

FILLED WITH THE SPIRIT

Text: Ephesians 5:18-21

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Let me ask you all this morning: how you are going spiritually? Are you happy with your relationship with Jesus? Is it fruitful and fulfilled? Or are you spiritually dry? I know the Natural Church Development survey showed that 'passionate spirituality' was our lowest factor. But that doesn't mean we are all spiritually low. It could be that the other factors rated higher at the time. But it is good to search ourselves and ask: am I spiritually passionate or just going through the motions? The Apostle Paul knew that Christian lives could be mediocre. That's why he gave the command to the church in Ephesians 5:18 to "*...be filled with the Spirit.*" Paul here writes to Christians. He calls them (1:1) "*...the saints in Ephesus, the faithful in Christ Jesus.*" By commanding them to "*...be filled...*" he is recognising that there are those who are not full of the Spirit. But just what does that mean? If we have confessed Jesus as our Lord we do indeed have the Spirit. As Paul says in 1 Corinthians 12:3 "*...no one can say 'Jesus is Lord', except by the Holy Spirit*". It is the Spirit who gives us new birth and leads us to Jesus. He is the one who puts on the 'finishing touches' of Jesus' work. But if we all have the Spirit as Christians why is there a difference in our experience of the Spirit? Why do some Christians seem full of life and joy and others the opposite? In the desire to experience more of the Spirit many Christians are joining up with Charismatic churches. In a culture that emphasises the sensational over logic there is a tendency to move away from teaching about God to having an experience of God. People wanting something that refreshes, look for things like a 'second blessing in the Spirit'. Do we need that? We need to be careful in this. Jonathan Edwards who led the spiritual revival, the 'Great Awakening' in America, said 'An experience by itself does not prove anything either way.' To know the truth of a matter we must look carefully at what the Bible says. And the Bible does not teach of the need for some extra blessing. But it does make a distinction between the 'gift' of the Spirit and the 'fullness' of the Spirit.

The 'gift' of the Spirit is what God has given to all his children. It is a possession we will never lose. Paul writes in Ephesians 1:14 the Spirit is the *"...deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession."* However the 'fullness' of the Spirit refers to a condition which can fluctuate. It is something we need to work on daily. 'Fullness' of the Spirit does not refer to the amount of the Spirit we have. You cannot have more or less of a person. Either you have the Spirit as a believer or you don't because you are not a believer. Rather 'fullness' refers to how much you are 'under the influence' of the Spirit. It refers to how much we submit to his control. How much we acknowledge his presence. How much we follow his leading. Notice what Paul writes in our text (Ephesians 5:18) *"Do not get drunk on wine... Instead be filled with the Spirit."* We see there the idea that we should be 'under the influence' of the one rather than the other. When we are under the influence of alcohol we lose control of ourselves. When we are under the influence of the Spirit, it is not a case of being 'drunk in the spirit'. We do not lose control. We gain control of life as we allow him to control us. Remember we have said that the 'Fruit of the Spirit' is the Spirit's character. And one of the fruit is 'self control'. We see this same thing in Luke 4:1 *"Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit into the desert"*. Being filled with the Spirit means to be led by him, to be controlled by him.

Paul gives a command here. He says *"...be filled..."* So being filled is not a matter of something happening to us. As a command it demands we do our part. So note the difference. The 'gift' of the Spirit does not depend on what we do. It is God's gift through Christ's work. It is the Spirit who works in our life and brings new birth. Our faith is a sign we have the Spirit. But 'being filled with the Spirit' is dependent on us. It requires our obedient submission to the control of the Spirit. Being 'filled' is something that is often repeated. And if not repeated it needs to be maintained. We have to work at it to keep it at a certain level. We are not puppets in our relationship with the Spirit. We are in a partnership with the Spirit. We cooperate with him in our life of obedience to Jesus. In the parallel passage in Colossians 3:16, where Paul is teaching that church the same thing, he does not say *"...be filled with the Spirit"* but *"Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly... as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts."* So to be filled with the Spirit means feeding yourself on the Word of God and letting that Word dominate how you live. Don't forget the Word of God was inspired by the

Spirit to give us guidance. That's the heart of the matter. We are to be controlled, moved along by the Spirit as we live by the Word of God.

