

KEEPING OUR HEARTS WARM: 2 Thessalonians 2:16-17.

Reading: 2 Thessalonians 2: 13-17.

The Christian religion is something that involves the whole person. It is a relationship whereby God relates to us in our entirety. We relate to Him and respond to Him with the whole person, making our whole bodies a living sacrifice. In our relationship with our Lord Jesus Christ, we relate to Him who is fully God and fully man. He is a real Christ and is to be a 'felt Christ' to us, not an idea, but a Person we relate to. So we are to love Him with all our soul. So, with some hard Winter days perhaps ahead of us, we need to keep close to Him that our hearts may be kept warm.

1. It is easy to get cold hearted.

The Christian life can be an exhausting journey and we can lose something of the warmth of our affection for the Lord. When we lose that vital part of our relationship with Him, we also lose something of a vital relationship with each other. When we lose a sense of wonder of what the Lord has done for His people, then things can become very drab and grey. We can become careless and given over to making complaints. The Lord spoke to the church in Ephesus about its loss of love (Revelation 2:4-5). We can become weary in doing good (Galatians 6:9). We can be discouraged when lawlessness abounds (Matthew 24:12).

What are some of the signs that we are becoming cold hearted? One thing is that we are unmoved by the glory of Christ (v14). The truth of what the Lord has done for His people loses its impact and we are dulled to its meaning for us and its importance. We might cease to be very penitent and instead tolerate our sins too comfortably, become slothful and self-indulgent. We cease to be jealous for the health of our soul and cease striving to be holy. We may lose interest in the spiritual welfare of others and cease to care about the state, for example, of our nation. And whenever there is a state of cold heartedness creeping over us, we will not have much interest in or appetite for prayer.

2. Some causes.

There can be lots of causes of this sad malaise. We cannot hope to list them all here. But here are a few possibilities. For a start, it might be that we are actually unwell. Illnesses can take away our energy and desire for spiritual things. Likewise, it might be that we are tired and the dullness that has come over us is the result of over-exertion, so that we are numbed in our spiritual senses and just going on auto-pilot.

We always have to be alert to the possibility that sin might have taken up occupation somewhere in our soul. Perhaps it has been some inordinate affection or interest. Perhaps our thoughts have been taken up with jealousy, or anger or covetousness.

Likewise it might be that the world has invaded our heart. Our aims and ambitions no longer have anything to do with spiritual objectives but are centred only in this life and what it can give us. We are looking to be popular in the eyes of the world and hoping to achieve status and success, measured by the world's standards.

3. He warms us.

We always do well to remember in situations when we are perhaps becoming aware of cold heartedness in ourselves, that our love for God is to be kindled by His love to us. A candle is able to thaw ice. The warmth of Christ's love is able to thaw our icy hearts (1 John 4:10; and John 17:25-26). In a way it is so, so obvious, and so, so simple. Yet we forget this and then lose our way.

In this process, if followed through, we manage to remember who we are. We battle through to get a proper perspective that we are in Christ Jesus, that our identity is rooted in Him. We are saved, justified, in the way of being sanctified and, eventually, to be glorified. We refer who we are to Him and find our true selves again, as the Lord's people, saved by grace, and traveling home to glory. We are able to affirm to ourselves that we are loved of Christ, that we are Christians because of Him (v16). We have everlasting consolation and good hope through His mercy.

We realize too that He goes on loving us throughout our Christian life in exactly the same way that we discovered He loved us when we were converted. The love that took Him to the cross did not get left behind at the cross. We were precious to Him then, when He died for us, and we are precious to Him still. The love that was willing to bear pain is willing to bear pain still for us. So the consolation and comfort (v17) are not yesterday's news but today's experience too. We are to discover the reality of this in our conditions of tiredness or illness, in our loneliness, in our trials and in our griefs. With it all comes a greater assurance. We have mounting evidence of His care for us in time past. This helps us to be forward facing, but carrying with us the felt consolation of our spiritual experience.

We have to clear our minds of distractions. We can be like Martha who was distracted and missed the better things that Mary discovered. We are not mindful enough of the truth about our Lord Jesus Christ but should be like Mary in Luke 10:42, who chose what was needed. To meaningfully receive the love of Christ and to have our hearts warmed by it, requires time and care. It is not something received if we are in a rush. The clarity that comes when we are able to say, 'Now I see it', is a realization that brings warmth to the soul.