

# Send the Fire!

by Ian Brown

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*The Holy Spirit is a powerful force that consumes our sin, cleanses and purifies us, and guides us in our lives, empowering us to live a life of consecration to God.*

**Duration:** 32:07

**Scripture:** Luke 24:32, Acts 4:13, Acts 7:51, Acts 7:55, Romans 8:14, Galatians 5:18, 1 Peter 1:13-16

**Topics:** "Spiritual Transformation", "Repentance"

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## Description

In this sermon, the speaker shares a story about a man who came to their house in a state of agitation and concern. The man sought counseling from an evangelist and, after being counseled about a sin, he threw his packet of cigarettes into the fire, symbolizing his desire to get rid of his sinful habits. The speaker then discusses the importance of applying the Word of God to our lives and how it can lead to a burning of the heart and a transformation. The sermon also mentions the significance of prayerfulness and reading the Bible on one's knees, as exemplified by the great evangelist George Whitefield.

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## Transcript

There's an old Greek legend about Prometheus, a man who was said to have scaled the heights and stolen fire from heaven when he got away up there. Now, as punishment for his action, it is claimed that Jupiter chained Prometheus to a rock on Mount Proclus, where he was tempted by an eagle. Christ, I suppose we could say, is our Prometheus.

By means of his atoning death, he has ascended to heaven and he has procured by right the fire of the Holy Spirit's presence and power for us. One preacher has said the opened heaven of the coming Spirit has been secured by the open side of the crucified Saviour. Had our Lord not gone the way of the cross, had he not scaled the mountain of Calvary and gone and suffered and bled and died on our behalf there, had he not poured out his soul unto death, and by the pouring out of his soul purchased for us all of the blessings of God, then the pathway, the highway for the Holy Ghost to come from heaven to our hearts, to dwell amongst us, to empower us, that highway would not have been in place.

The early verses of Acts chapter 2 describe the coming of the Holy Ghost, tell how he emerges from the opened heavens. These are the words, And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sign from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting.

And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them, and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost. I have a twin picture there, or twin figure, that is pulled in by Luke here as he describes how the Spirit of God came upon the church in power. He compares the Spirit first of all to the wind, and then he compares the Spirit to the fire, and they are pretty appropriate comparisons.

We are all familiar with the words of the hymn that says, Thy Christ of burning, cleansing flame, send the fire, thy blood-bought gift, today we claim, send the fire. Look down and see this waiting host, give us the promised Holy Ghost, we want another Pentecost, send the fire. And it is verse 3 tonight, and the Spirit of God being propelled here and propagated before us as being the fire that we want to think of tonight.

For example, fire incinerates, it consumes, it cleanses, and it conforms, it incinerates. If only the unsaved were sufficiently awake to understand who God is. Then you would find that one of the most frightening and one of the most striking descriptions of God in the Bible is that we find in Hebrews 12 and verse 29, for our God is a consuming fire.

And through the Word we learn that He consumes His stubborn enemies. In Deuteronomy 9 verse 3 for example, we are told to understand therefore this thing, that the Lord thy God is He which goeth over before thee, as a consuming fire, He shall destroy them, and He shall bring them down before thy feet. We are taught as well in the Word of God that He consumes those who, like Achan, have dared to sin against His strong and His clear commands, and then have backed up that sin and aggravated their iniquity by lying and deceiving.

And in Joshua 7 verses 15 to 25, we will not take time to read it, but that is the passage where Achan is brought before us, a man who disobeyed God. And then not only did he scatter the sand again in its proper place in the floor of his desert pitch tent, but he comes and he tries to scatter lies and deceptions to try to get away from that sin. God as well, we are told, as the fire, consumes our sin upon conversion.

And He does that business after conversion as well. Saint Spurgeon once said, you may write on wax, and only make the record fair. Take a hot iron and roll it across the wax, and it is all gone.

That, he says, seems to be what the Lord did with Paul's heart. It was written over with blasphemy and rebellion, and Christ rolled the hot iron of burning over his soul, and his evil inscription was all gone. He ceased to blaspheme, and he began to praise.

And surely that is what He has done in our hearts. All of those embossed writings, the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, and the handwriting that the devil had placed upon our heart, and all of the scratch marks of our sins and our iniquities, but the hot iron of God's cleansing Word came across our hearts, and all of that was moved out. I think of the impressive scene that we have described in Acts 19, that took place in the city of Ephesus.