Now, if the 'filling' of the Spirit is not maintained it is lost. If it is lost it can be recovered by submitting and obeying again. Remember Paul's words in Ephesians 4:30 "*Do not grieve the Holy Spirit with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.*" There we see the Spirit will never leave us. By him we are 'sealed'. His presence is our guarantee of eternal life. But even though the Spirit will never leave we can very much "*...grieve the Holy Spirit.*" Grieving the Spirit comes about through sin. We grieve the Spirit when we go against his leading, when we do not follow "*...the word of Christ.*" When the Holy Spirit is 'grieved' he ceases to 'fill' us. When we sin and are not submissive to his leading, in a sense our sin pushes him out. Let me put it like this. In the Bible the Spirit is often seen as 'the living water'. So think of a glass full of water. It is 'filled' with water. If I place stones in that glass of water what happens? The water spills out. It is no longer 'filled' with water. Now it has water and stones. For the glass to be 'full' with water we need to remove the stones. In a similar way repentance is the only road to recovery for us to again 'be filled with the Spirit'.

Now in our text Paul is actually commanding the Christians to "*...go on being filled with the Spirit.*" The NIV translation "*...be filled...*" doesn't quite capture the nuance here. The tense of the command in the Greek means to 'continually go on' being filled. So it is not a matter of a once off experience. 'Being filled' is something that must continually be worked on. It is lifelong. The fact that Paul gives a command here shows that it is all too possible for Christians to have the Spirit and not 'be filled'. Don't we know it. Aren't we often spiritually dry!

But then, how do we determine or measure if we are filled with the Spirit? What does it look like if we are living under his influence? Some suggest it is seen by speaking in tongues. Or having some other ecstatic experience. But the Bible shows that the evidence for being 'Spirit filled' is not so much in the spectacular gifts. Even in the New Testament times it was not the gifts of 'healing' or 'tongues' that demonstrated the Spirit's 'fullness'. We can see that with the church in Corinth. That church was very much into the spectacular gifts. They were into the gifts of tongues and so on. But Paul in his letter to them says in 1 Corinthians 3:1 "*Brothers I could not address you as spiritual but as worldly...*" They indeed had the Spirit in their midst. But they were more 'under

the influence' of the 'world' than of the 'spirit'. By their speaking in tongues they may have claimed a certain 'fullness'. But it was not the 'fullness' of the Spirit. They were 'worldly'. And their 'worldliness' was seen in two things: their childish understanding and their fighting amongst themselves. As Paul writes in verses 2&3 "*I gave you milk not solid food, for you were not ready. Indeed you are still not ready. You are still worldly. For since there is jealousy and quarrelling among you, are you not worldly?*"

In Paul's writings it is rather the 'Fruit of the Spirit' that shows the Spirit's indwelling. Things like "*...love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.*" And we see that also in our text. The command "*Go on being filled with the Spirit*" is followed by four present participles, four results of being 'filled with the Spirit': "speaking, singing, thanking, submitting." Our NIV translates it as (5:19-21) "*Speak to one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in our heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.*" These are the result of being filled with the Spirit. Note how they all have to do with relationships. The Spirit's 'fullness' does not involve just some private mystical experience. It has much more to do with a relationship with God and with our fellow Christians.

