

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

(LESSON NINETY-TWO)

“BE FILLED WITH THE SPIRIT” (PART 3)

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.

Adrian Pierce Rogers was an American pastor and author, who served three terms as president of the **Southern Baptist Convention**.

Commenting on Paul’s command to the believers in Ephesus to “*be filled with the Spirit,*” **Rogers** made the following observations:

“Imagine that a man had bought a new car. He invites his friends over to see the flawless paint job, to sit in the soft seats. But everywhere he goes, he has to push it, which can be extremely exhausting. So rather than being a good thing, his car is really more of a burden. But then one day, someone introduces him to the ignition...He discovers that if you put the car in ‘drive,’ it can surge forth in power. ‘Why didn’t somebody tell me about this before?’ he asks.

'Nobody could be that dumb,' you say—unless that person is a Christian who does not understand the power of the Holy Spirit of God. Many Christians don't understand that when they got saved, God implanted an engine into their salvation. I don't mean any disrespect by calling the Holy Spirit an engine, but He is the dynamism, the power of our Christian life. Some people are like the man and his car. Rather than salvation carrying them, they're the ones always pushing it, grinding out their Christian experience because they haven't yet discovered the wonderful Spirit-filled life. The Spirit will turn your drudgery into dynamism. Rather than making Christianity a burden, He will make it an empowering blessing to you....**I believe far more harm is done in our churches by people who are not Spirit-filled than by people who are drunks. Far more harm is done by people who are trying to do the work of God in their own flesh...**

The first reason for being filled with the Holy Spirit is obedience....Being filled with the Spirit is not a good idea, not a suggestion. It is an imperative if we are to be obedient to the Lord.

The second reason for being filled is because of your obligations, to help you accomplish the tasks that are before you. Many people think, 'If I just knew what I was supposed to do, then I'd have it made.' No, just knowing what to do is not enough. You also need the power to do what you know you ought to do. You can't do it alone. You need the Spirit's empowerment....

How can you be filled with the Spirit? **It is not your responsibility to persuade God to fill you with His Spirit.** Many people think, 'If I could just persuade God to fill me with His Spirit, I could finally walk in victory.' No, **it is not your job to talk Him into it; it is your job to permit Him to do it.** God wants to fill you with His Spirit. It is His desire to do so. He longs for you to live in the power, freedom, and victory that He alone can provide you. If you have trusted him for

salvation through Jesus Christ, His Spirit already lives within you. Now let Him have all of you.

One of the requirements for being filled with the Holy Spirit is that we bow to Him in full surrender. To be filled with the Holy Spirit is to be filled with His life, the Spirit of the living God. Is there any area of your life that is out of bounds to the Holy Spirit? Your financial life? Your sexual life? Your personal life? Your career ambitions? Your recreational hobbies? Anything? Anywhere? To be filled with the Spirit means that there is a Person who is completely occupying the temple, the sanctuary of your life—every room, every desk drawer, the key to every closet. Everything now belongs to Him. That's what it means—a complete commitment. You just turn the keys over to Him. Are you ready to do that?"

To be filled with the Holy Spirit is to have one's mind completely under His divine control. Being filled with the Spirit parallels allowing the Word of Christ to dwell in us richly (**Colossians 3:16**). When our minds are saturated with, immersed in, and surrendered to God's Word, His Spirit will control and dominate us. The fruit of the Spirit will be produced in our lives, and our speech and behavior will testify that we are Spirit filled. It is not a matter of **available power**, for God's supplies are infinite. Rather it is a matter of **available will**. It is a matter of our willingness to surrender to the influences and control of the indwelling Spirit. The more willing we are to surrender to the influences and control of the indwelling Spirit, the more the Spirit's power becomes available to us.

In **1 John 1:5-7** John writes, *"Now this is the gospel message we have heard from him and announce to you: God is light, and in him there is no darkness at all"* (**New English Translation**).

In **Luke 11:34-36** Luke writes,

34 Your eye is the lamp of your body. When your eye is healthy, your whole body is full of light, but when it is diseased, your body is full of darkness.

35 Therefore see to it that the light in you is not darkness.

36 If then your whole body is full of light, with no part in the dark, it will be as full of light as when the light of a lamp shines on you.”

(New English Translation).

John Phillips makes the following insightful comments: “As we begin to read the Word of God, the Spirit of God brings some divine truth to our attention: a promise to claim, a sin to confess and avoid, a command to obey. Because we have established the basic premise that Jesus is Lord and made that the foundation for all our behavior, our immediate response is to obey. We yield on whatever issue in the Word of God the Spirit of God has brought to our attention. **As we yield, He fills us and we receive the power to turn that teaching into practical reality.** As this process continues, the Holy Spirit enlarges our horizons, increases our capacity, deepens our spirituality, and enables us to grow in grace and increase our knowledge of God.”

