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The Holy Spirit and Worship

The Holy Spirit and the Life of the Christian  
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This morning we come to the book of Ephesians as we continue in this series, *The Holy Spirit and the Life of the Christian*. Last week we looked together at “The Holy Spirit and Prayer.” We take great comfort that God helps us in our weakness--that we do not know how to pray, but the Holy Spirit guides us in our prayer. He intercedes, he offers prayers on our behalf according to God's will. And that gives us great comfort, great freedom to bring our whole life to the Lord. Prayer itself at times can be turned into this very large mountain that looms before us, and we find it very difficult to climb, and we struggle with prayer and therefore we feel guilty, frustrated about not praying. We take great comfort at the invitation that God by his Spirit helps us in our weakness. But the Holy Spirit in the Christian life is not only the agent of the Spirit guiding us in prayer, he also aids us in worship. In fact, he helps us to see what worship is all about. And so we turn to this familiar passage in Paul, Ephesians 5:18-21, where he instructs us in regard to worship.

Hear now God's word. Ephesians 5:18-21.

Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit. Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.

This is the word of God. Thanks be to God. Will you pray with me. Almighty God, we thank you that even as we come to you in prayer, and even as I offer prayer on behalf of this congregation, we take comfort that your Spirit is praying for us. We pray that you would hear your Spirit's prayer, that you would meet us in our weakness, that you would help us to see the importance of worship and how your Spirit helps us to worship. So Father, by your Spirit and Word, open our eyes that we would see wondrous things--that we would see Jesus more beautiful and more believable. And help us to worship and to worship you. In Jesus' name, Amen.

So this morning as we look at these few short verses, Paul has been going throughout chapter five thus far talking about what it means to live the Christian life. And I believe he comes to the crescendo of that part of his argument, and after that he goes into what does it look like, then, to be Spirit-filled people in our various kinds of relationships as husbands and wives, as parents and children, as employers and employees, and so forth. But here he reaches the central point of those who are called to Christ in salvation--trusting in him alone for salvation--what does it look like to have the Holy Spirit and to be ushered into worship.

He gives us here what it looks like. You'll see it in your outline: Under the Influence, The Key Intersection (which is inferred in all that he is saying) and the Resulting Activities of being under the influence of God's Spirit. And then--this is not in your outline, but boy, it should be, so you can add it--How do we do it, then? How do we worship by the Spirit?

So with this idea let's look at it. And before you get there I just want to tell you I'm going to ask that you take your understanding of worship--and I recognize with an audience of this size there will be lots of different definitions with regard to worship. What I'm asking you to put pause on is the thinking that worship is just what we do on Sunday morning. That is, just singing or just praising or just prayer or just hearing the word. Or perhaps you think of worship as being moved emotionally, perhaps you think of worship as being impacted intellectually, or perhaps worship is being changed in terms of your will. What I want you to see, and I think what Paul would want us to see, is that it is all of that, and not just any singular part. It is singing, it is speaking, it is hearing from God's word. It is the mind. It is the will. It is the emotions. It is to be all of life, and it is the Spirit's work that helps the Christian to worship. I failed to do this properly in the first service, but I want to say, whether you are a Christian or not, you are a worshiper. The question is, what do you worship?

So let's look, then, at being Under the Influence. You'll see here in verse 18 Paul is quick to say, "Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit." Now here he's not saying that the Christian should not drink wine or not drink alcohol—that's not what he is saying. What he is saying is, however, be aware of what alcohol can do. He is essentially saying that when you give yourself to wine, when you give yourself to alcohol to such a degree, it will lead to being drunk. That's being under the influence. In my home we call alcohol 'Stupid Juice.' Let me be clear. I enjoy a wonderful glass of wine, I enjoy a great 'artisanal'-- if there is such a thing--kind of beer. That's great, fine, wonderful--that's not the point. The point is that if you give yourself alcohol, it will lead to folly, it will lead to stupidity. Because what Paul is trying to show in this negative statement, 'Do not be drunk with wine, because it will lead to debauchery'--he's setting up a pattern. When you put yourself under the influence of something it will lead to something else, it will have a result. In this case he's telling us that being drunk with wine leads to something. What is it? Well, it leads to a dullness. It dulls the emotions. It dulls the thinking. It dulls eyesight. It dulls physical feeling. And when it dulls those things it can also influence our behavior by causing us and influencing, putting down our inhibitions, so we do really, really dumb things. We can also do very devastating, hurtful things. It can lead to all kinds of behavior. Whether you're a Christian or not, we can agree that drunkenness will definitely lead to a result. It isn't something that is just worthy of humor. I would suggest, then, that we need to have a proper fear of alcohol. Because anything which can have its influence on the human mind, the human body, the human emotions, the human being, then we have to respect it, we have to have a fear for it. And by 'fear' I mean respect, because it will have an influence.

