

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

## **(LESSON NINETY-ONE)**

### ***“BE FILLED WITH THE SPIRIT” (PART 2)***

#### **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 our previous Lesson, we considered Paul’s exhortation to the Ephesian believers in verse **18**: *“And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit.”*

We noted that the Greek connective **kai**, translated “*and*” at the beginning of verse **18**, clearly links this verse with the preceding verses—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 *“filled with the Spirit.”*

The word “*drunk*” is the translation of a Greek word which means, “to get drunk, become intoxicated.” Drunkenness is one of the many destructive tendencies of unsaved persons and it is therefore inconsistent for those who profess Christ to drink excessively. Like the rest of Scripture, Paul does not forbid alcohol consumption altogether. God’s Word does permit the wise use of alcohol, but it forbids drinking to the point of intoxication.

It is very likely that Paul was 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.

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.”

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.” The word was often used of the wind billowing the sails of a ship providing impetus to propel the ship through the water. In the spiritual realm, it is the Holy Spirit who provides the thrust to move believers down the pathway of obedience. A Spirit-filled believer is not motivated by his or her own desire or will. Instead, he or she allows the Holy Spirit to carry him or her in the proper directions. To be filled with the Spirit means to be carried along by the

gracious pressure of the Holy Spirit. To be filled with the Spirit then is to be carried forward in our Christian life by the same dynamic by which the writers of Scripture were “*carried along by the Holy Spirit*” (**2 Peter 1:21 New English Translation**).

In verse **18**, Paul draws a direct parallel between being drunk with wine and being filled with the Spirit. The point of the comparison is the issue of influence or control. Persons who are under the influence of alcohol experience a radical transformation in their behaviour. They may say or do things that they would not ordinarily say and do. If they imbibe enough alcohol, their mental processes will be impaired and their ability to make proper decisions will be affected negatively. Persons who are “*filled with the Spirit,*” and are therefore under the influence or control of the Holy Spirit, also experience a radical change in their speech and behaviour.

The noted biblical Greek New Testament scholar of the mid-twentieth century **Kenneth Samuel Wuest**, explains that there are four grammatical rules in the Greek language which lead us to four truths, relative to the command for believers to be filled with the Spirit.

First, the verb is in the **imperative mode**. Paul is issuing a command to all believers. He is not making a suggestion. He is not giving them an option; he is giving them a mandate. It is imperative that believers be filled with the Spirit, first, because God commands it, and second, because the fullness of the Spirit is the divine enablement in the life of a Christian which results in a Christ-like life.

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 an irregular, infrequent filling. 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! The believer is not filled only when he or she is

involved in ministry. A continual moment by moment fullness of the Spirit is to be the **normal** experience of every believer.

Third, the verb is in the **plural number**, which teaches us that this command is addressed, not only to those who are engaged in full-time ministry but to every believer; to the company executive, the physician, the teacher, the student, the gardener, the household helper and the housewife. It is the responsibility of every believer 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.

Paul is not implying that believers should receive more of the Holy Spirit, because the Holy Spirit takes up His abode in each believer and indwells each believer completely, the moment he or she places his or her trust in the Lord Jesus Christ for salvation. 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 command, “*be filled with the Spirit*” is a call for believers to be continually controlled by the Spirit in their mind, emotions, and will. The phrase does not mean that the Holy Spirit is somehow to be progressively added to the believer’s life until he or she is full of Him. It means that the believer is to be under the Spirit’s total dominion and control moment by moment. According to **Expositor’s Bible Commentary**, “The Christian life should be an uninterrupted filling.”

**Ray Stedman** observed that, “The filling of the Holy Spirit has nothing to do with an experience or a feeling or a crisis; **it is a quiet drinking again and again of an inner supply of strength.** This is a truth that many Christians seem to miss. They think that Christianity means coming to church, getting a blessing, and then going away to try to live in the light and warmth of the blessing until it leaks away, and then they must come back and get filled up again. But that is not Christianity. When Jesus said of the person who drinks of Him, ‘*Out of his innermost being shall flow rivers of living water,*’ John says, ‘*By this he meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were later to receive*’ (**John 7:39**). That is the strengthening that comes from within, and there is plenty there for any situation.”

