

The Christian Walk: “Walking in Wisdom”

(Ephesians 5:15-21)

Introduction

➤ In the Bible, the word “walk” can be used literally or figuratively. In the figurative sense, “walking” describes the direction, decisions, and devotions of one’s life. This year’s Summer Sermon Series is titled, “The Christian Walk.” In this series, we are studying various verses in Scripture that describe specific aspects of the Christian’s walk. So far, we have preached on what it means to ...

“Walk the Christian Walk” (Eph.2:1-10)

“Walk in Love” (Eph.5:2)

“Walk in Light of Eternity” (Phil.3:17-21)

“Walk in the Truth” (2Jn.1:1-4)

“Walk by the Spirit” (Gal.5:16)

“Walk in Obedience” (1Jn.2:3-6)

➤ Today, we are going to look at what it means to “walk in wisdom” – to “*walk, not as unwise but as wise*” (Eph.5:15). Unfortunately, the word “wisdom” is often misunderstood and misused. It is common to hear that wisdom is from God, and knowledge is from the world. Others state that wisdom is spiritual, and knowledge is carnal. Or that unbelievers can have knowledge, but they cannot possess wisdom.

Biblically, however, these are simply not true. In the Bible we read of a godly (or heavenly) wisdom and knowledge, as opposed to an ungodly (or worldly) wisdom and knowledge. To be sure, “all truth is God’s truth” in that all true knowledge and wisdom comes from God. Yet, for those who reject God’s truth, there is a knowledge and wisdom that is ungodly – even demonic.

James 3:13-18 ~ “Who is wise [*sophos*] and understanding [*epistēmōn*] among you? By his good conduct let him show his works in the meekness of wisdom [*sophia*]. ¹⁴But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast and be false to the truth [*alētheia*]. ¹⁵This is not the wisdom [*sophia*] that comes down from above, but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic. ¹⁶For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be disorder and every vile practice. ¹⁷But the wisdom [*sophia*] from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere. ¹⁸And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.”

1 Cor 1:20-22 ~ “Where is the one who is wise [*sophos*]? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom [*sophia*] of the world? ²¹For since, in the wisdom [*sophia*] of God, the world did not know God through wisdom [*sophia*], it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe.”

1 Cor 2:4-8, 13 ~ “and my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom [*sophia*], but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, ⁵so that your faith might not rest in the wisdom [*sophia*] of men but in the power of God. ⁶Yet among the mature we do impart wisdom [*sophia*], although it is not a wisdom [*sophia*] of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are doomed to pass away. ⁷But we impart a secret and hidden wisdom [*sophia*] of God, which God decreed before the ages for our glory. ... ¹³And we impart this in words not taught by human wisdom [*sophia*] but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual truths to those who are spiritual.”

Godly wisdom and knowledge

Ephesians 1:17-18; 3:10, 19 (see 1 Corinthians 1:21, 24, 30; 2:6-16; James 3:17)

Worldly wisdom and knowledge

Ephesians 4:17-24 (see 1 Corinthians 1:20; 2:3-5; 3:18-20; 2 Corinthians 1:12; James 3:15)

- A simple, yet accurate, definition of wisdom is “knowledge applied” (or applied knowledge). Wisdom is derived from knowledge. A person can have knowledge without wisdom, but not wisdom without knowledge. This is one reason why we are commanded to pursue biblical (godly) knowledge – so that we can have biblical (godly) wisdom.

Those who have godly knowledge and wisdom truly believe in God, worship Him as God (“*in spirit and in truth*”; Jn.4:23-24), and seek to the commands of God. Those who reject and rebel against God, those wallow in sin, and those who revel in idolatry, are immersed in worldly knowledge and wisdom – or, as stated in the Bible, they are “fools.”

Ps 14:1 ~ “The fool says in his heart, ‘There is no God. They are corrupt, they do abominable deeds, there is none who does good.’”

Prov 1:7 ~ “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction.”

Prov 9:10 ~ “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is insight.”

Isa 32:6 ~ “For the fool speaks folly, and his heart is busy with iniquity, to practice ungodliness, to utter error concerning the LORD ...”

Isa 32:6 ~ “For a fool speaks foolishness and his mind plots iniquity. He lives in a godless way and speaks falsely about the LORD. ...” (HCSB)

Rom 1:21-23 ~ “For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile [*mataioō*] in their thinking, and their foolish [*asynetos*] hearts were darkened.

