

Articles and Sermons :: The Fires of Holiness and Sin -west

The Fires of Holiness and Sin -west - posted by sermonindex (), on: 2006/8/11 18:58

[Image: <http://photos1.blogger.com/blogger/6363/2297/320/fire.jpg>]

The Fires of Holiness and Sin

by Paul West

"For the Lord your God is a consuming fire, a jealous God." (Deut. 4:24)

God's fire is a consuming fire, a "destroying" fire. The object of God's destruction is sin. Jesus was sent to the world to destroy the power of sin in men's lives. On the cross, Jesus became sin in God's eyes...and God promptly had His own sin destroyed. Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed with fire and the Bible promises that all God's enemies will be thrown into everlasting fire at the end of the world. God kills, and then burns sin.

Not only is our God a sin-destroying King, but He is also a jealous King. God demands complete devotion to His crown. God will not share his throne with any rival you invite into your heart. He is supremely jealous and sublimely righteous. The righteousness of God will not allow any sinner to escape condemnation, and conversely, the righteousness of God will perfectly reward every good deed done in Jesus. If God's righteousness did not spare Jesus, it is well the epitome of arrogance to think God will spare anyone who appears before His throne clothed in unconfessed, unrepentant, and unforgiven sin.

God is still destroying sin today. The consuming flames are applied to every believer's heart, purifying and purging all evil thoughts. The holy flames cleanse and sanctify us from lustful passions that harm our walk with the Father. It is the blood of Christ that washes away sin, and it is the fire of God that keeps the heart cleansed with zealous passion devoted solely to Jesus Christ.

I want to show you something from the Old Testament:

"A fire shall always be burning on the altar; it shall never go out." (Lev. 6:13)

I want to give you a revelation of this scripture. Although this verse was written by Moses over a thousand years before God clothed Himself in flesh and came to earth, I believe we can read it today with spiritual eyes and apply it to modern Christianity with a profound spiritual impact.

Everyone knows that altars are found in churches. Now, the Bible says that we are the church, and that our bodies are the temple of God. When we came to Jesus, the atoning Blood of Christ was applied to our hearts and we were washed clean at the cross. We came to Jesus by rending our hearts, broken and repentant over our sin. Our hearts were broken because of the knowledge of our sin, and we repented with bitter tears asking the Lord to forgive all our crimes against Him. It was all done in the heart, it was a spiritual, personal altar call in the temple of our body! Therefore, I think it is safe to visualize this:

If our bodies are temples of God, then our hearts are the altars.

God told Moses to tell the priests to always keep a fire going on the altars of the sanctuary. This was not a suggestion; this was a command. God knew the fire had to remain blazing because the Hebrew children were a sinful bunch. Fire was required to consume the slain animals of their sin offerings. The Bible says that in order for God to forgive sin, blood has to be shed. Something has to die in order to give the sinner life.

In the time of Moses and the prophets and kings of Israel and Judah, sinful people hauled living animals to the gates of the tabernacle where a priest would be waiting with a knife. The animals would then be slaughtered, cut in pieces, and laid on the fire. As the flesh burned, the smoke would rise up as a "sweet savour unto the Lord" (Lev. 1:9).

The New Testament tells us God provided his own sin offering for us. Hear John cry out, "Behold, the Lamb of God that takes away the sins of the world!" as he points to Jesus in the crowd by the river bank. God laid Jesus on a cross-shaped

altar and slaughtered Him for all sinful mankind. The flames of God consumed our sins through the blood sacrifice of His Son. Paul says it like this:

"Christ...hath given Himself for us an offering and sacrifice to God for a sweet smelling savour." (Eph. 5:2)

There can't be sweet smelling savours without flesh cooking flames. I can lay raw steaks on a fireless grill, I can season them, marinate them, tenderize them. They can be juicy porterhouse slabs or meaty t-bones. I can lay them there on the cold grill and just stare at the dead animal flesh. If I leave them there long enough, they'll rot and spawn maggots. A terrible, dead stench will result.

But what happens when I apply them to flames of fire? Something delightful happens! Suddenly, a wonderfully delicious aroma fills the backyard, the smell wafts down the street, fills the neighborhood. People who drive by know that someone is having a barbecue! Why? Because of the fire. There can be no sweet smelling aromas without fire. And if we read the abovementioned scripture from Ephesians, this is just what Jesus' sacrifice became to the Father - a sweet smelling savour!

Fire transforms dead flesh into sweet smelling aromas before the throne of God.

Fire is an awesome element; nothing living can survive in a flame. No sin, no matter how vibrant, can remain unpurified in God's holy fire. God's living fire consumes all flesh - if the fires are continuously burning at the altar. And this brings us back to Leviticus 6:13. God has said that a fire shall always be burning at the altar. But who is responsible for keeping the fire going?

Why, the priest in charge of the temple, of course!

