

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

Ephesians 5:17-21

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Ephesians 5:17-21 (Power Point)

Preface

In the 19th century, a theologian of the South African Republic named Andrew Murray left these words in one of his writings: "When I die, the Holy Spirit lives. When I die to self, the Holy Spirit lives."

The Apostle Paul, the author of the Epistle to the Ephesians, confesses in 1 Corinthians, "I face death every day" (1 Corinthians 15:31).

And when we look at what is written from Ephesians 5:17 through chapter 6, it feels as though it is telling us that "to be filled with the Holy Spirit" is a spiritual battle—one of "dying to oneself and letting others stand," "killing the ego and raising others," "lowering oneself for the benefit of others," and "denying oneself and respecting others."

The Lord Jesus, in Matthew 16:24, after rebuking His disciple Peter with the words, "Get behind Me, Satan! You are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men," then addressed them, saying, "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, die to himself, and follow Me." The content of what the Apostle Paul is saying here from Ephesians 5:17 onward about the filling of the Holy Spirit, though in different words, is exactly the same message as what Jesus spoke in Matthew 16:24-25.

Surprisingly, the "being filled with the Holy Spirit" spoken of in this Epistle to the Ephesians seems to be quite different from what the phrase might ordinarily bring to mind—something special, so to speak, or some kind of mysterious religious or spiritual experience.

Rather, it teaches that "being filled with the Holy Spirit" is something that manifests itself, is expressed, in very real and vivid human relationships and everyday interactions: the relationship between husband and wife, in married life; the exchanges between parent and child, in the parent-child relationship; in one's behavior and attitude toward those under one's authority—subordinates or juniors; and also in one's demeanor toward those above—superiors or seniors—in the workplace or in society at large.

Part One

I believe I have spoken about this before, but when I was a university student, I had what might be called a mysterious religious spiritual experience—something that is often associated with the phrase "being filled with the Holy Spirit."

It was an experience like when the Holy Spirit came upon the disciples of Jesus, and they suddenly began to proclaim the gospel in foreign languages, or like when the Spirit of God came upon the seventy elders besides Moses, and they began to speak ecstatically about the matters of the Kingdom of God.

This happened in America, during a two-night, three-day youth retreat of Calvary Chapel San Diego, the church where I came to faith.

On the second night, there was a program where, just as described in the Old Testament, we prayed while anointing with oil on the head.

The pastor would pour oil not just on the head but over the whole body while praying over the youth.

The pastors at that time were Pastor Paul Kim and his wife, Pastor Sarah.

While the praise team was singing worship songs, Pastor Paul and Pastor Sarah laid their hands on my head and prayed, and they poured generous amounts of olive oil over my head.

Then, suddenly—and this truly surprised me—I began to tremble all over and could no longer stand, and I fell backward onto the floor.

And then, all of a sudden, unknown tongues began to come out of my mouth, and I began to pray in those tongues.

Even when I tried to get up, I couldn't.

But both my heart and body were filled with peace.

I felt incredibly good.

Later, one of the young people who had been praying a little ways off and watching told me that he saw Jesus, dressed in white robes, walking around that place.

It was truly astonishing.

Through that experience, from that point on, I could no longer deny the existence of the Lord Jesus Christ or the existence of the Holy Spirit God.

I believe that was the moment when I resolved the path of my life.

I felt, "To someone like me, a doubting Thomas who won't believe even when he sees, God granted an unforgettable memory of His presence, so that I could know with my own body, in a dynamic way, that God truly exists, that Jesus and the Holy Spirit are indeed God."

And even now, I am thankful for that experience.

The Bible does record such mysterious spiritual experiences of being filled with the Holy Spirit, like this one—but in reality, far more frequent are the manifestations of the Holy Spirit's filling as character, as conduct, in the midst of ordinary, everyday life.

The filling of the Holy Spirit is revealed in very real, concrete human relationships and interactions, and in one's attitude and behavior toward others.

