

Biblical Spirituality

How a Christian Is Filled with the Spirit

From a Doctrinal Bible Study by
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All Bible passages are quoted from the King James Bible,
the Authorized Version of 1611.

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Introduction

We live in a day of much confusion and controversy in the Church concerning the ministry of the Holy Spirit to the believer. The debate centers around the question of “What does it mean to be filled with the Spirit?” There are various viewpoints ranging from the Pentecostal emphasis on emotional experiences, with speaking in tongues, to the rigid mechanical exercise of constant, moment-by-moment “rebound” taught dogmatically in so-called “doctrinal” churches.¹ In between these two extremes can be found a variety of other views on the meaning of Paul’s statement in Ephesians 5:18, “*Be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess, but be filled with the Spirit.*” Another popular view worth mentioning is that to be filled with the Holy Spirit one must attain a state of “absolute surrender” or “total consecration” in holiness.

With all these views, the emphasis is always placed on some *absolute experience* of the Holy Spirit’s work at any moment in the life of the believer. Once certain conditions are met by the believer, he enters into an “instant state of spirituality.” The conditions vary according to one’s particular understanding of the Spirit’s filling ministry. Pentecostals and Charismatics contend that one must seek the “baptism” as a second work of grace after being regenerated. This involves prayer for the “baptism of the Spirit,” waiting, believing, and speaking in tongues as proof of receiving this experience of the “filling of the Spirit.” These groups fail to recognize that every believer is baptized by the Spirit into the Body of Christ at the moment of salvation (1 Corinthians 12:13). In recent years these groups have used the terms “baptism of the Spirit” and “filling of the Spirit” interchangeably. The experience of speaking in tongues is viewed as a second work of grace in the believer’s life after salvation. This view tends toward spiritual elitism, separating believers into the “have’s” and the “have-not’s.”

The majority of believers under this false teaching live their lives in frustration, as they are constantly seeking an experience they cannot attain. All this effort stunts their spiritual growth as they are distracted from their focus on learning and obeying the Word of Christ, to seeking an experience such as speaking in tongues. If God were giving the gift of tongues today, it would still not equate to the “filling of the Spirit.” Tongues were given as a sign gift of the Spirit. Speaking in tongues would not make someone a spiritual believer. Gifts do not make a believer spiritual. Growth in grace makes one spiritual.

Other groups, which also see the “filling of the Spirit” as an absolute state of instant power and spirituality, teach that one must meet the condition of “absolute surrender” of one’s life to the Lord’s will, in order to be filled with power and super holiness. This is a tall order indeed for even the most mature believer to achieve. This is also a gross contradiction, in that the believer is required to produce on his own the surrender that the filling of the Spirit is designed to produce in him. It is a glaring case of placing the cart before the horse, and only leads to frustration on the part of the misguided believer. As with the Pentecostal view, the filling of the Holy Spirit is seen as an immediate spiritual state and experience, once the condition of “total surrender” has been met by the believer. Again, the believer becomes frustrated by seeking a spiritual

¹ We refrain from using the designation “doctrinal church” because it tends toward an elitist attitude, failing to recognize that there are many Independent, Baptist, Non-Denominational churches, etc., that also teach sound doctrine.

experience which tends toward severe legalism. Legalistic taboos and strictures become the standard to attain, as he tries to achieve the required condition of holiness. All this hinders the believer's growth in grace through learning and applying the Word of God, as he is forced back under the "Law" from which he has been delivered (Romans 6:14).

Those who make their home in the so-called "doctrinal" churches hold to a very rigid mechanical view of the filling of the Holy Spirit. They teach that all one must do to be filled with the Spirit is to constantly confess known sins to God. This doctrine of the constant naming of one's sins to God is called "rebound" by its advocates. The basic premise of this teaching is that when one confesses his known sins, he is "filled with the Spirit," is in an absolute state of spirituality, and is controlled by the Spirit. When he sins, the believer loses the filling of the Spirit and enters a state of carnality. To regain the filling and to reenter the state of spirituality, he must name and cite his sins to God. This doctrine is built on the false premise that 1 John 1:9 is addressed to believers (see the companion study to this book, *Rethinking Rebound*, for an in-depth examination of 1 John 1:9). 1 John 1:9 is addressed to Gnostic unbelievers and has nothing to do with believers, whose sins have all been forgiven and judged at the Cross, once and for all time (Colossians 2:13-14; Hebrews 9:24-26, 10:16-18; 1 John 2:12; Revelation 1:5-6). Once he has been forgiven at the moment of salvation, the believer never needs to be forgiven again. Since 1 John 1:9 has nothing at all to do with a believer, it certainly is not in any way a condition for being filled with the Spirit.

If one accepts the false premise of being filled with the Spirit instantly, through constant confession of sin, he begins an existence of in-and-out spirituality, supposedly in fellowship with God and "filled with the Spirit" when confessed up, then out of the filling and out of fellowship when he sins, then back in when he confesses, then out again when he sins, etc. Eventually this view leads to spiritual bondage as one is constantly confessing wrong thoughts, words, and deeds in a futile effort to stay filled with the Spirit. The believer taken in by this error is caught in a yo-yo type of lifestyle, spiritual one moment, carnal the next, back to spiritual, then carnal again, etc. This little ritual of "rebound" can easily degenerate into a casual habit of going through the motions of confession, with little change of heart over sinful patterns of behavior.

The common denominator with all these viewpoints on the meaning of the "filling of the Spirit" is that the "filling" is seen as an *absolute* state and experience for believers. Our premise in this study is stated as follows: "When all that the scriptures teach on this subject is examined, we will conclude that the 'Filling of the Holy Spirit' is *not* an absolute state achieved by meeting certain conditions, but is simply the process of spiritual growth into the image of Christ in the life of the believer. This process of conforming the believer into Christ's image is performed by the indwelling Spirit through the Word of God."

2 Cor 3:18 *But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord.*

The Greek verb "to fill" is *pleroo*. Its basic meaning is not to control, but to occupy, to fill up a deficiency, to put something into something else, or to bring to completion. To be filled with the Spirit is not the Spirit taking control, but is rather the Spirit putting into the believer that which is lacking. To be "filled with the Spirit" is to

have more and more of our lives filled with conformity to Christ. To be filled with the Spirit means to be brought to completion spiritually. This is the result of spiritual growth in the life of the believer, not some instant state attained by meeting certain conditions. As the believer grows, the Spirit conforms more and more of his life into the image of Christ. The idea of being “filled by the Spirit” is not so much one of control by the Spirit, but of the Spirit bringing the believer to spiritual maturity. Spiritual growth is the result of a continuing process accomplished *over time* in the believer. To be filled with the Spirit is to be filled up with Christ. The deficiency in the believer is Christ-likeness (Galatians 4:19). As the Spirit works in the believer, He fills the believer up with Christ. This is the process of spiritual growth. Being filled with the Spirit is not being in the state of absolute control of the Spirit. Again, *pleroo* means to occupy, to fill up a deficiency, and to put something into something else. It does not connote the idea of “control.”

Since many modern Bible critics make an issue out of Greek grammar and verb forms, in their attempt to convince common Christians that they cannot understand the Bible for themselves, we will take a moment to look at this verb *pleroo* in Ephesians 5:18. It is in the present tense, which can denote three types of action:

- It can express action **now taking place** or a state **now existing** (example: *He goes*).
- It can express an action that is **continuous** or **habitual** (example: *He speaks with an accent*).
- It can denote an action that is **always true** (example: *two and two is four*).

There are three possible uses of the Greek present tense, and it is the *context* that determines which sense of the verb is meant. Greek is no different from any other language in this respect. Context determines the meaning of words, and context determines how a verb is used. (As we will see in this study, to be “filled with the Spirit” in Ephesians 5:18 is a continuous, ongoing process.) The context of a passage can be understood by the most simple, uneducated believer, and therefore he does not require technical knowledge of syntax and grammar to grasp its meaning, nor does he need language scholars and Bible critics to interpret God’s Word for him!

Spirituality is not an instant attainment but a process of growth that requires time for the indwelling Spirit to work conformity to Christ in the life of the believer. As the believer grows in grace through the Word of God and the discipline of the Spirit, more and more of the believer’s life is “filled up,” or in other words, conformed to Christ. To the degree the believer grows spiritually he is conformed to the image of Christ by the Spirit. To be “filled with the Spirit” simply means conformity to Christ-likeness. Those who promote views of spirituality that reduce the spiritual life to an instant attainment (by following certain conditions such as confession of sin, prayer, surrender, speaking in tongues, etc.) have reduced the spiritual life to a mechanical exercise or formula. This is a perversion of the spiritual life. Christ-likeness cannot be attained instantly by following a formula. It is the result of a process of spiritual growth in the believer as he walks with Christ daily over time.

The basic premise of this study is that to be “filled with the Spirit” means spiritual growth into Christ-likeness, which is accomplished in the believer by the indwelling Holy Spirit. This is a study on Biblical spirituality. It is an examination of what it means to be spiritual or “filled with the Spirit.” This booklet is not an exhaustive study on the Holy Spirit’s person and work, but rather deals with one specific area of the Spirit’s work in

the life of the believer. Simply stated, it is an explanation of Paul's statement in Ephesians 5:18, "And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess, but be filled with the Spirit." We have assumed from the outset that the believer understands that the Holy Spirit is the third person of the Trinity and as such He is God. Briefly we will note that the Holy Spirit has various ministries to believers and unbelievers alike. Scripture reveals:

- To unbelievers: The Holy Spirit convicts the unbelieving world of its need of salvation through faith in Christ.

John 16:7-11 *Nevertheless I tell you the truth; it is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you. And when he is come, he will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment: of sin, because they believe not on me; of righteousness, because I go to my Father, and ye see me no more; of judgment, because the prince of this world is judged.*

- To believers: The Holy Spirit makes the call of the Gospel efficacious by applying salvation when men believe in the Lord Jesus Christ.

2 Thess 2:13 *But we are bound to give thanks always to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth.*

1 Peter 1:1-2 *Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to the strangers scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ: Grace unto you, and peace, be multiplied.*

- The Holy Spirit regenerates believers.

John 3:3-8 *Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. Nicodemus saith unto him, How can a man be born when he is old? can he enter the second time into his mother's womb, and be born? Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again. The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit.*

Titus 3:5 *Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost...*

- He baptizes believers into the Body of Christ.

1 Cor 12:13 *For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews*

or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit.

Gal 3:26-28 *For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus.*

- He indwells believers' bodies.

