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## WALKING CAREFULLY IN AN EVIL DAY

Ephesians 5:15-21

By

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Ephesians Lesson 42

## Walking Carefully in an Evil Day Ephesians 5:15-17

If you've ever done any boating, you know that it is essential to have a means of steering and a source of power. You need both. If you are cruising off the coast and lose your ability to steer, all the power in the world won't do you any good. You're at the mercy of the wind and the currents. Or, if you can steer, but you have no power, again you're in big trouble. You may drift into rocks or hidden reefs.

These two necessities become even more essential if you are navigating through dangerous seas. You would also need an accurate navigational chart and a means of determining your own location, so that you know exactly where the obstacles are and can avoid them. Without these, disaster is almost certain.

The Christian life is much the same. The enemy has planted traps and mines to wipe you out. There are dangerous rocks and reefs that can cause you to shipwreck your faith. To navigate safely through, you must be very careful. You must have a means of direction, a source of power, and pay close attention to the chart.

That is Paul's subject in our text: walking carefully as children of light in an evil day. "Therefore" points back to the preceding context, where we saw that as Christians, we are now children of light (5:8). Yet we are walking in a world that is morally and spiritually dark. We are not to cover our light and blend in with the darkness. Rather are to expose the unfruitful deeds of darkness as sin and dispel the darkness by leading sinners to Christ.

Therefore, because of these dangerous waters through which we are navigating, Paul now says, "Look carefully how you walk!" *Look carefully* means to consider with exactness and precision. It was an accounting term. If you're keeping the books for an organization or just balancing your checkbook, it is vital to be exact. You can't say, "Is that a 10 or 100? Oh, well, it doesn't matter. Let's call it 100." You must be precise.

Or, if you're a soldier on patrol in a minefield, you must know where the mines are placed and be careful to avoid them. Paul is saying that we must walk that way as believers. We must choose our steps carefully, because the enemy has strewn the path with dangerous obstacles that will cause us serious harm if we are careless. The days are evil!

And yet, many Christians just saunter through the minefield with no awareness of the grave danger that they face. They are flirting with serious danger, and yet they aren't paying attention. Paul gives us three essentials if we want to walk carefully in this evil day, to avoid spiritual disaster. Today I am giving an overview of these verses, which open a section that runs through 6:9. Then in five subsequent messages, I plan to go back through them in more detail. If there is any repetition, hopefully it will serve to cement these vital truths in your thinking. Paul is saying,

To walk carefully in this evil day, you must use your time  
wisely, understand the will of the Lord,  
and be filled with the Holy Spirit.

1. To walk carefully in this evil day, you must use your time wisely (5:15-16).

Paul writes (5:15-16, literal translation), "Therefore, look carefully how you walk, not as unwise men but as wise, redeeming the time because the days are evil." Note three things:

- A. To walk carefully, you must think carefully about how you will spend your life in this evil day.

This is Paul's final use of the word "walk" in Ephesians (cf. 2:2, 10; 4:1, 17; 5:1, 8). "Walk" pictures our way of life, worked out in a daily, step-by-step process. In Paul's day, people didn't just walk for exercise. They walked to get to a destination. So to walk spiritually pictures steady progress toward a definite goal.

"Look carefully" implies that if you are careless about how you walk, how you spend your time each day, you will not get through life without serious mishap. You will step on a mine or be attacked by the enemy or wander around hopelessly lost. The Gentiles walk in the futility of their mind, being darkened in their understanding, giving themselves over to sensuality and greed (4:17-19). But Christians are not to walk in that manner. We must walk

carefully, because the days are evil. Without deliberate carefulness, the evil that surrounds us will overwhelm us.

This is one reason that I urge you prayerfully to write out a one-sentence purpose statement for your life. It should describe what you think God wants you to be if you live to be 80. You should base it on biblically determined criteria. Then, underneath that purpose statement, write out some short-term goals that will move you toward your life purpose in each area (spiritual, relational, intellectual, moral, physical, financial, and vocational). Look at it often and readjust as necessary. If you just drift through life without thinking carefully about how to spend your time, you will not end up where God wants you to be.

