

Ephesians 5:18-20

Introduction (Refer to the outline below)

Last week, Paul began a new section in his letter to the Ephesians with these words: “Watch carefully therefore how you walk.” And then he follows this up with three contrasting exhortations (“not... but...”; see verses 15-18). Last week we reflected on the first *two* of these contrasting exhortations (15-17). The third one is connected with the first two, but it “feels” different, and it also introduces something new. In the first two, Paul simply makes his point and then he’s done. But in the third one, Paul makes his point, and then he goes on to expand on it with four different (participial) phrases (19-21). These four phrases are all connected together because they’re all talking about what it looks like to be filled by the Spirit. But the fourth phrase “feels” different, and it also introduces a whole new section on the husband/wife relationship (5:21-33), and then ultimately on the relationship between parents and children and masters and servants (6:1-9).

So you can see how Paul seamlessly transitions from one thing to the next so everything feels very intimately connected. But now you can also see the “one thing to the next” and why this morning we’re just looking at verses 18-20. This can also help you if you’re reading the text to not get lost in the flow, but rather to *follow* the flow of what Paul is thinking and saying. So we begin this morning with these words breathed out and given to us by God Himself:

¹⁵WATCH CAREFULLY THEREFORE HOW YOU WALK,

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**NOT** as unwise

***BUT*** as wise, <sup>16</sup>buying up the time, because the days are evil.

<sup>17</sup>Because of this, do **NOT** be foolish,

***BUT*** understand what the will of the Lord is.  
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¹⁸And do **NOT** get drunk with wine, in which is dissipation,

BUT be filled in the Spirit,

(1) ¹⁹***speaking*** to one another with *psalms* and hymns and *songs* that are spiritual,

(2) ***singing*** and ***psalmodizing*** in your heart to the Lord,

(3) ²⁰***giving thanks*** always for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God, even to the Father,
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(4) <sup>21</sup>***submitting*** to one another in the fear of Christ,

<sup>22</sup>***wives*** to your own husbands as to the Lord...

<sup>25</sup>(Husbands, love...)

<sup>6:1</sup>***Children, obey your parents...***

<sup>6:4</sup>(Fathers, do not provoke...)

<sup>6:5</sup>***Bondservants, obey your earthly masters...***

<sup>6:9</sup>(Masters... stop your threatening...)

## **I. “And do not get drunk with wine, in which is dissipation”**

So where did that come from? Why, all of a sudden, is Paul telling us not to get drunk with wine? Remember that for the Christian, life is very black and white. There are no shades of gray. We’ve seen this in Ephesians over and over again. In the last few verses, Paul described the life of *darkness* in terms of *sexual immorality and impurity and greed*, and then the fruit of *light* as *goodness and righteousness and truth*. There’s either darkness or light. There’s no twilight zone in the middle. You’re either still sleeping the sleep of death, or you’ve been awoken and raised from the dead to a wholly new life and walk in Christ Jesus. And so Paul quotes Isaiah: “Awake, O sleeper, and rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.” Now these themes of darkness, and sleep, and sexual immorality are combined with drunkenness in two other places by Paul.

- ✓ Romans 13:12–14 — The *night* is far gone; the *day* is at hand. So then let us cast off the works of *darkness* and put on the armor of *light*. Let us walk properly as in the *daytime*, not in orgies and *drunkenness*, not in *sexual immorality* and sensuality, not in quarreling and jealousy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.
- ✓ 1 Thessalonians 5:6–8 — So then let us not *sleep*, as others do, but let us keep *awake* and be sober. For those who *sleep*, sleep at *night*, and those who get *drunk*, are drunk at *night*. But since we belong to the *day*, let us be sober, having put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation.

So drunkenness is just one more way to summarize what we were before we were in Christ. We may not have been literally given to drunkenness, but we were given to the pursuit of our own desires. All we really wanted was the fulfillment, and satisfaction, and happiness, and pleasure of self – even if we set out to attain all these things through a good and religious—even a “Christian”—life. This is literally *instinctive* to the old man that we all were, and to the sin nature that still remains. Paul says that drunkenness consists in dissipation. The idea here is a reckless and senseless abandonment to the lusts of the flesh in the pursuit of a “good time” – in the pursuit of the next “high.” How many of us respond to something like this by saying, “Well, at least I know that’s not me”? How many of us read this command, “Do not get drunk with wine,” and happily check that one off in our mind? But this reveals a legalistic, outward focused understanding of Christianity. Paul doesn’t tell us not to get drunk with wine to make us feel good about something we never struggle with. Paul tells us not to get drunk with wine because he would have us be aware of the illegitimate ways that all of us pursue the next “high” and the next “good time” outside of or apart from Christ. Paul tells us not to get drunk with wine as a foil – as a way of setting us up for the *only* other option that exists. “And do not get drunk with wine, in which is dissipation...”

