

# The Fire of Hell and the Fire of Love

by Zac Poonen

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*Zac Poonen explores the contrasting fires of hell and love, emphasizing the importance of purification from sin through the Holy Spirit and immediate obedience to God's leading.*

**Duration:** 1:05:26

**Scripture:** Matthew 5:29, Revelation 3:16

**Topics:** "Fear And Love", "Overcoming Sin"

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## Description

This sermon emphasizes the importance of moving from a fear of punishment to a deep love for Jesus Christ in order to overcome sin. It discusses the two fires mentioned in the Bible - the fire of hell that can keep us from sinning out of fear, and the fire of fervent love for Jesus that motivates us to obey His commandments out of love. The sermon encourages believers to progress from the fear of punishment to a genuine love for Jesus, comparing it to moving from school to college spiritually.

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## Transcript

Think about this verse in Revelation chapter 3, which we have been thinking about since yesterday. Because you are lukewarm, verse 16, I will spit you out of my mouth. Verse 15, I wish you were cold or hot.

Now, in those days when the Bible was written, there was only one way to produce heat and that was with a fire. Today we have electricity to heat, but in those days it was only fire. So, when we think of fire to make us hot, see, fire can burn up many things and fire is what purifies gold.

There is no way to purify gold without fire. So, there are two types of fire that the Bible speaks about. One is the fire of hell.

The Bible speaks of a lake of fire. So, when we talk about purification, it is purification from sin. To be fervent and heat means we have been purified from sin.

Not completely, that will happen only when Christ comes. But from known sin. You know, if you put a cube of ice in a glass of juice, 90% of that ice is under the surface, only 10% is on top.

You see that when you put an ice cube in a glass. Most of it is hidden underneath. Only 10% of that ice cube you can see on top.

That's a picture of our life. You can see only 10% of the sins in your life. Same with me, same with everybody.

With everyone it's like that. So, we can say that which we can see is what we call conscious sin. And what we cannot see is unconscious sin.

Just like that cube of ice, you cannot see what is under the surface of that grape juice or something. But if you take a knife and slice off that top 10%, what will happen to the cube of ice? All you intelligent people, what is the answer? A little bit will come up which is under the surface. Ice cube will become a little smaller and you will see a little more which is under the surface.

That is how if you deal with the sin that you can see in your life and get rid of it, you will see something of unconscious sin in your life. And then you slice off that 10%, some more will come up. And the ice cube becomes smaller and smaller and smaller.

That is how God makes us holier and holier and holier. But always there will be something underneath. But it should become less and less and less and less.

So, the fire of God is meant to help us to get rid of sin from our life. That fire is the Holy Spirit. You cannot get rid of it without the power of the Holy Spirit.

So, Paul speaks about conscious sin and unconscious sin in 1 Corinthians 3, 1 Corinthians 4. He is very clear. 1 Corinthians 4, verse 4. I am conscious of nothing against myself. What does that mean? That means my entire conscious area, I have sliced off.

What I know to be sin, I have got rid of in my life. See, when we first get converted, what we know to be sin is a very small thing. When you think dirty movies are sin, getting drunk is a sin, ruining our lungs with smoking is a sin.

It is not the cigarette that is sin, it is destroying this body that is a sin. It is not the alcohol that is sin, it is destroying the body with that drunkenness that is a sin. See, just like some people call a building the house of God.

Now, if you destroy that building with an axe or a hammer, nobody will do that. But the real house of God is this body. Not this building.

God doesn't dwell here. God dwells in this house. And anything, you know, if you have a habit in your life by which you are destroying this body by drinking or smoking or the mind by pornography or dirty movies or reading dirty stories, that is also destroying the mind.

That is like somebody coming here with a hammer and breaking down this building. It is like that. It is destroying the house of God.

Same thing. That is all destroying the house of God. So, those are conscious sins.

But then, when we get rid of that, we think we have become holy. But then God shows us something underneath. And more subtle sins like pride and selfishness.

So, Paul says, I am not conscious of anything against myself. That doesn't mean I am acquitted. No.

