



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Systematic Theology

TRANSCRIPT

“The Holy Spirit’s Work of Sanctifying Believers, part I:

The Problem of the Filling of the Spirit”

I have to finish on time, so let’s have a word of prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we turn to Thee with thanksgiving for this opportunity to open the Scriptures and consider, again, the teaching of Thy Holy Word. We thank Thee for its truth and for the ministry, which it has had in our lives. We rejoice that the Holy Spirit has opened our hearts to attend to the things which have been written and preached to us. And we thank Thee for his continuing ministry in our lives. And as we study of the Spirit’s ministry and work, enable us, Lord, to know what he does and know, also, our responsibilities as well as our enablings. And we pray that through our studies we may come to know Thee better and Jesus Christ, whom Thou hast sent. And we make our prayer.

In His name and for His sake. Amen.

[Message] Now, we are going to study for the next five weeks, or so, “The Holy Spirit’s Work of Sanctifying Believers,” which is the conclusion of our study of the work of the Holy Spirit. And then we shall see how the interest is in our studies. And, if there is

interest, we will proceed to other aspects of Systematic Theology. If there is not, well, then we will stop because we will have stopped at a good point. And then you can have your Tuesday night free. So we will just see how things work out.

Now, the subject for tonight is “The Holy Spirit’s Work of Sanctifying Believers,” that’s the first part of the title. And we are considering, particularly, tonight, “The Problem of the Filling of the Spirit.” And then, on next Tuesday night, we will consider “The Holy Spirit’s Work of Sanctifying Believers, The Theological Aspects of the Work.” On the following Tuesday, we will consider, “The Practical Aspects of the Work.” And then on our fourth Tuesday, continuing “The Holy Spirit’s Work of Sanctifying Believers, The Believers Response to the Sanctifying Ministry.” And finally, we will conclude with “The Problem of Spirituality, Growth, and Maturity.” And that will conclude our study of the theology of the Holy Spirit.

Now, tonight, our subject is “The Holy Spirit’s Work of Sanctifying Believers: The Problem of the Filling of the Spirit.” And I want to turn to two passages, which are somewhat related, as you can tell. They are both very brief. One of them simply one verse, Acts chapter 13 and verse 52. And then we’re going to turn to Ephesians chapter 5, verse 18 through verse 21, which is the great passage in the minds of most people on the “filling” of the Spirit.

So will you turn now to Acts chapter 13 and verse 52, and let’s read this one verse. This is the conclusion of Paul’s ministry in Antioch and Pisidia, and we read “And the disciples were filled with joy, and with the Holy Ghost.” Now, let’s turn over to our Ephesians passage and read verses 18 through 21. Ephesians 5, verse 18 through verse 21. And Paul writes.

“And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit; speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord; Giving thanks always for all things unto God and the

Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ; Submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God.”

Now, we are coming, and I want to give you a few words of introduction. We are coming to the final work of the Holy Spirit, in relation to believers. We have considered his work in relation to the Trinity, the Creation, the Scriptures, the unbelieving world of Old Testament times, the unbelieving world of New Testament times; we considered also the work of the Holy Spirit in the life of Jesus Christ and we were, particularly, considering the work of the Holy Spirit in the believers of the Church. And we have seen the following ministries: The top circle, which you will see, is a circle in which the Spirit’s work in the unbelieving world is set forth. We saw that the Holy Spirit had, with reference to the world, a ministry of moral influences as set forth in Acts chapter 7, verse 51 and Acts chapter 17, verse 22. We saw the Holy Spirit had the ministries of natural blessings to this unbelieving world. That is set forth for us in Acts chapter 14 in verse 7.

And we saw the Holy Spirit also had the ministry of redemptive influences, particularly, in connect with the lives of children of believing parents, 1 Corinthians chapter 7 in verse 14. And then we went on to consider and were considering the Spirit’s work in the believing community. And we saw his first work, of course, is regeneration. His next work is baptizing. We saw his third work was indwelling. We considered that. We considered his work of teaching. We considered his work of giving spiritual gifts. And then we stopped and spent three times on the ministry of the Spirit in connection with the gift of tongues, and that’s where we stopped.

And so tonight, we want to pick up his sanctifying ministry, and at the same time say something about what has been claimed to be his ministry of filling. And that’s where we are.

Now, let me turn back to the outline that I was giving you, so we’ll know where I’m going. Now, I hope to show in this lecture that our common terminology concerning

the filling of the Spirit is misleading. I shall seek to show that it is not thoroughly harmonious with the New Testament to urge Christians to become filled with the Spirit. That is in the common sense of the expression in which is meant that we should have an experience to be sought by, first, confession of sins, by the presentation of our bodies and our lives to Jesus Christ, and the acceptance of the filling ministry by faith. Now, that is a very common little formula for the filling of the Holy Spirit. And it is commonly taught and preached among evangelicals.

