

**THE FILLING OF THE HOLY SPIRIT:
DEFINITION, REQUIREMENTS & BENEFITS**

R. HAMMOND

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The ministry of the Holy Spirit in the post-apostolic church age is perhaps one of the most hotly debated doctrines in modern churches. While Charismatic believers hold that the spiritual gifts of the apostolic period (e.g. apostleship, prophecy, miracles, healing, tongues) are available to modern believers, neither Scripture nor the typical experience of New Testament immersionist believers clearly attest to this position. In an effort to avoid the perceived doctrinal error of the Charismatic Movement, New Testament churches have too frequently been guilty of failing to teach the Biblical role and utter necessity of the Holy Spirit in the believer's life.

The failure to teach the proper role of the Holy Spirit in a believer's Christian walk necessarily robs the believer of the means of spiritual growth and maturity. Indeed, Chafer observed that "there is an obvious difference in the character and quality of the daily life of Christians."¹ And Walvoord attributed this "diversity of spiritual experience" to "the two factors of the fullness of the spirit and spiritual maturity."² It clearly behooves New Testament immersionist believers to develop a thorough understanding of the person and ministry of the Holy Spirit.

Grudem observes that the ministry of the Holy Spirit extends to areas including: giving life, empowering believers for service, revealing God's words, providing evidence of God's presence, providing assurance of salvation, teaching and illuminating God's Word.³ Grudem also observes the Holy Spirit's role in regeneration⁴ and

¹ Lewis Sperry Chafer, *He That Is Spiritual: A Classic Study of the Biblical Doctrine of Spirituality*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1983), p. 15.

² John Walvoord, *The Holy Spirit*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1954), p. 191.

sanctification of believers.⁵ Ryrie and others emphasize that the Holy Spirit provides each believer with a Spiritual gift for use in serving the Body of Christ.⁶ And Lockyer points to the various Scriptural titles used for the Holy Spirit for further insight regarding His ministry, including:

... “the Spirit of *Wisdom*” (Isa. 11:2, Exo. 28:3; 31:1-4), “the Spirit of ... *understanding*” (Isa. 11:2), “The Spirit of *council and might*” (Isa. 11:2), “the spirit of *knowledge* and of the *fear of the LORD*.” (Isa. 11:2), “the Spirit of *grace and supplication*” (Zech 12:10), “*Comforter*” (John 14:16, 26)...⁷ [emphasis mine].

Perhaps the foundational doctrine for understanding the work of the Holy Spirit in a believer’s life is the notion of the Spirit’s *indwelling* of believers. Walvoord notes numerous passages that attest to the believer’s indwelling by the Holy Spirit, including: John 7: 37-39; Acts 11:17; Rom 5:5; 8:9, 11; 1 Cor. 2:12; 6:19-20; 12:13; 2 Cor. 5:5; Gal 3:2; 4:6; 1 John 3:24; 4:13.⁸ The indwelling of the Holy Spirit provides believers with ongoing, personal access to the ministry of the Holy Spirit. For example, the indwelling of the Holy Spirit enables each believer to understand God’s words and to learn spiritual matters (1 Cor. 2:9 ff; 1 John 2:27).⁹

³ Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), p. 635-644, 699.

⁴ Grudem, p. 699.

⁵ Grudem, p. 753.

⁶ Charles Ryrie, *The Holy Spirit*, (Chicago: Moody Press, 1997 edition), p. 124. Note that while Ryrie held to the notion of a universal, mystical Body of Christ, this author holds that the Bible defines each local assembly as the Body of Christ.

⁷ Herbert Lockyer, *All the Divine Names and Titles in the Bible*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1975), p. 291-366.

⁸ Walvoord, p. 151.

⁹ Walvoord, p. 220.

However, as noted earlier, the fact of indwelling does not necessarily ensure that the believer experiences the full spiritual benefit of the indwelling of the Spirit at any given point in time. Rather, Ryrie notes that the *filling* of the Holy Spirit “is the channel by which His ministries are worked in and through the believer.”¹⁰ And Walvoord states that the *filling* of the Holy Spirit is “*the source of all vital spiritual experience* in the life of the Christian.”¹¹ Ryrie defines being filled with the Spirit as “simply being controlled by the Spirit.”¹² He offers Scriptural support for his definition from Eph 5:18:

The clue to the proper definition of being filled with the Spirit is found in Ephesians 5:18 ... Although there is undoubtedly a sharp contrast in the verse between drunkenness and Spirit-filling, there is also comparison, and this furnishes the clue. The comparison is a matter of control. A drunken person is controlled by alcohol ... Likewise, the man who is Spirit-filled is controlled, and he too acts in ways that are unnatural to him. This is not to imply that these ways are erratic or abnormal, but to say that they are not ways that belong to his old life.¹³

Walvoord notes that while *indwelling* and *filling* are related doctrines, Christians should understand the difference:

Filling relates wholly to experience, while indwelling is not experimental, in itself... In the church age, it is impossible for anyone to be filled with the Spirit who is not indwelt. Indwelling is the abiding presence of the Spirit while the filling of the Spirit indicates the ministry and extent of control of the Spirit over the individual. Indwelling is not active. All the ministry of the Spirit and experience related to fellowship and fruit issues from the filling of the Spirit. Hence, while we are never exhorted to be indwelt, we are urged to be filled with the Spirit (Eph. 5:18).¹⁴

¹⁰ Ryrie, p. 153.

¹¹ Walvoord, p. 189.

¹² Ryrie, p. 157.

