

Sermon 28: Ephesians 5:18: Be Filled with the Spirit: Part Two

OUTLINE

Filled by the Spirit
Led by the Spirit
Sword of the Spirit
Prayer in the Spirit

INTRODUCTION

When I say 'be filled with the Spirit,' what comes to mind? You might think of power to do miracles, you might think of having a mystical experience, you might think of the Toronto Blessing. The problem with these conceptions and those like them is that they are extraordinary events that are reserved for the few where the command to be filled with the Spirit is something that is for all Christians to grasp. We continue then this week looking at what Paul means to be filled with the Spirit.

Filled by the Spirit

There is another experience of the Spirit that the NT talks about that we can all experience, and that is the filling of the Spirit. We see various types of filling of the Spirit: firstly, we see momentary fillings of the Spirit, perhaps for a specific task at hand. "Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, "Rulers of the people and elders" (Acts 4:8). Here we see a fulfilment of Jesus promise that the Father will give us words when we are before men (Matt 10:19-20). "And when they had prayed, the place in which they were gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and continued to speak the word of God with boldness." (Acts 4:31). Here we see a filling of the Spirit in answer to prayer with the result of boldness to preach the Gospel in a difficult situation of persecution. Some people think that 1 Peter 4:14 speaks about a special filling enable the Christian to face martyrdom and persecution, "If you are insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you." Secondly, there are various people in Scripture, who because of their Godly character are described as being filled with the Spirit, "for he was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith. And a great many people were added to the Lord." (Acts 11:24); "Therefore, brothers, pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we will appoint to this duty," (Acts 6:3). And then thirdly, there is an ongoing filling that should be the Christians regular experience. Eph 5:18, "And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit."

Various things can be highlighted from this verse. Firstly, it is in the imperative mood, in other words it is a command not a suggestion. The fact that it is a command must impress upon all of us that we must understand this in order to obey it. This is something for every Christian not the hyperspiritual, not the supersaints. Secondly, it is in the plural, so it is referring to all of us, and not just one or two people. In other words, every Christian is to be filled with the Spirit. Thirdly, it is in the present tense, and so has the meaning of ongoing filling, 'be being filled.' In other words, this is not pointing to a one-off single experience, the nature of the experience being described here is something we have to do regularly and not just once. Fourthly, being in the passive voice it speaks about surrender to a person, namely the Spirit. What this surrender looks like, how we are to be passive and be receivers is a key part of what we need to explore. Please note that in the letter to the

Ephesians these are people who received the Spirit when they believed (1:13-14), however, they still have an ongoing need to be filled regularly.

How then are we filled with the Spirit? Do we have to go to the front of a church, and like the flu, 'get it from someone else?' Is it by the laying on of hands, lying on the floor, do we need to feel a special anointing for filling before we can expect it, do we refill ourselves by speaking in tongues every morning, like putting fuel in our cars? Let me read a section from a theologian who I think nails it:

"A few New Testament passages describe being filled with the Spirit as consisting of walking or living by the Spirit (Rom. 8:4; Gal 5:16, 25). What does it mean to live or walk by the Spirit? I would suggest two things: living by the Spirit's guidance and living in the Spirit's strength.

Living by the Spirit's guidance means waiting on the Spirit, asking what the Spirit would have us do, and where the Spirit would have us go. This entails daily study of the Bible, since the Spirit does not lead us apart from the Word. The better we know the Scriptures, the better we shall know how to live by the Spirit. Negatively, living by the Spirit's guidance means to silence the clamour of fleshly voices, to quell the energy of fleshly haste, to restrain every impulse until it has proved to be of God. Positively, it means to be guided by Him, to listen to Him as He reveals Himself in His Word, and to yield to Him continually. Living by the Spirit's strength means leaning on Him for the necessary spiritual power. It means *believing* that the Spirit can give us strength adequate for every need, *asking* for that power in prayer whenever we need it, and *using* that power by faith in meeting our daily problems. The only way we can live by the Spirit's strength is to keep in constant touch with Him. The difference between a battery-operated radio and a plug-in radio is that the latter must always be plugged in to the source of power in order to operate. The Spirit gives us strength, not on the battery principle, but on the plug-in principle: we need Him every hour."¹ Submitting your will to the will of the Spirit not the flesh is being filled by the Spirit, and using those things that the Spirit uses to bless and save us like the Bible and prayer.

