

What Does It Mean to Be Filled With the Holy Spirit?

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It hardly seems necessary that we, a group of Lutheran Christians; must of whom have been members of Lutheran Churches for our entire life should be engaging in a study of what it means to be “Filled With the Holy Spirit.” The work of the Holy Spirit is so basic to Christian faith that it seems impossible for a person to be a Christian and not have the answer to this fundamental question. Why then even ask it?

There obviously, must be an answer to that question. And the answer lies in the fact that there is today, within the visible Christian Church a movement which is known by various names (Neo-Pentecostal, Charismatic, Full Gospel) which we must deal with. It is being found with increasing regularity within established denominations. The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod recently acknowledged in a study they have done in their midst that there are some 200 Charismatic Pastors within their Synod. Evidences of this movement also have been seen within our own Synod, although to my knowledge, it has yet been noted only among laymen.

The signs of this movement are primarily: (a) an increased emphasis on the work of the Holy Spirit; (b) use of the “gifts” of tongues and healing; and (c) the employment of the terms “Baptism in the Holy Spirit” and “Spirit Filled.”

It is becoming that this movement not only is here to stay, but also that it is gaining momentum, and increasing. It is therefore something which we dare not ignore, but must study on the basis of God’s Word. The Lord himself instructs us. I John 4:1 – “Beloved, believe not every spirit but try (test) the spirits whether they are of God; because many false prophets are gone out into the world.”

In pursuing the study of “What Does It Mean To Be Filled With The Holy Spirit?” we shall explore four areas: I. The Work of the Holy Spirit, II. Special Equipping by the Holy Spirit, III. God’s Desire for All Christians, IV. Dangers to Be Avoided.

I. The Work of the Holy Spirit

Anyone who has studied from Luther’s Small Catechism will acknowledge that the work of the Holy Spirit, as it is revealed in the scripture, is the work of Sanctification. II Thessalonians 2:13-14 – “But we are bound to give thanks away to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth; Whereunto he called you by our Gospel, to the obtaining of the Glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.” I Corinthians 6:11 – “And such were some of you; but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God.

This work of sanctification is, first of all, to bring men to faith in Jesus Christ as Savior. I Cor. 12:3 – “No man can say that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Ghost.” Romans 8:16 – “The Spirit beareth witness with our Spirit that we are the children of God.” Ephesians 2:8,9 – “For By grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of Gods not of works, lest any man should boast.” Philippians 2:13 – “For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure.”

Thus, the only way that a man can know and believe in Jesus Christ as his own Savior from sin, is by the working of the Holy Spirit in his heart in order to there create faith which lays hold of the works of Christ, and trusts in the promises of God. By the working of the Holy Spirit, full entrance is gained into the very family of God.

But having accomplished this blessing, the Holy Spirit does not then abandon the Christian. He continues to work his blessing in the life and heart of the believer. This is what we might call “Sanctification, Phase II.” Romans 14:17 – “The kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy

in the Holy Ghost.” Galatians 5:16 – “Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh.” Gal. 5:22-23 – “The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance.” I Peter 1:5 – “Ye are kept by the power of God through faith, unto salvation.” I Thessalonians 5:23-24 – “And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul, and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Faithful is he that calleth you, who also will do it.”

One further aspect of the Spirit’s work must also be considered, namely the means by which he works these wonders in our lives. These we call “The Means of Grace” which are the Word of God and the Sacraments. Acts 2:38 – “Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.” Romans 10:17 – “So then faith cometh by hearing and hearing by the word of God.” The scriptures speak clearly that we should not look for the working of the Holy Spirit anywhere but in the Word and Sacrament. Colossians 2:8 – “Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ.” John 17:17 – “Sanctify them through thy truth, thy Word is truth.”

This has also been the confession of the Lutheran Church from the beginning as is shown in these words from the Smalcald Articles Part III, Article viii, page 497, *Concordia Triglotta*. “Therefore we ought and must constantly maintain this point, that God does not wish to deal with us otherwise than through the spoken Word and the Sacraments. It is the devil himself whatsoever is extolled as spirit without the Word and Sacraments.”

