

## Ephesians 5:1-20

1. This passage is animated by motion, Spirit-empowered activity and direction, demonstrated by Paul's sequence of exhortations. This list includes finding out (10) and understanding (17) the Lord's will, careful of how you live (15). We tend to seek God's will for the big things in our lives. From the context, is this what Paul's describing? Is it enough to avoid living like the "sons of disobedience" (8) or is something loftier in view?
2. We are both children of light and light itself (8), because Jesus, the true light, has shined on us (14). Using this same light/darkness imagery, Paul tells us to Take no part in works of darkness but expose them (11). This brings to mind John the Baptist exposing Herod's sin, and Paul's exposing Peter's bias against the Gentiles, as well as Paul's call to believers to "admonish" one another (Col 3:16).

Given Paul's goal of body unity, what would it look like to expose darkness in our church and small group? How is that carried out without alienation, hurt feelings, reprisals, etc.?

3. "Do not be drunk... but be filled with the Spirit" (18). "Filled" here is based on the same loaded term (*pleroma*) used throughout Ephesians (and its partner, Colossians) which indicates completion and fulfillment, such as in:
  - 1:22: Christ's body is the **fullness** of the one who **fills** everything in every way
  - 4:12: The 4-fold gifts are used to build us up into unity and matured and **fullness**
  - Col 1:19-20: In Christ the **fullness** of God was pleased to dwell, and through Christ God reconciles all things to himself through the cross

What practical steps does Paul give in 18 and in Colossians 3:16 for being filled with/completed by the Spirit? Are we (church, Huddle) carrying out these activities in a way that leads to unity and maturity (4:12)?

4. Listen to and discuss the clip from Tim Keller's "Children of the Light."

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*Fun fact:* Whereas Eph 5:18-20 tells the reader to sing and give thanks, the parallel verse, Colossians 3:16, adds they should "teach and admonish" one another. This instruction is for everyone, not just the leaders. In the words of Fee, "One might add that such 'teaching and admonishing' activity would have also included the women. After all, one of the specific persons addressed in Nympha (Col 4:15), in whose house one of the churches met. (On the basis of later prejudices, she was turned into a man by later scribes, who clearly recognized the implications of a church meeting in her house)." [*God's Empowering Presence*, 649n57]

## Leader's Intro:

- This at first seems like yet another list of virtues and vices painting the picture of the generic Christ, but there's more to it than that. First, we need to remember that the context through all of this is healthy Christian community. While this paraenesis often speaks to individual behavior the community should always be kept in view.
- There are several themes which run through this passage and are worth noting:
  - **Children and inheritance** (1, 5, 8): How do we live as children of God rather than “sons of disobedience” (6; cf. Bruce 372)
  - **Light and darkness** (8-14): We are both children of light and light itself (8), because Jesus, the true light, has shined on us (14).
  - **What God wants us to do**: We are to understand what that is (17; 10). Coupled with 2:10 (we are God's workmanship) and the driving repetition of exhortation, there is a picture here of a dynamic and intelligent people actively seeking out God's will—much the same as Keener's exegesis of Roman 12:1, where Paul says giving our bodies as a living sacrifice is our “spiritual” act of worship. “Spiritual” (or in the NRSV “appropriate”) is *logikos*. As Keener says,
    - “In contexts referring to the mind, however, like this one (Rom 12:2-3), the term often implies reason (i.e. the rational element), in this case unexpectedly captured by the old KJV rather than by many of the newer translations. Thus, for Stoics, for example, any act that was not appropriate was wrong for a ‘rational’ (*logiko*) being, by which they meant humans. Stoics saw a relation between humans as *logikos* and God as *logos*—in other words, between human reason and the reason that structured the cosmos... In other words, in Romans 12:1 the way one offers one's body as a sacrifice to God is rationally, through reason—one's mind dictates how the body will serve. In view of 12:2-23, this means that one's renewed mind discerns God's will (12:2), including one's useful place in Christ's body (12:3-8).” [*Mind of the Spirit*, 151-2]
    - Now couple this with the cognitive emphasis in 4 (where we “put on Christ”) and throughout Paul:
      - 1 Cor 2:16—we have the mind of Christ
      - 1 Cor 2:10-11—true wisdom about divine matters only comes through the Spirit and is foolishness to the world (1 Cor 1:18, 21, 23, 27)
      - 2 Cor 3:18—we are transformed through vision—through focusing our minds on Christ
      - Phil 2:5—we are to think the way Christ thought
      - Phil 4:6-8—our hearts and thoughts are guarded by Christ as we give him our thanksgiving and petitions, and as we focus on the whatever is honorable, just, sacred, etc. Cf. also Col 3:1-2
    - The conclusion of this is that we must never just be passive, and God's will is never simply a list of virtues and vices. God literally intends to teach us to think the way the creator of the universe thinks. Once we do that we will know his will and will be complete, which brings us to the next theme:
    - They are warned against fornication, impurity and greed (3) but as Keller points out these are not simply “don't screw around, read porn and grub for money” (my words, not his). These each represent a wrong way of thinking in which we

- try to meet our needs through something other than God. Again, this is an issue with the way we think, not just what we do.
- **“Do not be drunk... but be filled with the Spirit” (18).**
    - This is followed by a list of instructions, here as in the parallel Col 3:16 involving singing, giving thanks (19-20); and teaching and admonishing one another (Col 3:16).
    - This both tells us how to be filled with the Spirit...
    - ...and we should note that “filled” is from the same root, *pleroma*, which BDAG ascribes as having a sense of “completedness”. This word appears at several key places in Eph:
      - 1:22: Christ’s body is the fullness of the one who fills everything in every way
      - 4:12: The 4-fold gifts are used to build us up into unity and matured and fullness (which unity is a mark of the Body—Jn 17:23)
      - Col 1:19-20: In Christ the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through Christ God reconciles all things to himself through the cross
  - **Indicative/imperative:** This passage attempts to engage the reader’s mind with a clear picture of the life of the new community, the new humanity (2:15) and the driving, active force of this transforming vision is embodied in the list of exhortations:
    - Don’t be deceived (6)
    - Don’t associate with them (7) (see below)
    - Live as children of the light (8)
    - Be imitators of God (1)
    - Live in love (2)
    - Try to find out (10) and understand (17) the Lord’s will, being careful how you live (15)
    - Take no part in works of darkness but expose them (11)
    - Don’t get drunk but be filled/completed by the Spirit (18)
    - Sing songs, give thanks (19-20)
  - **The Trinitarian nature** of the passage should be observed. Occasionally one will hear the statement that the Trinity is not to be found in the Bible, and this is a great counter-example; the Trinity is active throughout.
- There are also a few exegetical or lexical points which should be brought out:
    - In 16, “making the most of the time” [NRSV] lit. means “buy/redeem” the time. This leads to the common reading the NRSV gives, but note that this phrase is used in the LXX of Dan 2:8, where the court magicians are stalling. In that case they are actually trying to forestall something bad, not make better use of the time they have. If that’s what Paul had in mind, the meaning of the verse becomes quite different. Standing against this new reading is the LXX of Ps 90:12, “so teach us to count our days that we may gain a wise heart.” There more time isn’t gained, it’s just used better.
    - In 7, “don’t be associated” is *summetoxoi*, don’t be “joint partakers” (Bruce), or “don’t throw your lot in with them” or “partner” with them (BDAG). Compare to 1 Cor 15:33.