

MARKS OF A SPIRIT-FILLED CHRISTIAN

Ephesians 5:18–6:9

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Our Scripture today once more is from Paul's letter to the Ephesians. It's a rather lengthy passage today and one that could take us many weeks to look at. Sometimes, looking at something in detail is rewarding, but looking at it as a whole is rewarding as well. I want to look at a whole section of Scripture today to get an appreciation of what the marks of a Spirit-filled life are.

“Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit. Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ. Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything. Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. After all, no one ever hated his own body, but he feeds and cares for it, just as Christ does the church—for we are members of his body. ‘For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.’ This is a profound mystery—but I am talking about Christ and the church. However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her

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husband. Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. ‘Honor your father and mother’—which is the first commandment with a promise—‘that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth.’ Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord. Slaves, obey your earthly masters with respect and fear, and with sincerity of heart, just as you would obey Christ. Obey them not only to win their favor when their eye is on you, but like slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from your heart. Serve wholeheartedly, as if you were serving the Lord, not men, because you know that the Lord will reward everyone for whatever good he does, whether he is slave or free. And masters, treat your slaves in the same way. Do not threaten them, since you know that he who is both their Master and yours is in heaven, and there is no favoritism with him” (Ephesians 5:18–6:9, NIV).

Last week, we looked at the theme from Ephesians 5:1–17 on how to deal with anger and immorality. We noted that twelve of the fifteen works of the flesh are related to anger and immorality. Therefore, if we are to look at about 80 percent of our Christian life and want to have some degree of victory in it, we will deal successfully with anger and with sexual temptation.

Dealing with anger involves, as Paul says in Ephesians 5, extending forgiveness and showing love. And dealing with immorality involves agreeing that immorality is improper for God’s people. That we must guard our speech, that we must live in God’s will. Then today the fourth step in dealing with both of these matters. That is, to stay filled with the Spirit. Verse 18 is the centerpiece of the whole of chapter 5 and the first nine verses of chapter 6. Dwelling with the Spirit of God residing in us.

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When you look at how the Christian encounters the Holy Spirit, you'll find, as you look at the New Testament, that there are at least four different ways in which we receive the Holy Spirit in our Christian experience. We, obviously, receive the Spirit of God when we are converted. When we become saved, we don't receive Christ the Son and God the Father and have two thirds of the godhead, and wait for the third person to show up later. We have God the Father, God the Son, and God the Spirit. Jesus says to us, "Unless one is born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God" (John 3:5). 1 Corinthians 12:3 says, "Therefore I want you to understand that no one speaking by the Spirit of God can ever say Jesus be cursed. And no one can say, 'Jesus is Lord' except by the Holy Spirit." John 20:22 says, "Jesus breathed on them and said to them, 'Receive the Holy Spirit.'" This occurs before the Acts experience of Pentecost. In Galatians 4:6, Paul, writing to every Christian, says, "God has sent forth the Spirit of his Son into our hearts crying, 'Abba, Father.'" In Romans 8:9, "If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is not of him." And Romans 8:16, "The Spirit bears witness with our spirit that we are the children of God."

So everyone who enters the family of God is given the Spirit of God from the moment of conversion. We define that as a time when we receive the Spirit. But yet the word "receive the Spirit" is not limited to that initial encounter with the Lord and salvation. We find that it's also appropriate for us to describe receiving the Spirit in an experience called the "baptism in the Spirit." We look to the Book of Acts and we find that, in the Early Church, although there were believers who had already come to faith in Christ and had already had the Word of Christ and received the Spirit, in Acts chapters 2, 8, and in 9, 10, and 19, they are all receiving the Spirit in a fresh dimension and way, being baptized in the Spirit.

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We learn from this, by the way, that our Christian lives parallel with the life of our Lord. He was conceived of the Spirit and so we are also conceived by the Spirit in conversion. But He was anointed by the Spirit as He began His ministry. So also we look to that anointing of the Spirit of God for empowerment in our Christian experience. This is really what the baptism of the Spirit is about. To anoint our lives inwardly and outwardly, as they relate to people.

