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## THE SPIRIT-FILLED LIFE

Ephesians 5:18

By

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Ephesians Lesson 44

## The Spirit-filled Life Ephesians 5:18

We live in a day of increasing energy shortages. The world has ever-increasing energy demands in the face of ever-decreasing energy supplies. Power outages are becoming more frequent. The cost of heating or cooling our homes and driving our cars continues to escalate. And with all of the global warming talk, the search is on for some kind of clean, renewable energy source. Under these conditions, it would be utterly inconceivable if a great number of people had access to a free and readily available source of energy, but failed to use it.

And yet, many Christians seemingly do this very thing with regard to the Christian life. God has provided us an inexhaustible, free, readily available source of power to live the Christian life. And yet many Christians do not use the power that God has given to overcome temptation and sin. Christian families fall apart because the family members manifest the deeds of the flesh, instead of allowing the Holy Spirit to produce His fruit in their daily relationships. Many Christian workers burn out serving the Lord because they do not avail themselves of the power that God offers through His indwelling Holy Spirit.

And so the subject of our text, the Spirit-filled life, is vital for every Christian to understand and practice. As often has been said, the Christian life is not difficult; it is absolutely impossible, apart from the power of the Holy Spirit. Jesus said (John 15:5b), "apart from Me you can do nothing." But in the same context, He repeatedly promised to send the Holy Spirit to live in us as the divine Helper (John 14:16-17, 26; 15:26; 16:13). So the Christian life must be the Spirit-filled life. To walk wisely, to redeem the time in these evil days, to understand the will of the Lord and live in light of it, we must be filled with the Spirit.

To live wisely in evil days, you must live continually  
under the control of the Holy Spirit.

Paul draws a rather startling contrast, which also has some points of comparison (Eph. 5:18): “And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit.” Some have argued that since the Greek text did not utilize capital letters, Paul meant, “be filled in [your human] spirit.” But, the same Greek phrase “in [or with] the Spirit,” occurs four other times in Ephesians, and each time it refers clearly to the Holy Spirit (2:18, 22; 3:5; 6:18). Paul was probably thinking of the accusation leveled against the believers who were filled with the Spirit on the Day of Pentecost, that they were drunk with wine (Acts 2:13). So Paul means that rather than be filled with wine, so as to be under its influence, Christians should be filled with the Holy Spirit, so as to be under His influence. The Spirit is the One who empowers and works in and through us, but we have to trust Him to work (Phil. 2:12-13).

Before we examine what it means to be filled with the Spirit, we should take a moment to note...

1. It is sin to deal with evil days by living under the influence of alcohol.

“Do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation...” The Bible does not forbid all use of alcoholic beverages, but it does strongly warn about the dangers of alcohol (Prov. 20:1; 23:29-35) and it *always* condemns drunkenness. “Dissipation,” in modern slang, is to be wasted. It points to the wastefulness and destruction of property, relationships, and life that often go along with drunkenness. The adverb is used (Luke 15:13) of way that the prodigal son wastefully spent his inheritance on loose living. It means to be out of control, because alcohol now controls the person.

As you know, alcohol may become physically addictive and some are more prone to this addiction than others are. The Bible would not call this “addiction,” but rather, “being enslaved to sin.” To label alcoholism as *only* a disease is not scriptural. The Bible calls it “drunkenness,” a deed of the flesh (Gal. 5:21). Some will say that it’s cruel to label alcoholism as sin, but actually, it’s merciful. If it’s a disease, you may be without hope. But, if it is sin for which you are responsible, the Bible offers a remedy for sin, which includes being born again and being filled with the Holy Spirit.

In the context, where Paul has been talking about the need to walk wisely in this evil day, he is surely making the point that it is foolish to cope with this evil day by turning to alcohol. Christians are not immune from this temptation. It is easy to fall into the trap of dealing with stress by having a drink. Pretty soon, it becomes your comforting routine. You get home from a stressful day and you have a drink to calm your nerves. Or, there is tension in your home, so you have a few beers and forget about the problems. Before you know it, you're dependent on the alcohol for your inner peace. But, as believers in the living God, *He* is to be our peace in times of trouble (Ps. 94:19; John 16:33; 1 Pet. 5:7). To turn to alcohol, instead of Jesus Christ, for peace is to fall into sin.