We then can take comfort and strength from the divine truth that in the means of grace as they are administered in our midst, we have also the working of the Holy Spirit. He is ours, and we are his. Were this not true, then God could have never said through Paul in I Corinthians 6:19-20, “Know yet not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price. Therefore glorify God in your body and your spirit which are God’s.”

II. Special Equipping By the Holy Spirit

Before Jesus ascended to his throne in heaven he made a promise to his disciples. It was a promise of power and it was promised that this power would be theirs with the coming of the Holy Spirit. Acts 1:7-8 – “And he said unto them, ‘It is not for you to know the times or the seasons which the Father hath put in his own power. But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you; and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.’” John the Baptist foretold this same happening in Luke 3:16, when he promised that Jesus would baptize men “with the Holy Ghost and with fire.” The same was prophesied by Joel in the Old Testament, Joel 2:28-31, saying that in the last days, the Lord would pour out his Spirit and many mighty signs and wonders would follow. Peter established that the day of Pentecost was the fulfillment of that promise in Acts 2:16-21.

It is obvious from these examples that the Holy Spirit also gives power to men, and marvelous power at that. But the question must be raised, “Is this empowerment by the Spirit something special, brought about in special circumstances, or is it something which is both available to, and to be expected by all believers?” I think that a study of examples from the scriptures will be sufficient to answer the question.

Already in the Old Testament, notably in the books of Judges and I Samuel, God gives numerous instances of the special empowering of men by the Holy Spirit. Such power was given to Gideon in Judges 6:34, to Samson in Judges 14:19, to Saul in I Samuel 10:6,10, and to David in I Samuel 16:13. In each of the above cases, the term “*The Spirit of the LORD came upon him*” or a very similar term with the same meaning is used. In each of the cases the person on whom the Spirit of the Lord came for the purpose of equipping a chosen servant of God for a special task. Gideon, to wage war against the godless, Samson, to bring God’s vengeance on the Philistines, Saul, to demonstrate that God had chosen him as King over God’s people; and David also to equip him for his work as King. Generally it was apparently something which was given for that special task, for in David’s case, the Lord clarifies the coming of the Spirit with these words. “*And the Spirit of the LORD came upon David from that day forward.*” It also is demonstrated that when a man was removed from his

position of special service, the special coming of the Spirit was removed. I Sam. 16:17 – “But the Spirit of the Lord departed from Saul, and an evil spirit from the Lord troubled him.”

In the New Testament it also appears that special outpourings of the Spirit were given to the Lord’s special instruments, in order to equip them for their service to the Lord. This was true of John the Baptist in Luke 1:15; of Jesus in Luke 4:1,18,21; of the disciples on Pentecost in Acts 2:4; of Peter in Acts 4:8; of Stephen in Acts 8:55; of Barnabas in Acts 11:25; and of Paul in Acts 9:17 and 13:9. These men all had special tasks to perform, and were given a special measure of the Holy Spirit in order to bring about their service to the Lord. The Lord Jesus obviously must be, however, set apart by virtue of his very nature as God and Man. Here in these New Testament references the term that is generally used to describe this occurrence is “*They were all filled with the Holy Ghost,*” or again, a term conveying the same meaning.

In the Old Testament references it appears that the coming of the Spirit empowered these men physically for their tasks, e.g. Gideon and Samson. In the New Testament, the evidence is that spiritual power was given, as evidenced by miracles which were worked by and associated with those who received the special empowering of the Holy Spirit.

