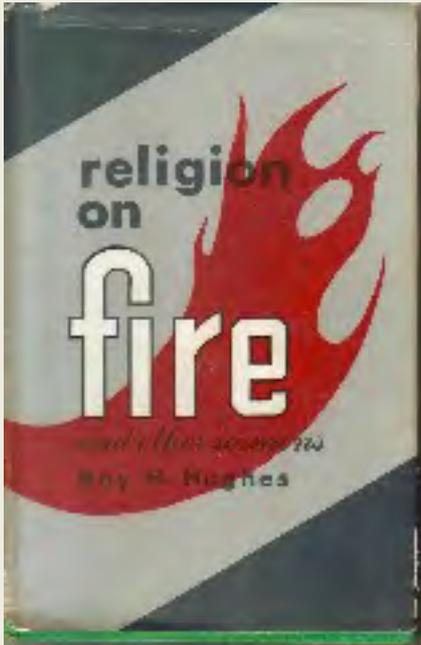


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## RELIGION ON FIRE

(Chapter One from “Religion on Fire”)

**“Not wanting in devotion, but on fire with the Spirit...” Romans 12:11  
(Goodspeed translation)**



Religion is a “hot dish” and in order for it to be palatable, it must be served piping hot. Cold, formal, ritualistic religion is repulsive. It has no attraction to the earnest-hearted individual. John Wesley said, “Get on fire, and the people will come to watch you burn.” Religion that is aflame is attractive. Much of the indifference to religion in our day can be attributed to the smug, snug, sedate condition of the church. Many ministers are preaching to Religion is a “hot dish” and in order for it to be palatable, it must be served piping hot. Cold, formal, ritualistic religion is repulsive. It has no attraction to the earnest-hearted individual. John Wesley said, “Get on fire, and the people will come to watch you burn.” Religion that is aflame is attractive. Much of the indifference to religion in our day can be attributed to the smug, snug, sedate condition of the church. Many ministers are preaching to paint, varnish, and pews rather than people because they are not messengers as flames of fire. Fire is a crowd-getter.

John the Baptist was a burning and a shining light (John (5:35), and all Jerusalem came out for to hear John preach in the wilderness. He could attract men, not through his eloquence, polish, or organizational ability; but because he was the voice of one crying in the wilderness set afire and aflame for God.



On the day of Pentecost, fire came down and sat upon the heads of each of the 120 who tarried in the upper room. The result was “Now when this was noised abroad, the multitude came together,” Acts 2:6. An ice wagon attracts but one now and then, but when the fire bells begin to clang and the whistles begin to blow, almost everyone is attentive. Individuals rush from their homes, leave their places of business and drive their automobiles at breakneck speeds in order to see the fire. If the church of today would attract the masses, it must leave its tepidness and lukewarmness and become a flaming fagot of truth in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation.

The message of Jesus Christ which He sent and signified by His servant, John, to the Laodicean church was “I would thou wert cold or hot. So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth. Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked: I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness to not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eyesalve, that thou mayest see,” Revelation 3:15-18. It is Christ’s desire for the Church to be aflame. Evidently, the church at Laodicea was doctrinally sound, and there was no argument against the organization of the church, but they had become mechanical and lukewarm in their operation. The Church has wandered a far distance from the pattern of the early Church. When the Church was born it was a time of Holy Spirit activity, and the people looked on with amazement and were confounded at the supernatural manifestations and operations they beheld.

## **THE CHURCH NEEDS TO BE STIRRED**



I am not talking about a mere emotional spree but a real earth-shaking stir. So many Christians of today are like Rip Van Winkle; they come to life during a revival and then go back to sleep. There is nothing worse than dead orthodoxy; dead things have no resistance. They drift and float with the current. In many churches there is an absence of any sensation whatsoever. They have a name that they live but are dead. The admonition could be given them that was given the Church of Sardis, “I know thy works, that thou has a name that thou livest, and art dead. Be watchful, strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die: for I have not found thy works perfect before God. Remember therefore how thou hast received and heard, and hold fast, and repent.” If the church is going to hang out its shingle, it must have the practice.

