

Relationship with the Trinity

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[0 : 00] Acts of Romans, Corinthians, Galatians, and then Ephesians. I don't normally give any of my sermons titles too often, but if I was to give this sermon a title, it would be Relationship with the Trinity. I know that we're going to focus on verse 18 and what it is to be filled with the Spirit of God, but the focus of the title is to point out that the Trinity here is involved. So we're going to pick it up in verse 15 of chapter 5 and read through to the end of verse 21. Now hear God's word.

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 and making melody to the Lord with all your heart, giving thanks always for everything to God the Father. In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ.

Well may God bless his word. You would have noticed there in the short reading that the Trinity is mentioned. God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. And the reason for pointing that out is fairly simple to begin with, is that while we're going to focus on the life of the Spirit in the life of the believer this evening, I do want to point out to you that your relationship as a Christian is with the Trinity. You need to think about that perhaps a little bit more often than what you do.

In other words, if someone was to explain what a relationship with God is like, how many of us would explain it in terms of a relationship with the Trinity?

Well probably not that often because we don't often think in terms of the Trinity. We tend to think either relationship with the Son or we pray to the Father or you know the Spirit leads us. But sometimes we can speak in a way where we speak of God as being three separate people.

[2 : 51] But actually relationship with God is relationship with the Trinity. That God is triune. One God in three persons.

A little difficult to understand? A little difficult. And at some point you simply have to bow down and worship because you get to a point where you can't explain God. God in his very sense is beyond our understanding.

If he wasn't, he wouldn't be God. Normally when people explain a relationship with God, they go how the relationship began.

Well, Jesus Christ, the Son of God, died on the cross and took away my sins and saw him right with God. Okay, that's good. But that's how your relationship with God began. That's how it started. That doesn't explain your relationship. That explains how you got together. But it doesn't necessarily explain what relationship with God is like. And that's also important to distinguish. It is true that relationship with God involves the forgiveness of sins or else no relationship can take place.

[4 : 00] And Jesus is the one who forgives you of your sins, enabling that relationship to happen. But that's how the relationship begins. That doesn't really explain the relationship in its full.

So if we are to explain what a relationship with God is like, we have to begin and end with the Trinity. And I guess that most of your relating with the triune God of Scripture goes something like this.

That you thank God for Jesus in prayer. That you thank God for Jesus in prayer. You recognize what Jesus Christ has done for you and you go to God in prayer.

You recognize that your life exists because Christ exists. That as Christ died, you died to your old life. And as Christ lived as he rose from the grave, you have new life because he has life beyond death.

And because your life is hid in him, in him, you too have life. So you pray to the Father. You thank him for the Son. So your relationship with the Father is one of prayer. God's relationship with you is one of control and power and authority and sovereignty.

[5 : 13] Love. Love. Love is at the very heart of it. But the relating part is communion, prayer. With the Son, it's more to do with what the Son has done for you.

The vicarious work. In other words, he's done something for you you couldn't do. And Jesus Christ, this very day, stands before God, reminding God. Not that God needs reminding, but it's a picture of what he's done for you.

So every time you sin, Jesus is, imagine this, before God, reminding him that he died for you. Every time you sin, Jesus Christ says to the Father, yeah, my death covers that as well.

And my death covers that as well. Jesus intercedes for us before the Father all the time. But then we get to the Spirit. And we're told to live life according to the Spirit.

And if I told you the imperative this evening, which is verse 18, the command, which is what an imperative is, be filled with the Spirit, go home and be filled with the Spirit, would you know what to do?

[6 : 23] If I told you to go home and pray, you've got a rough idea. It probably involves putting my hand together, but it doesn't need to.

It might involve closing my eyes, but it doesn't need to involve that either. But what it does involve is me coming before God and communing, talking with him or to him.

I know how to pray. But now I'm asking you, or I'm not asking you actually, Scripture is asking you, God is to be filled with the Spirit.

Something needs to be addressed here, and that is, well, how do I do it? How do I be filled with the Spirit? Do I just pray for it?

Well, you can, there's certainly a good start. But something else has to take place. So I'm going to lay the background, and then we're going to get to the point of explaining how you are to be filled with the Spirit.

