

“Are You Filled with the Spirit?”

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Ephesians 5:18-21

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A man walks into a lumber yard and said he wanted to buy 10 – “2 be 4’s”. The puzzled clerk asked, “Are you sure it isn’t 2x4’s?” “Let me check,” the man responded. He walked out to the car, conferred with a woman who was sitting inside and then came back into the store. “Yes, it is 10 – 2x4’s that we want.” “Okay, how long do you want them?” the clerk asked. “Let me check.” The man said. Again he went out to the car, conferred and then came back into the store. “We want them for pretty long. We are going to use them to build our house.”

Friends, communication can be difficult, especially when we are not sure what people meant by some of the words they use. That can happen in the church with some of the jargon we use. One label that can be somewhat confusing is “spirit filled.” When I was in high school someone asked me, “Dan, are you a spirit filled Christian?” I was not sure whether I was supposed to be or not, so I asked, “Are you one?” The person responded, “Yes,” so I said, “Yah, I am too.” At times I am still not quite sure what people mean by that phrase. This ad appeared in a newspaper a few years ago. “Help Wanted: Spirit-filled hairstyling shop need an experienced hairstylist.” I am not sure how the shop can be spirit filled, but I guess that would be an okay place to get a haircut. Friends, today our journey through Ephesians brings us to 5:18-21. If you have your Bible, you can turn there. Today we will focus on what the Bible means by the phrase “spirit-filled.” As we do, my hope is that each of us would desire to be truly filled with the spirit. Let’s pause and pray that will happen.

Let’s start by reading our text. **Ephesians 5:18-21 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.** The question here is: are you filled with wine, or are you filled with the Spirit? Paul starts by telling us, “Do not get drunk.” That is not shocking. Even the alcohol industry

acknowledges that abusing alcohol can be very destructive. The Bible’s command is clear: Do not be drunk, do not abuse alcohol. That is good advice. But it is not Paul’s real concern in this passage. His command not to get drunk is used as a contrast to being filled with the Spirit. Instead of being fill with spirits, be filled with *the Spirit*.

Now, there are actually some similarities between being drunk and being spirit filled. We say a drunk driver is driving under the influence of alcohol. A spirit filled person is under the influence of the Holy Spirit. Exuberant behavior is sometimes associated with both. At Pentecost, Acts 2, the suggestion was made that the apostles were drunk with wine, when really they were filled with the Spirit. Now, of course, that was a false accusation, but apparently the speaking in tongues and overall exuberance made people think of a wild party.

However, there are some important contrasts between being filled with wine and being filled with the Spirit. A drunk person loses self-control, but self-control is a fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:23). The more someone is filled with the Spirit, the more self-control he/she has. Another difference is, that despite what TV ads may imply, alcohol is not a stimulant, but a depressant. It dulls the mind and impairs our abilities. On the other hand, we could say that being filled with the Spirit has a stimulation effect. It enhances, sharpens and strengthens us in our soul. In his community John Stott says, “The Holy Spirit stimulates our every faculty—the mind, intellect, hear and will.” Some call this a natural high. Really it is a supernatural high and it is absolutely healthy. We need to “just say no,” to being drunk with wine, and say, “yes,” to being filled with the Spirit.

“Okay, Pastor Dan. But what exactly does it mean to be filled with the Spirit?” There are a couple things to keep in mind. First, the Holy Spirit is a person, not a force. You may be inclined to view Him as an imaginary figure. Yet, the Bible clearly teaches that though the Spirit is not a physical being, He is real and He is a He, not an it. The Bible always uses the male pronoun to describe Him. The Holy Spirit is God, the third person of

Godhood, the Holy Trinity. He is often called “the Spirit of God” or “the Spirit of Christ.” Years ago, Christians referred to Him and the “Holy Ghost.” Some folks still do today, but that might be a confusing label. Getting “filled with the Holy Ghost” may sound a little eerie. Second, the Holy Spirit has a multifaceted ministry in our lives. It is the Holy Spirit who convicts people of their sin, brings spiritual life to those who are spiritually dead, and enables them to turn to the Lord Jesus of salvation. And the Holy Spirit indwells every genuine Christian. **Romans 8:9 You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. And one who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him.** If the Holy Spirit does not indwell you, you are not really a Christian. So even though not every Christian is filled with the Spirit, all true Christians are indwelt by the Spirit. Only those who put their trust, their faith, in Jesus as Savior and Lord have the Holy Spirit. If you have not done that, that is what you need to do. If you are not sure what I mean by trusting in Jesus Christ, we need to chat real soon.

So what is the difference between having the Spirit, when every believer in Jesus does, and being filled with the Spirit, which Paul commands Christians to do? “Be filled with the Spirit,” is how English Bibles translate that phrase in verse 18. That is accurate, but misses some nuances of the Greek verb. Better is John Stott’s translation of this verse, “Let the Spirit continually fill you.” So, what is the significance?

