

**Be Filled With the Spirit and Not with Wine:
Echoes of the Messianic Banquet in the Antithesis
of Ephesians 5:18¹**

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Abstract

Ephesians 5:18 contrasts wine drinking with being filled with the Holy Spirit. There are a number of reasons, both in the text and the socio-cultural context, to suggest that Paul is not primarily addressing an ongoing problem of alcohol abuse in the congregation. Instead, this article will suggest that he is using the antithesis as a double-edged theological foil to describe the practical inauguration of the Messianic Banquet in the life of the church. Collaborating evidence for this interpretation, which highlights the celebratory mood of the passage, will also be found in Ephesians 2 & 4. Christian worship and mutual submission that is fuelled by the liberating power of the Holy Spirit is a practical foretaste of the forthcoming Messianic Banquet.

¹ The views expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the beliefs of the South African Theological Seminary.

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1. Introduction

1.1. The Problem

It is widely acknowledged that Paul's³ injunction against the drinking of wine to destructive excess in Ephesians 5:18 was not primarily aimed at addressing a particular problem of alcohol abuse in the Ephesian congregation. There are several reasons for this view. The instruction is abruptly introduced and is stated in a brief and fleeting manner. If Paul was therefore attempting to rebuke a particular problem, he appears not to have expended sufficient effort to do so. This is very much unlike the situation in Corinth, where the apostle devoted extended parts of his first epistle to address a similar issue.

The linguistic and grammatical features of the verse also indicate that Paul is using the reference to wine drinking for his theological purposes. He employs the word *alla* (instead) to create a contrastive parallelism. This suggests an effort to generate a lesson from the first part of the parallelism to serve the purpose of the second part. In addition, the two datives and imperatives have the same instrumental function of agency suggesting an attempt to relate meanings between the two parts.

Despite the possible allusion to Proverbs 23:31 (Bruce 1984:379), the juxtaposition of drinking alcohol with being filling with God's Holy Spirit leaves one with a "sour" aftertaste. Although in 1 Corinthians 12:13, Paul describes the Holy Spirit as given to believers to drink, he does not contrast this with drunkenness as vividly as he does in Ephesians 5:18. Lincoln explains the contrast as part of the three series of antitheses between "folly and wisdom" in Ephesians 5:15-18 (1990:338). Yet, this does not sufficiently

³ Every one of the extant manuscripts of the epistle state Pauline authorship, and all external evidence have collaborated this. Other questions that have been raised about Pauline authorship of Ephesians are not convincing. For example, the epistle does not contain the characteristic features of contemporary pseudepigraphas. In addition, the theology of the epistle is thoroughly Pauline, even though; they are much more philosophically reflective. The difference in style, compared to the other Pauline epistles, is well explained by Paul's likely use of a different amanuensis. For discussions on Pauline authorship, see Guthrie 1975: 400-404.

explain why Paul would create the particular parallelism between drunkenness and being filled with the Holy Spirit.

Bruce (1984:380) has helpfully pointed out that the metaphorical sense of the antithesis “does not suggest that the Spirit is a sort of fluid”. All the same, Paul’s juxtaposition of the two requires further explanation. The verse no doubt points to the destructive effects of excessive wine. Yet, in addition to emphasizing its negative inhibitory effects, the apostle also depicts a celebratory mood of singing and thanksgiving and making melodious music that parallels the “liberating” or disinhibitory effects of wine drinking.⁴ Such a deliberate allusion would have limited the effect of an instruction aimed at addressing an on-going problem of alcoholism.

Furthermore, there are indications that the epistle may have been an encyclical from Paul to one of the churches in Ephesus (or a number of churches in its immediate surroundings).⁵ The apostle did not know this particular Ephesian congregation (in contrast to another Ephesian congregation with whom he spent three years – Acts 20:31). The tone of the letter, like that to the Romans, is very much reflective and theologically crafted. He had *heard* about their faith (Eph 1:15) but had had no previous personal dealings with them. And the various accounts that he had received about them were praiseworthy. Equally, the recipients had not yet met him but only *heard* about “the administration of God’s grace” that Paul had received (Eph 3:2). This lack of intimate acquaintance suggests that the instruction in Ephesians 5:18 is crafted to serve an additional exhortational purpose. What is this additional purpose?

