

## **Serving an Unchanging God (Hebrews 12:28–29)**

Hebrews chapter 12, beginning at verse 18:

18 For you have not come to a mountain that can be touched and to a blazing fire, and to darkness and gloom and whirlwind,

19 and to the blast of a trumpet and the sound of words which sound was such that those who heard begged that no further word be spoken to them.

20 For they could not bear the command, “If even a beast touches the mountain, it will be stoned.”

21 And so terrible was the sight, that Moses said, “I am full of fear and trembling.”

22 But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to myriads of angels,

23 to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the Judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect,

24 and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood, which speaks better than the blood of Abel.

25 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.

26 And His voice shook the earth then, but now He has promised, saying, “Yet once more I will shake not only the earth, but also the heaven.”

27 This expression, “Yet once more,” denotes the removing of those things which can be shaken, as of created things, so that those things which cannot be shaken may remain.

28 Therefore, since we receive a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us show gratitude, by which we may offer to God an acceptable service with reverence and awe;

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29 for our God is a consuming fire. (Heb. 12:18–29 NASB)

You and I have been saved to serve. Forgiveness of sins and salvation from the wrath of God is not by any means the end of our story. In fact, that is not at all even the sum total of God's work in and through us. Our salvation should be thought of, it should be imagined, it should be considered in light of the fact that salvation is the beginning of God's work in us in terms of our usefulness to Him and His work through us. Salvation is only the beginning of a life of service that we render to One who has blessed us with redemption. Just as Israel was saved out of Egypt and out of the bondage of slavery in Egypt so that they might serve God, so it is that you and I have been redeemed so that we may offer to God acceptable service. That is the goal of our salvation. God works through us to that end.

Remember that the Lord sent Moses to Pharaoh with this command: “Thus says the Lord, ‘Let My people go, that they may serve Me’” (Exod. 8:1). In fact, that is the repeated refrain all the way through the Exodus account. Let My people go, that they may serve Me. Let My people go out into the wilderness so that they may serve Me. And Moses kept saying to Pharaoh, “You shall let God's people go so that we may go out from Egypt and serve Yahweh our God.” At one point even Pharaoh says, “I will not let your people go. Why should they go out into the wilderness or out into the desert to serve this Yahweh?” Israel knew that it was being redeemed from the slavery of Egypt in order that they might become Yahweh's servants.

This is the essence of our relationship with the Lord. In fact, there are a number of ways that believers are described in the New Testament, many of which speak of and connote this idea of service. For instance, we are called servants of God, slaves of Christ, slaves, ministers, stewards, and even the analogy of us being a holy priesthood to the Lord speaks of the idea of offering sacrifices and service because that was the goal and the function of the Old Testament priesthood. And if we have been made a priesthood unto God, then the idea behind that is that then we may offer up to God continually sacrifices and service.

In 1 Thessalonians 1, Paul describes our redemption in terms of being turned from idols to serve the living and true God and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, even Jesus, who delivers us from the wrath to come (vv. 9–10). And there salvation is characterized in terms of being turned from our idolatry and our service to vain idols to serve a living and true God. And in fact, that is the most—that is the highest honor that could be placed upon us.

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Paul said in Romans 12:11 that we should not be lagging behind but be diligent and fervent in spirit, serving the Lord. What does it look like for somebody to have their minds conformed and transformed into the image of Christ (Rom. 12:2)? What does it look like to have somebody offer to God this reasonable sacrifice of service? Part of that is that we would be fervent in spirit, always serving the Lord.

It is assumed in the New Testament that we will be servants. That is the assumption. And so if that is the assumption, then any deviation from that norm ought to be seen as a great cause of concern. And I'm not talking here about just attending worship one day a week from ten thirty to noon. This is part of service, but if this is all of your service to the body of Christ, to this body, something is fundamentally wrong with your walk with the Lord. He has saved you to use your spiritual gift, a measure of the Spirit of God that He has given to you to serve other people in the body of Christ in some capacity. And it's always tempting to say, well, I don't get paid, I'm not on staff at a church, therefore I'm not offering to God service. No, that is just a small sliver of the service that goes on in a body of people such as ourselves. Most—99 percent—of the stuff that goes on in a church should be done by those who are not on staff and not paid. Because all of us are saved to serve. In fact, service is the most rational, the most reasonable, the most natural response to salvation. A grateful heart serves. That is the very purpose of Christ's work in saving us.

