

July 5, 2021! Another great celebratory weekend for our beloved nation. Now, we are off to another week of work, pleasure, rest ... or whatever we do in "retirement." I trust this Devotional will be a challenge and a blessing to all who read it.

KEEP THE FIRE BURNING!

A Devotional prepared by Dr. Robert L. Morris

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"And the fire on the altar shall be kept burning on it; it shall not be put out. ... A fire shall always be burning on the altar; it shall never go out." (Leviticus 6:12, 13; NKJV)

God's instructions to Moses specifically defines His concept of the relationship He desired to maintain with His people Israel. God established a procedure by which that relationship would be perpetually maintained. It was through a consuming fire on the altar, with the strongly stated instruction that the fire must not be extinguished, for it was the law of the burnt offering.

The New Testament clearly reveals the truth that God's instructions to Moses describe His concept of a genuine Christian life ... a dynamic, victorious Christian life. The Apostle Paul stated that we are to present ourselves to God as living sacrifices. That instruction is found at the beginning of the section in the Letter to the Romans after beginning his teaching on the doctrines of salvation and sanctification. At Romans 12 Paul begins his instruction on how to maintain the vital experience of entire sanctification. It must be done by a deliberate, willful and conscious decision to present ourselves ... totally ... as living sacrifices, symbolically related to the sacrificial altar concept of the Old Testament.

Taking it then, that God's instructions to Moses defines God's teaching concerning a truly real and victorious Christian life, we need to look at the matter of the FIRE to discover the heart of the issue.

Two questions must be asked and answered: (1) What is the purpose for fire? And (2) How can we preserve the fire? So, to these questions.

1. WHAT IS THE PURPOSE FOR FIRE? In other words, why does fire exist? What does it do? I am speaking of the spiritual aspects of fire on the altar of our commitment to God, but understanding them from the perspective of real fire in real life.

a. Fire protects. The Children of Israel were protected every moment on their way to the Promised Land, always assured of God's presence, evidenced by the fire on the altar in the Tabernacle in the Wilderness. When Moses had completed the assignment of constructing the Tabernacle, the Scripture informs us: "Then the cloud covered the tabernacle of meeting, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle. And Moses was not able to enter the tabernacle of meeting, because the cloud rested above it, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle. Whenever the cloud was taken up from above the tabernacle, the children of Israel would go onward in all their journeys. For the cloud of the LORD was above the tabernacle by day, and fire was over it by night, in the sight of all the house of Israel, throughout all their journeys." (Exodus 40:34-38; NKJV) The spiritual fire of the presence of the Holy Spirit is our moment-by-moment reassurance of God's unfailing spiritual protection in our lives. We may face physical calamities such as a terminal illness, but the fire of God on the altar of our hearts is the reassuring evidence that He is with us in the valley as well as on the mountain top, and that our eternal souls are protected in the journey toward eternal glory.

b. Fire purifies. On the Day of Pentecost, "They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit." (Acts 2:3, 4a; TNIV) When new converts had surrendered to the life-transforming work of God, Peter, instructing the fledgling church, explained what had actually happened: "God, who knows the heart, showed that He accepted them by giving the Holy Spirit to them, just as He did to us. He did not discriminate between us and them, for He purified their hearts by faith." (Acts 15:8, 9; TNIV) When the fire of purification fell on the Disciples on the Day of Pentecost, their hearts were made pure. Peter testified that the same purifying fire of God fell on new believers as he and others preached the life-transforming Gospel of grace.

c. Fire consumes. The human writer of the Book of Hebrews in the New Testament wrote, quoting from the Old Testament: "For our God is a consuming fire." (Hebrews 12:29; see Deuteronomy 4:24, and 1

Kings 18:24-38) In the Deuteronomy reference, the reference is to “the form of anything the LORD your God has forbidden.” (Deuteronomy 4:23; TNIV) This is so applicable to people in every generation. How easily we attach exaggerated value to “things,” “places,” “positions,” “relationships” and a host of others, when we really need to examine our hearts, our minds, our desires, and make sure there is nothing there that God has forbidden in His Word. Let the fire consume those “idols.”

