

Ephesians 5:15-17

Introduction

- ✓ Ephesians 2:1-2 — [We *were*] dead in [our] trespasses and sins in which [we] once *walked*.
- ✓ Ephesians 2:10 — [But *now*] we are his workmanship created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should *walk* in them.
- ✓ Ephesians 4:1 — I urge you *therefore*... to *walk* worthy of the calling with which you were called.
- ✓ Ephesians 4:17 — This *therefore* I say and testify in the Lord that you no longer *walk* just as the Gentiles also *walk* in the futility of their mind.
- ✓ Ephesians 5:1-2 — *Therefore* be imitators of God as beloved children, and *walk* in love.
- ✓ Ephesians 5:8 — For you were once darkness, but now — light in the Lord. *Walk* [*therefore*] as children of light.

And now Paul writes in chapter five verse fifteen:

I. “Watch carefully *therefore* how you *walk*”

This is the seventh and last time in Ephesians that Paul speaks of our *walk*. That doesn't mean he's done with the theme. It's just the last time he uses that word. And so once *again*, we're reminded that Christianity is about a “*walk*.” I think of how Jesus so often said to so many different people: “come, follow Me.” (Mat. 19:21) The life of a follower of Jesus is about a daily, moment by moment way of thinking and speaking and acting. Walking in good works; walking worthy of our calling; walking in love; walking as children of light. To be a Christian is a life that we live – it's something we can never stop being; it's the most basic and *true* description of who we are. And this is *because* Christ has redeemed us, body and soul, and made us His own. This is *because* we're a new creation, no longer dead in trespasses and sins but now alive together with Christ Jesus. Christianity is about our *walk*.

And so now in this last use of the word, Paul adds some very strong words of emphasis, “Watch carefully *therefore* how you *walk*.” Paul could have just said, “Therefore, walk not as unwise but as wise.” Instead, he says, “**Watch carefully** *therefore* how you *walk*, not as unwise but as wise.” In other places, this word “careful” has the idea of being very *thorough* and *exact* (Acts 18:25, 26; 23:15, 20; 24:22; 26:5; 1 Thess. 5:2). Sometimes, it's just emphasizing the same idea in another word. In Matthew 2:8 Herod tells the wise men, “Go and **search carefully** for the child.” Luke speaks of “having **investigated** everything **carefully** from the beginning.” (Luke 1:3) When you think of a “search” or an “investigation,” you usually assume something thorough, but just to be safe, *search* and *investigate* **carefully**. That's what we have here in Ephesians 5, “Watch carefully...” “Watch” already means to “pay close attention.” But just to be safe, “Watch **carefully** *therefore* how you *walk*.” Once again, we see a picture of a Christian life lived **purposefully**. Or maybe we could say a Christian life lived **consciously**. O'Brien puts it this way: “Paul admonishes his readers to take **great care** in the conduct of their Christian lives.” It's this carefulness, and thoroughness, and purposefulness that we may very often be lacking. There's a good, and even a necessary kind of incessant “self-consciousness.” You're whole life, from “a” to “z” should always be under your most careful scrutiny and observation. Does this describe

you? Are you one who takes the very greatest *care* in the conduct of your Christian life? Paul summarizes this godly “self-consciousness” like this: “**Watch carefully** therefore how you *walk*.” And then he describes its goal:

II. “not as unwise but as wise”

What does it mean to walk not as unwise but as wise? In the Old Testament, to live wisely was to live gladly and skillfully according to God’s Law – according to the very clearly spelled out rules and regulations of the Old Covenant (O’Brien; Lincoln). In a sense, it was all very “simple” and straightforward.

But what does living wisely look like today, under the New Covenant? Well, I guess you could say that now it’s even simpler than before. Paul says in chapter four that we have “learned Christ” – that we have “heard Him and been taught in Him as the truth is in Jesus.” (4:20-21) To walk wisely is to walk in light of the *Person* we have learned. Christ Jesus Himself *is* our truth. He *is* our law.

