

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

(LESSON NINETY-FOUR)

“BE FILLED WITH THE SPIRIT” (PART 5)

EPHESIANS 5:18-21

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.

20 always giving thanks to God the Father for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ,

21 and submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ.

In verse **18** of our text Paul writes, “*And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit.*” Paul is not making a suggestion here, he is issuing a command to all believers. Every believer is to ensure that he or she is continually filled with, or controlled by, the Holy Spirit.

In Lesson **90**, we quoted **Ray Pritchard**, who made the following remarks relative to believers being filled with the Spirit: “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 that same Lesson, we also quoted **John MacArthur** who said, "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."

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 with the Spirit*" is the secret of real Christianity.

According to **Colossians 3:16**, being filled with the Spirit is synonymous with allowing the Word of Christ to dwell in us richly. When our minds are saturated with, immersed in, and surrendered to God's Word, His Spirit will control and dominate us. According to **Galatians 5:16-23**, being filled with the Spirit is also synonymous with "*walking in the Spirit,*" or "*living by the Spirit.*"

We noted in our last Lesson that the secret of victory over sin is not found in an attempted obedience to the Law, or to a set of rules, regulations and standards. The secret of victory over sin is found in surrender to a divine Person, the Holy Spirit, who at the moment the sinner places his or her faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, takes up His permanent residence in his or her being for the purpose of ministering to his or her spiritual needs.

In **Galatians 5:16**, Paul gives believers a strong assurance that if they depend upon the Holy Spirit to give them both the desire and the power to do the will of God, they will not bring to fulfillment in action the evil impulses of the fallen nature, but will be able to resist and conquer them. The Holy Spirit will put sin out of the life of the believer who is surrendered to Him and He will produce His fruit in the believer's life.

It is the responsibility of the believer to refuse to obey the bidding of the fallen, unregenerate, adamic nature, or the **flesh**, by conducting himself

or herself in the power of the Holy Spirit, which means “under His control.” The will of the believer has been liberated from the enslavement to sin which it experienced before regeneration occurred. The believer is now free to choose right and refuse wrong. The Holy Spirit has been given to him or her to counteract the evil nature, but He does that for the believer when he or she puts himself or herself under His control. The believer who consistently puts himself or herself under the control of the Holy Spirit is a believer who is “*filled with the Spirit.*”

In Lesson **91** we indicated that in verses **19-21**, Paul writes,

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

20 Giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ;

21 Submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God.

In this passage, he mentions three practical results of the Spirit’s filling of believers: **worship**, **gratitude**, and **submission**. Interestingly, the first evidence noted by Paul that identifies a person who is filled with the Spirit is what comes out of their mouths! In other words, our speech is a good indicator of the extent to which we are under the influence and control of the Spirit. When a believer is filled with the Spirit, his or her heart overflows with thankfulness to God and that overflowing expresses itself in singing. In other words, the first practical result of an individual who is continually filled with the Spirit is a transformation of his or her worship.

The **present tense** indicates that this singing is the Spirit filled believer’s lifestyle. When a person is born again, or born from above, there is a sense in which music is “born again” in his or her spirit. And as he or she is continually “filled with the Spirit,” there will continually be songs of praise springing up from deep within him or her.

Paul says, “*Speaking to one another in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, singing and making music in your hearts to the Lord*” (**New English Translation**). In all likelihood, Paul is referring here to the gathering of first-century believers for corporate worship. The heathen festivals were noted for intemperate, revelry and song, but the Christian congregation was to set an example of worship dedicated to an omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent, thrice Holy God. Paul understood that there is a horizontal dimension to the worship of believers. In praising God, believers should consciously be directing their worship to the edification of others.

Paul exhorts believers to minister to each other as they worship God. He encourages them to sing and make music **in their hearts** to the Lord. In Scripture, the “*heart*” is used figuratively to refer to the seat and center of human life. The heart is the center of the personality, and controls the intellect, emotions, and will. No **outward** obedience is of the slightest value to God unless the heart is turned to Him and tuned to Him, because the heart is the wellspring of a person’s spiritual life. The idea is that this “*singing and making melody*” must not be merely musical, but it is to be a service of the heart. The Spirit-filled believer’s heart is in a continual state of worship, notwithstanding the circumstances that he or she may find himself or herself in.

To whom do believers sing? Although believers sing among themselves, their songs are to be directed **to the Lord**. Our singing and making melody is not for the purpose of drawing attention to ourselves or of entertaining others. It is for the purpose of worshipping God!

