

How to Have the Power of God for Effective Ministry, Both Sacred and Secular

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And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:4).

And Peter filled with the Holy Spirit, said unto them (Acts 4:8).

And when they had prayed, the place where they had gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and began to speak the word of God with boldness (acts 4:31).

Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus . . . has sent me so that you may regain your sight, and be filled with the Holy Spirit (Acts 9:17).

But Saul . . . filled with the Holy Spirit, fixed his gaze upon him (Acts 13:9).

Numerous books on the subject of Spirit-filling can be found in Christian bookstores nowadays, but the majority of believers still do not understand what it means to be “filled with the Holy Spirit.” Some do realize the importance of Spirit-filling, but since they lack knowledge about the Holy Spirit’s Person and work, they usually seek to be filled with the Spirit mainly for an emotional experience. Thus their spiritual lives are not strengthened and their service to God is not empowered by desiring an experience that only gratifies their “self.” Other believers, due to a bad impression made by those who go to emotional extremes, either deny or reject the idea of Spirit-filling entirely, and sometimes even ridicule it. Consequently, they forfeit the grace of God that could be theirs and have little ability to serve God and little perseverance when they do attempt to serve. Between these two groups are some believers who, not wanting to be involved in either extreme and unwilling to study the Scriptures to find out what the truth is, simply ignore Spirit-filling and its importance altogether. They allow prejudice and misinformation to rob them of this glorious blessing and greatly diminish their spiritual lives.

My purpose in this study is to consider the reality of Spirit-filling in a practical way that will bring spiritual results. I have no desire to give an academic discussion nor to attempt to persuade others intellectually of the truth and importance of Spirit-filling. My hope is that all believers may learn how to incorporate Spirit-filling into their lives so that they will have power for witnessing and effective service and enjoy the life-giving effects of this blessing. We will look at the subject of Spirit-filling under five topics: the importance, the misunderstandings, the purpose, the conditions, and the command to be Spirit-filled.

A. The Importance of Spirit-filling.

The Scriptures record, “But realize this, that in the last days difficult times will come. For men will be lovers of self . . . holding to a form of godliness, although they have denied its power . . . always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth” (2 Tim. 3:1-7). A careful reading of Second Timothy 3:1-7 reveals that the passage does not describe the wickedness of the world in the last days but the degree of

unrighteousness which will be rampant in the church. The catalogue of vices listed in this passage (for example, lovers of self, lovers of money, boastful, arrogant, revilers) sounds like the universal failings of mankind since the days of Adam. Surely it must be an exaggeration to attribute them to the church! It is only in the church, however, that you will find those who hold to a form of godliness and at the same time are always learning and never able to come to the full knowledge of the truth about God's Word. So it is extremely serious to find such an evil situation in God's holy institution.

This passage in Second Timothy is a vivid description of many individual churches and entire church organizations which outwardly seem alive but inwardly are spiritually dead. What is puzzling, however, is that it also describes many churches (started by true Christians and often pastored by capable ministers) who claim to be pure in the faith and fundamental in basic doctrine. Unfortunately they too know only how to maintain a form of godliness, while denying its liberating power. They either have forgotten, or have never learned, how to obtain power from above by faith. For instance, every Sunday many stand behind the pulpit trying to entertain the listeners in a frivolous way rather than being concerned about preaching God's Word with power. They are orators with good sounding words but with little content or spiritual life in their messages. Many times they make unreasonable interpretations of Scripture just to appeal to the prejudices of their congregations. As a result, today most messages from the pulpit have no life-giving power nor do they edify and build up the saints in the faith. In some of these churches they consider essential for fellowship such questionable activities as drinking, smoking, dancing, card playing, bingo, and so on. Some churches approve divorce and others even ordain homosexuals. The leaders of some denominations favor doing the latter but fear that not enough of the laity are yet willing to accept such an action, and that their membership would decline and the collection box would suffer if they did so. All these evils exist because of darkened spiritual understanding and a dearth of the power that comes from above. When there is a drought in the land and the population must get their water from polluted wells, a weak and infirm citizenry is the predictable result.

Well-meaning pastors who know the Lord, have a tender heart, and great Scriptural knowledge, but do not know how to appropriate God's power for preaching, are like a luxury sedan with an empty gas tank. What good are they in God's church? Pastors certainly should work to improve their skills in human relationships, learn how to prepare a worthy sermon and develop administrative skills in order to "bring forth out of [their] treasure things new and old" (Matt. 13:52). But an even higher priority than improvement in the craft of preaching and church management should be for pastors to learn how to receive power from above and to utilize it in life and ministry, for "the Kingdom of God is not a matter of talk but of power" (1 Cor. 4:20 NIV).

It is only by the mighty power of God that sinners will realize their wickedness and willingly humble themselves to turn from it to receive the LORD as Lord. Only this mighty power will cause backsliders to realize their rebellion and return to God's love. Only by God's mighty power can believers be edified and built up in the truth so that the young Christians will not walk the wrong path and the aged will be constantly strengthened. From Genesis to Revelation the only effective work ever done for God was by the proclamation of the Word of God in the power of the Spirit of God. The initial chaotic elements of the earth were prepared by the Spirit of God in Genesis 1:2 to

respond to God's creative life-giving words, "Let there be . . ." throughout the remainder of the chapter. Christ "who went about doing good, and was healing all who were oppressed by the devil" was empowered to do so because "God anointed Him with the Holy Spirit and with power" (Acts 10:38). In appropriating the mighty power of the Holy Spirit for fruitful service, Christ was an example for every believer to do God's work with the same authority that their Master did.

D.L. Moody was a person with a nature just like ours. The only difference between him and us is that he was filled with the Holy Spirit, and we are not. William Moody told of his father's experience.

The year 1871 was a critical one in Mr. Moody's career. He realized more and more how little he was fitted by personal acquirements for his work. An intense hunger and thirst for spiritual power were aroused in him by two women who used to attend the meetings and sat on the front seat . . . at the close of services they would say to him:

'We have been praying for you.'

'Why don't you pray for the people?' Mr. Moody would ask.

