



## Sermon

### ***The Flow of Life from the Spirit***

**Ephesians 5:15-22**

11<sup>th</sup> October 2015

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Remember that in the first half of the epistle, Paul laid out in detail the wondrous nature of Christ and his redemptive work. We told us of the position the Church has in God's plan. How we are taken into Christ – "in Christ" is a favourite expression of his – we are seated with Christ in heavenly places.

That being so, the second half of the epistle lays out what should flow from those facts. It is true that in the first half of the epistle it is all statements of accomplished fact. In the second half it is all instruction in behaviour and commands for living.

So, Paul continues his instruction in this portion by telling us to be careful how we live. There is the word, "then", there. It relates back to what he has just written. To summarise the previous section, we have been told:

- Imitate God and live a life of love
- No hint of sexual immorality, impurity, greed – improper for God's holy people. We need to be clear on this – we hear so much propaganda from the world – the Christian teaching on relationships is that the only holy place for sexual intercourse is inside marriage – that is the right, proper and holy place for it. Marriage as the Bible understands it is between one man and one woman – we heard that last week in the gospel reading. Sexual relations between unmarried people is called fornication or adultery if a marriage covenant is being broken. Why am I stressing this? Because church-goers don't seem to understand the standards we are called to – the standards God expects of his people. If Paul says let there not even be a hint of sexual immorality, you can be sure he includes fornication and adultery, let alone other sexual practices outside marriage.
- No obscenity, foolish talk, coarse joking – rather there is to be thanksgiving.
- No immoral, impure, greedy person has any inheritance in KoG – because of such things God's wrath comes on the disobedient.
- Do not be partners with them.

In the light of that, then, live wisely. Make the most of every opportunity you get. Do you see he finishes that list with the very positive: Find out what pleases the Lord! Wake up and Christ will shine on you! If you are in darkness; if the light is dim – then throw off the slumber of sin and turn towards the light of Christ. He will shine on you and cleanse you.

Rather than indulge in shameful acts – things that will be under judgement and God’s anger – we are encouraged to find out what pleases the Lord.

Have you considered that in your conduct? I remember hearing of someone who explored the idea of applying the tithe to time as well - she could devote a tenth of her time consciously to God - her response was excitement at the idea! Find out what pleases the Lord.

I told you last week, about Chris Wyatt, author of “The Prisoner” the musical about to show at Centrestage. He wrote it while recovering from cancer. His response on first hearing the diagnosis was, “Oh good; a fresh adventure with Jesus!” Find out what pleases the Lord. I am not suggesting that we seek sickness to please the Lord; however, I think the Lord would be pleased with such a trusting attitude in the face of that challenge.

The same idea recurs in our text today, “Do not be foolish but understand what the Lord’s will is.”

This is not about theoretical knowledge – it is practical. It is a call for moral discernment and practical skill in making decisions. It is about keeping our life on target. And the target relates to actions which suit the rule of God.

The NIV uses the expression make the most of every opportunity. You may remember the AV rendering, “redeem the time.” The idea is that time is going by and evil will use it if we do not. In the film, “Dead Poets’ Society.” Robin Williams played a school teacher who urged his pupils, “*Carpe Diem! Seize the Day*” This verse could, “Buy up every opportunity!” We would do well to recall Psalm 90:

<sup>10</sup> The length of our days is seventy years--or eighty, if we have the strength; yet their span is but trouble and sorrow, for they quickly pass, and we fly away. <sup>11</sup> Who knows the power of your anger? For your wrath is as great as the fear that is due to you. <sup>12</sup> Teach us to number our days aright, that we may gain a heart of wisdom.

We live in an age where we have so many time-saving helps. Machines to speed things up; prepared products so we don’t have to spend hours of preparation. It was salutary being in Tanzanian villages to see how long it took to prepare meals. Breakfast? The dough for the chapattis had to be mixed, rolled into balls, and fried, then reheated before they were served –rather slower than taking two weetbix from the box and pouring on milk from the bottle. Chicken stew? First catch your chicken! Kill it, pluck it, gut and prepare it – that takes time. Rice for dinner? It has to be dried in the sun, prepared, sifted to remove husks before they get around to boiling it. Then of course the fire needs to be prepared and maintained; the charcoal purchased. Did you want to iron your clothes? Again charcoal is needed for the iron – and it so easy to get ash on your clothes. If you don’t blow it off quickly, you either have a burn or at very least you have to wash them again. And so it goes on.

Here we are in the West, with so many labour-saving machines and we are so busy! What has happened? Is it that we waste time on non-essentials? How many hours of TV do you really need to watch? How much of it is worthwhile? Do we aim too high – simply unrealistic about what we can achieve? Whatever is going on – Paul’s words are appropriate, “Buy up every opportunity.” Use time well.

