

April 21/22, 2001

The Truth About Our Life in Christ

A Study in the Book of Ephesians

Spirit-filled Living

Ephesians 5:15-21

Pastor Bryan Clark

Time magazine had a cover article that opened with these words:

If you have a moment to read this story with your feet up, free of interruption, at your leisure ... put it down. It's not for you. Congratulations. If, like almost everyone else, you're trying to do something else at the same time—if you are stuck in traffic, waiting in the airport lounge, watching the news, if you're stirring the soup, shining your shoes, drying your hair ... read on. Or hire someone to read it for you and give you a report. There was once a time when time was money. Both could be wasted or both well spent, but in the end gold was the richer prize. As with almost any commodity, however, value depends on scarcity. And these are the days of the time famine.

– “How America Has Run Out of Time” by Nancy Gibbs, *Time*, 4/24/89

That was written in 1989, twelve years ago. We would say that the speed of the culture hasn't slowed down. There is a busyness about our culture that continues to accelerate. We are a very busy people. The question that we need to think about is, *What are we busy about?* It is one thing to be busy. It is another thing to be busy about the right things. What are you investing in that will last forever?

Paul says that we should be wise people. He says that if we are wise people, then we will make the most of our time. And the only way to do that is to live a Spirit-filled life. Turn to Ephesians 5, and let's see what Paul has to say about these things.

Ephesians 5:15 opens with the word *therefore*, which is a reference to what we discussed two weeks ago. Therefore, because we are light (the reflection of the presence of Christ in our lives) we provide a testimony to those who are in darkness, so some in darkness will move from darkness to light. Therefore, because of that and because of the importance of that, Paul says, “be careful how you walk, not as unwise men, but as wise.”

Paul has used a number of contrasts here in Ephesians. He has talked about those who are spiritually dead versus those who are spiritually alive. He has talked about those who are darkness versus those who are light. Now he is talking about those who are unwise versus those who are wise. In the end, the point is the same. There ought to be a radical difference that Jesus makes in our lives. Therefore, we live our lives differently. In this case, how we spend our lives and how we use our time should be different.

When he says, “be careful how you walk,” that phrase means to walk with precision. Maybe the best way to visualize it is to think about somebody walking barefoot across a rock driveway or across a field that has sticker patches in it. Every step is carefully calculated. They take a step and then they look for the next place to step. That is what this word means. It means to walk with great precision, with every step carefully calculated.

“Therefore, be careful how you walk, not as unwise men, but as wise, making the most of your time, because the days are evil.” That phrase “making the most of your time” is actually an accounting phrase. It means to redeem your time or to buy it back. Buy it back from what? Buy it back from the culture. When he says the days are evil, he means that, by

and large, the culture is busy, but it is busy about the things of this earth. Because people live in spiritual darkness, that is all they know and that is what they live for. So they are busy about the things that have to do with material things, with position, with power, and trying to find significance and meaning. They are busy with all of those things that drive the pace of the culture, and that is how they live, because they live in spiritual darkness. Paul says that we need to buy back our time from that momentum, in a sense, in order to invest it differently—to live for something different. It is the idea that, rather than just getting caught in the flow and living the same way as everybody else, we redeem our time. We buy it back. We invest it in the Kingdom.

One of the things that is very important to understand, in order to live the way Paul is talking about living, is to really remove this distinction between the secular and the sacred in terms of our lives. What tends to happen is that when I say, “we need to live for things eternal; we need to live for the Kingdom,” there is a tendency to think, *I work 40 or 50 hours a week. Then I have to do this and I have to do that. Every Wednesday night, I serve two hours in AWANA, and that is really my Kingdom building.* If you think that when you stand before God and tell Him that you invested two hours a week in Kingdom building, that is going to be acceptable, you are going to be disappointed. Because God is not going to find that acceptable at all. What God wants is 100% of your life. Rather than making a distinction between the sacred and the secular, I need to understand that every day I go to work is a Kingdom day. I understand there is opportunity, then, to live with the presence of Christ in my life and be a witness to others. Every day it is a Kingdom day. Everything that I do with my life somehow is first and foremost about the Kingdom.