²²Claiming to be wise, they became fools [*mōrainō*], ²³and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things.”

1 Cor 3:18-19 ~ “Let no one deceive himself. If anyone among you thinks that he is wise in this age, let him become a fool [*mōros*] that he may become wise. ¹⁹For the wisdom of this world is folly [*mōria*] with God. ...”

- The biblical term for “fool” is a moral designation; not an intellectual one. As we have seen, unbelievers possess worldly (ungodly, “demonic”) knowledge and wisdom. Their foolishness is directly related to their ungodliness – it stems from ungodliness and expresses itself in ungodliness.
- ✓ **Illust:** “The unregenerate person is a fool because he denies God by belief and by practice. He is a fool because he becomes his own god. He is a fool because he mocks sin. And he is a fool because he contaminates the rest of society with the ungodly foolishness that damns his own soul. He bequeaths his legacy of foolishness to his children, his friends, and his society – to everyone who falls under the influence of his folly” (John MacArthur; *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary: Ephesians*; 5:15-17).
- While Christians may be regarded as fool in the eyes of the world (Acts 17:18, 32; 26:24; 1Cor.1:18, 23; 2:14; 4:10), they walk in the knowledge and wisdom of God. To walk the Christian walk is to walk in the wisdom of God.
- Eph 5:15-21** ~ “Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, ¹⁶making the best use of the time, because the days are evil. ¹⁷Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. ¹⁸And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit, ¹⁹addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart, ²⁰giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, ²¹submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ.”
- In these verses, we are not only commanded to walk in the wisdom of God, but we are also told how to walk in the wisdom of God. This passage can be marked by three major headings.

A. The Command (vs.15a)

- The first thing we must notice in this verse is the word *“Look”* (vs.15; *blepō*). This imperative verb (*blépete*) is used as an exhortation to “pay attention”, to “beware”, or to “watch out” for evildoers or evil days ahead. In the New Testament, it is used in some of the most severe, most sobering, circumstances:

Matt 24:4 ~ “And Jesus answered them, ‘See [*blépete*] that no one leads you astray.’”

Mark 8:15 ~ “And [Jesus] cautioned them, saying, ‘Watch out; beware [*blépete*] of the leaven of the Pharisees and the leaven of Herod.’”

Phil 3:2 ~ “Look out [*blépete*] for the dogs, look out [*blépete*] for the evildoers, look out [*blépete*] for those who mutilate the flesh.”

Heb 3:12 ~ “Take care [*blépete*], brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God.”

2 John 8 ~ “Watch [*blépete*] yourselves, so that you may not lose what we have worked for, but may win a full reward.”

- In other words, we must not walk around with our heads in the clouds or in the sand. We simply cannot afford to be ignorant, foolish, or naïve. We cannot be spiritually apathetic, clueless, or careless. We must not be easily blindsided by temptation or sin, or blind to our weaknesses and failures.
- This is further emphasized by the adverb *“carefully”* (vs.15; *akribōs*), which could be translated accurately, fully, or perfectly. In other words, don’t just look but examine; don’t just see but investigate; don’t just casually observe but diligently inspect.

Matt 2:8 ~ “And [Herod] sent [the wise men] to Bethlehem, saying, ‘Go and search diligently [*akribōs*] for the child [i.e., Jesus], and when you have found him, bring me word, that I too may come and worship him.’”

Matt 2:13 ~ “Now when they had departed, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, ‘Rise, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you, for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him.’”

Luke 1:3 ~ “it seemed good to me also, having followed all things closely [*akribōs*] for some time past, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus”

Acts 18:25 ~ “[Apollōs] had been instructed in the way of the Lord. And being fervent in spirit, he spoke and taught accurately [*akribōs*] the things concerning Jesus, though he knew only the baptism of John.”

1 Thess 5:2 ~ “For you yourselves are fully [*akribōs*] aware that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night.”

- These two words serve as a strong exhortation as well as an admonition. In order for us to faithfully walk the Christian walk, we must walk introspectively. We must be diligent in our decisions, contemplating every step we take *“Look carefully then how you walk”* (vs.15). We are to be careful in how we live, as if walking on ice or walking in the dark. We must never walk carelessly, hastily, or arrogantly.

