

Be Filled With The Spirit

Ephesians 5:17-20

17 . . . do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. 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, even the Father.
(Ephesians 5:17-20 (NASB))

As we have been examining these words over the past few weeks, we cannot help but hear a resounding caution being given to be very careful and to exercise great caution as we venture through the dark and evil days that are now prevailing upon the earth. Our enemies, “the world, the flesh and the devil” are clever and they are very adept in their efforts to turn you and me to their way and to their will. And so the Lord reminds us,

17 . . . do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. 18 And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit,
(Ephesians 5:17-18)

This warning is so appropriate to this season of the year when celebration is the “watchword”, both for the Christmas season just passed and for the upcoming New Year’s activities. As we know, it has somehow become the custom, especially across our nation, to greet those who visit our homes during Christmas with the offering of a “glass of Christmas cheer”. And then especially in the days ahead, to celebrate the incoming New Year with a glass or two, or three, or more of some form of strong drink. And if the Lord Himself sees fit to warn us away from that behavior, then we really should take notice.

What are the dangers that God is warning us away from with His words?

18 And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation? (Ephesians 5:18)

The dangers begin within our own flesh. As we all know, alcohol is, in its simplest form a “drug”, one that from the first drink that enters our body will cause changes to begin to take place within us, within every molecule of our body, and within every thought process of our minds. And to make some excuse and say that alcohol doesn’t have those effects on us is foolishness to the highest order. After all, is that not why we drink the drink in the first place, for the effects we hope it will have on us?

So then . . . you and I need to realize and accept the simple truth that alcohol will absolutely do what alcohol does!

So again, what are the dangers that God is warning us away from with these words? They begin first with our relationship with Him. Recall that the first and greatest command that He requires of us is that we “love Him with all of our heart, soul, mind and strength”. And He knows that all of those elements of our being will be involved as we reach forward to love Him. And here, He is taking into account that as we drink the alcohol, it will then travel throughout our bodies and quickly enter into each of these parts of our being, “our heart, our soul, our mind and our strength”. And as the alcohol courses its way through each of them, they will be given over to its effects.

And thinking back on the words of a recent message, I am convinced that yes, the alcohol really does have “another spirit” that hides within its wake. Recall from that message that the origin of the word “spirits”, as it relates to alcohol, comes from an Arabic word "al-kuhl" which was in their culture the name of a “body-eating spirit”. And when those Arab alchemists' who were experimenting with brewing whisky ingested the alcohol, their senses were deadened. And so they named the substance according to its "body-eating" qualities, calling it “alcohol”. And it has then developed over time that the word "spirits" has become synonymous with alcohol.

In that message, we asked the question . . . could those alchemists who first discovered the distillation of alcohol have been truly correct in their estimation of what was taking place? Recall the definition, that the alcohol, the "al-kuhl", is a “body-eating spirit”. Could God have chosen to reveal a warning to those who would drink alcohol that “another spirit” than their own is being introduced into their heart, mind, body and soul? Folks, I must confess to you that I am fully convinced that that is exactly what God is warning us about in these words,

18 And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, (Ephesians 5:18)

Am I suggesting that everyone who takes a drink is influenced or even possessed by a demon? No, but I am suggesting that the demonic world is always close at hand, and they are eager to add their evil influences into the effects of the alcohol that we are foolishly pouring into our bodies. Alcohol simply has become a very effective “weapon of choice” in the demon arsenal for the destruction of the human soul.

And so here, God sees fit to offer His warning in the form of a strong and deliberate and straightforward contrast. He says,

18 And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit, (Ephesians 5:18)

These words are a clear contrast giving two distinctly different choices, with each choice having its own distinct effect. You and I can either become drunk with wine, fully dissipated and corrupted by its numbing effects, or we can put that alcohol aside and instead be filled with the Holy Spirit of God.

Or to put it another way, we can invite that “other spirit”, that “body eating spirit” within the alcohol to come in and take control over our heart, soul, mind and strength, corrupting everything within us. Or we can instead invite the Holy Spirit of God to come in and take control over our heart, soul, mind and strength, bringing with Him love and joy and peace beyond all measure.

And may I offer one more additional observation about this verse,

18 And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit, (Ephesians 5:18)

Notice that there are no other options being offered within these words. And remember that God does not give His word in needless fashion. Here, He restricted His warning to only two possibilities, “drunk, dissipated and corrupted with wine” or “filled with the Holy Spirit”. Folks, there is nothing mysterious about these words. They are clear and plain and straightforward, and we must take their warning in the way it is presented to us.

May I remind us again that these words in this Book of Ephesians were written expressly to those of us who are committed believers in Christ, those of us who have truly received Christ as our personal Savior and Lord! And here, God is saying to us, His beloved children, that we must not allow ourselves to travel down this path of being filled with that “other spirit” that comes from the world, the flesh and the devil. But that we must instead be filled to the fullest with the power and the presence of His own blessed Holy Spirit.

As I was seeking the Lord for the words for this message, I found that there are nearly one hundred separate references in these scriptures that speak to us about being filled with God’s Holy Spirit and about allowing His Spirit to abide within us. Listen to some of those . . .

