

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

Ephesians 5:18-21



A man had 50 yard line tickets for the Super Bowl. As he sits down, a man comes down and asks if anyone is sitting in the seat next to him. “No,” he says, “the seat is empty.” “This is incredible,” said the man. “Who in their right mind would have a seat like this for the Super Bowl, the biggest sporting event in the world, and *not* use it?”

He says, “Well, actually, the seat belongs to me. I was supposed to come with my wife, but she passed away. This is the first Super bowl we haven't been together since we got married in 1967.” “Oh, I'm sorry to hear that. That's terrible. But couldn't you find someone else—a friend or relative, or even a neighbor to take the seat?” The man shakes his head. “No, they're all at the *funeral*.”

You might be sitting tonight here thinking about being here instead of being at Ford Field—and wondering if there is not some sort of equivalence about being here and being at a funeral. I mean how do we compete with all the glitz and glamour of this past week and all the hoopla and hype of tonight's game and halftime show? Truthfully, you can't compare the two. But the reason for that is not as obvious as it might seem—at first.

According to yesterday's **Wall Street Journal**, “Super Bowl Sunday” has become a national holiday of sorts. Last year, 133.7 million Americans watched the Super Bowl. That is 11.5 million more than the number of voters in the 2004 presidential election. The Super Bowl Weekend is the year's slowest weekend for weddings and the biggest for parties. More revelers will host more parties than New Year's Eve and consume more food than any other day besides Thanksgiving Day. Both ABC TV and Domino's pizza will record their single biggest day of revenues for the year today. Nationally, the economic impact is in the *billions*. The week before the SB is the biggest of the year for the sale of TV's and recliners—and the day after is the biggest for the sale of antacids!

So what are *we* doing *here*? Let's all hop in our cars and race for that last seat on the 50 yard line! While I am not suggesting for a moment that your being here makes you a nominee for the Mother Teresa Award for personal piety, neither am I suggesting that everyone who is *not here* is somehow *less* spiritual than those who are.

I would rather ask a *different* question. *What is it* that *draws* people to celebrations? Is it just about the hype? Or were we in fact created to celebrate *something*? Is it simply another excuse to eat? Undoubtedly we like to do that. But you won't likely find many people downing pizzas or sticking their Tostitos in salsa as they sit by themselves in front of their TVs. For most, it means getting *together* with other people. Why? Because *we were never meant to celebrate alone*. So go ahead and celebrate. But as you do, keep asking yourself—what *is it* about celebrating that draws us like flies to a light bulb on a warm summer evening?

Now I have said all that to sort of prepare you for the text we are going to briefly jump into tonight. Do you know that the text before us *screams* “celebration?” Does that *surprise* you? Now before you jump to conclusions and label me as “charismatic,” at least hear me out. This is one of those texts that we have heard preached and explained so many times that we don’t even *hear it* any more. Our understanding has become so shaped by a particular view that we don’t bother to read it with fresh eyes and ears. We already know what it says so why bother?

Some have tried to turn this passage into a methodology for speaking in tongues. Others have tried to turn it into a list of steps for discovering the secret of the Spirit-filled life. Others have tried to explain it as a sort of shorthand for memorizing and meditating on Scripture. I myself have preached this passage many times. And looking back on it, I have to admit that I have unwittingly aided and abetted some small, near-sighted views of this text. This passage is *not merely* talking about an experience. It is *not* merely listing X number of steps to follow or principles to live by. It is *much bigger* than that.

To really appreciate, let’s jump in a helicopter and fly up a ways—high enough over this passage to get a bird’s eye view. Chapters 1-3, Paul explains how God—before the world was even created—*chose* sinners like you and me to be *in Christ*. He further explains in chapter 1 that He adopted us as His sons, that through the blood of Jesus He redeemed us out of our bondage to sin, that He actually has made us the centerpiece of an amazing plan that one day will restore this sin-cursed world to its pre-fall condition—*no*—that will even be *better* than life in the Garden *before the Fall*. He further tells us how He has sent His Holy Spirit to literally be on site with us 24/7 to continue His work in us until He is finished and He fully possesses us as His inheritance. In chapter 2, he reminds us of how the Triune God reconciled us—not only to Himself, but to each other. At the end of chapter 2, Paul reminds us that God has done this so that the unity that our invisible God enjoys within the Godhead is *visibly* reflected to a watching world—and even to the angels (as chapter 3 points out). Paul ends both chapters one and three with a prayer that God would give His people hearts to see and insight to grasp all that He is doing through His Church to demonstrate His love and wisdom and power.

