**THE CONTROL OF THE SPIRIT**

**(Ephesians 5:15-21)**

In 1954, 66 years ago, Christian Herter was running for re-election as the governor of Massachusetts. His busy campaign schedule brought him to a church barbecue.

Herter thought he was starving. As he started down the serving line, he came to the woman who was serving the chicken. He asked, “May I have two pieces of chicken?”

“Sorry,” she replied, “Only one to a customer.”

“But I’m really hungry,” the governor pled.

“I’m sorry,” the woman said, “but I’ve been instructed to give only one piece of chicken to each person.”

Normally, Herter was a modest, humble man, but this time his hunger made him decide to throw his weight around a little. “Do you know who I am?” he asked. “I’m the governor of this state! And I want another piece of chicken.”

“Do you know who I am?” the woman retorted. “I’m the lady in charge of the chicken. Move along!”

As we go through life, we need to remember who is in charge. Let me ask you a few questions:

* Who’s in charge of your life?
* Who’s in charge of your business,
* your use of leisure time,
* your finances,
* your family,
* your plans,
* your personal choices day in and day out?

Who is actually in charge? Now, let me ask, who’s supposed to be in charge? Is there a difference between who’s truly in charge and who’s supposed to be in charge?

This morning we are going to concentrate on the subject of control because that is what the filling of the Holy Spirit is about; it is about the matter of control. The phrase “filled with the Spirit” is used several times in the Gospel of Luke. It is found a handful of times in Acts. The only time it is used elsewhere in the NT is in Ephesians 5:18. Our text today is Ephesians 5:15-21.

That word *filled* is variously used to describe those who are filled with sorrow, fear, anger, faith, and even Satan (John 16:6; Luke 5:26; 6:11; Acts 6:5; Acts 5:3). Those uses convey the idea of complete control.

In recent days, many people have been filled by fear or anxiety or worry. Their face may be covered by a mask, but you can see it in their eyes as you walk around the grocery store. Maybe you begin to feel that same fear fill your own heart when you arrive at the paper goods section of the story and see the shelves completely bare. When an emotion fills you, that emotion exerts control over how you think and how you act. It can cause you to do irrational things, like horde toilet paper or other items.

In the same way, a person who is filled with the Holy Spirit is under the sway of God’s Spirit. What that person says and does is controlled by the Spirit’s guidance. The filling of the Spirit is a matter of control.

So, I ask you again, what or who is controlling your life? Let’s read our text—Ephesians 5:15-21. I want you to notice three things . . .

**I. THE CONTROL OF THE SPIRIT IS ESSENTIAL.**

The Christian life is meant to be a supernatural life, and you and I need supernatural help to live that supernatural life. The fact is, it is impossible to live the Christian life apart from the Spirit’s control. So really, you and I need more than a little help, a little boost, a little shove or nudge; we need the Spirit to control us.

Jesus said in John 15:5, “I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in Me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from Me you can do nothing.” By that, He means there is nothing we can do to please God if we are attempting to live the Christian life on our own strength.

Let’s look back at our text. The key verse is v. 18. That verse is the hub around which the entire passage is centered. Everything that comes before and everything that comes after that verse will not be possible without the command of that verse being fulfilled. Verse 15 teaches us we need to be wise. Verse 16 calls upon us to use our time well. Verse 17 says we are to know God’s will.

I suggest to you, if we are not filled with God’s Spirit, if we do not allow Him to have control, we cannot be wise, we won’t use our time well, and we won’t know God’s will. Being filled with God’s Spirit is the very foundation of you and I living the Christian life. If He is not in control, it is not going to happen.

The same is true with what follows v. 18. Everything in vv. 19-21 is contingent upon being filled with the Spirit . . . If we do not allow God’s Spirit to be in control, none of those things will come to be.

Let’s take a moment to see how crucial and essential the Spirit was in Jesus’ ministry. Turn to Luke 4. In v. 1 we see that Jesus was full of the Holy Spirit. Because Jesus let the Spirit be in control, He successfully withstood the temptations Satan brought to Him. If you do not allow the Spirit to be in control, you will quickly become a casualty in the spiritual warfare that rages about us. Jesus, however, was victorious because He allowed the Spirit to be in control. Because Jesus emerged victorious, look what happened next. He was empowered by the Spirit (v. 14). After He was empowered, He was anointed. Look at v. 18. And then, the Spirit used Him in ministry. We find here a process. First, the Spirit is to **infill** us. Then, He will **empower** us. Next, He will **anoint** us and **use** us.

In 1957, movie director Ingmar Bergman released a film entitled *Wild Strawberries*. It tells the story of an aging professor as looks back upon his life. One night this professor dreams he is taking an early morning walk. A horse-drawn funeral carriage turns the corner where he is walking, but there is no driver. When the carriage bumps into a lamppost, a wheel wrenches loose, and the coffin rolls off the wagon to the street below. The lid to the coffin is jarred loose. The coffin leans to one side, and the hand of the corpse is left dangling outside the coffin. The professor reluctantly approaches the coffin when suddenly the hand seizes the wrist of the professor. takes hold of it to put it back into the box. The hand pulls him closer, and in horror, the professor sees his own face staring back at him.

