

(Beauty for Ashes) 4. the Beauty of the Christ-Life

by Zac Poonen

Zac Poonen's sermon explores the beauty of the Christ-life and the transformative role of the Holy Spirit in a believer's life.

Scripture: 1 Kings 19:11, Job 38:1, John 3:8, 2 Corinthians 10:1, Galatians 2:20, Ephesians 5:18, Philippians 3:14, Philippians 4:11

Topics: "The Cross", "Holy Spirit"

Description

Zac Poonen preaches about the beauty of the Christ-life, emphasizing how Christ offers His Divine life in exchange for our self-life. He highlights the necessity of embracing the way of the cross, being broken and emptied, to transition from darkness to the full glory of the Christ-life. Poonen addresses common misunderstandings about the Holy Spirit's sovereignty, the need for alignment with God's Word, the importance of humility in acknowledging our limited knowledge, the absence of shortcuts to a Spirit-filled life, and the humility required in not boasting about being filled with the Spirit.

Transcript

The beauty of the Christ-life

Christ came to give us "beauty for ashes" - the beauty of His own Divine life for the ashes of our self-life. We have seen some of the characteristics of the self-life. And we have also seen that the way of the cross - the way of being broken and being emptied - is the only pathway that can lead us out of the darkness of our own self-life into the full glory of the Christ-life. One day, when Christ returns and all shadows disappear, the glory will shine undimmed on all who have walked this pathway. But even now, here on earth, our lives can reflect something of that glory. That is why God has given us His Holy Spirit Who wants to fill our lives. The beauty of the Christ-life is brought to us through the fullness of the Holy Spirit.

Before considering the characteristics of a Spirit-filled person, there are a few misunderstandings concerning the Holy Spirit and His ministry that need to be cleared up.

The Sovereignty of the Spirit

First of all, we must remember that the Holy Spirit is sovereign and works in varied ways. Jesus said, "Just as you can hear the wind but can't tell where it comes from or where it will go next, so it is with the Spirit"

(John 3:8 - LB). You can't control the wind - either its speed or its direction. So too with the Holy Spirit. And yet many believers think that they can control Him and make Him work according to their rules and patterns.

When the Second Person of the Trinity was here on earth, the Pharisees tried to tie Him down with their petty rules and traditions. But he refused to be locked up in their water-tight compartments. The descendants of the Pharisees in evangelical Christianity today are trying to tie down the Third Person of the Trinity to work within the confines of their traditions and their human understanding. But He refuses to work according to man-made patterns. He blows where He wishes. We can hear the sound of His working, but He will not be controlled or directed by us. We cannot say that He should work in the same way in other lives as He has worked in ours; neither should we expect Him to work today in the same way as He worked in days past. No. He is Sovereign. The best thing we can do is to set our face in the direction the wind is blowing and allow that wind to carry us along. The Holy Spirit cannot be tied down in the doctrinal compartment of any denomination. We shall find that He surprises us by the way He works. Both Pentecostals and non-Pentecostals need to recognize this!

The Holy Spirit may at times manifest Himself like a whirlwind. There may be deep stirrings of the emotions and even physical reactions too. We must be willing to accept this. God spoke to Job out of a whirlwind (Job 38:1).

But we also need to remember that the Spirit may at times blow like a gentle breeze. When Elijah heard the whirlwind, it says that God was not in the whirlwind (1 Kings 19:11). No. Every stirring of the emotions is not from God. And so we must be careful. To Elijah, God spoke in a gentle breeze (1 Kings 19:12).

The Holy Spirit does not always blow like a tornado. Sometimes He does, but not always. We should not expect Him to blow like a whirlwind all the time in everyone's life, just because He did so once in someone's life. Equally, we should not expect Him to blow always like a gentle breeze. We do need His blowing as a tornado upon many of our churches today, to uproot the things that are dishonouring to Christ therein.