Rather, I believe that this kind of filling of the Holy Spirit is the main one, and it is the one to which the Bible gives greater emphasis.

Part Two

For example, take the man named Moses.

The events like “parting the sea” or “bringing forth water from a rock” were just fleeting moments within his long life.

Of course, those incidents were undoubtedly unforgettable and spiritually significant turning points, and there is no doubt about their importance. However, nearly all of his walk as a man of faith was the fullness of the Holy Spirit manifested and expressed in human relationships—interacting with others amid the raw reality of life in the wilderness.

It means he embodied being filled with the Spirit of God through his relationships with others.

Let’s take a look at one example in Numbers chapter 14.

Numbers 14:1–5 (PowerPoint)

Moses and Aaron had done nothing wrong against the whole assembly of Israel. And yet, the entire congregation of Israel, in baseless resentment, irrationally and without any grounds, said things like, “There’s no way we’re going to the promised land! You two deceived us innocent people and brought us out to this wilderness to let us die here!” And they came at Moses and Aaron with the momentum to strike them down.

But Moses and Aaron did not talk back saying, “Why are you stubbornly causing us trouble with such nonsense?” Instead, they simply fell face down before them.

As if to express with their whole bodies that they could never claim to be blameless before God, they died to themselves, lowered themselves, denied themselves, and prostrated themselves before these unreasonable and irrational people—thus humbly expressing that they were filled with the Spirit of God.

We’ll look at it more later, but as it says in Romans chapter 12:

“Be fervent in spirit, serve the Lord. Honor one another above yourselves. As much as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. Do not take revenge yourselves. Leave room for God’s wrath”—Moses embodied being filled with the Spirit in the raw reality of life and in his relationships with others, just as those words declare.

It is not a battle over whether one is right or wrong, but a battle over how deeply one can recognize before the Lord God how undeserving and wretched they themselves are.

It is a battle over whether one can truly realize how great the grace of God is, even though we are completely unworthy to receive it.

It is a battle over whether one truly knows—deep down—that they are a sinner crucified with Christ on the cross.

It is a battle over whether one is striving to remain in that place where they have died and Christ lives within them.

To put it even more plainly, it is a battle over whether one knows God or not, believes in Christ or not.

The whole congregation of Israel saw their opponent in battle as the people right in front of them.

They treated fighting, looking down on, and judging those people as their battle.

But Moses and Aaron, before God, before Jesus Christ, fought the battle of “What kind of person am I?”

And through that, they showed the fullness of the Holy Spirit.

Also, David—who left behind massive praises and the birth of the Messiah Christ in the form of God’s Word—his experiences like defeating Goliath or so-called mysterious spiritual encounters with the Holy Spirit were only fleeting moments in his long walk of faith.

The majority of his life was a manifestation of being filled with the Spirit through raw, human interactions and relationships.

When the prophet Nathan pointed out the great sin David committed by abusing his power as king and trying to cover it up, David tore his clothes, knelt down, and did not try to hide or excuse his sin. He followed the prompting of the Holy Spirit and honestly admitted it.

Even when he was unjustly and life-threateningly pursued by King Saul—a situation that can only be described as an outrageous misfortune—David, **in fear of God**, tried to embody mercy, forgiveness, and submission toward that unreasonable pursuer.

He entrusted vengeance to God, followed that person as he would follow Christ, and simply waited upon the Lord.

Furthermore, he did not treat his subordinates and soldiers as mere tools, but as individual persons, striving to serve them with honor and respect.

I wonder what David’s expression and demeanor were like, as he tried to express being filled with the Holy Spirit through his relationships with others.

Part Three

25 years ago, even though I could hardly speak Korean, when I decided to go to a seminary in Korea, there were several candidate seminaries, but the reason I chose the United Graduate School of Theology was because of the appearance and expressions of the professors who were teaching there and the seminarians who were studying there.

At that time, my wife (then girlfriend) and I, without any connections or appointments, visited several seminaries we had listed as candidates. When we first went to the United Graduate School of Theology, I still remember it clearly.

