

The Letter Of Paul To The Ephesians

*⁷In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, ⁸which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight ⁹making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ ¹⁰as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.
(Ephesians 1:7-10. ESV)*

Message 22

Characteristics Of The Spirit Filled Church

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Ephesians 5:19-21

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Introduction:

Good morning! Open your Bibles to Ephesians 5:19. As I mentioned last week the main verb for this entire section of text running from 5:18 – 6:9 is the verb *pleirousthe* which means “be ever being filled” by the Holy Spirit. That’s found in verse 18 and we talked about that last Sunday. Its followed by five supporting participles. Participles support or amplify main verbs – they provide more details and in this case they provide characteristic results of being every filled by the Holy Spirit. There are 5 participles but two of them are parallels meaning that Paul is using two overlapping words to convey one new idea. Therefore what we are looking at this morning is 4 characteristics of the Spirit filled church. Let’s begin at verse 18 so that we have the context and the main verb fresh in our minds. Hear now the word of the Lord:

¹⁸And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit, ¹⁹**addressing one another** in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs,

The first participle there in verse 19 informs us that:

A Spirit Filled Church Will Increasingly Manifest...

- 1. Bible saturated, other edifying, spiritual speech and song**

The Greek word underneath the ESV's "addressing one another" is the word *laleo* which means "to preach", "to speak", or "to tell". The three nouns that follow are all in the dative meaning that we will preach, speak and tell each other IN Psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Those three words are almost synonymous. The word for Psalms refers to the Psalms of the Old Testament – that was the hymnbook of the early church. We know however that they also wrote their own songs –in fact Paul quoted from one earlier in this chapter. As 21st century western readers we are very tempted to impose on these words our modern categories and to hear this as if Paul were saying: "Sing the Psalter, sing a few Isaac Watts hymns and then also bust out some Chris Tomlin songs". We hear this as a plea for blended worship but in fact, these three words all mean more or less the same thing. Paul is saying speak and sing to each other in the practice and pattern of the Psalms. Use the existing Psalms and write your own songs in that same pattern and spirit. Let's pause here and reflect on that.

First of all I want you to notice that the Bible dictates that our singing PREACH. When you look up the word *laleo* in the Greek dictionary, the definition runs "preach, say, speak, talk, tell, utter". Indicating that the most common meaning of this word is PREACH. Paul is saying that our singing should PREACH. It should teach the Gospel from the whole word of God. We see this even more clearly by comparing this text to its very near parallel in Colossians 3:16ff:

¹⁶Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God. ¹⁷And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him. (Colossians 3:16-17. ESV)

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly – that's how you keep being filled by the Holy Spirit – and then he moves to an almost identical description of the result of that; you will be teaching and admonishing in all wisdom, singing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs and so forth. Almost identical. What is very useful here is that in the parallel passage about singing instead of *laleo* he says "teaching and admonishing one another" which helps to define what Paul means by using this unexpected word. Paul is saying that our singing OUGHT TO HAVE A DIDACTIVE AND CORRECTIVE FUNCTION. It should TEACH and it should REBUKE. Now, let me ask you, how good is most of our modern hymnody at doing that? Not very good. Most modern Christian hymnody – song writing – is pretty light and pretty self affirming. Paul is calling for something stronger than that, something edgier than that. Something more like the Psalms.

The Psalms do a very good job of teaching the Gospel. They are filled with detailed recollections of God's gracious redemption of his people. They rehearse the story of salvation and they pull no punches in terms of God's character and expectations. Psalm 78 is a classic example of this, look at verse 12 and following:

¹² In the sight of their fathers he performed wonders
in the land of Egypt, in the fields of Zoan.
¹³ He divided the sea and let them pass through it,
and made the waters stand like a heap.
¹⁴ In the daytime he led them with a cloud,
and all the night with a fiery light.
¹⁵ He split rocks in the wilderness
and gave them drink abundantly as from the deep.
¹⁶ He made streams come out of the rock
and caused waters to flow down like rivers.
¹⁷ Yet they sinned still more against him,
rebellious against the Most High in the desert.
¹⁸ They tested God in their heart
by demanding the food they craved.
¹⁹ They spoke against God, saying,
"Can God spread a table in the wilderness?"
²⁰ He struck the rock so that water gushed out
and streams overflowed.
Can he also give bread
or provide meat for his people?"
²¹ Therefore, when the LORD heard, he was full of wrath;
a fire was kindled against Jacob;
his anger rose against Israel,
²² because they did not believe in God
and did not trust his saving power. (Psalm 78:12-22. ESV)

A Spirit filled church is going to write songs like that, Paul says. Songs that rehearse God's deeds of redemption and that tell the truth about his holiness and wrath. In verse 62 it goes on to say that when they later forgot the Lord and disobeyed them:

⁶² He gave his people over to the sword
and vented his wrath on his heritage.
⁶³ Fire devoured their young men,
and their young women had no marriage song.
⁶⁴ Their priests fell by the sword,
and their widows made no lamentation (Psalm 78:62-64. ESV)

We need songs like that written and sung again in the House of the Lord! Songs that tell the truth about who God is and songs that tell the truth about his holiness and his mercy. Songs that teach and songs that correct. Songs like that will return and resound in the Spirit filled church.

