

WATCH YOUR STEP EPHESIANS 5:15-21

See then that you walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be unwise, but understand what the will of the Lord is. And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord, giving thanks always for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, submitting to one another in the fear of God.

I'll never forget the first whitewater rafting trip taken by the men of CC... *It sure didn't go according to plan.*

We camped out overnight, ate our breakfast, and then we all went down to the river to scout the rapids.

I was angling for a closer look, when I leaped from the rock I was standing on to the ledge underneath me. But I never saw where my foot landed. I slipped, and fell about four feet - back first - into the ice cold river.

I smacked a rock that was just under the surface of the water. If I'd hit my head it would've knocked me out. I might've drowned. Instead, I landed on my side...

I'll never forget emerging from the freezing water, gasping for breath. The blow took the wind right out of me. And wow, was it painful. *It hurt to breathe!*

The guys drove me to the Rabun County Hospital to get X-rayed. I had broken ribs... AND *a bruised ego*.

That next Sunday the men of CCSM had customized a T-shirt just for me... For the next few months, I had a new nickname. *Pastor Sandy* was “Blunder River.”

But it reminded me, to always *watch my step!* In fact, that’s the title of today’s message, “Watch Your Step.”

Remember, the book of Ephesians is divided into two sections... Chapters 1-3 is *how we see ourselves* - and in light of that, Chapters 4-6 is *how we live our lives*.

In Christ we’re blessed with all spiritual blessings. Ours is a rags to riches story. We’ve gone from *dead in sin* to *alive with Christ*. We have access to God. We’re part of *a third race*, and it’s all a result of *God’s grace*.

And now that we’re somebody special, we’re Christians, let’s live like it! Ephesians 4:1 tells us “*walk worthy of the calling with which you were called...*”

And if we’re going to walk in a worthy manner it requires us to *watch our step...* There’re dangers along life’s path. Temptation stalks us. It lurks around every corner. Life is strewn with land mines and booby traps.

As Christians, our rock is Jesus, but as I learned on the river, if you’re not careful you can slip off a rock...

I heard a confession years ago, that’s always stuck with me. It was in the wake of the scandal that brought down Jim Bakker and his PTL ministry. Bakker had seduced his secretary, Jessica Hahn, into adultery.

In referencing his sin, Bakker was honest. He said, “It’s amazing how fifteen minutes can ruin your life.”

My mom use to tell us, “It takes a whole life to build a reputation, but only a few short moments to tear one down...” And this is why we have to watch our step!

In Ephesians 5 Paul has encouraged us to walk in love, to walk as children of light, and now he teaches us to walk in wisdom. If we’re going to walk in victory over sin and temptation, we have to watch our step!

And Paul tells us how in verse 15, “See then that you walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise...”

The word translated “circumspectly” means “to walk gingerly, to be careful where you plant your feet.”

Several weeks ago now, I heard “a bump in the night.” It’s always a man’s job to check out the noises, so I took off on a search and destroy mission.

The house was dark, and just in case there was an intruder, I didn’t want to turn on the lights. I’d give away the element of surprise. In the dark, I had the drop...

The grandkids had been over earlier that day, and taken the hard-plastic animals Kathy bought for them, and had scattered them out all over the house. So when I stepped on that scaly dinosaur *it stung - it hurt.*

It reminded me of the legos I use to pierce my feet on when my kids were tots. I’m telling you, *If I had a dime for every lego I’ve stepped on I’d be a rich man!*

And this illustrates how Christians should walk.

Don't just stomp through life without giving any thought to where you're stepping... Don't amble - or stroll aimlessly. This how you slip up. As Christians we should live our lives deliberately - we step carefully...

Do you think through the choices you make?

Do you pay attention to their consequences?

Do you have a plan for your life? Do you stick with it? Do you strategize how you spend time and resources?

Satan loves to pepper our path with banana peels.

When he *targets you for a takedown*, the enemy will position the banana peel where it's least expected.

He doesn't just tempt us, he tries to distract us and get us to go offline - *outside God's will*. He wants to knock us off track. This is why we have to stay alert.

