

February 10, 2013

Rom. 14:17-18 / Rom. 15:7-13 / I Thess. 5:16-18 / Ephesians 5:15-20
Holiness (#10): Wise, Joyful, God-Adoring and Filled with the Spirit

Over the past 10 weeks we've seen Paul piecing together (bit by bit) a more and more complete picture of what holiness looks like. Sort of like adding new pieces to a puzzle each week, until the puzzle is finished & the picture complete.

And what he does today, is bring us to the conclusion of this section, by telling us that the MOST ESSENTIAL ASPECT in being a holy person is being filled (in an ongoing way) with the Holy Spirit. That's why Paul concludes it by giving us this all-important command: **"Do not be drunk with wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Holy Spirit."** Because being full of the Holy Spirit -- in an ongoing way -- is the essence of what holiness is all about.

In fact, because it is, I toyed with the idea of entitling my message: "How to be filled with the Holy Spirit." Because when it comes right down to it, holiness is not defined by mere piety (that is, our religious practices like church attendance, Bible reading, daily devotions or even saying one's prayers), nor is it defined by mere morality (as C. S. Lewis called it) since even unbelieving heathens or atheists can be very moral people -- without being "holy" in any sense of the word.

No, according to the Bible, what makes one "holy" and thus sets them apart from ethical unbelievers or atheists, is not just faith in God, but the fact that they have received the Holy Spirit. An unbeliever can be a moral person, but only a believer -- by virtue of receiving the Holy Spirit and walking in the fullness of that Spirit -- can be holy. Holiness is the fruit of the Spirit's presence in our lives.

And we need to remember -- holiness is not optional. As the author of Hebrews points out: **"Without holiness, no one will see the Lord"** (12:14). Holiness is necessary to our seeing and being with the Lord.

And because this text has so much to cover, I'm going to jump right in with the **FIRST** thing Paul shares: **"Be very careful, then, how you live..."**

THAT is what "holiness" or "being filled with the Holy Spirit" involves -- "being very careful about how you live..." And why are we to be so careful? Paul tells us: "**Because the days are evil.**" It's because we live in a fallen world, that is filled with innumerable temptations and evil that we need to be very careful, about how we live.

Holiness, then (as we have seen before): Involves a very purposeful determination on our part NOT to give in to the temptations all around us or engage in the evils of our day.

Which means that the nonchalant, lackadaisical, take life as it comes, unconcerned person, who simply goes with the flow of society and has no spiritual goals or ambitions, and sees no need to be watchful or guard against sin and temptation, and simply does whatever they feel like at the time without much concern at all regarding what they do or how they live -- will NEVER be holy.

In fact, that type of attitude toward life is a sign that the Holy Spirit -- who relentlessly seeks to move us in the direction of holiness -- does not yet dwell within them / or is being almost entirely quenched by them.

As we saw last week, growth in holiness takes effort and commitment and determination and a purposeful resolve on our part. If this world we live in was NOT filled with so many temptations and evil things to ensnare us... / If sin did not continue to dwell within us, giving Satan something inside us which he can use to make sinful things appeal to us -- then being holy would not demand that we, "**be so very careful about how we live...**"

But, unfortunately (at least until we die or Christ returns) that's not the case. In this age the world we live in will continue to be filled with temptations and evils will continue to ensnare us, because sin will continue to reside within us until the day we die, giving Satan all he needs to tempt us and lure us back into involvement with the fruitless deeds of darkness or the unmentionable things which "**the disobedient do in secret.**"

That's why any person who truly seeks to grow in holiness must heed these words: "**Be VERY CAREFUL, then, how you live -- not as unwise (that is,**

foolishly and aimlessly wandering into situations that could ensnare you and do you spiritual harm), but as wise -- making the most of EVERY opportunity, because the days are evil."

Then **SECOND**, Paul tells us in verse 17: ***"Therefore do not be foolish (that is, do not be unwise, as he's already stated), but understand what the Lord's will is."*** Here the Greek word for "understand" means: "to bring to agreement," or "oneness of mind and opinion," either "through hostility and battle, or by willing agreement, as between friends." In other words, God will bring us to see -- either through a battle with our wills, or by friendly agreement, that what follows is His stated will for our lives.

