



ephesians

a church becoming

Sunday, January 19, 2025

Ephesians 5:8-20

If you were with us last week, we started walking through the second last chapter of Ephesians, chapter 5. And in the first seven verses, Paul's reminder was very strong and very clear: that as Christians who are part of God's family, we are therefore called to be imitators of Christ. True to form, Paul then walks us through different things that he uses to show us what this isn't: fornication, uncleanness, covetousness, filthiness, foolish talking, and coarse jesting. The connection between all six being self-centredness. Paul reminds us that it's not about what I want but about what God wants and that the antidote to this kind of self-centredness is actually thankfulness - gratitude. Because a heart filled with gratitude is positioned towards what God has already provided for us instead of what we don't have and may want. And when the heart's focus is gratitude, it's harder to redirect it towards selfish desires and wants.

And so now as we come to the rest of the chapter, we are going to see that Paul teaches us that this works only when we embrace our true nature of being children of light, not darkness.

If you have your Bibles with you this morning, please turn with me to Ephesians 5:8-21. If you are able to, please stand for the reading of the Word of God:

Ephesians 5:8-21

'For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light 9 (for the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness, righteousness, and truth), 10 finding out what is acceptable to the Lord. 11 And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather expose them. 12 For it is shameful even to speak of those things which are done by them in secret. 13 But all things that are exposed are made manifest by the light, for whatever makes manifest is light. 14 Therefore He says:

*"Awake, you who sleep,
Arise from the dead,
And Christ will give you light."*

15 See then that you walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise, 16 redeeming the time, because the days are evil.

17 Therefore do not be unwise, but understand what the will of the Lord is. 18 And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit, 19 speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord, 20 giving thanks always for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ...'

I want to look at this section in two parts. The first part being vs. 8-14 and the second part being vs. 15-20.

The first part is all about light vs. darkness which if you've been with us for a while, then this is nothing new. It's basically what we walked through in our previous series on the book of the Revelation of Jesus Christ. And then all throughout Advent, we saw the same theme present as well. The general point being that Jesus Christ represents the light. And the world and sin represent darkness. Jesus came as light to dispel the darkness and then calls each and every one of us to embrace His light and allow His light to shine in and through us in all that we do.

Now, that being said, I want to suggest that the focal point of this whole first part is actually found in vs. 14 where Paul takes his cue from the prophet Isaiah by quoting an early first century hymn:

"Awake, you who sleep,
Arise from the dead,
And Christ will give you light."

Which is Pauls way of saying that living as children of light begins with an awakening of sorts - an awakening from the darkness that once bound us to the light that will now restore us. Paul is calling believers to step out of the shadows of sin and self-centredness, and to step into the radiant light of Christ. And here's the most amazing thing - when we let the light of Christ shine upon us and through us, He will reveal those areas of spiritual apathy and self-centredness that He longs to transform and heal.

I think this is part of the beauty of living as children of light: it's not about striving in our own strength, but about surrendering to His. This quote serves as a reminder that we are no longer bound by the darkness but that we have been transformed by the light of Christ - a light with the power to shape literally every aspect of our lives.

A good real-world example of this is to take a look at the growth patterns of plants. Jordan has a ton of plants sitting on the ledge in our living room and the other day, I was doing a bit of a deep clean, so I took them off to scrub the window sills. I made the fatal flaw of forgetting just how each plant was positioned and so after everything was cleaned, I just put the plants back up without any thought....but they looked so bad - they were all off-center and pointing in every direction. I couldn't figure it out until it dawned on me to position them all in the same way. And when I did, I realized they were all leaning heavily towards the window. You see, the plants know exactly where their source of light comes from, and they lean into it. They don't run or hide from the light - no, it's instinctive for them - they grow towards it because they know that it means life.

And that's the key difference between light and darkness - darkness stunts growth and leaves us lost and ultimately disoriented, while light brings life, growth, and clarity. This is the point Paul is making here: as followers of Christ, we are no longer people of the darkness. Instead, we are children of light, called to live in a way that reflects the light of Christ in everything we do.

As we lean into the light of Christ, we develop a holy lean - a posture of heart and mind that keeps us oriented toward Him. This lean becomes our sense of direction, guiding us toward His purpose and filling us with His peace. It's something that those walking in darkness simply don't have. And I'll be honest with you - living as light often goes against the grain of the flesh. But it's in this leaning, in this continual alignment with His truth, that we find clarity, purpose, and the life He's called us to live.

Paul now moves to his next exhortation which is to be wise in everything we do. Wisdom is probably one of the greatest gifts that any of us could ask for. In fact, it is so great a gift that when given the opportunity to have anything in the world, King Solomon of old asked for wisdom. Why? Because he understood that wisdom is the foundation for making sound decisions and living a life that honours God. And as a king, this foundation was everything for him. Perhaps, contrary to popular opinion, wisdom is not just knowledge. Wisdom is the ability to take that knowledge and apply it to real life situations.

Share Story of car accident

(I know I'm called to live as light, but in the situation I really wanted to blast him back, but wisdom said to look deeper....and as I did, I found out that there was a lot going on in the family and the issue wasn't the car accident, but that triggered a response based on their current circumstance. If I had engaged like my flesh wanted to then I would have only added to the chaos and pain they were already experiencing. Instead, by choosing to respond with wisdom and grace, I was able to de-esca-

late the situation and show compassion. In that moment, I realized that living as a child of light isn't just about doing the right thing - it's about reflecting Christ's love and understanding, even when it's difficult. Wisdom allows us to see beyond the surface and respond in a way that brings peace and healing rather than division and hurt.)

