

The Spirit-Filled Life

by

G. Harry Leafe, Th.M., D.Min

Perhaps the most important concept that a believer must understand in the sanctification process is how his thinking is related to the biblical concept of spiritual maturity. Spirituality by definition is a grown-up and growing relation to the Holy Spirit. And while this may simply be another way of saying that spirituality is Christian maturity, what this definition tries to do is to delineate more openly the factors of spiritual growth over a period of time.

Genuine spirituality involves three things. First, it involves regeneration, for no one can be spiritual who is not been made alive by the Spirit at the point of trusting in Christ for their salvation. Regeneration is the first essential in spirituality.

The second is that the Holy Spirit is preeminently involved in producing spirituality. The entire growth process takes place under the filling of the Spirit. To be filled with the Spirit means to be influenced and controlled by the Spirit so that the thought-life, speech and behavior of the person will reflect the character of God.

The third element involved in the concept of spirituality is time. If, according to 1 Corinthians 2:15, the spiritual person has the ability to appraise [judge] the quality or worth of all things, this must involve time in order to gain the knowledge and experience necessary to be able to appraise all things. The word maturity, therefore, seems to hold the key to this whole concept of spirituality, for Christian maturity is the growth that the Holy Spirit produces in the life of a believer over a period of time. It is important also to note that the amount of time necessary for maturity is not the same for every person, but some time is necessary for all.

When I took physics in high school, I learned a basic formula that many of us use when we are taking a trip in an automobile. We use it to calculate how long it's going to take us to get from where we are to where we want to be. The formula is rate times time equals distance. If you drive 50 mph for 3 hours, you will have driven 150 miles. Lower your rate of speed and it will take you longer to reach the same distance.

The same principle is also true when applied to the spiritual realm. The rate has to do with our intake and application of the Word of God; the distance is the goal of maturity. How long will it take to reach our goal? If we increase the rate then it takes less time to reach the goal. If our rate slows down, it takes us a longer time to get to the goal. The extreme would also be true: the goal will never be reached if there is no rate!

Consider the two classifications of people that are in the world. 1 Corinthians 2:14 describes the first classification: the *natural* man. Notice that it says of him that he "*does not accept the things of the Spirit of God; they are foolishness to him and he cannot understand them because they are spiritually appraised [to judge as to quality and worth].*" This person is clearly to be classified as an unbeliever. He wants nothing to do with God; the things of God are foolish to him; he is devoid of the Spirit [spiritually dead], thus being unable to understand the things of God.

The second classification is noted in verse 15, where the natural man is contrasted with one who is called the *spiritual* man. The fact that he is called spiritual gives clear indication that he is a believer in Christ, one that has been regenerated by the Holy Spirit. The text says that he has the ability to "*appraise all things,*" and yet he himself is "*appraised by no man.*" The Living Bible translates the phrase like this: "*He just baffles the man of the world.*" And the reason is because someone who is not spiritually minded just cannot understand how a spiritually minded person ticks -- because their worldview, their frame of reference, is so different. And yet being able to see things from God's point of view, the spiritual man has the ability to judge the quality or worth of all things.

All people fall into one of these two categories: they are either believers or they are unbelievers. But in the case of believers -- and we will develop this in a moment -- there are actually three conditions in which they can be found, the spiritual person being the first.

A popular understanding of the spiritual man has evolved over the last 50 years or so, primarily because of a little volume that was published by the first president and founder of Dallas Seminary, Louis Sperry Chafer. The book is entitled, *He That is Spiritual*. What Chafer postulated in that book is basically this: Spirituality is relative and maturity is absolute. Chafer

understood spiritually and maturity, although related, as being distinct. He understood being filled with the Spirit as a state of being. Utilizing 1 John 1:9 as a basis he said if there is no unconfessed sin in your life, you are filled with the Spirit. For many it has become nothing more than a mechanical formula: no unconfessed sin in your life, you are filled with the Spirit. When you sin, confess it and you are immediately filled with the Spirit.

