

Watch Where You Step (Part 4)

Ephesians 5:15-18

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Several years ago, I received a piece of mail that I'm sure some of you have received letting me know that it was my wonderful opportunity to fill my civic duty. In other words, it was time for me to serve on jury duty. And, at that time, I actually ended up being part of the jury pool for a criminal trial. The defendant was accused of drunk driving and we sat there, the few of us who out of whom the jurors would ultimately be called, listening to the defense attorney. And he began by reminding all of us through a series of placards exactly what the Texas statute on DUI is. He then proceeded to ask several of us what we thought about the law and specifically to ask us if we thought the law was fair. I remember a few of the other responses that people had, but when it came my turn, I said something like this as respectfully as I knew how. I said, 'You know, as I understand it, our opinions about this specific law isn't really the issue. Our job as jurors, as I understand, is simply to decide whether or not your client is guilty of violating the law as it's written.' I think it was my response to that question that got me dismissed.

But as I thought about that specific situation and the crime of driving under the influence of which that man was accused, it occurred to me that we all live under the influence of something. Paul makes this very point in several of his letters. He says that you and I consistently live out our lives either primarily under the influence of the flesh – that is, our fallenness, our unredeemed humanness – or under the influence of the Spirit of God. That's it. Every person here, without exception, is living under the primary influence of the flesh or of the Spirit. Paul makes this point in Romans 8, a passage we looked at last week. He makes it in Galatians 5 and as well as a number of other passages. In Ephesians 5, the passage that we come to again this morning, Paul demands that those of us who are new in Christ, those of us who have that new position that he described in the first three chapters, that we no longer live under the influence of the flesh, but that we consistently live instead under the influence of the Spirit of God.

Now several weeks ago, we began to look at the longest section of Paul's letter to the church in Ephesus. That section begins in chapter 5, verse 15 and runs all the way down through chapter 6, verse 9. In this section, we are learning that if we're going to walk worthy of our new position in Christ, then we must walk in Biblical wisdom. In verses 15 to 18 of chapter 5, we see the command to walk in Biblical wisdom. And as we've sort of unpacked those four verses, we've seen that in the command, itself, there are also **the** components, or the path to a life of Biblical wisdom. If we're going to follow that command, then we need to first of all examine our ways, verse 15. Verse 16, we need to seize every opportunity to pursue that wisdom. Verse 17, number three, we need to understand God's will. A life of Biblical wisdom flows out of an understanding of God's revealed will in His Word.

Last week, we began to look at the fourth crucial component of a life of Biblical wisdom, and that is be filled with Christ's Spirit. Be filled with Christ's Spirit. If you're going to walk in Biblical wisdom, the Spirit is absolutely integral to that process. Look at verse 18. Here's where he tells us if you're going to walk in wisdom, then you need to be filled with the Spirit of God. Verse 18 says: "And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit..."

Now last week, we laid the foundation or groundwork **for** grasping what Paul means here when he says, 'be filled with the Spirit'. We examined the New Testament role of the Spirit. We started by going back to the Old Testament and saying, 'What was the role of the Spirit in the life of Old Testament believers?' We said primarily that involved regeneration, that is, the impartation of new life to the individual sinner as he exhibited faith and repentance just as in the New Testament. It also - the work of the Spirit was also sanctification, that is, the progressive, making more, progressively making more and more holy the individual believer. And then there was, thirdly, the special empowering for a specific task that came on the kings, for example, the prophets and on others. That's the role of the Spirit in the Old Testament.

Then we said, ‘Well, how does that role change when it comes to the New Testament?’ And primarily in two ways – one of those is by the indwelling of the Spirit. Now several people asked me last week and I tried to make it clear but let me just reiterate. It’s not that the Spirit wasn’t coming alongside and assisting people in the Old Testament. He had to be. No one can be perfected or made holy by the flesh, Galatians 3 says. Therefore, if they were made holy in the Old Testament and they were, then it had to be a work of the Spirit. He had to have an abiding presence with them. You say so what’s the difference between that and what happened at Pentecost when the, the indwelling of the Spirit is made a big deal of? I would say this. You have to think of it like this when it comes to the indwelling of the Spirit. It’s not that what happened in the Old Testament was ‘A’ and what happened in the New Testament was ‘B’. Instead, it’s more like, when it comes to the indwelling of the Spirit, what happened in the Old Testament was little ‘a’. What happens in the New Testament is big ‘A’. There is something more intense about the presence of the Spirit in the mind and heart of believers than was present in the Old Testament times.