Hebrews 9:14: “How much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without blemish to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?” This is in fact an element of Christ's likeness. He, Christ, did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many. And in serving others and in giving His life for us, He modeled for us that humility that we are all called to adopt. He who deserved the worship of angels and the worship of all of creation laid aside the independent use of His attributes and left behind Him the comforts, the conveniences, and the glories of Heaven itself and came here to live in this sin-infested planet amongst us and then to give His life as an offering and a sacrifice before the Father in order to atone for our sins. And He came not to be served, but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many.

Now let me be clear and careful about something. He calls us to service not for His sake but for our sake. This is a key thing to understand. This is not for His sake but for our sake. In Acts chapter 17, when the apostle Paul is preaching on Mars Hill, he says in verses 24 and 25, “The God who made the world and all things in it, since He is Lord of

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heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands, [listen] nor is He served by human hands, as though He needed anything, since He Himself gives to all people life and breath and all things.” Now that's not to say that we don't serve God with human hands. We do. But it is to say that we don't serve God with human hands because He needs something or as if He needs something. In all of the temples of the idols that the Athenians were familiar with in Acts chapter 17 in the city of Athens, in all of those temples, they would go in and they would lay food and drink before their idols, and then they would have to, as the gold became tarnished a little bit, they'd have to polish that up, dust off the mantle every once in a while and all of the implements in the temple and clean all of that up and do all of these acts of service because their idol was powerless to do any of those things. And so Paul is contrasting the offerings and service that are offered by human hands to idols with the service that we give to the Lord, and he says our God is not served by human hands in that way, not meaning that we don't serve Him, we do, but we don't serve Him because He needs us to serve Him. In fact, if you withhold your service from God, you don't harm Him at all. You do Him no ill. He's not affected by that. You are. You harm only yourself. We harm only ourselves when we withhold that service.

Adoniram Judson, who was the first missionary to bring the gospel to Burma, said this: “Oh, when will Christians learn . . . that their puny, polluted offerings of works are not necessary to God? He permits them to work, as a favor, in order to do them good, personally, because he loves them, and desires to honor them, not because he needs them.” See, God calls us to service for our good, not for His good.

And we are called to this service in light of the great blessings that we have received, and that brings us to Hebrews chapter 12. Look at our text. “Therefore, since we receive a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us show gratitude, by which we may offer to God an acceptable service with reverence and awe; for our God is a consuming fire” (Heb. 12:28–29). Now you'll notice that we are called here to offer to God an acceptable service with reverence and awe out of gratitude for the unshakable kingdom that He has given to us. God has blessed us with innumerable blessings, not the least of which is this massive kingdom that we get to inherit at the end of it all, this reward to the faithful. And in light of that, we are to offer to God, out of hearts of gratitude, service that is acceptable to Him, colored with reverence and awe. It's the beauty of it.

And we've already looked at what this unshakable kingdom is. And to remind you just a little bit of the context, because it has been a couple of weeks, this is the end of the fifth

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and final warning passage in the book of Hebrews. And the author is, in light of all of the blessings received under the new covenant as compared with the old covenant (vv. 18–24), the author is, in verses 25–29, encouraging us toward faithful and diligent and attentive obedience. And he reminds them in verse 25 that God's past acts of judgments against disobedience is a motivation for their own obedience. If they did not escape, how would you escape if you neglect this salvation? That's the idea.

Verse 26, he reminds them that God is ultimately going to judge in the future. There is coming a judgment in which He will shake everything that is created, the heavens and the earth, so that only that which is eternal remains. And this final culminating judgment is in fact also a motive for our attentive obedience.

And then we looked at the third motivation which is in verse 28, the promise of an unshakable kingdom.

And today we come to this fourth motivation, the perfection of an unchanging God. Our God is a consuming fire. This is why we offer to Him service out of reverence and awe, because our God is a consuming fire.

