

Watchful and Wise

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Bible Text: Ephesians 5:15-17
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Well, let's go to Ephesians tonight as we continue through this New Testament epistle on Sunday night and we're continuing in this practical side of the book as the apostle is now exhorting these people who are a called out fellowship of believers in a very un-Christian, ungodly, promiscuous, secular community and he's telling them they ought to look different, act different, be different, and we come to Ephesians 5:15-17. I don't know how long I'll be in these verses but it will be a couple of three sessions. Ephesians 5:15-17. He exhorts the church at Ephesus and us tonight and says,

15 Therefore be careful how you walk, [in other words, watch it, watch your walk carefully] not as unwise men but as wise, 16 making the most of your time, because the days are evil. 17 So then do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is.

Now he begins in verse 15 with that word "Therefore." We have a lot of "therefores" in the Bible and there's a reason for that, that's because what he's saying to them now must build upon, absolutely it is essential that it builds upon the great truths he has unfolded for them up to this point. It's dependent upon that glorious doctrinal foundation and mainly of chapters 1 through 3, and that's a unique aspect of Christianity that I want to say something about right quick, and that is just giving you how-to sermons, sometimes that can make a pastor popular if he's real practical and gives you a lot of how-tos. You know, how to teach your dog to do this trick or something or other. How to get your wife to cook you supper every night. Or how to make your husband the kind of caring, giving husband you've always wanted him to be. Just all kinds of how-tos. Now the Bible has some how-tos and those are important but only after the rich doctrinal truths have apprehended your heart. Only after the glories and the wonders of God's love and the wonders and the glories of sovereign grace have penetrated your soul to give you a fresh humility and gratitude and joy. That has to be there. If that's not there, then all you are is just experiencing some behavior modification that's not going to last. So the heart transformation of the great doctrine of salvation through Christ and what we sometimes call sovereign grace has to be there. That foundation must be there.

So I have frequently as we've come to this practical end of the book, gone back and thrown out again some of the things you must be grasping by the Spirit and that they must be affecting you, causing you to glory in him and treasure him and wonder over

him. All those spiritual blessings he talked about that we have in the heavenly places, he's mentioned that. How he has chosen us before the foundation of the world. How he has predestined us to adoption as sons. All that is under his sovereignty.

Then he talked about his purposes in doing this. He talked about how he saved us through this multifaceted, beyond our comprehension aspects of love and grace through Christ Jesus and he did that simply because of the kind intention of his will. Be done with the foolish blasphemous nonsense that God looked down from heaven and thought, "These people are so appealing, they're so attractive to me, they're so wonderful, I think I'll send my Son to die for them." Absolutely the opposite. He found nothing attractive in us, nothing desirable in us, nothing worthy in us, nothing of beauty in us, and in that state, it was just the great magnanimous character of a holy God with holy love whereby he would choose as an act of his own will to come and save us. These things needs to grasp us, grip us and impact us. He says he did all of this to the praise of the glory of his grace. He wants us to be, if you will, something of a portrait that illustrates to all the world and in the eternal state to all the universe what his grace can accomplish.

Then he talks about having sealed us with the Holy Spirit which has behind it all the aspects of God's work of bringing the Gospel to you, and the Spirit of God using the Gospel preached to you to do that mysterious work that no man can put his finger on, but we know it when we've experienced it whereby you're convicted of the truth of your sin and convicted of the truth of Christ, and you're born-again and that is, as I preached this morning, that's the seal of the new covenant, the new birth, the changed heart. God did that.

Then in chapter 2, remember how he told us that in our natural state before Christ changed us. We were dead spiritually, dead before God. We were deviant in our thoughts and deeds. We were demonized. In other words, we were in the realm of the kingdom of darkness. We were disobedient to God in every way and then ultimately he said we were damned before him because of our status naturally as sinners before him.

Then he talks about how he richly loved us and had mercy on us, and in that dead, deviant, demonized, disobedient and damned state, he caused us, the Bible says, Ephesians 2:5, he causes us to be born-again, to be quickened by the Spirit of God to where we begin to see and grasp and enjoy the beauties of this love and this grace he has shown us.

