

WOMEN AFTER GOD'S OWN HEART

HEARTS AFLAME

The theme we have chosen today is evangelism. God is the Evangelist. It is the Holy Spirit who initiates evangelism, motivates for it, and empowers it.

Evangelism follows from the nature of God; He so loved the world. He is the supreme lover who gave everything, endured anything for us the beloved. That is what our God is like, and if we are his beloved children, then it stands to reason that we should mirror in our own attitudes that supernatural love for the lost souls all around us.

The early church was like that--they had a profound sense of indebtedness backed by the love of God warming their own hearts. They could not bask in it selfishly, they simply had to go out and tell others. They went out because they had fallen in love with the Great Lover. "We loved because He first loved us" (I John 4:10) and because Christ had given them a clear command. They did what He told them to: they went out in the power of the Spirit and proclaimed the Good News as Jesus commanded them. We should be excited about sharing this life-changing message with everyone. Especially, since it is the dearest and nearest thing on the heart of God.

It is my conviction, however, that many of us have lost our sense of purpose because we have become sidetracked.

(1) First, we can focus on many good and noble Christian activities and neglect the most important thing, the reason Christ came to earth: "to seek and save the lost."

(2) The other ways we are sidetracked are through confusion, losing our passion, discouragement, becoming diverted or simply complacent.

Unless there is a touch of revival in each of our hearts we run the risk of becoming an institutional success without a radical commitment. Christ's command is to make disciples; faithful reproducing followers of Christ. Not only should we lead people to a saving knowledge of Christ, but we should also nurture them toward maturity so they can do the same (II Tim 2:2). Making disciples is to be the part and parcel of everything we do.

Possibly you are experiencing spiritual tiredness or pressure to perform or feeling spiritually trapped or the frustration of an up-and-down relationship with Christ. If you are experiencing any of the above, let me say, every Christian at one point or another has wrestled with frustration and failure. We have all at times struggled and

failed in our attempts to be spiritually vibrant, radically committed Christians. I would like to examine some reasons why we fail or falter, and some solutions to our problems.

Let's examine some heart problems and find out how to have hearts which are consistently aflame.

I. THOSE WHOSE HEART'S ARE THE LORD'S - PARTWAY

Two examples illustrate this heart problem: (1) Solomon in the Old Testament and (2) some would be disciples in the New Testament.

1. Solomon's "However" Becomes "Not Fully the Lord's"

The Lord loved Solomon deeply; even offering him the option to

"Ask for whatever you want me to give you." (I Ki 3:5)

At Solomon's request the Lord gave him wisdom and great knowledge. The condition placed on Solomon to enjoy this undeserved blessing was

"If you walk in my ways I will give you a long life."

The life of Solomon prospered. But then we read Solomon's "however."

"King Solomon, however loved many foreign women." (I Ki 11:1-9)

The word "however" qualifies what has gone before--it is a modifier--it changes the good report to a conditional one. In this case, the word "however" recasts Solomon's life into a sad light. The Lord had said to Israel,

"You must not intermarry with foreign women because they will surely turn your heart after their gods."

"Nevertheless Solomon held fast to them"--his foreign women.

Because he intermarried with the culture of the world

"his heart was not fully devoted to the Lord his God."

"The Lord became angry with Solomon because his heart turned away."

Solomon's life was fine until he came to his "however": his love of foreign women who turned his heart away from Jehovah God to their false gods. In the same way, our life as a Christian is a cause and effect relationship: if we are seduced by the culture and intermarry with it, then we will surely have the result of "however"--merging the way of the world with the way of God. The result is that the world

swallows us up. Solomon died a broken man--disillusioned and spiritually insensitive (vanity of vanities, all is vanity). "His heart was not fully devoted to the Lord" and he could not have it both ways--God and the world.

The lesson for us is: flee from the gods of this broken world before they swallow you up--don't think "I can get away with compromise because it's not hurting me now." Wrong conclusion! It is easier to continue with the Lord than it is to make a comeback. Our pride stands in the way and being our own God is addictive. Don't think you are wiser than Solomon. If you want to avoid Solomon's "however", surrender to the God who is. Stop seeking the god you want in the world and start seeking the God who is and live a "life fully devoted to God."

2. The Would Be Disciples In The New Testament

The would be disciples of Luke 9:57-62 present to us the same divided devotion. In September we looked at the different responses to Christ's call to become His disciple in Luke 9:57-62. The three responses were:

- (a) The verbally committed--just to say you are a disciple isn't enough. Christ wants us to identify with him completely.
- (b) The procrastinating disciple is one who is retaining the right to make selective self-determining decisions regarding commitment. It is really an excuse for partial obedience.
- (c) The undecided disciple is one who keeps her options open, trying to get the best from both worlds. This indecision results because we don't really believe God has our best interests at heart.

