

UNDER THE INFLUENCE (PT. 1)  
EPHESIANS 5:18-21

During His last supper, just before He was arrested and then crucified, Jesus said some things to His disciples that must have blown their minds. For starters He told them He was going away and that where He was going, they could not come. And they realized, perhaps for the first time, that He was going to die.

This was shocking and upsetting, to say the least. The One they were convinced was Messiah, the One they were counting on to establish God's Kingdom and rule over it, would be dead and gone, and, for all they knew, their hopes and dreams with Him.

And yet Jesus spent the majority of that Upper Room Discourse giving them hope and assurance. He said, "Do not let your hearts be troubled" (John 14:1). Things may *seem* like they are falling apart, but they are actually going according to plan. My going away, while it may *seem* like the end, is actually just the beginning. It is going to result in far greater blessing for you and for the world, and a far wider expansion of the kingdom and your participation in it."

In fact, Jesus said that it was actually to their advantage that He was going away, for if He did not go the *Helper* would not come to them (John 16:7). The Helper is a reference to the Holy Spirit, who, at the time, was practically a Stranger to the disciples. Implicit in this promise is that the Spirit would continue the work of Jesus, picking up where He left off, and expanding His work. And He would be doing this work *through* those who believe in Jesus, enabling them to do even *greater things* than Jesus himself had done (14:12).

But in this same conversation Jesus said that their ability to do those great things, indeed, their ability to do anything of eternal consequence, is dependent on whether they are connected to Jesus so that His Spirit is the controlling force or power in their lives. He said, "I am the vine and you are the branches. You must be attached to Me so that My life and power are flowing into you because if you are detached from Me you can do nothing!" (15:5). "Nothing" means nothing of kingdom value, nothing of eternal significance.

Here is the implication: It is only under the influence of the Holy Spirit that Jesus' followers are enabled to be, say, and do everything Jesus wants them to be, say, and do. He is talking about kingdom things, eternally consequential things—things that can only take place through divine enablement. Conversely, if we are *not* under the influence of the Spirit, we will *not* be used by Jesus to continue His work in this world, for apart from Him—apart from His Spirit's enablement—we can do nothing.

Last week we looked at a passage in Ephesians 5 where Paul tells us that we are light in the Lord. We are light, because Christ himself is light, and we are *in* Christ. Jesus is the Light of the World, and because we are in Him, we are able to reflect and radiate His light to the world. So, Paul urges us to live as *children of light*, which means we live in such a way that we reflect the life and character of Jesus—His wisdom, goodness, grace, love, kindness, and holiness—so the darkness in this world is illuminated by Jesus.

Paul then shifts from the metaphor of light to a *walk* to describe how we live out a life of representing Christ in this world. Earlier he said that "...we are [God's] workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them (2:10). In chapter 5, Paul describes the difficult path we must navigate in this walk. He said, "Look carefully, then, how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, making the best use of your time, because the days are evil" (5:15-16).

The path on which we walk in this world is fraught with peril, not only because the days are evil (v.16), but because we are surrounded by sinful influences *and* we have an enemy

that prowls around like a roaring lion seeking someone to devour (1 Pet. 5:8). But God has given us everything we need to navigate that path successfully, including wisdom. Wisdom is having the mind of Christ. Wisdom is the ability to think God's thoughts after Him to some degree and to have His perspective. It is also the ability to understand His will. When we ask God for this wisdom in faith, He gives it to us, and we are then able to redeem the time for God's eternal purposes. That is how we walk as children of light, that is how we impact our peers, our culture, our community, and our world for Jesus. That is also how we avoid the potholes and pitfalls on the perilous path before us.

But there is something else related to our walk that Paul addresses in **verses 18f**. Paul says, **verse 18**, "*And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit*".

It is easy for us to see how the command to be filled with the Spirit flows out of the context of living as children of light and walking in wisdom. But it is not as easy to make the connection between being filled with the Spirit and drunkenness. For even though Paul has been contrasting the behavior of unbelievers with followers of Jesus and prohibiting such things as lying, cheating, stealing, sexual immorality, anger, and obscenity, it seems that this prohibition against drunkenness is inserted into the text in an unnatural place. It seems random, unrelated to the context.

But in light of Paul's attempt to help us understand the vital role of the Holy Spirit in a Christian's life, it is not hard to see how these two imperatives *are* related. In setting these commands side by side I believe Paul is providing both a contrast and a comparison between being under the influence of alcohol and being under the influence of the Holy Spirit.

