

The Fountain of Marriage (and All Relationships):
The Holy Spirit
Ephesians 5:18-21

I want to start with a bit of a personal testimony to lead into this passage.
I want to highlight a person who embodies Eph 5:18-21. I want to talk about what I call “C.J. Joy**.”**

This week I had the privilege of leading a conference. I’m at a lot of conferences, and I don’t always talk about them here. But I must talk about this one. First, I would **recommend you go to the website and watch three sermons by C.J. Mahaney** this week (particularly the first two). **I say that because I am not caring for you as I ought if I don’t point you to such deeply edifying messages.**

I told the group at the conference that this was the **best birthday** I’ve had in recent memory. It wasn’t because I received **two new sweaters** from my mom (which I’m grateful for), or some **new work out clothes** from my bride (which I’m grateful for), **but it’s because I got to spend multiple hours with one of my favorite preachers, and without question the greatest encourager I’ve ever met: C.J. Mahaney.**

I love many things about C.J.

- He’s 60 years old and wanted to play basketball
- He’s a preaching machine (“Keep shooting, keep preaching”)
- He’s bald – benefits of the baldness
- He’s a Redskins fan

More than anything else though, he radiates a contagious joy, unlike anyone I’ve ever met.

We went to the coffee shop 5-6 times this week, and even they noticed it! We spent multiple hours together this week, talking about serious stuff, but through it all, it had a note of joy.

I ask him on a panel discussion: **How do you stay so happy?** (Let me add, he is going through a painful time of spiritual warfare).

C.J. said that it's because he is so grateful. He said something like, "**When you think about where you were before God rescued you in your sin, and saved you by his grace, how could that not move you?**" he asked.

(He said "I fear that I will become professional, polished pastor in my interactions with others (that will lack affection), and I fear the gospel getting smaller in my heart."). So he thinks on the grace of God, a lot.

In fact, he said that his typical line when someone asks, "How are you doing?" is to respond with "**Better than I deserve.**" He said it actually catches people off guard. Once in particular he said that **the barista wanted to argue with him! He said a whole line of people were watching this interaction, as he told him, "I am the worst sinner I know."**

He said the lady looked at him like, "**I'd recommend the decaf.**"

Then C.J. said, "**When hell is your reference, anything you have that is not hell, is better than you deserve.**"

You see, C.J.'s joy is deep. It's rooted in theology. It's rooted in truths like God is holy, we are sinful, Jesus came to save sinners from God's wrath. Those of us who have been rescued should never get over the good news of the gospel!

A result of his joy is his heart-felt singing. You need a football helmet worshiping next to him! He talks to the band, "Don't stop singing. Whatever you do!" At one point during the break, he asked if he could recommend something to the band. I said, "Sure." Later, the band told me that he wanted something with an electric guitar solo!

This is not a wild man. He's a profoundly intelligent man, who is a leader of leaders – yet, there is so much joy in his heart that he wants more electric guitar!

But I would add one more thing, related to this.

Where does this joy, this heart-felt singing, and this gratitude, and this humility and submissiveness come from?

Because I want it! The whole world is looking for it!

It doesn't come from the success of his football team, or the absence of trials. Paul tells us in Ephesians 5:18-21 where deep joy in God comes from. It comes from the Holy Spirit.

It's not mainly about personality, it's about spiritual vitality.
Therefore, if we want to have our affections moved, our hearts stirred to sing and live with joy, we should consider this passage closely.

This joy works itself out in relationships.

We learn about our new life in Christ in Ephesians. **One of the most important results of our new life is that we have new relationships.** Sin separates us from God and sin separates us from people. But through Christ, we are made new people. We are given new hearts, a new identity, and **new relationships**.

- Our relationships with one another are different – there is unity among different groups of people in Christ. (2:11-22)
- Our relationships with our spouse is different (5:22-33)
- Our relationship with kids are different (6:1-4)
- Our relationships at work are different (6:5-9)
- Our relationship with this world is different. (6:10-24)

Christianity is a relational faith. And Life in the Spirit is not just an individual experience, but corporate or relational experience. That is made super clear in this passage (notice the **two "one anothers"**).

