

Be Filled With the Spirit

All born –again believers believe in salvation by grace through faith. If you are saved, then you got saved by grace through faith. But not all believers believe in, or practice, sanctification by grace through faith. They believe that salvation must be by God's grace, which they receive by faith. But they think then that sanctification, spiritual growth, is somehow to be done in their own strength. They think, salvation may have begun by grace, but it's carried by works. And to that, Paul cried out in Galatians 3:

“This only would I learn of you, Received ye the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith? Are ye so foolish? having begun in the Spirit, are ye now made perfect by the flesh?” (Gal 3:2-3)

Salvation is by grace through faith. But so is spiritual growth, sanctification, becoming like Christ. Sanctification, spiritual growth, is by grace through faith.

In salvation, the object of your faith is Jesus Christ. His grace appears in the form of the Holy Spirit regenerating you, indwelling you, baptising you, sealing you. You place your faith in Him, and His Spirit does the work. In sanctification, it is the same. The object of your faith is Jesus Christ, as your Shepherd, Helper, Priest, Lord, King. Once again, His grace appears in the form of His Holy Spirit – this time filling you.

The filling of the Holy Spirit is thus the link between the blessings that are ours in Christ, and our subjective experience of them. It is the link between the positional ‘you in Christ’ to the practical ‘Christ in you’. *You in Christ* is what you are by God's grace through faith at salvation. Now by God's grace through faith in sanctification (that is- being filled with the Spirit), you can flesh out *Christ in you*. This concept of being filled with the Spirit is the hinge, the bridge, between being orthodox and orthoprax. It is the thing that causes your faith to have works. It is turning your beliefs into behaviour.

Now this is clearly a command. In the original language it is a present passive imperative. Imperative means this is a command. It is something God expects us to obey. Present means it is something that is to be obeyed continuously, not just once off. It could actually be translated, “Be being kept filled with the Spirit” or “Be ye continually getting filled with the Spirit”. Passive means though this is something for us to obey, it is something that must be done to us. God does the filling. We must so prepare our hearts

What it's not

- 1) **It cannot refer to having the Spirit or being indwelt By Him. (Rom 8:9, I Cor 6:19)**
- 2) **It cannot refer to being baptised by the Spirit (I Cor 12:13)**
- 3) **It cannot refer to speaking in tongues (1Co 12:29-30)**

So what is it?

The word translated ‘filled’ was used in different ways. It was sometimes used to mean a form of pressure – to be carried along, like a boat pushed by the wind.

Sometimes it referred to something permeating another, like water permeating soil and saturating it. It was also used in the sense of being satisfied. The full measure is reached – there is contentment or fullness. But perhaps the primary meaning of filled meant to be dominated by, to be controlled by. Whatever fills a man is what controls him. For example, we see the same Greek word used when Jesus said to His disciples, *“But because I have said these things to you, sorrow has filled your heart.”* (John 16:6)

Now recall what Jesus said the main ministry of the Holy Spirit is: to reveal Jesus Christ.

“He shall glorify me: for he shall receive of mine, and shall shew it unto you.” (John 16:14) *“But when the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, he shall testify of me:”* (John 15:26)

So the filling of the Spirit is when a believer is so yielded to the Spirit of God by faith that the Spirit’s ministry of revealing Jesus Christ to them and through them is overflowing and abundant. He reveals Jesus *to* them as they seek Him in the Bible, as they seek to serve Him and fellowship with Him. He reveals Jesus *through* them as they become holier and serve like Christ did. The result of seeing Christ is that you worship, you love Him. You are loving Him and living like Him.

That brings us to the key: how are we filled? It is a command, it is something we are to do – so how and why does it happen?

The Reason

As we go through the Bible, even in the Old Testament we see the Holy Spirit filling people for service when and how He wanted to. The filling of the Spirit is God’s sovereign act. But here’s the pattern that I think emerges in this – when someone pleases God, God is pleased to fill them. Let’s see some Scriptures to back that up. And the Holy Ghost descended in a bodily shape like a dove upon him, and a voice came from heaven, which said, *Thou art my beloved Son; in thee I am well pleased.* (Luk 3:22)

And Jesus being full of the Holy Ghost returned from Jordan, and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness, (Luk 4:1)

Behold my servant, whom I uphold; mine elect, in whom my soul delighteth; I have put my spirit upon him: he shall bring forth judgment to the Gentiles. (Isa 42:1)

But now thy kingdom shall not continue: the LORD hath sought him a man after his own heart, and the LORD hath commanded him to be captain over his people, because thou hast not kept that which the LORD commanded thee. (1Sa 13:14)

Then Samuel took the horn of oil, and anointed him in the midst of his brethren: and the Spirit of the LORD came upon David from that day forward. So Samuel rose up, and went to Ramah. But the Spirit of the LORD departed from Saul, and an evil spirit from the LORD troubled him. (1Sa 16:13-14)

For he whom God hath sent speaketh the words of God: for God giveth not the Spirit by measure unto him. (Joh 3:34)

Though certainly the Spirit could come on whomever He wanted to, the filling of the Spirit seems sure when the person pleased the Lord. It is as if when your heart and

attitude pleases God, He is pleased to reveal more of Himself to you and therefore satisfy your heart with more of Himself.

