

Ephesians: *Drunkenness and the Holy Spirit*  
Ephesians 5:18-21

Last Sunday we heard Paul challenge the church to not be foolish, but to be wise...to be those who redeem the opportunities that are before us as we seek to discern the will of the Lord. This morning he is going to continue on that line of thought as we read Ephesians 5:18-21:

<sup>18</sup> And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit, <sup>19</sup> addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart, <sup>20</sup> giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, <sup>21</sup> submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ.

My message this morning will fall under three subheadings: 1) A Sobering Command; 2) The Filling Station; and 3) Evidence of the Holy Spirit.

### **I. A Sobering Command**

Church, for this message to be effective, I think we need to be very clear and transparent about what goes on in many of our homes every week. So, I'm just going to come out and say it: Presbyterians like to drink wine! Am I right? It's O.K., we are in a safe place here! I've been in many of your homes and it's a fact—we like our wine. Now, if you are visiting today and you just happen to be Baptist, don't panic...we are, of course, assuming that you do not drink at all (in front of anybody that you know!). I say that as one who was ordained Southern Baptist and served in Baptist churches for many years...so lighten up!

Listen, what we're talking about here this morning is super-important, and I want us all to take Paul's words to heart. Paul in no way will demonize a glass of wine. We all know that Paul actually instructs Timothy to drink some wine instead of always drinking water because wine could help Timothy with his digestive system. The truth is, one glass of red wine at dinner can actually be good for you according to most nutritionists...so let's not begin our time together in a defensive posture. Whether you are a teetotaler or you have an occasional glass of wine, there is much for us to consider in our text today.

Paul begins by writing in vs. 18, "Do not get drunk with wine which is debauchery..." Now...in case you are inclined to think that Paul is being overly moralistic and this is old fashioned religious thinking, let's step back a bit and take the literary and historical context into account. Let's read vs. 18 within the context of what Paul just said in vss. 15-17: Look that you walk accurately, not as unwise but as wise, redeeming the time because the days are evil.<sup>17</sup> Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. <sup>18</sup> And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit.

Getting drunk on wine...or beer...or hard liquor...or getting high on marijuana, crack, Adderall, meth, opioids, or any other mind-altering substance...to be overly dependent upon anything other than God is to walk inaccurately as a Christian. It is unwise behavior as opposed to wise behavior...it is to be foolish. Here in vs. 18 Paul says this kind of behavior is *asowtos*...the Greek word that the ESV translates as "debauchery". Debauchery means excessive indulgence

in sensual pleasures. That's not a horrible translation of the word *asowtos*, but often that word means *dissipation* or *profligacy*. Both of those words suggest "wastefulness" or the "squandering of resources." And that makes sense, right? Drunkenness...or any form of indulgence that compromises our minds...squanders the time and opportunity we have been given and is inconsistent with who we have been saved to become. Drunkenness (and many other indulgent behaviors) is the antithesis of redeeming the time.

Now, why did Paul pick on this particular sin? Why pick on drinking too much wine? There are several possibilities as we examine the historical context. First of all, people getting drunk on wine was a huge problem in the ancient world for both Jews and Gentiles. Philo of Alexandria, a Jewish philosopher who lived just one generation before the birth of Christ, devoted an entire treatise to the problem of drunkenness. In it he writes:

By its own nature, the human race is very fond of wine, and this is the sole thing of which it is immeasurably insatiable, since there is no one who it is impossible to be satisfied with sleep, and eating, and carnal enjoyments, and things like these; but nearly everyone is insatiably fond of wine, and especially those who are occupied with serious business; for after they have drunk they are still thirsty, and they begin drinking at first out of small cups, then, as they proceed, they tell their servants to bring them wine in larger goblets, and when they are pretty full and getting riotous, being no longer able to restrain themselves, they take bowls and goblets of all the largest sizes that they can get, and drink the wine unmixed in huge draughts, until they are either overcome by deep sleep, being no longer able to govern themselves, or till what they have poured into themselves is vomited out again through repletion. But even then, nevertheless, the insatiable desire which exists within them continues to rage as though it were still under the influence of hunger.