- The Spirit's infilling results in worshiping with one another and submitting to one another.
- The connection with the Spirit and relationships has already been made in Ephesians (4:1-3; 4:17-32, 5:1-17), and is made elsewhere (Gal. 5:16-6:10)
- Personally, we must be renewed by the Spirit (4:23), but that renewal should lead us to relational harmony and purity (25-5:14).

Therefore, my goal today is to magnify the source of power for relationships in general and marriage in particular: the Holy Spirit.

Transitional Text

Ephesians 5:18-21 serves as a transition into the next section.

- Some commentators attach verse 21 to verses 18-20, but some begin the next section at verse 21, making the next section 21-33 (See Thielman, 365).

Verse 21 transitions in topic.

- We go from *worship to household codes*. (However, to go from worship to the home could make good sense in light of worship taking place in homes. See Thielman, 366). The topic of ‘submitting’ is carried into the next sections – “fear” “obey”

The command in verse 22, "Wives submit to your husbands," has no verb in the original. It simply says, "Wives to your own husbands." (Piper). This means it is a continuation of verse 21.

The flow of thought is: "Be filled with the Spirit . . . submitting to each other out of reverence for Christ, wives to your own husbands as to the Lord."

So you see why I've been saying that healthy marriages (and families) are a work of God's Spirit. It's the same flow of thought.

But verse 21 is connected to verse 18 grammatically. So the next sections 22-6:9 should not be viewed apart from verse 18.

- So it's important to see 18-21 with 22-33. There is a "spirit-filled" submitting, which involves a loss of pride and self that enables a person to humbly serve others. When you get this, then you can make sense of our roles within marriage.
Submission doesn't become a dirty word, but a beautiful thing, Christian thing.

Thus, what we have is a big unit on Spirit-filled relationships in 5:18-6:9 (some include 5:15-17 in this unit).

The first relationship mentioned is marriage.

- What do you need in your marriage? You need the Spirit's power!

So, our focus today is on the Holy Spirit's work, but I want to make application for marriage and other relationships throughout.

Here's where I'm headed in the next few weeks:

- The Fountain of Marriage (& All Relationships): The Holy Spirit (18-33)
- The Foundation of Marriage: Creation and Redemption (22-33)
- The Focus of Marriage (& Singleness): The Glory of Christ (22-33, & other texts)

I want to study verses 18-21, and then highlight verses 22-33. We may break it apart in three sections:

1. The Exhortations (18)
2. The Effects (19-21)

#1: THE EXHORTATIONS (18)

The wise person (17) is not intoxicated by alcohol or anything else, but is filled with the Spirit (**5:18**).

Grammatically, Paul gives two commands: "Do not get drunk, and be filled with the Spirit." Though the focus seems to be primarily on the latter command (O'brien, 390).

These commands are followed by five participles: "*addressing, singing, making, giving, and submitting*" which I believe are evidences of the Spirit. When we are filled with the Spirit, these graces are present in our lives.

Paul has already taught us much about the Holy Spirit in Ephesians: (cf, 1:13, 17; 4:3, 23, 30).

Piper says: **I think being filled with the Spirit means, basically, having great joy in God.... The fundamental meaning of being filled with the Spirit is being filled with joy that comes from God and overflows**

in song. And Luke would agree with that, too, because he says in Acts 13:52, "The disciples were filled with joy and with the *Holy Spirit*."

Let's think some more about being filled with the Spirit and this joy.

- A. **Compare and Contrast.** How should we understand the Spirit in light of this link with being drunk with wine?

Similarity. One immediate answer is: "Just as a drunken person is full of, and controlled by, wine, so the believer should be full of, and directed by, the Spirit" (Thielman, 359). Believers are to operate under the influence of the Spirit.

The Spirit fills us with the fullness of God (Eph 3:19), which leads us to conformity to Christ (4:13), and a surrender to his Lordship.

But that's where the comparison ends. The rest is contrastive.

Contrast. A person who is drunk is out of control, but the person who is filled with the Spirit is under control.

Remember, one of the fruits of the Spirit, according to **Galatians 5:22-23**, is "self-control."

Whenever, anything makes you lose control, you can be sure that we are living out of the flesh, not the Spirit.

