

YOU CAN BE FILLED WITH THE HOLY SPIRIT**EPHESIANS 5:8-21**

The pastor of a very proper, formal congregation in Scotland had an old woman in his congregation who was in the habit of saying “Praise the Lord!” or “Amen!” out loud when anything particularly helpful was said from the pulpit. Frankly, it got on the pastor’s nerves just a bit, so he went to visit her at her home. It happened to be early January. “Betty,” he said, “I’ll make you a bargain with you. You yell out ‘Praise the Lord!’ just when I get to the best part of my sermon and I lose my train of thought. If you’ll just stop doing that all this year, I’ll give you two wool blankets at the end of the year.” Now Betty was poor financially and the offer of those blankets sounded very good to her. So she did her best to earn them. Sunday after Sunday she kept quiet. But then one Sunday a guest pastor came to speak who was just bubbling over with joy. As he preached on forgiveness of sin and the blessings that follow, the vision of those blankets began to fade for Betty and the joys of being a child of the one, true King grew. At last she couldn’t stand it any longer. She jumped up and cried out – right there in the service, mind you – “Blankets or no blankets, Hallelujah!”

Was that woman filled with the Holy Spirit? Is that what it means to be full of the Holy Spirit? Perhaps, but being filled with the Holy Spirit means more than being able to shout “Praise the Lord!” or “Hallelujah!” – although that’s not a bad place to start! We’re getting towards the end of our three month study of Paul’s letter to several churches in and around the city of Ephesus. Ephesians is all about your new identity in Jesus Christ. Above all and in all, you are now a child of the one, true King. That foundational fact changes everything. Part of your new identity is the possibility of living every day being full of the Holy Spirit. But what does that mean? That’s what we want to consider today. Let’s read the text that will guide our thinking. What does it mean to be filled with the Holy Spirit? Let me suggest two key words.

IT MEANS TO BE CAPTIVATED.

Look with me again at v. 18. “Don’t be drunk with wine, because that will ruin your life. Instead, be filled with the Holy Spirit.” (Eph 5:18 NLT) Does it seem a little odd to you that Paul, this great Christian leader, mentions being drunken in the same context with being filled with the Holy Spirit? Whatever Paul’s rationale, there are some interesting parallels between being drunk and being filled with the Holy Spirit. For example, we sometimes refer to someone who is drunk as being “under the influence” of alcohol. In other words, that person is captivated, controlled or dominated by the alcohol. It has affected the mind, the body, the speech, the attitudes and the behavior of that person. Well, when a person is “under the influence” of the Holy Spirit, he or she is captivated, controlled and dominated by the Holy Spirit. Now the Holy Spirit affects your mind, your body, your words, your attitudes and your behavior.

Please notice with me at least four important facts about being filled with the Holy Spirit from v. 18. First, it’s a command, not a suggestion. God doesn’t say, “May I suggest that you get filled with the My Spirit?” No, it’s a command. Be filled with the Spirit. Secondly, the object of the verb – “be filled” - is plural, meaning that every Christian is

called to be filled with the Holy Spirit. It's a command given to every Christian; therefore, it's something that every follower of Jesus should experience. If you're not filled with the Holy Spirit, there's clearly something deficient about your relationship with God. This is not an experience reserved for pastors, or missionaries, or Christian leaders. Being filled with the Holy Spirit is available to every child of the one, true King.

Third, the verb is in the passive voice – "be filled with the Spirit." This isn't something you work up or produce on your own. This is something that the Holy Spirit does to you and in you. But, that's not to suggest that it's totally passive. After all, in order to get drunk, you have to drink. Likewise, in order to be filled with the Spirit, you have to open yourself to His influence. Fourth, the verb is in the present tense which in the Greek language – the language the New Testament was written in originally – means continuous, ongoing action. It is entirely correct to translate that verse as, "...keep on being filled with the Holy Spirit." It's not a once and done experience. Being filled with the Holy Spirit should keep on happening to you over and over again with increasing frequency the longer you follow Jesus.

