

—{1}. **Ephesians 5:15-21** **Walking in Wisdom**

A. Introduction

1. Wisdom

- a. is not a quality most of us are willing to claim for ourselves
- b. intelligence, yes; cleverness or discernment, perhaps
- c. but not wisdom ... maybe that is because we can think back on so many foolish things we have said, or ideas that we have had, or acts we have committed; no not wise
- d. Agur, the writer of Proverbs chapter 30, felt this way: — ² Surely I am more stupid than any man, And I do not have the understanding of a man. ³ Neither have I learned wisdom, Nor do I have the knowledge of the Holy One." (Proverbs 30:2-3)

2. yet in our text for today, Paul exhorts us to walk not as unwise but as wise; to walk in wisdom; – is that possible for me?

- a. well, if Paul wrote it, then it seems it is in God's plan
- b. that same Agur, the son of Jakeh, goes on to give some of his observations and concerns about life – some of these are in the form of lists – and we read a very interesting list starting with verse 24:
- c. ²⁴ ¹ Four things are small on the earth, But they are exceedingly wise: ²⁵ The ants are not a strong people, But they prepare their food in the summer; ²⁶ The shephanim {‘conies,’ ‘rock badgers’} are not mighty people, Yet they make their houses in the rocks; ²⁷ The locusts have no king, Yet all of them go out in ranks; ²⁸ The lizard you may grasp with the hands, Yet it is in kings’ palaces.
- d. God has endowed some of the least among His creatures with wisdom – the ants; the locusts
 - (A) I am looking forward to seeing the lizard that lives in Rachel's house in Japan and takes care of spare insects
 - (B) no one knows for certain what the shephanim are, that is why the NAS translators just used the Hebrew word, but I think that they must be a little like the pika who live in the rock piles in the mountains, who whistle warnings to one another of danger from hawks and humans, and who lay out grass to dry on the rocks before taking it into their tunnel as winter fodder

- (C) where I sit and prepare my message, I can see squirrels dashing back and forth across the road fetching and burying nuts: too stupid to remember where they buried them all, but wise to bury enough to find some
- (D) God has given wisdom to these small creatures, what can he do for us, those of us who are His new creation in Christ Jesus?
- e. But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him. (James 1:5) – what an encouragement!
 - (A) so Paul, by the Holy Spirit, is right in giving us ...

B. The command 5:15

1. ¹⁵ Therefore be careful how you walk, not as unwise men but as wise,
 - a. to capture the picture in this verse, there are many varied translations: the AV is 'see then that ye walk circumspectly' which brings to mind the picture of a cat walking along a wet pathway, carefully avoiding the puddles and the mud
 - b. some others are to walk 'strictly,' 'accurately' or 'precisely'
 - c. that word 'careful' is from a root word meaning 'highest or topmost' used to describe the area of a city (Acropolis), a hill or a mountain – take the high road in your life's walk
 - d. having done some hiking in the mountains, this verse brings to me another picture: that of a mountain path were you need to put each foot down very precisely to avoid slipping or tumbling down the hillside
2. this verse is not a suggestion, but a command and a warning
 - a. in the original language it begins: 'watch out, take heed'
 - b. Christians are to pay attention to how they walk, to how they live, because God tells us to do so, because it is foolish to do otherwise, and because of the danger in not doing so
 - c. Paul gives us four marks of walking in wisdom
 - (A) marks whereby we can measure our walk
 - (B) marks to aim at if we are to walk in wisdom
 - d. these four marks are
 - (A) being wise in our use of our time
 - (B) being wise in our understanding of God's will

- (C) being wise in being controlled by the Holy Spirit
- (D) being wise in our servanthood

C. Mark 1: Wise in Our Use of Time – in our Activities 5:16

1. ¹⁵ Therefore be careful how you walk, not as unwise men but as wise, ¹⁶ making the most of your time, because the days are evil.

a. this verse gives us

- (A) a mark of our wise walk – our use of time
- (B) a reason it needs wisdom – the times we live in

2. our use of time

a. we began to look at the word 'redeem' this morning in our adult Bible class; that phrase 'making the most of' can also be translated 'redeeming' and is used of Christ's paying the price to remove us from being under the curse of the law (Galatians 3:13, 4:5) –

b. it is, literally, 'to take out of the marketplace' and is here combined with the word 'time' – not time as on the clock, but time as in 'the proper season, the right time, the fit time'

c. the prudent shopper will take advantage, buying from the market place as the best opportunity presents itself

d. that is the thought behind this and its parallel verse, 'Conduct yourselves with wisdom toward outsiders, making the most of the opportunity.' (Colossians 4:5 NAS95)

3. the times in which we live

a. lots of people are wishing that they had moved some of their savings funds a month ago into safer investments – because the stock market place isn't always kind – that's the kind of world in which we live – you have to make wise choices while the opportunity is still there

b. so it is also with our time

c. Isaac Watts wrote these words:

