

## Jason Upchurch - Ephesians 5:15-21 - Time, Alcohol, Submitting to One Another

We're winding up our section on put-on, renew your mind, and put off. I know you've heard that phrase a few hundred times by now and are probably excited to not hear it for a while. But I hope that it's been etched into your mind and you remember that this is how we are to put off sin and help others put off sin. And to be sanctified and walk in righteousness.

We're going to see a handful of final admonitions here this morning of this principle.

### 1) Put off wasting time. **Read 15-16**

So we are called to make the best use of our time.

There's a thing that happens at the end of almost all sports games that are close in score. And it's that the last five minutes takes forever to play. Because if the score is close managing the clock matters to win games. In fact, it's called clock management and the best coaches are good at clock management.

How coaches use timeouts changes. The style of offense changes. The defensive strategy changes. The last 3 minutes is like a completely different game than the first hour. And often times I wonder: why don't they play like this all game? I mean, if they really think this is the best way to use the clock in the last 5 minutes to gain the most amount of points, why don't they do that to begin with?

And the answer is perspective. The perspective has changed. Time is now limited and coming to an end and that reality changes the perspective of how you play the game.

And I think that's an excellent illustration of the Christian life. Because we've been bought by God through Christ in the gospel, we now have a different perspective on life. We now realize there is a clock and the stakes matter. The Bible says you have 70 years on this earth or 80 if you're strong.

You have 75 winters to endure. 75 springs to look forward to. 75 summers to play outside. 75 falls to enjoy the beauty of creation. Maybe a couple more, maybe a couple less and then you're done.

**Psa 90:9-10:** for all our days pass away under your wrath; we bring our years to an end like a sigh. The years of our life are seventy or even by reason of strength eighty, yet their span is toil and trouble, they are soon gone and we fly away.

What often happens in life, just like in the football game, is we don't value clock management the way we should early on. We waste a lot of time on things that don't matter in the end. You reach the 4th quarter of your life - your 60s - and you realize oh boy, the game will be over soon. I wish I played better earlier.

This clock management is what Paul is calling us to in **Vss. 15-16. Read**

So we put off unwise usage of time. Wasting time.

There's a lot of ways to waste time. You can waste time not working, Proverbs are filled with scathing comments about the lazy person.

You can also waste time working. Wearing yourself out and neglecting your family and service all in the name of productivity.

Not all work is good and not all rest is good. I feel the need to say that it's okay to rest. It's okay to recreate. It's okay to have hobbies. It's okay to work long hours. But are you managing the clock wisely?

I remember in college realizing how much time I was playing video games. It was an absurd amount. And you take all that time - even an hour a day - add that up over the course of a year or two or two and you realize that's a lot of time. But is that really the best use of time? An hour a day of anything is 15 solid days of that thing every year.

Are you on social media an hour a day? That's 15 solid days a year you're on the screen.

Are you watching 2 hours of YouTube every day? That's a solid 24/7 month of your life every year.

You get the idea. Paul says a few things about this. Look carefully how you walk. Just step back and take a look at your schedule and what you're spending time on. Take a careful examination with your life.

Then he says to walk wisely. **Read 15a**

Here, the issue isn't even sin. Obviously we should get sin out of our lives. But here the issue is just wisdom. Is what you're spending time on wise? Is it beneficial?

Again, I think there's space for hobbies, recreation, rest, for YouTube and even video games maybe. But would someone else look at the whole of your life and conclude that what you're doing is wise?

And here's the reason. **Read 15**

The days are evil. What days are evil? All the days from now until the Lord returns.

**Gal 1:4:** says that we live in the present evil age. The church age - from now until the Lord returns - is defined by evil.

The Bible talks about 3 ages: the former age from creation to the cross, the present age from the cross until the second coming, and the age to come which is eternity. This age is evil and sinful.

**Eph 2:2:** The course of the world is sinfulness, it follows the prince of the power of the air - Satan - and Satan is at work in the sons of disobedience.

We'll see in chapter 6 that we put on the armor of God so that we can stand in the evil day.

Here, the days are evil. What days? All the days. All the days we live. That's why we need to have constant vigilance in all that we do.

There's never a time where we can go: Hey, the days aren't evil anymore so I don't have to walk wisely. I can just sit back on autopilot and do nothing. No, that never happens. We walk wisely through the whole church age because even though the gospel is advancing, the age is evil.

Now, that doesn't mean there aren't good things. We have medicine and education and rule of law and civic order, science because of the Christian world view. Those are great things that were only brought about by Christian influence.