'Because you need the power of the Spirit,' they would say.

'I need the power? Why,' said Mr. Moody, in relating the incident years after, 'I thought I had power. I had the largest congregation in Chicago, and there were many conversions. I was in a sense satisfied. But right along those two godly women kept praying for me. . . . I began to cry out as I never did before.'¹

After Moody had been filled with the Spirit, he said, "I went to preach again. The sermons were not different: I did not present any new truths and yet hundreds were converted."² This testimony alone provides adequate proof of the importance of Spirit-filling for effective service, but there is more evidence.

The importance of Spirit-filling for effective service is seen in the seventy men who helped Moses judge the Israelites, Bezalel and the tabernacle artisans, the judges of Israel, the prophets, the New Testament apostles, the disciples at Pentecost, and the Lord Jesus Christ—all were filled with the Holy Spirit to do God's work with power and fruitfulness. Unfortunately, the truth about Spirit-filling has been misunderstood and abused so often that many who have great love for the Lord and earnestly desire His power are afraid to properly investigate it. However, that we "be filled with the Spirit" is still God's desire and one of His great promises to us. As Scripture says, "how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him" (Luke 11:13). We would never dare to stop eating just because one time we choked on our food. Likewise, we must ignore the past abuses concerning Spirit-filling and go immediately in prayer to Christ to receive what He has prepared for us to be His effective servants.

¹ Moody, W. R., *The Life of D. L. Moody* (New York: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1900), 146-147.

² *Ibid.*, 149.

B. Some Misunderstandings Concerning Spirit-filling.

In these last days Satan has caused more confusion about being “filled with the Spirit” than about any other biblical truth. We should expect this because counterfeiting, deceit and fraud are his areas of expertise. He has applied his schemes to this particular grace of God so often that many believers either hold badly distorted ideas about it or keep completely away from it. In order to better understand what Spirit-filling is, I will discuss a few of the misinterpretations—or what Spirit-filling is not.

1. Many Pentecostal brethren confuse Spirit-filling with Spirit-baptism, which they claim is manifested by speaking in tongues. Some insist that every believer should have the baptism of the Spirit accompanied with the same manifestation of speaking in tongues as happened on the Day of Pentecost, or as occurred in Cornelius’ house, or was experienced by the twelve disciples at Ephesus. If the gift of speaking with tongues does not occur, some advise holding a special meeting so that they can pray earnestly and attempt to force the Holy Spirit to supply the manifestation of speaking in tongues since many believe it is the only sign of Spirit-baptism. In this meeting they may incessantly pray for tongues until their voices are gone, their bodies exhausted, and perhaps their heads spin with dizziness, which often leads to self-hypnosis. Once they achieve the experience, it is a special symbol of being divinely blessed and often is sufficient to last for their whole lifetime. Paul did not speak with tongues at his initial Spirit-filling (Acts 9:17), nor did the disciples at Antioch do so (Acts 13:52).

When being filled with the Spirit, a person may experience either a strong explosive manifestation or one with no special signs whatsoever. The effect on the individual is at the discretion of the Holy Spirit who “distributes to each one individually just as He wills” (1 Cor. 12:11). The Holy Spirit cannot be forced to fulfill one’s desire to speak in tongues. When Peter was tried by the Sanhedrin, he did not speak in tongues (Acts 4:8). When Peter and John were released from jail and returned to the other disciples, “when they had prayed, they were all filled with the Holy Spirit,” but they did not speak with tongues (Acts 4:31). When Paul received his initial Spirit-filling, he did not speak with tongues (Acts 9:17). Neither did Paul speak with tongues when he was filled with the Holy Spirit for the task of rebuking Elymas the magician (Acts 13:8-10).

Many who speak in tongues are generally unaware that what Christians experience today (other than at the time of salvation) is no longer Spirit-baptism, but Spirit-filling which may or may not be accompanied by outward manifestations. In short, the operation of the Holy Spirit in baptism and filling are two different actions. Although they occurred together at the establishment of the church (See Acts 1:5 and compare with 2:4), after the experience of the twelve disciples at Ephesus, they were separated into two operations: Spirit-baptism being a general event for all Christians at their new birth (1 Cor. 12:13), and Spirit-filling being a separate special act repeatedly available as needed for all Christians (Eph. 5:18). May all those who understand biblical theology and the progressive nature of God’s revelation say, “Amen!”

Therefore, what believers need to experience today for power to do God’s work is not baptism with the Holy Spirit but to be filled with the Holy Spirit. Neither should tongue-speaking be pursued but rather prophesying (1 Cor. 14:1), that is, uttering words inspired by the Spirit which communicate God’s message to the hearers for edification,

exhortation and comfort. Furthermore, speaking in tongues is not a sure sign of being Spirit-filled.

2. Many Holiness brethren confuse Spirit-filling with sanctification. Some hold that all believers should receive Spirit-filling but confuse it with the Spirit's work of sanctification. They claim the path to the blessing is the removal of all sin through cleansing their heart and crucifying their flesh. Then, they say, the Spirit will automatically fill them with all kinds of heavenly blessings, especially perfect love and complete holiness. They think that these blessings, and even their salvation, may be lost through various sins and disobedience. Such teaching, however, destroys the believer's assurance of salvation, degrades the finished work of Christ, and devotes too much merit to personal struggles against sin. In fact, any doctrine that exalts good works as meriting God's grace will lead to disappointment, even despair. The secret of spiritual victory is not self-struggle but appropriating by faith the victory wrought by Christ and then resting upon it.

King Jehoshaphat of Judah is an excellent example of how to secure such a victory. When the Moabites and Ammonites came to make war against him, Jehoshaphat called upon his faith and "appointed those who sang to the Lord and those who praised Him in holy attire, as they went out before the army and said, 'Give thanks to the Lord, for His lovingkindness is everlasting'" (2 Chron. 20:21). As Israel began to sing and praise, Yahweh Himself started the battle, moving the Moabite and Ammonite armies to attack and destroy one another. When the Judean soldiers arrived on the scene all they saw were dead bodies and total devastation. The battle truly was the Lord's.

