

Reminder: The letter tells us of the great love God has for us. We have been reconciled and forgiven; therefore, our lives should reflect that same love and forgiveness to one another and the world.

Chapter 5 begins:

*5<sup>1</sup> Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children, <sup>2</sup> and live in love, as Christ loved us<sup>[a]</sup> and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.*

The rest of the letter is how to live as imitators of God, living in love as we live the Spirit filled life.

**Ephesians 5:15-20**

5:15 Be careful then how you live, not as unwise people but as wise,

5:16 making the most of the time, because the days are evil.

5:17 So do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is.

5:18 Do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery; but be filled with the Spirit,

5:19 as you sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs among yourselves, singing and making melody to the Lord in your hearts.

5:20 giving thanks to God the Father at all times and for everything in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

5:21 Be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ.

**John 6:51-58**

6:51 I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats of this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh."

6:52 The Jews then disputed among themselves, saying, "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?"

6:53 So Jesus said to them, "Very truly, I tell you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you.

6:54 Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood have eternal life, and I will raise them up on the last day;

6:55 for my flesh is true food and my blood is true drink.

6:56 Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me, and I in them.

6:57 Just as the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so whoever eats me will live because of me.

6:58 This is the bread that came down from heaven, not like that which your ancestors ate, and they died. But the one who eats this bread will live forever."

**Proclamation of the Word**

Time. This is the weekend in our town when time speeds up for many of us.

- Students move in to dorms, and parents wonder where the time has gone.
- Seniors begin a new school year, and wonder what the future holds.
- Parents pack the new book bag for little Johnny, and wonder how their baby is ready for kindergarten.
- Teachers and faculty take deep breaths.
- All of us drive more cautiously.

Time speeds up and moves at warp speed. For so many of us this is our New Year's Day more so than January 1. But you do not need to begin a new school year to feel the effects of time speeding up.

- The woman looks in the mirror finding another grey hair and wonders, "When did I become middle age?"
- The man tries to button his pants and notices he is now sporting a "Dad Bod".
- The older adult cleans out his family home after the loss of his beloved spouse and feels the effects of the fleeting ship of time.

The author of Ephesians writes, "Be careful then how you live, not as unwise people but as wise, making the most of the time, because the days are evil." (Eph. 5:15-16)

Make the most of the time. That is today's wisdom for the student, the parent, the new retiree, the teacher, the Christian. It is the advice of Woman Wisdom from Proverbs 8 when she declares, "Take my instruction instead of silver, my knowledge rather than choice gold; for wisdom is better than jewels," she says. (Proverbs 8:10)

The Preacher Qoheleth shares wisdom in Ecclesiastes 3, "To everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven...a time to be born, a time to die...."

And then today, the writer to the Ephesians reminds us to make the most of our time for the days are evil. In other words, "Time is running out." or according to philosopher Steve Miller of the Steve Miller band, "Time keeps on slipping, slipping, into the future."

This week some of you were here for the Home-going service for Milton Benson. Milton served as our Sexton for over 30 years at Fort Hill. He was sent off with a great celebration of life and of the good news of the resurrection. Several members requested that sort of send off when his or her time came. I told them we would have to ask all those neighbors from the Fire Baptized Holiness church back to help us praise and amen like that!

One speaker, Miles Thomas, knew Milton while he, Miles, was a college student. Miles worked as the Youth Director at Fort Hill. Miles is now about 40 years old, a maritime lawyer in New Orleans who serves on his Associate Pastor Nominating Committee. He is married with two little children. He said that when he heard of Milton's death, it was a wake-up call. He realizes how much Milton cared for his

family and how much faith in God meant to him. That was an important lesson and an important reminder to Miles. Miles said it shook him up to realize how many long hours he works a part from his family, missing important time with his children. I think Milton's death reminded Miles that time is short. We must be wise about how we spend it and who or what we serve.

**True Wisdom teaches us to live fully in the sight of God while we walk the earth. Wisdom is seeking God's will and living under the influence of the Spirit.**

*A number of years ago, well-known sportswriter Mitch Albom became more widely famous for a moving little book entitled, Tuesdays with Morrie. It was about the Tuesdays Albom spent with his favorite college professor, Morrie Schwartz, as Morrie died of Lou Gehrig's disease. In one conversation about what Albom would do if he had only one day to live, Morrie says, "Our culture doesn't encourage us to think about such ultimate things, until you're about ready to die. We're so wrapped up in egotistical things, career, family, having enough money, meeting the mortgage, getting a new car, fixing the radiator when it's broken—we're involved in trillions of little acts just to keep going. So we don't get in the habit of standing back and looking at our lives and saying, 'Is this all? Is this all I want? Is something missing?'" He paused and said to Albom, "Mitch, you need someone to probe you in that direction."*

*We all do, and that's exactly what we have in this text—Someone probing, pushing us to look at life more carefully. "Be very careful then how you live, not as unwise, but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil." <sup>ii</sup>*

So how is it that we should live in this new year? How do we make the most of our time?

