

Ephesians 5:15-20 “Watch Your Step” August 19, 2018
Pastor Don Sutton – St. Paul’s Lutheran Church – New Ulm, MN

Introduction

Some steps and stairways can be dangerous. Some are uneven, others in disrepair, and still others snowy and slippery. In these places one has to be very careful. A misstep here or there could end up in a broken hip, a fractured arm, brain damage or even death. So often in these places there are signs that say, “Watch your step.”

God says this to us in Ephesians 5:15-20.

¹⁵ Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise,¹⁶ making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil.¹⁷ Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord’s will is.¹⁸ Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit,¹⁹ speaking to one another with psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit. Sing and make music from your heart to the Lord,²⁰ always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The New International Version reads, **“Be careful, then, how you live...”** If one wanted to translate literally one could say, “Look carefully at how you go or walk about .” In a sense God is saying, **“Watch Your Step....”** 1)... **Knowing God’s Will and, 2) Being Filled with the Spirit.**

... Knowing God’s Will

“The days are evil.” This was Paul’s evaluation of his times. Likely it was easy for him to arrive at this conclusion as he considered the idol worship and materialism of his day, not to mention his society’s obsession with sexual perversion, drunkenness, and immorality.

“The days are evil...” can be said of today too. While our way of life may be more technically advanced, more sophisticated and more sanitary than 2000 years ago, the days are evil. Murder, robbery and rape occur daily. Families are hurting as a result of over-scheduled schedules, poor communication, a lack of spirituality and/or poor management of money. Sex outside of marriage is a national past-time. Drug abuse is creating a chemical warfare that erodes our society. Greed is still a major motivator for millions of Americans. Idolatry thrives. It’s still okay to kill unborn babies. Homosexuals have asked for society’s stamp of approval and society has given it. TV programming is becoming not only increasingly flashy, but also increasingly trashy. The devil is still in business; the days are still evil.

The result is that people, including some Christians, are confused as to what’s right and what’s not. More and more Christians are in intimate live-in relationships outside of marriage and feel there’s nothing wrong with it. Churches are ordaining homosexual clergy and marrying homosexual couples. Many Christians no longer seem to think it important to faithfully attend worship services or regularly receive Communion. Some Christian parents are more concerned about their kids’ sports teams or having an academic edge than about their kids’ relationship with Jesus. Sometimes it is difficult to tell Christians from non-Christians. For some people, what God says is sin, they say, “It’s in.”

Periodically when I walk through the hospital I see yellow signs that say in three languages, “Attention, Caution, Achtung, and Cuidado.” These are warning signs alerting people to watch out because the floors are wet and may be slippery. God says, **“Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil.”** God wants us to watch

out, on one hand, for those things that are sinful and harmful and avoid them. On the other hand, God wants us to watch out for the opportunities that we have to serve him and show love to others.

To watch out for sin and to make the most of our opportunities it is important that we know the will of God. This includes God's law that tells us to be pure and holy and directs us as to what to do and not to do. God's law directs say NO to lying, cheating, greed, idolatry, lust, having sex outside of marriage, homosexuality, overeating, drunkenness, withholding forgiveness, gossiping, cursing, disrespect, mismanagement of money, and more. God's law sets moral boundaries for us and reminds us that more than we realize we have trespassed those boundaries and deserve God's punishment.

God's law directs us to say YES to loving, forgiving, sharing, helping, respecting, and being patient, gentle, kind, and good. The YES may be to give some comfort to someone who is down, to give some encouragement to someone who is doing but doubting what's good or to someone slow to do what's right. It may be to say, "I love you or I forgive you" to someone who really needs to hear that from you. It may be to show concern to someone caught in sin or to speak of the love of God to someone caught in despair.

God's will goes beyond what he wants us to be and do for him. It also includes what he wants us to have from him. Paul wrote, "**God our Savior ... wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth.** ⁵ **For there is one God and one mediator between God and mankind, the man Christ Jesus,** ⁶ **who gave himself as a ransom for all people. (1 Tim 2:4,5).**" In love God the Father gave his Son and God's Son gave himself to serve to perfection under God's law and to suffer even separation from his Father and death on the cross to save you, me and all from the suffering and punishment we deserve in hell. Because of Jesus God our Father has forgiven us. "**God was reconciling the world unto himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them (2 Co5).**" God wants us to have his love, forgiveness, peace, power and eternal life. God's will is that all believe in his son and enjoy his salvation. "**For my Father's will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise them up at the last day.**" (John 6:40)." This is gospel.