Now, some of you here in Believers Chapel have been listening to me preach for about nine years, and you probably have noticed that I have never mentioned this formula. And the reason that I have not mentioned it is because I, personally, do not accept that formula in that way. I certainly want to express my firm support of the doctrine of confession of sins, my firm support of the doctrine of the presentation of our bodies, and my firm support of the doctrine of faith. But I think that when we teach that people are to have an experience, which they call the filling of the Spirit, through this particular technique; I think that it is very misleading and contrary to the teaching of the New Testament. I do not think that there is any text in Scriptures that says that we receive the filling of the Spirit by faith.

Now, there are texts that say we receive the Spirit by faith; but the filling of the Holy Spirit by faith is not taught in Scripture. Furthermore, it is my own feeling that the term, the filling of the Spirit, has been preached far beyond its importance in the New Testament. And from what I am going to say tonight, I hope when we conclude, if you do not agree with me at least you will say “Well, Dr. Johnson does have a few points that are worth considering.” I am going to suggest to you that the Bible sets forth our responsibility, not so much in terms of the filling of the Spirit, as it does in terms of living by the Spirit, or in terms of walking by the Spirit, and that when we speak of God’s work in the sanctification of the believer, we do not speak of his ministry of filling by the Spirit, but we rather speak of his ministry of sanctifying by the Spirit.

Now, of course, regardless of our terminology, we all agree that the maintenance of contact with the Lord in the Spirit is the great need of our daily lives. And, I think, we all will agree; even though to disagree with me about what the Bible teaches in this matter of the filling of the Spirit, they will agree with me and I will surely agree with them that we have not taken advantage of the privileges that we have as believers.

We all have, at one time or another, read stories in our newspapers of individuals who have lived like beggars and then, after their death, discovered that they were really, relatively wealthy people. I have before me a clipping, which is the story of a man who died in London. He had just given to his brother \$20,000 in cash, which at the time that he did it was a considerable amount of money. And as far as I’m concerned, it’s still a considerable amount of money. He had sold some securities just recently for a couple of thousand dollars and he, in spite of this, he lived in one room for which he paid one dollar a week. He was sixty years of age when he died on the streets of London; but he looked eighty. He was dressed in rags. He used to walk the streets of London picking up pieces of stale bread.

And when the official announcement and pronouncement of the causes of his death was printed up; it read like this “He died of self-starvation when he had ample funds in his possession and a banking account.” Now, that of course, is a vivid illustration of Christians because we have the ministry of the Holy Spirit, we have the ministry of our Lord, we have the ministry of the word of God, we have all of these great riches. But in actuality many of us are just as this man, we are walking the spiritual streets of London. We live in a shack for which we pay one dollar a week when we have ample funds, spiritual funds, in our bank account that we could spend, but we are spiritual paupers. On the other hand there are many of us who do not take advantage of our privileges because we are not in harmony with the word of God and we know it.

Charlie Alexander was one of the great song leaders of the past couple of generations when evangelists were very popular. And Mr. Alexander, one time, took

some meetings himself, in Tennessee. And he told the story of something that happened in his meetings there. He said that one night they were having a prayer meeting before the evening meeting and a man got up and began to pray very fervently. And it was pretty well known in the community that his Christian life was off and on; in fact, more off than on. But he began to pray very fervently “O Lord, fill me with the Holy Spirit. O God, fill me with the Holy Ghost.” And he said the whole atmosphere became alive with emotion, until finally a woman, who knew him, jumped up in the meeting and shouted out “Don’t do it Lord. He leaks.” [Laughter] Many of us know precisely what that means.

Now, let’s turn to our consideration of the problem of the filling of the Holy Spirit. And in the outline, it is Roman I – The Filling of the Spirit – An investigation of the term. Now whenever we’re studying anything in the Bible, it is fundamental for our clear understanding of what the Bible teaches to go to the terms that are used for that particular teaching and see what the Bible has to say about these specific terms. And so what we should do is go to the Bible and see what it has to say about the term “the filling of the Spirit.”

Now, it is much better to do that than do anything else. It is much better to do this first than to read any commentary, to listen to any preacher, to read any book on the spiritual life, to get your concordance down and take a look at the term “filling” and take a look at the term “Spirit” and just look up the passages in the word of God, consecutively, and see what the Bible has to say on that point. That will deliver you from manifold errors. And as I get older and older in the study of the Bible, I discover that more and more that is helpful to me. So I want to review, first, the Old Testament usage of the term “the filling of the Spirit.” And then secondly, I want to take a look at the New Testament usage of that term, by way of review. For remember, we have considered this.

