

Strange Fire
Equip Breakout
February 22, 2020
Newton Bible Church

- Welcome everyone to the workshop
- Make sure everyone has a handout.
- Pray for God's Spirit to direct the discussion of this important topic.

John MacArthur related "In one of my books I wrote about a trip to Arkansas. My son Mark had been signed by the Saint Louis Cardinals. He asked me, 'Dad, wherever they assign me, would you bring my little Honda? I think it'll be in the Midwest somewhere.' It turned out to be Savannah, Georgia.

So, Lance Quinn and I jumped in this little Honda and started across America to take him his car. On the way, we went through Arkansas, and there I thought, 'I think I'll get Patricia a quilt.' because I kept seeing quilt signs.

We pulled into a dirt driveway, drove up to the house and banged on the door. A little old lady came and said she had lots of quilts. We walked in. Her husband was sitting in a great big chair looking like he'd been there about six years. Piled around him were all kinds of religious books: Seventh Day Adventist books, Mormon books, cult books, Christian science. I took note of that.

She said, 'I'd like to show you my favorite quilt.' She pulled out this quilt. It was terrifying, to be honest with you. Every piece of quilt was completely alien to every other piece, so it was a patchwork of completely different little squares. I knew Patricia wouldn't put that anywhere in our house, so I said, 'Well, I . . .' She said, 'This is my favorite one.' I think she said that to everybody to try to get rid of the thing, but it wasn't working with me. And then it dawned on me: 'Ah, I know what happened. She quilted her husband's theology.'

I found a quilt that I did like, and we still have it at home. But I was struck by the fact that he had all these different religious articles and books and pamphlets. I finally said to him, 'I notice you're reading a lot of different things from religion,' and I will never forget his response. He said, 'There's good in all of it.' I knew I didn't have time to rearrange that man's mind. That mixed up quilt did turn out to be a metaphor for his approach to truth."

That man's approach to truth is rampant in the church today. People read a lot of things, listen to a lot of Christian radio and Christian television, download a lot of things on the internet, and unless they possess Biblical discernment, spiritual confusion and chaos is the result. Nowhere is this more prevalent than in how the Holy Spirit and His ministry are portrayed. That this matters to God far more than we realize is illustrated in the incident in the Old Testament that provides the title for this breakout.

Leviticus 10:1-3 (NASB)

10 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. ² And fire came out from the presence of the Lord and consumed them, and they died before the Lord. ³ 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.'"

1. What was the "strange fire"?
 - a. Nadab and Abihu were well respected religious leaders
 - By all appearances, Nadab and Abihu were righteous, respectable men and godly spiritual leaders. Nadab was heir apparent to the office of high priest with Abihu next in line.
 - These two brothers, together with the seventy elders, were privileged at Sinai to watch at a distance as God conversed with Moses. Nadab and Abihu were expressly named by the Lord Himself, who invited them to come up and bring the seventy elders. According to Exodus 24:11 "They saw God, and they ate and drank."
 - These young men appeared to be godly, trustworthy spiritual leaders. No doubt everyone in Israel was staggered when God suddenly struck them dead with a blast of holy fire. This took place on the first day of their service in the tabernacle, immediately following the seven-day-long ceremony of consecrating the tabernacle and the priests. Miraculous fire from heaven, verifying God's acceptance of the place and means of worship, climaxed that consecration.
 - That miracle immediately precedes our text in which these respected leaders' offering of "strange fire" resulted in another burst of divine flame; this time in punishment rather than blessing. This sobering account demands that we attempt to identify the "strange fire" that resulted in an immediate sentence of death.
 - b. Possible identifications of the "strange fire":
 - The term "strange fire" is probably most accurately translated as "unauthorized fire." In some manner Nadab and Abihu came to God in an unauthorized way; choosing their own way rather than the way that had been divinely revealed. That "unauthorized way" included:
 - i. The wrong fire: God had provided the authorized fire by the miraculous conclusion of the consecration of the tabernacle. All "fire" to be brought into the tabernacle was to be kindled by that miraculously given fire that was never to be extinguished. For whatever reason, they utilized fire of their own choosing rather than the fire God provided and proscribed. This was blatant disregard for His Word! This "strange fire" may also have included:
 - ii. The wrong incense: it is possible that they utilized incense of their own choosing rather than the exact incense that had been commanded to be utilized in the tabernacle. Exodus 30:9 provides a regulation against "strange incense" on the incense altar. The "strange fire" may also have been precipitated by:
 - iii. The wrong attitude: Verse 9 of the same chapter prohibits priests from drinking wine or strong drink before entering the tabernacle, lest they die. It is possible that this regulation was given because the brothers were inebriated when they

