

**Sun., April 18: Strange Fire: All Consuming**

Memory Verse: "The one who fears the Lord is blessed." -Psalm 112:1

Message: Strange Fire #2: Strange Fire: All Consuming -Pastor David

Text: Psalm 111:10 "The Fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom; all those who practice it have a good understanding."

Sermon Scripture: Hebrews 12:25-29

Reading of Scripture: 1 John 4:15-21

Blurb: We often think of God as a smiling grandparent who accepts us however we are. This is true, for God does accept us just as we are. Yet God loves us too much to leave us the way we are. God's holiness perfects us, refining us into the full intention for who God created us to be. God is an all-consuming fire!

**[Recorded Worship Beginning]**

**ACOLYTE & DOXOLOGY:** Lighting the candle symbolizing the presence of God -Pastor Andrew

**WELCOME** -Pastor Andrew

**MEMORY VERSE:** -Pastor Andrew

"The one who fears the Lord is blessed." -Psalm 112:1

**WORSHIP MUSIC SET** -Sanctify

*Come, Holy Ghost, Our Hearts Inspire  
Different*

Worship prayer -Pastor Andrew

**[Live Worship Beginning]**

**GATHERING SONG:** *Consuming Fire* -Sanctify

**ACOLYTE & DOXOLOGY:** Lighting the candle symbolizing the presence of God -Pastor Andrew

**WELCOME** -Pastor David

**MEMORY VERSE:** -Pastor David

"The one who fears the Lord is blessed." -Psalm 112:1

**WORSHIP MUSIC SET** -Sanctify

*Empty Grave  
Come, Holy Ghost, Our Hearts Inspire  
Different*

Worship prayer -Pastor Andrew

**[Both Recorded & Live Worship]**

**SCRIPTURE READING: 1 John 4:15-21 (CEB) -Reader:**

**John says that God is only love. But that love also perfects those who love God. We then also love others with that same love. 1 John 4:15-21,**

**15 If any of us confess that Jesus is God’s Son, God remains in us and we remain in God. 16 We have known and have believed the love that God has for us.**

**God is love, and those who remain in love remain in God and God remains in them. 17 This is how love has been perfected in us, so that we can have confidence on the Judgment Day, because we are exactly the same as God is in this world. 18 There is no fear in love, but perfect love drives out fear, because fear expects punishment. The person who is afraid has not been made perfect in love. 19 We love because God first loved us. 20 Those who say, “I love God” and hate their brothers or sisters are liars. After all, those who don’t love their brothers or sisters whom they have seen can hardly love God whom they have not seen! 21 This commandment we have from him: Those who claim to love God ought to love their brother and sister also.**

**GROW MOMENT “Photo Scavenger Hunt” -Sue LaVigne**

**THE APOSTLES’ CREED, COLBY KEINTZ’S VERSION -Colby Keintz**

My name is Colby Keintz, and this is my version of the Apostles’ Creed. Please join me.

I believe in God the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth.

I believe in Jesus Christ His only Son, our Lord and savior. Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified for our sins, died and was buried. On the third day He rose from the dead and ascended into heaven and is seated on the right hand of God the Father Almighty. From there He will come and judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy Church, and the communion of the saints. I believe in the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of our bodies and in everlasting life.

Amen.

**PRAYERS -Pastor Andrew**

**GENERATIONAL BRIDGE -Pastor Andrew with children.**

**MESSAGE: (Strange Fire #2) Strange Fire: All Consuming**

**PP#1: Strange Fire: All Consuming**

“The Fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom; all those who practice it have a good understanding.” -Psalm 111:10

Strange Fire: All Consuming. Psalm 111:10 “The Fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom; all those who practice it have a good understanding.”

**PP#2:** “The Fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom; all those who practice it have a good understanding.” -Psalm 111:10

“There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear. For fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not been perfected in love.” -1 John 4:18

I grew up hearing the verse “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom,” over and over again. Everyone kept saying it to me as I was growing up. That’s why it’s important to have kids in church, by the way. The church family reinforces the godly instruction that parents lay down at home. It’s kind of like rebar to concrete. And there are times that kids hear the wisdom better from other voices than their parents!

But it kind of puzzled me. I was told I needed to learn to fear the Lord, but I was also told that God is a loving God whom I could *run to* even when I really messed up. I thought that we were to run *away from* people we feared. Or even those fearsome folks who could make life miserable for me. I thought about the teachers I feared the most. I tried to avoid them as much as possible.

So, I was told to love God and fear God. Hmm.

But 1 John 4:18 says, “There is no fear in love, for perfect love casts out fear. Fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not been perfected in love.”

This seems to contradict the fearing the Lord passages.

