Catching Fire
With
The Holy Spirit
I owe so much to so many that I despair of even being able to mention their names.

The few that I will mention are notable for having been responsible for shaping my life and molded my thinking. I dedicate it therefore to my parents, Fred and Florence Smith; to L. C. Utley, the first preacher who made a lasting impression on me; To Sister Whitaker, who taught my early Bible classes: To H. A. Dixon, president of Freed Hardeman College, who saw something in me that he believed was worth saving, and took personal responsibility for keeping me in school, when others wanted to send me home; to Robert Witt, my math and Bible teacher, who befriended me, took me fishing, taught me to play tennis, and took a personal interest in me.

To my wife Judi, who stood by me, encouraged me, and loved me through the chaos, uncertainty, disillusionment and depression of forty years of ministry: To my sister Jary, who has been my faithful friend since the day I was born and has been my encourager, supporter, mentor, the one who taught me manners, selflessness and faithfulness:

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May God bless your lives as you have blessed mine.
Introduction

This book, like all of the books I have written on specific bibli-cal subjects, is not intended to be the “last word” on this topic. I’m sure there are areas of this book that I would approach differently if I had written it five years ago, or if I wrote it five years from now. The intense study of the Holy Spirit is a relatively recent endeavor for me. I have no recollection of the preachers or class teachers in the congregations where I grew up ever mentioning the Holy Spirit, with the exception of negative references to what we called the “Holiness” congregations like the Assemblies of God and other Pentecostal groups.

We ridiculed what to us were outlandish, sometimes bizarre, emotional exhibitions that they attributed to the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. We attributed them to carefully manipulated outbursts of excessive emotionalism, as well as premeditated, intentional “performances” that were offensive to our cerebrally-oriented, stern, austere, formal and sometimes sterile assemblies.

Even in my first church-sponsored college experience, I have no recollection of ever being in a class where the Holy Spirit was discussed in a positive and biblical way. References to the necessity of being “holy” were deliberately subdued for fear of being associated with “charismatic” practices. I’m sure that is the main reason why I ignored the topic of the Holy Spirit in my early ministry.
It was only after the clear, consistent and repeated biblical references to His work became so overwhelming that I could no longer ignore them, that I began to earnestly seek a better understanding of what the Bible teaches on this vital topic.

What follows is an attempt to briefly revisit the early part of my “spiritual journey.” I do that because it is my assumption that many of you who read this, may have journeyed the same path; perhaps many of you are still on it.

In Psalm 25:4-7, David says, “Show me your ways, O LORD, teach me your paths; guide me in your truth and teach me, for you are God my Savior, and my hope is in you all day long. Remember, O LORD, your great mercy and love, for they are from of old. Remember not the sins of my youth and my rebellious ways; according to your love remember me, for you are good, O LORD.”

Unfortunately, there are very few people who, like David, pause to remember the sins they committed when they were younger – as well as those they committed when they became older – and continue to grieve over them.

Most of us run from past sins, pushing them back into the dark recesses of our subconscious minds where we seldom, if ever venture – and even when we do, it is only because some event or circumstance forces us to go there.

Those who are blessed with enough personal integrity and raw courage to look back, find themselves, like David, called to their knees, crying out to God, pleading with Him not to remember the sins of their youth – and of their old age as well.

I was young once – sometimes it’s hard to believe at this point in my life – but I was – and I sinned in my youth. I was especially young in high school, and I did some sinning there in a very small, inconsequential and amateurish way. It wasn’t that I didn’t try. I just wasn’t capable yet of the type of deep-seated lust, pride, self-centeredness, deceit, stubbornness and rebellion that would come with time, maturity and greater self-awareness.

When I was a small boy, I became intrigued with the idea
of what I thought of as “holiness.” If you are wondering how I came up with that thought, especially after what I said earlier about the almost complete absence of any teaching on that topic, here is what I think. I am convinced that the idea came from some of the hymns we sang, because they had a much deeper and lasting influence on my early “theology” than all the rest of my church experience put together.

We sang: “Take Time to Be Holy;” “More Holiness Give Me;” “Holy, Holy, Holy;” and “Christ We Do All Adore Thee” – (“For on the holy Cross has Thou the world redeemed.”)

