

Building Biblical
COMMUNITY *in* CHRIST

BE FILLED WITH THE SPIRIT!
Ephesians 5:15-21

Introduction

15 Be very careful, then, how you live-not as unwise but as wise, 16 making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil. 17 Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord's will is. 18 Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit. 19 Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord, 20 always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. 21 Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ. Ephesians 5:15-21

Today is September 11, 2005...in case you didn't know. And exactly four years ago to the day, our country experienced a blazon, horrendous attack on both people and property. That day, the word "evil" took on a new dimension for many. But we were not ready and we were taken by surprise.

More recently, we experienced a natural disaster of monumental proportions. Though a few lone voices gave nearly prophetic warnings of the impending danger around New Orleans and the urgent need to immediately mobilize vast amounts of resources, there appear to be few who listened. And we all know the "rest of the story." Again, we were not ready and we were taken by surprise.

I see in both of these instances a picture of what Paul is telling us in these verses. Notice how Paul begins: "Be very careful, *then*, how you live....", referring back to the evil and darkness described in verses 1-14. And then he goes on to add "*Because* the days are evil." Here, as often, the Bible sounds a note of urgency...an urgency that you and I all too *infrequently* sense deep within us. It's the same urgency that Paul expresses in verse 14: "Wake up, O Sleeper, rise from the dead. And Christ will shine on you!"

On a more personal level, a crises enters our life that we are spiritually unprepared for. In desperation, we cry out to God. We sense our profound need as never before. We vow that we will never be the same. But soon the dynamic of spiritual slumber weighs heavily upon us once again and we slip into the status quo.

All that God tells us in these verses through the pen of the Apostle Paul is based upon a recognition and profound conviction that the days really are evil, the time really is short, and there really is no room for compromise.

With that in mind, Paul gives you and me three commands in these verses. We are going to briefly mention the first two, but focus on the third.

First, *we must not be unwise in our lifestyle, but wise, making the most of the opportunities that God gives us* (verses 15-16). Literally, we are to “buy up” the time, meaning we are to “redeem” the time and opportunity that God gives. This does not mean being a “workaholic,” trying to accomplish as much as possible, even if it be for the Lord. I believe Paul is speaking here of effectiveness in God’s eyes, not efficiency. *Efficiency* is the ability to do many things. *Effectiveness* is the wisdom to do the right things. Many are efficient, few are effective. Everyday we should have the attitude: “God, this day is *your* day. What do you want me to do today? How can I best use the opportunities that you give me to be light in a dark world and to bring glory to your name?”

But secondly (and closely related to the first point), *we are to not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is* (verse 17). And how do we do this? I believe the third command tells us how. And this is where we want to focus this morning.

“Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit.” Ephesians 5:18

Though not reflected in the NIV translation, Paul actually begins verse 18 with the word “and...” Actually, in this context, that little word “and” may best be translated “that is...” In other words, Paul is telling us what it means to live wisely and to understand the will of the Lord. *The way to understand and do the will of God is to be filled with His Spirit.*

But just what exactly does this mean, to be filled with the Spirit?

By the way, I may not tell you anything new this morning. My purpose is not to give you “How to be filled with the Spirit in five easy steps.” But as A.W. Tozer once put it, I hope to “set the table” and “arrange the dishes” a little better so you will be tempted to partake.¹ I’ll be telling you some familiar things, but encouraging you now to make them your own.

What the Filling of the Holy Spirit does *not* mean

But to answer that question “What does it mean to be filled with the Holy Spirit?” it would be good to first understand what the “filling of the Holy Spirit” *is not*.

1. **The filling of the Holy Spirit is *not* his work of regeneration.** Now that’s an interesting word, and maybe you don’t know what it means. We know what the word “generate” means. It means to “cause something to begin.” A generator *produces* or initiates energy. We have in the Bible the book of Genesis, the book of *beginnings*. Now that word, “regeneration,” is a theological term meaning “to generate *again*, to

begin again, or to give birth to *again*.” And so today we often speak of being “born again” (cf. John 3).