Well, let’s stop here a minute and talk about how to understand Scripture. There are a lot of Scriptures in the Bible, and usually, we can get track what it’s saying. But sometimes we run into passages that are rather confusing, or, like here, passages that seem to contradict each other. What then? How are we to understand them?

**PP#3:** How to read confusing Bible passages:

1. Affirm it is right and true

I offer three steps for tackling confusing Scriptures. First: always affirm that all Scripture is right and true. Start there. Resist the urge we hear so often from the world that anything confusing or unsavory in the Bible means that Scripture is untrustworthy. The world is on a crusade to discredit the Bible. Hang on to the faith conviction that it is true, even when its confusing. Guard against the reaction that because I don’t understand it, or because it doesn’t make sense to me, or because I don’t like what it is saying, that I can dismiss or ignore it. By faith Christians affirm that Scripture is right and true. So, step one: remind yourself it’s true. Then, go digging a bit more!

**PP#4:** How to read confusing Bible passages:

1. Affirm it is right and true
2. Seek to understand the main point

Second step: try to understand what the Bible is trying to convey. That includes reading the immediate context around it. Ask, “What’s it’s main point?” Also, don’t get derailed by a difficult word or phrase. If your father abused you or ran out on you, don’t reject calling God your heavenly Father. Pursue what the Bible is saying when it calls God our heavenly Father. God is like human fathers when at our best, or the way God intends for us to be. When the Bible talks about slavery, dig deeper and see that it is describing the reality of the ancient world and not saying that it is the way God wants things to be. The Bible is not trying to argue that slavery is good. It’s simply stating that slavery is real. So, second step: listen for what the Bible is saying. Let it speak.

Samuel Clemens—better known as Mark Twain—was in a discussion about the confusing parts of the Bible. He said, “I am not troubled by the things in the Bible which I do not understand, but I am troubled by those things which I do understand and which I find very difficult to measure up to.” Often we try to explain away convicting truths from the Bible saying that we don’t understand them. Try to receive the main message being conveyed.

**PP#5:** How to read confusing Bible passages:

1. Affirm it is right and true
2. Seek to understand the main point
3. Use Scripture to interpret Scripture (John Wesley)

And a third step for confusing Bible verses comes from John Wesley. His advise was to use Scripture to interpret Scripture. Place the confusing passage or verse in context with other verses from the Bible, and remind yourself that they are all true together. So, whatever the confusing Bible verse may be, the only right way to understand it is a way that fits with the other verses, too.

**PP#6:** “The Fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom; all those who practice it have a good understanding.” -Psalm 111:10

“There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear. For fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not been perfected in love.” -1 John 4:18

Now, let’s go back to our confusing verse today: “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.” Does this mean that we should be afraid of God like we might be of a criminal? No. How about like a teacher who can fail us if we don’t perform correctly? Well, maybe a bit. If I have my work done as I ought, then I need not fear the teacher. “Perfect love casts out fear.” This cast out fear is fear of punishment. The fear of God, however, like in Psalm 111, is something else.

Let’s look at some of the other passages that talk about the fear of God. You know, when I started looking into this, I found them all over the place! There are dozens and dozens of passages that say this!

**PP#7:** “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.” -Psalm 111:10

“The fear of the Lord prolongs life.” -Proverbs 10:27

“Fearing the Lord is correct, lasting forever.” -Psalm 19:9

“Fearing the Lord is riches and honor and life.” -Proverbs 22:4

In the Psalms and Proverbs, the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, it prolongs life, it lasts forever, it is like riches and honor and life. Fearing the Lord is a very good thing! And it’s good for you! Here are some more.

**PP#8:** For those who fear the Lord, it will “go well with them and with their descendants forever.” -Deut. 5:29

“If you will fear the Lord and serve Him and obey His voice...it will be well.” -1 Sam. 12:14

“Those who fear the Lord lack nothing” -Psalm 34:9

“The one who fears the Lord is blessed.” -Psalm 112:1

“Those who fear Him He fulfills their desires.” Psalm 145:19

Those who fear the Lord: it will go well with them and their descendants, it will be well, they lack nothing, they are blessed, God fulfills their desires. That's why all those Christians kept telling me to fear the Lord! It was good for me.

So, what is this kind of fear, then...fear that leads to help and blessing? When I was learning to hunt, my firearms safety instructor always said, "Fear every gun!" What he meant by that was handle every gun *with respect*. My driving instructor told me to fear the car. *Respect it*. Take great care when getting ready to handle it. I taught my kids in the kitchen to fear the knife. Not that it was bad, but because it was so good! Guns, when not handled with respect, can cause great harm. Cars, when not driven carefully, can cause great harm. Knives, when not handled rightly, will cut you!

