

SERVICE FOR THE BUILDING UP OF THE CHURCH

(Saturday—Evening Session)

Message Six

The Basis of Service—the Fire from the Altar

Scripture Reading: Heb. 12:29; Dan. 7:9-10; Luke 12:49-50;
Rev. 4:5; Exo. 3:2, 4, 6; Lev. 6:13

I. God is a consuming fire—Heb. 12:29; Deut. 4:24; 9:3:

- A. As the burning One, God is holy; holiness is His nature, and whatever does not correspond with His holy nature He, as the consuming fire, will consume—Heb. 12:29.
- B. In Daniel 7:9-10 the Lord's throne was flames of fire, its wheels were a burning fire, and a stream of fire issued forth and came out from before Him; the fire here indicates that God is absolutely righteous and altogether holy.
- C. The Lord Jesus came to cast fire on the earth—Luke 12:49-50:
 1. The release of the glory of Christ's divinity was to cast fire on the earth—John 12:24.
 2. This fire is the impulse of the spiritual life, an impulse that comes from the Lord's released divine life.
- D. The seven Spirits of God are the seven lamps of fire burning before the throne; these lamps of fire are for the carrying out of God's administration—Rev. 4:5.
- E. The fire burning out of the midst of the thornbush was the Triune God, the God of resurrection—Exo. 3:2, 4, 6; Matt. 22:31-32.
- F. The word of God is a fire that burns us and many of the things in which we have confidence—Jer. 23:29; 5:14; 20:9.
- G. Those who have a desire to serve God must know that God is a consuming fire that burns and energizes; when God comes to the earth, fire comes to the earth, and when God enters into man, fire enters into man and burns in him—Heb. 12:29; Luke 12:49.
- H. The fire that burned on the altar of the burnt offering came down from the heavens—Lev. 9:24:
 1. After coming down from the heavens, that fire burned continually upon the altar—6:13.
 2. The divine fire, the burning Triune God, enables us to serve and even to sacrifice our lives—Rom. 12:11.

II. Every service to God must be based on the fire from the altar of burnt offering—Lev. 9:24; 16:12-13; 6:13; 10:1-2:

- A. The service that we render to God must originate from the fire on the altar of burnt offering, and our service must be the issue of the burning of this fire.
- B. God wanted the service of the children of Israel to be based on this fire; the burning of incense was their service to God, but the fire used for burning incense had to be taken from the altar—6:13.
- C. Our service must come out of the burning of God's fire—Exo. 3:2, 4, 6.

- D. Fire is a source of energy; in order for our service to be full of energy, our service must pass through the fire on the altar—Lev. 6:13:
 - 1. This fire should be the energy, the driving force, the impulse, within us; if we have this fire, our service will be out of God, not out of ourselves—Luke 12:49.
 - 2. The energy and the motivating power for the New Testament service began with fire from heaven; the fire that descended upon the Galilean fishermen became the energy and the motivating power within them—Acts 2:3.
 - 3. This fire burns on those who love God, who offer themselves to God, who are willing to forsake everything for God, and who are willing to place themselves in His hand in order to be broken—Lev. 9:24.
- E. The fire from the altar is the genuine motivating power of service—6:13:
 - 1. What God does concerning our service is to send His fire to burn within us—Luke 12:49; Rom. 12:11.
 - 2. If we offer ourselves to God sincerely, fire will descend from heaven and burn us; this burning will become the energy that moves us, and the issue of this burning will be our service.
- F. The fire on the altar produces a powerful service:
 - 1. The altar of burnt offering is the cross of the Lord Jesus, and the fire is the Spirit—Gal. 2:20; Acts 2:3.
 - 2. The basis of genuine service is knowing the cross and placing ourselves on the cross in order to be gained by God and to allow the divine fire to burn within us; this produces service—Lev. 6:13; Rom. 12:11.
- G. Those who experience the fire from the altar build with gold, silver, and precious stones—1 Cor. 3:12:
 - 1. Such a work is full of the element of God, has the power of the cross, and expresses God—1:18; Phil. 1:20.
 - 2. Only work that is produced through burning is of gold, silver, and precious stones; the work that is not produced through burning is of wood, grass, and stubble—1 Cor. 3:12.
 - 3. The day will come when the work of each will be tested by fire; if our work is the issue of fire, our work will stand the test of fire—v. 13.