2. The wise way to deal with evil days is to live continually under the control of the Holy Spirit.

I want to deal with the last half of verse 18 by answering three questions: (1) What is the filling of the Holy Spirit? (2) How can I experience the Spirit-filled life? (3) How can I know that I am filled with the Spirit?

#### QUESTION 1: WHAT IS THE FILLING OF THE HOLY SPIRIT?

Because of much confusion in our day, I must first spell out what it is and then clarify what it is not:

##### A. What it is:

- (1) To be filled with the Spirit is to live with every conscious area of your life yielded to the Spirit's control.

Just as the person filled with wine is under the influence or control of the wine, so the person filled with the Spirit is under the Spirit's control. Furthermore, Paul is talking here primarily about a condition of increasing spiritual maturity, not about a momentary experience. Martyn Lloyd-Jones states (*Life in the Spirit* [Baker], p. 49), "This is not a critical experience, this is a state or a condition in which we are to live always, permanently." He goes on to point out that because Paul commands it, we are not to be passive as we wait for some experience. Rather, it is something that we must obey. The present tense of the verb indicates an ongoing condition, so that the person may be characterized as "full of the Holy Spirit."

For example, Luke 4:1 describes Jesus as “full of the Holy Spirit.” In Acts 6:3, the apostles direct the early church to select “seven men of good reputation, full of the Spirit and of wisdom,” to help with the need of serving the widows. One of the men, Stephen, is described (6:5) as “a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit.” Later (Acts 11:24), Barnabas is described as “a good man, and full of the Holy Spirit and of faith.”

So the phrase, “full of the Holy Spirit,” describes a person who habitually lives with every area of his life under the control of the Spirit. He is not a self-willed man, but a Spirit-controlled man. The fullness of the Spirit does not mean that he once had a dramatic experience, but rather that he has consistently walked with his life yielded to the Holy Spirit, so that the fruit of the Spirit characterizes his life.

- (2) To be filled with the Spirit is to live with the Word of God permeating every area of your life.

Ephesians 5:18 is obviously parallel with Colossians 3:16. Both texts are followed by joyful singing, thankfulness to God, and instructions about wives and husbands, children and parents, and slaves and masters. But in Colossians 3:16, rather than saying, “be filled with the Spirit,” Paul says, “Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you.” H. A. Ironside observes (*In the Heavens* [Loizeaux Brothers], p. 269),

There is an old rule in mathematics that “things equal to the same thing are equal to one another.” If to be filled with the Word is equal in result to being filled with the Spirit, then it should be clear that the Word-filled Christian is the Spirit-filled Christian. As the Word of Christ dwells in us richly, controls all our ways, as we walk in obedience to the Word, the Spirit of God fills, dominates, and controls us to the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ.

So to be a Spirit-filled Christian, you must be growing in your understanding and application of God’s Word.

- (3) To be filled with the Spirit involves an ever-deepening relationship with God through the Spirit.

We need to remember that the Holy Spirit is a Person, not a force. To be filled with the Spirit is not a mechanical formula that

you go through, where you “pull the Holy Spirit lever” and all the goodies come pouring out. Rather, it is a relationship with the Triune God through His indwelling Spirit.

This relationship is ever-deepening, which means that there is a difference between a newer Spirit-filled believer and a more mature Spirit-filled believer. Both are filled, but the mature saint is more filled than the young believer is. There are degrees of filling that correspond with degrees of spiritual understanding and surrender. As you grow in the Word, the Spirit reveals new areas that you need to surrender to His control. So your capacity for being filled with the Spirit expands over time.

- (4) To be filled with the Spirit includes special times of God granting extraordinary power for service.

In Acts 2:4, we read that all that were gathered in the upper room on the Day of Pentecost were filled with the Spirit. Peter went on to preach to the crowd, resulting in over 3,000 conversions. But then Acts 4:8, without any indication that Peter has lost his previous filling with the Spirit, we read that he was filled again just before he spoke to another crowd. It was a special anointing for a special task. Later, when Peter and John gathered with the church to report about their arrest, after they all had prayed, they all were filled with the Spirit, so that they began to speak the word of God with boldness (4:31). You see the same thing with Paul: he was filled with the Spirit just after his conversion when Ananias spoke with him (Acts 9:17). Some years later, on the first missionary journey when he had to confront Elymas the magician, he was filled with the Holy Spirit for that event (13:9).

