

## Are You Filled With the Spirit?

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### Acts 2:1-18, 22-24, 33, 36-39 ESV

When the day of Pentecost arrived, they were all together in one place. And suddenly there came from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. And divided tongues as of fire appeared to them and rested on each one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance.

Now there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men from every nation under heaven. And at this sound the multitude came together, and they were bewildered, because each one was hearing them speak in his own language. And they were amazed and astonished, saying, "Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? And how is it that we hear, each

of us in his own native language? Parthians and Medes and Elamites and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabians—we hear them telling in our own tongues the mighty works of God." And all were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, "What does this mean?" But others mocking said, "They are filled with new wine."

But Peter, standing with the eleven, lifted up his voice and addressed them: "Men of Judea and all who dwell in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and give ear to my words. For these people are not drunk, as you suppose, since it is only the third hour of the day. But this is what was uttered through the prophet Joel: 'And in the last days it shall be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams; even on my male servants and female servants in those days I will pour out my Spirit, and they shall prophesy. . . . And it shall come to pass that everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.'

"Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs that God did through him in your midst, as you yourselves know — this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men. God raised him up, loosing the pangs of death, because it was not possible for him to be held by it. . . . Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this that you yourselves are seeing and hearing. . . . Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified."

Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do?" And Peter said to them, "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself."

### Ephesians 5:15-21 ESV

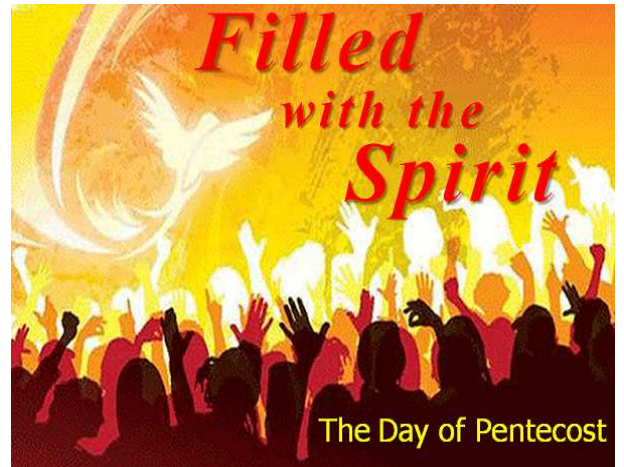
Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, 16 making the best use of the time, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit, addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart, giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ.

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Today is the day known as Pentecost, when we recall how the Holy Spirit first came upon the apostles, fifty days after Jesus' resurrection from the dead. That's what the name "Pentecost" means in Greek — "fifty days." The Hebrew name for this festival is *Shavuot*, "Weeks," or seven weeks after Passover plus one day. Pentecost is one of the three annual festivals ordained by Moses, so on this day there were Jews and proselytes, or Gentile converts, from all over the ancient world who had come to Jerusalem to observe the ceremonies. Luke

lists the nations in his description, and the many nations are important to his account because the sign of Pentecost was that people from all these nations heard the apostles speaking in their own language — even though, as they recognized, Peter and his associates were all Galileans who spoke a dialect of Aramaic.

What happened at Pentecost? As you recall, after his resurrection Jesus continued to appear to his followers for forty days, teaching them about the kingdom of God — the new creation he had come to set in motion. But on the fortieth day Jesus was taken into a cloud, as the disciples looked on, and two men in white appeared promising that he would return “in like manner.” That event is what we know as the Ascension, which proclaims the rule of Jesus over all creation from the throne of the Father. At his Ascension, Jesus commanded the disciples to spread the good news of his resurrection to all creation, but until Pentecost they had not done so. It was on the Day of Pentecost that Peter, speaking for the apostles, first announced to the people gathered in Jerusalem that Jesus had been raised from the dead, and therefore “God has made him both Lord and Messiah, this Jesus whom you crucified” (Acts 2:36).



What was the evidence the apostles presented that Jesus was, indeed, alive? As Luke reports it, “they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance” (Acts 2:4). Explaining this, Peter tells his audience, “Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this that you yourselves are seeing and hearing” (Acts 2:33). In other words, the coming of the Holy Spirit upon the followers of Jesus, and their speaking in other tongues, is the evidence that Jesus has been raised, is exalted as Ruler of all, and is alive today.

