

Prayer

Almighty God and Creator; restore my bruised and fallen soul
Lord Jesus Christ of Nazareth; heal my worn and tired body
Holy Spirit, breath of God, comfort my tender and painful heart
I yield my body, soul and spirit to Jesus Christ, Your Son
Almighty God and Creator, my Saviour and my Redeemer: AMEN.

Prayer Suggestions

Prayer ideas

Give thanks to God for His provision for each area of your life. Praise Him for His love and care

On-going prayers

- **Pray for the United Nations.** *Pray for the many staff working for the united nations in various roles across the world, especially any know to you*
- *Pray for those whose live are spent caring for others*
- *Pray about the forthcoming Copenhagen climate summit*

Meditation

The love of God is constantly offered,
Even when we don't deserve it:

It is infinitely expressive and overtly joyful,
Even when we are gloomy or sad:

It is forever undeserved and supremely generous,
Even when we have sinned against others:

It is overwhelmingly happy and totally kind,
Even when we are complaining and grumpy:

It is powerfully caring, and utterly unselfish,
Even when we are absorbed by ourselves:

It is completely satisfying and full of reward,
Even when we are impossible to satisfy:

It is awesomely true and profoundly real,
Even when we are contrary and stubborn.

For the love of God is available for all
And remains so from now and for ever.

Bible passage – Ephesians 5:15-20

¹⁵ So be careful how you walk, not as unwise people but as wise, ¹⁶ making good use of the time, because the days are evil; ¹⁷ so do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. ¹⁸ Do not get drunk with wine, for that is reckless indulgence, but be filled with the Spirit, ¹⁹ sharing with one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making music in your heart to the Lord, ²⁰ always giving thanks for everything to God the Father, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Thought for the Day

Text – Ephesians 5:18

¹⁸ *Do not get drunk with wine, for that is reckless indulgence, but be filled with the Spirit,*

Thought

This wonderful verse from Ephesians sounds comic, but we should not laugh at it! It tells us that there are two options in life; the first is to allow ourselves to be filled with the things of this world, and the second is to allow God's Holy Spirit to fill us and guide us in all holiness.

The Holy Spirit is not an optional extra faith. He is the presence of God, and he makes faith real and liveable. The church needs to ditch preconceptions about the Holy Spirit based on attitudes towards Pentecostals and charismatics, and let God to do His work by means of His Spirit.

Bible Study

Review

This short section of chapter five contains some inspiring advice about how to live the life of faith. It continues a chapter in which Christians have been called on to 'imitate God', and 'live a life of love' (5:1), to refrain from wrongdoing (5:3-6), shun darkness and 'live as children of the light' (5:8). Throughout, Paul's advice has recognised that each individual Christian is on a journey, with a beginning and an end. In between, each one has a responsibility to live in a godly manner so that the world might see the difference between 'darkness and light' (5:8-14).

Against this background, each sentence of our passage offers its own challenge to godly living, giving both general principles (e.g. 'make good use of the time' – 5:16) and specific examples (e.g. 'do not get drunk' – 5:18). As a whole, the passage is a powerful testimony to the work of the Spirit amongst the earliest of believers. There are four core pieces of advice, and the last comes with two additional comments:

1. *'be careful how to walk, not as unwise ... but as wise' (5:15)*
2. *'make good use of the time, because the days are evil.'* (5:16)
3. *'don't be foolish, but understand what God's will is' (5:17)*
4. *'don't get drunk ... but be filled with the Spirit' (5:18)*
 - a. *by sharing songs 'in your heart to the Lord' (5:19)*
 - b. *by always giving thanks 'to God ... for everything' (5:20)*

In this analysis we can see that each of the four pieces of advice contains a contrast between something good and something bad. This is typical not so much of the Greek philosophy that lay behind popular thought in the first century, but of the Hebrew 'wisdom' literature of the Old Testament, found especially in Proverbs.

To begin with, Paul urges God's people to be careful, and walk (also meaning 'live') 'not as unwise people but as wise' (5:15). People naturally consider themselves wise in their own eyes, but the Christian should focus on the wisdom of God, and be cautious about personal assumptions and natural reactions, asking the question, 'what is right before God?' Next, this letter advises the proper use of time for what is 'good', because 'the days are evil' (5:16), which contrasts the world's evil with good in the life of the believer. In Paul's day, some believed that it was not worth putting effort into life because Christ would soon return to end it. Paul strongly objected to this, and his advice (5:16) remains relevant today but in a different way; we who live in a busy world and must fill our time well. The third piece of advice is similar to the first, contrasting the foolishness of ignoring God with the wisdom of understanding His will (5:17). Clearly, those who love God need to put effort into their relationship with Him if they want to know what He requires of them, and at least, read the Bible!

