

Articles and Sermons :: Filled With The Spirit by A. B. Simpson

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"Be filled with the Spirit" (Eph. 5:18). "Ye are complete (filled) in Him" (Col. 2:10).

The emphatic word in both these verses is "filled." It is the Greek word which means to fill full, so full that there will be no room left empty. This is the thought which, with the assistance of the Holy Spirit, we desire to impress in this message. It does not mean to have a measure of the Holy Spirit, and to know a good deal of Christ, but to be wholly filled with, and possessed by, the Holy Spirit, and utterly lost in the life and fullness of Jesus. It is the completeness of the filling which constitutes the very essence of the perfect blessing. A fountain half full will never become a spring. A river half full will never become a water power. A heart half filled will never know "the peace of God which passeth all understanding" (Phil. 4:7) and the power which flows from the inmost being, as "rivers of living water" (John 7:38).

The Nature of the Filling

1. The filling is all connected with a living Person. We are not filled with an influence; we are not filled with a sensation; we are not filled with a set of ideas and truths; we are not filled with a blessing, but we are filled with a Person. This is very strange and striking. It is wholly different from all other teaching. Human systems of philosophy and religion all deal mainly with intellectual truths, moral conditions or external acts. Greek philosophy was a system of ideas; Confucianism is a system of morals; Judaism is a system of laws and ceremonies; Christianity all centers in a living Person, and its very essence is the indwelling life of Christ Himself. He was not only its Head and Founder, but He is forever its living Heart and Substance, and the Holy Spirit is simply the agent and channel through whom He enters, possesses and operates in the consecrated heart. This reduces Christian life to great simplicity. We do not require to get filled in a great many compartments, and with a great many different experiences, ideas, or influences, but, in the center of our being to receive Him in His personal life and fullness, and then He flows into every part and lives out His own life in all the diversified experiences and activities of our manifold life.

Shall we then realize, beloved, that God has made each of us, not a self-contained world of power and perfection, but simply a capacity to receive Him, a shell to hold His fullness, a soil to receive His Living Seed and fertilizing streams, and to produce, in union with Him, the fruits of grace? And shall we realize, on the other hand, that God has so constituted Christ and the Holy Spirit, who is the Spirit of Christ, as perfectly to meet and satisfy the capacities and possibilities of our being; so that, while we are nothing without Him, His life and grace equally require us for their full development? Into His living Son God has poured all His fullness, so that "in Him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily" (Col. 2:9). The Holy Spirit has now become the great Reservoir and system of distributing pipes and channels through which His fullness flows into us, and there is nothing which God requires of a man, or which man can ever need in the varied exigencies of life but Christ possesses for us, and we may have an exact adjustment to our every need, by simply receiving Him. This is the meaning of that beautiful expression, "Of His fulness have all we received, even grace for grace. For the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ" (John 1:16-17). All other systems gave us merely the ideas of things or the commandments or laws which require them of us. But Christ brings the power to realize them and is Himself the reality and substance in our hearts and lives. He is the Great Typical Man. But He is more than a pattern or a type, exhibiting what we ought to be, and demanding our imitation. He is also the Living Head and Progenitor of the very life which He Himself exhibits, begetting it in each of us by a living impartation of His very being, and reproducing Himself in us by the very power of His own life, and then feeding and nourishing this life by the Holy Spirit out of His own being.

Christ's Person, therefore is the very substance and support of the life He requires of us.

2. Christ is the true fullness of every part of our life. The idea of filling implies universality and completeness in the range within which He fills us. We are not filled unless we are filled in every part. This is just what Christ proposes to do in our full salvation.

He fills all the requirements of our salvation, all the conditions involved in connection with our redemption, reconciliation, justification. He just takes the indictment against us and fills it in with His own precious atonement, and in His own blood writes, "Settled forever." He takes the broken law and the sad and humiliating record of our failures,

omissions and transgressions, and fills it up with its own perfect righteousness and writes over all our record, "Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth" (Rom. 10:4); "Accepted in the Beloved" (Eph. 1:6); "He hath made Him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him" (2 Cor. 5:21).

And so we "are complete in Him" (Col. 2:10). "By one offering He hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified" (Heb. 10:14), and we are as fully saved as if we had never sinned.