The wrapping should never be mistaken for the gift. The Holy Spirit Himself is the Gift of the Risen Lord to His church. When He falls upon people, it may be with shouts of Hallelujah, tears of joy and the gift of tongues, or it may be quietly, silently and without much emotion. Temperaments vary, and the Spirit of God (unlike many Christians) is willing to adapt Himself to each temperament. It is foolish therefore to expect that others should receive the Gift in the same wrapping in which we received Him - whether spectacular or commonplace. Only babies are taken up with the wrapping-paper in which a gift comes. Mature men recognize that the gift itself is more important than the wrapping. The Apostle Paul was converted through a vision of Jesus. But he did not preach that all needed a similar vision before they could be saved. No. He recognized that it was the inner reality that mattered, in whatever wrapping the gift might come. So too with the fullness of the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit and God's Word

Secondly, we need to remember that the Holy Spirit always operates in line with the Word of God - for He Himself has written that Word, and He does not change. We see this truth in the very first paragraph of Scripture. When darkness covered the earth, the Spirit of God brooded upon it, and the Word of God went forth - "Let there be light". And it was the joint operation of the Holy Spirit and His creative Word that brought light into the darkness and brought fullness and form where previously there had been emptiness

and shapelessness (Genesis 1:1-3).

The new birth is attributed to the implantation of the Word of God in us (1 Peter 1:24), as well as to the operation of the Holy Spirit (Titus 3:5). Sanctification, likewise is the result of the working of God's Word and of the Holy Spirit in our lives (Compare John 17:17 with 2 Thessalonians 2:13). In the same way, the fullness of the Holy Spirit and being filled with the Word of God go together. This becomes clear when we compare Ephesians 5:18 to 6:9, with Colossians 3:15-21. In the Ephesian passage, we are told that giving thanks, praising God and submitting to one another in Christ-like home relationships, is the result of being filled with the Spirit. Whereas in the Colossian passage, these very same things are said to be the result of being filled with the Word of God.

We need to recognize this truth if we are to be balanced Christians. A steam-locomotive needs not only steam in order to move forward, but also rail-tracks. We need the steam of God's Spirit if we are to make spiritual progress, but we also need the rails of God's Word to keep us from going astray. One is not more important than the other. Both are equally important. Some who claim to be full of steam, have ignored the rails and got stuck in the mud. Placing a premium on experience, they have not been careful to test everything by God's Word, and as a result have gone off the track. Like a derailed engine blowing its whistle furiously, many of them make a lot of noise in their meetings, but there is no spiritual progress - no growth in Christlikeness - in their lives.

Others have gone to the opposite extreme. Although they have kept on the rails, they have despised the need for fullness of steam in the engine (or have imagined that they have the fullness when they haven't), and they are stuck too. They emphasize the importance of the Word of God and are careful to cross every 't' and dot every 'i' in it. They keep admiring and polishing the rails. But they don't recognize that they need to be filled with the Holy Spirit. They are fundamental in their doctrines, all right - the rails are perfectly straight - but there is no steam to move the engine. They are dead right in their doctrines, but they are also both dead and right!

Our Limited Knowledge

Thirdly, we must recognize that even the best among us do not know everything about the Holy Spirit and His workings. Some Christians give the impression that they have all the answers concerning everything that relates to the Holy Spirit. They have analysed the Biblical teaching on the subject and neatly pigeon-holed every verse. I'm terribly wary of such people for I know they are wrong. We do not know everything. We know only in part - and especially when it concerns the ministry of the Spirit (See 1 Corinthians 13:9, 12). We need to acknowledge that our finite, sinful minds are not able to comprehend the greatness and the vastness of God the Holy Spirit fully.

A.W. Tozer has said that the most profound statement in the Bible is, "Oh Lord God, Thou knowest" (Ezekiel 37:3)! We all come to a point in our understanding of the things of God where we have to say,

"Lord God, I know this much, but there is so much beyond this that I don't know. I have come only to the fringe of truth."

As Job said,

These are but the outskirts of His ways....How small a whisper do we hear of Him! But the thunder of His power who can understand (Job 26:14 - ASV).

Such an attitude will save us from a lot of carnal dogmatism on matters concerning the Holy Spirit, on which the Bible does not give us clear instruction. It will also give us a greater tolerance of other believers who do not see eye-to-eye with us on the Spirit's ministry. They may be wrong - but we may be too! That which is clearly revealed in Scripture is for our instruction. Beyond that we are not to speculate (Deuteronomy 29:29).