Romans 8 . . . ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his. (Romans 8:9)

Ephesians 4 . . . And grieve not the Holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption. (Ephesians 4:30)

Acts 4 . . . And when they had prayed, the place was shaken where they were assembled together; and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and they spake the word of God with boldness. (Acts 4:31)

Romans 5 . . . And hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit which is given unto us. (Romans 5:5)

Acts 2 . . . Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. (Acts 2:38)

1 John 4 . . . Ye are of God, little children, and have overcome them: because greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world. (1 John 4:4)

And these words go on and on and on, God admonishing us to surrender our hearts, our souls, our minds and our spirits to Him and to allow His Spirit to come and live and abide within us.

A question . . . what does it really mean, to be “filled with the Spirit”? What takes place in us? Our Charismatic friends have their special thoughts on this subject. But what do the precepts of scripture say about our being “filled with the Spirit of God”? And what does it “feel” like? Can we actually “feel” the presence of God’s Spirit when He is fully abiding within us?

I must confess to you that for the most part of my years as a believer in Christ, this command has been somewhat of a mystery to me. Yes, the words are relatively simple . . . “Be ye filled with the Holy Spirit”. But I do not know if I have ever been able to fathom the depth of their real meaning? After all, if the Holy Spirit is already within me from salvation, how can He “fill” me even more? Preachers have preached many sermons on that one question, but still, for most of us the “mystery” remains.

For myself, and for my meager abilities to understand, I have at least begun my search for understanding with the verses of scripture that use the words “all” and “whole” within their commands from God, such as,

Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. (Deuteronomy 6:5 (NIV))

And

10 With my whole heart I have sought You; Oh, let me not wander from Your commandments! (Psalm 119:10 (NKJV))

And

34 Give me understanding, that I may keep your law and observe it with my whole heart. (Psalm 119:34 (ESV))

In some way, perhaps in many ways, you and I are able to actually limit and restrain the presence and the power of God and His effectual working within us. But to the degree that we will freely allow Him full access and control to all that we are, to all that we think, to all that we say and do, that is the degree to which He will be able to do His marvelous work in and through us.

And perhaps it really is as simple as understanding that, “a little commitment accomplishes very little”, but a “greater commitment accomplishes greater things”.

To be sure, it is dependent to some measure upon us, you and me, and upon our free-will surrender of ourselves into His hands. Why do I say that? It is because these words are a command. And as we said in an earlier message, when God gives us a command, it means that you and I have some responsibility for the doing of what He is commanding us to do, and here it is to be “filled with His Spirit”. These words are clear and plain, you and I must do our part. And the simple truth is that you and I must join in with God’s Holy Spirit in His filling our spirit with His Spirit.

To say it another way, much of the sanctification that God brings into our soul is a “joint” effort, Him giving us the power and the strength and the will to do it, and then our “working it out” in the practical matters of our day. Listen to these words from Philippians 2!

12 Therefore, my beloved . . . work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; 13 for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure. (Philippians 2:12-13 (NKJV))

Take careful note in these words that it is first God’s hand and then our own hand that is put to work in our sanctification. These words tell us that God gives us both the “will” and the “ability” to do His Will. But unless and until you and I are willing to “get up and get about the doing of His Will”, we will languish, falling short of His plan for us. So then, you and I need to begin this very moment diligently seeking how we can fulfill this very brief command . . . “be ye filled with the Holy Spirit”.

May I add one other thought on these words? The Bible Scholar, Martyn Lloyd Jones contends that if we diligently dedicate ourselves to this pursuit of being “filled with the Holy Spirit”, our pursuit will invite an additional special presence of God’s Holy Spirit . . . that the Lord Jesus Himself will often “pour out” His Holy Spirit upon us, a measure of God’s presence such as we have never known before. And may I confess to you that I do very much personally desire to know that kind of special presence of the Holy Spirit.

But may we return to the questions we posed a moment ago, about what really takes place when we are “filled with the Spirit”? And what does it “feel” like? Can we actually “feel” the presence of God’s Spirit when He is fully abiding within us?

May I give an unqualified “yes” to that question, that “yes” we are able to know and to sense His blessed presence within us. As His Spirit lives and abides within our spirit, His blessed “fruits” begin to change our thoughts and our behaviors causing us to think and to act very differently from that person we once were. His “fruits” are described for us in Galatians 5. Listen!

22 . . . the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness, self-control. (Galatians 5:22-23 (NKJV))

When these “fruits” are administered and empowered by God’s Holy Spirit, they enable us to do things we could not otherwise do. With the presence of His “fruits” continually rising to the surface in us we really do become very “different” people, thinking and acting differently.

And yes, I do personally “feel” very differently when and as I surrender my whole heart to Christ. My personality is by nature wretchedly impatient. But as God’s “fruit of patience” comes forward, my behavior is very different.

And then to add blessing upon blessing, God’s Spirit also brings with that “fruit of patience” love and joy and peace and kindness, making it easier for me to love other people, even and especially those who are not very loveable.

And while I am still not able to walk through all my days in complete harmony and serenity, I am so very thankful that my life is much, much better than it used to be. So then, you and I have these two options in front of us, on the one hand, to be “drunk and dissipated and corrupted by drinking too much alcohol”, or on the other hand we can be “filled with the loving presence of God’s Holy Spirit”. Which one would you, should you choose?

May I say that for me the choice is an easy one! I much prefer love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness and self-control to all those other behaviors that come from being drunk with wine. And may I encourage you also to make the same obvious choice. So then, "I beseech ye therefore brethren

17 . . . do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. 18 And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit,