

THE STUDY OF EPHESIANS

LESSON 18

EPHESIANS 5:18-21

NOTES

“BE BEING KEPT FILLED WITH THE HOLY SPIRIT”

The verse which these words introduce is one of the most crucial texts relating to Christian living, to walking ***“in a manner worthy of the calling with which (we) have been called”*** (4:1). Being controlled by the Holy Spirit is absolutely essential for living the Christian life by God’s standards. God’s way cannot be properly understood or faithfully followed apart from the working of the Spirit in the life of a believer.

THE COUNTERFEIT AND THE TRUE

Before Paul commanded us to ***“be filled with the Spirit”*** and gave the characteristics of the Spirit-filled life (v. 18b-21), he first gave a contrasting and negative command, ***“And do not get drunk with wine.”*** Getting drunk with wine not only is a hindrance to, but a counterfeit of, being filled with the Spirit. In light of the apostle’s preceding contrasts between light and darkness (v. 8-14) and between wisdom and foolishness (v. 15-17), his point here is that getting drunk is a mark of darkness and foolishness and that being filled with the Spirit is the source of a believer’s being able to walk in light and wisdom.

There have been few periods of church history in which the drinking of alcoholic beverages has not been an issue of disagreement and debate. Evangelical churches and groups in our own day have widely differing views on the subject. Denominations and missions organizations sometimes have differing views even within their own constituencies from country to country.

We must be clear that drinking or not drinking is not in itself a mark, and certainly not a measure, of spirituality. Spirituality is determined by what we are inside, of which what we do on the outside is but a manifestation.

Both the Old and New Testaments unequivocally condemn drunkenness. Every picture of drunkenness in the Bible is a picture of sin and disaster.

In light of the Ephesian situation, however, it must be recognized that Paul's primary concern in the present passage is religious, not moral. To the Ephesians, as to most pagans and former pagans of that day, drunkenness was closely associated with the idolatrous rites and practices that were an integral part of temple worship. In the mystery religions, which began in ancient Babylon and were copied and modified throughout the Near East and in Greek and Roman cultures, the height of religious experience was communion with the gods through various forms of ecstasy. To achieve an ecstatic experience the participants would use self-hypnosis and frenzied dances designed to work themselves up to a high emotional pitch. Heavy drinking and sexual orgies contributed still further to the sensual stupor that their perverted minds led them to think was creating communion with the gods.

This is precisely the type of pagan worship with which the Ephesians were well acquainted and in which many believers had once been involved.

In Ephesians 5:18, Paul was therefore, not only making a moral but also a theological contrast. He was not just speaking of the moral and social evils of drunkenness, but of the spiritually perverted use of drunkenness as a means of worship. Christians are not to seek religious fulfillment through such pagan means as getting drunk with wine, but are to find their spiritual fulfillment and enjoyment by being ***"filled with the Spirit."*** The believer has no need for the artificial, counterfeit, degrading, destructive, and idolatrous ways of the world. He has God's own Spirit indwelling him, the Spirit whose great desire is to give believers the fullest benefits and enjoyment of their high position as children of God.

The context of this passage further indicates that Paul was speaking primarily about the religious implications of drunkenness. The frenzied, immoral, and drunken orgies of pagan ceremonies were accompanied by correspondingly corrupt worship. In verses 19-20 Paul showed the kind of worship that pleases God: Spirit-filled believers ***"speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord; always giving thanks for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God, even the Father."***

BE FILLED WITH THE HOLY SPIRIT- A COMMAND

Although Paul was not present when the Holy Spirit manifested Himself so powerfully at Pentecost, he must have had that event in mind as he wrote ***“be filled with the Spirit.”*** Pentecost obviously occurred while he was still an unbeliever and before he began persecuting the church. But without Pentecost he and other unbelievers would have had no reason to persecute the church, because it would have been too weak and powerless to threaten Satan’s domain. It was there that the other apostles heard the heavenly ***“noise like a violent, rushing wind,”*** saw ***“tongues as of fire distributing themselves”*** and resting ***“on each one of them,”*** and were ***“filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit was giving them utterance”*** (Acts 2:2-4). It was also there that some of the crowd accused the apostles of being ***“full of sweet wine”*** (v. 13), probably expecting them to break out into the typical frenzied antics of mystical pagan worship.

Though others (such as Moses, Ex. 31:3; 35:31) had been filled with the Spirit for special purposes, it was at Pentecost that all believers in the church were first filled with the Holy Spirit. Every promise that Jesus gave to His disciples on the last night He was with them, was fulfilled in some sense by the coming of the Holy Spirit on that day. In fact, it was the coming of the Holy Spirit that made real all the promises of Jesus Christ.

Being filled is not the same as possessing, or being indwelt by, the Holy Spirit, because He indwells every believer at the moment of salvation. As Paul plainly states in the book of Romans, ***“If anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him”*** (8:9; John 7:38-39). A person who does not have the Holy Spirit does not have Christ. Even to the immature, worldly Corinthian believers, Paul said, ***“For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body,... and we were all made to drink of one Spirit”*** (1 Cor. 12:13). Unlike believers before Pentecost, on whom the Holy Spirit would come temporarily (Judg. 13:25; 16:20; 1 Sam. 16:14; Ps. 51:11), all Christians are permanently indwelt by the Spirit.

