

Filled with the Spirit

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[0 : 00] I would like us to turn now to the epistle to the Ephesians. The epistle to the Ephesians and chapter 5. And I would like us to centre our thoughts this morning around verse 18 of Ephesians chapter 5.

I think well-known words to many of us where Paul says, And be not drunk with wine wherein is excess, but be filled with the Spirit.

Now if we just give a cursory reading to that text, we might think that it's a word that is specifically related to folks who may have some difficulty with drink and who may find strong drink a particular temptation.

And so we might think that it's a verse that is really for a very specific group of people. But that couldn't be further from the truth.

Although the text does use the example of drunkenness and the misuse of drink to help us to understand what Paul is saying, the central command of the text is, Be filled with the Spirit.

[1 : 31] That is, be filled with the Holy Spirit. And particularly when we notice the context in which that command is given, we are left in no doubt that this is a text from God's Word that is relevant to every one of us.

I don't know all of you here this morning. It's lovely to have a good number of visitors with us in the congregation this morning. I may not know some of my own congregation all that well.

But I can be absolutely certain today that this exhortation, just as it is relevant to me this morning, it is relevant to you.

From the youngest to the oldest, whatever your background, whatever your present circumstances, this is a verse for you.

And God is saying you must be filled with his Holy Spirit. I say that the context is important because I want us to notice that this verse marks the beginning of a new section in Paul's letter to the Ephesians.

[3 : 01] We've been going through this letter mostly on a Sunday evening, but I now want us to go through these last parts of the epistle on a Sunday morning. And this verse marks a new beginning in Paul's writing.

And there's going to be quite a lengthy section about our relationships. About our relationships as husbands and wives, as parents and children, as employers and employees.

And indeed, by taking these very central examples, Paul wants us to consider all the relationships that we have with other people in this life.

And surely we look abroad in our world today and we see that relationships are in a mess. our country has never known breakdown in marriages as it has known in these days.

No matter the great events of history that there have been in the last decade in our world. International relationships.

[4 : 24] relationships. And now we are finding increasingly relationships within what have been nations for a long time are in a mess.

and it's into that context that affects every one of us here this morning.

God is saying, be filled with the Holy Spirit. That must be the introduction God is saying to all the important and detailed instructions that I have to give you about your everyday relationships with other people.

even your relationships with your nearest and dearest that you might imagine that you could cope with very well.

God is saying no. Because of the sin that is in the hearts of every one of us. We will need to be very pessimistic about all our relationships unless we have the assurance of being filled with the Holy Spirit of God.

[5 : 57] You see, if God has intervened in our lives and we have been finding that this whole epistle is very much an interventionist epistle.

It describes to us God's great work of salvation for his people. And it reminds us right from the beginning and throughout that God's salvation is a salvation that means that God has to intervene in the natural course of our lives.

salvation is not something that happens to us by ourselves naturally developing or evolving in a certain way in our lives.

This epistle as well as the whole of God's word is absolutely clear that it left to ourselves every human individual no matter the variety that there may be in our experience no matter the level of morality that we may have as we are naturally we are all on the road away from God under God's wrath and on the way to hell and to a lost eternity and unless God intervenes we are hopeless and undone and we need to face up to that and my great worry is that there are so many people in this congregation and you are hearing that message time and time again and still you remain unmoved and unconcerned about your spiritual condition and even those of us who profess the name of Christ in these vital days there is still so much apathy abroad amongst us and there is so little change that would be the evidence of the vital intervening work of the Holy

Spirit of God in our lives and so to all of us there is the need of this most important message this morning be filled with the Holy Spirit of God come to a knowledge of yourselves where you begin to take more seriously and where I begin to take more seriously our natural spiritual weakness and inability so that we at last face up to the fact that even in the most important relationships of our lives things could go terribly wrong with us unless we are filled with God's

[9 : 30] Holy Spirit that's what this text is about in this context context that's how serious it is that's how relevant it is for every one of us today whatever our spiritual condition and so of course we ask ourselves well what is involved in being filled with the Holy Spirit of God as it is exhorted to us in this text what does it mean what is involved well I hope I will have time to explain what is involved there are three things that I would like to deal with but we may just deal with two of them the first thing that is involved if you are to be filled and if I am to be filled with God's Holy Spirit the first thing to be involved is that we are born of the Spirit being born of the