No Short-Cuts

Fourthly, remember that there is no short-cut to the Spirit-filled life - no easy formula that guarantees success. In our day, when push-buttons have replaced hard manual labour, and when man has generally accepted a philosophy of easy, comfortable living, Christians can all unconsciously bring this attitude into spiritual matters as well. The result is that we can think that there must be some simple formula for being filled with the Holy Spirit - "Take these three steps - and lo and behold, you are filled!" But we don't find any such formula in the Bible. We must beware of trying to reduce the Holy Spirit's operation in a person's life into a set of formulas. The fullness of the Spirit is not a mechanical matter but a matter of life - and spiritual life cannot be expressed in formulas.

Don't Boast that You are Filled

Fifthly, a fact to be noticed in the entire New Testament is that although certain people are referred to as being 'full of the Spirit' (Acts 6:5; 11:24), no-one ever testified to being full of the Spirit himself.

I am not referring now to the baptism in the Spirit (or 'receiving the Spirit', as it is called in some passages), which is the initial experience of being filled with the Spirit. Concerning this, the apostles expected every believer to have a clear testimony as to whether he had received the Spirit or not (See Acts 19:2 & Galatians 3:2).

But in Ephesians 5:18, Paul exhorted the Ephesian Christians (who had already been baptized in the Spirit) to "be being filled with the Spirit" (literal translation) - in other words, to be filled with the Spirit continuously. Those who walk in the Spirit in this continuous fullness alone can be referred to as men and women "full of the Spirit". But this is something for others to notice, not for us to testify to. When Moses' face shone with the glory of God, others saw it, but he himself was ignorant of it (Exodus 34:29, 30).

To be full of the Spirit is to be full of the Spirit of Christ; and it is by the fruit of Christ-likeness in our character that others will know that we are Spirit-filled. There is no need for us to testify concerning this, for our life will speak louder than our words.

Paul's Example

There is perhaps no clearer description of the Spirit-filled life than in Paul's statement in Galatians 2:20, "I am crucified with Christ. It is no longer I but Christ that lives in me." For what is the purpose of the fullness of the Spirit if not to reproduce the life of Jesus in us? And so the measure in which our self-life is crucified and the Christ-life manifested in us, is the true measure of our being full of the Holy Spirit.

Paul told the Galatian Christians, "Brethren, I beseech you, be as I am" (Galatians 4:12). He was one who could ask others to follow his example. He did not have to say, "Don't look at me, but look at Christ." He repeatedly urged others to look at the example of his own life and to follow him as he followed Christ (See 1 Corinthians 4:16; 11:1; Philippians 3:17). He had such a satisfying Christian experience, that even when in chains, he could tell King Agrippa, "In spite of all that you have in the world, O king, I only wish that you

could be as I am (spiritually)" (Acts 26:29). He was not boasting, for he said elsewhere, "By the grace of God, I am what I am" (1 Corinthians 15:10).

Let us then look at the life and ministry of the Apostle Paul to see some of the characteristics of the Christ-life. We shall consider eight passages from Scripture where Paul describes his life and service, using this very same phrase, "I am".

We shall look first at the characteristics of Spirit-filled service and then at the characteristics of the Spirit-filled life.

Spirit-Filled Service

There are four things that I would like to mention concerning Spirit-filled service, from the words of the Apostle Paul.

A Love-Slave

First of all, Spirit-filled service is the service of a love-slave. In Acts 27:23, Paul says, "...he God whose I am and whom I serve". He was a love-slave of his God. He retained no right to his own life. He had given everything to his Master.

The only proper basis for our consecration is recognizing the fact that we belong wholly to God in the first place. Giving ourselves to God out of gratitude for what He has done for us, though good in itself, is not the true basis for Christian consecration. Love for Christ can be the impelling motive in our service for the Lord. But the basis on which we should dedicate our lives to God, is the fact that He has purchased us on the cross. We are therefore now God's own property, and have no right to ourselves. When slaves served their masters in olden times, it was not primarily because they loved their masters, but because they were their master's property!

And so, when a person gives his entire life to God, he is not doing God a great favour. No! He is only returning to God what he had stolen from Him. If I were to steal a man's money and later, convicted of my sin, were to return it to him, I would certainly not be doing that man a favour. I would go to him as a repentant thief. And that is the only proper attitude in which we can approach God when we come to give our lives to Him. God has purchased us. When we recognize that, we arrive at the only proper basis for consecration.

