

Ephesians

5:18-21

Introduction

California has some of the nation's strictest laws regarding drinking and driving. Blood alcohol content limits vary depending upon the driver's age and by whether he or she is a commercial driver. Drivers who exceed these limits are said to be "**DUI**," *Driving Under the Influence*.

Instead of being DUI, the apostle Paul says Christians should be "**WUI**" – *Walking Under the Influence*. You should be so "filled" with God's Holy Spirit that His influence touches upon everything you think, everything you say, and everything you do.

If you want to be **WUI**, you'll need to do two things: You'll need to *thirst* for God, and you'll need to *trust* in God. We'll organize our thoughts around two points: #1 You Remain Under The Influence Of The Holy Spirit By Regulating Your Thirst, #2 You Remain Under The Influence Of The Holy Spirit By Relegating Your Trust.

#1 You Remain Under The Influence Of The Holy Spirit By Regulating Your Thirst (v18)

Paul uses alcohol to illustrate what it's like to be filled with the Holy Spirit:

Ephesians 5:18 And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit,

We describe an intoxicated person as being *under the influence*. Just like you can drink wine and become under the influence of alcohol, you can thirst for God and become under the influence of the Holy Spirit.

"Be not drunk with wine..." How many of the problems in our society could be resolved if people could heed this one command?

Drunkenness is *always* sin. Be careful you don't think that by "drunkenness" the Bible means what we commonly call 'alcoholism.' A lot of Christians drink, and even get drunk, but since they don't consider themselves 'alcoholics,' they don't believe they are sinning. It is *always* sin to be drunk at any time.

The next thing we do is convince ourselves that to be "drunk" means vomiting and loss of consciousness. As long as I am not hugging the toilet, and can still stagger around, am I technically drunk? I suggest it is not the severe and extreme case Paul has in mind. You are drunk the moment you begin to become under the influence of the alcohol.

Ask a Christian if it's OK to drink and 90% of the time you'll get a "Yes" answer, along with the comments that "*Jesus made wine at a wedding*" and "*Paul told Timothy to drink wine for the sake of his stomach problems.*" All three of those statements are true. It is OK to drink... But the wine Jesus made *may not have been alcoholic*, and unlike Timothy, *most Christians don't drink because of a physical ailment!*

It is abundantly clear from both historical and scientific evidence that two kinds of wine were used in Bible times. One was sweet, pleasant, refreshing, **and unfermented**. The other was **fermented**. **Both** of them are called "wine" in the Bible. The context must determine whether or not the wine mentioned in the text is fermented and contains alcohol or unfermented grape juice.

For example: When Paul mentions "wine" in our verse, he's clearly describing the fermented kind that can lead to intoxication.

What about the wine he recommended for Timothy's stomach? Dr. David Hocking writes,

"Paul recommended wine with no evidence as to its condition. Since the nutritional value of wine... decreases with fermentation, it makes sense to believe that Paul was referring to the sweet, refreshing taste of grape juice, or **wine that is unfermented**." (Moral Catastrophe, p. 219).

What about the wine Jesus made from water at the wedding? It is likely that there, too, it was unfermented grape juice. What we don't

realize is that unfermented grape juice was a rare and coveted beverage in the ancient world. Without our modern methods of sterilization and refrigeration it was extremely difficult to preserve grape juice from fermenting for any length of time. It was Charles Welch who first applied pasteurization to grape juice in 1893. By the way, Welch's efforts were, and I quote, "[born] out of a passion to serve God by helping His church to give its communion [as] 'the fruit of the vine' instead of the 'cup of devils.'" (Associated Press).

Unfermented grape juice was rare and coveted. Producing such a beverage, especially late in the wedding feast and at such a great volume, would have been a praiseworthy feat. Furthermore, Bible scholar R.A. Torrey argues that Jesus would not turn water into fermented wine, saying,

"Fermentation is a process of decay. There is not a hint that our Lord produced alcohol, which is a product of decay and death. He produced a living wine uncontaminated by fermentation."
(*Difficulties in the Bible*, p.96-97.)