⁴ Martin Lloyd-Jones, the late physician pastor, drew attention to the depiction in the passage of both depressant and stimulant pharmacological effects of alcohol. He notes, “If it were possible to put the Holy Spirit into a textbook of Pharmacology, I would put Him under the stimulants...He stimulates our every faculty...the mind and the intellect...the heart...and the will” (1975:21).

⁵ The possible encyclical nature of Ephesians was mooted as far back as the second century by Tertullian (155-230 AD) and Origen (185-254 AD). This was largely because two of the oldest extant manuscripts omit the phrase “in Ephesus” in Eph 1:1. Marcion, the heretic (110-160 AD) also regarded it to have been a letter to Laodicea. Not all scholars agree with this encyclical theory however. For discussions on this, see Black 1981:73, Guthrie 1975:400-404 & Metzger 1965:235.

1.2. The Festival and Banquet Theories

Two likely scenarios in the socio-cultural milieu of Ephesus have been recommended to explain this double-edged exhortation by Paul. Almost three decades ago, Cleon Rogers Jr. described a number of corresponding parallels between the passage and the wine drinking festivals of the cult of Dionysus (also called Bacchus), the Greek god of wine. This festival was so popular and widespread throughout the Mediterranean region that conversations about grapes, wine or even ivy were almost always assumed to be related to the cult. The pleasures and creative inspiration of poetry and song resulting from wine drinking were regarded by many Greeks as gifts from Dionysus (Henrichs 1980:140-43). Plato, in *the Republic* 2.363c-d, even suggested that the Dionysian festivals were symbolic of the joys of the afterlife.

According to Rogers, the popularity of the wine festival resulted in many pagans mistaking “the Jews of worshipping Dionysus, simply because certain things in Judaism appeared to have Dionysian motifs. To talk of wine and drinking immediately brought Dionysian expressions in the conversation, and to live a riotous, wanton, debauched, drunken life was characterized as a 'Dionysian mode of life'” (1979:253). Rogers therefore suggested that Paul was contrasting the wild excesses of the cult with the “wisdom and power, the intellectual and artistic ability, the freedom from the drudgery of daily life, as well as a prophetic message from the true God” (p. 257) that is released by being filled with the Holy Spirit.

Peter Gosnell (1993:363-371) has, on the other hand, examined the passage from the perspective of the catalogues of mealtime etiquettes published in the Greco-Roman writings of antiquity. Food in the Mediterranean region, according to Mary Douglas (1972:61), “was treated as a code, the messages it encodes will be found in the pattern of social relations being expressed”. Most social and religious meetings of antiquity were conducted in the mealtime setting. And these meetings were often organized as banquets and structured according to specific rules and regulations on how best to behave at the table. Many of the rules encoded cultural norms which ranked the diners in a hierarchy according to their statuses.

The banquet setting served as occasions for socialization and religious instructions (Reinhartz 1999:228). Indeed, ancient people made very little distinctions between what modern people now dichotomize into sacred and secular meals. Every meal gathering in ancient times was for that matter a religious one (Smith 2003:6). In Gosnell's view, therefore, Paul in Ephesians 5:18 was describing the appropriate behaviour expected of believers when they gathered together under the power of the Holy Spirit. Simply put, they should never get drunk. As a countercultural community, they should instead be filled with the Holy Spirit and so mutually submit to each other. In this sense Paul's teaching parallels his emphasis in 1 Corinthians 11-14 in which he stressed the need for the Spirit filled life to show itself through love, self-control and prophetic edification of one another.

To a large extent, these two theories are compatible with each other and do mostly provide us with the additional purpose of Ephesians 5:18. As expertly demonstrated by Smith (2003), the Mediterranean table symposia, and food and drink festivals, were significantly imbued with religious significance. The Jewish Passover, Pentecost and Tabernacles festivals demonstrate the close relationships between food, celebrations and religion. Themes from these festivals invariably influenced many of the religious teachings of the time.

Accordingly, several of the parables of Jesus contain descriptions of eating and drinking. For instance, Robert Karris has identified as many as fifty-one passages in Luke's gospel alone in which Jesus is linked with food. He quips that in Luke's gospel, "Jesus is either going to a meal, at a meal, or coming from a meal" (1985:47; cf. Poon 2003:224-230). Similarly, Paul's preoccupations with table motifs in his other letters, especially Galatians, Romans and 1 Corinthians, support the suggestion that he may have been thinking of the banquet and festival setting in Ephesians 5.