Now, I know many of you have forgotten it, particularly, those who come and don’t take notes. Because if you come and don’t take notes, I’m not saying we’re going to set someone at the door back there and see if you bring a notebook next time and take

notes. But it is a known fact that if you take notes, you remember more of what has been said. Now, maybe that’s a blessing. But nevertheless, as far as learning is concerned, it’s good to take a few notes. And if you had taken notes, you’ll recognize this as review. If you didn’t take any notes or if you weren’t here, then you won’t recognize it, but it is review.

And so I want to say something, now, about what we said about the use of the term “the filling of the Spirit” in the Old Testament. And we saw this a long time ago that the Spirit’s work in believers, in the Old Testament, was a two-fold work. It was the work of sanctification, and that was set forth for us in passages like Psalm 51, verse 10, when David said “Renew in me a right spirit, O Lord.” And then we saw that the second ministry of the Holy Spirit in the Old Testament in believers was the enduement of believers with power engaged in a ministry of sanctification and a ministry of enduement with power. And if you can remember way back there, I said that there were three great words that expressed enduement with power in the Old Testament, and one of them was the term “rushed upon.” And we have a few instances in the Old Testament in which it is stated that the Holy Spirit “fell upon” or “rushed upon” someone. That’s a term for enduement with power. The Spirit fell on someone in order to give them spiritual strength to do a particular task.

Then I said, and we referred to Gideon’s experience, that the Holy Spirit’s terminology for enduement with power, includes his ministry of “clothing himself with.” It is stated in Judges chapter 6, verse 34 that the Spirit “clothed himself with Gideon.” He put on Gideon like a garment. And the Spirit went out and performed those mighty works through Gideon. It was the Spirit who did the work; but he did them through Gideon. Gideon was like his suit that he had on, like his dress. He was the worker. Gideon was simply the person who was about him.

And the third word was the word “filled.” And we saw, for example, in Exodus chapter 31, and verses 4 and 5, that Bezaleel, who was engaged in the ministry of

building the Tabernacle, was “filled” with the Spirit for that task. In other words, he was given an enduement with power; he was given power for that task.

Filling then, in the Old Testament, was a term, which referred to enduement with power for special ministry. Now, listen to that. Let me say it again. The term filling of the Spirit in the Old Testament was a term that was used for the enduement of power for a special ministry. If someone was filled with the Spirit, he was endued with power to perform a specific task. There is no evidence, whatsoever, that it was a continuing thing. That is, a man was always filled with the Spirit, always endued with power. As far as we can tell, it was a sovereign work of the Holy Spirit.

Now, that’s the Old Testament usage. Now, we learn, of course, a great deal in the study of the Scriptures by looking at the Old Testament for the simple reason that the writers and authors of the New Testament were men who used the Old Testament as their Bible. If you had come up to Paul and you had said to him, in Antioch, for example, “Paul, what is the Bible?” Why, he would have said “The Scriptures.” And you would have said “What do you mean by the Scriptures?” And he would have said “The thirty-nine books of the Old Testament.” If you had come to our Lord and asked him what the Bible was, he would say “The thirty-nine books of the Old Testament. They are the Scriptures.” Peter? “Thirty-nine books of the Old Testament.” John? “The books of the Old Testament.” Peter might have added, on the basis of some things he says in the third chapter of his last Epistle, his second epistle, he might have said “It seems to me that Paul’s writing has the character of Scripture, too.” But that was later. That was after Paul began to write.

So the Scriptures to them were the Old Testament Scriptures. And the meanings of the terms that they used are the meanings that these terms have in the Old Testament. When we hear, in the New Testament, the Lord and John the Baptist coming and saying “Repent, for the kingdom of the heavens is at hand,” we don’t have to run off to a modern theologians Systematic Theology or Biblical Theology to find out what the term

the kingdom of the heavens means. We go back in the Old Testament and see what they meant by that term. And the Old Testament revealed very plainly that it has to do with the kingdom of God upon the earth. So when we come to the term in the New Testament, the “filling of the Spirit,” we don’t run off to one of Andrew Murray’s devotional pamphlets or the pamphlet of Campus Crusade for Christ, How to be Filled with the Spirit; or any other devotional pamphlet to discover what the “filling of the Spirit” means. We go to the Bible and read what it has to say about that term. And specifically, we begin with the Old Testament because these terms have meaning derived from their original usage.

