

Christian Retirement

Part 46

By [Thomas Reade](#)

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ON LUKEWARMNESS

The path of the true Christian lies remote from unbelief and lukewarmness. Thousands who profess to believe the Gospel, are indifferent to its precepts and promises; and tens of thousands, though nominally Christian, are opposed to it through unbelief. Hence the zeal of the true believer is reviled by the infidel as fanaticism, and by the lukewarm professor as unwarranted obsession.

No state of heart is more revolting to a God of love, than a state of spiritual lukewarmness. Bodily sickness and earthly privations are slight evils, when compared with this spiritual distemper. It is most offensive to that gracious Being, who unrobed himself of his glories, who condescended to become a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; that we hell-deserving sinners be rescued from the burning wrath, and be received into heavenly glory.

Outward prosperity, the admiration of friends, self-love, and the gradual omission of watchfulness and prayer, lead us insensibly towards this dangerous precipice, down which thousands have fallen, and from which nothing but sovereign grace can preserve us.

The natural inclination of the heart is from God; and even when renewed in righteousness, it feels the force of this evil inclination, the moment it relaxes in the exercise of faith and prayer. Believers in Jesus should therefore dread nothing so much as leaving their first love, and backsliding in heart. All spiritual declensions begin in the heart and in the closet; and though slow at first, yet they increase with awful rapidity as the principle of grace is weakened through the indulgence of sin.

If reason and experience tell us that the surest preservative against falling down a precipice, is to keep at a distance from its edge; surely that must be the safest path for a Christian, which lies the most remote from spiritual declension. Those impressions which are made merely upon the passions, soon degenerate into lukewarmness, when the novelty ceases, or when persecution arises because of the word. This lukewarmness is rapidly succeeded by coldness, and coldness by

contempt; for "evil men and seducers wax worse and worse, deceiving, and being deceived."

But what is painfully true must not be withheld— even real Christians may grow lukewarm for a season, through the power of temptation, the force of indwelling sin, the fear of man, or the blandishments of the world. They may fall asleep in the arbor of carnal ease, or on the soft couch of worldly prosperity; and by thus grieving and quenching the Spirit, lose for a time the sensible enjoyment of divine love, as well as the evidence of their adoption into the family of God. Awful state! most seriously to be dreaded. No eclipse is so dark as the hidings of the divine countenance.

For this, they shall be made to smart and mourn; for this, they shall go heavily, "as one that mourns for his mother," when they are awakened by the voice of mercy, and called to look upon him whom they have pierced by their ingratitude and declension.

This sinful wandering from God does not destroy their sonship—for the word of truth declares, that "the gifts and calling of God are without repentance"—any more than the disobedience of a child towards an earthly father makes him not a child. He is still a child, though a disobedient child. The father is displeased, and withholds his regards. The wayward child is made to know this, either by correction, distance of manner, or the withholding of some favor. Hence he is brought to see, to fret, and to lament his disobedience; to long after reconciliation; and never to rest easy, or become happy, until the displeasure is removed and confidence and comfort are restored.

In this manner God deals with his redeemed people, when they decline and disobey. He hides his face, and they are troubled. He blows upon their comforts, and they wither. He has a thousand ways of manifesting his displeasure, both in the course of his providence, and in the actings of his grace.

But love is still inscribed upon all these chastening dispensations. How gracious is the voice of their heavenly Father, speaking to his wayward children through his word! "As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten." "Whom the Lord loves he chastens, and scourges every son whom he receives." "You shall consider in your heart, that as a man chastens his son, so the Lord your God chastens you." "I will be his Father, and he shall be my son; if he commit iniquity, I will chasten him with the rod of men and with the stripes of the children of men, but my mercy shall not depart from him" "Behold! happy is the man whom God corrects; therefore, despise not the chastening of the Almighty." Is not this the language of a loving, tender parent, who seeks the good of his rebellious children?

All sin is productive of sorrow, and naturally leads to the chambers of death. Blessed, then, are those souls whom grace has brought within the bonds of the covenant. If they wander from the fold, they shall be mercifully driven into it

again, through the faithfulness of the good Shepherd, who has said, "I will hedge up your way with thorns; I will never leave you nor forsake you"

But let no one dare to presume upon the mercy of God, and sin that grace may abound. Such conduct would prove the person so acting to be destitute of faith and love. Should any deluded sinner be led by Satan so to abuse the grace of the Gospel, he may be allowed to follow the wicked devices of his own depraved heart, until he fall, as a vessel fitted for destruction, into the abyss of hell.

