

Expository sermon outline and notes:

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Ephesians 5:18-21 “The Spirit Filled Life”

Intro. In chapter 5 of Ephesians we have been talking about the walk of the Christian believer. We have seen that we are to walk in love. We are to walk in light, that is, in moral purity and by the light of God’s truth. We are to walk in wisdom, not as fools. Today we are going to add another truth about the daily walk of the believer. Here in our text we read that we are to live our lives filled with the Holy Spirit.

It is so important that we learn about the ministry of the Holy Spirit in the life of a believer. Just before Jesus died for us on the cross, He promised His disciples that He would send the Holy Spirit to indwell our lives. Every Christian has the Holy Spirit of God living within them. Romans 8:9 says, “if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not His.” But we need more than the *presence* of the Spirit. God wants to *fill* our lives with His blessed Holy Spirit. He wants to transform you into the likeness of Jesus Christ. But you have to understand His Work and cooperate with Him.

There was a time when Baptists preached and taught very little about the Holy Spirit. But because of our Pentecostal and Charismatic brethren, we have had to search the Scriptures to see if their emphasis and teaching on the Holy Spirit was biblical. That has been good for us, because we have had a greater emphasis on the teaching of Holy Spirit than in the past. I believe this message might be one of the most important messages you as a believer will hear. I believe that the truth of the filling of the Holy Spirit is the truth that is vital to your growth and service as a believer. If you are not filled with the Holy Spirit, then anything you do is done in the energy of the flesh. Yet Zech. 4:6 says, “Not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit, says the Lord.” Furthermore, I believe also this is the truth which makes the difference between the carnal believer and the spiritual believer. I believe there are people who are saved and yet they have never yielded themselves to the control of the Holy Spirit. For this reason they live defeated lives. I want you and I to live Spirit filled lives, walking in power, victory, and the fruit of the Spirit.

Now let’s begin in v.18 and see together first of all:

I. THE MEANING OF A SPIRIT-FILLED WALK

Paul says in the last of v.18, “...be filled with the Spirit.” Does this mean that a person becomes wild and fanatical? Absolutely not. So let’s explore what it *does* mean to be filled with the Holy Spirit. First of all:

A. It Means To Be Controlled by the Spirit – Notice from our text that:

1. This Meaning Is Seen by Way of Contrast – Paul says in v.18, “And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit.” When a man is drunk, filled with wine, he is given over to the influence and control of alcohol and has very little self-control. Drunks often make fools of themselves.¹ So to be filled by the Spirit means to be so

¹ Likewise, in Jn. 16:6 Jesus said, “Sorrow has filled your heart.” That sorrow totally affected their lives at that moment. It controlled them.

permeated by His presence and power that He gains a gracious control of your life. The filling of the Spirit does not have to do with you getting the Spirit, but rather it has to do with the Spirit getting control of you. Jesus Christ wants to exercise His lordship through the filling of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit wants to control the believer, to lead the believer (Rom. 8:14), to empower the believer.

Furthermore:

2. This Meaning Is Seen by Way of Comparison - When a person is drunk it changes them. They are a different person altogether when they are drunk. For example, here's a person who is normally very shy. They normally have very little to say. But if they get drunk, all of a sudden they suddenly become loud and boisterous. They say stupid, outlandish things. Or, a person normally is rather fearful and afraid, but when he is filled with alcohol, he becomes bold as a lion.

I heard about some guys having a drinking party one time and one of them was up on the sixth floor of a building, and he was so drunk that he decided he could fly. So he jumped out of the window to fly. Of course, he hit the ground and wound up in the hospital. Some days later one of his drinking buddies came over to him and there he was with both arms in casts, and one leg in a cast. He said to his buddy, "Why in the world didn't you stop me when I thought I could fly out of that window?" His buddy said, "At the time I thought you could." Clearly, they were both drunk!

So just as drunk becomes a different person, even so a person who is filled with the Holy Spirit of God becomes another person. A person normally timid becomes bold in the power of the Holy Spirit (Acts 4:31). The person normally fearful becomes now filled with courage in the power of the Holy Spirit. I am convinced that is the only solution to cause you and me to be the witnesses for Jesus Christ we ought to be. We will never do it in our own power. In fact, Jesus said in Acts 1:8, "But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me...." We must be filled with the Spirit of God. Even so, when you are filled with the Spirit, He controls you, and He changes you, but it totally positive ways. A person controlled by the Holy Spirit is able to say or do what he could not normally say or do.

