

Be Filled With The Spirit

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[0 : 0 0] reading. If you keep your Bibles open at Ephesians 5, that would be a great help to me. And as always, you can find an outline inside the notice sheet if you'd like to see where we're going and follow the points. But it's important that we ask for God's help as we turn to his word. So let's pray together. Father God, we thank you for your word.

And we long to be changed by you. So we pray that by your spirit you will open your word to our hearts and open up our hearts to your word. For Jesus' name's sake. Amen. Well, I don't know what comes into your mind when you think of a spiritual person. You might think of yourself as a very spiritual person and have ideas about what that means, what that would look like. Sometimes if we're thinking of somebody else and they're described as a very spiritual person, it's got a kind of intangible feel to it, hasn't it? The idea of someone whose mind isn't set on sort of practical things in the world. It's on a different plane to everybody else's. They're just thinking about heaven or ultimate reality all day. Well, we're in this series, in this book, Ephesians as a church family on Sundays and in growth groups. And chapters four to six of the book are immensely practical.

But in these verses, we get urged to be spirit-filled, spirit-filled believers. The command to be spirit-filled comes in verse 18 there. But really the whole section is about being filled with the spirit. And you can see the way that works because there's a structure to verses 15 to 21. There's three things we're told not to do and then to do. So in verse 15, don't be unwise, not as unwise, but as wise. Then verse 17, don't be foolish, but understand. And then verse 21, sorry, and verse 18, don't get drunk on wine, be filled with the spirit. So three things not to do and three things to do that kind of come as a package together. Be filled with the spirit. And we know from chapter one of Ephesians that every Christian has the spirit living in us. But this command to be filled with the spirit is a continuous command. It's not that we're sort of having to prize the spirit from God.

It's about us taking hold of what we already have from God in Christ, wanting the spirit to be more fully at work in us, making us more like Jesus, whom we love and follow. Now in chapter one, we heard that it's Jesus who fills everything in every way. And the church is his body. It's growing up into him.

And then in chapter three, Paul prayed that we'd be filled to the measure with all the fullness of God. And now he says, be filled with the spirit. So being spirit filled isn't something different to that.

[2 : 5 8] It's about the living God, the triune God being fully at work in us to transform us, making his home in us. So what will the spirit filled person look like? Well, we get three commands this morning in this section. Walk carefully, live wisely and sing joyfully. So first of all, walk carefully. That comes in verse 15. If you just have a look with me. Be very careful then how you live, not as unwise, but as wise. Now it's literally, be very careful how you walk. Our translation uses the word live whenever in Ephesians Paul used the word walk. And it's a good translation. It doesn't mean live.

It's the way you live, the way you walk. But there's just a danger that by doing that, we miss that Paul keeps repeating that word again and again in the book. He's just used the word walk since chapter four.

Well, chapter four, verse one, literally is, I urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling you've received. In verse 17 of chapter four, he said, you must no longer walk as the Gentiles do. In chapter five, verse two, he said, walk in love as Christ loved us. Chapter five, verse eight, at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light. Walk, walk, walk. And now, be very careful then, how you walk. And it's a way of seeing that this letter is a seamless robe. It's one piece of cloth, the letter Ephesians. And we're splitting it up as a church into kind of bite-sized chunks so that we can understand it. But we have to keep remembering, we're looking at one part each week of a bigger story in the book. So when Paul says, be careful how you walk at this point, it's because he made us aware earlier in Ephesians of how darkly we used to walk, how dark our non-Christian past was, if you're a Christian. In chapter two, he said this. He said, we were trapped by the world, the flesh, and the devil. I've got it on the screen. You were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked. There it is again. Following the course of this world, that's our culture and its values, following the prince of the power of the air, that's the devil, verse three, among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, so living for ourselves and our own desires. That's what we were. And those habits, that direction of life, it's still deeply ingrained in us when we come to faith in Christ. Many of you will know Adolf Eichmann was one of the main organizers of the Holocaust.

It's said that he boasted that he'd been responsible for over five million people dying. Now, he was brought to trial in 1961, and when he was brought to trial, they brought survivors of the Holocaust at the trial. He was there in the dock, and they cross-examined and re-examined these witnesses. One of them was a survivor called Yehi el-Dinur, and he'd been imprisoned in Auschwitz.

He took stand to give evidence. Very dramatic. This is what happened when he was on the stand. Mr. Hausner, could I perhaps, Mr. Dinur, put a few questions to you, if you will consent?

