

A Different Take On: Be Filled with the Spirit

The majority of evangelical Christians believe in the infallibility of the Bible. They take this stance on the premise that Holy Spirit put the collection of books together, not people. The upshot of that is that they refer to the Bible as ‘The Word of God’. Both the infallibility of and the pseudonym given to the Bible are both erroneous in regards to spiritual reality.

There’s enough evidence of problems with interpreting the NT’s 2,000-year-old grammar on my ‘A Different Take’ webpage¹ and my Forerunner teachings to put “infallibility” in the minds of that group of believers. There’s also enough evidence that the Bible contains some of the word of God, because it couldn’t contain everything he has said or is saying today.²

Being filled with the Spirit is the cornerstone of the “Spirit-filled” teachings of the Charismatic and Pentecostal systems. Having been in both, as well as being “baptised in the Holy Spirit”³, finding out that “filled with the Spirit” is another of the many anomalies that arise in interpreting NT scripture. In this article I look at the difficulty in understanding this injunction from Paul in our English translations.⁴



In Ephesians we normally read this:

Ephesians 5:18 (NKJV) – *And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit,*

“Filled with the Spirit” appears in the NT Greek as *plērousthe en pneumati* (πληροῦσθε ἐν πνεύματι), but does it translate to “filled with the Spirit”? Alternatively, is “filled with the spirit” the correct or only translation of the Greek phrase? If, not, what was the writer intending to convey to his audience.

The first thing to know is that not all ancient Greek documents have those words within the text. For example, the Tischendorf Greek NT, 8th Edition has this instead: *πληρώω ἐν πνεύμα.*⁵ This version has a similar translation, but it’s not the same. Which phrase is the one that Paul wrote? We simply don’t know. He could have written something completely different to both of them because we don’t have his original parchment as the primary source as the reference to answer the question.

(There’s more on the variability of Greek manuscripts elsewhere. It’s not the topic for this article.)

Focusing now on *plērousthe en pneumati*, it’s interesting to note that there are three major ways to interpret the phrase. One would think that infallibility would ensure that that didn’t happen, but that’s the problem with trying to understand what someone wrote in the past and you can’t quiz them on what they meant when they stated it.

The variations are caused by the Greek preposition *ἐν* (en), which can be interpreted to mean many things. For example:

- in, at, by, on, upon, about, after, against, almost, altogether, among, as, before, between, by, hereby, by all means, for, for sake of, give self wholly to, here, herein, into, inwardly, mightily, because of, up, open, openly, outwardly, one, quickly, shortly, speedy, speedily, that, there, therein, thereon, through, throughout, to, unto, untoward, under, when, where, wherewith, while, with, within.⁶

1 – canberraforerunners.org/?page_id=55267

2 – “The Concept of ‘The Word’ in the 1st Century”

canberraforerunners.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/The-Concept-of-The-Word-in-the-1st-Century.pdf

“The Word of God is What the Spirit Gives Us to Speak”

canberraforerunners.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/03/The-Word-of-God-is-What-the-Spirit-Gives-Us-to-Speak.pdf

“Focus on the Word of God, not the word of God”

canberraforerunners.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/03/Focus-on-the-Word-of-God-not-the-word-of-God.pdf

3 – William E. Wenstrom (2016) “The Baptism of the Spirit” www.academia.edu/34167301/The_Baptism_of_the_Spirit

4 – SOURCE: Douglas N Petrovich (1996) “The Meaning of *en pneumati* in Ephesians 5:18” [Master of Divinity Thesis]

www.academia.edu/1049010/_1996_The_Meaning_of_en_pneumati_in_Ephesians_5_18_Masters_Seminary_NT_Department

5 – biblehub.com/text/ephesians/5-18.htm

6 – “Strong’s #1722: en” www.bibletools.org/index.cfm/fuseaction/Lexicon.show/ID/G1722/en.htm

Any wonder that Greek texts throughout the NT can mean different things depending on the word chosen to translate ἐν (en). That's not as unwieldy as it may seem because context often narrows down the English words that should be used in the translation of any text. However, narrowing it down doesn't provide absolute certainty of the ancient writers intent. Such is the case with πλῆρουσθε ἐν πνευματι.

Another reason for the confusion in the translation of the phrase is the range of meanings for the Greek word πνευμα (πνεύμα) and the words related to it (called 'cognates'⁷). The root of the word describes the result of the movement of the air, which was considered as a special substance which stressed its underlying inherent power.⁸ In the NT, πνευμα can refer to the human spirit, demonic spirits, as well as Holy Spirit.

The result of this confusion of translating ἐν πνευματι gives rise to the three mentioned variants, which are:

1. "Be filled with the Spirit." [Known as the 'Spirit-filled view'.]
2. "Be filled by (means of) the Holy Spirit." [Known as the 'instrumental view'.]
3. "Be filled in the realm of the (human) spirit." [Known as the 'human spirit' view.]

A quick check on BibleGateway.com⁹ shows that the difficulty translating the phrase produces a variety of translations, other than "be filled by the Spirit":¹⁰

- (HCSB) "but be filled by the Spirit:"
- (LEB) "but be filled by the Spirit,"
- (NET) "but be filled by the Spirit"
- (CJB) "Instead, keep on being filled with the Spirit"
- (ISV) "but keep on being filled with the Spirit"
- (YLT) "but be filled in the Spirit"
- (NMB) "but be fulfilled with the Spirit"
- (PHILLIPS) "but let the Spirit stimulate your souls"
- (MIRROR)¹¹ "While wine offers no lasting escape from the evil of the day, spirit certainly does. Indulge in spirit intoxication."¹²

The upshot of this is that there's no definitive NT directive to "be filled by the Spirit". It must be considered, therefore, that the expression, by consensus, is the one that's accepted by translator's and chosen by those calling themselves 'Spirit-filled'. As has been observed:

*"If you examine the doctrine of the indwelling ministry of the Holy Spirit, never is a command given that we should be indwelt. When we consider the sealing ministry of the Holy Spirit, a command is never given that believers should be sealed. If we consider the baptizing work of the Holy Spirit, never in the Word of God can you find a command that the believer should seek the baptism of the Holy Spirit."*¹³

So, what are we to believe that Paul was telling his readers? To tell the truth, we don't exactly know. A full reading of the Master of Divinity thesis by Douglas N Petrovich¹⁴ shows that theological experts in NT Greek do not concur completely as to what Paul actually meant. At the end of his treatise, he states:

"Indeed, the use of the anarthrous construction likely represents that which is by quality spirit, or the

7 – Words that come from either πνευμα or its precursor in Greek.

8 – SOURCE: E. Kamlah, J. Dunn, and Colin Brown (1986) "Spirit, Holy Spirit" in vol. 3 of The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology [ed. Colin Brown] p:689

9 – www.biblegateway.com

10 – www.biblegateway.com/verse/en/Ephesians%205:18

11 – From the MIRROR Study Bible, not BibleGateway.com

12 – Scripture taken from THE MIRROR. Copyright © 2012. Used by permission of The Author. Mirror Bible: www.mirrorword.net

13 – Dwight J. Pentecost (1977) "The Divine Comforter: The Person and Work of the Holy Spirit" p:155

14 – Douglas N Petrovich (1996) "The Meaning of ἐν πνευματι in Ephesians 5:18" [Master of Divinity Thesis]

www.academia.edu/1049010/_1996_The_Meaning_of_ἐν_πνευματι_in_Ephesians_5_18_Masters_Seminary_NT_Department

realm of the spirit. This fits better contextually, since Paul contrasts the drinking of wine, which is a corruption of the flesh and leads to the ruin of life in dissolute living of every kind, with being filled in spirit. The instruction for his readers was to avoid filling up the body with a substance that destroys the flesh, and **instead to be filled in their spirits**, where the unseen benefits will continue into eternity. This brings to light a weakness of both the ‘Instrumental view’ and the ‘Spirit-filled view’.”¹⁵

As complex as that quote may seem, what Petrovich is saying (which comes out in the body of his thesis) is that the expression *en pneumatē* itself has different ways of relating to the rest of the sentence and the chapter(s).

CONCLUSION: Be “filled by the Spirit” could quite easily be “filled in your spirit”, as well as numerous other renditions. To stick with the former is to go with theological consensus, rather than know that there’s difficulty in understanding exactly what a 1st century writer might have stated.

IMPORTANT: You can ‘prove’ any belief you like using scripture. That’s why Christendom is so fractured.

Believe It or Not! **The choice is yours**

Whatever you choose to believe won't negatively impact Father's relationship with you

Laurence

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(Readers will need to look up for themselves any scriptures alluded to in this document)

15 – Douglas N Petrovich (1996) “The Meaning of *en pneumatē* in Ephesians 5:18” p:45