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SOME REFLECTIONS ON THE SPIRIT-FILLED LIFE

We have spent some time to consider how to receive the baptism with the Holy Spirit and maintain the fullness of the Spirit. Today, we will go on to reflect on the Spirit-filled life.

The Spirit-filled life is a vast subject. To cover it reasonably would require a series of messages, so I will be considering with you only some important aspects in this and the next message.

Just the starting point

There is a tendency for some to seek for the fullness of the Spirit as *the* goal. And if they think they have experienced it, they have that sense of having arrived. Some even become complacent and lose their vigilance and earnestness.

Although the fullness of the Spirit is crucial for us to live our lives well, experiencing it does not mean we have arrived at the pinnacle of spiritual attainment. It is just the starting point, the beginning of potentially healthy growth and a healthy walk with God. It is only a potential because much depends on how we go on from there. If we continue to work out our lives well, we can increasingly attain to all that God intends for us in the Lord Jesus Christ and increasingly enter into a life of abundance and effective service. All these are central to God's purpose in filling us with the Holy Spirit. There is much for us to look forward to and earnestly work towards. We should not view the fullness of the Spirit as the ultimate experience.

Varying quality and meaning

The experience of the quality and meaning of the fullness of the Spirit varies from person to person and even for the same person, at different periods in his life. It varies according to the quality and meaning of our consecration to the Lord and the depth of our commitment to Him. It deepens if we cooperate with the Spirit of God, but diminishes if we grieve or quench Him.

The Lord Jesus is the only One who has experienced the fullness of the Spirit to the highest degree. This is because of the perfect quality of His life.

John 3:34 is an interesting verse we can look at in this regard.

John 3:34

“For He [*Jesus*] whom God has sent speaks the words of God; for He gives the Spirit without measure.

There are two ways we can appreciate the meaning of the phrase “He gives the Spirit without measure”. The first is that God the Father gives the Holy Spirit to the Lord Jesus without measure. That is, the Lord Jesus experienced the Holy Spirit without measure, to the fullest potential. The second is that the Lord Jesus gives us the Spirit without measure, which communicates to us the limitless measure of the Spirit that we can experience in Christ. This means we can work towards and look forward to experiencing increasing measure of the Holy Spirit and His working in and through our lives. Both of these meanings are possible and are in line with what has been considered.

Maintaining and deepening the quality and meaning of the fullness of the Spirit and walking according to the Spirit

Having experienced the fullness of the Spirit, we need to maintain and deepen it by nurturing a healthy walk with God.

The apostle Paul exhorts us in Ephesians 5:18 to be filled with the Spirit. In the original text, “be filled” is in the imperative, present and passive tense. The exhortation is therefore a command (imperative) that we be filled and be continually filled (present, passive) with the Spirit. This suggests that being filled with the Spirit is to be a continuing experience, not just a one-off experience.

We need to learn what it means to be led by the Spirit and to walk according to the Spirit (Rom. 8:4, 14). This is an area fraught with danger. If we do not know how to go about it, the evil one can easily deceive or confuse us.

Wrong notions about walking according to the Spirit

There are various wrong notions about walking according to the Spirit. Some of them may have certain elements of truth, including the use of scriptural words and phrases which sound right.

One wrong notion some Christians have is that a life consecrated to the Lord means surrendering all our faculties to the Lord, for Him to take over, possess and use. To them, we should no longer try to exercise our faculties because to do so would be “fleshly” and would be expressions of the “self-life”. Instead, we should let the Lord exercise them for us. We should no longer use our mind to think or exercise our will to choose. We just let the Lord think and choose for us. After all, He knows what is best. So we simply offer ourselves as “instruments” for His use. Our part is to be “quiet and still” before Him and to wait for His directions. We wait for the “prompting” of His Spirit. We strain to hear His “still small voice”. And as He directs and moves us, we act. To these Christians, this is the “Spirit-controlled” life.

But this is not the scriptural teaching. This is not the way the Lord wants us to live our lives. He does not want to take over our lives and use our faculties in this way. But the evil one and the powers of darkness would be eager to do so. If we approach life in this way, we open ourselves to spiritual deception and to the powers of darkness working in our lives. They will deceive us into thinking the Lord is at work even as they seek to take over our lives, bring us into spiritual bondage and use us as their instruments.