There’s a second change in the Spirit’s work when it comes to the New Testament and after Pentecost and that is what Paul calls the baptism of the Spirit. This is what happens to every Christian according to 1 Corinthians 12:13 at the moment of salvation. We are all baptized - no water in that verse - we are all immersed into Jesus Christ. We are all connected to Christ and connected to each other. That’s the role of the Spirit, the unique role of the Spirit in the New Testament - this new intense indwelling and the baptism of the Spirit. Then we talked about the current confusion about the Spirit, and it’s everywhere, and it stems from those movements that we discussed. And we finished our time by looking at the common flawed views of what it means to be filled with the Spirit.

Now that brings us this morning – today I want us to examine the true filling of the Spirit. If we’re commanded to be filled with the Spirit, to walk in Biblical wisdom, we have to understand what it means. What actually is the filling of the Spirit? When does it happen and how does it happen? Now we’re going to come back to Ephesians 5:18, trust me, but first we need to look at this concept in the rest of the New Testament because it will set

the table for understanding Ephesians 5. The New Testament uses two distinct word groups in the Greek text - two different Greek word groups - both of which are translated 'filled with the Spirit' or 'full of the Spirit'. These two different Greek word groups, listen carefully, describe two different kinds of filling. Now just to keep our minds clear, just for the sake of clarity, let's call one of them special empowering and the other normal filling – so special empowering, normal filling.

Let's look first at the first word group that we've called special empowering. This word group, this Greek word group, describes an event when the Spirit uniquely equips someone for a specific time and purpose. There are no conditions to the person being filled like this; it just happens. God sovereignly decides to do it. It can happen to the same person on different occasions. It is a divine enabling for a specific spiritual task. It's very similar to what happened in the Old Testament when the Spirit of God would come upon a king to empower him to fulfill his responsibilities or a prophet or a judge, etc. It's an event. It could happen once and last for a lifetime as long as they were in that role. It could happen once and last for only a short period of time. It could happen repeated times throughout that person's life. That's essentially this word group in the New Testament.

Now let me show you what this looks like. Now keep in mind there are two different Greek words. You can't see that in English but, in the Greek, we are dealing with two different Greek words. Let me show you this first word group in the New Testament – special empowering by the Spirit. Turn back to Luke. Luke loves this word, this word group. Luke 1. It begins with Gabriel's prophecy about John the Baptist. In Luke 1:15, Gabriel says this to Zacharias: "For he will be great (speaking of John the Baptist) in the sight of the Lord; and he will drink no wine or liquor, and he will be (watch this) filled with the Holy Spirit while yet in his mother's womb." He's going to be specially empowered for this unique task while he's still in his mother's womb and throughout his life as he carries out this unique mission. He's going to be specially empowered.

Later in 1:41, again to affirm that the baby growing in Mary is in fact the Messiah, verse 41 says: “When Elizabeth heard Mary’s greeting (this is her cousin, her older cousin), the baby (inside Elizabeth) leaped in her womb; and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. And she cried out with a loud voice and said, ‘Blessed are you among women...’” She prophesied essentially, saying, ‘Here is the mother of the Messiah.’

Later in this same chapter, verse 67 - after John the Baptist was born, eight days later he was circumcised and named John. Finally, Zacharias could speak again and verse 67 said: “And his father Zacharias was filled with the Holy Spirit (here’s an event, a special empowering) and (as a result he) prophesied, saying: ‘Blessed be the Lord God of Israel...’” And then you have that wonderful song of Zacharias in the verses that follow.

Turn over to Acts. You see the same thing in the book of Acts, a special empowering for a special ministry. Acts 2 – we’re on the day of Pentecost. Verse 4 says as that group sat there in the upper room: “They were all filled with the Holy Spirit (here’s an event) and (as a result, they) began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit was giving them utterance.” By the way, just as an aside, there’s a lot of confusion about what **speaking in** tongues is in the Scripture. This is where it all starts. Whatever it is in the rest of Scripture, it is here. In fact, if you go to chapter 10, Peter says this is what happened to us at the beginning. So, all through the book of Acts, it refers back to this event. Notice what happened here in verse 8: “we each hear them in our own dialect to which we were born.” So the apostles were enabled by this special filling of the Spirit to speak in languages that they had not studied so that the people could understand the proclamation of the Word of God. That’s what speaking in tongues is and was.

