

COMING TO THE KNOWLEDGE OF THE TRUTH (THRU PARTICIPATION III)

Let us continue with the passage of 2 Timothy 3:1-7 and the idea of verse 7 which says that in the last days some will be "*ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth.*" We have outlined four steps to coming to this knowledge: education, meditation, participation, and evaluation. In previous articles we've studied the first two steps and have gone through two articles on the third step, participation. In this article we study three specific areas in which we must learn through participation. These steps are 1) we must fully participate in our own suffering, 2) we must participate in self-examination to correct others, and 3) we must participate in certain basic Christian activities.

We must fully participate in our own suffering. This thought is totally foreign to many Christians today. Many churches preach the message of prosperity, happiness and joy, regardless of the situation. It is strange that the Bible has so much about suffering. Consider three passages:

- ▶ **Philippians 3:4-11:** In verses 4-7 Paul lists all the things he gave up that he might win Christ, things that would have made his life easy and prosperous. Paul even goes so far as to say in verse 10 that he wanted to know the fellowship of Christ's suffering. What a testimony for us! Paul knew that the way of Christ was not the easy way, and he embraced the suffering ways of Christ.
- ▶ **1 Peter 4:12,13:** Peter must have had the same spirit as Paul concerning suffering, because in these verses he not only tells the church that a fiery trial was going to come upon them, but also that they should rejoice in it as if partakers in Christ's suffering. Not only that, but because of this suffering they would be able to rejoice with exceeding joy when Christ's glory is revealed! It is hard to imagine that the path to exceeding joy is through suffering, isn't it?
- ▶ **2 Corinthians 12:7-10:** Here Paul gives us his real "AHA" moment. He speaks of his "thorn in the flesh," and like most spiritually immature people he wants to be rid of it. Notice his attitude is to pray and continue to pray for the removal of the thorn. He is not learning a thing from the thorn, because he is not embracing the thorn. The Lord finally tells Paul

that his suffering is meant to make him stronger through the power of Christ. Then Paul has a change of heart. The situation with the thorn is the same, but the attitude of the victim has changed. Paul's "AHA" moment is revealed in three of his words, "*Most gladly therefore...*" Do you get it? This idea must not escape us. Suffering will come in this life. There's no avoiding it. We have two choices. We can endure and complain and even pray that it will go away, or we can embrace it and learn from it and let our suffering make us stronger.

The Lord has hammered on me pretty good the last few years, and it's convinced me the latter way is the only way for me to survive. Dear Reader, please look at all your troubles and throw away any complaining, "poor me" attitudes you may have and embrace your suffering as God's call to come closer!

We must participate in self-examination to correct others

(2 Corinthians 13:5). It is very difficult for each person to admit the truth about themselves. This makes it very hard to participate in self-examination. That's exactly what Paul tells us to do in this verse so we can make sure we are in the faith! Paul tells us to take off the rose-colored glasses when looking at our own selves and prove our own faith. Why do I have to do this?

Read Matthew 7:1-5. The folks that don't want to see themselves probably spend a lot of time meditating on verse 1. But put verse 1 in context with the next four verses and we get God's vision of how the Church is meant to correct itself - by one member helping another member, one problem at a time. When we examine our faith and prove our own selves, it will allow us to help remove the mote out of our brother's eye. The mote in my brother's eye cannot stay; it's got to go or he may be lost. But if I can't or won't help, who will? Matthew 18:15 gives us more proof that we are to participate in gaining our brother and not just sit back and think and pray.

We must participate in certain Christian activities. Read Philippians 4:5 and 1 Timothy 2:9, 10. These two passages tell us not so much what to do, but how to do what we do. We are to act in moderation, wearing modest clothing. See the connection? Consider the opposite - those who act on the extreme and wear immodest clothing are feeding a mutual desire.

See me, people! Look at me! But those that act in moderation and wear modest clothing are feeding a mutual desire too, but it's the desire to be what Jesus wants them to be. When you pick the clothes you want to buy and wear, choose your hair style and make-up and jewelry, and choose how you will act, do you let God participate with you in the selection process?

Read 1 Corinthians 14:15, 16. Paul says we are to participate in our congregation's song service and prayer. Here's a dangerous subject. Ever been to a church that was louder when the assembly was dismissed than they were in the song service? It doesn't say much about their level of participation, does it? What if they were not participating in the prayer service very well, either? When we don't completely participate in our song service and prayer, then we're just not giving God our best. It sounds like a spotted, maimed, culled sacrifice to me.

Read John 15:8-10 and Colossians 1:10. Jesus and Paul exhort us to bear fruit - much fruit in every good work. Maybe they meant in good deeds and converts, or maybe they meant increasing the Christian graces in our lives. Either way we must participate, we must do, we must decide to put forth effort and proceed. That's the only way to our own spiritual maturity and taking the gospel to others. Will you examine yourself and see if you are as fruitful as God has given you the talents to be?

There are many other passages that point out the necessity and benefit of participation. Hopefully, this study about participating in our own suffering, in our own self-examination, and in our own Christian activities has made you aware of a few specific areas of participation that you can do now. Please, Dear Reader, make the decision this moment to participate every day in every way possible to do God's will. And expect your "AHA" moment!

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APOLOGIA

QUESTION: Can you elaborate on Ephesians 5:18? What does the phrase "*be filled with the Spirit*" mean? Does this apply to us today?

ANSWER: The nature and the work of the Holy Spirit is an area where, unfortunately, much ignorance abounds particularly when it comes to this passage. Many are confused about what being

filled with the Spirit means. On the one hand, there are those who believe that being filled with the Holy Spirit is the same as being baptized with the Holy Spirit. To others it means speaking in unknown tongues or having the ability to perform miracles. To some it is some sort of ecstatic state into which they enter emotionally during periods of worship. On the other hand, there are those who have reduced the subject of the Holy Spirit to meaninglessness: He exists, the Bible mentions Him, but as far as His work being relevant to us today, it isn't. Those of this persuasion are usually driven to this position due to the error involved in the other positions mentioned above.

To deal with these and all of the other positions concerning the Spirit and His work, would take far more space than is afforded us here and would certainly be a major endeavor. Therefore, it is our intent to simply answer the question posed above.

The passage under consideration is a simple one. Paul writes, *"And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit."* This passage sets forth for us the key to living the Christian life. That key is being controlled by the Spirit or living a life that is under the Spirit's control. It is this control of the Spirit on our lives that furnishes us with the power to walk worthy of the vocation with which we are called (Eph. 4:1).

There are many people who believe that you can live the Christian life without being obedient to the will of God. Nothing could be further from the truth. In fact to resist the filling and control of the Spirit is flagrant disobedience. But in order to live a life that pleases God we must be willing to walk in the Spirit and allow Him to fill our lives.

While there are those who deny the indwelling presence of the Spirit of God in their bodies, the Bible is clear that to do so is erroneous. The first fact we want to establish is that we as Christians possess the Holy Spirit. We turn our attention to a few passages to establish this truth.

The first is found in Acts 2:38. On the day of Pentecost when Peter preached Christ to those in Jerusalem he stated, *"...Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."* Here we find that faith in Christ involves repenting and being baptized in order to be forgiven (have one's sins remitted) and receiving a gift. The gift of which He speaks is that of the Holy Spirit.

Now regarding the last statement, *"the gift of the Holy Spirit,"* some have argued that linguistically one cannot determine whether the gift is actually the Holy Spirit or something that the Holy Spirit gives. And so goes the attempt to deny an indwelling of the Spirit in the heart of the Christian. We will admit that if this was the sole passage dealing with the subject it would be open to its meaning. However, the Bible does clarify the meaning elsewhere. Note the following:

"And we are His witnesses to these things, and so also is the Holy Spirit whom God has given to those who obey Him." (Acts 5:32)

"But you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. Now if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not His." Rom. 8:9)

"Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God and you are not your own?" (I Cor. 6:19)

Other references could be cited to establish the truth of the indwelling Spirit of God but from the above we determine that God gives the Spirit to all who obey, that the Spirit dwells in us, and if not then we do not belong to God!