Paul had been among the people there, had, in characteristic fashion, signed or write the word of life. Men and women listening to his testimony, to his preaching, they were converted. What did they do? Well, in verse 19 of Acts 19, we are told that many of them also, which use curious arts, brought their books together, and burned them before all men, and they counted the price of them, and found it fifty thousand pieces of silver.

And so in the city of Ephesus, their past practices went up in flames. Those people came and he put the torch to their former transgressions. They threw everything that they had been wedded to with their hearts

into the fire.

Everything associated with the old way of living, it was tossed in there, it was burned up, it was an all-consuming bonfire that they had, and it was a genuine one as well. I can recall many years ago, there was a mission at the back of her house, and there was a man who came knocking on her door one night, maybe an hour after that mission had concluded, and he seemed to be really agitated and full of concern. And you would have imagined that the conviction of the Holy Ghost had really fallen upon him, the state that he was in.

And he got us to call for the evangelist, and the evangelist came to the house, and he sat there and he was counseled about a sin. And just when the counseling was concluded, he reached his hand into his inside pocket, and he pulled out a packet of cigarettes, and our fire was blazing up at the time, and he threw them into the back of the fire, and he said as he did it, I suppose I'll have to get rid of these now that I'm sealed. Well, he lost one packet of cigarettes, but he didn't gain a cleansed heart that night.

In fact, I was speaking to one of our students there when we were away in youth camp, and this particular man, who must be now 30 years ago, came into our house to be converted that night. That wasn't his first experience of being counseled, and apparently still he pops up in meetings and ministers' houses and seeks them out, and again gets counseled and goes through the same old procedure. Many other things could be said, but back then it certainly wasn't genuine.

But here was a bonfire, and these people had taken everything that was associated with their former way of living, and they wanted a public declaration of it. And here there was a real genuine feel about it. One preacher, F.E. Marsh, has declared, well, for God's people, if there was a bonfire of all the old things of the Egyptian world and self-life at the commencement of the Christian career, but alas, we often find as Israel brought some of the dough out of Egypt with them, so the saints often bring some one thing into the new life.

And sadly, Marsh is all too accurate in what he says. God's child saved by His grace, sometimes you could say almost invariably, goes back to scoop up some of the old grime of his former living. He goes back there and he sneaks another little taste of that former sin that he had.

He sips again at the old broken cistern of the world. He salves just something, what he can from the ashes of some spiritual Sodom or Jericho. It happens.

Despite the clear command of the Most High God against it, it happens. Despite God's striving by His Spirit in that man or woman's heart, it happens. Despite all the encouragements that we have to live for Jesus every day, it happens.

Despite the inducements that we have to press onward in the narrow way, and the thoughts that we have in our mind it's the only way, still it happens. We go back. Despite the richness of the resources our Lord has laid on for us, still it happens.

Utterly destroy all was God's instruction to King Saul in 1 Samuel 15 and 3 regarding the people of Amalek. But Saul had another idea, and so he compromised and he disobeyed and he spared what he should have slain. And the result was that Saul is put to death by the sword that is wielded by an Amalekite.

The very race of people that he was told you must destroy, and destroy all, and destroy utterly. And he didn't. And an Amalekite kills him.

2 Samuel 1 verses 6 to 10. Thank God for the provision of the fire. By the Holy Spirit it breaks through and burns up.

It consumes and cleanses from these besetting sins. To the prophet the words of Isaiah 6 and 7 were spoken. Lo, this hath touched thy lips, and thine iniquity is taken away, and thy sin purged, and a fire on that occasion it consumed his sin, and it gave cleansing to his soul.

That again is a picture, a wonderful picture of the work of the Holy Spirit. When Samson was endued with the power of the Holy Ghost, he was able to stand forwards there and break as though it was just a little thread that was around his body, those ropes that the Philistines had put upon him. Judges 16 in the verse 9. And if we are to hand over all our sins to the fire, well then really that should be our chief objective in Christian living.

Numbers 31, the verse 23 carries good instruction for us. Everything that may abide the fire, ye shall make it go through the fire, and it shall be clean. Nevertheless, it shall be purified with the water of separation.

And all that abideth not the fire, ye shall make go through the water. There needs to be, in other words, this thorough, constant purging. It was Matthew Henry who said, Fire makes all it seizes like itself.

And that is why the Holy Spirit of God comes upon us, works upon our heart to make us like himself, to transform us and change us, to make us holy. When Moses was commanded to build the tabernacle, God gave him very precise instructions and he had a whole pattern that he needed to follow right down to a T. Every detail that he could have conceived off in his mind had he sat down himself to formulate some plan for the tabernacle. Well, God had done it all for him.