John 7:37-39 *In the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, saying, If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink. He that believeth on me, as the Scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water. (But this spake he of the Spirit, which they that believe on him should receive: for the Holy Ghost was not yet given; because that Jesus was not yet glorified.)*

1 Cor 3:16 *Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?*

1 Cor 6:19-20 *What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's.*

- He seals the believer, guaranteeing eternal security.

Eph 1:13-14 *In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that Holy Spirit of promise, which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of his glory.*

Eph 4:30 *And grieve not the Holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption.*

- He bestows a spiritual gift to every believer.

1 Cor 12:4,7,11 *Now there are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit... But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal... But all these worketh that one and the selfsame Spirit, dividing to every man severally as he will.*

- He fills the believer as he grows in grace.

Eph 5:18-19 *And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit; speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord*

Col 3:16 *Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and*

admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.

As we can see, the ministries of the Holy Spirit are many and varied. To understand any of the ministries of the Spirit, we must depend on what He has revealed to us in the divinely inspired and preserved Word of God. Only the Holy Spirit can reveal the things of God to our hearts through the Word of God for our edification and instruction (1 Corinthians 2:10-13, 2 Timothy 3:16-17). Without the blessed Holy Spirit's work, as our indwelling Comforter and Teacher, we as believers would be helpless in understanding the things of God. We care not for religious tradition or the opinions of men. We desire to know what God's book, the Bible, says on this subject. "What saith the Scripture?" This is our only Authority.

Men's opinions and experiences, no matter how good the men may be, must be tested in the light of the scriptures. "*To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them*" (Isaiah 8:20). To understand the filling of the Spirit, as with any other doctrine, we must compare Scripture with scripture. We must always pay attention to the context of each passage we examine, as well as its relation to the overall revelation of scripture. Following these principles of interpretation that are set forth in the Bible will help us to "rightly divide the word of truth" (1 Corinthians 2:13, 2 Peter 1:20, 2 Timothy 2:15). As we approach this subject, we claim no infallible interpretation, but only seek to rely upon what has been written and preserved in God's Word. We do not claim to have the "final word" on this issue. Our contribution is simply to communicate faithfully the portion we have received as the fruits of our study of Scripture. We set forth this study to the reader as the result of examining the Scriptures, with the hope that it will enlighten and challenge others to further study the inexhaustible riches of God's Word on this subject. We will find that God is faithful to openly and clearly give us the answers we seek.

Isa 48:16 *Come ye near unto me, hear ye this; I have not spoken in secret from the beginning; from the time that it was, there am I: and now the Lord GOD, and his Spirit, hath sent me.*

Let us open the Book of books, and may God grant us wisdom and discernment to understand His Word on this matter of the "filling of the Spirit."

1 Complete in Him

In contemplating the subject before us, we have observed that there is a great disservice done to believers by those that teach that the filling of the Spirit is an absolute state of spirituality to be instantly attained. They often neglect to present before believers the tremendous truth that God, in His matchless grace, has already provided everything the believer needs to live the spiritual life. Many sincere believers are led into frustration and discouragement as they continually strive to meet the conditions laid out by their teachers, in order to secure and maintain the elusive “filling of the Spirit.” They are kept in ignorance of the fact that the Spirit indwells them and His power is available freely to them. What the prophet Hosea declared of old stands true to this very hour, “My people suffer for lack of knowledge” (Hosea 4:6).

Gal 3:2 *This only would I learn of you, Received ye the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?*

God has made everything available to believers through Christ and His finished work, yet so many believers fail to discern their completeness in Christ. All the believer needs is to activate the power of the indwelling Spirit by faith in the knowledge of the Word of God. The believer need only be occupied with Christ as the object of his faith, through the Word, to receive all that God has provided. God has made a complete provision in grace for every need of the believer. No clearer statement could be made than what Paul has communicated to us:

Col 2:10 *And ye are **complete in him**, which is the head of all principality and power.*

How marvelous and all-encompassing are these words, “And ye are complete in Him”! Through the riches of God’s grace, made possible because of the work of Christ on the Cross, the believer has a perfect, eternal, and complete position of acceptance before the Father. With this exalted position in Christ, the believer is showered with all spiritual blessings. God’s divine power has provided for every need of the believer through the knowledge of God and Jesus our Lord.

Rom 8:31-32 *What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us? He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us **all things**?*

1 Cor 3:21-23 *Therefore let no man glory in men. For **all things** are yours; whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come; all are yours; and ye are Christ's; and Christ is God's.*

Eph 1:3-6 *Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with **all spiritual blessings** in heavenly places in Christ: according as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame*

before him in love: having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, to the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved.

2 Peter 1:2-3 *Grace and peace be multiplied unto you through the knowledge of God, and of Jesus our Lord, according as his divine power hath given unto us **all things** that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue.*

We as believers are “in Christ,” and Christ has been made “all things” unto us. We have everything in Christ—wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption.

1 Cor 1:30 *But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption.*

He is in us, and we are in Him (John 14:20). We are identified with Him in His death, burial, and resurrection (Romans 6:3-5). Christ is “our life” (Colossians 3:4), and “as He is, so are we in this world” (1 John 4:17).

Believers are not spiritual paupers who need to constantly seek after some experience or spiritual state of the Spirit’s power. We have Christ and are complete in Him. We need only to look to Him and, with simple faith, appropriate what has already been graciously and abundantly provided by our Heavenly Father through the work of His Son. As the old Gospel song goes, “Only believe, only believe, all things are possible, only believe.” Our job is to believe in what God has already accomplished and provided for us in Christ. We are not to seek something more than what God has already given in Christ and sealed in us with His Spirit. As we seek Him in the Word, and believe what He has promised, He will accomplish that which He has willed for our lives. This is grace. This is rest and peace for our weary hearts.

Dear child of God, the Holy Spirit indwells you. He has come to fulfill the Father’s purpose of conforming you to the image of Christ (Romans 8:29). You are not required to meet conditions laid down arbitrarily by men, no matter how well-intentioned they may be. You are to seek the knowledge of Christ and find in Him all that you need, in things that pertain to life and godliness (2 Peter 1:3). The blessed Comforter lives within all believers to accomplish God’s purpose for their lives. He will give us freely all that we need as we walk by faith in Christ, through believing the Word of God. God has promised to *fill* us with joy and peace as we *believe* through the power of the Holy Spirit who indwells us.

Rom 15:13 *Now the God of hope **fill** [pleroo] you with all joy and peace in believing, that ye may abound in hope, through the power of the Holy Ghost.*

Do not weary yourself to attain the “filling of the Spirit” by following man-made conditions. Simply believe the Word of God daily as you walk with Christ, and He has promised to “*fill you with joy and peace in believing...through the power of the Holy Ghost.*” Do you see it, friend? No striving to attain the Spirit’s work is required on your part. Just believe the Word of God faithfully in all things, and the Spirit will fill you. How freeing, how blessed, how gracious of our Lord! He asks us only to trust His Word,

and He will do for us that which we cannot do for ourselves. Amen and Amen!

Dear believer, can you not see that God has given His Beloved Son for you? Will He withhold anything from you that is necessary for your spiritual well-being? Never! *“If God be for us who can be against us? He that spared not his own son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?”* (Romans 8:31-32). If he commands you to “be filled with the Spirit,” will He not perform this work in you, unto His Glory? He most certainly shall do what He purposes for your life. The “filling of the Spirit” is not some separate experience, detached from our salvation, to be secured by our meeting certain conditions. It is the result of understanding our completeness in Christ, as we grow spiritually through His Word daily. In the remainder of this study we shall see that the “filling of the Spirit” is the result of God’s work of grace in us as we grow spiritually. This is all in accordance with His Eternal Purpose for each believer in Christ.

2 God's Eternal Purpose

As with any doctrine of the faith, we must begin with divine revelation found in the Bible. Today there are many new translations and modern versions that claim to be Bibles. All these modern versions are merely perversions of Scripture based on inferior manuscripts in the Old Testament and especially the corrupt manuscripts known as *Sinaiticus* and *Vaticanus* in the New Testament. Modern New Testaments are based on a handful of notoriously corrupt manuscripts, filled with omissions of words, verses, and entire passages of Scripture. These omissions consistently undermine the **deity** and **atonement work** of our Lord Jesus Christ. Sadly, many believers have bought into the Satanic deception promoting these watered-down versions.² Too many Christians today have foolishly made up their minds about this issue without examining all the facts, or have chosen to ignore it altogether. To such all we can say is found in the warning words of Scripture:

Prov 18:13 *He that answereth a matter before he heareth it, it is folly and shame unto him.*

Even worse than accepting the corruptions of the modern English versions is the Nicolaitan heresy that one can only understand the Bible if he knows the “original languages.” This is a deceitful scheme of Satan aimed at taking the Bible out of the hands of the common believer and making him fully dependent on a clergyman who studies long-dead languages for his final authority. This deception, for all intents and purposes, turns the Protestant pastor into a Roman Catholic priest, since the Bible in English is essentially of no use to the common believer according to their Nicolaitan doctrine.

Nicolaitanism is the practice of dividing the equal brotherhood of believers into a laity and clergy. It is the establishment of an elite clerical class as the final authority in the things of God over the common believer. The word “Nicolaitan” is found in Revelation 2:6 and 2:15. It is a compound word derived from the Greek *nikao*, “to conquer,” and *laos*, the “people” or “laity.” Thus it means “to conquer the common people.” It is found in its grossest form in Roman Catholicism, with its anti-scriptural hierarchy of priests, bishops, cardinals, and pope. It sets up a mediatory class between men and God in its pagan-styled priesthood. Nicolaitanism exists in modern Protestantism in a more subtle but still dangerous form, when a ministerial class lords it over the common brethren as their authority in spiritual matters. It is the authority of man replacing the authority of the Word of God in believers’ lives. It is what the Lord Jesus Christ Himself hates.

Rev 2:15 *So hast thou also them that hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitanes, which thing I*

² For more information on this important subject, see our book *The Preeminence of Christ: the King James Bible versus the Modern Versions*, the extensive studies *Forever Settled* by Jack Moorman, *Defending the King James Bible* by D. A. Waite, and *An Understandable History of the Bible* by Samuel Gipp; or, for an abbreviated study, our booklet *The Preeminence of Christ: Scripture Comparison*.

