

Ephesians 5C

- It's time to return to Paul's instructions to the church concerning walking in love
 - Last week we gained a reprieve from Paul's exhortations for Christian living
 - Instead, we heard Paul's arguments for *why* we should pursue this walk
 - In short, Paul argued our lives are to be missionally-minded
 - And he gave several reasons for making missional living our goal
 - Paul summed up his argument in v.14 quoting a hymn of his day that paraphrased Isaiah 60:1
 - We are to arise from our slumber
 - To wake up from living like the world
 - So that as we walk out our new life before the world, we may serve Christ as He intended
 - Displaying light, exposing the world's evil and proving what pleases the Lord
 - As we do these things, we will see Christ shine on us
 - We will be blessed now and in the kingdom
 - As we understand this truth, we find greater motivation to tackle our sin, crucify our flesh and walk in the Spirit
- You remember he started the chapter discussing immorality, vulgarity and other ways our behaviors can detract from our witness to the world
 - In Ephesus these behaviors were likely common among the Greek pagans who were coming into the Church
 - So Paul called upon the church to put aside their old self and put on a new self, one consistent with their new nature
 - But as we noted, these behaviors are still common in the unsaved culture around us

- So we still have equal reason to set them aside today
- We need to look different if we're going to convince the world we possess a different message
- That's our mission, and it requires focus
- Then Paul gave us added urgency saying we must make the most of the time God gives us for accomplishing this mission
 - Because our lives are short, at least in view of eternity
 - We each get very little time to serve Christ before we receive our report card
 - And the days in which we live are evil, Paul says
 - So we have to prepare and plan to do the right thing if we hope to succeed more often than not
- So let's go back to Paul and pick up where he left off, naming sins that easily entangle believers and distract us from our mission

[Eph. 5:17](#) So then do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is.

[Eph. 5:18](#) And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit,

- Notice Paul begins with the word "so"
 - He's drawing the proper conclusion for us
 - And there truly is just one sensible conclusion we can make given what we studied last week
 - We're here to serve a purpose, a mission to bring light into a dark world, to expose the world's evil by proving what pleases God
 - Our mission requires we stand apart from the world, that we look different and live differently
 - And we do this knowing our time is short and the days are evil
 - Therefore, Paul says we cannot afford to be foolish
 - The label "fool" is a strong word in scripture
 - It means to act without reason, to act without sense

- And given the importance of our mission and the limited time we have, we must act sensibly, not foolishly
- A lot of Christians do, in fact, live foolishly though
 - They live without proper reasoning
 - They are not thinking about what life is truly about and what they're here to do for Christ
 - Some Christians float through life, from moment to moment, pursuing the world while keeping Jesus in a corner reserved for Sundays, Easter and Christmas
 - What's missing for these believers?
- Paul says in the second half of v.17 that the issue is they aren't seeking to understand what the will of God is
 - In this context, the will of God refers to God's desires for their life
 - His will for how they live, what they are on earth to do in service to Christ
 - They aren't asking the question, "What does the Lord want for my life?"
 - And they aren't consumed in finding the answer
 - And therefore they can't walk according to His plan and fulfill His purposes in their life
 - Perhaps more importantly, they don't concern themselves with God's will for His followers in general
 - They aren't reading His word to learn His expectations for a called-out life
 - They aren't aware a judgment is coming, they aren't thinking about the day they stand before Christ
 - And they aren't concerned with how their choices and decisions now will impact that day to come
 - Imagine a young man who was drafted into the army but he never bothered to read his draft notice when it came in the mail

- The young man had been called into service, yet he kept on living for himself oblivious to his new calling
- He was oblivious because he hadn't taken time to read what he knew was true, and certainly we would describe such a man as foolish
- One day a policeman knocks on his door, and much to his surprise he's taken away
- I think that's Paul's concern for the church in Ephesus
 - He didn't want the church to live ignorantly unaware of the mission God was calling them to serve
 - Or even worse, disregarding what they already knew God expected
 - Having been distracted or deceived into following the world instead of Christ
- Paul then calls out one particular form of distraction and disobedience, one that forms the first half of a comparison at the heart of today's teaching
 - Paul says do not become drunk with wine
 - There is no mystery in the Greek words Paul is using here
 - To be drunk means simply to be inebriated, to lose control of our faculties by consuming too much alcohol
 - And the word wine refers to the fermented drink common to Paul's day just as it is today
 - Some have tried to argue that wine in the Bible isn't really wine
 - And if you are interested in an in-depth explanation of how we know the word wine in the Bible refers to an alcoholic beverage, read our article here: [May a Christian drink alcohol?](#)
 - But the Bible teaches believers have liberty to consume alcohol responsibly so long as they do so without becoming drunk
 - We are expected to recognize where the line is between enjoying wine in the way God intended
 - And crossing that line into drunkenness which is abuse and it is sin