1 Cor 10:12 ~ “Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall.”

Prov 3:21-23 ~ “My son, do not lose sight of these – keep sound wisdom and discretion,²² and they will be life for your soul and adornment for your neck. ²³Then you will walk on your way securely, and your foot will not stumble.”

- Satan is the ruler of this world (Jn.12:31; 14:30; 16:11; 2Cor.4:4), a prowling lion *“seeking someone to devour”* (1Pet.5:8), we must be ever vigilant against his temptations, distractions, and deceptions (Eph.6:10-17; Jms.4:7).

B. The Contrasts (vs.15b-18)

- The command is followed by a series of contrasts: “... *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*. ¹⁸*And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit*” (vs.15-18). Within these verses are three contrasting statements: “*not as unwise but as wise*” (vs.15), “*do not be foolish, but understand ... the will of the Lord*” (vs.17), “*do not get drunk ... but be filled with the Spirit*” (vs.18).
- These three contrasting statements show the extreme difference between those who are truly walking with Christ and those who are not.

1. “*not as unwise but as wise*” (vs.15-16)

- As we have seen, to be “*unwise*” (vs.15; *asophos*) is to act foolish or to be a fool. Remember, simply put, wisdom is knowledge applied. A person can be very knowledgeable in worldly things and devoid of godly wisdom. Conversely, a person can be ignorant of worldly things and rich in godly wisdom. Those who possess godly wisdom have godly knowledge. This enables them, by the leading of God’s Spirit within them, to make godly decisions.

This is why we need to pursue biblical (spiritual) knowledge and understanding. Christians simply cannot afford to be ignorant or naïve regarding the truth(s) of God. For the absence of biblical knowledge hinders one’s ability to walk in wisdom. In fact, those who have a shallow or wrong understanding of biblical truth are prone to walk not as wise but as unwise.

- We must actively and sincerely pursue godly knowledge and wisdom, for it will not happen to us by accident or osmosis. No one is born wise, and no one naturally grows in godly wisdom. Thankfully, God wants us to be truly wise, and He readily lavishes His wisdom on those who truly seek it as they truly seek Him. We must never think we can receive God’s wisdom when we are not right with God Himself.

Prov 3:13-15 ~ “Blessed is the one who finds wisdom, and the one who gets understanding, ¹⁴for the gain from her [i.e. wisdom (personified)] is better than gain from silver and her profit better than gold.

¹⁵She is more precious than jewels, and nothing you desire can compare with her.”

Prov 4:5-9 ~ “Get wisdom; get insight; do not forget, and do not turn away from the words of my mouth. ⁶Do not forsake her, and she will keep you; love her, and she will guard you. ⁷The beginning of wisdom is this: Get wisdom, and whatever you get, get insight. ⁸Prize her highly, and she will exalt you; she will honor you if you embrace her. ⁹She will place on your head a graceful garland; she will bestow on you a beautiful crown.”

James 1:5 ~ “If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him.”

- Unfortunately, some Christians believe – or act as if they believe – that biblical knowledge (doctrine and theology) is antithetical to spirituality. They have wrongly convinced themselves that their ignorance is pleasing to God, and that studying Scripture (doctrine) leads to arrogance and a heartless Christian life. They believe that true faith is merely emotional and not intellectual. This is both unbiblical and dangerous.

Eph 4:11-15 ~ “And [God] gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, ¹²to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, ¹³until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, ¹⁴so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes.

¹⁵Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ”

Col 1:10 ~ “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.”

Heb 6:1 ~ “Therefore let us leave the elementary doctrine of Christ and go on to maturity ...”
(1Cor.3:1-2)

2 Peter 3:18 ~ “But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be the glory both now and to the day of eternity. Amen.”

- The phrase *“making the best use of”* (vs.16) translates one Greek word (*exagorazō*). The word basically means to “to buy up/back” or “to redeem.” This specific word is used only four times in the New Testament, two of which are used to describe the redemptive work of Christ through His substitutionary and sacrificial death on the cross (as He paid the full penalty of our sin):

Gal 3:13 ~ “Christ redeemed [*exagorazō*] us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us...”

Gal 4:5 ~ “to redeem [*exagorazō*] those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons”

Col 4:5-6 ~ “Walk in wisdom toward outsiders, making the best use of [*exagorazō*] the time. ⁶Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person.”