Secondly, Paul says, Christians in a Spirit filled church will increasingly be found:

singing and making melody to the Lord with all your heart, (v. 19b. ESV)

The Spirit filled church increasingly manifests:

2. Whole hearted, Scripture rooted, musical praise to God

Here is where we encounter the two participles working together as syntactic parallels. The second participle there is *psallo* which literally means “twitching or twanging” and refers to strumming the harp or lyre – an ancient guitar. In modern English we would render this: “Singing and strumming to the Lord with all your heart”. Notice three things here; first notice that musical accompaniment is a command and an assumption of Scripture. The church has not always recognized this. The church is notorious for over reacting and over compensating. We find ourselves in the ditch on one side of the road and we pull and pull and pull to get ourselves out and we pull so hard that we fall face down in the ditch on the other side of the road. This happens again and again on issue after issue. We see this particularly with respect to music. Music CAN and often HAS become an idol in the church. Music can be a gateway to silly and stupid and distracted. It can. It often does. It’s happening now in wide swaths of the Evangelical church. But. The solution to that is not to dive face first into the other ditch and outlaw music altogether. Many churches do that. There are churches in this town that have made the decision that because of the potential abuses of music they will only sing the Psalter and they will not utilize musical accompaniment. That is a bridge too far. That is forbidding what the Scripture endorses. Music is good. Music is from God. Like all good things from God it can be abused but the solution is not to outlaw it altogether, the solution is to regulate it.

Secondly we want to notice the shift in audience. In the first section the audience was “one another”. Here the audience is “to the Lord”. The songs we sing in the church have a dual function. They should instruct and admonish the congregation – that’s us preaching to each other through the songs – and they should convey praise to the Lord. Sometimes you will hear super spiritual people say: “It’s not about us, it’s about the Lord!” That sounds really pious except it is incredibly arrogant and unbiblical. It is about the Lord and it is about us. We sing to the Lord

and we sing to us. Don't be so arrogant as to think you don't this. You do. This is to the Lord but it is also to us. We're here for the Lord and we're here for us. The worship in God's house should EXALT God and EDIFY the congregation. That is the consistent teaching of the Bible and that is why for example, Paul forbids unintelligible tongues in the worship service. If the only concern was speaking to God then tongues would be perfectly acceptable in corporate worship. You may not know what is being said, but God knows and if that was all that mattered then it wouldn't be a problem. But it is a problem because TWO things are supposed to happen simultaneously – God is supposed to be exalted and the church is supposed to be EDIFIED.

Thirdly notice the phrase “with your heart”. That doesn't mean “in your heart” as the NIV translates for some reason, it clearly means “with your heart” as in “with your whole person”. Whereas content and strength are being emphasized in the first clause about singing to one another, here on the vertical axis the emphasis is on passion and engagement. Passionless worship is an affront to God. Put yourself into it for the glory of His Name.

A Spirit filled church will increasingly manifest Bible saturated, other edifying speech and song, whole hearted, Scripture rooted musical praise to God and thirdly it will be:

²⁰giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ,

Paul is predicting:

3. Constant, all inclusive, Christ mediated thanks to God

The participle here is *eucharisteo* which you will recognize from our English word “Eucharist”. One of the alternate names for the Lord's Table is the Eucharist or the Thanksgiving. A Spirit filled church is constantly overflowing in thanksgiving. The English word “thanksgiving” does not capture the entirety of what is meant by the Greek word *eucharisteo*. To say thanks in English implies that something has been done for you for which you are grateful. That is certainly an aspect of what is meant here; but Biblical thanksgiving also includes delight or gladness in who God is. So Christian thanksgiving is more than just saying: “Thank you God for this and for that” It is that, but it is also “I am glad Father that you are this and that”. Biblical

thanks is GRATITUDE AND GLADNESS. It includes what we typically call “praise”. Praise is rejoicing in who God is and that is gladness. The two together capture what Paul is talking about with the word *eucharisteo*.

There are four modifiers in this clause that describe the manner of gratitude and gladness Paul is looking for:

- i. Constantly
- ii. For everything
- iii. In the Name of our Lord Jesus Christ
- iv. To God the Father

“Constantly” implies that this is not just something we do during gathered worship services; rather it is the characteristic attitude of the true believer. The true believer walks in constant awareness that he or she has been saved by grace, that she contributed NOTHING to her salvation, that she was dead in her trespasses and sins and under a sentence of eternal separation and yet God in his mercy SAVED HER and made her a child of God and joint heir with Jesus in all the promises and blessings of God. That thought sticks in her mind and changes how she thinks, feels and talks. She is glad that God is Holy AND MERCIFUL and she is grateful for her election and salvation.

