

**04/07/24 “Walk Wisely”
Ephesians 5:15-17**

Welcome...

We have been studying the wonderful book of Ephesians chapter by chapter and verse by verse. In chapters 1–3, Paul describes the contents of the Christian’s heavenly “bank account” and describes our regeneration, forgiveness, redemption, adoption, the seal of the Holy Spirit, the wisdom, mercy, and grace of God, life in Christ, our citizenship in heaven, and our glorious inheritance—in short, every spiritual blessing!

Drawing upon that huge spiritual endowment, chapter 4 begins with an exhortation to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which we have been called. As Christians, we have all the resources we need to live a life “to the praise of the glory of His grace” (1:6). Chapters 4–6 give instruction in what a spiritual walk rooted in our spiritual wealth in Christ looks like.

And that brings us to our text this morning where God’s word calls us to walk wisely. Let’s read Ephesians 5:15-17...

How different would your life be today if you knew the exact day that you would die? If you knew that on this Tuesday your life here would end, how would you spend the next 48 hours? Would you read more of the Bible perhaps than you ever read before as you prepare to meet your Creator? Would you be on the phone with family and friends telling them how much you love them? Would you share the good news of the gospel with those close to you who do not have a living relationship with God? Would you seek spiritual counsel from mature Christians on how to live most wisely with the remaining time you have left?

I came across a website called DeathClock.org. Here is the description on the home page: “Have you ever asked yourself 'when will I die?', our advanced life expectancy calculator will accurately predict your death date for you depending on where you live, your diet, and your lifestyle to show your own death clock countdown.”

It sounds sort of humorous. It is kind of entertaining in a strange sort of way. So, I entered my information and it said, “Based on our calculations you will die on: Thursday, March 3rd, 2072.” So, according to DeathClock.org, I will live to be 107 years, 3 months and 16 days old! I have another 48 years to live.

But the truth is only God knows when it’s our time to die. We may have many years, or we may have many days. Or we could be called home to glory before this day ends. We don't know. Hebrews 9:27 says, “it is appointed for man to die once and after that to face judgment.”

God’s word tells us our death is an appointment, not an accident, and God knows when it is going to be. Only those who have repented from self and sin and trusted in Christ alone for salvation will enjoy eternity with our Lord in heaven. And those who don’t bow the knee and embrace Jesus Christ as the only Redeemer will spend eternity in hell.

Ephesians 2:8-10 tells us...

When you are saved in Christ, when you are born again, you are rescued from the penalty of sin, you are being saved from the power of sin, and one day you will be free from the presence of sin. In the meantime, our text tells us we are to make the most of our time. We are to redeem the time because we ourselves are redeemed.

Time cannot be stopped. It cannot be stored. Time cannot be saved. It cannot be shared. Wasting the gift of time insults the Giver of time.

Our text says, therefore be careful how you walk, not as unwise but as wise making the most of your time.

Main point: Ephesians 5:15-17 provides three necessary elements to walk wisely.

Walk in an Attentive Way in verse 15

Walk in an Opportune Way in verse 16

Walk in an Understanding Way in verse 17

Our text tells us how to walk wisely, so that we make the precious years that God provides to us, we make each day count for His purpose and glory.

There is a bit of paradox here because Ephesians 1:11 reminds us that God works all things according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will. In other words, God's plan for us is not contingent upon our decisions. Nobody can change or thwart God's will. God's purpose, God's plan is sovereign.

But at the same time, our text today commands us to walk wisely. We have a responsibility to make wise decisions and understand what the will of the Lord is. Next week will see how significant the Holy Spirit is in helping us to do just that.

My prayer this morning is that each of us will redeem the time God has given us, and that we each examine our hearts to know if Christ is Lord and we will carefully, prayerful, intentionally not just live horizontally for what this world has to offer, but we will live by faith vertically in our risen Savior and wisely make decisions that will count for eternity.

I. Walk in an Attentive Way

Verse 15...

Notice Paul begins with the word "Therefore." So when we see the word "therefor" we need to ask: what is it there for?