Because the Lord examines me and he sees some things which I don't see. So, in verse 4, he talks of two types of sins. One which I can see, which I get rid of.

But then there is so much else which God can see. So, I am not really free from guilt. But God will show me that little by little.

And I can get rid of it as I see it. I cannot get rid of it before I see it. Let me use another example.

Our self life is like an onion. There are many many layers of selfishness and pride. You peel off one layer, there is another layer underneath.

You know how an onion is. You take off one layer, there is another underneath. So, you see some selfishness in your life or some pride.

You get rid of it. Oh, you haven't finished with it. There is another layer of selfishness and pride underneath that.

But you never see that till you peel off the first layer. So, if you don't deal with the selfishness and pride you see in your life now, you will never see all the many many layers of selfishness and pride hidden underneath that. So, spiritual growth is this onion getting thinner and thinner and thinner.

So, to use another example from the Bible itself. When the children of Israel were delivered from Egypt by putting the blood on the door, that's a picture of our initial forgiveness of sin. That is the picture of the blood of Christ by which our sins are forgiven.

And they went into the Red Sea and came out is a picture of water baptism. And then the cloud came down from above is a picture of baptism in the Holy Spirit. And what was the purpose of that cloud? It wasn't just to give them a nice experience.

That cloud at night it became a pillar of fire. Daytime it is a pillar of cloud which rested on the tabernacle. In the night it was like a fire, a pillar.

And sometimes they travelled at night. And this pillar of fire will go in front of them and that's how the Israelites walked behind it. And that's a picture of the Holy Spirit.

Sometimes it would stay for one month. Sometimes after one day it will move. The Lord was teaching us from there, you must listen to the leading of the Holy Spirit in your life everyday.

Sometimes there is nothing special, the Lord tells us for one whole month. But then sometimes everyday the Lord says something. So, we must follow that.

If those Israelites had not followed the pillar of cloud and fire, they will get lost in that wilderness. Cloud and fire has moved on. And here one Israelite decides to stay here.

And after one week he says, ok now I will follow. He doesn't know where that pillar of cloud has gone. Then he has got to go searching for it.

That is why they had to follow the pillar of cloud and fire immediately. Otherwise they will get lost. That is a warning to us that if you don't follow the leading of the Holy Spirit immediately, you can wander in your spiritual life.

I have seen many Christians like that. They are wandering. That's because they don't listen to the promptings of the Holy Spirit.

For example, the Holy Spirit says, go and ask forgiveness from that person whom you hurt. And you say, I will think about it. And you think about it for one week, one month.

And you say, ok now I will do it. Good. But then you got to wonder now, where is the pillar of cloud? Where is it gone? One month ago he told me to do something and it moved on.

Now I don't know where it is. And if you keep on living like that, your whole Christian life will be one of wandering. That is how some people never progress in their Christian life.

You know Jesus taught us to pray, thy will be done on earth as it is done in heaven. We mustn't just repeat that prayer. We must meditate.

We say, how do the angels do God's will in heaven? I am supposed to do it like that. See, the Lord told the angel Gabriel, go down to Nazareth and tell Mary, she is going to have a baby. OK, he hears it.

And he says, I am a bit busy now. I will go next month. What do you think would have happened? Can you guess? I know.

Gabriel would have joined the devil and become a demon. And God would have sent another angel to go and tell Mary that. See, God's work is not going to be hindered just because you disobey.

You will miss the privilege. God will find somebody else. When God told Abraham, leave Ur of the Chaldees and follow me, you are going to be the father of the whole nation of Israel.

He didn't know that in the beginning. But God only showed him one step at a time. Tested him, will you follow me? He said, no Lord, I want to be safe here only.

I want to stay in Ur of the Chaldees. What would God have said? Ok, ok, stay there. I won't trouble you.

He would have called somebody else, whatever his name was. You would never have heard of Abraham in your life. The father of the nation of Israel would have been somebody else.

You can miss what God has for you if you don't obey when he tells you to do something. See, God has a plan for your life. He will show you step by step by step.

And for 5 or 10 years you don't obey. You may not be able to fulfill it later on. See, God called me to leave my job when I was, I left it when I was 26 years old.

