

The Fire of God's Presence

Removing the Clouds that Obscure the Son

Hebrews 12:1; Isaiah 59:1-2

Imagine waking up after one of those rare, perfect nights of sleep. You feel rested. Clear. Strong. Alive. You rise from bed with energy in your step. There's a quiet joy in your heart. You find yourself humming without even realizing it. The day ahead feels full of possibility. Your goals seem attainable. Your spirit feels light. Then you step outside. Instead of a wide blue sky and golden sunlight, you are met with thick layers of gray stretching from horizon to horizon. The sky feels lowered — pressed down. The light is dull and flat. The colors of creation seem muted, as if someone drained the vibrancy from the world. The air feels heavy. Damp and still. And slowly — almost imperceptibly — your optimism fades. It is as though the same clouds that obscure the beauty of the sky begin to drift into your mind. The plans that felt so vibrant when you awoke now seem distant. The joy dulls. The energy slows.

You are no longer thinking about thriving —
you are thinking about surviving.

Your step shortens.
Your vision narrows.
The day feels smaller.

But here is the truth:

The sun has not weakened.
Its brilliance has not faded.
Its warmth has not diminished.

It is still shining with full intensity —
it is simply hidden behind the clouds.

And that is why clouds are such a powerful spiritual picture.

There are days — perhaps many days — when we do not feel close to God.
Our worship feels dull.
Our prayers feel heavy.
Our joy feels muted.

But the Son has not dimmed.
His glory has not faded.
His presence has not been withdrawn.

The problem is not the absence of the Son — it is the presence of clouds. Unlike the clouds in the sky, which we cannot move, the spiritual clouds that obscure our view of Christ can be removed.

When we chase after what is not eternal...
when we harbor sin in secret...
when we allow competing loves to crowd our hearts...

Clouds move in. And slowly, the radiance of the Son — who shines infinitely brighter than our physical sun — becomes obscured.

Today, we are going to identify those clouds. Because the clouds of sin do not have to linger. They dissipate in the light of repentance. They scatter in the wind of confession. We were not called to live under gray skies. We were called to walk in the light. Today, we remove the clouds — so that we may see the Son clearly again.

The Cloud of Busyness and Distraction

One of the greatest enemies of feeling the fire of God's presence is not rebellion — it is distraction. Luke 10:38–42 tells us that when Jesus entered a village, a woman named Martha welcomed Him into her home. It was an extraordinary honor. To host a rabbi — a teacher sent from God — was a privilege. Hospitality in that culture was sacred. So Martha did what any devoted host would do. She hurried. She prepared. She served. She set the table. She arranged the room. She cooked the meal. She labored to make everything perfect. Her activity was not sinful. It was admirable. It was culturally expected. It was even loving.

But it became a cloud.

While Martha moved frantically from task to task, her sister Mary did something unexpected. She sat at Jesus' feet — the posture of a disciple. She listened intently. She absorbed every word. She was not distracted by performance; she was consumed with presence. She was not serving the Master; she was submitting to Him. She desired not to impress Him, but to be fed by Him. Martha finally reached her breaking point and said, "Lord, don't You care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself?"

And Jesus gently answered:

"Martha, Martha, you are worried and upset about many things, but few things are needed — indeed only one. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her."

Notice what Jesus does not rebuke: service. Notice what He does rebuke: anxiety, distraction, misplaced priority. Martha was in the same house as Jesus — yet missing His presence.

Busyness had formed a cloud.

We live in a fallen world like fish swimming in water — rarely aware of the currents pulling us. Jesus warned in the Parable of the Sower that the seed of the Word is often “choked by life’s worries, riches and pleasures” (Luke 8:14). Not destroyed — choked. Slowly suffocated. We are commanded to “seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness” (Matthew 6:33), yet too often we resemble the Rich Young Ruler who walked away sorrowful because he could not release his grip on earthly security (Mark 10:22).