A wonderful prayer every morning would be to thank God for the gift of life and say, “Lord, make this a Kingdom day. Help me to be aware of opportunities you bring into my path to affect the Kingdom.” When you go to work, when you play golf, when you are in your neighborhood, whatever you are doing, there is still a Kingdom purpose to it. It is very important to think that way, and it is the only way that you are going to redeem your time. It is like money. Sometimes people think that a certain amount belongs to God and the rest they can spend however they please. But that is really incorrect. One hundred percent of it belongs to God, and you do not have the right to squander any of it. God owns it all, and He expects you to wisely steward all of it. The same would be true of your time. You don’t just give God a little piece of time and live the rest of your life your own way. It all belongs to God. If you are going to make the most of our time, then every day is a Kingdom day. That is what he is talking about here, and that is what it means to be walking “as the wise.”

Verse 17: “So then {*if that is true, if that is how we are going to live*} do not be foolish.” This word *foolish* is stronger than unwise. It could be translated stupid. It is a pretty strong term that gets right to the point. “Don’t be foolish {*don’t be stupid.*} but understand what the will of the Lord is.”

In just a minute, we are going to understand what the will of the Lord is. But before we do that, it is important to realize that we often find ourselves searching for God’s will for our lives. We want to know God’s will as far as a career, or as far as a partner. We want to know God’s will about changing jobs, or whatever it might happen to be. There is nothing wrong with thinking that way, but we need to also understand that most of God’s will has already been revealed to us in His Word. This is what we call His known will. It is very important to understand that, until we are willing to be obedient to His known will, we really have no right to ask Him to reveal His unknown will. When you leave here this morning, you

can't say, "I don't know God's will for my life." Because Paul is going to spell it out in black and white in this text. Until we are willing to be obedient to His known will, He probably isn't going to answer our questions about His unknown will. So we need to keep that in mind as we study this passage.

There are two commands in this text and both of them are in verse 18: "And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, *{that is the negative}* but be filled with the Spirit, *{this is the positive}*." This idea of drunkenness deals with literal drunkenness, which was a problem in Ephesus. There were a lot of vineyards there, and a lot of alcohol related to the pagan worship. By and large, these people lived drunken lives, and as believers in the Church, that obviously needed to change.

It also creates an imagery, a picture, of the wasted life. Back in verse 15, Paul talked about walking with precision, which means that every single step is carefully calculated. The opposite of that is someone who is drunk. They stumble and stagger, and they don't walk with precision at all. They just stumble their way along, and it is the ultimate waste of time. They are in a drunken stupor, and they do nothing of value. It is an imagery of total waste. Paul is saying that those people live their lives totally wasting them. The opposite of that is the wise person who carefully calculates every day as a Kingdom day. There is no time to waste. There is an imagery in the drunkenness and the understanding that, when you are drunk, you are under the control of the alcohol. The contrast to that is to be under the control of the Spirit of God.

Verse 18 says, "Be filled with the Spirit." That is a command, but what does it mean? There is a lot of confusion as it relates to the Holy Spirit, and I want to address a few of those areas in order to help clarify this. The Bible is very clear in Ephesians 1, and also in Romans 8:9, that the moment you trust Jesus as Savior, the Holy Spirit comes to dwell within you. As a matter of fact, Paul says very clearly in Romans 8 that you cannot be a believer in Christ and not have the Holy Spirit. Therefore, it is not something you have to pursue; it is not something you go looking for. You don't have to travel to some meeting somewhere else in the country for somebody to give you the Holy Spirit. It is automatic at the moment of salvation. The Holy Spirit is a person; it isn't an energy force. Sometimes it looks as if people have 110 volts and they are seeking 220 volts. They just want to "up the power" a little bit. But when you have the person of the Holy Spirit, you have God. You have *all* of God; you don't have part of God. Therefore, you have everything you need, and you don't have to go looking for something else.

Also, we often hear the term baptism—the baptism *of* the Spirit or baptism *by* the Spirit. Those terms are thrown out interchangeably with other terms. But that is a very specific term in the New Testament. It is the action by which the Holy Spirit of God places you into the body of Christ. It means to be identified with the body of Christ. That, too, happens the moment of salvation. It would be impossible for you to have trusted Jesus as Savior and not to have been baptized by the Spirit, because it is automatic at the moment of salvation. That is why you never find one place in the New Testament where it instructs you to seek the baptism of the Spirit. There is no command to be baptized in the Spirit. It is a done deal. It is automatic—one time—at the moment of salvation.

Also, sometimes you hear the terminology to be "slain in the Spirit" and there are all kinds of interesting manifestations of that. It is helpful to know that terminology shows up

nowhere in the Bible, nor do those manifestations. So, let's just set that one aside and go on to what we are talking about, to "be filled with the Spirit."

