

The Nature and Content of the Filling in Ephesians 5:18

Timothy C. Hoelscher -First Baptist Church - Royal City, WA. - April 2000

The filling of the Holy Spirit, as it is commonly called, is a vital truth for the spiritual life. Yet that which is most often taught concerning this filling is based upon an unbiblical premise. “Thus being filled with the Spirit is simply being **controlled** by the Spirit”¹ [emphasis added] It is the purpose of this paper to examine the content of this filling and in view of that content whether it can be properly called “control”.

To understand the filling we will make a brief of examination of the words that are translated “fill”. We will also consider a cognate of “fill”. We will examine the grammar of the key passage Ephesians 5:18-21. Having done this we will consider this passage in the context of the letter to the Ephesians. Frequently, this last step is omitted in this process of interpretation and yet is necessary. All these will contribute to a biblical understanding of this filling.

The Greek Words Translated Fill

Two words in our New Testament are chiefly translated “fill”. Both πληθω [*platho* - πιμπλημι-*pimplemi*] and πληρωω [*plarao*] are translated “fill” yet each has a different emphasis. Our examination of these words will be brief.² We would like to bring out the distinction that exists between these two words. πληθω emphasizes a filling that completely or fully pervades. So, T.S. Green notes, “to be filled *mentally*, to be under full influence.”³ πληρωω is a filling, which makes up a lack, a deficiency though Green also, adds, “to pervade *with an influence*, to influence fully, possess fully...”⁴

πληθω is found in Luke 1:57 and 2:6 in which the time for Elizabeth and then Mary is completely filled for each to give birth. Any woman who has given birth will testify that when that time comes, when labor begins, it takes over, and even the great advances in medicine can do little to halt it. This is a good illustration of the nature of this type of filling. Unlike the second term, there is no condition to be fulfilled. John the Baptizer was filled in this sense from his mother’s womb (Luke 1:15). John, an unborn child did nothing to be filled, there were no conditions which he met. The Spirit filled him for God’s purpose. When Mary came to visit Elizabeth, John leapt and Elizabeth, meeting no special condition, was filled from the Holy Spirit (Luke 1:41). In the upper room, the believers awaiting the promise consisting of the Holy Spirit were filled and began to speak in the languages of other races (Acts 2:4). There is no condition mentioned which they attempted to fill. They were waiting as commanded. Neither is any indica-

1 Charles Caldwell Ryrie *The Holy Spirit* Chicago, Moody Press, 1965; p. 94.

2 For a detailed study of these two words see *The Filling Ministry of the Holy Spirit: A Consideration Based On The Biblical Concepts Of Filling And Fullness* a paper by Dale Spurbeck presented at the 1999 Theological Forum on Contemporary Issues. This is a very thorough analysis of the words, which I would highly recommend.

3 Thomas Sheldon Green *A Greek-English Lexicon to the New Testament*, Grand Rapids, Zondervan 1977, p.146.

4 Ibid p. 148

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tion made that they attempted to speak in this manner. Rather, the Spirit filled them with such a control that they simply began to speak. The last recorded use of this word, with reference to the Holy Spirit is Acts 13:9.

πληροω on the other hand is used of the fulfillment of Scripture (e.g. Matthew 1:22; 2:15, 17 et al). It used this way 26 times of its 90 occurrences. The nature of this verb makes it fitting for this use. An Old Testament prophecy or statement, which has not come to pass, is lacking something. It is deficient [from a human point of view] because the prophesied event has not yet taken place. Therefore when a Scripture is “fulfilled” the event takes place and it no longer lacks anything. In John 16:24 Christ told His disciples to ask in a new manner. If they would ask in this manner, they would receive that for which they asked and their joy would be full. If they asked in this manner, they would lack nothing with reference to their joy. Their joy would have no deficiency. This is the word which is found in Ephesians 5:18. The Holy Spirit is filling a lack or deficiency. It is not the purpose to draw the distinction here. There is a distinction and as noted in the footnotes, those who wish to consider the uses of these two words, should see Dale Spurbek’s paper.

πληρωμα - Fullness

There are many cognates of "fill". For our purposes we will be considering πληρωμα [plaroma], a Third Declension Neuter noun. This noun is built on the stem of our verb πληροω. The μα ending indicates result of an action.⁵ Thus πληρωμα is the result of a filling, hence it is frequently translated “fullness”⁶ Since πληροω is a filling which makes up that which is lacking or deficient, then πληρωμα is the resulting fullness in which nothing is lacking or deficient.

πληρωμα can be illustrated in several passages. In Mark 8:20 we have the account of Christ feeding about four thousand people with seven loaves of bread. Upon collecting the remaining bread scraps the disciples had seven baskets which were “full”. The baskets were not partially full. They were completely full. In Matthew 9:16, Christ illustrates a difference between the old and the new as the old garment and a new piece of material. The new piece of material, which patches up the old garment, is called “the fullness”. The patch is that which makes the garment full and without any lack or deficiency.

When God the Son became flesh, He did not cease to be God. He did not become part man part God or some kind of demigod. He became a genuine man. He remains completely God. Therefore, Paul wrote, “Because in Him settles down at home, all the fullness of the Godhead bodily.” (Colossians 2:9). Everything that is true of God remains true of God the Son. He didn’t lay aside His deity. “There was no loss or corruption of the divine essence when the eternal Son

5 Bruce M. Metzger *Lexical Aids for Students of New Testament Greek*, Princeton, Theological Book Concern 1983, p. 43.

6 Green, op cit. p. 148.

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took upon Himself a full and complete humanity.”⁷ Therefore, the idea of fullness here is that no deficiency exists. He is fully God!

