

Before You Say, "I Do"

Humans Are Unique

By Bob Vincent

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Bible Text: Ephesians 5:18-33
Preached on: Sunday, May 19, 2019

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Notice what he says in Ephesians 5:18, he said, "Don't be drunk with wine because that's debauchery." Now when somebody's drunk, you know it, right? You can smell it. You can hear it. You can see it. I remember my boy was interested in politics and so we were invited to a particular political party's state Christmas party and we were there and I said to Ben, "Now Ben, I'm going to drink some soda water with lime in it, and I want you to observe the people who are going to the free bar and what they're drinking, and then observe what happens as they've had another drink and another drink and another drink." And it was interesting that the politicians in that particular political party in Louisiana were careful to drink soda water with lime in it. Why? Because people end up making promises they can't keep otherwise; they end up saying terrible things. My daddy used to have an expression, "That's the liquor talking," and so when people are drunk, when they're full of wine, you know it. You can see it. You can hear it. And you can smell it.

I learned to preach on the street corners of Asheville, North Carolina, and the only place the police would let us preach was in the particular district of town where the bars were, where people were three sheets to the wind, and I've told you this story before, I was preaching outside a bar and because I studied opera, I learned how to breathe and project my voice, and I was evidently booming so much that the bartender came out of there with a shotgun and pointed it at me. That's when you know that the clock has reached 11:30.

So as you visit with people who are lifelong drunks and living on the street, I mean, the smell is overpowering. So what am I getting at with "be not drunk with wine"? This is not a temperance sermon, this is a sermon about marriage, but the point I'm making is when somebody is drunk, they are full of wine. Now by the same token, when someone is full of the Holy Spirit, you can hear it and you can see it. It manifests itself, this being filled with the Spirit, by how people deal with each other. So being filled with the Holy Spirit is both like and unlike being filled with alcohol.

Now St. Paul gives us five participles to describe the Spirit-filled life. Here they are right here and it's very important, in fact, the participles are carried over in this English translation. So as we are filled with God's Spirit, it manifests itself, that filling with him, the Holy Spirit, in several ways.

First he says in verse 19, "addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs." So we are speaking and we're speaking God's words. We may not quote them exactly but we are having God's words be part of us in a profound way. You know, it's interesting as we think about the Spirit-filled life, if you compare this with Colossians 3:16, you discover that we are to let the word of Christ dwell in us with all wisdom. So the two things are two sides of one coin, to have God's word dwelling in us with all wisdom is, in a sense, the same thing as being filled with the Spirit. So it isn't that somehow or another if somebody's filled with the Spirit they will come running down the aisle here and leap over the communion table and take my place, it is that they will manifest a Christian life based on the word of God in their speaking and their acting. So he says, "addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody." So there we have three participles already. So the Spirit-filled life is a life that's manifested by how we talk and by what we sing, and the content of that singing are the psalms and the hymns and the songs of the Spirit.

Now he goes on and he says that this is "singing and making melody to the Lord in your heart." Now I always appreciate Martha's playing. I've never heard her hit a bad note. I'm very inspired by it, but the focus here is not how well you play an instrument, it's making sure that you've cued your heart to sing God's praise. So when we come together, you may not be able to carry a tune in a bucket, but if your heart is right with the Lord, that's what he really wants. God is far more impressed with a cheerful heart that is expressing gratitude to him as we sing and as we speak, than he is by profoundly competent musicians, and I think that we are all impressed and the Lord is appreciative of Martha.

So as we go on, we see something else here and this is really important. Look at verse 20, the Spirit-filled life is dominated by a cheerfulness, "giving thanks," he says, "always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ." And if you look back over your life, if you could look at the confusion of life and you could see it from God's perspective, this is not original with me, this illustration, if you look at the backside of a tapestry, it doesn't make much sense but if you look at the front of a tapestry, it really does. So if we understand that God is orchestrating the events of our lives for our good, for our blessing, to accomplish great good in our lives and the great good in our life of all things is to be like the Lord Jesus, that's God's goal for your life and my life, to make us like the Lord Jesus, and so we should, therefore, praise God in any and all circumstances.

