

# The Spirit-Filled Life

## Ephesians 5:18-21

- 15 See then that you walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise,
- 16 redeeming the time, because the days are evil.
- 17 Therefore do not be unwise, but understand what the will of the Lord is.
- 18 And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit,
- 19 speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord,
- 20 giving thanks always for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ,
- 21 submitting to one another in the fear of God.

We live in a day of increasing energy shortages. The world has ever-increasing energy demands in the face of ever-decreasing energy supplies. Power outages are becoming more frequent. The cost of heating or cooling our homes and driving our cars continues to escalate. And with all of the global warming talk, the search is on for some kind of clean, renewable energy source. Under these conditions, it would be utterly inconceivable if a great number of people had access to a free and readily available source of energy, but failed to use it.

And yet, many Christians seemingly do this very thing with regard to the Christian life. God has provided us an inexhaustible, free, readily available source of power to live the Christian life. And yet many Christians do not use the power that God has given to live the transformed life. There are Christian families that fall apart because the family members manifest the deeds of the flesh, instead of allowing the Holy Spirit to produce His fruit in their daily relationships. Many Christian workers burn out serving the Lord because they do not avail themselves of the power that God offers through His indwelling Holy Spirit.

And so today in our verse-by-verse study of Ephesians we come to the subject of the Spirit-filled life. It's been said, "*the Christian life is not difficult; it is absolutely impossible,*" apart from the power of the Holy Spirit. Jesus said (John 15:5b), "**apart from Me you can do nothing.**" But in the same context, He repeatedly promised to send the Holy Spirit to live in us as the divine Helper (John 14:16-17, 26; 15:26; 16:13). So the Christian life must be the Spirit-filled life. To walk wisely, to redeem the time in these evil days, to understand the will of the Lord and live in light of it, we must be filled with the Spirit.

We have already seen in our study of Ephesians that when we were saved, we were indwelt with and sealed by the Holy Spirit (1:13-14; 4:30). When we were saved we were baptized into Christ by the Spirit. 1 Cor.12:13 says, "**For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body; whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free; and have all been made to drink into one Spirit.**" The Bible teaches that the Holy Spirit convicts us, teaches us, empowers us, leads us, intercedes for us and reveals God to us. If you are born again, you have all of the Holy Spirit you will ever need!

But here in verse 18 Paul urges us, even commands us to be **"filled with the Spirit."** It literally reads, **"You must be continuously filled by the Spirit."**

We studied last time what it means to be filled with the Holy Spirit. You can be **"filled with the Holy Spirit"** when you surrender yourself to the Spirit. Being **"filled"** is not getting more of the Spirit, but letting the Spirit have more of you!

The present tense of the verb indicates an ongoing condition, so that the person may be characterized as "full of the Holy Spirit." Luke 4:1 describes Jesus as **"full of the Holy Spirit."** In Acts 6:3, the apostles direct the early church to select **"seven men of good reputation, full of the Spirit and of wisdom,"** to help with the need of serving the widows. One of the men, Stephen, is described (6:5) as **"a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit."** Later (Acts 11:24), Barnabas is described as **"a good man, and full of the Holy Spirit and of faith."**

So to be filled with the Spirit is to live with every conscious area of your life yielded to the Spirit's control. How do I yield to the Holy Spirit of God who lives within me?

Let's look at Colossians 3:16-17, **"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. And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him."**

This passage is obviously parallel with Ephesians 5:18. Both texts are followed by joyful singing, thankfulness to God, and instructions about wives and husbands, children and parents, and slaves and masters. But in Colossians 3:16, rather than saying, **"be filled with the Spirit,"** Paul says, **"Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly."** So to be a Spirit-filled Christian, you must be growing in your understanding and application of God's Word. As the Word of Christ dwells in us richly, controls all our ways, as we walk in obedience to the Word, the Spirit of God fills us and everything we do and say is under the Lordship of Jesus Christ.

