

# False Fire

by Ronald Glass

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*The sermon warns against the dangers of false fire, counterfeit revivals that imitate the work of the Holy Spirit but lack biblical content and are driven by human motives.*

**Duration:** 59:51

**Scripture:** Leviticus 9:22

**Topics:** "Revival"

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## Description

In this sermon, the speaker addresses the issue of false fire in contemporary media revivalists. These charlatans deceive unsuspecting senior citizens into sending them money, living lavish lifestyles while claiming to do God's work. The speaker quotes Peter's words from the Bible, condemning these false ministers and urging them to repent. He emphasizes that genuine revival is not a staged event or a product of public demonstration, but a true encounter with the glory of God. The sermon also warns believers to be discerning and not be misled by emotional outbursts, as seen in past revivals.

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## Transcript

I should have sung the amen on that one. As you're turning to Leviticus chapter 9, let me just say that I really am rejoicing over the organ. And let me tell you one reason why.

When I first came to this church, in fact, not even, I guess, as a potential candidate, not even as a candidate, when I first came here, I said, one of the things that needs to happen at Waiting River Baptist Church is for the instruments to be replaced. And within about two years, less than two years, we had a new piano, which was badly needed. But God doesn't always do everything we'd like right when we'd like it.

So it's taken 16 and 1/2 years for the new organ. But it's finally here. And I've been waiting for this for 16 and 1/2 years.

And I'm so very grateful to God for that. That's why I'm rejoicing. And I want to just say, again, a verbal thank you.

I've said it to the men, written it to them. But I want to say a special thank you to George, to Ed Tolff, and to Jim Perry, and his son Josh for all of the work that they put in over and above many hours here that none of you know about in helping to get this done. And then some of the others of you who have invested

time a week or two ago helping to install speakers.

And I'll thank you for every one of you who have had a part. All right, our text today comes from Leviticus. And we're going to read the last three verses of chapter 9 and the first three verses of chapter 10, our text today.

Then Aaron lifted up his hands toward the people and blessed them. And he stepped down after making the sin offering and the burnt offering and the peace offerings. Moses and Aaron went into the tent of meeting.

When they came out and blessed the people, the glory of the Lord appeared to all the people. Then fire came out from before the Lord and consumed the burnt offering and the portions of fat on the altar. And when all the people saw it, they shouted and fell on their faces.

Now Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, took their respective firepans and after putting fire in them, placed incense on it and offered strange fire before the Lord, which he had not commanded them. And fire came out from the presence of the Lord and consumed them. And they died before the Lord.

Then Moses said to Aaron, it is what the Lord spoke, saying, by those who come near me, I will be treated as holy. And before all the people, I will be honored. So Aaron, therefore, kept silent.

For many years now, when you talk about revival, it has a bad reputation in the minds of many people, especially unbelievers, but sometimes even within the Christian community. That's unfortunate, but it's also not entirely surprising. Any perceptive Christian knows that whenever and wherever God is at work, Satan is not far behind, seeking to destroy the fruit of the Spirit's blessing.

Satan is a master counterfeiter. Genuine revivals in America, I think back to about 1798 up through the year 1831, there was a period of time of real revival in many places, especially in the South and in the Northeast, up in this area and in New England. But these revivals that took place in the first part of the 19th century were followed by the false revivals of Charles G. Finney and those who followed him in the 1830s.

The worldwide impact of the Welsh Revival, 1904 to 1906, was followed immediately in 1907 by the Azusa Street Revival in Los Angeles, led by Charles Parham, and the birth of Pentecostalism. The powerful revivals in Western Canada in the early 1970s were followed in the 1980s and 90s with the so-called revivals in Lakeland and Brownsville, Florida, and with the Laughing Revival at the airport vineyard in Toronto in Canada. Now, these are just three examples.

The history of counterfeit revivals tells us of many such examples where spiritually anointed, doctrinally pure preachers are replaced by greedy, mesmerizing charlatans appealing to popular acclaim, where popular preaching gives way to religious entertainment and sound doctrine to hyper-emotionalism with no biblical content. The work of the Holy Spirit is imitated by frauds, unsuspecting people are manipulated, and the power of the gospel is eviscerated. Revival fire? No, false fire, false fire.

