

The “fullness of the Holy Spirit” is intended to refer to two topics which occur in Scripture: “being full of the Spirit” and “being filled by the Spirit.” The latter is often associated by some with Spirit-baptism but biblically it is a distinct work of the Holy Spirit although it happened concurrently with Spirit-baptism at certain times. This limited overlapping as well as the broad use of *fill* and *full* in both English and Greek has led to confusion and much debate. Also like Spirit-baptism it is not insignificant. Living in the fullness of the Spirit is a guarantee of significance in the eyes of God. To understand our responsibility we should begin by understanding what the fullness of the Spirit is.

I. The basic nature of the fullness of the Spirit

Two primary concepts occur represented by the phrases “full of the Spirit” and “filled with the Spirit.”

1. *Being “full of the Spirit” most often refers to a character trait.* Of two word groups translated “filled” or “full”, one seems most often to point to a lasting possession of character quality.
 - a. The aspect of a character trait is seen in examples where “full of” is used with something other than the Holy Spirit. E.g., Acts 9:36 (full of deeds of goodness and charity), Acts 13:10 (full of all deceit and fraud), Luke 2:40 (literally, “being filled with wisdom”, i.e., “growing in wisdom”), Rom 1:29, 15:14, Phil 1:11.
 - b. Being “full” or “filled” (2x) with the Spirit as a character trait is seen in various examples. E.g., Acts 6:3, 5, 8 (Stephen and the other six were full of Spirit and of wisdom, full of faith and the Holy Spirit, and full of God’s grace and power), Acts 11:24 (Barnabas was full of the Holy Spirit and faith), Acts 13:52 (“the disciples were continually filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit”).
 - c. To be “full” of the Holy Spirit then refers to a life that is characterized by the Spirit, e.g., having the fruit of the Spirit, submitting to the Holy Spirit, and directed by the Holy Spirit.
2. *Being “filled with the Spirit” refers most often to a special enabling.* That which fills moves the person to certain action and marks the person which is filled.
 - a. Examples which do not refer to the Spirit include such references as Luke 4:28-29 (they were “filled with rage” and drove Jesus out), Luke 6:11 (the Pharisees were filled with rage and discussed how to kill Jesus), Acts 5:17-18 (they were filled with jealousy and arrested the apostles). The concept is not foreign to the other word group (cf. Acts 5:3).
 - b. Examples of being filled with the Spirit demonstrate this same element of control and marking. E.g., Luke 1:15-16 (John was to be filled with the Holy Spirit from birth and would turn back the hearts of the people to their God), Luke 1:41-42 (Elizabeth was filled and spoke), Luke 1:67 (Zechariah was filled and prophesied), Acts 2:4, Acts 4:31
 - c. To be filled with the Spirit therefore speaks of a life which is specially controlled or enabled by the Spirit to accomplish something special.

II. Finer distinctions concerning the fullness of the Spirit

1. *Being “filled with the Spirit” occurs in both the OT and the NT.* OT examples include Bezalel (Exodus 31:3), and probably Joshua (Deut 34:9), certain judges (e.g., Samson, Othniel, Gideon, Jephthah), kings (i.e., Saul, David), and even one false prophet, Balaam. This distinguishes “being filled with the Spirit” from Spirit-baptism which first occurred at Pentecost.
2. *The fullness of the Spirit can result from personal initiative or independent of personal initiative.* E.g., John was to be filled with the Holy Spirit from birth (Luke 1:15-16), something about which he could do nothing, but in Ephesians 5:18 being filled is commanded. This distinguishes the character trait from the enablement.
3. *Being filled can be repeated in the individual and be both a long term as well as a short term experience in same individual.* Cf. Acts 2:1-4 with 4:8 where Peter is again filled; and Acts 9:15-17 with 13:9. This distinguishes being filled from both Spirit-baptism and the indwelling of the Spirit.
4. *Being filled by the Spirit or being full of the Spirit refers to an influence and marking of the Spirit in the life of the person.*

III. Our responsibility in regard to the fullness of the Spirit

1. *We should protect our relationship to the Spirit.* For example: do not lie to the Holy Spirit (Acts 5); do not grieve the Holy Spirit (Eph 4,30-32); do not quench the Holy Spirit (1 Thes 5:19).
2. *We should live in obedience.*
 - a. Ephesians 5:18 contrasts the control which alcohol takes over a person’s life with being filled with the Spirit. It is the Spirit to whom we should submit ourselves, not to such things as alcohol.
 - b. In Romans 6 obedience is divided into two logical steps: consider yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus.

To be full of the Spirit is a character quality that is possible for every believer who lives in obedience, but the special enablement and empowering happens at the discretion of the Holy Spirit. We should develop those things in our lives that lead to being “full of the Spirit” such as selflessness and putting God’s righteousness and His kingdom first. (Hebrews 11 gives excellent examples.) This results in a life of eternal significance because it pleases God, though the world may not recognize it.