

# (K-Char-03) Strange Fire

by Art Katz

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*The sermon warns against the danger of bringing false fire in worship, which can reduce the sense of God's holiness and fear, and can lead to a decline in the spiritual quality of life.*

**Duration:** 48:12

**Scripture:** Exodus 28:1, Exodus 30:9, Numbers 3:4, Matthew 6:33

**Topics:** "Strange Fire"

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## Description

In this sermon transcript, T. Austin Sparks discusses the concept of false life and false fire. He emphasizes the difference between spiritual eternal life and soul life, stating that false fire is a masterstroke of Satan. Sparks references the story of Aaron's sons offering false fire on God's altar and the consequences they faced. He also mentions Moses' loss of self-control and the judgment he received for not sanctifying God's name. Sparks warns against worship that is not in accordance with God's instructions, as it diminishes the sense of God as holy and authentic.

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## Transcript

Well, I enjoyed those reminiscences when they result in salvation. No accidents with the Lord. And I trust there'll be no accident tonight, though I want to apologize for those students who have been looking at Psalm 18, which I told them would be my text for today, but the Lord has switched signals.

So we'll have to save that for a later time and turn to what He has quickened. When I looked at Psalm 18 today, it was stone cold dead. But somewhere between last night and this morning and through the day, something else began to loom large from which I have never spoken in chapter 10 of the book of Leviticus about the sons of Aaron who brought false or strange fire.

So Lord, in my naive, simple faith that this is Your thought, Your topic, come, my God, and grant Your expression. You're perfect in all Your ways. You'll not misuse, my God, a speaking occasion.

And we're asking blessing, Lord, in the thing that is appointed, the blessing principally of the anointing of Your Holy Spirit, that unction, my God, that without which, however correct we are, the Word fails. So come, Lord, and send both the Word and the Spirit in the accomplishment of Your appointed Word and time and will and receive the praise, the glory, and the honor, Lord, that is Yours alone. In Yeshua's holy name we pray.

Amen. So chapter 10 of Leviticus, Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, took either of them his censer and put fire therein and put incense thereon and offered strange fire before the Lord, which he commanded them not. And there went out fire from the Lord and devoured them, and they died before the Lord.

Then Moses said unto Aaron, This is it that the Lord spake, saying, I will be sanctified in them that come nigh me, and before all the people I will be glorified. And Aaron held his peace. And Moses called Mishael and Elazephan, the sons of Uzziel, the uncle of Aaron, and said unto them, Come near, carry your brethren from before the sanctuary out of the camp.

So they went near and carried them in their coats out of the camp, as Moses had said. And Moses said unto Aaron and unto Eliez and unto Ithamar, his sons, Uncover not your heads, neither rend your clothes, lest you die, and lest wrath come upon all the people. But let your brethren, the kinsmen, the whole house of Israel, bewail the burning which the Lord hath kindled.

And you shall not go out from the door of the tabernacle of the congregation, lest you die, for the anointing oil of the Lord is upon you. And they did according to the word of Moses. I'm astonished again at how brief the account is, and so remarkable an episode that God intends for the instruction of the church for every generation, especially the last, raises remarkable questions about the severity of God in annihilating two of Aaron's four sons.

Praise God, I think that I'm actually personally descendant from the two that survived. But how many other potential outcasts were lost for the elimination of the men and their progeny in all of the succeeding generations? So when God's judgment falls, it's remarkable in its magnitude. And what could have taken place that would justify such a judgment in men who had probably the best of intentions, who were well-meaning, thought they were doing God's service, wanted to get into the act, and just acted a little presumptuously, and were immediately killed by fire? They brought false fire, and they died by fire.

A remarkable kind of logic in the judgment that was earned by the very thing that they sought to bring. These two young men, and their youth must be considered, were impetuous. In fact, I think the name Nadab means impetuous and rash.

And the other brother, Abihu, means spontaneous and self-initiating. The very kinds of quality that would be appreciated, admired, and encouraged in the charismatic realm earned for them a solemn judgment unto death. Maybe they were inspired and provoked by the fire of God that had come out at the end of chapter 9, when Aaron and Moses had performed all of the requirements of God and the establishing of the worship prescribed through Moses, having finished the remarkable details.

