

Preaching Series: Experiencing the Spirit
Sermon Title: The Filling of the Spirit

Text: Ephesians 5:15-21 -- Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, 16 making the best use of the time, because the days are evil. 17 Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. 18 And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit, 19 addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with all your heart, 20 giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, 21 submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ.

Introduction: In the latter part of the nineteenth century, D. L. Moody was travelling to England for an evangelistic crusade. An elderly pastor who had been asked to help with the evangelistic crusade protested, ***“Why do we need this ‘Mr. Moody’? He’s uneducated and inexperienced. Who does he think he is anyway? Does he think he has a monopoly on the Holy Spirit?”*** Another pastor with a bit more wisdom responded, ***“No, but the Holy Spirit has a monopoly on Mr. Moody.”*** Think about that for a second or two. “The Holy Spirit has a monopoly on Mr. Moody.” What does that mean? It means that D. L. Moody was fully surrendered to serve the Lord as an evangelist and was filled and empowered by the Holy Spirit to do so. That’s why we’ve been talking about in the last five messages in our series, ***Experiencing the Spirit. It’s so important to understand that, as Christians, we are only usable to God for His glory to the degree that we are yielded to the Spirit of God in our lives.***

This morning, in the sixth message in the series – **Experiencing the Spirit** -- I want to look at a very familiar passage written by the Apostle Paul that helps us understand ***how*** we are filled with the Holy Spirit and ***what*** happens in us as a result. In **Ephesians 5:15-21**, Paul is describing the means by which we, as Christians, are to live a life worthy of the calling we’ve received. That’s what he’s been talking about since **Ephesians 4:1**, and it’s why he begins in Ephesians 5:15 with ... ***look carefully then how you walk***. It’s as if he’s saying, ***“Hey ... if you want to live a life worthy of your calling then make sure you live in such a way that you please the Lord.”*** Then he offers three contrasts to help us understand more about our walk with Christ. By the way, a *contrast is a way of showing the difference between two things by holding them up to each other.* Here they are starting in verse fifteen.

- ... (do not walk) as unwise but as wise, making the best use of the time, because the days are evil. In Psalm 14:1 we're told that the fool says in his heart that there is no God. In other words, he lives as if God is a myth. **Because he does not believe, he does nothing to prepare for the arrival of His kingdom. The fool is guilty of wasting the time in the pursuit of other things.** This is the same thing the five foolish virgins were guilty of in the parable the Lord told in **Matthew 25:2-13**. They did not bring any oil for their lamps as they waited for the groom probably because they thought there would be enough time to do that when he finally arrived. But when the groom returned at a late hour they were caught off-guard and could not enter the wedding banquet. The point is that they had enough time to properly prepare, but they wasted it. **On the other hand, the wise person has a right attitude about time.** While living in an evil age under the control of the prince of the power of the air – the devil himself, the wise man takes advantage of every opportunity to live in a manner that pleases the Lord so that whenever Jesus chooses to return for His bride, he'll be ready.
- ... do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. Listen to these words from **Proverbs 10:23 -- A fool finds pleasure in evil conduct, but a man of understanding delights in wisdom.** The fool is careless and lacks understanding. He only wants personal pleasure and doesn't care what compromises he has to make to obtain it. This describes every one of us **before** we began to follow Christ. We were self-centered and seldom even thought about God's will. But now that we've met Christ, believers exercise care with regard to how we live so that we don't return to the foolishness of the past. This is the will of the Lord ... **TO BE HOLY AND BLAMELESS IN HIS SIGHT – Ephesians 1:4.**
- ... do not be drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit. I'm told that when a person drinks too much alcohol, his body will first try to eliminate what it can by increasing his output of urine and by exhaling what he can through his breath. That's why you can smell the alcohol on the breath of someone who has had too much to drink. That which cannot be eliminated in these ways will go to our brains where it will **inhibit normal human behaviors**. It slows down our high-order cognitive abilities such as decision-making and processing. Then it will exaggerate our emotions and fragment our memories. Eventually our motor skills and coordination will be affected so that we can't do simple things like walk in a straight line. If we drink too much it will actually hinder our basic functions such as breathing and movement ... leading to death if there is no medical intervention. **Paul warns that this kind of thing leads to habitual and unrestrained indulgence in immoral behavior.** On the

other hand, we find those who are **filled with the Spirit**. Just as alcohol can influence a person to do all sorts of immature and sinful behaviors, so the Holy Spirit enables us to live a healthy and holy life. Let's break it down by consider **THREE OBSERVATIONS, THREE ISSUES, TWO APPLICATIONS AND THREE OUTCOMES** related to Paul's command to be filled with the Spirit.

THREE OBSERVATIONS ABOUT THE COMMAND TO BE FILLED WITH THE SPIRIT.

Note that Paul commands us to be filled with the Holy Spirit. It's not as if he's giving us the option of yielding to the Spirit. The idea is that if we aren't filled, something is not right. We're outside of God's will. Here are three more thoughts ...