Hebrews 8 and verse 5 says, Moses was admonished of God when he was about to make the tabernacle for, see 17, that I make all things according to the pattern showed to thee in the mount. So up in that mount of Sinai, when Moses came and communed face to face as it were with God, heart to heart, friend to friend, God gave him the blueprints, the architect's plans for the tabernacle. And he was told this is the detail.

And of course there was the burnt offering, the brazen lever, and everything that suggested cleansing and purging by fire in that tabernacle. Now there is more than a hint of this in 1 Peter 1, 13-16. Peter says, Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ, as obedient children, not fashioning yourselves according to the former lusts in your ignorance.

You are not to work of the old plans here. But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation, because it is written, Be ye holy, for I am holy. A porcelain vase may be easily spoiled when it is in the first stages of production.

When the clay, for example, is wet and pliable, for example, it can be twisted out of shape. Or when the colors have just been applied to that clay, you only need somebody to come along and just run their finger down over the ridges of that vase and pull the color down, smear the whole thing, and ruin that exquisite design. There is a need for that vase to be put into the kiln so that the artist's skill can be burned into it and the colors will become permanent.

And it is the same with the work of the Holy Spirit within us. If we keep to this figure of the porcelain vase, then the Holy Spirit of God, He is the artist, and He is also the fire. It is Him alone who, by working upon our heart, can produce the fascinating colors of a sanctified life and can give us solid resistance against all the attacks of evil.

It is He, by His power, who can help us mortify the deeds of the body, who can help us subdue the flesh, who can help us to battle effectively against sin. It is He alone, the Holy Spirit, who can implant within us those desires to rise up and conquer those enemies that assail us, who can restore in us the image of Christ that our first parents marred and forfeited in the Garden of Eden. American preacher Jonathan Edwards, used of God in the mighty revival, declared, If I believed that it were permitted to one man and only one in this generation to lead a life of complete consecration to God, I would live in every respect as though I believed myself to be that one.

Now, that is a big statement. A big claim. One that we cannot make in our own energy.

One that we cannot make or follow through at all in the power of our flesh. It does not lie in our own strength to be so burnt out and consecrated to God and so on top of all of the sins that beset us. We cannot do it.

And I know that Jonathan Edwards did not think for a second that he could do it by his own power and strength, but he was relying on the Holy Ghost to do it. The hymn writer got it right when he said, Every virtue we possess and every victory won and every thought of holiness are His alone. To be spirit fashioned, to be spirit fired, to be the kind of man and woman who has been operated upon by the Spirit of the Lord in a way that we resist sin more successfully, to be not quickly moved away from the principles of the Gospel, to be utterly focused on our purpose in life, to glorify God while we live, to be pressing on with that gritty determination to gain the prize of the high calling of God, to fight against the powers of darkness and still remain standing, to be able to say with the Apostle, But none of these things move me, neither can I my life deal unto myself, so that I may finish my course with joy.

To have that determination is worth striving for, and we can only do it with the power, the fiery power of the Spirit of God. And our Lord Jesus leaves us here without excuse where this is concerned. It is not as if we need to get up into the higher echelons of church life to have the Holy Spirit breathe upon us.

Listen to Jesus' words in Luke 11, verses 10 and 13, For everyone that asketh, that is what we need to do, receive it. And he that seeketh, findeth, and to him that knocketh, it shall be opened. If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask Him.

He is saying, Pray for it. Yearn for it. Strive towards it.

Ask and seek and knock. The Holy Spirit here is compared to fire in that He incinerates. He consumes our iniquities.

He cleanses us from sin. He conforms us unto the image of Christ. But fire not only incinerates, fire illuminates.

There is a thought of direction and a thought of protection here. It illuminates. You will remember the children of Israel coming out of Egypt and they have the wilderness cracked ahead of them and they are marching on towards Canaan with great purpose.

But they only ever see the way by the pillar of cloud and the pillar of fire. It gives them light. It gives them protection and defense as well.

Fire, for them, illuminated, directed their steps, protected them by moving in behind them so that the Egyptians could not overtake them. Two things are said to have been the secret of George Whitefield's most distinguished ministry. One was his unusual prayerfulness and the other his habit of reading the Bible on his knees.

