

## CHURCH OF THE REDEEMER

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### TRANSFORMED MINDS AND THE INDWELLING WORD OF CHRIST

*Home, home on the range, where the deer and the antelope play. Where seldom is heard a discouraging word, and the skies are not cloudy all day...* What an idyllic picture those famous lyrics paint! However, the truth of the matter, as we all know all too well, is that life is not like that either on the range or in the Church! The Apostle Paul's letters to the various churches reveal that even Apostolic churches had problems. Ralph Martin helpfully points out that Paul's thought is never narrowly individual and pietistic as though his chief design was to write a manual for the interior life of sainthood. His concern is ever with the Christians' corporate life, and the perfection he sets before his readers is attained only in the fellowship of believers whose attitudes and living together reflect something of the graces of verse 12 and the spirit of verse 13. How we get along with other people is quite often the decisive test of the quality of our Christian living, and a truer index of our character than our pious feelings or private devotions. 3:15 The need to have a Christian community living together in unison and tolerance is further stressed. What happens when strife and friction enter as disturbing elements? The umpire in any dispute is Christ's peace – both the peace He embodies and which He alone can give – which is the desired prize in all Christian relationships (John 14:27). He is our peace (Eph. 2:14) in the special sense of uniting Jews and Gentiles in the church as both groups are reconciled to God. The call here is to allow no alien spirit to creep into church members' relations with their fellow-believers, which would destroy that "peace." Probably the Old Testament idea of "wholeness," "integrity," "soundness" (implicit in the Hebrew term *shalom* = peace) is in the background. The harmony of the church is God's will for His people. To that goal they are called as the one body of Christ who is the appointed Head (1:18, 24). As He rules in His house and settles every faction ("rule" means "arbitrate," "give a verdict" in either a legal case or an athletic contest), so His peace is realized in the church's becoming in fact what it is intended to be by God's design. It is nothing less than the coming into visible reality of that new man of verse 10; a new society is born and grows and is distinguished by a corporate life of "wholeness" affecting every dimension of the church's existence in the world. W. Foerster can therefore correctly designate the peace of Christ as "a kingdom in which the believer is protected"<sup>1</sup> as long as he seeks the will of the King and is obedient to the Head of the body. And he shows that response by the measure of his acceptance of a life-style patterned on the spiritual qualities of verse 12 and a forgiving disposition which reaches out to any who bear him malice (v. 13). The manifestation of this new society is a cause for thanksgiving to God. In that segment of human life where God's will is honoured and obeyed and in which the new life of His Son is at work and in which a new humanity is taking shape, the appropriate response must be one of gratitude. As Paul has sounded this note in 1:12 to preface the recital of God's mighty deeds in redemption, so now he concluded fittingly with the same thought. In the sphere of the church, Christ's body and His new people who reflect His image (3:10), the hymn of praise takes on fresh significance.<sup>2</sup> As the Colossians were exhorted to let the peace of Christ rule their lives (v 15), so now they are admonished to let the Word of Christ (HO LOGOS TOU CHRISTOU is parallel to A EIRENE TOU CHRISTOU, "the peace of Christ") dwell richly among them. The expression, "the Word of Christ" (HO LOGOS TOU CHRISTOU), is used here instead of "the Word" (HO LOGOS, 4:3), "the Word of God" (HO LOGOS TOU THEOU, 1:15) or "the Word of the Lord" (I

Thess 4:15; 2 Thess 3:1). The change from “of God” or “of the Lord” may have been due to the Colossian situation; certainly the present expression is in keeping with the rest of the letter with its emphasis on the person and work of Christ.<sup>3</sup> Note the emphasis on the role of the Holy Spirit. The two key passages in the NT that address the subject of the filling of the Spirit are Eph. 5:18-21 and Col 3:15-17. The context of Eph. 5:3-21 is particularly important. The Apostle is contrasting Christian behavior with that of worldly behavior (5:3-14), which is described in terms of *light* and *darkness*. In 5:15-21 the same contrast is drawn in terms of *wisdom* and *folly*.

