

HALF-BAKED CHRISTIANS

Rev. 3:15-16

This letter sent by our risen Lord through the Apostle John to the church at Laodicea is one of the most arresting utterances that ever fell from His lips. We cannot read it intelligently without being stirred. It tends to lay a strong hand upon us and shake us into wide wakefulness. It startles us, if we hear it thoughtfully, like a fire alarm in the dead of night. It not only arrests our attention but also arouses our interest. From this letter which Christ sent to the church at Laodicea we may profitably consider:--

I. His Commendation

This last of the seven letters to the churches is in one respect the saddest of them all. In every other letter we find some word of commendation from Christ, but here there is absolutely none. He does not speak a single word of commendation for this church. The reason for the absence of some word of commendation is the condition that He observed in the church.

There was nothing among them that could be called fervour, or zeal, or self-consecration, or enthusiasm, or holy passion in the cause of Christ. The key-note of the moral condition of this church was its wealth. It was not disturbed by heresies, or broken up by persecutions. Its members were in comfortable circumstances. The services could be maintained without strain, there was nobody in the church of a contentious disposition to disturb the peace so they had drifted into an easy-going way, and were satisfied with simply keeping things up to an average level. Hence, Christ could not commend such an attitude of self-complacency.

II. His Complaint

In our scripture context we find Christ complaining about:--

I. Their tepidity and indifference

Christ had nothing to say against the organization or doctrine of this church. His objection was just this: "Thou art neither cold nor hot." "Thou art lukewarm." He knew their condition, did not misrepresent it, and had a right to complain about it. The members of this church were not infidels, yet they were not earnest believers. They did not oppose the gospel, neither did they defend or propagate it. They did not attempt working mischief, neither were they doing any great good. The church was not characterized by utter indifference. Neither was it characterized by fervent zeal. It was lukewarm or tepid about everything. Nobody in the church brought any great disgrace upon the Christian name; neither did anyone bring any particular honor upon it. They were simply indifferent, that is, content to go on aiming at nothing and doing nothing. They never put themselves to any inconvenience, never braved any reproach or abandoned any comfort for Christ's sake. There was no emotion, enthusiasm, urgency, or compassion manifested in the whole church. This condition of tepidity was utterly repugnant to Christ. Why was or is Christ so antagonistic to lukewarmness? Why does He hate it more than positive and aggressive sin? It is evident that He does so hate it. He said, "I would that thou wert cold or hot."

Of course our Lord wants us to be out and out for Him. He wants us to be enthusiastic in His service. But He declares that if we are not going to be genuinely for Him, He desires that we be genuinely against Him. There is nothing that He so loathes, that He so hates as lukewarmness.

(1) Why Christ hates lukewarmness

He hates it because:---

- a. It is hateful in itself
Half-heartedness is in itself offensive both to God and man.
None of us would want to play a game with an opponent who is too half-hearted to care to play.
None would want such an individual for a close friend or associate.
Did you ever shake hands with one that was so half-hearted and limp that there would not have been any hand shake unless you had done it all?
- b. It is a foe to all progress
This is true because lukewarmness is a child of self-satisfaction.
Such a spirit means death to earnestness and progress
For instance, if you know as much as you want to know, you will not likely learn any more. Or, if you are as good as you want to be, you will not get any better.
If you are as high up the hill as you care to be, you will not climb any higher.
- c. It kills possibilities of usefulness
The battles for the spread of the gospel and the extension of the Kingdom are all won by those ^{who} are in earnest.
Lukewarm water never wrecked an engine, neither did it ever move one. It is the soul that is on fire that fires other souls. It is the whole-hearted man that moves mountains of difficulty. When impossibilities see an earnest man coming, they take to their heels.

(2) How lukewarmness manifests itself

So far as the lukewarmness of the Laodiceans was concerned, it was manifested in various ways:--

- a. In the tone of conversation common among them
- b. In their dislike of spiritual thought and incapacity for it
- c. In the lightness with which they regarded abounding iniquity
- d. In their neglect of personal effort to propagate the gospel
- e. In their transference of work to others.
- f. In their conformity to the world
 - (a) Love of worldly society and amusements
 - (b) Doing what is religiously fashionable
 - (c) Avoiding that which leads to bearing a cross

(3) What lukewarmness indicates?

Lukewarmness always:--

- a. Argues the vilest ingratitude
- b. Indicates hypocrisy
- c. Disgraces the name of a Christian

(4) What causes lukewarmness?

- a. Worldly prosperity
That is, the intrusion of something else into the place which God alone ought to occupy in the affections.
- b. Frequency of little sins
Evil speaking, untruthfulness, vanity, self-indulgence etc.
- c. Dissipation of mind
That is, the occupation in so many pursuits that little or no time is allowed for prayer and meditation.

