

“Be Careful, Little Hands, What You Do!”

(Ephesians 5:15–21)

A song taught in children’s Bible classes speaks about the importance of personal influence. This song seeks to impress upon tender, young minds that what we do, say, and see has consequences. The little child is trained ever to be aware of how important his personal influence is. The words of this song include the following:

Oh, be careful, little eyes, what you see. . . .
Oh, be careful, little ears, what you hear. . . .
Oh, be careful, little tongue, what you say. . . .
Oh, be careful, little hands, what you do. . . .
Oh, be careful, little feet, where you go. . . .

At the end of each of these stanzas, the chorus says, “For the Father up above is looking down in love, so, be careful. . . .” At the conclusion of the song, some sing a verse that includes every item mentioned in the song: “Oh, be careful, little eyes, ears, tongue, hands, and feet, for the Father up above is looking down in love, so, be careful . . . !”

By becoming a Christian, you have chosen to live a lifestyle that makes you different from others in society. You are a “saint” (see 5:3). This means that you are not to be involved in ungodly associations or behaviors. While the Christian cannot do things that compromise his influence, this does not mean that he lives a dreary life and wears a forlorn countenance. Paul’s words in Ephesians 5:15–21 indicate that the Christian, while prohibited from engaging in some behaviors, is able to enjoy life to a greater extent than anyone else by experiencing better things. Living the Christian life is an adventure!

The good influence of the Christian is different from the influence of those in the world. This is the contrast in 5:15–21. Just as the little child is instructed to watch what he sees and says, where he goes, and how he acts, the Christian is urged to keep his influence from being compromised.

“BE CAREFUL HOW YOU WALK” (5:15)

The first step in protecting your influence is to be “careful,” watching every step you take. The Greek term translated “careful” indicates that we must “walk” accurately and exactly. The “unwise” choose to walk without thinking. They go places and do things that ruin their potential influence for good. After their reputations have been destroyed, they may say, “I just did not *think* that would happen.” The Christian must not go to places or engage in behaviors that will stain his reputation. A father saw his son doing something that was inappropriate for a Christian. The father asked, “Son! What were you thinking when you did that?” Obviously, the son was not thinking; he was walking as the “unwise.”

The Christian enlightened by God’s Word has the wisdom to make the right choices. When you are invited to join a group of friends in an activity that is inappropriate for Christians, the light of God’s wisdom will cause you to avoid going. You are to choose associates and actions by using the wisdom of Scriptures to determine whether a choice will enhance or stain your influence (see 1 Thessalonians 5:21, 22). By using

biblical principles to govern your actions, you will protect your influence and be “sanctif[ied]” (1 Thessalonians 5:23). This simply means that when you use the Bible’s principles to direct your choices in life, your influence will remain pure. By following the Bible, you will behave as a saint should.

Since you are now a Christian, you must learn to use wisdom in choosing what you do, how you live, the language you speak, and the friends with whom you associate. You should be concerned about being wise in every step of life. Your life must be controlled by the Bible’s principles (Galatians 5:16; Ephesians 4:1; 1 John 1:7).

“MAKE THE MOST OF YOUR TIME” (5:16)

The careful, wise walk of 5:15 may seem impossible. How can a Christian be expected to live such a life? Some look despondently at the many years of life that lie ahead and resign themselves to failure, saying, “Living such a careful life for so many years is impossible. I’ll *never* be able to do this!” Many give up all efforts to live as the wise are commanded to live.

The difficulty of living as a saint is addressed in verse 16. This is a very practical verse; it makes living by wise choices a more manageable concept. Paul said that we are to look at living the sanctified life in moments, not in years. The Christian is asked to walk as a child of Light and make decisions as each situation presents itself. You may look at the totality of your life and say, “It is hopeless!” Instead, Paul said you should look at the brief moments. What you cannot see as possible over twenty or thirty years in time, you can easily see as possible for the moment. Walk as a wise child of Light in regard to whatever you are facing now.

If you will make the most of your moments and live them with wisdom, then you will be able to live a sanctified life. You must use every opportunity to follow the path of light.

“Making the most of your time” (“redeeming the time”; KJV) is an interesting word picture. The phrase communicates the idea of buying something that is possessed by another. In a marketplace, you purchase (or redeem) articles from different vendors. Paul was describing the moments of your life with this marketplace

metaphor. As you live on the earth, the moments of your life are in the possession of “evil.” You have an opportunity to redeem those moments and use them wisely. How will you use your time? As a Christian, you are responsible for using the moments of your life for God and not for yourself (Galatians 2:20). Your reputation will be protected if you spend the moments of each day walking in the light.