III. We must not serve God with strange fire but with the fire from the altar—Lev. 10:1-2; 9:24; 6:13:

- A. According to typology, strange fire is any fire other than that which burns on the altar—10:1.
- B. The failure of Nadab and Abihu lay in their failure to use the fire from the altar.
- C. Strange fire is fire of the self; it is fire that issues from the soulish life, the fleshly life, and the natural life—Matt. 16:24-26; 1 Cor. 2:14:
 - 1. Strange fire means that the self-life interferes with the work of God.
 - 2. Although the works are God's, the self-life wants to dictate the way the works are carried out.
 - 3. Offering up strange fire is employing the self's methods and wisdom and insisting on the self's proposals in the service of God.

- D. Nadab and Abihu were judged not because they did something that was not for God but because they acted according to the natural life and did something for God in a natural way—Lev. 10:1-2.
- E. God pays attention not only to whether or not there is fire but also to the source and nature of the fire; our zeal must come from the altar—6:13.

IV. If we would serve God, we should not quench the Spirit but fan into flame the gift of God, which is in our spirit, and be burning in spirit—1 Thes. 5:19; 2 Tim. 1:6-7; Rom. 12:11:

- A. The word *quench* in 1 Thessalonians 5:19 implies fire:
 - 1. The Spirit is burning within us.
 - 2. Because the Spirit causes our spirit to be burning and our gift to be flaming, we should not quench Him—v. 19.
- B. There is fire in our spirit, and we need to fan our spirit into flame—2 Tim. 1:6-7:
 - 1. The spirit in 2 Timothy 1:7 denotes our human spirit, regenerated and indwelt by the Holy Spirit—John 3:6; Rom. 8:16.
 - 2. To fan into flame the gift of God is related to our regenerated spirit—2 Tim. 1:6-7:
 - a. The fanning of our gift into flame is the fanning of our spirit into flame.
 - b. Our God-given spirit is what we must fan into flame; we must fan our spirit, for the spiritual gift is in our spirit.
 - c. If we want to fan our spirit into flame, we need to open our mouth, open our heart, and open our spirit and call on the name of the Lord—Rom. 10:13.
- C. If we do not quench the Spirit but fan our spirit into flame, we will be burning in spirit, serving the Lord—12:11.

Excerpts from the Ministry:

**THE FIRE FROM THE ALTAR BEING
THE BASE OF OUR SERVICE TO GOD**

Every service to God must be based on the fire from the altar of burnt offering. In the Old Testament the priests burned incense before God. The burning of incense symbolizes the service rendered to God by man. The fire used to burn the incense had to be taken from the altar of burnt offering (Lev. 16:12-13). If a person did not burn incense with the fire from the altar of burnt offering, that is, if he offered strange fire, his service was not accepted by God, and he suffered the judgment of death (10:1-2). This example shows that our service to God must be based on the fire from the altar of burnt offering.

When the children of Israel followed the tabernacle in their journey through the wilderness, their service before God began with the burning of the fire on the altar of burnt offering. The fire on the altar of burnt offering descended from God (9:24). The children of Israel could not begin their service to God until the fire descended. Although they had been delivered by God out of Egypt, had crossed the Red Sea, and had raised up the tabernacle at the foot of Mount Sinai, they could

not serve God, because they did not have a basis for their service. The basis of their service was the altar of burnt offering with fire burning upon it. It was not adequate to have the altar of burnt offering. The altar had to have the fire that descended from God.

God delivered the children of Israel out of Egypt so that they might serve Him (Exo. 3:12; 9:1). After the Israelites were rescued out of Egypt, they were in a position to serve God. However, they could not serve Him, because they did not have the altar. Even after the tabernacle was raised up and the altar of burnt offering was put before the entrance of the tabernacle, the children of Israel still could not serve God, because fire had not yet descended from heaven. At the beginning of Leviticus God was before the Israelites, yet they still could not serve Him. It was not until chapter 9 that God led them to do what was necessary for fire to come down from heaven.

