

**Spirit Filled Living**  
*The Truth about our Life in Christ*  
**Ephesians 5:15-21**  
Pastor Bryan Clark

I ran across this article in *Time Magazine*. The article stated:

“If you have a moment to read this story with your feet up, free of interruption, at your leisure, put it down. It’s not for you. Congratulations! But if like almost everyone else, you’re trying to do something else at the same time—if you’re stuck in traffic, waiting at the airport lounge, watching the news, if you’re stirring the soup, shining your shoes or dying your hair—then read on, or hire someone to read it for you and give you a report. There was once a time when time was money. Both could be wasted or both spent well. But in the end, gold was the richer prize. As with almost any commodity, however, value depends on scarcity, and these are the days of the time famine.”

Interesting article...it’s especially interesting when you realize it was written in 1989. I think we all would understand the culture has not gotten less busy. For sure we are busier today than we were then. Everybody feels that we’re a busy culture. Now it’s helpful to remind ourselves that just because we’re busy doesn’t mean we’re important. It doesn’t mean we’re successful. It doesn’t mean we’re accomplishing anything. Busy isn’t necessarily good or bad. Busy is just busy. I think the more relevant question would be: What are you busy doing, and why are you doing that? That’s the more relevant question. We’re all busy, so what are you busy doing, and why are you doing that? And how do we make sure that we are busy about the right things?

Well, that’s what we want to talk about today. If you have a Bible, turn with us to Ephesians, Chapter 5. We’re continuing on in our study of the book of Ephesians. Today we pick it up in chapter 5, verse 15, which starts with the word *therefore*; a lot of this part of Ephesians starts with the word *therefore*. That just makes you back up and try and figure out what came before this. You know, whenever you see the word *therefore*, you stop and see what it’s “there for”.

If you back it up to verse 8, Paul told us that we formerly walked in darkness, “*But now you are light in the Lord; walk as children of the light,*” which kind of backs you up to chapter 4, verse 1, that we are to, “*Walk worthy of our calling.*” To walk worthy of our calling is to walk in the light, and that’s the discussion then in verse 15:

**Therefore be careful how you walk...** (\*NASB, Ephesians 5:15a)

That phrase actually is a phrase that refers to being very careful where you put your feet when you’re walking—kind of one step at a time. Now I thought about illustrating this as if we’re walking through a mine field, but then I remembered most of us haven’t done that before, so maybe that’s not so helpful. Maybe it’s more the idea of walking barefoot across the rock parking lot or through a yard that is full of stickers. You’re just very aware of every step you take. That’s the idea of the phrase.

**...not as unwise men but as wise, (Vs. 15b)**

Now I think it's often hard to figure out what that word *wisdom* means. It's kind of abstract. So I like the idea of *skillful*—skillful living. That's basically what wisdom is referring to. It's a little bit different from knowledge or information. So basically, how do we walk in the light as very skillful people? How do we live life skillfully now that we're in the light? Verse 16:

**... making the most of your time, because the days are evil.**

Making the most of your time is literally redeeming the time. It's an accounting phrase. It carries the idea of buying back time. Why? **Because the days are evil.**

Now my opinion is the translation **evil** is unfortunate because I think it's misleading. We hear *evil* and we think of a lot of bad, evil, sinful behaviors, so most of us think, "*Well, that's not me.*" But this Greek word that is translated evil carries much more the idea of that which is worthless, that which is empty, that which is a waste of time. Now suddenly it becomes much more relevant to all of us. So the idea, then, is that there is a current in the culture, like a current in the river, and the current really is all about investing in things that ultimately are a waste of time. And so it's the idea that that's kind of the natural default flow. So you imagine a leaf blowing out of a tree and it lands in the river; it's going to just go with the flow, and that defines most people in the culture. It certainly defines those in darkness.

Remember in chapter 4 where he talked to us about, "*Before Christ our hearts were hard.*" Because our hearts were hard, we walked in darkness. And because we walked in darkness, there was a futility to life. We just didn't really understand what matters, and so we lived accordingly.

