AN EARNEST WARNING AGAINST LUKEWARMNESS

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A SERMON
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AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON

"Unto the angel of the church of the Laodiceans write; These things saith the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God; I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot. So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth. Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked: I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eyesalve, that thou mayest see. As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent. Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me. To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne."
Revelation 3:14-21

NO Scripture ever wears out. The epistle to the church of Laodicea is not an old letter which may be put into the waste basket and be forgotten. Upon its page still glow the words, "He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches." This Scripture was not meant to instruct the Laodiceans only, it has a wider aim. The actual church of Laodicea has passed away, but other Laodiceas still exist—indeed, they are sadly multiplied in our day and it has ever been the tendency of human nature, however inflamed with the love of God, gradually to chill into lukewarmness. The letter to the Laodiceans is above all others the epistle for the present times.

I should judge that the church at Laodicea was once in a very fervent and healthy condition. Paul wrote a letter to it which did not claim inspiration, and therefore its loss does not render the Scriptures incomplete, for Paul may have written scores of other letters besides.

Paul also mentions the church at Laodicea in his letter to the church at Colosse. He was, therefore, well acquainted with it, and as he does not utter a word of censure with regard to it, we may infer that the church was at that time in a sound state. In process of time it degenerated, and cooling down from its former ardor it became careless, lax, and indifferent. Perhaps its best men were dead, perhaps its wealth seduced it into worldliness, possibly its freedom from persecution engendered carnal ease or neglect of prayer made it gradually backslide. But in any case it declined till it was neither cold nor hot.

Lest we should ever get into such a state, and lest we should be in that state now, I pray that my discourse may come with power to the hearts of all present, but especially to the consciences of the members of my own church. May God grant that it may tend to the arousing of us all.

I. My first point will be THE STATE INTO WHICH CHURCHES ARE VERY APT TO FALL.

A church may fall into a condition far other than that for which it has a repute. It may be famous for zeal and yet be lethargic. The address of our Lord begins, "I know thy works," as much as to say, "Nobody else knows you. Men think better of you than you deserve. You do not know yourselves, you think your works to be excellent, but I know them to be very different."

Jesus views with searching eyes all the works of His church. The public can only read reports, but Jesus sees for Himself. He knows what is done and how it is done, and why it is done. He judges a church not merely by her external activities, but by her internal pieties. He searches the heart and tries

the reins of the children of men. He is not deceived by glitter, He tests all things, and values only that gold which will endure the fire.

Our opinion of ourselves and Christ's opinion of us may be very different, and it is a very sad thing when it is so. It will be melancholy indeed if we stand out as a church notable for earnestness and distinguished for success, and yet are not really fervent in spirit or eager in soul-winning. A lack of vital energy where there seems to be most strength put forth, a lack of real love to Jesus where apparently there is the greatest devotedness to Him, are sad signs of fearful degeneracy.

Churches are very apt to put the best goods into the window, very apt to make a fair show in the flesh, and like men of the world, they try to make a fine figure upon a very slender estate. Great reputations have often but slender foundations, and lovers of the truth lament that it should be so. Not only is it true of churches, but of every one of us as individuals, that often our reputation is in advance of our deserts.

Men often live on their former credit, and trade upon their past characters, having still a name to live, though they are indeed dead. To be slandered is a dire affliction, but it is, upon the whole, a less evil than to be thought better than we are. In the one case we have a promise to comfort us, in the second we are in danger of self-conceit. I speak as unto wise men, judge ye how far this may apply to us.

The condition described in our text is, secondly, one of mournful indifference and carelessness. They were not cold, but they were not hot. They were not infidels, yet they were not earnest believers. They did not oppose the Gospel, neither did they defend it. They were not working mischief, neither were they doing any great good. They were not disreputable in moral character, but they were not distinguished for holiness. They were not irreligious, but they were not enthusiastic in piety nor eminent for zeal. They were what the world calls "Moderates," they were of the Broad-church school—they were neither bigots nor Puritans, they were prudent and avoided fanaticism, respectable and averse to excitement.

Good things were maintained among them, but they did not make too much of them. They had prayer meetings, but there were few present, for they liked quiet evenings at home. When more attended the meetings they were still very dull, for they did their praying very deliberately and were afraid of being too excited. They were content to have all things done decently and in order, but vigor and zeal they considered to be vulgar.

