

Speaking for the Lord

The Prerequisite of Spiritual Fullness

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Introduction

In our Wednesday night services we're emphasizing the subject of evangelism. Tonight we're going to consider evangelism within the larger framework of speaking for the Lord. Specifically, we're going to look at the matter of speech and talk about how God wants us to be prepared to speak on his behalf. Let's begin by looking at some examples of different kinds of God-honoring speech in the "book" of Luke-Acts.

Speaking for the Lord

Praising God [Luke 1:39-42]

- 39 And Mary arose in those days, and went into the hill country with haste, into a city of Juda;
- 40 And entered into the house of Zacharias, and saluted Elisabeth.
- 41 And it came to pass, that, when Elisabeth heard the salutation of Mary, the babe leaped in her womb; and *Elisabeth was filled with the Holy Ghost*:
- 42 *And she spake out with a loud voice*, and said, Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb.

Prophesying [Luke 1:67-69]

- 67 And his father *Zacharias was filled with the Holy Ghost, and prophesied*, saying,
- 68 Blessed be the Lord God of Israel; for he hath visited and redeemed his people,
- 69 And hath raised up an horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David;

Speaking in Tongues [Acts 2:1-6]

- 1 And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place.
- 2 And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting.
- 3 And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them.
- 4 And *they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues*, as the Spirit gave them utterance.
- 5 And there were dwelling at Jerusalem Jews, devout men, out of every nation under heaven.
- 6 Now when this was noised abroad, the multitude came together, and were confounded, because that every man heard them speak in his own language.

Proclaiming the Gospel [Acts 4:8-12]

- 8 Then *Peter, filled with the Holy Ghost, said* unto them, Ye rulers of the people, and elders of Israel,
- 9 If we this day be examined of the good deed done to the impotent man, by what means he is made whole;
- 10 Be it known unto you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom ye crucified, whom God raised from the dead, even by him doth this man stand here before you whole.
- 11 This is the stone which was set at nought of you builders, which is become the head of the corner.
- 12 Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.

Encouraging Believers [Acts 11:22-24]

- 22 Then tidings of these things came unto the ears of the church which was in Jerusalem: and they sent forth Barnabas, that he should go as far as Antioch.
- 23 Who, when he came, and had seen the grace of God, was glad, and *exhorted them all*, that with purpose of heart they would cleave unto the Lord.
- 24 For *he was* a good man, and *full of the Holy Ghost* and of faith: and much people was added unto the Lord.

Pronouncing Judgment [Acts 13:8-10]

- 8 But Elymas the sorcerer (for so is his name by interpretation) withstood them, seeking to turn away the deputy from the faith.
- 9 Then *Saul*, (who also is called Paul,) *filled with the Holy Ghost*, set his eyes on him.
- 10 And *said*, O full of all subtilty 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?

Transition

Each of the texts we've just read contains two common threads--someone spoke for the Lord, and that person was filled with the Holy Spirit when he or she did so. The filling of the Spirit is, I am afraid, poorly understood in our day. By and large, Christian groups tend to either ignore or distort the Bible's teaching on the subject.

The New Testament refers to Spirit filling 15 times--four times in Luke (1:15; 1:41; 1:67; 4:1), ten times in Acts (Acts 2:4; 4:8; 4:31; 6:3; 6:5; 7:55; 9:17; 11:24; 13:9; 13:52), and once in Ephesians (5:18). The Bible says enough about spiritual fullness to warrant our attention. It is as if Luke, in particular, wished to say to us, "If you are going to speak for God, you'd best be prepared to do so by being filled with his Spirit." With this in mind, we'll take a look at what it means to be filled with the Spirit and how we can fit ourselves for his filling.

Body

What is the Filling of the Spirit?

LEXICAL INSIGHTS

Two Greek words--*pleroo* and *pimplemi*--are used in reference to Spirit filling. Their meaning is quite straightforward, implying that we are spiritually empty and ineffective apart from the Spirit's continued activity in our lives.

D. L. Moody said, "I believe firmly that the moment our hearts are emptied of pride and selfishness and ambition and everything that is contrary to God's law, the Holy Spirit will fill every corner of our hearts. But if we are full of pride and conceit and ambition and the world, there is no room for the Spirit of God. We must be emptied before we can be filled."

J. Kuhatschek, *Taking The Guesswork Out of Applying The Bible*, IVP, pp. 153ff [taken from <<http://www.bible.org/>>]

CONTEXTUAL INSIGHTS

We can learn about Spirit filling from the context in which it appears in the New Testament. Ephesians 5:18 contrasts the filling of the Spirit with drunkenness. According to this text, the two are incompatible. As is the case with intoxication, spiritual fullness involves surrendering one's control to an outside agent.

Moody was to have a campaign in England. An elderly pastor protested, "Why do we need this 'Mr. Moody'? He's uneducated, inexperienced, etc. Who does he think he is anyway? Does he think he has a monopoly on the Holy Spirit?"