In verse **20**, Paul gives us the second practical result of the Holy Spirit’s filling of a believer. The **New English Translation** renders the verse in the following way: “*always giving thanks to God the Father for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.*”

Brothers and sisters, a continual **attitude of gratitude** to God for all things is an unmistakable evidence of a believer being Spirit filled.

The words “*giving thanks*,” are the translation of the Greek word **eucharisteó**: (**yoo-khar-is-the’-o**), which means, “to be grateful, feel thankful; to give thanks.” The word itself is made up of two words- **eu**, which means “good,” and **charis**, which means “grace.”

Eucharisteó then, means to acknowledge how good grace is!

Eucharisteó describes a person who is depending on God’s grace moment by moment. The **present tense** indicates that this dependence on God’s grace is the person’s lifestyle, a lifestyle which is only possible when one is under the control of the Holy Spirit. Giving thanks is the quality of being grateful, and it also implies that the person who is continually giving thanks has the appropriate attitude, which is the result of being filled with the Spirit.

When are we to be thankful? Paul says, “*Always*.” The Greek word translated “*always*” means, “at all times, always, ever.” The Spirit filled believer gives thanks at all times. He or she gives thanks in all circumstances, and in all places. To be **thankful** always is to recognize God’s control of our lives in every detail as He seeks to conform us to the image of His Son. To be **thankless** is to disregard God’s control, Christ’s lordship, and the Holy Spirit’s filling. Nothing must grieve the Holy Spirit so much as the believer who does not give thanks. God’s people, both corporately and individually, are to have a thankful attitude of mind and heart which comes to expression regularly in thanksgiving and praise.

John Stott rightly remarks that, “The grumbling spirit is not compatible with the Holy Spirit. Grumbling was one of the besetting sins of the people of Israel; they were always ‘murmuring’ against the Lord and against Moses. But the Spirit-filled believer is full not of complaining, but of thanksgiving.”

It is notable that one the chief characteristics of unregenerate human beings is the failure to give thanks to God, and this attitude of ingratitude is one which results in the most serious consequences. In **Romans 1:21** Paul writes, “*For although they knew God, they did not*

glorify him as God or give him thanks, but they became futile in their thoughts and their senseless hearts were darkened.” If a failure to glorify God and give Him thanks results in the heart being darkened, then an attitude of gratitude must result in the heart being enlightened!

For what are we to give thanks? Paul says we are to give thanks *“for all things.”* The greatest gift we can give to God is a thankful heart, because all that we have is from Him. We give Him thanks for *“all things”* because He has given us all things! **1 Chronicles 29:10-16** clearly indicates that the patriarch David was very cognizant of this reality. The **New English Translation** renders the passage as follows:

10 David praised the LORD before the entire assembly: “O LORD God of our father Israel, you deserve praise forevermore!

11 O LORD, you are great, mighty, majestic, magnificent, glorious, and sovereign over all the sky and earth! You, LORD, have dominion and exalt yourself as the ruler of all.

*12 **You are the source of wealth and honor;** you rule over all. You possess strength and might to magnify and give strength to all.*

13 Now, our God, we give thanks to you and praise your majestic name!

*14 “But who am I and who are my people, that we should be in a position to contribute this much? Indeed, **everything comes from you, and we have simply given back to you what is yours.***

15 For we are resident foreigners and temporary settlers in your presence, as all our ancestors were; our days are like a shadow on the earth, without security.

*16 O LORD our God, **all this wealth, which we have collected to build a temple for you to honor your holy name, comes from you; it all belongs to you.***

It is noteworthy that in verse **15**, David describes the Israelites as, “resident foreigners and temporary settlers.” The children of Israel did not own the land in which they lived. **Leviticus 25:23** highlights the fact that Israel was a guest on God’s land: “The land must not be sold without reclaim because the land belongs to me, for you are foreign residents, temporary settlers, with me” (**New English Translation**). The children of Israel were a very privileged people, but they were also a very dependent people. Since they were a very dependent people they should also have been a very grateful people. Unfortunately, they were often very ungrateful. How sad!

The only person who can genuinely give thanks for all things is the person who knows that he or she deserves **nothing** and who therefore gives thanks even for the smallest things. A lack of thankfulness really originates from pride. It comes from the conviction that we deserve something better than we have. Pride tries to convince us that our job, our health, our spouse, and most of what we have is not as good as we deserve. Pride was the root of the first sin and remains the root of all sin. Satan’s pride led him to rebel against God and try to usurp God’s throne. The pride of Adam and Eve led them to believe Satan’s lie that they deserved more than they had and that they even had a right to be like God. But true humility will enable us to have the perspective that Paul, a Spirit-filled man, spoke of in **Philippians 4:10-13**:

10 I have great joy in the Lord because now at last you have again expressed your concern for me. (Now I know you were concerned before but had no opportunity to do anything.)

