

Filled with the Spirit

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First Christian Church, Hamilton, Illinois —May15, 2016 (Pentecost)

Acts 2:1-24; 32-41



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.

Now they were staying in Jerusalem God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven. When they heard this sound, a crowd came together in bewilderment, because each one heard them speaking in his own language. Utterly amazed, they asked: "Are not all these men who are speaking Galileans? Then how is it that each of us hears them in his own native language? Parthians, Medes and Elamites; residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia

and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya near Cyrene; visitors from Rome (both Jews and converts to Judaism), Cretans and Arabs—we hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues!" Amazed and perplexed, they asked one another, "What does this mean?" Some, however, made fun of them and said, "They have had too much wine."

Then Peter stood up with the Eleven, raised his voice and addressed the crowd: "Fellow Jews and all of you who live in Jerusalem, let me explain this to you; listen carefully to what I say. These men are not drunk, as you suppose. It's only nine in the morning! No, this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel:

In the last days, God says,
I will pour out my Spirit on all people.
Your sons and daughters will prophesy,
your young men will see visions,
your old men will dream dreams.
Even on my servants, both men and women,
I will pour out my Spirit in those days,
and they will prophesy.
I will show wonders in the heaven above
and signs on the earth below,
blood and fire and billows of smoke.
The sun will be turned to darkness
and the moon to blood
before the coming of the great and glorious day of the Lord.
And everyone who calls
on the name of the Lord will be saved.

"Fellow Israelites, listen to this: Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs, which God did among you through him, as you yourselves know. This man was handed over to you by God's deliberate plan and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross. But God raised him from the dead, freeing him from the agony of death, because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him. . . .

"God has raised this Jesus to life, and we are all witnesses of it. Exalted to the right hand of God, he has received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit and has poured out what you now see and hear. For David did not ascend to heaven, and yet he said, 'The Lord said to my Lord: "Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet.'"

"Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Messiah."

When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do?" Peter replied, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call." With many other words he warned them; and he pleaded with them, "Save

yourselves from this corrupt generation." Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day.

We come today to the fiftieth day, or seven weeks, after Easter, known as Pentecost. (The name "Pentecost" actually means "fiftieth day" in Greek.) Pentecost is one of the three annual feasts mandated in the Law of Moses, although in the Torah it's called "Weeks." In Deuteronomy 16 we read the instruction:

Three times a year all your males shall appear before the LORD your God at the place which he will choose: at the feast of unleavened bread, at the feast of weeks, and at the feast of booths. They shall not appear before the LORD empty-handed; every man shall give as he is able, according to the blessing of the LORD your God which he has given you (Deuteronomy 16:16-17).

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– Deuteronomy 16:16



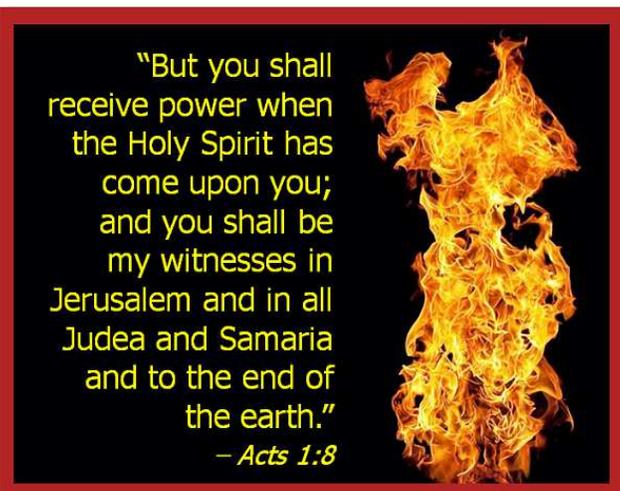
The first Christians, who were all Jewish, observed these special days, which helped them remember the great events of their history — how the Lord delivered the people of Israel from slavery in the Exodus from Egypt, and gave them the Law on Mount Sinai. These days coincided with the annual cycle of agriculture, so that the Feast of Weeks (or *Shavuot*) was a celebration of the first fruits of the harvest, and the Feast of Booths or Tabernacles (*Sukkot*) was the festival of ingathering in the fall. But the main purpose of these festivals was to help the people of Israel remember what the Lord had done for them in making them his people with a special calling to serve him.

Today, Christians observe Passover as Easter, when God delivered his people from sin and death through the resurrection of Jesus. In some languages Easter is actually known by a name derived from the Hebrew word for Passover, *pesach* — such as *Pascha* or *Pâques*. Many Christian groups observe Pentecost, because it was on the Day of Pentecost that the Holy Spirit came upon the apostles and they first began to preach the resurrection of Jesus (as we read in our passage from the Book of Acts). However, some churches seem to have forgotten about Pentecost; it gets swallowed up by other events that happen around the same time, such as Mother's Day. Then, the third Jewish festival, Tabernacles, seems to have been almost entirely forgotten by the church. In America, we have Thanksgiving as our observance of a bountiful harvest in the fall, but Tabernacles comes earlier, usually in October, and it's pretty much neglected. But a few groups have adopted the Feast of Tabernacles as a time to celebrate the use of the fine arts in worship: music, dance, banners, and the like. I think it's a pretty good idea to bring back the biblical festivals into our Christian celebration, because we're supposed to be a church that worships according to the pattern of the Christians of the New Testament.

So today is Pentecost, when we remember how the Holy Spirit came upon the apostles in Jerusalem and they received power to proclaim the risen Jesus as the Messiah of Israel. As Peter stated, "God has made him both Lord and Messiah, this Jesus whom you crucified."

Pentecost is the fulfillment of what Jesus promised his disciples. "But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be my witnesses in

Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth" (Acts 1:8), or as in the older translation, "to the uttermost parts of the earth." Sometimes we get this turned around; we think of ourselves as the "Jerusalem" from which the gospel is to go out to the rest of the world. But the Bible is geographically specific;



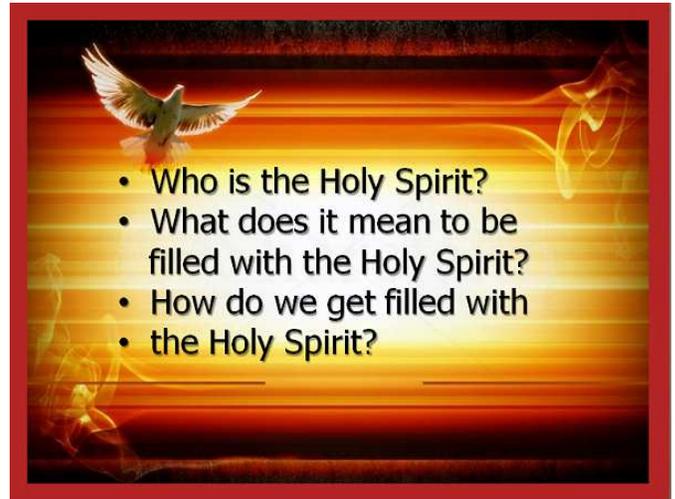
the gospel began from Jerusalem and spread, eventually, to Hamilton — which, here in Forgottonia, is one of “the uttermost parts of the earth.” Viewed from the perspective of Scripture, we’re the blessed *recipients* of that word of salvation that went out beginning from Jerusalem.

It was the coming of the Holy Spirit, on Pentecost, that gave the gospel its first “push” to break out of its Jewish environment into the rest of the world. So the work of the Holy Spirit is basic to all we do as witnesses to the lordship of Jesus. I thought it would be useful today to take up three questions: Who is the Holy Spirit? What does it mean to be filled with the Holy Spirit? and, How do we get filled with the Holy Spirit? Volumes have been written on these questions, so naturally our treatment today has to be brief.

First, **Who is the Holy Spirit?** We’re all familiar with the Trinity formula, “In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit,” and that tends to make us think of them as three separate entities, like three Gods.

