

The Spirit-filled life

Ephesians 5:18-21

Are you living a Spirit filled life? What does it mean to be Spirit filled? In this series on the inside-out work of the Spirit, I related that many today are misinformed about how the Spirit makes His presence known in the church. I've noted that many view the ministry of the Spirit through an Old Covenant lens, rather than a New Covenant lens. Do you know the difference? Let me quiz you.

Recently, I heard a well-known Pastor/Christian artist speaking on how God uses the church to bring us into His presence. Passionately he explained to the congregates: "God shows up where two or three are gathered in His name. Praise offers heaven an invitation that it can't refuse. When you come together into an atmosphere like this and you glorify God, He moves into the room. And when He moves into the room, He moves on purpose. He comes to change lives." Tauren Wells

Church, let me ask you, did this Pastor give the congregation a New Covenant or an Old Covenant view of how the Spirit makes His presence evident in the church? Perhaps unwittingly, this well-intentioned Pastor presented an Old Covenant understanding of the presence of God. Under the New Covenant, the Holy Spirit, who makes Christ's presence known, doesn't change lives by filling a room, but by filling the lives of surrendered believers.

As we will see from our text, the New Covenant command is not for believers to seek the Spirit to fill a room. The New Covenant command is for believers to be filled with the Spirit.

Main idea: Spirit filled believers continuously yield control to the indwelling Spirit so that the life of Christ shines forth.

To unpack this theme, we are going to look at three keys to living a Spirit filled life.

1. Surrendering to the witness of the Spirit

As we prepare to unfold our text, it's important to note that in the first half of Paul's letter to the church of Ephesus, he expounds on the great blessings of our salvation, and how spiritually rich we are in Christ because of His grace. In the second half of the book, Paul expounds on how our salvation ought to be worked out in our daily lives. The first half shows who we are as God's people in Christ, and the second half calls us to live out who we are as God's people in the world.

Moreover, the first half speaks of how we are no longer strangers and aliens, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, and the second half makes clear that spiritual growth happens best in community with other believers. The first half declares that together believers are a holy temple in the Lord, and the second half describes how we as the dwelling place of God by the Spirit are to reflect His glory in the church. Ephesians 2:21-22

Now having also explained in the first half of chapter five that because we are light in the Lord we are to walk as children of light, the apostle Paul commands in verse 18: *“And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit,”* (Ephesians 5:18).

To not be overcome by the darkness of this world and walk as children of light, we must be filled with the Spirit. What does it mean to be filled with the Spirit? This question brings us to our first point:

To be filled with the Spirit means that we are surrendering to the witness of the Spirit—that we are under the influence and control of the Spirit.

In the New Testament, there are two Greek words (pimplestha and pleroun) which are translated *filled* in reference to the Spirit. The Greek word translated *filled* which is most often found in the book of Acts, is always connected with being empowered for gospel service.

For example, in Acts chapter four, under the threat of persecution, Peter prayed for God to grant boldness to His servants to preach the

gospel. As a result of his prayer, Doctor Luke records in Acts 4:31: “*and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and continued to speak the word of God with boldness.*”

Whereas Luke uses the word *filled* to denote Spirit enabled *Christian service*, the other Greek word Paul uses denotes Spirit controlled *Christian living*.

Regarding the two Greek words translated *filled* in the New Testament, one bible teacher explains: “These terms are used in two primary ways. First, ‘to be filled’ points to the ‘sudden inspiration of a moment,’ leading to various expressions of supernatural ministry impact. The second usage [of the word] refers to a person’s ‘governing characteristic, his controlling disposition.’ [Be filled] refers to the Holy Spirit ruling the heart, mind, and actions of a Christ follower in a consistent way so as to produce the fruit of Christ’s character and affect our relationships with others.” Daniel Henderson

To clarify, *to be filled with the Spirit* does not mean that we need the Spirit to be poured into our bodies from the outside, like water is poured into a glass. The Holy Spirit is the third person of the Godhead. He doesn’t come into us in parts. We don’t get one part of Him now and another part of Him later.

