Ephesians 5:15-18

Walk in Wisdom

Sermon

We are currently going verse by verse through the book of Ephesians and we are in a series entitled – "a New Way to Walk". Paul has been talking about how we are to now walk as Christians in response to the glorious salvation that God has given to us as a gift in Christ. Paul's main way of arguing in Ephesians is, first, this is who you ARE in Christ, and therefore, second, this is now how you are to walk in response to who you are. You ARE a child of God, therefore, walk AS A CHILD OF GOD. This is the logic of Paul in Ephesians.

In Hebrew wisdom literature, the "walk" or "way" of a person was a metaphor to speak of one's lifestyle that resulted favorably or unfavorably, in blessing or in cursing. This is especially seen as it relates to "wisdom". Wisdom is often taught by comparing and contrasting *two different opposing paths* all throughout the OT, and especially in wisdom literature there is a way of death and a way of life (Moses says in Deut. 30 – "choose life"!). There is a way of the wicked and a way of the righteous (Psalm 1 tells us that those who walk in the way of the righteous will be like trees planted by streams of living water). God is the source of all wisdom and the fear of God is the beginning of wisdom (Prov. 1:7; 9:10). Jesus, the perfect Jew, and perfect rabbi, taught wisdom to His disciples according to the tradition of OT wisdom literature. Especially in the sermon of the mount you can hear the "two-path" approach to wisdom as He compares and contrasts two different paths. Look at, for example, Mt. 7:13-14:

> **Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. [14] For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few. (Mt. 7:13-14)**

Jesus presents two gates into two paths – a narrow gate leading to eternal life, and a broad gate leading to eternal destruction. Jesus tells His disciples, "enter the gate that is narrow and travel along the way that is less traveled." Go against the grain…swim upstream…don't walk down the pathway that most travel on…that pathway will lead you off a cliff! I've used the picture of a hiker that comes to a fork in the road. Down one path it's broad and lush and beautiful and intriguing…but there is a sign that reads, "danger - Stay off that path". Most people ignore the warning signs of Scripture and travel down the broad path that looks pleasurable to them. They lean on their own understanding and it never ends well. The other path - while it is visually unpleasant, narrow, and unappealing - leads to safety and true abundant life. This is how wisdom is often portrayed in Scripture.

Paul, the Jew, also knows his wisdom literature and he has been using the metaphor of "walking" all throughout Ephesians: In **2:1-3** - We formerly ***walked according to the course of this world,*** but God has set us on a new pathway because of His mercy and grace. In **2:10** we are now to ***walk in good works*** that God has prepared before us. Then in **4:1** – Paul said we are to ***walk worthy*** of the calling of God in Christ. In **4:17** – Paul reminds us to stay off the pathway we left behind! We are ***no longer to walk*** as we formerly walked. ***Maybe recently you've noticed yourself taking some old habits out of the closet and trying them on again…they will never fit!*** You are to put on the new self which is created after the likeness of God (**4:24**). In **5:2** – we are to "***walk in love"*** as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God." Jesus laid down His life for you on the cross when He died in your place as the perfect sacrifice for your sin…because of His love for you, He took upon Himself your curse for sin…now you and I are to love others this way! Last week we learned in **5:8** that we are to "***walk as children of light***". We see things clearly now…we are to walk as those who are awake! Now Paul tells us this morning that we are to "***walk wisely***".

First Paul tells us…

1. **Walk wisely in these last days (vv.15-16)**

Look at 5:15…

Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise (5:15)

To be "wise" is different than to simply have "knowledge". The two words "wisdom" and "knowledge" are closely related and sometimes used interchangeably, however there is a slight distinction. Wisdom can be understood as "experiential knowledge". In Greek literature someone who was "wise" was particularly skilled at something – how to build, write poetry, give speeches. My wife Lorrie is "wise" in "estimating" metals and "wise" in cooking….and "wise" in putting up with me. Steve Redmond is wise when it comes to responding to emergencies. So you might call wisdom "skillfull or masterful living". Where knowledge speaks more to the ***nature*** of something (what it is) wisdom is how to ***apply*** that knowledge usefully or masterfully in life. For example, I can ***"know"*** what a ladder is and what it's for, but I would be "wise" to learn how to operate it and to use balance, and to be careful when I'm up high. You can know what a fishing rod is, but there is then the wisdom and experience of knowing where to go and what types of lures/bait to use if you expect to be successful at catching any fish. Knowledge is knowing things about the world, but wisdom is the proper application of that knowledge to be successful, blessed, and to live the flourishing life that God desires for us.

