

Urgency and Gratitude

I'd like to continue today with a similar theme from last Sunday. My subject is gratitude, thanksgiving. But I would like to combine it with the idea of urgency and spiritual warfare. I know that may sound strange, but here's my thinking on this.

One way to describe the Christian life is that there are a number of paradoxes in it. In other words some ideas and concepts don't seem to fit or go together at first reading. For example in 2 Corinthians 6:10 the apostle Paul describes his life "as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing,, and yet possessing all things."

These are paradoxes of the Christian life. How can you be always rejoicing if you are sorrowful? This must mean that there is a kind of sorrowful joy. And indeed there is. This is one of the deep paradoxes of the lives of those who rejoice in God and yet feel the pain of living in a hurting, broken, sinful world. Another paradox is from 1 Corinthians 7, where the apostle Paul wrote,

But this I say, brethren, the time *is* short, so that from now on even those who have wives should be as though they had none, ³⁰ those who weep as though they did not weep, those who rejoice as though they did not rejoice, those who buy as though they did not possess, ³¹ and those who use this world as not misusing *it*. For the form of this world is passing away.
(1 Corinthians 7:29-31)

In other words, love your wife just as Christ loved the church¹, but don't forget there are other people to love too. Go on and weep, but don't forget your great hope. Rejoice, but don't forget those who weep. Go ahead and deal with the world, engage in business, but don't get wrapped up in it.

This all may seem a little confusing. But when we take the time to pray about and think about our lives from this perspective we will realize the godly value of the paradox.

So, what I would like to do now is ponder the paradox of Ephesians 5:15-21. Let's think about how these verses should affect how we feel, think and behave.

¹ Ephesians 5:25

See then that you walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise, ¹⁶redeeming the time, because the days are evil.

¹⁷Therefore do not be unwise, but understand what the will of the Lord is. ¹⁸And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit, (Ephesians 5:15-18)

On the one hand Scripture says watch carefully how you live. Look both ways before you cross the street spiritually. Don't live foolishly. Be wise in all that you do. Grab the opportunities that are before you to serve God and to love others. Don't get tripped up, the days are evil. Don't surrender your brain to booze, rather let the Spirit of God enlighten and empower your mind.

These are sharp commands like the words of an Army officer to his troops before they go into combat. Be sharp. Keep your eyes open. Keep your rifle ready. But then we come to verses 19 and 20.

¹⁹speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord, ²⁰giving thanks always for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, (Ephesians 5:19, 20)

So here we have the paradox. The world out there is full of fools so be wise. Ponder the pitfalls. Be spiritually sharp and ready for war. But then all of a sudden we are at a song fest and we are singing! Turn up the volume on the gospel songs. Let's sing with all our hearts. Let's rock on for the Lord! And be full of thanksgiving and gratitude to God for all things.

Verses 19 and 20 make it seem like the war is over. The urgency and vigilance of conflict with the world is over. It is Thanksgiving and Christmas and there is a fire in the fireplace. But it really is not. Here's the paradox. We are to be vigilant and walk circumspectly. We are to be wise and filled with the Spirit. The days are evil. We are at war. Yet at the same time as we are to be spiritually prepared for battle, we are to sing and make melody in our hearts and be thankful for all things.

Now, the apostle Paul was not naïve about the world. He tells us the days are evil. In this evil age God allows sinful pride and wickedness to manifest itself in the human heart. Even during the holidays people are lonely, hurt,

disappointed, confused used and abused. So walk circumspectly. Keep your eyes open. Look to meet needs and to love and serve.

Don't get fooled. Redeem the time. Use every occasion to do good. But along with all of this remember Galatians 1:4 told us that Christ has delivered us from this evil age. We will not share the fate of the wicked in this age. So let your heart sing and be thankful! Again, here is the paradox. We are not told that we cannot weep with those who weep. Only that we must never let our hearts be discouraged. WE have the ultimate victory.

I know, it is difficult to balance this paradox. These two states of mind don't fit together easily, but both are necessary. This is why God has them together in His Word. I must be vigilant. There is urgency for me to be spiritually sharp and prepared. The days are evil. I need to be wise and redeem every moment I can to fight against sin and to do good.

But I will become hard hearted and battle weary and perhaps judgmental of others if I do not also sing songs of love and joy and truth. I will burn out and want to give up if I do not develop an attitude of gratitude. War time vigilance and urgency and peace time joy and thanksgiving are side by side. The paradox is in God's Word for a good reason. Still there is one more point in verse 21. But let's read this altogether from verse 15.

See then that you walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise, ¹⁶redeeming the time, because the days are evil.

¹⁷Therefore do not be unwise, but understand what the will of the Lord is. ¹⁸And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit, ¹

⁹ speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord, ²⁰giving thanks always for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, ²¹submitting to one another in the fear of God.
(Ephesians 5:15-21)

Every Spirit filled believer (and there is no other kind) is to be humble and submissive to every other believer. Here again is another paradox. I am a child of God. I am an heir of God. I have Christ in me in the gift of the Spirit. I am empowered and gifted to serve. But, so are you! And therefore I must offer you respect and honor and love. And you must offer the same to me. I can learn

from you and be comforted by you and challenged by you. And you can receive the same from me.

Martin Luther put it this way, "A Christian is a perfectly free lord of all, and subject to none. A Christian is a perfectly dutiful servant of all, and subject to all." And our fear of God, our deep respect and reverence for God's mercy and grace to us is the basis for our submitting to one another.

So, as we enter this Christmas season stay sharp, keep your eyes open, be spiritually prepared. Don't be deceived, be wise, redeem the time, because the days are evil. And be full of joy and let your heart sing. Encourage one another and be full of thanksgiving to God for all things.