

**F → Following**

This message will focus on obedience to the Holy Spirit for He is God in us. We cannot be filled by Him if we are not obedient to Him. This week will include Ephesians 5:18, which is the most direct commandment of God to live lives filled by the Spirit, and the degree to which I am filled by Him is reflective of the degree to which I surrender to Him. We have the Spirit (Acts 2:38), but does the Spirit have us?

\*\*\*\*\*

**INTRODUCTION**

It's good to be back! My thanks to our pastor for inviting me to bring a good word (or two) from this Good Book. I count it nothing less than a sincere privilege to teach on this day, in this place, from this book to you—my church family. Here is my prayer for each one of us: *When the child of God looks in the Word of God and finds the Son of God, he or she is changed by the Spirit of God into the image of God for the glory of God.*

We are feeling some pain at the pump. Across America and around the world, a fuel crisis continues. While I wrote this message, Forbes.com reported—in real time—that the average price of gas nationally is \$3.57 per gallon, and the highest prices are on the west coast with people paying \$4.80 per gallon. Yet what we pay for gas pales in comparison to what people are paying in Hong Kong, where gas is \$11.88 per gallon! We cringe when the price goes up at the pump. So then, what do we do? Some people download an app to find the lowest price of gas in the area. Some individuals sign up for a fuel rewards program at the grocery store. Some people choose **not** to fill up the car or truck, even choosing to run on empty, hoping to make it to their destination.

In much the same way, another FUEL crisis is taking place, but it's spiritual in nature. We will explore this *spiritual fuel crisis* for four consecutive weeks, thinking *FUEL: Running on Empty or Filled with the Spirit?* Each week, we will discover one thing that is essential to being filled by the Spirit, and to help us remember, each of those discoveries will spell the word F.U.E.L. (a simple memory tool to help us recall what we discover).

Whether we are here on-site or on-line, we might now be aware of the Spirit. In the first century, the Apostle Paul met up with some new Christians. He asked them if they had received the Holy Spirit, and they said, “We have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit” (Acts 19:2). In the 21<sup>st</sup> century church, it may be that you have not heard that there is a Holy Spirit.

God's existence is sometimes referred to as a “mystery” because He exists in three persons called the Trinity: God the Father, Jesus the Son, and the Holy Spirit. All too often, we think of the Trinity as God the Father, Jesus the Son, and the Holy Scriptures! It's time that we try to understand this “mystery” and even *solve* some of it.

During the COVID-19 shutdown, Leah and I got hooked on British murder mysteries—even to the point of subscribing to Brit Box. We have watched HOURS of these shows and we're getting pretty good at solving them before the show is over. Whether we are detectives in real life or not, we need to ask the interrogatives of speech if we hope to solve a mystery, and those happen to be who, what, when, where, why, and how. Using these simple interrogatives, we will “peel away the layers” like peeling away an onion.

## WHY?

WHY do you and I need to listen today to the Word? Why should we want to have open minds and teachable attitudes to Scripture today? The late Dr. Billy Graham said,

Everywhere I go I find that God's people lack something. They are hungry for something. Their Christian experience is not all that they expected, and they often have recurring defeat in their lives. Christians today are hungry for spiritual fulfillment. The most desperate need for the nation today is that men and women who profess Jesus be filled with the Holy Spirit.

Is that true of us, of you and me? Do we experience “recurring defeat” in our lives? Are we “hungry for something” and that something is not just another Bible study or small group or sermon series? Could it be that we are running on empty, and we are not filled with the Spirit?

It seems that the Christian faith is taking a hit in our culture. Christianity is not the “home team” that everyone cheers on and supports. Quite the opposite. Christianity is the “away team” that is jeered and despised and unwanted. Could that be because we, as Christians, are not living in the strength and power of the Holy Spirit?

Do we want fulfilling marriages, healed and whole families? Do we want robust fulfillment on the job, at school, in friendships? Do we want to know God in deeper ways, transforming our lives moment by moment? Do we want to have an impact—for the good—right here where we live and beyond? Do we want to see God work supernaturally in our lives? Do we want to meet Jesus on the printed page of His Word while we read it and to sense His very presence while we pray? How can we possibly have MORE here in this life when we know that through Jesus, we have EVERYTHING there with Him in the next life? The answer: by being filled with the Spirit!