In fact, that’s what Muslims and other opponents of Christianity think we believe. They don’t stop to consider that no reasonable person *could* believe in three Gods, since by definition God has to be One. If God isn’t one, he’s not God, he’s something less than God. So the Holy Spirit isn’t a *department* of God, or a *section* of the divine being alongside other sections. Instead, the Holy Spirit is just a name we give to the one God relating to us in a certain way. Last week we observed Mother’s Day. But every mother is also a daughter, or a sister, or an aunt, or a grandmother — yet she’s one person. That’s sort of how it is with God the Holy Spirit.

In our reading from the Book of Acts we saw how the disciples received power to declare the resurrection and lordship of Jesus when the Holy Spirit came upon them. So we could say that the Holy Spirit is the life of God, or the energy of God, as he gives us the power to do what he’s calling us to do. We might say the Holy Spirit is “the life of God in the soul of man,” enabling us to become, as Peter says, “partakers of the divine nature” (2 Peter 1:4).



- Who is the Holy Spirit?
- What does it mean to be filled with the Holy Spirit?
- How do we get filled with the Holy Spirit?

The Holy Spirit:



The Life of God

The Spirit of God is his creative force. The Nicene Creed proclaims the Holy Spirit as the “Giver of life.” Indeed, the very first words of the Bible indicate that it’s through his Spirit that God brings all things into being: “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form and void, and darkness was upon the face of the deep; and the Spirit of God was moving over the face of the waters. And God said, ‘Let there be light’; and there was light” (Genesis 1:1-3).

Scripture isn’t concerned to make fine distinctions between the “persons” of the Trinity. What the Father is, the Son is; and what the Son is, the Spirit is. As Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 3:17-18, “Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And we all,

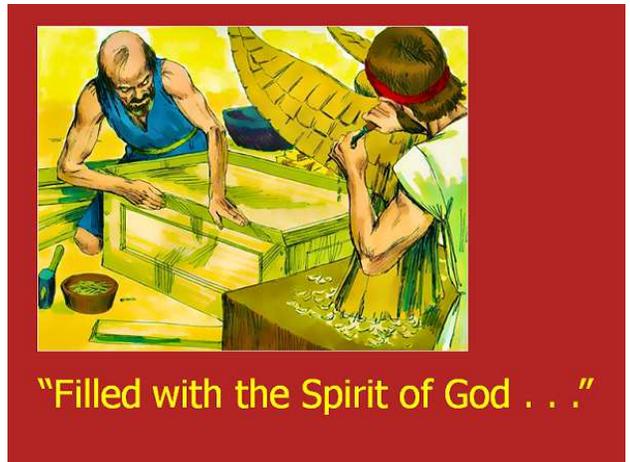
with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being changed into his likeness from one degree of glory to another; for this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.” The Spirit is the fulness of God making us into what the Creator intends us to be.

That brings us, then, to our second question: **What does it mean to be filled with the Holy Spirit?** It means, essentially, that we’re becoming the people God means for us to be, and doing the things he means for us to do. That could cover a wide spectrum of life and activity. For example, do you know who are the first

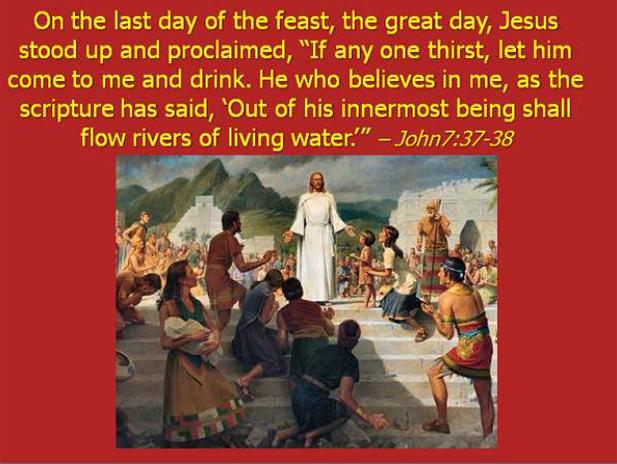
people the Bible says were filled with the Spirit of God? No, it wasn't the apostles at Pentecost; to find them we have to go all the way back to the Book of Exodus, chapter 35:

And Moses said to the people of Israel, "See, the LORD has called by name Bezalel the son of Uri, son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah; and he has filled him with the Spirit of God, with ability, with intelligence, with knowledge, and with all craftsmanship, to devise artistic designs, to work in gold and silver and bronze, in cutting stones for setting, and in carving wood, for work in every skilled craft (Exodus 35:30-33).