Paul was a love-slave of the Lord. Like the Hebrew slave, who could go free in the seventh year of his service, but chose to continue in that service because he loved his master (Exodus 21:1-6), Paul served his Lord. He was not a hired servant who worked for wages, but one who served without any rights of his own. The service of a love-slave has been beautifully summed up by someone in the following poem:

"I'm but a slave!

I have no freedom of my own;

I cannot choose the smallest thing -

Nor e'en my way.

I'm a slave!

Kept to do the bidding of my Master -
He can call me night or day.
Were I a servant, I could claim wages -
Freedom sometimes, anyway.
But I was bought -
Blood was the price my Master paid for me,
And I am now His slave -
And evermore will be.
He takes here, He takes me there,
He tells me what to do;
I just obey, that's all -
I trust Him too!"

This is what it means to be a love-slave.

God is looking for those who are so yielded to Him, that they will look to Him always to see what He wants them to do - and not busy doing what they feel they should do for God. A slave does not go around doing whatever he feels like. No. The slave asks his master, "Master, what do you want me to do?" And he does what he is told. The Bible says, "The most important thing about a servant is that he does just what his master tells him to" (1 Corinthians 4:2 - LB).

As someone has put it so beautifully, this is the type of man the Lord is looking for:

I'm seeking for one who will wait and watch
For My beckoning Hand, My eye;
Who will work in My manner, the work I give,
And the work I give not, pass by.
And oh the joy that is brought to Me
When one such as this I can find,
A man who will do all My will -
Who is set To study His Master's mind."

"I sought for a man," the Lord once said, "but I found none" (Ezekiel 22:30). He is looking for love-slaves today. But He finds so few.

Evangelistic Passion - Not Emotional Excitement

Secondly, Spirit-filled service, is a service that recognizes its debt to others. Paul said, "I am a debtor to the Greeks (civilized) and to the barbarians (uncivilized)" (Romans 1:14). God has given us a treasure to share with the world. We are like post-office employees who have been entrusted with a large amount of money to be given to various people as money-orders. Such an employee remains in debt to those others until he has finished paying off to each one his due. He may have thousands of dollars with him, but not one cent of it is his. He is a debtor to many.

The Apostle recognized a similar debt when God entrusted him with the message of the gospel. He knew it had to be given out. And he also knew that he would remain in debt to others until he had given them the message of salvation. After twenty-five years spent in preaching the good news, Paul still says, "I am a debtor," and he tells the Roman Christians that he is ready to come to Rome to clear his debt to the people of Rome. Notice the three "I am"s of Paul in Romans 1:14-16: "I am a debtorI am readyI am not ashamed to preach the gospel".

Spirit-filled service is outgoing. Recognizing its debt to others, it is always ready to go and discharge that debt. The evidence of the Spirit's fullness and the beauty of the Christ-life are seen not in thrilling emotional experiences but in a passion in the heart that says (as Mrs. F.C. Durham has so wonderfully put it):

"I am Thy slave, Thy bondslave; nevermore
Will I be free from this fierce urge within,
To spread from race to race, and shore to shore
The joyful news of pardon for man's sin.
Give me the souls of men, or else I die,
Give me the love that counteth not the cost,
Give me that faith all barriers to defy,
Give me the joy of bringing home the lost."

Spirit-filled service has an evangelistic passion and is perpetually outgoing. It is concerned with the needs of others and not its own satisfaction. Christ Himself never once sought His own satisfaction (Romans 15:3).

It needs to be emphasized in our day that the Spirit's fullness and His gifts are not given for our emotional satisfaction. Much less are they given for exhibition. "Exhibitionism", A.W. Tozer has said, "is common to the kindergarten!". God wants us to be spiritually mature, and when we are, our passion will be neither emotionalism nor exhibitionism but evangelism.

In his book, *The Spirit of Holiness*, E.L. Cattell mentions some of the perils of emotionalism - seeking emotional excitement instead of God, an adverse witness, wasted energy and false holiness.

Those who major on emotionalism will usually consider the Holy Spirit to be present in a meeting only when the emotional fervour of the singing and praying reaches a certain pitch and the noise reaches a certain decibel level! This is living by feelings and not by faith. It is worshipping the emotions instead of God. God dwells in our spirit, not in our emotions.