The actual word is used by Paul in writing to Titus:

...he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the *washing of rebirth* [lit. regeneration] and renewal by the Holy Spirit. Titus 3:5

2. **The filling of the Holy Spirit is *not* his baptizing work.** Paul says in 1 Corinthians 12:13 “For we [speaking of believers] were all *baptized* by one Spirit into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink.” The word “baptize” means simply “to place something into something else.” It was often used in the First Century of a piece of cloth dipped into a vat of dye. Similarly, you and I at the moment of believing in Jesus Christ were *placed into* Christ and into the Body of believers of which Christ is the head. And it was the Holy Spirit who did this. This is his baptizing work.
3. **The filling of the Holy Spirit is *not* his indwelling work.** Once the Holy Spirit places us into Christ, he then lives within us. We are in Christ, and Christ by his Holy Spirit is within us. The Holy Spirit lives in *all* Christians and *only* in Christians (Romans 8:9; Galatians 4:6). Paul says, “If anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to him” (Romans 8:9). Just as I place this object into this glass of water, so the Holy Spirit comes into the very being of the individual who places his or her faith in Jesus Christ.

Now be sure to understand this. Only those who are *born again, baptized and indwelt* by the Spirit are in a position to be *filled* with the Spirit. But the question remains, “What does it mean to be filled with the Spirit?” Having clarified what it’s *not*, let’s try to understand what it is.

What it means to be filled with the Holy Spirit

First, notice that this is a command, not an option. Paul says, “Be filled...” While we are *never* commanded to be regenerated, baptized or indwelt by the Spirit, we are commanded to be filled with the Spirit. This positive command “be filled” is just as urgent and binding as the negative command “Don’t get drunk. And since Paul is writing to believers, this filling is for *all* believers. This is not a deluxe edition of the Christian life, reserved for a select few.

Not only is “to be filled with the Spirit” a command, but it is a command in the present tense. That means it is not a once-for-all experience, but something that is to take place on a continual basis. There is a normal filling, which seems to emphasize an ongoing state of fullness.ⁱⁱ But beyond this, there is what we might call a special filling which God gives enabling you and me for effective service.ⁱⁱⁱ

Second, to be “filled with the Spirit” is to be controlled by the Spirit.^{iv} There are many Bible passages where a person is “filled” with either positive or negative qualities. When Paul preaches the gospel to the Ephesians, as recorded in Acts 19, they are “filled with rage” (Acts 19:28).^v On the other hand, Paul describes the Roman believers as being “filled with goodness” (Romans 15:14).^{vi} In other words, the anger or goodness *controls* and *dominates* the lives of these people. When a person is “filled” by a certain quality, they are characterized and controlled by that quality. That quality exercises a “restraining or directing influence” over them.^{vii}

To be filled with the Spirit is not getting more of the Spirit, but letting the Spirit get more of you. It is not putting gas in your tank, but putting a driver behind the wheel. To be filled with the Spirit is to experience what we might call an intensification of his indwelling presence in our lives.^{viii}

Earlier I said that the indwelling of the Spirit is like placing an object in this glass of water. There it is, lying on the bottom of the glass. It can be like that with the Holy Spirit, there but not active giving direction to your life. The Spirit can *indwell* you and me without *filling* you and me.

Let’s take a similar object and compare the difference. I place it (an Alka-Seltzer tablet) into the water. And what happens? It begins to fill the water and penetrate the water. Quite a difference! The Spirit of God is *in* you, but now He is to *control* you.

This is seen in the verse itself. We are not to be *drunk* with wine, but *filled* with the Spirit. We are not to be *controlled* or *drunk* with wine, but *controlled* or *drunk* with the Holy Spirit.^{ix} In other words, don’t be controlled by alcoholic spirits, but be controlled by the Holy Spirit. Alcohol produces one lifestyle. The Holy Spirit produces another lifestyle.

The filling of the Spirit is a type of “spiritual drunkenness.” Remember those who received the Holy Spirit on Pentecost? They were accused of being drunk with wine. And there are some parallels. Just as a person who is drunk is insensitive to danger or even physical pain, a person controlled by the Spirit of God is not overly bothered by the daily difficulties of life. What matters is pleasing Christ.^x

Thirdly, to be filled or controlled by the Spirit is to be controlled by Christ. Actually in this verse, the Spirit seems to be the *agent*, the one who does the filling. And Christ is the *content*, the one we are filled with.^{xi}

It’s interesting that Paul has already used this word “filled” or “fullness” three times in this letter to the Ephesians. We’ll look at just two of these.^{xii} By the way, when studying the Bible, when you run across a word or concept that you don’t understand, rather than turning to an entirely different part of the Bible, it’s best to begin with the immediate context.

Look, for example, at what Paul has already told the Ephesians about this idea of “filling” in Ephesians 3:17-19 –

And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge-*that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.*

Remember, in this passage, Paul is “praying in” to our experience what he has already “spoken out” about our all that we have and are “in Christ.” So to be “filled to the measure of all the fullness of God” is to allow the character and virtues of Christ himself dominate and control our lives.

Then again we find the same idea mentioned *twice* in Ephesians 4:10-13 –

He who descended [i.e. Christ] is the very one who ascended higher than all the heavens, in order to *fill* the whole universe.) It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining *to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.*

Here, Paul gives us three goals of the church: unity, maturity, and Christ-likeness. Here, it is not the individual alone that grows into Christ-likeness, but the Church. As believers are equipped for ministry within the Body, we grow *together* in Christ likeness, i.e. the “fullness” of Christ. When the Spirit fills us, Christ controls us. And that makes sense. The role of the Holy Spirit is always to point to Christ, never to himself. When we are filled by the Holy Spirit, Christ directs our lives. He becomes our everything.

How am I to be filled with the Spirit?

But the third and most practical question is this: *How* am I to be filled with the Holy Spirit? Well, the Bible doesn't lay out a three step process. But it does give us several indications of how to be filled with God's Spirit.

We need to recognize that the Spirit of God *desires* to control us and produce in us the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-26). So if you and I are not filled by the Spirit, guess whose fault it is?

That is why *we must first desire the filling of the Spirit in our lives.* Jesus says in Luke 11:13 “If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, *how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!*”

You must *desire* to be filled with the Spirit...and then ask him for it. For some of you, this may appear strange. Well, of course I want to be filled with the Spirit. Look at all

I'm struggling with. To be filled with the Spirit will help me sort it all out! Oh really. Do you really want to be filled with a *spirit* other than you own? If He possesses you, that means Christ will be the CEO of every area of your life. Maybe this morning you want the benefits of the filling, without the cost of the filling.^{xiii} According to Luke 4, when Jesus was full of the Spirit, he was led into the wilderness to be tested 40 days by Satan. The implications of being filled with the Spirit are not always on our top 10 list of most happy experiences! For example, right here in these verses we see three that are mentioned: speaking, singing and submitting.^{xiv} The first two are OK, but what about submitting to one another?

We must first *desire* the filling of the Spirit with all that that implies.

Secondly, ***to be filled with the Spirit, we must not grieve the Spirit.*** You see, the first criteria (desiring the filling of the Holy Spirit) is foundational to the next. We must desire God's filling so much that we are willing to lay aside anything that grieves the Holy Spirit in our lives. Paul tells us in Ephesians 4:29-32:

Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen. *And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.* Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.

To grieve the Holy Spirit is to wound or cause pain to the Holy Spirit. By the way, this tells us that God's Spirit is not an impersonal force, but a person, the third person of the Trinity. Only a person can be grieved.

Notice in this verse what can grieve God's Spirit: unwholesome talk, bitterness, rage, anger, slander, malice, lack of forgiveness. Grieving the Holy Spirit can diminish His activity within us as much as emotional grief can paralyze a person. Have you ever experienced grief like that? It so pervades your very being that you are literally paralyzed? When we sin, we – in a certain sense – paralyze the work of God's Spirit within us.

What is the remedy for grieving the Holy Spirit? Confession. 1 John 1:9 says, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." Don't grieve the Holy Spirit through sin, but release the Holy Spirit through confession.

Thirdly, ***to be filled with Spirit, we must not quench the Holy Spirit.*** Paul says in 1Thessalonians 5:19-20 "Do not quench the Spirit" or as the NIV puts it, "Do not put out the Spirit's fire."

We've seen on the news lately the many firefighters who are mobilized in the Gulf Coast after hurricane Katrina. Fires are everywhere and they are destructive. But there is a

positive fire can that burn in you and me by the Spirit. But you and I can also put out his fire. When can restrict and restrain his power in our lives.

Let's take once again the example of the "fizzy" in the glass of water. I can put it in the water, and it can *begin* to fill the water, but I can also immediately *put out* its influence by putting a cap on it. That's what many of us do with God's Spirit.

How can we do this? Paul tells us in the next verse: "Do not treat prophecies with contempt." In other words, when the Spirit of God speaks to you through His Word or through someone else, don't wait. Obey.

