

# HOW GREAT IS OUR GOD!

## STUDY TEN

### What Does Being “Filled with the Spirit” Mean?

*Ephesians 5:15–21*

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*Our Father and our Savior have not left us without a Comforter. Though the work of the Holy Spirit is not as well-known or well-articulated or defined as the work of the Father and Son, we do need to be aware of what the Spirit of God does and the role He plays—including the all-important subject of His filling.*

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

A gas-powered car won't drive without fuel. No matter how new its engine, glossy its paint, or state-of-the-art its design; to achieve its purpose, fuel must power the engine to rotate the wheels and move the vehicle from point A to point B. Same with steam engines and heat. No heat—whether from coal or wood or oil—means no movement.

Just as humans designed these engines to run on fuel and heat, God designed people to run on fuel—physical *and* spiritual fuel. Water and food power our fleshly bodies. But what about our spirits? That's where His Spirit comes in.

Relying on our own energy, we can't drive ourselves in the way God intends. Rather, we must depend on fuel only He can give. While the “mind of Christ” shapes our perspective (1 Corinthians 2:16), the presence of the Holy Spirit abides with our spirit, *enabling* and *empowering* us to love as God loves (Romans 5:5).

The New Testament describes this spiritual combustion as “being filled with the Spirit.” The apostle Paul teaches us what this means in one of the most important biblical passages for living out the Christian life practically: Ephesians 5:15–21.



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SEARCHING  
THE  
SCRIPTURES  
BIBLE STUDIES

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## PREPARE YOUR HEART

Many think the Spirit’s sole responsibility is to perform miracles, like when Peter commanded the paralyzed man to walk (*Acts 3:1–10*) or when Paul touched a handkerchief that then healed any who touched it (*19:11–12*). But these miracles do not occur in the everyday lives of most Christians. Instead, the normal activity of the Spirit comes in the form of divine enablement so you can live like Jesus every day.

With that in mind, take a moment to pray for the Spirit’s enablement during this study—that you may profit from what you learn and use it to glorify Jesus in your life.



## TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

Before examining Ephesians, let’s review two of the Spirit’s activities in our lives based on two New Testament statements.

### You Will Receive Power—Acts 1:8

*“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you. And you will be my witnesses, telling people about me everywhere—in Jerusalem, throughout Judea, in Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”* (Acts 1:8)

We don’t receive just any power. We receive the kind of power rooted in a unique source and designed for a specific purpose. What did Jesus communicate in this statement about the Holy Spirit’s power in our lives?

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## He Will Give You Another Advocate—John 14:16–17

*“And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, who will never leave you. He is the Holy Spirit, who leads into all truth. The world cannot receive him, because it isn’t looking for him and doesn’t recognize him. But you know him, because he lives with you now and later will be in you.” (John 14:16–17)*

According to Jesus’ words above, where will the Spirit dwell and for how long once He resides there? What will He do?

Above, we read how the Spirit comes to us and empowers us to enjoy Jesus’ presence and share Jesus’ message. Below, in Paul’s epistle to the church in Ephesus, he explores how the Spirit helps us follow in Jesus’ footsteps.

*And now, just as you accepted Christ Jesus as your Lord, you must continue to follow him. (Colossians 2:6)*



### **Observation: Not with Wine**

In the first half of Ephesians, Paul’s theology opens the curtain of eternity past and paints a vision of eternity future. God planned our salvation through Jesus Christ as well as our eventual glorification with Christ—all for the purpose of bringing praise to God (Ephesians 1:3–14). But what about the present? What should we do after we are saved and before we enter glory? Paul answered that question in Ephesians 4–6. Read what he teaches in [Ephesians 5:15–21](#).<sup>1</sup>

What did Paul exhort his readers to avoid?

What did Paul exhort his readers to pursue?

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During observation, we look for contrasts, like you did above. Exhortations provide clear contrasts: “Don’t do this. Instead, do this.”

*Because I have the Spirit of Christ, I have within me the controls to handle my flesh. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll*

In this passage, two main clauses with their subordinate clauses visualize how Paul’s ideas connect. Consult the New American Standard Bible for this segment of observation, as it more clearly conveys Paul’s flow of thoughts.

First, Ephesians 5:15 contains a main clause with a command and 5:16 a subordinate clause with a participle. (A participle is an “-ing” word that functions like an adverb.) The main clause conveys *what*, and the subordinate conveys *how*.

5:15 Main Clause—*do what?* \_\_\_\_\_

5:16 Subordinate Clause—*how: by* \_\_\_\_\_

Second, 5:18 contains a main clause, and 5:19–20 includes four subordinate clauses with participles.