Such churches have schools, Bible classes, preaching rooms, and all sorts of agencies. But they might as well be without them, for no energy is displayed and no good comes of them. They have deacons and elders who are excellent pillars of the church, if the chief quality of pillars is to stand still and exhibit no motion or emotion. They have ministers who may be the angels of the churches, but if so they have their wings closely clipped, for they do not fly very far in preaching the everlasting Gospel and they certainly are not flames of fire. They may be shining lights of eloquence, but they certainly are not burning lights of grace, setting men's hearts on fire.

In such communities everything is done in a half-hearted, listless, dead-and-alive way, as if it did not matter much whether it was done or not. It makes one's flesh creep to see how sluggishly they move. I long for a knife to cut their red tape to pieces, and for a whip to lay about their shoulders to make them bestir themselves.

Things are respectably done, the rich families are not offended, the skeptical party is conciliated, the good people are not quite alienated, things are made pleasant all round. The right things are done, but as to doing them with all your might, and soul, and strength, a Laodicean church has no notion of what that means.

They are not so cold as to abandon their work, or to give up their meetings for prayer, or to reject the Gospel. If they did so, then they could be convinced of their error and brought to repentance. But on the other hand they are neither hot for the truth, nor hot for conversions, nor hot for holiness, they are not fiery enough to burn the stubble of sin, nor zealous enough to make Satan angry, nor fervent enough to make a living sacrifice of themselves upon the altar of their God. They are "neither cold nor hot."

This is a horrible state, because it is one in which a church wearing a good repute renders that reputation a lie. When other churches are saying, "See how they prosper! see what they do for God!" Jesus sees that the church is doing His work in a slovenly, make-believe manner, and He considers justly that it is deceiving its friends.

If the world recognizes such a people as being very distinctly an old-fashioned puritan church, and yet there is unholy living among them, and careless walking, and a deficiency of real piety, prayer, liberality, and zeal, then the world itself is being deceived, and that too in the worst way because it is led to judge falsely concerning Christianity. For it lays all these faults upon the back of religion and cries out, "It is all a farce! The thing is a mere pretence! Christians are all hypocrites!" I fear there are churches of this sort. God grant we may not be numbered with them!

In this state of the church there is much self-glorification, for Laodicea said, "I am rich and increased with goods, and have need of nothing." The members say, "Everything goes well, what more do we want? All is right with us." This makes such a condition very hopeless, because reproofs and rebukes fall without power, where the party rebuked can reply, "We do not deserve your censures, such warnings are not meant for us."

If you stand up in the pulpit and talk to sleepy churches, as I very frequently do, and speak very plainly, they often have the honesty to say, "There is a good deal of truth in what the man has said." But if I speak to another church, which really is half asleep, but which thinks itself to be quite a model of diligence, then the rebuke glides off like oil down a slab of marble and no result comes of it.

Men are less likely to repent when they are in the middle passage between hot and cold, than if they were in the worst extremes of sin. If they were like Saul of Tarsus, enemies of God, they might be converted. But if, like Gamaliel, they are neither opposed nor favoring, they will probably remain as they are till they die. The Gospel converts a sincerely superstitious Luther, but Erasmus, with his pliant spirit, flippant, and full of levity, remains unmoved. There is more hope of warning the cold than the lukewarm.

When churches get into the condition of half-hearted faith, tolerating the Gospel, but having a sweet tooth for error, they do far more mischief to their age than downright heretics.

It is harder a great deal to work for Jesus with a church which is lukewarm than it would be to begin without a church. Give me a dozen earnest spirits and put me down anywhere in London, and by God's good help we will soon cause the wilderness and the solitary place to rejoice. But give me the whole lot of you half-hearted, undecided, and unconcerned, what can I do? You will only be a drag upon a man's zeal and earnestness.

Five thousand members of a church all lukewarm will be five thousand impediments, but a dozen earnest, passionate spirits, determined that Christ shall be glorified and souls won, must be more than conquerors. In their very weakness and fewness will reside capacities for being the more largely blessed of God. Better nothing than lukewarmness.

Alas, this state of lukewarmness is so congenial with human nature that it is hard to fetch men from it. Cold makes us shiver, and great heat causes us pain, but a tepid bath is comfort itself. Such a temperature suits human nature. The world is always at peace with a lukewarm church, and such a church is always pleased with itself.

