

Ephesians 5 (18) – Filled with the Spirit, pt.1

In the last two messages, we examined what it means to walk in wisdom. We saw that in terms of a lifestyle, the wise person is walking carefully, watching what's going on, awake and alert. They are walking redemptively, looking for an opportunity to shine the light and shine as a light. They are walking perceptively, realizing the situation and moved by burdens for sanctification, evangelism, and discipleship. And they are walking submissively, aimed at pleasing God.

Walking in wisdom is walking carefully, redemptively, perceptively, and submissively. Paul applies this in vs.18. Being drunk is not being careful, it is using the opportunity for the flesh, it is participating in the evil instead of being a change agent, and it is aimed at pleasing itself, not God. This isn't walking in wisdom, and so it doesn't lead to being filled with the Spirit.

Paul has been using a series of contrasts in order for us to examine our lives and for him to exhort us to live as we ought. The Christian was once darkness but now they are light (vs.8). The Christian was once unfruitful, but now they are fruitful (vs.9-11). The Christian was once dead, but now they have been made alive (vs.14). The Christian was once foolish, but now they are made wise (vs.15). Now, here in vs. 18, Paul gives us another contrast, which serves as a summary. The Christian was once living in the flesh, now they are living in the Spirit.

In vs.18-21, we see three basic things about this life in the Spirit; the Contrast (vs.18), the Command (vs.18), and the Context (vs.19-21). In this message will focus on that contrast.

The contrast (vs.18) – *And do not get drunk with wine...but be filled with the Spirit.* So why does Paul contrast being drunk with being filled with the Spirit? First of all, we should recognize that this is a contrast that is given elsewhere in Scripture (cf. Luke 1:15 / Acts 2:12-18). Secondly, and in a sense, Paul is contrasting the most foolish thing we can do with the wisest thing we can do. Getting drunk doesn't lead to wise or godly behavior.

However, Paul's main concern here is not to teach us about drinking. The Bible is quite clear on the matter of drunkenness, condemning it without reservation (Proverbs 20:1, 23:29-33). Paul doesn't intend to discuss that here; rather, he is giving us a spiritual lesson. He is summing up what he has been saying by way of these contrasts, giving us a final, climactic contrast, in order that we might have a clear understanding of what God is commanding us to do here.

Paul is not just telling us to stop getting drunk, as if this will cause us to be filled with the Spirit. Of course, if you are still getting drunk you are certainly *not* being filled with the Spirit. However, even if you aren't getting drunk, it doesn't mean that you are being filled with the Spirit, it just means that your drinking is not hindering you from being filled.

Paul's purpose is to tell us that we are not to live our old way of life, and drunkenness and debauchery characterized the lifestyle and worship of the pagan in Paul's day (cf. Romans 13:13 / 1 Corinthians 5:11 / 1 Thessalonians 5:6-8 / 1 Peter 4:3). The problem had social consequences but it also had a spiritual dynamic. The pagans believed that you could commune with the gods through ecstasy, so they would get themselves worked into a literal frenzy and they would drink until they were drunk and they thought that lifted them to the level of communion with the gods.

for that is debauchery – Drunkenness leads to destructive, wasteful behavior (cf. Luke 15:13 – the prodigal son is described with this word, translated as “reckless” in the ESV). Since Paul contrasts the effect of the Holy Spirit with the state of drunkenness, it is helpful to think about why people get drunk, what happens when they get drunk, and why God’s way is better.

Why do people get drunk? People drink to forget their troubles, to induce joy, or some sense of comfort. People “medicate” in order to escape their circumstances (fear, despair), and/or to find some sense of happiness, or to gain some sense of control (in an ironic and twisted way). But intoxication is never the remedy for the cares or worries of life. It just compounds the problem. Alcoholism is not a disease, it is a sin. It has some of the effects of a disease in that it will affect the body. But being a drunkard, according to the Bible, is a sin, and it needs to be confessed and dealt with as a sin. And biblically speaking, drunkenness always comes out bad.