While the two of us were wandering around the campus, looking around here and there, we entered a building that looked like a seminary hall. Just then, about 12 or 13 meters away, an elderly gentleman with white hair and glasses happened to be standing there. The moment he saw us, he gave us a bow with a cheerful, kind, and quiet smile—so gentle that I wouldn't be exaggerating to say I had never seen such a smile before—towards us, who were just youngsters.

In Korea, which is strongly influenced by Confucian culture, it is natural for younger people to greet those older or above them first. So, when a person clearly much older and above us greeted us first, with a cheerful and kind smile, bowing his head, my wife and I were, in a sense, shocked.

And at that moment, we both simultaneously thought, "Ah, this seminary is somehow different."

Later on, when we found out who that person was, we were even more surprised.

There is a book thicker than the Bible called *Institutes of the Christian Religion* by John Calvin, who laid the foundation for Protestant theology. That man was the theologian who translated this book into Korean for the first time, and he was the president and dean of the seminary at the time.

Also, on another day when we made an appointment and visited the seminary again, a senior professor of church history, who lived near my wife's parents' home, came to pick us up in his own car and drove us to the school.

The two of us sat in the back seat of the car, and though the professor didn't speak many words, we exchanged a few words with him through the small rearview mirror. Yet again, through his cheerful and kind eyes, the quiet radiance that came from his expression, and the tone of his respectful words as he spoke to us—mere youngsters—we thought again:

"Ah, this seminary is somehow different."

When we arrived at the school, a senior seminarian who had been waiting to guide us around was there. We saw the way this student served the professor with a sense of reverence, and how the professor, while still using honorific speech toward the student, spoke to him with eyes like those of a father toward his beloved son. Watching this interaction between the two of them, we again thought, "Ah, this seminary is somehow different."

Now, if someone were to ask me, “What did you learn at such a seminary, and is that why you are who you are today?” I wouldn’t really know how to answer. But what I can say is that during the three years I studied at the United Graduate School of Theology, the message that was repeatedly and emphatically taught was this: “The fullness of the Holy Spirit is not an experience—it is a way of life.”

This is exactly the content that the Apostle Paul is speaking of in the latter half of Ephesians chapter 5 through chapter 6.

“Understand what the Lord’s will is. Be filled with the Spirit. Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.”

Ephesians 5:17–21 (PowerPoint)

After saying in verse 17, “Understand what the Lord’s will is,” Paul continues in verse 18, almost as if saying “The Lord’s will is to be filled with the Spirit,” and exhorts, “Be filled with the Spirit.” Then he goes on to say where the result of being filled with the Spirit will be seen—in verse 21: “Submit to one another **out of reverence for Christ.**” It’s as if he’s saying, “By human strength alone, people cannot submit to one another.” That is why he says, “Submit to one another **out of reverence for Christ.**”

Just as Christ, in order to save us sinners, though being God, humbled Himself to become like a human, obeyed even unto death on the cross, “killed Himself to give life to others,” “denied Himself for others,” “considered the existence of others more important than His own life,”—in the same way, Paul commands: “Out of reverence for such a Christ, submit to one another.”

I believe this word implies a profound truth: “Human beings, by their own strength, morality, humanity, dignity, education, or life experience, are not easily able to submit to one another.”

In other words, true submission to one another can only be the work of the Holy Spirit. Being filled with the Holy Spirit, remembering Christ, realizing and confessing one’s own sinfulness—only through that can a person die to self and submit to others.

Why is that? Because, as we saw last week, humanity, having betrayed God and fallen into sin, ended up extinguishing the indwelling Spirit of God, and broke harmony with God, harmony with one another, and harmony with creation.

As described in Genesis chapter 4, people began to operate through behavior driven by “revenge” and “murder.”

In order for such humanity to once again embody the original image of “submitting to one another,” there is only one way: to be filled once more with the Spirit of God, which is the original state of humanity.

