

# Fire and Love

*[The following is a literary illustration with an extended metaphor known as an analogy or parable. As in all cases with such a method of illustration, the metaphor will break down at some point, since there is not an exact correspondence between the source (vehicle) and the target (tenor). It does, however, get the point across.]*

*In the neighborhood of Christendom, three houses stand next to each other in the following order: the house of Arminian, the house of Calvinist, and the house of Christian. The houses of Arminian and Calvinist are on fire; the owners are in them and apparently oblivious to the horrific blazes around them. Christian, who sees that his neighbors' houses are on fire, is on the street, and Arminian and Calvinist are in their houses.*

*Christian: Arminian, your house is on fire! You need to get out!*

*Arminian: That's really unloving of you to say that. My house is perfectly fine.*

*Christian: Your house is being destroyed! You are headed for destruction! Please, leave before it's too late!*

*Arminian: I've heard about people like you. You think everyone's house is on fire but your own. You're a wacko cultist. Even our neighbor Calvinist thinks so. Calvinist knows a lot about houses and fireproofing. If my house is on fire, why hasn't Calvinist said so? He's my next-door neighbor, after all.*

*Calvinist: What's all the ruckus?*

*Arminian: It's Christian again. He's telling me that my house is on fire and I need to get out or else I'll be destroyed (*chuckle*).*

*Calvinist: (*Chuckle*) Yeah, I told you he was going to do it again. He can't help it. He must have some mental disorder that keeps him from loving his neighbors.*

*Christian: Your house is on fire, too, Calvinist! Can't you see? Are you so blind? You and Arminian are laughing it up while you go to destruction! You need to get out! Now!*

*Calvinist: There you go again, with those unloving words like "blind" and "destruction." You really are a sad case, Christian. You should try love for a change.*

*Christian: Your house is on fire and you don't even know it!*

*Calvinist: Sure, Christian, whatever you say (*chuckle*). We have all these neighbors around here, and none of them are saying what you are saying. We have Wesleyan and Pelagian and Roman Catholic and even Hyper-Calvinist on this block. If what you are saying were true, wouldn't they also tell us? You're saying that my house is on fire and the house of my friend Arminian is on*

fire and we don't even know it, yet know one knows it except for you. You think you have the only right knowledge. You think God has given you perfect knowledge. You think you're better than everyone else and that your house is better than everyone else's. You've deluded yourself into thinking that everyone's house is on fire except your own. No one else agrees with you – shouldn't that tell you something? Now take Arminian's house for example. His house is not as well-built as my house and certainly would have more of a tendency to be susceptible to fire, but just because it's more susceptible to fire doesn't mean that it actually is on fire. Your logic uses the following *non sequitur*: Since Arminian's house is more susceptible to fire, this means that it actually is on fire. Quite an irrational kind of logic, wouldn't you say (*chuckle*)?

*Arminian:* (*Chuckle*) Calvinist, I love the way you use those big logical words like *non sequitur*! It sure puts wacko Christian in his place! He doesn't have any logic! You're too smart for him!

*Christian:* Neighbors, I'm not using the fallacious reasoning of which Calvinist is accusing me! There is no mere "susceptibility" or "tendency" here! I can actually see the fire! I can see your house being burned up! And if you stay inside, you will be burned up with it!

*Arminian:* Man, you are so judgmental. Calvinist is right. Try some love for a change! Calvinist loves me, and he shows his love for me by giving me tips on how to fire-proof my house and by telling me that my house is a safe refuge from fire. This makes me feel really good about myself and makes me want to fire-proof my house even more. That is the love I get from Calvinist.

*Calvinist:* Did you hear that, Christian? Do you see how you can get much more of an audience when you're not so harsh and unloving and judgmental? Do you see how Arminian is now much more receptive to being given advice on how to fire-proof his house? If I took your approach, he wouldn't want to fire-proof his house at all! I've now established a productive, meaningful relationship with Arminian, so he respects me and my views. A little love goes a long way!

*Christian:* Calvinist, you have no clue as to what is safe from fire and what is not! Look at your own house burning up! You don't even know what fire is, let alone know enough about fire safety to be able to help Arminian! In fact, the advice that you have given to Arminian is actually making his house burn more quickly! What kind of love is that? Your love is actually hatred! I am loving both you and Arminian by telling you again that your houses are on fire and you must leave immediately!

*Calvinist:* That's a good one – I made Arminian's house burn more quickly by giving him loving advice (*chuckle*). I guess that makes him two-fold more a child of the fire than he already was, right (*chuckle*)? Man, you are just so out of touch with reality. So, not only is Arminian's house on fire, but my house is on fire, too, because of what I've said to Arminian. Yeah, right. You're sounding so much like a cult right now. You're right and everyone else is wrong. Yours is the only house in the whole world that is not on fire, yet no one can see the fire except for you. You've been given some kind of "special revelation" to see fire that no one else can see. I'm talking la-la land here. I'm talking Jim Jones Kool-Aid time here. I'm talking time for the guys in

the white coats to take you up to that special room made out of rubber.

*Arminian:* (*Chuckle*) That's a good one, Calvinist! You are so funny!

*Christian:* No, I'm not the only one in the world whose house is not on fire. There are others even in this neighborhood whose house is not on fire and who can see others' houses on fire. They, too, are out warning the people whose houses are on fire.

*Arminian:* Yeah, you and just a few others scattered throughout this neighborhood and throughout the world? They must've had the same Kool-Aid that you did!