I also believe it was the result of listening to my mother read stories to me about Noah and the ark, Samson and the Philistines, Queen Esther and King Ahasuerus, David and Goliath, Daniel in the lion’s den, and Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego in the fiery furnace.

Those stories filled me with an intense desire to be noble, brave and heroic. When I say “heroic,” I mean in the old, romantic sense of performing noble actions to defend and support the things that we believe in – things that require that we lay our lives on the line. When I sang, “More Holiness Give Me,” that’s what holiness “looked like” in my young mind.

Initially, my ideas of what constituted holiness were very romantic – associated with the characters mentioned above and augmented by the books I read about Robin Hood and King Arthur and the knights of the roundtable. Stories of Sir Lancelot searching for the Holy Grail, slaying dragons, rescuing fair maidens (no one ever risked their life to rescue an ugly one), and converting infidels intrigued me.

As a boy, I dreamed of going to foreign lands to find infidels to convert, and it was a great comfort to me when I got older, to realize that there were many of them in my home town.

Yes, I wanted very badly to have the reputation of being a “holy” person. Holiness became my driving, motivational inspiration – my “It” – as in when a person has been desperately searching for something and when they find it they state emphatically – “That’s It!”

I honestly believe that I pursued what I thought of as holiness for its own sake and out of a pure heart until I reached junior high. About the time that puberty set in, I began to see
holiness differently – not as something to be pursued for its own glory, or because I hungered for righteousness – but as the “means to an end” – a self-centered end. I am ashamed to say it now, but I am convinced that this happened because it was in junior high that I first began to be aware of myself, and there is no human failure that has a greater tendency to lead us into sin than self-awareness.

It may be obvious to you, as it is to me as I look back, that the major flaw in my pursuit of holiness was in what I thought it was. I did not see it as an internal quality, nor was I taught it as one. I only saw holiness as it was displayed in external actions. For instance, in the story of Samson – who I much admired – I saw that he did “holy things” externally, but I completely ignored the fact that internally he was far from being a holy person. My point is that my desire for holiness was focused on “doing holy things” – not “being” holy. That fatal misunderstanding led me far astray from the pursuit of biblical holiness.

In 1 Peter 1:15-16, Peter writes, “but like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all your behavior; because it is written, “You shall be holy, for I am holy.” Notice that God does not say, “You shall act holy because I act holy.” Being holy is an intrinsic quality passed to us genetically. When we undergo the new birth and become “children of God,” we do holy things because it is our “nature” to do them, not because of a morally motivated, guilty conscience.

I was a “child of the church.” I was born and raised as a child of the church. By “church,” I do not mean “The Church,” the “Kingdom of God” that is made up of every redeemed person on the face of the earth, I mean that peculiar group of congregations of Christians that my family attended. That “church” was my world, and coupled with my growing self-awareness, I somehow came to believe that holiness was tied to “religious success.” By “success” I mean “recognition.”

The more I became “aware of myself,” the more I wanted to be “recognized,” and if being “holy” (by doing “holy things”) was the way to get recognized, then I would be holy. So I began to do “holy things;” I led singing; I led prayer; I
gave talks; I waited on and then “presided” at the Lord’s table; I asked “spiritual” questions in class and I memorized Bible verses, and the church rewarded me by showering attention on me.

That self-centered pursuit of “holiness” continued until I started junior high school and began to participate in sports. That is when it began to occur to me that my “church world” was a very small and insignificant world and its ability to reward me with recognition was extremely limited. My new, “outside-of-church” world had much more to offer in terms of recognition. It was a world absolutely filled with “Its” – wonderful things to be pursued and recognized for, and unfortunately, doing holy things had very little value in that world.

I need to say that I did not give up my pursuit of holiness – however mistaken it may have been – in one day. No, it’s never that simple, and no matter how far I drifted from it, circumstances would occasionally arise that reminded me of that glorious dream I once had. Sometimes it would be a sermon that “got through,” or I found myself singing some of the familiar hymns that spoke to my heart so deeply, or I would see my mother praying with her Bible open on her lap and I would feel so guilty that I would pray that God would help me to be like my mother.