[7 : 27] So here's the background. Back in Acts chapter 6, the apostles wanted leaders to be chosen to take care of the church, the physical concerns of the church as well as some of the spiritual needs.

They were known as deacons, or we call them deacons. And the charge was this, go ahead and find me men, seven men full of the Holy Spirit. Question number one, what does that look like? Question number two, or rather statement, it has to look like something because you're being asked to go out and find men full of the Holy Spirit. So it has to appear as something.

It must be noticeable for men to notice men filled with the Holy Spirit. Now here's the point. Is it necessary that these men are filled with the Holy Spirit just so that they can serve in the church? In one sense, yes. And not just men, but women also. And there are women deacons, as we hear in Romans. And that.

[8 : 33] The issue is rather, why filled with the Spirit? You know, often if someone's a banker, they'd make a good treasurer.

But why? Well, because they've got the necessary skills. Well, skills are definitely needed. But not according to the leadership of Acts 6. All of that is looked beyond to something far more important. And that is whether or not a person is filled with the Spirit. And the reason is this. Not because the roles that they are to undertake can only be undertaken by the Spirit.

But rather, if they are to be done in God's ways, they must be undertaken by the Spirit. What does that mean? Well, it means that you can do something in your own strength.

And God can do it in his. You doing it in your own ability will lead to its own results. But God doing it in the Spirit through you will lead to the type of blessing that is meant to lead to.

[9 : 37] And that's crucially important. And it's important because the church, full of people or believers that aren't necessarily full of the Spirit, can do all the things that a church needs to be done.

But very little blessing will come out of it. And when I look at the church, I think that's what I see. Not this church particularly or generally.

Rather, the church globally. A lot of people, and even money, I think, can get in the way of the Spirit's work. Or dare I say, how does someone have enough wisdom and discernment to be able to tell the difference of something that is being done with money and something that is actually being

done in the power of the Spirit?

Can you notice the difference? I certainly hope so. The issue here is that the leaders are to be filled with the Spirit because God is to work in his church.

Not people. God works through his people. And he works through his people by his people being filled with the Spirit. He doesn't send his people out to work as independent messengers.

[10:55] Rather, he sends people out to work very similar to a hosepipe. That God works through them so that what he has gets out the other end of them. That's how it's actually meant to work.

In other words, you're a vessel, you're a channel for God to work and for God to fill. You yourself are not necessarily to do it without the work of God.

Now, God uses you. He uses your abilities. He uses your natural skill set that he's given you. But God must do it in order to receive the blessings of God.

And so too often I feel that as Christians, even myself, forget the command to be filled. I forget, and perhaps you do as well, that we are a vessel to be filled by God and to be used by God.

And the issue here is a fairly simple one. That just because there is the presence of God, it doesn't necessarily mean that there is also the influence of God.

[12:03] I've been around long enough to see enough marriages to see, yeah, there's the presence of a husband and wife. But someone wears the chalzes and the other person doesn't.

In other words, there's the presence of both, but there's the influence of one. That's not the way relationship works. That's the way domination works.

The spirit, dare I say, is to fill us completely. But at the same time, the spirit doesn't grieve us, doesn't twist our arm and just uses and abuses us.

Now, this is a cooperation where we can experience the presence of God. But the thing that Paul is drawing out here is whether or not you're going to be able to experience the influence of God.

And that's the key issue. Presence and influence. So I want to begin then with the externals. Now, Jesus calls people to follow him. Fairly easy to understand.

[13:10] In other words, Jesus goes by the water side, calls the disciples to follow him. Externally, it's very easy to see what's happening. They drop their fishing nets and they follow Jesus.

Jesus then tells them to be perfect like the Father. A little bit harder, but they understand what's going on. Paul teaches us to be imitators of Jesus Christ.

In other words, be like Jesus. Notice what Jesus did and be like him. He even says to Timothy, follow me as I follow Christ. In other words, the pattern of imitation is a biblical one.

To copy somebody else is a biblical idea. More importantly, when the person that you're copying is actually a person who's following Christ themselves.

Follow Godly women. And follow Godly men men. Learn from others who do it well.