Chafer's view was picked up by some of his students who later were instrumental in developing materials used in the ministries of such well-known organizations as Campus Crusade for Christ, whose presentation of the Spirit-filled life is essentially the same as that of Chafer.

Think logically with me for a minute. The command to *"be filled with the Spirit"* is found in Ephesians 5:18, a book that was written by Paul while he was in prison in Rome – probably around 60 A.D. On the other hand it is very likely that John did not write 1 John until the late 60's A.D. at the earliest. If this is correct, then there would have been no association made by the Ephesians between the command of 5:18 and 1 John 1:9. Further, there is no reference anywhere in the prison epistles to any sort of formula to confess your sins in order to be filled with Spirit. The point is this: Chafer's view of the Spirit-filled life is not correct biblically and I'm going to show you why.

Recall what the spiritual man is able to do. He is able to appraise all things. That is the exact opposite from the natural man who does not want anything to do with the things of God. He does not have the ability to appraise all things.

The circumstance of the believers in the book of Hebrews will give us insight into the problem. The Hebrews were believers living in and around Jerusalem just prior to the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. They had grown to a place of maturity but because of the neglect of the Word of God, they had regressed back to a place of being babies again – which introduces another basic principle: We can grow to a place of maturity in our relationship with Christ and then regress back to being a baby again. There is no maintaining the status quo; you cannot grow to a certain level of maturity, cool your heels for a while, and then pick up where you left off. You are either moving forward or you are moving backward at any given time.

In Hebrews 5:11 the writer is beginning to address the doctrine of the priesthood of Melchizedek but realizes that he has a problem because of the maturity level of his audience. He begins by saying, *"Concerning him"* – that is, Melchizedek – *"we have much to say, and it is hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing."*

Notice he does not say, *"You are dull of hearing."* He says, *"You have become dull of hearing."* This phrase and the phrases that follow, *"you have need again"* and *"you have come to need,"* clearly indicate a regression from a previous state.

He continues: *"For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you have need again for someone to teach you the elementary principles of the oracles of God, you have come to need milk and not solid food."* Did you pick up on what he said? *"You have come to need milk and not solid food."* He explains further: *"For everyone who partakes of milk is not accustomed to the Word of Righteousness."* Why? *"For he is a babe."*

Note carefully that the baby Christian feeds on milk, not solid food. That is his diet. *"But solid food,"* he says, *"is for the mature, who because of practice"* – that is, living out the word of God in life – *"have their senses trained."* For what purpose? *"To discern good and evil."* My friend, that is the same characteristic as that of the Spiritual man in 1 Corinthians 2:15. He has the ability to appraise all things. It is absolutely clear: *the spiritual man is a mature Christian!*

Now, let's go back to 1 Corinthians 3:1 and see how this spiritual person of 2:15 carries over into this verse. In 3:1 Paul says, "And I brethren could not speak to you as to spiritual, but as to men of flesh, as to babes in Christ." This verse moves us into the second condition in which we may find believers that are in the world: those who are called "fleshly." But there are two sub-categories of fleshliness. The first one is called *fleshly* because he is a babe in Christ. Notice from verse 1 that this person is contrasted with the spiritual person of 2:15.

When a person is a brand-new believer in Christ, his lifestyle is characteristically fleshly simply because he doesn't know any different. His thinking – and remember that as we think within ourselves that's the way we are – his core beliefs, are based on something other than the Word of God. Therefore, fleshliness doesn't mean that a person is necessarily involved in a lot of immorality, drunkenness, murder, and things like that, although that could be a part of it; but basically a fleshly person is one who does not live according to the word of God.

The world is full of Ph.D.s who are fools. A fool by definition is not an unintelligent person. A fool by definition is one who chooses to persist in a worldview that has nothing or little to do with God. That's why the Bible tells us that heavenly wisdom and earthly wisdom are different (see James 3:13-18). Skills in living life differ according to the character that is attendant to the wisdom. There is a heavenly wisdom; there is an earthly wisdom. The same concept is involved here. A baby is fleshly simply because he has not had enough time to renew his mind on the word of God so as to think differently. He thinks just like the world. You would expect that of a baby, right?

