

God: A Consuming Fire

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[0 : 00] Good morning, everyone. It's a blessing to be here. So as I was pondering on what Brother Laverne was sharing about forgiveness, a quote that I found interesting, very interesting, was! Don't forgive after you get revenge.

So how many times do we like, well, I will forgive that person, but once he feels what I've been feeling, then we can maybe get to understand how we're feeling, right? He needs to feel a little bit of that. I just forgive him, then he does it again.

And another thought that I was thinking about with that, my dad really emphasized this as a child growing up, and it's in Luke 17, verse 3 and 4.

And I wonder if we would practice this, how much more the Spirit could flow through us, and that we could grow. And it says, in verse 3, it says, Pay attention to yourselves.

If your brother sins, rebuke him. And if he repents, forgive him. Very simple, very straightforward. It's not a complicated process. And if he sins against you seven times in the day, and turns to you seven times saying, I repent, you must forgive him.

[1 : 21] It doesn't say, well, because he came the seventh time, I'm not willing to forgive him. If he comes and he says, I repent, it says, forgive him. So, exactly how that looks in life, I'm not sure that I have that answer.

But that is the words of Jesus. And it was a very good thanks for that, Laverne. And also, that it's not a feeling, it's a choice.

We choose to forgive. It's not, we don't go by our feelings. It can be very, very deceiving, and take us sometimes where we don't want to end up. So, I don't know.

I did not have a lot of time to prepare. I had something that was on my heart. And so, I will share the best of my ability. And as God leads, and I will try to not talk too fast.

I know I have a habit of talking really fast. And I think that if I'm not talking fast, it's not flowing like it should. So, I'll try, bear with me as I try to slow down and try to make sense of what I'm about to share.

[2 : 32] So, the thought that I had was probably about a month ago, a month and a half ago, Laverne and I spent a decent amount of time with this Seventh-day Adventist guy at the job that we're working at.

And the one day, he asked me why I believe or if I know why in the Scripture that it refers to God as a consuming fire.

Why does the Scripture refer to God as a fire? I said, I don't know that I know. And then, as I was reading a story to the children the other night, this past week, I believe, they had this story about Elijah going to heaven in a chariot of fire.

And again, I was like, wow, there again, it's speaking of God as a fire. What is a fire? Why does it speak of God as a fire? So, I'm going to read some Scripture on that and then it'll be more or less just comparing some parallels of the fire of God to our physical world and how we can compare it to our lives.

So, in 2 Kings 2, starting in verse 4, there's only a couple verses in the Bible that speaks directly about God being a consuming fire.

[3 : 53] But in this, we know that God came down in a fire and we want to read about how this happened and what it looked like and what happened to Elisha after Elijah was taking up in that chariot of fire.

So, starting in verse 4, we'll read to verse 18, which will be our Scripture that we're going to talk about. And verse 4, it says, And Elijah said unto him, Elisha, tarry here, I pray thee, for the Lord hath sent me to Jericho.

And he said, As the Lord liveth, and as thy soul liveth, I will not leave thee. So they came to Jericho. So, I'm not sure why Elijah wanted Elisha to tarry, but Elisha was like, no.

I'm going with you. And the sons of the prophets that were at Jericho came to Elisha and said unto him, Knowest thou that the Lord will take away thy master from thy head today?

And he answered, Yeah, I know it. Hold ye your peace. And Elijah said unto him, Tarry, I pray thee here, for the Lord hath sent me to Jordan. And he said, As the Lord liveth, and as thy soul liveth, I will not leave thee.

[5 : 02] And they too went on. And fifty men of the sons of the prophets went and stood to view afar off. And they too stood by Jordan.

And Elijah took his mantle and wrapped it together and smote the waters. And they were divided hither and thither, so that they too went over on dry ground. And it came to pass when they were gone over, that Elijah said unto Elisha, Ask what I shall do for thee before I be taken away from thee.

And Elisha said, I pray thee, let a double portion of thy spirit be upon me. And he said, Thou hast asked a hard thing. Nevertheless, if thou see me when I am taken from thee, it shall be so unto thee.

But if not, it shall not be so. And it came to pass, as they still went on and taught, that behold, there appeared a chariot of fire, and horses of fire, and parted them both asunder.

And Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven. And Elisha saw it, and he cried, My father, my father, the chariot of Israel, and the horsemen thereof. And he saw him no more.

[6 : 10] And he took hold of his own clothes, and rent them in two pieces. He took up also the mantle of Elijah that fell from him, and went back and stood by the bank of Jordan.

And he took the mantle of Elijah that fell from him, and smote the waters, and said, Where is the Lord God of Elijah? And when he also had smitten the waters, they parted hither and thither, and Elisha went over.

And when the sons of the prophets, which were to view at Jericho, saw him, they said, The spirit of Elijah doth rest on Elisha. And they came to meet him, and bowed themselves to the ground before him.

And they said unto him, Behold now, there be with thy servants fifty strong men. Let them go, we pray thee, and seek thy master, lest peradventure the spirit of the Lord hath taken him up, and cast him upon some mountain, or into some valley.

And he said, Ye shall not send. And when they urged him, till he was ashamed, he said, Send. They sent therefore fifty men, and they sought three days, but found him not.

[7 : 16] And when they came again to him, for he tarried at Jericho, he said unto them, Did I not say unto you, Go not? So we find that Elisha trusted that Elijah had went to be with the Lord.

But these people didn't trust it. They were like, Well, maybe the spirit lifted him up and just set him in another mountain or in a valley, right? Let's go see. Let's make sure. How often in our life do we walk things by faith when the Lord speaks?

Or do we say that, Well, maybe I better check on this mountain or I better check the valley again to make sure that it's not so. Or do we just by faith take God at his word and we walk it out, not knowing.

It doesn't, we don't always have to know those things. So I found it interesting first that it says that he came down in a chariot of fire and horses of fire.

So if it was a fire, how did they know it was a chariot and how did they know it was horses? So in my mind, I believe that they were shaped as a horses and chariot, but it was a flaming fire.

[8 : 17] And yet when Elijah was taken up, it doesn't say that he was consumed by this fire. That was the way that the Lord took him out of this world. And we can read of several different areas in scripture that God uses the fire.

Moses in the burning bush. The bush was not consumed, but God spoke out of that fire. He led them by a pillar of fire.

And I'll turn to that verse and just read it because I found it was interesting that he created light by the fire. We know that God is light. In Exodus 13 verse 21, it says, And the Lord went before them by day in a pillar of a cloud to lead them the way and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light, to go by day and night.

So he used a cloud through the day. He used a pillar of fire at night to give them light. And so I just, it was interesting to me that God uses fire to give us an example of himself.

And so I was doing some research. What is fire? How does it work? And how can we compare this fire? And how can we maybe see God in our physical realm that we say we can't see God?

[9 : 31] But yet he has given us so many things that we can look at and actually see God. There's only two verses that I'm aware of that talks about God being an actual fire.

In Hebrews 12 verse 29, it says, For our God is a consuming fire. And also in Deuteronomy 4, chapter 4 verse 24, it says, For the Lord your God is a consuming fire, a jealous God.

So we know that, as Laverne spoke earlier, that God pursues us. And when he pursues us and we accept, he consumes us with that fire.

And what does that fire do? It burns off everything that God cannot use and turns and creates us into a vessel that can be used for his honor and glory. So I believe that we're only, we are only, we can only be consumed to the extent that we desire to be consumed.

So this is maybe more in a physical sense. I wanted to go through some things about fire. And I just wrote down, what is fire?

[10 : 38] What is fire? When we think about fire in a physical realm, what is it? What does it consist of? We use fire every day, right? We can use it. And as Brother Merlin had to help put out a chimney fire this morning, that fire was not something that we desire, right?

It takes away things that we need. But yet, when we have a lot of garbage and we have a pit, we use fire and it's very useful to us. So first of all, fire needs three things.

For a fire to operate, it needs oxygen, it needs fuel, and it needs heat. Friction creates energy and it creates heat. So without any of these, any of these three items, it cannot function.

The fire cannot function. As I was sitting here this morning, I was thinking, how interesting, the Godhead is divided into three parts. It's God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit.

And I was just thinking, can we function, can the Godhead function in us without all three of those? I don't believe that He can. And the same with a fire. If we are missing one of the components, the fire does not work.