If the church is going to advertise its product, it must have the goods on the shelf. Years ago, when a teen-ager, I worked in a bargain store in a large city. The proprietor of this store invited me to go with him to purchase some goods. While there, I saw him purchase one pair of shoes. I could not see the point of his buying only one pair of shoes since he would not be able to advertise them; however, upon returning, I inquired as to why he purchased one pair of shoes. His answer was that he wanted them for a window display. He said he would put an enticing price on the shoes; thus, he would lure customers into his store and would sell them something else. To me, this was a hypocritical practice; he was advertising something that he did not have on the shelf.



Much religion today is merely decoration and window display. Men and women are putting on a front with no goods on the shelf. If the Church is going to profess the fullness of the Spirit and make its claims to the world, it must have the goods on the shelf. We should not be a Church merely in name but in evidence and practice, also. We cannot stay alive on the name alone. Everywhere the early Church went there was a stir. In Ephesus “There arose no small stir about that say,” Acts 19:23. At Thessalonica the Apostle Paul was termed the world-upsetter for they said of him, “These that have turned the world upside down are come hither also.”

My heart is saddened when I behold persons whose countenances once radiated and reflected the glory of Jesus Christ now in a formal and backslidden state. They are dying flames and smoldering embers of a once bright experience. They need to cry out, as did the foolish virgins, “Give us of your oil; for our lamps (torches) are gone out”; or as one version renders it, “Our flame is dying.” This is something about which the ministry of our day should be alarmed. The smoldering embers of the once bright, fiery experience need to be stirred into a glowing flame again. This was the desire of Paul for young man, Timothy, “Rekindle the fire that is within thee.”

Well do I remember my boyhood days when I visited grandmother in the red hills of North Georgia. The only heating system that the farmhouse had was an open fireplace. At night grandmother would smother the fire with ashes, and let it smolder through the night. The next morning I would hear grandmother stirring around. Though it was chilly and the air crisp, she would pull the ashes off the smoldering embers, place some rich pine kindling on the fire and begin to fan it into a real crackling flame. In a few moments she would call for us children to get up and warm ourselves by the fire. The fire had to be rekindled. If she had let it alone long enough, it would have gone out. That is what has happened in many cases in our Church. We have left our experience alone until the fire has gone out. Oh, that the Holy Spirit would come again as a rushing, mighty wind and fan the smoldering embers of our experiences into real flames of Pentecost!



There are some who are worried about extreme emotionalism and fanaticism when you talk of spiritual fire, but I am not as much worried about frying in emotionalism as I am about dry rot in the Church. A Texas evangelist was preaching with a great deal of fire and zeal in a tent meeting. The pastor told him to put on the brakes, for

he was preaching too hard. The evangelist replied, “God didn’t call me to be a brakeman, but a fireman.”

## **FIRE IS A SYMBOL OF GOD’S PRESENCE**

Throughout the Bible, the presence of God is symbolized by fire. While Moses kept the flock of his father-in-law, Jethro, the priest of Midian, on the back side of the desert, “The angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush: And he looked, and behold, the bush burned with fire, and the bush was not consumed.” God called unto Moses out of the midst of this bush, signifying that the fire was a symbol of His presence. The Lord led the children of Israel by fire through the night, “And the Lord God went before them by day in a pillar of a cloud, to lead them the way; and by night in a pillar of fire, to give them light.” When the Lord came down on Mt. Sinai, “...Mt. Sinai was altogether on a smoke, because the Lord descended upon it in fire.” There are many other instances where God’s presence was symbolized by fire, but space will not permit the enumeration.



## **FIRE PROVIDES PROTECTION**

Have you ever seen anyone backslide while he is on fire for God? As the shepherds build fires around their flock to ward off beasts of prey; likewise, the fire of God will serve as a wall around about the Christian. “For I, saith the Lord, will be unto her a wall of fire around about, and will be the glory in the midst of her,” Zechariah 2:5. When Elisha was being pursued by Benhadad, the king of Syria, and his thousands, he was not worried; because he was being protected by the chariots of fire that were round about him. The fire burning brightly in a man’s heart is a guarantee against sin. Those who have trouble with the world are those whose flame is dying. There is an old adage, “Flies don’t settle on a hot teakettle.” God gives us the fire in our hearts, but He expects us to keep it burning.



