

Be Imitators of God

Be Filled with the Spirit – Part 2

Ephesians 5:18b-21

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Scripture

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

Last time we began to examine what Paul meant by being filled with the Spirit. Today, we shall complete our examination of Paul’s teaching on being filled with the Spirit.

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

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

Introduction

In October 1871, the Great Chicago Fire destroyed much of the bustling city of Chicago. But, surprisingly, the flames actually started on the other side of the Chicago River. So how did the fire cross over the river and reach Chicago?

The river-jumping fire is partially explained by the high winds that spread the fire to wooden ships moored in the river. But there was also another even more important factor in the spread of the fire. In those days, the Chicago River was a shallow, sluggish sewer for the entire city. The Union Stock Yards in Chicago dumped all their animal waste into the river. People

called it “The Stinking River” or “Bubbly Creek.” It was so bad that the waste was actually combustible.

All of this putrefaction flowed into Lake Michigan, where there were drinking-water intakes for the city. Waterborne diseases broke out. Every year through the 1880s and 1890s, at least 10,000 people died from cholera and typhoid fever. In 1885, fourteen years after the Great Chicago Fire, nearly 100,000 people died from illnesses carried by the river’s putrid waters.

Finally, city engineers took action. First, they started digging 28 miles of canal. They moved more earth and rocks than were moved building the Panama Canal. They set in locks and gates. Then, on January 2, 1900, a worker opened a sluice gate at Lake Michigan, and the entire Great Lakes flowed into the Chicago River, pushing it a direction it had never flowed. *They reversed the flow of the Chicago River.* It now flowed the opposite way—into the canal, into the Des Plaines River, into the Illinois River, and, finally, into the Mississippi River.

This brought a huge flow of fresh water. Instead of shallow, sluggish, diseased water, making the community sick, the river now brought the city life. Some writers argue that Chicago would not even be around today, had the flow of the Chicago River not been reversed.¹

There is a similar principle at work in our new lives as Christians. Before we became Christians, we moved in the direction of sin and darkness and foolishness and drunkenness, as Paul has been describing in Ephesians 5. But, now that we are new creations in Christ, the flow is in the complete opposite direction, in the direction of love and light and wisdom and being filled with the Spirit.

¹ <https://www.preachingtoday.com/illustrations/2012/september/4092412.html>.

In this sermon series we have been examining the new life in contrast with the old life. Let us now continue our examination of what is involved in being filled with the Spirit.

Review

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

First, let's look at the command to be filled with the Spirit. Paul said in verse 18b, **"...be filled with the Spirit."** Dr. James Montgomery Boice notes the following:

First, being filled with the Spirit is not the same thing as being "baptized" by the Spirit. Some, having confused the two, have taught the need for a second work of grace, usually accompanied by the gift of speaking in tongues, if a person is to grow or get on in the Christian life. Actually, the baptism of the Spirit refers to the work of the Spirit in regenerating us and uniting us to Christ, which is how we become Christians in the first place. It is rightly called "baptism," because baptism is the sacrament marking the beginning of the Christian life. It is something that happens to every Christian and does not need to be urged upon him.

Being "filled" with the Spirit *is* something that is urged upon Christians, which is what Paul does here. But it does not concern any special miraculous gifts such as speaking in tongues. Rather, it refers to our being so under the Holy Spirit's control and leading that our thought and life are entirely taken up with Jesus Christ, to whom it is the Spirit's chief responsibility to bear witness.²

² James Montgomery Boice, *Ephesians: An Expository Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Ministry Resources Library, 1988), 188.

There are several things that are *not* meant by being filled with the Spirit.

First, being filled with the Spirit is not a dramatic experience subsequent to salvation advancing a Christian into some higher state of spirituality.

Second, being filled with the Spirit is not an act of the flesh which has God's approval.

Third, being filled with the Spirit is not the same as possessing, or being indwelt by, the Holy Spirit, because he indwells every believer at the moment of salvation.

Fourth, being filled with the Spirit does not describe a process of progressively receiving him by degrees or in doses.

Fifth, being filled with the Spirit is not the same as the baptism of the Spirit, because every Christian receives the baptism of the Spirit at the moment of conversion.

