



The Marks of the Spirit-filled Life

By: Russell E. Joyner

Those of us who have been nurtured within the historic tradition of Pentecostal churches have received the heritage that the Spirit-filled life should be the normal Christian life. However, not every segment of the church has understood this matter of “being Spirit-filled” in the same manner. But this is changing.

In the South American country of Bolivia a protestant missionary, C. Peter Wagner, served faithfully for 16 years. Young Wagner had been trained in the finest evangelical Bible-believing tradition and theology. He had been taught to believe in the power of the Holy Spirit to enable him to live a holy life. He served diligently on the mission field, but did not believe in the miraculous, and accused Pentecostal missionaries of fraud. But, after a personal miraculous healing, all of this changed.¹ Then Dr. Wagner was invited to become a professor at Fuller Theological Seminary in California. While teaching there, international students began changing his worldview. Those students from foreign lands had consistent testimonies of the miraculous signs and wonders that accompany the proclamation of the Word in their homelands.

Professor Wagner came to the realization that Western culture has a limited worldview, perceiving reality on two separate levels: (1) the natural world operating according to provable scientific laws, and (2) God confining Himself to the supernatural; that is, the internal and spiritual.

This perspective is the foundation of humanistic secular philosophies. This two-tiered concept is not how much of the world sees reality, and this is certainly not how the Bible views God’s world. God has given us His Holy Spirit for the purpose of breaking down the false barrier between the natural and the supernatural.

Take note of Stephen — a deacon, called and anointed to serve at the table for needy widows, full of Gods’ grace and power, doing great wonders and miraculous signs among the people (Acts 6:8). At what point did Stephen change gears from “natural” to “supernatural?” I don’t think there was a barrier in Stephen’s life between natural and supernatural. When the church sought out deacons to distribute daily food to widows, they looked for men full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom.

“Brothers, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom” (Acts 6:13).² Deacon Stephen was full of faith and full of the Holy Spirit (Acts 6:5). When the Sanhedrin prepared to stone Stephen, he was again filled with the Holy Spirit, enabled to have a vision of Jesus and forgive his executioners. “But Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, looked up to heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God” (Acts 7:55).

In order to make a lasting, powerful contribution for the cause of the gospel, our hearts and lives must be shaped by the purposes of God, rather than by human goals. We want to experience the power that we know is a part of the move of the Holy Spirit of God upon our lives. Consider some of the other Biblical persons who accomplished the goals that God intended.

Before our Lord Jesus began his public ministry He had a desert encounter with the Adversary. “Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the desert … [in order to be] tempted by the devil”

(Luke 4:1).

Several years later, Peter had a unique encounter with the Jewish rulers and elders when he was jailed. “They [Annas and Caiaphas] had Peter and John brought before them and began to question them: ‘By what power or what name did you do this?’ Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them: ‘Rulers and elders of the people!’ ” (Acts 4:7,8). Peter went on to preach a sermon of salvation to them.

Before the great apostle Paul began his own ministry, he received ministry from Ananias in Damascus. “Then Ananias went to the house and entered it. Placing his hands on Saul, he said, ‘Brother Saul, the Lord-Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you were coming here-has sent me so that you may see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit’ ” (Acts 9:17). Paul regained his sight and his strength and began preaching powerfully in synagogues throughout Damascus. Years later, Paul was on the island of Cyprus and confronted by Elymas the sorcerer who opposed the Word of God. “Then Saul, who was also called Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, looked straight at Elymas and said, … the hand of the Lord is against you” (Acts 13:9-11).

Paul’s traveling companion for many years was Barnabas. “He was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and faith, and a great number of people were brought to the Lord” (Acts 11:24).

In order for us to experience that same power we must also be filled with God’s Holy Spirit. But what are some of the purposes and marks of being full of the Spirit? Occasionally, some will focus on the outpouring of the Holy Spirit for the sake of emphasizing the blessing and emotional experience they derive from that outpouring. While this may in fact be a very legitimate result, we must investigate what the Bible states explicitly and implicitly as the purpose of filling people with the Holy Spirit.

Point To Jesus

Jesus left His followers with the commission to make disciples of all peoples (going into all the world, baptizing them, and teaching them; Matthew 28:19,20). That first Pentecost after Jesus’ resurrection was the occasion for the beginning of the equipping process that God started in His Church. Several weeks after having been filled with the Holy Spirit, Peter and John served some time in jail because of their persistent, powerful witness. After being released, they returned to the fellowship of believers where they experienced a powerful prayer meeting. “After they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly” (Acts 4:31).

