

PM Ephesians 5:15-21

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[0 : 00] Ephesians 5, beginning to read at verse 15. Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise, but as wise, making the best use of the time, because the days are evil.

Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit, addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing a meek melody to the Lord with your heart, giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ. As a boy growing up, I was sent to BB all through my days.

I was sent right through from the anchor boys, from the little boys, in the red jumper to the junior section with the blue jumper, and then eventually into the company section, before I became a leader of the BB in my local church.

One of the leaders that we had loved riddles and puzzles. And he would often present them to us to see if we could figure them out or not. He would often present them to us to see if we understood them or not.

[1 : 18] You know, he would say, what is brown has a head and a tail but no legs. You can see the cogs whirring. It's a penny for those who are that way inclined.

David's father had three sons, Snap, Crackle, and Who. Now those of you of a certain vintage probably want to say Snap, Crackle, and Pop, because after all, that's the television answer, isn't it? But of course the answer is David. David's father had three sons. But one of his favourite riddles that he told us time and time again, although, you know, after the first time I suppose it really lost its luster and its appeal, was to tell us to imagine a bag, a big bag.

And in one of the bags you're going to put a ton of lead. And then in another bag you're going to put a ton of feathers. And he'd say to us, well, which is heavier? And instinctively, of course, your mind, well, the ton of lead's bound to be heavier than a ton of feathers.

But of course the trick is, the riddle is, that they both weigh the same. They both weigh a ton. Just that the bag with a ton of feathers in it will be considerably fuller than the bag with a ton of lead in it.

[2 : 30] And as we come to Ephesians 5 tonight, as we think about these verses 15 through 21, they're all about being full, aren't they? There's kind of two options that Paul presents to us, two ways of living that Paul presents to us.

He instructs this church in Ephesus not to be filled with wine, but rather to be filled with the Spirit. These are the two kind of ways of living that Paul lays out, the two divergent paths that people can take.

You're either filled with wine, or you're filled with the Spirit. And we want to think about those two things together, they use those two headings to think about this passage this morning, this evening, sorry.

We want to see the two options for living, that they're either filled with wine, or we are filled with the Spirit. So firstly then, we think about this idea of being filled with wine, and we see that in verses 15 through 18a, verses 15 through 18a, just halfway through verse 18 there.

We finished last week by thinking about Paul's instruction to the church in Ephesus, that they should be known as children of light, that wherever they go, they're to take the light of God, the gospel with them, that wherever they go, they're to take the good news of Jesus Christ with them.

[3 : 50] The light shines, we remember, in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. The gospel light shines in the darkness, and the darkness can't overcome it. And as we come to verse 15 then, we see the outworking of that.

We see the outworking of Paul's instruction to take the gospel light with the Ephesian believers wherever they go. We see Paul offering practical day-to-day tips on how his theology, on how his teaching works out in everyday life.

We see Paul says, verse 15, to the church in Ephesus, to those early believers, verse 15, look carefully then, how you walk. The Christian life wasn't to be, for them, an absent-minded stroll through Dock Park.

It wasn't to be a walk where you just absent-mindedly kept meandering round. Rather, the Ephesian Christians are told, pay attention, look carefully to how you walk.

They were to take heed of the terrain that was around them. They were to be careful with where they were planting their next step. They were to be careful with their walk.

[5 : 05] Now what would that mean for them? Don't miss the connection with what's gone before. Verse 11, what are they told? They're told to expose the deeds of darkness to the light of the gospel.

They're told to take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather to expose them. But, verse 15, this is going to require wisdom.

Don't do it, Paul says, verse 11. Don't become partakers with them, verse 11. Rather, shine the gospel light. But, remember, verse 15, to be careful.

Be careful how you walk. Less than trying to expose the works of darkness, less than trying to show the works of darkness, you end up falling yourself.

You too end up embroiled in the darkness. They are to be wise with how they walk, not unwise. They are to be careful with where they plant their steps.

[6 : 07] They are to not put themselves in unnecessary danger, but to be careful about what they're doing. They're to expose the darkness, yes, but to make sure they don't come into the darkness.

And it's always that line that we're treading, isn't it? It's always that fine line that we have to walk, that line between being in the world, but not of the world, of having those connections, in the world, but not being of the world.

That line that we want to share the gospel with our friends, we want to expose the darkness in the world. We want our friends to hear about Jesus Christ, yes.

