

"SENSIBLE MEN LIVING IN A SENSELESS WORLD"

Text: Ephesians 5:15,16

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September 12, 1965

First Baptist Church, Lakeland, Florida

I take my expression "sensible men" from Goodspeed's translation of Ephesians 5:15, 16 - "Be very careful then, about the way you live. Do not act thoughtlessly, but like SENSIBLE MEN, and make the most of your opportunity, for these are evil times."

I do not believe that there are many who will argue that this is a senseless world. Most of us recognize that we live in a world, and in a day, which does not make sense. William Temple once said that the whole scale of values of the modern world is upside down. He likened them to the prices in a British hardware store in which a night-prowling prankster had switched the price tags. "When we entered in the morning," said he, "We found lawnmowers were two for five cents, nails were twenty-five dollars each, and a gallon of paint was a penny." Our civilization has become a senseless world because its price tags do not tally with God's. When our values are upside down, that doesn't make sense.

Leland Stowe suggests another indication that ours is a senseless world. This great foreign correspondent tells about his study of the women of the world. He concludes that the American woman is the best looking woman in the world, the most modern, and the best-dressed woman in the world. Also, the American woman is the most intelligent woman in the world. Furthermore, the American Woman is the most independent. Then Mr. Stowe goes on to add an additional fact - the American woman is the unhappiest and the most dissatisfied woman in the world, and, in general, she is less spiritual. I go on to say that if this be true of the American woman, it is equally true of the American man. It just doesn't make sense that with all we have, we are still so unhappy.

The words of General Omar Bradley are also very indicative of the kind of a world in which we live. "We have too many men of science and too few men of God. We have grasped the mystery of the atom and rejected the Sermon on the Mount. The world has achieved brilliance without wisdom, power without conscience". Ours is a time of nuclear giants and ethical infants. We know more about war than we know about peace, more about killing than we know about living." Again, this just doesn't make sense.

As sensible men in a senseless world, what can we do?

I-AS SENSIBLE MEN, WE NEED TO REALIZE THAT OUR MAJOR PROBLEM IS A SPIRITUAL ONE.

Living in a confused world, we need to face the fact that the destiny of mankind is contingent upon moral and spiritual resources.

1. One aspect of the spiritual problem is a LACK OF STRAIGHT THINKING

We often fail to realize that the confusion of our world is brought upon by the staggering effects of world wars and the fear of another one; the impact of godless forces like fascism and communism; the squeezing pressure of both materialism and secularism; the amazing and disturbing role that science is playing in our world; and the lack of moral, ethical and spiritual strength to give our world the balance that it needs.

We live in a world of fear. The atom bomb is the symbol of our age. Yet we need to do some straight thinking and realize that the problem of atomic energy is not the atom, but in the man. Our safety does not depend upon our ingenuity, but upon our integrity.

Sensible men need to realize the power of the everlasting gospel of Jesus Christ. Unless the hearts of men - unless the minds and wills of men - are changed, our world will continue to be a senseless world. The tragedy is that we are trying to build a safe world out of unsaved people. Someone has said that the peoples of the world are islands shouting at each other over seas of misunderstanding.

2. A second aspect of our spiritual problem is a LACK OF CONSCIENCE

Basic to the reality of our spiritual problem is a development of conscience. If conscience is to be dependable it must be kept delicate. How can you expect communism to have a conscience when it ignores the God who can keep conscience delicate?

3. A third aspect of our spiritual problem is A LACK OF INTEGRITY.

The lack of fundamental integrity is manifesting itself in the life of America from high governmental posts down to college athletes and college students. Almost every issue of the press relates that which is an indictment against those who scorn basic integrity. When a police chief in a neighboring city is arrested and charged with involvement in a robbery for which, apparently, an innocent man was imprisoned, there is a sinking in the heart of decent people.

As sensible men we must face these facts. Our world is sick, but it is not dead. We are confused and fearful, but we are not helpless. God's resources are adequate, and they are available, too.

II. AS SENSIBLE MEN, WE MUST BE VERY CAREFUL HOW WE LIVE.

The King James rendering of our text reminds us to walk circumspectly in the world. Moffatt puts it in clearer language. "Be strictly careful, then, about the life you lead."

Some Christians have rejoiced in the idea that it is a small thing for them "to be judged of man's judgments". (I Cor. 4:3) They fail to realize that they cannot carelessly disregard public opinion of their lives. The Christian should "have a good report of them which are without". (I Tim. 3:7) I am convinced that the moral inadequacies of both laymen and clergy are assets to the forces of evil that work on the outside against the church. The most common criticism of the church by outsiders is the so-called "inconsistencies" of Christians. Now I realize that no one in the world will ever live a perfect life. The church is still the fellowship of "saved sinners". But when the hostile critics of the church can use the moral failures of church leaders as ammunition against the church, then these religious leaders have fallen into what Paul calls "the snare of the devil". (I Tim. 3:7)

As sensible men we need to refrain not only from outward and visible acts of sin, but from the inward lusts and hidden desires of evil. As sensible men we must not only abstain from gross and notorious crimes, but also lesser, and so-called "small sins". Circumspection in the true meaning of the word requires that we love all about us, take good notice of all things, and weigh well what we do and say. Some people, who would be shocked at the idea of robbing a bank, do not hesitate to start a rumor that could rob a man of his character and his reputation by so-called 'idle gossip' and innuendos. When are men going to weigh and watch their words before they speak?