Moreover, other Scriptures admonish, "In repentance and rest you shall be saved" (Is. 30:15), meaning that believers cannot aid themselves by trusting in either the power of the flesh or of the world. Only by the mighty power of the Holy One of Israel can deliverance be brought to those who turn to Him in purity, faith, and obedience; who stop relying upon their own activity and who start resting upon the grace of God. Elsewhere Scripture says, "for though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh" (2 Cor. 10:3), indicating that our work for God is not to be performed by the best human skills such as intellectual reason, powerful arguments, or persuasive speech but by the supernatural power of God. Again Scripture says, "'Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit,' says the Lord of Hosts" (Zech. 4:6), teaching that we can never accomplish the work God has given us to do by simply increasing our own strength, but by allowing God Himself to fill us with His Spirit.

3. Other well-known brethren have confused Spirit-filling with the fullness of the Spirit. These tend to hold that if a believer is willing to offer his body as a living sacrifice and allow the Spirit to fill him, the Spirit will automatically take complete possession of him. This has been taught to thousands who come to their conferences to be instructed concerning a deeper spiritual life. Scofield said "grieve not the Holy Spirit of God" and "quench not the Spirit" are negative conditions for the filling of the Spirit, and "yieldedness," "faith," and "prayer" are positive conditions. Yet when I read the Greek New Testament carefully, I found that these are all requirements for being full of the Holy Spirit and not for being filled with the Holy Spirit. "Fill" is an action, whereas "full" is a condition. The former is for the believer's work and service, the latter is for

his abundant spiritual life. So we need to be clear about this. The distinction between them may be seen in this comparison:

To Fill	To be Full
A verb	An adjective
An action from above coming into	A condition which overflows from inside out
Gives power to serve	Related to spiritual growth
Related to gifts and work	Associated with faith and life

This comparison does not mean that the two are completely unrelated. Although their nature and end result are different, they still have a very close relationship. Stephen and Philip, two of the seven deacons chosen to care for widows in the early church, possessed the Spirit's fullness which resulted in godly lives as well as powerful sermons. Both of these Spirit operations work together for effective ministry, growth of the believer's spiritual life, and for bringing glory to God. Rain is one of the many important elements for the growth of plants, yet plants do not grow on water alone. Air, sun, and soil are also important. In like manner, Spirit-filling is one of the conditions by which the Holy Spirit causes the believer's entire being to be "full of the Holy Spirit."

4. The truth of Spirit-filling lies between two extreme positions. One group of extremists takes the act of Spirit-filling as evidenced by speaking in tongues to be the climax of a believer's spiritual life. They hold that when a believer has experienced Spirit-filling even once, he has reached the high point of God's desire for him and he does not need to pursue any further the Spirit's fullness in his life. Just prior to the Sino-Japanese war, when I was a pastor in Shanghai I knew some believers who did not feel that they needed to pray with understanding nor receive enlightenment from God's Word to achieve a mature and abundant spiritual life. They regarded edification from God's Word as unimportant and the careful study of His Word as a nuisance. They wanted to take a short cut to spiritual growth by emphasizing emotional stimuli while neglecting edification which would develop their spiritual life. When praying, their main goal was to enter into an emotional twilight zone induced by clapping upraised hands in rhythm while yelling "Hallelujah" repeatedly, and unfortunately often fell into Satan's trap of self-hypnosis and, thus becoming defenseless, some even allowed demons to influence them.

For this reason the daily life of some tongue-speakers is no different than that of those who belong to the world, and according to my experience, in some cases may be even worse; although they claim that because they speak in tongues they have been filled with the Spirit. They often focus extensively on self with the result that their pride is often greater than that of a peacock. They imagine that they are God's favorite children and condemn those who do not speak in tongues as of the world. Some women, failing to heed the scriptural command to respect their husbands, belittle their spouses who do not speak in tongues calling them sons of perdition. What a tragedy!

The other extreme wants the fullness of the Spirit only as a goal for their personal spiritual benefit and neglect the filling with the Spirit which would help them reach His fullness in their lives. They do not realize why they are so weak in their service and have no fruit from their labor for God. Their actual spiritual life and their ideal spiritual life are not in harmony, for they live in imaginary castles that are suspended in thin air. In truth, the reality of Spirit-filling lies somewhere between these two extremes.

C. The Purpose of Being Filled with the Holy Spirit.

The purpose of Spirit-filling is not the same as that of baptism with the Holy Spirit nor of being full of the Holy Spirit. Spirit-filling is the very power of God energizing the faculties of our inner man for the accomplishment of the work to which God has called us. To be Spirit-filled is to experience divine power to do all kinds of ministry and to overcome our ignorance and weaknesses. Concerning this point, Bruce says, “The Spirit of God can energize men and impart to them physical power, mental skill, or spiritual insight that they would not otherwise have.”³

Therefore, God gave Bezalel and his fellow artisans Spirit-filling to endow them with wisdom to design the articles for the tabernacle and the ability to execute their designs (Ex. 35:30-36:1). Moreover, Spirit-filling qualified Bezalel and Oholiab to instruct other workmen in all the skills needed to make the articles for the holy tent (Ex. 35:34). Jesus taught this same principle when He promised that Spirit-filling obtained through prayer (Luke 11:13) would enable believers to answer effectively when wrongfully accused in court (Matt. 10:17-20) and to witness everywhere with power (Acts 1:8). His promise was fulfilled many times, but only in part, when the apostles preached at Pentecost with great boldness and liberty (Acts 2:6-11; 4:31), and when Paul powerfully rebuked Elymas the magician (Acts 13:8-12).

Spirit-filling need not be accompanied by supernatural manifestations or unusual activities, although in some instances it may produce external manifestations. The wind blows wherever and however it wishes, lightly one time and strongly the next. Sometimes it may be merely a mild breeze bending the long stems of wheat or corn so that the field appears to be a gently rolling sea of vegetation. On other occasions the wind may become a powerful tornado, uprooting large trees and sweeping houses off their foundations. No one would say that a gale force storm is the wind and a mild summer breeze is not. Actually tornadoes and summer breezes are the same wind manifested in different forms arising from different conditions. The difference between a gale and a breeze is in the intensity of the wind. The same principle applies to being filled with the Spirit. Unfortunately, many Christians believe that being filled with the Spirit must always be accompanied by tornado-like manifestations. Every Christian should be repeatedly filled with the Spirit, however, the degree of intensity and the outward manifestations will vary because of differences in each individual's understanding of Christ, because of variations in the believer's obedience to Him, and because of the Spirit's purpose at the time.

