

FLYING CLOSER TO THE FLAME

STUDY FOUR

Is the Spirit's Filling That Big a Deal?

1 Corinthians 6:19–20; Ephesians 5:15–21

Just as we came to Christ by faith, we continue to walk by faith as we are fueled, energized, and empowered by the person of the Holy Spirit.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

CHRISTIANS live in two dimensions: physical and spiritual. In the physical world, we experience life through our senses. We smell a bouquet of fresh flowers, warm our hands over a campfire, or marvel at the sunlight dancing on the dewdrops in a lush meadow.

On the spiritual plane, we pray to our heavenly Father whom we can't see but who we know is always with us. Even our body is not just flesh and bone but also a "temple of the Holy Spirit,"—the Holy Spirit who, Paul writes, "lives in you and was given to you by God" (1 Corinthians 6:19).

Two dimensions. Paul referred to them as "the things which are seen" and "the things which are not seen" (2 Corinthians 4:18 NASB). Because they exist together, a walk in the woods can also be a walk in the Spirit. As we take in the sights, sounds, and smells of creation's wonders, a melody of praise reverberates through our inner cathedral. Every day can be a walk in the Spirit whenever we set our minds "on the things above" (Colossians 3:2 NASB)—that is, live on a spiritual plane in a physical world.

The *filling* of the Spirit refers to the power that fuels our walk in the Spirit. When we invite the Spirit to fill us, He enables us in ways that surpass our own abilities. Filling is what happens when the Spirit takes control and produces God's work in us and through us. The filling of the Spirit is a big deal. In fact, it's the biggest deal!



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PREPARE YOUR HEART

Pause a moment to consider that the one who created and controls the universe indwells *your* body as His sacred sanctuary. Amazing! Nothing could be more intimate in your relationship with the Holy Spirit than the reality that He lives in you. Before you open the Word, give thanks and pray for guidance.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

Paul taught about the filling of the Spirit in Ephesians 5. The first three chapters of his letter to the Ephesian church focused on how God rescued us from sin and gave us a new identity as His adopted children. When we believed in Christ, God sealed us as His own “by giving [us] the Holy Spirit”—God’s “guarantee that he will give us the inheritance he promised” (Ephesians 1:13, 14).

Chapters four through six of Ephesians focus on how to live as Christians. Prior to salvation, we were dead in sin; but God, with His resurrection power, raised us to new life *in Christ* (2:5). Now, we need God’s power to live *like Christ*. We need to be filled with the Spirit—which is Paul’s pinnacle point in Ephesians 5.

We must have the fuel of the Holy Spirit to empower us, to energize us, and to move us from where we are to where we want to be. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



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Observation: Be Filled with the Spirit

A helpful analogy regarding the Spirit's role in our lives is driving a car. We know where God wants us to go spiritually (to become like Christ), and we have gas in the tank (the indwelling Spirit), but we still must start the engine for the car to move. What must we do and not do to engage the Spirit's power, according to Paul in *Ephesians 5:18*?

We'll dig deeper into the contrast between drunkenness and the filling of the Spirit in the interpretation phase. For now, observe four evidences of the Holy Spirit's influence mentioned in *5:19–21*.

5:19: _____

5:19: _____

5:20: _____

5:21: _____

Notice that the Spirit's filling overflows into *praise to God* and *service to others*. The more we are "filled" with the Spirit, the more our hearts sing in grateful worship (Ephesians 5:19–20) and the more our hands reach out in submissive acts of love (5:21).

Paul's teaching on the filling of the Spirit links back to the beginning of chapter 5. What overarching commands from *5:1–2* does the filling of the Spirit help us obey?



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Interpretation: The Meaning of “Be Filled with the Holy Spirit”

Paul contrasted “be filled with the Holy Spirit” with “don’t be drunk with wine” (Ephesians 5:18). Both conditions refer to control or influence—but the instrument of control could not be more opposite, along with the effects. In the following chart, we’ve listed some negative characteristics of drunkenness. Fill in the right column with what you think might be the contrasting positive attributes of being Spirit-filled.

Drunkenness	Being Filled with the Spirit
Out of control	
Deadened senses	
Confused thinking	
Shameful behavior	
Ruined life	

How are we filled by the Spirit? In one sense, we already are filled. The Holy Spirit indwells all believers, and our spiritual tank never needs refilling! Paul had in mind another sense in his command, *be filled*, which emerges as we examine under the grammatical microscope the Greek word, *plerōō*.

1. *Command*: The verb is an imperative, which means that filling is necessary for our obedience to Christ and spiritual growth.
2. *Plural*: Paul applied his command to *all* believers, not just a select few for special tasks. Imagine a whole community of believers filled with the Spirit!
3. *Present tense*: The verb tense implies continuous action. While the Spirit’s baptism is a one-time, unretractable event, the Spirit’s filling is ongoing and must be cultivated.
4. *Passive voice*: We can’t fill ourselves. We call upon God to fill us with His Spirit. Only the Spirit can enable us to be like Christ and worship with pure hearts.



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Summarize these concepts in your own words. What key characteristics of being filled with the Spirit stand out to you?

How do you know when the Spirit is filling you?

We regularly pray, "Fill me, Lord, for this moment. I want to be used. I want to be available. I make myself dependent on You." It's like walking. It's just part of your life.
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Correlation: Questions and Answers

Our study may be prompting a couple of questions. First, *why is Spirit-filling necessary?* An answer lies in the message the Lord gave the prophet Ezekiel. What can God's people do in the power of the Spirit that they couldn't do before the Spirit came at Pentecost, according to Ezekiel's prophecy in *Ezekiel 36:26–27*?



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In addition, apart from the Spirit's power, there would be no hope of overcoming our spiritual enemies. What three enemies does the Spirit empower us against in these verses: *Romans 8:12–14; Ephesians 6:11–18; and 1 John 5:5–8*?

Second, *can we be filled with the Spirit at times and not filled at other times*? Most of the Spirit's ministries can't be undone. He seals us (*Ephesians 1:13 NASB*), regenerates us (*Titus 3:5 NASB*), gives us spiritual gifts (*1 Corinthians 12:4–7*), baptizes us into Christ's body (*12:13*), and dwells in us (*3:16 NASB*). But what did Paul say in *Romans 8:6–8* and *Ephesians 4:30–31* can hinder the Spirit's flow of power?

Thankfully, confession of sin and repentance reconnect us to our spiritual power source, and, by yielding to the Spirit's control and acting in obedience, we sense the Spirit's filling once again.

Application: A Prayerful Mind-set

The key to starting the “engine” and engaging the power of the Spirit is a mind-set of prayer. Paul said it simply, “Pray without ceasing” (*1 Thessalonians 5:17 NASB*)—which means keep a conversation with God going throughout your day, from your first wakeful thoughts in the morning to your final thoughts before drifting asleep.



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In his book, *Embraced by the Spirit*, Pastor Chuck Swindoll offers his morning prayer as a model:

“This is your day, Lord. I want to be at Your disposal. I have no idea what these next twenty-four hours will contain. But before I sip my first cup of coffee, and even before I get dressed, I want You to know that from this moment on throughout this day, I’m Yours, Lord. Help me to lean on You, to draw strength from You, and to have You fill my mind and my thoughts. Take control of my senses so that I am literally filled with Your presence and empowered with Your energy. I want to be Your tool, Your vessel today. I can’t make it happen. And so I’m saying, Lord, fill me with Your Spirit today.”¹

In the space below, compose your own daily prayer asking for the Spirit’s filling.

Now slip these thoughts in your mental pocket and carry them with you. Keep reminding yourself of your need for the Spirit’s filling and power . . . when you step into a meeting at work, when you search for wise words for your children, when you start a homework assignment, when you feel tempted to sin, when you consider an important decision—at every moment of your day.

And then, watch the Spirit work in you and through you as you take each step in the power and filling of the Spirit.



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, focus my thoughts on You as I drive the freeways, as I meet with people, do chores, eat meals, and as I go about my day. Take control of my senses so I am filled with Your presence and power. Fill me, Lord, with Your Spirit as I face whatever I face today. In Jesus’ name, amen.

ENDNOTE

1. Charles R. Swindoll, *Embraced by the Spirit* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 77.