

Sermon & Bible Study Helps

Substance Abuse - Do Not Get Drunk on Wine
Emphasis Passage: Ephesians 5:18

SERMON FOUNDATION - THE WORD

Parallel Translations (Full context)

King James Version - 5:18 And do not be drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit; 19 Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord; 20 Giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ; 21 Submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God.

New King James Version - 5:18 And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit, 19 speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord, 20 giving thanks always for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, 21 submitting to one another in the fear of God.

New International Version - 5:18 Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit. 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.

Holman Christian Standard Version - 5:18 And don't get drunk with wine, which leads to reckless actions, but be filled with the Spirit: 19 speaking to one another in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, singing and making music to the Lord in your heart, 20 giving thanks always for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, 21 submitting to one another in the fear of Christ.

New American Standard Version - 5:18 And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit, 19 speaking to one another in psalms, 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.

New Living Translation - 5:18 Don't be drunk with wine, because that will ruin your life. Instead, let the Holy Spirit fill and control you. 19 Then you will sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs among yourselves, making music to the Lord in your hearts. 20 And you will always give thanks for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. 21 And further, you will submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.

Greek Text - 5:18

καὶ μὴ μεθύσκεσθε	οἴνῳ	ἐν ᾧ ἐστὶν ἀσωτία,	ἀλλὰ πληροῦσθε	ἐν πνεύματι,
And do not get drunk	with wine,	for that is dissipation,	but be filled	with the Spirit,

KEY WORDS (WITH STRONG'S REFERENCE NUMBERS)

μεθύσκεσθε (*methuskesthe*) – present, passive, imperative, second person, plural

(3182) μεθύσκω (*methuskō*) – get drunk, become intoxicated

ἀσωτία (*asōtia*) – noun, nominative, feminine, singular

(810) ἀσωτία (*asōtia*) – profligacy, dissoluteness, debauchery, reckless living, dissipation

πληροοσθε (*plērousthe*) – present, passive, imperative, second person, plural

(4137) πληρώω (*plarōō*) – fulfill, bring about, make full, fill

SCRIPTURAL CONTEXT

Paul established the church in Ephesus on his second missionary journey (Acts 18:18-19). During his third missionary journey, he stayed in Ephesus around three years in order to strengthen the work in that strategic metropolitan center and to spread the gospel throughout Asia Minor (Acts 19:1-41). By the time he wrote this letter, Paul was in prison for his evangelistic efforts. But prison didn't dull his burden for the churches of Asia Minor. While he sat in that Roman prison, the Holy Spirit led him to write to the churches in Asia Minor to instruct them in matters of faith and practice. Building on the theological foundation established in the first three chapters of his letter, Paul wrote three chapters of intensely practical guidance for these fledgling churches. Included in his instructions is the crucially important issue of substance abuse (Eph. 5:18).

SUGGESTED SERMON OR BIBLE STUDY OUTLINE

Introduction: From the earliest days, substance abuse has plagued humanity. Even Noah got drunk and created the occasion for Canaan's sin and the tragic curse that followed (Gen. 9:20-25). Today, substance abuse is at epidemic levels around the world. (The accompanying Fact Sheet provides some helpful facts about today's substance abuse problem.) The epidemic of substance abuse is felt by the church today both among its own members and in the culture at large. Christians must understand what is at stake with substance abuse and resolve to live their lives without abusing drugs.

In Paul's day, the situation was not much different. The Christians to whom he wrote could not afford the negative consequences of substance abuse for themselves, their relationships with each other and the Lord, and the unbelieving world. Paul instructed them to give themselves to the controlling power of the Holy Spirit instead of drunkenness. Through the Spirit's power, they could be assured of vibrant lives, a dynamic church, and a positive witness in the world (5:19-21).

The Prohibition of Substance Abuse, v. 18

Paul states in forceful terms that there is no place in the Christian life for drunkenness. He was concerned about drunkenness because of the way it affects a person. Paul recognized that drunkenness interferes with relationships, whether with others (vv. 19-21) or with the Lord (v. 20).

Considering Paul's concern about drunkenness, it is evident that any substance that interferes with relationships would be unacceptable to Paul. In other words, Paul is not only restricting the consumption of wine, he is restricting the consumption of any drug that interferes with relationships, which would include any alcoholic beverage and illicit drug. There is no place for these in the Christian's life.

The Reason for the Prohibition of Substance Abuse, v. 18

The reason these intoxicating substances are not acceptable in the Christian's life is because they produce "dissipation" (asōtia). R. Lenski, *Interpretation of Ephesians*, p. 618, says the word *asōtia* "describes the condition when mind and body are dragged down so as to be incapable of spiritual functions." Some translators prefer to use the word "wasteful" to translate this Greek word. Jesus used this word when he described the prodigal son's lifestyle in Luke 15:13. He said this wayward son engaged in "foolish living" (HCSB). The issue is not that a person cannot express himself when he is drunk; it is that he cannot express himself on a spiritual level when he is drunk. A drunk person often has plenty to say; but little of what he says is useful, meaningful, or helpful.