Spirit is the first thing that is absolutely necessary if we are to be filled with the Spirit you see we can't be filled with the Spirit if we don't have the Spirit and the way that the Bible most specifically and indeed the way that Jesus Christ himself most specifically explains the coming of the Holy Spirit into the lives of sinners to bless them with God's salvation the way that the Bible explains that is to talk about being born of the Spirit or being born again and I think you'll all remember that this was the way that Jesus spoke to Nicodemus when he came to him by night we cannot go into all of that in detail but just let's remember first of all what

I've already said that that marks the beginning of a saving relationship between a sinner and God and his Holy Spirit it's when the Holy Spirit comes and brings us to a new spiritual birth so that God can look down upon us and say that we are born again that we have been born of God's Holy Spirit a spiritual birth that has similarities to our physical birth just as our physical birth was the mark of the beginning of our life in this world but sadly a beginning that was marred by sin the beginning of a life for every one of us that was a life of sinfulness a life of fallenness a life of being under

God's wrath because we were the children of Adam our disobedient first parent and so for every one of us here this morning our first birth our physical birth marked the beginning didn't matter if we were born in a Christian home or not it didn't matter if from our earliest days we were brought to church and to Sunday school or not for everyone their natural birth speaks of being born in sin and shaped in iniquity that's the way that the Bible describes it naturally but Jesus Christ has come and has explained to us that he is able to bring a new birth a new spiritual start into people's life he is able to send his spirit with the power of

God to change us and to transform us so that as Paul says in in his epistles in the epistle to the Corinthians the second epistle isn't that we become new creatures in Christ that's the beginning of the work of the Holy Spirit in the lives of God's people and without that work we can never be filled with the Holy Spirit of God and the most important idea that is communicated to us by the new birth by being born of the Holy Spirit the most important idea that is communicated to us there by God is this that we need to recognize how helpless and how hopeless we are so that we can never know the blessing of God coursing through our lives except he does his holy work of salvation in us and he does it sovereignly and entirely by his own power and so we have to ask ourselves this morning do we know that sort of spiritual work in our lives

[15 : 18] I do not ask you if you've had a dramatic spiritual experience in your life I feel I always have to make that qualification to a free church audience because there is such an ongoing belief that to be born again it must be something that you feel and experience dramatically although indeed the new birth is something that happens suddenly and once for all it may happen very quietly and secretly to begin with in your heart it may only be gradually that the effects of that new birth become evident and so the question is not have you had this dramatic experience but have you come and is there now the evidence in your life that you have come to that point where you see and you are convinced that you are utterly dependent on the power of the spirit of almighty

God for all spiritual good in your life and the most important evidence of that dependence is this that you have turned to Jesus Christ the mediator of God's spirit the one through whom God's spirit comes and you have looked to him as the one who has died for sin and risen with salvation power and your whole hope and your whole confidence is in him and not at all in yourself that's the evidence of the new birth that's what Jesus said to Nicodemus when he said how can these things be well Nicodemus you'll know if these things have been in your life when you come to the same sort of spiritual experience that your forefathers in the wilderness in Israel came to when they saw that they were dying because of the poisonous bite of some serpents and they saw the depths of their helplessness and hopelessness and they also saw that God had prepared a saviour in a brass serpent and he said to them look to the serpent and you'll be saved when that has happened in your experience and you have seen

Jesus Christ as God's only saviour and in all helplessness and hopelessness you have began to cling to him for your life then you will know that you are born again that you are born of the spirit of God that's the first thing that's involved in being filled with the Holy Spirit spirit but if we're going to try and do justice to this text of God's word we cannot stop there what's involved in being filled with the spirit being born of the spirit is involved but the second thing that is involved is being influenced by the spirit or being under the influence of the spirit in something of the same way as a drunk man is under the influence of alcohol of course we have to be careful to interpret that and see what we mean and we must try and do that but this you see is the central idea of the text you must not be under the influence of alcohol to excess so that in any way it takes over in your experience even for an hour or two don't be drunk with wine we're in a success but see a contrast here and you'll perhaps be able to understand what it means to be under the influence of the Holy

Spirit don't be under the influence of strong drink because that leads to excess but be under the influence be filled with the Holy Spirit of God now to try and understand what is behind these words we must go as so many of the modern day commentators now go we must go to Dr.

