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small group material



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Turning Lost Students into Christ-Centered Labourers

IMITATING GOD • The Spirit Filled Life

What Do I Need to Know About the Passage?

Ephesians 5:15-21

This should be an exciting study. This week you'll get to teach on a fundamental concept that has helped countless people walk with Jesus. If you can help your group understand what it means to be filled with the Spirit you will have served them well and set them up for much joy. Let's take a look.

Chapter 5 begins with the command, "Therefore, be imitators of God..." (5:1). This entire chapter is a fleshing out of what it does mean and does not mean to be an imitator of God. Paul understands the battle these believers face daily. It is a battle that comes with trying to live differently than those who do not know Christ. If the battle they face, and the battle we face, could only be fought in their own strength, it would be hopeless. But here, Paul connects them to the power source that will be necessary in waging this battle.

Last week's passage depicted how we are not to walk. Ephesians 5:15-21, clearly lays out a way of life that contrasts this old manner and prescribes how we are to walk. The good news, as we'll see, is that we're not in this alone.

Notice all the contrasts. Paul sets up distinctions between walking wisely and unwisely; being foolish and understanding the will of the Lord; being drunk with wine, and being filled with the Spirit. In fact all three of those contrast are really saying the same thing. The first two are parallels to the third and central contrast in this passage between being drunk on wine and being filled with the Spirit.

Consider the similarities that may have motivated Paul to choose drunkenness as his foil for the Spirit-filled life:

Control. Both alcohol and the Spirit control those with whom they are filled.

Love. Often, those intoxicated are much freer with their emotions and affections. Likewise, a hallmark of the work of the Holy Spirit in a person's life is a greater capacity to love.

Comfort. People turn to alcohol for comfort in difficult times. The Holy Spirit in Scripture is called the "great Comforter."

Boldness in speech. Though the results are generally embarrassing, boldness is often exhibited by those who have been drinking. Likewise, when the Holy Spirit comes upon the disciples, we see them boldly proclaiming the gospel.

Joy. Often people drink because they experience the sensation of joy. Joy, of course, is a fruit of the Spirit mentioned in Galatians 5.

What's the Big Idea?

We cannot do what Jesus did, be an imitator of God (5:1), or walk wisely, apart from God's intervention. He has both prescribed a way (a way of wisdom) and made a way (the Spirit-filled life) whereby we can live like Him. By being filled with the Spirit, we can in fact live the life He wants us to live.

What's the Problem?

We are utterly unable in our own power to be imitators of God and live lives that please Him.



While, in some ways, this helps us to better see what it looks like to be empowered by the Holy Spirit, it must also be seen that alcohol really is a counterfeit. What people are really thirsting for is the presence of God. Alcohol-induced states only create the temporary illusion of a reality that only the Spirit can produce in our lives.

Everything Paul says prior to v. 18 is setting the stage for this one command to be filled with the Spirit. All the verbs following it in vv. 19 and 20 are actually participles in Greek. Without getting into too much grammar that you don't care about and I don't really remember, it just means that what appear to be verbs in English all relate back to the main verb, be filled. They explain what it looks like when one is filled with the Spirit. More on those in a minute.

Since the command, "be filled with the Spirit" is the centerpiece of this passage let's take a careful look at. [Warning: more grammar to follow!]

"Be filled with the Spirit" is a present tense verb. This implies that being filled is not a one time occurrence. We must constantly be filled. It happens moment by moment.

"Be filled with the Spirit" is a command. It's not a suggestion. It is imperative. If we are to live as God wishes, we simply cannot do it apart from being filled. Therefore, Paul does not suggest, or even exhort; he commands.

"Be filled with the Spirit" is in the second person plural form meaning "all of you." (or "y'all" for those of you down south.) That tells us that being filled with the Spirit is not an exclusive privilege for some faction of believers. Paul commanded that it be appropriated by all. It is a divine privilege for all believers.

Finally, "Be filled with the Spirit" is in the passive voice. That tells us that we cannot fill ourselves. God is the one who grants the filling. He graciously gives us His Spirit. We are passive recipients of His filling.

Think about this: we are commanded to do something we cannot do. What does this tell you about the Christian life? By commanding us to do something we cannot do He is leading us to greater dependence on Him. We see that we can't do what He has commanded. Just as we could not save ourselves from sin, neither can we manufacture in our own power a life that can please Him. He must intervene.

Now if you want to see what it looks like when we are filled, check out those participles. The four things Paul says should denote the lives of Spirit-filled believers are fellowship, worship, gratitude, and submission.