It's a study in itself of how these priests were consecrated, and that this is the first worship service, so to speak, after the consecration. And it ended with the glory of God being demonstrated through fire, as we read Moses having waved the wave offering, lift up his hands in 922 toward the people, imagine stained with blood, as I often say, from fingertip to elbow, and came down from offering of the sin offering and the burnt offering and peace offerings, and Moses and Aaron went into the tabernacle of the congregation, and came out and blessed the people, and the glory of the Lord appeared unto all the people. And there came a fire out from before the Lord, and consumed upon the altar the burnt offering and the fat, which when all the people saw, they shouted and fell on their faces.

So, these young men, seeing this demonstrable glory of God, had an itch to get into the act, and that they could themselves stimulate or provoke another such demonstration by doing something that was not

bidden them. They took their senses and put incense and fire. The commentators say the fire was not even from the fire that had come down on the altar, from which every subsequent igniting of the sacrifices of Israel were to be performed, but they took fire from a common source, where the meat was boiled and cooked, that the priest would subsequently eat.

So, the fire was common, and the act was illicit. Only Moses could bring incense into the holy place twice a day, and so they presumed upon their father's role and calling to initiate something that was not theirs to perform, and the Lord struck them. Elsewhere in Scripture, I think it's in Exodus chapter 30, there's a clear prescription of the penalty for false fire, and so we're not likely to see something enacted like this, and yet I don't think it's an exaggerated statement to say that false fire is taking place universally, widely, throughout Christendom, and maybe most particularly in the charismatic realm, in the things that men will initiate of themselves that God had not invited out of the same kind of rash impetuosity and the hope of somehow evoking a demonstration of God's glory.

And that's why I believe the Lord wants us to consider this text, lest we be guilty of that, because if we are at fault in worship, God is depreciated. The sense of himself suffers loss if he allows some kind of ostensible celebration to take place, which he had not enjoined nor required, and allow men to do their thing in his name that moves us away from the authenticity of God, holy and solemn, and into a realm that is religious, man-made, and designed for human enjoyment and satisfaction. Well, we'll talk about it maybe in a few minutes, but not the least of those tested on this remarkable and sudden occasion is Aaron himself, watching his sons brought instantly to death and being told by Moses, don't you dare make any demonstration of sorrow.

Don't dishevel your hair, don't tear your clothing, don't do any of the kinds of things that one would expect when tragedy of this kind strikes, because if you do it, it might be interpreted by those who are observing you as giving countenance, as validating your sons, and maybe raises the question that you're not in agreement with the judgment that God has brought. Lest you yourself die, you keep silent and make no motion of any kind that could be construed as being in any way opposed to this divine act. If there's any mourning to take place, all Israel needs to mourn over the fire that God has struck.

And when these bodies were carried out by relatives of Aaron, who were not themselves of the Aaronic priesthood, they were Levites, because a priest cannot touch a dead body, and they took them in, these two sons in their garments, and carted them out from before the tabernacle and out through and out through the camp, so that people had an opportunity to observe these bodies being removed. I can't think of anything more instructive about holiness and the holiness of God that he jealously preserves, knowing that if there's any erosion or loss there, everything will suffer eclipse, everything will go down the drain, if the sense of God as holy is diminished. If it requires a stark act of this kind that will communicate the fear of the Lord, that will be a plus and a benefit for the nation that has called to make him known as a nation of priests and a light unto the world.

A New Testament act of a comparable kind would be the death that came instantly to Sapphira and Ananias in Acts chapter 5, when they brought an offering and made it to appear as the whole when it was actually in part, and Peter saw by the Spirit their error and condemned them for seeking, for deceiving, seeking to deceive even the Spirit of God, and before the words were out of his mouth, first the husband dropped dead, and when the wife came in later and she was told what had taken place, she equally died. Those young men from the fire school that carried out those bodies received more instruction in carting out those cadavers than months and years of things that could be communicated in a classroom. They

were taught the fear of God.