In verses **19-21**, Paul mentioned three practical results of the Spirit’s filling of believers: **worship, gratitude, and submission.** The **New English Translation** renders the passage in the following way:

*19 speaking to one another in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, singing and making music in your hearts 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.*

The last result that of **submission**, is most significant because true submission always involves giving up our right to be in control in every

situation. When we submit from the heart, we are saying in effect, “I do not have to have the final say all the time.” In **1 Corinthians 10:31-33** Paul wrote,

*31 So whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do everything for the glory of God.*

*32 Do not give offense to Jews or Greeks or to the church of God,*

*33 just as I also try to please everyone in all things. I do not seek my own benefit, but the benefit of many, so that they may be saved.*

**(New English Translation)**

Only a person whose heart is being radically and continually impacted by the Holy Spirit can maintain such an attitude in every relationship of life.

Brothers and sisters, we are obligated to give God glory in every area of our lives, and it is a necessity in the nature of the case that we must be filled with the Spirit in order to do so. In the rest of his letter, Paul will mention six specific areas of a believer’s life where the Spirit’s filling is especially important. The specific areas are:

|                           |                          |
|---------------------------|--------------------------|
| <b>Worship:</b>           | <b>Ephesians 5:19-20</b> |
| <b>Marriage:</b>          | <b>Ephesians 5:22-33</b> |
| <b>Family:</b>            | <b>Ephesians 6:1-4</b>   |
| <b>Work:</b>              | <b>Ephesians 6:5-9</b>   |
| <b>Spiritual Warfare:</b> | <b>Ephesians 6:10-18</b> |
| <b>Witnessing:</b>        | <b>Ephesians 6:19-20</b> |

Lord willing, we will examine these areas in greater detail in future Lessons.

Brothers and sisters, we must endeavor to be available, sensitive, submissive and obedient to the urgings of the Holy Spirit in our daily lives. We must bear in mind that the Holy Spirit is not an “agent” or “force” of God. The Holy Spirit is a divine person. As such He can be **resisted** (**Acts 7:51**), He can be **quenched** or **stifled** (**1Thessalonians 5:19**), and He can be **grieved** (**Ephesians 4:30**). We certainly cannot fill ourselves with the Spirit, but we do have the responsibility and privilege of cooperating with the Spirit in His work of putting sin out of our lives and bearing His fruit in our lives. We have the responsibility and privilege of allowing Him to exert His influence and control over our thoughts, words, and actions. We do so by heeding Paul’s exhortation in **Romans 12:1-2**:

*1 Therefore I exhort you, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a sacrifice—alive, holy, and pleasing to God—which is your reasonable service.*

*2 Do not be conformed to this present world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may test and approve what is the will of God—what is good and well-pleasing and perfect.*

**(New English Translation)**

This presenting of our bodies as living, holy and pleasing sacrifices to God, represents a loving and voluntary yielding or surrendering of our entire beings to the influence and control of the Holy Spirit. As we daily present ourselves to Him as living sacrifices, He will gradually conform us to the image of Jesus Christ, to which we are predestinated according to **Romans 8:29**. This is what it means to be “*filled with the Spirit.*”

In **Acts 16:6-10**, Luke furnishes us with an example of how the Holy Spirit operates in the lives of believers who are surrendered to him. The **New English Translation** renders the passage as follows:

*6 They went through the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been prevented by the Holy Spirit from speaking the message in the province of Asia.*

*7 When they came to Mysia, they attempted to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus did not allow them to do this,*

*8 so they passed through Mysia and went down to Troas.*

*9 A vision appeared to Paul during the night: A Macedonian man was standing there urging him, “Come over to Macedonia and help us!”*

*10 After Paul saw the vision, we attempted immediately to go over to Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to proclaim the good news to them.*

In **Colossians 3:16-4:1**, Paul presents a very interesting parallel with **Ephesians 5:18-6:9**. The **New English Translation** furnishes the following rendering:

*16 Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and exhorting one another with all wisdom, singing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, all with grace in your hearts to God.*

*17 And whatever you do in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.*

*18 Wives, submit to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord.*

*19 Husbands, love your wives and do not be embittered against them.*

*20 Children, obey your parents in everything, for this is pleasing in the Lord.*

*21 Fathers, do not provoke your children, so they will not become disheartened.*

