

If there is one thing that winter camporees are notified for, it is cold weather. This little thermometer that I have with me reads degrees. One year, I remember, it got down to 16 F. The discomfort of the cold that year started me thinking about a comparison of cold to a life without God. The world, because of the influence of Satan, is cold and hard, and it came to me that life without Christ is very cold and uncomfortable. We find Isaiah, the prophet, comparing life without God to sleeping in a 'bed that is too short, with a blanket that is too small'. If you have ever tried to keep warm in a blanket that was too small to wrap around you, you can see what he was saying. Growing out of my first sleeping bag; there was no way to straighten out and still be able to cover my head. It makes me shiver to remember.

Each of you knows that the cold drives you to find a warm place. Right now, you are probably thinking, 'Why doesn't he shut up so that we can go back to our fire and get warm?' But the warmth of God's love is the only place that we can turn to from the cold of the world. We may try to provide the warmth ourselves, but it is never as comforting.

Each of you, to come on this trip, had to make preparations for the cold. You had to ask yourself the question: what keeps me warm? There are four things that I would like to suggest today that do this. First is shelter. We would be crazy to come out here without a tent of some kind to keep the rain or snow and cold wind out. I don't guess that I have ever been out without one. At the same time, I won't go anywhere without my spiritual shelter. In Ps 61:3 we read, 'For you have been a shelter for me, and a strong tower from the enemy.' Then, in Ps 91:1,2, we read, 'He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High, who abides in the shadow of the Almighty, will say to the Lord, 'My refuge and my fortress; my God, in whom I trust.' Our spiritual shelter, as I see it, is the everlasting gift and hope of eternal life that we have in Christ. What greater comfort against the storms of life could we have than the knowledge that God loved us enough to send his Son to die for us, and that no matter what happens to us here, as we walk in the light, nothing can destroy the security of that gift.

An earthly image of this shelter is the church; the house of God. In 1 Pet 2.5, Peter describes a spiritual house built by those who have given their lives to Christ. It is the warmth of fellowship that makes this house such a comfortable shelter. The problems of life are to be shared and burdens borne by those who care for each other. But we try to build our own shelters with earthly materials. I remember camping with some guys who just sort of threw a tent together. Because they did not have the right shelter, they had a freezing draft flow through it all night long and woke up to find 2 inches of snow in their boots. Another time I went camping and decided to sleep under a plastic tarp over the fire. I woke up the next morning, threw open my sleeping bag, and quickly closed it again. It was snowing! That cold snow inside my sleeping bag taught me the importance of having the right kind of shelter. To recast Ps 127.1 in a new light, 'Unless the Lord build the house, it will always have an annoying draft.

The second item that I know that you all brought that keeps us warm is clothing. Layers and layers of it! Have you ever been so cold that you wore every stitch of clothing that you brought and were still cold? I'm sure that you have some very special thermally insulated underwear either on you or in your gear. (Richard Broughton: vine, water, no extra clothes). The Bible mentions some clothing that I think warms our lives. Col 3:12,14 reads, 'Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience ...and over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.' Right attitudes can be great protection, for they enable us to endure when others hurt us, or when they are 'cold' to us. With the attitudes mentioned these verses, we are made warm, for our needs are made smaller, and the world seems less frigid. And then there is faith, another attitude which is mentioned in 1 Thess 5.8 as being 'put on' like clothing. This is perhaps the single most protective and insulating of our clothes. Our faith in Christ and God can keep us warm in spite of the wildest blizzard, for we know that God cares for us and will give us the strength we need to endure.

The third thing that can keep us warm is fire. You all brought matches and firestarters, I am sure. Camping just wouldn't be the same without a roaring campfire to huddle up next to. In Jer 23.29 the Lord says, 'Is not my word like fire?' Fire has many times provides light, ides comfort and warmth, too, because of its revelation of God's love, wishes, promises, and power.

But isn't it funny how that, standing by the fire, only half of you can really get warm at one time. If you warm your back, your front gets cold, and vice versa. As we study the Bible and try to improve on various weaknesses, or warm various cold spots within us, we then to let other places become cold. Whatever we are not concentrating cools off. This is a somewhat natural result of our human nature.

But the Bible can and must warm us from the inside, too, as we become 'on fire' for the Lord. It can generate power and enthusiasm within us as our hearts come nearer to God's. Just modifying our lives and actions, however, isn't enough. Our hearts must be changed too. We must never let this fire die. Mt 24.12 says that 'the love of most will grow cold (like a fire which slowly dies out) But he who stands firm to the end will be saved.'

The fourth item that keeps us warm is activity. You know that if you are comfortably dressed, and you begin to exercise vigorously, you will warm up really fast! (cross country skiing). You learn pretty quickly that it is not the greatest idea to wear your thermal underwear on a good hike. I've seen many boys who had to run into the woods to take them off after only a mile or two of hard walking, even though it was pretty cold. I've had to do it myself! Similarly, I've found that if you are active in the work of the Lord, that the world doesn't seem so chilly. An obedient life allows God to make good his promises, to shelter you, clothe you, warm you, and in general keep you in the comfort of his love. It also allows you to spread his warmth to others who are freezing slowly to death in a world of sin.

I know that some of these analogies that I have presented today are not the greatest, but maybe they have touched you in some way to make you see the great expanse of God's shelter for us. Let us all live so that we will hear God say, 'well done, thou good and faithful servant, come in out of the cold into the warmth of my love.'