Developing and exercising our faculties

God does not want to use us as passive instruments. He has created us with faculties and He expects us to exercise them and be responsible for the way we develop and use our faculties.

Renewing our mind

In Romans 12:2, the apostle Paul urges us not to be conformed to the world but be transformed by the renewing of our mind. The renewal of our mind is a major aspect of our transformation. Why does God want us to be renewed in our mind? It is so that we can exercise our mind in line with the truth and not expect God to think for us. God wants to transform us by the renewing of our mind so that we may be better equipped to love Him with all our heart, soul, mind and strength and live our lives in fellowship with Him.

Let us look at another important passage on how God wants us to live our lives:

Colossians 1:9-10

9 For this reason also, since the day we heard of it, we have not ceased to pray for you and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding,
10 so that you will walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please Him in all respects, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God;

Paul's prayer for the believers is that they be "filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding", so that they may "walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please Him in all respects, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God". It is therefore critical for us to grow in spiritual wisdom and understanding so that we may be able to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, be truly pleasing to Him in every aspect of our lives, bearing fruit in every good work and growing in our knowledge of God and relationship with Him.

Exercising our will to choose

In the Scriptures, there are many exhortations. These exhortations are directed at our will, urging us to choose the path of truth and the will of God. When the Scriptures exhorts us to be patient, kind and faithful, it means we must choose to be patient, kind and faithful. God's approach is to help us to know the truth and to

encourage and help us to exercise our will in line with the truth. He has created us as moral beings and He expects us to choose wisely in all situations, and will hold us accountable for our choices.

Why has God given us the Scriptures? Paul tells us in 2 Timothy:

2 Timothy 3:16-17

16 All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness;
17 so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.

God has given us the Scriptures so that we may be taught and trained in righteousness, that we may be men of God, adequate and equipped for every good work. God wants us to search the Scriptures and learn from it so that we may grow in our knowledge of Him, His purposes and His ways. This will enable us to cooperate effectively with God in the outworking of His purposes. All these require that we exercise our faculties to think and choose well in fellowship with Him.

We see a similar thrust in Joshua 1:8:

Joshua 1:8

"This book of the law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it; for then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have success.

God wants us to continually meditate on the Scriptures and to be careful to do according to all that is written in it so that our lives will be truly successful.

Towards the same end, it is God's will that we grow in maturity and develop our faculties wholesomely in the context of the expression of healthy church life, which includes preaching, teaching, fellowship and learning together with the brethren. The whole body of Christ can then be built up in love, manifesting the manifold wisdom of God.

Developing and exercising our faculties in dependence on the Lord

As we seek to grow spiritually and to develop our faculties, it is important that we do so in dependence on God. If we try to do so on our own, without relying upon the Spirit, we will be moving in the direction of spiritual death because we are not created with the capacity to function well independent of God.

We should live our lives and exercise our faculties in fellowship with the Lord, looking to the Spirit to guide and enable us. When we live in this way, we will be walking according to the Spirit.

The Holy Spirit fills us to enable us to develop and exercise our faculties effectively and that we may increasingly learn to live according to His guidance and enabling. When the Holy Spirit fills us, He does not numb our faculties or cause us to give up self-control. Instead, when we are filled with the Spirit, we find that our faculties are sharper and we are more able to exercise self-control. The apostle Paul tells us that self-control, together with love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness and gentleness, is the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22-23). When we are filled with the Spirit and walking according to the Spirit, we will experience in increasing measure the fruit of the Spirit, the formation of the fruit of the Spirit in our being and the manifestation of the fruit of the Spirit in our lives.

Knowing the will of God

Having consecrated our lives to the Lord, we no longer live as we please, according to our own thinking and in our own strength. We continually look to the Lord to guide and strengthen us. We also seek to understand His will and walk in it.

You may ask, "How do I know the will of the Lord in major areas and in the details of my life?" This is a big and complex subject. We may go into more detail perhaps another time. At the moment, I will just make some general comments on how we can approach this subject.

We must first of all be sincere in wanting to know the will of God and be committed to walk in it. These are important prerequisites to knowing the will of God. Then we seek to have a good grasp of the major areas of truth, especially pertaining to the character and ways of God, His intentions and requirements of man.