Let's look first at the motive for our service, verse 28, and that is our gratitude. The motive for our service: "Therefore, since we receive a kingdom [he is laying out that blessing first] which cannot be shaken, let us show gratitude, by which we may offer to God an acceptable service." Why does he mention there the promise of a kingdom? You remember from back in chapter 10 all the way through chapter 11, the author has been reminding us periodically that we are faithful and remain faithful to the truth and to Christ and cling to Him, not laying aside our confidence or abandoning our confidence, because we have at the end of all of our sacrifice and service some reward that will make it worth it. And he has alluded to this reward on numerous occasions beginning in chapter 10 all the way through chapter 11 into chapter 12. This reward that we get here is characterized as a kingdom. We receive an unshakable kingdom.

And wrapped up in that idea of a kingdom, I said a couple of weeks ago, wrapped up in that idea of a kingdom is really all of the salvific blessings that are promised to us. If He gives to you everything that is His, which is the kingdom to come, if He gives that to you, then He must first before that give to you adoption and forgiveness and righteousness and regeneration and the indwelling and the sealing of the Spirit. He must first give you all things that lead up to Him giving to you all things. So the kingdom is the author's way of saying if He did not spare His own Son but delivered Him up for us all, how will He not

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with Him—that is, His Son—also give to you everything else? The unshakable kingdom is everything that belongs to Yahweh. When everything temporal is passing away and has passed away, we receive the kingdom, a new creation, new heavens, New Earth, glorified bodies into which sin and death and destruction will never enter, and we will live there forever and ever in an unshakable kingdom. So the most natural response to that is gratitude. If you understand that, the most natural response is gratitude, and that is why we read in verse 28 “Let us show gratitude.”

Now here's an interesting thing about that statement “Let us show gratitude.” There are two different ways of understanding that phrase and two different ways of translating that phrase, which is why the King James translates it “Let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear.” So that Greek phrase that is translated “Let us show gratitude” can refer either to offering to God thanksgiving and gratitude and giving to Him that gracious, grateful disposition of heart and allowing that to color everything that we do and say, or that phrase can be used to describe one who goes to Him and receives or has grace. There's two really entirely different meanings from the same phrase. It is used, for instance, in terms of being grateful or joyful or glad. Here are a couple of familiar verses.

First Timothy 1:12: “I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has strengthened me, because He considered me faithful, putting me into service.” Paul says, “I have gratitude” or “I have a *charis*, a grace, so I give to God this thanksgiving for what He has done.”

Second Timothy 1:3: “I thank God, whom I serve with a clear conscience the way my forefathers did.”

So it refers to the idea of expressing gratitude, which is how the NASB translates it here: “Let us show gratitude, by which we may offer to God an acceptable service.” But it is also used in the New Testament in terms of receiving grace.

Acts 2:47: The people were “praising God and having favor [that is receiving grace] with all the people. And the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved.”

It's also used this way in 2 Corinthians 1:15 where Paul says, “In this confidence I intended at first to come to you, so that you might twice receive a blessing.” That you might twice have *charis*, have grace. So it can refer to the act of receiving grace. It can also refer to the act of giving out thanksgiving and thankfulness or gratitude.

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And here's something interesting. The book of Hebrews teaches both of these things previously. This is not making our decision any easier in how to translate this or understand the phrase. Hebrews 4:16 says, "Let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need." So we are commanded to approach God in order that we may receive grace. And then in Hebrews 13:15 it says, "Through Him then, let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that give thanks to His name." So we are commanded both to come to God for grace and then to turn around and to give back that grace in thanksgiving.

So how does the author intend it to be understood here? Is he suggesting that we must first come to God in order to receive grace so that we may serve Him acceptably? Or is the author saying that we are to express our gratitude and thanksgiving to God because that is what makes our service acceptable? What is the answer to that? Yes. It is, in fact, I think, both of those ideas. And I don't think that we need to, as so often in Scripture when we come across some of these enigmatic phrases, I don't think we need to take one side or the other and say, well, it can't mean the other, it must mean this. I think in the context it would be perfectly fitting to say that since we have received a kingdom which cannot be shaken, we come to Him in gratitude, asking for grace so that we may serve Him acceptably in that gratitude. It can be both of those.

