

Walking Under the Influence – *Ephesians 5:17-18*

Introduction – “Walk in unity.” “Walk in holiness.” “Walk in love.” “Walk in the light.” “Walk in wisdom.” Once we become Christians, we really do want to know what we are to do and what we are to think. But the temptation of the flesh, even here, is to become Pharisaical “do-gooders” and people who treat the Word of God like it was primarily a debater’s index. To actually follow these commands of Ephesians 4-6, we must not confuse the means (what we do and think) with the goal (union and communion with the indwelling Christ). (*HT – Bryan Chapell*). “*Be filled with the Spirit*” is the topic. To be filled with the Spirit is to be under the sanctifying influence of God – in a relational, not mechanical, way. It is the ongoing life of walking according to the gracious glory of Christ personally revealed in His people. And it is the key to avoiding an existence of grinding out a life of raw ethics and philosophy – as though either could save anybody.

Drunkenness: A Poignant Contrast – After exhorting the Ephesians to seek to know the will of the Lord rather than walking in a foolish way, Paul contrasts two different kinds of “walking under the influence.” Eph 5:6 should still be ringing in our ears: “*Let no one deceive you...*” because in one sense, we are always under the influence of something or someone else. We live according to what we believe and we all believe in something transcendent, outside of ourselves. In other words, we will be filled with something.

This is not a passage primarily about abstinence or temperance; rather, the command, “*Do not get drunk with wine*” is a synecdoche (a part for the whole), prohibiting a sinful influence of anything of this world over our thinking and actions. Drunkenness is a lifestyle of unbelief and a picture of a lifestyle of unbelief – lazy, blurred, indistinct, leading to reckless living that would darken the very light we are claiming to be in Christ. The words, songs, entertainment and actions of the drunk do not get progressively more and more pure – quite the opposite. A side note: the prohibition of drunkenness with wine does not somehow allow intoxication with margaritas, marijuana, etc. Wine is used also as a synecdoche – and probably because wine in particular is also permitted and encouraged to be used for completely appropriate purposes throughout the scriptures.

Filled By the Spirit – As we said, we are going to be filled with something. And Paul must have had Pentecost in mind when he chose this contrast (Acts 2:13). There is something about the Spirit-filled life that makes the unbelieving world think that we are crazy-drunk in the way we “waste” our lives away. If we allow our flesh to influence us, we will go one way. If we allow the Spirit to fill us, to influence us, to overtake us, we will go another.

The phrase “*filled with the Spirit*” should not be understood as a direct correlation between wine and Spirit as though the Spirit was something that we could be running a little low on. Col 3:15-16, a parallel passage, helps shine light on this. “*Let the peace of God rule... Let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom...*” are evidenced by the same results (Eph 5:19-21 and Col 3:17). Instead of “*filled with the Spirit*,” a better translation would be “*filled by the Spirit*.” The Spirit is filling us with His Word. This is the Word-Light-Power of God by His Spirit that raised Jesus from the dead and that we are to understand is ours in Christ (Eph 1:16-19), and that fills all in all (Eph 1:23).

Clarification: Sealing, Filling, and Sanctification – Paul has already taught that we have been sealed with the Holy Spirit (Eph 1:13-14). That is a one-time event. But the filling by the Spirit is to be a present and ongoing reality. Sanctification begins at the time of the new birth. It is all of grace by means of the Holy Spirit in the name of Jesus (1 Cor 6:11). At that time, we were washed. We were unclean, but now we are made clean. We were sanctified: set apart for a holy purpose. And we were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus. The Holy Spirit can grab anyone (look at the list of 1 Cor 6:9-10) and does. Nothing is too unclean, too unholy, too Gentile-ish, not even me and you.

But then there is also the ongoing work of sanctification. This is also the operation of the Spirit and is appropriated by faith alone (Gal 3:1-4). By grace, we can avail ourselves of the means which the Spirit uses: the Word of God (John 17:17, 1 Pet 1:22-2:3), partaking of the sacraments (1 Cor 10:16, 12:13), giving oneself to prayer (John 14:13-14), and receiving the gracious discipline of God’s providence (John 15:2, Rom 5:3-5). Are you availing your soul to these graces? More importantly, are you availing yourself to these graces by faith?

The Fine Point of Faith – Unbelief sees rules, a series of steps, a path, and a set of neat proverbial sayings to live by and understand the world. All of this can be attempted without faith and that is the damning work of a false gospel (Gal 1:8-9). Faith looks to Jesus. Faith grasps no ethic abstracted from the Bible; faith grasps Jesus and is filled by His Spirit. And that filling causes a Christian to live according to the Spirit and not the flesh (Rom 8:4-6). To be “*filled by the Spirit*” is to be under the sanctifying influence of God. It is the ongoing life of walking according to the gracious glory of Christ personally revealed in His people.