

FIERY HOLY SPIRIT

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This morning, I'm going to tell you about the most famous rave party ever reported.

The view from Mt Carmel, just south of Haifa, is spectacular! On a clear day, you can see across the nation of Israel into Jordan.

It was on this mountain top that Elijah gathered with the leaders of Israel and the prophets of Baal. He said to the people, *"How long are you going to be paralyzed by indecision? If the Lord is the true God, then follow him, but if Baal is, follow him!"* (1 Kings 18:21; NET). In fact, the people were so paralyzed that they could not respond at all.

So Elijah challenged the 450 prophets of Baal to a simple test. *"Give us two bulls. Let the prophets of Baal choose one for themselves, cut it into pieces, lay it on the wood, but not set it on fire. I'll do the same with the other bull. You call on the name of your gods, but I will call on the name of the Lord. The god who answers by fire is the real God"* (1 Kings 18:23-24; GWT). All the people agreed that would be a good demonstration.

1 Kings 18 (NLT)

²⁶ *So they prepared one of the bulls and placed it on the altar. Then they called on the name of Baal from morning until noontime, shouting, "O Baal, answer us!" But there was no reply of any kind. Then they danced, hobbling around the altar they had made.*

²⁷ *About noontime Elijah began mocking them. "You'll have to shout louder," he scoffed, "for surely he is a god! Perhaps he is daydreaming, or is relieving himself. Or maybe he is away on a trip, or is asleep and needs to be wakened!"*

²⁸ *So they shouted louder, and following their normal custom, they cut themselves with knives and swords until the blood gushed out.* ²⁹ *They raved all afternoon until the time of the evening sacrifice, but still there was no sound, no reply, no response.*

³⁰ *Then Elijah called to the people, "Come over here!" They all crowded around him as he repaired the altar of the Lord that had been torn down.* ³¹ *He took twelve stones, one to represent each of the tribes of Israel,* ³² *and he used the stones to rebuild the altar in the name of the Lord. Then he dug a trench around the altar large enough to hold about three gallons.* ³³ *He piled wood on the altar, cut the bull into pieces, and laid the pieces on the wood.*

Then he said, "Fill four large jars with water, and pour the water over the offering and the wood."

³⁴ *After they had done this, he said, "Do the same thing again!" And when they were finished, he said, "Now do it a third time!" So they did as he said,* ³⁵ *and the water ran around the altar and even filled the trench.*

³⁶ *At the usual time for offering the evening sacrifice, Elijah the prophet walked up to the altar and prayed, "O Lord, God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, prove today that you are God in Israel and that I am your servant. Prove that I have done all this at your command."* ³⁷ *O Lord, answer me! Answer me so these people will know that you, O Lord, are God and that you have brought them back to yourself."*

³⁸ *Immediately the fire of the Lord flashed down from heaven and burned up the young bull, the wood, the stones, and the dust. It even licked up all the water in the trench!* ³⁹ *And when all the people saw it, they fell face down on the ground and cried out, "The Lord—he is God! Yes, the Lord is God!"*

This kind of conviction of faith is needed again today. Too many follow the Lord only casually—just enough to feel better about themselves, but not enough to turn away from our false gods of luxury,

convenience, and pleasure. Attestations of faith abound, sometimes from the most unexpected lips, but it is the persistent practice of faith in Christ alone that will win the day. Jesus asked, “*why do you keep calling me ‘Lord, Lord!’ when you don’t do what I say?*” (Luke 6:46).

Tragically, the history of Baal worship did not end that day. The Israelites struggled with divorcing themselves from the worship of the Baalim for hundreds of years, at least until the end of their exile to Babylon. It takes more than a flash of fire, even heavenly fire.

John, the cousin of Jesus, was preaching a message of repentance to the people of Israel. They came to hear him, because everyone was expecting the Messiah to come soon, and they were eager to know whether John might be the Messiah.

Luke 3 (NLT)

¹⁶ *John answered their questions by saying, “I baptize you with water; but someone is coming soon who is greater than I am—so much greater that I’m not even worthy to be his slave and untie the straps of his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire.”* ¹⁷ *He is ready to separate the chaff from the wheat with his winnowing fork. Then he will clean up the threshing area, gathering the wheat into his barn but burning the chaff with never-ending fire.”* ¹⁸ *John used many such warnings as he announced the Good News to the people.*

The Messiah is He who baptizes you with the Holy Spirit and fire. He is the One! Yes, He is the One!

It has been suggested that the words “Holy Spirit and fire” might also be translated as “the Fiery Holy Spirit.” “Fire” speaks of His heart—fervent and zealous. He is passionate about Jesus Christ and zealous for His Kingdom. He is jealous for the people of God, to bless us and protect us. His heart is aflame with saving love.

“Fire” also speaks of the effect of His activities within and among us. I will mention five ways in which His fire impacts us. It heats, energizes, lights, purifies, and seals. I’ll explain in a moment.

Your Helper

The fiery Holy Spirit is your Helper. His fire helps us as we submit to His ways. Today, I’m going to tell you about five ways the Holy Spirit helps us—and five ways you may help yourself to more of God’s grace and victory. Let’s use an acrostic to learn this lesson:

Heats
Energizes
Lights
Purifies
Seals

The Holy Spirit gives us heat. He takes away the heart of stone (cold) and gives us a heart of flesh (warm). Said Jesus to the members of the church of Laodicea, “*I know all the things you do, that you are neither hot nor cold. I wish that you were one or the other!*” ¹⁶ *But since you are like lukewarm water, neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth!”* (Revelation 3:15-16; NLT).

