

Has the Term 'Spirit-Filled Church' Lost Its Meaning?

I'm convinced many Christians have no understanding of the term "Spirit-filled."

Stay with me. The topic of this article could easily trigger those who are easily offended at the suggestion that some churches are more Spirit-filled than others. I'd like to challenge you to remain engaged and to honestly consider what I'm about to communicate, even if you ultimately disagree.

Someone asked a question in a Facebook group I'm subscribed to about the types of churches in our area. They mentioned some particular churches, including Upperroom in Dallas, Texas, as the type of church they were looking for.

It seemed clear, at least to me, that they were looking for a church that many would label as Spirit-filled. This, however, was lost on most of the people who responded.

Some wonderful Christians started filling up the comments with suggestions. What struck me was that the majority of them were not charismatic, Spirit-filled churches. Many of the people were emphasizing the upbeat, contemporary style of worship, the relevant teaching and the family atmosphere their suggested church offered. As I read through everybody's input, I couldn't help but flash back several years ago to my first Sunday in town.

Our family visited a fairly large, well-established and vibrant church that was filled with friendly people. The worship was concert-style, professional and well-polished. Several people were closing their eyes and lifting their hands as they sang along. The preacher was a young guy with the rough, raw, yet skilled edge you'd imagine in an environment like this. He communicated well, and the message was biblical.

I couldn't get out of there fast enough.

Again, stay with me. Please hear my heart. I'm convinced this place was filled with legitimate Christian brothers and sisters, people who were devoted to the Lord and who loved their church home. I applaud this. It wasn't for me, though. Why? I later discovered this was not a church that believed in the manifestations and gifts of the Holy Spirit. The Bible tells us that spiritual things must be discerned spiritually and, while what I discerned naturally was really appealing, spiritually I was discerning a lack of Holy Spirit activity.

This is the point of this article. Churches that do embrace Holy Spirit gifts and manifestations are radically different than those that do not, even if they may look similar to the human eye.

There Is a Difference

Years ago, when the worship movement really began to take off, I often wondered how churches and movements that were "more Baptist" in theology and practice would respond. Would they move on from hymns or resist the new sound in the earth? To my surprise many of them adopted the songs, the vibrancy, some of the more mild expressions and the passion. What was missing in many of these scenarios however was the manifestation of the Holy Spirit. The invisible move of the Spirit of God was absent.

Yesterday's Facebook conversation confirmed yet again the idea that many Christians simply don't understand the difference between "Spirit-filled" and not "Spirit-filled." They are limited to human emotion and intellectual understanding. They are looking for songs that move them, sermons that inspire them, teachings that inform them and a Christian experience that saves them. Supernatural discernment and spiritual revelation are foreign concepts.

Again, please hear my heart. I despise mean-spirited finger

pointers who look down on others who “don’t line up” with their definition of appropriate. I cringe to think I’d be one of them. At the same time, I believe it’s important to discuss some potentially irritating topics so we can all go deeper in Jesus. This is one of those topics.

There certainly is a difference between charismatic and non-charismatic churches. The theologies of cessationism and continuationism are definitely not the same. Those who endorse and practice spiritual gifts and those who don’t are in different places.

A Spiritually Electric Atmosphere

It would only be fair to admit that even many of today’s Spirit-filled churches have disengaged spiritually. They have stepped back from the movement of the Holy Spirit more and more in recent years. The glorious manifestations of an omnipotent, invisible God interacting with finite man are undeniably rare today.

My message is a call to all. Whether you affirm supernatural activity or not, I encourage you to dive deeper into the realm of the Spirit than you ever have in your life. It should be normal for everybody in today’s church to have dreams and visions. Praying in tongues, prophecy and trembling in the fear of the Lord should be experienced by all. Supernatural boldness, signs, wonders and miracles and burning night and day with the fire of the Holy Spirit are our portion!

The church should be the place where believers gather to collapse to the ground in groans of intercession. The place to boldly decree prophetic oracles, to prophesy and to get equipped in the Spirit.

Loud guitars, a perfectly orchestrated set, ripped jeans, fog, lights, friendly people, relevant talks about the Bible and programs for all are not what make up a New Testament church. All of that can be there, but it’s nothing more than paint on

the walls. Decor. Instead of fog machines, we need to contend for the mist of the Holy Spirit to descend into our churches. It should be difficult to stand at times as the cries of our heart explode out of us and as the weighty, tangible presence of God covers us.

Yes, a Spirit-filled church is something to behold. It's a place where God orchestrates everything, and man gets out of the way. It's where God's presence is so thick that our human intellect cannot process what's happening. It's a revival atmosphere. It's a place of miracles. It's church.

The moment you experience it is the moment you understand that there's a stark difference between churches that promote Holy Spirit activity and those that don't. It's night and day, black and white. When you are swept over by the most powerful force in the world and filled with indescribable fire and love and freedom and joy, you'll never be able to go to a church that doesn't experience that.

I'm excited about the opportunity to introduce people who have never experienced this all-consuming fire, this invisible force, to something so wondrous that they are transformed for all eternity.