Paul is setting up a paradigm. He's saying if being drunk with alcohol can lead to foolishness and folly and debauchery--and that's what's built into the word debauchery, which is not a word we use very much, but it's foolishness, it's folly---then how much more will being led or filled or being under the influence of the Holy Spirit lead to things. Here's what he says, "Instead, be filled with the Spirit." Couple of things there. When he talks about the word 'filled' or 'to be filled' the idea is not a just a passing word. This is

an important word for Paul, because it is something that he talks about quite often. In just the letter of Ephesians alone it's referred to four or five times. Then throughout the New Testament it's referred to in Acts and Luke. In the Old Testament it's used quite often as being filled with the Spirit that leads to actions. We find it in Exodus, we find it in Deuteronomy, we find it in Micah. We find this idea all over the place in Scriptures: that when we are filled with the Spirit it leads to particular things, it leads to a result. (Which we'll get to in just a moment. These are the resulting activities that Paul talks about.)

I believe what Paul is trying to do is send us a message: As human beings we will fall under the influence of something. In this case alcohol will lead to one set of ideas, and the Spirit will lead to yet another. But the message is quite clear that whether you use alcohol to escape a present circumstance, to try to forget a previous or historical situation, or you're in fear of something in the future--I want to tell you it's a form of worship. Being under the influence is worshiping something. And it is interesting--he says if you give yourself to this kind of worship, this is what it will lead to. Consider, then, by contrast, when he says about being filled, being under the influence of the Holy Spirit. He says in chapter three, verses sixteen and following, as he's praying for the church, "I pray that out of his glorious riches [this is Christ] he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith." And then hear this, "And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge--that you may be filled to the measure of the fullness of God." Do you see the invitation to what he is giving? He's saying the one invitation, alcohol, which is readily available to us, really is just a form of worship that is an escape, and it will not lead to an engagement, it will lead to a dullness and a disengagement. Rather, he says to be filled with the Spirit leads to...what? It means to be filled and under the influence of God's power, but what does God's power do? It connects us to the deep, the wide, the long, and the high love of Christ. So look at them. One is being out of control of one's faculties, given to whatever whim, an escape. The other is radical engagement with love of God the Father in Jesus Christ. Could there be any greater contrast?

And I will tell you in many ways there are many people who look to bottles for love, but it will never ever love you back. It will always want more. But God in his Spirit, under the influence of the Spirit, leads us into a new life as he invites us into what Jesus Christ has done for us. And he will change everything, because he's connecting us to the power which we really desire--the power of God's love in Christ.

In case you're wondering what I mean, or whether you agree with this, this is what I'm talking about in terms of the Key Intersection for the Christian. You see what Paul is saying is that being under the influence of the Spirit, being connected to the power of God, being filled with the Spirit, having the fullness of God within you, is itself worship. Because it changes who we are. Let me explain. Here let me define what worship is, because the gravitational point for the Christian life isn't first and foremost what you do or what you think--it is worship. Because, you see, God has created us, every one of us,

to be worshipful beings. We worship something. What is worship, then? Worship is ascribing ultimate value to something and placing yourself underneath its influence-- not just a part of you, not just your mind, not just your emotions, not just your will, but your whole life being submitted to that which you ascribe as ultimate value. That is what worship is.