- Substance abuse is a particularly dangerous form of sin
 - It robs us of our senses and erects barriers between us and the Spirit's leading
 - If substance abuse becomes a fixture in our lives, it will likely give rise to other sinful practices
 - In the end, the sin of drunkenness is the abandonment of self-control
- Self-control is always the goal for the Christian
 - It is the goal for all areas of our walk
 - Nothing of this world should control us
 - Only the Spirit of God should have our obedience
 - Therefore, whether we abuse wine or prescription drugs or illegal drugs or food or something else, we are sinning
 - So why did Paul focus on wine?
 - First, wine was the drug of choice in his day
 - It was easily made, reasonably priced and commonly available
 - There were few other ways to sin in the same, socially-accepted way
 - Today, we have a smorgasbord of choices for stimulating our body in an attempt to escape
 - So we should understand this teaching broadly as a condemnation of any kind of inebriation regardless of the source
 - It is always a lack of self-control and a giving over of our bodies to something other than the Holy Spirit
- Paul says when we demonstrate a lack of self-control and allow ourselves to become drunk, we are experiencing dissipation
 - The Greek word translated dissipation can have three meanings, and all three are applicable here
 - First, dissipation means self-indulgence or excessiveness
 - Acting in an excessive way and for selfish reasons

- Certainly, the decision to be drunk can be understood to be an excessive act born out of selfishness
 - This definition reminds us that drunkenness is ultimately a choice, a decision
 - Christians who get drunk are making a choice, they are not victims of an outside force
 - There may be complex life circumstances that lead us to make our mistakes
 - But in the end, becoming drunk involves a decision or series of decisions made in our flesh and at the expense of others
- Secondly, the word dissipation means a squandering of resources
 - And certainly becoming drunk involves squandering resources
 - But we're not referring to the money spent on drink or drugs
 - Paul is primarily referring to the squandering of time and opportunity
 - Remember, last week Paul said we must make the most of our time, this brief period we will live on earth to serve Christ
 - In my life I counted maybe 10,000 days remaining in my life
 - Assuming that's accurate, then every day I might choose to spend drunk would be one less day I'm serving Christ and the mission
 - And I don't have enough days that can I afford to waste even one
 - I want to make the most of every day knowing I will face judgment one day
 - Paul also said the days are evil, so we must be on our guard
 - We must make plans and adopt strategies to avoid being sidelined in our mission whether by the schemes of the enemy or our own temptations
 - And drinking excessively is one of the surest ways to get sidelined in the pursuit of Christ and His will in your life

- So if I'm prone to drunkenness, I must take meaningful steps to avoid that temptation because the days are short and evil
- In fact, every addictive drug creates a craving in the flesh
 - So as we give ourselves over to it, we make future episodes of drunkenness all the more likely
 - We're strengthening our flesh at the expense of our spirit
 - So a choice to become drunk today means dissipation today and makes it more likely the Christian will lose more days in the future
- The only hope is to break the pattern so we can establish a new pattern
 - We must starve the flesh of its drug so that its attraction will weaken over time
 - Meanwhile, we spend time strengthening our spirit through the pursuit of Christ in the discipline of our faith
 - To do otherwise is to waste resources, and the most precious resource we have is our time to serve the Lord
- And finally, the word for dissipation in Greek can also be translated "unsavedness"
 - Because the entire existence of an unbeliever can be described as dissipation
 - An unbeliever lives a lifetime on earth opposing God and wasting their time
 - Only then to spend eternity in the Lake of Fire
 - Their life is one big self-indulgent, excessive affair that ends in nothing...and they will be forgotten in eternity
 - Then in v.18 Paul applies this same word to believers who get drunk because drunkenness makes the believer indistinguishable from unbelievers
 - Physically, a drunk believer looks exactly like the world in many ways
 - While we are drunk we sideline our witness and our pursuit of the mission