*hate.*³

When it comes to the interpretation of the Bible, Nicolaitanism is seen in men who teach that the common believer cannot understand the Bible without the scholarship and understanding of Greek and Hebrew. This, in effect, sets up man as the final authority instead of the Word of God. The inevitable result of this line of thinking is that the pastor and scholar with the knowledge of Greek and Hebrew become the *final authority* for the believer, replacing the authority of the Word of God! If such a spurious doctrine were true, then 99.9% of Christians can never have access to God's Word for themselves because they do not know Hebrew and Greek. The vast multitudes of believers are then at the mercy of some man to tell them what God's Word says. Is it any wonder that so few Christians consistently read their Bibles for themselves anymore? Nothing would please "Holy Papa," sitting on his throne in Rome, more than this!

Thankfully, we see through these fallacies and spiritual pitfalls. We know God has not hidden His Word from His people:

Isa 45:19-22 *I have not spoken in secret, in a dark place of the earth: I said not unto the seed of Jacob, Seek ye me in vain: I the LORD speak righteousness, I declare things that are right. Assemble yourselves and come; draw near together, ye that are escaped of the nations: they have no knowledge that set up the wood of their graven image, and pray unto a god that cannot save. Tell ye, and bring them near; yea, let them take counsel together: who hath declared this from ancient time? who hath told it from that time? have not I the LORD? and there is no God else beside me; a just God and a Savior; there is none beside me. Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth: for I am God, and there is none else.*

Note how the Lord has told us that He has not hidden His Word, but has spoken openly to all men. Dear reader, if His Word is not available in a book that we can read, if it is hidden in the dead languages of Greek and Hebrew, then God has deceived us. But thankfully He has never failed to preserve His Word for His people; we have it in a book we can hold in our hands and read in our own language, the Lion of the Protestant Reformation, the greatest piece of literature given among men in our time, and the final authority for our faith and practice, the King James Bible. For us, the Bible is not a matter of "personal preference." For English-speaking Christians, the Bible that God promised to preserve (Psalm 12:6-7) is found in a single book, the King James Version of 1611, based on the traditional Hebrew Masoretic Text in the Old Testament and the traditional Greek Received Text (known as the *Textus Receptus*) in the New Testament. We bow to no other authority.

We have a book we can hold in our hands and read in our own language, which is all-sufficient to reveal the things of Christ to us, if our hearts are in the right condition before God (Psalm 25:8-9,14; Hebrews 11:6; John 7:17). We make no apology for this confidence in our King James Bible, despite the derisive and arrogant attitudes of vain men who would promote themselves as correctors and critics of our blessed old book. In it we have found the true path of eternal life and rest for our souls. There is no other book that so exalts Christ as preeminent in all things.

³ Modern versions omit the phrase "which thing I hate."

God's revelation of Himself in Scripture sets forth to our minds His great "eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Ephesians 3:11). In order to understand the filling of the Spirit, we must understand God's eternal purpose for each believer and the Holy Spirit's work to accomplish that purpose. We must begin with the role that the Holy Spirit performs in the believer as it relates to God's eternal purpose in Christ. The filling of the Spirit, as with every ministry of the indwelling Spirit, is God's working in the believer to accomplish His plan and purpose for the believer's life. This purpose for the believer is defined in Scripture as being conformed to the image of Christ: "*For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be **conformed to the image of his Son**, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren*" (Romans 8:29). God wills to make each believer into the image of Christ. To be conformed to the image of Christ means to grow to spiritual maturity. As the believer grows in grace, more and more of his life is brought into submission to God's will. As the believer submits more and more of his life to God's will, he is being "filled with the Spirit." To the degree he is conformed to the image of Christ he is filled by the indwelling Spirit.

God's grand eternal purpose of bringing many sons into glory begins with the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ. God's purpose is *Christocentric*, centered in the person of His only begotten Son.

Isa 42:1-7 *Behold my servant, whom I uphold; mine elect, in whom my soul delighteth; I have put my spirit upon him: he shall bring forth judgment to the Gentiles. He shall not cry, nor lift up, nor cause his voice to be heard in the street. A bruised reed shall he not break, and the smoking flax shall he not quench: he shall bring forth judgment unto truth. He shall not fail nor be discouraged, till he have set judgment in the earth: and the isles shall wait for his law. Thus saith God the LORD, he that created the heavens, and stretched them out; he that spread forth the earth, and that which cometh out of it; he that giveth breath unto the people upon it, and spirit to them that walk therein: I the LORD have called thee in righteousness, and will hold thine hand, and will keep thee, **and give thee for a covenant of the people, for a light of the Gentiles; to open the blind eyes, to bring out the prisoners from the prison, and them that sit in darkness out of the prison house.***

Eph 1:3-6 *Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ: **according as he hath chosen us in him** before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love: **having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself**, according to the good pleasure of his will, to the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved.*

Col 1:15-18 *Who is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature: for by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him: and he is before all things, and by him all things consist. And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; **that in all things he might have the preeminence.***

Heb 2:9-11 *But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honor; that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man. For it became him, for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings. For both he that sanctifieth and they who are sanctified are all of one: for which cause he is not ashamed to call them brethren.*

Through one man, Adam, the human race was ruined, condemned in sin and spiritual death. Adam was the representative head of fallen humanity, and through his sin and disobedience he forfeited man's relationship and fellowship with God.

Rom 5:15-18 *(...But not as the offense, so also is the free gift. For if through the offense of one many be dead, much more the grace of God, and the gift by grace, which is by one man, Jesus Christ, hath abounded unto many. And not as it was by one that sinned, so is the gift: for the judgment was by one to condemnation, but the free gift is of many offenses unto justification. For if by one man's offense death reigned by one; much more they which receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness shall reign in life by one, Jesus Christ.) Therefore as by the offense of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation; even so by the righteousness of one the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life.*

Eph 2:1-2 *And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience*

To redeem and restore Adam's condemned posterity to right relationship and eternal fellowship with God, required another sinless man as a Kinsman-Redeemer, the Lord Jesus Christ. Christ, as the second Adam, is the representative head of a new humanity—a new spiritual creation, the sons of God in union with Christ, which compose the Church, which is His Body (John 1:12, Galatians 4:4-7, Romans 8:14-17). The Lord Jesus Christ is God's perfect man. Christ lived His life in perfect submission to the Father's will.

John 5:19 *Then answered Jesus and said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, The Son can do nothing of himself, but what he seeth the Father do: for what things soever he doeth, these also doeth the Son likewise.*

John 5:30 *I can of mine own self do nothing: as I hear, I judge: and my judgment is just; because I seek not mine own will, but the will of the Father which hath sent me.*

Conformity to the image of Christ concerns doing the will of the Father obediently. Adam and his posterity were disobedient, and it would take one who was completely obedient to rescue Adam's fallen race. In accepting the cup of suffering at the Cross, the Lord Jesus demonstrated the highest expression of obedience and submission to the Father's will. "Not my will but thy will be done," is what the Lord Jesus prayed in the garden before being betrayed into the hands of wicked men to be crucified. The Lord

Jesus did the Father's will always and perfectly, in complete submission, even unto the agony of the Cross, where He bore the judgment for the sins of the world. In the Lord Jesus Christ's life is told out God's will for each believer. God wants to bring the believer's will into obedient submission to His perfect will, in all areas of the believer's life.

To be conformed to the image of Christ in our hearts is to be conformed to the will of our heavenly Father in our lives, in such a way that the fruit of the Spirit is manifested in us. *This purpose of the Father does not happen instantly in the believer's life.* It is an ongoing process of spiritual growth in the believer's life as he matures in His walk with the Lord. The believer will never be sinless or perfect, and his submission will fall far short of our Lord's perfection. But as the believer grows spiritually through the work of the indwelling Spirit and the renewing of his mind through the Word of God, more and more of his life will be conformed to God's will. To the degree that the believer's life is conformed obediently to God's will, he is conformed to the image of Christ. And to the degree the believer is conformed to Christ, he is filled by the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit fills the believer up with Christ by forming Christ in the believer. The filling of the Spirit is not the believer surrendering to the Spirit, but is rather the Spirit working the obedience of Christ into the believer as he grows spiritually.

The term "spiritual maturity" is commonly used as a synonym for being conformed to the image of Christ. Maturity in the Christian life means the believer is advancing or growing in conformity to God's will. This growth is revealed by the fruit of the Spirit, "love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness and temperance," being manifested in the believer's character. This is in accordance with the purpose of God to work the obedience and submission of Christ into the believer's life. God will accomplish this work of bringing the believer into Christ-like obedience, through the ministry of the Holy Spirit who indwells every believer, by a process of spiritual growth. The Holy Spirit will teach the believer the Word of God, which is the expression of the will of God for his life.

John 6:63 *It is the spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing: the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life.*

The Holy Spirit will also enable the believer to apply the Word of God obediently through the various circumstances, discipline, and trials of life. All this is designed by the Spirit to break the believer's self-life and self-will, producing dependence on Christ and spiritual maturity in the believer.

When celebrating the Passover meal with His apostles prior to enduring the agony of His betrayal, trial, scourging, and crucifixion, the Lord Jesus comforted their hearts with the promise that He would send them the Holy Spirit. The Lord told them that in his physical absence, He would come to them by sending them the Comforter, the Spirit of truth.

John 14:16-20 *And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you forever; even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him: but ye know him; for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you. I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you. Yet a little while,*

and the world seeth me no more; but ye see me: because I live, ye shall live also. At that day ye shall know that I am in my Father, and ye in me, and I in you.

In His physical absence the Lord Jesus has sent the third person of the Godhead to indwell every believer. The Holy Spirit has come to take up residence in the believer forever.

John 14:17 *Even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him: but ye know him; for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you.*

The Spirit's presence in the believer is permanent. He indwells the believer permanently to accomplish the work of God's eternal purpose in the believer. The Holy Spirit has taken up permanent residence in the believer's body to perform the ministry of making the believer into the image of Christ. In providing salvation for sinners, God has a greater goal than just saving men from the eternal punishment of the lake of fire. God's goal is to secure many sons, who have been conformed into the image of His only begotten Son (Romans 8:29). To be "filled with the Spirit" is the process of God's purpose being accomplished in the believer's life. We find this purpose of God revealed throughout the New Testament, especially preeminent in Paul's letter to the church at Rome.

The book of Romans penned by the Apostle Paul is the great exposition of the salvation God has provided by His matchless grace. In Romans, Paul explains God's plan of salvation by grace for lost sinners. There is no passage of Scripture that reveals the grand scope of God's eternal purpose like Romans chapter eight. The great Reformer Martin Luther commented that if the book of Romans was the great cathedral of Scripture, then chapter eight was its highest steeple. It is in this chapter that God reveals His complete eternal plan for believers' lives. The great plan and purpose of God begins in eternity past with God's foreknowledge and predestination of believers. It then sweeps down into time with His calling through the Gospel and justification of the foreknown believer, and is consummated in eternity future with the ultimate glorification of all those whom he has foreknown as believers from eternity past (2 Thessalonians 2:13-14, 1 Peter 1:2).

