

Walking in Wisdom

Ephesians 5:15-21

- 15 See then that you walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise,
- 16 redeeming the time, because the days are evil.
- 17 Therefore do not be unwise, but understand what the will of the Lord is.
- 18 And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit,
- 19 speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord,
- 20 giving thanks always for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ,
- 21 submitting to one another in the fear of God.

I love the story of the young man of 32 who had been appointed President of the bank. He'd never dreamed he'd be president, much less at such a young age. So he approached the venerable Chairman of the Board and said, **"You know, I've just been appointed President. I was wondering if you could give me some advice."** The old man came back with just two words: **"Right decisions!"** The young man had hoped for a bit more than this, so he said, **"That's really helpful, and I appreciate it, but can you be more specific? How do I make right decisions?"** The old man simply responded, **"Experience."** The young man said, **"Well, that's just the point of my being here. I don't have the kind of experience I need. How do I get it?"** The older man replied, **"Wrong decisions!"**

We all need wisdom and we need a better way to gain it than the experience of making wrong decisions! The theme of this passage of Scripture is just that, walking in wisdom... God's wisdom.

In our study of Ephesians we have seen already how Paul often uses the word **"walk"** to symbolize how we live, our lifestyles. In this chapter we've learned a lot about walking the **"walk"** or living like a Christian. The main message is: *Jesus should make a difference in our lives*. In v.2 we are told to **"walk in love."** In v.8, we are commanded to **"walk as children of the light."** Now the Apostle Paul admonishes us to **"walk... not as fools but as wise."** One thing we all need is to learn how to walk in God's wisdom.

The Bible has a lot to say about wisdom. In this passage we will learn two aspects of walking in wisdom. First, to walk in wisdom is to *live purposefully*. Second, to walk in wisdom is to *be filled with the Holy Spirit*.

I. To Walk in Wisdom is to Live Purposefully (vv.15-17).

So many people wander aimlessly through life, rolling with the punches, accepting the high and lows, drifting with the tide and they never get anywhere. The wise person always has a direction, a purpose in life. Notice three ways we can live purposefully:

A. To Live with a Purpose is to Walk Circumspectly (v.15).

V.15 says we must **"walk circumspectly."** **"Circumspectly"** literally translates "carefully." We are to live or **"walk"** in a careful fashion.

Being careful means being wise. Pro.14:16 says, **"A wise man fears and departs from evil, but a fool rages and is selfconfident."** 12:15 says, **"The way of a fool is right in his own eyes, but he who heeds counsel is wise."** 28:26 says, **"He who trusts in his own heart is a fool, but whoever walks wisely will be delivered."**

To **"walk circumspectly"** or live carefully means paying attention to details. It means keeping your eyes open, looking where you are going. Notice also in v.15 that we are to walk **"not as fools but as wise."** The opposite of walking carefully is to walk foolishly, not paying attention.

A while back I had gone through the check-out at the WalMart and was carrying my bags toward the exit. In front of me was a young lady who was walking really slowly. So I moved to the left to go around her. As I did, she wandered to the left in front of me. So I moved to the right to pass her, and again she veered to the right. I was getting annoyed by this time and wondered why she was walking so erratically. I looked closer. She had her head down, not really watching where she was going because she was texting on her phone. Text-walking is about like drunk-driving—it's dangerous. ABC news did a story on text-walking that showed a lady walk right into a mall fountain while texting. A man walked into a closed door. And one woman walked right off the Santa Monica pier into the Pacific Ocean. Why couldn't these people see where they were going? They were so involved in texting they were not paying attention to where they were going.

That kind of thing can happen in our spiritual life too. We can get so caught up in the day to day things that we foolishly fail to carefully look at the big picture.

Living carefully, **"circumspectly"** or wisely is to pay attention to where your life is going. Are you living your life carefully, **"circumspectly"** or wisely? Or, are you just taking things one day at a time, distracted by any and everything?