Here verse 15 refers immediately back to verse 14 where Paul calls for believers to walk as those who have been raised from the dead and are living in Christ's light. There can be no slumbering for believers, we must wake up and live our lives intentionally for Christ.

Paul says in verse 15, "Therefore be careful how you walk."

"Walk" is one of the key words of Ephesians. We see it in 2:2, 2:10, 4:1, 4:17, 5:2, 5:8, and now in 5:15. This spiritual walk describes our way of life, worked out in a daily, step-by-step process. In the apostle Paul's day, people didn't just walk for exercise. They walked to get to a destination. So, to walk spiritually pictures steady progress toward a definite goal. What is that goal? To know Christ and to make Him known.

Verse 15 says you must walk in an attentive way. Be careful how you walk means to look at, behold, discern mentally, observe, perceive, consider, contemplate, look to in the sense of taking care, take heed. It carries the idea of looking around carefully so as not to stumble.

The present imperative here is a command to continually pay especially close attention to how you walk. "Be constantly taking heed how accurately you are conducting yourselves."

Paul used the same Greek verb with a similar meaning in Colossians 2:8, “See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception, according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary principles of the world, rather than according to Christ.”

The apostle John uses the same word to warn the believers in 2 John 2:18, “Watch yourselves, that you might not lose what we have accomplished, but that you may receive a full reward.”

We should pray Psalm 90:12, “Lord, teach us to number our days, that we may present to You a heart of wisdom.”

Ephesians 5:15...

Paul’s command in verse 15 is based upon two assumptions, first that Christians are wise, and not fools. Secondly that Christian wisdom is practical wisdom, for it teaches us how to live wisely, and how to behave in a way that brings glory to God. We are not to simply follow our own hearts’ desires, but instead, we are to look carefully at what God desires, we are to understand the will of the Lord.

I grew up near a forest, behind our house was the woods. There was a path that my friends and I would follow that was faithful and true to get us to our destination. But one day a friend saw a box turtle and we quickly got distracted and went to pick it up and bring it home. But leaving that path to get that turtle meant going through some poison ivy and it was not long before I suffered the consequences and was itching all over with a terrible reaction to poison ivy.

In John Bunyan’s Pilgrims Progress, Christian and his companions learn from their mistakes of leaving the narrow path to go on the easy, wide path. Other pilgrims who lack understanding may have advanced fairly far, like Mr. Heedless, Mr. Talkative, and Mr. Too-bold, who almost get to the Celestial City; however, they do not walk wisely and understand the will of the Lord.

Verse 15...

The word “unwise” means without wisdom and describes one who lacks the power of proper discernment.

So, what does it mean to be wise? “Wise” is the practical application of acquired knowledge. James Montgomery Boice says wisdom generally describes "acquired intelligence characterized by the ability to use knowledge for correct behavior."

James 3:13 says, “Who among you is wise and understanding? Let him show by his good behavior his deeds in the gentleness of wisdom.”

1 Corinthians 1:30 says, “By God’s doing you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption.”

When you become a Christian, it’s more than a change in theory - it’s a change in direction, a change in motivation, and a change in how you live.

Colossians 2:3 says, “In Christ are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.” You are in Christ, and all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are in Him.” And so we seek Christ, to know Him, to know God’s will as revealed in God’s Word.

My bachelor’s degree was in mathematics. I enjoyed math because for every problem there is only one correct answer. And when our children were living at home, I would go over their math homework. Occasionally, despite

knowing how to do the problem, they would get the wrong answer by either getting a little sloppy in using the right formula or not taking the time to check their answers carefully.

Aren't we all a little like that in our Christian life? We know what we should do. We have a good understanding of how to live the Christian life, but we get careless or lazy. We know better, but we fail.

For instance, we know that Jesus says in Matthew 6:33 "Seek first God's kingdom and His righteousness." But instead, we don't seek God in prayer, we don't read His Word, we forget His promises and we make foolish decisions because we are anxious and hasty.