## I. THE EVIDENCE OF THE SPIRIT’S FILLING<sup>4</sup> (Eph. 5:18-21)

Paul unfolds this by listing four present participles.

A. Christian Fellowship “It is wonderful to revel in the love of God,” declares D.A. Carson, “Truly to experience that love, to live in the warmth of its glow, invests all of life with new meaning and purpose. The brotherhood of the saints takes on new depth; “fellowship: becomes precious, not the artificially arranged shaking of hands in a service or the shared pot of tea or coffee. Forgiving others becomes almost natural, because we ourselves, thanks to God’s immeasurably rich love, have been forgiven so much. Others may despise us, but that makes little difference if God loves us.”<sup>5</sup>

Fellowship is described in terms of *speaking* (LALOUNTES – lit. to talk. In this context it is the sense of a glad or cheerful dialogue) to one another in psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Note the teaching aspect of music “It is significant that much of what is taken to be hymnic in the Pauline corpus has a didactic and paraenetic function in its present form and context (e.g. Phil 2:6-11; Col. 1:15-20; I Tim. 3:16).”<sup>6</sup>

B. Christian Worship In Rev. 5:8-9; 14:3; 15:3 the worship of Christ by the inhabitants of heaven is described in terms of singing a new song – so here in Eph 5:19 we are instructed to “sing and make music in your heart to the Lord.”<sup>7</sup>

C. Christian Gratitude This is expressed by “giving thanks for all things” and this is to characterize believers. Note the Trinitarian dimension. The Holy Spirit inspires thanksgiving to the Father mediated through the Son. The expression in Col 3:15 EUCHARISTOI GINESTHE stresses a continuous attitude, lit. keep on being thankful.

D. Christian Accountability “Submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ.” This will be spelled out in specifics in the following verses.

## II. THE RESULTS OF THE INDWELLING WORD (Col 3:15-17)

There is a close connection between Ephesians and Colossians, particularly between the two passages we are examining. The parallelism involves the filling of the Spirit and the richly indwelling word of Christ.

A. Christian Fellowship Teaching and counseling constitutes an important dimension of true fellowship.

B. Christian Worship The language is the same as Eph. 5:19.

C. Christian Gratitude Again note the correspondence with Eph. 5:20.

**NOTE:** In view of the parallelism involved, we are bound to conclude that the filling of the Spirit and the richly indwelling Word of Christ are functionally equivalent. That indwelling Word is not some specialized or restricted truth granted only to some in the congregation, but “everything I have commanded you” (Matt. 28:20), faithfully believed and obeyed. “The filling of the Spirit, then, is not a matter of unusual or spectacular experience (although something of that may at times be involved), but Spirit-worked obedience to Christ as that comes to expression in the basic, everyday relationships and responsibilities of life. The reality of the Spirit’s filling work is the reality, in all its breadth and richness, of the ongoing working of Christ, the life-giving Spirit, with his Word. To look for some word other than this Word, now inscripturated for the church, is to be seeking some spirit other than the Holy Spirit.”<sup>8</sup> In other words, the filling of the Spirit closely parallels having our minds transformed by the Word of God.

**CONCLUSION:** What is the filling of the Spirit? Is it some special emotional high reserved only for those who have had a charismatic experience? No. To be filled with the Spirit is to be indwelt by the Word of Christ. “One must never separate the Spirit from Christ’s word or Christ’s word from the Spirit. The Spirit works by and with Christ’s word. Christ’s word works by and with the Spirit.”<sup>9</sup> The fullness of the Spirit, contrary to the claims of well-meaning Charismatics, is not something that individuals

