

## Filled With the Spirit.

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No. 2.

Ephesians 5 : 18. Be filled with the Spirit.

Our speaking last Sabbath, dedicated itself to the questions of Paul, "Know ye not that ye are a temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you? Know ye not that your body is a temple of the Holy Ghost?" Emphasis was given to the believer's present possession of the Spirit, and our protest was uttered against the exhortation that calls upon the disciples of Jesus to seek or to wait or to pray for the Holy Spirit as if he were far away and not within the believer. From the illuminating pages of Scripture we saw that no believer is without the Spirit, that God's possession of us as children carries with it, as an inseparable consequent, our possession of the personal indwelling Spirit of God, that, because we are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, that if any man hath not the Spirit of Christ he needs no further proof that he is none of his.

But possession of the Spirit does not exhaust the Biblical statement on the believer's relation to the Third Person of the Godhead. Seeking for light on the great theme of the believer's relation to the Spirit of God we are met by this command of Paul, "Be filled with the Spirit," accompanied by mention in other parts of the New Testament of those who are described as filled with or full of the Holy Ghost. The question therefore arises, is being filled with the Spirit an experience different and distinct from the common experience of the ordinary believer in Jesus Christ? Is it one thing to possess the Spirit and quite another to be filled with the Spirit? Every believer by virtue of his relation to God and to Christ possesses the Holy Spirit. But is every believer who possesses the Spirit filled with the Spirit? If not, what is it to be filled with the Spirit? These are questions which the command of Paul and other New Testament words call into being.

I. To the first of these questions, is being filled with the Spirit the same as possessing the Spirit, we give ourselves first. For an answer to it as to all other questions we must turn to the Word of God. In the Old Testament and previous to Pentecost the phrase "filled with the Spirit" or "full of the Holy Ghost" is a rare one. In the Old Testament it is declared that Bezalel was filled with the Spirit that he might artistically design the furnishings of the tabernacle. In the New Testament previous to Pentecost the declaration is made concerning John the Baptist, and his father Zacharias, and Elizabeth his mother, and then concerning Jesus Christ. But these cases do not help us much for they belong to a period when the Holy Spirit was not resident on earth as he is in the present day. They belong to a day when the Holy Spirit was not yet given.

Beginning, then, with the earthly ministry of the Third Person of the Godhead what has the New Testament to relate on being filled with or being full of the Holy Ghost? At the very threshold of the Spirit's ministry there stands the account of Pentecost when tongues of fire, which were the visible symbols of the Holy Spirit's descent upon and entrance into the disciples, sat upon each one of them and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost. On that occasion there was no exception or distinction among the assembled believers, "they were all filled with the Holy Ghost." Some days later Peter healed a lame man at the Beautiful Gate of the temple, and when the council before whom they were called put to him and John the question, "By what power or in what name have ye done this," Peter—and Luke is our informant—"filled with the Holy Ghost," gave answer. Being warned by the council Peter and John were given their freedom, "and being let go" they went to their own company, and when they had prayed the place where they were assembled was shaken "and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost. Next we come to the appointment of deacons together with the apostolic direction that deacons were to be men full of the Holy Ghost. "Look ye out therefore, brethren, from among you seven men of good report, full of the Spirit and of wisdom." Of these seven Stephen was one, and both on the occasion of his appointment to office and at the time of his death he is referred to as a man full of the Holy Ghost. Not long afterwards Ananias told Saul of Tarsus that he was to be filled with the Holy Ghost, and we do not read of any particular occasion or ceremony other than his confession of faith in baptism as the occasion of his being so filled. Finally the expression is used of the apparently uniform experience of Barnabas, of Paul on the occasion of his visit to Paphos, and as descriptive of "the disciples" at Iconium during the first missionary journey.

Now take these passages, and these are the only ones in which the phrases "filled with the Spirit" or "full of the Holy Ghost" occurs, and what is the truth which they impart? Ponder them and tell me are they not descriptive of what ought to be the uniform, ordinary condition of every rightly instructed and faithful believer? Do they contain any suggestion that to be filled

with the Spirit is a condition not intended for the average everyday believer, but reserved for a special and favored religious aristocracy and clique? For one I utter my protest against the thought. I believe it not. "Full of the Holy Ghost," "filled with the Spirit," are words denoting a condition of life containing nothing that every believer ought not to seek for and possess. As it is not in Scripture so banish from your mind the thought that this blessing is open but to a few. Indeed, instead of being open to the few alone, to be filled with the Spirit is the privilege and, if we read aright, the duty of every believing child of God. "Full of the Holy Ghost," "filled with the Spirit," that is what God expects us to be, that is the divine ideal of the holy faith of Jesus Christ.

