

## **“WHAT IT MEANS TO BE FILLED WITH THE SPIRIT” (Ephesians 5:18)**

We’ve been studying the book of Ephesians for some weeks now, and it seems like each section we come to is the most important part of the book. Ephesians is filled with one astounding truth after another – and the verse we come to today is one of the most important verses in the Bible on living the Christian life.

A.J. Gordon, a pastor and professor who founded Gordon-Conwell Seminary, talks about going to the World’s Fair and from a distance he saw a man pumping water with a hand pump. As he watched, he was amazed at how much energy this man had – he kept pumping and pumping without taking a break – and an endless supply of water poured out of the pump. Gordon decided he needed to meet this amazing man, and began walking towards him. As he got closer, he discovered that it wasn’t a man pumping the water, but wooden figure made 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 that was powered by electricity. The man was not pumping the water, the water was pumping him. Gordon went on to say, “When you see a man or woman overflowing with love and joy and peace, you can be sure that it is the power of God working through them. All a person has to do is keep their hand on the handle.”

What professor Gordon is was a perfect illustration of living the Christian life, where we allow the power of God to work in us and through us. As we’ve been making our way through Ephesians, we’ve seen that a dramatic change takes place at conversion – we are born again spiritually and begin a brand-new life in Christ. Positionally, everything about our life changes – we are delivered from the kingdom of darkness and transferred to the kingdom of light – we become part of God’s family called the church – we are given every spiritual blessing in Christ, and are fully equipped to live a victorious Christian life. And yet many Christians struggle to live this new life. Even the great Apostle Paul did.

In Romans 7 he says, “I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do... For I do not do the good I want to do, but the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing” (Romans 7:15, 19). Can you identify with this? We all can. Just because we’re saved does not mean we automatically live differently – it doesn’t mean that we don’t struggle with sin – and it doesn’t mean that we are instantly mature in Christ. In the very next chapter of Romans – Romans 8 – Paul says the key to change – the key to living victoriously – is the power and presence of the Holy Spirit within us.

In Romans 8:5-8 he writes... “Those who live according to the flesh have their minds set on what the flesh desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires. The mind governed by the flesh is death, but the mind governed by the Spirit is life and peace. The mind governed by the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God’s law, nor can it do so. Those who are in the realm of the flesh cannot please God. You, however, are not in the realm of the flesh but are in the realm of the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God lives in you.”

Notice the different phrases Paul uses regarding the Holy Spirit – we are to live in accordance with the Spirit – we are to set our minds on the Spirit and let our minds be governed by the Spirit – and we are to live in the realm of the Spirit. In Galatians 5:16 Paul puts it this way... “So I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh.”

All of what Paul says is encapsulated in the little phrase we will look at today – being filled with the Spirit. Over the next two weeks we’re going to take time to explore what it means to be filled with the Spirit, and in doing so, learn more about who the Holy Spirit is and the vital role He plays in our lives.

In Ephesians 5:18 Paul writes, “Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit.” As Paul likes to do, he first gives a negative command – what not to do – followed by a positive command of what we are to do.

He begins by saying, “Do not get drunk on wine.” Paul uses drunkenness as a way of contrasting what it means to be filled with the Spirit. While getting drunk is not the main point of the verse, we do have a clear command to not drink to the point of intoxication. God’s Word presents wine in both a positive and negative light. On the positive side, in the Old Testament wine is pictured as a sign of God’s blessing, and Psalms says it “gladdens the hearts of men” (Psalm 104:15). But the Bible also warns of the moral dangers that can come from wine. Proverbs 20:1 says, “Wine is a mocker, strong drink a brawler, and whoever is led astray by it is not wise.” The Bible does not forbid the moderate use of alcohol, but it strongly condemns drunkenness.

Drunkenness, Paul says, leads to debauchery. That’s not a word we use every day. It means reckless, unrestrained, out-of-control living. It’s the same word used to describe what the prodigal son did when he ran away to a distant country and lived like a wild man – he threw off all moral restraints and gave in to all his fleshly desires.

Debauchery and drunkenness go hand-in-hand. When a person gets drunk, they are no longer in control of their mind and body – the alcohol is in control – and they do and say things they normally wouldn’t say or do. This is what happened to Noah – he got drunk and took off all his clothes and was left exposed in his tent. His reckless actions led to a chain of long-lasting consequences for his family. Later in Genesis 19, Lot’s daughters got their father drunk in order to have children with him. They knew that if he was intoxicated, he wouldn’t be thinking straight and open to doing something foolish.

