

Be Filled with the Spirit

The VISION Newsletter / September 2015

Pastor E. Keith Hassell

Ephesians 5:18–21 (NKJV) “And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit, ¹⁹ speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord, ²⁰ giving thanks always for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, ²¹ submitting to one another in the fear of God.”

Believers are not to be drunk with wine but are to be filled with the Spirit. Drunkenness is intoxication. Intoxication on alcohol leads to “dissipation”. Dissipation is reckless abandonment and self-indulgent behavior that does not consider the destructive consequences of its actions. This was the case with the prodigal son who left home and wasted his inheritance on unwise living. Unfortunately, so many today that are high on drugs and alcohol are in the same predicament.

Consider the negative effects of drunkenness. First those who are drunk are out of their right mind—their thinking is impaired. Secondly they are out of touch with reality—small things are blown completely out of proportion and important things are ignored and dismissed as nothing. Thirdly, those who are drunk are out of control—they say and do the unthinkable. People will often say, “That is the alcohol talking!” or “They are nothing like that when they are sober!” As a result, drinking is like playing with a rattlesnake—one day you will get bit! No one drinks their first beer or glass of wine thinking they will become an alcoholic. Drunkenness undermines the sobriety of the Christian life.

Paul admonishes that Christians not be drunk with wine but be “filled with the Spirit”. “Be filled” is one word in the Greek, *plerousthe* that means “to make full” or “to fill up to the full”. Grammatically *plerousthe* (“being filled”) is in the plural, present, passive, indicative form. Let me explain why this grammatical form is important in understanding what Paul is saying. “Be filled” is *plural in number* meaning that the fullness of the Spirit is for *every believer* and *every church*. When Paul wrote these words there were no Pentecostal denominations or Charismatic churches. Paul’s words were meant for every believer in every church. “Be filled” is *present in tense*, meaning that believers are to “be always being filled”; i.e. to be *continually* filled. “Be filled” is *passive in voice* meaning that the believer is the recipient of the action. In other words, being filled is not something the believer does, it’s something the believer *allows God to do*. “Be filled” is *imperative in mood* meaning that being filled is a *command* rather than a suggestion or option. In other words, the word “be filled” is a command that every believer in every church receive from God a continual filling.

What does it mean to be “filled with the Spirit”? Being filled with the Spirit means to be *Spirit-filled*. It means to be *full* of the Holy Spirit. That which is *full of the Spirit* must be at the same time *empty of everything else* that is not the Spirit such as fear, worry, anger, wrath, hate, bitterness, pride, prejudice, selfishness, etc. In his book *Pattern for Maturity*, Dwight Pentecost said, “The common concept which is basic to all these words is the thought of filling up of a vessel by putting something into it. An empty glass into which water is poured is said to be filled with water. Now, of course, it would be a mistake to say that the glass is empty. For unless it is in a vacuum, it is not empty at all; it is filled with air. And the water that is poured into that glass drives out what previously had been filling and fills it with something new. And when the apostle speaks of being

filled with the Spirit, he is speaking of the Spirit supplanting that which was within, then taking over so that the person is filled with the Spirit of God.”

Being filled with the Spirit does not mean that believers lose the Holy Spirit. Believers do not lose the *presence* of the Holy Spirit but they can lose the *fullness* of the Spirit. As someone has said, “Christians are like leaky buckets.” Therefore the Holy Spirit must be continually flowing into them. Being filled with the Spirit enables a person to walk in the Spirit rather than in the flesh.

What are the characteristics of being Spirit-filled? First, being Spirit-filled means being *Christ-filled*. Christ-filled believers will be Christ-centered rather than “Spirit-centered”. The Holy Spirit Himself is Christ-centered. He does not speak on His own authority: “*He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come.*”¹ The Holy Spirit glorifies Jesus Christ rather than Himself: “*He will glorify Me...*”² When the Spirit speaks in prophecy, He testifies of Jesus: “*...For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.*”³ When the Spirit of God is genuinely at work, the focus will be on glorifying Jesus rather than the Holy Spirit. This point is clearly expressed by Pastor Dan Phillips in his book *The World-Tilting Gospel* when he says: “Show me a person obsessed with the Holy Spirit and His gifts (real or imagined), and I will show you a person not filled with the Holy Spirit. Show me a person focused on the person and work of Jesus Christ—never tiring of learning about Him, thinking about Him, boasting of Him, speaking about and for and to Him, thrilled and entranced with His perfections and beauty, finding ways to serve and exalt Him, tirelessly exploring ways to spend and be spent for Him, growing in character to be more and more like Him—and I will show you a person who is filled with the Holy Spirit. We should learn what the Bible says about the Holy Spirit. We should teach what the Bible says about the Holy Spirit. We should seek to live lives full of the biblically defined ministry of the Holy Spirit. But we should never lose sight of this: To the degree that we are filled with the Holy Spirit, we will be targeted on, focused on, the person of the Lord Jesus Christ.” It is good and right to learn about the Holy Spirit, His role, His ministry, and His gifts as long as we remain Christ-centered.