5:18 Main Clause—*do what?* \_\_\_\_\_

5:19 Subordinate Clause One—*how: by* \_\_\_\_\_

5:19 Subordinate Clause Two—*how: by* \_\_\_\_\_

5:19 Subordinate Clause Three—*how: by* \_\_\_\_\_

5:20 Subordinate Clause Four—*how: by* \_\_\_\_\_

Yet, 5:20 does not contain the last subordinate clause of 5:18. In fact, 5:21 in Greek has the same verb form for the phrase *be subject* as the four subordinate clauses above. So we should be filled with the Spirit by *being subject* “to one another in the fear of Christ” (5:21). See how it all connects? We can summarize Paul’s flow of thought with this theological principle: *The Spirit gives us a grateful heart that praises God and a humble attitude that serves others.*

That’s the reason we observe the passage slowly, to discover God’s truths through which we can more clearly see our world and our role in it! Paul’s theological spectacles become our theological spectacles.

*The Spirit of God fuels us with power to live as authentic Christians with a joyful attitude. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll*

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## Interpretation: But with the Spirit

For interpretation, we break down just one verb in Ephesians 5:18 because of its significance for our walk with Christ. In his sermon, Pastor Chuck explains four characteristics of the verb form of *pleroo*, translated *be filled*, as in “be filled with the Spirit” (Ephesians 5:18).

1. *Command*: The verb *pleroo* is not a philosophical suggestion nor magazine advice. It’s an imperative, necessary for our obedience to Christ and enjoyment of Him.
2. *Present tense*: This verb implies consistency. We are baptized by the Spirit once at our salvation (Romans 6:3–4; 1 Corinthians 12:12–13). But we seek to be filled by the Spirit daily! Hourly, even. At home and work, while running errands and doing chores, in the ordinary activities of life.
3. *Passive voice*: We can’t fill ourselves with God’s Spirit. We call upon God to enable us through His Spirit to do what we could never do on our own: live like Christ. Our job is to yield our will to His, seek Him in His Word, praise Him in our songs, and step out in faithful obedience.
4. *Plural*: We don’t grow in the Christian life when we isolate ourselves from other Christians as if we were on a remote island. God brings people together. Being filled with the Spirit occurs in community. Not alone.

Put in your own words what it means to “be filled with the Spirit” (Ephesians 5:18). How would you explain the concept to someone else?

After reflecting on the four characteristics of *being filled* with the Spirit, record below why these themes are significant for Christians today. What do we lose if we neglect these truths?

*What is the normal Christian life? It is the authentic. The real. The enablement to live a life that those without Christ can’t even imagine. The power to control your tongue. The ability to clear and clean up your thoughts. The ability to guard yourself against temptation. Being filled with the Spirit offers you hope beyond the normal drag of the flesh. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll*

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## Correlation: The Fruit of Being Filled with the Spirit

Paul, in his letter to the churches of Galatia, exhorted his readers to gaze upon the tree of virtue, sprouting spiritual fruit when irrigated with divine waters. Galatians 5:16–26 correlates well with Ephesians 5:15–21 because it adds color to the meaning of *being filled with the Spirit*. It, too, is a passage of contrasts. Watch for them as you carefully read [Galatians 5:16–26](#). Fill in the chart below, contrasting desires of the flesh’s sinful nature and the fruits of the Spirit.

Desires of the Flesh	Fruit of the Spirit

*The flesh and Spirit are always in opposition to one another. Think of them as such. The flesh life; the Spirit life. The carnal walk; the spiritual walk.*

—Pastor Chuck Swindoll



## Application: Two Considerations

Reflect on these two thoughts as you consider how to apply this text.

1. *The world is looking for the authentic, not the amazing.*
2. *The church needs daily enablement, not monthly miracles.*

The Spirit provides each of us the ability to give the world what it’s looking for and what the church needs: authenticity and daily enablement. Now consider your relationship with the Spirit. How do you normally cultivate your dependence on the Spirit? In what way can you improve upon this? How would you be different if you did so?

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Do you sense the Lord leading you to depend on His power as you step out in faith in a certain area of your life? Tell the Lord your desire to yield to His will and allow the Spirit to fill you with His divine enablement.

In Christ we have the key. With the Spirit, we have the fuel. His energy works far better than our own. As we yield to His will and step out in faithful obedience, His power flows through us. Rely on the Spirit every day, because the world needs it and our joy depends upon it.



## A FINAL PRAYER

End this study by incorporating into a prayer what you have learned.

### ENDNOTE

1. To learn more about Pastor Chuck Swindoll’s *Searching the Scriptures* Bible-study method, go to the web page, “*How Does Pastor Chuck Swindoll Study the Bible?*”

For the 2026 broadcasts, this *Searching the Scriptures* Bible study was developed by Aaron Massey, senior vice president of *Searching the Scriptures* Ministries, and Bryce Klabunde, vice president of *Searching the Scriptures* Ministries, based upon the original outlines, charts, and transcripts of Charles R. Swindoll’s messages. Copyright © 2008, 2019, 2026 by Charles R. Swindoll, Inc. All rights are reserved worldwide. Duplication of copyrighted material for commercial use is strictly prohibited.

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