

Rooted & Grounded In Love ~ Ephesians

Week 7 ~ 5:15-6:9

*(***Note to Table Group Leaders—there are A LOT MORE questions than usual this week. As always, just pick a few that you think would be beneficial to your group...or use them as fodder to generate questions as you see fit. Enjoy your group discussion ☺ ***)*

5:15-6:4

Depending on your church background, the idea of being filled with the Spirit (or Spirit-filled) might bring up a variety of connotations. Regardless of the connotation such a statement has for you/us, we need to recognize the importance of this command. It is a key command for Christians, one which opens up the Christian life (and to not obey it stagnates us, leaving us powerless, useless, unfulfilled, joyless, etc.)

We were created to live life in God, for God, through God, with God (and seeing as God is Triune, feel free to substitute Jesus or the Holy Spirit where I've used "God".) When we don't live as God intended (in communion/fellowship with Him), our lives are less than what they could/should be...and all sorts of negative ramifications result. Most of the problems we see in the world can be attributed to this.

Another quick point to clarify is the difference between being "indwelt" with the Spirit and "filled" with the Spirit. Everyone who accepts Jesus as their Lord and Savior is indwelt with the Spirit; or as Paul states in Ephesians 1:13b-14, *"Having believed, you were marked in Him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession—to the praise of His glory."* Now it's one thing to have the Holy Spirit in us; it's quite another to be yielded to the Spirit, to be walking/living in harmony with the Spirit as we go about our days. A good image of this sort of relationship with the Spirit is John the Baptizer who, when he heard that people were going after and following Jesus, said, *"He must become greater, I must become less."* (John 3:30)

By way of contrast, Paul often draws the difference between life according to the Spirit and life according to the flesh or sinful nature (which coincides with his earlier description of old self and new self—see 4:22-24). Two important and popular passages we want to be familiar with when it comes to life in the Spirit vs the flesh are Romans 8 and Galatians 5.

Let's think of the Self as a container of some kind. What is in the container of "me"? Pride/ego, anger, desires, fears, thoughts, emotions, memories, joys, hurts, etc. But at the executive center of it all is "me". And I (or you as the case may be) am trying to micromanage everything as I think is best. Now it's popular, in the Christian world, to think I'm supposed to give "control" to God. I would like to qualify that a bit. We were given free will for a reason. If God's goal was to control us He would have made us into robots. He wants us to live in partnership with Him (as opposed to a power struggle). We can go about our lives running on the limited power, perspective, and resources we have at our disposal, usually to our own short-sighted ends. Or, we can access the unlimited abundance of God (His love, power, and wisdom) and shoot for His higher/better goals. But the choice is ours. That's why I like the word yield (synonyms include concede, relinquish, acquiesce, surrender). He doesn't force Himself upon us but allows us the space to recognize our need for His help. And then He lovingly offers us the help we need...which is Himself. God allows us authority, if you will, over this little kingdom of Self. But His hope is that we'll recognize His greater authority over a much bigger Kingdom which we are invited to be part of...so long as we yield our kingdom/authority to His. Again, like John the

Baptizer, more of Him, less of me. Or, to say it another way, the “new self” is “filled with the Spirit”.

The thing is, this type of yielding (or being very careful, attentive, intentional to what we’re filled with) takes practice. It’s a habit that needs to be developed. Additionally, life comes at us fast and furious. It’s easy to lose sight of our need for God. (And it’s easy to second guess God and think we know better—as human history so readily demonstrates.) Our fears and desires scream for attention. Do we trust that God truly knows best? Or do we need to look out for ourselves?

So how do we go about being filled with the Spirit? How do we go about yielding the Self to the divine Other? Are there practices we can do that help us develop this habit? Thankfully, yes. Now we quickly run into the proverbial “*which came first, the chicken or the egg?*” scenario.

Paul offers three exhortations or “practices”. The question can be asked: are these activities we do IN ORDER to be filled with the Spirit? Or are they activities we do as a RESULT of being filled with the Spirit? I believe the answer is Yes! In a mysterious way they are both the means and the evidence of being filled with the Spirit. (Paul’s list is not exhaustive by any stretch. Christians have a long history of spiritual disciplines that are well worth learning/developing.)

First is immersing ourselves in Christ-centered community (verse 19)...

- Christ-centered: “*Speak...with psalms, hymns and songs from the Spirit. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord.*”
- Community: “*...to one another...*”

Second, is fostering an attitude of gratitude (verse 20)...

- “*always giving thanks...*” This is a crucial foundation. Grumbling and complaining (in its varied, subtle, and nuanced forms) is the antithesis of being filled with the Spirit because it’s so self-focused.

Third, putting others before ourselves (verse 21)...

