

## Lesson 9

# Submit to One Another

And don't get drunk with wine, which leads to reckless living, but be filled by the Spirit: speaking to one another in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, singing and making music with your heart to the Lord, giving thanks always for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, submitting to one another in the fear of Christ, Ephesians 5.18-21.

## Introduction

Have you ever wondered why Paul would contrast drunkenness with being filled with the Spirit? Those reading in Ephesus would have drawn an immediate connection. Ephesus was home to the temple of Dionysius, the god associated with drunken orgies and frenzied behavior. The backgrounds of many of the Christians in the church there might have been associated in this activity. Paganism had been their life. Now, in contrast to that, Paul's emphasis here is not just the negative command of avoiding drunkenness, but rather it is being filled with the Spirit. Paul describes this as a continuous, ongoing, daily pursuit. Whatever we do in terms of the Christian life, it must flow from a life controlled by the Spirit. This will impact every relationship we have in life.

## What Happens When I am Filled with the Spirit?

### ***5.19: Praise***

Praise is the natural result of a devoted life to God. Joy will pour out from our heart. A Christian should be characterized by faith-filled optimism, happiness, and reverent worship. Their heart will be filled with psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs.

### ***5.20: Thankfulness***

This is a person who sees their blessings and will not hesitate in glorifying God at every opportunity. This is person who is full of love, joy, peace, gentleness, goodness, and faith.

### ***5.21: A Submissive Heart***

The *submitting* in this verse means "to arrange under." It is a military term that expresses the idea of placing oneself under those who have responsibility for you. The application is generic and applies universally. Christians are called by place themselves under each other. Our culture looks down on submission. The world sees it as a sign of weakness... something that should be avoided at all costs. Submission is not degrading. It is a fact of life. During New Testament times, the word was used to refer to the social ordering of people, such as warriors giving allegiance to their commander. Similarly, people living in a city, state, or region are to respect the authority of the local governor. Submission carries the responsibility to live in an orderly manner and not be seditious or rebellious.

From this, Paul elaborates in this text that “submission” should characterize the day-to-day life of the Christian. All believers “submit to one another.” It is the outward expression of self-denial and concern for others. The absence of this virtue hinders the work of the Spirit inside us and in the local church.

## The Heart of Submission

Philippians 2 probably contains some of the greatest teaching on submission and how it is expressed. In the opening verses, Paul lists out four expectations for the local church:

- 2.2a – think the same way.
- 2.2b – have the same love.
- 2.2c – (be) united in spirit.
- 2.2d – (be) intent on one purpose.

How is this possible? How can people get along so completely? The answer is found in the next two verses:

Do nothing out of selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility consider others as more important than yourselves. Everyone should look not to his own interests, but rather to the interests of others, Philippians 2.3-4.

Here we see the attitude that makes submission possible. It is characterized by humility, which is produced by the Spirit who dwells within us. As we are filled with the Spirit, Ephesians 5.18, we are being moved along the path to becoming more like God.

## Submission in Day-to-Day Life

Some of the most practical instruction on submission comes to us from Peter. In chapter 2 he reminds Christians of their place in this world (we are strangers and exiles, 2.11). Since that is the case we are to conduct ourselves with honor through:

- 2.13 – submitting to every human authority (emperors, governors, etc.)
- 2.15 – doing good, living under the expectations of our Master.
- 2.17 – honor everyone. Fear God. Honor the emperor.
- 2.18-20 – submission also applies in the workplace.

In both examples, i.e., submission in public life and in the workplace, we may have to endure unjust treatment from cruel and godless people. The call here is to endure it. Not resist. Not rebel. But submit. *This brings favor with God, 2.20.* This certainly runs counter to the American way, which thrives on the promotion of one’s personal rights and freedoms.

- Next, Peter draws our attention to the greatest example of submission in the face of unjust treatment: Jesus. He *left (us) an example that (we) should follow in his steps, 1 Peter 2.21.* He did not respond to insults. He did not threaten. Instead he trusted that God would right all the wrongs committed against him.

When one follows the example of Jesus, there will be submission in marriage, 1 Peter 3.1-6. The husband will respect and submit to his wife, 1 Peter 3.7. And the principle of submission is certainly seen in the

directives of 1 Peter 3.8-12. How much would our relationships improve if we fulfilled these expectations more effectively?

## Submission to Church Leaders

In creating order in the local church, God has established shepherds as leaders. Their task is to *oversee* the work. They have been called to lead the local church with humility, exemplifying what it means to live the Christian life. Because of this, those who place them in this position are called to honor and respect their authority.

- Hebrews 13.17: *obey your leaders and submit to them, since they keep watch over your souls as those who will give an account, so they can do this with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you.*
- 1 Peter 5.5: *...be subject to the elders. All of you clothe yourselves with humility toward one another...*
- 1 Corinthians 16.15b-16: here we find a general principle of submission to leaders in the local church. Paul mentioned the household of Stephanas who *had devoted themselves to serving the saints*. Paul then says, *I urge you to also submit to such people, and to everyone who works and labors with them.*

It is the submissive attitude that makes the Christian life work.

## For Thought and Reflection

1. What are the natural effects of being filled with the Spirit? (Ephesians 5.18-21)
2. What does it mean to submit? Why is it looked down upon in our culture?
3. What is the key ingredient to submission in our relationships? (See Philippians 2.3-4)
4. How can we better apply the principles of 1 Peter 2.13-17 as we think about the politics of our day? How can we better set an example of respect for our government leaders and people who are in the opposite party of our preference?
5. How does God expect us to treat our local church leaders? Why?