

Believers Should be Filled with the Spirit

Ephesians 5:18-21

Ephesians 5:18-21 – *“And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord, giving thanks always for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, submitting to one another in the fear of God.”*

Background Notes

In the second half of Ephesians there are exhortations to believers that are based on the doctrine that is taught in the first three chapters of the epistle. In this section of Ephesians 5, we are commanded to be filled with the Spirit. In our doctrinal points, we'll see the characteristics of the Spirit-filled believer, but first let's discuss what the filling of the Spirit is, and what the filling of the Spirit is not.

First, what the filling of the Spirit is not. The filling of the Spirit is not the same as the baptism of the Spirit. The baptism of the Holy Spirit took place at Pentecost when the Holy Spirit came upon the believers and the Church was formed. When we become Christians, we are brought into the Church, the Body of Christ, the already-Spirit-baptized body of believers. So, baptism of, or by, or in, the Holy Spirit is not a “second experience” for the Christian, an experience that occurs subsequent to conversion. Your baptism of, or by, or in, the Holy Spirit took place when you became a believer.

I think it's more in line with Scripture to think of the baptism of the Holy Spirit in reference to the Church, and that it took place once and for all time at Pentecost. At conversion, individual believers are brought into that already-baptized Body of Christ. In 1 Corinthians 12:13 says, *“For in one Spirit we were baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and have all been made to drink into one spirit.”*

Here's an illustration. Many of you know that I used to work as a research scientist with Westinghouse Electric Company. When I signed the contract with Westinghouse, I joined the company. I was brought into the corporation. But the corporation wasn't formed when I joined. The corporation was already formed. It was formed many years before I was incorporated into the company. Similarly, at conversion every individual believer is incorporated into the Church, or Body of Christ, that was originally formed at Pentecost by the baptism of the Holy Spirit. The filling of the Holy Spirit is not the baptism of the Holy Spirit.

Furthermore, the *filling* of the Holy Spirit is not the same as the *indwelling* of the Holy Spirit. In Ephesians 5 we are commanded to be *filled* with the Holy Spirit, but we are never commanded to be *indwelt* of the Spirit. Why? Because

the Holy Spirit comes to live in us, or indwell us, at the moment of conversion. Ephesians 1:13 says that when we believed, we were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise. So, the Holy Spirit already indwells everyone who is a true Christian, and every believer's body is the Temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 6:19). The filling of the Holy Spirit is not the baptism of the Holy Spirit, and is not the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

So, what is the filling of the Spirit? To be filled with the Spirit means to be under the influence and control of the Holy Spirit. That's why we have the comparison here of being filled with wine: *"Do not be filled with wine, in which is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit"* (v18).

In the Greek language, the words "be filled" here are in the present passive tense – thus *"be filled"* here means *"be continually filled"*. And verse 18 is not just an exhortation – it's a command!

Doctrinal Point

Believers should be filled with the Spirit.

The following three points are the characteristics of the Spirit-filled believer. Notice that there is nothing here about speaking in tongues or having ecstatic experiences in order to be filled with Spirit - or even as a result of being filled with Spirit. Some Christians who insist that speaking in tongues or ecstatic experiences are essential to being Spirit-filled need to re-read Ephesians 5:18-21.

a. The Spirit-filled believer sings spiritual songs (v19). *"Speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord."* In Colossians 3:16, we have a very similar passage of Scripture: *"Let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord."* Notice the close connection between *the Word* and the psalms and hymns and spiritual songs in Colossians 3. In other words, the Spirit-filled Christian of Ephesians 5 is the Word-filled Christian of Colossians 3! When the Word dwells richly in us, it's bound to affect the way we live, the way we speak to one another, the way we sing, and even what kinds of songs we enjoy.

What kinds of songs do you enjoy? (I'm talking here about the lyrics or the words - not form or style of music!) Are the lyrics scriptural, like the psalms and hymns and spiritual songs of the early Church? The kind of lyrics you enjoy may be an indication of whether or not you are a Spirit-filled believer - I think that's a logical conclusion to draw from this passage. There's bound to be melody in your heart if you're a Spirit-filled Christian. There's bound to be melody in the hearts of the Spirit-filled believers, who sing to the Lord even when life is not going very well. Remember Paul and Silas, who sang when they were shackled in prison (Acts 16:25)!

b. The Spirit-filled believer gives thanks for all things (v20). “Giving thanks always for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.” Notice - *all things!* Even when the car breaks down, or your basement is flooded, or you have to pay more income tax than you thought you had to pay, or even when you become very ill. We can be thankful in all circumstances, because we know God is in control and He has a beneficial purpose in what He has allowed to happen.

Are you thankful to all the things God has allowed to come into your life, even though you may not understand why? Being thankful for all things is a characteristic of the Spirit-filled believer. Remember, Paul was chained to a Roman guard when he wrote this letter. He was certainly a Spirit-filled believer!

c. The Spirit-filled believer submits to authority structures (v21). “Submitting to one another in the fear of God.” How about this as a characteristic? I know a number of (self-identified) Spirit-filled Christians who don’t like this characteristic. They don’t like to submit to authority - whether it is in the home, or the church, or in society. They claim to be Spirit-filled, but they want to do their *own* thing. Sometimes they even justify their refusal to submit to authority structures with words such as “the Lord told me to do this or that”. Ever hear that before? I know of a Christian man who left his wife and children and married another woman, and justified it by saying that the *Lord* told him to do it! No way! I don’t know what voice he heard, but it certainly wasn’t the voice of God.

The idea of submitting (v21) doesn’t mean that we just arbitrarily submit to any believer. That’s not the idea. It has to do with submitting to the authority structures that God has set up. How do we know that? We know it from the context of the verse. From verse 22 on, Paul begins to elaborate on authority structures. The first authority structure that Paul takes up is the home: the duties and responsibilities of husbands and wives, and even children (in chapter 6). So, Spirit-filled believers submit to authority structures – that’s part of their character. Just as the early Christians were filled with the Spirit, so today’s believers should be filled with the Spirit.

Practical Application

Are you a Spirit-filled Christian?

First of all, are you a Christian? You are a Christian if you have accepted Jesus Christ as your personal Savior. Have you trusted in the work of Jesus on the cross for forgiveness of sin? That’s how you become a Christian.

But now, are you a Spirit-filled Christian? In Ephesians 5 we are *commanded* to be filled with the Spirit! You’ll know you’re Spirit-filled if you can honestly meet these three characteristics: Do you sing spiritual songs? Do you give thanks for all things? Do you submit to authority structures? Do you meet all three characteristics?

Being Spirit-filled is not defined as having spiritual gifts, or having certain spiritual experiences, but rather by the three life characteristics that the apostle Paul mentions in this passage. Although I believe there are special *anointings* of the Holy Spirit upon some believers at certain times and for certain situations in the work of the Lord, we don't program the anointing of the Spirit. It is under the sovereign control of the Holy Spirit Himself. And anointing is not the same as being filled with the Spirit.

I once worked with a person who claimed that he was Spirit-filled because he'd had certain spiritual experiences subsequent to his conversion. One day he came to me for counseling because he was filled with doubts. He wasn't thankful, and he had problems with authority in the home. I couldn't resist saying, "But Carl, I thought you are Spirit-filled." Then I shared the passage here, and he saw the point. No matter what "experiences" he may have had, he was not Spirit-filled because he didn't meet the three characteristics that Scripture says will characterize the lives of Spirit-filled believers.

We are commanded to be filled with the Spirit! Are you a Spirit-filled Christian?