There were times when, after I had committed some sin, *convicting thoughts* would come to me about the thing I had done and I would go to God in absolute agony, begging Him to help me to be “a man after God’s own heart,” like King David. “Yes,” I thought, “that is *It* – I want to be like David,” but like David, there were many other “Its” that interrupted that desire. I also learned that I could not “seek first the Kingdom of God,” and at the same time seek to fulfill my selfish goals.

I did not attribute my convicting thoughts, my guilt and remorse over my sins, to any direct intervention by God, or more specifically, to the work of the indwelling Holy Spirit, although it is blatantly obvious to me now that that is what they were!

My first material attempt to be recognized was in sports: baseball, football, and hockey to be exact. Sports as an “It” entered my life very early and they have never totally left. I
devoted time, energy and emotion to sports. I sacrificed all other things, including my pursuit of holiness, in order to pursue my “sports It.”

I reveled in the captivating “feelings” of power, popularity, adulation and respect – even internal gratification – that I experienced when I was recognized for my success and the more of those things I got, the more I craved them and those feelings became an insatiable hunger that I pursued with every ounce of my being.

Sports did have some value. I learned the necessity of self-discipline. I learned how to live with physical pain. I learned that the exaltation of winning and the bitterness of losing were both short-lived. I learned that being adored and being despised were both completely dependent on my performance and changed accordingly, due to the fickleness of those who came to watch. Sports took me a long way from my pursuit of holiness.

My second “It” was cars – fast cars to be exact. I grew up in and around Detroit, Michigan, in the days of what we called the “muscle cars.” Cars became my “It.” I didn’t want just any car – not even the most “attractive” car – no, what I wanted was to have the fastest car! Only those who have actually experienced the wildly emotional, almost erotic surge that comes from mashing the accelerator to the floor and feeling yourself pressed relentlessly back into the seat, while trying to control the fishtailing of the screaming, smoking tires – listening to the high pitched, almost deafening roar that comes from open exhausts (no mufflers), while keeping your eyes glued to the tachometer, waiting for the exact moment when you have reached the top RPM (revolutions per minute) your engine is capable of, and then simultaneously clutching and slamming the transmission into another gear so you can experience it all over again – yes – only those who have done it can truly understand how incredibly addictive drag racing is.

The ultimate thrill in drag racing is to set a national record for the fastest time in your class, in a quarter mile drag race. You know, I actually did that. I set a national record one weekend in Toledo, Ohio for the fastest car in my class and the “feelings” I experienced reached an unbounded summit!
However, just two weeks later, my record time was broken by someone in Oklahoma City who had a faster car and my “feelings” plummeted to an all-time low. In just two weeks – from the summit to the pits.

I wish I could say that I learned a lasting lesson about the short-lived – ever-changing nature and fickleness of “feelings,” but I didn’t. I just changed directions and started trying to satisfy the “feeling itch” I so desperately wanted to scratch in another direction.

For all the time, money and emotion I invested in cars, I have nothing but a few trophies and a few memories – many of them bad ones – to show for it. Of the three materialistic “Its” that have dominated and plagued my life – cars were the most superficial and disappointing “It” of all.

Right in the middle of sports and cars, I discovered a new “It” – an “It” that made winning at sports and having the fastest car even more important. I discovered girls – not fast girls exactly, but pretty girls. At first the “girl it” confused me because I didn’t understand how to “win” at it, but then I discovered that “girls” were just a different kind of game. It was the “Girl Game” – with winners and losers, just like sports and cars.

Girls came late in my growing-up years, but when they came, they came with a fury and a vengeance. When I discovered girls, they became my “It” in a more complete and absorbing way than any other “It.” I experienced an unparalleled, heady, sensual “feeling” in the company of the opposite sex – a feeling that was more exhilarating and demanding and grew more and more insatiable with every experience.

After the girl “It” came, an integral part of my sports and cars “Its” were directly connected with “success” in pursuit of my girl “It.” I poured myself – body and soul – into this new phenomenon. Yes, girls became the all-consuming “It.” I began to pursue girls – I actually started caring about my appearance, which I had never done before. I started wearing nicer, more “stylish” clothes; was more aware of how I smelled and how I combed my hair (I had hair then); I even learned how to “talk” to a girl, which was a laborious and painstaking experience that took a lot of time, because I wanted to “win” with girls so I could have more of that “feeling.”
I must have “fallen in love” a hundred times – but I didn’t fall in love with a girl exactly – no, what I fell in love with was the feeling of “falling in love.” Of course I didn’t know that at the time, because “falling in love” was the most deliciously exciting, exhilarating, totally captivating and tingly feeling I had ever experienced – and it was easy. I mean it didn’t involve any effort, practice, even money or time – it just happened!” I began to believe that if I could have all I wanted of a girl – if I “possessed” her – if we were together all of the time and if she did everything I wanted to do, I would have that “feeling” all of the time.

