

UNDER THE INFLUENCE (PART 2)
EPHESIANS 5:18-21

Louis L'Amour, the prolific western novelist, was not known for his philosophical profundities. He wrote about cowboys, barroom brawls, gunfights, and lonely campfires in the middle of nowhere. But several years ago, I was reading one of his novels when I came across a passage that made me stop and think—something I had no intention of doing (which is why I was reading this particular novel). The main character of the book was, as always, a rugged individualist, the epitome of self-assurance, self-reliance, and invincibility. But one day this character was in a reflective mood and was suddenly struck, not with a bullet or an arrow, but with an overwhelming sense of vulnerability.

He was contemplating the meaning of life and he thought to himself, “You can be snuffed out like you never existed at all, and a few minutes after you’re buried nobody will care except maybe your wife or your mother. You stick your finger in the water and you pull it out, and that’s how much of a hole you leave when you’re gone” (*The Daybreakers*, p.24).

That is an unsettling statement! To think that, when all is said and done, your life amounts to nothing more than a fading ripple in the waters of time.

It is possible that this pandemic is causing you to do more self-reflection than unusual. I wouldn’t be surprised if some of *you* have been contemplating what your life is all about, and if what you have been doing with your life and how you have been living your life and using your talents and resources is making a lasting impact in this world.

Those are good questions, important questions, questions that we ought to be contemplating regularly. But how do you know? How can you be certain that you are investing your time and energy and talents and resources that have lasting significance?

This is part 2 of a message entitled “*Under the Influence*”, taken from Ephesians 5:18f. Paul begins, “*Do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit*” (5:18 ESV).

Last time I suggested that Paul put these two commands side by side to provide both a contrast and a comparison between being under the influence of alcohol and being under the influence of the Holy Spirit. Verse 18 is in the context of living as children of light and successfully navigating a perilous path in a dangerous world. Paul has been telling us that because the days are evil, because we are surrounded by sin and temptation, and because we have a cunning enemy that is adept at trapping and tripping us, we need to keep our wits about us. We need to be alert and attentive so we can make the most of every opportunity.

Drunkenness *impairs* one’s ability to think clearly, speak coherently, and respond effectively. Someone who is under the influence of alcohol is unable to be attentive, responsive, or effective. On the other hand, being filled with the Spirit *enhances* one’s ability to think clearly, speak coherently, and respond effectively. Someone who is under the influence of the Spirit has the mind of Christ and is able to speak for Christ and act on His behalf.

But Paul is also *comparing* drunkenness with being filled with the Spirit. Someone who is inebriated is under the influence of a substance *outside of himself*. Alcohol is influencing how a person thinks and talks and acts. Likewise, a person who is filled with the Spirit is under the influence of a *Person* outside of himself. The Holy Spirit is supervising that person’s faculties, so that his/her thoughts and words and actions are directed by the Spirit.

It is interesting that on the Day of Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit came upon Jesus’ disciples, people who saw them thought they were drunk because they were not acting like the timid, inhibited, fearful Galileans they were accustomed to seeing. So, they concluded

that they were under the influence of something that dissolved their inhibitions and generated boldness and courage.

They were, but it wasn't alcohol. It was the Holy Spirit who had taken possession of their faculties, infusing them with wisdom, power, and courage so that, through his enablement, they were able to say and do what they otherwise could not.

Why would the Spirit do that? Why would God send His Spirit to inhabit Jesus' disciples and take possession of their faculties? It is because Jesus' disciples, including us, represent Him in this world. Jesus told His disciples just before He died that He was going to send the Holy Spirit to be with them so they could continue His work after He was gone. He said the Holy Spirit would do that work through them, enabling them to do even *greater things* than Jesus Himself had done (14:12).

But Jesus also said that if we are to do those things, we must live under the influence of the Spirit so that He is the controlling force or power in our lives. Jesus said, "Apart from Me you can do nothing!" (15:5).

In other words, being under the influence of the Spirit is the only way we can do things that have kingdom value and eternal significance. If we are *not* under His influence, if we are *not* filled with Him, we will only spin our wheels, spiritually speaking. We cannot possibly represent Christ effectively or express His character authentically. Neither can we bear fruit that remains.

