

What to do about a Lukewarm Heart

Galatians 5:22-23; Luke 19:45-48

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Godly zeal may not be one of the fruit of the Spirit listed in Galatians 5:22-23, but it is a necessary grace in the life of a Christian without which a Christian will be left drifting along in a sea of lukewarmness, apathy, and indifference to the Lord Jesus Christ and His glorious kingdom.

When Jesus at the beginning of His public ministry (in John 2) drove the buyers and sellers of sacrificial animals out of the temple, turned over the tables of the money changers, and chased them out as well, the Lord Jesus justified His actions by quoting the messianic prophecy found in Psalm 69:9: “The zeal of thine house hath eaten me up”, i.e. has consumed me. Though we are not called to imitate precisely every activity Jesus wrought in fulfillment of prophecy, we surely are to press forward in being conformed to His image in the spiritual graces which He possessed. And godly zeal was eminently present in the life and character of the Lord Jesus Christ and was manifested in His cleansing the temple (not once, but twice).

As those who have been redeemed by the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we are to be a people who are “zealous of good works” (Titus 2:14). The Lord Jesus leaves believers no option in this matter when He commands in Revelation 3:19, “Be zealous” (the root of this word, *zeo*, means to boil). Godly zeal is a fervent and earnest desire and passion for Christ as opposed to a lukewarmness for Christ. Godly zeal is not a mere profession of faith, a dead orthodoxy, or a mere formal relationship, but is a living and growing relationship with a crucified and risen Savior, which can only live and grow from daily spending time with Christ, being humbled in awe and wonder at His power, love, and holiness.

Dear ones, when the Lord and His truth are despised or reviled by the world, is it as if it were done to you personally because your heart beats so closely with His heart? Does your heart burn in love and devotion to Christ or are there now only some smoldering embers of a fire that once burned fervently in your life? Dear ones, today is the day to repent of your lukewarmness, to renew that first love you had for Christ, and to be consumed with a holy zeal for the Lord.

As we consider our text in Luke 19:45-48, the main points are these: (1) Zeal for God and His House (Luke 19:45); (2) Zeal for the Nations (Luke 19:46); and (3) Zeal for God Despised (Luke 19:47-48).

I. Zeal for God and His House (Luke 19:45).

A. Let me first begin with some background information to our text.

1. After the Triumphal Entry of Christ into Jerusalem on the first day of His passion week (at which time He was acclaimed by the multitudes to be the messianic King of Israel), Jesus entered into the temple and “looked round about upon all things” (according to Mark 11:11) and then left Jerusalem to spend the night in nearby Bethany (about 2 miles from Jerusalem) where He likely lodged with His beloved friends: Lazarus, Mary, and Martha, who lived there (John 12:1-2). What He saw in the temple shall be revealed shortly.

2. After awakening on the second day of His passion week, Monday, Jesus and His disciples headed for Jerusalem again, and along the way Jesus became hungry and seeing a fig tree He proceeded to curse it for having no fruit upon it (which was a symbol of Christ’s curse upon Israel for having been planted by the Lord and yet rejecting their Messiah, and bringing forth no fruit to the glory of God—to whom much is given, much is required).

3. In Luke 19:45, Christ and His disciples arrive in Jerusalem, and they ascend the heights of Mount Zion where worshippers were gathering in droves in order to celebrate the great feast of the Passover later on that same week. As the Lord approaches the temple, and walks through the gates, the first courtyard which He would have entered was known as the “Great Court” or “The Court of the Gentiles” (according to Josephus, the eminent Jewish historian of the first century). The Court of the Gentiles was an immense open area wherein Gentiles were permitted to pray, to be instructed, and to seek the one true living God. The Lord Jesus taught on various occasions in that very spot because it was able to accommodate so many people. A wall separated the Court of the Gentiles from the rest of the temple and upon that wall was this warning:

No Gentile may enter within the railing around the sanctuary and within the enclosure. Whosoever should be caught will render himself liable to the death penalty which will inevitably follow (*Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia*, 5:650).

On the other side of this wall and up some stairs, the Gentiles could hear the prayers of both the men and women of Israel pouring their hearts out to God from the Court of the Women and from the Court of Israel.

4. When Christ had entered the temple the day before, He looked around upon all things that were within this portion of the temple (i.e. the Court of the Gentiles). We now learn what He had seen in the temple the previous day—a profaning of the temple by making it an actual market place wherein live animals were being sold, and money was being exchanged from other parts of the world in order to pay for sacrificial animals and the temple tax (as stated in Exodus 30:13).

a. The initial establishment of the market place within the temple would likely have just preceded the Lord’s first cleansing of the temple at the beginning of His ministry (in John 2:13-17). It is now over three years later, and the market place within the temple has been introduced once again within the temple.

b. Whether the market place was functioning in full force between the cleansing of the temple at the beginning of Christ's ministry (in John 2) and the cleansing of the temple at the end of Christ's ministry (here in Luke 19), we are not expressly told. However, it seems very unlikely that the Lord having cleansed the temple on one occasion (in John 2), would have tolerated the profaning of the temple on subsequent occasions during His visits to the temple over a span of three years.

