

LIVE CAUTIOUSLY AND WATCHFULLY; EPH. 5:15-17 (Ed O'Leary)

INTRODUCTION.

TODAY WE TAKE UP THE NEXT SECTION OF EPH., ~ A VERY SHORT ONE, ~ 5:15-17.

▶▶ And here we see a familiar pattern. ~ Paul makes his main point and then builds on it.

LET'S BEGIN WITH PAUL'S MAIN POINT, ~ VERSE 15a.

"LOOK CAREFULLY THEN HOW YOU WALK."

▶▶ As we've noted, ~ "walk" is used figuratively to mean "behave, ~ live, ~ conduct one's life."

▷▷ So Paul is saying "Pay careful attention to how you conduct your lives."

▷▷ Or, ~ "Pay careful attention to how you live."

▶▶ In [Verse 15a](#), ~ Paul is calling believers to make every effort to be cautious and watchful in how we live.

▷▷ He wants us to think carefully and deeply about how we should live and be careful about what we do, ~ and here's our link to the previous paragraph, ~ **most likely in order to live as new creations in Christ should.**

▷▷ I.e., ~ P telling us to think carefully and deeply about how we should live and be careful about what we do, ~ in order to make sure we are being guided by our new nature, ~ ¶¶

↳↳ to make sure we are examining and evaluating issues and situations in order to determine and take the course of action that is pleasing to the Lord, ~ ¶¶

→→ to make sure we are abstaining from "the unfruitful works of darkness," ~ and to make sure that we are living in a way that exposes them for what they are, ~ sin.

SOLOMON SAYS SOMETHING VERY SIMILAR IN PROV. 4:26-27.

▶▶ "Ponder the path of your feet; then all your ways will be sure. Do not swerve to the right or to the left; turn your foot away from evil."

▶▶ Basically, ~ in [verse 26](#), ~ Solomon is saying watch where you are going.

▷▷ He's calling us to think carefully and deeply about how we live and to be careful about what we do, ~ no doubt in order to always do what is right. ¶¶ 1/8

▷▷ And when we do so, ~ Solomon says, ~ then all our ways will be secure.

↳↳ Most likely the point here is that, ~ when we "Ponder the path of [our] feet," ~ ¶¶

→→ when we think carefully and deeply about how we live and are careful about what we do, ~ we will stay on solid ground spiritually and not fall into sin.

▶▶ In [verse 27a](#), ~ Solomon says, ~ "Do not swerve to the right or to the left.

▷▷ "swerve" refers to deviating or turning from a straight-line course.

↳↳ The command is to avoid turning or moving suddenly away from the straight line ahead.

▷▷ Right and left do not refer here to any quality such as good or bad.

↳↳ Together they serve to make clear, ~ or perhaps to emphasize, ~ that we are not to turn from a straight-line course.

▷▷ But what is this straight-line course?

↳↳ Well, ~ [Deut. 5:32](#) tells us, ~ "You shall be careful therefore to do as the LORD your God has commanded you. You shall not turn aside to the right hand or to the left."

↳↳ And [Josh. 23:6](#) says, ~ "Therefore, be very strong to keep and to do all that is written in the Book of the Law of Moses, turning aside from it neither to the right hand nor to the left."

↳↳ The straight-line course then, ~ that Solomon is talking about in [Prov. 4:27a](#), ~ is God's word.

▷▷ So Solomon is exhorting us to not deviate or turn from following God's word,

▶▶ And then in [verse 27b](#) Solomon tells us to keep away from evil paths.

▷▷ In [Prov. 4:14-15](#), ~ Solomon puts it this way: ~¶¶

↳↳ "Do not enter the path of the wicked, and do not walk in the way of the evil ~ [i.e., ~ don't do what evil people do]. ~¶¶

→→ Avoid it; do not go on it; turn away from it and pass on." ¶¶ 2/8

▶▶ So we could say that, ~ basically, ~ both Solomon and Paul are calling believers to live cautiously and watchfully, ~ in order to live as new creations in Christ should.

▷▷ I.e., ~ we are to go all-out to think carefully and deeply about how we should live ~ and be careful about what we do, ~ in order to make sure we are being guided by our new nature, ~ ¶¶

↪↪ to make sure we are examining and evaluating issues and situations in order to determine and take the course of action that is pleasing to the Lord, ~ ¶¶

→→ to make sure we are abstaining from "the unfruitful works of darkness," ~ and to make sure that we are living in a way that exposes them for what they are, ~ sin.

IN VERSES 15b-16a, ~ PAUL EXPLAINS HOW WE LIVE CAUTIOUSLY AND watchfully.

THE FIRST WAY, ~ VERSE 15b . . . ~ WE LIVE CAUTIOUSLY AND WATCHFULLY IS BY not living unwisely.

▶▶ The unwise are people who lack proper discernment, ~ and who are unthinking, ~ thoughtless, ~ careless.

▶▶ They are not concerned about making every effort to be cautious and watchful in how they live.

▶▶ Solomon calls this type of person a fool. ~ Prov. 14:16, ~ "One who is wise is cautious and turns away from evil, ~ but a fool is reckless and careless."

