

Be Imitators of God

Walk in Wisdom

Ephesians 5:15-17

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Walk in Wisdom

Scripture

Two weeks I began a sermon series in Ephesians 5:1-21 called, “Be Imitators of God.”

In his letter to the Ephesian Christians, the Apostle Paul wrote in Ephesians 5:1a, “Therefore be imitators of God.” That is Paul’s overall command for this section of Scripture. He then gave three ways in which Christians imitate God. Christians imitate God by walking in love, by walking in light, and by walking in wisdom. We have previously examined walking in love and walking in light. Today, I want to examine how Christians imitate God by walking in wisdom.

Let’s read about walking in wisdom in Ephesians 5:15-17:

¹⁵ Look carefully then how you walk, 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. (Ephesians 5:15-17)

Introduction

Dr. Hershel Hobbs writes that when he was a seminary student he recalls hearing of a man with a Ph.D. who ran an elevator in a downtown Louisville, Kentucky, office building. Just prior to his oral examination for the same degree the faculty examining committee failed to pass a philosophy student. Dr. Hobbs was concerned, thinking the faculty committee was getting tougher. He asked one of the professors why they failed to pass the man. The professor said the student was able to answer all the questions about the philosophy of others, but he

had no philosophy of his own. Both the elevator operator and the student had *knowledge*, he said, but neither had *wisdom*.

And then Hobbs states, “Knowledge is a mental accumulation of facts. Wisdom is the ability to use knowledge properly in the ordering of one’s life.”¹

After King David died, his son, Solomon, became the third king of Israel. The Bible says that “Solomon the son of David established himself in his kingdom, and the Lord his God was with him and made him exceedingly great.”

One night God appeared to Solomon, and said to him, “Ask what I shall give you.”

And Solomon said to God, “...Give me now wisdom and knowledge to go out and come in before this people, for who can govern this people of yours, which is so great?”

God answered Solomon, “Because this was in your heart, and you have not asked for possessions, wealth, honor, or the life of those who hate you, and have not even asked for long life, but have asked for wisdom and knowledge for yourself that you may govern my people over whom I have made you king, wisdom and knowledge are granted to you. I will also give you riches, possessions, and honor, such as none of the kings had who were before you, and none after you shall have the like” (2 Chronicles 1:1-12).

One of the characteristics of those who imitate God is that they possess wisdom.

Lesson

The command to imitate God in Ephesians 5:15-17 teaches us to walk in wisdom.

¹ Herschel H. Hobbs, *My Favorite Illustrations* (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1990), 265.

Let's use the following outline:

1. What Christians Do to Imitate God (5:15)
2. How Christians Behave to Imitate God (5:16-17)

I. What Christians Do to Imitate God (5:15)

First, notice what Christians do to imitate God.

As I have already mentioned, in his letter to the Ephesian Christians, the Apostle Paul wrote in Ephesians 5:1a, "Therefore be imitators of God." That is Paul's overall command for this section of Scripture. He then stated three ways in which Christians imitate God.

First, Christians imitate God by walking in love, as Paul wrote in verse 2a, "And walk in love." We examined that two weeks ago.

Second, Christians imitate God by walking in light, as Paul wrote in verse 8b, "Walk as children of light." We examined that last week.

And third, Christians imitate God by walking in wisdom, as Paul wrote in verse 15, our text for today, **"Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise."** The moment a person becomes a Christian by repenting of sin and believing the Lord Jesus Christ, God makes that person **wise**. John MacArthur writes, "The moment we were saved we became a repository of wisdom that henceforth renders us responsible for our behavior. Because we are in Christ, 'the treasures of wisdom and knowledge' that are hidden in him (Col. 2:3) are therefore also hidden in us."² MacArthur continues, "The believer begins his new life in Christ with all the wisdom necessary to live for his Lord, but he is also to continually grow

² John F. MacArthur Jr., *Ephesians*, MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago: Moody Press, 1986), 218.

in wisdom, that he can be even more mature, more faithful, and more productive in his service.”³

That is why Paul is so precise in his statement when he says, **“Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise.”** Paul knows that Christians can revert to walking in foolishness. In fact, Solomon, the wisest man who ever lived, eventually slid into half-hearted obedience to God by marrying unbelievers and worshiping other gods. So, Christians are not immune from reverting to walking **as unwise**.