Does that sound familiar? Think: Chiefs' parking lot and college stairwells.

Drunkenness is nothing new...it goes all the way back to the days of Noah. In fact, there are many references to people getting drunk on wine in the Bible, and in almost every instance when drunkenness is mentioned, the outcome is pretty humiliating or devastating. You might remember that after God destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah, Lot fled with his two adult daughters and hid in a foreign land. The young ladies were so desperate to have children that on two consecutive nights they got their dad drunk and hopped into bed with him and they both got pregnant. That's just wrong. Church, the Bible's witness is consistent: drunkenness is never the will of God, and it always comes with horrible consequences.

Paul may also be addressing his Gentile converts who were previously members of the cult of Dionysus. Members of this cult believed "cultic inebriation" was a means of experiencing ecstasy and union with their Greek god. It was a practice prevalent in the region of Ephesus in the first century; so, it's possible that Paul is correcting some well-meaning Gentile converts who are experimenting with drunkenness as a means of achieving union with the one, true God.

Whatever prompted Paul to condemn drunkenness, we all know Paul is speaking the truth. Drunkenness is contrary to God's will...it is acting foolish instead of exercising wisdom...it is a squandering of the gift of time and opportunity that we've been given. Now, I know some of you are a bit offended. You like your wine because it helps you relax...it helps you unwind...it helps

you forget your worries...it helps you sleep. I get it, but let's be clear about what alcohol actually does.

Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, who was both a pastor and a physician, writes that alcohol ‘depresses first and foremost the highest centers of all in the brain...These centers control everything that gives a man self-control, wisdom, understanding, discrimination, judgment, balance, the power to assess everything; in other words, everything that makes a man behave at his very best and highest.’<sup>1</sup>

Alcohol does not help you...it depletes you of much needed functions that make us human. And here's what the Word of God clearly states: believers are not to be *filled* with alcohol (or any other mind-altering substance). Instead, believers are to be *filled* with the Holy Spirit. Paul writes in vs. 18, “And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Holy Spirit...” It's the bottle or the Holy Spirit...but it can't be both. We cannot be drunk on wine and hope that the Holy Spirit will abide in us. Remember what Paul has previously written in this regard. We were sealed with the Holy Spirit (1:13) when we made our profession of faith...that sealing of the Spirit happens once and is irrevocable, thanks be to God. However, because the Holy Spirit is a person, we are now to live in such a way that does not “grieve the Holy Spirit” as Paul writes in 4:30. And now says Paul, be *filled* with the Holy Spirit.

Paul makes this command in the present imperative, which means this command to be filled with the Holy Spirit is not optional for the believer. Every person in the church is to resist drunkenness so that he or she might be filled with the Holy Spirit...and not just once...but to be filled with the Holy Spirit as a habitual, repeating practice.

The indwelling of the Holy Spirit is the power that animates the life of a believer. Whereas drunkenness makes us less human, the indwelling of the Holy Spirit makes us more human because the Holy Spirit slowly transforms us into the nature of Jesus, the only perfect human being who has ever walked the earth.

Now Church, let me be perfectly frank: wine is an escape from the life you are living; the Holy Spirit is the life you have always wanted. Drunkenness is fun you can't even remember; the Holy Spirit is joy you will never forget! But here's the deal: we must stop behaving in ways that grieve the Holy Spirit. If you want to experience the full power and presence of God in your life...if you want to hear God speak to you...if you long for the freedom that your Christian faith promises...we must be willing to set aside drunkenness...and many other behaviors of that nature.

