

# MYTH 9

All Spirit Fillings  
Are the Same



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*Therefore be careful how you walk, not as unwise men but as wise, making the most of your time, because the days are evil. So then do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit.*

Ephesians 5:15-18

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MYTH

*All Spirit Fillings Are the Same*

TRUTH

FILLING IS VOLUNTARY OR INVOLUNTARY

My daughter and son-in-law own two small dogs and live in downtown Boston. You can immediately see the problem. If you own two dogs and you also live in an apartment, it is imperative that the dogs are kept under control. Hold down the barking, no riotous playing, and use leashes when taking them for a walk. Control is necessary. Otherwise their neighbors and the apartment management will be displeased.

### Rules Are Rules

We all deal with rules. Federal, state, and local ordinances must be obeyed. In the work environment, each company has its own way of doing things. Teachers require students to follow directions in submitting assignments. Of course dog owners must comply with rules involving pet ownership. All these guidelines ensure the proper function of the community, workplace, and school.

Also God wants believers to obey His rules. Parents have rules for their children, and harmony and fellowship in the family depend

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on complying with parental authority. God has spelled out His standards in the Scriptures (2 Tim. 3:16-17). God's Word tells us how we are to behave so that fellowship with Him is not disrupted.

### Walking in the Light

As Paul penned Ephesians 5:1-18, he gave the believer a behavior blueprint. Three times he addressed believers' conduct. *First*, he commanded believers to "walk in love, just as Christ also loved you" (v. 2), followed by some do's and don'ts in verses 3 and

*Believer's choices  
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lifestyle exposes  
the darkness or  
actually fades into  
the shadows.*

4. Christ's life should be our pattern. *Second*, using the contrasting imagery of light and darkness Paul wrote, "Therefore, do not be partakers [partners] with them [sons of disobedience]; for you were formally darkness, but now you are light in the Lord; walk as children of light" (vv. 7-8). Believers should "walk as children of light" since now in God's eyes they are children of the light. The believer's conduct should match and reflect his position in Christ

(v. 9). Such an appropriate lifestyle will prove "what is pleasing to the Lord" (v. 10). As discussed in *Myth 8: Spirit Causes Transformation*, this is the identical concept found in Romans 12:2, "Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is." "Proving the will of God" (Rom. 12:2) and "[proving] what is pleasing to the Lord" (Eph. 5:10) are the result of making correct choices. The believer's conduct should reveal intimacy with Christ that comes from fellowship with Him and conformity to His Word. On the other hand believers can walk in darkness. That is why Paul

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immediately warned, “Do not participate in the unfruitful deeds of darkness, but instead even expose them” (v. 11). Even though the believer is a child of light, his choices determine if his lifestyle will expose the darkness.

### Walking with Purpose

In the next portion of Ephesians 5 Paul continued the theme of walking. Verses 15-18 present three contrasts.

Therefore be careful how you walk, not as unwise men but as wise, making the most of your time, because the days are evil. So then do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit.

#### *Taking Note*

Here in verse 15 Paul made his *third* reference to the believer’s walk (vv. 2, 8). A more emphatic translation for “be careful,” would be “take notice.” Christians are to “take notice” as to how they walk. Why? Because one’s life can exhibit either wisdom or folly (v. 15). This wise-versus-unwise contrast mimics verses 8-11 as well as 1 John 1:6-7 (see *Myth 10: Spirit Dictated*). To walk unwisely is to walk in darkness, and to walk wisely is to walk in the light.

A wise Christian walk results in intimacy with Christ. Living skillfully according to biblical principles results in wise living and making the most of opportunities to reflect Christ to the lost world (Eph. 5:11-13; Col. 4:5). On the other hand a believer can have fellowship with darkness (Eph. 5:11) as the result

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of worldly choices, yielding lost opportunities in this life and future heavenly rewards.

### *Putting It Together*

Paul then turned to the basis for a careful walk. *First*, he gave two commands: one negative and the other positive. “Do not be foolish, but understand” (v. 17). The emphasis is on the will of God to which the believer can be either dismissive or attentive. This verse is an echo of verses 9-10, “Walk as children of light...[proving] what is pleasing to the Lord.” An obedient walk results in living out the will of God in the believer’s life. On the other hand foolish living dismisses God’s Word.