*22 Slaves, obey your earthly masters in every respect, not only when they are watching—like those who are strictly people-pleasers—but with a sincere heart, fearing the Lord.*



23 *Whatever you are doing, work at it with enthusiasm, as to the Lord and not for people,*

24 *because you know that you will receive your inheritance from the Lord as the reward. Serve the Lord Christ.*

25 *For the one who does wrong will be repaid for his wrong, and there are no exceptions.*

*I Masters, treat your slaves with justice and fairness, because you know that you also have a master in heaven.*

The only “difference” between the two passages is in the way in which they begin. In **Ephesians 5:18** Paul commences with, “*And do not get drunk with wine, which is debauchery, but be filled by the Spirit.*” The positive imperative or command in this verse is “***be filled by the Spirit.***” In **Colossians 3:16** he begins with the positive imperative or command “***Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly.***” This is the only real “variable” in the two passages. In other words, the practical effects in the lives of believers who are “*filled with the Spirit*” are identical to those in the lives of believers who have the Word of God dwelling in them richly. We may say that any believer who has the word of God dwelling in them richly is a believer who is filled with the Spirit and vice versa! One of the ways to ensure that we are constantly filled with God’s Spirit is to be constantly filled with God’s Word.

**Charles Spurgeon** exhorted, “Do try, dear friends, to get so full of the word of Christ in all forms of it, that you may run over with it. You know, it cannot come out of you if it is not first in you.”

It seems that in Paul’s mind, being filled with the Spirit was synonymous with letting the word of Christ dwell richly in the believer. The expression, “*the word of Christ*” is not limited to the words that Jesus spoke during His earthly pilgrimage, but refers to the entire body of truth contained in Scripture. We should live in the Word of God like we live in our homes. We must thoroughly acquaint ourselves with the

Word. The idea is to let the Word of God dwell inside and live at home in our lives. The Word of God needs to inhabit us. The believer is to so surrender himself or herself to the Word of God that the Word will “feel at home” in his or her heart. Not only must the saint be yielded to the Word, but he or she must have a good knowledge of it. The Holy Spirit uses the Word of God that we know as He talks to us and guides our lives. The Word of God is the language that the Holy Spirit uses and He can only talk to us effectively to the extent to which we know the Word.

What is very clear is that one of the ways in which a believer lives a “Spirit filled” life, is to have his or her mind saturated with the Word of God. It is not possible for a believer to be sanctified without the Word. In **John 17:17** our Lord in His prayer to His Father prayed, “*Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth*” (**King James Version**).

In **1 Peter 1:22-2:3**, the apostle Peter writes,

*22 You were cleansed from your sins when you obeyed the truth, so now you must show sincere love to each other as brothers and sisters. Love each other deeply with all your heart.*

*23 For you have been born again, but not to a life that will quickly end. Your new life will last forever because it comes from the eternal, living word of God.*

*24 As the Scriptures say, “People are like grass; their beauty is like a flower in the field. The grass withers and the flower fades.*

*25 But the word of the Lord remains forever.” And that word is the Good News that was preached to you.*

*1 So get rid of all evil behavior. Be done with all deceit, hypocrisy, jealousy, and all unkind speech.*

*2 Like newborn babies, you must crave pure spiritual milk so that you will grow into a full experience of salvation. Cry out for this nourishment,*

*3 now that you have had a taste of the Lord's kindness.*  
(**New Living Translation**)

Peter says in chapter 2 and verse 2 that new converts should “*crave pure spiritual milk*” in order to “*grow into a full experience of salvation.*” He says that we should earnestly desire the pure milk of the Word, not merely in order to **know**, but in order to **grow!** It is possible to know and yet not grow. The Bible was not written to satisfy our curiosity, but to help us conform to the image of Jesus Christ, who Himself is **The Word**. Our aim in studying God's Word is not to fill our heads with a collection of biblical facts but to have our lives radically transformed.

How long have we been saved? Is it one year, or ten years, or twenty-five years or fifty years? The real issue is not how long we have been saved but how much we have grown since we have been saved. That is Peter's concern in this passage. The **primary** reason for studying the Bible is that it is the means of spiritual growth. **There can be no real spiritual growth without the Word!** The Word is God's primary tool to save sinners and it is His primary tool to develop them to Christ-like maturity.

