

The Work of the Holy Spirit in the Believer - Continued

by John F. Walvoord

The filling of the Holy Spirit is a repeated experience that can be experienced continuously by Christians who are yielded to God, and is the source of all vital spiritual experience in the life of the Christian.

Scripture: Acts 2:4, Romans 8:9, 1 Corinthians 12:13, Galatians 5:16, Ephesians 5:18

Topics: "Holy Spirit", "Spiritual Growth"

Description

John F. Walvoord delves into the crucial topic of the work of the Holy Spirit in filling the believer, emphasizing the necessity of understanding the nature, conditions, and results of this filling. The sermon highlights the importance of the believer's spiritual growth and maturity in relation to the fullness of the Spirit, stressing that while all Christians are indwelt by the Spirit, not all are filled with Him. The command to be filled with the Holy Spirit is explored, revealing that it is a continuous, repeated experience that believers are responsible for, distinct from other ministries of the Spirit like regeneration and baptism.

Transcript

[Author's Note: The present article continues the study of the work Of the Holy Spirit in the believer begun in the last issue, with consideration of the subject of spiritual gifts.]

{Editor's note: Footnotes in the original printed edition were numbered 11-13, but in this electronic edition are numbered 1-3 respectively.}

II. The Work of the Holy Spirit in Filling the Believer

From the standpoint of practical value to the individual Christian, no field of doctrine relating to the Holy Spirit is more vital than the subject of the filling of the Spirit. It has been greatly neglected in the average theology, along with other practical applications of doctrine. The doctrine of the filling of the Spirit demands in addition to theological knowledge an experimental understanding of the truth. It is necessary to bear in mind the important foundation laid in the delineation of the other ministries of the Holy Spirit, and upon this foundation to erect the grand structure of living experience entirely in keeping with the doctrine of the Scriptures on this truth. Many have been the attempts to explain the doctrine without a proper understanding of its background in the baptism, indwelling, regeneration, and sealing of the Spirit. Some have ignored the teachings of Scripture in favor of conclusions based on experience alone. The task

before us is to expound this doctrine in the light of the Scriptures accounting as well for the varied phenomena of Christian experience. The subject is here treated from three standpoints: (1) the nature of the filling of the Holy Spirit; (2) the conditions for the filling of the Holy Spirit; (3) the results of the filling of the Holy Spirit.

1. The Nature of the Filling of the Holy Spirit.

A careful study of the nature of the filling of the Holy Spirit will reveal that it is the source of all vital spiritual experience in the life of the Christian. As such it is sharply distinguished from experience which precedes salvation, such as conviction, and is distinct from salvation itself, with all the attendant ministries of the Spirit. The facts that sustain these conclusions are found in the Scriptural representation of the filling of the Holy Spirit, including its conditions and results.

a. The Diversity of Spiritual Experience.

There is no experimental fact more abundantly sustained in the Scriptures than the wide diversity of spiritual experience. As Dr. Lewis Sperry Chafer has well written in the opening words of his work on the Holy Spirit, "There is an obvious difference in the character and quality of the daily life of Christians. This difference is acknowledged and defined in the New Testament."¹ The Scriptures distinguish fundamentally between the saved and the lost by use of many distinguishing terms, but the spiritual divisions of mankind do not stop there. The Scriptures also distinguish the "spiritual" and the "carnal" (1 Cor 2:9-3:4); those who "walk in the Spirit," and those who walk "according to the flesh" (2 Cor 10:2; Gal 5:16); those who walk "in newness of life," and those who do not (Rom 6:4); those who "abide in Christ," and those who do not (John 15:1-11); those who walk "worthy of the Lord," and those who "walk as men" (1 Cor 3:3; Col 1:10). The distinction represented in these frequent contrasts is within the fold of the Christian Church and is definitely traced to a difference in relationship to the Holy Spirit. Accordingly, Paul writes the Galatians, "This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh" (Gal 5:16).

