

6 Reasons Christians Are Afraid of the Holy Spirit

Read Time: 4 Minutes, 25 Seconds

When I was filled with the Holy Spirit many years ago, I knew my Southern Baptist mother probably wouldn't be happy about my Pentecostal experience. She and I shared the same core beliefs in Jesus and salvation, of course. But I knew that some Christian denominations don't encourage believers to be baptized in the Holy Spirit or to practice the spiritual gifts mentioned in the New Testament.

So I didn't share my testimony with her for a few years. I'll never forget the day my mother learned of my experience. After she told me a story from her childhood, in which she witnessed some Christians "rolling in the sawdust" at a backwoods Pentecostal meeting, she widened her eyes and asked: "You don't speak in tongues, do you, Lee?"

"Yes, mama, I do," I said. I didn't apologize for my experience, even though she was visibly horrified. And I reminded her that I received the baptism of the Holy Spirit while praying at our Southern Baptist church in suburban Atlanta. I first spoke in tongues on Baptist property!

Since then I have shared my story with countless people, written books about my testimony and prayed for hundreds of people to be filled with the Spirit. But I've also been shunned, rejected, misjudged, ridiculed and treated with suspicion by brothers and sisters in Christ because I embraced an experience that brought me closer to God.

I've learned not to take these reactions personally. I love God's family, with all of its flaws and divisions. I don't just love Christians who agree with me. I love Christians who think I'm deceived or even dangerous. Since love is a fruit of

the Holy Spirit, it would be counterproductive if I lashed out in anger at a brother in Christ.

But why are so many Christians afraid of the Holy Spirit? From my observations, there are six reasons:

1. Religious tradition. Many of the hardline Jewish people in Jesus' day couldn't handle it when He touched lepers, healed a bleeding woman or talked to Samaritans because He was breaking old religious rules. Tradition prevents us from being open to anything new, even if God is the one providing the new path. Many Christians have been taught that the spiritual gifts in the New Testament don't happen anymore, so they have built-in skepticism.

2. Fear of the supernatural. The book of Acts is full of accounts of healings, angelic visitations, doors opening by themselves and demons coming out—accompanied by screams. I'm not sure why a Christian wouldn't want to see such miracles today. Maybe they watched too many horror movies about demons? Fear can cause someone to live in a box of limitation. I hope more believers today will ask the Holy Spirit to do His supernatural work through them, because we need New Testament-style miracles now more than ever!

3. Dependence on logic and reason. Many Christians today have built their faith completely on an intellectual foundation. They love apologetics and eloquent sermons, but they forgot that the apostle Paul—who was a masterful scholar—actually put more emphasis on the subjective realm of the Holy Spirit than on scholarship. Paul wrote: "...my message and my preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power" (1 Cor. 2:4). God gave you a mind, but if you continually lean on your own understanding you will limit Him!

4. Fear of talking to others about God. When people are baptized in the Holy Spirit, they are filled with boldness and

begin to share their faith openly. This can be terrifying to someone who is timid or introverted, so they naturally pull back when there is an opportunity to receive more of God's power. God has not given us a spirit of timidity (2 Tim. 1:7), but many Christians are satisfied to live in timidity's control.

5. Unresolved emotional wounds. I've prayed with many Christians who have endured sexual abuse, parental neglect, violence, divorce or other forms of dysfunction in relationships. Sometimes people can be so emotionally crippled by life that they can't open their hearts to the Holy Spirit's transforming power. They want the Spirit to heal them, but they must be lovingly coaxed out of their hiding places.

6. Fear of full surrender. This is perhaps the most common reason why many followers of Jesus don't want to swim in the deeper waters of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit-filled life requires a total surrender to God's will. We must be empty if we want to be filled with Him. We must be able to say, "Not my will, but Yours be done," or else He cannot work in us. We must give God an unqualified yes.

☒ People have admitted to me that they could not fully surrender to God because (1) they feared He would require a job change, and they wanted financial security; (2) they didn't want to give up a romantic relationship that they knew was wrong; (3) they were afraid God would send them to a distant continent as a missionary; (4) they worried that He would require them to reconcile a broken relationship; or (5) they didn't want friends and coworkers to know they were Christians.

If you want to be saturated in the Holy Spirit as you begin this New Year, I hope you will surrender all your fears and make room for His miraculous power. You can pray like this: "Father, I renounce all fear in Jesus name. Forgive me for keeping You at an arm's distance. I want everything You have

for me, even the things I don't understand. Fill me with Your Spirit, and give me boldness so I can be Your witness. And let Your signs, wonders and miracles follow me as I share the gospel of Jesus. Amen."

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