[6 : 22] President of court, Mr. Dinur, please, please listen to Mr. Hausner and to me. Shh! Shortly, just five minutes into being interviewed, about what had happened at Auschwitz with Eichmann, that he collapsed. Now, years later, he was asked why he'd collapsed. People thought maybe he was terror-stricken by seeing Adolf Eichmann. He actually said, it was remarkable, he said, what had made him collapse was that going into court and seeing Eichmann, he realized Eichmann wasn't a demon, he was just an ordinary man. And he said this, I was afraid about myself.

I saw that I am capable of doing this. I am exactly like he. Extraordinary. What he'd realized was this frightening truth about the human condition. We're all broken and fallen, and we're shaped by the people around us. The values we have about good and evil are formed by cultural influences on us. And put in the wrong place, with the wrong influences and values and doctrines, we are all capable of terrible things. Now, Paul says in Ephesians 2, that's how we used to walk, that principle of life. Not, of course, not that we've all fallen to the same depths, not that all sin is equally serious, and yet that fundamentally, when you're not walking with God, from his perspective, you're walking in darkness, dead in your transgressions and sins, under the control of the world, the flesh, and the devil.

That's what every Christian comes to realize about ourselves, sometimes gradually over time as we look back. And then we see how wonderful it is that there's been this complete transformation, all of God's work from darkness into light. You see, the more we're willing to grasp how dark our past was, the more we come closer to a better measure of the love of God for us, that even in that condition, he loved us with a great love. Chapter 2, verse 4 says this, because of his great love for us, God who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ, even when we were dead in transgressions. It is by grace you have been saved.

So Jesus rose again and can offer us, any of us, new life, and we were given that new life so that we would walk differently. So chapter 2, verse 10 finishes that little section saying, we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them. That word walk again. So the primary motivation for living differently in the Christian life isn't to get ourselves into God's good books, it's that we're completely different people now. He has saved us, and we should be who we really are, his handiwork.

We're not saved by our good works, but we are saved by him for good works. He set us free from the power of sin, and we don't have to sin anymore. So he wants us to live out that new freedom.

[9 : 35] When we disobey God and continue to live like we used to, or like the world does around us, against God's will, it's like we're denying who we really are. It's a bit like if you imagine you had a hostage, or you were a hostage, you've been taken hostage, and you're living in a prison cell for years and years and years in a different country, and there's no way you can get out.

And one night, the SAS come, and they break in, and they break the doors of your cell open, and they grab you, and they pull you out. You could never have done it yourself, and you've been rescued. And suddenly, you've got this new freedom that you haven't had for years.

But because you spent so long in the prison cell, it's as though some days you feel you're so in the habit of living as a prisoner, you go back, and you go back through the doors of the cell you were in, and you sit there like you used to sit. And people come in, and they're urging you to come out. You're free now. The doors are open. Be who you are. Live out your freedom that has been won for you. So be very careful how you walk. That's the first thing we're commanded to do.

And our second command this morning is live wisely. The command to be wise comes in verse 15. We already had that. Not as unwise, but as wise. And then it's explained in verse 17. Just have a look.

Therefore, do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord's will is. So true wisdom is to live in God's world in accordance with God's will.

[11 : 11] Lots of us long for guidance about the big decisions in life. Where should I live, God? Should I get married, God? Who should I marry, God? What job should I do? We long for guidance in those decisions. And sometimes that guidance comes as we pray through decisions, and we push on doors.

We can come to a settled rest that what we're doing is what God wants us to do. But it's worth saying that in lots of our big decisions in life, because God is generous, we are free to choose.

And we sometimes fall into a paralysis of indecision, waiting for guidance. Where does God want me to go? I just want to know where God wants me to be. And forgetting God has put us somewhere today.

And wherever we are today, wherever we live, whoever we're married to, or whether we're single, whatever we're doing for a job, God wants us to be godly, to know his will, and to do it.

God's will is incredibly extensive. The gospel changes everything about us. So in chapter 4, we looked at our relationships with one another as a church family. That was in chapter 4. And we were told be kind to one another, be generous, speak to one another to build each other up. Then last week, we thought about our godliness in the world around us when we're out meeting other people. And Paul gave us two case studies in chapter 5. I don't know whether you remember from last week in verse 3.

[12 : 35] The two case studies were sexual immorality and greed. That word sexual immorality is the word pornea that we get our word pornography from. It's sexual activity outside of marriage. Now, some churches are very good at speaking about sexual immorality and speaking against that.

But they don't speak as often about greed and materialism and social justice. Other churches are really good at speaking about helping the poor and social justice and greed.