Being filled with the Holy Spirit isn't about how much of the Holy Spirit you have, but rather how much the Holy Spirit has of you. When you first start to follow Jesus, your spiritual capacity is rather small. There are many areas of your life and mine that need to get cleaned out, corrected and pointed in a new, positive direction. As you grow and develop in your knowledge and experience of God, your spiritual capacity grows and the Holy Spirit is always seeking to fill you to your current capacity level. Many of us have studied about or watched documentaries about World War 2 in the Pacific theatre. Much of it was island warfare and the US military adopted a certain strategy. The Japanese military would control an important, strategic island. The Marines were sent in to establish a beachhead. Then, they would gradually take over more and more territory until either all the Japanese soldiers were killed or they left the island. When you put your trust in Jesus as your Savior and Lord, it's as if the Holy Spirit establishes a spiritual beachhead in your life. But His job is far from over. He begins the process of claiming more and more territory or sections of your life and mine. In fact, it's a lifelong process. Essentially, that's what the Holy Spirit is seeking to do in your life and mine 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, year after year until we get to Heaven.

So, how does a person get filled with the Holy Spirit? I wish I could recommend that you just go and seek some ecstatic experience with God. It would be nice to offer six easy "how to" steps that would lead you inevitably to being filled with God's Spirit. The real answer to that question, however, is rather simple, straightforward and not very sensational. How are you filled with the Holy Spirit? Personal, daily surrender or submission to Jesus as your Lord. I know the word "Lord" is not one we use much outside of the church. I suggest that when we say Jesus is your Lord that it means He is your Boss 24 hours a day, 7 days a week and 365 days a year. Yes, Jesus is your Savior because He died on the cross and rose again for you. But He is also your Boss – the most loving, generous Boss you will ever have, but your Boss, nonetheless. He has every right to tell you how to live every aspect of your life. I find many Christians never quite understand that very important fact. If you like the fact that Jesus is your

Savior, but you resist or reject His Lordship of your life, you don't really understand Jesus or what He came to do. Is that such a big deal? Indeed, it is. If you don't recognize Jesus' Lordship over you personally, I question if He has ever truly become your Savior. Jesus didn't die on the cross so you could get a free "get out of hell" card, but instead to make it possible for the Holy Spirit to fully captivate your life in every way.

Experiencing Jesus as the Lord or the Boss of your life means constantly giving Him the most control of your life that you're capable of giving Him at that point in time. You offer as much as you know about yourself today to as much as you know about God today. That's not static. It's not once and done. As you surrender to the Holy Spirit daily, He will keep on showing you areas of your life that need to be submitted to Him, turned over to Him and surrendered to Him. A person who gets drunk surrenders himself and his will to alcohol. As a follower of Jesus, you surrender yourself and your will to the Holy Spirit. Now, people don't just fill their lives up with alcohol or drugs. Some people fill up their lives with loving money or the things money can buy. Others fill up their lives with ambitions for success in some other area of life: a certain career, for example. As a child of the one, true King, you are called and expected to fill up your life with a Person – the Holy Spirit – being fully surrendered and submitted to Him.

Imagine with me just now two glasses of water up here and two packets of Alka-Seltzer. I drop a packet of Alka-Seltzer, with the wrapper on, into one glass. What will happen? Not much of anything! Then I plop an unsealed packet into the second glass. What will happen then? We will all watch it fill with fizz. Both glasses have the Alka-Seltzer, just as every follower of Jesus has the Holy Spirit. But notice how you can have the Holy Spirit and yet not be filled with Him. Your goal and mine is to live in such a way as to unwrap the packaging around the presence and power of the Holy Spirit within us. To be filled with the Holy Spirit means that we allow him to occupy and control every area of our lives. How much of you does the Holy Spirit have?

Can you be filled with the Holy Spirit all the time? Sure! Jesus was described as being full of the Holy Spirit continually. The first Christian to die for his faith in Jesus, a man called Stephen, is described as a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit. Barnabas, a close associate of Paul in ministry, is described as a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and faith. Being continuously filled with the Holy Spirit ought to a personal goal for you and me. Is it even possible to be controlled by the Holy Spirit all the time? Yes. First, confess any personal sin the moment the Holy Spirit convicts you about it and turn away from it then and there. Don't excuse or rationalize it away. Get rid of it immediately. The Bible makes it clear that the Holy Spirit can't fill you if you're tolerating known sin in your life. But when you confess your sin, you are forgiven and the Holy Spirit can assume His rightful place in your life. Second, trust God in every area of your life and live by faith every day. That is a whole lot easier said than done! Yes, we begin to follow Jesus by faith. We put our trust in Him for eternal life. But it's much harder to live by faith day in and day out and entrust every area of your life to Him – your job, your marriage, your kids, your finances, your health. Not easy at all! But when you do – and as you do – you get filled with the Spirit and you stay filled with the Spirit. What does it mean to be filled with the Spirit? It means to be captivated. But here's a second word.