d. Fire illuminates. Do you recall the account of the journey of the Children of Israel on their way from Egypt to the Promised Land? Moses recorded this for our instruction: “The LORD went ahead of them in a pillar of cloud to lead them on their way during the day and in a pillar of fire to give them light at night, so that they could travel day or night. The pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night never left its place in front of the people.” (Exodus 13:21, 22; HCSB)

e. Fire refines. The Prophet Malachi wrote concerning the coming Messiah: “But who can endure the day of His coming? And who can stand when He appears? For He is like a refiner’s fire and like launderers’ soap.” Malachi 3:3; NKJV) The prophet then proceeded to write about refining precious metals, silver and gold. “He will sit as a refiner and a purifier of silver; He will purify the sons of Levi, and purge them as gold and silver, that they may offer to the LORD an offering in righteousness.” A person acquainted with making the precious metal gold useful, knows that it takes the refining fire to remove the dross, or the non-gold element. And so it is with our spiritual lives! We need the fire of the Holy Spirit’s presence to burn away anything that contaminates the heart of a believer.

f. Fire warms. In a Scripture passage that is terribly revealing, we find the account of the Disciple Peter who, in “the courtyard of the high priest, ... sat with the servants and warmed himself at the fire.” (Mark 14:54; NKJV) This concept is so easily understood. When the chilling air of certain times of the year come to where we live, we need fire, of some kind, to provide warmth for our homes, and thus for our personal lives. In the realm of the spiritual, we frequently speak of those times in our churches when the atmosphere in the church is suddenly “warmed” by the obvious presence of the Holy Spirit. Let it be, dear Lord, let it be.

g. Fire discomforts. I suspect we just do not want to think about this ... but we must! We can all recollect the account in the Gospel of Luke, in which “a certain rich man ... died and was buried. And being in torments in Hades ... he cried out and said ... ‘I am tormented in this flame.’” (Luke 16:19, 22, 23, 24; NKJV) So sad, but so true! In that magnificent, beautifully-written, powerfully-revealing Book of Revelation we read what we may not want to read, but it is there, and it is true: “The devil, who deceived them, was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone where the beast and the false prophet are. And they shall be tormented day and night forever and ever. ... And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire.” (Revelation 20:10, 15; NKJV) To avoid this? “Let Jesus come into your heart!”

9. Fire empowers. Both Matthew and Luke record the words of John the Baptist announcing the coming of Jesus: “He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.” (Matthew 3:11; Luke 3:16 NKJV) This is a great truth. It is also an important part of Luke’s understanding of the words of Jesus, as recorded in the Book of Acts: “You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.” (Acts 1:8; NKJV) There is obviously a correlation with Luke’s additional statement of what happened on the Day of Pentecost: “When the Day of Pentecost had fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. Then there appeared to them divided tongues as fire, and one sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit.” (Acts 2:1-4a; NKJV) Empowered by the fire of the Holy Spirit’s presence, they marched across the land, stirring the synagogues, penetrating the palaces, and mauling the marketplaces with the transforming Gospel of Christ.

We now move to the second major question:

2. HOW CAN WE PRESERVE THE FIRE? Let me make this plain by using three basic statements: We need to (1) know WHEN the fire is going out, (2) know WHY it is going out, and (3) know WHERE and how to rekindle the fire.

1. We must know WHEN the fire is going out. This not difficult. It is easy to detect. The spiritual fire of God's dynamic fire that should be burning on the altar of our hearts, is going out,

a. When there is no longer any heat – that is, the passion that accompanies His presence.

b. When there is no longer any light – that is spiritual growth that His Word produces.

c. When there is no longer any power – that is, the resultant service in the work of His kingdom.