These Levites who carted out the two sons of Aaron and had to move through the populace in order to get them out of the camp were instructing an entire nation in a lesson of an ultimate kind which we have forgotten, never known, and never rightly considered. And that's why we ourselves are slack and take liberties and perform things that we assume is a blessing to God because it certainly blesses us, but we need to be reminded of how jealous he is for worship and to be careful for that which is impetuous, rash, and self-initiating for which he made no requirement. So, they violated their father's own calling, who alone as the high priest, as I've mentioned, could light the incense and bring the fire into the holy place.

The altar of incense is itself a symbol of worship, the very last thing before you enter the Holy of Holies. It's not for anyone to traffic in and out of that place, only Aaron himself, and yet they presumed to bring their false fire into that place. It's a wonder why they did not confer with their father and test and say, you know, we think that the Lord would be blessed if we did this, but no conferring, but immediate independent action without regard to the authority of the father is part of the whole scenario that needs to be factored and taken in.

It's an offense against the authority of God who did not command them. It's an offense against the authority of their father whom they did not consult and whose exclusive role they sought to perform. So, there's much here that needs to be considered, and I was brought to the consideration of this text this summer in one of our morning prayer times during the prophetic school.

We got into a discussion of Aaron and his sons, and my spirit was really being stirred. I hadn't considered this text in some time. And some young man raised his hand, and I called on him, and he said, I think we're missing God.

This is a prayer time, not a discussion session, and we need to go to prayer. And that encouraged another young guy to leap up and say, not only are we neglecting prayer, but we're neglecting worship. And then he went on to do or say something that was construed as worship.

And then when I got the microphone again, I said, you men have brought false fire in what you have performed, because this discussion of Aaron and his sons, though it took place in ostensibly a prayer time, was divinely ordained. And if you had known the history of Ben Israel, prayer times have that character, that we will allow the Lord his freedom to move us in certain directions by the consideration of a text or a verse and a comment, and then subsequently what we talk and discuss about finds its expression in prayer. But because you're young, because you're new, because you don't understand the history, you were quick to get yourself up and to make an announcement that impeded the Spirit of God and doused the sense of his presence and the thing that he was honoring and anointing.

Your correction was a false fire. And the first one who had spoken up and said that this was a prayer time and not a discussion time, bent over as if he had been hit in the solar plexus and began to cry. And those around him had to comfort him because of my public rebuke of his act.

Because he was assured that this was God. Because after all, his adrenaline was flowing. He felt a certain excitement in the inner man, a certain heady assurance that the Lord was touching him to bring a word of correction.

Instead of conferring with the figure of authority in the room, all the elders were present. He stood up rashly and acted at the same kind of self-initiation as the two sons of Aaron. And that provoked the other guy to do his thing in the so-called name of worship, both of which were false.

Maybe it takes two. One to encourage another. What is it? Something loves company.

One encouraged the other. So, we need to examine the elements of what took place here because the thing is universal and a continual threat into the house of God as it was then and so also now. It's really an act of disrespect as I've said to the authority of God and the authority of their father in the name of worship.

Not a remarkable paradox and contradiction in which I'm sure they were totally persuaded that what they were doing was right and God-honoring until in that moment the Lord executed them without even an opportunity for repentance. You think of the instant judgment of God without in any way giving these men an opportunity to learn that they had missed God. He summarily and instantly removed them, taking vengeance, if you will, on this audacious act against himself from men who were light and careless and acting without due reverence and provoked by seeing people fall on their faces before the glory of God.

And that same kind of incentive can be a factor in our own time. We see something happening that God himself has given. People are affected by it and we want ourselves to be an instrument used of God to bring about a like kind of effect with his people and so we will speak or do something that is not given or ordered of God and instead of bringing that fire we bring upon ourselves a judgment.

And the errands that are there who condone or endorse these self-initiated acts rob the congregation and the church of the solemnity and fear of God that would be appropriate. And in endorsing or going along with the whole of the environment, the spiritual quality of the life declines. There's a death that comes to the congregation when there's not a Moses to bring instant correction and to not allow those that are related to the offenders to support or endorse them.

