

SPIRIT-FILLING IN EPHESIANS 5:18

by
William W. Combs¹

*And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation,
but be filled with the Spirit (Eph 5:18)*²

When Paul tells the Ephesians to “be filled with the Spirit” in Ephesians 5:18, he uses a verb (πληροῦσθε) in the imperative mood that is universally understood to be an exhortation³ or command.⁴ The difference between the two is sometimes negligible, as one suspects would be the case when an apostle addresses believers.⁵ An exhortation or request from an apostle would generally seem to have the force of a command for believers under his authority. Thus we can rightfully consider it a requirement for Paul’s readers, as well as us today. Unfortunately, contrary to what some might believe, exactly what Paul means by being “filled with the Spirit” is difficult to ascertain, as is demonstrated by the

¹Dr. Combs is Academic Dean and Professor of New Testament at Detroit Baptist Theological Seminary in Allen Park, MI.

²All Scripture references in English are from the *New American Standard Bible*, 1995 edition.

³Peter T. O’Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 386; John P. Heil, *Ephesians: Empowerment to Walk in Love for the Unity of All in Christ* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2007), 233; Clinton E. Arnold, *Ephesians*, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 344.

⁴John F. Walvoord, *The Holy Spirit* (reprint of 1958 ed., Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1970), 193; William MacDonald, *Ephesians: The Mystery of the Church* (Wheaton, IL: Harold Shaw Publishers, 1968), 117; Homer A. Kent, Jr., *Ephesians: The Glory of the Church*, Everyman’s Bible Commentary (Chicago: Moody Press, 1971), 96; Curtis Vaughan, *Ephesians* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1977), 111; Chip Anderson, “Rethinking ‘Be Filled with the Spirit’: Ephesians 5:18 and the Purpose of Ephesians,” *Evangelical Journal* 7 (Fall 1989): 62; Andrew T. Lincoln, *Ephesians*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, 1990), 344; Klyne Snodgrass, *Ephesians*, NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 289; Walter L. Liefeld, *Ephesians*, IVP New Testament Commentary Series (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1997), 134; Robert Gromacki, *The Holy Spirit* (Nashville: Word, 1999), 185; Henry Holloman, *The Forgotten Blessing* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1999), 85; Harold W. Hoehner, *Ephesians* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002), 702; Frank Thielman, *Ephesians*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2010), 357; Larry R. Oats, “Filled with or Full of the Spirit: Acts and Ephesians,” *Maranatha Baptist Theological Journal* 1 (Fall 2011): 197.

⁵See the discussion by Daniel B. Wallace (*Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996], 485–88).

numerous, varied interpretations of the apostle's language. This may be at least partly due, as Hollis notes, to the fact that "the exact phrase πληροῦσθε ἐν πνεύματι occurs nowhere else in Greek literature, except for quotations of Eph 5:18 in the church fathers."⁶ But before delving into the meaning of the text itself, I will review the contemporary and historical emphasis (or lack thereof) that this text has enjoyed.

CONTEMPORARY EMPHASIS

This command to be filled with the Spirit is commonly seen as an essential element, if not the primary element, in the believer's sanctification. In critiquing Anthony Hoekema's chapter on sanctification in *Five Views on Sanctification*, John Walvoord says: "Hoekema strangely omits any reference to or discussion of either the filling of the Spirit or the baptism of the Spirit. In the Augustinian-dispensational perspective, the filling of the Spirit is the secret of sanctification."⁷ In another place Walvoord says: "From the standpoint of practical value to the individual Christian, no field of doctrine relating to the Holy Spirit is more vital than the subject of the filling of the Spirit."⁸ Great emphasis is often placed on the need for the filling of the Holy Spirit in evangelical literature. Lewis S. Chafer and John Walvoord observe: "Undoubtedly the experience of being filled with the Spirit for the first time is a very dramatic one in the life of a Christian and may be a milestone which elevates Christian experience to a new plateau."⁹ Similar comments are expressed by J. Dwight Pentecost¹⁰ and Charles Ryrie.¹¹ John MacArthur calls Ephesians 5:18 "one of the most crucial texts relating to Christian living.... Being controlled by the Holy Spirit is absolutely essential for living the Christian life by God's standards."¹² This stress on the need to be filled with the Spirit has been a common theme in evangelical preaching.

⁶Wendall Hollis, "Become Full in the Spirit: A Linguistic, Contextual, and Theological Study of ΠΛΗΡΟΥΣΘΕ 'ΕΝ ΠΝΕΥΜΑΤΙ" (Ph.D. dissertation, Trinity International University, 2001), 169. This is from a search of the Thesaurus Linguae Graecae database.

⁷"Response to Hoekema," in *Five Views on Sanctification* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1987), 101.

⁸*The Holy Spirit*, 189.

⁹Lewis S. Chafer, *Major Bible Themes*, rev. John F. Walvoord (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1974), 117.

¹⁰*The Divine Comforter: The Person and Work of the Holy Spirit* (Westwood, NJ: Revell, 1963), 154.

¹¹*The Holy Spirit*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: Moody Press, 1997), 155.

¹²*Ephesians* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1986), 229.

HISTORICAL EMPHASIS

In contrast to the contemporary emphasis on Paul's command to be filled with the Spirit, there appears to be little discussion of Paul's words in most of church history.¹³ If one searches the standard editions of the ante-Nicene, Nicene, and post-Nicene fathers, there are a few references to Ephesians 5:18, but they almost exclusively relate to the prohibition on drunkenness in the first part of the verse.¹⁴ Chrysostom does make a brief comment that will be discussed later. Probably the most definitive work on the Holy Spirit in the early church, *On the Holy Spirit* by Basil the Great (330–379), seems to make no mention of the subject. The greatest theologian in the early church, Augustine (354–430), appears not to have discussed our verse.

Peter Lombard (c. 1096–c. 1160) wrote what became the standard theological textbook in the Middle Ages, his *Four Books of Sentences*.¹⁵ Yet he apparently never mentions Ephesians 5:18. The greatest scholastic theologian, Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274), in his famous *Summa Theologica* mentions our text twice, both in passing, once when discussing fasting¹⁶ and second when discussing lust.¹⁷ In neither case is the filling of the Holy Spirit emphasized.

Martin Luther (1483–1546) mentions Ephesians 5:18 a few times in his *Works*, mostly when making reference to the problem of drunkenness. On one occasion he quotes the verse and compares it with Acts 2:4, where the apostles are said to be “filled with the Holy Spirit.”¹⁸ No actual explanation of the verse is given. John Calvin (1509–1564) never appears to reference Ephesians 5:18 in his *Institutes*.¹⁹ In his commentary on Ephesians, he has only a few words to say about 5:18, and these are almost exclusively reserved for the dangers of drunkenness. Only in passing does he say that the filling refers to spiritual joy produced by the

¹³Hollis observes that “historically, Eph 5:18 is not an important verse” (“Become Full in the Spirit,” 8). He goes on to say that “Eph 5:18 is rarely referred to, or commented on, by church fathers, teachers, or commentators, until the sixteenth century” (ibid., 8, n. 1).

¹⁴*The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, Accordance electronic ed., version 2.2, n.d.; *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, ed. Philip Schaff, 1st series, Accordance electronic ed., version 2.3, n.d.; *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, ed. Philip Schaff, 2nd series, Accordance electronic ed., version 2.3, n.d.

¹⁵*The Sentences*, 4 vols., trans. Giulio Silano (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 2007–2010).

¹⁶*Summa Theologica*, 5 vols., trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province (Notre Dame, IN: Christian Classics), 3:1786.

¹⁷Ibid., 4:1806.

¹⁸Robert Pelikan, ed., “Lectures on Genesis,” in vol. 8 of *Luther's Works* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1966), 248.

¹⁹Eph 5:18 is not included in the Scripture index of the McNeill edition. John T. McNeill, *Calvin: Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 2 vols., Library of Christian Classics (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960).

Holy Spirit.²⁰ James Arminius (1560–1609) never seems to address our text in his *Writings*.²¹ Similarly, Francis Turretin (1623–1687) does not discuss the text in his *Theology*.²² John Owen (1616–1683), who is often regarded as the greatest of the Puritan theologians, references Ephesians 5:18 only once in his voluminous writings. He notes that Paul advises us to be filled with the Spirit, and suggests that what this means is that the believer is filled “with holy, spiritual thoughts.”²³ Jonathan Edwards (1703–1758), who has often been called America’s greatest theologian, mentions Ephesians 5:18 in his published *Works*, but does not interact to any degree with its meaning.²⁴

The reason for the preceding survey is an attempt to demonstrate that throughout most of church history the command to be filled with the Spirit in Ephesians 5:18 seems not to have garnered much attention from some of the most important theological minds in the church. Paul’s command to be filled with the Spirit was apparently never viewed as an essential requirement in the believer’s relationship to God. There was apparently no particular emphasis on the filling of the Holy Spirit as an important element in the believer’s sanctification. This all changed in the nineteenth century.

REASON FOR THE CONTEMPORARY EMPHASIS

Today’s emphasis on the filling of the Holy Spirit had its birth pangs in the theology of John Wesley (1703–1791), the founder of Methodism, who developed a distinct doctrine of sanctification that he called “Christian perfection,” “perfect love” (1 John 4:18), “entire sanctification,” “full salvation,” and the “second blessing.”²⁵ Wesley believed that this work of entire sanctification happens instantly by “a simple act of faith.”²⁶ He did not actually tie entire sanctification to the work of the Holy Spirit, but John Fletcher (1729–1785), whom Wesley wanted

²⁰*The Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians and Colossians*, trans. T. H. L. Parker (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965), 203.

²¹*The Writings of James Arminius*, 3 vols., trans. James Nichols and W. R. Bagnall (reprint ed., Grand Rapids: Baker, 1977).

²²*Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, 3 vols., trans. George M. Giger, ed. James T. Dennison, Jr. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 1992–1997).

²³*The Works of John Owen*, ed. William H. Goold (1965 reprint ed., London: Banner of Truth, 1965), 300.

²⁴E.g., *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 24, ed. Stephen J. Stein (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press), 1103.

²⁵For a more extensive historical survey than what is given in this essay, see William W. Combs, “The Disjunction Between Justification and Sanctification in Contemporary Evangelical Theology,” *Detroit Baptist Seminary Journal* 6 (Fall 2001): 19–33, and Andrew D. Naselli, *Let Go and Let God? A Survey and Analysis of Keswick Theology* (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2010), 76–169.

