

The Spirit-Filled Church

Ephesians 5:15-21

The first half of Ephesians shows all that God has done for us in Christ. The second half calls us to respond to that Good News.

Ephesians 1-3

What God has DONE

He has

- Loved us (ch. 1)
- Saved us (ch. 2)
- United us (ch. 2-3)
 - *in Christ*

Ephesians 4-6

What we must DO

Therefore, live

- Worthy (4:1)
- Holy (4:17)
- Lovingly (5:1)
- Truthfully (5:8)
- Wisely (5:15)

God has blessed us in the heavenly places with “every spiritual blessing in Christ.” He chose us before time began. He adopted us. He redeemed us with the precious blood of Jesus! We were dead in our sins, but God sent Jesus on the ultimate rescue mission to raise us from the dead, connect us in relationship with Him and lift us up into the heavenly places. As those who have been united with Jesus, we are also one with each other. And we will see **how relevant that is for all of our relationships and especially in marriage!**

Because of all that God has done, therefore - **Christian believer - live differently!** Live as one who has been transformed - live as a new creation. Don't keep living like a blind, dead, hard-hearted slave. **Live like a resurrected, reborn, healed, Spirit-filled child of God!** Live worthy of your calling. Live a holy life as a holy saint of God. Live in love as one who has been infinitely loved. Live in the light of God's truth, don't wander back into the darkness of your old life.

And today in Ephesians 5:15 we get the fifth of the “therefore, live” exhortations in Ephesians, **“Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise.”** The gospel changes everything about our lives. So we are seeking to **apply the gospel** to our relationships, our mindset, our overall devotion to the Lord and now to our church.

Our passage today introduces a Household Code **calling husbands, parents and masters** to specific expectations. How does the gospel apply to marriage, parenting and work? That’s where we are heading over the next few weeks! Look at the sequence, starting in verse 18:

“Be filled with the Spirit... submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ. Wives, to your husbands... Husbands, love your wives... Children, obey your parents... Fathers, do not provoke... Slaves, obey... Masters, do the same...” Ephesians 5:18, 21, 22, 25; 6:1, 4, 5, 9

The gospel applies to **all of us - in whatever place in life we find ourselves**. The Spirit fills us so we can exalt Jesus with our lives. We can do “all things through Christ who gives us strength.” Whether you are married or not married, whether you are a husband or a wife; whether you have kids, grandkids or no kids; whether you are a high level executive, an intern or a student - **the gospel applies to you** - right where you are!

This passage has three parts -

The Spirit-Filled Church

- The Caution - v. 15-17
- The Command - v. 18
- The Characteristics - v. 19-21

First we will hear ***Paul’s warning*** - expressing great caution about the world we live in and the time we live in. Then we will see ***the central command*** of this chapter - to “be filled with the Spirit.” Finally, we will hear a description of ***the four characteristics of the Spirit-filled church***. How does the Gospel transform our speech, heart, attitude and relationships?

The Caution: Beware of deception and distraction

“Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, making the best use of the time, because the days are evil.” Eph. 5:15-16

These are dangerous, evil times. As we saw last week, we must protect one another to guard our holiness and not become partners with godless materialists. The devil is active. Sin in our hearts can lead us astray. ***Beware of the sin that so easily entangles and the distractions that can hinder your race.***

These warnings make it clear that it is very possible - even inevitable - that ***believers can squander our time instead of MAXIMIZING our time*** - if we are deceived or distracted. Are we walking in the wisdom of God or in the foolishness of this world? Are we aware of the sins of our culture so we can work against them?

The phrase in verse 16 is ***“redeeming the time.”*** It’s the language of the **marketplace** - like when you see a great deal at an outlet store, or a Black Friday deal. You look for the best opportunity and when it comes available, you go get it. That’s the idea - these are evil times and opportunities are limited when it comes to reaching people with the gospel, loving and serving our neighbors, attacking injustice and other kingdom initiatives.

- How many opportunities have you had with **YOUR NEIGHBORS**? It’s pretty limited, right? If we aren’t prepared to talk with them when they happen to pop outside we will miss the opportunity.
- How many spiritual conversations have you had with ***your extended family*** members? Yes, we need to initiate some of these - but we also need to be ready to have them - realizing that it doesn’t happen every day, and it’s totally possible to wave at these opportunities as they pass us by.
- What about an issue or **cause that has been on your heart**? You can’t take on everything, but the Lord may have given you a burden for poverty, seniors, children, human trafficking, foster care, crisis pregnancy, international students or something else. There are opportunities in life to get involved - and if you don’t move on something, that window in your life will eventually close.

