

NEW YEAR'S COMMITMENT

Ephesians 5:15-20

"Pay careful attention, then, to how you walk—not as unwise people but as wise—¹⁶ making the most of the time, because the days are evil. ¹⁷ So don't be foolish, but understand what the Lord's will is. ¹⁸ And don't get drunk with wine, which leads to reckless actions, but be filled by the Spirit: ¹⁹ speaking to one another in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, singing and making music from your heart to the Lord, ²⁰ giving thanks always for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ."

INTRODUCTION

On Tuesday, September 11, 2001, 19 terrorists hijacked four fuel-loaded U. S. commercial airplanes. A total of 2,977 people were killed in New York City, Washington, DC, and rural PA (where the 4th plane crashed after passengers & crew heroically sought to retake control rather than let it strike its target, possibly the White House). Al Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden orchestrated these strikes. Of those who perished in the initial World Trade Center attacks and subsequent collapses of the towers, 343 were New York City firefighters, 23 were New York City police officers, and 37 were officers at the Port Authority. Victims ranged in age from two to 85; about 75-80% were men. At the Pentagon in Washington, 184 people were killed when hijacked American Airlines Flight 77 crashed into it. Someone posted this item on the Internet, entitled, *What a Difference a Day Makes*, to underscore the far-reaching impact on this nation of the events of 9/11:

On Monday we carelessly emailed jokes. On Tuesday we did not.

On Monday we thought that we were secure. On Tuesday we learned better.

On Monday we were talking about athletes as heroes. On Tuesday we relearned who our heroes are.

On Monday we were irritated our rebate checks had not arrived. On Tuesday we gave money away to people we had never met.

On Monday there were people fighting against praying in school. On Tuesday you would have been hard pressed to find a school where someone was not praying.

On Monday people argued with their kids about picking up their room. On Tuesday the same people could not get home fast enough to hug their kids.

On Monday people were upset if they had to wait 6 minutes in a fast food line. On Tuesday people didn't mind waiting up to 6 hours to give blood to the dying.

On Monday we waved flags promoting our cultural diversity. On Tuesday we waved only the American flag.

On Monday there were people trying to separate each other by race, sex, color and creed. On Tuesday they were all holding hands.

On Monday we were man or woman, black or white, old or young, rich or poor, gay or straight, Christian or non-Christian. On Tuesday we were all Americans.

On Monday politicians argued about who most needed government assistance. On Tuesday grief stricken people in government agencies sang "God Bless America."

On Monday the President was going to Florida to read to children. On Tuesday he returned to Washington to protect our children.

On Monday we had families. On Tuesday we had orphans.

On Monday people went to work as just another day to live. On Tuesday these people lost their lives.

On Monday people were fighting allowing the 10 commandments on government property. On Tuesday most of us were wishing people everywhere were taught, "Thou Shall Not Kill."

The one who posted these thoughts commented, "It is sadly ironic how it takes horrific events to place things into perspective, but it has. The lessons learned this week, the things we have taken for granted, the things that have been forgotten or overlooked, hopefully will never be forgotten again."

On this first day of 2017, let's inventory our lives to see if we are overlooking our commitments touching three themes drawn from **Ephesians 5:15-20**: Godliness, Gratefulness, and Gloriousness; before some horrific event drives us in repentance to our knees over our misplaced priorities.

I. GODLINESS (Ephesians 5:15-16)

"Pay careful attention, then, to how you walk—not as unwise people but as wise." We are quick to cautiously scan our surroundings for threats if in a place that might endanger us personally or physically. But "pay careful attention" in Greek speaks of guarding against moral dangers that tempt us to betray our loyalty to **Jesus Christ** or fall short of living in strict conformity to conduct befitting His followers. The NLT translates **vs. 15** as, "So be careful how you live. Don't live like fools, but like those who are wise."

In **vs. 16**, "making the most of the time, because the days are evil," "evil" refers to conditions unfavorable to our Savior's moral values. We demonstrate devotion to Christ by two positive uses of time. First, time is devoted to activities that promote a closer relationship with the Lord, not actions that dampen our love for Him. **I John 2:15-17** (NCV) exhorts us, "Do not love the world or the things in the world. If you love the world, the love of the Father is not in you. ¹⁶These are the ways of the world: wanting to please our sinful selves, wanting the sinful things we see, and being too proud of what we have. None of these come from the Father, but all of them come from the world. ¹⁷The world and everything that people want in it are passing away, but the person who does what God wants lives forever." Tucsonan Drew Anderson wrote to *Reader's Digest*, "While my wife and I were shopping at a mall kiosk, a shapely young woman in a short, form-fitting dress strolled by. My eyes followed her. Without looking up from the item she was examining, my wife asked, 'Was it worth the trouble you're in?'"