Now, let’s take a look at the New Testament. The Old Testament, then, the Holy Spirit’s filling is enduement with power for special ministry. Now, let’s turn to the New Testament, and I’m going to distinguish at this point, for our purposes, the usage for this term in the Gospels and then in the Acts because we’re going to consider the Ephesians 5:18 passage a little more lengthily.

Now, the usage in the gospels, and this is review. If you’re a little hazy about the details then I suggest that you get one of the tapes and play it again. But I said “With reference to the usage in the gospels that the term, “the filling of the Spirit” was, primarily, a term used by Luke. And I also said that it was a term that referred to divine enablement for work, which resulted in the Spirit’s control of a person. So that the filling of the Holy Spirit, in the Gospels, is precisely the same term that it was in the Old Testament. It had to do with divine enablement for a specific work, which, of course, resulted as a result of the Spirit’s control of the person, in the Spirit’s direction of that person, and enablement in that work.

Now, second, the usage in the Acts, when we are reviewing New Testament usage. And again, we looked at a number of the passages in the Book of Acts and we saw that the thrust of the usage in the Book of Acts is also along the line of enduement with power through the Spirit’s control. For example, when Peter was filled with the

Spirit on the day of Pentecost, what did he do? Well, as a result of the filling of the Spirit, he and others began to speak in tongues. They were endued with power by the filling of the Spirit for utterance. As a matter of fact, you will notice that when the men of the New Testament speak often it says “Paul, filled with the Spirit,” or “Stephen, filled with the Spirit” began to speak.

And I have a friend on the faculty of Dallas Seminary who spent a great deal of time studying this and in his opinion, I don’t concur with this one hundred percent, but it’s his opinion that this term is almost a term for divine inspiration. That is, a person who is filled with the Spirit is one who gives forth inspired utterance. And, of course, that is true with reference to some of the speeches, which are now recorded in the Book of Acts. But the inspiration, in my opinion, does not attach to the filling, it attaches to the recording in the word of God.

But still, the point that we both are trying to make is this; that the work of the filling of the Spirit is a divine endowment with power for a specific task. It is not the everyday experience of a man. If it were the everyday experience of a man, we would not have those expressions in the New Testament “Paul filled with the Holy Spirit said” such and such. It was something special. That is the ordinary meaning of the term the filling of the Spirit.

Well I know what you’re going to say “Well, doesn’t the Bible say that Stephen was a man filled with the Spirit?” Yes. “Doesn’t it say in Acts 13 that the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Ghost?” Yes. Well, that means exactly what we mean when we say they were filled with joy. That is, their lives were characterized by joy. Their lives were characterized, also, by the influence of the Holy Spirit. But that does not mean that that little term should be taken out and made the keystone of the doctrine of the spiritual life. If that were so, why do not we take the other things and make them the keystone? You see, those adjectival expressions are simply description.

So the essential ministry of the Holy Spirit in filling is to endue a person with power for a specific task. Now, I think, if I were going to be preaching mission to someplace that required attention, I might be perfectly justified in getting down upon my knees and saying “O God, fill me with the Holy Spirit for the preaching of the word in Atlanta or the preaching of the word in New York City.” For the filling of the Spirit, is primarily a term of enduement with power for a specific task.

Now, I pointed out that there were three Greek words and they all meant essentially the same thing. One was the Greek word *pimplemi*. Now, those of you that are real scholars, I know you want to know how to spell that word so I will put it on the board here, *pimplemi*. Now, *pimplemi* is a word that means or which refers to “that which fills or takes possession of the mind.” Now, that’s from one of our simple Greek Lexicons. So that to be filled with the Spirit is to have ones mind or being taken control of by the Spirit. And then there is the adjective, did I say verb, word *pleres*. This adjective *pleres* is commonly used of the filling of the Spirit and the thought again is the thought of being taken possession of. And the third word is the word, oh I started to write that in Greek. I did write it. So used to writing the Greek that I’m having a hard time transliterating it, *pleroo*. Now, that too means “to take possession of; to fill.”

Now, you will notice the great stress in the meanings of these words on the idea of taking possession of a person. It refers to enduement with power for spirit controlled utterance, most of the time. But at least for the Spirit’s control. There seems to be no clear teaching that this is to be regarded as the normal Christian experience.

Now, I want to illustrate for you how this word “to fill” means to control. And I want you to turn with me back to Acts chapter 5, Acts chapter 5. In Acts chapter 5, we read, in verse 1.

