

UPWARD CALL

Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet; but this is my one aim: to forget everything that's behind, and to strain every nerve to go after what lies ahead. I press on toward the finish line, where the prize waiting for me is the upward call of God

IN KING JESUS.

(Philippians 3:13-14)

#09-1508

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Salted (Preserved) with Fire

"For everyone will be salted with fire." (Mark 9:49 NASB)

Jesus said these words in the context of going into hell where the worm does not die and the fire is not quenched. I have written much on this subject to refute the common interpretations of hell, which are traditions of men, so it will not be repeated here. If interested, please follow these links.

Eternity or Ages?—Eternal or Eonian? — <http://www.kingdomandglory.com/art/art57.pdf>

Hell—Reality or Pagan Imagery? — <http://www.kingdomandglory.com/art/art59.pdf>

Second Death—Lake of Fire — <http://www.kingdomandglory.com/art/art61.pdf>

Now, there are two levels that I want to briefly address in this issue. The first one is the general view that all or everyone will be salted with fire. To understand this, we need to understand the nature and purpose of fire. The second one is the more specific judgment of most of mankind in what is called *the lake of fire*. Again, more in-depth discussion of these concepts is found in the above articles.

It seems that the fire of God is a misunderstood concept. In a sense, it is almost an attribute of God just like God is love, God is light, and God is spirit. The word *almost* is used because there does seem to be a difference between fire and the other attributes. Scripture states that **God is a consuming fire** (Deuteronomy 4:24; 9:3; Hebrews 12:29); the article *a* is not used with the three main attributes of God.

Fire only exists when there is something (i.e., fuel) to burn. Once all the fuel is burned up, the fire goes out. Unless it is fed with an unlimited supply of fuel, it only lasts as long as there is fuel or a source of material that it can consume. Consequently, it can be said that all fires must eventually die out; they simply will burn themselves out when they exhaust their fuel. Even our natural sun is destined to exhaust all its fuel and one day be extinguished. And, so it will be with God's fire.

What is the fuel for God's fire? The simple answer is everything and anything that is not of His divine nature and character. In order for His ultimate purpose of *All in all* to be achieved, it appears that He plans to burn up all that is not of His life and the life of His Son. This is why at the end of the ages death itself will be fully and totally and forever abolished (1 Corinthians 15:26). Death itself along with all sin and dead works of the flesh will be consumed in God's fire.

Everything that is unclean must be burned with God's fire, as seen in the law of the unclean. *The flesh that touches anything unclean shall not be eaten; it shall be burned with fire* (Leviticus 7:19). Our mortal flesh is like leprous flesh. Presently, we occupy bodies of death and, apart from the life of His Son, we all are unclean. Our mortal flesh cannot appear in the presence of God without being consumed. Nay, it must be consumed. *For the LORD will execute judgment by fire and by His sword on all flesh, and those slain by the LORD will be many* (Isaiah 66:16). Obviously, there is context to what Isaiah declared, but in a very broad and general sense, our old Adamic-flesh is an enemy of God. It must be slain, and the process through which God does this is what is called His consuming fire.

John the Baptist indicated the nature and purpose of this fire when he declared: *He who is coming after me is mightier than I ... He will baptize you with the holy spirit and fire. ... He will gather His wheat into the barn, but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire* (Matthew 3:11-12). God's consuming fire is a baptism of fire; an immersion into His holy fire. Unfortunately, many have abused this word and applied it to some strange behaviors.

It is true that at Pentecost the holy spirit came upon those waiting in the upper room, tongues of fire appeared on them, and they spoke in foreign (not strange) languages. But this was a sign of the fire of God coming to consume the chaff. We all have chaff in us. In fact, our mortal flesh is chaff, and it must be burned up with God's unquenchable fire until it is no more. Another way of stating this is that our soul life or our Adamic self-life must die, and the aim of God's unquenchable fire is to do just that.

It is quite common to hear Christians, especially young ones, say: *I am on fire for the Lord*. Of course, they mean that they are excited about or energized or zealous for the Lord. To them, it is a good thing to be on fire for the Lord, as if it is a sign of being spiritual. In some measure, it is. Unfortunately, the use of this expression indicates a lack of understanding of God's ways. God is a consuming fire, and His fire is designed to do just that, consume until that which is in view has been reduced down to its pure elemental state.

Scripturally speaking, this expression would mean that God is doing some deep work in burning up the flesh that wages war against the spirit (Galatians 5:17). This is a good and necessary thing for the Lord through His spirit to do; however, it may not be, and often is not, a very pleasant thing to experience. Let's face it; dying to self or, for that matter, dying to anything can be rough going, especially if we don't understand what is happening to us and why. By the very nature of war, some win and some lose; being on the losing side, at first, may not seem to be pleasant. On the other hand, we need to embrace God's fire, knowing that the end result is not the good but the best. So, I would caution against using this expression unless one wants to make the point that the Lord is dealing with them in a very deep way.

I know a brother who says: *The fire is good, come on in*. Although this is closer to the truth and a necessity in all our lives, I still would not make it a point to invite in the fire of God, as if it is a common event to take lightly. It is a very serious matter that I would rather leave to God, knowing His timing and ways are perfect. In our walk with the Lord, all of us will experience the fire of God in varying intensities and in various ways. It is to be expected, especially if we have purposed in our hearts to not love our life even unto death (Revelation 12:11). The psalmist said: *With all my heart I have sought You; do not let me wander from Your commandments* (Psalms 119:10). If we have this whole heart for the Lord, we can be assured that the fire of God will be active in our life.

There are many other ways to explain God's fire working in our lives. One such way is the fiery ordeals or trials that we are called to endure. *Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial among you, which comes upon you for your testing, as though some strange thing were happening to you* (1 Peter 4:12).

What about the rest of mankind, the unbelievers of our age? We know there is a fire reserved for them. Is it a different kind of fire? No! There is a reason that *the second death* is called *the lake of fire*. First, it is a lake, which implies a limited body, not one that is infinite. Second, it is the same fire that speaks of *God is a consuming fire*. His fire will work in the lives of those cast into His fire until it has no more flesh or dead works to consume. When this is fully done to all who are cast into His presence in this fashion, His fire will go out. Another way to look at this is that mankind, even unregenerate, wicked mankind, does not have enough fuel to feed God's fire without end. It is not infinite; therefore, like the sun, one day God's fire will be fully quenched. Given this, the fire attribute of God seems to be limited to the ages or eons. It is an eonian fire, not an eternal fire. When He is All in all, there will be no more fire, for all will be like His beloved Son.

There is one more vital meaning to *salted with fire*. The word *salted* could be translated as *seasoned* or *preserved*. In other words, the action of fire preserves a person. But if the flesh is consumed, what is preserved? Simply, the person is preserved, meaning the person is saved minus his or her carnal flesh. Fire is God's preservative; it is not for annihilation but for rescue of the person. Rescued by the love of God! This is good news.

So, according to Jesus, everyone, including all of us who believe, will be salted or preserved with fire. We must be salted and so must all mankind, not all at the same time or even in the same way, but all nonetheless. There are no exceptions. A day will come when there will be no more sinful flesh to consume. But the good news is that we will all be preserved for God the Father who is all in all. Hallelujah!