You may ask, "How do I know these things?" God has provided the Scriptures and church life to help us grow in our knowledge of these things. And if we are prayerful, the Spirit of God will help us to appreciate these major areas of truth in a lively way as we go about our daily life.

You may say, "But this takes time. What about in the meantime when I still do not know much?" As we go about our daily life, it is very important and helpful for us to be mindful of the perfection of God. Knowing that God is morally and spiritually perfect, we are motivated to know Him and His ways. We also know we can trust and depend upon Him. And as we recognise that God is a God of truth and righteousness, we know He wants us to walk in truth and righteousness. In decision making, moment by moment and in all the details of our lives, we seek to do so to the best we can understand of what the Lord desires of us as we prayerfully look to Him for His guidance and enabling in the light of our understanding of the truth.

There are many clear truths in the Scriptures that are relevant to daily life. Even before we are confronted with any specific issue, we should take time to prayerfully consider our goals, priorities, direction and approach to life from the perspective of God's kingdom. And when seeking the Lord's will and guidance for specific issues and

in specific contexts, we do so within the framework of our knowledge of who God is and our understanding of His ways and scriptural truths and principles. So we are exercising our mind, pondering over these things in fellowship with the Lord. We are not just waiting for the Lord to choose for us and to move us. At times, the will and guidance of God can be beyond what our mind can understand, but it will not be contrary to scriptural truths and principles.

Working at what is pleasing to the Lord

To maintain the fullness of the Spirit, we need to work at what we recognise the Lord desires of us and turn away from what is displeasing to Him. We must not harden our hearts but maintain a humble and contrite spirit. When we recognise something is not right in our spirit, attitude or conduct, we must not persist in it. If we live in this way sincerely and consistently, we will grow in our knowledge of God and the truth, and we will know more and more how to walk with Him and be sensitive to His guidance and will.

If we want to walk with God in truth, the Spirit of truth will guide us into all the truth and empower us to glorify Christ in our lives. We have seen that this is the fundamental role and ministry of the Holy Spirit in our lives.

A commitment to live a consecrated life is a commitment that needs to be worked out daily, moment by moment. It requires the constant exercise of our faculties in fellowship with the Lord, and our continually aligning our hearts with His.

Active cooperation with understanding

In John 15:14-15, the Lord Jesus told His disciples:

John 15:14-15

14 "You are My friends if you do what I command you.

15 "No longer do I call you slaves, for the slave does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I have heard from My Father I have made known to you.

The Lord wants us to have a meaningful and active part in the outworking of His purposes. He does not want to use us as passive instruments. Neither does He want us to be His slaves who do not know what He is doing. Rather, He wants us to work together with Him as His friends who know what He is seeking to accomplish. We can have a meaningful relationship with the Lord as friends, where there is that identification and fellowship with Him. We also actively cooperate with Him even as we seek to grow in our understanding of His plan and purposes. However, all this is in the context of our submission to Him, doing what He commands (v. 14). He is still our Master and Lord.

Not grieving or quenching the Holy Spirit

We need to pay heed to Paul's warning not to grieve or quench the Holy Spirit.

Ephesians 4:30

Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.

1 Thessalonians 5:19

Do not quench the Spirit;

We grieve or quench the Holy Spirit when we are disobedient, complacent or fail to maintain a healthy walk with God. It is possible to grieve or quench the Holy Spirit such that we cease being filled. Let us not be presumptuous and think that once we have experienced the fullness of the Spirit, we will always be filled with the Spirit.

Maintaining a healthy walk with God

To maintain a healthy walk with God, we need to periodically review our lives along the lines of what has been considered in earlier messages on how to receive the baptism with the Holy Spirit and maintain the fullness of the Spirit. The truths and principles shared can help us to respond well to God.

Whenever we are conscious of anything that is not right in our lives, we should immediately repent and ask the Lord for forgiveness and cleansing. We need to do this on a continuing basis. At the same time, it is also helpful to evaluate our lives in a more thorough way from time to time, looking to the Spirit of God to search our hearts and reveal areas that we need to look into. We then confess and repent of our sins and failures, re-consecrate our lives to the Lord and ask Him to fill us afresh with the Holy Spirit.

