Ephesians 5:18-20

Filled by the Holy Spirit, Overflowing in Praise

18 And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit, 19 speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord; 20 always giving thanks for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God, to the Father;

Paul’s last statement, as he presented comparisons and contrasts between the flesh and the Spirit, was focused on doing the will of God. As he continues on with the stewardship of time he’s pointing towards a heavenly mindset and how that impacts our earthly ministry to one another.

***Note****: This lesson should be bundled with a supplemental list entitled “The Ministry of the Spirit to Believers” which will be referenced throughout the first part of the lesson.*

# Drunkenness

## A Culture of Drunkenness

The Greek and Roman cultures worshiped a variety of gods and goddesses that were dishonest untrustworthy and wicked. One ‘god’ that was extremely popular across the empire was Dionysus who was a god of wine, drunkenness, orgies, ritual madness, and religious ecstasy. The church stands in stark contrast to these ideas and the God of the Bible is not like the pagan gods in any way. Paul’s admonition is tied to what God’s contrast to ritual madness and drunkenness: by filled by the Holy Spirit.

## Alcohol is Not Drunkenness

While alcohol consumption is not commanded in the New Testament it’s worth noting that the New Testament does not prohibit the consumption of alcohol, but instead Paul’s warning is against the excess consumption of alcohol. Since the fruit of the Spirit is self-control and alcohol consumption can lead to a lack of self-control we observe that the direction is towards moderation, care to be abiding, and not towards trying to find the line by crossing it a few times. We preserve Christian liberty, but we care for one another so as to not be a stumbling block for those who may not choose to partake in the consumption of alcohol.

### A Few Other Biblical Considerations

* The culture would have seen wine as a way to speak to gods, but the Bible tells us it hinders our setting our minds on Him.
* Christ’s first recorded miracle was turning water into wine [John 2]. The people there were already feeling its effects, but Christ does the miracle anyway.
* Romans 14:21 speaks to not causing stumbling through wine consumption.
* Paul instructs Timothy in 1 Timothy 3:3 that elders should not be addicted to wine.
* In 1 Timothy 5:23 Paul tells Timothy to consume some wine (with apparent care) for his health

In short, the concern isn’t the wine itself, but drunkenness. If one can carefully consume wine without the dissipation, without addiction, and without causing others to stumble, it is permissible.

## Dissipation

Paul just told us in the earlier verses [v. 16] that we needed to redeem the time. Dissipation is time that has not been saved or redeemed. Without an eternal view getting through the next day without pain is “good.” With an eternal view we’re stewards of the day (and night) and we’re to be growing as individuals and together with that time.

# But Be Filled with the Spirit

## But

The Greek language has two words that we translate into ‘but’ and this is the stronger of the two. The point is to emphasize a more intense contrast. Put into an English comparison ‘de’, which is weaker, might be presented like, “We have American cheese, but we also have cheddar.” Paul is emphasizing that the value should be far greater in the life of the believer if they would, instead of wasting time and getting through the day, in sharp contrast be choosing to be filled by the Holy Spirit.

## Be Filled with the Spirit

The word translated ‘filled’ here [plerousthe] is Present Imperative Passive and it carries with it the idea of being filled and fulfilled by God through His Holy Spirit. Present tense means right now; imperative implies a sense of you choosing to do or allow something; and passive means God does the filling. Contemplate the intricacies of what Paul is implying here: As a believer dedicated to a relationship with God make yourself an available vessel via alignment of your will with His [AKA Setting Your Mind – Colossians 3:1-3; Romans 8:5-6].

### Being Fulfilled by the Holy Spirit

The plerousthe word mentioned earlier carries with it not just a filling aspect, but a fulfilling aspect. This challenges us at our core with a key question: *Where do we get our fulfillment?* Can we be confronted with this question and answer, not like the pagans, with carnality, dissipation and coping, but with the rich, indwelling, filling, and fulfilling personhood of God through His Holy Spirit?

*What things in your life appear to be fulfilling but never are?*

*What does biblical stewardship look like if it is rooted in being fulfilled by God rather than in things?*

*Where does your value come from if you are being fulfilled by God?*

## The Opposite: Quenching

1 Thessalonians 5:19 tells us, “Do not quench the Spirit.” This idea of suppressing or dismissing the direction of the Holy Spirit is critical to the idea of our being made in God’s image with a mind that is spiritually alive. If we are to be abiding, filled and fulfilled, then we are not quenching or ignoring the direction of the Holy Spirit, but instead seeking God’s direction, seeking His empowering, and seeking His fulfillment through the active ministry of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer.