But we need to be careful about how we do that. I remember when we had our chaplaincy training, Mark Fleming was the convener of sports chaplaincy in Scotland.

And he was talking to us about team nights out, about those team bonding sessions that you were invited on. He said that he would go and he'd stay a while. He'd go and show his face, but after maybe two or three pints for the players, that was it.

[7 : 25] He would leave because he knew it wasn't going to go anywhere after that. He would leave because he knew that there was nothing to be gained from it. In order for our friends to hear the gospel, we're going to need to build some bridges.

In order for people in our community to hear the good news of Jesus Christ, we're going to need to build some bridges. We're going to have to make some connections. We're going to have to meet them where they're at.

But in doing that, we must be careful. We must be wise in what we do. We need to be careful in seeking to bring them to Jesus Christ, that in coming to the places where they are, that we don't fall ourselves.

We need to be careful with how we walk. The Ephesian Christians, verse 16, Paul then instructs them, verse 16, to make the best use of time. Why? Because the days are evil.

They're to be wise. What does that look like? They're to be careful how they walk, verse 15. But what does that look like? Well, verse 16, it looks like making the best use of the time.

[8 : 35] Knowing the days that they lived in, knowing that the time they lived in was evil, they're to make the best use of the time. The Ephesians aren't to waste their time doing things of little significance.

The Ephesians aren't to waste their time playing round after round of golf with their Christian four ball. They weren't to spend their time doing things that could be left.

Rather, they're called to redeem the time, to make the best use of the time. Because the days are evil. I've been doing a fair bit of travelling up and down to Inverness recently with the revitalisation track.

It meets there every other month. Now, I discovered earlier on that there were kind of two ways to get there. You could drive, and it was a much shorter trip. It was a long drive, it was, of course. But that meant you were in control. You could go where you wanted. You could go how fast you wanted. You could do basically whatever you wanted. But it's a bit of a wasted trip, because it's five hours there and five hours back, so you've wasted ten hours, where you can't really do anything other than drive.

[9 : 44] So I found taking the trains the best option. It might take slightly longer. It might take six, seven hours from Dumfries. But then you can make use of the time. You can read. You can study.

You can do whatever it is that you want to do. You can write. Whatever. It enables me to make better use of the time. It takes slightly longer, but the time is redeemed.

It takes slightly longer, but it enables me to use the time better. And that's what Paul calls the Ephesian church to here, to make the best use of their time. The two clauses hang together, don't they?

Two ideas hang together, don't they? Because the days are evil, then what's the best use of time? Because the days are bad, what's the best use of their time?

Well, it's about telling people about Jesus Christ. Because the days are evil, the only antidote, because the days are evil, the only hope in the face of the darkness, the only hope in the darkness, is the light of the gospel.

[10 : 47] The only hope that they have to share is the good news of Jesus Christ. That's how they make the best use of the time. Because of that, verse 17.

Because of that, therefore, verse 17, do not be foolish. Because the days are evil, because the darkness abounds, because the light of the gospel can save people, make the best use of your time.

Don't be foolish. But understand what the will of the Lord is. Understand what the Lord wants you to do. Understand how the Lord wants you to live.

Now what does the Lord want them to do? Paul tells them, verse 17, understand what the will of the Lord is. So what is the will of the Lord? We're going to get there in a moment. It's what we read at the end of verse 18.

The will of the Lord is that they be filled with the Spirit. Paul himself gives them the opposite, if you like. He says to them, understand what the will of the Lord is.

[11 : 57] This is what it is in verse 18. Verse 18, the will of the Lord isn't getting drunk with wine. For that is debauchery. As we said before in our study of Ephesians, Ephesus was known as a cult center.

Ephesus was known for the worship of the goddess Diana. It was a place where ritual prostitution was roundly practiced. And part of what fed that was wine.

Part of what fed that was the inhibitions being lifted by drunkenness. People were uninhibited by the wine and strong drink.

And Paul says to the church in Ephesus then, you don't get drunk with wine. That's what people who worship Diana do.

That's what people who go to the temple prostitutes do. Rather, you be filled with the Spirit. Don't get drunk with wine because that doesn't lead anywhere good.

[12 : 59] That doesn't lead anywhere positive. That doesn't lead us in paths of righteousness. Instead, all it leads to is debauchery. But notice again, friends, that the command here isn't don't drink wine.

