



Ephesians 5:15-21 **How To Get Along**

As we move through the book of Ephesians we're learning that becoming a Christian, being born again, is only the beginning. It's just the first step of something much larger and much more comprehensive that God has planned for us. The Christian life is about so much more than just forgiveness. It is that, that is foundational; everything begins when we are forgiven of sin through the sacrifice of Christ, but after we are born-again the next step is to grow.

As we read and study this book together we're seeing that God has prepared good works for us (Ephesians 2:10), there are things He wants to involve us in, things He wants to entrust us with. And He has given pastors to the church to equip the saints for the work of ministry (Ephesians 4:11-12).

We're learning that God lives inside us individually and corporately. Ephesians tells us each Christian is like a single brick, personally filled with Christ, and then my brick is stacked next to yours and together we are being formed into a dwelling place for God. So we have both a personal and a corporate relationship with Him. And we've seen another analogy too – that we are all parts of the body of Christ. You're a hand and I'm a foot but Christ is the head and we're all connected.

Both of those analogies are important because they show us that our spirituality is personal, but never private. What you do, and whether or not you grow in Christ, actually affects me. And the same is true in reverse, as I grow and mature in Christ I am of greater value to you *because* we are all members of one another.

So we have to ask ourselves, you have to ask yourself – am I growing? Are you a more mature Christian now than you were six or twelve months ago? Are you thriving in Christ or are you spiritually stagnated or plateaued, or worse, are you in spiritual decline? In what ways are you being intentional about your identity in Christ? And who is benefitting as a result? Who is being helped by the fact that I'm becoming more like Christ?

We need to be asking those hard questions as we dig into the Scriptures, and at the same time we need to remember the answer doesn't just affect me personally, it affects others in this church because we are all members of one another, there's only one body of Christ, we're all in it together, and we need to grow so that we can serve one another. So read with me:

Eph 5:15 See then that you walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise,
16 redeeming the time, because the days are evil. 17 Therefore do not be unwise,
but understand what the will of the Lord is.

Right away we're confronted with the fact that there are two ways to live – we can live as fools or as wise men and women, and foolishness is the default setting because the days are evil.

But when it says the days are evil, is that something you agree with? Is that the word you would choose? The answer depends on your viewpoint, your personal experience, and your definition of evil. Someone might say we're making incredible progress in technology, in medicine, we're seeing a decrease in crime, what do you mean the days are evil?

Or someone might think of evil and think it means something dark and sinister and demonic – the worst of the worst, the most depraved and depressing conditions you could imagine, and you would say, “take a look around, this is suburbs of the nation's capitol, the streets are clean, I don't see demons or dragons roaming around with open fires and heavy clouds of smoke. What do you mean the days are evil?”

And I would respond: don't think of evil in such an apocalyptic and dark way. Think of it is as the opposite of God and His holiness.

We find a lot of things described as evil in the Bible; we're told there are evil days, evil people, evil thoughts, an evil generation, evil works, evil boasting and evil deeds. It's not all just heavy metal T-shirts and horror movies. It's much more pervasive than that. It's much more inclusive than that.

For several weeks now we've made mention of the fact that what comes out of our mouths is a reflection of what is going on in our heart. I've repeated the same quote from Jesus for the past two weeks:

Matt 12:34 For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks.

But notice the very next thing Jesus says as He explains this further:

35 A good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth good things, and an evil man out of the evil treasure brings forth evil things.

It's easier than you think to be evil because “evil” is an umbrella term for anything that is no longer following God's original plan. And that's a pretty low threshold. Notice what our passage says:

Eph 5:15 See then that you walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise,
16 redeeming the time, because the days are evil.

The natural tendency, the natural trend is for all things to decompose – but as Christians we are commanded to actually pay attention to what is going on, to pay attention to how we walk or how we live, and to intentionally pursue **wisdom**, to intentionally **redeem the time**. Those things don't just happen naturally.

