

GOD IS A CONSUMING FIRE

- A. Introduction: We have a lot of inaccurate, religious ideas about God's justice, wrath, and punishment which make us afraid of God when there is no reason to be afraid. So, we have been considering what the Bible says about a loving God and punishment to remove fear of what God is doing to us or will do to us.
1. The Bible describes God as a consuming fire (Deut 4:24; Heb 12:29). That scares us because we think of God burning bad people up, we think of God burning people in hell for their sins.
 2. In this lesson we want to talk about what it means that God is a consuming fire.
- B. In the last lesson we talked about a loving God and hell. We want to begin our discussion of God as a consuming fire by restating several points and amplifying them.
1. God does not "send" anyone to hell. People's sins "send" them to hell. People's rejection of Jesus sends them to hell. II Pet 2:1
 - a. Sin, at its most basic level, is independence from God. It is the choice to turn away from His wisdom, His word, His way, to our own way. Isa 53:6
 - b. The inevitable consequence of sin is death (Gen 2:17; Rom 6:23). Death includes much more than physical death (a whole lesson for another day). Death is ultimately separation from God who is Life and Light and Peace and Joy and all that is Good.
 1. It isn't God who kills. Independence from God kills. Men, apart from Christ are dead in their sins, cut off from the life in God. Eph 2:1; 4:18
 2. People who live separated from God, people who live independent from God in this life, will continue in separation from God in the next life. Hell is an open expression of their condition.
 - d. God will not force anyone to serve Him. He wants men to willingly choose to come out of the pig pen of sin and death and come back to father's house.
 2. Sometimes people wonder: How could God love a sinner so much that He would die for him (John 3:16), but the moment that sinner draws his last breath, God's love turns to: Now, I can and will cream you!! I'll fry you in hell!! That question comes out of a misunderstanding of hell.
 - a. God is not "punishing" people in hell. God is loving people in hell. The torment of hell is the ruin of being eternally separated from all that is life and all that is good.
 - b. The New Testament describes hell as a place of fiery torment, darkness, weeping and gnashing of teeth (Luke 16:24; Matt 8:12; etc.). The suffering is mental and spiritual as opposed to physical.
 1. The descriptions of hell are meant to emphasize the point that the conditions are the result of being cut off from God, from all life and light, from all peace and joy. They are meant to emphasize the permanence, the unending ness of hell.
 2. Existence in hell means being cut off from God who is Light and Life. It is total and complete destruction and ruin (II Thess 1:9). Men who were made in the image of God for sonship and relationship, because of their willful rejection of God, will experience eternal ruin: Their destiny unfulfilled and they know it.
 3. It is not the locality of hell that makes hell hell, it is the condition of the sinner.
- C. The Bible uses numerous word pictures to describe God who is indescribable to our finite minds.
1. One word picture alone does not give a complete picture of God. However, when we consider each example in the light of other word pictures in the Bible, together, they help us see God more clearly.
 - a. The Bible refers to God as fire, not because God is fire, but to help us understand some things about His person and works.
 1. Just as calling God a Shepherd gives us insight into God's actions and attributes, so it is with

