

"What Happens When A Body Gets Coordinated With Its Head?"

Ephesians 5:18-21



Introduction

Review Ephesians 5:15-17. My first time flying was at the age of 10. (Or when I discovered how big the world really was!) In many ways, I have had the same experience with God's will!! (Illustrate your small view of God's will). God's will is so big and expansive. It takes us out of our little claustrophobic kingdoms and calls us to live in His Big Sky country. But what is it that God's wills or wants? What is it to which He invites us?

I. What God *doesn't* will (18a)

Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery.

Paul is warning against living in such a way that we become disconnected from our calling. He uses the example of drunkenness because it was so prevalent in the Ephesian culture with the worship of false gods that was so often accompanied by drunken orgies. But that is merely one example of what God doesn't want. The truth is, He does not want us to be intoxicated or controlled by ***anything*** that distracts us from who we are and from what He has called us to be and do. Whether that is substance abuse or preoccupation with food or hobbies or sex or anything else "under the sun"—God doesn't want us setting our desires on the creation, but rather on the Creator-Redeemer and His wonderful plan and purpose that has been the focus throughout this epistle.

II. What God *does* will (18b)

Instead, be filled with (by) the Spirit.

Did you catch that little difference in wording? When we looked at this last time, I pointed out to you that the translation "with" (which is used in nearly all English translations) is rather ambiguous. In fact, there are some 18 different meanings of that little word in Webster's New World Dictionary. Most people have understood this word to mean "with" in the sense of "content." Filled with the Spirit is like filling a bucket "with" water. But actually the text here points to "with" in the sense of filling "by means of." Such as filling a bucket "with" or "by means of" a hose. In other words, the Spirit is not the *specific content* of the filling that this verse is talking about. Instead, the Spirit's constant work in our lives is the ***means by***

which we are filled. So if the Spirit is not the specific content here—what or who is? Paul doesn't tell us in this verse because he has already told us earlier. Just listen as a couple of earlier passages actually start to become clearer to us in light of this passage:

Ephesians 1:22-23:

*22 And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, 23 which is his body, **the fullness of him** who fills everything in every way.*

Here the body of Christ is described as “the fullness of him.” (i.e. Jesus Christ). God's plan is to fill the church, His body, with Jesus Christ.

Ephesians 4:13:

*...until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the **fullness of Christ**.*

Again, as God works in his body, the Church, His ultimate aim is to bring it to its complete and ultimate maturity. And what does the Church look like when she reaches complete maturity? “The whole measure of the fullness of Christ!” So to be filled *by* the Spirit is to cooperate with God's ongoing work in us by His Holy Spirit to restore what sin and the Fall destroyed and to remake us fully and completely in the image of Christ. Ok. But what does *that* mean?

When God created Adam, He breathed into him the breath of life and man became a living being—a being made in God's image and designed accordingly to reflect God's likeness. Just like ancient rulers would erect images of themselves in the far flung regions of their conquered dominions, the invisible God of the Universe made us in His image to visibly represent His rule and reign over Creation. But when Adam and Eve sinned, that image became marred. Man was still a reflection of God's image. And certainly under common grace, people can do relatively good deeds and acts of kindness. But sin has so marred and disfigured the image by making man a slave of his own selfish desires that our image bears only a faint resemblance to the Creator. Man is like a beautiful Thomas Kinkade print that has endured a terrible fire and has suffered significant smoke damage. It's still a Kinkade print, but it does no justice to the original.

If to be truly human means to be like God, then sin in many ways rendered us less than human. We talk about people being normal vs. abnormal. The truth is—sin has made us *all* abnormal—or better yet, *sub*-normal. And we don't even realize it. When we are forced to face sin's distortion in our lives, we try to run to statistics and hide behind them. Such and such percent of Americans admit that they struggle with the same problem I struggle with—therefore it must be ok! So now I don't feel as bad because I am “normal.” But the Gospel says otherwise. It

helps us understand that while my sinful experience is indeed all too common—there is a difference between *common* and *normal*.