made this offering. That would have clouded their thinking and resulted in highly irreverent behavior. It is also possible that it was:

- iv. The wrong time: they perhaps were presenting an incense offering at an unprescribed time. Priests were authorized to present the incense offerings inside the holy place only at certain prescribed times. There is an additional phrase in our text that suggests this offering may have been in:
 - v. The wrong place: the “strange fire” was said to be offered “before the Lord;” a phrase that is often utilized to describe the offering given by the high priest annually in the Holy of Holies – a place his sons were not authorized to enter! If that is what they did, then a last factor of this “strange fire” was:
 - vi. The wrong person: neither Nadab nor Abihu was high priest and it certainly was not the day of atonement, so if they entered the Holy of Holies it was clearly unauthorized and prohibited by pain of death.
- Whether it was the wrong incense, attitude, time, place or person we may not know with absolute certainty. But we do know that this was not the fire God had ordained to be used and that is a deadly serious matter!
- c. The divine explanation of the severe response:
- The Niphal verb of the Hebrew root qadash in verse 3 can mean either “to be treated as holy” or “to show oneself holy.” The latter rendering seems more likely here since the Lord Himself has indeed shown Himself to be holy by the way that He responded to the illegitimate incense offering of Nadab and Abihu.
 - At this inauguration of the pattern of worship for the Israelites, for the priests to ignore God’s Word and to choose their own way of approaching Him would have set a precedent that could not be allowed to stand.
 - God obviously takes very seriously irreverent treatment of His Word and His person. Though He does not visit fire upon those who do so today, He is just as serious about that irreverence! Which leads us to the conclusion that:
- d. Dishonoring the Holy Spirit is “strange fire.”
- MacArthur wrote in the introduction to his book entitled ‘Strange Fire,’ “It is a sad twist of irony that those who claim to be most focused on the Holy Spirit are in actuality doing the most to abuse, grieve, insult, misrepresent, quench, and dishonor Him. How do they do it? By attributing to Him words He did not say, deeds He did not do, phenomena He did not produce, and experiences that have nothing to do with Him.”
 - It is ironic that in Jesus’ day, the religious leaders blasphemously attributed the works of the Spirit to Satan (Matt. 12:24), while today’s purveyors of confusion do the opposite, attributing the work of the devil to the Holy Spirit!
 - MacArthur concludes: “They have thrown their theology into the fires of human experience and worshiped the false spirit that came out – parading themselves before it with bizarre antics and unrestrained behavior. As a movement, they have persistently ignored the truth about the Holy Spirit and with reckless license set up an idol spirit in the house of God, dishonoring the third member of the trinity in His own name.”
 - Because so much of this has pervaded Christian media, and been tolerated by the evangelical church at large, confusion reigns, and even those who do not belong to the movement are impacted by its false teachings.

