

**Eph. 5:18-21**  
**Life in the Spirit**

**Plea for nursery workers**

**Marriage and parenting series (the next 4-6 weeks)**

**Ephesians 5:18–21 (ESV)** — **18** And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit, **19** addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart, **20** giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, **21** submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ.

**Introduction:**

Have you ever attempted the following activities?

Swimming across the Pacific Ocean, without a life jacket.  
Jogging from here to Chicago, without stopping.  
Bench pressing 2,000 pounds.  
Drinking five gallons of milk in one sitting.

Of course not! Why? These activities are impossible. If something is impossible (really impossible), it makes little sense to attempt it.

Yet, many of us attempt the impossible all the time. What do I mean? We try to love our enemies, humble ourselves, forgive our spouses, serve our families, navigate the difficulties of parenting, evangelize our friends, put to death besetting sins, and exercise self-control—all in our own strength. These things are not hard to do in our own strength, they are impossible to do in our own strength.

Yet we attempt to do these things in our own strength all the time, which leaves many of us wondering, why is the Christian life so hard? Why do I always feel so defeated? Why do I always feel so powerless?

This brings us to this morning's passage. In Ephesians 5:18-21, Paul exhorts us to *be filled with the Holy Spirit*.

This command comes right in the middle of a long section of exhortations that begin in 4:1 and end in 5:22. This is no coincidence, since we need the Spirit's enabling power to obey all these commands.

So, what does it mean to be filled with the Spirit? To answer this crucial question, we will look at two topics...

*The command*  
*The consequences*

**First, the command!**

*Let me ask a few questions...*

**What is the context of the command?**

**Ephesians 5:18 (ESV) — 18** And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit,

The Bible frequently addresses the sin of drunkenness (Prov 20:1; 21:17; 23:30, 31; 31:4). At the same time, the Bible frequently describes the blessings of wine (when you look up the word wine in a Bible concordance you may be surprised). Furthermore, Jesus made 200-300 gallons of really good wine at the wedding feast in Cana. So clearly, drinking is not a sin, but drunkenness is.

Why is drunkenness a sin, that must be repented of? The issue is control. When someone is drunk, they are under the control of alcohol, not the Holy Spirit. When someone is being controlled by alcohol, they cannot do the things that God calls them to do. For instance, when someone is drunk, they cannot obey God's commands to love their spouse, discipline their kids, evangelize their friends, control their anger, read their Bibles, or obey the civil authorities. Why? They are controlled by the alcohol, not the Holy Spirit. You can't be controlled by alcohol and the Holy Spirit at the same time. The two are mutually exclusive.

Coincidentally, this is why it is sinful to use recreational drugs that dull one's senses or lead to altered states of consciousness (check out our position paper on Marijuana at the welcome center on the way out).

### **Illustration:**

I have a neighbor in his early 90s. He lives with a huge dog, named Romo. Romo probably weighs at least 150 pounds. Romo is big and mean and my neighbor is old and frail. It is a really bad combination.

Romo is often on a leash, praise God. But even when he is on a leash, my neighbor can't control him. When Romo sees a small child or another dog, he takes off, barking, growling, and baring his teeth. His owner does everything in his power to hang on to the leash! But it is futile. Romo drags my neighbor down the street like a 4-year-old girl drags her rag doll around the house.

Once Romo came after me. As I backed up, Romo bared his teeth, growled, and barked. The neighbor yanked and yanked on his leash to no avail. The only reason I walked away unscathed is because Romo changed his mind, not because the neighbor controlled him.

My neighbor does not control his dog, his dog controls him. The drunk does not control his alcohol the alcohol controls him.

### **Application:**

The issue in Ephesians 5:18 is control. Who or what controls you? Christians must be controlled by the Holy Spirit. This means that they must not be controlled by alcohol, marijuana, heroin, lust, greed, or anger.

But what does it actually look like to be controlled by the Holy Spirit? This brings us to the next question...

*What is the context of the command?*

**What is the meaning of the command?**

**Ephesians 5:18 (ESV) — 18** And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit,

What specifically does be filled mean?

The verb, represented by the phrase “be filled” is a present imperative verb—which means “keep on being filled.” In other words, this is not a one-time crisis experience. We are to keep on being filled with the Spirit every day, even better, every hour.

The Holy Spirit is a person, he is not a force, or a gas, or a substance. He has a personality and a will. He can be grieved, he is all powerful, and he is everywhere present. He is the third person of the trinity, who is coequal, coeternal, and co-substantial with the father and the son.

We must be continually filled with the Holy Spirit.

*At this point, some of you are probably thinking.*

Wait a minute, I thought I received the Holy Spirit the moment I was converted. You are absolutely right! Upon conversion, every Christian is baptized in the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 12:13). This means that every Christian has the Holy Spirit dwelling inside of them. This is one of the greatest privileges of living under the New Covenant.