## Dissipation vs. Being Filled by the Holy Spirit

Being fulfilled by the Holy Spirit is another critical part of this verse’s intent! If the pagan idolatry was to get drunk and participate in ritual madness and drunken dissipation to be fulfilled in their person by drunkenness, we have a strong contrast with Holy Spirit guided interaction.

## Speaking to One Another in Psalms, Hymns & Spiritual Songs

## Speaking of Speaking

Paul keeps talking about this idea of speaking within the book of Ephesians [c.f. 4:15, 25; 5:12, 19]. It’s worth noting that we have the choice in what words we use. We can choose to speak truth, we can choose to speak kindle, we can choose to build each other up. Or we can use our voices to use words that tear down, divide and hinder. The words spoken from the psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs are about spiritual truth!

## What are These Song Types?

Paul lists three types of songs, and they each cover a unique part of the Christian songbook:

* Psalms – the book of psalms contain the Jewish national praise book. These would have been familiar to the Jewish believers, but the gentiles would have needed to learn them. When we read the psalms we find prophecies of the Messiah, proclamations of God’s faithfulness, and large doses of thankfulness.
* Hymns – songs of testimony that proclaim God’s faithfulness, events that have happened to heroes of the faith, and praise to God. At the time of this writing these would have been about Old Testament saints for the most part.
* Spiritual Songs – Songs that are rooted in truth and may have been inspired by God’s revelation. As God revealed truth those in the body who turned those ideas into songs would likely have shared them.

## The Value of Song in Ministry within the Body

As part of some of the cult religious activities within the Greek and Roman culture the pagan rituals would involve speaking in tongues and being filled by the spirits but being out of your own mind. The hope would be that the message might have some coherency and some utterance that would possibly be meaningful within the nonsense. Paul starkly contrasts this with the idea that instead we should be purposefully spreading an ‘infectious[[1]](#footnote-1)’ message of truth through psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs.

Songs or poems are structured so that they become a mnemonic. If we take the truth, as revealed by the Holy Spirit, and carefully structure it into principles as poetry we can help pass along God’s truth and memorize His ideas for later recall and meditation. As the body had yet to receive the complete New Testament these teaching-through-song ideas were critical in sharing God’s message throughout the region, which would not have had a literacy rate we enjoy in modern America.

### Teaching is a Music Ministry (or Music Ministry is a Teaching Ministry)

Often the today’s churches there’s a polarizing effect of people saying things like, “I’m more interested in teaching than worship,” or, “I didn’t feel the music, and the teaching was boring.” *Both of these ideas are reflective of immaturity.* As Paul states here we have a need for the lyrics of the songs we sing in the church to be useful for teaching truth! The creativity of song is not the focus, but the message. If we view music as just a necessity for a well-rounded service, then we see it in the wrong light. If we view music as the primary focus of the service, we see it in the wrong light.

When we look at Ephesians in a broader scope we find that every part of the the believers’ interactions directly impacts growth of the individual and the body:

1. Abiding causes us to consider our thoughts and our lives and our values in light of God’s revealed truth and direction
2. When we teach or fellowship or worship we share these truths
3. When we learn these truths in one place we share them elsewhere
4. When we make these truths part of our thought life the Lord often reveals new appropriations, new truths (we didn’t know before), and the cycle starts over again as we mature into the complete man [c.f. Ephesians 4:11-13]

# Giving Thanks to God, the Father

The welling up in our fulfilled and filled hearts pours out into the lives of other believers through ministry (at least partially through psalms, hymns and spiritual songs), those messages will impact the outpouring of our hearts towards the Father. How can we not be moved deeply when we consider God’s love, God’s life, and God’s ministry in and through us?

## Always for All Things

When we consider God’s provision and God’s fulfilling us through His Holy Spirit, we would logically be moved to be thankful. Paul wants us to consider the scope of all time and all things in this thankfulness. In parallel with Romans 8:28, we must consider that God’s provision is not always through happy circumstances that make us feel pleasure, but instead may involve difficulties and growth opportunities through trials. We don’t get to tell God what He can use for our growth and edification, but we may observe after the fact what He was or is doing.