²⁶*The Works of John Wesley*, 3rd ed. (reprint of 1872 ed., Grand Rapids: Baker, 1978), 11:446.

to be his successor, commonly spoke of the experience as the “baptism” or “filling of the Holy Spirit,” and Wesley never disapproved of Fletcher’s teaching.²⁷

Charles Finney (1792–1875) and his colleague at Oberlin College, Asa Mahan (1799–1889), adopted the Wesleyan doctrine of entire sanctification. “They taught a doctrine of perfectionism made possible by the baptism of the Holy Spirit, which empowered and perfected the will of the believer to act in conformity with the will of God.”²⁸ Mahan believed that there were thus two kinds of Christians: a lower kind who had received only justification—the carnal Christian, and a higher kind who had also received sanctification—the spiritual Christian.²⁹ Finney and Mahan adopted their perfectionist theology from Methodism, and they were influential in promoting a connection between entire sanctification and the baptism or filling of the Holy Spirit among Methodists in the first half of the nineteenth century.³⁰

This doctrine of entire sanctification by the filling or baptism of the Holy Spirit was popularized by a Methodist lay couple, Phoebe (1807–1874) and Walter Palmer. Beginning in 1840 she and her husband embarked on an itinerant ministry that eventually took them throughout the United States, Canada, and the British Isles, spreading their new-found faith. The teachings found in her book *The Way of Holiness* (1843) and her periodical *The Guide to Holiness* (first called *The Guide to Christian Perfection*) were influential in establishing what became known as the Holiness Movement. Mrs. Palmer followed the Oberlin Theology and John Fletcher in their identification of entire sanctification with the baptism of the Holy Spirit.³¹ She also emphasized that entire sanctification was an endowment of divine power for service, linking holiness with power.³² Her theology was adopted by holiness denominations such as the Wesleyan Methodists, the Free Methodists and the Church of the Nazarene, as well as the Salvation Army and the Keswick Movement in England.³³

²⁷John A. Knight, “John Fletcher’s Influence on the Development of Wesleyan Theology in America,” *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 13 (Spring 1978): 27.

²⁸*Dictionary of Christianity in America*, s.v. “Perfectionism,” by R. J. Green, 892.

²⁹B. B. Warfield, *Perfectionism* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1958), 67, 107. This is a condensed edition of Warfield’s *Studies in Perfectionism*, 2 vols. (New York: Oxford, 1931).

³⁰Timothy L. Smith, “The Doctrine of the Sanctifying Spirit: Charles G. Finney’s Synthesis of Wesleyan and Covenant Theology,” *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 13 (Spring 1978): 106.

³¹*Ibid.*

³²Charles E. White, “Phoebe Palmer and the Development of Pentecostal Pneumatology,” *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 23 (Spring–Fall 1988): 201.

³³*Dictionary of Christianity in America*, s.v. “Palmer, Phoebe Worrall,” by C. E. White, 861.

Outside Methodist circles, the Holiness Movement was known as the Higher Life Movement. William E. Boardman (1810–1886), a Presbyterian minister, succeeded in opening the doors of non-Methodist churches to Holiness teaching through his ministry and especially his book *The Higher Christian Life* (1858). Boardman had been influenced by the writings of Finney and Mahan as well as Phoebe Palmer.³⁴ Like all Holiness advocates, Boardman believed in a “full salvation” or “second conversion” that is separated into two distinct parts—justification and sanctification—which are received by two distinct acts of faith.³⁵ Later in his life Boardman identified this second work of grace as the baptism of the Holy Spirit.³⁶ Higher Life teachers moved away from the Wesleyan view that sin is entirely eradicated from the believer in the second blessing, preferring to speak of the believer’s dominion or victory over sin that results in deliverance from all conscious sinning.³⁷ Also instrumental in spreading Holiness teaching outside Methodist circles, especially in Europe, were Robert Pearsall Smith (1827–1899) and his wife, Hannah Whitall Smith (1832–1911). In 1875 Mrs. Smith produced her widely read *The Christian’s Secret of a Happy Life*, which probably became the most popularly read book advocating Holiness, second-blessing theology. She tied this experience to the command to be filled with the Spirit in Ephesians 5:18.³⁸ In 1873 the Smiths were in England for a series of meetings with William E. Boardman and Asa Mahan that produced large results for the Holiness cause.³⁹

A series of breakfast meetings designed to promote Holiness teaching during Dwight L. Moody’s 1873 London campaign led to what is known as the Keswick or Victorious Life Movement. These meetings were led by Robert and Hannah Smith and included other Holiness leaders like William E. Boardman and Asa Mahan. One of the converts to the Victorious Life at these meetings was Rev. T. D. Harford-Battersby, Vicar of St. John’s, Keswick, a parish in the lake district of northwest England. He organized a conference for July of 1875 that was held in a tent on his church grounds with about three or four hundred attending. The meeting was led by H. W. Webb-Peploe, a Church

³⁴*Dictionary of Christianity in America*, s.v. “Boardman, William Edwin,” by W. S. Gunter, 170.

³⁵*The Higher Christian Life* (reprint of 1858 ed., New York: Garland Publishing, 1984), vi–vii, 94.

³⁶W. E. Boardman, *In the Power of the Spirit: or, Christian Experience in the Light of the Bible* (London: Daldy, Isbister, & Co., 1875). See Warfield, *Perfectionism*, 229, n. 39, and Naselli, *Let God and Let God?* 102.

³⁷Warfield, *Perfectionism*, 238.

³⁸*The Christian’s Secret of a Happy Life*, rev. ed. (Boston: Willard Tract Repository, 1885), 244.

³⁹*Dictionary of Christianity in America*, s.v. “Smith, Robert Pearsall,” by W. S. Gunter, 1098.

of England clergyman. Through his influence, the Keswick movement turned away from Methodist-type perfectionism, which taught the eradication of the sinful nature in this life.⁴⁰ Keswick teaching denied that the believer's tendency to sin is extinguished or eradicated, but, instead, is merely counteracted by the Holy Spirit.⁴¹ But as long as the believer is filled with the Spirit, he can still be free from committing any known sin.⁴² Though some who were associated with the movement (e.g., Moody and R. A. Torrey) continued to use the popular Holiness terminology "baptism of the Holy Spirit" for this second work of grace, most Keswick teachers preferred the term *filling*.

This emphasis on the filling of the Holy Spirit in sanctification became a dominant theme in the twentieth century with the spread of Keswick in America through Moody's Northfield Conferences in Massachusetts. James M. Gray (1851–1935), who was the successor to Moody and Torrey, took over leadership of Moody Bible Institute in 1904.⁴³ He was influential in moving Moody away from "from its early roots in holiness theology and directed it more towards the idea of 'victorious living' embodied in the Keswick movement,"⁴⁴ which teaching can be seen in his tract *Entire Sanctification: What It Is and What It Is Not*.⁴⁵ Gray contends the believer's filling provides power for "a life of victory over every known sin," and thus is obviously essential to the believer's sanctification.⁴⁶ This Keswick theology with its emphasis on the filling of the Holy Spirit was passed on to thousands of Moody graduates.

Equally important in spreading the Keswick emphasis on the filling of the Spirit was C. I. Scofield (1843–1921). After his conversion in 1879, he came under the Keswick teaching of James H. Brookes (1830–1897) and became friends with Dwight L. Moody.⁴⁷ In 1899 he published his *Plain Papers on the Doctrine of the Holy Spirit*, in which he argues that one must obey the command to be filled with Spirit in Ephesians 5:18 if one is to experience "blessing, victory, and power" in

⁴⁰George M. Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), 77–78.

⁴¹Steven Barabas, *So Great Salvation: The History and Message of the Keswick Convention* (London: Marshall, Morgan and Scott, 1952), 94.

⁴²*Ibid.*, 99.

⁴³*Dictionary of Christianity in America*, s.v. "Gray, James Martin," by A. C. Guelzo, 494.

⁴⁴*Biographical Dictionary of Evangelicals*, s.v. "Gray, James Martin," by T. Gloege, 267.

⁴⁵(Chicago: Moody Bible Institute, n.d.).

⁴⁶*Ibid.*, 8. Similarly, see his *The Holy Spirit in Doctrine and Life* (New York: Revell, 1936), 59.

⁴⁷Mark A. Snoberger, "Second Blessing Models of Sanctification and Early Dallas Dispensationalism," *The Master's Seminary Journal* 15 (Spring 2004): 101; Charles G. Trumbull, *The Life Story of C. I. Scofield* (New York: Oxford University, 1920), 32–35.

the Christian life.⁴⁸ This requirement to be filled with the Spirit (“the believer’s privilege and duty”) became part of essential Christian doctrine for millions of believers when it was incorporated into Scofield’s 1909 *Reference Bible*.⁴⁹

One might argue that greatest impetus for the contemporary emphasis on the filling of the Holy Spirit has come from the theology of Lewis Sperry Chafer (1871–1952) and his disciples. Chafer attended Oberlin College, but his major theological influence came from his association with C. I. Scofield, whom he met in 1901 while Scofield was teaching at Moody’s Northfield Training School.⁵⁰ At the Northfield Bible conferences Chafer’s perspective on sanctification was shaped by various Victorious Life teachers he heard there.⁵¹ Later, with the help of W. H. Griffith Thomas, Chafer started Dallas Theological Seminary (originally Evangelical Theological College) in 1924, the theology of which was distinctively Keswick.⁵² According to Chafer, all new Christians are carnal Christians, who can move out of their carnal state and begin the process of sanctification only through the filling of the Holy Spirit.⁵³ Dallas teachers and graduates have spread this idea throughout evangelical circles.

Believers today continue to hear teaching and preaching that places special emphasis on the need to be filled with the Spirit, suggesting that it is the most important element in their sanctification. For example, Ryrie says: “From the viewpoint of Christian living, the filling with the Spirit is probably the most important aspect of the doctrine of the Holy Spirit.”⁵⁴ Hoekema argues: “There is nothing the church needs more today than to be filled with the Spirit of God. Such fullness is the most important key to victorious Christian living and to a radiant Christian witness.”⁵⁵ MacArthur adds: “Being filled with the Holy Spirit is not an option for believers but a mandate. No Christian can fulfill God’s will for his life apart from being filled with His Spirit.”⁵⁶ “To resist the

⁴⁸*A Mighty Wind: Plain Papers on the Doctrine of the Holy Spirit* (reprint of 1899 ed., Grand Rapids: Baker, 1973), 62.

⁴⁹*The Scofield Reference Bible* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1909), 1149.

