

**Footprints of the Saints
& the Filling of the Spirit**
Ephesians 5:15–21
North Center | 6.9.2024
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If you haven't yet, turn in your Bibles to **Ephesians chapter 5**. As we continue our journey through the apostle Paul's letter to the churches in Ephesus, once again we hear Paul talking about how the church should “walk” in their relationship with God and with one another as they live in a world of darkness. This is the sixth time Paul has used the word “walk” (περιπατέω), and he's using it as a relationship word. It's this picture of ongoing fellowship: *day-by-day, step-by-step, moment-by-moment*.¹

But (*one of the things that's hard to see here in our English translations is that*) the command is **plural** – meaning, Paul isn't primarily focused on our *individual* relationship with God; he's talking about how we live in relationship to God **together** as the body of Christ. It's about walking with Christ **in community** with one another in the local church.

In other words, this is not a self-help letter; it is a church-help letter. **You cannot WALK as God is calling you to WALK if the path you are on is outside the covenant community of the local church**. Let me beg you right now, don't take the summer off from gathering regularly with the local church.²

So, we walk together (and we know that because the command is plural), but now the question is “HOW” do we walk? Paul says, “walk **circumspectly**” (ὑποκριθῶς), which means: “*strict conformity to a standard or norm, giving careful attention...*”.³

In other words...

- Pay attention to how you live your life.
- God has given you a way that He wants you to live; you don't get to just make it up as you go along.
- As much as our culture hates hearing this, we don't get to do whatever feels good to us.
- The stakes are too high to “go with the flow” or to “fly by the seat of your pants”.
- We are to pay careful attention to how we, as a church, walk in relationship with God together.

“Not as fools but as wise.”

~ Ephesians 5:15

- For Paul, there are always only two kinds of people in the world.
 - Those who are spiritually dead & those who have been made alive in Christ
 - Those who are foreigners & those who are members of the household of God
 - Those who are far off & those who have been brought near
 - Those who are sons of disobedience & those who are children of God
 - Those who are of the darkness & those who are of the light
 - Those who are fools & those who are wise

¹ The first time we hear this word in the Bible is when God is walking toward His people in the Garden of Eden (**Gen 3:8**), and this walking is in the context of relationship. God was walking toward them to be with them. In other words, the very first time we hear about “walking” in the Bible, it's a picture of God seeking relationship with His people. Then, towards the end of the OT, the prophet Micah tells the children of God exactly what God wants for their lives: “*He has shown you...what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with our God*” (**Mic 6:8**). Again, it's this picture of relationship. Paul is using it in the same way.

² Maybe you are thinking to yourself, “*How can you say that when you aren't even here this morning!?*” Though I am not with you (in person) at North Center, by the grace of God, my family will be gathering with the local church every Sunday this summer in the community where we are staying on our sabbatical. If you are on vacation, if you are traveling, if you are visiting family... see if there is a Bible-preaching, Christ-exalting local church somewhere nearby that you can gather together on the Lord's Day. If this seems legalistic to you, consider for a moment that this was the habit of Jesus when He was traveling (**Luke 4:16**).

³ BDAG.

Paul describes the difference between those who are wise and those who are fools in **Roman 1**. He says that those who reject the knowledge of God are fools. “*Professing to be wise, they became fools*” (1:21–22).

Paul makes that same connection here in his letter to the church in Ephesus.

In **1:17**, he says, I’m praying...
“that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory,
may give to you the spirit of **wisdom** and revelation in the **knowledge** of Him...”
~ *Ephesians 1:17*

- For Paul, there is an inextricable connection between truly knowing God and being a wise person. Do you want to be a person who walks in wisdom? Devote your life to knowing God.⁴
- And this isn’t just the language of Paul; it’s the language of the whole Bible. If you have ever studied through the book of Proverbs, you know that this kind of language is all over Proverbs. In **Proverbs 9:10** we read, “*The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.*” In other words, the person whose heart has been shaped by knowing God is a person who has wisdom and understanding. Contrast that with **Psalms 14:1** where we read, “*The fool has said in his heart, ‘There is no god’*”.

Here in **Ephesians 5:15**, Paul says,
*Don’t live like someone who has rejected the Word of God and the ways of God.
Live as those who know the **word** of God,
who trust the **heart** of God, and who delight in the **ways** of God.*

And then, Paul says, as a church, be wise in how you invest your time because the days in which you live are evil. “*Redeeming the time, because the days are evil*” (**Eph 5:16**).

I have a very close friend who is constantly reminding me to pay attention to the times in which we live. “**Know what time it is.**” The problem with far too many of us is that we think we live in “neutral world” – where it just doesn’t really matter how we spend our time. Paul says, “*No, when you are surrounded by evil days, it absolutely matters how you spend your time. Don’t be a fool in how you spend your time. Be wise with your time.*” One of the most precious gifts God has given to this world is time: time to love, time to serve, time to learn, time to dream and create and pray and laugh and cry and hope and trust and encourage and exhort and work and rest and share the good news of Jesus Christ to a lost and dying world. Paul says, “*Church, don’t squander the gift of time that God has given you.*”⁵

Then, Paul repeats himself again in **verse 17**, “*Therefore, do not be unwise, but understand what the will of the Lord is*” (**Eph 5:17**).

I remember being **a young college student** and asking the question, “*Lord, what is Your will for my life?*”

- And usually when I asked that question, what I meant was: (1) who do you want me marry, (2) where do you want me live, (3) and what kind of job should I get? I was thinking in very earthly terms (marriage, vocation...). But the Lord’s will for our life is so much bigger than that.
- As we’ve already seen, the Lord’s will for our life is a moment-by-moment, day-by-day, season-by-season relationship with Him.