Yet while the privilege of being filled with the Holy Spirit is open to all there is reason to believe from Scripture that even in apostolic days all did not open their lives to the privilege of being full of the Holy Ghost. Among the qualifications of a deacon there was this, "Look ye out therefore, brethren, from among you seven men full of the Holy Ghost." In their selection they were to choose only men full of the Holy Ghost. Now had all primitive Christians been full of, as all possessed the Spirit, mention of this characteristic as essential to deacons would have been unnecessary. Plainly mention was made of it because all were not full of the Holy Spirit. That of course, mark you, is only to affirm that some were not what they ought to be, for every believer ought to be filled with the Spirit. But distinctly observe that this Scripture goes that far and does not hesitate to imply that there were some among them who were not in possession of the qualification essential to a deacon, some of whom it could not be said that they were full of or filled with the Spirit. And what shall we say of this command from Paul, "Be filled with the Spirit?" What would it lead us to believe, at least concerning some among the Ephesian Christians? Like the restriction thrown around the deacon's office surely it makes bare the truth that the believer's possession of the Holy Spirit is not identical with his being filled with or full of the Spirit. Therefore in answer to our question, is being filled with the Spirit the same as possessing the Spirit, we must give a negative answer. By virtue of their relation to God and to Christ every believer possesses the Spirit. But as it was in New Testament days, so is it at the present, and while every believer possesses, all are not filled with the Spirit.

II. This brings us to our second question, What does the phrase "filled with the Spirit" mean? That is a difficult question to answer. But it will help us in our study if we remember that the word "full" or "filled" is not confined to the Holy Spirit. Full of light, full of joy, full of wisdom, full of faith, full of power, full of mercy, full of comfort, full of the knowledge of his will are all Biblical expressions. "Full" or "filled" then, it would seem, are common Scriptural expressions descriptive of those especially under the influence of some particular mental or emotional or spiritual condition. When used in connection with the Holy Spirit they seem to describe the condition, not of those who have the Spirit as distinguished from those who have not, but of those who, already in possession of the indwelling Spirit are more especially under his controlling influence. To sum up our thought in a brief word to be filled with the Spirit involves not our having more of the Spirit but rather the Spirit having more of us. This may seem a mere quibble. But between the two there is a vast difference; between the two there is a difference as vast as that which separates belief in the Spirit as an influence and belief in him as a living personal being. As an influence we might have more or less of the Spirit, but as a person he must be incapable of such division. Many fail to see this and so there is much longing, praying, waiting for God to give us something more when the essential condition to our being filled with the Spirit is for us to give him something more than we have already handed over.

Perhaps illustration may lighten up our thought. One may dwell in a home and have no control in it or over it. Living in a home is not synonymous with being a dominant power in its life. One may dwell in a home and be a mere tolerated presence. So the Holy Spirit dwells in hearts where he is not the dictating, dominating, controlling power. Large stretches of the life are lifted out from under his government. manifold and important phases of conduct are never submitted to him for direction. Daily life is entered upon and its tasks are taken up with the Spirit as completely ignored as if he were great leagues of space away. I am not speaking of unbelieving hearts, I am speaking of believing Christian hearts where the Spirit dwells but where the Spirit does not control the life. I am speaking of believing, Christian hearts where sometimes, at least, there is a waiting, seeking, praying for the fullness of the Spirit when the plain, essential condition to their being full of the Holy Ghost is not for God to give something more to them but for them to give something more to God.

Sometimes there are aged ones in our homes cared for, respected and loved but given no active, decisive, determining part in the life of the home. These aged ones are not consulted at important moments nor reckoned on for onerous tasks, but are given a quiet life of irresponsibility. Could one more fittingly describe the place and the power and the control of the Spirit in a few lives than that are Christian? As a consequence of their acceptance

of Jesus Christ the Spirit dwells in the life. But while the Spirit makes the life his dwelling he is not in possession of the life; the life is not given up to him. In the duties and cares, in the ambitions and purposes of life the Spirit is passed by, not it may be with scorn or disdain, yet nevertheless passed by, and so while the Spirit dwells in them and they possess the Spirit, the Spirit is not in possession of them and they are not filled with the Spirit.