This is why scripture warns us of the dangers of alcohol. I talked with someone not long ago who is very involved in Alcoholics Anonymous, this person described how alcohol completely took over his life, it alienated him from his loved ones, and led him into poverty, and along with heavy narcotics use caused him to lose all his teeth and suffer other health problems – and he’s only in his 30s. Beer commercials portray alcohol as fun and festive, but it doesn’t the negative, harmful effects that can come from it. There is an appropriate use of alcohol, and each believer has the freedom to decide if they will drink or not – it falls into the category of a gray area – but the Bible is clear that believers should never put themselves in a position to be drunk and lose control.

Paul says, “Do not get drunk on wine, but – and here is the contrast – be filled with the Spirit.” In order to understand what this means we first need to understand who the Holy Spirit is. The Holy Spirit is the third person of the Godhead. The Bible teaches that God is three persons – the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit – and that are three persons of the trinity are fully and equally God. It’s not hard to understand who God the Father is – we see His works of creation all around us; and it’s not difficult to picture who Jesus is because He walked the earth as a flesh-and-blood person.

But the Holy Spirit is difficult for our human minds to grasp. Many people conceive of Him not as a person, but mystical force or energy. But the Bible declares the Holy Spirit to be a person with a mind, will, and emotions.

I've taught the Bible for many years and it's still hard for me to wrap my mind around the trinity – that God is three-in-one. One thing that is helpful to me is to remember that each person of the Godhead is distinct – in other words the Son is not the Father, and the Holy Spirit is not Jesus – yet each person is God – each person is deity. We naturally think of the Father as being God, and many times in scripture the Father is referred to simply as God. But the Son and the Holy Spirit are equally God. When we use the phrase “the Holy Spirit of God,” it doesn't mean that the Holy Spirit is an extension of the Father, it means that the Holy Spirit is God, just as the Son is God.

Now that that is all cleared up... it's also important to know that each person of the trinity has a unique role in God's eternal plan, and sometimes those roles overlap. For example, when you ask, “Who created the world?” The Bible declares that all three persons of the Godhead played a role in creation. But the primary role and ministry of the Holy Spirit is manifesting the God's presence and power. By the Holy Spirit we experience the presence of God in our lives – He makes our relationship with God personal and intimate – and by the Holy Spirit we receive the power and ability to be all that God created us in Christ to be.

We first meet the Holy Spirit in the first chapter of the Bible where the Spirit of God is hovering over the unformed, dark world – ready to bring about life and order and beauty. The Old Testament word for Spirit is *ruach*, which means “wind” or breath.” Just as wind and breath are invisible, God's Spirit is invisible. Just as wind is powerful, so God is powerful – and just as breath keeps us alive, so God's Spirit sustains all of life.

As the story of the Bible continues, we see the Spirit of God giving special powers to people for specific tasks. The first person in the Bible that happens to is Joseph – God's Spirit enabled him to understand and interpret dreams. And then it happens to a man named Bezalel – God's Spirit filled him with knowledge and skills to make beautiful things in the tabernacle. It happened to Samson – four different times it says that Spirit of the Lord came upon him, enabling him to perform superhuman feats of strength. We also see God's Spirit empower the Old Testament prophets to see into the future and record prophecy.

The prophets saw that while God's Spirit created a beautiful, good world, the world has been cursed by sin – but that the Spirit would come, just like in Genesis 1, to recreate and transform the human heart. Centuries pass by and then Jesus comes to earth. At His baptism the skies open up and God's Spirit comes and rests on Him like a dove, empowering and anointing Him to begin the work of a new creation.

On the night before His death, in the Upper Room, Jesus told His disciples that He would be leaving them and returning to heaven. But, He says in John 14:16-17, “And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever—the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you.”

Don't miss those last two words... He will be *in you*. In the Old Testament the Holy Spirit would come temporarily upon people, but never permanently dwelled in them. Ten days after Jesus ascended back to heaven, on the Day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit descended on the believers in the Upper Room, with the sound of a violent wind, and they were filled with the Holy Spirit.

In the book of Acts you see a group of believers who were timid and full of fear, receive the Holy Spirit and then go out and turn the world upside-down for Christ. The Holy Spirit of God was now dwelling right inside them, and the effects of His presence was unmistakable.

Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, went out into the streets of Jerusalem and preached a sermon. Afterwards, 3000 people were saved and baptized. Stephen, filled with the Spirit, boldly preached Christ and was martyred in chapter 7. As Paul and his missionary team went out, several times it says they were filled with the Spirit.