Anger, lust, greed, or Jose Quirvo can make you lose control.

While having a glass of wine is not prohibited, and is even viewed positively sometimes in Scripture (1 Tim 5:23; Ps 104:15; Is 25:6, 55:1, 62:8; Neh 5:16-19; Prov 3:10, 9:2-5; Amos 9:13-15; Jn 2:1-12 - see Gentry, *God Gave Wine*), drunkenness is a sin. And yes, the wine had alcohol in it (or Paul would not have to say "Do not get drunk with wine").

It is never God's will for a Christian to be drunk. This was a big problem in Ephesus. Drunkenness leads to other sins because you are out of control. It leads to "**debauchery**" (wickedness, rebellion, depravity).

Therefore, the Holy Spirit helps us gain control. The Spirit makes you like Jesus, our model for self-control and all other fruits of the Spirit.

Remember this: Christ is better than any of God's gifts that we enjoy, better than good food and drink. **As we delight in Christ, the Spirit works in our hearts to bring us profound joy and divine pleasure.** This is where you will find joy and satisfaction.

"You have put more joy in my heart than they have when their wine and grain abound" (**Ps 4:7**)

It's not **happy hour** that ultimately satisfies, but satisfaction in God. There **is a better way to ease your tension, and experience childlike freedom** – be filled with the Spirit.

Transition: Let's think about this verb "**be filled**" (*plerousthe*). Present tense, imperative mood, passive voice, and plural form. It suggests some important truths (Stott, 208-9).

B. A Commandment: Be Filled

Paul is *not* giving an option to us. This is an **imperative for all believers**. In other words, this is *not* restricted to a select group of believers. All believers are commanded to be filled with the Spirit.

This is not a deeper life, or a higher life, but the normal Christian life.

What a great God to command something that is exactly what we need!

All believers are to do this, but notice also that God's Spirit leads to **corporate activities**: singing, speaking, submitting to one another! Then relationships are talked about.

Paul desires for the entire congregation to be filled with the Spirit and for worship and mutual edification and service to take place.

C. A Continual Commandment

Paul also gives this in the present tense. Literally, “be filled with the Spirit continually.” This suggests a repeated action.

While the Holy Spirit indwells believers forever (we are “sealed”), we need constant filling.

Why? Because no one lives a life of constant joy and thanksgiving and love on their own! We need the Spirit.

We can “run on fumes” and we must go to the source of power: God.

“be filled with the fullness of God” (3:19) Paul prayed earlier.

John says that the Spirit is our “helper” (READ John 14:16-17). Jesus says that he will not leave us as orphans. He will come to us by way of the Spirit, and the Spirit will not be with us, but *in us* (a new covenant blessing).

We desperately need his help.

Application for Marriage:

- The Holy Spirit makes us loving, forgiving, peaceful, self-controlled, gentle, and servant hearted. We need his help to live like this in all relationships, including marriage.
 - When you get married, you learn how selfish you are, don't you?
 - Do you think the type of sacrifice described in **verse 22**, and **verse 25** is possible apart from the Spirit's help? No. Everything in us wants to fight this.

Remember how Paul describes love in 1 Cor 13?

Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful.

Good luck with that! How does this happen? It happens as you are constantly filled with the Spirit.

Paul told the Philippians, “in humility count others more significant than yourselves.” (Phil 2:3). This is a challenge for all believers, that applies to the marriage.

Love involves counting the needs of your spouse ahead of your own. How much more do you need the Spirit?

The reality is that this kind of life actually brings you happiness. We are made like God, and inside the Trinity there is an “other-orientation.” The Father, Son and Spirit delights in glorifying, honoring and loving the other (Keller, 59).

A satisfying marriage comes from being self-less - in thinking of yourself – less. “Paul said that Jesus died so that we may no longer live for ourselves but for him who was raised.” (2 Cor 5:15). Christ frees us from our addiction to ourselves.

The Spirit enables us to love and serve, and *herein lies happiness* – in all relationships in general, and in marriage in particular.

What about conflict? Do you need the Spirit's work to reconcile? Yes. One sinner is bad enough, but now, two have become one! *When Sinners Say I Do* is appropriately titled! Marriage is difficult because both fall short of the glory of God.

