

“Be Filled With The Spirit” – Ephesians 5:18

by Micky Galloway

A few weeks ago (7-22-12) in I PRESS, we published an article on Colossians 3:16, “*Let The Word Of Christ Dwell In You Richly.*” We noted the context of that passage includes significant changes that were necessary in one’s life. It was essential that they “*put to death, therefore your members which are upon the earth ... and put on the new man*” (Colossians 3:5-9). Paul gives specific attributes that are to characterize the new man (Colossians 3:10-12). Then he commands, “*Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly*” (Colossians 3:16). We concluded that the “*word of Christ*” is to have permanent residence in us so that it will have full control over our every thought and deed. It must be an integral and permanent part of who we are.

The commandment, “*Be filled with the Spirit*” (Ephesians 5:18), is a parallel text to Colossians 3:16. Therefore, the contexts are very similar. In Ephesians 5:7, Paul commands them to “*walk as children of light.*” In verse 11, they are to “*have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness.*” In verse 15 he concludes, “*Therefore,*” they are to “*walk not as unwise, but as wise.*” The King James Version translates it, “*See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise.*” Then Paul commands them to redeem “*the time,*” and “*understand what the will of the Lord is*” (verses 16-17). In this series of commandments, we see the familiar “*not ... but ...*” construction in Paul’s writing. “*Be not drunken with wine ... but be filled with the Spirit.*”

Christians are commanded, “*Be not drunken with wine, wherein is riot*” (*Gk. asætia*). In other words, drunkenness results in “*behavior which shows lack of concern or thought for the consequences of an action - ‘senseless deeds, reckless deeds, recklessness’*” (Greek-English Lexicon Based on Semantic Domain). This is the opposite of the commandments in the context of the preceding verses: “*walk as children of light,*” “*have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness,*” “*walk circumspectly, not as fools ...,*” etc.

Christians are commanded, “*But be filled with the Spirit.*” In this “*not ... but ...*” construction there is a vivid contrast exhibited between fullness of wine and fullness of the Spirit. Rather than to be controlled by drunkenness accompanied by partying and unrestrained merrymaking, we are to be controlled by the Spirit of God. To “*be filled*” (*Gk. pleroo*) is, “*to make full, to fill, to fill up ... to cause to abound*” (Thayer). The USB New Testament Handbook Series makes this comment, “*One can ... use an equivalent expression such as ‘be controlled by the*

Spirit' or 'let the Spirit rule you' or 'let the Spirit live within you.'" The Bible Exposition Commentary says, "In the Bible, filled means 'controlled by.' 'They were all filled with wrath' (Luke 4:28) means 'they were controlled by wrath' and for that reason tried to kill Jesus. 'The Jews were filled with envy' (Acts 13:45) means that the Jews were controlled by envy and opposed the ministry of Paul and Barnabas. To be 'filled with the Spirit' means to be constantly controlled by the Spirit in our mind, emotions, and will."

But HOW do we obey the command, "*But be filled with the Spirit?*" Just how are we controlled by the Spirit? Some have suggested that this is miraculous. This is foolishness. When the apostles were baptized with the Holy Spirit, it is said that "*they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance*" (Acts 2:4). This was the result of the Lord's promise to the apostles (John 16:13; Acts 1:5) and was manifested in their ability to speak with other tongues. We are not commanded to speak in tongues or perform any miracles. Others have suggested that this is the result of some personal, direct indwelling of the person of the Holy Spirit. Again, this is not the result of obedience to the command, "*Be filled with the Spirit.*" In the context of Ephesians 5:18, Paul is exhorting the saints to live a different kind of life just as he did in Colossians 3: "*Walk circumspectly*" (KJV), "*redeem the time,*" "*understand what the will of Lord is,*" and be "*filled with the Spirit*" (Ephesians 5:8-10, 15-18). We obey the command to "*be filled with the Spirit*" by letting "*the word of Christ dwell in you richly*" (Colossians 3:16). We "*walk in the Spirit,*" are "*led by the Spirit,*" "*live in the Spirit,*" produce the "*fruits of the Spirit,*" and are "*filled with the Spirit*" when we "*understand*" and obey the will (word) of the Lord (Galatians 5:16, 18, 22-25; Ephesians 5:17-18).

When the word of Christ dwells in us richly there is evidence of our fellowship with the Spirit of God. However, one who disobeys the "*will of God*" shows evidence that he is not "*filled with the Spirit,*" he has no fellowship with the Spirit and is lost in sin.