

The Book of Ephesians

Lesson 10: Filled with the Spirit; Worship and Submission -- Ephesians

5:15-21

Everyone is looking to be filled. Walk through any city on a Friday night and you will see it: people reaching for one more drink, one more thrill, one more experience, hoping that this time the emptiness inside will finally be answered. The ache is universal. We were made to be full, and we feel the hollowness when we are not. The only question is what we will reach for to fill it.

Paul puts his finger right on this human longing. Do not get drunk with wine, he says, for that is debauchery. He names the most common counterfeit of his day and ours, the attempt to fill the empty soul with a bottle, a substance, an escape. But he does not stop at the warning. He offers the real thing: instead, be filled with the Spirit. The contrast is not between fullness and emptiness; it is between two kinds of fullness, one that wrecks a life and one that fills it with God Himself.

And then Paul tells us what a Spirit-filled life sounds like, and it may surprise us. It sounds like singing. Be filled with the Spirit, he says, addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart, giving thanks always and for everything. The overflow of a soul full of God is not first ecstatic experiences or dramatic signs, but a congregation lifting its voice together in song, hearts tuned to the Lord, thanks rising for everything.

Paul is drawing a portrait of wise living in evil days. Look carefully how you walk, he begins, not as unwise but as wise, making the best use of the time. The wise person understands the will of the Lord, is filled with the Spirit rather than with substitutes, sings from the heart, gives thanks in all things, and submits to others out of reverence for Christ. This is what it looks like when the fullness we were made for finally finds its true source. We stop trying to fill ourselves, and we let God fill us instead.

Group Discussion: Paul contrasts being drunk with wine with being filled with the Spirit, and says the Spirit-filled life overflows in singing, thanksgiving, and mutual submission. Why do you think Paul points to these particular marks, and what does it suggest about where true fullness of life is found?

Personal Reflection: Paul says everyone is being filled by something. When you feel empty, restless, or stressed, what do you most often reach for to fill yourself, and what would it look like to be filled with the Spirit instead?

Read Ephesians 5:15-21

Study Questions

1. 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?
2. 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?
3. 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?
4. 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?
5. 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?
6. 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?
7. 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?
8. 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?
9. 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?
10. 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.

Now or Later

Reflect on these passages: Colossians 3:16, let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God; Hebrews 13:15, let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise, the fruit of lips that acknowledge His name; 1 Corinthians 14:15, I will sing with my spirit, and I will sing with my mind also; Acts 16:25, Paul and Silas praying and singing hymns to God in prison; Galatians 5:22–23, the fruit of the Spirit, the evidence of a Spirit-filled life.