



THE SPIRIT-FILLED LIFE

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Ephesians 5:6-20

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The Rev. Dr. Baron Mullis wrote in a sermon, “The letter to the Ephesians is not about making ourselves significant. We had that the minute God formed us out of the dust into God’s own image. It’s not even about salvation; God has done that too. It is about a way of life that reflects God. It is about a way of life that reflects the image of God imprinted on us and renewed in Jesus Christ. We are called into life in Christ.”

What does it mean when we say, “to be filled with the Spirit” or rather to live “the Spirit-filled life”? Often times, imagery that comes to one’s mind, is someone, perhaps in a Pentecostal or Baptist church, flamboyantly bouncing around, with their hands waving high in the air, singing praise songs to God. Though that certainly is by definition being Spirit-filled, I’m thinking more along the lines of being filled with the Spirit in order to live a love-filled life, a peace-filled life, a joy-filled life. One where our hearts, minds and souls are at peace with ourselves and with the world around us. And that’s hard, I mean really hard. But that doesn’t mean we shouldn’t strive toward it. In fact, today’s scripture said, “to make the most of the day.” Meaning to strive to that all day, every day.

This is all somewhat tricky because if we call ourselves Christians then we believe that we are already filled with the Spirit. So wouldn’t that mean we are already living a Spirit-filled life? Not necessarily. Just because we believe in God, and we are filled with God’s Spirit, does not mean that we are actively living a Spirit-filled life. In fact, oftentimes we are not.



There are days and times in all of our lives when we aren't living in the ways of the Spirit. And when that happens to me I'm not proud of it, or happy about it, but often times aware of it, and always trying to rekindle the Spirit that lives inside of me. To conquer the darkness by being a child of the light, just like today's scripture says. Some days are of course easier than others, and some seasons are better than others, but no matter what I try, and we all need to try.

Unfortunately, there are times in all of our lives when we aren't actively striving to live in the ways of the Spirit. This can be for a day, a week, a month or more. It's those times when we become numb, or we forget, or we get too busy, or something in our lives causes us to have great pain or great anger and we slip, and we let the darkness win. It may not always seem like "darkness" but it is. It's that chip on your shoulder, that lashing out over something little, that instance when you are "kind of okay" with something bad happening to someone else. That's the darkness rearing its ugly head and if we aren't careful it can grow inside of us. But I'm getting ahead of myself.

We are indeed all filled with the Spirit. But are we all truly seeking to do what God has called us to do? Are we acting in ways that God has called us to act? Are we living how we've been taught to live? Sometimes we forget we are Christians and we don't act the way scripture has taught us. Worse, sometimes we are aware that we are Christians, and aware that we are called to live differently than the world teaches us to, and yet we still let the things that are the opposite of the Spirit get to us, fester inside of us and make us act in ways we aren't supposed to.

In scripture, we often find these two things pitted against each other. One is often referred to as "living in the light" and the other is "living in darkness." The right way to live and to act is often called "the fruits of the spirit," while the other is called "the works of the flesh".

These "fruits and works" are true actions that come from the light or from the darkness. They are specific actions and instances that can become ways of living



and vice versa, ways of living that lead to specific actions. Meaning we can be living in the light at any given moment, which produces fruits of the Spirit, which then helps us continue to live more into the Spirit and to be children of the light. On the other hand, if we do works of the flesh, the darkness grows inside of us, producing more works of the flesh. It is symbiotic or it is reciprocal, and we all need to be careful about how we live.

Galatians chapter five teaches us that “the works of the flesh are obvious: fornication, impurity, licentiousness, ²⁰ idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, anger, quarrels, dissensions, factions, ²¹ envy, ^[a] drunkenness, carousing, and things like these.”

But Paul goes on to say that, “By contrast, the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness, and self-control.”

Therefore, Scripture tells us that when we live with anger instead of love, we are letting the works of the flesh beat out the fruit of the Spirit. For the fruit of the Spirit would be love above all other things. You see, Paul starts with love. I think that is intentional because it happens in other instances of scripture as well. This is likely due to the fact that if we live a Spirit-filled life, we are living a life filled with love. All the other fruits of the Spirit pour forth from that love.

That if we live with love as our aim, our goal, our constant strategy for living out the day to day, we will then be joyful and spread joy. We will then have peace of mind, heart and soul and spread peace to others.

We will spread peace to the doormen each morning when we greet them – just like we passed the peace with one another a few moments ago. We will spread peace to the crossing guard, the barista, or to the security guard or custodian at work or anyone else we come into contact with on a given day. To our spouses, our friends, our kids and to every stranger we see.



If we wake up with love in our hearts, because we've looked to the Spirit for it, we have a better chance at being patient throughout the entire day. And sometimes, living in the city, I think we could all use a double dose of that patience.

Occasionally I may wake up and ask the Lord to fill me with the Holy Spirit and control my actions and reactions for the day. And then I may get my day started right, spreading some love and joy and peace but then I pass that second building that's under construction and the jackhammers start to get to me. They start to break down the armor of the Spirit that I've prayed for. And then for the fourth time of the morning a cabby honks his horn right in my ear and, my gosh, I'm ready to lose it. That's when I need a double dose of the Spirit and maybe that's when you do, too. That's the time we need to pray again, and breathe, and pray again for patience. It's not easy, but it's what we are called to do.

Fred Craddock once said, "Being committed to the way of God in the world does not exempt one from the struggle. In fact, it is those who are most engaged in the way of God who seem to experience most intensely the opposition of evil. If Jesus struggled, who is exempt? Nor did the presence of the Holy Spirit mean the absence of temptation; rather, the Spirit was the available power of God in the contest."

Having the power of the Spirit in our lives is what leads us to patience. And when we are patient, we are kind. When we are kind, we are generous. When we are faithful, we are gentle and we have self-control. One Spirit-filled action breeds another. It snowballs. It affects ourselves, our existence, who we are, who we are becoming, our very being.

This Spirit-filled way of life is not something that happens instantaneously; rather it is the long game. It is the long game of life built up over years, over months, over days, over fractions of days, and over simple moments. It is a life built of waking up every morning asking God to fill you with the Holy Spirit and to control your actions and reactions for the day. It is the asking of God to fill your heart and your mind and your soul with God's love. To ask God for superhuman strength



when it comes to patience and kindness rather than anger and rudeness. To have love rather than hostility.

This is not just about you or me; it is about everyone. When the Spirit transforms our hearts and our minds, God calls us to action. He calls us to commit acts of mercy, kindness, caring, love, and to do works of justice. You see, the Spirit-filled life is not an idle life; it is a transformed and transforming life. As we change and as we grow, it is imperative that we help others to change and grow. Paul says in first Corinthians, “To each person is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.” It’s not just about us and our well-being; rather it’s about our families, this church, our neighborhood, this city and the entire world. So what are we doing about that?

A pastor named Chuck Queen blogged that “the church is called... to be a microcosm of God’s macrocosm. What I mean is that the church, a local church, is called to realize – in a particular place, within a particular community, in and through a particular people – what God wants to do globally and universally. God wants to heal the nations and redeem this planet...”

He goes on to say, “We offer a witness to the world when we – the church – care for one another with the love of Christ and work for the common good of all people. This is why church is important. We are not a business. We are not a club. We are not a mere religious organization. We are the family of God in a particular place living out the life Christ called us to live in order to show the world what it means to be the family of God.”

That’s the Spirit-filled life. Are we living it?

In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.