That's one thing I like about preaching. I am normally quiet and shy. By nature I stutter and am not fluent in speaking. But especially when I preach, I become a different person due to the filling of the Holy Spirit. Have you noticed?

Something else we see from our text is this. Being filled with the Spirit is:

B. A Continuous Obligation - "Be filled" is a present, continuous tense. "Keep on being filled...." Thus, he is commanding us to be constantly, moment by moment, filled with the Spirit. This is not a "once for all" experience. There are some people who teach you can have that kind of experience. They call it a "baptism of the Holy Spirit." But the filling of the Spirit is an experience we should experience every day, but usually, we will need to be filled over and over again. Furthermore, sometimes we hear teaching to the effect that the Holy Spirit fills one only when he is engaged in some particular form of Christian service. That idea comes from the Old Testament ministry of the Holy Spirit. But here we see that you need the filling of the Spirit all the time, whether for Christian service or for daily victorious Christian living.

C. An Inclusive Obligation - The verb is a plural verb. He is saying be ye (plural) filled with the Spirit. Thus, it is addressed to every believer. We know the preacher ought to be filled with the Spirit. We know the deacons ought to be filled with the Spirit (Acts 6:3). The singers

ought to be filled with the Spirit when they minister. But unlike the Old Testament, *all* believers are to be indwelt and filled with the Holy Spirit.

D. The Spirit Does the Filling - The verb is passive. We are acted upon. We must allow the Spirit to fill us. But we must be careful here. Just because the verb is passive does not mean that we are *totally* passive in the Christian life. It is not an existence somewhat like that of a jellyfish floating in the warm currents of the Gulf Stream. God is not developing jellyfish Christians. God wants to develop Christian men and women of moral stamina and spiritual power.

In the physical realm, no one becomes strong by merely eating wholesome food and resting. Exercise is also needed to change the food-energy into stronger bones and muscle. In like manner, the Christian must exercise himself spiritually if he is to grow strong in his Christian life. That demands making right choices, the constant striving to improve one's spiritual life. As we shall see, you have a role in meeting the conditions of a Spirit-filled life. Phil. 2:12b-13 gives a good picture of this balance in the Christian life. There Paul says, "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure." Illus: It is like bending one's arm. The strength to bend one's arm is in that member of the body, but the strength is only potential and not active unless the will power is exerted which will cause that strength to function. Just so the power of the Holy Spirit is potentially resident in the saint by virtue of His indwelling presence, but it is only operative in that believer when he is yielded to and dependent upon the ministry of the Spirit, and then steps out in faith in the performance of the action prompted and empowered by the Spirit. And concerning temptation, we must by an act of our own free will say a bold, positive NO to it. The instant we move in that direction, the Spirit is there with His wonderful energizing power.

E. This Is A Command, Not a Request - The verb is an imperative. This is not an option, not a suggestion, but he commands us to be filled with the Spirit. And if it is a command, then it is a sin not to be filled constantly with the Spirit. Have you thought of that? That means I ought never to preach unless I am consciously filled with the Holy Spirit. That means that the singers should never sing unless you are filled with the Holy Spirit. Sunday School teachers should never stand up in front of your class members and teach unless you are filled with the Holy Spirit. You ought never to go out visiting unless you go out in the power of the Holy Spirit.

So I hope you have a better grasp of the meaning of v.18. Now let's consider together:

II. THE MEANS OF A SPIRIT-FILLED WALK

How can we be filled with the Spirit? Even though the verb "filled" is a passive, it is also a command we must obey. So we have a responsibility to do what is necessary to allow the Holy Spirit to fill our lives. And when God gives a command, we know He gives the believer the ability to obey it. Paul doesn't directly tell us how to be filled by the Spirit, but from this verse and others, I believe that I can show you the requirements for the filling of the Spirit:

A. Reject Sin – You can't be filled and controlled by the Spirit if you are full of sin. One example is given in v.18, "And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation...." As Christians, we are not to allow anything or anyone to control us besides the Holy Spirit of God. And there is no doubt but that getting drunk will bring you under the control and influence of

something besides the Holy Spirit. Here is one of many places where the children of God are clearly forbidden from getting drunk. It is a sin. And it doesn't take much alcohol to become legally drunk, even in the eyes of the State. You can't be filled with the Spirit if you are committing the sin of drunkenness.

Furthermore, Paul said that drunkenness is "dissipation." The word literally means "unsavable." There are no saving qualities about it. It expresses the idea of an abandoned, out of control, debauched life. The corresponding adverb is used in the familiar phrase "riotous living" in the parable of the prodigal son. Both the wastefulness and the lack of self-control implied by this word are things which should not be seen in the lives of those who have found in Christ the source and the way of wisdom.