In chapter 4, Paul shifts gears and moves from what God has done for and in us to how we need to respond. We are to live lives worthy of this high calling (4:1). We are to put on the humility and gentleness and patience of Christ and work out the implications of our unity and oneness in Christ. We are to take the gifts and the equipping of those gifts and support and serve and build each other up in Christ (4:7-16). In chapter 4:17, our lives are to demonstrate a marked contrast to the old, unregenerate way of life. And for the rest of chapter four and on into chapter 5 through verse 21, Paul makes several contrasts: In our speech, our anger, the way we handle being sinned against—just to name a few. We are to put off living in moral darkness and put on living lives that become lights which expose the darkness around us.

As Paul brings this section to a close in chapter 5:15-21, He does so with three strong prohibitions coupled with three balancing commands:

- v. 15—Don't live as unwise—but wise.
- v. 17—Don't be foolish, but understand the Lord's will.
- v. 18—Don't get drunk on wine—but be filled with (lit. "by") the Spirit.

All three statements are sort of parallel. Don't be stupid; don't live like lost people who have no moral sense apart from the knowledge of God. Instead, be wise. How do you do that? Know God's will. What is God's will? Be filled with (by) God's Spirit.

Now why have I bothered to go back and in a brief way—perhaps too brief—tried to connect all this? Because there is a flow here. Too often we try to understand God's Word by reading verses lifted out of the flow of their context. That can be dangerous. Like the Blacksmith who was trying to train his apprentice about how to use a hammer to shape a hot piece of metal resting on an anvil. He tried to come up with a non-verbal signal so that the apprentice would strike the white hot metal precisely at the right moment. And so he said: "**Now when I move my head, hit it!**" The million dollar question of course is: What is the antecedent of "it." If someone were to interpret that phrase outside of the context, there could be disastrous results!

Likewise, there is a flow of thought that precedes Ephesians 5:18 that you must follow if you would get verse 18 *right*—and what flows afterward. So let's keep that in mind as we briefly try to understand verse 18. In verse 17, Paul has just told the Ephesians and us that wise living means understanding God's will. In light of that, Paul is telling us then three things: What God *doesn't* will. What God *does* will. What God's will *looks like*. So that we can see this for ourselves—let's read Ephesians 5:18-21 together:

*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.*

First, let's see...

- I. What God *doesn't* will.

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

Why does Paul talk about an issue that from our viewpoint seems so obvious?—though when it comes to some of the celebrations that have been going on this week in connection with the Super Bowl—maybe its not so obvious! But to a Christian audience, surely we don't have to be told not to get drunk—do we? Perhaps Paul was concerned about the believers in Ephesus who like there brothers and sisters in Corinth were surrounded by false religions that indulged in immorality and drunkenness as a way of celebrating or even communing with their false gods and goddesses. Maybe so. But I think Paul has something even more in mind. What is the outcome of this that Paul so vehemently opposes? Where does drunkenness take you? **To "debauchery!"**

When you hear that word, what comes to mind? Gross immorality? Animal-like behavior? (Though I think we need to be careful there. I have found there are some things even animals won't do!) This sounds like a lot frat party on some major college campus. Does Paul oppose that? Do people sin against God, others, and even their own bodies when they engage in this sort of behavior. Absolutely! But the real essence of the word translated here as *debauchery* has an even more fundamental idea to it: It describes a person who has *lost control*. Most of the other times this word is used in the NT, it speaks not specifically of drunkenness, but of a *disorderly* life. One dictionary of NT Greek describes the behavior of debauchery this way: "*behavior which shows lack of concern or thought for the consequences of an action.*" In other words, a life that is lived without an overarching purpose. This same dictionary goes on to describe this state of mind as follows: "*what one does without being able to think about it*" or "*what one does when the mind is absent.*" (Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament Based on Semantic Domains by Louw and Nida). There is nothing more tragic than when a person's body is practically disconnected from their mind. You can think of all kinds of consequences when that happens. Physically speaking that can be scary. Spiritually it becomes a tragic denial of our true identity.

I don't think Paul was merely commenting on the "party animal" culture of Ephesus—though he certainly included that. I think he was warning about living in such a way that we become disconnected from our calling. When we become intoxicated with anything that distracts us from who we are and from what God has called us to be and do. Substance abuse may in fact be only one example of this.

*What is it that God doesn't want?* He doesn't want His chosen, redeemed-by-the-blood-of-Jesus children who are part of His incredible plan which involves reconciling former enemies to himself and each other so we can be a visible evidence of the power and wisdom of the invisible God to a watching world to forget their identity and calling. So *what does God will?*

II. What God *does* will.

***Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit.***

If you are seeking understand this passage, there are two questions you must ask. The first one is this: What is the *content* of the filling? *Who* does the filling? These questions could actually take a significant amount of time to work through. But in accordance with my earlier promise, I am going to keep this brief. So let me answer these questions the way I was taught—and then follow up with some considerations that have caused me to look at this verse a bit differently—and I believe more in line with Paul's flow of thought in the book. I will do this one question at a time.

