

Ephesians 5:18

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[0 : 00] Amen. This morning we were exhorted to remember Jesus Christ, to remember Jesus Christ.

Well, this evening I have a less transcendent call to make just as we begin, and that's simply to remember last Sunday evening's sermon, because we are going to be taking off, in a sense, from there, connecting with something that was said last Sunday evening.

You'll remember, those of you who were able to be here, that we were considering last Sunday evening the distance the disciples gathered on Easter Sunday evening, the distance that they had to travel from where they were to where the Lord would have them be, not in the sense of a geographic distance, but where they were emotionally or spiritually.

We noticed how, at the beginning, they were those who were talking about these things. They were talking about the risen Lord.

But as we read through the passage, it was clear that Jesus would have them be in a different place, where they were preaching to the nations about the risen Lord.

[1 : 18] And we thought a little bit about what was needed for them to travel that distance from where they were to where they needed to be, and how it was Jesus Himself who would grant them what they needed.

They needed conviction concerning Jesus, that He was indeed risen. They needed conviction concerning themselves, who they were. They needed understanding of the Scriptures, and they needed power.

And the passage ends with this call of Jesus, or this command of Jesus, that they would wait in Jerusalem until they had been clothed with power from on high.

And I want to pick up on the third of those elements, this power that was needed by the disciples.

And I want to think about it by considering that second passage that we read in Ephesians.

We made a fleeting reference to that last Sunday evening, but this evening I want to just spend a little bit more time on Paul's teaching there in Ephesians chapter 5 from verse 18.

[2 : 28] And let's just remind ourselves what Paul says there in that verse. In Ephesians chapter 5 and verse 18, Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit.

And everything that we will say this evening will revolve around or be connected to these key words of Paul in our text, be filled with the Spirit.

The manner that we'll consider these words and the verses that follow will be as follows. First of all, we'll think about what we are told to do.

What is it that we are told to do? Well, we're told to be filled with the Spirit. So, that's the first thing that we want to spend a little time thinking about. But then also, I want us to consider how we are to do so.

How do we do that? That is important. It's not enough to recognize, well, yes, this is something we must do, but how do we do that? And then, thirdly, we want to consider, as we find very clearly presented in the passage, in the verses that follow, what the results will be of being filled with the Spirit.

[3 : 44] Or another way we might put that, what the evidence is that we are indeed filled with the Spirit, or indeed being filled with the Spirit of God.

So, these are the three ways in which we will consider these verses before us this evening. First of all, then, what we are to do.

Now, before, I hope, carefully dissecting the command that concerns us, we do need to note that the command is presented in contrast to another command.

In verse 18, there are, in fact, two commands. There's a negative command, and there's a positive command. Now, our primary concern is with the second, the positive command. But Paul does present that second command together with, and in contrast to, a first command, a negative command.

Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. And though this isn't our primary concern, we do want to just make a brief comment on this first command in the verse, a negative command concerning what we are not to do.

[4 : 54] So, just a couple of things to say. While it is clearly the case that this negative command is introduced, not so much for its own sake, but in order to provide a contrast with the subsequent command, it does serve as a timely reminder that drunkenness is both sinful and destructive.

As I say, Paul's primary concern isn't to teach concerning drunkenness, though clearly he sees this as an opportunity to make the point, to remind the believers that this is something they ought not to do.

And while his concern and our concern is, in a sense, to move swiftly on to his greater concern, nonetheless, we do need to pause and just note that.

When I say, well, that's so obvious, of course we shouldn't get drunk on wine. But even those things that may seem so obvious are things we do need to be reminded of.

The consequences, Paul makes clear, are damaging and destructive to us. Getting drunk on wine leading to debauchery.

[6 : 08] As a contrast, this first command of the two in verse 18, this negative command, as a contrast, the intention really is to stress how different the two conditions are, being drunk with wine and being filled with the Spirit.

I think it's important to say that, that Paul here is using the two commands to contrast one with the other, but precisely to stress how different the two conditions are. Sometimes the mistake is made to think that what Paul is saying is that in some ways they're quite similar.