Now let's go back. When you place yourself under the influence of alcohol to the point of drunkenness, you are worshipping. It affects the mind. It affects the body. It affects the will. It is worship. Do you see? Whether you are a Christian or not, you are worshipping. Let me quote from an author who was not a Christian. He is no longer with us, he passed away at a young age, but is perhaps one of the best writers of this generation. He said this at a commencement speech in 2005. His name is David Foster Wallace. He says these words, "In the trenches of adult life there is no such thing as atheism. There is no such thing as not worshipping. Everybody worships. The only choice we get is what to worship, and pretty much everything you worship will eat you alive. If you worship money and things, if they are where you tap real meaning in life, then you will never have enough, you will never feel that you have enough. It's the truth. Worship your own body and beauty and sexual allure and you will always feel ugly. And when time and age starts showing you will die a million deaths before they finally plant you. Worship power, and you will feel weak and afraid, and you will need ever more power over others to keep the fear at bay. Worship intellect, being seen as smart, and you will end up feeling stupid, all a fraud, always on the verge of being found out. This is your default setting. These kinds of worship just gradually slip in on us without us ever being fully aware that's what we're doing. And the so-called real world will never discourage you from operating on your default settings because the so-called real world of men and money and power hums along quite nicely on the fuel of fear and contempt and frustration and craving--the worship of self."

That is not a preacher. That is a man who did not believe in the Christian Christ. And he called that capital-T Truth. The issue is not whether you worship, whether you're under the influence of something. The question is what? And the gravitational point, the key the intersection for every human being and for the Christian is that Adam and Eve's problem was not first and foremost just taking of the fruit. It was the worship of self. It was the belief that I can be like God. I do not want him to be my head, I do not want to be under his influence. I want to be like God. And for ever and ever until Christ returns, human beings would be born day after day, grow into childhood, grow into adolescence, grow into adulthood, and into old age as those who worship, but our natural default setting is to worship self and not the risen Christ.

But hear the invitation. Hear the key intersection where Christ wants to meet you. He wants you to come to him. He invites you into his love. [God] sent his son to die for that sin of choosing to want to be like God. And instead of judging you, [Christ] comes to stand under his own Father's judgment, and he invites you to receive what was due to him—and he took on what was really deserving of us. He took God's wrath, we receive God's love. And when he was raised on the third day, he stands and is seated at the right hand of God the Father, and by his Spirit he invites you in to see, in the words of

Paul, how long, how deep, how high, and how wide is the love of Christ. And when we enter in and we receive that Spirit, and we fall under [his] influence it will change the way we think, the way we feel, the way we act. You see, worship is never disengaged from action. It's always together. Worship is not coming into a church somewhere and having an emotional experience or an intellectual filling up, or just being told what to do. No, it's being put under the influence of a loving God who gives you his Spirit to invite you into him, and when we do, everything changes. Everything.

One writer says this: "You see, if I am saved by grace because of what Jesus has done, then there's no limit of what he can ask of me and my obedience comes and is based on no conditions." You see, most people think that when they hear 'saved by grace and not by works,' they think, great, I can do whatever I want. But in reality it means that I actually owe him everything, that I am not my own. It means that I am in debt to his majesty. As John Calvin once said, we should obey because the beauty of all our obedience is really just being fit to his majesty. And that's what the Holy Spirit is doing. Under his influence he is fitting us for the majesty of the loving, merciful God.

So it has a result--it will change us. Paul says, "Be filled with the Spirit." He then unpacks what the results of being filled with the Spirit lead to. You see it here. It's speaking, singing, thanking, submitting.

When he says 'speaking' here, notice what he says in verse 19. "Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs." What's beautiful about that is, Paul says worship isn't merely vertical between us and God. It has a horizontal aspect to it. When we enter into worship--and by the way, it's not just the individual, just you and God, it's we, collective, plural--when we come in together on a Sunday morning to worship the Lord, we are actually charged to speak the word to each other, to sing—and when we sing we're singing and quoting hymns--to one another. I know that there are many in this room who have come into these doors at times and the last thing you've felt like doing was worshiping, but what you heard and what you saw were others worshiping, and you heard their singing, and it moved you and your will to worship. That is what we get to do every Sunday because there is a horizontal aspect to worship.