Andrew Murray (*The Spirit of Christ* [Nisbet & Co. Ltd.], pp. 303-305) has a helpful analogy. In the drought-stricken South Africa, where he lived, farmers built two types of reservoirs for catching water. Some were spring fed, so that a gentle, slow inflow of water filled the reservoir. But other farms lacked such a spring and built the reservoirs to catch the rainwater, often in a matter of a few hours when there was a downpour. The spring-fed reservoir was the more certain, because it ran steadily. Although it was not especially powerful, it supplied the need. The rain-fed reservoir was more impressive when it rained, with a powerful rush of water, but it could stand empty for months if there was no rain. The ideal res-

ervoir included both: it was fed from a steady spring to keep it supplied for daily needs, but it also had a capacity to take in a gush of water when a thunderstorm hit.

Murray then applies this to these two aspects of the filling of the Holy Spirit. We need that steady, quiet flow of His power for our daily needs, to overcome sin and to live in a godly manner. But there are special occasions where we need the downpour, the gush of the Spirit's power to enable us to preach or witness or counsel or whatever the need. The special filling only supplements the normal, habitual filling. It would be rare for a person who is not walking daily in the fullness of the Spirit to receive a special filling for some sudden need. The normal experience of the Spirit's filling is to live with every conscious area of your life yielded to the Spirit's control. Then He may grant the special filling to meet a special need.

Because there is a lot of confusion about the filling of the Spirit in Christian circles, I must say a brief word about...

B. What it is not:

- (1) The filling of the Spirit is not the same as the baptism or sealing of the Spirit.

Often you will hear that you must receive the baptism of the Spirit subsequent to your salvation. This is supposedly based on certain passages in Acts, where the baptism of the Spirit and the filling of the Spirit are equated. Also, some argue that the sealing of the Spirit is an experience to be sought subsequent to salvation. Martyn Lloyd-Jones equated the baptism and the sealing as experiences to be sought.

My understanding is that while the initial outpouring or giving of the Holy Spirit in Acts is identified both as the baptism of the Spirit and the filling of the Spirit (Acts 1:5; 2:4; 11:15-16), after that transitional period, *all* believers are baptized by the Spirit into the body of Christ (1 Cor. 10:13). All believers are indwelt by the Holy Spirit from the moment of conversion (Rom. 8:9; Gal. 3:1-5). And, all believers are sealed with the Spirit the moment they are saved (Eph. 1:13; 4:30; 2 Cor. 1:22). We are never commanded to be baptized in the Spirit or to be sealed with the Spirit, but we are commanded to be filled with the Spirit. The baptism and sealing of

the Spirit are facts to be believed. The filling of the Spirit is a habitual condition that we must seek.

- (2) The filling of the Spirit is not a once and for all experience that elevates you to a higher plane.

Sometimes, in charismatic circles and in devotional literature, being filled with the Spirit is promoted as a one-time, dramatic experience that will transport you to a higher spiritual plane. Sometimes this is presented as arriving at a place where all temptation barely touches you for the rest of your life. Or, those who have this life-transforming experience see amazing results in their ministries from this point forward, while at the same time they exert less effort. I have read accounts of this in the lives of D. L. Moody, R. A. Torrey, and Hudson Taylor, among others.

But I find this kind of teaching to be detrimental. I want to experience all of the Spirit's fullness and power that He is pleased to give me. But it is not helpful or biblically sound to think that I should seek a dramatic experience that removes me from the daily battles against sin or the difficulties, setbacks, and frustrations that inevitably go along with ministry in a fallen world. Paul had these difficulties right up to his death. Being filled with the Spirit does not shortcut the need to discipline myself for the purpose of godliness. It will not advance me to instant maturity or deliver me from difficult situations that require steadfast perseverance.

- (3) The filling of the Spirit is not an irrational, emotional experience.

Some of the claims to revival include accounts of people barking like dogs, laughing uncontrollably, or lying in a catatonic state for hours or days. Or, sometimes it is said that if you have not spoken in tongues or been slain in the Spirit, where you pass out and fall over backwards, you have not been filled with the Spirit.

