

another question. Are all believers filled by the Spirit?

Several learned men have implied in their writings that many believers are not filled with the Spirit. I know why these men say this, and I am sympathetic with them. But I'm not sure I would say it like that. I think it would be more accurate to say that every believer is filled by the Spirit (i.e., letting the word of Christ dwell in him) to some degree — however great or small. It's not all or nothing. The issue is not whether I have all of the Spirit; I received the indivisible person of the Spirit at regeneration. The issue is whether the Spirit has all of me!

Spirit-filling (or word-indwelling) is not

balloon expands and in a sense it is 'more full' (Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 782).

Conclusion

What does it mean to "be filled"? It means to be controlled. What does it mean to be filled "with the Spirit"? It means to be controlled by the Spirit. How can you be controlled by the Spirit? Let the word of Christ richly dwell in you (Colossians 3.16). Resolve by God's grace to let the word of Christ richly dwell within you so that Christ will fill you with God's character by means of the Spirit!

Andrew Naselli teaches Greek as a graduate assistant at Bob Jones University, where he is pursuing a Ph.D. in Theology.

Sola! Gets a Facelift

Editorial Comment

If you have been receiving *Sola!* on a regular basis, you will immediately recognize that it has experienced a transformation! This has taken place for a few reasons.

First, the primary audience of *Sola!* has always been Christians in local churches. This goal has not always been reached, however. Though pastors and other church leaders have benefitted from *Sola!*, few church members have been able to access it.

Second, constraints of time and money have made the previous format of *Sola!* very difficult to maintain on a regular basis. Over the history of the periodical, we have had to change frequency from monthly, to bi-monthly, to quarterly for this very reason.

Now, *Sola!* will be offered every month in this smaller format, and hopefully pastors will print and copy each issue to be inserted into bulletins or made available in some other way. If you are not already on the mailing list to receive *Sola!*, please email us right away (sola@ekkleisia.to).

Sola! will be teaming up with the Ekklesia Consortium (www.ekkleisia.to) in order to produce theologically sound, practical articles for every believer.

It is our burden to put theology back in the pew. Future editions of *Sola!* will include a wide variety of articles ranging from exegesis of particular passages to biographies to practical lifestyle issues. It is our desire that God's people will grow and mature as a result of *Sola!*

To download copies of Sola! or to read past articles, visit www.ekkleisia.to, the website of the Ekklesia Consortium.

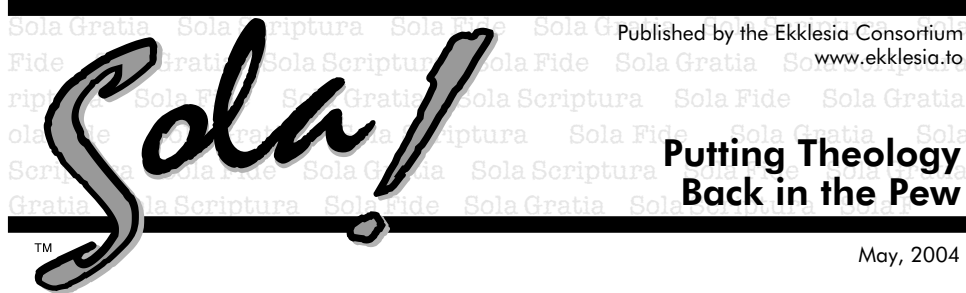
Are you filled with God's words? Are you obeying what you know?

like flipping a light switch off and on. Rather, it is like a dimmer switch. Sometimes the light is bright, and sometimes it is not so bright. The degree to which believers are filled with God's words is the degree to which the Spirit is controlling them.

Are you filled with God's words? Are you obeying what you know? If you are sinning in one area, you are not necessarily sinning in every other area. But that one area is significant and is keeping the "dimmer switch" lower.

Believers may be filled by the Spirit to different degrees. Compare a tiny, newborn baby boy to a full-grown man. Both are "filled with air," but the capacity of the baby's lungs is far less than the man's. Both the baby and man are "filled," but the man is more filled with air than the baby. Similarly, believers are growing in grace and knowledge and have different spiritual lung capacities.

"Someone might object that a person who is already 'full' of the Holy Spirit cannot become more full – if a glass is full of water no more water can be put into it. But a water glass is a poor analogy for us as real people, for God is able to cause us to grow and to be able to contain much more of the Holy Spirit's fullness and power. A better analogy might be a balloon, which can be 'full' of air even though it has very little air in it. When more air is blown in, the



Putting Theology Back in the Pew

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Being Filled by the Spirit

Andrew Naselli

One of the most misunderstood sentences in the New Testament related to Christian living occurs in Ephesians 5.18: "Be filled with the Spirit." In conservative evangelicalism today, many believers understand Paul's command "Be filled with the Spirit" to be the secret key that unlocks holy living. But is this emphasis Scripturally and historically founded? I don't think so.