The Alternative to Substance Abuse, v. 18

Paul offers an alternative to substance abuse. He says Christians should be filled with the Spirit. The word "filled" (πληροῦσθε, *pl̄rousthe*) is important for Paul's argument for a couple of reasons. First, the true spiritual power and effectiveness in this world are achieved through the Spirit's power, not human power. Luke used the word "filled" (πληρῶ, *pl̄roō*) to describe the condition of the disciples on the day of Pentecost. Acts 2:4 says the disciples were all filled with the Holy Spirit. On that momentous day, the disciples were transformed from a cowering, broken band to a powerhouse of spiritual vitality. From the moment the disciples were filled with the Spirit nothing was ever the same. The Spirit elevated everything about this young community, and through them God shook the world.

Second, the word "filled" has special significance because of the form that Paul used. The word is in the imperative mood, which means that what is prescribed is not an option. Paul wasn't saying these Christians could choose drunkenness or the Spirit as they desired. He was prohibiting one and commanding the other. The present tense form means that Christians are commanded to "go on being filled" with the Spirit. Paul was not thinking of a one-time filling. He was commanding a constant controlling influence of the Christian's life by the Holy Spirit. The passive voice of the verb means that Christians are supposed to allow the Spirit to fill them. A. Skevington Wood, *Ephesians, The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, p. 72, interprets the passive sense of the verb as "let yourselves be filled with the Spirit." The filling of the Spirit is not something a Christian manufactures; it is something a Christian submits to. Some people use alcohol to give them courage and to convey a bold attitude. The Christian way is to allow the Holy Spirit to express His power through the believer. Such power is genuine, rather than the product of a distorted view of reality.

The Benefits of the Alternative to Substance Abuse, vv. 19-21

Most translations and most commentaries recognize that the four clauses comprising verses 19-21 are dependent on the imperative form of "filled" in verse 18. R. Lenski, *Interpretation of Ephesians*, p. 619, comments that these four participles "describe the condition of those who are filled with the Spirit." Obviously, the four conditions Paul describes are not the only benefits of the filling of the Holy Spirit, but these four benefits were of particular concern to Paul in this context.

The common element in these four clauses is relationships. Paul says that a person filled with the Holy Spirit will

speak to others in “psalms, and hymns, and spiritual songs” (v. 20). Of course it isn’t normal to speak to people in this way. The picture that comes to mind is the current use of songs in musicals. Often at significant junctures actors will break out in song, and sometimes they even will sing to each other. Some wonder why such an unreal situation is portrayed between two people on stage. The answer is that the songs are used to convey a greater sense of involvement and emotional intensity between the characters. Paul probably has the same thing in mind here. A Christian who is filled with the Spirit will be more involved in the lives of those around him and commit more of himself to those relationships. He will in essence sing out his life. Contrasted with the role that alcohol plays in creating distance between people, including family relationships, it is easy to understand why Paul would want Christians to choose the Spirit’s control.

The next two benefits Paul describes deal with the relationship between the Christian and God. A Spirit-filled Christian will be led to worship God outwardly and inwardly (v. 19). This Christian also will be more inclined to see God’s hand in all things, even in tragedies, and thank God for His work that is beyond human comprehension. Of course, alcohol would interfere with both of these responses to God. An intoxicated Christian’s worship is not going to be focused, and the use of alcohol is often an escapist attitude toward adversity.

The final clause (v. 20) introduces the theme that occupies Paul’s attention through Ephesians 6:9. Here Paul explains the benefit of the Spirit’s controlling influence over ego in relationships. A spirit-controlled Christian will not dominate others. He will consider others as more important than himself, even when in a position of authority (5:22-29; 6:4, 9). And those who are under authority will accept the proper exercise of that authority (Eph. 5:22-29; 6:1-3, 5-8). Alcohol does not foster these attitudes. Often, alcohol enflames the ego, encouraging an attitude of domination in those in authority and an obstinate spirit in those who are under authority.

Conclusion

This passage makes it quite evident that there is no place in the Christian life for intoxication of any kind. Anything that controls the believer’s life besides the Holy Spirit is not allowable. Paul’s use of the present tense form of “filled” also excludes those momentary lapses some Christians defend as “rest and relaxation.” The Christian is supposed to be continually submitted to the Holy Spirit and continually filled with His power. It is not possible to be filled with the Holy Spirit and at the same time to be under the influence of alcohol or any illicit drug. The intoxicating effect of these drugs will interfere with the Spirit’s work in and through that Christian’s life. The only possible response for the person who desires to be obedient in all things is to choose the Spirit and to abstain from the use of all intoxicating drugs, which includes alcohol.

WHAT CAN ONE PERSON DO?

- Decide to abstain from the use of alcohol and illicit drugs.
- Begin an alcohol and drug rehabilitation ministry in your church.
- Ask your pastor to make substance abuse awareness a regular part of the church’s message.
- Teach a Bible study on substance abuse to help others become more aware of the Bible’s teachings on the issue.
- Encourage public officials to pass laws and to enforce laws that discourage the use of alcohol and illicit drugs.
- Write letters to the editor stating your position on alcohol and substance abuse, and your reasons for it.