Had Moses not enjoined Aaron to keep silent we would have seen more than the death of the sons but possibly the high priest himself. So we have to appreciate Moses who understood what was taking place and knew that God's judgment had to be honored and no display made by which any question could be raised that he was not just in performing what he did and that that would illustrate how great was the offense before him that was performed by these two sons who were presumptuous about their own office as priests and thought that they could take this liberty because after all they had gone through all of the preliminaries that preceded this worship time and being set into office. They presumed upon God, they presumed upon their father, they presumed even upon their own calling and misused it.

Bringing upon themselves a just and swift retribution without even as I've said a time to repent. They died by fire as they had sinned by fire having brought reproach upon God's name. They had their own names justly blotted out.

So God removes two of Aaron's sons and what would have been the result of their continuation and their own progeny and this priestly line we can only imagine so this judgment cuts Aaron's family in half reducing everything and whatever the cost whatever the consequence practically and spiritually God does not hesitate to go as far as he did because they had brought reproach upon his name they lost their own. Why was God so severe? Because Israel itself was at stake as a worshipful nation required to make God known as holy. God says they did not sanctify my name.

We know later on that the same Moses who acted so rightly here himself loses self-control and hits a rock rather than speaks to it that the water might gush out and earns for himself a judgment by which he's not permitted to enter the land for which he had sacrificed 40 years in bringing Israel through the wilderness and the announcement of God is you did not consecrate me before the people. Your intemperate act, your blurting out, your striking instead of speaking gave an impression to those who observed you about me as God that is not in keeping with what I myself am. Because of your position, because of your title, your conduct what you display in your attitude registers upon those who observe you as being a statement about myself.

You did not sanctify my name. You did not consecrate me. And that's true now, say did the God who struck the sons of Aaron is he God still? Or has he been displaced and another has succeeded him? Can you reconcile this God as being our present Lord or is there kind of an unconscious thing by which we somehow dismiss these episodes as being the God of the Old Testament and have substituted a kind of a God of the New Testament who is loving, patient, kind and would not ever stoop to conduct himself in such a way as severely as this.

This is God, dear saints. And these things are written for our admonition upon whom the ends of the age have come. And probably the greatest danger and threat to the church is taking this kind of liberty in every well-meaning intention, but performing a kind of false fire that does not consecrate God and actually reduces the sense of him and the fear of him, diminishing the sense of holiness which I see as a prevailing character of the present church.

This came into my hands this weekend from T. Austin Sparks and it's a summary of messages that he gave in the final conference he conducted before the Lord brought him home. And in it, in the early part of his speaking, he talks about there's such a thing as false life. There's a vast difference between spiritual eternal life and soul life and that thing is the master stroke of Satan.

There's a vast amount of false fire in this world today. He said that in 1970. What would he say in 2005? It looks like true life, true fire, what is of God, but there is a lie in it and the fruit of that tree is bitter fruit in the end.

You'll remember that there was a time in the history of Israel in the wilderness when certain sons of Aaron brought false fire and offered it upon God's altar. You know what happened. You know all about God's jealousy and yet there's a vast amount of false fire in the world today.

And probably the area that most lends itself to that is what we call worship. So I don't know how to touch this, how to speak of it, but just to ask your prayer for me is that I'm from another generation, but that I'm very rarely blessed by what seems to bless many in the name of worship. I'm more often chafed than I am blessed.

More often having to hold my breath and wait patiently for the thing to come to an end that find that in any way my spirit has been affected and lifted and a sense of God communicated. Whether it's the music, the tempo, the lyrics, which by the way, forgive me, I think too often, what's the word, ordinary. I yearn more for Charles Wesley than I do some of these little ditty choruses that are actually, in my opinion, monotonous and do not communicate something about the holiness of God or the nature of God or the mystery of God, but just an opportunity for a calisthenic time of rejoicing.

So pray for me, whether it's my generational difference that affects the way I perceive that, or maybe I'm one of those rare Aaronic priestly characters who has an Edward sense that is violated by what others seem so freely to enjoy. But we need to ask what are we bringing and is it divinely inspired? Is it honoring? Is it fostering the sense of God's holiness or is it something more predicated for man and his enjoyment? Sparks enjoins us that we need to know the difference between the true life and the false life, for Satan's masterwork is to imitate God. And that's what these young men were doing, using their fire pans, their censors, using incense, taking fire from the wrong source, going into the tabernacle before the face of all Israel and having a semblance of rightness about what they're doing and yet in the whole of it totally wrong, totally out of God, totally not ordained, totally self-initiated and presumptuous by men who are using their office to act in ways in which their office did not entitle them.