Not too worldly—no! We have our limits! There are certain amusements which of course a Christian must give up, but we will go quite up to the line, for why are we to be miserable? We are not to be so greedy as to be called miserly, but we will give as little as we can to the cause. We will not be altogether absent from the house of God, but we will go as seldom as we can. We will not altogether forsake the poor people to whom we belong, but we will also go to the world's church, so as to get admission into better society, and find fashionable friends for our children.

How much of this there is abroad! Compromise is the order of the day. Thousands try to hold with the hare and run with the hounds, they are for God and Mammon, Christ and Belial, truth and error, and so are "neither hot nor cold."

Do I speak somewhat strongly? Not so strongly as my Master, for He says, "I will spue thee out of my mouth." He is nauseated with such conduct, it sickens Him, and He will not endure it. In an earnest, honest, fervent heart nausea is created when we fall in with men who dare not give up their profession, and yet will not live up to it. Who cannot altogether forsake the work of God, but yet do it in a sluggard's manner, trifling with that which ought to be done in the best style for so good a Lord and so gracious a Savior.

Many a church has fallen into a condition of indifference, and when it does so it generally becomes the haunt of worldly professors, a refuge for people who want an easy religion, which enables them to enjoy the pleasures of sin and the honors of piety at the same time. Where things are free and easy, where you are not expected to do much, or give much, or pray much, or to be very religious. Where the minister is not so precise as the old school divines. A more liberal people, of broad views, free-thinking and free-acting, where there is full tolerance for sin, and no demand for vital godliness.

Such churches applaud cleverness in a preacher, as for his doctrine, that is of small consequence, and his love to Christ and zeal for souls are very secondary. He is a clever fellow and can speak well, and that suffices. This style of thing is all too common, yet we are expected to hold our tongue, for the people are very respectable. The Lord grant that we may be kept clear of such respectability!

We have already said that *this condition of indifference is attended with perfect self-complacency*. The people who ought to be mourning are rejoicing, and where they should hang out signals of distress they are flaunting the banners of triumph. "We are rich, we are adding to our numbers, enlarging our schools, and growing on all sides. We have need of nothing. What can a church require that we have not in abundance?" Yet their spiritual needs are terrible. This is a sad state for a church to be in. Spiritually poor and proud.

A church crying out to God because it feels itself in a backsliding state. A church mourning its deficiency, a church pining and panting to do more for Christ, a church burning with zeal for God, and therefore quite discontented with what it has been able to do, this is the church which God will bless. But that which writes itself down as a model for others is very probably grossly mistaken and is in a sad plight.

This church, which was so rich in its own esteem, was utterly bankrupt in the sight of the Lord. It had no real joy in the Lord, it had mistaken its joy in itself for that. It had no real beauty of holiness upon it, it had mistaken its formal worship and fine building and harmonious singing for that. It had no deep understanding of the truth and no wealth of vital godliness, it had mistaken carnal wisdom and outward profession for those precious things. It was poor in secret prayer, which is the strength of any church, it was destitute of communion with Christ, which is the very lifeblood of religion. But it had the outward semblance of these blessings and walked in a vain show.

There are churches which are poor as Lazarus as to true religion, and yet are clothed in scarlet and fare sumptuously every day upon the mere form of godliness. Spiritual leanness exists side by side with vainglory. Contentment as to worldly goods makes men rich, but contentment with our spiritual condition is the index of poverty.

Once more, this church of Laodicea had fallen into *a condition which had chased away its Lord*. The text tells us that Jesus said, "I stand at the door and knock." That is not the position which our Lord occupies in reference to a truly flourishing church. If we are walking aright with Him, He is in the midst of the church, dwelling there, and revealing Himself to His people. His presence makes our worship to be full of spirituality and life. He meets His servants at the table, and there spreads them a feast upon His body and His blood. It is He who puts power and energy into all our church action, and causes the Word to sound out from our midst. True saints abide in Jesus and He in them.

Oh, brethren, when the Lord is in a church, it is a happy church, a holy church, a mighty church, and a triumphant church. But we may grieve Him till He will say, "I will go and return to my place until they acknowledge their offense and seek my face." Oh, you that know my Lord and have power with Him, entreat Him not to go away from us.