Dan 2:8 ~ “The king [Nebuchadnezzar] answered and said [to the magicians, enchanters, sorcerers, Chaldeans (vs.2)], ‘I know with certainty that you are trying to gain time [*exagorázete* (LXX)], because you see that the word from me is firm”

- To be sure, proper time management is no parallel to the redemptive work of Christ. But the concept is the same. As Christians, we are to “buy up” all the *“time”* (vs.16; *kairos*) that we can. In other words, metaphorically, we are to take full advantage of the time allotted to us; of every minute and opportunity the Lord gives us to serve Him in this life.

We must be careful not to waste or squander the time we have in this life. For none of us truly know how much time we have left on this earth, or how much time is left for those whom we are called to minister. This is a never-ending battle for us today. For we live in a time when distractions have reached epidemic proportions (e.g., social/digital media, internet, shows/movies, etc.).

- Paul gave another reason as to why we are to redeem the time: *“because the days are evil”* (vs.16). Here we are soberingly reminded that we are living in the midst of an evil age. Make no mistake, the current days are no less evil than they were in the first century. Furthermore, we know that (in the future) the days will be increasingly evil as the “end times” draw near.

Matt 24:24 ~ “For false christs and false prophets will arise and perform great signs and wonders, so as to lead astray, if possible, even the elect.” (see Matt.24:5, 11-12; 2Thess.2:6-12)

2 Tim 3:12-13 ~ “Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted, ¹³while evil people and impostors will go on from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived.”

2. *“do not be foolish, but understand ... the will of the Lord”* (vs.17)

- Secondly, those who walk in godly wisdom understand the will of God: *“Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is”* (vs.17). This, of course, does not mean that we will know all things (i.e., omniscient like God). Rather, this is a two-fold command – both negative (*“do not be foolish”*) and positive (*“understand what the will of the lord is”*). Christians are commanded by God to know God – not just know about God but to know God. This is neither a suggestion nor an elective. Again, this will not happen by accident or osmosis. We must pursue the wisdom of God and His will, by pursuing the knowledge of God and His Word.

➤ God is not playing some cosmic game of hide-and-seek in heaven. He is not aloof nor seeking anonymity. He wants us (you) to know Him. He has commanded us (you) to seek Him. But He will not be mocked nor manipulated. Too many people treat God as some cosmic bellhop, or divine genie in a lamp – someone they could occasionally call upon (when the need arises) to answer questions such as “Who should I marry?”, “What job should I take?”, “What college should I go to?”, etc. (like the friend or family member who only calls when they want something or are in need).

That is, they want God to tell them what they should do without having a right and growing relationship with Him (i.e., they only pray to God when they want/need something from Him). Some, if they were honest, would have to admit that they would rather have God as their answer man (or Santa Claus) than as their Lord and Savior. There is a grave danger in seeking God’s will without seeking God!

➤ To be sure, we are to seek to know God’s will for our lives, but seeking God’s will is not some formulaic or mystical endeavor. God wants us to know His will, but God’s will is not to be sought apart from seeking God Himself! We cannot truly know the will of God apart from knowing God.

The heart of the issue is this: if you want to know the will of God get to know God! If you want to know God’s will for your life, you must delve personally and passionately into a relationship with Him. The more a person knows the truth of who God is, the more they will understand how God has called them to live. The will of God cannot be truly found apart and embraced from believing in Him, worshipping Him, and loving Him.

Ps 9:9-10 ~ “The LORD is a stronghold for the oppressed, a stronghold in times of trouble. ¹⁰And those who know your name put their trust in you, for you, O LORD, have not forsaken those who seek you.”

Ps 37:4-5 ~ “Delight yourself in the Lord, and he will give you the desires of your heart. ⁵Commit your way to the LORD; trust in him, and he will act.”

Jer 29:13 ~ “You will seek me and find me, when you seek me with all your heart.”

Heb 11:6 ~ “And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.”

➤ The more we know God, and follow God, the more we will understand His will for our lives. The Greek word translated “*understand*” (vs.17; *syniēmi*) literally means “to put together” (to figure out), meaning to comprehend, understand, or perceive. This comes from regularly reading, studying, and applying His Word – the holy Scriptures.

Ps 119:10-11 ~ “With my whole heart I seek you; let me not wander from your commandments! ¹¹I have stored up your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you.” (see Ps.1:2; 37:31; 119:97-98; Col.3:16)

2 Tim 3:14-17 ~ “But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it ¹⁵and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. ¹⁶All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, ¹⁷that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.”