HELPFUL SCRIPTURE

Genesis 9:21-24; Leviticus 10:8-9; Proverbs 20:1; Proverbs 21:17; Proverbs 23:20-21, 29-35; Proverbs 31:4-7; Isaiah 5:11, 22; Isaiah 28:7-8; Isaiah 56:12; Hosea 4:11; Hosea 7:5, 14; Joel 3:3; Habakkuk 2:15-16; Nahum 1:10; Luke 12:44-46; Luke 21:34; Romans 12:1; 1 Corinthians 6:12, 19-20; Ephesians 5:18; 1 Thessalonians 5:7-8, 22; 1 Timothy 3:3, 8; 1 Timothy 5:23; Titus 1:7; Titus 2:3; 1 Peter 2:16; 2 Peter 2:19

SUGGESTED BIBLE STUDY QUESTIONS

This is a suggested Bible study for any size group. The sermon notes on this sheet, the accompanying Fact Sheet, and the enclosed materials serve as resources as you prepare to teach and then lead this Bible study. Answers are provided with the questions when appropriate, but do not be too quick to give the answers. Allow the participants time to talk about the questions among themselves and offer their own answers.

Create Learning Readiness: Share an example of someone whose life or work was severely affected by drug abuse.

Ask: *Why would someone allow drugs to ruin his or her life?*

Let the group talk about this for awhile. Make a list of the reasons members share.

Say: While we all know that the hard drugs are especially destructive, we should not think that alcohol is any less dangerous to a person's life and prospects for the future. (Share some facts about alcohol abuse from the accompanying Fact Sheet to make your point.)

Ask: *Why do most people think differently about alcohol than other drugs?*

List the reasons given by members of the group.

Comment on the kinds of reasons shared by the group. Some will blame the difference in attitudes on the way alcohol is portrayed in the media or because of the different kinds of people who abuse the other drugs.

Say: While people's attitudes about alcohol may be different than their attitudes about other drugs, we must recognize that alcohol is also a very dangerous drug that can destroy people's lives. In addition, alcohol interferes with a person's walk with God and relationships with other people.

Instruct the group to open their Bibles to Ephesians 5:18. Share the information provided in the Scriptural Context section of this guide. Then call on a member to read the verse. Be certain the member is comfortable reading in public.

Say: Paul talks about drinking too much wine in this passage. Certainly Paul isn't saying that a person can get drunk on something other than wine, like whisky or beer. The point he is making is that a person shouldn't get drunk. Perhaps the first question is, "How much does a person need to drink to get drunk?"

Ask: *How much do you think is too much?*

Share the information from the Fact Sheet about the amount of alcohol in different kinds of alcoholic beverages.

Say: As far as the police are concerned, when you have had as little as two drinks, you shouldn't be driving.

Ask: *Have you ever seen someone who was obviously too drunk to drive? How did you know the person was too drunk?* Let the members share their observations.

Ask: *What does Paul say happens when a person gets drunk? He is guilty of dissipation.* Explain from the accompanying Sermon Notes section what the word "dissipation" means.

Say: Instead of getting drunk, Paul says these Christians should "be filled with the Spirit."

Ask: *In what way are the concepts of getting drunk and being filled with the Spirit related?*

Let the members share their ideas. They probably will know the answer to this, but if they do not, share with them that when a person is drunk, he does not have control over himself. He will not be able to do some of the things he wants to do, and he will do some things he doesn't want to do. The filling of the Holy Spirit is a kind of controlling influence as well. Share with the group some examples in the Bible of people who were filled with the Holy Spirit and the kinds of things they did as a result. (See Acts 2:4 for example.)

Say: Paul relates the filling of the Holy Spirit to the ability to do some very special things here.

Direct the group to look at verses 19-21. Call on a member to read the verses.

Ask: *What are the things Paul says these Christians will do when they are filled with the Holy Spirit? List the things mentioned in the verses.*

Ask: *What does it mean to speak "to one another in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs"?*

Paul is talking about the nature of the conversation. See the Sermon Notes section for a discussion of what Paul means.

Say: Of course, we know what it means to sing and make melody with our hearts to the Lord, and to always give thanks for all things.

Ask: *Can't a person do these things when he is drunk? Why is it important to be sober and filled by the Holy Spirit to do these things?*

A person controlled by alcohol may do these things, but their actions will not be motivated by the Spirit, and their actions will not be as pure because the alcohol will impair the person's ability to do these things as well as he could if he were sober.

Ask: *How will the filling of the Holy Spirit help us to do these things?*

Let the members talk about this and share their ideas. Be sure they recognize that whatever people can do on their own is only a shadow of what they can do when they are filled with the Holy Spirit.

Say: It is obvious that our relationships with each other and with God will improve if we are filled with the Holy Spirit. What is more, Paul says our lives should be characterized by these things all the time. Share with the group the importance of the form of the verb "filled," explained in the Sermon Notes section.

Say: The antithesis of being controlled by the Spirit is being drunk. If these activities are supposed to be regular and continual, there cannot possibly be any time for drinking or drugs. How can we make sure that we are being continually filled by the Holy Spirit? Let the members suggest ways that they can follow Paul's directions. Plan to talk about how members did the next time they meet.