

Essential Truths III: Working With God

9

Filled with the Spirit

So far in this module, we've established a number of vital points that must flavor our understanding of ministry. These points are:

- **ES106-01** – That our ministry is defined by the firstborn nature of our authority and responsibility in Christ.
- **ES106-02** – That our focus in life should not be on God's blessings but on his eternal purpose.
- **ES106-03** – That the Lord has commissioned us to take his Gospel out into every corner of the world.
- **ES106-04** – That our individual ministry finds its context within the larger Body of Christ.
- **ES106-05** – That every believer is full-time in the ministry, regardless of what focus that ministry may have.
- **ES106-06** – That we are not called simply to work *for* God, but to work *with* him, cooperating in God's own work.
- **ES106-07** – That our ministry is not to bring condemnation but the divine solution to people's problems.
- **ES106-08** – That our ministry is defined by an understanding of the reconciliation we have received from God and a ministering of that reconciliation to others.

The Birthright

Taking the Baton

The Great Commission

The Body of Christ

The Ministry of Every Believer

Joining the Work of God

The Tree of Life

The Ministry of Reconciliation

▶ **Filled with the Spirit** ◀

Ministry to the Body

Sent into the Harvest

Speaking the Word of God

A Lifestyle Gospel

Salt of the Earth

Enforcing the Victory

Signs and Wonders

A New Kind of Leadership

Establishing a Daily Church

Making Disciples

The New Wine

The Goal of Ministry

In this lesson, we will look at the energy that empowers all ministry – the anointing of the Holy Spirit. To kickstart this study in God’s Word, let’s examine for a moment one particular incident in the life of the early Church.

Read Acts 4:31

This verse describes the outpouring of God’s Spirit upon the infant Church, and lists three closely related effects:

- **A physical effect** – The place where they were meeting was shaken.
- **A spiritual effect** – They were all filled with the Holy Spirit.
- **A ministry effect** – They spoke the Word of God boldly.

We need to understand that **Acts 4:31** – an account of the early disciples being filled with the Holy Spirit – was in fact a direct answer to prayer.

Read Acts 4:18-31

The early Christians were facing severe persecution – severe enough to tempt them to shrink back from the commission Christ had given them. Their response was to pray.

But note that in their prayer, they did not *ask* to be filled with the Holy Spirit. Instead, they asked for boldness to fulfill the commission that Christ had given them. It was in answer to their prayer for boldness that God filled them with his Holy Spirit.

This was not an isolated incident. As you read the book of **Acts**, you will find that the early believers counted being filled with the Holy Spirit as the norm for life and ministry.

Read Acts 2:4

Read Acts 7:55

Read Acts 9:17

Read Acts 13:9

Read Acts 13:52

Also of interest is the fact that the Church of **Acts** considered being “filled with the Spirit” a primary qualification for ministry.

Read Acts 6:3-5

Read Acts 11:24

Jesus himself emphasized the importance of being filled with the Holy Spirit in order to fulfill the commission he gave to his Church. He had commissioned his disciples to preach the Gospel to every person under heaven, but with that commission he promised a corresponding empowering. In **Matthew 28:18-20** we see this reflected in two statements:

- All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.
- And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.

In **Luke 24:47**, we see Jesus summarizing the Great Commission with the words “repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in [my] name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.” But then in **verse 49**, he instructs his disciples:

“...but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high.”

In **Acts 1:8** we see again the two parts to Jesus’ commission – the *entrusting* of the commission and the *empowering* of the commission, in this case in reverse order:

“But *you will receive power* when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and *you will be my witnesses* in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

In the minds of the early believers, there could be no effective fulfilling of the Great Commission without the corresponding empowering promised by Christ.

Nothing has changed. For your ministry, too, there is both a commissioning and an empowering. Let’s take a closer look, then, at how the Bible describes this empowering.

The Baptism in the Holy Spirit

Read Matthew 3:11

The Bible associates the coming of Jesus with a baptism (or “immersing”) in the Holy Spirit. Yet this term “baptism in the Holy Spirit” has been a source of much controversy, particularly in the 20th century. As one group of scholars put it:

“Mention ‘baptism in the Holy Spirit’ in a group of assorted evangelicals and you are likely to have a fight on your hands. For one group it happens at conversion with no outward experience, and to insist on a later experience is to attempt to suggest that the work of Christ was incomplete. For another group it is a necessary second work of grace after conversion that empowers one for ministry.”¹

It is important to understand that no Bible-believing Christian denies the baptism in the Holy Spirit. The point of difference lies in *when* and *how* the Christian is baptized in the Holy Spirit.

So before we look at the more practical details of being filled with the Spirit, let’s examine briefly the three broad positions on this subject that can be found today in the Body of Christ.