Martin Lloyd Jones who of course had the help of a medical background as well as his homespan theological background and we must see how helpfully he deals with a verse like this and from his medical background he helps us lay people to understand that alcohol alcohol is essentially a depressant and when we take too much alcohol it depresses some of the most important faculties in our lives in the makeup with which God has made us and that's why drink changes the personality it's by depressing some of the most important God given faculties that are at the very heart of our personality I think if you're like me as a lay person you might much more think that alcohol was a stimulant because of course it often makes people a very rowdy and sometimes very confident to speak about things that they would never speak about in their normal personality but the medical people tells us that it has that effect because it's first of all a depressant and Martin

[21 : 40] Lloyd-Jones goes on to say that there's a contrast here don't be drunk with wine wherein is excess there's no answer in depressing some of the God given faculties that God has given to us and thinking that we can escape from the reality of life no we need to be filled with the stimulant of the Holy Spirit the Holy Spirit doesn't depress any of our God given faculties the Holy Spirit depresses and destroys the power of sin yes but he refines and brings into their fuller capabilities the good blessings that God has placed within us and that have been spoiled and marred by that sin and we are able to be in control under the Spirit and we are able to live in the way that God wants us to live in the power of the Holy Spirit of God you see with strong drink there is excess by depressing some of the faculties we can go to excess on other baser faculties and the whole life is spoiled and put off balance just as the very physical demeanour of the drunk person can be put off balance but when we're filled with the Holy Spirit it's entirely different and we're able to live as we ought to live we're able more and more to live as God meant us to live and that's why we all need to be filled with the

Holy Spirit of God and then what the text is saying when it explains to us something of what it means to be filled to be under the influence of the Spirit it's making very clear that we need to be under the influence of the Spirit more and more and more being filled with the Spirit can often work as a progress in the Christian life as more and more we come under the influence of the power and the authority of the Holy Spirit of God again the commentators help us especially those who know the language well the original language and help us to notice the verb and the tense of the verb that Paul uses here first of all it's a plural verb it's not just a verb to an isolated individual it's for all who will hear this word yes especially saints to whom the letter was first written but for all who will hear it's an open a plural verb that is saying to anyone who will hear be filled with the Spirit that's the answer to life's problems and that's the answer to the great problem that's at the root of all your problems the problem of your sin it's to come under and to come completely under the power and the influence of the good and the gracious and the loving and the all wise

Spirit of our God the Spirit of our Lord Jesus Christ who always does things in line with the way Christ does it it's for all it's a plural verb and then it's a present verb the verb is really saying go on being filled with the Holy Spirit of God there will never be a time in the experience of the Christian in this life where this verse will not be irrelevant there will not be a time in our experience no matter how mature we become as Christians in our Christian progress when as we face in any new day in our lives the relationships that we have to enter into with all sorts of people this word will be relevant to us and God will say to us again and again for the rest of our lives go on being filled with my

Holy Spirit get more of my Spirit see that you are under his influence more than ever before that's the way to glory that's the way to heaven a loving heavenly father is saying to sinners I wouldn't for a moment leave you to yourselves I wouldn't for one second ask you I wouldn't say that on the journey of any individual towards heaven just for a second just for a millimeter of a second there's going to be a break in my work and for that millimeter of a second you're going to have to live in your own strength you're going to have to obey me you're going to have to trust in me in your own strength oh God's love for sinners goes infinitely beyond that and it's with that love that he says be filled with my