Now, beloved, the great thing is to realize right here that this is complete, and, at the very threshold, to begin to enter into the fullness of Christ by recognizing ourselves as fully justified and forever saved from all past sin and transgression through the complete redemption of Jesus Christ. The lack of fullness in our subsequent experience is largely due to doubts and limitations which we allow to enter here. Christ's work for our redemption was finished, and when we accept it, it is a complete and eternal salvation.

Again, Christ fills the deeper need of sanctification. He has provided for this in His atonement and in the resources of His grace. It is all wrapped up in Him, and must be received as a free and perfect gift through Him alone. "But of Him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us...sanctification" (1 Cor. 1:30). Is sanctification the death of the sinful self? Well, this has been crucified with Him already upon the Cross, and we have but to hand it over to Him in unreserved committal, and He will slay it and bury it forever in His grave. Is sanctification a new life of purity, righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit? Still more emphatically it is true that Christ Himself must be our life, our peace, our purity, and our full and overflowing joy.

Again, He is the fullness of our heart life. There is no place so sacred to us as our affections, no place so claimed by the great adversary of our souls, and so impossible to regulate by our own power and will. But Christ will give us His heart as well as His Spirit, and will love in us with the love which loves the Lord our God with all our heart and soul and strength and mind (Luke 10:27), and which loves one another even as He has loved us (John 13:34; 15:12). Oh, how blessed that we have One who will really fill all the delicate and infinitely difficult and varied requirements of these sensibilities and affections, which carry with them such a world of possibility for our own or others' weal or woe.

Again, Christ will fill all the needs of our intellectual life. Our mental capacities will never know their full wealth of power and spiritual effectiveness until they become simply the vessels of His quickening life, and these brains of ours are laid at His feet simply as the censers which are to hold His holy fire. He will think in us, remember in us, judge in us, impart definiteness and clearness to our conceptions of truth, give us the tongue of fire, the illustration that both illuminates and melts, the accent and tone of persuasiveness and sympathy, the power of quick expression and utterance, and all the equipment necessary to make us workmen "that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth" (2 Tim. 2:15). Not of course without diligent and faithful attention to His wise and holy teaching, as He leads us in His work to see at once our own shortcomings and His full purpose for us. We must be taught of God, and teaching is sometimes very gradual, and even slow; but "He will guide into all truth" (John 16:13), and "perfect that which concerneth" (Psa. 138:8) our education and preparation for His work and will; and the mind that the Holy Spirit quickens and uses shall accomplish results for God which all the brilliancy of human genius and the scholarship of human learning can never approach.

Again, He will fill the needs of our body, for His body has been constituted, by the resurrection from the dead, a perpetual source of physical energy, sufficient for every member of His body the church, and adapted to every physical function and every test that comes in the pressure of human life, and the experience of a world where every step is beset with the elements of disease, suffering and physical danger. Christ is the true life of a redeemed body, and His Holy Spirit is able so to quicken these mortal bodies, as He dwells within us, that they shall receive a supernatural vigor directly derived from our exalted Head.

Again, Christ will fill all the situations of providence and all the needs that arise in our secular callings and the circumstances of our daily life. There is not one of them that may not be recognized as coming from Him, and meant to prove His all-sufficiency in some new direction. Oh, had we the faith to see God in everything as it meets us day by day, every chapter of life's history would be a new story of the romance of heavenly love in its power to transform darkness into light, difficulty into triumph, sorrow into joy, and the earthly into the heavenly; and Christ would be enabled to manifest Himself in His grace and power to innumerable witnesses, who never hear of Him from a pulpit, or read the story of His grace in anything else but human lives, in whom they could thus behold Him.

Again, Christ will fill our capacities for happiness. He is the fullness of our peace and joy. He is the true portion of the

souls that He has made; and, wholly filled with Him, there is no room for either care or fear.

Finally, Christ will fill that fundamental need on which every other experience of His fullness depends, namely, the faith that receives Him. This too, is but the life of Christ within us, and our highest part in the life of faith is to so abandon even our highest and hardest efforts to trust God, and so boldly venture that we can receive the very faith of God and claim the "all things are possible to him that believeth" (Mark 9:23).

