

# THE PERVASIVE AND PREVAILING INFLUENCE

Theme: We are instructed in Scripture to be 'filled' with the Holy Spirit.

So far, the subjects that we've touched on regarding the Holy Spirit have involved the things that He graciously does for us apart from our participation—that is, ministries that He performs toward us for which we are the passive recipients. But now, we begin to consider one of the things that He does in cooperation with us—a ministry that requires our active obedience and submission. We begin to explore what the Bible teaches us about the wonderful ministry of His 'filling' of the believer.

Dr. Charles Ryrie wrote; "From the viewpoint of Christian living, the filling with the spirit is probably the most important aspect of the doctrine of the Holy Spirit."<sup>1</sup> It is worth our time to consider carefully and reverently. And so, over the next while, we will be dividing our study into three parts: (1) the character, (2) the conditions, and (3) the consequences of His filling. This morning, we begin with its character—that is, what exactly it means to be "filled" with the Spirit.

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## I. THE MEANING OF THE WORD "FILLED".

- A. The Greek word that is usually translated "to be filled" with respect to this ministry of the Holy Spirit is *plāroō* (and its various forms). It basically means "to make full", or "to bring a thing to completion". But often, this word is used in the figurative sense to overwhelm a person with a prevailing influence or emotion. Take Luke 5:26 as an example. That verse speaks of people being "amazed, and they glorified God and were filled with fear ..." <sup>2</sup>—that is, they were overwhelmingly ruled-over by an emotional sense of awe and reverent fear. Or consider Luke 6:11. In that verse, the enemies of our Lord were "filled with rage"—so much so, in fact, that it controlled their actions; and as a result of it, they plotted what they might do to Him. Another such reference might be Luke 2:40. That verse tells us that, as our Lord grew into adulthood, He was "filled with wisdom". These expressions speak of a 'qualitative' sense of filling rather than a 'quantitative' sense of it (that is, being pervasively influenced by a thing rather than being literally filled up to capacity with it).
- B. This is important to remember; because the Spirit's influence in our lives is not a matter of 'quantity'. We don't receive different 'quantities' or 'portions' of the Holy Spirit, or ever need to ask for "more" of the Holy Spirit to indwell us. As John 3:34 says, "...for God does not give the Spirit by measure"; suggesting to us that when the Holy Spirit enters our lives, He indwells us in the fullness of His whole person. Rather, these verses speak of the Spirit's filling as a matter of the degree to which He exercises an influence over us. We either allow Him a prevailing rule over us or we do not. Another way to say this is that we are not filled with the Spirit like a dixie-cup would be filled with water. Rather, we are filled with the Spirit in the same way that a dixie-cup that has

submerged beneath the waves of the ocean drifts along in a completely yielded manner, and becomes prevailed over by all of its fullness and vastness.

## II. THE SOVEREIGN ASPECT OF THE SPIRIT'S "FILLING".

- A. There is a sense in which we should speak of the Spirit's filling as a sovereign act of His own initiative by which He takes a prevailing control of someone for a special activity or purpose (that is, as opposed to waiting for us to yield ourselves to Him). Dr. Charles Ryrie says that this "emphasizes the *event* of being filled in contrast to the *state* that results from being filled [emphasis added]. It occurs in Luke 1:15 (of John the Baptist), Luke 1:41 (of Elizabeth), Luke 1:67 (of Zacharias), Acts 2:4 (of the group on the day of Pentecost), Acts 4:8 (of Peter), Acts 4:31 (of the believers), Acts 9:17 (of Paul), and Acts 13:9 (of Paul again)."<sup>3</sup>
- B. Dr. Ryrie explains further;

*In these instances God simply overpowered these people, sovereignly filling and thus controlling them by the Spirit for some special activity. God did not impose any conditions for experiencing this aspect of filling. Also, some of the same people had this experience more than once, the repetition being due to a new need for special service and not due to any intervening sin on the part of those people that would necessitate another filling (Acts 2:4; 4:8, 31).<sup>4</sup>*

- C. This is an aspect of the "filling" of the Holy Spirit that is not so much conditioned upon a believer's choice as it is upon God's desire to use that believer in particular circumstances; and thus enabling them for that usefulness. It's something that the Holy Spirit does in a believer's life as He sovereignly chooses. It's important to point out that this involves no loss or suppression of the essential personality or consciousness of the man or woman the Spirit sovereignly fills. As the Bible teaches us in 1 Corinthians 14:32-33, "And the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets. For God is not the author of confusion, but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints."

