

The Spirit-filled Life Eph. 5:18-21

Intro. When taking a trip, do you ever slow down and get out to take a closer look at something? Instead of racing to a destination, it's good to *"stop and smell the roses."* That's what we need to do with regard to our study of **Eph. 5** and the ministry of the Holy Spirit. Because of some doctrinal confusion and the urgent significance of **v.18**, we need to park the car and take a moment to absorb this important word of instruction.

1. The Context of the Spirit's filling - Eph. 4:1-6:9

Let's start by taking a broad look at the context. As we've observed along the way, Paul's letter divides into two sections. **Chaps. 1-3** are doctrinal while **chaps. 4-6** are practical. A key word in **chaps. 4, 5** is *peripateo* which, when literally translated, means **to walk**. The NIV has the words *live or live a life*. By either translation *peripateo* is used to set forth a normal pattern for progress in godly living...a lifestyle. Let's review the instances where this key word appears.

- **4:1** encourages believers to *live a life (peripateo) worthy of the calling you received*
- **4:17** then says you *must no longer live (peripateo) as Gentiles do in the futility of their thinking*
- **5:1** encourages us to *live a life of love (peripateo) ...just as Christ loved us*
- **5:8** instructs us to *live (peripateo) as children of light*
- **5:15** then instructs us to be *careful how we live (peripateo) in wisdom not foolishness*

A fair question at this point is "how?" Since we are selfish and sinful to the core, how is it possible to live out these lofty ideals? What power can overcome the downward pull of the sinful nature still so alive in us? Throughout his letters, Paul gives the answer. His answer in **Eph. 5:18** is worded this way...**be filled with the Spirit**. To the Galatians he wrote, **live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature.** **(5:16)** To the Romans he wrote, **Those controlled by the sinful nature cannot please God. You, however, are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you.** So as we glance backward in the context, **5:18** is the key that explains how it's possible to live a life worthy of our calling...a life that is different from that of the unsaved / a life of love / a life of light / and a life of wisdom.

But let's also look ahead. The immediate results of the Spirit's filling are stated in **vs. 19-21**. **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. Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.** Here Paul lists three effects produced when the Spirit fills our lives. We will sing from the heart / give thanks to the Father for everything / and submit to one another. Notice how the phrase **one another** appears in **v.19** and **21**. The first

place a Spirit filled life shows up and has impact is in the church...in the heart response of a believer to the Lord and to others.

But then notice how the venue changes. **v. 22** says, **Wives submit to your husbands** and **v. 25** says, **Husbands, love your wives...** From relationships within the church at large, Paul gets more specific. He says, now let's talk about marriages. (not that marriages need help!) Paul continues in

6:1 when he writes, **Children obey your parents.** Then in **6:3** where he writes **Slaves, obey your earthly masters with respect...** The call to live a life worthy of our calling is applied to the heart response of one Christian to another / the loving relationship between husband and his wife / the obedient relationship between parent and child / and finally, the relationship between employee and employer. Yet the key is **v.18** where Paul explains how and by what power this is possible.

Apart from the energy of God's Spirit, we are powerless to live a life worthy of our calling. The key to Christ-honoring fellowship / marital harmony / healthy families / and righteousness in the workplace... is here in the command **to be filled with the Spirit.** Human effort is hopelessly inadequate. In

John 6:63 Jesus said, **The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing. The words I have spoken to you are spirit and they are life.**

Are you beginning to understand why we need to slow down and park the car? It's a critical mistake to fly past **v.18** in a hurry to get somewhere else! The command to **be filled with the Spirit** is critical because it explains how a life worthy of our calling is possible. But as we attempt to comprehend what **v.18** means, we need to correct some misunderstandings.

