

Lukewarmness – Part 2

Welcome to Lukewarmness, Part 2, August 27, 2008. Recall this is a three-part series; last time was Part 1, today Part 2, and next time we'll do Part 3. I took lukewarmness and described it as Christians doing the spiritual moonwalk whereby we give the appearance of moving forward—that is to say closer to God while in reality we're moving backward in our lukewarmness. But lukewarmness always wears a camouflage suit. There is no Christian who comes up with a sign on saying I am lukewarm compared to other Christians. So it's important that we address lukewarmness by undressing lukewarmness so that we look at these various mechanisms by which lukewarmness exists within us and is camouflaged. Last time we looked at the first three—namely, compartmentalization, compromise, and living in condemnation.

Today we'll pick it up with Part 4 which is living by feelings. Living by feelings is to measure God's love by whether or not we feel it. It's to measure God's presence by whether or not we feel it. It's to determine truth by how it feels to us. But we're never to worship feelings. Feelings, in fact, are part of the soul of a Christian that needs progressive sanctification. We worship God. God is truth. Recall the definition of truth. Truth is what God is and how God views everything else. That's truth however we may feel about it. We worship facts and not feelings.

Next poster. Many of you all have seen this simple drawing before, but it's to keep us in proper relationship in understanding of our feelings. Jesus Christ is a fact. He is truth. That's the fact that we worship. We're to sum up all things in Jesus. We attach to that fact by faith. Feelings are to follow faith as faith is attached to the fact of Jesus Christ. You'll notice on this train that feelings are the caboose and feelings are not the engine; but feelings are to follow behind the engine. We're never to determine facts by feelings. So our attitude is this. As Christians we do not live by our feelings; but thank God that we can come to progressively feel what we live by. The Christian is not joyless; but the Christian is to follow Jesus Christ whether or not he feels joy at that moment, operating in faith, in Jesus, that ultimately joy will come; because He came that we might have His joy. Living by feelings is a mechanism of lukewarmness toward God. The world tells us to follow your heart. Well that's true because the world functions in self worship and the heart of fallen man will always tell him to follow his own desires. The Christian walks by truth. Jeremiah 17:9 (in the KJ Version) – The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked; who can know it? So we follow Jesus Who is the truth. He's the truth because He is God and He came to model for us and to teach us how God views all other things. We do not follow our hearts which are deceitful above all things. Walking by feelings is a form of passive aggressiveness toward God. It's to be passive toward God as being truth. And it's to be in self worship, and aggressively so, by self declaring our feelings to be the barometer of truth as we follow our hearts.

Now go back to the lukewarmness poster which has the categories listed. Number five is substitution. Substitution may take many forms such as moral crusades, political activism, church positions, or even knowledge gained from the Bible, from books, from tapes, and from conferences. None of these are bad in themselves; but they can become a substitute for surrender to God. Moral crusades can be an expression of self righteousness and a hunger for the praise of man as we think that others should follow our example to be angry about the crusade which the person is engaged in or angry about that which the person must pursue the opposite of. But

political activism can function entirely in the power of self, to try to bring about holiness from the top down and from the outside in by one's own contrived schemes about how best to bring about holiness. Even church positions can be sought and used primarily to exhibit ourselves and our natural gifting. Knowledge can become a substitute for knowing. We can fulfill II Timothy 3:7 by always learning, but never coming to the truth. Knowledge can puff up as we're told in I Corinthians 8:1.

I once heard a highly honored, academic theology professor give a speech and then afterwards had a question and answer session. You could tell from the speech that certain Christians were probing him with questions about some of the things that he had said. And his reply given in anger openly was: Do you speak Latin? Do you speak Hebrew? Do you speak Greek? Then who are you to argue with me about the proper interpretation of these things from the original language? In other words, a person can memorize the Bible, even understand some of the connectedness of it and never surrender to one phrase in the Bible about God. All of that can be done in the power of self. All of that can be done to call attention to self. All of that can be done to seek the praise of man. All of that can be done to maintain a position of self righteousness. All of that can be a substitute for a surrender of self. And all of that can be a substitute for growth in true godliness as one fixes his gaze upon Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith. In short form, all of those can be done in self worship. I Corinthians 6:12 tells us that all things are lawful; but not all things are profitable. All of those things that I mentioned are lawful. All of them may be profitable. But it's also true that if we substitute any of those things instead of surrendering to God, then our substitution can be a mechanism of lukewarmness toward God that is carefully camouflaged.

