

The Christian Life
Part 4b
Be Filled With The Spirit

Eph 5:14-18

- 14 Wherefore he saith, Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light.
15 See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise,
16 Redeeming the time, because the days are evil.
17 Wherefore be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is.
18 And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit; KJV

There are several ‘don’ts’ in this text, some spoken and some inferred. “Don’t be asleep.” “Don’t be dead.” “Don’t live carelessly, like a fool.” “Don’t waste your time.” “Don’t be ignorant of God’s revealed will.” “Don’t be drunk.” In contrast to the ‘don’ts’ there are ‘do’s.’ “Wake up.” “Rise up.” “Live deliberately and carefully.” “Make the most of your opportunities” (to serve God). “Give yourself, in wisdom, to the learning and doing of God’s will.” “Be filled with the Spirit.”

I suppose if we fully developed all of these thoughts and studied every scripture that relates to them, we would write an encyclopedia of the Christian life. While we do not want to spend the rest of our lives together on this one passage of scripture, please be aware that almost all of genuine Christian living revolves around these principles.

I. Don’t be asleep, don’t be dead, wake up, rise up, seek the light that Christ gives.

Once we get beyond repentance and faith, once we have been brought from death to life, once we have been ‘born again,’ two forces set to work within us. One is the Spirit of God prompting us to continue to grow until we become mature believers and the other is the combined work of our ‘old man’ and the kingdom of darkness to bring us to a standstill, seduce us into spiritual lethargy, sleep, and a state that looks for all the world like spiritual death.

Unless we steadfastly pursue spiritual growth and maturity, lethargy and sleep will overtake us and put us in a state of inactivity and spiritual drowsiness that will prevent us from going any further down that road of development.

Paul took note of this tendency in two other places.

Rom 13:11-14

- 11 And that, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep: for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed.
12 The night is far spent, the day is at hand: let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armour of light.
13 Let us walk honestly, as in the day; not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envying.

14 But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof. KJV

1 Cor 15:33-34

33 Be not deceived: evil communications corrupt good manners.

34 Awake to righteousness, and sin not; for some have not the knowledge of God: I speak this to your shame. KJV

From personal experience I know that spiritual lethargy is one of the most difficult enemies to fight. It is far more difficult than getting up in the middle of the night to go work the rest of the night in the cold. Spiritual lethargy is a mind-numbing, spirit-captivating, paralyzing disease that makes any spiritual movement, any seeking after God, any prayer, any Bible-study almost impossible. In fact, one cannot do any of those things successfully unless he spiritually shakes himself awake and cries out to God for help.

We use noise making devices to wake us up from physical sleep. Long ago, on the farm, this was the job of the rooster, to let us know that the sun was up and it was time to go to work. Now we use alarm clocks and devices of all kinds to do the same thing. But the noise must be loud, irritating, intrusive, annoying or we will simply ignore it and go back to sleep.

These passages are intended by the apostle Paul to be just such alarms. He wants us to be jarred with the reality that we are not seeking God as we ought and are, in fact, sleeping on the job, allowing life to carry us along down a path of spiritual decline and decay. In fact, he says in Rom. 13:12, it is far later than we think, “the night is far spent, the day is at hand,” and it is “high time” to rise and get to work for God.

Physically sometimes we must force ourselves awake, simply refusing to accept our feelings of comfort and ease in our beds. We push ourselves out of bed, make some coffee, go for a walk, shake ourselves, do whatever it takes to wake up because we must go to work.

Waking up spiritually is far more difficult. One of the problems is our motivations are too weak. We get up on Monday morning and go to work because we must. No work means no job and no job means no pay and no pay means no food. So, because we want to eat, we roll out and go to work. With many of us spiritual progress and wakefulness so that we can make progress, are bitter enemies of our natural selves.

The wakefulness that we need (v.14), the rising up from near death, are necessary in order for the Lord Jesus to give us light. The light Paul mentioned here is that same light from v.13, that which makes manifest the works of darkness and reproveth them.

Our problem is that we are not only asleep but in the dark, stumbling around, acting anything but wise, and not clear at all in our minds concerning what is the will of God for us, specifically concerning our behavior. We wish that the Lord would simply break into our lives, wake us up and give us light but that is not the way that it goes. He wants for us to take the initiative, develop the desire, see the danger and the need and stir ourselves up to spiritual alertness. Then, He will give us more light, more direction, more motivation, and more spiritual energy. This is the process of spiritual maturity.

Why? Because the Lord would have us driven by an internal desire to succeed spiritually rather than being driven from behind. He wants us to be mature adults, not children or lazy servants who must be constantly motivated by someone else. He has told us that already.

There is another issue as well. If we are asleep, we got that way by being foolish, immature, lazy, and indifferent to important realities. It is, therefore, our duty, our responsibility to reverse course, shake off the lethargy and return to the path of growth toward spiritual adulthood.

