

“Live In The Spirit”

11 October 2020 - Led by Rev. Sam Mawhinney

Welcome & Call To Worship:

Hymn of Preparation: IPH 51 Come, Ye Thankful People, Come

Prayers of Adoration & Confession: Winnie Wilmot

Reading: Ephesians 5:15-21

Sermon:

I have sympathy for our government because living with Covid is proving very difficult: weighing up our health needs, both physical and mental, the economic cost to business and the exchequer, the relative seriousness of having the virus in our older people and the relative lack of consequences for our younger population. The under capacity of our health service, added to the idea of people simply not obeying instructions and the issue of enforcement, has meant that right decisions are often unclear and hard to call. What to do?

Living for the Lord Jesus in the world, in days that Paul calls evil (v.16) or dark (spiritually speaking), is also difficult. Paul, as a shepherd to the church in Ephesus, is concerned that they do not simply become critical and judgemental (as we often do with our government) but live a life of love. Nor does he want them to give up and retreat, but instead be light and shine in the darkness. And today we are going to look at our responsibility in the instruction, “be very careful, then, how you live” (v.15) and in the exhortation, “be filled with the Spirit” (v.18).

I. Be Very Careful, Then, How You Live (v.15-18a)

A. Responsibility

Making decisions and determining how we live as individuals and as a church is a responsibility given to us. There are choices to be made - be wise, not unwise. There are opportunities to be taken, there is the pervading reality of evil (“the days are evil”), and in this do not be foolish. (Remember, a fool in the Bible says there is no God, so they live life without reference to God - Psalm 14:1). Those like the man who built bigger barns but hadn’t taken care of his soul are fools (Luke 12:20). Instead, we are to understand what God’s will is and for us that is through the revelation of His will in the Scriptures.

Picture being on a journey (walking say in the hills even in the fog and you have your map and compass, or GPS) but you most definitely need to be attentive, constantly checking and reassessing and being honest about what you know and do not know. It is your responsibility to have a map and to be attentive. To embark on a journey without both is foolish and recognised to be so. How much more the journey of life! We only have one and the consequences are eternal. “Be very careful, then, how you live!”

So Paul has been anxious to impress on us the need to think: are we grieving the Holy Spirit (4:30)? are we loving (5:1)? are we being light (5:8)? are we pleasing the Lord (5:10)? is it God's will (5:17)?

We struggle with these decisions, struggle to know what is right, struggle to do what is right, because of the sin in our hearts. Knowing what is right but aware it is unpopular, we become afraid of people, conflicted. This is the reality, normal, and that is why God has promised us help in His presence through the Holy Spirit, the word of God and the community of God's people. We need the Bible, prayer and each other.

This is the purpose of 3D groups, as we wrestle with how best to live in the light of God's Word. I really do want to encourage us all to engage with each other and the Scriptures so that we will understand more clearly what the Lord's will is and walk in it.

B. Time

Many of us are willing, some of us make excuses. We are too busy and don't have the time to pray, read the Bible, get involved in that situation, think things through. And that is where v.16 is an incredible challenge. *"Making the most of every opportunity"*; literally the verse says, *"redeem the time or buy back the time."* Time!

What commands our time in life? How do you weigh the different priorities in life? What time does your relationship with God have, in personal communication and corporate church life? What time does serving others have in your life? What time are you giving to sport, box sets, TV films and drama, current affairs, and news?

How much of your day is given to understanding God's will - reading, praying, chatting with each other? I feel convicted about this and certainly need to think afresh about my use of time.

Notice that the focus is not simply on discipline and priority, but on knowing how to live and be an effective light, because the days are evil. The darkness needs the light and you are light in the Lord.

C. Drunkenness

Paul then gives us a practical example of what was a societal issue in his day, drunkenness and the Christian responsibility to this important social issue.

Do not get drunk on wine which leads to debauchery (v. 18a).

Alcohol is a problem in society, binge drinking particularly in students and young adults, men and women. Escapism and avoidance of the harshness of life, cost to our health service, cost in terms of deaths, drunk driving, homelessness, domestic abuse! My family has been affected, as has our church family. Drunkenness destroys lives and it ruins the beauty of the life God intends. It is not wise but foolish and it is not God's will for us to be drunk.

Paul looks at his society and he sees as we do the problem of alcohol, and he tells us what God's will is. It is our responsibility to take time to think through the Bible's teaching on alcohol and then by God's grace live out His will.

Scripture takes a balanced position. I just want to make a few comments on the instruction “do not get drunk”.

The Bible does not insist upon abstinence but does instruct that the Christian should never be drunk. It is logical to conclude it is sinful to be drunk. Drunkenness is sin. This is important because it will determine how we deal with a propensity to be drunk. We should think of this in terms of temptation and sin. The need to admit this to ourselves, and to others, and to do so will be the beginning of tackling the problem of drunkenness and alcohol addiction.

An alcoholic is someone who has an addiction because they have repeatedly disobeyed God's instructions (even though they may not have known it was God's instruction). It does not mean the person will not need professional medical help, as the addiction affects our bodies and minds as well and is serious and difficult. Therefore, we are responsible for the choice to drink or not and the amount we drink. Our decision regarding alcohol will be influenced by many factors, but it primarily is one of responsibility and choice. “It is not for kings, O Lemuel— not for kings to drink wine, not for rulers to crave beer, lest they drink and forget what the law decrees, and deprive all the oppressed of their rights” (Prov. 31:4-5).