So, how do we become filled with the Spirit? By simply permitting and inviting the Spirit to fill us. Since the Holy Spirit is our heaven-sent Helper who loves us and resides in us, being filled with Him begins by having a conversation with Him. I told you last week that it might be good to begin that conversation by asking Him to incinerate the things in us that get in the way of Him working in and through us, for we cannot be full of ourselves and full of the Spirit at the same time. Then, the conversation might continue to go something like this:

"Spirit, I recognize that you live in me, that my body is your temple. I want you to have your way in me. Would you take control of my faculties—my mind and heart and will? Would you give me the mind of Christ so that I can think your thoughts after you? Would you give me your heart so that I can love with your love? Would you give me your strength, your energy, your power, your wisdom so that I can say and do what you want? Would you display your fruit through me, which is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control?"

When are we to be filled with the Spirit? The answer is *all the time*. The present tense of the verb "be filled" has the sense of "keep on being filled," and it is not hard to understand why this is essential. When we consider the enormous responsibility of representing Christ and continuing his work in this world, when we contemplate that apart from him we can do nothing of kingdom value or eternal significance, it would be foolish to think that we could get by without the Spirit's influence for one day—even for one circumstance.

You see, I do not just represent Him when I'm standing behind the pulpit, I represent Him when I'm having a tense conversation with my wife. I do not just represent Him when I'm sharing the gospel with an unbeliever, I represent Him when I'm driving on Sunnyview Road and the person in front of me is going 30 mph.

The fact is, we represent Jesus all the time, in every single situation and in every conversation. Which means that if we compartmentalize our lives, thinking that in some situations and conversations we can do our own thing, speak our own mind, lean on our own understanding, rely on our own wisdom, and walk in our own strength, we are settling for wood, hay, and straw, when we could have gold, silver, and precious stones, and it will all be burned up.

Any time we are not under the Spirit's influence, we waste opportunities that would otherwise be eternally consequential. We risk misrepresenting Jesus to the world and tarnishing His reputation. We also make ourselves vulnerable to temptation and the enemy's traps.

If I am not filled with the Spirit I am not going to consistently and successfully resist temptation when it comes my way. If I am not filled with the Spirit, I'm going to insert my own angst and my own biases into that comment I make on social media. I am going to lose my temper, or have an edge to my voice, or get impatient with my kids while we are on lock-down. I may give advice that could deter someone from following God's will.

We need to be filled with the Spirit all the time because we represent Jesus and speak and act on His behalf in every relationship and every circumstance.

Finally, how do you know when you are filled with the Spirit? Is it a euphoric feeling? Is it like a shot of adrenaline? Is there a manifestation of a particular behavior, like speaking in tongues or prophesying?

Even though this question has generated lots of speculation, the text itself answers this question directly. The main clause in verses 18-21 is "*Be filled with the Spirit*". The five clauses that follow are subordinate to that main clause, and the verbs in those five clauses actually modify the phrase "be filled with the Spirit". Those verbal adjectives are called participles.

So, verses 19-21 describe the results of being filled with the Spirit. Look at **verses 18-21**. ¹⁸ *And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit,* ¹⁹ *addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart,* ²⁰ *giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ,* ²¹ *submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ (ESV).*

Isn't it interesting that of the five participles describing a life that is controlled by the Spirit, three have to do with songs or singing (5:19)? Which tells us something about the role of songs and singing in the Christian life. Even if you have not been blessed with a great voice; even if you are tone deaf and can't carry a tune, singing about the Lord and singing to the Lord are the spontaneous, Spirit prompted activities that are the result of being under his influence. Which reveals how much God likes singing and how powerful singing can be in our lives.

Notice, the first manifestation of the Spirit's fullness is singing to *each other* about the Lord. Spirit-filled Christians sing to each other, reminding each other about God's character and God's work in Christ, and encouraging each other to keep their eyes fixed on Jesus. That is what is meant by psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs. They are God-centered, God-focused songs, not songs that merely entertain us or make us feel good.

But Spirit-filled people also sing *to the Lord* as a way of adoring Him and offering praise to Him. We are told in Scripture that one of the roles of the Holy Spirit is to magnify the Lord Jesus. When we are filled with the Spirit, He opens our spiritual eyes to see Jesus more clearly, which always produces wonder and awe. And that wonder and awe compels us to sing and make melody to Him in every kind of circumstance.