Another aspect of watching how we live is that we should avoid trying to see how close we can come to danger and temptation without falling. This skirting of the precipices of life is not sensible. Many Chinese believe that they are followed by three devils. If one can jump in front of a moving motor car and have it skim by, just missing the back of their heels, it is considered a great piece of luck. They believe that the car, which just missed them, came between them and their devils, thereby breaking the chain. The closer the car comes to hitting you, the better it is, because if the car is further back, it may catch only one devil. I am afraid that some Christians are using this method of dealing with evil. They see how close they can come to a spiritual accident without having one.

III. SENSIBLE MEN MAKE THE MOST OF THEIR OPPORTUNITIES TO WITNESS.

"Redeeming the time, because the days are evil". Redeeming the time means to buy up opportunities, to put to profit those fleeting occasions that are given to us.

Many people interpret the redeeming of time to mean not wasting time~ but filling it full with positive Christian living. Horatius Bonar described this phase of meaning in his little poem:

"Fill up each hour with what will last, Buy up the moments as they go;
The life above, when this is past, Is the ripe fruit of life below."

I like to emphasize another meaning of "redeeming the time". The phrase suggests being alive to opportunities for personal witness. Someone has described this idea in these words, "Seize the critical moment as it comes, the chance encounter, the unforeseen turn in the conversation, the unplanned incident which brings a Christian and an unbeliever into contact."

I am sure that the idea of witnessing loomed large in Paul's concept of redeeming the time. Another of his passages, which mentions the same phrase, "redeeming the time", could well be used as a study of effective witnessing. "Walk in wisdom toward them that are without (i.e. all of those who are not Christians) redeeming the time. Let your speech be always with grace, seasoned with salt, that ye may know how ye ought to answer every man." (Gal. 4: 5,6) This is one of the finest passages on the Christian testimony, or the Christian witness, that I know.

This brief passage on effective Christian witness suggests three things:

I- THE RIGHT EXPECTANCY

"Walk in wisdom toward them that are without, redeeming the time". In the area of witnessing, Paul is challenging us to expect opportunities to witness, to be alert to them, to be prepared to make good use of every opportunity to witness. Paul himself was ever alert to the open door to a man's soul. He redeemed himself by taking every opportunity to talk to a man about his eternal destiny. Two striking examples are seen in his chance meeting with Onesimus and his meeting with Apaphras in Rome.

The unwise Christian will go on his way serenely believing that he never gets a favorable opportunity to "put in a good word for Jesus. The sensible Christian will find opportunities, because he has the right expectancy.

II. THE RIGHT ENTHUSIASM

Paul also suggests that to be an effective witness we need to have the right enthusiasm. This enthusiasm helps us make the right approach. There is nothing that makes for more enthusiasm than to "let your speech always be gracious". Enthusiasm for witnessing comes from gracious lives. Not only our words, but also our lives need to be gracious. A loving spirit makes a lovable Christian. Such a gracious spirit is interested in cultivating the one to whom the witness will be made. Someone has wisely said, "Too many eager witnesses take the short cut of trying to make Christians before they have taken the trouble to make friends."

No person can truly be enthusiastic about witnessing unless his life is rooted in Christ and dedicated to His purpose. As a Christian, if your life is firmly established in a sincere and dedicated loyalty to Christ, you can speak convincingly from your own experience. Thus, when you speak, your words are "seasoned with salt." They will have that delightful tang which does away with so much witness that is dull, insipid and platitudinous. When you witness in such a spirit, you will not give testimony that sounds like religious humbug, but will have the ring of reality about it.

III. THE RIGHT EVALUATION

In Paul's short summary of effective witnessing, he gives a closing suggestion, "That ye may know how you ought to answer every man." This involves the right evaluation as implied in "every man". We need to speak to men as individuals. How we need to know people, love them as persons, deal with them on an individual basis. If you like a man, he will be encouraged to like you. If you respect a man, he will come to respect you. The faith you will talk about will have meaning for him in the light of his own unique character and circumstances. Thus you can help him to see the meaning of Christ for his own life.

Jesus looked at His world. It was as senseless as the world we live in today. As He looked at the world, He said, "For their sakes I sanctify Myself". As sensible men who realize that the underlying problem of the world is a spiritual one -- as sensible men, who watch carefully the life we live -- and as sensible men who use wisely every opportunity to witness -- may we call ourselves to a fresh and rededicating act of faith.

"We are watchers of a beacon whose light must never die;
We are guardians of an altar which shines forever high."