He can see much about us as a people which grieves His Holy Spirit, much about any one of us to provoke Him to anger. Hold Him, I pray you, and do not let Him go, or if He be gone, bring Him again to His mother's house, into the chamber of her that bore Him, where, with holy violence, we will detain Him and say, "Abide with us, for thou art life and joy, and all in all to us as a church. Ichabod is written across our house if Thou be gone, for Thy presence is our glory and Thy absence will be our shame."

Churches may become like the temple, when the glory of the Lord had left the holy place, because the image of jealousy was set up, and the house was defiled. What a solemn warning is that which is contained in Jeremiah 7:12-15, "But go ye now unto my place which was in Shiloh, where I set my name at the first, and see what I did to it for the wickedness of my people Israel. And now, because ye have done all these works, saith the LORD, and I spake unto you, rising up early and speaking, but ye heard not; and I called you, but ye answered not; therefore I will do unto this house, which is called by my name, wherein ye trust, and unto the place which I gave to you and to your fathers, as I have done to Shiloh. And I will cast you out of my sight, as I have cast out all your brethren, even the whole seed of Ephraim."

II. Now let us consider, secondly, THE DANGER OF SUCH A STATE.

The great danger is, first, *to be rejected of Christ*. He puts it, "I will spue thee out of my mouth"—as disgusting Him, and causing Him nausea. Then the church must first be in His mouth, or else it could not be spued from it. What does this mean?

Churches are in Christ's mouth in several ways, they are used by Him as His testimony to the world, He speaks to the world through their lives and ministries. He does as good as say, "O sinners, if ye would see what My religion can do, see here a godly people banded together in My fear and love, walking in peace and holiness." He speaks powerfully by them and makes the world see and know that there is true power in the Gospel of the grace of God.

But when the church becomes neither cold nor hot He does not speak by her, she is no witness for Him. When God is with a church the minister's words come out of Christ's mouth. "Out of his mouth went a two-edged sword," says John in the Revelation, and that "two-edged sword" is the Gospel which we preach. When God is with a people they speak with divine power to the world, but if we grow lukewarm Christ says, "Their teachers shall not profit, for I have not sent them, neither am I with them. Their word shall be as water spilt on the ground, or as the whistling of the wind." This is a dreadful thing. Better far for me to die than to be spued out of Christ's mouth.

Then He also ceases to plead for such a church. Christ's special intercession is not for all men, for He says of His people, "I pray for them: I pray not for the world, but for them which thou hast given me." I do not think Christ ever prays for the church of Rome—what would He pray for, but her total overthrow? Other churches are nearing the same fate. They are not clear in His truth or honest in obedience to His word. They follow their own devices, they are lukewarm.

But there are churches for which He is pleading, for He has said, "For Zion's sake will I not hold my peace, and for Jerusalem's sake I will not rest, until the righteousness thereof goes forth as brightness, and the salvation thereof as a lamp that burneth." Mighty are His pleadings for those He really loves, and countless are the blessings which come in consequence.

It will be an evil day when He casts a church out of that interceding mouth, and leaves her unrepresented before the throne because she is none of His. Do you not tremble at such a prospect? Will you not ask for grace to return to your first love? I know that the Lord Jesus will never leave off praying for His own elect, but for churches as corporate bodies He may cease to pray, because they become anti-Christian, or are mere human gatherings, but not elect assemblies such as the church of God ought to be.

Now this is the danger of any church if it declines from its first ardor and becomes lukewarm. "Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do thy first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent."

What is the other danger? This first comprehends all, but another evil is hinted at—such a church will be *left to its fallen condition* to become wretched—that is to say, miserable, unhappy, divided,

without the presence of God. And so without delight in the ways of God, lifeless, spiritless, dreary, desolate, full of schisms, devoid of grace, and I know not what beside, that may come under the term "wretched."

Then the next word is "miserable," which might better be rendered "pitiable." Churches which once were a glory shall become a shame. Whereas men said, "The Lord has done great things for them," they shall now say, "see how low they have fallen! What a change has come over the place! What emptiness and wretchedness! What a blessing rested there for so many years, but what a contrast now!" Pity will take the place of congratulation, and scorn will follow upon admiration.

Then it will be "poor" in membership, poor in effort, poor in prayer, poor in gifts and graces, poor in everything. Perhaps some rich people will be left to keep up the semblance of prosperity, but all will be empty, vain, void, Christless, lifeless. Philosophy will fill the pulpit with chaff, the church will be a mass of worldliness, the congregation an assembly of vanity.