Brothers and sisters, have we in our personal lives, established the basic premise that Jesus is Lord, and have we made that the foundation for all our behaviour? If we have, then our consistent response to the Holy Spirit will be one of obedience. If we have not, then we will not yield consistently to the Holy Spirit and our obedience to Him will be sporadic at best. We all need to honestly ask ourselves the following question: “Is Jesus Christ truly Lord of my life?”

The **New English Translation** renders **John 13:12-14** in the following way:

12 So when Jesus had washed their feet and put his outer clothing back on, he took his place at the table again and said to them, “Do you understand what I have done for you?”

13 You call me ‘Teacher’ and ‘Lord,’ and do so correctly, for that is what I am.

*14 If I then, your **Lord and Teacher**, have washed your feet, you too ought to wash one another’s feet.*

In verse **13** our Lord says, “You call me ‘**Teacher**’ and ‘**Lord,**’ and do so correctly, for that is what I am.”

He did not say, “I am your **teacher** and **Lord,**” but rather, “You call me ‘teacher’ and ‘Lord.” He then proceeded to instruct them based on their confessed view of Him. The order in which these titles occur is significant. The disciples had come to know Christ first as their teacher. It was only afterwards that they came to know Him as their Lord. They saw Him **primarily** as their teacher and **secondarily** as their Lord. But in verse **14**, Jesus reverses the order. He says, “If I then, your **Lord and Teacher**, have washed your feet, you too ought to wash one another’s feet.” Why did He reverse the order? Because this is the experimental order now. We must first surrender to Him as Lord, bowing to His supreme authority and submitting to His yoke, before He will teach us! If we view Him **primarily** as our **teacher**, we will not necessarily feel an obligation to obey His teaching. But if we acknowledge Him as **Lord first**, then we are obligated to obey His every Word.

Brothers and sisters, those of us who worship at **The Grace Workshop Ministries** must ensure that we recognize and acknowledge Jesus Christ as Lord first, and then as teacher.

As the Word of Christ dwells in us richly, and controls all our thinking and our behaviour; as we walk in obedience to the Word, the Spirit of God fills, dominates, and controls us to the glory of the Lord Jesus

Christ. Therefore, if we desire to be filled with the Spirit we must not tolerate anything in our lives which is contrary to the Word of God.

To be filled with the Holy Spirit, does not necessarily result in an overwhelming emotional experience, but results rather in a state of being controlled. It results in a state of orderliness and common sense. In **2 Timothy 1:7** Paul writes, “*For God did not give us a Spirit of fear but of power and love and self-control*” (**New English Translation**).

Harry Ironside made the following observations as it relates to our subject:

“What is the filling with the Holy Spirit? I think the thought that a great many people have is that it is some strange, ecstatic, emotional experience that comes to them at a given moment and then later passes away and has to be repeated again. But that is not it. **This is the normal experience of the Christian life**...I have been in some places where people talk a great deal about the fulness of the Spirit and where I have seen things that I never would have thought possible a few years ago outside of an insane asylum, people rolling upon the floor and raving like maniacs, and yet calling that the fulness of the Spirit. That is not the spirit of a sound mind. The man who is filled with the Holy Spirit does not go off into some wild, fanatical state, but walks thoughtfully and carefully with God, and his testimony has power with men.”

In verse **19**, Paul writes, “*Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord.*”

It is very interesting that the first evidence noted by Paul that identifies a person who is filled with the Spirit is the character of their speech! In other words, our speech is a good measuring instrument 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. The

Christian faith is by far the most joy-inspiring of all faiths, which is the reason why there are so many Christian hymnals.

The phrase, “*Speaking to yourselves*” is a translation of two Greek words which literally mean, “Speaking with yourselves.” But this translation is open to the misinterpretation that Paul is commanding, each Christian to commune with himself or herself. This is **not** his idea. What Paul has in mind is the communion of believers with each other. Saints are to speak to one another. The **New English Translation** renders the verse as follows: “*speaking to one another in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, singing and making music in your hearts to the Lord.*”

Believers are to communicate their joy in salvation to their fellow believers in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs. They are to find expression to the Spirit-filled life in this way. This clearly indicates that as far as Paul is concerned, the “Spirit-filled” life is not to be measured solely by one’s private morality or even by one’s private spiritual experience, but also by how one conducts himself or herself with other believers. Throughout this epistle Paul stresses over and over again the importance of every member of the Body of Christ understanding the vital importance of every other member, and therefore striving to preserve the unity of the Spirit.