And according to Hebrews 5:11-14, babies feed on what? Milk. So it's no surprise that Paul brings that into play here. He continues by saying, "I gave you milk to drink, not solid food; for you were not yet able to receive it." Why? They were babes in Christ. Remember, solid food is for the mature.

In this passage, Paul is actually revisiting the time when he founded the church in mid-March of 51 A.D. It is now the summer of 56 A.D. Five years have passed. One would have expected babies to grow up. But what do we see? Listen to this, "For even now you are not yet able for you're still fleshly." They had not grown at all!

This brings us to the problem of those who persist in being children. Just because a person is a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ does not mean that the passing of time is going to produce maturity. Remember the formula: rate times time equal distance. If distance equals maturity and rate equals the intake and application of the Word of God, then time by itself doesn't produce anything. You cannot reach the goal of maturity without being involved in the rate to get there.

So, there are two conditions in which we find believers who are in the world. First, there is the mature believer, who in 1 Corinthians 2:15 is called *spiritual*. This same person in Hebrews 5:14 is called *mature*. The second condition is called *fleshly*. But there are two sub-classes of fleshly: One is a babe, a brand new or relatively new believer. The other is a believer who has persisted in being a child – he has refused to be involved in the process of growing up. As a result, his thinking is essentially same as that of a baby Christian, and his life is influenced and controlled by that thinking. The conclusion that we can draw is this: the spiritual man is not just one who is spirit-filled – for that can be the momentary (but not characteristic) experience of a baby Christian; the spiritual man is one who is a *mature* believer.

The key item in all of this is this, of course, is the role of the Holy Spirit in the growth of the believer. In Ephesians 5:15 and following, Paul begins by saying that we need to be careful how we walk. The preceding couple of paragraphs in this chapter are important because the “therefore” in verse 15 is drawing an application from what went before it. In essence he has said this: we are no longer darkness; we are light. Therefore, we are to live like it. We are not to be partakers in the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather we are to expose them.

It makes sense, then, that he would now say, “*be careful how you walk [live your life], not as unwise men, but as wise, making the most of your time, because the days are evil.*” The phrase “*making the most of your time*” literally means to “redeem or buy up the opportunities.” There is so much vying for our time that we must choose wisely how we will use our time in order to accomplish the objectives that God has given to us.

A basic principle of time management is this: *If you don't control your time, other people will control it for you.* Do you know that principle? A lot of people seem to think that because they do not have anything to do, that you do not either. They drop by, call you on the phone, etc., just to chat – and it seldom has any substance to it at all. If you don't control your time, other people will control it for you.

In verse 17 Paul continues by saying, “*so then do not be foolish.*” In this context, the proper utilization of time is evidence of either wise or foolish living. Further, to live wisely one must understand that God's will for every believer is “*not [to] get drunk with wine for that is dissipation, but be filled with the spirit*” (verse 18).

Now the contrast between getting drunk and being filled with the spirit is really important. If you were to drink alcohol to the point that you were under its influence and you were driving a car and a policeman saw your car moving about erratically and pulled you over, what kind of summons would he give you? DWI or DUI. What does it mean? You are driving while intoxicated, or driving under the influence. And that is really the key to understanding the Spirit-filled life. Instead of being under the influence of something like alcohol, we are to live under the influence of the Holy Spirit. Which brings us to the meaning of *filled*.