11 I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content in any circumstance.

12 I have experienced times of need and times of abundance. In any and every circumstance I have learned the secret of contentment, whether I go satisfied or hungry, have plenty or nothing.

13 I am able to do all things through the one who strengthens me.
(**New English Translation**).

We are also to give thanks “*for all things*” because it is God’s will that we should do so. In **1 Thessalonians 5:18**, Paul writes, “*in everything give thanks. For this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus*” (**New English Translation**).

What understanding of God is consistent with Paul’s command in **1 Thessalonians 5:18** for believers to give thanks to God “*for all things?*” Is it the view that says that God merely reacts to His creation? Or is it the view that recognizes that God ordains everything that comes to pass? The answer should be obvious. A God who has not ordained evil cannot actually be thanked and praised for bringing good out of evil as Joseph did in **Genesis 50:19-20**:

19 But Joseph answered them, “Don’t be afraid. Am I in the place of God?”

20 As for you, you meant to harm me, but God intended it for a good purpose, so he could preserve the lives of many people, as you can see this day.

(**New English Translation**)

Paul tells us to give thanks in all circumstances, and we have a basis for thanking God in all things only if He has ordained all things. If the events and human decisions that result in our good occur because God ordained them, we can give Him all the praise and glory for them.

In **Ephesians 1:11**, Paul writes, “*In Christ we too have been claimed as God’s own possession, since we were predestined according to the purpose of him who accomplishes all things according to the counsel of his will*” (**New English Translation**). Since the Lord’s sovereign decree is the foundation for everything that ever happens, we can be confident of God’s good purposes as He works all things according to

His own will. In **Romans 8:28** we read the following: “*And we know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose*” (**New English Translation**).

Believers can be thankful when things seemingly go wrong, not because of the tragedy, trauma, grief, or pain in and of itself, but because we know the Lord is working in these things for His glory and our good. Absolutely nothing can come to us but what God’s love allows. Let us therefore endeavor to be “*filled with the Spirit*” in order to cultivate a grateful attitude toward God, informed by the knowledge that He is in control of everything that happens to us.

It is only possible for us to obey the command to give thanks to God the Father for all things when we are “*filled with the Spirit,*” or when the Word of God is dwelling in us richly! It is only then that we will be able lay hold of the precious Scriptural truths that are able to mount a garrison around our hearts and minds. Thanksgiving implies that the grateful person submits to the will of God, however His will is manifest. Why? Because it is only when we are fully convinced that God is working all things together for good that we can really give God thanks for all things.

The ability to give thanks for all things stems from joy. According to **Galatians 5:22**, joy is one of the aspects of the fruit of the Spirit, and it is a basic feature of genuine Christianity. In **Romans 14:17** Paul writes, “*For the kingdom of God does not consist of food and drink, but righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit*” (**New English Translation**). However, it is only a believer who is continually filled with the Spirit who can consistently manifest true joy in the midst of adverse circumstances.

To whom are we to give thanks? Paul says we are to give thanks to “*God the Father.*” The thanks that we give always, for all things, are given to God the Father. We thank our heavenly Father just as His only

begotten Son, our Lord Himself, did during His earthly life (**Matthew 11:25-26, John 11:41-42**).

According to **James 1:17**, “*All generous giving and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or the slightest hint of change*” (**New English Translation**). The Father is the giver of “*every perfect gift*,” and He should therefore be the Receiver of every genuine and heartfelt thanksgiving.

It is important for us to understand that even those things that come to us through persons, come to us from God. We should certainly be grateful for whatever we receive from others, but we must always recognize that the true source of the gift is God. The word gratitude comes from the same root word as grace. If we have experienced the grace of God, then we ought to express our gratitude to Him for His grace.

In his book “*Folk Psalms of Faith*,” **Ray Stedman** tells of an experience **H. A. Ironside** had in a crowded restaurant. Just as **Ironside** was about to begin eating his meal, a man approached and asked if he could join him. **Ironside** invited the man to have a seat. Then, as was his custom, **Ironside** bowed his head in prayer. When he opened his eyes, the other man asked, “Do you have a headache?” **Ironside** replied, “No, I don’t.” The other man asked, “Well, is there something wrong with your food?” **Ironside** replied, “No, I was simply thanking God as I always do before I eat.” The man said, “Oh, you’re one of those, are you? Well, I want you to know I never give thanks. I earn my money by the sweat of my brow and I don’t have to give thanks to anybody when I eat. I just start right in!” **Ironside** said, “Yes, you’re just like my dog. That’s what he does too!”

