



Ephesians 5:15-21

If I had grown up in today's world, I would have surely been subscribed medication for ADHD. My report cards always had the "talks too much" box checked. I was hyperactive. In third grade, I bit a kid on the playground when he tried to cut in front of me on the slide. I wasn't a miniature psychopath but I was a handful. The lower level of our house made a large racetrack of sorts. The living room had a door into the family room which was connected to a long hallway which entered the living room. So it was all connected together. I can still picture my mom and my grandma both chasing me around that circle with a plastic spatula that doubled as a spanking implement. I was full of mischief and often a lot more than that. In the KJV, Proverbs 12:21 reads, "There shall no evil happen to the just: but the wicked shall be filled with mischief." Yep, that was me.

I was filled with mischief. But you and I are always filled with something. Verse 18 warns, *do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit*. Paul was not merely warning against drunkenness. Rather, he was comparing being controlled by alcohol with being controlled by the Spirit. Being controlled by alcohol is wrong. Drunkenness is condemned throughout Scripture but fundamentally it is so wrong because when alcohol controls you, the Holy Spirit cannot. Being filled with the Spirit is the same as being controlled by the Spirit. And you will always be controlled by something—alcohol, your passions, the idols of your heart. Or we can be controlled by the Holy Spirit.

Being filled with Holy Spirit is not just one verse. This theme runs through the rest of chapter five and at least halfway into chapter six. Let's read the passage and I'll show you how this fits together.

Look carefully then how you walk:

not as unwise

but as wise, making the best use of the time, because the days are evil.

Therefore do **not** be foolish,

but understand what the will of the Lord is.

And do **not** get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery,
but be filled with the Spirit

- addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs
- singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart
- giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ
- submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ.
 - 5:22-33—Husbands and wives
 - 5:22-33—Jesus and the Church
 - 6:1-4—Parents and children
 - 6:5-8—Masters and bondservants

Look carefully then how you walk

By now you probably know that for Paul, walking is a metaphor for living the Christian life. He wrote it in chapter four. *Now this I say and testify in the Lord, that you must no longer walk as the Gentiles do* (Ephesians 4:17). And also earlier in chapter five. *Walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God* (Ephesians 5:2). Don't walk as the Gentiles do but instead, walk in love. Now we are warned to look carefully how we walk. It's an introduction to all that follows. Next, he proceeded to explain what that looks like.

The next three sentences are parallel in thought to one another and each has a positive and a negative command.

not as unwise

but as wise, making the best use of the time, because the days are evil.

Therefore do **not** be foolish,

but understand what the will of the Lord is.

And do **not** get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery,

but be filled with the Spirit

This will help us to understand what it means to be filled by the Spirit. It is unwise and foolish to get drunk on wine. But the opposite is also true. It is wise and not foolish to be filled with the Spirit.

Then there are four specific applications of what it looks like to be filled by the Spirit.

- addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs
- singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart
- giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ
- submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ.

Finally, there are four applications of what it looks like to be in submission.

5:22-33—Husbands and wives

5:22-33—Jesus and the Church

6:1-4—Parents and children
6:5-8—Masters and bondservants

That's the whole outline, how it all works together and why being filled with the Holy Spirit forms the big idea throughout. With that big picture in mind, let's go back to verses 15-16.

*not as unwise
but as wise (making the best use of the time, because the days are evil.)*

Look carefully then how you walk:

not as unwise

but as wise, making the best use of the time, because the days are evil.

Therefore do **not** be foolish,

but understand what the will of the Lord is.

And do **not** get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery,

but be filled with the Spirit

- addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs
- singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart
- giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ
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5:22-33—Husbands and wives

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We are to make the most of our time. The KJV translates it as “redeeming your time” which is what it says in the original language. Our time is too important to waste frivolously. I don't know anyone who is not a little convicted by this verse because everyone wastes time occasionally. We do need to rest our minds and our bodies, but we have a really hard time drawing the line between rest and wasting time.

And we are to make the most of the time “because the days are evil.” At face value, that does not sound very encouraging: life is evil, therefore don't waste it. What Paul meant is that this life is brief compared to eternity. This is not our home and the days we spend here—though we are blessed and should be grateful—are evil. The prince of the power of the air runs this world and it is filled with evil. People are perishing all around us. There are ways to glorify God with the use of our time and there is everything else. Time is a commodity and we need to steward our time just like we steward our money and other resources.