The diversity of spiritual experience and blessing is contrasted in Scripture to another important aspect of doctrine, the Christians' growth in grace. While any Christian may be spiritual, may walk in the Spirit, and abide in Christ, even though a new-born saint, there is a gradual spiritual growth which issues in maturity and ultimate conformity to Christ when the body of flesh is cast aside in death or at the Lord's coming for His own. This gradual growth while conditioned to some extent upon the spirituality of the individual is nevertheless in the sovereign control of God, and the individual Christian is promised ultimate perfection. Frequent reference to this truth in Scripture assures it a major part in the purpose of God. The wheat and the tares grow together until the wheat is mature and ready for harvest (Matt 13:30). The purpose of the gift of gifted men to the Church is "For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ.... But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into [unto] him in all things, which is the head, even Christ" (Eph 4:12, 13, 15). Christians are exhorted, "As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby" (1 Pet 2:2). We should "Grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ" (2 Pet 3:18).

There is, however, a vital relation between the Christian's growth in grace and the Christian's spirituality. While the Christian is assured ultimate perfection in heaven, he is exhorted to grow to spiritual maturity.

While it is impossible for any Christian to attain spiritual maturity apart from the gradual process which it entails, any Christian upon meeting the conditions may enter at once into all the blessedness of the fullness of the Spirit. The correspondence of spirituality and maturity to the health and growth of the physical body is patent. A child may be immature as to stage of growth but at the same time be perfectly healthy. Growth of the body requires time and development, while health is an immediate state of the body which determines its present enjoyment and growth. Likewise in the spiritual realm, a new-born saint may have the fullness of the Spirit, while being nevertheless quite immature, and in contrast a mature saint may lack the fullness of the Spirit. That there is an important connection between maturity and spirituality, however, no one can deny. A saint will mature in the faith more rapidly when living in conscious fellowship with God in the fullness of the Spirit than if wandering in the realm of the flesh. A "babe in Christ" is one who has had time to reach some maturity but whose development has been arrested by carnality. What physical health is to the growth of the physical body, the fullness of the Spirit is to spiritual growth.

There has been some opposition to the viewpoint that any Christian, however immature, can attain immediately to a spiritual state upon meeting its conditions. The proof of the possibility is found in the fact that Christians are exhorted to have the fullness of the Spirit. As J. East Harrison states it: "Some Christians who are living on the lower plane of religious experience are not only content to dwell there, but resent the suggestion that there is anything nobler or better; while others go constantly mourning and complaining of the dreary desert way they are treading. In either case the loss is unspeakable, and the harm done to the cause of Christianity by their defective testimony and character is pitiable."²

The diversity of spiritual experience can, therefore, be traced to the two factors of the fullness of the Spirit and spiritual maturity. Of the two, the fullness of the Spirit is by far the most important in spiritual experience. All the ministries of the Spirit may be known by the immature Christian if he is living in proper adjustment to the Spirit. The fruit of the Spirit is intended by God to be produced in any Christian in whom the Spirit has full sway. The evident fact that many Christians never know the full-orbed ministry of the Spirit in their own lives constitutes a challenge to the church and its ministry to proclaim this important aspect of truth.

b. The Unhindered Ministry of the Indwelling Holy Spirit.

The work of the Holy Spirit in filling the believer may be simply defined as that ministry which is accomplished in the believer when he is fully yielded to the indwelling Holy Spirit. Every reference to the filling of the Holy Spirit indicates a spiritual condition on the part of the person filled which is brought about by the complete control of the Spirit. There are fourteen references to the filling of the Holy Spirit in the New Testament, including the references in the Gospels. The Greek verb *πληροῦμαι* is found eight times used in this connection (Luke 1:15, 41, 67; Acts 2:4; 4:8, 31; 9:17; 13:9). Another form of the same verb, *πληροῦσθε*, is found twice in reference to the filling of the Spirit (Acts 13:52; Eph 5:18). In addition to the two verbs used to express the idea, the adjective *πληρής* is used in four instances (Luke 4:1; Acts 6:3; 7:55; 11:24).