The most striking advice in this passage contrasts being filled with alcohol and being filled with the Spirit (5:18)! This is not the first scripture to say this; those who first heard the disciples speak in tongues at Pentecost thought they were drunk (Acts 2:13)! However, Paul adds two comments about being 'filled with the Spirit' that are real treasures of God's Word, and each one describes worship. The Spirit is shown in the singing of psalms, hymns and songs, with an emphasis on 'sharing' and worship that comes from the heart (5:19); He also enables the believer to perceive the hand of God in everything, and give thanks (5:20)!

This is controversial, because Ephesians 5:19,20 is very similar to Colossians 3:16,17, except that Colossians does not say 'give thanks for everything' like Ephesians! So those who do not think it right to

give thanks for everything argue that Ephesians has been wrongly copied from Colossians! I suggest that Paul meant what he said in Ephesians, and wrote to emphasise an important truth. At the heart of any true walk of faith is the belief that whatever things may look like here on earth, we may give thanks for everything because God is truly in control.

Going Deeper

The Bible study goes deeper to look at these issues:

- Knowing God's will, and making good use of the time (5:15-17)
- What does it mean to be 'filled with the Spirit' (5:18)
- Why are singing and giving thanks examples of being full of the Spirit (5:19,20)

Notes on the text and translation

Important words

V16 'time'

The Greek word used here is 'kairos', which means time in general, not a particular event (as in 'now is the time'). It refers here to the period of time available to people before the Lord comes again (see study).

V18 'reckless indulgence'

The Greek word is 'asotia', which means abandonment to immoral behaviour without regard to the consequences. This is a great deal to try and say within one word, and other translations say 'dissipation', or 'debauchery'. However, although these words are correct translations, they do not communicate well, so I have chosen to use two words to convey the meaning of this one Greek word.

Significant phrases

V15 'So be careful how you walk'

Other translations:

'Be very careful, then, how you live' (NIV)

'Look carefully then how you walk' (English Standard Version)

The difference between the ways that this is translated is due to the Greek word 'peripateo', which means 'to walk, live, or conduct oneself'. I have retained the word 'walk', because this links strongly with the important theme of 'journey', found in the preceding verses (see study).

V19 'singing and making music in your heart to the Lord'

Other translations:

'singing and making melody to the Lord with all your heart' (ESV)

'singing and making melody to the Lord in your hearts' (NRSV)

The difficulty in translating this comes from the fact that after the word singing, the Greek uses another word that means roughly the same as singing, but there is no equivalent word in English. I prefer the expression 'making music', because this phrase is commonly used, whereas 'making melody' is perhaps more rare. In addition, the Greek says '*in your heart*' (singular), not '*in your hearts*' (plural). I have kept this even though it does not read easily, and we might expect the plural.

Going Deeper

Knowing God's will, and making good use of the time (5:15-17)

Looking closely, the first three pieces of advice in this text go together, offering consistent advice about the Christian life (described as a journey or a 'walk' – see translation notes above). Paul tells us here that the way we live counts for a great deal, because what we do and how we do it is seen by others and they make judgements based on what they see of us, together with the Faith we publicly confess. For good reason, each of us must 'be careful' about how we live, and know what is 'wise' in the sight of God (5:15).

This begs many questions, such as what is 'wise', and what is God's wisdom? This passage says clearly that to be wise is to know the heart and will of God, yet it is too easy to give up and say that it is impossible

to know what God thinks, or to aspire to the immense wisdom of God. This may be true in that we cannot know all things about God, but there is much that we do know. In broad brush strokes, the teaching of the Old Testament tells us that God is on a constant mission to overcome sin. Whereas the Old Testament people of God were never able to overcome sin by their own efforts to keep the law, the New Testament Gospel tells us that Jesus has overcome the problem. If we look to Jesus, we see God (see John 14:7f. and also Ephesians 1:4f.), and this is the 'wisdom of God'.