Secondly, we demonstrate our devotion to our Savior when we insist the time God gives us must be used to accomplish His will rather than merely our will. "Pay careful attention, then, to how you walk—not as unwise people but as wise— ¹⁶making the most of the time, because the days are evil. ¹⁷So don't be foolish, but understand what the Lord's will is." Too often, we live as Christians by the rule, "I don't see anything wrong with that," when deciding whether or not some action is appropriate for us to do. Our standard should be, "What is right about it? Will this help me to become more pleasing to my Savior or help me to accomplish His will?" Our primary concern as followers of Christ must never be doing merely what is most profitable financially, what is most pleasurable or enjoyable, or what will be most to our advantage. Our overriding concern should always be, What does **Jesus** want me to do or be?

The Greek word translated "making the most of" in **vs. 16** is a market term meaning, "to buy out or purchase completely." The best understanding of the Greek word for "time" is "opportunity." Greeks portrayed the concept of "opportunity" in sculpture as a youth with wings on his feet, only one lock of hair on the front of his scalp, and bald in back. This represents the fleeting nature of opportunity that must be grasped before it slips past us. We are thus encouraged to "buy out" or "seize the opportunities" God gives us each day by paying the price in effort necessary to put the time God gives us to best use.

Suppose an anonymous benefactor entrusts you with a bank account crediting you each morning with \$86,000. You are instructed use this money to better your life and others. You are not allowed to carry over any balance. Each evening the amount you fail to use that day is cancelled. What would you do? Draw out every cent each day, of course, and use whatever you don't need to benefit others. You have such a bank. Its name is TIME! Each morning it credits you with 86,400 seconds. Each night it cancels as lost whatever you failed to invest to good purpose. This is your loss and those you could have helped. There is no going back. Calvin of the comic strip *Calvin & Hobbes* once said, "God put me on this earth to accomplish a certain number of things. Right now I'm so far behind I'll never die." Closer to the truth is that Calvin squandered much of the time to accomplish God's will and will die with them left undone.

II. GRATEFULNESS (Ephesians 5:20)

Let's read again vs. 20, "giving thanks always for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ." We'll undoubtedly be confronted this year with unexpected or unwelcomed circumstances. Our faith may even be challenged if God doesn't answer our prayers the way we'd hoped He would. Does this mean we cannot, "Give thanks in all circumstances," as **I Thessalonians 5:18** (NIV) exhorts us to do, "for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus"? Can we be fooled by appearances into thinking something is bad that is truly a blessing? One morning after a terrible snowstorm, a woman named Susan was outside shoveling her driveway. She stopped to wave hello to her neighbor, and he asked her why her husband wasn't out there helping her with the chore. She explained one of them had to stay inside to take care of the children, so they drew straws to see who would go out and shovel. "Sorry about your bad luck," he said. Susan sprightly replied, "Don't be sorry. I won!" If we had God's ability to view every circumstance of our lives, we'd often rejoice over what only seems bad at the time.

God does not expect us to be thankful for everything that happens to us, like a devastating injury or illness. He does ask that we trust Him to be working for our ultimate good despite the apparent harm or loss we suffer. **Romans 8:28** (NIV) assures us, "And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love Him, who have been called according to His purpose." Joni Eareckson Tada has been a quadriplegic since suffering a diving accident in 1967 at age 17. After enduring 2 years of rehabilitation, which she at first bitterly resented, Joni dazzled the world with the highly detailed art paintings she completed by holding a brush between her teeth. Since 1982, she's hosted the radio program *Joni and Friends* aired on more than 1,000 outlets. She's visited 47 countries, often bringing wheelchairs to crippled children as part of her *Wheels for the World* outreach ministry. Joni Eareckson Tada has also authored over 50 books, including devotionals such as *Pearls of Great Price* (2006), in which she says, "I give God thanks for my quadriplegia. It has become my strange friend that helps me know Jesus better. It is the shadowy companion that walks with me daily, pulling and pushing me into the arms of the Savior where I find grace and comfort. Your affliction falls well within the overarching decrees of God. It comes from His wise and kind hand, and for that, you can give thanks."