There's a very helpful book that was written several years ago by Ian Murray of England. And Dr. Murray has made some very helpful comments about this. He says, and I quote from him, in all revivals, there are admixtures.

It cannot be supposed that in the high excitement attending the work of the Spirit of God, God's saving work can be instantly distinguished from what moves men only temporarily or from what can be accounted for in psychological terms. The depth of feelings shown by professed converts and physical phenomena, such as falling and swooning, provide no safe means for distinguishing the permanent from the transitory. And so we realize that wherever God is at work, Satan will be at work as well.

How Satan and his demonic forces undermine and neutralize the work of genuine revival is a fascinating study. Our series on biblical revival would not be complete without giving at least some attention to this subject. Now, this is important because you have been, I'm sure, or if you haven't, you will be eventually exposed to the claims of some religious leaders, especially in the media today, on television primarily, and their ministries.

And they will tell you that the Spirit of God is at work. They will tell you that they are experiencing constant revival in their ministries. You may hear of unusual manifestations alleged to be the work of the Holy Spirit.

Now, you need discernment. Many uninformed believers have been misled in the past, misled to believe that this is the work of the Spirit of God, and as a result, very often misled into turning over their resources, generous gifts to these charlatans. And what has happened in the process in many cases is lives, spiritually lives, have been destroyed.

These religious frauds are accountable for their deceptions, and they need to be exposed. And scripture gives us the basis for making such judgments. Now, to see what is at stake, I am going to turn today to a tragic event which took place in the camp of the Israelites at the foot of Mount Sinai.

It is often overlooked, but it is powerfully instructive. Now, here's what has happened. Israel has been camped for a while at the foot of Mount Sinai.

In his conversations with Moses on the mount, God gave instructions to Moses for certain things to be done that would establish the religious life of the nation. He gave instructions for the building of a tabernacle. At this point, when we come to this text, that tabernacle is standing.

It has already been built, and it has been blessed by God with a cloud of his presence settling there upon it. God has given in the early chapters of the book of Leviticus the instructions for the sacrifices which were to be offered there in the tabernacle. He's given him the instructions for the various offerings, how they are to be offered, when they are to be offered.

And now, beginning in chapters 8 and 9 of Leviticus, God turns our attention to those who would actually offer those offerings, those who would serve in that tabernacle. So we have the tent, the building, and we have the sacrifices outlined, explained, and commissioned. And now, we need the priests to be able to do the service of the tabernacle.

And that's what chapters 8 and 9 of Leviticus are about. It is the commissioning or the ordination of the priests. But in the process of all of this, something unexpected happens.

In thinking about this event, there are three dynamics that become clear, and I want to share them with you. Also, I'm going to be going to that passage we read earlier, a little bit later in our service, to that passage that we read earlier in Acts chapter 8. And also, I am going to refer a number of times to the awakening that took place in the early part of the 19th century here in the United States and what happened afterwards. So that's where we're going.

Let me give you the first of these three dynamics that I think is important as we consider the subject of false fire. The first is this. False fire is focused on false ministries.

False fire is focused on false ministries. Now, if you go back and you read beginning in chapter 8, you find that the process of the consecration or ordination of the priests took an entire week. On the eighth day, there was a special ceremony involving special sacrificial offerings.

That's chapter 9. You see that chapter 9 begins. Now, it came about on the eighth day. After this week has been observed, on the eighth day, there are these special offerings that are made there in the tabernacle.

The climax is reached in chapter 9, verses 22 through 24, as we read them a while ago. Aaron lifted up his hands toward the people and he blessed them. And then he stepped down after making the sin offering.

This is stepping down from the brazen altar. And the burnt offering and the peace offerings. And Moses and Aaron then went into the tent of meeting, out of sight of the people.

And when they came out and blessed the people, the glory of the Lord in that Shekinah cloud came and appeared to all the people. And then just see the scene there. The tabernacle and Moses and Aaron emerge.

The cloud of God's glory envelops the scene. And suddenly, fire from heaven comes and consumes the burnt offering. And when all of the people saw it, they shouted.

And they fell on their faces in abject fear and worship. But then we have this account, beginning in chapter 10, of Nadab and Abihu. And something tragic takes place.

They offer fire that is called here strange fire. And fire from heaven falls again and destroys them. False fire.

