

Be Imitators of God

Do Not Get Drunk with Wine

Ephesians 5:18

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Scripture

We are currently in a sermon series in Ephesians 5:1-21 that I am calling, “Be Imitators of God.”

In his letter to the Ephesian Christians, the Apostle Paul wrote in Ephesians 5:1a, “Therefore be imitators of God.” That is Paul’s overall command for this section of Scripture. He then gave three ways in which Christians imitate God. Christians imitate God by walking in love, by walking in light, and by walking in wisdom. In verse 18, Paul teaches that Christians are to imitate God by being filled with the Spirit. He contrasts the filling of the Spirit with drunkenness.

Let’s read about not getting drunk with wine in Ephesians 5:18:

¹⁸ And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit.... (Ephesians 5:18)

Introduction

Dr. D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones notes in his excellent commentary on Ephesians, from which I am drawing heavily today, that when Paul writes about living the Christian life “he always does so in a doctrinal manner.”¹ As he continues his discussion on imitating God, he does so in a very important way. He writes, **“And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit.”** Now, it may seem to us that Paul is dealing with the issue of drunkenness. But

¹ David Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Life in the Spirit in Marriage, Home and Work: An Exposition of Ephesians 5:18–6:9* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1974), 10–11.

that is not in fact Paul's objective. To be sure, he does write, **“And do not get drunk with wine,”** but Paul is not dealing with the issue of intoxication. If we were to deal only with drunkenness, we would miss the whole point of Paul's argument. And, we would also be in danger of legalism.

In his letter to the Ephesians, Paul is making a very clear distinction between the new life and the old life. For example, so far in chapter 5 Paul has been exhorting Christians to walk in love and not in their previous way of sin, to walk in light and not in darkness, and to walk as wise and not as unwise. In fact, Paul really begins this distinction between the new life and the old life back in Ephesians 4:17.

So, as he gets to Ephesians 5:18 Paul is again making a distinction between the new life and the old life. He is emphasizing that Christians are to imitate God by being filled with the Spirit (that is the new life), and they must not get drunk with wine (that is the old life). But, why introduce this element of drunkenness?

Lloyd-Jones notes “that there was nothing which was more characteristic of the old life which these people had been living, and which their contemporaries were still living, than drunkenness and debauchery. The ancient world at the time when our Lord came into it was characterized by this very thing.”² Paul's point is that drunkenness is characteristic of the old life. But now that the Ephesians have become Christians they are to live the new life.

Lesson

Ephesians 5:18 teaches us the difference between the old life and the new life.

² David Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Life in the Spirit*, 12.

Let's use the following outline:

1. The Characteristic of the Old Life (5:18a)
2. The Characteristic of the New Life (5:18b)

I. The Characteristic of the Old Life (5:18a)

First, let's look at the characteristic of the old life.

Paul writes in verse 18a, **“And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery.”** Paul is writing about a lifestyle that characterized non-Christians. He is talking about the old life. Non-Christians not only drank wine and got drunk, but their drinking led to **debauchery**. Paul is not simply calling attention to the amount of wine that is being consumed, but that those who become **drunk with wine** are in a condition of **debauchery**. That is a very interesting word that Paul used. The word **“debauchery”** (*asotia*) means “having no hope of safety; extravagant squandering, dissoluteness, prodigality.”³

Precisely the same word is used in the Parable of the Prodigal Son (cf. Luke 15:11–32). A man had two sons. The younger son wanted his inheritance, which his father gave to him. The younger son then journeyed into a far country, and “there he squandered his property in reckless living.” The word that is translated as “reckless” (*asotos*) is exactly the same word (in adverbial form) as **“debauchery”** (*asotia*). So, we could read Paul's comment in verse 18 as follows, **“And do not get drunk with wine, for that is ‘reckless.’”** One who is drunk with wine is in a condition of **debauchery**, recklessness, extravagant squandering, dissoluteness, prodigality.

But what is even more interesting is the root meaning of the word for **“debauchery.”** The word for **“debauchery,”** as

³ Spiros Zodhiates, *The Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament* (Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers, 2000).

well as for “reckless,” has a negative prefix, but its essential meaning is “to save.” “To save” is the opposite of “extravagant squandering.” A person who saves is careful with what he has; he looks after his possessions. But, if you add a negative prefix you have the opposite. You have a person who squanders, is reckless, is debauched, and in the end has nothing at all. So, instead of saving, it is a process of destruction.

