

*Pancho presented this text at the NSC-meeting in Järfälla March 7-9 echoing a 50-year-old prophetic message by Ralph Martin but which he says he confirms completely and which is of enormous importance today.*

## The Fire

*I have come to cast fire on the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled. (Luke 12:49)*

With these words, Jesus revealed an essential part of his mission and purpose in the world. He echoed John the Baptist's prophecy:

*"I baptize you with water for repentance, but he who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptize you in the Holy Spirit and in fire.<sup>12</sup> His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor and gather his wheat into the barn, but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire." (Matt 3:11-12)*

What is the fire that Jesus spoke of? It is the fire of God's burning love for his creation and the fire of his great wrath against all evil that seeks to destroy this creation. It is a sign of God's intense personal presence that saves and leads to joy those who receive him but rejects and condemns to torment those who harden their hearts and persist in proud sin.

**Fire is an image that the Bible uses throughout its breadth to describe the inner nature of God's heart in its dual qualities of love and wrath.** Throughout the record of thousands of years of God's dealings with humans, the image of fire appears and recurs with remarkable consistency. It is as if the inspired writers found this fundamental element, which all people have experienced and understood, almost uniquely capable of describing for every age and culture the reality of God's presence. **Fire burns. Fire purifies. Fire warms and gives light. Fire consumes and destroys.**

**God's love does the same: He is a consuming fire.** "For the LORD your God is a consuming fire, a jealous God" (Deut. 4:24) "For our God is a consuming fire." (Hebr 12:29-13:1). Fire is a manifestation of God's personal presence with people and of His protection and care for them.

His voice spoke to Moses from the burning bush.

"And the glory of the LORD appeared to the children of Israel like devouring fire on the top of the mountain." (Exodus 24:17).

Fire fell from heaven as a sign of God's presence in Solomon's temple on the day of its dedication. And it was Fire that fell again on the day of Pentecost when the Holy Spirit came into the lives of the disciples. At that moment of God's profound self-giving, there was SPIRIT and FIRE!

Fire expresses the intensity of God's love for people. It is a sublime and powerful love, a love "strong as death" and a passion as relentless as the grave. Its arrows are a blazing fire, a consuming flame. (Song of Solomon 8:6)

It is a fire of great and wonderful holiness, a purifying fire that burns out all sin in whoever comes in contact with it. Anguish accompanies this purification, as in the anguish of Jeremiah, when he cried out:

You have never seen anything like this, you who pass by; when have you seen such a plague as I have, which is laid upon me, when the Lord has afflicted me in the day of his fierce anger. (Lamentations 1:12)

We cannot change the Truth, we cannot change the Word of God, we should never try, just to please people so that they hear what they want to hear because the fire of God's love is also the fire of his wrath. It passes judgment on unrighteousness, destroys sinful people and cities, inspires terror in the wicked. (cf. Lev. 10:1–2; Gen. 19:24; Isa. 33:11–14, 43:2; Zeph. 1:18, 3:8; Isa. 66:15–16; Matt. 13:40–50, 25:41; Luke 17:29:7–3f; 5:3; 2 Pet. 3:7; Rev. 21: 8.

“The sinners in Zion tremble, the wicked are afraid: “Who can dwell with the devouring fire, with the everlasting flame?” (Isa. 33:14 NIV) But like the three men who escaped unharmed from the fiery furnace, those who fear the Lord and live in the fear of God will not be harmed by it, even though they live in its midst.

The many expressions that the fire of God’s love and wrath has taken in history will culminate in the great day when all people and nations will be judged by God. Depending on how they have responded to God’s approach in their lives, they will be brought into either the deep love and eternal union of God’s kingdom or into the unquenchable torment of hell.

But the fire of God is not withheld until the final day of judgment. Even now, those who through repentance and faith are united with God, shine with his fire, themselves becoming a manifestation of his fire and light to the world.

The fire of God that fell on the day of Pentecost ignited a flame that will never be extinguished. The life, the very Spirit of God, that fell upon the little group of men and women gathered in a room in Jerusalem transformed them. The fire of God fused them into one people, one body united in one heart and mind.

The creative heat of God radiated from them, healing sickness and transforming lives. The judgment of God blazed forth from them, casting out evil and convicting men of sin. Men saw the face of God revealed in that small group, they saw His Love and His truth and came running to be His.

Three thousand came in one day, five thousand in another; more were added to their number day by day. “The love of Christ compels us,” Paul exclaimed (2 Cor. 5:14), for the fire of God’s love and wrath caused him and the Christians of his day to kindle that fire in their world. It happens when the Holy Spirit burns brightly in the hearts of God’s people. The fire of love is manifested in the midst of creation, tangible in the lives of men. The fire of judgment, shedding its light on the evil of the world and clearly revealing the truth of sin.

**This is the very essence of the church's mission: to convince the world of its need for salvation, to reveal to the world the love of its Savior.**

**The fire of the Spirit that burns in the heart of the church is there to warm and touch lives throughout the world**