What was explicitly stated as the intended result of receiving the Holy Spirit’s power (Acts 1:8) is implicitly taught in the narrative described above (3:11-4:31). We conclude that one of the primary purposes of the infilling of the Holy Spirit is to point to Jesus. We are empowered, energized, enabled to make bold, clear, faithful proclamation of the person and mission of our Lord Jesus Christ. The apostle John writes, “But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come. He will bring glory to me by taking from what is mine and making it known to you” (John 16:13). The Spirit will glorify Jesus. The Holy Spirit did not come to draw attention to the Holy Spirit, nor to draw attention to us, but to draw attention to Jesus. The Holy Spirit makes us “Jesus” conscious, not “Holy Spirit” conscious!

Power To Live for God

Another major purpose for being filled with the Holy Spirit is power to live for God. This is taught by historic main-line churches, though in varying degrees. We must affirm with other Bible-believing Christians that this perspective on the purpose of the Spirit is true. I would like to distinguish three areas where that power is manifest: (1) power to live a holy personal life; (2) power for service to God and to His work; and (3) power to face an immediate task, difficulty, or crisis.

Power to Live a Holy Personal Life

Jesus said, “… let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven”

(Matthew 5:16). The apostle Paul wrote, “So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God” (1 Corinthians 10:31). We are urged to live a life worthy of the calling we have received (Ephesians 4:1). Yet on our own strength, we are really unable to live the life, shine the light, and give all glory to Him on our own strength. If we try to do it on our own, we fail. Again, the apostle Paul posed this problem in his epistle to the Romans: “15 I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do but what I hate I do. 16 And if I do what I do not want to do, I agree that the law is good. 17 As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me. 18 I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. 19 For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do — this I keep on doing” (Romans 7). But Paul also poses the solution: By God’s power, given through His Spirit, are we able to live the life of holiness to which we are called: “9 You, however are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ. 10 But if Christ is in you, your body is dead because of sin, yet your spirit is alive because of righteousness. 11 And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit, who lives in you. 12 Therefore, brothers, we have an obligation—but it is not to the sinful nature, to live according to it. 13 For if you live according to the sinful nature, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live, 14 because those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God” (Romans 8).

Power for Service to God and to His Work

The next area of necessary power is the realm of service. Peter’s preaching on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:14-40) was an act of serving the Lord and building up the Church (2:41) for which the prior filling with the Holy Spirit was necessary. In addition, the Early Church deacons were filled with the Spirit in order to fulfill God’s call for them to serve at the food distribution tables. The word “deacon” literally means “servant.” It is the same Spirit that fills us to serve the physical needs and spiritual needs of individuals. What is distinctive is the purpose: to live for God.

Power to Face an Immediate Task

The third area of living for God is what may be called power to face an immediate task (which may include a difficulty or crisis). Deacon Stephen was again filled with the Holy Spirit just prior to being stoned by the people because of his proclamation. Stephen was empowered to see a vision of Jesus and to forgive his killers. When Peter confronted the difficult situation of his trial before the Sanhedrin he had yet another empowering, equipping him for this immediate need (Acts 4:8). When Paul had to face the power of Satan, present in the sorcerer named Elymas, Paul received his filling and entered into the crisis with the presence of the Lord (Acts 13:9). Paul walked in power into the task at hand, while Elymas walked away blind.

Each of these crisis situations was accompanied by a miracle. It is usually in this type of circumstance (immediate task, difficulty, or crisis) that signs and wonders occur. God is in the business of “crisis intervention.” The gifts are not for our greed, but for our need! God wants His Church to be “built up” — not in the sense of being flattered, of course, but in the sense of being edified.

Look at what Paul says in Ephesians. “Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil” (Ephesians 5:15,16). In such evil days we need God to fill us with the Holy Spirit’s power in order to (a) live a holy life against the evil lifestyle and culture around us; (b) to serve in both practical and spiritual service; and (c) to attend to the crises at hand.

God wants us to be more than conquerors through him who loved us (Romans 8:37). “Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord’s will is” (Ephesians 5:17). We need to understand God’s will and act upon that understanding: “Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit” (5:18).

Paul draws a strong contrast. Some interpret this passage to mean that charismatics/Pentecostals are like spiritual drunkards. Paul is not saying that being filled is like getting drunk. He is not comparing, but is contrasting these two actions. Drunkenness leads to a loss of self-control. Debauchery here is excessive sensuality, a condition in which people cannot control or “save” themselves. It is a condition of going from bad to worse. The contrasting condition is

fullness of the Spirit, which involves no loss of self-control. In fact, part of the fruit of the Spirit is self-control (Galatians 5:23). Excessive alcohol leads to unrestrained behavior. Fullness of Spirit leads to restrained behavior. The result of being under the influence of alcohol is that it makes us like beasts, while the Spirit makes us like Christ. Therefore, BE FILLED! The Greek verb here is plerousthe. This is a present tense, passive voice, imperative mood, second person plural verb. It means to fill up, complete or bring to fulfillment. In this context it is used as a metaphor of pouring. However, beyond the metaphor lies the purpose.

