

FILLED WITH THE SPIRIT OR FULL OF THE SPIRIT?

Whatever you are filled with has an effect! This realization came as I was preparing this message. Whether the effect is positive or negative depends on the spirit with which you are filled. Let's look at some examples from Scripture.

When Jesus was in his hometown of Nazareth and spoke in the synagogue, he applied the words of Isaiah to himself. When the people of the synagogue heard this, they were all filled with fury. The effect: they rose up, drove him out of town, and led him to a hill to hurl him down headfirst. Luke 4:28

Jesus healed a man with a withered hand. The Scribes and Pharisees were filled with rage. The effect: they discussed what they might do to Jesus. Luke 6:11

Ananias was filled with Satan. The effect: he lied to the holy Spirit and retained part of the price of the land he sold. It cost him his life! Acts 5:3

Speaking of those who suppress the truth by their wickedness, Paul says they are filled with every form of wickedness, evil, greed, and malice, envy, murder, rivalry, treachery, and spite. Romans 1:29 See also Acts 5:17 Acts 13:45, James 3:8

And so, Paul warns us, "Watch carefully how you live, not as foolish persons but as wise, making the most of the opportunity, because the days are evil. Do not continue in ignorance but try to understand what is the will of the Lord. Do not get drunk on wine but be filled with the holy Spirit. One effect: address one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and praying to the Lord in your hearts, giving thanks always and for everyone in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God the Father. Ephesians 5:15-20

Being filled with the Spirit has many other effects.

John was filled with the Spirit even from his mother's womb. He turned many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God. Luke 1:15

When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the infant leaped in her womb. Filled with the holy Spirit, Elizabeth cried out in a loud voice and said, "Most blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb, Jesus." Luke 1:41

Zechariah, filled with the holy Spirit, prophesied. Luke 1:67

Those who were gathered in the upper room were filled with the holy Spirit and began to speak in different tongues as the Spirit enabled them to proclaim. Acts 2:4

The leaders, elders, and Scribes brought the believers into their presence and questioned them. Peter, filled with the holy Spirit, answered them. Later, the believers returned to their own community. As they all prayed, the place where they were gathered shook, and they were all filled with the holy Spirit and continued to speak the word of God with boldness. Acts 4:5-8

Ananias went into Saul's house. Laying his hands on him, he said, "Saul, my brother, the Lord has sent me, Jesus who appeared on the way by which you came, that you may

regain your sight and be filled with the holy Spirit.” Immediately, he regained his sight, was baptized, and recovered his strength. Acts 9:17

Finally, Elymas the Magician opposed Paul and Barnabas in an attempt to turn the proconsul away from the faith. But Paul, filled with the holy Spirit, looked intently at him and said, “You son of the devil, you enemy of all that is right, full of every sort of deceit and fraud. Will you not stop twisting the straight paths of the Lord? Even now, the hand of the Lord is upon you. You will be blind and unable to see for a time. When the proconsul saw what had happened, he came to believe, for he was astonished by the teaching about the Lord.” Acts 13:8-12

Being filled with the Spirit is the starting point of what God really wants from us, however. We can be filled with the Spirit, but also full of our human, fleshly nature to a great extent.

Picture a bottle mostly filled with dirt (representing our fleshly nature). You add water (representing the holy Spirit) to the top. The bottle is now filled with the Spirit, but there is still a lot of the flesh. Picture the bottle half full of dirt and half full with water. The bottle is again filled with the Spirit, but there is less of the flesh. Finally, picture a bottle with no dirt in it but only water. This bottle is full of the Spirit. We can only be as full of the Spirit as we are empty of the flesh, though in any case we can be said to be “Spirit filled”.

The goal of being filled with the Spirit is ultimately to be full of the Spirit. How do we get from being “Spirit filled” to being “Full of the Spirit?”

It is simple: it is the way of humility: God must increase, and we must decrease. (John 3:30) We must choose the way of humility. Humility does not mean putting ourselves down or denying that we have any gifts or talents. To do so is to insult the God who gave us these gifts and talents. Rather, humility is simply acknowledging that we are nothing apart from God and the gift of his Spirit and then living that way..

First Peter says, “All of you, clothe yourselves with humility in your dealings with one another, for ‘God opposes the proud but bestows favor on the humble.’ So, humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God so that he may exalt you in due time.” 1 Peter 5:5b & 6 Note: humble yourselves is an active verb; it is something that we do.

Jesus tells us that whoever humbles himself like a child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. Matthew 18:4 Whoever humbles himself will be exalted. Matthew 23:12b.

How do we learn humility? From the Master, as always. Though he was in the form of God, (Jesus) did not regard equality with God something to be grasped. Rather, he emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, coming in human likeness; and, found human in appearance, he humbled himself, becoming obedient to death, even death on a cross. Philippians 2:6-8 Jesus says, “Come to me, all you who labor and are burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am meek and humble of heart; you will find rest for yourselves. My yoke is easy, and my burden light.” Matthew 11:28 & 29

What are the effects of being full of the Spirit? Again, let's look at Scripture.

When the Apostles selected assistants to serve the community, they told the people to select from among them seven reputable men, full of the Spirit and wisdom. Acts 6:3 Among those was Stephen, a man full of the faith and the holy Spirit. Acts 6:5 Soon, we see Stephen filled with grace and power, working great wonders and signs among the people. Acts 6:8

The church in Jerusalem sent Barnabas to Antioch. When he arrived and saw the grace of God, he rejoiced and encouraged them all to remain faithful to the Lord in firmness of heart, for he was a man full of the holy Spirit and faith. A large number of people was added to the Lord. Acts 11:22-24

Full of the holy Spirit, Jesus returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit into the desert for 40 days to be tempted by the devil. Luke 4:1 Jesus was full of the Spirit when he went into the desert and full of the Spirit when he came out. He returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit, and news of him spread throughout the whole region. Luke 4:14

Stephen was the first Christian martyr. As he is being stoned to death, Stephen, full of the Spirit, looked intently to heaven and saw the glory of God and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. Acts 7:56

When you are full of the Spirit, you may be led to places you'd rather not go. But, when you are full of the Spirit, it really doesn't matter.

Spirit filled or full of the Spirit. An incredible choice! Which one we choose will determine how much God, through his Spirit, can use us. How empty do you want to be? How far do you want to go?

--Patrick J. Hession