Where is the miracle in changing water into unfermented grape juice? Instead of water going into the ground, coming up through the trunk and out to the vine to eventually become grapes, Jesus simply turned standing water into sweet, refreshing, coveted and rare unfermented grape juice without the processes of nature.

Two more things:

1. According to Dr. John MacArthur the strongest wine drunk in Bible times was normally mixed with three parts water to one of wine. Its alcohol content would have been **no higher than 2.75%** - well below the 3.2% that today is generally considered necessary to classify a beverage as alcoholic.
2. The phrase "strong drink" occurs in the Bible to refer to highly intoxicating beverages – what we would call hard liquor. The Bible recommends the use of strong drink under only one condition – *when a person is dying*. That doesn't include "dying for a drink."

Alcohol is a dangerous liberty. If you choose to drink, you should do so knowing that getting drunk is always sin; that strong drink is condemned; and that many of the biblical examples people point to in order to justify their drinking alcohol involved unfermented wine.

“Be not drunk with wine, in which is dissipation.” Some of your Bible’s use the word “excess” instead of “dissipation,” giving you the impression Paul is simply condemning excessive drinking. That’s *not* what he means. “Dissipation” describes the destructive and detrimental effect of alcohol. It is a depressant, *not* a stimulant, that causes you to lose control of your mental and physical faculties. The higher faculties are gradually abandoned in favor of the baser instincts. In a sense, when you drink you become *less* human – you become dehumanized.

In contrast, you can be **re**-humanized as you are “filled with the Spirit.” The Holy Spirit can influence you to become more the person God intends you to be.

Paul sees at least three similarities between being intoxicated and being filled with the Holy Spirit:

1. In both cases you make a deliberate choice to become intoxicated.
2. In both cases your behavior changes while you are intoxicated.
3. In both cases you must remain intoxicated in order for the changes in behavior to continue.

“Be filled with the Spirit” is in a Greek verb tense that should be translated, “*be being filled with the Spirit.*” It signifies a continuous and ongoing activity. It is a command to be immediately obeyed. And it is plural, meaning it is for every believer.

We might translate this by saying, “**Let** the Holy Spirit fill you.” But don’t be fooled by the word “let.” It’s not “*Let go and let God.*” The idea is that you are to not **let** anything hinder the Holy Spirit from influencing you.

Remember, being under the influence of the Holy Spirit is like being intoxicated. It is a deliberate choice that leads to a change of behavior. **But you must remain under the influence for the changes to continue.** Sin and selfishness hinder the Holy Spirit from influencing you. It’s entirely up to **you** whether you go on being filled or not. “*Let go*” of sin and selfishness and “*let God*” fill you.

We can get confused by the various terms used to describe our relationship with the Holy Spirit. For example: When you get saved, you are indwelt by the Holy Spirit. It's a one-time, non-repeatable experience. What we are talking about here is not the one-time *indwelling*, but rather a continuous *infilling* of the Holy Spirit. You can be indwelt by the Holy Spirit, but not be infilled with Him. You can be saved, but choose sin and selfishness.

There is the baptism with the Holy Spirit which is also described as a kind of "filling." *That's not what Paul means here either!* The baptism with the Holy Spirit is the power to serve God with supernatural boldness. It comes to you by faith. You ask for it. The filling Paul describes here is something very different. You don't ask for it and wait upon God to receive it; you adopt it and accomplish it in your walk. It's up to you.

How do you accomplish it? One author suggested the illustration of a triangle. The base of the triangle is labeled "The Lordship of Jesus Christ." One side is labeled "The Word of God." The remaining side is labeled "The Spirit of God." As you read or otherwise encounter God's Word, the Holy Spirit brings its truth to your attention – there is a promise to claim, a sin to confess and avoid, or a command to obey. If you have established that Jesus is the foundation of your life, you yield to the influence of the indwelling Holy Spirit. You then find you have all the power you need to walk in accordance with what you've read.