[14:08] And don't pay too much attention to those who are not doing it so well. Godly men can lead younger men. And Godly women can lead younger women.

That's the pattern laid out biblically. Timothy, Titus. Go read it for yourself. The trouble is, is that our tendency is to look on the outside.

To look at the external. To judge everything according to the externals. God, on the other hand, doesn't do that. God looks on the inside. He looks at a person's heart. That doesn't mean that the externals aren't important.

What it means is, is that there's a tension here. And the tension is, is that if you're a person who looks to the externals only, you're going to get yourself into a whole load of trouble. Let me give you an example.

A woman in the church loves how another woman in the church serves. And she wants to be like her in her service. But not necessarily like her in her charity.

[15:10] In other words, copying the external. Maybe the way she dresses or even wears her hair. Wants to be like her in those ways, but not necessarily like her in her giving.

Or a man, looking at another man in the church, wants to be like him in his position in the church. But not necessarily like him in his praying life. Or perhaps children growing up, got to be careful.

That they want to be like other Christians that seem to be hip. Or be able to play musical instruments. The piano, the violin, all the other type of instruments that are there.

And they want to be like those people who play them, but not necessarily want to be like them when it comes to their devotion. And practice to learning. In other words, we all have a tendency to focus on the externals.

And fail on the internal. We want to be like this person, but we don't want to be like this person when it comes to the hard work that needs to be put in. We want to be like that person, but we don't want to be like that person when it comes to the things that are done in secret.

[16:22] The things that aren't seen. And the reason why that needs pointing out is for this reason. That for those who concentrate on the externals more than the internals, find this verse 18, be filled with the spirit, almost impossible to obey.

Find it very difficult to obey. Why? Because it has literally nothing to do with the external. Nothing whatsoever. A bit like Jesus when he says, you know, those who pray out in the open, they've received their reward.

Nothing more for you. But I'll take notice of the person who takes himself away in the quiet room where there's nobody else there. And he just, him and God praying.

Or her and God praying. That's the person that will receive the blessing. Why? Why? The internal compared to the external. But as humans, we can't help fallen humans to focus on the external rather than the internal.

And so this call to verse 18, to not be drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but to be filled with the spirit, is difficult. Extremely difficult for those who live life according to the externals.

[17:38] It's all about show. It's all about making sure I come to church with the right face on. It's all about making sure that I come to church even with the right clothes on.

It's all about coming to church being a different person. How much effort goes in to the external? Quite a lot, I would imagine. While the internal is in turmoil. Well, how do you sort a problem like that out? Well, Paul gets to the point.

Be filled with the spirit. Don't be drunk with wine, for that is debauchery. But be filled with the spirit. Why? Well, Paul understands quite clearly that if people are concentrating on the externals rather than the internals, then much of what we call Christian in the Christian church is hardly Christian at all.

So be filled. Verse 18. Be filled with the spirit. Now, notice this because it's a little bit difficult to understand. But here we go. Verse 18. Do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery.

[18:53] There's the negative illustration. It's negative in the sense that alcohol, drunkenness, is not the position you want to be in. However, you do want to be filled with the spirit.

So let's begin, firstly, with the negative illustration. Now, this is fairly easy to understand. That when a person is drunk, they are filled with a substance, alcohol, and they're filled to the point where they no longer think or act under their own influence, but rather under the influence of alcohol.

In other words, they've been taken over. The issue here is not what the alcohol is, whether it's beer or wine or spirits. That's not the issue. The issue here is what it can do.

And that it can lead a person to debauchery. It can lead a person into a way where they're not even taken into consideration. The only blessing found for a drunk person is that in a matter of time, they'll become sober again.

How sober, one wonders. But for people who drink, the drunk state can wear off. To the point where it disappears.

[20:13] And suddenly, the person comes back to their senses. Their faculties begin to work properly again. But Paul's point is very simple.

is not to focus on the alcohol, but rather to focus on the negative influence that alcohol brings if consumed to the point where you are, dare I say it, out of your mind.

Rather, he says, be filled with the spirit. So here's the positive command. And this is where you need to know a little bit of Greek, but not too much.

It's called a present imperative, which means that we are always to be filled. We're always to be filled. We're always to be full up on the spirit.

