

EPHESIANS 5:15-20

INTRODUCTION

Paul has been outlining the fact that because of all the doctrinal truths that he has expounded throughout this book we who are Christians must live remarkably different lives from the unbelievers. We are light and they are darkness therefore we must live as children of light. Verse 15 actually starts with the word “therefore” (left out by the NIV) Paul is carrying on his train of thought here we are children of the light therefore live wisely.

If we are going to expose the fruitless deeds of darkness then there is a certain lifestyle that we must adopt. If we really believe the great doctrines highlighted in this book then let us allow them to shape our lives so that we will live, as we ought to live as children of light.

1. CHILDREN OF LIGHT LIVE CAREFULLY AND WISELY (v 15)

Just as Paul has been contrasting light with darkness he here contrasts wisdom with folly. Christians are to live wisely. Now in bringing out this contrast the apostle uses an adverb, which means to be accurate (carefully). Now we might think that Paul would use this word concerning his teachings that they should understand and pass on his teachings accurately. But Paul uses the adverb here to refer to the way Christians should live. We are to be accurate in our lifestyle so that our manner of life clearly proclaims accurately the Christian message. In other words we are to live in such a way that there are no clear inconsistencies so that the unbelieving world are clear concerning how Christians should live. This involves two things.

a) We should never give the impression that being a Christian involves giving up things that the bible does not command. There are Christians who clearly say and live it out that a Christian should not drink alcohol or go to the cinema or be involved in the arts etc. Now it may be that some Christians feel quite strongly that they should not do certain things but such people must not give the impression that such denial is commanded in the bible.

I was brought up believing that Christians did not do certain things like drinking alcohol and going to the cinema and other things that were considered ‘worldly.’ But I was given a wrong picture of Christianity; I saw it as something that was joyless and negative. So we must be very careful that we do not give people the wrong impression we must live out our principles accurately according to God’s word.

b) But the second danger is our failure not to live the Christian life as it should be lived. If we treat the things of God very loosely and lightly as so many professing Christians do today then are we not equally giving people the wrong impression about our faith? If we treat the means of grace loosely then are we not saying these things don’t matter. If we are not ruthless with sin in our lives then what impression is that giving to our world?

If the church is disunited and always fighting between itself then is that living out our faith accurately? Perhaps the church today is in greater danger of failing to live out real Christianity than it is of giving the wrong impression about matters of conscience. When churches are loveless places and when they are hypocritical places then is it any wonder that people today have no idea what the Christian faith is all about.

So let us not contribute to the confusion of the unbelieving world; let us be a church and a people that live out the Christian faith accurately. There is no point professing to be children of the light unless we live accurately as children of the light.

Christians live accurate lives and in doing so we are to live wisely. To do that we need God's wisdom so that we know how to act wisely in every situation that we find ourselves in. Whether that situation is at work, within our families or within our society or even at church we need to know how to apply God's word and his principles into every situation so that we will act wisely. What are the marks of someone who is living and applying God's wisdom to life and therefore living wisely?

2. HOW TO LIVE WISELY

i) Wise people make the most of their time – The phrase “redeeming the time” appears here and the idea is to buy up the time so the NIV is probably right in its paraphrase “making the most of every opportunity.” A wise Christian knows that time is precious. All of us have the same amount of time at our disposal; we all have 60 minutes in an hour and 24 hours every day. None of us can stretch time although there are times that we would like to.

So the wise Christian seeks to use the time available to the fullest possible advantage. Once that minute or hour has gone it has gone for good no one can ever relive it so time needs to be made use of wisely. Every opportunity to do good and to bring glory to God should be taken up. Christians need to be at the state of readiness looking for those God given opportunities to put our faith into action. We do this through our actions and through our conversations.

As Christians we need to plan our time so that we do not use it wastefully by unthinking and unplanned for activities. We have all been in the situation where we sit down perhaps to watch one programme and at the end of it we wait to see what is coming on next and before we know it we have spent three hours watching what we never intended to watch.

As a result we fail to do the very things we wanted to do like read Christian book. We all have limited time so let's make sure that we do not waste the time God has given to us and let us look for those God given opportunities to do good and to share the gospel and to bring glory to the name of our God.

The motivation for making the most of our time is a strange one. Paul says 'redeem the time because the days are evil.' We might have expected Paul to say use your time wisely even though the days are evil. In other words make the most of the situation. But actually Paul says it is because the days are evil that we should make the most of every opportunity. Paul's point is that because the days are evil there will be plenty of opportunities to serve God and to do good to others therefore use your time wisely.

Now as Christians we can say to ourselves we live in an evil world and therefore we need to entrench ourselves in our church and seek to live godly lives among our own people. It's so easy to say O things are so bad what's the point in bothering with this evil world. We are all members of a society that is secular and does not accept our Christian values. In fact they mock and scorn those values. So what do we do? Do we become inward looking and keep ourselves to ourselves expecting people to come to us.

Well Paul would say don't do that; plan your time and use your time to do good to speak of Christ to influence our society because the days in which we live are evil and our society needs the gospel more than ever. See today's world as an opportunity to display God's glory through our good lives and through our proclamation of Christ.

It is so easy for the church to be so taken up with our own existence that we can become so indifferent to our evil world so that we miss those God given opportunities and appointments to influence others for Christ. We must remember time is relentless it moves on so if we miss those opportunities when they come our way they are gone for good.

