

Is the Holy Spirit a Casualty of Unity?

It's common for the Holy Spirit to be asked to "sit this one out" as attempts at unity are made.

I have wrestled with this topic for years. It has troubled me considerably. I've held off writing on it for a long time to ensure I do my very best to communicate the issue as purely and precisely as I can. I believe now is the time to hit this head on, even though some will still misunderstand or completely disagree.

It's extremely important to me that you grasp just how much I value people who are devoted to Christ, deep in the Word and living a life of integrity—whether they embrace the gifts of the Spirit or not. There are some absolutely amazing, humble, servant-hearted Christians out there who touch my heart deeply. Many of them are brilliant leaders who are models of both passion and compassion for the people on God's heart. I look up to them and desire to emulate their lives.

I know others have the same testimony—they have been blessed powerfully by such people. It's for this reason that gifts of the Spirit have been willingly minimized by some for the sake of unity.

Again, I highly value unity, and I do embrace unifying around the cross of Christ as opposed to dividing away on other lesser theological issues. It's clearly true that anybody who is a legitimate believer in Jesus Christ should be embraced as a brother or sister. Unity, fellowship and love should be pursued and guarded.

"I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also

*may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me” (**John 17:20-21, ESV**).*

Additionally, I don’t presume those who function in the gifts of the Spirit to be better, more precious to Jesus or elite. The accusation does come at times that practitioners of the gifts presume themselves to be more spiritual. We better not think highly of ourselves, lest we fall!

*“For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned” (**Romans 12:3, ESV**).*

*“Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall” (**1 Corinthians 10:12, ESV**).*

I hope this helps you peer into my heart a little bit. I endeavor to be humble, teachable and full of honor for everyone Jesus shed his precious blood for!

This being said, I do believe we have underestimated the necessity of the Holy Spirit and His gifts—to the detriment of true, biblical unity and to kingdom advance.

Mark records the final words of Jesus before he left the earth to be:

*“And these signs will accompany those who believe: in my name they will cast out demons; they will speak in new tongues; they will pick up serpents with their hands; and if they drink any deadly poison, it will not hurt them; they will lay their hands on the sick, and they will recover” (**Mark 16:17-18, ESV**).*

MINIMIZING THE ACTIVITY OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

I understand there are many Christians who do not agree theologically with the practice of the gifts of the Spirit. I also understand that unity with a greater number of Christians would, by default, require that we minimize the activity of the Holy Spirit in our combined events.

This is where we can stumble into trouble. This is where a reformation must come if we hope to have the necessary power to fulfill a humanly impossible mission. Holy Spirit power must be non-negotiable.

Isn't it interesting that the Holy Spirit is called the Comforter, yet He makes so many Christians uncomfortable?

I saw something on a church website that disturbed me. What I read sounds good, and a lot of churches and ministries are adopting this philosophy, but that's all it is—a philosophy. I believe it's extremely dangerous. We simply cannot reject the activity of the Holy Spirit in the hopes that unity results. Here's what was posted:

Those who claim to possess the gift of tongues and other sign gifts are welcome to worship and fellowship with us if they are willing to be a source of unity rather than division within our church body. UNNAMED CHURCH seeks to prevent the propagation of doctrines that would cause divisions within an individual church. Therefore, members of and adherents of UNNAMED CHURCH are not to propagate the teachings and emphases of the current charismatic movement.

Before you presume me to be naïve, you need to know that I fully grasp that the above church is not what we would consider to be Spirit-filled, and that they are attempting to take a healthy position in the name of unity. However,

consider that many, many Spirit-filled churches today are also minimizing the activity of the Holy Spirit in the hopes that they can attract, and not offend, visitors. It's extremely common for the Holy Spirit to be dismissed for the Sunday morning service while inviting Him back into HIS house for the Sunday evening service.

I have always, unapologetically, declared to those in churches I was giving leadership to that *I refuse to tone down the activity of the Holy Spirit out of respect of those less hungry.*

How could we ever presume that less supernatural, less spiritual methods that are driven by our human spirit and human wisdom could have more impact with visitors and others than the Holy Spirit? It is nonsensical.

The manifestation of the Holy Spirit is absolutely necessary if we hope to experience the power required to see lives transformed.

"Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good" (1 Corinthians 12:4-7, ESV).

While we can be unified in love as brothers and sisters while disagreeing about the activity of the Holy Spirit, I firmly believe it's time that we as Spirit-filled believers humbly admit that we cannot accomplish much of anything without the manifestation of the Holy Spirit. The activation of the gifts of the Spirit is mandatory. The level of power in the church today is embarrassingly low. We can't use unity as an excuse to keep the Holy Spirit on the bench any longer. It's His time to shine.

