

# Maintaining Your Spiritual Fire

## Session #4 – Cleaning Out the Ashes

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I had the fire in my fireplace burning well after starting with a fresh supply of wood and getting the air flowing. But after several fires, the wood didn't burn as well and was harder to light. I put charcoal lighting fluid all over the logs, but the fire still died right away.

Frustrated, I called my father. "Dad, my fireplace isn't working," I said. He asked whether I had good wood and whether the flue was open. I told him I had a fresh supply of wood and the flue was wide open, but something was wrong.

Dad came over to see if he could help. He took one look in the fireplace and exclaimed, "How do you expect a fire to burn in that fireplace?"

"What do you mean?" I replied.

"Don't you ever clean the ashes out?" he asked. "What do you think this little shovel hanging on this rack is for?"

"I thought it was for decoration," I said sheepishly.

The third component in maintaining a fire is regularly cleaning out the ashes. Over time, ashes build up—the residue left as a natural by-product of a burning fire.

Is there a natural residue that is the by-product of living a Christian life?

A careful examination of Romans 12 reveals that the spiritual issues Paul addresses are not readily observable sins or the problems of new Christians. Rather, they are natural tendencies of our selfish, sinful nature that build up over time, like ashes in a fireplace. They are not lying, stealing or committing adultery, but they will just as effectively destroy our spiritual fire.

### **Insincerity**

Paul says in Romans 12:9, "Let love be without hypocrisy." A new Christian does not have to struggle with insincerity as much as Christians of long standing do. Similarly, Matthew 5:8 says, "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God." The person who is pure in heart has a perception and sensitivity to the presence of God that the person battling mixed motives and impurity does not. If our hearts are not pure, we will have a difficult time perceiving and experiencing the presence of God.

Paul warned about people in the last days who have "a form of godliness but denying its power."<sup>1</sup> Christians know how to give the appearance of spirituality. We can sing the right choruses, make the right gestures and motions, and shout "Hallelujah." But it can all be done insincerely. Living and worshipping insincerely will kill our spiritual fire.

### **Selfishness**

Paul says in Romans 12:13, "contributing to the needs of the saints, practicing hospitality." New Christians don't usually have a problem with selfishness. They tend to be generous, because people who have just experienced the grace of Jesus have a desire to give. But as our spiritual passion diminishes, so does our generosity.

Selfishness left to build up in our heart will kill our spiritual fire.

## **Compromise**

Romans 12:9 says, “Abhor what is evil; cling to what is good.” Paul does not say “lean away from evil and lean toward good.” He says abhor and cling. Both are very strong, clear and even extreme actions.

The “fear of the Lord” is a spiritually healthy commodity to help a person stay pure. Most people are not afraid of God anymore. Instead they are afraid of other people’s opinions of them. That is why people compromise.

John Wesley said, “If I had 300 men who feared nothing but God, hated nothing but sin and were determined to know nothing among men but Jesus Christ and Him crucified, I would set the world on fire.” The world is not set on fire by compromisers, but by people who abhor what is evil and cling to what is good.

Holiness means separation. We have to draw boundaries in our lives. Spiritual fervency is impossible if we compromise with sin. Compromise will kill our spiritual fire.

## **Pride**

In the latter part of the Romans 12:16, Paul says, “Do not be haughty in mind, but associate with the lowly. Do not be wise in your own estimation.” Earlier, in verse 3, he says, “Through the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think more highly of himself than he ought to think; but to think so as to have sound judgment, as God has allotted to each a measure of faith.” This speaks to the issue of pride.

Is spiritual pride a problem of new Christians? No. They have just experienced the grace of God. They know that their salvation is a free gift and there is nothing they have done to deserve it. If our mindset drifts from a comprehension of God’s grace to a works mentality, the “ashes” of pride will accumulate in our heart.

Pride is a very difficult thing to guard our hearts against. As we serve the Lord with the good works He has prepared for us, we can begin to feel that we are repaying the Lord for His sacrifice. Subconsciously we may live as if Jesus saved us on credit and now we are paying Him back on a sort of spiritual installment plan. This is subtle—but deadly!

There is no room anywhere for spiritual pride in the life of a Christian who comprehends the grace of God. First, it is totally unjustified. Second, pride will kill our spiritual fire.

## **Disunity**

In the first part of the Romans 12:16, Paul says, “Be of the same mind toward one another.” That is a positive exhortation. Its opposite is the negative danger of disunity.

Disunity will not only kill your personal fire, but it will also kill the fire in the body of Christ. What is disunity? It may not be open strife or conflict. A church suffering from disunity does not have to be filled with fighting. Disunity is simply the lack of something positive, a lack of unity.

Where does disunity start? With pride. “I now know more than the rest of them. I know more than my Sunday School teacher. I know more than my pastor. I’m special.” That attitude is the root of disunity.

Paul says that if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it.<sup>2</sup> If you cut off your finger, it will die. The body still lives, even though the finger is gone. You could be the most zealous believer or the most biblically knowledgeable person in your church. You might pray longer at the altar than everyone else. But apart from the Body, you will die. We cannot survive spiritually outside the Body. Disunity will kill your spiritual fire.

