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Four Questions About Being Filled with the Holy Spirit - Part 1

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The story is told (which may be apocryphal) that the great 19th century evangelist Dwight L. Moody once posed a riddle to his audience. He supposedly brought an empty gallon-sized jug onto the platform where he was speaking and sat it on a table. He then asked the crowd, "How can we get all of the air out of this vessel?"

Several solutions were suggested. For instance, someone said, "We can use a pneumatic pump and suck all the air out." The problem with that idea was that it would create a vacuum in the jug which would cause the glass to implode. After a few minutes Moody cagily reached under the table and pulled out a pitcher of water. Slowly he poured the liquid into the jug filling it to the top. "There," he declared. "All the air is removed from the jug!"

Moody's demonstration illustrates what the Bible says is true about living the Christian life. It is not possible, metaphorically speaking, to suck all the sin out of our lives. It is, therefore, necessary for us to fill up our souls with the Holy Spirit of God. The key to Christian living is the process of being filled with the Holy Spirit. No other way will be successful for spiritual victory.

In this article and the next we will examine four essential questions that Christians ask about being filled with the Holy Spirit. In addressing these issues we will examine what the Bible says about the subject, but also correct some misconceptions that many Christians have adopted about it. Also, we will look at how we can practically express this

essential dimension of our Christian life. We will begin with the most basic question.

Question 1 - What Exactly Does it Mean to Be "Filled" with the Holy Spirit?

The Apostle Paul wrote his letter to the Ephesians to educate them as to the qualities of a true church of Christ. One of the key sections in his epistle is located in chapter five where Paul expressed some general exhortations about Christian living. He began by declaring that love was the foremost quality for spiritual maturity. He reminded them how Jesus had loved them and died for them. So everything starts with love (vss. 1-2).

In verses 3 through 13 he warned them of the sins of darkness in which they had formally lived. In verses 7-10, however, he commanded, "Therefore do not be partakers with them; for you were formerly darkness, but now you are Light in the Lord; walk as children of Light (for the fruit of the Light consists in all goodness and righteousness and truth), trying to learn what is pleasing to the Lord." The basis for that life is found in verses 15-21. He told them to walk in wisdom and to know the will of God. The key is vs. 18: "Be filled with the Spirit."

Paul was not introducing a new concept. Actually, many people in the Bible were said to be filled with Holy Spirit. The New Testament provides numerous examples of Spirit-filled people. For instance, John the Baptist was declared to be filled with the Spirit even before he was born (Luke 1: 15). Luke also recorded the filling of the young Christian church on Pentecost (Acts 2: 4). Peter was filled with the Spirit when he stood before the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem (Acts

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4:8). Barnabas was sent by the Jerusalem church to Antioch to investigate what was happening there because . . . "he was a good man, and full of the Holy Spirit and of faith" (Acts 11:24). Paul was filled with the Spirit when he confronted the magician/false prophet Elymas at Paphos on the island of Cyprus (Acts 13:6-12).

So what does that phrase actually mean? To begin with we must not forget that The Holy Spirit is not some power force or energy field we can turn on or off at will. The Holy Spirit is none other than God Himself! He is the Third Person of the Holy Trinity and is, thus, worthy of our worship, praise, and obedience.

That being said, Paul gave a clue about the phrase in Ephesians 5:18. He commanded them to "be filled," but began his exhortation by making a contrast. He told them, "And do not get drunk with wine" He calls the intoxicated state of mind "dissipation" (KJV "excess"). That word means wastefulness, self-indulgence, or debauchery. Obviously someone who is drunk is controlled and dominated by the drug alcohol and is not able to function reasonably or with moral clarity.

In contrast to intoxication, a Christian is to be filled with, that is, controlled and dominated by, the Holy Spirit. The difference is clear. Alcohol makes a person lose control of his or her emotions and inhibitions. The Holy Spirit gives the believer more control over those qualities and empowers him or her to exercise good behavior.

Earlier we mentioned Moody's idea of a bottle filled with water to illustrate this principle. Perhaps a better metaphor might be that of a house being "filled" with dwellers. As Robert Boyd Munger said in his little

book *My Heart Christ's Home*, nothing is colder or more vulnerable than an empty house. Our body is the House of God (Temple of the Holy Spirit) and we should allow Him to have control of His dwelling (1 Cor. 6:19-20).

So, being filled with the Holy Spirit means we allow God who dwells in us to use us, empower us, and control us. It is really that simple. But that leads to another question: "So what?"

Question 2 - What Is the Purpose for Being "Filled with the Holy Spirit ?"

As we indicated earlier, in chapter five of Paul's Ephesians letter he laid some basic principles for Christian living (vss. 15-22). He first told them to be careful in how they walked (KJV - "walk circumspectly"). That is, he was advising them to go through daily life cautiously, acting wisely and not wasting precious time (vs. 15). He then told them not to be foolish but to understand and do the will of God (vs. 17). He also said for them to speak to one another "in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord; always giving thanks for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God, even the Father; and be subject to one another in the fear of Christ" (vss. 19-21). He then went into detail about family relationships, including the responsibilities of wives, husbands, children and servants (vss. 5:22- 6:9).

At the center of it all is Paul's admonition to "be filled with the Spirit" (vs. 18). All of these activities are characteristics of Spirit-filled living. As Paul told the Galatians: "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law" (Galatians 5:22-23).

Thus, the over-riding purpose for being filled with the Spirit is to empower us for the Christian life. In this, we must understand one very important

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point: being Spirit-filled is an intensely practical principle. It is not just an emotional or mystical experience (more on this in the next installment). It applies to moral, ethical, and practical decision making and personal relationships – all of which has the ultimate objective of bringing glory to Jesus Christ.

But some Christians say they just don't know if they are really Spirit-filled or not. In the next installment we will answer two more important questions about the filling of the Holy Spirit. How do we know if we are filled with the Holy Spirit? And, what is necessary to be filled with the Holy Spirit?

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