Next, they will become blind, they will not see themselves as they are, they will have no eye upon the neighborhood to do it good, no eye to the coming of Christ, no eye for His glory. They will say, "We see," and yet be blind as bats. Ultimately they will become "naked," their shame will be seen by all, they will be a proverb in everybody's mouth. "Call that a church!" says one. "Is that a church of Jesus Christ?" cries a second. Those dogs that dared not open their mouths against Israel when the Lord was there will begin to howl when He is gone, and everywhere will the sound be heard, "How are the mighty fallen, how are the weapons of war broken."

In such a case as that the church will *fail of overcoming*, for it is, "to him that overcometh," that a seat upon Christ's throne is promised. But that church will come short of victory. It shall be written concerning it even as of the children of Ephraim, that being armed and carrying bows they turned their backs in the day of battle. "Ye did run well," says Paul to the Galatians, "what did hinder you that ye should not obey the truth?"

Such a church had a grand opportunity, but it was not equal to the occasion, its members were born for a great work, but inasmuch as they were unfaithful, God put them aside and used other means. He raised up in their midst a flaming testimony for the Gospel and the light thereof was cast athwart the ocean, and gladdened the nations, but the people were not worthy of it or true to it, and therefore He took the candlestick out of its place and left them in darkness. May God prevent such an evil from coming upon *us*. But such is the danger to all churches if they degenerate into listless indifference.

III. Thirdly, I have to speak of THE REMEDIES WHICH THE LORD EMPLOYS.

I do earnestly pray that what I say may come home to all here, especially to every one of the members of this church, for it has come very much home to me and caused great searching of heart in my own soul, and yet I do not think I am the least zealous among you. I beseech you to judge yourselves, that you be not judged. Do not ask me if I mean anything personal. I am personal in the most emphatic sense. I speak of *you* and to *you* in the most plain way.

Some of you show plain symptoms of being lukewarm, and God forbid that I should flatter you or be unfaithful to you. I am aiming at personality, and I earnestly want each beloved brother and sister here to take home each affectionate rebuke. And you who come from other churches, whether in America or elsewhere, you need arousing quite as much as we do, your churches are not better than ours, some of them are not so good and I speak to you also, for you need to be stirred up to nobler things.

Note, then, the first remedy. Jesus gives a *clear discovery* as to the church's true state. He says to it—"Thou art lukewarm, thou art wretched and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked." I rejoice to see people willing to know the truth, but most men do not wish to know it, and this is an ill sign.

When a man tells you that he has not looked at his ledger, or day-book, or held a stock-taking for this twelve months, you know whereabouts he is, and you say to your manager, "Have you an account with him? Then keep it as close as you can." When a man dares not know the worst about his case, it is certainly a bad one, but he that is right before God is thankful to be told what he is and where he is.

Now, some of you know the faults of other people, and in watching this church you have observed weak points in many places—have you wept over them? Have you prayed over them? If not, you have not watched as you should do for the good of your brethren and sisters, and perhaps, have allowed evils to grow which ought to have been rooted up. You have been silent when you should have kindly and earnestly spoken to the offenders, or made your own example a warning to them.

Do not judge your brother, but judge yourself. If you have any severity, use it on your own conduct and heart. We must pray the Lord to use this remedy, and make us know just where we are. We shall never get right as long as we are confident that we are so already. Self-complacency is the death of repentance.

Our Lord's next remedy is *gracious counsel*. He says, "I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire." Does not that strike you as being very like the passage in Isaiah, "Come ye, buy, and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price"? It is so and it teaches us that one remedy for lukewarmness is to begin again just as we began at first. We were at a high temperature at our first conversion. What joy, what peace, what delight, what comfort, what enthusiasm we had when first we knew the Lord! We bought gold of Him then for nothing, let us go and buy again at the same price.

If religion has not been genuine with us till now, or if we have been adding to it great lumps of shining stuff which we thought was gold and was not, let us now go to the heavenly mint and buy gold tried in the fire, that we may be really rich. Come, let us begin again, each one of us. Inasmuch as we may have thought we were clothed and yet we were naked, let us hasten to Him again, and at His own price, which is no price, procure the robe which He has wrought of His own righteousness, and that goodly raiment of His Spirit, which will clothe us with the beauty of the Lord.