Led by the Spirit

So being filled with the Spirit consists in two main things submitting to the Spirit as opposed to the Flesh, and utilizing those things that the Spirit uses to bless us, particularly the Word and prayer. I want to look now at Romans 8:14, 'For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God.'

The first rule for understanding any verse is read it in context. Is Paul in the context talking about hearing an inner voice that tells us what to do or something else? Paul in the context is talking about why Christians are no longer condemned and can have assurance. Jesus has done for us what we could not do for ourselves²⁻³, and we have the Spirit who has set us free from sin enabling holiness, and who is the guarantee of the resurrection we will one day receive. In v13, the verse before this one Paul has been telling us that we are typified by a life of putting sin to death in our lives and ended the verse saying that those whose lives are characterised in that way 'will live'. Paul is arguing that holiness is a proof of life not merit to buy life. V14 is brought in to further confirm and give evidence to why we will live. 'For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God.' The word 'For' indicates that this verse is concluding what was said just before linking it to the context. The words 'led by the Spirit' are employed as another way of saying, 'by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body'. And the verse ends with the first mention of our new adopted status

¹ Anthony A. Hoekema, *Saved By Grace*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan, Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub Co: 1994), p53.

'are sons of God.' So summarizing, Paul is saying that those who are led by the Spirit to kill sin, it is they who can know they have salvation because they are the sons of God. They are not made sons by holiness but revealed to be sons by holiness. So then being led by the Spirit has nothing to do in this context with listening to a voice but living according to the Spirit in holiness, and in particular in mortifying sin. Do you see any mention of listening to an inner voice in the context?

The second rule for understanding any verse is look for other places in scripture, preferably by the same author where they talk in the same way about the issue you are exploring. So in order to confirm this reading we go to Galatians 5:18, I will read the whole context so you can hear the verse in context and when Paul mentions being led by the Spirit you can tell me whether he means hearing an inner voice or being holy, 'But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. 17 For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do. 18 But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law. 19 Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, 20 idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, 21 envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. 22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. 24 And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit. 26 Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another.' Being led by the Spirit means being in conformity to the Spirit's will of holiness for us and being submitted to it, this is what being filled with the Spirit looks like. It is the constant submitting of ourselves to the will of the Spirit not the flesh, that will be discerned by an informed conscience, by prodding's of the Spirit from within with regards to sin; as well as walking in the clear light of God's word.

Now every Christian is led by the Spirit when they walk in the Spirit and not in the flesh, when they deny the flesh and do the will of the Spirit. Likewise, every Christian is either being filled by the Spirit or by the flesh accordingly. When you say no to sin you are led by the Spirit/filled with the Spirit, not when you make mundane decisions like should I have tea or coffee with my breakfast led by an inner voice. This being led by the Spirit is not for the super saints who have trained their inner ears, but every believer, if they are a true believer if they are saying no to the flesh and yes to the Spirit, are led by the Spirit.

When you respond to the conviction of the Holy Spirit to stop sinning and repent, when you pray for God to help you put a certain stubborn sin to death, when you turn away from a situation you know will weaken your resolve, when you nurture your hatred for sin and your delight in God's will, this is all being led by the Spirit. Do not be intimidated by the apparent super spirituality of someone who goes around saying, 'God told me....' 'I felt led to....' Don't feel inferior, don't be manipulated, this is a false notion of God's leading. And especially don't let anyone control you with what God is telling them about what you should do with your life, God is capable of letting you know what He wants you to do. Sadly, many Christians have been manipulated by this mysticism of others and think it is spiritual to force their feelings on others, it isn't. we are killing to birds with one stone here, all those fanciful understandings of being filled with the Spirit, and those fanciful understandings about being led by the Spirit are both answered with one answer, to be holy, to say no to the flesh and yes to the will of the Spirit is to be filled with the Spirit and to be led by the Spirit.

Sword of the Spirit

One of the things we must do when reading Ephesians 5 is compare it with Colossians 3, both these epistles were written by Paul around the same time and there is a lot of similarity between them, the most obvious are the instructions about marriage, parenting and submitting as servants. Paul also has a parallel section which mirrors, v 18-21 in Col. 3:15-17, listen out for the similarities, 'And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful. ¹⁶ Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God. ¹⁷ And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.' You can see that same ideas about singing and thankfulness, but what isn't there that is in Ephesians? It doesn't say be filled with the Spirit, but what does it say we should be filled with? V16, 'Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God.' Ephesians says be filled with the Spirit, Colossians says be filled with the Word.