How are we to be thankful? Paul says we are to give thanks “*in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ*.” The exhortation to give thanks “*always...for all things*” must be interpreted in the light of the clause, “*in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ*.” It is this clause that qualifies the exhortation. Our thanksgiving is to be for everything **which**

is consistent with the loving Fatherhood of God and the self-revelation he has given us in Jesus Christ. If we do not understand this we may come to the conclusion that we are to thank God even for things that He despises!

As **R.C. Sproul** has written, "We dare not thank God for evil consequences of sinful actions, such as when a drunken driver kills another person. **What we praise God for is for being God in the midst of such terrible tragedies, and for His redeeming purposes which can bring light out of darkness.** There is a multitude of things to thank God for in the midst of tragedies, but these must be consistent with His character and redeeming purposes. Exhaust those things in prayer, and do not be tempted to offer indiscriminate praise to the offence of God. To give thanks in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ is to give thanks consistent with who He is and what He has done. We can give thanks always and for all things because no matter what happens to us it will turn out not only for our ultimate blessing but, more importantly, for His ultimate glory."

Brothers and sisters, when a believer is "*filled with the Spirit,*" he or she will manifest a radical spirit of gratitude. He or she will be able to genuinely give thanks to God in the midst of difficulties, for everything which is consistent with His own character and with that of His Son. The fullness of the Spirit will increasingly eliminate a grumbling, complaining, negative, sour disposition and replace it with an attitude of gratitude and thanksgiving.

Warren Wiersbe gives the following helpful advice: "When a Christian finds himself in a difficult situation, he should immediately give thanks to the Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, by the power of the Spirit, to keep his heart from complaining and fretting. The devil moves in when a Christian starts to complain, but thanksgiving in the Spirit defeats the devil and glorifies the Lord."

Gratitude is an attitude that like all spiritual virtues, needs to be consciously developed and deliberately cultivated in dependence on the Holy Spirit. There are some practical steps that we can take in order to nurture the gracious attribute of gratitude. For example, we can intentionally and consistently make thanksgiving a priority in our prayer life, rather than focusing only on petitions and requests. And even our petitions and requests should be made with thanksgiving. In **Philippians 4:6** Paul writes, “*Do not be anxious about anything. Instead, in every situation, through prayer and petition **with thanksgiving**, tell your requests to God*” (**New English Translation**).

What will happen when we season our petitions and requests with thanksgiving? Paul answers the question in verse **7**: “*And the peace of God that surpasses all understanding will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.*”

We should also consider arranging times when our prayer consists of nothing but thanksgiving to God. We can express our gratitude to Him for the various wonderful aspects of salvation (election, predestination, atonement, regeneration, justification, adoption, sanctification). We can thank Him for His love, mercy and grace. We can thank Him for His providence, protection, provision and overall sovereign care. We can thank Him for His faithfulness, His forgiveness, His patience, His kindness, His tenderness, His forgiveness, His refusal to give up on us.

Let us also remember to thank the persons who are kind to us in even the smallest ways. It will enhance our enjoyment of the blessing, and it will increase our capacity to thank God. It is important for us to also minister to those who are less fortunate than us. This will remind us of how gracious God has been to us, which will in turn motivate us to be more grateful to God.

Martin Rinkart was a Lutheran minister in **Eilenburg, Saxony**, during the **Thirty Years’ War (1618 to 1648)**. The walled city of **Eilenburg** saw a steady stream of refugees pour through its gates. The Swedish army surrounded the city, and famine and plague were rampant.

Eight hundred homes were destroyed, and the people began to perish. There was a tremendous strain on the pastors, who had to conduct dozens of funerals daily. Finally, the pastors, too, succumbed, and **Rinkart** was the only one left—doing 50 funerals a day.

When the Swedes demanded a huge ransom, **Rinkart** left the safety of the walls to plead for mercy. The Swedish commander, impressed by his faith and courage, lowered his demands.

Soon after, the **Thirty Years' War** ended, and **Rinkart** wrote a hymn for a grand celebration service.

*“Now thank we all our God, with heart and hands and voices,
Who wondrous things has done, in whom this world rejoices;
Who from our mothers' arms has blessed us on our way
With countless gifts of love, and still is ours today.”*

It is a testament to his faith that, after all the suffering and misery that he had witnessed, he was able to write a hymn of such abiding trust and gratitude toward God. May it be so with all those who claim to be “filled with the Spirit.”