Busyness is one of Satan’s most subtle idols.

Not blatant wickedness.
Not open defiance.
But constant motion.

We fill every hour. We chase achievement. We minimize suffering. We pursue comfort. We conquer tasks. We build platforms. We measure worth by productivity. And without noticing, our schedules become crowded altars where self sits enthroned.

Someone once said BUSY means:
Being Under Satan’s Yoke.

Whether or not the acronym is perfect, the warning is real. A life consumed with activity can quietly crowd out intimacy. And soon there is no room left in our hearts, minds, or calendars to “be still and know that I am God” (Psalm 46:10). No margin to take time to be holy. No space to sit at the Master’s feet. We may still serve Him — but we no longer savor Him. And when that happens, the fire does not go out instantly. It simply grows dim behind the cloud.

The Cloud of Hidden Sin

Martha was distracted by many things. But sometimes the distance we feel from God is not caused by what we are doing — it is caused by what we are hiding. King David opens Psalm 32 with words of joy:

“Blessed is the one whose transgressions are forgiven,
whose sins are covered.
Blessed is the one whose sin the Lord does not count against them
and in whose spirit is no deceit.”

Psalm 32:1–2

We expect David to move next into celebration of righteousness. Instead, he takes us into the darkness he experienced before confession — into the cloud that hid the warmth of God’s presence. He writes:

“When I kept silent, my bones wasted away
through my groaning all day long.
For day and night Your hand was heavy on me;
my strength was sapped as in the heat of summer.”

Psalm 32:3–4

Hidden sin did not make David feel free — it crushed him. God’s loving hand became heavy. His joy disappeared. His strength evaporated. Sin concealed never remains small — it becomes suffocating. Then comes the turning point:

“Then I acknowledged my sin to You
and did not cover up my iniquity.
I said, ‘I will confess my transgressions to the Lord.’
And You forgave the guilt of my sin.”

Psalm 32:5

The cloud lifted the moment confession began. Forgiveness rushed in the moment honesty arrived. The fire of God’s presence returned when secrecy ended.

The truth is this: we often treat sin as small, private, and harmless. But Scripture speaks very differently. Apostle John tells us:

“God is light; in Him there is no darkness at all.”

1 John 1:5

We cannot walk toward the light while clinging to darkness. We cannot pursue intimacy with God while secretly serving the idol of self. Psalm 66:18 warns us:

“If I had cherished sin in my heart, the Lord would not have listened.”

Proverbs 28:13 adds:

“Whoever conceals their sins does not prosper, but the one who confesses and renounces them finds mercy.”

Hidden sin clouds our fellowship with God.
It dulls spiritual sensitivity.
It silences joy.
It weakens prayer.
It dims the fire.

And yet this cloud is not permanent.

Because the gospel speaks louder than our guilt.

“If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.”

1 John 1:9

When we fall to our knees with a broken and contrite heart:

“A broken and contrite heart, O God, You will not despise.”

Psalms 51:17

We are not rejected — we are welcomed.

We are invited to:

“Approach God’s throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.”

Hebrews 4:16

Confession does not push God away.
It brings us home.

The cloud lifts.
The warmth returns.
The fire burns again.

The Cloud of Shame and Condemnation

Confession removes the cloud of hidden sin — but for many believers, another cloud quickly rolls in: the cloud of shame and condemnation. After Peter denied Christ three times, the rooster crowed. Scripture tells us he “went outside and wept bitterly” (Matthew 26:75). Those were not casual tears — they were tears of failure, regret, and crushing shame. In John 21, we find Peter back on the Sea of Galilee. He says to the others, “I’m going fishing.” It sounds simple — but it feels like retreat. The other disciples join him, and they fish all night... and catch nothing.

