

Being Controlled By The Spirit

Ephesians 5:18-21

The last time we were in Ephesians, we explored chapter 5, verse 18, where Paul tells us that we should not allow anything to come between us and our relationship with the Lord. He specifically tells us to “be filled with the Spirit,” instead of allowing other things to dominate our lives and behavior. We talked about the fact that whatever we give ourselves to will be that very thing that controls us.

So we came to the conclusion that being filled with the Spirit means that we are controlled by the Holy Spirit. 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.

Today we dig a little deeper. If being filled with the Spirit means that we are controlled by the Spirit, then what does being controlled by the Spirit mean? It could and does mean a myriad of different things, but here is a very important truth:

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

If you are filled with the Spirit, you are controlled by the Spirit. That’s the way it works! The words Paul uses are in the present tense, so they are translated, “Keep on being filled.” Being baptized by the Spirit happens once at the moment of your salvation, but being filled by the Spirit should happen continually. This is a glorious surrender of our beings so that every moment is a joyful experience as we open ourselves up to His work in us.

It is wrong for us to say “Well, I was filled with the Spirit thirty years ago, so I don’t have to concern myself with that anymore.” Oh, how wrong that is! Are you saying that for thirty years you have done only what the Spirit has led you to do? We know that’s impossible because of the presence of sin in our lives, don’t we? That thirty-year-old experience is stagnant. Your life in Christ is stale. What you need right now is to have a fresh infilling of God’s Holy Spirit into your being. It is something that must happen on a continual, daily basis. Being filled with the Spirit means that we are hungry and thirsty for God. The psalmist sang, “*As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God*” (Psalm 42:1-2a).

Now here comes a very important question: how can you tell if you are filled with and controlled by the Holy Spirit? There are several indicators, but Paul mentions at least four in verses 19-21, and they all have to do with being filled, or controlled, by the Holy Spirit.

1 Spirit-controlled people worship together, v. 19a.

Paul tells us that we are to “*Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs.*” Bible scholars admit that they really don’t know what the distinctions are between psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. The emphasis, though, is on the fact that this was something they did together. We really do need each other, even if we don’t always agree on every little detail. When we are filled with the Spirit, the little things which would ordinarily divide us fade away, because the most important thing is being controlled by the Holy Spirit, and not by our own petty desires and prejudices. If I am filled with the Spirit, I can’t wait to be with other Christians to join together in worship and celebration!

This doesn’t mean that I merely go through the motions. It doesn’t mean that I merely warm the place on the pew, that I stand when I’m told to stand, that I bow my head when I’m told to bow my head, that I give when I’m told to give. It means that I actually participate with my whole being, that my will is surrendered and my heart is engaged.

2 Spirit-controlled people sing, v. 19b.

Verse 19 goes on to tell us that we are to “*sing and make music in your heart to the Lord.*” Pay attention to this: verse 19 does not mean that our worship services are contests or showcases for musical talent. It is simply an acknowledgement that when we are filled with the Holy Spirit of God, singing is the natural response of a joyful heart that is controlled by the Spirit. If I am filled with the Spirit, my singing is from my heart and not just my mouth. I may not be talented in that area; I may only be able to make a joyful noise, but if I am filled by the Spirit, I simply cannot hold it in. I offer this “to the Lord” as the Scripture says here, and if I truly am offering it “to the Lord” then I am not so concerned about what other people are thinking, am I? And if I am more concerned about what other people are thinking about my singing and my worship than I am about whether the Lord is pleased with my singing and my worship, that’s a good sign that I still have some growing up in Christ to do.

According to verse 19, our Christian singing has two audiences. We are to sing to each other reminding each other about God’s character and His work in Christ, but our singing is also to be directed to the Lord as a way of offering praise to Him.

This is what we read in the Scriptures. “*Sing joyfully to the Lord, you righteous; it is fitting for the upright to praise him. Praise the Lord with the harp; make music to him on the ten-stringed lyre. Sing to him a new song; play skillfully and shout for joy.*” (Psalm 33:1-3) “My

soul will be satisfied as with the richest of foods; with singing lips my mouth will praise you.” (Psalm 63:3)

And here’s another: *“He put a new song in my mouth, a hymn of praise to our God”* (Psalm 40:3a).

3 Spirit-controlled people are thankful people, v. 20.

Read this carefully: *“Always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.”* Many Christians today have forgotten what New Testament thanksgiving is all about. It’s about remembering what Jesus did for us on the Cross, and how He rose triumphantly from death, and how He ascended to Heaven, and how one day He is coming again. Philippians 4:6 reads, *“Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.”*

Being thankful means that I recognize I am not the one in control, that all I have comes from Him. It means that I recognize the work of Christ in my life, and that I have surrendered my entire life to Him in gratefulness and thanksgiving.

4 Spirit-controlled people submit to one another, v. 21.

We are told in that verse that we are to *“submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.”* It doesn’t say that some Christians are to submit to some other Christians. It says that we all are to submit to all others, and that our reverence for Christ is to be our motive for doing so. This may be the most important of all of them “because true submission always involves giving up your right to be in control in every situation. When we submit from the heart, we are saying, ‘I don’t have to have my way all the time.’ Only a heart touched by the Holy Spirit can maintain such an attitude in every relationship of life.” (Ray Pritchard)

It means that I stop complaining when things don’t go the way I like them. You know why? Because if I’m controlled by the Spirit, then I’m not in control—He is! It means that I quench the hellish tendency to gossip and criticize when something happens that I don’t like. As long as there is no violation of Scripture, I surrender my right to be in control, and I submit to the overall health of the Body of Christ.

Oliver B. Greene has written,

One of the greatest needs of the church today is for people to fear God, and work in harmony and unity. One of the terrible sins in the church today is the lack of unity. As in the Corinthian church, every person has a song, every person has a doctrine, every person has a testimony, every person has a sermon—and everybody wants to run things. God has an abundance of bosses, superintendents, presidents, chairmen of the board; He

is looking for common laborers...folks who will get down in the dirt and be a humble servant. We are to submit to one another, and when we are filled with the Spirit we do that. We do not feel our importance, and we esteem our brethren higher and nobler than ourselves.

Based on what we have heard about what God's Word says about it, can you say that right now, you are filled with the Spirit? Are you controlled by the Spirit? Would you like to be? Being filled with the Spirit is something God does in us, but before He can, there are two things required of us.

We **first** must be open to this marvelous work of God in us. You can't fill a jar that has a lid tightly closed on it. We have to be willing for God's Holy Spirit to come in and do His work in our lives.

Second, we must be empty. Again, you can't fill a jar with something when there is already something else in it. The Holy Spirit will not and cannot fill a heart which is filled with unconfessed sin for which there has been no repentance. He will not pour His pure water into a dirty vessel.

“Oh, that the Spirit of God would come upon this entire Church and fill us all to overflowing!”
(Charles Spurgeon)