

B. 3 Fullness of the Holy Spirit

Although every Christian is baptized and indwelt by the Holy Spirit, not every Christian is filled with the Holy Spirit. There is a significant difference between being indwelt with the Holy Spirit and filled with the Holy Spirit. Look at 1 Corinthians 2:14-3:3.

Paul says,

The unspiritual man does not receive the gifts of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned. The spiritual man judges all things, but is himself to be judged by no one. “For who has known the mind of the Lord so as to instruct him?” But we have the mind of Christ.

But I, brethren, could not address you as spiritual men, but as men of the flesh, as babes in Christ. I fed you with milk, not solid food; for you were not ready for it; and even yet you are not ready, for you are still of the flesh. For while there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not of the flesh, and behaving like ordinary men?

Then also in 1 Corinthians 3:11-15. Paul says,

For no other foundation can any one lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if any one builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw— each man’s work will become manifest; for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each one has done. If the work which any man has built on the foundation survives, he will receive a reward. If any man’s work is burned up, he will

suffer loss, though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire.

Here Paul seems to describe people who are Christians but who are still dominated by the flesh, that is to say, the fallen human nature. He calls them carnal or men of the flesh. He says that their works are not like gold and silver and precious stones that will endure testing, but they are like wood, hay, and stubble that will be burned up and destroyed, though they themselves will be saved. What Paul seems to contemplate here are three different kinds of people.

There's the natural man, who is the unregenerate man. He does not have the Spirit of God. He is living in the power of the flesh – the fallen human nature. Then there is the spiritual man. This is the regenerate Christian who is living in the power of the Holy Spirit. And then there is the carnal man, or man of the flesh, who is regenerate (he has the Spirit of God) but still living in the power of the flesh – the fallen human nature – and so is immature and experiences futility.

Notice what the sign or evidence is of the spiritual man. It is not charismatic gifts. The church in Corinth exhibited all sorts of charismatic gifts, didn't it? Speaking in tongues, miracles, other sorts of charismatic phenomena. Yet it is the most carnal church in the New Testament. People were getting drunk at the communion services. A man was living in an incestuous relationship with his step-mother. It was riven with strife and jealousy and party spirit. So even though the charismatic gifts were highly abundant and evident in Corinth, this was not a church that was under the direction and power of the Holy Spirit. So the sign of the spiritual person is not charismatic gifts. Rather, it is the fruit of the Holy

Spirit which are produced in a person's life in the place of the works of the flesh. That is what we saw when we looked at Galatians 5:16-25. Paul says,

But I say, walk by the Spirit, and do not gratify the desires of the flesh. For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh; for these are opposed to each other, to prevent you from doing what you would. But if you are led by the Spirit you are not under the law. Now the works of the flesh are plain: fornication, impurity, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, anger, selfishness, dissension, party spirit, envy, drunkenness, carousing, and the like. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such there is no law. And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit.

So the evidence of the Spirit-filled life is not charismatic gifts like speaking in tongues. The evidence of the Spirit-filled life will be the fruit of the Holy Spirit that is produced in a person's life instead of the works of the flesh.

Unfortunately, as we've seen, we do not always experience the fullness of the Holy Spirit. What does it mean to be filled with the Holy Spirit? I think that it means to be, not only indwelt by the Spirit, but to be empowered and controlled by the Holy Spirit. If we say that someone is filled with rage or filled with jealousy, we mean that person is controlled and possessed by that anger or by

that jealousy. In the same way, when Paul says to be filled with the Holy Spirit, he is telling us to be controlled and empowered by the Holy Spirit, so that he will produce in our lives the fruit of the Holy Spirit that is described in Galatians.

The question, then, is this: why is it that many Christians are not filled with the Holy Spirit? Why is it that so many Christians seem to fall into that category of carnal Christians – Christians who are still living under the domination and influence of the fallen human nature? Let me suggest two reasons as to why many Christians are not filled with the Holy Spirit.

1. *A lack of total commitment.* In other words, these persons, though they are Christians, are not really sold out 100% to Christ. This lack of total commitment, I think, prevents the fullness of the Holy Spirit in their life and leaves them in the power the flesh.

Look at Jesus' very familiar parable of the sower in Mark 4. In Mark verses 3-9 Jesus gives the parable of the sower and then in verses 14-20 he gives its interpretation.

