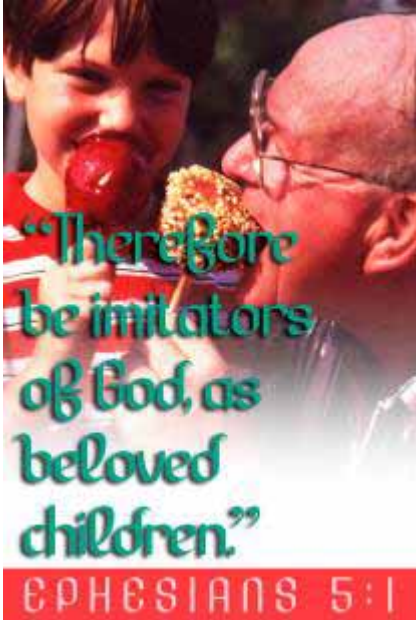


LOOK BEFORE YOU LEAP

Dr. Fred Fourie ~ Sunday, July 22, 2007

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.

A famous, but absent-minded professor was on board a train, he was unable to find his ticket. The conductor said, "**Take it easy. You'll find it.**" When the conductor returned, the professor still could not find the ticket. The conductor, recognizing the famous scientist, said, "**I'm sure you bought a ticket. Forget about it.**" "**You're very kind,**" the professor said, "**but I must find it, otherwise I won't know where to get off.**"

John Metaxas, a former Prime Minister of Greece, had a pilot's license, and loved to fly. Just before the Second World War, he insisted on trying out a new type of airplane. He did quite well until a general on board noticed that they were about to make a landing at an airport. "**Excuse me, Sir, but it would be better to land on water - this is a hydroplane!**" Embarrassed, he quickly turned the plane around and made perfect landing on the water. Then he opened the door and promptly stepped out into the sea. To the delight of his enemies, he forgot, as the proverb says, "**to look before he leaped**" and made a fool of himself by falling into the water. We all know stories about the dumb and funny things people can do when **they do not look before they leap**. There is a saying, "Look before you leap for as you sow, ye are like to reap."

The Apostle Paul warned that there is also a real danger for those who do not look before they leap. Often serious consequences follow! When former ABC Anchor, Peter Jennings was first diagnosed with lung cancer, he appearing on World News Tonight and told viewers that he had been a smoker until about 20 years ago, but had slipped and smoked after the 9/11 terror attacks in 2001.

There was a day, long ago, that Jennings, like millions of others, made a lighthearted decision to start smoking. He leaped without looking ~ and now all his talent, friends, and impressive

career seem to fall victim to one, apparently of lesser importance decision that he made early in his life. So many people can tell us – as we can relate out of our own histories - where we made some dumb choices!

In his letter to the Ephesians Paul put it this way: **“Be careful then how you live, not as unwise people but as wise, making the most of the time, because the days are evil.”** Paul was writing to the Church-folk in Ephesus, not about serious crimes in their midst, but about those little daily decisions that we all have to make from time to time. He was telling them, “Be careful how you live...!” In very direct language, he writes, **“So do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. Do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery;”** In other words, use your head! Do not do anything stupid! Do not foul up your life!

So amazing hearing the sad stories people tell. Some of them are victims of tragic and unavoidable circumstances. Others admit to a different kind of foolishness that is avoidable. It consists of those little, stupid things -- little things that so often bring people down. Those things that need changing but somehow most people never get around to. Those "little" things can keep people like you and me from being all God intends us to be. This is the age of addiction and dependence. People seem to want to escape the realities of life. Countless billions of dollars a year go down the drain because of the immense cost of drug, and alcohol abuse.

There is the story about the very diligent teacher who faithfully warned the kids against alcohol abuse. As a fourth-grader turned in his drawing lesson, the teacher said, **“Johnny, it looks as if that cowboy is going into a bar!”** **“He is, Teacher, but it's OK, he is not going to drink anything. He's only going to shoot a guy.”**

There is a slowly changing attitude in our society toward the different kinds of addiction. Even Budweiser is now telling us to **“know when to say when.”** Some do not get smart until it is too late. **“Do not be foolish,”** Paul says. Be careful how you walk. Use your head. Look before you leap!

Paul then reminds God’s people that they have a safe, positive and uplifting alternative! **“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.”**

That is a description of the early church at its best. Gathering in each other's homes, rejoicing in their faith, sharing all things — the early church experienced God’s Spirit in power and in fellowship. That is when God is most real in our lives—when we open our hearts to God’s Spirit and to each other. Well, in many ways that is what you and I can appreciate in our Church-life. Our Church folks meet from time to time for exactly the same purposes. We call them friendship circles, or potlucks, or whatever – **and I believe with all my heart that all our members and friends should be part of some, if not all these activities.** In our Christian Enrichment Sessions we are experiencing how people warm up to one another and soon begin

taking part in the discussions and questions, discovering how much we all have in common, as we seek to follow Jesus. When the church really is the church, people are visiting in one another's homes. People are breaking bread together. People are **worshipping, learning, and singing** with one accord. Life cannot **beat people down** when they live like that. **Despair** cannot take up residence in the open heart. The Bible says, **"Be careful how you walk. Look before you leap. Use your head. Also, have an open heart -open to God and open to one another."**

Paul has another secret to share with the Ephesians! He says, "Giving thanks to God at all times and for everything in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. That is a great secret of life -- **to develop an attitude of gratitude**. We are surrounded by many good and honest people who are truly dedicated and willing to reach out, support and help when we are in need.

Sometimes, we need to ask for and receive help in times of need! For instance, the weather bureau had predicted heavy rains for many days. Now the flooding was beginning. Rescue teams went around telling people to evacuate their homes. One man, noted for his faith in God, refused to go with the rescue team that came to take him to higher ground. **"The Lord will take care of me,"** he said with conviction. Soon the water began covering his front yard. This time would-be rescuers came in a motorboat. **"The Lord will take care of me,"** he announced. Later the house filled with water and the man stood stranded on his roof. Again a rescue team came, this time in a helicopter. **"The Lord will rescue me,"** he said, refusing their help. Nevertheless, the water kept rising and he was getting worried. **"Lord"** he prayed with great earnestness, **"When are you going to rescue me?"** The Lord replied, **"What do you mean when am I going to rescue you? I have already tried three times!"**

Yes, God still works through others – to rescue us!

Look before you leap! Use your head. Open your heart. Give thanks and praise. Life is worth living. Together we shall overcome. Let us be God's people – in times like these.

AMEN.