I will never forget a story a conference speaker told about himself. He was a local pastor at the time and one Sunday morning as he was headed to church, he noticed his neighbor sitting alone in his truck in the driveway. He walked over to say hello and quickly realized that his friend was in great despair. I don't recall the details but I do remember this part. This pastor spent the next 3 hours in that truck witnessing to and offering Biblical counsel to his neighbor. He missed both morning services where he was supposed to be preaching. That story left a mark on me because I know I don't have the guts to do such a thing myself, unless the Spirit was so ridiculously clear that I had no other choice. This may not be a typical way to make the most of our time, but it can help us to think through our priorities. The urgent is always the enemy of the important. We can miss the best things because we are enslaved to good things.

Verse 17—*Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is.*

Wouldn't you like to know God's perfect will for your life? This tends to be a top question for young people who are trying to figure out the best path for their lives. Where should I go to

school? Which job should I take? Who will I marry someday? These are all huge, life-changing kinds of questions about the Lord's will.

In the past two weeks I have talked with 3 potential candidates for the pastor of discipleship and worship. One is from Portland, one is from the Philadelphia area and the other is from Texas. These applicants could not be more spread out on three corners of the U.S. Believe me—they are seeking the Lord's will for their life. They feel called to vocational ministry and they want the Lord to guide them to the right church. They are looking for personal guidance that applies specifically to them. But this is not what Paul is referring to. He is not talking about personal guidance per se. He is not talking about which job you should take or who you should marry. The Lord's will here is the general will of the Lord—that is, God's divine will for mankind in general and for believers in particular. This is the full counsel of God found in all of Scripture rightly taught, understood and applied

We are commanded to know God's will and to the degree that you do not understand God's divine will and purpose, you are foolish. Understanding the Lord's will is the opposite of being foolish. In fact, the knowledge of God's will is what drives our foolishness from our hearts and minds. Left to ourselves, we are foolish but knowing and doing the Lord's will drive away our foolishness.

So if you are asking the question, What is God's will for my life? The answer is t understand the will of the Lord. In other words, if you want to understand God's specific will for your life you first need to understand his revealed will. His will for your life is contained within the pages of this book called the Bible. He has a purpose and plan for you and you can understand it and practice it. It will drive away your foolishness and allow you to better see his specific will for your life.

Verse 18—*And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit.* We have already established that being filled with the Spirit is contrasted with being drunk because both control a person. You will be filled and controlled by something so it is best to be filled with the Spirit.

You have probably also heard that this is a continual filling. When we are saved, the Holy Spirit permanently resides within us. 1 Corinthians 2:12 says, "Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might understand the things freely given us by God." We cannot get more or less of the Holy Spirit because, as Jesus said in John 14, the Spirit wells within us. We can't get more of the Spirit but we can be filled or not filled with the Spirit. So what's the difference? I've heard it said that being filled with the Holy Spirit is not necessarily getting more of the Holy Spirit but that the Holy Spirit gets more of us. He has more control over us. And this is a fluctuating thing in the Christian life. We learned in chapter four that we can grieve the Holy Spirit.

It's difficult to quantify this filling. It's not like we are a car being filled and we know when we are topped off. In some ways you could say that the more you are filled the more you can be filled. It's like a tank that can expand. What being filled with the Holy Spirit looked like when I was a new believer probably looks different than being filled 38 years later. Hopefully, my tank

has expanded and I can be filled even more than I was before. That is, the Spirit has more control over my life, my time, my decisions, my feelings than ever before. But I can also lose that or go backwards.

Thankfully we don't have to guess what it means to be filled with the Spirit because there are also clear descriptions of what it means.

- addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs
- singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart
- giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ
- submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ.

I'm going to try and tackle the first two with the time we have remaining. These two obviously go together: addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs and singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart. This is congregational singing that has two dimensions to it. The first dimension is horizontal: addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs. And the second is vertical: singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart. Generally, when we think about worship through music we only think of the vertical dimension. In fact, I have heard pastors and worship leaders say that this is the only purpose for worship. It has often been said that when we worship it is only for an audience of one—the Lord. While I understand the emphasis they want to place on worshipping in a proper manner, this is a very imbalanced perspective. We are told very clearly that part of singing is addressing one another. But if worship is for the Lord, why are we to address one another?

The purpose is obviously for mutual edification. This horizontal dimension of congregational singing is meant to teach and encourage. When we sing to one another we receive instruction, admonishment, warning, encouragement and edification. Ephesians and Colossians overlap in so many ways and Paul has a parallel verse in 3:16. *Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God.* What he is saying in Colossians and Ephesians is that congregational singing and sound doctrine cannot be separated. This is why what we sing is so important. One of the reasons I love this church is because so many of you are good Bereans. You check what I teach you against the word of God and if necessary, you challenge me. We are very careful to teach sound doctrine so we must be just as careful to sing sound doctrine.

This is more important in today's culture than it has ever been before because there is an overwhelming amount of worship music. Worship music is big business. Just ask Chris Tomlin, the multi-millionaire. Here's an interesting comparison that puts his success in perspective.