What is left unaccounted for by the festival and banquet theories however, is the pervasive eschatological tone of the passage. The whole of Ephesians 5:3-21⁶ is indeed draped in eschatological language. The apostle begins by referring to the final exclusion of evildoers from inheritance in the kingdom

⁶ There is a definite change of subject and tone in Eph 5:3, but it is disputed among commentators whether the section ends at Eph 5:21 or the theme of mutual submission continues to Eph 6:9 (See Lincoln 1993:xxxv-xlv).

(Eph 5:5). He then warns about the wrath of God's judgment on such people (Eph 5:6) and challenges his readers to wake up from sleep as heralds of the coming resurrection (Eph 5:14). Even though the source of the quotation in Ephesians 5:14 is unknown, whether from an earlier Christian hymn, or a paraphrase of Isaiah 26:19 or 60:1-3; its reference to the great day when the Lord will appear and believers will be gathered to Him is unmistakable. The apostle goes on to appeal for wisdom in discerning that "the days are evil" and in "making most of every opportunity" (Eph 5:16; see Anderson 1989:64). It is within this eschatological context that Paul gives the warning about drinking wine to excess. The command to be filled with the Holy Spirit should therefore be interpreted from this eschatological perspective.

1.3. The Messianic Banquet as a Solution

One festive background that may account for the antithesis in Ephesians 5:18 from an eschatological perspective is the Messianic banquet. Several New Testament passages interweave eschatological themes with motifs of food/wine and being drunk.⁷ For example, Jesus promised to drink wine with His disciples at a banquet in His coming Kingdom (Mt 26:29; Mk 14:25; Lk 22:18) and yet also warned them against being "drunk" on the day that He returns to judge the living and the dead (Lk 21:34). Similarly, Paul elsewhere warns against callous living and debauch drinking as the Lord's coming draws near (Rom 13:13; 1 Thes 5:7). In 1 Corinthians 10:21, he juxtaposes drinking at the "table of the Lord" with drinking at the "table of demons". The book of Revelation also depicts God's righteous anger as wine that is given to make "the beast" drunk, at the same time as the redeemed of the Lord worshipped the Lamb on Mount Zion (Rev 14:1-10). I hypothesize therefore that these antithetical depictions of meals within an eschatological framework echoes in the background of Ephesians 5:18.

In what follows, I shall make a three stage argument to support the hypothesis that the reference to debauched wine drinking and filling with the Holy Spirit in Ephesians 5:18 echoes the Bible's teaching that the Messianic banquet has already been inaugurated in the church through the ministry of the Holy Spirit.

⁷ E.g., Mt 11:18-19; 20:22; 26:29; Lk 12:45; 22:30; Jn 4:14; Rom 13:13, 1Th 5:7; Rev 14:10 & 17:2

To begin, I shall argue that by the time of Paul, the Messianic banquet was regarded as inaugurated by the outpouring of the Holy Spirit in the church. Secondly, I shall demonstrate that Paul's antithesis in Ephesians 5:18 echo this motif. I shall then seek collaboration for this interpretation by briefly examining two other passages in Ephesians (Eph 2 and 4) in which Paul's description of the eschatological ministry of God's Spirit in the church also echo themes associated with the banquet.⁸

2. The Messianic Banquet and the Holy Spirit

Dennis E. Smith (2003:166) has defined the Messianic banquet (also called eschatological or apocalyptic banquet) as a prevalent mealtime motif found in various stages and descriptions in Jewish literature. It contained "the general symbolism of food and/or a festive meal to signify immortality and/or the joys of the end-time or afterlife". Though there are variations in the way the banquet is portrayed, some characteristics are constant. The motif describes metaphorical consumption of large amount of food and/or drink associated with the celebration of the victorious presence of God. The banquet tends to combine two separate meals together. One meal describes the celebratory meal of God's people and the other describes the destruction or feasting of His enemies. The food is usually bread and fish, whereas the drink is usually wine,⁹ water, milk or honey (Webster 2003:40).

Isaiah 25:6-8 is one example of the description of Messianic banquet. As in that passage, the motif is often depicted as a victory banquet with themes of jubilation and triumph over enemies. There is also description of the

⁸ Intertextual echoes constitute the metaleptic use of previously existing scripture or tradition in another text. They are unstated or sometimes suppressed remodelling of a previous text or textual tradition that resonates in the background of another text. Due to their unstated nature, one cannot be absolutely certain that Paul has intentionally used the Messianic banquet motif in his exhortation in Eph 5:18. My present interpretation is therefore fallible. To reduce the margin of error, the methodology of this investigation has followed the seven criteria for testing the validity of echoes of Scripture as set out by Richard Hays (1989:29-32). I hope that, at least, I have arrived at an understanding that is faithful to Paul's "evocative use of Scripture".