He energizes us for the life and work of the Kingdom. He is the great power of God. Heavenly Dynamite. Spiritual Dynamic. Definitely not boring! “*You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you. And you will be my witnesses, telling people about me everywhere—in Jerusalem, throughout Judea, in Samaria, and to the ends of the earth*” (Acts 1:8; NLT).

He lights our path with the Word of God, guiding our feet, ensuring our progress. *“Your word is a lamp to guide my feet and a light for my path”* (Psalm 119:105; NLT).

He purifies our hearts. He makes us holy (like Him, like God). The heat burns up the impurities; and He removes the dross. Isaiah prophesied, *“The Lord will wash away the filth of the women of Zion; he will cleanse the bloodstains from Jerusalem by a spirit of judgment and a spirit of fire”* (Isaiah 4:4; NIV).

He seals our hearts for Christ. He guarantees that our redemption will be fulfilled. He protects us through the process of our Christian growth. All the children of God are *“being kept safe by God’s power through faith until the salvation which has been prepared is revealed at the final point of time”* (1 Peter 1:5; NJB).

Have you taken Him as your Helper? Here are five ways to do so.

Praise the Lord

Our hearts are prone to wander from God, and life can overwhelm us with its demands. When your heart grows cold through distraction, carelessness, disobedience... will you turn to the Holy Spirit for help? Then, begin to praise the Lord. Say it aloud. Though it feels awkward. Though it feels like dry straw in your mouth. Press through the awkwardness in praise. God is worthy!

Praise is how you rebuild the altar of your heart. Build one in the morning. Build another at noon. Build a third one in the evening. The heat will rise and thaw your frozen soul. Your sacrifice of praise will become a blazing fire on the altar, whose smoke ascends to heaven, to the throne of God.

Act in Love

Life may batter you relentlessly at times. In such seasons, after you have struggled nobly for a time, you are likely to run out of strength and be unable to keep up. When you lose your spiritual drive, through weariness or laziness, when you pull your head and limbs into your shell and don’t want to be bothered, when you’ve lost your love and concern for others in the church... will you ask the Holy Spirit for help? Then, find someone who needs your help or attention and make plans and time to serve them. *“You will receive power, after the Holy Spirit comes upon you, and you will be my witnesses.”*

The Holy Spirit will restore your spiritual energy as you reach out in acts of love. He will rekindle the flame of Christian love within you and that love will refuel your heart. You’ll be able to give again and enjoy it.

Read the Word

When you lose your way, lose your sense of purpose, when God’s voice seems to have fallen silent... will you turn to the Holy Spirit for help? Then, pick up your Bible and begin to read—start with the Psalms or the Gospel of John (these are books that feed the heart with fresh revelation and courage). When you find a psalm that echoes your feelings or pinpoints your condition, slow down, re-read it and meditate (think) on it; it will build you up just like it did the psalmist when he sang it over and over again.

In the Gospel, concentrate on the words of Jesus, for they contain the power to make you what He wants you to be. Jesus said of the Spirit, whom He was going to send, *“He will glorify me, since all he reveals to you will be taken from what is mine”* (John 16:14; NJB).

Speak the Word

When you are distracted by evil, seductive thoughts or imaginations, and can only think of how to gratify yourself, when you feel spiritually shallow or hollow... will you ask the Holy Spirit for help? He'll build a fire within you that surfaces those thoughts and activities that displease the Lord. If you repent, He'll wipe them away and make you clean. He'll teach you the Lord's ways, and then reorder your steps, as necessary, to get you back on the Lord's path, back in the Lord's grip.

Cast down those evil thoughts and counter them by taking up God's words in their place. Paul wrote to the church in Rome, *"The word is very near to you; it is in your mouth and in your heart, that is, the word of faith, the faith which we preach, that if you declare with your mouth that Jesus is Lord, and if you believe with your heart that God raised him from the dead, then you will be saved. It is by believing with the heart that you are justified, and by making the declaration with your lips that you are saved"* (Romans 10:8-10; NJB).

Begin to speak of yourself and your circumstances those very words of promise that you find written in God's Word about all who belong to Jesus. Declare His words with the confidence that God will back them up and use them to transform your life for His glory. Sometimes, you must decide NOT to speak what you feel at the moment, but to speak, instead, what God has said He has done for you or what God has said He will do as you trust in Him.

Pray in the Spirit

When you are uncertain of your faith or your future with the Lord, when it seems that the world's troubles are too many or too heavy to survive... will you ask the Holy Spirit for help? He has been sent by God to watch over you, to comfort you, to encourage you, to build you up. Jude, the brother of the Lord Jesus, urged, *"You, my dear friends, must build yourselves up on the foundation of your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit"* (Jude 20; NJB).

Smith Wigglesworth said, "It does no good for a man to pray from the earth, he must get into heaven if he wants to pray effectively." He was not suggesting a physical translation, but a spiritual transaction: move from the flesh into the Spirit. David Yonggi Cho, pastor of the great Korean Assembly, admitted, "I may spend the first 45 minutes in prayer just getting into the Spirit." (No wonder some of you don't know what I'm talking about right now—you've NEVER prayed for more than 45 minutes in one setting!) Until we have laid down our own agenda, our pride, our will, our whining... we have not even begun to really pray.

You have someone who will help you! As Paul said, *"The Spirit also helps us in our weakness, because we don't know how to pray for what we need. But the Spirit intercedes along with our groans that cannot be expressed in words."* (Romans 8:26; GWT). Have you received a heavenly language? Use it to pray more effectively.

Remember, the Holy Spirit is your Helper—sent by the Father, given by the Son. He wants to change your life for the glory of God, as He heats (no more cold heart), energizes (power to live for God), lights (your path with the Word), purifies (makes you holy), and seals (preserves, protects you until His work is complete). Get to know Him today!