God's people must always remember that God is an all-consuming fire! He is not a harmless washcloth that just lies there. God is way beyond what we can handle. *Our approach to God must be respect and honor and taking care*. That is fearing God. He is Himself the very force of life. He is the power that controls all things. He is so pure and holy that even trying to touch Him is instant death.

If you fear God—and that means you live your life like God is in charge, not you!—you will experience great blessing. But if you do not, you will experience great harm.

**PP#9:** Abraham obeyed God and was declared righteous "for fearing the Lord." -Genesis 22:12

"Moses said to the people, 'Do not fear, for God has come to test you, that the fear of Him may be before, that you may not sin.'" -Exodus 20:20

"Serve the Lord with fear." Psalm 2:11

"But in every nation anyone who fears Him and does what is right is acceptable to Him."  
Acts 10:35

Genesis 22:12, Abraham is declared righteous for fearing God *by obeying God*. Healthy fear means 1. obedience. Moses tells the people to fear the Lord *so* "that you may not sin." Godly fear 2. keeps them from sinning. It's a little like taking a test with the teacher over my shoulder. I guarantee you I will not try to cheat. Fearing God means 3. serving God. And Acts 10:35 says that people everywhere who fear God and therefore do what is right, they are acceptable. This is what all those Christians kept saying to me: "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom." That means learning what God says is true, not what David thinks is true. And that means, then, to live in God's path of life, doing what is right to God. Even though I may not like it, or when I don't think it makes sense, when I fear God I will do it anyway, trusting that our loving God has given us His path of life for our blessing.

**PP#10:** "Since we have these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body and spirit, bringing holiness to completion in the fear of God." 2 Corinthians 7:1

"Fear God." -1 Peter 2:17

2 Corinthians 7:1 says, "Since we have all these promises [from our good God who only wants to give us what is best,] beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body and spirit, bringing holiness to completion in the fear of God." The ultimate goal is holiness. It's spiritual maturity. Mature discipleship. God is wanting to clean us up from all the selfish ways we live for pleasure and self-justification, and push us toward holiness.

You know, this is what our parents did, when they were at their best. They pushed us to be better. They wanted more for us, than what we even wanted for ourselves. This is like our God. Our parents, and God, use positive and negative reinforcement to train us in healthy, holy patterns, and behaviors, and thoughts, and desires. It's a long, growing up process, a process of maturing. Fear God!

**PP#11:** "The Lord your God is like a fire that burns everything up. He wants you to worship only Him." -Deuteronomy 4:24

"Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that can't be shaken, let's continue to express our gratitude. With this gratitude, let's serve in a way that is pleasing to God with respect and awe, because our God really is a consuming fire." -Hebrews 12:28-29

I think now we may be a bit more ready to tackle some of the other harder passages in the Bible about God as an all-consuming fire. Fire is another of those things you must treat with respect, with care. It can do amazing good, or horrible harm. Our message series is hinged on this key verse, from Deuteronomy 4:24, "The Lord your God is like a fire that burns everything up. He wants you to worship only Him." And by "burns everything up," here, it means that God is like a purifying fire. Put the pot in the fire, and all the germs are burnt off. Take metal and melt it in fire. The dross is burned away and only the pure metal remains. Fire purifies. God is like this. God is so holy and pure that only what is perfect can be near Him. So, take care, extreme care! Fear God!

Fearing God means we run to Jesus who gives us His righteousness. Because of Him, our sin is removed and we can stand safely with God. Then, this love we experience when we have Jesus casts out our fear of being purified or of eternal punishment. God is a jealous God. Take care. No cheating on Him! Worship only Him!

This verse is quoted in the New Testament, in Hebrews 12:28-29. "28 Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that can't be shaken, let's continue to express our gratitude. [We respond to God giving us the blessing of an eternal inheritance by serving Him in gratitude.] With this gratitude, let's serve in a way that is pleasing to God with respect and awe, 29 because our God really is a consuming fire." What does it mean to fear God? Respect and awe.

**PP#12:** *Two images for God as holy: 1. Angry God smiting and 2. Sad God regretting*

This helps us understand some of the most troubling passages of the Bible. The most horrific one, I think, might be the flood. God kills all the people of the earth except Noah and his family. Why? Often people portray God as an angry, smiting God, vengefully punishing all sin. But listen to what it says in the Flood Story. It says, "The Lord saw that humanity had become thoroughly evil on the earth and that every idea their minds thought up was always completely evil. The Lord regretted making human beings on the earth, and He was heartbroken." (Genesis 6:5-6) They no longer feared God.