Rom 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. ²Do 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.”

Eph 1:7-10 ~ “In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, ⁸which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight ⁹making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ ¹⁰as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.”

- Seeking God's will is not an occasional endeavor – reserved only for the major decisions in life. Seeking the will of the Lord is to be our daily work. We are commanded to *“understand what the will of the Lord is”* (vs.17), and this comes from abiding in Him and obeying His Word. We must not relegate God's will to “major” decisions in our lives. For the *“will”* (*thelēma*) of God refers to His desires, His pleasure, and His commands. Seeking God's will is ultimately seeking how to please and glorify God!

Eph 5:10 ~ “and try to discern [*dokimazō*] what is pleasing [*euarestos*] to the Lord.” (see Phil.4:18; Col.1:10; Heb.13:21)

3. *“do not get drunk ... but be filled with the Spirit”* (vs.18)

- Thirdly, those who walk in God's wisdom walk under the influence of God's Holy Spirit: *“And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit”* (vs.18). While drunkenness is sinful [*debauchery*] (*asōtia*; reckless, uncontrolled, “unsaved” behavior)], and therefore forbidden, it is not the main point of this verse. The command is again two-fold: negative (*“And do not get drunk with wine”*) and positive (*“be filled with the Spirit”*).
- The analogy seems to be “do not be filled with wine but be filled with the Spirit.” Or, to put it another way, “do not be under the influence of alcohol (or anything ungodly), instead we are to be under the influence of the Holy Spirit of God.”

When a person is under the influence of alcohol, their emotions, thoughts, and actions characterize that influence. In the same way, when a person is under the influence of the Spirit, their emotions, thoughts, and actions characterize that influence. As drunkenness promotes ungodliness, being filled with the Spirit promotes godliness.

- The Greek word translated *“be filled”* (*plēroō*) can mean to be completely filled, or perfectly complete. In the New Testament it used to describe a fishing net being crammed full of fish (Matt.13:48), the complete fulfillment of prophecy (Matt.1:22), the perfect righteousness of Christ (Matt.3:15), and the fulness of Christ's redemptive work in and through the church (Eph.1:23).

In addition, the construction of this imperative verb (present, passive) indicates that the filling of the Spirit is something that happens to us (by God), and continually happens to us. We (apart from God) cannot command or control the Spirit of God. It is God who gives His Spirit to all believers (Eph.1:13-14; 2Cor.1:22; 5:5; 1Thess.4:8). Every true Christian receives the fulness of the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit the moment of their genuine conversion – not in doses or stages (Jn.3:34; Rom.8:9). The command to *“be filled with the Spirit”* (vs.18), or *“be filled by the Spirit”*, is a command for us to always be fully yielded (submissive) to the presence and influence of the Spirit of God in our lives – to never *“quench the Spirit”* (1Thes.5:19; by sins of omission) or *“grieve the Holy Spirit of God”* (Eph.4:30; by sins of commission). To *“be filled with the Spirit”* is not to resist or rebel against the Spirit's work in our lives (Jn.3:30).

- Christians are called to live their lives under the influence of the Holy Spirit of God. That is, to live in obedience to the instruction and guidance of God's Spirit that indwells them. To help explain this, two illustrations come to mind.

The first is an electric cable car. When the car is connected to the power source, it can move along the track as it was designed to do. If it becomes disconnected it is unable to move. So it is with the Christian life. If we are walking in the Spirit, “filled with the Spirit”, we are empowered and guided to live lives that are holy and pleasing to God. If not, we are under the influence of something else.

The second is a glove. A Christian is like an empty glove. Apart from the indwelling Spirit of God, he/she is spiritually lifeless and dead (Jn.15:4-5). However, when a hand fills the glove it enables and directs the glove to do what it wants. So it is with the Christian life. When the Spirit of God fills the life of a believer, and the believer is yielded to the leading of the Spirit, God enables and directs that believer to that which is pleasing to Him.

C. The Characteristics (vs.19-21)

- Specifically, these verses are characteristics that come from being filled with the Spirit of God (vs.18). Generally, however, this passage teaches what it means to walk in godly wisdom. For the person who is truly walking in godly wisdom is filled with God's Spirit, and the person who is truly filled with God's Spirit will walk in God's wisdom. Apart from the power and presence of God's Spirit, no one can truly walk in God's wisdom.
- Paul listed these characteristics with five distinct verbal participles: "*addressing*", "*singing*", "*making melody*", "*giving thanks*", and "*submitting*" (vs.19-21).