Do you remember what Paul and Silas were doing when they were in prison, fastened in stocks, just before the earthquake around midnight? They were singing, which was a manifestation of real joy, even though they had just been stripped, beaten, and unjustly thrown in jail; even though they were in a great deal of pain and discomfort.

We are also told that when the early Christians were rounded up by Nero, the Roman Emperor, and put in a stadium where lions were turned loose in order to devour them, they

huddled and sang to each other and to the Lord even as the lions were pouncing on them. I would suggest to you that is an evidence of being under the influence of the Spirit!

The book, *Miracle at Tenwick*, tells the story of Dr. Ernie Steury, a missionary doctor in the remote highlands of Kenya. When Tenwick hospital began in the late 1950's, he was the lone doctor for many years, on call 24/7, with a workload that was staggering. Not only would he work all day long, but he would often be wakened two or three times a night in order to do emergency surgeries.

On one occasion, after working thirty-six hours straight, he stumbled home in the evening and told his wife Sue, "There is no way I can go back up to the hospital for anything tonight. I'm just dead tired." He managed a few bites of supper and went straight to bed. Not an hour had gone by when he got a knock on his window telling him he was needed in surgery.

He writes, "By the time I got dressed and headed up the hill to the hospital I was having a personal pity party. 'I can't do this!' I told God. 'Why can't You find someone else to help me? I can't keep this up by myself!'"

*But even as he hiked up the hill toward the darkened shaped of the hospital buildings, verbally assaulting God with those thoughts as he walked, Ernie suddenly realized he had subconsciously begun humming the notes of a song. "I couldn't believe it," Ernie often told people later. "I said to myself, 'you have got to be crazy! There is nothing to sing about here tonight!' Then it hit me what the tune was, and God assured me with the words of that song—"The Joy of the Lord is My Strength." I knew in that instant; I **can** do this. Because the Lord will help me.*

And you know what? He did give me the strength as I operated that night. The surgery went quickly—and well. And I walked back home, climbed into bed, and slept peacefully until morning" (Miracle at Tenwick, p.88).

Again, singing to the Lord or to one another about the Lord is a manifestation of the Spirit's fullness, because more than anything else the Spirit wants to reveal and glorify the Lord in every circumstance, and when we sing that is precisely what is happening. But He also wants us to experience His joy and His pleasure, and singing is an outward expression of His joy and His pleasure.

And so, I want to encourage you, even you tough guys who think singing is for sissies, when the Holy Spirit prompts you to sing, do it. For singing to the Lord and about the Lord is an outward expression of the joy of the Lord, which is one of the fruits of the Spirit. And when you respond to His prompting to sing, you will be blessed; the people around you will be blessed, and God Himself will be blessed.

The fourth manifestation of being under the Spirit's influence is thankfulness. Look at **verse 20**, "...*giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ...*"

It is not difficult to understand why continual, unconditional thankfulness is one of the results of being filled with the Holy Spirit. If, as verse 18 clearly teaches, being filled with the Spirit *enhances* one's ability to think clearly, then it stands to reason that being filled with the Spirit sharpens our mental focus and expands our mental capacity. The Spirit, as the Illuminator, gives us insights and wisdom that transcend our natural understanding. He enables us, to some degree, to think His thoughts after Him.

Thus, being filled with the Spirit is the mode in which a person is most completely and accurately in touch with reality, and thankfulness is the *attitude* that most completely and accurately corresponds with reality.

When the Spirit reveals the truth about God, about God's provision for us in Christ, about who we are in Christ and what we have and where we are going because of Christ, we cannot help but be thankful. Understanding those truths *produces* gratitude. And the more truth the Spirit reveals to us, the more grateful we become.

Let me say it again: Thankfulness is the attitude that most completely and accurately corresponds with reality. Conversely, *thanklessness* is an evidence that a person is out of touch with reality. And thanklessness, for a Christian, which manifests itself in complaining and discontentment, is an evidence that one is not under the influence of the Spirit.

