

FANNING THE FLAMES OF PASSION FOR CHRIST

“WHAT TO DO WHEN OUR HEARTS GROW COLD”

Christ – He is our life. Scripture says that He has become for us in salvation, everything we would ever need or desire. In a phrase, Jesus said in **John 10** that the reason He came was so that we **“may have life, and have it abundantly.”** Abundant life not only includes eternal life in heaven hereafter, but a quality of life here and now, where we experience the fullness of God from the moment of conversion, and in an ever-increasing way as we grow. John’s Gospel alone overwhelmingly describes how abundant this life is, as Christ alone has become everything to us:

<p>“I AM the Bread of life” (6:35,41,48,51).</p>	<p>He is the only source of provision from God upon which our entire spiritual life depends, and without which we would die in a barren spiritual wilderness.</p>
<p>“I AM the Light of the world” (8:12).</p>	<p>He is the bright hope of life when all other lights go out, without which we would live in the domain of darkness.</p>
<p>“I AM the Door of the sheep” (10:7,9).</p>	<p>He is the One through whom we enter into the sheepfold of salvation and therefore the One in whose goodness we trust and partake.</p>
<p>“I AM the Good Shepherd” (10:11,14).</p>	<p>He is the loving leader whose guidance we follow, whose voice we know, and whose care and protection will withstand any attacker.</p>
<p>“I AM the Resurrection and the Life” (11:25).</p>	<p>He is the One who has already performed in us a spiritual resurrection from the deadness of sin and will raise us up and take us to heaven, as He Himself was raised to conquer sin and death.</p>
<p>“I AM the Way, the Truth, and the Life” (14:6).</p>	<p>He is the way to the Father which we must walk, the truth from God we must believe, and the life of God upon which we must depend. It is only through Him that we know the Father.</p>
<p>“I AM the true Vine” (15:1,5).</p>	<p>He is the source of spiritual power, from which comes our ability to bear fruit and evidence true salvation. Apart from Him we can do nothing, but by Him we can do all things.</p>

All of these descriptions of Jesus, which He used of Himself, speak of the vibrancy of our life in Him, and they are intensely personal. He is everything we need and want. One hymn writer called Him, “Jesus, joy of every man’s desiring.” And yet as we strive to experience the fullness of life in Him, at times and for a variety reasons, we feel spiritual anemia, we are enveloped in a stubborn spiritual darkness, we wander off and lose our way so that we can hear only the howl of wolves, we feel enslaved by the

trappings of sin, we forget the truth and do not walk in His ways, and we struggle to see fruit, leaving us with questions about whether He is really at work in us or not.

All of us know what it's like to see our passion for Christ dwindle, our desires lose enthusiasm, our affections become stiff, our spiritual duties become drudgery, and our hearts grow cold. To us, He is not always the highest joy and our greatest desire. Sometimes we don't desire God.

- How can you tell when your heart is burning fervently for Christ?

- How can you tell when your heart is starting to grow cold?

C. H. Spurgeon – “Your whole life...will be affected by the vigor of your piety. If your zeal grows dull, [others] will feel your barrenness, perhaps before you perceive it yourself. Your [words] will betray your declension...there will be a perceptible loss of spiritual force” (Steve Miller, *Spurgeon on Spiritual Leadership*, p. 64).

When Jesus spoke about “abundant life,” He did it against the backdrop of a form of religion that was lifeless, drudgerous, and cold. The religion of the day, for the most part, was anything but fervent; it was limp and motionless. And when Jesus preached, His message was unexpected and unwelcome because it violently assaulted the prevailing attitude of the day – religious externalism. Jesus offered a living and passionate relationship with God and what He found was a form of godliness without power. The question is: how do we cultivate this passion for Christ and keep our hearts from growing cold. The answer comes from a careful look at those whose passion was not for Christ, but against Him – the Scribes and Pharisees. *In this study we will learn the how to expose the symptoms of cold heart, so that we can fight for real passion for Christ, that our relationship with Him would be strong and growing.*

WHO ARE THE SCRIBES AND PHARISEES?

As the New Testament opens, the setting is one of passionate spiritual hypocrisy, where almost religious groups were devoid of any true spirituality. Most notably were the Scribes and Pharisees, whose devoutness dwarfed everyone, but whose heart for Christ was so cold, it became a malicious hatred that ultimately led to Jesus' execution.

- A. **Scribes** – Starting with the tradition set by Ezra after the days of captivity, these men were the ThD's of the ancient world, the supposed “expert” interpreters of the Law of God. They were the lawyers of the day, who were copied on the Old Testament and all the extrabiblical literature containing tradition passed down (*the Mishna and Talmud*). They had a noble beginning, tracing their heritage from the guardians of the truth, who resolved to never let the truth be so grossly misapplied as it was before the exile. In some cases, they were used to enforce civil laws in Israel.

- B. **Pharisees** – Emerging during the period between the Old and New Testaments, this group came from the mighty men of Israel who aggressively sought to observe the Law of God in their native land. Different than the priests, these leaders were well-trusted and thus given high ranking positions within Israel. This explains why the Pharisees had constant dread and concern when Jesus began to attract followers.

While their beginnings had the marks of passion for God, His truth, and His people, something went awry in only a few generations, where their spirituality had deteriorated to nothing more than an outward conformity to certain external standards that replaced true devotion to the Lord.