The Significance of πληρωμα

και εστε εν αυτω πεπληρωμενοι ο εστιν η κεφαλη παση αρχη και εξουσιω
Colossians 2:10 “And you all are in Him having been filled [made fullness], Who is the Head with reference to every ruler and authority.”

Having explained that Christ remains fully God, that all the fullness of the Godhead has settled down in Him, Paul points out that we partake of fullness in our position in Christ. Paul uses the verb “fill” rather than the noun, but there is a tie to the fullness in verse 9. Jesus Christ lacked nothing and in Him we lack nothing. We are those who have been made full in Him. God’s provision for us in Christ is complete. In Christ the believer “recognizes that God the Father counts him to share in the divine perfection of Christ.”⁸ As one moves through the remainder of chapter 2 and into chapter 3, we find that Paul places attention on the body and its Head as well as the individual in Christ (cp. 2:17, 19; 3:10-11). This is important, as we will find in the remaining passages that the emphasis of the fullness is on the body of Christ not just the individual.

The Spirit moved Paul to use this term several times with reference to the body of Christ.
τη εκκλησια ητις εστιν το σωμα αυτου το πληρωμα του τα παντα εν
πασιν πληρουμενου Ephesians 1:22b-23 “The Church which is His body, the fullness from the one filling all things in all ways.”

This is a good place to begin understanding this fullness. Paul defines the fullness as “the Church which is His body.” All believers in this present dispensation of grace knit together as one in Christ comprise this fullness. The fullness of the Godhead was settled down at home in Christ’s human nature. He lacked nothing. He knew no deficiencies. So, in Christ, the body is not deficient. God sees it as full.

γνωσαι τε την υπερβαλλουσαν τη γνωσεω αγαπην του χριστου ινα
πληρωθητε ει παν το πληρωμα του θεου Ephesians 3:19 “to experientially know the love for the Christ which super-abounds beyond the experiential knowledge, in order that you might be filled unto all the fullness from God.”

Some might miss the fullness here. We can see the word “fullness” but many Christians get lost in all the language of Paul’s request. In light of the future, beginning in verse 14 Paul records his desire to God for the Ephesians. The desire involves: being made manifestly mighty⁹ in the inner man by the Spirit (v. 16); being rooted and grounded so the Christ is settling down at home in their hearts (v. 17); to experientially know the love for the Christ which abounds beyond experience (vv. 18-19); that they would be filled with all the fullness from God (v. 19). This is all

7 Robert Glen Gromacki *Stand Perfect In Wisdom An Exposition of Colossians and Philemon* Grand Rapids, Baker Book House Company, 1981, p. 104.

8 David K. Spurbeck, *The Christian in Christ* Forest Grove, OR, Know To Grow Publications 1999 p. 125

9 κραταιω - to be plainly mighty. It would indicate a display of might or strength, an obvious might.

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body truth. Sometimes when we simplify things, we detract from God's Word, but let's break this down into

1. Inner strength from the Spirit. This is not physical strength but strength for the inner man. Simply, when I was saved in the past, it was my spirit that was affected. Because of this, if I am to live out that salvation, I must use my spirit. It is my spirit that needs this manifest might from the Holy Spirit.
2. A firm foundation so the Christ is at home in our hearts - I also need to be firmly grounded. Paul combines the idea of sinking roots down deep and of setting a firm foundation to picture this stability. It is my spirit that is stabilized and it is in my position in Christ, specifically the Christ that this stability exists. The purpose of this stability is so that the Christ can settle down at home in my heart. The Christ is Jesus Christ knit to His body (cp. 1 Corinthians 12:12). It is a God-imputed entity consisting of Jesus Christ as the head and the Church as the body, viewed as one new man (cp Ephesians 2:15f)¹⁰. I need this stability for my spirit so that this truth of the Christ is not a truth with which I am uncomfortable but rather a truth which is settled comfortably at home in my heart.
3. An experiential love for the Christ. We could assume that all Christians love properly, but we would be wrong. One of the greatest need of Grace believers is a proper love for the Christ. We love Jesus Christ the head by loving the body. This love is so important that it is the new commandment that makes up the law of Christ. Christ instructed us to love one another as He loved us (John 13:34-35). Paul seems to contradict himself by asking for an experiential knowledge, which abounds beyond experiential knowledge. Paul knew that this Spirit produced (Galatians 5:22) love for the Christ, was beyond anything with which we are acquainted in our conduct.
4. A filling consisting of all the fullness from God - Here's where the fullness and filling come together. They need this filling and the content of the filling is the fullness. We already know that the fullness is the Church, which is His body (Ephesians 1:22-23). This fits the context and relates to the idea of the Christ settling down at home in our hearts.

So, in this context we begin to see that the fullness is related to the body of Christ.

μεχρι καταντησωμεν οι παντες εις την ενοτητα της πιστεως και της επιγνωσεως του υιου του θεου εις ανδρα τελειον εις μετρον ηλικιας του πληρωματος του χριστου Ephesians 4:13 "until we all arrive into the oneness from

¹⁰ Most of the occurrences of ο χριστος - the articular noun, refer to the single Person of God the Son in His resurrected glorified human nature. But more than twenty times in the New Testament, this expression refers to the body of Christ united under Christ the head and viewed as one new man.