Rom 8:28-30 *And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose. For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified.*

It is important to note that in this fantastic passage, which reveals God's tremendous love, faithfulness, acceptance, and purpose for every believer, that the Holy Spirit is mentioned as playing a prominent and essential role in accomplishing God's design. Note verses 26-27 carefully, dear reader:

Rom 8:26-27 *Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. And he that searcheth the hearts knoweth what is the*

mind of the Spirit, because he maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God.

Here Paul tells us through divine revelation that the Holy Spirit who indwells every believer is constantly praying for the believer in accordance with the will of God for our lives. This is a ministry that the Spirit carries on in us without our conscious efforts or the exertion of our will. He prays for us *always* in spite of our will! This means the Holy Spirit is *always* at work in us to accomplish the will and purpose of God for our lives. He never stops working in us through *all* things, the good decisions we make as well as the bad. This is “Amazing Grace.”

Now note carefully, dear reader, that the Spirit’s work does not depend on us meeting certain conditions to enter into an absolute state of spirituality. Rather, the Spirit is at work through the “*all things*” that are permitted in our life by our sovereign God. This work is a process of our whole lifetime with the goal of conforming us to the likeness of Christ. On this point, Miles J. Stanford has noted the following:

To be filled with the Spirit, is to be filled with the Life of the Lord Jesus Christ. It is to have His life manifested in our mortal flesh (2 Cor 4:11). That growth is transmitted by the Spirit of the Lord, who from glory to glory, is transforming us to the image of the Lord (2 Cor 3:18).

—*The Green Letters*, page 280

Dear reader, Biblical spirituality is not an either-or, any-moment, absolute condition. Do not fall into the spiritual trap of trying to meet conditions and seek experiences to be filled with the Spirit. Seek Christ faithfully and obediently in the Word and *you will be filled*, as you grow in grace with the eyes of faith focused only upon Christ! You see, Biblical spirituality, being “filled with the Spirit,” is a *process of growth over time* in the life of the believer, as the Spirit continually works in the believer’s life. This takes place by the application of the Word through the manifold circumstances God chooses for our growth in grace. As the believer focuses on Christ in the Word, he is being “filled with the Spirit.” Being “filled with the Spirit” is not an absolute state, but is simply a synonym for the process of spiritual growth in the believer’s life. To be filled with the Spirit is to be filled with the Word of Christ, as we will see as we continue our study.

When Paul contrasts the filling of the Spirit with being drunk with wine in Ephesians 5:18 (*And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit...*), he is distinguishing between the works of the flesh, such as drunkenness, and the things that accompany a walk in the Spirit—in vs. 19, *speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord*, in vs. 20, *giving thanks always for all things unto God*, in vs. 21, *submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God*, in vv. 22-25, marital respect and love, in Ephesians 6:1-4, children’s respect for parents and parents’ nurture of children in the Lord, in vv. 5-7, servants honoring masters faithfully and masters treating servants with respect and honor.

Paul did not mean, as many assume, “Be controlled by the Spirit as alcohol controls those who are drunk.” Paul was basically saying to the Ephesians, “Instead of

focusing on the works of the flesh, be focused on the things of the Spirit. Instead of being ‘filled’ with the works of the flesh, be filled with the things of the Spirit (i.e., the things of Christ). Instead of the debilitating influence of alcohol, be filled with praise and thanksgiving to the Lord through psalms and hymns and spiritual songs.” Paul was not commanding an absolute state of instant spirituality to be sought and attained. He was simply admonishing the Ephesian believers, who were struggling with carnality, to focus on the things that produce spiritual growth. Paul understood that spirituality is a process of spiritual growth, achieved through focusing on Christ in the Word (Colossians 3:16, 2 Corinthians 3:18).

Dear reader, please note that there is *only one specific command in the entire New Testament* to be “filled with the Spirit.” There are many commands, however, that are synonymous with the objective of the believer’s spiritual life. To be “filled with the Spirit” must be essentially the same as these commands, or else the New Testament has a mass of contradictory and confusing commands and objectives for the spiritual life of the believer. Note the interrelated, complementary nature of the following commands for the conduct of our spiritual life:

Col 3:16 *Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.* [The focus of the believer’s life is to be the Word of Christ in his daily walk.]

2 Cor 5:7 *For we walk by faith, not by sight.* [The believer is to walk by faith (the object of which is Christ through the Word). The object of the believer’s life is to be occupied with Christ in his daily walk.]

Heb 12:2 *Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.* [The believer is to look, focus, and concentrate with the eyes of his faith on Christ as he runs the spiritual race. The object of the believer’s life is to be occupied with Christ in his daily walk.]

John 8:31-32 *Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on him, If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed; And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.* [The disciple of Christ is to continue in Christ’s Word as the object of his faith. Christ is the Word made flesh. To live by faith in Christ’s Word is the same thing as living by faith in Christ. To have the Word as the object of faith is to have Christ as the object of faith, for Christ is the Word made flesh (John 1:1,14). The object of the believer’s life is to be occupied with Christ in his daily walk.]

John 15:4-5 *Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me. I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing.* [The believer is to “abide,” remain, and continue in Christ as the object of his faith. To abide in Christ is to have His word in us (John 15:7) and to have obedient faith in His word (John 14:21,23, 15:10). The object of the believer’s life is

to be occupied with Christ in his daily walk.]

Col 2:6 *As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him.* [The believer is to walk continually in his spiritual life upon the same principle that he first received Christ. The believer receives Christ as Savior “by grace through faith” (Ephesians 2:8-9). The believer is told to continue walking by grace through faith in Christ. Again, the object of the believer’s life is to be occupied with Christ in his daily walk.]

2 Pet 3:18 *But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and forever. Amen.* [The believer is to daily grow in the grace and knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ. This growth in grace and knowledge comes through learning of the living Word, Jesus Christ, through the written Word. As always, the object of the believer’s life is to be occupied with Christ in his daily walk!]

In all these commands, the main point is that the believer is to be *occupied with Christ*. The main focus of the believer’s spiritual life in the New Testament is spiritual growth into the image of Christ. All these verses and so many others give us the main emphasis of the believer’s spiritual life. These all agree that to walk by faith in Christ through the Word is the governing principle of the Christian life. The Holy Spirit’s ministry is not to glorify Himself, but to *glorify the Lord Jesus Christ* (John 15:26, 16:13; 1 Corinthians 12:3).

Ephesians 5:18 is a command that also gives the main objective of the believer’s spiritual life. To be “filled with the Spirit” is synonymous with the spiritual growth that we are commanded to pursue, through daily faith in Christ’s Word. *Paul is not commanding believers to be occupied with the Spirit Himself*. He is admonishing them by setting up a contrast concerning how men may walk. In contrast to being occupied with the works of darkness (Ephesians 5:11) of which drunkenness is an example, the believer is to be filled with the Spirit, or in other words, be occupied with his spiritual growth in Christ.

Those who teach “absolute spirituality” based on meeting certain prior conditions, miss the whole point of the Spirit’s work in the believer’s life. They limit the work of the Spirit to only specific periods of the believer’s life, when he is meeting their arbitrarily assumed conditions for the filling of the Spirit. For example, those who advocate “rebound,” or constant confession of sin to be in fellowship with God, limit the work of the Holy Spirit to only those times in which the believer is “confessed up.” But the Spirit indwells the believer permanently according to Scripture. How then can the work of the Spirit ever cease or be limited to the actions of the human will? Indeed, He allows us our free choices and we do not argue this point. Yet even when we choose negatively against God’s will, the Scripture declares that the Spirit intercedes for us, and when He is being grieved or quenched, He convicts and disciplines us and absolutely and ultimately He works all things for good to mature us into Christ’s image (Ephesians 4:30, 1 Thessalonians 5:19, Hebrews 12:5-12, Romans 8:26-28).

God’s Spirit is *always* at work in His children, in spite of our negative choices. Those who teach absolute spirituality must demonstrate from Scripture that the Spirit’s work is nullified and curtailed by the negative will of the believer. Such evidence will not

be found in Scripture. The advocates of instant spirituality claim that one must speak in tongues, totally surrender, or confess his sins. Yet Paul, in calling believers in Ephesus to be filled with the Spirit, *never mentioned any of these conditions*, but simply assumed the ongoing work of the indwelling Spirit in their lives.

Forasmuch as the believer is admonished to “work out his own salvation with fear and trembling,” we are also reminded that “it is God which worketh in you both to will and do of His good pleasure” (Philippians 2:12-13) and that “we are his workmanship” (Ephesians 2:10). These clear statements of Scripture, while maintaining the free-will choices of believers in relation to the will of God, also establish that His sovereign workings in a believer’s life are in no way dependent upon or hindered by the believer’s will.

If a believer makes choices contrary to the will of God or falls into sin, the indwelling Spirit simply adjusts to the believer’s will by working in him to convict and discipline in order to bring him to repentance. This aspect of the Spirit’s ministry is yet another part of the process of spiritual growth which contributes to the believer “being filled with the Spirit.” What is more important to note is that the convicting and disciplining work of the Spirit is conducted independently by the Spirit towards the believer. The believer’s sin or resistance to God’s will does not stop the Spirit from convicting, disciplining, interceding, and working *all* things together for good in the believer’s life. You see, dear reader, *the Holy Spirit never ceases in His efforts to conform the believer into the image of Christ*. He is always at work in the believer’s life to lead the believer onward in spiritual growth toward full maturity in Christ.

The Holy Spirit indwells the believer to teach him God’s Word, which is the food for spiritual growth. The Holy Spirit works through the Word to mature the believer into Christ’s image. It is through the Word that the Spirit illuminates Christ to the believer’s heart.

John 14:26 *But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you.*

1 Cor 2:9-13 *But as it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him. But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God. For what man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him? even so the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God. Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God. Which things also we speak, not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth; comparing spiritual things with spiritual.*

The Holy Spirit has not come to magnify Himself but to testify of and to glorify Christ. He has come to reveal the things of Christ to the believer. The object of the believer’s faith is not the Spirit but the risen Lord and the believer’s position in Him:

John 15:26 *But when the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father,*

even the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, he shall testify of me.