Hear God’s Word - beware of deception and distraction!

The Caution: Beware of deception and distraction

“Do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is.” Eph. 5:17

It is possible for Christians to lose track of what the Lord’s will is. ***It is possible to be sidetracked*** by the lies of the devil, the idolatry of our culture, the distractions of life or the sin in our own hearts.

Obviously it is God's will for the believer to **AVOID SIN**. But often long time Christians fall into this trap of thinking, "Hey, I'm avoiding active, intentional sin - so it doesn't matter what else I do with my life and my time." But don't you see how that thinking, in itself, is a sin? Remember James 4:17 - "Anyone who knows the good he ought to do and doesn't do it, sins."

Beware of the ***seductive deception of this world*** that says, "You deserve every comfort, every pleasure, every happiness." Beware the deceitful nature of your own heart that says, "It's all about you - you are the center of everything." "Don't be foolish. Understand what the will of the Lord is."

What does God want from us? "To do justice. To love mercy. To walk humbly with our God." Do YOU know what God's will is for you? There is so much foolishness and evil in our culture, in our world. That's the caution. Now hear the command.

The Command: Surrender all you are to Jesus

"And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but *be filled with the Spirit...*"
Eph. 5:18

In evil times, under stress as we have been, it's no surprise that many people turn to ***alcohol for relief***. This verse gives Biblical perspective on alcohol. Scripture does not forbid the use of alcohol, but it does provide guidelines. Remember the verses right before this one about being WISE. Remember the caution, the warning. Don't let the idolatry and stupidity of our culture overly influence your choices. Indulgence is the mantra of our day - so of course the worldly people around us use and abuse alcohol and expect us to come right along. Don't be a fool. Remember God's will.

And God's will is ***that believers not be controlled by wine but by His Spirit***. I like the Amplified translation for this verse - it gives the sense in a helpful way:

The Command: Surrender all you are to Jesus

"Do not get drunk with wine, for that is wickedness (corruption, stupidity), but be filled with the [Holy] Spirit *and* constantly guided by Him." Eph. 5:18, Amplified Bible

We don't use the word "***debauchery***" much. Other translations say "dissipation," which is not much more helpful. Just think of what drunkenness leads to. What happens when

college students drink a lot? A whole lot of stupidity, oftentimes a doorway to sin and even danger.

It is possible for Christians to become ***controlled by alcohol instead of by the Holy Spirit*** - or to be controlled by work or by money or by our own desires and plans. Anything other than the Holy Spirit that controls you, directs you, drives you, is an idol in your life - that is your functional god.

The command of this verse is to **SURRENDER**. Don't give yourself, like godless materialists, to the passions of your sinful heart or to the immorality of our world. Instead, increasingly surrender your heart and mind and life to the Holy Spirit. Give yourself fully to Him!

This is the ***Great Commandment*** - "Love the Lord your God with all of your heart, with all of your soul, with all of your mind and with all of your strength."

- **If you got a report card** today on each of those areas, what grade would you get?
- What percent of your ***heart*** is fully devoted to loving God?
- What percent of your ***soul*** is surrendered to Him?
- What percent of your ***mind*** is consumed with the glory of God?
- What percent of your ***time, energy and money*** are devoted to the kingdom of Jesus?

Would you make the Christian honor roll? Would you pass?

What controls YOUR LIFE? What do you surrender yourself to every day? Is it the Holy Spirit? "BE FILLED with the Spirit." Is your life filled with the Spirit? Are you in the habit of saying "Yes" to the Spirit when He speaks to you, when He leads you?

Or do you more often "grieve" the Holy Spirit as Ephesians 4 warns us against? The context in chapter four and five is **RELATIONSHIPS**. ***So the best gauge of Spirit-fullness is the health of our relationships***. And that is precisely where this passage goes. In the next two weeks we will see how the Spirit should fill our marriage, then two weeks on parenting, then two weeks on work. This week we focus on our relationships in the church.

We've heard the caution. We've heard the command. Now look at the characteristics of a Spirit-filled church.

The Characteristics of a Spirit-Filled Church

“Be filled with the Spirit, addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs...” Eph. 5:18-19

- Transformed speech, heart, attitude, relationships

When the love of Jesus fills you and overflows through you it transforms your speech, your heart, your attitude and your relationships. As individual believers are filled with the Spirit and transformed, it will change how the whole church feels and functions.

Let’s look at each of these areas of transformation. First - our speech.

