



“And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit” (Ephesians 5:18).

Be Filled With the Spirit

Central Truth: The power of God is manifest in service for every Christian who is filled with the Holy Spirit.

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“Be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit” (Ephesians 5:18).

With such words of Holy Scripture, the key to effective Christian service is set forth. The key verse of this study seems to set drunkenness with wine over against filling with the Spirit. As an intoxicant affects every part of one's being (thoughts, speech, actions, judgment), so the person filled with the Holy Spirit will be affected in every part of his being by the Spirit. In each case it is what is within one that influences his conduct, whether an intoxicating drink or sanctifying Spirit. Drunkenness with liquor is forbidden; filling with the Spirit is commanded. The way to effective Christian service is made clear.

The term "*filled*" means "to cause to abound, to diffuse throughout, to thoroughly permeate." To be "filled with the Spirit" suggests the total control of the Holy Spirit over the acts, attitudes, and personality of the Christian. The Bible recognizes three classes of people. (1) The natural man is man as he is by nature and apart from God. (2) The carnal man is the believer in Jesus who still follows much of the dictates of his flesh nature. (3) The spiritual man is the person who is saved by faith in Jesus and who is filled with the Holy Spirit. God's will is that we all be spiritual.

I. WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE FILLED WITH THE SPIRIT?

“And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit; Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord; Giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ: Submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God” (Ephesians 5:18-21).

Misunderstandings abound as to what God meant when He commanded Christians to *“be filled with the Spirit.”* It is not an “emotional high,” a certain kind of emotional experience which one must have. It is not any kind of a “baptism of the Spirit.” It is not to receive the Holy Spirit, nor to receive more of the Spirit that the Christian already has. It is not to be made more holy through some special sanctifying experience as a “second work of grace.” All those are misunderstandings of God's command.

Look at the grammar of the verb *“be filled”* as God gave it in Ephesians 5:18. (1) It is the imperative mood, indicating a command. To fail to be filled with the Spirit, therefore, is to disobey God and to sin. (2) It is present tense, indicating the filling is available now and is to be experienced repeatedly and continually. One can be filled with the Holy Spirit right this moment. (3) It is plural number, indicating the filling is for all Christians, not a select few. It means “each and all of you” be filled with the Spirit. Filling is available to every Christian, not a few special workers only. (4) It is passive voice, indicating God moves upon us to fill us. We do not fill ourselves, nor can we fill one another with the Spirit. What an insight the grammar gives!

Then what does it mean to be *“filled with the Spirit”*? It means to be controlled and empowered by the Spirit. Instead of our getting more of Him, He gets more of us. He who indwells us is permitted by an act of our will to control us. We submit willingly to His government. We do as He directs. “Filling” indicates the Spirit's control over the believer in Jesus. And it is the privilege of each Christian who will to be continually yielded and available to Him. Thus the Divine Indweller becomes the Divine Governor of life.

II WHY DO WE NEED TO BE FILLED WITH THE SPIRIT?

“Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves: be ye therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves. But beware of men: for they will deliver you up to the councils, and they will scourge you in their synagogues; And ye shall be brought before governors and kings for my sake, for a testimony against them and the Gentiles. But when they deliver you up, take no thought how or what ye shall speak: for it

shall be given you in that same hour what ye shall speak. For it is not Ye that speak, but the Spirit of your Father which speaketh in you”
(Matthew 10:16-20).

A. The nature of our spiritual warfare demands spiritual control.
“For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places” (Ephesians 6:12). Such a contest can never be won by human wisdom, natural talent, or without divine aid. The person who attempts to *“fight the good fight of faith”* (1 Timothy 6:12) without the filling of the Holy Spirit will come to the same frustration which Paul manifest in Romans 7. *“For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me, but how to perform that which is good I find not”* (Romans 7:18). But when one is filled with the Holy Spirit, he can testify, *“The weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds”* (II Corinthians 10:4). The spiritual warfare requires us to be filled with the Spirit if we would experience spiritual victory.

B. The limitations of the natural talents in the flesh demand spiritual control. When Paul said *“no good thing”* was in his flesh (Romans 7:18), he was speaking in spiritual terms. There is nothing in the flesh which will give victory over the devil. There is nothing in the flesh which can do spiritual service for our God. Our knowledge is incomplete. Our ability is limited. Our motives are not wholly pure. There is nothing we can do, apart from the Holy Spirit, to improve our lot. But when He fills us we can say, *“Though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh”* (II Corinthians 10:3). His filling (control and empowering) qualifies us to serve.