- B. To walk wisely, you must skillfully apply God's Word to your life.

Paul draws the first of several contrasts, "not as unwise men, but as wise." Wisdom is a huge theme in the Bible, especially in the Old Testament, where Job, many of the Psalms, Proverbs, and Ecclesiastes are called, "wisdom literature." The basic meaning of the Hebrew word for "wisdom" was "skill." The wise man had the skill to live properly. At the root of wise living is the fear of the Lord: "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding" (Prov. 9:10).

Thus the wise person lives in a godly, skillful manner, thus producing a beautiful finished product that brings glory to the Lord. The only way to accomplish this is to follow the divine plan, given to us in Scripture. Just as God gave Moses the plan for the tabernacle, and skillful men crafted the beautiful final product, so we must follow God's directions if we want our lives to be beautiful for Him. The Bible tells us the godly character qualities that we need to develop. It warns us about the many temptations to sin that will harm or destroy us. It tells us how to determine our life-priorities so that we will make the best use of the years the Lord gives us. As Moses prayed (Ps. 90:12), "So teach us to number our days, that we may present to You a heart of wisdom."

- C. To use your time wisely, you must use every opportunity for the will of God.

“Making the most of your time” (5:16a) is literally, “redeeming the time.” To redeem means to buy back. The implication is that time is in bondage and that a price must be paid to buy it back. The Greek word here for “time” does not view time as extended, but rather time as opportunities. The idea is that God gives us choice moments to seize for His purposes. We must be alert to His purposes and ready to grab those opportunities, like a shrewd merchant sees an opportunity for a profit and grabs it. Redeeming the time has special reference (both here and in Col. 4:5) to Christian witness in the world (F. F. Bruce, *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians* [Eerdmans], pp. 378-379).

For the unbeliever, life is in bondage to futility and meaninglessness (4:17-19). He goes through school, gets a job, starts a family, raises the family, retires from his job, and hopes that his health lasts long enough to cruise through all the national parks and take videos, or to catch a lot of fish. Then he dies. Throughout the process, he spends ten years of his life watching mindless TV shows. What’s the point? His time was in bondage to futility.

But the Christian can buy back those otherwise wasted hours and use the opportunities for eternal significance. He grabs every opportunity to grow to know Christ and be conformed to His image. He rears his children to know and follow Christ. He works to bring others to know Christ and grow in Him. He is a steward of his resources for God’s kingdom purposes, investing wisely in opportunities to further the gospel around the globe. By walking carefully in this evil world, he buys back opportunities for God’s kingdom purposes.

But, the word “redeem” implies that there is a cost. You must say no to certain secondary things in order to say yes to the crucial. You must say no to hours of TV or computer games in order to say yes to reading and studying God’s Word. You must say no to selfish activities that pull you away from God’s kingdom purposes. You must say no to certain ways of squandering your money on worldly pursuits in order to say yes to eternal riches. To walk carefully, you must use your time wisely.

2. To walk carefully, you must understand the will of the Lord (5:17).

Paul continues with another contrast, "So then [because the days are evil] do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is." The will of the Lord is the navigation chart that tells us where we're going and how to get there. Just as it would be foolish beyond imagination to put out to sea with no idea of where you're going or how to get there, the same is true in life. When I was in the Coast Guard, there was one crucial question you asked when you took over the helm: "What course are you steering?" The captain determined the course. If he said, "Steer at 280, I wasn't free to steer at 180!" My job was to keep the boat headed at 280, against the wind and currents that would have pulled us off course.

The Lord wants you to understand His will so that you can keep your life on course. Verse 17 isn't talking primarily about whether you go to this or that school or take this or that job. Rather, in the context of Ephesians the will of the Lord refers to something much bigger.

- A. You must understand the will of the Lord, which involves His ultimate purpose for creation.

To understand means to grasp with the mind, which implies some effort on your part. The Lord's will is revealed in His Word and Paul has mentioned it several times in Ephesians. He began the book (1:1) by referring to himself as "an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God." He goes on to say (1:5) that God "predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will." He said (1:9) that God "made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His kind intention which He purposed in Him." And, he said (1:11) that "we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will."