“But a certain man named Ananias, with Sapphira his wife, sold a possession, And kept back part of the price, his wife also being privy to it, and brought a certain part, and

laid it at the apostle’s feet. But Peter said ‘Ananias, why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Ghost, and to keep back part of the price of the land?’”

Now, notice that term “filled.” “Why hath Satan filled thine heart?” Well what does that mean? Why has Satan come in and so taken possession of you, Ananias, that he controls you? That’s what it means to be “filled” with in this case, to be filled by Satan in such a way that we are controlled by them.

Now, you will notice, that in the Bible, there are three times, three occurrences of a contrast between the filling of the Spirit and the filling of the spirits. And I’m going to ask you to turn with them for me so you can see them. Let’s turn back to Luke chapter 1, Luke chapter 1. And let’s read verse 15, Luke chapter 1, verse 15. Now, this is concerning John the Baptist.

“For he shall be great in the sight of the Lord, and shall drink neither wine nor strong drink; and he shall be filled with the Holy Ghost, even from his mother’s womb.”

Notice “He shall drink neither wine nor strong drink; but shall be filled with the Holy Ghost.” He will not be filled with the spirits. He will be filled with the Spirit. You know what the “spirits” are, don’t you? Of course you do. Some of you are looking so pious, I wonder if you have even come near any “spirits?”

All right, now, let’s look at the second occurrence. Let’s turn over to Acts chapter 2, yes, Acts chapter 2. And let’s notice verse 12, after what happened on the day of Pentecost, we read in Acts chapter 2, verse 12.

“And they were all amazed, and were in doubt, saying one to another, What meaneth this? Others mocking said, These men are full of new wine.” [In other words, these men are under the influence of the spirits.] “But Peter, standing up with the eleven,

lifted up his voice, and said unto them, Ye men of Judaea, and all ye that dwell at Jerusalem, be this known unto you, and hearken to my words: For these are not drunken, as ye suppose, seeing it is but the third hour of the day. But this is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel; And it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh.”

And so he says “It’s not a case of being under the influence of the spirits, it’s a case of being under the influence of the Spirit.” These men are not filled with the spirits; they are not filled with wine. They are filled with the Holy Spirit.

Now, Ephesians chapter 5, a passage we want to look at for a moment, in a moment, a little more deeply. But, in Ephesians 5, verse 18, Paul says “And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit.” And so, you’ll notice, that in each one of these three occurrences there is a contrast of the filling with the spirits and the filling with the Spirit because just as when a man has a little bit too much to drink, he comes under the influence of the whiskey and that’s the term that we use. “You know, he was under the influence of whiskey.” We say a few more things that he’s more than under the influence, completely controlled. But, that’s what we say. So the ministry of the Holy Spirit is to control, or does control, a person in certain circumstances, these specific ones. So it is obvious then that to be filled with the Spirit is an endowment with power for the performance of a specific task that leads to the control of that individual, just like the control of the spirits.

Lee Trevino did not play too well in the World Series of Golf. And he finished last, as a matter of fact. And when he came in, he’d just been operated on for appendicitis a few weeks back and so according to the newspaper accounts, he came in and flopped down and asked for a Scotch and soda. And while he was talking in his characteristic way, he uttered these words. He talked about how he’d been playing so poorly, but he said “Give me ten of these, and I’ll walk out of here thinking I won the

tournament.” Now, he is talking about control, under the influence. Now, the Holy Spirit’s filling is controlled, but controlled for a specific purpose. It is enduement with power. That means, that would eliminate a lot of wrong conceptions about the filling of the Holy Spirit. It does not mean we see visions, when a person is filled with the Spirit. It does not mean that we feel icicles running up and down our backs, or falling down our backs, or balls of fire running up and down our backs, when a person is filled with the spirits. To be filled with the Spirit is to be controlled by the Spirit and it is for enduement of power we have seen.

Now, that’s the background. And I want you to turn with me to Ephesians 5:18, because we’re going to look at this text which, I think, has been woefully misunderstood. Ephesians 5:18. This is Roman II in the outline - Be filled with the Spirit; the special problem of Ephesians 5:18.

Do you know what a “bellwether” is? Well, a bellwether, if you are a shepherd, is a male sheep that wears a bell, usually the leader of the flock. And it has come in our language to mean a leader, especially, of a foolish sheep-like crowd. And we might say “He was the bellwether of the Baptists.” Well, that wasn’t good, was it? “He was the bellwether of the Presbyterians.” Or “He was the bellwether of Believers Chapel.” Or well, you know, we use this of the leading text or the leading doctrine or the leading person. Now, the text that is a bellwether of the view that the filling of the Spirit is the Spirit’s crucial ministry to the believer in this age is Ephesians 5:18. And if I can show you that this text does not mean what it is ordinarily thought to mean, that is, a command for us to be filled with the Spirit by, first, confession of sins; second, by rededication or dedication; and third, by the acceptance of the filling ministry in faith; then I hope we have dealt a mortal blow to what I think is a misunderstanding of the Spirit’s teaching.