It is clear in all of these instances that the Spirit of God is ministering to the individuals concerned in entire freedom from hindrance. Frequently, there is outward evidence of this ministry in the form of a work for God accomplished in the power of the Spirit. The thought is not that individuals by any process have received more of the Spirit, but it is rather that the Spirit has complete possession of the individual. In the original act of indwelling the believer at the time of salvation, it is clear that each individual received the whole of the Person of the Spirit, as well as other members of the Trinity. In the nature of the Persons of

the Trinity, their personality is undivided, ministering and dwelling in entirety wherever any ministry or presence is indicated at all. Accordingly, it is not a question of securing more of the presence of God but of entering into the reality of His presence and yielding to all the control and ministry for which He has come to indwell. While in this age it is impossible to be filled with the Holy Spirit unless permanently indwelt, it is a sad reflection on the spiritual state of many Christians that though their bodies are the temple of the Holy Spirit they are not yielded to Him and know nothing of the great blessings which His unhindered ministry would bring.

A study of the various passages referring to the filling of the Spirit bring out these aspects in clarity. According to Luke 4:1, Christ was filled with the Holy Spirit, speaking of more than the unity of the Persons of the Trinity, extending a definite ministry particularly to His human nature. It is prophesied that John the Baptist should be filled with the Spirit from his mother's womb (Luke 1:15), and Elisabeth, his mother, and Zacharias, his father, are on occasion filled with the Spirit (Luke 1:41, 67). These references to the filling of the Spirit in the Gospels partook of the character of this ministry found in the Old Testament, being, with the exception of Christ (Luke 4:1), a temporary infilling governed by the sovereign purpose of God, rather than being a universal privilege extended to all yielded saints. The references in the Acts and Ephesians all speak of the normal experience of this dispensation.

The doctrine of the Holy Spirit is subject to gradual unfolding in the Acts, certain aspects of His ministry being subject to the immediate agency of the apostles. In the doctrine of the filling of the Holy Spirit, however, every instance fully sustains the premise that this ministry is found only in Christians yielded to God. Accordingly, in Acts 2:4, on the day of Pentecost, the company waiting in the upper room was filled with the Spirit. Peter seeking to honor God before the Sanhedrin was filled (Acts 4:8). The early Christians experienced a second filling after prayer (Acts 4:31). An essential quality sought in selection of the first deacons was that they should be "full of the Holy Ghost" (Acts 6:3). Stephen was "full of the Holy Ghost" as he looked to the heavens to see the glory of God before his martyrdom (Acts 7:55). Paul upon receiving the Lord's messenger, Ananias, was filled with the Holy Spirit (Acts 9:17). In this case, an unusual feature was that Paul was not filled until Ananias placed his hands upon him, a temporary restriction designed to authenticate Ananias as a messenger of God. Paul is mentioned as filled with the Spirit again years later (Acts 13:9). Barnabas is described as "full of the Holy Ghost" (Acts 11:24), and all the disciples at Antioch in Pisidia were "filled with joy, and with the Holy Ghost" (Acts 13:52). Every historic instance of the filling of the Spirit illustrates the principle that only Christians yielded to God are filled.

c. The Command to be Filled with the Holy Spirit.

The work of the Holy Spirit in filling the believer partakes of the peculiar quality of being commanded of every Christian. According to Ephesians 5:18, all Christians have the responsibility of being filled with the Spirit: "And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit." As such the ministry of the Holy Spirit stands in sharp contrast to other ministries. While all men are commanded to obey the Gospel and believe in Christ unto salvation, no one is ever exhorted to be born again by any effort of the flesh, or exhorted to be indwelt, or sealed, or baptized by the Spirit. These ministries of the Spirit come at once upon saving faith in Christ. They pertain to salvation, not to the spiritual life of the Christian. Christians are, however, commanded to be filled with the Spirit. It is, of course, impossible for any Christian to be filled with the Spirit by simply willing it. The Scriptural conditions for this fullness of the Spirit are revealed. It is the responsibility of the Christian to meet these conditions of yieldedness. The fullness of the Spirit will inevitably result.