(5) What are the symptoms of lukewarmness?

- a. Inattention to the private duties of religion
 - (a) Prayer
 - (b) Bible study
 - (c) Self-examination
- b. Carelessness in attending public worship
- c. Failure to support Kingdom interests

2. Their poverty and self-deception

This church was in a rich city and was rich in pride and conceited, but poor in grace and ignorant of its spiritual poverty. This church had an utterly mistaken view of itself. It was exceedingly well pleased with itself in its worldly status and spiritual progress. It considered itself as well off as need be. They were satisfied with things as they were and had no wish for a change. They were sadly deceived because:---

- (1) They imagined they were rich and had need of nothing
"Thou sayest, I am rich"--possessing abundantly
- (2) They imagined they were prosperous
"I have gotten riches"--perfect self-satisfaction
- (3) They imagined they had attained all possible excellence.
"And have need of nothing"--entire independence

No doubt they would have said, whatever we want we have. We are independent, having need of nothing, because we have everything. But their condition was abhorrent to the Lord. Consequently, He revealed to them their true condition. He said:---

- (1) "Thou art wretched"
Wretched here means oppressed with a burden. Their burden was the wealth which they imagined carried them. Instead of it helping and lifting them, it hindered and degraded them. They were pressed down with the burden of unconsecrated wealth.
- (2) "Thou art miserable"
Miserable here means pitiable. Christ was moved in pity toward them
He had no commendation to offer them. His were the feet

feelings of commiseration.

(3) "Thou art poor"

"Poor" here means as a pauper by the highway side is poor.

They were rich in goods and poor in grace.

They were spiritual paupers surrounded by uncounted riches.

(4) "Thou art blind"

Nearsighted is the word which perhaps more accurately expresses the thought. They were lacking light, lacking in vision, devoid of the sense of the far distances, and confined within narrow limits.

(5) "Thou art naked"

They were stripped of the glory and beauty which ought to have adorned them as a church. They were without the garments of real character, praise and service.

Let it be noted that all these words which Christ used to describe the church and its membership are words of pity. There is not an angry word among them. His only anger was that they were satisfied with things as they were.

III. His Counsel

From the foregoing we have learned that a church may fall into a condition far other than that for which it has a repute.

When Jesus said, "I know thy works," it was as if He had said, "Men think better of you than you deserve." Although their condition was bad, it was not hopeless. Something could yet be done. So Christ proceeds to counsel them what to do. In this counsel we shall observe----

1. His expressed wish

"I would thou wert cold or hot."

This statement forcefully reveals His deep abhorrence of their condition. He would rather have had to have dealt with the extremely cold who were clamoring for warmth than with this crowd of lukewarm people who thought they had need of nothing.

2. His declared intention

"I will spew thee out of my mouth."

This passage ascribes an emotion to our Lord that no other passage does. Elsewhere, Christ is represented as being grieved and being angry. Here, He is represented as being disgusted. He is not slightly disgusted, but disgusted to the point of utter nausea. Literally, He said, "I am about to (on the point of) vomit you up." That means that on account of the lukewarmness of the church He is on the point of casting out the church from her position of witness bearing. However, in the form of this statement there is an intimation of a possible escape from the threatened judgment. It is not yet done but He is on the verge of doing it.

3. His proffered advice

In His counsel there is a declaration of the way by which all that is objectionable in their condition may be corrected.

(1) It is characteristic of the Lord.

a. Tender and considerate

b. Appropriate and definite

- c. Timely and solemn.
- (2) It is wise
 - a. He advised them to get true wealth
The true gold of spiritual wealth
the treasure of holiness, peace, and joy
 - b. He advised them to get renewed purity
the white raiment of personal purity
 - c. He advised them to get clear vision
"Anoint thine eyes with eyesalve that thou mayest see."
 - d. He advised them to get Christly merchandise
the most valuable things are to be had from Christ without money.
- (3) It emphasized repentance.
"Be zealous therefore and repent."
- (4) It urged the readmittance of Christ
Christ had been crowded out
He said, "Behold, I stand at the door and knock."
- (5) It encouraged the overcomer
"To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with Me in my throne."

From this discussion we learn that the only cure for lukewarmness is the readmission and enthronement of the excluded Christ. Apostasy must be confronted with His fidelity, looseness with conviction born of His authority, property with the fact of His wealth, frost with the mighty fire of His enthusiasm, and death with the life Divine which is His gift. There is no other cure for the maladies of the church and the world than the readmitted Christ. If you will open the door of your heart and let Jesus Christ in, your lukewarmness will vanish as wintertime vanishes at the kiss of spring. If Christ comes in, then this disgusting foe of our progress and our usefulness must go out. Will you accept this counsel and remedy?