But I don't think that's what Paul is saying at all. He's saying they're very different. That said, in order for it to work as a contrast, there must be some element of similarity.

And what is that? Well, perhaps the obvious similarity in the two conditions, being drunk with wine or being filled with the Spirit, is that in both conditions we are, if you wish, under the influence.

In the first condition, we're under the influence of alcohol. And in the second condition, well, we're under the influence of the Spirit of God. So, in that sense, you could speak of similarity in that both are or involve being under the influence, but there the similarity, indeed we can call it that, ends and the contrast begins.

[7 : 25] Just to develop that a little bit further before we move on to our primary concern. Dr. Martin Lloyd-Jones, who was the minister at Westminster Chapel in London, and had a great influence there in the years of his ministry.

Before he was a minister, he was a medical doctor, and he preached on Ephesians, indeed a series of tomes covering all of his sermons on this letter to the Ephesians.

And in commenting on this text, he contrasts the influence of alcohol and the influence of the Spirit in pharmacological terms, no doubt drawing on his medical background.

He identifies alcohol as a depressant in medical speak, in the sense that it depresses our faculties, such as self-control and judgment, balance, discernment.

It depresses those faculties, so we lose control in a measure over these faculties. And in some ways, it makes us less human as we lose control of those things that is important to have control of.

[8 : 39] The Spirit, in contrast, is like a stimulant. He's not saying that the Spirit is a stimulant, but He is like a stimulant in that the Spirit of God hones and sharpens our faculties, our mind, our intellect, our will and understanding.

The fullness of the Spirit makes us more human, for the Spirit makes us more like Jesus, more like the men and women that God would have us be and intends us to be.

Well, so much for the negative command and the contrast that it serves in this verse. But let's move on to the positive command we have here to be filled with the Spirit.

What we're going to do this evening is briefly go back to school. We're going to go back to the classroom and study a little bit of grammar. Now, I say go back to school to study grammar.

Maybe for many of us, we never did study grammar at school. So, speaking about going back to school to do that isn't really something that would make sense. But you know what I mean.

[9 : 43] What we want to do is to dissect the verb, the verb here in verse 18, to be filled. Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit.

We want to dissect the verb and, as we do, identify four truths concerning this verb, four grammatical truths. And that may sound all very dry, but I think you'll find that as we identify these four things, it helps us better understand what it is that Paul is saying.

The first thing that we can say about this verb is that it is in what's called the imperative mood. In other words, it's a command. As a command, it indicates that this is something that we need to do. This isn't something that is being suggested as something that might be useful for us to consider. No, Paul is commanding us in these terms.

Be filled with the Spirit. It's in the imperative mood. That's important also because it stresses that this must be something that we can do.

[10 : 55] God will not command us to do something that is beyond our means or capacity to do. God wouldn't do that. He's not going to command us to do something if it's impossible for us to do so.

It also, and this is maybe all very obvious but important, it also identifies this as a matter of obedience. If we are faithful and obedient disciples of Jesus, we will seek to be filled with the Spirit. Why? Because we are commanded to be filled with the Spirit. To ignore this command and say, Oh, well, I can live my Christian life quite happily and quite effectively and quite usefully without worrying about these matters would be disobedience because we're commanded to be filled with the Spirit.

And if it's a command, then clearly it's a command that we are intended to obey. That's the first thing. The verb here is in the imperative mood.

The second thing that's interesting about this verb is that it's in the plural form. The command is addressed to all the readers of the letter and by extension to all Christians.

[12 : 07] Being filled with the Spirit is not to be the experience of some Christian elite. Sometimes that is what seems to be suggested, that somehow this matter of being filled with the Spirit is for some elite, some privileged few, some anointed community that are very special.

It's not for the likes of us. But no, there's nothing to suggest that this is what Paul intends. Quite the reverse. The verb is addressed to all the readers, to all Christians.

There's always a danger that of imagining that there can be elites within the Christian community in different traditions. I don't know if some of you have been watching the news, but even today in the Vatican, you know, two new saints have been whatever you do to make a saint, but that's been done.

