

## **The Book of Ephesians, Teacher's Guide**

### **Lesson 10: Filled with the Spirit; Worship and Submission**

#### **Ephesians 5:15–21**

##### **Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)**

This short passage is the hinge of the letter's practical section, moving from the walk of the believer into the life of worship and the relationships of the Christian home. Its central command is be filled with the Spirit (v. 18), set in contrast to being drunk with wine. The teacher should help the class see that this is about who or what fills and controls us. Everyone is being filled by something; the wise, in evil days, are filled with the Spirit, and the marks of that fullness are singing, thanksgiving, and mutual submission. This is a warm and searching truth: the fullness every human craves is found not in substances, experiences, or achievements, but in God Himself.

The doctrinal point to handle with care is what Paul says about worship in song. Being filled with the Spirit overflows in addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with the heart (v. 19), echoed in Colossians 3:16. The teacher should present this as the New Testament pattern of worship in song: its source is the indwelling Spirit, its form is congregational singing in which believers both praise God and teach and encourage one another, its instrument is the heart (the melody is made in and with the heart), and its direction is to the Lord. Keep the focus on the text. The emphasis falls on heartfelt, congregational, vocal praise as the worship the New Testament describes, rather than on performance or spectacle. Let the passage itself set the pattern, and lead the class to value singing as a serious and joyful act of worship.

Formationally, the aim is to expose the counterfeit fullnesses we reach for and to lead students to seek the genuine fullness of the Spirit, whose evidence is a thankful heart, a humble spirit, and a singing congregation. Paul's closing call to submit to one another out of reverence for Christ also prepares the way for the household teaching that follows, framing all of it under humility and the lordship of Christ.

##### **Question 1**

###### **Student Question:**

*In verses 15 and 16 Paul says to look carefully how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, making the best use of the time, because the days are evil. What does it mean to walk wisely and to make the best use of the time, and why does Paul connect this to the days being evil?*

##### **Commentary and Teaching Notes**

Paul urges, look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, making the best use of the time, because the days are evil (vv. 15–16). The word translated look carefully suggests precision and attentiveness. The Christian life is not to be lived carelessly or on autopilot but with deliberate wisdom.

Making the best use of the time pictures buying up opportunity, redeeming the moments we are given before they slip away. Time is a limited and non-renewable gift, and the wise treat it as precious, investing it rather than squandering it.

Paul grounds this in the evil of the days. Because we live in a fallen and hostile age, opportunities for good are easily lost and dangers are real. Wisdom is needed to navigate such times and to seize the openings for good while they last.

Help the class feel the urgency without anxiety. We are stewards of our days, called to live them attentively and purposefully for the Lord, not frittering them away.

### **Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues**

- Attentive, deliberate living rather than autopilot
- Time as a limited, precious gift to be redeemed
- Wisdom for navigating evil days
- Stewardship of our opportunities for good

### **Discussion Prompts**

- What does it mean to walk wisely and make the best use of the time?
- Why does Paul connect this to the days being evil?
- How is living attentively different from living on autopilot?

### **Question 2**

#### **Student Question:**

*Paul calls us to make the most of our limited time. When you look honestly at how you actually spend your days, where is your time being wasted or misused, and what would wiser use of it look like?*

#### **Commentary and Teaching Notes**

This question makes the stewardship of time personal. Most of us lose far more time than we realize, not always to obvious sin but to distraction, aimless scrolling, and busyness that accomplishes little of eternal value.

Help students examine their actual patterns rather than their intentions. Where does the day go? What habits quietly consume hours? The goal is not frantic productivity but purposeful living, time invested in what matters to God: people, prayer, service, growth.

Encourage one concrete adjustment, reclaiming a portion of wasted time for something good. Wisdom shows itself in small, consistent choices about how the hours are spent.

### **Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues**

- Honest examination of how time is actually spent
- Distraction and busyness as quiet thieves of time
- Purposeful living over frantic productivity
- Small, consistent choices about our hours

### **Discussion Prompts**

- Where is your time being wasted or misused?
- What would wiser use of your time look like?
- What is one adjustment you could make this week?