2. The Confusion about the Holy Spirit and His filling ministry

When I sit down to read, I often start by cleaning the smudges from my glasses. To clearly see what the Spirit's filling means, we need to wipe away some unfortunate smudges. Teaching about the Holy Spirit has suffered extremes from obsession to avoidance. The neglect in churches like ours has caused some to refer to the Holy Spirit as "the Cinderella of the Trinity." Yet the Church Age is the Age of the Spirit! The power of the risen Christ for life and service is communicated to us by means of the Spirit who indwells all who have trusted Christ for salvation. Like the engines under the hoods of every car in our parking lot, the Holy Spirit is the drive train behind the *peripateo*, the Christian life. We go nowhere apart from Him. So let's wipe away some smudges by remembering first...

- **who the Holy Spirit is**

As we said on Palm Sunday, in the Bible the Holy Spirit is referred to as the Spirit of God and the Spirit Christ. Forgive my irreverence, but the Holy Spirit is **not** the wild / spooky / spontaneous / free-lancing member of the Trinity. He is One with the God the Father and One with God the Son. As the Spirit of or (belonging to God), His mind, nature, and will are the same as that of God the Father. As the Spirit of Christ, He is Jesus minus a body.

In **Jn. 14:16-18** Jesus said this to His disciples...**I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever--the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you. I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you.** Notice this...after promising to send the Spirit to indwell them, Jesus said, **I will come to you.** Who is the Holy Spirit? He is the Spirit of Christ. Jesus fulfilled His promise...He didn't leave His followers as orphans. On Pentecost He came to them in the person of the Holy Spirit.

But there's another subtlety in these verses. The Greek language has two prepositions which are translated **another**. One preposition is **heteros** which means *another of a different kind*. But the preposition here is **allos** not **heteros**. **Allos** means *another of the same kind*. In other words, the **Counselor...the Spirit of Truth**, is just like Jesus! He is another of the same kind. In other words, Jesus and His Holy Spirit are One and the same. This is important. To **grieve the Spirit** is to grieve Jesus. To **quench the Spirit** is to extinguish the energy of God in our lives. The Holy Spirit isn't the wild / spooky / spontaneous / free-lancing member of the Trinity. The Spirit who indwells and walks beside every believer is Jesus minus a body. This leads to the next matter.

- **what the Holy spirit produces**

It is tragic that the Holy Spirit has so often been associated with wild and bizarre behavior. I've got news for you...the Holy Spirit doesn't energize believers to bark like dogs / cackle like chickens / or laugh uncontrollably. He produces Christlike behavior! **Gal. 5:22, 23 - But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.**

The Holy Spirit doesn't knock believers out, He urges us to wake up. And He will never lead someone to be rude or to violate principles of God's Word because He is the agent who inspired that Word.

The role of the Holy Spirit is to glorify Jesus as He produces the character of Jesus in us! So as we consider who the Holy Spirit is, we must understand He is holy...and that He is the Spirit of God and the Spirit of Jesus. He is Jesus Christ living in us and through us.

This reminder is important because Bible-centered believers tend to tense up whenever the Holy Spirit is mentioned. We disagree with the doctrinal carelessness and bizarre behavior often exhibited among Spirit-centered believers. But reacting to those who have misrepresented the Holy Spirit, we tend to *throw the baby out with the bathwater*. We neglect the NT teaching about the Holy Spirit. We lower our ceiling fans to make sure no one gives the impression they are worshipping in the Spirit by raising their hands in worship. I'm poking fun. But the truth is...Bible-centered believers are often so defensive, that we **quench the Spirit**. Satan loves that we do that! He loves for us to forfeit the blessings and power the Holy Spirit was sent to provide. Even though the command to **be filled with the Spirit** is clear, we often marginalize this divine person who is so essential to our lives and our ministries. But faithfulness to what God has revealed in Scripture demands that we wipe away the smudges so they don't obscure

the clear command to **be filled with the Spirit**. Somebody put it this way and I like it...*"Spirit-centered believers have their windows wide open...Bible centered believers have their windows closed. Perhaps it would be wise and more faithful to Scripture, to open our windows but keep the screens on!"* One final matter needs to be reinforced.