Emotionalism can also hinder our testimony to the world around us. Paul warns us that unbelievers coming into an emotional church meeting (where everyone is "speaking in tongues") will consider all of them to be mad (1 Corinthians 14:23). God is a God of order, not of confusion (1 Corinthians 14:33). Emotional Christians dub others as unspiritual just because those others don't accept their frenzied behaviour as manifestations of the Holy Spirit. "Grace accepts torture", says Cattell, "but it never tortures others"!!

Emotionalism also becomes a substitute for service very often. Instead of helping others, we can merely keep enjoying our "emotional highs" in the meetings! Our energies must be directed toward "going around doing good and delivering people from the bondage of Satan" as Jesus did, when he was filled with the Holy Spirit (Acts 10:38) - and not to satisfying our emotions.

Counterfeit emotional "thrills" can also deceive us about our spiritual state. If you have offended your wife or some other person, God will want you to apologize to her/him first before fellowship with God can be restored. But Satan can give you such a nice feeling in a high-pitched emotional meeting or in a "release in tongues" that he can deceive you into believing that you are in communion with God, when you cannot be, for the main issue has not been settled. It may be more exciting to speak in tongues. But God expects you to take the humiliating step of asking forgiveness from the wounded person first. Otherwise Satan has fooled you with an illusive holiness.

I am not devaluing our emotions or the genuine gift of tongues. God has created our emotions and He doesn't want us to be like dead stones. He is also the One Who gave the church the gift of tongues and there is a place for that too. But let us never forget that Spirit-filled service is always outgoing, thinking of its debt to others, and not just satisfying itself with experiences in the emotional realm.

We must also remember two important facts:

Any experience received in an emotionally tense meeting may have been self-induced, and not from God at all.

Any experience that makes a person lose control of himself cannot be from the Holy Spirit, for the fruit of the Spirit is self-control (Galatians 5:22, 23).

God does not want us to live depending on our feelings. He wants us to live by faith. This is why God sometimes allows us to feel spiritually dry. Such feelings of dryness are not always an indication of sin in our life. They are often God's attempts to shake us out of our dependence on feelings.

We need to walk carefully in these days, for the Devil is leading many astray through counterfeit gifts and an over-emphasis on emotions. If we want to be delivered from Satan's snares, let us remember that the beauty of the Christ-life is seen in a life that seeks to bless others. Jesus came from heaven to earth not seeking anything for Himself, but only to bless others.

Human Insufficiency

Thirdly, Spirit-filled service is a service that is conscious of human insufficiency. Notice Paul's words in 2 Corinthians 10:1, "I am base among you" - or, in other words, "I don't have an impressive personality."

Tradition tells us that the Apostle Paul was only 4 feet 10 inches in height and bald. He had a hooked nose and he was probably beset by an eye-disease. He obviously did not have a movie-star-like personality. The success of his labours did not depend on any human factor, for there was nothing impressive about his appearance or his speech.

Concerning his preaching, Paul writes to the Corinthians, "I was with you in fear and much trembling" (1 Corinthians 2:3). When he preached, he felt conscious of his weakness, rather than of the power of God flowing through him. This is Spirit-filled service - for remember, that a church was established in heathen Corinth as a result of Paul's preaching.

When the Spirit of God speaks through a man, the man himself is not usually conscious of being God's mouthpiece. I'm always wary of those folk who are so sure, when they stand in the pulpit, that God is speaking through them (and who preface their pronouncements with a "Thus saith the Lord..."). My experience with such people has been that God has never spoken through them at all. They've just had conceited ideas of being prophetic voices. The man through whom God speaks is usually not conscious of that fact at all. The Apostle Paul says in one of his writings, "I think I am giving you counsel from God's Spirit when I say this" (1 Corinthians 7:40 - LB). He was not sure whether God was speaking through him. Yet we know that it was God speaking through Paul, for God has included it in inspired Scripture. But Paul himself was unaware of it.

Yes, Spirit-filled service is one that is conscious of human insufficiency. As Paul says, "When I am weak, then I am strong" (2 Corinthians 12:10). The Spirit-filled servant of God goes again and again to God, like the man in the parable, saying, "I have nothing to give others. Please give me the living bread" (Luke 11:5-8). The Lord's servant is perpetually conscious of his own insufficiency.

Let us not have any mistaken ideas of Spirit-filled service. It has no great awareness of God's power, but on the contrary of fear and uncertainty. It is only long after the labours are all over that, on looking back, there will be the assurance that God did indeed work through us.

