

## Walking with Wisdom

*Series on Ephesians 5*

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**Bible Text:** Ephesians 5:8-10  
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Do you wish to be wise? Do you wish to make wise decisions and be someone that others can come to for wise counsel? Would you like to be able to discern God's will and use your time wisely? Well, our text wants that for you and I invite you to turn with me to our text in Ephesians 5:15-17 to see what wisdom we can gain from it. If you're using the church Bibles, you'll find that on page 978. Again, Ephesians 5:15-17.

Now we're about to close out a section of Ephesians regarding the Christian walk. It began back in chapter 4, verse 1, in which the Ephesian saints are told "to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called," and such a manner included humility and gentleness, it included patience, bearing with one another in love, being eager to maintain the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace. Paul then presented the Christian walk in the context of the church, what it is to walk as members of the church. Then in verse 17, he moved onto the walk of Christians in the world and he says there, "no longer walk as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their minds." These Gentiles who are darkened in their understanding. That leads him to present a series of contrasts of behavior which give through the illustration of putting off old clothes of the old self, and putting on the new clothes of the new self, and the summary of that walk is given in chapter 5, verse 2, where he says to "walk in love, as Christ loves us." And Paul speaks again of their walk but this time not merely as a contrast to the old ways of walking but in terms of what that walk should accomplish. So in chapter 5, verse 8, he says to "walk as children of light" and that light then will expose the darkness and it may even transform those who walk in that darkness.

Now we come to the final instruction about walking.

15 Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, 16 making the best use of the time, because the days are evil. 17 Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is.

Now when he uses that term then as he begins there in verse 15, now he certainly is referring to what he's just said about light and darkness. If we are light, by our light we are going to be exposing the darkness so that others may come to faith, well then, then we should look carefully to how we are walking before unbelievers, but coming as it does

also at the end of this whole section about the Christian walk, Paul probably has in mind all that he has said in that section. This worthy walk that is to be done in love and as light, this walk that contrasts with the walk of the world, he's saying it requires ongoing attentiveness otherwise we might stray back into our old ways.

Now I need to give a secret out here. Oftentimes on Tuesdays when we have our staff meeting, for devotions I'll read the text that I'm going to preach on so that I can get the staff to give me the points that I need for the sermon, and I tell them that I'm not going to give them credit but I feel like I should give Johnny McGreavy credit for this next statement in which he made a comment that the Christian walk is not merely about choosing the right path but it's how we walk on that path once it is chosen, and that's the point of Paul here.

Now Paul gives us three thoughts to keep in mind about the walk: we're to walk with wisdom; we're to make the best use of the time; and we are to understand what the will of the Lord is. Now let's take them in order.

First of all, we're to walk with wisdom, not as unwise but as wise. Now really this is what Paul basically has been saying all along with that imagery of what to put off and what to put on. All these sinful ways of the old life are, they're unwise. They belong to those who are, as he says back in chapter 4, verse 18, who "are darkened in their understanding, who are alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them," and so this is un-wisdom, it is born out of ignorance of God.

Now wisdom, biblical wisdom, is tied to knowledge of God and so back in chapter 1 in verse 17, Paul prays for the Ephesians. He prays "that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a Spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him." So one could label the first three chapters of this book as the revealed wisdom of God, and then these latter three chapters he's presenting the practical lessons that are drawn from that knowledge, from that wisdom, and so would such biblically informed wisdom, wisdom that is informed with the knowledge of God and of God's ways, we are to walk in this world so that we do not, again, become of the world.

Now the second thing he tells us is that we're to make the best use of the time, or like how the King James has it, that we are to redeem the time, and Paul notes we are to do this because the days are evil, and I think that what he is saying to the Ephesians is something like this, he's saying, "Look around you. You have come out of a way of life that was marked by darkness in understanding and behavior, but that way of life remains the very society in which you still live and you can easily fall back into. So you must, therefore, make a determined decision to use your time in such a way that you're going to mature in the faith, that you're going to grow up into your Head, Jesus Christ, and not fall back to your old patterns of life. So you must redeem the time. You must use it wisely to step clear of the traps and the obstacles that the world places in your way. You must take advantage of every opportunity to do good, to be light, to grow in your faith, because you live in such a time and society that works against such things."