Now turn over **and** - this all happened out of the filling of the Spirit there in verse 4, the special empowering for a specific duty there on the day of Pentecost. Look at Acts 4:8. Now persecution has begun and Peter, verse 8 says - notice the marginal reference there, the little ‘1’ if you have the New American Standard. “Peter, having just been filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them...” and then he speaks. Now remember, he was filled back

on the day of Pentecost and here he is just having been filled again, at some point in the future, during this persecution. It's special empowering for a particular ministry or task.

Verse 31 of the same chapter - after they're released from custody, they pray and verse 31 says: "When they had prayed, the place where they had gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit..." Here it is again - same group, Peter a third time. He's filled with the Holy Spirit and began, as a result, to speak the Word of God with boldness - again, special empowering for specific ministry.

Acts 9. You see it with Paul. Acts 9:17 - this man named Ananias shows up in Damascus to lay hands on Paul, known then as Saul. Verse 17 says: "Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road by which you were coming, has sent me so that you may regain your sight and (so that you may) be filled with the Holy Spirit (for that unique ministry that He's going to give you)." Verse 15 describes that unique ministry.

Chapter 13 – now remember, Paul has already been filled with the Spirit, but it happens again here. Acts 13:9. Again, in the face of opposition to the gospel there on the first missionary journey, verse 9 says: "But Saul, who was also known as Paul, having been filled (having just been filled) with the Holy Spirit (as you see the marginal reference again), he fixed his gaze on him..."

So, you see it is an event. In each case, this word group marks an event, a special empowering for a specific situation. And we are never told to seek this kind of filling. God just does it by His own sovereign choice when and with whom He chooses. That's the first word group – special empowering.

The second word group for filling with the Spirit in the New Testament designates what we have called normal filling. Normal filling describes the ongoing condition or state of a person. With this, with this group of words, there are implied conditions. In other words, you can aid it, or you can hinder it. You can help it, or you can hurt it. And

rather than an event, it seems to be just a normal characteristic of the life. It's how the person is known. It's not an event that happens once or time after time. Instead, it is simply an attribute or characteristic of who they are.

Now let me give you these references in their context, this second group of Greek words. And let me just - I'll share the references with you. You don't need to turn there. Luke 4:1 describes Jesus as full of the Holy Spirit as a condition, as a state. Acts 6:3 - when the first sort of predecessors **to the** office of deacon are selected, it says: "Brethren, select from you seven men of good reputation who are full of the Spirit..." This is their state or condition. This is how they're characterized. Verse 5 of the same chapter: "they chose Stephen, a man who was full of faith and full of the Holy Spirit..." This was who he was.

Acts 7:55 describes Stephen again as being full of the Holy Spirit. Acts 11:24 says Barnabas was a good man and he was full of the Holy Spirit and full of faith. Those were characteristics of who he was. Acts 13:52 - the disciples were continually filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit.

So, let me summarize this. You have these two word groups, each describing a different kind of filling. Special empowering describes unexpected sovereign acts of divine enablement for a specific task or purpose. God determines who gets it and when, and we are never told to seek that kind of filling. The second word group describes normal filling. It describes a condition or a state of the person's soul. Think about it. To be full of something consistently means that you are characterized by that quality. What if I said, 'You see that person over here? He is full of anger.' What do I mean by that? I mean he's characterized by anger. Or I say, 'That person is full of pride.' It means they're characterized by pride. So, when the New Testament describes someone as 'full of the Spirit', it's saying that that person's life is, as a state or condition, characterized by the presence of the Spirit, by the Spirit.

So, with that background, turn with me to Ephesians 5. Ephesians 5:18. Here in verse 18, Paul uses the second Greek word group that refers to an ongoing state or a condition. He's not talking about the kind of filling that is an event or repeated events, but it's a state or condition of the soul, a characteristic of the person that can vary in its intensity. Think about two people who are under the influence of alcohol. One of them may be at a higher level of 'under the influence of alcohol' than another. Even so, when it comes to this state or condition of being filled by the Spirit, people can vary in the degree of which they are filled by the Spirit, but it is a state.

Now look at verse 18 for a moment, the second half. We'll come back to the first, to the first half, but look at the second half of the verse: "be filled with the Spirit..." Literally, the Greek verb is a present tense command. You could translate it - it's awkward, but you could translate it something like this: 'be being filled with the Spirit.' Or you could say: 'be continually filled by the Spirit.' Whatever this means, it's not a one-time event nor is it an event that is to be repeated from time to time in our lives. Instead, it is to be a constant reality, a state or condition of our souls.

