

WATCH HOW YOU WALK

by Ray C. Stedman

We have been looking together at the great passage in Ephesians where the Apostle Paul is dealing with the preparation of the Christian for living in a sick society. We have seen that the problems the 1st century Christians faced were the same problems we face today, and the world in which they lived was essentially the world in which we live. We now come to the summary passage on this subject, found in Ephesians 5:15-20:

Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise men but as wise, making the most of the time, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery; but be filled with the Spirit, addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with all your heart, always and in everything giving thanks in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God the Father. {Eph 5:15-20 RSV}

This passage is in the nature of a review. The apostle is describing how to walk as simply a figure, a symbol, for how to live.

This passage began in Chapter 4, Verse 17, with the apostle's admonition to live no longer as the Gentiles do. He then describes how that is and goes on to exhort, rather, that Christians live as they have been taught to live in Christ -- that is to put off the old nature and put on the new. That simple process of putting off and putting on is what the apostle means by walking. Everyone knows that a walk consists of two steps repeated over and over again. You never take more than two steps in walking, one leg forward then the other leg. But do that again and again and you are walking. This is an apt simile for how to live the Christian life. We are to be continually putting off the old and putting on the new. That is what Christian living is all about.

Now, as we have already seen, he has gone into some detail in this. He has shown us something of the practical application of this process in various normal and expected situations of life. He has come to grips with some of the great issues of his day and ours, especially in the matter of sexual morality, which we have been looking at in the last few messages. Now he summarizes this for us in an attempt to put the emphasis upon the supreme things.

He begins with one statement that says it all, "Look carefully then how you walk." That is the supreme thing, not where you walk, but how you walk. Where you walk is a relatively easy problem, but how you are applying this principle in every moment of your life. That is what is important.

Last night I drove down from Mendocino County along the Redwood highway. I had no problem as to where to drive. The highway was well marked, I knew where I was going, and there was very little danger that I would get off the road. But how to drive, that was the constantly recurring problem. How to relate the principles of good driving to every changing situation along the road.

Watch a man walking a tightrope and he has no concern as to *where* he is expected walk; the rope is there. But *how*, that is the problem.

This is, then, the exhortation of the apostle here, "Look carefully how you walk." Then he goes on to give us the two characteristics that constitute walking rightly, accurately. We can gather them around two wonderful words that describe the Christian life. The first one is "understandingly," and the second is "overflowingly." Walk understandingly and then, overflowingly. As we develop this, you will see how these words describe what he is saying.

Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise men but as wise, making the most of the time, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the

will of the Lord is. {Eph 5:15-17 RSV}

First, walk understandingly.

Well, understanding what? Understanding the character of life. Paul comes to grips here with a problem that is personal and present with all of us. He is dealing with the matter of the times in which we live and he says, "Understand this, be wise; don't be foolish but act as a wise man." How? By making the most of the time, because the days are evil!

Now that is setting forth for us a principle that very few Christians seem to really grasp in practical living. What he is saying here, essentially, is that evil days create opportunities, and, therefore, understanding this, we must make the most of those opportunities which are created by evil days. The word for "making the most" is one word that is used in the New Testament for redeeming. It means to buy up. It is a word from the market place. You go down to your supermarket and look for bargains because you know they will not last long; they are passing, changing. Therefore, make the most of them and buy them up. This is exactly the word he employs here. Buy up the opportunities which are created constantly by the evil days.

What a far cry that is from the outlook many Christians have toward evil days! Most of us look at evil days as obstacles, as defeating circumstances, as pressures which tend to make us unable to be Christians. Recently, at a Christian conference, I spoke on certain relationships within the Christian home. After a message on, *What Every Wife Should Know*, a woman came up to me and said, "What would you do if, as a wife, you wanted to do the right thing, and you know what the right thing is, and you want to be a good wife, but you just can't do it because your husband won't let you? He makes it so difficult for you that you just can't do it?" I looked her in the eye and said to her, "You are deceiving yourself. The Word of God says you can be what God wants you to be, regardless of what anyone else is around you. In fact, it is our responsibility to be what we ought to be regardless of what anyone else is. We cannot blame what others do to us as an excuse for not being what we ought to be."