¹³ Ryrie, p. 157.

¹⁴ Walvoord, p. 155-156.

Given the clear importance of being filled with Spirit, it is important for believers to understand the Scriptural requirements for filling. First, contrary to our frequent practice, Ryrie notes that nowhere in the New Testament are believers instructed to *pray* for the filling of the Holy Spirit. He further explains:

... this does not mean that filling comes automatically without first meeting certain conditions. If filling means the control of the Spirit in one's life ... then it means yieldedness and obedience. Prayer may be involved in meeting the demands of obedience, but prayer (particularly seeking and tarrying prayer) will not of itself bring the filling.¹⁵

Instead of praying to be filled, Ryrie argues that obedience and dedication of one's life to the LORD are the means of being filled with the Spirit. Ryrie observes three specific prerequisites for filling (Rom. 12:1-2).¹⁶ First, he observes that believers must dedicate their years to the LORD, i.e. they must "...present (their) bodies as a living sacrifice ..." (Rom. 12:1). Second, they must separate from the world, i.e. "... be not conformed to this world ..." (Rom 12:2). Third, their dedication and separation must be characterized by *continual transformation*, they must "be transformed" (Rom 12:2).

Walvoord observes three other pre-requisites for being filled with the Spirit. First, he observes that believers who desire to be filled must "Quench not the Spirit" (1 Thes. 5:19). He defines "quenching the Spirit" as "being unyielded to Him, or saying 'No'"¹⁷ Second, he observes that believers are cautioned against grieving the spirit (Eph 4:30). And he holds that "grieving the Spirit" is frequently the result of quenching the Spirit to the point of denying the Spirit His desire to fully bless the believer:

¹⁵ Ryrie, p. 160.

¹⁶ Ryrie, p. 160-161.

¹⁷ Walvoord, p. 197

It is a spiritual condition characterizing unyielded Christians. The first step may well be quenching the Spirit, i.e. refusing to follow His leading and resisting His will. It is not an issue of Salvation, as this is settled once and for all when regeneration took place. The persistent resistance of the leading of the Spirit results in further departure from the will of God. The Spirit can no longer direct or bless in fullness as His ministry has been denied.¹⁸

Walvoord observes that the result of grieving the spirit is “loss of fellowship with God and the fruit of the Spirit.” And he also identifies simple confession as the Scriptural remedy for this condition.¹⁹

Third, Walvoord points to the Scriptural mandate to “walk by the Spirit” (Gal 5:16) as a prerequisite to the filling of the Spirit.²⁰ He defines walking by the Spirit as “walking by the power and presence of the Spirit who dwells within.”²¹ Walvoord’s definition echoes Chafer’s earlier version: “Walking by means of the Spirit is simply walking by a definite reliance upon the ability and power of the One who indwells.”²² Chafer observes that while *indwelling* is entirely the part of the Spirit, the believer must play an active role in remaining *filled*:

There is a wide difference between “fighting” to do what God alone can do, and “fighting” to maintain an attitude of dependence on him to do what He alone can do. The child of God has an all-engaging responsibility of *continuing* in an attitude of reliance upon the Spirit. This is the point of his constant attention. This is his divinely appointed task and place of co-operation in the might undertakings of God. The locomotive engineer will accomplish little when pushing his ponderous train. He is not appointed to such a service. His real usefulness will begin when he takes his place at the

¹⁸ Walvoord, p. 200.

¹⁹ Walvoord, p. 200-201.

²⁰ Walvoord, p. 196. While Walvoord takes issue with the A.V. translation of Gal. 5:16 (preferring “by the Spirit” to “in the Spirit,” the overall sense of his position is essentially unchanged, e.g. Believers need to yield to the Spirit in order to be filled by the Spirit.

²¹ Walvoord, p. 204.

²² Chafer, p. 96.

throttle. The important conflict in the believer's life is to *maintain* the unbroken attitude of reliance upon the Spirit. Thus, and only thus, can the Spirit possess and vitalize every human faculty, emotion and choice.²³

Scripture provides ample testimony to the spiritual benefit of being filled with the Spirit, i.e. of *yielding* to the Spirit. Ryrie observes four key benefits to being filled, including: (1) a Christlike character (Gal. 5:22-23), (2) worship and praise (Eph. 5:18-20), (3) submissiveness (Eph 5:21), and (4) service (John 7:37-39).²⁴ Walvoord sees additional benefits including: progressive sanctification, teaching (John 14:26, 1 John 2:27), guidance (Ps 48:14; 119:105; 143:10; John 16:12-15; Rom. 8:14)²⁵, and assurance (Rom. 8:16; Gal. 4:6; 1 John 3:24; 4:13).²⁶ And Chafer adds the Spirit's ministry of intercession in prayer for filled believers (Rom. 8:26). He also notes that filling is essentially to our ability to minister to others through intercessory prayer. Chafer continues, "A few Christians have entered this boundless ministry of prayer ... Not all have entered, but all Christians *may* enter."²⁷

In summary, New Testament believers should understand that the Holy Spirit is the key to our spiritual life. The Spirit regenerates and indwells believers at the time of salvation. And, importantly, the Spirit fills believer and enables their spiritual service and maturation to the extent that they yield to His guidance and control. Let our continual prayer be: "Father, help me yield myself to the Holy Spirit." Amen!

²³ Chafer, p. 97-98.

²⁴ Ryrie, p. 165-166.

²⁵ Verse references mine.

²⁶ Walvoord, p. 219-224.

²⁷ Chafer, p. 59.

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