

# **“The Filling of the Holy Spirit That We Seek and Choose”**

**Ephesians 5:17–21**

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## **Ephesians 5:17–21 (PowerPoint)**

### **Preface**

Last time, from the same Bible passage, more than the so-called extraordinary experience of being filled with the Holy Spirit—given and received by God’s sovereignty and grace—we considered the importance of the filling of the Holy Spirit as character, appearing in our daily lives, which believers in Christ seek and choose with their own will.

Mysterious Holy Spirit experiences such as being suddenly filled with the Holy Spirit by the providence of the Lord and speaking in tongues or prophesying are, I believe, important faith experiences given as blessings from God. However, the filling of the Holy Spirit that Apostle Paul speaks of here in Ephesians chapters 5 and 6 is the filling of the Holy Spirit that is manifested in our daily lives, requiring our own will and attitude.

That is, it is the filling of the Holy Spirit that appears in relationships between people, the filling of the Holy Spirit that is manifested in connections and interactions with others outside of oneself.

It may be said that "a person’s life is all about human relationships," but the Bible, surprisingly, seems to value not so much the mysterious, spiritual experiences of the Holy Spirit, but even more so, the filling of the Holy Spirit that is embodied in every human relationship in the real field of life—especially not with distant people, with whom we can expand imagination or fantasy, but rather with those who are right near us—our neighbors, the people right in front of us—the filling of the Holy Spirit that is embodied in raw human interactions.

### **Part One**

Why does war never cease?

I think this is a question everyone has. But the reason the Bible gives seems surprisingly simple and clear.

It is because people direct their thoughts toward those far away, with whom they cannot immediately interact, rather than toward those nearby.

It is as if God, or Jesus, is saying, “You try to care about distant things or distant people, but you don’t care about those who are right near you—you don’t try to be considerate of them.”

That is why Jesus came to this earth in the limited form of a human being.

He was born 2,000 years ago, in the limited time of history, in the specific town of Bethlehem in Palestine, as a baby—a being who could only survive held close in the arms of a mother and father, with human limitations.

Then, during the following thirty years of His walk, within the limited region from Galilee to Judea, He revealed Himself as the Messiah, the Christ, within relationships with people whom He met in that limited setting.

In other words, He treasured those right before Him, those close at hand, those whom He could reach out and touch—and within those relationships, He embodied the Kingdom of God through the filling of the Holy Spirit.

After Jesus was crucified, died, rose again, and ascended into heaven, the Holy Spirit, whom He sent to us, came not in the form of a human being with limitations like Jesus, but as a spirit—unlimited in form—and descended upon this earth and upon people.

Yet what God demands and expects of those who receive and seek this filling of the Holy Spirit is the manifestation of that filling within relationships with people nearby, those right before us, within reach—the Kingdom of God that we seek to embody through the filling of the Holy Spirit.

Just as Jesus said, “When you receive the Holy Spirit, and the world sees that you love one another, then the world will know that you are My disciples.”

I think we human beings are generally unwilling to admit that the small conflicts we have with those near us become, on a global scale, the great waves of war that shake the world.

The “butterfly effect,” where “if a butterfly flaps its wings in Brazil, a tornado may occur in Texas,” seems to apply equally to our sins and spiritual problems.

The work of the Holy Spirit that the Bible values, the work that the Bible teaches us, is one that appears and is revealed in those who are right near us.

The filling of the Holy Spirit that is manifested in our relationships with those immediately around us—whether husband or wife, child or parent, brother or sister, colleague, senior, junior, or friend.

The Bible speaks to us to seek and choose the filling of the Holy Spirit that appears in facial expressions, deeds, attitudes, and postures.

And I believe that this message is summarized in the words of Ephesians 5:18, 21 that we read today: “Be filled with the Spirit. Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.”

This morning, to go one step deeper into this Word beyond last week’s message, I would like to consider one example of a negative model.

This negative example is someone who experienced a mysterious spiritual filling of the Holy Spirit, but did not seek the filling of the Holy Spirit that is manifested in human relationships—“submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ”—which God delights in.

## **Part Two**

We are currently studying the Book of Numbers in the early morning prayer meeting, and the Bible passages we are reading in accordance with the Bible reading chart distributed last month are also from Numbers. In that Book of Numbers, a certain fortune-teller and sorcerer named Balaam appears.

