

# The Cup and the Fire - Part 3

by T. Austin-Sparks

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*T. Austin-Sparks explores the profound implications of Jesus' declaration about casting fire upon the earth, emphasizing judgment, division, and the role of the Holy Spirit in discerning truth and testing human relationships.*

**Duration:** 49:06

**Scripture:** Luke 12:49, Luke 12:51, 1 Corinthians 3:10-15, 2 Corinthians 2:14, Hebrews 12:26, 1 Peter 1:7

**Topics:** "Christian Life"

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## Description

In this sermon, the speaker discusses the testing of the Israelites' hearts during the 40 days and nights that Moses was on Mount Sinai. The Israelites failed this test when they engaged in idolatry and worshiped a golden calf. The speaker then transitions to the Gospel of Luke, where Jesus speaks about bringing division rather than peace on earth. The speaker explains that the coming of the Holy Spirit, symbolized by fire, brings judgment and tests the motives and intentions of people's hearts. This judgment extends to human relationships, as the fiery sword discerns the true nature of individuals.

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## Transcript

We return again to our basic passage of Scripture. First chapter of the Gospel by Luke. At verse 49, I came to cast fire upon the earth.

And what will I? Oh, that it were already kindled. But I have a baptism to be baptized with. And how am I straightened till it be accomplished? Think ye that I am come to give peace in the earth? I tell you, nay, but rather division.

For there shall be from henceforth five in one house, divided three against two, two against three. They shall be divided father against son, son against father, mother against daughter, and daughter against her mother, mother-in-law against her daughter-in-law, and daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. I confess to you that it is one of the things that the Lord said that I least like, that I find myself most unhappy to speak about.

But there it is. If anyone else but he had said it, perhaps we should have found a way. I'm quite sure if that had originated with me or with any of us here, it would have caused very great offense.

But he said it. And it seems to me to be all of a piece with the beginning of that statement. And I think perhaps you have noticed that this is a very abrupt change in the whole course of the narrative.

You get to the end of verse 48. It seems to have been on one thing, and then quite abruptly there's this change. I can only think that there was a pause on his part.

He said that, and then he was quiet for a moment. And his mind reigned the future, the future of his own influence and effect on the world. And then he began this part of his utterances in quite a different grain and realm.

I came to cast fire upon the earth. That is why I came. That sums up the meaning of my coming.

Why did I come? For what did I come? What is to be the outcome of the issue? I came to cast fire upon the earth. And how am I pent up, treated, limited? What do I want? What is it that is necessary? Well, I have a baptism to be baptized with. I wish that were over.

I wish that were accomplished. And then I should be free of this straightness, this limitation. The purpose for which I have come could be realized.

Oh, that it were already accomplished, this baptism of the passion. So he thinks and so he speaks. Now this morning we took one fragmentary implication of this casting fire upon the earth.

Noting, of course, that the meaning of that was the coming of the Holy Spirit. Baptism of fire, the spirit of fire. And that fire is a positive thing.

There is no mistaking fire when it touches you. You know. Now this afternoon we are just taking one other aspect of this.

I think probably for the time being the last. I have said that this paragraph from verse 49 to verse 53 seems to be all of a piece. The effect of the fire is very terrible here.

It introduces the element of judgment. And there is no need to argue with anybody who knows anything about the Bible at all. Fire in the Bible is very often, so often, the symbol of judgment.

And here it is here. But we want to comprehend the meaning of that word judgment. We so often limit it to one of its aspects and perhaps that's the final one.

Judgment. You just bring judgment. And we mean by that the punishment.

The final, perhaps the final effect of judgment. But judgment in the Bible is a more comprehensive word than that. In the Bible judgment, and this can be clearly seen in terms of fire, or fire in terms of judgment.

It is to begin with a trying of things. A trying of things. Putting them to the test.

Now scriptures will leap through your mind to bear that out. Fire tests. The fire tries.

The fire finds things out, doesn't it? It finds out. The first effect of fire, and that is the first meaning of judgment. Put everything to the test.

To try it. And having done that, it discriminates. That is, it divides.

It shows to which category things belong and it puts them there. Fire has that effect. That is of that kind and it belongs to that kind.

It belongs to that category or that realm or that kingdom. This belongs to another. Fire finds out, it discriminates, and it divides, and then it relegates.

