

## **Sagaciousness**

### **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.

# Sagaciousness

Ephesians 5:15-20

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## I.

The scripture before us, I will admit up front, is a bit of a hard pill to swallow, at least for me and, perhaps for you, by the time sermon concludes. Oh, at first listen it seems pretty straightforward and agreeable. Certainly it is better to be wise than unwise; a part of which is understanding, to whatever degree possible, that which is God's will for our lives. Few will argue there is great evil afoot in every age and each generation. Having a posture of thankfulness for all the blessings God have given us no doubt makes it much more pleasant for those around us, and a much more enjoyable life for ourselves. The older we get, the more we surely understand the importance of making the most of our time; as we know all too well that everything things come to an end; usually much sooner than we expect.

## II.

Further, I think, all of us have had enough experience to recognize and appreciate the problems associated with coping with the challenges of life not just through alcohol and drugs, but with many, other, more subtle methods of distraction and avoidance, like too much television, video games, web-surfing, materialism and busy-ness to name just a few. We get all of that. We could certainly spend our time together rehashing these things; but let's admit, at least in these matters, the cement is already dry. The real work of the passage, however, the rub if you will, is in the section which states, without further comment: "*be filled with the spirit.*" Huh?!?

## III.

In order to temper what I'm about to say, one thing you need to know about me is that I tend to be a person of extremes; I push hard to one side or the other. Now, if I tell you I believe we each certainly have a significant role to play in our *faith*, but our *grace* is wholly a gift from God, you'd agree with such a statement (*right?*). But my years of ministry have pushed me past this, to a position I call "absolute of grace." This leads me to conclude that even our *faith* is a gift from God, and not of our own making or design. So, when I start taking this to the extreme, which, remember, I'm prone to do, I see less and

less of *human endeavor* with respect to faith, and more and more *divine intervention*.

#### **IV.**

Now, I'm not necessarily in bad company in thinking in such a way, as this is straight from the Apostle Paul and, later, Martin Luther, but it begins to put me right in the same hot water in which John Calvin bathed: double predestination. That is, God's selects, or pre-ordains from birth, those who are gifted with grace sufficient enough to place in them a saving faith in Jesus Christ, while others, those less fortunate, are not given such a degree of grace, so they do not possess a saving faith in Jesus Christ and are, essentially, born into eventual damnation (I know, not a pretty picture). Now, the careful listener will note that the idea of absolute grace, which sounds good in theory and is, in many ways, a comfort, removes from the faith equation any notion of free will.

#### **V.**

If I may, I'd like to ask you to picture in your mind a see-saw, or as we used to call it, a teeter-totter: some form of fulcrum set on the ground with a stout board resting upon it. But, if you drive by any playground, anywhere in the world, you will *never* see the stout board hanging in perfect balance upon the fulcrum; it will always be weighted to one side or another, with one end of the board up in the air and the other end touching the ground. For the past 2,000 years, humans (and Presbyterians in particular) have striven to approach, envision, and make sense of God not in a *willy-nilly* fashion, but with *reason*. The resulting discipline is what is referred to as "Systematic Theology." That is, a comprehensive and organized way of understanding God. So, back to our teeter-totter.

#### **VI.**

Systematic Theology has always understood that on one end of the teeter-totter we have Human Free Will and, on the other end, God's Grace. So, as if bound by the same physical laws which govern the teeter-totter, the more you weight God's Grace in your theological equation, the less you weight Free Will, and vice-versa. For the past 2,000 years, theologians have been riding this teeter-totter up and down, up and down. In some eras, and for some churches, the importance of human decisions, actions & responsibility

have ruled the roost. For others, such a thought is too frightening, as this would deny, or at least detract from, the grace God chooses to offer, or in the extreme, not to offer. If humans had the power to deny God's Grace or if they had the power to accomplish the same result, i.e. a saving faith in Christ, without God's Grace, then God, and God's grace, would be rendered impotent and superfluous.

## **VII.**

Now, obviously, the real flaw in all of this is that finite minds are trying to comprehend the infinite and, ultimately, the incomprehensible; however, we must try. Doing so is what moves us down the road of our faith journey and, if you keep it in perspective and not let it go to extremes (*Mike*) it actually is a fair bit of fun. I mean, what else are we going to do, watch American Idol reruns? Remember today's scripture: "*make the most of the time, being careful how we live, not as unwise people, but wise.*" So, back to the teeter-totter we go. Now, one always need to be careful not to push any analogy too far, but since this kind of thinking is what got us into this mess let's see if it can get us out of it as well.

## **VIII.**

I began the sermon by telling you the real rub in the passage is the line: "*be filled with the spirit.*" Though we define, if not pride ourselves on being Trinitarians, in practice we often focus too much on God the Creator and Christ the Redeemer, while seldom giving proper due to the third leg of the stool, the Spirit which sustains us. In your mind's eye, I'd like you to again imagine our teeter-totter. I will bet dollars to donuts that in this image you see the stout board resting upon a fulcrum which is some form of a triangle, with the tip of the triangle pointing up. Now, what I want you to do, is flip that triangle upside down, with the point resting upon the ground: Wallah! Problem solved! You don't see it yet? Ok, let me explain.

## **IX.**

In the traditional way of envisioning our theological teeter-totter, Free Will and God's Grace fight an impossible battle for balance; eventually and inevitably one will out-weigh the other. But, by flipping the fulcrum, the Trinity, Free Will and God's Grace rest on an even keel between God, and God's grace at one end; and, at the other, Christ, and the saving faith in him

we can freely and willingly choose to have. The balancing act, then, is left not to either a diminished sense of God's Grace or the frailty of human endeavor, but to the remaining point of the Trinity, the Spirit. The key, though, is that the inverted fulcrum of our theological teeter-totter, the Trinity, must remain pointed to the ground with the open end pointed up, like a cup, a vessel, a chalice, in order to be...*filled with the Spirit*.

**X.**

It is the *Spirit*, then, that does the hard work of creating a faith that is balanced between Grace and Free Will; BUT only if we position ourselves in such a way as to allow the Spirit to *fill* us. And, the thing that positions us properly is *Sagaciousness*. Paul says, we are to live as *wise people*: that is, intelligent, knowledgeable, sensible, discerning, judicious, canny, perceptive, astute, shrewd, prudent, thoughtful, insightful, and savvy. We cannot *will* ourselves to be more Sagaciousness; it is a gift, like grace, which comes only through time, experience and awareness. And, we can only receive this gift by opening ourselves up to it so that we might be filled with the Spirit. Amen.