In short, God's will relates to His eternal purpose to be glorified by summing up all things in Christ. He does this by saving His elect (Jews and Gentiles) and bringing both groups together as one in His dwelling place, the church, which manifests His wisdom to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places (3:10). You must work to grasp that purpose with your mind so that you can live your life in line with it.

- B. You must apply the will of the Lord to your life.

In other words, you must live daily in light of God's purpose to be glorified in Christ through His church as that church grows in holiness to become His pure and spotless bride (5:27). This entails several things:

*\*You must submit to the lordship of Jesus Christ over all your life.* You will not glorify Him if you reserve certain areas of your life to do as you please. Rather, you must learn what is pleasing to Him (5:10) and live accordingly, seeking to glorify Him in every thought, attitude, word, and deed.

*\*You must be committed to Christ's church.* If God is working out His eternal purpose through the church, then His people must be committed to the church. To be casual in your connection to the church is *not* to be committed to what God is committed to.

*\*You must be committed to harmony with other believers in the church and in your home.* God's will involves bringing these two formerly diverse, hostile groups, Jew and Gentile, together as one in the church under Christ's headship (2:11-22). Through this means, He displays His glory to the angelic hosts (3:10). Therefore, we must labor to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace (4:3). And, we must live in harmony as husbands and wives, because marriage ultimately concerns Christ and the church (5:32).

*\*You must be committed to God's glory in the world.* The will of the Lord through His church includes bringing the gospel to the lost so that they may be saved and incorporated into the church. In that way, His glory is manifested all over the earth, as former rebels are reconciled to God and to one another through the cross.

If you're just living to get a good job, pay the bills, and enjoy selfish pursuits, with an occasional trip to church when it doesn't interfere with your entertainment program, Paul calls you foolish. To walk carefully in this evil world, you must not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is and apply it to how you live each day.

Thus, to walk carefully in this evil day, you must use your time wisely and understand the will of the Lord. Thirdly,

3. To walk carefully, you must be filled with the Holy Spirit (5:18-21).

Paul gives another contrast (5:18), "And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit." Grammatically, this is followed by five participles that show the results of being filled with the Spirit: speaking, singing, making melody, giving thanks, and being subject to one another. The first and the last relate to our behavior towards one another. The second, third, and fourth relate to our behavior towards the Lord. The last participle also serves to introduce and govern the section on relationships between husbands and wives, parents and children, and slaves and masters (5:22-6:9). I will go into more detail in future messages, but for now I can only skim over things.

- A. To be filled with the Spirit means to be controlled by the Spirit (5:18).

Why does Paul somewhat abruptly interject the subject of drunkenness at this point? There are probably two main reasons (Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Life in the Spirit* [Baker], p. 12): First, drunkenness and debauchery were characteristic of the futile, sensual lives from which the Ephesians had been saved and in which their contemporaries still lived. Paul is drawing a marked contrast between the old way of life and the new.

Second, he uses the analogy of wine and drunkenness to show that while there is a great contrast between being drunk with wine and being filled with the Spirit, there are also many similarities. Even as one filled with wine is under its influence, so the Christian should be under the control or influence of the Holy Spirit. Briefly, note two things about being filled with the Spirit:

- (1) Being filled with the Spirit is ongoing and repeated.

The verb tense indicates, "Be continually filled." As you study the examples in the New Testament, you learn that godly men were filled on more than one occasion (Acts 2:4; 4:8, 31; 9:17; 13:9, 52). The *filling* of the Spirit must be distinguished from the *baptism* of the Spirit. After the Day of Pentecost, the baptism of the Spirit is a one-time action that takes place at the moment you are saved, when you receive the Holy Spirit and are placed into the body of Christ (Rom. 8:9; 1 Cor. 12:13; Gal. 3:2, 5). Contrary to what many say, the baptism of the Spirit is not an experience subsequent to salvation that you are to seek. It is not an experience; it is a fact.