Finally, it says that has been found to belong to a certain realm. It has been designated, has been discriminated. We put it there.

It belongs there. We put it there. And that is the final effect of the fire.

That is the content of the word judgment. You must always keep that full meaning in mind when you use the word. Do not dwell upon it in application.

More fully at the moment, we get on with the message. We are shown in the word of God that this judgment which would come with the coming of the Holy Spirit, mark you, the effect of Christ's release through the cross, in the coming of the Holy Spirit, was to cast fire. In other words, the effect of Christ's release would be the coming of the Spirit as the Spirit of fire.

And as the Spirit of fire, his presence would always be in terms of judgment in the threefold sense of the word. The Holy Spirit's presence is like this, and it has this effect. And we are led by that into the word to see the realm in which that operates.

Now here, in chapter 12 of Luke's Gospel, we have that operating in one realm. You've read those terrible words. Think ye that I am come to give peace in the earth? I tell you, nay, but rather division.

The old word in the old version is whore. Division. Sounds terrible.

We're on very delicate ground. We've got to be very careful. He goes on to explain what he means by division.

Henceforth there shall be five in one household, divided, three against two and two against three. Then the division in the family. Here the fire is at work in the realm of human relationship.

Now let me here in parentheses say at once and with considerable emphasis that this has nothing to do with division within the Church. Divisions amongst those who are in Christ. That is not what the Lord is speaking about, nor is it what he is pointing to.

He is thinking in a totally different realm. He is speaking in the spiritual realm. This division takes place entirely upon a spiritual basis.

The divisions, as we have them in the first letters of the Corinthians, are because of other things amongst believers that are not spiritual. This is a spiritual division, essential and basic. Perhaps the classic illustration or example of this is the one that we have way back there, the early part of the Old Testament.

In the case of the Levites, you will recall to mind, when they had reached the wilderness, Moses was called up into the mountain. He was there so long, people came under a very severe test. I think deliberately placed under a very severe test as to really where their hearts were.

Whether they really were after their own interest or after God, their own end or his. Whether their hearts were in this matter with the Lord or whether their hearts were set upon their own gratification, pleasure. Put to the severe test of that probationary period of the forty days and the forty nights in which Moses was in the mountain.

And they broke down under the test. When Moses came down, hearing the noise in the camp, you remember what had happened. The calf and the dancing, These be thy God, O Israel, brought thee out of the land of Egypt.

And Moses took the tent, moved it right outside of the camp, and stood in the door and cried, Who is on the Lord's side? Who is on the Lord's side? Let him come unto me. And all the sons of Levi went over to him. He said, God, every man his sword upon his thigh, and go in and out, and slay every man his brother, every man his friend.

Seeing the sword, the fiery sword, has come into the realm of human relationship. It is finding out where the heart is. It is testing the heart.

It is discriminating between motives, intent, and thoughts of the heart. You know where I'm putting it. And it is putting in the category to which these people belong.

Well, here are the Levites who have been put to the death test and have come through it triumphantly. And forevermore, they represent God's thought concerning his people. They stand as representing the full, pure heart of God for his people.

The point is that this work of judgment, of the fire of the sword, came into this realm of human relationships to find out a heart, the motive of the heart. And you can take that into Luke 12. Just that, that's what it means.

The division, even within the family, and the home, the household, will be made by the Holy Spirit on this matter of the relationship of the heart. We can see, can we not, as we read the history of Israel, that that nation in the wilderness, that generation, that their hearts, as the psalmist said, were not tense parts toward God. In their hearts they lusted after Egypt.

The flesh parts of Egypt. Their heart was back there, even while they were in the wilderness. And that generation never did go in because its heart was not with the Lord.

It's a matter of inward division, isn't it? It is the division in the heart. Now, the Holy Spirit is always a divider in that way. It's a work of the Holy Spirit to do that.

In a sense, not in the wrong sense, be careful how you pick me up, in a sense the Holy Spirit is the cause of division. There is a realm in which he is the divider. Now let us take our Bible and go right back to the beginning.

The Spirit of God rooted upon the chaos, the darkness. What was the first thing done by and through the Holy Spirit? Dividing between. A process of division between light and darkness.

God divided the night from the darkness. The light he called day, the darkness he called night. God divided.