He goes on in chapter 2 and then he begins to tell us how he saved us as a free gift, "For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not by works," and here's the phrase, "lest any man should boast." God so wholly, totally, completely is responsible for your conversion and you have no room anywhere for boasting. That's good for preachers to remember, that it's not our techniques, it's not our invitation system, it's not our manipulations, it's not our schemes, it's not clever things we might do. It's not anything you do, it's God who does it through the preaching of his Gospel in the power of the Spirit. There is no boasting.

He talks about how he reconciled us to God and made us now one. I've been hitting on the phrase of "called out ones," ekklesia. It's the word we translate "church." He has called us out to himself but called us out to each other. We are now a collectivity of people, a body, a oneness about us as a church family. He called us to that.

Then he goes on to talk about, "Now I've gifted you. I've given all of you spiritual gifts to function together as you minister, care for, encourage, reprove, comfort, have mercy toward." Whatever, all the ministries we have, God gave us the gifts to carry out those ministries. Then he says, "I gave you gifted men. I gave you pastor/teachers," Ephesians 4:11, "to equip you so that you might do this work and thrive and go on as a body of Christ."

Then we get to chapter 5 and he says, "Now, you're light. You're God's light in the world," and I used the imagery of shock and awe, how as we live our lives and as we share the Gospel as your pastor preaches the Gospel, as you have a chance to share something of your testimony or the things of Christ in the community, there is something of a shock and awe aspect of that. The Spirit of God will take the truth of the Gospel and bring people to a shocking conclusion concerning their fallen, sinful, offensive status before this holy God and then they'll be brought to an awe of how he loves them anyway; how he died for those sinners like themselves; how he gave his Son in their place.

All of that and much much much much more I don't have time to talk about and we get to Ephesians 5:15. "Therefore." All that being true. If you are indeed one who's experienced these glorious things, if you are indeed one who's beginning to grasp, it's beginning to sink in the wonders, the glories, the marvels, the love, the greatness, if it's beginning to humble you and impact you and make you deeply grateful for such love in such a salvation, then you have the capacity to begin to live out these things he's talking about. But only then. Can I say to you it's going to take more than raising your hand at vacation Bible school to do what he's telling you to do? It's going to take more than repeating a prayer after an evangelist to do what he's going to tell you to do. All that's not necessarily wrong but you'd better make sure more than that has happened. Make sure you've experienced the new birth.

So, "Therefore," he says, "Therefore since all of that is true, I want you to walk wisely, not as unwise men. I want you to make valuable use of your time because you're in evil days. I don't want you to be foolish but I want you to understand what the will of the Lord is." You know, I think where we are as Christians in this day and in our day, we're kind of like the woman mentioned in Proverbs 30:21-23, and in that section, the Proverb writer says this, it says the earth quakes when an unloved woman gets a husband. Why does the earth quake when an unloved woman gets a husband? Well, the point is quite obviously that all she's known is being abused; all she's known is being mistreated; all she has known is being cheated on perhaps; and so when that fellow's gone and she finds a man who does love her and who does really genuinely care for her, she can't receive it. She just can't believe it and so she's skeptical and she pushes away and she reads everything he does in a negative light because that's all she's known. It's just you can't, it's so very very hard to win her heart and we see this happening in the world, and often she

pushes the man who really loved her away because she just couldn't accept his love because of where she's been and what she's been through.

Well, that's where we are as Christians sometimes. We haven't begun to grasp – are you listening to me this evening – we haven't begun to grasp the great, great, unfathomable, unquenchable love God has for you in Jesus Christ and so you kind of keep saying, "Yeah, but. But I don't think and I don't deserve," and you don't just dive in and wallow in the glories and the wonders of the great great love he has for you. You've got to begin to taste that, accept that, glory in that, to have the inward motivation to walk in the truths God wants you to walk in.