- calling God a consuming fire. God is like fire in His attributes and actions.
2. God is compared to fire because of the brightness of His glory and because His wrath consumes sin.
 - c. Fire was a symbol of the Lord's presence and power in the Old Testament.
 1. The Lord appeared to Moses in a flame of fire in a burning bush and on Mount Sinai (Ex 3:2; 19:18). God led Israel on their journey to the promised land as fire (Ex 14:19,24). When Israel entered the promised land God went before them as a consuming fire to destroy their enemies (Deut 9:3).
 2. God showed Himself to Isaiah and Ezekiel in the midst of fire. Isa 6:4; Ezek 1:4
 - d. In the New Testament Jesus showed Himself to John with eyes of fire (Rev 1:14). Jesus will appear in fire at His Second Coming (II Thess 1:8; 2:8).
2. To call God a consuming fire is scary to us because we hear that phrase "religiously" -- through preconceived ideas that have been built into our thinking by religion.
 - a. Think about it. Fire is not bad in and of itself. Fire is actually a blessing. It gives light and warmth. It cooks food. It is awesome and beautiful to look at. Who has not enjoyed the blessing of staring into a campfire or a crackling fire in a fireplace on a cold night?
 - b. Fire can be destructive because it burns. However, it isn't the fire that determines if something burns, it is the makeup of the object itself. Is it combustible (capable of being burned) or non-combustible (cannot be burned)?
 3. Israel saw God as both a fire that consumed and as a fire that did not consume.
 - a. In the case of Moses, when God appeared to Moses in the burning bush and on Mt. Sinai to give him the Law, God's presence was like a consuming fire but neither Moses, the bush, or the mountain was consumed. Ex 3:2; 24:17
 - b. In the case of Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, they saw God's fire consume evil. Lev 10:1,2 (Strange fire was fire used for sacred purposes which did not come from the altar. The altar fire was originally sent from God. Num 3:4; 26:61; Lev 6:9,13; 9:24)
 1. There are places in the Old Testament where destruction came on people for their sin and it is called the fire of the Lord.
 2. The expression of His wrath against sin is described as a fire consuming people. Lev 10:2; Num 16:35.
 - c. Did God blast these people with a heavenly blow torch? That makes no sense and it is not consistent with other revelations given to us about God in the scripture. The point is: Destruction came on them for their sin.
 1. Remember, in the Old Testament God was working to show Himself as the Only All Powerful God in the midst of a world of idol worshippers. Deut 4:32-38
 2. For that reason He connected everything with Himself. Destruction came to them because they chose independence from God. They chose sin.
 4. Deut 4:24 calls God a consuming fire. Note the context of that statement. God is warning Israel of the consequences of idol worship -- they will be removed from or consumed from off the land. v23-28
 - a. If they worship the gods of the people around them they will be swept from the land by Assyria and Babylon, and God wants them to clearly understand it will happen because they are out of right relationship with Him.
 - b. The word jealous is always used to describe God's attitude toward the worship of false gods.
 1. God was jealous of Israel for their good. Their idol worship brought them destruction. Deut 6:14,15; Ex 20:5; Ex 34:14; Isa 42:8
 2. The word jealous comes from a verb that means to be zealous. Deut 4:24--a zealous God

(Young's Literal); an impassioned God (Torah); Ex 20:5--am a God who will not give his honour to another (Basic).

- D. In the New Testament God is referred to as a consuming fire in Heb 12:29. What is the context?
1. Hebrews was written to Jewish believers who were facing persecution at the hands of their own countrymen, their own former household of faith.
 - a. Some had already abandoned Jesus and others were on the brink of doing so. To return to Judaism they had to repudiate the Lordship of Jesus and His sacrifice on the Cross.
 - b. The whole purpose of the epistle is to encourage them to stay faithful to the Lord. The author uses many arguments ranging from explaining how the New Covenant is superior to the Old Covenant to warning them of the severe consequences of rejecting the Lord and His sacrifice. Heb 10:26-29
 2. Beginning in Heb 12:25 the writer is coming to the end of his argument and exhorts the Hebrew Christians to stay faithful.
 - a. Listen to the One who is speaking to you. Remember those who refused the voice of the Lord in the past. They paid dearly for their refusal to listen and you will too. Heb 2:2,3; 3:15-17
 - b. Then he tells them to remain in the kingdom which cannot be shaken. v26--When God spoke from Mount Sinai the whole earth shook (Ex 19:18), and God has promised to shake the earth once more. This was a reference to Haggai 2:6
 1. Haggai was sent to post-exile Israel to urge them to complete the rebuilding of the temple. Haggai 2:1-9 is a message of encouragement and prophesy. The people were concerned that the second temple did not compare with the beauty and splendor of Solomon's temple.
 2. But, the Lord assured them that the glory of this latter house would surpass the former. This is the temple the Lord Jesus Christ stood in when He came to earth the first time.
 3. None of the Old Testament prophets saw clearly the two comings of Jesus. Often, one prophesy has reference to both His first and second comings. When Jesus came the first time the earth shook or quaked with the crucifixion. Matt 27:50-52
 - c. But the writer of Hebrews says another shaking, not just of the earth, but the heavens, too is coming, referring to the end of this age and the Second Coming of Jesus.
 1. v27--By this he means that he will sift out everything without solid foundations, so that only unshakable things will be left. (Living)
 2. His point is that everything that can be shaken will be shaken. But we do not have to fear because we belong to an unshakable kingdom. Don't leave that kingdom!! v28--Let us hold fast to grace; Let us be filled with thankfulness (Conyebear) and in this way continue to serve God acceptably (Williams) with godly reverence and awe (Weymouth)
 - d. It is at this point that the writer calls God a consuming fire (V29). The point is not to tell them or us that God is an angry fire and He will get you if you don't watch out. His point is: Shakable things will be removed as surely as fire removes anything that can burn.
 3. When Jesus comes back to earth He is going to remove from God's creation all traces of sin and the death and corruption it brings.
 - a. The heavens and the earth are going to be renovated by the fire of God. II Pet 3:10-13
 1. Elements means the basic parts or components of something. Melt and dissolve are the same word meaning to loose or loosen. The elements of the heavens and earth will be dissolved or literally, loosed.
 2. Earth is under a curse because of sin. At the return of Jesus it will be purged by fire and recreated to become the scene for God's family and His eternal glory.
 3. Rev 21:1-4--There will be a new heaven and a new earth. New means new in kind or order as

