

"Overflow" (PT)

July 29, 2018

Scripture: Ephesians 5: 15-20

¹⁵ Be careful then how you live, not as unwise people but as wise, ¹⁶ making the most of the time, because the days are evil. ¹⁷ So do not be foolish but understand what the will of the Lord is. ¹⁸ Do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery; but be filled with the Spirit, ¹⁹ as you sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs among yourselves, singing and making melody to the Lord in your hearts, ²⁰ giving thanks to God the Father at all times and for everything in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.



To begin today, I would like to share a story I found as I was preparing for today's message. It is a story a ham radio operator heard one Saturday morning. He used to begin each Saturday by getting a cup of coffee and the newspaper. He would make his way out to the "shack" here he would drink his coffee, read the paper, and listen to the conversations on the ham radio. It used to be how he loved to spend his free time on Saturday mornings.

I turned the dial up into the phone portion of the band on my ham radio in order to listen to a Saturday morning swap net. Along the way, I came across an older sounding chap, with a tremendous signal and a golden voice. He sounded like he should be in the broadcasting business. He was telling whoever he was talking with something about "a thousand marbles".

I was intrigued and stopped to listen to what he had to say. "Well, Tom, it sure sounds like you're busy with your job. I'm sure they pay you well but it's a shame you have to be away from home and your family so much. Hard to believe a young fellow should have to work sixty or seventy hours a week to make ends meet. Too bad you missed your daughter's dance recital."

He continued, "Let me tell you something Tom, something that has helped me keep a good perspective on my own priorities."

And that's when he began to explain his theory of a "thousand marbles."

"You see, I sat down one day and did a little arithmetic. The average person lives about seventy-five years. I know, some live more and some live less, but on average, folks live about seventy-five years. Now then, I multiplied 75 times 52 and I came up with 3900 which is the number of Saturdays that the average person has in their entire lifetime. Now stick with me Tom, I'm getting to the important part."

"It took me until I was fifty-five years old to think about all this in any detail", he went on, "and by that time I had lived through over twenty-eight hundred Saturdays. I got to thinking that if I lived to be seventy-five, I only had about a thousand of them left to enjoy. So, I went to a toy store and bought every single marble they had. I ended up having to visit three toy stores to round-up 1000 marbles. I took them home and put them inside of a large, clear plastic container right here in the shack next to my gear. Every Saturday since then, I have taken one marble out and thrown it away."

"I found that by watching the marbles diminish, I focused more on the really important things in life. There is nothing like watching your time here on this earth run out to help get your priorities straight."

"Now let me tell you one last thing before I sign-off with you and take my lovely wife out for breakfast. This morning, I took the very last marble out of the container. I figure if I make it until next Saturday, then I have been given a little extra time. And the one thing we can all use is a little more time."

"It was nice to meet you Tom, I hope you spend more time with your family, and I hope to meet you again here on the band. 73 Old Man, this is K9NZQ, clear and going QRT, good morning!"

You could have heard a pin drop on the band when this fellow signed off. I guess he gave us all a lot to think about. I had planned to work on the antenna that morning, and then I was going to meet up with a few hams to work on the next club newsletter. Instead, I went upstairs and woke my wife up with a kiss. "C'mon honey, I'm taking you and the kids to breakfast."

"What brought this on?" she asked with a smile. "Oh, nothing special, it's just been a long time since we spent a Saturday together with the kids. Hey, can we stop at a toy store while we're out? I need to buy some marbles."

In our passage today, Paul tells the people, *"Be careful then how you live, not as unwise people but as wise, making the most of the time"*. As Christians living about 2,000 years later, how we hear this admonition is different than how the

Ephesians would have heard it. For the Ephesians, as it was with all in the early church, they thought that the end was literally near. They believed that Jesus was going to return any day. His exhortation encourages them to be prepared for Jesus to return. This same advice plays well in our lives. It plays well because there are at least two things we know for sure. The first is this: we do not know when Jesus will return. The second is this: none of us know how many marbles we have left in our jars. With those thoughts in mind, let us pray...

In one sense, the story I opened with and our passage today are about our priorities in life. If we were to take a moment and write down our priorities, what do you think would be the top three or four?

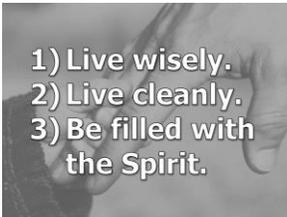
Since we are in church, hopefully God or faith would top the list. Then maybe family followed by friends. Fourth would probably be work. Yet if some person or organization spied on each of us for a week, would this be the order that the spy would say we live by? Would our life reveal that God or faith is the most



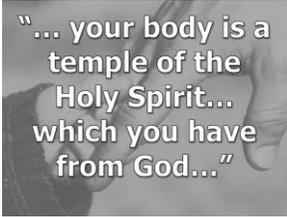
- 1) God/faith.
- 2) Family.
- 3) Friends.
- 4) Work.

important thing in our lives? Would work be down there at #4? Since Paul is writing to a church, we can assume that he is taking some things for granted. Because Paul lives with God as his #1 priority, he is assuming that those in the church do to. Or at least Paul is implying that they should. In much the same way, we would all acknowledge that this should be the list of our priorities, right?