Nevertheless, the age we are in is evil. And I think part of the way that we are salt and light in the evil age and affect the evil around us is to use our time wisely.

You know when I went on Sabbatical we planned our time very carefully. We only had so much time, and we needed to keep moving and keep going. I wanted to spend more time in Yellowstone, way more time in Grand Teton. I could have spent a month in Washington DC.

But the fact that time was short meant we had to wisely decide the most important things to do. There's a lot of things we could do as Christians. But there's only so much time.

There are things I want to do — my heaven hobbies. Hobbies and interests that I just don't have time for in life so it'll have to wait for heaven. I want to play the drums and play the piano. I want to go climb huge mountains, travel to warm beach areas in Mexico. I want to build things, houses, businesses. That's like 10 lifetimes of things - I can't do them all. It'll have to wait for heaven.

Some people try to do too much, others don't try to do anything.

Beloved, use your time wisely. Whether you're young and learning, single and trying to figure out life, married, drowning in diapers, retired and wondering how to fill your time: use it wisely.

One last thing. **Read 17**

This is connected with good use of your time. God's will is that you use whatever time he's given you wisely. He doesn't want you to be foolish, he wants wisdom. Get advice, counsel, perspective on the use of your time.

2) Don't get drunk. **Read 18-20**

Maybe it should be obvious to us as believers, but we shouldn't be drunk. What is drunkenness? It's when alcohol has so much influence on you that you can no longer control your body. Not only are you not in control, but you have no ability to be in control.

**Turn to Proverbs 23** for a minute. There's a lot of talk about drunkenness in the Bible. And although I think we know this, it's always important to clarify that drinking alcohol is not forbidden, drunkenness is forbidden. You're free to drink beer or wine or whiskey.

**Psa 104:15:** The Bible says God has given wine to gladden the heart of man and make his face shine.

What does that mean? It means wine isn't a sinful accident. It's not a liability of the fall. It's a gift from God to make us happy. Just to be really granular: the actual effects of alcohol - the warmth, relaxation, easing of anxieties - are a gift from God. It's not drunkenness.

**Deuteronomy 14:** actually commands people to eat or drink in front of the Temple to give thanks to God. And then God gives them a menu of options they can choose to eat or drink: wine, beer, sheep, oxen - whatever your heart wants. God wants us to remember that every steak dinner, every lamb chop, every freshly opened wine bottle and cold beer on a hot day is on him. He gives it to refresh us and give him thanks and praise.

But we don't get drunk. Here Solomon warns us in several ways. **Read 19-25**

I want you to notice a couple of things. First, just like in Ephesians drunkenness is talked about in the context of wisdom. Remember Paul said we need to walk in wisdom because the days are evil and then says to not get drunk. Same thing here. Drunkenness destroys wisdom.

Second, and I might step on some toes here, but that's why they pay me the big bucks: drunkenness is a sin. Drunkenness is not a disease or a medical condition. Or a psychological condition. It's sin, just like gluttony - eating too much food. It's easy to tell when people are gluttonous, it's easy to tell when people are drunk.

People are not "alcoholics" or they have "alcoholism." That language is secular "disease" language. What the secular world wants to do is make drunkenness a disease that can't be helped. They're a victim of the disease and so all we can do is mitigate the problem, like we'd mitigate Multiple Sclerosis or strokes or other medical issues.

They'll say alcohol changes your brain so it's different. Listen: all sin changes your brain. All sin has societal pressures. Sin can affect different people in different ways with different constitutions. You know what? It's still sin that we're commanded to put off.

And here's the real issue: if drunkenness is labeled as something other than a sin, then repentance is not possible because it's not a moral category. You can't repent from multiple sclerosis. You can't repent from the flu. You can't repent from diseases. So if drunkenness and gluttony are diseases there's no repentance. There's no way to overcome it.

But if they are sin, like the Bible says they are sins, then they can be overcome and they can be forgiven in the gospel.

Even the old Alcoholics Anonymous “Hi I’m so and so, and I’m an alcoholic” is wrong biblically speaking. If you’re in Christ - if you’re a believer - then you are not defined by your sin. You’re defined by righteousness and light and purity and Jesus Christ.

And here, it’s not just put off this sin but it’s also don’t go around those who are drunkards or gluttons. They will destroy your life. Then Solomon paints us a picture. **Read 29-35**

You want to wreck your life? You want to fill it with woe and tragedy? You want to say things that will ruin you and destroy those around you? Just get drunk. It’s a simple plan.