But there is yet another occasion when we may be described as being filled with the Spirit. It occurs a number of times in the Book of Acts. I would call this time “Being filled with the Spirit at pressure points in our life.” For we find incidences—like Peter in Acts 4, Peter and John when they heal the lame man and they have to appear before a council on trial for doing a good work—in which they’re facing they know not what, persecution of some kind. As they speak to the council, Acts 4:8 says, “Peter was filled with the Spirit.” How can this be? They obviously received the Spirit at conversion. They were obviously filled with the Spirit on the Day of Pentecost. But yet again it is said of Peter, “He was filled with the Spirit.”

The same thing, same verb, happens in Acts 7 when Stephen is brought into a place where he is going to be done away with. Stoned to death. As he is looking at his angry accusers, the text of Acts tells us that Stephen, “full of the Holy Spirit, looked up to heaven and saw the glory of God.”

The same kind of experience happens with Paul in Acts 13:9, when he is on the first missionary journey. At the very outset, he is met by a sorcerer who tries to turn the Roman proconsul against the Lord. Paul, full of the Holy Spirit, looked at this sorcerer and said, “You are a child of the devil,” and caused blindness to come upon him.

Peter and John, Stephen and Paul, all had moments in their experience where they are described as being filled with the Spirit. What is happening? What is happening is they are meeting new

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pressure points in their life. There is a sense that when you received the Spirit of God in the first instance, the Son is infinite and you are expandable. You are capable of receiving more of Him and He is capable of giving more of himself. Therefore, when you face an extreme situation as a Christian, you find a new stretch in your life, you are being pushed out of the borders of your life more than you have ever been pushed out before. It's like a balloon that is expanding, and you have more need of the Spirit than you have ever had. And the Spirit comes to fill you, always to the level of your need, if you will open yourself to Him. So the filling and the receiving of the Spirit is also described in the Book of Acts as coming in pressure moments in our life, when we could not have responded to a situation, except the Spirit of God came upon us and equipped us in a new way.

The fourth way in which the Spirit is at work in us is the continual filling of the Holy Spirit, which is noted here in the passage that I have read today. The continual filling of the Spirit. In fact, the New Testament is far more concerned with the issue of, “*Are* you filled with the Spirit?” than, “*Were* you filled with the Spirit?” Because the Spirit, in a sense, is called “wind” after all, and when you receive the Spirit, there is a sense in which you could use the analogy of the filling up of a balloon with air. But unless you continue to put air in the balloon over a period of time, it will deflate. Therefore, there is this dynamic of the work of the Spirit in our lives that it is not sufficient to just be filled once. That we're able to look back five, ten, or twenty years of our life and say, “I was filled with the Spirit and simply let that experience be dormant.” One must have an ever-present, continuing experience with the Spirit of God, the Spirit of Christ. Therefore, Paul says here, “Be filled with the Spirit.”

There are several things about the verb which he uses, “Be filled with the Spirit.” It is a plural verb. It means “all of you.” “All of you be filled with the Spirit.” Rather than becoming drunk

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with new wine. What a tragedy is being drunk on wine that leads to brokenness, that leads to ruination. The Christian, though, has a different perspective. The Christian gets his or her lift not on some chemical or liquid. The Christian gets his or her lift and power to live life on the basis of the invisible Spirit of God. None of us are to get drunk, but all of us are to get filled. And the fullness of the Spirit is not something just reserved for the privileged few. The fullness of the Spirit is meant for every one of us—“All of you be filled with the Spirit.”

Be filled with the Spirit is also a passive verb. It might be translated properly, “Let the Holy Spirit fill you.” The important thing is to yield to Him without reserve. As a person gets drunk by drinking, if you will drink, the wine will do its work. So also if you will simply take the Spirit, the Spirit will do His work of filling in your life. Jesus said “If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink” (John 7:37).