The overall impression is of a group of people continually seeking to edify each other, and praise God together. There's a cheerful gratitude to God that is undiminished by difficult circumstances. And a quickness to submit and consider others more important than yourself. Doesn't that sound incredibly attractive? Who wouldn't want to be part of a community where people were filled by the Spirit of God and living like that?

Encourage your group to yield their lives to Christ and allow Him to fill them. The *Satisfied?* booklet (available from crupress.com) would be great to have on hand to explain more about the Spirit-filled life.

What's Our Response?

We'd love to see the members of your group be gripped by two things:

1. Their need for a power beyond themselves in order to be an imitator of God.
2. The provision of God's Spirit to satisfy this need and a subsequent appropriation of His filling by faith.

And we'd love them to decide to yield their lives to the Spirit of God and experience His filling moment by moment for the rest of their lives. The *Satisfied?* booklet is a tool that may help them take this step.

What Are the Questions?

Ephesians 5:15-21

LAUNCH

Name a hero you remember having as you grew up. Did you ever try to be like him/her? What challenges did you face? In 5:1, Paul exhorted his readers to “imitate God.” Just as we were overwhelmed in trying to be like our childhood heroes, these readers must have been even more overwhelmed to think of trying to emulate a sinless, perfect God.

EXPLORE

Read 5:15-18

1. What contrasts do you see in these verses?
2. Foolishness is contrasted with understanding the will of the Lord. Why?
3. The last contrast in these verses is the command “do not get drunk with wine but be filled with the Spirit.” Why do you think Paul uses the drunkenness contrast here with being filled by the Spirit?
4. This is not the first reference to the Spirit in Ephesians. Read Eph 1:13. According to this passage, when do Christians receive the Spirit?
5. Read Eph 2:18-22. What role does the Spirit play in the Christian life?
6. Read Eph 4:30. How does this passage relate to the command in 5:18?

Be Filled with the Spirit

7. “Be filled with the Spirit” is a present tense verb. Why would Paul use a present tense verb to describe being filled with the Spirit?

8. “Be filled with the Spirit” is a command. Why is this significant?
9. “Be filled with the Spirit” is in the passive voice. Why would Paul teach that believers are passive recipients of the filling of the Spirit?
10. Think about this: we are commanded to do something we cannot do. What does this tell you about the Christian life?
11. Read Eph 3:16-19. What similarities do you notice between Paul’s prayer in Eph 3 and 5:18?

Read 5:19-21

12. These verses display beneficial results of being filled with the Spirit. What are they?
13. How does thankfulness qualify as an expression of being Spirit filled?
14. What does Paul want us to understand about living as an imitator of God?

APPLY

15. Paul exhorts us to “walk wisely.” What would it look like for you to walk wisely?
16. Describe what it feels like to try to be an imitator of God without being Spirit-filled. What thoughts have you had when you found yourself trying to live this way?
17. Where do you presently see the greatest need to experience God’s empowering presence in your life?
18. Based on our study of Ephesians thus far, what should we do to be Spirit-filled?

What Are the Answers?

1. They should see the contrasts between walking wisely vs unwisely, being foolish vs understanding the will of the Lord and not getting drunk with wine, but being filled with the Spirit.
2. Allow the group to discuss.
3. See “What Do I Need to Know About the Passage?”
4. When they come to faith in Christ.
5. He is the means by which we relate to the Father through the Son. God dwells among believers by the Spirit.
6. It describes the opposite of “filling,” i.e., grieving
7. Being filled is not a one time occurrence. We must constantly be filled moment by moment.
8. This is not a suggestion. It is imperative. If we are to live for God we cannot do it apart from His Spirit. Therefore, Paul does not suggest, or exhort; he commands.
9. We cannot fill ourselves. He is God’s Spirit, and God is the one who grants the filling. We are passive recipients of His filling.
10. Apart from God’s intervention, we cannot do the things we are commanded to do. In essence, God’s commands lead us to greater dependence on Him. Just as we could not save ourselves from sin, neither can we manufacture, a life that can please Him. He must intervene.
11. They are both talking about the same reality; in 3:16-19 Paul prays these believers would be “strengthened with power through his Spirit.”
12. Fellowship, worship, gratitude, submission.
13. Only the Spirit can empower us to take a vantage point above our present circumstances and to be thankful in all things.
- 14.-17. Allow the group to discuss.
18. Go through the *Satisfied?* booklet and give participants an opportunity to respond to His filling, by faith. You might close with a story about how the Spirit filled life has made a difference in your own life.

Memorize

Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit.

Ephesians 5:18