

Series Title / The Blessed Life
A study through the letter to the Ephesians
1-6-19 The Wise and Foolish Paths Pt. 2

A Call to Live the Blessed Life: Chapters 1-3 spell out all of the blessings in spiritual realms that the believer has in Christ. It tells us our position in Christ:

- we are blessed to be chosen as sons by adoption.
- we are blessed to have the secret of the Gospel previously hidden so that the rulers of this age could not discern or decode it and stop the plan.
- God has saved us by his grace
- Sealed us by his Holy Spirit
- To have spiritual sight to see and understand the truth
- To be seated with Christ in heavenly places. We are citizens of his already-but-not-yet-Kingdom.

And he has done all of this to the praise of his glory. This is cause for great rejoicing. To be blessed so immeasurably, and so lavishly.

Chapters 4-6 Paul turned sharply to an application of the blessed life. He has told us that we are to live worthy of the grace which we have already received.

- A worthy life reflects the character of Christ in humility, gentleness, loving patience, and a commitment to maintain the Spirit's unity and the bond of peace. A life worthy of grace looks like Jesus.
- A worthy life is one that affirms the creed—making the good confession of faith in love—there is one God of the universe and no other, there is one body of Christ joined together by the Spirit, there is one true faith—there is one baptism of the Spirit by which individuals are initiated into this holy family.
- Yet, Paul maintains, that within this framework of unity in the essentials—God has given the body of Christ great diversity of expression. Many Spiritual gifts and it is through these gifts that God matures the body of Christ until the day he brings our redemption.

Paul has also told us about the barriers to the blessed life.

- Futile thinking—reverting back to the darkened understanding and false beliefs.
- As a result of futile thinking, men are driven to reckless, insatiable lusts which puts a wedge between them and God.

Paul has given us the way to a blessed life.

- Redeemed thinking.
- Truthful and gracious speech
- Resolved anger, being friendly and forgiving

He then warns us against the foolish path of judgment that characterizes those who practice idolatry.

He encourages us toward the wise path which is characterized by:

- a careful life—taking care to build our lives on the foundation of Jesus and his teachings.
- a productive life—a life that produces the fruit of the Spirit.
- a Spirit-filled life.

The Main Text: Eph. 5:18-21

The Main Idea: The blessed life is sustained by routinely “being filled” with God’s Spirit.

A Spirit-filled life 5:18-21—¹⁸ “And do not get drunk with wine, which is debauchery, but be filled by the Spirit, ¹⁹ speaking to one another in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, singing and making music in your hearts to the Lord, ²⁰ always giving thanks to God the Father for each other in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, ²¹ and submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ.”

The passive aspect of Spirit-filling This is one of the oddest texts in all Scripture. I say that because it is definitely a command. I’m going to take just a few minutes to break down some of the grammar of this passage for you today. We covered some of this a few weeks ago, but today we are going to explore this issue of being filled with the Spirit a bit more fully.

- “get drunk” and “be filled” are analogous concepts. Both concepts involve a passive reception, or the passive effect of an acting agent.
 - The drinker he’s referring to here is the pagan who gets sloshed at a dinner party or a local pub. These folks were cultists who drank and sang songs and believed they were being possessed by the gods. Their drunken revelry produced the effect of depravity and moral dissipation. This in turn opened them up to experiencing ecstatic experiences from their deities.
- By contrast (not comparison)**
- The believer is to “be filled” which is passive. God is the one who supplies us richly with his Spirit. And we learn that being filled with the Spirit is to encounter the Spirit’s abundance.

What does it mean to be Spirit-filled? Firstly, being filled is an analogy. All human language is the language of analogy. We employ word pictures, and evoke rich imagery to describe what we’re experiencing.

(1) It is a spiritual transformation—it is existential. Every believer has been baptized in the Spirit. This is the “one baptism” in Chapter four that he’s talking about. If you have not been baptized in the Holy Spirit and his purifying fire, **then you are not of Christ at all.** A Christian is not a religious person, not a member of a faith system or merely a religious practitioner who affirms a creedal system. If you have not been baptized by and born anew by the Holy Spirit then you do not belong to Christ. Every believer has been initially baptized in and filled with the Spirit.

(2) It is an experience of abundance—it is phenomenological. There is an effect on our attitudes, thoughts, behaviors and habits. **Definition in this context: “To encounter the Holy Spirit as a present, transforming reality so that we come under the influence of his divine will.”** The Holy Spirit’s influence in your life will be directly proportional to your experience of Him.

The issue here in Paul’s writings and in Colossians 3:16ff. is not what happened to you in the finite past. But whether or not you and I are living in the abundance of the Spirit’s filling in the here and now.

Commentators usually focus on the second part of that sentence, and proof text it with a few Scriptures which seem to affirm what is called the **Spirit-control theory of Spirit-filling.**

- 1 Sam. 28:20 “Immediately Saul fell full length on the ground, filled with fear because of the words of Samuel; and there was no strength in him.” So Samuel prophesies to Saul and it is ominous. Saul is filled with fear and sapped of strength—and then, Saul, out of overwhelming fear—makes some super bad decisions. Bad choices.
- Lk 4:28 “When they heard this, all in the synagogue were filled with rage.”
- Lk. 15:20 “So he set off and went to his father. But while he was still far off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion; he ran and put his arms around him and kissed him.”

- Act 4:17ff. “¹⁷ Then the high priest took action; he and all who were with him (that is, the sect of the Sadducees), being filled with jealousy, ¹⁸ arrested the apostles and put them in the public prison.”