[11 : 44] It does not function. So if you take away oxygen, it suffocates. If you take away fuel, it starves. And if you take away heat, it goes out. So it needs these three elements or these three components to create the fire and to do what it's proposed to do.

And so with the thought being that God is a consuming fire, number one, we can put it in this form that it consumes sin.

When we accept Christ, we trust in Him and we put our faith in Him. It consumes our sin. Number two, it purifies our hearts. And number three, it guides His people by the light. So we can take His word as His light and it guides us by that.

And as we had read earlier that in Exodus 13 verse 21, it was a pillar of fire, which was a light by night, a cloud by day that directed and guided them physically. So then I just, I was doing some research on what are some physical things so we know that, well, we can use the thought that when fire consumes something, it destroys it, right?

Well, it's now destroyed. It's nothing. You take wood and you burn it. It burns into an ash, which there still is some, there is a component to the ashes that is useful, right? We used to put the ashes on our garden in our ground because it was high in potash, I believe.

[13 : 02] And so there was a use for it. But then the other thought is, my other, my thought went to this. What is, what are some physical elements or some physical things that fire can be used to actually do good, to purify, to cleanse, to bring to a better state?

And so I come up with, the research that I've done, I come up with about nine different things.

There's a few more if you want to do research on it. But one is gold. Well, it can be gold or silver, iron or metal, copper, clay, glass, water, food, and the last one I wrote down was tools and instruments.

So starting with gold and silver, we know that the more that gold is refined, the purer it gets. And it can only get to a certain level of purity, right? They go to 99.9% pure gold.

It can only be refined so, so pure and then it's as pure as it gets. So, I believe if we look at gold and silver as our lives, God uses, his, God uses his fire to purify us, to remove spiritual impurities.

You can call it sin. And in iron and steel, we can look as our character. God strengthens it through steel. And I'll go through a couple of these things of how these processes are done and how we can

apply that to our lives.

[14 : 26] And clay can be made into vessels. God shapes us into vessels of honor. And glass, God brings us, which is sand or silica, he used to bring us to greater clarity and transparency.

And in tools, God uses those for us to work in his kingdom. So, with gold and silver, the refining process is based on how much dross, I believe, we are willing to let God remove during the refining process or how pure we actually desire to be.

It typically takes two or three cycles to refine it to its purity limits. So, a normal refining process, it takes about two to three cycles to purify it to its limits.

And so, I'm not sure where God's at in my life in purifying myself. I hope I'm past the first, like, I desire to be past just the first stage of maybe taking a little bit of the main dross off the top.

But, I ask it as a question, can we ever come to the place where we are 99.9% pure? Probably not in our human flesh, but I think that our desire and goal can be there and I believe that God, I believe that God knows our hearts and that he's willing to help us in those situations.

[15 : 39] But, I just thought that it was interesting how we can compare that to our lives and it's not necessarily that more heat brings more purity. It's just that at this certain level of heat is where the separation is made.

The dross floats to the top and then is scraped off and refines the gold. And then, iron and steel. We could look at that as our character.

God shapes our character and I found this very interesting. So, iron and steel must be refined but with skill and timing. Too much carbon can make it very hard and brittle.

And I had to think about that. Is my character very hard and brittle that if anything comes in contact with it, it just snaps and breaks? Or is it, do I let God refine and make me to where I have the exact right temperament that when I come into contact with whatever it is that I can rightly divide by the word of God and that I don't just bend because I'm too soft or break because I'm too rigid.

Because too much carbon can make it very hard and brittle and too little carbon can make it soft and weak. So, I believe our heart is to be the right temperament.

[17 : 04] Our character to be refined to the right temperament that God can use us if you will, let's say a knife to rightly divide the word of God and to not be too hard and rigid that we just break when we come into, I don't know if you want to say conflict or into trials and things in life that when our character is tested that it breaks or then when our character is tested we just bend over and just go whichever way is the easiest.

It says weak can make soft, weak, so too little carbon can make soft and weak iron. So, proper refining can purify character and it can strengthen our faith and it requires patience and proper cooling periods.

I found this interesting in a parallel in our life. It requires proper cooling periods and we could put these into the thought of rest and reflection and prayer.

So, there are times that we need to rest and we need to give it to God and trust in Him and to reflect on our lives and where we stand with God and where our character actually is and prayer.