"But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness and into His marvelous light." (1 Pet. 2:9)

The New Testament calls every believer in Jesus a priest. Peter calls the Body of Christ a "royal priesthood" and even states:

"...you also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a royal priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ." (1 Pet 2:5)

We are priests clothed in clay tabernacles of flesh, bone and blood. When we are born-again, God comes and lives in us. We are now His tabernacle, His dwelling place, and He expects the fire in our hearts to be well kindled every day. The altar must remain swept and ablaze. The moment a sinful thought or desire invades our sanctuaries, holy flames of purification must be ready to consume the seed. I believe the Holy Spirit is most often grieved because of negligent priests who've let the fires go out on their altars. How else can sin thrive in the temple of God and remain unconsumed at the altar?

But what happens to a fireless altar that's gone cold?

A fireless heart is a hardened heart.

Molten lava is melted rock. I've seen movies with volcanos erupting, spewing bright orange lava out into the night. As the rivers of lava flow down the sides of the volcano, have you ever noticed how flexible, how malleable the melted rock is? It can be formed into almost any shape imaginable. But when the inevitable happens, the rock begins to cool down. What happens to the lava when it flows into the cool ocean water? It hisses violently and begins to solidify. It forms lava rock... which is quite worthless (as opposed to gold and silver and precious stones).

As long as a flame is applied to our hearts, we are putty in God's hands, for He is the Master Potter. Remember, God is not a sculptor; He is a Potter. The Father can't do much with hearts of slate and granite and marble. A hard heart is a bad thing - like Pharaoh's pre-Exodus attitude. Hard hearts denote spiritual blindness, rebellion. God desires peculiar priests with molten hearts of lava - not disobedient children with cool slabs of granite.

How many sit in churches today with smoldering ashes upon chilled altars? You look at their passionless faces and notice their drowsy diligence in pursuing the things of God. Inside, on their altars, a fire has been extinguished. They want to

argue, they want to criticise. They have no joy, no excited testimony, no zeal for the Lord, no cymbal clash of praise, no desire to preach or witness Jesus to the heathen.

But how did it get like this? Why did the flames go out?

Before He left, Jesus warned His apostles of wolves. Paul also told the churches to beware of dogs and false prophets. I believe that if every believer kept his or her heart aflame with the sanctifying torch of God's Word, no wolf would ever stand a chance. Satan simply will not play with God's fire. His demons are systematically defeated when they mess with a fire-baptized royal priest of Jehovah God. Temptations can be hurled, yet they dissolve when they're laid on the fiery altar of a consecrated believer's heart.

When the Bible exhorts us to examine ourselves, I believe this, in part, applies to doing a fire check daily. Have you ever gone out camping and lit a good, blazing fire? An awesomely warm, and wood-consuming fire? You cook your food on it, toast marshmallows, stare at its beauty. It provides comfort and security; it lights up the surrounding woods, and you can see if something's approaching your campsite. You know that wolves are afraid of fire, so this allows you to relax and enjoy the night.

But as the night wears on, you get comfortable in your sleeping bag, drowsy...and eventually fall asleep. When you next wake up, the fire is all but smouldering ash. You've been asleep for hours, and nobody's fed your fire. It's real dark now; you can't see the trees anymore. It's cold. You're disoriented. You hear a long, chilling wolf's howl in the distance, and so you scramble blindly into the darkness to fetch more wood before it goes out completely. Because if it does, you know you'll be totally blind and helpless, and at the mercy of the creatures that roam the darkness.

In the same way, I believe we can become drowsy and allow spiritual sleep to diminish our altar-flame. The truth is, we need to feed this blaze in us, or it'll go out. A heart ablaze with God's holy flame keeps demons at bay. That's about as plain as I can put it. Someone once asked Charles Spurgeon why he continually needed to be filled with the Holy Spirit, and he simply said, "Because I leak!" Can you relate?

"And the sons of Aaron the priest shall put fire upon the altar and lay wood in order upon the fire." (Lev. 1:7)

Friends, when I think of laying the wood, I think of worship and prayer, devotion to God and obedience to the Word. This is what dutiful priests use to feed the fire, which in turn, consumes the sin laid upon it. If you want a big, healthy flame on your altar, why don't you start laying down the wood of worship and prayer! Oh, friends! Grasp this truth. If you've got sin in your life, if you're away from God, if you're feeling lukewarm and miserable spiritually, if you're backslidden and passionless, God says to just "turn from your wicked ways and begin to worship and glorify me. My flames will build and purify your heart if you give me the wood of worship and obedience, and the sacrifice of praise for food!"

"And He shall purify the sons of Levi" (Malachi 3:3)

Oh, brothers and sisters, feast on the meat of this message: Jesus is in the flames! He's in the fiery furnace, He walks a midst the seven candlesticks, He's returning with a multitude of flaming angels, His eyes are as flames of fire, the elements will melt with fervent heat on the Day of the Lord, and the heavens and earth will burn up! He will try our works with fire when we stand before His utter holiness. Why don't we get acquainted with the heat now instead of later!

The truth is, if you're saved, you've got the spark. Stir it up! God's eyes search the world, looking for firestarters called by His Name in holiness and faith. Are you one of them?

"Wherefore...stir up the gift of God..." (2 Tim. 1:6)

Re: The Fires of Holiness and Sin -west - posted by murdog (), on: 2006/8/12 0:02

Paul,

BBQ's, lava, and campfires. Great analogies. But even better truth. Thank you for this message. This was just what I needed.

Murray