

Ephesians 5 (18) – Filled with the Spirit, pt.2

The Command (vs.18) – *be filled with the Spirit*. The way that we can continue to experience and walk in the new life that we received in Christ when we were born again is by continuing to be filled with the Spirit. This is crucial to the controlled, ordered, purposeful, and productive spiritual life, and the foundation for godliness in our marriage, home, and work relationships (5:22-6:9). It is an obvious necessity in successfully engaging our spiritual battles (6:10-18). In a very real sense, we must obey this command to be filled with the Spirit if we are to obey any of the other commands of God. Yet this command is widely and often misinterpreted, misapplied, or missed altogether. So in order to gain a correct understanding, we will examine the meaning of this command, and in the next message, we will look at how we experience it.

To answer the question of meaning, it helps to look at what being filled with the Spirit is not.

First of all, the filling of the Spirit is not the same thing as the baptism of the Spirit. All believers are baptized by the Holy Spirit into the body of Christ at conversion. In 1 Corinthians 12:13, Paul speaks of this baptism of the Spirit as having happened to all believers, and it is spoken of as a past event. Ephesians 5:18 exhorts believers to be filled; it doesn't exhort them to "get the baptism". The baptism is a onetime occurrence, while being filled is an ongoing objective.

Secondly, the filling of the Spirit is not the same thing as the sealing of the Spirit. Ephesians 1:13 speaks of this sealing as having happened to all believers at conversion, and it is spoken of as a past event. You don't have to be sealed numerous times (cf. 2 Corinthians 1:22 / Ephesians 4:30). Ephesians 5:18 exhorts believers to be filled; it doesn't exhort them to "seek another sealing". This sealing is a onetime occurrence, while being filled is an ongoing objective. God placed the seal of His ownership on all believers when they were saved.

There is no command to be baptized by the Spirit in the New Testament, and there is no command to be sealed with the Spirit in the New Testament, because it is something that God does at conversion. The command is to be filled with the Spirit, which is something else.

Thirdly, this command to be filled with the Spirit is not the same thing as the empowering of the Spirit that we see in the Old Testament. In the OT, the Spirit came upon certain people to empower them for specific works of service (cf. Exodus 31:3, 35:31 / Judges 3:10, 6:34, 11:29, 13:25, 14:6, 19, 15:14 / 1 Peter 1:11 / 2 Peter 1:21). But the permanent indwelling of all believers with the Holy Spirit began with the NT church age (John 7:37-39, 14:16-17 / cf. Ezekiel 36:27).

Fourthly, the filling of the Holy Spirit is not the same thing as the indwelling of the Spirit. Ephesians 5:18 is not speaking of the Holy Spirit coming into a person's life. If someone is saved, they already have the Holy Spirit (Romans 5:5, 8:9, 15 / 1 Corinthians 6:17, 19 / Galatians 3:2, 14, 4:6 / Ephesians 2:18, 22, 3:16 / 2 Timothy 1:14 / 1 John 4:13). The Holy Spirit doesn't come in "doses"; you received all of Him when you trusted Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit is fully resident in all Christians. We don't have to ask for Him, or for more of Him.

The filling of the Spirit is not the baptism of the Spirit, it is not the sealing of the Spirit, it is not the OT empowering of the Spirit, and it is not the indwelling of the Spirit. We are never

commanded to do those things, but we are commanded to be filled with the Spirit. So, in light of that, let's notice several things about the phrase, "*but be filled with the Spirit*".

It is personal in nature – this is not about a force, a power, or a substance. The Holy Spirit is a person, who is God, and who exerts His control and influence over our personal lives. The Bible does use terms like “poured out upon” to describe the Spirit’s activity (Acts 2:33, 10:45), but this is just for the purpose of illustration, to help us understand how He affects us.

It is plural in number – the filling of the Spirit is for everyone, not just a privileged few.

It is in the imperative mood – this is a command; being filled with the Holy Spirit is not optional, it is obligatory.

It is in the present tense – this means to “keep on being filled”; the filling of the Spirit is something that we are to be continually involved in. It is not a momentary experience where we get “zapped”. It is not a crisis experience that has an ongoing effect. It is not a power encounter for a specific purpose. It is an ongoing state, which is characteristic of a lifestyle (cf. Acts 6:3-5, 11:24). We cannot rely on a past experience, a past “filling”; it is to be a continuous filling. The Holy Spirit is filling us when He is leading our present activity.