And God said, it is good, it is good. There is a division that is good, you know. It is something that the Holy Spirit makes between light and darkness.

And then God divided between the heaven and the earth. He put them asunder, they got too near. One was right down on top of the other that you could not discern or discriminate between the clouds of the heavens and the earth.

And he put the permanent between. He divided between the heaven and the earth. And the one he called heaven and the other he called earth.

And it is very good. It is good. Now these are Old Testament things which have, as we know, a New Testament meaning.

These are found in their counterpart in the New Creation. And when you come to this book of the Acts it is the book of the Holy Spirit and works in relation to the New Creation. And so you'll find all the way through this book divisions are taking place as a result of the action of the Holy Spirit.

Indeed you can say that is the characteristic of the Spirit's work right through the New Testament. A dividing between light and darkness. A judging of this and saying that is darkness.

That's one realm. And that is light. And that's another realm.

And these two can never in the right and proper way obtain together. They cannot coexist. They are separated and belong to two entirely different categories.

And the Spirit of God has done that. Interpret that spiritually. And you see what it means.

What a tremendous amount there is bound up with that in spiritual life. It works out in this way dear friends that anyone who really has the Spirit and this is the test. This is the test.

Anyone who really has the Spirit is very sensitive to light and very sensitive to darkness. They know quite well that there is a big division that God has made. And when they touch anything that belongs to the darkness realm they feel the darkness in their own spirit.

And they know they've touched darkness. They know they've come into another realm. That's a work of the Spirit.

And a very important work of the Spirit. On the other hand anyone who has the Spirit will be equally sensitive to light. And there is true, true light.

I'll define that in a moment. When there is true light the spiritual man or woman at once leads to it. Why? Because this kind of light is not cold light.

It's the light of fire. It's living light that has energy in it. You can have light but it's cold.

You can have imitation fire but it's cold. We've got one of those things at home that you switch on, you know. And there's the imitation coal but it doesn't make any difference other than psychologically.

You see the thing and perhaps you imagine something but really it's all an illusion. And you can have that kind of light it's imitation, it's artificial, it's false. You can switch it on and equally quickly switch it off.

But that is not the light of fire which is energetic. The light of the Spirit, the light of God, the light of Christ is always living light. Energetic light.

And when you and I who have the Spirit come into touch with light it is not that we become mentally and intellectually interested, fascinated, charmed or captivated. It is that something within us leaps up, responds. We met energy.

These are marks of the Spirit judging which is which and what is what. What belongs to this realm and what belongs to that. And these things are put aside so that it is something quite abnormal if darkness comes into the day or light into the night.

It's not the ordinary course of things at all. But you see the point? You can have those differences of kingdom, realm within your own family, your own household. And there can be no fellowship at all because there's the division which is made by the Holy Spirit himself.

Now many of you know how true that is. And some of you are suffering because of that. But the point is this.

That is how it will be if the Holy Spirit comes in. And you can't avoid it. And the Lord Jesus was faithful and honest enough to let it be known that that is how it would be.

And you can't get over that. You can't bridge that. There it is.

It's painful but it's a mark that the Spirit has done something. And oh that we as the Lord's people were more and more sensitive to what belongs to those different realms which are put apart by the Spirit of God. The mark of growth in the life of the Spirit to become more and more sensitive to what belongs here and what belongs there.

You know Paul on two different occasions used that phrase the things which differ. And he said it to believers. Once to the Roman believers and once to the Philippian believers.

Things that differ. He would have them know the Christians know the things that differ. That was the true kind of division that ought to have existed at Corinth.

The other was the false and the wrong division. But this is where things had got mixed up. Day and night had been all mixed up together.

Things which belonged to the night were present and they were not sensitive to that. And so the first epithet of Corinthians is so much about the Holy Spirit isn't it? The real effect and work of the Holy Spirit. We must leave that for the moment.

I think it's perhaps too obvious even to spend all that time with. But let it be recognized that the life of the Spirit is a life of spiritual dividing. And the course of the Spirit governed life is that of discerning.

Discerning. Being sensitive to the things that differ. We pass to the next application of this as it comes to the whole matter of Christian work.

You know that is given to us in the first letter to the Corinthians. Chapter 3. Here it is. According to the grace of God which was given unto me as a wise master builder I laid a foundation and another buildeth thereon.