The above passage of Scripture reveals that the gifts of the Spirit are for the common good. That sounds like unity to me. It also says that God empowers these gifts in us. This is for the sake of the fulfillment of ministry.

When the Holy Spirit was given in that Upper Room, two specific manifestations were imparted into the people who were baptized in fire:

1. **Boldness:** “And when they had prayed, the place in which they were gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and continued to speak the word of God with boldness” (**Acts 4:31, ESV**).
2. **Power:** “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth” (**Acts 1:8, ESV**).

The church must not only experience boldness and power, but we must be fueled by it in every moment, every service, every event. This is what was happening at Brownsville Assembly of God:

All told, more than 2.5 million people have visited the church's Wednesday-through-Saturday evening revival services, where they sang rousing worship music and heard old-fashioned sermons on sin and salvation. After the sermons were over, hundreds of thousands accepted the invitation to leave their seats and rush forward to a large area in front of the stage-like altar. Here, they “get right with God.” ... Untold thousands have hit the carpet, where they either writhe in ecstasy or lie stone-still in a state resembling a coma, sometimes remaining flat on the floor for hours at a time. Some participants call the experience being “slain in the Spirit.” Others simply refer to receiving the touch of God. Regardless of what they call it, these people are putting the “roll” back in “holy roller.”— Steve Rabey[3]

I believe we must see the manifestation of the Holy Spirit increase to a radical degree—enough that we have the supernatural power necessary to succeed. We need an outpouring like Brownsville to become normal in our churches again.

This means those who don't embrace the gifts will have a decision to make. Understand this very clearly: we must never divide away from anyone who names the name of Christ, and who is living according to the Word of God. However, if others refuse to participate because the gifts are in play, they are the ones causing disunity. They are making the choice to pull away. It's on them.

If we shut the gifts down, we are communicating that we are more interested in people being in attendance than the Holy Spirit, or at least, we want people to give leadership and determine what the Holy Spirit is allowed to do. This mindset should terrify us.

When I hold prayer events, praying in tongues is a constant. I absolutely love it when those who have yet to experience the baptism of the Holy Spirit join in with us. Honestly, that is one of my favorite times in prayer—when those who don't pray in tongues refuse to allow that to get in the way.

Sadly, there are also those who refuse to attend such gatherings. It's their decision, not mine.

But, let it be known: I will always choose the attendance of the Holy Spirit ahead of people. I will always allow the Holy Spirit to manifest the way he chooses, even if it upsets people. I will never offend the Spirit of God, even if that offends people.

I am smart enough to know that the goal of any corporate meeting is absolutely impossible without the power of the Holy Spirit raging throughout.

The manifestation of the Holy Spirit can't be limited to times

of prayer and worship. We need anointed men and women of God to preach with such power that entire rooms are filled with fire! Our church services much change, and fast!

“While Peter was still saying these things, the Holy Spirit fell on all who heard the word” (Acts 10:44, ESV).

It's time we see the temperature of Holy Spirit activity shoot so high the thermometer explodes. We need to have meetings that are so full of God's presence that people have to crawl through the door! It's time for a shaking, quaking, Spirit-filled environment of eruptions in prayer every Sunday morning (and every other day of the week)!

Doing ministry any other way just won't work. It will accomplish some things, sure, but the goal we have been given requires power, boldness, signs, wonders, miracles and a lifestyle of burning, Spirit-driven intercession and worship. It's time we actually become OK with scaring the visitors with the tangible, fearful movement of God in our services! They may actually hit their knees and cry out in repentance instead of sitting quietly filling out a visitor card. Maybe the greeter's handshake in such an environment might actually impart something:

“Then they laid their hands on them and they received the Holy Spirit” (Acts 8:17, ESV).

We can't keep the Holy Spirit on the bench. We can no longer choose when or how He manifests. Do we want revival or not? Try to imagine revival without a supernatural atmosphere. You can't. It doesn't exist.

A newspaper report on the Asuza Revival:

... disgraceful intermingling of the races ... they cry and make howling noises all day and into the night. They run, jump, shake all over, shout to the top of their voice, spin around

in circles, fall out on the sawdust blanketed floor jerking, kicking and rolling all over it. Some of them pass out and do not move for hours as though they were dead. These people appear to be mad, mentally deranged or under a spell. They claim to be filled with the spirit. They have a one eyed, illiterate, Negro as their preacher who stays on his knees much of the time with his head hidden between the wooden milk crates. He doesn't talk very much but at times he can be heard shouting, 'Repent,' and he's supposed to be running the thing ... They repeatedly sing the same song, 'The Comforter Has Come.'[3]

Are you ready for the Comforter to come?