In John Bunyan's classic *Pilgrims Progress*, Pilgrim, the main character is being attacked by roaring lions. The lions almost reach him but Pilgrim discovers that if he carefully watches his step and stays on his path, the lions cannot reach him. They are bound by chains that keep them just out of reach. However Pilgrim has to keep his eyes on the path. If he watches the lions, he'll veer off the path and be devoured. 1 Pet.5:8 says, **"Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour."**

B. To Live with a Purpose is to Redeem the Time (v.16).

Verse16 tells us we are to be **"redeeming the time."** We are to be making the most of the time God gives to us. One of the reasons we need to walk carefully or **"circumspectly"** is because time is limited. We only have so much. A wise person uses time. A foolish person wastes it.

We all live at a frantic pace. We rush here and there. We take this call and make that one. We live in constant cycle of bedroom, bathroom, table and job. The problem is that much of that time is wasted. Our enemy, Satan wants to steal our

time. He wants us to be so caught up in temporary things of little significance that we will fail to maximize eternal things of supreme importance.

Psa.90:12 says, "**So teach us to number our days, That we may gain a heart of wisdom.**"

*I like this little poem from an unknown author:
Just a tiny little minute only sixty seconds in it
Forced upon me. Can't refuse it. Didn't seek it, didn't choose it,
I must suffer if I loose it, Give account if I abuse it.
Just a tiny little minute, but eternity is in it.*

The phrase "**redeeming the time**" can also be translated "buying back or buying up the time." When I read this verse I think of Noah. He worked on the ark for over 100 years because his days were "**evil**" too. He made the most of his time. He seized the opportunity. He preached as he hammered. However, people didn't listen. When the ark was shut and the rain began to fall, how people used their time determined who was "**wise**" who were "**fools**."

For the unbeliever, life is in bondage to futility and meaninglessness (4:17-19). He goes through school, gets a job, starts a family, raises the family, retires from his job, and hopes that his health lasts long enough to cruise through all the national parks and take videos, or to catch a lot of fish. Then he dies. Throughout the process, he spends ten years of his life watching mindless TV shows. What's the point? His time was in bondage to futility.

But the Christian can buy back those otherwise wasted hours and use the opportunities for eternal significance. He grabs every opportunity to grow to know Christ and be conformed to His image. He rears his children to know and follow Christ. He works to bring others to know Christ and grow in Him. He is a steward of his resources for God's kingdom purposes, investing wisely in opportunities to further the gospel around the globe. By walking carefully in this evil world, he buys back opportunities for God's kingdom purposes.

But, the word "redeem" implies that there is a cost. You must say no to certain secondary things in order to say yes to the crucial. You must say no to hours of TV or computer games in order to say yes to reading and studying God's Word. You must say no to selfish activities that pull you away from God's kingdom purposes. You must say no to certain ways of squandering your money on worldly pursuits in order to say yes to eternal riches. To walk carefully, you must use your time wisely.

C. To Live with a Purpose is to Understand the Will of the Lord (v.17).

Again we see in this verse "**do not be unwise**" or foolish. Rather we are to "**understand what the will of the Lord is.**"

How can we walk carefully or "**circumspectly**?" How can we redeem the "**time**" in these "**evil**" days? How can we be wise? We must "**understand**" the "**will of the Lord.**"

If we don't know God will, we will squander our time and resources doing things that really don't matter. So much of what we do doesn't really matter. Have you

ever heard of the 80/20 rule? 20% of the people do 80% of the work. The same is true in your life too. For the average person 80% of what we do has little long-term significance. John Maxwell says, "**You cannot overestimate the unimportance of practically everything.**" In reality only about 20% of what you do really matters. Doing the will of the God is prioritizing that 20%!

General Eisenhower is quoted as saying, "**The urgent is seldom important, and the important is seldom urgent.**" Too often life is controlled by the "tyranny of the urgent". We put aside higher and worthier goals to put out fires.

How can we "**understand what the will of the Lord is?**" We have to get in the Word. V.10 says we are to be "**finding out what is acceptable to the Lord.**" We must study the Word of God to know the will of God! If we are not daily learning from God's Word, we are not walking in wisdom, we are not seizing the time because we don't understand His will.

