

Ephesians 5:15-21 | Walking Wisely as a Spirit-Filled Church

Big idea: To walk wisely as a local church in our dark, evil age, we must understand and carry out the desire of the Lord Jesus through the moment by moment filling of the Holy Spirit, resulting in God-glorifying singing, thanksgiving, and mutual submission.

1. Introduction.

a. Image:

- (1) “Mary and I lived in England all of 1992. While there I observed that some Brits had built high brick walls around buildings to protect them from intruders. Their concrete tops are often imbedded with broken shards of glass, with their jagged points protruding upward, threatening to pierce any trespasser. It was interesting to watch a cat walk on such a wall. With extreme care and slow, deliberate moves, it deftly and cautiously placed its paws, one at a time, between the sharp cutting edges. That is walking circumspectly. You and I need to walk like that. We cannot go through a single day carelessly. We need to take every step carefully.”¹

b. Need:

- (1) We live in evil times (v. 16).
 - (a) Sexual sin, from teens to adults is, commonplace (v. 3). Crude joking (v. 4) is often heard after school or on the job site. Going to the liquor store after work on Fridays to gear up for a weekend of drinking is normal (v. 18). Christians themselves watch a huge amount of YouTube and Netflix, flitting their time away with trivialities and entertainment (v. 16).
 - (b) We can be drawn into partnership into the sinful activities of Satan’s world system (v. 7). Although we are by identity children of light (v. 8), the darkness is always inviting us to join in its revelry. It is often difficult not to take part in the unfruitful works of darkness (v. 11). We can be easily drawn into the world’s foolishness (vv. 15, 17). The appeal of the darkness is often strong. Satan is crafty and often deceives us into joining in the world’s way of life. The world throws many obstacles in the way of the believers who seek to live a God-honouring life.
 - (c) How do we walk wisely in this evil, dark, foolish world?

c. Subject: Walking wisely in our evil age through the filling of the Spirit.

- (1) Big idea: To walk wisely as a local church in our dark, evil age, we must understand and carry out the desire of the Lord Jesus through the moment by moment filling of the Holy Spirit, resulting in God-glorifying worship singing, thanksgiving, and mutual submission.

d. Text: Ephesians 5:15-21

- e. **Outline:** (1) What we need to do and why; (2) Power to do it; and (3) Results to be expected.

2. Read Ephesians 5:15-21.

¹ Thomas L. Constable, “Notes on Ephesians,” (111).

3. Pray.

4. Ephesians Overview.

5. What We Need to Do (vv. 15-17).

a. “Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise....” (v. 15).

- (1) Paul has said much about our Christian **walk**, that is, our lifestyle. The theme of Eph 4-6 is how to walk as believers in accordance with our wealth as believers.
 - (a) **Eph 2:10** 10 For we are [God’s] workmanship, created in Messiah Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should **walk** in them.
 - (b) **Eph 4:1** 1 I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord [Jesus], urge you to **walk** in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called....
 - (c) **Eph 4:17** 17 Now this I say and testify in the Lord [Jesus], that you must no longer **walk** as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their minds.
 - (d) **Eph 5:8** 8 for at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. **Walk** as children of light....
- (2) As believers, we have a choice to make whether to live **wisely or foolishly** (v. 15). It is very possible for believers to be fools. In fact, it happens all the time. That’s why Paul often warns about it.
 - (a) **Ro 16:19** 19 For your obedience is known to all, so that I rejoice over you, but I want you to be wise as to what is good and innocent as to what is evil.
 - (b) **Col 4:5** 5 Walk in wisdom toward outsiders, making the best use of the time.
- (3) Wisdom is the ability to live skilfully.

b. “...Making the best use of the time, because the days are evil” (v. 16).

