

Baptism Compared to Fillings



RETHINKING EMPOWERMENT

*Zacharias was filled with the Holy Spirit,
and prophesied.*

Luke 1:67

*He commanded them...to wait for what
the Father had promised...you will be
baptized with the Holy Spirit.*

Acts 1:4-5

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

Acts 4:8

*And do not get drunk with wine, for that
is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit.*

Ephesians 5:18

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Maybe you have had the same problem. You go to Home Depot looking for a certain item. You are shown a variety of models by size, capability, and price. Now you have to make a decision. Which one do you choose? The problem worsens. You notice the labels have been mixed up and the models on display do not match with the boxes stacked below. The challenge—distinguish the differences—which is what and what is which. The project looms and you are not heading home until you can make the best choice.

Likewise, confusion reigns regarding the different labels attached to the various ministries of the Spirit. Teaching on the Spirit's ministries can seem scrambled as well as confusing. Clarification is imperative if a correct understanding is to be our goal.

Baptizing with the Spirit differs from Fillings with the Spirit

Receiving the Father's promise of the Spirit and being baptized with the Spirit are inextricably linked in Acts 1:4–5. The gift of the

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Spirit is to be baptized with the Spirit.¹ In Peter's message at Pentecost, he stated that if the Jews changed their mind regarding Christ as the Messiah, this would result in their receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38). Paul likewise confirmed that the Spirit is received through faith (Gal. 3:14), and placement into the body of Christ is

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by the baptism of the Spirit (1 Cor. 12:13; Rom. 8:9). Consequently, as at Pentecost the same phenomenon continues today. At the moment of salvation believers are baptized with the Spirit and placed into the body of Christ. However, baptism with the Spirit must be separated and distinguished from the fillings with the Spirit.

Luke used the phrase, "filled with the Spirit," four times in his Gospel and ten times in the Book of Acts, a total of fourteen times. The phrase is used only *one* additional time, by Paul in Ephesians 5:18. Since "filled with the Spirit" is overwhelmingly a Lucan expression, only Luke's application will be considered in the current discussion; Paul's treatment of the phrase will be addressed in the next section.

Considering each time the phrase is used by Luke, certain factors must be understood, particularly whether the expression reflects ministry or character, or both at the same time. 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

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certain character of life, and seems to be a close synonym to spirituality.²

The following chart, *Spirit Fillings*, lists the locations and contexts of each passage, indicating the primary emphasis of each text. The predominant focus of a number of texts concerns ministry or service by the believer. For example in Luke, the four people (John the Baptist, Elizabeth, Zacharias, and Jesus) mentioned as “filled with the Spirit” became the forerunner of Christ (1:15), offered praise to God for His provision of the coming Savior (1:41), prophesied of the

SPIRIT FILLINGS						
Book	Ch.	Vs.	Individual	Context	Service	Walk
Luke	1	15	John the Baptist	Forerunner of Christ	P-1	
		41	Elizabeth	Praised God	P-1	
		67	Zacharias	Prophesied	P-1	
	4	1	Jesus Christ	Tested by Satan	P-2	
Acts	2	4	Apostles*	Spoke in Tongues	P-1	
		4	8	Peter*	Proclaimed Christ	P-1
		31	Apostles* & Others	Spoke with Boldness	P-1	
	6	3	None	Criteria for Service		P-2
		5	Stephen	Servants to Widows		P-2
	7	55	Stephen	Testified of Christ	S-2	P-2
	9	17	Saul/Paul	Apostle to Gentiles	P-1	
	11	24	Barnabas	Proclaimed Christ	S-2	P-2
	13	9	Saul/Paul	Confronted Magician	P-1	
		52	Disciples	Faced Persecution		P-3
Eph.	5	18	Believers	Obedience		P-3

P = Primary Issue	*Peter	1 = To fill (Vb.—πληθω)
S = Secondary Issue		2 = Full (Adj.—πληρης)
		3 = Be filled (Vb.—πληρωω)

Savior’s advent (1:67), and was led out to be tested by Satan (4:1). In the Book of Acts various people were “filled with the Spirit.”

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Some spoke in tongues as a sign of God's movement at Pentecost (2:4). Peter proclaimed Christ (4:8). Believers spoke with boldness (4:31). Saul became Paul for his ministry to the Gentiles (9:17). Paul confronted and silenced a deceitful magician set against the ways of the Lord (13:9). In these nine instances the primary focus is *service or ministry*, rather than character.