When I was 24, he called me and I put in my resignation. But just like the Egyptians would not let the Israelites go, the Navy would not let me go. But finally after 2 years they let me go.

That delay was not because of me. I obeyed immediately. That delay was part of God's plan to train me some more.

But if I had disobeyed, he would have said, no Lord, I don't want to go out in this life of faith where I don't know where my money will come from. I may not be able to get married. Then God would not force me.

He would have left me in the Navy. He would not have forsaken me. I would still be his child.

But I would not have got God's best plan for my life. I would have gone to God's second best or third best. I believe there are many people like that.

I heard of a man who, when he was a young man in America, God called him to be a missionary. He said, no, I can't live that life. God said, ok.

And he was working somewhere else in some other job for a number of years. Then one day his little child fell down from a chair and died. Then he woke up and he said, Lord, what do you want me to do? I missed your best plan for my life some years ago.

At least show me your second best. I can do it now. It's a very serious thing when you don't obey God immediately.

When the pillar of fire is moving and you say, no, no, no, I am not ready. I want to stay here for one more month. How will you look for the pillar of cloud and fire after that? God is very merciful.

Sometimes He permits you to delay, delay, delay, delay, delay and you still don't miss God's best. God is very merciful. See, in the days of Noah, God told the people to repent.

And then He told them in Genesis chapter 6, He told Noah that I am giving the world a hundred and twenty years. Verse 3, the last part. Hundred and twenty years.

People did not know that. That's what He told Noah. Oh, we don't even know whether He told Noah or whether God just said that to Himself.

Because it only says there, the Lord said. Doesn't say He said it to Noah. But He determined in His mind.

Maybe even Noah did not know it. But God determined in His mind. I am going to ask these people to repent.

I will give them a hundred and twenty years. If they don't repent, I will destroy the world by a flood. Because, verse 3, my spirit will not strive with man forever.

Please remember that. When the Holy Spirit speaks to you, He is not going to speak to you forever. There is a time limit.

Today it won't be hundred and twenty years because we don't live that long. In those days they lived up to nine hundred years. So, hundred and twenty years is like eight or ten years today.

Because today we live only up to seventy or eighty. So, it's like eight or ten years today. And the Lord is saying, I won't strive with this person forever.

I have been keeping on telling him to give up some sin in his life. But he is still playing the fool with it. Ok, I will bear with him.

I will give him eight years, nine years, ten years. And then finished. My spirit will not strive with man forever.

So, don't take advantage of God's long suffering. Just because you have disobeyed, disobeyed, disobeyed for six, seven years and nothing has happened in your life. I am not talking about full time work or anything like that.





That's for sure. But don't take advantage of God's goodness. See now, you can stop sinning out of this fear that you may cross the red line.

That's a good way to stay from sinning. Oh, I may cross the red line and I will go to hell. Is the fear of going to hell a good way to prevent people from sinning? Yes.

The fear of hell, fear of judgment, that is the old covenant way. The Lord told the Israelites, turn with me to Deuteronomy 28. In those days it was not the fear of hell.

Because there was no understanding of heaven and hell in the Old Testament. Very important to understand. There was very little understanding of heaven and hell in the Old Testament.

There was no understanding of God as a Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Because the Holy Spirit was not dwelling in people's heart, they could not understand these things. So the only way God could make people obey was by earthly blessings.

So see Deuteronomy 28. If you are careful, verse 1, to obey all that I taught you, I will bless you in all these ways. And you read the whole thing, there is no mention I will take you to heaven.

There is no mention I will give you victory over sin. No, not at all. No heaven, no victory over sin.

If you obey me, I will make you the top nation in the world, like America, super power. Israel will be the super power in the world. That is what earthly people are looking for.

And I will bless you. With what? Lord, victory over sin? No, no, no. I will bless you in your earthly work, in the city and in the country.

I will bless your children. I will bless all your cattle, because that is the way they earned money those days. And your food, your basket, verse 5. When you go out of your house, you will be blessed.