Don't make the mistake of confusing "typical" or "common" with "normal." Parents—the terrible two's may be *common*. But they are not *normal*. Instead, they ought to be a reminder that your "self-willed" two year old is fallen and falling—and that he or she needs the help of a godly parent using loving, consistent discipline to *break* that fall—or else! Just this week I read a disturbing article in the March 2006 Reader's Digest which reports that cheating and plagiarizing in American high schools and colleges has become increasingly common. As high as 70% of public high school students say they have been involved in serious test cheating and 60 % say they have plagiarized papers! That may be *typical* in our increasingly secularized culture—but it's *not normal*.

Getting angry and telling off your spouse when he or she irritates you or swearing at a driver that has cut you off may feel quite "normal"—but it is not. The definition of human normality is not what everyone else is doing or what feels normal to me when I am under pressure—the definition of what it means to be truly human is to think and respond like *Jesus Christ!!*

When God made Adam and Eve and breathed in to them the breath of life, that breath was full of *His* life. His holiness. His character. Sin rejected the life of God and chose death. And with death man became a slave to self and thus became full of himself. The Gospel frees us from ourselves and in faith and repentance calls us to empty ourselves of ourselves so we can be full of the God-man, Jesus—the One who came to not only live and die for us—but to show us *how* to live in a yet sin-cursed world by the power of His Spirit which is at work in us.

Isn't that the testimony of Romans 8:28-29 and many other passages? And it's not only God's will on an individual level, it is God's will on an even bigger scale than that. If you look back at the passages we just read, you begin to realize that God's goal to fill us with Christ and thus to ultimately restore His image in us is not only individuals—but as members of His body. We are not simply to be individual representations of Christ—but we are as a church to embody Christ. That is God's will! But exactly what does this look like? That brings us to verse 19....

III. What God's will *looks like*.

19 Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord, 20 always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. 21 Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.

This passage doesn't give you *eight steps to follow in order to be filled by the Spirit*. It describes rather what it *looks like*. It answers for us the question: What

does Christ's body look like when we are increasingly coordinated with our Head, the Lord Jesus. There are five participles (action words ending in **-ing**)—but three main features or evidences. The first three participles describe the first characteristic and the fourth and fifth participles describe the other two. The first evidence of a body of believers that is being filled by God's Spirit and is evidencing maturity and growth in likeness to Christ is:

A. Increasing Spiritual Communication:

“Speaking (lit. using your voice) to each other in Spirit inspired psalms, hymns, and songs...”

The combination of words here may seem a little confusing at first. Paul talks about *speaking or addressing* each other in the first part—which sounds like normal conversation. But then you come to the substance and you find words that sound very musical: psalms, hymns, and songs. So which is it? Is this talking or is it singing? If it is singing, does this mean we have to abandon normal speech and confine ourselves to song so that church life becomes an opera? *“Hi, Bill, how are you doing to today?”*
“Not so well. The kids are sick and kept us up all night and now my wife has just come down with a fever!”

As you move on to the second part of the verse, you have pretty much all singing. *“Singing songs and making music in your heart to the Lord...”* So what is going on here?

It seems as you look at the whole verse that there is an **inflow** and an **outflow**. The inflow starts with what is going on in the heart. As the Spirit works in your heart, He seeks to draw you to focus on God's wonderful and gracious plan, namely redemption from the penalty and power of sin and to renewal into the image of Christ for the glory of God. But as Colossians 3:16 (a helpful parallel passage) teaches us—the Spirit does this as we allow the Word of Christ or *about* Christ to dwell in us **richly**. That isn't just rote memory going on (like learning sections of verses in Awana). It is lavishly spending the resources of your inner man on the implications of God's story of redemption. It isn't just learning some truths that you repeat back to others so you can demonstrate that you understand the basic truths of the Christian faith, it is meditating on these truths like a woman who gets a love letter from her fiancé who is stationed abroad but is eventually coming home (Compare reading Love Sonnets with notes from Kellie).

