

Session Six

Climbing higher

THE ASCENDING LIFE

God's Golden Stairway to Glory

PRINCIPLES OF SPIRITUAL GROWTH

THE PRINCIPLE OF BEING FILLED WITH THE SPIRIT

Acts 2:1-4; 4:23-31; Eph. 5:13-20; Gal. 3:13-14; 5:16-26



Pentecost, Filled with the Spirit

Introduction –

Just because some people have gone to extremes in their teaching about the Holy Spirit and His role in a believer's life does not mean that we should neglect a correct and balanced teaching on this important subject.

Our proposition is:

- I. The ascending life is not only a crucified life but a life which is filled with the presence and power of the Spirit of God.**

We receive the presence of the Holy Spirit at the time of our new birth. This is sometimes referred to as the baptism of the Holy Spirit. According to Mark 1:8 John the Baptizer says: ⁸*I have baptized you with water, but he (Jesus) will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.*” John 1:33 reflects the same occasion: ³³*I myself did not know him, but he who sent me to baptize with water said to me, ‘He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain, this is he who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.’* In addition, in the opening chapter of his book of Acts Luke says, ⁵*for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.*

John also speaks of this in his Gospel (3:5-6) when he records that Jesus informed Nicodemus, who came to Him to enquire about spiritual truth, that he must be "born of water and the Spirit" because *Flesh gives birth to flesh but the Spirit gives birth to spirit*. Jesus made it clear to him that he must be *born again* not physically (*of water*) but spiritually. Such a spiritual birth is mysterious. It is real, like the wind, and we can see and feel the effects of it, but we don't understand just how it happens. When we are born of the Spirit, God's Spirit creates in us the new birth and His Spirit comes to live in us. The following scriptures illustrate and enforce this truth:

1. John 14:17 says, "*(the) Spirit of truth . . . lives with you and will be in you.*"
2. Romans 8:9 points out that "*You (as a believer in Jesus) are not controlled by the sinful nature but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ.*"
3. I Cor. 3:16 clearly says, *you yourselves are God's temple and God's Spirit lives in you*. See also I Cor. 6:19 which says: ¹⁹ *Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own,).* II Tim. 1:14 indicates that we must depend on *the help of the Holy Spirit who lives in us*. I John 2:27 says, *the anointing you received from Him remains in you*" I John 3:24 adds, "*Those who obey His commands live in him and he in them. And this is how we know that he lives in us: We know it by the Spirit he gave us*" I John 4:13 says, "*We know that we live in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit.*"

The work of the Holy Spirit in us is not only to give us a spiritual birth and a new life, but also to give spiritual gifts to believers to use for the good of the whole body of Christ (I Co 12:4-11). Each believer in Jesus is given one or more spiritual gift by which to minister to other believers in the body of Christ, His church, for their benefit and to minister grace to those outside the body so that they may also become believers.

We receive the power of the Holy Spirit when we are filled with the Spirit (Ep 5:15-21). Having God's Spirit living in us changes our inner nature. He cleanses us from sin and makes it possible for us to have a personal relationship and fellowship with God so that we no longer desire sinful pleasures which are like poison to our souls. Having God's Spirit in us gives us life and gifts for service; being filled with the Spirit gives us the power to live a victorious life and to use His gifts to bless others.

As we saw in our last session, we may be filled with God's Spirit after we have been cleansed and crucified with Christ. This is a continual or repetitive action, not once for all.

Ep 5:18 – 21 tells us, ¹⁸ *And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit.*" The verb, "be filled," is a present tense imperative meaning, "keep on being filled repeatedly or continuously." It is not a once for all experience although at times we may be given a special spiritual event which helps us to take a giant step of growth.

In Acts 4:31 we read that a group of those who had been filled with the Spirit on the day of Pentecost were re-filled while they were praying after Peter and John had been released from prison. *“After they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly.”*

Being in the Spirit and being filled with the Spirit may be illustrated by a hand squeezing a sponge in a bucket of water. The water represents the Holy Spirit. The sponge represents our lives. The squeezing hand represents our control. When our hand is squeezed tight, not much water gets into the sponge. That is, when we keep tight control of our lives the Holy Spirit cannot get into us to fill and control us for our good and His glory; but when we relax our grip on the sponge or relinquish control of our lives and relax and let Him take over, then the more we relax our control, the more the water of the Spirit can enter the sponge (our lives) to empower us for service--for our own good, for the good of others and for His glory. ARE YOU READY TO LET HIM FILL YOUR LIFE TODAY???