This may be the most difficult part of the entire equation. I remember when I was running 30 miles a week that the most difficult part of the run often was making the decision to put on my running clothes and get out of the house and start the run. Once I had gone a ½ mile or so, I was fine, but that inertia of getting moving was often difficult to overcome.

But I didn't have spiritual enemies working against me when I ran. Every step you and I take toward spiritual growth is resisted by a headwind of man-made and spiritual resistance. Spiritual growth is rowing against the current, climbing an ascending road, running against the wind and the forces that resist us never let up. They fight us every step of the way.

It is only as one gives himself over to the vehement desire of the spiritual man to be like Christ that the motivation can be found to drive onward over, around, and through the obstacles to progress. This is where the motivation to 'wake up' must come from.

I. **Once awake and moving in the right direction we find other admonitions; "Don't live carelessly, like a fool." "Don't waste your time."**

Other translations render v.15 as "you must be very careful how you live."

Indeed, it is carelessness of life that put us in the place of spiritual lethargy to begin with. We certainly must avoid going back there, so, we must, in a wise and mature fashion, analyze the things that cause us to tend toward sleep, laziness, and inactivity and remove them from our lives, whatever the cost. This is what a wise person does and what a fool does not do.

Make the days count. This means making the hours and the minutes count. Live spiritually productive lives, Paul would say. Plan well and then work the plan. Make time for God. Seek Him in prayer. Read His Word. Share what you learn with others. Live a life that is an example.

Rising from the dead is of little use if one does not use that life to make a difference, somehow, in the world around him for the glory of God.

"Don't be ignorant of God's revealed will," Paul said in v.17. This new life, this productivity in spiritual things, does not happen accidentally. Nor do we naturally know what it is that we are to do. Therefore, God has given us a manual, as we pointed out in the last message. An important part of this being 'awake' is to study the manual so as to know how to live carefully and avoid being foolish.

“Make the most of your opportunities” (to serve God). “Give yourself, in wisdom, to the learning and doing of God’s will.”

I. **Then, we come to one of the most misunderstood and misused portions of this text; “Don’t be drunk,” “Be filled with the Spirit,” v.18.**

We live in a day in which some very bizarre things go on supposedly in the name of the Lord and are ‘justified’ by this text. “See there,” some say, “the Bible says that we are supposed to be drunk on the Holy Spirit.” And, so, they babble and dance and do all sorts of foolish and unbecoming things under the umbrella of being “filled with the Spirit.”

But all of the words that Paul has just used fly in the face of any such understanding of this verse; “awake,” “arise,” “walk circumspectly,” “don’t act like fools,” “make the most of your opportunities,” “don’t be senseless,” “be wise,” “understand what the will of the Lord is.”

Just an honest look at this passage will tell anyone that what Paul is describing is the very opposite of being drunk. The person who is drunk is senseless, foolish, anything but alert and wise. Being filled with the Spirit, in Paul’s mind, was being hyper-conscious, super-aware, and extraordinarily wise and well disciplined.

The most disciplined, godly, mature, and wise person who ever walked this planet was Jesus Christ and we never find Him out of His mind in some religious trance state. In His closest approaches to His Father, He was fully rational and fully aware both of His circumstances and the next thing that He needed to do. Likewise Abraham, Moses, David, Isaiah, Daniel, John the Baptist, Paul and all the others who walked with God through history.

I guarantee you that the closer you are to God, the more spiritually mature and awake, the more ‘circumspect’ in your life you are, the wiser, more obedient, more prayerful, and more disciplined you will be. I am convinced that God the Holy Spirit will never take you to a place in which you are somehow out of your mind and unaware of what you are saying and doing.

Instead, the fullness of the Holy Spirit consistently produces a life that is marked by godly living and a worshipful interaction with other believers. Notice that v.18 begins a sentence that does not end until v.21.

Eph 5:18-21

- 18 And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit,
- 19 speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord;
- 20 always giving thanks for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God, even the Father;
- 21 and be subject to one another in the fear of Christ. NASU

Conscious, deliberate worship offered not only to God but in each other’s hearing as encouragement, thankfulness for all things and mutually committed to serving one another; these are the evidences of the fullness of the Holy Spirit, not the wild exhibitions that some claim to prove their spiritual closeness to God.

We are to speak and sing to one another the praises of God as we are taught from the “psalms, hymns and spiritual songs” in scripture. Many do not know that the Jews divided the psalms into these three categories.

And, we are to be thankful for everything, even things that are troubling and painful to us, because we have a God Who has all things under His control and is working them all together for the good of His people, even those things that do not seem to be good.