So the believer has this daunting challenge to embrace all that because proper Christian conduct is dependent upon you ever increasing in your knowledge of this great love God has for you in Christ Jesus. Of course, what's one of the primary ways you can increase in grasping the great love? Faithful preaching. Faithful preaching. Faithful preaching. You need that. Your children need it. Your spouses need it. We all need that. It is a foolish exercise in futility to instruct a believer in how to walk as a believer without first helping them to understand the glory of their salvation. It's the glory of our salvation that humbles us and makes us say, "I'll do anything for him." "Pastor, you don't know how difficult my marriage is. You don't know how hard this man is." But do you know what? When you're grasping the glories of how much Christ has forgiven and loves you, all of a sudden you have new strength to say, "Hey, do you know what? I can give it another go because of Christ." And on and on we could go in all kinds of challenges and difficulties and troubles and difficult seasons. We have the strength and the energy to go on because we're beginning to grasp all that he's done for us.

I read about that in the days of an arranged marriage, there was a simple village girl and she heard from her father one day that she had her future marriage spouse had been chosen for her and it was time for her to begin preparations to marry this man. She didn't know who he was. She had not met him and all of a sudden these tutors come to her house and they begin to teach her the customs, the traditions, and the formalities of her new husband and this new life she was soon to have. After a little while, she became frustrated and she became afraid. She was afraid she could not live up to these expectations and, furthermore, she wasn't sure she was ready to live such a different life that she had known. She was quite comfortable with where she was, but then she learned who he was. He was the crown prince of the wealthiest and most powerful kingdom in the entire world and she was to become his queen. After she began to grasp, "This is who I am." Then she gained a new motivation and a new desire to learn the protocol of royalty and the dignities of being a queen and that's where we are.

You have to begin to grasp who you are in Christ. What a glorious thing he's done for you. What an exalted position. What a wondrous inheritance you have in Christ Jesus. Grasp on that. That's why the Bible says look to Jesus. That's why the song writer wrote, "Turn your eyes upon Jesus. Look full in his wonderful face and the things of earth." The way the earth wants you to live, the way the world says you should live, the things the

world says you should value, the things of earth, the Bible says, will grow strangely dim or the song says, will grow strangely dim in the light of his glory and grace.

So we must as believers have an expanding embrace of who we are in Christ. Do you understand you are royalty by the choice of sovereign grace and the merits of Jesus Christ? You are royalty. So Paul writes to the Ephesians in chapter 5, verse 15, "Now let's live like it. Let's live like who we are. Let's walk out the reality of who we are. Let's be in practice what we are in position."

Now a couple of quick Roman numerals and I., and that was introduction but I only have two points and they're not long. 1. Keep a careful watch over your behavior. Keep a careful watch over your behavior because all this is true: because you're royalty; because of what he's done for you; because of the love he's shown you; because of the status he's given you. You're a joint heir with Jesus Christ.

Verse 15, chapter 5, Ephesians, "Therefore be careful how you walk." Ladies, you can't walk just like other ladies in the neighborhood. Ladies, you can't be just another average homemaker like the other homemakers in the neighborhood. Men, you can't be just another guy in the factory. You're different. Businessmen, you can't function just like the other businessmen in town. I hope you make \$100 million but you're different therefore, therefore, therefore, you function differently. Now again in balance, we don't go out to try to put on some sort of showy veneer of Christianity. That's not what we're talking about. We're talking about a genuine heart devotion to Christ that changes who we are in the world.

Be careful how you walk. It has the idea of being alert. Keep an accurate focus of who you are in Christ Jesus as you walk in this world. Psalm 119:105 talks about how the word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path. I found this little illustration of a man by the name of James Wells. It talks about, and this is years before they had modern lighting, how he was his Sunday school teacher's helper and he would help his Sunday school teacher, an older gentleman, walk across the street at night and they were walking across the street and he had the lantern up kind of high and they stepped into a big mud puddle and they kind of shook the water and mud off their feet and got on across the street and the Sunday school teacher looked at James and said, "James, son, you've got to learn when we go across, you've got to hold it lower to the ground. We want to really see what's there."

Well, that's the idea here. You've got to hold it low. You've got to get the word of God down there to where the rubber meets the road in your life. You've got to get the Scriptures into the actuality of your life. Be careful. There is a thoroughness here, an alertness here, sobriety here.