Paul now expands on the call to wisdom by comparing and contrasting being drunk with wine and being filled with the Spirit - one of the most fascinating comparisons in the New Testament. And it might seem a little disconnected from his previous call to wisdom, but Paul is driving home the idea that wisdom is not an abstract concept but that it is reflected in everyday choices and actions - ultimately, in what we allow to influence and control us. And as an example, he uses wine and the Holy Spirit - which might seem obvious at first, but let's dig into it.

So, the first thing we need to understand is that this isn't a straightforward apples-to-apples comparison. If it were, Paul would have said, 'Do not be drunk with wine, but be drunk with the Spirit,' or, 'Do not be filled with wine, but be filled with the Spirit.' Instead he uses two distinct words: drunk and filled. Drunk is only applied to wine and filled is only applied to the Spirit. This is intentional.

In the original Greek, the word for drunk, *methyskō*, refers to being intoxicated or under the influence of alcohol. It implies a loss of control, impaired judgment, and a state where behaviour is dictated by the substance. Whether applied to alcohol or something else, the state of drunkenness is always associated with indulgence, excess, and recklessness - it is never portrayed as good or healthy.

On the other hand, the word Paul uses for filled is *plēroō*, which means to be made full, complete, or under the influence of something in a way that brings wholeness and purpose. This distinction is crucial.

Why does Paul choose to contrast these two words?

Because being drunk involves losing control, while being filled with the Spirit involves surrendering control. Losing control means allowing external forces - like substances, impulses, or even emotions - to dictate your behaviour, which often leads to chaos, recklessness, and harm. In this state, you are no longer in charge of your actions, and the result is dissipation - a wasted life without direction or purpose.

In contrast, surrendering control to the Spirit is an intentional act of the will - it's a conscious choice

to align yourself with God's will. It means allowing God to lead and influence every aspect of your life. Instead of chaos, this produces clarity, peace, and purpose.

There's a growing movement that is using language about being 'drunk in the Spirit,' as a way to redeem the term drunkenness, but I strongly disagree with it. Because ultimately, the Holy Spirit does not call us to lose control, but to surrender it. Drunkenness - whether viewed physically or metaphorically - implies a state of recklessness and chaos, where actions are driven by impulse rather than purpose. This is the opposite of what it means to be filled with the Spirit. Being filled with the Spirit is a deliberate, God-centred surrender that brings order, wisdom, and intentionality.

And so, Paul's teaching makes this distinction very clear: losing control leads to dissipation, but surrendering control to the Spirit leads to clarity, purpose, and a life that glorifies God.

Now Paul could have used a variety of examples to show this, but he speaks specifically about wine because in Ephesus people were abusing and indulging specifically in wine. Life in Ephesus revolved around the goddess Artemis, known as Diana to the Romans. The Temple of Diana, one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World, was dedicated to her as the goddess of the hunt, the moon, fertility, and pleasure. Statues in her honour depicted a woman with many breasts, symbolizing abundance and fertility.

At the time Paul is writing this letter, the Temple was infamous for its 'worship events,' which involved ritual drunkenness and frenzied behaviour. Worshippers would come under the control of Diana by first coming under the control of wine.

This is why Paul speaks so strongly: 'Do not get drunk with wine.' Not because he's against alcohol in principle, but because something fundamental to our wholeness is at stake. What we seek to fill us will ultimately control us. This is perhaps most obvious with alcohol, but the same principle applies to things like food, work, entertainment, or even exercise. Slowly but surely, these things can begin to master us. Too much of anything other than the Spirit of God leads to dissipation - to waste.

So Paul says, 'But be filled with the Spirit.' It's the only filling that finally fills.

And when that truly happens - when we are filled with the Spirit - Paul says that children of the light will speak to one another in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs. To me, this seems more like a figurative instruction than a literal one. As children of the light, filled with the Spirit, everything that comes out of us should be good, wholesome, and Godly - almost as if we are singing hymns to one

another or speaking Scripture over each other.

Why? Because, ultimately, out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaks. When our hearts are full of the Spirit, what flows from our words will naturally reflect His goodness and truth.

Paul follows this instruction with a reminder of what we touched on last week: to live lives of thankfulness. It is through thankfulness that our hearts remain full, as gratitude shifts our focus from what we lack to what God has already provided. A thankful heart reflects a life that is rooted in the light of Christ.

I'm sure it's not hard to see that this message is all about discipleship. It flows really well from last week's message where the challenge was to be covered in the dust of our rabbi. That as disciples, as we follow Jesus, everything that He steps into just covers us as a result. This is the proximity of following that true discipleship requires.

And at the end of the day each and every one of us sitting here right now, are all disciples of something. The question isn't if we're disciples - it's what or who are we following? Are we following the ways of the world, letting culture, desires, or impulses shape us? Or are we following Jesus, letting His light, His truth, and His love guide every step we take?

True discipleship requires being filled with the Holy Spirit on a regular basis. It's not a one-time event or a momentary experience, but a continual surrender to His presence and guidance in our lives. Without the Spirit, we're left to navigate life in our own strength, vulnerable to the influences of the world and our own desires.

But when we are filled with the Spirit, He shapes our hearts, transforms our minds, and empowers our actions. He gives us the clarity to discern God's will, the strength to walk in obedience, and the love to reflect Christ in everything we do.

So the question doesn't just stop at what or who we're following - it's whether we're staying close enough to Jesus, filled by His Spirit, so that His ways become ours, His light shines through us, and His mission defines our purpose. True discipleship is about living in step with the Spirit, every moment of every day.

Some of us may have been conditioned to view the filling of the Holy Spirit as a one time deal but it's not. We need Him to fill us daily. Take a moment - to ask the Holy Spirit to fill you.

Ephesians 3:20-21

'Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, 21 to Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.'

Blessing

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