And so when you share with each other in fellowship time, you're not just sharing how good the coffee is or how beautiful the day is or what's going to happen on the sports game, it's 'This is the Scripture that Christ brought to my mind this past week when I was ready to, you know, discipline my child and I was really angry.' And we have no idea how Christ will use that word. Or discouragement and I hear you singing and I'm encouraged.

But he doesn't just say that it's horizontal, he also says it is vertical. In the very next sentence he says, "Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord." The challenge is, we hear that in English and we think that it's private. "Sing and make music in your heart." Let's be honest, most of the time, particularly as Presbyterians, when we hear, "Sing and make music in your heart," it means 'Okay, I'm going to sing and make music in my heart over here.' But what he means is that it's back out in the public again. And I

think what he's talking about is the doctrine of the Holy Spirit which Jesus taught us about in John, chapter 14, when he was speaking to the woman at the well. Do you remember what he tells her? 'The water I give you will be like a well flowing up within you.' He was talking about that in the context of his Spirit--that when he gives his Spirit and we fall under the influence of a loving God, by his Spirit connected to what Christ has done, joy will be the product. And we will rejoice in our hearts, and it will well up and come out of us, and we will want to make music. And let me say this: as wonderful as our musicians are, worship isn't first and foremost about having musicians up here and hearing all these good singers sing to you. God has made every one of us with an instrument. It's a voice, and he doesn't care one whit how it sounds. So in fact, the greatest thing we can ever do is to out-sing our leaders. We're not here to hold it in—we're here to rejoice and make music and to sing! We want to make worship about style and form—and that's great and that's wonderful and it has its place and that's cool, but that's not what Paul is talking about. He's talking about a human heart gripped by the love of Christ and what he has done, and joy is the product and music comes out.

But he says not only just speaking to one another and singing, it's also thanking--living a life of thankfulness. This is so important to Paul. In fact some have argued that for Paul, thankfulness to God is synonymous with the Christian life. He talks about it in so many of his letters: Thessalonians, his letters to the Corinthians, Romans, Philippians, Colossians. He doesn't mean like this naive optimism. He means--and if you read Paul, and we talked about it last week and the week before that--it's not just thankfulness when everything is going well, but it's thankfulness in the mundane, the day in-day out humdrum of life. Saying, 'Thank you, Lord, that you have been so good, even in the difficulties, for in my weaknesses your grace is sufficient for me.' Thankfulness and the Christian life are synonymous. And he tells us that thankfulness is the product of what the Spirit does, and when we're under the influence....It's hard, right? We think that what we're supposed to do is sort of gin up the speaking, sort of gin up the singing, gin up the thankfulness. But in reality, that's not what it's about. It's about being under the influence of the one who is the Spirit, who God has given one hundred percent. We can't gin up the Spirit's presence; it is the gift of God. But we can pray for the Spirit's renewing power.

But you know, he doesn't finish. He gives us this verse 21 when he says, "Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ." "Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ." This is a transitional verse. It not only in some way summarizes what he's just said about being filled with the Spirit, it also serves as a controlling verse in what he says about the family and in working together. But as to this idea of submitting, I want to suggest to you that it's not Christian worship if it's not changing our minds and our wills and our emotions. It's not Christian worship--we're not under the influence of the Spirit--if it's not changing how we treat one another and how we love one another. And boy, is there any bigger sticking place for the Christian gospel than whether we learn how to love one another---not through the smiles, but through the brokenness of relationships. Let me suggest that this worship that takes place here ought to spill over. He tells us, "Submit unto one another out of reverence for Christ." We are thankful for everything that Christ has done and in his name, and then he tells us to submit to one another out

of reverence for Christ. So we look to Christ as the model, but we receive what Christ has given and it changes the way we see, the way we speak.