The Greek word "*walk*" means "*to walk in a straight line.*" Never forget, the shortest distance between two points is *a straight line*. And this is true spiritually.

I like to say, "*You never go wrong, doing right.*"

It's sin that complicates. It throws a wrench in the gears. Life was made to live God's way; thus, when we buck His will, situations and relationships get difficult...

One lie leads to another lie, which leads to still another lie... Before long your whole life is nothing but layers of deception you're trying to weasel out of...

Proverbs 13:15 says it best, “the way of the unfaithful is hard.” God’s will isn’t always easy, but it is simple.

It’s like driving a car. Stay between the white lines and you’re usually fine. It’s when you steer off-road, that it seldom ends well... The same is true in life. The terrain gets rough - and confusing - outside God’s will.

Paul says it’s a “fool” who ignores how he walks. Whereas, the “wise” man will “walk circumspectly.”

I want to pause now to speak specifically to a person here this AM. If it’s you, *and you’ll know if it’s you in just a moment*, listen carefully to what I’m about to say...

You’ve got to make a decision in the next few days, where doing what’s right will have grave, short-term consequences - *and you’re afraid of the outcome...*

You know you’re going to upset some people... You might lose your job, or create friction in your family...

Here’s what you need to believe, “You never go wrong, doing right.” God may not spare you all the fallout, but I promise you, He’ll see you through. Walk wisely, and in the end God will honor your obedience.

It’s important we “walk circumspectly,” for we should be “redeeming the time, because the days are evil.”

One of the reasons we walk foolishly, is that we’re too busy to think about what we are and aren’t doing...

Time flies - our head spins - we get hurried - life is a blur... Then one day the train stops - it let’s us off - and we realize we’ve missed our destination by 100 miles.

The other day I made it to the airport just in time for my flight. The plane was already boarding passengers.

I was standing in line when I had the strange sensation to make sure I was boarding the right plane.

This week I read a CNN report of an 80 year old lady who bought a ticket on Delta from Atlanta to Dulles.

Somehow she got on the wrong plane, and landed in Charlotte. Someone blogged the comment, [“Delta must stand for Delivering Elderly Ladies To Anywhere.”](#)

My point though - it can happen! You spend money on a ticket, travel for hours, yet end up in a place you never wanted to be... *And this can happen in life...*

How many people have wasted time and money and effort to end up at a place in life they never intended?

This is why we need to be careful how we walk, and *“redeem the time.”* The idea behind the phrase is to take advantage of opportunities. Make your time count.

Don't just let life come to you. Embrace every hour and minute. Live in the moment. Recruit time as a servant to help you achieve the goals God has for you.

The guy who stumbles off life's treadmill one day with a broken marriage, and estranged kids, and gobs of debt... isn't just a fellow who failed to walk wisely...

He also floundered at managing his time. He allowed opportunities to slip away. Moments were he could've made a memory were lost or stolen. Here's a man that no doubt postponed *the important* for *the convenient*.

This person failed to “*carpe diem*” or “*seize the day.*”

And Paul is encouraging us not to be this person!

It was Benjamin Franklin who said, “*Dost thou love life? Then do not squander time, for that's the stuff life is made of.*” Don't think you can build *a life worth living* with just money, or busyness. It's not what you do, or money you spent that'll be remembered. It's the time invested and experiences shared that'll be treasured.

I was watching TV this week with Kathy. It was the grandma episode of a Food Channel show, “*Chopped.*”

The grandma that won said she planned to use her prize money to gather her large family in one location, for a fun vacation - *just to make some memories*. I was impressed. She understood “*the stuff life is made of.*”

We “*redeem the time*” when we take advantage of the opportunities God gives us to share our faith, and serve our Lord, and love the people around us.

Paul says “*the days are evil.*” That means there's too little good and godly going on in our world. Our day is characterized by evil. That's all the more reason we can't let a single opportunity to do good slip away.