- “*submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ.*” This requires the relinquishing of the “me first” attitude/posture/mindset which is so prevalent and pervasive. This is what makes Jesus so unique. On the night He was arrested He prayed, “*Not my will but yours be done.*” (Luke 22:42b) Paul picks up on this all-important characteristic of Jesus that we are called to emulate:
“*Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who being in the very nature God did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made Himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross!*” (Philippians 2:3-8)

As we do these (and other practices/disciplines/habits), we are filled with the Spirit. Now, I want to make the point that this command to be filled with the Spirit is the overriding command that governs everything else in this letter up to 6:10...i.e. everything Paul is about to say about marriage, parenting, work relationships. We will not be able to fulfill Paul’s instructions under our own power. At the same time (remember the chicken and the egg) following Paul’s instructions of submitting to one another (of which marriage, family, and work relationships are normal, everyday contexts in which we have the opportunity to live this out) is both the result of, and evidence of, being filled with the Spirit.

To summarize, allow me to cut & paste an excerpt from Week 7 of our series The Way We Worship...

- Be filled with the Spirit. (the command)
 - How? By...speaking to one another in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs; singing and making music in your hearts to the Lord
 - How? By...giving thanks to God...
 - How? By...submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ.
 - For example...wives and husbands...
 - For example...children and parents (and particularly fathers)...
 - For example...slaves and masters...

It is important to recognize what Paul is doing here. He took very familiar relationships of his day (ancient near-East household codes), which had a clearly understood power dynamic, and he turned it on its ear. What Paul said to wives, children, and slaves was nothing new, par for the course. BUT...and this is so key...Paul's instructions to husbands, fathers, and masters under the category of "*submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ*" was REVOLUTIONARY. Telling those with understood, unquestionable, undisputed power that they, too, needed to submit in recognition of the risen, reigning Lord Jesus was EXTRAORDINARY. Historically, even globally, as far as we know, this was the first time anyone suggested such a change in the culturally understood power dynamics. People in power don't just give up power. But in light of Jesus, in light of Love, power needs to be reimagined. This will only happen if/when people are motivated by the Spirit; and this will also be evidence of the Spirit at work in people's lives.

In Christ we learn to relate differently with one another. No person looks at another person as property or as an object. There is no reason for power struggles when we recognize that we are safe and secure in God's Kingdom (despite the situation/circumstances we find ourselves in). As we live "in Christ" and "filled with the Spirit" (main messages from the book of Ephesians) we alert the world around us to the presence of God's Kingdom and the resulting new humanity.

Sadly, many people like to use the examples in 5:21-6:4 as if they are commands/imperatives, but the actual command is 5:18b. That is sloppy, if not abusive, use of Scripture.

- *What comes to mind when you hear "be filled with the Spirit?"*
- *What are some specific practices you do in order to yield yourself to God?*
- *What are some areas of life in which you find it challenging to yield to God, areas in which you feel you need to have command/control?*
- *Being "in Christ" and being "filled with the Spirit" are not solely individual endeavors. In what ways have other people helped you grow in Christ? In what ways are you helping others grow in Christ?*
- *Spiritual disciplines (or practices) can be categorized into individual/personal disciplines and communal/collective disciplines. Which have you found helpful in*

connecting with God and being empowered to fulfill His mission in the world around us?

- *Right now, at this very moment, how grateful are you feeling? (Be honest, you don't need to impress anyone...but please explain your response...i.e. what's going on in your life or heart?)*
- *What kinds of "power struggles" have you experienced (or are you currently experiencing) with God? With someone else? Power struggles are often a symptom of fear. Can you identify what you're afraid of?*
- *Describe your relationship with your parents while you were growing up. What challenges/tensions did you experience? (How would your parents describe you as a child and teenager?)*
- *What do you appreciate about how your parents raised you? What do you wish was different about how your parents raised you?*
- *What are some of your favorite memories with your parents?*
- *For those of you who are parents, what challenges have you faced (or are you currently facing) in raising children?*
- *For those who are parents, how are you allowing your church family to help/support you in the child-raising process? And, what role do you think the church family can/should play in the child-raising process?*
- *For those who are not raising kids, how can you (or in what ways do you) help/support those with kids in your church family?*
- *For those who are single, how has the church been a family to you (or how would you like to see it be so)?*
- *For those who have grown kids, what do you look back on wishing you would have done differently? What do you look back on and think, "Yeah, I/we did well there."?*
- *What does it look like to honor your parents now that you are an adult?*
- *As a group, brainstorm ways in which parents can bring up their children in the training and instruction of the Lord.*

6:5-9

Now let's turn our attention to how "being filled with the Spirit...submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ" (Eph 5:18; 21) fleshes out in the work environment and work relationships. Thankfully, the terms "slaves" and "masters" are no longer fitting in our context. (Though, sadly, there are places in the world where slavery of various forms is still a reality. Let us pray God's Kingdom comes in those places.) For our purposes, we're going to shift from terms of slaves/masters to employees/employers (or bosses).

First, let us explore a proper theology of work. Some people have the misguided idea that work is a consequence of the Fall. That is not accurate. Working has always been part of God's plan for humans. Genesis 1:28 states, "*God blessed them and said to them, 'Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground.'*" Likewise, Genesis 2:15 states, "*The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it.*" So, work has always been part of the plan. But upon the Fall and subsequent curse, work certainly became more difficult. Part of the reason work became more challenging, and can still be very challenging, is that things like trust, respect, appreciation, cooperation (which naturally make work easier) are sorely lacking in sinful, selfish creatures who are primarily concerned with looking out for #1.