We need the Spirit for unity, harmony, and peace in marriage.

D. How are we filled?

I know of just a few scholars/pastors who have taken these participles as "means" rather than results (CJ texted in me this!), though most do not (O'brien, Thieleman, Akin, and others). They see them as a result.

The problem is Paul doesn't tell us how to be filled the Spirit.
As Americans we want a formula!

- Structurally, exegetically, I think these are the evidences or effects of the Spirit.
- Practically, I think one could do them as spiritual disciplines, that serve as a means of Spirit's infilling, but I just don't think that's what Paul is precisely saying here.

The verb is passive. We receive the action. "Let the Holy Spirit fill you." This suggests that God does it. Like we drink wine, we drink the Spirit. How?

This is a great predicament. How do we do what can only be done to us?

While there is no formula, or set procedure for this (unlike some popular pamphlets), I think we can safely say we must look to the Lord to fill us. That's "the major emphasis" – God does the filling.

Specific instructions **do not follow**. We might say a few "**minor emphases**" exists, related to what we are to do (see Kostenberger, "What does it mean to be filled with the Spirit?"). We but overall, there's a lot of mystery. I think it's a **mysterious dynamic**. How does the Lord do the action? The following is not exhaustive but I'll mention how this dynamic can happen:

- **Faith.** I draw this from two other references. Stephen is said to have been "full of faith and of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 6:5); and Barnabas was "full of the Holy Spirit and faith" (Acts 11:24). Piper says, "**The two go together. If a person is filled with faith, he will be filled with the Spirit, the Spirit of joy and peace.**" Perhaps a more important text is Romans 15:13:

*"May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace *in believing*, that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope."*

Piper: "**Notice that it is *in or by believing* that we are filled with joy and peace. And it is *by the Spirit* that we abound in hope. When we put those two halves of the verse together, what we see is that through our faith (our believing) the Spirit fills us with his hope and thus with his joy and peace.**"

We must believe in what God has said and what he has done. Could this be done through singing? Sure. But not exclusively.

- **Obedience.** I draw this from the surrounding context. By sinning against God and others, we “grieve the Spirit” (4:30). Do not grieve the Spirit. Treasure Christ (2 Cor. 3:17-18), and walk in his ways.
 - One sure way to not be filled by the Spirit is to NOT grieve the Spirit! We do this by unholy and unwise (v. 17) living (getting drunk, Greed, lust, bitterness, etc).
 - **Isaiah 63:10-11** is instructive. There the Lord put his Spirit in Israel’s midst. But God’s people “grieved his Holy Spirit” (10). God did the action. **The people were to simply live obediently.**
 - **I don't think we are to walk around wandering if we are filled with the Spirit.** I think we are to live obedient lives, and it is in keeping in step with the Spirit that we experience God’s fullness. (cf., Gal 5:16, 6:8)
- **Dwell.** I draw this from the parallel passage. “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly” (Col. 3:16). There, the effects of the word lead to singing. There is a tight connection between the Spirit and the word. As the word dwells richly in us, the Spirit empowers us. Could this be done through singing? Yes, but not exclusively.
- **Ask.** I draw this from Jesus’ teaching about prayer and the nature of the Father. While little is said about asking the Lord to fill us explicitly in the NT, I think Grudem is correct in saying that there is nothing necessarily wrong with instructing believers to pray along these lines. Let us remember we have a gracious Father, who loves to give us good (spiritual) gifts:

“If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him.”
Luke 11:13

**Ask him to fill you, to empower you. You aren't interrupting him!
What can you do without him!**

Here is **hope**. If you feel defeated, this morning, remember that as you are filled with the Spirit, God gives new love, joy peace, etc. If you are complacent, then go on being filled with the Spirit (Stott, 209).

#2: THE EFFECTS (19-21)

Next we turn to these participles. Although some see these participles as imperatives (things we must do), it seems more precise to regard them as results “which describes the overflow or outworking of the Spirit's filling believers. (O'brien, 387)

The results of the Spirit's work in our lives is quite simply renewed worship and renewed relationships. Interestingly, the phrase “filled with the Spirit” appeared in Exodus 31, as the craftsmen constructed the tabernacle for worship.

