

WHAT IT MEANS TO BE FILLED WITH THE HOLY SPIRIT

My definition of being full of the Holy Spirit is what happens when the Holy Spirit has the controlling interest in your life. Going back to the contrast between wine and the Holy Spirit, as discussed this morning, (Ephesians 5:18), drunken and Spirit-filled people have one thing in common. They are both controlled. Their lives and their behaviour are radically changed by that which fills them.

- If a man is filled with anger, then anger controls his life.
- If a man is filled with greed, then greed dominates his life.
- If a man is filled with love, then love influences all he does.

When the Holy Spirit fills you, He will have the controlling interest in your life. It is “control by consent.” Let me make a critical distinction here. Being filled with the Holy Spirit doesn’t mean I have more of the Spirit; it means the Spirit has more of me. It doesn’t happen all at once any more than you get drunk all at once. Being filled with the Spirit happens as you continually choose to live under His influence. I believe that every Christian is being filled with the Spirit from the moment of the new birth. Since the Holy Spirit indwells us from the moment we are saved, it only makes sense that new believers are filled with that very same Spirit, which is why new believers often have so much joy and walk so closely with the Lord. For them, it’s the most natural thing to do. They haven’t learned yet to be boring and they haven’t backslidden yet.

That means the central issue is one of cooperation. Am I going to cooperate with the Holy Spirit and let him lead me or am I going to keep on trying to do things my own way? So many of us struggle with that. We fight the Lord because we want to do things our way.

So God says, “Okay, we can do it your way for a while, but it’s not going to work.” In that sense, even if we won’t cooperate with God, He’ll cooperate with us by letting us do things in our own strength and by our own will. But when we fail and cry out to the Lord and He says, “Are you willing to cooperate with Me now?”

There is the issue of “contact.” I once heard a preacher explain the Holy Spirit’s filling this way. He said that most people think of the Spirit as a substance to fill us, like gas filling up a tank. So we run out of the Spirit and God fills us up again. But that’s not the best image to use. Think about the elevated trains that you find in many cities. Those trains run on three rails - two for the wheels and one for the electricity. The electricity is always there, but the train doesn’t move unless there is contact with the third rail. Touch that rail and the train moves, pull away from that rail and it stops. The third rail is like the Holy Spirit. His power is always available, and unlike your local utility, there’s never a power shortage and never a burnout. Sometimes we live out of contact with His power, and when that happens, our lives simply stop working the way God intended.

Here is my definition of the filling of the Spirit: *It is that state in which the Holy Spirit is free to do all that He came into my life to do.* The key word is “state.” The filling of the Spirit is not primarily an emotional experience, and it’s certainly not reserved for a few super-Christians. It’s nothing more than the normal Christian life when the Holy Spirit is continually in control. That is why the command is in the present tense: We are continually to be controlled by the Spirit, cooperating with the Spirit, and in contact with the Spirit. This, then, is God’s moment-by-moment provision for faith, vitality, strength, courage, boldness, victory and the abundant life. It’s for you, it’s a command, and it’s God’s plan for your life.

God is ready, willing and able to fill you right now. He's more willing to fill you than you are to be filled. If for some reason you aren't filled with the Holy Spirit, it's not because of God's reluctance. We do not have to beg God to do what He has already promised to do. Rather, He is pleading with us to make the way clear so He can do what He promised to do! Imagine trying to fill up a jar that is already full of something else. You can't fill what is already full. Or, imagine an empty jar with the lid screwed on tight. You can't fill that jar either. Some Christians are so full of themselves, they have no room for the Holy Spirit. Some Christians have simply closed their heart to the work of the Holy Spirit.

In a sense being filled with the Spirit is an impossibility - at least as far as it depends on us. Only God's Spirit can fill us. We need two things - **emptiness** and **openness**. You can't fill a jar that's already full, and you can't fill a jar that is not open. There must be a sense of need; *"Lord, I'm empty and I need to be filled by your Spirit right now."* There must be a willingness; *"Lord, I'm open to you. Let your Spirit fill me right now."* The filling of the Spirit is really as simple as that. As long as we are conscious of our need and as long as we are willing to yield to the Lord, we can be "filled" with God's Spirit because His power is available to us all day long.

Let me end by putting this matter in a larger perspective. The Holy Spirit is never given for our own personal enjoyment. God sends his Spirit to enable us to live for Christ in the world and to do what Christ did. More than once in recent days, with the economic turmoil we see around us, and with all the tension generated by the financial crisis, several people have said that we need to see a revival in the UK. Yes, we do! And may I remind you of the prayer that goes like this: *"Oh Lord, change the world. Begin, I pray, with me."*

It's not the people "out there" that need to be revived by God's Spirit, it's you and it's me. Our nation will be better when our churches are better. Our churches will be better when we are better people. And we will be better people when we are filled with the Holy Spirit. So I invite you to join me in praying that we might be filled with the Holy Spirit tonight. If we live another day without the Holy Spirit's control in our lives, we have only ourselves to blame. God has made Himself fully available to us. The question is, have you made yourself fully available to Him?