But they don't speak about what God says about us sexually and being sexually pure. See, the will of God is so hard as a church family to get the balance right. It's so extensive for us. God calls us to be transformed by him in the whole of our lives. And Paul reminds us here that as we go about living that out and keeping God's commands for him, we also have a very limited commodity in verse 16. He says, making the most of every opportunity because the days are evil.

Literally, Paul says, redeem the time, redeeming the time, buying back every day as a chance to live for God. A vital opportunity we have every day to be light in the darkness around us.

The office or the school or the hospital or the restaurant that you go to to work in tomorrow is your front line in living for Christ. And how we live there makes a difference.

[14 : 08] When we listen to the people we work with and their problems and we take time for them. When we take an interest in our colleagues and we know the name of their spouse and the names of their kids because we care about them. When we play our own part in the team as conscientiously as we can to make a difference. Or even when we stay patient at night holding a baby at half past three in the morning because they won't be put down and go to sleep. None of it is unseen by God. All of it is an opportunity to redeem the time and live as light in the world. That's what it looks like to live wisely. So what's going on on the inside as we live like that? How are we going to feel? Well, as we walk carefully and live wisely, our third command is to sing joyfully. We get the negative and the positive in verse 18. Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit.

Now just to clarify, it mentions wine here, but that doesn't mean that vodka, Guinness and gin are okay. It's drunkenness that is offside for every Christian. And he doesn't give any exceptions there, the Christmas party, special celebrations. So it's not wrong to enjoy alcohol as a gift from God, but it is wrong to have alcohol change your behavior. It grieves the Spirit of God.

And so let me ask, if you're a Christian here this morning, are you someone who needs to take that command more seriously from today onwards with God's help? So instead of letting alcohol control us, we're commanded in verse 18 to let the Spirit of God control us. And then Paul gives a description of what the Spirit-filled believer looks like.

And there's nothing miserable here. God isn't out to spoil our fun by filling us with the Spirit. In fact, the big emphasis is on singing. We actually get three marks here of the Spirit-filled believer.

It's all one sentence. In fact, I put it in the notice sheets just to show you how it's constructed grammatically. Paul says, be filled with the Spirit. And then he says five things that characterize the Spirit-filled believer. All one sentence. Singing, thanksgiving, and submitting. Now submitting introduces for us the next section of the letter. And that word that Paul uses there, it's a word that always carries with it, whenever it's used, the idea of submitting to an authority. So it introduces the next section as we look at submission in the household. Slaves to masters at that time, children to parents, and, if that wasn't controversial enough for us, wives to their husbands. Now we're going to look at what that looks like next week. We're going to spend next week and the week after looking at that big section on marriage as a church family. But today, before we get there, we're just going to focus on the other marks of being Spirit-filled, the mark of joyful singing. Just look again at verse 19 with me.

[17 : 14] Speak to one another with psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

It's a great command, isn't it? Singing together. It has a special place in the life of the church to sing. We don't gather to sing because we're particularly singing-type people. We do it because God puts a song in our mouths and he commands us to sing. And we're encouraged by that verse there to sing a whole variety of songs. I guess ancient hymns and contemporary songs are covered by that description, psalms, hymns, spiritual songs. And our singing, we're told there, has two directions.

It's horizontal and vertical. So when we gather as God's people on a Sunday, we come together to encourage each other and to glorify God. And singing has those same goals. It's part of the way we teach and encourage each other. We're called by God to speak the truth in love to each other. And one of the ways we can do that is through our singing in psalms, hymns, spiritual songs. And we see that vital, horizontal dimension explicitly in lots of really good Christian songs, don't we? You might be able to think of some.

Praise to the Lord, the Almighty, the King of creation. Oh, my soul, praise him, for he is thy health and salvation. All ye who hear, brothers and sisters, draw near. Praise him in glad adoration. Praise to the Lord, oh, let all that is in me adore him. All that has life and breath, come now with angels, come now with praises before him. Let the amen sound from his people again. Gladly for all we adore him.