As we found out this morning, the battle rages as we try to make the decision to follow Christ and become His disciple. It continues to rage throughout our walk with the Lord, but it will be a victory if we are fully devoted to the Lord.

II. THOSE WHOSE HEARTS ARE THE LORD'S - WILLING BUT TENTATIVE

What do I mean by tentative? Probably the word that describes this person is naive.

1. The 12 Disciples

I think of the 12 disciples before the cross. They loved Christ--recognizing His messiahship, enjoying His

miracles and teachings. But, their focus was largely on what they were going to get: Who among us is going to be the greatest?, When is He going to bring in the Kingdom?, Let's hear about your time schedule Lord and our seats of authority. They were embarrassed by Jesus, who He associated with, and His offending statements to the pharisees and scribes. They got more and more nervous about the increasing animosity of the rulers and their determination to kill Jesus. The disciples didn't intend to forsake Jesus, but in the crisis of His arrest they all ran away in fear.

2. New Believers - Like The Disciples

The new believer is like those disciples. They are willing, they are excited, they participate fully in the Lord's work. But they don't yet realize the implications of suffering for Christ or being "hated by the world." It comes as quite a surprise that being a disciple of Christ's often involves rejection, or a daily, sometimes unexciting walk. Even more disillusioning is the exposure of our sins to a greater and greater depth, more than you ever expected you had. Add to that Satan's attacks which are unexpected and vicious.

III. THOSE WHOSE HEARTS FOR THE LORD ARE TIRED AND LUKEWARM

Christ addresses these two responses in his message to the churches of Ephesus (Rev 2:1-5) and Laodicea (Rev 3:14-19).

(1). Ephesus - Tired

Ephesus--"I have this against you, you have lost your first love." The missing element is love; that spontaneous glad response to the grace of God which resulted in your coming to Christ. What has changed? Has Christ's love diminished? Christ advises the church of Ephesus to "remember from where you have fallen" and "repent."

To "remember" is to realize that we should be living in our identification truths with the power of the Holy Spirit as our strength. Losing that motivation of love for Christ is to "forget our forgiveness" and forget our condition as unbelievers: guilt, fear, failure, despair, and depression in our former life.

To "repent" means choosing to change our mind and the direction of our life. Agreeing to see our life the way the Lord sees us and living according to truth--God's Word, not our feelings. If Christ is our first love, then all of life

becomes exciting and motivating, and His agenda becomes ours. Conversely, life becomes hopelessly confused and boring when we take our focus off Christ and His love for us. We lose interest and stop being involved in His program: evangelizing the world.

2. Laodicea - Lukewarm

Laodicea lukewarmness is the natural result of losing our love for Christ. The mark of the Laodicean church was that it was composed of people who were deceived: so self-deceived that they were indifferent to everything that was of real value, both now and in eternity future. The two phrases that express their wrong view of themselves are:

- (1) "You say..." and
- (2) "but you do not realize....."

(a) They said, "I am rich." - Center of banking industry; materialistic.

Christ said, "You are poor, wretched."

(b) They said, "I have acquired alot. I have clothes and many things."

Christ said, "You are naked and poor."

(c) They said, "We make the best eye salve to preserve our eyesight."

Christ said, "You are blind."

The points of their greatest achievements and pride, Christ condemns as their greatest weaknesses.

Christ hates compromise with the world's values and spiritual indifference. It's a real challenge for us to keep from being drawn into the apathy of our world towards God. The world feels no need for God. We dare not allow ourselves to fall into the trap of indifference. It leads to self-deception and not being used by the Lord. Our indifference towards the Lord and His agenda is observed by neighbors, and even more troubling, we transfer it to our children. They become enamored by the world's values and want the world's riches and accolades.

The self-deception which results is very addictive. Christ says, because he loves us, he will rebuke and discipline this lukewarmness. We often become alienated from God as the result of continuing in a besetting sin and refusing to deal with it. Our walk with God becomes lukewarm and He disciplines us to get our attention. Repentance is the only way back to our first love. Accepting Christ's forgiveness,

His righteousness to cover our nakedness, and His riches which are so much more satisfying than the world's.