- Though it is distasteful to even mention these aberrations, we must take some time to identify them so that we are better equipped to deal with their fallout.
2. “Strange fire” abounds:
- a. End time restorationism:
 - i. Tongues:
 - End time restorationism had its genesis in the early morning hours of the first day of the twentieth century. A twenty-seven-year old preacher from Topeka, Kansas, named Charles Parham placed his hands on the head of his young student, Agnes Ozman. According to Parham suddenly ‘a halo seemed to surround her head and face’ and Agnes began to speak Chinese. For three solid days she was supposedly utterly incapable of speaking a single word in English. Ozman’s experience became the catalyst for other students in Parham’s class to seek the gift of tongues.
 - Parham’s insistence that the end time restoration of tongues was now the evidence of the baptism of the Holy Spirit (a claim completely contradicted by Scripture) became the genetic code of the charismatic movement that followed. Though other so called “phenomena” of the Spirit have taken the fore in that movement in recent years, this false teaching still abounds and confuses many.
 - MacArthur concludes: “When we consider the Biblical passages that describe the gift of languages . . . we see in every way that the modern charismatic version is a hoax. The genuine gift endowed a person with the miraculous ability to speak in unlearned foreign languages for the sake of proclaiming the Word of God and authenticating the gospel message . . . By contrast, the modern charismatic version consists of nonmiraculous, nonsensical gibberish that cannot be translated . . . The fact that modern glossolalia parallels pagan religious rites should serve as a dire warning of the spiritual danger that can be introduced by this unbiblical practice.”
 - The insistence that speaking in tongues is evidence of the baptism of the Holy Spirit is unbiblical and dishonoring to the One it claims to exalt. It is “strange fire.”
 - ii. Healing:
 - The first of the three pillars of end time restoration of the gift of healing was A. A. Allen (1911-1970) whose undocumented claims included the deception that he could raise people from the dead. Allen, who is extolled today by Benny Hinn as ‘a great man of God’ was arrested for drunk driving during a Tennessee revival in 1955. He was excommunicated by Pentecostal leaders in his day but extolled by end time restorationists in our day.
 - The second pillar was William Branham (1909-1965). Despite the fact that he denied such essential Christian doctrines as the Trinity, end time restorationist Paul Cain calls him ‘the greatest prophet that ever lived in any of the generations of revival I’ve lived through.’ Branham’s failed healings and prophecies were only exceeded by his false doctrines.

- The third pillar was Jack Koe (1919-1957). Oral Roberts considered Jack Koe 'a man of great faith,' but most well-known religious leaders considered Coe a master of gimmicks and fabrications. The Assemblies of God were so embarrassed by Coe's exaggerated claims that they finally expelled him in 1953 on the grounds that he was 'misleading the public.'
 - The fraudulent heritage of these pillars was passed down to Aimee Semple McPherson, Oral Roberts, Kenneth Hagin, Kathryn Kuhlman, Kenneth Copeland and Benny Hinn.
 - MacArthur concludes: "While the New Testament does instruct believers to pray for those who are sick and suffering, trusting the Great Physician to do that which is according to His sovereign purpose (James 5:14-15), that is not equivalent to the supernatural gift of healing described in Scripture. Anyone who claims otherwise is fooling himself. Benny Hinn, and others like him, simply cannot do apostolic-quality miracles, and when they try to pass parlor tricks, showmanship, frauds and scams off as if they were true signs and wonders, they forfeit their own credibility with most, undermine the authority of Scripture in the minds of many, mislead multitudes who are gullible, and condemn themselves as false prophets and liars before God Himself."
- iii. Super prophets:
- Despite multiple warnings in the New Testament against false prophets infiltrating and harming the church, end time restorationists vehemently claim that the gift of prophecy (foretelling the future) has been restored.
 - The Scriptures give specific criteria to identify a false prophet:
 1. Anyone who leads people into false doctrine and heresy.
 2. Anyone who lives in unrestrained lust and unrepentant sin.
 3. Anyone who proclaims a supposed 'revelation from God' that turns out to be inaccurate or untrue.
 - Even the leaders of the movement admit that their so-called super prophets are off the mark far more than on target. To circumvent the clear teaching of Scripture they have come up with the idea that there are two types of prophets described in Scripture; one that is infallible and authoritative and another that is not.
 - The notion of fallible prophets has a fatal flaw – it is not Biblical! The true prophetic office demanded 100% accuracy – something end time restorationists admit they cannot achieve.
 - Charles Spurgeon had this to say about those who came to him with supposed words of revelation from the Holy Spirit: "Take care never to impute the vain imaginings of your fancy to Him (the Holy Spirit). I have seen the Spirit of God shamefully dishonored by persons . . . who have said that they have had this and that revealed to them . . . Semi-lunatics are very fond of coming with messages from the Lord to me, and it may spare them some trouble if I tell them once for all that I will have none of their special messages . . . Never dream that events are revealed to you by heaven, or you

may come to be like those idiots who dare impute their blatant follies to the Holy Ghost. If you feel your tongue itch to talk nonsense, trace it to the devil, not to the Spirit of God. Whatever is to be revealed by the Spirit to any of us is in the Word of God already – He adds nothing to the Bible, and never will.”