Many Christians have thought of the Holy Spirit as a pendulum swinging to two sides. To one extreme, a Christian may think that being filled with the Holy Spirit is manifested by speaking in tongues, being slain in the Spirit, that charismatic, Pentecostal experiences are mandatory to prove that a person is saved. More emphasis is given to the Spirit than to Jesus. To the opposite extreme, a Christian may give little or no consideration to the Holy Spirit out of fear or worry that he will become too Pentecostal! Hence, the Christian will focus on God the Father, Jesus the Son, and the Holy Scriptures, but not Spirit.

When we choose NOT to refuel the car, we run the risk of running out of gas (or EV) causing real difficulty and inconvenience. When we choose to *spiritually* run on empty, we run the risk of far more than inconvenience, but of real misery and loss. **WHY** listen to the Word today? We cannot live life well without Him.

## WHO?

WHO is the Holy Spirit? Simply put, He is God, fully and completely God! And because the Spirit is God, the Spirit is not the Holy Ghost (as referred to in the KJV). The Spirit is not “the Force” as in Star Wars as in “may the Force be with you.” The Spirit is not a genie in a bottle that grants our every wish or command. The Spirit is none other than God Himself. On the last night of His life, Jesus ate the Passover with His disciples in the upper room and with only a few hours until He would be executed on a cross, Jesus said to His disciples, “Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me” (John 14:1).

Why did Jesus say that? His disciples were troubled! Their lives were coming apart. They were beginning to grasp what Jesus had been trying to tell them, that He would be arrested, tried, and killed on a cross. Their lives were seemingly coming apart at the seams! But Jesus went on in that same conversation to say

And I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Counselor to be with you forever—the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept Him because it neither sees Him nor knows Him. But you know Him, for He lives with you and will be in you. I will not leave you as orphans... But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you.” (John 14:16-18, 26)

In Greek, “another Counselor” is two words: *allos parakletos*. *Parakletos* means “the one called alongside,” the Counselor, Comforter, Advocate, Helper. Hence, as His disciples’ lives were falling apart, Jesus did not leave them alone and helpless like orphans. God, the Father, would send the Holy Spirit, the “one called alongside.” And the word “another” does not mean different. To the contrary, it means another of the *same kind!* Hence, “God will send you another person to be with you who is just like me!” Not once, but twice, in the New Testament, the Holy Spirit is called the “Spirit of Jesus” (see Acts 16:7, Phil 1:19). After Jesus was raised from the dead, He gave His disciples—and us—what we call the Great Commission: “Therefore, go, and make disciples of all nations; *immersing* them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Spirit; and teaching them to obey all that I have commanded you. And surely, I am with you always, to the very end of the age” (Matthew 28:19-20).

Notice two things: Jesus *named* Him the Spirit. The Holy Spirit has a name. He is God, the Spirit. Also, the Great Commission comes with a Great Companion! Jesus said, “I am with you always, to the very end of the age.” How is that? Through the abiding presence of the Holy Spirit, the “Spirit of Jesus” never leaves us or forsakes us. When your world and mine are coming apart at the seams, “do not let your hearts be troubled!” We can trust in the Spirit of Jesus! He is Immanuel, God with us—and He is for us!

## WHEN?

WHEN do we receive the Holy Spirit? In the Old Testament, God gave His Spirit to people as He chose, and most often, to accomplish His will in their lives. Here are just a few:

- Then the Lord said to Moses, “See, I have chosen Bezalel, son of Uri, the son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah, and I have *filled him with the Spirit of God*, with skill, ability and knowledge, in all kinds of crafts....” (Exodus 31:1-2).
- “Then the *Spirit of the Lord came on Jephthah*. He crossed Gilead and Manasseh, passed through Mizpah of Gilead, and from there he advanced against the Ammonites” (Judges 11:29).
- “The woman gave birth to a boy and named him Samson. He grew and the Lord blessed him, and *the Spirit of the Lord* began to stir in him while he was in Mahaneh Dan, between Zorah and Eshtaol” (Judges 13:24-25).