So, let's look at it. How can we further understand what this means? Well, first I want you to see the illustration here. What does 'being filled with the Spirit' look like? The answer is the first half of verse 18. Look at it again: "And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation..." Paul says, as Christians, we are not to get drunk with wine or, for that matter as we will see, with anything else. Paul is probably quoting, here, the Septuagint translation of Proverbs 23:31. But whether you're talking about that passage, or this passage, or throughout the Scriptures, the Bible does not allow those who are truly connected to God to become intoxicated or to be under the influence of alcohol. The Bible does not prohibit the drinking of wine, the drinking of alcoholic substances. That's an issue of Christian liberty as we've looked at before. But it absolutely prohibits being drunk or under their influence.

Let me show you several texts. Turn back to Proverbs 20:1. The proverb writes: "Wine is a mocker, strong drink a brawler, and whoever is intoxicated by it is not wise." Look

at Proverbs 23:29: “Who has woe? Who has sorrow? Who has contentions (or fightings)? Who has complaining? Who has wounds without cause? Who has redness of eyes? Those who linger long over wine, those who go to taste mixed wine. Do not look on the wine when it’s red, when it sparkles in the cup, when it goes down smoothly; at the last it bites like a serpent and stings like a viper (and then it describes the state of inebriation, the state of being drunk). Your eyes will see strange things, your mind utter perverse things. You’ll be like one who lies down in the middle of the sea or like one who lies down on the top of a mast. They struck me, but I didn’t become ill; they beat me, but I didn’t know it. When shall I awake? I shall seek another drink.”

The Old Testament is filled, the prophets particularly, with rebuke of God’s people for being drunk, for drinking to intoxication. But let’s look at the New Testament. Look at 1 Corinthians, 1 Corinthians 5, just in case you think all of that’s sort of past tense with our Christian liberty. 1 Corinthians 5. Paul tells the Corinthians, ‘Listen. When I told you not to associate with sinners, I didn’t mean unbelievers because all unbelievers are sinners. They’re given to lifestyles of sin. You’d have to leave the world. Instead, verse 11: “Actually, I wrote to you not to associate with any so-called brother (in other words, anybody who says I’m a Christian) if he is an immoral person, or a covetous person, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard... not even to eat with such a one.” Don’t connect yourself, or have fellowship with, or affirm in any way a person who says I’m a Christian and lives in a pattern of getting drunk, of being intoxicated. They’re living in sin.

And, in fact, it’s serious sin because if it’s truly a pattern of their life, they’re probably not a Christian at all. Look at 1 Corinthians 6:9: “Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Don’t be deceived...” And then he gives this list of sins and notice in verse 10: “nor drunkards... will inherit the kingdom of God.” A person who, as a habit of life, is consistently drunk with alcohol is not a believer. And by the way, that translates equally well for illicit drugs also.

Look at Galatians 5. Paul says the same thing in Galatians 5. He’s going through the deeds of the flesh or the manifestation of our fallenness and he gives this list of sins. In

verse 21, he lists drunkenness. And then he says: “I forewarn you, just as I have forewarned you, that those who practice these things (as a habit of life) will not inherit the kingdom of God.” You’re not a Christian. You may claim to be a Christian but, if that’s the pattern of your life, you are not in Jesus Christ.

So, it’s forbidden. Getting drunk, being under the influence of alcohol, is forbidden. You say, ‘Well, practically, how can I know when I’m taking my Christian liberty too far and I’m sinning in my use of alcohol?’ Well, how about just going to secular law? How about looking at the Texas statute? The Texas Penal Code defines intoxication in two ways – either not having the normal use of mental or physical faculties or having an alcohol concentration of .08 or more. And then it finishes, the law finishes, with this statement, something like this: ‘Simply stated, if you have lost any of your normal mental or physical capabilities because of the drinking of alcohol, you are considered under the influence of alcohol.’ And if you get in your car and drive in that state, you will be breaking the law of the State of Texas. If you find yourself in that condition at all, you have broken God’s law.

Now why is this command not to get drunk important? Look back at verse 18: “And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation (or that leads to dissipation)”. The word ‘dissipation’ refers to a wild, undisciplined life. In Luke 15, it describes the lifestyle of the prodigal son in the far country. Getting drunk leads to that kind of life because it undermines all self-control and restraint and therefore it leads to a wild, undisciplined life under the condition of alcohol. It may be unbridled anger in your case, it may be uncontrolled lust, it may be unrestrained depression and despair, but it leads to an undisciplined, uncontrolled life.