“UNDERSTAND THE WILL OF GOD” (5:17)

Once again, in verse 17, we see an emphasis upon the knowledge that the Christian possesses. The term “foolish” here refers to one who is slow-thinking. This kind of person is incapable of reasoning through a situation and making the right choice. The Christian is not foolish because he can “understand” God’s Word.

The number-one priority of our Lord was to do His Father’s will (Luke 2:49). This is likewise the Christian’s priority. You must understand and practice the will of the Lord. The term translated “understand” is from a Greek word that means “to perceive, comprehend, or see with the mind.” It refers to a practical knowledge of the facts and how those facts affect life. Already, you have come to know certain facts of God’s will for your life. Now it is your duty to study and understand how God’s commands are to control your life. Many people know facts about the Bible’s teaching, but few people are willing to study and gain an understanding about how those facts are to control one’s choices in life.

As a new Christian, you are aware of the facts of the gospel. Knowing these facts compelled you to obey God’s commands so your sins could be washed away in immersion. Continue to study God’s Word so you can understand how to make good choices in life!

“BE FILLED WITH THE SPIRIT” (5:18–21)

The final step in the protection of your influence is to realize the vast difference between the Christian and the worldly person. Once you understand the great contrast between these two, you will want to avoid being influenced by those who are worldly.

This section of the Scriptures presents the Christian as being filled with the Spirit of God and the worldly person as being filled with poisonous wine. There could be no greater contrast. One pursues selfish gratification of the physical, but the other is focused on finding joy in spiritual blessings. The non-Christian is devoted to the false joys of the world, while the Christian is filled with songs of joy. The worldly person finds "dissipation" (wastefulness) because he has no control at all, while the godly individual finds treasured rewards through self-control.

Tragic emptiness results from the way of the world, and the Christian has filled his heart with a better way. He has chosen to follow true wisdom and conform to God's commands. He has resolved to live so that his life is filled with thanksgiving to God and service to others. The Christian has chosen to put aside arrogant pride and enjoy the delight that results from contented service.

In these choices, the Christian has decided to crucify self and follow the Lord's example. Every day the Christian finds more blessings that fill his heart with joy. Resulting from such joy is a deep concern and affection for others. The one who desires to share God's joy carefully studies life's options so that his own choices do not ruin another Christian.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

You have a powerful impact on the people surrounding you. Your choices and opinions have suddenly become very important. Your language, dress, and recreational hobbies will be viewed differently by you and by those who know that you have become a Christian.

I read once about a young woman who worked in a worldly office environment. It was not unusual for the office to be filled with cursing, blasphemy, and talk about every form of immorality. This young woman became a Christian, and she was filled with apprehension about returning to her office. She was concerned about how her coworkers would view her conversion. She confided in her mother, telling about the fears she had. On the following Monday, the young woman returned to work. At the end of the working day, she returned home. Her mother asked, "How was your day at the office?" The

young woman said, "Everything was fine. No one found out that I am a Christian!" This cannot be the attitude of Christians, who are compared to salt and light. If salt and light are unnoticed in their environment, they are worthless (Matthew 5:13-16).

As a Christian, you must strive to impact the world surrounding you. Your presence should cause others to recognize that there is a gracious God in heaven and that you are His child. How careful are you in choosing how to live each moment?

Since you have decided to live for Christ, you should carefully watch your eyes, your ears, your tongue, your hands, and your feet. The Father up above is looking down in love, and He expects you to "walk" as one of His "children of Light."

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Self-Discipline

In our world are many people who do not practice self-discipline. Some are so undisciplined in their behavior that they must be locked in prisons. The laws of society encourage self-discipline. In our spiritual lives, we need self-discipline as well. If we are to grow spiritually, self-discipline is essential.

Discipline is important in every area of life. For example, a student in school may have great aptitude; but if he is not self-disciplined enough to do his assignments, attend classes, and study for tests, he will fail the course. The same is true in athletics. An athlete does not just show up for a competition. He prepares before the contest. A coach must remind his players that the desire to win is not enough. The team must also have the dedication to prepare. A single competition requires long hours of preparation. Each athlete must exercise self-discipline, spending time in practice so he can perform his best in the contest. The same principle applies to working in the marketplace. If a worker lacks the self-discipline to go to work on time or to do his job well, he cannot succeed.

Just as discipline is a part of all of life, it is an important aspect of spiritual growth and development. If we are to grow in Christ, we must apply ourselves diligently to prayer, to the study of God's Word, and to making godly choices.

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