

15 August 2021 - Living wisely

BIBLE READING (NET)

Ephesians 5:15-6:9

Therefore consider carefully how you live—not as unwise but as wise, taking advantage of every opportunity, because the days are evil.

For this reason do not be foolish, but be wise by understanding what the Lord's will is.

And do not get drunk with wine, which will ruin you, but be filled by the Spirit –

speaking to one another in psalms, hymns and spiritual songs,

singing and making music in your hearts to the Lord,

always giving thanks to God the Father for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ,

and submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ,

wives, to your husbands, as to the Lord, because the husband is the head of the wife as also Christ is the head of the church (he himself being the Saviour of the body). Just as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything.

Husbands, love your wives just as Christ loved the church and gave himself for her to sanctify her by cleansing her with the washing of water by the word, so that he may present the church to himself in splendour—not having a stain or wrinkle, or any such blemish, but holy and blameless. In the same way husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. For no one hates his own body, but feeds it and takes care of it, just as Christ does the church, because we are members of his body. "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and will be joined to his wife, and the two will become one flesh." This is a great mystery—which I understand as applying to Christ and the church. Nevertheless, each one of you must also love his own wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband.

Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. "Honour your father and mother," which is the first commandment accompanied by a promise, namely, "that it will go well with you and that you will live long on the earth." Parents, do not provoke your children to anger, but raise them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.

Slaves, obey your human masters with fear and trembling, in the sincerity of your heart, as to Christ, not like those who do their work only when someone is watching—as people-pleasers—but as slaves of Christ doing the will of God from the heart. Obey with enthusiasm, as though serving the Lord and not people, because you know that each person, whether slave or free, if they do something good, this will be rewarded by the Lord. Masters, treat your slaves the same way, giving up the use of threats, because you know that both you and they have the same master in heaven, who judges everyone by the same standard.



MESSAGE - Living wisely

Today's passage from Ephesians starts with a call to live wisely.

What does wise – or unwise – living look like? Two examples from the news this week ...

Example 1 ... Comments on Covid restrictions by maverick Coalition MP George Christensen:

'When will the madness end? How many more freedoms will we lose due to fear of a virus, which has a survivability rate of 997 out of 1,000? It's time we stopped spreading fear and acknowledge some facts: masks do not work ... lockdowns don't work ... they don't destroy the virus but they do destroy people's livelihoods and people's lives.'



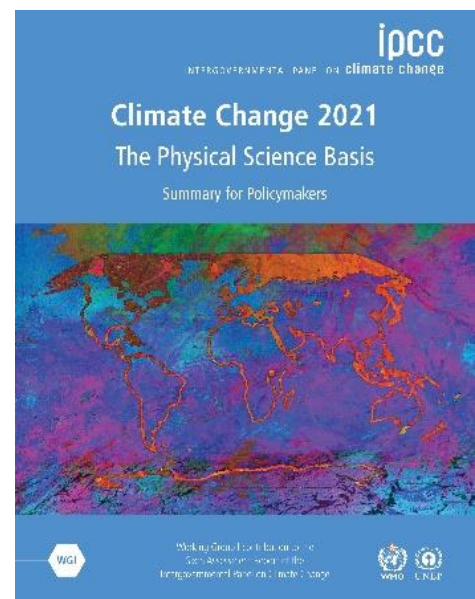
The response from Opposition Leader Anthony Albanese was sharp:

'Madness is saying – let this disease rip. Let people die. ... That is what is madness.'

Experience from multiple countries overseas is that removing restrictions too fast causes massive spikes in infections and deaths from Covid. The foolishness in Christensen's view is that the profits of business matter more than people. Thankfully, State leaders are following the advice of health experts.

Example 2 ... Release of the sixth IPCC (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change) report:

'It has been clear for decades that the Earth's climate is changing, and the role of human influence on the climate system is undisputed ... Climate change is already affecting every region on Earth, in multiple ways ... Over the next 20 years, global temperature is expected to reach or exceed 1.5°C of warming ... For 1.5°C of global warming, there will be increasing heat waves, longer warm seasons and shorter cold seasons. At 2°C of global warming, heat extremes would more often reach critical tolerance thresholds for agriculture and human health ... Unless there are immediate, rapid and large-scale reductions in greenhouse gas emissions, limiting warming to close to 1.5°C or even 2°C will be beyond reach.'



The IPCC report is call to urgent action now ... like a Code Red warning for bushfires. Yet the response of Prime Minister Scott Morrison this week was all about deflect, distract and do nothing. He claimed the problem was emissions from developing countries. Australia's approach is still to rely on technology to address emissions, much of which is not yet developed or proven. So there is no plan, no timetable and no urgency to actually reduce Australia's emissions. The wisdom of the Government is to ignore the stark warnings of climate scientists. This seems (to me) to be such foolishness, arrogance and short-sightedness just to protect the interests of mates in the fossil fuel industry.