Someone once said, “*Time flies, but it's up to you to be the pilot.*” Make sure to land your life in a good spot.

And verse 17, “Therefore do not be unwise, but understand what the will of the Lord is.” Here’s the ultimate test of *where to step* and *how to spend time*?

Is it the will of God? I’ll *walk wisely* and *redeem my time* only to the degree I’m able to discern God’s will.

Yet for many believers this is the most ambiguous, and confusing area of Christian discipleship. We pray and pray, but how do we really know God’s will?

It reminds me of a farmer out in the field. He noticed a cloud formation in the shape of a “P” and a “C.” He took it as a sign from God. “PC” meant “Preach Christ.”

He sold his farm, went to Bible College, and upon graduation took a church. He preached his first sermon... But it was awful - *boring with a capital “B.”*

After his sermon, the pastor told someone about his call to the ministry. The man replied, “Pastor, are you sure God meant *“preach Christ,”* and not *“Plant Corn?”*”

Granted, it’s possible to miss out on the will of God, but I’m convinced it’s not as hard as we make it out to be! God wants us to know His will more than we do!

The term *“understand”* involves the putting together of contradictory thoughts. It implies a *mental process of reasoning*, rather than some *mystical revelation*.

Don’t *misunderstand* I believe in divine dreams, and words of knowledge, and prophetic utterances - but it seems to me those communiques are the exception, not the rule. It’s not God’s first line of communication.

One time I was browsing through a Christian bookstore, when I noticed a fellow with his eyes closed, running his hand across the shelves - combing the spines of books. *I asked him what he was doing?*

He said it was his way of letting God show him what book to read. Implied was that he had to turn off his mind - stop his normal thinking - and depend on some mystical impulse to discover God's will. *I disagree...*

God gave us a brain. Surely He wants us to put it to good use! It makes sense that God would work through the hardware He created, in order to speak to us! I'm sure in God's view, **"A mind is a terrible thing to waste!"**

I believe divine guidance and supernatural insight often comes in the commonplace and natural ways.

God puts a thought in our head that rings true...

A friend speaks to us in a loving way...

We read something that resonates in our heart...

*If you're listening, God has a thousand ways to speak His will... And the best way to decipher **the will of God** is by understanding **the Word of God**. We look for God to write in the sky but He's written in a Book.*

It was Mark Twain who said, **"It ain't those parts of the Bible that I can't understand that bother me, it's the parts that I do understand."** In other words, Twain's problem wasn't knowing the will of God, but doing it.

There's enough in the Bible that I know is God's will.

And I believe it's only when I do what I know to be God's will, that I'm ready for God to relay the next step.

And here's one thing I know is God's will for every Christian... Verse 18, **“Do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit...”**

If you're driving erratically, and the police officer pulls you over - *guess how he determines if you're under the influence of alcohol?* He checks out your walk!

Can you walk a straight line? **He watches your step!** And likewise, we need to **watch our step.**

It's one thing to stand in the church and say we love God - but on the road, in the field - God's sobriety test has nothing to do with words - *He checks out our walk.*

And as *wine* influences your *walk*, so will the Spirit!

Distilled spirits prohibit you from walking straight, whereas the *Holy Spirit* enables you to walk straight.

Understand, verse 18 tells us, drunkenness is **“dissipation.”** The term means **“wasteful.”** Drinking to excess is sinful, foolish, harmful, *and mainly wasteful.*

The Bible is full of verses that warn us about alcohol.

“Who has woe? Who has sorrow?... Who has wounds without cause? Who has redness of eyes?

Those who linger long at the wine, those who go in search of mixed wine. Do not look on the wine when it is red, when it sparkles in the cup, when it swirls around

smoothly; at the last it bites like a serpent, and stings like a viper. Your eyes will see strange things, and your heart will utter perverse things.” Proverbs 23.

Drunkenness is a waste. And Proverbs 23 isn't just speaking of the fall down, sloppy, head-in-the-toilet drunk. This warning is to the sophisticated taster - the wine connoisseur. He isn't a guzzler - *at least at first...*

He appreciates the “*swirl*” of the wine - its “*smooth*” taste - its “*sparkle*” - *yet in the end it bites, and mocks!* Can't he find a more useful, less dangerous pastime?

