

GOD

Be Filled with the Spirit (Ephesians 5 verse 18)

God wants the best for us. He wants us to let His Word dwell in us to the point that we are not distracted by the sometimes-intoxicating effects of the senses' realm. When we fill our minds with God's Word, renew our minds, and live with the love of God, we can base our decisions on what is best for the household to which we belong.

Ephesians Chapter 5, part of the great practical portion of the Book of Ephesians, provides us with some guidelines on how to do this.

We already saw in this chapter that God desires that we be followers, or imitators, of Him, and to do this we must first walk in love in the Lord, standing together with one another in the household. As we do this, our paths are illuminated by the light of God's Word, and we walk as children of light. We then need to walk circumspectly, or accurately, making the right decisions based on the Word of God that will be the best both for us and for the household. As we walk circumspectly, we are walking in wisdom: verse 15 states "not as fools (*asophos* – unwise), but as wise (*sophos*)".

So, God desires that we carry out this three-fold walk: walk in love, walk as children of light, and walk circumspectly. We are exhorted to do this now, "redeeming the time" as it says in verse 16:

Ephesians

5:16 Redeeming the time, because the days are evil.

We see the truth of verses 15 and 16 re-iterated in Colossians chapter 4, verse 5, which says "Walk in wisdom toward them that are without, redeeming the time."

We are to get busy in our walk. Why? Ephesians 5:16 says "because the days are evil." Here we find a figure of speech called metonymy, in which a noun ("days") is used in place of related words. The word "days" is used for what is done during these days, the present time in which we live, namely deeds done by people. As verse 16 says, those deeds are evil. Because of the adversary's influence, evil deeds are prominent in our day and time, so we are exhorted to "redeem the time", to get busy putting on the Word and carrying out our three-fold walk for the growth and protection of the household to which we belong.

5:17 Wherefore be ye not unwise, but understanding ("understand" *in most critical Greek texts*) what the will of the Lord is.

This verse begins with the word "Wherefore", which refers back to the previous verse.

Because we are to walk circumspectly, in wisdom, redeeming the time in the face of evil deeds, we are exhorted not to be unwise, and we are to understand what the will of the Lord is. The Greek word for "unwise" here is different from the word used for fools, or unwise, in verse

15. Here the word is *aphrōn*, used only here. It carries the sense of being ignorant, without common sense.

Because of the evil that is prevalent in our day and time, with many sometimes-enticing choices being made available that might sense-knowledge-wise look good, we are not to be ignorant when we walk circumspectly and evaluate the choices. Instead, we are to “understand what the will of the Lord is.” We are to ponder, to reflect on, to deeply consider, what God’s will, His passionate desire, is for us. When we keep our eyes on God’s will, which we know is His Word (“The Word of God is the Will of God”), we will not be ignorant or senseless and will make the decisions that are best for us individually and for the household to which we belong.

5:18 And be not drunk with wine, wherein in excess; but be filled with the spirit (“by spirit” *in the text*);

The word “and” is a conjunction, linking this verse with the previous verse. In verse 17 we were exhorted not to be unwise, but to understand, to comprehend and consider, God’s will. According to verse 18, we are also not to be “drunk with wine” in excess; instead we are to be “filled by spirit”.

Without an understanding of figures of speech, which God made great use of in the Book of Ephesians to emphasize what He wanted to say, this verse would be difficult to understand. Why, after reading several verses dealing with the three-fold aspect of our walk and how we are to walk in wisdom, understanding God’s will, are we suddenly exhorted to watch what we drink? How does this fit in? Also, verse 18 says that in contrast to being drunk with an excess of wine, we’re supposed to be filled by spirit. The Greek word for “filled” is the word *plēroō*, which means “filled to capacity”. When we got born again, we received the gift of holy spirit: we were filled to capacity with spirit. Since that time, we never gained or lost any of that spirit, so how can this verse, written to born-again believers, be exhorting us to once again be filled with spirit?

As we will see, verse 18 is a key verse that links our three-fold walk with the truths in the verses that follow, so we really want to understand what this verse is telling us.

As it turns out, God made use of a figure of speech to make a major point. In fact, He used it twice in this verse. Once again, the figure of speech used is metonymy, the use of a noun for words related to that noun.

According to E. W. Bullinger’s book *Figures of Speech used in the Bible*, metonymy is used in the latter part of verse 18 where we are told to “be filled by spirit”. This verse is not telling us to get filled with holy spirit, because we already were filled when we got born again.

Rather, the word “spirit” is here used instead of words relating to our operation of that gift of holy spirit that we already have. We need to operate the nine manifestations of holy spirit, which will help us to most effectually know God’s will so we can make the right decisions in our walk.

To be most effective in our spiritual lives, we need to put on the Word of God in our minds. In the Book of Colossians, written to correct doctrinal error by those who failed to adhere to the doctrine of Ephesians, this same great truth is expressed in chapter 3, verse 16, where it says: “Let the word of (pertaining to) Christ dwell in you richly...” To be “filled with spirit” as it says in Ephesians 5:18, we need to let God’s Word dwell in us richly, which will enable us to most effectively operate the manifestations of holy spirit so we can walk wisely and redeem the time.

