

Under the Spirit's Influence

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Bible Verse: Ephesians 5:18
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As you know, we completed on Sunday our series "How to Know the Bible is True." That series is done and it's finished. We talked about how the Holy Spirit opens our minds and testifies to our hearts that the Bible is true and that's, you know, the ultimate authority for the truthfulness of the Bible is God himself. We're done with that. I'm going to pick up on theme and continue theme of the Holy Spirit here in just a moment but as we've said in the recent past, we've alluded to this, the elders also want the pulpit to have an opportunity to re-articulate and to expand on our philosophy of church membership, and we're going to take the opportunity to do that over the next couple of Sundays. And actually, Nathaniel is going to be the one bringing the word on those. He's prepared material that I'm excited for him to deliver and so we're going to have the opportunity to do that and to put our church life in a position to, you know, to start talking about church membership again. We've put things on hold a little bit as elders to, you know, to rethink some of our philosophy, to clarify and expand it and from the pulpit and in practice, and so that's what we're going to do and so we're going to pivot to that over the next couple of weeks.

Tonight, I want to kind of focus on that from a text that you might not expect to find the importance of church membership as stated, and our text is actually a well-known verse on Christian living tonight and I invite you to turn to Ephesians 5:18. This is a clear, direct statement about the will of God. I often deal with people who want to know what the will of God is for their lives, and they're thinking about it in terms of where they should live, what school they should go to, what person they should marry, and so forth, and the Bible doesn't answer those kinds of questions directly. If we're really interested in the will of God, we can go to those passages of Scripture where it says this is the will of God, and that can capture and captivate our attention and let God frame the issue about his will rather than defining it from an earthbound perspective, as we're trying to make decisions, for example.

So on Ephesians 5:17, to set the whole context, we read the Apostle Paul saying this, he says,

17 Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is.

And then he goes on to say in verse 18,

18 And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit,

The will of God is that you would be filled with the Holy Spirit as a believer, and so this text brings us to the Spirit-filled life, and as it does that, it connects us with the much larger purpose of God and what we're going to see here is that the Spirit-filled life is something that is far more than how we do our devotions or the way that we feel about things personally in our private lives. I know that you've probably heard messages that make that emphasis from this text and whatever the value of that may be, the broader context shows us that there is a much bigger picture in mind when it comes to the Spirit-filled life. Paul makes a contrast in verse 18 about being drunk with wine but being filled with the Spirit and that will be the focus; this contrast will be our focus for this evening and drawing out the implications that it has for our lives and for the life of a local church. I'm delighted to be able to share these things with you here this evening.

Now, first of all, our first point this evening is a simple one. Paul starts with a negative command, a prohibition, he says, "Be not filled with wine. Do not be filled with wine," or in verse 18, "Do not get drunk with wine." Now, keeping in mind that Paul had just called his readers to consider the will of God there in the end of verse 17, understand what the will of the Lord is. Well, you might say, "Well, yeah, what is the will of the Lord?" He goes on and says, "and here you go, here's what I'm thinking of when I talk about the will of the Lord, do not, first of all, on a negative side, do not get drunk with wine." But what we find is that thinking about God's will brings us to think about his Holy Spirit and the role of the Spirit in our lives. It's a vertical focus. Being filled with the Spirit gives us a vertical focus on the will of the Lord rather than that horizontal preoccupation with earthly matters that sometimes actually distracts us from thinking about what the will of God is in our lives. But Paul introduces it with this contrast and, first of all, says, "Do not get drunk with wine."

Now you read some of the authorities and there are many authorities that think that Paul is alluding to the reality of pagan religious rituals of the day. People would get drunk with alcohol and their thought was that that kind of release, that kind of alcohol-soaked ecstasy brought them closer to the deity that they worshiped and brought an elevated sense of communion with the deity. What Paul is saying here is if you want an elevated experience with deity, don't look to liquor to do it, and Scripture condemns drunkenness in other settings. It could never be appropriate for a Christian to be intoxicated by wine. In Proverbs 20:1 we read this it says, "Wine is a mocker, strong drink a brawler, and whoever is led astray by it is not wise." And in Proverbs 23:20 and 21 Scripture warns us about our associations, Scripture tells us that bad company corrupts good morals and as believers seeking to live in obedience to Christ, we need to be mindful of this and understand that there are times where it is appropriate to terminate a friendship over issues of sin in an unbeliever's life, for example. So in Proverbs 23:20 and 21, Solomon warns us, he says, "Be not among drunkards or among gluttonous eaters of meat, for the drunkard and the glutton will come to poverty, and slumber will clothe them with rags." Scripture warns us about this, and young people do well to take note of who they let