In **Lesson 55** we made the following remarks: “Christian growth and development does not occur in isolation. God’s people come into the unity of the faith, not as individuals, but together. It is not a goal to be attained by a select few “elite” saints only, but by all believers, and it will be fully attained by all believers when our Lord returns. If an individual believer is to mature fully, he or she needs the fellowship of other believers. The idea of an arm or a leg of a physical body developing in isolation from the other members of the body is ridiculous! In the same way, it is not possible for any member of the mystical Body of Christ to attain full spiritual maturity apart from the

rest of the Body. When Christ returns, the entire church will arrive at complete maturity or glorification."

We will refresh our memories as it relates to this matter by reading 4 passages from this epistle, all reflecting the rendering of the **New English Translation**:

Ephesians 2:14-22

14 For he is our peace, the one who made both groups into one and who destroyed the middle wall of partition, the hostility,

15 when he nullified in his flesh the law of commandments in decrees. He did this to create in himself one new man out of two, thus making peace,

16 and to reconcile them both in one body to God through the cross, by which the hostility has been killed.

17 And he came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near,

18 so that through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father.

19 So then you are no longer foreigners and noncitizens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of God's household,

20 because you have been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone.

21 In him the whole building, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord,

22 in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.

Ephesians 3:14-19

14 For this reason I kneel before the Father,

15 from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named.

16 I pray that according to the wealth of his glory he will grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in the inner person,

17 that Christ will dwell in your hearts through faith, so that, because you have been rooted and grounded in love,

18 you will be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth,

19 and thus to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you will be filled up to all the fullness of God.

Ephesians 4:1-6

1 I, therefore, the prisoner for the Lord, urge you to live worthily of the calling with which you have been called,

2 with all humility and gentleness, with patience, putting up with one another in love,

3 making every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

4 There is one body and one Spirit, just as you too were called to the one hope of your calling,

5 one Lord, one faith, one baptism,

6 one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

Ephesians 4:11-16

11 And he himself gave some as apostles, some as prophets, some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers,

12 to equip the saints for the work of ministry, that is, to build up the body of Christ,

13 until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God—a mature person, attaining to the measure of Christ’s full stature.

14 So we are no longer to be children, tossed back and forth by waves and carried about by every wind of teaching by the trickery of people who craftily carry out their deceitful schemes.

15 But practicing the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into Christ, who is the head.

16 From him the whole body grows, fitted and held together through every supporting ligament. As each one does its part, the body builds itself up in love.

In this epistle, in addition to speaking generally of how believers are to relate to each other, the apostle highlights three sets of relationships: that of wives to husbands and husbands to wives, that of children to parents and parents to children, and that of slaves to masters and masters to slaves.

Paul says, “*speaking to one another in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, singing and making music in your hearts to the Lord.*” The Greek word translated “*speaking*” is **laleó**: (**lal-eh’-o**). In its most basic sense **laleó** simply means to use the voice to make a sound and in this context of **Ephesians 5:19**, the sound is a song. These song-sounds are the products of a Spirit-filled heart. The songs that please the Lord are the songs that come from a Spirit-filled heart. 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.

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. Someone has observed that there is nothing that comes nearer to the door of heaven than the corporate singing of a group of Spirit-filled believers.

Tertullian, writing from North Africa toward the end of the second century, has described a Christian feast at which “Each is invited to sing to God in the presence of others from what he knows of the Holy Scripture or from his own heart.”

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. As Christ ministers to others by extending himself for them, when we worship with the needs of others as our concern, then we are ministering Jesus Christ to our fellow believers.

We are to sing “*psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs*” to one another. What the distinctions are between **psalms**, **hymns**, and **spiritual songs**, has been considerably disputed, and it would therefore not be wise for us to differentiate too strictly between them. Paul probably uses the three words here with a view to rhetorical force. He desires to emphasize the importance of believers gathering together for corporate worship and that singing is to be an integral aspect of their worship.

The following lengthy quotation is an excerpt of a document entitled, “*The Theology and Place of Music in Worship*,” prepared by a Commission on Worship of the **Reformed Church in America**. The report speaks to the importance of singing as it relates to corporate worship.

“Music and song continue to play a vital role in the life of God’s people today. Contemporary culture and modern technology bring new possibilities and new challenges to the music ministry of the church.

People's lives are surrounded with music...Yet much of the time music functions as 'background' rather than as an opportunity for serious listening, much less participation. Outside the church there are few occasions or opportunities...for people to sing together. Much of the popular music (including popular Christian music) composed today is for performance rather than for participation.

The church also has greater access and has shown greater openness to a greater variety of music...Such diversity is to be welcomed and celebrated; it reflects the diversity and richness of God's creation. But greater variety and options in music call for greater discernment and care in planning and implementing the music ministry of the church. The people of God sing; what they sing and how they sing are important issues.