It's a song to one another as well as to God. When I was at theological college, we used to have chapel every day. And there was a guy in our college, Chris, in my ear, who he'd noticed whenever a verse was a bit more about singing to one another than singing to God on the screen. And he used to look around at us all while he was singing. He'd look you in the eye. It felt really weird. It's not really my thing. But you see, spiritually, he was bang on. He was spot on, encouraging us with the words that he was singing. So one of the things that we have to evaluate as a church when it comes to singing together is, does this song work congregationally? That's one of the things our musicians work so hard at. There are some songs that work well in the car and well on the iPod, but not so well when we're singing together because of that horizontal dimension. And in some churches with the right speaker system, you almost get to a point where you can't hear one another singing. But Ephesians 5 says our goal should be that we're singing to God and to one another together. It's not just that the songs have to be directed at each other. Sometimes you can be singing a song to God that still, as other people hear words like, beautiful saviour, wonderful counsellor, clothed in majesty, God of history, you're the way, the truth, the life. That, you know, we're praising God directly, but it helps each other to hear one another sing that. And singing isn't just horizontal. The next thing Paul says is sing and make music in your heart to the Lord. It's vertical as well. Your heart is what you are on the inside. So in other words, Paul is saying, sing to God with everything you've got. Now that might be, for some of us, physically, that looks very expressive, that we're dancing, that our hands are in the air. It might be that if you learn, like me, to sing on the football terraces, it just means you sing loudly. For some of us, whether someone is making melody in their own heart to God will be completely imperceptible on the outside. But what matters is what's going on in our hearts. That's what matters to God, that we are singing with passion for him. So what should we be singing about? Well, we get important help with that in the next verse. See, verse 20, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything. So we're seeing here in these chapters of Ephesians that the spiritual life is a very practical one, the Christian life. It's a life of obedience. But it's a life not of resentful obedience, but of joyful obedience, of thankful obedience to God. And our problem, the reason why a lot of the time we sin, is because we don't feel very thankful. We don't want to live for Christ because we're not overwhelmed with thanks for what he's done for us.

[21 : 58] It's a bit like when you go to the gym, and you know, if you're buying a bottle of drink at the gym, and you put money in the machine, sometimes the money doesn't go down. And so you have to kind of bang the machine. You check no one's watching.

You bang the machine on the side, so that the pound coin will drop, and then the drink comes out for you. It's a bit like that with us when we know the truth about the Christian faith. We know the gospel. We know what Jesus did for us in our heads. But sometimes it hasn't sunk down into our hearts, and really taken hold of us. And the Holy Spirit takes the truth about God that we believe, and he lets it sink in. He does that banging on the side job, so that the truths really start to go into our hearts, and make a difference. When Jesus promised the Holy Spirit in John 16, he said of the Spirit, he will glorify me. In other words, in your lives, the Spirit will overwhelm you with wonder at who Jesus is, and what he's done for us. So that we're thankful, not just as we sing, but thankful through the week, and gladly surrender the whole of our lives to the will of God. So that's the aim, and it should shape our singing. Not that the words we sing should be naive about life. The Psalms grapple with brokenness, and grief, and guilt. And it's appropriate to sing in a real way about our real broken world. But overwhelmingly, in the Bible,

God's people sing to celebrate the wonder of who God is, and what he has done. I was reading a review last week of the new musical La La Land, that people are saying it's going to take the Oscars by storm, in a way that no film ever has since the last one that did. And the reviewer said this, he said, I could almost feel the music performing plastic surgery on my heart, as he watched La La Land.

It's just getting at how powerful music is. It can be dangerous if it's misused, but it's also a great gift from God, isn't it? So that our hearts are engaged by the truth, as well as our heads, and things sink in as we sing together. So we sing because God has given us every spiritual blessing in Christ already, and we hope that one of the fruits of our singing together is that during the week, we feel more thankful to God for what he's done for us in Jesus Christ, and it makes us glad to live for him. So putting that all together, it's worth thinking, what makes a good Christian song?

No song is going to do everything. How about songs that together give us words to sing to God and to each other, telling of our salvation story and expressing our thanks?

[24 : 53] God's words put to music, that stirs up passion in us in a way that is appropriate to the words we're singing, so that we're not just moved by the music, whatever the words are, but the music is helping us to engage with the truths that we sing.

When I was lost, you came and rescued me, reached down into the pit and lifted me, all to see my name written in your wounds, for through your suffering, I am free.

Death is crushed to death. Life is mine to live, won through your selfless love. Ever since by faith I saw the stream, thy flowing womb supply. Redeeming love has been my theme and shall be till I die.

You're rich in love and you're slow to anger. Your name is great and your heart is kind. For all your goodness I will keep on singing. Ten thousand reasons for my heart to find.

So this is the spirit-filled life. And when we look at this passage, when we looked at it in our growth group about ten days ago, one of the most helpful comments that somebody made in our group was, it is surprising how ordinary it looks, isn't it?

[26 : 03] This is practical, everyday stuff. And yet it's supernatural. It is spirit-wrought. As we pray and read our Bibles and serve the Lord and think more about Jesus Christ and spend time with each other as a community, we let the spirit work in our hearts so that more and more we can be a people who walk carefully, who live wisely, and sing joyfully.

Let's pray together. I have a moment of quiet.