And finally, being filled with the Spirit is not the same as being sealed, or secured, by him. Christians are never commanded to be sealed, secured, indwelt, or baptized by the Spirit. The only command directed to Christians is to be filled with the Spirit.³

So, what did Paul mean when he wrote, **"...be filled with the Spirit"**? Several things.

First, being filled with the Spirit is a command. To be filled with the Spirit is obligatory, not optional.

Second, being filled with the Spirit is in the plural form. That is, it is addressed to the entire body of Christ. *None* of us is to get drunk; *all* of us are to be filled with the Spirit.

Third, to be filled with the Spirit is in the passive voice. The *New English Bible* renders it: "Let the Holy Spirit fill you."

³ John F. MacArthur Jr., *Ephesians*, MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago: Moody Press, 1986), 247–248.

There is no technique to learn and no formula to recite.

And fourth, to be filled with the Spirit is in the present tense. We need to be continuously filled with the Spirit. We have been baptized by the Spirit (at our conversion), and we need to be filled with the Spirit and go on being filled day by day, and even moment by moment throughout the day.⁴

How then are Christians filled with the Spirit? The parallel passage in Colossians to our passage here in Ephesians says, “Let the 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.”⁵ 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.”⁶

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

Lesson

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.

A. J. Gordon, one of the founders of Gordon Conwell

⁴ John R. W. Stott, *God’s New Society: The Message of Ephesians*, The Bible Speaks Today (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1979), 208–209.

⁵ John F. MacArthur Jr., *Ephesians*, 252.

⁶ John F. MacArthur Jr., *Ephesians*, 251–252.

Divinity School, told of being out walking and looking across a field at a house. There beside the house was what looked like a man pumping furiously at one of those hand pumps. As Gordon watched, the man continued to pump at a tremendous rate; he seemed absolutely tireless, pumping on and on, up and down, without ever slowing in the slightest, much less stopping.

Truly it was a remarkable sight, so Gordon started to walk toward it. As he got closer, he could see it was not a man at the pump, but a wooden figure painted to look like a man. The arm that was pumping so rapidly was hinged at the elbow and the hand was wired to the pump handle. The water was pouring forth, but not because the figure was pumping it. You see, it was an artesian well, and the water was pumping the man!⁷

This is an illustration of a person who is filled with the Spirit. It is the Holy Spirit that is at work in the person, enabling and empowering that person to live a holy life that is pleasing to a holy God. All that the person has to do is to be filled with the Spirit. In our text, the Apostle Paul lists four evidences of being filled with the Spirit.

A. Fellowship (5:19a)

The first evidence of being filled with the Spirit is fellowship.

In verse 19a, Paul said that an evidence of being filled with the Spirit is **“addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs.”** Paul does not mean that Christians should stop speaking to one another and start singing to one another instead. No, the context is public worship, and it

⁷ Michael P. Green, *1500 Illustrations for Biblical Preaching* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2000), 190.

is specifically a reference to Christian fellowship in the context of public worship. Whenever Christians assemble to worship God, they love to sing to God, but they also love to sing to **one another**. Most of the **psalms and hymns and spiritual songs** are addressed to God or are about God. But some of them are a mutual exhortation. A good example is Psalm 95:1–2, where we exhort one another, “Oh come, *let us* sing to the Lord; *let us* make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation! *Let us* come into his presence with thanksgiving; *let us* make a joyful noise to him with songs of praise!”

Christianity is a singing religion. Atheism is songless. It has nothing to sing about. The funeral notice of Robert Ingersoll, the noted agnostic, stated, “There will be no singing.”

The psalm-singing of Christian martyrs going to their deaths in the arena alerted the Roman Empire to the fact that a new and revolutionary force was coming into being. When the pleasure-bent populace saw the Christians singing to one another as they fearlessly entered the amphitheater where hungry lions awaited them, they were filled with awe.⁸

So, the first evidence of being filled with the Spirit is fellowship.

B. *Worship (5:19b)*

The second evidence of being filled with the Spirit is worship.