To "be filled with the Spirit" is a command—this is something that we choose. We can choose to do it or not. It also is in the continuous present tense as a verb, which means it is a way of life. The indwelling, the baptism of the Spirit, is done one time at the moment of salvation for all time. To be filled with the Spirit is a way of life. It is a daily thing. It is a choice I make every day to be submissive to the Spirit of God within me. But still, what does it mean? To be filled with the Spirit does not mean filled in the same way you think of a water glass having water poured into it and being filled up. That is not really what the term means. It means to be controlled by. As a matter of fact, we use the term the same way. We say someone was filled with rage, or filled with anger, or filled with fear." What we mean is that anger, that fear or that rage controlled their behavior. The New Testament uses this word the same way. When you read through the gospels, it says, "They were filled with anger. They were filled with fear. They were filled with rage." It is the same Greek word that is used here and it means to be controlled by.

Even then, it still seems rather vague and abstract—still "out there." I am not sure practically what it means to be filled with the Spirit. I remember for me what unlocked this doctrine was when I understood what Jesus was saying in John 14. Jesus is having a discussion with his disciples in the Upper Room in John 14. Jesus had spent a significant amount of time teaching His disciples to be totally dependent upon Him, and that did not come easy. They were prone to be dependent upon themselves, their own skills and their own abilities. Jesus had to break them of that and say, "I want you to depend on me. I want you to trust me. I am the One who is going to take care of you."

So, about the time the disciples were learning what it meant to be dependent on Jesus, Jesus dropped a bombshell on them and said, "By the way, I am leaving." Of course, they became very anxious because they had learned to be totally dependent on Jesus. Now what were they going to do when Jesus left? Jesus responded with these words from John 14:16: "And I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may be with you forever."

Jesus even went on to say that the arrangement with this Helper was going to be better than what they had known before. When Jesus was with them in the flesh, if Jesus was one place and they were somewhere else, there was a separation. As a matter of fact, in a matter of hours, Jesus would be arrested and separated from them. The disciples fell completely apart. Jesus told them that the new arrangement was going to be better, because He was going to come back to them in His Holy Spirit and dwell within them. Jesus said that He would always be with them and never leave them or forsake them. He would be with them forever, so there would never again be this separation. Never again would there be this distance between them that they felt in those hours that followed.

The key is understanding the word *another*. In the Greek language, there is "another of a different kind" and there is a whole different Greek word that means "another of the same kind." This word is very strategically chosen, because it means another of the exact same kind. In other words, Jesus is saying, "I am going to send a Helper, and He is going to be just like me. He is going to dwell within you. You are going to be able to live life just as if I was right there at your side."

One of the most practical ways to understand what it means to be filled with the Spirit is to read through the gospels and look specifically at how it affected people's lives when Jesus was right there at their side. Track the disciples and look at how it changed how they spoke. Look at how it changed their faith, their courage, and their behavior. As long as Jesus was there, every day was a Kingdom day. There were no wasted days when Jesus was there, because every day for Jesus was a Kingdom day. Because the disciples were so in tune with that, they made the most of their time.

Can you imagine what it would be like if Jesus were right there at your side, every day when you go to school? Every word that comes out of your mouth, everything that you do would be done with Jesus right beside you. Whatever difficult experiences you face, He is right there. He goes with you to business tomorrow, and he watches every transaction. He listens to every word you say. He sees how you treat every single person. He is with you during every program you watch on TV. We all have to agree that this would radically change our lives, wouldn't it? The reality is that is true—it is not a make-believe thing. Jesus is with you, dwelling within you. He does go with you every day to work. He does observe every transaction. He does hear every word out of your mouth. He does see everything that you watch on TV. He is right beside you every time you experience difficult circumstances. You do have Jesus dwelling within you every moment of every day. So, to be a Spirit-filled believer is to be aware of that. It is to be sensitive to that and to live each day in light of that—knowing that Jesus is right there by your side.