1. “To be filled with the Spirit” is for all kinds of duties. In the days after Israel came out of Egypt, God put His Spirit upon the seventy elders so that they could share Moses' and Joshua's responsibilities in shepherding the people (Num. 11:25-29). It was in this same period that Bezalel and others were filled with the Spirit of God to give them wisdom to construct the tabernacle with all its various utensils and furniture (Ex. 28:3; 31:1-11). “The Spirit of the Lord came upon” Jephthah, Samson and various other judges in order to deliver the Israelites from their enemies (Judg. 3:10; 6:34; 11:29; 15:14); upon Saul and David so that they could rule the entire nation of Israel competently (1 Sam.

³ Bruce, F. F. “The Epistle of Paul to the Romans,” *Tyndale New Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids: The Tyndale Press, 1963), 46.

11:6; 16:13); and upon the prophets so that they could speak for Yahweh, the LORD (2 Chron. 15:1; 24:20). In the New Testament times, the Holy Spirit came upon John the Baptist to call the nation to repentance and salvation, and to rebuke the common sins of Israel (Luke 1:13-16). Elizabeth and Zacharias, parents of John the Baptist, were filled with the Holy Spirit to witness for the Lord (Luke 1:41-42, 67). The Holy Spirit came upon Jesus to anoint Him to preach the gospel and perform His entire ministry (Luke 4:18-19; Acts 10:38). In the book of Acts, the phrase “filled with the Holy Spirit” is mentioned six times. Each passage, except the last, states unequivocally that those who were filled with the Holy Spirit also witnessed for Christ. Even in the last account, we may also be sure that the believers at Antioch witnessed for the Lord through their joy. The chief apostle, Paul, was likewise filled again and again with the Holy Spirit to do God’s work with power and effectiveness (Acts 9:17; 13:9), and under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, he commanded that all Christians “be filled [often] with the Spirit” (Eph. 5:18).

Some Scripture verses say “the Spirit came upon or fell upon him” whereas others say “he was filled with the Spirit.” This is simply a matter of grammar. When the Spirit is the subject of the sentence, the verb must be in the active voice; but when the believer is the subject, the passive verb is used because he certainly cannot fill himself. In most Old Testament passages, the Spirit or God is the subject used with the active verbs “came upon,” “fell upon,” “poured out,” or “filled with.” In the New Testament, however, most verses have the believer as the subject, so naturally the passive verb “be filled with” is used. But even in the New Testament when the Holy Spirit is the subject of the verb, “came upon” or “fell upon” is used (Luke 2:25; 3:22; Acts 8:16; 10:44; 11:15). In other words, “came upon” or “fell upon” and “be filled” are two different views of the same action, and thus the Scriptures do not teach that the Spirit “came upon” only in the Old Testament and “filled” only in the New. For example, the Holy Spirit came upon Jesus at His baptism (Matt. 4:16) which resulted in the same manifestation as Spirit-filling. Subsequently, He was led by the Spirit (Matt. 4:1) and performed His ministry in the Spirit’s power (Luke 4:18) and by the Spirit’s anointing (Acts 10:38). Remember, too, that Bezalel, Oholiab and their associate artisans were “filled with the Spirit of God” to do God’s work (Ex. 35:30-36:1), and all the Old Testament prophets had the indwelling Spirit of God enabling them to proclaim God’s Word with life and power (1 Pet. 1:9-10) in much the same manner as New Testament saints who had the gift of prophecy (1 Cor. 14:1-6), which is “declaring the mind of God in the power of the Spirit.”⁴ In principle, the Holy Spirit’s work in the individual is the same in both the Old and the New Testaments, although the manifestation of filling is somewhat different because of the progressive nature of God’s revelation.

2. “To be filled with the Spirit” is for preaching God’s message with spiritual life and power. Because Spirit-filling is mainly to empower believers for works of ministry, any worker who is not filled with the Spirit will lack the right degree of ability in the gospel ministry—to be kind and affectionate in serving the Lord, to have good spiritual results in teaching, preaching, shepherding the sheep or in edifying and building up the flock. Since to be filled with His Spirit is essential for effective service in the work of the Lord, it is little wonder that Christ did not permit the disciples to go forth to be witnesses

⁴ Bruce, F. F., *The Canon of Scripture* (Westmont, Ill.: Intervarsity Press, 1988), 264.

for Him until they had received power from on high, telling them not to leave Jerusalem, “but to wait for what the Father had promised” (Acts 1:4). He wanted His disciples to perform their ministry with the same power in which He accomplished His work. As the Scriptures testify, “Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit . . . and He began teaching in their synagogues and was praised by all” (Luke 4:14-15). For this reason, before beginning their gospel ministry following Jesus’ ascension, the disciples prayed earnestly and fervently for this heavenly endowment. Paul asked the Colossian believers to pray “that God may open up to us a door for the word, so that we may speak forth the mystery of Christ” (Col. 4:3). Herbert M. Carson thinks that Paul’s request “may be viewed as a desire that he may be given by the Spirit that ability to preach the gospel which is beyond the unaided natural powers.”⁵ D. L. Moody, the Spirit-filled evangelist, also spoke about the need of the gospel servant to be Spirit-filled, writing, “I have lived long enough to know that if I cannot have the power of the Spirit of God on me to help me work for Him, I would rather die than just live for the sake of living.”⁶ Spurgeon had similar thoughts, saying, “Let the preacher . . . burn his manuscript and **depend upon the Holy Spirit**. If the **Spirit does not come to help him**, let him be still and let the people go home and **pray that the Spirit will help him** next Sunday [emphasis added].”⁷

From his statement, one realizes that Spurgeon knew well the need for the Holy Spirit as the Helper. He preached to thousands of people each Sunday at a time when most congregations were small. He founded a school and stood for righteousness, morality and the truthfulness of the Bible. Although he has been dead for over 100 years now, more of Spurgeon’s sermons are sold annually than those of any other preacher, living or dead. He was indeed a mighty man of God and realized that the source of his power for effective preaching was the Holy Spirit as his Helper. God knows that in our natural weak self, we could never carry on His work, so He gave the Holy Spirit to help us (See John 14:16, 26; 15:26; 16:7 where the NASB translates the Holy Spirit’s name *parakletos* as Helper).

