

## **FUELED BY THE SPIRIT**

### **Ephesians 5:15-20**

August 16, 2009

A husband and wife were sitting peacefully at the breakfast table when she commented, "Honey, I bet you don't remember what today is." Angrily he got up from the table and stormed out of the house. His last words were, "I do too know what today is." An hour later the doorbell rang. There were dozen red roses for the wife. Another hour went by and he doorbell rang again. This time it was a two-pound box of chocolates. A third hour went by, and again the doorbell rang and there was a new dress for the wife. She was impressed and prepared a candlelight dinner for her generous husband. He came home and with a big grin on his face declared, "I bet you didn't think I'd remember what today is." She said, "You're right. I didn't think you'd remember that today is Groundhog Day."

Forgetting can be costly. In God's design for life, he sends His Holy Spirit to keep us from forgetting that Jesus is the beginning and the end – the source and center and goal of our faith and life. The Spirit is sent to remind us of all that Jesus said and did. The Spirit calls us to faith in Jesus and then gives us the power to live a life that is pleasing to God. In our text today Paul gives some more words of advice on living a Christ-centered life. I want to focus today on three things, three commands from Paul – Be Wise, Be Sober, Be Thankful. When the Spirit lives in us, when we are fueled by the Spirit, we can make a difference in the lives of our family, friends, church, and neighbors.

I. First Paul says, "Be wise." Listen again to verse 15 – "Be very careful than how you live, not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil." Wisdom. It is a virtue that seems to have gone out of our vocabulary. Wisdom, to acquire it, takes too much time, too many failures, too many hard knocks, too much listening, too much being still and watching. You can't download wisdom on your computer, so most people prefer to move on and do without. But Paul warns that if we are careless we will miss opportunities. Every day we are bombarded with choices and wisdom is required to make the most of them.

In the early 1900's automaker Henry Ford asked electrical genius Charlie Steinmetz to build the generators for his factory. One day the generators ground to a halt, and repairmen couldn't find the problem. So Ford called Steinmetz, who tinkered with the machines for a few hours and then threw the switch. The generators came to life again. Later that week Ford got a bill for \$10,000 from Steinmetz. Stunned, the rather tightfisted carmaker inquired why the bill was so high. Steinmetz's replied: For tinkering with the generators, \$10. For knowing where to tinker, \$9,990. Ford paid the bill.

Steinmetz had what the repairmen lacked -- an understanding of how the machines were put together. They had knowledge; he had wisdom. They knew how to repair generators; he knew how to build them.

As it is in life, so it is with God. In your Christian life you need to be wise and make the most of every opportunity. Be careful how you live, Paul says. Understand God's will, know right from wrong. Remember that God has given us Ten Commandments, not Ten Suggestions, to guide our daily living. Understand that God has given these commandments for our good.

The days are evil, says Paul. Sometimes we think that things couldn't possibly be any worse than they are today. Look at the headlines, watch the news. Last week in Milwaukee a 13-year-old girl cut the throat of her grandmother's husband and killed him. But as Scripture says – there is nothing new under the sun. Sin and evil were around in Paul's day. Sometimes we long for the good old days. But sin and evil were present in your parent's day, in your grandparent's day.

By the power of God's Spirit you and I have been changed from the inside you out. We are transformed from people lost in the darkness of sin to children of the light. As forgiven and redeemed children of God, we live a life that is controlled by the Spirit. That means we put off those old sinful ways and live a new way. Throughout chapter four and chapter five of Ephesians, Paul gives a list of do's and don'ts for Christian living.

I'll give you the Reader's Digest version this morning:

Put off falsehood.

Do not let the sun go down in your anger.

He who is stealing must steal no longer.

Don't let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths

Get rid of bitterness, rage, anger, brawling, slander, and malice.

There should be no hint of sexual immorality, impurity, or greed.

No obscenity or foolish talk

All this behavior is sinful and it displeases God and we should get rid of all that and not live that way. In Ephesians 5:5 Paul says, "No immoral, impure, or greedy person has any inheritance in the kingdom of God."

When we read those words and think about our own lives, we have to admit that we are sinners, we fail so often. And how good it is to know, to remember, that Jesus has taken all of our sins to the cross and paid for them. God is gracious and merciful and he forgives our sins for Jesus' sake. And He give us the power to live a new way, to live as the new creation He wants us to be. That power comes from the Spirit. Only by the power of the Spirit can we come to faith in Jesus. Only by the power of the Spirit can we live a life that is pleasing to God. The Spirit helps to turn our focus from sin and self to God and others.