The great evangelist, one person maintained, had learned the first lesson in service, his own utter nothingness and helplessness, that he was nothing and could do nothing without God. He could neither understand the Word for himself nor translate it into his own life nor apply it to others with power unless the Holy Spirit became to him both insight and unction. Can you see him there? Getting the sermons ready.

Going out to preach them. And looking, figuratively looking, for that pillar of fire to illuminate the dark night of his own heart and the night of those hearts around him. Led by the Spirit is a good biblical phrase.

In Luke 4, verse 1, we read of our Lord and Jesus being full of the Holy Ghost, returned from Jerusalem, and no surprise, being full of the Holy Ghost, we read, and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness. And we have the same provision laid on for us. We don't need to wander about in the darkness banging our head off walls wondering where really we should go from here.

Through the death of Christ, the Holy Spirit has come down being bequeathed to us as our guide has descended like that fire to come and to illuminate our pathway and show us the way to go. What did our Lord promise in John 16, verse 13? Howbeit when He, the Spirit of truth, is come, He will guide you into all truth. Then when we would turn over the pages of Holy Scripture to Romans 8, verse 14, to Galatians 5, and to verse 18, again we are faced with this thought of being led by the Spirit.

In 18th century Wales, a young man named William Williams graduated from university as a physician, but quickly he changed profession to become in effect a physician of the soul, a preacher. He'd been warned about those fanatical dissenters, Whitefield and Wesley and the like of them. But William Williams decided no matter what this advice was that had come to his heart that he would become one of those himself, a fanatical dissenter, a preacher of the gospel.

And he joined the Calvinistic Methodists. During 43 years of itinerant ministry, Williams clocked up more than 95,000 miles. His impassioned preaching drew crowds of 10,000 or more on occasions.

Once he spoke to a crowd that was estimated to be 80,000 people or more and he wrote in his journal, God strengthened me to speak so loud that most could hear. William Williams, however, is best remembered for his hymns. He was the Isaac Watts of Wales in total he composed over 800 hymns.

His best known was what is termed an autobiographical prayer, one that he was writing about himself and wanting the Lord to hear and answer his cry. We have it in 431 in our book, Guide Me. Oh, thy great Jehovah, pilgrim through this barren land.

I am weak, but thou art mighty. Hold me with thy powerful hand, bread of heaven. Feed me till I want no more.

And then he sits down and he writes, Open thou the crystal fountain. Whence the healing stream doth flow, let the fiery, cloudy pillar lead me all my journey through strong deliverer. Be thou still my strength and shield.

He lived like a pilgrim. He came through all kinds of obstacles. He was beaten by mobs when he preached.

Once within an inch of his life he was cheered on on other occasions by the crowds. But in all his travels he sought only to do the will of God with the anointing and leading of the Holy Spirit upon him. This Holy Spirit is shown here under the emblem of fire.

Fire incinerates, consumes our sin. It illuminates, gives direction, protection. And then it also inflames.

It inflames. It encourages, in other words, and it emboldens as well. It was said of the old carpenter that was sitting in the shop there and was taking the bits of wood away that he didn't want and formulating a little figure.

And the figure became an idol to people. It was said of the idolatrous carpenter in Isaiah 44 in verse 16. He burneth part thereof in the fire.

Yea, he warmeth himself and saith Aha, I am warm. I have seen the fire. Now, when the Holy Ghost comes upon our hearts, the child of God would be completely warranted in taking the words of this man and renouncing them out of the old idolatrous context and saying I am warm.

I have seen the fire. I think, as I'm sure you do, of those two disciples travelling from Jerusalem to Emmaus on the resurrection morning. How downcast they were.

How forlorn they were. How dejected they were. They were choked in soul and so choked they hardly mustered the strength to speak a word to one another.

But when the Christ of God drew near, when He accosted them, opened the Scriptures to their understanding and He showed through the power of the Holy Spirit how Jesus filled the book beginning to end. What a change came over those two downcast disciples. And then later on they began to reflect on what had happened that day.

And they were thinking of this sudden intrusion of this stranger into their lives. The application of the word of God to their circumstances and to their consciences. And they were lost in wonder and exclaimed in Luke 24 and 32 Did not our hearts burn within us? Why did He talk with us by the way and why did He open to us the Scriptures? And through that burning apart they had been encouraged.

We can have similar encouragement today. It is available. In Isaiah 11 and 3 the Spirit of God is described in seven different aspects.

And each one of the seven is full of comfort and cheer for us. We are told He is the Spirit of Jehovah. And so He cheers us by His unchanging love.