▷▷ The idea here seems to be that a wise person does things carefully and avoids getting into trouble, ~ ¶¶

↪↪ but a fool is careless and rushes into things with reckless confidence and without thinking or having any regard for consequences.

▶▶ We live cautiously and carefully by rejecting this kind of living.

THE SECOND WAY, ~ VERSE 15b . . . ~ WE LIVE cautiously and watchfully is by living wisely.

▶▶ I.e., ~ we live cautiously and watchfully by being sensible, ~ by exercising good judgment, ~ by abstaining from thoughtless, ~ rash living, ~ and by having and using common sense.

▶▶ The apostle Peter says something very comparable in his first epistle.

▷▷ In 1 Pet. 1:13, ~ Peter calls us to be "sober-minded." ¶¶ 3/8

↳↳ Being sober-minded means to keep a cool head in all situations, ~ to not do anything irrational or panicky. ~~ It indicates stability over against extremes.

↳↳ Furthermore, ~ being sober-minded involves having a calm, ~ steady state of mind that evaluates things correctly, ~ ¶¶

→→ and as a result enables us to make right decisions and to act rationally and carefully.

▷▷ And in 1 Pet. 5:8a, ~ Peter writes, ~ "Be sober-minded; be watchful."

↳↳ These terms are virtually synonymous in meaning and could be translated as a single term. ~~ It's written as two commands for emphasis.

→→ We could read it this way: ~~ "Be extremely vigilant (exclamation point)!"

↳↳ Peter is emphasizing the fact that, ~ at all times, ~ we are to pay close and careful attention to, ~ and be fully aware of, ~ what's going on around us, ~ ¶¶

→→ and to look at it realistically ~ and to evaluate it correctly.

↳↳ We must do this in order to be prepared for, ~ and not taken by surprise by, ~ whatever dangers, ~ spiritual or otherwise, ~ come our way in life.

↳↳ Peter is not calling us to be paranoid, ~ or to jump at shadows, ~ or to view every act by people or the world or governments ~ as a conspiracy against believers.

→→ He's just calling us to a high level of ~ and a levelheaded, ~ watchfulness and attentiveness, ~ so we are ready for, ~ and not be shocked by, ~ ¶¶

↳↳ whatever hazards, ~ spiritual or otherwise, ~ come our way in life.

▶▶ We live cautiously and watchfully is by living wisely.

THE THIRD WAY, ~ VERSE 16a . . . ~ WE LIVE CAUTIOUSLY AND WATCHFULLY IS BY "making the best use of the time."

▶▶ Here Paul is saying that we live cautiously and watchfully by taking advantage of every opportunity.

▶▶ The question is, ~ taking advantage of every opportunity to do what?

▶▶ Well, ~ In vs. 16b, ~ as we'll see in a few minutes, ~ Paul says "the days are evil." ¶¶ 4/8

▷▷ Obviously, ~ we are not to be involved in evil. ~~ As we have been discussing, ~ we are not to participate in "the unfruitful works of darkness."

▷▷ Rather than doing evil, ~ we, ~ believers, ~ are to do good. ~~ And i.e., ~ good to people.

▷▷ So, ~ more than likely, ~ in [verse 16a](#), ~ Paul is saying that we live cautiously and watchfully by taking advantage of every opportunity to do good to people.

▷▷ That this is what Paul has in mind here is reinforced by what he says in [Gal. 6:10](#), ~ ¶¶

↪↪ "So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith."

▶▶ There may also be an implication here in [Eph. 5:16a](#) regarding evangelism. ~~ Paul says something very similar in Colossians within the context of evangelism.

▷▷ [Col. 4:5](#), ~ "Walk in wisdom toward outsiders ~ [i.e., ~ unbelievers], ~ making the best use of the time."

↪↪ Simply put, ~ Paul is calling believers here to seize and use every opportunity to share the gospel.

▷▷ So back in [Eph. 5:16a](#), ~ most likely Paul is implying this as well.

▶▶ Then Paul's point in [verse 16a](#) is this: ~~ believers live cautiously and watchfully by taking advantage of every opportunity to do good to people ~ and to share the gospel with unbelievers.

IN VERSE 16b, ~ PAUL TELLS US WHY WE MUST LIVE CAUTIOUSLY AND watchfully.

"BECAUSE THE DAYS ARE EVIL."

▶▶ "days" here in [verse 16b](#) refers to the present age. ~~ So Paul is saying that this present age is evil.

▷▷ I.e., ~ this age in which we live is characterized by an abundance of evil.

▶▶ And it is dominated by, ~ as Paul puts it in [6:12](#), ~ "the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places," ~ i.e., ~ Satan and his demons. ~~ 3x Jesus referred ~ Paul

▷▷ Though defeated by the death and resurrection of Jesus, ~ they still rule over this world. ~~ And will do so until Jesus returns. ¶¶ 5/8

SO HERE, ~ I WOULD SUGGEST, ~ IS PAUL'S POINT IN VERSE 16b.