When you come back to your house, you will be blessed, verse 6. And all your enemies, the Assyrians, Syrians, Egyptians, they will all be defeated. They will come to fight against you one way, verse 7. They will run away in 7 directions. And there will be God who will command the blessing on your bonds.

In today's terms, that is like saying, God will bless your business that you will become a millionaire and a billionaire. In today's terms, that is like saying, God will bless your business that you will become a millionaire and a billionaire. That is the meaning of verse 8. And whatever you touch will be blessed.

Any business you do, you will get money. And the Lord will keep you as a set apart, holy means set apart people for himself. And all the people in the earth will see, oh, how God has blessed these people.

Blessed with what? Victory over sin? No, no, no. They are still losing their temper and arguing and fighting with their wives at home. That still continues.

No, no, no. They don't have victory over anything. They abound, verse 11, in prosperity.

And many children, that was a mark of God's blessing those days. Verse 11. And their fields, they were all farmers.

The rain came and they prospered in their farms, verse 12. And verse 13, they will be head of all the nations in the world. Read the whole thing.

There is not even one spiritual blessing there. No victory over sin, no heaven. That is the old testament gospel, that is being preached in many places today.

Prosperity, prosperity, prosperity and healing and health and all that. But now if you don't obey, verse 15, there is a big list of things all the way up to the end of that chapter. Right up to verse 68.

Fifty four verses. But not one word about going to hell. That was not the threat in those days.

What will happen? Verse 16, you will be cursed. Verse 17, cursed, cursed, cursed, cursed. 17, 18, 19.

And verse 22, you will have consumption and fever and all types of sicknesses. And your enemies will defeat you, verse 25. And verse 27, in your body you will get boils and tumors and madness and blindness, verse 28.

You will get engaged to a wife, verse 30, and somebody else will violate her. And verse 35, you will get boils in your knees and legs from which you cannot be healed. And your crops will be destroyed, verse 42.

You read the whole thing, I don't have time to read it. It was all earthly curses, earthly blessings. And so they feared God and said, we better obey God.

Why did they obey God? To get earthly blessings. Whenever you look for earthly blessings, you are under the old covenant. Anybody who preaches to you that God will give you earthly blessings, he is preaching Deuteronomy 28, not New Testament Gospel.

You say, you mean we will not be blessed in an earthly way? Is that how it is in the New Covenant? No. See Matthew 6.33, this is the blessing in the New Covenant. Seek God's kingdom first and His righteousness, not earthly prosperity and physical healing.

Instead of earthly prosperity, seek God's kingdom. Instead of physical healing, seek for righteousness in your life. What will you get? You will get God's kingdom, you will get His righteousness, and you will get all the earthly things that you need.

The church will not be the superpower in the world. No. But you will be free from worry.

Verse 25, don't be worried what you will eat and what you will drink and what dress you will have. That includes, how will my children eat and drink and where will they get clothes? God will take care of you and He will take care of your children. If you seek His kingdom first, you will not be the richest person in the world and you will not even be the healthiest person in the world.

Your children will not be the richest people in the world and they will not be the healthiest in the world either. But they will be righteous and they will have God's kingdom and they will have enough health and money to live in this world. That is the new covenant blessing.

You know that too much money can ruin you? I have been a Christian for 58 years and I have seen something. Some of the most spoiled children in the world are the children of rich people. They get everything on the table.

They get everything they need because the parents have got such a lot of money. They can go for a holiday to any country in the world. They can spend the money for anything.

They can have expensive cars and everything. Just see how spiritual such people are. So don't look for wealth unless you want to spoil your children.

And some people say, what can I do brother? I am having a good job and I am getting a good salary. You mean my children will all be spoiled? My own sons asked me that question. When we brought up our four sons, we had to struggle for every rupee.

Because my wife and I never went after money in our life. I can stand before God and say, 58 years in my life I never went after money. So we never starved.

We had three meals a day. We never had to sleep on the streets. God gave us enough but not plenty.

So we had to be very careful with our children. The younger boys had to wear the same dress that the older boys had. Even school uniform, what the older boys had, the younger boys will wear.