3. “To be filled with the Spirit” is for all Christians who would be effective disciples. The above discussion does not mean that Spirit-filling is God’s special privilege exclusively for pastors. It is for all believers. As Moses said, “would that all the LORD’s people were prophets, that the LORD would put His Spirit upon them” (Num. 11:29). God later promised this very thing, “I will pour forth of my Spirit upon all mankind; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy” (Acts 2:17). Our gracious Lord gave an invitation in the temple to the same end, “He who believes in Me, as the Scriptures said, ‘From his innermost being shall flow rivers of living water’” (John 7:38). So God has granted to every believer the privilege of being filled with the Spirit. Not only Peter and John but the entire body of believers who prayed with them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak the word of God with boldness (Acts 4:23-31). The examples in Samaria, in Cornelius’ house, at Ephesus, and of the disciples at Antioch of Pisidia are all clear indications that **Spirit-filling is a heavenly gift granted to all God’s children** (Acts 13:14, 52). Spirit-filling is the help every believer needs **to be an effective**

⁵ Carson, Herbert M. “Colossians and Philemon,” *The Tyndale New Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids: The Tyndale Press, 1981),96.

⁶ Moody, D.L., *The Secret of Power* (New York: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1881), 113.

⁷ Spurgeon, C.H., *Twelve Sermons on the Holy Spirit* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1973), 51.

Christian. By being filled with the Holy Spirit our **natural abilities are energized** so that we may perform every ministry He gives with liberty, life, authority, and effectiveness. Thank God for the Holy Spirit who Himself is the help we need in order to live an overcoming life and be effective in our ministry. Sadly, not every believer takes advantage of the help and power offered through being Spirit-filled.

4. “To be filled with the Spirit” and emotions. When a believer is filled with the Holy Spirit, his emotional feelings may become excited, but they should not race as a wild stallion across the valley floor. When a medium or witch doctor falls into a trance at a temple or shrine, he is possessed by demons, and will dance, shake, become semi-conscious, and uncontrollably utter demonic-given, unknown tongues. Such loss of control will never occur when the Holy Spirit fills a believer.

Regarding emotions in spiritual matters, two extreme views presently prevail. One view holds that human emotions belong to the flesh, are degraded, and that under no circumstances should they ever have any part to play during the Spirit’s work. The life of a Christian, they feel, should be solemn with all expression of joyful feelings suppressed. Otherwise, they think, the believer does not display a desirable Christian model, but is an emotionalist or exhibitionist. The other view is exactly the opposite, and equally extreme. These Christians let their emotions run loose, or amok, and forget that they are rational beings. When praying, worshipping or preaching, they allow their emotions such free rein that they sometimes become semi-conscious. At times, they deliberately empty their minds which leaves room for Satan and can lead later to all sorts of unfortunate results. Some reach such a high level of emotional intensity that they no longer care whether their actions are normal. As long as they can sustain an emotional high, they are satisfied and even exhibit a holier-than-thou attitude because of their self-induced state of excitement. They fall into an egomaniacal trap, deceiving others about the Spirit’s work and cheating themselves by accepting an illusion rather than reality. This is not only pitiful; it is tragic.

Neither of these extreme views agrees with God’s truth because God Himself created emotions, together with reason and will power, and gave them to us in order that we might be psychologically well balanced. As long as we use and develop each part of our personality according to God’s ordained rule, everything will be beautiful. Therefore, believers should develop and use each part in proper proportion, in order to maintain psychological equilibrium and help to prevent mental problems. During Spirit-filling the believer should not overthrow either reason or will and thus let emotions run wild. True Spirit-filling makes one’s intellect more logical, one’s will more sturdy, and one’s emotions more rich, “for God is not a God of confusion but of peace” (1 Cor. 14:33).

When the saints are edified by our teaching, the church is strengthened and blessed by our preaching, sinners are converted by our witnessing, our family life is stabilized and flourishes, our jobs become a joy, and our relatives and neighbors become our friends, we have the objective proof of the Spirit-filling for which we prayed. These manifestations will be accompanied by joy in our hearts and a sense of the presence of God. But how can we receive power to accomplish these humanly impossible tasks? Let’s look at the biblical conditions for our being Spirit-filled.

D. The Conditions for Being Filled with the Spirit.

After studying the importance of being filled with the Spirit, the immediate question should be: How can we be Spirit-filled? There is only one way and that is by God's grace alone. We need to obey His conditions for Spirit-filling, because the Holy Spirit is the Person of the Trinity "whom God has given to those who obey Him" (Acts 5:32). First we must offer Him our trust and obedience before He will fill us for His effective service. To trust and obey is not a demonstration of our cooperation with Him, nor is it any kind of meritorious work. It is simply complying with His prerequisites to be filled with Himself, just as we meet our need for fresh air by first exhaling the stale then inhaling the fresh.

Consider the scriptural examples that follow. If the disciples had not obeyed Christ's command to wait in Jerusalem for the outpouring and filling of the Holy Spirit, they probably would not have been filled (Acts 1:4; 2:4). If Peter and John had given heed unto the high priest, Annas, to stop preaching the good news about the resurrected Christ rather than obeying God who told them to continue speaking of what they had seen and heard, they would not have been filled with the Holy Spirit time after time (Acts 4:6, 8, 31). Saul was not filled on the road to Damascus when he saw the Lord, but after he had prayed and fasted for three days. As soon as Peter started to speak, Cornelius and all those listening were filled with the Holy Spirit because he was "a devout man, and one who feared God with all his household . . . and prayed to God continually" (Acts 10:2, 44; 11:15).