- Because inebriation robs us of our sensibilities
- We can't make choices that reflect Christ or show love
- We are simply a walking display of debauchery
- So to any observer, we simply look like the world, and lacking contrast we cannot serve the mission
- And spiritually, the drunk believer is also like the world, at least in a sense
 - Clearly believers share nothing in common spiritually with unbelievers
 - But in practical terms, the drunk believer is no more spiritually-directed than the sober unbeliever
 - Neither an unbeliever nor a drunk believer is under control of the Spirit
- While we're under the influence of any drug, our flesh takes charge and hands control over to the enemy
 - If you've ever been drunk, do you remember saying or doing things you would never normally say or do?
 - That's proof to you that you are not acting under the control of the Spirit but of the flesh and the enemy
 - The more we drug ourselves, the more our flesh gains control while our spirit becomes imprisoned
- All three meanings of the word dissipation point us to the same conclusion:
 - We're engaged in a battle between flesh and spirit so we can't afford to be foolish
 - The wise thing to do is to seek to be filled by the Spirit rather than wine, Paul says in the second half of v.18
 - It means to come under control of the Spirit, to be filled in the same way as someone may be filled with rage or joy
 - The Greek verb filled is in the passive tense, meaning this is something done to us not by us

- So we are called to set aside anything that conflicts with the Spirit so that He is free to lead us
 - We are to be consumed by the will and desires of the Spirit
 - We are to be under His control in the sense that we yield to the Spirit's will and desires by denying our flesh its desires
- That's how the Lord has constructed the process of our sanctification
 - We must set aside our flesh to give the Spirit opportunity to take over
 - We must say no to self before we can say yes to the Spirit
 - When we do that, the Spirit will guide us for as long as we seek the will of God
- Some believers see Paul's contrast in v.18 between being drunk in the flesh vs. being filled by the Spirit and come to a wrong conclusion
 - They assume a filling of the Spirit is like a filling of wine, something we must take in that isn't with us normally
 - As if we must take in a secondary experience of the Spirit beyond what we already received at the point we were saved
 - Secondly, they imagine that being filled with the Spirit must result in a similar physical response to being drunk with wine
 - A believer filled with the Spirit should exhibit strange or unconscious behaviors
 - Out of this thinking comes charismatic errors of one kind or another including the teaching that a person isn't truly saved without such manifestations
 - And that even true believers must seek after a subsequent "filling" of the Spirit following salvation
 - Reading v.18 in its context makes clear the charismatic teachings are born out of a wooden interpretation of the text, one that misses Paul's point entirely
 - We can see Paul is contrasting slavery to a physical addiction with submitting to the Spirit
 - And these things work in opposite ways, not in similar ways

- One is a barrier to serving Christ while another is a means to serving Him
- One causes us to lose control over our flesh, while the other puts our flesh in subjection
- One is giving in to self while the other is yielding to the Spirit
- In fact, Paul goes on to clarify what walking in the Spirit looks like in the life of a believer

[Eph. 5:19](#) speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord;

[Eph. 5:20](#) always giving thanks for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God, even the Father;

[Eph. 5:21](#) and be subject to one another in the fear of Christ.

- In this list we find four behaviors that typify a believer walking in the Spirit
- Each of these behaviors has a parallel to the earlier contrast with drunkenness
- In contrast to the counterfeit joy that comes from feeding the flesh with wine or any such thing, Paul's examples illustrate true joy among believers walking in the Spirit
- These things enhance fulfilling the mission, in contrast to the dissipation of feeding the flesh
- First, Paul says a believer walking in the Spirit with a mind set on the mission speaks to other believers in psalms, hymns and spiritual songs
 - He's talking about public expressions of joy
 - A psalm is a poem of praise taken from the Old Testament book of the same name
 - A hymn is a song of praise sung to the glory of God
 - And spiritual songs are simply any other joyful expression of spiritual truth (we might include Christian pop music here)
 - When you see someone singing in public, they appear joyful and exuberant