That was good. They learned how to be careful with money. We couldn't spend for them like all the rich people's children who came to school.

That was so good for them. So now my children say, brother, dad, we are not poor like you were. What shall we do? I say, you don't have to become poor in order to make your children spiritual.

You didn't run after money. God blessed you with a good job and you earned some money. You don't have to give it up in order to make your children spiritual.

But teach your children to deny themselves. When they want something, say to them, there is no need for you to have that. You have already got more than enough.

There is no need for you to get that. They want something and the father says, no. That is denying themselves.

That is what makes a person spiritual. Not poverty. Poverty and spiritual means that all the beggars should be spiritual.

They are poor. But they are not spiritual. It is not poverty that makes a man spiritual.

It is not wealth that makes a person carnal. It is denying yourself that will make you spiritual. Jesus said, if you want to follow me, become poor.

No, he didn't say that. No. He said, if you want to follow me, deny yourself.

So, we don't preach in the church, you must become poor to be spiritual. I mean, I have to say today, I am not poor. I was once upon a time.

I mean, I do a little business to support myself and that has prospered. It is not because I went after money. God blessed it.

That's all I can say. But I don't have to say, oh, now I can't be spiritual because I got a little more money than I had 40 years ago. No.

I think I am more spiritually minded today than I was 40 years ago. Even though I have more money today than I had 40 years ago, it is because I have denied myself more. So, please remember, we are all equal.

You may be earning 10,000 rupees a month or 100,000 rupees a month. That will not determine whether you are spiritual or carnal. What will determine is how much you deny yourself every day.

When you are tempted to be angry, you say no. When you are tempted to lust, you say no. When you are tempted to grumble, you say no.

You think people who get 5,000 rupees a month don't grumble and complain? People who get 5,000 rupees also grumble and complain. They may be poor. Maybe they get 2,000 rupees a month.

You think they will become spiritual? No. If they grumble and complain, they will not be spiritual. Another person who gets 100,000 rupees a month, but he denies himself, denies himself, he will be spiritual.

It is by denying yourself that you become a follower of Jesus and spiritual. That is what I told my children and that is what I tell you. So, the question is, is it right that the fire of hell will prevent me from sinning? Yes.

But that is the second best way. Jesus did not say, if you are afraid of hell, keep my commandments. That is a good way.

But Jesus said in John 14, 15, if you love me, keep my commandments. Not, if you don't want to go to hell, keep my commandments. That is the second best way.

Best way is, if you love me, keep my commandments. There are two fires. One is the fire of hell that can keep you from sinning.

There is another fire. The fire of a fervent love for Jesus Christ. That fire also can keep you from sinning.

So, in the beginning, you keep from sinning because of the fire of hell. That is good. We can say that is like school.

Then you go to college, where you keep from sinning because of the fire of love for Jesus. So, if you haven't gone to college, at least study in school. If you can't obey the commandments because you love Jesus fervently, at least obey the commandments out of the fear of the fire of hell.

Jesus taught that. If you get angry with your brother, you will be guilty before the court. And if you say something that is in your heart, and then from that anger from your heart comes out in your mouth with a few words, then you will be guilty before the supreme court.

And then some more comes out from your heart, some more evil things against your brother. Then you can go to hell. Your anger can send you to hell.

So, Jesus was saying, at least the fire of hell should keep you from anger. So, Jesus himself threatened people with hell if they get angry. So, I am not afraid to tell people, you go to hell.

That is the second best way of keeping from anger. But the best way is, where I love Jesus so much, I don't want to get angry. Then I have come to college.

Otherwise I am in school. At least let the fire of hell keep me from getting angry. Ok.

Jesus said, in verse 29, verse 28, if you lust after a woman, you are sinning. And so if your right eye makes you lust, pull it out. Otherwise, verse 29, you will be thrown into hell.

If your right hand makes you sin in a sexual way, cut it off. Otherwise, verse 30, you can go to hell. So, the Lord is saying, if you sin sexually, you can go to hell.

In your thoughts or with your hands. So, at least let the fear of hell keep you from dirty thoughts. That is not the best way.