Drunkenness is **a waste of money...** while the joy of the Spirit is free! It's **a waste of health...** think “*liver disease.*” It's **a waste of time...** how can it be time well spent when you don't recall anything the next AM?

Is this the best use of the short span we call “life?”

Drunkenness is wasteful, whereas the filling of the Holy Spirit is God's richest, fullest, highest blessing!

I've heard some Christians take this passage in Ephesians 5 as if Paul were making a comparison.

As if being filled with God the Holy Spirit, and being stone-cold drunk are similar experiences. *Not hardly!*

Paul's words are a contrast, not a comparison. “*Do not be drunk with wine... but be filled with the Spirit.*”

Drunkenness and holiness are poles apart.

Realize, alcohol is a depressant, not a stimulant.

It deadens and mutes centers in the brain. A drunk acts giddy, and loses his or her inhibitions, because the alcohol depresses their normal defense mechanisms. They lose their balance. Their thinking becomes foggy.

Whereas the Holy Spirit's influence is a stimulant.

To be filled with the Spirit is to be the best you can be. We grow stronger - think clearer - act better. The Spirit enhances our capacities. Our balance improves.

Paul tells us we need to be *“filled with the Spirit!”*

It is true, that the Bible allows for the moderate use of alcohol. If you don't stumble, or cause a brother to stumble... *A Christian can drink, just don't get drunk.*

But again, the opposite is true with the Holy Spirit. God's desire for us is *intoxication, not moderation.*

No little doses - God wants His Spirit to get into the bloodstream - get carried into all parts of who we are. The influence of the Holy Spirit should permeate every area of life - *our identity, our longings, our thoughts.*

The Holy Spirit resides *or dwells* in all believers, but not all Christians allow Him to have *run of the house!*

Paul tells us, *“be filled with the Holy Spirit.”*

And here's where the Greek grammar is a huge help.

This verb, *“be filled,”* is **continuous**. (*This is not a one time experience. It’s a repeatable event. It’s an on-going dynamic. We’re filled over and over and over...*)

The verb is **passive**. (*We don’t make this happen. We ask God, desire it, we’re open to it - but we can’t manufacture it ourselves. Rather than the result of a formula we follow - or our reward for a good deed - the Spirit’s filling is a gift of God’s grace. It’s God’s work!*)

And third, the phrase, *“be filled,”* is **imperative**. (*It’s not a suggestion. It’s not optional. There’s nothing subtle here. Don’t live without the filling of the Spirit!*)

If we pulled your life over this AM, and watched how you walk, would we see *you’re under the influence?*

When a person is full of wine they lose control of their faculties... *their speech, and mobility, and clarity.*

Whereas, one of the fruits of being filled with the Holy Spirit is **self-control**. God’s Spirit will *tame the fiery temper, and put a lid on loose lips, and focus wandering eyes, and corral all of our stray thoughts...*

Oh, how every Christian needs to be filled to overflowing - filled to the brim - full of the Holy Spirit!

And how does this happen? Again, it’s not a result of our manipulations, or a reward for our righteousness.

It’s in God’s heart to fill us with His Spirit!

He just wants us to ask. In Luke 11:10 Jesus encourages us! *“For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened. If a*

son asks for bread from any father among you, will he give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will he give him a serpent instead of a fish? Or if he asks for an egg, will he offer him a scorpion?

If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him!”

In Acts 19 when Paul visited the Ephesians he asked them if they'd ever received the Holy Spirit. Their reply is revealing... *they'd never heard of the Holy Spirit.*

How can this be? The Spirit is the power source of the Christian life. He's bread on our table - fuel in our tank. Without Him, nothing of eternal value gets done!

It reminds me of the Rose Bowl Parade that was delayed by a float that ran out of gas. The float was beautifully decorated - covered with roses. But the float sputtered, and kicked, and eventually came to a halt.

