

Saved by Fire!

Clyde L. Pilkington, Jr.

"Saved, yet so as by fire" (I Corinthians 3:15).

*M*any see God's judgments as an end within themselves, rather than a means to an end. There are coming some wonderful days in the future, days of divine judgment when God shall apply the refiner's fire to His creation. As in the due process of gold and silver's refinement, these days will forever remove all the stains, disgraces and sins of the "former things."

Refinement's purging fire is indeed a most gracious act, producing a gloriously positive loss. It will remove all that wishes to be forgotten. As God in His forgiveness remembers them no more, so "the former things are passed away."

GOD IS LOVE

"God is love" (I John 4:8).

"God is love" (I John 4:16).

John gives us a definitive statement about God. Here we have presented to us the plain, clear definition of God of who He is. Could anything be more direct and to the point?

*"God **is** Love."* Love is what He is. Love is who He is. It is not that God's character is simply a loving one; that love is one of His attributes. Neither is it that love is His occasional quality; that sometimes His nature of love gives way to "wrath." No, indeed not!

God does not simply love: He **is** Love! Love is not just one of His attributes: Love is *who* He is!

Even "wrath" is the manifest passion of His love, for Love is who He is, and it is the sum-total of all His ways and workings with His creation. "Wrath" and "judgment" are not ends

unto themselves; they are His wise means to an end – the victorious loving of His creation to Himself.

GOD IS A CONSUMING FIRE

“For our God is a consuming fire” (Hebrews 12:29).

We are also told that God is a consuming fire. Is this a contradiction of what John wrote, that He is love? No, indeed not! The same God who is Love is also a consuming fire. He is a consuming fire of divine love. That is the only answer, if Love is who He is.

That God is a *“consuming fire”* wonderfully demonstrates the great passion of His love. His is a *“consuming”* love; and His love is a *“purging, purifying”* love. His is a love that knows no retreat; knows no end; knows no defeat. He conquers all, not with pure might and strength, not with pure wrath and judgment; but with pure, undying, unrelenting, unceasing, unconditional love.

“Love never fails” (I Corinthians 13:8).

“The greatest of these is love” (I Corinthians 13:13).

Love is the greatest, because He is Love – and He is the greatest.

Love never fails, because He is Love – and He never fails.

SAVED BY FIRE

We who know the true and living God, the God of absolute Love, welcome **everything** that comes from His hand, even His *“wrath”* and *“judgment”*; for He **is** Love.

As believers we should welcome the day when our works shall be revealed by *“fire”*; for it is a loving fire that comes from the hands of our Father. He will love away all the dross of our lives.

*“Every man’s work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be **revealed by fire**; and **the fire** shall try every man’s work of what sort it is... If any man’s work **shall be burned**, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; **yet so as by fire**”* (I Corinthians 3:13, 15)

We *“shall be saved”* ... *“by fire.”* This is what Paul wrote. God’s fire of love will save us from all the stains and disgraces of the *“former things”* and *“the former things are passed away.”*

Did you ever really stop to consider the glorious nature of the *“fire”* at the Judgment Seat of Christ?¹ Did you ever consider it in relationship to the *“Lake of Fire”* for example?

1. See the author’s work, *The Glorious Presentation of the Saints*, Clyde L. Pilkington, Jr., Bible Student’s Press, (Item #8778).

God's future judgment of believers is associated with "fire."

God's future judgment of unbelievers is associated with "fire."

Fire is such wonderful blessing to our daily lives. We make profitable use of it every day. The only *dangerous* fire – one that is to be feared – is a fire that is *out of control*. Be assured that the God who is Love, and who is a consuming fire – is *not* out of control. As Fanny Crosby wrote in her hymn, He "*doeth all things well.*"

In the Bible fire is presented as having a purging effect. It does so many things – it cleanses, frees, reduces, refines.² It is interesting how we recognize this fact when "fire" is applied to the believer, but we forget this when it is applied to the unbeliever. Just as the "fire" of the believer's judgment is a purging, purifying act of God's love; so it is with the "fire" of the unbeliever's judgment.

Think about it! Why do we as believers so often make the "fire" of the unbeliever's judgment *literal*, while we leave ours the *figurative* refiner's fire?

The lost will thank God for the "*lake of fire*" that shall free them, and bring to an end their old identity in Adam. This "*lake of fire*" is but the further manifestation of the love of God; of the love of His consuming fire. It is defined by John as "*the second death*" (Revelation 21:8).

Paul teaches us that, "*the last enemy that shall be destroyed is **death***" (I Corinthians 15:26). That's what the "*lake of fire*" is – it is "*death.*" So it shall be destroyed; and the only way to "*destroy*" death is by "*resurrection!*" The "*lake of fire*" is just a transition from death to life.

The "fire" of both the believers' and unbelievers' judgments are but the momentary transitions of love wrapped in the beautiful analogy of "fire."

As one former pastor has written:

I do not think we are compelled to see this as a literal fire. It is a metaphor for purging, purifying, and refining. As God completes the process of restoring all things (Acts 3:21), all the old rubbish left here by the first Adam (the unrighteous deeds of fallen humanity) will be burned up. Meanwhile, redeemed humanity is welcomed into the presence of God where eventually, "*God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away ...*" (Revelation 21:4).

Yes, the Book of Revelation speaks apocalyptically of an *abyss* and *lake of fire*, but it is in the context of describing the ultimate overthrow of evil.³

2. John Wright Follette, *Arrows of Truth*.

3. Steven L. Rogers, *Quit "Going" to Church ... and Other Musings of a Former Institutional Man*, pages 146-150; 135.

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