If, moreover, we have come to be rather dim in the eye and no longer look up to God and see His face, and have no bright vision of the glory to be revealed, and if we cannot look on sinners with weeping eyes, as we once did, let us go to Jesus for the eye-salve, just as we went when we were stone blind at first and the Lord will open our eyes again and we shall behold Him in clear vision as in days gone by.

The word from Jesus is, "Come near to Me, I pray you, My brethren. If you have wandered from Me, return. If you have been cold to Me I am not cold to you, My heart is the same to you as ever, come back to Me, My brethren. Confess your evil deeds, receive My forgiveness, and henceforth let your hearts burn towards Me, for I love you still and will supply all your needs." That is good counsel, let us take it.

Now comes a third remedy, sharp and cutting, but sent in love, namely, *rebukes and chastenings*. Christ will have His favored church walk with great care, and if she will not follow Him fully by being shown wherein she has erred, and will not repent when kindly counseled, He then betakes Himself to some sharper means. "As many as I love I rebuke and chasten." The word here used for "love" is a very choice one. It is one which signifies an intense personal affection.

Now, there are some churches which Christ loves very specially, favoring them above others, doing more for them than for others and giving them more prosperity. They are the darlings of His heart, His Benjamins. Now, it is a very solemn thing to be dearly loved by God. It is a privilege to be coveted, but mark you, the man who is so honored occupies a position of great delicacy. The Lord thy God is a jealous God and He is most jealous where He shows most love.

The Lord lets some men escape scot-free for a while after doing many evil things, but if they had been His own elect He would have visited them with stripes long before. He is very jealous of those whom He has chosen to lean upon His bosom and to be His familiar friends. Your servant may do many things which could not be thought of by your child or your wife. And so it is with many who profess to be servants of God—they live a very lax life, and they do not seem to be chastened for it, but if they were the Lord's own peculiarly beloved ones, He would not endure such conduct from them.

Now mark this, if the Lord exalts a church and gives it a special blessing, He expects more of it, more care of His honor and more zeal for His glory than He does of any other church. And when He

does not find it, what will happen? Why, because of His very love He will rebuke it with hard sermons, sharp words, and sore smiting of conscience. If these do not arouse it He will take down the rod and deal out chastenings.

Do you know how the Lord chastens churches? Paul says, "For this cause some are sickly among you, and many sleep." Bodily sickness is often sent in discipline upon churches, and losses, and crosses, and troubles are sent among the members, and sometimes leanness in the pulpit, breakings out of heresy and divisions in the pew, and lack of success in all church work. All these are smitings with the rod.

It is very sad, but sometimes that rod does not fall on that part of the church which does the wrong. Sometimes God may take the best in the church, and chasten them for the wrong of others. You say, "How can that be right?" Why, because they are the kind of people who will be most benefited by it. If a vine wants the knife, it is not the branch that bears very little fruit which is trimmed, but the branch which bears much fruit is purged because it is worth purging. In their case the chastening is a blessing and a token of love.

Sorrow is often brought upon Christians by the sins of their fellow members, and many an aching heart there is in this world that I know of, of brethren and sisters who love the Lord and want to see souls converted, but they can only sigh and cry because nothing is done. Perhaps they have a minister who does not believe the Gospel, and they have fellow members who do not care whether the minister believes it or not. They are all asleep together except those few zealous souls who besiege the throne of grace day and night, and they are the ones who bear the burden of the lukewarm church.

Oh, if the chastening comes here, whoever bears it, may the whole body be the better for it, and may we never rest till the church begins to glow with the sacred fire of God and boil with enthusiastic desire for His glory.

The last remedy, however, is the best of all to my mind. I love it best and desire to make it my food when it is not my medicine. The best remedy for backsliding churches, is *more communion with Christ*. "Behold," saith He, "I stand at the door and knock." I have known this text preached upon to sinners numbers of times as though Christ knocked at their door and they had to open it, and so on. The preacher has never managed to keep to free grace for this reason, that the text was not meant to be so used, and if men will ride a text the wrong way, it will not go.

This text belongs to the church of God, not to the unconverted. It is addressed to the Laodicean church. There is Christ outside the church, driven there by her unkindness, but He has not gone far away, He loves His church too much to leave her altogether, He longs to come back, and therefore He waits at the doorpost.

