

# **Be Imitators of God**

## **Be Filled with the Spirit – Part 1**

*Ephesians 5:18b-21*

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# Be Filled with the Spirit – Part 1

## Scripture

We are currently in a sermon series in Ephesians 5:1-21 that I am calling, “Be Imitators of God.”

In his letter to the Ephesian Christians, the Apostle Paul wrote in Ephesians 5:1a, “Therefore be imitators of God.” That is Paul’s overall command for this section of Scripture. He then gave several ways in which Christians imitate God. Christians imitate God by walking in love, by walking in light, by walking in wisdom, and by being filled with the Spirit.

Last time we examined what Paul meant by not getting drunk with wine. Today (and next week) we will examine what Paul meant by being filled with the Spirit.

Let’s read about being filled with the Spirit in Ephesians 5:18b-21:

<sup>18</sup> And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, **but be filled with the Spirit,** <sup>19</sup> **addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart,** <sup>20</sup> **giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ,** <sup>21</sup> **submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ.** (Ephesians 5:18b-21)

## Introduction

About a month ago, Ligonier Ministries released its 2018 study regarding The State of Theology in the United States. The 34-statement survey was designed to discover what Americans believe about God, salvation, ethics, the Bible, and so on.

The conclusion offered at The State of Theology website is as follows:

The 2018 State of Theology survey reveals deep confusion about the Bible's teaching, not only among Americans as a whole, but also among evangelicals. There is something very wrong when a majority of Americans can give the correct answers to basic Bible questions and at the same time say that their beliefs are purely a matter of personal opinion.

These results show the urgent need for sound biblical teaching and the bold preaching of the gospel. Millions of people do not understand the holiness of God, the reality of sin, and the one way of salvation in Jesus Christ. There is much work to be done, but it is our hope that these findings will serve the church in its efforts to reach more people with the faithful proclamation of the truth of God's Word.<sup>1</sup>

Three statements in the survey deal with the person and work of the Holy Spirit. One statement is: "The Holy Spirit is a force but is not a personal being." How would you answer that statement? The statement is false, but 59% of all Americans agree with that statement. Sadly, 59% of Evangelical Christians also agree with that statement. The fact is that "the Holy Spirit can be grieved and lied to (cf. Isaiah 63:10; Acts 5:3; Ephesians 4:30). He can also speak (cf. Hebrews 3:7-11; 10:15-17). An impersonal force can do none of these things, so these personal characteristics indicate that the Holy Spirit must be a person."<sup>2</sup>

Moreover, the Holy Spirit is the Third Person of the Trinity. He is the one who regenerates or gives new life to a person,

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<sup>1</sup> <https://thestateoftheology.com>.

<sup>2</sup> <https://thestateoftheology.com/data-explorer/2018/8?AGE=30&MF=14&REGION=30&EDUCATION=62&INCOME=254&MARITAL=126&ETHNICITY=62&RELTRAD=62&ATTENDANCE=254>.

which is what enables that person to exercise faith and become a Christian. The Holy Spirit is the one who then empowers and enables Christians to live holy lives before a holy God. Christians are empowered and enabled to live holy lives before a holy God by being filled with the Spirit.

## Lesson

Ephesians 5:18b-21 teaches us what is involved in being filled with the Spirit.

Let's use the following outline:

1. The Command to Be Filled with the Spirit (5:18b)
2. The Evidences of Being Filled with the Spirit (5:19-21)

### I. The Command to Be Filled with the Spirit (5:18b)

First, let's look at the command to be filled with the Spirit.

From Ephesians 4:17 onwards the Apostle Paul has been describing the new life of the Christian. And he has been contrasting the new life of the Christian with the old life of the non-Christian. So far in chapter 5 Paul has been exhorting Christians to walk in love and not in their previous way of sin, to walk in light and not in darkness, and to walk as wise and not as unwise. In verse 18 Paul exhorts Christians to be filled with the Spirit and not to get drunk with wine.

As previously mentioned, last time we examined what Paul meant by not getting drunk with wine. Now we will examine what Paul meant by being filled with the Spirit. Paul said in verse 18b, **"...be filled with the Spirit."**

There is confusion in Christendom about being filled with the Spirit. Indeed, there is confusion in Christendom

about the baptism of the Holy Spirit. There are some who believe that the baptism of the Holy Spirit is a work subsequent to conversion. They would say that just as the Holy Spirit came upon the believers at Pentecost and enabled them to speak in tongues (cf. Acts 2:1-4), so believers today may expect the Holy Spirit to come upon them some time after their conversion and enable them to speak in tongues. How do we answer this?

It is helpful to recognize that in the Bible we must distinguish between what is *prescriptive* and what is *descriptive*. On the one hand, something that is *prescriptive* is that which gives directions or injunctions. That is, we are to follow the teaching that is given in that portion of Scripture. On the other hand, something that is *descriptive* is that which describes or explains an event. Christians are not to put into practice what is described in that portion of Scripture—unless there is a clear command to do so. The pouring out of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost that enabled believers to speak in tongues was a unique event. Speaking in tongues was an evidence that the Holy Spirit was now being given to all people from every people, tribe, nation, and language.

