

Strange Fire in the House of the Lord

We need to be careful. Current fads involving angels, ecstatic worship and necromancy could push us off the edge of spiritual sanity.



No one fully understands what Nadab and Abihu did to prompt God to strike them dead in the sanctuary of Israel. The Bible says they loaded their firepans with incense, ignited the substance and “offered strange fire before the Lord, which He had not commanded them” (Lev. 10:1, NASB). As a result of their careless and irreverent behavior, fire came from God’s presence and consumed them.

Zap. In an instant they were ashes.

When Moses had to explain to Aaron what happened to the two men, he said: “It is what the Lord spoke, saying, ‘By those who come near to Me I will be treated as holy, and before all the people I will be honored’” (v. 3). Although we don’t know the details of what Nadab and his brother did with the holy incense, we know they were careless and irreverent about the things of God.

“We want the miracles of God, but we also want the fear and reverence of God. We cannot allow this strange fire to spread unchecked.”

This ancient story has relevant application for us today. We don’t use incense or firepans in our worship, but we are expected to handle God’s Word with care and minister to His people in the fear of the Lord. In other words: No funny business allowed. We aren’t allowed to mix God’s Word with foreign concepts or mix our worship with pagan practices.

Yet as I minister in various churches around this country I am finding that strange fire is spreading in our midst-even in churches that call themselves "Spirit-filled." Pastors and leaders need to be aware of these trends:

1. Deadly visitations. In some charismatic circles today, people are claiming to have spiritual experiences that involve communication with the dead. One Michigan pastor told me last week that some church leaders he knows promote this bizarre practice and base it on Jesus' experience on the Mount of Transfiguration. The logic is that since Jesus talked to Moses and Elijah on the day He was glorified, this gives us permission to talk to dead Christians and our dead relatives.

Although little is said about these experiences from the pulpit (since the average believer is not ready to handle this "new revelation"), people in some streams of the prophetic movement are claiming to have visitations from Aimee Semple McPherson, William Branham, John Wimber or various Bible characters. And we are expected to say, "Oooooooo, that's so deep"-and then go looking for our own mystical, beyond-the-grave epiphany.

That is creepy. Communication with the dead was strictly forbidden in the Old Testament (see Deut. 18:11), and there is nothing in the New that indicates the rules were changed. Those who seek counsel from the dead-whether through mediums and séances or in "prophetic visions"-are taking a dangerous step toward demonization.

2. Ecstatic rapture. Not long after ecstasy became known as a recreational drug, someone in our movement got the bright idea to promote spiritual ecstasy as a form of legitimate worship. The concept evolved from "spiritual drunkenness" to the current fad in which people gather at church altars and pretend to shoot needles in their arms for a "spiritual high." Some preachers today are encouraging people to "toke the Holy Ghost"-a reference to smoking marijuana.

I hate to be a party pooper, but the Bible warns us to “be of sound judgment and sober spirit” (1 Pet. 4:7). There is plenty of freedom and joy in the Holy Spirit; we don’t have to quench it by introducing people to pagan revelry. Christian worship is not about losing control. Those who worship Jesus do it “in spirit and in truth” (John 4:24), and our love for God is not measured by how violently we shake or how many times we fall on the floor.

Recently I told a friend in Pennsylvania that when people get tired of this drug imagery it won’t be long before we see some Christians having sexual experiences at the altar. “It’s already happening,” my friend said. He described a recent “worship concert” in which one of the musicians simulated sex while stroking a microphone and whispering sensual phrases to Jesus. What is next-orgasmic worship? God help us.

3. Angels among us. Angels have always played a vital role in the life of the church. They are “ministering spirits” sent to protect, guide and strengthen believers (Heb. 1:14). But suddenly angels have become the rage in some segments of our movement. People are claiming to see them everywhere, and often the stories don’t line up with the Word of God.

During the Lakeland Revival last year in Florida, a man from Germany took the stage and claimed that an angel walked into a restaurant while he was eating a hamburger, took his intestines out and replaced them with a gold substance. Others have testified that angels took them to heaven and operated on them. And many are claiming that angels are dropping feathers, gold dust and precious gems on worshippers.

I know God can do anything. He can make an iron axe head float, hide a coin in a fish’s mouth and use a little boy’s lunch to feed a multitude. Those were genuine miracles that He can still do today. But we still have to use caution here. There are counterfeits. If we promote a false miracle or a false angel in the Lord’s house, we are participating in

strange fire.

I know of a case where a man was caught planting fake jewels on the floor of a church. He told his friends he was “seeding the room” to lift the people’s faith. I know of others who have been caught putting gold glitter on themselves in a restroom and then running back in a church service, only to claim that God was blessing them with this special favor. Where is the fear of God when Christians would actually fabricate a miracle?

This is a time for all true believers with backbones to draw clear lines between what is godly worship and what is pagan practice. We want the miracles of God, but we also want the fear and reverence of God. We cannot allow this strange fire to spread unchecked.

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