The enemy, I think, would encourage that and if Moses had not been as alert to what was being expressed, Israel would have suffered loss in its sense of God as God. And that's why Moses says to Aaron, don't you exhibit any mourning. Don't you do those things of tousling your hair and ripping your clothing but let the nation itself, let Israel mourn.

Let your brethren, the whole house of Israel, in verse 6, bewail the burning which the Lord hath kindled. Bewail the burning. Not a sense of pity for those that were its victims but what was involved, what was expressed in this judgment that God performed.

Let them rightly assess what it means. Let them ache that God would go so far as to reduce Aaron's sons by two for this single act and what is he saying about his holiness through that and the violation of it for which we need to mourn. But don't you yourself in any way exhibit mourning lest you honor your sons more than God.

Not a remarkable tension that if a man would act humanly and fatherly to the sudden loss of two sons dear to him, he's making a choice of an honoring of flesh and of sons over that of God and that in fact that was the whole crisis by which the tribe of Levi entered its Levitical role in the priesthood of God in the day of the golden calf when Moses ground that calf to powder and made the people to drink it and said who is on the Lord's side and the people of the descendants of Levi stood on his side. Then he said strap your sword to your side and let every man go in and slay his neighbor, his friend, his brother and God says that day the Levites were consecrated to God for their priestly service. It required blood and not the blood of a stranger but the blood even of their own flesh and blood that this priestly requirement which is again made a point here of choosing between affection and natural identification and love for one's own flesh and blood versus the honoring of God even at the expense of their death and not even being allowed to show or exhibit a remorse or a mourning over that loss.

I'm not doing good. Does that Levitical requirement still pertain? Can it be an issue for us where your own flesh and blood in which you have to be aloof or alienate yourself or act in a way contrary to what every fatherly impulse toward them would require? Am I the only one who has to endorse a judgment of my eldest son who is being judged by a fellowship for his unwillingness to receive counsel and consider the divorce which he has obtained and they felt that his attitude and conduct his unwillingness to consider and talk his determination to be shed of that marriage and take up with another demanded a judgment that his flesh would be given over for its destruction that his soul might be saved and I have to make a choice as a father and as a man of God on whose side do I stand? Do I align myself with my son though he's clearly in error and I believe is deserving of that judgment and the judgment is calculated for his repentance or do I stand with that judgment and do not allow myself the enjoyment or the privilege of fellowship with my own

flesh and blood that I'm required to stand aloof and be distant and listen to my wife who will say but don't you want to see him as if the seeing and the identification and the warmth and all of those natural kinds of things are more imperative than the standing for the issue of judgment and righteousness by which hopefully there might be a turning and a repentance and a reconciliation and God would be honored who hates divorce and hates putting away. Am I the only one going through something like this at this time where against one's own flesh one has to stand with the same kind of absoluteness that Moses required of Aaron and that this is the real and ultimate test of consecration to God.

When the Levite was willing to go in and out and slay every man, his own brother, his friend, his neighbor, God said this day you have been consecrated for the purposes of God because the blood is not the blood of someone for whom you're indifferent and unrelated. The blood is that of that which is dear to you in every natural and affectionate way and yet you could not allow yourself the liberty of withholding God's judgment on those who celebrated the golden calf. That God is God still.

I think we need to be reminded of that at the risk of sounding like an old fogey, old testament Jew who's moving us away from New Testament orientation and bringing again some kind of ancient and out of the way and out of tune sense of God as he was known at the first and desires still to be known. They were forbidden to mourn lest he countenance their sin or impeach the justice of God. If you have not come to this what is your worship? Cats.

Now you're going too far. I'm asking you the question. If you have not come to this radical separation from your own flesh in the honoring of the holiness of God and what might be required in an attitude and conduct toward your own flesh, what then is the truth of your worship? Is worship really worship until this Levitical consecration has taken place and is maintained? So long as we're casual, callow, shallow, mindless, what is the truth of that worship? This text is not just a little piece of historical curiosity.

