

THE SPIRIT-FILLED CHURCH, part 2

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When we were last together, I spoke to you about the *character* of a Spirit-filled church. Looking especially at Acts 2:42-47, we found that a Spirit-filled church is

- Joined and devoted
- Teaching and learning
- Fellowshiping and sharing
- Praying and worshiping
- Reaching out

These characteristics serve both as an anchor for our faith and as a compass for our growth and development. Failing to maintain a balance of these five elements warps our faith and can lead to various doctrinal heresies and exaggerated emphases. An imbalance of these characteristics would also stifle our development as a people among whom God is pleased to dwell; the fading scent of God's presence would make our meetings unattractive to seekers and cripple our growth.

As we bring these elements into balance, what will be the marks of our *behavior* as a church? What can we expect to see and hear and experience?

Signs Following

In one place, Jesus said,

Mark 16:17 *These signs will follow those who believe in My name: they will cast out demons; they will speak with new tongues; ¹⁸ they will take up serpents; and if they drink anything deadly, it will by no means hurt them; they will lay hands on the sick, and they will recover.* (NKJV)

Casting out demons, speaking to God in unlearned languages, escaping deadly dangers, and bringing healing to the sick are four characteristic experiences of Spirit-filled believers.

Of course, to experience such things, believers must live where demons are active, where dangers are deadly, and people are sick. These are the settings for such miracles.

Spiritual Fullness

In another place, Jesus predicted,

John 14:12 *Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me, the works that I do he will do also; and greater works than these he will do, because I go to My Father.*(NKJV)

The key is in the words "because I go to My Father." Only because of Jesus' return to Heaven was the promised Holy Spirit poured out on the waiting Church. The necessary key to "greater works" is the baptism and fullness of the Holy Spirit, which comes to us only because Jesus was glorified and is seated at the right hand of God.

Jesus affirmed,

John 16:7 *If I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I depart, I will send Him to you.* (NKJV)

What more does the Scripture teach about Spirit-filled behaviors? I believe the Holy Spirit's activities fit within five headings:

- Magnifies Jesus, the Living Word
- Intensifies spiritual fire
- Amplifies spiritual fruit
- Accentuates spiritual gifts
- Accelerates reaching the lost

Magnifies Jesus, the Living Word

John 14:26 *The Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you. (NKJV)*

The Holy Spirit comes to us to remind us of Jesus' teachings and to bring their truth home to our hearts.

John 15:26 *When the Helper comes, whom I shall send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father, He will testify of Me. (NKJV)*

A primary work of the Spirit is to tell us more about Jesus and to show us what He is like and what He wants to be to us and do through us.

John 16:13 *When He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come. ¹⁴ He will glorify Me, for He will take of what is Mine and declare it to you. (NKJV)*

The Holy Spirit has not come to speak of Himself, but to magnify Jesus for us.

Just as Jesus represented to us the Invisible Heavenly Father, so the Holy Spirit represents the now-Invisible Heavenly Jesus. He reveals to us His heart and purpose, declares to us His mind and truth; He makes Jesus known and magnifies Him as the only Son of the Living God.

As it is written:

1 Corinthians 12:3 *So I want you to know that no one speaking by the Spirit of God will curse Jesus, and no one can say Jesus is Lord, except by the Holy Spirit. (NLT)*

The Spirit centers us in the written Word of God, the Bible, because it is God's revelation of Himself to us in human form and language. The Word of God is the Spirit's sword (Ephesians 6:17), our weapon against the forces of darkness and the key to overcoming temptation. By it He divides soul from spirit, and by it we overcome the evil one. "It is written" is our battle cry, our victory song. It is the Holy Spirit who teaches us to measure our lives by what God has said.

Thus, a Spirit-filled church centers its teaching and life around Jesus, through the record of the Bible.