So gratitude is in fact the most natural, rational, reasonable expression of a saved and redeemed heart, one that desires to serve Him. And notice there is an order here. It is because we have received a kingdom that we express our gratitude. We cannot serve Him in order to warrant a kingdom. We can't deserve the kingdom. We can never merit it. He bestows it upon whom He wills. God is the sovereign in that. The kingdom is given by grace, and it is most certainly an unmerited favor that He bestows upon us.

But those who are not first properly reconciled to that King through the death of Christ, those who are not first related rightly to Him by repenting of their sin and believing upon the gospel and receiving eternal life and newness of life cannot possibly serve Him acceptably. They can never be, in fact, acceptable to Him at all because they are not first related to Him rightly. You must receive the kingdom before you can offer to Him acceptable service that is pleasing to Him out of gratitude. Because the one who tries to serve Him in order to receive that kingdom without first coming in repentance and faith to become the recipient of grace and receive that kingdom is not, in fact, a servant of

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God at all, but rather a rebel who is attempting to bribe a judge. And you do not want to be standing before Him having tried to bribe your way into the kingdom.

First we receive the kingdom, then our hearts are filled with affection and gratitude and grace. And we give back to Him our thanks and say, “What else can I do but to give my life and service to this King who has been so benevolent as to save a wretch like us?” Gratitude is the most natural, rational response, and it is also the acceptable motive for all of our service. We don't serve begrudgingly or reluctantly, but we serve graciously. We serve gratefully. A grateful heart is a serving heart.

I'll just give you a couple of references in the Scriptures to thanksgiving so you can remember this is so prolific. The references to thankfulness and thanksgiving in Scripture are so prolific that I could spend the rest of this hour just reading to you the verses that talk about us giving thanks to God for His many blessings.

Luke 17:10: Jesus said, “So you too, when you do all the things which are commanded you, say, ‘We are unworthy slaves [we can't do anything; we're unworthy slaves]; we have done only that which we ought to have done.’” That is my obligation.

Hebrews 13:15, I read it earlier: We are to “offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that give thanks to His name.”

Psalm 54:6: “Willingly I will sacrifice to You; I will give thanks to Your name, O Lord, for it is good.”

Psalm 100:4: “Enter His gates with thanksgiving and His courts with praise. Give thanks to Him, bless His name.”

Ephesians 5:4: “There must be no filthiness and silly talk, or coarse jesting, which are not fitting, but rather giving of thanks.” Notice the two different ways that we use our tongues and use our mouths. No filthy talk and coarse jesting, but rather the giving of thanks. Those are opposites.

Colossians 3:15: “Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body; and be thankful.”

Colossians 3:17: “Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father.”

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First Thessalonians 5:18: "In everything give thanks; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus."

Gratitude for grace that is received should color everything we do. It is the plate upon which we offer up our sacrifice to God. It is the garnish around our sacrifice. It is the aroma that comes off the sacrifice. It is the color. It is the scent. It is the attitude. It is the offering. It is everything. With gratitude! And the one who tries to serve the Lord without a heart of gratitude, begrudgingly or in a stingy way, cannot possibly offer to Him any sacrifice or any service that is acceptable to Him because it must come served up with a healthy dose of gratefulness for what He has done. That is acceptable service. Gratitude is the loving expression that pleases God, and it comes from a heart that recognizes both the Giver and the gift.

So now my question. Are you thankful? Are you thankful? Are your prayers marked with thankfulness and thanksgiving? Do you thank God for the discipline that He brings into your life, for the afflictions that He sends your way, for the trials and the difficulties, for the difficult people, the difficult circumstances, the sickness, the illness? Do you serve because you have been given so much, and is your worship marked by gratitude and thanksgiving? Do we as a congregation come to worship just by the rotteness of our tradition? This is what we do on Sunday mornings. This is what we've always done. I'm in town visiting my family, so I guess I'm going to go do what they do. Or do we come here because we have before our eyes such a vision of all of the multitude of untold and unmerited blessings that have fallen upon us, most of which we cannot even name? I promise you I have been blessed with ten thousand things today that I have not thanked God for. And if I were to spend the rest of the day thanking God for those things that are mine today, I would exhaust the rest of this day. And then I would wake up tomorrow morning to find that His mercies are new every morning and I have a whole new host of things to thank Him for.