Now that, says Paul, is the characteristic of the old life, **“And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery,** a life that is squandered in reckless living, dissoluteness, and prodigality. That is the life that belongs to the non-Christian. That is the life that you lived before you became a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ. Do not live like that.”

II. **The Characteristic of the New Life (5:18b)**

And second, let’s look at the characteristic of the new life.

Paul goes on to the positive side of the Christian life. He describes what is characteristic of the new life. He says in verse 18b, **“And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit.”**

Next time we will examine what it means to **be filled with the Spirit**. Now, however, I want to examine several features of the new life, especially in contrast with the old life.

A. The New Life Is a Controlled Life

First, the new life is a controlled life.

Paul links this to what he has just said in verse 15, where he writes, “Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise.” A wise person, Paul writes, makes the best use of the time, and understands the will of the Lord. He also is filled

with the Spirit and so lives a controlled life, an ordered life.

That is the very opposite of a person who is drunk with wine, who, as Lloyd-Jones writes, “has lost control, and is being controlled by something else, as it were, and who is therefore in a state of utter disorder and disarray. Excess of wine leads to a condition which is characterized above everything by the loss of understanding, the loss of refinement, the loss of judgment, the loss of balance. That is what drink does.”⁴

I like what John Stott says about the new life being a controlled life. He writes, “But it is a serious mistake to suppose that to be filled with the Spirit of Jesus Christ is a kind of spiritual inebriation in which we lose control of ourselves. On the contrary, ‘self-control’ (*enkrateia*) is the final quality named as ‘the fruit of the Spirit’ in Galatians 5:22–23. Under the influence of the Holy Spirit we do not lose control; we gain it.”⁵

The new life is a controlled life.

B. *The New Life Is a Productive Life*

Second, the new life is a productive life.

The new life is not an unproductive or wasteful life. The Parable of the Prodigal Son really illustrates that truth, doesn’t it? The Prodigal Son in the far country lives a reckless life, an unproductive life, a wasteful life. But, when he returns home to his loving father, it is the complete opposite. He now lives a productive life.

Drunkenness always leads to debauchery, reckless living, dissoluteness, prodigality, and extravagant squandering. And what is it that is squandered? Time is squandered. A drunken

⁴ David Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Life in the Spirit*, 15.

⁵ John R. W. Stott, *God’s New Society: The Message of Ephesians*, The Bible Speaks Today (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1979), 204.

person fritters away time while drinking. He does things that he would not do when he is sober. On the other hand, the person who is filled with the Spirit makes the best use of the time, because the days are evil, as Paul says in verse 16.

Moreover, as we think of the Prodigal Son, we remember how impoverished his life was when he was at the bottom in the far country. His money was gone, his so-called friends were gone, everything was gone, and he was trying to keep himself alive by eating the pods that the pigs ate. “And no one gave him anything” (Luke 15:16). At this point in his life, he had nothing at all. He was completely impoverished. But, then he thought of his home and his loving father, and he said, “How many of my father’s hired servants have more than enough bread, but I perish here with hunger!” (Luke 15:17). The new life of the Christian is the complete opposite of the impoverished life of the old life of the non-Christian. Lloyd-Jones rightly concludes, “The old, natural, sinful life impoverishes, and leaves us with nothing.”⁶

The new life is a controlled life and a productive life.

C. The New Life Is a Positive Life

Third, the new life is a positive life.

As you read through Ephesians, and especially from Ephesians 4:17 onwards, you may be tempted to think that the Christian life is a negative life. For example, Paul writes, “...you must no longer walk as the Gentiles do....Do not let the sun go down on your anger....Let the thief no longer steal....Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths....And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God....Let all

⁶ David Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Life in the Spirit*, 18.

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bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you” (Ephesians 4:17-32). Some people reading Ephesians superficially may see the new life of the Christian as a list of “do’s” and “don’ts.” They think that Christianity is just a list of rules to be rigidly obeyed in order to earn and keep the Father’s love.

But nothing could be further from the truth! That is what the Apostle Paul wants to stress. The new life of the Christian is a positive life that is lived in the power of the Spirit! When a person receives God’s grace and is enabled to trust in Jesus and repent of his sin, God does so through the work of the Third Person of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit. That person is born again through the gracious operation of the Holy Spirit. He is a completely new creation. He then walks with the Spirit and is led by the Spirit and is filled with the Spirit in a most wonderful and positive way.