Now, this is the bellwether text. Benjamin Whichcote, an ancient Bible interpreter, said “Such preaching of others hath most commanded my heart which hath most illuminated my head.” Now, I believe that. I believe that the teaching that is most

effective and the preaching that is most effective and which most commands my heart’s consent and obedience is that which hath “most illuminated my head.” So I’m going to try to illuminate your head so that this teaching will command your heart.

Now, let’s look at our passage. And I want you to notice that Paul in Ephesians 5, 2 through 21, has been speaking or is speaking about the believer’s walk. Notice verse 2 “And walk in love.” Notice verse 8 “For ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord: walk as children of light.” Verse 15 “See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise.” Now, you can see that the characteristic and key word for Paul in this section is the injunction that the believers “walk” in a certain way. So he is talking about the Christian’s walk. Now, that’s very important but what does this clause in verse 18 mean? “Be filled with the Spirit.”

Now, when we come to a text like this, it’s not surprising that there have been a variety of interpretations given to it. And I’m going to suggest two or three that have been given and try to point you to at least one or two, which may be correct. And I want to try to lead you away from those that I think are wrong.

First of all, this has been rendered “Be filled with the Spirit.” Now, that’s the way it’s rendered in the Authorized Version “Be filled with the Spirit.” Now, if I were to say to you “Now, Ron Caulkins, what does this mean?” Now, I’m going to speak for you Ron, and you can correct me afterwards. You would come up to me and say “I wouldn’t have said that at all.” But I believe that nine persons out of ten would say, if I were to say to them “Now, what does this mean?” “Why, it means we are to be filled with the Spirit.” In other words, the content of this filling is to be the Holy Spirit. And the average person would also think of a glass of water or liquid, which you filled up and after a certain place, it began to overflow. In fact, there are many stories I could give you, preachers’ stories on the overflowing of the cup or the glass or whatever it may be. And so you probably would think that this “with the Spirit” represented the “content” of the filling.

“Be filled with the Spirit.” Well, that’s what it would mean in English. Be filled with water means to be filled with the content of water.

Now, I’m going to say something that might surprise you. The Greek usage of the term *pleroo*, which is used here with the preposition *en* which is translated “with” here that usage is never found in this sense. In other words *en* with *pleroo* never refers to the content of filling, never, never. Abbott, for example, in his commentary on Ephesians says “Such usage is quite unexampled.” So what do we do, if this doesn’t mean “be filled with the Spirit.” What do we do? Well some would say “I give up the Bible.” Now, that isn’t what we are to do. What do we do when we study the text of Scripture and we discover that it doesn’t agree with what we have thought was the teaching of the Bible? What do we do? Give up that interpretation? Give up that teaching? No, we revise our theology. That’s what we do. We revise our theology.

Now, theology, remember, theology is not something that is final. Now, a lot of people are saying “My goodness, I thought theology was final. You mean to say, if we cannot have final theology, what can we accept?” Well we can accept the word of God. Theology, you see, is man’s interpretation of the word of God. Theology is what the church thinks the Bible teaches. But theology may change, the word of God never changes.

I’ve often said to you, and I say it over and over again, now, you must distinguish three things. You must distinguish what the Bible says, believe that. You must distinguish from what the Bible says what I or anyone else says that it says. Now, don’t believe that near as much as you believe the Bible because I or any other teacher may be wrong. I may say it means this, but in reality it means something else. And then I may say to you, “Now, I think that we are justified in saying on the basis of this that such and such is true.” Now, I’m inferring from the Bible, believe that even less.

Now, inferring is all right. As a matter of fact, the Scriptural writers infer in statements of Scripture. So it’s all right to draw inferences. But they drew them under the

inspiration of the Holy Spirit. I do not. Sometimes I think under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, I think I have the Spirit saying within me “Go to it, Lewis. You’re right. Straighten them out.” And then sometimes I’m not so sure. I tell you what I think.

Now then, if this text does not mean “be filled with the Spirit” then we must revise our theology if our theology depended upon that rendering. “Be filled with the Spirit.” So, that isn’t what it means. It doesn’t mean that. Now, if you have other editions of the New Testament, other translations, the chances are you’ll find that they do not agree with that reference, for that’s not Biblical. That’s not good Greek usage.