Rom 8:28

28 And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose. KJV

Even when we cannot see the good, even when we cannot even imagine a good thing coming from the circumstance, when our mind and heart and faith are at war with one another, we are to ‘know’ that God is in control and, so much as we are able at the utmost stretch of our faith, we are to give thanks by faith, knowing that when we here the explanation in eternity to come, we will agree that it was the best plan for us and for His glory.

We heard a lot about thankfulness this past week and much of it was true. Your grandmother may have said that “cleanliness is next to godliness,” but in all reality Thankfulness is next to Godliness.

Let’s consider together this thing of “be subject to one another in the fear of Christ.”

First of all “in the fear of Christ” means “out of reverence for Christ” (Williams). The idea is mutual submission to each other, but what does that mean in practical terms? Here it is taught as a general principle which is going to introduce some specific guidelines for relationships both within and without the home. But Paul is still in the mode of describing the outflow from the fullness of the Spirit which He mentioned in v.18.

It is then a general rule of relationships within the church that there be a mutual yielding to each other. He expressed it in other ways in his letters.

Phil 2:1-4

1 If there be therefore any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any bowels and mercies,
2 Fulfil ye my joy, that ye be likeminded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind.
3 Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves.
4 Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others.
KJV

There is to be, in the church, as an effect of each one being filled with the Holy Spirit, a loving commitment to unity and an absence of struggle for position and power. Each one is to view the rest as ‘better than themselves’ and each is to look out for the welfare of others.

Jesus had a similar instruction to His disciples during His earthly ministry.

Matt 20:25-28

- 25 But Jesus called them unto him, and said, Ye know that the princes of the Gentiles exercise dominion over them, and they that are great exercise authority upon them.
- 26 But it shall not be so among you: but whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister;
- 27 And whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant:
- 28 Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many. KJV

The principle of serving one another and laboring for one another's spiritual prosperity was both lived and taught by Jesus.

This has been twisted in our day as the ideas of socialism has infected the institutions of higher learning particularly in many denominations of Christianity. This idea of serving has been changed to the notion of giving things to poor people. Now there is certainly a place for charity to the poor in the service of God but this is not what Jesus and Paul were really talking about.

They were talking about spiritual service designed to encourage and prosper one another in the service of Christ.

Go back to Ephesians 4.

Eph 4:11-16

- 11 And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers;
- 12 For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ:
- 13 Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ:
- 14 That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive;
- 15 But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ:
- 16 From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love. KJV

Our primary service in this regard and the object of this mutual submission is the growth of each individual and the growth of the body itself.

I think that our failure in this regard can be demonstrated with one question. ***When was the last time that you did something for another believer in which your primary and sole motive was to help them advance in spiritual growth as a direct outcome of your help?***

Here is a paraphrase from an old Baptist of the past (Robert E. Pattison, A Commentary on the Epistle to the Ephesians, PBP). Submission is a mutual duty of all believers and is here taught as a general principle introducing the following teachings on specific duties. The gospel work in a believer's soul not only brings him to this duty but energizes his disposition to obey it. Our first encounters with this subject of submission occur when we acknowledge the authority of someone superior and cheerfully acquiesce to it. But here, secondly, we are taught to possess that meek and yielding spirit which defers to the wishes of others whether they are superior or inferior to us in authority. *Submitting yourselves one to another* - Every one should exhibit this lovely habit in his daily interactions with others. ***“It stands opposed not only to that exacting, arrogant spirit which distracts the peace of the social circle, but, in no small degree, to that false decision of character, stubbornness, which is so nearly allied to manliness and bravery as often to be mistaken for a virtue.”*** (A stubborn spirit is contrary to the spirit of submission. - ld) The gospel teaches us and requires us to do those things that *are lovely*.¹ This submission is to be done *in the fear of God*,² meaning with a deep sense of our *accountability* to Him.

I. Conclusion

Eph 5:14-21

14 Wherefore he saith, Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light.

Wake up, shake off, everything that is contrary to godly living. Christ will give you light in any matter of this for which you seek Him.

15 See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise,

16 Redeeming the time, because the days are evil.

17 Wherefore be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is.

Be wise, not foolish. Seek understanding concerning the will of the Lord in these matters of holiness. Make the most of all the opportunities to be holy and godly that come your way.

18 And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit;

Resist all stupor and cloudiness of mind. Give yourself to God so that you will have great clarity of mind and willingness to obey, which is the fruit of the Spirit's fullness

¹ Phil 4:8 Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things.

² Verse 21

19 Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord;

Speak scripture principles to others, giving your mind to a melodious harmony with the Lord, directed by His Word.

20 Giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ;

Be thankful.

21 Submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God.

Have a gladly yielding spirit, which is the heart of Christian Unity, the topic from which Paul launched this manual of Christian living.

2 Peter 1:5-10

5 And beside this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge;

6 And to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness;

7 And to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity.

8 For if these things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.

9 But he that lacketh these things is blind, and cannot see afar off, and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins.

10 Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall: KJV