- Some texts in which the articular "Christ" is simply a reference to the Person Jesus Christ.
Romans 1:16; 5:8; 7:4; 8:35 -?; 9:5; 15:3; (w/ 1:16 - 15:19, 29); 1 Corinthians 1:16, 17; 6:15 (art. of prev. ref.); 10:16; Galatians 1:22; 6:12, 14, 18; Ephesians 1:20; 2:5-?

- Some texts in which the articular "Christ" is a reference to Jesus Christ united with His body as the Head.
Romans 9:3; 14:18; 1 Corinthians 1:13; 12:12; 2 Corinthians 1:5; 5:14-love of the Christ; 9:13 - Good News about; 1:7, 9; 12:9; Galatians 1:7; 5:4, 24; 6:2 - the law pertaining to the Christ - how you treat each other.; Ephesians 1:10, 12; 3:4, 8, 19; 4:13, 20; Philippians 2:30 (1:15, 16, 21, 27, 29; 3:7, 18; Colossians 1:24; 2:2; 3:16; 4:1, 3, 15 - Acts 22:21-22; 21:20-26; 1 Timothy 5:11; 1 Peter 4:13, 14; 2 John 9

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the faith and the full experiential knowledge concerning the Son of God, unto a complete man, unto a measure consisting of stature - the fullness of the Christ.”

Paul looks forward to the Rapture, at which point, all we Grace believers will arrive at a oneness. At that point, the body of Christ will in reality be everything God has planned. Parents measure the physical growth of their children. They may place marks on doorframes indicating the heights and ages of the children through the years. Perhaps some parents even guess the height of their children. But God hasn't guessed what the full adult stature of the Christ will be. God knows. And when the Rapture takes place, the Christ will reach the mark on the doorway. Here the fullness is clarified as being the full height God knows it will be. Even though not every person may be in Christ yet, God imputes the body in Christ to be complete.

Philippians 4:19 - “My God shall fill your every need, according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus” Many of us have thought Paul is referring to our needs: food, clothing, shelter, etc.? It is the location in which God fills these needs that clues us in on Paul's meaning. He fills the needs “in Christ Jesus.” It is in our position in Christ that God fills these needs. If the needs are filled there, then Paul is not writing about material needs but about spiritual needs for which God has already provided in Christ. Because of the translation “supply”¹¹ many have missed this. Additionally, there is no specific reference to the Holy Spirit in verse 19. “God” would be a reference to the Spirit. The verb “fill” is Future Active Indicative. It is the Holy Spirit Who is presently working directly in the life of believers.

There is certainly a relationship between v. 19 and verse 13, “I am endued with strength for all things **in** the one empowering me - Christ!” Though not apparent in our English Bibles, Paul uses two distinct words for power. *ισχυω* is translated, “I can do” in most English Bibles and literally means, “I am endued with strength.”¹² The second *ενδυναμοω* is “to be empowered” or “to make strong, strengthen.”¹³ There are also two persons of the Godhead in this verse. Christ is our position, and it is in Him that we are empowered (cp. 2 Timothy 2:1), but it is the Holy Spirit who endues us with strength as we have seen in Ephesians 3:16. Since this is done in relation to our position in Christ, this strength is spiritual not physical. So, as in verse 19, the Spirit makes up a deficiency, which in this context is spiritual strength. The Spirit does so in our position in Christ. The Locative “in” tells us where we go to get this strength. If we need this spiritual strength, we need to go to our position in Christ.

The Grammar of Ephesians 5:18-21

11 It is translated “fill” by Alfred Marshal in *The Interlinear Greek-English New Testament* Samuel Bagster and Sons, 1958, p. 788 and the editors of *The NKJV Greek English Interlinear New Testament* Nashville, Thomas Nelson, Inc. 1994, p. 695, though in the latter they add “supply” below their Interlinear translation.

12 See on the various terms for strength and power Kenneth S. Wuest *Ephesians and Colossians in the Greek New Testament for the English Reader* Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1953, p. 54.

13 G. Abbott-Smith *A Manual Greek Lexicon of the New Testament* Edinburgh, T&T Clark 1937, p. 152

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Grammar involves many parts of speech but begins with the verb. The main verb in these verses is “be filled”. The Mood¹⁴ [that quality of the verb which defines its relationship to reality] is Imperative. The Imperative Mood is used when one individual attempts to exert his will upon another individual. It is a strong encouragement to do that which the one speaking desires. Paul is strongly encouraging the Ephesian believers to be filled.

The verb is in the Present Tense. A Present Tense views the action as ongoing, without any focus upon its beginning or end. While there are several ways to interpret a Present Tense, the context would indicate that this would be an Iterative Present, that is, a repeated Present Tense. The idea is to be filled and filled again and filled again, etc. As often as is necessary the filling is repeated. The very fact that Paul is writing these words to them indicates that some or all need to be filled. We would assume that some or all knew how to be filled and had been filled in the past but needed to be filled again. This is iterative, repeated ongoing action.

The Voice is Passive. The Ephesians are not to fill themselves. The Passive means that someone else fills them. This is important because there are those who interpret “Spirit” to be “spirit” a reference to one’s own human spirit.¹⁵ We know from the remainder of the verse that the Spirit is the One who fills. Though *πνευματι* is without the definite article, for good English I will use “the Spirit” as it does refer to God the Holy Spirit.