1. "*addressing*" (vs.19)

- The first characteristic walking in wisdom (generally), and being filled with the Spirit (specifically), is "*addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs*" (vs.19). Technically, the Greek word (*laleō*) translated "*addressing*" (vs.19) refers more to speaking than it does singing. This could mean that Paul is specifically referring not to the singing of songs but communication between believers – i.e., to "*one another*" (vs.19; see Deut.31:30; 2Sam.22:1; see Lk.2:13; Rev.4:8, 10-11; 5:9-14). While this certainly does not exclude singing, it seems the emphasis here is on how Christians should formally and informally communicate with each.

This communication is categorized in three ways: "*addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs*" (vs.19). Here are the musical/theological distinctions that I think can be helpful.

- a. Scriptural ~ "*psalms*" (*psalmos*). "Psalms" are a specific piece of sacred music. This may specifically refer to Scripture that is set to music, or even more generally to any song that recites Scripture. A psalm is a declaration of what God has said (a declaration of God's Word).
 - b. Doctrinal ~ "*hymns*" (*hymnos*). Hymns are also sacred songs, but tend to be more doctrinally or theologically centered. They are often written to convey specific truths about God, in order to teach us, and help us sing, about God. A hymn is a declaration of who God is (a declaration of God's nature and attributes).
 - c. Testimonial ~ "*spiritual songs*" (*pneumatikos ōdē*). Spiritual songs are songs of testimony, or songs that tell a story about God's sovereign power, transforming love, or saving grace. A spiritual song is a declaration of what God has done (a declaration of God's work in creation, and in the life of believers).
- Christians are greatly benefitted by a "balanced diet" in worship (both individual and corporate). We need to regularly speak (and sing) Scripture to one another, as well as teach biblical doctrine to one another, and to encourage one another with our personal testimonies of what the Lord has done in our lives. It is good to ask ourselves, "How much of my conversations are about God's Word, the attributes or character of God, or what God has done for me?" (especially in comparison to how much we talk about the weather, current events, politics, sports, hobbies, etc.).

Col 3:16 ~ "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching [*didaskō*; vb. part.] and admonishing [*noutheteō*; vb. part.] one another in all wisdom, singing [*adō*; vb. part.] psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God."

- In addition, our conversations should not be perverse or profane, and we should not be given to discouragement or gossip.

Eph 4:29 ~ "Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear."

Eph 5:4 ~ "Let there be no filthiness nor foolish talk nor crude joking, which are out of place, but instead let there be thanksgiving."

2. “singing” (vs.19)

- A second characteristic of walking in wisdom, and being filled with the Holy Spirit of God, is by singing: “*singing ... to the Lord with your heart*” (vs.19). Whether privately or publicly (individually or corporately), Christians are to sing “*to the Lord*” (vs.19). Christians are compelled to sing worship songs to God. The book of Psalm is replete with exhortations to “sing praises to the Lord” extoling God for His greatness, giving thanks for His goodness, and proclaiming to others the mighty works that He has done. We are not to sing our opinions, or our feelings. We are to sing about God – who He is, what He has done, and what He has promised to do – all that has been revealed to us through His Word.
 - ✓ **Illust:** “The Spirit-filled life produces music. Whether he has a good voice or cannot carry a tune, the Spirit-filled Christian is a singing Christian. Nothing is more indicative of a fulfilled life, a contented soul, and a happy heart than the expression of song. ... When the believer walks in the Spirit, he has an inside joy that manifests itself in music. God puts music in the souls and then on the lips of His children who walk in obedience” (John MacArthur; *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary: Ephesians*; 5:19).
- Singing to the Lord has always been part of the believer’s life: the Israelites burst into song when God delivered them from the Egyptians by enabling to cross the Red Sea on dry ground (Ex.15:1-21); when the ark of God returned to Jerusalem, king David commanded a song of praise and thanksgiving be sung to the Lord (1Chron.16); when the foundation was built for the temple, the people sang responsively praising the Lord (Ezr.3:11); before Jesus went to the Garden of Gethsemane (where He would be arrested and later crucified), He and His disciples sang a hymn (Matt.26:30); when Paul and Silas were in prison, for preaching the Gospel, they sang hymns to God (Acts 16:35); the four living creatures and twenty-four elders sing to the Lamb of God in heaven (Rev.5:9-10).
- It is important to note, and not miss, that worship songs must be sung “*to the Lord*” and “*with your heart*” (vs.19). True worship is not self-centered (self-affirming, self-esteem building) but God-centered. Singing to the Lord from the “*heart*” (*kardia*) describes the sincerity of the one worshipping. The heart must not be relegated to feelings or emotions. It refers to the core of a person’s life, their inner self. While it certainly includes one’s emotions and affections, it also incorporates the will and intellect too.

