

## GOD'S PROCESS OF CLEANSING & REFINING US 30.9.18

*"For he is like a refiner's fire and like fullers' soap. He will sit like a refiner of silver, burning away the dross. He will purify the Levites, refining them like gold and silver ..."* (Malachi 3:3).

### What is Fuller's Soap?

The word fuller comes from the word "full", which mean to "whiten" or to "complete". A fuller was a person who "whitened" clothing or "completes" them.

The fuller process was carried out outside the city because it was dirty, smelly and quite frankly, disgusting. As shown in scripture, the fuller did his work outside the city of Jerusalem, in a fuller's field. "... And when they went up, they came and stood by the conduit of the upper pool, which is on the highway of the **fuller's field**" (2King 17: 18 and also Isaiah 36:2). The cleaning and whitening of clothes by the fuller was a process with several stages of scouring, milling and whitening the clothes. The cleaning stages included soaking in soap, handwashing, stomping the clothes with feet, pounding the clothes with a club or rocks, and bleaching and rinsing. Some of the cleaning stages involved the use of specific clays, some of which were sometimes mixed and reacted with human urine (for ammonia and nitrate) or citric acid. Sometimes even vinegar was used in some of the processes. All this made the process tough and hard on the clothing, but also smelly and filthy.

During the transfiguration, when Jesus was transformed, the Bible says "His clothes became shining, whiter than snow, so as no **fuller** on earth could whiten them" (Mark 9:3). This shows that the fuller whitened clothes. Another stage involved pounding and **tumbling the clothes then** in running water. The tumbling acted to strengthen and thicken the cloth material. It's already clean and white, now it needs to be strengthened. The mixture was tumbled and pounded for a long time to thicken and strengthen. So, when the Bible says God cleans us like the fuller's soap, it means God clean us and whitens us, removing our sins and curses. But expect the process to be painful, smelly and disgusting. The cleaning process was hard, disgusting, filthy, smelly and painful. But after each stage we are cleaner than the previous stage. At the end we are whiter than snow, and full or complete.

Paul went through many of these cleaning cycles in his 32 years of ministry. Paul says, "I have worked much harder, been in prison more frequently, been flogged more severely, and been exposed to death again and again. Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was pelted with stones, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea, I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my fellow Jews, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false believers. I have laboured and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked" (2Cor 11: 23-27). **Now that is a tough cleaning process. That is the fuller's soap.**

I remember during one of these testing and cleaning stages in **Acts 16**, Paul and Silas were "**stripped and severely flogged with rods**" and thrown into prison and bound in chains. Instead of complaining about their situation, they decided to praise God, praying and singing hymns at midnight. The prison doors were miraculously opened and Paul and Silas were set free. In the last three chapters of the book of Acts Paul was arrested, put on trial, sent on a ship to Rome, the ship went through a storm, they were shipwrecked and ended up on the island of Malta. Then went they thought they would take a break from these trials, the islanders helped them put up a fire to warm them up, and a snake came out of the wood to bite Paul. This kept moving from one stage of difficulty to the next. But God healed him from the snake bite. Paul was going through the fuller's soap.

### What is the Refiner's Fire?

The Fuller's soap is spoken of in the same statement as the Refiner's fire because the two processes are very similar. In those days gold was refined in a furnace. It was heated to a certain temperature and the organic materials would be the first to burn off. The temperature would be turned up and next the Tin would melt off and be skimmed off the top. The temperature would be turned up and next the Lead impurities would float to the top and be skimmed off as dross. "**Son of man, the house of Israel has become dross to me; all of them are bronze and tin and iron and lead in the furnace; they are dross of silver**" (Ezekiel 22:18).

The temperature would be increased at each stage, and the next impurity would be skimmed off, then the temperature would increase again. Bronze / copper, iron and other metals would be removed in different stages as the temperature is cranked up. Each unwanted element would float to the top as the temperature is cranked up and it would be skimmed off.