Now, am I promoting a teetotaler life...void of any alcohol whatsoever? Well, yes...for most of us...at least for a while. Why? Because so, so many of us “need” our wine more than we should...especially after Covid. Now, how do you know if you're overly dependent on alcohol or your substance of choice? Well, if you are offended right now, you are likely more dependent on drink than you think. Be honest-- if you are drinking to the point of losing your best

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<sup>1</sup> Quoted from John Stott's *The Message of Ephesians*, pages 204-205.

judgment...if you are drinking to escape the stress of your life...if you are drinking because you can't sleep without it...if you are drinking because you can't relax without alcohol...you are more dependent upon alcohol than you are the Holy Spirit...and you can't have both. The Christian community is to walk in a way that is set apart from the unbelieving world, and that means we are filled with the Holy Spirit, not drunk on wine, amen? We are to pursue the will of God, making the most of the time God has given us...and that won't happen if we squander our time and resources.

Here's a test that hails back to last Sunday's challenge. Commit 10 days to going without your substance of choice. Let it be a spiritual discipline during which time you will ask the Lord what He thinks about your drinking, or your use of marijuana, or your vaping. Ask Him and listen to how He speaks to your heart. Pay very close attention to your body and your mind. If you experience any kind of physical withdrawal symptoms that cause you stress, discomfort, or irritation, you can be sure your drinking or drug use has more power over you than it should. Finally, during your ten days, ask the Lord to fill you with His Holy Spirit. Ask Him...as Jesus said, "If you, then, who are evil know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more shall your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him?" (Luke 11:13).

## **II. The Filling Station**

Listen again to our passage in vss. 18-21, "18 And 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, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart, 20 giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, 21 submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ."

The Apostle Paul has inasmuch presented "the filling station" for thirsty souls who long to be filled with the Holy Spirit. It would seem that those gathered in corporate worship, singing songs of praise to the Lord, giving thanks, and serving one another are those who can anticipate being filled with the Holy Spirit!

If you look at our text, there are five participles that all rely upon the one main verb. The main verb here is found in vs. 18 "*be filled* with the Holy Spirit"...then we have five participles that follow in the next three verses: addressing, singing, making melody, giving thanks, and submitting. The relationship between the participles and the main verb is tricky. At first, it would seem that if we are filled with the Holy Spirit, we will also be doing all the following actions (addressing, singing, making melody, etc.). However, according to NT scholar Clinton Arnold, this particular Greek construction suggests that the participles are actually "the means" by which the Holy Spirit fills the believers.<sup>2</sup>

In other words, when the Church gathers to worship...when believers communicate the promises of scripture that are written in the lyrics of psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs both to God and to each other; when believers sing and make a melody to the Lord with sincere and pure hearts;

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<sup>2</sup> Clinton Arnold: Exegetical Commentary on the NT—Ephesians; p. 351. Arnold writes, "...the participles being taken as the means of being filled by the Spirit makes the best sense in this context."

when the Church gives thanks and willingly submits one to another, the Holy Spirit is pleased to indwell those hearts, just as the *shekinah* glory of God would indwell the House of God in the Old Testament when the Israelites worshipped God.

To make his case, Arnold quotes 2 Chronicles 5:13-14: <sup>13</sup>and it was the duty of the trumpeters and singers to make themselves heard in unison in praise and thanksgiving to the LORD, and when the song was raised, with trumpets and cymbals and other musical instruments, in praise to the LORD, “For he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever,” the house, the house of the LORD, was filled with a cloud, <sup>14</sup>so that the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud, for the glory of the LORD filled the house of God.

Just as the Holy Spirit descended upon the tabernacle when God was worshipped and praised with thanksgiving by the Israelites, so the Holy Spirit indwells the new Temple in the hearts of the believers when they sing praises to the Lord with a pure heart, giving thanks and serving one another with mutual submission. We must remember that because of the saving work of Jesus, the hearts of believers now serve as the dwelling place of God. I am the Temple, and so are you...we, the Church, are the Temple where the Holy Spirit chooses to dwell when we praise and sing and bring glory to the Lord, amen?

