

# **We Are the Church**

## **Part Three: Spirit-filled**

*Ephesians 4:3; Hebrews 12:29; Leviticus 9:24;  
Leviticus 6:12-13; Leviticus 10:1-3; Numbers 3:4*

### **1. Strange strength.**

*- Colossians 1:28-29*

### **2. Strange sanction.**

*- Exodus 30:30-33; Leviticus 16:12-13; 1 Samuel 2:17;  
Jeremiah 5:29-31; Romans 6:15-23; Zechariah 4:6*

### **3. Sanctified Spirit!**

*- Matthew 3:11; 2 Timothy 1:6-8*

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West Valley Church  
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## We Are the Church Part Three: Spirit-filled

We are all very well aware of fire season. We've had numerous fires in our county and state and in the states of the Pacific Northwest. The smoke has been thick in the air and it's been hazardous to go outside for very long.

My brother lives outside of Medford, and last week he was evacuated. The next day he found out he was fortunate; the fire had gotten as close as a few feet from where he lives, but it went around it. So while we are thankful that he didn't end up homeless, at the very same time we are praying for the many, many others who did lose their homes. I can't imagine how difficult that must be.

But we did get a scare here after the Evans Canyon Fire started just a little over a week ago. Like you we were watching the news and the alerts closely, and praying for those who were evacuated. I signed up for updates on my phone, and went to bed. About midnight, we woke up to a loud alarm blaring, and I checked my phone – it was a warning that we will need to be prepared to evacuate. I couldn't believe the fire would've shifted direction and come that far south and west, so I began checking the news. Everything indicated it was still in the canyon – a long way from our home here in West Valley. So we went back to bed, and the next morning we received another alert – apologizing for the previous alert! It seems it was supposed to go out to those in the area of the fire, and instead went out to most of the county.

I'm not making light of the fire – I'm definitely praying for all those who are displaced. But I'll tell you it was quite alarming to get a false fire alarm! There is a big difference between real fire and false fire.

I tell you that, because there is a story in the Old Testament about false fires. In fact, a couple of people were killed because they messed around with false fire. I'll explain what happened in just a moment, because it has a lot to do with what it means to be the church.

We are in our third Sunday of our series, "We Are the Church," exploring what the Bible says about what it really means to be the church. We're doing this because the majority of what the Bible tells us about being the church applies *whether or not we are able to meet together for worship one hour a week*. I hope you heard that; we are the church whether or not we meet together one hour a week.

So we've looked at some of the Bible's descriptions of the church, and we talked last week about our unity. If you remember, Ephesians 4:3 tells us to "make every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace." The unity of the Spirit. Capital "S". That means our unity comes from God's Spirit, the Holy Spirit.

So I would like today for us to talk about the role of the Holy Spirit in our church and how we intend to make sure this is a Spirit-filled church!

If you were with us for our outdoor services, you recall that I referenced a passage in the book of Hebrews that reminds us that we are in a time of shaking; that God is using this time to shake loose from our church and our lives whatever can be shaken so that what remains is the unshakeable. The last verse of that passage says:

“Let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe, for our God is a consuming fire.” (Hebrews 12:29, niv)

That is a reference to an Old Testament story that is sort of obscure but is very, very important for us as a church. God is very particular about what and who we base our lives and our church on. God has given us his very Spirit, who is the source of our unity, and he expects us to function by his Spirit. His Spirit is fire.

As I said, that reference to God being an all-consuming fire refers to an important incident that happened in the Old Testament, and this is it: when God’s people had been delivered from Egypt and were headed to their promised homeland, they didn’t yet have a temple to worship God at. So God instructed them to build a tabernacle, or a large tent, that would be portable so that they could set it up, and they could take it down and carry it with them to the next place. Aaron, Moses’ brother-in-law, was the man whom God appointed to be a family of priests to perform the duties of worship. When they dedicated the Tabernacle, they offered the very first burnt offering of meat on the altar. It was placed on the altar of burnt offering, and God sent fire from heaven that consumed the offering and lit the fire on the altar. We’re told:

“Fire blazed forth from the Lord’s presence and consumed the burnt offering and the fat on the altar. When the people saw this, they shouted with joy and fell face down on the ground.” (Leviticus 9:24, nlt)

That fire, started by God from heaven, was supposed to remain lit at all times. And that was one of the responsibilities of the priests – to keep that fire lit at all times and never let it go out. So every morning, one of their tasks was to stoke the fire and fan it into flame. Then they were told to light the burnt offerings from the fire on the altar that God started. God was very explicit about this:

“Meanwhile, the fire on the altar must be kept burning; it must never go out. Each morning the priest will add fresh wood to the fire and arrange the burnt offering on it. He will then burn the fat of the peace offerings on it. Remember, the fire must be kept burning on the altar at all times. It must never go out.” (Leviticus 6:12-13, nlt)