⁵⁰*Dictionary of Christianity in America*, s.v. “Chafer, Lewis Sperry,” by J. D. Hannah, 238. See also John D. Hannah, “The Early Years of Lewis Sperry Chafer,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 144 (January–March 1987): 16–23.

⁵¹Randall Gleason, “B. B. Warfield and Lewis S. Chafer on Sanctification,” *Journal of the Evangelical Society* 40 (June 1997): 243.

⁵²*Dictionary of Christianity in America*, s.v. “Chafer, Lewis Sperry,” 238. This is the opinion of John Hannah, who for many years was chairman of the church history department at Dallas.

⁵³Lewis S. Chafer, *He That Is Spiritual* (Philadelphia: Sunday School Times, 1919), 39–40.

⁵⁴*The Holy Spirit*, 155.

⁵⁵Anthony A. Hoekema, *Holy Spirit Baptism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972), 79.

⁵⁶*Ephesians*, 248.

filling and control of the Holy Spirit is flagrant disobedience, and to deny or minimize its importance is to stand rebelliously against the clear teaching of God's own Word."⁵⁷ Thus it can be seen that the need for the believer to be filled with the Spirit is thought to be of utmost importance. In order to determine if this level of emphasis is warranted, we will next examine the scriptural data.

THE SCRIPTURAL DATA

Outside the single instance in Ephesians 5:18, all other references to the filling of the Holy Spirit occur in Luke-Acts, a total of fourteen times. Two different word groups are used: *πίμπλημι* and *πληρώω/πλήρης*). Though both word groups are derived from the common root *πλη* ("full, fullness"⁵⁸), they are used by Luke in two clearly distinguishable senses when they involve the Holy Spirit, sometimes designated as (1) special filling and (2) fullness or ordinary filling.⁵⁹

Special Filling

<i>πίμπλημι</i>		
Luke 1:15	ἔσται γὰρ μέγας ἐνώπιον [τοῦ] κυρίου, καὶ οἶνον καὶ σίκερα οὐ μὴ πῖνῃ, καὶ πνεύματος ἁγίου πλησθήσεται ἔτι ἐκ κοιλίας μητρὸς αὐτοῦ, ⁶⁰	"For he will be great in the sight of the Lord, and he will drink no wine or liquor; and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit, while yet in his mother's womb."
Luke 1:41	καὶ ἐγένετο ὡς ἤκουσεν τὸν ἄσπασμόν τῆς Μαρίας ἡ Ἐλισάβετ, ἐσκίρτησεν τὸ βρέφος ἐν τῇ κοιλίᾳ αὐτῆς, καὶ ἐπλήσθη πνεύματος ἁγίου ἡ Ἐλισάβετ,	And it came about that when Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby leaped in her womb; and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit.

⁵⁷Ibid., 249.

⁵⁸*New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, s.v. "Fullness: *πληρώω*," by R. Schippers, 733.

⁵⁹Timothy D. Crater, "The Filling of the Spirit in the Greek New Testament" (Th.M. thesis, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1971), 14–48; Dwight A. Ekholm, "The Doctrine of the Christian's Walk in the Spirit" (Th.M. thesis, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1973), 37–46; William E. Arp, "An Interpretation of 'Be Filled in Spirit' in Ephesians 5:18," (Th.D. dissertation, Grace Theological Seminary, 1983), 61–79; Richard G. Fairman, "An Exegesis of 'Filling' Texts Which Refer to the Doctrine of Filling" (Th.D. dissertation, Grace Theological Seminary, 1986), 287–88; Larry D. Pettegrew, *The New Covenant Ministry of the Holy Spirit*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2001), 197–201; Michael Green, *I Believe in the Holy Spirit*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 193–97.

⁶⁰All Scripture references in Greek are from *Novum Testamentum Graece*, 28th edition.

Luke 1:67	Καὶ Ζαχαρίας ὁ πατὴρ αὐτοῦ ἐπλήσθη πνεύματος ἁγίου καὶ ἐπροφήτευσεν λέγων·	And his father Zacharias was filled with the Holy Spirit, and prophesied, saying:
Acts 2:4	καὶ ἐπλήσθησαν πάντες πνεύματος ἁγίου καὶ ἤρξαντο λαλεῖν ἐτέραις γλώσσαις καθὼς τὸ πνεῦμα ἐδίδου ἀποφθέγγεσθαι αὐτοῖς.	And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit was giving them utterance.
Acts 4:8	Τότε Πέτρος πλησθεὶς πνεύματος ἁγίου εἶπεν πρὸς αὐτούς· ἄρχοντες τοῦ λαοῦ καὶ πρεσβύτεροι,	Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, “Rulers and elders of the people,”
Acts 4:31	καὶ δεηθέντων αὐτῶν ἐσαλεύθη ὁ τόπος ἐν ᾧ ἦσαν συνηγμένοι, καὶ ἐπλήσθησαν ἅπαντες τοῦ ἁγίου πνεύματος καὶ ἐλάλουν τὸν λόγον τοῦ θεοῦ μετὰ παρρησίας.	And when they had prayed, the place where they had gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and began to speak the word of God with boldness.
Acts 9:17	Ἀπῆλθεν δὲ Ἀνανίας καὶ εἰσῆλθεν εἰς τὴν οἰκίαν καὶ ἐπιθεὶς ἐπ’ αὐτὸν τὰς χεῖρας εἶπεν· Σαοὺλ ἀδελφέ, ὁ κύριος ἀπέσταλκέν με, Ἰησοῦς ὁ ὀφθεῖς σοι ἐν τῇ ὁδῷ ἣ ἤρχου, ὅπως ἀναβλέψῃς καὶ πλησθῇς πνεύματος ἁγίου.	And Ananias departed and entered the house, and after laying his hands on him said, “Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road by which you were coming, has sent me so that you may regain your sight, and be filled with the Holy Spirit.”
Acts 13:9	Σαῦλος δέ, ὁ καὶ Παῦλος, πλησθεὶς πνεύματος ἁγίου ἀτενίσας εἰς αὐτὸν	But Saul, who was also known as Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, fixed his gaze upon him,

The special filling of the Holy Spirit always uses *πίμπλημι* in the passive voice and the aorist tense, except for Luke 1:15, which is in the future tense. In each case *Holy Spirit* is in the genitive case (verbal genitive of content), specifying the content of the filling.⁶¹ “Special fillings are sudden, sovereign, unexpected, overwhelming, incident-oriented acts of enablement; undefined as to duration, lasting as long as their purposes and situations demanded, and resulting in some verbal proclamation.”⁶² A special filling is not the result of prayerful seeking; in fact, no conditions have to be met to obtain it, since each one is sovereignly given. This special filling in the New Testament is similar to the coming of the Holy Spirit on Old Testament saints to accomplish a divinely given task (cf. Exod 28:3; 31:3; 35:31; Num 11:25; Deut

⁶¹Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics*, 92–94.

⁶²Fairman, “Exegesis of ‘Filling’ Texts,” 288.

34:9).⁶³ One can debate whether these special fillings occur today. My own opinion is that they ended with the apostolic age. Regardless, special filling has no necessary correlation to the sanctification of the individual; it is never commanded.⁶⁴

Ordinary Filling

πλήρης		
Luke 4:1	Ἰησοῦς δὲ πλήρης πνεύματος ἁγίου ὑπέστρεψεν ἀπὸ τοῦ Ἰορδάνου καὶ ἦγετο ἐν τῷ πνεύματι ἐν τῇ ἐρήμῳ	Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led around by the Spirit in the wilderness
Acts 6:3	ἐπισκέψασθε δέ, ἀδελφοί, ἄνδρας ἐξ ὑμῶν μαρτυρουμένους ἐπτά, πλήρεις πνεύματος καὶ σοφίας, οὓς καταστήσομεν ἐπὶ τῆς χρείας ταύτης,	“Therefore, brethren, select from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may put in charge of this task.”
Acts 6:5	καὶ ἤρρεσεν ὁ λόγος ἐνώπιον παντὸς τοῦ πλήθους καὶ ἐξελέξαντο Στέφανον, ἄνδρα πλήρης πίστεως καὶ πνεύματος ἁγίου, καὶ Φίλιππον καὶ Πρόχορον καὶ Νικάνορα καὶ Τίμωνα καὶ Παρμενᾶν καὶ Νικόλαον προσήλυτον Ἀντιοχέα,	The statement found approval with the whole congregation; and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, and Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas and Nicolas, a proselyte from Antioch.
Acts 7:55	ὑπάρχων δὲ πλήρης πνεύματος ἁγίου ἀτενίσας εἰς τὸν οὐρανὸν εἶδεν δόξαν θεοῦ καὶ Ἰησοῦν ἐστῶτα ἐκ δεξιῶν τοῦ θεοῦ	But being full of the Holy Spirit, he gazed intently into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God;
Acts 11:24	ὅτι ἦν ἀνὴρ ἀγαθὸς καὶ πλήρης πνεύματος ἁγίου καὶ πίστεως. καὶ προσετέθη ὄχλος ἱκανὸς τῷ κυρίῳ.	for he was a good man, and full of the Holy Spirit and of faith. And considerable numbers were brought to the Lord.

πληρῶω		
Acts 13:52	οἱ τε μαθηταὶ ἐπληροῦντο χαρᾶς καὶ πνεύματος ἁγίου.	And the disciples were continually filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit.

⁶³Leon J. Wood, *The Holy Spirit in the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976), 72–73; Pettegrew, *New Covenant Ministry of the Holy Spirit*, 201.

⁶⁴Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics*, 94.

The five references in Luke and Acts that use the adjective πλήρης are followed by either *Spirit* or *Holy Spirit* in the genitive case (nominal genitive of content), specifying the content. Wallace notes that the nominal construction is typically figurative.⁶⁵ These references would seem to describe a quality of life, something that is generally characteristic of the person. The “deacons” in Acts 6 are described as having a life-style characterized by “wisdom,” “faith,” and the “Holy Spirit”—those who display the fruit of the Spirit, what Allison calls “an honorable Christian lifestyle.”⁶⁶ The idea is that of a godly believer, someone whose spiritual maturity is apparent to all.⁶⁷

In Acts 13:52 the cognate verb πληρώω, followed by *Holy Spirit* in the genitive case (verbal genitive of content), is in the imperfect tense, indicating a continuing state.⁶⁸ Thus the sense is practically equivalent to the five uses of the adjective πλήρης. Fairman correctly observes: “The durative use of the imperfect tense conveys the ongoing nature of this fullness. In this instance, it parallels the use of the adjective πλήρης in that it is being used statively (i.e., ‘to be full’) to describe a continuing disposition of joyfulness.”⁶⁹

Ephesians 5:18

πληρώω		
Eph 5:18	καὶ μὴ μεθύσκεσθε οἶνω, ἐν ᾧ ἔστιν ἀσωτία, ἀλλὰ πληροῦσθε ἐν πνεύματι,	And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit,

The Meaning of Ἐν Πνεύματι

There is an important difference between the syntax of Ephesians 5:18 and the previous verses. This is not evident in English translations,

⁶⁵Ibid., 93.