But I gradually, painfully learned, that even when I got what I wanted – even if I won the “Girl Game” – even if we were together all the time and she was totally devoted to me – that somehow – beyond my understanding – and to my everlasting disappointment, after a while the “feeling” began to diminish. No matter how hard I tried, I couldn’t get it back and I got tired of her – or what was exponentially worse, she got tired of me. It happened every time.

For a long time, I thought the problem was that the girl I was with was the “wrong girl,” so I thought I could “fix that” by going in search of another “It” – the “right girl” to fall in love with – and I did, but the same thing happened again, and I began to become “disillusioned” with the “Girl Game.”

Now remember that I am recalling events that happened more than fifty years ago, and I didn’t have a clue at that time about what is so blatantly obvious to me now. For instance, it hadn’t occurred to me that a person can only be “disillusioned” if they have been living under a powerful and pleasing “illusion.” What should have been equally obvious is that the “Its” that I pursued were not holiness, sports, cars or girls – no, those things were just the means to my real “It.”

What I was pursuing were my feelings – the feelings I experienced from the power, recognition, respect and self-importance that came to me when I was successful in those “Its.” The proof of that is that no matter how “successful” I was at any of my “Its,” I was never satisfied.

It has taken a lot of courage to revisit that time of my life and I have not enjoyed it. I cannot speak of those years with-
out feeling the pain, guilt, regret and remorse all over again. I would have much preferred to just blow off that period of my life and pretend that it never happened. But the Holy Spirit has never allowed me to do that because if I did, an important part of God’s “providential working” in my life would be lost. Only God knows what I would give to have back the countless hours, money, vast energy and emotion that I poured into, sports, cars and girls, so I could spend them in more noble and lasting pursuits.

During the time I was pursuing those “its,” I did not totally lose my aspiration to be “holy.” In fact, although I certainly didn’t realize it, that is exactly what I was seeking through my “its.” Yes, I was trying to fill the “vacancy” in my soul with cars, sports, girls and material success – a “vacancy” that God created in every human being – “He has also set eternity in their heart…” Ecclesiastes 3:11. Yes, God has “set eternity” in our hearts and created a “need” that only He can fill.

I still went to church regularly. I still sang, prayed and communed, often with deep feelings. I still listened to sermons – not with deep feelings – but even those things I did with deep feelings had very little practical impact on how I lived. The conscious pursuit of internal holiness was lying dormant, somewhere under the surface of my thoughts, waiting until greater sin conviction, brought on by changing circumstances, would restore my perspective.

My point is that God was using my pursuit of material “Its” to accomplish His purposes. Yes, He was answering all of those prayers I had prayed to be more like my mother; to be a man after His own heart like David; and to help me to stop “wanting” to sin.

I know that, because every time my growing disillusionment with my “its” reached a peak, I still prayed fervently. I went to God desperate over my failures, pleading with Him to help me to have a better heart. As long periods of time passed – and no help seemed to come – at least none that I could see, I often wondered if God was listening to me.

Of course He was, but His responses to my pleas were not as dramatic as I wanted them to be. They were more of a “gentle nudge” than a “boot in the rear,” and they demanded
a price that I did not wish to pay. What God taught me through this process was that I did not want to “purchase my holiness” at the expense of “denying myself” – or moderating my pursuit of my “Its.”

I did not want to give up my materialistic goal of experiencing the “feelings” of self-satisfaction I got from being recognized, popular and successful in order to experience holiness.

*It took a long time for me to realize that*

*I didn’t want to be holy –*

*I just wanted to feel holy.*

When I was nineteen, I decided to go to a small church-sponsored college in Tennessee. I made that decision carelessly, without thought or purpose, on the spur of the moment. I didn’t make it because I wanted an education; I made it to *avoid getting married.* But that “thoughtless” decision was a major step in God’s providential answer to every prayer I had ever prayed about holiness.

