

THE UPWARD CALL

*Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet;
but one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead,
**I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God
IN CHRIST JESUS.**
(Philippians 3:13-14 NASB)*

#04-1029

Cold or Hot, But Not Lukewarm

March 22, 2010

(14) “To the angel of the church in Laodicea write: The Amen, the faithful and true Witness, the Beginning of the creation of God, says this: (15) ‘I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot; I wish that you were cold or hot. (16) So because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of My mouth.’” (Revelation 3:14-16 NASB)

For many years, whenever I read these verses, I thought the cold and hot drinks referred to our relationship with the Lord. In thinking back on what I was taught early in my education with the Lord, I vaguely recall being taught that the Lord would rather have us cold for Him, for at least He would have something to work with. If our love for Him were cold, then He could work on us to heat up our love for Him. Accordingly, He would prefer our love to be “hot” for Him, as in being “on fire for the Lord.” The only problem with this teaching is that it never made any sense to me. I held to it, at least for a season, as many of us so often do when we are taught the tradition of men as if it were the truth of Scripture.

However, I have never embraced the concept of being “on fire for the Lord.” I know what people mean by it, but it does not seem appropriate according to Scripture, for fire signifies God’s word and, more specifically, His fiery law, as well as His glory and God Himself. Fire signifies a purifying agent that consumes or destroys the enemies of God, and the worst enemy is the sinful flesh of man. The fiery, spiritual law of God (Romans 7:14) goes forth not to destroy mankind but to deal with and, ultimately, to destroy or consume the sinful nature of mankind.

“Is not My word like fire?” declares the LORD, “and like a hammer which shatters a rock?” (Jeremiah 23:29 NASB)

And he said, The LORD came from Sinai, and rose up from Seir unto them; he shined forth from mount Paran, and he came with ten thousands of saints: from his right hand went a fiery law for them. (Deuteronomy 33:2 KJV)

The voice of the LORD hews out flames of fire. (Psalm 29:7 NASB)

And to the eyes of the sons of Israel the appearance of the glory of the LORD was like a consuming fire on the mountain top. (Exodus 24:17 NASB)

“For the LORD your God is a consuming fire, a jealous God.” (Deuteronomy 4:24 NASB)

“Know therefore today that it is the LORD your God who is crossing over before you as a consuming fire. He will destroy them and He will subdue them before you, so that you may drive them out and destroy them quickly, just as the LORD has spoken to you.” (Deuteronomy 9:3 NASB)

(28) Therefore, since we receive a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us show gratitude, by which we may offer to God an acceptable service with reverence and awe; (29) for our God is a consuming fire. (Hebrews 12:28-29 NASB)

These are only a sampling of the many verses that pertain to fire, none of which exhort the Lord’s people to be “on fire for the Lord.” In fact, if we are on fire, it means that we are being purged of our sinful flesh in some manner; that is, our old nature is being consumed. In this sense, being on fire is a good thing, for it removes all the dross or impurities so that one can become pure just as the Lord is pure.

And everyone who has this hope [i.e., to be like the Son of God] fixed on Him purifies himself, just as He is pure. (1 John 3:3 NASB)

Metaphorically speaking, Scripture likens this to the smelting process in which metal, especially silver, is exposed to intense heat (e.g., 1200 degrees Celsius) in order to melt it and separate it from its impurities (i.e., dross) to yield a metal of very high purity. By the way, *dross* is defined as “waste matter; worthless stuff; refuse, rubbish.”

Take away the dross from the silver, and there comes out a vessel for the smith.... (Proverbs 25:4 NASB)

“I will also turn My hand against you, and will smelt away your dross as with lye and will remove all your alloy.” (Isaiah 1:25 NASB)

How does God smelt away our dross? Again, He does it by His words that are likened to silver refined seven times in a furnace of fire. Seven signifies divine perfection, so we can be assured that there is no impurity or dross in His words, for they are true.

The words of the LORD are pure words; as silver tried in a furnace on the earth, refined seven times. (Psalm 12:6 NASB)

Now, returning to the Laodicean ecclesia, they were judged by the Lord for being lukewarm, which, according to the Lord, is a detestable elixir that elicits vomiting.

First, we need to understand that the Lord was (is) judging works or deeds. He was looking at what they were doing or not doing and declaring that their actions were neither cold nor hot but rather lukewarm.

Second, the Lord was looking for either cold or hot works. In other words, both cold and hot works are good works. Again, following the misguided teaching of being “on fire for the Lord,” one might think that cold works are not commendable, but this is not true. Since the Lord judged the lukewarm works as something to be vomited out of the mouth, it is obvious that He was (is) looking for cold or hot works.

Third, the cold and hot works are likened to cold and hot drinks. In other words, offering others a refreshing drink is simply a type of any and all types of works that one can and should do to help others and to fulfill the Lord’s commandment to love. But it is more than simply giving help to another; it is the quality and character of the help that the Lord is after.

As I asked in issue #04-1026, March 10, 2010, *They Speak Falsehood: Is a lukewarm drink better than a cold drink on a sweltering hot day or a hot drink on a frigidly cold day?* Giving the proper drink in season provides refreshment to the recipient. During hot seasons, a cold drink brings refreshment; in cold seasons, a hot drink brings refreshment. In either season, a lukewarm drink provides little, if any, refreshment. Scripture gives us confirmation of this, at least in regard to giving some cold water (drink) to those in need of it.

Like cold water to a weary soul, so is good news from a distant land. (Proverbs 25:25 NASB)

“And whoever in the name of a disciple gives to one of these little ones even a cup of cold water to drink, truly I say to you, he shall not lose his reward.” (Matthew 10:42 NASB)

Fourth, this reminds me of Paul’s instruction to Timothy to **preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction** (2 Timothy 4:2). As for the Laodiceans, I believe they dished out the same drivel day after day with no respect of the season. They did not care what season it was; they simply were in a holding pattern, doing and preaching the same things. Why? They were rich and in need of nothing; they did not have to consider their actions or their teaching. Everything was going along just fine for them. As far as they were concerned they were “blessed.” Is this not the end result of leaving first love (Revelation 2:4) and holding to the tradition of men (Mark 7:8; Colossians 2:8)?

Fifth, in judging their works, the Lord actually made a statement about their character or, we could say, their spiritual condition: **“You are neither cold nor hot.”** In other words, spiritually speaking, they were lukewarm in their love for the Lord and one another, in their works, and in their vision. They needed gold refined by fire (love), white garments (righteous acts), and eye salve (spiritual vision).

What is the solution? **“Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline; therefore be zealous and repent”** (Revelation 3:19). Let us yield to His love! In His love, let us be zealous and repent!