Let me give one specific example of this that applies to our church body. The Bible in John 14:12-14 teaches that it is prayer that, in a particular way, releases the work of the Spirit of God in our lives and in our church. Jesus says this:

I tell you the truth, anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father. And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Son may bring glory to the Father. You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it. John 14:12-14

According to these words of Jesus, you and I can do even greater works than those of Christ, probably meaning that the breadth of our ministry can potentially touch many more lives than initially impacted by Jesus during his earthly ministry. But how will this be done? Jesus tells us: "I am going to the Father." Jesus here is referring to his ascent to heaven and the descent of the Holy Spirit to earth. But notice, it is prayer that releases this work of the Holy Spirit in our lives: "And I will do whatever you ask in my name."

Again, it's like this glass of water. You put a "fizzy" in it but immediately "cap" the work of God's Spirit by our lack of prayer. But what happens when we pray and obey the prophetic word to "devote ourselves to prayer" (Colossians 4:2)? There is a releasing of God's Spirit in our lives (take the "cap" off the fizzy and let it fill the glass).

The remedy to quenching the Spirit is to surrender our lives (Romans 12:1,2). God can't fill what he doesn't have.

Is this your desire this morning? If so, follow in prayer with me as I lead us.

ⁱ A.W. Tozer, *How to be Filled with the Holy Spirit* (Harrisburg: Christian Publications, Inc. n.d.), 5.

ⁱⁱ Luke 4:1; 6:3, 5; Acts 7:55; 11:24; 13:52.

ⁱⁱⁱ Luke 1:15, 41, 67; Acts 2:4; 4:8, 31; 9:17; 13:9. In Acts 9, Ananias prays for Paul to receive his sight and we are told that Paul was filled with the Holy Spirit (Acts 9:17). But later, Paul is once again filled with the Spirit and pronounces a curse of blindness on Elymas, the Jewish magician and false prophet (vv 4-11). In a similar way, Peter is filled with the Spirit and preaches the Gospel to hostile Jewish leaders (Acts 4:8-12).

^{iv} Often in the Bible, an object is described as being *filled* with something in a physical sense. For example, Jesus describes the Kingdom of Heaven as a net. It is let down into the lake, and “When it was *full*,” we read in Matthew 13:48, “the fishermen pulled it up on the shore.” Or when Jesus was on the cross and thirsty, “One of them ran and got a sponge. He *filled* it with wine vinegar, put it on a stick, and offered it to Jesus to drink” (Matthew 27:48-49). Cf. John 12:3; Matthew 22:10; 27:48; Luke 5:7.

^v Cf. Acts 5:3 “full of all kinds of deceit;” 13:10 Satan filled Ananias’s heart; John 16:6 the disciples are filled with grief. Though two different Greek words are used in the New Testament meaning “to fill” or “fullness” (πληρωω and πιμπλημι), a significant difference cannot be discerned.

^{vi} Cf. Colossians 1:9-10; Philippians 1:11; John 15:11; Acts 13:52.

^{vii} Webster’s Dictionary.

^{viii} Eldon Woodcock, “The Filling of the Holy Spirit,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 157 (January – March 2000): 73. Woodcock calls this an “expansion and intensification of the impact of His indwelling presence.”

^{ix} The word “but” (αλλα) in this verse also shows the contrast in Ephesians 4 and 5 between the old and the new (4:22-23), between light and darkness (5:7-14), and between the wise and the unwise (5:15-17).

^x This insightful though originally comes from John Goodwin, *A Being Filled with the Spirit* (Edinburgh: James Nichol, 1867), 11-12 and cited by Woodcock, *op cite*, 78.

^{xi} Cf. Colossians 3:15-17. The phrase εν πνευματι is found in Ephesians 2:22; 3:5 and 6:18. In each of these passages, the Holy Spirit is the personal agent. But compare Romans 1:29.

^{xii} Cf. Ephesians 1:22-23 – And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, which is his body, the *fullness* of him who fills everything in every way.

^{xiii} This is emphasized by the passive command in the verse. We don’t fill ourselves, but it is the Spirit who fills us with Christ. This is done *to us*. Our role is to submit.

^{xiv} There are many results of being filled with the Spirit: the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-24), worship and praise (Ephesians 5:21), submissiveness (Ephesians 5:21ff), preparation for spiritual warfare (Luke 4:1-2), guidance (Romans 8:14), assurance (Romans 8:16), instruction in prayer (Romans 8:26), victory over sin (Galatians 5:16-18), and fulfillment and blessing to others (John 7:37-39).