*Who is the Holy Spirit?*

- The evidence that Jesus is alive!
- Not a “part” of God.
- A “person” (face) of God?

Luke’s account of Pentecost states that the apostles “were all filled with the Holy Spirit.” Paul, writing to the Ephesians, indicates that the mark of the full Christian life is to be filled with the Holy Spirit, as were the apostles. “Do not get drunk with wine,” he says, “but be filled with the Spirit” (Ephesians 5:18). So what does it mean to be filled with the Spirit, and when does it happen? As to the second part of this question, some teachers claim all Christians are filled with the Holy Spirit when they come to Jesus and give

their lives to him. Others teach that the filling of the Holy Spirit occurs in what they call a “second work of grace,” so that we might be a believer in Jesus for some time before receiving the “baptism in the Holy Spirit.” I don’t think it’s profitable to argue a question like that, because I believe it reveals a misunderstanding of who the Holy Spirit is. So let’s take up that question.

Next Sunday is Trinity Sunday, the one Christian special day devoted to a doctrine rather than an event in the life of Jesus and his church. I won’t be teaching on the Trinity next week, because we’ll have a guest speaker instead. But just let me clarify a thing or two about it. First of all, the Holy Spirit isn’t a “part” of God, since Christian teaching has always understood that God doesn’t have “parts.” We use the expression of three “persons” of the Trinity, but the word “person” doesn’t mean three individuals; it’s derived from the Latin term *persona* which refers to a mask worn by an actor to play a certain character. So, in that understanding, the Holy Spirit is one of the “faces” (we could say) by which we recognize God. But we shouldn’t get hung up on the number “three,” because there’s no essential difference between Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. In fact, the apostle Paul specifically tells the Corinthians, “Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into

the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit" (2 Corinthians 3:17-18). We could hardly find a better statement of the fact that we can't explain the Trinity by dividing God up into parts!

How, then, can we speak of the Holy Spirit? I would suggest that the Spirit is the life of God as he lives it in us and among us. In the Bible the word for "Spirit" is *ruach*, in Hebrew, and *pneuma*, in Greek. Both of these words also mean "breath" or "wind," and it's only the translator's judgment which way to render the word in English. To have the Holy Spirit is to have the breath of God's life in us. Now, when you stop to think about it, doesn't every living thing — doesn't *every created thing* in this universe — depend on God's life and activity?

Paul reminds the Athenian philosophers, in Acts 17, "In him we live and move and have our being . . . for we are indeed his offspring" (Acts 17:28). There is something fundamental to the very existence of all things that depends on God's activity — just as Hebrews says that the Son of God "upholds the universe by the word of his power" (Hebrews 1:3). What that "something" is could be a perplexing question for science. Physicists at the Large Hadron Collider in Switzerland are looking for what some call the "god particle" that gives matter to all other particles. Will they really find it? It may be that within the four dimensions of our space-time universe we will never observe that "word," or that "spirit," that

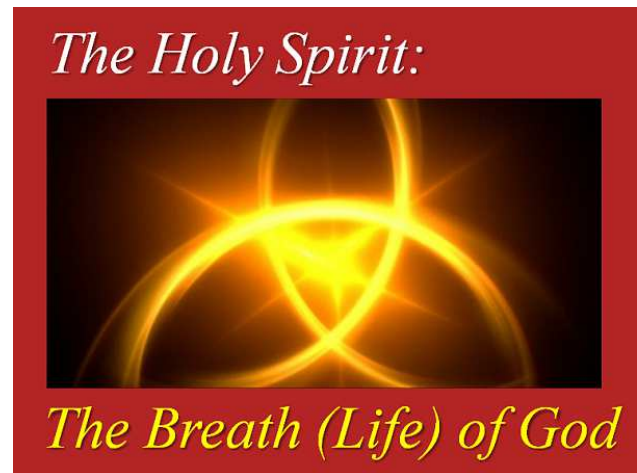


makes all existence possible, for it may reside in dimensions beyond the four to which we have access. But the "breath" of God is active around us and through us at all times, or we wouldn't be here and nothing else would be here either.