Remember, He has been talking about carefully and wisely navigating the path ahead of us. He's been telling us that in light of the fact that we are surrounded by sin and temptation we need to keep our wits about us—we need to keep a sharp eye out for how God might want to use us at any given time in any given situation.

It is obvious that drunkenness *impairs* one's ability to think clearly, speak coherently, and respond effectively. Drunkenness is a state of mind and the state of being that is just the opposite of what is required to be alert, attentive, and ready. And if you are not alert, attentive, and ready then you cannot possibly redeem the time or make the most of every opportunity. You will waste those opportunities.

It is fitting that one of the idioms we use in our culture to describe someone who is drunk is "wasted," which is essentially the meaning of the word *debauchery* in verse 18. Debauchery means wasteful or worthless. Drunkenness is the epitome of wasteful or worthless living, simply because when a person is mentally and physically impaired, he/she cannot be of benefit to anyone. It is not just that drunkenness is destructive; it's a waste. And Christians are, by our very nature and by our calling, are responsible to make the most of the time.

Contrast this to being filled with the Spirit, who *enhances* one's ability to think clearly, speak coherently, and respond effectively. Since the Holy Spirit is God (a Member of the Trinity), being filled *with* the Spirit gives a person *supernatural* capabilities. Being filled with the Spirit enables a person to say and do things that someone without the Spirit is not able to say and do.

When I was a little boy, I went through a phase where I recited a mantra several times a day. It went like this: "Faster than a speeding bullet, more powerful than a locomotive, able to leap tall buildings in a single bound—look, up there in the sky! It's a bird, it's a plane, it's Superman!" Then I would jump off a wall or a couch or the stairs and do my best to fly, just like my hero on TV.

At the time I did not know what gave Superman his superhuman powers. It was only after googling it this week that I learned that he was actually an alien from another planet called Krypton. All I knew at the time was that when Clark Kent went into a phonebooth dressed in a business suit, he would come out in a leotard with a dazzling “S” on its chest, and he could do amazing things—superhuman things, things that no one else could do.

When Christians are filled with the Holy Spirit something similar happens. We are endowed with supernatural power and ability and are capable of doing things that no ordinary human being can do—kingdom things, eternally consequential things.

So, the contrast between drunkenness and being filled with the Spirit is that the one severely *impairs* one’s abilities while the other greatly *enhances* one’s abilities.

But I am convinced Paul also wanted to show a *comparison* to drunkenness and being filled with the Spirit. Someone who is inebriated is under the influence of a substance that is *outside of himself*. It is the alcohol that alters the person’s state of mind and impairs his reflexes. It is the alcohol that impacts the person’s mind and speech and behavior. The person under the influence of alcohol is not in control of his own faculties.

Likewise, someone who is filled with the Spirit is under the influence of a Person outside of himself. The Holy Spirit is influencing that person’s mind and speech and behavior. He is supervising that person’s faculties, so that the person’s thoughts and words and actions are directed by the Spirit. Mind you, it’s *not* that the Spirit hijacks our personalities and minds and bodies so that we are passive instruments. We’re not puppets; the Holy Spirit is not a puppeteer.

No, there is a collaborative relationship between us and the Holy Spirit whereby He is using our personalities, minds, and bodies and infusing His energy, His power, His wisdom, His love, etc. so that, through His enablement, we are able to say and do things that are eternally profitable.

Paul testified to this supernatural phenomenon when He described His ministry of proclaiming the gospel and teaching God’s Word. He said, *“To this end I labor, struggling with all His energy, which so powerfully works in me” (Col. 1:29).*

I assure you that this energy from the Holy Spirit was more than a shot of adrenaline that boosted Paul’s strength and endurance. It was a supernatural power that enabled him to do things he otherwise could not do.

In his letter to the Corinthians, when describing the success of his preaching and teaching, Paul said, *My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit’s power, so that your faith might not rest on men’s wisdom, but on God’s power (1 Cor. 2:3-5).*

Paul was acutely aware that his effectiveness as a preacher was *not* due to his own intellectual prowess or his oratory ability. Frankly, Paul was not a particularly gifted speaker. The reason for his success was due to the fact that the Holy Spirit had filled Paul and was infusing his preaching with divine power—power that transformed lives.

And later in Ephesians, when Paul asked the church to pray for him, he said, *“Pray that whenever I open my mouth, words may be given me...” (6:19).* Paul did not ask the Ephesians to pray that *he would know what to say*, as though what he had to say originated from his own intelligence or insightfulness. No, he prayed that *“words may be given to him,”* suggesting that the words Paul wanted and needed came from an outside Source.