And what is it? "Do not be drunk on wine which leads to debauchery, but instead, be filled with the Spirit." THAT is God's will for your life all your life long! That you, as His redeemed child, be, ***"filled with the His Spirit."***

And because this issue is so instrumental to our growth in holiness, I want to cover it in great depth, hoping that before you leave today you will understand what it means to be "filled with the Spirit," and even more so that you will DO what is necessary in order to be so filled.

So let's look at this verse in its context (rather than plucking it out of its context, as is often done), and let's see how doing so helps us understand the five things we must know about this command if we are ever to put this very crucial aspect of God's universal will for His people into practice.

1st) We need to remember the difference between the initial reception of the Holy Spirit (that is, regeneration or the baptism with the Holy Spirit), which is a one time, never to be repeated experience which, "seals us unto the day of redemption" (as we saw in chap. 4, verse 30) and the many repeated fillings of the Holy Spirit which should occur hundreds (if not thousands) of times, throughout our Christian lives -- depending on when we were converted, where His providence leads us, what our service for the Lord entails, and how long we walk with the Lord.

For instance: Peter was "initially filled" or "baptized by the Spirit" on the Day of Pentecost (in Acts 2:2-4). But that wasn't all. For we find him "filled with the Spirit" a second time in Acts 4:5-12, and a third time in Acts 4:31.

Likewise, Stephen is "initially filled" or "baptized by the Holy Spirit" on Pentecost. But we also find him being, "filled with the Spirit" a second time as well -- just before his death by stoning in Acts 7:55.

And the same should be true in our experience. If we are truly believers in the Lord Jesus, then we have received the Holy Spirit. In fact, that's what being born again means -- to be born of water and the Spirit! And when we receive the Spirit at the moment of regeneration or new birth, we are there-by sealed, "until the day of redemption." Which means we cannot lose the Spirit, as I pointed out a few weeks back, once we've received it.

Yet we can indeed, as I've also pointed out, GRIEVE or QUENCH His power and presence in our lives. We do so through sin, doubt, disobedience, spiritual apathy, anger at God, bitterness, unforgiveness, distancing ourselves from the fellowship, or a refusal to do what God calls us to do.

The initial reception and consequent sealing of the Spirit is a once done, never to be repeated or reversed, infusion of the Spirit of God into the life of the believer.

But the second experience Paul speaks of -- being filled with the Spirit after we've already received the Spirit should be an often repeated experience -- which depends on the need of the hour, the state of our soul, whether disobedience has quenched the Spirit, and a slew of other possible things!

Then **2ndly**) we need to know that in the Greek the command to, "be filled with the Holy Spirit" is a continuous present imperative. That is, it's NOT a command that one obeys once and never needs to worry about again!

NOR is it a command that at some point in the future will cease to apply to us, as if we could ever one day say: "I'm now so full of the Spirit I never need to be filled again."

No, my friends. Paul's point in phrasing it as he does is this: There is never a point in the life of a believer where he or she can ever stop seeking to be filled with the Holy Spirit. For as various commentaries will point out, a more literal translation would be: **"Be being filled with the Spirit"** (Fee), or, **"go on being filled with the Spirit"** (Stott) / or **"keep on being filled with the Spirit"** (Howard).

And why would Paul tell mature Christians to continually keep on being filled with the Spirit, when they've already received that initial filling with the Spirit? Acts 1:8 gives us a clue. There Jesus tells the disciples (prior to Pentecost):

"But you will receive power" ("dunamais" in the Greek -- the same word from which we get our English word "dynamite") when the Holy Spirit comes upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and Judea, and Samaria, and to the uttermost parts of the earth."

It shows us that the Holy Spirit comes upon them, NOT to give them a warm feeling, or euphoric spiritual experience. Nor does it come to give them divine power and energy simply to do whatever it is they feel like doing in life. Rather, it empowers them to serve God -- primarily as bold and powerful witnesses for Jesus.

Because the hearts of people are like stone and spiritually dead in trespasses and sins (or enslaved by sin) -- and thus powerless to free them-selves apart from the attending power of the Spirit -- the Gospel would always be rejected by people if our witness to Christ wasn't attended by, or empowered by, the will-altering and sin-destroying power of the Holy Spirit!

The same point is made again in Acts 2:1-4, where the Spirit is poured out upon the disciples, and they begin speaking in tongues (in this case, at least, foreign languages they had not learned) as the Spirit enabled them. And why tongues? Because it was Pentecost (a Jewish holy day commemorating the giving of the Law to Moses) and as the passage tells us, **"there were in Jerusalem people from every nation under heaven"** (v. 5).