Alcoholism promises peace and joy, but it only delivers just the opposite, especially as time passes. Alcoholics are some of the hardest folks to try to save from the awful consequences of it. So often drunks will lose job after job, relationship after relationship. They will get arrested for drunk driving, and at times even kill someone by driving drunk. They will stop drinking a while, and then relapse, over and over again.

So the best thing to do is just stay away from alcohol. There is no real need to drink at all. The dangers are too great to risk just so you can drink socially. Alcohol cannot give lasting peace and joy, but the filling of the Spirit can. The filling of the Spirit is the greatest and best "high" you can experience.

There are many other sins that can control your life, and they will crowd out the Spirit's control. Some examples would include immorality, pornography, gambling, and any other sins that become addictive.

So we see that there must be a death of self-will before we can be filled with the Spirit. Your spirit, your being can only be filled with one entity. If it is full of self and sin, then it cannot be filled with the Spirit. You must die to self and sin to make room in your heart for the filling of the Spirit. Then to be filled with the Spirit is to be controlled by the Spirit in obedience.

So to be filled with the Spirit, reject sin. Then:

B. Have A Desire to Be Filled - In Jn. 7:37-39a, Jesus said, "If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water." Then John the apostle says, "But this He spoke concerning the Spirit, whom those believing in Him would receive...." Our Lord lays down this simple requirement for the fullness of the Spirit. "If anyone thirsts" refers to a desire on the part of the believer that the Holy Spirit be the One to control his every thought, word, and deed. This will include a desire that He put sin out of our lives and keep it pure, a desire that He dethrone our self-life and enthrone the Lord Jesus as absolute Lord and master, a desire that He produce in us His own fruit, a desire that He make us Christ-like, and a desire that he lead us and teach us. I hope as I share about the filling of the Spirit that you will have a greater desire to be filled with the Spirit.

C. Choose to Be Filled - This is an act of the will. I say this because Paul gives a command here. That indicates that a person must exercise their will to be filled with the Spirit. The believer is not automatically controlled by the Spirit just because the Spirit indwells him. You have to understand what the filling of the Spirit means, and then choose to allow the Holy Spirit to control your life. Ask Him to fill your life. Yet asking for the filling of the Spirit is not enough if accompanied by an unyielded life.

D. Have an Attitude of Trust/Dependence - Another requirement is trust. The Spirit-controlled life is a matter of trust. Instead of relying upon our own strength, we depend upon the Holy Spirit for guidance and power. We must depend upon Him for all needed wisdom. He is waiting for us to recognize Him and trust Him for His aid.

So we have seen what it means to be filled with the Spirit. We have reviewed what is required to be filled with the Spirit. Now the question is this: Are you filled with the Spirit? Have you recently been living and serving as a Spirit-filled Christian? You need to put the issue to the test. How can you know that you have truly been filled with the Spirit? Well let's see last of all:

III. THE MANIFESTATIONS OF THE SPIRIT-FILLED WALK

Verses 19-21 give us some of the results or manifestations of the filling of the Spirit. If you are not manifesting these results, then you are not filled with the Spirit, and you need to take the steps necessary to be filled by the Spirit tonight. Perhaps some of you would freely admit that you have not been filled with the Spirit but something else: full of anger, full of bitterness, full of sin, such as occasionally being full of alcohol. So I want to motivate you to seek that filling by showing you what will happen to you if you are filled with the Spirit.

So what *will* happen to you if you allow yourself to be filled by the Spirit? Will you become a religious freak? Will you get ecstatic and speak in tongues? It is an easy thing to mistake a fleshly enthusiasm for the filling of the Spirit. Well, we see in vv.19-21 that the fullness of the Spirit leads to joyful singing (v.19), thankfulness (v.20), and mutual submission (v.21). These, *plus* speaking the Word of God with boldness,² are the evidences of the Spirit-filled life. So let's look at the manifestations of the Spirit-filled life seen in our text. First, we will have:

A. A Singing Heart – What do most people tend to do when they are joyful, or in a good mood. They sing! So since the fruit of the Spirit is joy (Gal. 5:22), we should not be surprised to read in v.19 that the Spirit-filled Christians will be, “speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord.” When believers are filled with the Spirit, they will not get together and have wild parties. Instead, they will get together to edify each other, speaking to one another in Christian song. The fullness of the Spirit will find manifestation in fellowship whenever Christians are found together, and will be given joyful expression in song and praise. Thus, the filling of the Holy Spirit is not a private experience, but intended to find public expression. Also, instead of expressing our joy through worldly means, one of the main ways we express our joy is through singing the songs of the Lord.