### **Question 3**

#### **Student Question:**

*In verse 17 Paul says, do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. What does it mean to understand the will of the Lord, and how is that different from drifting through life without reference to God?*

#### **Commentary and Teaching Notes**

Paul commands, do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is (v. 17). He assumes that God's will can be understood, and that failing to seek it is a form of foolishness. The wise person orders life around what God wants.

Understanding the will of the Lord is, first, knowing what God has revealed in Scripture about how to live, His commands, His values, His priorities. The great bulk of God's will is not hidden; it is plainly given, and our task is to know it and do it.

It also involves applying that revealed wisdom to specific decisions, discerning the wise and God-pleasing course in our particular circumstances. This grows as we soak in Scripture and walk closely with God.

Help the class see the contrast Paul draws. The fool drifts through life by impulse, appetite, and the surrounding culture. The wise consciously seek and follow the will of the Lord. The difference is the orientation of the whole life.

### **Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues**

- God's will as knowable, chiefly through Scripture
- Most of God's will already revealed and to be obeyed

- Applying revealed wisdom to specific decisions
- Drifting by impulse versus living by God's will

### **Discussion Prompts**

- What does it mean to understand the will of the Lord?
- How much of God's will is already revealed to us?
- How is this different from drifting through life by impulse?

### **Question 4**

#### **Student Question:**

*Paul assumes a Christian can and should know God's will. In what area of your life are you currently making decisions without seriously asking what the Lord wants, and how could you begin to seek His will there?*

#### **Commentary and Teaching Notes**

This question asks students to find the area where they are living without reference to God's will. Often there is a compartment, a relationship, a financial habit, a career decision, a use of leisure, that we quietly keep for ourselves, never seriously asking what the Lord wants.

Help them identify it honestly. The point is not guilt but invitation: to bring that area under the lordship of Christ and to begin seeking His will there through Scripture, prayer, and wise counsel.

Encourage a concrete first step, perhaps prayerfully searching what Scripture says about that area, or seeking godly counsel, rather than continuing to decide by mere preference.

#### **Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues**

- Compartments of life kept from God's will
- Bringing every area under the lordship of Christ
- Seeking God's will through Scripture, prayer, and counsel
- Replacing mere preference with genuine seeking

### **Discussion Prompts**

- Where are you making decisions without asking what the Lord wants?
- Why do we tend to keep certain areas for ourselves?
- How could you begin to seek God's will there?

### **Question 5**

#### **Student Question:**

*In verse 18 Paul contrasts being drunk with wine, which leads to debauchery, with being filled with the Spirit. What is Paul teaching about being filled with the Spirit, and why does he set it against drunkenness in particular?*

### **Commentary and Teaching Notes**

Verse 18 sets the contrast that governs the passage: do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit. Paul deliberately compares two kinds of fullness, one destructive, one life-giving. The comparison is instructive.

Both drunkenness and Spirit-filling involve being influenced and controlled by something outside ourselves. The drunk person is under the influence of wine, and it shows in their behavior. The Spirit-filled person is under the influence of God, and it shows in singing, thanks, and humility. The question is always what controls us.

But the contrast is also sharp. Drunkenness leads to debauchery, the wreckage of a life; the Spirit leads to fullness, joy, and order. The counterfeit fullness empties; the true fullness fills. Paul names wine because it was the common escape of his culture, as substances and addictions are of ours.

Note that be filled is a continuing command, not a once-for-all event. We are to go on being filled, daily yielding to the Spirit's control. This is the normal Christian life, not an elite experience.

Help the class grasp that the issue is not whether they will be filled and controlled, but by what. Paul calls them to be controlled by the Spirit of God.

### **Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues**

- Two kinds of fullness: destructive and life-giving
- Being controlled and influenced, the issue in both
- The counterfeit that empties versus the fullness that fills
- Be filled as an ongoing, daily yielding to the Spirit

### **Discussion Prompts**

- Why does Paul contrast being filled with the Spirit with drunkenness?
- What does it mean to be controlled or influenced by the Spirit?
- Why is being filled with the Spirit a continual matter, not a one-time event?