Think about what we talked about several weeks ago when we talked about risk management and we talked about the value system of the world—it's a performance-based value system where we're seeking, on the basis of our performance, to find significance and security and safety and value. But the problem is, at the end of the day, the system doesn't work. We can spend our entire lives trying to find significance and value and safety and security in the things of this world, but when we get to the end of our story and look back, we'll have to conclude the system didn't work. It was a total waste. It's like building our lives like a sand castle, where the tide comes in and takes it out, and it was a total miss. That's basically the idea. That's the default mode. It's not that people are doing things that are necessarily evil and all kinds of bad things. It's just they're wasting their lives away.

So the idea is now that we are in the light we should see it more clearly; we should be much more mindful of the steps we take. And rather than just going with the flow we, in a sense, have to buy back time—redeem back time out of the culture and invest it in something that matters more.

So we're still left with the question: What does that mean? I mean it's one thing to say that, but what does that mean? Does that mean that every moment of every day we are super spiritual, and every moment we're dialed in to the *Jesus thing*, and we spiritualize every moment of every day? Now there are people that try to do that, but frankly, nobody can live at that intensity level, nor is that what the text is talking about.

To me, it's much more like a marriage. For those of us who are married, I would say there is no one on planet Earth that I love like I love Patty. But that doesn't mean that I'm dreamy-eyed and thinking about her every moment of every day. I mean that sounds wonderful, but it's just not

realistic. But it's also true that there's never a moment where I'm not aware I'm married to Patty. It's a part of my convictions; it's a part of my passion. It's a part of how I frame my life; it's about what matters to me. Everything I do still has this awareness that I'm married to Patty, and that matters and affects everything that I do in life.

In the same way it's this awareness of who I am in Christ, who I am as a child of God. It never disappears. It's always there and part of my life. It's part of my convictions and my choices and my passions and what matters to me. It's very helpful to remove the distinction between the *secular* and the *sacred*. There's a tendency to think most of my life is secular. You know, if you're thinking that really investing in the things that matter are those two hours on Wednesday night when you're part of a children's club, what you're basically saying is the overwhelming majority of your life is wasted, but you get in two good hours a week. That's a very difficult way to think about this. It's not that there's secular and sacred. It's that God wants to be part of all of it. Your work matters to God; your school matters to God; your relationships matter to God; your family matters to God. Your hobbies matter; your leisure matters; your rest matters. All of that is part of what matters to God. All of it is sacred when God is in it.

So the question you have to wrestle with is: Why does this matter? If in my job, all I'm doing is showing up, grinding through whatever it is, and getting a paycheck—if that's all it is to me, I don't know why that matters. But if you can back up and rethink that and think why does this matter—*What am I doing? Are there people here? Are there relationships there? What ultimately am I doing? Why does this matter, and why am I doing it?*—and begin to see where God is in all that and how does God factor into my hobbies and my relationships and my leisure and my fun, I think the reality is God wants us to enjoy this incredible earth that He has created and that includes fun. All of that somehow matters to God and becomes sacred.

So in thinking through the grid of: *What am I doing? Why am I doing this, and why does this matter to God*, even reading through the gospels and getting a sense of Jesus and how He lived His life, it wasn't this super-spiritual, super-intense ministry every moment of every day. It wasn't like that at all. As a matter of fact, Jesus liked to go to parties. Jesus loved people. Jesus needed His time alone. If you take all of the days that are recorded in the gospels related to the life of Christ and put them together, we have the record of 50 days out of 33 years of Jesus' life. All we really know about is 50 days. There is so much we don't know. A lot of that was time spent walking from point A to point B, relationships, conversations, teaching. Who knows what all went on? But this sense of rhythm to life that was right and meaningful and purposeful is what defined the life of Jesus.