In our passage today, Paul encourages the Ephesians and us to do three things. The three are to live wisely, to live cleanly, and to be filled with the Spirit. In the story that our ham radio operator happened to drop into the middle of, we can assume that young Tom was not living wisely. Their conversation began with the older man commenting on how hard it is to believe that Tom had to work 60 to 70 hours a week just to make ends meet, concluding by saying, *"Too bad you missed your daughter's dance recital"*. You can bet that hearing the older man say this made Tom rethink his priorities. We have all been there. We all fall or have fallen into society's lie that we have to work more to get more, to rise higher, to be happier. Yes, we could work 40 hours a week and live in a more modest house. Yes, we could choose to drive the car that we own for another few years. But...

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- 1) Live wisely.
 - 2) Live cleanly.
 - 3) Be filled with the Spirit.

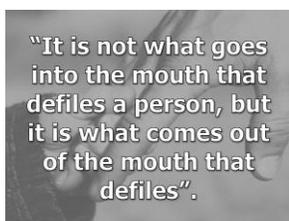
The second encouragement that Paul gives is to "live cleanly". Paul says to not *"get drunk on wine"* and that is certainly part of living cleanly. But the idea of living cleanly is more than just avoiding alcohol in excess. When I consider what it means to live cleanly, the passage from 1st Corinthians 6, verses 19 and 20 comes to mind. These verses read, *"Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you were bought with a price; therefore, glorify God in your body"*.



"... your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit... which you have from God..."

This passage always brings to mind these two questions: How should we treat our bodies since they are the temple of the Holy Spirit? How should we respect this gift that God has given us to use?

To me, these verses mean that we should treat our bodies well - not overindulging in food or drink, in social media or television, or in anything else that could be harmful to our bodies. And I think it goes one step further too. Our mind is part of our body and so we need to be careful and aware of what we are putting into our minds. We cannot watch certain shows or movies or listen to certain music and not expect it to affect us. What we fill our minds with is what eventually fills out hearts and what comes out of our mouths. In Matthew 15:11 Jesus said, *"It is not what goes into the mouth that defiles a person, but it*

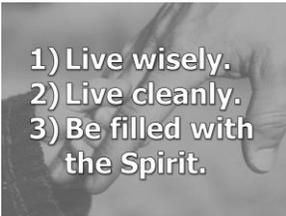


is what comes out of the mouth that defiles". When we

choose to associate with people who curse or who lie or who gossip, guess what ends up coming out of our mouths, thus defiling us. It can happen so easily. For many summers in my past life I worked construction. The "guys" on the job site did not have the best language. Inevitably, I would be at home after a week or so on the job and this word would slip out of my mouth. I would almost recoil at the sound of it. But there it was. I learned that I had to be acutely aware of how others were affecting me and my language.

When Paul is writing to the Ephesians about living wisely and living cleanly, we must also remember the context. At this time in the history of the church, he is writing to a vast minority within the general population. The Christians in Ephesus are a very small group living within a much larger secular and pagan society. The large majority of people in Ephesus worship many gods and seriously pursue the pleasures of the flesh on a regular basis. Paul is encouraging the church, this very small minority, to live a very different way of

life than the world around them. By contrast, in our part of the world today, it is still very acceptable to be a Christian. No one looked at you funny on your way to church this morning. No one gasped when you shared a story about how cute the VBS children were last Sunday. But I would posit that year by year the ways that society views Christianity is changing ever so slowly in our nation. We see it already happening in the more metropolitan, more liberal parts of our nation. Bakers are being sued for not wanting to use their artistic talents to glorify a wedding that is against their religious beliefs. This is just one case among many. Closer to home, our own denomination is wrestling with issues surrounding the LGBTQ community and our relationship with those who identify in these ways. The special general conference that will meet in early 2019 will set the course for our denomination as this group of delegates from all over the world meets to decide our denomination's stance on this topic. So, more than ever, Paul is also writing to us. He is encouraging us to continue to live by our faith in this increasingly post-Christian era in our world. Paul is encouraging us to live cleanly and to live wisely amidst an increasingly secular society.

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- 1) Live wisely.
 - 2) Live cleanly.
 - 3) Be filled with the Spirit.

And, lastly, Paul encourages us to "be filled with the Spirit".

To me, of the three encouragements, this one is the hardest to live out. The choices to live wisely and to live cleanly are

choices somewhat in my control. I can choose to stay at work longer and to miss dinner with my family. I can choose to have that bowl of ice cream. On the other hand, I can choose not to engage in gossip. I can choose not to go to that place or web site that can lead to sin. It is a choice to listen to the voice of the Holy Spirit and to heed its warnings as I strive to live wisely and cleanly.