A younger, wiser pastor rose and responded, "No, but the Holy Spirit has a monopoly on Mr. Moody."

Source unknown [taken from <<http://www.bible.org/>>]

The verses that follow Ephesians 5:18 name four positive evidences of Spirit filling, three of which involve speech:

- *speaking to yourselves*--exhorting one another to worship
- *singing and making melody*--worshiping the Lord from the heart
- *giving thanks*--thanking God at all times for everything, not complaining
- *submitting to one another*--yielding to others (Stott 57-59; cf. Leggett 11-12)

Judging from the wider context of Ephesians 5:18, Spirit-filled living is not merely a matter of internal fellowship with God. Rather, it makes itself known in our personal conduct, especially in our marriage, family, and employment relationships.

The book of Ephesians as a whole sheds further light on what it means to be filled with the Spirit. It is noteworthy that Paul also refers in this same epistle to the fullness of God (3:19) and the fullness of Christ (1:23; 4:13). Since these forms of spiritual fullness clearly belong to the church as a whole, one might expect that the Spirit's filling is not strictly an individual matter.

CONCLUSIONS

"To be filled with the Holy Spirit involves an expansion and intensification of the impact of His indwelling presence. It is to have His presence saturate one's being with His qualities of godliness in life and power in ministry. [. . .] It means that He takes possession of the believer's mind, thereby pervading his or her disposition and guiding the individual" (Woodcock 73).

"Believers [. . .] are now exhorted to allow the Spirit to have the fullest control that they are conscious of in their lives and to open themselves continually to the one who can enable them to walk wisely and to understand Christ's will and who can inspire their worship and thanksgiving" (Lincoln 345).

How Can One Be Filled with the Spirit?

The New Testament does not tell us specifically what we must do in order to be filled, thus we must guard against dogmatic statements in this area.. However, we can gather enough clues to point in a meaningful direction. Two points must be balanced: passivity and discipline.

PASSIVITY

We cannot fill ourselves, but we can remove encumbrances to the Spirit's filling. We cannot expect to be filled if we are quenching or grieving the Spirit (Willmington; cf. Eph. 4:30; 1 Thess. 5:19). We must confess known sin to God and yield to his will as we know it.

"The imperative call in the passive voice indicates that God acts upon us with our cooperation (literally, 'let the Spirit keep filling you')" (Leggett 11).

“How can we be filled with the Spirit? In the same way as we obtain a new mind, even the mind of Christ. The process is comparable to the raising of a harvest of wheat which is both a gift of God and a work of man. Men can not have it unless God gives it; God can not give it unless men work for it” (Richards 38).

DISCIPLINE

Intoxication imagery implies personal involvement in being filled. Preparing ourselves for fullness likely involves fellowship with God in prayer (e.g., Acts 4:31; Eph. 3:19), saturation with his Word (Col. 3:16 par. Eph. 5:17), and involvement in a local body of spiritually minded believers.

There is no biblical command to pray for Spirit fullness. In Acts 4:31 members of the Jerusalem church were filled following prayer. However, the text does not say that they asked to be filled; rather, they asked to be emboldened. Nevertheless, Paul prayed for the Ephesians to be filled with God’s fullness (3:19).

There also seems to be a connection between the Word of God and Spirit filling. Colossians 3:16, which is essentially parallel to Ephesians 5:18, instructs us, “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom.” Ephesians 5:17 tells us to be “understanding what the will of the Lord is.” Both of these references imply that being filled with God’s Word is a prerequisite to being filled with his Spirit.

A walk in the Spirit will of necessity be a walk in accordance with the Word the Spirit has inspired. The parallel between Eph. 5:18-21 and Col. 3:15-17 is significant. The same results are said to flow from being filled with the Spirit in the first case, and being filled with the Word in the second.

To remain filled with the Spirit, and thus enjoy His continuing sanctifying work, will mean continuing to be filled with the Word. The relationship is obvious.

J. O. Sanders, *Enjoying Intimacy with God*, Moody, p. 91 [taken from <http://www.bible.org/>]

Finally, there is a corporate dimension to spiritual fullness. Both Ephesians and Colossians assume a plurality of readers. In addition, other references to fullness in Ephesians are clearly corporate. By implication, we should seek the filling of the Spirit in Christian community. As with so many other aspects of the Christian life, we cannot directly control whether we are Spirit-filled. But we can create the right conditions for God to fill us at his discretion.

Conclusion

In every age of history God has ordained for his people to speak on his behalf. There are quite a number of types of God-honoring speech, but all are united in this: They require the speaker to be under the Holy Spirit’s control. To be Spirit-filled is to surrender to his working in our life in such a way that he can alter our speech as well as our behavior.

The filling of the Spirit is, to an extent, something that we receive passively from God. Yet we can prepare ourselves to be filled through disciplines such as prayer, meditation on God’s Word, and church fellowship. Each of us is called to represent the Lord verbally somewhere, somehow. Let’s be ready to speak when the opportunity arises by maintaining an intimate relationship with God’s Spirit on an ongoing basis.

Works Cited

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