

Be Careful

Ephesians 5:15-20

This week is a continuation of last week's instructions about being imitators of God where Paul gave us a list of sins that we were to eliminate from our lives and told us how we were to be like children who wanted to be like our Father and therefore try very hard to do the same things our Father does.

Now Paul goes on give the members of the Ephesian church and us additional instructions on how to live faithfully. Paul said "See that you walk carefully, with exactness" always looking around with precision and accuracy. They were to be careful to live as the wise and not as foolish people. The opposite would be walking carelessly and without proper guidance and forethought. Paul told us not to leave the Christian life to chance. We must make wise decisions and seek to do the will of God.

Paul appeared to be saying, "Don't walk in your sleep! Wake up! Open your eyes! Make the most of the day!" Make the most of opportunities to live for Christ and serve Him. Paul presented several reasons why we should be accurate and careful in our walk.

1. *It is a mark of wisdom (v. 15).* Only a foolish person drifts with the wind and tide. The wise mark out a course, set sails, and guide the rudder until arriving at the appointed destination. When a person wants to build a house, they first draw up plans to follow. However, how many of us Christians plan our days so that we use our opportunities wisely? It is true, we cannot know what a day may bring (James 4:13–17), but it is also true that a planned life can better deal with

unexpected events. Someone said, “When the pilot does not know what port he is heading for, no wind is the right wind.” We are to be careful!

2. *Life is short (v. 16a).* “Buying up the opportunity—taking advantage of it.” An old Chinese adage says, “Opportunity has a forelock so you can seize it when you meet it. Once it is past, you cannot seize it again.” Our English word for opportunity comes from a Latin word which means “toward the port.” It suggests a ship taking advantage of the wind and tide to arrive safely in the harbor. The brevity of life is a strong argument for making the best use of the opportunities God gives us. Be careful!

3. *The days are evil (v. 16b).* In Paul’s time, this meant that Roman persecution was on the way (1 Peter 4:12–19), as they had already lived through the Jewish persecution of which he has been a part. How foolish to waste opportunities to live for God when soon those opportunities might be taken away by the advances of sin in society! We also experience evil days in our society! Paul says “be careful!”

4. *God has given us a mind (v. 17a).* “Understanding” suggests using our minds to discover and do the will of God. Too many of us have the idea that discovering God’s will is a mystical experience that rules out clear thinking. But this idea is not true. We discover the will of God as God transforms our mind (Rom. 12:1–2); and this transformation is the result of the study of Word of God, prayer, meditation, and worship. Since God gave you and me a mind, God expects us to use it. This means that learning God’s will involves gathering facts, examining them, weighing them, and praying for God’s wisdom (James 1:5). God does not want us simply to know God’s will; God wants us to understand His will.

5. *God has a plan for our lives (v. 17b).* Paul alluded to this plan in Eph. 2:10. If God saved me, God has a purpose for my life, and I should discover that purpose and then guide my life accordingly. God reveals His plan through His Word (Col.

1:9–10), God’s Spirit in our hearts (Col. 3:15), and the working of circumstances (Rom. 8:28). As Christians we can walk carefully and accurately because we know what God wants us to do. Like the builder following the blueprint, we accomplish what the architect planned. Let’s plan a spiritual gifts exploration to discover how God has gifted the members of this congregation for the work of ministry.

Next Paul gave a few examples of wisdom and foolishness. For Paul the Christian that “walks in wisdom” has the benefit of joy and thankfulness. But the one that walks in foolishness have ignorance and debauchery. To illustrate this joy, Paul used the familiar image of drunkenness: “Do not get drunk with wine... but be filled with the Spirit” (Eph. 5:18). When the believers at Pentecost were filled with the Spirit, the crowd accused them of being drunk with new wine (Acts 2:13–15). There was such a joyfulness about them that the unbelievers could think of no better comparison. But some practical lessons can be learned from the contrasts. To begin with, the drunk is under the control of another force, since alcohol is actually a depressant. One feels a great sense of release—all their troubles are gone. They can “lick anybody in the house!” The drunk is not ashamed to express themselves, nor can he or she hide what is going on in their life.

Transfer this picture to the believer who is filled with the Spirit. God controls their life, and they experience a deep joy they are not afraid to express to the glory of God. Of course, the drunk is really out of control, since the alcohol affects the brain, while the believer experiences a beautiful self-control that is really God in control and self-control is among the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:23). The drunk makes a fool of himself, but the Spirit-filled Christian glorifies God and is willing to be a “fool for Christ’s sake” (1 Cor. 4:10). The drunk calls attention to them self, while the Spirit-filled believer is a witness for Christ.