Now the question is why would Paul insert a command about drunkenness here? It’s in the middle of a paragraph about walking wisely in Biblical wisdom found in the Word of God. So how in the world does it fit here? Well, there are a couple of possibilities. Some say that it’s because the Ephesians, like the Corinthians, had trouble with getting drunk at their ‘agape’ feasts, at their love feasts, and so Paul wrote to correct that. Others

say, 'No, it's because, as part of their pagan lives, they involved themselves in the worship of the gods like Dionysus, the god of wine. And that meant you purposefully, in the worship of that god, got drunk so that you could be in communion with the god so that he would fill your body and you would be under his will and control.' Still others say, 'No, what you have here with this command is just **the** normal sort of contrast that we've seen throughout the book of who the Ephesians were before Christ and who they are supposed to be now that Christ has come.'

To some extent, all those things may have been true. But I think, in its context, the most obvious reason for including this command here 'not to get drunk', is as an illustration. It is an illustration - the first half of verse 18 is an illustration of what Paul means in the second half of verse 18, what he means by being filled with the Spirit. Notice how he words it. In fact, let me translate it similarly as it is in the Greek text: 'Do not get drunk with wine, but rather (on the other hand) be filled with the Spirit.' He wants us to know that being filled with the Spirit isn't like filling a glass with water. That's not what he's talking about. You know, I think we get that picture in our minds. To be filled with the Spirit must mean that, you know, God pours the Spirit into us and some of us, you know, have a little bit in our glass, and some of us have more in our glass, and some of us are full. That's not what he means at all. He means being filled with the Spirit in the sense of being under the influence of the Spirit, so he uses this illustration of being under the influence of alcohol.

I mean, think about the similarities between being drunk and being filled with the Spirit. They're obvious. In both cases, the person is under the influence of something other than himself. And he has given up, in both cases, the independent exercise of his will - either to the influence of alcohol or to the influence of the Spirit. A person who's drunk, think about it - their will is no longer fully in control. They have yielded the control of part of themselves to the influence of the alcohol. For example, a man is pulled over for drunk driving. **The** policeman asks him to walk a straight line. His mind and will tell his body to do what? Walk the straight line. But he can't (why?) because he has yielded up his will, in a very real sense, to the influence of that alcohol. He's no longer in control in one

sense. So being drunk here serves as an illustration of what it means to be filled. It means to be under the influence of something.

Now let's move on in verse 18 and ask ourselves, 'Okay, if that's what it looks like, who does it? Who does the filling? Who is the agent?' Notice here the verb 'be filled' is passive. That's true in both English and Greek. And if you remember just a little bit of English grammar, you know that a passive verb means that the subject of the sentence is not doing the action, but instead is receiving the action of the verb. So, what's the subject of this sentence? Well, understood in the command 'be filled' is 'you' – you be filled. Paul does not say, 'You Christians fill yourselves.' He says, 'Be filled.' That means we don't fill ourselves. So, the question is who does? Well, the prepositional phrase that follows tells us: "with (or by) the Spirit". Now folks, if you ask most Christians based on this verse, 'What are we to be filled with', they'll say what? 'What is the content that is to fill us' they'll say according to this verse? The Spirit. Be full of the Spirit. That's the content that's to fill us. And for many years, I read this verse the same way, but that is definitely not what this text says. Nowhere else in the New Testament is this construction, the Greek construction used here, used with the verb of 'filling' to say that the Spirit is the content with which you're to be filled. Instead, the phrase that's translated 'with the Spirit' in our New American Standard Bible literally means 'by the Spirit'. He is the agent. In other places, Paul uses that exact same construction, and it is translated 'by the Spirit'. You can look at it later if you want in 1 Corinthians 12:3. Twice it appears there. The same thing in 1 Corinthians 12:13, Romans 15:16. In all three of those cases, exactly the same Greek construction and it's 'by the Spirit'.

So, then we are filled by the agency or work of the Spirit. A number of the best Greek commentators make this point, including Harold Hoehner, who's now with the Lord, Daniel Wallace, an eminent Greek professor, Peter O'Brien. Listen to Harold Hoehner. He writes: "It is best to translate 'by the Spirit' or 'by means of the Spirit.'" So we don't fill ourselves. The Spirit fills us with something. You say, 'Well, what's our part then? If the Spirit does the filling, why is it a command to us? What are we to do?' Well, notice the second half of verse 18 is a command. It is an imperative. And by the way,

it's plural. In the Greek text, it's very clearly addressed not to one person, but it's plural - addressed to everyone in the church in Ephesus. In other words, this command is addressed to every Christian here this morning. This isn't just for the spiritual elite. This isn't for church leaders. This isn't for pastors. This is for every Christian. This is a command for you and for me.

