

THE SOVEREIGN GOD AND THE MYSTERY OF HIS WILL: A STUDY OF EPHESIANS

(LESSON NINETY-THREE)

“BE FILLED WITH THE SPIRIT” (PART 4)

EPHESIANS 5:18-21

18 And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit;

19 Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord.

20 always giving thanks to God the Father for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ,

21 and submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ.

In verse **18** of our text Paul writes, “*And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit.*” Paul is issuing a command here to all believers. He is not making a suggestion. Every believer is to ensure that instead of being controlled by alcohol, or by anything else, he or she should be continually controlled by the Spirit.

The Greek word translated “*filled*” is **pléroó**: (**play-ro’-o**), which means, “to make full, to fill up, to cause to abound, to furnish or supply liberally, to render full, i.e. to complete.” Paul is not implying here that believers should get more of the Spirit, because the Holy Spirit takes up His abode in each believer, and indwells each believer completely, the moment he or she believes on the Lord Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit baptizes believers, or places them into the Body of Christ only **once**, according to **1 Corinthians 12:13**, but believers are to **continually** be

filled with the Spirit. Being filled with the Spirit does not mean that we have more of the Holy Spirit, but that the Holy Spirit has more of us!

As a believer increasingly submits to the Holy Spirit's influence, he or she is increasingly controlled by Him, and increasingly manifests the fruit of the Spirit. The Spirit's **baptism, indwelling, and sealing** occur at the time of regeneration and therefore there are no commands for believers to be **baptized, indwelt or sealed** with the Spirit. However, believers are commanded to be continually **filled** with Holy Spirit. Every believer has the Holy Spirit, but the command in **Ephesians 5:18** is that the Holy Spirit have the believer!

Being "*filled with the Spirit*" is synonymous with "*walking in the Spirit,*" or "*living by the Spirit.*" Paul speaks of this in **Galatians 5:16-23**. The **New English Translation** renders the passage as follows:

16 But I say, live by the Spirit and you will not carry out the desires of the flesh.

17 For the flesh has desires that are opposed to the Spirit, and the Spirit has desires that are opposed to the flesh, for these are in opposition to each other, so that you cannot do what you want.

18 But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.

19 Now the works of the flesh are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity, depravity,

20 idolatry, sorcery, hostilities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, selfish rivalries, dissensions, factions,

21 envying, murder, drunkenness, carousing, and similar things. I am warning you, as I had warned you before: Those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God!

22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,

23 gentleness, and self-control. Against such things there is no law.

In this passage, Paul negates and corrects the erroneous impression held by the Galatian believers, probably as a result of the legalistic teaching of the Judaizers, that without the restraining influence of the Law, they would fall into sin. Instead of being motivated by fear to attempt to obey the Law in their own strength, Paul urges them to govern their lives by the inward motivation of the Holy Spirit.

Before the Judaizers had infiltrated the Church in Galatia, the believers had lived their Christian lives in dependence upon the Holy Spirit, in accordance with the teaching of Paul. The power of the fallen, unregenerate, adamic nature or the flesh, had been broken in their lives, and the Holy Spirit had entered their hearts to take up His permanent residence. The conflict spoken of in verse **17** between the Spirit and the flesh, had been going on in them, and the result had been that they were living victorious lives over sin. We know this because in **Galatians 5:7** Paul wrote,

7 You were running well; who prevented you from obeying the truth?

8 This persuasion does not come from the one who calls you!

The Judaizers had introduced a new factor into the experience of the Galatian believers. This new factor was the Law. The Galatians were still trying to live Christian lives, but now they were endeavouring to do so by obeying the Law, and they were trying to do so in their own strength. They were no longer depending on the Holy Spirit to supply them with the desire and the power to live overcoming lives. They were trying to live their Christian lives in the power of the flesh, and they were failing as a result. The mechanical setup of spiritual machinery which God had installed, had become ineffective by reason of the monkey-wrench of self-dependence which the Galatians had thrown into it.

Brothers and sisters, the secret of victory over sin is not found in an attempted obedience to the Law, or a set of rules, regulations and standards. The secret of victory over sin is found in surrender to a divine Person, the Holy Spirit, who at the moment the sinner places his faith in the Lord Jesus, takes up His permanent residence in his being for the purpose of ministering to his spiritual needs.

Paul gives believers a strong assurance that if they depend upon the Holy Spirit to give them both the desire and the power to do the will of God, they will not bring to fulfillment in action, the evil impulses of the fallen nature, but will be able to resist and conquer them. The Holy Spirit will put sin out of the life of the believer who is surrendered to Him and He will produce His fruit in the believer's life.