So we're to walk with wisdom, we're to make the best use of time, well, thirdly he tells us that we are to understand what the will of the Lord is, and he contrasts this with being foolish, and that contrast actually helps us to clarify what this understanding of the will of the Lord is about. First of all, it is not about knowing the secret counsels of God, those secret counsels by which he directs the course of history, how he determines who the elect will be, nor is it about getting special revelation about the specifics for our own lives. Normally he's not going to give us kind of information of the future of what we can count on. What it is about is about being wise as opposed to being foolish. You see, the fool is wise in his own eyes and he trusts only in himself. In contrast to the fool is the wise person and the mark of wisdom is knowing God, it is living according to the ways that God has revealed.

So to give an example, the fool, well, the fool will lie and he will lie in order to attain his end. He thinks to himself that lying is a good and clever means of protecting himself, of getting ahead. But the wise person only knows that God forbids lying and he knows that trust in God is the best means of protecting himself and attaining what he needs to attain. You see, it's with that kind of knowledge, with that trust in God, that he will then be more likely to be able to determine God's will for any situation. So understanding what the will of the Lord is, well, it's about understanding how the Lord would have us go about making the daily decisions that we need to make in life.

So these are the three ways that we are told to walk: walk in wisdom; make the best use of the time; understand what the will of the Lord is. But how are you doing? How wise are you feeling? How is that walk coming along? Well, I want us to consider this morning a few practical ways to help us attain these ends and one of the things that we need to do if we're going to act as wise persons, we must be people who make time for thinking. You see, our tendency is to fill our time as consumers. We allow little time, if any, for actually having reflective thought. You might consider your day, from the moment we get up to the time we go to sleep, we tend to fill our waking hours with something being fed into us. It might be music. It might be news. It might be listening to sermons or instructions. It might be, more likely is the case, being entertained and with iPods today and smartphones, it's rather easy to do. We now can go through a day in which every waking moment is covered by sounds coming into our ears or receiving some kind of visual communication. We no longer need to be caught alone ever with our own thoughts.

Now if our minds are always receiving, and as James Boice would have added, always being entertained, we simply cannot develop the capacity to think deeply, and yet this is the necessary exercise for wisdom to mature in us. We cannot look carefully at how we walk if we are continually distracted by sights and sounds coming in, I mean, even if they may be good sights and sounds, and so I want to encourage you: practice restraint. Practice restraint turning on the car radio or cd player every time you get into the car. You know, you do not need to listen every moment that you are driving. I encourage you, do not listen to your iPod every time you must actually walk a bit of a distance or ride in a vehicle. Take some time in the day to be alone with your thoughts, or I should say not completely alone, do your thinking in conversation with God who is with you and

listening in on your thoughts. Now your subject might be the very questions of life. They might be the pressing issues of the day. They might just be the personal cares of your life, but whatever the case, give yourself some thinking time with God. Now you actually might find it a difficult exercise as you learn how dependent you are on being constantly fed outside communication, but such exercise will build your ability to walk, to act wisely.

So we're to take time to think. Also to act as a wise person, we must take the time to critique what the world produces on the impact it has on us. Now what the world produces is not necessarily bad. Because of God's common grace, there is much that is produced by unregenerate man that is helpful, that is good. I mean, we know now that we are in the midst of a technological and communications revolution and we're aware that it is making information available that before was restricted, and we now have the means to be connected in ways never before and to exchange information. These are good things but with every innovation, we need to critique its impact on us both positively and negatively.

Now we know some obvious examples. We can think of the internet, how that now allows us access to explore masterpieces in the arts and literature, to be exposed to the fruit of historical and scientific inquiry, things that before were unavailable to us, but we know that same internet allows us access to very harmful things that we normally would not have seen or experienced before. But the wise person besides thinking about that, will also consider subtle effects both good and bad that technology brings to us.

I remember Dr. Boice doing this and he was heavily influenced, as many of you will remember, by the writings of Neil Postman and amusing ourselves to death, and he would talk to us about the way, the impact that television has on us and how it presents the news and religious programming. We're listening to this, we think we are being informed but the very nature of television which depends on being entertaining to keep our attention, it was turning the news, it was turning the religious programs into entertainment shows. Now this has been so effective, by the way, we know from our last presidential election you can no longer seriously run for president if you do not make a showing on Saturday Night Live or be interviewed on entertainment shows. You can't run. Now the impact on us is that we are now programmed to need whatever it is we receive, we have to receive it in an entertaining format. Now that's something that has crept into the churches and churches will advertise, you can look in the papers and so on, or go to the websites, they don't just have worship services, they have dynamic worship services and they promise customer satisfaction.