Under the Old Covenant the Spirit dwelled in some of the saints some of the time, but under the New Covenant the Spirit indwells all of the saints all of the time.

Speaking of the New Covenant...

**Ezekiel 36:27 (ESV) — 27** And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules.

Yet, Paul clearly teaches us in Ephesians 5:18, that Christians must continually be filled with the Holy Spirit.

This is not like water filling a glass. The glass can be half full or all the way full. But according to Wayne Grudem a much better analogy is a balloon.

“a balloon... can be “full” of air even though it has very little air in it. When more air is blown in, the balloon expands and in a sense it is “more full.” So it is with us: we can be filled with the Holy Spirit and at the same time be able to receive much more of the Holy Spirit as well. It was only Jesus himself to whom the Father gave the Spirit without measure (John 3:34).” (Grudem)

If you are a Christian, you are indwelled by the Holy Spirit, but you must also continually be filled with the Holy Spirit.

How does this actually happen? This brings us to the next question.

*What is the context of the command?*

*What is the meaning of the command?*

**What is the application of the command?**

**Ephesians 5:18 (ESV) — 18** And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit,

Let me make a few comments of application...

Paul commands all Christians, not just the super spiritual ones, to continually be filled with the Holy Spirit. This is a command, not a suggestion.

In addition, this is a passive command. It literally means “Let the Holy Spirit fill you” (NEB). In other words, there is nothing you can do to earn this privilege. We don’t have to wave a magic wand. We don’t have to perform seven steps. We don’t have to climb a mountain or go to a sacred temple. We don’t have to fast and pray for 40 days.

We simply repent of known sin and ask for the Spirit to fill us. That’s it! Jesus earned the indwelling Spirit for you on the cross.

The founder of Campus Crusade for Christ was Dr. Bill Bright. He called this process spiritual breathing. We breath out sin (the Bible calls this repentance) and we breath in the Holy Spirit. This is metaphorical language; we don’t actually breathe out sin and we don’t actually breathe in the Holy Spirit. But the metaphor is nonetheless helpful.

When should we ask to be filled with the Spirit?

During a conflict with your spouse!  
Right before you discipline a child!  
Right before you confront your roommate!  
When you really don’t want to serve someone but know you must!  
When you are tempted to be fearful about our nation’s future!  
When you are tempted to be fearful about money.  
Right before you strike up an evangelist conversation with your friend!  
When you are tempted with sexual sin...  
When you don’t feel like engaging in the spiritual disciplines...

Basically, all the time...

Before these events we must, must, must quietly pray, “Spirit of God please fill me now.” Why must we do this, because apart from the Spirit we can do nothing!

### **Illustration:**

How many of you lost power during the recent windstorm? Let me ask you a question, “If you lost power, and you knew you lost power, how many of you walked around your house flipping light switches on, turning the television on, plugging in your phone, trying to make coffee, or trying to turn on your electric blanket?” Probably none of you, why, because you know that without electricity it is impossible for your devices to work. Since it is impossible, you don’t even try.

Yet we try to live without the power of the Holy Spirit all the time and wonder why the Christian life seems so incredibly hard?

Paul commands us to continually be filled with the Holy Spirit.

*Once I’m filled with the Spirit, what happens? This brings us to the second point.*

*First, the command*

### **Second, the consequences**

*What are the consequences of being filled with the Spirit??? There are many, Paul lists three in our passage.*

## People filled with the Spirit sing!

**Ephesians 5:18–19 (ESV) — 18** And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit, **19** addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart,

Notice the contrast—drunkenness leads to debauchery but being filled with the spirit leads to joyful singing. Let's look at Holy Spirit empowered singing in more detail.

*When the Spirit fills us, we sing to each other.*

“but be filled with the Spirit, (19) addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs,”

When the spirit fills us, the natural consequence is singing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to one another. Psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs refer to OT Psalms, 1<sup>st</sup> century hymns, and spontaneous songs inspired by the Holy Spirit.

Listen to the parallel passage

**Colossians 3:16 (ESV) — 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.

The word of Christ literally means the words about Christ. Let's put these two verses together. When the Holy Spirit fills the saints, they sanctify each other, by singing gospel centered songs to each other.

You may not feel like singing is your thing. You may even have a bad voice. But that does not matter. When the Spirit fills us we want to sing to the saints, for their edification.

*When the spirit fills us, we sing to each other... in addition*

*When the Spirit fill us, we sing joyfully.*

**Ephesians 5:18–19 (ESV) — 18** And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit, **19** addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart,

When the Spirit fills us, we sing and make melody to the Lord with our hearts. This means that we sing to two audiences—we sing to the Lord and we sing to the saints. And here is the key—we do this with joy in our hearts. The fruit of the Spirit is “Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.” Joy... Joy... Joy....