***“And I will put this third into the fire, and refine them as one refines silver, and test them as gold is tested. They will call upon my name, and I will answer them. I will say, ‘They are my people’; and they will say, ‘The Lord is my God’”*** (Zechariah 13:9). So at the end the last element to be skimmed off would be pure silver, leaving pure gold in the furnace. God allows us to be tested as through fire in order to be purified like Silver and Gold. At the end when we have gone through the fire, we become pure gold and we will say the Lord is my God, and He will say, they are my people.

*“Years ago, a fishing fleet went out from a small harbor on the east coast of Newfoundland. In the afternoon, there came a large furious storm. When night settled in not a single fishing vessel of the fleet was in the harbor. All night long the wind blew and thunder blasted. The wives, mothers, children, and sweethearts laboured all night in prayer for their loved ones out in the storm. They called on God over and over to save their loved ones. Then to add to the horror of the night one of the houses caught fire. Since most of the men were on the storm-tossed sea it was impossible to save the house from burning to the ground. When morning broke, to the joy of all who laboured in prayer there was the fleet safe in harbor. Everyone was home safe. Yet, in the joy filled crowd there was one sad face-it was a picture of despair-the wife of the man whose house had burned to the ground. Meeting her husband as he came ashore she rejoiced that he was alive but cried out in anguish, “Honey, we are ruined! Our home and all its belongings were destroyed by a fire last night!” But the man looked at her with excitement and exclaimed, “Thank God for the fire” Then all the men around said the same. The woman looked confused then her husband announced, “It was the light of our burning house that guided the whole fleet into port!”*

**The man said thank God for the fire.** The fire was an answer to a prayer, it saved many lives. Sometimes God can use fires to answer our prayers. **The presence of a Fire does not mean the absence of God.**

There is a story in the book of Daniel. ***“Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, answered and said to the king, O Nebuchadnezzar, we are not careful to answer you in this matter. If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of your hand, O king. But even if he doesn’t, let it be known to you, O king, that we will not serve your gods, nor worship the golden image which you have set up”*** (Daniel 3: 16-18). The three men refused to worship an idol at the risk of being thrown into the fire. They said our God will save us, ***but even if he doesn’t,*** we will not worship the idol. They put their trust in the Lord. The King as angry with them and ***“he ordered the furnace heated seven times hotter than usual”*** (Daniel 3: 19). The furnace was made seven times hotter – like refining gold. The three men were being refined. After they were through in the fire, the king asked ***“weren’t there three men that we tied up and threw into the fire? .... He said, “Look! I see four men walking around in the fire, unbound and unharmed, and the fourth looks like a son of the gods”*** (Daniel 3: 24-25).

There was a 4<sup>th</sup> man in the fire, and he looked like the son of God, he was the son of God, his name was Jesus. It’s all about making sure that Jesus is with you in the fire. **The presence of a fire does not mean the absence of God.** In life we go through many refining fires. But our prayers should be that God should be with us in the fire. We need Jesus to be our 4<sup>th</sup> man in the fire. Regardless of how hard or how tough it is, as long as Jesus is in it with us as the 4<sup>th</sup> man we will be okay. Fires do come in different ways in life. The most important thing is not always to avoid the fires, but to make sure Jesus is with us in the fire.

## **TOOLS FOR SURVIVING FIRES**

***There are two key similarities between the Fuller’s process, and the refiner’s process”***

- 1. In both cases, the refiner and the fuller do not take their eyes off the job. They have to be there every step of the way. Always remember that “for whoever touches you, touches the apple of His eye”*** (Zech 2:8). God will never take his eye off you when you are going through the cleaning or refining process.
- 2. Both processes have several stages and cycles. They only stop when you are white as snow, or in the case of gold, when the refiner case see his image on the gold. God will refine you until he sees his image in you. God will clean you until you are whiter than snow. So if you are in the fire remember that the presence of a fire does not mean the absence of God.***

3. ***Do not always pray for God to take the fire away, pray that God be with you in the fire.***
4. *Do not take your eye off the Lord. "... fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith" (Heb 12: 2).*
5. *"They conquered him by the blood of the lamb, ....."*. We need to be washed and cleansed in the blood of the lamb. Being washed in the blood of Jesus is the first step in the cleansing and refining process.
6. *".....and by the word of their testimony" (Rev 12: 11)*. The word of God, and the word of our testimony helps us to go through fires during the refining process.