influence them and what friends that they choose, and if you start to see these darker sides of life coming in with people that you know, the idea is not to try to be like them and to be very, very careful about how you even try to witness to them because it's like a vortex that will suck you into their sinful lifestyle; you witness to them by standing apart and speaking into it rather than joining in with their activities and their associations. Be not among drunkards or among glutinous eaters of meat, the Scripture says. And so Paul draws upon that biblical theme and in the context of his day says, "Don't think about religion like this. Don't be, you know, in the context of the broader Bible, be careful about how you associate with others." And so Paul is forbidding drunkenness for all time. If a Christian is ever intoxicated by alcohol, they're in every circumstance that is a matter of sin that has been committed that calls for repentance. It calls for repentance, not an excuse, "Well, you know, I guess I'm an alcoholic," or something like that. You know, we can't adopt the world's terms to describe what the Bible says is sinful behavior. Paul says don't get drunk with wine. This isn't complicated. And so we need to be aware of that as we go about our lives and as people choose whatever kind of, you know, culinary things that they want to pursue. There is a bright line that Scripture says do not cross.

Now look at verse 18 with me again. He says, "do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery." The underlying term here in the original language has the idea of wasting resources. To be intoxicated is to waste your life, it's to waste your resources on that which can do no good and which is a sin against God. In Luke 15:13, the story of the prodigal son, a related adverb is used in this way. You know the story so I won't bother to set the context any further than that but it says about the prodigal son that he squandered his estate with loose living. He squandered what he had with the loose living that he chose to pursue as he turned his back on his righteous father and pursued a course of sin and iniquity and all of the wealth and riches that he had that his father had given to him through the estate, he squandered it. He lost it and he had nothing to show for it. Scripture says this not sympathetically but as a statement of foolishness and it's a sense of condemnation upon that, on what he had done. And so Paul's point is, is that you waste your life when you're pursuing drunkenness.

Some of you know by sad experience that people will throw away their marriage, throw away their family, throw away their children, sometimes literally throw away their lives with drunkenness. I had a second cousin, I believe it was, who died in a most degraded, degraded way. He was walking in the winter, he was intoxicated, he was walking in the winter along a railroad trestle, fell off the trestle and was found, you know, hours, days, I don't remember the exact time sequence later, literally wasted his life for the sake of his intoxication. And that's what happens. As you know, you know, Scripture says don't look on the wine when it's red and sparkling in the cup because when it goes into you, it bites like a viper. And so the best thing to do is to just be aware of these things and to guard your heart against it because the wastefulness, even to the point of wasting your very life, is put into play with such things.

Paul is addressing Christians here, and when he warns them against drunkenness, his point is that this is not what God gave life to you to pursue, this is not what God saved you to do. God saved you out of that degraded kind of lifestyle. He saved you unto the

purposes of God. He saved you unto holiness. He saved you to glorify him and you can't do that as a drunkard, and so take the prohibition and say, "I'm not going there," with your life and guard against it. Just make that a principle by which you live. You know, elsewhere in 1 Corinthians 6, the Apostle Paul says you've been bought with a price therefore, glorify God with your body, and the one who gives himself over to liquor and intoxication to excess like that is not glorifying God with his body. And long ago, you know, it's been decades since, you know, the world turned its back on the term drunkard and substituted in alcoholic, by that term saying this is a disease over which the man has no control, and thereby seeks to eliminate the moral issue and the moral culpability for exposing yourself and entering into that condition. I realize that once a man has become a practicing drunk, it is very difficult for him to break away from alcohol. I'm not denying the captivating force that that has, as if you can once you've given yourself over to that, that you can just snap your fingers and it's a simple matter of the will to stop. I'm not denying that reality, but what you and I as Christians and Bible believers need to be aware of is that Scripture assigns moral culpability and moral responsibility for drunkenness and that's why you will almost never, I do not use the term alcoholic. I'll talk about being drunk. I'll talk about a drunkard. But I don't like the term alcoholic, despite the fact that it is received wisdom in our society today, because for a Christian to embrace that whole mindset and approach that disease model is to take away the sinful aspect that led the person into it in the first place.