It is the part of true wisdom to distinguish between the privileges of God's children, and the abuse of those privileges. Who would condemn the noble faculty of speech, because thousands pervert it to the basest purposes? Is there any one gift of providence, which is not, by some, converted into an instrument of wickedness? But let it ever be remembered, that those who abuse the blessings, either of providence or grace, must bear the consequences of such impiety, whoever they be; for God is no respecter of people.

It is evident, then, that if we do not enjoy peace through believing, there must be something wrong either in our views or in our hearts. Examine, Oh my soul, where the evil lies; for peace is the sacred legacy which Christ left to his church when he said, "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give unto you."

God in Christ is the Father of all his redeemed people. Now, a loving, obedient child delights in the society of a tender parent. He comes to his father cheerfully, and without fear. He tells him his little needs, and sincerely and sorrowfully confesses any fault which may have been committed against so loving a parent. But if a child dreads his parent, or feels shy, and avoids his company, even when his father is manifesting nothing but kindness towards him; must there not be something wrong in the heart of such a child? Does not the child either mistake the character of the parent, or feel a consciousness of some indulged sin, which is the latent cause of this defect in duty?

The Gospel inspires confidence and love. The moment we believe in Jesus with the heart, that moment we obtain peace with God, and pass from death unto life. This peace of justification cannot be broken, because it is founded on the atonement of Christ, who is "our peace," and "has made peace for us through the blood of the cross." The sins of believers cannot destroy this peace, which is immutable; since Jesus, foreseeing the sins of his people, atoned for them by the one sacrifice of himself. "Being justified by faith, we have peace with God." The debt was paid; the satisfaction was made, and fully accepted; when the Savior cried out, "It is finished!" and bowed his head and died!

But the peace of sanctification— that peace of God which is the sweet fruit of the Spirit—may be ruffled. Every sin disturbs this peace, like the agitating wind, or the pebble cast into the glassy lake. To preserve this inward peace, we must go continually to Jesus. As the feet contract defilement by walking through a miry

road, so our souls have need to be washed every hour from every hour's defilement, while journeying through a sinful world.

As peace with God is not the result of our obedience, but of Christ's atonement, and, as such, cannot be broken; so the enjoyment of that peace of God which passes all understanding, and which is the work of the Spirit in our hearts, can only be maintained by constant prayer; by delighting in the study of God's word; by watching against the workings of indwelling sin; by walking closely with God in all holy obedience; and by a daily application, through faith, to the fountain opened for sin and uncleanness.

Every approach to lukewarmness is destructive to our peace. To keep the heart under a lively sense of the love of God, we must never put our sins between our souls and the Savior. This will only obscure his grace and bring distress upon our minds. We must look at them as laid upon Christ when he hung upon the cross. Oh! that nothing, no, not a finger, may be placed between Jesus and my soul, lest it obstruct my view of his full and free redemption!

Many look at their sins, instead of their Savior; or at their sins as lying between them and their Savior; and so are discouraged, by false fear, from coming to him. But this is a device of Satan. We must remember that Christ was made a curse for us when he hung upon the cross; that he there made a full atonement for all the sins of all his believing people; for thus says the apostle, "He gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity;" "having forgiven you all trespasses." Oh blessed revelation of grace and mercy! This apprehension of Christ and his all-sufficient merits will banish every doubt and fear; prevent that hateful lukewarmness which is the very bane of godliness; and cause our hearts to burn with holy love; and to overflow in grateful praise.

Oh heavenly Father! be graciously pleased to preserve my soul from this evil of lukewarmness, and from every approach to spiritual indifference and declension. Let the sacred fire of love ever burn upon the altar of my heart. Keep me humble and active, zealous and self-denying, until called to your courts above where all your servants shall serve you with ever-growing delight through the countless ages of eternity.

You saints, who taste the holy joys,
Which from the Gospel sweetly flow;
Can you behold with unconcern
A world deep sunk in guilt and woe?

Behold the millions bound with sin,
Surrounded by the shades of night;
Behold, until pity drops the tear,
Until zeal awakens at the sight.

Arouse, you torpid saints, and bend
Your knees with humble, contrite shame,
That you so little pain have felt
For those who know not Jesus' name.

Come, join that little holy band,
Who labor to convert a world;
Join the victorious host of God,
Whose peaceful banners are unfurled.

Pour out your consecrated store;
Enrich the treasury divine;
Pour out the fervent heart-felt prayer,
Until truth through every region shine.

The cause is great—the promise sure;
The work of mercy shall be done:
Eternal love has firm decreed
The heathen to the eternal Son.

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