But even if the gift of tongues is valid for today, Paul is clear that not all speak in tongues (1 Cor. 12:30), but all are to be filled with the Spirit. As for being slain in the Spirit or the other weird manifestations, there are no valid biblical examples or exhortations to these things. They do not lead to growth in godliness.

QUESTION 2: HOW CAN I EXPERIENCE THE SPIRIT-FILLED LIFE?

I have already covered a lot of this in explaining what the filling of the Spirit is and is not. I must be very brief:

A. You need to understand certain facts.

As we've seen, if you have believed in Christ as your Savior and Lord, God has given you the Holy Spirit to indwell you. He commands you to be filled with the Spirit, which primarily means living with every conscious area of your life yielded moment-by-moment to the indwelling Holy Spirit.

B. You must recognize and acknowledge that you are empty.

You will not seek the Spirit's control and power unless you recognize your own inadequacy and need. Often, it is a major failure or sin that drives you to your knees to cry out for the Spirit's filling and power, so that you will not fall the next time.

C. You must confess and forsake all known sin and yield every area of your life to God.

The Holy Spirit will not fill a dirty vessel. "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9). We must present ourselves to God as those alive from the dead and yield our minds and bodies to Him as instruments of righteousness (Rom. 6:13).

D. You must walk by faith, not feelings.

Walking implies repeated, moment-by-moment reliance on the Spirit of God (Gal. 5:16). There will be battles between the flesh and the Spirit, even in a believer who is fully yielded to Him (Gal. 5:17-18). The Spirit-filled believer will still have strong desires of the flesh. Our enemy will entice us and wage war against us. In all of these situations, acknowledge your own weakness and cry out to God by faith, that He would control you and give you His strength. Faith is also coupled with obedience, so that you avoid and flee from tempting situations.

E. You must dwell in God's Word.

We have already seen this, but especially it is important to saturate your mind with the Word, memorizing it or being so familiar with it that God can use it when you don't have a Bible or concordance ready at hand (which is most of the time!).

As you walk this way, confessing and turning from sin, relying on the indwelling Spirit for His power, being obedient to His Word, you will develop a habit of holiness. At first, like a toddler learning to walk, you will fall a lot. Get up and keep walking. Pretty soon, walking becomes the norm. You'll experience the Spirit's fullness in an ever-expanding capacity. He will control or influence your thoughts, your emotions, your words, your attitudes, your schedule, your relationships, your finances, and all of life. He does not do this as a master controls a robot, but rather, using your unique personality and gifts, He fills you as the wind fills the sails of a ship, directing you in His paths of righteousness and joy.

### QUESTION 3: HOW CAN I KNOW THAT I AM FILLED WITH THE HOLY SPIRIT?

I can only mention two things in passing.

- A. The Spirit-filled life produces ever-deepening Christlikeness.

You and those who know you best will be able to see steady, progressive growth. Like a child's growth, it isn't always discernible day by day, but as you look back, you should see definite change toward godliness. This includes *Christlike character*. The fruit of the Spirit—love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control—will be growing in your life.

You will also be growing in *Christlike conduct*. You will experience consistent victory over the deeds of the flesh (Gal. 5:19-21). These sins will be replaced by good deeds of *Christlike service* and love to others for Christ's sake.

- B. The Spirit-filled life results in heartfelt worship and thankfulness to God, along with godly relationships.

These are the results that Paul enumerates from Ephesians 5:19-6:9. We will look at them in detail in future messages.

### Conclusion

I conclude by asking, Are you filled with the Holy Spirit? Would those closest to you agree? If the Holy Spirit pulled out of your life for a week, would you miss Him? Or, would life go on pretty much as usual? God has called us to a supernatural life of daily dependence on His Holy Spirit. You can begin right now!

## Application Questions

1. Some equate the baptism and the filling of the Spirit and say that once you receive it, you will be transported to a higher spiritual plane. How would you refute this biblically?
2. If the Holy Spirit were controlling us, wouldn't we be perfect, just like He is? How would you refute this biblically?
3. A charismatic brother claims that if you've been filled with the Spirit, you will speak in tongues. What Scriptures would you use to reply?
4. If the filling of the Spirit is not an emotional experience, how can you know that you are filled?

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