

## Be careful which spirit fills you!

Text: Ephesians 5:15-20 for 8/19/2018 by Pastor Bolwerk

*<sup>15</sup> Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise, <sup>16</sup> making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil. <sup>17</sup> Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord's will is. <sup>18</sup> Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit. <sup>19</sup> Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Sing and make 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.*

What comes to mind when you hear the word “spirits”? Maybe it makes you think of ghosts at Halloween. Perhaps you think of your soul, or the Holy Spirit. Maybe it brings to mind alcoholic beverages. But these are not the only things the word ‘spirit’ can mean. Spirit can also mean an attitude that a group of people have such as a spirit of cooperation. It can even mean a state of mind, such as ‘being in high spirits.’

As God speaks to us through the Apostle Paul, God gives us a warning about spirits, especially about the spirits that we fill ourselves up with. God says to us ...

Theme: Be careful which spirit fills you!

- I. Don't be filled with the foolish spirit of the world.
- II. Be filled with the Spirit of the Lord's will.

Paul has just finished telling the Ephesians how they should be “**imitators of God**” (Eph. 5:1). He told them to “**live as children of light**” (Eph. 5:8), and that they should “**have nothing to do with [...] deeds of darkness**” (Eph. 5:11). Paul follows that up in our text by saying, “**Be careful, then, how you live [...] because the days are evil** (vs. 15-16).

Starting with this warning Paul points down the path where he doesn't want believer to go. Paul says don't live as someone who is ‘unwise.’ A wise person is someone who has knowledge and knows how to apply that knowledge to their life. A wise Christian is someone who uses their God given knowledge of scripture and salvation to make God pleasing choices and actions. An unwise Christian is someone who does things without considering what God says. They don't think about the consequences of their actions. They are not using the knowledge God gave them to make God pleasing choices.

Next, Paul says, “**Therefore do not be foolish**” (v. 17a). The word Paul uses when he says ‘foolish’ literally means ‘someone who is unthinking.’ This is a person who is ignorant and mindless, making no attempt to understand what is going on. A foolish Christian is someone who claims to be a believer, yet they do not even attempt to understand God's will for their life. This person foolishly says one thing with their mouth, but they live in complete contradiction to God's will.

Finally, Paul says, “**Do not get drunk**” (v. 18a). A drunken person is someone who is out of control; they cannot control their thoughts or their actions. People who are ‘drunk’ are controlled by what they have filled themselves with, so they no longer act as someone who is sober would.

Do you see what Paul is doing here? Each of Paul's points are all about ‘thinking’, because ultimately our brain is what controls our actions. Notice the progression Paul takes: from unwise – not using one's knowledge; to foolish – not even trying to think; to drunk – not even being able to think. What Paul is saying to the Ephesians, and to us, is “Stop and think!” What you fill yourselves up with is what will control your life.

Now, to correctly understand what Paul is saying we need to remember that everything in this world is a gift from God. God made all things for us, and he wants us to use these gifts to his glory. There is nothing wrong with wanting or having anything that God has placed in this world for us. The problem occurs when we fill ourselves with the things of this world to the point where those things start controlling us.

When we purposely fill ourselves with the things of this world, then we become “drunk.” Like a

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person who has filled themselves with too much alcohol, we are no longer in control of our lives. We cannot think straight because the things we have filled ourselves with control us. We stop using our God given knowledge to consider our actions. Instead we let our feelings and emotions control our behavior.

It all starts when we crave something we know we cannot have: whether it is a person or a thing; whether it is abilities or power or fame or wealth. We know what God says: Do not commit adultery, do not steal, or murder, or give false testimony; do not covet. But we become 'unwise' by not using that knowledge to set aside our longings. We become foolish by not thinking about what God says, and simply going after what we want. And when we reach the point where we are willing to do anything to get what we want, when we no longer control our thoughts and actions, that is when we have become "drunk" on the things of this world.

The Apostle Paul, in his letter to the Galatians, gives some very stark examples of what happens when we fill ourselves up with worldly things. It's tempting to dismiss some of these things in this list, yet I find that there are many that certainly apply to myself. Paul writes: **The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft;** - (I know I have not practiced witchcraft, but the next few things on the list certainly hit home) - **hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy;** (Any of those fit? Paul goes on,) **drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God** (Gal. 5:19-21).