This inflow does involve information (which is why we have a lot of teaching going on at this church—but it is *more* than our mere acquiring of information. It is the personal contemplation on those truths that turns what for some may remain mere factoids into a love story. And the more

that happens, the emotions cannot help but eventually be won over and seek to express themselves in *singing praise to God*. That is what I think is going on in the second part of this verse.

I start there though because it seems like as though this inflow singing generated by the Spirit but in response to the Word of Christ that we allow to lavishly dwell in our hearts leads to the outflow communication that you see at the beginning of verse 19.

Pastor Kent Hughes describes this inflowing as being like an artesian well that silently comes from the depths of your inner being. It is passionately joyful and inevitably it has to become verbal. Like a Piston fan that has just seen his team score 10 unanswered points, capped off by a monstrous slam dunk on a breakaway steal—you just can't sit still. You *have* to do something.

This of course can happen anytime. But God designs that inner build up of joy to intersect when we come together for public worship. Paul uses three words to describe this corporate overflow of praise. Psalms, hymns, and songs. Just a couple of quick observations. One is that the word, spiritual, which in most translations is treated like a modifier of the word, "songs", can actually modify all three words and it may refer to the Spirit's energizing of our outflow in corporate worship.

Secondly, many people try to pin down specific examples of what Paul is talking about when he refers to Spirit-energized psalms, hymns, and songs. Psalms at least in part refer to the OT psalms. But beyond that, we really don't know exactly the types of music to which he refers. I think the point is less about the particular medium and more about the message. It is as if Paul is calling us to make use of the full range of music available to the community of God's people to praise and worship Him.

Whatever Paul had in mind, you would probably not recognize any of it. The sort of music and liturgy that first century Christians employed would not sound anything like the music of the 20th or the 21st century. If you are a diehard traditionalist or you like only cutting edge contemporary music—you would likely be disappointed if you were attending one of their services. But not if you could understand the words and loved the Gospel. Because the *Word about Christ* ultimately transcends style. It makes the medium yield to the power and persuasiveness of the message.

People filled by God's Spirit *overflow* in song! This has been illustrated down throughout church history and it will forever mark the people of God throughout eternity. If you don't think so—just read church history. You hear it over and over again in the songs of the reformation and in the songs of some of the great revivals in our own country.

The one thing they have in common—they *overflow* in praise to Christ. See Revelation 4-5. See “A Mighty Fortress Is Our God.”

But there is one more thing we need to look at. That word “speak.” What does it mean—or at least imply? That while this spiritual communication is so appropriately conveyed through music—it is not limited to music. Once again, Colossians 3:16 sheds light on this text.

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God.

Notice who is doing the teaching? All of us! That is the biblical model! There are a lot of implications here.

Where do we teach?
When?
How?
Who?

This verse gets us out of the formal settings—as important as they are. And it puts us into real life contexts of ministry during the week and between the formal. This text tells us that a church that is really in step with God’s Spirit is a church *full* of teachers. A church full of people offering godly counsel. And that it doesn’t necessarily have to be in a classroom (though it certainly can). In fact, it could be in a small group. In a hospital or nursing home. At National Coney Island or Starbucks.

The bottom line is not the method. It is the message. Sometimes it is spoken. Sometimes it is sung. Sometimes it in formal situations. Often it is informal. It starts with the Spirit’s inflow. It leads to corporate outflow. And often the corporate outflow sparks more hunger for the private times of inflow.

Some questions:

What evidence do you have of the Spirit’s work in your life?
What are you doing to cooperate and facilitate? Or to hinder?
What are you doing in your inflow to contribute to the corporate outflow?

- B. **Increasing Thanksgiving:** *“Giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father.”*
- C. **Increasing in (Joyful) Submitting:** *“Submitting to each other out of reverence for Christ.”*