In the days of the Old Testament, God *gave* His Spirit to King Saul and King David, to Isaiah, Ezekiel, and Zechariah. But in the New Testament, following the death and resurrection of Jesus, God gave and still gives His Holy Spirit in a normative way.

In Acts 2, God fulfilled the promise that Jesus gave to His followers, that the Father would send the Comforter, Counselor, Helper, the Holy Spirit. That defining moment happened on the Day of Pentecost

(see Acts 2:1-13). Peter, then, began to preach what you and I could call the first sermon in the Church (vv. 14f), and he concluded with

“Therefore, let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ.” When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, “Brothers, what shall we do?” Peter replied, “Repent and be *immersed*, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.” (Acts 2:36-38)

Their question was, “What shall we do?” Peter’s crystal clear, strong, direct response: “Repent and be *immersed*.” Over 3,000 people surrendered their lives to Jesus Christ, declaring that Jesus was BOTH Savior and Lord of their lives. In that very moment two distinct things happened: 1) the individual was **forgiven** of his or her sins—past, present, and future—and 2) the individual was **given** the Holy Spirit. The same thing occurs today!

Listen carefully: when you and I were *immersed* (or when you are *immersed*), we did not just get wet, making a simple decision followed by a family dinner or cook-out. In that very moment, we died! The Apostle Paul said it quite clearly:

What should we say then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? By no means! We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer? Or don’t you know that all of us who were *immersed* into Christ Jesus were *immersed* into His death? We were therefore buried with Him through *immersion* into death in order that, just as Jesus was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life! (Romans 6:1-4)

When we are *immersed*, we are surrendering to Jesus, declaring Him to be BOTH our Savior and Lord! We HAVE the Spirit BUT does the Spirit have us? Or are we double-minded—we want Jesus to save us from our sins, but we do not want Him as LORD of our lives? Are we living lukewarm, run-of-the-mill, mediocre *spiritual* lives because we have not surrendered to the Spirit of Jesus **in** us? That leads to the next interrogative.

## WHERE?

WHERE is the Spirit right now? Simply put, He is in us! Paul wrote, “Do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore, honor God with your body” (1 Corinthians 6:19-20).

The Apostle John wrote, “Greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world” (1 John 4:4). God is spirit (John 4:24). He has no skin. Jesus is God with skin (“...became flesh and dwelt among us” John 1:14). The Holy Spirit is God *in our skin*! The Spirit fills us just as our hands fill a glove. We don’t put our hand partially into a glove. That would be foolish, and it is foolish for us to not be filled with the Spirit of Jesus. Remember, we are souls with physical bodies, bodies that wear out. We exist eternally. Even when we draw our last breath here, every person continues to exist somewhere—either with God in heaven or away from God in hell. When we surrender our lives to Jesus and are immersed, we have the Spirit of Jesus **in** us—but does the Spirit have us?

## WHAT?

WHAT must we do? We must be filled with the Spirit. Check out Ephesian 5. The Apostle Paul wrote a long list of “do nots.” For example, “don’t be immoral, impure or greedy” (v. 3); “don’t lose control of your tongue” (v. 4); “don’t be deceived” (v. 6); “don’t participate in evil, in darkness” (v. 11); “don’t be

unwise” (v. 15); “don’t be foolish” (v. 17); and “don’t get drunk on wine” (v. 18). But, DO THIS: “be filled with the Spirit.” Ephesians 5:18 is the most direct, clear statement about being filled with the Spirit in the entire Bible: “Do not get drunk on wine which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit.”