In verse 19b, Paul said that an evidence of being filled with the Spirit is **“singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart.”** **Singing** may be a reference to the use of our voices, whereas **making melody** may be a reference to the

⁸ Paul Lee Tan, *Encyclopedia of 7700 Illustrations: Signs of the Times* (Garland, TX: Bible Communications, Inc., 1996), 877.

use of instruments in our worship. Moreover, the **singing** here is not to one another but **to the Lord**. And, as John Stott notes, it is most likely a reference “to either the sincerity or the inwardness of authentic Christian praise, or both.”⁹ Christians who are filled with the Spirit have, as Stott points out, “a song of joy in their hearts, and Spirit-filled public worship is a joyful celebration of God’s mighty acts.”¹⁰

Many years ago, Thomas K. Beecher once substituted for his famous brother, Henry Ward Beecher, at the Plymouth Church in Brooklyn, New York. Many curiosity seekers had come to hear the renowned Henry Ward Beecher preach. Therefore, when Thomas Beecher appeared in the pulpit instead of his brother, some people got up and started for the doors. Sensing that they were disappointed because he was substituting for his brother, Thomas raised his hand for silence and announced, “All those who came here this morning to worship Henry Ward Beecher may withdraw from the church; all who came to worship God may remain.”¹¹

So, being filled with the Spirit is evidenced by our worship of God.

C. *Gratitude (5:20)*

The third evidence of being filled with the Spirit is gratitude.

In verse 20, Paul said that an evidence of being filled with the Spirit is **“giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.”** A

⁹ John R. W. Stott, *God’s New Society: The Message of Ephesians*, 206.

¹⁰ John R. W. Stott, *God’s New Society: The Message of Ephesians*, 206.

¹¹ Michael P. Green, *1500 Illustrations for Biblical Preaching* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2000), 407–408.

grumbling spirit is not compatible with being filled with the Holy Spirit. Grumbling was one of the besetting sins of the people of Israel. They were constantly grumbling against the Lord (cf. Exodus 16:7-9). But Christians who are filled with the Spirit do not grumble. Instead, they are filled with gratitude.

We need to be careful to rightly interpret **“giving thanks always and for everything.”** For instance, we do not give thanks to God for evil. A husband does not give thanks to God for his wife’s adultery. A wife does not give thanks to God for her husband’s pornographic habit. A child does not give thanks to God for a perpetrator’s sexual abuse. John Stott is helpful when he writes, “Of course God’s children learn not to argue with him in their suffering, but to trust him, and indeed to thank him for his loving providence by which he can turn even evil to good purposes (*e.g.* Romans 8:28). But that is praising God for being God; it is not praising him for evil. To do this would be to react insensitively to people’s pain (when Scripture tells us to weep with those who weep) and to condone and even encourage evil (when Scripture tells us to hate it and to resist the devil). God abominates evil, and we cannot praise or thank him for what he abominates.”¹²

So, the **“everything”** for which we give thanks to God is qualified by its context, namely, **“in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.”** As Stott writes, “Our thanksgiving is to be for everything which is consistent with the loving Fatherhood of God and the self-revelation he has given us in Jesus Christ.”¹³

So, when we are filled with the Spirit we give thanks to God our Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

¹² John R. W. Stott, *God’s New Society: The Message of Ephesians*, 207.

¹³ John R. W. Stott, *God’s New Society: The Message of Ephesians*, 207.

D. *Submission (5:21)*

And the fourth evidence of being filled with the Spirit is submission.

In verse 21, Paul said that an evidence of being filled with the Spirit is **“submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ.”** Christians who are filled with the Spirit listen to one another, serve one another, help one another, and are not aggressive, self-assertive, and brash. The Holy Spirit is a humble Spirit, and those who are filled with the Spirit exhibit the characteristics of the Spirit. They display the meekness and gentleness of Christ, particularly in their relationships with one another.

Conclusion

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

In 1926 Daniel Iverson was inspired to write a poem after hearing a sermon on the Holy Spirit. He wrote:

Spirit of the living God, fall afresh on me;
Spirit of the living God, fall afresh on me.
Break me, melt me, mold me, fill me,
Spirit of the Living God, fall afresh on me.¹⁴

May this be our daily prayer as we seek to be filled with the Spirit. Amen.

¹⁴ Paul Eckert, *Steve Green's MIDI Hymnal: A Complete Toolkit for Personal Devotions and Corporate Worship*, Electronic ed. (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 1998).

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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

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