### **Question 6**

**Student Question:**

*Paul implies that everyone is being filled and controlled by something. Where do you tend to seek fullness, escape, or control apart from the Spirit, and what would it mean to surrender that area to Him instead?*

### **Commentary and Teaching Notes**

This question presses the truth that everyone is being filled by something. When the soul feels empty, restless, or stressed, we reach for something to fill or numb it. The Christian must notice what that something is.

Help students name their habitual reach: it may be alcohol or food, but also screens, shopping, work, approval, entertainment, even ministry busyness. None of these can finally fill the soul, and several can master it.

Surrendering the area to the Spirit means turning, in the moment of emptiness, to God rather than to the substitute, in prayer, in Scripture, in the company of God's people, in worship. Encourage one concrete redirection this week, replacing a habitual escape with a turning to the Lord.

### **Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues**

- Everyone filled and controlled by something
- Naming our habitual escapes and substitutes
- The inability of substitutes to fill the soul
- Turning to God in the moment of emptiness

### **Discussion Prompts**

- What do you most often reach for when you feel empty or stressed?
- Why can these things never finally fill you?
- What would turning to the Spirit instead look like in that moment?

### **Question 7**

#### **Student Question:**

*In verses 20 and 21 Paul says the Spirit-filled life gives thanks always and for everything and submits to one another out of reverence for Christ. Why are thanksgiving and mutual submission marks of being filled with the Spirit, and what does it mean to submit to one another?*

### **Commentary and Teaching Notes**

Paul lists the marks of the Spirit-filled life: singing (v. 19), giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father (v. 20), and submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ (v. 21). These are the overflow of a soul full of God.

Thanksgiving is a mark of fullness because the grateful heart has learned to see every good as a gift from God, and even to trust Him in hardship. An ungrateful, grumbling spirit signals a soul running on something other than the Spirit. Giving thanks always and for everything is a high call that grows out of confidence in God's goodness and sovereignty.

Mutual submission, submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ, is the other surprising mark. The Spirit produces humility, a willingness to yield to others, to consider their needs, to serve rather than to demand. This verse also introduces the household relationships that follow; all of them are framed by this reverence for Christ.

Be careful to explain submitting to one another rightly. It does not erase all God-given order or roles, which Paul will spell out in the following verses, but it does set the whole Christian community, and the Christian home, under a spirit of humility and mutual service rather than self-assertion.

Help the class see that thanksgiving and humility are not add-ons but evidences. Where the Spirit fills, gratitude and humble service appear; where they are absent, something else is in control.

### **Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues**

- Thanksgiving as the mark of a heart confident in God's goodness
- Mutual submission as the fruit of Spirit-wrought humility
- Reverence for Christ as the frame for all relationships
- Submission rightly understood, not the erasure of God-given order
- Gratitude and humility as evidences of the Spirit's filling

### **Discussion Prompts**

- Why are thanksgiving and humility marks of being filled with the Spirit?
- What does it mean to submit to one another out of reverence for Christ?
- What does a grumbling or proud spirit reveal about what controls us?

### **Question 8**

#### **Student Question:**

*Paul ties thanksgiving and humility to the fullness of the Spirit. Where is it hardest for you to give thanks, and where does your pride most resist submitting to or yielding to others?*

### **Commentary and Teaching Notes**

This question makes thanksgiving and humility personal. Paul says give thanks for everything, which is hardest precisely where life is hard, in disappointment, loss, and unanswered prayer. Help students locate where gratitude is most difficult for them.

The call is not to thank God that evil is good, but to give thanks in all circumstances, trusting that God is good and at work even there (Romans 8:28). Gratitude is a discipline of faith that steadies the soul.

On submission, help students name where pride resists yielding, to a spouse, an elder, an employer, a brother or sister in Christ. The Spirit-filled life is marked by a humble readiness to serve and to yield rather than always to assert and to win.

