**Our God Is A Consuming Fire (SR: Heb. 12:25-29)**

There is something intoxicating and overpowering about fire. Countless memories are made by this unique fourth form of matter. We think of positive memories of campfires with friends, observing the fiery lightning bolts of a powerful storm with a loved one, lighting a gum wrapper on fire with a candle in the middle of a restaurant. We may think of negative memories too. Fire can destroy as much as it can build.

Given these truths about fire, it should not surprise us that fire has been connected with the divine in many cultures. Persian religions, for instance, deify fire itself. Other religions and pantheons include references to the interaction with the divine and fire (e.g. Prometheus, Zeus, Thor, etc.). In biblical times this was no different. Many religions in the ANE connected the divine to fire (e.g. Ra in the Egyptian pantheon). Fire and the divine are intimately wed throughout the tapestries woven by all sorts of cultures.

These cultural connections are noteworthy to consider, especially how widespread they are. But they are all built upon systems of false gods, goddesses, and idols. There is however a connection between the divine and fire that we should be infinitely more fascinated with, the biblical connection to the one true God of the universe. Let’s explore this connection today.

**I. *“Our God Is A Consuming Fire”* (Heb. 12:25-29)**

A. The message of Hebrews is the superior privilege of Christians to those who were under the old law and the folly of returning to that which is inferior. In light of that clear & undeniable theme, consider the place of this statement in Hebrews:

*Ch. 1. Jesus is God, heir of all things, & better than angels; we must listen to Him*

*Ch. 2. Jesus became like us to save us; we must listen to Him*

*Ch. 3. Jesus is the Apostle and HP of our confession; unbelief after the manner of the Jews under the OC will bring destruction; we must listen to Him*

*Ch. 4. A rest awaits believers, but only those who listen to Christ*

*Ch. 5. Jesus is perfect HP; we must listen to & obey Him Who obeyed the Father*

*Ch. 6. Jesus provides better things for those who listen and obey Him*

*Ch. 7. Jesus is priest of Melchizedek, greater than Aaron; listen to Him*

*Ch. 8-9. Jesus provides a better ministry and covenant; listen to Him and partake*

*Ch. 10. Jesus is superior sacrifice; such carries responsibility for us to listen/obey*

*Ch. 11. Plenty of others obeyed inferior things, how much more must you obey?*

*Ch. 12. Christians have Mt. Zion, more than Mt. Sinai; you must listen & obey!*

*Ch. 13. The sacrifice of Christ necessitates our own sacrifice unto God; Obey!*

B. What does the place of this statement *“Our God is a consuming fire”* (12:29) tell us?

1. Since we have greater privileges than physical Israel including a better priesthood, ministry, covenant, and sacrifice, it is obscenely ridiculous that we would not obey God.

2. God punished those with less guidance, vision, and blessings than we have. If He did that with them, how much more must He do it with us? *“From everyone who has been given much, much will be required”* (Lk. 12:48b)

C. What may we ascertain about God being a consuming fire?

1. His Position

a. *“There is only one Lawgiver and Judge, the One who is able to save and to destroy”* (James 4:12a)

b. *“Those who contend with the LORD will be shattered; Against them He will thunder in the heavens, The LORD will judge the ends of the earth”* (1Sam. 2:10a; cf. Gen. 19)

c. *“For if we go on sinning willfully after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a terrifying expectation of judgment and the fury of a fire which will consume the adversaries.”* (Heb. 10:26-27; cf. Rev. 19:20; 20:10, 14f)

2. His Power

a. The emphasis on God being a consuming fire makes this point strongly. In Greek, the word is intensified form of consume, i.e. to utterly consume – katanalivskw). This intensity is explained by God’s absolute jealousy for His people (cf. Deut. 4:24) and His expectation of them to do what is right (Deut. 9:3).

b. Divine descent onto Mt. Sinai is described as intense fire (Ex. 24:17).

c. Amos 7:4-6 uses the same image of God’s consuming fury against Israel. There it states that the fire of His wrath is able to consume the *great deep*. Imagine a fire that you dumped all of the oceans of the world upon and it still burned with the same intensity! Not even the entirety of the world can stand against His fury (cf. 1:1ff).

d. Other passages make this same point (2Kgs. 1:10, 12; Is. 9:19; 30:30; Jer. 4:4; 21:12; Nahum 1:6; Zeph. 1:18; 3:8)

