

# Rev. 3:20. Christ's Loving Earnestness

by Horatius Bonar

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*The sermon emphasizes the love, patience, and earnestness of Christ towards those who are lukewarm or backslidden, and encourages listeners to hear His voice and open the door to Him.*

**Scripture:** Song of Solomon 5:2, Isaiah 1:18, Luke 12:35, John 14:23, Acts 18:25, Romans 12:11, Revelation 3:20

**Topics:** "Spiritual Awakening", "Christ's Love"

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## Description

Horatius Bonar emphasizes Christ's loving earnestness in Revelation 3:20, where Jesus stands at the door and knocks, seeking to enter the hearts of the lukewarm Laodiceans. He highlights the church's need for awakening from spiritual slumber and the importance of responding to Christ's persistent call. Bonar illustrates Christ's love, patience, and earnestness, urging believers to open their hearts to Him, as He desires a personal relationship with each individual. The sermon conveys that Christ's invitation is for all, regardless of their spiritual state, and emphasizes the joy of communion with Him. Ultimately, Bonar reassures that Christ's promise to sup with those who open the door signifies a deep and abiding fellowship.

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## Transcript

"Behold! I stand at the door, and knock--if any man hears my voice, and opens the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me."--Revelation 3:20.

This is the sound of a trumpet. Yet it is not the iron, but the silver trumpet that here sounds out, 'Behold!' The church is asleep, and needs to be awakened; or she is busy with worldliness and pleasure, and needs to be recalled to Him whom she is forgetting. Jesus loves her, but she loves not Jesus; or at least has grown lukewarm in her love. Iniquity abounds, and the love of many waxes cold.

Laodicea is the worst of the seven Churches; of whom her Lord has not one good thing to say. She has not rejected His name, nor disowned His cross, nor departed from the faith; but she is neither cold nor hot. She is one whom it is difficult to know how to deal with or to discipline. If she were 'cold,' He would put her under special discipline; if she were 'hot' ('fervent in spirit,' Acts 18:25; Romans 12:11), He would commend her, and make her to become more and more fervent. But she is in the worst state of all--'lukewarm;' distasteful and useless--and therefore she must be 'spued out'--rejected as utterly loathsome, in the most loathsome way. Yet it is to this Church that the Lord sends His most gracious messages--loving her to the last.

As He sent His words of largest grace to Israel in their worst state, by the prophets in the Old Testament, and by His Son in the New, so He does to Laodicea. The tone of this epistle is marvelous for its kindness; and the words no less marvelous for the generosity and tenderness. This is not the manner of men; but it is truly the way of the Lord--of Him who came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.

I. The love of Christ. Herein is love. It is the love that passes knowledge. It is love not to the lovable and the loving, but to the unloving and unlovable. It is love to the worst of sinners, the worst of backsliders; love to those who had left their first love; who had once known Christ and His love, but had begun to go back. It is free love. It is large love. It is love irrespective of goodness in us. It is love which has broken through many a barrier in order to reach us; love which many waters could not quench, nor the floods drown. This whole verse and this whole epistle breathe true and unequivocal love. There is but one interpretation that can be put upon them--love. If they mean not this, what can they mean? This speaks out in every line. 'I will heal their backslidings; I will love them freely.'

Here is the fullness of the grace of Him who wept over Jerusalem; who said, 'him who comes to me I will never cast out.' Here is the good news to all--for that which takes in Laodicea will surely take in the ungodliest, the farthest gone in declension and apostasy. 'Return unto me, you backsliding children.' 'How shall I give you up? Can even Laodicea answer this question? It is one which God Himself leaves unanswered.