It has also helped me over the years to kind of abandon the idea of a list of priorities. I grew up with the understanding of a list of priorities, and we all know what those are. If I was to ask you to do that this evening, you could whip it out. You know, we have God, and then we have family, and then we have our job, and we have church, and it makes a nice linear list. The problem is life isn't linear; the list simply doesn't work. In other words, think of it this way: Does that list of priorities practically create for you a filter by which you say yes and no to the things of life? If it does not—and I would suggest it does not—then it's really not doing you any good.

What makes more sense to me is what I refer to as a *circle of priorities*. It's the idea of thinking through what are the top things that matter to me—that when I get to the end of this decade, for example, I want to look back and make sure these are the things I absolutely did not miss—then I put them in my circle. In essence, I put them in a blender; I mix them all up, and I don't try and

separate them out. I understand there are times when my family demands more of my time than at other times. There are times when my job makes more demands on me than at other times. There are certain rhythms to life. It's different for me as an empty-nester than it was when my kids were young and at home. So I'm thinking about, "What are those things?" And I put them in the blender, mix them up, and put them in my circle. I just want to make sure those are the things I don't miss. Everything else is secondary. It helps me say, "No," to a lot of things because I have to say, "Yes," to *that*.

Think about the *list of priorities* concept. Okay, we have God as #1 and church as #4. How do you separate out God from church? And you have your job and church separate, and yet you *are* the church going to work every day. How do you separate that out, and why would you want to separate out church from your family or your family from God? That's why the list never works because life just doesn't work that way. So in thinking about what matters to me, what goes in my circle in this season of life, and then disciplining myself to make sure these are the things I live for, which means I must say, "No," to other things that might be good things, but they're just not best things. Well, in light of all this, verse 17:

**So then do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is.**

The language is actually really strong. **Do not be foolish**—it's much stronger than that. We would probably use the English word *stupid*. *Do not be stupid*. It's just right on the edge of *offensive*. **Understand what the will of the Lord is.**

Now it isn't unusual that I have conversations with people and they want to know the will of God, and that's a very legitimate pursuit. Typically what they're referring to is what we call *the mysterious will of God*. Should I change jobs? Should I change careers? Should I marry this person? Should I buy this car? You know, what is God's will? Should we move to another city? But we also have what is known as the *revealed will of God*, and that means that which is already revealed in black and white in the Scriptures. So the Bible says, "*This is My will*." In essence, God would say, "*I've already told you*."

I think it's very important to understand when I'm seeking the *mysterious* will of God, the place to start is to first make sure I'm walking in obedience to the *revealed* will of God. In other words, if God has already said, "*This is My will*," and I've chosen to ignore that, why would He reveal any more to me? And I think, by and large, He won't until I'm obedient to what I already know is His will, and then I'm asking Him beyond that, "*What is Your will for my life*." So put on your seatbelts; get out your pen. I'm about to reveal to you God's will for your life.

**So then do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit.** (Vs. 17-18)

So there are two parts to it: *Do not* and *Do*. **Do not be drunk with wine.** Drunkenness was a huge problem in the Roman Empire in the first century. It was a huge problem in Ephesus, mostly because first-century life under the Roman Empire was so hard; it was so full of despair; it was so empty that people just simply got drunk all the time to deal with their pain and to escape for a period of time the pain and the struggle and the despair and the suffering. Not so different than our culture today, as people again and again turn to alcohol; they turn to pornography; they turn to drugs to try to somehow escape the struggle, the pain, the futility, the emptiness of life. When it says **dissipation**, it's the idea of *it's just a total waste; it's debauchery; it amounts to nothing*. Now

I do think it's talking literally about drunkenness, but I also think it's metaphoric in the sense that it creates a picture of total waste. I mean, can you think of anything that is less productive for the things that matter than being intoxicated? It's just a virtual waste of time. So it creates kind of this bigger picture of an absolute waste.