And then the physical element of clay or dirt we know that the Bible uses that as an example of creating a vessel.

[18 : 21] He uses clay to be molded and to be made into a vessel. So, natural clay needs to be kneaded or wedged because it needs to remove air bubbles, rocks, and impurities.

So, we know that natural clay that's dug out of the soil has impurities in it as well. It can have rocks in it, it can have air bubbles, it can have other impurities, I'm not sure exactly what all they are. But, just in the physical sense of how this is made into a vessel.

It is then shaped into a vessel and dried slowly to avoid cracking. So, it has to, from the research I've done, it has to dry slowly so that it avoids cracking.

I was thinking in that. So, if it dries too fast and it cracks, what are we worth as a vessel with a big crack in it? We're never going to hold anything, we're never going to retain anything, we're never going to be useful for anything, I mean, outside of maybe some dry ingredient that doesn't flow through a crack.

But, for the most part, when we have a cracked vessel, it's in the back, in the closet, right? Or in our pantry. It's not something that we use. We might use it if we're in a pinch, but it's not useful.

[19 : 26] The purpose of the vessel is to not be cracked. And I believe God's thought for us is to not be cracked. I believe He wants us to be a whole vessel in His image, molded for His kingdom

and for His glory.

And so, it says that it has to dry slowly to avoid cracking and then it's fired or put in a kiln to harden it. And then sometimes it's glazed with minerals to create a smooth glass-like finish.

So, first it's shaped, then it's fired or kilned, and then it's glazed. And so, I believe that unless God can shape us and unless we are fired in the kiln of God's, whatever we face in life, unless we are letting God use that to kiln dry us into the vessel that He wants for us, we're either going to be a cracked vessel or we're going to be a, I can't find the word I want to say, we're going to be a vessel that is just not, that is not designed by God.

It's going to be our own thought of a vessel and it's going to be, at best, not right. And then, finally, God glazes us with His blessings and with His, His purpose for us.

Ultimately, we can be that beautiful vessel. I just found that to be a very interesting parallel in a spiritual sense of how we can be made into the image that God wants us to be.

[20 : 50] Not that it's anything that we do, but it's, the more that we are willing to be refined, the more God can actually do in us and with us. And then, we have the, the element or the, of glass.

And I, I wrote that down as clarity. As a researcher, I was doing, what is glass? The main thing that we have for glass in our windows is for us to be able to see through to be transparent, right?

That we can see things. We can, it blocks off the code and yet we can still see what's happening outside. And, well, how is glass made? If we would take glass in its original form before it's refined, we would see nothing.

It would be a, it would be like a brick of sand, silica, you know, and a couple other minerals that are added to it. So the main ingredient of, in sand is, is a ingredient in glass is silica or sand.

And then there's some other components added to it like sodium carbonate and calcium carbonate which is limestone. So let's take, we take the ingredient, we take the actual ingredient, let's, and let's parallel that to our life before we are inside of, before we have accepted Christ.

[21 : 58] We're not going to be able to do nothing. We're not going to be transparent. We're not going to have clarity. We're not going to be able, people are not going to be able to use us for anything. God's not going to be able to use us. It's like us coming to the Bible as we did growing up in our Amish culture and reading the Bible, reading the word as God's law but yet it was, there was no transparency, there was no clarity because it was in the original form.

We had not been transformed. We had not been refined and so, and I like to think of it as this glass pane being in its original form. All that it would be is part of the wall. There's no clarity, no transparency.

So, the way that glass is made, it starts as sand plus additives and it's transformed by extreme heat. I like to think of us, who of us in our lives would not say that when we were transformed it was by extreme heat?

It's only by extreme heat, it's only by coming to that, the bottom of ourselves, coming to the end of ourselves that we can actually be transformed and let God actually bring this clarity and this transforming from the original component into what God wants us to be.

And so, we can usually see three things a lot, we can usually see things a lot clearer when we come through the trials and tribulations in victory. So, I believe as God brings us through these things, it brings greater, when we persevere, when we endure, when we let God use these extreme times of heat, it can bring greater clarity, greater transparency, greater peace, greater joy, all the attributes of the Spirit.

[23 : 33] And it was just, that was just, I thought it was a beautiful parallel to our life that it's brought to this, these components are brought to clarity and transparency through extreme heat.