To those who desired His power for effective ministry, God's requirements for Spirit-filling were the same in the Old Testament as in the New. Only after Gideon had obeyed God by pulling down the altar of Baal, cutting down the Asherah beside it and building a new altar on which he sacrificed to the LORD, did the Spirit of the LORD come upon him (Judg. 6:25-34). The Spirit of God came mightily upon Saul and David after they had accepted God's call and were anointed to be king over Israel (1 Sam. 10:1, 10; 16:13). When he did what his teacher asked of him, Elisha received a double portion of the spirit that moved Elijah (2 Kings 1:9-12).

All these examples point to trust and obedience as divine requirements for Spirit-filling. Since "trust and obey" are so important, what do they mean and how can we put them into practice? The process of learning to "trust and obey" might follow these steps.

1. The need to recognize and acknowledge the importance of Spirit-filling. It is a sad fact that most believers have never been filled with the Holy Spirit. Some either do not understand what is meant by Spirit-filling or do not recognize how important it is to their spiritual life and ministry to be filled with the Spirit. There are others who lack courage to act upon what they know about Spirit-filling because they suffer from weak faith that does not allow them to believe and act upon all the truths of Scripture. These may have only a partial understanding or were abused or frightened by some who take an extreme view of Spirit-filling. The responsibility for the lack of understanding about being filled with the Spirit lies in part at least at the door of the church which unfortunately neglects this truth.

Without doubt, no one would ever be saved without first having a spiritual understanding of the importance of salvation and of the need to repent and believe.

Without knowledge he would not know where to begin. Likewise, no one can be filled with the Spirit until he has recognized the great value of being filled. This is why Christ reminded the apostles repeatedly, before His death as well as after His resurrection, regarding the high priority of this matter. He often spoke of this truth to teach His disciples to recognize the significance of Spirit-filling, act upon it as quickly as possible, and not waste their time in a fruitless ministry. Therefore, in these last days, the necessity for Spirit-filling should be emphasized frequently from the pulpit. No matter what kind of work we do (secular or sacred), we still need the Holy Spirit to fill us over and over again, in recognition of the spiritual principle, “That which is born of the flesh is flesh and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit” (John 3:6). Our flesh can produce only what is earthly. To accomplish God’s work, we must have the Holy Spirit—the Divine Helper—to empower us.

2. The need to understand and accept the pure nature of the Holy Spirit. In order to be Spirit-filled it is essential to know and to accept the holy nature of the Spirit. Dr. A. A. Hodge wrote an excellent description of the Spirit’s holiness. “He is called the Holy Spirit because He is the author of holiness throughout the universe . . . the end and glory of whose work in the moral world is holiness, as in the physical world beauty.”⁸

Since the Holy Spirit specializes in accomplishing beautiful and holy works, He will not fill an unclean vessel. The same principle was illustrated when Jesus said, “no one puts new wine into old wine skins” (Luke 5:37), because new wine and old wine skins are completely incompatible. Likewise, a filthy, dirty heart is not a suitable dwelling for the Holy Spirit. They do not belong together. God disciplined King Saul, rendering him unable to commit dreadful crimes against God’s chosen ones. Those who desire to be filled with the Holy Spirit but are unwilling to be pure before the Lord should heed this serious warning (1 Sam. 19:23-24). Therefore, we must forsake unrighteousness by repenting of all our sins and allow the precious blood of our Lord Jesus to cleanse our hearts before seeking to be filled with the Holy Spirit. This way we comply with the Holy Spirit in His desire for us to be pure before His work within us can proceed. As preparation for Spirit-filling, we may want to deal with our sin in this manner:

- If our sin has offended only God, we confess to God (Ps. 51:4a).
- If we have offended our fellow man, then according to the Scripture, we have also offended the Lord, who created and cares for man. So we must confess to both parties (Lev. 6:1-7; Num. 5:6-7).
- If our sin is robbery or theft or other similar transgressions, we must confess to the Lord and also repay the victim by making “restitution for it in full, and add to it one-fifth more” (Lev. 6:5).
- If the offended party is no longer living, or for some reason cannot accept restitution, it should be paid to his closest relative. If there are no relatives, it should be given to the church (Num. 5:8).

These are God’s mathematics governing the regulation of confession and restitution. Against whomever we have sinned, to him should our confession be; not to a substitute, nor to a priest. Compensation should be given to whom restitution belongs and should

⁸ Hodge, A. A., *Outlines of Theology* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1928), 196.

not be offered to God, unless the injured person has passed away and there is no near relative to accept the payment in his place. In short, real confession is confessing according to God's standards.

3. The need to appropriate by prayer. Since it is Satan's nature to oppose God and since our old sinful nature is at enmity with God, before our Lord's return prayer will become unpopular and will be kept in the church's freezer (Luke 18:1-8).⁹ (I heard that in a certain divinity school in the Far East, when some students who love the LORD pray, they are scoffed at by other students for failing to see the reality of life. Can this be a divinity school or is it a demonic one?) Not many believers pray earnestly and persistently to be filled with the Holy Spirit. Consequently, the church is weak and powerless and the pulpit has no strength to either feed the spiritual life of the saints or to arouse them to serve God. Some quarrelsome Christians even say that the Bible does not teach us to pray for Spirit-filling and thus believers should not pray for it. With views like this, believers who have inherited from Adam a natural bent toward laziness have a perfect excuse to close the door of their minds to this grace. Let us see, however, what the Lord Jesus and other saints have to say about praying for Spirit-filling.

a. Taught by the Lord. There are not many scriptural references emphasizing the necessity to pray for the filling of the Spirit, but our Lord clearly stated, "How much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask" (Luke 11:13). This promise agrees with Jesus teaching concerning prayer elsewhere. He said, "Ask [repeatedly] and it shall be given to you" (Matt. 7:7). In this verse the verb "ask" is the Greek present tense which means to pursue with persistence or to do again and again. Then the Father shall (future tense) give us the Holy Spirit. All of God's grace exists as objective promises. If we want to enjoy God's promises subjectively in our lives, we must accept them by faith in order to receive them. Praying to God again and again for Spirit-filling is one wonderful way for faith to be raised up to receive this marvelous blessing. The disciples' filling with the Holy Spirit at Pentecost is clearly related to the gathering of the 120 people in the upper room at Jerusalem who "with one mind were continually devoting themselves to prayer" (Acts 1:14). When Peter and John were threatened and then released from jail, they went to their own companions, who together lifted their voices to God in one accord in prayer. The result was, "they were filled with the Holy Spirit, and began to speak the word of God with boldness" (Acts 4:31). These examples clearly demonstrate the relationship between Spirit-filling and prayer.