I think like ancient pagans, we have sometimes compartmentalized God and how these ancient pagans would have a god of this and a god of this and a god of that, and wherever they needed a god to fit, that's where he was. I remember reading an article. They were interviewing a Christian leader in our community, well, they were not in a Christian

organization but they were a leader in our community and they were a Christian, and I don't know what the person exactly meant by this but as they were talking about their life and how they organized their life they said, "Well, I've got this part of my life and this part of my life, the social part, the professional part, and then there's my spiritual part, my church life down here." That's so wrong. That's absolutely wrong. You listen to me: Jesus is Lord of the totality of the pie of your life. It's Jesus at work. It's Jesus in your social life. It's Jesus in your family. It's Jesus in your hobbies. And of course, Jesus in your church.

It's getting hard today to find a real church that's got Jesus in it. They've about programmed Jesus out of his own congregation. Well, I shouldn't say that. Every congregation that's his, he's right in the middle of it. But my point is, we don't want to get that way. We want to be careful that our lives look like Christian lives and not because there's this accountability. That's true, we need that, I need that. Accountability is a part of our life together as a corporate body but that's not the foundational reason. The foundational reason is we haven't gotten over the glory of the love and the grace he has shown us.

So we want to be careful. It comes from our heart. "Lord, help me be careful." You know, maybe we'd go back 150 years ago when biblical Christianity influenced the culture and an old Christian philosopher by the name of Francis Shaeffer, Francis Shaeffer's been dead a long time now but he used to say that when America began and in her early days, our country had a Christian consensus. Not everyone was a Christian, not every founding father was a Christian, but almost to a person, every person would agree with you that the morals and the truths of the Bible are true and those are best for any culture or for any people. There was a Christian consensus. They would believe that God was the source of all things; God's the center of all things; God's the judge of all things; divine providence is over all things. Read some of the writings and the speeches of the Generals in the war between the states and look at their continual reliance and conviction of the providence of God in everything. It was just that God was in the center of everything.

It was the way they thought but we've lost that today, but as Christians we have to reclaim that God-centeredness and like Paul says here, keep a careful watch. Take the light of Scripture and let's get it down on our lives. How is my attitude? How is my viewpoint? Am I being jealous here? Am I being too envious here? Am I being too materialistic here? Yes, it's a never-ending repentance but thank God we have the grace to be repenters, amen? God didn't leave me to my sin to ruin me and ruin my family and everything I touch. He's given me the word and given me the grace whereby I want the Bible to help me so I can be careful. Be careful. Keep a careful watch over your behavior.

II. Live as one who is being mentored by the all-wise God. Live as one who is being mentored by the all-wise God. Did you realize that's exactly what's going on in your life? As if God himself personally has become your personal mentor for your life. That's what Paul is talking about here when he gives us in verse 15 as we continue on, "not as unwise," the world is full of the lack of wisdom, non-wisdom, "not as unwise men," verse 15, the last part, "but as wise." Actually the idea of one unwise means unskilled and the

idea of being wise means being skilled, but here it means you're skilled by God. You're trained by God. God himself mentors us in the skill of living. He mentors us that we might live life as it truly should be lived; that you husband can begin to strive and be the kind of husbands he truly meant for husbands to be; and wives can learn from God in his word how to be the wives God really meant for wives to be; and young people can learn to be the children to parents as God really meant for children to be; and businessmen can be the kind of businessmen God really meant for businessmen to be; and on and on and on we can go. It should be in the community that people would look at us and watch our lives and they should say, "You know, they're not perfect. They blow it at times but there's a wisdom there. There's a difference there. There's a skill about the way they approach life."

You know, when it comes to what you might call the construction or building crafts, making stuff out of wood or whatever, I'm not a craftsman and I have some hammers and some screwdrivers, I have some power drills and some grinders. Boy, I really like to get to grinding. You'd be amazed what you can tear up with a grinder. I mean, I like to take on a project and my joke often is when I take on something to save me some money, I usually have to go and get it fixed and it costs me more money than I ever saved myself. But I do enjoy building some stuff. I did, by the way, I used to have a big German shepherd dog. His name was Sam. He weighed about 120 pounds. And I had a Labrador retriever named Lucy and they really got along fine and I built them a doghouse and I called it the dog condo. It was really big but it was funny, after I got the thing built together, the corners were not square and some of the plywood would be over about an inch maybe at the top and so I just got my circular saw and just cut that off and it looked square when I got through. It's still up today. You can come by my house and look at it.