## **FIRE GENERATES POWER**

The Words of John the Baptist to his congregation, “I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance: but he that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and with fire,” Matthew 3:11. There are some who believe this means that He will either baptize them with the Holy Ghost or with hell fire, but, it is my opinion that if he had meant that, he would have said, “Holy Ghost or fire.” I believe he had reference to power and zeal that accompanies the baptism of the Holy Spirit in a life. As Jesus Christ said in His parting message to His disciples, “But ye shall receive power after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.”

A church cannot carry out the Great Commission without fire. Organization and plans, and programs without the touch of the Spirit are but dead weight to the Church. A car with twelve cylinders is no better than one with four if there is no spark there. A freight train can be loaded and everything in order; every workman can be in his place, but if there is no fire in the tender, there will be no freight moved.

I do not think it would be fair to you to diagnose your case and not give you a prescription. We do not have to long and hunger for the fire of God without knowing how we may receive it. The wise man, Solomon, said, "Where no wood is, there the fire goeth out," Proverbs 26:20. I am going to put three pieces of wood on the fire, and let us see how brightly it burns. It is within the reach of every man and woman to have a glowing experience with Christ.



### **THE FIRST PIECE OF WOOD IS MEDITATION**

This is an age of stress and strain, a time of peptic ulcers, headache powders, and sedatives. Amidst this hustle and bustle and the din of our day, few Christians are taking time to pause and meditate upon Christ. Because of the lack of meditation many experiences have lost their freshness. On first thought, one might not realize the importance or relationship that meditation has with being on fire for God. When one become lax and cold in his experience and then begins to meditate upon the goodness of God and His mercies toward him, it is not long until his heart becomes hot within him. When my Christian experience becomes drab, I begin to think upon the bountiful graces that Christ has bestowed upon me and the hallelujahs begin to swell in my bosom.

The Psalmist David had a similar experience, "My heart was hot within me, while I was musing (meditating) the fire burned: then spake I with my tongue." The beautiful Psalms that were penned by David were penned when his heart was aflame. No wonder David was called the man who was raised up on high, the anointed of the God of Jacob, the sweet Psalmist of Israel. He said, "The Spirit of the Lord spake by me and His word was in my tongue." This accounts for the beautiful Twenty-third Psalm, the Ninety-first Psalm and many others that have served as sources of inspiration and consolation to the followers of God since David's day.



Everyone is interested in success in life and General Joshua gives a good prescription, "This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein: For then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, then thou shalt have good success," Joshua 1:8. By meditating day and night in the Word of God, one can know the road to success. "Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful. But his delight is in the law of the Lord; and in his law doeth his meditate day and night. And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither; and whatsoever he doeth shall

prosper,” Psalm 1:1-3. There is a guarantee of spiritual prosperity to every man that will meditate and take delight in the law of the Lord.



There was a man who came to his pastor and told him that he had lost confidence in everybody, even himself. The pastor told him that he thought he had a prescription for his illness. He told him to go home and clean out the little storeroom behind his house, place a table, Bible and a light in the room, and go in there thirty minutes a day for the next week and return to him at the end of the week. The man thought it was such a simple thing that it would be useless; nevertheless, in search for satisfaction he did as his pastor bade him do.

The first day he entered into the room, he sat down and began to meditate. He asked himself the question, “Why did my pastor want me to come in here?” He had a little time on hand so he picked up the Bible and began to read. He read only a few moments before he felt his need for prayer. He bowed and God refreshed his soul. He followed the same pattern the next day. When Wednesday came, instead of being home from prayer meeting to balance his books, he headed for the house of God with Bible under arm. With a radiant gleam upon his face, he approached the pulpit and told his pastor that he had confidence in everybody, even himself. Meditation is necessary to keep the flames of Pentecost in your hearts.

## **THE SECOND PIECE OF WOOD IS PRAYER**



I would imagine that prayer is talked about more and practiced the least of any one thing in the Church today. If a beginner is called on to make a talk at a young people’s service, he usually talks on prayer. Prayer is treated so lightly by the average Christian of our day; in fact, it is said that the average prayer life of the Christians of our time is only three minutes a day for the laymen and nine minutes a day for the clergy. On wonder religion has fallen to such a low state in many places. Messages on prayer and exhortations concerning prayer have become so commonplace in church work that little heed is taken by the listeners.