***What is the content of the filling?*** The traditional view says: The Holy Spirit. Why would I challenge that? *Only* if the text leads me to do so. And I believe it

does! Here is why? First of all, the translation “filled with” is ambiguous at best. If you don’t think so, try looking up the preposition “with” in a dictionary. Do you know how many definitions there are for “with” in Webster’s New World Dictionary? **Eighteen!!!** You don’t believe me? Let me give you three examples:

I eat ice cream *with* my wife.  
I eat ice cream *with* my pie.  
I eat ice cream *with* my spoon.

How many different ways did I use the word, “with?” Three.

First—*in association with*. I eat ice cream in the presence of my wife who also was eating ice cream. (We might have even been eating from the same bowl!)

Second—*in addition to*. I eat ice cream in addition to my pie.

Third—*by means of*. I eat ice cream by means of a spoon.

And yet, we know and use the word “*with*” as sort of shorthand for all three meanings.

So which “*with*” is it in Ephesians 5:18? Actually, the word “*with*” doesn’t appear in the Greek NT. The best rendering of the phrase that is used is: “by means of.” So the text is saying is the Spirit is the means by which the filling is accomplished. The best translation: Be filled *by* the Spirit. Now if your head is itching right now and you are really tempted to scratch it—just wait a couple of minutes. It will start to make some sense if you will hear me out. So let’s move on to the second question.

Who does the filling? Answer? The Holy Spirit! Real answer? It really doesn’t say. “Be filled with” is in the passive voice. For those of you who hated grammar, the passive voice is what is used when you don’t want to emphasize who is doing what. For example, all wise children know that when they are playing NFL football in the living room around Mommy’s priceless heirlooms, antiques and “knick knacks”—if you ever accidentally hit one of those objects and send them crashing to the floor—You don’t say: Mommy I broke it. You say: Mommy, it got broken. It fell or something like that. You do this so that you (the perpetrator) can remain anonymous long enough to give you time to call the FBI and enter their witness protection program. In the *passive* voice, the person performing the action is not named.

I think most people have assumed the Spirit is the One who does the filling because He seems to be the one closest to what is happening. But how can He be the filler if He is the One who is the *instrument* or *means* of the filling? Who actually does the filling? Why don’t we let Paul explain that:

In Ephesians 4:10, Christ is the One who fills all things. And part of the way He accomplishes this filling in the lives of His people is through the gifted men He gives to the church in the next verse.

He who descended is the very one who ascended higher than all the heavens, in order to *fill* the whole universe.)<sup>11</sup> It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, [But let's not stop here].<sup>12</sup> to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up<sup>13</sup> 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*.

Do you get the point? *Jesus* is not only doing the filling. Jesus is in fact the content of the filling. But that's not all. Back up to 3:17 to Paul's prayer and just listen to His prayer:

*“And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love,<sup>18</sup> may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ,<sup>19</sup> and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the **fullness of God**.”*

So you have Christ filling us with Himself. Christ filling us with the Father. Christ the One who became our legal righteousness *for us* is now developing practical righteous *in us*. But *how* is He doing that? **By** the Spirit! Jesus sent His Spirit to work onsite in us and through us 24/7. Again you see this throughout the book of Ephesians!

Ephesians 1:13-14:

*13 And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, 14 who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession—to the praise of his glory.*

He is our seal of God's work and the guarantee of its completion.

Ephesians 1:17

*I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the **Spirit of wisdom and revelation**, so that you may know him better.*

He reveals God to us!

Ephesians 2:18

*For through him we both have **access to the Father by one Spirit**.*

He gives us access to the Father through Jesus!

Ephesians 2:22

*And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling **in which God lives by his Spirit.***

He is the means by which God temples in us.

Ephesians 3:16

*I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power **through his Spirit in your inner being....***

He strengthens our inner man.

Ephesians 6:17-18

*17 Take the helmet of salvation and the **sword of the Spirit**, which is the word of God. 18 And **pray in the Spirit** on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints.*

We have *his sword* and *in Him* we pray.

Jesus fills us. Jesus fills us *with Himself*. His character. His virtue. And the Holy Spirit remains on site 24/7 to carry this out on our lives as we understand God's will, this incredible purpose, this wonderful calling to be God's object lesson to a watching world.

**Contrast this the with Super Bowl party**—\$150 to get in and \$450 for VIPs (athletes and Play girls). For what? To talk to people who will soon become “who is that fat man” and “who is that old lady?” Paul is unfolding a view of the things that gives us hope and joy and purpose beyond anything the world can imagine. I'm not at all against celebrating. Let's do it! But let's make sure we get the ultimate celebration right.

Brothers and sisters. This is where our Head is. This is where **His** game is going. This is what **the** Big Game is all about. “Be filled by the Spirit” is a call to you and me to get in sync with His game.

**Next week:** What does God's will look like? How do I know if I am in sync with His game?

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