Jesus gave a famous illustration in the Sermon on the Mount about two men who lived two different ways – one who received what God said, took it seriously, and took action accordingly – he was considered wise. And one who just let things happen naturally – let life go on autopilot, took the easy road, the path of least resistance, and he was called a fool. One redeemed the time, the other did not, and when a crisis came they had two different outcomes. Jesus said:

Matt 7:24 “Therefore whoever hears these sayings of Mine, and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the rock: 25 and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it did not fall, for it was founded on the rock.

26 “But everyone who hears these sayings of Mine, and does not do them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand: 27 and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it fell. And great was its fall.”

Do you see the contrast, between a wise and a foolish way to live?

Which would you say best categorizes your life? In real terms, what is the difference between how you live and how the people around you live? Is there a real difference in the way you spend your time, the way you spend your money, the things you are passionate about, the way you seek to solve problems or resolve conflict? Do you prove that you walk according to wisdom?

You see, unless you’re being intentional about seeking wisdom, about walking circumspectly, about receiving instruction from God and seeking to live differently by His grace, you’re going to be sucked into the lower form of living, because the days are evil.

So the Scriptures call us to redeem the time, and they tell us we need to understand the Lord’s will so we can do that.

Which begs the question, how can we know God’s will? How we, as human beings, know what God desires? How can we know His plans? Well, it’s not as hard as we make it out to be. I have a whole study on the subject, contact me if you’re looking for that, but let’s make two really basic observations this morning.

First, if you’re looking for wisdom, how about turning to Proverbs? The book of Proverbs is full of short little sayings that describe and contrast wisdom and foolishness. Solomon, who the Bible says was the wisest man to ever live, wrote Proverbs as a way to pass that wisdom on to his son. It’s a great place to turn to learn practical instruction for your daily life if you’re seeking more wisdom. There are 31 chapters, so one thing you can do is just turn to the chapter that corresponds to the day’s date and read it. You’ll find plenty of things to chew on. Like this.

Some of you have memorized

Proverbs 3:5 Trust in the LORD with all your heart,
And lean not on your own understanding;
6 In all your ways acknowledge Him,
And He shall direct your paths.

Do you see how this is calling us not to do things the natural way, don't just trust your own understanding – in all your ways acknowledge Him, seek wisdom – say “God I'm your servant, I'm your son, I'm your subject, what do YOU want me to do?” And let Him direct your paths.

Over in the New Testament James gives us similar direction:

James 1:5 If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him. 6 But let him ask in faith, with no doubting

This all boils down to two words: seek God. Submit to God. Ask Him how you should live, what choices you should make. Don't go on autopilot. Don't follow the crowd. Walk circumspectly. Don't assume what everyone else is doing is the right thing, there is a wise way to live and a foolish way to live, and we're called to be the abnormal ones who redeem the time, make wise choices and pay careful attention to how we live because know what the will of God is.

As we turn back to our passage in Ephesians, Paul lays out three specific areas where this difference in our lives should be manifested. As we look at each of them remember that the bigger picture involves the impact we're having on the lives of others. It's about you, yes, but it's also very much about the impact you have on others.

Eph 5:18 And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit, 19 **speaking to one another** in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord,

Did you see that? Don't be drunk; be filled with the Spirit, SO THAT you can speak to others. Christianity is the antithesis to a private religious experience. We are a community of faith. And in order for the community to grow and be strengthened, we need to take individual actions.

So let's look at what the Bible says here, again, very specific instruction about real matters in our daily lives.

Our passage says: **Do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation.** One of the reasons we have so many versions of the Bible is because the English language is always changing. Old words drop out of use, new words are coined, and the meaning of some words shifts

over time. So, we come out with new versions of the Bible that attempt to update the language for our modern times.

The word **dissipation** is a good example. It was used in the 1800s a lot more than it is now. Other ways to translate the idea behind it are excess (KJV), debauchery (ESV), reckless action (CSV) – it means a life without borders or boundaries. In Tit 1:6 it applies to children allowed to run wild with no rules or structure.

And we recognize that, we know alcohol lowers our inhibitions; too much causes us to lose our motor skills and then our ability to think quickly – we can act like children running wild with no rules. In cases of addiction we lose our ability to make independent judgment, we're no longer in control of our own lives.