Let us abide by our illustration a little longer. The aged one in your home is already there. You could not possess more of that loved personality than you already have. They are yours now in their entire personality. But while you could not possess more of their personality, their personality could easily be a more permeating and dominating force in your home. In all his entirety the personal Holy Spirit now is yours. To possess more of him than you do could not be possible. But it were an easy possibility for him to be in larger possession of your life, to be a more potent and determining force in your being, and being filled with the Spirit, I repeat again, involves not our receiving more of the Spirit so much as the Spirit receiving more of us.

To be filled with the Spirit is to have the Spirit with sovereign, regnant power in every position and sphere and area and stretch of the life. The Spirit filled life demands the surrendered will, the yielded body, the emptied heart with every thought brought into captivity to the obedience of Christ. The Spirit filled life is a life in all its practical and every day phases under the Spirit's control, a life that submits all that goes to the making of a life to his all searching eye and then discards what he would cast out. Business life, political life, social life, domestic life, hidden and private life with all motives and ambitions, our time in all its sweep, our energies with all their marshalling forces, with these under the care and control and sovereign sway of the Spirit the Spirit possesses us and we are filled with the Spirit. Our study, then, has taught us that one may possess and yet not be filled with the Spirit. Further we have learned that being filled with the Spirit involves the Spirit having more of us rather than our having more of the Spirit.

Wrapped up in this doctrine are several important truths. This doctrine should teach us that the fullness of the Spirit is not a blessing that comes in any magical way or through any religious sorcery. Prayer is often made for the fullness of the Spirit with a belief that men become filled with or made full of the Holy Ghost by some arbitrary act of God. Many are waiting, seeking, praying for some new strange wonder working power that will change them in a moment and fill them with the Spirit apart from any submission of themselves to the will of God. But the filling of the Spirit is not an experience to be indolently desired or passively waited for. Since to be filled with the Spirit involves not our receiving more of the Spirit but the Spirit receiving more of us, instead of being utterly helpless we ourselves determine whether we shall be filled or not with the Holy Spirit. Give yourselves up to God and you will be filled with the Spirit. That we should seek the enabling grace of God to help us in an effort to put the life under the indwelling Spirit's control is true. But no enabling grace will answer for or take the place of the surrender of the life; through no passive waiting nor indolent desire nor magical process will one find himself filled with the Spirit.

Again, to be filled with the Spirit does not denote a permanent condition, a blessing received once for all. One is filled with the Spirit only so long and just so far as the Spirit controls the life. No one possesses a life lease or tenure of this blessing simply because of some experience through which he went in the past. Frequent reference is made by some to these marvelous experiences of other days. But unless the submission to God that brought the life under the Spirit's control and filled it with his presence has been repeatedly and continuously ratified, that submission or experience of the past will not fill the life with the Holy Spirit at the present. Not what we were or went through in the past but what we are in the present determines whether we are filled or not with the Holy Ghost.

Again the fullness of the Spirit does not manifest itself in the same way or by the same gift in every believer. To be filled with the Spirit does not imply power in some single given direction. Rather being filled with the Spirit gives power for any service to which God may call the disciple. Enumerating the various gifts which were manifest among the Corinthian Christians Paul adds, "all these worketh the one and the same Spirit, dividing to each or severally even as he will." To be filled with the Spirit will not give every one evangelistic success or pulpit power, or teaching tact, or executive ability to run great churches, some quite different gift may be imparted. This fact is often overlooked and much disappointment and doubt are the result. The manifestations or results of fullness with the Holy Ghost vary in accord with his own pleasure and in harmony with the character of the service to which he has called us. That the Spirit will give some gift to every surrendered life it is our joy to believe but beware of the error which teaches that the Spirit of God always manifests himself in the same way or by the same gift in every life surrendered to his control.

Finally, I would remind you that to be filled with the Spirit is a duty. Our text is part of a double command, "Be not drunken with wine wherein is riot, but be filled with the Spirit." Shall we read the first part of this verse as a command and not the second? I tell you, nay. As clearly as it is a Christian duty to avoid intoxication so is it a duty to be filled with the Holy Spirit. To be filled with the Spirit is a privilege, a high and holy privilege, a privilege too exalted for human words to describe or for human hearts to measure. But side by side with the privilege of being filled with the Spirit lies the duty, and our conception of what God expects of us is utterly inadequate unless we recognize that he looks for us to be entirely surrendered and given over to the Spirit's control until we are filled.

On his last birthday but one Livingstone wrote, "My Jesus, my King, my Life, my All, I again dedicate my whole self to thee." Do those words describe the life we are living? Do they accurately represent our attitude to him? Day by day, hour by hour, do we dedicate our whole self to God? In the secret of your own hearts give answer and learn whether or not you are filled with the Spirit.

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