Singing is a ministry that belongs to all the people of God. The congregation is always the primary choir. The role of professional or volunteer choirs and musicians is to aid the whole people of God in their worship. While anthems or vocal and instrumental solos may be offered, they do not have to be. Congregational singing, however, is essential. While it is possible to be actively engaged in worship and in prayer while listening to an anthem or solo, a diet of worship which does not regularly include ample opportunity for all the members of the congregation to join in song will be impoverished worship, and the life of the church and the faith of its people will suffer.

Of all the art forms that may be employed in worship, singing is especially corporate. Indeed, it is the art form most suited to expressing the church's unity in the body of Christ. Different voices, different instruments, different parts are blended to offer a single, living, and unified work of beauty...

The church's ministry of song is for the glory of God. The principal direction of congregational singing is to the Lord (**Psalm 96:1**)...Music

should communicate and express a sense of awe and wonder in the presence of God; it should lead our thoughts toward God rather than toward ourselves.

The church's ministry of song is for the edification of God's people. Through congregational singing Christian faith is not only expressed; to a very real degree it is formed. Since people tend to remember the theology they sing more than the theology that is preached, a congregation's repertoire of hymnody is often of critical importance in shaping the faith of its people. Here again, it is the meaning of the text that is of primary importance. It is through the sense of the words that God's people learn of the nature and character of God and of the Christian life... Christian hymnody contains some of the most tightly packed, concise doctrinal and devotional thought of the church. Through congregational song God's people learn their language about God; God's people learn how to speak with God. Songs of worship shape faith. It is, therefore, very important that a congregation have a rich 'vocabulary of praise.'

Evaluating and choosing music for Christian worship should be a careful process, guided primarily by theological considerations. Pastors, consistories, musicians, choir directors, and worship committees may be aided in this process by being attentive to the following suggested guidelines...

What theology is expressed in our congregational singing? Is it biblical? Is it consistent with our theology? Is the range of what we sing representative of the 'whole counsel of God?' What do our songs and hymns say or imply about the sovereignty and grace of God? About the life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ? Hymns used in public worship should be in harmony with the beliefs of your church.

Is there sufficient historical, cultural, and generational breadth? Does our congregational singing express belief in the communion of saints? Are all the saints present encouraged to join in singing, and do our songs also express our belief that we sing with saints throughout the ages and around the world? Do the hymns and songs include contributions from other cultures, languages, and eras? Are songs included which allow for the full participation of children? For those beginning the journey of faith as well as for more mature Christians?

Is the language of our hymns inclusive? Do our hymns make use of the full range of biblical imagery for God? Can all believers, male and female, young and old, feel included by the language of our congregational songs?

Are we providing our congregation with a sufficient vocabulary of praise?...What do we learn about God and the Christian faith from what we sing?

Does our music encourage corporate worship? Does the music encourage congregational singing or is it designed for the solo artist or does it come across as entertainment? Are soloists and choir effectively leading and supporting the congregation in its worship or are they merely displaying their virtuosity? Do the hymns and choruses we sing express the faith of the gathered community or do they tend toward individual and private expressions of faith?

Is the music appropriate to the ability of the congregation? Do our musical selections respect the past practice of congregation? Do we include enough familiar hymns?

Do the hymns and choruses we sing assume and encourage growth in discipleship? Is continuing congregational education in music and worship a part of our ministry? Do we take the time and effort to learn

new hymns and challenging hymns? Worship is a 'living sacrifice,' and therefore our gifts to God should represent some cost to us. Learning more difficult music and coming to understand and appreciate richer theology may be difficult work, but it can also be a source of spiritual renewal and growth."

John MacArthur comments that, "For over a thousand dark years of its history (c. 500-1500) the church in general did not sing. From shortly after New Testament times until the Reformation, what music the church had was usually performed by professional musicians. The music they presented could not be understood or appreciated by the average church member. In any case, they could only sit and listen, unable to participate. But when the Bible came back into the church during the Reformation, singing came with it. Martin Luther and some of the other Reformation leaders are among the greatest hymn writers of church history. Where the true gospel is known and believed, music is loved and sung. God's Spirit in the heart puts music in the heart... In his great allegory **Pilgrim's Progress**, **John Bunyan** pictured the pilgrim, **Christian**, falling into the slough of despond, straying into doubting castle, and enduring many other hardships, frustrations, and failures. And though the expression 'filled with the Spirit' is not used in the story, each time **Christian** is delivered we see him going on his way singing. Every time he came back under the Spirit's control he had a song in his heart."

Brothers and sisters, when we are filled with the Spirit, not only will joyful ministry flow from our lives in corporate worship, but there will also be joyful God-honouring songs flowing out of our spirit in our private devotions.