Verse 15 reminds us that we must be careful, we must walk in an attentive way.

II. Walk in an Opportune Way

Verse 16...

How does a believer walk wisely and not walk foolishly? Paul says one way is by making the most of your time.

Paul does not here use *chronos*, the term for clock time, the continuous time that is measured in hours, minutes, and seconds. He rather used *kairos*, which denotes a measured, allocated, fixed season or epoch. The idea of a fixed period is also seen in the use of the definite article in the Greek text, which refers to the time, a concept often found in Scripture. For example, 1 Peter 1:17 says, "conduct yourselves in fear during the time of your stay on earth."

We all understand that time is valuable, for even the lost world says "time is money". We all have the same amount of time, but in this context, as explained more fully below, Paul is not speaking so much of time in general but of the opportunities that are placed before us.

God has set boundaries in our lives, and our opportunity for service exists only within those boundaries. God knows both the beginning and end of our time on earth. As believers, we can achieve our potential in His service only as we maximize the time He has given us.

"Making the most of your time" comes from a Greek verb which means to buy up every opportunity. It was used in buying a slave in order to set him free; thus the idea of redemption is implied in this verse. We the redeemed in Christ are to redeem all the time that we have and devote it to the Lord for His honor and His glory.

Notice Paul gives us a reason to make the most of our time in verse 16...

The days are evil because 2:2 says they are controlled by the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience who oppose God and His kingdom and who will try to prevent any opportunities for the declaration of God's program and purposes.

Notice that Paul is not recommending that we fear the present evil age or avoid interaction with it. Rather his exhortation is to walk wisely in the evil days by seizing every opportunity.

Instead of allowing our time to be used for evil, or to remain evil, we are to "redeem" it—buy it back for the purposes of doing good, just as Christ redeemed us and brought us from darkness to light. This is more than just sitting around waiting for opportunities to do good and bring God glory. We are to actively seek them. To live in an opportune way, means to purposely use your time by asking, "How will this glorify God? How will this decision help me to know Christ and make Him known?"

“Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.” 1 Corinthians 15:58

“And let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up. So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith.” Galatians 6:9–10

“Sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence.” 1 Peter 3:15

We are to walk in an attentive way, we are to walk in an opportune way. Third:

III. Walk in an Understanding Way

Verse 17...

The Greek word for Foolish means literally a lack of sense, reflection, understanding, or reason.

Jesus used the word in Luke 11:40 to denounce the Pharisees as fools because they were hypocritically clean on the outside but wicked on the inside. In Luke 12:20 God labels the rich farmer a fool who wanted to build larger barns but yet was not prepared for eternity.

Here in the present context of Ephesians 5:17 it can be translated “foolish” or “careless conduct,” “contrasted with careful, intentional observance of the will of God.

Verse 17...

The word “but” is a strong term of contrast indicating that Paul is in essence "reversing direction," in this case from the negative command to the positive command.

Understand is in the present imperative indicating this is a command to make this our continual seeking to comprehend the will of God.

When I was flying in the Navy my job as the mission commander on the plane was to brief the crew on our mission and then the Navigator would open his navigation chart and show the crew members our destination.

God's will as revealed in God's Word is the Christian's “navigation chart” which guides us to where we are going and how we will be able to get to our destination. The will of God is more than a road map. It is a relationship!

Verse 17...

Understanding the will of the Lord is virtually identical to Paul's earlier charge in 5:10 for believers to walk “trying to learn what is pleasing to the Lord.”

God's will is best discerned from God's Word as taught by God's Spirit. We will see in coming weeks as we continue in Ephesians that God's will includes continually being filled with (controlled by) God's Spirit, being thankful, submitting to one another in humility, being loving husbands, being obedient children, being fathers who spiritually shepherd, being obedient employees and being gracious employers.

The word for “understand” describes the comprehending activity of the mind and entails the assembling of individual facts into an organized whole, as when one collects the pieces of a puzzle and puts them together to see the “big picture!”

