

How To Be Filled With the Spirit

The filling of the Holy Spirit is greatly misunderstood by many. Some Christians think that the Holy Spirit is not normally living within them and only dwells within them when they are filled with the Holy Spirit. But Scripture teaches that the Holy Spirit continuously lives within a believer starting at the moment one believes in Christ for the forgiveness of one's sins - that is, at the moment one has saving faith. That is the message of Romans 8:9. What is saving faith? Saving faith occurs when a person believes only Jesus Christ can forgive their sins and responds in repentance over his or her sin (Luke 13:5; Acts 11:18) and yields himself or herself to God from the heart (Romans 10:9-11).

1 Corinthians 12:13 and Ephesians 1:13 teach that at the moment a person has saving faith that person is placed in the body of Christ by the Holy Spirit and sealed. Other passages say the Holy Spirit starts living in a believer at the moment of saving faith. 1 John 5:13 says,

These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life.
1 John 5:13 (NASB)

Romans 8:9, 11 and Galatians 5:25 also indicate the Holy Spirit must dwell within a believer. If not, the person is not a believer. That is, the Holy Spirit continuously lives within

every believer.

It is important to understand that even though the Spirit dwells within a believer, in the book of Ephesians the apostle Paul urged the believers in Ephesus to be strengthened with the Holy Spirit. This implies that there is something more than the Spirit baptizing, sealing and dwelling in a believer.

For this reason I bow my knees before the Father . . . that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man . . .
Ephesians 3:14-16 (NASB)

Did you notice in the passage that Paul prayed that they would be strengthened with the Holy Spirit? Paul was not

praying that they become Christians because they were already Christians. The book of Ephesians was written to people who were already Christians or "saints" according to Ephesians 1:1.

Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, To the saints who are at Ephesus and who are faithful in Christ Jesus . . . Ephesians 1:1 (NASB)

Paul was asking for the Holy Spirit to strengthen these Christians. He tells us that the Holy Spirit can help believers



have victory over sin (Galatians 5:16-17). The Holy Spirit is the spiritual power for ministry (1 Corinthians 2:4; 12:7). The Holy Spirit also helps us understand the Bible (1 Corinthians 2:14; 1 John 2:20, 27). These are just a few ways in which the Holy Spirit ministers to us and works through us. How does this happen? It happens when we are “walking in” or are “filled with” the Holy Spirit. There are several passages in the Bible that will help us understand what this means.

WALKING IN THE SPIRIT. The first passage we will look at is Galatians 5:16-23.

But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh. For the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, so that you may not do the things that you please. Galatians 5:16-17 (NASB)

Here we are commanded by God to walk in the Spirit. To walk in the Holy Spirit is the key to victory over sin - to living a holy life. The key to victory over sin is not self-punishment, doing penance, praying the rosary, or “mortification” of sin. It is not self-help books or going to prolonged counseling sessions. (Did you know that the success rate of professional counselors is lower than counseling with a loving friend?) The key to living a holy life as a Christian is to walk in the Spirit. The Holy Spirit is God’s Counselor. As Christians, we are commanded to walk in the Spirit since we are already living in the Spirit (Romans 8:3; Galatians 5:25; 1 Peter 4:6).

The Greek word for “walk” in this verse has the idea of continually walking in the Spirit and the Greek word for “carry out” has the idea of accomplishment. That is, if we are constantly walking in the Spirit, the desire of our flesh will not be satisfied. That is a strong statement. Now we need to ask, “What is the desire of the flesh?” The answer is given in the next verses,

Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, envying, drunkenness, carousing . . . Galatians 5:19-21 (NASB)

The desire of the flesh is to commit sin. The flesh wants to sin. When we are walking in the Spirit, we will not be constantly sinning. If a Christian is walking in the Spirit, he or she will discover some exciting changes taking place in his/her life. He/she will find that God the Holy Spirit is changing his/her life; and the fruit of the Spirit is growing, blossoming, and flourishing.

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control . . . Galatians 5:22-23 (NASB)

Our flesh wants to sin, but the Spirit wants to grow the fruit of righteousness. How does the fruit grow? It grows as we faithfully and constantly walk in the Spirit.