Thus, it is clear that the Holy Spirit, given in a very special and powerful way, is God’s gift to specially selected men who were employed by the Lord for the work which needed to be carried out in the Lord’s name. But do we have evidence that the Lord has continued this beyond the time encompassed by the Sacred Record? If anyone had been given such authority and power by the Holy Spirit, then it is likely, and perhaps even to be expected in a man such as Martin Luther. Luther, however, to my knowledge makes no statement or claim which would indicate that he was given any special abilities directly by the Holy Spirit for the carrying on of the work of the Reformation. On the contrary, his writings would seem to indicate that the only thing that Luther was acquainted with or expected was the working of the Holy Spirit which came through Word and Sacrament, and therefore was available to every Christian. “With all (Karlstadt’s) mouthing of the words ‘Spirit, Spirit, Spirit,’ he tears down the bridge, the path, the way, the ladder, and all the means by which the Spirit might come to you. Instead of the outward order of God in the material sign of baptism and the oral proclamation of the Word of God he wants to teach you. not how the Spirit comes to you but how you come to the Spirit.”

One thing which perhaps needs to be said is this. The question is not, “Does God have the power and ability to work today as he did in the Scripture?” That is something which is so obvious that it needs no comment except to reinforce the fact that the Lord is as all-powerful today as he was in the days of the Apostles. The question which presents itself today is “Does the Lord any longer work in these special ways in the church today?” Many would answer with an unqualified and resounding “Yes!” They would say that everything which God offered to his believers in the time of the Scriptures are both available and expected for all his believers today. Suffice it to say at this point, that this expectation simply does not have the Scripture support that those who claim it say it does. But this does bring us to our third point of consideration, namely, What is God’s desire for all Christians, including those of the twentieth century?

III. What Is God’s Desire For All Christians?

The heart and core of the Gospel is this. First “(God) will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth” (I Timothy 2:4). And because of this desire, our Lord also made possible the gift of salvation by the redemptive work of his Son. “God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation” (II Corinthians 5:19).

As we have already seen, the work of delivering this blessing to men is the work of sanctification, as carried on by the Holy Spirit. II Thessalonians 2:13-14 – “But we are bound to give thanks alway to God for you, brethren, beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth.”

The media, then, by which God works personally and directly with men, is the third person of the Trinity, namely the Holy Spirit. Let us briefly examine how much is available to us through the Holy Spirit.

Paul says in Ephesians 5:18, “Be not drunk with wine wherein is excess, but be filled with the Spirit.” This statement is not made to special instruments of God, but to all Christians in the city of Ephesus and therefore also to all Christians of all time. To be filled with the Spirit is obviously the height of blessing which God can give here on this earth, and according to Paul’s words, it is something which is certainly attainable, or rather, available.

Paul’s letter to the Colossians gives us a very clear presentation of the fact that Christians have, with faith in Jesus Christ, the fullness and completeness of everything that God had to give to them. He writes to answer the false teachers who would insist that something had to be added to the Gospel in order for their spiritual condition to be really complete. The great danger was that these false teachers would be able to rob from God’s People the assurance that they had already all of God’s blessings by faith in Jesus. It would be helpful to hear some of the statements which Paul makes by way of assuring the Christians of their complete possession of God’s blessings.

Chapter I – “For this cause we also, since the day heard it do not cease to pray for you, and to desire that ye might be filled with the knowledge of his will in *all* wisdom and spiritual understanding; that ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing being fruitful in *every* good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God; strengthened with *all* might, according to his glorious power, unto *all* patience and longsuffering and joyfulness” (verses 9-11). “And you, that were sometime alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now hath he reconciled in the body of his flesh through, to present you *holy and unblameable and unprovable* in his sight; if ye continue in the faith grounded and settled, and not be moved away from the *hope* of the gospel which ye have heard and which was preached to every creature which is under heaven” (verses 21-23). “But now is made manifest to his saints; to whom God would make known what is the *riches of the glory* of this mystery among the gentiles, which is *Christ in you, the hope of glory* whom we preach, warning every man, and teaching every man in *all wisdom*; that we may present *every man perfect in Christ Jesus*” (verses 26-28).

