

LIVING THE CHRISTIAN LIFE VICTORIOUSLY

PART 6B – *LIGHT & POWER & FIRE*

Last week we talked about two of the three characteristics of the Holy Spirit; Illumination or Light, and Power. Today we will be talking about the Holy Spirit as Fire.

I want to begin today's topic by introducing two words that are used in theological discussions regarding the true nature of God:

These are: Inscrutable and Ineffable – two dollar words for sure, so let's first unwrap the meaning of these words so that we can appreciate the remainder of our discussion.

When we say that God is inscrutable we are saying that God is incomprehensible, unfathomable, and mysterious.

In Psalm 77 verse 19, the Psalmist says it this way:

¹⁹ Your way was in the sea,
Your path in the great waters,
And Your footsteps were not known.

Scriptures contain hundreds of examples of God's inscrutability; let's look at one of them for clarification.

We know that John the Baptist was anointed by God to "prepare the way of the Lord." And we recall how it was that John the Baptist baptized Jesus in the Jordan.

Shortly after that, John was arrested and thrown in prison by Herod where he languished until he was beheaded at the order of Herod.

Now fast forward to after Pentecost when Herod imprisoned Peter, do you recall what happened? If you want to read a marvelous yet mysterious story about how Peter was freed, read Chapter 12 of the Book of Acts; it is so amazing, even Peter had difficulty realizing that what was happening was not a dream.

The point is that John the Baptist remained imprisoned until he was beheaded by Herod, yet God intervened on Peter's behalf and set Peter free.

Doesn't this beg the question, "WHY?" "Why was John the Baptist not freed?"

Surely John the Baptist was an agent for the spreading of the Gospel, why did God allow him to languish in prison only to be beheaded while he set Peter free?

This fully exemplifies the theological term of inscrutability; for mankind, God and His ways are inscrutable, they are unfathomable mystery.

Let's turn now to the term, ineffable. Ineffable means indescribable, inexpressible and indefinable; thus when we speak of God's nature and His plan for us we quickly move into a realm that is best described as being beyond comprehension and unable to be expressed through human means of articulation.

We can read in Deuteronomy 29:29 that there are secret things that are of the Lord our God and that remain to Him only, these are the things about which we say are ineffable; they are known only to God and are unspeakable to mankind because language is inadequate to describe God. Our finite experiences cannot capture his infinite being and so though He might wish to tell us of these mysteries, our intellect is too trivial in comparison to God, that we just would not comprehend what He was telling us.

Thus, when we think of God as being inscrutable and ineffable, we begin to appreciate all the more our own limitations to knowing God. But just because God cannot tell us what He is so that we might know Him, He frequently tells us what He is like; and it seems that one of the more frequent similarities that He uses is that He is like fire.

You will find a list of the following scripture references in your bulletin, I'm only going to read excerpts from them today, but you probably will want to read them in their context and meditate on them.

Exodus 19:18 - "...the **LORD descended upon it in fire.**"

Numbers 11:1 - "**So the fire of the Lord** burned among them..."

Deuteronomy 4:24 - "**For the LORD your God is a consuming fire...**"

Malachi 3:2 - "... **He is like a refiner's fire** and like launderers' soap."

These are a few examples from the Old Testament. We can add these from the New Testament to your list:

Matthew 3:11 "... **He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.**"

Hebrews 12:29 - "... **our God is a consuming fire.**"

These and others like these agree with God's revelation of Himself as recorded throughout scripture.

- Recall that God spoke to Moses from a burning bush,
- He was in the pillar of fire that led the Israelites at night as they fled from Egypt,
- He revealed Himself to Ezekiel as a brightness that radiated out of the midst of the fire; and

- At Pentecost He lighted upon each of the disciples as tongues of fire.

We need to appreciate that when the disciples, who were well versed in the scriptures, experienced the tongues of fire on their brows that they knew that the God who throughout their history had appeared as fire, had now come to them in the form of fire and was indeed dwelling in them.

God, who had been a God external to mankind, had become God internal to those who received His Resurrected Son.

