Text: Ephesians 5:17–21
Title: The Filling of the Spirit
Truth: The Spirit-filled believer produces much fruit
Date/Location: Sunday PM, February 2, 2025 at FBC

Introduction

Verse seventeen ties vv.15–16 to vv.18–21, which is our text this evening. We find two more of the comparisons that we mentioned last time in v.17 and in v.18. These comparisons continue to contrast the worldly living of those in darkness with the expected behavior of those who are light in the Lord. In sum, we're learning what the Christian life ought to look like.

In vv.17–21 we learn *that the Spirit-filled believer produces much fruit.* This begins by understanding God's will and living accordingly.

I. Not Unwise, But Understanding (v.17)

Paul already introduced the wisdom concept in v.15 in relation to walking wisely. There is a way of living that is right in the eyes of a fool, but in reality, they are operating on the impulse of their own desires of the flesh. As a Christian, God calls us to carefully observe how we conduct ourselves to ensure that we walk wisely by making the most of our God-given opportunities. To walk in wisdom requires us to fear God and to know His will.

The wisdom exhortation is picked back up in v.17, where we find the command not to "be unwise, but understand what the will of the Lord is." A person who is "unwise" is someone who acts like the fool described throughout Proverbs. A fool openly displays his folly (13:16; 15:2), is careless (Prov 14:16; 21:20), despises wisdom and understanding (Prov 23:9; 26:7, 9). Proverbs 1:22 says, "How long, you simple ones, will you love simplicity? For scorners delight in their scorning, And fools hate knowledge."

A fool may appear wise in his ways to the rest of the world (and to himself), but true wisdom understands that there is more to life than food, and the body and clothing (Luk 12:16–23). Jesus admonishes the crowds in Luke 12 that wise people will be rich toward God and seek first His Kingdom. Wise or prudent people are those who have spiritual understanding concerning what matters most in life and then apply that knowledge to every aspect of their life.

Paul wants you to be that person who has spiritual understanding/insight into God's will (Col 1:9). Many Christians get confused when thinking on the topic of God will. Paul is not talking about God's undisclosed sovereign decree about all that will happen in the future, He is talking about God's moral will, which has been disclosed to us in the Scriptures. His moral will could be described as the sum of all His commands in Scripture. One major part of God's moral will is your sanctification (1 Thess 4:4). Working backwards, Paul urges you and I to understand God's moral will—that requires studying and understanding the Scriptures. Paul wants you to not be unwise, that means applying that spiritual insight to my life.

Transition: Living accordingly God's moral will is made possible by God's Spirit ministering in you along with your active, willing participation. In vv.18–21, Paul builds on the above truth by describing some specific outworkings in the life of the believer who is living out God's will through the Spirit's ministry.

II. Not Drunken, But Filled (v.18)

We should not quickly overlook the negative command of v.18a, "do not be drunk with wine." The Scripture does not tolerate drunkenness (Rom. 13:13; 1 Cor. 5:11; 1 Thess. 5:7). Drunkenness often leads to other sins and impairs the ability to think sober-mindedly. The word "dissipation" is the opposite of wise. It carries the idea that drunkenness leads to a wild, unrestrained, dissolute living, leading only to ruin.

Paul draws an analogy between drunkenness and the present imperative to "be filled with the Spirit." I caution you not to over-extend the analogy. While we talk about alcohol "controlling" a person's cognition and motor skills, the "filling of the Spirit" is not tantamount to the Spirit "controlling" the believer. The comparison seems to be between the two resulting states: a drunkard leads a life of dissipation/folly/unfruitfulness, but a Spirit-filled believer (to be defined below) leads a life of godliness/wisdom/fruitfulness.

That brings us to the question, what does it mean to be "filled with the Spirit." Let's begin by discussing what it does not mean.

The Reason for Contemporary Emphasis on the Filling of the Spirit[1]

The command to be filled with the Sprit is commonly, though mistakenly, seen as an essential element, if not the primary element, in the believer's sanctification. This view has its roots in John Wesley's distinct doctrine of sanctification called "Christian perfection" or "entire sanctification." According to this doctrine, Christians can achieve a level of perfection wherein sin is totally eradicated from the believer.

Charles Finney adopted the perfectionist theology and connected the baptism of the Spirit or the filling of the Spirit with entire sanctification. A couple named Walter and Phoebe Palmer helped popularize this doctrine of entire sanctification by the filling of the Spirit and were influential in establishing what became known as the Holiness Movement within Methodism.