So I can build stuff, it just doesn't look as good as some of these men in our church who've been in the building crafts all their lives and it's amazing the skill they have. They can just start with stuff, it's just a pile of wood and when they get through, it looks like something neat. I'm motivated by that, I'm just not good at that. But some guys are really really skilled at that. Well in the same way, God took you, a pile of almost nothing, and he with his skill is mentoring you and making you into what he wants you to be.

It's a silly song in a way but a true song, "He's still working on me, to make me what I ought to be/ It took him just a week to make the moon and stars, sun and the earth, Jupiter and Mars/ How loving and faithful he must be, he's still working on me." And that's what Paul is saying. He wants you to walk as wise, as a skilled one because it is God himself through his word who is mentoring you.

Let's look real quick and I won't spend but just a minute here. Go back to Ephesians 2. Here's who you were and who you were being mentored by. Ephesians 2:1, "And you were dead in your trespasses and sins, in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world," so you were mentored by somebody else, "according to the prince of the power of the air," that's Satan, "of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience." Verse 3, "Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath,

even as the rest." That's who we used to be but he says that's not who you are anymore. You've been taken out of that. You've been saved and called out of that by the glorious merits of Jesus Christ and in the unfathomable grace and love and mercy, he chose in his own will to shine on you and now, now that that's true and now that you're grasping that, now that that's becoming a treasure to you, now let's walk with more wisdom. He's talking to these guys in that Ephesian culture where it's obvious to me, they slipped a bunch. They stumbled some. They fell back into the worldly things that they came out of and he says you've got to keep striving forward. You've got to keep repenting on and walk as one who is being mentored by the all-wise God.

Now of course, he does this through his word so right quick I will not much more than mention these four conclusions for practical application tonight of how to cultivate a delightful and submissive spirit toward God as you get in his word, as you hear his word. How to cultivate a more delightful and submissive spirit knowing that here God is, he is the one who is mentoring me, he is the one who has given me his word which is, by the way, his wisdom, to make me skilled as a vessel of his, as a light in this world.

1. Realize the word of God reveals the heart and the wisdom of your Father. Now just stop right there. Don't just go past that. Think about it. The Bible reveals the heart and the wisdom of your Father.

I knew a man several years ago who ran a pretty big organization and he was a very committed Christian. We would fellowship some and just being with him, he was constantly bringing up his dad. "Man, my father used to tell me this. And my father gave me this advice. And my father would always remind me." And I realized his father was a man of God. His father was a good man. His father had godly wisdom and it made me want to meet his father and I told him one day, I said, "I'd like to meet your dad because I see the impact he's had on you."

Well, that's what the world should think about us. They should say, "I'd like to see your Father, that is your heavenly Father, because I see the impact he's had on you." Realize that the Bible will teach you God's wisdom and it teaches you God's heart.

2. Understand and realize that the word clarifies difficult matters. The Bible is just an amazing clarifier.

I've told you this before and I don't know how this dear woman is doing. She was not a church member but another church member brought this lady to my office and she was having paranoid and unsound thinking and she was thinking irrational things, as a matter of fact, she said like for example, "Pastor, I would get to obsessing over maybe somebody has a camera in the light fixture of my home and I'm being spied on." And I thought, "Well, that's not true." Philippians 4 says to think on things that are true. I said, "You need to repent of that. That's sin. Don't think on that. There is nobody spying. There is no basis in reality. You need to ask God to forgive you. You're letting your mind dwell on things that are not true. Ask God to forgive you. Let's do that right now. Will you pray and ask God to forgive you for letting your mind think on something that's not true? The

Bible commands you to think on what's true." And she did right there in my office, she prayed and said, "God, please forgive me. I'm letting my mind think on things that are not true. I don't know that to be true so I can't conclude that's true and I can't let that bother me and I repent of that. That's sin." She said, "Amen." She said, "I feel better now." And I said, "Well, I do too."