- Couple in church in Oklahoma who believed every thought that came into their mind was from the Holy Spirit . . .
- Children in KCCS who were uncorrectable because they had been taught the same thing . . .

iv. Super Apostles:

- If 1901 was a big year for the charismatic movement (when Agnes Ozman reportedly spoke in tongues), 2001 was potentially even larger. Some charismatic leaders assert that 2001 ‘marked the beginning of the second apostolic age.’
- C. Peter Wagner was at the forefront of this movement, claiming that there is now ‘widespread recognition that the office of apostleship . . . is functioning in the Body of Christ today.’ Wagner began to recognize his own apostleship in 1995 when two prophetesses declared he had received an apostolic anointing.
- The restorationism movement operates on the premise that everything that happened in the early church ought to be expected and experienced in the church today. But there is a fatal flaw in that approach. The Biblical criteria for apostleship make it impossible for any credible claim to be made that there are still apostles in the church. Those criteria are:
 1. Had to be a physical eyewitness of the risen Christ
 2. Had to be personally appointed by the Lord Jesus Christ
 3. Had to be able to authenticate his apostolic appointment with miraculous signs.
- Those criteria dictate that Paul was the last apostle and there will be no more!
- MacArthur concludes: “In the end, despite the protests of some continuationists, there is no escaping the fact that one of the significant features described in 1 Corinthians 12 (namely apostleship) is no longer active in the church today . . . To acknowledge that point is to acknowledge the foundational premise on which cessationism is based. If apostleship ceased, it demonstrates that not everything that characterized the New Testament church still characterizes the church today. Moreover, it opens the door to the real possibility that some of the other gifts listed in 1 Corinthians 12-14 have also ceased.”
- The claim of current apostleship is unbiblical and dishonoring to the Spirit it claims is empowering the gift. It is “strange fire.”

b. Dishonoring the Spirit (two examples)

i. Holy laughter:

- Rodney Howard-Browne is the charismatic leader who labelled himself the ‘Holy Ghost Bartender.’ A description of one of his “revival” meetings

includes: “The scene was surreal. It looked like a bomb had exploded. Bodies were strewn haphazardly throughout the sanctuary. Some lay motionless on the ground. Others twitched spasmodically. A woman shrieked, ‘I’m hot! I’m hot!’ A boy standing in the aisle chopped his hands feverishly at some imaginary object. Next to him a man whirled round and round in a circle. All the while waves of sardonic laughter cascaded eerily through the sanctuary. A boy staggered drunkenly across the platform and collapsed at Howard-Browne’s feet. The ‘Bartender’ screamed, ‘Git him, Jesus! Git him, Git him!’”