John 16:13-15 *Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will show you things to come. He shall glorify me: for he shall receive of mine, and shall show it unto you. All things that the Father hath are mine: therefore said I, that he shall take of mine, and shall show it unto you.*

Eph 2:4-6 *But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, by (grace ye are saved;) and hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus.*

The Scriptures clearly reveal that the indwelling Holy Spirit's ministry to the believer is according to God's purpose of *the glorification of Christ* among many brethren who are conformed to His image. This is the work of the Spirit. He has not come to magnify Himself but to exalt Christ in the believer's heart. God wants us focused on Christ through the Word. This is how we will grow and be filled with the Spirit, by being filled in our hearts with Christ and His Word. The "filling of the Spirit" is the result of the process of spiritual growth, not the means of growth. The emphasis in Scripture is on Christ and the believer's position of identification with Him. When Paul commands the Ephesians to "be filled with the Spirit," he is admonishing them to do the things that lead to spiritual maturity. He is commanding them to live by faith, focused on Christ's Word. This is in order that the Spirit may fill them up with Christ, according to God's purpose of conforming the believer to the image of Christ.

Religious men have placed too much emphasis on exalting the work of the Spirit, rather than the *purpose* of the Spirit's work. The emphasis in the New Testament epistles is *not* on the filling of the Spirit (the words "be filled with Spirit" are only used once in the entire New Testament) but on the believer's identification and position "in Christ." It is the understanding of and reckoning on our position in Christ through grace that produces spiritual growth. As believers, we are not to seek more of the Spirit, but rather we are to seek to know *more of Christ*, revealed in the pages of Scripture. If we seek Christ in the Word, the Spirit will do the work of filling us and changing us into the image of Christ. Many men, though sincere, have misled God's people, turning them away from a Christ-centered focus and walk through the Word. Instead, they are focused on trying to obtain (and maintain) the power and ministry of the Holy Spirit, *which they already have!* Sadly, they do not understand that they are already being filled more and more with the Spirit whenever they are focused on Christ, the Living Word, through the written Word. Many believers have been led into a quest for instant spirituality by their man-made formulas of how to be "filled with the Spirit."

In his book *The Green Letters*, Miles J. Stanford offers this insightful comment on the filling of the Spirit:

The Spirit of God does not give immediate holiness of life by faith or any other means. True, His method of producing holiness is by faith, but it is through a process of growth. The Spirit matures the new life in Christ as He holds the old

life in the position of death through the Cross. There are no shortcuts to maturity.

—*The Green Letters*, page 275

The filling of the Holy Spirit in the believer's life is the result of the process of growth in grace. As the believer grows towards maturity the Spirit fills up more and more of his life. The Spirit cannot fill up areas of our life that are still under control of self. Only as the believer is brought through many experiences of the Spirit's discipline over time, does he surrender these areas of his life to the will of God. This is a process that takes time and growth. It is not the result of simply meeting an instant condition. The more that the believer experiences death to self, as the Spirit works the Cross into his life, the greater is the believer's growth and submission to God's will. Through the process of growth, the Holy Spirit fills him.

To understand this principle of the Spirit's working, compare the following verses of Scripture:

2 Cor 3:18 *But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord.*

2 Cor 4:10-11 *Always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body. For we which live are always delivered unto death for Jesus' sake, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our mortal flesh.*

The death that Paul speaks of here is the death that comes to the believer's self-life through the many disciplines, afflictions, and sufferings through which God leads him. These are designed by God to bring the believer to the end of his own self-will, into dependence on the power of the Spirit. This is a process of the Spirit working in the believer through the Word and experience. The result is growth and greater filling of the believer's life as he surrenders to God's will. Thus is the fruit of the Spirit manifested, as the believer is conformed into Christ's image to a greater and greater degree. There is no shortcut or instant state of spirituality. Biblical spirituality is a process of growth, not an absolute state to be lost or regained at any moment.

As we close this chapter, we remind you, dear reader, once again of the eternal purpose of God to conform the believer into the image of Christ. The Holy Spirit has come to abide permanently in the believer to accomplish this work according to God's purpose. He has come to fill our hearts with Christ. *Christ alone* is the focus of the Christian life, not the filling of the Spirit! Once again, we quote Miles J. Stanford, whose sentiments reflect our thoughts clearly on this subject:

The Lord Jesus was explicit in explaining to the Disciples, just what the Spirit's ministry was to be on behalf of His own. He said, "I will send Him unto you" (John 16:7)... He also informed them that, "He shall glorify me: for He shall receive of mine, and shall shew it unto you" (John 16:13-14). He laid down no conditions: all was to be through the faith by which they had lived. True faith is centered in the Word, including faith for growth. "Sanctify them through thy

truth: thy word is truth” (John 17:17).

The Spirit of Christ within us is at work, and has been from the moment we were saved. He is not cringing in some corner of our being, in some dark garret, hopefully waiting for a series of conditions to be met so that He may have the privilege of filling us. Far from it! We have been bought with a price of Calvary and re-created in Christ Jesus; therefore the Spirit is able to carry out God’s eternal purpose in us by means of that finished work and flowing life.

—*The Green Letters*, page 282

To these words we can only add a heartfelt, “Amen and Amen!” The blessed Comforter is always at work in the believer to fill and conform to the image of Christ. Do not fret, dear reader—you do not need to try to “be filled” by your own human efforts, whether it be striving for a “second blessing” or a constant ritual of “rebound.” You are simply to walk by faith with your eyes focused on Christ in the Word. The Holy Spirit will do the rest of the work in you. As for your part, simply abide in Christ and allow his Word to fill your heart and life. He is altogether *faithful* to do in you what you cannot do for yourself!

3 Biblical Spirituality

The study of Paul's admonition in Ephesians 5:18, "Be filled with the Spirit," is the study of the concept of Biblical spirituality. The concept of spirituality set forth in the Bible is not an absolute state to be gained or lost at any moment, dependent on certain conditions. Biblical spirituality is the result of a process that takes place over time, leading to the spiritual growth of the believer. Being filled with the Spirit is the *result of spiritual growth*. As the believer grows in grace under the discipline and workings of the indwelling Spirit, he is filled to greater degrees of conformity to Christ. Again, there is no such thing as "instant spirituality" ever mentioned in the Bible.

Spirituality and **carnality** are descriptive of different stages or levels of spiritual growth (or lack thereof). Paul, in his first letter to the Corinthians, makes it clear that spirituality and carnality are degrees of spiritual growth or spiritual immaturity related to the extent of knowledge and application of the Word of God in the believer's life.

1 Cor 3:1-4 *And I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto **spiritual**, but as unto **carnal**, even as unto **babes** in Christ. I have fed you with **milk**, and not with **meat**: for hitherto ye were not able to bear it, neither yet now are ye able. For ye are yet carnal: for whereas there is among you envying, and strife, and divisions, are ye not carnal, and walk as men? For while one saith, I am of Paul; and another, I am of Apollos; are ye not carnal?*

Here we note that the Corinthians could not receive Paul's words of advanced instruction because they were in a carnal state. This carnal state is equated to spiritual babyhood by Paul.

1 Cor 3:1b *...as unto **carnal**, even as unto **babes** in Christ.*

Carnality, therefore, is not an absolute condition, but is simply spiritual immaturity. Paul clearly illustrates for us here that carnality, the opposite of spirituality, is a low level of spiritual growth (not an instantly attained condition). To be classified as spiritual, a believer has to grow out of the "baby stage" of carnality. Being carnal or spiritual is not a state instantly achieved, but rather is a level of growth. One cannot exit the state of carnality instantly. One has to go through the process of spiritual growth to exit carnality. Therefore, believers make the transition from carnality to spirituality *progressively*, in stages. Some areas of our life are brought into conformity with our Lord's will more rapidly than others, but as long as we are focused on Christ through the Word, we are becoming more spiritual and less carnal.

The Corinthians, as babes in Christ, could not digest the meat (the advanced doctrines) of the Word. They had not yet outgrown the carnal stage of spiritual babyhood. They were still in need of the milk of the Word (the basic doctrines). Milk and meat are the foods and nourishment for different stages of physical development and growth. So Paul uses the same analogy for the spiritual life. The believer needs spiritual food to grow

and be filled with the Spirit. In order to get from carnality to spirituality, the Corinthians would need to be nourished with spiritual food. First they would need to feed on milk regularly (the basics), and once they had grown and developed enough on the milk of the Word, they would then be ready for the meat, which would enable them to advance to a mature stage of spiritual development. The point is clear. To advance from carnality to spirituality, requires “eating” and “digesting” the milk of the Word. This enables the believer to grow and gain the capacity to “digest” the meat of the Word. This happens as a *process of development*, over time, as the believer feeds on the Word daily. To become spiritual cannot be attained instantly. Let us consider Paul’s use of the word “spiritual” in the following scriptures:

1 Cor 2:15 *But he that is spiritual judgeth all things, yet he himself is judged of no man.*

Gal 6:1 *Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such a one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted.*

Paul could hardly make such statements about any believer who was merely “confessed up”! To judge all things and to restore a backsliding brother requires maturity.

Just as with physical growth, one must eat to grow, and so it is in the realm of spiritual growth. In the physical realm, the baby begins by digesting milk, and through the process of digesting milk over a period of time, he grows through the various stages of physical development until he can digest meat. As he feeds on meat, he moves on to adulthood. Through continuously digesting meat, he becomes fully developed as a man into physical maturity. It is the same with the spiritual life. Believers cannot go from a state of carnality to a state of spirituality in an instant of time, any more than a three-month-old infant can instantly grow into adulthood by drinking a bottle of milk and swallowing a T-bone steak! It takes daily nourishment on milk and then meat over years of gradual growth, to develop from a newborn babe into an adult person. It is no different with the transition from carnality to spirituality.

Failure to consistently take in proper nourishment would severely hinder the development of an infant or child. In the same way, the failure to learn the Word of God and apply it regularly to the believer’s life would severely hinder his spiritual growth and development. Neglect of the Word of God would leave the believer in an abnormal and stunted condition of spiritual development. The result of such sloth and neglect would be a carnal condition with very little progress in conformity to Christ. This was the exact state of these Corinthian believers. The remedy for them would not be to confess their sins and jump into an instant state of spirituality. That is ridiculous!

It is important to note that with all the carnality at Corinth, Paul never gave one admonition, in two epistles to this church, commanding anyone to “rebound” (confess sins), in order to be “forgiven,” “restored to fellowship,” or “filled with the Spirit.” Why? Because 1 John 1:9 has nothing to do with the filling of the Spirit! There is no reason whatsoever to connect 1 John 1:9 to Ephesians 5:18. As we have demonstrated in our publication *Rethinking Rebound*, 1 John 1:9 is not addressing a believer’s spirituality, but is dealing with the unbeliever who denies that he sins and therefore denies his need for a Savior. There is no need for a born-again child of God, whose sins have been washed away forever by the redeeming blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, to seek a second

forgiveness for each sin after he has been saved. Every believer is already completely forgiven and in permanent fellowship with God (Colossians 2:13-14, 1 Corinthians 1:9, 1 Peter 2:9).