II. The patience of Christ. 'I stand at the door.' He stands, and He has stood, as the words imply--not afar off, but near, at the door. He stands. It is the attitude of waiting--of perseverance in waiting. He does not call from a distance--He comes. He does not come and go--He stands. He does not sit down, or occupy Himself with other concerns. He has one object in view--to get access to this poor Laodicean--and therefore He stands. Patiently and untiringly He stands. At the door of a backslider He stands. Day after day He is seen in the same posture, immovable in His patient love. 'Behold! I stand.' Here, surely, is the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ; the 'meekness and gentleness of Christ;' the patience of Him who endured the contradiction of sinners against Himself.'

III. The earnestness of Christ. 'I knock.' If the standing marks His patience, the knocking marks His earnestness--His unwearied and persevering earnestness--as if He were renewing the ancient oath, and swearing by Himself, because He can swear by no greater--'As I live, says the Lord, I have no pleasure in the death of the sinner.' He calls as well as knocks; for He says, 'If any man hears my voice.' One of our modern literary men (Carlyle) has described the Bible as 'that most earnest of all earnest books;' and here is one of the passages which exhibit its unutterable earnestness. Christ does not merely speak or call to Laodicea. He is too much in earnest for that; and, besides, she is so much engrossed with the world that a voice would not reach her deaf ears. It needs knock upon knock to startle her. So He continues knocking; not forcing the door, or using violence, for God always treats us as reasonable and responsible creatures; and, besides, force cannot change the will or heart, and it is with these that Christ has to do; it is unto them that He is seeking entrance.

We cannot by stripes or angry words compel a man to love us. Hearts not won either by force or gold. Only love wins love--only earnestness overcomes rebelliousness. Christ treats us respectfully as well as reasonably, as we treat each other when wishing to enter their dwelling, counting that dwelling sacred, and only to be entered with the consent of the owner. How condescending is the Master; how meek and lowly! How He exemplifies His own precept, 'Knock, and it shall be opened!' Hear His words of old, 'It is the voice of my beloved that knocks, saying, Open to me, my sister my love, my dove, my undefiled--for my head is

filled with dew, and my locks with the drops of the night' (Song of Solomon 5:2). We ask--

(1.) HOW does He knock? By His word; His warnings; His invitations. By providences; by trials; by comforts; by sorrows; by joys; by family troubles and national calamities; by wars at home or abroad; by the confusions and distresses of nations. By convictions; by sermons; by friends; by the changes of the year. By His Holy Spirit ever working; every striving. By this message here.

(2.) WHEN does He knock? Continually. Day and night. All the day long. No man passes a day, no, an hour, without a knock--sometimes louder, sometimes gentler. He is always knocking; and His knocks seem to get louder as the last days draw on, and His coming approaches.

O sinner, O Laodicean, listen! The Lord is knocking! Listen! Do not let Him longer stand without. Open, and bid Him welcome.

IV. The appeal of Christ to the Laodiceans. 'If any man will hear my voice, and open the door.' It is--

(1) a loving appeal;

(2) a personal appeal;

(3) an honest appeal;

(4) an earnest appeal.

'If any man!' Here in another form is the often-repeated 'whoever' of other places; and the force or point of the expression is, 'Oh that every man--every one of you!' 'If you had known' is equal to 'Oh that you had known;' so 'If any man' means 'Would that each of you!' What an appeal! And is it to do some great thing? No! only to hear His voice and to open the door--only that. Christ will do all the rest. Hear, O man, O Laodicean! The Lord speaks to you from heaven. Is His voice inarticulate and inaudible? Does He not mean you? Are His knockings not for you? Are His love, His patience, His earnestness, not for you? At each door He knocks, saying to the inhabitant--Hear and open. No lost soul hereafter shall be able to say, He did not knock at my door, else I would have heard and opened.

O deaf Laodicean, listen and open, before it be too late; before He has gone away and left you alone in your worldliness. Lukewarmness may seem little now, but what will it be hereafter? Christ's knocks may be unheeded now, but each one of them will come back to memory, when too late, to torment you forever. Oh hear and open! Quickly, quickly, for the time is short!