- **why the Holy Spirit's filling is so vital**

Paul addressed the futility of a Spiritless-Christianity in **Gal.3:3. Are you so foolish? After beginning with the Spirit, are you now trying to attain your goal by human effort?** Every Christian life begins as a miracle of God's Spirit. The miracle of salvation begins as the Holy Spirit convicts us of sin, righteousness and judgment. With invisible cords of love, the Spirit draws us to the Savior. **I Cor. 2:14** says no one can know or understand the things of God apart from the Holy Spirit's ministry of illumination. Then, having led us to trust Jesus, the Spirit enters our being. By His baptizing ministry He places us into the body of Christ (**I Cor. 12:13**). His presence in us is God's mark of ownership that seals us until the day of redemption. (**Eph. 4:30**). The baptizing, indwelling, and sealing ministries of the Spirit are supernatural and fully accomplished the moment we trust Christ and are saved. In contrast, the filling ministry is present, ongoing, and completely essential. But think about it...what is left if the supernatural is removed from Christianity and our churches? We're no different from a civic organization, a club, or a business! A Spiritless-Christianity is pathetic and powerless. Paul says we are foolish to substitute human effort for the energy of the Spirit.

As we wipe the smudges from our glasses, we should also understand that it has never been God's purpose for the Holy Spirit to be given center-stage prominence. We're not instructed to worship or pray to the Spirit. We worship and pray to the Father, in or by means of the Spirit. The distinct role of the Holy Spirit is to glorify the Lord Jesus. In **Jn.16:4** - Jesus said, **"He will bring glory to Me by taking from what is mine and making it known to you."** In some settings, the Holy Spirit and "the anointing" is the main thing...the focal point. This is a distortion. The Holy Spirit's assignment is to be back stage. His role is to glorify the Lord Jesus who is pre-eminent over all!

So **Gal. 3:3** should correct any of us who tend to get nervous and apprehensive whenever the Holy Spirit is mentioned. **Are you so foolish? After beginning with the Spirit, are you now trying to attain your goal by human effort?** If our ambition is to live a life worthy of our calling, we must seriously embrace the enablement God has provided. The Christian life is not the result of human effort! It's not the product of trying hard, but the result of believing deep. The Christian life is a life of allowing the risen Christ to shape and control our attitudes and behavior by the Word of God and the person of His indwelling Spirit. This is what we need to come to terms with.

Dr. Chafer concludes, *"Here again, turning from human reasoning to Bible doctrine, we discover Christian life and service to be a direct exercise of the energy of the Spirit working in and through the believer."* This is so important to get straight in our minds. We naturally default to the idea that Christian living consists of believing in Jesus / ceasing to do naughty things / and obeying God's commandments. Said another way..."just trust Jesus and do the best you can." According to this mindset maturity equals attendance at church / hours spent in prayer / or chapters of the Bible read and

studied. While each of these disciplines contribute to maturity, the missing link that keeps many believers immature and ineffective is moment by moment dependence on the Spirit of Christ and fellowship with Him. Left out is the supernatural stimulus and energy of the Holy Spirit.

3. The Contrasts and Comparisons to the Spirit's filling - Eph. 5:18

Let me read **v.18** again. **Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit.** As we said a few weeks ago, the main point of this analogy is control. A person who is drunk has allowed alcohol, (which is a depressant) to dull their senses and reduce their shyness and inhibitions. With senses dulled, they more readily surrender to impulses and control of their lower nature. The thoughts and speech of an intoxicated person are hindered. Their physical coordination is reduced. As they become louder and bolder they often do and say things they regret later. **v.18** says, the result of drunkenness is *asotia* which is translated **debauchery**. (Not that we need a picture of what this looks like), but the prodigal son is a poster boy for what this word means. **Lk.15:13** says ...**(He) set off for a distant country and there squandered his wealth in wild living.** This young man disgraced His family name / wasted his inheritance / and trashed his reputation. When his money was spent, his friends split and he was left with nothing. That's **debauchery**.