For perspective, consider Tomlin's musical success against one secular counterpart. In 2012, Katy Perry's record sales dwarfed Tomlin's, but Billboard reported her songs were played 1.4 million times on the radio. Using CCLI's low-end calculation, Tomlin's songs were played 3.12 million times in churches.¹

I am not familiar with all of Tomlin's 128 worship songs, so I can't endorse all that he has written but as far as I know, I don't have issues with his music. So my intent is not to criticize

him but to demonstrate the huge business of worship music. The problem is that other people and other groups have seen the potential of this same success except that many of them are the equivalent of dangerous false teachers disguised as worship leaders. When you combine this with the fact that we tend to be less discerning when it comes to worship music, it becomes a tinder box that could quickly ignite dangerous heresy.

We just received an extensive community survey of the Viroqua zip code.² One of the questions was as follows.

Estimated 2018 Households Likely to Prefer Church Worship which is:

- | | |
|-------------------------------|-----|
| A. Emotionally Uplifting | 28% |
| B. Intellectually Challenging | 9% |
| C. Both A and B | 41% |

Thankfully, 41% said they would prefer both but it's still alarming to think that almost 30% said that when they go to church, they just want to feel better. They don't seem to care about their minds being engaged. This is just the way many people are wired. And it's a hard fact that music primarily engages the emotions. Music engages the emotions so the words can just quietly slip their way into your mind.

When you think of Martin Luther, we think about the amazing impact of his teaching and how he rediscovered the true gospel and ignite the Reformation. But it was so much more than that. In a new book by Keith and Kristyn Getty, they write: "Many of Luther's enemies feared his hymns more than the man himself. Singing was at the heart of the reformation."³ Here is the same idea in Luther's own words as he referred to the songs in the Roman Catholic Church.

They do indeed possess many admirable, fine musical compositions and songs, especially in the cathedral and parish churches. But they have adorned them with many foul, idolatrous texts. Therefore, we have removed these idolatrous, dead, and nonsensical texts, have divested them of the fine music, and have used this for the living, holy Word of God, to sing, to praise, to glorify therewith, so that this fine ornament of music might be put to proper use and serve its dear Creator and His Christians, that He might be praised and glorified and that we might be bettered and strengthened in the faith through His holy Word, driven into the heart with sweet song.⁴

Elsewhere, Luther also wrote: "After all, the gift of language combined with the gift of song was only given to man to let him know that he should praise God with both word and music, namely, by proclaiming [the Word of God] through music and by providing sweet melodies with words."⁵

This past week I was greatly helped by a worship song I had never heard before. I was feeling a little down and overwhelmed. Can you relate? Do you know this feeling? 😊 It's called "daily life," right? I didn't even really have a good reason to feel this way. It was just there. The song is called Help My Unbelief.⁶ The music was written by Red Mountain Church, but the lyrics were written by John Newton who, as you probably know, also wrote Amazing Grace. As I listened to

this song, a tear fell from my eye. It was not a moment of deep sorrow and weeping but it was both word of admonishment and a great encouragement to me. Let me play you part of the song⁷ and then explain why it impacted me the way it did.

I know the Lord is nigh,
And would but cannot pray,
For Satan meets me when I try,
And frights my soul away,
And frights my soul away.

I would but can't repent,
Though I endeavor oft;
This stony heart can never relent
Till Jesus makes it soft,
Till Jesus makes it soft.

Help my unbelief.
Help my unbelief.
Help my unbelief.
My help must come from Thee.

This is the point at which I felt simultaneously chastised and encouraged. I felt the Lord saying to me that I was feeling the way I did fundamentally due to my lack of faith.

I would but cannot rest,
In God's most holy will;
I know what He appoints is best,
And murmur at it still.
I murmur at it still.

Help my unbelief.
Help my unbelief.
Help my unbelief.
My help must come from Thee.

Rich Maurer
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¹ <http://religion.blogs.cnn.com/2013/03/09/the-most-sung-artist-on-the-planet/>

² <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1Qsdmn71yD7ZJzX54SM29ICvH38DfN0kP/view?usp=sharing>

³ Keith and Kristyn Getty, *Sing: How Worship Transforms Your Life, Family and Church*, B&H Publishing: Nashville, © 2017, p. xxiii.

⁴ Edwald M. Plass, gen. ed., *What Luther Says*, Vol. 2 (Saint Louis: Concordia, 1959), 981.

⁵ Luther, *Vol. 53, Luther's Works, Liturgy and Hymns*, 320.

⁶ <https://www.invubu.com/music/show/song/Red-Mountain-Music/Help-My-Unbelief.html>

⁷ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U-BK4SVi9HI>