Being filled afresh with the Holy Spirit

The filling of the Holy Spirit is not a once-for-all experience. In the Scriptures, there are indications of believers being filled afresh with the Spirit even though they have already experienced the fullness of the Spirit.

I will refer to three of such instances.

Acts 4:31

And when they had prayed, the place where they had gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak the word of God with boldness.

"They were all filled with the Holy Spirit". This was a context where Peter and John were persecuted by the Jewish leaders. They were arrested, imprisoned and warned

“not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus” (Acts 4:18). Upon their release from imprisonment, they reported to the brethren all that the leaders had said to them. The brethren then prayed to God with one accord and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit.

It is likely that many, if not all of them, had already experienced the fullness of the Spirit on the day of Pentecost. Here, we see them being filled again.

Acts 4:8

Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them...

The notation in the margin of the NASB for “filled with the Holy Spirit” says “Or, having just been filled”. This seems to indicate a fresh experience of the filling of the Spirit. We know Peter was filled with the Spirit on the day of Pentecost. Here, he was being filled afresh. And he was filled again in Acts 4:31.

In Acts 13:9, we see the same expression “filled with the Holy Spirit” being used of Paul:

Acts 13:9

But Saul, who was also known as Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, fixed his gaze on him,

Here, the apostle Paul was confronting Elymas the magician, who was opposing his witness to Sergius Paulus. In this verse, the notation in the margin for “filled with the Holy Spirit” is also “Or, having just been filled”.

There are two aspects I wish to highlight from the above three examples.

a. On all three occasions, when the various people were filled afresh with the Spirit, it was not because they had ceased to be filled and needed to be filled again. It is likely they were receiving more of the Holy Spirit.

For example, when Peter was filled afresh with the Spirit in Acts 4:31, was it because he was not filled with the Spirit at that time? Did he grieve the Spirit such that he was no longer filled? The context does not indicate that. It is more likely that he was receiving more of the Spirit.

Similarly, Paul would have sought to maintain the fullness of the Spirit in his life. So when the Lord filled him with the Spirit in Acts 13:9, it is likely he was receiving more of the Spirit.

This helps us to see that even when we are filled with the Spirit, we can receive more of the Spirit. The Lord can fill us afresh with the Spirit.

b. The second aspect I wish to highlight is that on these occasions, it is likely that the Lord filled the people afresh with the Holy Spirit to specially empower and equip them for the needs of the situation.

For example in Acts 4:8, the Lord specially empowered and equipped Peter to testify before the Jewish Council.

Likewise in Acts 13:9, the Lord specially empowered and equipped Paul to confront Elymas the magician who was opposing him and his co-workers.

And in Acts 4:31, in the context of persecution from the Jewish leaders, the Lord filled the believers afresh with the Spirit to empower them to witness with confidence.

So when we are about to go through or are going through situations in which we sense the need for the Lord's special enabling, we can look to the Lord to specially empower and equip us, to enable us to go through the situation well.

Concluding remarks

Having experienced the fullness of the Spirit, not only should we maintain it, we should seek for a deeper experience of the Spirit by deepening our response to the Lord. As we have noted, we can be filled afresh with the Spirit even though we are already filled. Our motivations however must be right. We want to experience a deeper measure of the Spirit because we desire deeper fellowship with the Lord and to be more effective in overcoming sin, the evil one and the world. We also desire to be more effective in service. The overriding motivation is that Christ may be glorified in our lives.

A deeper and richer experience of the fullness of the Spirit can come about gradually as we respond more and more to God. At times, as the result of a significantly deeper response to the truth, we may have a fresh experience of a deep working of the Spirit such that we are lifted to a higher plane of living, like entering a new chapter or a new phase in our spiritual life. This can come about when the Lord grants us fresh insight into important areas of truth or speaks to us powerfully through a message, a book, an occurrence or a combination of a few things.

God has much in store for us and He is always seeking to draw us into deeper fellowship and oneness with Him. We must never become presumptuous, proud or complacent. We need to be vigilant and prayerful, constantly looking to the Lord to help us gain fresh insight into the truth and do a deeper work in us, that we may experience the fullness of the Spirit at a higher level and increasingly enjoy the life of abundance and fruitfulness in the Lord Jesus.

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