Paul says that is what it means to be a wise person, to make the most of your time, to live as a Spirit-filled person. What are the results of living as a Spirit-filled believer? Sometimes, whether through personal experiences, or maybe through television, you perhaps have come across what some teach is the evidence of the presence of the Holy Spirit. Sometimes, they are very interesting. For some, it means that they go into this subconscious state and they just crumple on the floor. This is interesting, because when Paul talked about the fruit of the Spirit, he said that it is self-discipline. It is a very conscious state. As a matter of fact, even in this text, he says that you walk with precision. This means that I deliberately choose each step I take, and I am very aware of what I am doing. I am not in any kind of subconscious state. Sometimes you might see somebody touch a person and they go flying backwards. One of the newer things is that they make animal noises. They bark and they moo. Some of them even experience what they call "holy glue" where they seem to be stuck to the floor and can't move for hours. The latest thing is that they are experiencing gold dust from heaven. If the Spirit is moving in them, they look at their skin and they see flecks of gold dust. Somehow they think it is being shaved off the streets of heaven and falling on them, like a precursor to the Kingdom coming.

People can really get distracted with all those things. It is helpful to know that those things are not identified anywhere in the Bible as marks of the Spirit's presence in your life. As a matter of fact, what Paul talks about in this passage are three different marks or results of the Spirit-filled life. They are all very sensible—imagine that!

The first one, in verse 19, I would call unity in worship. A mark of a Spirit-filled life is the ability to enter into unity in worship. Paul says, "speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord." One thing to notice is that worship has both a vertical and a horizontal dimension. I think we are aware of the vertical. In other words, we are singing praises to God, and we are talking to God. That seems fairly obvious. But it is helpful to know that worship also has a horizontal

dimension to it. That is what he is saying here, “speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs.” Paul says this same thing in Colossians 3 where he says, “teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs.”

If you paid careful attention to the worship today, about half of the songs were directed to the Lord, but the other half of them were sung to one another. The very last chorus we sang, “Give Thanks,” was not sung to God. It was reminding ourselves about God. That is a legitimate form of worship. We teach and admonish one another in worship when we remind ourselves how we should live. We remind ourselves that we should be thankful people, and we remind ourselves who God is. That is an element of worship. We teach and admonish one another in worship, as we speak to one another and we also speak to God. The Body comes together and that is pleasing to God, because it comes from our hearts.

I think the point of verse 19 is that this is done with great musical diversity. Paul is very intentional in saying it is done with psalms, with hymns and with spiritual songs. Nobody is quite sure what these categories are. Psalms is probably the clearest, and probably means just the Old Testament Psalms. For hymns, we immediately go to our hymnbook and think that is what it is talking about. Most commentators think it is talking about a form of music that was part of the pagan worship. They sang these songs of dedication to their pagan gods. The church said, “Let’s take that music and dedicate it to our God,” which you have to believe was somewhat controversial in the early church. That is the category of hymns. Spiritual songs are in this generic category that just picks up the diversity of music and expression in worship. Also, when he talks about singing and making melody, singing is a Greek word specifically talking about the voice as an instrument. Making melody is literally to pluck a string, so it is talking about instruments. Ultimately, what Paul is saying is that, with great diversity of styles of music—psalms, hymns, spiritual songs—and also diversity of voices and instruments, the Body is unified in worship, because we all have the same Spirit. That Spirit leads us to worship the Lord together.

So, I am just going to stick my foot right in it here. If that is what Paul is saying, and it seems very clear that is what he *is* saying, then it would also be fair to say that those who cannot enter into unity in the Body in worship in the midst of diversity are not Spirit-filled people. I mean, we can explain this away any way we want. But the reality is that Paul is saying that is more the mark of a consumer critic than it is of a Spirit-filled individual. Don’t misunderstand me. There are times when people very graciously share, “I really appreciate this about worship” or “I have this concern about worship.” That is very good and it is very proper. I would also say it is very necessary, because that keeps us in balance. We do need to hear from the Body. But there is a difference between that, and people who just constantly peck—people who are just coming as consumer critics. They like this style of music, they don’t like this style of music. They like this instrument; they don’t like that instrument. They like this person on stage; they don’t like that person on stage. Paul says that is the mark of someone who is not filled with the Spirit.

I have watched this closely over the years, because this is an area that I am very concerned about. It is an area where I want us to have a meaningful worship experience together as the Body—old, young, and all different backgrounds. One of the things that I have noticed over the years is that those people who I would consider to be godly, who have an intimate, dynamic relationship with God, for them issues of music style and instruments are non-issues. They really are. They come to worship because they are excited about God. They come because they are excited about the body of Christ. They just come and enter in.