It’s usually suggested that the people who were filled with rage at Jesus, or Saul filled with fear, or the religious leaders filled with rage and jealousy—became controlled by these emotions and so the phrase “filled with” means to be controlled by something—so Paul must be telling us to be controlled by the Spirit.

But I think we can see from all these proof texts used for a **behavioral control theory** that the subjects in question are actually experiencing the phenomena of fear, rage, jealousy or awe. Yes the experience of these emotions have prompted them to take action, sometimes in destructive ways.

The byproduct of becoming Spirit-filled is coming under the effect of His divine will in our lives.

The issue is not Spirit-control (because the Spirit wants to give you greater self-control cf. Gal 5:22ff.), but being ***Spirit-led***.

Here’s how Paul put it in **Galatians 5:18-25** **But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.** ¹⁹ **Now the works of the flesh are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity, depravity, ²⁰ idolatry, sorcery, hostilities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, selfish rivalries, dissensions, factions, ²¹ envying, murder, drunkenness, carousing, and similar things. I am warning you, as I had warned you before: Those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God!**

²² **But the fruit of the Spirit is love** (in place of selfishness and anger), **joy** (an inexpressible joy and an inexplicable joy), **peace** (a deep calm when the storms rage against us), **patience** (in place of exasperation), **kindness** (thoughtfulness and consideration for the feelings of others), **goodness** (a virtuous, benevolent soul), **faithfulness** (fidelity to the faith), ²³ **gentleness** (a soft hand—handling people with care), **and self-control** (notice that the Spirit doesn’t want to control you. You are a free moral agent. What God does want to do is to enable you to live in self-controlled life, self-restraint). **Against such things there is no law.** ²⁴ **Now those who belong to Christ have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.** ²⁵ **If we live by the Spirit, let us also behave in accordance with the Spirit.**

So now, how do we get filled with the Spirit?

The active dimension: the command.

But if being filled is passive how can we do anything to potentiate the filling? What exactly is there to obey? Now there is a school of interpretation here, some biblical scholars think that the singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs is the fruit of being Spirit-filled and not the activity that initiates but rather the evidence of being filled.

Personally, I find that interpretation of the passage baffling for two reasons: (1) one is a textual reason and the other (2) is a practical reason.

So let me give you the textual reason why I think the singing together is a command that catalyzes or sets into motion a life filled with the Spirit, rather than being the mere evidence of a Spirit-filled life.

First, there is a clear command in the text.

Every verb has what we call tense, voice and mood (mode).

πληρόω

Plero'ō meaning “to fulfill, fill full, to bring to an intended completion.”

Tense: Present Continuous

Voice: Passive (not active)

Mood: Imperative (a command)

So what in the passage are we being commanded to obey? To do?

Sing together (this verb is also second person plural)

Now we mentioned last time the nature of these songs:

Psalms: *psalmos* and refers to the book of Psalms proper. The song book of the Jews.

Hymns: *hymnos* is a type of song used in the ancient world to teach (didactic hymnology)

Spiritual Songs: *hode pneumatikos* “spontaneous or extemporaneous song of praise” from the heart. Can also refer to a contemporary worship and praise song. Deeply personal songs from the spirit of the believer.

Making music: *psallo* “to pluck the strings of an instrument; to compose and arrange a musical expression.”

The heart that is primed for worship on a Sunday has practiced devotional worship from Monday to Saturday.

The key here to a vigorous environment of singing, praising, and instructing in song together is each individual believer scattered throughout the week—people who have turned their devotions into worship services.

Illus. I have a friend with a big barrel chest who sings with all of his heart in worship—but can't hold a note in a concrete hall.

Some might say, “Well, I'm not much of a singer and so, I just don't like to sing.” I'm sure before you were a Christian you didn't like going to church either. Or reading your Bible. The issue is not what our personal preferences are, the issue is what we're commanded by Paul the Apostle to do. This is the corporate activity that potentiates and sets into motion the filling of the Spirit of God's people. Frankly, it doesn't matter what my personal preferences are.

Now, my second argument reason for interpreting this as a command to obey (and not just evidence of...) is practical. Over the last 20 or so years in ministry I have met scores of Christians who were baptized and filled with the Spirit experiencing an existential change of heart; but who also have deplorable praise and worship lives. They don't sing, they hardly ever give thanks, and all they seem to do is complain about what God hasn't

done for them. You can't be filled with the Spirit when you're a grumpy fault-finding complainer. It's impossible to be grateful and grumpy simultaneously.

Now the key to motivation in this regard is right here in the text:

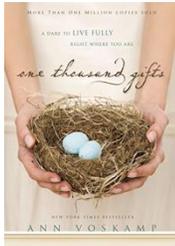
εὐχαριστέω

Eucharisteo: "to express appreciation for benefits or blessings, to give thanks."¹

When I find myself being grumpy about trials, I practice the art of thankful living. I start making a list of all that God has done. When times get tough, I recalibrate my spirit through thankfulness and gratitude as I express my appreciation for God's abundance and his goodness.

Here's a book I want you to get and read and inhale. I don't know of a book that is a better theology of gratitude than this book.

One Thousand Gifts by Ann Voskamp.



When we go up and get the 12,000 ft view and see the landscape of all that God has done for us and is doing for us—we will be amazed at his goodness, grateful for what he's provided, and inspired to praise and worship him through psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs.

That's what we're going to do right now.

Worship Team/Prayer

¹ William Arndt et al., [*A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*](#) (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 415.