There are two Greek words that are important to understand when talking about being filled with the Spirit. The first word is $\pi\mu\pi\lambda\eta\mu\iota$ and the other is $\pi\lambda\eta\rho\omega$. Both of these terms are very similar, but there is also a critical difference between them. They both have a literal and a metaphorical use. The literal sense means to fill up something with something. For example, in Luke 5:5-7 the term $\pi\mu\pi\lambda\eta\mu\iota$ is used in a literal sense: “*Master, we've worked hard all night and caught nothing, but I will do as You say and let down the nets. When they had done this, they enclosed a great quantity of fish, and their nets began to break; so they signaled to their partners in the other boat for them to come and help them. And they came and filled both of the boats, so that they began to sink.*” So filling the boats with fish is an example of $\pi\mu\pi\lambda\eta\mu\iota$ being used in the literal sense -- of filling something with something. Do you see?

Now turn to John 12. Jesus is in the home of Mary, Martha and Lazarus and they were having supper together. In verse 3 it says, “*Mary then took a pound of very costly pure nard, and anointed the feet of Jesus and wiped His feet with her hair; and the house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume.*” Here, the term $\pi\lambda\eta\rho\omega$ is translated filled and shows how it also can be used in a literal sense.

If I had a big pitcher in my hand and I filled it with water, that is the meaning of both words when used in a literal sense. But when you use them as a figure of speech,

metaphorically, they take on different connotations. In a metaphorical sense, they both mean this: to influence, to control. It means that what fills you will be that which influences and controls your life -- your thoughts, your words, and your actions. In other words, you will be living under its influence and control. Like the wine in the Ephesians 5:18 passage, whatever influences and controls your life will be observed in your life in behavioral ways.

To see the metaphorical use of these same terms, let's look at a couple of passages where the filling of the Spirit is *not* being illustrated. In this way we will be better able to grasp the concept of the words.

In Luke 4:25-30, we have the account of Jesus' ministry in Nazareth and the people's response to it – which was not at all pleasant! In verse 28 we read, “*And all the people in the synagogue were filled with rage as they heard these things.*” This is a metaphorical use of *πιμπλημι*. If the sense is whatever fills (influences and controls) a person will be evidenced by their behavior, we should expect to see some behavioral expression in the context. And indeed we do. Notice verse 29, “*And they got up and drove Him out of the city, and led Him to the brow of the hill on which their city had been built, in order to throw Him down the cliff.*”

Πληρωω can be illustrated in the same way. In Acts 5, a large segment of the people were turning to the apostles for instruction and leadership as they ministered the word of God. As a result, the church was developing and expanding. The religious leaders of the Jews become jealous and envious of the ministry of the apostles. In verse 17 we are told “*the high priest rose up, along with all his associates (that is the sect of the Sadducees), and they were filled with jealousy.*” Jealousy is now in control of their lives. The result? “*They laid hands on the apostles and put them in a public jail.*”

Do you see how strongly emotions can control a person's behavior? That is what *being filled* means when used in a metaphorical sense: whatever fills you will manifest itself behaviorally in your life.

Most uses of these terms in the New Testament, when not referring to the filling of the Spirit, refer to emotions. And you remember where emotions come from, do you not? Of course you do; they come from our thinking. We think and analyze life momentarily and emotions are generated. And those emotions have a tremendous influence on our behavior – the things we say and do.

Civil law recognizes this. Do we not have laws that fall under the category of “crimes of passion”? Recently I noticed a headline story at the bottom of page one in the paper about road rage. Think just for a quick moment about road rage and what it is. At its core, it is the sin of selfishness.

Picture in your mind someone driving who is selfish in their beliefs about their rights and their space on the road. Suddenly, another driver cuts them off. They quickly analyze the situation based on their selfish beliefs and they become angry because this thoughtless, arrogant person has moved into *my* space! They speed up next to that person's car with a stern glare on their face, and as soon as the person looks their way, they wave to them in an unfriendly manner. They do not realize that their life is being greatly influenced and controlled by the emotion of anger; hence, road rage.

Sometimes in such circumstances people will shoot you. I mean, they will actually take out a gun and shoot you. There was an illustration in the same article about a person who shot up

the car of another person – it even had some children in it – because the other person had cut over into *their* space.