## Unforgiveness

Finally, Paul says in Romans 12:17-19: “Never pay back evil for evil to anyone. Respect what is right in the sight of all men. If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men. Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, ‘Vengeance is mine, I will repay,’ says the Lord.”

This passage speaks to the “ashes” of unforgiveness. New Christians generally overcome unforgiveness easily. They have just been forgiven, so it is not as difficult for them to forgive someone else.

When I don’t forgive my brother, I no longer understand my own need of forgiveness. I can no longer go to God in genuine faith, trusting Him to forgive me.

You might say, “It is not fair, because that person sinned against me. They owe me something.” But Jesus said, “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.”<sup>3</sup>

We should love one another in the same way that He loved us. The love of Jesus made us forget our shame. When our heart is set on fire by the Holy Spirit, we will help bring people to Jesus, the One who will take away their shame.

Jesus put only one “footnote” on the Lord’s Prayer: “But if you do not forgive others, then your Father will not forgive your transgressions.”<sup>4</sup> It is tragic when a Christian who has experienced the grace of God can no longer extend forgiveness. Without forgiveness, the fire dies in the believer’s heart as well as in the heart of the church.

How can we deal with the spiritual “ashes” that build up in our hearts?

As we read the Word, the Spirit shows us what needs to change—unconfessed sin, wrong attitudes, relationships that need healing. “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”<sup>5</sup> But faithfulness to the disciplines of Bible reading and prayer is not enough. We must ask God to work in our hearts to produce true repentance.<sup>6</sup>

Paul told the Philippians that God works in us “both to will and to do for His good pleasure.”<sup>7</sup> The Spirit works in us to want God’s will and then gives us the power to do His will. The apostle Peter said, “His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness.”<sup>8</sup>

Paul wrote to the Thessalonians, “God chose you to be saved through the sanctifying work of the Spirit and through belief in the truth.”<sup>9</sup> We need the Holy Spirit’s cleansing work in our hearts. Hymn writer George Croly expressed it this way in “Spirit of God, Descend Upon My Heart”:

“Teach me to love Thee as Thine angels love,  
One holy passion filling all my frame;  
The baptism of the heaven-descended Dove,  
My heart an altar, and Thy love the flame.”

<sup>1</sup> 2 Timothy 3:5, NIV

<sup>2</sup> 1 Corinthians 12:26

<sup>3</sup> John 13:34-35

<sup>4</sup> Matthew 6:15

<sup>5</sup> 1 John 1:9, KJV

<sup>6</sup> Romans 2:4, 2 Corinthians 7:9, 2 Corinthians 7:10, 2 Timothy 2:25

<sup>7</sup> Philippians 2:13, NKJV

<sup>8</sup> 2 Peter 1:3, NIV

<sup>9</sup> 2 Thessalonians 2:13, NIV

Some have asked Pastor Russ and me if I'd share some of my "Daily Texts" to which I have referred in the Wednesday night teaching.

Some of these are what Pastor Russ would call "power verses." They are essentially texts the Holy Spirit has "quicken" (made alive) to me in my daily devotional Bible reading. I feel they are the spiritual truth "prescriptions" the Holy Spirit gives us that we individually need. I feel it's important to repeatedly read these texts as we pray for the Holy Spirit to actualize these truths as we continue to seek Him to grow in the Lord's transforming work in our character.

I hope some of these are a help to you but I encourage you to compile your own lists from your own Bible reading. My texts are from the New American Standard version unless otherwise indicated. I have also left my emphasis of certain words and phrases in ***bold italics*** that I have done for my own meditation. You may want to do the same with some of your texts.

## **\*\*DAILY TEXTS\*\***

### **MORNING**

#### **Philippians 4:6 TLB**

Don't worry about anything; instead, pray about everything...

#### **2 Timothy 2:13 TLB**

Even when we are too weak to have any faith left, he remains faithful to us and will help us, for he cannot disown us who are part of himself, and he will always carry out his promises to us.

#### **Romans 14:17**

The kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy ***in the Holy Spirit***.

#### **Romans 15:13**

Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you will abound in hope ***by the power of the Holy Spirit***.

#### **Galatians 6:7-9 NLT**

Don't be misled—you cannot mock the justice of God. You will always harvest what you plant. Those who live only to satisfy their own sinful nature will harvest decay and death from that sinful nature. But those who live to please the Spirit will harvest everlasting life from the Spirit. So let's not get tired of doing what is good. At just the right time we will reap a harvest of blessing if we don't give up.

#### **Matthew 7:13-14**

Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the way is broad that leads to destruction, and there are many who enter through it. For the gate is small and the way is narrow that leads to life, and there are few who find it.

#### **Matthew 13:44-46**

The kingdom of heaven is like a treasure hidden in the field, which a man found and hid again; and from joy over it he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field. Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant seeking fine pearls, and upon finding one pearl of great value, he went and sold all that he had and bought it.

**Deuteronomy 30:19-20 NKJV**

I call heaven and earth as witnesses today against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore choose life, that both you and your descendants may live; that you may love the Lord your God, that you may obey His voice, and that you may cling to Him, for He is your life and the length of your days.

