

ARE YOU LIVING A SPIRIT-FILLED LIFE?

5 ¹⁴For this reason he says, "Awake, O sleeper, even rise from the dead," and, "Christ will shine upon you." ¹⁵Therefore, watch carefully how you walk. Do not walk like foolish men, but like wise men; ¹⁶making good use of the time, because the days are evil. ¹⁷For this reason do not be ignorant, but understand what is the will of the Lord. ¹⁸And do not become drunk with wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit—¹⁹speaking to each other with Psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and praising the Lord in your heart, ²⁰always giving thanks to our God and Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ for all things, ²¹submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ. (Eph. 5:14-21)

Introduction

Here is a riddle: What do a liquor-filled life and a Holy Spirit-filled life have in common? For a clue, consider this passage of Scripture:

All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages as the Spirit enabled them. ⁵Now there were staying in Jerusalem God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven. ⁶When they heard this sound, a crowd came together in bewilderment, because each one heard them speaking in his own language. ⁷Utterly amazed, they asked, Are not all these men who are speaking Galileans? ⁸Then how is it that each of us hears them in his own native language? ¹¹ ... we hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own languages! ¹²Amazed and perplexed, they asked one another, What does this mean? ¹³Some, however, mockingly said, They are filled with new wine! ¹⁴Then Peter stood up with the Eleven, raised his voice and addressed the crowd: Fellow Jews and all of you who are in Jerusalem, let me explain this to you. Listen carefully to what I say. ¹⁵These men are not drunk, as you suppose. It is only nine o'clock in the morning. ¹⁶No, this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel: ¹⁷In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. (Acts 2:4-17a)

The apostles were filled with the Holy Spirit, but some mistakenly thought that they were filled with wine. Peter explains that they were not drunk; on the contrary, they were filled with the Spirit of God.

The answer to the riddle: In both cases a man becomes "a different person." In the liquor-filled life, the person does and says things he normally would not; his inhibitions are relaxed, and the sinful nature expresses itself more evidently. He may speak horrible things. He may do violent things. He may undergo a strange personality change, becoming sullen or surly or giddy or lewd or flirtatious. Indeed, he exhibits a demonic presence in his life.

In the Holy Spirit-filled life, the person does and says things he normally would not; his inhibitions are overcome and the new life of Christ expresses itself more evidently. He may boldly speak out for the Lord Jesus. Contrast Peter's natural

behavior as expressed in Matthew 26:73-74a with his conduct when filled with the Holy Spirit as recorded in Acts 2:14,22-24,

After a little while, those standing there went up to Peter and said, Surely you are one of them, for your accent makes you known. ⁷⁴Then he began to call down curses upon himself and he swore to them, I do not know the man. (Matt. 26:73-74a,) here is the description of the occasion on which Peter denied his Lord

Then Peter stood up with the Eleven, raised his voice and addressed the crowd: Fellow Jews and all of you who are in Jerusalem, let me explain this to you. Listen carefully to what I say ... ²²Men of Israel, listen to this: Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders, and signs, which God did among you through him, as you yourselves know. ²³This man was handed over to you by God's set purpose and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross. ²⁴But God raised him from the dead, freeing him from the agony of death, because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him. (Acts 2:14,22-24,) being filled with the Holy Spirit, this is Peter's bold witness for his Lord on the day of Pentecost

The man who is filled with the Holy Spirit may exhibit striking displays of self-denial, humility and love:

But Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, looked up to heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God ... ⁵⁹While they were stoning him, Stephen prayed, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit. ⁶⁰Then he fell on his knees and cried out, Lord, do not hold this sin against them. When he had said this, he "fell asleep. (Acts 7:55,59-60)

The man who is filled with the Holy Spirit will exhibit the presence of God in his life.

As a Christian, your life is not to be lived under the intoxicating influences of the world; rather, it is to be controlled by the Holy Spirit, and be filled with His blessed presence: *"do not become drunk with wine ... Instead, be filled with the Spirit"* (Eph. 5:18.) Because it is Christ's desire and the commandment of Scripture, let us seek to live Spirit-filled lives.

In order to do so, let us consider the biblical answers to the following questions: What does it mean to have a Spirit-filled life? How do you gain a Spirit-filled life? What is the evidence of a Spirit-filled life?

I. What Does It Mean to have a Spirit-filled Life?

Does it mean to receive a "second blessing"? Does it mean that after you initially receive the Lord Jesus as your Savior, at a later date you receive the Holy Spirit?