In nine of the fourteen references in Luke and Acts cited above, there is no prerequisite for "filling with the Spirit." No specific steps are required in order to be filled. No obedience to a command was needed. They uttered no prayer in order to be filled.³ Rather, they served and ministered because the Spirit had already filled them. All these individuals were filled by God's sovereign choice apart from any urging, requesting, or pleading on their part. In each in-

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stance, God moved on each person to provide "special empowerment" for a particular ministry. In fact Peter was filled in three separate instances for three separate purposes as a sovereign act of the Spirit (Acts 2:4; 4:8,31).⁴ On each occasion God made provision for the individual's responsibility in service.

However, in the remaining five instances in Acts the *walk or character* of the believer is the primary focus. Acts 6:3 deals with the selection of men, who were "full of the Spirit" along with good reputations and wisdom, to serve the tables so that the apostles would be allowed to pursue their main mission—as witnesses of Jesus Christ. One of those chosen, Stephen, was "full of faith and of the Holy Spirit" (6:5), and when he was stoned for his faith he testified of Christ (7:55). Barnabas, also, was "full of the Holy Spirit and of faith" and began an extensive ministry with Paul (11:24). In the last mention of filling, the disciples were "filled with joy and with

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the Holy Spirit” (13:52). Walking full of faith, full of wisdom, and full of the Spirit are apparently synonymous terms for spirituality.

Whatever the purpose, whether for ministry or life, filling with the Spirit does not involve obtaining more of the Spirit. Some, however, have unfortunately illustrated filling with the Spirit by pouring water from a pitcher into a beaker, indicating the rising of the water level in the beaker compared to the Spirit’s filling of the believer. At the new birth, believers possess all of the Holy Spirit they will ever obtain. He indwells us completely and forever. We do not get more of Him. Rather, the filling concept of Luke refers either to (1) a special, sovereign empowerment for ministry and service, or to (2) living by faith with the assistance of the Spirit.

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The context of each passage determines which idea is addressed. The former is the sovereign intervention of God to accomplish a specific activity through the believer. The latter is an expression of Christian character, revealing that the Spirit has more of us. The former is involuntary; the latter is voluntary. This distinction between fillings will be explained further in the next section of this chapter.

The baptism with the Spirit differs from fillings with the Spirit (see the chart, *Baptism and Fillings in Acts*) on the next page. Baptism refers to the Spirit’s indwelling and the believer’s placement into the body of Christ. This was instituted at Pentecost and continues today. Fillings refer either to (1) the Spirit’s empowerment of individual believers for service or ministry, or to (2) the Spirit’s influence in the believer’s walk. Following Pentecost, baptism occurs universally whenever an individual trusts Christ as his Savior. Fillings occur either (1) as God especially and uniquely empowers a believer for a particular ministry or (2) as the believer allows the Spirit to assist his walk.

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BAPTIZING AND FILLINGS IN ACTS			
	Spirit's Work	Spirit's Purpose	Believer's Involvement
Position	Baptizing	Believer into Body of Christ	Universal Gift
Mission	Involuntary Filling	Service and Sign	Special Empowerment
Practice	Voluntary Filling	Assist Obedience	Obedient Walk

The controversy about a distinction between baptizing “of” the Holy Spirit or baptizing “in” the Holy Spirit is invalid. In each of the seven passages in which baptism and the Holy Spirit are used (Matt. 3:11; Mark 1:8; Luke 3:16; Jn. 1:33; Acts 1:5, 11:16; and 1 Cor. 12:13), the identical Greek preposition (en) appears and should be translated the identical way on each occasion. Therefore, no theological distinctions are warranted.

Involuntary Fillings with the Spirit differ from Voluntary Fillings with the Spirit

As discussed concerning the fourteen times Luke used the expression, “filled with the Spirit,” this phrase emphasizes either service/ministry (involuntary filling) or character/walk (voluntary filling). This phrase, used only one other time by the apostle Paul, makes the context critical so as to understand his use of the phrase and to compare it with Luke’s treatment of the same.

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Following an extended section addressing the believer's walk (Eph. 5:6–14), Paul provided a set of three contrasts to clarify the way the believer is to live (Eph. 5:15–18). Paul then gave four characteristics that will result from living according to God's Word (Eph. 5:19–21). In the second section, in the last of the three contrasts, the phrase, "filled with the Spirit," occurs.

