

## Being Filled with the Spirit

*Ephesians 5:18-21*

A father passing by his son's bedroom was astonished to see that his bed was nicely made and everything was picked up. Then he saw an envelope, propped up prominently on the pillow, addressed to “Dad.” With the worst premonition he opened the envelope with trembling hands and read the letter.

*Dear Dad:*

*It is with great regret and sorrow that I'm writing you. I had to elope with my new girlfriend because I wanted to avoid a scene with Mom and you. I have been finding real love with Stacy and she is so nice. But I knew you would not approve of her because of all her piercing, tattoos, tight motorcycle clothes and the fact that she is much older than I am. But it's not only the love... Dad, we're going to have a baby!*

*Stacy said that we will be very happy. She owns a trailer in the woods and has a stack of firewood for the whole winter. We share a dream of having many more children. Stacy has opened my eyes to the fact that marijuana doesn't really hurt anyone. We'll be growing it for ourselves and trading it with the other people that live nearby for cocaine and ecstasy.*

*Don't worry, Dad. I'm 15 and I know how to take care of myself. Someday I'm sure that we will be back to visit so that you can get to know your grandchildren.*

*Love,  
Your Son, David*

*PS. Dad, none of the above is true. I'm over at Tommy's house. I just wanted to remind you that there are worse things in life than the report card that's in my center desk drawer.*

*I love you.*

*P.P.S. Call me when it's safe to come home.*

That young man's strategy may not have been the best approach, but he may have stumbled onto something nonetheless. Before he told his dad what *was* true, he told him what was *not* true. That is the approach we're going to take this morning when we talk about being filled with the Spirit. There are so many misconceptions about what “being filled with the Spirit” means, that we are first going to look at what it doesn't mean—what is *not* true about it—before we look at what it does mean—what *is* true about it.

What happens many times when there is a misconception about a particular subject is that people tend to lean all the way in the opposite direction. It is almost a knee-jerk reaction to anything we don't like or understand. That may be the case with the whole idea that Paul introduces to us in Ephesians 5:18—“*Do not get drunk on wine (we can agree with that part of it), which leads to debauchery. (Here's the part where we might have some difficulty) Instead, be filled with the Spirit.*” Why do we have trouble with it? Because we have misunderstood it. So let's clear this up. I realize that we may use some terminology which may be unfamiliar to some, but don't check out just yet. We're going to make sure that everyone moves along at the same speed. Let's first talk about what being filled with the Spirit *is not*.

***First, it is not strictly an emotional experience.*** Having said that, it is possible that there will be a great deal of emotion associated with being filled with the Holy Spirit. There is a lot of Scriptural evidence and even from our own experiences that point to the filling of the Holy Spirit being accompanied by great joy, which sometimes is manifested through emotion. Joy and emotion are not necessarily the same thing, either. But the emotion itself is not evidence that one is being filled by the Spirit.

***Second, it is not speaking in tongues.*** In the second chapter of Acts, we find the disciples gathered together when the Day of Pentecost came. They were waiting in Jerusalem, just as Jesus told them to do, for the “power from on high” which would come to them through the Holy Spirit. “*Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them*” (2:2-4). We read that beautiful and amazing passage and automatically confuse the two. We read that they were filled with the Holy Spirit and that they spoke in tongues, and we automatically assume that the two are one and the same. We do that because we are ignorant of what the Scripture really teaches.

So here is the truth of God's Word: the phenomenon of speaking in other earthly languages occurred at three major events in Acts. The first was when the Holy Spirit was first given to the Jews on the Day of Pentecost in Acts 2. The second and third were when the Holy Spirit was given to the Gentiles in Acts 10, and again in Acts 19. That's it! There's no other occurrence of this happening in the entire book of Acts.

But what we *do* see happening in the Book of Acts over and over and over is that the disciples were “filled” with the Holy Spirit. When Peter stood before the Sanhedrin in Acts 4, we read that he was “filled with the Holy Spirit,” but there is no mention of speaking in tongues. Later in Acts 4, when the disciples prayed for boldness to proclaim Christ, we read “*After they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy*

*Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly*” (4:31). Again, there is no mention of speaking in tongues with this filling.

Seven men, whom we believe to have been the first deacons, were selected in Acts 6. The twelve disciples told the people, “*Brothers, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom*” (6:3). Notice what is missing: the church was not told to select men who had spoken in tongues, but men who were full of the Spirit. One of the Seven, Stephen, was stoned to death in Acts 7 for his faith. We read in verse 55, “*But Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, looked up to heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God.*” He was full of the Spirit, but he was not speaking in tongues. I don’t want to belabor the point here, but there are several other examples in Acts, and you can research them for yourselves. Being filled with the Spirit is not the same as speaking in tongues.

