

THE SOVEREIGN GOD AND THE MYSTERY OF HIS WILL: A STUDY OF EPHESIANS

(LESSON NINETY)

“BE FILLED WITH THE SPIRIT”

EPHESIANS 5:15-19

15 See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise,

16 Redeeming the time, because the days are evil.

17 Wherefore be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is.

18 And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit;

19 Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord.

In verse **18** of our text Paul writes, “*And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit.*”

The Greek connective **kai**, translated “*and*” at the beginning of verse **18**, clearly links this verse with the preceding verses (**15-17**). The obvious implication is that if believers are to walk circumspectly; if they are to redeem the time, or take advantage of every opportunity; if they are to understand what the will of the Lord is, it is a necessity in the nature of the case that they be continually “*filled with the Spirit.*”

Brothers and sisters, the sobering truth is that every single time we encounter an **imperative** in the New Testament, we are confronted with

our desperate need for the enabling power of the Holy Spirit in order to obey the command. There are more than 1000 **imperatives** or commands in the New Testament and we are not able to obey even one of them in our own strength. We will therefore have to learn how to lean and depend on the Holy Spirit.

I believe it will be helpful at this juncture to digress somewhat and address the matter of the **indicatives** and **imperatives** in the New Testament.

The terms “**indicative**” and “**imperative**” refer to two different **verb moods** commonly used by the authors of the New Testament. The **indicative** mood generally signifies actuality, certainty, reality. The **imperative** mood denotes a command or a directive. In other words, the authors of the New Testament use **indicative** statements to refer to what **God** has done, what He is doing, or what He is going to do. They use **imperative** statements when they are exhorting believers as to what **they** should do. The **indicatives** signify the things that are true of believers as a result of their exalted position in Christ, while the **imperatives** speak to how believers should regulate their lives in light of their exalted position in Christ.

It is important for us to understand that there is a specific relationship between these two moods in the area of the believer’s sanctification. The **imperatives** are **always** based upon the **indicatives**. Whatever God commands believers to do is **always** based upon what He has done, what He is doing, or what He is going to do for them. **Philippians 2:12-13** furnishes us with a good example of this principle. The **New English Translation** renders the passage as follows:

*12 So then, my dear friends, just as you have always obeyed, not only in my presence but even more in my absence, **continue working out your salvation with awe and reverence (imperative),***

13 for the one bringing forth in you both the desire and the effort—for the sake of his good pleasure—is God (indicative).

In this example, we see that the **imperative** command for the Philippian believers to work out their salvation, is based on the **indicative** reality that God is the One who is at work in them, supplying both the desire and the energy to obey the command. The use of the word “*for*” at the beginning of verse **13** indicates dependence or causality. In other words, it would be an exercise in futility for believers to endeavour to obey the command to work out their salvation if God was not the One providing the inner motivation and effort!

Brothers and sisters this is God’s consistent pattern throughout Scripture. Let us consider **Exodus 20:1-3**, an Old Testament example. The **New English Translation** renders the verses in the following way:

1 God spoke all these words:

*2 “I, the LORD, am your God, who brought you from the land of Egypt, from the house of slavery (**indicative**).*

*3 “You shall have no other gods before me” (**imperative**).*

This consistent pattern clearly signifies that while the sanctification of a believer depends on God, the believer’s cooperation is required.

Justification is the work of God alone, but the work of **sanctification** involves both God and the believer.

In **Ephesians**, the first **3** chapters are filled with **indicatives**, signifying what God has done for believers. In the last **3** chapters we have the **imperatives**, signifying how believers should live in light of all that God has done for them. Interestingly, the **indicatives** vastly outnumber the **imperatives**. The statements outlining what God has done for believers are more numerous than the commands given to believers. The clear implication is that believers should be motivated to obey the commands out of gratitude for all that God has done **for** them, and by virtue of all that he has done and is doing **in** them!

In **Ephesians**, the **imperatives** follow the **indicatives**. The statements outlining what God has done for believers lead to the commands that they are urged to obey. For example, in **Ephesians 5:8** we read, “*For ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord (indicative): walk as children of light*” (**imperative**).