And “Be filled with the Spirit” is also in the present tense. There’s a real difference between the Greek past tense and the Greek present tense. In the past tense, Jesus might give a command like this in John 2:7, “Fill the jars with water.” That was at Cana, and He meant for the jars to be filled then and just filled once. So it is in the past tense imperative. “Fill the jars up with water.” But here, Paul is saying, “Be filled,” or “Go on being filled and filled and filled and filled” with the Spirit. Make it a continuous action. The filling of the Spirit is a developing experience.

We all have different ways and capacities, I think, for being filled with the Spirit. If you were to compare a newborn baby of about seven pounds, who had just begun to breathe, and take a 6-foot tall man of about 168 pounds, take both of them—fit and healthy and breathing properly—both may be described as being filled with air. Yet the baby’s lungs do not have nearly the same capacity as the man’s lungs. There is a sense in which every one of us can be filled with the

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Spirit, although our capacity may be different according to where we are at at that particular time of our walk.

What are the marks of a Spirit-filled life? The continuing marks a Spirit-filled life are four, as are outlined in the passage for us.

I. The first evidence of a continual filling of the Spirit is that we are speaking to one another.

I'm not talking about the initial experience or the baptism of the Spirit, I'm talking about the evidence of the continual filling of the Spirit—the first evidence. It's not surprising that the first mark of a continued Spirit-filled life is a life of fellowship with others. After all, the first fruit of the Spirit is love. Therefore, it's not surprising that the first mark of being filled with the Spirit is speaking to one another. However deep we may feel our walk with God is, we cannot claim to be filled with the Spirit if we're not on speaking terms with someone. It can't exist. You cannot be filled with the Spirit of God and not be speaking to people.

The first sign of fullness is fellowship. And speaking is not just ordinary speaking, by the way; it's speaking with psalms taken from the Old Testament. Speaking with hymns, songs we create as worship to God. Speaking with spiritual songs which may be songs we create in the melody of our hearts to the Lord.

I think this Scripture is saying turn around and sing eyeball-to-eyeball, face-to-face, as a sign of the Spirit-filled life. You are singing to one another and encouraging one another. Your fellowship is risky enough when you dare to encourage one another through song in the Scripture.

Christians who are Spirit-filled are always going to face the danger of being thought of as somewhat inebriated, as they were on the Day of Pentecost. There is an exhilaration to the walk

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with Christ that gives us the kind of ability to get out of our normal shyness and inferiority complex, and encourage one another with words and with songs. Speaking to one another and singing of the Spirit-filled life.

II. Singing is the second sign of the Spirit-filled life.

It's not only speaking to one another with psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs. Speaking may not just be singing. It may be just using the words. But then, singing and making music in your heart to the Lord is a sign of the Spirit-filled life.

We have a classic example of this in Acts 16:25, when Paul and Silas, after a disastrous second missionary trip, are put into jail at Philippi. The second missionary journey is the most intriguing thing in all of Scripture to me. It begins with an argument. Paul and Barnabas have a dispute and they don't go with one another. Paul then picks a new companion. He walks about two to three hundred miles back to the place where he founded some churches on his first missionary journey, and picks up another companion: Timothy. And the three of them start walking again about three to four hundred miles, and they don't know exactly where they're going. Paul wants to go to Asia. The Spirit says no. He doesn't sit down in the road. He keeps walking. He finally comes to Troas. At Troas, he has this mystical experience. In a vision, a man of Macedonia says, "Come help us." He goes to Macedonia, to the town of Philippi, and there's no man of Macedonia here. There's not even a synagogue there. In fact, he finally comes down on a Sabbath day to the riverside and finds a group of Jewish women who are worshipping the Lord. When a demon-possessed slave girl is converted and gives up her fortune-telling trade, her owners are mad and they throw Paul and Silas into a Roman prison at Philippi. The whole trip has been a colossal disaster. He has almost no fruit to show for it at all, except he has this certainty that he's walking in God's will.