God fills his people to serve and worship. Only now, we need no tabernacle.

We've mentioned that the Spirit helps us live self-controlled life, but that doesn't mean a passionless, joyless life. Quite the contrary!

Rather, the Spirit helps us renounce sin, and find superior joy and pleasure in worshiping God and serving others.

The first three of the five participles deal with singing, the second with thanksgiving, and the third submitting.

A. Singing

WE are a singing people because God is too great to merely be talked about his. We are to sing of his salvation (cf., Ex 15). We are not just think of his grace, but feel it, and rejoice in it.

The Roman Governor **Pliny**, in his famous letter to Trajan in A.D. 112, describes how Christians met on an assigned day before dawn to recite a hymn “to Christ as God.”

Tertullian writing from N Africa toward the end of the same century describes a Christian feast saying, “Each is invited to sing to God in the presence of others from what he knows of the holy Scriptures or from his own heart.” (Hughes, 175)

Bruce Ashford's story - 45 guys, no Bibles, East Asia, teach the whole Bible... They wrote a song on the spot, resurrection they celebrated and did the equivalent of a military victory chant.

It's hard to know exactly what Paul meant by these three types of songs in Ephesians. He says that we should sing Psalms (from the Psalter), hymns (perhaps like those in Rev 4-5, cf., 1 Cor 14:26), and some sang spiritual songs (perhaps unpremeditated praise from the heart, like 1 Cor 14:15 implies?).

I think the reason for these different types of songs may be that God is “infinitely varied in his beauty and he meets us in various ways” (Piper). There are different seasons of life, and different purposes for gatherings.

What is totally clear is that there is a **horizontal** and vertical dimension to our singing. We sing “**to one another**” (19a) and “**to the Lord**” (20)

O'brien is probably right when he says that Paul is not teaching two different responses of singing – to one another and to God – but rather, he “is describing the same activity from *different perspectives.*” (394)

When we sing, more than one thing is happening.

Horizontally, mutual instruction, exhortation, and edification takes place as we sing different types of songs prompted by the Spirit to one another.

Paul says that we “address one another” with songs. This doesn’t mean that when I call Donnie on the phone, I start singing! (“A mighty fortress is our God”). But rather, as we gather together for worship, and sing to God, we are actually ministering to one another.

Did you know that you have a responsibility in corporate worship? How much does this change things? Worship gatherings are not about what you can get, but about how you can build up others.

You encourage each other through singing. You also instruct one another through singing. (Rex Rehab, our songs are teaching).

Musical worship is take home theology.

Of course, you should also do this through conversation with others, and pray with each other when you gather. But here the emphasis is on singing. It is similar to Colossians 3:16 (perhaps based on Eph 5:19)

“Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom singing Psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God”

Again, as we sing these songs, we instruct and encourage one another.

It is clear from this why corporate worship is important. Why not curl up on a Sunday with a box of chocolates and watch a worship service on computer or TV? You can’t do what this verse is teaching.

Vertically, the Spirit prompts us to sing with our whole being to the Lord Jesus.

These two participles belong together “singing songs” and “making melody.”

How? With your heart. I’m glad he says make melody with your heart, not voice. Does your heart sing?

Remember there is a type of singing that offends the Lord! The type that is heart-less, and the type that doesn't have other fruits going alone with it (cf., **Amos 5:23-24).**

The singing must be real, deep, from the heart, and spill over into acts of mercy and justice.

To whom? The Lord Jesus. Those who are filled with the Spirit sing to Jesus. They adore Jesus.

Why? Because Jesus is the best. He is most important. What else will you sing about?

"I've got an idea. Let's sing about our job with all our hearts!" No thanks. Let's sing about our prosperity. No thanks... Let's sing about our body! "I have no hair on my head, its coming out of my ears – looks like I snorted a cat... Here's a better idea: let's sing about Jesus.

Application for Marriage

An important lesson: Do not go looking to your spouse for something that only God can give you. Not only is that not fair to your spouse, that's idolatry. You must answer the big questions in life – why do you exist and who are you in Christ?