It may not appear that here in the fifth chapter of Ephesians, Paul is making a connection between the Gospel and everyday Christian faith, but he is. The whole of the second half of Ephesians must be read in the light of the first, which is almost exclusively a long, complex and yet inspiring description of the Gospel and Paul's right to preach it. It is entirely logical therefore to say that the 'will of the Lord' (5:17), as well as 'what pleases the Lord' (5:10) is one and the same thing, the Gospel of salvation by which we are saved.

If we make this leap of faith, then these three verse (5:15-17) are not just separate pieces of advice, they are all make similar points. To walk wisely is to live in a manner that befits one who has been saved by faith and knows that Jesus is the Saviour of the world. Such assurance changes men and women and gives them a completely different life, as we have already seen in Ephesians 4 (e.g. 4:25f.). Further, the one who has been saved is not idle, and this is Paul's true point in verse 16. The evil nature of the times, as evidenced by the slaughter of Jesus Christ on the Cross only a few years previously, fires the starting gun on the great evangelistic task of taking the news of Jesus Christ to all the world. Again, it is doubtful that Paul would have meant anything else by saying 'make good use of the time ...' (5:16). And lastly, there is surely no need to debate the nature of the 'will of the Lord' (5:17), when Jesus has commanded that the Gospel be taken to the world, as intended (willed) by God since the beginning of time (see Ephesians 1:3-14).

Now, we may want to know all kinds of details about how we may respond to various situations in life, and through Christ, we may pray to the Father to ask Him. However, we must expect that the answers to our prayers will be in accord with His global 'will' both for us and for all with whom we live. It is foolishness itself to imagine otherwise.

What does it mean to be 'filled with the Spirit' (5:18)

Again, Paul is not plucking pictures out of thin air when he speaks about avoiding drunkenness and being 'filled with the Spirit' (5:18). Firstly, Paul implored his readers not to be foolish in drinking wine to get drunk (see translation notes above). What Paul wants us to understand is that getting drunk shows a casual approach both to the self discipline necessary for godly living but also a desire for the sensual pleasure of getting drunk that is contrary to God's will for us. The Lord has far greater pleasures for us than getting drunk! This is not just a casual reference to the perils of drinking; it is a powerful and real example of how a godly life can be hauled away from the Lord by Satan. There have been too many examples of this within the life of the church for us to be complacent about it.

There have been too many arguments about what the term 'filled with the Spirit' means, but the truth is that this exact term is used extensively in Acts (2:4, 4:8, 5:3, 9:17, 13:9 etc.) and in Luke (1:15, 41,67) to describe the activity of God in the life of the believer after conversion. It is unwise to make it sound like a special experience, other than the natural consequence of faith, and we should expect that other phrases are used in scripture that say the same thing, such as 'baptise with the spirit' (Matthew 3:11, John 1:33, Acts 1:5,) and 'received the Holy Spirit' (Acts 10:47, John 7:39, 20:22, Romans 8:15, Galatians 3:2). Jesus Himself speaks about sending the Holy Spirit to his disciples after He has gone, as God's 'comforter' who will enable them to understand all truth and do the things of God (John 14:26,15:26).

You will see from these quotes that the language of the human experience of the Holy Spirit is spread across the Gospels, Acts and the letters of the New Testament. It is therefore unwise to suggest that one author uses one and not the other, as if there was some significance in this, and different shades of meaning or spiritual experience. This is highly unlikely. It seems that in the early church, these phrases were common expressions for the same thing; the work of God in the life of the believer. God gives us His Holy Spirit precisely so that we do not need to fear 'not knowing His will' as it applies to any circumstance of life, and so that we might know what it is like to live in the presence of God Himself. He is truly with us in 'Spirit'!

Why are singing and giving thanks examples of being full of the Spirit (5:19,20)

To be 'filled with the Spirit' is not an option for Christian faith, it is what every believer should expect and experience; this is the clear Biblical teaching of Scripture. If you know this and have allowed yourself to be taken over by God's spirit in wonder, love and praise, you will know that it is a far more pleasurable experience than getting drunk and it comes with no 'hang-over'! Paul's advice is to share the life of the Spirit with one another in 'psalms, hymns and spiritual songs' (5:19), and in constantly giving thanks for everything (5:20). The advice here in verses 19 and 20 is not liturgical instruction about worship, as if we must ensure that we cover each aspect of what is mentioned here when we worship God. It is Paul's description of what happens in the human souls when filled with the Spirit.