So if you think about the opening phrase talking about being really careful where every step goes as you navigate the parking lot in bare feet, when someone's drunk it's the polar opposite. They're just staggering all over the place out of control. So you kind of have these contrasting pictures there. So the **do not** seems clear. The contrast...**but be filled with the Spirit**. So what does that mean?

I think oftentimes we hear terms related to the Holy Spirit that seem like they're used interchangeably, and that creates a lot of confusion for people. You hear about the "*indwelling Holy Spirit*", the "*sealing of the Holy Spirit*", the "*baptism of the Holy Spirit*", being "*slain in the Spirit*", being "*filled with the Spirit*," and when I listen to people talk, they tend to use those terms interchangeably. It's very helpful to understand they are *not* interchangeable. Each one of those terms is very precise.

Romans is very clear that every believer, every Christian has the *indwelling Holy Spirit*—Romans 8:9. It is virtually impossible to be a Christian and not have the Holy Spirit, understanding, too, that the Holy Spirit is not an energy force. It's not like you have 110 volts and you need to ramp it up to 220. You have the person of the Holy Spirit, fully God in every way. Therefore, you do not lack anything. You don't need any more from a church. You don't need any more from a preacher. You don't need to travel somewhere and get more. You have the person of the Holy Spirit indwelling within you.

The *sealing of the Holy Spirit* is a concept we had in Ephesians chapter 1. To be sealed is automatic at the moment of salvation, just like indwelling. It is God's deposit. It's His down-payment. You have been guaranteed that God will finish what He started. You're *sealed* in your salvation. That's automatic for every believer.

The *baptism of the Holy Spirit* is the act by which the Holy Spirit places you into the body of Christ at the moment of salvation. The moment you trust Christ as Savior, you are baptized by the Holy Spirit and placed into the body of Christ. It's automatic. You cannot find a single place in the Scripture where you are commanded to *seek* the indwelling Holy Spirit, the sealing of the Holy Spirit, the baptism of the Holy Spirit. It's automatic the moment you trust Christ as Savior.

Being *slain in the Spirit* is terminology that doesn't show up in the Bible. The concept is not biblical. It's a non-thing. That's the easiest way to explain that.

So then, what is **filled with the Spirit**? It's important to understand *filled with the Spirit* is an imperative; it is a command. It's the only one of the terms that we've talked about where we are commanded, which implies I can obey or disobey. It's not automatic. The verb tense is in the continuous present tense which tells me it is *not* once for all, but it's day by day, hour by hour, that I choose to obey or disobey this command.

The idea of being *filled with the spirit*—the word *filled* is not filled as in *I filled a glass of water*. It's more the idea as it's used in the gospels of: *he was filled with fear*; *he was filled with anger*; *he was filled with joy*. It carries the idea of control—to be controlled by the anger, be controlled by the fear, to be controlled by the joy. The idea of **do not be drunk**, in a sense, is the contrast. When

you're drunk, you're under the control of the alcohol. When you're filled with the Spirit, you're under the control of the Spirit—that the Spirit is now controlling my steps so that I redeem the time and make the most of my days.

But we're still left with the question: *What does that mean?* That still seems so vague in the most practical ways. I think the best way to understand it is to think of it this way: When Jesus was with his disciples on this earth, Jesus taught them to be completely dependent upon Him. There was this transition from them being independent and selfish to being completely dependent on Him as God. And I think over time, more and more they learned that lesson.

So the night that Jesus was to be arrested, as part of the upper-room conversation and out en route to Gethsemane, Jesus told them, *"By the way, I am about to leave."* Now think about this: You have been taught to be completely dependent upon Him, and then he tells you, *"By the way, I'm leaving,"* and they respond just the way you'd think they respond. They go into a panic and Jesus tells them, *"Actually it's better if I go, because when I go, I'm going to send another One just like Me. It will be my Spirit—fully God in every way, and He will indwell you and He will be with you forever."* In essence, what Jesus was saying is the practical reality that being filled with the Spirit is to live each day just as if Jesus was right there by your side.

