



(Part One)

How Can We Be Filled With The Holy Spirit?

When you read of the spiritual vibrancy in the life of the early church do you wonder, "Why is my life not like that? How can I live under the Spirit's influence?"

Conversion to Christ is something amazing: We receive the gracious gift of forgiveness and the Holy Spirit as a gift from God.

It is the Holy Spirit who then identifies us as God's children and is the deposit guaranteeing our future inheritance in heaven.

Without the Holy Spirit, we cannot belong to God. His is an essential ministry to all God's people. (Acts 2:38; Galatians 3:14; Ephesians 1:14; Romans 8:9)

Though every believer has been given the Holy Spirit, not every believer lives a Spirit-filled life. The instruction to "be filled with the Spirit" (Ephesians 5:18) was written to those who already had received the Holy Spirit.

Now, however, they were being instructed to display the presence of the Holy Spirit in their lives.

Several points need to be noted. **First**, the instruction to be filled with the Spirit is not optional; it is not something we can take or leave. It is imperative!

Second, unlike our conversion, which is unrepeatable (we cannot be born again and again and again), being filled with the Spirit is a continuous process throughout our lives. We are literally to keep on being filled with the Holy Spirit.

Third, being filled with the Spirit is not something that automatically happens to us; it is something we are responsible for appropriating as we co-operate with God, who is working in us.



How Can We Be Filled With The Spirit?

We become filled with the Spirit in the same way one becomes filled with wine – by continually drinking.

How this spiritual "drinking" is done can be seen in two examples given by our Lord. He said, "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled." (Matthew 5:6)

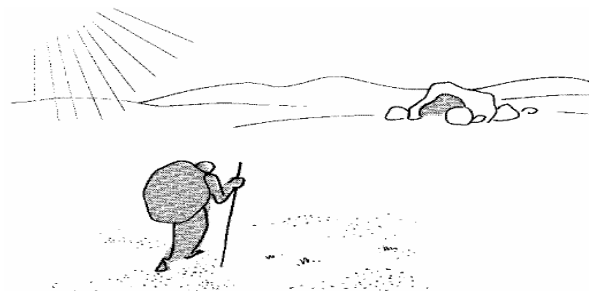


How do we hunger and thirst for righteousness?

Let me explain: We all experience hunger and thirst and, even when we are exhausted we will not rest until we have satisfied our cravings for food and drink.

The point Jesus is making is this: We are to pursue righteousness - the doing of the will of God - with the determination of a person pursuing food and drink. Only in the holy pursuit of God's will can we be satisfied.

This is why an appetite must be acquired for spiritual things. This is achieved by exposing ourselves to the will of God through our personal reading of his word, Bible study and prayer.



O God, I long for you;
like a dry, worn-out and waterless
land, my soul is thirsty for you.
(Psalm 63.1)

Satisfying Our Thirst

The Lord discusses the Spirit-filled life in the gospel of John: "On the last and greatest day of the feast, Jesus stood and said in a loud voice, 'If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him.' By this he meant the Spirit, whom those who believe in him were later to receive. Up to that time the Spirit had not been given, since Jesus had not yet been glorified." (John 7:37-39)

Jesus invites the thirsty to come to him and drink. **But who are the thirsty and how do they drink?**

The thirsty are those who desire to live for Jesus; they want his will done in their life. They desire to do the will of God on earth as it is done in heaven. They come to Jesus to "drink" and from within them flows "streams of living water".

This refers to the power of the Holy Spirit at work in their lives. And though their intake is small, their output is like streams of living water flowing from them. This is the Spirit giving a super-abundant display of his presence in their lives.

We are filled with the Spirit to the extent that we allow the Spirit to influence our lives. We yield to the Spirit's gentle movement in our heart: We "live by the Spirit", we are "led by the Spirit", we bear "the fruit of the Spirit" and we "keep in step with the Spirit". (Galatians 5:16, 18, 22, 25)

When we read what the Spirit wrote, hear what the Spirit says and do what the Spirit reveals we are being filled with the Spirit. (Revelation 1:11, 2:7; Colossians 3:16)



The Holy Evidence of a Spirit-Filled Life

How would you know if a person is filled with the Spirit?

What would there be about his or her life that would provide confirmation?

The answer is not hard to find. The early church needed to implement a programme to ensure that the material needs of the saints were being met.

Seven men were appointed to oversee this work; they were men "full of the Spirit". (Acts 6:3-4)

How did the church know which seven to pick?

They looked at their manner of life and saw the undeniable evidence of the Spirit's influence in their lives. The Spirit-filled life cannot be concealed.

When you live a Spirit-filled life, "Christ [will] dwell in your hearts." (Ephesians 3:17)

The word "dwell" refers to a place of permanent abode as opposed to temporary accommodation. Jesus speaks on the same theme: "If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching. My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him." (John 14:23)

The living Christ in our lives is Spirit-filled living. The Spirit-filled life is not an ordinary life; it bears all the marks of something extraordinary, something supernatural.