“*What does the Lord require of you but to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God.*”
~ *Micah 6:8*

⁴ “*Thou my best thought by day or by night*” (Be Thou My Vision).

⁵ The world has filled the days with evil; buy it back for the glory of God. “*Carpe Diem*” by Dan Saint.

What does it mean to understand the will of the Lord? It means that.⁶

And then Paul drops this comment about not getting drunk (5:18), which seems to just come out of nowhere – until we connect it to this theme of wisdom & knowledge. What does drunkenness do? It overrides the faculties of our mind. **Proverbs** says that whoever is “*led astray*” by wine is not wise (**Prov 20:1**). It makes a “*mockery*” of a person.

Paul has just warned us (in the previous section) against giving our time to darkness (*have no fellowship with the works of darkness*), and now he warns us against giving our mind to drunkenness. Don’t give your **time** to **darkness**, and don’t give your **mind** to **drunkenness**. I think we could paraphrase this verse by saying, “Don’t let your mind be under the controlling influence of something other than God.” Give your mind to God. Let God have “the controlling interest” over your thoughts and your decisions and your dreams and your meditations. **BE FILLED WITH GOD.**

This is very similar to what Paul said back in **Ephesians 3:19** when he talked about being “*filled with all the fullness of God.*”

It’s important to note that this isn’t a one-time experience like you maybe hear about sometimes in charismatic or Pentecostal circles. This **isn’t** a *one-time event*; it’s a lifestyle. And it **isn’t** a *personal experience*; it’s a congregational reality. If we were to translate this phrase literally from the original language, it would sound something like this: “*You all, be continuously being filled in the Spirit, with the Spirit, by the Spirit*” (5:18).⁷

Then, Paul describes HOW a church gets filled with the Spirit of God. We know **how** you get drunk with wine: *you drink too much wine*. How does a church get continuously filled up together with the Spirit of God? Here’s Paul’s answer:

Speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs,
singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord,
giving thanks always for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ...

~ **Ephesians 5:19–20**

After telling the church to be continuously filled with the Spirit of God, Paul uses several words (called participles) to describe the means by which this happens.⁸ How does a church get continuously filled with the Spirit of God? Paul says, “*I’ll tell you how – by **singing!** Singing to one another and singing to the Lord.”*

If you ever doubt the importance of singing in the life of the church, study what Paul has to say about singing. It’s **NOT** just something that we do to fill space in our Sunday morning gathering. It’s not just something we do because it feels good – or as a way to keep people engaged – or as a way to draw people in... it is a primary means by which a church is continuously filled with the Spirit of God.

In almost every church that I have ever been part of, there have been people who see the sermon as the important part of the Sunday Gathering, and everything else is just “extras”. I know people who wait to arrive until shortly before the sermon begins so that they don’t have to sit through all the extras. And I’ve had conversations with people who think that churches should eliminate singing altogether and just have preaching. **And, if you study church history,** you’ll find that there are many churches that did exactly that: *they got rid of the singing.*

But Paul could not be clearer that singing is not peripheral. It’s not extra. It’s not optional. It’s not the warmup for the sermon. Rather, singing is one of the primary ways that a congregation is continuously filled with the

⁶ But, again, it’s a path that is covered with footprints because you are not called to walk this road alone. Every command Paul gives is written in the plural – which means we are to be doing this in community. If we were to translate this phrase literally, it would sound like this: “*You all, be continuously understanding what is the will of the Lord*” (συνιέντες τί τὸ θέλημα τοῦ Κυρίου).

⁷ πληροῦσθε ἐν Πνεύματι.

⁸ In grammatical terms, we would call this a participle of means.

Spirit of God together. When your heart and your mind are united with God's people in singing His praise, the result is that the church is filled up with the Spirit of God.

As a way of describing the central importance of singing in the life of God's people, I want to close by sharing 4 Scripture verses that tell the story of singing in the world that God has made.

1. **Creation** || Job 38:7

- This universe was born into singing.

There is a reason that music covers our planet: weddings, funerals, coronations, sporting events, holiday celebrations, parties, movies, advertisements, radio, businesses... If you walk into **Menards** in Brooklyn Park, you know what you're going to hear? Somebody playing the piano! Why? Because music moves us. And why does it move us? Because it is woven into the very fabric of our existence.

2. **Fall** || Exodus 15:1

- The first thing God's people ever do together (*after God rescues them for the first time*) is sing. What do saved people do? Moses would say, "*They sing together.*"

3. **Redemption** || Matthew 26:30

- The last thing Jesus does with His disciples before going to the cross is to lead them in singing. *How important is congregational singing?* It's the last thing Jesus does with His followers...

4. **Consummation** || Rev 15:3

- God's people will spend eternity praising our God through song. No preaching, evangelism...

Why do we sing all kinds of songs together? Because God moves in power through the singing of His people. God fills up His people with His presence as we sing together.

CONCLUSION:

1. Come alongside one another in this walk of faith. Fight against the temptation to walk in isolation.
2. Surrender your time & your mind to God. This is where wisdom is found.
3. Be continuously filling up your heart and mind and soul with the Spirit of God by singing together with God's people. Make this a summer of singing! It doesn't matter if you gave a good voice. That's not the question. The question is, "*Is your heart making a melody to the Lord?*" "*Do you have a thankful heart*" (5:20)? How do you express your heart of thanks? Sing!

(1) Let's walk together. (2) Let's get to know God together. (3) And then let's sing together.