Let me suggest a couple of thoughts here. False fire disregards the authority of its actions. Satan's counterfeits do not care what God commands.

Now, the key word here that I want to focus on is in verse 1. Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, took their respective fire pans. And after putting fire in them, placed incense on it and offered, here's the word, strange fire. Now, that word strange means this.

It means illegitimate, unauthorized, or forbidden. Nadab and Abihu devised their own ceremony. They had no authorization to do what they did.

And thus their sacrifice was utterly illegitimate in the eyes of God. But they did it in front of the people, who, I assume, were thinking, well, they're sons of Aaron, so obviously what they're doing must be part of what God has authorized. But it wasn't.

So false fire disregards the authority of its actions. They did not look to God for His instructions. They just took it upon themselves to do this.

And therefore, and the reason this was so serious is, secondly, that false fire distorts the meaning of its actions. The reason what they did was so serious is found in the proper offering of incense. And that reminds us of the purpose of the tabernacle and the purpose of the priesthood.

Let me review for you for just a moment. Remember this. Israelites, just like you and me, like us, they were sinners.

They were lost in trespasses and sins. They needed a Redeemer and they needed to be saved. But they didn't have a New Testament.

They didn't know about Jesus Christ. And so, when God gave them the tabernacle and God gave them the sacrifices and the priesthood and the feasts, God gave them what amounted to their New Testament. Everything in the tabernacle, everything in the priesthood, everything in the sacrifices, and everything in the feasts spoke of Jesus Christ.

Now, how was incense supposed to be offered? Well, the fact is, at this very point, God hadn't said yet. But, if they had just waited a little bit, they would have learned. Leviticus still, chapter 16.

Turn over there for a moment, verse 11, and here's what we read. Then, instructions now for the Day of Atonement. The celebration or the observance of the Day of Atonement.

Then Aaron shall offer the bull of the sin offering, which is for himself, and make atonement for himself and for his household, and he shall slaughter the bull of the sin offering, which is for himself. He shall take a firepan full of coals of fire from upon the altar before the Lord, and two handfuls of finely ground sweet incense, and bring it inside the veil. That's the veil, the curtain that separated the Holy Place from the Holy of Holies.

Inside the Holy of Holies was the Ark of the Covenant, and that's where the glory of God rested. Verse 13. He shall put the incense on the fire before the Lord, that the cloud of incense may cover the mercy seat that is on the Ark of the Testimony, otherwise he will die.

The mercy seat was the lid upon which were mounted the two cherubim, golden cherubim. It was a golden lid, and it was there that the blood was sprinkled. Now, I want you to see what all of this meant.

When that blood was taken behind the curtain, and it was put on the mercy seat, it was the symbol of blood that would yet be shed one day on Calvary's cross. Blood that was sprinkled on the mercy seat came between the glory of God, and all of His holiness, and what was inside the box, which was the tables of the law. The symbol of man's sin.

Man had broken the law. God's glory was great. The two could not coexist except the blood be sprinkled there on that mercy seat.

The blood of an innocent victim. Well, of course, temporarily, the innocent victim was an animal. Permanently, ultimately, it was the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ.

It was in this ceremony, the context of this ceremony, of the high priest going behind the curtain and sprinkling the blood of the goat on the mercy seat, that the incense was burned. The incense altar was a small altar, about so high, and just about so big. Coals were placed on that altar from the brazen altar, and then incense was offered, two handfuls of incense, and the aroma of the incense filled the place as Aaron went behind the curtain.

What was the significance of incense? Incense in the Bible is always a symbol of prayer. Christ Jesus is our intercessor. He is the one who interposed His blood between us as guilty sinners and a holy God.

And that was symbolized in that ceremony. Christ Jesus, remember His great prayer in John chapter 17. Remember the fact that the risen Christ is at the right hand of the throne of God, ever living and making intercession for us.

But that intercession is made by one who died. The Redeemer became the intercessor. The Son of God became the high priest.

And therefore, that incense that was offered could not be offered apart from sacrifice. That's why the coals that were placed on the incense altar, by which the incense was burned, were taken from off the brazen altar, where the sin offering and the burnt offering and the trespass offerings were offered. They took coals from the place of sacrifice and death.