Intensifies Spiritual Fire

John, the Baptizer, reported:

Matthew 3:11 *"I baptize with water those who repent of their sins and turn to God. But someone is coming soon who is greater than I am—so much greater that I'm not worthy even to be his slave and carry his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire." (NLT)*

Here is a visual of that very thing:

Acts 2:3 Then, what looked like flames or tongues of fire appeared and settled on each of them. (NLT)

Luke 12:49 I have come to set the world on fire, and I wish it were already burning! (NLT)

Mark 9:49 For everyone will be tested with fire.(NLT)

1 Peter 1:6 So be truly glad. There is wonderful joy ahead, even though you have to endure many trials for a little while. ⁷ These trials will show that your faith is genuine. It is being tested as fire tests and purifies gold—though your faith is far more precious than mere gold. So when your faith remains strong through many trials, it will bring you much praise and glory and honor on the day when Jesus Christ is revealed to the whole world. (NLT)

Quoting an ancient proverb, Paul wrote:

Romans 12:20 If your enemy is hungry, feed him; If he is thirsty, give him a drink; For in so doing you will heap coals of fire on his head. (NLT)

These “coals of fire” are not for vengeance. These are the burning thoughts by which their conscience is tested by God. Your kindness makes no sense in response to their mistreatment of you. They are compelled to consider what could influence such unexpected behavior from you. They are compelled to consider an alternative to their present value system and lifestyle.

1 Corinthians 3:13 But on the judgment day, fire will reveal what kind of work each builder has done. The fire will show if a person’s work has any value. ¹⁴ If the work survives, that builder will receive a reward. ¹⁵ But if the work is burned up, the builder will suffer great loss. The builder will be saved, but like someone barely escaping through a wall of flames. (NLT)

Thus, Jesus concludes:

Revelation 3:18 So I advise you to buy gold from me—gold that has been purified by fire. Then you will be rich. (NLT)

Spiritual fire is fervor, enthusiasm. But it is not “put on” fervor, not mere mental or superficial excitement. It is the fervor of heart that is the product of successful testing in life—the result of passing through the flood and the heat and learning that God is faithful through all the circumstances.

Don’t reach for the superficial; go for the pure gold!

Let the fire burn, let the tests come. Hold on to God for all He is worth and then you learn how worthy He is of all your praise.

This is why a Spirit-filled church is characterized by fervent prayer and worship.

Amplifies Spiritual Fruit

Paul lists nine traits that the Holy Spirit produces in our lives as we learn to listen and obey:

Galatians 5:22 But the Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness, and self-control. (NLT)

The likeness of Jesus-in-us is the result of the persistent activity of the Holy Spirit in our daily lives.

St. Francis of Assisi offered this prayer:

*Lord, make me an instrument of Your peace.
Where there is hatred, let me sow love;
where there is injury, pardon;
where there is doubt, faith;
where there is despair, hope;
where there is darkness, light;
and where there is sadness, joy.
O, Divine Master,
grant that I may not so much seek
to be consoled as to console;
to be understood as to understand;
to be loved as to love;
for it is in giving that we receive;
it is in pardoning that we are pardoned;
and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.*

His prayer teaches us these simple truths: for love to prevail, it must be sown in an environment of hatred; for joy to prevail, it must be sown in an atmosphere of sadness; for peace to prevail, it must be sown in a condition of trouble; for patience to prevail, it must be sown in a time of anxiety; and so on. The supernatural influence of the Holy Spirit appears in situations that require His intervention.

It takes the power of the Holy Spirit to help us to live this way. It is not automatic, but it is available! Abundant spiritual fruitfulness is characteristic of a Spirit-filled church.

Accentuates Spiritual Gifts

Paul introduces this concept:

¹ Corinthians 12:7 A spiritual gift is given to each of us so we can help each other. ⁸ To one person the Spirit gives the ability to give wise advice; to another the same Spirit gives a message of special knowledge. ⁹ The same Spirit gives great faith to another, and to someone else the one Spirit gives the gift of healing. ¹⁰ He gives one person the power to perform miracles, and another the ability to prophesy. He gives someone else the ability to discern whether a message is from the Spirit of God or from another spirit. Still another person is given the ability to speak in unknown languages, while another is given the ability to interpret what is being said. ¹¹ It is the one and only Spirit who distributes all these gifts. He alone decides which gift each person should have. (NLT)