Of course our good and merciful God may present us with other opportunities but the one that we missed because of our carelessness with time or because of our preoccupation with ourselves has gone forever. Therefore let us be careful and wise and do whatever we can with every opportunity that comes our way and let us be careful about how we spend those 24-hour days that God in his goodness gives to us.

ii) Wise people discern the Lord's will (v 17) – Now I don't believe that Paul is talking here about God's general, will that is revealed to us all in Holy Scripture. Paul is still contrasting here wisdom with foolishness and so Paul says don't be a fool understand and discern what the Lord's will is for you personally.

You see if we are going to use our time and make the most of the opportunities that arise then we need to ask what should I do with my days. How should I be filling them? What should I be pursuing so that I can seek those opportunities and make the most of them?

How should I be spending my time for God? Now of course there are clear biblical principles that will guide us here we ought to pray and study His word and fellowship with his people and evangelise and so on. But the specific application of all those principles may differ from person to person. Some will pray more in the morning others at night others will have a number of short study periods others will have a longer one.

Some will be involved in this kind of evangelism others in another kind. It's only the fool who lives life without any reference to God's will and to God's leading through his word and by his Spirit. Every day we ought to be living with our eyes and ears fixed upon God himself. Yes we will have some clear biblical principles by which we lead our lives and use our time but on top of that we want to know the Lord's will every step we take so that we will make the most of every opportunity because the days are indeed evil.

This will involve walking closely with the Lord by developing a strong devotional life that is dependent upon the work of the Holy Spirit to lead and guide us throughout the day in accordance with his word. There are some Christians who can be fools in this area.

They simply live life by circumstances and feelings allowing them to dictate to us so that we do what they want us to do. If we come home from work and don't feel like writing that letter to a missionary then we don't do it.

Or if we don't feel like going to church then we don't. I heard recently of one Christian couple that were not going to any church because they were waiting for the Lord to lead them. That is simply foolishness (folly in action) but God says we are to be wise and discern God's will through constant contact with Him and through obedience to his clear biblical principles.

(iii) The wise Christian is filled with the Holy Spirit (v 18-20) – Now this is really the secret of being wise. Being filled with the Holy Spirit will enable us to be wise to apply God's wisdom to life's circumstances. Paul contrasts the filling of the Spirit with the filling with alcoholic beverages. Now we must remember in Paul's day that people only drank water if it was fresh or wine, they did not have a large selection of drinks to choose from.

So Paul says don't allow yourself to become drunk with wine for that only leads to debauchery. The idea behind this Greek word is the idea of destroying oneself by our lifestyle. So Paul says if you want to be wise avoid destroying yourself by a lifestyle of drunkenness but instead be filled with the Holy Spirit. Drunkenness leads to lack of control whereas being filled with the Spirit leads to self-control which is one of the fruit of the Spirit.

Now the word be filled with the Spirit is a command and it is plural. Every Christian has a duty to be filled with the Holy Spirit. This is not something that applies to some Christians but not to

others, this is not something that marks out super Christians from ordinary Christians; this is not an optional extra but it is an obligation placed on every single Christian person, whether old or young. This command is also in the passive voice so it speaks of something, which we let happen to us. It is also a present tense command so we are to be filled and to continued to be filled with the Holy Spirit. This is not a one off experience it is not some sort of second blessing experience that only takes places once in our lives. No! Every morning we are to arise and seek the filling of the Holy Spirit for that day's walk with God.

Someone has translated this phrase like this. It helps to bring out all the tenses and voices. "All of you go on letting yourselves be filled with the Spirit." So a wise person is filled and continues to be filled with the Spirit but now Paul lists the results of being filled with the Spirit.

i) Speak to one another joyfully (v 19)— Spirit filled Christians enjoy Public worship and fellowship with one another. The Spirit never divides but always brings people closer together. When you get two Spirit filled Christians you always get real and meaningful fellowship and true worship of God. This "speaking to one another" is marked by joyfulness; there is a real joy with being in one another's presence and a real joy in worshipping and praising God.

God has given us a wonderful salvation in Christ and has brought us into the family of believers therefore our communication with one another and our public worship should be marked by a God centred and God given joyfulness. This joyfulness will be expressed in singing, which is why singing has always been at the heart of Christian praise. Paul mentions what seems to be three different types of praise. There is the Psalm referring to the Old Testament Psalms.

Then there is the hymn, which was probably a song of praise composed by Christians and used at the time, and then there are spiritual songs, which may just mean something like a spontaneous outpouring of praise under the leading of the Holy Spirit. The truth is that Christians have debated for years the meaning of these phrases but what is clear is that there is not much difference between these words they are all songs of praise to God.

So what Paul is saying is that as Christians gather to worship God we will sing to one another and to God and do it joyfully

ii) Make music in our hearts to God (v 19) – Not only do we express out joy with audible singing of praise to our God but we are to do so from our hearts. Our praise to God is not a case of singing audible hymns but our hearts need to go out to God in joyful worship as well. This will mean that our thoughts about God will be so great that we cannot help but sing praise to our great God in our hearts if not in audible voices. So true worship is not just singing a hymn or a modern song but it involves engaging our hearts in joyful worship. This will of course be natural to Spirit filled Christians, joyful worship and adoration of God through Jesus Christ God's Son is what every sincere Christian desires to do. Even if our audible voices are not tuneful its what is in our hearts that counts, it might not sound pleasant to others but if our heart is in it is extremely tuneful to our God

Amen