

Filled with the Spirit

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Acts 4:1-12; 29-31

I have approached this study on the Holy Spirit with some basic tenants.

1. I have said that in seeking a biblical view of the Holy Spirit I do not make personal experiences to be the norm for biblical teaching, because God may reveal Himself in a variety of ways to people. We are looking for what the church taught about the Holy Spirit that is normative for all people.
2. I have taught that Pentecost is the fulfillment of the prophecy of the coming of the Holy Spirit to the church. The Holy Spirit is not a “second blessing” to be obtained after salvation.
3. There are many works of the Holy Spirit, including conviction for salvation, regeneration and sanctification, and sustaining the believer in faith. For a full account see my message last week.

Today, I want to speak on what the Bible means when it describes people as being filled with the Spirit.

First, let me begin with two stories. There are times when God brings spiritual awakenings and movements to people and communities. One of those came to a small village in Scotland back in the late 40's or early 50's. Some individuals stayed up all night praying for God to come and bring revival to the community. As they prayed into the early morning hours a light formed over the houses they were praying in. When the day broke forth, a sudden awareness of God was felt by all of the people in the community. No one could go anywhere or do anything but just be in prayer in the presence of the Lord. Many people flocked to the church to seek God. A spirit of repentance came over everyone as people began turning away from worldly sins. People who heard about the revival attempted to come to the town, but even as they walked along the roads, they fell to their

knees in awareness of the holiness of God, and wept at the presence of his love and forgiveness of sins. The presence of the Lord lasted for several days and then let up. People in that village still remember the outbreak of God's presence with tears of joy.

An Indian village in the north of Canada is another place where the presence of the Lord descended upon a village. It was a place where the darkness of alcohol, depression and suicides had controlled the native people. An Anglican pastor had planted a church there back in the late 1800's, but had no real success. However, a pastor began to lead many of the young people to turn away from alcoholism and other destructive things. They gathered a bunch of dark things and burned them in bonfire. After this, they gathered at a church to worship and seek Christ. During the service, as they were strumming their guitars and singing, a noise came along. They thought the amps were malfunctioning, so they turned off the amps. Yet, the noise continued to come as a steady beating sound. They became aware of the presence of the Lord, and they began to fall to their knees in prayer. They too felt the holiness of God and the overwhelming love of God among them. The spiritual encounter lasted only in that service, and then it was gone.

These are spiritual awakenings. However, they are life changing experiences for all who receive such experiences. However, as great and transforming as these experiences are they are not what the Bible talks about by being filled with the Spirit. We must be careful not to read into the biblical text our concepts of spirituality when we interpret the Scriptures.

Most of the times when the Scriptures say someone is filled with the Spirit it occurs in Luke's writings. So, let us look at one of the accounts in Acts.

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Acts 4:1-12, 29-31

The priests and the captain of the temple guard and the Sadducees came up to Peter and John while they were speaking to the people. ² They were greatly disturbed because the apostles were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection of the dead. ³ They seized Peter and John, and because it was evening, they put them in jail until the next day.

⁴ But many who heard the message believed, and the number of men grew to about five thousand. ⁵ The next day the rulers, elders and teachers of the law met in Jerusalem. ⁶ Annas the high priest was there, and so were Caiaphas, John, Alexander and the other men of the high priest's family. ⁷ They had Peter and John brought before them and began to question them: "By what power or what name did you do this?"

⁸ Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them: "Rulers and elders of the people! ⁹ If we are being called to account today for an act of kindness shown to a cripple and are asked how he was healed, ¹⁰ then know this, you and all the people of Israel: It is by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified but whom God raised from the dead, that this man stands before you healed.

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²⁹ Now, Lord, consider their threats and enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness. ³⁰ Stretch out your hand to heal and perform Miraculous signs and wonders through the name of your holy servant Jesus." ³¹ After they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly.

An analysis of the use of the phrase "filled with the Spirit" in the Bible indicates the phrase most often means being bold to speak for God.

1. In the Old Testament, the phrase is rarely used.

- Bezalel is first to be said to be filled with the Spirit. He was a tradesman. His filling with God's Spirit was evidenced in his skills in the craft of carving stone, wood and metals. Exo. 31:3; 35:31

- Joshua son of Nun. Deu. 34:9. (The only man besides Adam who was born without a belly button.)
- Micah 3:8 who says his filling enabled him to prophesy boldly.