It was Bezalel, and his partner Oholiab, who designed and built the Tabernacle in the wilderness and the Ark of the Covenant, the center of Israel's worship. They were "filled with the Spirit" to create their artistic designs and work their craft, making things of beauty to honor the Lord. This shows us that the Spirit of the Lord can move upon us to excel in a variety of areas — not just in such activities as witnessing to our faith verbally, as happened with the disciples on the Day of Pentecost. The Spirit manifests himself in works of art that honor the Lord: painting, dance, poetry, architecture, literature, music, and the rest. But let's not stop there, let's go on to what we might call more mundane things. For instance, perhaps you're filled with the Spirit of God to prepare tasty food for the meals we enjoy here in this church!



"Filled with the Spirit of God . . ."

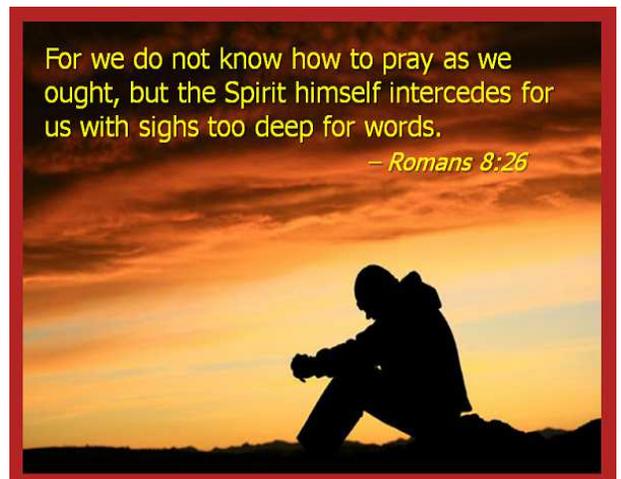


I can't cover everything on this subject, but let me just lift up a few more places where the Bible describes what happens when we're filled with the Spirit. In John, chapter 7, Jesus is present at the Feast of Tabernacles in Jerusalem, and he describes the person who is filled with the Holy Spirit: On the last day of the feast, the great day, Jesus stood up and proclaimed, "If any one thirst, let him come to me and drink. He who believes in me, as the scripture has said, 'Out of his heart shall flow rivers of living water.'" Now this he said about the Spirit, which those who believed in him were to receive; for as yet the Spirit had not been given, because Jesus was not yet glorified (John 7:37-39).

As the older translation says, "Out of his belly [or out of his innermost being] shall flow rivers of living water." When we're filled with the Holy Spirit, something of the very life of God flows out of us to impact people around us. There ought to be a kind of *enthusiasm* about us — and did you know that the word "enthusiasm" is derived from Greek words that mean having God within us? Generosity, concern for others, a positive attitude — these are aspects of those "rivers of living water" that Jesus says will flow out of the innermost being of a person filled with the Holy Spirit. Don't be afraid to get enthusiastic about the Christian life; that's what the Lord expects you to do, because he has been raised from the dead and is glorified at the right hand of the Father!

A well-known passage in Paul's Letter to the Romans points to another aspect of what it means to be filled with the Holy Spirit:

Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with sighs too deep for words. And he who searches the hearts of men knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God (Romans 8:26-27).



When we're filled with the Holy Spirit, then we know that the Lord hears our deepest prayers. We need to pray aloud, as we normally do, and we may not always know how we should be praying. But that shouldn't stop us; if we've opened ourselves to the filling of the Holy Spirit, then we know that, deep within us, the Spirit is connecting with the Father and taking our situation to him in a way that corresponds to his will for us. If I could use a crude analogy from the computer world, my PC is part of a network with other computers in our home. And the operating system has a feature called "network discovery" that's constantly on the lookout for the other computers, so I can share data with them. I think the Holy Spirit in us is like this "network discovery"; the Spirit is reaching out to communicate with the mind of God, even if I'm not consciously aware of his activity.