### **Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues**

- Giving thanks where life is hardest
- Gratitude as a discipline of faith, not denial
- Pride that resists yielding to others
- Humble service as the Spirit's fruit

### **Discussion Prompts**

- Where is it hardest for you to give thanks right now?
- Where does your pride most resist yielding to others?
- What would humble submission look like in that relationship?

### **Question 9**

#### **Student Question:**

*In verses 18 and 19 Paul says that being filled with the Spirit overflows in addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with the heart. What does this teach us about Christian worship in song, its source in the Spirit, its form as congregational singing in which we address one another, its instrument as the heart, and its direction toward the Lord?*

### **Commentary and Teaching Notes**

This is the doctrinal center of the lesson, and the teacher should keep the focus squarely on the text. Paul says the Spirit-filled life overflows in addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart (v. 19), a teaching repeated in Colossians 3:16. From the passage itself we can draw out the New Testament pattern of worship in song.

Its source is the Spirit. Singing is named as the overflow of being filled with the Spirit. Worship in song is not mere ritual or entertainment but the natural expression of a soul full of God. This means that genuine singing flows from a heart that is being filled, not merely from skill or habit.

Its form is congregational and mutual. Paul says addressing one another. When the church sings, believers are not only praising God but also teaching, encouraging, and admonishing one

another (Colossians 3:16 makes this explicit). Worship in song is something the gathered body does together, each voice joining the others, not a performance by a few for the rest.

Its instrument is the heart. Paul specifies singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart. The melody God seeks is made in and with the heart of the worshiper. This locates the essence of acceptable praise not in artistry or external accompaniment but in hearts genuinely lifted to God. The New Testament describes the worship of the church in song precisely as singing that comes from the heart, and this heartfelt, vocal, congregational praise is the pattern we see in passages like Colossians 3:16, Hebrews 13:15, and Acts 16:25.

Its direction is to the Lord. Though we address one another, the praise is ultimately offered to the Lord and to God the Father (vv. 19–20). Worship in song is God-centered, not a means of display or self-expression but an offering lifted to Him. Lead the class to value congregational singing as a serious and joyful act of worship, to sing from the heart and with understanding, and to see their voices joined together as part of how the Spirit-filled church praises God and builds itself up.

### **Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues**

- Worship in song as the overflow of being filled with the Spirit
- Congregational, mutual singing that addresses and edifies one another (Colossians 3:16)
- The heart as the instrument: making melody to the Lord with the heart
- Heartfelt, vocal, congregational praise as the New Testament pattern
- Worship in song directed to the Lord, not for display
- Singing with the spirit and the understanding (1 Corinthians 14:15)

### **Discussion Prompts**

- What does this passage teach about the source and the instrument of worship in song?
- What does addressing one another show about congregational singing?
- How does singing from the heart change the way you approach worship?

### **Question 10**

#### **Student Question:**

*Paul paints a picture of a life full of the Spirit, singing from the heart, thankful, and humble. Looking back over this whole passage, name one specific way the Lord is forming you through it, and one place where you most need to be filled by Him rather than by something else.*

### **Commentary and Teaching Notes**

The capstone gathers the portrait Paul has painted: a wise, watchful life, filled with the Spirit, singing from the heart, thankful in all things, and humble toward others. This is the fullness every soul was made for, found in God Himself.

Press for a personal response. Ask each student to name one way this passage is forming them, perhaps a wiser use of time, a clearer seeking of God's will, a new song in worship, a more thankful or humble spirit.

Then ask the searching question: where do they most need to be filled by the Spirit rather than by something else? Invite them to name the counterfeit they reach for and to turn instead to God.

Close by reminding the class that this fullness is not earned but received. We do not work ourselves into the Spirit's fullness; we yield to Him, day by day, and He fills us. The lesson ends in dependence and openness to God.

### **Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues**

- The Spirit-filled life as the fullness we were made for
- Fullness received by yielding, not earned by effort
- Turning from counterfeit fullness to the Spirit
- Daily dependence and openness to God

### **Discussion Prompts**

- Which truth from this passage most needs to shape you this week?
- Where do you most need to be filled by the Spirit rather than by something else?
- What does it look like to yield to the Spirit day by day?