

Self-effacing Servant— Consuming Fire

Dear Friend,

The Holy Spirit has chosen to reveal Himself through the Scriptures. What do they tell us about Him?

The primary revelation of the Holy Spirit is contained in His title: He is **Holy**. This is the standard by which we must judge every message, every manifestation, every movement that claims to be of the Holy Spirit: **Is it compatible with His holiness?**

From “Pentecostal” to “Charismatic”

Someone has said that “familiarity breeds contempt.” Unfortunately, this sometimes applies to the things of the Spirit—in particular, to the development of the Pentecostal movement. When the baptism and the gifts of the Spirit first impacted the Church in the early years of the 20th century, it was neither fashionable nor popular to be labeled “Pentecostal.” There was a stigma attached to it. There was a price to be paid.

The early Pentecostals, for the most part, were not highly educated. They came “from the wrong side of the tracks.” Some of the things they said and did were foolish. Their concept of holiness was often legalistic. But they paid a price. Their experience was not cheap.

In the course of the twentieth century this has changed—particularly with the advent of the “Charismatic” movement. The substitution of “Charismatic” for “Pentecostal” somehow seemed to make it more respectable. It became quite fashionable to be “Charismatic.” In fact, the word was no longer confined to Christians. I was astonished the first time I heard the media apply the term to a rather unscrupulous politician.

To these developments there was both a plus and a minus. On the plus side, the baptism and the gifts of the Holy Spirit have been made accessible to the whole Body of Christ. But on the minus side, there are ministries and practices to which the word “holy” can no longer be applied. Here are just a few examples:

1. Flippant and irreverent language applied to the sacred things of God.
2. Public ministries motivated by barefaced covetousness, bolstered by claims that are not substantiated or promises that are not fulfilled.
3. Bizarre and unseemly manifestations attributed to the Holy Spirit.

That these things are found in ministries that claim to be Christian does not surprise me. After all, covetousness and self-serving are deeply rooted in human nature. What astonishes me, however, is that millions of professing Christians apparently accept that kind of behavior as



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proceeding from the Holy Spirit. Obviously the time has come for us to take a fresh look at the Holy Spirit. What kind of person is He?

A Humble, Self-effacing Servant

I can still recall what a shock it was for me when I first realized that servanthood is part of the divine nature. Most people today regard being a servant as something to be avoided; something menial and degrading. This attitude is one of the corrupting influences that are poisoning our contemporary culture. Furthermore, it is false.

Servanthood did not originate in time but in eternity; not on earth but in heaven. Eternally Jesus the Son is the joyful, willing, obedient servant of God the Father. The Holy Spirit, in turn, is the obedient, self-effacing servant of the Father and the Son. He does not complain of “victimization” or demand His “rights.” He perfectly fulfills His appointed role. He is the Servant God!

This is beautifully illustrated in Genesis chapter 24, which describes how Abraham went about obtaining a bride for his son Isaac. There are four beautiful “types” in this account. Abraham is a type of God the Father; Isaac is a type of God’s Son, Jesus; Rebecca is a type of the bride of Christ, the Church.

But what about Abraham’s servant? Although never given a name, he is the main character. He is a type of the Holy Spirit. As a servant, he had one supreme objective: to find the young woman who was to be the bride; to equip and adorn her; and to escort her safely to the bridegroom.

It was for a similar purpose that the Holy Spirit came down to earth at Pentecost. He is here with one supreme objective: to find, equip and adorn the bride of Christ—the Church—and to escort her safely through this world and present her to Jesus—a pure and spotless bride.

One main characteristic of the Holy Spirit is that He never attracts attention to Himself. Here is a literal translation of some of the things that Jesus told us about Him: “He will testify of Me . . .”¹ “He will not speak from Himself, but whatever He hears He will speak . . .”² “He will take of Mine and declare it to you.”³

More remarkable still, in all the revelation which the Holy Spirit has given us in Scripture **there is no record that anyone ever addressed a prayer to the Holy Spirit.** The pattern prayer that Jesus gave to His disciples commences with the words “Our Father.” To this Jesus added His own promise: “And whatever you ask in My name, that I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son.”⁴

The terminus of all scriptural prayer is God the Father. The ministry of the Holy Spirit is to help us to reach the Father with our prayers, not to offer us an alternative destination. We are to pray **in** the Spirit, not **to** the Spirit. (See Ephesians 6:18.)

In recent years, however, some sections of the Church have deviated from this scriptural pattern. The focus has shifted from the Father and the Son to the Spirit. Many songs—with little scriptural content—are directed to the Holy Spirit. Often the main emphasis has been on subjective experiences that cater to the ego of those participating. This subtle, unadvertised shift of emphasis has opened God’s people to spiritual dangers which many fail to discern.