Then Jesus appears on the shore. He tells them to cast the net on the right side of the boat, and suddenly the nets are so full they cannot haul them in. They come ashore. They eat breakfast together. And then Jesus turns to Peter. Three times Peter had denied Him. Three times Jesus asks, “Do you love Me?” And three times He commissions him:

“Feed My lambs.”
“Take care of My sheep.”
“Feed My sheep.” (John 21:15–19)

This was not humiliation. This was restoration. Peter likely believed his failure had permanently disqualified him from serving in Christ’s kingdom. But Jesus does not rehearse Peter’s failure — He restores Peter’s calling. Shame said, “You are finished.” Grace said, “You are forgiven — now feed My sheep.” Like Peter, many believers live under the cloud of shame. They hear the whispers:

“You failed again.”
“You’re not worthy.”
“You’ll never change.”

But godly sorrow was never meant to paralyze spiritual growth. It was meant to lead us to repentance — and then into joy. When the Lord forgives, He does not partially cleanse. He purifies completely.

“If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.” (1 John 1:9)

“Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow.” (Isaiah 1:18)

Scarlet becomes white.
Crimson becomes wool.

The devil — the accuser — whispers, “How could One who is pure light ever associate with your darkness?” But Scripture answers clearly:

“Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus...”
(Romans 8:1)

No condemnation. Not less condemnation. Not delayed condemnation. No condemnation. We are sinners — yes. But we are also redeemed masterpieces of grace. There is no darkness in God at all — yet because of Christ’s atonement, that holiness does not push us away. It draws us near. And so we are given this astonishing invitation:

“Let us then approach God’s throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.”
(Hebrews 4:16)

Notice — not crawl.
Not hide.
Not shrink back.

Approach.

Boldly.

Repentant sin does not disqualify us. It invites us to the throne. It invites us to be restored. To be reshaped. To be molded by the Potter who never stops forming His children into the likeness of His Son.

Shame says, “Stay away.”

Grace says, “Come closer.”

And when we listen to grace — the cloud begins to lift.

The Cloud of Anxiety and Life’s Burdens

Even after the cloud of shame lifts, another cloud often rolls in — not from our past failures, but from our present pressures. Like Martha, we become “worried and troubled about many things” (Luke 10:41). The demands of life crowd in. Responsibilities multiply. Expectations rise. And before long, we are so consumed with managing life that we no longer sit at the Master’s feet. Living in these “jars of clay” in a world subjected to decay often feels overwhelming. We are fragile. The world is broken. Sickness, loss, disappointment, financial strain, relational tension — these are not imaginary threats. They are real. And when the enemy begins to parade before our minds all the calamities that could befall us, fear begins to grow. We do not merely tremble — we strategize. We obsess. We attempt to control. We begin living defensively, consumed with avoiding pain and securing comfort.

Jesus warned that our hearts can become “weighed down... by the anxieties of life” (Luke 21:34). Weighed down.

Anxiety dulls spiritual alertness.

It clouds eternal perspective.

It shrinks our vision until all we see are immediate threats.

Instead of running the race for the crown of righteousness, we begin chasing smaller prizes — security, comfort, control, pleasure — as though these fragile substitutes can protect us or satisfy us. Anxiety is a cruel master. It promises safety — and delivers exhaustion.

The cure for anxiety is not denial. It is trust. We are not called to pretend burdens do not exist. We are called to transfer them. “Cast all your anxiety on Him because He cares for you.” (1 Peter 5:7). Cast them. Throw them upon Him. Release what was never meant to remain in your hands. Instead of running like a hamster on a wheel that never stops turning, Christ gives us this invitation:

“Come to Me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light.”

Matthew 11:28-30

Weariness is not a signal to worry more. Exhaustion is not a call to try harder. It is an invitation to come closer. To lay the burden down. To walk yoked beside the One who carries the heavier side. This is not easy. Trust rarely feels easy. But listen to the counsel of the Apostle Paul:

“Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your request to God. And the peace of God, that transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.”