Just as a false understanding of God will lead to a false worship of God (or the worship of a false god), a shallow understanding of God naturally leads to a shallow worship of God. A person cannot truly or deeply worship one they do not know. Our knowledge of the Word of God increases our capacity to worship God! It is only when we truly dig down into the depths of divine truth through God’s Word, that we can elevate to the heights of praise in true worship.

3. “making melody” (vs.19)

- The third characteristic (closely related to the second) is, “*making melody to the Lord with your heart*” (vs.19). Some commentators see “*singing*” (*adō*) and “*making melody*” (*psallō*) two ways of saying the same thing. While this may be true, I think there is a helpful distinction to be made between the two (i.e., “singing and psalming” or “singing songs and psalms”). Some suggest that “*singing*” (*adō*) refers to the vocalist and “*making melody*” (*psallō*) refers to the instrument or musician (“*making music*” [NET, HCSB]).
 - ✓ **Illust:** “*Psallo* (making melody) is related to the term from which we get psalm and literally means to pluck on a stringed instrument, particularly a harp, with the fingers. The word, however, came to represent the making of any instrumental music. The Spirit-filled heart expresses itself in any sort of vocal or instrumental music, in both singing and making melody” (John MacArthur; *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary: Ephesians*; 5:19-21).
- What is evident in these verses is that “singing to the Lord” is not restricted to vocalizing praises in song. Notice that language Paul used here: “*making melody to the Lord with your heart*” (vs.19). Again, the “*heart*” here refers to one’s “inner self” not just one’s emotions. It represents one’s true self, the center of one’s spiritual life. It is not just feelings but includes the intellect and desires as well.

This not only singing worship songs (individually) or singing worship songs on Sunday morning (corporately), but praising God with all every part of our lives – not just with our mouths, but with our hearts; not just voices, but instruments; not just externally, but internally as well. Making melody to the Lord with our hearts is praising God with not only our lips but also our lives. It is living life as a praise-song to God!

1 Cor 14:15 ~ “What am I to do? I will pray with my spirit, but I will pray with my mind also; I will sing [*psallō*] praise with my spirit, but I will sing [*psallō*] with my mind also.”

4. “giving thanks” (vs.20)

- The fourth characteristic of walking in the wisdom of God is giving thanks to God: “*giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ*” (vs.20). Spirit-filled Christians are thankful, and they continually thank God for the gracious blessings that He gives. God has truly blessed each and every one of us far (infinitely) beyond what we deserve. We are recipients of His sovereign love, saving grace, and sanctifying work in our lives.

Unfortunately, some (professing) Christians are bitter, easily irritated/offended, and grumblers/complainers. Some Christians spend their days sulking in anger and self-pity thinking that God has someone wronged or failed them. Some Christians chronically mope around, like church curmudgeons, because other Christians have disappointed or wounded them. Some Christians wear joylessness like a badge of honor, and ingratitude like a fruit of the Spirit.

- But notice the exhaustive language Paul used to describe what it means to be truly thankful to God: “*giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ*” (vs.20) – “*always*” (*pantote*) and for “*everything*” (*pas*). This does not mean, of course, that Christians never feel pain or sadness (1Thess.4:13; Rom.12:9, 15), or that Christians are always to be walking around with a permanent smile on their faces, or that Christians have morbid longing for pain. It does mean, however, that Christians are to be fully and continually grateful to God, and they should constantly thank Him in their prayers – knowing that even through sufferings and sorrows, God is working for their good and for His glory (e.g., not thankful for cancer, per se, but thankful for what God will do in and through cancer)! We are to be grateful to God for everything because we know that His is sovereign over everything.