When a person gets drunk, it is often characteristic of them to begin to talk in vapid, vile, violent, and vulgar ways. They can become a real trial to the people around them. That’s characteristic of a drunken person. In contrast, when a person comes under the control of the Holy Spirit, it is commonly expressed through psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in their hearts to the Lord, giving thanks, submitting to one another in the fear of God (vs.19-21). These expressions are participles in the Greek text, which means that they modify the subject, which is “keep on being filled with the Spirit”. So these are things that characterize what it means to be filled with the Holy Spirit

To be drunk means to be saturated with drink, so that our faculties are impaired, our minds are restricted, and our personalities are modified. Alcohol, drugs, and other unbiblical, unhealthy ways of “medicating” reduce our self-control, wisdom, and godly focus. The Holy Spirit has an exactly opposite effect. When we become saturated with the Holy Spirit, He stimulates self-control, wisdom, and godly focus. It is foolish to seek and to live in the world’s ways, and it is wise to seek and to live in God’s ways. We don’t need an artificial or counterfeit joy, peace, or hope, we have the real thing. If you’re looking for an escape from your problems, for joy and comfort, don’t seek it in a bottle; seek it in the Holy Spirit. Let the Holy Spirit be your resource. That’s where the Christian finds real life. It is a life that is passionate, positive, and powerful.

These people, in their old life, when they thought about worship, they thought about getting drunk and participating in orgies and all sorts of wasteful and wicked excess. Now they are called to think about worship in terms of being filled with the Spirit. There’s the contrast. It’s not just about drinking, but about ridding ourselves of our old ways of thinking about God and life and worship, and receiving the new way of the Spirit that we have been brought into, a whole new way of thinking about, living for, and worshipping God. It’s a vivid contrast, the difference between being a drunk and being a disciple.

Instead of being saturated with the things of the world, we become saturated with the truth of the Word of God. You cannot be negligent, indifferent, or disobedient to the Word of God and walk in step with the Spirit of God. The Spirit-controlled life is a Word-controlled life. You can have a great sense of emotions, but if what you practice disagrees with the Word of God, it isn’t the work of the Spirit of God. The Holy Spirit never leads in a direction contrary to the Word. A Spirit-filled life is a life that is saturated with Scripture (cf. Colossians 3:16-17).

This contrast points to our entire life. All sorts of chaos and disorder go along with the state of drunkenness. But when we are in step with the Spirit, there is design and direction. A Spirit-filled life is controlled, ordered, purposeful, and productive. To be drunk is out of order, and a drunkard lives a lifestyle that is out of control, and out of order, it doesn't have a godly purpose, it is selfish, and it isn't productive, it is wasteful. In contrast, a life of being filled with the Spirit is a life that is being put in order, it is under control, and it is purposeful and productive.

The contrast itself is an illustration of a larger truth. The truth is that *all* sin brings some measure of disorder into our lives, while the Spirit begins to bring order to all of our life. There is a process, both positively and negatively. The maturing disciple is learning to live by the Spirit, and that means their lives are increasingly controlled, ordered, purposeful, and productive. But the drunkard falls into debauchery; their life gets worse and worse. This also applies to the believer who persists in willful disobedience. One of the consequences of not seeking to be filled with the Spirit is that the life of a resistant Christian falls into disorder.

Paul is pointing out the contrast in its most stark terms (drunkenness vs. Spirit-filled), but both of these can be measured in terms of movement, a process that produces certain results. It comes down to the question of "Which way are you going?" It is easy for someone to take one drink and declare they aren't drunk. But which direction are they heading? Which way is wisdom? Ask this question: Is the way you are going by the thing you are doing a case of walking carefully, redemptively, perceptively, and submissively? If not then it is not wise, and it is not being filled with the Spirit. By the way, it is also easy to have an emotional experience and declare that you are filled with the Spirit. Yet Paul is not talking about an event, but an endeavor.

We see evidence of this order and purpose by what follows the command in vs.19-21. More than that, it is abundantly evident with what we see in vs.22-33, which tells us how to have an orderly marriage. It continues with chapter 6:1-4, which tell us how we are to have an orderly home, and vs.5-9, which tells us about order within work relationships. The order we will see in these relationships is, on our part, a function of our being filled with the Spirit. If we are being resistant, we will invite disorder, if we are submitted, we will be an agent of order.