The controller for the city of Houston was recently in court charged with road rage because somebody violated *his* space. He got out of his car and punched the guy out on the side of the road. Can you believe it? What is it called? *Road rage!*

What was the problem? It began with a person's fundamental beliefs about himself, about the world in which he lives, in which his frame of reference, his world-view, influenced him to interpret the reality of the circumstance in a way that generated a very strong emotion. And that emotion was so strong that it influenced and controlled his behavior. What we see overtly is the result of it.

Take any emotion: anger, jealousy, envy, greed – any of these emotional feelings – they can influence and control your whole life. But the main point to see is this: whatever fills you; that is, whatever influences and controls your life, will demonstrate itself behaviorally in the way that you live.

In fact, we can say this: Our behavior – including our thoughts, words and actions – is a revelation of what consistently influences and controls our lives. Make sense? Let me say it again. When we look at our lives, our behavior and the words that come out of our mouth – what other people observe and hear – it is nothing more than an expression of what characteristically influences and controls our life. And that is true for every person.

What about the influence and control of the Holy Spirit? Consider Luke, chapter one, where we find two examples of individuals who are said to be under the influence [remember, this is what *being filled* means] of the Holy Spirit.

In verse fifteen, we are told how the future ministry of John the Baptist would be conducted: *“He will be filled with the Holy Spirit even from his mother’s womb.”* In other words, John's ministry would be conducted characteristically under the influence of the Holy Spirit. And what would be the results? Verse sixteen tells us that in part *“he will turn back many of the sons of Israel to the Lord their God, he will go as forerunner before them.”*

In verses thirteen through sixteen, the angel Gabriel has announced to Zacharias that he and his wife, Elizabeth, who were in advanced years of life, were going to have a child. Six months into her pregnancy, Elizabeth visits Mary, the mother of our Lord. Upon hearing Mary's greeting, the baby leaped in her womb and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit (v.41). That means that at that moment she was under the influence and control of the Holy Spirit. What is the result? Verse 42 tells us that *“She cried out with a loud voice and said, ‘Blessed among women are you, blessed is the fruit of your womb. How has it happened to me? For behold, when the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby leaped in my womb for joy. And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what had been spoken to her by the Lord’”* (vv.42-45). Elizabeth's declaration was the behavioral expression or result, at that moment, of her being under the influence and control of the Holy Spirit.

In the second chapter of Acts, we have the account of the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. The Apostles are the focal point of the narrative (the nearest antecedent for the pronoun *they* in verse one is the term *apostles* in 1:26). And while they were gathered together in one place, the text says that a *sound* was heard as if it were a violent, rushing wind. Further, it says that *“there appeared to them tongues as of fire distributing themselves, and they rested on each of them (the apostles)”* (v.3).

Although it is not explicitly stated in the passage, we do know that it was at this time that the Holy Spirit came to indwell the apostles (the baptism of the Holy Spirit; see also 1 Cor. 12:13; and Peter's explanation in Acts 11:15-16).

Verse 4 tells us *"they were all (the apostles) filled with the Holy Spirit."* What result do we see? *"And [they] began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit was giving them ability."* They were *"speaking of the mighty deeds of God"* (v.11). We know that they were speaking known languages -- not just some gibberish -- because of the term *dialect* that is used in verses six and eight (translated as *language*).

Another example is in Acts 4:8 where it says, *"Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, 'Rulers and elders of the people, . . .'"* Peter's sermon was the result of his being filled (πιμπλημι) with the Spirit.

After Paul's conversion, he was told by Ananias that *"The Lord Jesus . . . has sent me so that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit."* And although the immediate result of that filling, if any, is not stated, it certainly has to do with the conduct of his ministry as an apostle.

The final example of πιμπλημι used for the filling of the Spirit is found in Acts 13:9. The text says, *"Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, fixed his gaze upon him, and said, 'You who are full of all deceit and fraud . . .'"* Paul's statement was the result of his being filled with the Spirit at that moment.

