

Words to the Winners of Souls


By 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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Editorial Review

About the Author

Horatius Bonar - (1808-1889), Scottish churchman and poet Horatius Bonar had a passionate heart for revival. He was brother to the more well-known Andrew Bonar, and with him defended D. L. Moody's evangelistic ministry in Scotland. He authored a couple of excellent revival works, one including over a hundred biographical sketches and the other an addendum to Rev. John Gillies' Historical Collections bringing it up to date. Horatius was in fact one of eleven children, and of these an older brother, John James, and a younger, Andrew, also became ministers and were all closely involved, together with Thomas Chalmers, William C. Burns and Robert Murray M'Cheyne, in the important spiritual movements which affected many places in Scotland in the 1830s and 1840s. In the controversy known as the "Great Disruption," Horatius stood firmly with the evangelical ministers and elders who left the Church of Scotland's General Assembly in May 1843 and formed the new Free Church of Scotland. By this time he had started to write hymns, some of which appeared in a collection he published in 1845, but typically, his compositions were not named. His gifts for expressing theological truths in fluent verse form are evident in all his best-known hymns, but in addition he was also blessed with a deep understanding of doctrinal principles. Examples of the hymns he composed on the fundamental doctrines include, "Glory be to God the Father".....on the Trinity. "O Love of God, how strong and true".....on Redemption. "Light of the world," - "Rejoice and be glad" - "Done is the work" on the Person and Work of Christ. "Come Lord and tarry not," on His Second Coming, while the hymn "Blessed be God, our God!" conveys a sweeping survey of Justification and Sanctification. In all this activity, his pastoral work and preaching were never neglected and after almost twenty years laboring in the Scottish Borders at Kelso, Bonar moved back to Edinburgh in 1866 to be minister at the Chalmers Memorial Chapel (now renamed St. Catherine's Argyle Church). He continued his ministry for a further twenty years helping to arrange D.L. Moody's meetings in Edinburgh in 1873 and being appointed moderator of the Free Church ten years later. His health declined by 1887, but he was approaching the age of eighty when he preached in his church for the last time, and he died on 31 May 1889.

Users Review

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