When you realize that you were made by God and for the glory of God, and your ultimately identity is in Christ, then you will not demand something from your spouse that's impossible.

Sing first to the Lord. Let there be an inner music to him. Realize that he is what your heart really needs. Out of that song, then go love and delight in your spouse.

If you don't get this, get him, you won't be happy in marriage or single.

Modern day songs tend to overdramatize romance and marriage. They describe things that only God can give. I could use many examples, but consider **Trisha Yearwood...**

How do I get through

One night without you?
If I had to live without you
What kind of life would that be?

Oh I, I need you in my arms, need you to hold
You're my world, my heart, my soul
If you ever leave, baby, you would
Take away everything good in my life

Without you
There'd be no sun in my sky
There would be no love in my life
There'd be no world left for me

And I, baby, I don't know what I would do
I'd be lost if I lost you
If you ever leave, baby, you would
Take away everything real in my life

And tell me now
How do I live without you?
I want to know
How do I breathe without you?

While I realize she is trying to describe her love using exaggerated language, it still gets to the point. Don't look for anyone to give you what only Christ can give you.

The first step in marriage is to be a worshiper of Christ personally. Treasure him. And because you treasure him, go love sacrificially.

"Love is the overflow of joy in God which gladly meets the needs of others" – John Piper

Is your ultimate joy in God? If so, it will lead to sacrificially love.

The better worshiper you are, the better spouse you will be.

B. **Gratitude**

The next result of the Spirit's filling is gratitude to God (cf., Phil 4:6-7; Col 3:16-17). This is probably a reference to corporate worship as well (Thielman, 362), and more precisely to prayer.

Thielman says, "Thanks could certainly be given to God through singing, but Paul may intend to shift the thought slightly to encourage corporate prayer.... Normally when people give thanks in the NT, they do so to God in prayer for some gift that he has given to them, such as food" (62, see footnote 10).

This fits nicely with Eph 1:16 – "I do not cease to give thanks for you" Paul said. May that happen in our hearts! – which is a prayer.

All human beings are to give thanks (Rom 1:21; 2 Thess 1:3; 2:13). It was also a part of corporate worship (1 Cor 14:16-17).

It was an especially important part of the Lord's Supper (1 Cor 11:24), which the **Didache** calls the "**Eucharist**."

In any case, notice three parts to this experience:

It's frequency. "always" (1 Thes 1:2; 1 Cor. 1:4; Phil 4; Col. 1:3). The Spirit prompts us to give thanks constantly.

God's people are to have a regular attitude of thanksgiving. Gratitude should permeate our whole being.

It's comprehensiveness. "*for everything.*" (1 Thes 5:18, Col. 3:17). The Spirit makes us grateful in ease or in trouble, in the mountain or in the valley.

This doesn't mean that God is the author of evil or that we should praise God for that which is evil. It simply means that we can be grateful for trials because they have a purpose, which is to make us like Christ. (Rom 5:3-5; 8:28-29)

The Spirit creates in us a confident trust in God's sovereign grace.

It's object. We are to give thanks to God the Father in the name of the Lord Jesus. We are grateful to God because he is God. We are grateful to God because he is our Father. We are grateful to God because he did not spare the Lord Jesus but gave him up for us. Life may be hard, but Jesus has forgiven us our sins, risen from the dead, and will come back to make all things right. Suffering will be eradicated one day. We can be grateful always because of this good news.

App:

When we are filled with the Spirit, we give thanks to God.

The opposite of gratitude is complaining, murmuring, pouting. Spirit-filled believers are thankful people, not complaining people.

"What do you have that you have not received?" (**1 Cor 4:7**). Do you realize this? Do you appreciate grace?

"Spiritual growth always involves appreciating, receiving, and enjoying the grace of God." (Ferguson)

C. Submission

The final effect of the Spirit's fullness mentioned here involves submission.

This particular result is very important because the idea of submission reoccurs in the following sections (5:22-6:9, esp 5:22-33). (For some viewpoints on verse 21, see Thielman, 373)

Before speaking of it in marital, parental, and vocational relationships, Paul points out how it works in the church.