ASIDE: If the Spirit fills individuals that He is pleased with, what about whole churches? The difference between dead orthodox churches and living ones is the Spirit's pleasure over that church. He's pleased over the emphasis – to love God. He's pleased over what is preached – nothing but the Word. He's pleased with the humility and unity amongst the members – their care for each other. He's pleased with their consecration to Him and their separated lives. He's pleased with the leadership. He's pleased with the music. He's pleased with the outreach. He's pleased with the amount of prayer. There are multiple things that cause His pleasure, and result in Him resting on a church in a special way. The more Spirit-controlled individuals you have – the more Spirit-controlled church you will have.

So if the Spirit fills whom He is pleased with – the question is – what pleases Him?

The Requirement

The answer is – God is most pleased with Jesus Christ. Therefore, He is most pleased when Jesus Christ's centrality and supremacy is honoured in a human. Just think of how He set salvation up. He set it up so that His Son is '*the way, the truth and the life*'. His Son is glorified as the only way for the entire human race to know God. Think of how He made the requirement for salvation humble faith. When a man comes in humility, admitting that he is not the centre of the universe and does not have the ability to reach God, when he realises God in Jesus alone is his only hope, and then turns to Him in repentant faith, depending entirely on Jesus – this glorifies Jesus Christ.

Well, nothing changes for a believer:

"As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him:" (Col 2:6)

As Jim Berg put it, live the Christian life the same way you got it:

"I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me." (Gal 2:20)

Humble Faith is the only posture by which Jesus retains the pre-eminent position in our lives:

"But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him." (Heb 11:6)

In other words, the key to the Christian life, is the key by which you entered the Christian life – faith in Jesus Christ. Continual faith in Jesus pleases God and will result in the filling of the Holy Spirit. The grace of God always comes in response to humble faith. For the Christian that grace, being filled with the Spirit, comes in response to faith in Jesus Christ.

Let's describe what faith in Jesus Christ looks like. In many ways, if you are a believer, it is something you already know and recognise. It involves two sides to the same coin - the one side is humility, where you acknowledge your position, the other is faith, where you diligently seek His Person.

Acknowledge Your Position

"For thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy; I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones." (Isa 57:15).

Here we simply agree with what God says we are. We are sinners. We are helpless without him. We are sheep. We are creatures. We are finite. We are often blind. We don't deserve any glory. We are nothing without God. Now in Christ we have many blessings, but only by His grace, by being in Christ. It's amazing to see how Christ continually acknowledged His position before others. Then answered Jesus and said unto them;

Verily, verily, I say unto you, The Son can do nothing of himself, but what he seeth the Father do: for what things soever he doeth, these also doeth the Son likewise. (Joh 5:19)

I can of mine own self do nothing: as I hear, I judge: and my judgment is just; because I seek not mine own will, but the will of the Father which hath sent me. (Joh 5:30)

Then said Jesus unto them, When ye have lifted up the Son of man, then shall ye know that I am he, and that I do nothing of myself; but as my Father hath taught me, I speak these things. And he that sent me is with me: the Father hath not left me alone; for I do always those things that please him. (Joh 8:28-29)

How much more should we acknowledge our position before God! The Son of God made Himself a servant for our sake – but we are that by His grace! And humility acknowledges that continually. You acknowledge your position when you agree from the heart with that sweeping, all-encompassing statement of Christ's – ***without me you can do nothing***. So I must continually remind myself of my true position – I am a slave of Christ. I am a sheep of Christ. I have no rights, no power, no will, no authority, no purpose, and no life outside of Him.

If you continually acknowledge that position, you will have to do the reverse side of the coin – faith. The heart that looks away from itself as the centre, and looks to Jesus Christ as their source of joy and reward - this pleases God.

Diligently Seek His Person

Here we seek the person of Jesus Christ as our source, which pleases God. As I acknowledge my lack, my emptiness, my need, my sin, my inability, my weakness, I consequently turn and seek the Person of Jesus for all He has promised to be for me. When we need strength, we look to Jesus. When we need comfort, we look to Jesus. When we need wisdom, we look to Jesus. Now in seeking a Person, we are not only seeking His nature, we are seeking His will. We want to do the will of Jesus above our own will. We want to please the Lord Jesus. We are seeking His purposes above our own – we want to please the Lord Jesus.