And what were they saying in these tongues? The people they spoke to tell us:
"We hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues!"

Thus I need to stress: Every place in the Book of Acts where the disciples are said to receive a new infilling with the Holy Spirit has something to do with needing divine strength to be bold, or courageous, or face opposition and even death for sharing the Gospel and being witnesses for Him (Acts 4:5-12 / 7:55 / 9:17-20 / 13:9 / 13:52).

Which means the Spirit's fullness isn't given simply to make us feel good. It's given to empower us to do the will of God! Those new fillings came upon the disciples -- and will come upon us, as we like they -- step out in faith to take our public stand for Christ, or testify to the Gospel of His grace, or as in Stephen's case, face martyrdom for having done so.

So many people I know express the desire to be "filled with the Spirit." Yet many no intention whatsoever of being witnesses for Christ. And if so, they shouldn't be surprised if it doesn't happen! For God makes it very clear that the fullness of the Spirit is given to those who need it to carry out some type of service for Him -- usually that of public witness for Christ.

Just as "weapons" are given to those who fight in foreign lands on the front lines of battle and not to civilians sitting safe and secure in their houses back home; so also the fullness of the Spirit -- *God's ultimate weapon in the war for the souls of men* -- is given to those who are on the front lines of the Gospel battle of fighting for the souls of people.

Thus I admonish you (in keeping with Scripture): If you want to be filled with the Holy Spirit / then get engaged in the evangelistic battle for the souls of men and women and children -- because then you'll need it!

Then **3rd**) the context makes it clear that being filled with the Spirit is not to be seen as similar to being drunk with wine (in the euphoria sense), but contrasted with the getting drunk with wine -- because drunkenness leads to "debauchery" (or "a disorderly life characterized by a lack of self-control") and making the drunk person more susceptible to the temptations of sin.

Many people do things while drunk that they live to regret. Or sadder yet, they don't live to regret / because they don't live through them. Inebriated people often lose the desire and the ability to make wise choices, control their actions, or restrain their urges -- often leading to ethical disaster.

That's why (other than Proverbs 31:8-9) drunkenness is universally condemned in the Bible -- especially for those in leadership. Because it warps and distorts one's perception of reality, makes them easy to manipulate and lead astray, relaxes all their fears and moral inhibitions (including the necessary, God-given ones), and thus leads to very foolish and often very regretful choices and actions.

And understanding that helps us see how being "filled with the Spirit" is in complete contrast to drunkenness. One of the fruit of the Spirit's presence in our lives is self-control. And thus, we are never more in control or able to resist the lures of sin than when we are filled with the Spirit.

We are never more able to resist temptation, and reject foolish options, and avoid being manipulated (NOR are we ever more able to overcome unhealthy fear and be bold for the Lord) -- than when we are "full of the Holy Spirit."

Whereas drunkenness leads to a lack of self-control, the infilling of the Spirit enhances self-control, wise choices, and holy living. And if it doesn't, it's probably NOT the fullness of the Spirit one is experiencing, but the euphoria of a stroked ego.

A Pentecostal brother in Honduras once told me that when he was, "filled with the Holy Spirit" and speaking in front of large crowds that included women, he frequently found himself thinking (and I quote): *"I could have any one of them I wanted right now."*

Is THAT what the fullness of the Holy Spirit produces? Is THAT what Peter was thinking on the day of Pentecost? No. That's what a stroked ego produces -- though it's often hard to distinguish the euphoria of one from the other. That is, until one realizes that the HOLY Spirit, being HOLY, doesn't produce unholy thoughts, cravings and desires. Pride and sin do that.

Then **4th**) Paul shares the FOUR things which bring about, or are brought about by, and sustain the fullness of the Spirit. Verse 19a tells us such people, **"Speak to one another with psalms, and hymns and spiritual songs."** That is, Spirit-filled people love to declare the wonders of God to each other. It's also why some people have rightly said -- when they walk into churches where no one sings God's praises with any volume, or exuberance, or excitement, or enthusiasm -- that such a church is "dead" and not "spirit-filled."

Because Spirit-filled people love to gather so they can speak, or audibly declare, or sing the praises of God with other believers. They want to, they don't have to be prodded to!