We would be fooling ourselves if we said nothing on this list applied to us. Too often we allow ourselves to be filled up with the empty things of this world. We become unwise and foolish when we allow ourselves to be controlled by things that only lead to death.

Thankfully, God stepped in to save us. He saved us from drowning in the things our sinful nature would love to fill itself with. What is interesting is that God saved us not by filling himself up, but by emptying himself out. Our Savior, Jesus, emptied himself. He emptied himself of the glory and honor and respect due him as creator of this world. As Paul says to the Philippians, Jesus emptied himself and "[...] **made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness**" (Philippians 2:7). Jesus emptied himself so he could be filled with the sins of the whole world. Then, filled with our 'death', Jesus emptied himself of his perfect life on a cross. Christ died to pay for our jealousy, hatred, and envy. He paid for the times when, out of selfish ambition, we became "drunk" on the things of this world. When Jesus died, God stamped on our bill "Paid in full."

Jesus emptied himself so he could fill us with his free gift of righteousness, freely offering us all we need to be perfect and right before a holy God. Jesus has given us a new life that will last forever. This is why Paul is so emphatic when he says, "Be very careful how you live." You have been filled with Christ; you have been filled with life. Don't be filled with the foolish spirit of the world because the foolish way of the world is empty. This is why Paul shows us a better way to live. He shows us something better to be filled with. Paul tells us to be filled with the Spirit of the Lord's will.

Paul says, "**understand what the Lord's will is**" (v. 17b), and to do that Paul tells us we will want to "**be filled with the Spirit**" (v. 18b). How are we filled with God's Spirit so we can understand the Lord's will? Through God's Word. The more contact we have with God's Word the better we will know his will, and the more desire we will have to do his will.

One of the ways that Paul directs us to "**be filled with the Spirit**" is through worship. In worship God speaks to us through his scriptures, and we speak to each other. That's what Paul encourages us to do: "**Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs**" (v. 19). We strengthen each other in our faith when we sing God's Word put to music; when we tell each other the truths of the Bible in song. We also encourage each other in our faith when we pray, as Paul says, "**always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ**" (v. 20).

While worship is good, being "filled with the Spirit" is something we need to do more than just once

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a week. How many of you eat or sleep just one day a week? Our bodies need food and rest every day. Without these things our bodies become weak and break down. If your body gets weak without food and rest, how much more so your soul? Like eating and sleeping, being “filled with the Spirit” is something we need to do every day. We need to daily feed and rest our souls with God’s Word. Our Lord Jesus tells us how to do that. Jesus says, **“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest”** (Matthew 11:28). Jesus said in our gospel for today, **“I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever.”** (John 6:51). The Apostle John calls Jesus **“The Word”** (John 1:1). Christ is the Word who feeds our souls and gives us rest and eternal life.

You have so many options available for feeding your soul on a daily basis. There is the daily Bible reading we are doing as a congregation. That only takes about fifteen minutes a day. There are also devotional books for people of every age. There are audio recordings of the Bible you can listen to while driving or working around the house. Perhaps you want to better understand certain parts of Scripture. For that, there is the People’s Bible Series. Each book breaks the scriptures into chunks of verses of scripture, and then gives a detailed explanation of what those verses mean. The explanations are straight-forward, and easy to understand. We have the entire series on our library. If you are looking for electronic options you can find daily devotions on our synods website, wels.net. You can read these devotions online, print them, or e-mail them to your family and friends. There are more ways today than ever to “be filled with the Spirit.”

The more we are filled with the Spirit of Christ the more we will want to thank and serve him. The better we understand God’s will the more we will want to follow his will in our lives. We thank God when we put him first in everything: in the use of our time, skills, money and possessions. We live in the Spirit of God’s will when we love our neighbor as ourselves. We display God’s love by strengthening and encouraging our fellow Christians in their faith. We show that love when we share the saving message of Christ with those who don’t know him. We can only do these things when we are filled with God’s Spirit. So be careful to fill yourselves with the Spirit of the Lord’s will, so you will have the wisdom you need to live for your Lord.

We want to be careful of which spirit fills us. Filling ourselves with the spirits of this world will leave us as nothing more than drunken fools before God. But when we fill ourselves with the Spirit of the Lord’s will, filling up on God’s Word, our faith will be strengthened so that we are able live for God. May God continue to fill us all with his wisdom, so we may continue to walk the path that leads to our heavenly home. Amen.