Second, this may be translated, has been translated “Be filled by the Spirit.” Now, that of course, would mean that the Spirit is the means of the filling. That’s possible. But that’s not likely usage. The likely usage would be the use of the preposition “*propter*” rather than the preposition “*en*.” But if this means “be filled by the Spirit” then we are justified in saying, if we are to be filled “by” the Spirit then what are we to be filled with? Well, if it means simply to be controlled by the Spirit, that’s a possible meaning, be “controlled” by the Spirit. So we can say that is a possible rendering.

Third, this may also mean “be filled in the Spirit” and “*en*” which is used in our text, the Greek preposition “*en*” translated with here, would then refer to the “sphere.” And so we are told then, by Paul, “Be filled, be controlled in the sphere of the Holy Spirit.” Now, that would have practically the same force as that second rendering. But this does preserve the familiar analogy of the spirits. Because, men were filled in the sphere of the spirits, they came under their control.

Furthermore, in the Book of Ephesians in this expression “in the Spirit” occurs about three other times and it always refers to the Holy Spirit as the “sphere” of activity. So I am inclined to think that what Paul means then is “to be filled in the Spirit.”

But it’s possible to render it another way, and I’m going to mention this because someone may come and say to you “Well, it could be rendered this way” and it could be. It could be rendered “be filled in your spirit.” Now, I mean by that “be filled in the spirit,”

but put the spirit with the little “s” which would not mean “be filled in the Holy Spirit” but “be filled in the human spirit.” “Be filled in your human spirit.” That’s a possible rendering. The spirit would be the human spirit. But, of course, the ultimate filling would have to come from the Holy Spirit or else we’d fall into the hated doctrine of Pelegianism. And then we would have people who were “filled by” or in their own spirit, no reference to the Holy Spirit. Well, we would say, well, how did it come to pass? Such is impossible apart from divine enablement. Now, if you’re a Pelegian, then you can believe that. But I’m not a Pelegian and I can not believe that. I’m a Paulianist.

Now, what is it if “to be filled in the spirit” is the meaning of Ephesians 5:18 “be filled in the sphere of the Spirit,” what is it that we are to be filled with? We are not filled with the Spirit as content because we are filled in the sphere of the Spirit. Well, you know, it is always good when you read the Bible to read the context. And if you’ve ever read the context of this, of course, you have, but have you ever noticed it? Look, verse 18, Paul says “And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit.” Speaking to yourselves in songs and hymns and spiritual songs; singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord, giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father, in the name of our Lord, Jesus Christ, submitting yourselves, one to another, in the fear of God. What are the specifics of the filling, Paul? Well, this filling is to be manifested in a certain manner. And the evidences of this filling are fourfold. They are expressed by the participles that modify the subject of “be filled.” This is what it is to be filled in the spirit. Now, I’m going to put a little diagram on the board so you will understand what I’m talking about. It’s copyrighted. That is a joke.

Now, notice, there is the injunction “Be filled with the Spirit.” And the five participles I have arranged in four lines because two of them, the second and the third are connected by an “and,” the others are not, which indicates that there are four parallel expressions, but the second one of the four has a double part to it. So “be filled with the Spirit.”

What is it, Paul, to be filled with the Spirit? Why, the evidences, Lewis, are these. First, speaking to yourself in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs. Second, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord. Third, giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord, Jesus Christ. Fourth, submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God. Now, it becomes evidence, as we ponder these words, that the passage is not addressed primarily to the individual spiritual life but to the corporate spiritual life. Notice, he says “Submitting yourselves one to another, speaking to yourselves,” that doesn’t mean speaking to yourself, “Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs.

What is it to be filled in the sphere of the Spirit? Why, it’s when the saints gather and they have the meetings of the Lord and there are some who speak in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, there are some who sing and make melody in their hearts, not just simply with their lips, in their hearts to the Lord, there are others who give thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the Name of our Lord, Jesus Christ, and we express our filling in the spirit by submission one to another. That’s what it is to be filled “in the sphere of the Spirit.”

I would suggest to you, I only suggest if I cannot prove it, I would suggest to you that Paul was thinking of the meeting of the church, when they observed the Lord’s Table and around the agape, the Lord’s Supper, the Feast of Love. These were proper expressions of the oneness that they had in the Lord, Jesus Christ, and of their filling in the sphere of the Spirit, and he was exhorting them with regard to those things.