⁹ The greater significance of wine among the drinks is derived from its prominent image in Jacob's blessing of Judah in Gen 49:8-12.

vindication of the righteous and the strong bond of fellowship among them. Not infrequently, while believers enjoy the sumptuous blessings of God, unbelievers are depicted as suffering and sometimes given “harmful” food to eat in a divine reversal of fortunes (Isa 54:5-55:5).¹⁰ Ezekiel 37-39 for instance depicts the Messianic age as one everlasting banquet in which the destruction of God’s enemies will be used as sacrifice.

On occasions, the Messianic banquet is also depicted as a sacred marriage or a wedding banquet (Collins 1976:223-224).¹¹ In Isaiah 54, for example, Israel is described as God’s “wife of youth” (Isa 54:6). Revelation 21 is another example of a Messianic banquet in which the church as the New Jerusalem is depicted as the bride adorned for Christ the Bridegroom. As we shall shortly see, in Ephesians 5, the church is also depicted as a bride being prepared for a marriage banquet.

During the later period of Old Testament history, the major Jewish festivals became prototypes for describing the Messianic banquet. By the first century, the annual agricultural festival of Pentecost had been transformed to celebrate God’s showering of gifts and covenantal blessings on His people.¹² Special among these covenants was the new covenant in which God gave His Holy Spirit to renew His people at the beginning of the Messianic age (Ezek 36:27 & Jer 31). Joel 2:21-32 & 3:16-21 also link the feast of Pentecost with the eschatological outpouring of God’s Spirit “on all flesh” (VanderKam 2002:239-254). The connection between excessive “new” wine, the filling of the Holy Spirit and the Jewish festival of Pentecost in Acts 2:13 are therefore evocative of Paul’s contrast between drunkenness and the Spirit’s filling in Ephesians 5:18.

Another major Jewish festival associated with the Messianic banquet was the Feast of Tabernacles. Though this feast begun as a celebration of the migration of the Israelites through the wilderness (Ex 23:16 & Deut 16:13-15), it later became associated with the worship of God’s people in His presence in the

¹⁰ E.g., Isa 6:13, 25:6-8, Joel 2:24-26 & 3:18. 2 Bar 29:1-4 describes the dish at the meal as made from the giant mythical sea monster called Leviathan, representing the meat of God’s enemies.

¹¹ Also Hos 2:1-23, Is 54:4-8; Song 2:4, 5:1 Ezek 16:7-8.

¹² For example, in Jubilees 1:5; 6:11,17; 15:1-24; IQS1:7-2:19

temple. Its main themes were God's triumphal enthronement, His dwelling presence among His people, His gathering together of all nations to worship Him, pilgrimage into His sanctuary and later, its association with water (MacRae 1960:275). These themes made it a suitable prototype to describe the Messianic banquet. Thus Zechariah 14:16 depicts the eschatological Feast of Tabernacles in which the nations of the world will join God's people to worship Him. Similarly, in Revelation 7:9-17, the depiction of multitudes of the redeemed worshipping the Lamb of God is filled with motifs from the celebration of the Feast of Tabernacles (Ulfgard 1989).

In the Old Testament, the Messianic banquet was regarded as yet to be fulfilled in the future Messianic age.¹³ In the New Testament however, the banquet was portrayed as inaugurated in the church by the work of the Holy Spirit. Jesus described the banquet on several occasions.¹⁴ In Matthew 9:14-17, He intimated that wine drinking and the pouring of "new wine into new wineskins" occurs while, He, the "Bridegroom", is with His guests. The miracle of Cana (John 2:1-11) and Jesus' feast of tabernacles "streams of living water" (John 7:38-39) declaration also signify the inauguration of the Messianic banquet. It is therefore unsurprising that Luke's description of the life of the early church in Acts 4:31-35 contain themes from the Messianic banquet (see Sterling 1994:679-696 who argues that Luke's description in Acts 4 parallels the literary motifs of idealized or utopian communities). Luke was in no doubt that the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost was part of the inauguration of the Messianic banquet.