Eph 5:4 ~ “Let there be no filthiness nor foolish talk nor crude joking, which are out of place, but instead let there be thanksgiving.”

Phil 4:6 ~ “do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.”

Col 2:6-7 ~ “Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him, ⁷rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving.”

Col 3:15-17 ~ “... and be thankful. ¹⁶Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God. ¹⁷And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.”

1 Thess 5:16-19 ~ “Rejoice always, ¹⁷pray without ceasing, ¹⁸give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. ¹⁹Do not quench the Spirit.”

- Christians are commanded to be “thankful” to the Lord. To “[give] thanks” (*eucharisteō*) could literally be translated “good grace” or “well favored.” It is the state of being thankful – knowing that God has blessed you beyond measure. A thankful attitude and perspective are essential aspects of the Christian life. We are commanded to be grateful “to God the Father” (vs.20) and to express that gratitude to Him “in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ” (vs.20).

Christians should be the most grateful people on the planet. For, in Christ, the Christian is always better than he/she deserves to be. We know that we have been completely and eternally forgiven of all our sins (past, present, and future), and have God's indwelling presence guiding and guarding our lives in Christ. To put it bluntly, ungratefulness is a sin that characterizes unbelievers (see Rom.1:21; 2Tim.3:2).

5. "submitting" (vs.21)

- A fifth characteristic of walking in God's wisdom, and being filled with God's Spirit, is "*submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ*" (vs.21). Unfortunately, the word "submission" can conjure in our minds a lot of negative thoughts. People mistakenly relate the biblical idea of submission with slavery, dictatorship, or tyranny (especially when it comes to wives submitting to husbands; Eph.5:22). None of these are accurate synonyms for what it means to be submissive.

The Greek word (*hypotassō*) translated "*submitting*" (vs.21) literally means "to bring under control" or "to put under order." It is used in the New Testament to describe the willful surrendering of one's own desires or rights. Christians are not those who always demand to get their way. Christians are not to be belligerent, self-centered, or overbearing. Like Christ, who willfully relinquished His rights and prerogatives, Christians are to be submissive people (see Phil.2:5-8; 1Pet.2:21-23). This is essentially the act of deference – deferring one's wants and rights for the greater good.

- In the New Testament, we find that Christians are to be submissive, first and foremost, to God (Jms.4:7); the government (Rom.13:1, 5; 1Pet.2:13); to those who have authority over us (Eph.6:5-8; 1Pet.2:18); to church leadership (Heb.13:7, 17; 1Pet.5:5); wives to their own husbands (Eph.5:22; Col.3:18; 1Pet.3:1); and "*to one another*" in the church (Eph.5:21).

Practically speaking, the church cannot function if every Christian is doing his/her own thing, or everyone is demanding that everyone does everything their way. The church is not made up of self-centered or self-serving Christians. The church is not individual Christians all doing their own things. The church needs to have order and unity in order to function properly (see 1Cor.12).

- Christians are to do everything "*out of reverence for Christ*" (vs.21; 1Cor.10:31; Col.3:17). This, again, is fundamentally an act of worship. The word "*reverence*" (*phobos*) can refer to being afraid or showing respect. If a person is not right with God – not truly saved in and through Christ – they should be terrified of God (see Lk.12:4-7; Heb.10:31). However, for those who are truly saved, the fear of God is a reverent worship of Him and obedience to Him. We are not to be submissive due to a fear of man, but "*out of reverence for Christ*" (vs.21).

Heb 12:28-29 ~ "Therefore let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, and thus let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence [*eulabeia*] and awe [*deos*], ²⁹for our God is a consuming fire."

Conclusion

- To walk in godly wisdom is living according to God's commands, by God's Spirit, and for God's glory. It is knowing and obeying God's Word (Lk.6:46-49; Rom.2:13; Jms.1:22-25).

Ps 101:1-2 ~ "I will sing about loyalty and justice! To you, O LORD, I will sing praises! ²I will walk in the way of integrity. ..." (NET)

Ps 101:1-2 ~ "I will sing of steadfast love and justice; to you, O LORD, I will make music. ²I will ponder the way that is blameless. ..." (ESV)

Ps 101:1-2 ~ "I will sing of faithful love and justice; I will sing praise to You, LORD. ²I will pay attention to the way of integrity. ..." (HCSB)