So, if we don't fill ourselves, what is our role in this crucial part of living the Christian life? Daniel Wallace, one of the foremost Greek scholars of our time, joins many other voices that I read and argues that the best translation of this Greek construction is this: 'Permit or allow yourselves to be filled by the Spirit.' The Spirit does the filling, but we can hinder or encourage His work in us. How? Well, to fully understand that, we have to go to the core issue and ask the question what actually fills us. The Holy Spirit does the filling. With what does He fill us? What is the content with which the Holy Spirit fills us? Well, chapter 5, verse 18 of Ephesians does not tell us what the Spirit fills us with, but we can pick up a couple of clues elsewhere.

First, do you remember those passages in Acts that use this same word group and they speak of someone being full of the Spirit? In those passages, clearly, the content filling their character was the Spirit Himself. So, there's a sense in which the Holy Spirit is both the One who does the filling and He's what fills us. Let me just use an illustration from everyday life that'll make it clear to you. The Holy Spirit is not only the One holding **the** lever of the...from the gas tank filling our tank. He's also what flows through the tube and fills us. Okay? So, He's not only the One pumping the gas. He's also the gas that flows into our engine as it were. But that illustration needs to end because the Spirit's not a liquid. You don't have a full tank of the Spirit, or a half tank of the Spirit, or a quarter tank of the Spirit, or you're not riding on empty. Remember, Paul means be full, filled with the Spirit in the sense of being under the influence of the Spirit.

But what exactly does it mean to be under the influence of the Spirit like that? What does it mean? Well, Paul doesn't leave us wondering. He answers the question clearly in the parallel passage that was written at exactly the same time from the same jail cell. It's in

Colossians 3 and I want you to turn there. I want you to notice how this passage parallels Ephesians 5 and 6. Notice Colossians 3, the second half of verse 16, he talks about psalms, hymns, spiritual songs, singing. Verse 17: he talks about thanksgiving in all things. Verse 18: the duty of wives. Verse 19: the duty of husbands. Verse 20: the duty of children. Verse 21: the duty of fathers. Chapter 3:22-25: the duty of slaves. Chapter 4:1: the duty of masters. Now if you know anything about Ephesians, you know that is exactly parallel to what he deals with in Ephesians. So, this section in Colossians is exactly identical to Ephesians 5:19-6:9, with one very important exception. Everything's identical with one exception and that is how they begin. The central command, from which all of those things flow, is different in Ephesians than Colossians. In Ephesians 5, it's 'be filled with the Spirit'. In Colossians 3, notice what it is in verse 16: "Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom..." That means, by the way, that those two phrases are equivalent. To be filled with the Spirit in Ephesians 5 is exactly the same thing as letting the Word of Christ richly dwell within you because all of the things that flow out of them are identical. They were written at the same time from the same jail cell.

So, then, what does Colossians 3:16 mean? This is the key to understanding what it means to be filled with the Spirit. What does it mean? Let me translate it for you: allow the message of Christ, both the one He preached and the one that was preached about Him, to richly dwell within you. Now, you tell me, where do we have the message of Christ? It's in the Scripture. It's in the Scripture. This is a command to let the Scripture richly or abundantly dwell within you, that is, let it be at home in your heart. Let the Scripture be at home, find a home, in your heart. What does that mean? It means think about it. It means meditate on it. It means the Word of God should completely permeate and direct and control every thought.

Now think about, this is what the Scripture says throughout, isn't it? Go back to Joshua 1:8, a verse that many of us have taught our children. You remember what it says? "(The book) this book of the law shall not depart out of your mouth, but (in other words, you're supposed to read it all the time but) you shall meditate on it day and night, so that

you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it; then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have success.” Let the Word of God permeate you, Joshua.

Psalm 1:2 – what about the righteous man? “His delight is in the law of the Lord, and in His law he (what?) meditates day and night.” It permeates him. It dwells in him richly. It finds a home in him. Psalm 119:11 – “Your word I have treasured in my heart, that I may not sin against You.”