Paul's teaching about community meals in Romans, Galatians and 1 Corinthians also reflect his belief that the church is the inaugurated eschatological community. When God's people gather at meals, the rules that operate in the Messianic banquet were to be the norm. The worship,

¹³ There is limited evidence in the Dead Sea Scrolls that the sectaries of Qumran regarded their community meals as enacting the Messianic banquet. In IQS28a 2:11-22, for example, they expected the "messiah priest" to join them at their regular community meals. Cross has therefore pointed to the tendency for members of the Qumran community to regard their common eating together as a "liturgical anticipation of the Messianic banquet" (1961:77). Other inter-testamental references to the banquet are in Sibylline Oracles, Book 3; 1 Enoch 60, 4 Ezra 6 and Syriac Apocalypse of Baruch 29.

¹⁴ Matt 22:1-14, 25:1-13, Mark 2:19-20, Luke 5:34-35; 14:7-11 & 22:28-30

fellowship, and teaching ministry of the church, fuelled by God's Holy Spirit, should be seen as anticipating or enacting the banquet. Thus in 1 Corinthians, he emphasized that the Lord Jesus was the Host at their banquets - they were eating at "the Lord's table" (1 Cor 10:21). Though Paul linked the institution of the Lord's Supper with both the death and second coming of Christ (1 Cor 11:23-26), he also emphasized that in all of their communal meals, they were feasting in the presence of God's Holy Spirit. In 1 Corinthians 12:13, he reminds the believers that they have all been given the same Holy Spirit to drink. As pointed out by Talbert, this alludes beyond the Lord's Supper imagery to Jesus' description of the Holy Spirit as Living water (Talbert 1984:95-108).

Consequently, in 1 Corinthians 11-14, Paul argues that the spiritual realities of oneness, love and mutual submission of the body of Christ must be evident. In contrast to their pagan neighbours, believers were to behave as befitting the eschatological community among whom God's Spirit is at work. Those who eat and drink at the Lord's Table in an "unworthy manner" (1 Cor 11:27) are condemned as guilty because they have dishonoured the Lord at His banquet. Paul's vehement opposition of Peter in Galatians 2:11-14 and his strident rebuke of the mealtime inconsideration in 1 Corinthians 11 were based on this theology of the Messianic banquet (see Smith 2003:173-217). It is these motifs that are also reflected in his exhortation in Ephesians 5:18, and to which we now turn.

3. The Messianic Banquet in Ephesians 5:18

Scholars who have questioned the Pauline authorship of Ephesians have pointed, among other things, to the epistle's realized Hellenistic and spatial eschatology (Robinson 1922:96; Lincoln 1993:lx-lxxiii).¹⁵ As we now

¹⁵ They stress that Paul's usual teaching on the fast movement of time to its apocalyptic end is not emphasized as much as the growth and expansion of the church into a temple for God's dwelling. They also argue that in contrast to the horizontal eschatology of his other letters, Paul depicts the Lord Jesus Christ, in Eph 1:20-21, as now seated in the heavenly realms above all dominion and authority. And God has now raised believers up with Christ and seated us with Him in this same heavenly realm (Eph 2:6). They point to the peculiar presence of the phrase "heavenly realms" in this epistle as a reflection of the spatial emphases of its eschatology. As we shall find in the subsequent discussion, this argument has many flaws. In

demonstrate, though there are spatial eschatological themes, these are nevertheless closely interwoven with Jewish temporal and futurist apocalyptic motifs. In his prayer at the beginning of the letter, Paul refers to the fulfilment of time when God will bring “all things in heaven and on earth together” under Christ (Eph 1:10). In addition, believers have a glorious hope in the future, which is full of God’s rich inheritance (Eph 1:18). Paul however reminds the Ephesians that though “in the coming ages”, God will demonstrate His incomparable riches of grace towards them; they now already share this heavenly inheritance with Jesus (Eph 2:6-7). The eschatology of Ephesians is therefore both realized and yet to be consummated—it is an inaugurated eschatology.

As in Romans, Galatians and 1 Corinthians, the gathering of believers in Ephesians is also regarded by Paul as the earthly counterpart of the heavenly assembly of God’s holy ones (Eph 3:15). Even now, the incomparably great power, the same power that resurrected the Lord Jesus (Eph 1:19-20), is at work within believers. They have received a new self that is “created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness” (Eph 4:24). Believers are God’s holy people, among whom no hint of sexual immorality should ever be heard (Eph 5:3). The church, in Ephesians, in Smalley’s words is therefore “the instrument of God’s cosmic purpose—although the final consummation is of course to be beyond the mere unity of the church” (1956:153).

