

• *Another way to describe Godly living – being filled with the Spirit*

Paul now has yet another way of urging us to live godly lives. ‘*And do not get drunk with wine, in which is dissipation, but be filled by the Spirit* ^{□1}, *communicating to one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord* ^{□2}, *giving thanks always for all things in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ to God-and-Father* ^{□3}, *being subject to one another in the fear of Christ* ^{□4}.

□1 5:18
□2 5:19
□3 5:20
□4 5:21

Paul’s theme here is the godly life. That has been his theme all along. Since 4:17 every verse has been exhorting us to godly living or supporting an appeal for godly living. The theme is the same here. It has three parts to it: an ungodliness we must avoid (‘Do not get drunk...’); a fullness that we must show (‘but be filled by the Spirit’) and some results or accompaniments which attend the fullness of the Spirit.

1. *An ungodliness to avoid – excessive alcohol*

1. **An ungodliness we must avoid.** ‘Do not get drunk with wine’, he says. That was the way they got their stimulus and excitement in the old days before their conversion. But that kind of stimulus squanders one’s resources and is eventually destructive. In that kind of life there is ‘dissipation’ – exhaustion, wasting one’s money, damaging one’s health. Excess alcohol is depressing not stimulating!

2. *A fullness to cultivate*

2. **A fullness that must characterise our lives.** ‘Be filled by the Spirit’ says Paul. There is a kind of similarity between the fullness of the Spirit and taking excess alcohol – although they are very different also. The similarity is this. The worldly man uses beer and wine to get himself to feel good, to give himself a mood of relaxation, to make him convivial. Wine makes him talk freely; he may even start singing! But Paul knows there is a better way. The Holy Spirit leads us to feel good. He also gives us a mood of relaxed confidence and authority. The Holy Spirit makes us convivial. By the Spirit we talk of Jesus freely and boldly. In the Holy Spirit we like to sing! There is a similarity between the two kinds of fullness, but one is destructive and the other is wonderful and liberating.

• *The Holy Spirit is truly liberating*

• *Filled by the Spirit – two different ideas*

What does ‘Be filled by the Spirit’ mean? A study of the words ‘fill’, ‘filled’ and ‘fullness’ will show that these words are used in a very varied way to speak of at least two different ideas.

(i) It can be used of a sudden blessing or something that happens of one specific occasion. People can **suddenly** enabled to sing a song ^{□1} or to speak with tongues ^{□2} or to reply powerfully to an enemy ^{□3} or to speak boldly on one special occasion ^{□4}. I could call this a special filling.

(ii) But then the word is used in another way, it can refer to a constant characteristic of one’s life. Godly and spiritually powerful men and women are said to be ‘full’ of the Spirit. Barnabas was ‘full of the Holy Spirit’ ^{□5}. The people chosen as deacons had to be ‘full of the Spirit’ as the regular characteristic of their lives ^{□6}. There are yet other ways in which the words are used (sometimes speaking of more than one thing happening at the same time). The question is: how is the word being used here in Ephesians 5:18? It is certainly in the second way. Paul is calling us to be regularly and constantly obedient to and

□1 See Luke 1:41
□2 See Acts 2:4
□3 See Acts 4:8
□4 See Acts 4:31
□5 See Acts 11:24
□6 See Acts 6:3

rejoicing in the Holy Spirit. There are three reasons for saying that the word 'filled' refers to the second of these ideas, not the first.

(i) The context from 4:17–6:20 all the way through is dealing with godly living. Ephesians 5:18–21 is simply coming at the same subject from a slightly new angle.

(ii) The tense is a present tense. It does not refer to something sudden or dramatic. It refers to something constantly and steady.

(iii) Nowhere in the New Testament is a person **commanded** to be filled with the Spirit in the 'sudden' sense of the term. But we are **commanded** to work out our salvation and be 'full' of the Holy Spirit in the second sense. It means that we submit ourselves to the Holy Spirit. We listen to Him. We obey Him. We are 'full' of Him in the sense that He rules us and He finds no blockages or hindrances in us.

• Here refers to a constant characteristic of our lives

3. Signs of yielding to the Spirit

3. **Some signs and accompaniments of this yielding to the Spirit.** What exactly is the relationship between the basic command here ('be filled by the Spirit') and the five phrases that follow ('communicating ... singing ... making melody . . . giving thanks ... being subject...')? 'Communicating to one another' should not be translated 'Speaking'. You do not 'speak' a psalm or hymn!

• Things we do in fellowship with others – not alone

These are different **aspects** of being full of the Spirit. A person who yields himself to God the Holy Spirit will be someone who has fellowship with others, a person who sings, a person who is thankful to God, and a person who gets along well with other Christians. The words here are plural. Paul is referring to something that we all do together. Growing in holiness is not something isolated or lonely. Christians learn together to be full of the Spirit and express their joy to God in song and thankfulness.

• Putting the body of Christ before ourselves

Yielding to the Holy Spirit will show itself in our submissiveness to each other. It means we keep in mind that we are part of a fellowship. We cease to be self-assertive and self-centred and we each put the whole 'body of Christ' before ourselves. We do so 'in the fear of Christ', that is, eager to avoid missing Christ's rewards, eager to avoid Christ's chastening. Obedience is not something cold or isolated. We are living the godly life when the Spirit is working unhindered in us all and we are 'communicating . . . singing ... making melody ... giving thanks ... being subject' to the needs of the people of God around us.



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Dr Michael Eaton is highly respected internationally as a theologian, author, preacher and teacher. He lives in Kenya where he is one of the leaders of the Chrisco Fellowship. His *Preaching Through The Bible* (PTTB) books are highly popular worldwide. Michael Eaton puts the theological and practical meaning of the Bible in a clear and down-to-earth way so that what is written can be easily understood by the reader.



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