- Responsibility because of your position: judge, doctor, vehicle driver, pilot, minister.
- Responsibility to others: children, alcoholics, Covid 19
- Responsibility to society: a witness to society, cost

Be very careful, then, how you live. This must be applied to all aspects of life for the purpose of pleasing God and being light.

II. Be Filled With The Spirit (v.18b-21)

This is a command that intrigues! Many think it must be an ecstatic experience, charismatic, supernatural. When I spoke on this in 2008, I linked this reality of being filled with the Spirit to hearing the Spirit's voice as you are reading your Bibles, for it is God's breathed out word.

Let us consider this. We understand that when we first believe in Jesus we are given the Holy Spirit (Romans 8:9). Therefore, Christians have the Holy Spirit and to be filled with the Holy Spirit is not to experience the Holy Spirit for the first time, but must be a subsequent experience of the Holy Spirit, and that is relational, as he is a person. To be filled with the Spirit is an experience of being close to God. It is precious and desirable, and it must affect us and be emotional and it is, of course, deeply reassuring (Romans 8:16). The use of drunkenness as an illustration surely is to highlight the intoxication that alcohol gives with the “intoxication” the Holy Spirit gives us.

I have been arrested by a line in a book by Tim Keller on prayer, which is an exploration of the relationship a believer has with God. He writes that he doesn't believe he is to look for something more but, and I quote, “*Rather, I was meant to ask the Holy Spirit to help me experience my theology.*” So began an exploration of prayer.

This is a better understanding of “be filled with the Spirit” - know God better. To do so, we must understand the truth of God from the Scriptures and experience God more, and as it is relational it must at times be emotional and affect us.

The original word means, keep on being filled, and it is a command given to us by the apostle, *be filled*. As Paul explains, he gives us participles that describe what being filled with the Spirit means:

speaking to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs,
singing and **making** music (melody) in your hearts to the Lord,
giving thanks to God for everything in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ,
submitting yourselves to one another, in the fear of Christ, wives to husbands

A. Speaking/Singing (v.19)

Speaking, singing and making belong together, as related to praise and worship of God. You see we are to sing to one another and to the Lord Jesus Christ. We are to use a variety of types of songs, and this is not in any way perfunctory but in your heart. This is what and who we are, it is wholehearted, it is our expression of our relationship with God. It is not always emotional but must always be about God and our relationship with Him.

However, in these times of Covid restrictions, I am struck by the command of Scripture to sing and the prohibition placed upon us as a collective Church body to NOT SING for good public health reasons. I believe we need to wrestle with that reality and not just accept it without any sense of loss and desire to fulfil the command of God.

I am thankful to others who have been sharing their concerns with me about this and I have been convicted of the need to try and honour the command to sing. Could we honour God in this by:

Lament. Prayerfully take to God this deep conflict, ask Him to bring about an end to the restrictions, help us in the fight against Covid, grant success to church leaders who are asking the government, and possibly join in a campaign to allow us to worship and fellowship again. “By the rivers of Babylon, we sat down and wept” (Psalm 137).

Rediscover private worship. Invest in Spotify, pick up the guitar or a musical instrument, listen to worship at home, start times of family worship. Keith and Kristyn Getty have a good YouTube posting of family worship with their children.

B. Thanking (v. 20)

Here is a radical and true statement: the root of all sin is thanklessness to God. Romans 1:21: “*for although they knew God (in creation) they neither glorified Him as God nor gave thanks to Him.*” Thankfulness is a recognition of God and His goodness in everything! Therefore, we are to give thanks for everything. There is a lot written about how some carry this to extremes and feel guilty when they are not thankful when life is hard and difficult. John Stott calls the language hyperbole and Kyle Snodgrass agrees.

Always giving thanks for everything cannot mean that which is evil or plainly wrong. We do not give thanks for illness, for example, but we can give thanks we are in the Lord and He is our helper when we find ourselves in difficult circumstances (Psalm 46).

Paul reminds us here that we give thanks to God *our Father*. Our Father God loves us and He doesn't bring anything to us that He cannot turn around for good.

C. Submitting (v.21)

The NIV does us a disservice by separating the instruction to submit from the other part of the sentence, the original reads.

But be filled by the Spirit,
speaking to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs,
singing and **making** music (melody) with your hearts to the Lord,
giving thanks to God for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ,
submitting yourselves to one another, in the fear of Christ, wives to husbands.

We will look at this consequence of being filled with the Spirit over the next few weeks as we explore the examples Paul gives us. Now, we are going to find this culturally difficult and I suggest we will initially find the idea of submission at least weak and maybe for some abhorrent. It is surely surprising to find the idea here - the Spirit gives us power, not timidity, and to our way of thinking and our culture's way of thinking, it cannot be right. So, I flag the difficulty and ask us to engage and work out what submitting as an expression of being filled with the Spirit means. The word used by Paul literally means "arrange under". The direction the Bible leads us toward in understanding it is humility, self-giving love and a willingness to die. Jesus demonstrated this for us always in His life and best at the cross, as the wonderful hymn in Philippians 2 tells us. Note our motivation for submitting, out of reverence (fear) for the Lord Jesus Christ.

We need to hear Paul's call, be very careful, then, how you live . . . and to do so we need the Spirit filling us so that we can be singing, overflowing with thankfulness and submitting to others, in His will, out of reverence for Christ.

Hymn of Reflection: Come Thou Fount Of Every Blessing

Prayers for Others: David Boyd

Announcements

Closing Reading: Psalm 27

Benediction; And now may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all, now and forevermore. Amen.