One fundamental element of this “already and not yet” eschatology in Ephesians is the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on believers. The Holy Spirit who revealed the mystery of the Christian hope to the apostles (Eph 3:5) also seals believers “for the day of redemption” (Eph 4:30). He is the “deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption” (Eph 1:14). He grants us access to God the Father (Eph 2:18) to enable us fulfil His purposes on earth. Paul specifically links the giving of the gifts of the Holy Spirit for accomplishing these purposes to the ascension of the Lord Jesus Christ (Eph 4:8). He emphasizes that these gifts have been given to bring the Body of Christ to maturity (Eph 4:13). The goal of the Spirit’s work, Paul notes, is to prepare the church for the consummation of its marriage to Christ (Eph 5:27).

Ephesians, just as in his other letters, Paul mixed his Jewish apocalyptic eschatology with Hellenistic themes (See Bruce, 1990:229-240 & Guthrie, 1975:404).

Ephesians 5:18 should therefore be understood in this context of the work of the Holy Spirit in the inaugurated eschatological community.

In Ephesians 5:18, Paul warns the believers not to “get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery”. This reference to the drinking of wine to dissipation echoes the destruction of God’s enemies that is characteristic of the Messianic banquet motif. Paul uses of the word *asōtia* to describe the effects of drinking wine to excess. According to *The New Testament Greek Lexicon* (n.d.), this word means “an abandoned, dissolute life; profligacy and prodigality”. The most literal meaning of the word is “unsavedness”. Thus, in Ephesians 5:18, Paul is echoing the situation of those who drink wine to debauched excess as people heading for destruction. In the context of the eschatological banquet, this refers to the plight of the unsaved.

There are other indications in Ephesians 5 to support this understanding of the first part of the parallelism. The contrast between being drunk and being filled with the Holy Spirit is only one of several contrasting pairs between those who will inherit the kingdom of Christ and those upon whom the wrath of God will come (Eph 5:5-6). The other contrasts are darkness and light (Eph 5:8-14), wise and unwise (Eph 5:15), and folly and those who understand God’s will (Eph 5:15). In all these contrasts, Paul is describing the difference between the saved and unsaved person.

These contrasts have their roots in the Jewish wisdom tradition of the “two ways” (e.g., Prov 4:10-14; 10:8-14). They echo themes that contrast “sons of light” with “sons of darkness”, which were common among the Qumran sectaries (e.g., in IQS 3:19-25; 4:24). In 1 Thessalonians 5:6-8 and Romans 13, Paul also describes drunkenness as a characteristic feature of life of “darkness”. Indeed almost all references in the New Testament to drunkenness or drunkards typically described the life of the unsaved (e.g. Matt 24:49; Luke 12:45; 1 Cor 5:11; 6:10). The contrast between drunkenness and the filling of God’s Spirit therefore serves the function of distinguishing the unsaved from the saved within an eschatological context. Just as in 1 Corinthians 6:9-10 and Galatians 5:21 Paul warns that drunkards would not inherit the kingdom of God, so here, in Ephesians 5:18, he uses drunkenness as a dividing line between those who enjoy the superabundance of the Messianic banquet and those who do not.

As in some of the depictions of the Messianic banquet motif, the destruction of God's enemies in Ephesians 5:18 occurs through drinking. In Revelation 14, those who have the "mark of the beast" drink the wine of God's anger; while "the redeemed from among men" sing new songs of praise before God's throne.

Paul then commands the Ephesians that they should instead be "filled" with the Holy Spirit. Elsewhere in the epistle, believers are filled with Christ (Eph 1:23; 4:13), and with God (Eph 3:19). The word *plerousthe* (be filled) means "to make full, to cause to abound, to furnish or supply liberally . . . to consummate" (*New Testament Greek Lexicon*, n.d.; cf. Woodcock 2000:68-87). In the Old Testament, the term is associated with the filling of the temple by the Spirit of God¹⁶ and is previously alluded to in Ephesians 2:22. At the individual level, it describes allowing the Holy Spirit to operate in such a way as to produce a constant and overabundant result. There should be no room for anything else when the believer is filled with God's Spirit. As put by Kostenberger (1997:231), "being filled with the Spirit" should be understood in a metaphorical sense of someone being "full" of a given substance, be it material (wine) or spiritual (the Holy Spirit)". Thus, in Ephesians 5:18, Paul is describing the extravagant effect of the operation of the Spirit of God in the yielded believer and in the life of the church. This extravagance is a characteristic feature of the Messianic banquet.