When we’re saved, the full person of the Spirit takes up residence inside of us. The main issue for the believer is not whether the Spirit is a *resident* in him but whether the Spirit is *president* in His heart and life. Ephesians 1:13

To reiterate, being filled with the Spirit speaks of being taken over and controlled by the indwelling Spirit so that the life of Christ is manifested through our mortal bodies. This is why Paul contrasts being filled with the Spirit with being drunk with wine.

What violation is a person charged with when arrested for operating a vehicle while intoxicated? When a person is arrested for having a blood alcohol level that exceeds the legal limit, they’re charged with a DUI or with Driving Under the influence.

Driving under the influence is a crime because when someone whose had too much to drink gets behind the wheel of a vehicle, he is a danger to himself and to others. He's a danger because there's a substance in the body that is influencing and altering his mind, manners and motor skills.

Now in regards to the Christian life, a Christian should not only avoid being drunk on alcoholic beverages or being high on drugs while driving, they should never get drunk. Because of its inhibiting power, and the call to live the Christian life, Paul writes: “...*do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery...*”

Paul is not making a suggestion or giving us good advice. He is commanding Christ's representatives on this earth never to be drunk with wine or as the Greek construction implies, stop getting drunk. Paul gives this prohibition because as he explains in the previous verses, we are to walk wisely through this life. Ephesians 5:15-17

But if you get drunk, you are allowing wine to make a fool out of you. As Proverbs 20:1 explains, “*Wine is a mocker, strong drink a brawler, and whoever is led astray by it is not wise.*” So Paul is saying to Christians, if you want to live wisely, as opposed to acting a fool, don't get drunk.

Furthermore, Paul adds, don't get drunk because it leads to *debauchery*. That is, drunkenness leads to a life that is out of control—to a life that is dominated by sinful, destructive, and self-centered desires.

It's important to emphasize here that Paul is making a contrast not a comparison between being drunk with wine and being filled with the Spirit. He's not saying that we should be drunk with the Spirit, like a person is drunk on wine.

On the contrary, he's saying don't get drunk with wine, but instead be filled with the Spirit. Other than the fact that in both cases one is being influenced by another power, that's where the comparison ends.

Again, Paul is saying don't get drunk because if you do, wine will turn you into a fool and cause you to lose control. Being filled with the Spirit, on the other hand, will make you wise and cause you to gain control—to live a God honoring and self-controlled lifestyle.

How many of you know, there are churches today that teach one can be drunk on the Spirit? And in these churches people who claim to be intoxicated on the Spirit will laugh uncontrollably, and stumble around the sanctuary while speaking with a slurred speech.

This is the opposite of what Paul meant by *be filled with the Spirit*. When you're filled with the Spirit, you don't lose control, you gain control, you walk in wisdom, you live a Christ exalting, joy filled life.

Let me emphasize, the self-controlled, and Christ exalting life of the Spirit is not the result of getting more of the Spirit, but of surrendering and yielding to the Spirit already abiding in us. No where in the New Testament are we taught to seek or pray for the Spirit to **fall** on us, but only to **fill** us.

Daniel Henderson elaborates: "As we walk in the Spirit and worship together, we are not looking for some mysterious "falling" from heaven. Rather, we are pursuing full submission to the One who, because of the work of the cross, already indwells us and longs to transform us from the inside out. Instead of anticipating what the Spirit might do to us, we would do well to focus on what the Spirit is wanting to do in us.

So rather than our common appeals for the Holy Spirit to "fall" or bring down some kind of spiritual rain from heaven, our cry should be, 'Holy Spirit, take complete control of my mind, my heart, and my will. Show Jesus and His glory to me and through me. Make me keenly aware of His holiness and power in my life. Make me fully responsive to Your Word and will that I might become more like Christ and fulfill His purposes in this world—starting right now in my worship of You and my ministry to those around me.'