The Traditional Position

Traditional (non-Pentecostal and non-Charismatic) churches generally hold a position that equates the baptism in the Holy Spirit with the conversion experience. In other words, when a person is born again through the Spirit of God, they are at that time baptized in the Holy Spirit. This position is summarized by Warren Wiersbe:

“There is one baptism [in the Holy Spirit] that takes place at conversion, but many fillings of the Spirit as we daily yield to God.”²

Generally this position also is marked by the theological stand that the gifts of the Spirit listed in **1 Corinthians 12** (particularly the gift of tongues) have been superseded (made unnecessary) by the arrival of the full canon of God’s Word.

The Pentecostal Position

Two statements broadly distinguish the Pentecostal position:

- There is a baptism in the Spirit after the conversion experience. This is sometimes called “the second work of grace” or “the second blessing.”
- This baptism in the Spirit is evidenced by speaking in tongues.

This position is also held by most Charismatics.

The Third Position

Although most people are divided clearly into one or the other of the above camps, there is in fact a third position, which falls into the spectrum between these two positions. This third position, sometimes termed “the third wave,” allows for an empowering by the Holy Spirit as a separate and distinct experience after conversion (the term “baptism in the Holy Spirit” is generally avoided), but does not necessarily see this infilling as being evidenced by speaking in tongues. Although the gift of tongues is seen as a gift in operation today, it is not viewed as a “must” in the same way the Pentecostal position emphasizes.

Is the baptism in the Holy Spirit an individual experience distinct from salvation? Is the gift of tongues valid today and is it an evidence (or *the* evidence) of the infilling of the Spirit?

The position you take will greatly depend on your church background, and you will tend to mix mainly with Christians of a similar persuasion. For this reason, it is valuable for you to understand all three positions, not just so that you may evaluate and affirm your own position (which acts as a framework for you to experience God’s empowering for ministry), but also so that you may understand and appreciate other sections of the Body of Christ, even those with views that differ markedly from your own.

Interestingly, the Bible doesn’t help us much in identifying which position is correct, simply because the contention of when and how a believer is baptized in the Holy Spirit simply was not an issue in the first century. The theological positions regarding the presence and empowering of the Holy Spirit (called in academic circles “pneumatology,” or the study of the Holy Spirit) generally try to reconcile verses that were never intended to teach the *doctrine* of the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Instead, these verses are descriptions of ministry in action (as in the book of **Acts**) or teaching that briefly touches on the baptism or infilling of the Spirit in the context of other issues (as in the epistles).

In this particular module, our interest is not so much in the fine points of doctrine, but in the practical implications for ministry. But let's take a moment to inspect the scriptural record and see if we can determine the most basic framework for understanding what the baptism in the Spirit is actually all about.

The Evidence of Scripture

Here is what we know for certain. There is no question that "baptism in the Holy Spirit" referred to by John the Baptist (**Luke 3:16**) was fulfilled in **Acts 2**. Jesus himself promised his disciples in **Acts 1:5**:

"For John baptized with water, but *in a few days* you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit."

It was in the context of this statement that Jesus further elucidated on this baptism in the Holy Spirit by stating in **Acts 1:8**:

"But *you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you*; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

The event that Jesus predicted was recorded in **Acts 2:1-4**:

"When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. All of them were *filled with the Holy Spirit* and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them."

From a doctrinal standpoint, this would be simple, if it weren't for the fact that the book of **Acts** throws in some post-Pentecost examples of people receiving the baptism in the Holy Spirit.

Read Acts 8:12-17

Read Acts 10:44-48

Read Acts 11:15-18

It is at this point that the two main doctrinal positions – the traditional and the Pentecostal – begin to diverge, the traditional position holding that these were simply the *inclusions* of the Samaritans and Gentiles (respectively) in the baptism of the Holy Spirit that had already been poured out upon the Jewish believers, while the Pentecostal position pointing to these as examples of an ongoing *individual* baptism in the Holy Spirit distinct from the conversion experience.

One other passage has proven to be contentious in the great debate over the meaning of the baptism in the Holy Spirit.

Read Acts 19:1-7

But regardless of your doctrinal interpretation of the term “baptism in the Holy Spirit,” the book of **Acts** reveals that the early Church had the following view:

- There is one baptism in the Holy Spirit (a one-time experience)
- There is a continuing need to be “filled with the Spirit” (a repeating experience)

And so at this point in our study, we move beyond the *theology* of the baptism in the Spirit and look at the *imperative* of being filled with the Spirit on a daily basis.

The Command

Read Ephesians 5:18

Let’s take a look at how various versions of the Bible phrase Paul’s words:

New International Version: “Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit.”

New King James Version: “And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit.”

God’s Word: “Don’t get drunk on wine, which leads to wild living. Instead, be filled with the Spirit.”