Praying for Spirit-filling does not mean that we should conduct all night prayer and waiting meetings, or continually fast and plead. As long as we acknowledge the importance of being filled with the Spirit, recognize His holy nature, give ourselves unto purity and pray time after time; one day, when faith to receive this blessing rises up within us, we shall truly have our first taste of the sweetness of being filled with the Spirit, just as the fresh air automatically rushes in when we expand our lungs to receive it.

b. Testified to by the saints. At this point, the question might arise, "Since we are not to conduct all-night meetings to seek the filling with the Spirit, how long should one continue asking for the first filling?" The answer is, "Only God knows." He knows

⁹ Lin, Timothy, *The Secret of Church Growth* (Los Angeles: The First Chinese Baptist Church, 1992), 94-95.

exactly the best time for His child to experience this blessing. Usually the believer's initial Spirit-filling will occur sometime after his new birth, although Spirit-filling and conversion can be experienced at the same time. G. Campbell Morgan once said, "When a person is born of the Spirit, he will possess the Spirit and this is very true or else, he does not belong to him. But it is possible that he will be filled with the Holy Spirit later on and this is also true."¹⁰ The following testimonies show that God has no set time for it to occur.

It can happen at once: Dr. Wilbur Chapman (chosen by Mr. Moody to be the vice-president of the Moody Bible Institute) had the experience of being immediately filled with the Holy Spirit the first time he went before God and dedicated himself for Spirit-filling. Dr. Chapman prayed, "My Father, I now claim from you the infilling of the Holy Ghost." He testified later, "From that moment to this, he has been a living reality."¹¹

It can take three hours: Christmas Evans, the Welsh evangelist, was filled with the Holy Spirit after three hours of praying before God.

It can take a week: Dr. Torrey became convinced from the study of the Acts of the Apostles that no one had a right to preach the gospel until he had been filled with the Holy Spirit. He said that he would never enter the pulpit again until he had been filled with the Holy Spirit and knew it. "But Sunday did not come before the blessing came As to what the blessing has done for me, I could not begin to tell. It has brought a joy into my soul that I never dreamed of before; a liberty in preaching."¹²

It might take a little longer: After Moody understood the importance of being filled with the Holy Spirit, he said, "I was crying all the time that God would fill me with His Spirit. Well, one day in the city of New York, Oh, what a day!—I cannot describe it . . . it is almost too sacred an experience to name . . . I can only say that God revealed Himself to me, and I had such an experience of His love that I had to ask Him to stay His hand. I would not now be placed back where I was before that blessed experience if you should give me all the world—it would be as the small dust of the balance."¹³

It is the believers' responsibility and obligation to persistently continue in prayer to be filled with the Holy Spirit, especially for the first filling. The time, method, and degree of the believers' being filled is in God's hand. If the believers have tried their best, God will certainly do His part and wonderfully fulfill His promise. The Lord Jesus taught, "If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him" (Luke 11:13). The requirements that God sets for being filled with the Spirit should be faithfully followed at every filling; but they are essential for the first filling.

After having experienced being filled with the Spirit the first time, the average Christian can easily appropriate and enjoy this grace regularly. Whether he is praying, meditating upon God's Word, or thinking about God's wonderful works in his life, at that moment, if he has a clean heart and conscience before God and is in total obedience, he can enjoy the blessing of being filled with the Spirit.

¹⁰ Morgan, G. C., *The Spirit of God* (New York: Revell, 1900), 186.

¹¹ Chapman, W., *Holiness and Power*, 336.

¹² Torrey, R.A., *Holiness and Power*, 337-338.

¹³ Moody, W. R. *Op. Cit.*, 149.

This grace from God is especially needed by those of us who have been sent by God to speak for Him. Before speaking we should always pray for His filling. To be filled is His command and our blessing. If we are pure and obedient, He will be willing to fill us for the sake of His children to whom we minister. If we are willing to believe God's promise for Spirit-filling and appropriate it as He teaches us, we will be neither lazy nor unfruitful in our ministry and service.

E. God's Command to Us Is "Be Filled with the Spirit."

The primary purpose for the Holy Spirit to fill us is not for our emotional enjoyment (although it may gladden our heart as in Acts 13:52), nor for the fullness of the Christian's spiritual life (although it will empower us to forsake worldliness and to live closer to the Lord), nor for the eradication of our carnal nature (although it will enlighten our understanding and help us to know how to apply what Christ has done to our old nature). Spirit-filling is given mainly to empower us to serve God by activities such as leading people to Christ, establishing churches, preaching life-giving, edifying sermons, and giving good counsel. The Holy Spirit has also been given to empower us to serve our Lord effectively in secular activities, which include being a worthy Christian spouse, parent and neighbor and serving God competently in our vocation as a living witness to the grace of God in our lives.

According to most manuscripts and versions, the Epistle to the Ephesians was written "to the saints who are at Ephesus, who are faithful in Christ Jesus" (Eph. 1:1). Although the destination "at Ephesus" is questioned by some, the letter is nevertheless God's inspired Word to believers chosen "in Him before the foundation of the world" (Eph. 1:3). They had "faith in the Lord Jesus [and] love for all the saints" among themselves (Eph. 1:15). They "were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise" (Eph. 1:13). Yet, God writing through Paul told them, "Do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled [often] with the Spirit" (Eph. 5:18).