Let each man take heed how he buildeth thereon. Rather foundation can no man lay than that which is laid which is Jesus Christ. Ha! If a man buildeth on the foundation gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay, stubble, each man's work shall be made manifest.

For the day shall declare it because it is revealed by fire. The fire itself shall prove each man's work of what sort it is. A man's work shall abide which he buildeth thereon.

He shall receive a reward. If any man's work shall be borne he shall suffer loss. He himself shall be saved.

Yet so as by part and we place alongside of that passage from Hebrews chapter 12 at verse 26 whose voice then shook the earth but now he hath promised things yet once more will I make to tremble not the earth only but also the heavens. This word yet once more signifies the removing of those things that are shaken as of things that have been made that those things which are not shaken may remain. Wherefore receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken.

Here you see comes into the realm of values in life. In life's work the discrimination is brought in by the fire. The fire tries what sort it is.

And remember this is addressed to Christians. It is not addressed to people of the world who are doing their work following their profession. This is addressed to Christians.

And it is speaking about Christian work. Christ is the foundation and the work that you do on that foundation. It is Christian work.

And it says about Christian work that there is one realm which will abide the fire. And in Christian work there is another realm which will go up in smoke. And it will be proved that all that was for nothing.

And the worker will just get into heaven and that's all, saved. Yes, so as by the power. Here is a division in the realm of Christian work which the Holy Spirit makes.

And if we want to sum this all up and really get to the heart of it, it just demands this. Only what is really done by and through the Holy Spirit himself will remain, will abide the test, will be found unto praise and honour and glory of the appearing Jesus Christ. There can be a tremendous amount of activity and energy and work and work engaged in by Christians in relation to Christ intentionally, which comes into this category of disappearing in the flame.

Standing for nothing and leaving the workers at the end with nothing for all his time. This is what was happening in the book of the Acts. Look through this book and see the discrimination that's being made.

Yes, the discrimination is being made. Oh, how those Judaizers laboured. Oh, how those Judaizers laboured.

How they laboured. How they travelled and encompassed the inland on their long journey. It must have cost them quite a lot to do it, their movements far and wide.

And you have to conclude that they were men who not only meant business, but so far as they understood themselves and their position, they were what we would call sincere men. I don't see any difference between these Judaizers who pursued Paul wherever he went and gave their lives, their very lives to this sort of thing. I see no difference between them and Saul of Tartus as he was, just exactly what he was doing, exactly what he was doing.

He was one of them. Now then, listen to his whole summarised verdict upon that whole thing. I verily thought, I verily, I truly, if you like, I honestly thought within myself that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus Christ.

That is the utterance of an honest man. The utterance of a sincere man. I verily that I considered this thing.

This was no mere impulse. This was no mere fanaticism. I thought, we know Paul was a man who thought, I thought that I ought it was a matter of conscientious conviction with me that this is what I ought to do.

It was the right thing to do. I was called upon to do it. It was a matter of conscience with me to do it.

I verily thought within myself that I ought yes but how possible it is to be as utterly sincere as that and as utterly mistaken. The Judaizers were like that. But their work, their work didn't last.

Here is the work of the Spirit going on. The work of the Spirit going on. And it's gone on.

And it's gone on. And it's still going on. That work of the Spirit.

It has stood all the testing and all the trying out. It has proved itself to be the work of the Spirit. And it survives the fire.

The fire of judgment. The fire of testing. It survives.

The key to the whole of this thing is the importance the supreme importance not of being sincere not of being enthusiastic not of acting on the basis of conscientious conviction but of being governed by the Holy Spirit. That's the importance of it. Just that which allows the whole thing comes into the realm of Christian work.

Perhaps some of you had a little catch just now about the Judaizers. But you got to see them quite a lot you know. The Judaizers were not anti-Christian.

What they really wanted was Jewish Christianity. A Christianity with a Jewish conflict. They prepared to have Christianity if only Christianity would conform the Jewish order.

The Jewish practice. Now I'm not going to argue that out but we could bring in quite a lot to show that that is so. You see Paul shows by his letters to the Galatians that that is not the work of the Spirit.

It's not the work of the Spirit. It's something quite different. Let us pass to the next thought here.