How do we put these three together? Concerning the Present Tense, whenever a believer realizes he is not filled and needs to be, he is to be filled. Therefore it is a repeated act. It is the combination of the Passive voice and the Imperative mood, which is interesting. The Passive indicates that something is happening to the audience, while the Imperative gives a charge or strong suggestion to them, which they are to obey. Therefore, Paul is strongly suggesting that they are to allow something to be done to them. Filling is not unconditional. If it were unconditional, there would be no reason to use an Imperative. The Imperative places a responsibility on the believer. Filling does not just happen. It does not sovereignly take place. God’s plan as revealed here is that the believer is to allow the Spirit to do this work.

The Passive indicates that the believer does not fill himself. But the Imperative indicates he meets an unstated condition for the Spirit to proceed with this filling. Therefore, unlike sovereign filling in the Gospels and early Acts, this filling is conditional. It is imperative that the believer allows the Spirit to fill him.

14 The Four Greek Moods begin with the Indicative, which is reality, and each is one additional step removed from reality- Indicative-reality, Subjunctive-possibility, Imperative-demands from one’s will on another’s -less possible, Optative- wish-least possible.

15 Regarding the translation “Spirit”, R.C.H. Lenski comments, “Really this is impossible, for it pairs “wine” used for drunkenness with the Holy Spirit, the Third Person of the Godhead. But Paul is not capable of such a parallelism.” *The Interpretation of St. Paul’s Epistles to the Galatians to the Ephesians and to the Philippians* Columbus, OH., Lutheran Book Concern 1937, p. 619. This is an arbitrary judgment. The Holy Spirit could very well move Paul to draw this comparison and the Scriptures are full of such sharp contrasts between nature and God. The Present Passive is the same form as the Present Middle [action done to or for one’s self]. Context must determine whether the Passive or Middle is being used. In Ephesians 4:23 would be an example of a Middle / Passive voice interpreted as a Middle. Matthew 1:18; Romans 8:14; 1 Corinthians 12:3; Ephesians 4:4; 2 Timothy 1:14 can serve as example of *πνευμα* without the definite article referring to the Holy Spirit.

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“Spirit” [πνευματι] is in the Locative, Instrumental or Dative form. If it is Locative, then Spirit is the location of the filling, “be being filled in the Spirit”. The Instrumental case would indicate the means of being filled, “be being filled by the Spirit”, that is, the Spirit is the one that does the act of filling. The Dative case expresses interest, and an expanded translation would be, “be being filled for the interest of the Spirit”. We have seen that the verb is Passive and therefore, of these three cases, the Instrumental is the only one which makes sense.

When we are reading for understanding, it is helpful to begin with the main verb and build the thought from there. The main verb as we have seen is “be filled” or more literally, “be being filled.” In verses 19-21, the Spirit moved Paul to use a series of Present participles: speaking, singing, psalming, thanking, submitting. These participles are part of the same sentence of which “be being filled” is the main verb. It is necessary to determine the relation between these participles and the main verb. A look at a Greek Grammar shows a number of possible interpretations of a participle.¹⁶ When we apply the various adverbial uses of the participle to the verses under consideration, the only ones, which would make sense, are that of Purpose or Result. Of these two, which are very close, Result is more in keeping with the context. This use interprets the five participles to be the results of the main verb. Therefore, “be being filled by the Spirit” is the main thought and the five participles are products or results of this filling.

Understanding this use of the participles and the case of the noun “Spirit” helps us narrow the content of the filling. It is not the Holy Spirit Himself. The Spirit is doing the filling. He is the instrument. He is not the content. The Grace believer already has the Holy Spirit (cp. Romans 8:9). No Scripture indicates that the believer can get anymore of the Spirit. The Spirit indwells him at the moment he believes the Good News for salvation (cp. Romans 8:11; Ephesians 4:32; 1 Corinthians 15:3-4). So, he is not being filled up with more of the Spirit. Many of our English Bibles have translated the preposition and noun “with the Spirit” which would indicate that we are deficient with reference to the Spirit and so we are getting more of Him. This is not the case. The participles, which result from the filling, indicate that certain qualities in the believer are the areas of deficiency. The Spirit does a work of filling which results in these activities.

To further understand the nature of this filling we will now consider these resultant activities. The first four activities: speaking, singing, psalming, thanking, are done to one’s self. Though translated “one another” in some versions¹⁷, the pronoun εαυτος is reflexive not reciprocal. A reflexive pronoun indicates action done to or for the one doing the action. For example, “I throw the ball to **myself**.” “He reasoned through this matter by talking to **himself**.” Therefore,

16 See William G. MacDonald *Greek Enchiridion* Peabody, Mass., 1986, p. 56 - These uses are defined by observing written and spoken language. People use words in their various forms in a variety of ways. We break these uses out so that we might have a clearer understanding of what is written in God’s Word. “**Picking** up the box, I hurt my back.” Here “picking” is the cause or circumstance of the main verb “hurt”. “**Having picked** up the box, I put it away.” “Having picked” is the antecedent circumstance to “put it away”.

17 The New American Standard Bible (Lockman Foundation, 1995) has “one another” but notes in the margin “Or *yourselves*”. Kenneth Wuest disagrees with the interpretation that εαυτοις indicates action done to yourself, because practically he believes we should speak to one another, but the context demonstrates the reason for the reflexive.