So back to our question: what does it mean to be filled with the Holy Spirit? Obviously, if the life of God is the basis for our life already, being "filled with the Spirit" means to lay aside whatever inhibition, or remove every blockage, that hinders the manifestation of God's life in ours. Now, that's a little different from the way some people talk about being filled with the Spirit. For example, if when a person comes to Jesus and they're said to be filled with the Spirit then, but people *don't see any change* in them, then both

salvation and being filled with the Spirit are nothing but a useless, even imaginary, "head trip." Let's be clear about this: in the Bible, *being spiritual isn't the same thing as being invisible!* If someone is filled with the Spirit of God, then this filling becomes visible in some kind of action, in the same way that in the creation — as Genesis tells it — "the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters" (Genesis 1:2) so that the heavens and the earth came to be what they're supposed to be.

So the first people the Bible says are "filled with the Spirit of God" are two men called Bezalel and Oholiab (Exodus 31:2). How did their actions reveal that they were Spirit-filled? They designed and crafted the Tabernacle, the tent in the wilderness, with its furnishings, where the Lord met with his people. Their being filled with the Spirit was manifested *in their creativity*. The Book of Judges tells us that the Spirit of the Lord took possession of Gideon, and he led Israel in victory over the Midianites; likewise Othniel and Jephthah were Spirit-filled warriors. The Spirit of the Lord came upon Samson, of all people — a man who fooled around with women and wasn't the greatest example of pious behavior. That shows us that being filled with the Spirit doesn't always make you a nice person! The same is said of King Saul, who fell into a kind of prophetic trance when the Spirit came upon him (1 Samuel 10:10). I can cite other examples from Scripture, but the point I'm making is that when someone is filled with the Holy Spirit it's not just something that happens inside your





head, as if it were like some kind of medicine you take such as aspirin. Instead, people can see it in your behavior.

The same is true in the New Testament. Whenever the Book of Acts tells us that someone is filled with the Spirit, the Spirit's release is manifested in their actions. At Pentecost the apostles changed from being, perhaps, a covering band who had kept to themselves their message of Jesus' resurrection, into bold messengers of the gospel who spoke in other tongues and, what's more, proclaimed Jesus as Messiah in the very face of the people that had got him crucified. That's certainly a change in behavior!

Luke tells us, in chapter 4 of Acts, that Peter was again "filled with the Holy Spirit" and addressed the leaders of the Jewish community, explaining that it was the power of the risen Jesus that had healed a paralyzed man. "Let it be known to all of you and to all the people of Israel that by the

*People Filled With the Spirit*



**Gideon: Warrior For the Lord**



**Bezalel and Oholiab: Craftsmen of the Tabernacle**

*People Filled With the Spirit*



**The Household of the Roman Centurion Cornelius**



**The Apostles at Pentecost**

name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead — by him this man is standing before you well. This Jesus is the stone that was rejected by you, the builders, which has become the cornerstone. And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:10-12). Following that incident, the apostles gathered for prayer, and Luke tells us that "when they had prayed, the place in which they were gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and continued to speak the word of God with boldness" (Acts 4:31).


Going on through Acts, we read that Saul of Tarsus, having met the risen Jesus on the Damascus road, was filled with the Holy Spirit, regained his sight and began to proclaim Jesus as the Son of God (Acts 9:17-20). As Peter, in the house of the Roman centurion Cornelius, was preaching the risen Jesus as the Judge of all people, the Holy Spirit came upon the members of his audience — who weren't even Jews — and, Luke says, they spoke in tongues praising God, and were baptized (Luke 10:44-48). We could go on, but throughout Acts and the rest of the New Testament it's clear that whenever anyone is "filled with the Spirit" *something happens* to make that evident in their changed behavior.

There's nothing hidden, or private, or secret, about the work of the Holy Spirit. If you and I are filled with the Spirit, people will know it by what we say and by what we do. And all this is patterned after Jesus himself, who said at the beginning of his mission, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor" (Luke 4:18-19). As Peter summarizes what Jesus did in Acts 10:38, "God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power. He went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him."