## **II. “but be filled in the Spirit”<sup>1</sup>**

If we’re quick to say that we *never* get drunk with wine, then are we equally quick to say that we’re *always* filled in the Spirit? To say we’re *never* drunk with wine and *sometimes* or even

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<sup>1</sup> Most translations say “be filled *with* the Spirit,” though a few translate “by the Spirit (NET; HCSB; cf. O’Brien). I translate literally “be filled *in* (Gk. *en*) the Spirit with Thielman and the YLT (Thielman gives the paraphrased meaning: “in [the realm of] the Spirit.”)

*most of the time* filled in the Spirit is not a legitimate option in the Scriptures. We're either illegitimately pursuing the next "high" or "good time" outside of, or apart from, or without reference to Christ **or** we are being always filled in the Spirit. "Do not get *drunk* with *wine*... **but** be *filled* in the *Spirit*."

"Filled" in the Spirit *with what*? Three times already in Ephesians, Paul has spoken of being "*filled*," and each time we're filled up with all the fullness of Christ, or of God Himself.

- ✓ Ephesians 1:23-24 — And [God] put all things under [Christ's] feet and gave Him as head over all things to the church, which is His body, the **fullness** of Him who **fills all in all**.
- ✓ Ephesians 4:11-13 — And He himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints unto the work of ministry, unto the building up of the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a full-grown man, **to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ**.

In the last passage, this fullness of God in Christ is brought to us, or mediated to us *by the Spirit*. The fullness of God the Father comes to us in Christ through the Spirit! This is to be a wonderful, experiential reality in your life and mine.

- ✓ Ephesians 3:14, 16-19 — For this reason I bow my knees before the **Father**... that he may grant you... to be **strengthened with power through his Spirit in the inner man so that Christ may dwell in your hearts** through faith... that you may prevail to lay hold of, together with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be **filled to all the fullness of [the triune] God**.

There are mysteries here that we dare not try to uncover. But there is sweetness and beauty here that is ours to know and **experience** in fuller and fuller measure from now to all eternity. Paul says that instead of getting drunk with wine – instead of seeking our next "good time" in the sinful excesses of the world, we are *instead* to be filled by the Spirit with all the fullness of God Himself in Christ. We are to be filled up with the triune God. We are not to be drunk with wine, but instead – *filled* in the *Spirit*. Now what do you suppose that actually means? What does it actually look like in real life?

When we're filled up with God, we have a deep understanding of His gracious saving will. Remember what Paul just said: "Do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is." (5:17). This isn't just an intellectual, objective understanding, but an experiential, subjective understanding. The intellectual and the experiential are always to be melded together – as we'll see again in just a minute. But as we come to a deeper and deeper understanding of God's gracious, saving purposes not only for us, but for the entire creation – what happens then? It has to be so obvious. We're filled up with **joy**. When the Holy Spirit fills us up with all the fullness of God in Christ, this brings us joy. The fruit of the Spirit, Paul says in Galatians, is joy (5:22). The kingdom of God, Paul says in Romans, is joy in the Holy Spirit (14:17). This is a highly charged subjective and experiential reality. So instead of looking for happiness and good times in the sinful excesses of the world, we are *instead* to find our happiness by being constantly "*filled*

in the *Spirit*” – filled up with all the fullness of God in Christ. This is our true happiness. It’s our true contentment. Or as Hendriksen would say: our true exhilaration. He writes:

“Intoxication... is the devil’s poor substitute for the ‘joy unspeakable and full of glory’ which God provides... The Ephesians are urged to seek a higher, far better, source of exhilaration.”

And this exhilaration is found as we are filled up with a deeper and deeper understanding of God’s gracious, saving purposes not only for us, but for His entire creation. God intends for us to be exhilarated – to be filled with an ecstatic joy over what He has done, what He is doing, and what He has promised He will do. And so this explains why Paul goes on to say what he says next. “And do not get drunk with wine, in which is dissipation, but be filled in the Spirit...”