They brought them to the golden altar of intercession. And there they sprinkled the incense, which filled the room as Aaron, in the place of the great high priest, Aaron the high priest, sprinkled the blood on the mercy seat. Now what I want you to see is that in light of all of this symbolism, what Nadab and Abihu did was utterly illegitimate.

They took fire from somewhere. It doesn't tell us where, but it wasn't from the altar. Perhaps they went out to their backyard barbecue and took the fire.

I don't know, but they took fire from some place. And then they went through this little ceremony that God never authorized. It distorted the meaning of everything that God intended.

False fire is focused on false ministry, on false ministries. Now let me move to a second dynamic that I see here, and that is that false fire is fueled by false motives. Now let me repeat something that I hope has become apparent to you over the weeks that we have studied together the subject of revival, and that is that revival always seeks and manifests the glory of God.

The great motive of those who pray for revival and preachers who preach for revival is that God might be glorified in his church. False fire always involves the intrusion of man into the place of God. And we see this here in Leviticus, and also we see it in the strange story of Simon the magician.

So put your finger there in Acts chapter 8, and we're going to go there in just a second. Let me suggest to you some observations with regard to the false motives behind this false fire. First of all, false fire intends to exalt personal eminence.

Now the apparent motivation with respect to Nadab and Abihu, I think, is found in chapter 9, verse 23. Notice what it says. When they came out and blessed the people, the glory of the Lord appeared to all the people.

Nadab and Abihu apparently were mesmerized by the fact that Moses and Aaron had led this ceremony which had been so blessed by God, the presence of God, the fire from heaven on the altar, and all of the people falling on their faces before them and worshipping God. And they apparently were saying in their hearts, we want all the people to fall on their faces before us and worship God. We don't want them to worship us, but we want them to worship God.

But we want them to worship God. We want to be the ones that are there in front of the people. They wanted popular acclaim.

They didn't want to take second place to their father. They were driven by a passion for self-exaltation. Now come with me to Acts, chapter 8, and as we look at verse 9, there was a man named Simon who formerly was practicing magic in the city and astonishing the people of Samaria, claiming to be someone great.

You see that phrase? Claiming to be someone great. And they all from smallest to greatest were giving attention to him saying, and notice they were feeding this desire for greatness, this man is what is called the great power of God. Not exactly calculated for humility.

And they were giving him attention because he had for a long time astonished them with his magic arts. Do you see all of that? Claiming to be someone great. This man is called the great power of God, giving him attention.

He was at the center of all of this. The leading concern with the false revivalist is his personal reputation and his prominence as a preacher. He wants attention.

He longs for maximum exposure in the media. Everything is engineered for his success. And you watch them, I don't need to name them, you have seen them on television.

You know who they are. They want the same thing. Maximum exposure in the media.

They want everything pointing to them. They are the center of attention. They are the center of the show.

It's a sure sign of a false preacher. And anything he preaches and anything that follows from it in terms of alleged miracles or signs is false fire. False fire.

False fire intends to exalt personal eminence. Secondly, false fire intends to excite popular emotions. With your fingers still there in Acts, come back to Leviticus 9, verse 24.

And notice, the fire came out from before the Lord and consumed the burnt offering and the portions of fat on the altar. And when all the people saw it, they shouted and fell on their faces. Now, one of the things that is seen throughout the history of revivals is that at times there were great emotional outbursts.

This was something that was seen in the revival that we call the Evangelical Awakening. That was in 1740s in England. And its corresponding revival here in the colonies of America we call the Great Awakening.

These were the revivals under the leadership of George Whitefield, and Howell Harris, and John Wesley, and especially here in the colonies, Jonathan Edwards. In fact, Jonathan Edwards wrote several things, including his narrative of surprising conversions, and his thoughts on the revival, and his treatise on religious affections. He wrote these treatises in order to explain to people, especially back in Europe, what was going on.

Because there were people that would fall on the ground, and there were people who would go on and cry, and tears, and carry on. There was some of that. And he had to explain in very detailed terms, and you can read his works today, that these were in fact genuine marks of the Spirit of God.

Distinguishing marks of the Spirit of God, he titled it. That's what he was proving to them. God was at work.

This was not false. And he was right. However, there are other revivals, and we have the records of the revival in the early part of the 20th century that took place largely in New England, and in places in the South.