The present tense emphasizes right now and continuously-implying again and again. Note: We are saved once. What we call the baptism of the Holy Spirit is the initial experience of being filled with the Spirit.³ But we can be filled with the Holy Spirit again and again. Some speak of the Baptism as the gateway, and now the subsequent infillings as the path to walk on once you get through the gate. Peter was filled with the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:4) and again before speaking to the Sanhedrin (4:8). And “all,” including Peter, were “filled with the Holy Spirit” after praying (4:31). Ananias laid hands on Paul so he could see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit (Acts 9:17). But Paul, “filled with the Holy Spirit,” spoke to Elymas, “You are a child of the devil ...” (Acts 13:9-10). The disciples (including Paul) shook dust from their feet and “were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit” (Acts 13:52). Stephen was filled before serving at tables, then again before his vision and death.

The significance of the passive voice is that God is the originator of the filling action. We are acted upon by Him, and are therefore expected to be willing and yielded recipients.

The imperative mood implies a command by God. In our spoken language we convey the imperative demand by the vigor and volume of our voice. When we put a command in written English form, we generally utilize an exclamation point. In New Testament Greek, however, a command is clearly written with the inflections of a verbal mood that is quite distinguishable from a statement of fact or possible suggestion. It is not a suggestion to be debated. Since it is a passive voice imperative, it should be translated “allow to be filled.” To fulfill this command, we must remove any barriers to right relationship with God.

The second person plural means “all of you.” Therefore, a preferred translation of the passage is, “All of you, keep on allowing yourselves to be filled with the Spirit!”

In Ephesians 5:15-21, Paul links this fullness to four results: (1) speaking, (2) singing, (3) giving thanks, and (4) submitting. The first emphasis is on speaking. We are to address one another; to give testimony. During the First Century, when people who were not accustomed to public speaking were called upon to share, they would often recite a song or psalm (a composition already familiar and known to the community).⁴ Therefore, testimonies could express the full range of emotions through set prayers, songs, and recitations. Cries of anguish, rejoicing, and prayer could be unburdened in fellowship. This Spirit-filled speaking is not just “chit-chat,” but Spirit directed fellowship. This fellowship is conducted by way of three verbal types of expressions: psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs.

Psalms could include praise, encouragement, comfort, thanksgiving, or history of the patriarchs and prophets.⁵ The use of the Psalms by ancient Israel and the Early Church has revealed at least three important broad categories of use for us today. They serve as a guide to worship. They help us to relate honestly to God. They offer patterns for reflection and meditation upon the things that God has done for us.⁶

Hymns are exposition or exegesis set to melody. Hymns could serve to instruct, confess, teach, or exhort. Several passages in the New Testament may be regarded as hymns. For example, Ephesians 2:19-22 and 5:14, and Titus 3:4-7. Note especially the hymns that instruct us about the person of Christ such as John 1:1-18; Philippians 2:6-11; Colossians 1:15-20; 1 Timothy 3:16; and Heb. 1:1-7. Spiritual songs include all of the above. Colossians 3:16 confirms we are to utilize these same three (psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs) as means of teaching and admonishing one another. The second result of fullness of the Spirit is singing and melody making in your heart to the Lord (Ephesians 5:19).

This is not inward, private worship. Some will see this as a proof-text that God only accepts quiet meditative worship. This verse is not saying that the heart is the place of worship. Its emphasis is on the manner of worship; that is, “heart-felt” (by means of the heart), and upward bound (toward the throne of grace). There is a time for quiet prostration and also a time for exuberant declaration. The Spirit will lead us into both, according to His plan and timetable.

The third result of the Spirit's fullness is "always giving thanks to God the Father for everything" (Ephesians 5:20). This is not selective thanks. Avoid Israel's sin of moaning and groaning. "In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ" carries the impact of submission to the will, authority, power, and nature of Jesus. It is a thanksgiving resulting from Spirit-directed submission to the Lord's will.