Even though **drunkenness** is a specific sin condemned throughout the Bible...the mention of it in **v.18** is also representative. It represents the way of the unsaved world. For many people, the weekend is prime time to get plastered. The world's way of coping with life, is to deaden annoying sensibilities, and to remove inhibitions. While narcotics and the abuse of prescription drugs is wide-spread, alcohol is still the most frequently used coping mechanism. The Bible calls strong drink a mocker. When sobriety returns the drunk is left with only waste / emptiness / and regrets! So the point of **v.18** is made by way of contrast. Unlike drunkenness, the **filling with the Spirit** doesn't lead to an empty, wasted life. God's provision way leads to a full, useful, and God-honoring life.

But **v.18** also conveys a lesson by comparison. The **filling with the Spirit** compares to drunkenness in the matter of control. Just as the drunk has surrendered himself to the control of the alcohol consumed, the filling of the Spirit involves control of the believer who submits to the Spirit's control. Just as a person can be filled with anger or pride or full of himself...the Christian must be filled with or controlled by God's Holy Spirit. Because **v.18** is a command, we know the filling of the Spirit isn't automatic. Certain conditions must be met if we would be continuously being filled with the Spirit. But to understand what the filling of the Spirit really is, we need to visit a passage in the OT.

4. The New Covenant and the Spirit's filling - Ezek. 11:19, 20

The prophet Ezekiel prophesied a day in the future when God would replace the old covenant of law with a new covenant of grace. Because Israel rejected Jesus their Messiah, they forfeited the privilege of entering this new covenant. The Bible promises a day is coming when many Jews will be saved and brought into this wonderful covenant. But that can't happen until Israel is made ready to receive the Christ they rejected.

Today, every sinner who trusts Christ is brought into this new covenant. We celebrate the new covenant every time we observe the Lord's Table. It's helpful for us to see the provisions of this covenant as prophesied by the OT prophet. **Ezek. 11:19, 20 - I will give them an undivided heart and put a new spirit in them; I will remove from them their heart of stone and give them a heart of flesh. Then they will follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws. They will be my people, and I will be their God.** Notice that the Lord said He would give His people a new heart and a new spirit. This happens when a sinner trusts Jesus to save them.
II Cor. 5:17 - Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!

But notice the effect produced in those who receive a new heart and a new spirit. **Then they will follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws. They will be my people, and I will be their God. (Ezek. 11:20)** The provisions of the new covenant result in obedience and a new intimacy with God. Instead of a stony heart, the Christian is given a heart that is tender and capable of loving God. In fact, **Rom. 5:5** says, **...God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us.** Instead of legal obedience that is more duty than delight...the Christian is led by the Spirit into an intimate relationship with the Lord...a relationship that results in loving obedience. This new life motive and its results was described by Jesus in **Jn. 14:21 - "Whoever has my commands and obeys them, He is the one who loves me. He who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love him and show myself to him."**

The New Covenant is infinitely superior to the Old Covenant at every point. In Christ born again believers receive a new heart and a new spirit. But on the practical level, this doesn't mean a new life will be automatic. The potential or the capacity for living a new life is present. The possibility of living a life worthy of our calling is real. But we each bear responsibility to access the power of this new life by meeting certain conditions. And once again, the command to be **filled with the Spirit** or controlled by the Spirit is the key to the Christian life. It's the key to our call to live a worthy life and it's the key to relationships in the church / in marriage / in families / and in the workplace. So as we journey through Ephesians, it is imperative that we understand and embrace this command. But I have one final point.