Importance. This is so important because some people have sensational ideas about the Spirit's work. They like to talk about signs and wonders. I don't want to belittle these graces, but I want to point out something very obvious in the NT:

Those filled with the Spirit love others – through submission, service, bearing burdens (cf., Gal 6:1-10). The Spirit leads us into community, where practical acts of love are demonstrated.

I wish I could tell you how many times I've heard someone say that they are “walking in the Spirit” or “filled with the Spirit” or “love to be in the presence of God” but did not belong to a community of believers! This person is out of touch with the NT.

The Spirit enables you to do what is not natural, namely love people.
It is not natural to:

- put the needs of others above yourself,
- to work in childcare,
- attend weekly community group,
- care for the poor,
- tutor kids with your growth group,
- take a group trip to Haiti, or
- submit to others.

Sin separates you not only from God, but from people. Satan wants you isolated. The Spirit drives you into community.

A further practical note worth mentioning is this: You can be sure that if a person is acting brashly, arrogantly, or in a self-assertive way, they are not walking in the Spirit.

Stott puts it well: “**The Holy Spirit is a humble Spirit, and those who are truly filled with him always display the meekness and gentleness of Christ. It is one of their most evident characteristics that they submit to one another”**

Meaning. The word literally means “to arrange under.” It was used in the military to refer to the submission of soldiers in an army to those of a superior rank (O'brien).

Those in the military, surrender control. They turn lose of their selfish agenda. They live for the good of others.

So the idea here is one of order, service, humility and respect, especially to those in authority over you.

But Paul is not saying *only* submit to those in authority. He's saying actually submit "to one another" – "in a fully reciprocal sense" (Thielman).

Further, Christian leaders humbly serve others. "**There is a sense in which even those in authority "submit" to their subordinates**" (Thielman, 373). For example, Paul said that he was a "slave to all" (1 Cor 9:19) that he might win some. Husbands, serve, and even are called to die. It doesn't mean we don't have authority or roles, it means there is a humility in our leadership and a gladness in our submission.

With this view, then we might interpret "submit to one another" in the spirit of the following texts:

- Ephesians 4:1
- Romans 15:2 "Let each of us please his neighbor for his good, to edify him."
- Romans 12:10 "Outdo one another in showing honor."
- The Galatians are told to "serve as each other's slave."
- Husbands are to lay down their lives for their spouse.

When the Holy Spirit is holding full sway in your life, then your heart brims with a song of gratitude and your heart humbly submits to serve those around you. Submitting yourself to someone means not rebelling with a sense of superiority or a feeling that you are too good to stoop and help when someone puts upon you for service.
(Piper)

Jesus himself, our example of character, submitted to the Father's will (1 Cor 15:28). He was no less valuable than the Father (for Jesus is infinitely valuable). Yet, he served in his role.

An important part of our discipleship is learning to serve submissively.

Christ shines through humble, submissive servants.

Motive: Christians submit to one another “out of reverence for Christ” or “out of the fear of Christ.” This is an indirect statement of the deity of Jesus, for the OT teaches that we are to “fear the Lord.”

We submit to others because Christ is our ultimate authority over our lives.

This doesn’t mean believers live in terror of Christ. It means that they stand in awe of Christ, who is the King and judge.

You stand in awe not just of his holiness but also of his forgiveness.
(Psalm 130:4)

Christians stand amazed at his glory and grace. This moves you to serve and submit. We belong to Christ’s kingdom. He is the king. Out of reverence for him, we submit to his rule, and serve others, and submit to others, especially those put in authority over our lives.
(See O’brien 399-405 for more on “submission”).

Conclusion

Let me summarize all of these thoughts:

1. Let’s be filled with the Spirit
2. Let’s worship Christ from the heart for the glory of his name and for the edification of others
3. Let’s be a thankful people
4. Let’s humbly, submissively serve and honor one another

For single people and married people alike, what we need above all is to turn to the ultimate lover of our soul: Jesus Christ. He laid down his life for his bride, and because he did we enjoy the blessed Holy Spirit, and anticipate the future heavenly feast, the marriage supper of the Lamb.

“We love because he first loved us.” (1 John 4:19)