We probably should not make too sharp of a distinction between “psalms,” “hymns,” and “songs,” for Paul may have just been using synonyms for music used among early Christians. However, we can make *some* distinction. The term “psalms” in all probability has reference to

² As you compare other Scriptures where a filling of the Spirit has taken place, we find a common reality. For example, Lk. 1:67 says, “Now his father Zacharias was filled with the Holy Spirit, and prophesied.” In Acts 4:8 we read that Peter was filled with the Spirit, and he spoke to the leaders of Israel assembled before him. In v.31 of that chapter it says, “They were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and they spoke the word of God with boldness.” In Acts 1:8 Jesus said, “Ye shall receive power after the Holy Spirit is come upon you.” Why? Jesus goes on to say that God gives you the Holy Spirit's presence and power that you might be a witness for Him. Cf. also Acts 9:17b, 20; 13:9-11.

the Psalter, the hymnbook of believers of the God of Israel, carried over into Christian worship. The psalms were originally sung to the harp. Thus, it refers to a sacred song sung to the accompaniment of instrumental music. Also, the word translated “making melody” is really the verb form of the word “psalm.” It means to strum on a harp. So it is likely that the early church sang some of the same Psalms that were sung in the temple. The *humnos* in classical Greek was a festive lyric in praise of a god or hero. In the Christian use, “Hymns” refers mainly to New Testament songs of praise to God and to Christ (but cf. use of *humneo* in Matt. 26:30). Some suggests that psalms are more Jewish in Character than hymns, which were more Gentile in origin. “Spiritual songs” may refer mainly to sacred lyrics dwelling on themes other than direct praise to God or to Christ. A number of New Testament passages indicate the place of song in the early Church (e.g. Acts 16:25; I Cor. 14:26; Col. 3:16; Jas. 5:13). I believe that a Spirit filled Christian will sing far more spiritual songs than secular songs.

The point is that joyful singing of various kinds of Christian songs is one of the manifestations of the filling of the Holy Spirit. There will be an inward experience of joy like you have never known in your life if you will yield your life to the control of the Holy Spirit. There will be an inward song; there will be an inward praise, there will be an inward joy that only comes when you have yielded your life to the control of the Holy Spirit.

By the way, according to Colossians 3:16, such singing results from letting the Word of Christ dwell in you richly. So a Word-filled Christian is a Spirit-filled Christian. As you walk in obedience to the Word of God, you will be filled with the Spirit. That tells us something about how to be filled with the Spirit.

So when you are filled with the Spirit, you will have a singing heart. Have you been joyfully singing this past week? Have you desired to gather with other believers to sing to the Lord and one another?

Next, when you are filled with the Spirit, you will also have:

B. A Thankful Heart – Paul says in v.20, “giving thanks always for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.” Being filled with the Spirit will make you a thankful Christian. Paul said in 1 Thessalonians 5:18, “in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.” Clearly it is God’s will that we be thankful, since this is commanded not only here, but also in v.4. So when you controlled by the Holy Spirit, you will have a thankful heart.

Four things are said here about the thanksgiving that we would offer up to God:

1. It Should Be Constant – Paul said, “Giving thanks always.” You should give thanks morning, noon, and night, day in and day out. We have so much to be thankful for. Just think of all the spiritual and physical blessings you have. If you do, you will have no problem giving thanks on a regular basis. A thankful person is a joy to be around. But who wants to be around someone who complains all the time?

2. It Should Be Unconditional – Paul said that we should give thanks “for all things.” Clearly, the only way you can give thanks constantly, and unconditionally, is for you to be filled with the Holy Spirit. Humanly, we gripe and complain. But one thing the Spirit will do is enable you to be thankful. For example, the Holy Spirit will help you to remember Rom. 8:28, “all things work together for good to them that love God.” Since that is true, we can with sincerity give thanks for all things, and in all circumstances.

There may be times when you have an illness or injury that requires surgery. You will not be inclined to be thankful for the pain that follows surgery, but you certainly should be thankful for the healing that the surgery brings.

3. It Should Be “Unto God” – We should express thanks to people. But the One we are especially to give thanks to is the Lord our God.

4. “In the Name of Our Lord Jesus Christ” - This is rightly in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ because every blessing comes to us through Him. Jesus is the channel of blessing to us.