Chapter II – “For I would that ye knew what great conflict I have for you, and for them at Laodicea, and for as many as have not seen my face in the flesh; that *their hearts—might be comforted* being knit together in love, and unto *all riches* of the *full assurance of understanding* to the acknowledgement of the mystery of God and of the Father, and of Christ; in whom are hid *all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge*. And this I say *lest any man should beguile you with enticing words*” (verses 1-4). “As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him; *rooted and built up in him* and established in the faith as ye have been taught, *abounding therein with thanksgiving*. Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, *and not after Christ*. For in him dwelleth *all the fullness* of the Godhead, bodily. *And ye are complete in him*” (verses 6-10).

As we read those words we can almost feel Paul agonizingly reaching out to those Colossian Christians, praying, and striving, and reaching out to them, so that their joy, their comfort, their assurance might be *full* and they might be assured that they need not look elsewhere than to their Savior Jesus for their completeness.

If someone were to put to Paul the question, “What does it mean to be filled with the Spirit?” I am certain that he would probably read to them the first two chapters of his epistle to the Colossians, and would warn them once again that they let no man deceive them with philosophy and vain deceit after the traditions of men and not after Christ.

The man who needs to be assured that he is in fact filled with the Spirit, needs to inventory what the Spirit has done for him by the means of grace. He will find that he has been reborn by the sacrament of baptism – John 3:5. He will find that he has been brought to faith in Christ Jesus by the Holy Spirit – I Cor. 6:11. He will find that he is both a Temple of the Holy Spirit (I Cor. 6:19), and the dwelling place of his Lord Jesus (Colossians 1:27). He will find that because of the Spirit’s sanctifying influence he is a new creature (II Cor. 5:17). And finally he will be reminded that his old self has been crucified, and now Christ lives in him (Gal. 2:20).

To be filled with the Spirit then means simply to be in Christ because of the Holy Spirit’s having brought us to faith through Word and Sacrament.

IV. Dangers To Be Avoided

The first thing which we, having all things in Christ, need to be both aware of, and warned against, is that not every one who uses the term, “Filled with the Holy Spirit,” means what the Scripture declares is the real meaning. There are many who after faith in Jesus Christ, would urge us to go on from there to the “Fullness of the Spirit.” They would instruct us to “Seek the Baptism in the Holy Spirit.” And thus they would try to convince us that we are not complete in Christ Jesus, and certainly have not yet been filled with the Holy Spirit. These are they who espouse the Pentecostal teaching of a “second experience” or a “Full Gospel.”

Their teaching has many near fatal results. First, it diminishes, if not negates the work of Jesus wrought by his death on the cross. Second, it exalts the Spirit of God above both the Father and the Son. Third, it robs baptism of its saving power. Fourth, it frustrates and causes despair in the hearts of those who thought they had *full* salvation in Christ Jesus.

These facts are easily documented when we turn to the writings of the Pentecostals themselves.

“True it is the cross that saves and renders one a member of the family, but it is the endurment, anointing, in-filling, baptism of the Holy Spirit that equips with the gifts and renders one a miraculous member of the miracle-working body of Christ” (Harold Horton in *Gifts*, 45).

“As the Spirit of Christ, he had come at conversion, imparting the Christian life, revealing Christ, and making Him real. At the Baptism in the Spirit, He Himself in His own person comes upon and fills the waiting believer. This experience is as distinct from conversion as the Holy Spirit is distinct from Christ. His coming to the believer at the Baptism (in the Holy Spirit) is the coming of the Third Person of the Trinity, in addition to the coming of Christ which takes place at conversion” (Pentecostal Riggs as quoted in *A Theology of the Holy Spirit*, 71).

“Thus in water baptism, which is an action from our side, we seal God’s trustworthiness, and in the Spirit-baptism which is an action from God’s side, he places the seal upon our sincerity, the sincerity which we have brought to him.