Charles Dickens said we are mixed up in America. He suggested instead of having one Thanksgiving Day each year we should have 364. Use one day for complaining and griping, he said. Use the other 364 to thank God each day for the many blessings He has showered upon you by living in this special nation. He may be on to something. There was a television game show many years ago featuring children as contestants. The emcee gave nicely wrapped boxes of candy to each of the contestants at the end of the show. They didn't know it, but the emcee clued in the audience that every child who said "thank you" that day would automatically received an extra \$500. The emcee gave out seven boxes of candy before a girl said "thank you." How many of these kids' parents were squirming in their seats wishing they'd taught their children to be more thankful because of this missed opportunity for gain or from shame over the dishonor to their family? Does our Heavenly Father ever squirm wishing we'd learned to be more thankful because of what it costs us personally or the dishonor to His family?

III. GLORIOUSNESS (Ephesians 5:17-19)

"So don't be foolish, but understand what the Lord's will is.¹⁸ And don't get drunk with wine, which leads to reckless actions, but be filled by the Spirit:¹⁹ speaking to one another in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, singing and making music from your heart to the Lord." In the early 1960s, Federal Courts began separating our nation's public school children from the religiously inspired moral virtues that enabled citizens of the United States of America to constructively enjoy more liberties than any other people on earth. Since the early 1960s, our citizens have increasingly fallen victim to an alarming number of addictions and destructive habits. Instead of being "filled by the Spirit" to be empowered to live honorably as human beings to God's glory, many Americans now live little better than some animals

driven by "reckless actions." Is this just a coincidence? Do we undermine our national prosperity to the extent our citizens do not embrace the privileges and responsibilities of being created in "the image" and "likeness" of God (**Genesis 1:26-27**)? In George Washington's Farewell Address (1796), our nation's first President proclaimed, "Of all the dispositions and habits which lead to political prosperity, religion and morality are indispensable supports. In vain would that man claim the tribute of patriotism, who should labor to subvert these great pillars of human happiness, these firmest props of the duties of men and citizens. . . . Whatever may be conceded to the influence of refined education . . . , reason and experience both forbid us to expect that national morality can prevail in exclusion of religious principle."

There may be advantages to living into our senior years. We may be less prone to certain addictions. One man wrote as his New Year's resolution, "I have resolved not to do drugs anymore, because I get the same effect just standing up really fast." We should encourage each other throughout 2017 to draw our strength and hope from God's Spirit, as we face life's difficulties and demands, rather than resorting to stimulants or habits that deaden us toward the influence of the Savior's Presence in our lives. We can encourage one another to live honorably and magnify the character of our gloriously wonderful Creator by "speaking to one another in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs," and by filling our mouths with words inspired by the Bible. Will you join me in making **I Corinthians 10:31** the motto of this church in 2017: "Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do everything for God's glory"?

CONCLUSION

Chuck Swindoll, as we know him today, is an internationally known author of over 30 books, pastor to thousands, preacher on the *Insight for Living* radio broadcast carried on over 2,000 stations in 15 languages, and now President Emeritus of Dallas Theological Seminary.

After his marriage at age 21, he enlisted in the U.S. Marine Corps. His Commanding Officer called Chuck into his office one day to ask him why he'd not participated in a particular event "required" of all his Marines. The first time Chuck went to his office, he became so intimidated he forgot why he wanted to see his Commanding Officer. Now, he had to explain why he'd disobeyed an order; the only time he'd ever done so. Captain Burch snapped at him, "Who do you think you are?" He replied, "Not very much, right now." Chuck Swindoll was simply a young man who had determined not to compromise his commitment to **Jesus**. When walking six blocks from a bus stop to a Bible study in Okinawa, with more bars per mile than any island in the South Pacific, he'd discovered looking straight ahead without looking to the right or the left would help him overcome this temptation. But he could not avoid the C. O.'s demanding question. Chuck told his captain, "I want you to know why I could not participate." After Captain Burch said, "Talk fast," Chuck managed to declare clearly to his C.O., without stuttering, that his allegiance to **Jesus Christ** prevented him from participating in an event offensive to his Lord and Savior. His captain's mouth literally dropped open; so amazed he was stunned speechless. He finally uttered, "I admire you. Get out!"

If we faithfully demonstrate in 2017 our commitments as followers of **Jesus Christ** to Godliness, Gratefulness, and Gloriousness, many will admire us and may even be inspired to be as devoted to our Savior. Others will at least be amazed over how faithfully we honor these commitments without compromise. We may even experience some being stunned speechless or telling us to "get out" of their lives. But by this time next year, **Jesus** will have touched, even transformed many by His Presence being consistently demonstrated through our lives. As **Colossians 3:17** (NLT) urges, "And whatever you do or say, do it as a representative of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father."