The Characteristics of a Spirit-Filled Church

“Be filled with the Spirit, addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs...” Eph. 5:18-19

- Speaking worshipfully

The first result of Spirit-fullness is the transformation of how we SPEAK. Just a few verses before this Paul exhorted the believers to avoid all unwholesome talk, all foolish talk and coarse joking, but to use words that build up those who listen, that give them grace. Here Paul goes even further to say that ***our words should be filled with WORSHIP.***

Do our words exalt Jesus? Do we regularly talk about the goodness and mercy and power and glory of our Savior?

Remember that in the early church ***there were not “professional Christians,”*** like we have today. The men who led the early churches were almost entirely lay people who had other day jobs. It was hundreds of years later that clergy became prominent as a vocation and it became common to have paid, full-time, vocational pastors.

So the expectation was like the one set in 1 Corinthians 14 -

The Characteristics of a Spirit-Filled Church

“When you come together, each one has a hymn, a lesson, a revelation, a tongue, or an interpretation. Let all things be done for building up.” 1 Cor. 14:26

- Speaking worshipfully

That was how most of the early churches - typically house churches - functioned. Each believer was expected to contribute - coming prepared to share a hymn, a word of encouragement, a Scripture, a prayer. This is one of many reasons we are all about small groups at Oakwood. We believe that **PARTICIPATION is essential to Christian growth**. We don't want a church filled with FANS who just watch ministry - we want a church filled with FOLLOWERS who DO ministry.

How is the Holy Spirit changing your speech? Does your heart and life overflow with worship? Remember, our words are the overflow of our HEARTS. What is on your heart will come out of your mouth. So if you DON'T regularly talk about Jesus, it's not a speech problem, it's a heart problem. And that is our second fruit of a Spirit-filled church..

The Characteristics of a Spirit-Filled Church

“Be filled with the Spirit... singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart.” Eph. 5:18-19

- **Singing passionately**

God has no interest in empty words or rituals. ***He wants our HEARTS.*** He wants us to love Him with all we are - and for that love to express itself naturally, authentically, in words.

What is the music of your heart? **What is your heart song?**

There was a new show this year called ***Zoey's Extraordinary Playlist*** - where a young computer programmer named Zoey got an MRI that gave her a unique super power: she was able to hear people's inmost feelings in the form of heart songs.



In the middle of a conversation - sometimes in the middle of a board meeting - time would freeze and there would be a song and dance interlude.

Imagine what would happen if your heart, right now, expressed itself in a song. ***What song would it be?***

- “Yes, I’m the great pretender...”
- “I’m lost in the woods...”
- “I’m the one who wants to be with you...”

- “I get knocked down, but I get up again, you’re never gonna keep me down...”

Would your heart express:

- Loneliness, like the Beatles’ Eleanor Rigby or
- Confusion, like Come Together
- Hope, like Imagine
- Frustration like all heavy metal
- Sadness, like all country music
- Weird energy, like techno
- Desire, like the songs boys sing about girls or
- Self-exaltation like Katy Perry, “Baby, you’re a firework!”

Sorry, most of my music knowledge comes from *America’s Got Talent*. (Be glad that I spared you my high school knowledge of Vanilla Ice and worse.)

The Characteristics of a Spirit-Filled Church

“Be filled with the Spirit... singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart.” Eph. 5:18-19

- Singing passionately

The point is - ***what is your heart expressing right now?*** Does your heart regularly sing, “How great is our God”? Are you tuned to focus on the glory and grace of Jesus? Or is your heart more tuned to the things of this world?

Again, it’s a matter of ***OVERFLOW***. If we are regularly experiencing how wide and long and high and deep is the love of God - if we personally know the gospel and feel the glory of it - we WILL BE filled with all the fullness of God. You cannot force yourself to sing passionately. But you can ***choose to focus on the Lord*** - to remember His goodness to you - to meditate on the grace of Jesus. And that leads us into the third characteristic of the Spirit-Filled Church: gratitude.

The Characteristics of a Spirit-Filled Church

“Be filled with the Spirit... giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.” Eph. 5:18,20

- Living gratefully

Would you say this is stated strongly enough? “Giving thanks **ALWAYS and FOR EVERYTHING.**” Wow. That doesn’t leave a lot of wiggle room, does it?

But this is ***the fundamental mark of the Christian*** - the person who truly knows God - humility and gratitude. When you see God in all of His glory, pride and entitlement are obliterated. When you step into the blazing light of God’s perfect holiness you are overwhelmed by your own filth and sinfulness. You have that Isaiah experience in throne room of God when He saw the Lord high and lifted up and immediately fell on his knees, saying, “I am a man of unclean lips and I dwell among a people of unclean lips.”