Paul understood that his own words and insights were utterly incapable of doing what needed to be done in the spiritual realm. His words, originating from his own reflections and ruminations, were powerless to change lives. If he was going to be effective, if he was going to influence people in eternally

consequential ways, God would have to give him *His* words.

When a person is filled with the Holy Spirit, he comes under the influence of the Spirit to the degree that the Spirit supervises his attitudes, thoughts, speech, and behavior. He presides over that person's faculties, so that the person's thoughts, words, and actions are directed by the Spirit, enabling him to do eternally consequential things.

Our duty then, is to be filled with the Spirit, to *keep* being filled with the Spirit so that in any given situation we can be and do and say whatever it is that He wants us to be, do and say so that we can continue the work of Jesus in this world.

In January 1998, a man named Stephen Fossitt launched a hot air balloon from St. Louis, trying to be the first balloonist to circle the globe nonstop. That balloon was a technological wonder, designed by the most capable engineers and equipped with the most sophisticated apparatus.

Fossitt's journey began quite well, because he was quickly able to maneuver his balloon into the jet stream that carried him along at speeds of 185 MPH. He made record time going over the Atlantic Ocean. He passed over Europe and was heading southeast at an impressive pace. After reaching the halfway point he had every reason to believe his mission would be successful.

The jet stream carried Fossitt over North Africa toward the country of Libya. But, unexpectedly, he received word from Colonel Kaddafi that he had been denied permission to fly over Libyan airspace.

Fossitt had no choice but to change his course—a course that would ultimately move him *out of the jet stream and force him to fly in his own power*. And when he got off course and began to fly in his own power, it wasn't long before things started to go wrong.

He found that he was not exactly sure what direction he should go, and so he drifted aimlessly. His speed was reduced to a mere 35 MPH. The sophisticated equipment began to break down. He had to consume so much more fuel that it quickly became apparent that his current supply would not be enough to sustain him. Eventually he was forced to land in a field in the middle of nowhere.

The mission that had begun so well was aborted little more than half the distance of its goal.

The story of Stephen Fossitt's journey is an illustration of what it is like to live the Christian life while filled with the Spirit, and what it is like to live the Christian life while *not* filled with the Spirit. We have been commissioned by God to represent Him in this world, to continue the work of Jesus, to accomplish His eternal plans and purposes, and to display the glory of Christ. But we are not capable of doing this in and of ourselves. It is the Holy Spirit who gives us our power and our ability. He gives us everything we need to do everything He wants.

And so our responsibility is to position ourselves in the Spirit's jet stream...and stay there. That means we follow the Holy Spirit. It means we ask Him and allow Him to control us and carry us along. It means we ask for and rely on His power, energy, wisdom, love, and guidance.

When we do this, we will be successful. We will fulfill the purpose for which He has called us, and be, say, and do everything He wants us to be, say, and do. The kingdom of Christ will advance, people will be delivered from darkness and brought into the light, and the glory of Christ will be revealed.

But if we are not filled with the Holy Spirit, if we do not get in His jet stream and let Him carry us where He wants us to go then we are destined to have problems. We will become spiritually disoriented; we will become bogged down with all kinds of unnecessary issues and

problems; we will get sidetracked; we will break down and burn out; we will do nothing of eternal significance.

For the next couple of weeks, Lord willing, we are going to look at verses 19-21 which reveal what it looks like to be filled with the Spirit. Living under the influence of the Holy Spirit results in attitudes and behaviors that honor and please the Lord, and we will explore what those are. But before we close our time this morning, I want to address a couple of things from verse 18 that might help clarify the meaning of this command, and how we apply it.

First, please do not confuse the filling of the Spirit with the indwelling of the Spirit or the Baptism of the Spirit. When someone puts their faith in Jesus the Holy Spirit immediately comes to live in them—to inhabit their body—and this indwelling is unconditional. When He comes to reside in us, He stays in us, permanently, whether we honor Him or obey Him or are faithful to Him or not. Paul said we are sealed with the Holy Spirit, who Himself is the guarantee of our inheritance (heaven) until we acquire possession of it (Eph. 1:13-14).

Likewise, the *baptism* of the Holy Spirit is a one-time initiation into the body of Christ and its many blessings and benefits. Just like the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, we do nothing to bring this activity of the Holy Spirit about. It is a gift that He sovereignly and graciously gives, as part of our inheritance in Christ.

