

Ephesians 5:15-21 (NIV)

Ephesians 5:15-21

New International Version (NIV)

¹⁵ Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise, ¹⁶ making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil. ¹⁷ Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord’s will is. ¹⁸ Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit, ¹⁹ speaking to one another with psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit. Sing and make music from your heart to the Lord, ²⁰ always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Instructions for Christian Households

²¹ Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.

Ephesians 5:15-21 (HCSB)

Consistency in the Christian Life

¹⁵ Pay careful attention, then, to how you walk—not as unwise people but as wise— ¹⁶ making the most of the time, ^[a] because the days are evil. ¹⁷ So don’t be foolish, but understand what the Lord’s will is. ¹⁸ And don’t get drunk with wine, which leads to reckless actions, but be filled by the Spirit:

¹⁹ speaking to one another
in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs,
singing and making music
from your heart to the Lord,
²⁰ giving thanks always for everything
to God the Father
in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ,
²¹ submitting to one another
in the fear of Christ.

Footnotes:

- a. [Ephesians 5:16](#) Lit *buying back the time*

Holman Christian Standard Bible - Study Bible¹
Ephesians 5:15-21

5:15-16 These words provide a solemn warning that Christians should be wise and careful in all things, including their use of time. Our use of time is not neutral; it can be evil if it is not invested for good ([Ps 90](#)).

5:17 Understand what the Lord's will is summarizes the two philosophies of life described in [verses 1-17](#). The world's lifestyle is characterized by moral and spiritual darkness. The philosophy for godly living is characterized by moral and spiritual light, and its goal is to imitate God and His love.

5:18 Paul's imperatives contrast the differences between being under the influence of wine, which leads to **reckless actions**, and being under the influence of the Spirit, which results in joyful living. The commands are plural, thus the commands refer not merely to individuals, but to the corporate community of faith.

5:19-21 The Spirit's fullness is demonstrated in spiritual understanding, praise, and thanksgiving that are constant and comprehensive. The church that is filled with the Spirit will be characterized by praise and thanksgiving to God. Beyond that there will be evidence of self-control, mutual encouragement, and mutual submission, which is the opposite of rudeness, haughtiness, and self-assertion.

5:21 This verse serves as a hinge to connect what is prior with what follows. Grammatically, the participial phrase (lit "submitting yourselves") goes with [verses 18-20](#). The content of [verses 22-33](#), however, depends on the principle of submission in [verse 21](#).

1. Jeremy Royal Howard, ed., *HCSB Study Bible*, (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2010), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, Under: "Ephesians 5".

English Standard Version - Study Bible²
Ephesians 5:15-21

5:16 making the best use of. This phrase translates the Greek *exagorazō*, which can also mean “redeem” or “purchase.” Christians must actively take advantage of the opportunity to do good (cf. [Ps. 90:12](#)). Wisdom is especially needed in an **evil** age where the pathway of holiness is not always immediately clear until one reflects upon God’s Word and discerns his holy will.

5:17 understand... the will of the Lord. This does not mean that a person tries to discern God’s secret counsel (his “hidden will”) but that he applies God’s general guidelines for life as found in the Bible (his “revealed will”; cf. [Deut. 29:29](#) and note on [Eph. 5:10](#)).

5:18 Wine was the staple drink of the ancient Mediterranean world and was fermented in order to preserve it from turning into vinegar. **be filled with the Spirit.** As earlier (see note on [4:28](#)), Paul expresses a negative exhortation (what the saints are to stop doing) along with a positive command (what the saints are to start doing). Whereas wine can control the mind and ruin one’s judgment and sense of propriety, leading to **debauchery**, in contrast with this, being “filled with the Spirit” leads to self-control along with the other fruits of “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, [and] gentleness” ([Gal. 5:22-23](#)). The command in Greek (*plērousthe*) is a present imperative and does not describe a onetime “filling” but a regular pattern of life.

5:19 Being filled with the Spirit results in joyful praise through **singing** and **making melody**. This may refer to different kinds of **psalms and hymns and spiritual songs** found in the OT Psalter. It seems more likely, however, that Paul is referring both to the canonical psalms and to contemporary compositions of praise (see also [Col. 3:16](#)). “Spiritual” communicates the influence of the Holy Spirit’s filling ([Eph. 5:18](#)) in the believer’s acts of praise.

5:20 To pray **in the name of Jesus** means to pray in faith, trusting in him as our mediator with God the Father on “the throne of grace” ([John 14:6](#); [Heb. 4:16](#); [10:20](#); see also note on [John 14:13](#)).

5:21-6:9 Submission to One Another. [Verse 21](#) is transitional, connecting with the previous section and leading to what follows. Submission is illustrated in various family relations in [5:22-33](#) (wives/husbands), [6:1-4](#) (children/parents), and [6:5-9](#) (slaves/masters). See also [Col. 3:18-25](#).

