



Words to the Winners of Souls

Horatius Bonar, CrossReach Publications

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“HOW MUCH MORE WOULD A FEW GOOD AND FERVENT MEN EFFECT IN THE MINISTRY THAN A MULTITUDE OF LUKEWARM ONES!” Such was the remark of Ecolampadius, the Swiss Reformer,—a man who had been taught by experience, and who has recorded that experience for the benefit of other churches and other days. It is a remark, however, the truth of which has been but little acknowledged and acted on; nay, whose importance is to this day unappreciated even where its truth is not denied. The mere multiplying of men calling themselves ministers of Christ, will avail little. They may be but “cumberers of the ground.” They may be like Achans, troubling the camp; or perhaps Jonahs, raising the tempest. Even when sound in the faith, yet, through unbelief, lukewarmness, and slothful formality, they may do irreparable injury to the cause of Christ; freezing and withering up all spiritual life around them. The lukewarm ministry of one who is theoretically orthodox, is often more extensively and fatally ruinous to souls than that of one grossly inconsistent or flagrantly heretical. “What man on earth is so pernicious a drone as an idle minister?” said Cecil. And Fletcher remarked well, that “lukewarm pastors made careless Christians.” Can the multiplication of such ministers, to whatever amount, be counted a blessing to a people? The fathers of the Scottish Church, acting upon this principle, preferred keeping a parish vacant to appointing over it an unsuitable pastor. And when the church of Christ, in all her denominations, returns to primitive example, and, walking in apostolical footsteps, seeks to be conformed more closely to inspired models, allowing nothing that pertains to earth to come between her and her living Head, then will she give more careful heed to see that the men to whom she intrusts the care of souls, however learned and able, should be yet more distinguished by their spirituality and zeal and faith and love. In comparing Baxter and Orton together, the biographer of the former remarks that “Baxter would have set the world on fire while Orton was lighting a match.” How true! Yet not true alone of Baxter or of Orton. These two individuals are representations of two classes in the church of Christ in every age, and of every denomination. The latter class are far the more numerous: the Ortons you may count by hundreds, the Baxters by tens; yet who would not prefer a solitary specimen of the one to a thousand of the other? “When he spoke of weighty soul concerns,” says one of his contemporaries of Baxter, “you might find his very spirit drenched therein.” No wonder that he was blessed with such amazing success! Men felt that in listening to him they were in contact with one who was dealing with realities, and these of infinite moment.

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