

Difference Between Personality and the Holy Spirit

People possess natural qualities that can appear to be fruits of the Holy Spirit. We need to learn the difference.

A pleasant personality can look like the fruit of the Spirit. There are people who are just simply nice. They are sweet, friendly and cheerful. They are the type of people you want to be around all the time. At times their pleasant personalities can put Christians who have been saved for years to shame.

However, sometimes in their case an aspect of God's common grace is substituting for the Spirit's manifestation. Their pleasantness may have nothing whatever to do with the fruit of the Spirit. Actually, they acted the same way before they were converted.

It can be difficult to convince people like this of their own need to exhibit the fruit of the Spirit. But sooner or later their self-righteousness will surface if they haven't been convicted of sin. If you recognize this problem in yourself, I urge you to do two things:

* Thank God for giving you your pleasing temperament.

*Pray harder than ever to be sensitive to sin and to the Spirit.

Emotional maturity can look like spiritual maturity. Some people grow up faster than others, and some develop spiritually more quickly than others. There are many explanations for this.

If a person has developed emotionally in a manner that shows fewer psychological problems, it should not be surprising that

he or she appears spiritually mature as well. A person like this may or may not be strong in private prayer, worship and Bible reading but will nonetheless appear levelheaded and responsible compared with a neurotic Christian.

Regeneration and sanctification do not necessarily eradicate damaged emotions that come from abuse or neglect as one was growing up. For this reason a Christian who had severely damaged emotions as a child may struggle in areas in which a relatively unspiritual person does not. The latter may appear to be more godly when this is not really the case.

For some people, then, the appearance of the Dove may not be the explanation for their apparent maturity. Yet these same people are often the ones who get voted into positions of church leadership and who go into full-time ministry.

They are not unlike King Saul—they have the influence but not necessarily the anointing. Pigeon religion is widespread in the church.

The problem becomes even more complicated when ordinary Christians—beset with emotional difficulties but nonetheless consumed with a love for God and His Word—think that their church leaders aren't very spiritual. A poll showed that the average church leader spends only four minutes a day in quiet time.

Cultural and intellectual tastes can look like theological maturity. Some people have a head start when it comes to upbringing. They are brought up with poise, elegance and a certain aptitude for intellectual things. They go to the better schools. They have a cerebral framework that others do not have.

When people such as this become Christians, they may take to Pauline theology like a cat chasing a mouse. Does this mean they are more spiritual? Possibly, but not necessarily. There could be a natural explanation.

People who are theologically minded are not necessarily more interested in the things of the Spirit. They often think it is far more important to articulate the implications of justification by faith alone than to be personally filled with the Spirit.

At the other end of the spectrum are people who are more interested in things of the Spirit than they are in the intricacies of theological orthodoxy. But these people are not necessarily more spiritual. They may lack theological training and are therefore drawn more naturally to experiential knowledge than to doctrine.

We must resist the temptation to be judgmental about things that are opposed to our own interest levels. Often what appeals to a believer can be explained in natural terms rather than by Holy Spirit-motivated explanation.

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