The offering of the burnt offering was the prerequisite for fire to descend from heaven. Merely having the altar was not sufficient; the burnt offering had to be placed on the altar. After the sacrifice of the burnt offering was killed, skinned, cut, washed, and placed on the altar, fire could descend from heaven. God wanted the service of the children of Israel to be based on this fire. The burning of incense was their service to God, but the fire used for burning incense had to be taken from the altar. Hence, the service that we render to God must originate from the fire on the altar of burnt offering, and our service must be the issue of the burning of this fire.

Instead of using the fire from the altar, Nadab and Abihu used their own fire to burn incense in their service to God (10:1). Consequently, their service was not accepted by God, and they suffered the judgment of death (v. 2). This incident is a warning from God that our service must be based on the fire from the altar of burnt offering. We cannot use any energy other than this fire. Every item of the service of the children of Israel before God issued out of the fire burning on the altar of burnt offering.

Fire is a source of energy. Everything that moves in the physical world uses energy, and energy is produced through burning. In order for our service to be full of energy, our service must pass through the fire on the altar. This is not strange fire, which is of man and of the earth. Rather, this is holy fire. This fire is of God and of heaven. Our service must come out of the burning of God's fire. This fire should be the energy, the driving force, the impulse within us. Then our service will be out of God, not out of ourselves.

God accepted the service of the Israelites based on the fire from the altar of burnt offering. Shortly after entering the land of Canaan, the children of Israel failed, became desolate, and the Ark was carried away. As a result, the people could not serve God properly. After a period of desolation, David was raised up by God. David had a desire to serve God and to build a house for God. This desire was fulfilled through his son Solomon. After Solomon finished building the temple, he took the bronze altar, the altar of burnt offering, and put it in the temple. He also offered sacrifices and the burnt offering upon the altar (2 Chron. 7:1). At that time, the service to God was resumed.

Therefore, the service of the children of Israel in the temple was based on the fire from the altar of burnt offering. Every time they burned incense and served before God, they had to pass through the altar of burnt offering. They had to use the fire taken from the altar to burn incense. The fire was kept burning on the altar continually until the destruction of the temple (Lev. 6:13).

When the Lord Jesus was on the earth, He was the tabernacle of God, the temple of God (John 1:14; 2:21). Any people who had the desire to serve God had to serve through the Lord Jesus. They had to go to Him. The Lord also set up an altar—the cross on Golgotha—and offered Himself upon it as the burnt offering. Then one day fire came down. This fire was the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:1-4). The Lord Jesus Himself was willing to go to the cross and offer Himself to God. He also led Peter, John, James, and the rest of His lovers and followers to offer themselves to God, just as He did. Therefore, God accepted them as a satisfying fragrance of Christ (cf. 2 Cor. 2:15). Before Pentecost a hundred and twenty lovers of Jesus gathered in an upper room in Jerusalem (Acts 1:13-15) and presented themselves to God. As a result, on the day of Pentecost the Spirit descended upon them as tongues of fire. This was the beginning of the New Testament service. The New Testament service began on the day of Pentecost with the fire that came down and began to burn.

The energy and the motivating power for the New Testament service did not originate in man, that is, in the Galilean fishermen. The energy and the motivating power for the New Testament service began with fire from heaven. The fire that descended upon the Galilean fishermen became the energy and the motivating power within them. After the day of Pentecost they could speak for God, preach the gospel, save sinners, and establish churches. The disciples were not the source of the power for their work. The source of that power was heaven; the power came from the fire that descended from heaven.