And think about it this way, beloved, consistent drunkenness is a sign of someone who is not a Christian and if you say this is a physical disease that you have, what you're doing is you're pointing them away from the thing that they need the most, which is Christ as the Lord and Savior to deliver them from sin, judgment and from the practice of their sin. When you define what the Bible calls sin, when you define sin in terms other than what the Bible does, you're ultimately pointing them away from Christ. You're not doing them a favor. You're not being kind and gracious and loving by calling it alcoholism. You're actually sealing them off. You're giving them permission to continue what they're doing. "I have a disease here, you know." And then by removing the element of sin from the discussion, you're pointing them away from Christ rather than toward him. That's not loving, and we have to be biblical in our thinking about it.

So if any of you happen to slip and use the term alcoholic with me, I'm not going to rebuke you for it. I know what you mean, in part, as you say that, but that's not a term that I personally will use because I prefer what the Bible says, with the terms the Bible uses over the term that society uses. Paul says, "Be not filled with wine. Do not be, you know, do not give yourself over to intoxication." Well, our focus for this evening is on the positive command that he gives in verse 18 and that's what we'll spend most of our time here with this evening now. Look again at verse 18, "do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery," that's you squander your life that way, don't do that, God didn't save you so that you could squander the life that he's given to you and to debase his name in intoxication, do this instead, look at the contrast, it's a sharp contrast, "but be filled with the Spirit." Christians are to be filled with the Spirit as the pattern of their life, and that's kind of the sense of the underlying verb tense. There's an ongoing element to this. It's not

a one-time command but a call to be like this is the practice of your life as you live for Christ and so he says, "be filled with the Spirit."

Now I think it's important for us to take a moment or two to say what being filled with the Spirit is not. We need to clarify and kind of rinse our mouths, our spiritual mouths, from the way that some of the practices that are associated with the so-called Holy Spirit and to say that this is not what Scripture is talking about. What I mean is, is that the charismatics have rather hijacked the term of being filled with the Spirit, hijacked the role of the Holy Spirit, and and talk about behavior that they say is the product of the Holy Spirit's influence when actually it is the precise opposite of what Paul obviously means as he discusses the matter. You've seen the show, some of you have been in the services, some of you used to do this, and I say that with warmth and with sympathy and with gratefulness that the Lord brought you out of it, but the Holy Spirit is portrayed as an agent that causes people to lose control. So they speak in ecstatic Babble, which they call tongues. They fall down when somebody waves a handkerchief over them, as though the Spirit has slain them. You can find videos on YouTube of people running around in circles, and I even saw one a few years ago of somebody allegedly under the influence of the Holy Spirit running down the aisle and jumping into the baptistery on the platform, all in the name of glorifying God and, you know, "Look at me. I'm under the influence of the Holy Spirit." And a thousand other silly things that Scripture speaks nothing about. You and I should know well enough to recognize that those things have nothing to do with the real Holy Spirit of Scripture.

It's the exact opposite of what the Bible says, for example, in Galatians 5:22 and 23 we read this, "the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness," and what is it? "Self-control." One of the marks of the work and the controlling influence of the Holy Spirit in a life is self-control. Not losing control. Not being wild and animated and calling attention to yourself in public displays of behavior. I'm trying to be as gentle as I can in it. Scripture says it's a matter of self-control. In 1 Corinthians 14:40, the apostle says, "all things should be done decently and in order." This is the mark of the Spirit where there is order and self-control and godliness being manifested. And so when we talk about being filled with the Holy Spirit here this evening, beloved, I just want to be abundantly clear that we're not talking about those things that are manifested in charismatic circles and attributed to the Holy Spirit. And if you're newer to our church and want to explore this more, we did an entire series a few years ago called "The Holy Spirit Today," the Holy Spirit today, which goes into the whole matter of tongues and prophecies and healings and revelation and all of those things. If you want to pursue that more, there's a whole series there which is available online for you to pursue so we won't say anymore about that tonight.

Our focus tonight is constructive and the positive dimension of what it does mean to be filled with the Spirit. We're not being polemical tonight, we're wanting to say what does Paul mean here in Ephesians 5:18 when he says be filled with the Spirit? It's to be a normal part of Christian living and we'll get into it more in just a moment, but I do just want to condition your thought right now to realize that what you're going to see is that this has a great impact and a great outworking within life in the local church, life within

the body of Christ in a way that perhaps you haven't seen or recognized before, and that's what we're going to try to develop here from the broader context in the book of Philippians. By the time we're done, you may be surprised and say, "You know, I don't know how I missed that before." It's all right there on the surface of the text, and that's what we're going to see.