### *Getting It Together*

Then in verse 18 Paul stated a second reason for a wise walk. Again a negative command is followed by a positive one. “Do not get drunk...but be filled,” emphasizing control either by spirits or by the Spirit. When someone drinks an alcoholic beverage, each glass brings him closer to being intoxicated. This process depends on the will of the person. Since filling is contrasted with the influence of strong drink, the filling of the Spirit must also refer to influence. The case Paul presented is that living wisely depends on the believer allowing the Spirit to influence his thoughts and actions.

### *Conclusion*

If the believer walks in obedience to the Word of God, he is walking wisely (vv. 15-16), living out the will of God (v. 17) and allowing the influence of the Spirit in his life (v. 18). One can readily see that a wise walk is linked with God’s will in His Word, but how the Spirit influences the believer in the Christian life is more difficult to understand. To understand this, we first must make a distinction in biblical fillings.

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### Fillings: Two Facets

Luke used the phrase “filled with the Spirit” fourteen times: four times in his Gospel and ten times in the Book of Acts. The phrase is used only *one* additional time by Paul in Ephesians 5:18. Addressed in detail in *Rethinking Empowerment*, this expression addresses either the believer’s ministry or the believer’s character.<sup>1</sup> One author writes,

There seem to be two facets of Spirit-filling. The first may be described as a sovereign act of God whereby he possesses someone for special activity....The second facet of Spirit-filling may be described as the extensive influence and control of the Spirit in the believer’s life. It evidences an abiding state of fullness rather than the specific event. It produces a certain character of life, and seems to be a close synonym to spirituality.<sup>2</sup>

The predominant focus of a number of texts concerns *service or ministry* by a believer.<sup>3</sup> In each of these occasions and by God’s sovereign choice, He made provision for the believer’s role in ministry. The remaining examples concern the believer’s *walk or character*.<sup>4</sup> The context of each passage determines whether the filling with the Spirit refers to a special, sovereign empowerment for ministry and service, or to living by faith with the assistance of the Spirit. While the former involves the sovereign intervention of God in order to accomplish a specific ministry, the latter is an expression of the

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Christian walk. The *former* is *involuntary*, by God's choice alone; the *latter* is *voluntary*, by the believer's choice to allow the Spirit to influence him.

*Involuntary* fillings are limited to certain believers to whom God gives a "special empowerment" for ministry or service. *Voluntary*

### Voluntary Fillings

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fillings are universally available to all believers based on their obedience to God's Word. While Luke discussed both concepts, Paul limited his discussion to fillings in the believer's walk, addressing only the voluntary filling of the Spirit. Paul commanded believers to be influenced by the Spirit and to live in a manner pleasing to God. While Luke never addressed how voluntary fillings occur, Paul

in Ephesians 5 explains that a believer is filled with the Spirit as a result of allowing the Spirit to assist him in walking obediently in the light of God's Word.

## Biblical Fillings Misunderstood

The filling of the Spirit has been mischaracterized in a number of ways. Each tends to reinforce a misrepresentation of the truth.

### *Vacancy Within*

When we think of filling something, our thoughts may turn to cramming our minds in school with facts, filling a package with bubble rap to eliminate breakage, or filling a swimming pool with water. In each case it is understood that something is lacking. Many in the church have explained the "filling of the Spirit" in the same way. The believer is supposedly lacking evidence of the Spirit's



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presence and power. Using an empty beaker, water is poured from a pitcher and as the level rises it illustrates the increasing presence of the Spirit in the Christian's life. The believer is told to allow the Spirit to fill him increasingly. However, it is never explained why the Spirit is not already present, or if He was, how He leaked out! Unfortunately their illustration erroneously portrays Paul's instruction on the filling of the Spirit. We do not get any more of the Spirit than when He indwelt us the moment we were saved.