Being filled with the Spirit does not describe a process of progressively receiving Him by degrees or in doses. Every Christian not only possesses the Holy Spirit but possesses Him in His fullness. God does not parcel out the Spirit, as if He could

somehow be divided into various segments or parts. ***“He gives the Spirit without measure,”*** Jesus said (John 3:34).

It is also clear from 1 Corinthians 12:13 that the filling with the Spirit is not the same as the baptism of the Spirit, because every believer has been baptized with and received the Spirit. Although its results are experienced and enjoyed, baptism by and reception of the Spirit are not realities we can feel, and are certainly not experiences reserved only for specially-blessed believers. This miracle is a spiritual reality—whether realized or not—that occurs in every believer the moment he becomes a Christian and is placed by Christ into His Body by the Holy Spirit, who then takes up residence in that life.

The filling with Spirit is not the same as being sealed, or secured, by Him. That is an accomplished fact. Nowhere are believers commanded or exhorted to be indwelt, baptized, or sealed by the Holy Spirit. The only command is to be filled.

An understanding of the Greek word for ***“be filled,”*** *plerousthe*, clearly reveals the correct meaning of Paul’s command in Ephesians 5:18. A literal translation of the verb would read something like ***“be being kept filled.”*** The idea is one of keeping ourselves constantly filled, as we yield moment by moment to the leading of the Spirit. The passive aspect indicates that it is not something we do but that we allow to be done in us. The filling is entirely the work of the Spirit Himself, but He works only through our willing submission.

Being filled with the Holy Spirit is not an option for believers but a mandate. No Christian can fulfill God’s will for his life apart from being filled with His Spirit. If we do not obey this command, we cannot obey any other—simply because we cannot do any of God’s will apart from God’s Spirit.

God commands nothing for which He does not provide the means to obey. And if God commands something of us, we do not need to pray for it, because it is obviously His will and intent for us to do it. It is God’s deepest desire that each of His children be filled with His Spirit. We only need to discover the resources He has provided to carry out that obedience.

THE HOLY SPIRIT: BAPTISM VERSUS FILLING – EPH. 5:18	
<u>The Baptism of the Holy Spirit</u>	<u>The Filling of the Holy Spirit</u>
Happens once	Can happen many times
Past event	Present reality
For all believers	For obedient believers
Never commanded	Commanded
Positional truth	Experiential and practical
Places the believer in the body of Christ	Enables the believer to live for Christ
Holy Spirit resident in life	Holy Spirit president of the life
Brings into union	Brings about communion
Identification with Christ	Fellowship with Christ
Instantaneous act of God at salvation	Repeated experience when a believer is fully yielded
Single act of placing into body of Christ	Diverse ministry in helping believers serve the body of Christ

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THE EVIDENCE OF BEING FILLED WITH THE HOLY SPIRIT

Following his command to be filled with the Spirit, Paul gave a summary of the evidence of obedience to that command.

The first is the outward expression of praise through ***“speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs.”*** The second is the inner expression of praise by ***“singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord.”*** The third is the upward expression of praise by having a thankful heart, ***“always giving thanks for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.”*** The fourth consequence of being Spirit filled is submitting to one another in various relationships of life, by ***“being subject to one another in the fear of Christ.”***

The Spirit-filled life produces music. Whether she has a good voice or cannot carry a tune, the Spirit-filled Christian is a singing Christian. Nothing is more indicative of a fulfilled life, a contented soul, and a happy heart than the expression of song.

When God delivered Israel out of Egypt, all the people came together and sang a

song to the Lord (Ex. 15:1-18). After they finished, Moses' sister, Miriam, led the women in further singing and dancing (vv. 20-21). After Deborah and Barak delivered Israel from the Canaanites, they ***"sang on that day"*** (Judg. 5:1). Of the 38,000 people who ministered at the Temple in Jerusalem, 4,000 were musicians; and in Nehemiah we read of great choirs (Neh. 12:31, 38). Throughout the Old Testament, and particularly in the Psalms, we read of many kinds of musical instruments that God's people used to praise Him.

The last thing Jesus and His disciples did after the Last Supper was to sing a hymn before they went out to the Garden of Gethsemane, where Jesus was arrested (Matt. 26:30). While they were imprisoned in Philippi, ***"about midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns of praise to God, and the prisoners were listening to them"*** (Acts 16:25). On the heavenly Mount Zion the 144,000 who will have been purchased from the earth will sing ***"a new song before the throne"*** of Christ (Rev. 14:3).

Psalms refers primarily to the Old Testament psalms put to music, but the term was also used of vocal music of any sort, such as solos and anthems.

Hymns refers primarily to songs of praise, which in the early church were probably distinguished from the psalms, which exalted God, in that they specifically praised the Lord Jesus Christ. Many biblical scholars believe that various New Testament passages (such as Col. 1:12-16) were used as hymns in the early church.

Spiritual songs were probably songs of testimony that covered a broad category that included any music expressing spiritual truth.

The Spirit-filled Christian is happy, peaceful, assured, and productive regardless of the circumstances. Whether he is freely worshiping among fellow believers on Sunday morning or sitting in painful stocks in a dungeon at midnight like Paul and Silas (Acts 16:24-25), his heart will always be ***"singing and making melody."***

References:

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