But, as Paul has been reminding us throughout Ephesians, we are "in Christ". When we live consistent with the present reality of the Kingdom of God in our midst, our vision and viewpoint change. Paul's words in this passage, like the preceding passages, are predicated upon being filled with the Spirit, which allows us to trust God enough to be willing to submit to one another.

We must take note that the reality of Jesus is what Paul's instructions are based upon. From 5:21, we see our motivation is "*reverence for Christ*". We are to respect our employers/bosses, obeying them, working wholeheartedly for them as if Jesus was our boss (because, ultimately, Jesus is our Boss—as terms like Lord and King imply.) Likewise, employers/bosses are reminded that they too are under authority...the authority of Christ. And as believers their conduct and use of authority should reflect that of Jesus.

All of us, I suspect, can relate to either being an employee or an employer/boss on some level. Likely, we've all wrestled with difficult bosses and/or challenging subordinates (not to mention challenging co-workers or customers). This is such an important area and opportunity for us to apply the teaching of Jesus: "*Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.*" (Matthew 7:12) That's not a warm, fuzzy platitude. Properly understood, and properly lived out, that instruction has serious teeth to it. It's simple, yet it can be very hard. It is very hard to apply IF we aren't first very secure in the fact that God loves us dearly and is looking out for us...even if it doesn't always feel like it. If we can't or don't trust that, we won't care about anyone else. But when we are "in Christ" and filled with His Spirit, we can consider the needs and perspectives of others. We can't do any of this on our own steam. But, thankfully, we don't have to. Just for fun, reread Eph. 1:15-23. As we mentioned at the outset of this Ephesians series, the imperatives (commands/instructions) in the second half of the book are based on the indicatives (the facts/reality) presented in the first half of the book.

Areas of life like marriage, family, and work are the proving ground of our faith...where "*the rubber meets the road*". These areas both form us and test us. The way we conduct ourselves at work has the opportunity to alert people to the presence and reign of Jesus. Our goal should be to have our eyes and our heart alert to the presence and will of Jesus as we go about the various aspects of our days and life.

Personally, I have found the stories of Joseph (Genesis 39-47) and Daniel helpful and inspiring as examples of working in less than ideal environments (and with less than ideal bosses) yet remaining faithful to God...and the impact God was able to have through them for His purposes.

- *Describe the best work situation you've experienced. What made it so good? Describe the worst work situation you've experienced. What made it so bad?*

- *Similar to the question above, who is the best boss you ever had? What made that person such a good boss? Who was the worst boss you ever had? What made that person such a bad boss?*
- *Have you ever been the supervisor over others? Describe. What did you like/dislike about that role? Honestly, how good/bad of a supervisor were you? Explain.*
- *How do you go about being conscious of the Lord's presence with you throughout your day (particularly your work day)?*
- *What are (or were) the particularly challenging aspects of your job? What are (or were) your favorite aspects of your job?*
- *Do you prefer to work alone or with others? Explain.*
- *Does your work (effort, activity, productivity) change when the boss is present versus when they're not? Explain.*
- *As an employee, describe a time when a boss welded power/authority inappropriately ("inappropriately" doesn't necessarily mean illegally, though that would apply too, but in ineffective and demeaning/belittling ways). As a boss, describe a time when you perhaps welded power/authority in a less than Christlike way.*
- *How has your workplace been a mission field for you?*
- *Would you describe your current work life as more "life-giving" or "soul-sucking"? Explain. How, if at all, do Paul's words encourage you?*
- *Since work was part of the original design or Creation, we can safely assume that work will be part of the next life (the Resurrected life, the fully-consummated Kingdom life, the life after life after death)...how do you feel about that? How might your/our present work life be preparing you/us for that?*

Soul Training Exercise ~ Evaluating/Assessing Our Use Of Power

All of us, each and every one of us, have some power. Sure, some may have more than others, but we all have some. For example, simply consider our ability to speak. The words we use and the tone we take can emit great power...to help or to hurt. Really, any ability we have is a form of power that can be used for good or evil. Or consider the choice we have to either be compliant or resistant, on-board or indifferent, in whatever situation we find ourselves in. That, too, is a form of power we can exercise. The question, then, becomes how do we use our power? Toward what end? What guides our use of our power?

As we've already seen in Ephesians, we are "*created to be like God*" (4:24) and are exhorted to "*Be imitators of God...*" (5:1). How does God use power? I think we could say God uses power creatively, lovingly, wisely/thoughtfully, graciously, patiently, with great restraint...and seems to like to share it.

Let's take some time this week to assess the relationships and situations we regularly find ourselves in. What is the power dynamic at play? (There's ALWAYS one present...learn to recognize it.) Why is it that way? Is it one-sided or mutual? Is it good and healthy...toxic or oppressive/abusive...or neutral? What is your contribution to the power dynamic? How is the Holy Spirit's role in your life affecting the relationship/situation? Since you have power, who is flourishing because of it?