I've had terrible things happen to me, the worst of which was when Sandy was run over by a log truck on October 10, 1988, and that was a very difficult time in our lives, but I've learned that that was a wonderful event in our lives because God's plan was unfolding and it made our marriage better, it made me a better person, it made us people who prayed together. So we want, if we are filled with the Spirit, to be able to work our way through the issue, the disappointment, the hurt, the pain, to the point of being able to give thanks to God, and as you are able to do that, God will bless you.

I remember when I was fired as a pastor in Wichita, Kansas. Yup, there are many stories I could tell you. And the only job that I could get and I applied for all these jobs, the only one I could get was to be a part-time janitor in a Methodist church. I had fallen from

grace. And so, anyhow, I remember talking with Sandy who was my best friend in the world, and I said, "But that won't even pay anything except for our groceries," and she said, "But at least it'll pay for the groceries." So I took that job and, by the way, that was the one thing that was the decisive event for the Pulpit Search Committee in Alexandria when they decided to call me, that I was working as a janitor, and that made a huge impact on them.

Giving thanks. Well, one day I got a letter from a friend, this is before the days of computers and internet and all of that, and I opened the letter and he said, "Have you given thanks to God for what's happened to you?" And I thought to myself, "Yeah, thanks a lot, God. Thanks." And as I was mopping the floor and doing things and everything that could go wrong went wrong with that job, I ruined their brick floor because I used hot soapy water trying to remove the wax, and I knew nothing about modern waxes and ionized bonding, and I eventually, working overtime as if I'd had a full-time job for part-time pay, using a paint scraper and steel wool, removed all of that nasty wax that looked like somebody had dripped a candle, and it was a large foyer with a short stairwell going down to their fellowship hall, and a double-wide circular stairwell going up into their Sunday school room.

So I was not a happy camper, but one day I decided, I was deeply convicted as I was mopping another floor, this time knowing how to do it correctly, I decided to do it, and it was kind of like I used to have a little motor scooter and you had to kick start it, and finally it would start, and that's how I was able to be thankful. I'd have begun to say the words and finally my heart got where my mouth was and that's what you have to always remember, you don't wait until you feel like praising God, you begin to praise God with your mouth even though you are feeling like you're a hypocrite. You don't wait until you have no doubts to recite the Apostles' Creed, you say it praying to God, "O God, grant that as I say these words, the reality of what I'm speaking with my mouth will become the reality of my heart."

Now that's a great spiritual lesson and God taught me that because it wasn't long, that very afternoon, that I began actually to have thankfulness in my heart and I could truly say from my heart, "God, thank you that this has happened for me because something good is coming out of it." And do you know what happened? I was able to say, "God, I'm willing to do whatever you want me to do," and do you know what happened? I got a telephone call from the Eastminster Presbyterian Church in Wichita, Kansas that is now in the EPC, and the minister of that church said, "Bob, we want to hire you as our full-time janitor," and the minister did not live in their manse. He wanted his own home so they had a vacant manse and he wanted me to come and he said, "We will pay you \$10,000 a year," which was \$4,000 a year more than I was making. "We will give you a house to live in free of charge," because I was going to have to move out of the manse that I was living in. "But here are the conditions. 1. You will make a commitment to us that from the day you agree to take this job with our elders, you will not take another job for at least six months because it's gonna take us time to get you trained to learn how to be a janitor who doesn't ruin floors." And he said, "As you live in the manse, you will be responsible to lock and unlock the church when we have meetings at night." I said,

"Okay, Frank." I said, "That sounds like a wonderful deal. What about if we meet this coming Sunday?" This is right after I'd said, "Lord, I'm grateful for what's happened to me and I'm willing to do whatever you want me to do." That Wednesday night on the only Wednesday night that our mid-week prayer meeting met in the church, which was next door to the manse, I got a phone call from the Pulpit Search Committee in Alexandria, Louisiana and they said, they asked me a lot of questions and I went over and told Sandy afterwards, I said, "Well, that was an interesting phone call I got. I wonder what might happen?"

Well, we were sitting down at the kitchen table when the phone rang again, because the same phone rang in the house and in the church, and they said, "Could you come this Sunday?" I said, "I've got a deal but I can get out of it." And so the next morning I called Mr. K., and I said, "Look, can we put that meeting off?" And he said, "Sure." And so they flew me down there on a Saturday night in August of 1975 and they made a decision to call me shortly after that when they could have a congregational meeting, and we moved, and that's where we still live. It was tied in directly to our being thankful and giving thanks out loud to the point that like kick starting that motor scooter, my heart got right. So that's another example participle of a Spirit-filled life.