Water baptism is the rite of entrance into the Christian church, and symbolizes spiritual life begun.... Water baptism in itself has no saving power; people are baptized not in order to be saved but because they are saved. Therefore we cannot say that the rite is absolutely essential to salvation. But we may insist that it is essential to full obedience” (From an undetermined Pentecostal source as quoted in *A Theology of the Holy Spirit*, 263).

“I stand as one of the group of pastors who are desperately concerned and deeply disturbed and confused over the lack of power... there has been a growing concern in my heart, for I knew that something ought to be there which was not there, and could not be found.... I read in the Bible about the early church, and its supernatural power, and I so longed for such as that.... Men and women are tired of deadness and failure. My subject was in the form of a question. ‘When did Jesus baptize you in the Holy Ghost and Fire?’ I confessed to them that I had not had this experience, but was setting my heart and soul toward God to have it! – I discovered that even though Jesus was the Son of God, nothing was ever heard of his supernatural ministry on earth until the Holy Ghost came upon him” (The Rev. John Osteen “Pentecost is not a Denomination: It is AN Experience,” *Full Gospel Business Men’s Voice*, Vol. 8, June 1960, 4-9).

There are also a list of spiritual conditions given which men must fulfill before they are eligible before God to receive the Baptism in the Holy Spirit. “The Holy Spirit does not automatically fill men, unless they meet certain definite conditions and definitely seek to be filled” (Reed in *Pentecostal Truths*, 22). The conditions for Spirit Baptism are almost as varied as the writers who deal with it. The following is however a fairly representative statement...

“**The First Step** is that we accept Jesus Christ as our Savior and Lord.... **The Second Step** in the path that leads into the blessing of being baptized with the Holy Spirit is renunciation of sin.... A controversy with God about the smallest thing is sufficient to shut one out of the blessing. Mr. Finney tells of a woman who was greatly exercised about the baptism with the Holy Spirit. Every night after the meetings, she would go to her rooms and pray way into the night.... One night as she prayed, some little matter of head adornment, a matter

that would probably not trouble many Christians today, but a matter of controversy between her and God came up (as it had come up before) as she knelt in prayer. She put her hand to her head and took the pins out of her hair and threw them across the room and said, ‘There go!’ and instantly the Holy Ghost fell upon her. It was not so much the matter of head adornment as the matter of controversy with God that had kept her out of the blessing.... **The Third Step** is an open confession of our sin and our acceptance of Jesus Christ. **The Fourth Step** is absolute surrender to God.... What does obedience mean? Some one will say, doing as we are told. Right. But doing how much that we are told? Not merely one thing or two things, or three...but all things. **The Fifth Step** is an intense desire for the baptism with the Holy Spirit.... **The Sixth Step** is definite prayer for the Baptism with the Holy Spirit.... **The Seventh and Last Step** is faith.... Any one who will accept Jesus as their Savior, and their Lord, put away all sin out of their life, publicly confess their renunciation of sin and acceptance of Jesus Christ, surrender absolutely to God, and ask God for the Baptism... baptism with the Holy Spirit right now.... The seven steps given above lead with absolute certainty into the blessing” (*The Person and Work of the Holy Spirit*, 213-237).

The evidence of the Baptism with the Holy Spirit, Pentecostals unanimously agree, is the immediate blessing of speaking in tongues. This involves a separate study in itself. (cf. Pastor Nitz’s paper on the subject delivered at the January Pastoral conference.)

In conclusion, I would point to the time that Paul wrote to Timothy advising him “*Let no one despise thy youth: But be thou an example of the believers in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity*” (I Timothy 4:12). Perhaps today it would be well to re-echo those words with a minor modification... “Let no one despise thy *salvation by grace through faith in Christ Jesus* but be thou an example of the believers in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity.” And these words from Paul would also apply, words which he wrote to the church at Corinth which was plagued by those who sought a fuller Gospel. II Cor. 13:11 – “*Finally brethren, farewell. Be perfect. Be of good comfort. Be of one mind. Live in peace. And the God of love and peace shall be with you.*”