

Sloshed in the Spirit? It's Time to Get Sober

Getting “drunk in the Holy Spirit” has been a popular concept in some churches. But is it biblical?

A few years ago a traveling charismatic minister from the West coast passed through Florida to conduct a series of renewal meetings. I'd never heard of the guy, but the rumor was that he carried a “special” anointing. It was unique, that's for sure-especially when he took the microphone, slurred his words as if intoxicated and leaned to the left of the pulpit as if he were about to fall over. Then, in between some bizarre spasms, he would shout what sounded like “Walla walla bing bang!”

His message didn't make sense. But if he had just said “Ding Dong Bell” or “Yabba Dabba Doo” over and over, some people in his meetings would have run to the front of the room and swooned, even though he never opened his Bible during his message. They wanted what this man claimed to possess—an anointing to become “drunk in the Spirit.”

“Let's put the childish things behind us. It's time for us to grow up and sober up.”

Spiritual intoxication has been a trend in charismatic circles for a while. Some respected preachers, citing Acts 2:13, defend the concept that Christians might feel drunk when they are filled with the Holy Spirit (because the early disciples were accused of being drunk when they spoke in tongues). This teaching led to lots of disorderly conduct in revival

meetings—including nosebleeds, bruises and more serious injuries.

Some people began to manifest what looked like seizures during renewal services, and the bizarre behavior was defended as “manifestations of the Spirit.” Some pastors even encouraged wobbly saints to find “designated drivers” if they felt too drunk to operate a vehicle when it was time to go home. Meanwhile, some worship leaders introduced “Holy Ghost drinking songs” that encouraged people to slosh around in the joy of the Lord while uncorking more of His new wine.

The spiritual drunkenness craze led to other charismatic fads, including an infatuation with angels, an obsession with golden dust and the strange teachings of John Crowder—a confessed “new mystic” who compares the infilling of the Holy Spirit to smoking marijuana.

Crowder, who is planting a church in Santa Cruz, Calif., this fall, sometimes calls his meetings “sloshfests” and refers to himself as a bartender for God. He teaches that God wants all Christians to be continually drunk in the Holy Spirit—and he provides resources to help you do just that, including an electronica recording that will help you, in Crowder’s words, “trance out,” and a teaching that encourages stigmata and levitation.

I’ll let the theologians sort out all the obvious reasons why Crowder and other “new mystics” are treading on dangerous ground. Meanwhile I have a less complicated concern. With all of this emphasis on Holy Ghost intoxication, did anybody notice that the Bible clearly commands us to be spiritually *sober*?

If soberness wasn’t mentioned in the New Testament, then I wouldn’t be beating this drum so loudly. But I find numerous references, from both Peter and Paul. “But you, *be sober in all things*,” is Paul’s admonition to Timothy (2 Tim. 4:5,

NASB). He tells the Thessalonians, “But since we are of the day, *let us be sober*, having put on the breastplate of faith and love, and as a helmet, the hope of salvation,” (1 Thess. 5:8).

Peter hammers the same point. He wrote, “Prepare your minds for action, keep sober in spirit, fix your hope completely on the grace to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ” (1 Pet. 1:13) and “The end of all things is near; therefore, be of sound judgment and *sober spirit* for the purpose of prayer” (1 Pet. 4:7).

The soberness here is not primarily a reference to abstaining from alcohol (although it’s worth mentioning that believers who drink will find it more difficult to obey these commands). To be sober can be defined “to show self-control,” “to be sane or rational,” or “to be free from excess or extravagance.” A sober Christian knows the heights of God’s inexpressible joy, but he is never ruled by emotions, passions, lust or any other category of temptation that has the power to dull the spiritual senses.

When I look at the state of our nation today, and consider our spiritual challenges, it’s obvious the last thing we need are Christians who are so sloshed in emotional euphoria that they can’t pray intelligently and work diligently.

This is not a time for God’s people to be incapacitated. We need to be thinking, planning, strategizing, researching and building—all using the Holy Spirit’s wisdom. Yes, we need to be filled with the Holy Spirit like never before—but He is not going to fill us so we can act like giddy freshmen at a frat house keg party. Let’s put the childish things behind us. It’s time for us to grow up and sober up.

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