Scripturally, the NT does not emphasize Spirit-filling; it occurs only once in Paul's letters and is strikingly absent from Paul's theological treatise of sanctification in Romans 6-8. The emphasis that John Wesley's theology began carried over to the Higher Life and Keswick Movements; Dallas Theological Seminary's founder (Chafer) and successors (Walvoord, Pentecost, Ryrie, etc.) have propagated the view that believers may transition from being carnal Christians to victorious Christians only through the filling of the Holy Spirit. I am not suggesting that Ephesians 5.18 is unimportant; I am asserting that it is incorrect to think of Spirit-filling as the secret key to living "the victorious Christian life." The New Testament does not present two distinct levels or stages in the Christian life like that. Being filled by the Spirit is not "an event obtainable by 'full surrender'...any more than the admonition 'to be filled with knowledge' means that there is an event obtainable by 'full surrender' such as 'the filling with knowledge'" (Edgar, "The Sufficiency of Our Justification" in *CTI*, Sept. 1989, 234).

What does it mean to "be filled"?

The best way to contrast Spirit-filling is by analyzing its opposite in the first half of verse 18: "Don't get drunk with wine." What effect does alcohol have on someone when he is drunk? It has a controlling effect. A person

who is normally timid and soft-spoken may become bold and outspoken when "under the influence" of alcohol. Being filled is parallel to being controlled. Application: Don't let alcohol control you; rather let the Spirit control you.

What does it mean to be filled "with the Spirit"?

Does "with the Spirit" indicate content or means? For example, what is the difference between the following sentences?

"I filled the pool with water."

"I filled the pool with a hose."

"With water" indicates the content of the filling. "With a hose" indicates the means or instrument of the filling (that is, how or through what means it was filled).

So does Ephesians 5.18 mean "Be filled with the content of the Spirit" or "Be filled by means of the Spirit" or both? Grammatically, it cannot mean both, so that option is out. The popular understanding is that it means content. We can discover the answer to this question by studying the other ways that the New Testament uses words for filling with reference to the Holy Spirit. The New Testament refers to the filling or fullness of the Spirit 15 times; besides Ephesians 5.18, the other 14 times are in Luke and Acts. The New Testament uses three Greek words to refer to the filling or fullness of the Spirit: *πίμπλημι* (8 times; Luke 1.15, 41, 67; Acts 2.4; 4.8, 31; 9.17; 13.9), *πλήρης* (5 times; Luke 4.1; Acts 6.3, 5; 7.55; 11.24), and *πληρώω* (2 times; Acts 13.52; Ephesians 5.18).

(1) *Πίμπλημι* refers to a special filling that is not the result of prayerful seeking. "Holy Spirit" always follows this word

in the genitive case indicating that He is the content of the filling.

(2) Πλήρης refers to a spiritual maturity that characterizes a godly believer. Like ἅγιος, "Holy Spirit" always follows this word in the genitive case indicating that He is the content of the filling.

(3) Πληρώ occurs only 2 times with the Holy Spirit. Acts 13:52 says, "The disciples were continually filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit." Both "joy" and "Holy Spirit" are in the genitive case indicating that they are the content of the filling. Ephesians 5:18 is unique from the other 14 occurrences because "Holy Spirit" is not a genitive of content; rather "Holy Spirit" is in the dative case as the object of the preposition ἐν. Nowhere in the New Testament does this construction indicate content. Rather it indicates means,

instrumentality, or personal agency. The translation "Be filled with the Spirit" implies that the Spirit is the content of the filling. A better translation is "Be filled by the Spirit." This communicates that the Spirit is the personal agent or means of the filling.

Ephesians 5:18 does not say what the content of the filling is. To see what the content of the filling is, it is helpful to examine the other uses of the verb here translated "be filled" in Ephesians. That verb (πληρώ) occurs 4 times in Ephesians. Let's examine those occurrences.

(1) Ephesians 1:23: "which is His body, the fullness [πλήρωμα] of Him who fills [πληροῦμένου] all in all." Who does the filling? Christ!

(2) Ephesians 3:19: "and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge,

that you may be filled up [πληρωθῆτε] to all the fullness of God." What is the content of the filling? The fullness of God! What's that? That's "probably a reference to his moral attributes" (Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics*, 375). Be filled with the character of God!

