

Notes for the Ekklēsia Meeting

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Think About How You Live!

by Dan Trygg

“Therefore watch carefully how you walk, not as unwise people but as wise,¹⁶ redeeming-out the time, because the days are evil. ¹⁷ On account of this, do not come to be unthinking, rather put-together what the will of the Lord is. ¹⁸ And do not get drunk with wine, for that is senseless-wastefulness. Rather, be filled/fill-yourselves with the Spirit...” Ephesians 5:15-18

I think these three verses address the main problem facing the church in America today: *mindlessness*.

Most people who claim to be Christians are not living any differently than the non-Christians around them, day to day. Even if they go to church or Bible studies, they do not seem to be making any significant *application* of their Christian beliefs to the choices they make in the remainder of their lives. Those who are Christians in name only do not live distinctly different lives than most non-Christians. But, even many who would say they are true, born-from-above Christians live lives that only nominally reflect Jesus. **Where are the serious followers of Jesus? Why is it that so few seem to succeed at living lives that are making a difference? Why are so many excited when they first come to Christ, but their spiritual lives seem to go nowhere? They run out of gas, and get mired down in ordinariness?** What I read in the NT is that **God has given us His Holy Spirit to live inside of us and to guide us through life, to enable us to live in ways that will be noticeably different.** When I read Paul's listing of the “fruit of the Spirit”, and compare that list with many of the believers I know, I would expect to see a high correlation of those qualities in their behavior and character. Sadly, too often this is not the case. **In so many people, I see more of the “works of the flesh” than the “fruit of the Spirit”** (Gal. 5:19-22). In I Corinthians 3, Paul said he would like to talk to them like spiritual adults, but they were still spiritual babies, people living by the flesh instead of the Spirit. In verses 3 and 4, he cites some examples of their “fleshiness” and says, “Are you not walking like mere humans?” The implication is that **we should be living at a much higher, superior level, spiritually and morally. Why isn't this happening?**

This is exactly the context of the verses at the top of today's study. Paul had exhorted the Ephesian Christians to “no longer live as the unbelievers live, in the futility of their minds” (4:17). He went on to describe how *they don't have God in their personal experience*. They try to live life by their own strategies and schemes. They stuff their pain, and pursue pleasure to cover, distract and numb themselves from it. Paul says **they “walk in the vanity or fruitlessness of their minds”**. They are **“darkened in their understanding”**. They are **“strangers to the spiritual-life of God because of the ignorance which is in them.”** The word for “ignorance” can simply be *a lack of knowledge of what God has made available, or the lack of acquaintance with it in their experience*, or it can also refer to *a choice to ignore or disregard the life of God*. **This is the problem of today's church! Most of us are living exactly the same way other people do.** We are living the best we know how to live, ...but *our* minds are as futile and profitless as those who don't know Christ. **You can't live at a higher, superior spiritual and moral level than others, if you live using the same ineffective resources and strategies for living as they do.**

Back in Ephesians 4, after Paul exhorted them to “no longer live as the unbelievers live”, and briefly described their futile ways and erroneous thinking, he boldly stated, “But *you did not learn Christ in this manner*”! What *did* they learn? **What was it that Paul and the first century church taught new believers? They were taught to “put off the former manner of living and the old person”, and “to be renewed with a fresh, young mind”, and then to “put on the new person”,** the one created according to God in righteousness and holiness of the truth (vss. 22-24). **Paul clearly told them to abandon their old ways of living,** their former trust in self-reliance and self-ability. **They were to learn how to live differently.** This was a total reworking of their minds. It was like they were starting over with a fresh, new outlook at life, and learning to navigate through life in an entirely different way. **Finally, they were to “put on” a totally new identity,** a new inner self that has been born-from-above, created to be like God, **characterized by righteousness and honest devotion** toward Him. In other words, **they were to live from an entirely different source.** Instead of attempting to live a better life from their *former* self and *previous* understanding (“trying harder” to “be good”), Paul said that there was an *entirely new* and *different* way of understanding and navigating through life. **There is a radically different inner source of motivation and empowerment that can enable us to live dramatically different lives.** This new self is *already* in the image of God. It is *like* Him. It will want what He wants, and will act as He would act. It is characterized by “righteousness and holiness of the truth”. It is its nature to be fair, honest and good in its interaction with others. **The real key to its inner strength is this “holiness”.** The word here is not the same as is typically used for “holy” (*hagios*) or “holiness” (*hagiosunē*). Usually, holiness refers to someone “dedicated” or “set-apart” for God. The word for “holiness” here is from a different root word (*hosiotēs*). **It**

refers to an “inner piety” expressed in a faithful drawing near to God in reverence and dependence, a person who is faithfully *attending to the means and exercises that will promote intimacy with Him* (cf. Lk. 1:75; Acts 2:27; 13:34,35; I Tim. 2:8; Tit. 1:8; Heb. 7:26). **The orientation of the new self is to love and seek God for life and direction.**

This fundamental teaching is followed by several inferences, reflected in English by words such as “therefore, wherefore, or consequently”. There are three inferential sections in Paul’s argument which lead up to our passage for today’s study. Each section begins with a clear inferential statement, followed by several verses of application. **The first is, “Therefore, putting aside fakeness, speak truth each one with the one near him” (4:25).** Note that this refers back to what the activity of Body life is supposed to be (vs. 15). When we come together, we are to be speaking the truth in love to one another, to build each other up. Walking in the old, fleshly way would be to hide behind a mask of phoniness and pretention. Paul uses the same word, “putting off/aside” as in vs. 22. We are to put off the old man and its practices by putting aside “fakeness”, and endeavoring to speak honestly. We are to talk openly about anger issues, and resolve them. We are to talk openly about issues of responsibility, encouraging people to work to not only provide for *their* needs, but also to *share with others in need*. Our speech is to be wholesome and edifying, and we are to be quick to resolve relational hurts, forgiving each other. **The second inference is, “Therefore be imitators of God” (5:1).** *He* is to be our focus. We can’t imitate Him, if we don’t know Him or what He does. God’s heart and standards are to become our own. We are to walk in agapē-love and single-hearted devotion. Sexual immorality, impurity and greed are not even to be *named* as being among us, ...nor should they be reflected in our speech. These are practices and values of the world system. They are strategies that *distract* from God as our Source. They are *opposed* to inner-piety toward God, or righteous behavior toward others. They are markers of the old way of living, not Christ. God’s wrath is *against* those who pursue such things. **The third inference is, “Therefore do not become joint-partakers with those who disobey God” (5:7).** That is *not* who you are anymore. No longer walk in darkness, but walk as children of light. The *fruit* of the light will be goodness, righteousness and truth. Note that these are the *results* or *by-products* of *living life in the new way*, trying to learn what is pleasing to the Lord. *Fruit takes time to grow*. Satan wants to cut us off at the root, *before* we experience the positive fruits of walking with God. He does this by luring us back into old behavior. If we keep living out those old scripts, we will keep getting the old results. That is darkness and death, not light and vitality. We will continue to feel empty and defeated. We will *not* be being filled with the life of God, if we grieve, quench and resist His Spirit.

That brings us to today’s passage. It is a fourth inference that follows from the “truth that is in Jesus”, and the danger of falling back into living like those who do not know Christ. Paul writes, **“Therefore watch carefully how you walk...”** In other words, *the spiritually empowered life does not happen by itself*. It requires *cultivation* and *attentiveness*. The word translated as “carefully” here means “accurately, diligently, with exactness, deviating in no respect from the standard.” This is a *strong* word. There are serious implications and consequences for “how”, or “in what way”, we live our lives. Paul breaks this down further. **“...not as unwise people but as wise...”** Note the negated form, followed by the positive form. We can be one or the other. The Greek word for wisdom is not just *knowing facts*, it is *having perspective* and *knowing what to do*. It is *skill for living*. Those who are foolish are the ones who are simple, unaware, and naïve. They get caught unawares by life, and are easy prey for those with evil designs. **“...redeeming the time, because the days are evil...”** The word for “redeem” is literally to “buy out”. It means we are to free up time. We live in evil times, times which will steal our time or divert us away from God and His will. We must do what we can to stop the useless draining away of our time with inane and unimportant things, and purpose to carve out time for what is important. **“...on account of this, do not come to be unthinking, but understand what the will of the Lord is...”** Because of the relentless attack on our lives with distractions, diversions and escapism, we can lose sight of the larger picture of what we are here for. We can kind of “check out” and become dull toward spiritual things. Paul warns us *not* to “become un-thinking”. We need to *use our minds* and *thought process* in walking out our spirituality, and to discover God’s will. We need to keep our brain engaged. God is at work in our lives all the time. He will show us little indicators of what He is doing, or how he is leading us. Discerning His will is often a matter of connecting the dots. This will require not only attentiveness, but also a process of reasoning. The word for “understand” here is “to send together”. We mentally “put together” the clues, puzzle-pieces and indicators to figure out what God wants us to do in given situations. **“...and do not get drunk with wine, for that is senseless-wastefulness...”** God doesn’t have a problem with wine, He has a problem with the impairment and reckless-wastefulness of drinking to excess, i.e., too much and too often. Again, the days are evil. We have an enemy who is trying to steal away our spiritual usefulness, our time, our money, our health and our lives. Don’t play into his hands by indulging in activities that are wasteful and destructive. **“...rather, be being filled with the Spirit...”** Instead of investing yourself in wasteful living, apply yourself to know God, and be empowered by His Spirit. **“...the mind set on the flesh is death, but the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace”** (Rom. 8:6).