Have you passed the test so far? Do you have a singing heart? How about a thankful heart? Well, another evidence of being filled with the Spirit is that you have:

C. A Submissive Attitude – In v.21 Paul says, “submitting to one another in the fear of God [or Christ].” The word, submitting, there is a military word. It really means to rank under. It was used of soldiers marshaled in military order under a commanding officer. In this context it refers to the desire to get along with one another, being satisfied with less than one’s due, a sweet reasonableness of attitude. It means you adopt the attitude of a servant. You are not so interested in getting your way as God getting His way. Submission is opposed to rudeness, haughtiness, selfish preference for one’s own opinions, and stubborn insistence on one’s own rights. Pride of position and the authoritarian spirit are destructive of fellowship.

This is the way our Lord Jesus was. He fully submitted to His Heavenly Father. He did not insist upon His own rights (Phil. 2:6-7). There were times when He wanted to rest, but the demands of ministry pressed upon Him, and He submitted His desires to the needs of the people.

We are especially to submit to the authority figures that God has placed in our lives. But this is broader. We are to submit “to one another.” There must be willingness in the Christian fellowship to serve any, to learn from any, to be corrected by any. But mutual submission is sorely lacking among most Christians. When it is too hard to admit our wrong, or when it is too difficult to give place to another, we may be certain we are not filled with the Spirit. In a church whose members are Spirit-controlled, one sees no dissension, no quarreling, no selfishness, and no jealousy.

What kinds of birds sing? Have you thought of that? Have you seen a crow sing? Have you seen a vulture or eagle sing? Do you know of any flesh-eating bird that sings? No. Most of the singing birds are small birds. Big shot Christians, and Christians who devour one another (Galatians 5:15), are not the ones who are filled with the Spirit and sing with joy. (#T-2305).

The Spirit-filled believer, then, is joyful (vs. 19), thankful (vs. 20), and submissive (vs. 21). Indeed, this is the test of spirituality. A profession which lacks these things is false.

Conclusion: There was a young lay preacher named D. L. Moody sitting one day in an audience kind of like this. He heard a speaker say that the world has yet to see what God can do in one life totally dedicated to Him. D. L. Moody said, “By God’s grace I’ll be that man.” God took a man named D. L. Moody, and because he surrendered fully, he was filled by the Spirit and used in a great way. Yet he was never ordained as a preacher. They say his vocabulary was so bad he murdered the King’s English. They say he was the only preacher who ever lived who could pronounce Mesopotamia in one syllable. Yet, D. L. Moody knew what it was to be filled with the Holy Spirit. That lay preacher took America and he took Britain and literally shook those continents for God because he was filled with the Holy Spirit of God. There is no telling what

God might do in your life tonight if you make up your mind to seek the full control of the Holy Spirit.

Have you been filled with the Spirit? Has there been that conscious experience in your life when you said to the Holy Spirit, “Holy Spirit, take control of my life. I yield my life totally and completely to your control”? I’m going to ask you to pray a simple prayer and right where you are sitting ask the Holy Spirit to take control of your life. Maybe you have experienced that before. Today you need a new filling of God’s spirit. You need a new surrender to the Holy Spirit. Seek that filling. Ask for it.

Sources: W.A. Criswell, *Ephesians: an Exposition* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1974); Stephen Felker, *Devotional & Explanatory Notes on the Entire Bible* (Col. Hgts, VA: Published by Author), 2021; Francis Foulkes, *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries: The Epistle of Paul to the Ephesians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1963); Oliver B. Greene, *The Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Ephesians* (Greenville, SC: The Gospel Hour, Inc., 1963); William Hendriksen, *New Testament Commentary: Galatians and Ephesians* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1967); Alvah Hovey, ed., *An American Commentary on the New Testament*, (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1887); Harry Ironside, *In the Heavens: Practical Expository Addresses on the Epistle to the Ephesians* (Neptune, NJ: Loizeaux Brothers, 1937); Larry Pierce, *Online Bible [Ver. 5:30]* (Ontario: onlinebible.net, 2017); Lehman Strauss, *Galatians and Ephesians* (Neptune, NJ: Loizeaux Brothers, 1957); Paul Lee Tan, *Encyclopedia of 7700 Illustrations: #6525* (Rockville, Maryland: Assurance Publishers, 1979); Curtis Vaughan, *A Study Guide Commentary: Ephesians* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1977); Dr. Jerry Vines (notes from his sermon on this text dated 8/9/92); Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Rich: Ephesians* (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1977); Kenneth S. Wuest’s *Word Studies From the Greek New Testament*, Vol. 1, Ephesians (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1953), including vol. 3, pp.103-113. Other sources listed in the footnotes. Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from *The New King James Version* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1982).

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