At the time of Pentecost there was a great number of people in Jerusalem. However, the fire descended only on the hundred and twenty because they were on the altar of burnt offering. The fire of the Spirit descends only on the altar of burnt offering. This was not the fire of judgment, which will come in the future. This was the fire of salvation (Luke 12:49). This fire burns on those who love God, who offer themselves to God, who are willing to forsake everything for God, and who are willing to place themselves in His hands in order to be slain and broken. Their service to God is the issue of the burning. Whether in the Old Testament type or in the New Testament reality, man's service to God always comes out of the fire from the altar.

**THE FIRE FROM THE ALTAR
BEING THE GENUINE MOTIVATING POWER OF SERVICE**

The only thing that God does concerning man's service is to send His fire to burn within man. To serve God and to work for Him mean that man is joined to God and is mingled with God. It seems as though man is serving God. However, the service comes out of God; it does not originate in man. The service is God moving through man. Without the human element, there cannot be service. However, if there is only the human element, the service is not acceptable to God. In order for our service to have spiritual value and be acceptable to God, He must move through us and serve

through us. This is the purpose of the altar. God is calling those who love Him and desire to satisfy His heart's desire to offer themselves on the altar.

In Romans 12:1 the apostle Paul exhorts us to present our bodies a living sacrifice. This means that we must pay the price to forsake everything of ourselves. If we are willing to present ourselves on the altar, the divine fire will come down on us and pass through us. The issue of this burning will be our service, our work. On the one hand, such a work may be considered our work because we have a part in it; on the other hand, it is not our work because it is not out of us. This work is God working through us by being joined to us.

On the one hand, it was Peter who stood up on the day of Pentecost to preach the gospel (Acts 2:14-41); on the other hand, it was God who preached the gospel. It was the fire of God burning in Peter and speaking through Peter. This is an example of man being gained by God and of God being gained by man. God and man were joined and mingled together.

This is the service that God desires. When iron is being purified in fire, the iron seems to be swallowed up by the fire, but at the same time, the fire seems to burn in the iron. The iron becomes red because fire is burning in the iron. Then the fire burns wherever the iron is placed. We may say that it is a rod of iron, or we may say that it is a ball of fire. The fire and the iron become one. This is an illustration of the Christian service and work.

Genuine Christian service is not of man. Rather, genuine Christian service is God moving through man. God does not force man to receive Him. God has erected an altar, and those who are willing, those who love Him, may come forward willingly to be dealt with, broken, and placed on the altar. Such a person can say, "Lord, here I am. My only desire is to satisfy Your need." If we would offer ourselves sincerely in this way, fire will descend from heaven and burn us. This burning will become the energy that moves us. The issue of this burning will be our service. God wants His fire to burn in us.

THE WORK PRODUCED THROUGH BURNING BEING GOLD, SILVER, AND PRECIOUS STONES

Those who experience the altar of burnt offering build with gold, silver, and precious stones (1 Cor. 3:12). Gold refers to the divine life and nature. Silver refers to Christ's redemption and to the principle of the cross. Precious stones refer to God's image. The work of believers who experience the altar of burnt offering is full of the element of God, has the power of the cross, and expresses God.

Those who do not experience the altar of burnt offering work according to what they are. They build with wood, grass, and stubble (v. 12). Wood refers to the nature of the natural man. Grass refers to the man of the flesh (1 Pet. 1:24). Stubble refers to things grown out of the earth, earthly things. Human methods and common practices in society are of the earth, not of heaven. Precious stones denote the heavenly atmosphere; in contrast, stubble denotes the earthly situation. Only work that is produced through burning is of gold, silver, and precious stones. The work that is not produced through burning is of wood, grass, and stubble.

The day will come when the work of each will be tested by fire (1 Cor. 3:13). If our work is the issue of fire, our work will stand the test of fire. Gold, silver, and precious stones are of God and are produced through His burning. As such, the work of gold, silver, and precious stones will endure being tested by God's fire. Furthermore, those who carry out such a work will receive a reward (v. 14). If our work is according to the natural man, by the flesh, and earthy, it is of wood, grass, and stubble. When the work of each is manifested by fire, such a work will not endure the test but will be consumed, and we will suffer loss (v. 15). (*The Service for Building Up the House of God*, pp. 19-23, 27-28)