John Paul and then some other pope. Forgive me for not remembering his name. Was it John XXIII? Well, whoever it was. But the whole idea is that, you know, you have this elite of Christians in that particular tradition.

And we might say, oh, well, we don't agree with that. But in our own traditions, we can make the mistake of imagining that within the church, there are certain elites. And that has been a mistake that has been made in this matter.

[13 : 28] But here it's very clear that this is something that Paul and God, more importantly, intends for all of us to be filled with the Spirit. So, it's imperative in terms of the mood of the verb.

It's plural in its form. Another thing that's interesting about this verb that I want to just notice and comment on is that it is in the passive voice. In order to capture that, some translations opt for something along the lines of, let the Spirit fill you.

Let the Spirit fill you. And that, I'm not saying that's the best way of translating what we have here, but it does certainly capture that aspect of the verb. There's no technique that we can learn or formula that we can recite in order to be filled.

It is the Spirit Himself who fills us. Now, noticing that, and if you're following carefully what we've said, you might say, well, hang on, is there not a tension here?

Is there not a tension with what we have already said concerning this being a command? You could quite legitimately come back to me and say, well, hang on a minute. A moment ago, you said this is a command, and this is something that, given it's a command, that we need to do.

[14 : 39] And yet now you're saying that it's in the passive voice. It's something that the Spirit does for us. He is the one who fills us. How can it be both? How can it be a command, and yet a matter in which we are, to use the word, passive?

Well, we will come back to this in a moment, but even at this point, it's important to say that the answer to that question is, of course, that as with so much of God's work in our lives, the fact that it is God's work in and for us does not mean that we have nothing to do in the matter.

But then the final thing that we can say about this verb, and that is that it is in the present tense. In fact, if we combine this, the fact that it's in the present tense with it being in the imperative mood, we have what is called a present imperative.

And the meaning of this verbal form is what is sometimes called a continuous present. In translation, this could be captured by something like, go on being filmed.

Go on being filmed. So, what Paul is speaking of is not a one-off event, something that happens, and it's done and dusted, and well, that's it, never again. No, this is something that Paul contemplates and anticipates would be a repeated and a continuous action of being filled with the Spirit of God.

[16:09] And this is very important. Being filled with the Spirit is not, I repeat, a one-off event. We are to go on being filled day by day, week by week, month by month, year by year, and we could go on.

Now, that is not to say that Christians cannot experience particular and identifiable occasions when we are very conscious of being filled by the Spirit in a special, or I might even say unusual way. It's not precluding that possibility. But that will not be the norm, and it certainly will not preclude the need to go on being filled by the Spirit.

Well, that's the grammar lesson over, but I hope that you can see that sometimes, we wouldn't want to do this always, but sometimes it can be helpful to take a word, a crucial word like the one in this verse, and dissect it, I suppose, in that way, to draw out some important truths concerning what here Paul is saying to us.

So, that is what we are to do. We are to be filled with the Spirit. But the next matter that we want to consider is how are we to do so? How do we do that? And that's important just to pause and think about.

[17:29] I don't know about you, but over the years, as I've heard this command, be it reading it or hearing it stated in one or other circumstance.

It's not difficult for me to hear that. It's not difficult to process perhaps everything that is said concerning it, like we've done this evening, to think about what the verb means and its grammatical properties and all of that.

It does, I hope, make good sense, but we can still be left with the question, okay, but how do I do that? How do I be filled with the Spirit?

It brings us back to what we noticed just a moment ago, to the apparent tension between this being a command that we must obey and it being expressed in the passive voice as something that the Spirit does to or for us.

It reminds me perhaps a little of last week and the disciples being told to simply wait in Jerusalem that they might be clothed from on high. Is that all we can do?

[18:38] Do we just wait? Well, if we take the example that I've just commented on, on the disciples having to wait in Jerusalem, yes, they had to wait, but it wouldn't be accurate to say that they had to just wait.

They needed to believe what Jesus had said to them. They needed to obey what Jesus had said to them. And as they believed and obeyed, so they would experience that which was promised.