- **It's in the Present Tense**. This is important because it has the idea of continual action. It is something that we are to keep on doing. In other words, the filling of the Spirit is never meant to be a one-time event. **The Amplified Bible** says it this way: **...ever be filled and stimulated with the Holy Spirit**. Christians should be known for manifesting the fruit of the Spirit because our normal state is to be full of the Spirit.
- **It's in the Passive Voice**. An active command might sound something like this: **"Hey ... look at me. I'm talking to you."** It's active in the sense that the subject is required to take action. A passive command is not focused on something we do, **BUT ON SOMETHING THAT IS DONE TO US**. We receive the action. That's what Paul is saying here. **"Be filled with the Spirit."** The idea is that this is the work of God that He accomplishes in us, but that it still requires our submissiveness ... our desire to be filled. Thus, the command in the passive voice.
- **It's a Plural Command**. Paul is saying that **EVERY CHRISTIAN** is to be filled with the Spirit. This is not just for **A FEW OF THE REALLY SPIRITUAL PEOPLE**, but for the entire body of Christ. This filling is what transforms a church from a social club to a vibrant, living organism where we learn to worship, grow, serve and share together. **It's what makes the church an attractive place for hurting people to gather and seek the Lord together.** Have you heard about the revival that's occurring at Asbury College in Wilmore, Kentucky. Believe it or not, it's being led by young men and women most from Generation Z – born after 1997 who many of us thought had **HAD VERY LITTLE SPIRITUAL INTEREST**. It started organically without anyone taking the lead as students began to meet to pray together. Eventually those same students brought their enthusiasm for Christ to a chapel service for the school. More young people began to participate. That prayer meeting has now been going on for almost 200 straight hours. Here's what one person said about it. **"There isn't a single 'known' figure on the platform. It's students leading the way alongside a few campus ministers. It's**

raw worship, Bible reading and exhortation, and repentance. Confession broke out numerous times, the crowd would listen and speak out, "The blood of Jesus forgives me." The altars were full night and day, wet with tears, from young and old. It was multi-ethnic, multi-racial, and multi-generational. Now, upwards of 5,000 people from all over the country (some believers and some not) have been traveling to Asbury to witness what's happening. In some cases, they've been attempting to take the revival back to their home states. WHAT THEY ARE EXPERIENCING IS WHAT GOD WANTS EVERY BELIEVER TO EXPERIENCE – A FRESH FILLING OF THE HOLY SPIRIT.

THREE ISSUES RELATED TO THE COMMAND TO BE FILLED WITH THE SPIRIT. .

- **The Issue of Control.** When a person is filled with the Spirit, the Holy Spirit exerts controlling interest over his life. But it's not like you become a robot with no self-will. Thinking again of the contrast between drunkenness and Spirit-filled people, when alcohol is consumed at harmful levels, it has control over those who abuse it. They frequently do things that they later regret. Both of my grandfathers were alcoholics. One was a mean drunk, the other just lacked any kind of discernment when he became intoxicated. He once ran over himself with his own truck! **The Spirit-filled person willingly submits the controlling interest in his life to the Holy Spirit.** Then the Spirit leads the believer as he joyfully follows. One pastor describes it as "**control by consent.**" That's a good phrase. It involves our **surrender** to the Holy Spirit so that He has increasingly more of us (just like Moody).
- **The Issue of Cooperation.** At the moment of new birth, every believer is Spirit-filled. That's why those who are born again are so excited about their new faith in Christ. They share an exuberance, a fresh new sense of joy that rubs off on the rest of us. It's great to be around people who have recently met the Lord and can't seem to get enough of Him. Somewhere along the way, however, Christians may elect to take back controlling interest over their lives for their own selfish purposes. **They get in the driver's seat, so to speak, and attempt to live independently of the Holy Spirit.** When this happens, these believers lose their passion for Christ and desire to live for Him. OFTEN THEIR LIVES LOOK MORE LIKE THAT OF UNBELIEVERS THAN CHRIST-FOLLOWERS. And God will allow it ... He will say, "**Okay, go ahead. Live to please your flesh, but it won't get better for you ... only worse.**" **At this point, those of us who are wise understand the will of the Lord, stop rebelling, confess our sin and surrender again to the filling of the Holy Spirit.** That's how we can manage to walk in a manner worthy of our calling. The Bible says that **nothing done in the flesh will ever please God (Romans 8:8).**

- ***The Issue of Contact.*** Many people think of the Holy Spirit like gas in the tank of a car. When we run out of it our car's engine stops. They figure that in the same way, when believers run out of the power of the Holy Spirit, we just ask God to fill us up again. But that's probably not the best way to think of it. **Instead, I'd ask you to consider an elevated train that runs in Chicago. It has three rails, two of which are tracks for the train to run on. The third, however, is for the purpose of providing electricity to the train so that it can move. If somehow the train loses contact with that third rail, it will not move. People can board it. The conductor can push the lever that normally starts the engines, but if it is not connected to the power source, nothing is going to happen. It has to have electricity to run. The third rail represents for us the Holy Spirit.** He's the One who provides the power to walk in the footsteps of Christ – who, by the way, did everything in the power of the Holy Spirit when He walked the earth. **If we are ever disconnected from the Holy Spirit, we are powerless to follow Christ.**

TWO APPLICATIONS REGARDING THE COMMAND TO BE FILLED WITH THE SPIRIT.