From about 1800 through 1830, there were these revivals that were extremely quiet. There was none of that. The revival experiences that I have seen, I have seen tears shed, but I have never seen that kind of outburst.

Never. But you see, Nadab and Abihu were impressed. The people shouted, and they fell on their faces.

There's something about it with a spiritual leader, if you're not careful, when you see God's people get all excited, and you see them shouting and falling on their faces, boy, you want to be right in the center of that. Strong emotional displays are no guarantee of genuine revival. Again, back there in Acts chapter 8, you have all of this attention.

The astonishment of the people at the work of the Spirit of God through Philip, and then later when John and Peter come to Samaria, and again, the manifestations of the Spirit, but these were signs that God had given for a specific reason, and he wants them. Simon wants these signs. Why? Because he thrives on the emotions of the people, wants to get them excited, wants to get them stirred up.

So let me say it again. Emotional manifestations, strong emotional displays, are no guarantee of genuine revival, especially when they have no precedent in Scripture. And by that, I'm talking about things such as, and these are only three of many, one, public healing meetings.

There is no precedent in the New Testament for anything resembling a public meeting of healing. What we saw and heard of in the so-called airport revival in Toronto, people barking like dogs, rolling around on the floor. There's nothing like that in Scripture.

You see it on the television all the time if you watch, I don't know why you do, but if you do watch the faith healers, this so-called slaying in the Spirit, there is nothing in Scripture representing anything close to slaying in the Spirit. My friends, these kinds of things are exactly what Nadab and Abihu did. That is, they did things that God never authorized.

Never authorized. Things that God was ultimately so displeased about that He took their lives. False fire intends to excite popular emotions, and it very often does so by using these things that have no basis in Scripture.

Thirdly, false fire intends to enhance personal enrichment. Now once again in Acts chapter 8, impressing people with extraordinary spiritual phenomena was Simon's business. That's why he was called the man who has the great or is the great power of God.

That's why he could claim to be somebody great. That's why they gave attention to Simon. Extraordinary spiritual phenomenon.

That was his business. That's how he earned his living. So what does he do? Come over to verse 17.

Then they began laying their hands on them. They were receiving the Spirit. When Simon saw that the Spirit was bestowed through the laying on of the apostles' hands, he offered them money, saying, Give this authority to me as well, so that everyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit.

Peter said to him, May your silver perish with you, because you thought you could obtain the gift of God with money. What was Simon seeking to do? He wanted to buy the Holy Spirit's power, I believe, in order that he could sell it. Now we've all heard the stories of the contemporary media revivalists.

They're living sumptuously off the gifts of their unsuspecting audience and viewers. They live in mansions. They fly around the country on personal jets.

They wear lavish jewelry. They take vacations in all of the exotic places of the world, because in many cases, dear unsuspecting senior citizens are sending their \$20 checks to these guys, thinking they're doing God's work. I think the Bible's verdict on these charlatans is still the same.

The words of Peter echo to the 21st century. You have no part or portion in this matter, for your heart is not right before God. Therefore, repent of this wickedness of yours, and pray, the Lord, that if possible, the intention of your heart may be forgiven you, for I see that you're still in the gall of bitterness and bondage.

In my mind, that's a perfect description of these religious charlatans who are perpetrating their false fire. False fire is focused on false ministries. It is fueled by false motives.

Finally, false fire is fraught with false methods. There are three important principles I want you to see here. First of all, real revival is not the product of public demonstration.

Again, back to this 9th chapter, verse 24 in Leviticus, false fire comes out from before the Lord and consumes the offering, and when the people saw it, they shouted and fell on their faces. That was a spontaneous reaction on the part of the people to the glory of God. My dear friends, if you and I had been standing there on that day, we would have fallen on our faces in fear and in worship to God.

Genuine revival is not a staged event. But this was. Incense was to be offered on the golden incense altar.

Where was that located? It was located inside the tent, in the holy place, immediately in front of the curtain that separated the holy place from the holy of holies. Incense was offered out of view of the people. That seems interesting to me.

Nadab and Abihu staged their act publicly in front of the tabernacle. Did you notice that? Look at verse 3. Moses said to Aaron, By those who come near me, I will be treated as holy, and before all the people, I will be honored. Look at verse 4. Moses called also to Michiel and Elzaphan, the sons of Aaron's uncle and Uzziel, and said, Carry your relatives away from the front of the sanctuary to the outside of the camp.