▶▶ Because the age in which we are living is characterized by an abundance of evil ~ and dominated by "the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places," ~ believers must live cautiously and watchfully.

▷▷ To put it differently, ~ because of the evil nature of this present age ~ and the evil spiritual forces controlling it, ~ ¶¶

↳↳ we, ~ believers, ~ need to make every effort to think carefully and deeply about how we should live ~ and be careful about what we do.

▶▶ My brothers and sisters in Christ, ~ God has indeed "rescued us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of the Son he loves."

▷▷ However, ~ as long as we are in the flesh we are open to attack from Satan and his demons. ~ They continually implement schemes to defeat and destroy God's people.

▷▷ In 1 Pet. 5:8, ~ Peter warns us, ~ ¶¶

▷▷ "Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour ~ [i.e., ~ he's constantly looking for a believer to attack and totally destroy]."

▷▷ In Eph. 6:11, ~ Paul tells us that one of the reasons to "Put on the whole armor of God" is in order that we "may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil."

▷▷ And in Eph. 6:12, ~ Paul writes, ~ "For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.

▶▶ So there is a great need for us, ~ believers, ~ to live cautiously and watchfully.

▷▷ There is this great need, ~ because we are surrounded by an abundance of evil.

↳↳ And also because there are dangerous obstacles in our path, ~ each one designed by powerful, ~ evil supernatural forces to trip us up and destroy us.

▷▷ And to help us avoid the evil around us and the dangerous obstacles in front of us, ~ i.e., ~ to aid us in living cautiously and watchfully, ~ we have God's word.

↳↳ Ps. 119:98, ~ "Your commandment makes me wiser than my enemies, for it is ever with me." ¶¶ 6/8

↪↪ And Ps. 119:105, ~ "Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.

→→ God's word is like a lantern or a flashlight that lights the path of life ahead of us ~ and enables us to avoid the evil around us and the dangerous obstacles that the enemy has put in our way.

IN VERSE 17, ~ PAUL WRAPS UP THIS SHORT SECTION BY TELLING US WHAT WE should do as a consequence of the days being evil.

IN VERSE 17a, ~ PAUL SAYS "DO NOT BE FOOLISH."

▶▶ Basically, ~ Paul is saying, ~ "The age in which we are living is characterized by an abundance of evil ~ and dominated by the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. ~~ Therefore, ~ don't act carelessly or thoughtlessly."

▷▷ IOW, ~ Don't do the opposite of making every effort to think carefully and deeply about how we should live ~ and being careful about what we do. ~~ Abstain from living any other way than cautiously and watchfully.

▶▶ In addition to this, ~ Paul is also saying don't be ignorant. ~~ Most likely in two ways.

▷▷ 1st, ~ we are not to be ignorant of what we need to do to avoid the evil around us and the dangerous obstacles that the enemy has put in our way.

▷▷ 2nd, ~ we are not to be ignorant of the schemes of Satan and his demons.

RATHER THAN LIVING CARELESSLY, ~ THOUGHTLESSLY, ~ OR IGNORANTLY, ~~~/// Paul says in verse 17b that we are to "understand what the will of the Lord is."

▶▶ I.e., ~ "the days are evil," ~ so rather than living carelessly, ~ thoughtlessly, ~ or ignorantly, ~ Paul says we are to learn what the Lord wants us to do.

▶▶ Specifically, ~ according to the immediate context, ~ we learn that the Lord wants us to live carefully, ~ thoughtfully, ~ and not be ignorant.

▶▶ In a more general way, ~ we find out what God wants us to do by studying His word.

▶▶ Only if we know it can it make us wiser ~ Only if we know it can it be a lamp

▶▶ And the implication is that once we know it, ~ we then apply it, ~ that is we obey it.

▷▷ Only by knowing and applying what God wants us to do can we live a victorious life of faith in these "evil days." ↴↴ 7/8

▶▶ But this is not talking about just knowing a few verses and applying them once in awhile.

▷▷ This is talking about saturating ourselves with ~ and daily living ~ God's word.

↳↳ Knowing it so well that we can apply it to the situations that confront us every day.

↳↳ We are talking about following the example of the psalmist in [Psalm 119:11](#).

→→ He writes, ~ "I have stored up your word in my heart, ~ that I might not sin against you."

↳↳ Hiding God's word in our hearts means not just to read it but also to study it and even memorize it, ~ and then to act on it.

▷▷ By doing this, ~ we will guard against the abundant evil around us and falling prey to the enemy.

↳↳ By storing up God's word in our hearts, ~ we will be able to say, ~ as Jesus did, ~ "It is written," ~ "It is written," ~ "It is written," ~ when the enemy attacks us.

→→ And like Jesus, ~ we will defeat the enemy.

↳↳ As Martin Luther wrote, ~ "The prince of Darkness grim, ~ We tremble not for him; ~ His rage we can endure, ~ For lo, ~ his doom is sure, ~ **One little word shall fell him.**"

CONCLUSION.

EPH. 5:15-17, ~ A VERY SHORT SECTION BY PAUL HERE.

▶▶ One packed full of truth to think about and to apply to our lives.

LET'S PRAY 8/8