Now we come to the fifth participle and the fifth participle is directly related to what we're talking about today. The fifth participle is in verse 21, "submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ." You see, if you don't have the perspective of verse 21, you will completely misunderstand the verses that begin in 22 and following, because it has a heading in the pew Bibles that says "Wives and Husbands." I see it all as one big unit. Submitting to one another.

So here's the question. I am called upon by God to submit to you, and you're called upon by God to submit to me, we're called upon to submit to one another. Now in the practical way of the relationship in a home, husbands are required by God to be submissive to their wives. "What did he say? You must be kidding me? Submissive husbands? Husbands who submit to their wives?" Yes. That's what the context is, submitting to one another out of respect for Christ. "What in the world?" Well, bear with me for a moment. There is a difference in how a husband submits to his wife and how a wife submits to her husband, and there are other relationships, like chapter 6 where children submit to their parents and parents submit to children. We'll get to that on another Sunday. Submitting to one another.

So how is the wife to submit to the husband? Again in the context, here's how he says it and you can read it for yourselves, verse 22, "as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands." Okay, you've heard that before and I'm not going to rub it in, what I'm going to do is race through those verses to the next verse because this is how husbands submit to their wives, "Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her." Did Christ give up golf for the church? Did he give up hunting for the church? Or fishing? Did he give up going to ballgames for the church? What does he give

up? You see it there in verse 25, he "gave himself up." That's the most comprehensive and inclusive statement you can possibly come up with. In other words, the Lord Jesus Christ gave up everything for the church. He gave himself up.

Now at this point you begin to realize that the demand on a husband is far greater than the demand on a wife because the husband has to have wisdom to know how to submit to his wife. Why? Because the husband has to figure out what are the needs of my wife, the needs of my children, what are they? And that means that a husband has got to be Spirit-filled, again, the five participles: speaking, singing, and so on, giving thanks and submitting.

What are the needs of my wife? A man needs to become discerning. He needs to have sense about the things that are important to his wife. Why? Because as Peter talks to us, who was a married man, he tells us that men tend to not be real discerning about their wives and the needs of women. I'm going to tell you this after counseling, as I've said, I don't know somewhere in excess of 500 couples, I've learned something about men. I don't like to look in a mirror, first of all, but I've learned something about men: when it comes to how to handle a woman, there's another song, Lerner & Loewe, "How to handle a woman?/ "There's a way," said the wise old man/ "A way known by every woman/ Since the whole rigmarole began. He's gotta love her/ Love her, merely love her." But what is it? It's no easy task to love a woman. Why? Because we're clods, guys. We're just clods. We don't understand them. We can't figure them out. Women understand men vastly more than men understand women. I know all you women are agreeing with me, but you don't want to be shouting out, as in certain congregations when I have the privilege to fill their pulpits, "Amen, brother, preach it! Talk, talk, talk!" But you've got to be agreeing with me. Men are clods. Men are insensitive. Men don't realize how roughshod they happen to walk over their wives.

So a man is called upon to be the spiritual leader of his house by submitting himself first and foremost to the Lord Jesus Christ who has submitted himself to God the Father, and as we do that and we pray for wisdom and discernment, God will give it to us because the task of a man is far more difficult than the task of a woman because we're called upon to sacrifice ourselves, everything for our wife. "He gave himself up for her," verse 25, "that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish." Now look at verse 28, "In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church, because we are members of his body." In other words, the husband is called upon to a life of complete self-denial first and foremost as a Christian, because that's the life of Christ.

Do you know that John Calvin in his "Institutes" has a section in "The Institutes of the Christian Religion," on the Christian life and Calvin says that the very essence of the Christian life for men, for women, for kings, for subjects, for employers and employees,

and for children and for parents, is self-denial. Self-denial. Not what I want but what do you want, God? And that's the life of Christ. So we submit in every way to one another.

Then he says here that the husband is to do that for the needs of the wife. Now, he quotes from Genesis in verse 31, "Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh." We've talked about that before, but a number of huge issues in marriage failure is when people are still clinging to momma and daddy because when a marriage takes place the relationship with momma and daddy comes to an end in the way that it has been, and a new fundamental relationship begins between the man and the woman.