C.S. Lewis said it this way in his sermon, "The Weight of Glory." "It is a serious thing to live in a society of possible gods and goddesses, to remember that the dullest and most uninteresting person you talk to may one day be a creature which, if you saw it now, would be strongly tempted to worship. All day long we are in some degree helping each other towards one or the other of these destinations: either eternity with the Lord or eternally separated from him." He says, "It is in the light of these overwhelming possibilities, in the presence of the all and the circumspection proper to them, that we should conduct all of our dealings with one another, all friendships, all loves, all play, all politics. There are no ordinary people. You have never talked to a mere mortal. Nations, cultures, arts, civilizations. These are mortal and their life is to ours as the life of a gnat. But it is immortals that we joke with, work with, marry, snub, and exploit. Immortal horrors or everlasting splendors. This does not mean that we are perpetually solemn. We must play, but our merriment must be of that kind, and in fact it is the merriest kind, which exist between people who have from the outset taken each other seriously. No flippancy, no superiority, no presumption. And our charity must be a real and costly love with deep feeling for the sins, in spite of which, we love the sinner. No mere tolerance or indulgence which parodies love as flippancy parodies merriment."

He says that every one of us from the moment of birth are either going in one of two directions, but immortal we will be. And we will either live in eternity with the Lord or we will live in eternity separated from him, but we don't know that. But we must treat one another with love and respect and care, not with a flippancy or an arrogance or a condescension, but with a real love that brings about merriment. Why? Because we can laugh. Why? Because we can stand before each other without presumption, without pretense, and safe--for all have sinned. I have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. And unless I am in Jesus Christ I am without hope. Then how should I not love you as I have been loved? The Holy Spirit and his influence shapes us into the shape of the Majesty of God, who, the Scriptures tell us--God is love.

Being under the influence of the Spirit demonstrates itself most poignantly, and, I will confess—right?--most painfully in our relationships at times. I don't know about you, but I need the influence of the Spirit--not because you are hard to love. It is because my heart, at the center--by my default setting--is more set on me. But by the Holy Spirit's influence we learn how to submit, respect, to love, to honor, to laugh with, to pray with, to confront, and be confronted. That is where, if you will, the rubber of worship meets the road.

So how do we do it? We do it only by worshiping--coming again to the truth that is the same for us today until Christ comes again. To place ourselves before the glory of God and Christ, his cross and resurrection fully in view, under the influence of his Spirit, and to be shot through with joy and wonder at what God has done in Jesus Christ. And if we stop and reflect on that, the Holy Spirit will do his work and change us from the inside out. Columbia Presbyterian Church, let me say this. Do we need to be a healthy

church? Do we need to be healthier? You bet we do. But guess what, it's never going to happen because we use hymnals or don't use hymnals, whether we have a power point or don't have a power point, or whether we have five instruments or no instruments. What will make a church healthy is not its style. What will make a church healthy is not the size or the glory of its buildings. What will make a church healthy is not its demographic or its gifts. Where church gospel health begins and is empowered is under the influence--the renewing power--of the Holy Spirit. And what we must pray for is that the Lord, by his Spirit--though he gives his Spirit to all who believe in him, it is his gift, and he gives it full and foremost--we ought to pray for renewing seasons of the Spirit. But not of an emotional kind or an intellectual kind or a volitional kind—it's all of life. Lord, renew us again by your Spirit and make us a healthy people shot through with the influence of the Spirit, moved towards love, singing, speaking, and thanking because of what you have done. That is what the Holy Spirit in worship does.

So will you pray with me, and will you join with me in prayer and with our elders and with our deacons and our trustees. We ought to be about the season of prayer that God would bring before us and in us and through us a renewing power of his Spirit that we would be a healthy church reflecting--not perfection--but reflecting his life, his grace, and we're living that out under his influence with each other. Can we pray that? Can I ask you, encourage you, to be praying for this every day? We need that. I need your prayers. You need mine. Your elders--you need their prayers, they need yours. Let us pray together that God would bring forth a new season of the movement of his Spirit to make us a worshiping people.

Let's pray. Father, come. By the work of your Holy Spirit that draws us to the matchless work of Christ you've invited us in, you have given to us the gift of your Spirit. I would pray for a season of renewal for this, your church. That you would make us a healthy, growing church because your Spirit is renewing us, our life together. That your Spirit is renewing our singing, our speaking, our thanking, our submitting because you, Lord Christ, are our Savior. You are the King and Head of the church and you have given us your Spirit. So we ascribe to you ultimate worth, ultimate glory, and we submit ourselves to you. Lord, have your way. In Jesus' name, Amen.