But the command is rather do not get drunk on wine. Christians are perfectly free to drink if they so choose. But the biblical injunction is that we are not to be drunk.

we're not free to lose our senses. We're not free to engage in the debauchery. We're not free to lose our inhibitions. But we are free to drink if we so choose.

So Paul says to them, don't be drunk with wine. Don't live a foolish life for us. The question for us this evening is are we living foolish lives?

Are we taking up our days and hours and weeks and months with things that are relatively inconsequential? Are we spending hours getting involved in social media disputes that don't really go anywhere or help anyone?

[14 : 12] Are we wasting hours watching sports or soaps or quizzes on TV? Are we making the most of the opportunities that the Lord gives us? Are we making most of the friendships that the

Lord has placed along our paths?

Are we making the best use of the time that we have? That's what Paul inspired by the Holy Spirit called the church in Ephesus to do and that's what he's calling us to do today.

Why? Because the days are evil. Why? Because the darkness abounds and because the only hope in the face of darkness is the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ.

So that's the first path if you like the church in Ephesus could go down. That's the first path that people can go down being filled with wine. But secondly this evening we want to think about people who are filled with the Spirit.

Filled with the Spirit. That's the second path that people can go down and we see that in verses 18b through 21. So what's the alternative?

[15:20] Don't be filled with wine verse 18. Don't be filled with wine that leads to debauchery but rather be filled with the Spirit. Don't seek this artificial intoxication rather be filled with the joy of the Holy Spirit.

But this causes some problems for us doesn't it? It causes some difficulties for us because essentially here Paul is commanding us to do something and commanding the church in Ephesus to do something that they cannot do themselves.

He tells them to be filled with the Spirit. Now in one sense the believers in the church in Ephesus could easily ensure that they're not filled with wine.

That's not too difficult is it? It just means staying away from the wine mark or wherever. But they could not command the Holy Spirit to fill their lives. They could not ensure that the Spirit filled them so how are we going to understand?

How are we going to unpack what Paul says here in verse 18b? The easiest way the plainest way I think is to take the command as the opposite to be filled with don't be filled with wine.

[16:37] Don't be this don't be filled with wine rather be this. Now how does that help us? Well here then we can understand being filled with the Spirit as a shorthand way of saying if you like live a life worthy of the calling you've received.

A shorthand way of Paul saying don't do this which is what the temple does don't do this which is what the worshippers of Diana do rather do this.

Live a life worthy of the calling you've received. Live a life that doesn't quench the Spirit will ensure that we're filled with the Spirit. Living a life that isn't in open sin living a life that isn't in open rebellion living a life that is filled with the fruit of the Spirit.

Live a life that's honouring to God. And notice how these two tracks these two paths if you like have consequences.

Consequences verse 18 don't get drunk with wine what happens if you get drunk with wine well that leads to debauchery. And in the same way then being filled with the Spirit leads somewhere.

[17:58] Being filled with the Spirit has this overflow. the life that is filled with the Spirit will lead verse 19 to singing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs.

That's the overflow that's the outpouring of a life lived filled with the Spirit. Talking about the things of God amongst the Ephesians would be normal.

Encouraging each other with the thoughts from God's word would be normal for the church in Ephesus. Talking about what God has done and is doing in and through them would be normal for the believers in Ephesus.

But notice what Paul says verse 19. Be filled with the Spirit verse 18 verse 19 addressing who?

Again if we were writing this we would I think in reformed circles certainly we would say addressing God with psalms hymns and spiritual songs.

addressing the Father addressing the Trinity with psalms hymns and spiritual songs. But notice that's not what Paul says.

[19:10] Paul says verse 19 addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs. they aren't addressed to God as such.

When we come to praise God we are rightly often so focused on praising God often so focused on the Godward direction of praise that we forget that an essential part of worship is speaking to one another.

It's reminding one another of the great truths of God. Now don't mishear me the scene you don't misunderstand what I'm saying to you. We do not worship one another but Paul calls us here to address one another.

We're not praising one another we're not singing one another's praise but rather as we sing psalms hymns and spiritual songs we're reminding ourselves of the truths of God.

We're reminding ourselves of who God is. We're reminding ourselves of who we are. We're reminding ourselves of the grace of God in salvation. We're not praising one another but we're encouraging one another to follow God more closely.

