

Ephesians 5:15-20

Dear Friends in Christ,

Be very careful. That's what a mom might say to her young child who has to cross the street to go play with a friend. Be very careful. Look both ways, twice.

Be very careful. That's what anyone would say if they were in a room with someone who was defusing a bomb.

Be very careful. That's what Paul tells the Ephesians and us. Be very careful how you live your daily lives. Why would he say that? What's the danger? It's not traffic. It's not a bomb. Why does he want us to be very careful how we live?

You might have noticed that I left out a little word that might seem insignificant at first, but that is very important. "Then." Be very careful then how you live. "Then," is important because it tells us that the reason that we want to be careful how we live our lives each day is in the verses preceding this one.

In the first fourteen verses of this chapter Paul was talking about who we are, who God has made us. He reminds us that we were **once darkness**. We were separated from God, enemies of God because of sin. We were without faith and without hope; dead in trespasses and sins. But, by God's grace and the power of the gospel in word and sacrament, we **are now light in the Lord**. Be what God has made you. **Live as children of light. Be imitators of God**. Show the kind of love to God and your neighbor that God has shown to you. **Live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God**.

Be very careful THEN how you live, because **you are not your own**. Jesus has purchased you for God at the price of his own blood. You wouldn't want his sacrifice to be wasted. You are children of light, children of God. How you live your life each day reflects on God and reveals your attitude toward God and all that he has done for you.

That's the why; the reason we want to be careful how we live. Now what about the how?

Paul says, don't be unwise, don't be foolish in the way that you live. **The days are evil**. There are all kinds of temptations out there. The love of most has grown cold. Fame and fortune have become the gods of this age. Satan is working hard 24 hours a day trying to get us to give in to temptation and do something foolish so that he can accuse us before God and demand that God punish us; and so that he can try to convince us that God couldn't possibly love us. Don't give in. Don't conform to the pattern of the world. Don't be unwise and foolish, but wise.

It's interesting that the thing that Paul says can get in the way of making wise choices in the way that we live our lives for God is drunkenness. He says **drunkenness leads to debauchery**. Some of the definitions I found for debauchery are: "*recklessness, what one does when the mind is absent, behavior that shows a lack of concern or thought for the consequences of your actions.*" The same would apply to drug abuse. If you are not in total control of your mind, if your ability to think is compromised, you are going to make foolish, or unwise choices—like thinking you can drive in that condition, or that you can get away with committing some crime, or that you can fly.

Bill Cosby does a good job of depicting how foolish people look and talk when they are high or have had too much to drink. Rent the DVD sometime. You've probably heard the radio commercials that talk about the guy who is so drunk he can't read the screen at the karaoke bar and tries to free style rap until they turn off the mike. Or maybe you have witnessed it yourself and seen people laughing at the stupid stuff a drunk person was doing at a party. If you are not in full control of your mind you will do foolish things and you will make stupid choices. There's a good reason Peter reminds us to be **sober**, always in our right minds, because the Devil is a

roaring lion, licking his chops when he sees that we are not in full control of our minds. He knows it's a lot easier to lead us into sin when we aren't thinking straight. He can't wait to trick us into doing something that will embarrass us and bring dishonor to God.

Be very careful how you live. Don't be unwise. Don't be foolish. Be wise. How? How can you make wise choices that will enable you to bring honor and glory to God? **Paul says, understand what the Lord's will is.** There is only one way to do that; to be constantly in God's word.

Too many people today think that they can determine God's will by their feelings. They think that if they are Christians and something feels right to them, it must be right; that must be God's will. But God has not promised to reveal his will to us through our feelings. What a mess we would be in if he did. Our feelings about God, about ourselves, about our spouse, about our neighbor, change constantly. One minute we are on an emotional high thinking God loves us and everything is wonderful, the next minute we can feel depressed and forsaken by God. Remember our OT reading from last week. That's what happened with Elijah. God sent down fire from heaven and consumed his sacrifice. He proved that he was the one true God and Baal was a helpless idol. Elijah was on a spiritual high. Then next day he was depressed and running for his life and wishing he was dead.

We can't determine God's will by how we feel about someone or something. The only reliable way of determining God's will is by studying his word. The Bible is the place where he has revealed his will to us. The Bible is the place where he tells us what is right and wrong; where he reminds us that what feels right to us is often a sin—like getting revenge, or drunkenness, or adultery. The Bible is the place where he assures us that he loves us even when we don't feel loved; where he tells us that we are forgiven even when we don't feel he could or should forgive us.

It is only through constant study of God's word that we can understand what the Lord's will is, and, instead of being filled with spirits, we can be filled with the Spirit of God.

As we read and study God's word, the Holy Spirit continues to work in our hearts, helping us understand what God's will is and to make wise choices as we strive to live our lives for God each day. The Holy Spirit helps us make the most of every opportunity, Paul says.

Since he says this in the context of pointing out that the days in which we live are evil, the opportunity he seems to be talking about is an opportunity to witness to others about Jesus. Each day we have opportunities to say no to sin and to point out things that are opposed to God's will. When we do this, we are going to stick out like a sore thumb. People are going to wonder, and probably ask us why we think the way we do about things that are going on in the world around us; or why we don't join with them in cursing or drunkenness or immorality. That gives us the opportunity to tell them that it's because of what God says in his word and because of what he has done for us, and for them, in Jesus.

If we aren't careful how we live, if we are living the way the evil world does, we won't get those opportunities. But if we are careful how we live and we are studying God's word daily we will have plenty of opportunities to witness and the Holy Spirit will help us make the best use of those opportunities for the glory of God.

When the Holy Spirit is doing his job he is pointing us to Jesus. He doesn't want to attract attention to himself. He wants to point people to Jesus. So, Paul says, when we are filled with the Spirit we are filled with thankfulness. We will **always be giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.** We will be giving constant thanks to God first and most importantly for the gift of free salvation in Jesus; but it doesn't stop there.

Paul says **always** and **everything**, all our material blessings, our health, our abilities, and even our sickness and failures. Being filled with the Spirit we give thanks to God for everything.

Being filled with the Spirit, we **speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs**. We gather with our fellow Christians for worship so that we can encourage each other with the words of the Psalms, and with words and poetry that others have written that teach and give praise to God for all he has done and continues to do for us.

Being filled with the Spirit we **make music in our heart to the Lord**. While we go about our daily routines our hearts are filled with joy and thankfulness for our salvation in Jesus. Even when we aren't specifically thinking about what God has done for us in Jesus our hearts are singing a silent song of praise to God.

Does that mean that if we are true Christians we will always be walking around with a smile on our faces and a song in our hearts? No. We don't always win the battle against the evil world around us, against Satan and our own sinful nature. But, through his word and sacrament, God assures us of his love and forgiveness. He helps us understand what his will is and he fills us with his Spirit so that we are careful how we live; so that we make wise, God-pleasing choices; so that we make the most of every opportunity he gives us to witness about his love; all to the glory of God.