It’s like, it’s like a teabag. You know, **I** love both coffee and tea and it’s hard, on a given day, to decide which I’m going to drink. I have both in my office and **it’s a** weakness of mine I guess. But I love tea and I love loose leaf tea as well as bags. But let’s say for a moment that you and your mind are the hot water, and the Word of God is the teabag or the loose-leaf tea leaves. Imagine for a moment, if you took that teabag or those tea leaves and you just dipped ‘em down in the water once and pulled it out and I offered you a drink. Would you want it? No! **You** want that tea to stay in there for the required three minutes and let the - let the flavor permeate that water. You have to leave it in to steep. That’s how it is with the Word of God. We’re to allow it to be at home in us. We’re to take it in and **let it** permeate our thinking by keeping it in our minds. It’s not like coming to church, and you know, on Sunday morning, you sit here, you open your Bible, and you take the teabag, and you dip it in the water of your mind, and you pull it out, and you go away. No, you can’t live like that. As a Christian, you’ve got to let the Word of God steep in your mind so that it permeates your thinking. And then, you will begin to live under its influence. That’s what it means to be filled by the Spirit, with the Word of Christ.

Peter O’Brien, in commenting on Ephesians 5:18 writes: “We are to be subject to the Spirit’s control, which is tantamount to letting Christ’s Word rule in our lives.” John MacArthur in his commentary writes: “Being filled with the Spirit is living in the conscious presence of the Lord Jesus Christ, letting His mind, through the Word, dominate everything that is thought and done. The filling of the Spirit is not some

ecstatic or emotional experience, but a steady controlling of the life by obedience to the truth of God's Word."

I mean, think about it. Because the Holy Spirit is the author of Scripture, to be full or to be under the influence of the Spirit is to be under the influence of the Word. In fact, this is very important. Listen carefully. The Spirit always, always speaks in and through the Word and never apart from the Word. You know, I hear people saying things like: 'You know, God spoke to me' or 'God was telling me this or prompting me to do that.' Well, it depends on what they mean by that. Here's a test of whether or not it's the Spirit that's talking to you. Is He recalling the Word of God to your mind and prompting you to obey it? If not, it's not the Spirit.

Lest you think I'm sort of crawling out on my own here taking this position, let me stand on the shoulders of more brilliant minds than mine. Listen to Martin Luther: "The Word is the only bridge and path by which the Holy Spirit comes to us." The Word is the only bridge and path by which the Holy Spirit comes to us. He goes on to add: "We do not gape up to heaven for Him as the unstable spirits and visionary enthusiasts do and separate Him from the spoken Word or the ministry of the Word, but we learn and know **that He will** be by and with the Word and lead us into all truth through it; for there is no other way to experience the Holy Spirit." John Calvin: "The Holy Spirit so adheres to His own truth that He only displays and exerts His power where the Word is received with due reverence and honor. God does not bestow the Spirit on His people in order to set aside the use of His Word, but rather to render it fruitful."

So, let's bring it all together. Paul is saying to us, 'Permit or allow yourselves to be constantly filled by the Holy Spirit or under the influence of the Spirit and that influence will be carried out by filling you and your mind with the Word.' What does this look like in real life? What does - how does this flesh out tomorrow or later today in your life and in mine? Well, the Spirit revealed the Word. The Spirit inspired the Word. The Spirit gave us men and women who are gifted to teach and explain it to us. And then, when we read it or when we hear it taught, the Spirit illumines our thinking. He opens up our

understanding. He turns on the light of our mind to really get it. And then, if we carry on our responsibility, we leave this place thinking about it. And we think about it and when our minds **are** free to do whatever we need to do, then or when - I'm sorry. When our minds are tied up with what we need to do, that's one thing. But as soon as our minds are free, immediately we take our minds back to that passage and we think about it and **we** meditate on it. And then day after day, we're confronted with decisions. Today, you'll be confronted with decision after decision; tomorrow, decision after decision, of what we're going to do. In those decisions, we are presented with a choice of obeying our fallenness or obeying the Spirit and the Word that we have thought about and learned.

Let me just make this real practical. Look back at Ephesians 5. Notice in verse 19: you're going to be confronted with a decision of whether you're going to be morose and in despair or whether you're going to sing and rejoice in God. Verse 20: you're going to be faced with a choice in circumstances of whether you're going to give thanks for those circumstances or whether you're going to complain and fight against God. Wives, verse 22: you're going to be faced day by day with the decision, 'Am I going to submit my will to my husband's will or am I going to go out on my own and make my own decisions?' Husbands, you're going to be confronted with: 'Am I going to be selfish and think only of myself and what I want to do or am I going to be reminded by the Spirit of God that I'm to love my wife as Christ loved the church and to sacrifice myself for her?' You're faced with those decisions, one after the other. And if we decide to obey the Word that the Spirit brings to our minds and reminds us of, then we are being filled by the Spirit or, as Paul would say in other places, we are walking by the Spirit.

