

Rev. 3:19. the Love and the Discipline

by Horatius Bonar

God's love is a love that chastens and disciplines, calling us to repentance and zeal.

Scripture: Psalm 51:10, Proverbs 3:12, Matthew 24:12, Luke 15:20, Romans 12:11, 2 Corinthians 13:5, Hebrews 12:6, James 4:8, 1 John 4:16, Revelation 3:19

Topics: "Love Of God", "Spiritual Zeal"

Description

Horatius Bonar emphasizes the dual nature of Christ's love as both tender and disciplinary in his sermon on Revelation 3:19. He warns that believers can quickly become lukewarm, losing their zeal and joy in God, and instead becoming consumed by worldly distractions. Bonar highlights that Christ's rebuke and chastening are acts of love, intended to draw back the wayward heart to repentance and fervor. He calls for believers to recognize their true spiritual state, urging them to be zealous and repent from their complacency. Ultimately, Bonar reassures that Christ's love remains steadfast, even in our failures, and encourages a return to the fervor of first love.

Transcript

"As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten--be zealous therefore, and repent."--Revelation 3:19.

How quickly a believer may become lukewarm! How quickly his love and holiness and zeal fade away! His cheek becomes pale, with the symptoms of deadly decline; or flushed with the passions produced by drinking the world's cup, and partaking of the world's fellowships.

Spirituality loses ground. Worldliness, either in a gross or a refined form, steals in. Reality in religion disappears. Enjoyment of prayer and the Bible ceases. Pleasure, politics, and exciting literature supply the place which the things of God once held. First love is gone. Joy and peace become strangers.

Religious formalism, routine, and ritualism are adopted, by which a man is enabled to quiet his conscience with a few external performances--while devoting the rest of his time to vanity or business.

The soul withers; the eye that looked upward now looks downward; and the once 'religious man,' who 'did run well,' takes the downward path into lukewarmness or death. Yet Jesus leaves him not. He hates divorce. He pursues His fugitive. He pleads with the backslider--'Return, and I will heal.'

I. The love. The 'I' here is emphatic, and by its prominence Christ presents Himself specially as--the lover, the rebuker, the chastener. His thoughts are not our thoughts, nor our ways His ways. He loves where

others would hate. He shows His love by chastening where others would show theirs by indulging. "He who spares the rod, hates the child!" "Whom the Lord loves He chastens!" Herein is love--love to Laodicea, even in her lukewarmness. It is not 'Repent, that I may love you.' It is, 'I love you, therefore repent.' The lukewarm backslider, whether of Ephesus, or Sardis, or Laodicea--as long as he remains self-satisfied and happy in his worldliness, cares only for the love of the creature. He loves the world, and he would gladly have the world love him. This world would be his heaven--his gods and goddesses would all be here!

But when trial comes, and sorrow lays hold, and the deep consciousness of evil burdens, and the prospect of coming wrath rouses him, then he looks round and asks for love. 'Is there anyone to love me, anyone that can love one so unlovable?' The answer is, None on earth! But One in heaven! Jesus loves still. All Laodicea's unloveableness has not quenched His love! The worst of the seven Churches is that which receives His fullest words of love--'that love which passes knowledge.

II. The discipline of love. Mark the way in which this love deals with Laodicea. It deals in tenderness, and yet in solemn severity. Instead of letting Laodicea escape, it takes hold of her, as a wise father of his disobedient child, and makes her sensible how much it hates the sin. Love cannot bear lukewarmness. It expects love for love--and will leave no method untried in order to win back the straying heart, however far it has gone, either in indifference or hatred.

(1) I REBUKE. He reproves by word and deed. His words are full of tenderness, yet also conveying solemn and searching rebuke. Such rebuke may be 'His strange work,' for 'fury is not in Him.' Yet He does administer the rebuke when it is needed--not harshly, yet sometimes severely--for He speaks as one who has authority, and who will not be mocked.

(2) I CHASTEN. What the chastening was we know not--it would be something specially suited to the self-sufficiency and worldliness of the Laodiceans. Perhaps they were stripped of their riches; perhaps visited by sickness and death; perhaps laid desolate by grievous sorrow; some heavy blow, or some long-continued trial stroke upon stroke, crushing and emptying them. The chastisement, we are sure, would correspond with the cherished sins, searching the conscience and breaking the heart in pieces. For the Lord leaves not His own, even in their backsliding; nor indeed any who name His name. The unbelieving world may be allowed to go on unchecked in its wickedness and vanity, but those who call themselves Christ's may expect discipline. By naming His name, they have brought themselves under His special rule, and He will deal with them as He dealt with Laodicea. They profess to be His, to have been bought by Him, to follow Him; they must therefore know His rod, and be treated differently from those who reject His sway and service. Discipline, because of permitted sin, because of indulged worldliness, because of defection from truth or holiness--discipline, it may be, of great severity--they must be prepared for. In faithfulness as well as love He will chasten. Whatever it may cost, they must be made to feel the evil of their ways.

III. The exhortation of love. 'Be zealous, therefore, and repent.' The word zealous contrasts with lukewarmness, and implies true warmth and fervor. While He says, 'I wish you were either cold or hot;' He shows by this word 'zealous' that He desires to see zeal quickened in this Church, and lukewarmness done away. Be zealous! Be fervent in spirit! Be done with coldness and half-heartedness! Rouse yourself into the fervor of your early days, before this lukewarmness falls upon you!

Repent also! Repent of your present miserable estate; of your apostasy, and declension, and worldliness! Repent in dust and ashes! Retrace your steps! Awake from your lethargy! Your estimate of yourself is

high--come down from your loftiness. You say--I am rich, and increased in goods, and have need of nothing. Come down from the self-sufficiency, and learn that you are not what you think yourself to be. God's estimate of you and your estimate of yourself are widely different. Know yourself--as He knows you. Take His estimate of your poverty and blindness, and cast yourself down before Him. You are not the Laodicea of other days. You must go back to your early zeal, and faith, and love. Be not high-minded, but fear. Abhor yourself--and turn from your lukewarmness!

All this is the language of love; it is the treatment of love. It is love that is rebuking, and chastening, and exhorting. Hear the voice of love--the unchanging love of Him who yearns over you in your declension, and longs to see you restored. This was the beginning of your love, as well as of your confidence. 'We have known and believed the love which God has to us.' Go back to this, and what you first got there--you will get there again. Know that God is love!

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