Now, we're going to explain what this means in a minute, but let me give you a few illustrations. In John 16, verse 6, we learn of a person who is filled, but they're filled with sorrow.

[21:15] In Luke 5, we learn of a person who is filled, but they're filled with fear. In other passages, we learn that people can be filled with faith.

And what you begin to notice is you read the Gospels, and you read these people who are filled, filled with sorrow, filled with fear, filled with faith. Whatever they are filled with, that dominates. It is the controlling influence and factor in their life. So when a person is filled with sorrow, that sorrow takes full control.

They can't smile. They can't laugh. And if they did, it would only be in a moment of memory lapse over what their sorrowful over.

You ever done that? Where you've been deeply sorrowful. And someone says something that's funny, and for a moment it catches you and you smile. But as soon as you remember the sorrow, it takes you right back in where it wants to keep you.

[22 : 22] Powerful stuff for a person to be filled with sorrow. In other words, when a person is filled, as we see in the Gospels, it becomes the dominating influence.

When a person is filled with fear, it is the dominating influence, even to the point where it can paralyze the person. Not physically, but emotionally and mentally, to be able to do anything further forward.

When a person is filled with faith, again, that positive influence leads to great blessing and following of Jesus Christ. But we're able to notice the issue.

The issue is the influence that comes from being filled from whatever you are filled from or with. So the person who is filled with wine, to the point of being drunk, is filled with a negative influence. An influence that leads to debauchery. An influence that leads to moral corruption. An influence that leads to personal ruin. It just destroys a person when they are filled and influenced by what they are filled with.

[23 : 28] On the other hand, we have the positive. And that is to be filled with the Spirit. And here's the question.

How does it happen? How does it happen? Well, think of it in terms of relationship rather than as a cup of water.

Let me explain. You take a cup and you take it to your kitchen tap and you turn the tap on and the cup fills with water. Job done, right? The cup's filled. The trouble is that's not even an adequate way of explaining what it is to be filled with the Spirit.

You don't go to God and ask God to top you up because you're feeling low. It doesn't work like that. Remember Paul's illustration of being drunk with wine and being filled with the Spirit.

It's not to do with so much being filled. It's much as it is to do with what being filled leads to. And when a person is filled with wine, they are under the influence.

[24 : 27] And therefore lead to corruption. But when a person is filled with the Spirit, they are then under the influence of God. So when Paul says, beef, do not be drunk with wine, what do you think he means?

He means stay away from it. Or he means have a sip but not the bottle. He means, okay, go out for a glass but nothing more.

In other words, it's okay but the drunkenness does not lead you down a pretty road. When it comes to the Spirit, we can't go out.

And we can't necessarily go to God alone and ask for a top-up to the point where we'll be filled. This is how it works. That when we cry out to God because we need God's influence in our life, we recognize that we have either lost control and we need God to take over.

And so for a person to be filled with the Spirit, it is for that person to willingly, willingly submit to God in all areas of their life.

[25 : 38] Imagine it like a house with doors. In other words, you live a Christian life and God occupies half of the house. The rest of it is shut off to him.

Is that person living a life full of the Spirit? No, not at all. Because you're keeping him out of many other areas. So for a person to be filled with the presence of God, it is for that person to be submissive to God in every single area of their Christian life.

In their thoughts, in their words, in their deeds, in their service, in their prayer life. In every area, we give ourselves completely over to God. No part of our will triumphs.

Triumphs. There's no I'm doing it my way. It is a complete submission to the will of God. So that we don't only experience his presence, but finally we begin to experience his influence.

I'm sure that many people can feel very close to God. But I'm pretty sure that those people who can feel very close to God at times can feel very little of God's influence in their life.

[26 : 55] There's a distinction here between presence and influence. And that is it's possible to come into the presence of God in a situation like this where we feel God's presence amongst each other, but at the same time feel very little of God's influence over our own life.

And what Paul is saying here is that to be filled with the Spirit is to have the Spirit's influence over your whole life.

In the same way sorrow can dominate. In the same way fear can dominate. In the same way faith can dominate. Let the Spirit dominate. And it won't be abusive.

But rather it will be an act of blessedness to you. I'm going to try and illustrate this a slightly different way. King Solomon.

