

Be Filled

Eph. 5:18 | April 8, 2018 | Bryce Beale

There is a pernicious deceit common in our culture that pits faith against reason.

Faith has never had a dispute with reason. Some believers have, but faith has not. Some Christians have historically and presently shunned facts and evidence; but no more than non-Christians have and do.

Christ did not come to take men's minds away from them, but to give men's minds back to them. Our Savior's concern was not to rob the head of its brains; he knew the brains were already robbed, and his desire was to return the stolen property.

Karl Marx, although a century in his grave, well summarizes this common and current criticism of Christianity. "Man," he writes, "makes religion." This religion is, to Marx, a set of illusions that makes life tolerable; and it does make life tolerable, but only as an illusion, as an invented falsehood. And so Marx, like the New Atheists of our day, was intent upon uprooting these illusions and forcing man to look at the world without them.

Religion is, in Marx's famous words, "the *opium* of the people."¹

For opium, as a drug, restricts the thinking mind.

But the contention of Scripture is that the thinking mind is already restricted; it doesn't need religion for that. And Christianity has come, not to dim the mind, but to reawaken it. "Awake, O sleeper," is the call of Scripture.

The Enlightenment of the 1700's, with all its emphasis on science and reason, was impossible without the Reformation of the 1500's, with all its emphasis on faith; the many "aha" moments of scientists in the last several centuries were enabled by one prior "aha" moment of a monk with a Bible. Christianity did not close the minds of mankind; it opened them.

For Adam was fashioned as a reasonable creature, capable of fantastic thoughts, and he would have thought those thoughts if a serpent had not entered into the picture with one fantastic lie. If it was religion that

¹ Karl Marx, "A Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right: Introduction," Marxists.org, last modified 2009, accessed April 7, 2018, transcribed from *Deutsch-Französische Jahrbücher*, February 1844; emphasis his.

closed the human mind it was the religion of the serpent; it was the religion of sin that blinded the eyes of Eve and all her children.

But Jesus came to open the eyes of the blind. As he noted in his good confession before Pilate, “For this purpose I was born and for this purpose I have come into the world—to bear witness to the truth.”²

Through the temptation of the devil, our natural intellect has been infused with a legion of falsehoods, and it remains this way until the Savior casts them out and we finally sit at his feet, clothed and, for the first time, in our right mind.³

God did not enter into this world to stifle reason, but to open a window and give reason oxygen.

Paul makes this point in our text today.

EPHESIANS 5:18

The Spirit and the mind

This text, strangely enough, has been often tied and forced to say the opposite of what it means.

Allow me one extreme example to illustrate.

It is a not uncommon teaching of the Word of Faith movement that a believer can become “drunk in the Spirit.” For evidence they point to Pentecost: when those early Christians were filled with the Spirit and spoke in tongues, their critics mocking said, “They are filled with new wine.”⁴

In light of that and our present text, which contrasts being drunk with wine and being filled with the Spirit, they claim that someone filled with the Spirit may behave as though drunk with alcohol. The Toronto Blessing of 1994, for example, saw thousands falling on the floor, laughing uncontrollably, and making animal noises.⁵

One contemporary spinoff of this teaching is now coined “Drunken Glory.” Popularized by the American pastor John Crowder—not to be confused with the musician—and the YouTuber Brandon Barthrop, Drunken Glory teaches that an experience of the Holy Spirit is very similar to a drug trip or to drunkenness. Barthrop’s YouTube videos feature him and his friends acting as though they were high or drunk,

² John 18:37 (ESV).

³ Mark 5:15; Luke 8:35.

⁴ Acts 2:13.

⁵ “Toronto Blessing,” Wikipedia.com, last modified March 6, 2018, accessed April 7, 2018.

even pretending to drink from a Bible, with the claim that they are experiencing the Holy Spirit.⁶

This example is extreme, but something less extreme is common in American churches—that is, the notion that an experience of the Holy Spirit will lead you away from thinking, rather than toward it.

It is true that, in the early church, someone who prayed in tongues may not have understood what they were saying, though they spoke a real language. “For if I pray in a tongue,” wrote Paul, “my spirit prays but my mind is unfruitful.”⁷

Yet immediately afterward Paul adds: “What am I to do? I will pray with my spirit, but I will pray with my mind also.” In other words, I will pray that I might understand what I am praying in a tongue; and, if that prayer for understanding is not granted, I will not speak in tongues around others at all. “In church,” he concludes, “I would rather speak five words with my mind in order to instruct others, than ten thousand words in a tongue.”⁸

Even when, in the early church, the gift of tongues was present among God’s people as an experience of the Holy Spirit, it’s highest use was to inform the mind.⁹

Being filled with the Spirit, like Christianity itself, is not primarily intended as an opiate to slow the mind, but as a way to fully awaken it.¹⁰

⁶ Hugo Gye, “Getting high on The Most High: ‘Weird’ preacher starts ‘drunken glory’ cult where ex-addicts snort frankincense and get wasted through the power of sermon,” DailyMail.com, last modified December 19, 2013, accessed April 7, 2018.