C. The source of spiritual power demands spiritual control. Jesus told us how we would receive power as Christians: *“Ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you”* (Acts 1:8). That is the only way a Christian can be empowered for service. The central truth of this study is, *“The power of God is manifest in service for every Christian who is filled with the Holy Spirit.”* That is Bible truth! Apart from the Holy Spirit in the Christian, he is helpless. As Jesus said, *“As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me....For without me ye can do nothing”* (John 15:4, 5).

D. The ability conferred by the Holy Spirit demands spiritual control. Jesus promised that in situations in which human wisdom is insufficient, *“It shall be given you in that same hour what ye shall speak. For it is not ye that speak, but the Spirit of your Father which speaketh in you”* (Matthew 10:19, 20). How much better to speak and work in His

sufficiency rather than in our inabilities.

III, HOW IS ONE FILLED WITH THE SPIRIT?

“But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in Judea, and Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth” (Acts 1:8)

There is no magic formula which works automatically. But God has given clear guidelines to show us how to be filled with the Holy Spirit.

A. Admit the fact of His indwelling. On the basis of passages like John 4:14; 7:37-39; Romans 8:9; and I Corinthians 6:19, accept the fact that you have already received the Holy Spirit. Believe without argument that He is now already living in your human spirit. To be filled with Him does not mean that you are to receive Him. He indwells already.

B. Cultivate the desire to be filled. The Spirit fills the person who wants to be filled, who surrenders by an act of the will of His control. Where there is no desire for His filling there will be no filling. Jesus said, *“Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled”* (Matthew 5:6). As one Bible teacher says it, “You will have Him enough when you want Him enough.” As long as you are content without being filled, you will not know His filling. But when your heart cries out in longing for Him, you will know his fullness.

C. Settle the sin problem. The Holy Spirit will not control the life of a person who is practicing sin. Confess all known sin to God and receive His forgiveness.

I suggest that you get alone with God. Take a paper and pen. Ask God to reveal to you anything and everything in your life which displeases Him and grieves the Holy Spirit. As He reveals, write down each item. Confess what needs to be confessed. Make restitution where restitution needs to be made. Settle the sin problem with God and men. When you have confessed it all to God and asked His forgiveness, claim forgiveness by faith. Write out across that list of sins the words of I John 1:9, *“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”* Thank Him for forgiveness. Then destroy that list! The sin problem is settled.

D. Unreservedly yield. Give God access to your whole being by the act of your will. Consciously surrender to Him your thought life, your motives, your attitudes, your ambitions, your relationships, your livelihood, your recreation — every part of your life. That means you must choose against self.

Choose the will of God in advance in every situation for the rest of your life. Give up the right to have any will if it is contrary to the will of God. *“Reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord....Neither yield ye your members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin: but yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God”* (Romans 6:11, 13).

The demand of God is that you die to self. Jesus said to all who would follow Him, *“If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me”* (Luke 9:23). And again He said, *“Whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple”* (Luke 14:33). The requirement is as demanding as it sounds. You must die to self interest if you would serve God in the fullness of the Holy Spirit.

E. Accept by faith that God does fill you now, whether you feel filled or not. God has promised to fill everyone who truly surrenders to the Spirit. Trust God, not your feelings. Remember that the devil has the same access to your physical emotions as God has. And the devil will see that you never have assurance. Faith, not feelings, is the key.

Express your faith by thanking God for the filling (the control and power) of the Spirit. As you thank Him, your assurance will increase.

F. Engage in spiritual service to others in the name of God. The book of Acts records filling with the Spirit only in relation to Christian service. Those filled with the Spirit always expressed their filling by Christian witness and ministry in the name of Christ.

Filling with the Holy Spirit is not intended to show how spiritual one is. It is not intended to make a person feel spiritual. The filling with the Spirit is intended to qualify one to serve God. He who does not intend to serve God will never know the filling with the Spirit.

IV. HOW IS THE FILLING WITH THE SPIRIT MAINTAINED?

One can lose the filling with the Spirit. The moment he does not submit to the Spirit's control, he is not filled. Therefore, the filling is maintained by keeping the life clear of sin, living by faith rather than feelings, and keeping available to serve God as the Spirit directs.

Practice “spiritual breathing.” Breathe out in confession of any sin; breathe in the forgiveness and grace of God. That way the life will be kept clean, the Spirit will not be grieved, and you will live under His divine control and empowering. Keep on being filled with the Holy Spirit of God.

Questions

1. What does “filled” mean?
2. How is a natural man different from a spiritual man?
3. What does the grammar of Ephesians 5:18 teach you?
4. What does it mean to “be filled with the Spirit”?
5. What does Acts 1:8 teach you about the filling?
6. How is indwelling related to filling with the Spirit?
7. How is the sin problem settled?
8. How can you accept the filling with faith?
9. How is filling related to service?
10. Will you set your heart to be filled with the Spirit daily?