

introduction

As we continue our series looking at the Holy Spirit, this passage calls us to consider what it means to be “filled with the Spirit.” Though every Christian already has the Spirit, Ephesians 5 reminds us that there is a need to daily and continually orient ourselves to, or come under the influence of, the Holy Spirit. Considering the challenges of living in this world, the need to live under the Spirit’s power is an urgent one. This raises an important question for our lives together: what does it look like, in ordinary rhythms and relationships, to live under the Spirit’s shaping power?



Who or what has had a strong influence on you in your life — either in a positive or negative way — and how did it show up in your attitudes or behavior?

read **Ephesians 5:15-21 (NIV)**

¹⁵ Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise, ¹⁶ making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil. ¹⁷ Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord’s will is. ¹⁸ Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit, ¹⁹ speaking to one another with psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit. Sing and make music from your heart to the Lord, ²⁰ always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

²¹ Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.

Take a few moments to reflect on the Scripture. Share some insights, questions, or points that strike you. Then read what follows.

context

Ephesians 5:15-21 sits within Paul's broader call for followers of Jesus to "live a life worthy of the calling you have received" ([Ephesians 4:1](#)). The first three chapters of Ephesians are all about what is true of God and his plans to redeem a people through the gospel; the latter three chapters are about how God's people are meant to live in light of those great truths. This particular section of Ephesians centers on the contrast between being drunk with wine and being filled with the Spirit (v. 18). You might say that verses 15-17 introduce this theme by describing why we need to be filled with the Spirit, while verses 19-21 describe the Spirit's outworking in the life of a person and community who are filled with him.

filled with the Spirit

At the center of this passage is the call to "be filled with the Spirit" rather than "[getting] drunk on wine" (v. 18). "Paul has nothing against wine; but against getting drunk he is adamant. That's no way for Christians to behave." (Wright) The primary thrust of the contrast seems to be that a Christian is someone who is under the influence of the Holy Spirit. The British preacher Martyn Lloyd-Jones, writing with a medical background, contrasts how alcohol might make someone happy by depressing their senses (alcohol being pharmacologically classified as a depressant), while the Spirit can fill someone with joy by stimulating their senses to become more aware of what's true of them, who God is and all he's done, and the great promises of the gospel.

What does it look like to "be filled" with the Spirit? Scholars debate whether this means (a) a repeated filling of the Spirit in a Christian's life that can happen over and over again, or (b) a Christian relating to the Spirit that is already residing in them in such a way that exhibits a life that is under the Lordship of the Spirit. Perhaps it may be helpful to see that these two perspectives are not all that contradictory in terms of *how a Christian experiences the work of the Spirit in their life*. The call is to be so filled with the Spirit, so submitted to the Spirit, that one's life results in gospel-shaped living with love and power.

Paul situates the call to be filled with the Spirit within the broader call to live wisely (v. 15). To live wisely is to live with God at the center — to "understand what the Lord's will is" (v. 17) and align our lives accordingly. The will of God here relates to "God's gracious saving plan and, and as a significant element of this, the formation of a people into the likeness of Christ who will be pure and blameless on the final day" (O'Brien). Understanding the Lord's will is less about

specific life decisions (like career or location) and more about being shaped into people who reflect Christ — people marked by love and holiness — and to live in light of God’s gospel-plan to redeem the world. The need to live wisely in this way is urgent, for “the days are evil” (v. 16), meaning they are under the influence of the evil one. It’s easy to read Paul’s comment about “evil days” and to understand that in a modern and political sense (e.g. “It’s that evil political party and its leaders that make our world so evil”). But until Christ returns, the days are always evil. There was no golden age and there is no time in which it’s not hard to be a Christian. That’s why we need to be filled with the Spirit.

“What alcohol does is this; it knocks out those higher centres, and so the more primitive elements in the brain come up and take control; and a man feels better temporarily. He has lost his sense of fear, and he has lost his discrimination; he has lost his power to assess... This is the exact opposite of being filled with the Spirit; for what the Spirit does is truly to stimulate... He stimulates our every faculty.”

—Martyn Lloyd-Jones

discuss

- 1. How does the contrast with wine’s influence as a pharmacological depressant shed light on what it means to experience the stimulant of the Spirit’s fullness? If alcohol dulls and distorts, in what ways have you experienced the Spirit awakening and clarifying influence?**
- 2. When you hear that “the days are evil,” what comes to mind? How does Paul’s perspective challenge or reshape that view? Are there ways you have given yourself to passively drifting or complaining about the world? As you consider what Paul means by “making the most of every opportunity,” how can you actively seek how God might use you in your current season of life?**

- 3. How can we grow in understanding God's will in the sense Paul describes here? What is one way you can more align your life to the will of God?**

the outworking of the Spirit's influence

Grammatically speaking, verses 19-21 contain four present participles — speaking, singing (including making music), thanking, and submitting — that spell out the consequences of being filled with the Spirit as they are worked out in our relationships. In effect, these are the marks of the Spirit that evidence his influence in our lives. The visible, relational quality of these marks shows us that a Spirit-filled life is not primarily about private spiritual experiences but about transformed relationships.

One outworking of the Spirit's presence in Christians' lives is that they come together with joy and creative hope to express to the Lord, and amongst each other, the wonders of what God has done (v. 19). "Spirit-filled Christians have a song of joy in their hearts", and they love to be together in Christian fellowship where they can express that song to God and to each other (Stott). In light of their joyful praise, people who are filled with the Spirit also exhibit a gratitude to God that permeates their whole being (v. 20). Because their hearts are alive to God's glory and his gracious purposes, they can exhibit a deep and consistent gratitude to God even in the midst of life's challenges.

Since verses 18-21 are all one sentence in Greek, verse 21 shows that the final outworking of the Spirit's filling in a Christian's life is a "submitting to one another." The idea here is that Spirit-filled people are humble, gentle, and not afraid of submitting themselves to others. Scholars debate whether this is (a) a broad mutual submission of all Christians to one another, or (b) each Christian submitting to those in authority over them in certain specific relationships (e.g. children to parents; see [Ephesians 5:22-6:9](#)). It may be best to see these two options as needing to be blended: the call to a general others-oriented humility will manifest itself in particular relations that grow and develop over a person's life. But those particular relations can only function in the way God intends if there is a general humble spirit, the result of the Holy Spirit, guiding God's people.

“The grumbling spirit is not compatible with the Holy Spirit.... The Spirit-filled believer is full not of complaining, but of thanksgiving.... [The] Holy Spirit is a humble Spirit, and those who are truly filled with him always display the meekness and gentleness of Christ... those who are truly subject to Jesus Christ do not find it difficult to submit to each other as well.”

—John Stott

discuss

- 4. Paul talks about the outworking of the Spirit’s influence in ways that are visible and relational: speaking and singing and gratitude and submission. Why has he chosen these? In what ways have you been growing in these areas? In what ways does a lack of growth in any of these areas expose where we may be resisting the Spirit’s work?**
- 5. How do we practically live in such a way that we are more and more under the influence of the Holy Spirit? Are there steps we are meant to take, or are we mostly passive, in experiencing more and more of the Spirit’s fullness in our day-to-day life?**

upcoming

- Wednesday, May 13 | **Redeemer Network Prayer & Praise Night, 7pm**
All are invited to an evening of prayer, praise and stories of God's faithfulness across the city, hosted by Redeemer Downtown. Consider attending as a CG and meet Christians in the Redeemer church family!
redeemerdt.com/network
- Saturday, May 16 | **Young Adults: Salsa into Spring, 6:30-9 pm**
All young adults (21+) are invited for an evening of Latin rhythm, food and fun! Limited spots are available; register by May 9 for early bird pricing.
redeemerws.com/salsa
- Sunday, May 17 | **Quiz & Tell: A Trivia Event, 3:30-4:45 pm**
Facts - food - fun! Bring yourself, bring some friends if you want, just don't forget to bring it on because there will be prizes! Let's celebrate all the random knowledge we've tucked away and can finally justify storing.
redeemerws.com/trivia