I want to give you an example of that because I am still being rather vague. I would say an excellent example of that would be Ernest Lott, who is in his 90s. I pray to God that I would age as graciously as he has. As a matter of fact, I would say that I would like to be like him. Ernest is a godly man, who in his 90 years, has seen significant changes in music styles, in instruments, in people leading worship. But do you know what Ernest does? He is so excited about God and he is so excited about God's people that he just comes and he enters in. Those things are non-issues to him. I have had these conversations with him, and I know they are non-issues. He used to love to go down to the College Worship Hour when it was held downstairs. The music down there was sometimes loud, and it was pretty different, I am sure, than what he and Annie listened to at home. Never one time did I ever hear Ernest complain. He would not come up and say, "That music is too loud. I wish they wouldn't sing those songs. I wonder why they don't do that." I never heard Ernest say that. All he would do is come up with a big smile on his face. He was so excited about what God was doing in the lives of those college students. That is where he was at. Ernest would come out to Maranatha Camp when we had the youth week. He would sit in the back and listen to the worship band and to the worship experience. Never one time did I ever hear him say, "The music is too loud. Why do they use these instruments? Why don't they sing a different style of music?" He would just have a big smile on his face, and he was so excited about what God was doing in the lives of these young people. He loved to see them worship! Paul is saying that is a reflection of a Spirit-filled person. They are really about God and the body of Christ. They don't come as a consumer critic. They come as a worshiper.

He goes on in verse 20 to say the second mark of a Spirit-filled person is someone who is always giving thanks. In other words, Paul would say that a grumbling spirit is incompatible with the Holy Spirit. Look at what he says in verse 20. "Always giving thanks {*Always, just in case you missed it*} for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God, even the Father." He does not just say for all things. He says for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. When he says "in the name of" he means things that are in alignment with the will of God—in alignment with the name of God. Sometimes in life we experience things that we aren't very thankful for, nor should we be. But there are those things that are in alignment with His will, and in alignment with truth—those things that are about the Kingdom. There are enough of those things for us to be thankful every day and not be a grumbler.

Let's just take the first three chapters of Ephesians and pretend that there is nothing more than those first three chapters. In just those three chapters, we learned more about the lavish grace of God than we could even possibly conceive of for the rest of our lives, if we just meditated over and over on those things. God has so lavishly poured out His grace upon us that there is overwhelming reason to be thankful every day. You may experience some very difficult times in your marriage, or financially, or in some disease or difficulty that you are going through. It is not to minimize those difficulties, but it is to understand the things that ultimately matter and are eternal, the things that are going to get you through those difficult times, those things God has done. Those things are in place and no one can ever take them away from you. They are absolutely guaranteed. Paul says because of that we ought to always be a thankful person. I think we tend to minimize this and think it's not that big a deal. Some people just have a negative bent and they grumble all the time. If you think it is not a big deal, I would encourage you to read 1 Corinthians 10. Paul talks about the nation of Israel—how they constantly grumbled to God and how God responded to that. It says very strongly that God does not like grumbling. God expects us to be a thankful person.

Verse 21 goes on: “and be subject to one another in the fear of Christ.” The word *subject* there is the same word as “to submit.” It is a military word that means “to arrange under.” We are to arrange ourselves under the ... Senior Pastor? That’s not what it says. We are to arrange ourselves under the ... Board of Elders? That is not what it says either. We are to arrange ourselves under the head of the Church, who is Christ. That is what it means by “in the fear of Christ.” There is an authority structure set up in the church, and there must be, or there would be chaos. But we understand, as leaders, that we are called to submit and serve the Body. You submit to me; I submit to you. We serve one another. I understand that you have a role; you understand I have a role. We submit to one another’s callings. We submit to one another’s strengths. This is all under the headship of Jesus Christ. One of the places that this is felt the most intensely is in the home, which is what we are going to talk about next week.

As we close, let me ask you a question. Are you a Spirit-filled person? Do you live a Spirit-filled life? Do you really live each day as a Kingdom day? Do you really live each day with the awareness that Jesus is right there beside you, hearing every word, seeing every action, participating in everything that you are participating in?

If you are truly a Spirit-filled person, there ought to be a unity with the body of Christ in worship. You ought to be characterized by a thankful heart. You ought to be characterized, not by conflict or competition, but by submission to one another in the body of Christ, as we accomplish the mission. If you are Spirit-filled, then you will make the most of your time. Paul says that is *wise living*.