

## § 6. Doctrine of God: Holy Spirit

### Lecture 6

#### Why Are So Many Christians Not Filled With the Holy Spirit?

Last time we saw that there is a difference in the New Testament drawn between Christians who are *indwelt* with the Holy Spirit and Christians who are *filled* with the Holy Spirit. All Christians have been baptized by the Holy Spirit into the body of Christ and are therefore indwelt by the Holy Spirit. But as we saw in 1 Corinthians chapter 2 and the first part of chapter 3, Paul says that although all Christians are indwelt with the Holy Spirit some Christians still are living under the domination and influence of the flesh, that is to say the fallen human nature, and therefore do not produce the fruit of the Holy Spirit. Instead these Christians exhibit the works of the flesh that Paul talks about in Galatians chapter 5.

We saw that the signs of the Spirit-filled life are not charismatic gifts like speaking in tongues or prophetic utterance or working of healing miracles. The church in Corinth exhibited all sorts of charismatic gifts and yet was one of the most carnal churches in the New Testament. Rather, the evidence of the Spirit-filled life is the fruit of the Spirit that Paul talks about in Galatians chapter 5. Those who are walking in the Holy Spirit, who are filled with the Spirit, produce the fruit of the Holy Spirit in their lives rather than the works of the flesh.

The question that I left us with is this: why is it that so many Christians are not filled with the Holy Spirit? Why is it that so many Christians seem to fall into that category of carnal Christians – Christians who are still living under the domination and influence of the fallen human nature? Why do so few seem to enjoy the fullness of the Holy Spirit? Let me suggest two reasons as to why so many Christians are not filled with the Holy Spirit.

1. *A lack of total commitment.* In other words, these persons, though they are Christians, are not really sold out 100% to Christ. This lack of total commitment, I think, prevents the fullness of the Holy Spirit in their life and leaves them in the power the flesh.

Look at Jesus' very familiar parable of the sower in Mark chapter 4. In Mark 4:3-9 Jesus gives the parable of the sower and then in verses 14 to 20 he gives its interpretation.

“Listen! A sower went out to sow. And as he sowed, some seed fell along the path, and the birds came and devoured it. Other seed fell on rocky ground, where it had not much soil, and immediately it sprang up, since it had no depth of soil; and when the sun rose it was scorched, and since it had no root it withered away. Other seed fell among thorns and the thorns grew up and choked it, and it yielded no grain. And other seeds fell into good soil and brought forth grain, growing up and increasing and yielding thirtyfold and sixtyfold and a hundredfold.” And he said, “He who has ears to hear, let him hear.”

Thus the parable of the sower. In verses 14 to 20 Jesus interprets this parable for us. He says<sup>1</sup>,

The sower sows the word. And these are the ones along the path, where the word is sown; when they hear, Satan immediately comes and takes away the word which is sown in them. And these in like manner are the ones sown upon rocky ground, who, when they hear the word, immediately receive it with joy; and they have no root in themselves, but endure for a while; then, when tribulation or persecution arises on account of the word, immediately they fall away. And others are the ones sown among thorns; they are those who hear the word, but the cares of the world, and the delight in riches, and the desire for other things, enter in and choke the word, and it proves unfruitful. But those that were sown upon the good soil are the ones who hear the word and accept it and bear fruit, thirtyfold and sixtyfold and a hundredfold.

I want to draw your attention to that third kind of soil – the seed that is sown among thorns. These persons receive the word but they are not fruitful. They don't bear grain. They are living, but they are not a fruitful type of plant. What is the difference between these people and the people who are the good soil that bear fruit thirty, sixty, a hundredfold? Jesus identifies three things that choke out the word and make them unfruitful:

1. *The cares of the world* (that is to say, just the pressures and the vicissitudes of life that drag them down).
2. *The delight in riches* (the desire for monetary gain; for affluence).
3. *The desire for other things* (their heart's desire is not for God, not for the kingdom).

These three features conspired to make these people unfruitful. The cares of the world, the delight in riches, and the desire for other things.

The contrast to this type of person, I think, is found in The Sermon on the Mount, Matthew 6:33 where Jesus says, "Seek first his Kingdom and his righteousness and all these things shall be yours as well." Here Jesus says your focus is not to be upon worldly things, upon prosperity, upon material things. Rather we are to seek first God's Kingdom and its righteousness. That is in contrast, I think, to those who are represented by the third type of soil who lack this kind of total commitment. Their commitment is not first and foremost to God and his righteousness and his kingdom, but they have a desire for other things – for riches – and are burdened with the cares of this world. This, I think, would explain why many Christians are not Spirit-filled, fruitful Christians.

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<sup>1</sup> 4:56

The prescription for being that good soil – that type of person who seeks first the Kingdom of God and its righteousness – is found, I think, in Romans 12:1-2. This gives the prescription for this kind of life. Paul says,

I appeal to you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may prove what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

Here Paul describes a person who is totally committed to God, body and soul.<sup>2</sup> His body is committed to God as a living sacrifice, and then he is transformed by the renewal of his mind. So body and soul are sold out to Christ.

The result is that you can discern what is the will of God. Notice what the will of God is. It is characterized by three adjectives: it is good, it is acceptable, and it is perfect. You don't need to be afraid of God's will for your life. God's perfect will for you (if you could fully understand it) you would recognize to be good. It would be acceptable, not only acceptable to God but acceptable to you as well. And it would be perfect. That means there's nothing you can do to improve upon it. Any efforts you could make to improve upon God's will for your life will only damage it because it's already perfect. So there is no reason not to be totally committed to Christ in the way that Paul describes – as a living sacrifice, body and soul, given to him and so bearing fruit through the Holy Spirit directing and controlling your life.

I think one of the reasons that many Christians are not filled with the Holy Spirit is due to a lack of total commitment on their part.

But that's not the only reason.

*2. There is a reliance upon self-effort that frustrates the attempt to lead a Spirit-filled life.* Some people may indeed be totally committed to Christ. They are sold out to Christ, but they are attempting to live the Christian life on their own strength, in their own power, that is to say in the power of the flesh. And that is futile. The Christian life is impossible to lead in the power of the flesh. It cannot be done through self-effort. This is what Jesus teaches us in the parable of the vine and the branches in John 15:4-5. Jesus says,

Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in me, and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.

It couldn't be clearer, could it? The branch severed from the vine is powerless to produce fruit. It only withers and dies. The secret to bearing fruit is to be abiding in the vine. As the life of the vine courses through the branches they will naturally become fruitful. So it is a matter not of self-effort but rather a matter of abiding in Christ.

Notice that after his resurrection the disciples were told to tarry in Jerusalem until they are endowed with the power of the Holy Spirit. Acts 1:4-8.

And while staying with them he charged them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father, which, he said, "you heard from me, for John baptized with water, but before many days you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit. . . . But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth."

Here the Holy Spirit is the secret to the power to be effective witnesses for Christ throughout the world.<sup>3</sup> To go out on your own, to try to live the Christian life without the power of the Holy Spirit, is futile and hopeless.

The secret to the fruitful Christian life is allowing Christ to live out his life through us. This is what Paul talks about in Galatians 2:20. Paul says, "I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me; and the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me." This is the same truth that is expressed in the parable of the vine and the branches. Christ is the vine; we are the branches. It is Christ living through us that enables us to have a fruitful Christian existence.

Without the filling of the Holy Spirit (which is described here by saying Christ is living in me, that is to say, the Holy Spirit of Christ living in me) the Christian life is reduced to legalism and grinding self-effort. Therefore the non-Christian will actually often be happier than the Christian who is living a defeated Christian experience in the power of the flesh.

This, I think, was described no better than in the following testimony that I want to read from a Christian minister who apostatized and walked away from Christ and became a non-Christian. He contrasts his life as a Christian with the life that he now has as an apostate. I think you will hear a description that is perfect of the carnal Christian existence lived in the power of the flesh. This is what he says.

Since I'm passionate about the things I'm interested in, I tried as best as I could to be a faithful Christian, and good minister. I accepted God's grace, and it radically changed my life when I was a teenager. After being saved I wanted to show God

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<sup>3</sup> 15:27

how grateful I was for his gift of salvation by committing my life over to him with all I had. Even though I knew it was by grace that I had been saved, I almost always felt guilty that I wasn't doing enough in response to God's love. Whether it was spending time in prayer, evangelizing, reading the Bible, tithing, forgiving someone who had done me wrong, or whether it was struggling with temptations of lust, pride, selfishness and laziness, I almost always felt guilty. . . . I never could understand how Christian people could come to church every Sunday but never get involved much in the Church's programs, because that's what believers should want to do, as I did.

. . .

Today I am pretty much guilt free in the sense that I have no guilt in regards to the Christian duties mentioned above. In fact, I can't remember when I have ever been happier than I am today. . . . I'm living life to the hilt, pretty much guilt free, primarily because my ethical standards aren't as high. In fact, I believe the Christian ethical standards are simply impossible for anyone to measure up to.<sup>4</sup> Think about it, according to Jesus I should feel guilty for not just what I do, but for what I think about, lusting, hating, coveting, etc. I'd like every person . . . to experience the freedom I have found.

That, I think, is a perfect description of the carnal Christian life lived in the power of the flesh through self-effort. It is a miserable, guilt-ridden, works-oriented type of lifestyle. A lifestyle that is less fulfilling than being a non-Christian where you don't have to worry about these sorts of ethical duties and concerns.

I think the fundamental failure of this ex-Christian is that he did not understand that the Christian life is primarily about *being*, not *doing*. For him, the Christian life was primarily about what he did for God to show his gratitude to God. It was all about doing, all about performance, and not about being and about abiding in Christ in the life of the vine, enjoying the grace of God and the forgiveness of God that enables one to have that source of power in life. Certainly someone who is focused on being in Christ will be involved in doing. Of course he will! He'll be involved in evangelism and giving and acts of mercy and so forth. But those acts will not be the basis of the Christian life. They will be the overflow of an abundant life that is connected to the life of the vine and so naturally produces this kind of fruit.

I want to suggest that those two reasons may be why so many Christians don't experience the fullness of the Holy Spirit in their lives. Either there is a lack of total commitment (they are not really sold out; the desire for other things, for material gain, the pressures of life choke out the word in them and make them unfruitful) or else they are trying to live the Christian life in their own power and that results in futility, guilt, and a sort of grinding legalism.

That raises the question then: how can I be filled with the Holy Spirit? I want to suggest that it's a very simple matter of repentance and faith. Repent and believe.

First of all, repent. We need to confess to God the known sin that is in our lives. We need to come honestly before him and acknowledge the sin that he convicts us of. 1 John 1:9 gives this promise: "If we confess our sins he is faithful and just and will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness." So the first thing to do is to repent. Quit hiding from God, quit rationalizing your sin, but confess known sin to God, acknowledging it before him. That's the negative aspect. The positive aspect is to believe. That is to say, to yield oneself to God as a living sacrifice in the way that Paul prescribes in Romans 12:1-2. Body and soul yielded to God as a sacrificial offering. This is not dependent upon emotions or feelings which come and go. This is a commitment of the will.

Then, having made that total commitment of yielding yourself to God as a living sacrifice, then we need to walk in the Spirit on a daily basis – to log time in the Spirit. We need to practice immediate confession of sin and resurrender of our lives to God.<sup>5</sup> Being filled with the Holy Spirit is not a sort of permanent status that a Christian enjoys. Rather, one can, through sin, retake control of one's life. You need in that case to practice confession again, claim 1 John 1:9, and then resurrender your life to God. This is the difference between a living sacrifice and the sacrifices in the Old Testament. In the Old Testament the animal sacrifices were slaughtered before they were presented to the Lord. They were dead! But Paul says present yourself as a living sacrifice. That is much more difficult, right? Because a living sacrifice tends to crawl off the altar! So this is a life that needs to be continually resurrendered daily to God through immediate confession of sin and re-commitment.

The Scripture indicates that as Christians we can grieve the Holy Spirit through sin. Ephesians 4:30. Paul says, "Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God in whom you were sealed for the day of redemption." You are indwelt with the Holy Spirit. Paul says don't grieve the Holy Spirit. The context of Ephesians 4 makes it evident that we do that through sin in our lives. By sinning we grieve the Holy Spirit and so lose his fullness.

Not only that, however, we can also quench the Holy Spirit's work in our lives through disobedience. 1 Thessalonians 5:19. Paul says, "Do not quench the Spirit." I think the

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<sup>5</sup> 25:00

difference between grieving the Spirit and quenching the Spirit is that grieving the Holy Spirit is done through sin whereas quenching the Holy Spirit involves not following the Holy Spirit but suppressing his activity in your life. The context of 1 Thessalonians 5 is don't despise prophesying. Don't try to quench the Spirit in your life. We quench the Spirit when the Holy Spirit is leading us to do something and we refuse to do it, or we feel his conviction that something needs to change and we quench it and suppress it. By doing that we will forfeit his power and direction in our lives.

We need as Christians to be continually confessing our sins and surrendering the control of our lives to God so as to not grieve or quench the Holy Spirit through sin or disobedience.

This involves a daily commitment. Every day that you get up, before you roll out of bed and your feet hit the floor, just say a prayer, "Lord take control of the throne of my life today. Live out your life through me. Fill me with your Holy Spirit. Direct and control me today."

Jan gives a wonderful illustration of this truth of walking in the Holy Spirit. She thinks of it as a sort of umbrella through which you walk through life's storms. As long as you stay under God's umbrella you'll be safe in the storms of life. That doesn't mean you won't suffer, but you'll be where God wants you to be – you'll be in his will. But if you stray off the path or go outside the umbrella then you are apt to go into the ditch or into disaster because you no longer walking in the will of God for you. So we want to stay under that umbrella of God's will along life's way. That will be done by allowing the Holy Spirit to empower and direct us day by day as we go along life's path.<sup>6</sup>

### **START DISCUSSION**

*Student:* About the vine and the branches, I was curious about when you were talking about Christians that do not bear fruit, do you mean nominal Christians or Christians that are saved?

*Dr. Craig:* I'm thinking here of Christians that are saved. Remember in 1 Corinthians 3 Paul talks about the day of judgment when we will all stand before Christ. He says that judgment day will test each man's work to see how he has built on the foundation which is Jesus Christ. He says some people's work will be burned up. It is like wood, hay, and stubble that they built on the foundation whereas other people's work are like gold, silver, and precious stones. They survive the fire of judgment. Paul says he himself will be saved (this person). He is a regenerate Christian. But his works are going to be all burned up and so he will not receive the sort of reward that he would have received had he been faithful.

*Student:* I was just mainly curious because in John 15 (which you mentioned earlier) it mentioned in verses 1 and 2, “I am the true vine and my father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit while every branch that does bear fruit in pruned so that it will even be more fruitful.”

*Dr. Craig:* Yes. And particularly verse 6 which I didn’t read: “If a man does not abide in me he is cast forth as a branch and withers, and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned.” Now that raises the question of apostasy. Can someone commit apostasy and be severed from the vine in such a way as to lose his salvation? To all appearances the testimony that I read this morning is of a person who has committed apostasy and may find himself in that sort of situation. I don’t think we know when a person has crossed that line or not. I think we always have to assume that it’s possible for him to repent and come back and we should pray and work for that, but there may be persons such as Jesus described here who had become so severed from the life of Christ that they are now lost. But that’s a question will take up later. My focus today is on the fullness of the Holy Spirit and not on the question of perseverance of the saints.