Paul here wants us to walk with skill and mastery but not just in general, he is speaking of "wise (skillful, masterful) walking" in the midst of "days that are evil". Look at v.16:

making the best use **of the** ***time*****,** ***because*** **the days are** ***evil*****. (vv.16)**

It takes great skill to walk in the midst of evil days. The word that Paul uses here for "making the best use of" is the same word used for our redemption. In Gal. 3:13 – Christ *redeemed us* (same word) from the curse of the law on the cross – we are redeemed out from the curse by Jesus becoming a curse on the tree of Calvary. The word means "to purchase something out from the market". When someone wins the lottery, in order to get their money they have to give their ticket to "redeem" the prize money. Paul says we are to *redeem* the time…to "make the best use" of the "time"…. "*because* the days are evil".

Time is running out! You and I only have so much time left…and we need to "make the best use of it"…we need to redeem the time. Paul is talking about a specific time period…it is a time in which the "days are evil"….a time period, an "age" if you will, also known as "the last days". We are to walk wisely in the last days.

How many of you remember Y2K? Many people were freaking out and thought "this is the apocalypse!" They thought the whole world was going to fall apart because all computer systems were going to fail as the year 2000 approached. So people tried to act wisely and make the best use of their time…because time was running out and Y2K was here! They stocked their shelves with food, some even built emergency shelters. It was a time of anxiety as people prepared for chaos. Then the clock ticked down, and 2000 came, and nothing happened!

Y2K was a bust…but do you know what is not going to be a bust…Jesus Christ is coming back again…and He's nearer than ever before! You and I are to "walk wisely" while we wait for Him. The Bible tells us that the coming of the Lord can happen at any moment and will happen in the twinkling of an eye at the sound of a trumpet the Lord will come. But the days leading up to Jesus' coming will be marked with great evil - great enticements to sin, many people will fall away from having faith in God, the devil is ruling over the world in a very real way, but it will come to an end. It is also a time of invitation and opportunity - a time when the gospel is going out to the entire world. Another name for the "last days" is "the time of the Gentiles" because it's in the last days, since the birth of the church, that the nations are being drawn into faith in Jesus. Jesus told His disciples (Acts 1) before He went to Heaven, "go into Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the ends of the earth"…and so the charge for the church during the last days is to take the gospel to the Gentiles…even to the ends of the earth! It's a time of great opportunity to invite people into God's Kingdom through faith in Jesus. It is also a time of waiting - a time when God's people wait for His Coming Judgment and the coming of His Kingdom in all of its glory and perfection. ***Paul wants for the Ephesians to "live skillfully", to "walk wisely" in the midst of the "evil days"… the "last days". God wants His people to be ready for His coming?***

Are you walking wisely in these last days?

What are some ways we can walk wisely? This brings us to my second point…

2. Understand the will of God while we wait (v.17)

Therefore [because we live in these evil days and our time is running out**] do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. (5:17)**

What is the will of God concerning the time we've been given in these last days? I want to give you several things from Scripture:

Win souls to Jesus! In 2 Cor. 6:2 Paul says this:

In a favorable time I listened to you, and in a day of salvation I have helped you." Behold, now is the favorable time; behold, now is the day of salvation. (2 Cor. 6:2)

As evil as these days are, they are "days" of invitation and salvation. This means I need to be intentional with everyone around me! It means praying for opportunities and being flexible with my day and allowing the Holy Spirit to open doors of conversation. You have to be ready to walk through those doors when they open! You never know when your last opportunity to share the gospel might be!

Sanctify your family – Noah is often looked at as a model of great faith because he built the ark for years before the floods came. You know what else he did? Every single one of his family members came aboard! These days are likened to the days of Noah…they are evil and our family is being pulled in many different directions away from the truth…we need to set apart our households like Joshua who said, "as for me and my house we will serve the Lord!" (Josh. 24:15). Is your family ready to meet the Lord as Savior when He comes or will they meet Him as Judge?

Be watchful for times of temptation and spiritual warfare – The devil tempted the Lord Jesus while He was in the wilderness but was unsuccessful, but in Luke 4:13 we read "when the devil had ended every temptation, he departed from him until an opportune time." The devil comes and attacks us during times of temptation. There are seasons of intense temptation and spiritual warfare and we need to be ready when it comes…we are going to talk about spiritual warfare when we get to chapter 6…but for now just know that the devil would love to shipwreck your faith or at the very least make you ineffective at being the light God wants for you to be. The Christian life is a spiritual war with the greatest enemy the world has ever known, but Jesus fights for you and the devil is always looking for opportune times to trip you up and get you off course. Do not let the devil or your flesh gain any foothold. Be wise in these "evil days" where the devil lurks around every corner and the flesh within us tries to draw us back into darkness.

