

What is the Filling of the Holy Spirit All About?

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Listen to what some of the great pastors have said about the filling of the Holy Spirit:

- “Every Christian ought to be consciously filled with the Spirit, continuously filled with the Holy Spirit and conspicuously filled with the Holy Spirit.” --The late **Stephen Olford** (pastor, author, evangelist, equipper)
- “There is no greater secret of holiness than the infilling of Him whose very nature and name are ‘holy’” -**John Stott** (English Anglican priest, pastor, theologian, evangelist)
- “The fastest way to get from where you are to where you are supposed to be spiritually is to learn to live a life of Spirit-filledness.” - **Tony Evans** (pastor of Oak Cliff Bible Fellowship, author, radio and TV broadcaster)
- “No Christian can fulfill God’s will for his life apart from being filled with His Spirit. If we do not obey this command, we cannot obey any other—simply because we cannot do any of God’s will apart from God’s Spirit.” -**John MacArthur** (pastor, author, chancellor emeritus of Masters University and Seminary, radio and TV broadcaster)

While every believer has been born again, sealed, pledged, indwelt, baptized, adopted, gifted, interceded for, anointed, and united to Christ, not every believer is always filled with the Holy Spirit.

To be filled with the Holy Spirit does not mean you get more of Him. It means that He is being allowed to get all of you. The key is to learn the principle of appropriation. Just because Jesus died to forgive the sins of the whole world (1 John 2:2) doesn’t mean that everyone will experience that forgiveness until it is appropriated by faith in their heart. In the same way, God gives the Holy Spirit to every believer, but only those who appropriate His control in their life will be filled. The filling of the Holy Spirit is not a second blessing, but an understanding and appropriation of the first blessing.

#1: It is a commanded experience (Eph. 5:18: “and do not get drunk with wine...but be filled with the Holy Spirit”)

God gives us two commands in this verse in the form of a contrast between getting drunk and getting filled with the Spirit (one is a physical depressant while the other is a spiritual stimulant)

- Negatively (“do not get drunk with wine”), God commands His children to avoid letting the “spirits” (alcohol) intoxicate them. Drunkenness is foolish (v. 17) and sinful (Gal. 5:17).
 - ≈ Drunkenness is one of Satan’s tools to counterfeit joy and comfort and a degrading, destructive and controlling influence in a person’s life. In the first century, false religion tried to use drunkenness to induce a high-level religious consciousness to commune with the gods (Dionysus, the son of Zeus and Semele was the Greek god of wine and pleasure. The Romans called him Bacchus).
 - ≈ God has strong words and warnings for those who get drunk (Prov. 20:1; Isa. 5:11; 28:7-8; Rom. 13:11-12; 1 Cor. 5:11; 6:9-11; 11:28-32; Gal. 5:19-23).
 - ≈ Drunkenness is “dissipation” (v. 17). It is a reckless and unrestrained excess that dishonors God and is idolatrous
- Positively (“be filled with the Spirit”), God commands His children to let the “Spirit” influence them. God gave His Spirit to transform His disciples from beginning to end.
 - ≈ It is a greater sin to not be filled with the Holy Spirit than to be drunk with wine because the sins of omission (not doing what God requires) are greater than the sins of commission (doing what God forbids).
 - ≈ If you do what you ought, you will not do what you should not. Far more destruction has been done in the church by people who are not Spirit-filled than by people who are drunk.

#2: It is a common experience (Eph. 5:18: “but be filled [plural] with the Holy Spirit”)

The word “filled” is in the plural form indicating that it applies to every believer. It is not reserved for certain gifted people or leaders, but for all believers.

- God wants us all to witness confidently, so the Spirit empowers us (Acts 1:8) and emboldens us to proclaim the gospel (Acts 4:31; 6:10). He directs our opportunities (speaking through us – Matt. 10:20, teaching us what to say – Luke 12:12, leading us to the lost – Philip/Acts 11:12, Peter/Acts 10-Cornelius) and sometimes keeps us from proclaiming His gospel in certain places (Acts 16:6- Paul/Timothy).
- God wants us all to worship correctly, so the Spirit opens access to the Father (Eph. 2:18; Rom. 8:26-27) and helps us give proper recognition and respect to God (Phil. 3:3). He motivates us to focus on Christ (John 15:26) and to “cry out *Abba Father*” (Rom. 8:14-16).
- God wants us all to work competently, so the Spirit flows His ministry through supernatural gifts (1 Cor. 12:7, 11) designed to edify and bless His body.
- God wants us all to win convincingly, so the Spirit “sets us free from the law of sin and death” (Rom. 8:2), being our bondage-breaker (who “sets us free”), therapist (our “Helper” – Jn 14:16, 26; 15:26; 16:7) and chief accountability partner (Gal. 5:16)

#3: It is a controlling experience (Eph. 5:18: “*but be filled [plural] with the Holy Spirit*”)

The key to understanding the Spirit-filled life is to understand the word “filled”.

- The command is passive in terms of its ministry application. It literally means to allow oneself to be filled, yet disciples do not fill themselves. Someone else (Holy Spirit) provides the action and God’s disciples are the object of the action (the ones acted upon). What are you allowing your life to be filled with? Substitutes or the Spirit? We get filled by yielding ourselves to the Spirit’s power and work in our life.
- The command is permeating in terms of its meaning. The Greek word is “*plersousthe*”. It is used to speak of:
 - ≈ Being moved along like when the wind fills a sail
 - ≈ Permeation like salt which by saturation preserves and flavors
 - ≈ A dominating influence like being “filled with rage” as were the people Jesus challenged for their unbelief and anger took control so that they tried to push Jesus off a cliff.

#4: It is a continual experience (Eph. 5:18: “*but be filled [present tense]*”)

Becoming a Christian and receiving all the blessings of the indwelling Person of the Holy Spirit does not automatically trigger transformation. Everyone believer must cooperate with the Holy Spirit and learn to yield to His control.

- What does the present tense mean? It means the filling is supposed to be a continually repeated experience. It is a “*be being kept filled*” experience. It is a moment-by-moment, day-by-day submission to the Spirit’s control.
- What is going to help believers maintain the Spirit’s filling?
 - ≈ Addressing sin in your life (Eph. 4:30). It is dethroning self and enthroning Christ. When the desire of your heart is to honor Christ, the Holy Spirit will be allowed to do His transforming work (2 Cor. 3:16-18).
 - ≈ Asking God to fill you (Luke 11:13)
 - ≈ Abiding in God’s Word. Colossians 3:16 (“let the Word of Christ richly dwell within you”) is the twin verse to Ephesians 5:18 (“be filled with the Spirit”) as both have the same intended consequences (mutual submission, marriage, children, parents, employees). The “sword of the Spirit” is the word of God (Eph. 6:17).
 - ≈ Activate your willing obedience (Acts 5:32)

#5: It is a consequential experience (Eph. 5:19-21)

Many things happened when the Spirit filled believers in the book of Acts (4:8, 31; 6:5, 8; 7:55-60; 9:17, 20; 11:22-24; 13:9-11, 52-14:1).

There are four present participles (“ing” words – verbal adjectives) that reveal the Spirit’s filling in Ephesians 5:19-21.

- Adoration to God with others (v. 19: “*speaking to one another in psalms, hymns & spiritual songs and singing...*”)
- Appreciation “*always*” and “*for all things*” from the Lord (v. 20)
- Accommodation by “*being subject to one another*” (v 21) as one equal voluntarily serving another equal in Christ.
- Affirmation by “*fruit*” being produced by the Spirit (v. 22-23) that glorifies God and benefit others.