- (1) To walk wisely, we must make the best use of our time.
 - (a) Time is a precious commodity. All of us have the same amount of time, with 60 minutes in every hour, and 24 hours in every day. None of us can stretch time. It is a limited resource we must steward wisely.
 - (b) Jesus used his time wisely.
 - 1) **Jn 9:4** 4 We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day. Night is coming, when no one can work.
 - (c) Paul used his time wisely.
 - 1) **Col 4:5** 5 Walk in wisdom toward outsiders, making the best use of the time.
- (2) Wise time management is a chief mark of a disciple of Jesus. It is doubtful whether one can be a disciple of Jesus if one manages his time poorly.
 - (a) To be a disciple, we must count the COST. We have to be Committed, Obedient, Sacrificial, and **Time-intentional**.
 - (b) The first book new Navigators are asked to read, beside the Bible, is a short book on time management.
- (3) The reason we are to manage our time wisely is because we live in evil times.
 - (a) Satan and his world system makes it easy for believers to squander their time.
 - 1) **Mt 13:22** 22 As for what was sown among thorns, this is the one who hears the word, but the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and it proves unfruitful.

- (b) We live in a world of distractions. Open any major news website. Consider whether what you see is intended to make you a better human being.
 - 1) Sport, video games, social media, Netflix, and YouTube distract us from making and multiplying disciples of Jesus.
- (c) Living as children of the light in our dark world calls for determined effort to steward our time wisely. In our day, it's all about technological discipline.
- c. **“Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord’s desire is” (v. 17).**
 - (1) It is possible for us to be fools, as believers. Otherwise Paul wouldn’t warn us.
 - (2) We must strive to intellectually understand (συνίημι) what Jesus’ desire is.
 - (a) συνίημι: to have an intelligent grasp of someth. that challenges one’s thinking or practice” (BDAG, 972).
 - (b) **Eph 5:10** 10 ...And try to discern (δοκιμάζω) what is pleasing to the Lord [Jesus]....
 - (3) The Lord’s desire refers to what Jesus, our Master, wants for us, in both a general sense and a specific sense.
 - (a) “Nothing is more important in life than to discover and do the will of God.”²
 - (4) How do we know Jesus’ desire for our lives?
 - (a) Jesus’ general will is found in Scripture. In the immediate context, Jesus’ desire is for us to be filled with the Spirit so that we: (1) address one another with accompanying songs; (2) sing to him with all our heart; (3) give thanks always; and (4) submit to one another, especially in marriage, in the family, and in the workplace. These things are Jesus’ general desire for us. Notice his primary desire for us is to be filled with the Spirit.
 - (b) Jesus’ particular will is found after careful thought and prayer and seeking advice from mature and experienced believers. We should reflect our divine design, spiritual gifts, and ministry passions. Whatever else we do, we are to be disciples of Jesus, multiplying more disciples of Jesus.

6. How We Are To Do It.

- a. **“And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery [reckless abandon], but be filled with the Spirit...” (Eph 5:18).**
 - (1) Drunkenness represents any addiction that intoxicates us away from the Trinity and begins to take over our lives.
 - (a) Today, things that intoxicate people are: alcohol, cannabis, meth, pornography, television, YouTube, social media, video games (Minecraft, World of Warcraft), mass media, the entertainment industry (Hollywood, Netflix), sport, overeating, preoccupation with one’s appearance, politics, the stock market, and conspiracy theories. Many of us in the Church are addicted to one or more more of these things.
 - (b) Addictions prevent us from walking wisely and making the best use of our time.
 - (c) What percentage of U. of Otago students get drunk on any given weekend in Dunedin?
 - (2) The alternative is to be filled by/with the Holy Spirit.

² John R. W. Stott, *The Message of Ephesians*, 203.