Fulfilling Our Calling

Fourthly, Spirit-filled service is a service that fulfils God's specific calling. In Colossians 1:23, 25, Paul says, "I am made a minister", and in 1 Timothy 2:7, "I am ordained an apostle". Paul had been ordained by the nail-pierced hands of his Saviour, and not by any man. It was God Who had called Paul to be an apostle. This calling, he says in Colossians 1:25, was given to him. It was God's gift - not something that he had achieved or earned. He also says in the same verse that this calling was given to him to serve others. It was a stewardship entrusted to him by God for the work of building up the church.

God has a specific calling for each of us. It is futile asking God to make us into something that He has not called us to be - for the Holy Spirit decides what gift each of us should have. Paul was called to be an apostle. But not everyone has such a calling. What we do need to seek God's face for, is power to do that which He has called us to do. "Take heed to the ministry which you have received in the Lord, that you fulfil it," was Paul's advice to Archippus (Colossians 4:17).

God does not put square pegs into round holes. He knows what His church needs at a particular time in a particular place, and He prepares each of us, (if we are submissive) for a specific task - which may be quite different from what we ourselves want to do. "Is everyone an apostle? Of course not. Is everyone a preacher? No. Are all teachers? Does everyone have the power to do miracles? Can everyone heal the sick? Of course not. Does God give all of us the ability to speak in languages we've never learned [tongues]?No" (1 Corinthians 12:29, 30 - LB). But God has placed each of these gifts in the Body of Christ. The important thing is for us to recognize our gift and calling - and to exercise that gift and fulfil that calling. Spirit-filled service is service that fulfils that specific calling which God gives us.

If there is one gift that the New Testament specifically encourages us to seek, it is the gift of prophecy (1 Corinthians 14:39). This is perhaps the most needed gift in the church today. A prophetic ministry is one that edifies (strengthens and builds-up), exhorts (rebukes and challenges) and consoles (comforts and encourages) (1 Corinthians 14:3). We need to pray that God will give us prophets in our churches, who will speak the truth of God, without fear or favour - men of a different calibre from the professional religious scribes, who are more interested in their salary, status and popularity.

May the Lord help each of us to seek His face earnestly to find out what our calling is.

The Spirit-Filled Life

Let us look at four characteristics of the Spirit-filled life - again from the life of the Apostle Paul.

Perfect Contentment

The Spirit-filled life is, first of all, a life of perfect contentment. In Philippians 4:11, Paul says, "In whatever state I am, I am content." And such contentment brings with it fullness of joy and peace. Hence Paul speaks of joy and peace in verses 4 & 7 of the same chapter.

We can praise God only when we are perfectly content with all His dealings with us. If we believe in a God who is sovereign and Who can therefore make everything that befalls us work together for our good, (Romans 8:28) then we can be truly content in all circumstances. Then we can praise the Lord, like Habakkuk, even when the trees in our garden don't bear fruit, when our flock dies and when we have suffered heavy financial loss - or in any situation (Habakkuk 3:17, 18). Ephesians 5:18-20 indicates that the result of the infilling of the Holy Spirit is an outflow of praise to God.

The Apostle Paul could rejoice even when he was locked up in prison, with his feet in stocks (Acts 16:25). Even there, he was content and found nothing to complain about. This is one of the first marks of the Spirit-filled life. When murmuring is found in a Christian, it is an indication that he, like the Israelites who murmured against God in the wilderness has still not entered the promised land of victory.

Growth in Holiness

Secondly, the Spirit-filled life is a life of growth in holiness. As a man's own life increases in holiness so does his consciousness of the absolute holiness of God. The two go together. In fact, the latter is one of the tests of whether a person really has the former.

Twenty-five years after his conversion, Paul says, "I am the least of the apostles" (1 Corinthians 15:9). Five years subsequently, he says, "I am less than the least of all the saints" (Ephesians 3:8). Still a year later he says, "I am (notice, it is not "I was" but "I am") the chief of sinners" (1 Timothy 1:15).

Do you see his progression in holiness in those statements?

