7-14-19

Ephesians 5:18-21

These four verses all fit together as one paragraph. We are given two commands: Don’t get drunk and be filled with the Spirit. This is followed by four things we are to do: Speak, sing, give thanks, and be subject. We will be unable to perform the four actions unless we follow the two commands. Obviously, someone who is drunk can’t talk well, can’t sing, they tend to be ungrateful, and they are usually uncooperative and demanding. In order to do these things in a manner that is pleasing to God, they must be done through the Holy Spirit.

Paul has just talked about how we need to be careful to walk as wise not as unwise. He also reminded us to avoid being foolish. When a person is drunk, wisdom is scarce and foolishness abounds. Too much Alcohol, or drugs for that matter, suppress the mind’s ability to think; they open us up to the suggestions of evil. The existence of evil is an important reason for us to avoid drunkenness, our minds lose the ability to resist temptation and we become easier targets for demonic influence. Christians are supposed to be in control of themselves; self-control is one of the fruits of the Spirit.

It almost seems strange that Paul would couple avoiding drunkenness with being filled with the Holy Spirit. But much wine does change a person and they may seem happy for a while. Likewise, being filled with the Holy Spirit changes a person, while giving them a true joy. Of course, the effects of the wine go away with a crash. The Holy Spirit is permanent; once we have Him, He stays with us. The changes He affects in us stay for good; joy is ours, although in this fallen world we may feel it more strongly sometimes than others. Recall that at Pentecost some of the cynics accused the disciples of being drunk, although this was probably in more of a mocking tone.

The thing we are told to do is to be filled with the Holy Spirit. This is a command; it goes along with no longer walking as the Gentiles walk, speak truth to one another, steal no longer, imitate God. Because it is a command, we must look into how to filled with the Holy Spirit.

Back in verse 1:13, we were told that upon accepting Jesus we are sealed with the Holy Spirit. That sealing is our earnest of eternal life to come. We are only sealed if we have truly accepted Christ; our salvation is secure and He will not leave us. This sealing is a one-time event; a once for all event. All Christians have the Holy Spirit indwelling them.

In verse 3:16, part of Paul’s prayer for the Ephesians is that they are “strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man”. So, Paul is asking that their strength be increased and he is asking for it through the power of the Holy Spirit. The strength provided by the Holy Spirit can change, and we can pray for that to happen. As an aside, keep in mind that the power is the Holy Spirit’s and the strength we receive is to be used for God’s purposes, not our own.

Likewise, Paul tells us to be filled with the Holy Spirit. The way it is written means to continually be filled; every day, all the time. This too is something that can change. The Holy Spirit is with us, that doesn’t change; the effects He has on us, that can change.

Keep in mind also that the Holy Spirit is a person, a member of the blessed Holy Trinity, not some impersonal force. To be filled with Him means to be under His influence. Like the person who is drunk is under the influence of wine, the Christian is to be under the influence of the Holy Spirit. Let Him guide and influence your whole life; all your decisions.

How do we go about following this command? First, there are a couple of things we must not do. Paul tells us in verse 4:30, “Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God.” We do this if we sin, especially if we choose to live in sin. This can be in doing things that are not pleasing to God or in not doing things that are pleasing to Him. As Paul tells us in 4:31-32.

Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you.

It is important to realize that we can grieve Him and in doing so, we are grieving God. The Holy Spirit indwelling us is a wonderful gift from God; He irrevocably attaches Himself to us. With such a gift, how can we cause Him grief?

First Thessalonians 5:19 tells us, “Do not quench the Spirit”. This is when we actively resist the Holy Spirit’s leading. Perhaps we get a strong urge to pray, maybe for something specific or just in general, but we are doing something at the time and say, “OK, but I’ll pray later.” What happens is that when later comes, that urge is gone; or we forget about it entirely. This is quenching the Spirit. When that urge hits, we need to stop other things immediately and obey that prompting from the Holy Spirit. Prayer is just one example; it may be an urge to call someone, visit someone, or do something special for someone. There is a special feeling we have inside us when the Holy Spirit is leading us to do something. It takes willingness and practice to discern this.

Now, as far as some things to do. The main thing is to remember that He is there. Jesus told us that He would never leave us or forsake us, that He would send the Holy Spirit to be our constant guide and companion. We have become His home. 1 Corinthians 6:19, “Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own?” The Holy Spirit stays with us constantly and God the Father has provided Him for us to make us pleasing and useful to the Father. We belong to God because Jesus paid the price for us; He bought us at the high cost of His own life. We do well to keep in mind throughout the day, that the Holy Spirit is present.

Another thing to do is to want Him around; to have His company. Can you imagine being a guest at someone’s house and knowing that they don’t want you around? Desire His influence; thank Him for taking up residence within you; seek to have communion and fellowship with Him. Listen for those urgings He gives and thank Him when you receive them. When we follow His promptings in obedience, we are doing the opposite of quenching Him; this will lead to more frequent blessings of His urgings.

Seek the Holy Spirit in the word; in the Bible. He is the One who wrote it, we will find Him there. We will find all that God has revealed about Himself. By studying the Bible; by having Scripture in our minds; the Holy Spirit has better ways of speaking to us. He will bring appropriate Scripture to mind at the proper time. These Scriptures will help guide us in our lives, but more importantly, will guide us in God’s will for His glory.