**John MacArthur** explains the Spirit's filling in the following way:

“To be filled with the Spirit is to have one's mind completely under His divine control. This requires the Word's dwelling richly in the believer (**Colossians 3:16**). And when our minds are under God's control, our behavior inevitably will be as well. It is **not** a matter of available power but of available will. By the Spirit's power, all believers are able ‘to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which [they] have been called’ (**Ephesians 4:1**). Those who truly ‘put on the Lord Jesus Christ’ will ‘make no provision for the flesh in regard to its lusts’ (**Romans 13:14**). Being **controlled by God's Spirit** comes from being **obedient to His Word**. The Spirit-filled life does not come through mystical or ecstatic experiences but from studying and submitting oneself to Scripture. As a believer faithfully and submissively saturates his mind and heart with

God's truth, his Spirit-controlled behavior will follow as surely as night follows day. **When we are filled with God's truth and led by His Spirit, even our involuntary reactions—those that happen when we don't have time to consciously decide what to do or say—will be godly.**"

The command to *"Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly,"* is for every single believer as the context clearly indicates. No believer can legitimately say, "This command is for ministers and Sunday school teachers, not for persons like myself." In **Mark 4:24-25** our Lord spoke of the relationship between a believer's response to His Words and their spiritual well-being. The **New Living Translation** renders the verses as follows:

*24 Then he added, "Pay close attention to what you hear. The closer you listen, the more understanding you will be given—and you will receive even more.*

*25 To those who listen to my teaching, more understanding will be given. But for those who are not listening, even what little understanding they have will be taken away from them."*

**Alexander Maclaren** related the Spirit to the Word declaring that "He who has the Holy Spirit in his heart and the Scriptures in his hands has all he needs."

In summary we may say that a "Word-filled" believer is a Spirit-filled believer—a believer who is so controlled by the Word of God that it dominates his or her entire life. His or her life demonstrates that they are filled with the Holy Spirit. The Word of God teaches the Children of God how to live for the Glory of God. The Spirit of God supplies the power to live for the Glory of God. We observed last week that being *"filled with the Spirit"* is the secret of real Christianity, and the Scripture indicates that being "filled" with God's Word is the secret to being filled with God's Spirit!

It is not possible for us to experience an increase in the “amount” of the Holy Spirit we receive, for every true believer has all of the Spirit that he or she will ever receive. But it is possible for every true believer to experience an increase in the sense of a greater dependence on the presence and power of the Spirit.

Paul’s stress on believers being filled with the Spirit points to our need to be conformed to God’s own character. To be filled with the Spirit is to yield ourselves willingly to His sanctifying work as He prepares us for the coming of Christ. In so doing, our union with Christ is strengthened, our fellowship with the Father is enhanced, and we increasingly bear the image of God Himself.

Earlier, we quoted **Ray Stedman**, who stated that, “The filling of the Holy Spirit has nothing to do with an experience or a feeling or a crisis; **it is a quiet drinking again and again of an inner supply of strength.**”

This statement reminded me of one of my favourite hymns, “***Dear Lord and Father of Mankind.***” We will conclude our Lesson by reading the words of the hymn.

*“Dear Lord and Father of mankind,  
Forgive our foolish ways;  
Reclothe us in our rightful mind,  
In purer lives Thy service find,  
In deeper reverence, praise.*

*In simple trust like theirs who heard,  
Beside the Syrian sea,  
The gracious calling of the Lord,  
Let us, like them, without a word,  
Rise up and follow Thee.*

*O Sabbath rest by Galilee,  
O calm of hills above,  
Where Jesus knelt to share with Thee  
The silence of eternity,  
Interpreted by love!*

*With that deep hush subduing all  
Our words and works that drown  
The tender whisper of Thy call,  
As noiseless let Thy blessing fall  
As fell Thy manna down.*

*Drop Thy still dews of quietness,  
Till all our strivings cease;  
Take from our souls the strain and stress,  
And let our ordered lives confess  
The beauty of Thy peace.*

*Breathe through the heats of our desire  
Thy coolness and Thy balm;  
Let sense be dumb, let flesh retire;  
Speak through the earthquake, wind, and fire,  
O still, small voice of calm.”*