The closer Paul walked with God, the more he was conscious of the corruption and wickedness of his flesh. He recognized that no good thing could be found in his flesh (Romans 7:18). In Ezekiel 36:26, 27, 31, God says, "I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within youThen you will loathe yourselves for all the evils you did." There we see that one proof that we have got a new heart from God is that we loathe ourselves. Only a man who hates and detests his flesh will be able to fulfil the command in Philippians 2:3 to "esteem others as more important" than himself. Having seen his own corruption, he will no longer despise anyone else.

He will also be ready to confess failure immediately and will be willing to call sin, sin. The Spirit-filled man does not merely seek to give others an impression that he is growing in holiness, but will actually be doing so. He will not testify of experiences that supposedly made him holy, or try to convince others of his theology of sanctification. He will have such holiness in his life that others will come to him, of their own accord, and ask him the secret of his life. He will have what J.B. Phillips translates as, "the holiness which is no illusion" (Ephesians 4:24).

It makes no difference what our doctrine of holiness is. True holiness comes only to the man who seeks after it with all his heart, and not to the one who merely has the correct teaching in his head.

There have been godly men in past centuries (like John Fletcher) whose understanding of the doctrine of holiness led them to believe that they were 'entirely sanctified' and who called their unconscious sins 'mistakes'. There have been other godly men (like David Brainerd) who called their unconscious sins 'sins', and who bemoaned their sinfulness and their lack of devotion to God constantly - throughout their earthly lives. But both these groups of men may have been equally saintly in God's eyes, despite the radical difference in the way they evaluated their own lives. Their different temperaments and their differing understandings of the doctrine of sanctification accounted for their differing estimate of their own hearts. The secret of holiness is discovered not through a study of Greek words and tenses in the New Testament but through a wholehearted and sincere desire to please God. God looks at our hearts, not at our brains!

In any case, any growth in holiness, will always be accompanied, as it was with Paul, by an increasing awareness of one's own sinfulness in the sight of God.

A Crucified Life

Thirdly, the Spirit-filled life is a life that is crucified. Paul said, "I am crucified with Christ" (Galatians 2:20). We have already seen something of the meaning of the cross in the last two chapters. The way of the cross is the way of the fullness of the Spirit. The Spirit will always leads us like He led Jesus to the cross. The Spirit and the cross are inseparable.

The cross is a symbol of weakness, shame and death. The Apostle Paul had fears, perplexities, sorrows and tears in his life (See 2 Corinthians 1:8; 4:8; 6:10; 7:5). He was considered a fool and a fanatic. He was often treated like dirt and garbage by others (1 Corinthians 4:13). All this is not incongruous with the Spirit's fullness. On the contrary, the Spirit-filled man will find God leading him farther and farther, down the pathway of humiliation and death to himself.

The Spirit-filled man is one who does not care for the honour of men. He accepts humiliation and reproach gladly. He glories in nothing but the cross (Galatians 6:14). He does not glory in his gifts or abilities or

even his deeper life experiences. He glories only in dying to himself perpetually.

The cross is also the symbol of Divine love. God's love for man was manifested in God dying on a cross for men. Such love characterizes the Spirit-filled man as well. Between him and every other person, there is a cross on which he dies to himself in order to love the other. This is the real meaning of love.

Watchman Nee tells the story of two Christian farmers in China who had their fields halfway up a hill and who would get up early in the morning and water their fields. Some other farmers, whose fields were lower down the hill, came one night and dug a hole in the irrigation channels of the upper fields and let all the water flow down to their fields. This happened for seven nights in succession and the two Christians wondered what to do. They finally decided that as believers they would show the other farmers the love of Christ. And so they got up the next morning and watered the fields of those farmers first, and then watered their own. They put a cross between them and the other farmers and died to their own rights on it. After they did this for two or three days, the non-Christian farmers called to apologize and said, "If this is Christianity, then we want to hear more about it."

Jesus said that when the Holy Spirit came upon His disciples, they would receive power to be His witnesses. The word "witness" in the original Greek, is "martus", (which is translated as "martyr" in Acts 22:20 and in Revelation 2:13 and 17:6). So the literal meaning of Acts 1:8, is that when the Holy Spirit came upon the disciples, they would receive power to be martyrs - martyrs, not just in the sense of dying once on a stake, but martyrs who would die to themselves daily. And so, a Spirit-filled witness is one who lives a crucified life.