The word is the sword of the Spirit, it is the means by which the Spirit works to save or sanctify, if you want the Spirit to work then must use the word. Paul tells us that to be filled with the Spirit we must let the word of Christ dwell in us richly. This is God's word, but it also God's word about Christ, specifically it is the person and work of Christ, the gospel. Don't just meditate on facts, but the story of sin and redemption accomplished by Christ. Don't just memorize verses but verses that center your thinking on God's work in Christ. In order for it to dwell richly in us we must think upon it and meditate upon it. The Puritans had a rigorous method of meditating upon the word. Guidelines for the meditation itself include.

Praying for aid.

Read the Bible and choose a verse or doctrine to meditate on. When new to meditation choose easy topics.

Choose a verse or topic that is relevant to your present position. So, "If your conscience troubles you, meditate on God's promises to give grace to the penitent. If you're financially afflicted, meditate on God's wonderful providences to those in need" (Beeke, p15)

Memorise the verse.

Think about what the rest of the Bible says about your topic of meditation. Do not go beyond what Scripture says in your meditations.

When approaching a subject dissect it. Think of its name, its causes, qualities, fruits, effects. Think of illustrations, and opposites. Here's an example from Calamy. If you would meditate on the subject of sin, "Begin with the description of sin; proceed to the distribution of sin; consider the original and cause of sin, the cursed fruits and effects of sin, the adjuncts and properties of sin in general and of personal sin in particular, the opposite of sin, grace, the metaphors of sin, the titles given to sin, [and] all that the Scripture saith concerning sin..." (Beeke, p15).

Don't be bound by method

Keep a tight rein on your mind

Stir your emotions by preaching to yourself

Bring your applications to God as prayers

Believe that God will hear you

Move to resolutions

Conclude with prayers of thanksgiving and psalm singing.

This is how using the Bible you can be filled with the Spirit.

Prayer in the Spirit

We have said that in order to be filled by the Spirit one has to yield to the Spirit not the flesh, and that one must use the means of the Spirit, in particular the Bible and prayer. We know that the Bible is the sword of the Spirit, but the Bible also talks about praying in the Spirit, Eph. 6:18a, 'praying at all times in the Spirit.' This is another way of being filled with the Spirit, to have the Spirit not the flesh dominate our praying. What does it mean to pray in the Spirit? It does not mean to pray in tongues. Paul does talk about praying with his spirit as in 1 Cor. 14 but here he is talking about praying in the Spirit. Some have thought that this means praying from the heart with a genuine spirit. However, it is more likely that the mention of the Spirit, as is often the case with Paul is to view the Spirit as the opposite of the flesh. If we were to pray in the flesh we would be praying selfishly, in accordance with our own goals and desires, but to pray in the Spirit means to pray in agreement with His holy will not the flesh. This would be walking in the Spirit applied to prayer. We would add that we can make sure our prayers are in accord with the Spirit by basing our prayers upon the word which was given by the Spirit. If we want to guarantee that our prayers are not from ourselves but from God that He will not reject them then we must conform our prayers to the Word. Some have launched here into the idea that praying in the Spirit is trying to discern an inner voice, but this is to miss Paul's usual way of contrasting the flesh with the Spirit. Praying in the Spirit is not only possible for those who hear an inner voice, no every Christian can discern the mind of the Spirit from His word and pray in the Spirit. This is Paul's way of stressing that we must not merely pray a lot but pray intelligently and according to God's will.

So in conclusion. We have said much about our involvement with the Holy Spirit. We have spoken about the baptism of the Holy Spirit being a unique event at Pentecost that we all get plugged into when we are saved. Then we looked at the idea of being filled with the Spirit, not as a strange mystical experience but the yielding of ourselves to the will of the Spirit as opposed to the flesh, being filled with the Spirit means the same thing as being led by the Spirit or walking in the Spirit. We have also looked at some of the means by which we can encourage the work of the Spirit in us looking at allowing the word to dwell richly in us and praying in the Spirit. Hopefully this gives you a simple and practical understanding so that we can all obey this command.