In the parable of the sower, Jesus said in Matthew 13:23, “And the one on whom seed was sown on the good soil, this is the man who hears the word and understands it; who indeed bears fruit and brings forth, some a hundredfold, some sixty, and some thirty.”

Verse 17...

Who’s will? Verse 17 says the will of the Lord. Before we pray, “Lord, Your kingdom come, Your will be done[,]” we must be willing to pray, “My kingdom go.”

The title “Lord” describes one that has sovereign, unopposed power and absolute authority. God is the One Who has absolute ownership and uncontested power and therefore the One Whose will is good and acceptable and perfect. As His adopted children, but also as His loving servants, we should obey His will, our obedience enabled by His Spirit and motivated by our loyalty and love (not from a sense of guilt or legalism or merit).

God’s basic will is, of course, found in Scripture. Here we find His perfect and sufficient guidelines for knowing and doing what is pleasing to Him. The Bible reveals God’s general will for us and His will regarding certain specific matters (such as loving others, speaking truth, maintaining sexual purity, etc.). In any given situation, we should first determine if the Bible addresses the issue either specifically or in principle. If so, we have God’s will in the matter. This is a “screen out” criterion because God will never lead us to do something that contradicts His Word.

I’ve noticed two tendencies regarding our response to God’s will: Either we run ahead of Him or we resist Him. The first is caused by a lack of patience and prudence. We jump to conclusions, rush into decisions, or tumble headlong into every opportunity that presents itself.

When it comes to God’s specific, personal, and often subjective will for our lives, such as choosing a career, a spouse, a home, or a church, we get rather creative in the ways we run ahead of God.

Some may employ the “plop and point” method, letting our Bible fall open and randomly pointing our finger at a verse to guide the day’s choices. Like the guy who read about Joshua leading the Israelites around Jericho seven times and then walls of the city came down, so he pursued a girl and took her on seven dates and proposed to her believing that the walls of any doubt or resistance on her part would immediately fall. That did not go so well!

Or we decide that a string of green or red traffic signals is a divine sign. We need to stop this kind of superstitious hocus-pocus. Don’t look for the face of Jesus in an enchilada or lie awake, listening for sounds in the night - three clicks and a bump that means I need to go to the third college that I applied to! That’s called “voodoo theology.” Though popular, that kind of nonsense is far removed from how God would have us perceive His will.

The second extreme—resisting God’s will—comes as a result of pride. We dichotomize between “sacred” and “secular,” banishing God from the latter. We stubbornly ignore the clear mandates of Scripture, finding all kinds of reasons why they don’t apply to us.

Donald Barnhouse wrote, “I can say from experience that 95% of knowing the will of God consists in being prepared to do it before you know what it is.”

Following God's lead involves a simple, though by no means quick-and-slick, method. Instead, let me recommend four things:

1. Pray. Seek Him humbly, sincerely, and patiently with an open, willing heart. If you don't have a willing heart, start there. Pray for one.
2. Go to His Word prayerfully and intelligently, thinking through all your decisions in light of biblical principles and in line with His clearly revealed will for everyone.
3. Seek the counsel of wise and seasoned Christians, ideally those who have gone through the process of making similar decisions. Listen most closely to those who are objective, who personally have nothing to gain or to lose by your decision.
4. Consider your circumstances. I used to serve as a Blue and Gold Officer for the Naval Academy and would interview high school students for the admissions department and write a recommendation. One time I went to the home of a student and one of my first questions was, "Why do you want to go to the Naval Academy." He responded, "I want to be a veterinarian." My answer...

We may not always perceive every facet of God's will—it often includes some surprises—but what matters most is walking as wisely as we can in His revealed light. There's always enough time to do God's will. Instead of counting the days, make your days count. To spend time wisely, invest it in eternity.

Finally, don't seek God's will to the detriment of seeking Him. Jesus prayed for His disciples in John 17:3, "This is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent."

What a joy to walk wisely, to know Christ and make Him known.

Let's pray...

Communion

Psalm 90:12...

Benediction:

Hebrews 13:20-21...