## III. THE SUBMISSIVE ASPECT OF THE SPIRIT'S "FILLING".

- A. Another sense in which the Spirit "fills" someone is in the pervasive influence, the enabling and the control of the Holy Spirit that the believer willingly submits to as a constant, habitual pattern of practical obedience. We might call this the 'daily submissive filling' in order to differentiate it from the 'unique sovereign filling' we considered above. Dr. Ryrie describes this as "an abiding state of fullness of the Spirit rather than a specific event and which produces a character of life that may be equated with spirituality."<sup>5</sup> It's that 'filling' that comes about by the believer's willingness to continually yield to the Holy Spirit's abiding presence. Some of the examples Dr. Ryrie refers to are Luke 4:1 (of our Lord), Acts 6:3, 5 (of the first helpers of the apostles), Acts 7:55 (of Stephen), Acts 11:24 (of Barnabas), Acts 13:52 (of the disciples). This is that aspect of the filling of the Holy Spirit that we are to consciously and willingly yield ourselves to and cooperate with. It's the way the ministry of the Holy Spirit touches the life of a believer in a personal, day-to-day life-style sort of way—producing the life of Jesus in them.
- B. Perhaps the most important passage on this type of filling is Ephesians 5:18; where Paul

wrote, “And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit ...” Note that to be drunk with wine is to yield one’s self—in a prevailing and pervasive way—to the overwhelming influence of intoxicating drink. We could think here of Acts 2:13; where the believers, filled with the Holy Spirit, were mocked by bystanders who said, “They are full of new wine”. While drunkenness is a sin that the Bible calls us to avoid, it is, nevertheless, a great illustration of what it means to be submitted to the filling of the Holy Spirit. Instead of willingly placing one’s self under the prevailing and pervasive influence of wine (or any other such substance), we are instead to be willingly “filled with the Spirit”. There are some important things we should notice about this:

- (1) Consider that this is put in the form of a command (that is, we are instructed to be filled with the Holy Spirit as an act of willing obedience).
- (2) Consider also that it is (in the original language) put in the passive voice. That is, we are to passively allow ourselves to be filled with the Spirit rather than to actively seek to fill ourselves with the Spirit. He indwells us fully; and all we have to do is allow Him to have the influence He wishes to have and is ready to exert over us, and to yield willingly and obediently to Him.)
- (3) Finally, consider that this is put in the present tense; indicating a constant, ongoing habit of life. (We aren't to be 'filled with the Spirit' at one point in our lives and consider that to be final; but are rather to have a life-style of continual, day-by-day, moment-by-moment yielding to His influence.)

C. Though they are different in nature, these two distinct aspects of the filling should be seen as one ministry toward the believer by the one Person of the Holy Spirit. As Dr. Ryrie explains, “Spirit-filling is both the Spirit’s sovereignly controlling someone for special service and the Spirit’s filling the believer with His own character.”<sup>6</sup>

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When the young, captive Jewish woman Esther was among the women who were being presented to the Persian King Ahasuerus in his search for a wife, the women were each given a twelve-month beauty treatment. At the end of this treatment, each woman was given whatever she desired to take in presenting herself to the king. But when it came to be Esther’s turn to present herself to the king, she “requested nothing but what Hegai the king’s eunuch, the custodian of the women, advised” (Esther 2:15). As a result, “Esther obtained favor in the sight of all who saw her” (v. 16), and “she obtained grace and favor” in the king’s sight more than all the others. She wisely submitted herself to the prevailing influence Hegai’s guidance—since he knew best what it was that the king desired. As a result, she became the king’s bride.

We too are being prepared for our Bridegroom—the Lord Jesus Christ. The wedding day is coming soon. And God the Father has graciously provided His indwelling Holy Spirit—our Helper—to prepare us for that day. We would be very wise to yield ourselves completely to the Holy Spirit’s good influence, and guidance, and ‘beautification process’. He knows exactly what will please our Lord; and to the degree we submit to His prevailing and pervasive influence, to that degree we will be living a life that is pleasing in His sight.

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<sup>1</sup>Charles C. Ryrie, *The Holy Spirit* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1997), p. 155.

<sup>2</sup>All Scripture readings are taken from *The Holy Bible, New King James Version*; copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc.

<sup>3</sup>Ryrie, p. 157.

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup>Ryrie, p. 157-8.

<sup>6</sup>Ryrie, p. 159