Sodom and Gomorrah, whom God destroyed by raining down fire and brimstone: we forget that before that God said that even if 10 people weren't totally evil He would spare the cities. Alas, there were not. But, the only godly family was told to flee. Then, Genesis 19:24-25, "And the Lord rained down burning asphalt from the skies onto Sodom and Gomorrah. The Lord destroyed these cities, the entire valley, everyone who lived in the cities, and all of the fertile land's vegetation." Why? Because their sin was just so great. Even the vegetation! God is an all-consuming fire!

God drowned the Egyptian army for pursuing the Israelites. God even killed the Israelites who moaned and rebelled against Him in the desert. Remember the guy who tried to steady the Ark of the Covenant? He died when he touched the Ark to keep it from falling. Why? Because you just can't do things your way. God is an all-consuming fire. You can't treat Him like you want. You treat Him like *He* says you can. Not because He's elitist, but because His holiness will burn you!

**PP#13: Strange Fire: All-Consuming**

1. God's holiness makes Him an all-consuming fire

On one hand we don't understand purity very well. We think about God as a kind grandparent who smiles and invites her messy grandson into her lap. It's okay to have dirty hands...you're more important than my clean dress. God is loving, and by that many people seem to think that means accepting of whatever we want to do. It's okay, God loves you.

Well, it's true that God loves you. And it's true that God accepts you, however you are. But that does not mean that God can receive you as you are. Love also means holiness. If I truly love my wife, I cannot come to her with my mistress. If I love my children, I will tell them they cannot handle a knife however they want. Holiness means God is an all-consuming fire. We recently saw the terrible cost of sin when Jesus hung on the cross. We saw holiness, but we also saw mind-blowing love.

**PP#14: Strange Fire: All-Consuming**

1. God's holiness makes Him an all-consuming fire
2. We come before God in humility

Because we don't understand holiness very well, we don't understand God very well. We make God into whomever we want, or by what we reason makes sense. "God ought to be this way. I can't imagine a God who would be like that." We don't take care to treat God as holy fire.

And when we don't, we miss out on the blessings God plans for us. We walk in a way that brings undue hardship and struggle. It's not that God's path is free from trials. But God's path—perhaps narrow and uphill—does take us around many snares and traps that we could fall into. We have to trust that God's way is better, and follow it even when it doesn't make sense.

"The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom." Holy living starts with accepting God the way God is. It means letting God be God, and accepting how God has revealed Himself in the Scriptures as the sufficient and necessary revelation for human salvation.

God's purity, God's holiness, fearing God is a grand affront to our own human self-will. Easter is only Good News if we surrender our lives to Jesus, empty ourselves of our selfishness, deny ourselves, receive Him as our Lord, become poor in spirit and live in humility.

**PP#15: Strange Fire: All-Consuming**

1. God's holiness makes Him an all-consuming fire
2. We come before God in humility
3. When God (or Scripture) offends you, you need more fear!

When you find yourself offended by God, or how the Bible reveals God, then check your fear! You're running low. You need to fear up on holy fear!

I said that on one hand we don't understand holiness very well. But I think in another way, perhaps we do understand it better now. I think the COVID pandemic has made us live with a more purity mind set. You see, we have come to realize that we just can't go around doing whatever we want. There is a virus that is very harmful to at least some. We may not like it. It may make no sense. It may not be what we want, but we have learned to live with it as our reality. And that means that we need to mask up when we are with others in tight spaces. We realize that we are not virus-free.

This can help us understand holiness. We must come into God's presence with masks. By masks, I mean approaching God with holy fear. It's because we are vulnerable. We are in danger. We can be hurt. So we mask up with fear when we approach God. It's not for God's sake. It's for ours. Imperfection cannot withstand the all-consuming fire. We cling to Jesus! He is our mask! And then He works in us through the Holy Spirit over time to purify us from the inside out.

God's love makes Him holy. But God's love also makes Him send Jesus to die for our sin and to give us new life. God's purity consumes impurity in us. But God's purity is also a gift He gives to us to make us pure, from the inside out, so we can be with Him for eternity.

But for now, we as God's people mask up: mask up with humility. For, "the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom."

Amen.

**[IN-PERSON WORSHIP ONLY] CLOSING SONG: *One True God* -Sanctify**

**OFFERING: -Pastor David**

-Give of your monies to God's work through this church. You can give in person, mail it in or, most conveniently, you can make an automated transfer or a debit card payment on the church website or by using the "square" on the bulletin.

**ANNOUNCEMENTS -Pastor David**

Next Sunday's message: "Strange Fire: Final Fire"

**MEMORY VERSE -Pastor David**

"The one who fears the Lord is blessed." -Psalm 112:1

**BENEDICTION -Pastor David**

**ACOLYTE: God's light leads us out into the world.**