As you walk this way relying on the indwelling Spirit for His power, being obedient to His Word, you will develop a habit of holiness. At first, like a toddler learning to walk, you will fall a lot. Get up and keep walking. Pretty soon, walking becomes the norm. You'll experience the Spirit's fullness in an ever-expanding capacity. He will control or influence your thoughts, your emotions, your words, your attitudes, your schedule, your relationships, your finances, and all of life. He does not do this as a master controls a robot, but rather, using your unique personality and gifts, He fills you as the wind fills the sails of a ship, directing you in His paths of righteousness and joy.

So what does it look like when I am filled with the Spirit?

## **The Marks of being Filled with the Spirit (vv.19-21).**

How can you tell when a believer is Spirit-filled? How can you judge your own surrender? Paul gives us three marks of some who are "filled with the Spirit."

### **1. The Spirit-Filled Believer Loves Worship (v.19).**

As a little boy sat in church, his eyes were drawn to a large flag mounted on the wall, with a number of gold stars attached to it. He whispered to his father, "Daddy, why does that flag have all those stars on it?" His dad whispered back, "To remind us of all those who died in the service." The boy thought about that for a moment and then whispered again, "Did they die in the morning service or the evening service?"

While humorous, that story hits painfully close to home. At some church services it seems like those sitting there either are dead or at a funeral! They listlessly stare at the screen where the words are projected or they stare out the window or read the bulletin or look at their watch to see how much longer they must endure this ordeal. They don't sing with enthusiasm and evident joy in the Lord.

If a visitor not used to going to church came to our worship service would he conclude that something significant is happening here? Would she see that our God is a God of great joy, whose Holy Spirit produces joy in His people?

V.19 says we are to be "**speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs.**" First, this does not mean that we are to stop talking and start communicating by singing. It means that whenever we speak to one another we are to be so filled with the Spirit that there is a song in our heart, we are to be "**singing and making melody in your [our] heart to the Lord.**"

When the Spirit fills you, you can't help but sing! 1 Pet.1:8 says, "**Though now you do not see Him, yet believing, you rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory.**"

My life flows on in one endless song above earth's lamentation.  
I hear the real, though far-off hymn that hails a new creation.  
No storm can shake my inmost calm while to that rock I'm clinging.  
It sounds an echo in my soul, how can I keep from singing?

*(Source unknown)*

When we are Spirit-filled there won't just be a song of praise in our "**heart**" but we will also be "**speaking**" or singing "**to one another.**" When we get together we will sing songs of praise to God and songs of encouragement for each other!

- a. We will sing "**psalms**" – Psalms probably refers to the psalms of the Old Testament or scripture set to music. Hymn writer Isaac Watts set many of the Psalms to music. The Christmas hymn 181, "Joy to the World, the Lord Is Come," is simply Psalm 98 set to music. Sometimes we sing the song 554, "As the Deer Panteth for the Water, So My Soul Longeth After Thee." That song is just Psalm 42 put to music.
- b. We will sing "**hymns**" – songs of praise directed to God. These songs address God and give Him praise. Some good examples are hymn 6, "How Great Thou Art," hymn 68, "Holy, Holy, Holy," and hymn 133, "Shout to the Lord."
- c. We will sing "**spiritual songs**" – songs of testimony that speak of our own walk with the Lord and encourage others.

Spirit-filled people overflow with song. Our time of singing is not just something we do to fill the time before all the latecomers arrive. It is not a time to manipulate

our emotions, to get everyone pumped up with moving music. It is a time to worship God in spirit and in truth. It should engage our minds, our emotions, and our bodies as we exalt our glorious God and His great salvation. Be filled with the Spirit and sing with all your heart to the Lord!

Are you Spirit-filled? Even if you can't sing or read a note of music, do you find yourself **"making melody in your heart to the Lord?"**

## **2. The Spirit-Filled Believer Gives Thanks (v.20).**

Singing is an inward mark of the filling of the Spirit. **"Giving thanks for all things"** is an upward mark of the filling of the Spirit.

