

“FILL ‘ER UP ... BUT WITH WHAT?”  
by Rom A. Pegram (11/5/17)

Folks, in the Christian faith, we believe in a Triune God—the Trinity ... Father, Son, AND Holy Spirit—though many would love to just not talk about that last part of God. But, if we’re never talking about the Spirit of God, we’re leaving out at least 1/3 of the equation of God, aren’t we? Now, here are some things I’ve noticed when it comes to talking about the Holy Spirit in church...

For FANS, it’s kind of like the old Sesame Street song: “One of these things just doesn’t belong here; one of these things just isn’t the same.” The Holy Spirit is the odd one out, when it comes to learning about God. Being a person, I can say this: *the Holy Spirit is kinda like the Uncle Larry of the family...* You know—that odd uncle who shows up to your family gatherings or family reunions. *You just don’t know what to do with him!* (Every family has one, don’t they?) That’s the Holy Spirit when it comes to God... But, the truth is ... *no one can be a FOLLOWER unless you are filled with the Holy Spirit!* Here’s something else...

For FANS, *those who try and FOLLOW Jesus without this power will start to show signs.* Sooner or later, they reach a point in life where they’re frustrated by failure—spiritually speaking! *You keep doing what you don’t want to do ... and you don’t do the things you really want to do!* You promise others you’ll change: “Things are going to be different this time,” you say. And *this time* you really mean it! But the change rarely lasts more than a few days... You lay awake at night and promise yourself ... “Never again!” Never again will I lose my temper... Never again will I get on that website... Never again will I take that drink (or pill, or smoke and so on)... And pretty soon you’re right back there, lying in bed, making the same promises again... It just doesn’t work... When we try to FOLLOW Jesus without being filled daily with the Spirit, *we find ourselves frustrated by our failures and exhausted by our efforts!* And here’s one more thing...

For FANS, it’s kind of like the guy who totes his family’s luggage—all of their luggage—through the airport ... his family’s riding the moving sidewalk ... but because of the load, he has to walk alongside. They get to the end of that conveyor belt just a little before he does, but when they finally are together again, there’s a difference: His family is energized and ready to go; he’s already exhausted from the load ... and the vacation has just begun! FANS trying to FOLLOW Jesus without being filled with the power of the Holy Spirit *become overwhelmed by life’s circumstances...*

FOLLOWERS have discovered that it just doesn’t work without the power of God’s Spirit! I want to show you an image right now that I want to stick in your brain ... because I think the ridiculousness of this image shows just what God thinks of us when we try and live our lives for him ... *without the benefit of the power he’s given us!* Take a look at this...



This was somewhat of a common scene, as I understand it, during the Great Depression of the late 20s... Some were able to purchase an automobile prior to the crash of the Stock Market, but after ... they couldn't afford the gas to power their new cars. They were known as 'Hoover Wagons.' Ridiculous? It looks that way. But again, I'm sure that's the way God sees us when we *have* the 'fuel' for our lives, but don't put it in the tank! Hang on to that image, would you?

In our lesson for today, Jesus was trying to tell his FOLLOWERS just how important the Holy Spirit was going to be in their lives—to empower their lives ... especially after he'd ascended back to heaven. Just listen (John 16:1-15, NLT)...

"I have told you these things so that you won't abandon your faith. <sup>2</sup> For you will be expelled from the synagogues, and the time is coming when those who kill you will think they are doing a holy service for God. <sup>3</sup> This is because they have never known the Father or me. <sup>4</sup> Yes, I'm telling you these things now, so that when they happen, you will remember my warning. I didn't tell you earlier because I was going to be with you for a while longer.

<sup>5</sup> "But now I am going away to the One who sent me, and not one of you is asking where I am going. <sup>6</sup> Instead, you grieve because of what I've told you. <sup>7</sup> But in fact, it is best for you that I go away, because if I don't, the Advocate won't come. If I do go away, then I will send him to you. <sup>8</sup> And when he comes, he will convict the world of its sin, and of God's righteousness, and of the coming judgment.

<sup>9</sup> The world's sin is that it refuses to believe in me. <sup>10</sup> Righteousness is available because I go to the Father, and you will see me no more. <sup>11</sup> Judgment will come because the ruler of this world has already been judged. <sup>12</sup> "There is so much more I want to tell you, but you can't bear it now.

<sup>13</sup> When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own but will tell you what he has heard. He will tell you about the future. <sup>14</sup> He will bring me glory by telling you whatever he receives from me. <sup>15</sup> All that belongs to the Father is mine; this is why I said, 'The Spirit will tell you whatever he receives from me.'

So, folks, basically we have a pipeline to heaven ... that Jesus uses to communicate with and empower his FOLLOWERS for the work he calls them to do! So today, using our FAN or FOLLOWER analogy, let me ask this: **ARE YOU A SELF-EMPOWERED FAN ... OR A SPIRIT-FILLED FOLLOWER?** There's the question that will guide our time together today; so, let's begin here: When it comes to the Holy Spirit's presence in our lives, we need to know a couple of things. First...

**IT'S ONLY WHEN WE'RE WEAK THAT WE CAN BECOME STRONG!** Let me explain using 2 Corinthians 12:9-10, where Paul speaks of God removing a weakness from him and he says, "Each time [God] said, 'My grace is all you need. My power works best in weakness.' So now I am glad to boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ can work through me. <sup>10</sup> That's why I take pleasure in my weaknesses, and in the insults, hardships, persecutions, and troubles that I suffer for Christ. For when I am weak, then I am strong." A book I read many years ago was entitled, "The Upside Down Kingdom" ... and God's Kingdom certainly seems that way sometimes. Like ... **IT'S ONLY WHEN WE'RE WEAK THAT WE CAN BECOME STRONG!** God's strength can shine through our lives best ... in the midst of our weakness! And *it's that witness to God and his power in our lives that's matters the most*, isn't it?

Folks, the whole idea of being filled with the power of God's Spirit begins with ... an honest assessment & then acknowledgement of our own weakness! That's where it begins, but the truth is most of us go through life doing our best to disguise our weaknesses. For instance, *can you guess what the most dreaded question of any job interview is?* If you guessed "What's your greatest weakness?" you were absolutely right! How do you answer that question? I'll tell you what you *don't* do: You don't tell them your weakness ... because if you do, they won't hire you! So, we go to Monster.com or some other résumé site and do our best to cleverly disguise what we don't want others to know...

Paul, on the other hand, realizes that living in the power of the Spirit means shining a light on our weaknesses. This is what FANS find most difficult! Most FANS have learned to make sure everyone knows about their strengths, but no one finds out about their weaknesses. Not so with FOLLOWERS, however. Paul reminds his church to continually walk in the Spirit ... so their spiritual tank might be full ... and maneuvering through this life won't be so much of a burden (remember the image?)... **IT'S ONLY WHEN WE'RE WEAK THAT WE CAN BECOME STRONG!** Let God have your life, folks, and open yourself up to his Spirit living in you! Then, when it comes to the Holy Spirit living in us, we also need to know this:

**IT'S ONLY WHEN WE'RE EMPTY THAT WE CAN BE FILLED!** In other words, *the only way to be filled with the Spirit of God (Holy Spirit) is to empty myself of ME!* When too much of me is in the way, there's no room for God to live and work in my life, so ... spiritually speaking, *we're our own worst enemies* at times!

Let me see if I can explain it further in this way. In Philippians 2:1-8 (NRSV), Paul's writes this to the church at Philippi:

“If then there is any encouragement in Christ, any consolation from love, any sharing in the Spirit, any compassion and sympathy, <sup>2</sup> make my joy complete: be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. <sup>3</sup> Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. <sup>4</sup> Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others. <sup>5</sup> Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, <sup>6</sup> who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, <sup>7</sup> but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, <sup>8</sup> he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death— even death on a cross.”

Here’s where the theological idea of ‘emptying’ in scripture comes from. Jesus had to ‘empty himself’ of himself ... in order to fulfill God’s purpose for his life. He set aside his personal preferences for the sake of all! If it was good for Jesus, don’t you think it would also be good for us? **“Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus....”** Have you ‘emptied yourself’ of YOU? Or is there still too much of YOU in God’s way?

Folks ... FANS tend to think having the power of God in their lives is all about hard work. Unfortunately, over the years, the message from the church—from too many pulpits—has been ‘try harder!’ And who of us hasn’t done this: Instead of admitting our weakness and declaring our total dependence on God, we’ve tried to do it all ourselves...

There was a father who tells the story of their last move as a family and saving the heaviest piece of furniture for last—the big ol’ desk from his office. He tried to slide it, but that didn’t work. He finally figured out that if he flipped it over on its top, he could then slide it pretty easily across the carpet. He was pushing with everything he had, making pretty good progress, when his 4-year-old son came into the room. He wanted to help. He stood between his father’s arms and began to push. Together they started sliding it across the floor. His son was pushing and grunting as they inched their way along. Then he stopped, looked up at his dad, and said, “*Dad, you’re in my way!*” Now, his father could have easily pushed it himself. His son couldn’t even budge the desk on his own, but insisted on doing it himself. So, when the desk started sliding again, he thought he was pushing the desk ... and the dad couldn’t help but laugh...

I wonder if that’s how God feels about us sometimes. Having the power of God in our lives isn’t about trying harder; it’s really about surrender—letting go of ‘me’ ... and letting God be God in our lives...

- FANS eventually get burned out from trying to live the Christian life out of their own efforts; pretty soon, it’s so difficult, they just slide away...
- FOLLOWERS of Jesus, however, understand that it’s a journey they were never supposed to make alone...

Are you making room for God and his Spirit in your life? Or, are you still trying to do everything yourself? Do you remember the image I showed you earlier (show again)?

Now, picture someone running along behind the horse-drawn automobile ... carrying a gas can full of gas! That, folks, would be God in our lives! God desperately desires (and you could hear it in Jesus words today) for us to be empowered to live the lives he's called us to live! We were never supposed to do it on our own; that's not God's way...

As I move to prayer right now, I would invite you to do something for me. If you've ever struggled with this life of faith, if you've ever had the feeling that you're doing O.K. with God, but still lacking *something* ... what we've been talking about today may just be that *something*. So, **BE WILLING TO OPEN UP YOUR LIFE RIGHT NOW** to the Spirit of God coming in and living in you! I want to pray for all who are willing to be filled with God's Spirit of Love today...