IT MEANS TO BE ACTIVATED.

Sometimes the Holy Spirit will empower or enable you to do something specific for God. Back in the Old Testament, God filled people with His Spirit for such diverse tasks as prophesying to His people, or leading His people into battle against their enemies, or even decorating the Tabernacle – the place where His people worshipped Him. In the New Testament, God filled people with His Spirit to be able to preach with great power and effectiveness, or to perform miraculous healings on occasion. If you've been a follower of Jesus for a while, you've probably experienced this kind of Holy Spirit filling. Maybe you were sharing the message of Jesus with someone. Maybe it was when you were facing some great life crisis. Maybe you were involved in some ministry opportunity inside or outside the church. You're just suddenly aware that you're operating on a different, higher, better and more powerful level spiritually. You know what is happening through you is beyond your own ability. When the Holy Spirit fills you, He not only captivates you, He activates you as well. He has the power to get us moving and doing things that accomplish God's plan and purpose in some way.

Think about that analogy to being drunk again. When a person is drunk, can you see the effects even though he or she doesn't have a drink in hand at the moment? Of course. By the same token, when you are full of the Holy Spirit, other people can see the effect He is having on you and in you even though they can't see Him literally. In the passage we read today, Paul mentions some of those effects. I don't think he meant to be exhaustive, but there's enough here that you get the idea clearly enough. What does being filled with the Holy Spirit look like? Here are a few examples.

When you're filled with the Spirit, you demonstrate godly attitudes and behavior. "For once you were full of darkness, but now you have light from the Lord. So live as people of light! For this light within you produces only what is good and right and true." (Eph 5:8-9 NLT) If you were here last week, we looked at 4:17-5:7. Paul uses the metaphor to taking off filthy, smelly clothes – your life before Jesus – and putting on clean, fresh clothes – your new life in Jesus. He changes the image or metaphor to darkness and light in 5:8-14, but the message is the same. If you're going to be full of the Holy Spirit, you have to get rid of dark things like stealing, lying, an uncontrolled temper, an abusive tongue, greed, holding grudges and sexual immorality. You have to live into the light by telling the truth, being financially responsible, controlling your anger, using your mouth to encourage, being generous, practicing forgiveness and being doing sex God's way.

When you're filled with the Holy Spirit, you live wisely. "So be careful how you live. Don't live like fools, but like those who are wise." (Eph 5:15 NLT) You scrutinize how you live. You constantly examine your behavior, your attitudes, your values and your priorities to make sure they line up with God. When you're filled with the Holy Spirit, you make the most of every opportunity God gives you. "Make the most of every opportunity in these evil days." (Eph 5:16 NLT). When God gives you the opportunity to touch someone's life in His name, you do it. When God gives you the opportunity to serve Him in some way, you do it. You are constantly available to Jesus for His purposes. What will honor Him? What will promote Him? What will draw attention to Him?

When you're filled with the Spirit, you have joy in your life. "...Instead, be filled with the Holy Spirit, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs among yourselves, and making music to the Lord in your hearts." (Eph 5:18-19 NLT) In fact, Spirit-filled Christians have a tendency to sing with joy even if they can't carry a tune in a bucket! When you're filled with the Spirit, you're thankful. "And give thanks for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ." (Eph 5:20 NLT) Spirit-filled followers of Jesus have setbacks, disappointments, and heartaches like everyone else. Nevertheless, they have the ability to keep on being grateful to God under all conditions and in all circumstances. I don't mean a sort of artificial, bubbly, jolly face all the time. Spirit-filled gratitude is just able to keep on praising God even when hard times come. When you're filled with the Holy Spirit, you have a submissive spirit. "And further, submit to one another out of reverence for Christ." (Eph 5:21 NLT) You're easy to get along with. You aren't defensive, prickly, argumentative and insisting on your rights all the time. You show forth a basic humility that makes it easy to be around you. You know how to listen. You build up and encourage those around you. If you want to be filled with the Spirit, there's a few examples of what it looks like.