V. The promise of Christ. This is threefold, and each of the three parts full of meaning and love.

(1) I will come in to him. His standing on the outside is of no use to us. No doubt His standing there tells us His love, and forms one of the great items in the good news which we bring even to such a sinner as that of Laodicea. But a mere outside Christ will profit us nothing. An outside cross will not pacify, nor heal, nor save. It must come in; and it comes in upon our believing. We hear the knock, and we say to the knocking One, 'come in, You blessed of the Lord;' and immediately He comes in with His healing, saving cross; He comes in with His divine fellowship and love. The gracious promise is, 'We will come in to him, and make our abode with him' (John 14:23). The presence of the Lord Jesus in our dwelling, turns darkness into light. His absence is gloom; His presence is glory and gladness.

(2) I will sup with him. When He comes in, He does not give a hasty salutation, a brief 'Peace be with you,' and then depart. He sits down--not to rest Himself, as He did at Jacob's well, but to sup with us, as at Emmaus. He comes in as a guest, to take a place at our poor table, and to partake of our homely meal. The King comes in--not to His banqueting-house, but to our earthly cottage. He comes in lowliness and love, as He entered the house of Zaccheus, with 'Today I must abide at your house' upon His lips. At this table of ours, it is He who shares with us what we possess; it is we who give to Him that whereon to feast, and not He to us. Such are the meekness and gentleness of Christ! So affable, so accessible, so condescending He is! The knock comes to every door. Who will shut Him out?

(3) He shall sup with me. Christ has a banquet in preparation, a feast of fat things--'the marriage supper of the Lamb.' To this He invites us here, promising that they with whom He sups on earth shall hereafter sup with Him in His kingdom, when that shall be fulfilled which He spoke, 'I will not drink of the fruit of the vine, until the day when I drink it new with you in the kingdom of God.' The wise virgins go in to the marriage and the supper; the foolish are shut out. Here is the gracious promise, to be fulfilled hereafter when He comes again in His glory. He first sits down at our table, and then, while sitting there, He gives us the invitation to sit down with Him at His royal table, in the great bridal hall, where the marriage is to be consummated, and the festival held.

Now is the fast day--the feast day is coming. The absence shall be ended, the everlasting presence and fellowship begun. We have here a feast in absence, when we feed on the symbols of the body and the blood; but the feast of the presence is coming, when we shall feed on the divine 'show-bread' (or presence bread), Christ Himself being at once the provider and the substance of the feast. O everlasting festival, when will you begin? O song that never ends, when shall your first notes be heard? O lamps of the heavenly hall, when will you be lighted, to shine down on the great supper-table, in the King's own banqueting-house, where we shall feast forever, and go out no more?

While Christ is thus knocking at our door, He is bidding us knock at His. 'Knock, and it shall be opened.' He will certainly hear our voice, and open the door to us. He will not be deaf to our voice, nor bar the door, nor keep us standing, nor send us empty away.

Whether the parable of our Lord as to the waiting servants (Luke 12:35-37) may not point to the same scene as that here in Laodicea, I do not say. They have some points in common. For it is the Lord that there is said to knock that His servants may open to Him immediately. There is, no doubt, a difference. In Luke He is represented as returning from the wedding to His own house. In the Revelation, He comes to ours. But still, in both cases it is He who knocks. His Church will be found in different circumstances when he comes. Then, as well as now, there may be many kinds of knocking; yet in all it is the same earnest desire on his part to be admitted, that is described. He wants to enter. His knock and His voice are sincere and loud. He will not force the door; but still He wants to be in. O Church of God, keep Him not out. How much you lose! For His absence, no outward prosperity, nor riches, nor numbers, can compensate. If He be kept out, all is sadness, and leanness, and poverty. If He be admitted, all is well. Happy the Church with which Christ is daily feasting. Happy the soul in which He has come to dwell, and who, in daily communion by faith, tastes the Bridegroom's love!

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