Another way of putting it is to say you must **thirst** for God. Paul has described two ways to quench your thirst. One way is to give in to the appetites of the flesh - of sin and selfishness - and seek to quench your thirst with alcohol... Or maybe your "thirst" is not for alcohol but for something else – a thirst for *power*, or *position*, or *pleasure*. Whatever the case, you're seeking to quench your thirst in the world by satisfying your flesh.

The real way to quench your thirst is to seek the spiritual things that truly satisfy. You can never ultimately be satisfied by anything other than the fullness of God in your heart and life.

Regulate your thirst. Thirst for God and you will remain under the influence of the Holy Spirit.

#2 You Remain Under The Influence Of The Holy Spirit
By Relegating Your Trust
(v19-21)

Before you were a Christian, you trusted in things like your health and wealth; or in your career; or in your education. The list is endless. As a Christian you are called upon to trust in the Lord.

It's not easy to relegate your trust. God puts you in *circumstances* that challenge you to trust Him; and He puts you in *relationships* that challenge you to trust Him.

You must relegate your trust in your circumstances:

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

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

Joy, expressed through song, is certainly a fruit of the Holy Spirit; but I think Paul has something more in mind. Verse nineteen is the result of your deliberate choice in verse twenty. You first choose to “[give] thanks always for all things to God.” No matter your circumstances, you understand that Almighty God is sovereign over them.

Everything He allows is for your ultimate good and His eternal glory. You choose to trust that “all things work together for good.” “Giving thanks always” expresses your deliberate choice to trust God *especially in your challenging circumstances.*

Giving thanks is expressed in “songs.” This doesn't mean you turn your life into a musical! It means that your thankfulness is genuine. It comes from your heart; you “[sing] and make melody in your heart to the Lord.” You then further rejoice when you get together with other believers. “Speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs” describes your public worship. Trust in God leads to genuine thankfulness; thankfulness leads to triumphant joy.

There's a lot of disagreement about the exact meaning of the three terms. "Psalms" probably refers to Scripture being spoken or sung. "Hymns" are probably songs expressing certain doctrinal truths – what we might call creeds. "Spiritual songs" would include any other music that expresses worship.

All three are equal in Paul's estimation. There is great latitude in the Church when it comes to expressing worship. The point he's making here is that you will remain under the influence of the Holy Spirit by relegating your trust to God in all your circumstances.

You must relegate your trust to God in your relationships:

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

Paul is about to discuss some of the most important relationships in your life: Marriage, family, and career. Success in those relationships is measured very differently when you are a Christian. For example: Being a successful businessman has nothing to do with how much money you make. It has to do with things like honesty and integrity and how you care for those in your employ.

Success in relationships is measured by how much you are willing to "submit" to one another for the sake of glorifying God. "Submission" means that you recognize God has a certain way He wants you to relate to a person, a certain role He wants you to fulfill. **It takes trust in God to submit!** When wives are told, "submit to your own husband, as to the Lord," they need to relegate their trust to God. Their husband might not be all that great a guy; he may not be fulfilling his role; he may not even be saved. Still, wives are called upon to "submit," trusting God that His way in relationships is best.

You remain under the influence of the Holy Spirit *only* when you relegate your trust, *only* when your trust is in God.

Conclusion

After hearing this, *you might want to go out and get drunk!*

I'm joking... But here is what I'm getting at. If all this seems "too hard" for you, it's not. It's that you just don't want to do it for one of two reasons:

1. Either you are **thirsting** for something or someone other than God;
2. Or you are **trusting** in something or someone other than God.

If you are a Christian, **nothing** and **no one** other than God can quench your thirst; **nothing** and **no one** other than God is worthy of your trust.