- Ironically, you might wonder if they are drunk
- And that's Paul's point of comparison, of course
- If you want to get a little silly in public, then do it in the Spirit rather than the flesh
- Rather than getting drunk, standing on tables and singing your school fight song, sing songs of praise to the Lord by the Spirit
- That's an expression of joy that serves the purpose of the mission
- Secondly, a believer in the Spirit directs their joy to the Lord in private praise
 - Paul says we are to sing and make music to the Lord in our hearts
 - This is inward praise and joy before the Lord
 - So find joy in knowing what you have eternally in Christ and carry that joy in your heart praising Him continually
- This is in contrast to those who run from God into their addiction
 - We can't show God joy in our heart if we're so drugged we can't think straight much less praise Him sensibly
 - Furthermore, the desire to be drunk is inherently an act of running from God, not toward Him
 - Of denying Him rather than praising Him
 - Like the Prodigal Son, we're saying we want to run away to enjoy our inheritance now rather than remaining patient under the Father's authority
- Thirdly, Paul says give thanks for all things in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ to God
 - Those who abuse wine or other drugs are usually seeking an escape
 - At first, we may turn to a drug to numb ourselves from pain or disappointment in our life
 - Eventually we come to rely on the drug, and then the addiction takes on a life of its own
 - Seeking to escape from disappointments and trials in life is the opposite of giving thanks to the Lord for all things, including for trials

- The Bible teaches we are to thank the Lord for the trials we face knowing they are opportunities for spiritual reward

[James 1:2](#) Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials,

[James 1:3](#) knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance.

[James 1:4](#) And let endurance have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.

- James says trials are cause for joy because they present opportunity for eternal reward
 - But of course that assumes we endure them properly
 - We must face them soberly, prayerfully, seeking counsel and support from our brothers and sisters
 - Asking what good thing is the Lord trying to accomplish through this trial and how should I respond to it in godliness to ensure a reward?
 - If we bring that mature perspective to our disappointments, we can learn to count or consider our trials as a source of joy
- Therefore, we thank the Lord for everything, both the things that please us and the things that try us
 - But if we escape into a bottle or a needle, we won't be thanking the Lord for a trial
 - We'll be too busy trying to forget the trial is even happening
- Finally, Paul says Christians led by the Spirit will be subject to one another in the church out of fear of Christ
 - Paul isn't saying that we are to obey everyone and everyone is to obey us
 - That's a recipe for anarchy in the body
 - Paul will go on to explain what he means specifically in the following passages on wives, husbands, children and others
 - In short, Paul is saying we are to willingly submit to those spiritual authorities in our life whoever they may be
 - And everyone has one or more spiritual authorities in their life

- Children have fathers, wives have husbands, workers and slaves have masters
- And everyone has elders and teachers in the church
- Collectively, these people (when they rule properly) help ensure godly outcomes in our lives
 - Therefore, a Christian led by the Spirit will recognize the benefit of these positions and respect them and turn to them in times of need
 - As we allow God to work through those relationships, we are the beneficiaries
 - As the writer of Hebrews said:

Heb. 13:17 Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they keep watch over your souls as those who will give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with grief, for this would be unprofitable for you.

- Those in authority over us are there to help us be more godly
 - The Lord even considers them responsible for the outcome to a degree, such that they will give an account one day
 - We can make their lives easier or harder as they seek to guide and teach and admonish us
 - We can fight against the spiritual authorities in our life, or avoid them or lie to them or even dispute their right to have authority
 - But if we make it harder for them to serve us in these ways, then we're only hurting ourselves
 - Because we're the ones who fail to profit by their leadership Scripture says
- So Christians who walk in the Spirit will be those who show a sincere willingness to be led by others in spiritual matters and they will submit
 - By contrast, those who turn to wine or other escapes to deal with their spiritual issues are in effect failing to submit to leaders
 - First, they are escaping from a trial rather than turning to the church for assistance and guidance through the trial

- Secondly, by becoming incapacitated they erect barriers to fellowship that prevent those leaders from correcting or encouraging them through the trial
 - Thirdly, they are disobeying the spiritual counsel of those in authority and of the word of God
 - In all three ways, they are not submitting to one another but are engaged in dissipation
- Paul goes forward from here into an extended discussion of submission in the body, since it is a key to walking in the Spirit and accomplishing the mission
 - So we have a lot more to say on this topic
 - Today we stop here reflecting on the importance of sobriety in our walk, regardless of how our life circumstances may turn
 - If you are facing difficulties in your life that feel overwhelming, don't escape into a prescription bottle or wine bottle or something similar
 - Ask the Lord to help you understand why this trial was necessary in your life
 - Ask Him what eternal good work will be accomplished through your endurance
 - Ask Him to comfort you through the church body and to bring relief soon
 - But don't try to escape and thereby lose the benefit the Lord is working to bring to you
 - Walk in the Spirit, giving thanks for everything, praising the Lord in your heart