But as for me, I am filled with power, with the Spirit of the LORD, and with justice and might, to declare to Jacob his transgression, to Israel his sin. (Mic. 3:8 NIVO)

2. In the New Testament, "being filled with the Spirit" is a phrase used by Luke to describe the power or boldness to preach, prophecy or testify of the gospel.

The exception is one passage in Ephesians which takes a different meaning. All other instances of the phrase "filled with the Spirit" occur in Luke – Acts.

- Luke 1:15 of John the Baptist, who was filled with the Spirit since birth. John's nature of being filled led him to boldness in preaching on sin.
- Luke 1:41 Elizabeth when she greeted Mary after her conception and after her baby leapt in her womb. (Being filled, she prophesied a blessing for Mary for her role in the incarnation.)
- Luke 1:67 Zechariah when he prophesies John the Baptist's role in preparing the way for Jesus.
- Acts 2:4 The disciples at Pentecost when the Spirit came upon them and they preached in the tongues of other nations.
- Acts 4:8 Peter as he gives his defense of the gospel before the high priest and religious leaders after the healing of the lame man.
- Acts 4:31 The disciples in their prayer meeting after Peter and John's release. With the filling, the people were filled with boldness.

- **Acts 9:17 Ananias prays for Saul that his sight might return and that he might be filled with the Holy Spirit. (At which time Saul was baptized and recovered from losing his sight.)**
- **Acts 13:52 The disciples were filled with joy and the Holy Spirit after being expelled from Antioch of Pisidia.**

In Luke's usage of the phrase being "filled with the Spirit," people are most often empowered to stand up for the gospel or speak out something of a prophecy for the kingdom of God.

3. Paul's use of being filled with the Spirit means being under the full control of God.

Ephesians 5:18 (18-21 in the Greek) a spiritual condition we are to seek in contrast to being drunk with wine.

¹⁸ And do not **be drunk** with wine, in which is **dissipation**; **but be filled** with the Spirit, ¹⁹ **speaking** to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, **singing** and **making melody** in your heart to the Lord, ²⁰ **giving thanks** always for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, ²¹ **submitting** to one another in the fear of God. (Eph. 5:18-21 NKJ)

Paul exhorts us to be filled with the Spirit as a contrast to being filled with wine in intoxication. (The contrasting verbs in yellow are put in contrast by the Greek conjunction, **alla**, which has the idea of "rather.") He is not saying they cannot drink wine, for Paul drank wine. The issue is intoxication to the point the mind is **wasted in dissipation**. The word for dissipation is a word that means to be "**unsaveable**." It has the idea of throwing your life away through inebriation. Drunkenness is a state of incapacitation. Being filled is not to be a state of incapacitation, but one of being more in the control of God. It is not ecstasy but conformity to the will of God that Paul is speaking by the phrase. It is the opposite of drunkenness.

The character of God is demonstrated by the 5 participles describing the activity of the spiritual filling, demonstrating a life of submission and worship, rather than a life wasted by drunkenness. Charismatics interpret this state to be one of intoxication in the Spirit, resulting in a spiritual worship in tongues or other ecstatic state. Yet, Paul includes being thankful and submissive

neither of which are expressed in a mindless state. A mind full of God and in control seems to be Paul's idea rather than a laid out spiritual condition.

It is a state of control, opposite a state of incapacitation. It is a state of God-directedness, a spirituality where the Holy Spirit directs the believers in Christ's nature. Attributes are given for this such as speaking and singing praises (Psalms and spiritual songs), thanksgiving, and being submissive to one another.

4. Another phrase, being "Full of the Spirit," also fits the idea of being in control by God or being bold to speak.

- **Luke 4:1 Jesus as he was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted.**
- **Acts 6:3, 5 A description of those chosen to serve (deacon) in the distribution of food.**
- **Acts 7:55 Stephen when he defends the gospel and speaks of his vision of Christ in heaven.**
- **Acts 11:24 Barnabas who was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and faith, and who led many people to the Lord.**

Possible:

- **Rom. 15:13 Paul's prayer that the Romans might be filled with joy and peace, and overflow with hope by the Holy Spirit.**

Summary

- **Being filled is primarily a Lucan phrase.**
- **It speaks of Boldness to preach or speak for God. (Luke)**
- **It is also used to speak of life under the control of God by the Holy Spirit. (Paul)**
- **It is not a state of spiritual ecstasy.**