You see what they did? The incense was to be offered out of sight. I think that's a significant thing. Because so often God answers in public revival the prayers of men and women that are offered in secret.

But not Nadab and Abihu. They came out. And they apparently stood in front of the perimeter tent.

The tent that went around the outside. So that everybody in the nation could see them. They wanted to be seen.

And they staged this. Deliberately. Thinking that if they could take their firepans, and they could offer incense on their firepans, that the fire of God would come down and bless them.

Having no concept that they were defying God. And as such, the fire came down. But it destroyed them.

Let me give you this principle. In revival, the power of God falls outside. In response to the prayers offered inside.

Real revival is not the product of public demonstration. Secondly, real revival is not the product of creative innovation. Now again, the Lord never told anyone to do what Aaron's sons did.

Never told. In fact, he had given explicit revelation. And Moses and Aaron had followed the Lord's commandments.

Let me just take you very quickly through this week of consecration. Go back to chapter 8. Look at chapter 8, verse 9. He placed the turban on his head. The turban and so on.

Look at the last words. Just as the Lord had commanded Moses. Verse 13.

Just as the Lord had commanded Moses. Verse 17. Just as the Lord had commanded Moses.

Verse 21. Just as the Lord had commanded Moses. Verse 29.

Just as the Lord had commanded Moses. Look at verse 34. The Lord has commanded to do as has been done this day to make atonement on your behalf.

At the doorway of the tent of meeting, moreover, you shall remain day and night for seven days. Keep the charge of the Lord so that you will not die. For so I have been commanded.

Verse 36. Thus Aaron and his sons did all the things which the Lord had commanded through Moses. Chapter 9, verse 6. This is the thing which the Lord has commanded you to do.

That the glory of the Lord may appear to you. Come near to the altar and offer your sin offering, your burnt offering, that you may make atonement for yourself for the people. Make the offering for the people that you may make atonement for them.

Just as the Lord has commanded. Verse 21. Just as Moses had commanded.

You see this refrain throughout these chapters? They did exactly as the Lord commanded. Until Nadab and Abihu decided to do something the Lord had not commanded. They decided that they were going to be creative.

Well, we never did it that way before. Why not try it this way? We got a better idea. But what Nadab and Abihu did was an act of brazen presumption.

They had no authority. And throughout church history, my friends, countless preachers have violated this principle. Let me give you one example.

Charles G. Finney. We'll talk more about him in a minute. But Charles G. Finney, the evangelist who followed on the heels of the revival, here in the state of New York, primarily upstate in the western New York.

Charles G. Finney, who thought he knew better than God, adopted something that had appeared initially in Kentucky in the early years of the 19th century in the camp meeting atmosphere down there. It was called the mourner's bench. Well, for Finney, Finney put a new name on it.

He called it the anxious seat. And developed something that is popularly known today as the, quote, invitation. If you don't know church history, you don't appreciate this, but there was no precedent in church history for any of that.

And Finney did it because he had bad theology. Finney hated the doctrines of grace. Finney believed that man's will was not fallen.

All man had to do was make a decision for Christ. It's that simple. And so he would shame and cajole and plead and everything to get people to come down to the mourner's bench, the anxious seat.

In his later years, Finney had to admit that by far the majority, I believe he said 80% of his converts were false. Even he understood that. That's what happens.

When you do things like that, you end up with false disciples. He adopted a false technique based on false theology, something God never commended. We have to be careful about innovation.

That's very true today. In our churches today where the leading authorities today are from the business world, and the model of church administration is the secular CEO, and they are bringing all kinds of worldly techniques into the church, and they think there are people who think that this is innovation, that this is creativity, that this is reaching out to those who are seeking Christ, and that somehow this is going to glorify God. No, it isn't.

It's Nadab and Abihu all over again. Let me come to the third thing, and that is that the Lord, or excuse me, real revival is the product of spiritual preparation. The Lord makes it very clear what he expected.

In verse 3, Moses said to Aaron, it is what the Lord spoke. That's what we ought to be paying attention to, is what the Lord spoke, saying, by those who come near me, I will be treated as holy. And before all the people, I will be honored.