It is beyond natural explanation. Every believer should be actively pursuing the Spirit-filled life.

Resisting

(Part Two)

How Can We Resist The Holy Spirit?

The Bible records the prominent ministry of the Holy Spirit. Jesus promised that the Holy Spirit would guide, teach and recall to the apostles all he had said. (John 14:26; 16:13)

Through his ministry, the Holy Spirit convicts the world of sin, righteousness and judgement to come. (John 16:8-11) And the gospel, Peter says, is preached to you "by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven." (1 Peter 1:12)

God's plan to save believing Jews and Gentiles in one body, says Paul, "has now been revealed by the Spirit to God's holy apostles and prophets." (Ephesians 3:5)

The prophecies about Jesus were made known to the prophets; they "spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit." (2 Peter 1:21)

The Word of God is inspired by the Holy Spirit and its power is stated thus: "For the Word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart." (Hebrews 4:12)

Because the Word of God is a living oracle, we are exhorted: "Today if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts." (Hebrews 4:15) The voice of the living God is heard through his Word.

Resisting

Resisting The Holy Spirit?

The words of Stephen, the first Christian martyr, were spoken to a hostile audience. The message of the risen Christ was being rejected. "You stiff-necked people," he says, "with uncircumcised hearts and ears! You are just like your fathers: You always resist the Holy Spirit!" (Acts 7:51)

Their response was like the response their ancestors gave whenever a prophet came among them; their rejection of the message was tantamount to resisting the Holy Spirit. It was as if the Holy Spirit were personally speaking to them and they were rejecting him.

The Jews resisted what Stephen said: "they were furious and gnashed their teeth at him... they covered their ears and, yelling at the top of their voices, they all rushed at him, dragged him out of the city and began to stone him." (Acts 7:54-57)

The Holy Spirit was speaking through Stephen and, when his message was rejected, the Holy Spirit was being resisted.

We get an insight from Jesus into how the Jews in his day resisted the Spirit. Jesus worked miracles "by the Spirit of God" yet they attributed his power to demons. (Matthew 12:25-31)

They were resisting the Holy Spirit. Jesus said to them, "You refuse to come to me to have life." (John 5:40) Jesus didn't say that they couldn't come to him, but that they refused to come to him. They were resisting the Holy Spirit.

We see further resistance when Paul was on trial before Felix. Paul "spoke about faith in Christ Jesus [and] discoursed on righteousness, self-control and the judgment to come."

We read that "Felix was afraid and said, 'That's enough for now! You may leave. When I find it convenient, I will send for you.'" (Acts 24:25-26)

The Holy Spirit was at work in Felix's heart, but he was resisting the Spirit. He dismissed Paul; he didn't want to hear any more. The same resistance is seen in many of the Jews who came to Paul while he was under house arrest in Rome.

"From morning till evening he explained and declared to them the kingdom of God and tried to convince them about Jesus from the Law of Moses and from the Prophets. Some were convinced by what he said, but others would not believe." (Acts 28:23-24)

Those who "would not believe" chose to reject the truth and so resisted the Holy Spirit.

The message Jesus spoke to each of the seven churches in Asia was different, but the conclusion of each message was the same: "He who has an ear to hear let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches." (Revelation 2-3)

Today we can resist the Holy Spirit by rejecting what he has revealed, by ignoring what he has said, by being disobedient to his instructions. Closing our ears to what he has to say because we find it offensive is to resist him.

Everything revealed by the Holy Spirit is truth. We must approach the Word of God with a heart that submits to its authority, a heart that desires to know "the mind of the Spirit" and a heart that desires to conform to what the Spirit says.

Grieving

(Part Three)

How Can We Grieve The Holy Spirit?

"And do not grieve the Holy Spirit" is Paul's instruction to the Ephesian believers. (Ephesians 4:30)

If the Holy Spirit were simply a power or a force, and not a person, he could not be grieved. But the Holy Spirit is a person: he can be lied to (Acts 5:3); he can be resisted (Acts 7:51); he can speak (Acts 13:2); he can be insulted (Hebrews 10:29); he can be blasphemed (Matthew 12:31-32); and he takes personal care of God's people. (John 14:16, 26) Furthermore, he is holy.

When we sin, we grieve the Holy Spirit. We get an insight into how our sin affects him by considering how we ourselves grieve.

We grieve at the death of a loved one; we feel a sense of great personal loss along with a depth of sorrow never before experienced.

We mourn, we pine, and we lament. Similarly, when we sin the Holy Spirit is grieved by what we have done. Our sins are not committed in a vacuum; they affect the Holy Spirit. He is personally offended by what we do.