⁶⁶Greg R. Allison, “Baptism with and Filling of the Holy Spirit,” *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 16 (Winter 2012): 14.

⁶⁷Ekholm and Pettegrew suggest that this fullness of the Spirit is roughly equivalent to the popular use of the term *spiritual* (“Doctrine of the Christian’s Walk in the Spirit,” 45; *New Covenant Ministry of the Holy Spirit*, 201–3). Darrell L. Bock calls these “deacons” “spiritual men” (*Acts*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament [Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007], 260). This is not necessarily an objectionable use of the term *spiritual*, but it should be pointed out that this is a completely different idea than what Paul means by his use of the term πνευματικός, often translated *spiritual* in English versions. See Gordon D. Fee, *God’s Empowering Presence* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994), 28–32.

⁶⁸This would fall in the category of the customary imperfect, which Wallace says is “used to indicate a *regularly* recurring activity in past time (habitual) or a *state* that continued for some time (generally)” (*Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics*, 548).

⁶⁹“Exegesis of ‘Filling’ Texts,” 259.

which almost universally read, “filled with the Spirit.”⁷⁰ All the previous verses that have been discussed have either *Spirit* or *Holy Spirit* in the genitive case, indicating a genitive of content. However, in Ephesians 5:18 the verb πληροῦσθε is not followed by a genitive of content, but by the word *Spirit* (πνεύματι) in the dative case as the object of the preposition ἐν. The English translation “filled with the Spirit” suggests that “Spirit” is a genitive of content, but as some commentators have pointed out, this is grammatically suspect. Abbott, for example, noted over a hundred years ago that “the use of ἐν with πληρώω to express the content with which a thing is filled would be quite exemplified.”⁷¹ Wallace explains the problem:

Normally, a verb of filling takes a *genitive* of content. However, there are possibly three instances in the NT when πληρώω takes a *dative* of content. It must be noted, however, that there are no clear examples in biblical Greek in which ἐν + the dative indicates content. (Thus the popular interpretation of πληροῦσθε ἐν πνεύματι in Eph 5:18 as “be filled with the Spirit” in the sense that the Spirit is the content with which one is filled is most likely incorrect).⁷²

One way around this dilemma is to understand ἐν πνεύματι functioning as a dative of sphere,⁷³ “filled in the sphere of (your) human spirit,” and as the translation indicates, πνεύματι refers to the human spirit, not the Holy Spirit.⁷⁴ However, Paul’s other uses of ἐν πνεύματι in Ephesians (2:22; 3:5; 6:18) unambiguously refer to the Holy Spirit. The idea of possession (“be filled in *your own* spirit”) would seem to require a possessive pronoun or at least an article with πνεύματι.⁷⁵ Schnackenburg rightly notes: “The occasional interpretation of ἐν πνεύματι as meaning in their human spirits is erroneous. If we take the expression as local, we then need an indication of with what the spirit is

⁷⁰The one exception is the *NET Bible*, which reads, “filled by the Spirit.” This translation was the direct result of the grammatical analysis of Daniel Wallace. See below.

⁷¹T. K. Abbott, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistles to the Ephesians and to the Colossians*, International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1897), 161.

⁷²*Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics*, 170–71.

⁷³Wallace notes that ἐν + dative denotes sphere even more commonly than the naked dative (*Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics*, 175, 361).

⁷⁴Abbott, *Ephesians*, 162; B. F. Westcott, *Saint Paul’s Epistle to the Ephesians* (reprint of 1906 ed., Minneapolis: Klock & Klock Christian Publishers, 1983), 81; R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Paul’s Epistles to the Galatians, to the Ephesians, and to the Philippians* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg, 1937), 619; Crater, “Filling of the Spirit in the Greek New Testament,” 53–54; Arp, “Interpretation of ‘Be Filled in Spirit’ in Ephesians 5:18,” 190–206; Douglas Petrovich, “The Meaning of Ἐν Πνεύματι in Ephesians 5:18 (M.Div. thesis, The Master’s Seminary, 1996), 1, 44, 47.

⁷⁵Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics*, 215.

to be filled.”⁷⁶ Fee concludes: “In an earlier generation some found this expression so difficult that they were willing to argue that it meant ‘be filled in one’s own spirit’...; but there is nothing in Pauline usage, in the immediate context, or in the context of the letter as a whole that allows even the possibility of such a view.”⁷⁷ English translations universally understand *πνεύματι* as a reference to the Holy Spirit.

Another view, which also takes *ἐν πνεύματι* as a dative of sphere, agrees that *πνεύματι* refers to the Holy Spirit.⁷⁸ Heil believes that “the preposition ‘in’ (*ἐν*) refers to being within the dynamic realm or sphere established and characterized by having been given the Spirit.”⁷⁹ But this leaves the content of the filling unstated, which Heil believes to be the gifts of Christ’s love.⁸⁰ Though grammatically possible, taking *ἐν πνεύματι* as a dative of sphere yields an unlikely interpretation—believers are commanded to be filled in the realm of the Holy Spirit with the gifts of Christ’s love. There is no clear contextual basis for Christ’s love as the content of the filling. Also, the dative of sphere does not appear to “work well with the parallel *οἶνω*.”⁸¹

Another interpretation of *ἐν πνεύματι* understands *ἐν* as denoting means, a common use of the preposition.⁸² Thus, believers are to be filled *by means* of the Holy Spirit.⁸³ This view seems to have gained popularity in recent years due to the arguments of grammarian Daniel Wallace.⁸⁴ As noted earlier, Wallace admits that the dative can be used

⁷⁶Rudolf Schnackenburg, *The Epistle to the Ephesians*, trans. Helen Heron (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1991), 237, n. 16. So also Ernest Best, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Ephesians*, International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1998), 508.

⁷⁷Fee, *God’s Empowering Presence*, 721, n. 196.

⁷⁸Anderson, “Rethinking ‘Be Filled with the Spirit,’” 63.

⁷⁹John P. Heil, “Ephesians 5:18b: ‘But Be Filled in the Spirit,’” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 69 (July 2007): 507; Thielman is now persuaded by Heil that *ἐν πνεύματι* is a dative of sphere (*Ephesians*, 360), though he earlier understood the phrase as *means* (Frank Thielman, *Theology of the New Testament* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005], 404).

⁸⁰“Ephesians 5:18b,” 507.

⁸¹Hollis, “Become Full in the Spirit,” 242.

⁸²BDAG, 328. Murray J. Harris, *Prepositions and Theology in the Greek New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), 119.

⁸³J. Armitage Robinson, *Commentary on Ephesians* (reprint of 1904 ed., Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1979), 204; Fee, *God’s Empowering Presence*, 721, n. 196; ; Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 344; Schnackenburg, *Ephesians*, 237; Rodney J. Decker, “Be Filled with the Spirit, Eph. 5:18: Preliminary Notes on a Disputed Passage,” (unpublished manuscript, December 1996), available at http://ntresources.com/blog/documents/Eph5_18Lect.pdf (accessed 24 November 2014); O’Brien, *Ephesians*, 391–92; Timothy G. Gombis, “Being the Fullness of God in Christ by the Spirit: Ephesians 5:18 in Its Epistolary Setting,” *Tyndale Bulletin* 53 (2002): 267; Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 704.

⁸⁴*Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics*, 374–75. Wallace has strongly influenced O’Brien (*Ephesians*, 391), Gombis (“Being the Fullness of God in Christ by the Spirit,”

to express content following πληρώω, but he claims there is no example of ἐν + dative indicating content.⁸⁵ He argues that “the parallel with οἶνω [“drunk *with wine*”] as well as the common grammatical category of *means* suggest that the idea intended is that believers are to be filled *by means of* the [Holy] Spirit. If so, there seems to be an unnamed agent”⁸⁶ Wallace also faces the problem of determining the content of the filling. He argues that since Ephesians 3:19 speaks of believers being “filled up to all the fullness of God” (πληρωθῆτε εἰς πᾶν τὸ πλήρωμα τοῦ θεοῦ) and 4:10 speaks of Christ filling all things (πληρώσει τὰ πάντα), 5:18 means that “believers are to be filled *by* Christ *by means of* the Spirit *with* the content of the fullness of God.”⁸⁷ This interpretation has now been adopted in new commentaries by O’Brien and Hoehner.⁸⁸

However, there would seem to be a difficulty appealing to Ephesians 3:19 to solve the problem of the content of the filling. We should recall Wallace’s exact words: “Eph 3:19...makes a request that the believers ‘be filled with all the fullness of God’ (πληρωθῆτε εἰς πᾶν τὸ πλήρωμα τοῦ θεοῦ). The explicit *content* of πληρώω is thus God’s fullness.” But Paul does not actually speak of believers being “filled with all the fullness of God,” but being “filled *up to*”⁸⁹ all the fullness of God” (NASB; also NIV, NET BIBLE). The verb πληρωθῆτε is not followed by a genitive of content, but by a prepositional phrase beginning with εἰς, followed by the accusative case. It is not at all clear that this construction indicates content. The preposition suggests the idea of movement toward a goal.⁹⁰ It would seem the goal of filling is the fullness of God, not the content. Hollis notes that πληρώω is only used one other time with εἰς in the Greek Bible (Bar 5:7), and it cannot indicate content in that instance.⁹¹ Taking ἐν as denoting means in Ephesians 5:18 yields no likely solution to the content of the filling.

266), and Hoehner (*Ephesians*, 703–4).

⁸⁵Greek Grammar *Beyond the Basics*, 93, 170, 374–75.

⁸⁶Ibid., 375.

⁸⁷Ibid.

⁸⁸O’Brien, *Ephesians*, 391–92; Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 703–4. Also Gombis, “Being the Fullness of God in Christ by the Spirit,” 267, and Naselli, *Let God and Let God?* 251–55.

⁸⁹Emphasis added.

⁹⁰BDAG, s.v. “εἰς,” 290; Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 214; O’Brien, *Ephesians*, 265; Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 490; William W. Klein, “Ephesians,” in vol. 12 of *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, rev. ed., ed. Tremper Longman and David E. Garland (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006), 100.