You will do, if you come before me, you will do what I say. You will follow my commandments. Otherwise, when you disobey me publicly in front of my people, you shame me, and you shame yourselves.

I'm not going to be treated that way. That's why they die. It is clear that Nadab and Abihu were not thinking about what the Lord had commanded.

What were they doing? Well, it's very interesting that when you come down to chapter 10, verse 8, that there is an apparently unrelated instruction given, but I don't think it's unrelated. The Lord spoke to Aaron, saying, do not drink wine or strong drink, neither you nor your sons with you, when you come into the tent of meeting, so that you will not die. It is a perpetual statute throughout your generations.

Why? So as to make a distinction between the holy and the profane, between the unclean and the unclean, and so as to teach the sons of Israel all the statutes what the Lord has spoken to them through Moses. In other words, Nadab and Abihu apparently did this while they were drunk. God says you're not to drink.

You, Aaron, when you do service in my tabernacle, you will not do it drunk. Because not only is it a matter of disobedience to me, but you will foul up my message. That's what he says in verse 11.

So as to teach the sons of Israel all the statutes. If you're drunk, you're going to mess up the teaching of my statutes. And thus their behavior was not only presumptuous and inappropriate.

It was scandalous. Ephesians chapter 5 verse 18. Do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit.

That's what we want when it comes to revival. Not drinking, but the Spirit of God. Satan is the master deceiver.

And on the heels of these events, where at the inception of the tabernacle worship, God blessed that tabernacle with the demonstration of his presence, with a cloud of his glory and fire from heaven, Satan moves in and seeks to imitate. Satan is the supreme counterfeiter. These passages lead us to conclude that not all that claims to be revival, or in some way may even appear to be revival, is actually revival.

We therefore do well to know the difference between the true and the false fire. Between the genuine and the fraudulent. The New Testament tells us as much.

You know the word well. First John chapter 4 verse 1. Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world. That situation exists today.

There are many false preachers out there gaining the ear of the public. The money is rolling in, and their programs are broadcast across the nation, but they are what John goes on to call the spirit of antichrist. The spirit that is opposed to Christ, against Christ.

John says it again in his little third epistle. Third John verse 11. Beloved, do not imitate what is evil, but what is good.

Don't imitate what's evil. Imitate what's good. That's advice for all of us who preach God's word.

That's a command. Now historically a great deal of damage has been done by the false revivalists, and again I have mentioned most prominently here Charles G. Finney. His name is often revered as one of the greatest evangelists in American history.

I thoroughly do not concur with that opinion. I believe he did a lot of damage, not only in his own day, but that has continued to the present day. Now let me just give you quickly four kinds of damage that he did, and also anybody who is a false preacher, a false evangelist, the kind of damage they do.

Now as we look back on this, what happened after the revivals from 1800 roughly to 1830, climaxing in the year 1831, by 1835 things had fallen off rather badly, and Finney was a major force to be reckoned with throughout the country. There are four things. First of all, what you see is the dissemination of false doctrine.

I'm going to go back to Ian Murray and his book called Revival and Revivalism. Let me read to you what he says here. He says, and I quote, The spirit of the times, as it was affecting the church, was manifesting itself in the ascription of an unscriptural and disproportionate importance to human agency.

It was representing man as a mighty agent rather than a humble instrument. It was giving rise to the error that all religion consists in excitement, in action, and was pushing a relentless desire for change. This sounds so contemporary.

With persons who are the subjects of such passion, the mere fact that a thing is old is enough to condemn it. They dislike old doctrines. They have no patience with old measures, in other words, the old way of

doing things, and to use their own significant and stereotyped expression, they, quote, wish to see things go ahead, unquote.

In other words, throw out the old and let's do it in a new way. This ethos was simultaneously encouraging a new anti-intellectualism, both in society and the church. They were believing in those days that the need for ardent and practical men, not theologians, that there was, quote, too much theology in the church now and too little of the gospel.

This was the popular mood. And when preachers played down any attachment to what, and you probably know this name, Henry Ward Beecher called moldy orthodoxy, they had ready listeners. They were downplaying doctrine.

And again, as I pointed out to you, Finney and those who followed him hated the doctrines of grace, what is often called Calvinism. They did everything they could to undermine it. He did it in his writings.