And what are we to be thankful for? When you consider your former state, that you were lost and dead in your trespasses and sins and alienated from God and separated from Him and at a distance and cut off from the covenants and from grace and that you were a slave to your sin, to yourself, and to Satan, and you could no more change your hopeless and helpless condition than a leopard could change its spots . . . You were utterly dead in your trespasses and sins and unable to do anything that merited even the first expression of God's grace. But then in grace, He chose you in Christ before the foundation of the world and set His affection upon you and then sent His Son into the

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world to live a perfect life in your stead and then to die that death that you deserve to die. And then He rose again victorious over death. And then in time now, two thousand years later, He has opened your eyes to the reality of your helpless condition, drawn you to that Son, granted you the gift of repentance and then granted you the gift of faith and brought you then to everlasting life and adopted you into His kingdom and covered you with His righteousness and then promised to you that Yahweh, the King of kings, the Lord of lords, the God of Heaven and earth, will never leave you or forsake you, that you will be His everlastingly. Can you help but give thanks to God for that?

Therefore, gratitude is the most natural expression of a heart that has been redeemed from such a miserable condition. Show me an ingrate and I will show you somebody who is either not a believer or has not spent any time contemplating the riches and the depth of the grace that has been lavished upon them. But if you know the gospel and you have accepted the gospel and embraced the gospel and been changed by the gospel, then gratitude is all that can flow out of that heart. No matter how miserable your life is, it could be worse. I promise you it could be worse. You're here and not in prison. You're here and not being tortured. Your life could be worse. And therefore, gratitude is the order of the day.

And this gratitude, this thankfulness, must be sweetened by reverence and awe. That's the rest of verse 28 and 29: "Let us show gratitude by which we may offer to God an acceptable service with reverence and awe." The terms *reverence* and *awe* are somewhat synonymous there. They overlap a little bit. Both words have the idea of reverence or a high regard, of discretion, of caution. And this is a key—those words also have an element of fear in them. We don't like to think of fearing God in today's church. In fact, we say, well, "perfect love casts out fear" (1 John 4:18). Therefore, I have nothing to fear. Well, in one sense, that's true. I don't fear the judgment of God. I don't fear His condemnation because there's no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus. But that doesn't mean that I don't have a fear of God. My kids growing up would never fear me in the sense that I would abandon them or leave them or do harm to them. But they had a healthy fear of me when it came to displeasing me. There is a healthy fear. There is an element of fear here. And why are we to fear? Verse 29, our God is a consuming fire. Don't forget that. It's not that God was once a consuming fire. But our God, the God that belongs to us, to whom we belong, the God with whom we have to do, He is still a consuming fire.

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This harkens back to what the author says in verses 18–21 when he was contrasting the blessings we’ve received in the new covenant with the expressions in the giving of the old covenant. Verses 18–19: “For you have not come to a mountain that can be touched and to a blazing fire, and to darkness and gloom and whirlwind, and to the blast of a trumpet.” That was Sinai and that was the giving of the old covenant. The same God that blasted at Sinai has brought you to Himself in grace and promised to bring you also to glory. It's the same God. He has not changed. He is an unchanging God. He's still a consuming fire. You and I today sang our songs and read the Scriptures and thought our thoughts here this morning before a consuming fire. Did you realize that coming into worship today? I'm stepping into an assembly of people and I'm going to sing to a God who is a consuming fire. Not a God who was a consuming fire, but a God who still is to this very day a consuming fire.

Exodus 24—talking about the event at Sinai, Moses writes this: “The glory of the Lord rested on Mount Sinai, and the cloud covered it for six days; and on the seventh day He called to Moses from the midst of the cloud. And to the eyes of the sons of Israel the appearance of the glory of the Lord was like a consuming fire on the mountain top.”

In fact, I think that in the NASB, this phrase in verse 29, *for our God is a consuming fire*, should be in all capitals because it is in fact a quotation from the book of Deuteronomy, chapter 4, verses 22–24. And in that context, Moses is warning the sons of Israel about falling away from the one true God and going and worshipping idols. And listen to what he writes.