⁹¹“Become Full in the Spirit,” 160–61. Best (*Ephesians*, 347–48) and Thielman (*Ephesians*, 238) argue that εἰς cannot be translated “with,” indicating content.

Several of those who agree that ἐν πνεύματι primarily expresses *means* insist that the phrase also expresses the content of filling as well. Fee, who argues for means, says: "But when one asks, 'but with what "substance"?' it is but a short step to seeing the Spirit as that substance as well."⁹² However, it is grammatically improbable, to say the least, for ἐν πνεύματι to express means and content at the same time. This appeal to intentional double meaning fails to appreciate how language works. Silva explains: "Context serves to *eliminate* multiple meanings.... In view of the nature of language and communication, however, we should assume *one* meaning unless there are strong *exegetical* (literary, contextual) grounds to the contrary."⁹³ The reason for this appeal to double meaning may be the fact our natural intuition suggests that in this context the *Spirit* must be the content of the filling. Every other usage of filling (πίμπλημι/πλήρης/πληρώ) connected with the Spirit, as was shown in our discussion of the Luke/Acts passages, always has the Spirit as the content of the filling, so it is natural to assume the same in Ephesians 5:18, in spite of the apparent syntactical problem.

The view of most interpreters over the years is, in fact, that ἐν πνεύματι expresses the content of the filling.⁹⁴ This can be seen in how

⁹²God's Empowering Presence, 721, n. 196. Also Robinson, *Ephesians*, 204; Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 344; Schnackenburg, *Ephesians*, 237; Ryrie, *Holy Spirit*, 158; Thomas R. Schreiner, *New Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), 484, n. 137.

⁹³Moisés Silva, *Biblical Words and Their Meaning*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 150–51.

⁹⁴Charles Hodge, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Ephesians* (reprint of [1856] ed., Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 302; René Pache, *The Person and Work of the Holy Spirit* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1954), 114–36; Walvoord, *Holy Spirit*, 189–224; William Hendriksen, *Exposition of Ephesians* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1967), 239; Kent, *Ephesians*, 96; C. Leslie Mitton, *Ephesians*, New Century Bible Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1973), 190; Ronald B. Mayers, "The Infilling of the Spirit," *Reformed Review* 28 (Spring 1975): 157–70; Lehman Strauss, *Be Filled with the Spirit* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976), 69–87; John R. W. Stott, *The Message of Ephesians*, Bible Speaks Today (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1979), 204; Anthony A. Hoekema, *Saved by Grace* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 49–53; Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 781–84; Stanley D. Toussaint, *Basic Theology Applied* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1995), 210–18; Snodgrass, *Ephesians*, 289–90; Neil T. Anderson and Robert L. Saucy, *The Common Made Holy* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 1997), 279–81; Bruce Demarest, *The Cross and Salvation* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1997), 426; Andreas J. Köstenberger, "What Does It Mean to Be Filled with the Spirit? A Biblical Investigation," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 40 (June 1997): 231; Liefeld, *Ephesians*, 136; Best, *Ephesians*, 508; Robert L. Reymond, *A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1998), 765–67; Gromacki, *Holy Spirit*, 183–91; Holloman, *Forgotten Blessing*, 84–90; Eldon Woodcock, "The Filling of the Holy Spirit," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 157 (January–March 2000): 68–87; Pettegrew, *New Covenant Ministry of the Holy Spirit*, 204; Green, *I Believe in the Holy Spirit*, 197–98; C. John Collins, "Ephesians 5:18: What Does πληροῦσθε ἐν πνεύματι Mean?" *Presbyterian* 33 (Spring 2007): 19–20; Rolland D. McCune, *A Systematic Theology of Biblical Christianity*, vol. 3 (N.p.: Detroit Baptist Theological Seminary, 2009), 340–47; Arnold, *Ephesians*, 350; Allison, "Baptism with and Filling of the Holy Spirit," 14–15; John M. Frame, *Systematic Theology* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2013), 927.

English translations have usually rendered the phrase—"filled with the Spirit" (ASV, ESV, KJV, NASB, NIV, NKJV, NLT, NRSV). Two recent interpreters, Collins and Arnold, have challenged the *means* interpretation of ἐν πνεύματι and have brought forth additional evidence to support the traditional *content* view.⁹⁵ As noted earlier, Wallace asserts a number of times that ἐν πνεύματι cannot express the content of the filling in Ephesians 5:18 since "there are no clear examples in biblical Greek in which ἐν + the dative indicates content."⁹⁶ Arnold, however, points to what appears to be a clear example in Psalm 65:4 (LXX 64:5), where the psalmist speaks of being "filled with good things" (πλησθησόμεθα ἐν τοῖς ἀγαθοῖς).⁹⁷ There are also examples in early Christian writings of ἐν πνεύματι following a verb of filling indicating content. For example, Ignatius (?–107), in the salutation to his *Letter to the Smyrnaeans*, says that the church is "filled with faith and love" (πεπληρωμένη ἐν πίστει καὶ ἀγάπῃ).⁹⁸ The *Shepherd of Hermas* (no later than A.D. 175) speaks of "those who are filled with faith" (τοὺς πλήρεις ὄντας ἐν τῇ πίστει), using the adjective πλήρης followed by ἐν + the dative.⁹⁹

Collins calls our attention to Chrysostom's (354–407) understanding of Ephesians 5:18. In his *Homilies on Ephesians*, Chrysostom first quotes the biblical text, Ἀλλὰ πληροῦσθε ἐν Πνεύματι.¹⁰⁰ He then enters into a discussion of the text, remarking at one point, "For they who sing psalms are filled with the Holy Spirit" (οἱ ψάλλοντες γὰρ Πνεύματος πληροῦνται ἁγίου).¹⁰¹ But when Chrysostom says "filled with the Holy Spirit," he uses a genitive of content, Πνεύματος ἁγίου, to explain Paul's ἐν πνεύματι. Silva explores the significance of this:

Strange as it may sound, Chrysostom, along with other Greek Fathers, can be particularly helpful when he does *not* offer an opinion on an exegetical problem. As a native Greek speaker, his innate sense of the

⁹⁵Collins, "Ephesians 5:18," 19–20; Arnold, *Ephesians*, 349–51.

⁹⁶*Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics*, 170. This assertion is repeated on p. 93, n. 62 and pp. 374–75.

⁹⁷The English translation is from Albert Pietersma and Benjamin G. Wright, eds., *A New English Translation of the Septuagint and Other Greek Translation Traditionally Included under That Title* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 578. The Greek text is from Alfred Rahlfs, ed., *Septuaginta*, 2 vols. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelstiftung, 1935), 2:65.

⁹⁸Michael W. Holmes, ed. and trans., *The Apostolic Fathers: Greek Texts and English Translations*, 3rd. ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), 248–49.

⁹⁹*Ibid.*, 518–19.

¹⁰⁰*Patrologia Graeca*, 62, 129.

¹⁰¹English translation from Philip Schaff, ed., *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christians Church*, vol. 13 (reprint ed., Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), 138.

language—but not necessarily his conscious reflection on it—provides an important bridge between the modern commentator and the Pauline writings (with the qualification that Paul's Greek was of course not identical to Chrysostom's). Educated speakers are notoriously unreliable in analyzing their own language. If Chrysostom weighs two competing interpretations, his conclusion should be valued as an important opinion and no more. If, on the other hand, he fails to address a linguistic problem because he does not appear to perceive a possible ambiguity, his silence is of the greatest value in helping us to determine how Paul's first readers were likely to have interpreted the text.¹⁰²

The point is that Chrysostom quite naturally understands ἐν πνεύματι in Ephesians 5:18 as equivalent to a genitive of content.

I believe a good case can be made for understanding ἐν πνεύματι as a dative of content in Ephesians 5:18. Although the genitive case is normally used for content after a verb of filling, the evidence just cited shows that this is not always the case, and the evidence from Chrysostom seems quite compelling. Wallace himself admits that the dative is used for content, and he and other authorities are quick to point out that a common feature of Koine Greek is the replacement of the naked dative with ἐν + the dative in various uses of the dative case such as dative of time,¹⁰³ dative of manner,¹⁰⁴ and dative of sphere.¹⁰⁵ In fact, Wallace notes nine uses of the dative case that are sometimes replaced by ἐν + the dative.¹⁰⁶ It is not hard to imagine that ἐν πνεύματι in Ephesians 5:18 is another case of ἐν + the dative replacing the simple dative, and that this is simply a stylistic variation on the part of Paul.¹⁰⁷ The standard Greek lexicon of the New Testament understands ἐν πνεύματι as indicating the content of πληροῦσθε in Ephesians 5:18.¹⁰⁸ The parallel with the dative οἶνῳ earlier in the verse also suggests content.¹⁰⁹ The verb μεθύσκω is in the same semantic range as πληρόω, and LSJ suggests that the passive of μεθύσκω in Hosea 14:8 means "to be filled with food."¹¹⁰ One who is drunk is "filled with" wine. Thus, ἐν πνεύματι and οἶνῳ both express content.

¹⁰²Moisés Silva, *Philippians*, 2nd ed., Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005), 27.

¹⁰³*Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics*, 155.

¹⁰⁴*Ibid.*, 161.

¹⁰⁵*Ibid.*, 170.

¹⁰⁶*Ibid.*, 372. See also C. F. D. Moule, *An Idiom-Book of New Testament Greek*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1959), 75–77.

¹⁰⁷Fairman, "Exegesis of 'Filling' Texts Which Refer to the Doctrine of Filling," 278.

¹⁰⁸BDAG, s.v. "πληρόω," 828.

¹⁰⁹Hollis, "Become Full in the Spirit," 238; Arnold, *Ephesians*, 350.

¹¹⁰1091.

The Meaning of “Filled with the Spirit”

If we are correct in understanding ἐν πνεύματι as indicating the content of the filling, we must still determine exactly what it means to be filled *with* the Spirit. Clearly, Paul cannot mean that the Ephesians are to be filled with something they do not possess. The apostle is addressing professing believers in Ephesians 5:18, and all believers are already indwelt by the Holy Spirit (Rom 8:9). Thus “filling” has some metaphorical meaning.¹¹¹ The most common suggestion is the idea of *control*.¹¹² As Pentecost says: “If we would understand what Paul is trying to teach us in Ephesians 5:18, in place of the word ‘filling,’ or ‘filled,’ use the word ‘controlled.’”¹¹³ One can see how the idea of *control* might be derived from the comparison with wine in the earlier part of the verse. The thought being that to be drunk with wine is to be controlled by wine.¹¹⁴ Sometimes the idea of *control* is explained in ways that seem somewhat extreme. Allison, for example, speaks of the need “for Christians to yield to the Holy Spirit, to be controlled—permeated or permeated—by the Spirit in all their ways, to consciously place themselves under the guidance of the Spirit moment by moment.”¹¹⁵ Ironside, Walvoord, and Erickson, describe this control as the Spirit

¹¹¹Demarest, *Cross and Salvation*, 426; Köstenberger, “What Does It Mean to Be Filled with the Spirit?” 231; Pettegrew, *New Covenant Ministry of the Holy Spirit*, 203.

