

Bethany Bible Church; AM Bible Study; March 7, 2018
The Holy Spirit—Our Helper; Lesson 19; His Filling

A HEART FOR THE SPIRIT'S FILLING

Theme: There are certain we must do to cooperate with the Holy Spirit's 'filling' ministry.

In our last time together, we began to consider the wonderful ministry of the Holy Spirit in filling the believer. We characterized the Spirit's "filling" ministry by saying that it refers to the biblical command to allow the indwelling Holy Spirit to influence and empower the individual believer in a prevailing and pervasive way. And now in this lesson—because we have established that this is a ministry in which the individual believer cooperates with the Holy Spirit—we will talk about the what we must do in order to cooperate with the Spirit and experience His filling ministry. As the Swiss/French Theologian Rene Pache has wonderfully written;

“The Spirit in us is like an overwhelming force; He immediately occupies every particle of our being that we relinquish to Him, even as the air immediately fills any empty space to which it is given access. That is why we have nothing extraordinary to do to be filled with the spirit.”¹

To be filled with the Spirit is natural for a believer. But though, as Dr. Pache says, they are not 'extraordinary' things. there are nevertheless certain things that the believer must do. So; assuming that someone has truly placed their faith in Jesus Christ and has been saved by Him, what must he or she then do? There are at least four basic things that should characterize the Spirit-filled believer: (1) confession, (2) desire, (3) submission, and (4) trust.²

I. THE BELIEVER SHOULD CONFESS ALL KNOWN SIN.

- A. Earlier in our study, we learned that sin in our lives grieves the Holy Spirit. The Spirit—whom we are taught in the Bible to call “Holy”—will only fill us if He is not made to grieve by the presence of of unconfessed sin in our lives that we rebelliously cling to. Holding on to such sin deliberately in our hearts is essentially the same as telling the Holy Spirit, “You’re not really welcome to make Yourself fully at home in me.” The Bible says, “If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear” (Psalm 66:18).³
- B. It is not enough that we merely acknowledge the presence of sin. It must be confessed to God—and in such a way as to turn from it—in order for the Spirit to be willing to fill the believer. To “confess” means to ‘say the same thing’ as God says about our sin; and in practical terms, this would mean that we acknowledge that a specific sin is in our lives, that we agree with Him in our heavenly Father's verdict on that sin, and that we admit that it made it necessary for our Savior to die on the cross for us. We must do as the apostle John says about our sin, and ‘walk in the light’ with regard to it. He wrote,

This is the message which we have heard from Him and declare to you, that God is light and in Him is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin (1 John 1:5-7).

The cleansing for our sin has been completely provided through the blood of Jesus; but confession and repentance are the necessary proofs of our full acceptance of that cleansing. John goes on to say,

If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us (vv. 8-10).

- C. One of the greatest examples we have of how such confession of sin allows the Spirit freedom to fill the believer is in the experience of King David. In two great psalms (Psalm 32 and 51), David expressed the joy he experienced over God's ability to restore him and use him after he confessed sin. A good pattern to follow is to regularly pray David's prayer in Psalm 139:23-24; "Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me, and know my anxieties; and see if there is any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting." That's a prayer that the Holy Spirit—who loves us and wants to fill us—will be glad to answer whenever sincerely prayed. He will help us to know what sins grieve Him, and what sins need to be confessed that we are not even yet aware of; and He even knows the best and most merciful time to bring those things to our attention. He never reveals the truth to us in order to harm us; but always to restore us and help us walk with Him in joy.

II. THE BELIEVER SHOULD DESIRE THE SPIRIT'S FULLNESS.

- A. Some people who profess to be Christians are satisfied with themselves as they are; and yet, sadly—as our Lord said to the lukewarm Laodicean church in Revelation 3:17—they do not realize that they are "wretched, miserable, poor, blind and naked". The Holy Spirit behaves toward us in a gentlemanly way; and He will not bring His prevailing and pervasive influence to bear on someone against their will or upon someone who does not welcome it or desire it. And yet, as our Lord Jesus has said, "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled" (Matthew 5:6). As long as someone thinks that they can get along without the Holy Spirit's fullness in their lives—as long as they are willing to turn to other things as a substitute in their lives for His fullness—He will allow them to do so. He, we might say, 'respects' their choice—even if that choice leads us to frustration and fruitlessness. But as Dr. Pache wrote, "Fullness, life through the Spirit, is given only to those who truly thirst, to those who are prepared to pay the price, to abandon all if necessary to receive it."⁴
- B. Two passages help us to appreciate the importance of this. In John 7:37-39, the Lord Jesus said, "If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water"—and the apostle John then added, "But this He spoke concerning the Spirit, whom those believing in Him would receive ..." Note the condition that Jesus mentioned, "If anyone thirsts ..." And in saying this, our Lord was, without doubt, thinking of what it says in another passage—that is, in Isaiah 44:3; "For I will pour water on him who is thirsty, and floods on the dry ground; I will pour My Spirit on your descendants, and My blessing on your

offspring ...” To those who are dissatisfied with the power of the flesh—to those who are truly thirsty for the fullness of God’s Spirit as the permanent character of their lives—God promises to satisfy their thirst.