We need to keep two basic principles in mind. First, the Holy Spirit never caters to the human ego. Second, the Holy Spirit never attracts attention to Himself. He always directs our focus to Jesus.

Whenever these principles are set aside, the result may be a lot of fleshly excitement and emotional self-indulgence without any genuine holiness. Or—more dangerous still—it may open the way for a satanic counterfeit which in turn opens the way for the activity of demons.

A Consuming Fire

One way in which the Holy Spirit manifests Himself at times is *fire*. In fact, the last time that the Holy Spirit appears visibly in Scripture is as **“seven lamps of fire . . . burning before the throne . . . of God.”**⁵

The writer of Hebrews makes a simple, but profound, statement: “Our God is a consuming fire.”⁶ He does not say that God is **like** a fire, but that God **is** a fire. For this reason, “we must serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear.”⁷ Not slavish fear, but “the fear of the LORD, [which] is clean, enduring forever.”⁸

The writer of Hebrews is not speaking of God the Father, or of God the Son, but of God the Holy Spirit. He actually is a fire—a consuming fire.

At various points in the history of Israel the Holy Spirit came down among the people as a fire. In the tabernacle in the wilderness, when Aaron had offered all the appointed sacrifices, fire came out from before the LORD and consumed the burnt offering and the fat on the altar. When all the people saw it, they shouted and fell on their faces.⁹

Again, when Solomon had finished praying at the dedication of his temple, fire came down from heaven and consumed the burnt offering and the sacrifices; and the glory of the LORD filled the temple. And the priests could not enter the house of the LORD, because the glory of the LORD had filled the LORD’S house.¹⁰

Later, in a time of apostasy, when the LORD responded to Elijah’s prayer on Mount Carmel, Then the fire of the LORD fell and consumed the burnt sacrifice, and the wood and the stones and the dust, and it licked up the water that was in the trench. Now when all the people saw it, they fell on their faces; and they said, “The LORD, He is God! The LORD, He is God!”¹¹

Each time the fire came down and the people fell on their faces, they were not simply moved by a spiritual manifestation. They were responding to the presence of God—God the Holy Spirit—who had come down among them as a consuming fire. In His presence they were physically incapable of standing.

To Purify or to Destroy?

But there are two opposite sides to fire. Fire can be beneficial, but also dangerous. Fire can purify, but also destroy.

So it is with the fire of the Holy Spirit. He can minister God’s blessing and favor on those who are obedient. But He can also minister God’s wrath and judgment on those who are presumptuous and self-willed.

Immediately after the account of the fire that fell on Aaron’s sacrifice in the tabernacle, the record continues:

Then Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, each took his censer and put fire in it, put incense on it, and offered profane fire before the LORD, which He had not commanded them. So fire went out from the LORD and devoured them, and they died before the LORD.¹²

What a solemn lesson! The same fire that brought God's blessing on Aaron's sacrifice offered in obedience brought instant death to his two sons when they went into God's presence with "profane [unholy] fire."

God has already defined the way in which we are to approach Him: "with reverence and godly fear,"¹³ "we both [Jews and Gentiles] have access **by one Spirit** [the Holy Spirit] to the Father."¹⁴

To offer "profane fire" is to approach God with presumption and self-will in any spirit that is not the Holy Spirit. It is therefore a matter of vital importance—in fact, of life and death—to recognize the Holy Spirit in whatever way He manifests Himself and to distinguish Him from any other counterfeit spirit.

Of all the Israelites, Nadab and Abihu, Aaron's sons, might have felt that they had a special privilege to enter God's presence by a way of their own choosing. By right of birth, Nadab should have succeeded Aaron as High Priest. But there is no substitute for obeying God's Word—neither denominational status nor dramatic miracles nor crowd appeal. God does not have a special privileged "elite" who can ignore His requirements without suffering the consequences.

God's judgment on the self-exaltation of Nadab and Abihu shows us that the Holy Spirit only imparts His blessing to those who meet His requirements. Today, His first requirement is to focus on exalting and glorifying the Lord Jesus Christ. Second, to carefully follow the directions which the Spirit Himself has transmitted to us in the Scriptures.

The theme of my next letter will be the Spirit of Truth.

Yours in the Master's service,



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¹John 15:26

²John 16:13

³John 16:14

⁴John 14:13

⁵Revelation 4:5

⁶Hebrews 12:29

⁷Hebrews 12:28

⁸Psalms 19:9

⁹Leviticus 9:23–24

¹⁰2 Chronicles 7:1–2

¹¹1 Kings 18:38–39

¹²Leviticus 10:1–2

¹³Hebrews 12:28

¹⁴Ephesians 2:18