“Listen! A sower went out to sow. And as he sowed, some seed fell along the path, and the birds came and devoured it. Other seed fell on rocky ground, where it had not much soil, and immediately it sprang up, since it had no depth of soil; and when the sun rose it was scorched, and since it had no root it withered away. Other seed fell among thorns and the thorns grew up and choked it, and it yielded no grain. And other seeds fell into good soil and brought forth grain, growing up and increasing and yielding thirtyfold and sixtyfold and a hundredfold.” And he said, “He who has ears to hear, let him hear.”

Thus the parable of the sower. In verses 14-20 Jesus interprets this parable for us. He says,

The sower sows the word. And these are the ones along the path, where the word is sown; when they hear, Satan immediately comes and takes away the word which is sown in them. And these in like manner are the ones sown upon rocky ground, who, when they hear the word, immediately receive it with joy; and they have no root in themselves, but endure for a while; then, when tribulation or persecution arises on account of the word, immediately they fall away. And others are the ones sown among thorns; they are those who hear the word, but the cares of the world, and the delight in riches, and the desire for other things, enter in and choke the word, and it proves unfruitful. But those that were sown upon the good soil are the ones who hear the word and accept it and bear fruit, thirtyfold and sixtyfold and a hundredfold.

I want to draw your attention to that third kind of soil – the seed that is sown among thorns. These persons receive the word, but they are not fruitful. They don't bear grain. They are living, but they are not a fruitful type of plant. What is the difference between these people and the people who are the good soil that bears fruit thirty, sixty, a hundredfold? Jesus identifies three things that choke out the word and make them unfruitful:

1. *The cares of the world* (that is to say, just the pressures and the vicissitudes of life that drag them down).
2. *The delight in riches* (the desire for monetary gain; for affluence).

3. *The desire for other things* (their heart's desire is not for God, not for the kingdom).

These three features conspire to make these people unfruitful: the cares of the world, the delight in riches, and the desire for other things.

The contrast to this type of person, I think, is found in The Sermon on the Mount, where in Matthew 6:33 Jesus says, "Seek first his Kingdom and his righteousness and all these things shall be yours as well." Here Jesus says that your focus is not to be upon worldly things, upon prosperity, upon material things. Rather we are to seek first God's Kingdom and its righteousness. That is in contrast, I think, to those who are represented by the third type of soil who lack this kind of total commitment. Their commitment is not first and foremost to God and his kingdom and his righteousness; rather they have a desire for other things and are burdened with the cares of this world. This, I think, explains why many Christians are not Spirit-filled, fruitful Christians.

The prescription for being that good soil – that type of person who seeks first the Kingdom of God and its righteousness – is found, I think, in Romans 12:1-2. This gives the prescription for this kind of life. Paul says,

I appeal to you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may prove what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

Here Paul describes a person who is totally committed to God, body and soul. His body is committed to God as a living sacrifice, and then he is transformed by the renewal of his mind. So body and soul are sold out to Christ.

The result is that you can discern what is the will of God. Notice what the will of God is. It is characterized by three adjectives: it is good, it is acceptable, and it is perfect. You don't need to be afraid of God's will for your life. God's will is good for you. If you could fully understand it, you would recognize to be good. It would be acceptable, not only acceptable to God but acceptable to you as well. And it would be perfect. That means there's nothing you can do to improve upon it. Any efforts you could make to improve upon God's will for your life would only damage it because it's already perfect. So there's no reason not to be totally committed to Christ in the way that Paul describes – as a living sacrifice, body and soul, given to him and so bearing fruit through the Holy Spirit directing and controlling your life.

I think one of the reasons that many Christians are not filled with the Holy Spirit is due to a lack of total commitment on their part. But that's not the only reason.

2. There is a reliance upon self-effort that frustrates the attempt to lead a Spirit-filled life. Some people may indeed be totally committed to Christ. They are sold out to Christ, but they are attempting to live the Christian life on their own strength, in their own power, that is to say, in the power of the flesh. And that is futile. The Christian life is impossible to lead in the power of the flesh. It cannot be done through self-effort. This is what Jesus

teaches us in the parable of the vine and the branches in John 15:4-5. Jesus says,

Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in me, and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.