*Student:* I just wanted to give you a very interesting picture that we saw recently. We have some crape myrtle trees in the back of our house. A few months ago my wife cut some branches off those crape myrtle trees, scraped the twigs and leaves off of them, and used them to fashion a sort of a decorative arbor on the back of our deck. The interesting thing was about two or three days after that they started sprouting. They budded and they started growing leaves. Now about three months later there are still tiny little semi-shriveled-but-still-alive leaves growing on these sticks that have been cut off. If you look at that and you compare it to the trees growing right beside it, the leaves on the trees are green and lush and full and alive. These branches that have been severed have these tiny little shriveled leaves. It is just such a perfect picture of the branch trying to produce fruit on its own and how maybe it can produce a little bit but it is absolutely nothing compared to what it can do when those branches are still connected into the tree and how that's enough maybe in our own lives that maybe through our own efforts we are able to produce just the tiniest little bit of fruit and we deceive ourselves into thinking we can do it on our own and what a difference that is if we truly are abiding and what a difference there is in the fruit.

*Dr. Craig:* That is a very poignant illustration.

*Student:* I thank you for your important insights there. I think I hear a message of Bill Bright and the Spirit-filled life. It seems to me every system of human thought that tries to address comprehensibly reality says there is something wrong with human nature. I think, if I understand correctly, the main answer Christianity offers to the deficiencies of human nature and the human condition is the work of the Holy Spirit that happens here in

this life not something after death.<sup>7</sup> But it seems to me that I've heard Christians before say, *The answer to greed, lust, violence, selfishness, and all the forms of evil is for everybody to become a Christian and walk in the Spirit.* That would be wonderful but I don't think that's . . . Matthew 7:13-14 – *the way is narrow that leads to life, few who be that find it.* For example, Jim Daly, the President of Focus on the Family, after that terrible shooting in Newtown, Connecticut five years ago or so when those children were killed, he said the answer is not gun control, it is for everybody to change their heart and become a believer. That would be fantastic but I don't think that's realistic.

*Dr. Craig:* Yes, I sympathize very much with what you are saying. I saw Franklin Graham on television this week saying much the same thing – that God is our only hope. I thought if that's true then we are really in a hopeless situation because it is just highly, highly improbable that, as you say, everyone is going to turn to God and yield their lives to him. So we'd better find some other way of managing to live in a society that is a mixture of good and evil in such a way that evil can be restrained and controlled through a system of laws and punishment and so forth. It is just too facile to say, *We all need God.* Certainly I think that it is true that, as I've already explained, we do need God, the power of the Holy Spirit, in order to live a transformed life, but that's not going to be a realistic answer to the problems that society faces which will always be a mixture of good and evil together. We've got to figure out ways to control and inhibit the forces of evil in society.

## **END DISCUSSION**

Our Father in heaven, we thank you that though we are sinful and fallen creatures that you love us so much and that Christ died for those sins to free us from guilt and punishment and to impute to us his righteousness. Thank you that as we are clothed in his blood we stand righteous and forgiven before you. And now Lord, in the best way that we know how, we want to yield our lives to you as living sacrifices. Our bodies pure and dedicated to you. Our souls given over to renewal through the transforming power of your Holy Spirit. Lord Jesus, we pray that you would live out your life through us. Help us to abide in you as the branches abide in the vine and so to bear much fruit. Holy Spirit of God, we pray that you would take control of our lives, direct us and empower us to live lives that are full of your fruit and that are pleasing to our God and Father. Through Jesus Christ Our Lord, Amen.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> 35:03

<sup>8</sup> Total Running Time: 38:55 (Copyright © 2016 William Lane Craig)