Believing and obeying is most definitely doing something. It's not that they didn't have to do anything. But what about this matter, this command that is before us to be filled with the Spirit?

What do we need to do that it might be our experience? I think we can identify some concrete actions that we can and need to take before we then briefly turn to a parallel passage in Colossians that will further enlighten us in the matter of what we need to do.

First of all, some concrete actions that we can take. One is that we need to turn from sin and all that grieves the Holy Spirit.

[19:47] If we are to be filled with the Spirit, then clearly it's important that we would turn away from all that which offends the Holy Spirit. The language of grieving the Holy Spirit is taken from this same letter of Paul to the Ephesians in chapter 4.

And from verse 30, we read, And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. And then very practically, notice what Paul goes on to say, Get rid of all

bitterness, rage, and anger, brawling, and slander, along with every form of malice.

Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ forgave you. If we are to be filled with the Spirit of God, then we must do what we can do and indeed, and we can do, and that is leave aside and turn from all that is offensive to the Holy Spirit to turn aside and repent from sin in our lives.

That's something very concrete that we can do. I think we can also identify a second thing we can do, and that is that we can wait expectantly. We thought about the disciples waiting in Jerusalem. I'm not saying there's a direct parallel, but in terms of the example, and we stress that that waiting wasn't entirely passive. It involved believing and obeying.

[21 : 06] Well, we too can wait expectantly. It's maybe not the best illustration, but one picture that came to my mind as I was thinking about this, and I'm sure you can identify difficulties with this illustration, but bear with me.

The picture that came to my mind of waiting expectantly is of a dog who wants a treat. So forgive me for using the example of a dog to illustrate our waiting, but you know what a dog's like when his owner has a treat and he wants that treat.

Now, it's entirely within the power of the owner to give him or not give him the treat, but the dog is not passive as he waits for that. He's desperate for it. He's there just hanging on you until he gets what he wants, what he needs.

He needs, but certainly what he wants. As I say, no doubt we could find a happier illustration, but certainly the idea of waiting expectantly is maybe in a small way illustrated by that example.

That's certainly something we need to do. We need to wait expectantly on God. And in parallel with that, and perhaps more active in our minds, we need to ask, and we can ask.

[22 : 20] We can ask God that He would fill us with His Spirit. We can ask on our own behalf, and by all means, it is a good thing to ask also on behalf of others, of our brothers and sisters in the faith.

So, these are very concrete things that we can do in order that we might be filled with the Spirit. But let's also notice, as I anticipated we would do, what Paul says in what is a very clearly a parallel passage in Colossians.

Let's just turn quickly to Colossians chapter 3 and read verses 15 and 2.17. We'll read these three verses because if you have in your mind the verses that we've read in Ephesians, as we read these verses, you'll see how many ways in which they're connected.

Almost the same language is used in this passage, but at one point, a different phrase is used, and we'll just identify that.

So, from verse 15 to verse 17 of Colossians 3, we read, Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace, and be thankful. Let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly, as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, as you sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God.

[23 : 42] And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him. So, two very similar passages.

The part of the passage that speaks of what we do, of being thankful, of teaching one another in all wisdom, and singing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, all of this language, almost identical to the language in Paul's letter to the Ephesians.

But where in Ephesians, Paul urges the believers to be filled with the Spirit, heed in the letter to the Colossians, he says rather, let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly.

It's almost the equivalent phrase used in the letter to the Colossians to the one used in the letter to the Ephesians. Now, we're not saying that these two phrases mean exactly the same.

Clearly, they're different. But what is clear is that they're intimately connected. So that to be filled with the Spirit is intimately connected with letting the Word of Christ dwell in us richly.

[24 : 56] The Word that Christ spoke, the Word concerning Christ, for us, for all practical purposes today, that would be the Word of God, the Bible, that speaks of Christ and indeed records for us the words of Christ.

And so, intimately involved in this matter of being filled with the Spirit is being filled with the Word of God, studying the Word of God, listening to the Word of God, meditating on the Word of God.