The present continuous tense of the command, which therefore may be rendered as "be continuously filled with the Spirit", also echoes the Messianic banquet motif. The wine in the messianic banquet never runs out. In Joel's vision of the banquet, for example, "the mountains will drip new wine, and the hills will flow with milk; all the ravines of Judah will run with water. A fountain will flow out of the Lord's house" (Joel 3:18). Jesus spoke of the eschatological ministry of the Holy Spirit as "streams" of living water which flows from the believer. And in the miracle at Cana, Jesus turned water into large amount of "choice wine", just when the old wine had run out. Though there could be "excess" in drinking wine, believers on the other hand can never be over-filled with the Holy Spirit.

¹⁶ E.g. Exod 40 34-35, 1 Kgs 8 10-11, 2 Chr 5 13-14, 7 1-2, Hag 2 7, Ezek 10 4, 43 5 & 44 4.

In addition, the sense of the command, *plerousthe*, is plural; it is in the sense of a community being filled with the Holy Spirit rather than just individuals. Though each individual must apply this command and continuously yield to the presence of God's Spirit, Paul's command is for the whole church as a community of believers. Certainly, the result of being filled operates in the context of the church as an eschatological community. This also echoes the Messianic banquet motif which is always presented as a community meal, to which as many people as possible are invited to "Come! And let him who hears say, Come" and drink (Rev 22:17).

Paul's description of the results of being filled with the Holy Spirit also echo the celebratory mood associated with the Messianic banquet. He points out that those filled with the Holy Spirit would edify one another with psalms, hymns, spiritual songs and melodious music. They would be filled with thanksgiving to God the Father and submit to each other out of reverence to Christ. The picture that is depicted here is a life of continuous Spirit-filled worship in the presence of the enthroned Christ. This is another characteristic feature of the Messianic banquet. Of course, in the final Messianic banquet, the focus is totally on Christ. In the inaugurated but yet to be consummated eschatological community, edification of one another as well as thanksgiving to God features in the worship.

The mutual submission to one another in Ephesians 5:21 depict the image of believers at God's table with no concerns about their ranks and statuses. They are willing to submit to each other out of reverence for Christ, the Host of the banquet. Just as in 1 Corinthians 11-14; Paul describes the love and mutual submission of the church at the Lord's Table, so also in Ephesians 5, the eschatological community should show reverence to their Host by not being obsessed with their ranks.

This mutual submission fuelled by the work of the Holy Spirit provides Paul with the platform to discuss the household rules in Ephesians 5:23-6:9. These practical rules of how human relationships at home and work should honour God are also influenced by some themes from the Messianic banquet. He uses the comparatives, *hōs* ("as", Eph 5:23-24), *houto* ("so also", Eph 5:24, 28) and *kathōs* ("even as", Eph 5:25, 29) to compare Christian marriage with the marriage relationship between Christ and the church. In Ephesians 5:25-27, he

paints the picture of Christ as the marital suitor, who expresses His love through His death and “thereby privately and publicly, decently and legally, binds Himself to her and her to Him” (Barth 1974:691). As has been noted this concept of divine marriage is typical of the Messianic banquet. To Paul, the husband and wife relationship is more or less a parable of the marriage between the church and Christ.

4. The Holy Spirit in Ephesians 2 and 4, and the Messianic Banquet

A remaining question needs to be answered, albeit briefly. Is there any evidence in the rest of Ephesians to suggest that Paul’s eschatology of the Spirit may be understood from such a Jewish apocalyptic perspective? The answer to this question is, yes indeed. Two other passages in the epistle in which Paul links the eschatological ministry of the Holy Spirit in the church also allude to concepts related to the messianic banquet. Specifically, his teaching in Ephesians 2 and 4 regarding the outpouring of God’s Spirit is shaped by motifs from Jewish festivals.¹⁷ Though the allusions in these two passages do not directly echo the messianic banquet; their relationship to the Jewish festive traditions demonstrates Paul’s hermeneutic in Ephesians 5.