First, “Let the Spirit continually fill you” reflects the passive voice of the Greek verb. Being filled with the Spirit is something we allow, more than something we do. There is no duty to perform, no technique to master nor magical words to utter that will fill you with the Holy Spirit. You cannot wake up in the morning and drink some Spirit filled shake. The Holy Spirit does the filling. We allow Him to influence our lives. I find this illustration from Charles Hummel to be helpful. It is found in a marvelous little book, “My Heart, Christian’s Home.” Your life is like a house with different rooms. As a Christian, the Holy Spirit now lives in your house. Yet, you still have the keys. You can choose to lock some doors and try to keep the Spirit out of certain rooms or closets. Maybe it is the room where your money is. Or maybe it is the room where you watch TV and surf the internet. Perhaps it is where you keep that pet sin of gossip. Though you are a Christian, you can

still choose to try to prevent the Holy Spirit from influencing these aspects of your life. But, people filled with the Spirit, joyfully give the Holy Spirit full access to their lives. They submit to the Spirit’s will and want Him to influence every aspect of life. We need to let the Spirit fill us.

Second, “Let the Spirit *continually fill you*” reflects the fact the verb is in the present tense, not aorist. This means this is not a one time, completed act or event, but has a continuing dimension. Last night I had pizza for dinner. I probably won’t eat like that again until maybe 12:30 today. It is amazing. We can stuff ourselves full of food and just hours later feel like we are starving. Our bodies have a continuous, not constant, but continuous need for food. In a similar way, we have a spiritual need to be continually filled with the Holy Spirit. If someone says, I was filled with the Spirit in 2012, I think, maybe even say, “That’s too bad. That is a long time ago. I wonder what has happened in that person’s life since then.” When I was a kid we had a plastic pool in our backyard during the summer. We also had to occasionally run into the house to get a bucket of water because the pool leaked and we had to keep filling it up and I guess we didn’t have a garden hose. Friends, you and I, whether we like it or not, tend to be leaky vessels. We have little cracks and holes throughout our souls. We need to let the Spirit continually fill us.

Third, “Let the Spirit continually fill *you all*.” That translation would reflect that the “you” is plural, not singular. The command is addressed not to one individual, but to every Christian in Ephesus, really every Christian anywhere. Remember, you can have the Spirit, but not be filled with the Spirit. Yet, God desires that all who have the Spirit, every genuine Christian, receive that filling. Spirit filled Christians are not meant to be some elite group. It is not just Pastors, Deacons and Sunday School teachers who should be filled with the Spirit. Every one of you who is a believer in Jesus, should let the spirit continually fill you.

Now, at this point you may be thinking, “Wow, I hope I am doing okay. How do I know if I am letting the Spirit continually fill me?” A few years ago a common idea was that a Spirit filled Christian was someone who spoke in tongues. Now, I am not necessarily against speaking in tongues. Paul says it is one of the gifts of the Holy

Spirit. However, I don't think it really has anything to do with being filled by the Spirit. Why do I say that? Because there are Spirit filled Christian who speak in tongues and there are Spirit filled Christian who have never spoken in tongues. There are people who speak in tongues who are not filled with the Spirit and there are certainly Christian who don't speak in tongues who are not filled by the Spirit. "But Pastor Dan, if there is no correlation between speaking in tongues and being filled with the Holy Spirit, how do we know if someone is Spirit filled?" In the next few verses, the apostle Paul gives three exhortations. I believe those who are spiritual will obey these, not perfectly, but consistently. If you are doing the things Paul says you should be doing, that is a good indication that you are indeed a spirit-filled Christian.

Number one, if you are filled with the Spirit you delight in worship. Paul says, **Ephesians 5:18b, 19 Be filled with the Holy Spirit, addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart.** Note that worship here includes both praise to God and encouragement to other believers. Yes, it is possible to worship when you are out in the woods, in the car or in the shower. Yet, true New Testament worship involves meeting together with other believers in Jesus Christ. Yes, that means that watching the worship service on YouTube is a wonderful substitute, but not the real thing. When we gather, music plays a big part in our worship. The words of Martin Luther found in the beginning of that green hymnal in the pew rack says it well: "Music is a fair and glorious gift of God. I am strongly persuaded that after theology, there is no art that can be placed on the level with music. Besides theology, music is the only art capable of affording peace and joy to the heart. The devil flees before the sound of music almost as much as he does before the Word of God." Amen!