**Psalm 86:5**

For You, Lord, are good, and ready to forgive, And abundant in lovingkindness to all who call upon You.

**Isaiah 50:4 NLT**

Morning by morning he wakens me and opens my understanding to his will.

**Isaiah 50:7 NLT**

I have set my face like a stone, determined to do his will.

**Colossians 1:13-14**

He rescued us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

**Psalm 18:16 NLT**

He reached down from heaven and rescued me; he drew me out of deep waters.

**Proverbs 4:23 NLT**

Guard your heart above all else, for it determines the course of your life.

**Psalm 86:11**

Teach me Your way, O Lord; I will walk in Your truth; Unite my heart to fear Your name.

**Psalm 25:14**

The secret of the Lord is for those who fear Him, And He will make them know His covenant.

**Isaiah 55:8-9**

“For My thoughts are not your thoughts, Nor are your ways My ways,” declares the Lord. “For as the heavens are higher than the earth, So are My ways higher than your ways and My thoughts than your thoughts.”

**Psalm 19:14 NLT**

May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be pleasing to you, O Lord, my rock and my redeemer.

**Phil 4:8-9 NLT**

And now, dear brothers and sisters, one final thing. Fix your thoughts on what is true, and honorable, and right, and pure, and lovely, and admirable. Think about things that are excellent and worthy of praise.

**Proverbs 16:32**

He who is slow to anger is better than the mighty, And he who rules his spirit, than he who captures a city.

**1 Peter 2:11**

Beloved, I urge you as aliens and strangers to abstain from fleshly lusts which wage war against the soul.

### **Colossians 3:1 NLT**

Since you have been raised to new life with Christ, set your sights on the realities of heaven, where Christ sits in the place of honor at God's right hand.

### **Isaiah 26:3 KJV**

Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee: because he trusteth in thee.

### **2 Chronicles 16:9**

For the eyes of the Lord move to and fro throughout the earth that He may strongly support those whose heart is completely His.

### **James 1:2-4**

Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. And let endurance have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.

### **Lamentations 3:21-23**

This I recall to my mind, Therefore I have hope. The Lord's lovingkindnesses indeed never cease, For His compassions never fail. They are new every morning; Great is Your faithfulness.

### **Psalms 9:10**

And those who know Your name will put their trust in You,  
For You, O Lord, have not forsaken those who seek You.

### **James 1:19-20**

This you know, my beloved brethren. But everyone must be quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to anger; for the anger of man does not achieve the righteousness of God.

### **1 Timothy 1:5**

The goal of this command is love, which comes from a *pure heart* and a *good conscience* and a *sincere faith*.

### **1 Timothy 1:19 (NLT)**

Cling to your faith in Christ, and keep your conscience clear. For some people have deliberately violated their consciences; as a result, their faith has been shipwrecked.

## **NOON**

### **Proverbs 24:12**

If you say, "See, we did not know this," Does He not consider it who *weighs the hearts*? And does He not know it who *keeps your soul*? And will He not render to man according to his work?

### **NLT:**

Don't excuse yourself by saying, "Look, we didn't know." For God **understands all hearts**, and he sees you. He who **guards your soul** knows you knew. He will repay all people as their actions deserve.

### **2 Peter 1:3**

His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness, *through the true knowledge of Him* who called us by His own glory and excellence.

### **2 Peter 1:5-8**

Applying all diligence, in your faith supply moral excellence, and in your moral excellence, knowledge, and in your knowledge, self-control, and in your self-control, perseverance, and in your perseverance, godliness, and in your godliness, brotherly kindness, and in your brotherly kindness, love. For if these qualities are yours **and are increasing**, they render you neither useless nor unfruitful in the true knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.

### **2 Corinthians 7:1**

Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all defilement of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.

### **Galatians 4:9**

But now that you have come to know God, or rather to be **known by God**, how is it that you turn back again to the weak and worthless elemental things, to which you **desire** to be enslaved all over again?

### **1 Thessalonians 5:16-18**

Rejoice always; pray without ceasing; in everything give thanks; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.

## **EVENING**

### **Psalms 16:11**

You will make known to me the path of life;  
In Your presence is fullness of joy;  
In Your right hand there are pleasures forever.

### **2 Corinthians 5:9**

Therefore we also have as our ambition, whether at home or absent, to be pleasing to Him.

### **Colossians 3:23-24**

Whatever you do, do your work heartily, as for the Lord rather than for men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance. It is the Lord Christ whom you serve.

### **1 John 2:28**

Now, little children, abide in Him, so that when He appears, we may have confidence and not shrink away from Him in shame at His coming.

### **Revelation 22:11-13 (ASV)**

He that is unrighteous, let him do unrighteousness still: and he that is filthy, let him be made filthy still: and he that is righteous, let him do righteousness still: and he that is holy, let him be made holy still. Behold, I come quickly; and my reward is with me, to render to each man according as his work is.

### **2 Corinthians 11:3**

But I am afraid that, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, your minds will be led astray from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ.