

1

Three Talking Points for Q/A and Further Study

- What should we do with the filling of the Holy Spirit?
- How does this study affect our understanding of Christian Assurance?
- How does this study nuance our understanding the "Lordship" Salvation and Free Grace Controversy?

2

The Filling of the Spirit: Preliminary Observations

- The filling of the Spirit does not appear as a theological category prior to the holiness literature of the mid-nineteenth century.
- The command to be filled with the Spirit appears once in the Bible as a passive construct (Eph 5:18). In short, the load-bearing capacity of the informing text is weak.
- There is no agreement on the definition of filling.
- There is no agreement on the "conditions for filling."

3

The Filling of the Spirit: A Lexical Observation

There are two principal verbs used for "filling" in the NT, and they have arguably distinct meanings:

- **Πίμπλημι is used principally of the Spirit's coming upon people for revelatory or miraculous function, similar to OT anointings for prophecy and service (Luke 1:41, 67; Acts 2:4; 4:8; 31; 9:17; 13:9;).**
- **Πληρόω is used as a metaphor for exhibiting specific affections, virtues, and vices (Luke 2:40; John 16:6; Acts 5:3; 13:52; Rom 1:29; 2 Cor 7:4; Phil 1:11; 2 Tim 1:4).**
- **The "ordinary" filling of the Spirit always reflects the latter.**

4

The Filling of the Spirit: Interpretive Suggestions

Conclusion:

- Packer and Ferguson contend that the filling of the Spirit should be denied a theological category (after all we don't have sections in our theology books for "the filling of joy" or the "filling of wisdom," two virtues paired in Scripture with the filling of the Spirit). Packer's translation of πληροῦσθε ἐν πνεύματι, also the title of his critique of Keswick and my conference title, is to "keep in step with the Spirit," i.e., simply to obey God.
- See also Bill Combs, who argues against supernatural acts of Spirit "commandeering" or "control" ("Spirit-Filling in Ephesians 5:18," *DBSJ* 19 [2014]: 23–52)

5

The Assurance of Salvation: Preliminary Observations

There are two principal reasons why believers doubt their salvation:

1. A failure to understand the rudiments of the Gospel.
2. A life lived contrary to the ethical expectations of the Gospel.

If the former is determined to be the case, then a counsellor should respond by clarifying the Gospel.

If the latter is determined to be the case, a theological wrinkle emerges.

6

The Assurance of Salvation: Issues of Objectivity and Subjectivity

- The doctrine of eternal security is an objective question. It is true irrespective of the ruminations of the human subject. God saves to the uttermost all who come to him in faith.
- The doctrine of assurance is an eminently subjective question. It deals with whether the subject knows with certainty that he is an object of God's redeeming love. It asks whether the subject has sincerely trusted Christ.

These are separate questions and have distinct answers.

7

The Assurance of Salvation: Two Approaches

There are two THEOLOGICAL approaches to the issue of doubt due to disobedience:

- If one believes that justification occurs in isolation from and prior to the commencement of sanctification (all holiness models), then there is no reason to withhold assurance from a disobedient professing believer; a transformed life is neither necessary nor immediate in the wake of justification.
- If one believes that justification and regeneration are an instantaneous double benefit of union with Christ, then one SHOULD expect immediate (though never perfect) advance in holiness. A "believer" who refuses to confess and forsake sin and participate in Christian graces demonstrates that he is not "born of God" (1 John) and "casts away his confidence" (Heb 10).

8

The Assurance of Salvation: Biblical Concerns

The passages to which many turn for assurance are not direct discussions of assurance, offering only interpretive implications of texts seen through the grid of our theology:

- Texts that teach preservation and eternal security (e.g., John 10:28–29; Rom 8:38–39) supply a ground for assurance (they tell us that assurance is "out there"), but they offer no confidence to a doubting soul about the *genuineness* of his faith (in principle, Jas 2:19).

On the other hand, texts that explicitly offer means of assurance (i.e., "knowing," being "sure/confident," etc.) are uniformly concerned with the believer's persevering expression of faith and obedience, not a past profession (Rom 8:12–17; Heb 10:25ff; James 1:12; 1 John; 2 Peter 1:5–11; cf. 1 Cor 15:1–2; Col 1:21–23; Heb 12:14; etc.).

9

The Assurance of Salvation: Concluding Thoughts

- Assurance is surely "of the essence of faith," and is the birthright of spiritual infants. It should no more be withheld than baptism (itself a means of assurance).
- Assurance in the crucible of life is not seated in perfection, but in progress. It can grow over time.
- Assurance may, however, (and is designed by God to) waver in the face of protracted, unconfessed sins and/or apostasy.
- Such sins may alert us to our own penchant for self-deception and drive us to Christ in repentant faith—and penitence is one of the surest means of assurance (1 John).



10

Lordship/Free Grace: Preliminary Observations

- The Foundational Question in the Lordship debate (like the questions of assurance and progressive sanctification) is the primitive identification of what it means to be united with Christ and
- Secondarily, what exactly are the benefits of union with Christ in the life of the believer.
- Specifically, the debate persists due to disagreement over the relationship between pardon (justification), incipient holiness (regeneration), and mortification (initial sanctification).



11

Lordship/Free Grace: Free Grace Theology

- Free Grace theology, thoroughly steeped in the holiness tradition, sees the primitive and essential work of God in salvation as an act of pardon, and often defines union with Christ in judicial terms.
- Free Grace theology emphasizes the distinction (gap?) between pardon and the commencement of holiness. They do not discourage holiness; they simply do not regard it as necessary in either an *a priori* or *a posteriori* sense.
- Free Grace theology regards faith/repentance as objective/intellectual transactions, not as expressions of experimental submission/resolve.
- Free Grace theology denies that repentance or "fruits of faith" can contribute to assurance, and in some expression deny the need for perseverance at all. This stance is perceived as necessary to protect justification by faith alone.



12

Lordship/Free Grace: Lordship Theology

- "Lordship" theology, thoroughly steeped in the Reformational tradition, sees the primitive work of God in salvation as a participatory faith union.
- "Lordship" theology emphasizes the necessarily correlate relationship between pardon and new birth/mortification. While both remain distinct and causally unrelated, they always occur simultaneously. Good works are not necessary (or possible) in an *a priori* sense, but are necessary in *a posteriori* sense.
- "Lordship" theology regards faith/repentance as expressions of experimental submission/resolve/trust that emanate from regenerate persons.
- "Lordship" theology asserts that while divine promises contain the ground of assurance, the means of assurance are experimental: repentance, "fruits of faith/spirit," perseverance in trial, etc., which can and must progress over time. The notion of perfection, however, is reserved for the next life.

13

Lordship/Free Grace: Concluding Thoughts

It is unlikely that the long-running clash between "Lordship" and Free Grace theology will ever be resolved by appeals to Bible verses. And that is because each side reads the Bible through the lens of its theology (and specifically its view of initial sanctification). This is not an evil thing. We all do this and cannot help but do this. But unless the root theological issue that produces the debate is recognized and resolved, the debate cannot end.

14