

Evidences of Spirit-filled Living – *Ephesians 5:19-21*

Introduction – There are certain signs that one can look for that evidences that a man is “under the influence.” As dissipation issues from drunkenness, so singing psalms, giving thanks, and submitting to one another issue from Spirit-filled living. In these verses, three or four resultant characteristics of being filled by the Spirit are given, as well as some strong language that keeps us from seeking or demanding ecstatic spiritual experiences.

Speaking (or Singing) to Yourselves – The first stated evidence of Spirit-filled living is having a song in one’s heart. And then it comes out in two ways. First, disciples of Christ are used by the Spirit to “*laledo*” to themselves (“*teaching and admonishing one another*” – Col 3:16). While the Spirit works upon us as individuals, Spirit-filled living cannot be manifested simply in the individual. This is body-life, members ministering to one another (“*to yourselves*,” not “*to yourself*”) in song. In addition, note that music/singing has an implicit teaching/shaping affect in it. Therefore, be wise in your choice of what/who is “teaching” you (Phil 4:8).

We use the term *psalms* to distinguish from what we call *hymns*, and that is fine. We just have to remember that that is not what Paul meant. *Psalms* (like psalm 3), *hymns* (like psalm 55), and *odes* (like psalm 122), are terms pointing to the 150 psalm Psalter. These were regularly sung in the Jewish OT synagogue and the Gentile, NT church. This is the bread and butter of what the Spirit wants sung.

Singing and Plucking from your heart to the Lord – The human voice (and more importantly, voices) is universally employed to reveal the heart in all cultures. Instruments are universally employed to support the sound. Image-bearers who have been made new in Christ lifting up their voices to the Lord is quite an amazing gift. And when God pronounces judgment on the wicked, He makes clear there will be no music, no songs, no singing (Ezek 26:13).

Side Note – What does God mean when He says that we are to “sing a new song?” (i.e. Psalm 98). I have wanted to emphasize that it is the idea of a “re-newed” emphasis or experience in a song being sung. But I would submit a more biblical understanding of “new” song is one of genre (like a “country” song). We are to sing the songs of the New Covenant, songs of the New Adam, songs of the New Humanity, songs of the new Creation, and songs of the New Heart. These are the “new” songs.

Giving Thanks Always for All Things to God – This could be applied to being thankful in all situations and that is certainly what we are called to do. However, in this passage and book I believe Paul is emphasizing giving thanks for all we have come to realize that we have in God through Christ (i.e. all of Ephesians 1-3, see Paul’s own “thanksgiving” in 3:20-21). This then spills out into all things, for God is sovereignly good in all situations and so, remember that giving thanks is not a matter of feeling thankful; it is a matter of obedience. The only person who can give God thanks in all things is the humble person. Lack of thankfulness comes from pride and not circumstances.

Submitting to One Another – We were baptized by the Spirit into one body. The Spirit oversees and fills the body and not just the members. As members, we subject ourselves to the body, considering them as more important than ourselves (Phil 2:3-4).

A Word of Caution on Measuring Spirit-filling - When the Great Awakening broke out in New England in the 1700s, Jonathan Edwards had to teach hard against excessive and often fleshy-counterfeits to the miraculous work of God. The Second Great Awakening in the 1800s seemed to have even more emphasis on the passions to the exclusion of truth, order, and personal holiness. Shortly after this, the Pentecostal movement broke out along with an even stronger demand for ecstatic, individualistic experiences. While the Spirit does overwhelm the believer in one sense (gratefulness for salvation, hating sin, loving God, seeking unity and giving oneself away), the demonstration of the Spirit’s work is something that begins and ends with faith, not levels of passionate outbursts. My point is not to dump cold water on anyone who is experiencing great joy in one moment or another. It is to caution against trying to measure the sincerity of one’s heart by how one is “feeling” at any moment. The sincerity of one’s heart is measured by the fruit of one’s life.

Some Final Considerations – These are evidences of the Spirit’s work; they are not means to whistle up the Spirit in your life. The hard truth is that those who are filled by the Spirit will do these things and those who are not, will not. But this never means that you just wait to “feel” like doing these things. For instance, notice these two phrases in the text -

“In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ” – All of our praise, all of our petitions, confessions, thanksgivings, and works of service must be offered up in Jesus’ name, because we always fall short. But our Great Mediator and High Priest lovingly receives them, blesses them, and having perfected them all, gives them to the Father on our behalf. In Christ, our heavenly Father is pleased to receive our worship.

“In the fear of God” – John Bunyan said, “*I take this grace of fear to be that which softens the heart, and which makes it stand in awe of both the mercies and judgments of God.*” This fear of God is something which accompanies faith (Ex 14:31); it accompanies the worship in this assembly (Psalm 89:7); it accompanies hope in the mercy of God (Psalm 147:11). And so, “*let us have grace, by which we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear*” (Heb 12:28).