¹¹²Hodge, *Ephesians*, 302; H. A. Ironside, *In the Heavenlies: Practical Expository Addresses on the Epistle to the Ephesians*, 3rd ed. (New York: Loizeaux Brothers, 1942), 267; Walvoord, *Holy Spirit*, 192; J. Dwight Pentecost, *The Divine Comforter: The Person and Work of the Holy Spirit* (Westwood, NJ: Revell, 1963), 158; Kent, *Ephesians*, 96; Wood, *Holy Spirit in the Old Testament*, 71; F. F. Bruce, *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984), 380; Fairman, “Exegesis of ‘Filling’ Texts Which Refer to the Doctrine of Filling,” 267; Francis Foulkes, *The Letter of Paul to the Ephesians*, 2nd ed., Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 159; Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 344; Toussaint, *Basic Theology Applied*, 211; Tommy Ice, “The Filling of the Holy Spirit: A Quality of Life,” *Chafer Theological Seminary Journal* 2 (Spring/Summer 1996): 4; Snodgrass, *Ephesians*, 290; Liefeld, *Ephesians*, 137; Rylie, *Holy Spirit*, 157; Gromacki, *Holy Spirit*, 186; Holloman, *Forgotten Blessing*, 84; Jim Berg, *Changed into His Image* (Greenville, SC: Bob Jones University Press, 2000), 187; Woodcock, “Filling of the Holy Spirit,” 73; Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 705; Klein, “Ephesians,” 143; McCune, *Systematic Theology*, 3:343; Allison, “Baptism with and Filling of the Holy Spirit,” 15; Klein, “Ephesians,” 143; Thielman, *Ephesians*, 359; Oats, “Filled with or Full of the Spirit,” 220.

¹¹³*The Divine Comforter*, 158.

¹¹⁴Hodge, *Ephesians*, 302; Ironside, *In the Heavenlies*, 267; Pentecost, *Divine Comforter*, 159; Kent, *Ephesians*, 96; Wood, *Holy Spirit in the Old Testament*, 71; Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 344; Snodgrass, *Ephesians*, 290; Liefeld, *Ephesians*, 137; Rylie, *Holy Spirit*, 157; Gromacki, *Holy Spirit*, 186; Holloman, *Forgotten Blessing*, 85; Berg, *Changed into His Image*, 188; Woodcock, “Filling of the Holy Spirit,” 78; Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 704; Klein, “Ephesians,” 143; Naselli, *Let Go and Let God?* 250; Thielman, *Ephesians*, 359.

¹¹⁵“Baptism with and Filling of the Holy Spirit,” 15.

being in some sort of *possession* of the believer.¹¹⁶ Woodcock says this control is to the extent that the Spirit “takes possession of the believer’s mind.”¹¹⁷ Anderson and Saucy suggests that the Spirit “controls all of our thoughts and actions.”¹¹⁸ While most who use the word *control* in connection with Spirit’s filling would not agree with some of these descriptions, it seems clear that the main reason for the popularity of the term *control* can be traced to the previously described Keswick theology with its central teaching of the total and pervasive control by the Spirit.

Evan H. Hopkins is universally recognized as the leading theologian of the Keswick Movement from its earliest beginnings.¹¹⁹ In his 1884 seminal work, *The Law of Liberty in the Spiritual Life*, he, like other Keswick adherents, speaks of the need for the Spirit’s control.¹²⁰ This control of the Spirit is essential to the Keswick view of sanctification, which Hopkins and others call *counteraction*.¹²¹ The Spirit counteracts the “tendency to sin” as long as the believer is filled with the Spirit.¹²² This counteraction of sin in the believer allows him to live “a life of victory over conscious sin.”¹²³ It is an extraordinary level of *control* that would permit a believer to no longer be conscious of his own sin.

As previously mentioned, Keswick theology soon dominated a number of evangelical institutions and schools such as Moody Bible Institute and Dallas Theological Seminary. At Dallas Seminary, its founder, Lewis Sperry Chafer, made Keswick theology the official position of the school.¹²⁴ Ryrie explains: “The Chaferian view of progressive

¹¹⁶Ironside, *In the Heavenlies*, 270; Walvoord, *Holy Spirit*, 192; Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2013), 802.

¹¹⁷“Filling of the Holy Spirit,” 73. Similarly, Hodge says: “He controls all their thoughts, feelings, words, and actions” (*Ephesians*, 302).

¹¹⁸*Common Made Holy*, 279.

¹¹⁹Naselli, *Let God and Let God?* 121.

¹²⁰(Reprint of 1884 ed., Philadelphia: The Sunday School Times, 1954), 92, 124.

¹²¹*Ibid.*, 26–28; Barabas, *So Great Salvation*, 94.

¹²²Hopkins, *Law of Liberty*, 27.

¹²³Barabas, *So Great Salvation*, 99.

¹²⁴*Dictionary of Christianity in America*, s.v. “Chafer, Lewis Sperry,” 238. This is the opinion of John Hannah, who for many years was chairman of the church history department at Dallas. In a 1987 volume contrasting five supposedly different views on sanctification, John F. Walvoord, who followed Chafer as president of Dallas Seminary, presents what he calls the Augustinian-dispensational view. In his critique of Walvoord’s Dallas view, J. Robertson McQuilkin, who defends the Keswick view, says: “Many Keswick teachers and the basic Keswick approach are in harmony with John Walvoord’s presentation” (“Response to Walvoord,” in *Five Views on Sanctification*, 236). And similarly, after reviewing McQuilkin’s presentation of the Keswick view, Walvoord writes: “Those holding to the Augustinian-dispensational perspective on sanctification will find little with which they need to take issue in J. Robertson McQuilkin’s presentation of the Keswick perspective” (“Response to McQuilkin,” in *Five Views on Sanctification*, 194).

sanctification may be summarized by the idea of counteraction of the new nature of the believer against the old, or of the Spirit against the flesh.... In the Chaferian view, the central doctrine concerns the filling of the Holy Spirit."¹²⁵ Ryrie claims (in 1982) that this view is the official position of Dallas Seminary.¹²⁶ The *control* of the Spirit is absolutely essential because of the way Chafer viewed the two natures within the believer. "Having received the divine nature (2 Pet 1:4) while still retaining the old nature, every child of God possesses two natures; one is incapable of sinning, and the other is incapable of holiness."¹²⁷ I have tried to show elsewhere that it is perfectly acceptable to use two-nature terminology in explaining progressive sanctification, but the error of the Chaferian view is that it denies the natures are subject to change.¹²⁸ Thus, in the Chaferian view sanctification is nothing more than the counteraction of two unchangeable natures by the Holy Spirit. That is why Walvoord says "the filling of the Spirit is the secret of sanctification."¹²⁹

Those who place great emphasis on the need for the Spirit's control in the believer's sanctification, especially in the Keswick stream of theology, must determine the means for obtaining and maintaining this control. But as Toussaint admits: "The New Testament gives no specific instructions on this subject."¹³⁰ This is, to say the least, very strange if Paul intends the filling to be the key to sanctification. Nevertheless, in spite of Paul's silence, many interpreters present rather definitive lists of requirements:

1. Pache — Confession of sin, desire and seek the fullness, yielding, faith¹³¹
2. Chafer,¹³² Walvoord,¹³³ and Gromacki¹³⁴ — Walk in the Spirit, do not grieve the spirit, do not quench the Spirit
3. Pentecost — Confession of sin, yielding¹³⁵

¹²⁵Charles C. Ryrie, "Contrasting Views on Sanctification," in *Walvoord: A Tribute*, ed. Donald K. Campbell (Chicago: Moody Press, 1982), 191.

¹²⁶*Ibid.*, 199, n. 5.

¹²⁷Lewis S. Chafer, *Major Bible Themes* (Chicago: Bible Institute Colportage Association, 1927), 161.

¹²⁸William W. Combs, "Does the Believer Have One Nature or Two?" *Detroit Baptist Seminary Journal* 2 (Fall 1997): 81–103.

¹²⁹"Response to Hoekema," in *Five Views on Sanctification*, 101.

¹³⁰*Basic Theology Applied*, 213. Also Gromacki, *The Holy Spirit*, 187.

¹³¹*Person and Work of the Holy Spirit*, 119–22.

¹³²*He That Is Spiritual*, 82–172.

¹³³*Holy Spirit*, 196–218.

¹³⁴*Holy Spirit*, 187–89.

¹³⁵*Divine Comforter*, 159–60.

4. MacDonald — Confession of sin, yielding, obedience, emptied of self¹³⁶
5. Mayers — Recognition of spiritual emptiness, confession of grieving sin, obedience of a yielded will¹³⁷
6. Toussaint — Faith, obedience to the Word of God¹³⁸
7. Anderson and Saucy — Prayer, obedience to the Word of God, active in church¹³⁹
8. Ryrle — A dedicated life, an undefeated life, a dependent life¹⁴⁰
9. Holloman — Confess and forsake sin, yield to God, Christ-focused life, obedience to the Word of God, live by faith¹⁴¹
10. Woodcock — Walk in the Spirit, do not grieve the spirit, do not quench the Spirit, be involved in ministry¹⁴²

Many, if not most, of these requirements have good biblical support and are things that play a part, even important parts, in the believer's sanctification. But none of them are directly referenced by Paul as the means to being "filled with the Spirit."

The major problem for the Keswick view of sanctification, followed by Chafer and others, is that it is inherently defective.¹⁴³ Chafer argues that "the divine method of dealing with the sin nature in the believer is by direct and unceasing *control* over that nature by the indwelling Spirit."¹⁴⁴ But if there is only counteraction of the sinful nature, then there is really no sanctification of the believer. The believer receives a new nature or disposition at regeneration, but nothing really changes after that, according to Chafer. Nothing is ever made holy; there is no genuine *progressive* sanctification. This was one of B. B. Warfield's chief complaints:

[God] cures our sinning precisely by curing our sinful nature; He makes the tree good that the fruit may be good. It is, in other words, precisely by eradicating our sinfulness—"the corruption of our hearts"—that He delivers us from sinning.... To imagine that we can be saved from the

¹³⁶ *Ephesians*, 118–19.