This is exactly what the apostle is saying here. We are not to be unwise, but wise, making the most of the opportunity because the situation around us, which seemingly is against us, is really making the opportunity possible. If you were not under pressure, how could you manifest the overcoming grace of God? If you did not go through trials, how could you ever show that he is sufficient for every trial? If we are not always needing to make demands upon him for help, how would we know that we can never touch bottom in the resources that are in Christ? It is the evil days that create these opportunities. Now, I know, if you had been in Ephesus at the time that Paul wrote this letter, and you said to the people of that prosperous city, with its great commercial activity and material abundance, "Aren't these evil days?" they would have looked at you and laughed. They would have said, "Why, we never had it so good. Evil days? These are the best days we have ever had." But the apostle is talking reality. He is saying that whenever material prosperity abounds, and creature comforts are on every hand, and you live in an affluent society, then there is tremendous pressure being exerted to cancel out the true values of life. The spirit is often hungry and empty and hollow.

This is the explanation for the fact that, in our own affluent society, we find so many who are experiencing an inward emptiness. These are evil days, not only because of the widespread fears and tension and violence, but also because of the materialism that creates such hollowness and emptiness within. But what is the result? It is the evil days that make people want to know the truth about God. It is the evil days that give us opportunity to demonstrate Christian life. Therefore, buy up the opportunities. Understand, as you look at life, that this is the way life is.

These difficulties do not come in order to set you back, they come in order to advance you. Therefore, look at them that way. Do not regard them as some strange, unusual circumstance that you alone are called to go through while everyone else has it easy and has a delightful time. Do not feel that you only are being called to be a martyr and must go through difficult and unusual circumstances and live with horrible people. No, no. Peter says, "Do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial of faith which has come upon you as though some unusual thing happened to you," {cf, 1 Pet 4:12}. Oh, no, these are designed to an end. We could never demonstrate what it is to be a Christian if it were not for evil days. Therefore understand this. Do not be foolish; do not strike back and complain and grouse and gripe because of problems. Understand this. That is

the first important thing about living life -- walking understandingly.

The second thing is, "do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is." That is, be aware of what God wants out of every situation. Now, almost always, when one uses the phrase, "the will of the Lord," most people, including most Christians, understand it in terms of guidance. They think you are referring to what you ought to do next, where you ought to live, what job you ought to have, whom you ought to marry, or how you can decide a problem that is before you. But guidance is not the major problem, or the major factor, in understanding the will of the Lord. God is not half so much interested in what you do as what you are. Therefore, the will of the Lord does not concern itself primarily about what you do. That is a rather simple matter. Once you get the real issue straightened out, what you *do* is relatively unimportant and can be handled very easily. What you *are* -- that is the big thing, what you are in every situation. This is what the apostle is talking about.

As you are thinking of your life (not just your life in church, but your life at home, in business, at work, in relationship to the friends you run with or the crowd you go with, your social life), understand what it is God wants out of that situation.

Back in Verse 10, the apostle says, "Try to learn what is pleasing to the Lord." That is the same thing as understanding what is the will of the Lord. Learn what is pleasing to the Lord. Well, what pleases the Lord? Only one thing: Faith! "Without faith it is impossible to please him," {Heb 11:6}. Faith is believing God, believing what he says about life, believing what he says about people, about yourself, about the need of people, analyzing and understanding what is going on around you in terms of what the Scripture has revealed, that is faith; acting on that basis. This is what the apostle is referring to: Not trying to get guidance as to where you go next or what you should do or what your job should be, but remembering that in every situation you are to act on the basis of what the Word of God says about it; reflect the viewpoint of God, his analysis of what the need of human life is, his evaluation of what the great values of life are. Acting on faith means to reject the success image that the world is constantly holding before us, the image of the man who is able to manipulate people, move them at his command and thus gain riches for himself and everything else he wants. That is the world's evaluation. But God's is quite different. He says you can have all these things and still be a pathetically poverty-stricken individual. If you are going to measure life by its true values, you will understand that which really counts is being a gracious, love-filled person in the midst of demanding circumstances, manifesting the grace of God toward others, the love of Christ, the compassion and sweetness and self control of the Spirit-filled life. These are the important values. This is what Paul means here.