He knows that the church will never be restored till He comes back, and He desires to bless her, and so He stands waiting, knocking and knocking again and again. He does not merely knock once, but He *stands* knocking by earnest sermons, by providences, by impressions upon the conscience, by the quickenings of His Holy Spirit. And while He knocks He speaks, He uses all means to awaken His church.

Most condescendingly and graciously does He do this, for having threatened to spue her out of His mouth, He might have said, "I will get Me gone. And I will never come back again to thee," that would have been natural and just. But how gracious He is when, having expressed His disgust He says, "Disgusted as I am with your condition, I do not wish to leave you. I have taken My presence from you, but I love you, and therefore I knock at your door and wish to be received into your heart. I will not force Myself upon you, I want you voluntarily to open the door to Me."

Christ's presence in a church is always a very tender thing. He never is there against the will of the church, it cannot be, for He lives in His people's wills and hearts, and "worketh in them to will and to do of His own good pleasure." He does not break bolt and bar and come in as He often does into a sinner's heart, carrying the soul by storm, because the man is dead in sin and Christ must do it all, or the sinner will perish. But He is here speaking to living men and women who ought also to be loving men and women, and so He says, "I wish to be among you, open the door to Me."

We ought to open the door at once and say, "Come in, good Lord, we grieve to think we should ever have put Thee outside that door at all."

And then see what promises He gives. He says He will come and sup with us. Now, in the East, the supper was the best meal of the day, it was the same as our dinner, so that we may say that Christ will come and dine with us. He will give us a rich feast, for He Himself is the daintiest and most plenteous of all feasts for perishing souls.

He will come and sup with us, that is, we shall be the host and entertain Him. But then He adds, "and he with me," that is, He will be the host and entertain us. So we will change places, we will be host and guest by turns. We will give Him of our best, but poor fare is that, too poor for Him, and yet He will partake of it. Then He shall be host and we will be guests, and oh, how we will feast on what He gives! Christ comes, and brings the supper with Him, and all we do is to find the room. The Master says to us, "Where is the guest chamber?" and then He makes ready and spreads His royal table.

Now, if these be the terms on which we are to have a feast together, we will most willingly fling open the doors of our hearts and say, "Come in, good Lord." He says to you, "Children, have you any meat?" and if you are obliged to say, "No, Lord," He will come in unto you none the less readily, for there are the fish, the net is ready to break it is so full, and here are more upon the coals ready I warrant you, if we sup with Him, we shall be lukewarm no longer.

The men who live where Jesus is soon feel their hearts burning. It is said of a piece of scented clay by the old Persian moralist that the clay was taken up and questioned. "How camest thou to smell so sweetly, being nothing but common clay?" and it replied, "I laid for many a year in the sweet society of a rose, until at last I drank in its perfume." And we may say to every warm-hearted Christian, "How camest thou so warm?" and his answer will be, "My heart bubbleth up with a good medicine, for I speak of the things which I have made touching the King. I have been with Jesus and I have learned of Him."

Now, brethren and sisters, what can I say to move you to take this last medicine? I can only say, take it, not only because of the good it will do you, but because of the sweetness of it. I have heard say of some persons, that they were pledged not to take wine except as a medicine, and then they were very pleased when they were ill. And so if this is the medicine, "I will come and sup with him, and he with me," we may willingly confess our need of so delicious a remedy. Need I press it on you? May I not rather urge each brother as soon as he gets home today to see whether he cannot enter into fellowship with Jesus? and may the Spirit of God help him!

This is my closing word, there is something for us to do in this matter. We must examine ourselves, and we must confess the fault if we have declined in grace. And then we must not talk about setting the church right, we must pray for grace each one for himself, for the text does not say, "If the church will open the door," but "If *any man* hear my voice and opens the door." It must be done by individuals, the church will only get right by each man getting right.

Oh, that we might get back into an earnest zeal for our Lord's love and service, and we shall only do so by listening to His rebukes, and then falling into His arms, clasping Him once again and saying, "My Lord and my God."

That healed Thomas, did it not? Putting his fingers into the print of the nails, putting his hand into the side, that cured him. Poor, unbelieving, staggering Thomas only had to do that and he became one of the strongest of believers, and said, "My Lord and my God." You will love your Lord till your soul is as coals of juniper if you will daily commune with Him. Come close to Him, and once getting close to Him, never go away from Him any more. The Lord bless you, dear brethren, the Lord bless you in this thing.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—REVELATION 3

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—184, 787, 992

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