So Aaron the priest had four sons who were all working in the tabernacle. But one morning, two of his sons didn’t use God’s fire. Leviticus says:

“Aaron’s sons Nadab and Abihu put coals of fire in their incense burners and sprinkled incense over them. In this way, they disobeyed the Lord by burning before him the wrong kind of fire, different than he had commanded. So fire blazed forth from the Lord’s presence and burned them up, and they died there before the Lord. Then Moses said to Aaron, “This is what the Lord meant when he said, “I will display

my holiness through those who come near me. I will display my glory before all the people.”” (Leviticus 10:1-3, nlt)

Instead of using the fire that God had started, they took some coals from just regular fire and used those to light the burnt offerings. This is the way the story is told in the book of Numbers:

“Nadab and Abihu...died before the Lord when they made an offering with unauthorized fire before him in the Desert of Sinai.” (Numbers 3:4, niv)

Those translations say that it was “the wrong kind of fire,” or “unauthorized” fire, or literally, it is called “strange fire.” The word in Hebrew is “zor” (*szow*), and it means “strange, different, foreign, other, or arrogant.” All those words describe the attitude of these two men and the particular fire they used. They were given specific instructions by God, because God is holy, and they dismissed it as if it didn’t matter. But God took it seriously. This is what the writer of Hebrews was thinking of when he said, “Our God is a consuming fire.” By the way, in the Bible fire almost always represents the purifying presence of God – the Holy Spirit.

So what does this story have to do with our church? A lot! It instructs us, challenges us, and convicts us to make sure we learn its lessons and are filled with the Holy Spirit.

Every week, we tell you how much God loves you – as if you were the only one in all the world to love. And that is absolutely true! But that doesn’t mean he will ignore sin or that we can casually approach our life together as a church – or our own individual Christian lives. There is great power and abundant life in Christ for us, but it cannot be on our terms. So let’s learn this.

When Nadab and Abihu offered this “strange” fire, they were doing so with...

## 1. Strange *strength*.

God had specifically told them that the offerings to God must be given in the strength of the heavenly fire – the fire that God had started. That’s why they were to never let it go out. But those guys thought they could do the work of God in their own strength.

When I was in high school, I was working out at a weightlifting gym in Salem, trying to be strong for football. The gym I worked out at belonged to a man by the name of Doyle Kenady. Doyle was a world champion power lifter. He looked like a huge hillbilly with a long beard going down his chest and an enormous belly. If you didn’t know better, you’d think he was out of shape. His main competition was a man named Bill Kazmeier; if you watch any of the strongest man competitions, Bill is still a commentator. But that’s it; those two guys were fighting for the title. I watched Doyle unofficially break the 900-pound deadlift in the back of the gym, before he went on to do it officially. Doyle was the first person ever to dead-lift over 900 pounds and at one time he held the world record in squats and dead lifts. *Until* he was disqualified because he was caught using steroids. Turned out he was accomplishing things with strange strength. Unfortunately, Doyle passed away in 1999 – way too young, and who knows how much the steroids contributed to his early death.

There is a temptation to do church in our own strength, and many churches do so. They make plans and carry out ministries all in their own strength, and it's hard to tell the difference sometimes. For those two priests in the Tabernacle, the fire they used looked exactly like the fire that God had started. But God knew the difference, and only God's fire was appropriate for carrying out God's work. I want you to know, West Valley Church is committed to following the direction of the Holy Spirit, and functioning in *his* strength, not our own.

The Apostle Paul understood this. He said:

“This is what we preach as we warn and teach every person with all wisdom so that we might present each one mature in Christ.” (Colossians 1:28, ceb)

That's what we do as a church – we tell everyone everywhere about the Good News of God's Love in Christ; we introduce people to Jesus Christ, and we teach him to everyone so that those who *don't* know him will, and that those who *do* know him will grow. But that's not easy, and we don't do it in our own strength. That's why Paul said in the very next verse:

“I work hard and struggle for this goal with ***his*** energy, which works in me powerfully.” (Colossians 1:29, ceb)

The only strength that has room for God's supernatural transactions and transformation is the Spirit's strength, not our own.

Aren't you tired of living your Christian life in your own strength? Aren't you tired of struggling? Aren't you tired of the fight? Aren't you tired of the challenges, the struggles, the temptations, the trials? Aren't you growing weary of being apart from each other? Don't you want to start introducing others to Jesus? You can, if you do it all in *his* strength by his Spirit. God takes it seriously; it's a matter of life and death. Those two priests lost their lives because of it. Our church *must* operate in the strength of the Spirit of God.

The second problem was that they used a...