Have you ever been on the ocean and been sea sick? One time we went whale watching off the coast of San Francisco. It was like 90 minutes and I’ve never been so sick in all my life. The up and down and side to side. You can’t think, you’re vomiting. You can’t even walk straight, you’re dizzy.

I can’t imagine being at the top of a mast of a ship like Solomon says. Where the rocking is even worse. Where you’re swinging back and forth 10-20 feet as the boat below you rocks and rolls.

That’s a drunk man. Totally out of control of his physical body. No wherewithal. No ability to control anything. So drunk he doesn’t even feel pain when he’s struck.

And because of the applications here, I think we need to be sure to include drugs, psychedelic medicines, marijuana, hypnosis, basically anything that turns your brain to mush is a no-go. Anything that puts your body out of control is a no go.

Obviously if you’re going in for surgery or you’re in acute pain for a season you may need to have powerful meds. I remember visiting an older guy in the hospital who didn’t want to take morphine. He just refused. And the doctors and the nurses couldn’t get him to take it even though it was keeping him from healing. And finally I asked him: why don’t you want this? He said he didn’t want to get addicted and be hooked. He was 75 and fearful of being addicted.

I encouraged him that the morphine regulator wouldn’t allow him to get addicted. But that he actually needed the medicine to heal. If his body couldn’t relax he would probably get worse and die. But he was concerned about the long lasting effects of powerful narcotics. It’s good to be suspicious! But it’s also good to allow a season of healing in extreme cases.

But general rule is that we never want to fill ourselves with anything that will cause us to be out of control. Why? Because we’re called to control our bodies. We’re called to self-control, to be fully in control of our bodies as much as is possible within us.

So we don’t want to be filled with wine or any other drunkenness agent. What do we fill ourselves with? **Look back at Eph 5:18**

So don’t fill yourself with wine. That’s debauchery. Debauchery is an excess of something. Usually something that is sensual - it’s overdosing on physical pleasure. It could be food or drink or sex or drugs or partying or gambling.

What do we fill ourselves with? We fill ourselves with the Spirit. Drunkenness causes lack of control. What’s one of the fruits of the Spirit? Self-control.

So when we’re filled with alcohol to the brim, vileness comes out. When we’re filled with the Spirit, songs come out. Songs and hymns and spiritual songs and thankfulness. Both the bottle and the Spirit affect how we act.

Now, here’s the obvious question: what does it mean to be filled with the Spirit? There’s a lot of people who want to make this be a weird subjective experience. You just need to be in tune with the Spirit or connected to

the Spirit - whatever that means. They try to come up with definitions of what this is. Can I show what it means to be filled with the Spirit? **Turn to Col. 3:12-17**

Colossians and Ephesians are called the Twin Epistles. The content throughout most of the book is identical. Same phrasing, same topics, to some extent exact same words. Paul likely penned these at the same time. He's talking about things to put off and put on.

And you'll notice that he talks about singing songs and hymns and spiritual songs. Giving thanks. Then he'll talk about husbands and wives - it's almost identical to Ephesians. But watch how he frames it here. He doesn't doesn't say be filled with the Spirit. He says something else that's the same thing. **Read 12-17**

Did you see it? Let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly. If you do, then you'll teach and admonish and sing songs and hymns and spiritual songs.

It's the same exact thing, just using different words. So if you want to be filled with the Spirit, you have to be filled with what? The Word of Christ. What's the Word of Christ? It's the Bible.

The way the Spirit sanctifies us and fills us is by being filled with his Word. **John 17:17**: sanctify them in the truth, your word is truth.

It was said of John Bunyan - the author of Pilgrim's Progress - that he was so saturated with the Bible that if you pricked him, his blood would run out bible. Bible just poured out of him. Why? Because the Word of Christ - the Bible - went into him constantly.

It dwelled richly within him. And just to make another plug for you to read Pilgrim's Progress, but if you read that book a few times while you're reading your Bible, you realize he is nonstop quoting biblical passages and themes and situations throughout the book. It's all he knows how to talk about which makes the book so amazing.

So just like drunkards take in alcohol and it affects their behavior and their speech. Christians are to constantly take in the Bible - the Word of Christ, given to us by the Holy Spirit - and it will affect our behavior and our speech.

The reason Paul says to be filled with the Spirit is because the way the Spirit fills us is with his own Word.

Who moved men along to write down the Scripture? The Holy Spirit.

Who is called the Spirit of Christ? The Holy Spirit.

Who sanctifies us by his Word? The Holy Spirit.

The Spirit uses his own word in his own people, to bring glory to God through Jesus. You want to be filled with the Spirit? You want to be filled with songs and hymns? Fill your self with the word. Fill your self with songs that are saturated with the Word.