Second best way. But some believers need the second best way. Because they don't have the best way, which is, I love Jesus, so I never want to have dirty thoughts.

So, all of you can choose. You may start with the second best way, I am afraid of hell, so I don't want to have dirty thoughts. I don't want to go to hell, so I don't want to get angry.

But God wants you to move on from there. The fire of hell prevents you from sin. Good.

Move on from there to the fire of love for Jesus Christ. Where I say, now, I can say this today. I want to stay from anger, not because God will punish me.

But because I love Jesus. I don't want to lust with my eyes, not because God will punish me. But because I love Jesus, I have moved on from school to college.

I am not saying school is bad. Fear of hell is good. Jesus himself said that.

But it is not the best way. It is the second best way. The best way is John 14,15.

If you love me, keep my commandments, don't get angry, don't lust after women, speak the truth, love your enemies, bless those who curse you. Not because you are afraid of hell. If you always live afraid of hell, in a sense, it is like always being in the kindergarten.

It is good, you need kindergarten. But don't live there forever. Do you want your children to always be in kindergarten? How we love your children, you are so eager, they must finish school and go to college.

What about you yourself, going from school to college spiritually? So remember there are two fires. The fire of hell and the fire of a fervent love for Jesus Christ. See in Song of Solomon, Song of Solomon is a picture of a bride and the bridegroom.

The bridegroom is Jesus Christ and the bride is you and me. So here it says, it talks about love like a fire. Song of Solomon chapter 8, verse 6. It is talking about love.

Put me like a seal over your heart, the bridegroom is saying. No, the bridegroom. Put me like a seal over your heart, like a seal over your arm.

Because love is as strong as death. And in verses further, the fire of love is like the flashes of fire, the very flame of the Lord. The jealousy spoken of here is the jealousy of love.

Jealousy. That means the bridegroom is so jealous for his bride that he doesn't want her to love anybody else. It is a good type of jealousy.

I am jealous for you that you must only love me. You know Paul said that for the Corinthians. I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy.

That I want you to love only the Lord. I don't want you to love the world or sin or anything. That's the type of the jealousy of love spoken here.

It's like a fire. Such love is like a fire. What type of fire is this? Many, verse 7, many waters cannot quench this fire.

Rivers cannot quench it. Have you ever heard of a fire where you send a river and the fire is still burning, it burns up the whole river? When a house catches fire, people pour buckets of water and the fire engines will come with a hose to put down that fire with jets of water. But this fire is so strong that even if a river comes, the whole river will be burnt up.

We can say when Jesus was crucified, the rivers of satan's hatred tried to send it to him. But the fire of Jesus' love quenched rivers of hatred. How do we know? Because at the end of all those rivers of hatred flung at him, he said, Father forgive them.

Love quenched all those rivers of hatred. So love is a fire. Hell is a fire.

You can stay away from sin out of the fear of the fire of hell or you can stay away from sin because of the fire of the love of Jesus. So you must move on from the fear of hell to the fire of love for Jesus Christ. See the danger of just fire of hell is you may live before the face of man.

A child who is always afraid, Daddy will punish me. So I shouldn't do this. I think many of you are living in that type of fear of God.

That's good. But it's the second best. If I do this, God will punish me.

So I better obey God. Good. But move on from there to the real fire.

I love Jesus Christ and I never want to hurt him. See one is the fear that God may hurt me and the other is the fear that I may hurt God. How can I hurt God? How can you hurt your father? Not by slapping him.

You hurt your father by doing something that will bring dishonor to your father's name. If my child behaves badly in school, he has hurt me. I don't want my children to always fear, Daddy will punish me.

So I better do what's right. That is alright when you are 6, 7, 10 years old. But I don't want my 20 year old son thinking, Daddy will smack me.

So I better not do wrong. You want your 20 year old son to say, I don't want to hurt my father by doing anything wrong. That is the type of fire we need in our heart.

Love for Jesus Christ. Let's pray. Heavenly Father, help us to be gripped by these truths.

Not just to understand these as nice thoughts. But to be gripped in our hearts. In Jesus name.

Amen.

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