For I will die in this land, I shall not cross the Jordan, but you shall cross and take possession of this good land. So watch yourselves [that's a warning, isn't it?], that you do not forget the covenant of the Lord your God which He made with you, and make for yourselves a graven image in the form of anything against which the Lord your God has commanded you. For the Lord your God is a consuming fire, a jealous God.

That was Israel's God. That's your God. A consuming fire.

Deuteronomy 9:3: “Know therefore today that it is the Lord your God who is crossing over before you as a consuming fire. He will destroy them and He will subdue them before you, so that you may drive them out and destroy them quickly, just as the Lord has spoken to you.”

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So just as Israel by God's grace was redeemed from Egypt out of their slavery so that they may serve a God who is a consuming fire, you and I have been redeemed out of the marketplace of sin by the death of Christ so that we may serve a God who is a consuming fire. He is still that God today. He has not changed. He is still holy. He is still righteous. He is still just. His wrath against sin will consume the sinner and every last one who has not sought refuge from the judgment that is to come. This is why the last warning passage in Hebrews ended with these words: "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." And chapter 10 ends with these words: "It is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God." A terrifying thing.

Our God is a consuming fire, and this is the One that we worship. But listen, the consuming fire has pledged to you an unshakable kingdom. The God who is a consuming fire shakes the heavens and the earth and gives you a kingdom which cannot be shaken. He has promised to destroy the adversary, destroy the wicked and their works, and judge iniquity wherever it is found, and yet He draws and brings you to Himself without changing who He is. He is still a consuming fire, and He draws you near.

There's a beautiful part of a story in C. S. Lewis's book *The Silver Chair* in the Chronicles of Narnia. And let me give a disclaimer here first. This is not in any way an endorsement of everything that C. S. Lewis has ever thought, said, written, read, OK, anything like that. The Chronicles of Narnia, they even have some theological issues in them, but there's a beautiful story in *The Silver Chair* (chapter 2) where Jill, one of the main characters, is out wandering around, and she becomes parched, and she is just dying of thirst. And she comes across this stream that is running there, and she begins to approach the stream because she wants to quench this thirst. She feels like she's about ready to die. But then she spots the Lion standing right next to the stream. Now in Lewis's *The Chronicles of Narnia*, for those of you who may not know, the Lion's name is Aslan, and Aslan is the Christ figure through all of the books. And the similarities between Aslan and Christ are so incredibly clear that you have to be utterly benighted in order to not see it. So Aslan is the Christ figure. And so Jill sees the Lion standing there, and she stops. She doesn't want to come any closer, but she wants to come closer. And then Aslan says to her, "If you are thirsty, come and drink." And she says to Him, "Will you promise not to—do anything . . . ?" And Aslan says, "I make no promise." And so then she says, sort of thinking out loud, "Do you eat [little] girls?" And Aslan the Lion says, "I have [consumed] girls and boys, women and men, kings and emperors, cities

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and realms.” And so then Jill says, “[Then] I daren’t come and drink.” And He says, “Then you will die of thirst.” And then she says—I knew I shouldn’t have told this story. She says to Him, “[Then I will find] another stream.” And Aslan says, “There is no other stream.”

That's what we've been brought to. A God who is a consuming fire. Approach Him or you die in thirst. And when you approach Him, He is still a consuming fire. We are drawn inexorably to Him because we must have Him to drink and to have our thirst quenched. But He is a consuming fire. And we must never forget either one of those things. The fact that He is a consuming fire must affect our worship and how we worship. Do we come to Him flippantly and irreverently like Nadab and Abihu, only to find out that literally He is a consuming fire? Do we approach the Lord’s Table with a flippancy? Sure, I was involved in this habitual sin last week, but I'll just come and take the Lord’s Table again and maybe it'll be better the next week. Are we aware when we come together and examine our hearts and when we worship and when we sing that we are singing to a consuming fire? Did we sing today like we are singing to One who commands our song and commands our worship and is worthy of our worship but who is yet a consuming fire? Is that reflected in the thoughts of our heads and in our hearts and our meditations? When we stand before Him and read His Word, do we read His Word with the attentiveness that we are reading the Word of a consuming fire?