Now notice, he says that they sang psalms. Now, that word “psalms,” is a word that is derived from the Greek word *psalmos* which means to twitch or to twang like a bowstring. Now, I’m not sure that that would be applied to a guitar but, nevertheless, it meant to play a stringed instrument. Now, that would suggest that the early church did have music in their meetings. Now, there is a large denomination in the South that takes

a great deal of pride in the fact that their doctrine says that they are not to have any kind of instrumental accompaniment of singing. I do not really think that is taught in the Bible.

Now, there is a group of people which we call the Exclusive Brethren. Now, they also believe that. They believe that there should be no playing of the piano in meetings. When I was in Scotland, I was invited to speak in one of these churches. I didn’t know it was that kind of church. But when I came in to preach the Gospel on Sunday night, I looked around, there was no piano. And a man got up and took out one of those little instruments that came from the nineteenth century for giving the tone and I’ve forgotten exactly how he did it. He put it up to his mouth and then led us in a hymn or two. When he got done I asked him about the music. And he said “We don’t believe in the use of musical instruments.” And one of them, with a twinkle in his eye, said “We believe that,” oh, they referred to the piano as the ‘wooden brother.’ In other words, it was a kind of a play on, you know, members of the body of Christ. The piano is the “wooden brother,” who is always in our meetings. But, one of them with a twinkle in his eye said to me “We believe that the piano ought to come into the meeting the same way that we came into the meeting. Through water.” That is, through baptism. As far as I can tell, the New Testament does teach that there was the playing of musical instruments on occasion. Luther used to say “Music drowns the devil away.” Some of my friends say that “Rock” brings him back. But they played. They had music, as far as I can tell.

Now, notice these things, speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord. By the way, that’s a good text on congregational singing, isn’t it? We don’t sing words, we don’t sing tunes, we really sing the theology of the hymn. Giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the Name of our Lord, Jesus Christ, and the climax, submission. That’s the final evidence of being “filled in the Spirit.” Submission to one another in the fear of God, dominate is the world’s wisdom, submission is the wisdom of God.

Well, now, let me summarize and conclude. Roman III in the outline - The filling of the Spirit, then, is a term too narrow to express the Spirit’s primary work in the believer’s life. I’m not against the use of the term “filling of the Spirit.” I’m not against saying to someone “He is a person filled with the Spirit,” if what you mean by that is, simply, he is a person whose life seems to have the influence of the Holy Spirit about it. Just as we might say “He is a Christian filled with joy, a joyous Christian.” I’m not against that. But I do think it is too narrow to say that the work of God, the Holy Spirit, in the Christian’s life, is comprehended by the term “the filling of the Spirit.” That is, primarily, a term for enduement with power to perform a specific task in the New Testament. The proper term to express the believer’s responsibility is something else. And the proper term to express the Spirit’s ministry to us is much better, I think, “The sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit.” He sanctifies. And part of his ministry in sanctification is to exercise a ministry, which we know by filling. But the work of sanctification is broad enough to cover all of his activity in our life. And our response to that is to live or walk by the Spirit. And we shall, ultimately, consider these things.

So what I tried to show you tonight is that if you are exhorted by someone to receive the filling of the Spirit by, first, confession of your sin, that’s a good idea. I’m not against that at all. You should have confessed your sin a long time ago. Then, the dedication or yielding of yourself to the Lord, well, that’s fine. I’m not against that at all. And then, by the reception of the filling of ministry of the Spirit by faith, that is not taught in the Scriptures. Now, all those things are good. I’m not against them. It’s just not good Biblical terminology.

And now, I’m going to challenge you, since we have a minute. I’m going to ask you to do this. If you disagree, that’s your right and privilege, I ask you that you go to the New Testament and read those passages in which the term “fill,” “filling with the Spirit,” where these terms are used, and see if what I have said to you is not true to it. And notice the Epistle and notice how this is the only command in all of the New

Testament “to be filled” in the sphere of the Spirit. And it would be strange, if that were the best definition of what the Spirit desires to do in us, and what we should do in response, why is it so rarely mentioned in the New Testament? Why? Well, the truth is it was never intended to be a primary term for the Spirit’s work in our hearts as believers and our response to him. It’s a part but not the whole of his sanctifying ministry.

Next time, then, we will pick up the account here and we are going to look at the theological side of the sanctifying ministry of the Spirit.

Let’s bow in prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we are grateful to Thee for the ministry of the word of God. Deliver us, Lord, from little clichés and techniques, which are not true to the teaching of Scripture. And we pray, Lord, that in our desire to be accurate we shall not fall into the trap of failing to see that we are responsible to maintain contact with our Lord, through the Spirit, and we should know in our lives the experience of the Holy Spirit’s ministry. And may we be responsive through his power and through his enablement.

We pray in Jesus’ name. Amen.