He is the Spirit of wisdom. And so again He comforts our hearts by unfeeling guidance. He is the Spirit of understanding so He shows us those tremendous secrets about Himself.

He is the Spirit of counsel so He gives us uplifting instruction. He is the Spirit of might so that irresistible power that propels us along and helps us is ours for our comfort. He is the Spirit of knowledge so again He cheers us by irrefutable knowledge.

Knowledge the world does not grasp and cannot unless the Spirit of God comes upon them understand. He is the Spirit as well of the fear of the Lord and so He cheers our hearts by attachment to Himself. We are encouraged by the Spirit of fire coming and inflaming us with encouragement.

He also is the Spirit of fire emboldens us. Acts 2 where we are taking really the springboard of the text from verse 3. Acts 2 was a real watershed in the history of the church of Jesus Christ upon the earth. Before the crucifixion Matthew 26 verse 56 we are told then all the disciples forsook Him and fled.

Dust cloud goes out over the horizon. The disciples in front of it and causing it. But after the crucifixion, John 20 verse 19 we find again the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled for fear of the Jews.

They are a terrified bunch and that terror has sat upon them now for many days. But after Pentecost where is this cringing fear and where is this paralyzing dread? Look around the ranks of the disciples. Man, woman, child, it is nowhere to be found this fear anymore.

In Acts 2 the verse 14 verse 22, 23 the verse 36 as well we are told Peter standing up with the eleven lifted up his voice and said unto them that is the crowd ye men of Judaeum and all ye that dwell in Jerusalem be this known unto you and hearken to my words. He is very bold unto you. Ye men of Israel he continues.

Hear these words. Jesus of Nazareth the man approved of God among you by miracles and wonders and signs which God did by him in the midst of you as ye yourselves also know him being delivered by the determined counsel and foreknowledge of God ye have taken and by wicked hands have crucified and slain. Let all the house of Israel he says know assuredly that God hath made this same Jesus whom ye have crucified both Lord and Christ.

He is not a cowering disciple anymore. He is up on a soapbox and he is proclaiming to the people stern words, words of chastisement, words of power. I think of Acts 4 the verse 13.

Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John and perceived that they were unlearned and ignorant men they marveled and they took knowledge of them that they had been with Jesus. It was another display of boldness. And I think of Stephen also in Acts chapter 7. A man full of the Holy Ghost we're told.

Acts 7.55 and he comes and he delivers a biting charge to what was a bitter crowd. Acts 7.51 Ye stiff necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears ye do always resist the Holy Ghost. Not quite palatable messages but ones that were packed with power by the Spirit of God.

How we should plead in this day when again the ground is hard and barren. Come Holy Ghost our hearts inspire let us thine influence prove source of the old prophetic fire, fountain of light and love. God through himself we then shall know if thy within us shine and sound with all thy scenes below the depths of love divine.

Fire incinerates not only that it illuminates not only that it inflames. And this inflaming we need in our hearts. The Old Testament word offering talked about in Leviticus chapter 1 was sometimes termed the

ascending offering because the word burnt offering means to burn as incense and then to ascend as fragrance.

The same word is translated in 1 Kings 10 and 5 as ascent. The same word again for burnt offering is translated in Ezekiel 14 verse 26 as to go up. The Spirit of God is not only the spirit of burning to consume our sin and the dross that is in our lives, but he is the one who takes this offering of ourselves and makes it burn up ignites it inflames our heart to make our service well pleasing unto the Lord.

He turns our eyes Christward. He fixes the affection of our hearts upon him. He stirs up our minds to a blessed communion with Christ.

He prompts us in prayer. We are told that in Romans 8 26-27 that he helps us there and he lifts up that prayer of ours unto glory and he cleanses it through the sieve of the blood of a son and he presents it before the throne of grace. The Holy Spirit fire to incinerate fire to illuminate fire to inflame why we need him.

Isaac Watts, we have mentioned him in connection with William Williams but Isaac Watts himself wrote come Holy Spirit heavenly dove with all thy quickening powers kindle a flame of sacred love in these cold hearts of ours and he wasn't alone because I found looking through the old hymn writers in Isaac Watts' era the 18th century they all seemed to warm to this theme of the Holy Spirit warming their hearts and so the words of heart I close descend from heaven celestial dove with flames of pure seraphic love warm our cold hearts with heavenly heat and set our souls on fire. That's the kind of inflaming that we need.

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