experience, especially in regards to speaking in tongues; rather, it occurs in the corporate worship of the church. “The development of the argument in this section suggests, however, that the emphasis on the experience of the Spirit and on the community’s worship is not intended by the writer to lead to an obsession with religious enthusiasm for its own sake or to an absorption by the community in its own life and a corresponding retreat from the world. On the contrary, as has been noted, the passage links Spirit-led worship with the wisdom required for living in this present evil age. It is precisely the experience of being filled with the Spirit that gives believers understanding of their Lord’s will, and it is the spiritual songs that are a means of promoting the knowledge of that will. In this way the community’s worship can be seen to make a vital contribution to its wise living in the world.”<sup>10</sup> Finally, note the emphasis in Rom. 12:2 on discerning the will of God and how this is likewise accented in Eph. 5:17. J.I. Packer, in writing about the Puritans’ understanding of the Christian life and the need to know the will of God, wrote, “But how can God’s will be known? Can we tell his requirements with certainty and exactness? Is there any way out of the fogs of pious guesswork on this point into the clear light of certainty? Yes, said the Puritans, there is; the way out is to harness our consciences to the Holy Scriptures, in which the mind of God is fully revealed to us. To them, Scripture was more than the fallible and sometimes fallacious human witness to revelation, which is all that some moderns allow it to be; it was revelation itself, the living word of the living God, divine testimony to God’s own redemptive acts and plans, written by the Holy Ghost through human agents in order to give the church of every age clear direction on all matters of faith and life that could possibly arise. But it might be said such a formula is unrealistic and empty. The Bible is, after all, a very old book, the product of a now long-vanished culture. Most of it was written for people in an utterly different situation from our own. How can it throw clear and direct light on the problems of life today? It can do so, the Puritans would reply, because the God who wrote it remains the same, and his thoughts about man’s life do not change. If we can learn to see what principles he was inculcating and applying in his recorded dealings with Israel and the early church, and to reapply them to our own situation, that will constitute the guidance that we need. And it is to help us to do this that the Holy Spirit has been given. Certainly, seeing the relevant principles and applying them correctly in each case is in practice an arduous task; ignorance of Scripture, and misjudgment of situations, constantly lead us astray, and to be patient and humble enough to receive the Spirit’s help is not easy either. But it remains true, nonetheless, that in principle Scripture provides clear and exact guidance for every detail and department of life, and if we come to Scripture teachably and expectantly, God himself will seal on our minds and hearts a clear certainty as to how we should behave in each situation that faces us. ‘God hath appointed means for the cure of blindness and error,’ wrote Baxter, ‘Come into the light, with due self-suspicion, and impartiality, and diligently use all God’s means, and avoid the causes of deceit and error, and the light of truth will at once show you the truth.’”<sup>11</sup>

## **ENDNOTES**

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- <sup>1</sup> W. Foerster, EIRENE, in *Theological Dictionary of The New Testament* II ed. G. Kittel (Eerdmans, 1980) p. 414
- <sup>2</sup> Ralph Martin, *Colossians: The Church’s Lord and The Christian’s Liberty* (Zonderman, 1972) p. 123.
- <sup>3</sup> P.T. O’Brien, *Colossians: Word Biblical Commentary* (Word, 1982) p. 206
- <sup>4</sup> The text contains two imperatives “do not get drunk on wine” and “be filled with the Spirit.” This is a command and is addressed to the church. The imperatives are in the plural and the present tense and the passive voice, which could best be rendered “you be constantly letting the Spirit continually fill you all.”
- <sup>5</sup> D.A. Carson, *A Call to Spiritual Reformation: Priorities from Paul and His Prayers* (Baker, 1988), p. 197.
- <sup>6</sup> A.T. Lincoln, *Ephesians: Word Biblical Commentary* (Word, 1990), p. 345.
- <sup>7</sup> “To the Lord” is a reference to the Lord Jesus. In the parallel passage of Col. 3:16 we have “to God.” “This”, says A.T. Robertson, “is another proof of the deity of Christ” *Word Pictures In the New Testament* IV (Broadman, 1931), p. 544.
- <sup>8</sup> R.B. Gaffin Jr., *Perspectives On Pentecost: New Testament Teaching on the Gifts of the Holy Spirit* (P & R, 1979), p. 34.
- <sup>9</sup> Robert Reymond, *A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith* (Nelson, 1998), p. 766.
- <sup>10</sup> Lincoln. Op. Cit. p. 347.
- <sup>11</sup> J.I. Packer, *A Quest for Godliness: The Puritan Vision of The Christian Life* (Crossway, 1990) p. 113.