The baptism of the Holy Spirit (sometimes described as “the gift of the Holy Spirit”) is what happens when a person becomes a Christian. In 1964 (and reprinted in 1977), John R. W. Stott wrote an excellent book titled, *Baptism and Fullness*, in which he distinguishes the difference between the baptism of the Holy Spirit and being filled with the Holy Spirit. He writes:

I have concentrated on the meaning of the expression “gift” or “baptism” of the Spirit. I have tried to summarize the strong biblical evidence both that these two are one and the same thing, and that they describe an *initial* blessing (received at the beginning of the Christian life) not a subsequent

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one (received some time later), and therefore a *universal* blessing (given to all Christians) not an esoteric one (enjoyed only by some).<sup>3</sup>

In other words, the baptism of the Holy Spirit is a one-time event that takes place in the life of every Christian at the moment of regeneration. The fullness of the Holy Spirit, or being filled with the Holy Spirit, is something that takes place throughout the Christian's life. John Stott puts it this way, "When we speak of the baptism of the Spirit we are referring to a once-for-all gift; when we speak of the fullness of the Spirit we are acknowledging that this gift needs to be *continuously and increasingly appropriated*."<sup>4</sup>

So, God gave the command through Paul in verse 18b, **"...be filled with the Spirit."** What does this mean?

John MacArthur helpfully suggests several things that are *not* meant by being filled with the Spirit:

First, being filled with the Holy Spirit is not a dramatic, esoteric experience of suddenly being energized and spiritualized into a permanent state of advanced spirituality by a second act of blessing subsequent to salvation. Nor is it some temporary "zap" that results in ecstatic speech or unearthly visions.

Second, being filled with the Spirit is not the notion at the other extreme—simply stoically trying to do what God wants us to do, with the Holy Spirit's blessing but basically in our own power. It is not an act of the flesh which has God's approval.

Third, being filled is not the same as possessing, or be-

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<sup>3</sup> John R. W. Stott, *Baptism and Fullness: The Work of the Holy Spirit Today* (Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 1977), 47.

<sup>4</sup> John R. W. Stott, *Baptism and Fullness*, 47.

ing indwelt by, the Holy Spirit, because he indwells every believer at the moment of salvation. As Paul plainly states in the book of Romans, “If anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to him” (8:9; cf. John 7:38–39). A person who does not have the Holy Spirit does not have Christ. Even to the immature, worldly Corinthian believers, Paul said, “For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body,...and we were all made to drink of one Spirit” (1 Corinthians 12:13)...[A]ll Christians are permanently indwelt by the Spirit.

Fourth, being filled with the Spirit does not describe a process of progressively receiving him by degrees or in doses. Every Christian not only possesses the Holy Spirit but possesses him in his fullness. God does not parcel out the Spirit, as if he could somehow be divided into various segments or parts. “He gives the Spirit without measure,” Jesus said (John 3:34).

Fifth, it is also clear from 1 Corinthians 12:13 that the filling with the Spirit is not the same as the baptism of the Spirit, because every believer has been baptized with and received the Spirit. Although its results are experienced and enjoyed, baptism by and reception of the Spirit are not realities we can feel, and are certainly not experiences reserved only for specially-blessed believers. This miracle is a spiritual reality—whether realized or not—that occurs in every believer the moment he becomes a Christian and is placed by Christ into his Body by the Holy Spirit, who then takes up residence in that life.

Paul did not accuse the Corinthians of being immature and sinful because they did not yet have the Holy Spirit or the baptism in the Body and then exhort them to seek the Spirit in order to remedy the situation. Rather he reminded them that each one of them already possessed the Holy Spirit. Earlier in the letter he had pleaded with them to “flee immorality. Every other sin that a man commits is outside the body, but the immoral man sins against his own body. Or do you not

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know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own?” (6:18–19). They were not sinning because of the Holy Spirit’s absence but in spite of the Holy Spirit’s presence. Even when a Christian sins he is still indwelt by the Holy Spirit, and it is that very fact that makes his sin even worse. When a Christian grieves the Spirit (Ephesians 4:30) or quenches the Spirit (1 Thessalonians 5:19), he grieves or quenches the Spirit who resides within himself.

Finally, the filling with Spirit is not the same as being sealed, or secured, by him. That is an accomplished fact (see on 1:13). Nowhere are believers commanded or exhorted to be indwelt, baptized, or sealed by the Holy Spirit. The *only* command is to **be filled**.<sup>5</sup>

So, what did Paul mean when he wrote, “...**be filled with the Spirit.**” The Greek word for “**be filled**” (*plerousthe*) is key to understanding this command. John Stott writes:

First, it is in the *imperative mood*. “Be filled” is not a tentative proposal, but an authoritative command. We have no more liberty to avoid this responsibility than the many others which surround it in Ephesians. To be filled with the Spirit is obligatory, not optional.