For the Corinthians to become spiritual, would take time and effort in learning the Word and applying it by faith in their lives. No act of “rebound,” “absolute surrender,” or speaking in tongues could make them suddenly spiritual. Such an approach is totally unscriptural and ignores the context of Paul’s teaching completely, replacing it with the arbitrary inferences and opinions of men.

At this point in our study we should interject that in the Book of Acts we observe that there is a special immediate endowment of power from the Holy Spirit upon believers who are called to specific tasks of preaching and witnessing. This sovereign moving of the Holy Spirit was instantaneous and lasted as long as God’s purpose for bestowing it required. They had all been baptized by the Spirit when they believed, and at various times they experienced this special filling to serve the Lord. It was not something under the control of believers. There were no conditions mentioned to receive it, in the sense of a specific act to be performed by the believer. This particular ministry of the Spirit was simply given to believers with an obedient heart, who were willing to serve the Lord, when they needed it. It was simply God giving what is necessary to His witnesses at the moment to accomplish His purpose. Believers were not commanded to seek after it, nor were any conditions laid out by God through the apostles in order to attain it. This was as the Lord Jesus had foretold them when He commissioned His first disciples to bear witness to the Gospel of the Kingdom. He told them it would not be they that spoke, but the Spirit at work in them speaking His Word.

Matt 10:18-20 *And ye shall be brought before governors and kings for my sake, for a testimony against them and the Gentiles. But when they deliver you up, take no thought how or what ye shall speak: for it shall be given you in that same hour what ye shall speak. For it is not ye that speak, but the Spirit of your Father which speaketh in you.*

As they were called to a special task, they would receive a special enablement of the Spirit filling them to accomplish God’s will. This will also be true during the Seventieth Week of Daniel when the Body of Christ will bare witness to the Gospel under the great persecution led by the Antichrist. The scope of Matthew chapter ten goes beyond the preaching of the Gospel of the Kingdom to include the Second Advent of Christ (Matthew 10:21-23 cf. Matthew 24:9-14). Whenever God’s children are called to endure testing or perform tasks that are beyond the level of human strength, the indwelling Spirit is at work in them to faithfully supply the strength and enablement to meet their need. This supernatural experience of the enabling power of the sovereign Spirit is especially manifested in believers when they are called upon to suffer for the Gospel of Christ. Note the Apostle Peter’s words:

1 Peter 4:12-14 *Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you: but rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy. If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye; for the Spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you: on their part he is evil spoken of, but on*

your part he is glorified.

Peter makes it clear that there is a special enabling power given to those who suffer for Christ. He declares that “the *spirit of glory* resteth upon you” to those who endure undeserved fiery trials for Christ’s sake. This special supply of the Spirit for those who are suffering for Christ is not to be sought by meeting certain conditions. It is supplied faithfully by God in grace, whenever the need arises, for His children. We are to simply trust Him to provide when we need Him. There are no conditions to be met. The only condition is that we are saved children of God. If we are His blood-bought children, He will faithfully supply, in grace, our need of the enabling strength of the indwelling Spirit. Praise the Lord! He is always faithful to supply what we need. He will never forsake those that believe in Him (Hebrews 13:5, Romans 8:31-39).

In the Book of Acts we observe that this special filling of the Spirit is accompanied by speaking in tongues, signs, wonders, prophecy, and bold, joyful witness to the Gospel.

Acts 1:8 *But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.*

Acts 2:4 *And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.*

Acts 4:8 *Then Peter, filled with the Holy Ghost, said unto them, Ye rulers of the people, and elders of Israel...*

Acts 4:31 *And when they had prayed, the place was shaken where they were assembled together; and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and they spake the word of God with boldness.*

Acts 7:55 *But he, being full of the Holy Ghost, looked up steadfastly into heaven, and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God.*

Acts 13:9-10 *Then Saul, (who also is called Paul,) filled with the Holy Ghost, set his eyes on him, and said, O full of all subtlety and all mischief, thou child of the devil, thou enemy of all righteousness, wilt thou not cease to pervert the right ways of the Lord?*

Acts 13:52 *And the disciples were filled with joy, and with the Holy Ghost.*

As we can see from these passages, this filling of power with its accompanying overt manifestations was a sovereign working of the Spirit. This was not the usual work of the Spirit in the believer, but a special empowerment for service and testimony to the Gospel. It was given for the disciples to testify to the rebellious nation of Israel, as well as to testify of the revelation of the mystery doctrine of the Church to the Gentiles. Acts is a transitional book. The transition is between God’s program for Israel, which is being set aside for an age, and the beginning of His program for the new revelation of the mystery

of the Body of Christ, of Jew and Gentile alike. Note very carefully that there is absolutely no mention of certain conditions to be met, requiring specific acts to be performed by the believers, for this filling of power to be manifested. It was simply a sovereign working of God according to His purpose of testifying to the new revelation of the truth of the Gospel, to Jew and Gentile.

At a unique period of time, when God was inaugurating a new program for this age, He exercised His sovereignty and His Spirit moved to fill His servants with the power necessary to accomplish the service to which He had called them. It was not because they met certain conditions of “rebound,” “surrender,” or “holiness of life,” but it was a sovereign move of God’s Spirit within them to empower them supernaturally. This unique filling of the Spirit was instantaneous, but it was not based on conditions such as those imposed on us by religionists today. It did not necessarily require previous spiritual growth over a long period of time; the believer who received it simply had to have an obedient heart, ready to serve the Lord. It was supernatural empowerment and enablement for service and testimony, bestowed by the Spirit when needed. It was under the sovereign control of the Spirit when and where He so willed to move in this manner. This type of instant filling of power revealed in Acts was not what Paul was speaking of in Ephesians 5:18, when admonishing the Ephesians to “be filled with the Spirit.” In the passages from Acts that we have noted, the filling was a sovereign moving upon the believer, rather than a command to the believer. In Ephesians 5:18 the filling is a command to the believer to grow spiritually, as we have noted already. The “filling” of Ephesians 5:18 is the result of spiritual growth; it is not an instantaneous condition attained by meeting certain conditions, neither is it an instant, sovereign move of the Spirit. Indeed, Paul lays out no such conditions in the passage in Ephesians. To equate these separate fillings of the Spirit in these two books is to ignore the context and the distinctiveness of the working of the Spirit that is clearly set forth in the transitional book of Acts and the Church Age epistle of Ephesians.

We should also note that there are several other passages in Acts that use the phrase “full of the Spirit” in the same sense that Paul commanded in Ephesians 5:18. Again, as always, *context* defines the usage and meaning of terms, as well as comparing scripture with scripture. Note that in the context of the following verses, being “full of the Spirit” is synonymous with spiritual growth and the development of Christ-likeness:

Acts 6:3 *Wherefore, brethren, look ye out among you seven men of honest report, **full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom**, whom we may appoint over this business.*

Acts 6:5 *And the saying pleased the whole multitude: and they chose Stephen, a man **full of faith and of the Holy Ghost**, and Philip, and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicolas a proselyte of Antioch.*

Acts 11:24 *For he was a good man, and **full of the Holy Ghost and of faith**: and much people was added unto the Lord.*

When compared to Acts 1:8, 2:4, 4:31, 7:55, and 13:52, we can discern that in the verses above, the expression “full of the Spirit,” is referring to the *character* of the men involved, and not an immediate imputation of power by the Spirit. To be “full of the

Spirit” in these verses is an expression of the *quality* of these men’s lives. They were “full of the Spirit” because they were men whose faith had developed and who had grown to manifest Christ-like qualities and character in their lives. Here the phrase “full of the Spirit” is clearly equivalent to the term “spiritual” as Paul uses it in 1 Corinthians 3:1-4. When the writer of Acts, Luke the physician, says they were “full of the Spirit,” in context he meant they were spiritually mature men who had grown into Christ-like character by the grace of God and knowledge of His Word. Here Luke is in accord with Paul’s statement in Ephesians 5:18. Remember, Luke the physician was Paul’s traveling companion, and we would expect him to understand the “filling of the Spirit” in the same sense that Paul expressed in Ephesians and throughout his epistles.

Another passage that often troubles uninstructed believers is Luke 11:13 where the Lord Jesus Christ instructs the disciples, prior to Pentecost and the coming of the promised Holy Spirit, to ask for the Holy Spirit: *“If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children: how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask Him?”* This passage must be understood dispensationally to avoid falling into the error of asking for the Holy Spirit in the Church Age. This verse is spoken by the Lord Jesus Christ prior to the Cross, resurrection, and ascension. This is prior to the day of Pentecost and the descent of the Holy Spirit as Jesus had promised them (John 7:37-39, 14:26, 15:26, 16:13-15; Acts 1:8). At Pentecost and thereafter, the Spirit would be poured out on all believers. This would be the norm for everyone who by faith accepts Christ as their Savior. Upon believing in Christ they would receive the Spirit: *“He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water. (But this he spake of the Spirit, which they that believe on him should receive; for the Holy Ghost was not yet given; because that Jesus was not yet glorified.)”* (John 7:38-39).

When our Lord gave His instructions to the disciples in Luke 11:13, they were still under the dispensation of Israel and the Gospel of the Kingdom. In the Old Testament, the Spirit was given to certain believers performing special service. This ministry could be lost through carnality, as we see in David’s words in Psalm 51:11, *“Cast me not away from thy presence; and take not thy holy spirit from me.”* And in the Gospels, prior to the day of Pentecost, though the Holy Spirit had not officially been given, individual believers could have asked for the Spirit and received it in answer to prayer. However, in this dispensation of grace, no believer has to ask for the Spirit, for the Spirit is given as a seal to all believers when they are saved (Ephesians 1:13-14).

As we compare scripture with scripture, we recognize that Paul’s admonition to be filled with the Spirit in Ephesians 5:18 is not some absolute condition that changes moment by moment in the believer’s life. The believer is not spiritual one moment when certain conditions are met, then carnal the next moment when the conditions are neglected. This see-saw experience is not the picture of the spiritual life set forth in the Bible. Believers are not in and out of spirituality and carnality moment by moment in their walk with the Lord. Departing from carnality and becoming a spiritual believer is the process of growth whereby Christ is formed in the believer.