Philippians 4:6-7

The Cloud of Comfort and Worldliness

If anxiety is the cloud of fearing we will lose what we need, comfort and worldliness are the cloud of loving what we should never trust. In Luke 12, a man from the crowd interrupts Jesus with what seems like a reasonable request:

“Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me.”

But Jesus sees beyond the legal dispute — He sees the heart. He tells a parable about a rich man whose land produced an abundant harvest. The man faced what he thought was a problem — he had more than enough. His barns could not contain his surplus grain. So he decided to tear them down and build bigger ones. And then he said to himself:

“You have plenty of grain laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry.”

Luke 12:19

Notice what is absent.

No gratitude.

No generosity.

No dependence on God.

Just self-sufficiency.

Comfort had quietly replaced trust. And God responds with sobering clarity:

“This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself? This is how it will be with whoever stores up things for themselves but is not rich towards God.”

Luke 12:20-21

Worldliness is not neutrality — it is divided allegiance. Jesus warns us:

“Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

Matthew 6:19-21

What we treasure determines what we trust. And Paul reminds us:

“But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ.”

Philippians 3:20

Comfort makes heaven feel unnecessary. Worldliness makes eternity feel distant. The Good Shepherd becomes someone to admire — but not someone to rely upon. And when the heart grows comfortable with earth, the glory of the Son begins to fade behind the clouds.

The Cloud of Unforgiveness and Bitterness

If worldliness clouds our vision by attaching our hearts to things, unforgiveness clouds it by hardening our hearts toward people. In Matthew 18, Peter asks Jesus, “How many times shall I forgive my brother? Up to seven times?” Jesus responds, “Not seven times, but seventy-seven times.” Then He tells a parable.

The kingdom of heaven is like a king who wanted to settle accounts. A servant was brought before him who owed ten thousand talents — an unpayable debt beyond a lifetime’s earnings. He fell on his knees and begged for mercy. And the king did something astonishing. He canceled the debt. Not reduced it. Not restructured it. Canceled it. But that same servant went out and found a fellow servant who owed him a small amount — a fraction of what he himself had been forgiven. And when that man begged for patience, he refused. He seized him and had him thrown into prison.

When the king heard what had happened, he was furious. He said,

“Shouldn’t you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?”

And Jesus concludes with sobering words:

“This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother or sister from your heart.”

Matthew 18:35

From your heart.

Not outward compliance.

Not forced politeness.

But inward release.

The author of Hebrews warns us:

“See to it... that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defile many.”

Hebrews 12:15

A root grows underground.

Unseen.

Quiet.

Spreading slowly.

Bitterness does not usually explode — it burrows. It works beneath the surface. It hardens the soil of the heart until grace struggles to penetrate it. Paul commands us:

“Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.”

Ephesians 4:32

And John speaks plainly:

“Whoever claims to love God yet hates a brother or sister is a liar... Anyone who loves God must also love their brother and sister.”

1 John 4:20–21

Unforgiveness is not a small issue. It strikes at the very evidence of grace in our lives.

Jesus says:

“If you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others... neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.”

Matthew 6:14–15

This is not about earning salvation. It is about revealing the condition of the heart. A forgiven heart forgives. We do not keep a record of wrongs because the record of our own wrongs was nailed to the cross. What others have done unjustly to us — as painful as it may be — pales in comparison to the debt we owed the Lord. Bitterness fills the heart like smoke fills a room. And when the heart fills with smoke, it becomes difficult to see the Son.

Conclusion

The Son has never stopped shining. His glory has never dimmed, His grace has never weakened, and His presence has never withdrawn. If the sky feels gray, it is not because He has moved — it is because clouds have formed. Busyness, hidden sin, shame, anxiety, comfort, bitterness — each obscures what has always been true: Christ is radiant. Today the invitation is urgent and simple. Lay aside every weight. Confess what must be confessed. Release what must be released. Cast what must be cast. Forgive as you have been forgiven. And as the clouds part, you will discover what was true all along — the fire still burns, the light still shines, and the Son is as glorious as ever.