In this verse God's command to be filled often with the Spirit is contrasted with getting drunk with wine, an everyday problem of ordinary people at that time. This implies that to be filled with the Spirit is not just a privilege of the upper class. A light alcoholic beverage composed of two-thirds water and one-third wine was a commonplace item in the daily life of the people. Since drinking water in those days was frequently polluted, this light wine was consumed instead of water. However, if one drank too much of this water-wine mixture, he could get drunk and that would be dissipation. The word "dissipation" is a compound word consisting of a negative prefix with the word "saving," both together meaning "incurable moral behavior" or "unruly emotional release." The latter meaning is appropriate here. So whoever claims to be filled with the Spirit and at the same time displays unruly actions is not manifesting the Holy Spirit's filling but is involved in actions prohibited by the Spirit. For this reason, in a passage dealing with the work of the Spirit, the Scriptures say, "For God is not a God of confusion but of peace" and again "Let all things be done properly and in an orderly manner" (1 Cor. 14:33, 40).

"Be filled" is in the imperative mood, indicating that to "be filled [often] with the Spirit" is God's command. Many wrongly believe that other than the Ten Commandments there are no commands from God that are binding upon us today. To the contrary, there are many commands both in the Old and New Testaments that remain in

effect. For example, “Be holy, for I am holy,” “Devote yourselves to prayer,” “Rejoice always,” and “Do not quench the Spirit” are all words which God intends, by His grace, that we obey. So to “be filled with the Spirit” is just one of many biblical injunctions which we who have truly accepted the Lord should try our best to appropriate through faith and prayer. Otherwise, we will be disobedient to God’s Word, and our spiritual lives and service will be impotent and unfruitful. Especially when preparing to preach, we should pray for the Spirit’s filling and trust Him that we have been filled. Then we can preach with power, edification, and spiritual life, because God demands that we preach with the Spirit’s help. Thus we should remember and believe Jesus’ promise, “How much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him” (Luke 11:13). We should not be like those who pray for Spirit-filling but doubt God’s willingness to answer and as a result receive nothing. We should pray in faith, purity, and obedience and then receive the filling with the Spirit.

“Be filled” is in the present tense. Originally, Greek verbs emphasized action but not time. The time element was developed later. The present tense denotes action which needs to be pursued with persistence or repeated again and again. A. T. Robertson’s explanation of “Rejoice always” in Philippians 4:4 gives the sense of the present tense, “The force of the present [tense] is plain in *chairete*, Keep on rejoicing.”¹⁴ I might say, “I get up every morning.” This saying indicates that I not only got up yesterday morning and this morning but also that every morning in the foreseeable future I will be getting up. The same idea is expressed by the present tense in “be filled [again and again] with the Spirit.” The believer should not think that to be filled with the Spirit once is enough to last throughout his lifetime. Rather he needs to know that he must be filled with the Spirit many times throughout his life-span.

For example, the Scriptures record that Peter, the chief disciple of our Lord, was filled over and over again. He was filled on the Day of Pentecost and again before the high priest Annas. When the authorities released him to return to his fellow disciples, the believers prayed in one accord, and Peter was once more filled with the Spirit. When any believer is quietly meditating about God’s wonderful grace, or praying earnestly or if he is falsely accused in court, if he is able to take it by faith, he can be immediately filled with the Holy Spirit and thus be empowered to offer thanksgiving, praise, godly prayer or even a legal defense that cannot be refuted. This can certainly happen, because the Scriptures say that “all things are possible to him who believes” which also includes, “be filled [often] with the Spirit” (Mark 9:23; Eph. 5:18).

“Be filled” is in the passive voice. The passive voice means that the subject is acted upon which is quite clear in both the English and Chinese translations of Scripture. It tells us that to be filled with the Holy Spirit comes from neither our initiative nor our action. Spirit-filling is not due to our struggle nor our good works. It is completely by His grace which He delights to give. As long as we fulfill the requirements for filling, we can take it and then enjoy it in our praise, thanksgiving and anointed service. His command guarantees our experience. However, we cannot force the Holy Spirit to do anything, even to bestow a spiritual gift. He does not take orders, but distributes “to each one individually just as He wills” (1 Cor. 12:11). For you who earnestly desire to speak

¹⁴ Robertson, A. T., *A New Short Grammar on the Greek New Testament* (New York: Harper & Brother Publishers, 1933), 300.

in tongues as evidence of your filling, you need to remember that the Holy Spirit is not a slave who must give heed to your commands. If you forget or neglect this truth, demons may use the opportunity to help you satisfy your desire by giving you tongues like those they give to mediums and witches. Thus, when you pray to be filled with the Holy Spirit you must allow Him to distribute such gifts as He wills, because He knows exactly what you need and what you can do and when you should do it.

“Be filled” is in the second person and plural number. This tells us who should be filled. The candidates for filling are not just pastors, missionaries, elders and deacons but every member of Christ’s body, no matter how talented or how insignificant. Neither is any preference given to age or gender, because God told everyone in the Ephesian church to be filled. This is a grace that God has commanded every child of His to receive.

Every believer should enjoy the blessing. Not only those who do God’s work in leading prayer meetings, teaching Sunday School or Bible studies, but also every mother and father who would “train up a child in the way that he should go” must be filled with the Holy Spirit to insure effective parenting (Prov. 22:6). Here is the testimony of one mother: “A few months ago she . . . sought it [Spirit-filling] and received it. ‘Oh,’ she joyfully exclaimed as she told me the story, ‘since I received it, I have been able to get into the hearts of my children which I was never able to do before.’”¹⁵

As believers we must not treat lightly the reality and necessity of being filled with the Holy Spirit. We should diligently obey the Lord’s command and appropriate and experience over and over again the mighty power of God working in and through us. Then God can work in our lives exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think. May our prayers for Spirit-filling echo this old hymn.

Have Thine own way, Lord!
Have Thine own way!
Hold o’er my being absolute sway!
Fill with Thy Spirit ’til all shall see
Christ only, always
Living in me!

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¹⁵ Torrey, R. A., *The Baptism with the Holy Spirit* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1986), 20.