I spent three years at that school. I went to chapel every day for three years. I listened intently and reverently to God’s word, prayed and sang the songs of Zion with fervency, and laughed boisterously. I felt the weight of my sins as I had never felt them before, and consequently I felt the need for forgiveness in a greater sense than I had ever known.

Although I can’t say that I learned anything about the Holy Spirit there, or consciously experienced His indwelling – I can say that for the first time I “consciously experienced God.” God was no longer just a supernatural, divine being in a book; He was a living reality, and my childhood dreams of “holiness” were reborn there.

I paid a terrible price in suffering in order to have the experience of God – a price I did not wish to pay – but it was well worth it. That school, the teachers, administrators and “Chapel Hall” left an indelible mark on me – one that time will never erase.

As adults, we deal with the same materialistic longings, just on a higher level. Our “Its” grow ever larger, from Chevrolets and Fords to Cadillac’s, BMW’s and Lexus;” from a two bed-
room apartment to a tri-level with a three car garage; from a
good job to a six figure income with power over other people;
from blue jeans, Marshalls, Stein Mart and K-Mart to Dillards
and Nordstroms; from Burger King to Ruth’s Chris; from a
17-inch TV to a 75-inch high definition with surround sound;
from a trip to see the relatives, to a $5,000.00 trip to Disney
Land, or a cruise to Alaska, or a South Sea island – all in search
of a “feeling.”

But all of those “Its” are illusions; illusions that quickly
fade when they become reality. They fade because the “feel-
ings” we want – and the “things” we pursue to get the feelings
– are not synonymous.

The sad thing is that even when we discover the truth about
our “Its” and our feelings – when we discover what the Apostle
John put into words when he said “the world is passing away,”
we dare not admit that he was right – so we lie to ourselves
and keep on believing that there just has to be another “It” out
there somewhere that will bring us the “It” that never fades –
that will not end in disillusionment.

We tell ourselves that we are not older, we’re better, which
is a lie; we tell ourselves that there is no harm in having a
drink, or smoking one marijuana joint; no harm in one act of
sexual immorality; no harm in spending countless hours on
Facebook, or playing computer games; no harm in watching a
“little” pornography, or attending “R” rated movies.

There is no end to the lies – the self-deceptions – the illu-
sions we create and practice on ourselves to satisfy our “It”
search. Unfortunately, if we live long enough in a world of
smoke and mirrors, we reach a point where we can no longer
distinguish between truth and lies – between reality and illu-
usion – between Disney World and Heaven; between experienc-
ing self and experiencing God. Never forget that the worst lies
we tell are the ones we tell ourselves, and the worst deception
is self-deception.

Only the transforming work and power of the Holy Spirit
was able to bring me face-to-face with the reality of my bro-
kenness. And now I am seventy-nine years old, and my quest
for holiness continues to be reborn every day.
There are many good reasons for attending the assembly of God’s people, but the main reason is to experience God. God is not just an idea. He is not something to philosophize about, a possibility to be considered, or a topic for a theological discussion. God is the only immutable, substantial, unchanging and indescribable reality “It” there is.

In Philippians 3:10, Paul says that he wants “to know Christ.” He does not say that he wants to know about Christ – that is important – but it is not the same thing. Most of you who read this book have learned much about God – you know the facts. We teach those facts in every congregation, but the main reason why Jesus came to this earth, and the main reason for your being on this earth, is not to just know the facts about God, but to know God himself – to experience God.

That experience is the whole purpose of life, but some people – even some of those who “go to church” never actually do that. You must want to experience God. You must want to “know Christ” and you must seek for and feel the leading, guiding, convicting work of the Holy Spirit in order to do it. You must yearn for, hunger and thirst for God, for Jesus and for the Holy Spirit as a deer pants for water. Knowing God must become your all-consuming “It!”

But I warn you,

you cannot fully satisfy that hunger
without sacrificing your other “It’s.”
WHY THE TITLE,

“Catching Fire With The Holy Spirit?”