The first thing we see here as evidence of being Spirit filled is "*...speaking to one another...*" It is not surprising this is the first consequence since the first fruit of the Spirit is love. And Paul admonished the Corinthians in chapter 13 that "*...the greatest is love*". Without love their other spiritual gifts were of little value. We cannot claim the fullness of the Spirit if we are not on speaking terms with other Christians and loving each other. I find it disturbing how Christians can be critical of who has the more Spirit filled denomination. There can be a sense of elitism and division. Ironically, all in the name of the Spirit. Yet the first sign of being Spirit filled is unity, fellowship. The fellowship is of course a spiritual one, not just a worldly togetherness. Says Paul "*Speak to one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs.*" That does not mean we just sing to each other. Rather Paul means that true fellowship is expressed in worshipping together. We call on each other to worship God. Like the Psalms which call on us "*Oh come let us sing unto the Lord*". Being spirit filled means we encourage each other to praise God, together, in harmony.

That leads us to the second consequence of being spirit filled: *"Singing and making music in our hearts to the Lord."* Here the emphasis is not towards *"one another"* but *"to the Lord"*. The Holy Spirit loves to glorify the Lord. In fact the Spirit is Christ's gift to show that Jesus is glorified as the Ascended Lord. So if we are under the influence of the Spirit then he pulls us together because he is in each of us. And then he draws us to glory together in Jesus. The Spirit filled person loves to talk about Jesus, especially what he has done on the cross and brought forgiveness and hope. The gospel is the song 'in his heart' that overflows to his lips.

Thirdly by the Spirit we will be *"...thanking God always for everything in the name of Jesus."* Many of us give thanks 'sometimes' for 'some things'. The person filled with the Spirit gives thanks "always" for "all things". Thanksgiving is a sign of trust. Even in the most difficult circumstances we are thankful for God's grace in Christ. Grumbling was one of Israel's major sins. The offence was in the fact that it was a symptom of unbelief. It was a sign of lack of trust in God. But the Spirit makes us look at Jesus. In Jesus we know that God has given everything he has. We trust he will provide what we need. And so we give thanks in the name of Jesus, even in pain and suffering.

Finally we can see that we are Spirit filled by our *"...submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ."* Being humble and serving one another is a sign of the Spirit. That is his nature. The Spirit is always self effacing. He doesn't draw attention to himself but always to Jesus. He serves Jesus to bring him honour. The verb 'submitting' occurs 32 times in the New Testament. That's a sign of its importance in Christian behaviour. Look at how the idea of submitting or serving follows on from our text: (5:22,25; 6:1,4,5) *"...wives submit to your husbands...husbands love (submit) your wives, children obey (submit to) your parents, fathers do not exasperate your children...servants obey your masters..."* All these show that we are living under the influence of the Spirit. So if our marriages are no good, if our relationships are sour, no wonder we are spiritually dry. We are not following the guidance of the Spirit. And all the tongue speaking or other such experiences will not fix those relationships.

Well, given what we have said, are we 'filled with the Spirit'? If not let us stop grieving the Spirit by our sin. Let us repent of that which needs changing. As Peter says in Acts 3:19 *"Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord."* So first repent. Then cooperate with the Spirit.

Yield to the Spirit. Come under his influence. Instead of charging into a situation on your own steam, pray for guidance from the Spirit. Get into the Bible and do what it says. We must consciously recognise that God Almighty is residing in us. And every moment of the day rest in his strength, work by his power and follow his leading. That will bring peace to our hearts and thanksgiving in all situations. And the spiritual refreshing that so many thirst for.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION.

These questions can be followed up personally, with a Christian friend, in your small groups, or in discussion after the service. Reflection is important because too often we hear a good sermon and soon forget it without actually growing spiritually or changing in attitude or what we do. The reflection questions are meant to be challenging, because our spiritual growth and the salvation of others is so important.

- Where are you Spiritually? Are you fulfilled in your relationship with Jesus or are you spiritually dry? Why do you think that is?
- Explain the difference between the gift of the Spirit and being filled with the Spirit. How do we push the Spirit out? How are we filled?
- Think through the results of being Spirit filled. Which areas do you need to work on? Where do you most need to listen more to the Spirit?