Now that we have established the presence of the Holy Spirit in our hearts, we can turn our attention to the passage that is central to this article.

Being indwelt by the Spirit is not the same as being filled with the Spirit. The indwelling is the presence of the Spirit in our hearts given when we obey the Gospel. The filling of the Spirit deals with being under His influence. While related they should not be thought of as synonymous. The reception of the Spirit is the gift of God present with us at baptism. The filling of the Spirit is allowing ourselves to be controlled by the one who indwells us. It is possible for us to quench the Spirit's influence in our life. He is present but we fail to yield.

We believe that the above is true due to the fact that Ephesians 5:18 is an imperative statement in the Greek language. In other words, it is a command. We are not commanded to receive the Holy Spirit, but as Peter tells us in Acts 2:38 we receive the gift of the Holy Spirit when we obey the Gospel. Thus the indwelling is a gift. But in the passage under consideration, we are told

to be filled with the Spirit. Thus this is something to obey, something we are to do.

The meaning of being filled with the Spirit is better understood by way of contrast. Notice how Paul uses the illustration of being no longer drunk with wine. This passage was not a text on drunkenness but rather he uses an illustration of what wine does to those who indulge it in excess. It brings us under its control. Those who are intoxicated are under control of the substance upon which they are intoxicated. So Paul is telling us to no longer be controlled by things like wine but rather choose to filled or controlled by the Holy Spirit. The actual phrase in the Greek means to keep being filled or continually filled with the Spirit.

The Greek word here is "pleroo," which brings to mind pressure like that of wind filling a sail. Thus we get the concept of being moved by the Spirit. We are to allow the Spirit to influence us by being obedient to what He tells us to do. This is the same meaning as the passage that tells us to walk in the Spirit rather than in the flesh. (Gal. 5:16) Remember when we walk in the flesh we sin. When we sin it is not because of the Holy Spirit's absence but rather in spite of His presence.

Since being filled with the Spirit is a command, then we must have the resources to do it. While space does not allow a complete and thorough discussion of each point, note what the text itself says. In Ephesians 5:19-20 we note that we are filled with the Spirit when we sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs. We are filled with the Spirit when we give thanks always and for all things to God in the name of Jesus. We are filled with the Spirit when we submit to one another in the fear of God.

In conclusion being filled with the Spirit is the sum total of the Christian life. It occurs when we submit ourselves to God by obeying His will continually instead of our own!

SAM DICK
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GOSPEL MEETINGS

DATES

LOCATION

SPEAKER

Jan.
11 - 13
Friday and Saturday 7 P.M.
Sunday at 10:00 A.M. and 5 P.M.

Hokes Bluff Congregation
Hokes Bluff, AL

Sam Dick
(Cave City, KY)

Jan.
20 - 26

San Angelo, Texas

Harry Cobb
(Wedowee, AL)

SEARCH THE SCRIPTURES

1. Which two men were counted by Moses and Aaron in the first census and remained alive for the second census?
2. According to Proverbs, what turns away wrath?
3. What did Ezekiel suffer the loss of after the parable of the boiling pot?
4. In 2 Corinthians, what image did Paul use to illustrate the difference between the Old Testament of Moses and the new covenant of Jesus Christ?
5. Who did Jude say God has reserved in chains for the judgment day?

ANSWERS NEXT MONTH . . .

and remember last month's questions?

1. According to Psalm 1, a man who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly is comparable to what? A TREE PLANTED BY THE WATER (Psa. 1:3)
2. According to Jeremiah, what did the Lord say his people would no longer need to remember after he rewarded them? THE ARK OF THE COVENANT (Jer. 3:16)
3. Who asked Jesus, "What is truth?" PILATE (John 18:38)

4. Paul told the Corinthians that he was sent to preach rather than what? BAPTIZE (1 Cor. 1:17)
5. In Chapter 3 of Hebrews, Jesus is compared to whom? MOSES (Heb. 3:2-19)