distinguished from new in point of time.

- b. God is called a consuming fire because He is going to cleanse His creation by removing all that corrupts and offends (Matt 13:41-43) as surely as a fire consumes everything in its path.
 4. One theme we see over and over in the Old Testament is that God will one day cleanse His people.
 - a. There is more to that than we can discuss in this lesson. But, the point is that the people to whom Jesus came first (the Jews) understood that fire is a cleansing agent -- and that's a good thing.
 - b. In Mal 3:2,3 the Coming of the Lord is compared to a refiner's fire which will purge Israel.
 1. Metals were refined by separating the dross from the ore. The metal was heated to liquefy it. Solvents were added which mixed with the dross making it easier to extract the pure ore.
 2. We hear the words "refine" and "purge" in connection with the Lord and we hear: I've been bad. God is going to give me a car wreck or make me sick or burn my house down. But, in the context of the Bible, refine and purge are good words.
 - c. Isa 6:5-7--Isaiah the prophet was cleansed or purged by a fiery coal from the altar of God. Why? He had a repentant heart and willingly received the Lord's cleansing.
 5. When John the Baptist announced the coming of the Messiah he repeated the message of the Old Testament prophets: Israel will be cleansed by the Messiah. Matt 3:7-12
 - a. John said trees that do not bring forth fruit will be cast into the fire (v10) and Messiah will separate the wheat from the chafe and burn the chafe (v12). These Old Covenant people would have been familiar with Mal 4:1.
 - b. The point is: God will ultimately cleanse His creation and that's a good thing. The point is not: God is a fire, God's anger is like fire and He is gonna get you.
 1. Those who turn to Him in repentance and faith will be cleansed by the wrath of God. God's wrath is the remedy for sin. The wrath of God for our sins went to Jesus and it produced wholeness for us.
 2. Isa 53:5--The chastisement needful to obtain peace and well-being for us was upon Him, and with the stripes that wounded Him we are healed and made whole. (Amp)
 - c. Notice in the middle of these verses in Matt is v11--The Messiah will baptize you with the Holy Ghost and fire, a fire that will not consume them but rather, empower them. God pours His Spirit, His fire, on His children, and it blesses them. Isa 44:3; Acts 2:4
- E. Conclusion: Our God is a consuming fire. Remember, whether or not something is consumed is not dependent on the fire but on the makeup of the object in its path.
1. There is coming a day when the fire of God will remove all trace of sin and its effects. God's desire is to remove the sin and transform the sinner. But if the sinner holds on to his sin he will not be transformed. He too will be removed. Matt 13:30; 40-43
 - a. We now stand before the Lord, we will stand before the Lord at His Coming as sons and daughters of God (I John 3:2). We stand before Him justified (Rom 3:24), holy and blameless in His sight because we have been cleansed by the wrath of God expressed at the Cross.
 - b. To those who have been cleansed by the wrath of God expressed at the Cross the fire of God is a good thing. It will not consume us. It will consume all that would harm us.
 2. Ps 76:10--Man's wrath only adds to your glory; the survivors of your wrath you will draw like a girdle around you. (Jerusalem)