The verb tense in the original text, as I said, refers to an ongoing command. You are to be continually filled with the Spirit. Now that gives us a sense of understanding about what Paul does and does not mean. Because it's an ongoing command, Paul is not referring to the one-time past event of being indwelt by the Holy Spirit at your conversion. He's not talking about what he says earlier about being sealed with the Spirit at the time of your conversion because that is an act that the Spirit does and it's permanent and it stays that way. Here he's appealing to and addressing our will and our volition that you have a responsibility to do something here as you receive the ongoing work of the Holy Spirit in your life.

Well, what is it, then, that he's talking about if it's not about that initial indwelling of the Spirit that occurs in the life of every true believer? Well, considerations of context and parallel passages will guide us well this evening, but think about it just in the immediate context of this particular verse. Paul says do not get drunk with wine. Now, what is a man charged with if he's pulled over by the police and he's found to be driving at a blood alcohol content level that is above the state's permission level? He's charged with what? Driving under the influence, right? DUI. He's driving while he is under the influence of alcohol and that is a crime in our society. He's under the influence. Well, beloved to be filled with the Spirit is to be under the influence of alcohol as a negative, Paul's making a positive statement here, to be filled with the Spirit is to be under his influence, is to be under the controlling influence of the Holy Spirit and to have him animating, controlling our thoughts, directing our wills, and informing our emotions. It's to be filled with the Spirit.

Now, in what way, then, would the Spirit of God influence us? Not talking about the means that we use, we'll get to that in a moment by looking at a parallel text in Colossians 3, but in what way would the Spirit of God influence the people of God? What is the goal, what is the purpose of the Holy Spirit working out when he is controlling and directing the life of a believer in Jesus Christ? That seems to me to be a pretty important question. Well, what does the context of the book of Ephesians say? At one level, the Spirit-filled life is one of Christ-centered purity, of growth in sanctification. Look at Ephesians 5:1 through 4 and what we're doing tonight is we're using a very important interpretive principle, also called a principle of hermeneutics, meaning Bible interpretation, and one of the ways that you interpret a verse of Scripture is by looking at the surrounding context to see what the flow of thought and the themes that are emphasized around that verse in order to guide you to a proper understanding of what the apostle meant by what he said.

So at one level, the Spirit-filled life is one of Christ-centered purity. Look at Ephesians 5:1 through 4, just a few verses earlier than our text. Paul says, "Therefore be imitators of

God, as beloved children. And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God." He's emphasizing there's this Christ-centered dimension to what he says. He says look to Christ, look to the redemption that he accomplished on the cross, look at how Christ gave himself up for us, how he loved us, and in consideration of those historical facts, in consideration of the love of Christ, therefore, you live this way, and just as Christ loved you, then you should also walk in love, that there should be a pattern as you go through life of love for the body of Christ.

He goes on to make a contrast, you walk in love but by contrast, don't do this, "But," verse 3, "sexual immorality and all impurity or covetousness must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints. Let there be no filthiness nor foolish talk nor crude joking, which are out of place, but instead let there be thanksgiving." The Spirit of God directs us in the direction of fulfilling these New Testament commandments of God. On the positive side, walk in love remembering how Christ loved us and gave himself up for us. Part of that walk of love is to put to death in your life, put aside, turn away from, repent of in your Christian life these things which so often creep up in the life of people trying to walk with Christ. He says but sexual immorality, impurity, covetousness, it must not even be named among you. No filthiness. No foolish talk. No crude joking. And so we see this turning away from carnal life, carnal thinking, carnal speaking, carnal desires. Paul says recognize that and reject it, turn away from it for the sake of love and thanksgiving. You can recognize a Spirit-filled believer not by jabbering coming out of their mouth that has no linguistic characteristics whatsoever, not by speaking in tongues. You recognize a true Spirit-filled believer by someone who is filled with love for Christ, filled with love for the people of Christ, and someone whose heart is full of thanksgiving. That's what is in the context, as Paul says, be filled with the Spirit, that is what the Spirit produces, the Spirit produces personal purity in our lives and in our hearts.