Here's a final thought. Churches can and should be filled with the Holy Spirit, too; not just individuals. Remember that Paul was writing to several churches in and around Ephesus not just individual Christians. The churches we read about in the New Testament were far from perfect. But they were singing, joyful and spiritually expectant places. They spent more time praising God than asking things of God. Is our church like that? A Spirit-filled church is discovering the joy of building up and improving the relationships of people in our midst. Sure, there will always be some conflicts and disagreements, but a deep love for one another and submission to one another ought to pervade any local church. Is our church like that? A Spirit-filled church is always, always, always outwardly centered. It focuses on lost people, on hurting people, on struggling people and tries to point them to Jesus. It is not filled with people who ask, "How can I get my own spiritual needs met here?" Instead, it is filled with people who ask, "How can we best reach people in Northland that need Jesus?" Is our church like that? You always get as much of God as you really want. That's true of individuals and that's true of a local church. How much of God do you really want? Karl Road Baptist Church, how much of God do you really want? That leads me to ask you and me a final question. Do you really want to be filled with the Holy Spirit? Don't answer that question too quickly. It's a question that deserves more than an emotional, sentimental, or hasty answer. Why? There is always a cost involved in being filled with the Holy Spirit. There's always a price to pay to be filled with the Holy Spirit of God.

Even though Chuck Colson passed away a couple of years ago, many people still remember him and were profoundly touched by his life. He was involved in the Watergate conspiracy during the administration of President Nixon and spent time in jail as a result. But he went on to become a devoted follower of Jesus, a strong advocate for prison reform and ministry, and a Christian leader of great influence. He told an amazing story about another man named Jack Eckerd who died back in 2004. Eckerd was the founder of the one of the largest drugstore chains in the United States – Eckerd Drugs – a chain of some 1500 stores that were eventually sold off to CVS and Rite Aid.

Jack Eckerd saw Chuck Colson on TV one day talking about prison reform and the power of Jesus Christ to change lives. He invited Colson down to Florida to look into a criminal justice crises that Florida was facing at that time. Colson agreed and he and Eckerd flew around to different cities in Florida in Eckerd's personal Lear jet advocating criminal justice reform. Everywhere they went, Eckerd introduces Colson and would say something like this, "This is my friend, Chuck Colson. He's born again and I'm not. I wish I were." And then he's sit down and Colson would speak. They'd get back on the plane, and Colson would talk to Jack Eckerd about Jesus. He gave him books to read. Over the next year, he just pestered Jack Eckerd about putting his trust in Jesus. Eventually, Eckerd called Colson and told him that he now believed in Jesus. Colson said, "You're born again!" Eckerd said, "No, I'm not. I haven't felt anything." Colson said, "Yes, you are! Pray with me right now." After the prayer and Colson's reassurance that he was truly born again, Jack Eckerd said, "I am? Marvelous!"

Now, here's the rest of the story. Soon after putting his trust in Jesus, Jack Eckerd was walking through one of his drug stores. He'd seen copies of Playboy and Penthouse magazines in his stores many times, but it had never bothered him. For the first time ever, the presence of those magazines in his stores bothered him. He called the president of his company and said, "Take Playboy and Penthouse out of all my stores." The president said, "You can't mean that, Mr. Eckerd. We make 3 million dollars a year on those magazines." Jack Eckerd said, "Take 'em out of my stores." So in 1500 Eckerd Drugs stores by one man's decision, all those pornographic magazines were removed. All because one man gave his life to Christ and then understood what it meant to be filled with the Holy Spirit. When Chuck Colson heard about it, he called Jack Eckerd up and said, "I want to use that story. Did you do that because of your commitment to Christ?" Eckerd said, "Why else would I give away 3 million dollars? The Lord wouldn't let me off the hook."

That's what it means to be filled with the Holy Spirit. You realize God wants you to do more than just believe in Jesus so you can go to Heaven when you die. He wants you to be His man or His woman in this world all day and every day. And to be filled with the Holy Spirit and to stay filled with the Holy Spirit means doing what God wants you to do when He wants you to do it. It means saying "Yes" to the Holy Spirit – even when it cost you something or you pay a price. Jack Eckerd didn't stop there. He challenged other drug store chains to do the same. The result? In a period of one year, 11,000 retail outlets in our country removed those magazines. It wasn't because someone passed a law, but because one child on the one, true King was filled with the Holy Spirit. When He fills your life, you will be captivated and activated.