## 2. Strange ***sanction***.

Here's what that means: the passage says that those two priests were ordained by God; that means they were authorized by God – sanctioned by God. But instead of carrying out ministry by the anointing or the sanctioning of the Holy Spirit, they assumed their own authority or sanctioning. They decided they'd do it the way they wanted to, not the way God told them to. This was serious business (read Exodus 30:30-33!). Handling the fire had to be done according to God's very specific instructions and authority (read Leviticus 16:12-13!). They did not have the authority in themselves to use whatever fire they wanted to. Their authority came from God – not from themselves, not from their position or rank or title, not from what other people thought of them. Later on in the book of Samuel, we can read that the same thing happened with Eli the priest's sons, who were taking the meat offering off the altar and eating it for themselves. The Bible says that “they treated the offerings to the LORD with such disrespect.” (Read 1 Samuel 2:17!)

God spoke through the prophet Jeremiah about how bad the people had become, saying that the prophets said whatever they wanted and the priests ruled by their own authority, and God's people loved it that way. (Read Jeremiah 5:29-31!)

What happened to those priests is scary! So you're probably thinking right now, "It's a good thing we aren't priests, right?" Wait a minute: the Bible says that now, because of what Jesus has done for us, every Christian is a priest and we are a kingdom of priests. That means none of us gets to live the Christian life on our own terms or by our own sanction. You have no authority except by God!

You and I are not entitled to this Christian life; it is the free gift of God by his grace. We do not get to live this life because we've earned it or deserve it or because we "found Christ." Christ found us! It is only by God's grace, and only by his authority that we get to live the Christian life. We are slaves to righteousness, the Bible says (Read Romans 6:15-23!). The only thing you and I deserve is death. But thank God that in his authority he has given us the gift of this Christian life and the gift of His Spirit! God says it clearly:

"Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the LORD almighty."  
(Zechariah 4:6, niv).

If it's not by our own might (strange strength), and it's not by our own power (strange sanction), how is it that we are going to live the Christian life, and how are we going to function as a church? BY. HIS. SPIRIT. We have the...

### 3. Sanctified *Spirit!*

We as a church are always only as Spirit-filled as you are, as a part of this church. All of us must be filled with the Holy Spirit. Remember it was John the Baptist who came before Jesus to announce his arrival, so he baptized people with water to show that they had repented of their sins, turned their back on a life of sin and were ready to follow the Messiah. "Then," John said, Jesus would do his own baptizing. John said:

"I baptize you with water to show you have repented, but the one who will come after me will baptize you with *the Holy Spirit and with fire.*" (Matthew 3:11, gnb)

The Holy Spirit and with fire! You must be filled with the sanctifying, sanctioning, strength of the Holy Spirit!

Remember – it is "not by might or by power, but by my Spirit, says the Lord." By HIS fire, not ours. It is by God's Spirit in you that the holiness, the power, the fire of God will burn in you! Christian...West Valley Church...the fire of God will either burn *in* us or burn *up* us! Aaron's sons the priests had the power, the fire of God's presence with them, but they chose their own fire, and as a result, instead of being filled *with* the consuming fire of God, they were consumed *by* the fire of God. That's judgement day.

Remember that it was the priests' job to fan the fire into flame each morning. This is exactly what the Apostle Paul meant when he said:

"For this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands. For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but of

power, of love, and of self-discipline. So do not be ashamed to testify about our Lord.” (2 Timothy 1:6-8, niv).

Just like the priests in those days had to fan the flame every day, you and I need to fan into flame the gift of God – His Spirit, so that we are not afraid or timid, but have power, love, and self-discipline, telling others about Jesus! *That* is the Christian life. Don’t ever let the fire go out. The day the fire goes out in this church, we are done.

There is a Lutheran pastor in Canada named Kevin Smith who is in the Guinness Book of World Records. He’s set more than 30 records, mostly for pulling heavy things like fire trucks and even houses. But the largest thing he’s pulled weighs over 200 tons, or over 414 thousand pounds. He set the record for the heaviest aircraft pull. Tied to a Boeing C-17 military transport jet, he tugged for almost a minute before it finally started rolling, and he pulled it close to thirty yards. He not only set the record, he did some good – he raised money for some charity causes. It was an incredible feat. But that’s not how the aircraft is made to travel. It’s made to soar in the sky at high speeds.

I know of some pastors who can pull some amazing, large churches, and do so for some really good causes. But in the end, the church never gets off the ground.

Listen: as the Lead Pastor of West Valley Church, I have no intention of dragging us around, even if we’re doing so for some good causes. This church was made to soar in the skies at amazing heights and speeds. But it can only do so when we are filled with the jet-fueled engines of the fire of the Holy Spirit. We **MUST** be a Spirit-filled, strong, sanctioned, sanctified church.

### *Pray*

I remind you: we as a church are always only as Spirit-filled as you are, as a part of this church. Remember what God said after the two priests died for using strange fire? He said, “I will display my holiness through those who come near me.” God wants to display his holiness through *your* life so that others can see him! So come near him; Seek God’s Spirit. Surrender to his strength, his authority. Each morning fan into flame God’s Spirit in yourself through reading God’s Word and Prayer.