- (a) The filling by/with the Spirit is the means by which we walk wisely (v. 15), make the best use of our time (v. 16), and carry out the desire of Jesus in our lives (v. 17).
- (b) To be filled by/with the Spirit on a moment by moment basis is the single most important command for believers in the Christian life. It provides the power to carry out all other commands.
 - 1) “The Christian way of life is a supernatural way of life that demands a supernatural means of execution” (R. B. Thieme, Jr.).
 - 2) We desperately need the filling of the Spirit at all times in phase two of the Christian life.
- (c) What does it mean to be filled by/with the Spirit?
 - 1) The Spirit’s indwelling (Jn 7:37-39; 14:17; Ro 5:5; 8:9; 1 Co 2:12; 6:19-20; 1 Jn 3:24; 4:13), sealing (2 Co 1:22; Eph 1:13; 4:30), and baptism (1 Co 12:13; Ga 3:27) all occur at the moment of faith in Jesus. They are never commanded. They are one-time events in the life of the believer. The filling of the Spirit, by contrast, is an ongoing moment by moment command for every believer.
 - 2) The filling by/with the Spirit has several New Testament synonyms.
 - 3) The filling of Spirit is not dependent on emotion.
 - a) Sometimes strong emotion is involved. Other times it is not.
 - b) The filling of the Spirit is indicated by character and conduct, not an ecstatic experience.
 - c) It is wrong to think we are not filled by/with the Spirit simply when we don’t physically or emotionally feel the Spirit.
 - d) What happens to people when they “fall down” and say it was a filling of the Holy Spirit? What if that never happened to me? Did I miss the filling of the Holy Spirit?
 - e) If someone claims to be filled by the Spirit due to glossolalia or other similar activity, ask to speak with their wife, kids, and boss.
 - 4) The filling of the Spirit produces certain character:
 - a) **Ga 5:22-23** 22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness, self-control.
 - b) Essentially, this is the character of Jesus.
 - c) Notice self-control is a fruit of the Spirit. So the filling of the Spirit is not a sort of spiritual drunkenness in which we lose control of ourselves. Under the influence of alcohol we lose self-control, but under the influence of the Holy Spirit we gain self-control.³
 - 5) The filling of the Spirit produces certain conduct, described in what follows (Ga 5:19-6:9).
- (d) It is difficult to know whether Paul means filling by or filling with the Spirit (ἐν πνεύματι).
 - 1) Does Paul intend the Ephesians to allow God (the agent) to fill them with the Holy Spirit (the content)? Or is the Spirit the means by which the

³ John R. W. Stott, *The Message of Ephesians*, 204.

Ephesians are to be filled with some other content? If the latter, then what is the content?⁴

- 2) It may be that the Spirit is the agent of the filling and Jesus is the content of the filling.⁵
- 3) Elsewhere in Ephesians Paul uses the phrase (ἐν πνεύματι).
 - a) **Eph 2:22** 22 In [Jesus] you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit (ἐν πνεύματι).
 - b) **Eph 3:5** 5 ...Which was not made known to the sons of men in other generations as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit (ἐν πνεύματι).
 - c) **Eph 6:18** 18 ...Praying at all times by the Spirit (ἐν πνεύματι)....
- 4) Perhaps Paul means we are to allow ourselves to be filled by the Spirit with:
 - a) All the fulness of the Father and the Son.
 1. **Eph 3:19** 19 ...And to know the love of Messiah that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.
 2. **Eph 4:13** 13 ...Until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fulness of Messiah.
 - b) The word of Messiah.
 1. **Col 3:16** 16 Let the word of Messiah dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God.

7. The Results.

a. "...Addressing one another in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart..." (Eph 5:19).

- (1) The filling of the Spirit results in four specific behaviours in our lives and in our local churches. These behaviours are not exhaustive.
 - (a) These behaviours are more corporate than individual. All the verbs are plural, and two "one anothers" are mentioned (vv. 19, 21).
 - (b) We may ask whether we are filled by/with the Spirit as a local church. One way to measure whether we are is by these four participles (see D. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics*, 639).
- (2) To address one another in songs sounds a little strange. Probably what Paul means is for us to speak to one another *along with* psalms, hymns, and songs, similar to what we do on Sunday mornings.
 - (a) **Col 3:16** 16 Let the word of Messiah dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God.

⁴ William W. Klein, *EBC*, 12:143.

⁵ Harold W. Hoehner, *BJC*, 2:640.