⁷ 1 Cor. 14:14.

⁸ Vv. 15, 19.

⁹ Cf. v. 5.

¹⁰ “The first chapter of Dr Martyn Lloyd-Jones’ exposition of Ephesians 5:18–6:9, *Life in the Spirit in Marriage, Home and Work*, is entitled ‘The Stimulus of the Spirit’. Writing as both a physician and a pastor, he helpfully compares and contrasts the two states of drunkenness and the Spirit’s fullness. He says: ‘Wine—alcohol—... pharmacologically speaking is not a stimulant—it is a depressant. Take up any book on pharmacology and look up ‘alcohol’, and you will find, always, that it is classified among the depressants. It is not a stimulant’. Further, ‘it depresses first and foremost the highest centres of all in the brain ... They control everything that gives a man self-control, wisdom, understanding, discrimination, judgment, balance, the power to assess everything; in other words everything that makes a man behave at his very best and highest’.⁵ What the Holy Spirit does, however, is the exact opposite. ‘If it were possible to put the Holy Spirit into a textbook of Pharmacology, I would put him under the stimulants, for that is where he belongs. He really does

See this in our current text. I find three reasons to believe that being filled with the Spirit in this passage involves thinking, and not thoughtlessness.

First, I find it in what comes before this passage.

Notice that we begin our verse with an “And,” which points us to what precedes it. And what precedes are several contrasts, which result in the contrast of our text.

Consider verse 15: “Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise.” Do not be unwise—do not have a hampered reasoning, an incomplete grasp of reality. Rather, be wise, be thoughtful, reason well.

Now verse 17: “Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is.” Again, do not be *foolish*, but *understand*.

And then our present text appears: “And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit.” Do not walk as unwise (thoughtless), but as wise (thinking). Do not be foolish (thoughtless), but understand (think). And do not get drunk (thoughtless), but be filled with the Spirit (think).

But what precedes is not all that convinces us that being filled with the Spirit involves thought. We see the same idea in the verses that follow.

Notice how they complement the command, “Be filled.” These are activities in some way related to that command, and they are activities not of mindlessness, but of the mind.

Be filled, verse 19, “addressing [or speaking to] one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs.” These songs involve more than merely the mind, but they do not involve less. A psalm, a hymn, a spiritual song—each have words, and words require thought.

Be filled, verse 20, “giving thanks always and for everything.” This giving of thanks requires that one think of what he has as coming from God, and then that he articulate that thought in words.

And lastly be filled, verse 21, “submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ.” If you are to submit for this reason—reverence to

stimulate ... He stimulates our every faculty ... the mind and the intellect ... the heart ... and the will ...’ (John R. W. Stott, *God’s New Society: The Message of Ephesians*, The Bible Speaks Today [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1979] quoting D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Life in the Spirit in Marriage, Home and Work, An Exposition of Eph. 5:18 to 6:9* [Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1974]).

Christ—then you must be thinking of that reason. The mind must be actively set upon it.

These are the activities attached to this command, “Be filled with the Spirit,” and they are activities, not of thoughtlessness, but of thought.

And now one final evidence joins the former two, and it is a clear cross reference in Colossians 3:16, which reads: “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God.”

Notice that the activities are almost all the same as in our text, but with a slight variation. The command “be filled with the Spirit” is replaced with what we are to take as a very similar command: “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly.” And in Colossians an activity is added to the rest, added to singing and to giving thanks, and that activity is “teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom.”

Paul in these two places, Ephesians and Colossians, expresses ideas that are not far removed from each other, and he feels no qualm to interchange being filled with the Spirit, in one place, with having the word of Christ dwell in us richly. Nor is there in his mind any far distance between these and teaching in all wisdom. All involve thought.

The unusual behavior of people during the Great Awakening—crying and crying out, and so forth—insofar as it was valid differed from most similar experiences in the Word of Faith movement in that the emotion came from a heightening of thought. God’s wrath, or his mercy, became very clear, and individuals were overwhelmed.

So these three points of evidence—what precedes our text, what follows it, and its parallel in Colossians 3:15—converge on the same conclusion: whatever it is to be filled with the Spirit, it does not mean an emptying of the mind, but rather a filling of it.

Thoughtlessness

That is why Christianity forbids drunkenness.

Our text cannot be argued with: “do not get drunk.”