Romans 12:6 In his grace, God has given us different gifts for doing certain things well. So if God has given you the ability to prophesy, speak out with as much faith as God has given you. ⁷ If your gift is serving others, serve them well. If you are a teacher, teach well. ⁸ If your gift is to encourage others, be encouraging. If it is giving, give generously. If God has given you leadership ability, take the responsibility seriously. And if you have a gift for showing kindness to others, do it gladly. (NLT)

The Holy Spirit brings the supernatural within our reach. He delights to work *bone fide* miracles through the lives of Spirit-filled believers. If we have learned, through testing, how to listen to God, to depend upon His Word, and to wait with confidence for God to act, His power can flow through us in amazing ways.

This is not limited to those who stand “up front” or are “verbal” or “outgoing.” A gift has been given to *each of us*. If we listen, He will lead us to employ it effectively.

A Spirit-filled church is not simply a beehive of religious activities; it is active according to the spiritual gifts God has given them.

Accelerates Reaching the Lost

Jesus predicted:

Acts 1:8 **But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you. And you will be my witnesses, telling people about me everywhere—in Jerusalem, throughout Judea, in Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.** (NLT)

Luke 4:14 **Then Jesus returned to Galilee, filled with the Holy Spirit's power. Reports about him spread quickly through the whole region.** (NLT)

Jesus passed His test, returning in the power of the Spirit, and made headlines everywhere! People were talking because they were witnessing God-in-action.

Paul reported the results of his preaching to the Gentiles:

Romans 15:19 **They were convinced by the power of miraculous signs and wonders and by the power of God's Spirit. In this way, I have fully presented the Good News of Christ from Jerusalem all the way to Illyricum.** (NLT)

He also said this about his ministry in Greece:

1 Thessalonians 1:5 **For when we brought you the Good News, it was not only with words but also with power, for the Holy Spirit gave you full assurance that what we said was true. And you know of our concern for you from the way we lived when we were with you.** (NLT)

His words were true and the way he lived backed them up. Powerful effect!

How does that happen? How does God use a man who was once so opposed to His plan that he exposed and arrested Christians and put them in prison or had them executed? This is what the Holy Spirit can do in a person's life! Whoever you are, wherever you've come from, and whatever you've done—even if you were hostile to God and His church—He can make Christ real and magnificent to you, ignite you with spiritual passion, amplify the likeness of Jesus in your life, and operate through spiritual giftedness to reach lost people. This is what Spirit-filled people do.

There is no substitute for the power of the Holy Spirit in outreach ministries. Books and videos and high-tech tools cannot replace the Spirit-empowered representation of Christ by a Spirit-filled individual. That is why the Assemblies of God has been for many years the fastest growing segment of the Christian church worldwide.

In spite of some hype and showmanship, there is also authentic ministry that changes lives. I look for people to really fall in love with Jesus Christ, and worship Him fervently. I look for people to really show the fruit of the Spirit in their daily lives and boldly use their spiritual gifts to reach the lost.

This is what a Spirit-filled church does.

Final Analysis

In the end, it boils down to this:

1 Corinthians 14:1 **Pursue love, and desire spiritual gifts, but especially that you may prophesy.** (NKJV)

The verse describes the priority and order of spiritual development.

“Pursue love” sets the need for spiritual fruitfulness in its rightful priority: number one. Spiritual growth begins with your pursuit of love—not being loved, but giving love. Love for God and love for one another. If we don’t learn to love one another *here* (in the church) where we all share a common faith, no one out *there* is going to pay much attention to us. It may be elusive, but if you *pursue* it you will do it.

“Desire spiritual gifts” highlights the need for works of power in the church. If you are pursuing love, God will be pleased to release His power through your life, because He knows it won’t be abused or misused.

“That you may prophesy” leads us to the ultimate purpose: building up the church through the extension of God’s Word. Prophecy is the gift that reaches the most people at once to bless them and convince them of the truth, as it is in Christ Jesus.

Be filled with the Spirit and live in the power of God. As Paul said, “If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit.” (Galatians 5:25) If the Holy Spirit has given you life, then live it with Him, for the glory of God.