When we read **Ephesians 1-3**, we are blown away by the magnitude of God’s work for us. His amazing grace detailed in these chapters is almost incredible. Our hearts are overwhelmed with gratitude and appreciation to Him for all that He has done **for** us and **in** us. Then, when we read the **imperatives** in chapters **4-6**, we understand why we are to obey them. We will **want** to obey them and by His grace we will. But the secret to obeying them is to be continually filled with the Spirit!

Paul writes, “*And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit.*”

The word “*drunk*” is the translation of a Greek word which means, “to get drunk, become intoxicated.” The faculties of an intoxicated person become impaired, causing him or her to lose self-control. Both alcohol and the Holy Spirit operate in the human psyche. They effect people at the foundations of their personality.

Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones who was a medical doctor as well as a minister of the Gospel, explains that alcohol is not a stimulus, but a depressant. He says that alcohol “depresses first and foremost the highest centers of all in the brain. They are the very first to be influenced and affected by drink. They control everything that gives a man self-control, wisdom, understanding, discrimination, judgment, balance, the power to assess everything; in other words everything that makes a man behave at his very best and highest. The better a man’s control, the better man he is.... But drink is something which immediately gets rid of control; that indeed is the first thing it does.”

It is very likely that Paul is alluding in this verse to the orgies associated with the festivals in Ephesus celebrating **Bacchus**, the Roman god of agriculture, wine and fertility. **Bacchus** was the equivalent to the Greek god **Dionysus**. During the celebrations, men and women regarded it as an acceptable act of worship to **Bacchus** to become intoxicated, running through the streets and fields singing wild songs and engaging in unbridled sexual activity. The worshipers felt that they were united, indwelt and controlled by **Dionysus** who gave them special powers and abilities. This was no doubt how many of the believers in Ephesus had conducted themselves prior to their conversion.

The **IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament**, informs us that, "Many people in the ancient world believed that drunkenness could produce a sort of inspiration or possession by Dionysus, god of wine. Dionysus's most active worshipers yielded control of themselves to him and performed sexual acts or acts full of sexual symbolism (often to the distaste of conservative Romans)."

Paul writes, "*And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess.*" The word "excess" is a translation of the Greek word **asótia**:(**as-o-tee'-ah**), which speaks of that which is utterly ruined. It conveys the idea of waste that is irretrievable. The word as it is generally used, expresses the idea of an abandoned, corrupt, wasted life. It describes behaviour which demonstrates a lack of concern for the consequences of an action. It is characteristic of an individual who is devoid of hope.

In **1 Corinthians 6:12** Paul wrote, "*You say, 'I am allowed to do anything'—but not everything is good for you. And even though 'I am allowed to do anything,' I must not become a slave to anything*" (**New Living Translation**).

The Apostle Paul was determined that he would only be mastered and controlled by the Lord Jesus Christ, and he knew that the only way to be mastered or controlled by the Lord Jesus Christ was to be continually filled with the Holy Spirit. Accordingly he writes, "*Don't be drunk with*

wine, because that will ruin your life. Instead, be filled with the Holy Spirit” (New Living Translation).

In contrast to a state of intoxication with wine or any other alcoholic beverage, believers should be *“filled with the Spirit.”* Drunken persons and Spirit-filled persons have one thing in common—they are both controlled persons. Their lives and their behaviour are radically altered by that which fills them. Paul is saying in effect: “Don’t live under the influence of alcohol but under the influence of the Holy Spirit.”

In his book *“Embraced by The Spirit,”* the evangelical Christian pastor, author, educator, and radio preacher **Charles Swindoll**, made the following comments:

“I don’t know of a more important verse in the New Testament for the Christian than **Ephesians 5:18**—honest, no exaggeration. This verse tells the believer how to live an authentic, empowered life...It begins with a negative command: *‘Don’t get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation’* (which means excess, existing hopelessly out of control). When you’re drunk with alcohol, you lose control. You also lose self-respect and the respect of others...A positive command follows: *‘But be filled with the Spirit.’*...This is a command, not a suggestion. It’s an urgent imperative, not a casual option...

‘Be filled’ is a command, which means I play a part in it. For example, I cannot be filled with the Spirit while I have unconfessed sin within me. I cannot be filled with the Spirit while at the same time conducting my life in the energy of the flesh. I cannot be filled with the Spirit while I am resisting God’s will and relying only on myself. I need to be sure that I have taken care of the sins that have emerged in my life, that I have not ignored the wrong that I have done before God and to others. I need to walk in conscious dependence on the Lord on a daily basis.