Sometimes we don’t like this. Sometimes we’d rather have the list. Then things would be so much more clear – so much easier to figure out. Then we’d know how far we have to go, and when we can stop. Then, too, we can congratulate ourselves the more easily on our outward obedience. But the rules and regulations of the Old Covenant were for the days of our immaturity. Now that we have *come of age* under the New Covenant, the list of rules and regulations as a standard of wise living has given way to the truth that is in Jesus. Now it’s impossible for us to measure whether we’ve gone “far enough” in living wisely. Now it’s impossible for us to congratulate ourselves on a list checked off. Now to walk wisely is to walk in light of the *Person* we have learned – our Lord Jesus Christ. So in a sense, the standard is easier because it’s *one* New Covenant Person rather than *many* Old Covenant laws. But on the other hand that standard is also infinitely higher because Christ takes us beyond the mere letter of the Law to the spirit of the Law. Christ takes us beyond the mere letter of the law to the law as it’s been fulfilled and revealed *in Him*. This obviously assumes that we’ve all come to full “manhood” under the New Covenant. This assumes that God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, “Abba! Father!” (Rom. 8:16)

But now what is the *truth* in Jesus that we have heard, and been taught, and learned? What is the truth in Jesus that is to be the ultimate standard of wise and skilful living – the standard that enables us to “watch carefully how we walk?” “Watch carefully therefore how you walk, not as unwise but as wise...”

III. “buying up the time, because the days are evil.”

“Buying up the time” is a Greek idiom or figure of speech. The NIV translates: “Making the most of every opportunity.” But this might imply that life is a series of opportunities which we should take advantage of whenever they happen to come along – when what this verse really says is that life itself *is* our *opportunity*. Every second of every day is there to be bought up, and gathered up, and gobbled up by us. One Greek lexicon paraphrases: “Do everything with urgency because the days are evil.” (LN) Each and every moment of your day is there to be seized by you

– bought up and used in wise and skilful living according to the truth that is in Jesus. Why such aggressiveness? Why such urgency? Why such emphasis on not letting a single moment go to waste?

“Because the days are evil.” Paul speaks in Galatians of “this present evil age” (Gal. 1:4). In 2 Corinthians, he speaks of Satan as “the god of this age” (2 Cor. 4:4). And right here in Ephesians, Paul has spoken of a time when we once walked “according to the age of this world, according to the ruler of the authority of the air” (Eph. 2:2). We need to recognize Satan’s influence and power over this present evil age. We need to see that the days are evil – not just the newspaper headlines, but the entire spirit of the age that’s all around us. We need to be aware of this, because otherwise, we’ll be lulled into a false sense of comfort and security. The world around us is not neutral. The moral teachings and ideas of the world are not neutral. The values and ideals of the world are not neutral. The entire spirit of this age is at every point opposed to God because Satan himself is its god and ruler. And because of our remaining sin, we are at all times in danger of being influenced and shaped and molded by the teachings, and ideas, and values, and ideals of this age. The days are not neutral – they are evil.

Do we see this? Do we grasp this and understand this? Because if we do, then we’ll feel that sense of *urgency* and the *intense need* for us to be *aggressively seizing* each and every moment of our time – *buying it up* and using it in wise and skilful living according to the truth that is in Jesus. But now we ask again, what is the *truth* in Jesus that we have heard, and been taught, and learned? What is the truth in Jesus that is the ultimate standard of wise and skilful living – the standard that enables us to “watch carefully how we walk” as we look to be constantly buying up the time?

IV. “Because of this, do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is.”

Because of what? Because the days are evil. Because the days are evil, it’s *urgent*, it’s absolutely imperative that we not be foolish. We must not be unwise, but rather we must understand what the will of the Lord is.

Now how many people have ever asked themselves questions like these: How can I know God’s will? How can I know God’s will for this decision I’m making? How can I know God’s will for how I should live in this particular situation? And then sometimes we conclude in discouragement: If only God would reveal to me His will! And then we invent all sorts of ways to “divine” his will as though it was something hidden and secret – something that we have to somehow coax out of God or else find by following the secret clues. And then we read these words from the Apostle Paul: “Do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is” – as though we all already know. And so now we begin to wonder. Should we already know? Has His will already been fully revealed to us? Do I not need all the books on “finding” God’s will, or the secret clues, or the techniques for manipulating information out of God? No! says Paul, for God has already *fully revealed* His will, and now it is simply our great privilege to work always more and more at *understanding* that will and to buy up every moment of our time for the express purpose of living out our ever increasing understanding of that will from day to day.

So what is God's will? Where has He finally and most fully revealed His will to us? Not through the rules and regulations of the Old Covenant, but in the *Person* of Jesus Christ. We have "learned Christ" – we have "heard Him and been taught in Him as the truth is in Jesus." (4:20-21) And what is this truth that is in Jesus? What is the will of God that has been finally and most fully and most clearly and most brilliantly revealed to us in Jesus? That's what the first three chapters of Ephesians were all about – and especially that first long sentence.