The Bible says that if you're habitually given to drinking alcohol, if it has control over you, if you get drunk or rely on it to make through tough times that's sin.

In fact, being controlled by alcohol in any form disqualifies you for ministry – you need to build people up, not tear them down or tear yourself down. You need to be relying on God to lift you up and buoy you instead of relying on a glass of wine or a beer. I'm not telling you can't have it, the Bible doesn't say that. Jesus' first miracle was turning water into wine, He drank it at parties, they had it at the Last Supper.

For 1900 years the church used nothing but wine for communion until Dr. Thomas Bramwell Welch of invented non-alcoholic grape juice in 1869 by figuring out how to stop the fermentation process and created the same Welch's Grape Juice you buy today. Paul told Timothy to drink some wine for his stomach. So I'm not telling you can't have a drink, but I'm telling you, because the Bible tells you, don't be drunk.

But if you're the kind of person where one drink leads to another and another and the next thing you know you've had too much, then maybe you do need to cut it off entirely and work on your self-control, which is a fruit of the same Holy Spirit you're told to be filled with instead.

In fact, while the Bible says being given over to wine is a disqualifier for ministry, being filled with the Holy Spirit is a prerequisite for ministry. Ministry of all kinds. If you help in our Gatekeepers ministry, or serve as an usher or greeter, if you play an instrument in the band or help in a classroom, you need to be filled with the Holy Spirit, for your sake, and for the sake of the people you will serve.

When the church established the first deacons in Acts 6 the apostles said:

Acts 6:3 Therefore, brethren, seek out from among you seven men of *good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business*

Let me remind you they were looking for people to help with a service project, and yet these were the basic qualifications. So, again, being filled with wine will disqualify you for service, but being filled with the Holy Spirit and wisdom is essential for service.

And Jesus actually said we could do more than be filled – we could be so full that we would begin to overflow. He stood up in the middle of a huge celebration in Jerusalem

John 7:37 ... and cried out, saying, "If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. 38 He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water."

What in the world does that mean? Well, John goes right on tell us:

39 But this He spoke concerning the Spirit, whom those believing in Him would receive; for the Holy Spirit was not yet *given*, because Jesus was not yet glorified.

This is what Jesus is promising – that we could be so filled by the Holy Spirit, God Himself, that He would flow out of our lives like a river of water. Not a drip, not a trickle, a river of living water. You know what it looks like when people get intoxicated and the presence of alcohol inside their body makes itself known externally, well now we're talking about the presence of the Spirit inside of you making Himself known externally. Is that happening in your life? Is living water flowing out of you? Are you asking God to do this for you?

If you're a Christian you know the Spirit is in you, we already saw back in Ephesians 1:13 that we are sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise. He is in you. But are you *filled* with the Holy Spirit, is He *flowing* out of you? You can be so much more than you are by simply asking God to make you what He wants you to be – but that involves letting Him have His way in you and letting Him flow out of you.

Remember that's the driving idea here – God moving in and through you for the benefit of others, and for that to be manifested in at least one way specifically:

Eph 5:19 speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord,

Now don't get bogged down in the distinctions between all the terms because there's not much of one. The big idea is that there is a diversity of ways to talk about praising God with music and we should be ministering to one another through them all. We should share them with one another and we should make melody in our own hearts to the Lord.

So turn off sports radio or talk radio or NPR or whatever else and listen to some worship. I have a list of hymns I think every mature Christian should know and be able to sing without looking at the words. Ask me for it, and I'll share it with you, then find the songs and fill yourself with them. We created a YouTube channel for the church filled with the songs we sing in worship, pull that up at home or work and let it play, but get worship music into

your life – let it minister to you and let it minister to others because other people need ministry and God wants to use you to provide it.

And, having a heart and head that is full of worship will help you with the second item we see this morning that ought to mark our lives as Christians:

Eph 5:20 giving thanks always for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ,

Remember, our lives as Christians should always be lived in response, in response to what God has done. As He gives us chance after chance, fresh starts and new beginnings, as He takes our burdens and gives us blessings, we need to be thankful.