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these first four activities are done by the individuals, each, to his or herself. The importance of the reflexive pronoun will be seen when we understand the reason for the filling.

The fifth activity is done to one another. ἀλλήλος is properly a reciprocal pronoun as it is translated in most English Bibles. A reciprocal pronoun involves activity which two or more people are doing to or on behalf of each other. “We are throwing the ball to one another.” would illustrate a reciprocal idea. The reciprocal pronoun is not placed last as a matter of style, but because of the sequence indicated in these activities, which we will see.

Speaking

The first result of this filling is speaking. Paul used λαλεω rather than λεγω to indicate the nature of this speaking. The latter lays emphasis on the content spoken while this word considers the act of **speaking**, with less emphasis on content. Paul indicates the content with three Instrumental nouns: psalms, hymns, spiritual songs. By psalm, Paul is not referring to the book of Psalms. These are original psalms as a result of the Spirit’s filling at a point in time. A psalm is poetic verse, which relates God’s character to a given situation. It is distinguished from praise, which ties aspects of God’s character to a benefit, because a psalm can also include a plea for God to produce a benefit related to an aspect of His character, or perhaps a confession of an unrighteous act committed against God (cp. Psalm 35:1-8; 43:1-5). A hymn is a statement of worship. It concentrates upon the character of God, with no attention given to any benefits. While we use hymn to refer to songs we sing out of “hymnbooks” the Greek υμνος is not necessarily a song. Making a statement, a chant or a song could constitute a hymn in New Testament times. This is very hard for 20th Century Christians to understand because we have come to so fully associate “hymn” with “song” as the hymns we sing today, that the idea of a spoken hymn, a spoken recitation of God’s character is almost foreign.¹⁸ Spiritual songs “odes” are songs, which emanate from or express something from the Spirit. “Spiritual” characterizes the nature of the “odes” since this term was used broadly in New Testament times.

Since Paul uses the reflexive pronoun εαυτος these are not being done for others. Nothing in this phrase indicates that these are being done in a church congregation, choir, or performing for others in any way. Each of these is done by the individual as a result of the Spirit’s filling and is done to his or herself. If I am filled, I will speak to myself by means of psalms, hymns and spiritual songs.

Singing and Psalming

These two are repetitions of the last nouns, in participial forms. The singing is not necessarily verbal singing. The text specifically states that both of these take place in the heart and are to the Lord. Nothing here demands or even implies that these are on the lips or that anyone other than the individual and God can hear them. As in the last phrase, these two are for the benefit of the individual.

¹⁸ Of real interest is the lack of emphasis upon music in the New Testament epistles. Very little is said of corporate singing or “special music”. See, H.L. Schafer *The Spiritual Christian* Gaston, OR. The Dispensational Theological Seminary, 1996, pp. 38-40

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The spirit is the part of man's makeup, which has experienced regeneration. But Paul uses heart, which encompasses more than the spirit. The heart is the place of union between the spirit, soul and body of a man. It is from the heart that man makes decisions affecting his life (Proverbs 4:23; Matthew 12:34-35; Romans 10:9, 10). It is in this center that the believer enjoys the benefit of singing and psalming.

Thanking [Giving Thanks]

The word thanks [εὐχαριστία] (v. 20) is built on the word grace [χάρις]. The εὐ prefix means good and the resultant meaning is literally "good grace" [N.T.] or "good favor" [Gospels]. When a New Testament Grace believer "thanked" God, he was telling God, "Your grace is good." Since this is a result of the Spirit's filling work, the Spirit gives the believer the ability to recognize God's good grace. God by His grace is responsible for many things in the believer's life from certain benefits to bearing suffering without retaliating as Christ did (cp. Ephesians 1:7; 2:7; 1 Peter 2:19, 20). Yet, often believers are only thankful for "good" things experienced in life. The believer acquainted with the true grace from God is able to recognize God's grace in all things. Therefore, the Spirit produces this recognition of God's good grace.

This recognition of good grace from God is to take place always. We are not to give thanks only under special circumstances that seem better than others. The filled believer recognizes that God's grace is good always. As illustrated by Peter, "for this is grace from God, if on account of conscience towards God, if a certain one bears grief while suffering unrighteously. ... but if, having done good and then suffering, you are patient, this is grace alongside God." (1 Peter 2:19, 20).

This recognition of good grace from God is in place of [ὑπὲρ] all things. Whether a circumstance or thing is "good" or "bad" the filled believer communicates back to God, his recognition that the grace from God is good. The preposition ὑπὲρ directs the believer's attention away from the specific circumstance or thing to the reason, the good grace from God. The thanks is in place of the circumstance or benefit.

This recognition of good grace from God is in *the* name of our Lord Jesus Christ. This is one of many instances in which "name" does not refer to a title but to the character of the one to whom it refers (cp. Matthew 24:5, 9; John 14:26; 17:11). The idea is that the one giving thanks, does so in the character or manner in which our Lord Jesus Christ would. Although the English translations read "the name" there is no definite article. It is not **the** absolute character of our Lord but a sample or a quality of that character which the believer can have. It is in that character, doing so as our Lord Himself would that the believer recognizes this good grace from God.

This recognition of good grace from God is a form of communication with the Father. This isn't a mental recognition with no response. This is a mental recognition, which communicates this fact back to the Father. This communication needn't be verbal but thanks is still a form of communication with God.