New Century Version: “Do not be drunk with wine, which will ruin you, but be filled with the Spirit.”

New Living Translation: “Don’t be drunk with wine, because that will ruin your life. Instead, let the Holy Spirit fill and control you.”

The Living Bible: “Don’t drink too much wine, for many evils lie along that path; be filled instead with the Holy Spirit and controlled by him.”

The New Testament in Modern English: “Don’t get your stimulus from wine (for there is always the danger of excessive drinking), but let the Spirit stimulate your souls.”

The Message: “Don’t drink too much wine. That cheapens your life. Drink the Spirit of God, huge draughts of him.”

The Amplified Bible: “And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery; but ever be filled and stimulated with the (Holy) Spirit.”

In this verse, Paul expresses the norm for the Christian life. It is not simply something you are supposed to add to your spiritual “wish list.” It is a command, an imperative, something you are meant to obey. In fact, Paul doesn’t even tell you to *pray* to be filled with the Spirit. He simply says *be* filled with the Spirit!

D. L. Moody put it this way:

“God commands us to be filled with the Spirit, and if we are not filled, it is because we are living beneath our privileges.”²

The Greek grammar that Paul employs actually has the meaning of “continually being filled” with the Spirit. Being filled with the Spirit is, in Paul’s thinking, a “habitual and continuing action.”⁴

There are two interpretations of the meaning of being “filled with the Spirit,” as Paul describes it in this verse. The first *positively* compares being filled with the Spirit with being drunk with wine and the second *negatively* compares being filled with the Spirit with being drunk with wine.

A positive comparison

Some make a *positive* comparison between being drunk with wine and being “drunk with the Spirit.” We know from **Acts 2:13** that those who had been baptized in the Holy Spirit gave at least the appearance of intoxication, enough for people to say, “They have had too much wine.”

The 365-Day Devotional Commentary expresses it this way:

“People of the world try to escape from the dreariness of their everyday existence by seeking an alcoholic high. Paul said find that escape through the Spirit. Let Him lift you. Let Him make life fresh and new. You won’t even have a hangover!”⁵

While there are many instances even today of people being filled with the Spirit to the point of appearing “drunk,” this is neither the norm nor what Paul is actually meaning by his expression “filled with the Spirit.” Although being filled with the Spirit can produce a spiritual high (from which, wonderfully, there is no hangover), Paul is not actually encouraging you to live on a continual spiritual high.

A negative comparison

Paul is actually making a *negative* comparison between being drunk with wine and being filled with the Spirit. He regards both as being something that controls your speech and your actions, but while one leads to “debauchery” (NIV), “excess” (KJV), “riot” (ASV), and “dissipation” (NASB),* the other leads to a life that pleases God.

The Expository Dictionary of Bible Words sums up Paul’s negative comparison:

“The images associated with drunkenness in the [Old Testament] – such as reeling and staggering (**Psalms 107:27; Isaiah 19:14**), wild spending and poverty (**Deuteronomy 21:20; Proverbs 23:21**) – suggest a loss of physical control and a loss of judgment.”⁶

Instead of being drunk with wine, Paul says, be filled with the Spirit! Don’t be under the influence of alcohol but be under the influence of God’s Spirit, allowing him to control and direct your life. As the *Moody Handbook of Theology* puts it:

“The command to be filled with the Spirit is given in contrast to the warning ‘do not get drunk with wine.’ Drunkenness exhibits the inability of the person

* The original word that Paul uses has the meaning of “living wastefully.”

to control himself. The nature of the Christian's life is to be in contrast to the nature of the uncontrolled drunkard. The meaning of [the Greek word for] 'filled'...is 'control.' The indwelling Spirit of God is the One who should continually control and dominate the life of the believer."⁷

The *Victor Bible Background Commentary* expresses it in a similar way:

"We are to be under the influence of the Spirit of God, not of alcohol. The analogy may rest on the power of each to lower natural inhibitions. However, when our inhibitions are lowered by wine, this 'leads to debauchery.'"⁸

More Than Euphoria

Read Luke 10:21

Read Acts 13:52

There is no question that there is often a euphoria associated with being filled with the Spirit (note **Acts 7:55-56**). Charles Finney describes this kind of euphoria in his personal diary:

"The Holy Spirit descended upon me in a manner that seemed to go through me, body and soul. I could feel the impression like a wave of electricity going through and through me. Indeed, it seemed to come in waves and waves of liquid love...like the very breath of God...it seemed to fan me like immense wings."⁹

Yet the Bible reveals that there are other characteristics associated with being filled with the Holy Spirit. These characteristics include:

- Boldness (**Acts 4:31**)
- Wisdom (**Acts 6:3**)
- Faith (**Acts 6:5; 11:24**)
- Discernment (**Acts 13:9-11**)
- Guidance (**Luke 4:1**)
- Worship (**Ephesians 5:19**)
- Prayer (**Jude 20**)

Many people equate being filled with the Spirit with an ecstatic experience. While there is no doubt that the Lord does provide times of ecstatic enjoyment of his presence, the infilling of the Spirit is more than just an emotional high. It is an empowering for ministry.