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.

Prior to making these distinctions, Paul exhorted believers to walk in the light, not in darkness. He continued that theme into the second section. The first contrast in verse 15 is a warning that believers should walk wisely, not unwisely. The second contrast addresses understanding of the will of God, not to be foolish (v. 17). Up to this point, the examples have exact parallels—walking in the light versus walking in the darkness, walking wisely versus walking unwisely, and understanding the will of God versus being foolish. Continuity now begins to dissolve, for verse 18 reads, "Do not be drunk with wine, but be filled with the Spirit."

The conclusion is either that Paul discontinued exact parallels or that the correct understanding of the third contrast of "being drunk" and "being filled" must be considered. Because the passage says that drinking to excess is in view, the idea of being controlled or influenced by drink would continue the previous negative parallels—walking in darkness, walking unwisely, and being foolish. But what about "filled with the Spirit?" The answer becomes clear if "filled" is also understood as "influenced." Do not be influenced with spirits, but in contrast be influenced with the Spirit. This approach would fit with the previous parallels.

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Paul's use of "filled with the Spirit" corresponds with Luke's second type of filling (voluntary filling) in a couple of ways. First, Paul wanted believers to be influenced by the Spirit of God, to walk wisely and in the light of God's Word. This assistance is derived from the Spirit's leading and teaching the believer through the Word of God. Second, Paul commanded believers to be influenced by the Spirit and live in a manner pleasing to God. Acts never addressed

Acts never addressed how voluntary filling occurred, only that it occurred.

how voluntary filling occurred, only that it occurred. Ephesians 5, however, 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.

The chart, *Different Fillings Compared*, on the next page provides a comparison between involuntary and voluntary fillings.

Voluntary fillings are universally available to all believers based on their obedience to God's Word. Involuntary fillings are limited to certain believers to whom God bestows "special empowerment" for ministry or service. While Luke discusses both concepts, Paul limits his discussion to fillings regarding the believer's walk.

Conclusion

Hopefully it has become apparent that the standard appeal for "special empowering" for believers to live the Christian life is foreign to the Scriptures. In Acts 1:4-8, Luke was addressing the Eleven who were empowered as witnesses to affect a particular mission. One should not confuse those "witnesses" in Luke's development in the Book of Acts with every individual believer and impose a preconceived bias on the text.

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DIFFERENT FILLINGS COMPARED		
Aspect	Involuntary	Voluntary
Extent	Limited to Certain Believers	Universally Available to All Believers
Manner	Bestowed by God	Commanded by God
Purpose	Sovereign Act of God (empowerment for ministry)	Assistance from God (influence for walk)
Authors	Luke (exclusively)	Luke and Paul

The student of the Word must allow Acts 1:4–8 to speak for itself and not overlay a fixed theological grid imposing theological presuppositions. The church erroneously turns to the *empowering model* in Acts 1:8 rather than to the *influencing role of the Spirit* through voluntary filling in Ephesians 5:18, leading in Galatians 5:18, and teaching in 1 John 2:27 to explain the outworking of the Holy Spirit in the believer’s walk. Rather than a quick fix, the Christian life is a long haul. Rather than a getting-plugged-into-power that in some way mystically energizes us (Acts 1:8), the Christian life involves time plus obedience, producing a transforming walk and maturity in Christ (Rom. 12:2).

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Chapter 8, NOTES

1. Zane C. Hodges, *Notes on Acts* (Class notes, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1973), 11–12.

Hodges writes, “The filling of the Spirit is distinct from the baptism, yet related.” Additionally, Hodges indicates that filling seems “in Luke-Acts to be mainly a sovereign work of the Holy Spirit by which the filled person becomes His mouthpiece. (Cf. esp., Luke 1:41, 67; Acts 4:8, 31; 9:17 with 9:20; 13:9.)”

2. Charles Caldwell Ryrie, *Basic Theology* (Wheaton, IL: Victor, 1986), 376.
3. *Ibid.*, 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.”

Additionally note in reference to the baptism of the Spirit, that 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.

4. Hodges, *Notes on Acts*, 42.

Hodges states “that in Acts 2:4 they were all filled. And in 4:8, Peter is filled (τλησθεισ) Hence, at least in Peter’s case, we have three separate instances of his being filled (2:4; 4:8; 4:31)...Apparently the filling of the Spirit is a sovereign act of the Spirit....There is no recorded prayer for the Spirit’s filling.”