

The Spirit of Fire

by Samuel Chadwick

The sermon emphasizes the importance of the fire of God, the dangers of strange fire, and the power of the Holy Ghost to kindle moral and spiritual passion in the souls of men.

Scripture: Leviticus 9:24, Numbers 3:4, Matthew 3:11, Luke 12:49, Acts 1:8, Acts 2:3, Romans 12:11, 1 Corinthians 3:13, Hebrews 12:29, Jude 1:23

Topics: "Holy Spirit", "True Worship"

Description

Samuel Chadwick preaches about the significance of fire as a symbol of God's presence and approval, emphasizing the importance of true worship and devotion. He warns against offering 'strange fire' in place of God's fire, which leads to spiritual death and the secularization of the sanctuary. Chadwick highlights the necessity of the Holy Ghost fire in the Church, describing it as the ultimate gift of God that brings moral and spiritual passion, transforming believers into burning and shining lights for Christ. He stresses that true religion is characterized by fervent devotion, righteousness, and a consuming desire to save the lost, and that the Church's power lies in being clothed with the zeal of the Holy Ghost.

Transcript

"Our God is a consuming fire." The elect symbol of His presence is the fire unkindled of earth, and the chosen sign of His approval is the sacred flame. Covenant and sacrifice, sanctuary and dispensation were sanctified and approved by the descent of fire. "The God that answereth by fire; He is God." That is the final and universal test of deity. Jesus Christ came to bring fire upon the earth. The symbol of Christianity is not a Cross but a Tongue of Fire.

Strange Fire

So universally is this recognized that men substitute strange fire for the fire of God. A fireless altar is the sign of desertion and death. It means that the Temple has lost its God, and worship has died out of the land. There must be fire, or there can be no religion. If it cannot be procured from heaven it must be kindled of earth. There is much speculation about the strange fire offered with such terrible results by the sons of Aaron. The offense for which they died is expressed in the words, "they offered fire which the Lord had not commanded." The exact form of their sin is not stated, but the reasonable explanation is that they carried into their ministry unconsecrated fire. It did not come from the altar. The precise form of this transgression is no longer possible, but the sin is common to all ages. It is a kind of will worship, by which man substitutes his own enthusiasms for the will of God. The revealed will is ignored, and the divine

commandment set aside for other ways and means in worship and service. Earth-fires can soon be set ablaze. It is so much easier to excite the passions than to kindle souls. Thorns crackle as they burn, and the flying sparks arrest and amuse. True, the fuel is soon exhausted and the fire fizzles out, but they serve while they last.

The penalty of strange fire in the sanctuary is death. "Behold, all ye that kindle a fire, that gird yourselves about with firebrands: walk ye in the flame of your fire, and among the brands that ye have kindled. This shall ye have of mine hand; ye shall lie down in sorrow." Earth-kindled fires burn fiercely, but they burn out. They allure to deeper darkness. Lights that glare and dazzle blind the eyes. Artificial excitement destroys spiritual sensibility. Satiated desire fails. When religion turns to humanity for its inspiration and to the world for its power, God is dethroned and the sanctuary becomes a secularized fellowship.

Stage Fire

Strange fire may be offered in sincerity and in good faith. Stage fire is a trick. In the absence of the supernatural, earnest souls may turn to the best substitutes they can find, and believe they are doing God's service. When the fires of spiritual devotion go out, ritualism finds its opportunity. Aids to voluptuous meditation take the place of reverent adoration. If there be no power to cast out devils, transform sinners and save souls, there are other ministries within reach. John did no miracle; may not a ministry of "water baptism" avail for our day and generation? [Not] If we have no fire from on high by which men's souls can be saved, there are minds to be instructed and bodies to be fed. Churches destitute of divine fire may devote themselves fervently to good works, but stage fire is a mockery and a pretense. Stage-lights have found their way into the Church. The red glare dazzles, but it does not burn. Fireworks are brilliant, but they end with the hour. No ideals are kindled, no ministry impelled, no sacrifice inspired. The pretense of spirituality is the worst profanity. Strange fire is less offensive than stage fire. A religion of mere emotion and sensationalism is the most terrible of all curses that can come upon any people. The absence of reality is sad enough. but the aggravation of pretense is a deadly sin.

Holy Ghost Fire

What is the fire of the Holy Ghost? Everywhere earnest believers are lamenting its absence and praying for a Pentecost of Fire.