The fire of the Lord falls in a congregation as a result of prevailing prayer and tarrying before God. When King Solomon had finished his dedicatory prayer, the fire of the Lord fell. “Now, when Solomon had made an end of praying, the fire came down from heaven, and consumed the burnt offering and the sacrifices; and the glory of the Lord filled the house,” 2 Chronicles 7:1. When Isaiah made his confession in prayer, “Then flew one of the seraphims unto me, having a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with tongs from off the altar: And he laid it upon my mouth and said, Lo, this hath touched thy lips; and thine iniquity is taken away, and thy sin purged,” Isaiah 6: 6-7. Notice, the angel took the live coal from off the altar. One can always find the fire at the altar. Whereas, Moses spake unto Israel, “The fire shall ever be burning upon the altar; it shall never go out,” Leviticus 6:13. Revivals and great spiritual awakenings are born around the altars of our churches.

As Elijah, the Church must pray down fire from heaven; for the God that answereth by fire, let Him be God. We cannot expect the real Pentecostal fire to fall until we do pray. After the one hundred and twenty, being in one accord, had tarried with prayer and supplication for ten days, the fire of the Lord fell. After Elijah prayed, "Hear me, O Lord, hear me, that this people may know that thou art the Lord God, and that thou hast turned their heart back again. Then the fire of the Lord fell....." I Kings 18:37-38. A mechanical prayer prayed from a book or from the lips of man is not the type of prayer that brings fire, but the effectual, fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much. The forgotten secret of power in the Church today is prayer. Too much emphasis cannot be placed upon seeking God's face.



### **THE THIRD PIECE OF WOOD IS THE WORD OF GOD**

The bible not only contains the Word of God, but also it is the Word of God. It is neither the book of the month, nor the book of the year, but the book of the centuries, thoughts that breathe and words that burn. To the traveler, it is a map of the country here and of the one to which he is going. To the pilot, it is the chart by which he steers. To the pilgrim, it is a staff to lean upon. To the soldier, it is a weapon, the sword of the Spirit. To the student, it is a textbook to eternity. To a carpenter, it is a hammer that breaketh the rock to pieces. To the minister, it is the guidebook for humanity. To the sinner, it is the blueprint for salvation. "Let it dwell in you richly." Ignorance of the Word of God is the reason for much confusion in Christendom today. The answer to any problem can be found in God's Word. The Word is the answer to our sins, "Thy Word have I hid in my heart that I might not sin against thee." The Word is the answer to our sickness, "He sent His Word and healed them and delivered them from their destructions," Psalm 107:20. In fact, there is nothing that confronts a human being today that cannot be solved by the Word of God.

But you ask, "What does the Word of God have to do with being on fire for the Lord?" I think that this can best be answered by Jeremiah who said, "But His word was in mine heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones." Jeremiah 20:9. "Is not my Word like as a fire, saith the Lord; and like a hammer that breaketh the rock in pieces?" Jeremiah 23:29. "Wherefore thus saith the Lord God of hosts, Because ye speak this word, behold, I will make my words in thy mouth fire," Jeremiah 5:14. Wherever the Word is studied and kept in the hearts of individuals, there is a continual burning fire. After the Resurrection of Jesus Christ, He met two disciples on the road Emmaus. They were discouraged and downhearted and He began to speak to them. Their eyes were so clouded with doubt and fear that they did not recognize Christ. In fact, they even asked Him if He were a stranger in Jerusalem that He had not heard what had happened. As they trudged the dusty road, He began to ask questions starting with, "O fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken: Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into His glory? And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself." When they came nigh

unto the village, they constrained Him to spend the evening with them. When they were set down for the evening meal, He took bread and blessed and brake it and gave to them, and their eyes were opened and they knew Him and He vanished out of their sight. “And they said to one another, Did not our heart burn within us while he talked with us by the way, and while he opened to us the scriptures?” The Scriptures will set your hearts aflame, for in them you will find fuel for your souls. Does not your heart burn within you when you read the Bible, God’s Word to you and God’s message to men? My prayer “Oh that thou wouldest come down, that the mountains might flow down at thy presence, As when the melting fire burneth, the fire causeth the waters to boil.”



Ray H Hughes  
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