Each aspect of what is mentioned in this verse is significant. Psalms are the hymn-book of the Bible, originally written as songs of praise to God, at a time when people understood that 'praise' was more than having a good sing; it meant being totally honest with God about the good times and the bad. To sing the psalms is to sing words that are God's Words, with all that this means. Hymns are poems written and set to music that express the truths of our faith, sometimes in quite complex ways, but they are not Scripture, they are cultural, and will have meaning for one generation or another. The same is true of 'spiritual songs', the outpouring of the soul to God, often with words and tunes that are easy to memorise and repeat. It would be good to include these different forms of song in our worship today, but Paul is not making a rule book here, he is illustrating the natural consequences of the infilling of the Holy Spirit.

Lastly, Paul speaks about '*always giving thanks to God the Father for everything ...*'. This is a phrase that has caused a certain amount of controversy, as we saw above; but if we leave to one side any theories about why this is similar to, but not the same as Colossians 3:16,17, then we are free to interpret it for what it says. There are indeed other texts from Paul's letters that speak of unceasing prayer (Phil 1:4, Col 1:9), and about giving thanks to God in all circumstances (1 Thess 5:18), so we should not question the teaching but try to understand it. The point being made is this, the presence of the Holy Spirit enables the believer to appreciate the fact that God is in control of all things, whatever the appearances. This does not mean that life is will not be tough at times, but the Holy Spirit makes the difference between being overcome by the trials of this world, and being victorious over them. The Spirit assures us of God's love and His plans for us and the whole world. We need never have any fears.

Application

This is all sound advice from Paul about living the Christian life, and it stands as a powerful testimony to the active presence of Holy Spirit in the life of the believer. Paul wrote like this because it was his experience and that of many others. Unfortunately, many Christians today regard even talking about the Holy Spirit as evidence of some kind of fringe activity on the edge of the church. I even know of a significant number of churches where the Alpha programme is used for evangelism, but those who organise it insist that they will have nothing to do with the Holy Spirit section of the course! They want the teaching of the course, but do not want people to face its essential challenge! I suggest that Paul would have been astonished. If we are to walk as God's people in this world, then we need the active presence of God by His Holy Spirit if we are to live as He intended, and be empowered to be His people. The Holy Spirit will make us wise about the things of God, and prompt us to do what is necessary for the Kingdom of God; moreover, when we acknowledge the presence of God's Holy Spirit, our worship and praise will come alive.

The praise and worship of early Christians together with the evident love and care with which they treated each other was their essential testimony. It was so powerful that countless numbers of people were attracted to faith in Christ, enabling the church to grow substantially in the midst of the hostile Roman Empire. There is no doubt people have always been attracted to those who show that they are happy and joyful, and this attraction is even more powerful at times of trouble or distress in the world. What Paul says here in this passage is a true reflection of the work of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer, and we should not be surprised that the Holy Spirit brings joy to the heart of the believer. His overwhelming conclusion is that the infilling of the Holy Spirit not only enables us to live according to God's will, but enables us to show genuine joy and delight in our worship of Almighty God!

Discipleship

Questions (for use in groups)

1. Discuss in your group why it is that many people who are Christians still drink too much. What can be the results of this excess?
2. What difference does the Holy Spirit make to worship? How can we give thanks for 'everything', and what does this mean?
3. Do you enjoy singing Psalms, hymns and spiritual songs? What is the difference between these three?

Topics covered by this text

- *Discipleship*

- *Being filled with the Spirit of God*
- *Worship and thanksgiving*

Personal comments by author

This passage speaks of God's people enjoying worship, celebrating with song and giving thanks. I have known many services of worship in which the Holy Spirit has taken what the people have offered and lifted their praise to new heights. This does not happen because people plan their worship any less or any more, but because God is given His place in people's hearts and the Holy Spirit is welcome, whatever the structure of the service. We should not be asking the Holy Spirit to be present in our worship at the last moment; we should seek His blessing throughout the sustained and rewarding work of preparing for it technically, practically, musically, and in every other spiritual way.

Ideas for exploring discipleship

- *Do your best when attending worship to enter in to it with joy. Joy is infectious, and it will help other people to find true happiness if you radiate joy and peace with God through Christ!*
- *Write a note in your diary at the end of each day which indicates whether you have been happy or joyful during the day. Some days you will be, and some days you will not. See what pattern emerges.*

Final Prayer

Holy Spirit, we are amazed at Your mysterious ways. Yet you guide us along the path of life with power and grace, enabling us to fulfil our lives through the gracious gifts You bestow. All praise to You, Living Lord, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. AMEN