This order that the Spirit brings increasingly when we are increasingly under His control is not just in terms of the outward manifestations of control, order, purpose, and productivity, but in the inner man as well. Our emotions come into line as we come into line. Consider Galatians 5:22-23 – all of those things might be seen externally, but they are known internally, that is to say, they are feelings, emotions, characteristics on the inside that bear witness on the outside. The Holy Spirit produces an order in our emotions that we won't have otherwise. He changes us. It doesn't happen overnight, and the filling is an ongoing process, but fruit by its definition means produce. As we are being filled with the Spirit the Spirit will produce His fruit in and through us.

This is real change. Now of course, some people will see different sorts of "emotional" changes in their lives because they start out with a different emotional makeup. For example, certain people may not have had much patience, but now it is starting to develop. Others might have always been a patient person, but now they feel and exude joy when they were mostly somber before. It may seem subtle, but if we are yielding control to the Spirit, there will be changes that we will know on the inside and that we will see on the outside.

For the believer, the reverse is true as well. If we are not being filled with the Spirit, and we are instead grieving the Spirit, then we will see those most base emotions come to the fore in our lives. If we are not evidencing the fruit of the Spirit, then the fruit of the flesh will take prominence. And, as we continue to stifle the work of the Spirit, and suppress God's truth by our unrighteousness, continued declension follows. Our old ways will become more prevalent and prominent unless and until we repent. This is strong motivation for us to continue to be filled.

People might think that leaning on alcohol enhances their life in some way. But the truth is that instead of enhancing them it is exhausting them. They might feel better temporarily, but the more primitive part of the person takes control, and the power to properly assess and discern is lost. The inhibitions are lowered, and the person becomes capable of and susceptible to certain things that they would not otherwise be capable of or susceptible to while in their right minds.

It is the same with our "sin of choice"; it does not serve as a stimulus, it serves to sap our spiritual strength and it leads to a life of disorder. We might feel like it is stimulating us because it gives us some sense of relief. But it is actually serving as a depressant. It leads us away from God, and away from our source of godly energy. Given enough time, the drunkard will exhaust their supply of energy and other resources, material and relational. It is the same for all willful disobedience; it will have a dissipating effect on our spiritual life, and will spill over into other areas of our life as well. Doubt, despair, and destruction come creeping in, and it may lead to an avalanche of other evil desires, disobedience, and disorder. It is not wise.

The life of a drunkard is dissipating, and it leads to a waste of energy, resources, and relationships. In contrast, being filled by the Holy Spirit is invigorating, and it leads us to be good stewards of our energy, resources, and relationships. Sin impoverishes, the Spirit enriches. A life that is being filled with the Spirit is making *the best use of the time* (vs.16), and we will *understand what the will of the Lord is* (vs.17). This is a matter of degree for the disciple. To the degree that they are being filled with the Spirit, it is to this degree that the disciple is walking in wisdom, and that the control, order, purpose, and productivity are manifest.

Your life may be physically exhausting, but you can *be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being* (Ephesians 3:16), and know that *though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day* (2 Corinthians 4:16). The Spirit fills us with joy, meaning, and purpose, even when we are physically challenged and tired. We are tempted to give up, but we are called to seek the source of our true strength. This helps us to process pain; for example, you might wonder, "How can we enjoy things when other things are so bad?" The answer is that we have empathy for others (Romans 12:15 / 1 Corinthians 12:26). This doesn't make us actors, it makes us active. And even when the pain is in our own lives, when we keep seeking the things of the Spirit, **the order in our life helps us to process the chaos of life.**

A pattern of willful sin leads to an unwise walk. This is seen when a person remains in willful disobedience, and they fall away from the local church, leaving the context of vs.19-21 behind. They aren't being filled with the Spirit. Instead, they are out of control, out of order, without purpose and productivity, in the spiritual and eternal sense, if not also in the physical, material, and relational senses. It isn't wise, but foolish, and not the will of the Lord. If you want to walk in wisdom, you will keep on being filled with the Spirit.