

Be Filled with the Spirit

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And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery,
but 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 and for everything to God the Father
in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ,
submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ. – Ephesians 5:18-21

The filling of the Spirit is the most controversial, divisive, and misunderstood ministry of the Holy Spirit. Christians respond to the subject with ignorance, fear, speculation, fanaticism, or indifference. Why is there so much confusion about Spirit-infilling? No teaching and wrong teaching. Rather than arguing doctrinal theories, I want to simply make the point that you must be filled with the Spirit to be a healthy, strong, and growing Christian.

Spirit-infilling is not getting more of the Spirit. When Christ saves you, the Holy Spirit takes up residence in your heart immediately, completely, and permanently (Romans 8:9b). If you are saved, you do not need the Spirit to fall on you. He lives within you. Yet Spirit-indwelling is not Spirit-infilling. The human spirit fails unless the Holy Spirit fills. Ephesians 5:18-21 teaches four dynamics of the Spirit-filled life.

The Contrast to Spirit-Infilling

Ephesians 5:18 begins with a prohibition against drunkenness. Literally, Paul says, “Stop getting drunk with wine.” Christians should not get drunk, because it contradicts our Christian walk, work, and witness. How do you avoid, resist, overcome debauchery? Be filled with the Spirit. Keep being filled with the Spirit. Stay filled with the Spirit. Spirit-infilling is not spiritual intoxication. A drunken person is under the influence; so is a Spirit-filled person. But the two realities are antithetical (Acts 2:14-15). A drunk person loses control. The fruit of the Spirit is self-control (Galatian 5:22-23). Alcohol is a depressant; Spirit-infilling is a stimulant. Spirit-infilling enables you to resist temptation, love obediently, serve faithfully, witness boldly, and suffer joyfully.

The Call to Spirit-Infilling

What does it mean to be filled with the Spirit?

It is a command, not a suggestion. The New Testament never instructs Christians to be baptized, indwelt, gifted, sealed, or anointed by the Spirit. These Spirit-graces are the standard equipment of the Christian life. For this standard equipment to function properly, you must be filled with the Spirit. God commands us to be filled with the Spirit. In fact, the two commands in verse 18 carry the same weight. It is just as sinful for Christians not to be filled with the Spirit, as it is to be drunk with wine.

It is for everyone, not just for a few. Spirit-infilling is all-inclusive. It is not just for Pentecostals and Charismatics, church leaders, super-spiritual saints, ministry participants, or those who desire it. Ephesians 5:21-6:9 teaches every Christian husband and wife, child and parent, employee and employer should be filled with the Spirit. Christians – individually and collectively – are commanded to be filled with the Spirit. What would your home, job, or church be like, if everyone was filled with the Spirit?

It is repeated, not permanent. The filling of the Spirit is not a second work of grace that sanctifies you from sin once-and-for-all. Spirit-infilling is to be a continual experience in the believer's life. When asked if he was filled with the Spirit, D.L. Moody answered, "Yes, but I leak." That is true of every Christian. Keep short accounts with God. When the Holy Spirit convicts you of sin, repent, receive forgiveness through Christ, and submit again to the filling of the Spirit.

It is received, not performed. Spirit-infilling is the work of God, not man. It is our duty to submit to this command. But we must ask God to do it for us. It happens by humble submission, not human achievement. It is like commanding someone to be loved. You cannot do that on your own. To be loved, there must be someone who is willing to love you. Indeed, there is Someone who loves you and wants to fill you. The Holy Spirit is more willing to fill you than you are to be filled!

The Conditions for Spirit-Infilling

How is a Christian filled with the Spirit? Colossians 3:16 says: "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." Then Paul gives the same characteristics of Spirit-infilling he gives in Ephesians 5. Ephesians 5:18 says, "Be filled with the Spirit." Colossians 3:16 says, "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly." To be filled with the Spirit is to be with the word of God. Show me a person who lives the word of God, I'll show you a person who is filled with the Spirit.

Paul exhorts, "Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil" (Ephesians 6:10-11). The Devil wars against the Spirit-filled life. But Christians have the whole armor of God (Ephesians 6:14-17). One piece is defensive and offensive: "the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God" (Ephesians 6:17). When the enemy attacks, the Spirit helps you stand your ground. The Holy Spirit only fights with his own sword. But if the word of God is not in you, the Spirit has nothing to fight with. Bible intake puts a sword in the hand of the Spirit.

The Characteristics of Spirit-Infilling

In Scripture, no Spirit-filled person ever claims to be filled with the Spirit. Jesus said, "He will bear witness about me" (John 15:26) Jesus said, "He will glorify me" (John 16:14). The Holy Spirit is the "shy" member of the Trinity who exalts Christ. Likewise, Spirit-filled Christians do not show off how spiritual, gifted, or mature they are. To be filled with the Spirit is to be empty of self. What are the characteristics of Spirit-infilling?

Worship. Being filled with the Spirit will put a song in your heart: “*addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart*” (Ephesians 5:19). It will not teach you to sing. But it will give you a song. We do not sing to promote ourselves. We sing to build up others. Moreover, we sing to the Lord! The Lord is not impressed with your vocal ability. Singing that pleases God must come from the heart!

Thanksgiving. Spirit-filled people do not grumble, complain, or find fault. Spirit-filled people are thankful people. We give thanks to the Father in the name of the Son by the filling of the Spirit: “giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ” (Ephesians 5:20). Spirit-filled people give thanks unceasingly: “always.” And Spirit-filled people give thanks unconditionally: “for everything.”

Submission. Verse 21 reads: “submitting to one another out of reverence to Christ.” “Submitting” pictures a soldier’s obedience to his commanding officer. “Submit” a bad word to many people. But Spirit-filled people do not politic for a position, pursue platforms, insist on their rights. To get over what the Lord has put under you, you must get under what the Lord has put over you. We submit out of our reverence for Christ. We submit in the fear of God. We submit for Christ’s sake.

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