The Shekinah Glory that had once blazed over the mercy seat suddenly was on the disciples' foreheads as a sign that the fire of God had invaded their natures. The flame on their forehead was the seal of a new union, a union of the spirits of men and women with the Holy Spirit.

This is the ultimate message of the Gospel:

By the atoning blood of Jesus shed on the cross, sin-filled men and women may now become one with God; we can become unified in fulfilling God's purposes for our lives; we can receive that fiery flame of the Holy Spirit that transforms our spirits into a spirit that is unified with His.

When we consider all of the doctrinal issues regarding our salvation; the Incarnation, atonement, justification, regeneration, these are all preliminary acts to the final and life-saving grace, the invasion and indwelling of God's Holy Spirit in the redeemed spirit of men and women who receive Jesus.

This is the final Grace that restores with fire the original relationship God had with His creation in the Garden, a union of His Spirit with ours that can lead us and guide us in His way forever, pursuing the spread of His Gospel in ways we never dreamed we would be able.

It has been said that one of the most effective blows to the Church dealt by Satan, was the planting of fear of the Holy Spirit in the body of Christ, His Church. Many in the Church today, laity and clergy alike harbor a fear of the Holy Spirit, a fear that has the effect of crippling the Bride of Jesus and making her ministry ineffective.

This fear most likely comes from the same root of nearly all unwarranted fears; a lack of understanding and knowledge. Perhaps we can restore the Holy Spirit to our worship and our daily lives by exploring how His Fire can burn in our hearts and impact our lives.

Through my reading, study, and experience, I have discovered five ways that the flame of the Holy Spirit burns in our hearts to renew our spirits to the image of God:

1. Morals
2. Intellects
3. Spirits
4. Emotions
5. Wills

Let's consider these and see how the Holy Spirit impacts each.

In the name, "Holy Spirit," or "Holy Ghost," the word "Holy" imputes to God's Spirit the idea of moral purity. The idea that a person could be filled with the Holy Spirit while living a life that is replete with moral carelessness, little white lies, or flirting on the fringes of sin, is a total misconception. When the Fire of the Holy Spirit enters into one's heart, the flame of moral purity burns brightly and that person recognizes those areas that are abhorrent to God. Our morals are thus impacted by the Holy Spirit's flame burning in us.

The flame of the Holy Spirit impacts our intellect in that it motivates us to focus more and more to use our intellect to do the works that the Lord has in mind for us. While most theologians agree that the human intellect, our ability to reason, is a divine attribute; history, as recent as yesterday, is replete with examples of how a superior intellect without the saving grace of godliness can turn a person against family, neighbor, fellow countrymen, entire ethnic groups, and nations, reigning down terror and curses that can affect generations to come. I need mention only one word to prove this point: Jihad.

However, an intellect that has been infused with the flame of the Holy Spirit can produce great joy in the heart of the person and surely it does so in God. Consider the joy that Sir Isaac Watts has brought to us with his many hymns of worship; "When I survey the wondrous cross..." and "Our God, Our help in ages past..." (O God, Our help in ages past...).

Isaac Watts was certainly a learned man with superior intellect. He was a student of Latin, Greek, and Hebrew, and was proficient in English verse. He once wrote of himself, "I make no pretence to be a poet, but to the Lamb that was once slain, and now lives, I have addressed many a song, to be sung by the penitent and believing heart." This is the joy to which the intellect, spurred by the Holy Spirit, can bring to one's heart and more importantly to God.

The Fire of the Holy Spirit is a flame that excites our spirits much as the flame of a gas burner excites a beaker of water to boil and bubble. This flame excites us to rejoice in the opportunity to give of ourselves sacrificially, to abandon our will in favor of our Father's will. Mere religious belief could never have excited St. Stephen to speak out against the religious leaders with such conviction that they took him out of the city, reading in Acts 7:59-60: "And they stoned Stephen as he was calling on *God* and saying, 'Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.'⁶⁰ Then he knelt down and cried out with a loud voice, 'Lord, do not charge them with this sin.' And when he had said this, he fell asleep." There is no doubt that the Holy Spirit fire burned brightly in St. Stephen as we sought forgiveness for His persecutors.