This, in the true new covenant sense, is the filling of the Holy Spirit in our gatherings as the people of Christ. Rather than searching for an outside-in work that might feel more spectacular, we need to embrace an inside-out work that will be ultimately sanctifying.”

In light of this, it’s important to note that in the original language, Paul’s command to *be filled with the Spirit* is in the *present tense*. This means that the command is a continual necessity, not a one and done experience. As it is often explained, Paul is actually saying, “be being filled with the Spirit.”

It’s also important to note that the command is *plural*. That is to say, it’s not only for some believers but for all believers. Moreover, it’s not a command that we seek only in our personal lives, but that we pursue together as a body of believers.

This brings us to our second point:

2. **Speaking/singing of the wonders of the Savior**

Living a Spirit filled life not only involves surrendering to the witness of the Spirit, but also speaking and singing to one another of the wonders of Christ. Having exhorted believers to *be filled with the Spirit*, Paul continues in verse 19: “*addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart, 20 giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ,*”

Notice here that the characteristics of a Spirit-filled life is a heart overflowing with songs of worship to the Lord and continual thanksgiving for everything to God in the name of Jesus. The primary ministry of the Holy Spirit is to make Christ known in our hearts. And when our hearts are gripped by the glorious revelation of Jesus in the word, we will express it to the Lord in joyful song.

When Paul speaks of *psalms* and *hymns* and *spiritual songs*, he is describing “the full range of singing which the Spirit prompts” (P. T. O’Brien). And it’s important to note here that when we are truly *filled*

with the Spirit, we won't just express it in songs of praise and thanksgiving to God alone, but to one another.

If you've been around the church for a while, no doubt you have heard someone praying for God to *inhabit the praises of His people*, which is a reference to Psalm 22:3. What does this mean? Earlier I quoted a well-known Pastor who said in a recent sermon, "Praise offers heaven an invitation that it can't refuse. When you come together into an atmosphere like this and you glorify God, He moves into the room. And when He moves into the room, He moves on purpose. He comes to change lives" (Tauren Wells).

It's possible that when the Psalmist testified that God *inhabits* the praises of His people, which can also be translated *enthroned* on the praises, He had in mind the presence of God already inhabiting the temple. But I want to suggest to you that if we look at this through a New Covenant lens, God doesn't inhabit a room because we praise Him. We praise the Lord because God's presence is inhabiting us.

We praise God because our hearts are filled with the word of God made alive by the Spirit, and we can't help but sing of the glories of Christ. When Paul wrote of Spirit filled believers addressing one another in songs of worship, he emphasized that these songs flow from the heart, the same heart where the presence of God is made known by the Spirit.

With this in mind, let me ask you, what is the primary means by which the Spirit of God makes the glory of Christ known in our hearts, causing us to overflow with songs of praise? The Spirit of God makes the glory of God known in us as we saturate our hearts with the word of God.

Notice that in Colossians 3, the same characteristics that Paul applies to someone who is filled with the Spirit, He also applies to one in whom the word of God richly dwells. He writes: "*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

Brothers and sisters, we must get our theology not from poor music lyrics but from the word of God, which the Holy Spirit uses to reveal the praise worthiness of Christ in our hearts.

According to the teachings of the New Covenant, the presence of God doesn't fill a room when we praise God. We praise God because we are filled or controlled by the Spirit—because we are filled with the wonder of Christ—because we are filled with the reality of our salvation in Him, because the promises of God's word are made real in our hearts by the power of the Spirit—so real that we can't help but sing and give thanks unto God in the name of Jesus!

As Daniel Henderson explains: “There is no New Testament verse, teaching that music is a means of mediating the presence of the Holy Spirit. In some gatherings it seems that the worship leaders are trying to improve God's status or even ‘channel’ the Holy Spirit through the music, which is far more akin to mysticism than to biblical Christianity. Michael Horton notes, ‘Vagueness about the object of our praise inevitably leads to making our own praise the object. Praise therefore becomes an end in itself, and we are caught up in our own ‘worship experience’ rather than in the God whose character and acts are the only proper focus.’” Daniel Henderson

It's important that we worship together in prayer, in the word and in song not because the presence of God enters the room when we do, but because Spirit led prayers, faithful bible teaching, and biblically sound song lyrics will renew our minds and stir our hearts to worship God in Spirit and in truth.

