

"How Do You Live?"

Ephesians 5:15-20

16 August 2009

The Rev. Todd R. Goddard, pastor

Zion West Walworth United Methodist Church

Ephesians 5:15-20

Be careful then how you live, not as unwise people but as wise, making the most of the time, because the days are evil. So do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. Do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery; but be filled with the Spirit, as you sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs among yourselves, singing and making melody to the Lord in your hearts, giving thanks to God the Father at all times and for everything in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Prayer.

I am intrigued this morning
By the apostle Paul's call to believers in Ephesus
To "be careful then how you live."
It begs the question of any preacher worth their salt,
To ask his or her people, "how do you live?"
It begs the question of every self-reflective pastor
To ask myself, "how do I live?"
The Greek for live is *peripateo*,
Also meaning: walking all around,
Is an invitation for us to examine it's use throughout Ephesians,
To walk all around Ephesians,
To provide us with a useful reminder of some of Paul's overarching themes:
We once lived in sin, but are now called to live as righteous;
We once lived as Gentiles, we are now urged to live in a way that is worthy of our calling;
We once lived without Christ, we are now to reflect the love of Christ;
We once lived in darkness, we are now adopted as children of the light.

How do you live?

Is a helpful question every serious disciple of Christ should consider.

Do we live with wisdom,
Making the most of time?
Wisdom has been understood for thousands of years
As the application of knowledge to live a good life.
How does one take their knowledge, understanding, experience, discretion, and intuition
And apply them towards finding solutions to life's problems?
I know many book-smart people who have no real world experience,

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Who have an under developed understanding of how to solve the problems they face,
Who are constantly running up against the brick wall of frustration.
Where is the wisdom?
I may know Christ,
Who he was, what he did, why he died,
- I may know all these things from my academic work as a seminary student or biblical scholar -
But until my intellect is supported by a life of
Christian experience, reason, and tradition,
All my book knowledge of the scriptures will be for naught.
The intellect will starve
Without the rich fertilization of supporting wisdom.

John Wesley asks of his preachers: will you be on time? Will you not waste any time?
These are excellent questions related to Paul's admonition to live with wisdom, making the most of time.

There are so many ways to waste time.

A fine line exists between leisure, which can be a good use of time, and wasted time, which is what Paul is warning against.

How is one to know the difference?

Look to the Ten Commandments for guidance:

Work six days, but rest the seventh, in respect of the Lord who created the cosmos in six days and rested the seventh.

Look to others for directions:

A wise, retired mentor once told me,

"Of the three time periods during a day

- morning, afternoon, evening -

be sure to work two of the three."

If you are a child, play is work, for it adds to your development.

If you are a student, classes, study, and homework is your work, for it adds to your body of knowledge.

If you are an adult, employment is essential, for it is the application of your God given talents, that the kingdom of God may be increased.

If you are a senior, work may be volunteering, mentoring, or tutoring, that the wisdom you have may be passed on to the next generation.

It is OK to stop and surf the net, for a time,

But be disciplined, and surf no more than is necessary.

It is OK to play Airsoft in the woods, relax on the beach, or to play a video game, for a time,

But take control of your time, and return to work

- the task to which you are called, living as a disciple of Christ -
refreshed, restored, and renewed.

The practical edge of wisdom is how we live out our daily experience.
For the apostle Paul, wisdom has a particular Christian flavor.

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The Greeks knew wisdom as a purely philosophical endeavor,
Even personifying wisdom as the goddess Sophia.
But Paul is asking each of us in his writing audience to consider
How we live a Christian life in this "in-between" time,
The time between Christ's inauguration of the reign of God
And its completion on the last day.¹
While the faithful in Ephesus were not as consummated in debate about the imminent return of
Christ, as were their contemporaries in Thessalonica, Corinth, and elsewhere,
This does require the thoughtful Christian to develop a greater awareness:
One's location in time shapes Christian behavior
And is part of what it means to be wise.
For the child, filled with hopes and dreams of the future,
It is much easier to lead a life filled with freedom and adventure.
For the adult, saddled with the responsibility of supporting a family and providing guidance to
their child's development,
One should be filled with a tempered sense of importance:
Setting a Christian example, getting their kids to Sunday school and worship, establishing
routines of Christian life that will serve their children well in their lifetime of Christian maturity.
For the senior, more acutely aware of mortality,
Wisdom does take on a different sense of preparation,
Getting oneself right and ready
For the spiritual journey home to God.

How do you live?
The apostle Paul asks us this morning.
The temptation is to act foolish,
Undisciplined,
Without concern for consequences of one's actions
Or their effects upon the larger community of those we know and love.
Anyone can play the fool;
It takes no talent, effort, or preparation.
That's why there are so many candidates for being the court jester in this world.
Conversely, confidence comes from Christian wisdom,
Knowing that you are adopted as Christ's own child,
Knowing that you are loved and cared for every moment of every day,
Knowing that you are called to a higher calling, to be his disciple, living according to his will.
This confidence gives one the strength and will to discipline the inner fool,
To tame the desire to make one self the center of attention,
To avoid the temptation to live the self-absorbed, attention seeking, self-centered life.
The fool abuses alcohol or drugs,

¹ For this insight, I am indebted to Susan Hylen, Mellon Assistant Professor of New Testament, Vanderbilt University, Nashville, TN.

Leading to behavior described as debauchery;
Doing things that later causes deeply regretful feelings and the loss of self-esteem.
But this is not the only foolish behavior.
Committing adultery,
Lying,
Cheating,
Stealing,
You know the list.
Paul recites it well any number of times.
The fool engages in these unrighteous actions,
Tearing apart relationships, families, and communities,
Creating a deeper divide between the self and God.
But the wise, Paul rightly observes,
Does the will of the Lord.
The wise becomes the living personification of the Holy Spirit that animates from within.
As the wise opens the self to being filled with the Spirit,
The resulting behavior is praise:
Singing and making melody to the Lord,
Giving thanks to God, our Father,
Acting always in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, his son.
This is the Christian aspiration of wisdom,
The perfection towards which we strive.
It is not an all or nothing type of proposition.
Christian wisdom,
Christian *sophoi*, as it is in the Greek,
Is one that begins with the prevenient gift from God,
The seed that gets the whole machine moving,
That leads to a lifetime of Christian growth, development, and maturity.

How do you live?
Is the question we take away from worship this day.
It is an invitation to self-examination.
Are we wasting time away?
Are we playing the fool?
Or are we growing in Christian wisdom,
Seeking the will of the Lord,
Allowing ourselves to be filled with the Holy Spirit?
My beloved,
How do you live?
Amen.

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