By contrast, Paul urges the Ephesians to **live wisely**, making the most of the time, understanding the Lord's will, not getting drunk on wine but rather being filled with Spirit ...

... if we are to grow up spiritually (Eph 4:15) we will put on the character of God (4:24), follow the example of Christ (5:2) and seek to be filled with God's Spirit (5:18).

Being filled with the Spirit is a call to **worship** and **holy living**, yet this surely seems so foolish in the eyes of the world, a ridiculous response as we follow four simple actions ...



Sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs

Sing and make melody to the Lord in our hearts

Give thanks to God at all times

Be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ.

The Greek term translated be subject to another (hupotasso) can also mean be subordinate, to obey, to submit ... it suggests willing submission rather than forced obedience. The call to be subject to one another compares to earlier calls to bear with one another in love (4:2), be kind to one another and forgive one another (4:32).

So far there is nothing very controversial in this. But then Paul elaborates on the fourth point by providing examples from the home and workplace with guidance for wives/husbands, children/parents and slaves/masters and that's where some challenges arise.

Wives are to submit to their husbands. This is often marked as a new paragraph and the launching off point for a dubious wedding homily about the woman needing to obey her husband ... which leads to misunderstanding and even abuse.

*I NN take thee MM to be my wedded husband, to have and to hold from this day forward, for better for worse, for richer for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love, cherish, **and to obey**, till death us do part, according to God's holy ordinance.*

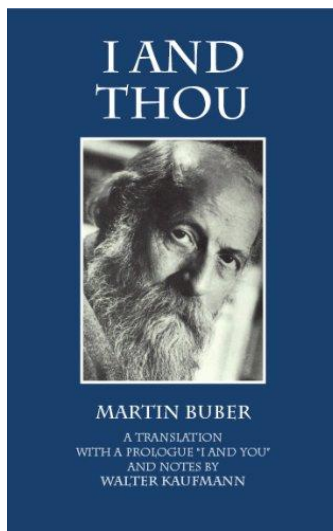
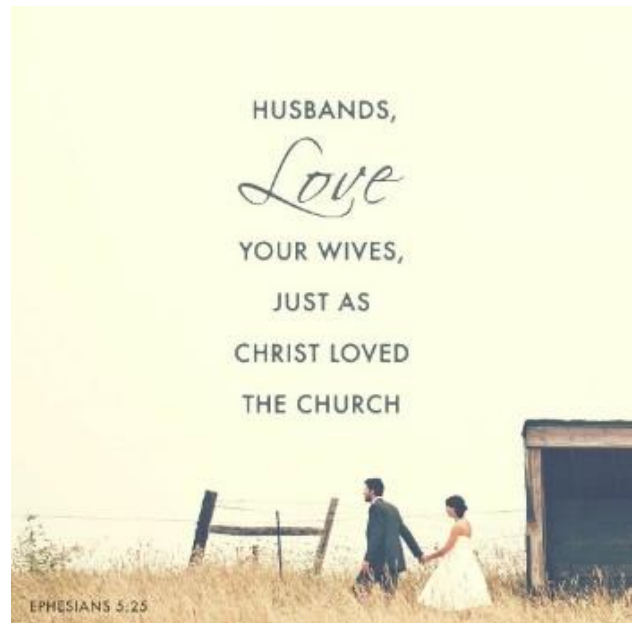
In Paul's strongly patriarchal culture, there is nothing controversial in these guidelines. Women were treated like property and of course were expected to live under the authority of their husband. Our culture holds quite a different view on marriage being an equal partnership.

The radical guidelines are directed to husbands. The key is the example of Christ's whole-hearted love for the church. So husbands are to love their wives as Christ loved the church and gave up his life for the church. The measure of love is being prepared to give up one's life for one's wife. Husbands are to always seek the best for their wife and care for her in a similar way that they care for their own body. Earlier guidelines from chapter 4 suggest this will include speaking words that build her up, putting

aside anger and violence and instead offering her kindness, forgiveness and love. This is how husbands are to live in peace, live wisely and be shaped by God's indwelling Spirit. I remember this teaching getting an enormous reaction in Africa when we taught there – a reaction of joy from the women ... that their husbands were supposed to **love** them like this.

Sadly, men have often demanded obedience from their wives yet failed to love them as Christ loves. There may well be fewer marriages that end in divorce and less domestic violence if Paul's guidelines were followed by husbands.

In a similar way, parents are not to exasperate their children and masters are to treat their slaves fairly as the Lord – Jesus – will reward every person according to how they treat others.



Jewish author Martin Buber distinguishes three types of relationship – I-It, Us-Them, I-Thou (or I-You).

I-It treats the other person as an object to be used to advance my own agenda

Us -Them leads to distrust, division and conflict

Only I-You leads to a genuine, personal relationship with another person

Paul encourages us to develop the third type of relationship within the church, the home and the workplace ... and with God whom we are encouraged to call our Father.

How is this made possible? Only by seeking to be filled with God's Spirit and learning how to truly worship God and how to love one another deeply.

This is how to live wisely.