The second characteristic of being Spirit-filled means being *Word-filled*: “*Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.*”⁴ People who are filled with the Spirit will be filled with Jesus. To be filled with Jesus is to be filled with His Word.⁵ Earl Radmacher says, “It is not possible for God’s Word to dwell in believers unless they are filled with the Spirit; and conversely, Christians can’t be filled with the Spirit without the Word of Christ dwelling in them.”⁶

The third characteristic of being Spirit-filled is to be *praise-filled*. The Spirit believer is a singing believer. Their heart overflows with joyful praise and intimate worship. They express praises to God that edify others in their faith. Spirit-filled believers are joyful and exuberant in their praise. Their praise declares that Jesus is alive, present, and victorious!

Paul says that Spirit-filled believers are to express their praise through *psalms*, *hymns*, and *spiritual songs*. “Psalms” are sacred songs of praise sung with musical accompaniment. The early Christians sang the Psalms of the Old Testament. “Hymns”, as distinguished from psalms, are composed songs that exalt God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. We often think of hymns

¹ John 16:13 (NKJV)

² John 16:14 (NKJV)

³ Revelation 19:10 (NKJV)

⁴ Colossians 3:16 (NKJV)

⁵ Compare Col. 3:16 and Eph. 5:18-19

⁶ Earl Radmacher, *Salvation* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2000), p. 150

as those found in modern song books. However, modern hymn development began in the first century church by through the sect of the Therapeutae who each stood to sing songs they themselves composed or songs that were composed by others. "Spiritual songs", as distinguished from psalms and hymns, refers to a songs that are spiritual in nature, verbal in expression, and melodic in pattern. These songs refer to personal expressions in song of God's love, grace, and salvation. Not only do Spirit-filled believers express their praise through psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, they express them *from the heart*: "*Singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord.*"⁷ "From the heart" refers to sincerity. Colossians 3:17 adds, "*Singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.*" Spirit-filled believers have a song in their heart that must be sung: "*My heart is overflowing with a good theme; I recite my composition concerning the King; My tongue is the pen of a ready writer.*"⁸ Spirit-filled believers express their praise from the heart *to the Lord*. The Father alone is the object of their praise and of their worship.⁹

The fourth characteristic of being Spirit-filled is being *Thanks-filled*. They are thankful to God *for all things*.¹⁰ Granted, not all things are good and not all things are of God but God has assured us that He works *all things* together for the good of those who love God and are the called according to His purpose.¹¹

The fifth characteristic of being Spirit-filled is being "*Godly fear*"-filled. Godly fear is not the fear of man or of demons or of danger. Godly fear means to be filled with the fear of the Lord: "*Submitting to one another in the fear of God*". Spirit-filled believers freely and willingly submit to the Spirit of God in one another. Why? They recognize that the same Holy Spirit that fills and works in their own life also fills and works in the lives of others. They know that if they claim that something is of the Holy Spirit which is not confirmed by the rest of the Spirit-filled community, that they may in fact be misguided or deceived. The confirmation of the Spirit's work within the company of Spirit-filled believers is an important safeguard against pride and deception. The one who claims to be Spirit-filled but who will not submit to other Spirit-filled believers in the fear of God are proud and in the flesh rather than in the Spirit.

Believers are called to respond in obedience to God's command to be filled with the Spirit. Usually there are four stages that a person must work through as they move toward receiving the fullness of the Spirit. The first is "I ought to be filled" whereby their obligation to be filled in light of God's command. Second is "I want to be filled" which expresses a desire to be filled. Third is "I must be filled" which is a recognition of their desperate need to be filled. Fourth is "I will be filled" which is a decision to receive the Spirit's filling without further hesitation or delay.

The church cannot fulfill the Great Commission without Spirit-filled leaders, members, and ministry. Believers cannot live a victorious Christian life without the Spirit's influence and power. For too long we have tried to do the work of the Lord in our own wisdom and strength. We wonder why the church has become so anemic. We must lay aside substitutes for the Spirit's influence and power. We must acknowledge our need for God's help. It is time for believers and the church to be filled with the Spirit once again!

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Grace Fellowship
P.O. Box 260
Rusk, Texas 75785
(903) 683-6550

www.gracefellowshiprusk.com

⁷ Ephesians 5:19 (NKJV)

⁸ Psalm 45:1 (NKJV)

⁹ John 4:23-24

¹⁰ Ephesians 4:20 (NKJV)

¹¹ Romans 8:28