It couldn't be clearer, could it? The branch severed from the vine is powerless to produce fruit. It only withers and dies. The secret to bearing fruit is to be abiding in the vine. As the life of the vine courses through the branches they will naturally become fruitful. So it is a matter not of self-effort but rather a matter of abiding in Christ.

Notice that after Jesus' resurrection the disciples were told to tarry in Jerusalem until they are endowed with the power of the Holy Spirit. Acts 1:4-8.

And while staying with them he charged them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father, which, he said, "you heard from me, for John baptized with water, but before many days you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit. . . . But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth."

Here the Holy Spirit is the secret to the power to be effective witnesses for Christ throughout the world. To go out on your own, to try to live the Christian life without the power of the Holy Spirit, is futile and hopeless.

The secret to the fruitful Christian life is allowing Christ to live out his life through us. This is what Paul talks about in Galatians 2:20. Paul says, “I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me; and the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.” This is the same truth that is expressed in the parable of the vine and the branches. Christ is the vine; we are the branches. It is Christ living through us that enables us to have a fruitful Christian existence.

Without the filling of the Holy Spirit (which is described here by saying Christ is living in me, that is to say, the Holy Spirit of Christ living in me) the Christian life is reduced to legalism and grinding self-effort. Therefore the non-Christian will actually often be happier than the Christian who is living a defeated Christian experience in the power of the flesh.

This, I think, was described no better than in the following testimony that I want to read from a Christian minister who apostatized and walked away from Christ and became a non-Christian. He contrasts his life as a Christian with the life that he now has as an apostate. I think you will hear a perfect description of the carnal Christian existence lived in the power of the flesh. This is what he says.

Since I'm passionate about the things I'm interested in, I tried as best as I could to be a faithful Christian, and good minister. I accepted God's grace, and it radically changed my life when I was a teenager. After being saved I wanted to show God how grateful I was for his gift of salvation by committing my life over to him with all I had. Even though I

knew it was by grace that I had been saved, I almost always felt guilty that I wasn't doing enough in response to God's love. Whether it was spending time in prayer, evangelizing, reading the Bible, tithing, forgiving someone who had done me wrong, or whether it was struggling with temptations of lust, pride, selfishness and laziness, I almost always felt guilty. . . . I never could understand how Christian people could come to church every Sunday but never get involved much in the Church's programs, because that's what believers should want to do, as I did.

. . .

Today I am pretty much guilt free in the sense that I have no guilt in regards to the Christian duties mentioned above. In fact, I can't remember when I have ever been happier than I am today. . . . I'm living life to the hilt, pretty much guilt free, primarily because my ethical standards aren't as high. In fact, I believe the Christian ethical standards are simply impossible for anyone to measure up to. Think about it, according to Jesus I should feel guilty for not just what I do, but for what I think about, lusting, hating, coveting, etc. I'd like every person . . . to experience the freedom I have found.

That, I think, is a perfect description of the carnal Christian life lived in the power of the flesh through self-effort. It is a miserable, guilt-ridden, works-oriented type of lifestyle. A lifestyle that is less fulfilling than being a non-Christian where you don't have to worry about these sorts of ethical duties and concerns.

I think the fundamental failure of this ex-Christian is that he did not understand that the Christian life is primarily about *being*, not

doing. For him, the Christian life was primarily about what he did for God to show his gratitude to God. It was all about doing, all about performance, and not about being and about abiding in Christ in the life of the vine, enjoying the grace of God and the forgiveness of God that enables one to have that source of power in life.

Certainly someone who is focused on being in Christ will be involved in doing. Of course he will! He'll be involved in evangelism and giving and acts of mercy and so forth. But those acts will not be the basis of the Christian life. They will be the overflow of an abundant life that is connected to the life of the vine and so naturally produces this kind of fruit.

I want to suggest that those two reasons may be why many Christians don't experience the fullness of the Holy Spirit in their lives. Either there is a lack of total commitment (they are not really sold out; the desire for other things, for material gain, the pressures of life choke out the word in them and make them unfruitful) or else they are trying to live the Christian life in their own power and that results in futility, guilt, and a grinding legalism.

That raises the question then: how can I be filled with the Holy Spirit? I want to suggest that it's a very simple matter of repentance and faith. Repent and believe.