In verse 18, we are told not to get drunk with wine. Why? - because it leads to behaviour which shows lack of concern for its consequences. These are senseless, reckless deeds. Being drunk makes us irresponsible because we act when the mind is absent. I said earlier that too many Christians are ignorant about the standards of morality God expects of us. So it is with drunkenness. We are not get drunk. God wants us in control of ourselves and our minds. It dishonours the image of God we carry when a man is drunken.

Surprisingly, Paul then contrasts being drunk with the positive of being filled with the Spirit. Why the juxtaposition?

There can be a certain similarity. When people are powerfully under the influence the Holy Spirit sometimes they can appear intoxicated. On the Day of Pentecost, some people said the disciples had had too much wine. The similarity lies in less inhibited, joyful emotions. However, Peter who was one of them, refuted that and was surely in control of himself as he preached a major sermon leading many to give their lives to Christ.

So we move to the command, be filled with the Holy Spirit. It is in the plural addressed to the Church. It is a continuing present passive which means go on being filled.

Having the Spirit of God is a mark of being a Christian. We were told that in chapter 1. The Spirit is the pledge and guarantee of our redemption. We do not control the Spirit so what does this involve? How should we obey a passive command?

We can understand the language of being filled with grief or joy. That emotion dominates the emotions. Paul then refers to people allowing the Holy Spirit to be the controlling influence which motivates and directs their lives. He has already referred to fullness in saying:

- Christ is the fullness of God who fills all things. (1:23)
- Christians are to know the love of Christ in order to be filled into all the fullness of God. (3:19)
- Christ ascended in order to fill all things. (4:10)
- Christians are to attain to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. (4:13)

So we may understand the command to be filled with the Holy Spirit, as the call to live in that unity of God and enjoy the wholeness of life with God. We allow ourselves to be the place where the presence and power of God are evident. The Holy Spirit will not force us. If we do not want to allow him to fill us – he will hold back. Because the Spirit is both a person and divine, we need to treat him with respect. The command is not grab hold of the Holy Spirit, but be filled with the Holy Spirit. It is about allowing him more access to us. How much are you prepared to allow God to have access to you? It is an easy answer in abstract but more challenging when a particular issue of control arises.

Now you may have been surprised by the end of point of this reading. Why did I run it on to include the bit about wives submitting to husbands? Surely that belongs with the next part of the letter? Well, the answer is grammatical.

Do you know the difference between a cat and a comma? One has claws on the end of its paws; the other is a pause at the end of a clause!

The grammatical point is verses 18-22 are all one sentence in the Greek because the verb occurs at the beginning only. There are two imperatives, “Don’t be drunk” and “Be filled.” All the rest of the clauses hang off those verbs with participles. Since in English we struggle with long sentences, the translators break such long sentences into shorter portions. However, in Greek, we read that we are to be filled with the Holy Spirit, speaking to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making music in your heart to the Lord, <sup>20</sup> always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, <sup>21</sup> submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ - <sup>22</sup> wives, to your husbands as to the Lord.

All these actions arise from the command, be filled with the Holy Spirit.

So what are the outcomes? We will express ourselves in five ways:

1. Speaking to one another in psalms, hymns and spiritual songs.
- 2&3. Singing and making music in our hearts to the Lord.
4. Giving thanks to God the Father for everything in the name of Jesus Christ.
5. Submitting to one another – wives to your husbands as to the Lord.

There is quite a lot of music here! The purpose is both praise to God and the encouragement and exhortation of other believers. When we sing, we are sometimes reminding ourselves and each other of God’s character and deeds; at other times we praise God directly. Some of us delight in singing; some dislike it. However, here there is a clear instruction to the Church to be using singing as an expression of the filling of the Spirit. It is noteworthy that with each reviving work of the Spirit there has come a fresh wave of music in the Church.

The next area is thankfulness. It is a believing acknowledgement of God and his purposes for good in Christ. As we give thanks to God for everything, we express trust to him in our circumstances.

Then we find that being filled with the Spirit we are to submit to each other. This is not some Christians to others but all Christians to each other. Jesus repeatedly made the point that whoever humbled himself would

be exalted.<sup>1</sup> Christians are called to live in mutual respect and submission based on a real love for the other person.

Finally, Paul applies that same mutual respect to the relationships in Christian households starting with the marriage relationship: “Wives to your own husbands as to the Lord.” There is no verb or participle there – it is supplied from the previous clause and is within the same context of mutual Christian submission of those filled with the Holy Spirit.

We will explore the marriage relationship next week, but remember that the submission of wives is firmly (both logically and grammatically) in the context of mutual, Christian submission – which makes it clear that husbands also are implicitly to submit to their wives!

Surely, what is important here, is that we actively choose to be filled with the Holy Spirit. When we prayed for that with the Christians in Kondo, it was a quiet and gentle time – yet we could see signs of the Spirit’s presence coming upon them. I invite you to open yourselves to the Spirit whether for the first time or afresh today as we receive communion. I will pray briefly for the filling the Spirit as I give you the bread.

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<sup>1</sup> Eg, Matt 23:12