Now already we're convicted, aren't we? You know, already we're convicted of the fact that, "You know what? I'm often a grumbler and a complainer. I'm not content with my circumstances. You know, I need to turn from that and pursue thanksgiving." And, you know, and the things that sometimes will come out of the mouth of Christians repeating crude jokes from the internet or something like that, or just talking foolishly, and you know, this is the mark of carnality, not Christian liberty. Paul says put all those things aside, and so the Spirit-filled life does produce personal purity in our hearts that is shown in the way that we speak and in the way that we live. That's an important aspect of it but, beloved, Paul means much more than simple personal purity here, as if you know, we lived out the Spirit-filled life in a silo isolated from others, and it's just a matter of how I live, how I conduct myself, how I think, and how I speak. It's more than that. There's an entire interconnectedness within the body of Christ that comes into play here. What we find as we examine the even broader context of the book of Ephesians is this, and I love this, and you can't avoid it, you can't avoid it. You would have to be willfully blind and refuse to see it once it's pointed out to you. Ephesians, Paul in the book of Ephesians teaches us as a primary theme of the book, teaches the role of the Holy Spirit in producing unity in the body of Jesus Christ. The Spirit has a particular role of producing unity in the body of Christ.

Now, let's go all the way back to the start of Ephesians just to remind you of the context. Paul opens with this magnificent praise at the beginning of Ephesians and he praises God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit for their work in salvation, so that he says in verse 3, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him." You see that element of sanctification and being set apart for God? Right from the very start is an important theme. Paul identifies that and picks it up later.

Verse 5, "he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ," and he did it, verse 6, "to the praise of his glorious grace." Verse 7, "In him," meaning in Christ, "we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace." Skipping down to verse 12, "so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of his glory." Verse 6, to the praise of his glorious grace. Verse 12, to the praise of his glory. And then in verse 13 he completes the Trinitarian exposition of salvation and he says in verse 13, "In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory." God the Father chose us to the praise of his glory. God the Son redeemed us with his blood to the praise of his glory. The Holy Spirit sealed us, keeps us to the praise of his glory. Father, Son and Holy Spirit to the praise of his glory, to the praise of his glory, to the praise of his glory.

And Paul, you know, proceeds to unfold that theme, speaks about the depravity of man, the lostness of man and attributes, all of this to a sovereign act of God in his mercy and kindness in saving us so that in the familiar verses of chapter 2, verse 8 and 9, look there with me, Paul says, "For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast." You've been saved by grace to the praise of his glory. You've been saved by his mercy to the praise of his glory. This is a gift that God has given to you, Paul says, and we can never see that, teach that, meditate on that enough. Paul makes it really clear but he goes on in verse 10 and he says you've been saved for a purpose. Verse 10, "we are his workmanship," God did the work in saving us. We did not save ourselves. Verse 10, he "created us in Christ Jesus," yes, but for this purpose, "for good works." True salvation results in Spirit-filled works coming out of the life of a true believer. He saved you in order to change you, to make you someone new, someone who would live for his glory. And those "good works which God prepared beforehand," verse 10, "that we should walk in them." So God saved you by grace that you would walk in the good works that he prepared for you before the foundation of the world.

Now, what we're going to see is that through the remainder of the epistle a theme that Paul keeps coming back to again and again is unity within the body of Christ. God brought Gentiles into one body with the Jews in the church. You remember that in the Old Testament it was primarily not exclusively oriented toward the Jews, and then when Christ came and the Holy Spirit came and the apostles went out and started preaching, the converted Jews had to process the fact that Gentiles were now coming into the church,

that God had granted repentance to the Gentiles just like he had the Jews. Suddenly salvation was now worldwide in its focus and in its intent and it was being worked out in practice what had been planned from all of the beginning. And now as Paul's writing here in around, you know, 60 AD, 30 years after the time of Christ, he's helping the church understand that Gentiles are received on an equal basis to converted Jews. They don't have to become Jews and then get saved. No, they're received as Gentiles and incorporated into Christ and the point of that is to teach that there is this principle of unity that is at work in the true body of Christ, so that if you look at verse 11 now, Ephesians 2:11, Paul says, "Therefore remember that at one time you Gentiles in the flesh, called 'the uncircumcision' by what is called the circumcision, which is made in the flesh by hands--remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world." Like almost every one of us in this room, Gentiles were not part of the covenant promises that were given to Israel. They were strangers to them. They were outside of them. They had no basis of approaching God, no hope to be able to be saved. "But now," he says in verse 13, "in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ." What a blessed thought. There we were lost in sin, not seeking for God, alienated from him, under his wrath, and Christ in grace came and brought us near by his blood, reconciled us, drew us near to the God who once threatened wrath against us. Now we've been reconciled and we are in a position and a state of favor before him. Verse 14, "he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility." Okay, there's division, there's a wall of division, Jew and Gentile. Now Christ has come and he has broken down that wall so that there is nothing separating Jew and Gentile any longer. And what has happened is that there is now a unified access Jews and Gentiles have that is produced by the Holy Spirit.