Another example is people operating in the natural gifts. Naturally sweet people may substitute sweetness for the Gospel; and in fact, believe that their sweetness is derived from the Gospel, although they haven't changed one bit since they got saved. Naturally caring people may substitute caring for the Gospel as their interpretation is that their caring is a fruit of the Spirit brought about by the Gospel even though it preceded the Gospel. Naturally giving people may substitute giving for the Gospel even though they were naturally giving before being saved by the Gospel. An example is that recently I watched a well known Christian singer give an incredibly beautiful rendition of the beautiful song I Am Not Ashamed of the Gospel. When later conversing about an illness that she had that, in fact, could become fatal, she said I know I'm going to Heaven because I've been a good person. In other words, she had substituted her natural singing gift and substituted her own goodness for the very Gospel of Jesus Christ which she sang so beautifully about. That could occur with all natural gifting. Even when you go to church and see a church full of good, sweet, caring Christians, the question has to be asked how good were they, how sweet were they, and how caring were they, and how giving were they before they got saved? Because it's only the change that can be called fruit of the Spirit as a result of salvation through Jesus Christ.

Number six on our list is playing solitaire. This is the flip side of substitution. This is to constantly seek to live in a cave or on a mountain top. It's to seek progressive revelation while avoiding the testing of your faith in that revelation. But the revelation about your attitude toward that revelation is in the testing of that revelation and that revelation never occurs in the mountain top or in the cave. The Holy Spirit comes with revelation, that is true; but He also comes with

power as Paul told us in I Corinthians 4:20. Playing solitaire is to acknowledge the grace of God to give revelation, but to deny the sufficient grace that would empower you to walk out that revelation through the adversities of life associating with other human beings. It is true that Jesus went to the mountain top; but it's also true that He didn't live there. He didn't stay there. Whatever He received at the top of the mountain, He came down the mountain to apply it, to walk in it, to receive the testing put His way by the Father, and to reveal it to others by teaching it and modeling it by His lifestyle. No one is to play solitaire in the Kingdom of God. Playing solitaire is to relish what we know and to seek to know more. This is good. But it can also be a means of seeking to have our untested and unchanged selves viewed as especially holy because of our mountain top life. That's bad. We freely received. But when we play solitaire, then we do not freely give that which we have freely received, in contradiction to the instructions of Jesus in Matthew 10:8 where He said – Freely you have received, now freely give. So playing solitaire can be another form of remaining in self worship, even to the point of self righteousness, taking pride in how much we know, while refusing to share it and refusing to come down to have it tested. That can be another mechanism of camouflage of lukewarmness toward God.

Number seven is excusism. This is to judge ourselves by our intentions, not by our fruit. Matthew 7:16 (Jesus says) – By their fruit you shall know them. Guess what? That includes ourselves and not just others. How far back does excusism go? Back to the Garden of Eden. Genesis 3:12-13 tells us that after eating the forbidden fruit, Eve blamed the serpent. Then Adam trumped her by blaming Eve and then blaming God. The woman that You gave me caused me to sin. God's attitude toward our excuses is revealed in Luke 14:16-24. This is the parable of the man who gave the big feast and the response of those invited to the feast. The Scripture tells us that they all began to make excuses. One had land that needed tending. One had oxen that needed training. One had a new wife that needed attention. All of those are worthy endeavors except when they keep you from coming to the feast of the Lord Jesus Christ. Excusism is to want full credit for wanting to come to the feast while assigning a higher value and a higher priority to other things that keep us from coming to the feast. It is our desire to have our response not to come be viewed as fully acceptable to a Holy God Who has invited us to come. In summary, excusism is to want credit for coming without coming. God's response to that is in verse 24 of that Scripture. None of those who were invited shall taste of My dinner. Yes, we're to love others and we're to love our parents and honor them and so on; but the revelation is that when we love God more than others we will love others more than before. So we are never to give priority to anything, even commandments of God above coming to God closer and closer as we seek His face.

Grumbling is a subtle form of excusism. Grumbling says to God that I obviously would have done more and glorified You more except for these people and these circumstances that You gave me to contend with. Grumbling always blames others and blames circumstances and by association blames God Who gave you those others and gave you those circumstances. Grumbling excuses self. Grumbling is a form of excusism and excusism is a form of lukewarmness toward God. Grumbling and excusism maintain our unresponsivity to the commandments of God to come to His face regardless of circumstances and regardless of others. God tells us in Lamentations 3:39 – Why should any living mortal or any man offer complaint in view of his sins?

Number eight is judgmentalism. This is to compare ourselves with others as a mechanism of validation of our own spirituality. It's to function spiritually with the attitude of the two campers in the familiar story about their being chased by a bear. The one said to the other as they ran side by side from the bear, do you think we can outrun the bear? And the other replied I don't have to outrun the bear, I just have to outrun you. That's how we function as Christians in our fallen natures; that we will function like radar to find someone with at least one quality worse than ourselves. Then we will compare evil with evil and then pronounce our lesser evil as acceptable to God. That's another way of seeking to have our unchanged selves viewed as righteous enough as a defense against coming closer to God. Judgmentalism is, therefore, another mechanism of lukewarmness toward God. We take the attitude of the bumper sticker that I may be slow, but I'm ahead of you. That's lukewarmness because it takes the slowness of our spiritual maturation and validates it as fast enough to God for God because others are even slower than we are. Rather than pressing toward the mark, lukewarmness prefers to miss the mark by focusing on how much others are missing the mark and taking pride in our ability to recognize how much they're missing it.