IV. THOSE WHOSE HEARTS ARE AFLAME AND FULLY DEVOTED TO THE LORD

This is what Paul urges us to do, "fan into flame the gift of God within our hearts." As a result, we serve him enthusiastically; using our God given gifts. Wesley Duevel calls this lifestyly being Ablaze for God. "You are so filled with the presence and beauty of the Lord that your life is radiant, filled with Holy Spirit given power, filled with the love and compassion of Christ Himself."

This love and this power is entirely beyond our ability and our power to produce. Nothing but God's love can expel and conquer our self-life. When we are overflowing with Christ's love, His overwhelming love produces in us the "fragrance of Christ," as Paul calls it.

A.B. Simpson became such a man as he utterly abandoned himself to Christ and was filled with the Holy Spirit. Tozer writes of him,

"A veritable flood of spiritual energy was released through the consecration and faith of Simpson. It was as if a burning core of power had been tossed into the center of New York city, radiating heat and light in all directions. Evangelism leaped out like fire. The work of the Lord that was accomplished was almost beyond belief."

Andrew Murray, in his book Absolute Surrender, insists that the cure for a lukewarm life is absolute surrender to Christ. This occurs when I am at last convinced that it is impossible for me to live the Christian life. "God, let there be an end to my trying, an end to my self-life. Let it be my delight to be helpless." Christ longs to fill us with His power and love. And further, He fills us with zeal to accomplish His work. This was true of the early church. All through the book of Acts when they were "filled with the Spirit" it resulted in God's power mightily and effectively working through the disciples while "everyone kept feeling a sense of awe."

The imagery of the "fragrance of Christ" illustrates several truths which should characterize our hearts aflame

In II Cor 2:14-16 Paul gives the analogy of being led in a triumphal procession by Christ, spreading everywhere the fragrance of the knowledge of Him. The imagery here is that of a Roman triumphal procession in which the victorious general would lead his soldiers and their captives in

festive procession while the people watched and applauded. The air was filled with the sweet smell released by the burning of incense being carried by the slaves in the procession.

1. Fragrance Description

We Christians, called to spiritual warfare, are triumphantly led by Christ. It is through us that God spreads the fragrance of the knowledge of Christ.

This fragrance, aroma/perfume, is the power of the UNCONSCIOUS INFLUENCE WHICH EVERYONE OF US EXERTS EVERYDAY. Fragrance is often used in Scripture to illustrate truth. But this fragrance is the most wonderful one of all: the fragrance of Christ. Christ is the One whose fragrance permeates the smog and the slime of the world system.

Do you know how to absorb this fragrance? When we spend time with Christ we carry away with us the fragrance of Christ.

(a) If we spend a short amount of time with Him on an inconsistent basis, it's like that watered down cheap perfume which evaporates within a short time.

(b) When we spend alot of time with Christ on a consistent basis and become intimate with Him, it's like that \$200 an ounce pure perfume that penetrates our skin, and the aroma stays with us all day wherever we go.

The fragrance of Christ, however, is not something we do; it's something we are. Are you the fragrance of Christ to your children all day long? How about at work? In your neighborhood? What do your friends smell? What is the UNCONSCIOUS INFLUENCE we leave wherever we go?

2. Triumphal Procession

Christianity is really a crusading battle with Christ as the victorious leader marching in irresistable triumph from age to age, continent to continent, city to city, house to house, person to person. How wonderful that Paul himself had been conquered by the very same Christ he had tried to debase. We see him spending his life reaching people; bringing them into the church he had tried to destroy. Christ had conquered Paul completely.

It's important to remember that we are engaged in a campaign which will be victorious. The church hasn't always looked triumphant. It doesn't look very triumphant in the western world right now. But from God's point of view, it is

triumphant. Christ said His church cannot be overpowered by Satan; His kingdom cannot be derailed or destroyed.

God leads us in triumph in Christ Jesus. The final victory is Christ's. Some battles may be lost due to the failure of the soldiers involved, but still God is leading a triumphant procession of the church in Christ (e.g. Church in China today, in Africa; 10,000 a day accepting Christ--in 15 years it will be the most Christian continent).

3. We Are The Fragrance To God

"For we are to God the aroma of Christ." The joy of this fragrance to God is very much a part of this analogy. We are the aroma of Christ to God: in some way, we remind God of Christ. Your life and my life can mean something to God as He sees us being transformed into the image of Christ. Isn't that incredible to realize that we remind Him of Christ?

