

Ephesians 5:18

Being filled with the Spirit

Introduction

Throughout Ephesians there has been constant comparison between the believer and the non-believer. Now we have another – filled with the Spirit, as opposed to filled with wine.

This does not suggest that, then or now, all unbelievers are full of wine. But many were, and are still, and many others attach certain values to alcohol. They imagine it to be a stimulus, when in fact it is a depressant. It depresses and knocks out the highest centre of all in the brain, which provides self-control, discrimination, balance and wisdom. People temporarily feel better and more confident. More primitive elements take control. Man believes he is being stimulated, but in reality his control over himself is being diminished.

This is the big difference between being filled with wine and being filled with the Spirit. The man filled with the Spirit has self-control and balance. Instead of the wastefulness of the drunkard, who wastes time, money, energy and whose reasoning powers and morality is impoverished, the man filled with the Spirit is built up, added to, improved, his mind, heart and will are stimulated and empowered. His life does not depend on passing happiness, but joy unspeakable and full of glory.

The man filled with the Spirit rejoices in the Lord. The joy of the Lord is his strength. His personality is expanded, he enjoys a thrilling and exciting life. He is even able to rejoice in tribulation – so unlike the morning after the night before of the man filled with wine. **The blessing of the Lord brings wealth, and he adds no trouble to it** (Proverbs 10:22).

More than that, this is a command to the people at Ephesus. They have been redeemed by Christ's blood, trusted in Christ, sealed by the Spirit, saved by grace through faith, and now God commands them to be filled with the Spirit. It is not just for a select few, or the lunatic fringe, but for every Christian. Not a possibility for some, but a command for all, not a luxury but a necessity.

The meaning of “being filled with the Spirit”

To be filled means to come under the control of, influence of, total possession of the Holy Spirit. Not something poured into us as though he was a liquid going into a bottle. He is a divine person, the third person of the blessed Trinity. To be filled means to be possessed and controlled by a divine person. Possession of whole personality – mind, emotions and will. Meant to be continuous and daily experience. Not a second experience of God or a second divine work of grace. The Greek πληρουσθε εν πνευματι is present, imperative, passive. Be continually filled. If it meant once for all, a different form of the Greek πληρωω would have been used.

Constantly, day by day, week by week, year by year, he is under the control of the Holy Spirit. It is not enough to possess the Holy Spirit, must be possessed by the Holy Spirit. Not enough to be born of the Spirit, must be filled and controlled by the Spirit. This is God's purpose for our lives once we come to know Him. Not something we get later on. We have been blessed with all spiritual blessings in Christ. All we need is found in Him. To have Him is to have every spiritual blessing.

Sometimes this is not realized, because of lack of teaching or lack of a sense of need. In some instances, Christians do not always maintain their walk with the Lord or remain consecrated to Him. They wander and drift. Then they come back to the Lord, and back under the control of the Spirit. It may take a crisis in life, or several crises. And one Christian's experience will be totally different from another's.

Several questions arise from this. Does this mean that once we are under the Spirit's control we have arrived, do we cease to grow, have we reached sinless perfection? Not at all. Only when controlled by the Spirit will we grow. He must be present for us to grow. The back-slidden Christian, ruling his own life, is not growing in spiritual things.

Does being filled with the Spirit mean our own personality is obliterated? Not at all, but it is enriched, developed, directed and energized so that we can function to God's glory. Our personalities, hands, eyes, lips, will, mind – under His control, to live as we were meant to live.

Does this mean we have to do nothing? Can we become passive and leave it all to Him? Not at all. We should be more active than ever. **Work out your salvation with fear and trembling for it is God who works in you** (Philippians 2:12,13). Fight, wrestle, put on the armour of God. But we do so in His strength and under His direction. It is not a hopeless struggle and fight in our own strength – which can be the experience of many Christians.

Being filled with the Spirit is the only way to live the Christian life, and to grow. Here is the secret and source of our enabling.

Results of being filled with the Holy Spirit

When the Holy Spirit controls the believer, He enables him to function in God's will and for His glory. This affects our Christian service and Christian character. Makes Christ real and vital in the life, and that soon shows. **Streams of living water will flow from within him** (John 7:38ff).