Think how that changed life for the disciples. The more they were with Jesus, the more they realized *this Jesus can calm the storm. This Jesus can feed 5,000 with a few loaves and fishes. This Jesus can make the lame to walk and the blind to see. This Jesus can raise the dead to life. With Jesus at my side, everything is different!* What would possess Peter to think that he could get out of a boat and walk on water other than *Jesus is here, so I can do it!* Everything changed.

If you think about Peter in the Garden of Gethsemane when the Roman soldiers come to get Jesus, and Peter pulls out his sword and chops off the servant of the high priest's ear, there is no human way that that little ragtag group of disciples could have taken on this Roman cohort other than Peter understood that with Jesus here, we are invincible! Everything is different with Jesus here!

Literally hours later, Peter is around a campfire and a little girl comes up to him and says, *"Hey, you were with Jesus,"* and he denies the Jesus that he loves. Why? Who wasn't there anymore? Jesus wasn't there. Jesus was now under arrest, and suddenly Peter didn't know what to do. But you open the book of Acts, and who is the courageous, heroic disciple that stands in the face of the officials and says to them, *"You can kill us; you can throw us in prison; but I tell you this: I cannot stop talking about Jesus."* Answer: It was Peter—Peter the coward that wouldn't even admit he knew Jesus to a little servant girl. What caused Peter in the book of Acts to once again be the courageous Peter that we saw in the Garden of Gethsemane? Answer: Acts chapter 2—He was filled with the Spirit of Jesus, and that changed everything.

Think about it. If every moment tomorrow Jesus is right there by your side, it would change what you say; it would change how you say it; it would change what you do; it would change what you watch on television; it would change what you watch on the computer; it would change how you treat your husband or wife; it would change how you raise your children; it would change how you go to work every day. It would change *everything*. That's the practical reality of what it means to be filled with the Holy Spirit. It's every day I'm aware of the Spirit's presence, and I seek to be obedient, to be submissive to the Holy Spirit within me.

The outflow of that then in verses 19, 20 and 21, he gives three kind of outflows—the result of probably just examples and probably areas that were a bit of a problem in the Ephesian church. The first one (verse 19):

**...speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord;**

The first one is this *unity in worship*. It is this idea that each one of us, as believers, has the same indwelling Spirit. The Spirit in you is the exact same Spirit that's in me. If that is true, then shouldn't we be supernaturally unified? And the answer is, "Yes!" We come together **speaking to one another in psalms, hymns and spiritual songs**. It's the reminder that worship is not just vertical; worship is horizontal. We come together not as selfish consumers; we come together as worshippers. It isn't about whether or not this is my favorite style of music. This is about *these are my brothers and sisters in Christ, and some of them are struggling and going through hard times*. And there's a solidarity that says *we need to be in this together*. And we remind each other together that this is what's true and this is what we believe about God, and we're going to get through it, and we're going to get through it together.

That's what worship is. It's not a concert. It's not coming, saying, "*I want my style of music; I want my preference*." It really has nothing to do with that. As a matter of fact, there's a lot of debate around what is meant by spiritual hymns and spiritual songs. Nobody quite knows what those categories mean other than it probably represented a high level of diversity within the Ephesian church, and perhaps there was some conflict around this. And he was saying that if we all have the same Spirit, we need to move beyond kind of our consumer, "*What's in it for me*," and realize we're in this together and we come to worship and to encourage and to challenge one another, and to learn and to grow together. That's what matters.

We actually tried today to offer you psalms, hymns and spiritual songs to say this is a level of diversity. But nobody is going to get everything they want all the time. None of us do. It isn't really the point. The point is much more unity as we come together to worship. It would be equally true, then, that those people who consistently grumble because they don't get their "style" are not people filled with the Spirit. How else do you explain that? They're here to get their preference; and if they don't get their preference, they're upset with that. They can't push past that to realize there are people all around me that are hurting, that are struggling, that need to be reminded that God is real and that God is true, and we're going to get through this together. Isn't that what matters?