[20 : 32] Setting things to music is a great way to remember things. It's an easy way to teach kids to remember things. I remember learning French at school and we had this little song about our morning routine Je me leve Je me lave Je me brasse les dents It's useless essentially but I can still remember it some 16 years later as we sing these songs together we're reminding ourselves of the great truths about God as we encourage each other with psalms hymns and spiritual songs we're calling to mind these truths about God when we need them.

Psalms 46 God is our refuge and our strength. Psalm 103 as far as the east is from the west so far God has removed our sins from us.

Psalms 100 all people that on earth do dwell sing to the Lord with cheerful voice him sir with mirth his praise foretell come ye before him and rejoice.

This of course leads us on to the question of what we should sing doesn't it? Some friends who argue for exclusive psalmity read this section and say well psalms hymns and spiritual songs was the common titles of the sections of the Psalter and the Septuagint okay fair enough.

I think if Paul had meant to write that we should sing psalms to one another surely he would have stopped there. He doesn't though he commands us to sing psalms hymns and spiritual song.

[22 : 28] We can think of some of the hymnic fragments that exist within the scripture themselves outside of the Psalms. We think of Mary's Magnificat. We think of the songs of Revelation.

We think of some of the songs that we see in Isaiah and some of the other prophets. The evidence of church history points us to the people of God gathering together to sing hymns.

Pliny writing to Trajan says that the Christians meet early to sing antiphonally a hymn to Christ as God. That's why friends I'm committed to singing psalms hymns and spiritual songs as I understand it to include material that is outside the book of Psalms.

That's why as a congregation we've departed from the traditional practice of the Free Church of Scotland in this regard. So we're called then to address one another in psalms, hymns and spiritual songs.

But that isn't where it ends is it? Addressing one another verse 19 in psalms, hymns and spiritual songs singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart.

[23 : 49] Again friends as I read this and my understanding I appreciate that others amongst you will have a different understanding. I feel that this gives us license to have music in our worship services.

The psalms themselves are full of musical instruments and musical instruction. We're commanded here to sing and make melody. I think the plainest reading of that is that making melody, instruments such as pianos, instruments that make melody rather than keep a beat, are perfectly permissible in the worship of God.

But in a sense though, in a sense though these things are peripheral. In a sense though these things are, I don't want to say insignificant, but in a sense they're not the key thing, are they, of verse 19?

Because what's the key thing that we address one another in psalms, hymns and spiritual songs that we're singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart. The Lord is the one whom our praise is directed to.

The Lord is the one whom we sing these songs to. We encourage one another, yes, we try and build one another up, yes, but ultimately we sing songs to the Lord alone, we praise him alone.

[25 : 12] Why? Because, verse 20, he is the one who is worthy of our thanks, he is the one who is worthy of our praise, he is the one who sent his son so that we might come to know him.

Jesus Christ is the one through whom we come to know God tonight. The question for us as we leave this section really, is are we praising God tonight aright?

By that I mean, not what songs are we singing or not singing. singing? I mean, are we singing giving thanks to God alone? If we're singing psalms, are we singing psalms to God alone?

Or are we singing psalms out of some theological position? Are we singing psalms because we think that it somehow makes us better Christians than others?

are we singing giving thanks to God alone? Are we singing words of encouragement, words of reminder, words of correction to one another as we sing?

[26 : 21] You see, it's easy to go through the motions, it's easy to stand here with our psalter, it's easy to stand here with our hymn book and empty mouth the words, empty parrot the words we see on the page.

But actually when we sing, it engages our whole being. It engages our heart as we remember what Christ has done for us. It engages our minds as we consciously think, well what is this teaching me about God?

What is this teaching me about Christ? What ways do I need to conform? What have I never thought of before about God or about Christ? Are we singing, giving thanks for all that God has done for us?

It's only when we do that that we're worshipping God aright. It's only when we do that that we're worshipping God in spirit and in truth. We set out tonight by saying that there are two things you can be full of.

You can be full with wine or filled with the spirit. You can be filled with wine that leads to debauchery or filled with the spirit that leads to praise. Which is it for you tonight?

[27 : 38] Are you living your own life, your own way with no thought for God? Are you indulging whatever it is that your flesh wants to do? Or are you living a life that praises and honours and glorifies God?

are you singing together with other believers, making melody in your heart to the Lord, who has saved you and redeemed you, filled with wine or filled with the spirit, which is it to be tonight?
Amen.