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I think if I'd been Paul in that prison cell at that moment, I'd have said, "God, where did I miss it?" Or, "Why do You treat Your servants this way?" Instead, what he does is, at about midnight, with their backs bleeding from the beating, he and Silas begin to lift up songs and hymns and praises to God. The prisoners are listening and God intervenes, and from that moment on, there is a whole turnaround in that missionary journey, and it becomes an unbelievably successful trip in terms of fruit that is produced. I'm convinced to this day that the key of singing in adversity was the thing that unleashed and released the whole work of God on this trip. I'm convinced in my own life that whenever we face dark circumstances, if we will resort to singing, it is a way of having the Spirit of God continually move in our life. Singing to the Lord.

Singing is straight out of heaven. That's why God wants us to sing. When you open the Book of Revelation, you find people singing around the throne. God gave us singing on earth because it's a copy of the true thing that's going on in heaven. He knows that singing is designed to liberate our spirits.

"Making music in your heart" (Ephesians 5:19). Singing to the Lord is a mark of the fullness of the Spirit.

III. The third mark of the fullness of the Spirit is giving thanks for everything.

Not just giving thanks for some things, but everything. Realizing that in everything God is working for the good. Groaning, grumbling, complaining are positive proof of a lack of a Spirit-filled life. Giving thanks is positive evidence of a life that is being lived out in the Spirit of God.

IV. The fourth mark of the Spirit-filled life is right relationships.

Wives rightly related to husbands. Husbands rightly related to wives. All of them linked by this theme: "Be subject one to another" (Ephesians 5:21). Children rightly related to parents and parents to children. Employees rightly related to employers and employers to employees. All of

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the right relationships spring out of contact with the Spirit of God, because the Spirit of God is interested in reproducing Jesus Christ in our life.

That's why Paul can say, "Husbands love your wives as Christ loved the church," and why he can say to wives, "submit to your husbands"—because Christ is both the lover and the one who also knows what it is to be in a submitted position. To reproduce the character of Christ in our life is the work of the Spirit. When we are Spirit-filled, our relationships will be impacted by that. The Holy Spirit puts us in a right relationship with God and man.

I think there's a reason why the marks of the Spirit are in the order that they're in. You start by speaking to one another. As you begin to speak to one another, the songs of God begin to fill your life. They bring life to you in an emotional level and begin to raise your spirit and build you up. Those of you who sing regularly know that it is a tremendous build-up. When I put a tape in and begin listen to praise songs, all of a sudden, I'm lifted to another level. With the singing, I begin to give thanks. When you're speaking to one another, singing and giving thanks, it's going to be hard to be in wrong relationships.

The marks of the Spirit-filled life on a daily basis. May the Lord help us to be filled with the Spirit.

Closing Prayer

Father, we thank You for these moments we've had already to worship You today and to gather around Your Word. We're excited about what the Spirit does in our lives. How Your Spirit has hovered over us when we were unconverted, just like He hovered over the waters of the deep, seeking to bring order and beauty to what was a massive, foreboding blackness and darkness (Genesis 1:2). Your Spirit brooding over the deep of our conscious and subconscious life was seeking to bring Jesus into our life. And through the convicting work of the Spirit, Jesus has

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entered and the Spirit has taken up a dwelling place in us. Then Father, the Spirit wasn't satisfied with that. But the Spirit wanted to empower us and anoint us to speak to You in ways that transcended our normal abilities and to speak to our fellow man in a power and confidence that we did not natively have. So Your Spirit wants to come upon us to baptize us and to make us kind of living coals of fire from Your altar in this world. Then, Lord, Your Spirit wants to come in those pressure moments in our life, when we really don't know how we can handle the situation, because it is beyond anything we've ever faced before. We find Your Spirit is there, giving us the power to face it. Filling us to a level we never knew we could be filled—because “out of your inner man, rivers of living water will flow” (John 7:38). Then, Lord, we thank You for that regular work of the Spirit, that is seeking to cause us to be filled at every moment and to translate our lives, Lord, in such a way, to rearrange our thinking and our patterns in such a way, that we may stay close to You through the work that the Spirit is doing in our lives.