

What Does the Spirit Filled Life Look Like?

Are you a Spirit-filled believer? Is your local Church distinguished as a Spirit-filled community of believers? How would you determine the answers to these questions? Clearly, the personal presence and power of the Holy Spirit is central to living a life that pleases God. It is also the key to true Christian community. The Scripture speaks of:

- Walking by the Spirit
- Being led by the Spirit
- Bearing the fruit of the Spirit
- Keeping in step with the Spirit
- Sowing to the Spirit

(Galatians 5 & 6)

This emphasis reminds us that everything in the believer's life is affected by the role of the Holy Spirit. All of these expressions (from Galatians 5 & 6) also fit under another New Testament command: "*Be Filled with the Spirit*" (Ephesians 5:18).

But how does one obey this command? What does the Spirit-filled life look like? Is there a way to identify the Spirit-filled person? An epitaph was written over the life of Barnabas identifying him as "...a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and faith, and a great number of people were brought to the Lord." (Acts 11:24). Notice that in this epitaph being "full of the Holy Spirit" is treated as a measurable and visible description of character (cf. Acts 6:4- "*pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom*"). We must guard against the tendency to understand the spirit-filled life as a subjective reality. It is about character and life choices. One should be able to see *evidence* that testifies to the Spirit-filled character of an individual or community of believers. Let's explore this in more depth.

The command to be Spirit-filled in Ephesians 5:18 follows another command (Do not get drunk on wine). The two commands are placed in contrast to each other in a way that invites a comparison between what the one forbids and the other requires. The *first* command is in a verb tense (aorist) requiring that we never do what it forbids: "Do not *ever* get drunk on wine." The *second* command is in a verb tense (present) requiring continual action: "Be continually filled with the Holy Spirit!" This supports the idea that being Spirit-filled should be descriptive of a person's life. Further, since each of these is a command – each one becomes a matter of choice and obedience – because each one could be disobeyed. Becoming drunk is a choice; Being filled with the Spirit is also a choice.

But what does it mean to be filled?

Two observations help us understand what it means to be filled with the Spirit:

1. The meaning of the word "filled." It is used of wind filling a sail, of being filled with emotions like joy or grief, of a body being filled with leprosy and of a person being full of

deceit (Acts 13:10). The idea of permeation or domination is envisioned. It could be framed this way, “allow the dominating influence of the Holy Spirit to permeate every part of your life.”

2. The contrast: “Do not get drunk on wine.” The person who decides to get drunk chooses to allow the alcohol to be the controlling factor in every function of his life (speech, vision, bodily coordination and even the mind are affected when one is drunk).

In contrast, the person filled with the Spirit chooses to allow the Spirit of God to be the controlling influence in all parts of his life (speech, vision, body, mind). “A person, and in this case, a community,” one wrote, “whose life is so totally given over to the Spirit that the life and deeds of the Spirit are as obvious in their case as the effects of too much wine are obvious in the other.”

The commands of Ephesians 5:18 are followed by four supporting participles – (1) speaking (2) singing (3) giving thanks and (4) submitting. These are not commands – they are participles that are expected outcomes of obedience to the main command to be filled with the Spirit (in this sense they are participles with imperatival force).

On this basis, a Spirit filled person is:

- Full of joy: 1st, 2nd participle
- Grateful: 3rd participle
- Humble/submissive: 4th participle

To put matters differently, a spirit filled person is not:

- Grouchy or grumpy
- Ungrateful or discontent
- Rebellious or arrogant

Again, central to living a life that is pleasing to God is the personal, presence and power of the Holy Spirit. *Personal*: (Ephesians 4:29-32); *Presence*: (As a community: I Corinthians 3:16, in individual lives: I Corinthians 6:18-20); *Power*: Ephesians 3:14-19 All of this is presented in the context of choices that relate to the question of control. (cf. the battle for control in Galatians 5:16-17).

Life which is (according to the flesh) is a life that is directed by self and for self. It is life driven by selfish ambition. It is life where I demand to be in control. And, since I am in control – I feel easily threatened and I must fight, scheme, manipulate and worry. I do these things to fight for my control (consider the contrast in James 3:13-17).

The apostle uses a harvest metaphor to describe our response to the flesh and to the Spirit. Choose the soil that you wish to cultivate and do your sowing. Expect to reap a harvest from your choice.

Galatians 6:7-8: *“Don’t be misled—you cannot mock the justice of God. You will always harvest what you plant. Those who live only to satisfy their own sinful nature will harvest decay and death from that sinful nature. But those who live to please the Spirit will harvest everlasting life from the Spirit.”*

Sowing to the flesh is a choice to cultivate and plant thoughts, attitudes and behavior in the direction of the things described in Galatians 5:15; 19-20, 24-25. Sowing to the Spirit is a choice to allow the control of the Holy Spirit to be the permeating and dominating reality in your life. It involves giving yourself – your thoughts, attitudes and actions to producing the fruit of the Spirit described in Galatians 5:22-23: “But the Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.”

It is significant to consider that each of the qualities from Galatians 5:22-23 is found in the New Testament as a command. This means that much of this is related to choices we make. Galatians 5:16 is a command. The question we must answer is “Who or what will we allow to be in control?”

Key points for individual believers and local Churches:

1. Being Spirit-filled is not a subjective reality but an observable and measurable reality as it was in the life of Barnabas (and the seven chosen in Acts 6:1-4).
2. When the Spirit fills an individual or a community of believers, expect to find permeating qualities of joy, gratitude and humility.
3. When the Spirit fills an individual or community of believers, do not expect to find a life or atmosphere permeated by complaining, discontentment, lack of gratitude or arrogance.
4. When the Spirit fills an individual or a community of believers, expect to find permeating qualities like love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.
5. The repeated commands in relation to the Spirit-filled life remind us that although the Spirit produces spiritual fruit (godly character qualities), he does not do this in a way that allows believers to be passive recipients of his work (See: Philippians 2:12-13 *“work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure”*). More to come on how to live the Spirit-filled life.