- In 1990 Benny Hinn invited Browne to speak at his church in Orlando, Florida. Pastors and parishioners began to fall, laugh, and get drunk in the spirit, Hinn initially endorsed this as being of the Holy Spirit but later things degenerated to such an extent that Hinn walked out of his sanctuary vowing never to invite Howard-Browne back.
 - The break that propelled Howard-Browne into international visibility happened in the spring of 1993 when he was invited to Lakeland, Florida. The laughter that erupted at Lakeland was enough to draw thousands of spiritually starved saints to the church sanctuary. The wine had only begun to ferment.
 - Influenced by Howard-Browne and Benny Hinn, John Arnott invited Randy Clark to speak at his Vineyard Church in Toronto. Throwing caution to the wind, holy laughter was embraced and became the party that people came to from all over the world.
 - Holy laughter is anything but holy and dishonors the Holy Spirit. It too is “strange fire.”
- ii. Slain in the Spirit
- Long before Benny Hinn became a household word, he had a vivid dream. In his dream a woman in a white dress came up to him, handed him a book, and said, ‘Read.’ The next day a man came up to him and handed him a book that he said God had told him to give to Hinn. On the front page of the book was a picture of the very woman Hinn encountered in his dream. She was Maria Beulah Woodworth-Etter (1844-1924), the one person most associated with the “slain in the spirit” phenomenon in early Pentecostalism. Her book, *A Diary of Signs and Wonders*, is filled with stories of people being slain in the spirit.
 - The next nationally renowned character to popularize the slain in the spirit phenomenon was another woman evangelist, Aimee Semple McPherson. When Sister Aimee died of an apparent drug overdose in 1944, her methods lived on in the woman who became the best-known woman preacher in the world, Kathryn Kuhlman. Among the thousands who tapped into the high voltage flowing through Kuhlman were Richard Roberts, Charles and Frances Hunter and Benny Hinn, upon whom her mantle fell.
 - In Houston, Texas, a woman attending a Hinn crusade crushed a fellow crusader when her fall was not checked by a catcher. In Oklahoma City a woman attending a Hinn crusade was not merely crushed, she was killed.

- One of this practices most prolific practitioners has admitted that, ‘the phenomenon is externally similar to manifestations of voodoo and other magic rites and is found today among many different sects of the Orient as well as among primitive tribes of Africa and Latin America.
- Suggestibility and peer pressure explain most of this phenomenon. Claiming that it is a work of the Holy Spirit is blasphemous and dishonoring to Him. It is “strange fire.”

This is just a portion of the examples of “strange fire” that abound in charismatic circles today. We have no time to develop a comprehensive list, because we would be involved in spiritual malpractice today if we did not address how to identify and avoid “strange fire.” That is where we will now turn.

1 John 4:1-8 New American Standard Bible (NASB)

4 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. ²By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God; ³and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God; this is the *spirit* of the antichrist, of which you have heard that it is coming, and now it is already in the world. ⁴You are from God, little children, and have overcome them; because greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world. ⁵They are from the world; therefore they speak *as* from the world, and the world listens to them. ⁶We are from God; he who knows God listens to us; he who is not from God does not listen to us. By this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error. ⁷Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God.

3. Identifying and avoiding “strange fire”

a. The command to test the spirits

- Being popular and found on “Christian media” does not mean that the spirits behind the message are from God. If the 1st century church needed this warning, we certainly need it as well.
- Much of what dominates Christian Television and to some degree Christian radio as well is nothing less than “strange fire” and we must be diligent to test the spirits. The text we just read is the passage that Jonathan Edwards used to determine which spirits were involved in the “revivals” of his day. This text will help us identify the:

b. True marks of the ministry of the Holy Spirit

i. Truth-centered – specifically tells the truth about Jesus Christ

- Jesus repeatedly refers to the Spirit as the “Spirit of truth” (Jn. 14:17; 15:26).
- The designation, “the Spirit of truth.” Implies of course that there is such a thing as knowable, unchanging truth. The rejection of absolute truth in our culture has resulted in gullibility in the church that accepts outrageous claims that are patently untrue!
- The Holy Spirit has not given new, authoritative revelation since the completion of the canon of Scripture. We may and should ask the Holy Spirit to give us understanding and illumination as we study Scripture, but He is not giving anyone new revelation.