Here is a very apt quotation by Keith Miller, taken from his book, *The Taste of New Wine*. It helps tremendously to illustrate what I am seeking to say:

It has never ceased to amaze me that we Christians have developed a kind of selective vision which allows us to be deeply and sincerely involved in worship and church activities and yet almost totally pagan in the day in, day out guts of our business lives ... and never realize it.

What is that saying? It is saying that we live by faith on Sundays and in religious matters, but we do not apply it to business or to our relationships with our neighbors or to our children and our homes. We have a strange dichotomy of vision that divides life and says in business we act one way and on a quite different principle than we do in church or in relationship to Christians. He goes on,

Sigmund Freud has said, very perceptively, I think, in his *A General Introduction to Psychoanalysis*, that these unchanged areas in our lives are like nature parks which the city fathers in large metropolitan areas fence off and allow to grow wild just as they always have, so the citizens will have a little piece of the old life to wander through to remember how it used to be.

In the case of far too many of us these are not little parks -- they are Golden Gate Parks that occupy the biggest part of the city and in which we still live most of the time!

Paul is saying do not be foolish, that is the way the Gentiles live, that is the way the non-Christian world lives, blindly swallowing the evaluations and moral codes that are propagandized around and accepted by everyone,

making no testing of them as to whether they are genuine or not. This word "foolish" is the same word Paul uses in the letter to the Galatians, "O foolish Galatians!" {Gal 3:1a RSV}. (Or as one version has put it, "You stupid Galatians!") "Having begun in the Spirit, are you now continuing in the flesh?" {Gal 3:3b RSV}. Did you understand that you were to begin your Christian life by believing God in faith, but now are you going to attempt to live it by accepting the principles of the world around you and its way of thinking, and thus be successful? Oh, you foolish Galatians! It will never work. Do not be foolish, but understand that in every situation, day or night, twenty-four hours a day, God expects faith from you. "Without faith it is impossible to please him," {Heb 11:6a RSV}

If you are trying to live your life as a Christian by going along with the general character of those around you, you are not living by faith. Even though you may be trying your hardest to work things out with the best of intentions on your part, and you feel that you are giving it all you have got in trying to analyze every situation and plan ahead and work to the best advantage, you are not pleasing to God. Your life is missing the mark, totally. The life that pleases him is the life that believes what he says, and acts on it. Look beyond the immediate to the eternal things; look beyond the visible to the invisible and walk in the light of that which is real. That is what our apostle means. Be careful how you walk. Walk intelligently, understandingly. As a Christian you have immense advantages over every other person who is not a Christian, because you know the truth, the truth as it is in Jesus, the basic, fundamental reality of life. Walk in that way.

Now the second word he gives us has to do with our resources. I have expressed it with this one word, "overflowingly." Live life, not only understandingly, but overflowingly. He says, "Do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery; but be filled with the Spirit." It is interesting that he puts these two things in contrast, one to the other. Don't get drunk with wine, he says. This recognizes there are things in life that tend to drive you to drink. There are pressures in life, there are demands made upon you so severe that you will feel the need of some stimulation, something that will undergird you a bit, give you some confidence and add help and strength. But don't let it be wine or any other artificial stimulant because, he says, the trouble with that is, it so easily leads to lack of control.

The word here translated "debauchery" in our RSV is the Greek word *asotia*, which means "without any limits, with reckless abandonment." It refers to escapism and the tendency to throw all restraints overboard and live without control.