5. The Conditions necessary to experience the Spirit's filling

I've referred several times to "certain conditions"...conditions that must be met to be filled with the Spirit of God. Concerning the filling of the Holy Spirit, I appreciate what Dr. Chafer has written... *"There is little Scripture to warrant the believer to be praying for the filling of the Spirit. It is the normal work of the Spirit to fill those who are rightly adjusted to God."* Rather than some extreme emotional phenomena that occur as the result of tarrying, prayer, and pleading...the filling of the Spirit occurs when a believer is rightly adjusted to the Lord. This is so important! It means ordinary Christians may experience the supernatural filling of the Spirit without a seminary degree to understand it. The Spirit's filling is not just for a select few. It's not just for the *mystics* among us. The **filling**

of the Spirit is for the rank and file believer who wants to live in purity and serve in power. While some regard the Spirit's filling as the supreme mystical experience, the NT regards the filling as normal for Christians who are clean and yielded to God. In fact, instead of an isolated experience, the NT equates the filling of the Spirit with the conditions described as **abiding in Christ - (Jn.15) / letting the Word of Christ dwell in us richly - Col.3:16) / and walking in the light - I Jn. 1)** Let me end with four issues that impact the conditions necessary to the Spirit's filling.

1. the issue of competition - Have you ever dealt with reduced water pressure at a faucet? Great pressure at the street, but the flow at the faucet isn't enough to rinse a tooth brush! The problem is a blockage somewhere in the pipes or the fixture itself. Something is restricting the pressure and impeding the flow. Here's another illustration...Can you imagine how many points a pro basketball team could score in 60 minutes if the other team didn't play defense? Sin is like that. It hinders and competes with God's desire to make us Christlike. It isn't asking God that accomplishes the filling. God's power is available when we humble ourselves and confess our sin. So sin resists and competes with and impedes the Spirit's desire to fill us. Because we're so infected with sin, it isn't possible for us to be filled with the Spirit all the time. That's why the command urges us to keep being filled with the Spirit. So the first condition to be filled with the Spirit, we must confess any known sin in our lives and by faith thank God for His promise to forgive and cleanse. Confession and renewed obedience eliminate the competition. **(1 John 1:9)**

2. the issue of "control by consent" - a good definition for the filling of the Spirit goes like this. *"It's what happens when the Lord has the controlling interest in your life."* In the analogy of **v.18** the drunk has one thing in common with a Spirit-filled believer. They both are controlled. Their lives and their behavior are altered by that which fills them. If a man is filled with anger, then anger controls him. 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 a life, He is given the controlling interest and the results will be holy. The filling of the Spirit then is "control by consent." And this "control by consent" involves 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 inadequate. I need to be filled by your Spirit." And there must be a willingness—"Lord, I'm open to you. Let your Spirit fill me now."

3. the issue of cooperation - Since all of the Holy Spirit indwells us from the moment we are saved, it makes sense that new believers are filled with the Spirit. This is why new believers have so much joy and enthusiasm. They begin their new life walking close to the Lord. It's natural for them to be full of love, joy and peace. They haven't yet learned how to be boring, churchy, or how to backslide in disobedience. If they hang around some old believers they might learn, but they haven't learned yet. Their example helps us realize the *central issue is cooperation*. Will I cooperate with the Holy Spirit? Will I let him lead me or will it be a tug of war as I keep doing things my own way? So many of us struggle at this point. We pull against the Lord because we want to do things our way. So the Lord says, "Okay, you can do it your way for awhile, but it's not going to

work!" God will let us do things in our own strength and according to our own will. Then when we fail and cry out to the Lord, He'll say, "Are you willing to cooperate with Me now?" So the Spirit's filling requires cooperation on our part.

4. the issue of contact - In one of his books F. B. Meyer explained the Spirit's filling this way. He said 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 again. *But that's not the best image to use.* Think about the elevated trains found in many large 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 there's never a shortage or a brownout. But sometimes we live out of contact with the Lord. Sometimes we fail to abide in Christ. When that happens, our lives simply stop working the way God intended. In the parable of the vine and the branches Jesus said, **Remain in me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. - Jn. 15:4**

So I invite you to obey God's Word in the desire that we might be a people filled with the Holy Spirit. If we live another day without the Holy Spirit's control in our lives, we have only ourselves to blame. The Spirit is eager to fill us and to produce the life of Jesus in us. God has made Himself fully available to every believer. The question is...have we made ourselves fully available to him?

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.