And exactly how does that happen? The new life is lived by being filled with the Spirit. And how are we filled with the Spirit? It is significant that in the parallel passage in Colossians, Paul does not write, “Be filled with the Spirit.” Instead, he writes to the Colossians in Colossians 3:16, “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly.” John Stott rightly notes, “We must never separate the Spirit and the Word. To obey the Word and to surrender to the Spirit are virtually identical.”⁷

A Christian is one who is born again by the Spirit of God. He delights in God’s Word. He reads it, he studies it, he meditates upon it, he memorizes it, and, most importantly, he applies it. He has a positive view of living the Christian life.

The new life is a controlled life, a productive life, and a positive life.

⁷ John R. W. Stott, *God’s New Society: The Message of Ephesians*, 209.

D. *The New Life Is a Stimulating Life*

Fourth, the new life is a stimulating life.

The new life of the Christian is a thrilling life! It is an exhilarating life! If you were converted as an older person (rather than as a young child), you recall vividly that your life was transformed. It was like night turning to day, and in a very real sense it was!

That is what Paul is saying to the Ephesians, **“And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery.”** Do not go back to the bottle to look for some thrill, or some exhilaration, or some stimulus. Instead, **“Be filled with the Spirit,”** and you will have that and more. Dr. Lloyd-Jones, who trained as a medical doctor before he became a pastor, writes, “This is the tremendous idea which is so characteristic of New Testament teaching. Wine—alcohol—...pharmacologically speaking is not a stimulant; it is a depressant. Take up any book on pharmacology and look up ‘alcohol,’ and you will find, always, that it is classified among the depressants. It is not a stimulus. ‘Well’, you say, ‘why do people drink alcohol in order to receive a stimulus?’...What alcohol does is this; it knocks out those higher centers, and so the more primitive elements in the brain come up and take control; and a man feels better temporarily. He has lost his sense of fear, and he has lost his discrimination, he has lost his power to assess. Alcohol merely knocks out his higher centers and releases the more instinctive, primal elements; but the man believes that he is being stimulated. What is really true of him is that he has become more of an animal; his control over himself is diminished.”⁸

⁸ David Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Life in the Spirit*, 19–20.

Dr. Lloyd-Jones goes on to say, “That is the exact opposite of being filled with the Spirit; for what the Spirit does is truly to stimulate. If it were possible to put the Spirit into a text-book of Pharmacology I would put him under the stimulants, for that is where he belongs. He really does stimulate. He does not merely appear to do so, as alcohol does, and, thereby fools and deludes us. The Holy Spirit is an active, positive, real stimulus. What does he stimulate? He stimulates our every faculty. He stimulates the mind and the intellect...the heart...and likewise the will.”⁹

The new life is a controlled life, a productive life, a positive life, and a stimulating life.

E. The New Life Is a Joyful Life

And fifth, the new life is a joyful life.

The Christian life is a life full of joy. Why does a person turn to wine? He does so because he is unhappy and miserable. And he wants something that will help him so that he does not feel unhappy and miserable.

Unfortunately, however, he turns in the wrong direction to address his unhappiness and misery. The Apostle Paul asks, “Do you want to relieve your unhappiness and misery?” Then, **“Do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit.”**

Perhaps you are a person who feels your life to be unhappy and miserable. You turn to drink or drugs or other activities to fill you with joy. But nothing works. I say to you: turn to the Lord Jesus Christ in repentance and faith. He will forgive you all your sins and receive you as his own. And you will have

⁹ David Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Life in the Spirit*, 20–21.

peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Through him you will also obtain access by faith into this grace in which you will stand, and you will rejoice in hope of the glory of God (Romans 5:1–2).

The new life is a controlled life, a productive life, a positive life, a stimulating life, and a joyful life.

Conclusion

Therefore, having analyzed Ephesians 5:18, let us not get drunk with wine, but be filled with the Spirit.

The Apostle Paul was writing to the Christians in Ephesus to help them understand that they were to imitate God. They were not to get drunk with wine, which was characteristic of the old life. Instead, they were to be filled with the Spirit, which is characteristic of the new life.

The words that he wrote almost 2,000 years ago are now applicable to us in the 21st century. Let us not get drunk with wine, but be filled with the Spirit. Let our lives not be characterized by anything that is reminiscent of our non-Christian lives. Instead, let our lives be characterized by the filling of the Spirit of God. Friends, God designed us to be in relationship with himself. And he has provided us with his Holy Spirit who alone enables us to live a controlled life, a productive life, a positive life, a stimulating life, and a joyful life. Amen.

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and membership in his church family,
develop them to Christlike maturity,
equip them for their ministry in the church
and life mission in the world,
in order to magnify God's name.*

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