Is "being filled with the Spirit" some extraordinary experience limited to the early days of the New Testament? Is it similar to the experience of some of the gifts of the Spirit that were especially prominent in the early New Testament period, but not a normal occurrence in this present period of church history?

Is it an experience reserved for just a few select "super Christians" or only for those Christians engaged in full time Christian service?

Or, is the experience of being filled with the Holy Spirit normal Christian living? Is it the kind of experience and life every Christian is invited and expected to live? In the light of Ephesians 5:18, where we are exhorted, and even commanded, to be filled with the Spirit. So, according to the Scriptures, the answer is, "Yes," being filled with the Holy Spirit is the kind of experience and life every Christian is invited and expected to live.

When you hear the phrase, "being filled with the Holy Spirit," what image comes to mind? Is it the image of a rainstorm coming down out of heaven and the rainwater filling an empty vessel to the brim? Is it the image of the Lord taking a huge pitcher of water and pouring it into an empty glass?

Listen closely to John 7:37-39, and see if the images just mentioned above are an accurate or inaccurate description of what it means to be "filled with the Holy Spirit:"

Now on the last day, the great day of the Feast, Jesus stood and cried out, If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. ³⁸Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, From within him shall flow rivers of living water. ³⁹Now he was referring to the [Holy] Spirit, whom they who believed in him were to receive; for the Spirit had not yet been [given]; because Jesus had not yet been glorified. (Jn. 7:37-39)

It is not a matter of first receiving Jesus as your Savior, and then at some later date receiving the second blessing of the Holy Spirit. When you receive the Lord Jesus it is by means of the person of the Holy Spirit that Jesus comes into your life and takes up residence in your heart: *"by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—whether we were Jews or Greeks, whether we were slaves or freemen—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink"* (1 Cor. 12:13.) Note, too, how the Apostle Paul describes the presence of Christ in the believer's life:

*You, however, are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit, if **the Spirit of God lives in you**. And if anyone does not have **the Spirit of Christ**, he does not belong to Christ. ¹⁰But if **Christ is in you**, your body is dead because of sin, yet your spirit is alive because of righteousness. ¹¹And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit, who lives in you. (Rom. 8:9-11)*

Being “filled with the Spirit” is not akin to a rainstorm pouring down upon a parched land or filling up an empty cup by means of a divine “water pitcher.” Being “filled with the Spirit” is more akin to a geyser erupting from deep within the earth and gushing up to the surface; note again the words of the Lord Jesus in John 7:38-39a, *“Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, ‘From within him shall flow rivers of living water.’”*³⁹ Now he was referring to the [Holy] Spirit, whom they who believed in him were to receive.”

What does it mean to be “filled with the Holy Spirit”? It is not some extraordinary mystical experience, reserved for super devote Christians or limited to the early days of the New Testament; on the contrary, it is normal, biblical Christian living. So much of our daily Christian living is sub-normal; so, when we come across the normal, it appears to be extraordinary. The Spirit-filled Christian is not living “on a higher plain;” on the contrary, all too often we are living on “a lower plain” or “in the valley.”

The Spirit-filled life is normal, biblical Christian living; it means having your life filled with and controlled by the Holy Spirit, even as we are commanded and exhorted in Scripture.

II. How Does One Get a Spirit-filled Life?

First we must realize that, as a Christian, the Holy Spirit is present with you and resides in your heart. Paul exhorts Timothy, *“Guard the good deposit that was entrusted to you—guard it with the help of the Holy Spirit who lives in us”* (2 Tim. 1:14.) Note, too, Paul’s teaching recorded in Galatians 4:6, *“Now because you are sons, God sent forth the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, and he is crying out [to God], ‘Abba, Father.’”*

Second, you must release the control of your life to the Holy Spirit. The Apostle Paul informs us, *“If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk in line with the Spirit”* (Gal. 5:25.) Allow the Holy Spirit to set the course of your life, as did the Psalmist when he wrote, *“The LORD is my Shepherd”* (Psl. 23:1.) Allow the Holy Spirit to set the pace of your life and set your priorities. Rather than imitating Martha, who was distraught and overwhelmed with the cares of this life, we are to imitate Mary, who sat at the feet of Jesus; she made communion with her Lord the top priority of her life:

As Jesus and his disciples were on their way, he came to a village where a woman named Martha opened her home to him. ³⁹She had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord’s feet listening to what he said. ⁴⁰But Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made. She came to him and asked, Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me. ⁴¹Martha, Martha, the Lord answered, you are worried and upset about many things, ⁴²but only one thing is necessary. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her. (Lk. 10:38-42)

We, as Christians, must not live our lives as did the leaders of Israel who were rebuked by Stephen with the words, *“You stiff-necked people, with uncircumcised hearts and ears! You are just like your fathers; You always resist the Holy Spirit!”* (Acts 7:51.)