3. To be filled with Christ is not only to be filled with the Divine life in every part, but it is to be filled every moment. It is to take Him into the successive instants of our conscious existence and to abide in His fullness. For this is not a reservoir but a spring. It is a life which is continual, active and ever passing on with an outflow as necessary as its inflow, and if we do not perpetually draw the fresh supply from the living fountain, we shall either grow stagnant or empty. It is, therefore, not so much a perpetual fullness as a perpetual filling.

It is true there are periodical experiences of spiritual elevation which are part of God's plan for our life in Christ, and are designed no doubt to lift us to a higher plane of abiding union with Him. There are the Pentecosts and second Pentecosts, the great freshets and flood-tides, all of which have their necessary place in the spiritual economy. But there is the continual receiving, breath by breath and moment by moment, between these long intervals and more marked experiences, which is even more needful to spiritual steadfastness and healthfulness. God would have us alive to all His approaches, and open to all the "precious things of heaven, for the dew, and for the deep that coucheth beneath, and for the precious fruits brought forth by the sun, and for the precious things put forth by the moon...and for the precious things of the earth and fulness thereof" (Deut. 33:13-16). Such lives will find that there is no moment of existence, and no part of our being which may not be some minister of God and draw some blessing from Him.

The Effects of the Divine Filling

1. It is the secret of holiness. There is a measure of the Holy Spirit's life in every regenerate soul, but it is when every part of our being is filled with His love and possessed for His glory that we are wholly sanctified, and it is this divine fullness which excludes and keeps out the power of sin and self, even as it was the descending cloud upon the tabernacle which left no room for Moses within.

Would you have continual purity of heart and thought and feeling, and entire conformity to the will of God? "Be filled with the Spirit" (Eph. 5:18); "Of His fulness have all we received, and grace for grace" (John 1:16). Let the heavenly water flow into every channel of irrigation and by every garden bed and plant, until all the graces of our Christian life shall be replenished by His grace, and bloom like the garden of the Lord. Only abide in Him and have His abiding, and you shall bring forth all the fruit of the Spirit.

2. It is the secret of happiness. A heart half full is only full enough to make it conscious of its lack. It is when the cattle are filled that they lie down in the green pastures. "These things have I spoken unto you, that My joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full" (John 15:11).

3. It is the secret of power. The electric current can so fill a little wire that it will become a force to turn the great wheels of the factory, and the overflowing sluice of the village stream has power enough to run a score of factories all along the river banks, but it is simply because it is overflowing. Only full hearts accomplish effectual work for God. Only the overflow of our blessing blesses others.

The Conditions of Being Filled

1. He has promised to fill the hungry. "Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled" (Matt. 5:6). Many who read these lines are no doubt longing for this experience and thinking with discouragement of how far short they come. Dear friend, this deep desire is the very beginning of the blessing you seek, and already the Holy Spirit is at work preparing your heart for the answer to your cry. No soul finds the fullness of Jesus so speedily as the one that is most deeply conscious of its failure and its needs. Thank God for that intense desire that will not let you rest short of His blessing. Follow it as it leads you to the throne of grace, to wait, and cry, and receive, until you can say, "Satisfied with favor, and full with the blessing of the Lord" (Deut. 33:23).

2. The empty are always filled. "He hath filled the hungry with good things; and the rich He hath sent empty away" (Luke 1:53). "Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 5:3). "Having nothing, and yet possessing all things" (2 Cor. 6:10). This is the paradox of grace. We never can be filled until we have room for God. Every grace

at blessing begins with a great sacrifice, a great severance, a great dispossessing. "He brought out...that He might bring in" (Deut. 6:23). Abraham must let Lot have his choice before he can have his full inheritance. Isaac must be offered on Mount Moriah before God can make it the seat of His future temple. Moses must let go the honors and prospects of his Egyptian principedom before he can receive his great commission, the lasting honor of his life work. The heart must be emptied of self and the world before it can be filled with Jesus and the Holy Spirit.