So, what exactly is our responsibility in all of this? You say, 'What do I do to cooperate with or to allow or permit the Holy Spirit to fill me with the Word?' Let me give you some very practical things that you need to do. Number one: cultivate an awareness of the Spirit's presence. Cultivate an awareness of the Spirit's presence. Lloyd-Jones makes the excellent point that if you have guests staying in your home - take for a moment, you have, you have folks staying overnight in your home. When you wake up the next morning, what's the first thing you do? You remind yourself there are guests in

my home. I probably should do things a little differently than I normally do. Maybe it means be quiet. Maybe it means put on a robe. Whatever it means, it means something. It means there are guests and I better behave differently. Lloyd-Jones, I think, rightfully says that we remind ourselves that our minds are not our own. We have an abiding guest and we remind ourselves with each morning that He, the Spirit of God, is with us so be careful what you see, and what you think, and what you say, and what you do, and where you take the Spirit of God. Cultivate that awareness of the Spirit's presence.

Number two: practice confession of sin. Practice confession of sin. Paul has already told us in Ephesians that by our sin we grieve the Spirit in our lives. So, we have to be in a pattern of confessing our sin or we are continually grieving Him. We will sin. And when we do, we need to confess it, and seek forgiveness, and seek to turn from it so that we don't grieve the Spirit of God and turn Him away from His work in our lives.

Number three: regularly expose yourself to the Word of God. Regularly expose yourself to the Word of God. The Holy Spirit works in and through (what?) the Word. If you don't have the Word as a regular part of your life, He has nothing with which to work. So read the Bible for yourself. Study it. Take it off the shelf and purposefully set aside time each day to be in the Word, to be thinking about the Word. Hear it taught. Get your iPod and download some podcasts of various good Bible preaching that will teach you and challenge your thinking. Study it for yourself. Meditate on it.

That brings me to number four which is meditate on the Word of God. Not only should you be exposed to the Scripture, but you need to think about it. Don't let the word 'meditation' scare you. Remember Paul tells us **in** Colossians 3: 'Let the word of Christ abundantly be at home in your heart'? That's what it means to meditate. It just means think about. Choose intentionally to think about the Scripture in order to better understand it and to think how to do it. That's all meditation is – intentionally choosing to think about the Scripture in order to better understand it and to discern how to do it.

Number five: follow the Spirit's lead. When the Spirit brings to mind that Word of God that you have heard taught, that you've learned, that you've thought about – in that moment of decision He brings it to mind - choose to follow the Spirit's prompting. Make up your mind now that when that moment comes, when the Spirit reminds you of your responsibility before God through the Word of God, that you're going to choose that rather than the way of your flesh, the way of your fallenness.

And finally, number six. And this is really the main point Paul is making. Cultivate an attitude of complete dependence. Cultivate an attitude of complete dependence. That's what Paul is encouraging here – a completely dependent spirit on the Spirit of God. If you're going to grow, if you're going to worship, if you're going to have healthy relationships, all of that is going to flow out of the work of the Spirit in your life because you and I don't have the ability to live out the Christian life. But what do we do? We skip verse 18 and we go to all these other commands as if we had the power to do them. We don't have the power to obey God on our own. Augustine was right: "O holy God, when Your commands are obeyed, it is from You that we receive the power to obey them." John Calvin was right when he wrote: "The increase of everything good in us comes from the Holy Spirit." Our only hope of obeying God's commands is if God gives us the power. And that power will always come to us through the work of the Holy Spirit using the Word of God in our hearts and minds. And it is a work we can either encourage or we can hinder. Cultivate that spirit of dependence. You can do (what?) nothing without Christ and His Spirit. Paul says, 'Brothers and sisters, allow yourself, permit yourself to be filled by the Spirit with the Word. Let it find a home in your mind and heart.'

Let's pray together.

Father thank You, as we so often thank You, for how clearly Your Word speaks on these things. Lord, when we compare Scripture with Scripture, it's so clear and it's there. I pray that You would help us now to think about these things, both to better understand them and in order to practice them in our lives. Father remind us constantly that we don't

have the power in our own strength to obey Your law, to obey Your will. But Father, remind us that through the work of Your Spirit - filling us and our minds and hearts with Your word, prompting us in the moment of decision, convicting us of sin when we don't - that we have every resource we need to obey You. Help us to do it. May You be pleased; may You be honored with our progress. May we be known as people who, as a state or condition of life, are filled by the Spirit with His Word. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen!