



HIGH ON GOD • Rick James

Which One of These Things is not Like the Other

In Eph. 5:18 it says, “Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery, Instead be filled with the Spirit.” This is a commonly quoted verse but one is compelled to ask, “What does getting drunk on wine have to do with being filled with the Spirit?” Could Paul have just as easily said, “Don’t snack in between meals, and be filled with the Spirit?” I would suggest that the thought that links the two commands is that of influence or control. Thus there is something similar between the two, the idea of control, as well as a contrast between a right way to be controlled, by the Spirit, and a wrong way, drinking.

Because the way and manner by which the Holy Spirit influences us is somewhat mysterious, or at least not easily measurable, the metaphor of drinking can actually be very instructive and perhaps aid us in understanding how the Holy Spirit influences us.

What It Looks Like to Be Filled with the Spirit

Interestingly, this is not the first place in Scripture that puts these two things side by side. Acts 2, contains the story of when the Holy Spirit first descends upon the church. As onlookers witness the effects of the Spirit’s descending, they become convinced that the Christians are actually drunk. Peter must stand up and explain, “These men are not drunk, as you suppose” (Acts 2:15).

So what is it about being filled with the Spirit that would cause people to suspect intoxication. Let me suggest a few things. First, is an open display of love. Ever known someone “under the influence” to say, in slightly slurred speech, “I love you man.” Often, those who are intoxicated are much freer with their emotions and affections. Likewise, a hallmark of the work of the Holy Spirit in a person’s life is a greater capacity to love, which is demonstrated in words and actions.

Next, people turn to alcohol for comfort in difficult times. Country and Western songs abound with laments of the difficulties of life: mama’s in prison, the bank owns my pick-up truck, Jake the dog died, etc., etc. These songs always seem to encourage finding solace in the local tavern, and multiple alcoholic beverages. In contrast, The Holy Spirit is referred to as the “Great Comforter” in Scripture. Life is hard and the Holy Spirit promises comfort and enablement to live above life’s circumstances.

There is also greater boldness in speech exhibited by those who have been drinking. Likewise, when the Holy Spirit comes upon the disciples, we see them boldly proclaiming the gospel. When called before the religious leaders and ordered to stop they proclaim, “we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard” (Acts 4:20). These shy, timid men were transformed by the influence of the Spirit so that they couldn’t keep their mouths shut about Christ and the gospel.

There are other comparisons we could make but you get the picture.



While alcohol is a good example of an unhealthy influence affecting our wills and behavior, similar effects can be noted in states of rage, lust, or greed. Even good things like music can, in great enough quantity, have an unhealthy ability to influence our behavior.

Yet in all of these examples, we get a better picture of what it means to have a foreign influence affect our thoughts, feelings, and behavior.

The Contrast

While, in some ways, this helps us to better see what it looks like to be empowered by the Holy Spirit, it must also be seen that alcohol is really a counterfeit. What people are really thirsting for is the presence of God. Alcohol-induced states only create the temporary illusion of a reality that only the Spirit can produce in our lives.

Also alcohol's control, as well as rage, lust, or greed, tends to be coercive, and usually means a loss of our own will and control. In Matthew 20:25 Jesus says, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them... not so with you." Jesus is telling them that their leadership and influence should be loving encouragement, not coercion, and the domination of the will. Such is the Spirit's influence. When we choose to listen and desire to be directed, the Holy Spirit leads and influences. But our desire to be lead is important to God and essential for experiencing the Spirit's power.

How Can We Be More Under the Influence of the Holy Spirit?

As we have looked at alcohol as an example, we may further note that there are differing degrees of intoxication. Likewise, there are differing degrees that a person can be controlled by the influence of the Holy Spirit. There are several things that we can do to make our sensing of the Spirit's leading and presence more acute. We will consider four.

Complete Submission to the Will of God

How does one become more drunk? He consumes more alcohol. In the case of the Holy Spirit, we have all of Him we will ever have. What determines influence with the Holy Spirit is how much of us we let Him consume. Or, to put it more practically, how much of our lives we are willing to allow Him to control. The question we must consider is, "Do we desire to live for His will above our own in every area of our life (dating, vocation, relationships etc.)?"

