

One Another

Lesson 9: Submit to One Another in Reverence for Christ -- Ephesians

5:15-21

Picture two people walking the same road on the same day. One ambles along, eyes half open, drifting wherever the path happens to lead, never asking where the day is going or what it is for. The other walks awake, eyes up, weighing each turn, redeeming the hours, alert to opportunity and to danger alike. Same road, same daylight, two completely different journeys. Paul says the difference between those two walkers is the difference between the fool and the wise, and he urges every Christian into the second way of walking. "Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, making the best use of the time, because the days are evil."

How do you walk awake like that? Paul's answer is surprising. He does not say, "Try harder," or "Plan better." He says, "Do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit." He sets two ways of being filled side by side. The world reaches for the bottle to feel alive, to drown the dullness, to escape the evil days, and ends up emptied and enslaved. The Christian is filled instead with the Holy Spirit of God, and that fullness does not numb us; it wakes us up, floods us with joy, and overflows in a particular and beautiful way.

Notice how Paul says Spirit-filled people overflow. Not first in private ecstasy but in shared song. "Addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with all your heart." There it is again, the heartbeat of this whole study: one another. The fullness of the Spirit spills out of us toward each other in song, in thanksgiving, in a glad chorus of believing voices lifting one another's eyes to the Lord. When the church gathers and sings from the heart, that is not a warm-up act before the real worship. That is the Spirit-filled life sounding out loud.

And then Paul reaches the verse that ties this lesson together and opens the door to everything that follows: "submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ." Here is the posture of a Spirit-filled people. Not jostling for position, not insisting on our own way, but lowering ourselves before one another in glad humility because we stand in awe of the Lord. This single sentence is the hinge of the whole passage. Out of it Paul will draw the specific shape of Christian homes and Christian lives in the verses that follow. But it begins here, with a people so filled with the Spirit and so reverent toward Christ that they gladly defer to one another. That is the kind of community this lesson is about.

Group Discussion: Paul contrasts being "drunk with wine" with being "filled with the Spirit" (verse 18). What does it tell us that he sets these two side by side, and what does the world hope to find in the bottle that it can only truly find in being filled with God's Spirit?

Personal Reflection: Where in your week do you tend to walk “as unwise” rather than “as wise,” drifting and wasting time rather than redeeming it? As you begin this lesson, what is one way you sense the Lord calling you to walk more awake?

Read Ephesians 5:15–21

Study Questions

1. Paul writes, “Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, making the best use of the time, because the days are evil” (Ephesians 5:15–16). What does it mean to “make the best use of the time,” and why does Paul ground this command in the fact that “the days are evil”?
2. Take an honest look at how you spent your hours this past week. Where did you redeem the time, and where did you simply let it leak away? Name one specific way you could walk more wisely.
3. Paul says, “Do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is” (verse 17). How does a Christian come to understand the Lord’s will, and what does it tell us that this is set in contrast with being foolish?
4. Are there areas of your life where you are content to remain “foolish,” not really seeking to understand the Lord’s will because you suspect you might not like the answer? Where do you most need to understand his will?
5. Paul commands, “Do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit” (verse 18). Why does Paul set drunkenness and Spirit-filling as rival ways of living, and what does it mean for a Christian to be “filled with the Spirit”?

6. Where do you turn for relief, escape, or fullness when life feels empty or hard? How would being “filled with the Spirit” reshape the way you handle those moments?
7. 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” (verse 19). Why does Paul describe congregational singing as something we do toward one another and not only toward God, and what does that teach us about worship in song?
8. When you sing with the gathered church, are you truly “addressing one another” and singing to the Lord from the heart, or merely going through the motions? What would it look like to sing as Paul describes?
9. Paul closes this section with “submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ” (verse 21), and he immediately applies it to specific relationships in the verses that follow (wives and husbands, children and parents). How does the mutual humility of “submitting to one another” relate to the distinct, God-given roles Paul then describes, so that we honor both without playing one against the other?
10. Look back across Ephesians 5:15–21 as a whole: walking wisely, understanding the Lord’s will, being filled with the Spirit, singing to one another, giving thanks, and submitting to one another in reverence for Christ. Name one specific way you sense Jesus forming you through this passage, and what you will do about it this week.

Now or Later

Reflect on these passages: Colossians 3:16–17, a close parallel where the word of Christ dwells in us richly and we teach and admonish one another in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs; Galatians 5:16–25, where walking by the Spirit produces the fruit that marks the Spirit-filled life; Philippians 2:3–8, where Christ's own humility is the pattern for counting others more significant than ourselves; Romans 12:1–2, where understanding the will of God flows from a renewed mind and a life offered to him; 1 Peter 5:5–6, where we clothe ourselves with humility toward one another under God's mighty hand.