Gal 4:19 *My little children, of whom I travail in birth again until Christ be formed in you...*

Note how Paul speaks of the formation of Christ in the Galatian believers, who were being troubled by legalistic teachers. He says that he will have to “travail in birth again until Christ is formed” in them. He uses the analogy of a woman going through the painful process of giving birth to describe the exertion of effort he will put forth in prayer and teaching on behalf of the Galatians, that they may grow to Christ-likeness. Paul knows that the transition from carnality to spirituality is a process that requires exertion and effort and struggle against the flesh, the old sin nature. He is not under any illusion that the carnal state of the Galatians can be changed into a spiritual state instantly by confession of sin, surrender, speaking in tongues, or any other experience. Spiritual growth, which is the formation of Christ in the believer, is a process that takes time and effort at learning the Word and applying it by faith.

Although Christ and the Spirit indwell every believer’s body (Colossians 1:27, 1 Corinthians 6:19-20), no believer is instantly spiritual as a result of these great truths. Even with the indwelling of Christ and the Spirit, it still requires time and effort to have Christ “formed in you.” As appealing as the idea of instant spirituality is to some, it simply is not true. Every believer when first “born again,” experiences the carnal baby stage of spirituality. Through growth in grace over time, the believer gradually moves beyond the baby stage of carnality into greater levels of spirituality and maturity. Sadly, believers who neglect the Word of God, which nourishes their spiritual growth, remain in a carnal condition of stunted growth, some after being saved for many years. Scripture as well as experience teach us that to exit carnality and become spiritual (filled with the Spirit) is the result of a process of spiritual growth that requires time in the believer’s life. For every believer, the time required will be different depending on the condition of the heart and willingness to submit to the process of growth that God has designed for them to pass through.

At this point of our study of Ephesians 5:18, we can confidently state that Paul was not speaking of an instantly attained state of spirituality. Paul was not talking about an absolute condition of spirituality, i.e., “Either you are completely controlled by the Spirit or you are completely controlled by the old sin nature.” A question here, for those who hold to the filling of the Spirit conditioned on “rebound” (the constant confession of sin), arises. If the filling of the Holy Spirit is an *absolute state* wherein the Spirit is in control of the believer, how is it possible for the believer to sin when “filled” and “controlled” by the Spirit?

The very fact that believers still sin demonstrates conclusively to any open heart that *the filling of the Spirit is not an absolute state of control by the Spirit*. If the filling were an absolute condition with the Spirit in control, it would be impossible for the believer to sin. The fact that a believer can be filled with the Spirit and still sin, demonstrates clearly that being filled with the Spirit is not an absolute state, but rather a process of spiritual growth. Indeed, spiritually mature believers are not without sin. Though they may have grown in many areas and gained a measure of victory over sinful tendencies, spiritual believers still sin and fail and are admonished to be watchful.

1 Cor 10:12 *Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall.*

Also note the Apostle Paul’s struggle with the flesh, which he records in Romans 7:18-25. This was written by Paul many years after being saved. He was certainly a spiritual

believer but was aware of the constant struggle with the flesh. Paul was certainly filled with the Spirit and Christ-like, yet he was prone to weakness and sin if not watchful and humbly dependent on the power of Christ. Since sin is still possible for those who are “filled with the Spirit,” it cannot be an absolute state attained by confessing sins. This is further demonstrated by the fact that throughout his entire dissertation on his struggle against the flesh, Paul never once mentions confession of sins.

Another command that is closely related to Ephesians 5:18 is Galatians 5:16, “*Walk in the Spirit.*” To “walk in the Spirit” means to walk with our focus on the things of the spiritual life. It means to conduct our lives with our focus on Christ and His Word. This leads to spiritual growth and results in the believer being “filled with the Spirit.” Notice that walking in the Spirit produces the nine-fold “fruit of the Spirit,” which is Christ-like character formed in the believer.

Gal 5:22-23 *But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance: against such there is no law.*

The result of a continual walk in the Spirit is the manifestation of the “fruit of the Spirit.” The “fruit of the Spirit” (love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, and temperance) is the image or character of Christ wrought in the believer by the Holy Spirit. To manifest the fruit of the Spirit is the result of the process of spiritual growth. As the fruit of the Spirit is being developed in the believer to varying degrees, he is being filled with conformity to Christ. Being filled with Christ is being “filled with the Spirit.” When a believer is manifesting the Christ-like character of the “fruit of the Spirit,” he is “spiritual.”

Paul uses the analogy of growing fruit to describe spirituality in this passage. Now note carefully that fruit requires *time* to be produced. For fruit to grow to fullness of *quality* requires a process of time. It requires sunlight, water, nutrients, and nourishment from the soil, as well as pruning when necessary by the farmer. Again, growing fruit is the analogy that Paul uses to describe Biblical spirituality. This is a process of growth over time. Fruit does not grow instantly in the soil. The same is true with the fruit of the Spirit. No believer instantly manifests the fruit of the Spirit, which is Christ formed in the believer. It requires time and growth for the nine-fold fruit of Christ-likeness to be manifested in the believer.

Paul never taught instant spirituality. Being “filled with the Spirit” is the result of spiritual growth. It requires time, learning the Word, discipline, testing, and experience, just as growing fruit from the ground requires time, pruning, water, sunlight, and nourishment from the soil. The Holy Spirit inside every believer is at work continually to accomplish this process of spiritual growth that will result in the “filling of the Spirit.” Paul chose the analogy of growing fruit to illustrate to us that Biblical spirituality is not an instantaneous achievement but is attained through a process of growth in grace.

In summarizing this section on Biblical spirituality we can conclude with these thoughts. Carnality and spirituality are not instantly attained, absolute states. Carnality and spirituality are levels of spiritual growth (or spiritual immaturity) related to knowledge and application of the Word of God (1 Corinthians 3:1-4 cf. Hebrews 5:11-14). The filling of the Spirit is not the Spirit gaining a state of “control” over the believer, but rather the Spirit filling the believer up with Christ as the believer grows in grace. The

Holy Spirit has taken up residence in the believer to do the work that the Father has appointed—transforming the believer into Christ’s image. The Holy Spirit is always at work in us until the day we go home in the likeness of Christ.

Rom 8:29 *For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to **be conformed to the image of his Son**, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren.*

2 Cor 3:18 *But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed **into the same image** from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord.*

1 John 3:1-2 *Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God: therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not. Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, **we shall be like him**; for we shall see him as he is.*

There is one who indwells every believer, the blessed Comforter, the Holy Spirit. He is the third person of the Trinity who came to do a work in us, and He never stops working, even when we “quench” and “grieve” Him with our rebellion. He prays for us continually (Romans 8:26-27), and He will finish the work that He came to accomplish in us according to the Father’s will.

Psalms 138:8a *The LORD will perfect that which concerneth me.*

Isa 14:27 *For the LORD of hosts hath purposed, and who shall disannul it? and his hand is stretched out, and who shall turn it back?*

Isa 46:9-11 *Remember the former things of old: for I am God, and there is none else; I am God, and there is none like me, declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done, saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure: calling a ravenous bird from the east, the man that executeth my counsel from a far country: yea, I have spoken it, I will also bring it to pass; I have purposed it, I will also do it.*

Phil 1:6 *Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ.*

Dear reader, do not focus your spiritual life on trying to be “filled with the Spirit” by your efforts to meet conditions that are not scriptural. Stop wearying yourself by trying to attain the elusive cure-all for spiritual health. You need not constantly confess, confess, and confess. You do not have to follow a legalistic set of taboos and rules to become holy enough to be filled. It is not by seeking an emotional experience or speaking in tongues that will cause you to be filled with the Spirit. All these *conditions* are subtle deceptions because they distract you from the one true focus of the believer’s spiritual life—**occupation with Christ** through the Word of God. Dear reader, simply focus your heart on Christ through the Word, and the Holy Spirit will do the rest! He will faithfully do in

you that which you cannot do for yourself. Keep your focus on Christ, and as you grow, you will be filled with the Spirit.

4 Filled with the Word of Christ

The filling of the Spirit in the believer's life is the result of the continuing process of spiritual growth into the image of Christ. The Word of God, which is the nourishment for spiritual growth, is the key to being "filled with the Spirit." The believer's attitude toward the Word of God daily will determine if the believer will grow and be filled to greater and greater degrees of conformity to Christ by the Spirit. If the condition of the believer's heart is right towards learning and applying the Word of God to his life daily, he will grow out of carnal infancy into spiritual adulthood. If the believer neglects the Word of God daily, he will wallow in the stage of carnality as a babe in Christ until he becomes serious about learning and applying the Word of God.

As the believer is filled with the Word of God, being a doer and not just a hearer, he will be "filled with the Spirit." His focus will be Christ, and the indwelling Spirit will form Christ in him, as he feeds on the milk and the meat of the Word, resulting in the process of spiritual growth. As there are degrees of spiritual development and growth, so also there are degrees of the filling of the Spirit. To the degree the believer grows into the image of Christ he is filled by the Spirit. The Spirit's work through the process of spiritual growth is to fill the believer up with Christ. He comes to put more and more of Christ into the believer as the believer grows in the grace and knowledge of Christ by the Word.

The believer's growth will depend on daily intake of the Word of God. A word of caution is called for here. There are no *shortcuts* in this process. Spiritual growth cannot be **forced**. It will take time and experience to grow and be filled. Spiritual growth, the progressive filling of the Spirit, is the **natural** result of occupation with Christ through the Word. Do not get caught in the trap of striving to force spiritual growth by rushing to attain mere knowledge of doctrine alone. Knowledge of the Word alone does not equal growth. It is the application of the Word over *time* and *experience* that produces spiritual growth. The Lord has a plan for each one of His children. He alone knows what is necessary for our growth. He will lead us onward, and in His time and way, He will fill us. For our part, we are to rest in Him, our crucified and risen Lord. Ours is to simply seek Him in the Word faithfully. He will produce the growth in us by the indwelling Spirit. It will be **natural** and **unforced**. Do not be fretful, anxious, or discouraged. Simply focus on Christ through the Word of God daily. It is the Holy Spirit's job to fill you. Yours is to humbly submit to the Word of God faithfully.