And that takes us into the realm of Christian testimony. The fire at work in the realm of Christian testimony and we turn to a very well known passage in the second letter to the Corinthians. The second chapter 14th verse.

Thanks be unto God which always leadeth us in triumph in Christ. Making manifest through us the saviour of his knowledge in every place. For we are a sweet saviour of Christ unto God in them that are being saved and in them that are perishing.

To the one a saviour from death unto death. To the other a saviour from life unto life. There's the dividing effect of the fire.

You know the picture. I need not relate it all to you again. But Paul's thinking in terms of that background, the Roman procession, the triumphant general leading his prisoners in his train holding celebrations of his victory from place to place.

But at every such place the fire was lit. The fire was lit. The altar erected.

The fire was lit. And the flame lit up. And the incense filled the air.

And that had a double effect. There were some who were in the way of perishing. And that was the place where they perished.

They were the sacrifice there. There are others who are not in the way of perishing. They will pass that fire and go on.

They will be saved. The background, you see. Very vivid.

Very vivid. The fire is discriminating and determining here. But Paul says this is the dual effect of the Holy Spirit in our life and ministry as we go from place to place.

As we go from place to place something happens everywhere and every time. One of two things or both things happen in every place. One is that those those who refuse the life, who persist in fighting against the victorious Lord, who resist the Holy Ghost, they are brought to condemnation.

They are put into the category to which they belong, condemned. On the other hand, those who believe, those who accept, are, by the same Holy Spirit who does the one thing, brought into liberty. They depart the testing fire and go on in life to the one favour of death unto death, to the other of life unto life.

Now the point is this. Paul is saying this is the effect to the presence of the Holy Spirit in our ministry, in our testimony. In other words, the Holy Spirit never leaves things as they were.

The presence of the Holy Spirit always brings about some kind of a crisis and burden. The Holy Spirit is present speaking. We cannot be the same afterward as before.

Something happens. We're either more hardened or more softened. We're either more condemned or more saved.

Something happens in the presence of the Holy Spirit. The fire does this work of judging. This is what the Lord Jesus says.

Casting fire on the earth, what will it do? What will it do? Well, it will make this division. It will bring this judgment. It will determine things and people and their destiny.

Well, we know how true that is in history. That is the effect of the Holy Spirit. But all I want to underline in that particular connection is this, dear friends.

If you and I are men and women who are really governed by the Spirit and filled with the Spirit, the effect of our presence and our passing this way will not be to leave things as they were before. There will be eternal verdictment by our having gone this way. And that is the object of ministry.

Thanks be unto God who leads me on from place to place to celebrate this victory. And the effect is this. One thing or the other, things are not as they were before.

The Holy Spirit ministry must be like that. It must produce something. It must effect something.

It must make a difference. It does. It does that.

It does that. The fire is caught. And we can see as we go through this book of the Acts all these things happen.

They're happening all the time. All the things that I've said, they're just happening here. You can see them.

The fire is doing it. The fire is finding out. The fire is testing.

The fire is discriminating. The fire is relegating. The end of the story is you've got two realms classified and shown to be what they are and what they belong to.

Now there's very much more of course that I could say on this matter about spiritual discrimination. Things that belong to different categories. That's essential spiritual difference.

But I can, I think I can sum everything up by saying that really, if really we are governed by the Holy Spirit we'll all belong to one category. That's the point. There will not be so many different categories.

Realms in which we live. There will not be two. There will not be two.

There will only be one. The Holy Spirit seeks to secure one category of people and that is a people wholly governed by himself and led by himself. And if you have to say I fundamentally disagree with you on anything then either you're right I'm wrong or shall be right.

If it's fundamental like that, if it's fundamental like that one of us is not in the spirit. It's up to us to find out where the wrong is because the Holy Spirit is not fundamentally of two different minds. He never can be that.

To be really in the spirit means, may I repeat, to be of one kind, of one category. And so the apostle wrote so much to these churches about this oneness of mind, this oneness of heart, this oneness of spirit, this all seeking the one thing. Well he said it again.

He asked for it again. He was pleading for it. Therefore it is possible.

The solution to all those problems and difficulties is life in the spirit. Life in the spirit. And that of course as we said this morning is based upon the cross where we have an infinite capacity for letting go to the mischief.

Forget all the rest. Remember that. Shall we sing?

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