Many a morning I begin my day by sitting on the side of the bed, saying: ‘This is Your day, Lord. I want to be at Your disposal. I have no

idea what these next twenty-four hours will contain. But before I sip my first cup of coffee, and even before I get dressed, I want You to know that from this moment on throughout this day, I'm Yours, Lord. Help me to lean on You, to draw strength from You, and to have You fill my mind and my thoughts. Take control of my senses so that I am literally filled with Your presence and empowered with Your energy. I want to be Your tool, Your vessel today. I can't make it happen. And so I'm saying, Lord, fill me with Your Spirit today.'

I challenge you to begin every day with a similar prayer. 'Lord, today, enable me to live out the authentic Christian life for Your glory.' Customize it with your own details depending on what may be the needs of that particular day."

Ray Pritchard, the president of "**Keep Believing Ministries**," made the following remarks relative to our subject:

"The filling of the Spirit is the most important doctrine of the spiritual life. It is foundational to everything else. There is nothing we need more. 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. 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.' There must be a willingness—'Lord, I'm open to You...' 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 the Lord all day long. This power is available to us all day long."

John MacArthur echoes the importance of believers being filled with the Spirit writing that, "If we do not obey this command, we cannot obey any other—simply because we cannot do any of God's will apart from

God's Spirit. Outside of the command for unbelievers to trust in Christ for salvation, there is no more practical and necessary command in Scripture than the one for believers to be filled with the Spirit."

The **Message** translates verse **18** as follows: *"Don't drink too much wine. That cheapens your life. Drink the Spirit of God, huge draughts of him."*

The Greek word translated "filled" is **pléroó**: (**play-ro'-o**), which means, "to make full, to fill up, to cause to abound, to furnish or supply liberally, to render full, i.e. to complete."

It is important for us to understand that Paul is not implying here that believers should get more of the Spirit, because the Holy Spirit takes up His abode in each believer and indwells each believer completely the moment he or she believes on the Lord Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit baptizes believers or places them into the Body of Christ **once** only, according to **1 Corinthians 12:13**, but we should **continually** be filled with the Spirit. Being filled with the Holy Spirit does not mean we have more of the Spirit, but that the Holy Spirit has more of us!

When a believer is filled with the Spirit he or she does not control himself or herself. Rather, he or she is controlled by the Holy Spirit. As the believer increasingly submits to the Holy Spirit's influence, he or she is increasingly controlled by Him, and increasingly manifests the fruit of the Spirit. The Spirit's **baptism, indwelling, and sealing** occur at the time of regeneration and therefore there are no commands for believers to be **baptized, indwelt** or **sealed** with the Spirit. However, believers are commanded to be continually **filled** with Holy Spirit. Every believer has the Holy Spirit, but the command in **Ephesians 5:18** is that the Holy Spirit have the believer!

The noted biblical Greek New Testament scholar of the mid-twentieth century **Kenneth Samuel Wuest**, made the following important exegetical comments regarding Paul's command to the Ephesian believers to be filled with the Spirit:

"There are **four** grammatical rules in the Greek language which lead us to **four** truths relative to this great subject. The words in **Ephesians 5:18** are, *'Be filled with the Spirit.'*

First, the verb is in the **imperative mode**. That is, it is imperative that we be filled with the Spirit, first, because God commands it, second, because the fullness of the Spirit is the divine enablement in the life of a Christian which results in a Christ-like life. **Failure to be filled with the Spirit is sin and results in failure to live a life honoring to God.**

Second, the tense of the verb is **present**, and this tense in the imperative mode always represents action going on. We learn from this that the mechanics of a Spirit-filled life do not provide for a spasmodic filling, that is, the Christian is not filled only when doing service such as preaching or teaching. But the Christian living a normal life of moment by moment yieldedness to God, experiences a moment by moment fullness of the Spirit. **No Christian can do with less and at the same time live a victorious life.**

Third, the verb is in the **plural number**, which teaches us that this command is addressed, not only to the preacher and the deacon, and the teacher in the Sunday School, but to every Christian, to the business man, the laborer, the housewife. **It is the responsibility of every Christian to be always filled with the Holy Spirit.**