Principles of Marriage	Scripture Reference
Marriage is part of the “mystery” of God’s will	Eph. 1:9 ; 3:3 ; 5:32
Paul’s instructions are directed to Spirit-filled believers	Eph. 5:18
Wives are called to submit, men are called to love	Eph. 5:21-33
Headship entails authority	Eph. 5:23-24 (cf. Eph. 1:22 ; 4:15)
Submission is still required of Christian wives	Eph. 5:22 ; Col. 3:18 (cf. Gen. 2:18 ; 1 Cor. 11:3)
Marriage involves spiritual warfare, which requires husbands and wives to put on the full armor of God	Eph. 6:10-18

2. Lane T. Dennis, ed., *ESV Study Bible, The: English Standard Version*, (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway Bibles, 2008), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, Under: “Ephesians 5”.

5:21 Submission in General. Grammatically, “submitting” is a participle in Greek and is dependent on the verb in [v. 15](#). It explains further how to walk in wisdom ([vv. 15-21](#) are one long sentence in Gk.). It also states a general principle of submission, which is illustrated in [5:22-6:9](#). Absolute “mutual submission” is popular today, particularly where egalitarian philosophies are the rule. But what Paul meant by submitting “to one another” is explained through the particular examples of family relations ([5:22-6:4](#)), so it is likely that **submitting to one another** means “submitting to others according to the authority and order established by God,” as reflected in the examples that Paul gives in the following verses.

NLT Life Application Study Bible³

Ephesians 5:15-21

5:15, 16 By referring to these days as evil, Paul was communicating his sense of urgency because of evil's pervasiveness. We need the same sense of urgency because our days are also difficult. We must keep our standards high, act wisely, and do good whenever we can.

5:18 Paul contrasts getting drunk with wine, which produces a temporary "high," to being filled with the Spirit, which produces lasting joy. Getting drunk with wine is associated with the old way of life and its selfish desires. In Christ, we have a better joy, higher and longer lasting, to cure our depression, monotony, or tension. We should not be concerned with how much of the Holy Spirit we have but with how much of us the Holy Spirit has. Submit yourself daily to his leading and draw constantly on his power.

5:18, 19 The effects of alcohol are obvious, but what happens when we are under the influence of the Holy Spirit? In these verses, Paul lists three byproducts of the Spirit's influence in our lives: singing, making music, and giving thanks. Paul did not intend to suggest that believers only discuss religious matters, but that whatever we do or say should be permeated with an attitude of joy, thankfulness to God, and encouragement of others. Instead of whining and complaining—which our culture has raised to an art form—we are to focus on the goodness of God and his mercies toward us. How would others characterize your words and attitudes?

5:20 When you feel down, you may find it difficult to give thanks. Take heart—in all things God works for our good if we love him and are called by him ([Romans 8:28](#)). Thank God, not for your problems but for the strength he is building in you through the difficult experiences of your life. You can be sure that God's perfect love will see you through.

5:21, 22 Submitting to another person is an often misunderstood concept. It does not mean becoming a doormat. Christ—at whose name "every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth" ([Philippians 2:10](#))—submitted his will to the Father, and we honor Christ by following his example. When we submit to God, we become more willing to obey his command to submit to others, that is, to subordinate our rights to theirs. In a marriage relationship, both husband and wife are called to submit. For the wife, this means willingly following her husband's leadership in Christ. For the husband, it means putting aside his own interests in order to care for his wife. Submission is rarely a problem in homes where both partners have a strong relationship with Christ and where each is concerned for the happiness of the other.

3. *Life Application Study Bible*, (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale, 1988), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, 2007=2008.

A Principle to Live By Ephesians #13: Walking Wisely

from [Ephesians 5:15-21](#)

To walk wisely, we must continually allow the Holy Spirit to enlighten our hearts to discover what God's will is, particularly as revealed through the authors of Scripture.

Paul used the term “walk” once again, but this time to summarize his earlier thoughts and to remind these believers of their divine source for both understanding and doing God's will. To walk worthy, they must have a proper relationship with the Holy Spirit.

In John's gospel Jesus told the apostles that, after His ascension, He would send “the Spirit of truth” to teach them and guide them “into all truth” ([Jn 14:17](#); [15:26](#); [16:12-13](#)). When Paul wrote this letter, this process was still unfolding, and it continued throughout the first century. This is why Paul prayed that “the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, would give [them] a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him” ([Eph 1:17](#)).

Today, believers are greatly privileged. We not only have the Holy Spirit dwelling within us corporately as communities of faith but within us personally. Furthermore, we have the body of truth the Holy Spirit revealed through New Testament authors. Paul's prayer for the Ephesians continues to be answered marvelously in our lives. Our challenge is to allow this divine process to happen more and more as we obey God's instructions about the message of Christ ([Col 3:16-17](#)).

Reflection and Response

Why is it important to have a perspective on the ministry of the Holy Spirit that is both objective (His revelation through Scripture) and subjective (His enlightening and convicting work in our hearts)?

4. Gene Getz, *Life Essentials Study Bible*, (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2011), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, 1633.