Submitting

Submission means to be in organized order under another (v. 21). Though submission has been maligned, it is important in the life of a believer. When kept in its proper place, which is a

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result of this filling, submission benefits the Grace believer. The filling results in the believer placing himself under other [αλληλος] believers for those benefits.

The first four participles we have considered are all Active participles. The believer is Actively engaged in those four activities as a result of this filling. It is, however, interesting that the first participle is Active though it is done to one's self [εαυτω]. Submitting is a Middle / Passive voice participle. Since it is being done in relation to other believers it can not be Passive. The Middle emphasizes action done in the interest of the subject. A fuller translation would read, "submitting for your own benefit to one another ..." While the first four participles take place between the believer and God, this one takes place between believers. There is specific interaction. This interaction is in the interest of the one submitting and therefore is in the Middle voice.

The body of Christ has been put together in such a manner that believers are to live in dependence on Christ's work through other members. Paul states this in 4:15-16 "...the Head, Christ, out of whom all the body, being harmoniously joined together and bound together through every joint, the ones for supply, according to the operation in measure of each part, makes the growth of the body for the edification of itself by means of love." In the earthly and limited manifestations of the imputed body of Christ, believers are supplied with that which they need through other members of the body. A **part** of the work takes place through the exercise of individuals' spiritual gifts. Those gifts were given for the benefit of the whole body (1 Corinthians 12:7). No believer can, therefore, operate as though he has no need of others. This is why submission is necessary. If he wishes to benefit from the exercise of others' gifts he needs to bring himself under their authority as defined by their gifts. Another believer can be used by God to provide benefits for the submitting believer. This submission is not believers refusing to lead resulting in no authority. Rather it is a recognition that each believer is so gifted by God that he can minister that gift on behalf of others (Ephesians 4:12; 1 Peter 4:10), who will allow themselves to benefit from this ministry, that is, they submit.

The results or benefits of this filling continue through specific examples of submission: wives to husbands (Ephesians 5:22-22); children to parents (6:1-4); slaves to masters (6:5-9). These specific examples are for filled individuals. For example, an unsaved or carnal wife can not submit in this manner. The filling of 5:18 is necessary for this type of submission.

Preliminary Observations Regarding Filling.

Nothing in this context has indicated control by the Spirit. Rather the Spirit has filled up the believer with the qualities of speaking, singing, psalming, thanking and submitting. In the specific examples of submission, note that wives are told to submit, children and slaves to obey. Paul uses the Imperative mood, strongly urging them to do these. If the filling were in reality "control", then there would be no need to use an Imperative, in fact there would be no need to even instruct them to do so, for the Spirit would be controlling them and they would automatically submit in the proper manner. This filling is distinct from what we call "control".

The Context of Ephesians 5:18-21

Next to the Spirit's illuminating the believer to God's revealed truth, context is essential to understanding Scripture. Much harm is done when we interpret Scripture without regard for its context. Frequently our perspective of a passage is made clear when considered in light of its

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context. How far back do we go to develop the context of this passage? In reality the whole book is important to our understanding. We'll work backwards from Ephesians 5:18.

In 5:1-2, the Ephesians were told to be imitators of God. The specific content of this imitation¹⁹ is walking in love, as Christ loved us. This instruction means they are to live their lives for what is best for other believers. They are to give themselves up for others. Therefore, this context is "body" related. It has to do with believers relating to one another by means of love. The remainder of the chapter to verse 18 deals with specific problems that evidence a lack of this love.

If we went back to the beginning of chapter 4 we find a series of statements encouraging unity within the assembly. These could be summarized with Paul's statement, "being diligent to guard the oneness from the Spirit in the bond of the peace;" (4:3). Paul continues through this chapter writing about the body of Christ and its local manifestation: edifying of the body of Christ (4:12); the fullness of the Christ (4:13); the growth of the body (4:16); learned the Christ (4:20); put on the new man [the Christ] (4:24); speaking to give grace to one hearing (4:29); becoming kind to one another (4:32).

In chapter 3 we find a mystery concerning the Christ which communicates an equal status between Jews and Gentiles in the Christ (v. 6). Paul desired that **the Christ** would settle down at home in their hearts (v. 17).

In chapter 6, immediately after giving the specific instances of submission, Paul instructs the Ephesians to put on the whole armor from God to stand against the Devil's methods (6:10-11). He explains that they are not wrestling with flesh and blood (v. 12). In the context, the Ephesians needed to be reminded that other human people were not their real problem but the Devil who uses people or circumstances involving other people was the problem. Because they were facing temptations from the Devil involving other people (see 4:27-32), they needed to put on the armor to resist the real enemy. The armor is necessary for all of Satan's temptations but here Paul mentions it because of potential conflicts between people originating with Satan. Hopefully these examples have demonstrated that the context involves the interaction between believers. The context addresses both positive and negative interaction between the believers. The context explains their standing together in Christ and the practical application of that position to their relations in daily life. The filling in 5:18 is not a separate matter but directly related to interaction in the body of Christ.

A Parallel Passage

We have to be cautious with parallel passages. All too often similar ideas are equated. There are passages, which address the same issues. These different passages are often helpful because they may use different words and phrases, which clarify the picture painted elsewhere. Combining Galatians 5 and Romans 7 gives us a larger and clearer picture of the conflict with

¹⁹ We should note, that Paul's use of this term is never that of watching another and then copy their observed behavior. Rather, it has to do with living out what God has given to us. It is bound to the truth which we relate to and through which we live out our salvation. It is illustrated by the Thessalonians being imitators of the brothers in Judea whom they were not able to observe, but living in the same manner, responded similarly (1 Thessalonians 2:14).