To be careful in these evil times and make the most of every opportunity knowing God's will, we need to use God's word regularly – at home by ourselves and with our family, and in church in Bible study and worship. Every day the devil preaches to us through society and the media. His sermons are powerful. He says that sin is good and what's godly is not. He sends mixed messages that we don't need saving, or that if we do, we're on our own, or that since God is love, or that everyone is going to heaven no matter what they believe. Whether we realize it or not these messages lap away at the foundations of our soul the way the waves of the sea can erode beaches and wash away structures. If we aren't daily reinforcing the will of God in our hearts and souls, little by little the devil's preaching gains ground and may one day win a victory as we lose faith.

Don't let this happen. Use your opportunities to grow in God's Word through school, through worship, through Bible study, through use of God's word at home. You will know the will of God. You will be equipped to watch out and make the most of the times. And using God's word you will be

... Filled with the Spirit

... filled with the Spirit which God commands, not spirits, which God forbids – "**Do not get drunk on wine which leads to debauchery. Instead be filled with the Spirit.**"

God does not forbid drinking alcohol except in Numbers 6 where God says that if anyone takes the vow of the Nazarite they are not to drink alcoholic beverages or where people are violating the laws of the land (Rom 13:1ff). But God warns about alcohol when it has a power over us with the result that we may become addicted or drunk. God does say to us, "Do not get drunk on wine." In Romans 13 he forbids

drunkenness in general whether it is from wine, beer or liquor. Drunkenness is a poor witness to Jesus. It ruins health, damages relationships, results in abuse, decreases productivity, leads to immorality, endangers lives, and wastes money. Drunkenness, if not repented of, leads to separation from God. So God says don't get drunk.

Instead of being filled with spirits, God directs, **“Be filled with the Spirit”** – the Holy Spirit. Every Christian has the Holy Spirit because as Paul wrote, **“No one can say, ‘Jesus is Lord’ but by the Holy Spirit(1 Cor. 12:3).”**

In the New Testament, we read of people filled with the Holy Spirit – Peter on Pentecost, Stephen at his death, Barnabas, and other leaders of Jerusalem. These people became Spirit-filled as they prayed that God would bless them with abundant working of his Spirit and then devoted themselves to spending time in the word of God. The Spirit filled their souls and blessed them. As a result they were equipped to cope with trials, wise to watch for out both for sin and opportunities to serve, bold to proclaim Christ, knowledgeable in what to say, eager to do Christ's will, and able to love a lot. Having the Holy Spirit in abundance brings joy, peace, power, hope, direction and purpose. This Spirit brings a good kind of high that doesn't hinder but helps in being wise guys and walking in Jesus' way.

In the last two verses Paul talks about two activities that both fill a person with the Spirit and help us to assist others to be filled with the Spirit. He wrote, **“Speak to one another in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.”**

This is why it's important we get-together and sing in worship. It's reason for having choirs. It's a way we can comfort the sick, dying or aged friend or family member. As we sing we build each other up. That's why it's good to know hymns and spiritual songs. As we sing those psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, we praise God. While we always want to give God our best, even if we can't sing with our mouths we can all sing in our hearts to God thanking and praising him. When people sing to God in this way with faith in Jesus Christ, there are no monotones or missed notes. Through Christ God hears beautiful music. This is something God likes. **“Sing and make music in your hearts to the Lord...”**

Doing this however is more than a one-hour-a-week. God wants this inward singing to be an ongoing thanks giving to God. But in order to do such singing and thanking, we also need to be thinking – thinking about the many things the Lord has done and is doing for us – forgiveness, eternal life, peace with God, assurance for daily life, family, friends, home, health, education, work. As we think about these things the goodness of God hits home. God is praised and we are built up. The gospel blessings we think about and give thanks for, the Holy Spirit uses to further build us up and fill our souls. As a result we more and more we become wise and watchful as God wants us to be. Amen.