But the filling of the Spirit is a repeated experience that empowers us for godliness and service. It is essentially the same thing as walking by means of the Spirit (Gal. 5:16), which gives us victory over the flesh and produces the fruit of the Spirit in us. It should be the normative daily experience of every Christian.

(2) Being filled with the Spirit is commanded.

We are never commanded to be baptized with the Spirit, but we are commanded to be filled. We should take the positive command to be filled with the Spirit just as seriously as we take the negative command not to be drunk. If you are not being filled with the Spirit as an ongoing experience, you are disobeying God!

You ask, "How do I get filled with the Spirit?" To be filled with wine, you give yourself over to the wine and keep drinking. To be filled with the Spirit, yield yourself completely to Him and keep doing it! If being filled means being controlled, you must continually yield the control of your life to the Holy Spirit. When you realize that you've taken control again, confess that sin to God and yield again to the Spirit. If the Spirit reveals an area where you're not yielding to Him, yield it instantly and ask Him to fill you. And, keep walking that way.

You may wonder, "How do you know if you're filled with the Spirit?" Are you aware of some sin that you're harboring in your heart? No. Are you consciously yielding control of your life to the Holy Spirit? Yes. Are you seeking His fullness by drinking in His Word and asking Him to conform you to the image of Christ? Yes. Then you must trust that He is filling you. But, don't be complacent about it. Keep seeking Him for a greater manifestation of His fullness in your life. Paul here gives three results of being filled:

- B. To be filled with the Spirit results in singing, thankfulness, and proper submission in our relationships (5:19-21).

I only have time to list these now, so we will come back to them in future messages. The participles here indicate the results of being filled by the Spirit (O'Brien, pp. 387-388). These may not be what we would have expected. We might have expected bold witness or speaking in tongues or miracles or something more dramatic. But Paul lists singing, thankfulness, and mutual submission.

The *singing* is two-dimensional: we instruct one another (Col. 3:16) and we make melody in our hearts to the Lord. The three different terms for songs indicate variety. Singing *with our hearts* to the Lord infers at least a measure of exuberance and joy.

*Thankfulness* is the opposite of grumbling and complaining. A thankful heart bows before God's sovereign goodness in all things, even when we may not be able to understand His immediate purpose (Rom. 8:28; Gen. 50:20).

"*Being subject* to one another in the fear of Christ" raises all sorts of issues in this day of "evangelical feminism," which maintains that this does away with all gender distinctions in the church and home. You'll have to wait a few weeks until I can explain this in more detail. But for now I will say that it clearly does *not* mean that, since verse 24 instructs wives to be subject to their husbands, just as the church is to Christ (and Heb. 13:17 tells the church to obey its leaders and submit to them).

Rather, while not doing away with proper spheres of authority, "being subject to one another in the fear of Christ" means that we all must set aside our rights and serve one another in love. Christ had a right to remain in glory in heaven, but He willingly laid aside that right, took on the form of a servant, and was obedient even to death on the cross (Phil. 2:5-8). Even so, out of reverence for Him, we should have that same attitude, submitting ourselves to one another as we outdo one another in love.

### Conclusion

Are you walking carefully in this evil world by using your time wisely for eternity, by understanding God's will for the ages, and by being filled with the Holy Spirit? Do you see the results of the Spirit's filling in joyous singing, a thankful heart, and in submitting yourself to serve others in love?

If you're not walking carefully, you're living dangerously! You're adrift without rudder or power in dangerous waters! You're wandering aimlessly in a minefield! Confess to the Lord your carelessness and coldness of heart. Ask Him to fill you with His Spirit. Commit to get into His Word regularly. Otherwise, you risk spiritual shipwreck!

## Application Questions

1. Does “redeeming the time” imply that every Christian must devote every spare minute to serving the Lord? How do we determine the balance between leisure and service?
2. How can we learn to be alert for the opportunities that God brings our way?
3. Practically, why is it important for every believer (not just theologians) to understand the big picture of God’s will for the ages?
4. Some claim that the main sign of being filled with the Spirit is speaking in tongues. How would you respond to this biblically?

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