Now, we should not think this passage is providing some mathematical, mechanical formula for being filled with the Holy Spirit, just as baptism is not some mechanical, mathematical formula for being filled with the Holy Spirit. We should, however, pay careful attention to Paul’s association of these activities with the Holy Spirit’s presence. Let’s take just a minute to look at each behavior.

First, the Holy Spirit is pleased to dwell where believers are “addressing one another in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs.” Most of our psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs address God, right? However, when we sing and worship corporately, we address one another even as we sing praises to God. Think about how many hymns bear witness about the grace of Christ to those in the room...like the classic hymn *Amazing Grace*. The whole hymn is a testimony to the church written by a man whose life was utterly transformed by the grace of God. Our worship is always to God, but the songs we sing and the words we speak bear witness, edify, encourage, and even educate those around us. Such is why there is nothing like corporate worship to literally experience the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in our hearts as individuals and within the Body of Christ.

We should note the diversity of music in the first century worship. The psalms were uniquely Jewish, and many of the psalms were set to music and used regularly in Jewish worship. It would have been quite natural for the Jewish converts to Christianity to draw upon the Psalms that pointed forward to the Messiah, who is Christ our Lord.

Hymns, on the other hand, were written by musicians in both the Roman and Greek cultures, and prior to Christ, hymns were written to worship other deities. For example, you might remember the *Homeric Hymns*—an anonymous collection of 34 different hymns of praise to various deities composed in the same style as Homer’s *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. The Greek

gentiles would have been familiar with the concept of hymns, and we know that many new hymns praising Jesus were written even before the four gospels were in distribution.

We also find other songs in the Bible that are neither psalms or hymns. Consider Mariam's song, Mary's song, Zachariah's song, and others that are scattered throughout the Bible. These may be what Paul was referring to as "spiritual songs", but any of the songs are "spiritual" if they faithfully bear witness to the Lord and reflect the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Regardless of the form of the music, what mattered most was that the content glorified Christ and the worshippers were making a melody to the Lord *with their hearts*.

Paul writes, "be filled with the Holy Spirit, addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart..." Most of us think of singing and making a melody with our voices...but our voices are secondary to what is happening in our hearts. Jesus said in John 4 that the Father is seeking those who worship in "spirit and truth." I think Paul is saying exactly the same thing here in Eph. 5. Our worship needs to glorify the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. Our worship needs to be truthful about who Jesus is and what Jesus has done. And we must worship with all our hearts, which includes our sincere emotions as well as our intellect. Wherever a melody is made to the Lord with a sincere heart, there we can expect to experience the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

Paul adds another behavior consistent with the indwelling of the Holy Spirit: "...giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ." Church, thanksgiving invokes the presence of the Holy Spirit in our hearts and in our church. I think we know that is true, and yet I suspect a lot of us burn up our prayer time with grievances, complaints, and requests. The Israelites were famous for their muttering and complaints, and the scripture reveals that constant complaining was an irritant to God's Spirit. However, when the Church gives thanks for everything Jesus has done to rescue our condemned souls...when we thank the Father for giving us His Son, not only does our thanksgiving please God, we can also expect that our souls and our corporate gatherings will be filled with the presence and power of the Holy Spirit.

The final behavior associated with the indwelling of the Holy Spirit is the way believers are "submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ." God opposes the proud, but He exalts the humble (James 4:6). Anyone who claims to be filled with the Holy Spirit but then reeks of arrogance is a liar. The Holy Spirit indwells those who humble themselves and become servants. The Holy Spirit filled believer is one who remembers the words of Paul in Philippians 2:3-4: "Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus..."

Paul then goes on to quote the early Christian hymn that describes the nature and character of Christ as the one who, though being in the very nature God, did not consider equality with God as something to be grasped but humbled himself, taking on the form of a servant. And that's the point: when the believers adopt the mind of Christ and humble themselves to serve one another...when they submit one to another as Christ knelt and washed the feet of His

disciples...then will the Holy Spirit fill the hearts of the believers and make His home in the Church!