“For everything” implies a Sovereign perspective on life. A true Christian can thank God even for suffering and loss because he can see it as from the hand of a gracious God. He believes that God works in EVERYTHING for the good of those who love him so he can THANK GOD for hardship, loss and trial. John Bunyan was a Baptist pastor back in the Puritan days. He was the one of the very first pastors arrested after the restoration of the monarchy. He spent 12 years in prison and he agonized over his wife and children, particularly his blind daughter Mary who had a special place in his heart. There was no welfare in those days and his family had to survive on the charity of other Puritans but most of the Puritans were poor because they were being forced to the margins of society because of their beliefs. So Bunyan made laces in prison for his wife to sell so that they could have food to eat. And yet; looking back on those hard, soul wrenching years Bunyan could write with thanksgiving:

I never had in all my life so great an inlet into the Word of God as now (in prison). Those Scriptures that I saw nothing in before were made in this place and state to shine upon me. Jesus Christ also was never more real and apparent than now. Here I have seen him and felt him indeed... I have had sweet sights of the forgiveness of my sins in this place and of my being with Jesus in another world... I have seen that here that I am persuaded I shall never, while in this world, be able to express. (John Bunyan, *A Relation of The Imprisonment of Mr. John Bunyan*)

That's constant and for everything thanksgiving to God. It is extraordinarily rare and it is characteristic of the truly saved.

The phrase “in the Name of the Lord Jesus Christ” means that we recall that our right to address God at all is only because of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ who ever lives before the Father to make intercession for us. “The Name” in the Bible world, refers to what a person is and what they have accomplished. It is only because of who Jesus is – the God-Man and what he has done – his life, suffering, obedience, death and resurrection – that we are welcome in the presence of God. Spirit filled Christians know that and rejoice in it.

All of this activity is with the help of the Holy Spirit – we're still dealing with the results of verse 18 – and Paul has just told us that it is because of Christ, and now lastly we see that it is “UNTO God”. Prayer in the Bible is TO GOD, BECAUSE OF CHRIST with the HELP OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. So it is here. God is good and the Spirit filled Church overflows in gratitude and gladness for all of who He is and all of what He has done for us in Jesus Christ.

Fourthly we see in verse 21 that a Spirit filled church is full of people who are:

²¹submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ. (Ephesians 5:18-21. ESV)

The ongoing work of the Holy Spirit in a church, filling those people with all the fullness of God, ought to result in:

4. Forward looking, Christ fearing, multi-context submission to one another

The fifth and final of these modifying participles is the Greek word *hupotasso* and it means to be in submission within divinely ordered relationships. As you may know there is some controversy in the wider Christian world about the exact meaning of this verse. Some people want to suggest that because Paul adds the phrase “to one another” that he is really calling for a flat, mutual,

reciprocal kind of submission where everyone is submitting to everyone without any obvious hierarchical structure. However, that is not what “one another” usually means in the Bible and it is not what the context suggests that Paul is trying to communicate. If Paul means “reciprocal and flat” by “one another” then it is odd that he follows this with three examples of nonreciprocal submission. He tells wives to submit to husbands but he does not tell husbands to reciprocate – he tells them to love. He tells children to submit to parents – but he does not tell parents to submit to children – he tells them to raise and instruct their children. He tells servants to submit to masters but does not tell masters to submit to servants he tells them to treat them with fairness and gentleness. None of the examples Paul provides are reciprocal so clearly that is not what he means. The point is, you can’t change the clear meaning of verse 21 into something it isn’t saying and then use that false construction as a magic eraser to wipe out all of the next three paragraphs but that is exactly what many preachers and liberal teachers do. They say: “Paul is calling for reciprocal submission and therefore, husbands and wives should submit to EACH OTHER and this does not therefore support the concept of male headship in the home.” Curiously they generally do not deal with the 2nd and 3rd examples because it would be brutally obvious that they are reading their own ideas into the text and making a hash of what the Bible is actually saying. The Bible is telling us that in a Spirit filled church we will conduct ourselves in godly ways within the varied contexts of human relationships. If we are husbands we will love and lead our wives. If we are wives we will honour and respect our husbands. If we are parents we will instruct and nurture our children. If we are children we will respect and obey our parents. If we are masters or employers we will treat our employees with fairness and gentleness. If we are servants or employees we will respect and obey our masters. That is how Christians, filled with the Holy Spirit submit to one another in the fear of the Lord.

