



BE CONTINUALLY FILLED WITH THE SPIRIT! EPHESIANS 5:15-21

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Today I want to focus on what it means to be filled with the Spirit, but before we turn to that let me make a couple of observations about vv. 15-17.

Paul's point in these three verses is to describe what it means for a Christian to live a life characterized by wisdom. The first thing he says is that we must make "best use of the time, because the days are evil" (v. 16a). The verb translated "make best use" could easily be rendered "redeem" or "buy back." Take advantage of every passing moment to make your life count for Christ.

As for redeeming the time, let me give you a few examples of what it means. The history and development of the Christian church have largely been shaped by only a few individuals. Consider what they were able to accomplish in a very short lifespan.

Martin Luther – 63 years old when he died
Charles Spurgeon - 58 years old when he died
John Calvin – 55 years old when he died
Jonathan Edwards - 54 years old when he died
George Whitefield - 53 years old when he died
Thomas Aquinas – 49 years old when he died
William Perkins - 44 years old when he died

The reason for being diligent to make good use of every minute of your life is that "the days are evil." Clearly, the apostle Paul was not naïve and uninformed about the world. In Galatians 1:4 he refers to "this present evil age." I hear people say that surely there has never been a time in human history when all manner of evil was so pervasive and present as it is today. I beg to differ. The way in which evil expresses itself may differ from one century to another, but evil has always been characteristic of life in the earth: abortion, rampant sexual immorality, war, poverty, greed, murder, kidnapping, together with a variety of natural disasters and plagues.

I'm actually a little surprised that Paul would even think that he needed to remind us of this. It was obvious in his day and is especially obvious to us in the 21st century. Evil in all its many forms does its best to get us to waste time. Perhaps it would help to pause and reflect on how we have either wasted or redeemed the time that God has given us. Paul's point, which is as relevant today as it was in the first century, is that we must seize and take advantage of every minute of life. That doesn't mean we can't slow down and enjoy our lives, our hobbies, our families, and even our leisure time. It simply means that even these activities are done conscious that they are God's gift, intended ultimately for God's glory.

My theological hero, Jonathan Edwards, who led the First Great Awakening in 1734-41, wrote his Resolutions when he was only 20 years old. The 70th resolution or commitment has always stuck with me:

"Resolved: Never to lose one moment of time, but to improve it in the most profitable way I possibly can."

And yet in spite of all the evil we see, when we get to v. 20 Paul will encourage us to "give thanks always and for everything." That doesn't mean you are to smile and sing joyfully at a funeral. Paul doesn't mean you can't grieve over the prolonged suffering of a friend who eventually dies at an early age. He doesn't mean that you can't rage against expressions of injustice in our world. If it is beyond our capacity to give thanks when so much of what we see and feel is wicked, that is why we need to be filled with the Holy Spirit. He alone can empower us to thrive and be thankful in a world that is rapidly decaying.

When Paul urges us to "look carefully . . . how you walk" (v. 15) he means that we must be *intentional* and *purposeful* in the decisions we make. Don't be careless. Don't merely drift through life. You must know yourself: your strengths and weaknesses. You must know your enemy: Satan, and all his schemes. You must discern every situation to know what the will of God is for you in that moment. Walk carefully!

Paul mentions a second characteristic of what it means to walk wisely: “understand what the will of the Lord is” (v. 17b). He’s not talking here about God’s will as revealed in Scripture. Rather he has in view decisions we make in the good use of our time, such as: what job should I take, whom should I marry, where should I live, who are the individuals that I should seek as friends, and of course, how should I make best use of my time.

The third way to walk “as wise” men and women concerns the importance of being filled with the Spirit, and that is my primary focus today.

Be Filled with the Holy Spirit!

