

Sermon – 08/02/2009 am

Walk in the Spirit

Study Text: Ephesians 5:18

It was 9 o'clock in the morning when the men emerged from the room speaking in strange languages. Some who heard them thought they were drunk. They laughed at them saying they were 'full of new wine'. Was that the case? No. They were not full of wine but full of the Holy Spirit. These were the disciples of Jesus to whom the Holy Spirit had just been given. Their speaking what seemed to be strange things was not because they were under the influence of alcohol but under the influence of the Spirit of God.

Do you know what it is like to be under the influence of alcohol? I hope you know what it is like to be under the influence of the Holy Spirit. This what the apostle urges upon the believers at Ephesus. He wrote to them *Do not be drunk with wine ... but be filled with the Spirit* (5:18).

This chapter is about how we are to walk as children of God. We must walk in love, remembering the love of Christ. We must walk as children of light for Christ has given us light. We must walk in wisdom making the most of the time that God gives us. We must find out the will of God and walk in his will. This verse continues in this context and hence the title of this sermon: 'walk in the Spirit'.

Full of Wine

It is important to keep the context in mind for this verse is not simply a proof text against drinking alcohol. It tells us clearly not to get drunk with wine but not just as a 'do not' command'. As with the other instructions in this second half of Ephesians Paul explains why, why we are not to tell lies, not to steal, or speak evil of others. Paul's pattern, as we have noted, is to balance the negative with the positive. His 'do not' is followed by a 'but do this'. This pattern is followed in this verse.

Why does Paul refer to getting drunk with wine at this point in the letter? Is it because there was a problem with drinking in the church? That could be the case as we will see. But the link with the Spirit, understood to be the Holy Spirit, is interesting. Some think he had Pentecost in his mind. At Pentecost there was a dramatic change in the life of the Apostles not because of excess wine but because of the filling of the Holy Spirit. Paul knew the guidance and power of the Holy Spirit in his own life and taught that all who believe must walk in the Spirit *for if you live according to the flesh you will die* (Romans 8:13, 14).

Drunkenness and binge drinking is a major personal and social problem in our society. It is the same in many societies. Tribals living in the jungles of India make wine and get drunk. From the Whitehouse and the Lodge to the mud hut and bark humpy, drunkenness has been a problem.

It was the same in Greek society in New Testament times. Why did some laugh at the apostles and accuse them of being drunk? Why did Peter say it is only nine in the morning? Clearly drunken behaviour, albeit later in the day and usually after dark, was not uncommon in that society. Some in the church had been drunkards (I Corinthians 6:10) and not all had turned away from this sin. Even at the Lord's Supper some were getting drunk (I Corinthians 11:21).

What is wrong with getting drunk? We are given all sorts of medical advice these days – alcohol kills liver cells, it kills brain cells, and so on. But still people drink to excess. We are told clearly of all the social harm that comes from drunkenness- abusive behaviour, violence and even criminal activity. But still drunkenness continues unabated.

Why does the apostle condemn drunkenness? *In which is dissipation* he writes. This is an interesting word. It actually means ‘riot’ or ‘excess’. In the Greek it is in the negative, the negative of the word meaning ‘save’. This word conveys the idea of wastefulness. To walk in wisdom means not to waste the time but to redeem the time (5:16). It also means not wasting other gifts of God especially the gift of life. God gives you life and he is concerned how you live your life.

Think of the prodigal son. What a wasted life he was living. In his riotous living he wasted all that his father gave him. This is what prodigal means- careless, wasteful and reckless living. This is the life of the drunkard. Thankfully he came to his senses, repented of his sin and returned to his father who graciously received him.

The other sinful aspect of drunkenness is the loss of self control. Self control is one of the fruits of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22). It should be a feature of the life of all believers especially those who serve as elders (II Peter 1:6, Titus 1:8). Notice how elders and deacons are, among other things, to be sober and not given to wine.

In the state of intoxication a person loses self control. Their judgment is severely impaired. That is why they are not allowed to drive. Their moral judgement is also affected. In such a state they do things that their conscience would otherwise not allow them to do. That is why they are later ashamed of what they said and did when drunk.

While Paul speaks of walking in a metaphorical way, it is a reality that intoxicated person loses their sense of balance. The drunk cannot stand up straight or walk in a straight line. You see them stumbling home from the pub, sometimes falling into the gutter. This is no way for a child of God to be walking. This is an offence before God who made us in his image. He made us to be ‘reasonable’ beings as the Larger Catechism puts it (Larger Catechism 17). He made us to live with self control.

‘Both wastefulness and lack of self control implied by this word (dissipation) are things that should not be seen in the lives of those who have found in Christ the source and way of wisdom’. Drunkards end up like the prodigal son living with the pigs and eating their food- at least metaphorically.

Full of the Spirit

On the day of Pentecost the apostles were all filled with the Holy Spirit. In the power of the Spirit they spoke in languages they did not know. They came under the control of the Holy Spirit. They went on to speak with power and authority of the things of God and to do wonderful works in the name of Jesus.

The apostles were filled with the Holy Spirit at Pentecost yet we read again of them being filled with the Holy Spirit in Acts 4:8 and 4:31. They were not baptised again with the Holy Spirit, as some think, for the Holy Spirit is a person, the third person of the God given to all who truly believe when they believe. To be filled with the Spirit then is not the same as being baptised or receiving the Spirit. It refers to work of the Holy Spirit in one’s life, the measure

to which the Holy Spirit is in control. The Holy Spirit is quenched when the old nature starts to rear its ugly head. The Holy Spirit is certainly quenched when drink takes control.

Paul writes 'be filled with the Spirit' using what is an unusual tense- it is present, passive imperative. He is not talking about what happened in the past but what we must pay attention to now. It is passive in that we cannot fill ourselves with the Spirit. We can fill ourselves with drink- that is active. But the Holy Spirit is given by God. How come the imperative. How can Paul urge us to be filled with the Holy Spirit if he is given to us?

Ferguson explains it like this- 'Paul is carefully balancing two things: first that we are active in the experience of filling- God does not treat us as automatons; but second, that this activity actually involves us being receptive (in that sense passive) so that we are filled with the Spirit'. What is involved is active submission. To be filled with the Holy Spirit involves submission to the control of the Spirit in every part of our life. This submission must be ongoing, a daily determination in our Christian walk.

It is helpful to compare this verse in Ephesians with Colossians 3:16. Paul wrote to the Colossian church at the same time as he writes to Ephesus. That is why the letters have much in common. In Colossians he wrote *let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom* before going on to the use of psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. So in Ephesians he says 'be filled with the Spirit' while in Colossians he writes 'let the word of Christ dwell in you'. Paul saw these two truths as being essentially the same.

The Holy Spirit does not bring new revelation but guides us in the truth found in the word of God. If you are praying to be filled with the Spirit but neglecting the word of Christ then you will get nowhere. Jesus sent the Holy Spirit to remind his disciples of what he had taught them not to give new teaching (John 14:26, 16:14). The filling of the Holy Spirit is passive but it is associated with earnest prayer and study of the Bible. Ask any one who is filled with the Spirit. Look at the history of revivals.

Let the Holy Spirit be in control of your life. Listen to him and not to the old sinful nature. Do not let drink or drugs take control. Do not think that peace and happiness can be found in the bottle. Walk in step with the Spirit of God and you will not stumble. Walk in the Spirit and you will have peace and joy beyond imagination.

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