

## Ephesians 5:15-20

Children of God living not for yourselves but for him:

Mostly I've only seen bits and pieces of a TV show called *Running Wild with Bear Grylls*. He's a survivalist/outdoorsman who seems to know all the tricks about how to keep oneself alive in the wilderness. In order to do that, you need survival training. You need to learn to recognize, e.g., which berries and mushrooms in the forest to pick and eat -- and which ones can kill you. An error in judgment can be fatal!

It's even worse, fellow believers, to take silly chances with our souls. We need spiritual survival training living in this vast wilderness called the world. It's full of things that can harm or destroy us. If our bodies die, we go into a grave. If we die spiritually, we go to hell. So the stakes are high.

Through the apostle Paul, God tells us: ***Be Careful to Live Wisely***. (1) ***Learn to recognize what is foolish***, and (2) ***Thank the Lord by doing what is wise***.

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The Lord says through Paul, ***“Be very careful how you live -- not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity because the days are evil.”*** It doesn't take a detective to figure out that ***“the days are evil.”*** The days were evil in 60 AD and they are now. Just like Paul and the Ephesians, we struggle to stay afloat in a vast ocean of immorality, dishonesty, greed, hatred, and violence. I'm a bit amazed at how often couples in premarital counseling mention that one of their greatest fears is bringing children into this frightening world. As we often sing: ***“We walk in danger all the way.”***

In order to live wisely, we need to recognize what is wise and foolish. Paul says, ***“Be very careful”*** about this. Our walk through life is like walking through a minefield...in the dark. We need to take our flashlights out of our pockets and shine them in front of us each step we take. What is that light? It is God's Word. His Word ***“is a lamp to our feet and a light for our path.”***

Just think of all the voices around us telling us what path to follow. TV commercials tell we are cool or not cool, valued or not valued, based on what kind of food we eat, car we drive, or brand of clothes we wear. Political commercials try to convince who to vote for by putting devil horns on one politician and angel wings on another. Some professors in universities seek to instill their own world view into impressionable students rather than present every side of the issue to promote independent thinking. Yes, it's a minefield, and the one laying the traps is Satan himself. That's why Paul says, ***“Be very careful!”*** Peter says something similar: ***“Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour”*** (1 Peter 5:8). It is a frightening picture!

Thankfully, God gives us an experienced guide (like Bear Grylls) to navigate us through the minefield of life: his Word. How well do you and I know it? Surveys tell us that people's general knowledge of the Bible is declining. Even as Lutherans, a teaching church, all too often we are satisfied with confirmation class and/or Lutheran school/high school -- but then take a vacation from reading and learning the Scriptures. Our catechisms and Bibles get dusty. And so what happens? As Paul says in Ephesians, it is easy for us to be ***“tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming”*** (Eph 4:14). It's not easy to navigate a minefield when the wind is blowing you all over the place.

So Paul tells his readers, ***“Do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord's will is.”*** What is the Lord's will? (1) That all people believe in Jesus and be saved (1 Tm 2:4). That's his primary will for all! Faith in Christ is the root of the whole tree. It guarantees us an eternity of life with the Lord in heaven, and it motivates us to follow his secondary will: (2) that we live our lives according to his Commandments, walking with Jesus step by step.

In the first part of this letter to the Ephesians, Paul tells us that we are saved by grace through faith in Christ alone -- God's primary will. And now in this part of his letter, he encourages people saved by Jesus to seek to live according to God's secondary will: align our words and actions with God's commands. In other words, since God made us Christians, we will want to reflect Christ in our lives.

He gives us one vivid example. ***“Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit.”*** Unfortunately, we live in a culture that thinks the abuse of alcohol is fun and funny. Oh, drinking and driving is at least taboo (and rightly so)! But overdrinking in general is all too often glamorized. God in his Word, however, pulls the smirking mask off of alcohol abuse and exposes its grotesque face. When people get drunk, people will say they are “wasted.” How true. It wastes people's time, talents, and treasures. It brings to waste countless precious relationships and destroys marriages and families. It wastes our youth on highway deaths and through liver disease (recent article). People can waste away into depression and despair. But we say, *“Oh, that will never happen to me.”* Until it does. Then it's not so funny anymore. Not at all.

Paul has a better idea: ***“Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery*** (wild, unrestrained living). ***Instead, be filled with the Spirit.”*** The Spirit loves you. The Spirit prepares you for eternal life. The Spirit strengthens you and your relationships and marriages. The Spirit gives us wisdom so we do fewer foolish things. So, how are we filled with the Spirit?: through Word and Sacrament. These are the means he uses to get into our heads and hearts so we can ***“say “no” to ungodliness”*** (Titus 2:12) and “yes” to what is wise and pleases the Lord.

Paul adds that the Spirit also leads us to ***“Speak to one another with 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.”***

Have you ever noticed the Spirit working that way in the lives of Christians? Do you have a Christian wife who hums or sings the melody of hymns as she goes about her work? What a joy! Do you have a Christian husband who sings Christian songs to children at bedtime or helps them work on their songs for the student Christmas service? What a blessing!

And notice that Paul says we can do all this ***“Giving thanks to God the Father for everything.”*** It's not easy to thank God for **everything**. That one item is often at the top of my personal prayer list. I certainly thank God for days when things go right and run smoothly. But I frequently find myself asking the Lord to help me be better at thanking him for days when things don't run so smoothly. The Spirit promises to help me with this. I need his wisdom and strength and his power to help me mature in this aspect of my faith -- to see that troubles are part of my survival training.

How blessed we are that Jesus' cup of suffering was filled to the brim with our sins and guilt and that he was willing to drink it completely. Having emptied us of our sin, he now fills us up with the Holy Spirit as we spend time with his Word and receive his supper. It stabilizes our lives on earth. It gives us confidence for our future in heaven. And...it moves us to share this good news of our Lord Jesus Christ with the needy world around us. That's the wisest thing we can do!

Amen.