Secondly, it is in the *plural form*. In other words, it is addressed to the whole Christian community. None of us is to get drunk; all of us are to be Spirit-filled. The fullness of the Spirit is not an elitist privilege, but available for all the people of God.

Thirdly, it is in the *passive voice*. The *New English Bible* renders it: “Let the Holy Spirit fill you.” There is no technique to learn and no formula to recite. What is essential is such a pen-

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<sup>5</sup> John F. MacArthur Jr., *Ephesians*, MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago: Moody Press, 1986), 247–248.



itent turning from what grieves the Holy Spirit and such a believing openness to him that nothing hinders him from filling us. It is significant that the parallel passage in Colossians reads not “Let the Spirit fill you” but “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly” (3:16). We must never separate the Spirit and the Word. To obey the Word and to surrender to the Spirit are virtually identical.

Fourthly, it is in the *present tense*. In Greek there are two kinds of imperative, an aorist describing a single action, and a present when the action is continuous. Thus, when Jesus said during the wedding reception at Cana, “Fill the jars with water” (John 2:7), the imperative is aorist, since the jars were to be filled only once. But when Paul says to us, “Be filled with the Spirit,” he uses a present imperative, implying that we are to go on being filled. For the fullness of the Spirit is not a once-for-all experience which we can never lose, but a privilege to be renewed continuously by continuous believing and obedient appropriation. We have been “sealed” with the Spirit once and for all; we need to be filled with the Spirit and go on being filled every day and every moment of the day.<sup>6</sup>

How are Christians filled with the Spirit? John MacArthur notes, “God commands nothing for which he does not provide the means to obey. And if God commands something of us, we do not need to pray for it, because it is obviously his will and intent for us to do it. It is God’s deepest desire that each of his children be filled with his Spirit. We only need to discover the resources he has provided to carry out that obedience.”<sup>7</sup>

As John Stott mentioned above, the parallel passage in Colossians to our passage here in Ephesians says, “Let the

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<sup>6</sup> John R. W. Stott, *God’s New Society: The Message of Ephesians*, The Bible Speaks Today (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1979), 208–209.

<sup>7</sup> John F. MacArthur Jr., *Ephesians*, 251.

word of Christ dwell in you richly” (Colossians 3:16). In other words, to be filled with the Spirit is to be filled with the Word of God. “And,” as John MacArthur says, “as we are filled with God’s Word, it controls our thinking and action, and we thereby come more and more under the Spirit’s control.”<sup>8</sup> Moreover, he says, “To **be filled with the Spirit** involves confession of sin, surrender of will, intellect, body, time, talent, possessions, and desires. It requires the death of selfishness and the slaying of self-will. When we die to self, the Lord fills with his Spirit.”<sup>9</sup>

So, God commands us to be filled with the Spirit.

## II. The Evidences of Being Filled with the Spirit (5:19-21)

And second, let’s look at the evidences of being filled with the Spirit.

Lord willing, I am going to spend next time fleshing this out in greater detail next time we meet. Let me just say today that the evidences of being filled with the Spirit include fellowship, worship, gratitude, and submission. Paul put it this way in verses 19-21, “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** [that’s fellowship], **singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart** [that’s worship], **giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ** [that’s gratitude], **submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ** [that’s submission].”

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<sup>8</sup> John F. MacArthur Jr., *Ephesians*, 252.

<sup>9</sup> John F. MacArthur Jr., *Ephesians*, 251–252.

## Conclusion

Therefore, having analyzed Ephesians 5:18b-21, let us be filled with the Spirit.

One of the other statements in The State of Theology survey is: “The Holy Spirit can tell me to do something which is forbidden in the Bible.”<sup>10</sup> Eighteen percent of Evangelical Christians agree with that statement. That is almost 1 in 5 professing Christians! The fact is that the Holy Spirit is God and the Holy Spirit will never contradict himself by telling us to do something that is forbidden in the Bible.

Our obedience to God’s Word is a barometer of how we are filled with the Spirit. So, let us make a commitment to obey everything that God has commanded us in his Word. Amen.

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<sup>10</sup> <https://thestateoftheology.com/data-explorer/2018/10?AGE=30&MF=14&REGION=30&EDUCATION=62&INCOME=254&MARITAL=126&ETHNICITY=62&RELTRAD=62&ATTENDANCE=254>.

# Mission Statement

The Mission Statement of the Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church  
is:

*To bring people to Jesus Christ  
and membership in his church family,  
develop them to Christlike maturity,  
equip them for their ministry in the church  
and life mission in the world,  
in order to magnify God's name.*

## Sermons by Rev. Freddy Fritz

This sermon, and other sermons, by the Rev. Freddy Fritz can  
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1. [www.tampabaypresbyterian.org/sermons](http://www.tampabaypresbyterian.org/sermons).
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