There are plenty of other places we could look in the New Testament to understand what happens to us when we're filled with the Holy Spirit, but I'll go to one important passage where Paul describes the effects of the life of God within us. In Galatians 5 he describes the results of the Spirit's work — first giving examples of what happens when we *don't* let the Spirit fill us with that divine life:

Now the works of the flesh are plain: fornication, impurity, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, anger, selfishness, dissension, party spirit, envy, drunkenness, carousing, and the like. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such there is no law. And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit (Galatians 5:19-25).

There are qualities of life and behavior that result from being filled with the Holy Spirit. Each one deserves a paragraph of its own, but let me just summarize.



- We *love*, as a reflection of the Lord's love for us — not a sentimental, emotional, unstable sort of love that can change with the behavior of other people, but New Testament *agape* love, a commitment to the people of God with whom we're bonded in Jesus.
- We have *joy*, a satisfaction and contentment within ourselves because we know who we are in the Lord.
- We have *peace* — not just a calm and untroubled way about us but an active peace, what the Hebrew Bible calls *shalom* or a healthy outlook.
- As a result we're *patient*, because we know we can work through any situation till God brings about the result he wants.
- We become *kind*, showing generosity to others and concern for their welfare.
- We display *goodness* — not just moral goodness, but the kind of goodness we associate with good food; we become the sort of person people like to have around, because we're interesting and add some "zip" to their life.
- We're *faithful*, loyal to the agreement the Lord has made with us that we should be his people and he will be our God. People can trust us to do what's right in whatever situation.
- We're *gentle* or *meek*, not lifting ourselves above the Lord but submitting to his Word.
- Finally, we have *self-control*, the "bottom line" that sustains all the rest of these qualities. We have a determination not to allow our unhealthy emotions get the best of us and make trouble. We remember to follow James's advice: "Resist the devil, and he will flee from you" (James 4:7).

As I said, this is a big subject and the Scripture has more to say. But these are examples of what it means to be filled with the Holy Spirit. So we come to our final question: **How do we get filled with the Holy Spirit?**

If, as Paul says, “the Lord is the Spirit,” the simple answer is that *if you have Jesus you have the Holy Spirit*. So the proper question may not be, “How do I get filled with the Spirit?” The right question might be, “How do I let him out? How do I learn to manifest the life of God that’s already within me?” Your lawn mower runs out of gas, and you’ve got more fuel in the can but it will do no good as long as it stays in the can. You need to pour it out so it can do what it’s supposed to do. In the same way we need to learn how to let the Holy Spirit out so he can do his work through us. For the apostles on the Day of Pentecost, they spoke in other tongues and then preached the word of the risen Jesus, so that thousands came to the Lord. That was their manifestation, as it still is for many Christians today.

So let the Spirit come out! I do believe this is a learning process; it isn’t something that just happens by default. If that were the case, Paul wouldn’t have given this directive to the Ephesians: “Be filled with the Spirit, addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with all your heart, always and for everything giving thanks in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God the Father” (Ephesians 5:18-20). There are things we might have to *learn to do* to let the life of God flow out from us as “rivers of living water.” And this process could begin with being a more enthusiastic worshiper, expressing our thanks to God in ways more active than the calm, unruffled style most of us are used to! Remember, if there’s no *enthusiasm* — no *en-theos*, God in us — that means the Spirit isn’t finding the outlet he needs to have his effects in our witness. That’s why I sometimes reprint the little “Can I” checklist of things each of us might do to make it evident that we know “God is surely among us” when we worship, as Paul said (1 Corinthians 14:25).

So today, on Pentecost, let’s each one of us think about some action we can take to release the Holy Spirit, the life of God within our souls. There’s no “cookie cutter” approach to this; each of us might learn to manifest the filling of the Holy Spirit in a different way. But I will assure you that, once the Spirit we all have is released in your life, you will know it and so will everyone else you meet!



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