¹³⁷ "Infilling of the Spirit," 161–62.

¹³⁸ *Basic Theology Applied*, 213–14.

¹³⁹ *Common Make Holy*, 280–81.

¹⁴⁰ *Holy Spirit*, 160–65.

¹⁴¹ *Forgotten Blessing*, 86–88.

¹⁴² "Filling of the Holy Spirit," 84–86. In Keswick theology, "to be filled by the Spirit means to be controlled by the Spirit" (Barabas, *So Great Salvation*, 145).

¹⁴³ This is the conclusion of Naselli's book (*Let God and Let God?* 295, 301). See also Combs, "Disjunction Between Justification and Sanctification in Contemporary Evangelical Theology," 17–44.

¹⁴⁴ *He That Is Spiritual*, 165.

power of sin without the eradication of the corruption in which the power of sin has its seat, is to imagine that an evil tree can be compelled to bring forth good fruit.¹⁴⁵

Warfield's use of the term *eradication* may seem somewhat strange to those of us who have been used to using the term in a pejorative sense as it is applied to those types of Christian experience which tend toward perfectionism—the complete eradication of the sinful nature as a present experience for the believer—but, of course, Warfield was violently opposed to any such idea of sanctification. By eradication, Warfield means a progressive and gradual process, not an instantaneous one. Neither does Warfield diminish the role of the Holy Spirit in the believer's sanctification. Instead, he argues

that the Spirit dwells within us in order to affect us, not merely our acts; in order to eradicate our sinfulness and not merely to counteract its effects. The Scriptures' way of cleansing the stream is to cleanse the fountain; they are not content to attack the stream of our activities, they attack directly the heart out of which the issues of life flow. But they give us no promise that the fountain will be completely cleansed all at once, and therefore no promise that the stream will flow perfectly purely from the beginning. We are not denying that the Spirit leads us in all our acts, as well as purifies our hearts. But we are denying that His whole work in us, or His whole immediate work in us, or His fundamental work in us, terminates on our activities and can be summed up in the word "counteraction." Counteraction there is; and suppression there is; but most fundamentally of all there is eradication; and all these work one and the self-same Spirit.¹⁴⁶

As Warfield explains, the ministry of the Holy Spirit is essential to the believer's sanctification, but unfortunately Keswick theology has centered most of its efforts on Paul's command to be filled with the Spirit, misconstruing Paul's meaning in order to support a defective view of sanctification.

Although the word *control* is commonly used in explaining what Paul means by being filled with the Spirit in Ephesians 5:18, there are a number of problems in understanding "filling with the Holy Spirit" as "control by the Holy Spirit." First, Decker and Arp argue there is no evidence that *control* actually falls within the semantic range of the verb *πληρόω*.¹⁴⁷ The standard Greek lexicon of the New Testament (BDAG)

¹⁴⁵*Perfectionism*, 368. See also Warfield's review of Chafer's *He That Is Spiritual*, *Princeton Theological Review* 17 (April 1919): 322–27; John Murray's, review of *So Great Salvation: The History and Message of the Keswick Convention*, by Steven Barabas, in *The Collected Writings of John Murray*, 4 vols. (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 1982), 4:284; and Gleason, "B. B. Warfield and Lewis S. Chafer on Sanctification," 241–56.

¹⁴⁶*Perfectionism*, 371.

¹⁴⁷Arp, "Interpretation of 'Be Filled in Spirit' in Ephesians 5:18," 149–55; Decker, "Be Filled with the Spirit, Eph. 5:18," 2.

does not list *control* as a meaning or gloss for πληρώ.¹⁴⁸ Neither does the standard Greek lexicon for all Greek literature (LSJ),¹⁴⁹ nor the *Greek English Lexicon of the New Testament Based on Semantic Domains*.¹⁵⁰ This is also true for other standard lexical works such as the *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology and Exegesis*¹⁵¹ and the *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament*.¹⁵² Though πληρώ is used 86 times in the New Testament, it is never translated *control* in common English versions.¹⁵³ Second, it is true that there is a contrast in Ephesians 5:18 with being drunk with wine, but Paul does not say “do not be controlled by wine,” but “do not get drunk with wine.” Wine can influence a person’s behavior, but Paul says nothing about that. Paul’s contrast is between being filled with wine, which produces drunkenness, and being filled with the Spirit, which produces the kinds of things he lists in verses 19–20. But more about that later.

The major problem with interpreting Paul’s command as meaning to be *controlled* by the Spirit is that it strongly suggests that even though the believer is indwelt by the Spirit, this latter ministry is not sufficient to bring about the believer’s sanctification. Some new experience of the Spirit is required—though indwelt, the believer still needs to be *controlled*. And, of course, this idea is at the heart of all second-blessing theologies, such as Keswick. What this does is minimize the divine effects of initial conversion and apply all the transformational qualities of the believer’s salvation to some second work of grace—some special post-conversion experience, such as the filling of the Holy Spirit.¹⁵⁴ But it is doubtful that Paul is actually issuing a command in Ephesians 5:18 for a new ministry of the Spirit beyond what has already begun and is being accomplished by the indwelling of the Spirit. Since our text is the only reference to being filled with the Spirit in the entire Pauline corpus, “this fact alone,” as Köstenberger keenly observes, “should caution one against making this aspect the focus of one’s pneumatology or even one’s entire approach to the Christian life.”¹⁵⁵ Paul has much to say about sanctification in his letters (e.g., Rom 6), so if the need to “be filled with the Spirit” is an essential aspect of that doctrine, it is difficult if not impossible to explain why he never writes about it anywhere else.

¹⁴⁸BDAG, s.v. “πληρώ,” 828–29.

¹⁴⁹LSJ, s.v. “πληρώ,” 1419–20.

¹⁵⁰S.v. “πληρώ,” §59.37, 1:598.

¹⁵¹S.v. “πληρώ,” 3:784–93.

¹⁵²S.v. “πληρώ,” 3:108–10.

¹⁵³E.g., ASV, ESV, HCSB, KJV, NASB, NIV, NKJV, NRSV.

¹⁵⁴Combs, “Disjunction Between Justification and Sanctification in Contemporary Evangelical Theology,” 37.

¹⁵⁵“What Does It Mean to Be Filled with the Spirit?” 231.

While I am arguing that there has been an overemphasis on Paul's command to be filled with the Spirit, I am in no way attempting to diminish the essential role of the Spirit in the believer's sanctification. John Murray, who was adamantly opposed to Keswick theology and in complete agreement with the views of Warfield, still rightly calls the Holy Spirit the "agent of sanctification."¹⁵⁶ He goes on to say:

The mode of the Spirit's operation in sanctification is encompassed with mystery. We do not know the mode of the Spirit's indwelling nor the mode of his efficient working in the hearts and minds and wills of God's people by which they are progressively cleansed from the defilement of sin and more and more transfigured after the image of Christ. While we must not do prejudice to the fact that the Spirit's work in our hearts reflect itself in our awareness and consciousness, while we must not relegate sanctification to the realm of the subconscious and fail to recognize that sanctification draws within its orbit the whole field of conscious activity on our part, yet we must also appreciate the fact that there is an agency on the part of the Holy Spirit that far surpasses analysis or introspection on our part. The effects of this constant and uninterrupted agency come within the scope of our consciousness in understanding, feeling, and will. But we must not suppose that the measure of our understanding or experience is the measure of the Spirit's working. In every distinct and particular movement of the believer in the way of holiness there is an energizing activity of the Holy Spirit, and when we try to discover what the mode of that exercise of his grace and power is we realize how far we are from being able to diagnose the secret working of the Spirit.¹⁵⁷

The Spirit works mightily to bring about the believer's sanctification, but he does so continuously from the moment of regeneration, and this operation does not wait upon the believer to be filled.

In order to get at Paul's meaning in Ephesians 5:18, we should begin by discussing the imperative πληροῦσθε, the present passive of πληρόω. Unfortunately, most people probably understand Paul's words to "be filled with the Spirit" like Ryrie: "Since he wrote it as a command he obviously did not think that all his readers had experienced it." But, in fact, if one wants to issue a specific command to take a new action, as Ryrie understands Paul's meaning, the aorist imperative, not the present, is generally used. McKay explains: "There is, I believe, no serious dispute that in a positive command for a specific complete action to be performed the aorist imperative is normally found."¹⁵⁸ On the other hand, the present imperative, as Wallace explains, "looks at the action from an internal viewpoint. It is used for the most part for general precepts—i.e., for habits that should characterize one's attitudes

¹⁵⁶*Redemption Accomplished and Applied* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1955), 146.

¹⁵⁷*Ibid.*, 146–47.

¹⁵⁸K. L. McKay, "Aspect in Imperative Constructions in New Testament Greek," *Novum Testamentum* 27 (1985): 207. So also Buist M. Fanning, *Verbal Aspect in New Testament Greek* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990): 327; BDF, §335, 172; Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics*, 719, 722.

and behavior—rather than in specific situations.”¹⁵⁹ Specifically, the present imperative πληροῦσθε probably has what Wallace calls a customary force: “The force of the customary present imperative is simply *continue*. It is a command for action to be continued.”¹⁶⁰ The Ephesians are urged to *continue* to be filled with the Spirit, not to *begin* to be filled with the Spirit. Fee observes: “Nowhere does the New Testament say, ‘Get saved, and then be filled with the Spirit’.... That all believers in Christ are Spirit-filled is the *presupposition* of the New Testament writers. Thus the imperative is, ‘Keep on being full of the Holy Spirit’ (Eph 5:18).”¹⁶¹

But what specifically does it mean to *keep on* being filled with the Spirit? The phrase πληροῦσθε ἐν πνεύματι is most likely another example of what we classified earlier as “ordinary filling.” That is, we should connect Paul’s command or exhortation to be filled with the Spirit with the usage of πλήρης/πληρώ in Luke/Acts, simply, as Mitton notes, “a different way of describing the same experience.”¹⁶² In our previous discussion, we noticed that πλήρης and πληρώ are basically the same word, one the adjective, the other the cognate verb. Luke uses πληρώ + the genitive to indicate the content of the filling, and I argued earlier there is good evidence to believe that Paul’s use of πληρώ followed by ἐν πνεύματι is equivalent to a dative of content. Thus Paul’s usage is simply a stylistic variation (dative of content versus genitive of content) from his friend Luke’s usage in Acts 13:52. And these verbal usages of πληρώ are ultimately expressing the same concept as Luke’s usage of πλήρης followed by the genitive of content in Luke 4:1; Acts: 6:3; 6:5; 7:55; and 11:24. Köstenberger suggests that Luke and Paul’s theologies on this are “compatible and complementary.”¹⁶³

Turner explains that Luke’s uses “are cases of *persons* being described as ‘full of some quality.’”¹⁶⁴ For example, Acts 11:24 describes Barnabas as “a good man, and full of the Holy Spirit and of faith (πλήρης πνεύματος ἁγίου καὶ πίστεως). The idea, according to Turner, is that “a life ‘full of a particular quality was a life which observably

¹⁵⁹Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics*, 721.

