

## ISAIAH 9:18 – 10:4 PLAYING WITH FIRE

<sup>18</sup> Surely wickedness burns like a fire; it consumes briars and thorns, it sets the forest thickets ablaze, so that it rolls upward in a column of smoke. <sup>19</sup> By the wrath of the LORD Almighty the land will be scorched and the people will be fuel for the fire; no one will spare his brother. <sup>20</sup> On the right they will devour, but still be hungry; on the left they will eat, but not be satisfied. Each will feed on the flesh of his own offspring: <sup>21</sup> Manasseh will feed on Ephraim, and Ephraim on Manasseh; together they will turn against Judah.

Yet for all this, his anger is not turned away, his hand is still upraised.

<sup>10:1</sup> Woe to those who make unjust laws, to those who issue oppressive decrees, <sup>2</sup> to deprive the poor of their rights and withhold justice from the oppressed of my people, making widows their prey and robbing the fatherless. <sup>3</sup> What will you do on the day of reckoning, when disaster comes from afar? To whom will you run for help? Where will you leave your riches? <sup>4</sup> Nothing will remain but to cringe among the captives or fall among the slain.

Yet for all this, his anger is not turned away, his hand is still upraised.

A fire is very useful and comforting in its proper place. Without fire the kiln, the oven, the furnace, the forge and even the lamp would be useless. Yet the fire that is released from control by carelessness, arrogance or maliciousness quickly takes on a destructive and murderous life of its own. Such a fire also manifests no discrimination; it merely consumes all that is in its path. The careless homeowner who decides to burn his leaves on a dry windy day, will likely burn down his house, as well as that of his neighbor before the day is over.

Fire is, therefore, the perfect metaphor for self-centeredness. We must pay attention to what we do and how we affect the Gospel and our neighbors. With faith comes the need for introspection and self-examination as we live in a sinful and fallen world. As it has been said, if we are to talk the talk, we must be sure to be walking the walk. As a soldier must be disciplined in his personal training and focused on equipping himself for battle, we need to pay attention to our relationship to God on a personal level.

The proper confines for this fire of self-centeredness is its proper context, that is, that it is to be exercised according to God's will and for the good of the community. When, through pride, greed, or the lust for power, we focus on our selves, we set a fire free that will consume everything around it, including us. The fire of our self-focus will either surround us and cut us off as captives or it will kill us. Although this is a natural consequence of our self-centered attitudes and actions, the Prophet tells us that there is more to it. God's wrath is expressed not only in allowing us to suffer the natural consequences, but in addition, he will not deliver us from our chosen path of destruction. As long as we remain focused on our own gain and fame, *his anger is not turned away, his hand is still upraised.*

**Almighty and Holy God, as the Prophet cried out in your presence that he was a man of unclean lips among a people of unclean lips, make me ever aware of your presence with me through the Holy Spirit. Use your fire to cleanse me of my improper self-centeredness and fuel my zeal to obey your will. Amen.**