There is only one occasion where πληρωω is used for the filling with the spirit and that is Acts 13:52. It simply says, *"They were continually filled with Holy Spirit."*

In sum, let me mention some general observations and conclusions about these two terms. First, πιμπλημι is always seen as a sovereign act of God whereby He uses or influences a person so as to bring about a particular act of ministry -- almost without exception, some ministry of the word.

I experience this kind of filling regularly in my ministry. Many times when I am teaching things come to my mind -- not things that I have not known before, but things that I have known but had not planned in advance to say -- and I know God is the one who has influenced my thinking because of the appropriateness of the thought at the time, or the related passages that come to my mind.

The second thing about πιμπλημι is this: We are never directed in Scripture to be filled in this way. There is no directive either to seek after or to be filled in this way. It is a sovereign act of God in a person's life.

The only way that πιμπλημι and πληρωω differ is that we are directed to be filled with the Spirit in the πληρωω sense (see Eph. 5:18). It will not take place unless we cooperate. Further, the tense of the verb suggests a continuing action -- something that should be characteristic of our lives. But an important question is this: How do I allow the Holy Spirit to influence and control my life? And what results will be seen in my behavior if I allow Him to influence and control me?

To answer these questions we first turn to the context of the directive, Ephesians 5:18. The passage says, *"And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit."*

Following the command, various behaviors are described that indicate the results that issue from being filled with the Spirit: *"speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord; always giving thanks for all things*
The Spirit-Filled Life

in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God, even the Father; and be subject to one another in the fear of Christ."

The final phrase, *"be subject to one another in the fear of Christ"* (mutual submission in the Body), is then applied to differing relationships in the Church: *"Wives, be subject to your own husband"*(5:22); *"Husbands, love your wives"* (5:25); *"Children, obey your parents"* (6:1); *"Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger"* (6:4); *"Slaves, be obedient to those who are your masters according to the flesh"* (6:5); *"Masters, do the same things to them, and give up threatening"* (6:9).

Let's look at a parallel passage where Paul is speaking about the same subject but in a slightly different way. The passage is Colossians 3:15-4:1. In 3:16, the directive is, *"Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you."* Now look at the results of that action: *"With all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God. Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father."* He then adds, *"Wives, be subject to your husbands"* (3:18); *"Husbands, love your wives"* (3:19); *"Children, be obedient to your parents"* (6:20); *"Fathers, do not exasperate your children"* (3:21); *"Slaves, in all things obey those who are your masters on earth"* (3:22); and *"Masters, grant your slaves justice and fairness"* (4:1).

What is so striking about this is that the same results occur from being *"filled with the Spirit"* as do from *"let[ting] the word of Christ richly dwell within you."*

What do we conclude? Just this: Yielding to the authority of the Word of God in dealing with life's issues is the way our lives are lived under the influence and control of the Holy Spirit. In other words, having a biblical worldview and living under that biblical worldview is to live under the influence of the Holy Spirit. That is what the Holy Spirit uses to influence our thinking so as to produce the godly living. Further, it has to do with our momentary choices; it is not a state of being that we enter.

Related to this, of course, is the directive of Romans 12:2, *"And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect."*

As we learn God's word and live obediently to it – making our evaluations about life and yielding to its authority in making our decisions – we live under the influence of the Holy Spirit. It makes sense, then, that if a Christian does not know God's word, either because he is a babe or has persisted in being a babe, he cannot think and live biblically – and therefore cannot live consistently under the influence of the Holy Spirit. And recall what we said earlier: a baby is characteristically fleshly; his core beliefs are based on something other than the word of God.

The spiritual person is the mature person who consistently and characteristically lives his life under the influence of the Holy Spirit through God's word. The results of that lifestyle are seen in his godly behavior (see Eph. 5:18-21) and the fruit of the Spirit that is lived out in his life (see Gal. 5:22-23). It is in this state of maturity that this person can be said to be *"filled up with all the fullness of God"* (see Eph. 3:19).