Read Colossians 1:29

The Holy Spirit has been given to anoint us for the work of God. The power of God is available for all ministry – whether in the church, in the home, in the workplace or on the street. What makes the difference in each expression of ministry is the infilling of the Holy Spirit, fulfilling the promise of **Zechariah 4:6**:

"...‘Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit,’ says the Lord Almighty.”

Conditions for Being Filled with the Spirit

The Bible reveals three conditions that are essential to experiencing the ongoing infilling of the Spirit of God. The first two are negative (commands *not* to do something), while the third is positive (a command to *do* something).

- **Do not grieve the Spirit (Ephesians 4:30)** –The context of this verse explains exactly how a Christian can grieve the Holy Spirit: through unwholesome and destructive talk (4:29), and through “bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, [and] every form of malice” (4:31).
- **Do not quench the Spirit (1 Thessalonians 5:19)** –The context of this verse explains how a Christian can “quench” the Spirit of God (KJV) or “put out the Spirit’s fire” (NIV): by treating prophecies with contempt. Unlike the previous command (“Do not grieve the Spirit”), which has to do with relationship, this command has to do with ministry and spiritual gifts.
- **Walk in the Spirit (Galatians 5:16)** –The context of this verse explains how a Christian walks (or conducts his life) in the Spirit: through being led by the Spirit and living within the parameters of the covenant of grace.

Being filled with the Spirit will involve two complementary expressions of the Christian life:

- **The fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23)** – the *character* of Christ
- **The gifts of the Spirit (2 Corinthians 12:7-10)** – the *ministry* of Christ

It is only when these two expressions of the Holy Spirit are operating in balance that a person can be called “filled with the Spirit.”

Evidences of the Infilling of the Spirit

A quick survey of **Acts 2** and **Acts 4** reveals remarkable parallels in the description of a Spirit-filled Church.

Read Acts 2:42-47

Being “filled with the Spirit” was evidenced by the early Christians in five practical ways:

- Signs and wonders (2:43)
- The bold preaching of God’s Word (2:14-42)
- Enthusiastic devotion to the Lord (2:42,46)
- Selfless sharing with others (2:44-45)
- Lives turning to Christ (2:47)

Read Acts 4:31-35

Read Acts 5:12-16

Here we see again the same pattern of the infilling of the Holy Spirit being evidenced practically in the Christian community:

- Signs and wonders (**4:30,33; 5:12,15-16**)
- The bold preaching of God's Word (**4:31,33**)
- Enthusiastic devotion to the Lord (**5:12**)
- Selfless sharing with others (**4:32,34-35**)
- Lives turning to Christ (**5:14**)

Read Mark 16:20

Streams of Living Water

Read John 7:37-39

To be filled with the Holy Spirit does not just mean to be filled to capacity. It means to be filled to the point of a brimming over. As we saw in **Module 102**, it is in the *overflow* of the Holy Spirit in our lives that we experience the anointing of ministry. This overflow is described by Jesus as “streams of living water [flowing] from within” the Christian.

We are not filled with the Holy Spirit for our own sake, but in order to minister to others. The living water is not just for us to drink but to flow out from us as gushing streams, touching other lives.

Read Isaiah 32:2,6

God wants us to be filled with his Spirit and empowered for ministry each and every day. Jesus was anointed with the Holy Spirit “without limit” (**John 3:34**) and God is preparing his people to be filled “to the measure of all the fullness of God.”

Read Ephesians 3:16-20

¹ *Hard Sayings of the Bible*, excerpted from QuickVerse 5.0.

² Warren Wiersbe, *Wiersbe's Expository Outlines on the New Testament*, excerpted from QuickVerse 5.0.

³ D.L. Moody, quoted by Edythe Draper, *Draper's Book of Quotations for the Christian World*, excerpted from QuickVerse 5.0.

⁴ Fritz Rienecker and Cleon Rogers, *Linguistic Key to the Greek New Testament* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House), p.538.

⁵ *The 365-Day Devotional Commentary*, excerpted from QuickVerse 5.0.

⁶ *Expository Dictionary of Bible Words* (Zondervan, 1985), p.238.

⁷ *Moody Handbook of Theology*, excerpted from QuickVerse 5.0.

⁸ *Victor Bible Background Commentary*, excerpted from QuickVerse 5.0.

⁹ Charles Finney, quoted by Edythe Draper, *Draper's Book of Quotations for the Christian World*, excerpted from QuickVerse 5.0.

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