Paul has already mentioned thankfulness in this chapter. In contrast to immorality, impurity, greed, and filthy talk, saints must give thanks (5:3-4). But now he brings it up again, because he knows how prone we are to grumbling. It's a lifelong battle to cultivate a grateful heart in all things.

The Spirit-filled believer is not a grumbler. He doesn't complain about what he doesn't have or what he wishes he did have. He simply thanks God for the gifts he has received.

God wants us always to give thanks for all things. If Paul had just said, "Often giving thanks for most things," it would have been more realistic and doable. I can give thanks often and I can give all things he means all things! Paul practiced this. He exulted in his trials, knowing that God was using them to produce perseverance, proven character, and hope (Rom. 5:3). When he was illegally beaten, imprisoned, and put in the stocks, he sang praises to God (Acts 16:25). When he was imprisoned in Rome with the local believers slandering him, he wrote to the Philippians, repeatedly mentioning his own thankfulness and joy and exhorting them to joy (Phil. 1:3-4, 18, 25; 3:1; 4:4, 10). It was from that same prison that he wrote these words we are studying today, **"always giving thanks for all things."**

While we may not thank God for evil things that people do or for things such as sickness, death, and natural disasters, which are the result of the fall, we can thank Him in the midst of these trials that **"all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose."**

Matthew Henry was once robbed. How can you possibly give thanks to God when you've been robbed? That night Henry wrote in his diary: "Let me be thankful, first, because I was never robbed before. Second, because although they took my purse, they did not take my life. Third, because although they took my all, it was not much. Fourth, because it was I who was robbed, not I who robbed"

On a practical note, I find that it's often more difficult to give thanks for minor frustrations and irritations than for the major trials that come. When major trials hit, I'm usually aware that God is dealing with me. So I stop and pray and try to figure out what He wants me to learn. But in the minor, day-to-day sort of hassles, I tend not to bring God into the picture. Why is this slow driver in front of me when I'm in a hurry? Why did my baby keep me up all night when I've got an important day at work? Why am I getting repeated interruptions when I'm trying

to meet a deadline? In those kinds of minor frustrations, I've got to stop, acknowledge God's sovereignty over them, and thank Him in the midst of them.

I'm still working on that lesson!

Are you Spirit-filled? Do you find yourself complaining more or thanking God more?

### **3. The Spirit-Filled Believer Submits to Others (v.21).**

Singing is an inward mark of the filling of the Spirit, gratitude is an upward mark and **"submitting to one another"** is an outward mark.

In the verses that follow this passage, Paul will apply the principle of submission in the areas of marriage and family relationships, and in our work relationships. But here we are dealing with the fact that all believers are to be willing to submit **"to one another."**

**"Submitting to one another"** means that we put the needs of others first. It means we seek to serve others, not ourselves. To be filled with the Spirit means that we will have the humility to put others first.

Jesus is our model. Even though He had everything, He held back nothing. He stripped Himself, got down on His knees, and washed the feet of the disciples. Jesus was in authority over the disciples, but He laid aside His rights and served them. Jesus taught us in Mark 10:42-44, **"You know that those who are considered rulers over the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you shall be your servant. And whoever of you desires to be first shall be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many."**

Paul says that we are to be **"submitting to one another in the fear of God."** This is not the cringing fear of judgment, but rather the reverential fear that acknowledges Christ's supremacy as Lord of the universe. It is the awe of knowing that God has put all things in subjection under Christ's feet (Eph. 1:22), so that at the name of Jesus every knee shall bow and every tongue confess that He is Lord (Phil. 2:9-11). It is also the fear of grieving or disappointing the One who loved us and gave Himself for us. When we submit to Christ, we will submit to other believers.

The world's way is, "Assert yourself! Stand up for your rights! You don't have to take such treatment! Get an attorney to fight for your rights!" God's way is, **"submitting to one another in the fear of God."** These views are at polar opposites!

Are you Spirit-filled? Do you find yourself humbly serving others or selfishly guarding your own selfish desires?