Sadly, so many today are seeking to be filled by the Spirit while neglecting the Word. This only leads to spiritual bondage, frustration, and deeper carnality. In order to avoid the dangers and pitfalls into which many have fallen while seeking to be filled with the Spirit, remember Paul's admonition in Galatians 5:16, "Walk in the Spirit and you shall not fulfill the lusts of the flesh." Seeking a shortcut to true spirituality through tongues, confession, or total surrender is nothing more than the flesh lusting after the power of the Spirit without the willingness to endure the process of the Spirit's working, through the Word and experience over time. To "walk in the Spirit" is to walk by faith in the person of Christ through feeding on the Word of God continually. To walk by faith, to

walk in the Spirit, means to be occupied with Christ in the Word continually. Compare the following verses:

2 Cor 3:18 *But we all, with open face **beholding as in a glass** the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord.*

James 1:22-25 *But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves. For if any be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto **a man beholding his natural face in a glass**: for he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was. But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed.*

Paul tells us in 2 Corinthians 3:18 that as we behold Christ as in a glass (mirror), we are changed into His image by the Holy Spirit's work in us. From the context of the passage in James we learn that the "glass" into which we look is the "perfect law of liberty," or in other words, the Word of grace that governs the believer's life. Being filled with the Spirit is conformity to the image of Christ. Here in 2 Corinthians 3:18, Paul tells us that this filling up the believer with Christ is the natural result of the Spirit's work in the believer, as he beholds Christ continually through the Word.

Another passage that clearly teaches us that the fullness of the Spirit is a result of being filled with the Word of Christ is Ephesians 3:14-19.

Eph 3:14-19 *For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, that he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might **by his Spirit** in the inner man; **that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith**; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be **filled with all the fullness of God**.*

Note that Paul's prayer for believers is that they would be "filled" (*pleroo*) with all the fullness of God. The believer will be filled with this fullness of God, which is synonymous with being filled with the Spirit, through having "Christ dwell in your hearts by faith." How does Christ dwell in the believer's heart by faith? Romans 10:17 tells us, "Faith cometh by hearing and hearing by the Word of God." Christ dwells in the believer's heart and fills the believer's life through the Word of God deposited in the believer's heart and soul. Again, through the process of focusing the heart on the Word of God, we are told that the believer is filled with the fullness of God, synonymous with the filling of the Spirit. Note that it is the Spirit that works out this process of filling the believer, through the Word, in the inner man.

In John 6:63, the Lord Jesus tells us that his very words are "*spirit and life*." The words of Christ are the nourishment of the believer's spiritual life and the key to being "filled with the Spirit." Note that the "words" of Christ are "spirit." To be filled with Christ's words, which are "spirit," is to be "filled with the Spirit." The Bible and the ministry gifts of the Word are given by God to bring believers to maturity and the

“fullness of Christ.”

Eph 4:11-13 *And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, **unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.***

To be occupied with Christ through the Word, or to be filled with the Word of Christ, is to be “filled with the Spirit.”

A parallel passage to Ephesians 5:18 and its context is found in Colossians 3:16 and its context. A comparison of these two passages clearly illustrates that to “be filled with the Spirit” is exactly equivalent to the believer’s heart being filled with the Word of Christ. As we examine chapters three and four in Colossians and compare them with chapters four through six of Ephesians, we will note that Paul is dealing with the exact same principles concerning the believer’s spiritual life in Colossians and Ephesians. Let us compare the following verses:

Eph 4:31 <i>Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice.</i>	Col 3:8 <i>But now ye also put off all these; anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy communication out of your mouth.</i>
Eph 4:23 <i>And be renewed in the spirit of your mind.</i>	Col 3:10 <i>And have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him.</i>
Eph 4:25 <i>Wherefore putting away lying, speak every man truth with his neighbor: for we are members one of another.</i>	Col 3:9 <i>Lie not one to another, seeing that ye have put off the old man with his deeds.</i>
Eph 4:32 <i>And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ’s sake hath forgiven you.</i>	Col 3:12 <i>Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering.</i>
Eph 5:2 <i>And walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweetsmelling savour.</i>	Col 3:14 <i>And above all these things put on charity, which is the bond of perfectness.</i>
Eph 5:18b-19 ...Be filled with the Spirit: <i>speaking one to another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord.</i>	Col 3:16 Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly; <i>in all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts unto God.</i>
Eph 5:20 <i>Giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.</i>	Col 3:17 <i>And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him.</i>
Eph 5:21 <i>Submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God.</i>	Col 3:13 <i>Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye.</i>
Eph 5:22 <i>Wives submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord.</i>	Col 3:18 <i>Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as it is fit in the Lord.</i>
Eph 5:25 <i>Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it.</i>	Col 3:19 <i>Husbands, love your wives, and be not bitter against them.</i>
Eph 6:1 <i>Children, obey your parents in the Lord: for this is right.</i>	Col 3:20 <i>Children, obey your parents in all things for this is well pleasing unto the Lord.</i>

Eph 6:4 <i>And, ye fathers, provoke not your children, to wrath; but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.</i>	Col 3:21 <i>Fathers, provoke not your children to anger, lest they be discouraged.</i>
Eph 6:5-6 <i>Servants, be obedient to them that are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in singleness of your heart, as unto Christ.</i>	Col 3:22 <i>Servants, obey in all things your masters according to the flesh, not with eyeservice, as menpleasers; but in singleness of heart, fearing God.</i>
Eph 6:7 <i>With good will doing service, as to the Lord, and not to men.</i>	Col 3:23 <i>And whatever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men.</i>
Eph 6:8 <i>Knowing that whatsoever good thing any man doeth, the same shall he receive of the Lord, whether he be bond or free.</i>	Col 3:24-25 <i>Knowing that of the Lord ye shall receive the reward of the inheritance: for ye serve the Lord Christ. But he that doeth wrong shall receive for the wrong which he hath done: and there is no respect of persons.</i>
Eph 6:9 <i>And ye masters, do the same things unto them, forbearing threatening: knowing that your Master also is in heaven; neither is there respect of persons with him.</i>	Col 4:1 <i>Masters, give unto your servants that which is just and equal; knowing that ye also have a Master in heaven.</i>
Eph 6:18-20 <i>Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints. And for me, that utterance may be given unto me, that I may open my mouth boldly, to make known the mystery of the gospel.</i>	Col 4:2-4 <i>Continue in prayer, and watch in the same with thanksgiving; withal praying also for us, that God would open unto us a door of utterance, to speak the mystery of Christ, for which I am also in bonds.</i>
Eph 6:21-22 <i>But that ye also may know my affairs, and how I do, Tychicus, a beloved brother and faithful minister in the Lord, shall make known to you all things.</i>	Col 4:7-8 <i>All my state shall Tychicus declare unto you, who is a beloved brother, and a faithful minister and fellowservant in the Lord: whom I have sent unto you for the same purpose, that he might know your estate, and comfort your hearts.</i>

These two passages in Colossians and Ephesians are concurrent in their instructions. Paul is communicating the same thoughts concerning the spiritual life of the believer in both passages. There is only one notable difference in wording in these two parallel passages.

In Ephesians 5:18b-19, Paul's command is:

Be filled with the Spirit, speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart unto the Lord.

In Colossians 3:16, his command is:

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another, in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts unto the Lord.

The only difference in these verses is that the command to "let the word of Christ dwell in you richly" is substituted for "be filled with the Spirit." The rest of these verses and passages are identical in their scope and admonitions, in both Colossians and Ephesians. This is very significant and we must take note, for the Holy Spirit who inspired Scripture

chooses His words very carefully to communicate God's truth to us. Here is a true "synonym" (different words with the same meaning). Colossians 3:16, "**Let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly,**" is quite clearly a synonym for Ephesians 5:18, "**Be filled with the Spirit.**" These two verses are communicating the same instruction in different words, and the correlation between everything else in these passages is obvious.

What is God telling us through these different phrases used in the midst of these two identical passages? What is the significance of this change in wording in Colossians 3:16 from what was said in Ephesians 5:18? The significance is this—Colossians 3:16 is not any different than Ephesians 5:18 in its meaning. "*Let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly*" is synonymous with "*be filled with the Spirit.*" It is as simple as it is clear. God is revealing to us that to "be filled with the Spirit" means to be filled with the Word of Christ as we are conformed to His image!

The comparison of these two passages confirms again for us that the command to "be filled with the Spirit" is not an instant state of spirituality, based on meeting certain fixed, rigid, absolutist conditions. Rather, it is referring to the process of spiritual growth into Christ's image, accomplished in the believer through the Word of God. This is all by the work of the indwelling Holy Spirit. Being "filled with the Spirit" is the result of conformity to Christ through spiritual growth in the believer's life. From our study of all the pertinent scriptures we can confidently state at the close of this chapter that true Biblical spirituality is growing into the image of Christ through the Word of God. This conclusion harmonizes completely with all Scripture, as it is compared with the New Testament epistles and the eternal purpose of God. To be spiritual, to be "filled with the Spirit," is the result of the process of spiritual growth in the believer's life, as he grows in the grace and knowledge of Christ over time.

Conclusion

Dear reader, as we close this our study of the “filling of the Spirit,” we have been reminded again that true Biblical spirituality is a process of spiritual growth daily over *time* in the believer’s life. The focus of the spiritual life for the believer is Christ Himself, our risen Lord. Our focus is not to seek some experience of power or the supernatural, such as speaking in tongues. It is not following legalistic taboos to make ourselves more holy so the Spirit can fill us. And it is not to mechanically go through the motions of constant confession of sins to stay spiritual. We are not filled with the Spirit by continually practicing “rebound, rebound, and rebound.” We are not to seek the filling of the Spirit as something separate from our spiritual growth. We are to seek Christ in the Word. We are to be occupied with Christ continually and our exalted position in union with Him. If we are *seeking Christ*, then the Spirit will indeed fill us with Christ.

Heb 12:2 *Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.*

Let us fix our hearts on knowing Christ through the Word. Our daily goal should be to simply enjoy fellowship with Him as we learn and obey the Word of God. It is the Holy Spirit’s work to reveal Christ to our hearts through the Word. He did not come to testify of Himself but to testify of and to glorify Christ. To be filled with Christ, as our object and life, is to be filled with the Spirit. God’s purpose of making the believer conformed to Christ’s image will be accomplished through the work of the indwelling Spirit and the Word of God. We need not be discouraged, for the Spirit will faithfully perform the task He has come to accomplish, which is to fill us.

Dear reader, if you are focused on the Lord Jesus through the Word and are falling in love with Him, you are being filled with the Spirit, despite your weaknesses and failures. God’s Spirit is always at work in you to form Christ in you. Get your eyes off yourself and fix them on Jesus in the Word, and His great love and care for you will become more precious to your heart. The emphasis in the New Testament is on a walk of faith that produces spiritual growth in the believer. Keep the eyes of your faith upon the Lord Jesus through learning and applying the Word of God daily, and you shall indeed “be filled with the Spirit”!