



## 9) The Filling of the Spirit (Eph 5:17-20)

### Section 2: Christian Growth: Strength & Dedication

God wants all His people to be regularly filled with His Spirit to increase their resemblance to the Father (1 Pe 1:15-17) and to do His will. Forms of the phrase “filled with the Spirit” depict those times God powerfully reveals Himself and exercises His will through His people. After exploring the general usage in the Old and New Testaments with a quick view at Acts, we will more fully examine the command to be filled in Eph 5:18.

#### A) Filled with the Spirit in Old Testament

Phrases similar to “filled with the Spirit” are not as common as similar wording such as: “came” on or “poured out upon” (i.e. tremendously influence) which are more frequent (27 times) in the Old Testament (OT).

*“And I have filled him with the Spirit of God in wisdom, in understanding, in knowledge, and in all kinds of craftsmanship” (Ex 31:3; 35:31).*

*“Now Joshua the son of Nun was filled with the spirit of wisdom, for Moses had laid his hands on him; and the sons of Israel listened to him and did as the LORD had commanded Moses” (De 34:9).*

- ‘Filled him with the Spirit of God’ (Ex 31:3) intimates that God at times in the OT greatly aided a person by giving him special ‘knowledge’ through the filling of His Spirit.
- “In wisdom, in understanding, in knowledge, and in all kinds of craftsmanship” (Ex 31:3; c.f. De 34:9) likewise shows that God is not limited in the ways that He helps His people and that the Spirit brings special talent to get God’s work rightly done such as in the building of the tabernacle (c.f. NT spiritual gifts).

*“On the other hand I am filled with power—with the Spirit of the LORD—and with justice and courage to make known to Jacob his rebellious act, even to Israel his sin” (Mic 3:8).*

- Micah the prophet announces how the work of God’s Spirit animated him with courage to rebuke Israel with hope that she might hear God’s Word and respond by repentance from her sin (c.f. NT bold prophesying).

Summary: The Spirit of God worked more selectively in the OT by filling certain individuals with His Spirit, empowering them to carry out His special purposes, setting a pattern for the NT.

#### B) Filled with the Spirit in the New Testament

The ‘filling of the Spirit’ is regularly mentioned in the New Testament, establishing a link between Jesus’ coming, filling, and His anointing (filling) of His people. It is not uncommon for the church as a whole, rather than a few select individuals, to be filled with His Spirit to accomplish God’s greater redemptive purposes.

- John the Baptist’s Birth

*“For he will be great in the sight of the Lord... and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit, while yet in his mother’s womb” (Lu 1:15). “...when Elizabeth heard Mary’s greeting, the baby leaped in her womb; and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit” (Lu 1:41). “...Zacharias was filled with the Holy Spirit, and prophesied” (Lu 1:67).*

- Jesus’ ministry

*“And the Holy Spirit descended upon Him in bodily form like a dove, and a voice came out of heaven, “Thou art My beloved Son, in Thee I am well-pleased” (Lu 3:22; Mk 1:10; John 1:32). “And Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led about by the Spirit in the wilderness” (Lu 4:1; Mat 4:1; Mk 1:12)*

- The Church’s birth (64 times Spirit is used in Acts)

*“But you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now” (Ac 1:5). “But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you: (1:8). “And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit was giving them utterance (Ac 2:4)... Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said...” (Ac 4:8). “And when they had prayed, the place where they had gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled*

with the Holy Spirit, and began to speak the word of God with boldness” (Ac 4:31). “And I remembered the word of the Lord, how He used to say, ‘John baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit’” (Ac 11:16). “And the disciples were continually filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit” (Ac 13:52).

- Is speaking in tongues a necessary sign of filling of the Spirit? No. This misunderstanding comes from confusing what happened 3 times in Acts—the immediate speaking in languages to prove God was similarly working with non-Jews—with the proof for a person’s filling. Other verses like Ac 13:52 identify being filled with the Spirit with other things like joy. A person’s filling will bear results but need not proof!

Summary: In the NT God does not work with one special believer as in the OT but in the body of new believers where the Spirit of God regularly fills believers’ lives by the Holy Spirit so that they can serve the resurrected Jesus Christ. As the anointing went from Elijah to Elisha, so at Jesus’ ascension the anointing went to His people.

## C) Filled with the Spirit (Eph 5:17-21)

Paul interestingly sets a vivid picture of drunkenness against the church’s infilling of the Spirit. Let’s see what the ‘filling’ practically means and if it refers to occasional events or a constant description of a believer’s life.

*17 So then do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. 18 And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit, 19 speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord; 20 always giving thanks for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God, even the Father; 21 and be subject to one another in the fear of Christ (Eph 5:17-21).*

- “Not get drunk with wine” stands in obvious contrast with being “filled with the Spirit” which is given to direct us not only to refrain from drunkenness but more importantly identifies the grand expectations shaping our lives when the Holy Spirit in Jesus fills His people (Ac 2).
- “Filled” speaks of an abounding amount, wholly influenced by the Spirit (walk, guided, empowered). “Behold, the glory of the LORD filled the house” (Eze 43:5).
- “Be filled with the Spirit” reminds us that no matter what our Christian heritage and possible discomfort with this phrase—and yes, it has been wrongly used at times—the importance of this command “to be filled with the Spirit” still stands. “Spirit” definitely is the Holy Spirit, God Himself at work in our hearts.
- Paul provides four aspects that help believers engage in the filling of the Spirit of God.
  - (1) “Speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs” (19) stresses not the chemically-induced charge of music which stimulates the flesh but the awesome corporate use of truth in worship.
  - (2) “Making melody with your heart to the Lord” (5:19) reminds us how God wants to engage our minds with words of truth in our hearts expressing our delight in the Lord.
  - (3) “Always giving thanks” (5:20) compels us to focus on God’s goodness and intimate work in our lives.
  - (4) “Being subject to one another in the fear of Christ” (5:21) hints at the necessity of good relationships to have a close relationship with God.

Summary: God opens the door for us to experience “an abundant life” (Jn 10:10) through the way the Spirit of God stirs and guides our spiritual lives. Those things that some associate with the filling of the Holy Spirit (e.g. slain, laughing, tongues, etc.) are not at all mentioned here, but worship, powerfully moved by His magnificent truths, delighting in God, giving thanks, and humbly serving with others.

### Conclusion:

The Holy Spirit comes upon His people for the special purpose to carry out God’s will (Eph 5:17). The new covenant depicts a new age when the Spirit of God lives out Christ’s life in and through believers. God’s filling of His Spirit transforms our persons and uses us and our gifting to bring blessings to others for His glory.

### Discussion Questions

- How are the world’s way of gaining excitement through drugs and alcohol different from Christians?
- What characteristic of the Spirit’s filling in Eph 5:18-21 delights you the most?
- What does it personally mean for you to be filled with the Holy Spirit? Please explain.

### The Spirit’s Filling

- Spirit’s indwelling
- God’s spiritual temple
- Filled (not some) with Spirit
- Transformed by Holy Spirit (being)
- Differently gifted by Spirit
- Community with others of Spirit
- Bear fruit of Spirit (joy, love, etc)
- Serve God’s purposes