Consider Paul and Silas in jail in Acts 16:23-34: Nothing about being jailed should lead to worship [in the flesh]. However, the Holy Spirit led them to be worshiping even in the dark, wounded circumstances they were in. The, because God had planned to use their being jailed for the gospel, an entire household in Philippi responded to the gospel. Consider that three books or letters of the New Testament involve Philippi: Acts, Philippians, and Philemon were all critical to Paul’s ministry to the churches around the world since their writing. The (former) slave Onesimus was critical to Paul’s ministry throughout the empire. So, sure, we can sometimes see imprisonment, jailing, or other difficulties as useless or hard or hard to praise God for, but God’s intent is to use all things, and we should not discard their value even if we cannot see it up front.

## In the Name of our Lord Jesus Christ, to the Father

Paul wants us to be considering the full relationship of the Trinity within these verses: The Holy Spirit is empowering, fulfilling, and enabling us to be thinking God’s thoughts after Him, to be teaching those thoughts through song, and then to be responding to God the Father, through His Son. The triune God is actively involved with the believer, and we interact with all three parts of the Godhead. Thankfulness is rooted in understanding, and then expressed by one party to another. We understand who God is, what He has done, and then we respond in thankfulness in all things. What a powerful principle of our eternal, spiritual life!

# Conclusion

We can see how God has setup an entirely different way of thinking that doesn’t involve the high risk, carnally focused, way of pagan life, and instead has given us an empowered, fulfilling relationship with Himself and with one another that has eternal impact. There are a number of principles given within the New Testament that intersect, but this passage is about to intersect with the eternal marriage of the church to Christ, the representation of our own marriages of that marriage, and our ministry of care towards one another through the Holy Spirit.

The Ministry of the Spirit to Believers

A Starting Point to Understanding His Involvement in Our Lives

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| 1 | Dwells in believers | Jn. 14:6; Rom. 5:5; 8:9: 1 Cor. 3:16 |
| 2 | Gives believers access to the Father | Ephesians 2:18 |
| 3 | Has fellowship with believers | 2 Cor. 13:14; Phil. 2:1; 1 John 4:13 |
| 4 | Teaches believers | 1 John 2:20, 27; 1 Cor. 2:13 |
| 5 | Reveals the glory of Christ to believers | 1 Cor. 2:9-13; John 16:13-15 |
| 6 | Transforms believers | 2 Cor 3:18; John 17:24; Eph. 2:6, 7 |
| 7 | Manifests His fruit through believers | Galatians 5:22, 23; John 15:5 |
| 8 | Gifts every believer for ministry | 1 Cor. 12:7,11,27; Eph. 4:7,8,11,12 |
| 9 | Empowers believers | Acts 1:8; Ephesians 3:18 |
| 10 | Fills believers | Acts 2:4; Ephesians 5:18 |
| 11 | Desires against believers' flesh | Galatians 5:17; Romans 8:13 |
| 12 | Empowers the mind of the new man | Romans 8:5, 6; Phil. 2:5 |
| 13 | Frees believers | Romans 8:2; 2 Cor. 3:17 |
| 14 | Guides believers | Rom. 8:14; Galatians 5:18, 25 |
| 15 | Intercedes in prayer for the believer | Rom. 8:26, 27; Eph. 6:18; Phil 3:3 |
| 16 | Is God's guarantee of his promises to the believer | 2 Cor. 5:5; Eph. 1:13,14; 4:30 |
| 17 | Is the agent in the believer's sanctification | 2 Thess. 2:13,14; Rom. 15:16 |
| 18 | Assures believers | Romans 8:16; 1 John 4:13 |
| 19 | Glorifies Christ through believers | John 16:13,14; 1 Cor. 12:3 |
| 20 | Can be grieved & quenched by the believer | Eph. 4:30; 1 Thess. 5:19 |
| 21 | Is the means by which a believer walks | Galatians 3:2,3; 5:16 |
| 22 | Perfects the believer | Galatians 3:3 |

Originally developed by Hal, updated by Randy - 2018

1. Meant in a positive way [↑](#footnote-ref-1)