This brings us to our final point:

3. Submitting to the wisdom of the Saints

In addition to surrendering to the witness of the Spirit, and speaking and singing of the wonders of Christ, living a Spirit filled life involves submitting to the wisdom of the saints. Concerning the characteristics

of the Spirit filled life, Paul continues in verse 21: “*submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ.*” Ephesians 5:21

Beloved, in essence, the Spirit-filled life, according to Ephesians 5:1-3, is a life that shows forth the compelling love of Jesus. Because of the love of Jesus, He submitted Himself to the will of His father, He became flesh to serve man by ultimately dying on the cross on our behalf.

Likewise, Spirit filled believers submit to God by submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ and in service to His cause.

As we learned last week, Spirit filled Christians don't think they know it all. They have an accurate assessment of themselves in view of the mercies of God in Christ. They understand that a commitment to Christ is a commitment to other believers so that together we might spread the glory of Christ in the world.

To live a Spirit filled life, as Daniel Henderson explains, “There must be a willingness in the Christian fellowship to serve any, to learn from any, to be corrected by any, regardless of age, sex, class, or any other division.”

Recently, I heard a pastor (Tauren Wells) share a powerful illustration about the importance of mutual submission and cooperation among believers. As he was delivering his sermon, he opened up a package containing 6 guitar strings. He went on to explain that on their own, guitar strings cannot serve the purpose they were made for. They must be connected to a guitar.

A guitar has a head stock, where a guitarist tunes his guitar and a body where the sound hole is located. To serve the purpose they were designed to operate in, guitar strings must be attached not only to the head stock, but also to the body.

Many believers want to be attached to Christ, but they don't want to be connected to the body of Christ, which is the church, especially if that means getting stretched. But like guitar strings must be attached to

both the *head stock* and the *body*, believers also must be willing, out of love and reverence for Christ, to be attached and connected.

There are different sounds guitar strings make when they are stretched. When they are stretched and in tune, they make beautiful music in the hands of a guitarist. Moreover, in order to make harmonious music, the strings must be stretched until there is tension. Without tension, the strings will not fulfill the purpose for which they were designed. The reason a guitar string can make a sound is because it's held in tension.

“You know what we experience when we are connected to the head which is Christ and to the body which is the church? **Tension!**” Many Christians do not want connection and attachment because they don't want tension. But, as the preacher said, “until there is tension, you cannot discover God's intention for you.”

What if we were comfortable being connected wherever God would have us be connected. What if we weren't fighting about who gets to play which note? What if we put aside our preferences, our desires to be served, and our stubborn pride, and instead submit to one another and serve one another out of reverence for Christ? What if we were patient with one another and forgiving? What if we didn't give up on one another when relationships get difficult and stayed committed to one another for the sake of Christ and His cause?

How many of you know, if we cut and run when things get tense, when our faith gets tested, the difference only Christ can make in our lives will not be seen and known. But “if you're willing to put your life in tension, you will realize a beautiful melody can come from your life” and the life of those you're attached to. Held in tension together by the love of the Spirit, we can show forth the praise of Him who called us out of darkness into His marvelous light. 1 Peter 2:9

Conclusion

Beloved, if you've trusted Christ as Savior and Lord, He lives in you in the person and power of the Holy Spirit. And His life will be manifested

in us and through us as we live a Spirit filled life. We don't need the Spirit to fall on us from the outside in, but to fill us from the inside out.

We live the Spirit filled life not by seeking an inflow of the Spirit, but by experiencing a continual outflow of the Spirit as we fully surrender to His indwelling presence and live in mutual service and submission in the body of Christ.

May we be willing for our faith to be stretched in submission to Christ and one another so that together we realize the melody and harmony that only Jesus can produce in our lives to the glory of His name.