Now that's the job of the man and if men were all like that, nobody would ever be debating about the role of a woman, submitting to her husband, because if men were truly submitting to the needs of their wives, nobody would be chafing under this at all. The trouble is we're boorish. We're clods. We're insensitive. We're jerks. We are, not the ladies.

Now moving back to the ladies in verse 22. What is the responsibility of a woman? The responsibility of a man is to determine, which is hard to determine, what are the needs of my wife? The responsibility of the woman is to determine what are the desires of my husband and unless those desires are contrary to God's moral standards. What is the standard in everything? Well, what do you make of that? Well, I'll say a couple of things about this passage. The first is this is not limited to the first century. This is not culturally conditioned. This is how to have a happy home.

I'll give you another lesson. If you think about the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said that before you go mess with the speck in your brother's eye, or your brother's and sister's eyes, deal with the 2x4 in your own. Here's a little lesson I've learned in counseling over the years: I can see the tiny fault in your eye so much clearer than I can see the beam in my own eye. Here's another thing: it takes multiple positives to overcome one negative. How does your brain work? You know how your brain works, somebody could have done really good things for you but what do you remember? You remember the bad thing they did. It may have been one out of 100 things that happened but you remember it, and you remember it with exaggeration, wiping out in your own mind all of the positive things this person did for you. You remember the negative, that's human nature. It's who we are. It's how we work. It's the selective memory. We are fault-finders and nitpickers by nature in a fallen world, and so translate this down to marriage: you can remember the failures of your wife far more often and frequently and with greater intensity than you can remember the wonderful good things she does, and the same things with regard to your husband, and we are oblivious to our own faults. That's why I said I don't like to look in the mirror because when I point the finger at you, I've got three pointing back at me.

That's human natural, so how do you deal with it? You deal with it by realizing that the call is equally to men and to women to submit to one another out of respect for Christ, and if you can understand this issue as a woman or a man, that this is how you express

you love and submission to Christ by loving and submitting to one another even though the role of a man and the role of woman are expressed differently. What does he want? Is it contrary to Scripture? If it isn't, I need to try to do it. What does she need? She will often tell you what she needs but oftentimes she won't, you know how it goes. "Are you mad about something?" No. That's how it is so how do you find out what's going on? You've got to get on your knees before God, "Lord, show me. Lord, show me." And if you're a man, you say, "Lord, you know I'm just a clod. I'm so insensitive. Help me."

So those are some things that I would point out about the nature of marriage and here's the final thing: before you say, "I do," you've gotta ask this question, "Am I willing to be a servant?" That's a question a man has to ask. That's a question a woman has to ask. And if you're not willing to be the servant of that man or that woman, you're not ready for marriage and it'll be just like the time after I had married a couple and we were in our fellowship hall and the photographer turned to me and he said, "This marriage isn't gonna last," and that was when she went to feed him some wedding cake and she did this number, rubbed it all in his face, all in his face, and he said, "It isn't gonna last." And do you know that photographer understood the truth, it wasn't gonna last. She was angry with him because of what he had done the night before.

So what do you do? You look back to Jesus. Jesus died on the cross for our sins. That's what this thing about husbands is based on and that means we've gotta forgive each other. Every day, every day, husbands need to forgive their wives and wives need to forgive their husbands and start with a clean slate and that's hard to do because the devil is a stenographer and he will love, would love to tell you, "Oh, well, if this were the first time..." No, you've gotta forgive and wipe the slate clean every day and if you will do that, God will bless you. Am I giving you an absolute guarantee of success? No, I can't do that, but I can tell you when we refuse to forgive and put it behind us, what does that mean? It doesn't mean that somehow or another you have amnesia. God doesn't remember our sins against us anymore and yet the sins of a whole bunch of people who are in heaven right now are recorded in the Bible. It means we no longer hold it against them and that's based on what Jesus did for us. Jesus died for you and me that we might be free people and have a clean slate with God on May 19, 2019.

Let's pray.

Lord, bless us as we ponder these things, not to feel ashamed or embarrassed or awkward but, Lord, to remember that as you have forgiven us, we are called upon to forgive each other and to serve each other in love. In Jesus' name. Amen.