And then, so, that was kind of the end of what I had, the summation of what I had written down and what I had, the research that I had done.

But it was interesting, I was just doing a little research in Kings. We know that the book of Kings, I believe it used to all be one book that's divided in 1st and 2nd Kings, that in, chapter 17, 1st Kings chapter 17, that we read about Elijah.

God raises up Elijah as a prophet. And that in chapter, 1st Kings chapter 19, verse 16, God tells him to anoint Elisha, that Elisha's going to continue on the prophet, be the prophet after him, after God takes him away.

And that they were, from the beginning of Kings to the end of Kings, that they were, they went from unity and glory to division and corruption and then ultimately to exile and judgment.

[24 : 46] And that they were divided from northern to southern. The Israelites were of the northern kingdom and the other two tribes were of the southern kingdom, which was two tribes in the southern kingdom, ten tribes in the northern kingdom.

And it began at the reign of Solomon and they both ended up being taken into judgment by Assyria and Babylon. So it was interesting how through this started in unity and glory, but it went to division, the tribes divided, and yet they were still both tribes of Israel, I guess, right?

Or they were of the twelve tribes of Israel. And then ultimately went to exile and judgment. I just found it was interesting as a whole across that.

So in the ending, I guess my heart would be, are we willing, how much are we willing to let the consuming fire of God give us greater purity and let Him refine our character and move us into a vessel of honor and bring greater clarity into our lives?

To what extent is that and is He doing that in each and every one of our lives? To what extent is the fire of God burning off the dross in my life? Or to what extent do I say, Lord, you've refined me to this extent, I think I'm good.

[26 : 21] I think I can handle it from here. I feel unless our heart is that we are to let the fire consume us to the degree that we are completely lost in Him.

Only then can God use us. And it's interesting that in verse, is it in verse 9, at the end of verse 9, what did, what did Elisha tell Elijah that he, that he desires?

Elijah asked him, what do you desire when I, before I am taken away from you? And Elisha, what did he say out of all the things that he could have said? He said, let a double portion of thy spirit be upon me.

And I believe that we recognize those of us that have, that do walk in the, you know, have been born again and walking in the spirit, that when we desire these things, they bring greater amounts of heat and fire.

Because as we desire this, there's a refining process that goes on. And as we continue this, as we, as we desire more anointing of the spirit to be upon us and to have a double portion of the spirit of God to be upon us that we, I tend to think that I cry out to God and say, God, just bless, let your spirit flow through me.

[27 : 39] Let me, use me for whatever you want. But then when those trials come and as he's doing that, then I'm like, well, I'm not sure, well, not quite that much maybe. I was like, well, I didn't expect you to use that much.

You know, I'm not sure I can handle this all. But it's, when we ask for these things that God gives them and sometimes they're in the thought of now I'm facing all this persecution, I'm facing all this confusion or whatever it may be.

Why is it? Well, it's because I believe that we ask for it. We ask to be refined. If I ask to be refined, do I expect God not to refine me? And if I ask to be refined, do I expect that it's just going to be, he's just going to not use the process that it takes to refine me?

I feel like sometimes we want the blessings without, we want this refining without the consequence, I don't know if you can call it consequences, but without the process of what it goes through.

So in the refining of the gold, the silver, iron and steel, clay and glass, it's not really a consequence that this refining process goes through. It is part of the process to get something better.

[28 : 44] And so I think maybe if we look at it that way, instead of looking at it as punishment and toil and grief and heartache, I know that a lot of times we face those things. But to know, to know that and to understand that can be a blessing.

As I was telling my wife yesterday, you know, we face trials, we face tribulations, we went to town, we're coming back home, and I was like, you know what, I can just feel, I just feel peace that I don't have to worry about these things.

I don't have to worry about these things, I can give them to the Lord, He's got control of it, and I can trust that. But then after that, it came about me sharing, and I was like, well, peace, peace.

It wasn't, it was a blessing, but I just didn't, it was, didn't have a lot of time to prepare, and that was okay, and it's not, it's, I don't think it's, it's about me, and it's about what I have to say, it's about what the Lord has to say, and about His word, and His blessings, and so I think that was about all I had, so Brother Joe said he would fill in if I run out.

So, blessings, thanks for listening.