Opening Words

Sin breaks us into fragments. But the Spirit of God puts the pieces of our lives together into wholeness. Sin dehumanizes us. But the Spirit of God restores the image of God inside us.

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It is the Spirit of God that marks us in a special way as the people of God. If we are not filled with the Holy Spirit, and if we do not have his presence among us and in us, we are just kind people with nice ethical teaching to make life more pleasing and profitable.

But if we are filled with the Spirit of God and his presence is among us, then we can declare to the world that the Creator has come to live among his people. The Creator is dwelling among us and all people can be restored to God. The great work of the Messiah to reconcile us to himself has been done because he made the payment for our sins. The Messiah has risen from the dead. The Messiah has now been enthroned at the right hand of God. And the Messiah is now bestowing his Spirit upon all who will believe so that we can once again be re-united with God.

With this in mind, let's look at Paul's familiar words again about the Holy Spirit in Eph 5:18-21.

> And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit, [19] speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord; [20] always giving thanks for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God, even the Father; [21] and be subject to one another in the fear of Christ.

In our previous broadcast, I provided an overview of the prophecies of the coming of the Spirit and the fulfillment of the prophecies by the coming of Christ. I provided this background to our passage because it makes it that much more meaningful when we realize that our experience of the Spirit is something God wanted for ages, for thousands of years. The Spirit brings fulfillment to us. Yes! But the coming of the Spirit is fulfillment to God. This brings joy to His heart because this is what he wanted – to live inside us – to live inside you and me – to be united with us at the very core of our humanity.

Let's start digging into the verses and see if we can find some fresh understanding that will increase our joy and power to live obediently to the Lord.

First, notice that Paul contrasts being filled with the Spirit and getting drunk with wine. Some press this too far and say that when one is filled with the Spirit he or she will be out of control spiritually and they will exhibit wild behavior, but that's not what Paul has in mind here, especially since the fruit of the Spirit is self-control. Remember that from Galatians 5:23? When some people get drunk, they don't get wild, they pass out! There's all kinds of different ways people react to too much alcohol.

Some have pointed to the accusation of the bystanders on the Day of Pentecost who said about those filled with the Spirit, "These men are drunk with wine." But that doesn't mean the believers

were out of control. That was an accusation by scornful men and the believers were filled with joy and were speaking about the great things God had done. The people listening could understand them speaking in their own language of God's mighty deeds. That doesn't sound like drunk people!

Let me draw out why Paul makes a comparison between drunkenness with wine and being filled with the Spirit.

First, it may be that some in the church had drinking problems. We should not be surprised for in the ancient world wine was one of the most common beverages. Let's remember, their water system wasn't that great and they didn't have convenience stores with purified bottled water or, as it is now, with all different kinds of flavored water enhanced by vitamins. Sometimes, believers in the first century had too much to drink. Some even showed up at the Lord's table drunk, Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians 11. And one of the requirements for leadership in the church was that men must not be addicted to wine. And so, this may have been a problem in some churches and our verses remind us of the importance of not letting any substance gain control of us. The only "substance" so to speak that we want to control us is the Holy Spirit.

We must remember also that alcohol is not a stimulant but a depressant. Look at how Paul describes the effect of drunkenness – dissipation. Let me define that word for you. It means to disperse, to spend wastefully, to squander, to scatter. Remember the old fairy tale of the man who caught a magic fish and the fish granted him three wishes? He could have anything he wanted. And so, he thought and thought, and he thought so long that he said, "I'm hungry, I wish I had a sausage," and the sausage appeared on a plate in front of him. Well, his wife was enraged. What a waste. They had such an opportunity in front of them and he squandered one-third of it by wishing for a sausage. She went on and on in her rage until he said, "I wish your nose would turn into this sausage," and immediately the sausage left his plate and attached to his wife's face. Well, now, she was completely humiliated and she begged her husband to use the third wish to restore her face, which he did and the three wishes were used up and he had nothing. What a waste!

But the word picture is even more powerful. Drunkenness and sin and any kind of addiction to sin is not only a wasted life but is a dispersal and a scattering of our human personality. Rather than our lives developing and coming into greater wholeness, cohesion, control, effectiveness, and fruitfulness, our lives become more fragmented, scattered, and out of control. Sin is like a rushing river that crosses its banks and causes widespread destruction. A rushing river is a powerful force and can be used for good if it is controlled and confined within a certain area. But if not, it destroys and scatters. Paul said, "don't get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation."

Sin fragments us. But the Spirit of God puts the pieces of our lives together into wholeness. Sin dehumanizes us. Sin makes us less than human. Sin makes us more animal-like than human. And what a tragedy that is because we are made in the image of God. But the Spirit of God restores our humanity. The Spirit of God restores the image of God inside us.

Allow me to make one more observation between wine and the Spirit of God. How does a person become drunk? He becomes drunk one drink at a time, one swallow at a time. For some people, it doesn't take much – a couple of glasses of wine and they are gone. For others, it takes a whole lot

more, but the point is that it takes a continual action of imbibing the alcohol to bring about the effect of drunkenness. As I thought on this one day, I asked myself, "Am I continually drinking in the Spirit of God? If becoming drunk is one swallow at a time, perhaps filling ourselves with the Holy Spirit is one swallow at a time as well."

I am afraid that we often want big Holy Spirit experiences that will just wash over us, inundate us, and take us to a new level in our relationship with God. Sometimes that happens. We read about such experiences in the book of Acts, and we see how there was an instantaneous filling of the Holy Spirit, almost like standing in front of a fire hydrant with the water rushing out. Jesus did say that the one who believes in him, from his innermost parts would come rivers of living water. Notice, not just a river, but rivers of living water. That's quite a promise, and I am sure you could tell of such experiences in your life and I could tell you about a couple in my life.

Because Paul draws a comparison with wine and the Spirit, I believe we can draw the implication of filling ourselves with God's Spirit "one swallow at a time" so to speak. My wife and I have been saddened as we have noticed friends that we love who have given themselves over to alcohol. They don't think they are addicted, but they are. They think they can have only a drink or two and stop. But they never do and they keep on drinking and keep on swallowing and keep on taking it in until finally they are controlled by the alcohol. But it starts with them setting apart time to drink, starting with a few swallows, and then consuming more and more.

Brothers and sisters, you and I must dedicate times to drink in the Spirit of God. We must dedicate time to be with and expose ourselves to the Spirit of God – to be in his word, to be in prayer, to worship with God's people, to listen to good teaching, to share the Gospel, to follow his leading, to share our faith, and many other things like this.

In this text, where it says, "be filled", it could be translated, "fill yourselves". In the Greek text, this is an imperative. Paul is *commanding* this. He is either saying, "put yourself in a place where God's Spirit will fill you," or he is saying, "fill yourselves with God's Spirit." Either way, the result is the same, the Holy Spirit fills us up with Himself and our lives are changed.

If this command is translated in a passive sense, that God does all the work in filling us then the following verses are evidences that we are controlled by God. If this command is translated for us to fill ourselves, then the following verses are steps to take, or to keep with the analogy, they are drinks of the Spirit to swallow so that with each drink we are more and more filled up.

What do these following verses tell us? They tell us to speak to one another in a certain way, to sing in our hearts to God, to be thankful, and to be submissive. They are plain and simple. Paul doesn't command us to speak in tongues. He doesn't say that we will do miracles. He talks about how we talk, what is going on in our heart, having a grateful spirit, and how we respond to authority. We'll consider these in our next talk as we continue exploring this passage of Scripture.