Someone may retort, “Well, it says, ‘Do not get drunk *with wine*.’” To which we reply, “But it adds, ‘which is dissipation.’” What is forbidden is forbidden not for its own sake, but because it turns off the mind. Wine is no evil in itself; neither is any alcohol a demon. But when wine or alcohol of any form, or mind-altering drugs for that matter, are taken to turn off or distort the brain, to remove inhibitions and numb the

capacity for thought, then the use of that substance is sin. Or more specifically, it is dissipation, reckless self-abandon, thoughtlessness.

We will not fault a man or woman for medicinal pain killers or anesthesia; these have a focused purpose and are appropriate when used within the proper bounds. They are a mercy in the face of more than usual physical pain. They are not intended for shutting down the brain, except insofar as that prevents the unusual pain of a physical abnormality.

The drunkenness pictured in our text is a surrender of reason not for these abnormalities, but for the normal, though grievous, circumstances of life.

A man sits at the bar, and he is given a drink. As he finishes it, he finds himself calmed. So he has two more. Now notice how his mind declines. He speaks louder now, but not more clearly; he does not take in information well, but he laughs quite loudly. He is, in some sense, now a child. The reason bequeathed on him by the Almighty, that he might thereby guide his conduct aright, he has willingly suppressed. And he has this punishment in himself, that he is now no wiser than a child of five or ten. He drinks another, then another, then another. And as he sets down his last empty glass, his similarity to an animal is obvious.

When a man in pride refuses this command against drunkenness, he is like Nebuchadnezzar on his rooftop, and like Nebuchadnezzar the penalty for his pride is the loss of his reason. He is sent as an animal out into the fields. He behaves in ways his sober self would blush at, for he has sold away the higher faculty of his reason and is guided by base and beastly instincts and appetites. This is dissipation, the evil instincts of man unhampered by reason.

And this is why drunkenness is not allowed. For the Christian, of all people, is to think. He may have naturally a strong mind, or naturally a weak one—it doesn't matter. Whatever he has, God intends for him to use it to its fullest capacity in his service. To squeeze the mind by excessive alcohol is inherently un-Christian—it is thoughtlessness, and it is sin.

And someone who lives this way, in drunkenness, as the Scriptures unbreakably say, will not inherit the kingdom of God.¹¹

I think it safe to assume, in an audience of this size, that some of you have given yourselves over to alcohol and to drugs. I do not doubt that you have reasons for this—for some of you, it began as a merely recreational thing. You were at a party or with a group of companions,

¹¹ 1 Cor. 6:9-10.

when you were offered a drink or a drug. And it felt good. It felt too good.

Others perhaps have taken to the bottle to drown a sense of sorrow or of guilt, to stamp out haunting memories of wrongs done against you, or of wrongs you have done.

And now the substance that once bowed before you as your servant has cast you at its feet, and you are forced to bow. Life without the buzz or high has become gray; the impulse to sedate yourself is overwhelming and you do not think you can resist. You are proving Jesus' maxim that "everyone who practices sin is a slave to sin."¹²

To you I must do more than warn. I must comfort. I must add this maxim of the Savior as well, just as true as the former: "If the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed."¹³

No drunkard can have heaven, but heaven gave its King for drunkards. When the sour wine upon the sponge was raised to the lips of our suffering Savior, it was the wine to which we had given away our reason, turned sour in the grip of sin. And he drank it, as if it were the wrath that we deserved.

"Woe to those," Isaiah cries, "who rise early in the morning, that they may run after strong drink." Yet the Son of Man rose early on the third day for such as these. "Woe to those...who tarry late into the evening as wine inflames them!"¹⁴ Yet Jesus tarried into the darkness of that horrid day, inflamed not by wine but by the nails rent through his hands and feet.

Behold the deeds of the LORD; see the work of his hands. Here is Jesus, friend of drunkards, friend of the dissolute. You who drown your sorrows now in wine, do not look at the wine when it is red, when it sparkles in the cup—look at the wine-red blood instead. There is a balm in Gilead for your sorrows, and it is Jesus, it is his gospel of freedom.

Come to him, believe on him, and you will discover why the lover of Solomon's song can say, "your love is better than wine."¹⁵

Filled with the Spirit

We see that drunkenness, the surrender of our reason, is forbidden. And this brings us to the main event, so to speak. We have established

¹² John 8:34.

¹³ V. 36.

¹⁴ Is. 5:11.

¹⁵ Song 1:2.

that whatever it means in this text to be filled with the Spirit, it involves thought.

But we must go further—in what way does it involve thought. How do we know if we are keeping this commandment to be filled with the Spirit?

The answer requires one more technical discussion.

And that discussion centers on this phrase: “with the Spirit.”

