

## How to be Filled with the Spirit Ephesians 5:18

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I really don't like the title to this week's message, *How to be Filled with the Spirit*, but it's as close to what the sermon is about as anything. The problem with this title is the same as entitling a book, *A Checklist Approach to a Happy Marriage*. Checklists don't make for happy marriages because marriage is a relationship. Marriages are personal. They're dynamic. A wife isn't a checklist item. She is a person.

The Holy Spirit is a person. Our relationship with Him is spiritual but no less personal than any other relationship. If we pray to the Holy Spirit, "I am going to do these few things and then You will have to fill me," we are forgetting that He is God.

Jesus made it clear that the Holy Spirit is like the wind; He blows wherever He wills (John 3:8). We cannot catch the wind in our hands and we cannot catch the Spirit in our formulas. All we can do is seek Him with the sure knowledge that He wants to bless us with His presence and guide us with His wisdom.

Our series in 1 Corinthians brought us to 12:13, *For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit.*

***Baptism in the Spirit*** - A summary term for the dramatic work of the Spirit at conversion which all Christians experience and which unites and locates all of us in the one body of Christ.

Baptism in the Spirit is a one-time event. There are no commands in Scripture for us to be baptized by the Spirit or to seek baptism in the Spirit. We don't do it, the Spirit does it. The implications are huge. We are one in Christ. There should be no room for any of the normal divisions of humanity. Racism. Prejudice. Social classes. Young. Old. The Spirit overwhelms them and unifies us as one. It is our responsibility to display relationally what is true spiritually. How? Love. Cue chapter 13.

If baptism in the Spirit is the summary term of what the Spirit does at conversion, what should we call the ongoing life of the Christian in relationship with the Holy Spirit?

*Do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit.* (Ephesians 5:18).

Last weekend was a holiday. Many of you were not here (nearly 1000 of you for the holiday). Let me quickly summarize. Paul compares being filled with the Spirit to being filled with alcohol, in this one way – when a person is drunk, the effect of the alcohol permeates their entire person, their thinking, their speech, their body. It is easy to see someone who is controlled by alcohol. Being filled with the Spirit is like that in this sense – the Spirit dwells within us and His effect permeates all that we are. Think of filling as control. Not that we get more of the Spirit, but that He gets more of us. This is what it means in Galatians 5:16 that we should "walk in the Spirit." It is the daily surrender of the flesh's natural desire to control.

I drew the analogy to a champion show horse and its rider. A horse is naturally wild and will not submit to a bridle, saddle, or rider. It has to be broken and every time the rider gets on, the horse must submit again. When a horse and rider are in sync, they can do amazing things. When they are fighting for control, you get a bucking bronco. That's a rodeo.

That is what it means to be filled with the Spirit. It is the daily surrender of my flesh's desire to rule, control and self-manage. It is to submit myself to the Spirit's control; to seek to be in sync with His desires, to want His good fruits in our lives. Filling is not a feeling, but His fruit can be, and occasionally is, intensely so. To be filled with the Spirit is to be controlled by the Spirit and to be controlled by the Spirit produces the fruits of the Spirit.

Galatians compares what being controlled by the flesh looks like and what being controlled by the Spirit looks like:

*But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law. Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit. (Galatians 5:16-25)*

This is the daily struggle we face and why our desires must be for the Spirit's good work in us. To walk by the Spirit, literally means, *get in line and follow the Spirit*. Walk in the Spirit. Pursue His presence and power. We can learn a lot from a horse.

## **How to be Filled with the Spirit or How to Cultivate a Relationship With the Holy Spirit That Allows His Control to Bear His Good Fruit in Us**

### **It is an active submission to His control (Galatians 2:20; Romans 12:1)**

- *I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. (Galatians 2:20)*
- *I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. (Romans 12:1)*

Both of these verses describe the inward life of the Christian – the heart and the mind – thinking, desiring, hurting, hoping. It is on that level that the indwelling Spirit has power to change us. Prior to salvation, our instincts and thoughts are fleshly, carnal, selfish. Upon conversion, the Spirit of God indwells us and exerts divine power to overcome our naturally selfish and sinful desires. Christ, by the Spirit, lives in me (Galatians 2:20). The Spirit produces righteous desires.