Now I'm not saying that that was the one quick all and, by the way, when you start down that path of dealing with irrational thinking and repenting and calling it sin, it has to be a pattern because about the time you get a victory, you'll slip back a little bit. But do you know what I've found? If you'll start out that way, you'll build a beachhead in your heart and in your thinking so that you can go back like those Marines that go to a beachhead so they can fight forward from it, you have a place to fight forward from. You don't have to be victim to wrong thinking. The Bible says think on what's true so you can think on what's true.

Now you have to fight it and bless some of your hearts, I understand some of this for some of us it's more of a battle than others in areas others don't have a problem with. I see some people struggling with things and I just think, "How could you struggle with that?" And then I'll start struggling with something and the people around me think, "Well, how can you struggle with that?" We're all messed up just in different ways, amen? We're all messed up just in different ways. The Bible just makes it clear. As a matter of fact, a whole lot of Christian counseling, now sometimes there's a dear soul that needs hope, they're just broken and crushed and you've got to have compassion and you've got to show care and encouragement before you can get right to the reproof, but that's where the answer usually is. Almost always it's getting to where their thinking is unscriptural and charging them to think biblically in that area. It's what we call biblical counseling but before it became biblical counseling, it was just Christianity. It's just the way Christians help each other. But what I'm saying is love the Bible, cherish it, delight in it because it makes hard things clear. It clarifies so many things.

Well, thirdly, realize his love for you and his desire for your good is immeasurable. His love for you and his desire for your good is immeasurable. You can only a little bit right now see it as through a glass dimly. That's what the Bible says. Have you experienced that, you're in the word, you're listening to a sermon, some truths are becoming real to you and a hope, a joy begins to connect, then something happens in the world and it gets dimmer again? We're looking through a glass dimly. We have to keep looking down here but one day we're going to see face-to-face. I'm telling you, there are glories and pleasures and enjoyments that are greater than all the pleasures of all the world of all the ages combined waiting for you because God wants you to have it. His desire for you, his love for you is immeasurable.

Lastly, when the word convicts, it's a healing ministry. The conviction of the word is a healing ministry. It brings healing to us. Remind yourself that when the word of God confronts you, when it corrects you, when it humbles you, it's to the end of healing. His transformation, his conviction, his correction are to make us more suitable for his presence and his glory. Listen to me now, listen: making you more suited for his

presence, for fellowship with him and for his glory is the key to your pleasure. He wants you to be happy and he's trying to get you off of the dope of this world so you can soberly enjoy the glories of himself. If he cuts you with his word, it's always for your good. Hebrews 12:10 reminds us, "For they disciplined us for a short time as seemed best to them," that's earthly fathers, disciplined us for a short time as it seemed best to them, "but He disciplines us for our good, so that we may share His holiness." We are divine offspring. He desires that we share his nature. Do you realize that he made you his? You're part of deity, in a sense. You're not deity but you're a part of him and he's deity.

So you've got to keep progressing in that way. All that is unholy will be condemned and will one day be destroyed and all that are holy will know eternal life and increasing joy and pleasure forever and ever and ever. Here's a good verse and I'll pretty much end with this. 1 Corinthians 11:32. I think we've got that to put on the screen. "But when we are judged, we are disciplined by the Lord so that we will not be condemned along with the world." Now think about that. Here's what that means: do you know there are people that can sit under my preaching and just yawn and go home and, "It's wasn't nothing." But some of you, you can't do that. Well, I hope all of you can't do that. Do you know why? You're his and he disciplines you because you're not one of those who is going to be condemned with this wretched fallen world. So when those corrections come, you ought to say, "Praise the Lord, I'm his! I just got rebuked by my sin, the word of God just convicted me and made me feel bad about this attitude or this disposition or this behavior. Good! Good! Good!" He only disciplines his own children. I only discipline my children. Well, I might have disciplined a couple of others but we mainly discipline our own children, amen? And he disciplines his own children. Man, the Apostle Peter could not get by with anything. Every time Peter turned around, Jesus rebuked him and sometimes very firmly because Peter belonged to him and he was preparing Peter for something greater, for greater pleasures, greater joys, greater wonders for eternal life and all that was to come.

The apostle says if you're grasping the glories, the treasures, the wonders of sovereign grace and how God saved you, then be careful how you walk in this world. You're not like everybody else. And secondly, remember God's mentoring you to live a life with skill based on the wisdom of God, not based on this world.