Likewise, v. 19b tells us they, **"sing and make melody in their hearts to the Lord"** (and it means, the Lord Jesus). / And, therefore, whereas v. 19a speaks of the audible voicing of praise in a public setting, v. 19b speaks of an internal heart-song of praise which goes on entirely unwitnessed in the soul of a Spirit-filled person -- a result of the joy they have in Jesus.

That's one of the ways you can identify Spirit-filled people. They find great joy in adoring Jesus! In their heart there is a deep love for Christ that yearns to find expression in worshiping Him. In fact, you cannot be "filled with the Spirit" and not desire to worship Jesus.

Likewise, verse 20 tells us that Spirit-filled people give thanks for everything. As John Stott points out, they don't grumble and moan and groan and complain about life's circumstances, for such things are signs of unbelief. **"Whenever we start moaning and groaning,"** he says, **"it is proof that we are not filled with the Spirit. For whenever the Spirit fills believers, they thank their heavenly Father, at all times, and for all things [in Jesus name]."**

And although you'd never know it, because the NIV separates v. 21 by itself (as I'll show next week it NEVER should have): The fullness of the Spirit also brings about, and is sustained by, an attitude of submission. Submission to God (as entire passage advocates from beginning to end), but also to one another as believers (v. 21), between spouses in the marriage relationship (vv. 22-33), in

children toward their parents (6:1-4), and in slaves toward their masters (vv. 5-9) -- which I will devote an entire sermon to for very obvious reasons!

Which brings us to our 5th) and final issue -- that a Spirit-filled person is a person who submits to God in all things. In fact, what you also need to know is that the verb "be filled" is not only in the imperative (or command form) and not only in the ongoing continuous present tense, but it's also in the passive form -- which means it could (or better yet should) be translated, "**LET the Holy Spirit continually fill you.**"

We don't repeatedly fill ourselves again and again with the Holy Spirit, anymore than we initially filled ourselves with the Spirit! God does that!

Yet, as I mentioned last week, when it comes to the work of sanctification -- of *which this is a part* -- we DO need to join with God in the work that HE is doing inside us. In fact, what this verse teaches is that we must allow him fill us with His Spirit. Or as Stott puts it, "yield to Him without reserve."

This is the aspect of being "***filled with the Holy Spirit***" that A. W. Tozer emphasized the most heavily. If the Spirit is ever to fill you, he says, it will only be as you surrender control of your life to Him.

"Do you want Him as the Lord of your life?" asks Tozer. Sure you want His benefits, he says, ***"But... do you want to hand the keys of your soul over to the Holy Spirit and say, "Lord, from now on I don't even have a key to my own house. I will come and go as you tell me.".... Are you sure that you want your personality to be taken over by One who will expect obedience to the written and living Word [of God]? Are you sure you want your personality taken over by One who will not tolerate sin -- the sins of self, like self-righteousness, self-admiration, self-aggrandizement, self-exaltation and self-pity -- which are all under the interdiction of God Almighty."***

Are you willing to empty yourself of yourself -- the sinful, self-pampering, self-willed, God-resisting self -- so that you might be filled with all the fullness of God? Because you can't be resisting Jesus, or rebelling against the will of God for your life, and be full of the Holy Spirit. Rebellion against God, says the Bible, is as the sin of witchcraft.

So I ask you: ***Are you letting the Holy Spirit fill you? Have you surrendered your self-will that you might do God's will?***

Have you said to Him in earnest truthfulness: *"I am yours, O God, do with me as you will. Tell me what you want me to do and where you want me to go -- for whatever you say I will do."*

Likewise: Have you sensed God pressuring you to let go of some sin where you are still saying "no"? Is He calling you to some task where you are still resisting? Because if you are resisting God, instead of submitting to Him, you are preventing yourself from being filled with His Holy Spirit.

That's why we need to know this command is in the passive voice, where Paul is saying to us: ***"LET the Holy Spirit continually fill you."*** Or, ***"Stop resisting the Spirit which is seeking to fill you."*** Because submission to His will both brings about and sustains the fullness of the Spirit.

It "lets" God to fill us.

And the same is true in relation to sin: You can have your sin, or you can have the fullness of the Spirit, but you can't have both -- you must choose between the two.

You can do your own thing and quench the Spirit, or you can do what the Lord asks of you and be full of the Holy Spirit.

You can be full of yourself, or you can be filled with all the fullness of God, but you can't be full of yourself and filled with the fullness of God at the same time.