And while we must not rely on our emotions to guide our walk with the Lord, it is a fact that the Flame of the Holy Spirit burning in our hearts impacts our emotions.

From our understanding that God is Unity in Jesus and the Holy Spirit, we know that He experiences love, grief, and joy, all of which are emotions. And to help keep you steadfast in your walk as Bereans, I have included more scripture verses that support that God; Father, Son,

and Holy Spirit, experiences these emotions. I am only going to read a short excerpt and am counting on you to read the entire reference to capture the context and upon which to meditate.

The first Emotion we will explore in scripture is **Love**:

Mark 10: “Then Jesus, looking at him, loved him ...”

2 Thessalonians 2: “...Now may our Lord Jesus Christ Himself, and our God and Father, who has loved us...”

John 3: - “For God so loved the world...”

The second Emotion we will explore in scripture is **Grief**:

Genesis 6: “And the LORD was sorry that He had made man on the earth, and He was grieved in His heart.”

Psalms 95: “For forty years I was grieved with *that* generation...”

Mark 3: “And when He [Jesus] had looked around at them with anger, being grieved by the hardness of their hearts,”

John 11: “Jesus wept.”

The final Emotion we will explore in scripture is **Joy**:

Nehemiah 8: “...the joy of the LORD is your strength.”

1 Chronicles 29: “...I know also, my God, that You test the heart and have pleasure in uprightness.”

Psalms 16: “In Your presence is fullness of joy.”

Isaiah 9: “Therefore the Lord will have no joy...”

Matthew 25: “...‘Enter into the joy of your Lord.’”

Now we must be careful that we do not misrepresent the facts by saying that God’s emotions are the SAME as ours:

- As finite beings our emotions are finite while God’s are infinite.
- Our emotions are self centered while God’s are not.

At best, we can say God’s emotions are in some ways similar to ours.

As we have seen in the short snippets I have read from scripture, we can form a rational picture of what God is like. We learn that God loved individuals similar to how we love individuals. And God loved the whole world, something that is difficult for us to fully grasp, and God sent His only Son to die to save us, wretched sinners, something that is even more difficult for us to fully comprehend. While God loves like we do, God loves on a plane that is far beyond our ability to imagine.

We can also sense the grief that God endured not just as Jesus felt the grief as He looked at the cross to which He must go, but also the grief that was and is felt because so many have had hardened hearts and could never be reached.

And the joy that God treasures in the righteous man is beyond our comprehension, partly because He is God and we are mere mortals; but also because our own righteousness has been dulled by the outlandish distractions and perversions that we witness daily and oft times hourly.

God has provided us with an exciting panorama of drama and intrigue just in the challenge of living our lives righteously; yet we have all, everyone, turned away from the excitement of His creation in favor of man's creations.

- We embrace gambling whether in a small way as in participating in an office football pool, or by encourage it on a large scale by buying state sponsored lottery tickets. And on top of our tacit approval of this abomination to God, we justify it under the guise that we can provide education for our youth without adding taxes; yet the burden of the gambling funds is borne by those who can least afford it.
- We use alcohol and illicit drugs to stimulate our senses of pleasure instead of enjoying the righteous natural pleasures of life that God intended for us.
- We turn to man-made theatre and television and putrefy our spirits with totally unrighteous garbage that God would never inhabit.

Then, after supporting all of these abhorrent behaviors and many more like them, when we are introduced to the Holy Spirit on Sundays, we wonder, "Why have I never experienced the illumination, power, and fire of God's Holy Spirit?"

It should be obvious by now that we need a change of pace, a change of priorities, a change in habits, a change of direction. Such changes are available to us and we can receive great assistance in making these changes by appealing to God to forgive our sins and asking Him to send His Holy Spirit to lead and guide us in His way. To illumine His way to us, to indwell us with His power, and to give us His fiery Spirit in our hearts.

Let us pray.