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the sin nature. Therefore, while we need to exercise caution to be certain that two passages are indeed parallel, genuine parallel scriptures are very helpful.

In Colossians 3, we have a parallel passage to Ephesians 5:18ff. There are several parallels between these two letters but none so striking as that between Ephesians 5:18-6:9 and Colossians 3:16-4:1. Both passages have an Imperative verb followed by a series of participles resulting from the action of the main verb. Notice the parallels.

Ephesians 5:18-22

18 ... **be filled** with the Spirit;

19 **speaking**

to yourselves by means of **psalms** and **hymns** and **spiritual songs**, **singing** and **psalming** in your heart to the Lord;

20 **giving thanks** always for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God, even the Father;

21 subjecting yourselves one to another in the fear of Christ.

22 Wives, **submit** for yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord.

Colossians 3:16-18

16 **Let** the word of Christ **dwel**l in you richly; in all wisdom **teaching** and **admonishing yourselves** by means of **psalms** and **hymns** and **spiritual songs**, **singing** by grace in your hearts unto God.

17 And whatsoever you do, in word or in work, all in the name of the Lord Jesus,

giving thanks to God the Father through him.

18 Wives, **submit** for yourselves to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord.

Like Ephesians 5:18, the context of Colossians 3:16 involves the importance of the believer's relationship to others in the body of Christ. In 2:17, 19 Paul writes of the importance of properly relating to the body of Christ as contrasted to the influence of false teachers pushing philosophy and legalistic, self-generated worship. In chapter 3 Paul instructs believers to put on the new man, their position in the Christ.

Now, let's note the differences. In Colossians 3:16, Paul instructs them to let something dwell in them richly rather than writing, "be being filled". The "speaking" of Ephesians 5:19 is more precise in Colossians 3:16 where we find, "teaching and admonishing." In Colossians, Paul writes only "singing" not "singing and psalming." Colossians 3:17 expands the idea of giving thanks "always for all things" to "whatever you do, in word or in work". Note that the second "do" in Colossians 3:17 is added thus missing Paul's point regarding being thankful. The general statement concerning submission is omitted in the Colossians passage, though Paul gives the specific instances as in Ephesians beginning with the wives, then husbands loving wives, children obeying, and slaves obeying.

Why do these differences exist? This can be explained in part by Paul's relationship to these two churches. Paul had spent nearly three years with the Ephesians, teaching them extensively (Acts 20:31) and announced to them the whole counsel of God (Acts 20:27). They had received an extensive education from Paul. The Colossian believers, however, had not personally met Paul (Colossians 2:1). They had not yet had the benefit of the depth of instruction from Paul, which the Ephesians saints had received. For this reason, in part, Paul expresses some matters to the Colossians differently. If Paul wrote the Ephesians, "be being filled" they know what he meant. But the Colossians needed an explanation. So rather than state, "be being filled" Paul

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wrote “let the Word concerning the Christ dwell richly in you.” The differences exist not only for the sake of Colossians but also for our benefit.

Let’s consider this first difference. “Be being filled by the Spirit” is a nebulous statement. Read books on the Christian life and you find that not all writers agree as to **how** to be filled. Additionally, many writers make statements regarding this filling which seem to be plucked out of thin air, they don’t have specific Scriptures which explain why this is the case. But when we turn to the Colossians passage, we find out what we are to do in order to allow the Spirit to fill us. We are to let the Word concerning the Christ dwell richly in us.

The “Word of the Christ” is not the Bible. In the context of this statement, Paul has been writing concerning the “new man” (3:9-10). This new man is Jesus Christ the head united with the body of Christ, which we have seen is called "the Christ" (cp. Ephesians 2:15f). This use of the Christ is common in the New Testament. In this new man there are no differences such as race or social status. In this new man the believer is alive to God (cp Romans 6:11). Therefore, in 3:16, Paul is instructing the Colossians to let the truth concerning the Christ to dwell in them richly. This Imperative regards a specific body of doctrine, which describes our relationship to all other believers in the body of Christ, united together with our Head, the Lord Jesus Christ. In order to properly relate to this truth, the believer must first relate to the truth that he is dead to the sin nature in Christ (Romans 6:11). This is closely related to Paul's instruction to put off the old man (Colossians 3:9). The believer puts off the old, who he was in Adam, and puts on the new, who he is apart of in Christ, alive to God as part of the Christ.²⁰

The Imperative in Ephesians 5:18 is Passive and the Imperative here is Active. Therefore, here in Colossians 3:16 we find out our part in allowing the Spirit to fill us. We actively let this specific truth to dwell richly in us, and by so doing, we allow [passive] the Holy Spirit to fill us. This is how these two passages work together to help us understand the filling of Ephesians 5:18. If I know that I am not filled and need to be, I allow the Word concerning the Christ to richly dwell in me? The adverb “richly” indicates that while this is mental, I am doing more than “thinking” about this truth. It is settled in me. It is in me in such a way that I benefit from it, that the purpose and content of this truth affect the way I think and act. It influences me. When I do this the Spirit fills me.