What is this Fire? The Scriptures evidently regard it as the supreme need of the Church and the final gift of God. The prophets associated it with the Messiah, and promised it as the unique triumph of His coming. It marked the difference between the Old Dispensation and the New. John's ministry shook the nation, but was only preparatory. "I indeed baptize with water ... He shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost and with Fire." Our Lord spoke of the coming of Fire as the one purpose of His mission, and the fruit of His sufferings and death. "I came," He says, "to cast Fire on the earth." The supreme need of the Church is Fire. The one persistent prayer of them that "sigh and cry" is for the fiery baptism of Pentecost. What do we mean by Fire? When Jesus promised the gift of Fire, what did He mean them to expect? In our impassioned pleading for the descent of Fire, what is it we want? For what does this elect symbol stand? Our God is a consuming Fire; the gift of the Holy Ghost is a baptism of Fire; Christianity is a religion of Fire; we are saved by Fire. If Fire is so vital and comprehensive, it is important its meaning should be clearly understood.

Moral and Spiritual Passion

Whatever this Fire may be, it is identified with the Person of the Holy Ghost. The baptism of the Spirit is the baptism of Fire. Our Lord's straitening for the baptism of blood was followed by the fullness of Pentecost, in the gift of the Spirit of Fire. Its power was moral and spiritual. Men's souls were charged, saturated, enveloped, in the Spirit of God. The Divine life entered into them. The passion of God possessed them with the intensity of fire. His love was shed abroad in their hearts, and His holiness became the master passion of their souls. They burned and they shone: burning and shining lights. They were intense as they were breezy, fiery as they were jubilant, impassioned as they were daring. The spirit of cold obedience was kindled into an enthusiasm for righteousness, and the slavish sense of duty burst into a flame of eager devotion. That is the miracle of Pentecost. It kindles the fires of Christ's soul in the souls of men. They receive, realize, and reproduce His mind, His heart, His life. His zeal becomes the all-pervasive character of their lives. They manifest His fervent devotion to the will of the Father, His holy passion for reality and righteousness, His consuming zeal for the salvation of the lost. It kindles a fervent devotion to God, a passion for righteousness, and a consuming desire to seek and save the lost. Religion at flame-heat illumines the mind, energizes every faculty, and impassions every element of compassion. Fire does not mean rant, or noise, or ruthless self-will. It acts differently on different material and in different people, but in all it burns, kindles, and glows. It is religion at white-heat.

The Offense of Fire in Religion

Fire in religion awakens a peculiar sense of distrust in the modern mind. There is no objection to it anywhere else. Enthusiasm in politics and recreation, fervor in reform and business, intensity in work and friendship, are among the most coveted qualities of modern life. In religion they are bad form. Enthusiasts in piety are suspects. Christians full of zeal are merely tolerated where they are not despised. They are regarded as intellectually inferior; the "babes and sucklings" to whom God has a way of revealing things precious to the soul. Their conception of religion is narrow and antiquated, and their experience of it too emotional and fervid. It is sometimes said they are defective in ethical balance and moral stamina, and they lack the charity which appreciates other types of goodness. Judged in the lump, the saints of the Fire-heart are condemned as unlovely, undesirable, and unreasonable. For things not fire-proof burning is not a pleasant sensation; but then, only that which can "dwell in everlasting burning" can be saved. We are saved by Fire. Light is not enough, and water is not enough. Knowledge does not save, neither is cleanliness the equivalent of grace. Salvation is of the heart. External conventionality and correct observance may make a Pharisee, but never a Christian. It is by a holy passion kindled in the Soul we live the life of God. Truth without enthusiasm, morality without emotion, ritual without soul, are the things Christ unsparingly condemned. Destitute of fire they are nothing more than a godless philosophy, an ethical system, and a superstition. Moral and spiritual passion are of the essence of the religion of Christ.

The Power of Fire

The penalty of intensity may be narrowness, but its reward is power. It submits all things to a severe test, and what will not assimilate it mercilessly assails. Fire cannot compromise. The logic of passion is direct, simple, relentless. Cool calculation is impossible to men ablaze. Inspiration despises dissimulation. Issues are simple when the heart is intense. The pure flame of a holy enthusiasm is a safer guide than the dry light of cold reason. The soul's safety is in its heat. Fire is the best defense against corruption. If we would be safe we must be clothed with zeal as with a garment. Our religion is only secure when it is guarded by "a wall of Fire round about."

It is Fire that prevails. For fifty days the facts of the Gospel were complete, but no conversions were recorded. Pentecost registered three thousand souls. It is the cause that sets men ablaze that wins converts. Gladstone's fiery passion routed Parliaments and slew the giants of oppression. Wesley, Whitefield, and General Booth wrought wonders by the Fire kindled of the Holy Ghost. Men ablaze are invincible. Hell trembles when men kindle. Sin, worldliness, unbelief, hell, are proof against everything but Fire. The Church is powerless without the Fire of the Holy Ghost. Destitute of Fire, nothing else counts; possessing Fire, nothing else really matters. The one vital need is Fire. How we may receive it, where we may find it, by what means we may retain it, are the most vital and urgent questions of our time. One thing we know: it comes only with the presence of the Spirit of God, Himself the Spirit of Fire. God alone can send the Fire. It is His Pentecostal gift.

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