Pursue holiness and wait patiently – Paul wrote to Pastor Titus and said:

For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, [12] training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, [13] waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ (Tit. 2:11-13)

The grace of God is a great teacher! Paul tells us "grace has appeared"…and it trains us… "training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, and godly lives in the present age. In other words, "grace teaches us to pursue holiness". This should be our pursuit while we "wait for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ." Pursue holiness and wait patiently…and rest your hope fully upon the grace that is to come at His appearing. Set your minds on heavenly things, not on earthly things. Look to His Coming and while you wait…pursue holiness.

One more way to walk in wisdom this morning…

3. Be filled with the Spirit, not with the "spirits" (5:18)

And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit (v.18)

I'm going to talk more about the words "be filled with the Spirit" in our final sermon in this series next Sunday. But notice that Paul tells us not to be filled with "spirits" – wine – but filled with the Spirit – the Holy Spirit. Paul is not telling us to abstain from alcohol, but he is telling us to abstain from being drunk. God doesn't want for us to be under the control of something else…God wants to be in control. Rather than being under the control of alcohol…be under the control of the Holy Spirit!

Being drunk with wine is a perfect example of what it looks like to walk foolishly. You are no longer controlled by reason, by logic, by God's Word…you are now controlled by the wine. God's desire is not for us to be controlled with wine, but to be controlled with His Holy Spirit. The time is short brothers and sisters…it's not time to indulge in wine…that's how the world operates – "let us eat, drink, and be merry for tomorrow we die!" We live in an age of great opportunity and God wants to use YOU…THINK OF IT…to be a light to others. We must be filled by the Spirit…we'll talk more about this next week.

Do you see the two paths presented in this passage? The path of the wise and the path of the unwise. The path of the foolish, and the path of those who understand God's will in these evil days. The path of those who are filled with wine, and the path of those who are filled with the Spirit. God always puts before us two paths.

As we close this morning…I want for us to consider together the wisdom of the gospel.

Communion is a time when we remember together the wisdom of God that has been given to us in the gospel.

God in His wisdom created the world and after each thing He created He said, "It is good". God created Adam and Eve and set them together in a garden in paradise. God in His wisdom gave to Adam and Even two trees…both trees representing two paths…a path for the wise and a path for the foolish.

The tree of life was meant to be the tree of blessing and provision and joy from which Adam and Eve could eat from. They would be under the protection and care and love of God. God would dwell with them forever.

The second tree was the tree of the Knowledge of Good and evil. This tree was to be avoided. This tree was a pathway of cursing and death. Adam and Eve were commanded to not eat from this tree. It represented a choice: "Will you be wise and fear the Lord, or will you be foolish and choose to go your own way?"

God has always set before us two paths! Sadly, Adam and Eve chose the wrong path. The Bible tells us that it was Eve's desire to make herself wise apart from God that caused the fall:

> **so when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and *that the tree was to be desired to make one wise*, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate." (Gen. 3:6)**

Therefore, sin entered the world and death through sin and death spread to all men, for all sinned (Rom. 5:12).

But God, in His wisdom created a third tree. Before the foundation of the world, before the fall, God devised a plan to put forth His Son as an offering for sin knowing that man would rebel against Him. He would send His Son as a blood offering to pay the penalty for our rejection of Him and for all of our foolish choices. The cross of Calvary was the third tree. Jesus, God's only Son, hung on the cross to pay for our curse. The Bible says that anyone who hangs on a tree is cursed…and the cross represents the third tree that Jesus hung on to break our curse of sin and death. He became a curse for us…and this was God's wise plan.

Today there are still set before us two paths: We can *reject* the plan of God to break our curse through the tree of Calvary that He has provided. OR… we can *receive* the tree of Calvary and be forgiven of our sins and the curse of sin and death is broken.

As we receive communion, we remember the path of life God has put before us. The cup represents the blood that Jesus shed for us on the tree of Calvary. The bread represents His body that was broken for us to break the curse of sin and death.

If you have received Christ as your Savior you are free to celebrate with us and receive communion to proclaim and remember what He has done for you. If you have not received

Christ you have two options: You can reject what God has offered, if you are still undecided we ask that you would refrain from receiving communion…or you can right now receive the gift of salvation through faith in the death and resurrection of Jesus. You simply need to confess that you are a sinner and that you need God to save you from your sin. He will not turn you away. Turn away from your sin, and turn towards the Savior who died for you.