I can only speak for myself, but when I read in Scripture that I am to continually be “filled” with the Spirit, it causes me to think of the Holy Spirit as more of a force rather than a thinking, feeling, willing person. After all, the imagery is quite graphic. When you fill up a container, you would never conceive of the content as being anything other than some inanimate, physical substance. It may be water or milk or coffee or a Diet Coke or some such item. My point is that the imagery of being “filled” with the Spirit tends to depersonalize the Holy Spirit. But we know the Holy Spirit is a person. And here is why

The Person of the Holy Spirit

Christians down through the ages have not always been polite to the Holy Spirit. As Alister McGrath has said: “The Holy Spirit has long been the Cinderella of the Trinity. The other two sisters may have gone to the theological ball; the Holy Spirit got left behind every time. But not now. The rise of the charismatic movement . . . within virtually every mainstream church has ensured that the Holy Spirit figures prominently on the theological agenda” (*Christian Theology*, 307).

Notwithstanding the emergence of the Spirit in the minds and experience of evangelicals worldwide, many still struggle to conceive of the Spirit as a person. There are several reasons for this. One is the very name or title, “Spirit,” or in the King James Version, “Holy Ghost.” Such terminology will likely not go away easily, especially as the doxology calls for praise of the “Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.” There may have been a time when such language felt appropriate, but in our day a “ghost” is hardly the sort of entity with which anyone in their right mind would want to be in relationship, much less love. I grew up watching the cartoon series of “Casper, the friendly ghost.” We must push back against any notion that the Holy Spirit is of a similar nature!

This is one reason why we don’t struggle all that much with relating to our Heavenly Father and with Jesus, the Son of God. Although we’ve never seen the Father, the name “Father” is one with which we can connect and relate. We’ve all had earthly fathers, some of them good, some of them bad. So the word “Father” evokes in your mind and heart the image of a person with whom you can interact.

It’s the same with Jesus. We know he had a body, and still does. People in the first century saw him, talked with him, listened to him speak, ate meals with him, touched his body, and he many times would lay his own hands on them. We can understand how Peter grew close in his relationship with Jesus. And John was probably more intimate with Jesus on a friendship level than any other. He is the disciple who is described as having leaned on Jesus’ breast in the Upper Room.

But what are we supposed to do with the Holy Spirit? How do you embrace empty space? Although it’s not really empty, since the Spirit is everywhere. He’s there. Still, it feels as if we are pretending, as if it’s all make-believe, when we speak of embracing the Spirit and being loved and embraced by him. We talk about being enfolded in the arms of our heavenly Father, but the Spirit has no arms. I recall Gordon Fee’s remark that a student once told a colleague of his, “God the Father makes perfectly good sense to me; and God the Son I can quite understand; but the Holy Spirit is a gray oblong blur” (*God’s Empowering Presence*, 5-6).

Given our society’s infatuation with Star Wars, many simply assume that the Spirit of God is no different from the “force” that supposedly permeates the universe and provides power to those who wage war against the dark side. We can envision a father and son smiling or frowning or giving expression to any number of relational clues. But it doesn’t make much sense for a spirit to smile or laugh or experience delight or disgust. Thus, the common but entirely unbiblical habit of describing the Holy Spirit as an “it” rather than “he”.

A persuasive case can be made that the Holy Spirit is a person by taking note of how the NT authors describe the Spirit as *possessing all the qualities that we typically associate with personhood*. Think for a moment of how you

would demonstrate to someone that another entity is a person, as over against a robot. What attributes would you cite? Most likely you would insist on *intellect or mind, will or the capacity for volitional action, as well as emotions, feelings, and affections*. You might also add *self-consciousness* and perhaps also *power*. Even in the OT we see personal qualities attributed to the Spirit. In Isaiah 11:2 we read of, "the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord." Wisdom and understanding are functions of the mind.