(3) Ephesians 4:10: "He who descended is Himself also He who ascended far above all the heavens, so that He might fill [πληρώσῃ] all things." Who does the filling? Again, Christ!

(4) Ephesians 5:18b: "but be filled [πληροῦσθε] with/by the Spirit [ἐν πνεύματι]." Who is the means or personal agent of the filling? The Holy Spirit!

Believers are to be filled by Christ by means of the Spirit with the content of the fullness of God.

Thus, "Believers are to be filled by Christ by means of the Spirit with the content of the fullness of God" (Wallace, 375).

Grammatically, the verb translated "be filled" is in the present tense and imperative mood. It has a customary force; the action should continue. In other words, you must make this your habit (cf. Wallace, 722). For example, in Ephesians 5:2, Paul used a present imperative when he wrote, "walk in love." This certainly means "continue in love" since in 1:15 he praised the Ephesians for having "love for all the saints." Similarly, the command in Ephesians 5:18 is to continue to let the Spirit fill you with the character of God.

The verb translated "be filled" is in the passive voice. What's the difference between the active and passive voice? A politician would be more likely to say which of these statements: (1) "I made mistakes" or (2) "Mistakes were made"? A politician would probably be more likely to say the second one because the second one leaves the subject of "making mistakes" unnamed. The passive voice does not explicitly state the subject of the action.

In Ephesians 5:18, the significance of the passive voice is that believers don't fill

themselves with the character of God. The Spirit fills believers with the character of God! This does not mean that you just sit back and wait for the Spirit to fill you! You are responsible for this — hence, the command. Just like you are responsible not to let alcohol control you, you are responsible to let the Spirit control you. Allow the Spirit to control you! That raises an important question.

Spirit-filling is not a mysterious experiential high. You can know if you are Spirit-filled by examining your life.

How can you be controlled by the Spirit?

How do you know if you are filled by the Spirit with the character of God? You don't have to wonder. Spirit-filling is not a mysterious experiential high. You can know by examining your life. Are you evidencing the results? "What results?" you ask. Paul lists five results in Ephesians 5:19-21. Each of the results are participles or words ending in "-ing." "Result participles are invariably present participles that follow the main verb; as well, the idea of result here would suggest that the way in which one measures his/her success in fulfilling the command of 5:18 is by the participles that follow" (Wallace, 639). Verses 18-21 are actually one long sentence.

Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.

Paul lists four results of being filled by the Spirit in 5:19-21.

- (1) Fellowship: speaking to one another
- (2) Worship: singing and making music to the Lord
- (3) Gratitude: giving thanks to God
- (4) Submission: submitting yourselves to one another. Paul then develops the

last result of submission in 5:22-6:9 in three household relationships: husbands and wives, parents and children, and masters and slaves.

That's how you can know if you are filled by the Spirit. But what can you do to ensure that this happens? Remember, Spirit-filling is not mysterious and intangible. The most helpful passage in this regard is a parallel passage to Ephesians 5:18-6:9. This parallel passage occurs in another letter that Paul wrote while imprisoned in Rome. Paul wrote four "prison epistles": Philippians, Philemon, Ephesians, and Colossians. Colossians is a twin

letter to Ephesians; Colossians emphasizes Christ, and Ephesians emphasizes the church.

In Colossians 3:16 and following, Paul lists results that are very similar to the Ephesians 5 passage. But in Colossians 3, the initial command before the results is not the same as Ephesians 5:18. What is it in Colossians 3:16? "Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you." That is parallel to the command in Ephesians 5:18, "Be filled by the Spirit." So what can you do to ensure that you are being controlled by the Spirit? Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you! Robert Reymond wrote, "These two ideas, both highlighting a divine, subjective influence, are practically identical. To be filled with the Spirit is to be indwelt by the word of Christ; to be indwelt by the word of Christ is to be filled with the Spirit. One must never separate the Spirit from Christ's word or Christ's word from the Spirit. The Spirit works by and with Christ's word. Christ's word works by and with the Spirit" (*A New Systematic Theology*, 766). I would hesitate to make the two commands mathematically equal. It seems better to view one as the means for ensuring that the other is happening; that is, letting the word of Christ dwell in you richly is the means for letting the Spirit fill you with God's character.

This means that you should not only be reading God's words consistently. but His words must also be living in you! That will only happen if you understand what you read, think about it continually (i.e., meditate), and obey it! Spirit-filling is not a quiver in your liver. "There are no shortcuts to spirituality. There is no easy way, no single spiritual 'zap' that does the job" (MacArthur, *Charismatic Chaos*, 321). This is a lifelong process. But this raises