Overall, it comes down to obedient submission to God. In the same way that we obey God the Father and the commands of Jesus, we need to obey the Holy Spirit; all three persons are one God. Again, this submissive obedience is out of love; it is in response to what the Triune God has done for us. Not only has the Father sacrificed His only begotten Son; not only has the Son given Himself for our undeserved salvation; but the Holy Spirit has condescended to live within us. This is almighty God who has chosen to do these things. This is amazing love, beyond our ability to comprehend.

In Romans 12:2, we are admonished to “be transformed by the renewing of your mind”. It is the Holy Spirit who accomplishes this, constantly working to give us the mind of Christ. It is He who gives us the ability to obey the commands of Jesus. The Bible clearly tells us that we are hopelessly evil; that there is no one who is good, not one. It is the Holy Spirit who enables us to overcome this evil and bring glory to God.

We have talked before about the Christian ethics or Christian morals that are in the Bible. It is often said that we just need to get the world to follow these principles and everything will be fine. Many will teach that all we need to do is follow the ethics and we don’t have to believe in the miracles or the atonement of Christ. These are absolutely wrong. Christian ethics divorced from Christian doctrine is worthless. Human-beings are incapable of living Christian morality unless they have accepted Jesus as Saviour and have received the Holy Spirit. For proof, just look at all the non-Christian world.

Having said that, we see that it is necessary to have the Holy Spirit before we can properly do the four things that Paul outlines in the rest of this paragraph. He tells us to speak “to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs”. There is really not much difference between these three forms of worship. They are poetic and rhythmic and often set to music. But we can certainly quote lines from any of these to encourage or admonish our fellow Christians. Some of these praise the Lord directly, some of them are to remind each other to praise the Lord. Psalm 95 is an example of this.

O come, let us sing for joy to the Lord,  
Let us shout joyfully to the rock of our salvation.  
Let us come before His presence with thanksgiving,  
Let us shout joyfully to Him with psalms.

This doesn’t mean that we Christians only speak to each other in Psalms; what is meant here is fellowship. This is a congregational setting or even just a couple of Christians spending time together. This leads into the second thing which is singing; specifically, “singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord”. Notice that this is directed to the Lord and not to one another.

Singing is important in a worship service; recall that Jesus and His disciples sang a hymn after they had the last supper. Notice that the heart is involved. When we sing to the Lord, it ought to be from within us, not just saying the words; we need to think about what we are singing. And really, there is a place for just our hearts to sing; no sound coming from us but just joyfulness expressed in song that is between us and God.

Verse 20 tells us “always giving thanks for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God, even the Father”. Giving thanks is something that we as human-beings are not very good at, especially giving it to God. We must keep in mind that God ultimately provides all good things for us even if we work for it; He deserves thanks. Our thanksgiving is to be in Jesus’ name, just like all our prayers. This means that the prayers are made in and through Christ; we cannot get to the Father except by Him. Thankfulness should be a way of life for us, even in bad times.

Paul tells us to give thanks for all things, but we need to take this in context and in relation to the Bible as a whole. God hates evil; we do not give Him thanks for it. He does not cause evil, nor does He tempt anyone, we don’t thank Him for temptation. We don’t thank Him for things like cancer or other things that are a result of a fallen world; These were not part of His original creation.

However, we do remain thankful when dealing with these things. We thank God that He has overcome evil in Jesus Christ and that He will bring an end to it in His own good timing. We thank Him that He has given us the Holy Spirt for the strength to overcome temptation. We thank Him that He will use things like cancer to sanctify us; to give testimony to His Kingdom; and to bring Him glory when he brings all things together in Jesus.

Christians are charged to be subject or submissive to one another and we are to do it in the fear of Christ. Submission to someone else goes against our own being and against the world’s ideas. Submission is considered weak; but consider what strength it took for Jesus to submit to the cross as He did. Paul goes into specific examples of subjection in the next several verses of this letter. But in general, we all must hear one another out. We are called to treat others with gentleness and kindness. Although there may be different levels of authority in a church, family, or in life, none of us is above the other in God’s eyes; we are on equal footing.

Again, this is pursuing and working for unity in the body of Christ. Things must be worked out among us but never at the expense of truth. Remember that we are all brothers and sisters in Christ because we are sons and daughters of God.

Keep in mind the last part of this verse: in the fear of Christ. Sometimes we think of the word “fear” in terms of reverence and respect, and these are correct. But we must not limit the word; although we love Jesus and He loves us, there is nothing wrong with having a healthy fear of Him. Recall John’s description of Jesus in Revelation chapter 1:

*I saw* one like a son of man, clothed in a robe reaching to the feet, and girded across His chest with a golden sash. His head and His hair were white like white wool, like snow; and His eyes were like a flame of fire. His feet *were* like burnished bronze, when it has been made to glow in a furnace, and His voice *was* like the sound of many waters. In His right hand He held seven stars, and out of His mouth came a sharp two-edged sword; and His face was like the sun shining in its strength.

John’s response was appropriate: He fell at His feet like a dead man. This is our King; it behooves us to listen to Him; to follow His Holy Spirit; in submission and obedience.

Prayer

We thank You, Lord God, for the gift of the Holy Spirit. He seals us as a guarantee of our salvation in Christ. He influences us to become more like Jesus and guide us in the ways that are pleasing to You.

We do ask for a continual filling of the Holy Spirit. We ask this that we may be used to glorify Jesus and through Him, God the Father. May He make us to know what You would have us do and also, to lead us on paths of righteousness.

In our hearts, we bow before You Lord Jesus. We ask that Your Kingdom come to this earth, that You may reign here in justice. At that time, we will be able to bow our knee before You in worship.

Lord Jesus, it is in Your name we pray

Amen