The apostle Paul mentions "*the mind of the Spirit*" in Romans 8:27. Again, in 1 Corinthians 2:10-11, he speaks of the Spirit who "searches everything, even the depths of God," and that "no one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God." The emergence of Artificial Intelligence (AI) has led some to conceive of highly advanced computers as having a mind. But "mind" seems inappropriate given the fact that we are describing a machine. Simply put, *the Holy Spirit thinks. He reasons, deduces, understands, infers, contemplates, experiences self-consciousness, and numerous other functions of a mind.*

But merely possessing a mind does not in itself lead us to conclude that the Holy Spirit is a person. He also experiences *emotions or feelings*. He "intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words" (Rom. 8:26). We read about "the love of the Spirit" in Romans 15:30, a reference to the Spirit's love or affection for us. Likewise, we are urged not to "grieve the Holy Spirit of God."

One would hardly meet the criteria of personhood in the absence of a *will*, the capacity to make choices and decisions. When Paul and his companions attempted to go into Bithynia, "the Spirit of Jesus did not allow them" (Acts 16:7). In other words, it was *against the Spirit's will* that Paul should enter that territory. One of the clearest statements about the personhood of the Spirit comes in Paul's discussion of spiritual gifts. Whereas we might like to think that whether we receive this or that spiritual gift is up to us, Paul declares that the Holy Spirit "apportions to each one individually *as he wills*" (1 Cor. 12:11; italics mine).

We wouldn't predicate personhood of the Spirit if he did not perform those *functions or activities* that we typically associate with a person. It is, therefore, quite telling that the NT speaks of the Holy Spirit talking (Mark 13:11; Acts 1:16; 8:29; 10:19; 11:12; 13:2; 21:11; 1 Tim. 4:1; Heb. 3:7; Rev. 2:7 ["what the Spirit says to the churches"; see also 2:11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22) and testifying (John 15:26; 16:23). The Spirit can be sinned against (Matt. 12:31), lied to (Acts 5:3), tested or tempted (Acts 5:9), and even insulted (Heb. 10:29). An inanimate rock or chair or other lifeless object is not capable of these decidedly personal actions. Furthermore, the Holy Spirit enters into *relationship* with other persons (2 Cor. 13:14), encourages (Acts 9:31), strengthens (Eph. 3:16), and teaches (Luke 12:12; John 14:26; 1 Cor. 2:13).

Of course, we cannot ignore several analogies or images that the NT authors use to describe the Spirit, some of which seem to depersonalize the Holy Spirit. Luke speaks of the Spirit as if he were a garment with which we can be "*clothed*" (Luke 24:49), while John quotes Jesus as comparing the Holy Spirit to "*rivers of living water*" (John 7:38). Jesus himself appealed to *breath or wind* to describe how the disciples would receive him (John 20:22; see also John 3:8). We must remember, however, that in making use of such language Jesus is not describing the Spirit's nature or being, but rather his work and activity, specifically in causing men and women to be born again. The OT prophet Joel, as quoted by Peter, prophesied that the Holy Spirit would be "*poured out*," as if a liquid (Acts 2:17; cf. Rom. 5:5). But how does one "pour out" a person? In addition, the Spirit is portrayed as a *fire* (Matt. 3:11; Acts 2:3; 1 Thess. 5:19) and *oil* (James 5:14). None of these statements are to be taken literally. They are clear examples of the sort of figurative language we find everywhere in Scripture.

We also find evidence that the Spirit is a person from *the sins that are committed against him*. Consider the sin of blasphemy of the Holy Spirit. It makes little sense to speak of blaspheming a law or a basketball or a book or any lifeless entity. The same may be said of lying to the Spirit, as was the case with Ananias and his wife Sapphira. You can't lie to an abstract principle, but only to a person. When the author of Hebrews (10:28) speaks of committing "outrage" (ESV) against the Spirit, or of "*insulting*" the Spirit (NASB), we once again can only envision such a sin against a person who suffers the dishonor of such an action.