Movements such as the Higher Life Movement or Keswick (Theology) or Victorious Life Movement all connect back to the false doctrine of perfectionism. In addition to the terms mentioned above, beware of terms such as "second blessing" or "full salvation" or "second conversion." These ideas are nowhere found in Scripture, and wrongly suggest two kinds of Christians, a "lower" or *carnal* Christian and a "higher" spiritual Christian.

Generally speaking, these movements promote a theology that overlooks the doctrine of definitive/positional sanctification, which refers to the believer's break from bondage to sin at conversion. Instead, this theology teaches "a second work of faith" ("a second blessing") is necessary for sanctification. According to their theology, this second work is the baptism of the Spirit or filling of the Spirit that comes sometime after conversion (Romans 6:6). Therefore, the filling of the Spirit becomes the key to spirituality and the victorious Christian life. Those who adopt the perfectionist view believe that as long as you are filled with the Spirit, a believer can be free from

[1]William W. Combs, "Spirit-Filling in Ephesians 5:18" DBSJ 19 (2014), pp. 26–31.

committing any known sin.[2] Today, this theology is commonly taught amongst Wesleyan Methodists, the Free Methodists, and the Church of the Nazarene.

A more subtle incorrect view of the filling of the Spirit is that it is a repeatable event that occurs throughout the Christian life and is dependent upon certain conditions. This view is held by many classic dispensationalists, including Scofield, Ryrie, Chafer, Stott, and Walvoord. In this view, the Filling of the Spirit becomes something that should be sought after by Christians by meeting a list of conditions in order to be achieve certain results. But the conditions and results are not agreed upon, and nowhere in Scripture does Jesus or the Apostles refer to a list of conditions necessary to be filled with the Spirit.

What then does Paul mean by "be filled with the Spirit"? Paul is urging the Ephesians believers to continue (*present* imperative) or "keep on being full of the Holy Spirit." Just as Luke, the Gospel writer, uses the term to refer to someone who is full of "faith" or "wisdom" (Acts 6:3, 5; 11:24) to refer to a particular observable quality in the life of a person, Paul uses the idea "full of" to exhort the Ephesians *to keep on* exhibiting those qualities that are characteristics of the Spirit. Elsewhere, Paul calls these the characteristics the "fruit of the Spirit" (Gal 5:22–23). In other words, to be characterized as full of the Spirit is to suggest that he or she is behaving as a Spirit-ual person.

This interpretation of Paul's filling metaphor undercuts the early notion that the filling of the Spirit is a special experience that should be sought after by believers. The proper interpretation of Paul's command leads us to conclude that Paul is stressing the importance and need for believers to have their lives marked out by those characteristics and qualities that distinguish Spirit-indwelt and Spirit-led Christians.

Am I full of the Spirit? Look for evidence of the Spirit's activity in your life. The evidence of the Spirit is found in good works, confession of

[2]Some view Spirit baptism and Filling of the Spirit as the same even, while others make a distinction between them. Either way, the results of Filling are similar in nature for these proponents: soul winning (Finney, Mody, Torrey, Rice, Hyles), tongues speaking (Pentecostals), immediate spirituality (as opposed to gradual),

sin, faith, wisdom, love, forbearance, mercy, submission to the Word of God. If you are walking in submission to the Word of God and the fruit of the Spirit abounds in your life, then I would answer YES, you are full of God's Spirit because of the evidence of the ministry of the Spirit in your life. In some ways, however, perhaps it is better to let other Christians evaluate your life to determine the evidence of the Spirit's presence and ministry. Even an unbeliever can recognize the characteristics of Spirit-filled person, or the lack thereof.

III. The Fruit of a Spirit-Filled Believer (vv.19–21)

The exact relationship of the participle phrases in vv.19–21 to the command to be "filled with the Spirit" is results. Paul is admonishing the Ephesians to keep on being full of the Spirit which will result in 1) speaking to another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, 2) singing and making melody to in their hearts to the Lord, 3) giving thanks always for all things to God the Father in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, 4) and submitting to one another in the fear of God.