- Obviously, the Spirit does not reveal anything contrary to Scripture. Anything that people claim was revealed to them that is contrary to Scripture did not come from the Holy Spirit!
- At the core of the Charismatic movement's preoccupation with new revelation is a devaluing and ultimately an undercutting of the authority of Scripture. This is deeply dishonoring to the author and interpreter of Scripture; the Holy Spirit.
- John MacArthur states, "How do we know the Spirit of truth from the Spirit of error? Because the Spirit of truth runs to the Scripture, to the Bible. That's how we know."
- This test of the spirits is does the ministry conform to Scriptural truth? Basing ministry upon anything else is driven by spirits other than the Holy Spirit.
- ii. Christ-centered – the Holy Spirit's ministry is always focused upon Christ.
 - Jesus says in John 14:15-16 that when the Spirit comes, He will show Christ to those to whom He comes. The Spirit's ministry is to point to Christ, leading into all truth concerning Christ.
 - We know that the devil seeks to twist, confuse, suppress, and misrepresent Christ. The devil currently seeks to draw attention away from the Son of God to a false image of the Holy Spirit while pretending to honor Jesus.
 - Leaders of the charismatic movement proudly proclaim that, "In the Pentecostal potpourri only one thing is the same for all: the passion they have to experience the Holy Spirit's presence and power."
 - When the Holy Spirit is the person sought, His work has been rejected. Christ is obscured, Scripture depreciated, replaced by a preoccupation with counterfeit experiences imagined to be induced by the Holy Spirit, but in actuality having nothing to do with Him at all!
 - This test of the spirits is who is the ministry centered upon? Centering ministry upon anything other than Christ is driven by spirits other than the Holy Spirit!
- iii. Christ-exalting – the Holy Spirit's ministry is always centered upon glorifying Christ.
 - The Holy Spirit's role is not to glorify Himself, but Christ. He does not call attention to Himself, but to Christ. He does not lead us to focus upon our experiences, but on Christ.
 - When people continually emphasize the Holy Spirit and their supposed experiences in the Spirit, they are not filled with the Spirit. The Spirit exalts only Christ.
 - Dr. Carson states, "Nothing brings more glory to our exalted Lord Jesus than for His followers to become steeped in all truth concerning Him."
 - Paul's prayer in Ephesians 3 is that the Spirit would lead us to a full understanding of the love of Christ. This is illustrative of the Spirit's true ministry – it always points to and exalts Christ.
 - MacArthur concludes, "Show me a person obsessed with the Holy Spirit, and I will show you a person not filled with the Holy Spirit. Show me a person obsessed with the Lord Jesus Christ, never tiring of learning and loving Him, entranced by His magnificent glory, and seeking to obey and be like Him, and I will show you a Spirit-filled person."

- This test of the spirits is who is glorified in this ministry? If self-glorification or glorification of anyone or anything other than Christ is present, it is driven by spirits other than the Holy Spirit.
- iv. Love-producing – the Holy Spirit’s ministry always induces God’s love to flow.
 - The true work of the Holy Spirit is manifesting the love of God. Love toward God, love toward God’s people.
 - That love toward God shows up in pure, true, holy worship. Worship that is God-centered rather than man-centered. Worship that makes much of Christ. Worship that truly is in spirit and in truth.
 - The love toward others shows up in a humble sacrificial desire to serve and edify others. It is less about what will bless me and more about how I may be used to bless you.
 - Unfortunately, in the charismatic movement, everything is about me, not about you. The gifts are for me, to edify me. Prayers are for me, to get me what I want. Where you have mysticism and materialism mingled, you have self-absorbed attitudes. It’s about me feeling, experiencing, me getting, me acquiring, me having what I want. It’s infantile self-love, cold hearted materialism, and selfishness in disguise as a work of the Holy Spirit.
 - This test of the spirits is does this produce genuine love for God and for others? Anything less is driven by spirits other than the Holy Spirit.

We do not have to give in to the confusion. We have the means needed to obey the Scriptural command to test the spirits. We must do so in order that we do not contribute to nor offer “strange fire.” As we conclude, let us heed the admonishment of G. Campbell Morgan: “To seek to make our work effectual and acceptable by any agent other than the Holy Spirit, is to burn ‘strange fire.’ The energy of the flesh, and the cleverness of the mind, unbaptized in the Holy Spirit, are polluted; and however pleasing the results may be to human minds and hearts, such forces are ineffectual in the service of God, and unacceptable to Him. To offer ‘strange fire’ is a deadly business. We may be in true orders, doing God-appointed work, but if we attempt these things in any energy other than that of the Holy Spirit, they are in danger of being cast away.”

May God help us to recognize and reject “strange fire” and allow His Spirit to do His true work in and through us!

Questions?

Prayer