The evidence clearly substantiates the view that the Holy Spirit is not some formless, free-floating wisp of air that is defined solely by the power "it" displays. The Spirit of God is most assuredly personal. "**He is a loving, self-conscious, willing, thinking, feeling person who enters into intimate relationship with all who have, by his power, trusted Christ for salvation.**"

The Biblical References to being Filled with the Spirit

Our first encounter with the language of being filled with the Spirit is found in Luke's gospel. In Luke 1:15 the angel told Zechariah, the impending father of John the Baptist, that "he will be filled with the Holy Spirit, *even from his mother's womb.*" How could John be filled with the Spirit in his mother's womb? Clearly, he would not have been capable of doing anything that resulted in this experience. There were no conditions that a fetus could fulfill. So what does being filled with the Spirit mean in this exceptional case?

Perhaps the point is that the Spirit was equipping John during his time in the womb for the ministry that would soon be his. This may have entailed shaping his mind, his physical endurance, his personal spirit in such a way that he would boldly proclaim the coming of Messiah and would face the opposition fearlessly. Perhaps it was the Spirit's way of granting John from the moment of his conception the boldness and unwavering commitment that would enable him to face up to King Herod and to endure his brutal execution without compromising his faith in Christ. The bottom line is that we don't know what it means to be filled with the Spirit long before any conscious act is even possible.

In Luke 1:39-45 we are told that Elizabeth, the mother of John the Baptist was filled with the Spirit when Mary, the mother of Jesus, entered her home. Nothing is said of Elizabeth doing anything to facilitate this filling. But upon her experience of the Spirit, she immediately *prophesies* to Mary: "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb! And why is this granted to me that the mother of my Lord should come to me?" (Luke 1:42-43). We see here something that will reappear in Luke's gospel and in Acts, that **when filled with the Spirit a person speaks prophetically**. This happens almost immediately in Luke's narrative, where Zechariah, John's father, following the birth of his son, "was filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied" (see vv. 68-79 for the content of Zechariah's inspired speech).

Although the precise language of being "filled with the Spirit" is absent from the portrayal of Simeon's experience upon seeing the Lord Jesus (Luke 2:25-32), Luke says that "the Holy Spirit was upon him" (v. 25). This sounds more like the experience of other OT men and women upon whom the Spirit would come but without entering into them fully to indwell from that point on. We also read that "it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death until he had seen the Lord's Christ. And he came in the Spirit into the temple" (Luke 2:26-27a). Clearly, Simeon was blessed with the powerful presence of the Spirit and following this prophesied (see Luke 2:29-32). His prophetic utterance also came to Mary regarding the pain she would suffer most likely as a result of the opposition her son, Jesus, would encounter (Luke 2:34-35).

We see in these early chapters of Luke's gospel a familiar pattern that will reappear in the book of Acts. There is no indication that the three people who were filled with the Spirit (John the Baptist in his mother's womb, John's mother, Elizabeth, and Zechariah, John's father), had done anything to cause this encounter with the Spirit. It may have been due to their faith, piety, and commitment to the Lord. The likelihood is that they were filled by a sovereign act of God to empower them to prophesy.

In Acts 8:16-17 Luke describes the Spirit as "*falling*" on people and their "receiving" the Spirit. As Peter preached the gospel to Cornelius, "the Holy Spirit *fell* on all who heard the word" (Acts 10:44). This would appear to be synonymous with simply receiving the Spirit, as Luke makes clear a few verses later (Acts 10:47). When Paul baptized the anonymous disciples of John the Baptist, "the Holy Spirit came on them, and they began speaking in tongues and prophesying" (Acts 19:6). Here again we see the link between the Spirit coming upon people and their subsequent prophesying.

There are five additional texts that speak specifically of people being "filled" with the Spirit (the Greek verb in all five instances is some form of *pimplēmi*, "to fill"). The first, in Acts 2:4, Luke appears to identify Spirit filling with Spirit baptism. We know that what the disciples experienced on the Day of Pentecost was Spirit baptism. This had been prophesied by John the Baptist (Matt 3:11) and Jesus himself in Acts 1:8. *But in Acts 2:4 we read that "they were all filled with the Holy "Spirit."* It would seem, then, that the baptism and filling of the Spirit can on occasion overlap and refer to a singular event. This does not mean they are the same phenomenon, but only that when someone is converted and baptized by Jesus in the Spirit, they are also, at least on this one occasion, filled with the Spirit.