[27 : 57] Holy Spirit no matter how long you have been on the Christian way I understand your weaknesses and your difficulties and your frailties and your fleshliness be filled with my Holy Spirit and then the other thing about the eight verb is the third thing it's a plural it's a present and it's a passive form of the verse that would be translated something like let yourself be filled with the Holy Spirit and so even in the form of the verse it's giving us a little bit of an impression of the relationship that there is between God's people and the Holy Spirit when they are being filled with the Spirit they are being submissive no we will find they are not being entirely passive but the passive form helps us to understand about submissive let yourself be filled the authority the enabling is all of the Spirit you must take up that position of humility of recognizing your emptiness and your need and your dependence and you must learn that way of humility and dependence more and more that you may be filled you see being filled is the very opposite of what Paul spoke about earlier in chapter 4 and at verse 30 when he said do not grieve the Holy Spirit and he places that exhortation in chapter 4 in the midst of a section where he is warning Christian believers against all sorts of sins inner sins in their lives and it is in that context that he says don't grieve the Holy Spirit you see when you get out of the submissive mode to Christ in your Christian experience and when you begin to exert your own sinful authority and when you don't resist the evil one and you give in to the evil one's way you are grieving the Holy Spirit when you or I when we decide to exert ourselves a little bit to take things into our own hands and to do something that is not pleasing to God that is not part of his law for us we grieve we hurt God's Holy Spirit who only loves holiness rather be filled submit to him in everything because he's good and perfect anything he will ask of you anything he will demand of you will be good and will be for your good and will do you good be filled with the

Holy Spirit of God how are we filled with the Holy Spirit of God well I think here the example of contrast that Paul has placed in the verse can also be an example of comparison don't be drunk with wine don't be filled with strong drink we're in a success so that you're dulled and depressed in your inner most important faculties but be filled with the Spirit there's a contrast but there's also a similarity how does a person become drunk a person becomes drunk by drinking more and more and the more a person becomes drunk or becomes used to the drink that makes him or her drunk the more they have to drink in order to become drunk they need to be filled with a new fullness in order to be under the influence of the drink and Christ himself tells us that it's by drinking that we are filled with the

Holy Spirit of God not by drinking strong drink of course not by drinking any sort of physical drink you'll remember many of you what Jesus says and it's recorded for us in John chapter 7 when he spoke on that last day of the feast Jesus cried if any man thirst let him come unto me and drink this speak he of the spirit which they who believe on him should receive drink of me come to me and come to me more and more and more and rely on me and depend on me and get to know me as the giver of the Holy Spirit the saviour of sinners and walk with me and learn of me and trust in me and become increasingly confident in me and listen to what I say and rest in my promises and obey my commands and drink and drink and drink that's what we were doing last week at the

Lord's table if we received blessing at the Lord's table last Sunday morning it wasn't because we merely drank a little wine and ate a little bread it was because we were helped to trust in Christ anew and to receive with new faith himself and his love and his power and his faithfulness love and his love I think many of us were blessed last weekend particularly blessed encouraged strengthened perhaps it is that we took special time because of the special services that there are we took special time to concentrate on our need oh I know that the

[35 : 16] Bible doesn't demand that there need to be preparatory services for communion but oh how good it is to have special times to concentrate on receiving more and more of God's word and maybe that was the reason that God enabled us to see how much we need it and to approach him with particular diligence and hopefulness but we don't just need that twice a year when we have special communion times we need it every day of every week we need with more longing with more appetite with more desire with more awareness of our sin with more longing for the glory of Christ we need to go to our Bibles we need to go to prayer we need to seek out the company of God's people we need to come back to church in the evening if we're able because we need Christ and we need to feed on him and we need to drink of him that we might be filled with the

Holy Spirit of our goal oh consider your position today and let me consider mine how are we going to manage in the trials and the challenges of this life how are we going to manage in the blessings of this life we may even spoil these by the sin that lingers with us God has a great prospect of blessing for those who will trust in him for those who will be filled with his Holy Spirit oh is there someone here this morning who hasn't really perhaps hasn't really ever or hasn't for a long time considered that you personally need the work of God's

Holy Spirit you've been doing far too much in your own strength and I have to ask is that the way with me too God has shown us a better way this morning a better way for every one of us a wonderful way a blessed way a heavenly way and he says be filled with my Holy Spirit Amen