This intimately related to being filled with the Spirit, and it's something we can do. It's not something that we just wait to see when it might happen for us. So that, just to consider a little bit about what

we need to do or how it is that we are to be filled with the Spirit.

But then finally, the third aspect of what we want to notice this evening is what the results will be as we are filled with the Spirit of God. What will the results be? Or to put it another way, what is the evidence that we can identify that would establish that we are indeed filled with the Spirit of God. And here we're back just very briefly, I suppose, to a grammatical point because following the two imperatives in verse 18, the negative command, don't get drunk, the positive command, be filled with the Spirit, there follows in the verses through to verse 21 four present participles.

[26 : 26] I'll tell you what they are, and that helps to identify. Speaking, singing, giving thanks, and submitting. And what Paul is saying is that in the measure that this happens, in the measure that you obey this command, in the measure that you are indeed filled with the Spirit of God, this will be the result.

This is what will make it evident that you are filled, that you are being filled with the Spirit of God. Speaking, singing, giving thanks, and submitting.

These are the activities that are the outcome or the result of being filled with the Spirit. And let's just notice very briefly each of them in turn. First of all, speaking.

What does Paul say there concerning speaking? In Ephesians 5, there from verse 19, speak to one another with psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs.

And this points us to the matter of Christian fellowship, of speaking to one another, of singing together. It's possible, this language, it's a little bit intriguing where it tells or it speaks of, speak to one another with psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs.

[27 : 40] You say, well, what does that mean? You know, we sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, we direct them in worship to God. And here, this business of to one another, what is that about? It's possible, and I wouldn't go further than that, but it's possible that this reflects the practice in the early church that there is some documented evidence for of what's called antiphonal singing.

So, one group of people would sing one verse and then that would be responded to by another group within the congregation. Indeed, there's a famous letter that was penned by somebody by the name of Pliny the Younger.

It dates to 112 A.D., so really a very, very early document. And Pliny the Younger was the procurator of Bithynia, and this letter is addressed to the emperor, to Emperor Trajan.

And in that letter, he describes some of the practices of the Christians. He himself wasn't a Christian, but he's describing what he's witnessed. And one of the things that he says in this letter is that the Christians would gather at daybreak, and then we quote part of the letter, to recite a hymn antiphonally to Christ as to God.

Now, what Pliny says there is of particular interest in regard to the matter of what it implies was the Christian's view of Christ as being God.

[29 : 05] But in addition, it also makes reference to this, seemingly, this manner in which songs and praise would be sung to one another, as well as, of course, being directed to God.

But the matter here concerns fellowship. Our fellowship, one with another, is to be impacted by being filled with the Spirit of God.

Speaking, but also singing, very specifically singing. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord. And here, very explicitly, worship is being referred to.

We're not to do this to one another, but we are to direct this singing to God. And worship that is from the heart. Sincere worship, heartfelt worship.

That is an evidence of being filled with the Spirit of God. It is a result of being filled with the Spirit of God. Speaking, singing. But what else? Well, also giving thanks.

[30 : 02] Verse 20, also giving thanks to God the Father for everything in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. A grateful heart, a grateful spirit, a grateful life is evidence of being filled with the Spirit of God.

A grumbling spirit is not one that should be found in a believer and will not be found in a believer being filled with the Spirit of God.

I think we've all experienced in our own lives as we've met other Christians in different circumstances how powerful it is and how striking it is when we meet a Christian who is going through very difficult circumstances, whatever those might be, and yet never a grumbling word, always thankful to God for some evidence of His care and His mercy even in the midst of pain and difficulty and suffering of different kinds.

Well, such a believer very clearly is a believer filled with the Spirit of God giving thanks. But then, finally, we have another verb, submitting there in verse 21.

In some Bibles, verse 21 is kind of divorced from what comes before as being a verse that relates to what follows. And of course, it does relate to what follows, but it also very much relates to what has come before and specifically being filled with the Spirit and one evidence of that, one result of that being that we are those who submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.

[31 : 38] Humble and joyful submission is also a result of being filled with the Spirit. Submit to one another. Now, that description of Christians as those who submit to one another in itself is an intriguing one.