When you study the Scribes and Pharisees, you learn that their religious hypocrisy was very convincing to others and themselves, but not God. Jesus' confrontation was not only bold but confusing to the people because for so long true spirituality was measured by the wrong instruments. Jesus exposes them in our text: **Matthew 23:1-36**.

Jesus' scathing rebuke of the Scribes and Pharisees takes place in the temple, and is spoken to three kinds of people: 1) the disciples who already had passion for Christ and needed to beware of the trappings of religious hypocrisy; 2) the Scribes and Pharisees themselves who hated Christ; and 3) the multitudes of people who had not yet handed in their verdict as to whether they would embrace Christ and true spirituality. Jesus' words are timely, because they teach us how to measure true passion for Christ and to expose religious hypocrisy.

1. SIGNS THAT DO NOT NECESSARILY INDICATE PASSION FOR CHRIST

These are useful to the true believer, but are not, in themselves, a guarantee that true passion for Christ is real. In other words, these things can be real to the sincere believer, but also faked by the religious hypocrite – and there might not be any apparent difference to the casual observer. These signs may or may not reveal true spiritual health. You cannot tell whether you have a passion for Christ if you are:

- A. Thoroughly studying and teaching God's Word – **v. 1-2**

- B. Visibly serving in leadership capacities – **v. 6-10**

- C. Aggressively influencing others in spiritual things – **v. 15**

- D. Meticulously detailing obedience to God's Word – **v. 23**

- E. Mournfully loathing the sins of others – **v. 29-33**

- Jesus is not condemning these practices, in and of themselves; and elsewhere in Scripture, these spiritual activities are affirmed. What then is He doing?
- How is it possible to do all of these things, and still have a cold heart?
- Are these activities a helpful gauge for true spirituality, at all?

Consider the words of C. H. Spurgeon, “‘Jesus only’ must be the motive and motto of your life course. It is the duty of a steward to be devoted to the interests of his master; and if he forgets this for any other object, however laudable that object may be, he is not faithful. We cannot afford to let our lives run in two channels; we have not enough life-force for two objects. We need to be whole-hearted. We must learn to say, ‘One thing I do.’” (Miller, p. 182-3)

2. SIGNS THAT INDICATE A “WOEFUL” LACK OF PASSION FOR CHRIST

These are hindrances to true passion for Christ, which the Lord Jesus condemns as having no place in the life of a believer. Even though the word “**Woe**” means “*be condemned*,” a believer may struggle with these tendencies, but he or she must fight against them if true passion for Christ is his goal. These signals indicate poor or no spiritual health. If you do not have passion for Christ, it is because you are:

- A. Living by a double standard – v. 3
- B. Elevating traditions over Scripture – v. 4
- C. Loving the admiration of others – v. 5-7
- D. Using godliness as a means of gain – v. 14
- E. Avoiding honesty in accountability – v. 16-22
- F. Neglecting the motives for obedience – v. 23-24
- G. Perfecting the exterior as a cover up for indulgence – v. 25-28

- How do these things *deaden* passion for Christ?
- Given Jesus' response in v. **37-39**, what do those who are not passionate for Christ receive from Him?

1 – G _____

2 – J _____

3 – W _____

3. SIGNS THAT DEMONSTRATE A SERIOUS PASSION FOR CHRIST

These are evidences that true spiritual life is not only present but thriving, and THIS kind of relationship with Christ cannot be counterfeited. These proofs demonstrate true spiritual health. If you have passion for Christ, it is because you are:

- A. Always pointing to the supremacy of Christ – v. **8-10**
- B. Fervently serving with all humility – v. **11-12**
- C. Honestly pursuing accountability with God – v. **15-22**
- D. Privately purifying the internal motivations – v. **25-28**

- How do you know that these evidences of passion with Christ are real, not faked?

“I pray God, if I have a drop of blood in my body which is not His, to let it bleed away; and if there be one hair in my head which is not consecrated to Him, I would have it plucked out.” – C. H. Spurgeon (Miller, p. 183)

TRUTH IN THE LIFE

- A. From “Signs that do not necessarily indicate passion for Christ” circle the one point that most accurately identifies what you are most tempted to trust in for your spirituality, other than Christ Himself. Then seek to answer why that is true of you. Finally, write out how you can more effectively use that sign to grow in your relationship with Christ instead of using it against Him.

- B. From “Signs that indicate a ‘woeful’ lack of Passion for Christ” circle the one point that most often steals your passion for Christ. Then identify why that is such a snare for you personally. Finally, write out how and when you are most easily drawn into that snare.
- C. From “Signs that demonstrate a serious passion for Christ” circle the one point that if you were to concentrate on more than anything else, would make the greatest difference in your sanctification. Share that with someone you trust immediately and commit yourself to change, by God’s grace.
- D. Consider purchasing some of the following books for your own growth in godliness:
- *The Godly Man’s Picture*, Thomas Watson
 - *The Dangerous Duty of Delight*, John Piper
 - *When I Don’t Desire God*, John Piper
 - *The Power of Integrity*, John MacArthur
 - *How to Help People Change*, Jay Adams
 - *Sin and Temptation: Revised and Updated*, John Owen