You might be thinking, "Are you suggesting that it's never appropriate to gripe, groan, complain or moan? What about when my circumstances are falling apart? What about when I'm suffering, or when my health fails, or when tragedy strikes? How, at such times, can I possibly be thankful?"

I want to remind you that *true* thankfulness is not an attitude that we generate or we develop; it's an attitude that corresponds to being under the Spirit's influence, who gives us the mind of Christ so that we are able, to some degree, to think His thoughts after Him. And "*...giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ...*" is a manifestation of being filled with the Spirit.

"*Always and for everything*" means at all times and in every circumstance—good or bad, pleasant or painful, happy or sad; in prosperity or in poverty, in success or in failure; when people like you or when people hate you, when your marriage is bliss or when your marriage is heartbreaking, when your kids are on the straight and narrow or when your kids are in the weeds, when the doctor has just given you a clean bill of health or when the doctor has just informed you that you have two months to live.

And the reason the Spirit-filled person can be thankful in all these situations is because he/she has the *mind of Christ*. He knows that trials in this life produce perseverance (James 1:3-4); that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us (Rom. 8:18) and that our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us a glory that far outweighs them all" (2 Cor.4:17). A Spirit-filled person knows (and lives in light of the fact) that this world is not her home; she is just passing through. She not only knows that painful trials are temporary, but that God is using them to form Christ more fully in her, to glorify Himself, and to groom her for glory, and that not one minute of that suffering is wasted.

So, let me ask you: Are you a thankful person? I'm not asking, necessarily, if you are in the habit of *saying* "thank-you", or if you frequently write thank you notes to those who do something for you. I'm asking if you have a genuinely thankful heart. I'm asking if you possess a *perpetual* attitude of gratitude that emanates from your core of your being and expresses itself in your countenance, your demeanor, your words, your actions.

I have learned that probably the most accurate way for me to evaluate my own spiritual health is whether or not I possess an attitude of gratitude. When I am in sync with the Lord, when I am on the Lord's frequency, when I am walking in step with the Spirit it is always accompanied by such a pervasive sense of gratitude that I am compelled to spontaneously praise the Lord throughout the day, no matter what my circumstances.

On the other hand, I can tell when I am walking in the flesh and not in the Spirit because that attitude of gratitude is gone and been replaced by a sense of entitlement or a pre-occupation with self—which then compels me to gripe, groan, complain and moan and invariably robs me of joy.

Once again, I want to remind you that thankfulness is the *result* of being filled with the Spirit. So, if you are *not* thankful take some time to talk to the Lord. Ask the Lord to incinerate your preoccupation with self and fill you with His Spirit. Let the Spirit take control of your

faculties and give you His perspective and His heart. When He does, He *will* reveal Jesus sitting on His throne in all His glory and splendor and majesty, and you will be overwhelmed by such wonder and awe and gratitude that you will be compelled to adore Him and sing praises to Him, no matter what your circumstances.

I've been trying to convince us of our need to be filled with the Holy Spirit—24/7. Without His controlling influence we are destined to waste opportunities, stumble in our Christian walk, and live joyless, powerless, inconsequential lives. Without His influence we are helpless to live as God intended us to live. We need the stark and humbling realization that this person had when he prayed,

Dear Lord, so far, I've done all right. I haven't gossiped, haven't lost my temper, haven't been greedy, grumpy, nasty, selfish, or overindulgent. I'm really glad about that. But in a few minutes, God, I'm going to get out of bed. And from then on, I'm going to need a lot more help.

That help comes from the One Jesus first introduced to His disciples as the Helper, otherwise known as the Holy Spirit. He is God's gift to us, enabling us to effectively represent Jesus and continue His work in this world, and to successfully navigate the perilous path before us.

Under the Influence (part 2)

Ephesians 5:18-21

Main Idea: Living under the influence of the Holy Spirit is necessary in order to be, say, and do everything God wants us to be, say, and do

Contrast and Comparison to Drunkenness (18a)

Filled with the Spirit (18b)

The meaning of "be filled..."

The need to "be filled..."

"Apart from him we can do nothing"

Eternally consequential things

The way to be "be filled..."

When to "be filled..."

The results of “being filled...”
Corporate Worship

Adoring Song

Continuous Thanksgiving