### **III. “speaking to one another with psalms and hymns and songs that are spiritual”**

“Psalms” and “hymns” and “songs” are all synonyms for the same thing (cf. Lincoln; O’Brien; Thielman). And so once again, Paul piles up words to express the passion and joy of his own heart. Calvin sums everything up beautifully:

“The children of this world are accustomed to indulge in deep drinking as an excitement to mirth. Such carnal excitement is contrasted with that holy joy of which the Spirit of God is the Author, and which produces entirely opposite effects. To what does drunkenness lead? To unbounded licentiousness – to unbridled, indecent merriment. And to what does spiritual joy lead, when it is most strongly excited? To psalms, and hymns, and [songs].”

Isn’t it a wonderful thing? Singing is the natural outflow and expression of joy in the heart. And if that joy is produced by our being filled up with God in Christ through the Spirit, then the psalms and hymns and songs that we sing will obviously be *spiritual* (inspired by the Spirit). The point isn’t that they are spontaneous (though this may happen at times), but rather that they all have for their inspiration the gracious, saving purposes of God.

The world parties with drunkenness. The Christian makes merry with psalms, and hymns, and songs that are spiritual – psalms and hymns and songs that have for their theme the fathomless mysteries of God’s saving will. What a contrast this is! How inconceivable and incomprehensible must be the one to the other! How totally different is the Christian’s happiness from the happiness of the world!

What Paul literally says here is “speaking among yourselves.” So the context seems to be times when Christians are gathered together for fellowship and worship together. When Christians who are filled in the Spirit gather together for fellowship, what do they want to do? They want to make merry *together*. They want to be glad *together* in their understanding and experience of God’s gracious, saving purposes. And so they speak to one another in spiritual psalms and hymns and songs. Paul says in Colossians:

- ✓ Colossians 3:16 (NASB) — Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom *teaching* and *admonishing* one another with psalms and hymns and songs [that are spiritual].

So we see that the content of our songs should have for its substance the “word of Christ” and always be fit for teaching and admonishing one another. Paul says in Colossians chapter one:

- ✓ Colossians 1:28 — We proclaim Him, *admonishing* every man and *teaching* every man with all wisdom, so that we may present every man complete in Christ.

The songs that we sing together should always be fit for teaching and instructing each other in the wonderful mysteries of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. As an example of this, consider these hymns from the early church:

- ✓ Colossians 1:15–20 — He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.
- ✓ Philippians 2:6–11 — who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.
- ✓ 1 Timothy 3:16 — Great indeed, we confess, is the mystery of godliness: He was manifested in the flesh, vindicated by the Spirit, seen by angels, proclaimed among the nations, believed on in the world, taken up in glory.

In comparison with the teaching and example of Scripture, the majority of what passes today for Christian music (whether on the radio or in our churches) should be immediately discarded. The point here isn’t what is good, or better, but what is best. The point here isn’t legalism. The point is holy joy – true exhilaration. Paul’s words also speak to the way that many churches “do” singing in our day. Many of these churches love God, preach the Gospel, and are very sincere, but Uzzah was also sincere when he “put out his hand to hold the ark, because the oxen nearly upset it.”

- ✓ 1 Chronicles 13:10 — And the anger of the LORD was kindled against Uzzah, and he struck him down because he put out his hand to the ark, and he died there before God.

One commentator says this: “Uzzah’s offense consisted in the fact that he had touched the ark with profane feelings, although with good intentions, namely to prevent its rolling over and falling from the cart.” (Keil and Delitzsch) What were these “profane feelings” mixed with