What becomes clear as the New Testament unfolds is that every believer has the Holy Spirit in his or her life. Romans 8:9 says, “If anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, they do not belong to Christ.” 1 Corinthians 12:13a says, “For we were all baptized by one Spirit so as to form one body.” These verses make it clear that the moment you are saved and born again into God’s family, the Holy Spirit comes to live in you.

The Bible uses four terms to describe what the Holy Spirit does at conversion...

First, the Holy Spirit **regenerates us** – where we once we’re dead in our sins, He makes us spiritual alive and makes us a new person.

Second, the Holy Spirit **baptizes us**. Just as water baptism identifies us as a true believer, so Spirit baptism identifies us as belonging to Christ and His church. The baptism of the Holy Spirit is the unseen, spiritual act where we are placed in union with Christ and other believers.

Third, at conversion the Holy Spirit **indwells us**. This is what Jesus meant in John 14 when He said that the Holy Spirit will live with you and be in you. At the moment of salvation the Holy Spirit takes up permanent residence in the bodies of believers, and our bodies become a temple of the Holy Spirit, a holy place that the presence of God inhabits. We tend to think of God as completely transcendent, far removed from us in heaven, this reminds us that God is also immanent, dwelling right inside us.

Fourth, at the moment of salvation the Holy Spirit **seals us**. This means that once we are saved the presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives assures us that we are saved and guarantees that God will see us all the way through this life to heaven – our salvation is protected and secured by the Holy Spirit.

These four things happen to every person who is truly saved at the moment of salvation. Nowhere in the Bible are we commanded to be regenerated or baptized or indwelt or sealed by the Spirit – all of these are one-time acts that take place at conversion. This brings us then to the filling of the Spirit which is different – we are commanded to be filled with the Spirit. This means that although the Holy Spirit lives in us, to experience His presence and power, we must be filled with the Spirit. The word “filled” is in the present tense, which means that being filled with the Spirit is an on-going experience.

Although the Holy Spirit indwells us, we must allow Him to work in our lives. In chapter four of Ephesians, when Paul was describing putting off our self and former life of sin, and putting on our new self and living a new life in Christ, he says in 4:30... “Do not grieve the Holy Spirit.” When we sin, when we ignore His presence, our relationship with the Holy Spirit is disrupted – He still dwells within us, but our fellowship and intimacy and harmony with Him is disrupted. It’s similar to a married couple who have stopped speaking to one another – they’re still married, but there is no warmth or closeness – there is no fellowship. The same is true when we grieve the Holy Spirit.

1 Thessalonians 5:19 says, “Do not quench the Spirit.” When we give into sin, and when we let our relationship with the Lord grow cold, the work of the Holy Spirit is quenched and He is not free to work in us. This is why we are commanded to be filled with the Spirit – it’s a choice to let the presence and power of the Holy Spirit work in us and through us.

Theologians like to say that the filling of the Spirit is not us getting more of the Holy Spirit, but the Holy Spirit getting more of us. That’s a great way to put it – all that the Holy Spirit is and does is available to us, but sin and apathy and worldly distractions can quench the Spirit’s work in our lives.

So then, after waiting all this time, let’s talk about what it means to be filled with the Spirit. To start with, it’s the opposite of being drunk with wine. Being drunk with wine, as we saw, is being under the influence and control by alcohol, and being filled with the Spirit is being under His influence and control. It’s like Samson who, when filled with the Spirit of God, was able to do supernatural things we otherwise could not do. He was under the influence of the Spirit, and once the Spirit of God left him, his strength left him.

The Greek word for “filled” – *pleroo* – is used in the Bible of being controlled by an emotion. For example, the disciples were filled with sorrow. It also says they were filled with joy. We know what it’s like to be filled with one emotion, and then quickly filled by another emotion. When a baby is born, you’re filled with unspeakable joy, but when a loved one dies you are filled with grief. You’re controlled by the emotion of the moment. To be filled with the Spirit means that your life is controlled and dominated by the presence and power of the Holy Spirit.

The word *pleroo* is also used of wind filling the sails of a boat and carrying it along. A sailboat is completely dependent on the wind, otherwise it just sits there. In the same way, our life is moved along and is powered by the Holy Spirit. It’s not so much the picture of the Spirit filling us like you fill a cup with water, but of filling us in the sense of motion and power. The word “filled” is in the passive voice which means that we are not moved along or empowered by our own energy or power, but by the Holy Spirit. In Mark 1:12 it says that Jesus was “driven” by the Spirit into the wilderness. Jesus was so controlled by the Spirit that the Spirit drove Him to where He wanted Him to go. That’s the idea.