Paul lists three types of songs that are used in worship – psalms from the Old Testament. Those are God's inspired words put to music; hymns, where are songs that worship and praise God for who He is and what He has done; and Spiritual songs. I think the latter is a broad category which may include lyrics that testify about our own spiritual experiences and encourage other is their faith. Now, I suppose there were some in Ephesus

who said, "Why do we have to sing those old psalms. They were written a thousand years ago." Others, maybe said, "I wish we didn't have to sing those 'spiritual songs.' They are new and I don't know them very well." Paul says, "Sing all those songs. Each can play a part as you worship together. And if you are filled with the spirit, your souls will be encouraged by all of them." Friends, the Christian church has a rich and diverse musical tradition. We have old favorite hymns, like "Amazing Grace" and "How Great Thou Art." We also have various flavors of contemporary worship music that we sing on Sunday mornings. There is also Christian rock music, black gospel, southern gospel, Christian country music, Christian rap, and classical sacred music. Those genres may not have a lot of value in corporate worship, but they can truly encourage your soul at other times.

Now, guess what? There are conflicts in churches over what type of music should be involved in worship. A few years ago someone said, in the average church, 25% of the congregation think the music should be more contemporary, 25% think it should be more traditional, 25% think the blend is just right, and 25% cannot tell the difference. A spirit filled Christian prefers certain types of music, but he/she learns to appreciate any music that praises the true God, exalts the gospel and encourages believers in Jesus. Spirit filled Christians don't pout because a worship time doesn't include their favorite songs. No, they are delighted for any opportunity to sing songs which truly honor the Lord.

Number two, a spirit filled person is thankful. An attitude of gratitude is evident in his/her life. We are to be **Ephesians 5:20 Giving thanks always and for everything to God that Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.** That is what is at the heart of what corporate worship is to be about, expressing thanks to God. It should also characterize our attitude throughout the week. Some folks have the ability to complain in almost any situation. Yet, a spirit of grumbling is really not compatible with being spirit filled. So what does Paul mean by "giving thanks always?" Should we be thankful for bad things that happen? When you hear that a friend fell down the stairs and broke his ankle are you supposed to shout, "Thank you Jesus!" No, I don't think so.

But, don't miss the point Paul is making. When difficult times come, even when tragedy strikes, we need to be thankful people. Oh, you may have one of those terrible, horrible, no good, very bad days where you feel like moving to Australia. Your favorite football team may get beat in the playoffs, again...or maybe not make the playoffs, again. You may hit the side of your garage door with your car, you may get a heating bill that is 50% more than a year ago, you may find out that your parents are getting a divorce, or the doctor may tell you that the biopsy shows cancer. Yet, in these situations you should still give thanks to the Lord. Why? Not because any of those things are fun or good. But we can always thank God for who He is and for what He has done, is doing and will do for us through Jesus Christ. That is why we come together to each Sunday, and what each of you can do throughout the week. At Robb Maki's funeral, Rachel and her children were able to give thanks to the Lord, even in what I know seemed like their darkest hour. They were thankful for people who had comforted them, thankful for the wonderful memories they had of Robb, and thankful for the promise of eternal life and the hope of the resurrection. That gratitude, in the midst of adversity, is the mark of individuals who are filled by God's spirit.

Number three, a spirit filled Christian submits to others. We are to be **Ephesians 5:21 Submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ**. Now, submitting to others does not mean that you are inferior or that you should let people treat you like a doormat. To submit does, however, mean that you don't demand your own way. It means you focus not on your own needs, but on what others need. No, that is not easy to do. However, spirit filled Christians have already submitted to Jesus Christ and have learned that the key to joy is not always doing what they want to do, but rather seeking to honor God and serve others. In a world full of strife and conflict, where it seems everyone is trying to get ahead of someone else, it is obvious we need men and women filled with the spirit of God, who are willing to submit to others.

Friends, today the question I need to ask you is this: Are you filled with the Holy Spirit? Do you delight in worshipping the Lord? Do you have a thankful attitude both on Sunday mornings and throughout the week? Are you willing to submit for the sake of others' needs? If you are doing those things, great. Just remember that being

filled once by the Spirit is not enough. All through your Christian life you need to continue to be filled by God's Spirit. And if you are not filled by the Spirit, or not sure that you are, here is what you need to do.

#1 Make sure you have the Holy Spirit, that He is indwelling your soul. In other words, make sure you are truly a Christian, someone who is trusting in Jesus Christ for salvation, rather than in yourself or in anything else. Remember, if you are not a genuine Christian, you don't have the Spirit of God within you.

#2 If you are a believer in Jesus, you should examine your life to see what may be preventing you from being filled with the Spirit. Are there parts of your life where you are keeping the door locked so that you can do things your own way, rather than God's way? If so, it is time to unlock that door or doors, confess your sin, and ask God's Spirit to fill that part of your life.

#3 Simply pray and ask the Holy Spirit to fill you. That is not a bad prayer for every morning. "Lord, fill me with your Spirit so I can live for your glory today." It is something you can pray right now as we sing this song, "Spirit of the Living God, Fall Fresh on Me."