In Ephesians 2:22, Paul depicts the church as a temple in which God dwells by His Spirit. This theme is not uncommon in Paul (e.g., 1 Cor 3:10; 6:19). However, it also has a festive background that should inform the interpretation of the passage. This is because the imagery is one of the characteristic features of the feast of tabernacle.¹⁸ Indeed, Jonathan Draper (1983:133) has argued

¹⁷ The mixture of Hellenistic and Jewish eschatological themes in Ephesians is not surprising when we consider that the congregation may well have had both Jews and Gentiles within their midst. The city itself was well known for its large number of Jews. The apostle wanted to engender cordial fellowship and unity between the two groups. Hence he insists that Christ has destroyed the dividing walls between Jews and Gentile to create “one new man out of two” (Eph 2:15). The Gentiles are heirs together with Israel (Eph 3:6) in this single temple of God of which Christ is its cornerstone. It has therefore been suggested that “a Hellenistic Judaism should prove the most plausible background of Ephesians” (Lincoln & Wedderburn 1993:90). For a recent discussion on the preponderance of Jewish themes in Ephesians, see Yee, 2005.

¹⁸ The festive occasions associated with Solomon’s dedication of the temple in 1 Kings 18 & 2 Chronicles 5 were interpreted as part of the celebration of the feast of tabernacles by Josephus

that by the first century, the Feast of Tabernacles “came to be associated with the temple and with the theophany in the Jerusalem temple”.

It is not surprising therefore that the same feast became a prototype to describe the Messianic banquet. Just as in Ephesians 2, Gentiles who were far off have been brought into the commonwealth of Israel to be built into God’s temple for His dwelling (Eph 2:13), so also does Zechariah 14:16 depict an eschatological Feast of Tabernacles with the ingathering of Gentiles to the city of Jerusalem to worship Jehovah. Timothy Gombis has also shown that the whole of Ephesians 2 follows the pattern of divine warfare ideology characterized by conflict, victory, kingship, temple building and celebration (2004:406). Just as in Revelation 21:1-27, in Ephesians 2, the church (or the New Jerusalem) is God’s eschatological temple in which His people celebrate the exalted and triumphant Christ.

Another passage which links the eschatological ministry of the Holy Spirit in the church with a Jewish festival is Ephesians 4:1-11. Psalm 68:18 that Paul quotes in Eph 4:8 describes the triumphant ascension of Jehovah on Mount Zion while showering His people with blessings and gifts. Though this Psalm was composed to commemorate the transfer of the Ark of the Covenant to Jerusalem (2 Sam 15), by Paul’s time, it had taken on eschatological significance depicting the victory of God (Gombis 2005:367). It is therefore not a mere coincidence that Ps 68 became linked with Pentecost (Kirby 1968: 138-139).¹⁹ Lindars has consequently argued that the theme of the Jewish feast of Pentecost influences Paul’s description of the distribution of the gifts of the Holy Spirit in Eph 4 and Luke’s in Acts 2:33 (1961:51-59). In Ephesians 4, Paul is interpreting Psalm 68 as a “Christian Pentecostal psalm, celebrating the ascension of Christ and His subsequent descent at Pentecost to bestow spiritual gifts upon the church” (Caird 1964:541).

These two examples do not conclusively show that the Messianic banquet echoes in Ephesians 5:18. What they prove however is that Paul consistently linked the eschatological ministry of the Holy Spirit in the church with motifs

in *the Antiquities of the Jews* 8:4.1. See also *Leviticus Rabba* 30:7.

¹⁹ The synagogue readings at Pentecost during the time of Jesus included Ps 68 and Num 17 & 18 (Van Goudoever 1959:201).

affiliated to Jewish festive celebrations. Since the most extensive biblical depiction of an eschatological festival is the Messianic banquet, these two examples together provide some indirect evidence. They support the hypothesis that in Ephesians 5:18 Paul's warning against drinking wine to destructive excess and his command to be filled with the Spirit may be understood in reference to the Messianic banquet motif. At least they indicate a high probability that Paul would have applied the Messianic banquet motif in Ephesians 5:18.

5. Conclusion

The church is the eschatological community in which the promised Messianic banquet has been inaugurated. When it gathers, it should be celebrating the triumphant and enthroned Christ at the same time as it edifies His Bride. Out of reverence for the exalted Christ, believers should mutually submit to each other. This is the vision of the church that Paul espouses in Ephesians 5:18 and the Holy Spirit is the Mediator, whose fullness makes it a constant reality. In continually being filled with God's Spirit, believers and the church alike are enacting the Messianic banquet, and so hastening the Lord's return to consummate His marriage with the church.

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