We submit to the Lordship of Jesus to do what pleases Him. We obey Jesus' commands. We depend on Jesus to give us power. We seek the person of Jesus Christ. We are following Him. We are seeking Him as our life, as our centre, as our sufficiency. Just as at salvation we needed forgiveness and redemption and so we acknowledged our position and sought the Person of Jesus to be the means by which we are forgiven. We trusted in His Person, in His power, in His Promises.

All of life can become a moment to moment looking to and embracing of the Person of Jesus Christ - seeking His will, obeying Him, trusting Him, waiting in Him, listening to Him, desiring Him, submitting to Him. This is a Christ-centred life. This is continual faith in Jesus.

What is the motive for this continual faith in the Lord Jesus? Hebrews 11:6 tells us. It defined faith as coming to God believing He rewards the one who diligently seeks Him? You could call it 'the pleasure of pleasing God'. We want to please God, but we know we have no power to please Him. Therefore, as we continually look to Jesus Christ in faith, this pleases God above all else. As we please God by continually seeking the Person of Jesus, God is pleased, and His Spirit then reveals Jesus to us. You keep seeking Jesus by faith; the reward is the Spirit revealing Christ to you. He'll do so by illumination, by imitation. Faith is embracing the promise of love. The reward of faith is that love revealed.

Galatians 5:6: "For in Jesus Christ neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision; but faith which worketh by love." (Gal 5:6)

And this turning to Christ, as we've seen before, is a passionate act. Hebrews 11:6 defines faith as the one who comes to God, believing that He is, and that He is a rewarder of them that **diligently** seek Him. Diligent seeking of His Person is not slothful; it turns and trusts with all its might. Faith is trusting Christ, seeking Him, submitting to Him, waiting on Him. It's abiding in Him – isn't it? When I acknowledge my position as a slave of Christ, I will passionately turn to Him for all that He is. I am empty without Him, so I need Him with all my heart.

We spoke about passion and zeal a few weeks ago. The Spirit does not fill the half-hearted, for faith is not lukewarm. We read in Colossians 1:29 the kind of balance:

"For this I toil, struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works within me."

When you trust, submit, seek and wait with all your might, the Spirit gladly fills you powerfully. I think the more acutely we feel our position, the more passionate will be our faith. The more humble we are, the more full of faith we will be. I think this goes a long way to explaining *1 Thessalonians 5:19: "Quench not the Spirit."* If we are slack, lazy and indifferent towards pleasing God, we put out the spark of God in our heart. We quench the very zeal of God. On the other hand, if we fan into flame what God has initiated, we will please Him.

Faith – turning to Christ for all He is, pleases God. We read of Stephen in Acts 6:5, that he was "*a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit,*" and he says of Barnabas in Acts 11:24 that he was "*a good man full of the Holy Spirit and of faith,*" The two go

together. If a person is filled with faith he will be filled with the Spirit. The posture of humble faith in Jesus Christ pleases God above all things, and it results in the filling of the Spirit.

Now I want to show why this continual attitude of humble faith in Jesus Christ hinges on the **Word of God and prayer**. Humility-faith in Jesus Christ lives on the Bible and prayer. Firstly, read Colossian 3:16. That is a parallel verse to Ephesians 5:18. What that means is to be Word-filled is almost the same as being Spirit-filled. The Spirit can fill you to the degree that you saturate yourself with Scripture. The reason is very simple. If you truly acknowledge your position as nothing without Christ - having no will of your own, no rights, no ambitions outside of Christ, then you are an empty vessel. But how will you now know what is the will of the Lord Jesus? What is His goal, His ambition, His desires? The answer is – the Word of God. It is one thing to say I want to please the Lord, but that necessitates you love and digest the Word of God, which is the will of God. If you truly desire to please Him, you will take this book in, in great amounts. Notice it is the word of Christ. The Bible is about Jesus. Taking in the Word of God saturates us with the Person and desires and will and mind of Jesus. The more of the Word we have, the more we have Christ's mind. You could think of it like this – the Holy Spirit's control over us is the Word of God. The more of it we have in our minds, the more His control can be exercised. Not only so, but what is it that brings about faith?

Romans 10:17 tells us: "So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God."

Now prayer...

Consider Luke 11:9-13: And I say unto you, Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you. For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened. If a son shall ask bread of any of you that is a father, will he give him a stone? or if he ask a fish, will he for a fish give him a serpent? Or if he shall ask an egg, will he offer him a scorpion? If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children: how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?