Probably each of us is as full as we can hold, because the places God does not fill are crammed with something else and God finds no room. Are we willing to be emptied? "Make this valley full of ditches," is still the prophet's command, "yet the valley shall be filled with water" (2 Kgs. 3:16-17). Are we in the valley of humiliation, and have we opened in the valley the still deeper ditches of need and conscious insufficiency? In proportion as we can say, "I am not sufficient," we shall be able to add, "My sufficiency is of God." Have we not only emptied out the old pirate self-will and his crew of worldliness and sin, but also all the cargo of our own strength, faith and religious experience, and made room for Christ to be our All and in all always? Do we habitually cease from ourselves in everything and thus make it necessary for God to assume the responsibility and supply the proficiency, and in this spirit of self-renunciation and absolute dependence are we growing poorer and richer every day?

3. The open heart shall be filled. "Open thy mouth wide, and I will fill it" (Psa. 81:10). We know what it is for the flower-cup to close its petals and also to open to the sunlight, the dew and the refreshing shower. The heart has its susceptibilities and receptive sensibilities, but often it is so tightened up with unbelief, doubt, fear, and self-consciousness that it can not take in the love which God is waiting to pour out.

There seems no avenue to the dull earthly heart, and even the love of God has cause to exclaim, "How often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!" (Matt. 23:37). I have seen a man dying for months simply because he could not swallow more than a single grain of food or spray of moisture. Many a Christian's spiritual larynx is just as shrunken, and millions are starving to death in the midst of plenty, because their hearts are not open to receive God. There must be confidence, trust, the love that draws near and takes, the faith that accepts and receives, and the quietness of spirit that stays long enough open to be wholly filled.

4. Again, we are filled by waiting upon the Lord in prayer, and especially in continued and persevering prayer. It was after they had waited upon the Lord that they were all filled with the Holy Spirit. Prayer is not only an asking but also a receiving. Many of us do not wait long enough before the Lord to get filled. You can take your breakfast in half an hour, but you cannot be filled with the Holy Spirit as quickly. There should be seasons of special waiting upon the Lord for this very purpose, and then there should be a ceaseless abiding in the Lord for the quiet replenishing, moment by moment. The one may be compared to the great rain storms that flood the river, and the other to the ceaseless moisture of the air and the morning and evening dews. No child of God who in a proper spirit, and with an entire self-surrender and trust, waits upon God for the full baptism of His Holy Spirit, will ever be disappointed, but we shall surely go forth from such seasons refreshed and overflowing with the love and life of God, and will find that special influences of power and blessing will follow such seasons, both in our own lives and the lives of others.

5. Service for God and for others is perhaps the most effectual condition of receiving continually the fullness of the Spirit. As we pour out the blessing God will pour it in.

We can always tell in the church of God when it is not full. There are some Christians whose overflow is so feeble and infrequent that it would scarcely furnish one good drink to a poor thirsty wayfarer.

Beloved, let us keep pouring out more of God's blessing and see if He will not more abundantly pour in the floods of His grace. Let us be very practical about this. Every blessing that we have received from God is a sacred trust, and it will be continued only as we use it for Him. Our salvation is not our own; it belongs to every perishing soul on the face of the globe who has not yet had the opportunity of accepting Jesus. Our sanctification and our great secret of the fullness of Jesus is a sacred trust for every Christian who has not yet received the fullness of God, and if we do not let this light shine, it will surely become obscure and we will not be able to tell out the story of our blessing. Our healing belongs to some sufferer. Our every experience is adjusted to some heart, and will enable us to meet some brother's need if we are but faithful to the opportunities of God's providence. Oh, how clear a truth becomes to us when we are trying to tell it to others! Oh, how real the baptism of the Holy Spirit when we are kneeling by another's side to claim it for them! Oh, how the streams of Christ's healing flow through our very flesh as we are leading some poor sufferer into the truth! Oh, how the joy of our salvation swells as we see it spring in the heart that we have just led to the fountain! Oh, the fullness that God is longing to share with every vessel that has room to receive it and readiness to give! As we have therefore received His fullness let us pass it on, drinking as the living waters flow through our hands, until we shall realize in s

ome measure, the largeness and blessedness of the great promise of the Lord, "If any man thirst, let him come unto Me, and drink. He that believeth on Me, as the Scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water" (John 7:37-38).

Taken from A Larger Christian Life by A. B. Simpson.