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A Consuming Fire

by Zac Poonen

In Isaiah's prophecy we read the following words: "Sinners in Zion are terrified; trembling has seized the godless (hypocrites - KJV). Who among us can live with the consuming fire? Who among us can live with continual burning? He who walks righteously, and speaks with sincerity, he who rejects unjust gain, and shakes his hands so that they hold no bribe; he who stops his ears from hearing about bloodshed, and shuts his eyes from looking upon evil" (Isa.33:14,15).

The first qualification to dwell with this consuming fire mentioned here is: "He who walks righteously and speaks with SINCERITY" (Isa.33:15)". That refers to those who walk according to the light they have, in sincerity in their private lives. They may not be perfect, but they are SINCERE. They are not hypocrites. If there is one thing that we must fear more than anything else in the church, it is giving people an impression about our spirituality that is not true. Do you give others the impression that you pray a lot, when you don't pray at all? Do you give them the impression that you fast much when you don't actually fast that much? Do you want others to consider you as wholehearted when you are not? Then you are in danger of falling away - not because you are imperfect, but because you are insincere. God desires truth in our inward part. The hypocrites in Zion tremble, because they are afraid of being exposed.

The second qualification to live with the consuming fire is "rejecting unjust gain" (Isa.33:15) - in other words, being righteous and faithful in money matters. We may have thought that the alternative master to God is Satan. But Jesus Himself stated in Luke 16:13 that that alternative master to God was Mammon (money and material riches)! No believer imagine that he can love God and Satan at the same time. But there are multitudes of believers who imagine that they can love money and God simultaneously. No believer will ever fall down and worship Satan. But there are millions of believers to day who worship Mammon and who imagine that they can worship God too. But they cannot worship God, if they are not faithful with money. They don't realise that Mammon draws a person away from the true and living God.

The third qualification to live with the consuming fire is shutting our ears from hearing about bloodshed (Isa.33:15). This is more than avoiding gossiping. This refers to not wanting to HEAR even someone else gossiping. A Godfearing man will shut his ears not only to the main Accuser of the brethren (Rev.12:10), but to the Accuser's agents as well!! If we could look at this earth from heaven's standpoint, we would see millions of people all over the world, tearing others to pieces with their tongue from early morning to late at night, every day. But if you want to live with God, the consuming fire, you must discipline yourself not to listen to such accusations. Even if you have to listen to them in situations where it is impossible for you to get up and walk out of the room, you should switch off your mind inwardly from listening. Let people around you be corrupt but why should you lose God's grace in your life? If you are serious about living with the consuming fire, then stop listening to all accusations. God has given us the ability to switch off our mind from inside. Do that. Stop your ears from bloodshed.

A fourth qualification that is mentioned here, to live with the consuming fire, is shutting our eyes from looking upon evil. These two bodily senses - hearing and seeing - are the main channels through which good and evil enter our minds. We must decide what we allow to enter in. One who lives with the consuming fire does not look upon what will defile his spirit. Only when you allow God to consume all that is worldly and that can be consumed in your life, will you be able to live with Him Who is a consuming fire. Whatever is left in you then will be incombustible!! God is going to populate heaven with such people - who have nothing combustible left in them. God is preparing us for heaven. When we sing the song, "Heaven came down and glory filled my soul", what are we talking about? We are talking about that consuming fire coming into our soul, that burns up everything that can be burnt up. Can we willingly say to the Lord, "Lord, I only want those things left in my life, that cannot be burned, so that You and I can live in fellowship with each other forever."