The problem? *Its mechanic forgot to fill it with gas!*

And here's the irony of all ironies - the float was sponsored by *the Standard Oil Company.* A corporation with vast reservoirs of petroleum... *had ran out of gas.*

And this is what happened to the Ephesians.

They had the Holy Spirit, but they didn't know what they had. They could be filled! They could know His power. God was willing to fuel and sustain their efforts.

It wasn't a problem with possession. It was a matter of *filling*... And this is my challenge to us today...

If you're a believer in Jesus, I'm not questioning whether you have the Holy Spirit. *I believe you do!* He dwells in the heart of every Christian. *But don't you want to be filled? Feel His power? Know His fullness?*

Think of Jesus' disciples after His resurrection, and *all that His crew had going for them...* They'd seen His miracles - even His victory over death. They were saved and dedicated... They left all to follow Jesus...

And they were raring and ready to tell the world!

You'd think Jesus would seize the momentum and send these men out immediately - *but not so...*

Instead He told them to return to Jerusalem and wait... *Wait? Wait for what? Weren't they ready to go?*

According to today's standards, there's never been a group of men more ready... But Jesus knew they lacked a missing ingredient - one indispensable...

They had yet to be filled with the Holy Spirit!

We too, need to be filled with the Spirit - and not just once! But like the Ephesians we need to be filled again and again. Continuously filled with the Holy Spirit.

And what will it look like when we do get filled with the Holy Spirit? In the next three verses Paul tells us...

You'll hear **melody** and **gratitude** and **submission**.

Verse 19, “Speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord...” Think about this, *have you ever been in a bar that didn’t have a jukebox?*

And if there wasn’t a jukebox, there was a band or a DJ - because intoxication and singing go hand in hand.

Tomorrow is St. Patrick’s Day - and trust me, every pub in Ireland will be full of singing and making melody.

Here’s a question, [what does a church and a bar have in common?](#) They’re both full of *bad singing!*

And here’s where both sources of intoxication - wine and the Spirit - produce *comparable* results. They both create a melody - a musicality - joy and a happy song.

Even if it’s off-key, it’s still “[a joyful noise.](#)”

But that’s where the comparison ends...

The guy who’s sauced sings because he’s “[light-headed](#)” - whereas the Spirit-filled man sings because he’s “[light-hearted.](#)” His burden has been lifted. He’s let go of his grudge. The fullness of the Spirit turns his worries into worship - and his perplexities into praise!

When your filled with the Holy Spirit there’s a song in your heart, and there’s thanksgiving on your lips.

I take the “*psalms, and hymns, and spiritual songs*” Paul mentions, not as hard and fast musical categories, but as an expression of the variety found in a merry heart. A Spirit-filled life is joy in different keys!

We’re “*speaking (songs) to one another.*” Church is where joy is contagious. Gladness is sung and shared.

A lot of grumbling goes on in a bar. People tend to drink while they complain about their boss, or spouse, or situation. It’s easy to vent once you get a little lubricated... *Wine tends to bring out a lot of whining.*

But being filled with the Holy Spirit causes us to look on the bright-side. We see the silver lining in the cloud.

A Spirit-filled guy or gal is always grateful. As Paul puts it, verse 20, “*giving thanks always for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ...*”

And finally verse 21, “*submitting to one another in the fear of God.*” Being filled with the Holy Spirit impacts the quality of our relationships with each other.

Sadly, I’ve met Charismatic Christians who believed in the filling of the Holy Spirit that gave off an air of superiority. They saw themselves as “*the spiritual haves*” - while other Christians were the “*have nots.*”

But this is the exact opposite effect the Spirit’s filling has on a Christian’s life. Rather than a *snob*, it turns us into a *servant*. Rather than make us *think we’re better*, the filling of the Spirit *reinforces that we’re brothers.*

It's important we understand this word *“submitting,”* and it's role in the Christian life. For over the next two chapters we'll see how *mutual submission* figures into all of life - into our marriage, and family, and work...