It is the responsibility of the believer to refuse to obey the bidding of the fallen, unregenerate, adamic nature, or the flesh, by conducting himself or herself in the power of the Holy Spirit, and under His control. The will of the believer has been liberated from the enslavement to sin which it experienced before regeneration occurred. The believer is now free to choose the right and refuse the wrong. The Holy Spirit has been given him or her to counteract the evil nature, but He does that for the believer when he or she puts himself or herself under His control. The believer who consistently puts himself or herself under the control of the Holy Spirit is a believer who is *“filled with the Spirit.”*

In verse **19**, Paul writes, *“Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord.”*

Interestingly, the first evidence noted by Paul that identifies a person who is filled with the Spirit is the character of their speech! In other words, our speech is a good indicator of the extent to which we are under the influence and control of the Spirit. When a believer is filled with the Spirit, his or her heart overflows with thankfulness to God and that overflowing expresses itself in singing.

The phrase, “*Speaking to yourselves*” is a translation of two Greek words which literally mean, “Speaking with yourselves.” But this translation is open to the misinterpretation that Paul is commanding, each Christian to commune with himself or herself. This is **not** his idea. What Paul has in mind is the communion of believers with each other. Believers are to speak to one another. The **New English Translation** renders the verse as follows: “*speaking to one another in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, singing and making music in your hearts to the Lord.*”

Believers are to communicate their joy in salvation to their fellow believers in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs. They are to find expression to the Spirit-filled life in this way. This clearly indicates that as far as Paul is concerned, the “Spirit-filled” life is not to be measured solely by one’s private morality or even by one’s private spiritual experience, but also by how one conducts himself or herself with other believers. Throughout this epistle Paul stresses over and over again the importance of every member of the Body of Christ understanding the vital importance of every other member, and therefore striving to preserve the unity of the Spirit.

In this epistle, in addition to speaking generally of how believers are to relate to each other, the apostle highlights three sets of relationships: that of wives to husbands and husbands to wives, that of children to parents and parents to children, and that of slaves to masters and masters to slaves.

Paul says, “*speaking to one another in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, singing and making music in your hearts to the Lord.*” The Greek word translated “*speaking*” is **laleó**: (**lal-eh’-o**). In its most basic sense **laleó** simply means to use the voice to make a sound and in the context of **Ephesians 5:19**, the sound is a song. These song-sounds are the products of a Spirit-filled heart. The songs that please the Lord are the songs that come from a Spirit-filled heart. The **present tense** indicates that this singing is the Spirit filled believer’s lifestyle. When a person is

born again, or born from above, there is a sense in which music is “born again” in his or her spirit. And as he or she is continually “filled with the Spirit,” there will continually be songs of praise springing up from deep within him or her.

In all likelihood, Paul is referring here to the gathering of first-century believers for corporate worship. The heathen festivals were noted for intemperate, revelry and song, but the Christian congregation was to set an example of worship dedicated to an omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent, thrice Holy God. Someone has observed that there is nothing that comes nearer to the door of heaven than the corporate singing of a group of Spirit-filled believers.

Paul understood that there is a horizontal dimension to the worship of believers. In praising God, believers should consciously be directing their worship to the edification of others. As Christ ministers to others by extending himself for them, when we worship with the needs of others as our concern, then we are ministering Jesus Christ to our fellow believers.

We are to sing “*psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs*” to one another. What the distinctions are between **psalms**, **hymns**, and **spiritual songs**, has been considerably disputed, and it would therefore not be wise for us to differentiate too strictly between them. Paul probably uses the three words here with a view to rhetorical force. He desires to emphasize the importance of believers gathering together for corporate worship and that singing is to be an integral aspect of their worship.

Paul exhorts believers to minister to each other as they worship God. He encourages them to sing and make music **in their hearts** to the Lord. In Scripture, the “*heart*” is used figuratively to refer to the seat and center of human life. The heart is the center of the personality, and controls the intellect, emotions, and will. No **outward** obedience is of the slightest value to God unless the heart is turned to Him because the heart is the wellspring of a person’s spiritual life.

The Spirit-filled heart should express itself in any sort of vocal or instrumental music, in both singing and making melody. From where do believers sing? According to verse **19**, these songs originate in the heart of a Spirit-filled believer. The singing is centered in his or her heart which becomes the channel through which these songs are expressed. The idea is that this “*singing and making melody*” must not be merely musical, but it is to be a service of the heart. The Spirit-filled believer’s heart is in a continual state of worship, notwithstanding the circumstances that he or she may find himself or herself in. In **Acts 16**, we see a wonderful example of this. The **New English Translation** renders verses **16-34** as follows:

16 Now as we were going to the place of prayer, a slave girl met us who had a spirit that enabled her to foretell the future by supernatural means. She brought her owners a great profit by fortune-telling.

17 She followed behind Paul and us and kept crying out, “These men are servants of the Most High God, who are proclaiming to you the way of salvation.”