III. THE BELIEVER SHOULD SUBMIT TO THE SPIRIT IN OBEDIENCE.

- A. Now; that desire for the Spirit’s filling is often put to the test in the arena of practical obedience. Will we do as the Holy Spirit commands us? Will we pray as John Calvin was said to have prayed?—“I offer my heart to you, O Lord, promptly and sincerely”? Will we pray this on all occasions and even in the little areas of life? Dr. Pache wrote,

Undoubtedly, if we are converted, the Spirit has occupied a certain amount of room in us, but is every part of our being open to admit Him? Or have we perhaps brought to God only those sins which inconvenience us, for which we cared not overmuch, while retaining several idols and, above all, our own wills? It is self-evident that our refusal to yield every sphere of our life, be it only in one thing, hinders the Lord from filling us. He wants us a hundred per cent for Him and gives us the choice—all or nothing; take it or leave it.⁵

To hold back, and not give ourselves unreservedly to the Spirit’s influence, prevents Him from filling us. If He is denied any area of our lives, then—by definition—He cannot ‘fill’ us. As Jesus said,

“Whoever desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake that the gospel’s will save it” (Mark 8:34-35).

- B. One of the most practical ways that this unreserved yielding shows itself is in obedience to the commands of Scripture. You’re already familiar with Ephesians 5:18—”And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit ...”; and you also know the results that are described in the verses that follow after. But it’s important to note that the exact same results follow after the command of Paul in Colossians 3:16; “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom ...” To be filled with the Spirit, we must be obedient to the Scriptures. As Jesus has told us,

“If you love Me, keep My commandments. And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever, the Spirit of truth” (John 14:15-16).

- C. This all sounds daunting. But Dr. Pache adds this important and helpful note:

Some, perhaps, will say: I would willingly yield all into God’s hand and empty my heart that He might fill it, but there are so many things which keep me bound and which I am unable to root out of my life. But of course, God does not expect us to purify ourselves or to expel first by our own efforts that which hinders His work. We would not accomplish this. All He asks of us is our consent to let Him enter into every part that He may transform and purify all. All He desires is

the complete submission of our will contrary to which He will not act, since He created us free beings. But once command has been placed in His hands, He will no longer be hindered from filling us and glorifying Himself in us. According to His promise He will produce in us both the will and the ability to act (Phil. 2:13), and will make all things possible.⁶

As Paul wrote in Romans 6:12-14,

Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in its lusts. And do not present your members as instruments of unrighteousness to sin, but present yourselves to God as being alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God. For sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under law but under grace (Romans 6:12-14).

IV. THE BELIEVER SHOULD TRUST IN THE PROMISE OF THE SPIRIT'S FILLING.

- A. Many Christians confess the sins that the Spirit reveals to them, earnestly desire His filling, and repeatedly yield themselves to the Spirit, and yet still do not experience the fullness of the Spirit that God wants them to experience because they fail to do one final, important thing—that is, to rest confidently by faith in the blessing of the Spirit's filling that God has promised them in His word. Jesus has promised the fullness of the Spirit to those who trust Him for it (see John 4:14; 7:37-38); and yet, many often demand to first have the promise of God proven to them through experience before they'll believe it; that is, rather than to simply rest in the promise of our Lord by faith. We mustn't forget that the filling of the Holy Spirit is a command that God gives us (Ephesians 5:18)—a command to be obeyed right now!—and not a reward from God that we must earn, nor a favor from God for which we must constantly appeal, nor even an outward experience that must first be made manifest to us before it can be accepted as true.
- B. It's helpful to remember what Paul asked the Galatians in Galatians 3:2; “This only I want to learn from you: Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?”—and the answer that Paul obviously anticipates is “by the hearing of faith”. As Dr. Pache writes,

Finally, let us note that we receive the fullness of the Spirit, quite simply in similar fashion to other forms of spiritual grace. The just shall live by faith, and it is by faith that we are pardoned, regenerated, baptized, adopted, sealed and filled with the Spirit. When do we receive pardon? When we have long humbled ourselves, and cried incessantly to God, or spent years working for it? No, but rather in the instant when, taking God at His word, with hearts both contrite and yet assured, we believed that we are pardoned.

Following on from our full submission to Him, let us believe with humility and assurance that we are now filled with the Spirit.⁷

¹Rene Pache, J.D. Emerson, trans., *The Person and Work of the Holy Spirit* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1954), p. 118).

²Much of the material for this study was taken from Pache (above), pp. 119-124.

³All Scripture readings are taken from *The Holy Bible, New King James Version*; copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc.

⁴Pache, p. 120.

⁵Ibid, pp. 120-1.

⁶Ibid, p. 121.

⁷Ibid., p. 124.