

Our God Is a Consuming Fire

by Zac Poonen

God's consuming fire burns up pride in our hearts, and we can cooperate with Him by living in humility and brokenness.

Scripture: Zephaniah 3:11, Matthew 11:28, Acts 13:22, Galatians 5:22, Hebrews 4:13, 1 Peter 2:18, 1 Peter 3:4

Topics: "Humility Before God", "Spiritual Brokenness"

Description

Zac Poonen preaches about the two categories of people before God: the humble and the proud. God seeks to burn up the pride in our hearts with His consuming fire, removing the haughty ones and leaving a humble and lowly people. God's acceptance is based on humility and sincerity rather than right or wrong actions, as seen in the contrasting cases of King Saul and King David. The key to triumphing over Satan is living in humility, brokenness, and meekness before God, enduring suffering patiently and forgiving others, as God values a gentle and quiet spirit that is imperishable.

Transcript

There are only TWO categories of people before God - not those who do right and those who do wrong, but those who are HUMBLE and those who are PROUD, or in other words, those who followed Jesus in His humility and those who followed Satan in his pride. It is the pride in our hearts that God is constantly seeking to burn up with His consuming fire, first of all. It is the proud, haughty ones whom He seeks to remove from Zion. The Lord says, "I will remove from your midst your proud, exulting ones, and you will never again be haughty on my holy mountain" (Zeph.3:11). And then the church will be left with "a humble and lowly people" (Zeph.3:12). This is the church that will triumph over Satan. In the final day, we will find many people who did right being rejected by God because they were proud. And amazingly, we will also discover then that some people who made serious mistakes in their lives are still accepted by God, because they were humble and sincere. Consider how God rejected some who committed what we would call "a small sin" and how He accepted and blessed some who committed what we would call "a great sin".

Take first the case of King Saul. He committed what we would call "a small sin": Instead of killing ALL the sheep of Amalek, as God had told him to, he killed only the bad sheep and kept the good sheep to offer to God as a sacrifice. Would you have condemned Saul for such a mistake? Perhaps not. But God did punish him - and that severely! He took away the kingdom from Saul. On the other hand, consider what King David did. He committed adultery with a man's wife when the man was out of town (fighting in David's own army). And then to cover up his sin, David had the man killed on the battlefield and then married the

woman. What would you do with such a man as David? You would perhaps send David to hell immediately. But God didn't do that. His ways are not our ways. God's ways cannot be understood by our human reason. We divide people according to whether they do right or wrong. But God divides them according to whether they are proud (and insincere) or humble (and sincere). And so God accepted David, after punishing him for his sin. God even refers to David as a man after His own heart, who served his generation in the will of God (Acts 13:22,36). David's end was not like Saul's, just because he was humble.

In observing Christians and Christian leaders who have fallen, I have noticed a difference. God allows some to get exposed but not others. Some whose crimes are very small (in man's eyes) are exposed and humiliated before everyone. While others (who I happen to know confidentially have committed far greater sins), do NOT get exposed at all! And not only does God cover up their failures, He even blesses them and uses them greatly! All this appears unfair to us. But it is not. Why does God do things like that? Because He is NOT Pharisaical, like most religious people are! He divides people into "Humble" and "Proud" categories and not into "Those who did right" and "Those who did wrong" categories. This what gives great hope and encouragement to all of us. If God had divided people up as men divide them, then we would have to live in constant fear lest we accidentally end up in the wrong group - for all of us make mistakes and do wrong things - at least accidentally, if not deliberately. Men usually come down hard on us, when we do even one wrong thing. But thank God, we don't have to deal with unmerciful men. We have to deal only with God our merciful Creator (Heb.4:13).

If we live in humility and brokenness before God always, never esteeming ourselves as better than anyone else, but always recognising ourselves as the chief of sinners; if we never seek to lord it over others and never seek to grab anything on earth (not even a ministry); if we are willing to walk "the second mile"; and if we are ready to forgive those who have done us the greatest wrong, then God will cover up our failures and continue to bless us, no matter what men think about us or do to us. 1 Peter 2:18,19 tells servants to be submissive even to unreasonable masters.

As long as we live in this world, we will all encounter people who are unreasonable. If we can live only with reasonable people, then we are unfit to be the disciples of Jesus. It is through unreasonable people that God consumes away our pride. And when we deal with unreasonable people, and we suffer at their hands, God will be happy with us, if we humble ourselves and endure our suffering patiently, because that is how Jesus suffered too. You get no credit for being patient, when you suffer for having done something wrong.

You get ZERO for that! Why should you get any marks from God in any case for that? But if you do what is right and suffer for it - whether in the office or in the church or anywhere - and bear that patiently, God is well-pleased with you (1 Pet.2:20). "Well-pleased" is such a wonderful word! That was the word that God used when He spoke about Jesus, saying, "This is My beloved Son in Whom I am well-pleased". Humility has tremendous value before God. It says in 1 Peter 3:4 that a meek and gentle spirit is extremely precious to God - whether found in a woman or in a man.

Jesus Himself had a humble and gentle heart and told us to learn these virtues from Him (Matt.11:28). A gentle and a quiet spirit is one that is not agitated or in unrest. Some washing machines have what is called an "agitator". It turns one way and then the other way - perpetually. It is never at rest, it is always "agitating"! In the hearts of all who are born of Adam too, there is an "agitator". If anyone rubs them the wrong way, the agitator starts "agitating". But those who are humble and gentle in spirit have got rid of this

agitator.

They are not offended or hurt, when anyone says or does something to them , or when they don't say or do something that was expected of them. They have put their "agitator" on the cross. Peter says that the beauty of a gentle and a quiet spirit is "imperishable"! This is the secret of eternal beauty. The world is full of women nowadays who are wanting to look younger. But what is the beauty that is really imperishable? It is a gentle and a quiet spirit. And this is for men too!

This is what will make you really precious to God - if you have a gentle, quiet spirit that is not agitated or offended, that doesn't get into bad moods, that is not grumpy or angry. You need never lose control of yourself at any time either, for the fruit of the Spirit is self-control. Let the world be full of people who have "agitators" but that's not for us any longer. Praise the Lord, we can get rid of our agitators permanently.

God is a consuming fire who is determined to consume every bit of pride from every corner of our hearts - if we will let Him. He will arrange people and circumstances in such a way that every particle of pride is totally consumed. Let us cooperate then with Him and allow the Spirit to do a perfect work within us.

He who has ears to hear let him hear.

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