Your translation probably reads that way, but in the original text it is not so clear. In the original, we might read this either as “with the Spirit” or “by the Spirit.”¹⁶

In other words, it is possible Paul means, “Be filled with the Spirit, so that the Spirit is more fully inside you, filling you completely.”

This would not be an unusual thing to say—elsewhere in Scripture “filled with the Spirit” appears as a commendation for some believers over other ones.

Every Christian has the Spirit inside of him or her—we call this the indwelling of the Spirit, and it is universal to all believers. But some believers, at certain times—especially when they must give bold witness before men—are said to be filled with the Spirit. The deacons chosen in Acts 6 were required to be men filled with the Spirit in this way, and it is implied that not all believers would qualify.

So Paul could be commanding us, “Be filled more fully with the Spirit, in a special way.” This makes sense too of the comparison of being drunk with wine—one is only drunk with wine when he has taken in too much of it.

But our text could also be read, “Be filled by the Spirit.” In other words, be filled up with an abundance—of joy, of vitality, etc.—by the work of the Holy Spirit. Calvin took the text this way, and this interpretation too makes sense of the comparison with drinking—one is made drunk by wine, and one may be made full by the Spirit.¹⁷

This second interpretation seems a bit more likely in Ephesians; however, it doesn’t make a big difference either way. If we are to be made full of joy and life, made to live abundantly in our spiritual blessings, *by* the work of the Spirit—well, because the Spirit dwells within us all, it is a greater working of him in us. This is not unlike being

¹⁶ Another view is that the phrase is to be taken “in the Spirit” (cf. Lenski).

¹⁷ John Calvin and William Pringle, *Commentaries on the Epistles of Paul to the Galatians and Ephesians* (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2010), 315.

filled *with* the Spirit, which focuses on the fact that the Spirit dwells actively within us.

In either case, the meaning is this: “Be more influenced by the Holy Spirit who dwells within you, so that you abound in the fruits of his work.”

Do not let alcohol exert its influence on you, but the Spirit.

When you are intoxicated, your reasons for self-control are forgotten. But when you are filled with or by the Spirit, those reasons are made clearer than they have ever been before.

The Spirit sharpens the mind, illuminates the understanding, to see more clearly why one ought to refuse sin and choose holiness. The instincts are still present, the temptations are not taken out of the world, but when you see them you are not fooled. And in this way the final fruit of the Spirit is produced in us: self-control.

“Don’t be drunk, but filled with the Spirit”—that is, “Don’t be drunk, but sober.” Think! The Spirit is present to guide the mind, and to inspire faith in the heart toward the things thought about.

Here is a man whose mind is often on the truth. He does not drink and drive, but thinks and drives, he thinks of Christ; when he is speaking with his friends, he is speaking about the wonders of the atonement, and the mysteries of the incarnation. Do not fool yourself—this is not some super-saint on an unattainable plateau. This is an ordinary, a very ordinary, Christian, but one who has obeyed the command of our text. It is not that he is an extraordinary believer, but that God dwells mightily within him.

He walks by the Spirit of God, submits himself to that Spirit, prays for that Spirit, surrenders his will to that Spirit. And the Spirit, having found a humble abode, happily takes residence there in his fullness. The woman confesses deep sins and idolatrous affections; she turns them out of doors and will not tolerate them any longer in her heart. And the Spirit is glad to inhabit this woman more fully, more deeply.

You will know her for she is rarely without a Scripture or an edifying song upon her mind or upon her lips. She is frequently giving thanks to God, and she will be happy to tell you why, because she often thinks about his benefits.

She is filled with the Spirit of God! She may once have been addicted to drugs, or dependent on alcohol; but no more. That empty life is gone, it has been filled up to its fullness. This is an abundant life.

And this is the kind of life within reach of every believer, if we will obey this command, to be filled with the Spirit.

Conclusion

Christianity is no opium for the people, an illusion to dull the mind. Christianity cannot be lived without a sharp mind, an active intellect. The Spirit comes not to silence our train of thought, but to put that train on the right tracks and to run it full steam.

The key to our advancement in the faith is not to pit faith against reason, but to nurture the progress of each simultaneously. “Be filled with the Spirit”—that is, on the one hand, surrender your will to his leading, and on the other, commit your mind to know that leading by knowing the word of Christ he has inspired.

Read it, memorize it, sing it, speak it. Turn it into prayer, turn it into gratitude. Let reason ruminates on every line of your Bible, and let humility cling to every jot and tittle and say, “I will not let you go until you bless me.”

Do not give yourself to the mindless manner of life common in our world, the atheistic materialism that stuffs the brain into a suffocating box, which is the true opium of the people.

Open your mind to the Spirit of God, and the eyes of your faith to all his wonders, and so be filled more fully by him.