- ✓ Ephesians 1:4-12 — [God] chose us in [Christ] before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before Him in love, having predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His *WILL*, in whom we have redemption through His blood—the forgiveness of trespasses—according to the riches of His grace, which He lavished upon us in all wisdom and insight, having made known to us the mystery of His *WILL* according to His good pleasure which He purposed in Him for the administration of the fullness of the times to unite all things in Christ, things in heaven and things on earth, in Him, in whom also we were taken as an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His *WILL*, so that we might be to the praise of His glory – we who have already hoped in Christ.

What is the will of God that has been finally and most fully and most clearly and most brilliantly revealed to us in Jesus? It's God's wonderful plan for redeeming and saving His people through Christ, and one day presenting them before Himself holy and blameless in Christ. What is God's will? It's His wonderful, gracious, saving plan for the uniting of all things in Christ, things in heaven and things on earth in Him. The will of God (that only "will" that we need to know) is not a secret. May this thought be forever banished from our minds!

And so now Paul says to each and every single one of us: "Do not be foolish, but *understand* what the will of the Lord is." In other words, *understand* how this redeeming and saving will of the Lord is your constant *standard* and *guide* as you *aggressively seize* each and every moment of your time – *buying it up* and using it in wise and skilful living. But is that really fair? God has revealed His gracious, saving, redeeming will fully and finally and completely in Christ, but how are we to understand how *that* will works itself out in the myriad of different nitty-gritty circumstances and situations that confront us from day to day? Isn't that the "secret"? Isn't that what the "experts" are for? No, Paul says, this is *your* task and *your* calling as one who has come of full age under the New Covenant. The New Testament writers have given us some basic examples or case studies of how to apply God's saving will to our everyday lives (Paul has just given us some in Ephesians four), but there's no way they could cover every possible scenario, and if they'd tried that would have been to treat us as though we were still children under the Old Covenant. The reason we still want to be treated like children is so we can measure when we've gone far enough, or else so we can congratulate ourselves on a list checked off. One commentator writes:

"The 'will of God' is... God's gracious saving plan... The contemporary preoccupation with personal guidance is wrongly directed if it is not understood... within this framework of God's gracious saving purposes for his world [and for us]. Personalized

concerns about ‘guidance’ may, in fact, be evidence of a *folly* which stands in contrast to, and needs to be corrected by, a true understanding of the Lord’s will.” (O’Brien)

And so now in that light, we can listen to what Hendriksen says:

“The unwise are those who, having no insight into things that pertain to [God’s saving will], are not aiming to reach the highest goal and therefore do not know and do not even care to know what are the best means to reach it. They regard as very important what is in reality of minor value or may even be harmful, and they do not appreciate what is indispensable. They conduct themselves accordingly. Those who are wise, on the other hand, have the proper insight [into God’s saving will] and walk in harmony with it... [they show] by means of their life and conduct the power and glory of the gospel, thus exposing evil, [having a transforming influence on the world around them], obtaining assurance of salvation for themselves, strengthening the fellowship, winning the neighbor for Christ, and through it all glorifying God.”

The New Covenant writers consistently refuse to treat us like children who have not yet come of age. They refuse to give us a New Covenant equivalent of all the rules and regulations in the Old Covenant. Instead, what do they do? Over and over and over again in diverse and manifold ways they bring us back to the saving will of God which was the sum and substance of everything that God had revealed to them. Paul wrote in chapter three:

- ✓ Ephesians 3:8-10 (cf. 3:1-7) — To me, the very least of all the saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, and to bring to light for everyone what is the administration of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things, so that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places.

Over and over and over again in diverse and manifold ways the New Testament writers bring us back to the saving will of God, and then they *pray* for us with prayers like these:

- ✓ Ephesians 1:16-19 (cf. 3:14-19) — I never cease giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers, that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you the Spirit of **WISDOM** and of revelation in the knowledge of Him (the eyes of your hearts being [already] enlightened), that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what is the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe, according to the powerful working of the strength of His might.
- ✓ Colossians 1:9-10 — We have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his [saving] will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, *so as* to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God.

Over and over again the New Testament writers bring us back to the saving will of God, and then they pray for us – that we might be filled with wisdom in the knowledge of that will, and then, finally, they *exhort* us with words like these:

- ✓ Romans 12:1-2 — I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, ***that by testing you may discern what is the will of God***, what is good and acceptable and perfect.
- ✓ Ephesians 5:8-10 — Walk as children of light (for the fruit of the light is in all goodness and righteousness and truth), ***carefully working to discern what is pleasing to the Lord***.
- ✓ ***“Watch carefully therefore how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, buying up the time, because the days are evil. Because of this, do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is [that saving will which has already been finally and fully and completely revealed in Christ].”***