

Judgment Begins With the House of God

We are living in times of great shaking, times of refining and purifying. How should we respond? In the words of the gospel song, and in the spirit of Isaiah 6, we should say, "Take the coal, touch *my lips*, here I stand." Let the cleansing begin with me.

Without question, God is purifying His church, bringing the dross to the surface in the heat of His refiner's fire. It is ugly. It is painful. It is grievous.

Many hearts are broken and many lives devastated.

God's children are wondering, "Who can we trust? Where do we turn? Is anything we believed real?"

The truth is that we are witnessing the hand of God at work. We are witnessing the love of God in action.

This is a move of the Spirit. This is what happens when the Lord draws near. It is intensely difficult but it is awe-inspiring as well.

As the prophet Malachi wrote:

"I will send my messenger, who will prepare the way before me. Then suddenly the Lord you are seeking will come to his temple; the messenger of the covenant, whom you desire, will come," says the Lord Almighty. But who can endure the day of his coming? Who can stand when he appears? For he will be like a refiner's fire or a launderer's soap. He will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver; he will purify the Levites and refine them like gold and silver. Then the Lord will have men who will bring offerings in righteousness, and the offerings of Judah and Jerusalem will be acceptable to the

Lord, as in days gone by, as in former years" (Mal. 3:1-4, NIV).

One of my ministry colleagues rightly said in a text that what is happening today is not about this fallen leader or that fallen leader. It is about the man in the mirror.

Precisely so.

This is a time for self-reflection, for humility, for getting low. Woe to those who exalt themselves at times like this!

Toward the end of the Brownsville Revival, there was a very painful and public split between Pastor John Kilpatrick and me, between the church he pastored and the school I led.

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For two years we could not find a way to reconcile until the Lord spoke to me while returning from a ministry trip to India.

"Don't be so self-righteous," the Spirit said to me, not with reference to the events of the split but with reference to my whole life.

We were reconciled shortly thereafter, and we are ministry colleagues to this day.

Perhaps the Lord is speaking that same word to many of us? Perhaps we too are guilty of the sin of self-righteousness?

Maybe you didn't commit adultery. Maybe you didn't abuse a minor. Maybe you didn't commit financial fraud. But Jesus also said that if you gave way to lustful thoughts, you committed adultery in your heart. And if you spoke ugly words about your brother or sister, you are in danger of the fires of hell.

This is not a time to gloat and boast. This is a time to fear.

This is a time to get low. This is a time to say, "Search *my life*, Lord."

Look at the seven things God hates as listed in Proverbs 6. The Bible actually calls them "detestable," the exact same word used for homosexual practice in Leviticus 18:22. Notice carefully that sexual sin is not even on this list:

There are six things the Lord hates, seven that are detestable to him: haughty eyes, a lying tongue, hands that shed innocent blood, a heart that devises wicked schemes, feet that are quick to rush into evil, a false witness who pours out lies and a person who stirs up conflict in the community (Prov. 6:16–19).

And notice those last two categories: "a false witness who pours out lies and a person who stirs up conflict in the community."

The fact is that God could damn some of us to hell just for our posts on social media—our defaming, mocking, slanderous, nasty, judgmental posts, posts that stand side by side with our lovely gospel posts. Careful!

James (Jacob) had some very strong words about the destructive power of the tongue:

"Consider what a great forest is set on fire by a small spark. The tongue also is a fire, a world of evil among the parts of the body. It corrupts the whole body, sets the whole course of one's life on fire, and is itself set on fire by hell. ... With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse human beings, who have been made in God's likeness. Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing. My brothers and sisters, this should not be" (James 3:5b-6, 9–10).

For good reason, Isaiah the prophet, after encountering the

blazing holiness of God, exclaimed, "Woe to me! ... I am ruined! For I am a man of *unclean lips*, and I live among a people of *unclean lips*, and my eyes have seen the King, the Lord Almighty" (Isa. 6:5, author's emphasis).

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Unclean lips reveal unclean hearts.

There are "Christian critics" who delight in finding fault, who are quick to repeat negative stories without factual verification, quick to stir up dissension, quick to look down at others who are not in their camp.

Careful, my friend! Your day will come as well. God hates a proud heart as much as He hates adultery. He detests bearing false witness as much as He hates stealing. You will be judged in the same way you judge.

That's why Proverbs urges us not to gloat when our enemy falls. That same judgment could quickly turn on us (Prov. 24:17-18).

God hates our double standards and our religious hypocrisy. He hates our selfish ambition, our lack of love, our divided hearts, our carnality.

God hates it when, to use a phrase coined by a friend, your shame becomes my fame.

That's why Paul, after warning the Corinthians to learn from the lessons of God's judgments on Israel (1 Cor. 10:1-11) said, "So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall!" (1 Cor. 10:12).

In these difficult days, there are nonbelievers who are mocking the church, as if every preacher were corrupt and every pastor immoral. They fail to recognize that this season

of purging actually gives evidence to the reality of God. And they fail to understand that judgment begins with God's household, "and if it begins with us, what will the outcome be for those who do not obey the gospel of God? And, 'If it is hard for the righteous to be saved, what will become of the ungodly and the sinner?'" (1 Pet. 4:17b-18).

So, this same Peter who taught that if we grew in grace and pursued holiness, we would receive a "rich welcome into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (2 Pet. 1:11) also said that "the righteous are barely saved" (1 Pet. 4:18b, NET).

Yes, the righteous, those who love the Lord, those who lead godly lives, those who seek to honor and obey Him—even they are "barely saved." What, then, will happen to "the ungodly and the sinner"?

Let us, then, get low, asking God to cleanse us and purge us and make us like His Son, granting us true and deep repentance where we have fallen short.

His mercy is overwhelming and His redemptive power amazing. But He does not wink at sin. And He loathes a self-righteous spirit.

God is seeking to accomplish a very deep work in His entire body. And if we fixate on sexual sin alone, as critically important as that is, we will completely miss the comprehensive level of purity to which He is calling each of us. It is time to step so much higher in all the deep crevices of our lives. Let us not miss this opportunity when the Spirit is so graciously moving!

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