- (3) Probably “psalms” refers to the Old Testament book of Psalms, “hymns” refers to Christian canticles as found in the New Testament, and “spiritual songs” refers to unpremeditated words sung in the Spirit.⁶
 - (a) Ian White is recommended for psalms.
 - (b) A negro spiritual, my mom’s “Has Anybody Ever Told You I Love You Today,” or “Jesus Loves Me” are examples of spiritual songs.
 - (4) Music was a hugely important practice in the early church.
 - (a) Many early Christian hymns are quoted in the New Testament.
 - (b) In ad 112, Pliny was told how the Christians of Bithynia were in the habit of meeting on a fixed day before dawn and singing a hymn to Christ as God.⁷
 - (c) Tertullian wrote of Christian love-feasts in North Africa at which each believer was invited to sing from what he or she knew of Scripture or from his or her own heart.⁸
 - (d) Music was also very important when the Brethren first came to Dunedin in the 1880s. Our church had a full choir for many decades.
 - (5) There are three dimensions involved in Christian music: horizontal (“addressing one another” (v. 18)), vertical (“to the Lord” (v. 20)), and internal (“with your heart” (v.19)).
 - (6) Our hearts and minds must be engaged as we sing.
 - (a) **1 Co 14:15** 15 What am I to do? I will pray with my spirit, but I will pray with my mind also. I will sing praise with my spirit, but I will sing with my mind also.
- b. “...Giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Messiah...” (Eph 5:20).**
- (1) Thanksgiving was hugely important in Paul’s life. Remember he had been unfairly imprisoned for about four years when he wrote *Ephesians*.
 - (a) **Eph 1:16** 16 I do not cease to ***give thanks*** for you, remembering you in my prayers....
 - (b) **Eph 5:4** 4 Let there be no filthiness nor foolish talk nor crude joking, which are out of place, but instead let there be ***thanksgiving***.
 - (c) **Col 3:15-17** 15 And let the peace of Messiah rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body, and ***be thankful***. 16 Let the word of Messiah dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, ***with thankfulness*** in your hearts to God. 17 And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, ***giving thanks*** to God the Father through him.
 - (d) **Php 4:6** 6 Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with ***thanksgiving*** let your requests be made known to God.
 - (2) Corporate worship should include times for thanking God. This type of thankful worship indicates a Spirit-filled church.

⁶ F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Ephesians*, 111.

⁷ *Epistle to Trajan*, x.96.

⁸ *Apology*, 39.

- (3) The Father is the one we thank. The Son is the one through whom we give thanks. The Spirit is the one by whom we give thanks. The entire Trinity is involved in our thanksgiving.
- (4) To be thankful for everything doesn't mean we are to be thankful for evil. But we are to be thankful that, for those who love God, all things work together for ultimate good.
 - (a) **Ro 8:28** 28 And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.
- c. **"...Submitting to one another out of reverence for Messiah" (Eph 5:21).**
 - (1) Mutual submission is subordinating our own interests to the needs of others so the welfare of others assumes more importance than our own (Php 2:1-11).
 - (2) An attitude of mutual submission characterises a local church filled by/with the Spirit.⁹
 - (a) The opposite would be a local church characterised by rebellion, infighting, abuse, gossip, and factions.
 - (b) **Eph 4:1-3** 1 I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord [Jesus], urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, 2 with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, 3 eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.
 - (3) Jesus, our King, taught and modelled mutual submission.
 - (a) Lk 2:51
 - (b) **Mt 20:25-28** 25 But Jesus called [the disciples] to him and said, You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. 26 It shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, 27 and whoever would be first among you must be your slave, 28 even as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.
 - (c) When Jesus washed his disciples' feet, he illustrated the principle of submission (Jn 13:1-5).
 - (4) Mutual submission does not obliterate hierarchical roles.
 - (a) In the next two weeks, we will learn about hierarchy in marriage, the family, and the workplace.
 - (b) The key is to practice mutual submission within the divine institutions that God established in Genesis. Leaders are to lead in a submissive way. Followers are to follow in a submissive way. All are to submit to one another out of reverence for Messiah.

8. Conclusion.

- a. For unbelievers, the issue today is not walking wisely, being filled with the Spirit, singing, or giving thanks. The issue is salvation by grace alone, through faith alone, in Jesus' death and resurrection alone.
- b. For believers, the issue is walking wisely in evil age through the filling of the Spirit.
 - (1) Remember the cat walking on top of the brick wall with broken shards of glass embedded. A cat may be able to do that successfully without the filling of the

⁹ William W. Klein, *EBC*, 12:147.

Spirit. But for us to walk wisely, make the most of our time, and to carry out Jesus' desire for our lives, we've got to have supernatural power—the filling of the Holy Spirit.

- c. Let us not get drunk with wine or any other addiction or distraction, but let us be filled with the Spirit as proven by our singing, giving thanks, and submission to one another!