This Balaam seems to have been a well-known and famous fortune-teller and sorcerer in the Middle Eastern world of 3,500 years ago. But for some reason, a man named Balak, the king of the Moabites—who feared and trembled before the wandering Israelites, who had no land, no nation, and were in a state like collective homelessness—paid a large sum of money to hire Balaam and asked him to curse and destroy the people of Israel.

The fortune-teller Balaam, thinking this was his chance, accepted the request. But the Lord God, who loved the people of Israel so much that He considered them His treasured people and would even give His life for them, appeared directly to this fortune-teller Balaam. Balaam was not a Christian who believed in the Messiah, Christ, but rather a person who made a living by deceiving and controlling people's hearts through divination, sorcery, and religious rituals that opposed the true teachings of God. And yet God spoke directly to him and said, “You must never harm the people of Israel. You must not utter even a single word of curse against them.” What did God say exactly?

### **Numbers 22:12 (PowerPoint)**

The Lord, the only God who created heaven and earth and all things, appeared directly to Balaam and spoke to him.

“Do not curse the Israelites, for they are a blessed people whom I love,” He said. In a way, Balaam had a very mysterious experience of God.

Anyone who believes in God, in the Lord Jesus, must have thought, at least once—or perhaps many times—“I want to hear God’s voice directly. If God appeared right before my eyes, how clear and good that would be! I wouldn’t have to live with such frustration, and I could have a faith without doubt.”

Now, Balaam did not believe in the one true triune God. He did not confess that “the cross of the Savior Jesus is my substitute.” And yet, for some reason, he experienced what Christians—who believe in God and long for it earnestly—may experience only once in a lifetime, if at all: direct words and revelations from God, multiple times over just a few days.

Even after Numbers 22:12, God continues to appear directly to Balaam and speak directly to him.

What’s more—what’s more—the Spirit of God, the Holy Spirit, even comes upon him.

### **Numbers 24:2 (PowerPoint)**

Even the Spirit of God comes upon the fortune-teller Balaam.

In a way, Balaam has this enviable, extraordinary experience of God.

But even so, this experience of the Holy Spirit, this encounter with God, did not change Balaam’s way of life.

Despite this experience of God, of the Holy Spirit, Balaam did not humble himself before the one true God, nor did he repent of his way of life—making a living by doing things directly contrary to what God desires—and confess his deep sinfulness. He did not seek forgiveness, nor did he abandon his business of cursing people. He did not resolve to love people in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, loving others as more important than himself, denying himself so that God might live within him, dying to himself and seeking the fullness of the Holy Spirit. He did not try to embody, in his daily life and relationships, the work of the Holy Spirit described by Andrew Murray that I mentioned last time: “When I die, the Spirit lives. When I die to self, the Spirit lives.”

He did not choose a way of life that manifests the fullness of the Spirit in relationships with people—relationships that are violent, empty, and brutal, where people curse

one another, fight over right and wrong, compete for superiority—and instead serve others.

Though he had this marvelous and even visible experience of being filled with the Holy Spirit, he did not deliberately seek or choose the work of the Spirit described as “submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ.” He did not choose the glorious life of recognizing Christ, becoming aware of and confessing his own sinfulness—not someone else’s—and dying to self, submitting to others.

He did not taste the joy of denying himself so that Christ might live within him. He did not choose the glorious path of dying to ego so that the Holy Spirit might work within him.

This precious experience of God bore no fruit of the Spirit.

And so, we read in **Numbers 24:25**:

### **Numbers 24:25 (PowerPoint)**

Even after being filled with the Holy Spirit and having that experience of God, Balaam “returned to his own place”—choosing not God, but himself.

He could not let go of the danger of making himself the master of his own life, of a self-righteous way of living. He returned to “his own place”—to eternal destruction, choosing sinful self, a path of eternal self-destruction.

Rather than choosing a life of engaging in the truly fruitful spiritual battle that bears the fruit of the Spirit—“dying to self to elevate others,” “killing ego and joyfully regarding others as better than oneself,” “lowering oneself for the benefit of others,” “denying oneself and honoring others”—he chose instead to keep living a life of unspiritual battles: “earning money even by cursing others,” “standing by his own power even by cursing others,” “forcing others to recognize his own correctness even by cursing others.” A life that seeks only milk and leads to no spiritual growth. He did not intentionally seek the fullness of the Holy Spirit that means “stopping what is not pleasing to the Lord.”