In the film, the professor awakes and understands the dream immediately. He has been living as a dying man. He has been a walking corpse—living apart from God. It is for him, a wake-up call, both literally and figuratively.

When you live apart from God, you may be alive physically, but spiritually you are dead or asleep. Is that your situation this morning? If so, ask Jesus to come into your life as your Savior and Lord. Ask Him to indwell You by His Spirit and then to infill you, letting Him have complete control.

The filling, the control, of the Spirit is essential.

**II. THE CONTROL OF THE SPIRIT IS EXPERIENTIAL.**

What do I mean by that? What I mean is, the filling of the Spirit of God is not just a concept to be understood. Nor is it only a biblical doctrine to be believed. The filling of the Holy Spirit is a truth, a reality to be experienced. Unless you experience the control of the Spirit of God in your life, you are not experiencing the Christian life.

Let’s look a little closer at that phrase, “Be filled with the Spirit.” I’m going to get a little technical; so, I am asking you to bear with me. Follow me closely. There are four things about that phrase that we need to understand. I’m going to explain each one, so don’t shut me off. Stay with me.

**First, that phrase is in the imperative mood.** If you will remember your junior or high school grammar, you will remember, there are four kinds of sentences: interrogative, declarative, exclamatory, and imperative. The imperative is a command. Since v. 18 is in the imperative, that means, **the filling of the Spirit is commanded by God.**

Commenting on this verse, Tony Evans wrote, “God is not saying, ‘If you want to, it would be nice if you were filled with the Spirit.’ God is not into suggestions. He is only into commands.”

When my children were young, I would tell them to do something, like clean their room or go brush their teeth, or something else, and believe it or not there were times, not many, but there were some times when they didn’t do what I said. Worse yet, there were some times when they said “no.” At those times, I looked them in the eyes and said, “I’m not asking you; I’m telling you.” If they still didn’t do what I said, I quietly walked to the kitchen and opened up a drawer where we kept a wooden spoon. It is amazing how quickly the opening of that drawer and the reaching for the wooden spoon elicited the action for which I was looking.

God commands us to be filled with the Spirit. If you don’t seek to be filled with the Spirit, don’t be surprised if God reaches for a wooden spoon.

At this point, let me add, nowhere in the Bible does God command us to be baptized by the Spirit or to be indwelt by the Spirit. God takes care of that all on His own the moment we receive Jesus as our Savior and Lord.

**The second thing** we need to understand is this, **that phrase is in the plural form.** You know the difference between the singular and the plural. This command applies to every believer. The filling of the Spirit is not reserved for ministers or deacons or some elite group of believers or just the Pentecostals. The filling of the Spirit is for all believers. It is for you and for me. It is for the Baptists, the Presbyterians the Catholics, and the Methodists. Every true believer is commanded to be filled with, to be controlled by the Holy Spirit of God.

There is **a third thing** I want you to catch. Not only is the phrase, “Be filled with the Spirit,” in the imperative mood and the plural form, it is also in **the passive voice.** Now, what does that mean? That means God does not expect you to fill yourself with His Spirit. The activity of filling is done by someone else. You are the fillee not the filler. You are the object of the action, not the one doing the acting. **The filling of the Holy Spirit is brought about by God Himself.**

You cannot fill yourself with God’s Spirit by doing just the right things. It is not a matter of following this formula, or memorizing these verses, or reading so much Scripture, or by spending x-number of minutes in prayer each day. The Holy Spirit fills those who simply surrender themselves to His control.

We have looked at three things about this experience: it is in the imperative mood (it is a command); it is in the plural form (it is for all believers); it is in the passive voice (it is brought about by God, not you). **The fourth thing** is this, **the command to be filled with God’s Spirit is in the present tense.** Verse 18 could be translated, “Keep on being filled with the Spirit.” **The experience of being filled with the Spirit is to be continuous.** No one gets filled once for all time. Just as you can’t eat one big meal to last you the rest of your life and you can’t make your car last with one filling of the gas tank, it is also true that you have to be filled with God’s Spirit again and again.

Tony Evans wrote, “Some husbands and wives won’t make it out of the [church] parking lot at church without losing their sanctification! Why? Because we live in a world that depletes the experience of filling. Sin depletes it. People deplete it. They can take your attention away from the Spirit.”

Please don’t misunderstand me. I’m not saying you can lose the Spirit. When He comes in, He comes to stay. You don’t lose His presence. You can, however, and will lose His control. Only one person can sit behind the steering wheel of your life, and sometimes we make the Spirit move over and we return to the driver’s seat.

Since the filling of the Spirit is experiential, what is the secret to experiencing the Spirit’s control? Let me run something by you. I’m not sure I agree with it, but I think it is worth considering. In v. 18 we are commanded to be filled with the Spirit and then in vv. 19-21, Paul makes some important statements about what we are to do.