One of the things I love about Lincoln Berean is over the years we have had so little complaining about styles of music. It's very, very rare that it happens. So what does that mean? Would not that be an indication that the people that gather are spiritually mature, that understand this is more than just being a consumer; this isn't about my preference. But being filled with the Spirit, we come together in the unity of the Spirit and come together to speak to one another and remind one another what's true in Christ. It's actually a very positive thing to experience that unity. It would be true that churches that are constantly struggling around this topic have deeper spiritual problems that need to be addressed. The second evidence is:

**... always giving thanks for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God, even the Father; (Vs. 20)**

The text is not saying that we should always be thankful for everything. That just doesn't even make sense. I'm not thankful for evil; I'm not thankful for abuse; I'm not thankful for sex trafficking. I'm not thankful for homelessness; I'm not thankful for cancer; I'm not thankful for tragedy; I'm not thankful for rebellion. It makes no sense. God isn't thankful for those things either. But what the text *does* say—look at the wording—**always giving thanks for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ**. That's the same thing as when we pray in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. The phrase means *in alignment with the will of God*. That's why we say that phrase at the end of our prayers. What we're saying is, ultimately, in the name of Jesus Christ, I want what I've asked for to be in alignment with the will of God. In essence then, no matter what I go through, there is thanksgiving in my heart because I remember what's true in Christ. There is an alignment with what is true.

I've found over the years that oftentimes when I'm going through the deepest water, I find myself the most thankful because in those moments I remember, *"This is what's true; this is who I am in Christ; this is what God did for me; this is what He has promised me; this is my future; this is my forever."* These are all the things that are true, and I remember those most intensely when life gets the hardest. So it's not being thankful for bad things; it's having your thanksgiving be in alignment with what is true in Christ—the things that nothing in this world can ever change or take away. Finally, verse 21:

**...and be subject to one another in the fear of Christ.**

It's the word *submit*—that we submit to one another in Christ. The idea of the **fear of Christ** is to remember that Christ is the head of the Church and we are the members of the body. The pastor is not the head of the Church; I'm not the boss of the Church. The elders are not the head of the Church; they're not the boss of the Church. Christ is the head of the Church. There are no celebrities in the church. There are no omni-competent, do-everything people in the church. We're all members and we all have a role to play—nobody more than, nobody less than—to remind ourselves that when we come together, we all come under the submission of Christ, and we submit, therefore, to one another.

To understand it that way, then, is to set up this discussion that follows that relates to marriage. I believe that the role of the pastors and the elders is to create an environment where everyone can flourish consistent with what God has called them to in the body of Christ. Our call is not to be the boss; our call is to oversee the context—the environment—so everyone is free to fulfill their calling, and we all submit to one another accordingly.

What I would suggest to you is when a church believes that the pastor is the boss and he rules with a heavy hand and the people submit to that, that same church is going to have the same concept in marriage—that the husband is the boss and the wife does what she's told. But when a church has an understanding that Christ is the head of the Church and that we are to submit to one another, that same idea is going to be understood within the context of marriage (which we will talk about in two weeks).

So how do we make sure that we redeem the time and not waste our lives? The answer is: You have to be very intentional. The flow of the river is going in a direction of wasting life. It's the default mode. You have to very intentionally say, *"I want to live differently."* As children of the light, we get it; therefore, we should live our lives differently. How do we do that? By being filled



with the Spirit day by day, moment by moment, living our lives just as if Jesus is right there at our side living our lives with us. That is how we *walk worthy of our calling*.

*Our Father, we celebrate today the gift of the Holy Spirit that indwells every single one of us as believers, in order that we might daily be filled with Your Spirit, that we might experience life with Jesus right there at our side, walking with us through the best moments and the most difficult moments of our lives. God, help us to understand what this means, that we might redeem the time and live for what matters. In Jesus' name. Amen.*

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