And once a person is filled with the Lord’s Spirit, the fear of Christ arises, and one can die to self and submit to others.

What's more, not unwillingly, but with joy, peace, and a profound sense of hope, we can live that way.

It is a peace that unintentionally shows itself on one's face.

Part Four

The first thing that the Bible teaches us about human nature and human beings is that we are not beings filled with optimistic hope, but rather sinful sinners who are motivated by "revenge" and "killing."

Perhaps because of this, in Ephesians 5:18, the Bible does not say, "I will fill you with the Holy Spirit," but rather urges, "Be filled with the Holy Spirit," emphasizing the effort, endeavor, choice, practice, and action on our part as believers in Christ—our will is required.

The Bible shows that there are two types of fillings of the Holy Spirit: one, like in Acts 2, where we are filled purely by grace, regardless of our side, and another where our will, decisions, choices, posture, and resolve are questioned—this is the "be filled" that requires us to actively desire and seek to receive the Holy Spirit. It seems there are two ways to be filled with the Holy Spirit.

The filling of the Holy Spirit mentioned in Ephesians 5, however, is the latter—specifically, the filling of the Holy Spirit where our faith is at stake, and we are being asked to desire to be filled.

When we look at the letters that make up half of the New Testament, written by the Apostle Paul, we are taught that there are two kinds of Christians in the Church, with Christ as the head.

One is the Christian who has believed in Jesus for a long time but is still like a child who desires only milk and refuses to eat solid food, remaining in immature faith.

The other is the Christian who, by yielding and surrendering themselves to the full control of the Holy Spirit's guidance, lives focusing on spiritual battle, seeking to live under the Holy Spirit's leadership.

We must each decide for ourselves, with our own will, which category we belong to.

This is the expectation, demand, and command from God conveyed in the words, "Be filled with the Spirit"—not "I will fill you with the Spirit."

Why does God make this demand?

Because the relationship between believers in Christ and God is one of love.

Love is not only an emotion but also a will.

Love is constantly confirmed through the expression of will and decision, with the expectation of this mutual confirmation.

For this reason, we have been given free will.

We are not programmed by God to say "I l-o-v-e y-o-u" as if by some form of divine programming.

This is the greatest, clearest difference between humans and animals/plants.

Animals/plants live according to the programming God gave them when He created them, following the cycles and order of the created world, and living in their assigned roles.

No creature other than humans defies God.

Only humans have been given free will and were created as beings who can express their love, trust, and loyalty to God through their own will.

Will we sail out into God's deep grace, humbly dying to ourselves and living a life belonging to the loving Holy Spirit? Or will we continue to live a life belonging to the flesh?

Will we choose to fear Christ, struggle to understand His immeasurable grace that is deep, wide, long, and high, and with joy, kill ourselves, choosing to follow others? Or will we remain immature, seeking only milk, pampering ourselves, exalting ourselves, looking down on others, refusing to understand others, and judging others, turning into a Pharisee-like religious person who only appears to know Christ?

Now, we are being asked by God to make the decision as Christians, "Be filled with the Spirit."

God, people, and circumstances are not the root of the problems or awareness of the problems I face right now. I, the person I am, am the root of all those problems and awareness. With the fear of Christ, we must humbly acknowledge this until we die. This is what it means not to quench the Holy Spirit who dwells in us and to let the Holy Spirit live in us, experiencing the eternal life that Jesus speaks of: "Those who believe in me, though they die, will live; those who try to save their life will lose it, but those who lose their life for my sake will find it."

Through this word, "Choose this," we are being asked by God right now.

Conclusion

Finally, I would like to conclude by reading the words from Romans 12.

Romans 12:10-21 (PowerPoint)

'Be fervent in spirit, serving the Lord, honoring one another as more excellent than yourselves.' Let us overcome evil with good and joyfully choose to be filled with the Holy Spirit, and let us pray that we may follow this path.

Let us pray.

Benediction: Ephesians 5:18c, 21"