This is what I experienced. During our first term (five years) in Lebanon leading up to our first Stateside assignment. We were in full-time language study for two years. Then I became Dean of Students and teacher at the seminary. In 1963 our mission hosted the World Baptist Youth Conference of the Baptist World Alliance. For the next two years Dr. Finlay Graham, our seminary founder and president, was in the U.S.A. working on his Th.D. degree, so I was filling in for him as president and also serving as dean of students and teacher at the seminary. The following year, Dr. James Ragland, founder and principal of the Beirut Baptist School, was also home in the U.S. That meant that I was the senior man missionary on the field even though I was still in my first term, so I served as Chairman of the Mission and the mission treasurer and administrator as well as being responsible for the 15 or so students and still teaching classes at the seminary. The responsibility was just too much and I was almost broken under the weight of it all. Finally, Drs. Graham and Ragland returned to Lebanon and my family and I were free to come to the States. In the following years, before the civil war in Lebanon which began in 1976, I stayed too busy and overloaded with responsibilities. I drifted away from my daily quiet time with the Lord and His Word. After 13 years in Lebanon we were on Stateside assignment in the fall of 1973. We settled for the year in Irving, Texas, in a missionary house provided by Plymouth Park Baptist Church. Our two young children were in school in the third and fifth grade, so Maxine could not travel with me to World Missions Conferences and other speaking engagements. That October I was lined up for two Missions Conferences, one in North Carolina and the other in Missouri in consecutive weeks and then a week preaching in a church in New Jersey which supported us with their prayers and sent out half of our prayer letters to friends in the U.S. I was desperate to regain some assurance of the reality and power of God. I told my wife and myself that if I did not experience the reality of God on this trip, I would resign as a missionary and perhaps feel it necessary to leave my family and go off somewhere where I was totally unknown and start my life all over again not as a preacher or teacher but as someone who learned a trade and earned his living by it.



During the first week I spent time every morning sitting on a hillside in the beautiful mountains of North Carolina just outside the Great Smoky Mountains National Park, reading my Bible and asking the Lord to make Himself real to me. Nothing happened. During the second week there was a lunch meeting of the missionaries attending the conference and the host pastors at one of the churches. At a meeting before lunch Miss Lillie O. Rogers (now with the Lord) gave her testimony of revival in Malaysia when some missionaries who had experienced revival in Indonesia came to visit and to share what they had learned with their colleagues in Malaysia. She told about how she had been a very negative person, opposed to what all the other missionaries wanted to do; but, as suggested by the visiting missionaries from Indonesia, she decided to seek the Lord and to repent of her selfishness and pride. She read her Bible and prayed and asked the Lord to reveal to her anything she ought to confess. He brought something to her mind and she confessed it as sin and claimed God's forgiveness. Then she asked, "Lord is there anything else?" and the Lord brought something else to her mind. She confessed that, too, with tears and received His cleansing. This process was repeated over and over again all night long until near dawn, she said, she felt totally empty, totally cleaned out, and she prayed, "O, Lord, please don't leave me like this, so empty. Please come and fill me with your presence and power." And He did! She was gloriously filled by the Holy Spirit and filled with the joy of the Lord which she was still experiencing as she spoke with us.

At lunch I was seated across the table from her. She was older than I was. This was our first time to converse since we had been introduced at the first meeting of the missionaries. I said, "Lillie, I wish I had the joy of the Lord that you have." She said, "Do you want to talk about it?" I said, "Yes, I would like to know more about it." We agreed to meet at the home of a pastor where we were both scheduled to eat lunch on Friday. We met an hour before lunchtime and walked up and down the sidewalk in front of the house while she taught me from Romans 6 how I needed to die and be buried with Christ and to be raised from the death of my selfish self to walk a new kind of life guided by the Holy Spirit. I agreed with her teaching and assured her that I had preached that truth often as a pastor.