One of my burning questions about King Solomon has always been this. Why is it the case that the wisest man on earth is also the most stupid? You think about it.

[27 : 57] He's known as the wisest man on earth. People came to him from all over the world to listen to his wisdom. And yet when you actually have a look at his life, not just what he said, but when you have a look at his life, total mess.

Known as the half-hearted king. So how can a man know so much wisdom and yet be so foolish in life? How can a man or a woman for that be know what is right and true and just but fail so miserably when it comes to carry those things out?

In other words, how can it be the case that we know what the right thing is to do and know what the right thing is in terms of biblical wisdom but fail to understand how that wisdom is to work out in her life?

And here's the problem. The problem is relationship. It has nothing to do with what he knew. He knew all of his wisdom, even at the moment of him sinning.

The wisdom didn't help him. The wisdom didn't help him for the simple reason that he was not living close and clean with God. And because he wasn't living close and clean with God, the wisdom was no benefit.

[29 : 11] And here's why. I'm not very good at computers, but I know how a download works. You go on the internet. There's a PDF there. You press download and it saves it from the internet to your computer.

Job done. That means that I can then go to my computer when I'm not on the internet, open up the file and there I have it. It's downloaded. I can have it whenever I want. It's there. I can read it whenever I choose to.

The problem is, is wisdom and being filled with the spirit doesn't work on a download. You can't come to church and download it into your system and that's job done for the rest of the week.

And now you've got it forever. It doesn't work like that. Rather, wisdom and being filled with the spirit works more like a live feed. There has to be a connection between the one who is giving and the one who is receiving.

And your life, your relationship with God has to be like a live feed, not like a download where it goes from one to the other and you can use it independently. No, wisdom and being filled with the spirit works like a live feed.

[30 : 18] There must be that constant connection between you and God. And the reason why Solomon failed so much is because the wisdom that he had no longer benefited him because he was disconnected in his relationship with God.

He was disconnected from the source that gave wisdom all of its power and certainty. And so many Christians, though they have received the spirit of God because they call Jesus Lord, they know and experience the presence of God.

They don't experience his influence. And the reason being is because they have, at conversion perhaps, as it were, downloaded the spirit.

But now live quite independently from the live feed with God. And so many of us here experience the presence of the Holy Spirit. But far few or fewer, far more rather, fail to experience the influence.

Do not get drunk with wine. In other words, don't come under that kind of influence. Rather be filled with the spirit. In other words, come under that influence. And the only way to be under the influence of something is if that something fills you completely.

[31 : 38] That's the point. In other words, you are to be filled with God. And the way that you get filled with God is to get rid of yourself. To submit your own will to God.

So here's a few considerations as we close. It seems that as a church, just like Paul experienced here in Ephesians, that we need to focus a lot more on the Christian life.

Not how we have this relationship with God, but rather how we are to live this relationship with God. Another thing to mention is that we must never forget that our relationship with God is with a triune

God of Scripture.

Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Another thing to mention and to remember is that it is possible to grieve the Holy Spirit. Ephesians 4 verse 30.

And the reason it's possible to grieve him, it is because he is a person. You can't grieve a law. You can't grieve a rule. You can grieve a person.

[32 : 43] And the way that you grieve the Holy Spirit is when you are the cause of sorrow in your relationship. And the way you cause sorrow in your relationship is simply by doing things your own way.

So here's the final thought. Do not get drunk with wine. Or do not be filled with anything else other than God. Rather be filled with the Spirit.

So that you don't only experience his presence. But more importantly, you experience his influence. The influence of God in your life.

Would a believer's life be different if the believer's life was filled with the Spirit of God? Undoubtedly. Would the church be different if the church was filled with the Spirit of God?

Yeah, of course. Would we see more blessing from God if we were all living Spirit-filled lives? Yes. Very simply, yes.

[33 : 50] So the call then is very simple. Don't be filled with anything else. Anything that you can come under the influence that can lead you away.

Rather be filled with the Spirit. Take responsibility for your own relationship with God. You go away and be filled.

And the way to do it is simply to submit not only to the presence, but to the influence of God in your life. Amen. Amen. Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you.