The fourth result is "submit [ting] to one another out of reverence for Christ" (5:21). This means to place one's self under (or after) another in reverence because of a desire to conform to the sovereign wish. This passage is sometimes treated as a separate unit of teaching. However, submission is one of the marks of fullness. The following directives to wives, husbands, children, slaves, and masters are all examples of the reverent submission that is commanded. This is a dependent clause that illustrates the previous thought, "submit yourselves to one another," which in turn is a participle phrase that is subordinate to the main imperative: "Keep on allowing yourselves to be filled with the Spirit." Paul's focal point is not on wives submitting to husbands. In other words, submission on the part of the wife is but one expression of mutual submission, which is but one result of being filled with the Holy Spirit.

Through these remarkable effects the Holy Spirit puts us in right relationship with God through worship and thanksgiving ("singing" and "giving thanks"); and in right relationship with each other through fellowship and mutual submission ("speaking" and "submitting").

How Do We Allow Ourselves To "Be Filled?"

There are no special gimmicks. Allowing ourselves to be filled with the Spirit involves understanding God's desires, submitting to His Lordship, and walking by faith.

It is necessary to understand that this is God's will (Ephesians 5:17). It is a command from God (5:18). Deal honestly and completely with sin in your own life. Don't grieve the Holy Spirit, but allow Scripture to convict (Ephesians 4:30, 2 Timothy 3:16).

Secondly, realize who is in charge. Give Lordship of your life to Him. Live no longer for yourself (Luke 9:23; 2 Corinthians 5:15). Yield to God and His will through confession and repentance (1 John 1:9). Submit to God as a living sacrifice (Romans 6:13; 12:1,2). Surrender, and be eager to do what is good (Titus 2:14).

Third, walk by faith. Act on the facts, not on feelings. Just obey God's Word. Live by the Spirit and keep in step (Galatians 5:25). Accept the promises by faith. Don't be like the child constantly digging up the planted seed to see if it has sprouted. Let it grow and get on with your walk with God. Corinth is a solemn warning to us. They were baptized by the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:13). They were enriched with charismatic gifts (1 Corinthians 1:4-7). Yet Paul rebuked them as unspiritual people, as not Spirit-filled. The continuing evidence is not gifts (they had plenty), but it is the ripening of fruit (they had little).

The charismatic gifts of God's grace are not pieces of jewelry to be worn around the neck, nor perfume to adorn the body with an air of spirituality. Instead they are tools to be utilized in the building up of the Church. I have worked from time to time as a carpenter. I have my belt with the tools I have carefully chosen through the years to accomplish different tasks. Often you will have to go out to the "construction" site to find out which tool will be required to accomplish the task. You may not discover your spiritual gift until you are in the middle of the construction labor and you cry out to God to hand you a spiritual hammer or sandpaper or tube of glue. By the same token, since the infilling of the Spirit also is purposeful, let us allow God to lead us in those purposes first in order to experience the power.

Traveling to Central America to teach Mayan Indians, I entered into a spiritual warfare that I was not accustomed to. I understood, submitted, then walked. Signs and wonders accompanied the proclamation of the Word as the Spirit flowed in power. The fullness of the Spirit will give power to withstand temptation (like Jesus), power to proclaim Jesus boldly (like Peter), power to be a servant (like a good deacon), power to forgive enemies (like Stephen), power to confront forces of darkness (like Paul), and power to encourage and teach (like Barnabas). "All of you, keep on allowing yourselves to be filled with the Spirit." The Spirit-filled life is marked by right relationship with God in worship and thanksgiving, and in right relationship with others by Spirit-directed fellowship and service.

Notes

1. See Wagner's personal account "How I Learned About the Power," 15-24, in *The Third Wave of the Holy Spirit: Encountering the Power of Signs and Wonders Today* (Ann Arbor, MI: Vine Books, 1988) and *Look Out! The Pentecostals are Coming* (Carol Stream, IL: Creation House, 1973; reissued in a slightly different form as *Spiritual Power and Church Growth*, Altamonte Springs, Fla: Strang Communications, 1986).
2. All Scripture references are from the NIV.
3. See Roger Stronstad, "Filled with the Holy Spirit: Terminology in Luke-Acts" in *The Holy Spirit in the Scriptures and the Church*, edited by Roger Stronstad and Lawrence M. Van Kleek (Clayburn, British Columbia: Western Pentecostal Bible College, 1987) 11,12.
4. See Bernhard Anderson, *Out of the Depths: The Psalms Speak for Us Today*, (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, revised 1983), p.16.
5. For a list of psalms according to type and use in the Early Church see Anderson, 239ff.
6. See Douglas Stuart and Gordon Fee, *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan), 184.
7. See Ralph P. Martin, "Hymns in the New Testament," 788-790, in Geoffrey Bromiley, ed., *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, Vol. 2, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, revised edition, 1982).

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