In 1 Thessalonians 5:19, Paul instructs the Christians in Thessalonica “do not put out the Spirit’s fire.” WOW! do we ever need to heed that admonition today! If the excitement, fervor, dedication, Jesus focus, spirit of sacrifice, courage and energy of first century Christians is ever going to be duplicated in our congregations, we are going to have to dispose of the current pragmatic, watered down, informational preaching that keeps us comfortable in our pews that is “throwing cold water” on the Spirit’s fire in an attempt to douse it.

“Catching Fire With The Holy Spirit” is the essential ingredient in revolutionizing our sterile, tasteless, unemotional and formalistic assemblies; elevate our depth of spirituality; fuel our feeble evangelistic efforts; empower us to throw off the social restraints that keep us from confessing our sins to one another; incorporate the “fruits of the Spirit” into our everyday lives; experience “the sanctifying work of the Spirit,” that leads us to “obey Jesus Christ and be sprinkled with His blood;” and pour the “love of God” into our hearts.

When we “Catch Fire With The Holy Spirit,” it results in a “burning sensation” in our souls that comes in the form of the Word of God, which is summed up in the person of the crucified and resurrected Messiah of God and explained and verified by the Holy Spirit inspired scriptures.
In Jeremiah 23:29 the voice of God thunders in our ears, “Is not My word like fire, and like a hammer which shatters a rock?” The “Word of God burns like fire” in our hearts and minds, convicting us of sin and warning us of the coming judgment of God. That Spirit inspired Word also has the divine power to destroy strongholds – and shatter every proud obstacle raised up against the knowledge of God, empowering us to take every thought captive to obey Christ. 2 Corinthians 10:4-5.

Jeremiah testifies in 20:9, “If I say, I will not speak anymore in His name, then in my heart it (the word of God) becomes like a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I cannot endure it.” Jeremiah has “caught fire” with the Holy Spirit inspired words of God.

What we see in these two passages, and the one that follows, is the inseparable nature of the Holy Spirit’s fire and the Word of God. I don’t mean the words of the Bible exclusively, but I do mean them inclusively. It is not the words of scripture that represent the Holy Spirit’s fire – it is the transforming power contained in the outpoured and indwelling, Holy Spirit inspired message behind the words.

Luke writes in Acts 17:16, “Now while Paul was waiting for them at Athens, his spirit was being provoked within him as he was observing the city full of idols.” It is the indwelling Holy Spirit that “provokes” our spirit when we witness evil and see our nation and communities full of idols.

Luke 24 records the story of the two discouraged disciples walking from Jerusalem to their home town of Emmaus right after the crucifixion. As they walk along, heads down, sandals scuffing the dirt, speaking in solemn, quiet, discouraged and defeated tones about the crucifixion of the One that they had hoped would redeem Israel, Jesus joins them from a side road. As unbelievable as it seems, they don’t recognize Him. (I say, “unbelievable” but I’m quite sure that I fail to “recognize Jesus” in the people and marvels of creation that surround me on a daily basis).
As they walk, He begins explaining the Old Testament prophecies about the Messiah to them. When they reach the turn-off to their home town, they ask Jesus to spend the night with them. He refuses at first, but when they plead with Him, He agrees.

Just before they eat the evening meal, they ask Jesus to offer thanks, and when He speaks they raise their eyes, realizing that it is the voice of Jesus and to their disappointment He immediately disappears. In their stunned amazement one of them says, “Was that Jesus?” The other says, “Of course it was, wasn’t your heart burning within you while He was speaking to us on the road, while He was explaining the Scriptures to us? We should have known right then who it was.”

These two men already knew the words in the passages of scripture that Jesus talked about, but obviously they did not understand their meaning or their power. What Jesus did was to teach them the “power and the message” of the Spirit inspired words, and that is what the Holy Spirit does in us.

A “burning heart” is the result of the “fire” that is kindled in us by the convicting work of the indwelling Holy Spirit, who uses the His sword of the word to cut, slash and pierce the defensive armor we put up to thwart the feelings of guilt and condemnation that result from the realization that we too have played a role in the death of the Son of God.

What did the fire that created a “burning heart” in these two disciples cause them to do “immediately?” They left their dinner and rushed back the seven miles to Jerusalem, found the eleven apostles and some others who were with them who tell them that – “The Lord has really risen and has appeared to Simon.” Then the two travelers, in excited, tremulous and breathless tones say, “Let us tell you what happened to us a while ago.