The Christian knows the holiness of God and the sinfulness of him or herself. So we are **HUMBLE**. But we also know the grace of God and the wonder of our salvation. So we are **GRATEFUL**. We know that we have been forgiven - that Jesus paid the full price for our sins. So it doesn’t matter what else happens in this life - we can be and must be grateful.

Jesus saved us from eternal misery. He washed away all of the sins that should have defined us and crushed us forever, into infinite. Once you’ve experienced the life-changing, soul-transforming grace of Jesus, everything else in this world fades into insignificance. And so we can give thanks ALWAYS and FOR EVERYTHING.

Even hardship. Even suffering. Even trials and tribulations are a cause for the Christian to ***REJOICE***. We can not only ENDURE suffering, we can rejoice in it because God is purging us of our worldliness. He is carving away our love of this world and purifying our love for Him. He is calling us more and more to Himself and away from this world, which is not our home anyway.

One of the first people I met at the church I served in Chicago was ***Joan***. I believe she was in her late 70s at the time and I met her when her 85 year old husband was entering hospice. By the special providence of God their hospice counselor happened to be my oldest sister!

Just a couple of days later, ***Joan’s husband was home with the Lord.*** Norm was an old Swedish guy who was telling Sven and Ollie jokes when I met him. But just a few days after meeting Joan, she was a widow again. She had been married to Norm for 15 years, having buried her first husband several years before that. Knowing those two facts about Joan might make you think she would be a melancholy person who struggles to stay positive.

But the truth could not be any more opposite. Joan is one of the most joyful, energetic and positive people I have ever met. Now in her 80s she still does aerobics most every day and lives a very active lifestyle. She overflows with gratitude for the years she had with both of these godly men. She rejoices in her own children and grandchildren and how she was accepted into Norm's family and loved by his kids and grandkids.

When I think of a grateful, joyful person, I think of Joan.

That's what it looks like to be filled with the Spirit - to live gratefully, even when you go through times of sadness and loss. I'm not saying you should fake it. I know some of you have gone through some recent and difficult losses and are grieving. Grief looks different for every person and every situation.

But generally, the Christian should maintain an attitude of gratitude for all we have in Christ - the riches of His abundant grace for us and the promise of our coming glorious inheritance. One more characteristic of the Spirit-filled Church:

The Characteristics of a Spirit-Filled Church

"Be filled with the Spirit... Submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ." Eph. 5:18,21

- **Loving submissively**

Next week we will see how Paul immediately ***applies this instruction to wives***, calling them to submit to their husbands as to the Lord. For now it's important to see that this is **a universal command to ALL BELIEVERS**. This should be our posture toward one another - to submit to one another.

Jesus is our Lord, we all bow before Him and follow His leadership. And out of reverence for our all-sufficient savior and all-powerful Lord we obey His instructions to love and serve and care for and SUBMIT TO one another. We should not think of ourselves more highly than we ought. But we should think of others - considering their needs and preferences ahead of our own.

And of course, this just follows ***Jesus' own example***. He did not come to be served but to serve. He humbled himself and became the servant to all of mankind. That is our example. That is our path.

As we experience the overflowing love of Jesus, we will be filled up with His love and grace and power and goodness. As we walk in the fullness of the Holy Spirit - surrendering more and more of ourselves to Him - ***He will bear fruit in every part of our lives:*** our speech, our hearts, our attitudes and our relationships.

Jesus said the kingdom of heaven is like a **mustard seed**. It starts very tiny - hard even to see. But it grows and grows until it spreads out everywhere. That is what the gospel does. You first hear it and it sounds like a small seed - God loves you, Jesus died for you. But that single seed, the simple message, when it takes root in the good soil of a humble, penitent heart, begins to grow and spread throughout your life.

As you are rooted in the love of Christ you experience the life of Christ in you and you will see the fruit of the Holy Spirit growing more and more out of your life.

What that looks like in the church is a gathering of believers who

The Spirit-Filled Church:

- Speaks worshipfully
- Sings passionately
- Lives gratefully and
- Loves submissively

Does that describe YOUR LIFE? Your marriage? Your parenting? Your Community Group? Your experience at Oakwood? I hope so!

The Gospel changes everything. When we come to Jesus, the overflowing fountain of life, joy, peace, power and goodness, He fills us and overflows through us - through our speech, our hearts, our attitudes and our relationships. May that be increasingly true of each of us and of Oakwood Community Church!

Let's pray!