The Greek word for “walk” is *peripateo* which means “to walk up and down” or “walk about” in the Spirit. It does not mean to walk up and down on the Holy Spirit. It does not mean to walk around the Holy Spirit but “in the Holy Spirit.” How do we do that? Do you climb inside the Holy Spirit? If so, how do we do that? No, we cannot climb inside the Spirit, but He can come inside of us and start directing us. The easiest way for this to happen is to let the Holy Spirit take control of us. We will discover in the next section how we can let this occur.

FILLED WITH THE SPIRIT. Have you ever wondered what God’s will is for your life? Did you know that the Bible reveals His will for us? One very important part of the will of God is “to be filled with” or “controlled by” the Holy Spirit.

So then do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit . . . Ephesians 5:17-18 (NASB)

To be filled with the Holy Spirit means that the Holy Spirit has complete control of us. Notice God’s illustration in Ephesians 5:17-18. He commands us to not become drunk with wine but to be drunk with the Holy Spirit. To be drunk means that wine has taken control of our senses. That illustrates the meaning of the Greek word “filled.” It means “to

make full, complete.” It was also used to refer to someone who was filled full of food. The will of God is that we be filled with the Holy Spirit or controlled by Him moment-by-moment. When we allow this to happen, we will be . . .

. . . speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord; always giving thanks for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God, even the Father; and be subject to one another in the fear of Christ. Ephesians 5:19-21 (NASB)

A Spirit-filled Christian will have joy in the heart, thankfulness, and humility towards others or submission. These are the marks of a Spirit-filled Christian. The passage does not talk about any other experiences.

Ephesians 5:19-21 is not talking about smiles on the face but melody and joy in the heart. A pastor who commented about the familiar statement that a Christian should have a happy smile on their face observed, “Where the sun always shines, there is a desert.” That is true. A person who does not experience suffering is a shallow Christian. The great saints of the ages suffered. The great preacher C. Spurgeon suffered greatly with depression between his messages. The saints in Hebrews 11:35-38 suffered great torture. The prophet Jeremiah is called the weeping prophet. This passage is also talking about humility on the inside that causes wives to submit to their husbands (Ephesians 5:22), husbands to love their wives (Ephesians 5:25-28), children to obey their parents (Ephesians 6:1), and slaves to obey their masters (Ephesians 6:5).

Colossians 3:16-22 is a very interesting passage because it is very close to Ephesians 5:17-6:5.

Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God . . . Wives, be subject to your husbands . . . Husbands, love your wives . . . Children, be obedient to your parents . . . Slaves, in all things obey those who are your masters on earth . . . Colossians 3:16-22 (NASB)

In Ephesians 5:17-18 the list starts with “be filled with the Spirit,” and in Colossians the list starts with the “Word of Christ.” In both Ephesians and Colossians we are commanded to do something and then the results which follow are identical. In Ephesians we are commanded to be “filled with the Spirit” and in Colossians we are commanded to dwell richly in the “word of Christ.” Then singing, thankfulness, and submission to others follows. Why? Because being filled with the Spirit and spending time in the Word of God go together. One who is filled with the Spirit will “dwell richly” in the Word. The Greek word for “dwell” means to “live in” like a person living in a home. This is an important spiritual insight. It implies we want to spend as much time as we can reading, meditating on and studying the Bible. The Spirit then uses the Word of God to make us more like Jesus Christ.

STEPS TO BEING FILLED WITH THE SPIRIT. Now let us put it all together. It is a command and it is the will of God for every Christian. To be constantly filled with the Spirit results in victory over sin, peace and joy in the heart, and submission/humility towards others. First, in order to be filled with the Spirit, you must desire that the Holy Spirit take control of you – “to fill you.” You must want Him to take over your life. Second, in order to be filled with or walk in the Spirit, you must confess your sins to God the Father every time you realize that you have sinned and ask for the Holy Spirit to take control of your life again. Third, you must spend as much time reading the Bible as you can. The Holy Spirit will change your life gradually, give you increasing victory over sins in your life, provide peace and joy in your heart and give you a tremendous longing to know Him. You will never be perfect, but you will become more and more like Jesus. Even though you sin, you will see God at work. Come – walk in the Spirit! You will be carried along like a sailboat whose sails are filled with the wind!