In this case the result is that they "began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance" (Acts 2:4). Jack Deere rightly comments that "if this were the only example of being filled with the Spirit, we would be justified in concluding that speaking in tongues is intrinsically linked to the filling of the Spirit" (*Why I am Still Surprised by the Power of the Spirit*, 169). But Deere reminds us that the other four instances of people being filled with the

Spirit say nothing about the recipients speaking in tongues (Acts 4:8, 31; 9:17; 13:9). Therefore, "speaking in tongues is a legitimate spiritual gift, but it is not intrinsically connected to being filled with the Spirit" (169).

When the apostle Peter was asked by what power he had healed the crippled man (Acts 3:1-10), he was instantly "filled with the Holy Spirit" and spoke powerfully and prophetically to the rulers of the people and elders (Acts 4:8). This was in fulfillment of something Jesus himself had prophesied in Matthew 10:20,

"When they deliver you over, do not be anxious how you are to speak or what you are to say, for what you are to say will be given to you in that hour. For it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you."

Again, Deere is helpful. He writes:

"This example proves that the filling of the Holy Spirit does not necessitate speaking in tongues. It is not some generalized power to live a better Christian life. It is a temporary experience of power. The power comes on Peter *when he needs it* and then lifts off from him when he is no longer speaking. Peter was filled with the Holy Spirit on Pentecost and then again weeks later in front of the rulers. Thus, the filling of the Spirit is a temporary, repeatable, prophetic empowering to testify about Jesus to hostile unbelievers" (171-72).

It's important to note, however, that when Deere says that the Spirit "lifts off from him" we should not take that to mean that Peter ceased to be indwelt by the Spirit, as if the Spirit departed from him altogether.

We also read of Spirit filling in Acts 4:31. After their interrogation by the religious leaders, Peter and John brought a report to the church in the form of a prayer:

"Now, Lord, consider their threats and enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness. Stretch out your hand to heal and perform signs and wonders through the name of your holy servant Jesus.' After they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly" (Acts 4:29-31).

Again, we see that there is nothing that the disciples did that resulted in their being filled with the Spirit, other than to pray for boldness and that God would perform signs and wonders. But they didn't ask in prayer that they be filled with the Spirit. It is as if God responded by saying that the only way they could speak the word boldly and without fear is by being filled with the Spirit. We also see that the result of being filled was bold and courageous speech in articulating the gospel.

Following his encounter with the risen Lord on the Damascus road, Paul was ministered to by Ananias. Paul certainly didn't pray to be filled. Ananias simply announced to him that he would regain his sight "and be filled with the Holy Spirit" (Acts 9:17). Although he did not immediately prophesy or speak, he did enter the synagogues, declaring that Jesus "is the Son of God" (Acts 9:20).

That ***being filled with the Spirit is a sovereign act of God designed to equip and empower the believer for some immediate act of ministry or miracle*** is evident from Acts 13:9. Paul had been preaching to the proconsul, Sergius Paulus when Elymas the magician sought to interfere. "But Saul, who was also called Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, looked intently at him and said, 'You son of the devil, you enemy of all righteousness, full of all deceit and villainy, will you not stop making crooked the straight paths of the Lord?' (Acts 13:9-10). ***This confirms yet again that to be filled with the Spirit is a temporary, circumstantial and thus repeatable, phenomenon designed to enable a believer (in whom the Spirit already permanently dwells) to bear prophetic witness to the Lord Jesus.***

The question most frequently asked is, "What must I do to be filled with the Spirit? What are the steps that will enable me to experience this empowering from on high?" As we have seen, nothing specific is said about the "how to" of Spirit filling. What we see are believers who have great faith and are passionately committed to Christ and are in situations where they need divine assistance to proclaim the gospel and pray for the sick. If there is anything approaching a command for us to do something to be filled, it is found in Ephesians 5:18, to which we now direct our attention.