Third, you must reverence the Holy Spirit for who He is: the Spirit of the living God who is holy. Do not grieve the Holy Spirit by willful disobedience and persisting in known sin, especially the sin of harboring bitterness in your heart:

Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. ³¹Get rid of all bitterness and rage and anger and clamor and slander, along with all malice. ³²Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving each other just as God by Christ forgave you. (Eph. 4:30-32)

Do not provoke the Holy Spirit by practicing spiritual adultery with the world. As the Apostle James informs us, the Holy Spirit has a holy jealousy for us, as a husband for his wife, and will not tolerate spiritual adultery: *“You adulterous people, do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity toward God? Anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God. ⁵Or do you think Scripture says without reason that the Spirit he caused to live in us envies intensely?”* (Jas. 4:4-5.)

As 1 Thessalonians 5:19 exhorts us, *“Do not quench the Spirit;”* doing so through unbelief. Stephen is described as *“a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit”* (Acts 6:5.) Barnabas is described as *“a good man, and full of the Holy Spirit and of faith”* (Acts 11:24.) From the Gospel of Mark we learn that the Lord’s Jesus’ ministry was “restricted” because of the unbelief of the people: *“He could not do any mighty work there, although he did lay his hands upon a few sick people and heal them. ⁶He was amazed at their unbelief. Then he went around from village to village teaching”* (Mk. 6:5-6.)

Fourth, you must rely upon the Holy Spirit at all times. We must especially rely upon the Spirit when you are confronted with temptation: *“if you live according to the sinful nature, you will die. But if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live”* (Rom. 8:12-13.) When confronted with temptation, we must hand over to the Holy Spirit both the temptation as well as our will and desire to indulge the temptation. It is also when we face trial that we must be especially careful to rely upon the Spirit. As the Apostle John assures us, *“You belong to God, my little children, and have overcome them, because the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world”* (1 Jn. 4:4.) As the godly king Hezekiah reminded the Old Testament people of God: *“with us is Jehovah our God to help us and to fight our battles”* (2 Chron. 32:7-8.)

III. What is the Evidence of a Spirit-filled Life?

The evidence of the Spirit-filled life is provided for us in Ephesians 5:19-21 by means of the four participles that follow the command to be filled with the Spirit.

“Speaking to each other with Psalms and hymns and spiritual songs;” that is to say, encouraging, comforting, and exhorting one another by means of the Word of God. Contrast this with the conduct described in Galatians 5:15, a conduct we are exhorted to avoid: *“if you bite and devour each other, watch out, or you will be consumed by one another.”*

“Singing and praising the Lord in your heart.” Praising the Lord, rejoicing in His presence, enjoying His fellowship, here is another evidence of the Spirit-filled life. Contrast this with the ungodly lifestyle described in Romans 1:21. In that passage the Apostle Paul declares of sinful mankind that although they know God, *“they did not glorify him as God, neither did they give thanks.”*

“Always giving thanks to our God and Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ for all things.” This means accepting God’s will, recognizing God’s sovereign control, trusting in God’s fatherly care, wisdom, and goodness. Contrast this with the attitude expressed by Job’s wife when she beheld the trials that came into Job’s life, *“His wife said to him, Are you still holding on to your integrity? Renounce God and die! ¹⁰But he said to her, You are talking like a foolish woman. Shall we accept good from the hand of God and not accept calamity? In all this Job did not sin with his lips”* (Job 2:9-10.)

“Submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ.” For the sake of our Lord Jesus Christ, in reverence to Him and holy fear of Him, we are to yield our will to our brethren instead of insisting on our own way; living in this manner is yet another exhibition of the Spirit-filled life. With regard to such an attitude and such a lifestyle, note the Apostle Peter’s exhortation: *“Clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because ‘God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble’”* (1 Pet. 5:5b.)

Conclusion

Having considered the biblical answers to some of the most common and important questions with regard to the subject of the Spirit-filled life, how would you answer the question posed in the title of this message: “Are you living a Spirit-filled life?”

Remember the commandment of our Lord given through the Apostle Paul, *“do not become drunk with wine ... Instead, be filled with the Spirit”* (Eph. 5:18.) This is our Lord’s command to us, and this is His desire for us.

Let us take note of the testimony recorded in Acts 13:52, *“the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit.”*