What, then, is meant in the first part of Ephesians 5:18, where we are told not to be drunk with wine wherein in excess? How does this fit into the great truths that are being set forth in this section of practical application of God’s Word? What does getting drunk on wine have to do with walking spiritually? Surely, even though drinking some wine can be a good thing, as stated in places like Psalms 104:15 (wine that maketh glad the heart of man) and I Timothy 5:23, getting drunk on too much wine is not a good thing, especially when one is endeavoring to walk spiritually for the benefit of the household. But why is wine singled out in this verse, contrasted so strongly with being filled by spirit, operating the gift of holy spirit we have as we put the Word on in our minds?

As it turns out, this first part of verse 18 contains the same figure of speech that we saw in the second part: metonymy. This time, the word “wine” is used to represent aspects of the senses’ realm that try to keep us from accomplishing our three-fold walk.

Before considering this figure further, let’s first consider the other words in this first part of verse 18:

5:18a And be not drunk with wine, wherein in excess...

We are not to be drunk with wine. The word translated “drunk” in this verse is the Greek word *methuskō*, which literally means “to begin to be softened”. We are to stay spiritually sharp, not allowing ourselves to become softened in any aspect of our lives.

The word “wherein” is from the Greek word *en*, here more accurately meaning “by which”, rendering the verse: ...be not drunk with wine, by which is excess...” By allowing ourselves to be “softened” by this “wine” we may experience “excess”.

Finally, the word “excess” is from the Greek word *asōtia*, which can be translated “debauchery” or “riot”. This is the same Greek word used in Titus 1:6 where a leader is to have “faithful children not accused of riot or unruly”. As an adverb, this Greek word is used in Luke 15:13, part of the “parable of the forgiving father” (often erroneously called the “parable of the prodigal son”). In that verse, the errant son had “wasted his substance (inheritance) with riotous living.”

So, in Ephesians 5:18 we are told that being “drunk”, or softened, with “wine” may lead to “riotous living”, living our lives ruinously, making decisions that will not benefit the household, but instead could harm it.

Now we need to consider what is really meant by the word “wine”, since even though drinking too much wine definitely is not conducive to one’s spiritual walk in wisdom, drinking some wine does not necessarily lead to riotous living, and many believers don’t even drink any wine at all (so how can this verse pertain to them?)

As mentioned, God chose to use the figure of speech metonymy, using the word “wine” to represent something that could “soften” a believer to the point that the believer may be tricked into living a life full of poor, ungodly decisions that will not benefit the household, let alone that believer.

Why wine? Whether or not they personally drank it on a regular basis, the people of the time when Ephesians was written were quite familiar with wine, because the land and climate of the area were conducive to growing and cultivating grapes. People were also quite aware of both the positive and negative aspects of drinking wine. Because of this, God chose wine to metaphorically represent things that were good and things that were bad. In Ephesians 5:18, the word “wine” is used to metaphorically represent the bad.

For a better understanding, let’s turn to a verse where the word “wine” is metaphorically used. Please turn to the Book of Revelation, chapter 14:

Revelation

14:8 And there followed another angel, saying, Babylon is fallen, is fallen, that great city, because she made all nations to drink of the wine of the wrath of her fornication.

Here, the word “wine” metaphorically represents spiritual idolatry, a result of people choosing to walk by the senses’ and not according to the Word of God. Just like wine can be intoxicating, things of the senses’ realm, leading to idolatry, can also be “intoxicating”, drawing people away from the things of the true God.

So, the use of the word “wine” in Ephesians 5:18 provides a good analogy to things of the senses’ realm. We are exhorted not to allow ourselves to get “intoxicated” with things of the senses’ realm that not only can get us off-track but could even lead to “riotous living” totally off the Word of God.

Instead, we are exhorted to fill our minds with God’s Word and operate the manifestations of holy spirit, endeavoring to make the right decisions in our three-fold walk that will best benefit the household.

We can see these truths also expressed in Romans, Chapter 13:

Romans

13:13 Let us walk honestly (decently), as in the day (fully illuminated); not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envying,

13:14 But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh (the things of the senses’ realm), to *fulfill* the lusts *thereof*.

We've considered Ephesians 5:18, which exhorts us to avoid the intoxicating influence of the senses' realm as we endeavor to walk according to God's Word for the benefit of the household. But the impact of this verse continues into the next several verses, which show us what will be the results of our being "filled by spirit", walking with God's Word dwelling in us richly.

We'll conclude by reading verses 18 through 21, which will be the subject of future teachings but are important to consider here in the context of verse 18:

- 5:18 And be not drunk with wine, wherein in excess, but be filled with the spirit;
- 5:19 Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord;
- 5:20 Giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ;
- 5:21 Submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God (*all but one critical Greek manuscript read: "in the fear of Christ"*).

As we walk according to the Word of God, not allowing ourselves to be caught up in the worldly stuff of the senses' realm, as intoxicating as it may seem at times, we will overflow with God's Word, as it says in verse 19, and will give thanks to God for all that He has made available. As we live together in the household, with the Word of God dwelling richly in us, our natural response will be to submit ourselves to each other as we build each other up and reap the benefits of the more than abundant life.

- Dr. Rick Batt