Sometimes, the reason for withholding areas of our life is fear. Romans 12:2 says that when we covenant with God to live entirely for His will and not our own, we will then be able to know what God's will is, "His good and pleasing and perfect will." It is quite possible that this verse emphasizes "good, pleasing, and perfect" to comfort our fear. It reassures the Christian that God's will for them in every area is always perfect, motivated by His love and our best interest. As one Christian put it, "There's no safer place than the center of God's will."

This decision to submit to the Lord is both critical and progressive. It is progressive in the sense that we are always becoming aware of new areas where we have never brought God into our lives. It is critical, or punctilious (meaning a point in time), in the sense that there is often a critical juncture in our Christian life where we tell God from our heart, "I will do anything or go anywhere you want. My life is yours." According to the passage in Romans 12:2, we will only enjoy His full empowerment, direction, and influence once we come to this point of submission.

Often we see people who have been Christians for 20 years with very little life-change to show for it. The reason is often they have only allowed the Holy Spirit little "sips" of their life. In contrast, we meet Christians who are relatively young in Christ whose lives have been transformed. They have allowed the Holy Spirit to consume every area of their life—they have withheld nothing—and they have the changed life to prove it.



Confession

Sin is choosing to go our own way in order to satisfy our needs, wants, and desires, rather than going God's way. When we sin, we are rending control of our life from the Holy Spirit, and turning it over to our sinful desires. Confession literally means to "agree with God." We agree that we have sinned (not rationalizing or justifying). We agree that Christ's death has paid for it and thus we are forgiven. Third, we repent, which involves turning back to God and agreeing to do things His way.

How do we maintain the Spirit's maximum influence on our lives? We keep a short account of sin. As soon as the Spirit brings awareness of sin to our mind, we confess it immediately.

Reliance

Have you ever watched a cigarette smoker? Every time they sense a need, they "light-up." If they feel lonely, they "light-up." If they feel scared or nervous, they "light-up." If they need confidence, they "light-up." I find myself doing the same thing with food, music, and coffee. Did you ever eat when you weren't hungry—only lonely? Throughout each day we sense the need for empowerment. Eaters, coffee drinkers (like me), and smokers have a reflex. You feel a need, you rely on _____ (fill in the blank). God wants us to reflexively turn to Him throughout the day and ask for comfort, empowerment, wisdom, direction, etc. This constant reliance on the Spirit keeps us intimately connected to the Lord throughout the day, and allows our thirsts to be met by His "living water."

Cultivating Our Hearts Toward God

While these three are the most important by far, I will touch on one more because it is mentioned in our Ephesians passage on the Holy Spirit. In Ephesians 5:19-20, Paul talks about singing spiritual songs and hymns and having a thankful heart. The important lesson here, as it relates to maximizing the Holy Spirit's influence over us, is that we can foster an environment in our hearts that facilitates the control of the Holy Spirit. Just as going to the mall might foster materialism's control, so certain activities such as thanksgiving, praise, singing, and prayer cultivate the Spirit's control. As we sing spiritual songs, and cloak our hearts with thanksgiving throughout the day, we find ourselves much more in-tune with the Holy Spirit's direction, leading, and presence.

A Paradigm of Influence

In summary, we have reviewed some of the major teachings concerning empowerment by the Holy Spirit through the lens of influence. Often it is more helpful to get our hands around the Holy Spirit's working in our life not by thinking that He is either in control or he's not—though clearly this can be the case, especially when we sin. Rather the paradigm of influence, supplied by our text, helps us to think in categories of maximizing His influence or decreasing it. This can be motivating as we think of how we can rely more upon Him throughout the day, or be constantly giving thanks or singing spiritual songs in our hearts to increase His influence over our minds, emotions, and behavior.

End

The Compass is the discipleship curriculum for Campus Crusade for Christ's Campus Ministry. It was created by Centerfield Productions, the field based division of CruPress. We'd love to hear your feedback on this lesson. Please write us at centerfield@uscm.org