It's a statement that reverberates and resonates. It's as if we're called almost to choose sides ourselves. Would we agree with Moses? Is he being too severe in requiring Aaron to be silent and not in any way to indicate mourning? Or do we agree with the rightness of that sentence, that it was just severe as it was because we understand what it was as an offense against God, His name, His honor, and His holiness that had to be met in the instant and in the moment for any delay and any alleviation of that harsh judgment would give an impression to the nation that it was not so serious a transgression and these men meant well and what's the difference if they take the liberty to bring a little incense into the tabernacle of God even though it's not their role? See how that goes and how we justify? And so we come to a kind of easy believism, Christianity, a shallow kind of a thing in which the great solemn note of God as God has been voided.

We've allowed the concern for the flesh that is dear to us to eclipse the holiness of God. Private affection, personal affection, more important than His just wrath. Where is it in the Book of Lamentations or someplace where it says more appropriate to be in the house of mourning than in the house of celebration? Do I have it right, Bob? Ecclesiastes, better to be in the house of mourning than the house of feasting.

Well, maybe I should have spoken from Psalm 18. Either I'm an anachronism myself and the purpose of my going in this direction is to evoke your sympathetic prayer that I be straightened out and lined up with my generation in time, or God has raised up this anachronism, this out of joint entity in order to strike a note of a kind that we would not otherwise hear. When I survey the condition of Christendom as I have

privilege traveling all the world, the most conspicuous absence that I see everywhere is the fear of God.

I do not see the fear of God. There's an absence. There's a whole generation of Christians, of your generation, that have grown up without it, never known it, never been exposed to it.

They know it only as a cliché, as a phrase. They don't know it in an actuality by which one's soul is tempered. And one's worship would be affected by the fear of God and the knowledge of himself as holy.

So as for me, I'm choosing to be in the house of mourning and lament than in the glib and easy house of feasting and celebration. I can't go along with the hoopla and the happy occasions because something is wanting of a remarkably profound kind, too easily lost, too difficult to be gained. And that the sacrifice of these two men, obliterated in God's judgment, needs to be a standing, everlasting statement of a God who is jealous for his own name when we ourselves have lost or never had a comparable jealousy.

So I want to pray for the church. Okay? And that the Lord would uncover and reveal whatever is in our practice conduct that he construes and sees as strange fire. You like it.

You enjoy it. It has its effect. But is it something out of our own presumption or out of our own self-initiation and not given and called for by him? So Lord, in Jesus' name, this is a preaching disaster.

But I'm asking that however this has come out tonight, if this indeed was your theme and word, you'll honor it and strike us in our deeps, my God. If we have been mindless and shallow and have given ourselves to things in the name of worship that have more to do with our enjoyment than your holiness and that there's something that needs to come into our deeps, Lord, that is ancient, true, everlasting, and eternal, the holiness of God. Because we are tempted, my God, to presume and to initiate and to be spontaneous and to do our thing and think that if it has some effect and consequence, if it'll affect people, if they'll go down, that somehow that justifies it.

We are more attuned to the response of men and flesh than we are to your name and to your honor. So, Lord, I'm asking that something would be inserted because of the foolishness of this message tonight and because of its awkward, stumbling communication that will nevertheless carry the weight and the sense that you intended to be expressed. I'm asking something utterly supernatural that has not to do with our enjoyment of a message or our impressiveness with it, but that it has gone out, that something has been struck, a thought has been sounded, which is your thought, and it's a thought that is rarely ever expressed that I'm able to observe in our present-day charismatic Christendom.

Come, my God, we have become too easy, too casual. We lack the jealousy of Moses, and I'm asking, my God, that you would do something of a sobering kind for us all, for the church that is the church that is called to make you known as you in fact are. Make us conscious, Lord, that of those things that are in your sight strange, fire, false, not called for, not given, self-initiated, self-serving, and save us, my God, from judgment.

Give us a sense of mourning for the degree in which we have been participant in that kind of environment, and we bless you and thank you. In Yeshua's name, amen.

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