*Calvinist:* That's a great one, Arminian! You're learning my one-liners! Keep it up, and you'll be able to debate anybody! Yes, Christian thinks there are a few others like him, but as soon as he gets to know them well enough, he suddenly "finds out" that their house is on fire, too, and they suffer the wrathful words of the deluded self-righteous wacko just like we've suffered. If what Christian is saying is the truth, why is it that such a small number of people see it? Remember when I went to Presbyterian for advice about this? Presbyterian said that Christian has no right to make such a judgment on his own. He said that the matter needs to be brought before the Presbytery and maybe even before the General Assembly so the clergy – the ones who know best – can make an official church judgment. They would then put together a Committee To Study Fire and Its Effects On Houses and delve into the deeper things of truth that we laymen know nothing about. They will study exactly what fire is and make a determination as to whether or not these houses are actually on fire. Then everyone needs to abide by their judgment, because they know what's best. Renegade judgment like Christian is doing is way out of line. Also, if what Christian is saying is the truth, why isn't the fire department coming to put the fires out?

*Christian:* The reality that your house is on fire has nothing to do with how many people know it! Your house is burning right on top of you, and it matters not if five or five hundred people know it – it doesn't change the fact that your house is on fire and you need to leave! The Presbytery and General Assembly have already considered such a matter, and the committee came to the conclusion that what is in Arminian's house is "fire-like but not exactly fire, and further work on the house will probably prove effective in keeping it from actually becoming fire, although more study needs to be done, and we have appointed a sub-committee to delve into the even deeper matters that laymen wouldn't dare to touch before we can come up with a definitive answer. Give us three years to come up with a comprehensive report." How helpful is that? And the reason the fire department isn't here is that the fire department has no eyes, no ears, no sense of taste, no sense of smell, and no sense of touch! In fact, if you go look at the people in the fire department, they are just carved images that were put there to make people feel like they were safe!

*Arminian:* I don't believe that for a second. I know from experience that those supposed "carved images" saved my life once. I had a fire in my kitchen some time back, and when I called the fire department, I heard a message stating this: "This is the fire department. We are here to save you

from fire. If you have called because you have a fire, go to the room furthest away from the fire and put a blindfold on. We will then come to put out the fire. Wait for one hour before you come out of that room and take the blindfold off. Then when you return to the place where you had the fire, the fire will be gone, and you will have peace and safety.” I did just as they said, and it was like a miracle! The fire in my kitchen was gone! And now I can sleep sound tonight because I know there is no fire in my house. The fire department is way more loving than Christian. They really put me at ease, especially with the “peace and safety” line at the end of the message. That’s what you say to me sometimes, too, right, Calvinist?

*Calvinist:* Oh, yes, all the time. Contrary to what Christian says, your house is not on fire, and you have built for yourself a refuge of peace and safety with my help. You can go to bed tonight knowing that you dwell in a house of peace and safety, just like I do. Good night, Arminian.

*Arminian:* Good night, Calvinist. I was getting worried there a little by what Christian said, but you put my mind at ease again.

*Christian:* Don’t let Calvinist put your mind at ease, Arminian! You need to not be at ease! There is no peace and safety in your house! Calvinist is lying to you! Do not go to sleep, Arminian! Your house is on fire! The fire is getting closer to you! Get out!

*Calvinist:* Don’t let Christian disturb your sleep, Arminian. Peace to you.

*Christian:* Calvinist, there is no peace to you or to Arminian! Your house is just as much on fire as Arminian’s house is! It is burning as we speak! You need to get out now!

*Calvinist:* Please, Christian, give it up. We’re not going to follow your delusions. I had a house like Arminian once, and, even though it wasn’t nearly as sound and as fancy as the house I have now (and not a perfectly sound house like you claim yours is), it provided the basics, especially peace and safety. That’s how I know I can say “peace and safety” to Arminian, because my house was very much like his. Stop telling Arminian that he is in danger. This only serves to put you more on the fringe. And none of us like to be on the fringe, right?

*Christian:* I don’t care if people think I’m on the fringe or not! But I do care for your safety, and that’s why I’m telling you to get out! I used to be in a house like yours, and it was burning around me, and I didn’t know it! But I had someone who loved me enough to tell me that my house was on fire and I needed to leave, and God opened my eyes! I got out of there quickly! I’m thankful to God for bringing that person into my life and telling me what I needed to hear! Now that is love!

*Calvinist:* Yeah, yeah. Now why don’t you be loving to me and let me get some shut-eye? See, there’s Arminian over there sleeping like a baby. Ah, how peaceful.

*Christian:* Arminian! Arminian! Wake up! Don’t sleep! Wake up, Arminian! Your house is on fire! You need to get out now!

Calvinist: How incredibly mean and insensitive of you. Is that the kind of love you're talking about? You would "love" someone so much that you disturb his sleep, make him unable to get a good night's rest, and make it so he's fatigued the next day? What kind of cruel person are you, anyway?

Christian: He must not sleep! He must be disturbed!

Calvinist: It is your kind of "love" that makes people upset rather than at peace. It makes them so they can't get any comfort at all. I detest your kind of love.

Christian: They should not be comfortable in a house that is burning to the ground! They need to get out! You need to get out!

Calvinist: We've been through this before. I don't want to hear it. Hey, I'm feeling a little warm; I need to turn the thermostat down. Okay – wait, the thermostat is already all the way down. It's getting quite warm in here. Hey ... hey ... ouch ...

*by Marc D. Carpenter*  
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