Number nine is ignorance. You may say that we are accountable for what we know. That is true; but it's not the whole truth. We're actually accountable for two things: what we know and knowing more. The drive to know more is called hunger and thirst in spiritual terms. We tend to pronounce our ignorance as excusable. The truth is we are ignorant of what we ignore and we ignore what we give a low priority. Recall the words of Jesus in Luke 23:34 as He prayed to the Father on behalf of those who were crucifying Him – Father forgive them for they do not know what they do. We interpret that to mean that their ignorance is excusable and, therefore, they're not accountable. But if it were excusable, they would have had no need of forgiveness and Jesus need never have prayed that prayer. Andy Capp is the cartoon character who never works and who lives off of welfare. One of Andy's young cohorts went rushing by him and yelled to Andy come on Andy, they're training us for jobs down at the plant. And Andy replied son, don't ever lose your ignorance, you can't replace it. The point being that as soon as Andy learned how to do something, he would be expected to do it and then would have to go off the dole. So his mechanism of remaining unchanged was to never learn anything. Do we function that way as Christians so as to avoid a higher level of accountability that comes with progressive revelation? Whenever we cling to our ignorance so as to avoid progressively larger accountability, then we use our ignorance as a mechanism of lukewarmness toward God. We're told to enter the rest of God. It's hard to enter the rest of God when we insist on remaining ignorant of the rest of God beyond what we know. John Piper tells us that we are too easily satisfied with the things of God. Scripture tells us to hunger and thirst and to seek the face of God as David wrote in Psalms 27:8. We're to follow the example of Moses who after all that God had shown him and all the miracles that had been performed on his behalf and the behalf of the children of Israel, had the attitude that Thou hast begun to show me. Anything less is an expression of lukewarmness as we value our ignorance more than we value giving more glory to God by passionate pursuit of the rest of God beyond what we have previously known as we maintain our comfort level.

Number ten – Scriptural filters. This is to cling to Scriptures and quote Scriptures that allow our unchanged selves to claim the maximal blessings from the Word of God. Then we filter out or minimize the Scriptures that call for maximal change or maximal sacrifice. We need to recall Psalms 119:160 which says that the sum of Thy Word is truth. It is my testimonial experience

that in most life circumstances, there are at least two or more spiritual frames of reference that have to be maintained in perfect balance to discern how to approach a particular situation. Help the needy. If you don't work, you don't eat. If you don't maintain both of those in perfect tension, then you will not be able to run the program for the needy in the church with true discernment. We are to help the needy; but we're not to enable parasitism and laziness. We do not necessarily surrender to nor apply all of the Word of God that we have highlighted in our Bibles. But it's probably true that you apply even less of that which you have not highlighted. Recall when tempted by Satan, Jesus told us in Matthew 4:4 speaking to Satan that man shall not live by bread alone, but by every Word that proceeds from the mouth of God. When we apply our Scriptural filters so as to accentuate our spiritual strong points to demonstrate our holiness and ignore the other half of the Word of God that calls for change in us with things which are still in residual self righteousness and unholiness; then we're in self worship, whatever we may call it. Applying our Scriptural filters can be a method of not responding to all of the Word of God; and thus, can be a mechanism of lukewarmness.

Number eleven is laziness, and this is the last one for today. I once read a quote that said most people will go to any extreme to avoid truly thinking. I have made an international reputation as a thinker by thinking twice a week. We're often lazy creatures who prefer not to be disturbed. That allows us to remain in our cocoon of carnality where we have comfort, convenience, and control at minimal costs. Laziness is extreme lukewarmness toward God. To understand that, we must go back to understanding love. Love is a passion for oneness. God loves us. He has a passion that no part of ourselves remain outside of Himself. He wants our unrenewed mind to be progressively renewed to express the mind of Christ, to come into complete oneness with Him. Since Malachi 3:6 tells us that I, the Lord, do not change, then any change to bring about oneness obligatorily must occur in us, not in God. Laziness is love; it is love of the status quo. Laziness is a passion to remain one with the status quo. It's a desire to remain unchanged. And the passion to remain unchanged is passionate inertia toward God, not passionate pursuit of God. Laziness, therefore, in a Christian is a primary mechanism of lukewarmness toward God.

So today we've hammered at ourselves (me included) and not just others, not just you, at the camouflage suits of lukewarmness including living by feelings, substitution, playing solitaire, excusism, judgmentalism, ignorance, applying Scriptural filters, and laziness. We'll pick it up next time and cover the remaining five of lukewarmness as we come into hopefully progressive oneness with God by addressing lukewarmness by undressing lukewarmness.

So my time is up and I thank you for yours.