The horse naturally wants to live for itself and, if it's broken, the horse wants to please the rider. How does a horse become a show horse? The horse trusts the rider, wants to please the rider, loves the rider and from happiness in that relationship, submits to the rider's

leadership. Similarly, the battle for control is waged on the level of desire and joy. Our desire for God and His good work in us must be greater than our valuation of life without His control.

*But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh.* (Galatians 5:16)

This is not passive on our part in any way. There is damaging teaching out there that sounds nice, but is dangerously misleading. You've probably heard, *Just let go and let God*. This is known as Quietism or Keswick theology – anything we do comes from the flesh, so we must do nothing. Just release. Surrender. This ignores so many passages that say, fight, work, labor, strive, struggle. These are sweaty words. To be filled with the Spirit is an active submission where I vigorously pursue the Spirit's leadership by starving my flesh and feeding holy desires so that on the heart level, the Spirit of God is in control.

"Let go and let God" is like the horse lying down and saying to the rider, "Now you do everything!" They make those horses into glue, or as I heard from one man in our church who travels internationally, in some places they make them into steak. The best show horse is the horse most determined to please the rider because of the close relationship they enjoy.

Seems to me that there are a lot of passive, lying-down Christians who wonder, *Why don't I have the fruits of the Spirit? I want joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, and the other fruits*. We don't have the fruits because we don't have the filling. We don't have the filling because we are not aggressively seeking it. Feed the flesh and get what the flesh gives. Feed desires for the Spirit and receive the good gifts the Spirit gives. Active submission.

### **His Word is His will (and its faithful application)**

- *Be filled with the Spirit, addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart, giving thanks always...* (Ephesians 5:18-20)
- *Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God.* (Colossians 3:16)

Notice that these verses are virtually identical, except in one he says, *be filled with the Spirit*, in the other he says, *let the word of Christ dwell in you richly*. Hmmm...is this a typo? Which is it? Word of Christ or Spirit of Christ? Holy Scripture or Holy Spirit? It is both.

The Holy Spirit inspired the authors of the Bible so what they wrote were the very words of God. God's Word is God's will. To have God's Word dwell richly in us is to have the Spirit's will and purposes dwell there also. I take this to mean that when I am contemplating, meditating, listening to God's Word (dwelling richly), the Spirit uses His Word to change my will. As His will is increasingly my will, He is exerting greater control, like a bridle. Hence, greater filling.

The Word of God plays a key role in how the Spirit directs our lives. He uses the Word to change our wills so that we want what He wants, and the decisions we make conform to what He would have us do. This also shows us how important obedience is to being Spirit-filled. We are told elsewhere not to grieve the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 4:30) and not to

quench the Spirit (1 Thessalonians 5:19). Sin does both and as sinful desires take root in our will, the Spirit's desires and control are minimized within us.

Most Christians know this. How do we feel on the other side of sin? Great? Do we feel an abundance of peace and love? Sin is pleasurable in the moment, but on the other side, we feel its destructive influence. I try to remind myself of this truth in the battle for sexual purity. I have been a male for 42 years. There have been plenty of times on the other side of letting something linger on TV or whatever, where I think, *Why did I let myself see that?* My memory of how nasty I feel after it helps me avoid it. Sin produces misery. Sin hollows us out. Sin makes us weak. As the Puritans said, sin is its own punishment.

On the other hand, when we deny a temptation, when we obey in a difficult place, it feels great, doesn't it? Have you ever regretted your obedience to God? What does it "feel" like? It feels like joy. It feels like peace. It feels like God's pleasure in us. Things are as they ought to be. I am in sync with my rider. I am filled with the Spirit.

*God's norm is one initiatory baptism with the Spirit followed by a continuous and increasing appropriation of his fullness which involves a steady growth in holiness and into Christian maturity. (John Stott, Baptism and Fullness, p. 88.)*

### **Ask the Holy Spirit to fill you**

I regularly pray this prayer, "Holy Spirit, fill me today; control me." I find it a helpful prayer because it helps remind me through the day to consciously think about how the Spirit would want me to respond or speak or act. We are never told to ask for the Spirit's filling, but we are told to pray for "His will to be done" and it is certainly His will to fill each of us.