It is certainly not difficult to live or work with someone who is filled with the Spirit and joyful. That one has a song in his or her heart and on their lips. The drunk often sings, but the songs only reveal the corruption in their heart. The Spirit-filled Christian's song comes from God, a song they could never sing apart from the Spirit's power. God even gives us songs in the night (Ps. 42:8). In spite of pain and shame, Paul and Silas were able to sing praises to God in the Philippian jail (Acts 16:25), and the result was the conversion of the jailer and his family. What a happy time they all had that midnight hour—and they did not need to get drunk to enjoy it!

One commentator told about reading: “Your neighborhood tavern is the friendliest place in town!” That slogan appeared in a headline of a special newspaper insert during “National Tavern Month,” so he decided to test its truth. He watched the newspapers for several weeks and cut out items that related to taverns—and all of them were connected with brawls and murders. The friendliest place in town! But this headline reminded him that people who drink together often experience a communication and geniality (you remember the television show Cheers, where everyone knows your name). This fact is no argument for alcohol, but it does illustrate a point: Christians who are filled with the Holy Spirit enjoy being together and experience a sense of joyful oneness in the Lord. They do not need the false stimulants of the world. They have the Spirit of God—and the Spirit is all they need.

Paul said the second evidence of walking carefully and being filled with the Spirit is thankfulness. The Holy Spirit gives us the grace of thankfulness. This morning I heard on the news that most workers are stressed because they don't make enough money, have annoying co-workers, have too much work, or don't like their job, rather than being thankful they have a job! The person who thinks

the world owes him a living is never thankful for anything. He thinks he is doing others a favor by permitting them to serve him. The thankful heart is usually humble, a heart that gladly acknowledges God as the “Giver of every good and perfect gift” (James 1:17). I have worked for Goodwill for almost 35 years and I know if you make your job important, it will make you important. Like Mary’s gift to Jesus in John 12, gratitude fills the house with fragrance.

It is true that all of us are grateful for some things at some special occasions; but Paul tells his readers to be thankful for all things at all times. In our own strength we could never obey this commandment. Can we really be thankful in times of suffering, disappointment, and even bereavement? We must remember Paul was a prisoner when he wrote those words, but he was thankful for what God was doing in him and for him (Eph. 1:16; 5:4, 20; Phil. 1:3; Col. 1:3, 12; 2:7; 3:17; 4:2). When we find ourselves in a difficult situation, Paul instructed us to immediately give thanks to the Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, by the power of the Spirit, to keep our hearts from complaining and fretting. “In everything give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus.” (1 Thes. 5:18).

The word gratitude comes from the same root word that is translated grace. If we have experienced the grace of God, then we ought to be grateful for what God brings to us. Thank and think also come from the same root word so if we would think more, we would thank more.¹

Paul drew a contrast between a pagan gathering and a Christian gathering. The pagan gathering is apt to be corrupt. We use the word symposium to mean a discussion of a subject by a number of people; but the Greek word literally means a

¹Wiersbe, Warren W.: *The Bible Exposition Commentary*. Wheaton, Ill. : Victor Books, 1996, c1989, S. Eph 5:15

drinking-party. The heathen found happiness in being filled with wine and with worldly pleasures; the Christian found happiness in being filled with the Spirit.

Another thing that we learn from this passage and living careful is certain facts about the Christian gatherings in the early days.

(i) The early Church was a singing Church. Its characteristic was psalms and hymns and spiritual songs; it had a happiness which made members sing. Being filled with the Spirit, they communicated with each other with psalms, those songs from the Old Testament song accompanied with stringed instruments such as harps; hymns were praises composed by Christians; and spiritual songs were general songs of praise. But they also communicated with God by singing and making melody in the heart. Church music should be a means of Christians ministering to each other, and singing should be a means of worshiping the Lord.² Some of our songs tell others of our relationship and dependence on God and others are songs of thanksgiving to God.

(ii) The early Church was a thankful Church. The instinct was to give thanks for all things and in all places and at all times. The early Church was a thankful Church because its members were dazzled with the wonder that God's love had stooped to save them; and it was a thankful Church because its members had a consciousness that they were in the hands of God.³

To be wise means to live carefully, disassociate with evil, and be filled with the Holy Spirit. Go and walk likewise!

²Walvoord, John F. ; Zuck, Roy B. ; Dallas Theological Seminary: *The Bible Knowledge Commentary : An Exposition of the Scriptures*. Wheaton, IL : Victor Books, 1983-c1985, S. 2:639

³Barclay, William, lecturer in the University of Glasgow (Hrsg.): *The Letters to the Galatians and Ephesians*. Philadelphia : The Westminster Press, 2000, c1976 (The Daily Study Bible Series, Rev. Ed), S. 166