18 She continued to do this for many days. But Paul became greatly annoyed, and turned and said to the spirit, “I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her!” And it came out of her at once.

19 But when her owners saw their hope of profit was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace before the authorities.

20 When they had brought them before the magistrates, they said, “These men are throwing our city into confusion. They are Jews

21 and are advocating customs that are not lawful for us to accept or practice, since we are Romans.”

22 The crowd joined the attack against them, and the magistrates tore the clothes off Paul and Silas and ordered them to be beaten with rods.

23 After they had beaten them severely, they threw them into prison and commanded the jailer to guard them securely.

24 Receiving such orders, he threw them in the inner cell and fastened their feet in the stocks.

25 About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the rest of the prisoners were listening to them.

26 Suddenly a great earthquake occurred, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken. Immediately all the doors flew open, and the bonds of all the prisoners came loose.

27 When the jailer woke up and saw the doors of the prison standing open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself, because he assumed the prisoners had escaped.

28 But Paul called out loudly, "Do not harm yourself, for we are all here!"

29 Calling for lights, the jailer rushed in and fell down trembling at the feet of Paul and Silas.

30 Then he brought them outside and asked, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?"

31 They replied, "Believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved, you and your household."

32 Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him, along with all those who were in his house.

33 At that hour of the night he took them and washed their wounds; then he and all his family were baptized right away.

34 The jailer brought them into his house and set food before them, and he rejoiced greatly that he had come to believe in God, together with his entire household.

Warren Wiersbe wrote the following concerning Christian joy: "Joy is one of the fruit of the Spirit (**Galatians 5:22**). Christian joy is not a shallow emotion that, like a thermometer, rises and falls with the changing atmosphere of the home. Rather, Christian joy is a deep experience of adequacy and confidence in spite of the circumstances around us. The Christian can be joyful even in the midst of pain and suffering. This kind of joy is not a thermometer but a thermostat. Instead of rising and falling with the circumstances, it determines the spiritual temperature of the circumstances. Paul put it beautifully when he wrote, *'I have learned in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content'* (**Philippians 4:11**)."

Persons who do not have a song in their hearts cannot sing from their hearts! They can only sing with their lips, and neither their music nor their message will have the power of the Spirit to bless others in Christ's name. Arthur Slater's song, "***It's in My Heart***," expresses this truth simply yet profoundly:

*"Though some may sing to pass the weary night along;
Though some may sing to entertain a worldly throng;
I sing because I worship God in song;
It's in my heart, it's in my heart.*

*It's in my heart this melody of love divine,
It's in my heart since I am His and He is mine,
It's in my heart, how can I help but sing and shine,
It's in my heart, it's in my heart."*

Ray Stedman writes that the phrase "*in your hearts*," refers to, "That inward bubbling that means that no matter how bad things are outside, inside they are wonderful. You know God is in control and he is working

things out and you cannot be troubled even though they are all wrong on the outside."

To whom do believers sing? Although believers sing among themselves, their songs are to be directed to the Lord. Paul writes, "*Singing and making music in your hearts to the Lord.*" Our singing and making melody is not for the purpose of drawing attention to ourselves or of entertaining others. It is for the purpose of worshipping God! In **1 Corinthians 10:31** Paul wrote, "*So whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do everything for the glory of God*" (**New English Translation**). Whether we are singing a solo, singing with a choir, or singing with the congregation, our focus should be on the Lord, not on ourselves. The Lord is the audience to whom we sing. If the Holy Spirit is the source of our fullness, then, instead of songs which celebrate the joys of Bacchus or any of the gods of this age, our hearts will be filled with melodies and words which glorify God and edify our fellow believers.

I am in full agreement with the following sentiments expressed by **John MacArthur**: "The words of every Christian song should be biblical—distinctly, clearly, and accurately reflecting the teaching of God's Word. It is tragic that much music that goes under the name of Christian is a theological mishmash, often reflecting as much of the world's philosophy as of God's truth. Much is little more than personal sentimentality colored with Christian words."

The following lengthy quotation is an excerpt of a document entitled, "The Theology and Place of Music in Worship," prepared by a Commission on Worship of the Reformed Church in America. The report speaks to the importance of singing as it relates to corporate worship.

"Music and song continue to play a vital role in the life of God's people today. Contemporary culture and modern technology bring new possibilities and new challenges to the music ministry of the church.

People's lives are surrounded with music...Yet much of the time music functions as 'background' rather than as an opportunity for serious listening, much less participation. Outside the church there are few occasions or opportunities...for people to sing together. Much of the popular music (including popular Christian music) composed today is for performance rather than for participation.

The church also has greater access and has shown greater openness to a greater variety of music...Such diversity is to be welcomed and celebrated; it reflects the diversity and richness of God's creation. But greater variety and options in music call for greater discernment and care in planning and implementing the music ministry of the church. The people of God sing; what they sing and how they sing are important issues.

