

Singing in the Reign
Ephesians 5:18-21
March 9, 2008
The Fifth Sunday in Lent

Paul is directing the Ephesian community to live in love and light, and this means walking in wisdom, redeeming the time because “the days are evil.” How is this life of light, love, and wisdom possible? Paul tells them the way this unfolds is by being continually filled with the Holy Spirit. The Bible uses this term – “filled with the Spirit” – to describe those moments when God sends his power and grace on his servants to accomplish a particular task. This meaning is broadened now to include all God’s people for all of life because our special calling in the world is to display the light, love, and wisdom of God. We are all to be “filled with the Spirit,” or as we might literally translate it, “be being filled – constantly and repeatedly – with the Holy Spirit.”

Now, obviously, we believe in the Holy Spirit – he is, as we confessed this morning, “the Lord and giver of life.” That is to say, the Holy Spirit is the One who makes real in our lives the presence and the purpose of God. What the Father arranges and the Son accomplishes the Spirit applies; what the Father plans and the Son procures the Spirit provides; what the Father planned in eternity past and the Son accomplished 2,000 years ago, the Spirit makes real to us now. He is the executive agent of the Trinity, bringing God’s presence to us, and us into God’s presence.

What does a Church filled with the Spirit look like? These few verses tell us in very plain language that a Spirit-filled Church is singing in submission to Christ. It is singing in the Reign.

I. *Godly Governance – Ephesians 5:18*

- A. Let us recall that what Christians oppose is the abuse of God’s gifts, not the gifts themselves.
- B. Drunkenness is “dissipation” (“debauchery” – ESV and NRSV). This is life lacking in the fruit of the Spirit, which is “self control” – Galatians 5:23. It is the abuse of God’s gifts and the vandalism of God’s icons. Living “under the influence of the Spirit” is the opposite of drunkenness.
- C. From a medical perspective, alcohol is not a stimulant but a depressant. Wrongly used it creates heaviness of heart, dullness of mind, and demolition of the human body. From a Biblical perspective, wine represents the blood of Christ poured out for us and is a gift to make the heart glad. Rightly used it directs us to Christ and his cross.
- D. At the cross of Christ we find ourselves to be those who are sinful and forgiven, and we rejoice in this salvation. Our use of wine, then, is to celebrate our deliverance, not to fashion new chains for our slavery.

A Spirit-filled Church is a place where people are learning to live not for themselves but for others, denying self to promote others and, above all else, the Gospel.

II. *Loving Fellowship – Ephesians 5:19a*

- A. When the Spirit comes, there is always the sound of human voices in joyous community. Acts 2:1-4, etc.
- B. We speak to the world under the influence of the Spirit, but we must learn to speak to one another as well. This is not a recipe for individual spiritual ecstasy, but for covenant community that means living face to face.

The Spirit-filled Church is not a crowd of individuals at a meeting, but a city of men, women, and children deeply committed to one another in loving community.

III. Joyous Worship – Ephesians 5:19-20

- A. Music and the King's House
 - This is not a lecture hall, it is a Banquet Hall
- B. Music of and by and for the King
 - Christ sings in our singing – Hebrews 2:11-12
 - We move from “speaking to one another” to “singing to the Lord.”
- C. Music for the Wedding
 - Joyous, but decorous; solemn, but lovely; thoughtful, but moving; thankful for the gifts, but addressed to the Giver.
 - Home – Away – Home (*Jeremy Begbie*)
Psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs: God's truth
- D. Music for the Night
 - Acts 16 – Psalms at midnight. If we learn to sing our theology, we will have our theology to sing – and start earthquakes.

The Spirit-filled Church is a people overflowing in thanksgiving, filled with joy because they are filled with grace, with Christ singing the Truth of God to God.

IV. Respectful Submission – Ephesians 5:21

- A. Our first confession is submission – “Jesus is *Lord*.” This is the root of all other submission – “in the fear of Christ.”
- B. We must learn the art of submission to properly constituted rulers. This meekness is characteristic of the Kingdom of God.
- C. The Holy Spirit's “submission” (not subordination); he proceeds from the Father and is poured out by the Son; he speaks not of himself but of Christ and glorifies him.
 - The Kingdom of God is hierarchical, not egalitarian.
 - The Being of God is both – mutual indwelling and co-equality, together with ordered submission
 - To manifest the rule of God requires respect for the authority God establishes.
 - To manifest the community of God requires cherishing others as “more important” than self.
 - Is Christ Lord? Yes. How does he show this? Not only by ruling but by dying.
 - “*Being a leader is a lot like being a lady. If you have to say that you are, you probably aren't.*”
– Margaret Thatcher

The Spirit-filled Church is a people learning the art of submission combined with opulent, self-giving love, especially for the weak and frail.

Does this describe our fellowship together? To the degree that it does, let us give thanks. To the degree that it exposes our impiety, let us repent. And in both rejoicing and repenting, let us sing in the reign as we come to the Table that tells us again of the Lord who loves us so dearly and has made us his Church by the power of his Spirit.