That's a long way to get into the text that I want to point your attention to. Look at the role of the Spirit in the passages that I am about to read to you. Verse 18, Ephesians 2:18, "For through him we both," Jews and Gentiles alike, "through him we both have access," here it is, "in one Spirit to the Father." One Spirit giving access to all of the people of God to the Father. He goes on and he says in verse 19 how that brings us together. He says, "So then," speaking to the Gentiles, "you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God," there it is, "by the Spirit." By the Spirit. The Holy Spirit working to produce unity in the people of God giving access to all of the people of God through the person of the Holy Spirit. The body of Christ being dwelt together for a collective dwelling place of God by the Spirit. The role of the Spirit in producing this unity.

Paul's only gotten started in developing this theme. Look at chapter 3 beginning in verse 4. He says, "When you read this, you can perceive my insight into the mystery of Christ, which was not made known to the sons of men in other generations as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets," there it is again, "by the Spirit." The Spirit

has made these things known and in verse 6, "This mystery is that the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel." Gentiles and Jews on equal footing in Christ and an equal footing that is produced by the Holy Spirit, that has been revealed by the Spirit and the Spirit is working to cultivate and having established that unity to cause it to grow into greater maturity.

As you go on and continue to read in Ephesians, you find that Paul again stresses unity by the Spirit, in the Spirit as you look at chapter 4, verse 1. Actually, before we get there, just look up at verse 15 for a second, chapter 3, verse 15. Paul is giving thanks to the Father. He's praying as we see in verse 14, he says, "from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being." The role of the Holy Spirit in the inner man of believers, the role of the Holy Spirit in creating unity in the body, this beloved – this is important – this is the ongoing, overarching, dominating theme associated with the Holy Spirit in the letter of Ephesians, and we must let that inform our understanding of what Paul means when he says be filled with the Spirit. Context allows us no other conclusion.

So now in chapter 4 verse 1 we read, Paul says, "I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called." I want you to walk this way, he says in verse 2, "with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." Walk in this way. Conduct your Christian life like this. These are the good works which God prepared for you beforehand that you should walk in them, that you should walk in the Spirit, be filled with the Spirit who is the Spirit of unity in the body of Christ.

How do we do that? How do we protect that? Well, drop down to verse 29 in chapter, 4 for example. Chapter 4, verse 29. Here again we see this emphasis on our speech that we've already been talking about. "Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear. And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption." And from that reference to the Holy Spirit comes this which also points us in the direction of unity and maintaining unity, he says in verse 31, "Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice." Notice how these are inner attitudes that we're to put to death, to repent of this inner bitterness and mindset of ungodliness. He says, in contrast, verse 32, "Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you."

Do you want help in recognizing a Spirit-filled person? Look for someone who speaks not with bitterness and wrath and anger, but someone who's kind, quick to forgive, ready to restore unity, ready to put aside an offense, ready to bury an offense for the sake of a broader unity. Knowing that, knowing that what Christ has done for us, for you and me, to use a weak metaphor, just as Christ buried all of our sins in the depths of the sea. Scripture uses that analogy. He'll put all of our sins in the depth of the sea and doesn't hold them against us anymore. The work of the Spirit, the mark of the Spirit, is shown in someone who is willing to put aside, to bury offenses that others have committed against

them with a mindset, "When I've been forgiven of so much, the least that I can do is forgive those who have sinned against me. I've sinned greatly against God, he's forgiven me. It's a small thing for me to forgive those who have offended me on a personal level." This is the mark of the Holy Spirit. This is where real life is lived out. This is not the manufactured drama on a stage with controlled lighting and controlled access that the security, you know, the security guys choose who can come up to be next to Mr. Hinn. That has nothing to do with the Holy Spirit. Where you see the Holy Spirit at work is in these quieter ways in the way of the character of Christ has worked out in the life of one who is submissive to him and who has genuinely been converted.