“good intentions”? Another commentator says this: “Uzzah was therefore a type of all who with good intentions, humanly speaking... interfere in the affairs of the kingdom of God, from the notion that they are in danger, and with the hope of saving them.” (Gerlach; quoted in Keil and Delitzsch) I wonder how much of what happens in “worship” today is unconsciously driven by the *fear* that we must keep the Gospel and the kingdom of God from becoming irrelevant in a changing culture? And so we enlist “worship teams.” Through the focus on the people in “front” we subtly emphasize the “concert” feel. Our songs become more catchy, but more difficult to sing together as a community – especially without some “beat” to hold them together. While not necessarily false, our songs become more and more doctrinally and theologically shallow. They no longer teach and instruct and admonish. We no longer have the consciousness of speaking *to one another* and *with one another* in our songs – reminding each other of the great and wonderful doctrines of the Gospel. I believe that much of the way that many very sincere churches “do worship” today is clearly, and very seriously opposed to the principles of God’s Word. And I say these things not for the sake of being critical or judgmental, but so that we might not be deceived and robbed of the true source of joy and exhilaration by the all too convincing counterfeits in the church today. The goal in every generation and in every culture is this: to have songs that the people of God can sing together (I believe this will usually mean that they can be easily sung together without musical accompaniment if necessary) – songs that celebrate the saving purposes of God in such a way that we are all taught and admonished by each other in the deep truths and right application of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

But as we’ve said already, the point here is not just doing things in the “right way” or having the “right words” in our songs. “And do not get drunk with wine, in which is dissipation, but be filled in the Spirit, speaking to one another with psalms and hymns and songs that are spiritual...”

#### **IV. “singing and psalmodizing in your heart to the Lord”**

One hundred years ago, “psalmodizing” was a word. I know it’s not anymore, but I use it here so you can see how in the Greek Paul is repeating the words he just used, but in reverse order:

“Speaking to one another with **psalms** and hymns and songs that are spiritual, singing and **psalmodizing** in your heart to the Lord.”

The point here is that the songs we use to speak *to one another* are at the *same time* the *same songs* that we use to sing *to the Lord*. The songs we sing to the Lord should be songs that instruct and admonish one another. And so we should always be asking ourselves – “Which songs are *best* suited to this goal?” Not, “Which songs are good?” but “Which songs are better, and even best?”

But now here’s the main point: The psalms and hymns and songs that we sing are to be sung *in our hearts to the Lord*. Or we could say, “*from* our hearts *to* the Lord.” O’Brien says: “*Heart* here signifies the whole of one’s being. The entire person should be filled with songs of praise, thereby expressing the reality of life in the Spirit.” But many of the churches today who do things in the “right way” and have all the “right words” are not truly singing “*from their hearts*.” They are not truly singing “*to the Lord*.” They know nothing of exhilaration – of true holy joy

and merriment. What about us? When Christians who are truly *filled* in the *Spirit* gather together, what do they want to do? They want to make merry together. They want to be glad together in their understanding and experience of God’s gracious, saving purposes. And so they speak to one another in spiritual psalms and hymns and songs that are spiritual, singing and making music from their hearts to the Lord.

**V. “giving thanks always for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God, even to the Father”**

The underlying, constant theme in all of our songs should be thanksgiving (cf. Col. 3:16). Thanksgiving *always*, for *all things*, in the *name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God, even to the Father*. That’s a lot of words, but they *all* help to express the breadth and length and height and depth (“always for all things”) of the gracious, saving purposes of God in Christ Jesus (“in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God, even to the Father”). There is nothing that ever happens in our lives that falls outside of these gracious saving purposes for you and for me. Nothing. Paul writes in Romans:

- ✓ Romans 8:28-29 — And we know that for those who love God *all things* work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son.

This explains *why* we give thanks always for *all things*. Paul says that we are to give thanks “in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, to God, even to the Father.” This explains *why* we are to give thanks always for *all things*. The underlying, constant attitude and theme in *all* of our Spirit-inspired songs—*every one*—should be thanksgiving. O’Brien writes:

“God’s people, both corporately and individually, are to have a thankful attitude of mind and heart which comes to expression regularly in thanksgiving and praise. Gratitude to God, which permeates their whole being, will be obvious as they express their praise of him constantly.”

But how rarely do we hear on the lips of some Christians thanksgiving to God for the gift of His Son! How rarely, it seems, are Christians today truly *filled* in the Spirit!

“Do not get drunk with wine, in which is dissipation, but be filled in the Spirit, speaking to one another with psalms and hymns and songs that are spiritual, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord, giving thanks always for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God, even to the Father.”

Calvin concludes for us:

“This is a pleasure which ought never to lose its relish... this is an exercise of which we ought never to weary. Innumerable benefits which we receive from God yield fresh cause of joy and thanksgiving... It will argue ungodly and disgraceful sloth, if [we] shall not *always* give thanks—if [our] whole life shall not be spent in the study and exercise of praising God.” (Calvin)