We were just walking down the road, discussing what we witnessed here in Jerusalem and some stranger joined us. He asked us what we were talking about and after we told Him He began explaining all of the prophetic references to the coming
of the Messiah. When we got to the turn off to our village we asked Him to spend the night with us and He reluctantly agreed.

Later, when we were about to eat, we asked Him to offer thanks and as soon as He spoke we realized that it was Him – yes, it was Jesus! But He disappeared immediately, and we just couldn’t wait to share the good news with you.”

That is what happens when we “catch fire with the Holy Spirit!” We get so excited that we rush to find someone to share the “good news” that Jesus really is the resurrected Messiah, sent by God to forgive our sins and fill us with abundant life.

This book was written in the hope that those who read it will find a “burning sensation in their hearts as they “Catch Fire With The Holy Spirit.””
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This book was initially intended to challenge the thinking of Christians who are members of congregations that are descended from the Restoration movement that began in the early 1800’s on the western frontier. But as it developed, it also became my intention to challenge, educate, and uplift all of those of any religious background who have more questions than answers about this critically important topic.

It is tragic that most of the leaders, and virtually all of those who attend main stream congregations have no clue about – what the Restoration Movement was – who started it – or what they were trying to accomplish.

The result has been that Restoration congregations have lost their identity as well as their purpose. They have become so isolated from their own historical heritage and so provincially focused that practically speaking they have no vision or concerns beyond the parameters of their own provincial boundaries, their immediate membership, and their own peculiar doctrines.

It is not necessary for a person to know much about the Restoration Movement in order to be living in harmony with its principles, although it certainly would be helpful. It is also true that having a thorough knowledge of the history and the people who led the movement can become a hindrance to being a Restorationist. Too much knowledge creates a tendency to get lost in analyzing the issues and personalities involved, rather than incorporating the principles.

**Restorationism is an idea** – a concept – not history or personalities. Thomas and Alexander Campbell, Barton W. Stone,
James McGready, Raccoon John Smith, David Lipscomb and countless others, were not particularly interested in pursuing or promoting a particular set of doctrines. They had no intention of starting a “church” – and they most assuredly did not want their peculiar idiosyncrasies to become the focal point of the movement. They were trying to enunciate a principle.

That principle, simply stated, is that it is the duty of every generation of Christians to examine the scriptures and determine how closely they are incorporating the doctrines and principles taught by the inspired apostle-led first century Church.

What we most admire about them is their willingness to sacrifice every idea and practice that they found inconsistent with their stated principle of restoring New Testament Christianity. I do not say that they did that quickly or easily, I do say that no matter how precious or long standing the doctrines and practices of their religious heritage, any doctrine or practice not found in scripture was abandoned.

It is equally fascinating and disappointing to me to realize that the topic of the Holy Spirit, that was so much on the front lines of the vocabulary, study, preaching and teaching of early Restoration leaders, gradually disappeared from Restoration congregations, as well as from most other mainstream churches, and was largely ignored until the last 30 years or so.

There are at least two reasons for that: one is that the worship atmosphere of Restoration congregations gradually became more formal, ritualistic, pragmatic and sterile – more “informational then transformational.” As a result, Restoration preachers and leaders were offended at what they considered the “emotional excesses” found in religious movements that were heavily focused on the Holy Spirit.

A second reason is that the indwelling and work of the Holy Spirit falls outside the parameters of both logic and common sense – the conclusions we can reach through our rational senses.

Early Restoration leaders attempted to present and believe every New Testament teaching they could find about the work and the nature of the Holy Spirit, but they also tried deter-
minedly to avoid speculation. What follows is a brief and general synopsis of their conclusions.

1. Everything that we know about God has been revealed to us by the Holy Spirit.

2. The Holy Spirit has revealed and attested to by prophecy, miracle, and supernatural gifts, the mission and ministry of Jesus and His apostles.

3. God has promised to give His Holy Spirit to all who seek Him through the new birth.

4. The gift of the Spirit, Acts 2, was the Spirit himself and the indwelling Spirit was the seal of the covenant and the source of the “fruits” – Galatians 5 – which adorn the Christian life.