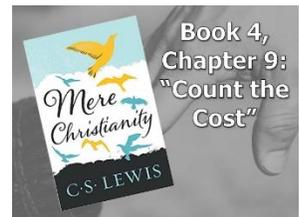
But Paul is not just talking about listening to the voice because it helps us to live wisely and cleanly. To me, that part is relatively easy. From experience, I know that life is better when I walk faithfully. I know this is true. I am old enough to know the pain and regret of sin and its consequences, so I avoid sinning whenever I can. But this idea of being "filled with the Holy Spirit" is scary.

To illustrate why, let us ask this question: what does it look like to be filled with the Holy Spirit? It looks a bit like John the Baptist out there in the wilderness, proclaiming the coming of the kingdom of God to one and all, to anyone who would come within earshot. It looks a bit like Stephen, the one who proclaimed the gospel before the Jewish council in spite of their threats of death, the one who asked God to forgive those stoning him to death. It looks a bit like King David, dancing half-naked in the streets, with total abandon, as the ark of God returned to the tent of meeting in the city of God. And it looks a bit like Jesus, the one who could call down a legion of angels but instead chose to go *"like a sheep to the slaughter, like a lamb, silent before the shearer"* as He went to the cross for you and me.

Hopefully there are moments when we will allow the Holy Spirit to really be in control. And it will feel like it did for Peter, when he stepped out of that boat and began to walk on water. O my God. There will be moments when the Holy Spirit leads us somewhere or to someone and what happens next is amazing. We encounter God. We know that we have seen Jesus in the other's face. We know that we were the voice of God to another. It is like walking on water. O

my God. And this is why it is scary. I am not in control. You are not in control. The Holy Spirit is in control. Standing out there on that water is scary. Yet it is still my hope and prayer every day that God uses each of us in this way.

As we extend this idea to the end result of living wisely, living cleanly, and being filled with the Holy Spirit, we can begin to see where God intends to take us. On the way home from school in Chicago, Kristin and I listened to the book Mere Christianity by C.S. Lewis. The book comes from radio talks that Lewis gave over a three-year period in the wake of World War II. The "book" itself is actually four books that group the various topics of his talks into four subcategories that make up the books. In chapter nine of book four, Lewis speaks of what this process of living wisely, living cleanly, and being filled with the Holy Spirit means to us as Christians. The chapter is called "Counting the Cost". Lewis speaks of coming to Christ being similar to what it was like going to the dentist when he was a boy. He would wait until the toothache was at its most unbearable because of what he had learned about the dentist. His mom would give him something for the pain and inevitably would bring him to the dentist the next day. After a couple of trips to the dentist, Lewis learned that the dentist would not just work on the tooth with a toothache but would *"give you the full treatment"*.



Lewis compares this to when we come to Christ and allow the Spirit to be, for example, at work in our life rooting out a sin. It does not end there with that one sin. Concerning this idea Lewis writes, *"That is why He warned people to*

'count the cost' before becoming Christians. 'Make no mistake,' He says, 'if you let me, I will make you perfect. The moment you put yourself in My hands, that is what you are in for. Nothing less, or other, than that'. Lewis eventually goes in to describe this "what you are in for" to be like a house remodeling project. You might have been thinking a little paint here, perhaps new carpet there. But that is not God's intent. Here is how Lewis describes what really happens:

"Imagine yourself as a living house. God comes in to rebuild that house. At first, perhaps, you can understand what He is doing. He is getting the drains right and stopping the leaks in the roof and so on: you knew that those jobs needed doing and so you are not surprised. But presently he starts knocking the house about in a way that hurts abominably and does not seem to make sense. What on earth is He up to? The explanation is that He is building quite a different house from the one you thought of— throwing out a new wing here, putting on an extra floor there, running up towers, making courtyards. You thought you were going to be made into a decent little cottage: but He is building a palace. He intends to come and live in it Himself".

In a nutshell, this is the end result of following Paul's encouragement to live wisely, to live cleanly, and to be filled with the Holy Spirit: Jesus will build us up into a palace to live in. When that moment comes, when Jesus comes and dwells forever in us, then we are beginning to near what God intends us to be. It is my hope and prayer for each of us, because it is precisely in those moments – those times when we live wisely, live cleanly, and allow the Holy Spirit to fill us

- that Jesus begins to overflow in us. It is in these holy moments that others truly see and experience Christ in and through us. They are powerful and blessed moments. They are blessings both to us and to those in our presence. May we each live wisely, live cleanly, and may we allow the Spirit of God overflow in each of our lives this week. May it be so for you and for me. Amen and amen.



GPS – Grow, Pray, Serve

- 1) Paul encourages us to “live cleanly”. What are of your life needs attention or redirection to better live cleanly?
- 2) How are you allocating your “marbles” – those things that you can choose to give priority to? Pray for God’s direction with your marbles.
- 3) Our life should be one of *“giving thanks to God the Father at all times and for everything”*. How do we serve God by living this way?