That phrase rendered by the ESV as “out of reverence for Christ” is way too soft. It literally says and actually means “in the fear of Christ”. The word *phobos* means fear. As in xenophobia – fear of strangers. Or claustrophobia – fear of tight spaces. In the Bible it doesn’t mean terror but it does mean fear. It means remembering that one day you will stand before Jesus the Judge and give an account and you better hope that your life bears witness to your words. It means, in this verse, that one day you will stand before Jesus and you will have to explain husbands, every harsh and unloving word you ever spoke to your wife. You will have to explain every selfish purchase, every game of golf, every internet page viewed and every anniversary missed. If that doesn’t frighten you, then you don’t know Jesus.

It means wives, that one day you will have to stand before Jesus and explain every disrespectful thing you said about your husband to your girlfriends or to your mother. It means you will have to answer for every time you resisted him just on principle – just to show him that you are an independent woman. It means that you will have to answer for every nag and every senseless argument and every time you used sex as a weapon to get your own way.

It means parents, you will have to answer for every abusive word or action, every meal time where the Bible was not opened, every conversation not had that should have been had. It means children that you will have to stand before Jesus and explain every cheeky outburst, every muttered curse, every lie and half truth and every act of defiance and disobedience.

It means business owners that you will have to defend before Jesus every raise not given, every benefit not extended, every condescending phrase uttered. It means employees that you will have to explain to Jesus every sick day taken, every time you arrived late or left early and every paperclip you took home without asking. It means – Christian in every conceivable context, that you need to be very sure that the manner of your living confirms the content of your confession.

And yet, true Christians are not terrified by this verse – they are chastened and encouraged. Paul is promising that the Holy Spirit will enable these behaviours in those who are ever being filled. God enables that which he commands. As you grow, this will happen. This is who you will become, by one degree of glory to the next.

Conclusion:

That's the text – those are the five participles and four points that Paul provides as characteristics of the Spirit filled church. Before we close I just want to reflect on this passage as a whole. I want to pull up from tree level to forest level and make a couple of concluding observations. I want you to see three things about this text.

First of all I want you to notice its flow and direction. Paul says that the Christian being ever filled by the Holy Spirit will overflow in this, this and that. What I want you to notice is that he doesn't say: "If you do this, this and that you will be filled Spirit filled." That's not the direction

of the text and missing that can have HUGE implications. If you reverse this – if you think that doing this, this and that will CAUSE God to pour down Spiritual fire on you – that is paganism plain and simple. That is the prophets of Baal dancing and shouting and slashing themselves so that fire would fall from the heavens. That is not Christianity. Christianity is about responding to the grace of a Sovereign God. We do not summon the FIRE!! We respond to it. If you have ever been to a church that seems to be singing that chorus one more time, or amping up the emotion one more notch, or giving the pump one last prime in hopes that fire will fall – here’s my advice to you: get out. You are in a pagan church that is dangerously confused about the ministry of the Holy Spirit.

Secondly, I want you to notice what isn’t mentioned as being characteristic of a Spirit filled church. There is a lot of talk in certain parts of the wider Evangelical world about the marks of a Spirit filled church. I find it interesting that most of what those folks are talking about is not mentioned in this text and most of what this text identified as a mark of the Spirit filled church is going mentioned in most of those conversations. That needs to be a caution to us as we find a church to worship and serve in.

Thirdly in addition to noticing what isn’t there, I want you to notice who is there. Scholars suggest that this passage is written in classic chiasmic structure. Meaning that it uses the very common A-B-B-A outline. It’s called chiasmic because of the letter chi in Greek which looks like a giant X. The bottom is a mirror image of the top. So chiasm is when the top two points are a mirror image of the bottom two points. There were four points. The first one was about us, the second one was about God, the third one was about God and the fourth one was about us. Horizontal, vertical, vertical, horizontal or H-V-V-H; that’s chiasmic structure and Paul is using it to say that worship is about God, first and foremost – God is at the centre – but it is also about us. It really is. We sing to God and we sing to each other. We need to relate with gratitude to God and with humility and submission to one another. God and us. Those are the key characters in Christian worship. Now notice who isn’t there in that picture. Seekers. Non-Christians. It’s not that they aren’t important – lost people matter to God and they matter to this church – it’s that they are not the point or intended audience for corporate worship! This whole thing breaks down when instead of singing to each other and to God we’re singing songs to appeal to the unbeliever. And yet that is exactly the plan being followed by countless churches in North America. Its unbiblical and it doesn’t work.

A Spirit filled church has a content rich horizontal dimension to its corporate response in worship, and it has a passionate and heartfelt vertical dimension, it is constant and all inclusive in giving thanks to God through Christ and it is filled with Christians who are growing in their capacity to submit to one another in a variety of complicated contexts but they're doing it in love and in the fear of the Lord. That's what a Spirit-filled church looks like. Accept no substitutes. This is the work of the Spirit in us and this is the Word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.