There are words of evaluation about such Balaam in the New Testament:

**2 Peter 2:15 (PowerPoint)**

**Jude verse 11 (PowerPoint)**

**Revelation 2:14 (PowerPoint)**

Balaam, despite having been filled with the Spirit of God, the Holy Spirit, acted as if it had never happened and “returned to his own place.”

## **Part Three**

Now, when we look at Numbers 24:25, we see that there is one more person who returned to his own place. That is Balak, the king of Moab.

### **Numbers 24:25 (PowerPoint)**

Balak witnessed with his own eyes everything that happened to the fortune-teller Balaam: his experience of God, his experience of the Holy Spirit, the words of God, the oracle of God, and God's blessing upon Israel. He heard and saw it all firsthand, and his emotions were stirred.

And yet, just like Balaam, he returned to his own place.

What is most regrettable is this: compared to the fortune-teller Balaam, Balak was much closer to the blessed people of Israel, and he had a far greater opportunity to partake in God's blessing. He was nearby. That person was Balak, king of the Moabites.

The Moabites were descendants of Lot, the nephew of Abraham.

In other words, they were people who had left Ur of the Chaldeans with Abraham, shared in the words of blessing from the Lord with Abraham, and were the people and nation closest to Abraham, the father of faith. That was the descendants of Lot—the Moabites.

Yet somehow, before they realized it, instead of submitting to the blessing of the Lord of hosts, who had blessed Israel, they came to make it their national enterprise to curse those who were under God's blessing.

And what's more, they even sought to curse and kill their closest relatives, their neighbors—the people of Israel.

Rather than looking at the blessing of Israel, their closest relatives, and choosing the path of "fearing Christ and submitting to one another," they relied on themselves, bound by superstition, making themselves king and choosing instead a salvationless, desolate way of life, cursing one another.

And to such Moabites, God—despite their bad motive of approaching Israel in order to curse them—used even that bad motive to provide them, here and now, with a chance and opportunity to return, like the Israelites, under the blessing of God. That is how it appears to me.

In his own way, Balak had a divine experience through the act of hiring the fortune-teller Balaam. Through Balaam's mysterious experiences of God and the Holy Spirit, and through seeing Balaam, who was led by the Spirit of God to declare words of

blessing upon Israel instead of cursing them—through all this, Balak experienced something of God.

And yet, Balak returned to his own place.

He did not choose the blessing of “dying to self and allowing the Holy Spirit to live,” of “fearing Christ and submitting to one another.”

Even though he was given an opportunity to escape spiritual blindness, he rejected it.

When we look at these two men—Balaam and Balak—we are made to realize that the fact we have been enabled to believe in Jesus Christ, to know the one true God by believing in Christ, to seek the fullness of the Holy Spirit, and to even *want* to express the fullness of the Spirit in our relationships with others as something God desires... all of that, in itself, is already a miracle.

We are no different from Balaam or Balak—sinners, spiritually blind, born as children who deserve wrath, inherently drawn to man-made superstitions and the temptations of Satan and evil spirits. We are people full of sin and guilt. And yet, we—such as we are—have been given the Holy Spirit, have come to believe in Christ, and while seeking the fullness of the Holy Spirit, have come to want to live in the fear of Christ, submitting to one another.

This itself is, without a doubt, a miracle.

## Conclusion

Today, we will celebrate the Lord's Supper. As we share the bread, representing His broken body, and the wine, representing His shed blood, with one another—may we once again inscribe upon our hearts the warm meaning of the words Jesus spoke when He said, “Do this in remembrance of me.”

May we seek the fullness of the Holy Spirit in order to fear Christ and submit to one another. And while seeking the fullness of the Holy Spirit, may we be granted the joy of dying to ourselves.

It is my prayer that we, Tsuchiura Megumi Church, would be a church in which the words “Be filled with the Holy Spirit. Fear Christ and submit to one another” are lived out.

Let us pray.

### **Benediction:**

“Be filled with the Holy Spirit. Fear Christ, and submit to one another.”

Let me know if you'd like this version smoothed out for public reading or publication, while preserving its message and tone.