What does that actually mean in terms of who we are to submit to? Submit to one another. I think this is a verse that has been and is often misappropriated by those who are uncomfortable with the Bible's clear teaching on submission in different areas of life.

So, the Bible clearly teaches that we are to submit to those who are in spiritual authority to us. If we are workers, we are to submit to our masters, to our employers.

Wives are to submit to their husbands. Children are to submit to their parents. Very clear teaching in all these matters, but teaching that some don't like and are uncomfortable with. And they find this verse and say, oh, this is the verse that rescues the situation for us.

Submit to one another. And it's all about mutual submission and everybody submitting to each other. But what does that look like? Does that work? How does it work? Everybody submitting to one another. That can't be what Paul is saying.

[32 : 56] So, what is Paul saying? Now, our primary concern is to notice that this is evidence of being filled with the Spirit. But what does it look like to submit to one another? Let me just give you an example of how this would work in practice.

Let's just imagine two people who are two believers in a given congregation, a man and a woman. Not related, not husband and wife, but a man and a woman in a given congregation. Okay?

Now, let's imagine that the man is an elder in that congregation. And given that position of spiritual authority, then the woman as a believer within that congregation has an obligation to submit to that elder together with the others, of course, his spiritual authority in that context.

Okay? So, the woman there has to submit to this man as he forms part of the leadership. But let's just imagine that these two same people work in the same workplace.

But in the workplace, the woman is the employer and the man is the employee. Now, what does the man have to do there? Well, the man has to submit to the woman because the Bible clearly teaches that those who are in a work situation or are under authority have to submit to the one who exercises authority.

[34 : 10] So, the same two people, but in one context, the woman has to submit to the man. In the other context, the man has to submit to the woman. And I think this is what is being said here by Paul, submit to one another out of reverence for Christ because immediately what follows is an example of the different circumstances in which submission is necessary.

Wives and husbands, children and parents, slaves and masters in what follows in the letter. So, in that sense, we are to submit to one another. Depending on the circumstances and where we are, then this is something we need to do.

It's not some free-for-all of everybody submitting to each other because that simply is chaotic. It doesn't make any sense at all. But leaving that to one side, our concern this evening is simply to notice that this humble and joyful submission is also a result of and evidence of being filled with the Spirit of God.

Just a kind of intriguing point here, and with this we draw things to a close almost, that the language that Paul uses, submit to one another out of reverence for Christ, or, as it can be translated, in the fear of Christ, also is an interesting and indirect testimony to Paul's belief in the deity of Jesus because the language he uses here, in the fear of Christ, is very much Old Testament language, but in the Old Testament, of course, it would be in the fear of God.

We are to obey in the fear of God. We are to serve in the fear of God. And here, Paul uses a very similar language, but he speaks of in the fear of Christ, or as it's translated in our version, out of reverence for Christ.

[35 : 56] So, speaking to one another, our fellowship, singing to God, our worship, giving thanks and submitting the results of being filled with the Spirit. Everyday activities for Christians further confirming the need for permanently being filled.

Now, you might be asking yourself a question, or you might not, what has all this got to do with power, which is where we began when we thought about the disciples there waiting in Jerusalem to be clothed with power from on high.

How does power fit into this matter of being filled with the Spirit of God? Maybe part of the reason why we might see a disconnect is that our conception of power is no doubt or probably very different to God's conception of power.

For God, power that is granted to us is power that we might live lives that are pleasing to Him. Live lives as they're described here in these verses.

That involves and requires power. We need power to live and interact with each other in the manner described. But also, a Christian community like the one described in our text is a powerful testimony to the power of God to transform lives.

[37 : 13] And it's also, I would suggest, a community that will draw others in that they too might experience the power of God in their lives. So, we have this exhortation, this command directed to us by Paul here, Do not get drunken wine which leads to debauchery.

Instead, be filled with the Spirit. May that be our desire, may it be our concern, but very especially, may it be our experience.

Well, let's just pray. Heavenly Father, we come to You this morning. Amen. Amen. Amen.