¹⁶⁰Ibid., 722.

¹⁶¹Gordon D. Fee, “Baptism in the Holy Spirit: The Issue of Separability and Subsequence,” *Pneuma* 7 (Fall 1985): 94; Köstenberger says: “Thus Paul does not here seem to think of believers’ asking to be filled with the Spirit but rather is encouraging them to live lives permeated by the Spirit’s presence (‘What Does It Mean to Be Filled with the Spirit?’ 233). Also Decker, “Be Filled with the Spirit, Eph. 5:18,” 6.

¹⁶²*Ephesians*, 190. Similarly, Sinclair B. Ferguson, *The Holy Spirit* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 89; Collins, “Ephesians 5:18,” 24; Arnold, *Ephesians*, 350–51.

¹⁶³Köstenberger, “What Does It Mean to Be Filled with the Spirit?” 237.

¹⁶⁴Max Turner, “Spirit Endowment in Luke/Acts: Some Linguistic Considerations,” *Vox Evangelica* 12 (1981): 53.

expressed that quality, so that it was seen clearly to mark the man.”¹⁶⁵ When Paul exhorts the Ephesians to be “filled with the Spirit,” he wants them to *keep on* exhibiting those qualities that are characteristic of the Spirit, what Paul calls elsewhere “the fruit of the Spirit” (Gal 5:22–23).¹⁶⁶ This is the natural and normal progress of sanctification as a believer continues in his obedience to God.

There may be a parallel in Colossians 3:16–17 that confirms the general parameters of this interpretation.¹⁶⁷ There Paul says: “Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms *and* hymns *and* spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God. Whatever you do in word or deed, *do* all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father.” The verb “dwell” is the present imperative ἐνοικεῖτω, which Wallace suggests is another use of the present imperative for a general precept.¹⁶⁸ And ἐνοικεῖτω may have the same customary force as πληροῦσθε does in Ephesians 5:18—“continue to let the word of Christ dwell in you.” The “word of Christ” (ὁ λόγος τοῦ Χριστοῦ) is an objective genitive—“the word about Christ.”¹⁶⁹ “The word of Christ,” which only occurs here, is equivalent to the more common “the word of the Lord” (e.g., 1 Thess 1:8; 4:15; 2 Thess 3:1).¹⁷⁰ To “let the word of Christ dwell within you” speaks to at least

¹⁶⁵Ibid.

¹⁶⁶Ferguson argues that these references in Luke/Acts and Paul refer “predominantly to exhibiting the fruit of the Spirit in a life that is under the lordship of the Spirit” (*Holy Spirit*, 89).

¹⁶⁷The thematic connection between the Colossians and Ephesians is commonly noted. See Ironside, *In the Heavens*, 269; Kent, *Ephesians*, 97; Richard B. Gaffin, Jr., *Perspectives on Pentecost* (Phillipsburg, NJ: 1979), 33; Bruce, *Colossians, Philemon, and Ephesians*, 380; Arthur G. Patzia, *Ephesians, Colossians, Philemon*, New International Biblical Commentary (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1990), 263; Fee, *God’s Empowering Presence*, 719; Decker, “Be Filled with the Spirit, Eph. 5:18,” 2–4; Anderson and Saucy, *Common Made Holy*, 281; Liefeld, *Ephesians*, 137; Raymond, *Systematic Theology*, 766; O’Brien, *Ephesians*, 395; Thomas R. Schreiner, *Paul, Apostle of God’s Glory in Christ* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 310, 422; Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 707; Naselli, *Let God and Let God?* 256; Collins, “Ephesians 5:18,” 22–23; John F. MacArthur, *Strange Fire* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson 2013), 205–6.

¹⁶⁸Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics*, 525, n. 30.

¹⁶⁹Peter T. O’Brien, *Colossians, Philemon*, Word Biblical Commentary (Waco, TX: Word, 1982), 206; Richard R. Melick, Jr., *Philippians, Colossians, Philemon*, New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman, 1991), 303; Fee, *God’s Empowering Presence*, 650; Todd D. Still, “Colossians,” in vol. 12 of *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, rev. ed., ed. Tremper Longman and David E. Garland (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006), 334; Douglas J. Moo, *The Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon*, Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 286; David W. Pao, *Colossians and Philemon*, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Zondervan 2012), 247.

¹⁷⁰James D. G. Dunn, *The Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 236. O’Brien notes: “The change from ‘of God’ or ‘of the Lord’ may have been due to the Colossian situation; certainly the present expression is in keeping

an *attention to* and *obedience to* the Word of God.¹⁷¹

The parallel between Paul’s words in Ephesians and Colossians can be seen in his use of a series of participles following the imperatives πληροῦσθε and ἐνοικεῖτω, which are dependent on them.

Ephesians 5:18–20	Colossians 3:16–17
Be filled (πληροῦσθε) with the Spirit	Let the word of Christ richly dwell (ἐνοικεῖτω) within you
speaking (λαλοῦντες) to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs,	teaching (διδάσκοντες) and admonishing (νουθετοῦντες) one another with psalms <i>and</i> hymns <i>and</i> spiritual songs
singing (ᾄδοντες) and making melody (ψάλλοντες) with your heart to the Lord	singing (ᾄδοντες) with thankfulness in your hearts to God.
giving thanks (εὐχαριστοῦντες) for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God, even the Father	giving thanks (εὐχαριστοῦντες) through Him to God the Father

The exact relationship between the participles and the imperatives in both passages is debated.¹⁷² The participles in Ephesians following πληροῦσθε are commonly seen as expressing result.¹⁷³ They describe the “characteristic activities of those who are Spirit-filled.”¹⁷⁴ The parallel with Ephesians suggests that the participles in Colossians could also be understood as indicating result.¹⁷⁵ Whatever the exact relationships, at least we can say that the similarity of language and structure suggests a strong thematic connection between being “filled with the Spirit” and

with the rest of the letter with its emphasis on the person and work of Christ” (*Colossians, Philemon*, 206).

¹⁷¹Bruce, *Colossians, Philemon, and Ephesians*, 158; O’Brien, *Colossians, Philemon*, 207.

¹⁷²Rather strangely, in the same book, Schreiner first says the participles are expressing result (268, 316), and later, he argues for means (422) (*Paul, Apostle of God’s Glory in Christ*).

¹⁷³MacDonald, *Ephesians*, 120; Kent, *Ephesians*, 97; Vaughan, *Ephesians*, 112; Gaffin, *Perspectives on Pentecost*, 33; Stott, *Ephesians*, 205; MacArthur, *Ephesians*, 255; Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 345; Toussaint, *Basic Theology Applied*, 215; Snodgrass, *Ephesians*, 290; Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics*, 639; Gromacki, *Holy Spirit*, 186; O’Brien, *Ephesians*, 387, 394; Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 706; Klein, “Ephesians,” 143; Naselli, *Let God and Let God?* 255; Heil, “Ephesians 5:18b,” 515, n. 24; Chapell, *Ephesians*, 263, n. 19; Thielman, *Ephesians*, 361; Oats, “Filled with or Full of the Spirit,” 215; Allison, “Baptism with and Filling of the Holy Spirit,” 15.

¹⁷⁴Chapell, *Ephesians*, 263.

¹⁷⁵Fee, *God’s Empowering Presence*, 650; Melick, *Philippians, Colossians, Philemon*, 303.

“let[ting] the word of Christ richly dwell within you.” When the ministry of the Spirit is evident in the life of the believer, it is natural to speak of that one as being “filled with the Spirit.” That filling is seen in certain character traits Paul calls the fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:22–23) and certain activities that he describes in Ephesians 5:19–20. These activities are also associated with “let[ting] the word of Christ richly dwell within you” in Colossians 3:16–17. These activities in Ephesians and Colossians are not exhaustive, but only exemplary of a holy lifestyle. The filling of the Spirit is no special spiritual highlight in the life of the believer. Instead, it is the normal experience of the believer as he increasingly strives to live a life that is in obedience to God and his Word. Paul’s exhortation is “to continue” or “keep on being filled with the Spirit.” Paul encourages the Ephesians to keep on acting like Spirit-people, to display those character qualities that are typical of their new life in Christ.

CONCLUSION

Until the 19th century, Paul’s exhortation in Ephesians 5:18 to “be filled with the Spirit” seems to have received no great attention in the church. It was not thought to be an important injunction in relation to the doctrine of sanctification. But this all changed with the popularity of second-blessing theology, beginning with John Wesley. Although Keswick theology seeks to distinguish itself from Wesley, it still retains the idea that the believer needs an additional work of grace beyond regeneration in order to bring about his sanctification. It commonly identifies that work with the filling of the Holy Spirit in Ephesians 5:18. The popularization of this theology by numerous evangelicals in the 20th century profoundly influenced the Christian milieu such that most discussions of sanctification commonly emphasize the need for Christians to be filled with the Spirit as an important or sometimes essential experience in the believer’s life. But as I have sought to demonstrate, this emphasis is greatly overdone since the theology behind it is itself defective.

Instead, the scriptural data suggests that the filling in Ephesians 5:18 is to be interpreted in line with what is often referred to as ordinary filling, which is found in several examples in Luke/Acts. Thus a right understanding of the scriptural data stresses the need for believers to have their lives marked by those characteristics and qualities that distinguish those who are regenerated and indwelt by the Holy Spirit. Paul wants believers to keep on being filled with the Spirit, which, of course, is the normal and expected activity of the obedient believer. There is no scriptural basis for believers to seek a special experience called the filling of the Holy Spirit as part of their progressive sanctification. Köstenberger cautions: “Believers should be advised to shed any undue preoccupation with whether they are filled with the Spirit, focusing rather on living obedient Christian lives that are increasingly characterized by the

Spirit's presence."¹⁷⁶ Therefore, Walvoord is wrong when he argues that "the filling of the Spirit is the secret of sanctification." If there is a *secret* of sanctification, it can be summarized by the word *obedience*.

¹⁷⁶"What Does It Mean to Be Filled with the Spirit?" 40.