Why so much joy? When the holy Spirit fill us, he makes real to us the realities of the gospel. This should not surprise us, since one of the main ministries of the Holy Spirit is highlighting the work of the Son.

### Application:

I recently had two different sets of visitors tell me how surprised and refreshed they were when they visited GCF and noticed that people were actually singing during the singing time.

This was music to my ears.

How many of you want to experience Joy? Joy comes when the Holy spirit fills us with the Spirit, which results in joyful songs sung to each other and to God. Some of the most joyful moments of my short life on planet earth have been the result of singing with the saints.

CLC, T4G, GLPC, etc...

I don't always experience this level of joy, but I want to. Pray with me to this end.

*People filled with the Spirit sing! In addition...*

### **People filled with the Spirit are thankful**

**Ephesians 5:18–20 (ESV) — 18** And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit, **19** addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart, **20** giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ,

When the Spirit fills us, we are thankful. Paul was an incredibly thankful person. One scholar points out that Paul mentions thanksgiving in his letters more often, line for line, than any other Hellenistic author, pagan or Christian. (DOP AHL)

Paul was an incredibly thankful person, which is utterly astonishing in light of the hardships he endured. His enemies threw rocks at his head and left him for dead, he was beaten with rods, he was whipped, he was thrown in prison, he was chased by bandits, he often went hungry, and he was persecuted, despised, and hated by his own people. He was not a very popular person!!!

Yet, in Eph. 5:20, Paul tells us to be thankful “**always and for everything.**” How is this possible? This is only possible for those who have been filled by the Spirit.

When the Spirit fill us, he reminds us that God is in control, God is good, and that God has promised to work all things for our good and His glory.

In addition, the Spirit reminds us that we have been reconciled to God.

Furthermore, the Spirit reminds us that all of our sins have been forgiven and we are going to heaven.

*Let me qualify this command somewhat.*

When Paul says that we must give thanks always and for everything, Paul is not implying that we must give thanks for a spouse's adultery, a child's death, a church split, rape, or some other vile deed. God hates these things. We must never thank God for what he hates. What Paul wants us to do, is give thanks in the midst of these horrendous circumstances knowing that God will somehow use these horrible things for good.

### **Application:**

This isn't hard, it is impossible! Giving thanks in all circumstances requires supernatural intervention. In other words, it requires that we are continually filled with the Holy Spirit.

When will you be tempted to grumble and complain this week?

When you get up on Monday morning to go to the job you despise,  
when your boss berates again,  
when the stock market crashes,

when your teacher gives you a D-,  
when your chronic pain will not go away,  
when you contract Covid,  
when the governor extends the lockdown 6 more months,  
when the new administration does something to unsettle you???

When you are tempted to grumble and complain, you must stop and say, “Spirit of God fill me, and help me remember all of the things I have to be grateful for.”

Of all the people on the earth Christians have the most reasons to be thankful. Everything is working for our good, literally. Thanksgiving is the language of Christianity!!!

*People filled with the Spirit sing.  
People filled with the Spirit are thankful. In addition...*

**People filled with the Spirit are submissive!**

**Ephesians 5:18–21 (ESV) — 18** And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit, **19** addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart, **20** giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, **21** submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ.

When you think of a “spirit filled” person, what comes to mind? Someone who speaks in tongues, or maybe someone who raises their hands in worship, or maybe someone who handles snakes in the deep south???

I don’t know...

But when Paul thought of a spirit filled person, one of the first things that came to his mind was submission. In the next 20 verses of Ephesians, Paul unpacks the details of submission. But for now, Paul wants us to understand that every Spirit filled person is eager to submit to others.

I wonder, does this describe you? Are you eager to submit to your spouse, your boss, the civil authorities, the elders of the church, your coach, your teacher, the police, the building inspector, and the Spokane county building permit office???

Submission is a very good thing. Jesus was the most submissive person to ever live. He was submissive because he was filled with the Spirit without measure (John 3:34).

**Application:**

A person filled with the Spirit constantly defers to others...

If Christians took this seriously, they would be no church splits, no Christian school splits, and harmony in the home.

Is there a time and a place to fight for what is right? Absolutely! Are there God given roles of submission and authority in society? Yes! More on that in the next few weeks. But here, in verse 21, Paul wants all of us to cultivate a demeanor of submission.

How? By relying on the Holy Spirit.

**Conclusion:**

It is foolish to attempt the impossible.

It is foolish to perform heart surgery on yourself.

It is foolish to jump off of a ten-story building.

It is foolish to go three months without eating.

Even more so, it is foolish to live the Christian life in your own strength. Yet, here is the good news, we don't have to, God has promised to fill us with his spirit when we ask, lets pray.