

ARE YOU COMBUSTIBLE?

The God who answers by fire, he is God. (1 Kings 18:24)

Throughout the Bible, God's presence is associated with fire. Wherever God appears and wherever his work is being done, the signature mark is fire. Whether in a smoking fire pot and a flaming torch (Genesis 15:17), a burning bush (Exodus 3:2), a pillar of fire (Exodus 13:21-22), a blazing mountain (Exodus 19:18), or a miraculous combustion of a sacrifice (1 Kings 18:24), the God of the Bible is a God of fire! This reality becomes only more intense in the New Testament.

I baptize you with water for repentance (said John the Baptist), but he who is coming after me... will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire. (Matthew 3:11)

I came to cast fire on the earth (Jesus said), and would that it were already kindled! (Luke 12:49)

They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. And all of them were filled with the Holy Spirit... (Acts 2:3-4)

Our God is a consuming fire. (Hebrews 12:29)

These references, of course, beg the question: Are *you* combustible? Does God's indwelling Spirit cause *you* to ignite with zeal? Is *your* walk with Christ characterized by fiery passion? Do the words of Jeremiah describe *your* experience: *There is in my heart as it were a burning fire shut up in my bones?* (Jeremiah 20:9)

The Scottish minister, George MacDonald (1824-1905), though mostly unknown today, had a tremendous influence on some of the great writers of the 20th century such as J.R.R. Tolkien, C.S. Lewis, Madeleine L'Engle, W. H. Auden and others. MacDonald was more than a pastor. He also wrote fairy tales, fantasy novels and poetry. One poem in particular has become a favorite of mine. It is a fervent prayer that God would set our hearts ablaze. It is entitled simply "Smoke."

*Lord, I have laid my heart upon thy altar
But cannot get the wood to burn;
It hardly flares ere it begins to falter
And to the dark return.*

*Old sap, or night-fallen dew, makes damp the fuel;
In vain my breath would flame provoke;
Yet see—at every poor attempt's renewal
To thee ascends the smoke!*

*'Tis all I have—smoke, failure, foiled endeavor,
Coldness and doubt and palsied lack:
Such as I have I send thee!—perfect Giver,
Send thou thy lightning back.*