As we are growing into the image of Christ, God sees what His Son has accomplished in our lives and His heart is gladdened. As we meet Christ in the Word, God sees us being transformed from one degree of glory to another degree of glory by the Spirit (II Cor 3:18). As the image of Christ becomes more a part of our life, and the fragrance of Christ is being diffused by us into this smoggy filthy world; then, God's purpose of making disciples of all nations is getting accomplished. This fragrance is wafting upwards as well as outwards. God rejoices--the angels rejoice as more people are reached and disciplined.

4. We As The Fragrance

Then the figure Paul uses changes as he says, "We are the fragrance"--we ourselves! This brings the analogy closer home to each one of us; the responsibility is great. Can we say with Paul, "Be imitators of me as I am of Christ"? (I Cor 11:1) When we come out of the presence of Christ, have we perfumed our mind with Him? How about our words--are they His words? Our will--is it His will? Our actions--are they His actions? **OUR GREATEST INFLUENCE IS UNCONSCIOUS.** Therefore, the greater our intimacy with Christ, the greater our fragrance of Him will be.

5. Process of Making Perfume

There is yet another aspect of this analogy. How do they make the fragrant perfumes we enjoy so much? By crushing flower petals (e.g., like lavender or rosemary), or by heating them and then extracting the perfume.

In our walk with the Lord, it is the crushing experiences which can produce a greater fragrance than anything else can produce. Those who have suffered and have taken those experiences as opportunities to mature--allowing Christ to produce His fragrance, those are the ones whose life is the most fragrant. Crushing events can produce the fragrance of the knowledge of Christ; is that the effect suffering or discipline of the Holy Spirit has on you? Or does it release bitterness? It all depends on the way we respond to crushing experiences.

6. Result of Fragrance

The solemn aspect of this analogy of Paul's is the result of this fragrance: "To the one we are the smell of death; to the other, the fragrance of of life." In other words, the same gospel that brings life to some, brings death to others. Again this fits the imagery of the triumphant procession in Rome. The stream of people divided in the city: one stream went to the coliseum for death--the slaves captured in battle. The other stream went before the emperor for rewards and freedom. That's why Paul spent his whole life "knowing what it is to fear the Lord therefore we try to persuade men." It was the love of Christ which motivated Paul, and it is this same love which should motivate us to that great privilege and responsibility.

V. KEEPING OUR HEARTS FULLY DEVOTED TO CHRIST

The constant tendency of fire is to go out. If we do not obey Christ, then our devotion to Christ will die down. That's why Paul urged Timothy to "Fan into flame the gift of God which is in you." (II Tim 1:6) The Greek tense of the verb "fan" emphasizes the continuous rekindling of the flame so that our love for Christ should never lapse. His presence and power in and upon us will never diminish; this will produce the "fragrance of Christ"--an unforgettable UNCONSCIOUS INFLUENCE which others are unable to ignore. We should long for, pray for and be willing to pay the price for the continuing experience of Christ's fragrance and power on our lives and ministry "so that Christ's power may rest on us" (II Cor 12:9).

CONCLUSION

This is an important aspect of our life: the UNCONSCIOUS INFLUENCE of Christ which is backed by the Holy Spirit's power. We should be characterized by a passion: a longing

that others will come to share what we enjoy in Christ. We sin against His love if we do not live close enough to His yearning heart.

Dr. A.T. Pierson reiterates how to receive this fiery passion for souls: "There is a secret fellowship with God where we get this heavenly fire kindled within, and it makes personal work for souls easy and natural. To linger in God's presence until we see souls, as through his eyes, makes us long over them with a tireless longing. This passion for souls is probably the highest product of spiritual communion with God." When the Holy Spirit fills your heart and my heart with hunger for souls, He will guide us in ways to express that love in seeking the lost. "Thanks be to God, who leads us in triumphal procession in Christ and through us spreads everywhere the fragrance of the knowledge of Him." (II Cor 12:4)

Jesus taught us that love seeks. Seeking love drives the shepherd out to find the one lost sheep, even though the other 99 are safe. When he finds the one lost sheep he joyfully takes the sheep home and calls all his friends and neighbors to rejoice with him (Lk 15:3-7). Think of the intense joy we experience when we welcome new brothers and sisters into the family of God. That joy gives a vision to all the members of the body so they can each one experience the thrill of leading people to Christ. No joy compares to that of seeing someone you have been praying for and sharing with come to Christ. And then, the joy of discipling that one; watching them grow and mature until they reach others. What else is there in this world besides people?--people to reach and people to disciple.

My constant prayer for us here at Xenos is that we never lose our radical commitment. That our hearts flame higher, brighter, and more intensely with the love of Christ--His fragrance, His seeking love which expresses itself in a passion for souls.