We have an RBC playlist on Spotify that you can save and listen to. It's comprised of the songs we sing at church. We choose these songs very specifically. They are carefully vetted for truth and clarity and comfort. They cover a variety of theological topics, reflect a variety of emotions and situations, and quote a variety of passages. And the goal of all of it is to help teach us and fill us with the word of Christ.

I was listening to it this last week. And man, so blessed by Christ the Sure and Steady Anchor. Why? It takes the Bible and puts it to song. It turned my complaining into thankfulness. **Look back at Eph 5. Read**

So we put of unwise living. We put off drunkenness.

### 3) We give thanks. Read 19-20

This is really tied to being filled with the Spirit. If we're filled with the Spirit by being saturated with the Word of God one obvious thing that will happen is that we'll be thankful people.

Christians are thankful people. So this is connected to being filled with the Spirit but I wanted to just emphasize this for a few minutes.

We need to be people who are thankful. There's so much in the world to complain about, worry about, fret about, be mad about. We can grumble about anything.

People fail us, government fails us, our bodies fail us.

But that's not a reason for complaining. One of the dead giveaways that someone isn't filled with the Spirit and is therefore not filled with the Word of God is complaining.

I'll give you a little pastoral secret: I can tell what your devotional life is like and how your walk with Jesus is just based on the ratio of thankfulness to complaining that comes out of a person. "Oh, gotta be careful what I say around pastor." No, gotta be filled with the Word of God so you're filled with the Spirit so you're filled with thankfulness.

The goal isn't to please me. The goal is please Jesus.

I was moping a little this week about some difficulties and read an encouraging article about how God has specifically designed trials and suffering to teach us about him.

We fill up what is lacking in the afflictions of Jesus through our own suffering.

Have you been betrayed by someone close? Now you know what Jesus endured for you.

Have your friends and family turned on you? Now you know what Jesus endured to secure your salvation.

Is the legal system broken and you feel the effects? Jesus was condemned through an utter joke of a trial for your sins.

Do you try your best but people keep misunderstanding you? Jesus was abandoned by thousands who misunderstood him.

So our situation doesn't negate the call to thanksgiving. Are we thankful that the Lord is good. He sustains us in the midst of hardship? That he provides for us?

Are you thankful that he has saved you from his wrath and made you a child of God?

Are you thankful that the Lord works all things for good for those who love him and are called according to his purpose?

We should be.

#### 4) Submit to one another. Read 21

This is a hard command for us to follow. It's always been hard. Part of it is that God has built in authority structures into the world and we buck against them.

Think of all the authority figures we don't like: politicians, police officers, government regulators, your boss, your parents.

In the home, husbands or fathers. Children, it's hard to joyfully submit to parents.

In the church, God says to submit to elders. Really? "Just teach the Bible and I'll take care of it."

We don't like to submit to sinful people. And certainly if it's not an authority figure we don't like.

You think the Christmas tree should be put over here, this person thinks over there. This person say why do we even have a tree? Who submits?

The wife wants a white kitchen, you want a warm wood kitchen. Who submits?

Sometimes submission is imperative for the job to function. In the military there's a clear line of command and it's followed.

With Christians, that's sort of the case. There are areas where there's firm authority boundaries. Husbands over wives, parents over children, elders over church members, government over citizens. But in the church it's not authoritarian.

We're called to take other peoples' thoughts and preferences into consideration.

What we often fail to just understand is that the Christian position should be that we esteem others more highly than ourselves.

**Phil 2:3:** Do nothing - nothing - from selfish ambition or conceit but in humility count others more significant than yourself.

Do you do that? Do you actually, functionally consider other people more significant than you? Especially if you're in an authority role. Or does it have to be your way? Does have to be what you want? Do you have manipulate or brow beat or yell to get your thing?

**Romans 12:10** says outdo one another in showing honor.

Do you honor those around you? Do you ask their opinion? Get their input? Take their criticism to heart?

I was watching Tom Brady talk about new quarterbacks and he was saying that they can have perfect throws and run amazingly well but if they can't take feedback from coaches, coordinators, running backs, wide receivers they're worthless.

Can you take feedback joyfully? And are you happy if no one takes your feedback? Are you okay placing yourself under someone else? Or do you always have to be top dog and have the last word?

There God-given authority structures in life. We'll see that next week. But we need to put off control and domineering and lording it over people and put on submitting to one another in love.

This is the Lord's plan for the church. This is his desire for us to overcome sin. Put off, renew, put on for his glory.

**Pray**