Prayer is a powerful tool for filling. Just the act of praying acknowledges that I am not sufficient for things. It also stirs affections and desires for God. It diminishes my flesh. It feeds my soul and requires me to think about my life from a spiritual perspective.

I can't help but notice that in two examples of the filling of the Spirit, Acts 2 and Acts 4, the disciples were praying when they were filled with the Spirit.

*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)*

I have to believe that if we prayed more, we would be filled more.

### **Inspect the fruit more than the experience**

There is always the danger of interpreting the Scripture by our experiences instead of interpreting our experiences by Scripture. When we make our experiences the measure we are making them more important than they should be. I am happy to say that in the Christian life, there are wonderful experiences – spiritual, emotional, physical – that flow from the presence of the Holy Spirit within us. How can the life of heaven by the Spirit dwell in us and NOT have some special times? Like any relationship, there are ups and downs. We shouldn't measure the Spirit's presence by whether we *feel* the Spirit's presence. The real measure of whether the Spirit is filling us is the fruit of the Spirit.

*Pastor Steve, thanks for the message on how to be filled with the Spirit. But how can I know if I am filled with the Spirit? Are the fruits of the Spirit present in your life? Next week's*

message will be on the fruit. I say this because the typical Christian experience includes some wonderful times of spiritual experience with the Lord. When we sense His presence and joy in us. When the beauty of creation whispers to us. When God just decides to fill us with joy. Some people have powerful moments of spiritual joy and gladness in God. But not everybody.

Jonathan Edwards wrote extensively about spiritual experiences he and others experienced during what is known as the Great Awakening in colonial America. His book, *Religious Affections*, is a Christian classic on the subject. Edwards' main point was that a true experience of the Holy Spirit will lead to Christ-exalting, God-centered living. (Guy Davies' blog, *Exiled Preacher*.) Genuine experience produces genuine fruit. Edwards describes one such experience:

*Once, as I rode out into the woods for my health, in 1737, having alighted from my horse in a retired place, as my manner commonly has been, to walk for divine contemplation and prayer, I had a view that for me was extraordinary, of the glory of the Son of God, as Mediator between God and man, and his wonderful, great, full, pure and sweet grace and love, and meek and gentle condescension. This grace that appeared so calm and sweet, appeared also great above the heavens. The person of Christ [was to me] ineffably excellent with an excellency great enough to swallow up all thought and conception ... which continued as near as I can judge, about an hour; which kept me the greater part of the time in a flood of tears, and weeping aloud. I felt an ardency of soul to be, what I know not otherwise how to express, emptied and annihilated; to lie in the dust, and to be full of Christ alone; to love him with a holy and pure love; to trust in him; to live upon him; to serve and follow him; and to be perfectly sanctified and made pure, with a divine and heavenly purity. I have, several other times, had views very much of the same nature, and which have had the same effects.*

DL Moody also spoke of a "blessed experience" he had where "There came a great hunger in my soul. I did not know what it was and I began to cry out to God as never before. I felt I did not want to live if I could not have this power for service."

The Spirit can do what He wants and we should be glad when people are blessed with a sense of God's goodness and love. However, we must not make spiritual experiences the measure of spiritual maturity. We are never told to. We are to seek God and seek His kingdom. If God chooses to give us unique experiential blessings, great. If not, great. These are not measures of spirituality. The measures of the Holy Spirit's filling are the Holy Spirit's fruits. 1 Corinthians 13 says, *If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal.* In other words, spiritual experiences without spiritual fruit mean nothing.

### **Be assured the Spirit longs for us (James 4:5)**

*Or do you suppose it is to no purpose that the Scripture says, "He yearns jealously over the spirit that he has made to dwell in us"?* (James 4:5)

I end where I started. Filling is about relationship. James 4:5 makes it clear that He not only indwells us, but He loves us with a jealous love. He desires our pure devotion. Laziness, sin, a lack of prayer or lack of time in God's Word will not produce His filling. But if we seek Him, ask the Spirit to control us and bear fruit in us, apply the Word faithfully to our lives, and do all we can do to treasure God above all else, this is a life that will be blessed by a deepening relationship with the Holy Spirit.

May we all be filled with the Spirit and mutually bless one another with His gifts and His fruits.

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