5. It is only by the supernatural influence and infallible testimony of the Holy Spirit that faith is possible.

6. The miraculous and supernatural manifestations of the presence of the Holy Spirit – the “gifts” of 1 Corinthians 12, were confined to the first century and the lifetime of the apostles.

7. The influences of the Holy Spirit – His intercessory work; His leading; the “fruit” of Galatians 5, plus the hope and Godly love that come to us through His indwelling presence, are felt and experienced by all true believers.

8. They had no theories as to “how” the Holy Spirit exerted His power.

Most of the early Restorers believed it was absolutely necessary for the Holy Spirit to personally indwell every believer in order for them to achieve a permanent union with Christ. This is evidenced in a letter Alexander Campbell wrote to a Mr. Meredith, editor of “The Baptist Interpreter.”

“The human heart must be changed and renovated by some cause; for unless the heart be reconciled to God, purified, cleansed, no man can be admitted into the society of heaven. Those views I have always presented to the public. But the question is, how is the moral change to be effected? By the Spirit alone? By the gospel facts alone? By the word alone?
I do not affirm any one of these propositions. I never did affirm any one of them.

How the Spirit operates in the word, through the word, by the word, or with the word, I do not affirm. I only oppose the idea that anyone is changed in heart, or renewed in the spirit of his mind by the Spirit without the word."

Walter Scott, another Restoration leader said “There is no member of the body of Christ, in whom the Holy Spirit dwelleth not; it holds as good today as it did on Pentecost that; “if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his.”

Unfortunately, later Restoration leaders rejected these tenets. Their approach to the Bible gradually became a strictly rational and legalistic one. This had the unwitting effect of causing many Christians to become dualists in thinking and practice, in spite of the fact that they claimed to be Trinitarians in their theology. I mean by that that they so closely identified the person of the Holy Spirit with the literal written words of scripture that there was no distinction between them.

Their failure to make a distinct separation between the “sword of the Spirit” and the Spirit Himself led to the Spirit’s demise as a viable force in the Christian life. All of the power that God intended that the Spirit would supply to His people to aid them in their struggle against sin; all of the ways that He was intended to influence our decisions; all of the “fruits” that God intended for Him to produce to aid us in our struggle to overcome the world, were dulled or eliminated by that perspective.

Additionally, prayer became little more than a ritual. Without the work of the indwelling Spirit, many of the temptations that Christians struggle with were relegated to the use of “trying harder” through the use of self-determination and will-power because the “means” (the Holy Spirit) that God would use to respond to our requests had been negated.

Although the Bible specifically refers to Jesus as, “the Good Shepherd,” the “Lamb of God,” “the Door,” and “the Word”
– we have had no difficulty separating His person and activity from those metaphors.

We understand Jesus’ statement, “I will be with you always,” as meaning that He will be with us personally, not in the form of scripture. But even though the Holy Spirit is never spoken of as the Word, He became so closely associated with the written scriptures that He was no longer conceptualized as a separate entity.

The consequence was that Christians were left to fight the fierce battles of spiritual warfare against the devil’s schemes – “against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms” with no weapons but their own determination to pick themselves up by their own doctrinal bootstraps. This distortion of scripture proved to be one of the most discouraging teachings ever imposed on devout Christians, people who tried valiantly to put it into practice and failed miserably.

There were those who “knew” that there simply had to be something wrong with an understanding of scripture that brought condemnation in spite of their best efforts, because it defeated the very purpose for which Jesus came. This led them to begin a search for a better understanding of what it means to be saved by grace, in spite of the fact that they had been taught that grace was “a Baptist doctrine.”

**Study Questions**

1. What was the “Restoration Movement?”
2. Restoration leaders were not interested in “starting a church,” or pursuing a particular set of doctrines. What was their intention?
3. What are some of the most admirable qualities of early Restoration leaders? Should we be imitating those qualities today?
4. Why did the topic of the Holy Spirit gradually disappear from the preaching and teaching of Restoration congregations?

5. Is it essential for the Holy Spirit to personally indwell every believer in order for them to be children of God? Why or why not?

6. What is the relationship between the Holy Spirit, as the third person in the “Godhead,” and the Scriptures that He inspired?

7. What effect did identifying the Holy Spirit so closely with the written Scriptures that He was no longer perceived as a separate entity have on the concept of the trinity and prayer?