Tony Evans asks the question concerning vv. 19-21, “Are these things the *result* of being filled with the Spirit, or are they the *means* to His fullness?” Most people, and I happen to be one of them, tend to believe that vv. 19-21 refer to the results of being filled with the Spirit. When you are filled with the Spirit, you will do those things mentioned in vv. 19-21. Evans, however, is convinced that those verses describe the *how* of being filled with God’s Spirit.

In other words, he says that if you want to be filled with God’s Spirit, you need to spend time fellowshipping with, encouraging and being encouraged by other believers. He claims that one reason we don’t experience God’s filling is that when we do get together, we talk about sports, about the weather, and about business or the latest gossip, but we don’t talk about what God is doing in our lives and what He is teaching us from His word.

The text says we are to sing and make melody in our hearts to the Lord. That sure sounds like worship to me.

Bro. Evans pastors in Dallas, so he says, “People in Dallas get ‘filled’ with a certain football team every fall. Lord have mercy, those Cowboys sure know how to throw a ‘worship service’! And it works. People all over town are wearing Cowboy clothes and talking Cowboy talk and squirming in the pew on Sunday so they can get home by kickoff . . . If your heart is on the Cowboys, you become a Cowboy fan, but if your heart is on Jesus, you become a Jesus fan.”

Then, he says that if you want to be filled with God’s Spirit, you need to practice gratitude. Grumblers never get filled with the Spirit.

A final means, according to Evans, of being filled with the Spirit is to be subject to one another. The Holy Spirit fills those who selflessly serve others.

When you put it all together, he makes his case that to be filled with the Spirit, we need to make worship a lifestyle. He writes, “The way you learn to live a Spirit-filled life is to learn to do Monday through Saturday what you did on Sunday.” Those things mentioned in vv. 19-21 take place on Sunday, but they need to take place every day.

Now, I agree with what Bro. Evans suggests we need to do. We need to make worship a lifestyle. I simply do not agree that is the means to being filled with the Spirit. I still believe that is the result of being filled with the Spirit.

So, what is the means of being filled with God’s Spirit? I think it is much simpler. It involves only two things. First, to fill something, it needs to be empty to start with. The reason most people aren’t filled with the Spirit is they are already filled with themselves. The Spirit cannot fill someone who is full of himself or herself. The first thing we need to do is empty ourselves of self. We do that by confessing and repenting of the sins of pride, selfishness, and self-centeredness. The first thing to do is pray, “Dear Lord, forgive me of and deliver me from the sin of pre-occupation with myself.”

The only thing left to do is to by prayer surrender yourself to the Spirit’s control. Ask the Lord to fill you and start controlling you.

**The control of the Spirit is essential**—you have to be filled to truly live the Christian life. **The control of the Spirit is experiential**—it is not a concept to be understood; it is a reality to be experienced.

**III. THE CONTROL OF THE SPIRIT IS EVIDENITAL.**

That means, when a person is truly filled with and controlled by God’s Spirit, he or she will live a life that affords evidence of that fact. We have already seem some of that evidence in vv. 19-21.

To restate those things, when we are filled with the Spirit, there will be . . . Truth in Our Speech; Joy in Our Hearts; Gratitude toward the Lord, and Peace in Our Relationships.

Earlier, I mentioned there are a number of verses in Acts that speak of being filled with the Spirit. Usually, when individuals were filled with the Holy Spirit, they demonstrate that filling by speaking for the Lord. Look at Acts 4:31. You can’t be filled with the Spirit and not be a witness.

Let me say that it is important to note that immediately after this passage on the filling of the Spirit in Ephesians 5, Paul proceeds to address the subject of family relationships. The vast majority of problems within marriages and families would be solved if one or more of those involved would empty themselves of self and ask the Lord to fill them.

Using your marriage and family life as the evidence, would you say that you and your spouse and family members are filled with the Spirit, or has someone sprung a leak? Is that someone you?

It is said that it takes two people to have a happy marriage. I agree, but it is not the two people you think. It is not you and your spouse. It is you and the Spirit of God. If you allow the Holy Spirit to control your actions and your tongue, He will show you how to act and re-act in a loving way that will melt the heart of your spouse.

F.B. Meyer, a great preacher of the 19th century, loved a certain illustration of the changed life. He told about a tug boat that traveled the Thames River between London and Portsmouth. She was called “Old Bust Me Up” because of all the collisions she had survived. The dock workers would laugh when she careened into the dock and other ships.

One day “Old Bust Me Up” came into the dock and the workers began to laugh and joke, expecting another collision. But this time “Old Bust Me Up” glided gracefully and skillfully up to the dock and gently kissed the wharf. A dock hand yelled out, “Hey, Bust Me Up! What’s wrong with ye?”

From inside the boat came the reply, “I’m still the same old boat, but there’s a new skipper on board.”

When Jesus becomes our skipper, we can trust Him to steer us in the right direction. You have a decision to make. You can remain the captain of your ship if you choose, but I would imagine that if you have been serving as the captain of your ship, you have the scars and damage to prove it. Your second choice is to let Jesus serve as the Captain. For some, that means you need to invite Him on board. For others, that means you simply need to let Him take the helm. I encourage you, today, do what the Spirit leads you to do.