As people of God we are fueled by the Spirit, empowered by the Spirit, to live for God. That Spirit comes to us in Word and Sacrament. The Holy Spirit comes to us first in baptism and our sins are washed

away and we are transformed into children of God. As we worship together and hear the Word of God, the Spirit is working among us. We are filled with the Spirit as we sing together. Paul mentions in verse 19 today – psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs. The Spirit is working within you as you read your Bible at home, and do your daily devotions, when you come together with others for Bible study. The Spirit is at work as you hear the Word of God in chapel services and classrooms of Northwest Lutheran and Milwaukee Lutheran. We need those reminders daily of what Christ has done for us and how God wants us to live and treat others. The Spirit is working also in Holy Communion – the body and blood of Christ – give and shed for the forgiveness of sins. The more we gather around Word and Sacrament, the more the Spirit has opportunity to strengthen our faith and guide our living.

Fueled by the Spirit, we can live as children of the light. I share the don'ts moment ago. Here are the do's Paul lists in Ephesians 4 and 5:

Be imitators of God.

Speak truthfully to your neighbor.

Share with those who are in need.

Do something useful with your own hands.

Build others up.

Be kind, compassionate, and forgiving.

Paul's words in verse 17 are certainly worth remembering: "Do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord's will is." Wisdom discerns between what is right and what is wrong. Wisdom knows there is good and there is evil. The wise are careful. They make the most of every opportunity. And they seek the will of God. That is wisdom.

II. Paul's second command or word of advice is this – Be Sober. He says in verse 18, "Do not get drunk on wine which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit." Why do you think Paul follows his admonition to "Be Wise" with his admonition to "Be Sober?" I believe there are two reasons.

First, drunkenness has been causing problems for a long time. 3000 years ago the book of Proverbs associated drunkenness with poverty, violence, and injustice, the three basic ills of any society. On poverty it warns: be wise, do not join those who drink too much wine, for drunkards and gluttons become poor and drowsiness clothes them in rags (Ch 23). On violence Proverbs has the drunkard saying, "They hit me but I am not hurt! They beat me, but I don't feel it! When will I wake up so I can have another drink?" (Ch 23). And on injustice the book warns that alcohol is not for kings to drink lest they forget what the law decrees (Ch. 31). Wisdom and sobriety go hand in hand. The sober mind is an alert mind.

And here's the second reason Paul talks about wisdom and sobriety together.

What does a man do when he over indulges and becomes drunk? He submits himself to the power of the beverage. It actually takes over his personality and he does things he wouldn't normally do. Let me ask you a second question. What does a man do when the Spirit has control of his life? He submits himself to the power of God! Paul does a crafty thing here. These two are profound powers: Drink and Spirit. Both have the power to control you. Both will change who you are: One for the better the other for the worse.

The question to ask today is – Which Spirit is controlling my life?" Both promise life but only one will fill you with it. Now let's make it very clear – to drink alcohol is not a sin (if you're 21 or over). The bible is not against drinking alcohol. A little alcohol is not a harmful thing; it is people who do harm with it. To

drink too much alcohol and get drunk is a sin. And I realize that some people become addicted to alcohol and that's a serious problem and it's not as easy as saying – just don't drink it any more. Thankfully there are treatments programs that can help. You fill your life with it; you will drown in its power. But if you fill your life with the Spirit you will have life and have it in abundance.

So then we must be careful how we live. First, be wise. Second, be sober.

III. Paul's third word of advice is - be thankful. Paul says, "Be careful how you live. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord, always give thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ."

Let's see. We are to be wise seeking the most of every opportunity. We are to be sober otherwise we will miss many opportunities. And wherever we are, whether making or missing those opportunities, we are to be thankful. As Paul says elsewhere, whatever circumstances we find ourselves in, therein we should be content. It's like the story of the man who goes to his rabbi and complains, "Life is unbearable. There are nine of us living in one room. What can I do?"

The rabbi answers, "Take your goat into the room with you." The man is incredulous, but the rabbi insists. "Do as I say and come back in a week." A week later the man comes back looking more distraught than before. "We cannot stand it," he tells the rabbi. "The goat is filthy."

The rabbi then tells him, "Go home and let the goat out. And come back in a week." A radiant man returns to the rabbi a week later, exclaiming, "Life is beautiful. We enjoy every minute of it now that there's no goat -- only the nine of us."

It's all a matter of perspective isn't it? We can be grateful or we can be bitter. We can seek wisdom or we can live as fools. We can be sober learning what the Lord's will is or we can fill ourselves with wine.

Fueled by the Spirit we can be wise, be sober and be thankful. Fueled by the spirit we can live a life that is pleasing to God and make the most of opportunities to share Word and love others.