B. Having now considered this background information, let us see the zeal of Christ for the house of God. Note how the Lord demonstrated His zeal.

1. First, Christ cast out all those who were buying and selling in the temple (and forced them to take with them all the animals and items which they were selling)—Luke 19:45 (**Matthew 21:12**). The Greek word for “cast out” (*ekballo*) in Luke 19:45 is not a passive word, but a very active word—in fact, it is the same word that is used of Christ casting out demons from people. The Lord did not politely ask these buyers and sellers if they would please mind leaving the temple and take all their goods with them. To cast out is to use force. No smile was seen at that time on Christ's face. No gentleness was observed in Christ's actions as He chased these profaners of God's house into the streets.

2. The second act that proved the zeal of the Lord was that He overturned the tables upon which the moneychangers made their profit and upon which cages of doves were placed (**Matthew 21:12**). Consider that the same divine power with which He drove out the moneychangers and the merchants could have been used to quietly send them forth by submission to a mere whisper uttered in each of their ears. Dear ones, if Christ could have accomplished the cleansing of the temple by a mere whisper had He chosen to do so, why did He chase them out and overturn their tables? Because this was a visible demonstration of

His messianic kingship (which acclamation He had received from the multitudes the day before)—the temple was His house by divine right; and because this was a clear evidence of His holy indignation with those who profaned (and treated as common and ordinary) His house.

Obedience to a divine whisper would certainly have demonstrated the divine power of Christ, but it would not have visibly demonstrated His royal prerogative over His own house or His righteous anger against those who profaned His house.

3. The third act that demonstrated the zeal of Christ for God's house was that He would not allow anyone to carry a common, ordinary vessel through the temple (**Mark 11:16**). For only those vessels that were specifically set apart for holy use were to be employed within the temple. To bring an ordinary or common vessel into the holy place of God was to profane the temple by treating the temple as ordinary and common rather than as holy.

a. Dear ones, to profane God's name is not necessarily to utter blasphemous words of hatred toward God, but rather it is to treat the most holy God as common or ordinary. To profane God's name is to trivialize the Most High God (or that which He calls holy).

b. Thus, we may profane the name of the Lord by using His name to punctuate our sentences ("O Lord", "My God", etc.). We may profane the name of the Lord by bringing into public worship common vessels as it were, which Christ has not ordained in His Word for New Covenant worship (whether hymns, instruments, images, choirs, holy days, wandering thoughts, lack of preparation, lukewarm hearts, faith in the preacher, faith in outward ordinances rather than faith in the living God). We may profane the name of the Lord by our careless, worldly speech and conduct on the Sabbath day. We may profane the name of the Lord by disowning or neglecting lawful covenants by which we are bound (whether a marriage covenant, baptismal covenant, personal covenant, or national covenants). We may profane the name of the Lord

by using our bodies, our eyes, our ears, our words, or our minds for vile purposes (which are God's gifts to us to be used for His glory) **(1 Corinthians 6:19-20)**.

C. Before leaving this main point, I would like to answer some proposed questions.

1. **Christ drove out those who profaned the Lord's house, whose responsibility is it to do so now?**

a. Though none are called to chase out with physical force those who desecrate the Church of Jesus Christ, it is the responsibility of those who are lawfully called as officers in Christ's Church and to whom are given the keys of the kingdom (of knowledge and discipline) to cast out the obstinate, the profane, and the scandalous from Christ's Church (which is the New Testament temple of the Lord according to **1 Corinthians 3:16**). Just as the high priest and the subordinate priests were primarily responsible for the corruption of God's house then, so the ministers and elders who tolerate (and therefore promote) corruption within Christ's Church must one day stand and give an account before the One who had such zeal for the house of the Lord that He cast out those who profaned it.

b. It is also generally the responsibility of all believers to see that they examine themselves (that they search their own hearts) that they do not profane God's name by their thoughts, words, or deeds and that they cast out that which is evil and profane out of their lives by the power of the resurrected Christ, rather than tolerating such things as did the priesthood at the time of Christ (**Matthew 18:8**).

2. **What if the officers of Christ's Church will not fulfil their duty in reforming and purifying the Church of Christ from corruption in doctrine, worship, and government as did Christ?**

a. Dear ones, even though the high priest and the merchants had aggravated the sin of profaning the Lord's name,

nevertheless, all that participated in it willingly likewise profaned the Lord's name. Likewise, dear ones, the only way for one to avoid the pollution of corrupt doctrine, worship, and government within a Church is to remove the beam from one's own eye, to go in love to the leadership so as to have that corruption removed which profanes the name of the Lord, and then to avoid such scandalous men if your words fall on deaf ears (**Romans 16:17; 1 Timothy 6:3,5**).

b. In a similar way, to participate in the profanity of others as a willing spectator or to join in laughing at that which is profane is to share in the guilt. We become willing partakers of the sins of others by way of our consent to listen, laugh, and join with those who are profane, whether we are joining with the profane in the same room or whether we are joining with the profane on the radio, tv, ipod, or the internet (**Psalms 1:1-2; Jeremiah 17:17**). Jesus did not eat with sinners, harlots, and tax collectors in order to enjoy their company or to listen to their profanity, but rather to lead them out of darkness and into life.