In the nature of the fact that Christians are commanded to be filled with the Spirit, it is clear also that it is possible to be a Christian without being filled. No Christian is ever warned to seek the other ministries of the Spirit because in their nature they are wrought in salvation. It is apparent, then, that the filling of the Holy Spirit, while possible only for the saved, is not a part of salvation itself. It is also evident that, the filling of the Spirit is to be contrasted sharply to the baptism of the Spirit, the former being a quality of spiritual life, the latter the possession of every Christian by which he has become a member of the body of Christ. The filling of the Spirit must also be contrasted to the indwelling of the Spirit as all Christians are indwelt from the moment of salvation (Rom 8:9), while the filling of the Spirit is found only in some Christians. No Christian can be said to be in the will of God unless he is filled with the Spirit. It is a universal responsibility as well as a privilege, extending equally to all Christians, but never addressed to the unsaved.

d. The Filling of the Holy Spirit a Repeated Experience.

An important contribution to the doctrine of the filling of the Spirit is the tense of the verb in the command to be filled (Eph 5:18). The verb πληρουσθε is found in the present imperative. The present tense clearly indicates a durative idea, and could be translated, "keep being filled." The contrast with the state of intoxication mentioned in the verse is patent. Instead of being constantly in a state of being drunk with wine, the entire faculties of the body being subject to its power and influence, the Christian should be constantly filled with the Spirit. The present imperative is regularly used in the New Testament to express this durative idea,³ and it cannot be doubted that it is of great significance here. Its major contribution is to bring out clearly the contrast between the baptism of the Spirit and the filling of the Spirit, the confusion of which has been the weakness of many studies on the Holy Spirit. A study of 1 Corinthians 12:13, reveals that the word baptize, εβαπτισθημεν, is found in the aorist, an action which takes place once and for all. In contrast to this, there is the continuous ministry of the Holy Spirit in filling.

The use of the present tense in the command to be filled with the Spirit makes it evident that this work of the Spirit is a continuous reality in those who are yielded to God. It is a moment-by-moment relationship which may be hindered by sin. It is not a question of a so-called "second work of grace" or any epochal experience. While the outward evidence of the fullness of the Spirit may vary, the abiding reality is intended by God to be the normal experience of His own. It is only as the Christian experiences the present reality of the fullness of the Spirit that the full-orbed ministry of the Spirit may be realized.

The Scriptures bear a decisive testimony that the filling of the Holy Spirit is a repeated experience. The early church was filled with the Spirit on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:4). In Acts 4:8, Peter is mentioned as again being filled with the Holy Ghost, and the entire company gathered at Jerusalem to hear Peter's report of his encounter with the Sanhedrin are again filled with the Holy Ghost (Acts 4:31). Stephen, originally chosen a deacon because he was filled with the Spirit, is revealed to have been "full of the Holy Ghost" immediately before his martyrdom (Acts 7:55). Both Paul and Barnabas are found filled with the Holy Spirit at widely differing periods of their lives (Acts 9:17; 11:24; 13:9, 52). The evidence for the experimental nature of the filling of the Holy Spirit is fully sustained in every instance.

It may be concluded from this study of the nature of the filling of the Spirit that the Scriptures point to this ministry as accounting for, in large measure, the wide diversity of spiritual experience. The filling of the Holy Spirit has been shown to be the ministry accomplished in the believer fully yielded to His control. The universal responsibility on the part of Christians to be filled with the Spirit was found to be substantiated by explicit command of the Scriptures. It was demonstrated that it is possible for any Christian to be filled continuously with the Spirit, the repeated experience of the early Christians being an illuminating

illustration. The filling of the Holy Spirit in every respect stands in sharp contrast to the ministries of regeneration, indwelling, sealing, and baptism, which are accomplished once and for all at the time of salvation.

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1 He That Is Spiritual, p. 3.

2 Reigning in Life, pp. 42-43.

3 Cf. A Grammar of the Greek New Testament in the Light of Historical Research, A. T. Robertson, p. 890.

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