

9. Go On Being Filled With The Holy Spirit

Opening question

What do you think our relationship with God will be like in the new creation?

Fact check: being filled with the Spirit is not a one-off event

Earlier in this series we saw in Acts that a powerful encounter with the Holy Spirit is not supposed to be a one-off event for Christians. Luke records people being filled with the Spirit on multiple occasions: Peter in Acts 2:4, 4:8, 4:31; Stephen in Acts 6:5,7:55; Paul in Acts 9:17, 13:9.

Paul encourages us to expect the same. Read these two key sections:

- Galatians 3:2-5
- Ephesians 5:18-21

In his argument with the Galatians, Paul assumes that true Christian living begins and continues by the power of the Spirit (verses 3 and 5). Similarly, in Ephesians he uses the present continuous tense to tell us to “go on being filled with the Spirit”.

Discussion

Why do you think God wants to give us powerful encounters with the Holy Spirit throughout our lives?

Fact-check: God among His people

The Holy Spirit clearly is given so that we might have power to witness to Christ (Acts 1:8) – and we’ll look at this in more detail in a future session.

He is also described the “firstfruits” of what we will one day fully experience (Romans 8:23), and as a “guarantee” of our inheritance – which is to be with God forever (2 Corinthians 1:22, 5:5, Ephesians 1:14). He is, therefore, our present experience of God’s ultimate intention for His people, that they be with God forever (Revelation 21:3; suggested in Genesis 3:8-9, promised in Leviticus 26:12, Ezekiel 37:27 and elsewhere).

Fact-check: “going on being filled”

Andrew Wilson clarifies Paul’s meaning in Ephesians 5:18:

“Many of us probably think of being ‘filled with the Spirit’ in terms of liquid, like a glass being filled with water, which raises various questions. (Why aren’t we full already? Do we leak? Can the Spirit be spilled?) But Paul’s original wording – ‘be filled with the Spirit/breath/wind’ – would make people think of being filled with air. It might call to mind a pipe or a trumpet, which can only fulfil its purpose when it is ‘filled with the breath.’ Or, even better, you might think of a sailboat, which requires a power beyond itself (the wind) to go anywhere. Paul is using a dynamic image, not a static one. A glass of water only needs filling once; a sailboat won’t be useful without continual filling.”

This encourages us to hoist our sails (with expectant, eager faith) and ask the Spirit to fill us again.

Discussion

What attitudes and actions have helped you to respond to Paul's command to "go on being filled with the Spirit"?

Discussion: What being filled with the Spirit results in

Read Ephesians 5:18-21 again and think about the results of being filled again and again by the Spirit that Paul mentions:

- "addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart"
- "giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ"
- "submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ"

Are these things you would have expected Paul to list as the results of being filled with the Spirit? Why do you think he chose them?

Look at the direction of these Spirit-empowered actions:

- We make melody and give Him thanks to God (verses 19, 20).
- And sing and submit to one another (verses 19, 21).

It is no accident that Paul describes the Spirit's actions in terms of loving God and other people, which is just what Jesus said the greatest commandments in the Law were all about (Matthew 22:35-40). What does this tell us about the Spirit's priorities for us?

Do it: singing and the Spirit

Paul says that our Spirit-led singing will be directed to God and to others. We can see examples of this in Old Testament psalms, which switch between addressing God and other people (Psalm 40 does this in verses 1-4, and 5-17, and within the section addressed to God twice mentions telling others about Him, verse 9 and 10).

The types of singing Paul lists are "psalms and hymns and spiritual songs". We can assume these are:

- Old Testament psalms.
- Songs written by other people (Ephesians 1:14 may be a quotation of a song lyric).
- Spontaneous songs from the Spirit.

We're probably most used to the second and third categories, but it would be great to learn to sing biblical psalms to each other as well. (There's a rich tradition of this in Scottish churches.) We can start with a phrase or a few lines from a psalm.

Spend time worshipping God together, with songs that you know, and making space for spiritual singing all together, and being led by people singing spontaneously. Try to make the focus of your singing God and each other, rather than yourself.

To reflect on during the week

It is God's plan for you to spend eternity with Him, in joy and peace and love beyond your imagination. Spend time thinking about what this tells us about His love for us, and ask His Spirit to give you more and more tastes of this in your relationship with Him now.