3. What inspired the high priest, the merchants, and the moneychangers to so desecrate the house of the Lord?

a. Covetousness! They were robbing God. It was not unlawful to sell animals to sacrifice or to exchange money from foreign currency so as to purchase the sacrifices God required. What was covetous was that they desired to make a profit at the expense of that which was holy. This is very much what happens in churches and on tv and radio programs so often, who are selling this or selling that, who are promising this or that to those who send \$20, \$50, or \$100. Dear ones, like Jesus, we should have nothing at all to do with merchandizing the gospel of Jesus Christ. Jesus said, "Free ye have received, freely give" (Matthew 10:8).

b. Dear ones, whatever we are willing to do for our own profit or gain at the expense of God's revealed truth is covetousness (whether to gain a reputation among men, or to make financial gain, or

to gain power, or to gain the applause of men, or to gain a comfortable Christianity, or to gain our own lives, or even to gain some supposed honor of God by filling the church or reaching more people. It is ungodly gain when the truth of Jesus Christ must be compromised in order to make our Christianity more comfortable.

c. One of the greatest hindrances to godly zeal in our lives is profaning the great and glorious name of the Lord—that is treating Christ and all that He calls holy as common and ordinary. There is indeed a zeal that is without knowledge (**Romans 10:2**). This is not godly zeal because zeal for the Lord must be founded upon sound doctrine and pure worship. However, having sound doctrine and pure worship does not guarantee a holy zeal for the Lord, for we may also put our Christian life on automatic pilot and rest in our mere profession of faith which is a dead orthodoxy (“Thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead” Revelation 3:1). A holy zeal for the Lord will only be kept burning through a vital living union and communion with Jesus Christ. Where that grows cold, so will your zeal for the Lord.

II. Zeal for the Nations (Luke 19:46).

A. Not only had the high priests and merchants profaned the Lord’s name (which is the supreme offence here), but they had as well excluded the poor, sincere seekers of Jehovah among the Gentiles from the house of God by setting up their market within the Court of the Gentiles (**Mark 11:17**). Apparently, the Gentiles could be excluded from the Lord for the sake of the personal gain and profit of the priesthood. Not only had God been robbed by their covetousness, but the Gentiles as well had been robbed of a place within the Church. Christ’s words here come from **Isaiah 56:7** where the promise of God’s grace to the Gentiles is prophesied.

B. Dear ones, we must never forget that zeal for the Lord's house will not only be evidenced in our desire for pure worship, but also in our prayers and work for the ingathering of the nations and the return of Israel to the Lord. Our zeal for the Lord must be evidenced in weeping for the lost to come to Christ. Our zeal for the Lord must be demonstrated in yearning that Christ fill His wedding feast with strangers, foreigners, with harlots, and publicans who know and acknowledge their desperate need of Jesus Christ. Christ did not come to save the righteous, but sinners. Parents, this truth must be taught and lived before your children. They must not see us as snobs who don't want to get our hands dirty but rather as those who seek to win to Christ those who are unclean.

III. Zeal for God Despised (Luke 19:47-48).

A. Finally, consider the consequences of following in the footsteps of Christ's zeal in reforming His Church.

1. There will be those who will seek to destroy our testimony, slander us, and eventually take our lives when they cannot silence us. There will always be opposition to a holy zeal to reform the Church of Jesus Christ. How comfortable and coddled we have become when we consider what our faithful fathers in the faith were willing to suffer to bring reformation to the Church (and faithful witnesses are even now willing to suffer): exile, isolation, privation, fleeing, imprisonment, mockery, torture, and death. Why? For the zeal that they had and do have for Christ and for His house.

2. A lack of godly zeal and passion for Christ and His narrow path only points us to the fact that we have left our first love. For godly zeal can only burn brightly in our lives when we are filled with and growing in knowledge of Christ's love for us and when we delight to spend time communing with Christ.

3. We all know what happens in a marriage where a marital

zeal and fervency that is hot is present—it makes service to the one loved a joy and delight. But where that marital zeal is absent and where we have left our first love—it makes our duties a heavy burden. The answer to a fervent zeal for the Lord is a daily enjoyment of the love of the Father for you as His own dear believing child (**Ephesians 3:17-19**).

Listen to the invitation from Jesus Christ to you who are lukewarm in your faith, in your love, in your zeal for the Lord. Don't continue in your apathy and indifference to Christ, to the gospel, to the commandments and doctrines of Christ, but come to the Lord and plead with Him to heal you of the dreaded disease of complacency in merely going through the motions of your faith: **Revelation 3:15-20**. Make it your prayer every day that zeal for Christ and His kingdom would consume you. Amen.

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