The writer tells us to get drunk. Yes, get drunk- not on wine, but on the Spirit. Eugene Peterson writes in *The Message*, "Don't drink too much wine. That cheapens your life. Drink the Spirit of God..."<sup>iii</sup>

Instead, we are to live under the influence of the Spirit of Jesus who we seek to imitate. And the way we connect with the Spirit- we worship!

Listen to the word of God:

*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. (Eph. 5:18-20)*

When we are living under the influence of the Spirit, our lives are centered in the praise of God and in thanksgiving. If you cannot praise, your life cannot be filled with the Spirit. There are barriers to our worship with which we need the Lord's help.

When our hearts are filled with anger, fear, and hate, we cannot praise and give thanks.

When we aren't forgiving or repentant, seeking reconciliation with our brother or sister or even with ourselves, we cannot praise and give thanks.

When we have given ourselves over to another influence or power, we cannot be under the influence of the Spirit.

As I discussed the passage with my teenage son, I asked, "What does it mean to get drunk to you?" (That's a great icebreaker with your 17 year old, by the way)

He responded, "Any excess that leads to a loss of control. Overcome by an outside influence."

What excesses do we have that are barriers to living under the influence of the Spirit of Christ? Like Miles, the lawyer, is it too many hours spent at the office, consumed by work? Or is it something less obvious? The pursuit of happiness, the love of money, anger, lack of love and forgiveness in our hearts, worry, or any pursuit which takes us away from God, the source of our daily lives

Sometimes I think we make an idol out of our children, giving their many activities top priority. Again, I asked my son, Avery, what excesses take control of our lives. As a defensive end playing for the Daniel Lions, I was shocked when he said, "Football."

As parents and as a church, we need to make the faith development of our children a priority. Parents play the most important role in their child's faith, praying with your child, reading the Bible together, all things that are important. But a critical influence is the relationships our children build with other Christian adults. The intergenerational church, the body of Christ, is radical, counter-cultural. Children, youth, and all of us need to know people who model the Christian faith or are "imitators of Christ." Our Sunday gathering is designed to help us to do that. Our College Connection program helps us do that.

At the Montreat Youth Conference, each youth was in a small group with 30 other youth and a few adults. Avery was in a group where one of the adults was Miss Pat from my home church, the First Presbyterian Church of York, SC. Miss Pat is in her late 70's and is still taking youth to Montreat. I've known Miss Pat my whole life. She sang alto in the church choir, taught school, and even now loves the youth of the church. She just Facebook messaged Avery to stay in touch! That is impressive for a woman my mother's age. I told Avery, I did not have a youth group, but I had a church who cared about me and knew me. It was full of Miss Pats.

We all need relationships with adults (outside our families) who are mature Christians who live under the influence of the Spirit. The Sunday gathering is an important time for us to build those relationships. I am so excited that we are trying something new. *The Bridge* on Sundays will be a way we build relationships with each other, learning God's ways together in our classes. And the schedule changes will allow time before and after worship to fellowship, to visit, to talk to one another. Our

church is full of Miss Pats who model the Christian faith, who try to live under the influence of the Spirit, who gather regularly to focus our hearts on God, the source of our lives, who alone we worship and serve.

So when we gather on Sunday remember that it is the Lord's Day. Keep it holy, special, set-aside. Worship is our true home. Bring an open heart ready to receive the Spirit of the living God. As we worship we are living near to the heart of God.

We gather around the word of God the Bible, so we may follow the Word of God made flesh in Jesus Christ. Jesus gives himself to us through his Spirit, not just once, but over and over. We are to live under the influence of the Spirit. This meal, this table represents his self-giving love that brings us new life.

*...every time we celebrate the Lord's Supper God comes to us once again to offer us a promise made so concrete and solid so that we can touch and feel, taste and eat it. For, here, again, in these common physical elements, we have God's promise that God not only cares about our births and deaths, our marriages and our jobs, our successes and our failures, but that God has also joined God's own self to them and to us through Christ, the Word made flesh and given for us.<sup>iv</sup>*

Make the most of your time and know that Jesus is with us wherever we go. He is our bread, our source of life. As we worship Him and give thanks we will live fully, abundantly under the influence of the Spirit.

And when we have lost our way, wandered down the wrong path, the good news is that through the grace of our Lord Jesus, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, we can begin again, hit reset, have a fresh start...time starts over.

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<sup>i</sup> Steve Miller Band, "Fly like an Eagle."

<sup>ii</sup> Mitch Albom quoted by David Lose, "Pentecost 12B: Meeting the Carnal God," [www.davidlose.net](http://www.davidlose.net) (August 10, 2010)

<sup>iii</sup> Eugene Peterson, *The Message*, Ephesians, chapter 5

<sup>iv</sup> David Lose, "Pentecost 12B: Meeting the Carnal God," [www.davidlose.net](http://www.davidlose.net) (August 10, 2010)