In marriage there's a definite order - *husbands lead and wives let them.* God gives the husband and wife separate roles, but in those roles they both have responsibilities that require *a mutual submission.*

Children rank under parents, but then the parent has the reciprocal responsibility to lovingly train their child.

In the workplace, employees need to follow the boss' orders - but the boss needs to follow his workers with genuine and compassionate concern for their welfare.

Yes, in all of life, even in the Church, you'll find a hierarchy of responsibility. Hebrews 13:17 tells us, *“Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls...”* You should submit to your pastor - *and your pastor should watch out for you.*

In every relationship both parties have a God-given part to play, and submission embraces the particular role that God assigns me. This is the submission that underlies every important relationship in your life...

Our *“submitting to one another”* is the grease that keeps the social wheels turning. And it's when the submission *dries up,* that the relationship *blows up.*

The Greek word translated *“submit”* means *“to arrange under.”* It was a military term involving rank.

We can see how rank works between a general and a private, *but how does mutual submission play out?*

Well, think of *that general* and *that private* - just two men, without the uniform - not as soldiers, but as people - each with their own skill set. Put them side-by-side, and they may be of equal ability as individuals.

Yet when they join the Armed Forces both men got involved in an enterprise greater than themselves. And now for the good of the whole - in support of a common cause - they're willing to bring their strength, and gifts, and smarts into a military order that can accomplish more for their country than they could as individuals.

And the very same attitude that holds the general to his duties, also keeps the private pledged to his job.

Their tasks vary, but both men have an allegiance to a common cause. This is their mutual *“submission.”*

Both men are *“sub”* - or *“under”* - the *“mission.”*

This is why when men join the military, whether enlisted men, or officers, they're first stripped of their individuality... They get a uniform - the same clothes.

They also get the same haircut. *It's not a fohawk for you and a mullet for you...* Everybody gets a crew cut. They eat the same food, at the same time. There's no call-ahead-seating in the mess hall. Nobody is ordering off the Boot Camp menu. It's not *“Have it your way.”*

The idea is that no matter your rank, everyone who wears that uniform, is submitted to the mutual mission.

The unit is greater than the individual.

And this is the attitude that produces successful marriages and families - the unit and the role God wants me to play within it is greater than the individual.

Any other attitude is called *mutiny*.

And this needs to be the attitude in the Church.

For we too are an army - *a spiritual army*. We've all been recruited to pursue a common mission - *to worship Jesus, and glorify God, and love a lost world...*

This is why Paul adds the phrase "*in the fear of God.*" "*Submitting to one another in the fear of God.*"

We submit not because we fear each other, but we "*fear God.*" He calls us to play a role in relation to one another, and whatever that role happens to be at that time, we should submit, out of a reverence for God!

And here's what I've found, it's so much easier to submit to one another when I'm filled with the Spirit!

When I'm not... I'm worried about my status... I'm focused on my wants... My mission is my own needs...

Yet when I'm filled with the Holy Spirit I'm rejoicing that I'm a child of God!... My heart is sloshing over with joy and singing... My needs are being met in Christ...

I'm no longer fixated on myself, and this is what makes it easier for me to submit to the bigger mission.

Well, here again is this morning's theme - "watch your step." Don't get careless and be a *Blunder River*.

Step gingerly... be careful where you land your feet.

Walk straight... You never go wrong, doing right.

Seize the day!... In a world full of evil, make sure you take advantage of every opportunity to do good.

Open the Word of God to understand the *will of God*.

And certainly, a big part of God's will is for you to be continually and graciously *filled with the Holy Spirit...*

So that *your life will sing...* So that you'll have a *thankful heart...* And so that all your ambitions will *be submitted to the greater good* of the glory of God...

And if you're thinking, "Pastor Sandy, good message today, but it's just a little too late. I stumbled big time this week..." Then take heart! God is not about to leave one of his kids with a skinned knee, or a broken arm.

This morning, His Spirit is here to *pick you up and dust you off* - to *heal the wound and mend the break*.

I pray that today, you'll open your heart to God...