Colonial, I hope you are hearing what the Spirit is saying! Let us set aside our drunkenness and all forms of foolishness so that we might worship God in spirit and truth, making melodies in our hearts to the Lord, remembering with thanksgiving all that the Father has done through Christ our Lord, even as we humbly seek to serve and submit to one another. What a compelling picture of the Spirit-filled Church! This is what it means to walk in a manner worthy of our calling...this is what it means to walk as children of Light who are empowered by the Holy Spirit.

### **III. Evidence of the Holy Spirit**

As we move further into chapter 5 next Sunday, we'll see how the Spirit orders and empowers Christian marriage, Christian parenting, and our relationships with those we manage and those who manage us. It will be imperative to remember that the indwelling of the Holy Spirit is assumed when we start looking at a husband's relationship with his wife and so on. In fact, so much of what the NT says about our lives as Christians assumes that we will be empowered, equipped, and inspired by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

So, how do we know if the Holy Spirit is present and at work in our lives? We're still people with a sin problem, so how do we live in the tension of the flesh and the spirit?

I would point you to Galatians 5, where Paul clearly presents the tension between living in the flesh, and living as one who is filled with the Holy Spirit. He makes a promise and a prediction in 5:16: "But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. The desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do."

Church, this leads us back to where we started, right? This leads us back to last week when we talked about giving up the lower, temporal things in order to redeem the eternal opportunities that this season of life provides us. Here we find another way of saying the same thing: we must learn to walk in the Spirit...which means, by definition, we must learn to deny the appetites of our flesh.

So what are the appetites of the flesh that should be decreasing in our lives as the Holy Spirit leads and empowers us? Paul writes in vs. 19, "Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of rage, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these." Paul goes on to warn the believers: "Those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God." Why? Paul says it clearly in Romans 8:9 "Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to Him." Do you see what Paul is saying? He's saying that as those who have been redeemed, the evidence of the Spirit-filled life will be a life that is increasingly liberated from indulgent behaviors of the flesh. That liberation doesn't happen all at once...it takes time to be sure...but

the Holy Spirit is making us more like Jesus, and that means we are gaining mastery over our appetites rather than living as those who are subject to our appetites.

Again, please know that being filled with the Holy Spirit is NOT an extra-curricular bonus for pastors or people who are all gung-ho about religion. According to the Apostle Paul, the signature evidence of a redeemed life is that he or she is filled with the Holy Spirit. It is assumed that if we belong to Jesus, we will have His Spirit living in us. If there is no evidence of the Spirit in our life, our attitudes, and our behaviors, we should not assume that we belong to Christ.

So how do we know if we have the Holy Spirit dwelling in us? The fruit...the fruit will tell the whole story about the nature of the tree, right? Paul writes in Galatians 5:22, "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control." These attributes should begin to become evident in the life a Spirit-filled believer. Again, not all at once, but over time these attributes are the predictable fruit that we can expect to see in our lives and in our life together as a community.

Church, as always, the New Testament divides the whole world into two groups of people: 1) those who walk according to the appetites of the flesh; and 2) those who walk according to the Spirit of God. This morning would be a good time to take inventory of your life and decide which group you belong to.

If you are still walking according to the appetites of the flesh...if you are still a slave to the passions and desires that do not satisfy and cannot save us from condemnation, hear the good news: in Jesus Christ, you have been forgiven. Repent of your sin and ask Jesus to apply His sacrifice to your account. Submit to the Lordship of Christ and follow Him, and you will be filled with the Holy Spirit, liberated, and transformed by the unmerited grace of God. That is the hope of the Gospel.

If you are one walking with the Spirit, let us praise the Father with thanksgiving for His infinite mercy. As Paul writes at the end of Galatians 5 "Let us not become conceited..." Instead, I pray that all those who are in Christ will worship Him in spirit and truth, sharing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making a melody to the Lord in our hearts; thanking the Father for everything He has done through our Lord Jesus Christ; and submitting to one another in reverence to Christ. Amen?

Let us pray.