He did it in his preachings. And the foremost error was the denial of the doctrine of man's total depravity, the dissemination of false doctrine. The second thing you see is the introduction of false methods.

Revival was simply a matter of employing the right means, they said. Here's what Finney said, quoting Finney. He boldly asserted, Christians were to be blamed if there was no revival, for God has, quote, placed his spirit at your disposal.

You see why you have not a revival? It is only because you do not want one. God has been for 1,800 years trying to get the church into the work. Poor God.

If the whole church as a body had gone to work 10 years ago and continued as a few individuals whom I could name have done, there might not now have been an impenitent sinner in the land. The millennium would have fully come into the United States before this day. Instead of standing still or writing letters, let ministers who think we are going wrong just buckle on the harness and go forward and show us a more excellent way.

If the church will do all her duty, the millennium may come in this country in three years. If the church would do all her duty, she would soon complete the triumph of religion in the world. And so that's led Finney to the promotion of all of the new measures, as he called them, including the invitation, the anxious seat, and so on.

The third thing is the undermining of spiritual authority. This went right along with it. If, as he taught, all faithful men were able to secure revivals, only one conclusion could be drawn on preachers who failed to do so.

What man has done, that is, Finney, in the Western revivals, man could do. Therefore, and this was the conclusion of that day, those stayed, that is, those rather conservative pastors who had not wrought such revivals must be at fault. The church was suffering from the delinquency of its shepherds.

And so persons whom they had baptized in infancy, received into the church in mature years, wrote anonymous letters to their pastors, asking them to create and continue a revival, or if not, to resign and not stand in the way of soul. Spiritual authority was being undermined. In fact, here's another interesting quote.

But in the new age of democracy now dawning, remember this is the early days of the United States, traditional positions and offices stood for far less, and half-educated, fast-talking speakers claiming to preach the simple Bible and attacking the Christian ministry were more likely than ever to find a hearing. And the final thing I would point out with regard to the false fire, the impact of it, was the instigation of lasting divisions. Finney, his ministry, those who followed him split families.

They split churches. They split seminaries. And they split entire denominations, including the Congregationalists, the Presbyterians, and the Baptists.

All experienced major splits because of this false fire. False fire, therefore, leaves a path of burned-out rubble in its wake. In fact, it is no coincidence that in upstate New York, especially in the area around Rochester where Finney preached, where I worked for a while, I know this from personal experience, it is still today called the burned-over district.

Spiritual work there is very hard. That's one of the reasons why New England is so hardened against the gospel, because of the impact of false fire over 100 years ago. Beloved, revival is a wonderful thing.

And over these weeks, we have seen that we should pray for it earnestly. But I want you to be discerning enough to tell the truth from the false. And if God answers our prayers as we trust he will and blesses us with revival, that we will understand that it is true.

And when we see false counterfeit measures, that we will understand that counterfeit revival has never glorified God. I want to close with a hymn that I found, a hymn by none other than the great author of Amazing Grace, John Newton, that old pastor and former slave trader. He understood what was at stake.

Let me share this hymn with you. Zeal is that pure and heavenly flame the fire of love supplies, while that which often bears the name is self in a disguise. True zeal is merciful and mild, can pity and forbear.

The false is headstrong, fierce and wild, and breathes revenge and war. While zeal for truth the Christian warms, he knows the worth of peace. But self contends for names and forms its party to increase.

Zeal has attained its highest aim, its end is satisfied, if sinners love the Savior's name, nor seeks it ought beside. But self, however well employed, has its own end in view, and says as boasting Jehu cried, come see what I can do. Dear Lord, the idle self dethrone, and from our hearts remove, and let no zeal by us be shown, but that which springs.

Father, have mercy on your church. In these wicked days in which we live, in these days of deception where Satan as the prince of the power of the air and the ruler of this world is deceiving so many, first of all we pray, Lord, that you will reign in his work, and then we pray that you will keep us from deception. Lord, we long for real revival.

We have no desire to attempt to engineer something that would only be false fire. We want the real fire. Burn through us, Lord.

May yet the fire fall from heaven such that we will fall upon our faces in fear and humble adoration of the God of heaven, our Lord and our Savior, in whose name we pray. Amen.

Audio: <https://sermonindex1.b-cdn.net/19/SID19905.mp3>  
Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/ronald-glass/false-fire/>

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