### *Sing Along*

Music in the church may not match biblical principles. During a staff meeting in a large evangelical church, the senior pastor asked the pastoral staff, of which I was part, about the words of a particular song the group had just sung. The lyrics implied that eternal security of the believer could not be known. I provided a quick response that went to the heart of the issue. I said, "The composer was John Wesley." Since Wesley was Arminian, the security of the believer depends on continued obedience. Just as the words of pastors reveal theological positions, lyrics of songs likewise present different theological views. One must be aware of the source and content in both teachings and music.

In the song, *Spirit of the Living God*, composed by Daniel Lver-son (1890-1977), the lyrics go as follows, "Spirit of the Living God, Fall afresh on me. Melt me, mold me. Fill me, use me." Whenever sung in an evangelical church, one would naturally conclude that believers are to call on the Spirit to fall on them, to change them, to fill them, and to use them. Peter's argument for the inclusion of Gentiles into the body of Christ is probably the origin of the song

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(Acts 11:15). “And as I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell upon them [Gentiles] just as He did upon us [Jews] at the beginnings.” One must decide whether filling was a unique experience for the infant church or if the filling is something the believer is to ask for. The weight of the biblical evidence shows that the young church was in view and that the filling of the Spirit was never sought.<sup>5</sup> Nevertheless many evangelical churches mistakenly continue to sing many songs that lack sound theology, thereby perpetuating error.

### *Scripture Skewed*

Many churches misuse Scripture. I have heard preachers teach on Psalm 51 and portions have even been put to modern church music. In this psalm David cried out to God for forgiveness because of his sin with Bathsheba. In verse 11 he said, “Do not take Your Holy Spirit from me!” Obviously he concluded that since his predecessor,

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Saul, had disobeyed God and God had taken the Spirit from Saul, the same would be his fate. As the King of Israel, David was God’s earthly representative to His chosen people. That representative was given the Spirit of God in order to lead that

nation, but the Spirit’s indwelling was not permanent. This differs from the permanent indwelling of believers in the present church age. Believers now cannot lose the Spirit. Yet some preachers teach that the Spirit can be lost. The impact of this error has a devastating effect on the biblical experience of the Spirit’s filling.

### *Conclusion*

The filling of the Spirit is taught in different ways today in the church. It is important for believers to determine the correct view in order to experience the actual biblical filling of the Spirit. If God’s

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way is different from your current perspective, you must realign your understanding or miss the biblical experience.

### Influenced by the Spirit

Some fillings relate to ministry and service, but the filling of which Paul wrote relates to the believer's sensitivity to the Spirit in allowing Him to influence his thoughts and actions. Studying and correctly understanding God's Word, and conforming one's mind to Scripture should in turn translate into choices in behavior that reflect that "which is pleasing to the Lord" (Rom. 12:2; Eph. 5:10). Voluntary filling of the Spirit does not mean getting more of the Spirit; rather it focuses on allowing the Spirit to have more and more influence through the Word over the believer's life choices. Not to be confused with an instantaneous or a mysterious event, voluntary filling of the Spirit is an ongoing process that leads to maturity in Christ.

FILLING IS VOLUNTARY OR INVOLUNTARY  
TRUTH

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### Myth 9, NOTES

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1. Ken Neff, *Rethinking Empowerment* (St. Augustine, FL: LQ Press, 2011), 100-111.
2. Charles Caldwell Ryrie, *Basic Theology* (Wheaton, IL: Victor, 1986), 376.
3. Luke 1:15, 42, 67; 4:1; Acts 2:4; 4:8, 31; 9:17; 13:9.
4. Acts 6:3, 5; 7:55; 11:24; 13:52; Ephesians 5:18.
5. Ryrie, *Basic Theology*, 378.

Ryrie says, “No example of praying for the filling of the Spirit exists in the post-Pentecost material of the New Testament. So praying, however earnest, is apparently not the way to be filled.”

Also in reference to the baptism of the Spirit, once the Holy Spirit had come (Acts 2), which was a future event in the model prayer of Luke 11:2-13, any further requests to the Father for the baptism of the Spirit need not be repeated or restated.