Now consider again the tremendous access that we have now to news and information which is good, I mean, we have the internet, you can subscribe to your newsletters, you can subscribe to tweets and blogs and there are the websites and video sites and so on, and through these things we are inundated with information and yet the very format of this information has actually shortened our attention spans. I mean, studies are done on this, we are less able to read long comprehensive writings and especially if they're void of pictures or visual effects. It's just more difficult for us to do now, indeed, the very reason

churches have changed their worship oftentimes to more visual effects and to kind of, well, Dr. Boice would have said, "dumb down things," is to adapt to a generation that just can't sit still for long periods of time and keep focus.

Well, maybe there needs to be adapting but we also have to ask are we contributing to a process that makes the sustained study of Scriptures of the doctrines of grace, of the knowledge of God, ever more difficult to do. Well, a wise person will think about these things, will consider such things. The wise person will take time to think and during that thinking time he will critique what is about him, but here's what he'll really spend his time doing, a wise person studies God and his ways, and this may seem an obvious statement to us but, again, it touches on another subtle way in which we may have become more like the culture than we suspect because like everyone else we want to set the agenda for what is important to know, and what we want to know is what we think will benefit us, what we think will help us get along in the world and be successful, and what happens in a quest like this, is that God suddenly becomes a mere tool to help us with whatever it is we're trying to achieve.

Now that alone is offensive but more to the point here is that it just doesn't work. It's ineffective. To understand life, to have wisdom for daily living, we must understand the Creator. We must understand the Ruler of life, the Redeemer, and we must understand him for who he is otherwise we will live foolishly. The study of God is not a discipline that's reserved for theologians, it's about getting to know the God for whom we were created and we were redeemed so that we can glorify him. That's what life is about. If we are not living to his glory, our lives will be out of order, but if we cannot glorify him, we do not know him as he is. So if we really wanted to grow and we really want to understand how to be better people and so on, we'll get focused on God and who he is.

Now Paul Tripp Ministries is like this, now that he's off the staff, I can tell you the real secrets behind Paul Tripp. Now he'll advertise his teaching as practical, he wants to be relevant, he's going to help you get your marriages better, he's going to help you raise your children better and be more satisfied in life, but when you actually open up his books or you listen to him teach, he's tricked you because he wants to take you to the bigger picture, he wants to take you to who God is, what God is doing, and he wants you to get focused on how you could fit in to who God is, what he is doing, how we fulfill his will.

Now how do we study God and his ways? Well, we study his word, the Scriptures, his revealed word. We'll avail ourselves of teachers who can help us in that study. We'll also study God through the natural revelation that he gives, observing his creation, observing just what he gives us to experience, but we always take those things back to the revealed word for examination and, of course, our focus must always take us if we're going to know God, to Jesus Christ, to God the Son, for it is by his life that he reveals what God's character is, it's by his work that he reveals God's will, and the lens that we are to use to know Jesus Christ and understand him is the cross. Jesus' work on the cross, I assure you, if you study it, it will take you to profound depths of understanding.

So the wise person takes time just to think, and in that thinking he thinks and he critiques about what's going on about him, and with his time he will study God and his ways, and he will use his time well. Now to use that time well, we must consider how we're using time right now. You've heard the comment in examination of our checkbooks we'll reveal where our hearts are. I'm sure that's true, but I assure you that a review of how our time is spent certainly will be revealing. Now Paul is telling the Ephesian Christians, "Make the best use of the time because the days are evil." All about them are opportunities to be lured into snares. That's the same with us. Now we know about obvious sinful temptations but I want you to consider how even innocent activities can lead us into the evil days he speaks of.

We'll start with an easy example, let's start with the internet. Again, it has opened wonderful opportunities to be connected with family and friends and to make new friends and yet it can be easy to become so enamored of our online relationships that we spend more time in virtually relating to folks than with those who are flesh and blood and that we can spend physical time with. We need to be thinking how is our time being spent.

