

THE SPIRIT-FILLED LIFE

By Peter Wiseman, D. D.

The scriptural lesson is recorded in Acts 6:1-8.

The text is the last verse of that reading: "And Stephen, full of faith and power, did great wonders and miracles among the people."

With the coming of the Holy Spirit there came to the church a mighty Holy Ghost revival. Souls were added to the church daily.

The church at this time faced a new problem, perhaps its first real problem.

The twelve called the multitude of the disciples unto them, and said, It is not reason that we should leave the word of God, and serve tables. Wherefore, brethren, look ye out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business. But we will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word.

There were two services, the service of tables, and the service of the Word. They were both sacred, for that matter; but the twelve could not look after "the Grecian Widows" and do justice to the ministry of the word; hence the division of responsibilities.

Service of tables and the service of the word are placed in contrast. The former being cared for by Holy Ghost laity, would permit the apostles to give full time to the latter, that is, "to prayer and the ministry of the Word": not that the former is not important, but the latter is more important.

We begin our meditation by considering—

Spirit-filled Men in Demand for Secular Service.

While we may speak of the service of tables as secular; yet, it is really sacred, for that which is really necessary in human life, if performed by a Christian, is to him sacred. "Whether ye eat or drink or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God." The spiritual experience required of those elected to serve tables is surely a lesson to the church of today. We have often wondered what the history of these nineteen hundred years would have been had laymen elected to look after the secular aspect of church work. This is God's standard for His Church.

Spirit-filled Men—a Normal New Testament Standard.

The New Testament emphasis is on fulness, Acts 2:4, "They were all filled with the Holy Ghost." Philippians 1:9-11, "This I pray that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and in all sense, that ye may approve things that are excellent, that ye may be sincere and without offence till the day of Christ, being filled with the fruits of righteousness which are by Jesus Christ." Colossians 1:19, "For this cause since the day we heard it do not cease to pray for you and desire that ye might be filled." Ephesians 3:19, "That ye might be filled with all the fulness of God." Ephesians 5:18, "Be not drunk with wine wherein is excess but be filled with the Spirit." Thus the emphasis in the New Testament in this line.

Spirit-filled Men Argue an Experience to Meet Various Needs.

We are being filled with the Spirit as a salvation experience; a crisis. Acts 2:4, is the Church of Christ continued to practise the standard of the early church, as required of Pentecostal experience. "They were all filled with the Holy Ghost," and this blessed Spirit who filled the disciples witnessed to them of

His accomplishment within and of His abiding presence. The other things mentioned, in verses 1 to 4 in this chapter, are but signs and manifestations. The being filled with Divine Personality, the Holy Ghost, is the thing that counts.

We are being filled with the Spirit for service. Acts 1:8, "Ye shall receive the power of the Holy Ghost coming upon you and ye shall be witnesses unto me." Again, in Acts 4:31, "And when they had prayed, the place was shaken where they were assembled together, and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and they spake the Word of God with boldness."

We are being filled with the Spirit as a state of Christian life. Ephesians 5:18, "And be not drunk with wine wherein is excess but be filled with the Spirit." The context here clearly reveals the marks of such a state: marked by "Walking circumspectly" (15); "redeeming the time" (16); understanding the will of the Lord (17); "Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord" (19); "giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ" (20); "submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God" (21). The Christian state of being Spirit-filled will meet this standard!

We are being filled with the Spirit for to meet specific aspects of need.

There is the satisfaction of a full man. Jesus said, "Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness; for they shall be filled." Matthew 5:6. Stephen was a full man, and a full man is a satisfied man. Did you ever see a hungry boy tackle a pie? One bite and there was a partial eclipse! Another bite and there was a total eclipse! Then fulness plus satisfaction. Yes, satisfied yet spiritually hungry!

There is the supplication of a full man. "Lord, lay not this sin to their charge"; like our Lord who in His dying hours prayed, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." A man filled with the Holy Ghost can and does pray thus as Stephen did, for his enemies.

There is the sacred study of a full man. Being filled with faith and the Holy Ghost, Stephen filled his mind with the Word. Read carefully his sermon and you will have the best brief possible of the history of Israel. It was a historic sermon, Biblical history!

There is the shine of a full man. "And all that sat in the council, looking steadfastly on him saw his face as it had been the face of an angel," Acts 6:15. Stephen had a "new look" but it came from heaven, not Hollywood. It was the result of the indwelling Spirit of God and absolute devotion to God and His cause. The shine of a cleansed soul, the shine of a saint! He was accused of using "blasphemous words against Moses, and against God" (6:11), and the Lord put a shine on his face similar to the one He put on Moses' face, thus vindicating him.

There is the sacred vision of a full man. Under a shower of stones, he "looked up steadily into heaven, and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God, and said, 'Behold I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God,'" Acts 7:55, 56. He could see Jesus through a shower of stones. "Blessed are the pure in heart; for they shall see God," Mat-

thew 5:8: see Him when it is dark! See Him in the midst of trouble!

Spirit-filled Men Should See Some Definite Results.

Increase of the word and of disciples. Verse 7: "And the word of God increased, and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly." There was a revival of Christian religion!

Priests were won to Christ. Verse 7, "And a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith."

Convincing logic. The wisdom of the Spirit produced unanswerable argument. Verse 10, "They were not able to resist the wisdom and spirit by which he spake."

There was Holy Ghost fearlessness. Acts 7:51, "Ye stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Ghost; as your fathers did so do ye." This might have hastened his death but it was the triumphant death of the first Christian martyr!

There was the power of holy character. Stephen not only had power for service but he had power to die for Christ and power to shine. The witnesses to Stephen's death "laid down their clothes at a young man's feet whose name was Saul." Acts 7:56. Saul, afterwards Paul, never did get over this sight. It was at least a mighty factor in his conversion. "And when the blood of thy martyr Stephen was shed, I also was standing by and consenting unto his death, and kept the raiment of them that slew him" Acts 22:20.

Let not the Christian laity think for a moment that they can accomplish for God in their sphere of the service of tables, any more than the Christian ministry can accomplish in their sphere, the service of the Word, without the fulness of the Spirit of God. There is no substitution for this glorious endowment of power from on high. It is not by the power of arms, nor by the power of human ability, human learning, human organization. It is by the power of God. "Not by . . . nor by . . . but by My Spirit saith the Lord," Zechariah 4:6. Humanism has always and ever will be a failure without God.

The Spirit-filled life is a life that honors God and in return is honored by God. The Holy Spirit taking over, purifying, filling, and possessing assures perfect and complete inward and outward victory. He will guide, for the promise is, "He will guide you into all truth." He will illuminate, for it reads, "He will show you things to come." He will exercise every aspect of His office and work through human personality. The Holy Ghost within assures a Holy Ghost revival; His presence and power will touch every faculty and power of the soul; and burst forth in a mighty revival in the service of God.

The question is, Can Christians afford to go without God's wonderful Gift, the blessed Holy Spirit? "Have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed?" Acts 19:2. This glorious Gift of God through Christ to His Church, Acts 2:33 is your inheritance. Have you received HIM? If you should ask, how? I would answer, we "receive the promise of the Spirit through faith," Galatians 3:14. And if by faith, He is obtainable now. May God help us! Amen!

The distinction between right and wrong disappears when conscience dies, and that between fact and fiction when reason is neglected.—Kirsopp Lake.