Continuous Enlargement

Fourthly, the Spirit-filled life is a life that is continuously seeking greater degrees of fullness. "I am pressing on," says Paul, nearly thirty years after his conversion, and as he was drawing to the end of his life (Philippians 3:14). He still has not attained. He is seeking a still greater degree of the fullness of the Spirit of God in his life, and is therefore straining every spiritual muscle toward this goal.

"I am not perfect (complete)," he says in Philippians 3:12. But in verse 15, he seems to say the exact opposite: "Let us who are perfect (complete) be thus minded." This is the paradox of the Spirit-filled life - complete, and yet not complete; in other words, full and yet desiring a greater degree of fullness.

The Spirit-filled state is not a static one. There are greater and greater degrees of fullness. The Bible says that the Holy Spirit leads us from one degree of glory to another (2 Corinthians 3:18) - or, in other words, from one degree of fullness to another. A cup can be full of water; so can a bucket; so can a tank and so can a river. But there is a vast difference between the fullness of a cup and the fullness of a river.

The newborn convert can be filled with the Spirit immediately on conversion. The Apostle Paul too was a Spirit-filled man at the end of his life. But there is a vast difference between the fullness of the newborn convert and the fullness of the mature Apostle. The former is like a full cup whereas the latter was like a full river.

The Holy Spirit is constantly seeking to enlarge our capacity, so that He can fill us to a greater degree. This is where the cross comes in. There can be no enlargement in our lives if we avoid the pathway of the cross. This is why the Corinthians Christians were so shallow. They gloried in gifts and ignored the cross. And so Paul exhorts them again and again in his two epistles, to accept the cross in their lives. He exhorts

them to be enlarged thereby (2 Corinthians 6:13).

If we accept the cross consistently in our lives, we shall find our cup becoming a bucket, our bucket becoming a tank, our tank becoming a river and the river becoming many rivers. At each stage, as our capacity enlarges, we will need to be filled again. Thus will be fulfilled in us the promise of the Lord Jesus,

"Rivers of living water shall flow from the inmost being of anyone who believes in me (He was speaking of the Holy Spirit)" (John 7:38, 39 - LB).

This also explains why Paul exhorts the Ephesian Christians to "be continuously being filled with the Spirit" (Ephesians 5:18). Paul obviously never believed in a once-for-all experience of being filled with the Spirit. What he is referring to here is a continuous enlargement of capacity for greater degrees of fullness.

Paul himself accepted the cross always. He says in 2 Corinthians 4:10, "Always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body [in ever-increasing degree]." One aspect of the cross that he accepted was the disciplining of his bodily appetites. The fullness of the Spirit is never a substitute for discipline and hard work. Paul still needed to pommel his body and bring it into subjection. He says,

"Like an athlete I punish my body, treating it roughly, training it to do what it should, not what it wants to" (1 Corinthians 9:27 - LB).

He disciplined his eyes in what they read and looked at, his ears in what they listened to, and his tongue in what it spoke. He disciplined his life in every area. Thus he was enlarged.

Thank God for the crises He gives us in our lives. But let us not forget that every crisis must lead to a process. Christ is not only the Door, He is also the Way. If we enter in through the narrow gate, we have to walk the narrow way. Let us never be guilty of emphasizing the crisis to the exclusion of the process. The new birth is a crisis, but spiritual life in the present tense is the important thing, not just the memory of a date in the past. Some are unable to remember the date when the crisis of the new birth took place. But we don't say that a man is dead merely because he can't remember his birthday! And yet, alas, to some Christians, the testimony of an experience is the only test of life!

In relation to the fullness of the Spirit too, the important thing is the present tense reality of it, manifested in Christlike living and service. The memory of an experience in the past, however wonderful that may have been, is, by itself, of no avail.

God is looking for men and women who will never be content with mere experiences and "blessings," but who will take up the cross daily and follow Jesus and thus manifest in their lives and in their service the reality of those words, "It is no longer I, but Christ that lives in me." This, and this alone is the Spirit-filled life.

"Not I but Christ be honoured, loved, exalted,

Not I but Christ be seen, be known, be heard;

Not I but Christ in ev'ry look and action,

Not I but Christ in ev'ry thought and word

Oh to be saved from myself, dear Lord,

Oh to be lost in Thee,

Oh that it may be no more I

But Christ that lives in me." (Selected)

Amen and Amen.

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