But in contrast to that he says, satisfy that need for something to stimulate and strengthen you by being filled with the Spirit, for that is God's provision for this need in human life. There is no need to feel ashamed over the sense of need. We were not made to be self-sufficient, independent creatures. We were made to have a sense of need. Because you feel like you need something to help you, to strengthen you, to make you feel adequate to face life, do not be troubled by that. You do need something. But do not swallow any of these senseless lies that are all around us today that you can be independent and self-reliant and have everything in yourself and you do not need anything else. You do need something. Ah, but let it be the right thing. "Be filled with the Spirit."

Now here he touches the great secret of real Christianity, the possibility of being filled with the Spirit. I am sure all of you know that when you became a Christian, when you believed in Jesus Christ and received him as your Lord, the Holy Spirit came to live in you. You have the Spirit, but the interesting paradox is that, though all Christians have the Holy Spirit, we constantly need to be filled with the Holy Spirit. The filling of the Holy Spirit is the momentary taking from him of the resources you need for the situation in which you are. It has nothing to do with an experience, or a feeling or a crisis; it is a quiet drinking again and again of an inner supply of strength.

Our Lord Jesus put it beautifully when he sat at the well in Samaria, dusty and tired after a long day's walk. A woman came up to draw water from the well and he said to her, "Give me to drink," {John 4:7}. She looked at his garment and the issue of race immediately came to the fore. "You're a Jew and I'm a Samaritan. How is it that you, being a Jew, ask drink of me, a woman of Samaria?" {John 4:9 RSV}. This was contrary to the accepted mores of the day. Jesus said, "If you knew who it is that is asking you for a drink, you would have asked of him and he would have given you a well of living water," {cf, John 4:10}. She said, "You don't have any water, what are you talking about? The well is deep and you have nothing to draw with," {cf, John

4:11}. Having piqued her curiosity, he now says what is perhaps the most revealing thing ever said in the ear of mankind, spoken to a lonely woman by a well in Samaria, "If you drink of this water you will thirst again" {cf, John 4:13}, that is, you will have to come back to the well over and over again. You know how that is, every day down to the well and back home. You must come back again and again. "But the water I shall give you shall be in you a well of living water springing up unto the experience of eternal life," {cf, John 4:14}. The key words there are the two little words "in you." The well, he says, is no longer going to be outside of you, so that you have to go somewhere else, but it will be in you.

This is a truth, again, that many Christians seem to miss. They think that Christianity means coming to church, getting a blessing and then going away to try to live in the light and warmth of the blessing until it leaks away and then they must come back and get filled up again. But that is not Christianity. The well is to be in you, and you are to take of it any moment, all the time. It is the Holy Spirit that is the well. When Jesus said of the man who drinks of him, "Out of his innermost being shall flow rivers of living water" {cf, John 7:38}, John says, "This spake he of the Spirit which they that believe in him shall receive," {cf, John 7:39a KJV}. That is the strengthening that comes from within, and there is plenty there for any situation. There is adequate resource for any demand made upon you.

I am not talking now about religious demands. I am talking about tomorrow morning when you will be at work, and the phone rings, and your boss is on the line, and he is asking you to do something difficult. Just then your pencil breaks, or you discover that someone has mislaid all of your papers, and you cannot find anything, and you already have a headache, and things are just falling apart. That is the moment you make demands upon the Holy Spirit, the well of living water that is within you.

Our problem is that we are still living on the basis of that woman at the well who thinks she must go to a meeting to get something from God. We feel that unless we are reading our Bibles we cannot draw upon his resources. Or that if we are not with Christian friends in Christian surroundings, we cannot live the Christian life.

No, no, Paul says life is to be lived constantly with the recognition that these demands and pressures come all the time. Do not try to meet them with artificial means, with alcohol or tranquilizers or any of the more modern substitutes, but meet them by being filled with the Spirit, making demand upon the well that is in you which goes with you everywhere you go. Drink from that.

The marks that you are doing that will be made evident by what follows here. He gives three things that will result:

... addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with all your heart, always and for everything giving thanks in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God the Father. {Eph 5:19-20 RSV}

Notice the three verbs there. Addressing yourselves, or literally, speaking, then singing, and giving of thanks. Those are the marks of one who is drawing every moment upon the well of the Spirit within.

"Speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs." We get help on that if we look at the parallel passage in Colossians, "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, as you teach and admonish one another in all wisdom," {Col 3:16 RSV}. In other words, one mark of the Spirit-filled life is that you will be talking about what you have read in the Scriptures, what the Lord has taught you from his Word. You will talk with one another about these things that God has shown you in the Word and how they relate to life. That is the first mark.

Now if you do not have a love for the Bible, do not try to work it up, do not try to force yourself. Drink from the well of the Spirit, because loving the Bible is a manifestation of something that is happening within you. We reverse the whole process and put the cart before the horse by trying to work up a love for Bible study. Learn first how to draw from his strength within. Believe that he is there and count on him to be working through you.

The second thing is singing, making melody to the Lord with all your heart. Now I am sure that means actual singing, but I am so grateful that the apostle put it, "with all your heart," singing from the heart.

I have a great deal of trouble singing with the voice. I used to sing in a choir until one day when I missed and someone thought the organ had been fixed!

But I can sing from the heart, beautifully. You know what this means, that inward bubbling that means that no matter how bad things are outside, inside they are wonderful. You know God is in control and he is working things out and you cannot be troubled even though they are all wrong on the outside.

Third, giving thanks. Notice how he puts it, "always and for everything." Now if we take that literally we shall discover that it eliminates every attitude of complaining or murmuring.

I remember when I was in the Navy we all took our meals in the mess hall. (If you could see the food trays after the serving men had plopped the food on them you would know why they called it a mess hall.) I recall sitting with a Christian friend across the table from a great, burly quartermaster who was a complete pagan, with one of the foulest mouths I have ever heard; that is not uncommon in the Navy. As we always did, we bowed our heads and gave thanks for the food. It happened that my friend disliked the food and began to complain about it. Suddenly this fellow sitting across the table spoke up and said, "Look, didn't you just give thanks for that? Then eat it and shut up!" This was a word in season.

You cannot give thanks and complain at the same time. The word to us is, "in everything give thanks."

Now why does it say that? Surely it does not mean in everything? But it does mean in everything, because of what he has just said here. The will of the Lord is that we be put in difficult situations and have unpleasant circumstances in order that we might have opportunity to manifest the life of Jesus Christ. Therefore, do not complain about it. Give thanks, because it will do something to you that nothing else could do. This is what Paul tells us in Second Corinthians, "this light affliction which is but for a moment is working for us a far exceeding eternal weight of glory," {cf, 2 Cor 4:17}. Also, "no chastening for the present seems joyous, but grievous; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those that are exercised thereby," {cf, Heb 12:11}. God has purpose in all these things. Therefore, give thanks in all things.

The Lord Jesus did exactly that. In Matthew 11 we see Jesus facing the cross and facing the failure of his ministry. I do not know if you ever thought of it that way, but his earthly ministry was, as far as human standards were concerned, a total failure by the time he arrived at the cross. In Chapter 11 of Matthew he is faced with the disbelief and the questioning of John the Baptist. There he remarks that wherever he preached he was rejected and the children of Israel refused to give credence to him. He upbraids the cities where most of his mighty works had been done and tells them they are in danger of judgment because of this. Then, in Verse 25, the Scripture says,

At that time Jesus declared, "I thank thee, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that thou hast hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to babes; yea, Father, for such was thy gracious will." {Matt 11:25-26 RSV}

That is, in spite of all the failure and the opposition, the Lord could say, "I thank you, Father, that no one can see what you are doing. You have hidden this from the wise and understanding, but I can give thanks, for this is your gracious will."

That is understanding what the will of the Lord is. It is to give thanks in all circumstances.

Prayer

Our Father, we pray that you will teach us to draw upon the well of water within, to know that every demand made upon us is a demand made upon you, and that you are prepared, ready, to live your life through us in every situation and thus manifest your grace. We thank you in Christ's name. Amen.

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