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Overcoming

Social Media Addiction

In the midst of the foolish and ungodly environment which social media presents to our generation, how should we conduct ourselves online? As God's children, we are to take heed of Paul's exhortation in Ephesians 5:17 – "Wherefore be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is." The question then is: how are we to behave wisely in the face of the prevalent social media culture? From the preceding three verses, i.e. vv. 14-16, three general guidelines may be gleaned pertaining to wise and godly Christian conduct, which of course is just as applicable to wise behaviour online.

Wake Up Spiritually

"Wherefore he saith, Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light" (Ephesians 5:14).

Now, if you do have an obsession and addiction to social media, it may not be possible to overcome it if you have not "arisen from the dead". In other words, you may still be "dead in sins" (Ephesians 2:5a) and your soul still in total darkness. You first need to come to Christ, who alone can give light unto your soul. Otherwise,

with your darkness, you cannot hope to overcome those “unfruitful works of darkness” (Ephesians 5:11). Only light can dispel darkness! You need to follow Christ who had said, “I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life” (John 8:12). You must repent of your sins and put your faith in Christ for real transformation to happen in your life. Otherwise, no amount of self-generated effort can cure you of your social media addiction. The same holds true for people who are addicted to drugs or, for that matter, under the slavery of any form of addiction.

The disturbing fact is, even many Christians, though not “dead”, seem to be in a deep spiritual slumber. Judging by their online activities, their souls have been lulled to sleep by cyber-attractions and distractions. To such, Paul’s admonition in 1 Corinthians 15:34 is most needful – “Awake to righteousness, and sin not; for some have not the knowledge of God: I speak this to your shame.” This is a good spiritual “checkpoint” to see if one has already been severely affected by social media addiction (cf. 2 Corinthians 13:5). Are we “awake to righteousness”? Or have the lusts of the flesh / eyes, and the pride of life been awake and active in us? These are sure signs of worldliness brought about by our overindulgence in and misuse of social media. It will be to our shame indeed if we continue to wallow in the darkness and evil of social media addiction!

“Awake thou that sleepest ... and Christ shall give thee light.” As God’s children, we are “all the children of light, and the children of the day: we are not of the night, nor of darkness. Therefore let us not sleep, as do others; but let us watch and be sober” (1 Thessalonians 5:5-6). Only when we are awake can we be watchful and prayerful as

we become aware of our own frailties. The Lord Jesus Himself also had cautioned His disciples in Mark 14:38, “Watch ye and pray, lest ye enter into temptation.” Those who will not pay heed to these admonitions will by and by not care about the Word of God and have no more desire to pray. Soon they are no longer seen in worship service or fellowship gatherings, and eventually, they will have no concern at all for godly living. They must “wake up” before it becomes a “nightmare” for them!

Walk Circumspectly

“See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise” (Ephesians 5:15).

Having already called us to “awake” and “arise”, Paul now says that we are to “walk circumspectly”. This is a call for a vigilant, careful and watchful walk. The word “circumspect” is a compound word which signifies “to look round about in all directions”; i.e. we are to be in every way watchful, wary, and cautious in order to avoid danger and to discern enemies before they come too close – like how a soldier walks on enemy territory. It is not a nonchalant and aimless walk, but a sober and vigilant walk. It is no exaggeration to say that the world of social media is indeed “enemy territory”. As such, we are to “Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour” (1 Peter 5:8). Christians who are careless and aimless in spending their time on social media are in danger of being devoured by the evil schemes of Satan!

A circumspect walk is also a wise walk that can greatly influence others, as Paul reiterates in Colossians 4:5, 6 – “Walk in wisdom toward them that are without,

redeeming the time. Let your speech be always with grace, seasoned with salt, that ye may know how ye ought to answer every man.” Our wise conversations in life can also get reflected on social media, which can be a powerful testimony towards them who are outside the kingdom of God. On the other hand, foolish behaviour can hardly lead others to believe in what you believe. In a word, to walk wisely and circumspectly is, as reflected in Paul’s prayer for the saints, to “walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God” (Colossians 1:10).

Work Productively

The Christian walk, in order to be worthy and pleasing to the Lord, must be fruitful in doing good works. Hence the exhortation in Ephesians 5:16 – “Redeeming the time, because the days are evil.”

The Greek word (*exagorazo*) translated as “redeem” is a compound word consisting of the prefix “*ek*” (which means “from out of”) and the root verb “*agorazo*” (meaning “to purchase”). “*Exagorazo*” gives the idea of “purchasing out of the market”. Paul is trying to tell us that time is a very precious “commodity” that needs to be purchased out of the “marketplace” of human transactions and affairs. We see how Jesus values time by redeeming it with productive work. This is clearly highlighted in John 9:4 – “I must work the works of him that sent me, while it is day: the night cometh, when no man can work.”

If we don’t hasten to make a move, our opportunities to do good works will soon be gone, perhaps even being consumed by idleness and works of darkness. If only

we could take back all the useless hours that we have spent on the internet and social networks, and use them instead for evangelism, what great impact on the number of souls we would have made for Christ! As God’s stewards, we are not to waste time. To squander this very precious commodity is unfaithful stewardship of God’s blessing. Rather, we are to redeem the time by valuing and making the most of the fleeting opportunities that are presented to us for productive work. Yet we often hear people speak of “killing time” when they do something to fight off boredom. Now with the internet, going online will be the most convenient way to kill time. This certainly is in direct contradiction to Paul’s injunction here.

The reason why Paul says we are to redeem the time is “because the days are evil”. This observation is never more true than in our internet age of “hyper-connectivity”. We are truly living in perilous (and immensely wicked) times, which is evident from the godless and ungodly content being circulated on social media. The admonition here is not to waste time but to make our time useful, fruitful and productive for the Lord. And that includes staying away from “evil communications” on social media. “Be not deceived: evil communications corrupt good manners” (1 Corinthians 15:33)! How healthy and robust our Christian life would be if all the useless time spent on social media had been spent on reading the Word of God! Likewise, how vibrant our worship and fellowship would be and how zealous our service to God would be, if our precious time had been devoted to constant and earnest prayer and intimate communion with the Lord!

The days are evil also in another sense. None of us knows what will happen

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tomorrow, but we do know that with each passing day, we continually decay in the body. Someone has said that the moment we are born, we have begun to die. Soon old age catches up with us, with all the attendant pains, sicknesses and sorrows associated with the deterioration of our health. That is how "evil" or distressing and miserable our days on earth are! We must take heed of what the wisest king of Israel has exhorted: "Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth, while the evil days (that is, of old age, as contrasted with one's youth) come not, nor the years draw nigh, when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them" (Ecclesiastes 12:1). Hence the imperative urgency (before time "runs out" for us) to spend our time productively and not squander it on needless, fruitless social media usage. Recognising the harsh reality of old age and diminishing health should instil in us the need to redeem the time and order our earthly life accordingly today, and not wait till tomorrow!

Conclusion

Dear Christians, let us be wise users of time and serve the Lord to the fullest in our lifetime. Whether we are in the cyber-world or in the physical world, let us use our time wisely and engage in fruitful and edifying work for the Lord. Let us not be engaged in the foolish activities of social media. Rather, let us conduct ourselves wisely and prudently in all things. "Wherefore be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is."

So, as Christians, we are to be spiritually awake and aroused, that we may be able to walk circumspectly and to work productively as we serve the Lord. In short, we are to occupy till the Lord comes again by being waking, walking and working servants of the Lord!