Ephesians 5:18

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

There are several things of interest here. *Being filled with the Holy Spirit is contrasted with being drunk with wine.* Thus, it is a question of influence, control, or power. If you insist on getting drunk, be inebriated with the Holy Spirit! Please note, however, that the force of this exhortation is not that Christians should stagger and slur their speech as those drunk with wine do. The influence of the infilling Spirit is *moral* in nature, the results and tangible evidence of which is the *spiritual and relational fruit* that Paul describes in Galatians 5. Paul envisions a community of people (the church) whose lives are so totally given over to the Spirit "that the life and deeds of the Spirit are as obvious in their case as the effects of too much wine are obvious in the other" (Fee, *God's Empowering Presence*, 721).

Does Paul mean we are to be filled "*with*" the Spirit, as if the Spirit is himself the content with which we are filled? Or does he mean we are to be filled "*by*" the Spirit, the content of which is not clearly specified? Some take the latter and appeal to the "fullness" language earlier in Ephesians to justify their choice (see Eph 1:23; 3:19; 4:10). The "fullness", then, would be a reference either to God or Christ. On this view, it is the Spirit who mediates or facilitates the fullness of God and Christ Jesus in the believer. However, I think Paul's point is that we are filled "*with*" the Spirit.

It is also important to note that the verb to be filled is an imperative, i.e., it is a *command*. This is not a suggestion or a mild recommendation or a polite piece of advice. Being filled with the Holy Spirit is not optional. It is obligatory. The fact that this is a command to all of us seems to require that we know how to obey it. That is, Paul's exhortation is that we either behave or believe in some way that will result in our being filled.

The verb to be "filled" is also *plural*. "The fullness of the Holy Spirit is emphatically not a privilege reserved for some, but a duty resting on all" (Stott, 60). In other words, the exhortation has primarily to do with community life, i.e., the need for God's people to be so collectively full of God's presence that their worship is enlivened, their relationships are transformed, their lives as a totality are changed.

The verb is also in the *present* tense, indicating that Paul envisions a *continuous, on-going experience*. This is not so much a dramatic or decisive experience that settles things for good, but a daily appropriation. It is a command that applies to all Christians throughout the course of their earthly lives. Thus, the mere fact that we are *commanded* to be *filled* implies that a Christian faces the danger of being "low" (but never empty!). We are always in need of refreshing and renewal.

In view of this command, we should cease speaking of the "second" blessing and begin to seek God for a "third" and a "fourth" and a "fifth" and more expressions of the Spirit's power in our lives until the day of our glorification.

What is *the consequential evidence* of being filled with/by the Holy Spirit? Paul mentions four things: (1) speaking to one another in ministry. Psalms, hymns and spiritual songs can have a didactic purpose. (2) Singing to God (wholehearted worship in corporate fellowship). (3) Gratitude (for all things at all times), and (4) mutual submission (as over against being self-assertive and demanding). We'll look at these in more detail next week.

I should briefly note in passing that some believe these results or consequences of being filled are in fact the means by which filling takes place. In other words, they contend that we ought to translate these four participles as expressing means or instrumentality. If so, Paul would be exhorting us to be filled with the Spirit "by" speaking to each other . . . and "by" singing and making music to the Lord, . . . and "by" giving thanks to God" . . . and "by" submitting ourselves to one another. Although grammatically possible, it is far less likely than understanding the participles as expressing the consequence or fruit of having been filled with the Spirit.