Being filled with the Spirit, on the other hand, happens *repeatedly*. The present tense of the imperative in verse 18 suggests that we must be filled over and over, again and again. It could just as well be translated, “Keep on being filled with the Spirit.” Just like Superman has to keep revisiting the phonebooth when there is a need for superhuman strength or ability, so also we need to be filled with the Spirit whenever there is a need for supernatural strength or ability (which is often).

Third, being filled with the Spirit is a command (an imperative) which means that we must do something to make it happen. The onus is on *us* to be filled, and if we neglect to obey this command, we will *not* be filled with the Holy Spirit, and, therefore, will forfeit the opportunities to be used by God to do whatever it is that God wants us to do through us.

Don't forget, the Holy Spirit has been given to us in order to continue the work Jesus started. The same Spirit who filled Jesus and did marvelous things through Him now dwells in us, so that it is possible for us to do the works of Jesus. But we must avail ourselves of his offer to be filled by him—to be under His influence. He is not going to force Himself on us and hijack our minds and hearts and wills; He is going to let us come under His influence as we allow Him.

Which raises the question, how do we allow Him? How do we become filled with the Spirit? It is very simple, but before I tell you (if you'll pardon me) I'd like to make another comparison to Superman. You know how Clark Kent had to enter the phone booth and shed his glasses and his business suit in order to become Superman? We have got to, figuratively, go into our prayer closet and shed some things that may hinder the Spirit's influence so that we can come out as a Spirit-filled Christian.

Let me change the metaphor to correspond to Romans 12:1. We must present our bodies as a living sacrifice to the Lord. Imagine kneeling before an altar with burning coals on it, and taking all your opinions, judgments, perspectives, assumptions, biases, attitudes, ambitions, and desires that are self-generated (are not from God) and placing them on that altar so they can be burned up. Ask the Lord to incinerate your pride, self-will, self-interest, self-reliance, independence, and anything else that might get in the way of the Spirit's influence.

Then ask the Holy Spirit to fill you. Ask Him to take control of your faculties—your mind, heart, and will. Ask Him to give you the mind of Christ so that you can think His

thoughts after Him and have His perspective and His wisdom. Ask Him to give you His heart so that you can feel what He feels, love what He loves, and hate what He hates. Ask Him to fill you with *His* love. Then ask Him to superintend your will so that you can be in sync with His plans, purposes, and priorities and can go in the direction He wants.

That's it. Being filled with the Spirit is a matter of shedding the things in us that can (and will) get in the way of Him working in and through us, and then asking the Spirit to take control. And then, by faith, it is proceeding in His power and His strength and His enablement to say and do what He wants.

You might be wondering, how do you know if you are filled with the Spirit, or if you aren't just saying and doing things in your own power and strength and ability, thereby deceiving yourself (and possibly others)?

We will get into that more the next two weeks, because there are definitely some attitudes and behaviors that accompany the filling of the Spirit, and if you don't have them, you can be pretty sure that you are not.

But let me mention a couple of things that, I believe, are evidences of being filled with the Spirit. One evidence is displaying the fruit of the Spirit, which is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. These are the characteristics of the Lord Jesus, and if we are filled with His Spirit—if we are living under His influence—they will characterize us as well.

Another evidence that we are filled with the Spirit is if our words and actions align with Scripture. God never contradicts Himself, so if someone comes along and says, "I have a word from the Lord," and it contradicts what God has said in his Word, you can be sure that person is *not* filled with the Spirit—he/she is speaking his own mind. Likewise, if a person is behaving in a way that is contrary to how the Bible says we ought to live, then you can be sure he/she is not filled with the Spirit.

I cannot help but think of those prosperity gospel preachers who are living opulent, extravagant lifestyles in the name of Jesus, and who claim to be filled with the Spirit. I assure you they are not. God never contradicts Himself. The Spirit never leads us to do things that are contrary to what Jesus did. Remember, His work in us is to continue the work of Jesus in this world.

May God fill each of us with His Spirit, for the glory and honor of Jesus.

## **Under the Influence** (part 1) **Ephesians 5:18**

Main Idea: Living under the influence of the Holy Spirit is God's provision to be, say, and do everything God wants

Introduction: The Promised Helper (John 14-16)  
The "Helper" comes when Jesus goes

The Spirit enables disciples to continue Jesus' work

Drunkenness versus Being Filled with the Spirit (18)

Contrast

Drunkenness impairs one's ability

The Spirit enhances one's ability

Comparison

Under the influence of alcohol

Under the influence of the Spirit

"Be Filled with the Spirit" (18b)

Being filled is not the same as being indwelt or baptized

Being filled...happens repeatedly

Being filled...is a command

Application