

## Keep On Being Filled with the Spirit of Jesus

In our Scripture passage today, we are encouraged to *Look carefully how you walk, not as unwise but as wise... because the days are evil.* (Eph. 5:15-16) Evil is often described in the Bible as a force inside and outside of us. And what's the effect of the outside force of evil on us?

I have two soda cans here. On the outside, they look the same. But one is full of something and the other is empty, which means that one of them is much more susceptible to outside forces than the other. Outside forces like this... (crush can #1, can't crush can #2).

A primary effect of evil on people is depression. Another name for depression in people is anxiety. The National Institute of Mental Health has noted a spike recently in what they call "situational anxiety." 73% of adults in the U.S. report levels of high stress or anxiety in their lives. 10% of men and 20% of women are now taking anxiety-reduction medications. With young adults it's increasing even faster. In ages 18-25, over the decade from 2010 to 2020, levels of high anxiety increased by 139%. A 2023 study of American college students found that 37% reported feeling anxious "always" or "most of the time." Even children ages 6-12 are not immune. According to the American Psychological Association, the number of children diagnosed with elevated levels of anxiety has doubled over a recent decade. <sup>1</sup>

The apostle Paul was no stranger to the depressing forces of evil. In 2 Corinthians he lists some of those depressing pressures: imprisonments, beatings, stonings, three shipwrecks, and frequent hunger and lack of shelter. But he then concludes that list of evil forces with these words: (2 Cor. 11:28)

**And ... there is the daily pressure on me of my anxiety for all the churches.**

The centerpiece of the seven verses we're looking at today is the phrase, ... **but be filled with the Spirit.** (Eph. 5:18b) This is the alternative, the solution to the depressing force of evil. So, that's what we're going to study today and we begin with a definition. The term ...

### I. "Fullness of the Spirit" has a Distinct Definition

There is a difference between being baptized in the Spirit and being filled with the Spirit. Are you aware of that? When you are born again, you are **baptized** with the Holy Spirit. Before Jesus went back to heaven, he promised this. Acts 1:4-5 says:

**And while staying with them he ordered them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father, which, he said, "you heard from me; for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now."**

And that is exactly what happened at Pentecost a few days later and what happens to every believer now when they become a Christian. But listen carefully, this is crucial: Baptism and fullness of the Holy Spirit are two different realities.<sup>2</sup> Baptism is the promised gift from God. It is His mark of acceptance into His forever family. It is, in a sense, your spiritual birth certificate. You do not ask for it, you do not work for it, it comes automatically when you are born again spiritually into a relationship with Christ. Nowhere in the New Testament are you ever commanded to be baptized by the Spirit. Nowhere. Why? Because this is an all-in-one experience that takes place at conversion. It's a package deal. It's what Jesus said would happen.

So, Eph. 5:18 is talking about something OTHER than baptism. What is it? First of all, it's a command. It says you should *be filled*. Secondly, this command is plural, so it applies to all

Christians and not just to a select few. It's essentially saying, "Y'all should be filled!" (Ephesus is in southern Asia Minor!) Thirdly, it is present tense so a more literal translation might say, "Keep on being filled" meaning it's an experience we need to choose daily. And lastly, the verb is passive which means we do not, we cannot fill ourselves. There are no self-service Holy-Spirit-filling stations. So, spiritually, the entire world is living in New Jersey.

Did you know that you cannot fill your own car with gas in New Jersey? No, it's the law that a station attendant must put the gas nozzle into your car, not you. Apparently, the Holy Spirit lived in New Jersey at one time because there is no such thing as self-serve filling of the Holy Spirit's power either. You must ask Him to do it, which He promises He always will do because he's a 24-7, full-service provider. But you must ask.

Now, you might be thinking; "So, Pastor, are you saying that I can use up the power of the Holy Spirit in my life and that's why I have to constantly be refilled? Is the Holy Spirit's power limited?" No, I'm not saying that His power is limited. I'm saying it's the size of your tank that's limited. And when you use up His energy, you have to ask for a refill, or you run the risk of being stranded far from home. So, what does a spiritual empty tank look like?

One of my college roommates shocked me one day when he said he was driving from Chicago to Tennessee and back in one weekend. I said, "Why on earth would you be doing a crazy thing like that?" He said, "Because I just got a phone call from my mom who said my brother might be in Tennessee." I said, "Wait, you don't know where your brother is?" He said, "Actually, no. I haven't known for years. When my brother graduated from high school, he just took off. To this day we don't know why. He never told us where he was going. He never wrote. He never called. He just disappeared. We've been looking for him for five years. We don't know if he is alive or dead." Spiritually, my roommate's brother had an empty tank.

When we're born into a family, we take on that family name, don't we? Nothing we do can remove us from that family in terms of our DNA. But we can choose whether or not we will continue to identify or live in relationship with our birth-family members.

The same is true when we are spiritually born again into Christ's family. Our sins are forgiven as His Spirit baptizes us and we formally become members of a new family, the family of God. However, we still possess freewill. So, we are capable of listening to the voices of our family or listening to the voices of another rebel family who disregards the words of our Father God.

So, listening to the Spirit within and obeying Him need to be a daily, conscious choice. **Warren Wiersbe says, "The baptism of the Spirit means that I belong to Christ's body. The filling of the Spirit means that my body belongs to Christ."**<sup>3</sup> Baptism in the Spirit is the initiating event. It is not repeatable and cannot be lost. But the filling of the Spirit can be repeated and must be maintained. If it is not, we will find ourselves one day out of spiritual gas and stranded far from home.

Which leads us to the second critical truth of this passage, which is that ...

## **II. The Fullness of the Spirit Has Incredible Beauty and Practical Power**

Bishop J.C. Ryle said, "There are some passages in Scripture which deserve to be printed in letters of gold." I believe these seven verses of Ephesians 5 constitute one such passage. The apostle Paul is not known for his original poetry, though some passages clearly qualify, such as, (1 Cor. 13 and Phil. 2:1-11). But these seven verses in the middle of his dissertation on the necessity and practicality of being imitators of God, to me are sheer beauty intended to motivate us to the simple practicality of living in the power of the fullness of the Spirit.

These seven verses can be divided in half almost perfectly. The first 3 ½ verses are a forceful warning. The second 3 ½ verses are pure encouragement. Listen again:

**Look carefully then how you walk ... because the days are evil. ... do not be foolish ... do not get drunk ... but**

#### **BE FILLED WITH THE SPIRIT**

**... addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord ... giving thanks always ... and for everything to God ... in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ.** (Eph. 5:15-21)

What will people look like, act like when they are filled with the Spirit? They'll be quoting and singing God's Word. They won't always be complaining about all the evil; instead they'll be giving thanks for all the blessings. They won't be bullying, trying to throw their weight around. No, they'll be looking for ways to serve the needs of others through submission.

But still the question remains ... how? What method did these Ephesians use to change from their old manner of self-serve living to their new manner of Holy-Spirit living? Well, let's go to Acts 19 where we see what the first filling of the Ephesians with the Holy Spirit looked like. I find this absolutely fascinating: (Acts 19:1-7)

**And it happened that while Apollos was at Corinth, Paul passed through the inland country and came to Ephesus. There he found some disciples. And he said to them, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?" And they said, "No, we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit." And he said, "Into what then were you baptized?" They said, "Into John's baptism." And Paul said, "John baptized with the baptism of repentance, telling the people to believe in the one who was to come after him, that is, Jesus." On hearing this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. And when Paul had laid his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they began speaking in tongues and prophesying. There were about twelve men in all.**

Now, some Christians believe that this passage teaches that every Christian must be baptized twice, once for the forgiveness of your sins and once to receive the Holy Spirit. But that would contradict what Paul has defined for us in Ephesians 4 about our oneness being based in "one Lord, one faith, one baptism (un solo bautismo)." (Eph. 4:5) So, what was the Ephesians' problem? Their problem was that they had been baptized in the wrong name. They were baptized in John the Baptist's name, not Jesus' name. Their commitment was to someone who had no power to change their lives!

This would be like trying to make a purchase at the grocery store with an expired credit card. You run it through the card reader and it says, "Invalid." The cashier says, "You'll have to use another card." You say, "But I want to use this one." She gives you that funny look and says, "You can't use that one because it has no access to money!" Being baptized in a name other than Jesus is a nice compliment to that other person, but it won't give you access to the power Jesus promised you. You cannot walk with Jesus in the rhythm of His Spirit unless you have His Spirit living in you. Everyone receives the Spirit of Jesus when you accept Him as your Savior. And once you have His Spirit, you have access to His power to live like Him! You have access. But what are you doing with that access? Are you using that power?

In Eph. 4, the apostle Paul speaks about putting off the "old self" and putting on the "new self." Putting on the "new self" means living, filled with the Spirit. It's not a life of greater effort, greater discipline. That's the way of the "old self." The "new self" is life lived in surrender to the

Holy Spirit. The Spirit enters our lives when we become Christians. That's the single act of justification which makes the power of the Spirit accessible to us. But using that power is not a single act; it's the ongoing, daily process called "sanctification". As a Christian, do you understand the power, the spiritual wealth which you possess?

An old Scottish woman lived in poverty in her hometown. Years before, her son had immigrated to America and secured a great job, but was so busy he couldn't get away to visit his mother. One day, a friend of the elderly woman visited her in her sparsely furnished cottage. "Doesn't your son ever send you money to help with your needs?" she asked.

"No," the old woman said. "He does write me nice letters though, and he sends me the most interesting pictures."