A classic illustration of being filled with the Spirit is a glove. I can tell this glove to go over and turn the Christmas light off, but the glove can’t do anything unless I put my hand in the glove. Likewise, being filled with the Spirit is God living His life in me and through me. Apart from Him I can do nothing – I’m just a glove sitting on a table – but with God filling my life, I can do all things through His power.

So then, to be filled with the Spirit means that you are under His influence and control – that you are dominated by His presence and power – and that all that you say or do is driven and carried along by the Spirit.

The big question is: How do I experience the filling of the Spirit? The Bible commands me to be filled with the Spirit – what do I need to do in order for that to happen? Paul doesn’t give any formula for how that happens, but when we look at the rest of scripture, we see three essential things I must do in order for the Holy Spirit to fill me.

Number one, **I must yield to the Holy Spirit.** To yield means to give up or give way to something. Yielding to the Holy Spirit means to give the steering wheel of your life to God, surrendering control of your life to Him. This is what Paul means in Romans 12:1 when he says, “Offer your bodies as a living sacrifice,” and in Romans 6:13a where he says, “Do not offer any part of yourself to sin as an instrument of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God.”

One simple way to yield to the Holy Spirit is to begin your day by praying and saying to God, “This is your day, and I am at your disposal. I have no idea what the next twenty-four hours will hold, but I’m yours Lord. Take control of my mind and heart so that I am filled with you power and presence. Without you I can accomplish nothing – fill me with your Spirit today.” The first thing I must do is yield to the Spirit.

Number two, **I must confess my sin** – I must examine my heart to make sure there is nothing that is grieving the Spirit or quenching His power. To use the illustration of the glove, I must make sure there is nothing sinful – nothing part of my old life – that is already filling me. or detrimental that is filling up the fingers of the glove and preventing the Holy Spirit from filling me. When King David lived with unconfessed sin for almost a year, it ate away at his body and soul, and the Spirit of God was not free to work in Him. He had no joy, he had no peace, and his intimate fellowship with the Lord was severed. But when he acknowledged his sin before God, the guilt of His sin was lifted, joy returned to his soul, and His fellowship with God was restored. The Holy Spirit cannot fill a life that is sinful and worldly, but He is free to work in a life that is broken and contrite.

Number three, **I must walk by the Spirit**. Galatians 5:16 says, “So I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh.” Walking by the Spirit means that you establish a spiritual atmosphere in your inner life every day by the spiritual disciplines of prayer, reading the Bible, attending church, and fellowshiping with fellow believers. By practicing these daily basic disciplines you will experience spiritual energy and power to overcome the old desires of the flesh. By walking by the Spirit your desires will change and your attraction to sin will decrease. Instead of focusing on what you shouldn’t be doing, focus on walking by the Spirit and practicing the spiritual disciplines that foster spiritual growth.

It all gets back to the man A.J. Gordon saw at the World’s Fair. The man was not pumping the water, the water was pumping him. If you want to experience the presence and power of God in your life – if you want to live differently and see good things come forth from your life – simply keep your hand on the handle. Yield to the Spirit’s control, confess your sin, and practice the spiritual disciplines that create the atmosphere in which the Holy Spirit can work.

**Let’s pray...** Perhaps you haven’t yet been born again and indwelt by the Holy Spirit, and this morning the Spirit of God is drawing you to come to Christ for salvation. Salvation is a free gift from God that flows from His grace – all He asks you to do is acknowledge your sin and need for a Savior and trust Christ as your Savior from sin. You can do that right now – believe in Christ and you will be saved, and you can begin to walk a new life filled with the Holy Spirit.

Perhaps you are here this morning and you had received Christ as your Savior, you have been regenerated and baptized and indwelt and sealed by the Holy Spirit, but you’re not experiencing His presence and power in your life. There’s something missing, and you want to experience all that God has for you.

- Yield your life to God and say, “Fill me with your Spirit, Lord, I’m all yours.”
- Come clean with God and confess any sin that has grieved the Holy Spirit and quenched His power. Tell God you want to clear out whatever is preventing the Spirit’s work in your life.
- And then tell God that you want to get back to the spiritual disciplines and habits that set the atmosphere for the Spirit to work.