Paul's words "do not grieve the Holy Spirit" are found among instructions to put off the old self and put on the new self "created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness". (Ephesians 4:24)

Paul itemises a number of sins that grieve the Holy Spirit, though his list is not intended to be exhaustive: lying, anger, stealing, unwholesome talk, bitterness, rage, brawling, slander and every form of malice. (Ephesians 4:25-31)

I believe Paul intends to do more than simply tell us not to grieve the Holy Spirit. I believe he wants to motivate us to have nothing to do with sin, since he reminds us that we were "sealed for the day of redemption" by the Holy Spirit. (Ephesians 4:30)

By referring to the day of our redemption, Paul is taking our minds from our life here on earth to our eternal home with God in heaven.

His remark is similar to what he told the Colossian believers: "Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things." (Colossians 3:1-2)



Do you see what Paul is doing here?

He is saying to the Christians that since this is true - your conversion to Jesus – then a holy life must follow. He is exhorting us to become a heavenly-minded people. Our body is the temple in which the Holy Spirit resides. (1 Corinthians 6:19)

Meditation on that glorious truth should motivate us to want to live a holy life. And we can because we have been given the Holy Spirit for that very purpose. (1 Thessalonians 4:1-8)

When we "keep in step with the Spirit" (Galatians 5:25) not only will we not grieve him, but we will enjoy his holy fellowship. (2 Corinthians 13:14)

Quenching

(Part Four)

How Can We Quench The Holy Spirit?

We say that people are "on fire for the Lord" when they are zealous for God, are committed to the cause of the Lord Jesus Christ, and are sacrificial with their time, their energy and their finances.

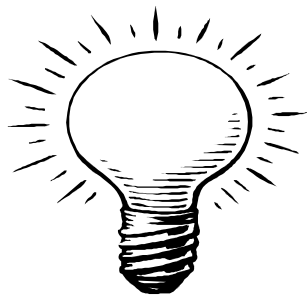
They have a holy enthusiasm, a burning desire fuelled by the Holy Spirit. The prophet Jeremiah was in this category. Discouraged by Israel's refusal to repent, he remained determined to fulfil his ministry.

"But if I say I will not mention him or speak any more in his name, his word is in my heart like a fire, a fire shut up in my bones. I am weary of holding it in; indeed, I cannot." (Jeremiah 20:9)

The ministry to which God called Jeremiah was like a burning fire in his heart; he had to continue proclaiming the message irrespective of the response from his fellow Israelites. Quenching that fire was not on his agenda.

On his resurrection morning, Jesus appeared to two of his disciples on the road to Emmaus. He engaged them in a Bible study: "And beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself." (Luke 24:27)

Jesus would have explained the messianic texts and prophecies that foretold his redemptive mission.



How did they respond to this holy encounter?

"Were not our hearts burning within us," they said, "while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?" (Luke 24:32) The Lord lit a fire in their hearts that day that would burn for the rest of their lives.

Paul tells the young Thessalonian church: "Do not put out the Spirit's fire." (1 Thessalonians 5:19)

He is saying do not quench, do not extinguish and do not pour water on the Spirit's fire. Often it is among those recently converted to Jesus that the Spirit's influence is very evident: They are filled with wonder at God's grace and mercy to them.

The message of the cross compels them to be evangelistic. The study of the word of God is exciting. They love talking about the Lord and sharing the "discoveries" they have made in the Scriptures. Like the psalmist, they delight in the word of God because it nourishes their soul.

This is the type of people to whom Paul says, "Do not put out the Spirit's fire." The Spirit's holy influence must be protected; nothing must be allowed to extinguish the flame. Paul's reminder to Timothy is instructive.

He says, "For this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands. For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline." (2 Timothy 1:6-7)

The Spirit's influence in Timothy's life needed to be continually fanned in order that the Spirit's fire would continue to blaze.



For Us Today

We cannot leave Paul's instruction locked in the first century for it equally applies to us today. Scripture is the living word of God, given by the Holy Spirit for all time.

It is like a doubled-edged sword the penetrating power of which "judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart." (Hebrews 4:12)

It is this word that provides the spiritual nourishment we need to grow and mature. "Like new born babies," Peter says, "crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation, now that you have tasted that the Lord is good." (1 Peter 2:2-3)

Consuming the pure spiritual milk of God's word ensures that the Spirit's fire stays aglow.

The Spirit's fire can be extinguished by neglecting what he has revealed or going outside his revelation in search of truth.

The sufficiency of what God has revealed is expressed so well by the psalmist: "The precepts of the Lord are right, giving joy to the heart. The commands of the Lord are radiant, giving light to the eyes. The fear of the Lord is pure, enduring forever. The ordinances of the Lord are sure and altogether righteous. They are more precious than gold, than much pure gold; they are sweeter than honey, than honey from the comb. By them is your servant warned; in keeping them there is great reward." (Psalms 19:8-11)

The Bible is the word of God, given by him for our benefit.

Furthermore, there is not a problem we encounter in life, not a situation that can arise, for which the word of God does not provide an answer, either directly or in principle.

When we "live by the Spirit" and are "led by the Spirit" and "keep in step with the Spirit" we will never quench the Spirit. (Galatians 5:16,18, 25) On the contrary, we will keep his fire burning in our heart.