What you need to see, then, from all of these passages that we've looked at is this: Paul repeatedly in Ephesians has joined the Holy Spirit with church unity. He has created a fundamental reality of unity and now it is our responsibility to cultivate, develop and protect that unity as part of living out the Spirit-filled life. When Paul gets to Ephesians 5:18, beloved, understand he's continuing that same theme. He hasn't changed the subject. It's so important that he is continuing it and you can see that by what follows. Verse 18, look at it there with me, "be filled with the Spirit." What follows after he gave that command? Beloved, its life in the body. It's how we interact within the body of Christ. Verse 19, "addressing one another," one another, you see, it's mutual. This isn't me alone in my private devotions, this is me living out the Spirit-filled life in the context of the local church. Verse 19, "addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart, giving thanks always," there's that theme of thanksgiving again, "giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ." Be filled with the Spirit, he says, and then he says this is the way this works out. Think about how you're living with one another, submitting to one another, addressing one another, giving thanks. The theme didn't change, being filled with the Spirit was an advance in the broader purpose that he is expressing for unity in the church as it is produced by the Holy Spirit.

Now, many of you are probably familiar with the parallel passage in Colossians 3 to which we now turn. Turn to the right in your Bible. Goes Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians. And the same emphasis on harmony and unity is found even in the parallel passage. Verse 14, actually go back to verse 11. "Here there is not Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free; but Christ is all, and in all." These prior ethnic differences are submerged in the greater reality of our common salvation in Christ, he says. There's this unity that transcends personal distinctions and so he says in verse 12, "Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, bearing with one another." You see, it's mutual. It's life among others. "Bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body." You see, you're called into a body. This is not you being peaceful apart and separate in your own mind and in your own thinking. You're called to peace in a body. "And be thankful," there again the theme of gratitude. Now in verse 16 he says, "Let the

word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching," and then the parallel to Ephesians 5 becomes clear. In Ephesians 5 he said be filled with the Spirit, and then we saw all of these things about bearing with one another, submitting to one another, and so forth. Here he has the same idea in mind as shown by what follows. Verse 16, "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly," a parallel to being filled with the Spirit as shown by what follows, "teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God. And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him." Verse 15, be thankful. Verse 16, thankfulness in your hearts. Verse 17, giving thanks to God the Father through him. Thankfulness. Peace. Harmony. And you get the sense from the slight distinction in the command to be under the influence of the Holy Spirit, be filled with the Spirit, be under his influence by this parallel text in Colossians 3, it means to be under the influence of the word of God. The word which the Spirit produced as we have just seen in recent days, the Spirit produced the word of God, he mediates his influence through the written word of God, and so we need to be in the word of God if we are going to be under the influence of the Spirit of God.

Where does all of this leave us? In a blessed place, I would say. As we think about what it means to be filled with the Spirit, beloved, we need to expand our thinking far beyond where most of us have gone with this because we've tended to think, we've tended to think about this in terms of our own little private devotional life. That's so self-centered. There is an aspect to our devotional life and we thank God that there is an experiential reality to true Christianity, but it's not just about you or just about me in isolation. The Spirit-filled life is not about inner feelings of truth and power as you think about God. That may be an incidental consequence of it, that may be an incidental blessing, but that's not the primary focus as we see it explained in Scripture, and we must understand that. It's too subjective, too self-centered, to consider it all from that perspective. What the Holy Spirit has done from the beginning at the birth of the church in Acts 2, what the role of the Spirit has been a predominant element of his ministry among the people of God is this, is that he leads us, he leads you into a unifying role with the people of God, participation with the people of God. How can you submit to one another, sing to one another, serve one another if you're not involved with the people of God on a meaningful relational basis.? You cannot bypass the local church and be filled with the Spirit.

I am grateful to have before me so many people who live that reality out and your commitment to the church of God and being with the people of God and ministering to the people of God is exemplary and a challenge to my own life. But we need to state it in the negative as well for the sake of understanding what God would have us know in the fullness about this. Beloved, men and women who ignore the church, who marginalize the church in their lives, they're not filled with the Spirit when they're doing that on an ongoing basis as a pattern of life. It does not matter what anyone says about their devotional life or how close they feel to God if this aspect of the Spirit's work predominant in the teaching of Scripture about unifying believers together, if a man or a woman is indifferent to that, how can they say that the Spirit is at work in them if the primary thing that the Spirit does is missing? I ask you, show that to me from Scripture

and the pages of the New Testament epistles. We can go further. Divisive men, critical, contentious women are not filled with the Spirit, no matter what else they may say about themselves or whatever other kind of portrait they may try to make of themselves before others because the Holy Spirit builds and unifies the body of Christ. It doesn't strike it, divide it, or ignore it.