Fourth, the verb is in the **passive voice**. This grammatical classification represents the subject of the verb as inactive but being acted upon. This teaches us that the filling with the Spirit is not a work of man but of God. We cannot work ourselves up to that condition by any amount of tarrying, praying, or agonizing. **A simple desire for that fullness and a trust in the Lord Jesus for that fullness will result in that fullness (John 7:37-39).**

But what is meant by the fullness of the Holy Spirit? We find the answer in **James 4:5**, *'Do ye think that the Scripture saith in vain, The Spirit that dwelleth in us lusteth to envy?'* The word 'lust' is an obsolete English word meaning 'to earnestly desire.' The translation reads, *'The Spirit who has taken up his permanent abode in us constantly and earnestly desires to the point of envy.'*

Now, what does He desire even to the point of a divine envy? In **Galatians 5:17** we read, *'For the flesh has a strong desire to suppress the Spirit, and the Spirit has a strong desire to suppress the flesh, and these are firmly settled in an attitude of opposition to one another that you may not do the things which you constantly desire to do.'* The constant desire of the fallen nature is to sin. The Holy Spirit is the divine provision against sin in the life of a Christian. The evil nature wishes to use the faculties of the believer for sinful purposes. The Holy Spirit desires to use them for God's glory. The choice is with the Christian. He chooses which of the two will control his faculties. Thus the passage in **James** reads in paraphrase, *'The Spirit who has taken up his final abode in us, jealously desires the whole of us.'* Yieldedness to and dependence upon the Holy Spirit results in the Spirit putting down the evil nature in defeat and producing in the believer a life pleasing to God. Thus, the fullness of the Spirit refers to His control over the believer. The translation of our text is, *'Be ye being constantly filled with the Spirit.'*

As has been noted earlier, Paul is issuing a command to all believers. He is not making a suggestion. It is not an option but a mandate. Every believer is to ensure that instead of being controlled by alcohol or by anything else, he or she should be continually, constantly, moment by moment, controlled by the Spirit. Brothers and sisters, it is one thing for us to have the Holy Spirit. It is another thing for the Holy Spirit to have us. If we are not continually, constantly, moment by moment, being controlled by the Spirit, we are living beneath our privileges.

In light of the fact that we are commanded to be filled with the Spirit, if we are not obeying the command then we are out of the will of the Lord, at least to some degree!

Being filled is not a one-time event! The fact that the command is in the present tense indicates that we are not to rely on a past filling nor are we to rely on a future filling. We are to be continually filled with the Spirit.

Brothers and sisters, I cannot overstate the importance of us ensuring that our doctrinal position is sound as it relates to this matter. Regarding the matter of believers being filled with the Spirit, there are at least 3 misconceptions that we should be careful to avoid. Firstly, Paul in this verse is not speaking about an ecstatic experience accompanied by any external manifestation such as speaking in tongues, shouting or violent shaking. Being filled with the Spirit may certainly be joyous when it results, as it inevitably does in the believer living an overcoming life, but it is not primarily an emotional experience.

Secondly, being filled with the Spirit is not something that is reserved for only a few special believers who are more “spiritual” than others. Paul’s command is applicable to every believer.

Thirdly, although being filled with the Spirit has unfortunately been associated with some very controversial and unbiblical teaching, it should not be disregarded for that reason. It is an ongoing experience that every believer is commanded to pursue. I want to emphasize that being filled with the Holy Spirit is what characterizes the normal Christian life. It is not to be reserved for isolated “spiritual” experiences, but is to be enjoyed and experienced constantly. Every true believer is always **indwelt** by the Spirit, but to be **filled** with the Spirit is to give Him the preeminence in every area of our lives.

Someone has observed that, “If you and I are going to experience the fullness of the Christian life, then we must learn how to be filled with the Holy Spirit. It isn't enough just to be saved. That will get you to

Heaven, but unless you are filled with the Spirit, you will have a rough road here below."

Ray Pritchard made the following remarks as it relates to believers making themselves available to the Holy Spirit: "Let me give you a new term you've never heard before. The term is '**fillability**.' It's what happens when you go to a full-service gas station and say, 'Fill 'er up.' The person pumping the gas knows that the statement 'Fill 'er up' means two things: **1** I'm empty and **2** I want to be filled with gas. That's **fillability**. It's **need** plus **desire**. And when your need to be filled with the Spirit becomes your great desire, you will be filled. Over and over again."

Brothers and sisters, being "*filled with the Spirit*" is the secret of real Christianity.