- **Before you can be filled you have to be emptied.** Before you can be filled with the Spirit, you must GET RID OF anything that is taking His place in your lives. **I'm referring to the idols that occupy that central place in our hearts and that keep us from surrendering to Christ.** I cannot tell you what those idols are for you, but I can say that for me they probably involve my pride, my love of food, my desire to be worshipped. The Holy Spirit will not fill me until I have emptied myself of these, and anything else that gets in the way, first. This kind of soul work requires contrition, confession and cleansing. **D. L. Moody** once said, ***"I believe firmly that the moment our hearts are emptied of pride and selfishness and ambition and everything that is contrary to God's law, the Holy Spirit will fill every corner of our hearts. But if we are full of pride and conceit and ambition and the world, there is no room for the Spirit of God. We must be emptied before we can be filled."***
- **Before you can be filled you have to be open.** Once we've removed our idols, we can experience a fresh filling as the Holy Spirit takes His rightful place in us. But be warned! No one who has closed his heart to the work of the Holy Spirit can expect to be filled with the Spirit. **We must be willing to yield to His guidance, leadership and direction in our daily lives.**

THREE OUTCOMES OF BEING FILLED WITH THE SPIRIT. (1) **We will address one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs.** When God the Holy Spirit fills us, we desire to build each other up in the faith and we worship the object of our faith ... the Lord Jesus Christ. We accomplish the former by addressing one another

in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs. You may be surprised to learn that worship has **A HORIZONTAL ELEMENT** to it. The Holy Spirit enables us to bless, exhort and instruct one another. *By the way that's a good reason why we should not forsake opportunities for us to assemble together (Hebrews 10:25). How can we encourage each other if we're not meeting together?* There is also **A VERTICAL ELEMENT** that is found in the latter part of **verse nineteen (singing and making melody to the Lord with all our hearts)**. We are to praise and worship Christ together through our music. This is not to say that every song must have Jesus' name in it to be biblical, but when our worship excludes Christ, it is probably not Spirit-filled; **(2) We will give thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.** Gratitude is a normal expression for those who are filled with the Holy Spirit. Here Paul gives us some instructions about how we're to give thanksgiving to God. **First**, it is to be regular (always); **second**, it is also to be thankful for everything (including the painful stuff because we know that *God works everything for our good – Romans 8:28*); **last**, it is to be directed toward God the Father in the name of Christ. As our mediator, Christ has represented God to us and us to God. We come to the Father in the name of the Son who has made it all possible; **(3) We will submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.** There are two ways to take this verse. One is that everyone is to submit to everyone in the body of Christ. At first glance this might sound right, but it makes little sense to say that parents should submit to their children or slave owners work expected to submit to their slaves. The better alternative is to see that God has ordained a structure in society that includes the right and responsibility of authority. Our submission to those in authority over us is evidence that we're filled with the Spirit.

Conclusion: All of this is possible as we yield our lives to the Holy Spirit. Then, and only then, will we find the power to live a life worthy of our calling. **A. J. Gordon**, one of the founders of **Gordon Conwell Divinity School**, told of taking a walk one day and gazing across a field at a house. **There beside it was what looked like a man pumping furiously at an old hand pump.** As Gordon watched, the man continued to pump at a tremendous rate; he seemed absolutely tireless, laboring on and on, up and down, without ever slowing in the slightest, much less stopping. Truly it was a remarkable feat of endurance, so Gordon started to walk toward the fellow. **As he got closer, however, he could see it was not a man at the pump, but a wooden figure painted to look like a man.** The arm that was pumping so rapidly was hinged at the elbow and the hand was wired to the pump handle. **He quickly figured out that the water was pouring forth, but not because the figure was pumping it.** You see, it was an **artesian well**, which means that the water pressure beneath the ground was so great that it was just waiting to come out. When a person inserted a well casing into the ground and created a way for the water to

escape, that's exactly what it did. The powerful pressure forced the water upward and outward. So, it turns out that what **A. J. Gordon** saw was not the figure of a man pumping water, but the water pumping the figure of a man! **So what's my point?** Listen ... when you see a Christian who is walking as a wise man (**verse fifteen**), who understands the will of the Lord (**verse seventeen**), who is producing real fruit, recognize it is the Holy Spirit, like the water pouring fourth from an artesian well, that is actually doing the work. While the man may seem to be laboring tirelessly, he cannot claim any credit for the results. He's knows what God wants all of us to know ... ***as long as we're connected to the Holy Spirit, He does the work and God gets the glory.***