And so the Spirit builds and unifies the body of Christ. He influences us through the teaching of Scripture. And beloved, when you are under the influence of the Holy Spirit, you will find yourself in one way or another somehow contributing to life in the body of Christ. You give edification. You give encouragement. You give love. You manifest gratitude. You receive edification. You receive encouragement. There's a mutuality to it all that cannot be separated from life in the church. And so this brings it down to a closing question. In one sense, the dominating question as we seek to apply this teaching to our own hearts: are you filled with the Spirit as manifested by what we have seen in the word of God tonight? I quickly and gladly state that from my perception, yes, many of you are and I can only thank God for you. The filling of the Spirit in your life, my friends, is shown by the love that you have shown to the people of God over the course of time. You give of yourselves. You show up when the people of God gather together. You send encouragement. You do encouraging thing. This is a quiet mark of the work of the Holy Spirit in your life. True, no one is going to gather around in an arena to watch you be a loving Christian in an unobtrusive way to the lives of other believers but that doesn't matter. That's not the standard. God sees. Christ knows. The spirit is at work and we rejoice in that. And we thank God, as speaking for the other elders, we thank God for you. So, so grateful that the Lord has brought so so many Spirit-filled Christians in the way that Scripture describes it. You're a blessing to one another. You're a blessing to us as elders. You're a blessing to me. You glorify God as you do.

Let me state the negative just for the sake of rounding it out and, beloved, and I say this with a, you know, a broken heart but it's not always like that in the church, is it? Not everyone that ever darkens the door of a church is like that. Let me just say this, I say it tenderly. I say it with sadness but it needs to be said for the sake that everyone who comes under the sound of this message might be able to examine their hearts and see where they are really at spiritually before the Lord. When you understand that the Spirit produces unity and self-giving in the body of Christ, there's no other conclusion on the other side than this: selfish apathy, recurring neglect of the assembly of believers, speak of a darker reality in the lives of those who claim Christ. You know, and it's not that someone's consciously trying to be dark by, you know, by infidelity to the body of Christ. Sometimes people get sick. I get all of that, but that's not what we're talking about here tonight. When someone allows it to become their pattern to be indifferent to the church, indifferent to the gathering, indifferent to the saints, beloved, they have no claim on being filled with the Spirit and if you're not filled with the Spirit, what are you filled with then? What are the biblical alternatives?

And so for all who would come under the sound of my voice, I can only encourage you to look at your life. Do you see a love for the people of God? Give thanks to Christ. Without boastfulness, can you say, "You know what? I love to be with the people of God. I love to

serve in the body. I love to interact." Beloved, give thanks, humbly thank God, you know, "The Spirit's at work in me. I may have other struggles I may fail in other ways, but love for the brethren is one of the marks of true salvation and God's at work in my life, and I thank him for that and pray that he would sanctify me in the other ways that I still fall short." If you look at your life and you see those things, rejoice and give thanks. But for some, look at your life, maybe you need to come to grips with the fact that you've drifted away from your love for the body. You're away a lot and you don't care. You don't long to be back. You don't make changes. You just kind of live that way and settle into a pattern that is really outside the flow of life of a local church. Beloved, what reality's at work in you if the Spirit produces love and unity in the body and you can comfortably stand apart from the body or inject a vision or reject and isolate and divide the body, what Spirit's at work in you? It can't be the Holy Spirit that's producing that as a pattern of your life.

I'll close by saying this as we are kind of hitting a reset button on church membership and considering what that needs to look like to make it better in the days to come, I just say this. I say it by way of encouragement, by way of doctrine, by way of sanctified, gentle admonishment. Church membership is for those who by their lives display the filling of the Holy Spirit in and among the body of Christ on a consistent basis.

Let's pray together. If you are not a Christian and these words have deeply convicted you of that fact, I invite you to come to the Lord Jesus Christ. My friend, he died as an atoning sacrifice for sinners just like you. He has saved rebellious, guilty, indifferent, cold, hard sinners like you for thousands of years and he can save one more. He invites you to come to him with the promise that he will forgive all of your sins if you come to him in genuine repentance and by faith alone, trusting him and his righteousness, not yourself, for eternal salvation. Come to Christ and be saved.

Our Father, may your Holy Spirit influence us individually and corporately with such power that you would fully achieve all of the purposes for which you saved each one of us in Christ. In the blessed name of our precious Lord we pray. Amen.

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