3. His Purity – our word “purity” comes from the Greek word for fire pu:r

a. Consumption of Nadab and Abihu for not respecting the purity of the LORD (Lev. 10:1-3)

b. Purification of Isaiah’s lips accomplished by means of the fire of the LORD (Is. 6:1-7)

c. Ezekiel’s vision of the LORD uses words like fire, radiance & brightness to convey the loftiness, grandeur, & holiness of God (Ezek. 1)

4. His Protection

a. God as a pillar of cloud & fire to lead & protect His people (Ex. 13:21f; 14:19f)

b. God as a wall of fire around His people (Zech. 2:5; cf. 2Kgs. 6:17)

c. Of an angel of the LORD protecting the persecuted (Rev. 10:1)

**II. Paradoxical Duality: God’s Fire Doesn’t Have To Consume (Ex. 3:1-6)**

A. The narrative is as clear a demonstration of the Christian doctrine of grace as there ever could be. Nearly everywhere else the concept of God and fire is made, the idea of destruction and judgment is the focus. Here, the opposite; that which everywhere else consumes, here does not consume.

B. Consider also that the holiness of God is also a point of emphasis here. So, God’s grace is not a license for sin (Rom. 6), it is inherently and wholly consistent with a proper understanding of God’s expectation to be regarded as holy and for His subjects to listen and obey Him.

C. *”The [Hebrews] writer is stressing to his readers that they may only overlook the reality and fierceness of this wrath at their own peril. His intention is therefore to inspire a sense of awe and reverence regarding God. Just as Israel under the Old Covenant took Gods warnings lightly and suffered greatly, those in the New Covenant era who do not hold God in reverence and awe and therefore ignore his warnings, will suffer dreadful consequences as well.”* (King, *Hebrews*, *Truth*, 444)

D. *“The Christian’s interest in His favour, is no warrant for casting off a solemn fear of God: though He has laid down His enmity against him, He has not cast off His majesty and sovereignty over him. ‘Even those who stand highest in the love and favour of God, and have the fullest assurance thereof and of their interest in Him as their God, ought, notwithstanding, to fear Him as a sin-avenging God and a consuming fire’ (Ezek. Hopkins, 1680). Though God has taken His redeemed into intimate nearness to Himself, yet He requires that they always retain a due apprehension of the majesty of his person, the holiness of His nature, the severity of His justice, and the ardent jealousy of His worship. If we truly dread falling under the guilt of this awful sin of irreverence, our minds will be influenced unto godly fear. The grace of fear is in nowise inconsistent with or an impediment to a spirit of adoption, holy boldness, or godly rejoicing: see Psa. 2:11, Matt. 28:8; Phil. 2:12.”* (Pink, *Hebrews*, 1103)

**III. Knowing These Things, What Is Our Responsibility?**

A. We need to ensure that God’s fire will not be consuming toward us.

1. *“See to it that you do not refuse Him who is speaking. For if those did not escape when they refused him who warned them on earth, much less will we escape who turn away from Him who warns from heaven.”* (He. 12:25)

2. *“Do not fear those who kill the body but are unable to kill the soul; but rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.”* (Mt. 10:28)

3. *“Unfaithfulness to the covenant manifests apathetic ingratitude to the one who has done so much to save us, and brings the destructive, fiery wrath of God.”* (McClister, 488)

B. We need to make every effort to ensure that God’s fire will not be consuming toward our loved ones. *“Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade people”* (2Cor. 5:11; cf. Eph. 5:22-6:4; 1Pet. 3:1-7)

C. We need to make every effort to ensure that God’s fire will not be consuming even toward our own personal enemies (Matt. 5:43-48).

D. We must trust that God will mete out perfect justice for those who are His enemies (cf. 2Thess. 1:6-12).

*“Our God is a consuming fire.”* Do we realize this? And do our actions correspond to this knowledge? God maintains the power over body, soul, and spirit. Those who do not render obedience and freely welcome His immeasurable grace to save them from their sins, will abide in the shadow of His divine wrath. An eternal fire in which all your hope, love, and blessings will be consumed will await you. And here’s the kicker, you will not be consumed. You will go to the place where *“their worm does not die and the fire is never quenched”* (Mk. 9:43-48). Why suffer this fate when you can freely choose today to be purified by the fire of God and not consumed? The decision is yours and yours alone.