Is this vile world a friend to grace,
To help me on to God?^{2}

d. and the answer to his question is a resounding 'No!'

e. in an evil world, wise Christians take every opportunity that presents itself to be good and to do good

D. Mark 2: Wise in our Understanding of God's Will 5:17

1. ¹⁷ So then do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is.

a. sometimes we distinguish between

(A) God's general will: for mankind, for believers; and,

(B) God's particular will: for an individual

2. God's general will

a. or His revealed will as found in the Scriptures

b. and, these as applied, provide the regulative principles of our Christian life; that is the message of ¹⁶ All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; ¹⁷ so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work. (2 Timothy 3:16-17)

3. and there is the seeking of God's particular will

a. what college should I attend?

b. what vocation should I pursue?

c. who should I marry?

d. now it is my contention that if we seek to be wise in understanding God's general will – and wisdom means the taking of knowledge and putting it into action – then God will make known His particular will for our lives

(A) in our prayer, in our meditation, in advice received from mature, spiritual Christians

(B) spiritual ... that brings us to

E. Mark 3: Wise in Being Controlled by the Holy Spirit 5:18-20

1. ¹⁸ And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit,

a. verse 18, contrasts two lifestyles

(A) a material lifestyle

(B) versus a spiritual lifestyle

2. the material lifestyle reflects the first form of control
 - a. the first or old method of trying to satisfy our appetites
 - b. the specific instance given is that of drinking to excess
 - c. leading a foolish life of dissipation or debauchery
 - d. this can take many forms – gaining possessions for their own sake (houses, paintings); the eating of gourmet foods; going on spending sprees; like the prodigal son, ‘wasting our lives in riotous living’

3. the spiritual lifestyle reflect surrender to Holy Spirit control
 - a. interesting is it not, that while alcohol can rob us of our self-control, the Holy Spirit gives us self-control – it is listed in the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5:22-23
 - b. **be filled with the Spirit** – the form of the Greek has three things to tells us about this:
 - (A) first, it is a command ‘**be filled**’ – it this is not the case, then it indicates that we are being disobedient
 - (B) second, it is in the present tense, meaning, ‘**go on being filled**’ – not just one time but a continuing activity
 - (C) third, it is in the passive ‘**be filled**’ this is God’s work, not ours; our responsibility is neither to ‘**quench the Spirit**’ nor to ‘**grieve the Spirit**’ so that He may fill us
 - c. but what is a Spirit filled life? ... how do I know I have it?
 - d. the Spirit filled life, the spiritual life leads to worship: – ²³ **But an hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for such people the Father seeks to be His worshippers. ²⁴ God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.** (John 4:23-24), and here we find

4. three aspects of Spirit filled worship 5:19-20
 - a. ¹⁹ **speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord; ²⁰ always giving thanks for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God, even the Father;**
 - b. first we have the public aspect of worship – **speaking** – expressing by means of our voice our praise to God

- (A) the three forms of praise Paul lists overlap each other
- (B) psalms, like the OT psalms, would be accompanied by musical instruments, often plucked such as harps
- (C) hymns, could be either sung or spoken
- (D) spiritual songs could be spontaneous in nature
- c. second, we have the private aspect of worship – **singing and making melody**
 - (A) could be vocal, could be instrumental (for gifted ones)
 - (B) but in either case, a praise flowing from the heart
- d. third, worship as gratitude, the human response to grace
 - (A) **grace and gratitude** – in English have the same root Latin word **gratia** – that’s true in Greek as well
 - (B) this gratitude is spiritual, thankful for material blessing but is not depending thereon for its existence
 - (C) but is thankful for everything that is in keeping with the name of Jesus, with His person, with His work

F. Finally, Mark 4: Wise in Our Servanthood 5:21

1. **and be subject to one another in the fear of Christ.**
 - a. a self-centred life is a foolish life
 - b. to have an other-centred life is to walk in wisdom
 - c. living in such a fashion is to show our respect and reverence to the Man who walked in wisdom more than any other in all the history of the world: Jesus of Nazareth
 - d. **just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.**
(Matthew 20:28 NAS95)
2. we will pick up this theme of ‘**submission to one another**’ next week with a more particular application of its application in the marriage relationship

G. Conclusion

1. We have here four marks to aim at and to check ourselves:
 - a. use of our time

- b. our understanding the will of God
- c. our worship
- d. our servanthood
- e. that we are walking in wisdom

- 2. Jesus Christ, our Saviour, is also our Great Example
 - a. Oh, that He may teach us His way!

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ERV	The Revised Version of 1885
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NIV	New International Version © 1984 by the International Bible Society
NKJV	New King James Version © 1979 Thomas Nelson Inc., Publishers
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2. ‘Am I a Soldier of the Cross?’ by Isaac Watts (1674-1748)