Singing is a ministry that belongs to all the people of God. The congregation is always the primary choir. The role of professional or volunteer choirs and musicians is to aid the whole people of God in their worship. While anthems or vocal and instrumental solos may be offered, they do not have to be. Congregational singing, however, is essential. While it is possible to be actively engaged in worship and in prayer while listening to an anthem or solo, a diet of worship which does not regularly include ample opportunity for all the members of the congregation to join in song will be impoverished worship, and the life of the church and the faith of its people will suffer.

Of all the art forms that may be employed in worship, singing is especially corporate. Indeed, it is the art form most suited to expressing the church's unity in the body of Christ. Different voices, different instruments, different parts are blended to offer a single, living, and unified work of beauty...

The church's ministry of song is for the glory of God. The principal direction of congregational singing is to the Lord (**Psalm 96:1**)...Music

should communicate and express a sense of awe and wonder in the presence of God; it should lead our thoughts toward God rather than toward ourselves.

The church's ministry of song is for the edification of God's people. Through congregational singing Christian faith is not only expressed; to a very real degree it is formed. Since people tend to remember the theology they sing more than the theology that is preached, a congregation's repertoire of hymnody is often of critical importance in shaping the faith of its people. Here again, it is the meaning of the text that is of primary importance. It is through the sense of the words that God's people learn of the nature and character of God and of the Christian life... Christian hymnody contains some of the most tightly packed, concise doctrinal and devotional thought of the church. Through congregational song God's people learn their language about God; God's people learn how to speak with God. Songs of worship shape faith. It is, therefore, very important that a congregation have a rich 'vocabulary of praise.'

Evaluating and choosing music for Christian worship should be a careful process, guided primarily by theological considerations. Pastors, consistories, musicians, choir directors, and worship committees may be aided in this process by being attentive to the following suggested guidelines...

What theology is expressed in our congregational singing? Is it biblical? Is it consistent with our theology? Is the range of what we sing representative of the 'whole counsel of God?' What do our songs and hymns say or imply about the sovereignty and grace of God? About the life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ? Hymns used in public worship should be in harmony with the beliefs of your church.

Is there sufficient historical, cultural, and generational breadth? Does our congregational singing express belief in the communion of saints? Are all the saints present encouraged to join in singing, and do our songs also express our belief that we sing with saints throughout the ages and around the world? Do the hymns and songs include contributions from other cultures, languages, and eras? Are songs included which allow for the full participation of children? For those beginning the journey of faith as well as for more mature Christians?

Is the language of our hymns inclusive? Do our hymns make use of the full range of biblical imagery for God? Can all believers, male and female, young and old, feel included by the language of our congregational songs?

Are we providing our congregation with a sufficient vocabulary of praise?....What do we learn about God and the Christian faith from what we sing?

Does our music encourage corporate worship? Does the music encourage congregational singing or is it designed for the solo artist or does it come across as entertainment? Are soloists and choir effectively leading and supporting the congregation in its worship or are they merely displaying their virtuosity? Do the hymns and choruses we sing express the faith of the gathered community or do they tend toward individual and private expressions of faith?

Is the music appropriate to the ability of the congregation? Do our musical selections respect the past practice of congregation? Do we include enough familiar hymns?

Do the hymns and choruses we sing assume and encourage growth in discipleship? Is continuing congregational education in music and worship a part of our ministry? Do we take the time and effort to learn

new hymns and challenging hymns? Worship is a 'living sacrifice,' and therefore our gifts to God should represent some cost to us. Learning more difficult music and coming to understand and appreciate richer theology may be difficult work, but it can also be a source of spiritual renewal and growth."

John MacArthur comments that, "For over a thousand dark years of its history (c. 500-1500) the church in general did not sing. From shortly after New Testament times until the Reformation, what music the church had was usually performed by professional musicians. The music they presented could not be understood or appreciated by the average church member. In any case, they could only sit and listen, unable to participate. But when the Bible came back into the church during the Reformation, singing came with it. Martin Luther and some of the other Reformation leaders are among the greatest hymn writers of church history. Where the true gospel is known and believed, music is loved and sung. God's Spirit in the heart puts music in the heart... In his great allegory **Pilgrim's Progress**, **John Bunyan** pictured the pilgrim, **Christian**, falling into the slough of despond, straying into doubting castle, and enduring many other hardships, frustrations, and failures. And though the expression 'filled with the Spirit' is not used in the story, each time **Christian** is delivered we see him going on his way singing. Every time he came back under the Spirit's control he had a song in his heart."

Brothers and sisters, when we are filled with the Spirit, not only will joyful ministry flow from our lives in corporate worship, but there will also be joyful God-honouring songs flowing out of our spirit in our private devotions.