Now some might take this to refer to salvation, but I take a different view. I think He is speaking about the filling of the Spirit. And this is said in the context of prayer. Prayer is truly a way of acknowledging our position and acting with passion. When we pray we are saying, Lord, I am helpless, weak, sinful, blind and without purpose. I am your slave. Help me! Guide me! Empower me! I want to please you. Give me grace. Moreover, prayer is done in the name of Jesus. The Person and will of Jesus dominates and governs the prayer. This posture of humble faith is maintained by prayer. Fill me with your Spirit so as to do this.

Now remember that the command in Ephesians 5:18 is: *"Be ye continually getting filled"*. Therefore, I think one of the keys here is an attitude of prayer and meditating on the Word of God that is continuous. It does not mean we pray every moment of our lives. But it does mean that the eyes of our mind and soul continue to look to Jesus so that communing with God in prayer; thinking on His Word; thinking on what pleases Him becomes a natural, ongoing thing.

I like the idea of Psalm 123:

“Behold, as the eyes of servants look unto the hand of their masters, and as the eyes of a maiden unto the hand of her mistress; so our eyes wait upon the LORD our God,”

Sometimes we have to divert our attention to some pressing business. But then, by default, our eyes return to our Master. After all, we’re slaves; we want to see what He wants, what He is doing, what He requires next. And silent prayers of thanksgiving, adoration, confession and supplication – these keep us in this posture of humility-faith which the Holy Spirit fills. Thinking on God’s Word, this keeps us in the place of humility-faith where we are pleasing to Him.

So when I make the Word and prayer central to my being, I will continually be acknowledging my position and diligently seeking His Person to please Him. It’s continual. That’s why Paul uses the words ‘*walk in the Spirit*’ in Galatians 5:16. A walk is a repetition of steps. We take step after step after step of humble-faith, acknowledging I’m a slave, and passionately seeking to please God in dependence on Him.

Consider the verse in Galatians 5:

“If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit.” (Gal 5:25)

The word in the Greek there for ‘walk’ is different to the one used earlier in the same chapter. It means, “Keep in step”. Keep in step. The Holy Spirit has a rhythm you are to march to. Get into it by continually thinking on the Word and speaking to Him in prayer, abiding in Him. The best way to think about being filled is not to think of it as a cup. A cup can be filled at one point. The best way is to think of it like a pipe. To fill the pipe there must be a continual supply, and a continual demand. There certainly is a continual supply of grace. But what pleases God is when we have this posture of humility-faith in Jesus which is a continual demand for grace. When we, as pipe, continually need filling, we will be channels of blessing. That’s why having our quiet time is just getting the pipe open, it’s getting the supply running. It’s not where we get filled for the whole day.

That’s why we live on the Word and prayer so as to continually acknowledge our position and diligently seek His Person – because of the pleasure of pleasing Him. When we please Him, He rewards us by revealing Himself to us, which is the greatest joy and satisfaction of our souls possible. And that leads us to the final point:

The Results

When Spirit-filled the first and primary result is **worship**:

“Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord; Giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ;” (Eph 5:19-20)

As a result of the Spirit revealing Christ to us in the Word, in His Works and in His Worth, we will be filled with delight and joy in God. We see God's glory and delight in it. We'll be satisfied; we'll be content. We'll find our every need and desire abundantly fulfilled in Him. We'll sing. We'll praise:

Acts 13:52, "The disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit." We'll be grateful for all He is to us.

This is the main result of being filled with the Spirit – the revelation of Christ to our thirsty souls, and the joy that comes as we drink in Him, the living waters.

A second result will be **servanthood** (5:20-ff). We will submit to other people. Our family and work relationships will be smoother and more enjoyable. The inevitable by-product of submitting to each other is **unity**. Not only that, but when filled with the Spirit, there will be **power and a desire to proclaim**. Throughout the book of Acts, we read when someone was filled with the Spirit – what did they do? They preached; they shared the Gospel. If we will continually adopt this posture before God, we will be witnessing, evangelising, soul-winning ambassadors for Christ, overflowing with infectious joy and attractive good news.

When we are filled with the Spirit, we will **exhibit the fruit of the Spirit** - love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness and temperance. We will bear the fruit of Christlikeness.

Now who would not want a life of seeing God and growing in love for Him, being filled with power to witness about Him, having better family and work relationships and becoming more like Christ? This is what is offered to us if we will yield to the Spirit in continual humility-faith.

Salvation is by grace through faith in Jesus Christ. You place your faith in Jesus, and the Holy Spirit regenerates and baptises you into His Body.

Sanctification is by grace through faith in Jesus Christ. You place your faith in Jesus, and the Holy Spirit fills you and enables you to see Jesus Christ and be like Jesus Christ.