We don't have the right to anything. Why do we get to live here in the United States with all our freedoms as Christians instead of suffering for our faith in Pakistan or Syria or Egypt? Don't confuse your American blessing with your Christian blessings, but give God thanks for them all and ask Him how He wants to use the special freedoms and opportunities He has given you for His glory.

We come to our final verse that sums it all up again and which lays the foundation for what we're going to see in the coming weeks:

Eph 5:21 submitting to one another in the fear of God.

OK, one more time, we see that our Christian faith requires us to live differently and to do it in relationship with others, in this case, to take my own preferences and opinions and push them to the side if they're going to cause conflict with other people. I'm actually called to submit to others, to prefer them over my own desires, and do that in the fear of God.

And that's counter-cultural. That's not what we see happening in the world around us. Let me ask: does the word submission, as in putting yourself under another person, does that have any good, any noble, connotation in our society today? We don't champion submission, we champion independence and freedom, be your own boss, call your own shots, do things your way.

And so once again the Scriptures collide with our culture and call us to a different standard of living. When Paul wrote this letter to the Ephesians, he used Greek, the common language of the day, and the Greeks had been a warring nation and empire. Remember these are the people who produced the Spartans and fought the Persian Wars including the Battles of Marathon and Thermopylae as well as the Peloponnesian Wars. They used the term submission in the way a soldier would be submitted to his commanding officer - to serve and obey in the pursuit of a greater cause.

This is what we are called to do. And it's going to get really personal in the coming weeks when we look at how wives are to submit to their husbands, how children are to obey their parents, and how workers should serve their bosses.

But you need to understand a few things from the start.

First, when we submit it doesn't mean we're less of a human being, or have less worth, but we are willing to humble ourselves instead of asserting ourselves for the sake of a greater cause or benefit. Remember, there is this constant call in Ephesians to live a certain way because God has done things for us, and because we are members of one another. When you grow I benefit and vice versa. We need to fit together well for mutual benefit and the benefit of others.

Second, we need to remember that we are called to do this because it's what Jesus did. Jesus wrapped himself with a towel and washed the feet of His disciples. He made less of Himself for the sake of serving others.

Let me share with you something that might help make the idea of submission click.

Some of you will know the name Pat Tillman. Pat was a professional football player, he played for the Arizona Cardinals as a safety. But in 2002, after the attacks on 9/11 he gave up a three million dollar contract to play football in order to enlist in the Army with his brother Kevin. After boot camp the two went on to become Army Rangers where his new base pay was seventeen thousand dollars a year, and an extra \$150 a month after he graduated from Airborne school.

What do you think Pat Tillman learned about submission by going from being a pro football player to being an Army recruit? Did it change who he was? Was he "worth" more as a NFL player or a soldier? And I'm not talking net worth, I'm talking human worth. Of course not. Submission doesn't mean we're worth less, it means we help others more, we honor others more than our selves.

Pat Tillman submitted himself to others, served others, by humbling himself. And then, his submission led to sacrifice. On his second tour in Afghanistan he was killed by friendly fire during a raid.

Submission cost him something, he gave up something real, but he did it willingly. He volunteered to serve. And though his life was cut short, it serves as a vivid reminder to us all of what it looks like to walk away from something that we enjoy or prefer so that we can serve others.

And in that way we see Christ in this story too, don't we? We see Christ setting aside all of His rights as the Son of God in Heaven and taking on human flesh, submitting to the Father's will to come and be a sacrifice for our sin.

Christians, we are called to live differently than the world around us, we're called to pay attention, to go against the flow. We're called to live in a way that glorifies God and serves others. That's going to affect the things we do – can you see the evidence of it in your life?

Don't be satisfied with 'normal' don't be drunk with wine, be filled with the Spirit, be filled with worship and worship songs, be thankful, be submissive, and be a blessing to others as they hopefully are a blessing to you. Seek wisdom and walk in it. This is what we are called to.

Let's pray.