We could turn the relationship around a full 180 degrees and conclude that those who manifest the qualities in vv.19–21 are evidencing the Spirit's presence and ministry in them. The Spirit's ministry results particularly in five spiritual qualities or actions as laid out by Paul in the text:

1) Speaking and singing to one another. The "speaking" of psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs emphasizes that we're to use our voices to build one another up. It's best not to make too much of distinction between the various "kinds" of songs mentioned. We could (and do) sing from Psalms, but there are other spiritual songs and hymns written and composed that praise God that are appropriate for us to sing. In Matthew 26:30, the disciples and Jesus sang a hymn before they went o the Mount of Olives. Paul and Silas sang hymns in prison (Acts 16:25).

   Even if you don't have a great voice, let me encourage you to just do your best. God commands us to sing. Singing is means of ascribing praise to God, and we should have a desire to do that. Singing also has a horizontal ministry as well. We are singing not only to God but also to "one another." Colossians 3:16-17 tells us that singing is a method of teaching and admonishing. It is

beneficial to the souls of everyone else who is there. It is a more indirect way of teaching and admonishing, but it has an important place in our worship service.

2) Giving thanks to God. A believer who is full of God's Spirit will be a thankful person. Our thankfulness should be directed to God first and foremost. We give thanks in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ or through Christ (Col 3:17) because of relationship to God through Jesus.

3) Submitting to one another. Verse twenty-one becomes somewhat of a transition marker between the previous section and down through 6:9. This is perhaps the most difficult of all the above-mentioned characteristics. But, keeping in mind the relationship of these characteristics to being Filled with the Spirit, the sign of a believer who is walking in the Spirit is that they are willing to submit to others.

   An un-submissive, stubborn spirit is evidence that they are resisting the Spirit's work in their life. Submission requires humility (1 Peter 5:5). Submission is required of certain people, wives to husbands, church members to leaders (Heb 13:17), children to parents, slaves to masters. But in a sense, we are all to be submissive to one another, not unwilling to take rebuke or correction from another believer, spouse, or even child. Paul will talk more about submission in chapter 6.

Conclusion

As one theologian aptly explains the filling of the Spirit: "The filling of the Spirit is no special spiritual highlight in the life of the believer. Instead, it is the normal experience of the believer as he increasingly strives to live a life that is in obedience to God and his Word. Paul's exhortation is "to continue" or "keep on being filled with the Spirit." Paul encourages the Ephesians to keep on acting like Spirit-people, to display those character qualities that are typical of their new life in Christ."[3]

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[3]Ibid., 51.

Normal/Ordinary Filling	Special Filling
Πληρόω "full of" Πλήρης "to make full"	Πίμπλημι "to fill"
Acts 13:52 And the **disciples were filled** (πληρόω) with joy and **with the Holy Spirit.**	Luke 1:15 For he will be great in the sight of the Lord, and shall drink neither wine nor strong drink. **He will also be filled with the Holy Spirit**, even from his mother's womb.
Eph 5:18–21 And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but **be filled** (πληρόω) **with the Spirit**,	Luke 1:41 And it happened, when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, that the babe leaped in her womb; and **Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit.**
Luke 4:1 **Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit**, returned from the Jordan and was led around by the Spirit in the wilderness.	Luke 1:67 Now his father **Zacharias was filled with the Holy Spirit**, and prophesied, saying:
Acts 6:3 Therefore, brethren, select from among you seven **men of good reputation, full of the Spirit** and of wisdom, whom we may put in charge of this task.	Acts 2:4 And **they were all filled with the Holy Spirit** and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.
Acts 6:5 … and they chose **Stephen, a man full** of faith and **of the Holy Spirit**, and Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas and Nicolas, a proselyte from Antioch.	Acts 4:8 Then Peter, **filled with the Holy Spirit**, said to them, "Rulers of the people and elders of Israel:
Acts 7:55 But **being full of the Holy Spirit**, he gazed intently into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God.	Acts 4:31 And when they had prayed, the place where they were assembled together was shaken; and **they were all filled with the Holy Spirit**, and they spoke the word of God with boldness.

Acts 11:24 for he was a good man, and **full of the Holy Spirit** and of faith. And considerable numbers were brought to the Lord.	Acts 9:17 And Ananias went his way and entered the house; and laying his hands on him he said, "Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you came, has sent me that you may receive your sight and **be filled with the Holy Spirit**."
	Acts 13:9 Then Saul, who also *is called* **Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit,** looked intently at him.