***Third, it is not the same as being baptized in the Spirit.*** To our shame, “baptism in the Holy Spirit” is not a term we use a lot in Baptist churches. It goes back to what we said earlier about having a “knee-jerk” reaction to others’ use of the terms. “Baptism” by the Holy Spirit is something which occurs in us once when we are born again. The Holy Spirit comes to dwell in us permanently the instant we receive our salvation. Peter preached on the Day of Pentecost, and told the people, “*Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.*” So from the very beginning it was understood that the Holy Spirit is given as a gift at the moment of salvation. Paul asked the Corinthians “*Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God?*” (1 Corinthians 6:19)

So being filled with the Spirit is not mere emotion, it is not speaking in tongues, and it is not the same as being baptized in the Spirit. Let’s dig a little bit and find out what it *is*. Paul began by saying to them, “*Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery.*” Now the King James Version reads, “***And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess.***” The little word “and” is left out of many modern translations for some reason. When you include the word “and” you see that verse 18 is connected to the verses just before it. Then we understand that being filled with the Spirit is directly related to *being careful how we live* (v. 15), *making the most of our time* (v. 16) and *doing the will of God* (v. 17). So let’s look at what being filled with the Spirit *is*:

### **Being filled with the Spirit means that we are controlled by the Spirit.**

Look at the word “drunk.” In our day, we all know what it means to be drunk, even if we’ve never personally been in that condition. It meant the same thing in Paul’s day: When a person is drunk, he says things he doesn’t mean. She does things she wouldn’t ordinarily do. They are controlled by it. The word Paul used is interesting. When a leatherworker was trying to stretch the hide of a bull, he would soak it in fat, to make it more elastic. That’s the description Paul used here. “Don’t be soaked in wine. Life can sure get stretched out of shape if you do.”

There may be someone here today who will hear this and say, “Well, I enjoy a little bit of alcohol every now and then. I certainly don’t ‘soak’ myself in it. So it must be okay to have a little bit once in a while. It must be okay as long as I don’t get drunk.” Don’t pull the verse out of context just to suit what you want to do. When Paul says, “Don’t be soaked in wine,” he goes on to say that instead, we are to be filled with the Spirit. The two possibilities are exact opposites of each other. So here is a good test for determining whether drinking alcohol or engaging in any other questionable thing is right or wrong. **Can you do this thing and still be filled with the Spirit?** Can I dabble a little bit in something questionable, and still allow myself to be filled by the Holy Spirit? As Charles Spurgeon said years ago, “If you take your hats off to the devil today, you will have to take your shoes off to him soon. And by-and-by you will become utterly his slaves.”

What the world needs, what the Church of God needs, is a committed, sold-out mass of believers who have turned their backs on the attitude that says that it’s okay to play a little bit with the things of the world. People who rationalize like that are the very ones who also dabble a little bit in the Holy Spirit, but listen carefully: The Holy Spirit is not to be dabbled in or experimented with. He wants to fill you, and control you. He wants you to soak yourself in Him.

Think deeper. If a person drinks even a little bit of alcohol, his brain is affected. His ability to make decisions and react physically to danger is impaired. His behavior is changed. His speech and even his ability to walk may be affected. In the same way, being filled with the Holy Spirit produces a change in the way we think, and talk, and even the way we live.

That is the specific meaning, but don’t miss the broader application. He just as easily could have named anything else which was so prevalent in the culture. The point is that as followers of the Lord Jesus we should never allow ourselves to be controlled by anything else other than the Holy Spirit of God. Don’t be soaked in wine, or power, or money, or sex, or greed, or popularity, or fear, or ambition, or depression, or regret, or anything else that might control your actions and prevent you from being all that God wants you to be.

Do you have a problem with anger, or lust, or greed, or even apathy? Maybe it’s just one of those days when there are a bunch of little irritating things that happen, one after the other. And the whole day seems to have turned sour and bad because of a few exasperating circumstances. The Word of God says that you should not let those things control you, that instead, you are to surrender the control of your life to Him, so that we say, “**This** is not going to control me; **He** is going to control me. **These** circumstances are not going to determine whether I have a good day or not, because the Holy Spirit of God is in charge of me and what happens to me.” We can only say that if we have surrendered ourselves to Him on a daily basis.

Next, look at the word “filled.” We can fill a glass to the brim with water, and that glass will be full. But there are other meanings, too. The word in verse 18 was used to refer to the sails on a ship being filled with wind so that the ship is pushed along across the water. When we are filled by the Spirit, the sails of our hearts billow out as our lives are propelled along in the direction God chooses for us.

When your life is filled by the Spirit, it means that you don’t have to strive and work and struggle—it means that you merely make sure your “sail” is in place to catch the mighty wind of the Spirit as He blows across your life! It means that the primary responsibility we have as a church is to make absolutely sure that our sails are hoisted and in place, so that we are ready and willing to go wherever the Spirit leads us.

Have you surrendered to Him? Have you said to Him, “I take my hands off my life; I surrender control of my entire being to You?” Now that you’ve heard what the Word of God says, are you willing to be obedient to the Holy Spirit?