Distinguishing between Spirit Baptism and Spirit Filling

What we've seen thus far also helps us differentiate between Spirit-baptism and Spirit-filling. Spirit-baptism is a metaphor that describes our reception of the Spirit at the moment of our conversion to Jesus in faith and repentance. When we believe and are justified, we are, as it were, *deluged and engulfed* by the Holy Spirit; we are, as it were, *immersed in and saturated* by the Spirit. The result of this is that we are made members of the body of Christ, incorporated into the spiritual organism called the church, and permanently indwelt by the Holy Spirit.

Spirit-baptism is therefore *instantaneous* (i.e., it is not a process), *coincident* or *simultaneous* with conversion, *universal* (i.e., all Christians are recipients), *unrepeatable*, and *permanent*. Spirit-filling is also a metaphor describing our continuous, on-going experience and appropriation of the Holy Spirit. To be filled with the Spirit is to come under progressively more intense and intimate influence of the Spirit. Spirit-filling can be forfeited and subsequently experienced yet again, on multiple occasions, throughout the course of the Christian life.

There are two senses in which one may be filled with the Holy Spirit. First, there are biblical texts which describe people as being “*full of the Holy Spirit*” as if it were a condition or consistent quality of Christian character; a moral disposition; possessing and reflecting a maturity in Christ. See the following examples: Luke 4:1-2a; Acts 6:3, 5a; 7:55; 11:24. Acts 13:52 is an interesting text, as it describes the disciples as being “filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit.” The verb “filled” is an imperfect, passive form that suggests we translate it as: “were being progressively filled” or “continued to be full of the Holy Spirit.” This is the ideal condition of every Christian. It emphasizes the *abiding state* of being filled.

Thus, on certain occasions, perhaps a spiritual emergency of sorts, a person may be “filled” with an immediate and special endowment of power for an especially important and urgent task. Someone who is already filled with the Holy Spirit may experience an additional filling. That is to say, no matter “how much” of the Holy Spirit one may have, there’s always room for “more”! In Acts 7:55 Stephen, though “full of the Holy Spirit”, is again “filled” with the Spirit to prepare him to endure persecution and eventual martyrdom, as well as to “see” the vision of Jesus. Once again, there is no indication that he asked to be filled or empowered. It was a sovereign work of God: as he walked in faith and obedience and made himself available, God “filled” him in accordance with his need.

To sum up, to be filled with the Spirit is different from being baptized in the Spirit. ***There is one baptism, but multiple fillings.*** In no NT text are we commanded to be baptized in the Holy Spirit. There is no appeal to do something in order to be baptized; there is no exhortation or imperative. On the other hand, we *are* commanded to be filled with the Holy Spirit (Eph. 5:18). Thus, it is possible to be baptized in the Holy Spirit, to experience the permanent indwelling of the Holy Spirit, and yet *not* be filled with the Holy Spirit. Finally, to be “full of the Holy Spirit” is to reflect a maturity of character; it is the ideal condition of every believer. To be “filled with the Holy Spirit” is to experience an anointing for power, purity, proclamation, and praise.

The most startling text that speaks of being “full of the Holy Spirit” is Luke 4:1 where the evangelist describes Jesus in precisely those terms. This may well be a case in which being “full of” the Spirit encompasses as well the notion of being “filled with” the Spirit. Deere contends, and rightly so, that ‘full of the Holy Spirit’ is not a character description here [or perhaps it should be said it is not merely a character description]. It means that Jesus was completely empowered by the Holy Spirit to do battle with the devil” (181). What makes this text so significant is that Luke uses precisely the same language to describe how Christians can be “full” of the Holy Spirit.

Conclusion

I suspect that you are still wondering if there is anything we can do to facilitate being filled with the Spirit. Perhaps the analogy with wine in v. 18 can help. How do you get drunk? It is by drinking the wine. How do you get filled with the Spirit? It is by drinking in the Spirit, imbibing the Spirit, praying for the Spirit, walking in faith and obedience, and most important of all, by being always committed to glorifying Jesus in every aspect of your life.



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