In the days of Moses, the fire on the altar in the Tabernacle in the Wilderness consumed the sacrifice, and it was then a "burnt offering," and pleasing to God. Now, it is a "living sacrifice." The Apostle Paul expressed it so well: "Therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, I urge you to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God; this is your spiritual worship." (Romans 12:1; HCSB) We desperately need the consuming fire of the Holy Spirit's presence that will reassure, protect, illuminate, refine, warm, empower, and when necessary, discomfort us.

2. We must know WHY the fire is going out. In using the simple analogy of the Scripture, there are probably three reasons why a fire goes out. It goes out,

a. When it is unattended – it has a natural tendency to end its burning.

b. When it is unprotected – when robbed of oxygen due to various reasons.

c. When it is unaccompanied – and in need of supporting flammables.

Remember your last campfire? You knew the fire was going out ... no heat, light, or power ... so you also knew why! No one had attended to the fire. It was robbed of oxygen and protection from possible rain. It became low on supporting flammables. So it is in our Christian lives. We are often too busy to spend time in prayer and in the Word, when these are needed to keep our spiritual fire going strong.

3. We must know WHAT is needed to rekindle the fire and to keep it burning as it should. Just think of the campfire again. The following is an overly-simplistic outline, but it is true. Note that it is applicable to the spiritual fire needed in our lives. In such a situation, we need to awaken to the fact that we are in spiritual trouble. What about the spiritual fire of God's presence in our lives? Let's do something when there only a few glowing embers and these seem to be dying.

a. We must admit that the fire is going out, or had died completely.

b. We must believe something can be done ... God can, wants to, and will re-ignite the fire.

c. We must commit to using God's resources, including His Word, Prayer, the Church, Christian friends, Christian books, Christian leaders.

Whose responsibility is to keep the fire burning? It is OUR responsibility, as individuals. Aaron was the High Priest and responsible to keep the fire burning on the altar of the Tabernacle of Meeting in the Wilderness. But God made an additional designation regarding His people Israel. "You shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation." (Exodus 19:6; NKJV)

There are those who will say immediately that the "kingdom of priests" relates to Israel. That is true, if all we have is the Old Testament. The Apostle Paul stated clearly, "if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise." (Galatians 3:29; NKJV) He explained this in more detail to the Ephesians: "Remember that at one time you were Gentiles in the flesh ... excluded from the citizenship of Israel, and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, with no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus, you were far away have been brought near by the blood of the Messiah. For He is our peace, who made both groups one and tore down the dividing wall of hostility." (Ephesians 2:11, 12-14a; HCSB) Therefore, we have what Biblical theologians often refer to as "the priesthood of the believers." As such, then, we are individually responsible to keep the fire of God's holy presence burning brightly on the altar of our commitment to our Lord Jesus Christ. Keep the fire burning brightly by reading, studying, meditating on, and memorizing special parts of the Holy Scriptures. Spend time daily in prayer. Intercede for the lost. Pray for the healing power of God over our nation. Pray daily for the peace of Jerusalem. Pray for your own witness and that of other believers, that our witness will be strong and powerful for the work of God's kingdom.

In 1936, J. Edwin Orr, a Baptist minister, Professor, and Evangelist, wrote the lyrics to this beautiful hymn of consecration. It is usually sung to a Maori Melody. With this "prayer hymn" I close this Devotional study.

CLEANSE ME

1. Search me, O God, and know my heart today. Try me, O Savior, know my thoughts, I pray.
See if there be some wicked way in me; cleanse me from ev'ry sin, and set me free.
2. I praise Thee, Lord, for cleansing me from sin. Fulfill Thy Word, and make me pure within.
Fill me with fire, where once I burned with shame. Grant my desire to magnify Thy name.
3. Lord, take my life and make it wholly Thine; fill my poor heart with Thy great love divine.
Take all my will, my passion, self, and pride. I now surrender; Lord, in me abide.
4. O Holy Ghost, revival comes from Thee. Send a revival – start the work in me.
Thy Word declares Thou wilt supply our need. For blessing now, O Lord, I humbly plead.