First of all, repent. We need to confess to God the known sin that is in our lives. We need to come honestly before him and acknowledge the sin that he convicts us of. 1 John 1:9 gives this promise: "If we confess our sins he is faithful and just and will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness." So the first thing to do is to repent. Quit hiding from God, quit

rationalizing your sin, but confess known sin to God, acknowledging it before him.

That's the negative aspect. The positive aspect is to believe. That is to say, to yield oneself to God as a living sacrifice in the way that Paul prescribes in Romans 12:1-2. Body and soul yielded to God as a sacrificial offering. This is not dependent upon emotions or feelings, which come and go. This is a commitment of the will.

Then, having made that total commitment of yielding yourself to God as a living sacrifice, then we need to walk in the Spirit on a daily basis – to log time in the Spirit. We need to practice immediate confession of sin and resurrender of our lives to God. Being filled with the Holy Spirit is not a sort of permanent status that a Christian enjoys. Rather, one can, through sin, retake control of one's life. You need in that case to practice confession again, claim 1 John 1:9, and then resurrender your life to God. This is the difference between a living sacrifice and the sacrifices in the Old Testament. In the Old Testament the animal sacrifices were slaughtered before they were presented to the Lord. They were dead! But Paul says present yourself as a living sacrifice. That is much more difficult, right? Because a living sacrifice tends to crawl off the altar! So this is a life that needs to be continually resurrendered daily to God through immediate confession of sin and re-commitment.

The Scripture indicates that as Christians we can grieve the Holy Spirit through sin. Ephesians 4:30. Paul says, "Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God in whom you were sealed for the day of redemption." You are indwelt with the Holy Spirit. Paul says don't grieve the Holy Spirit. The context of Ephesians 4 makes it evident

that we do that through sin in our lives. By sinning we grieve the Holy Spirit and so lose his fullness.

Not only that, however, we can also quench the Holy Spirit's work in our lives through disobedience. 1 Thessalonians 5:19. Paul says, "Do not quench the Spirit." I think the difference between grieving the Spirit and quenching the Spirit is that grieving the Holy Spirit is done through sin whereas quenching the Holy Spirit involves not following the Holy Spirit but suppressing his activity in your life. The context of 1 Thessalonians 5 is the command, "don't despise prophesying." Don't try to quench the Spirit in your life. We quench the Spirit when the Holy Spirit is leading us to do something and we refuse to do it, or we feel his conviction that something needs to change and we quench it and suppress it. By doing that we will forfeit his power and direction in our lives.

We need as Christians to be continually confessing our sins and surrendering the control of our lives to God so as to not grieve or quench the Holy Spirit through sin or disobedience.

This involves a daily commitment. Every day that you get up, before you roll out of bed and your feet hit the floor, just say a prayer, "Lord take control of the throne of my life today. Live out your life through me. Fill me with your Holy Spirit. Direct and control me today."

Jan gives a wonderful illustration of this truth of walking in the Holy Spirit. She thinks of it as a sort of umbrella through which you walk through life's storms. As long as you stay under God's umbrella you'll be safe in the storms of life. That doesn't mean you won't suffer, but you'll be where God wants you to be – you'll be in his will. But if you stray off the path or go outside the

umbrella then you are apt to go into the ditch or into disaster because you no longer walking in the will of God for you. So we want to stay under that umbrella of God's will along life's way. That will be done by allowing the Holy Spirit to empower and direct us day by day as we go along life's path.

For those who wish to make such a commitment right now, let's close in prayer.

Our Father in heaven, we thank you that though we are sinful and fallen creatures that you love us so much and that Christ died for those sins to free us from guilt and punishment and to impute to us his righteousness. Thank you that as we are clothed in his blood we stand righteous and forgiven before you. And now Lord, in the best way that we know how, we want to yield our lives to you as living sacrifices. Our bodies pure and dedicated to you. Our souls given over to renewal through the transforming power of your Holy Spirit. Lord Jesus, we pray that you would live out your life through us. Help us to abide in you as the branches abide in the vine and so to bear much fruit. Holy Spirit of God, we pray that you would take control of our lives, direct us and empower us to live lives that are full of your fruit and that are pleasing to our God and Father. Through Jesus Christ Our Lord, Amen.