You see how this picture of God as both a consuming fire and the water that quenches our thirst must both go together because they are both true. But we may never lose sight of the fact that He is a consuming fire.

This motivates you also to pursue holiness, my friends. Pursue holiness without which it is impossible to see God. You must be holy to see Him. And if you are to see Him, then you must pursue that holiness out of the fear of God. You know what will keep you from sin? The fear of God. You know what will keep you in a pure way? The fear of God. Because in the moment of our sin, in the moment we sin, we have no fear of God before our eyes. That is the problem with our sin. In the moment I transgress, I have no fear of God before my eyes. But if I lived in constant fear of Him, and if I could understand that, then that would purge the temptation from me. It would quench my lust, my flesh, my desires, my wickedness. It would quench all of that. If I could just have a consuming passion, a consuming vision, of this God who is a consuming fire.

What will keep you from looking at porn? From lying? From lusting? From hatred? From greed? From selfishness? From pride? You know what will keep you from those things?

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The fear of God. Your accountability group won't do it. Because you'll come this next week and lie about the week that is behind you, say that everything was good, or you'll be minimally honest only to have them pat you on the back because you promise to be better in the weeks that are to come, and then you'll walk away from there and plunge right back into sin. The problem is not that you don't have accountability or the right computer software or that you carry a smartphone. The problem is we don't have a fear of God before our eyes. We don't understand that He is a consuming fire and that He is everywhere and sees everything and understands all of our thoughts and reads our hearts like an open book, and that we live before Him as the God before whom we all must stand on that day, and that He sees everything because we live our lives out in naked view of Him. It is because in the moment of our sin, we convince ourselves of all kinds of lies. He doesn't see this. He doesn't care about this. He'll never discipline me for this. I can get away with this. He's distracted and has other things to do. Our God is so gracious, so loving and kind. He's no longer a consuming fire. And once we have bought all of those lies, then we plunge headlong into our sin, because the lies that we believe about ourselves and our God and our sin make sin in the moment more appealing than standing before a consuming fire.

He makes no such promises. Come and drink or you die. Repent and believe or you die. And there is no other stream. We must approach this God who is a consuming fire.

And remembering that God is a consuming fire will increase your gratitude. Because when you remember that, you think, how much have I been saved from? Because if He had not redeemed me, He would consume me. Not to say that you will ever go out of existence if you are not in Christ, but it is to say that you will be forever consumed by that consuming fire as He pours out His wrath upon you. My friends, such were some of you. You've been washed, and you've been redeemed, and you've been justified, and you've been sanctified, and you've been glorified in the name of our God. Such were some of you, but He rescued you out of the slave market of sin and brought you to Himself and adopted you into His family and covered you with His righteousness and has given you His grace. And that God who has done all of that has brought you to Himself, all the while being a consuming fire.

And so why is it or how is it that He can draw you to Himself without ever ceasing to be a consuming fire and you, a wicked slave of sin, are not consumed? It is not because He is no longer a consuming fire, but rather it is because all of the fury of His wrath toward you for your sin has been fully absorbed by another who stepped in between you and

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the Father and sacrificed His life so that you may have righteousness and so that all of your sins may be forgiven. So He is still a consuming fire, but His wrath does not burn against you if you're in Jesus Christ because it has been fully absorbed by the Son who suffered on the cross and paid the full price for sin. And so when we come to Him, we come to Him not as One whose fire has changed, not as One whose nature has changed, but as One who, because He is eternal and infinitely righteous and infinitely just, has satisfied the just demands of the law upon His Son so that He may call me a son and I may absorb none of that wrath. And “therefore,” Romans 8:1 says, “there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.” We are free from that condemnation not because He is not a consuming fire, but because another has consumed all of the wrath for us, drank the full wrath of the Father on behalf of any and all who will trust in Him.

If you reject Him, then you can expect the fury of a fire which will destroy the enemies and the adversaries. But if you repent and believe, He brings you to Himself and gives you an unshakable kingdom. And out of gratitude for that, with reverence and awe, we come to Him and offer to Him an acceptable service.

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