Are you filled with the Spirit today? You can be, if you will drop whatever is blocking the manifestation of God's life in your life, and let that life — the risen life of Jesus — come forth. Remember, you and I wouldn't be here if the Spirit of God hadn't brought all things into being. So you already have the life of God in you; are you going to let it out, so that others can see it? Remember, you "live and move and have your being" in God, so you can't get away from his Spirit. As Psalm 139 puts it:

O LORD, you have searched me and known me!  
 You know when I sit down and when I rise up; you discern my thoughts from afar.  
 You search out my path and my lying down and are acquainted with all my ways.  
 Even before a word is on my tongue, behold, O LORD, you know it altogether.  
 You hem me in, behind and before, and lay your hand upon me.  
 Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high; I cannot attain it.  
 Where shall I go from your Spirit? Or where shall I flee from your presence?  
 If I ascend to heaven, you are there! If I make my bed in Sheol, you are there!  
 If I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea,  
 even there your hand shall lead me, and your right hand shall hold me.  
 If I say, "Surely the darkness shall cover me, and the light about me be night,"  
 even the darkness is not dark to you; the night is bright as the day, for darkness is as light with you (Psalm 139:1-12).

**We wouldn't be here if the Spirit of God hadn't brought all things into being . . .**



*"O LORD, you have searched me and known me! . . . Where shall I go from your Spirit? Or where shall I flee from your presence? . . . Even the darkness is not dark to you; the night is bright as the day, for darkness is as light with you."*  
 (Psalm 139:1, 7, 12)

If we can't get away from the Holy Spirit, how are we going to experience the release of that life of God within us so it can be said of us that we're filled with the Spirit? What's it going to look like when we let God's life, the resurrection life of Jesus, manifest itself in our behavior? Paul gives us some directions in Ephesians 5: Be filled with the Spirit, addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart, giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ (Ephesians 5:18-21).

*Specifics of Being Filled With the Spirit*  
**Ephesians 5:18-21**

- **Get together with other believers.**
- **Worship freely in song and prayer.**
- **Develop the habit of thanksgiving and praise.**
- **Consider the needs of others and look to their interests.**



These are pretty specific behaviors. First, get together with other believers because all these things require interaction with other people. Worship in song with Psalms, hymns, and "spiritual songs" which might just be free-flowing praise, maybe in another tongue. Have a heartfelt habit of thanksgiving and praise to God; Paul says to do that "in the name of our Lord Jesus," which means to do it as Jesus did it, as if you were one with Jesus himself (which you are, of course, through your baptism into him). And "submit to one another out of reverence for the Messiah." That is, always take into consideration that you're part of a body of believers with a responsibility to other members. As Paul says in Philippians 2:4, "Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others" — which

is part of what it means to "have the mind of Christ." Or, as he puts it in Galatians 6:2, "Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ." These are ways you and I can manifest the Spirit of God in our lives, and the neat thing is that the Spirit is already with us; we just have to let him out to do his work.

In his letters, Paul gives us a few lists of the things the Spirit gives us when we release that life of Jesus within us. Here's what he says in 1 Corinthians 12:

Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. For to one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the ability to distinguish between spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues.

How would you like to work out *your* being filled with the Holy Spirit? There are so many ways! Be creative and skilled in things that honor the Lord, like Bezalel and Oholiab. Be a warrior for the Lord, like Gideon and others, against the corrupt values of our culture. Give wise direction to others with the “word of wisdom”; bring out hidden truths about a situation with the “word of knowledge.” Exercise your faith in a special way in a challenging situation, extend healing prayer to those who need it, dare to command “miracles” or signs of God’s presence and activity. Speak prophetically, to uphold the word of the Lord; use your good judgment to “discern spirits” or hidden motives that might be causing difficulties in a situation. Pray in tongues, or interpret the utterances of others so people can add their “Amen” to the thanksgiving. Worship freely with singing and praise, with constant thanksgiving to God. And, above all, be considerate of the needs of others, especially fellow believers, and serve them unselfishly as a reflection of God’s own love for them.

This is the Pentecost message: Be filled with the Spirit. You already have the life of God, the life of the risen Jesus, within you. It’s time to let it come forth to do its work.

*Work out YOUR being filled with the Holy Spirit!*

- Honor the Lord with your creativity and skill.
- Do battle against values that oppose God’s way.
- Exercise special wisdom and insight God gives you.
- Apply your faith for healing and the signs of God’s presence.
- Stand up for the Word of the Lord.
- Expose hidden motives that cause problems.
- Pray in tongues, and interpret the thanksgiving.
- Worship freely, with constant praise and thanks.
- Serve others as a reflection of God’s love.



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