In the second difference the idea of speaking to ourselves is expanded to "teaching and admonishing." The individual needs to teach himself. When the Spirit fills a believer, the individual instructs himself concerning the appropriate truth of Scripture. Often, when a believer is confronted with the truths of God's Word, it alters his thinking, his perspective, and his resulting actions. God knows that the individuals needs this more than anyone else. Admonition is similar to teaching but normally involves the negatives or warnings.²¹ Many of the Psalms involve admonition and demonstrates a connection between Colossians and Ephesians. So the believer instructs himself in positive truth and in matters to be avoided or in which to be cautious.

²⁰ Schafer, op cit, pp. 36-37.

²¹ "ADMONITION, ADMONISH" in W.E. Vine *Vine's Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words* McClean, VA., MacDonald Publishing Co. nd, pp. 32-33

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There is another set of qualities, attitudes in reality, which result from this filling. These traits have been revealed to us as "the fruit from the Spirit" (Galatians 5:22-23). "From" emphasizes that the Spirit is the source of the fruit. These nine traits, making up a singular fruit,²² are attitudes, enabling believers to relate to one another in the manner which God desires. We often refer to them as "Christ-like" character. Verse 24 supports this idea, "But the ones of the quality of the Christ...".²³ Paul is not considering possession by Christ but the character belonging to the Head and shared with His body, and is therefore true of the whole New Man. These people are not only positionally in Christ and therefore in the Christ, but they are living this truth as a reality. In their conduct, at least at that moment, they are practicing their position. Those who are practicing their position, are of the quality or character of the Christ and have this fruit.

The Significance of Understanding the Nature of the Filling in Ephesians 5:18

We have seen the connection between Ephesians 5:18 and Colossians 3:16. We have seen that to be filled we are to allow the particular truth concerning **the Christ** to dwell richly in us. We have seen that both passages involve the practice of relationships within the body of Christ. What is the goal of this filling in light of the context? We can answer this by considering the results of the filling. The proper understanding of the results and the pronouns used clarify the purpose of this filling.

The first results of filling are done to one's self [εαυτοϛ]. In Ephesians 5:19 Paul uses only "speaking" while he expands the nature of this speaking in Colossians 3:17 as "teaching" and "admonishing". While some may prefer the inaccurately translated reciprocal pronouns of our English translations, the result is first of all teaching and admonishing ourselves. Consider James' words, "Do not become many teachers, my brothers, knowing that we shall receive the greater judgment. For in many things we stumble. If anyone does not stumble in word, the same is a mature man, able to bridle the whole body also." (James 3:1-2). We are quick to fire off at the mouth. We are quick to teach and admonish everyone else. But the result of this filling, the result of letting this truth dwell richly in you is first of all speaking to yourself not others. You, before anyone else, are the one in need of teaching and admonishing. You need the singing and psalming in your heart to the Lord. You need to be thankful to God in everything you do. The point is you need the results of filling so that you can properly relate to other believers. Only when you have first spoken to yourself, been singing and psalming in your heart to the Lord and are thankful for all things in the Lord, are you able to submit to other believers in the manner God desires.

The **filling** in Ephesians 5:18 is directly related to the **fullness** which is His body (Ephesians 1:22). The fullness is in Christ. It is also related to the fullness of Colossians 2:10. The fullness is positional. But the filling of Ephesians 5:18 makes it possible to live out the fullness. Like many aspects of our position in Christ, we have the potential to live like we are in the body of Christ. We do not have resign ourselves to mental acknowledgement that we have a position with out any practical aspect. We can have real victory over the sin nature as though we are genuinely

²² It is καρπος not καρποι as many treat it.

²³ Some Greek texts have added Ιησου, not understanding Paul's intended meaning.

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dead to it and alive to God. We can actually live like a son. We can rest at ease at the right hand of the Father. We can indeed guard the unity or oneness from the Spirit in a bond of peace. We lack the qualities that make it possible for us to act as part of the body. We are deficient of those activities, which allow us relate to other believers in the manner, which God desires. But when we are filled by the Spirit, He produces in us those qualities which make this possible. We first address ourselves and then we can submit to other believers. This is accomplished by our being filled. The filling is accomplished by our allowing the truth concerning the Christ to dwell richly in us.

Earlier we considered Philippians 4:13 and 19 as contributing to an understanding of this filling. The Philippians were experiencing their own problems with functioning as members of the body of Christ. Philippians has many references to the need and means of unity in this assembly (1:10, 27; 2:1-5, 12, 14; 3:15-17; 4:2-5, 21). While the Philippians had met Paul's material needs by sending gifts to him, God would fill up their need. Their need was not material but spiritual. God would fill up their need by means of His riches of glory in Christ Jesus. Paul doesn't mention the Spirit in verse 19 but does in verse 13. God would fill up every need. He would fill up the need by the work of the Spirit, as we operate in our position in Christ.

Conclusions

While many Bible teachers describe the filling in Ephesians 5:18 as “Spirit control” we have found no evidence that such a control exists. “Control” is not the meaning of this word, either literal or inferred. We have seen that the content of the filling does not consist of the Spirit Himself. The Spirit carries out the filling. He is the instrument. The contents of the filling are the qualities and activities of speaking, singing, psalming, thanking and submitting. The nature or rather purpose of this filling is to make the positional fullness real. This positional fullness shared with Christ and the fullness which is His body. This filling does not control, but makes it possible for believers to live out in very practical terms their gracious, God-reckoned position in Christ where we have been filled full!