We're also to understand, as well, that what we spend our time in doing will shape our values. It will happen. Let's go to entertainment. The object of the entertainment industry is to capture our time because if it captures our time, it will capture our money, and as we become enamored of entertainment, we begin to tolerate, then we begin to accept its values. But I don't want you to be thinking and restricting this to the obvious thing just so that, for example, the immoral sexual morals that are presented in entertainment. I was reading the other day an article by a former minister in our church, Rick Phillips, and Rick has written a new book called "The Masculine Mandate," and he wrote an article from it in "By Faith" magazine and in that he speaks of his love for John Wayne movies and especially his favorite "She Wore a Yellow Ribbon." He had grown up in a military family and he was completely enamored of Wayne's portrayal of masculinity summed up in that movie by a phrase that John Wayne would keep saying, "Never apologize."

Now Rick goes on to write, "When I became a Christian, however, I learned that not every manly saying in John Wayne movies should be adopted. 'Never apologize' may sound great in theory, but in practice it can combine with a man's sin nature to make him overbearing and arrogant." Rick speaks of how while growing up that he must have seen the movie a thousand times but here's the point, he says, "and absorbed much of its ethos." You see, that is what happens to us in whatever activity or environment we spend most of our time in. We absorb the ethos. So in Rick's case, when he converts to the Christian faith and as he says became more familiar with Scripture, that's when he was able to gain insight into the biblical view of being a man and that not everything that he's watching conforms to Scripture. So in other words, by spending more time in the study of Scripture and less time being entertained, he was able to step back and critique the entertainment message rather than being inculcated by it.

So the wise person just takes time to think, uses that time to critique what is going on about him, spends time studying God and his ways, spends less time doing the old things of the world, and finally to be wise, to make the best use of time, to understand God's

will, we must desire above all else to know God and to glorify him. We must want it. You see, that was the key to Jesus' perfect life. He said in John 5:30, he says, "I seek not my own will but the will of him who sent me." Now Jesus died for us in love but we need to understand that his primary love is for his Father and in doing what his Father desires. As Hebrews 10:5-7 explains, "Consequently, when Christ came into the world, he said, 'Sacrifices and offerings you have not desired, but a body have you prepared for me; in burnt offerings and sin offerings you have taken no pleasure. Then I said, "Behold, I have come to do your will, O God, as it is written of me in the scroll of the book.'"" It's in his Father's will and it's what Jesus delighted in doing. Again, Hebrews 12:2 tells us that it was for the joy that was set before him that he endured the cross. Now what was that joy? Well, certainly it encompassed the salvation that he would accomplish for us, but that first concludes with how he is seated now at the right hand of the throne of God.

So Jesus' joy is being received back into his Father, at his side in glory. His comfort, his strength, was the loving relationship of his Father and so it is in such confidence of his Father's love, it is in such love flowing out of him for his Father that God the Son acted wisely; that he used his time wisely; that he understood and he delighted in doing his Father's will and thus he won for us our salvation. Now here is the wondrous part: we can join in. Listen to Jesus as he prayed to his Father in Gethsemane, he said, "I do not ask for these only," meaning his disciples there with him, "but also for those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one just as you, Father, are in me and I in you, that they also may be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. The glory that you have given me, I have given to them that they may be one even as we are one. I in them and you in me. I made known to them your name and I will continue to make it known that the love with which you have loved me may be in them and I in them."

We can have it too and I tell you, until you grasp the joy that is set before you, you will not stay the course. Until you know the treasures that belong to you now, you will seek after worldly treasures. Jesus knew the treasures that he possessed as well as the treasures that awaited him. Do you know the same? Do you know what you have in Jesus Christ now? The love of the Father? The fellowship with the Father and the Son? The possession of the Holy Spirit? These are the treasures that Paul was presenting before the Ephesians in the first three chapters of the book because he knew, you know, that to walk in a manner worthy of the calling, they had to know what they had. The walk is not an easy one but the walk can be filled with blessing and with fulfillment if we know what we have from God and if we, then, desire to know him above all else and desire to please him above all else. If we have that, then the calling can be walked with wisdom. If our wisdom is found in knowledge of God and his ways, then we will walk that walk that we need to do, and our time can be used well if that time is spent delighting in his presence, and we can discern his will if his glory above all will be our vision.

*We give you praise, our God, for our Lord Jesus Christ who loved you, who knew your love, who desired above all else to understand and to do your will. May we have that same heart's desire. May we by your Spirit grasp the love that is ours, the treasures that*

*you've given to us now, the inheritance that awaits us, that we will desire to walk with wisdom and in your ways. In Christ's name we pray. Amen.*