Being filled with the Spirit is not some secret sauce or an incantation to repeat. Rather, there are FOUR essential insights from this one single verse that have everything to do with being filled with the Spirit. First, this is a command, not an option to consider or a suggestion to take under advisement. It’s an imperative in Greek, and that means it’s a command to obey. Second, it’s a present tense imperative, which means it is a continual command, constantly in force. Third—and listen carefully—the present tense imperative is in the passive voice, meaning this is about control. We must yield to the control of the Spirit for the Spirit is God! In John 16:8, Jesus said that the Holy Spirit will convict the world regarding sin, righteousness, and judgment to come. In other words, the Spirit is convicting every man and woman 24/7/365 the world over. We might be looking at something on our phones we have no business seeing. The Spirit is shouting at us, “Shut this down! Turn this off!” When we fail to do so, we are NOT under His control. We are grieving Him, and in that moment, we are not filled by Him. We are about to gossip about someone, slander someone, say something vile, and the Spirit is shouting in us, “Don’t say what you’re about to say,” but we do so anyway. In that moment we are not under His control, and therefore not filled by Him. We can have two glasses of water and in each we can put Alka-Seltzer. In one glass, we can simply drop the cellophane packet into the water, but in the other glass, we can tear open the packet and drop two tablets into the water. Alka-Seltzer is in both glasses, but only in one does it fill the water! Unrepented, cherished sin prevents the Spirit from controlling us. Dwelling and filling are two different experiences. To have MORE of the Spirit requires MORE of us to be given to Him. The Spirit dwells in us, but do we want Him to fill us? The late Dwight L. Moody was preaching in England about the Holy Spirit. Someone said, “Why do we need this ‘Mr. Moody’ from America to tell us about the Holy Spirit? Who does he think he is? Does he think he has a monopoly on the Holy Spirit?” A person responded, “No, but the Holy Spirit has a monopoly on Mr. Moody.” Being filled with the Spirit is more about being under His control.

Fourth and finally, when we yield to his control, we are filled by Him, and that is conspicuous! Paul used the metaphor of being drunk on wine. In other words, Paul is saying not to allow anything or anyone else to control us. We can be controlled by a drink or drug of choice, by lust, greed, gossip, envy, jealousy, pride, power, and more. The list is long of what competes for the lordship of Jesus in our lives. When a person is controlled by something or someone, it is conspicuous. Likewise, when a person is controlled by the Spirit, it is conspicuous. That person stands out in a crowd because that Christian exhibits the fruit of the Spirit—that is, love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Galatians 5:22-23). HE produces that fruit in His strength as we yield to Him! Jesus said that by a person’s fruit, you will know or recognize them (Matthew 7:16). Perhaps we have never been filled by the Spirit because we have never obeyed Him.

Think with me. This is all about a relationship with God, the Spirit. If I want my marriage to work with Leah, I must work at the marriage. If I don’t work at the marriage, I will grieve Leah. If something or someone becomes my focus and my focus is no longer Leah, my marriage will not be at its best and it will be at risk! The same is true about my relationship with God—and your relationship with God. If we want an incredible, resilient, robust walk with God, we must work at that relationship and that means we yield to God, the Spirit, in us. The Spirit is God, and we are not. The choice is ours—we can run on empty or be filled with the Spirit. Now here’s how.

## HOW?

So then, HOW can we be filled with the Spirit? **F is for FOLLOW.** On the last night of His life, Jesus told His followers, “But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all truth” (John 16:13). Again, the question is, will we FOLLOW Him or not?

A toddler *learns* to walk, step-by-step. Similarly, a Christian learns to walk in the Spirit, step-by-step, day-by-day. Paul wrote, “Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit.” (Galatians 5:25) Living this way does not happen quickly nor easily. To walk in the Spirit is intentional. We make a deliberate decision to FOLLOW Him. The Holy Spirit guides us, but will we FOLLOW Him or not? There is a big difference between someone who stands at an information desk and points us in a particular direction as compared to a person on a guest services team who says, “Follow me! I will walk you there.” So, we depend on that individual to take us, to lead us to where we are going. The Holy Spirit lives in us, and we need to learn to depend on and trust in Him to lead us. When we do, we learn to “walk in the Spirit,” FOLLOWING Him. This is essential to being filled with Him!

To do so, we don't need more commitment. We need to surrender to Him. There's a difference between commitment and surrender. We can commit to all kinds of things. For example, I can commit to losing weight by dieting and exercise, but that is about me. If I commit to being a better husband, a dad, a grandpa, then it is about others. It's not about me, but others. In that case, I relinquish my rights, I surrender to the needs of others—and one of the greatest relationships in which we need to surrender is to the Holy Spirit, God in our skin.