The listening friend was annoyed at how heartless her son was. She asked his mom, "May I see the interesting pictures you spoke of?" The old woman proudly brought them out of her drawer. To the visitor's amazement, they weren't pictures at all. They were valuable banknotes from America worth tens of thousands of dollars. The old woman was needlessly living in poverty. She possessed great wealth and didn't know it, so, she wasn't using it.<sup>4</sup>

In his letter to the Corinthians, Paul explains that each person has an "inner" and "outer self" that correspond to the "new self" and the "old self." In 2 Cor. 4:16 writes:

**Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day.**

The inner self is made alive and empowered by the Holy Spirit and the outer self is powered by us – our physical, emotional desires and our will. A non-Christian lives completely by their outer self, what Paul calls the "old self." When you become a Christian, the Holy Spirit brings your inner self to life, BUT, but you still have the power to ignore the Holy Spirit and live by your physical and emotional desires, your "old self." So, any Christian who chooses to live by the "old self", has a war going on inside them! This is what Paul was talking about in chapter 4:

**And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God ... (Eph. 4:30a)**

He wouldn't tell us not to grieve Him if it weren't possible. And this isn't the only place Paul says this. In 1 Thess., he warns us not to *quench the Spirit*. In Acts it warns us not to *resist the Spirit*. Jesus told us why it's so important to listen to the Spirit in John 16:13:

**"When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth ..."**

Have you been frustrated in your attempts to walk faithfully with Jesus? You know in your head the commands of Jesus. You WANT to obey Him. You WANT to be a person who is full of *love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self control* – THE FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT; but you are constantly frustrated in your attempts to live this way. What's the problem? The problem is that only the Spirit can produce the fruit of the Spirit – NOT YOU! You've got to stop trying to produce HIS fruit through YOUR discipline, YOUR trying harder to control everything and everyone around you. That's the way of the old self.

This is why Jesus said that IF we decide to follow Him we must deny our old self and:

**"... take up [our] cross daily and follow [Him]." (Luke 9:23)**

Listen to the Chinese Christian evangelist, Watchman Nee's comments on this verse: "But what is the cross? The meaning of the cross is the breaking of the outer man. The cross puts the outer man to death and breaks open the shell ... It destroys our opinions, methods, self-love, and everything. Once the outer man is broken, the inner man is released, and the spirit is able to function."<sup>5</sup>

I'm going to give you an opportunity right now to choose to ask the Holy Spirit to fill you. We're going to sing a song that was literally, I believe, written by the Holy Spirit through a worship leader named Marie Barnett. Listen to her story:

Marie Barnett didn't consider herself a worship songwriter, although she had led worship with her husband, John, for years and wrote her own compositions during her personal worship time. [Marie says,] "I never sat down and wrote thinking, *This could be sung in a congregation*. It was more between me and the Lord in my bedroom with the door locked."

But that changed during a Sunday evening service at the Mission Viejo Vineyard [church] in Southern California. The Barnetts were leading worship as they had done hundreds of times before, and words to what would become the worship song "Breathe" just spontaneously came out. [Marie explains it this way:]

"We had been singing *Isn't He* by John Wimber... and my husband continued to play. I was so enthralled with Jesus at that moment, thinking I could never live, I could never even take a breath if I didn't have a word from Him every day, and I heard words 'this is the air I breathe. This is my daily bread' and I started singing them."

"People would come up to me at the grocery store [that week] and say, 'You know what we were singing on Sunday night? I've been singing it all week.'"

So, they began to sing the song regularly in church, and it continued to elicit a strong response, bringing many to tears. Barnett says even now she can hardly get through it. "I think the word *desperate* digs deep into me... The longer I'm a Christian, the more desperate I am for God."<sup>6</sup>

How desperate are you for the Holy Spirit to fill you right now? He wants to fill you with His power, so that you can know the Father's pleasure in you, so that you can know that no force of evil in this world can crush you because the Spirit of your uncrushable God is in you. As we sing this song which I believe was in fact, written by the Holy Spirit, I invite you to pray this trinitarian prayer. First, ask the Father to cleanse your heart, to forgive any sin. Second, thank Jesus for His sacrifice so that this gift of the Spirit could be yours. And third, invite the Holy Spirit to fill you to the brim. Cleanse — Thank — Invite. Stand with me now as we truly worship

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<sup>1</sup> Statistics from two sources: Jonathan Haidt, *The Anxious Generation* (New York: Penguin Press, 2024) pp. 26-27 And National Institute of Mental Health/American Psychological Association, Tori DeAngelis Vol. 53, no. 7

<sup>2</sup> John R.W. Stott, For an excellent treatment of this subject please see *Baptism & Fullness*, (Downers Grove, IL., Inter Varsity Press, 1976)

<sup>3</sup> Wiersbe, Warren, *Be Rich*, Victor Books, Wheaton, 1976, p.137

<sup>4</sup> [www.cru.org/us/en/train-and-grow/transferable-concept/be-filled-with-the-holy-spirit.5.html](http://www.cru.org/us/en/train-and-grow/transferable-concept/be-filled-with-the-holy-spirit.5.html)

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 12

<sup>6</sup> <https://cbn.com/article/integrity/breath-fresh-air-history-song-breathe>