The mind is enlightened, the affections are purified, the will is reinforced. In trial and suffering we are under-girded and held. The effects of the control of the Holy Spirit are endless. The New Testament is full of the ways He enables us to live the Christian life, and the differences that He makes. We must confine ourselves to the context here in Ephesians. The Holy Spirit makes a difference when we live on God's resources, grace and energy daily, and not on our own. He helps us to walk circumspectly – wisely, carefully. He helps us to redeem the time – make the most of every opportunity. He helps us in finding out God's will, discovering His purpose and plan for our lives.

In our church life, the Holy Spirit helps us encourage and support one another. He helps our rejoicing and gladness in the Lord. When He fills us we have a sense of gratitude and thankfulness. **Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ** (Ephesians 5:19-20).

The Holy Spirit also affects our relationship with others. He gives us a graciousness and warmth in our dealing with others. **Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ** (Ephesians 5:21). No self-assertion, but meekness and gentleness in Christ. In subsequent verses Paul goes on to paint a picture of home life where there is harmony and complementarity. Wives defer to husbands as the head, husbands love wives with the sacrificial love which Christ had for the church. Children have respect for parents. Parents take care in the upbringing and training of their children. In industrial relations, workers serve their masters from the heart, as to the Lord. Masters are fair, just and honourable in their treatment of workers. This teaching, if implemented, would solve troubled society's ills at a stroke. The Christian faith offers the perfect blueprint for every relationship of life, and also the means of carrying it out through the Holy Spirit. According to G.K.Chesterton, the problem is not that Christianity doesn't work, but that it hasn't yet been tried seriously.

The control of the Holy Spirit has a transforming effect on the personal life, church life, home life and industrial life. All motivated by reverence for Christ and desire to please Him, because of our love for Him and gratitude to Him. Though not practiced by the world, it must be practiced and will be practiced by us as we are controlled by the Holy Spirit and live lives in His energy and by His grace.

Steps to take to obey this command

This is a clear command for us to obey. That we are born of the Spirit and indwelt by the Spirit is a permanent fact of Christian life. But filling of the Holy Spirit is conditional on our response and obedience to the Lord. Different levels and degrees of the Holy Spirit working in our lives depending on our response. It can be a minimal experience, or an abundant life. A bare spiritual life, or full spiritual health. We have a clear responsibility to face up to.

Too often we have to admit we have not obeyed this command as earnestly or regularly as we ought. As a result, our lives at times have been wrong with God, and we have been living below our spiritual possibilities. Life has been lived at a distance from God, and our lives have been in a mess. We have experienced a lack of hunger and desire for God. Perhaps we have been afraid of what God might do to us and with us if He took full possession. We have not trusted Him completely, thinking He might be capable of playing a mean trick on us.

What we must do is abandon self to God. This means facing up to things which are grieving the Holy Spirit and quenching the Holy Spirit, sins which we are playing with and have not forsaken. God says it has to go or else He cannot fully possess us. If we are to abandon self to Him, that thing which He is putting His finger on has got to go. Let go of all that is coming between us and God. We cannot be controlled by what

is contrary to His will and be controlled by the Holy Spirit at one and the same time. Definitely and deliberately yield self to God that He may have His way in your life. Definite relinquishing of control over the life. God must have His way in the life. Will has to be handed over. He will take control of what we yield to Him. If He is not Lord of all, He is not Lord at all. God wants us, not just our service.

Ask Him to take possession, to control and fill. **If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink** (John 7:37). **How much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him** (Luke 11:13).

Abide in Him, keep in closest contact. Each day, yield self afresh for that day. Seek His fellowship. Live life in the light of His Word. Daily waiting on God. Daily walk, daily obedience, daily confession of whatever disturbs our relationship with Him. Consult with Him about everything. Be led and directed by Him. Obey His prompting. Know His will in His Word.

There are no short cuts here. Someone once said to D.L.Moody, "The world has yet to see what God can do through one man wholly surrendered to Him." Moody replied, "By God's grace, I'll be that man." Need to daily confirm our submission. As we constantly submit, so we go on being filled with the Spirit in all the choices in daily life. As long as we keep believing, so long shall we keep receiving.

Conclusion

Be continually filled – dominated, ruled, controlled by the Spirit. You have been born of the Spirit, but have you been filled by the Spirit? It is not a question of having more of the Spirit, but of the Spirit having more of you. Are you relying, cooperating and depending on Him? Or do you obstruct and grieve Him? Is He resident, or president? Have to be yielded to discover full possibilities in Christ.

Return to the Lord this morning. He delights to restore and recommission those who will confess sin and failure, and place their lives under the control of the Spirit.