The American Church is full of Christians who are nominally committed to Jesus. They attend worship when it is convenient to do so. They get involved in the church occasionally. They give of their time, talent, and treasure sparingly. Their Christian lives look the same day after day, and even year after year. Instead of being biblical Christians, they are cultural Christians, living a lifestyle of their choosing, interpreting the Bible in any way they choose that will accommodate their desires and wants. They became believers and have been baptized, but not much has happened since.

Yet, in the American Church, there are a minority of people who surrender to the lordship of Jesus Christ. Surrender is relinquishing our rights for others, and in this case, the other is God in our skin, the Spirit of Jesus! Commitment is one thing, but surrender is entirely different. What if every Christian surrendered to the Holy Spirit, day-by-day and even moment-by-moment? Not only in this church, but in every church across town, throughout the state, from coast to coast and around the world? It's unimaginable what could happen! Christianity has a King and His name is Jesus! Is He Savior AND Lord of our lives, or not? When we FOLLOW the Holy Spirit, He fills us. FOLLOWING Him is not a once in a lifetime moment, but it is a constant way to live (i.e., walking in the Spirit).

We learn to “walk by the Spirit” (Galatians 5:16) by reading and knowing the Word, and by listening to the Spirit speak to us through our conscience. Every person has a conscience, an internal moral compass that points out right from wrong in our lives. God has placed this conscience in every person and by this compass, we determine what is right and what is wrong. In the strength of the Spirit, we can choose to do what is morally right, and in that moment, we are more SURRENDERED to the Spirit; relinquishing what we want for what HE wants. In those moments, He fills us. Surrender is the key that unlocks a flood of the Spirit filling us time and again. When we FOLLOW the Spirit, He will fill us.

## Final Words

AW Tozer said,

Satan has opposed the doctrine of the Spirit filled life as bitterly as any doctrine there is. He has confused it, opposed it, and surrounded it with false notions and fears. He has blocked every effort of the Church of Christ to receive from the Father the divine and blood bought patrimony. The Church has tragically neglected this great liberating truth that is for now, for the child of God, a full and wonderful and completely satisfying anointing with the Holy Spirit. The Spirit filled life is not a special deluxe edition of Christianity. It is part and parcel of the total plan of God for his people.

Living as Spirit-filled Christians poses a great threat to Satan and his kingdom of darkness. If Satan cannot keep us from coming to Jesus, he will be tireless in trying to keep us from coming closer to Jesus. Satan fears blood-bought, Holy Spirit-filled followers of Jesus, who live with unwavering courage, unrelenting compassion, and unshakeable conviction.

Be filled with the Spirit by FOLLOWING the Spirit.

\*\*\*\*\*

### **Resources Consulted**

#### **Chan, Francis**

*The Forgotten God: Reversing our Tragic Neglect of the Holy Spirit* Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook, 2009

#### **Cottrell, Jack**

*The Holy Spirit: A Biblical Study* Joplin, MO: College Press, 2006.

#### **Ponsonby, Simon**

*MORE...How You Can Have More of the Spirit When You Already Have Everything in Christ* Colorado Springs, CO; David C. Cook Publishing, 2009.

#### **Denison, Jim**

*Empowered: A Guide to Experiencing the Power of the Holy Spirit* by The Denison Forum, 2017.

#### **Smith, Steve**

*Spirit Walk: The Extraordinary Power of Acts for Ordinary People* Littleton, CO: William Carey Publishing, 2020.

#### **Stanley, Charles**

*The Wonderful Spirit Filled Life* Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1992.

#### **Staton, Tyler**

*Praying Like Monks, Living Like Fools: An Invitation to the Wonder and Mystery of Prayer* Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing, 2022.

#### **Swindoll, Charles**

*Flying Closer to the Flame: A Passion for the Holy Spirit* Dallas, TX: Word Publishing, 1993.

#### **Wood, David**

*Holy Spirit: Filled, Empowered, and Led* Renew.org 2021