It is true that we see instances when the filling of the Spirit was seemingly an instantaneous event (Acts 4:8, 31, 13:9), but a “filling of the Spirit” wasn’t a specific thing that they sought, and being specially empowered for a specific moment isn’t what Paul is describing here in Ephesians 5:18. From these instances it is obvious that a person is filled with the Spirit when he is under the control and is empowered by the Holy Spirit. A specially empowered moment might happen in the context of a person who was already “under the influence” of the Spirit.

From our book “*The Fellowship Files*” (pg.48) – some people urge this as the answer to all our struggles, and in truth, it is what we need, to be filled with the Spirit. However, this is not speaking primarily of some instantaneous event, but rather a process, a lifestyle, as clearly seen in the verses that follow (vs.19-21), which show the context of being filled (cf. Colossians 3:12-17). The truth is that all Christians are Spirit filled to various degrees. Being filled is a process, it can be an instance, but it is spoken of more in terms of what is going on in your life, what you are being filled with. The fruit of the Spirit is indicative of how much you are filled.

It is in the passive voice – you don’t do it, you receive it. The filling of the Spirit is not something we achieve but something we allow. Certainly we are active in our role, and we do have a choice in the matter, but it is the Spirit’s work in us. In the NT, you don’t find people praying for the filling of the Spirit, you see people travelling towards or away from the filling. The command is to choose it, to allow yourself to be filled with the Spirit rather than filled with your selfish interests. The Spirit works through our willing submission.

It is instructive to realize that being filled by the Spirit is synonymous with walking by the Spirit. If you are walking by the Spirit you are being filled by the Spirit (Galatians 5:16-25). Similarly, and considering the context of vs.15-17, it can be said that when you are walking in wisdom, you are walking by the Spirit, and this is being filled by the Spirit.

Being filled is a process; step by step, decision by decision, thought by thought, moment by moment, day by day, you are yielding control of your life to Him. Of course, nobody stays full of the Spirit all the time, because no one is always totally submissive to God. Nevertheless, this should still be our aim, our goal, our great longing. We have to keep on being filled.

It is obvious that all Christians do not have the same degree of spirituality, or wisdom, or submission to the Lord. It is obvious in our own lives as well, that at certain times we are either more submitted or less submitted to God. The reason is that sin is what hinders the filling of the Holy Spirit, and obedience to God is how the filling of the Spirit is maintained. It is not praying for the filling of the Holy Spirit that accomplishes the filling. Our obedience to God's commands is what allows the Spirit the freedom to work within us. Because we are still infected with sin, it is impossible to be filled with the Spirit all of the time. So when we sin, we should immediately confess it to God and renew our commitment to being Spirit-filled and Spirit-led.

The term "filled" is a term that refers to influence, control, power, or possession. It basically means simply to be controlled or possessed by, in this case by the Spirit. To be controlled or to be filled or to be possessed all mean the same thing. When people are filled with anger, or rage, they are possessed by that anger, or that rage, and it will seek expression in some way. It is the same with bitterness; it is ready to express itself. Bitter people are not easy to be around. You could think of it in positive or negative terms. I was filled with gratitude, filled with joy, filled with sorrow, etc. You see this sort of "filling" in the book of Acts (Acts 3:10, 5:3, 17, 13:45, 19:29). Paul is referring to being under the control of the Holy Spirit (Acts 13:52).

When we think of the word fill we might think of water being poured into a glass, or gasoline being pumped into our car. But the Greek pleroo, a form of which is used in Ephesians 5:18, has three shades of meaning that illustrate the idea of being Spirit-filled.

The word pleroo conveys the idea of **pressure**. It is used to describe wind filling the sails on a ship, moving the vessel across the water. Spiritually speaking, it is the Holy Spirit providing the thrust to move the believer down the pathway of obedience. To be filled with the Spirit means to be carried along by the gracious pressure of the Holy Spirit.

The word pleroo also conveys the idea of **permeation**. This is like salt permeating meat to flavor and preserve it. It is like what Alka-Seltzer does to a glass of water, all of the water is permeated with the distinct flavor of the Alka-Seltzer. When we yield to the control of the Holy Spirit, His influence permeates how we think, how we feel, how we see things, and how we make choices.

The word pleroo also conveys the idea of **control**. In Luke 5:26, 6:11 / John 16:6 it is used to indicate an emotion so overwhelming within the people that it dominated their thoughts. This isn't the sort of control where our own personality is erased. It isn't a "cookie cutter" manifestation that looks exactly the same in each of our lives. But when we are being filled with the Spirit, it is evident that He is the one who is in control of our life.

The issue in being filled with the Spirit is not the problem of getting more of the Spirit, but the problem of the Spirit getting more of Christians. This is the Holy Spirit leading, influencing, and controlling our lives. This is the meaning of being filled with the Spirit.