She began to ask me questions about my relationships with others, especially with the Muslim people in Lebanon. I told her that I thought they needed Jesus as Savior and Lord and that I was there in Lebanon not only to teach church leaders but also to be a good witness to the Muslim people who lived near us. Then she asked how I

felt about the Israelis to the south of Lebanon (this was before the Israeli invasion during the Lebanese civil war). I told her that I thought they needed the Lord as their Savior just like everyone else and that they were not accepted by God automatically just because He chose them to bring Jesus into the world. Then she asked me how I was getting along with my wife. I had to admit that we had had some rough times lately. She encouraged me to confess that to my wife and seek a better relationship. She emphasized the need for repentance and cleansing for anything which might hinder the flow of God's Spirit in me. Then it was time to go to lunch.

The following Sunday we each went to a different church to speak. I spoke about our work in Lebanon at the Baptist Seminary and in the churches in beautiful Lebanon, but my heart did not feel that my words had any power. After the service we had lunch at the church. As soon as I finished eating, I asked permission to go to the pastor's home to rest. It was close by. As soon as I got to the house I went to the bedroom and threw myself across the bed and began to pray. "Dear Lord, please bring to my mind anything I might need to confess and be forgiven for." I opened my heart to Him and He brought some things to mind which I confessed and was forgiven for. Then I prayed, "O Lord, please make yourself more precious to me than anything else in my life, even what gives me most pleasure."

At that moment I felt a strange tingling in my fingertips. It swept up each arm until it covered my entire body. I felt strangely warmed as though a warm blanket of love was wrapped around me! Then I saw, as in a vision, a body of clean, clear water sparkling in the sunlight! Off to my left, on the shore of the lake, I saw a huge black candle which, I understood, represented my sinful self. As I watched, it melted and disappeared into a hole in the ground where the candle had stood! Immediately I was filled with the Spirit of the Lord and His joy filled my soul like I had never experienced it before! As I wept with joy I praised the Lord and gave Him thanks in both English and Arabic! After maybe ten or fifteen minutes, I heard the pastor and his family come into the house and that ended my wonderful experience of the powerful reality of the Lord's presence!

I don't believe that every Christian needs to have such an experience. I know I needed it and the Lord provided it but many others keep growing in the Lord and ascending in the power of the Holy Spirit without any such experience. That was certainly true of my wife and of many other people I knew.

Notice that, according to Acts 4:31, those who had been filled with the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost were now re-filled with God's Spirit as they were praying and the place was shaken by the power of God. It can happen anywhere, any time God's people meet the conditions of confession, repentance, faith and cleansing.

The Spirit's presence and power are to be received by faith. Galatians 3:14 says, ¹⁴ *so that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promised Spirit through faith.* According to Hebrew 11, *By faith Abraham, . . . obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going . . . was enabled to become a father . . . offered up Isaac as a sacrifice . . . received Isaac back from death.*

Faith means more than intellectual assent to facts; it means putting into practice what you believe is true. By faith we act as though God is ready to act and trust Him to work His will through us.

The power of the Holy Spirit is something God is always ready to provide. Lk 11:13 says, *If you, then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him!* It is important to ask in prayer for the gift of the Holy Spirit. He (the Spirit) is given when we ask Him to enter our hearts and to forgive us of our sins and to save us from eternal damnation. Romans 8:9 says, *If anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ.* It is the Spirit Who gives us the new birth and plants His Spirit in our hearts.

God fills us with His Spirit for service, not for pleasure or pride. The apostles were filled for service on the day of Pentecost. As they spoke the Word of the Lord in all the languages of the people who were listening, the Holy Spirit inspired Peter to preach a powerful sermon. After he finished preaching at least three thousand people repented and believed in Jesus as their promised Messiah and were baptized into the fellowship of the believers. A short time later they were filled again in order to speak God's message with boldness (Ac 4:31).

We must continually seek the fullness of the filling of God's Holy Spirit so that we may be able to minister in His Name. To try to minister in His name without the power of the Holy Spirit is to be doomed to failure from the start, although Satan knows how to give counterfeit success to those who are willing to work with him. One who is filled with the Spirit of God does not need to advertise it because the fruit of the Spirit will be so evident in his/her life (Gal. 5:16-26).

Conclusion:

Whether by some dramatic experience or by steadily climbing higher by the steps we have outlined above the infilling of the Holy Spirit is absolutely essential to the ascending life. May it become a reality for all those who are Christ-followers!