

## Sacred Fire

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by James W. Adams

Among the ancient Greeks, sacred fire was kept burning constantly in the temples of their gods at Athens and Delphi. If for any reason the fire was extinguished, as in time of war or earthquake, it was rekindled only with flame drawn from the pure rays of the sun. This custom suggests an analogy fraught with lessons that are both interesting and challenging to those who would “*serve the living and true God*” in our generation.

God’s spiritual temple today is the church of the Lord Jesus Christ: “*Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints, and of the household of God; and are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone; in whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord: in whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit*” (Eph. 2:19-22). In it also “sacred fire” is to be kept burning constantly on the altar of “*spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God by Jesus Christ*” (1 Pet. 2:5). The sacred fire of God’s spiritual temple is Divine truth. Long ago, Jeremiah declared, “*Is not my word like as a fire, saith the Lord...*” (Jer. 23:29). Typical of this fact was the fire which burned continually on the great altar before the tabernacle of the Lord under the Mosaic economy, and with which incense was burned within the Holy Place by the Levitical priests. With “*strange fire*” — fire not from off the altar of burnt offering — God was not pleased. Nadab and Abihu, sons of Aaron, offered incense with such fire and were destroyed with fire from heaven (Lev. 10).

Also analogous to the practice of the ancient Greek worship is the fact that the God of Heaven anticipated the contingency of the fire of Divine truth being extinguished in His spiritual temple — the church. That is to say that He anticipated not only the possibility but the probability of apostasy. As evidence of this fact, note Paul’s warning to the Ephesian elders: “*Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood. For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them. Therefore watch and remember, that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn everyone night and day with tears*” (Acts 20:28-31).

As a Divine preventative, Paul also said, “*And now, brethren, I commend you to God and the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified*” (Acts 20:32). Observe, it was the word of God’s grace which was to preserve God’s people from apostasy and to insure to them their heavenly inheritance. As was true with the sacred fire among the Greeks of ages past, when the fire of Divine truth is extinguished among the people of God today through departures in doctrine, faith, and practice, an approved relationship with God can only be re-established by a return to the original source. As the Greeks rekindled their fire with flame drawn from the pure rays of the sun, so God’s wandering children today can rekindle spiritual fire among them by drawing flame from the “*Sun of Righteousness*” through the infinitely pure rays of original, apostolic revelation. That is to say that a return to a “*thus saith the Lord*” in the realm of religious faith and practice is mandatory. True Christianity is a religion regulated by the Word!

To practice as acts of worship and service to God acts not authorized by the word of the Lord, or even to perform authorized practice through unauthorized organizations of purely human origin, is to offer “*spiritual sacrifices*” with “*strange fire*” — fire not originating from the great altar of Divine truth. We cannot expect God to be any less displeased with such sacrifices under the covenant of grace than he was under the covenant of bondage. Superior privileges increase responsibility; they do not diminish it! May we keep the sacred fire burning in the house of God.