II. To Walk in Wisdom is to be Filled with the Spirit (vv.18-21).

These verses continue the contrast between wisdom and foolishness. Being "**drunk with wine**" is foolish. Being "**filled with the Spirit**" is wise.

A. The Meaning of being Filled with the Spirit (v.18).

First, Paul says "**Do not be drunk with wine in which is dissipation**" or excess. It is never "**the will of the Lord**" (v.17) for a believer to be "**drunk**" with alcohol. In the same sense he should never be high on drugs. Why? Because to be "**drunk**" or high is to be controlled by an outside substance.

Why do people drink alcohol, smoke pot or use other narcotics? Some want to escape the problems of today. Some want to forget the pain of the past. Some want to find a sense of joy. Some want to feel better. Some want to be accepted.

Though they may find temporary relief in alcohol or drugs, they also lose physical and mental control. It is "**dissipation**," which is a word that referred to someone who was incurably sick. It means self-destruction. Let's examine **Proverbs 23:19-21**:

- 19 Hear, my son, and be wise; And guide your heart in the way.
- 20 Do not mix with winebibbers, Or with gluttonous eaters of meat;
- 21 For the drunkard and the glutton will come to poverty, And drowsiness will clothe a man with rags.

Many people have asked me "**Can a Christian drink?**" A better question is "**Why should a Christian want to drink?**" He can take his problems to Jesus. Jesus removes the guilt and pain of the past. Jesus gives lasting joy. Jesus makes us feel better. In Jesus we have total acceptance and unconditional love. In short, Jesus removes any reason for drinking!

Rather than being "**drunk**," we are to be "**filled with the Spirit.**" Instead of being "under the influence" of alcohol, we should be "under the influence" of the Spirit of God.

Being "**filled with the Spirit**" does not mean being drunk with the Spirit. Alcohol is a depressant. The Spirit is a stimulant. To be "**drunk**" is to be out-of control. "**Self-control**" is a fruit of the Spirit (Gal.5:22-23).

When we were saved, we were indwelt with and sealed by the Holy Spirit. Let's reexamine **1:13-14** and **4:30**. When we were saved we were baptized into Christ by the Spirit. 1 Cor.12:13 says, "**For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body; whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free; and have all been made to drink into one Spirit.**" He convicts us, teaches us, leads us, intercedes for us and reveals God to us. If you are born again, you have all of the Holy Spirit you will ever need!

To be "**filled with the Spirit**" is something completely different. It is a command in the English language, but a much stronger injunction in the Greek NT. It literally reads, "**You must be continuously filled by the Spirit.**" The questions then come, "**Pastor, how can I be filled with the Holy Spirit? How can I obey this command?**"

You can be "**filled with the Holy Spirit**" when you surrender yourself to the Spirit. Being "**filled**" is not asking for more of the Spirit, but relinquishing more of yourself to Him! When I sense I am empty and need again to be filled with the power and presence of the Spirit, I just pray a prayer of surrender like this, "**Lord, I'm empty. I feel spiritually powerless. I confess I've been operating in my strength, not Yours, doing my will, not Yours. I surrender myself to You and ask the Holy Spirit to fill me up that I may think the thoughts You want me to think, say the words You want me to speak and do the things You want me to do. I surrender afresh to You.**"

Next time we will examine the Marks of being Filled with the Spirit in verses 19-21.

If you're not walking wisely, you're living dangerously! You're adrift without rudder or power in dangerous waters! You're wandering aimlessly in a minefield! Confess to the Lord your carelessness and coldness of heart. Ask Him to fill you with His Spirit. Commit to get into His Word regularly. Otherwise, you risk spiritual shipwreck!

But to close today, do you remember the young bank president? He was searching for wisdom and was told it could only be found in wrong decisions and experience. I don't know about you but I've experienced too many wrong decisions. I want to redeem the time I have left to do the will of the Lord by being filled with the Holy Spirit. That's a right decision. That's a wise decision.

God will honor it. How about you? Are you walking carefully in this evil world by using your time wisely for eternity, by understanding God's will for the ages, and by being filled with the Holy Spirit?