The first way a Christian walks as unwise is by not believing God completely. A Christian who is wise believes completely and fully. But a Christian who reverts to being unwise does not believe God for everything. He may believe God for many things, but he does not believe God for everything.

A few weeks ago, I was at a lunch with many hundreds of pastors at which Pastor Ron Walters of Salem Radio spoke. He said, “I have a series of seven statements. Say ‘Amen’ if you agree with each statement.” Let me see how you respond.

“Say ‘Amen’ if you believe that God is but one only, the living and true God.” Everyone shouted, “Amen!”

“Say ‘Amen’ if you believe that God is almighty, most wise, most holy, most free, most absolute, working all things according to the counsel of his own immutable and most righteous will.” Everyone shouted, “Amen!”

“Say ‘Amen’ if you believe that God created the heavens and the earth out of nothing .” Everyone shouted, “Amen!”

“Say ‘Amen’ if you believe that God’s works of providence are his most holy, wise, and powerful preserving of and governing all his creatures, and all their actions.” Everyone shouted, “Amen!”

³ John F. MacArthur Jr., *Ephesians*, 219.

“Say ‘Amen’ if you believe that God is in sovereign control of the entire universe, and that there is not a single atom that is not under God’s sovereign control.” Everyone shouted, “Amen!”

“Say ‘Amen’ if you believe that God raised Jesus Christ from the dead, and that Jesus is now seated at God’s right hand.” Everyone shouted, “Amen!”

“Say ‘Amen’ if you believe that God is able to take care of you with all your troubles and trials.” Only a few whispered, “Amen!”

When we do not believe God completely and fully, we walk as unwise.

The second way a Christian walks as unwise is by disobedience. Jesus told believers in John 14:15, “If you love me, you will keep my commandments.” Christians not only love Jesus but demonstrate wisdom by obeying Jesus’ commandments.

And the third way a Christian walks as unwise is by desiring wrong things. Paul wrote to Timothy in 1 Timothy 6:9, “But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction.” John MacArthur says, “It is tragic that so many Christians foolishly do not take God at his word in everything he says, do not obey him in everything he commands, and desire so many things that he warns against.”⁴

So, Christians imitate God by walking in wisdom.

II. How Christians Behave to Imitate God (5:16-17)

And second, let’s examine how Christians behave to imitate God.

⁴ John F. MacArthur Jr., *Ephesians*, 220.

Paul tells us that there are two ways that Christians walk in wisdom.

A. By Making the Best Use of the Time (5:16)

First, Christians walk in wisdom by making the best use of the time.

Paul said in verse 16, “...making the best use of the time, because the days are evil.” The phrase “making the best use of” (*exagorazō*) means “to do something with intensity and urgency, to work urgently, to redeem the time.”⁵ Christians walking in wisdom make the best use of the time that God has given us. When God saved us he did not immediately take us to heaven. No. He left us here on earth. We are to worship and serve him to the best of our ability. We are to tell others about the hope that we have found in Jesus Christ. We are to live as salt and light before a watching world, pointing people to Jesus.

Christians make the best use of every opportunity to imitate God. Once that opportunity has passed, however, even wise people are unable to recover it. Somebody once advertised as follows: “Lost, yesterday, somewhere between sunrise and sunset, two golden hours, each set with sixty diamond minutes. No reward offered, for they are gone forever.”⁶

MacArthur writes, “The great sixteenth-century reformer Philipp Melancthon kept a record of every wasted moment and took his list to God in confession at the end of each day. It is small wonder that God used him in such great ways.”⁷

⁵ Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996), 662.

⁶ Horace Mann, quoted by Ted W. Engstrom and Alex Mackenzie in *Managing Your Time* (Zondervan, 1967), 63.

⁷ John F. MacArthur Jr., *Ephesians*, 223.

And John Stott notes that “Jonathan Edwards, the philosopher-theologian who became God’s instrument in the ‘Great Awakening’ in America in 1734–5, wrote in the seventieth of his famous *Resolutions* just before his twentieth birthday: ‘Resolved: Never to lose one moment of time, but to improve it in the most profitable way I possibly can.’ He was a wise man, for the first sign of wisdom which Paul gives here is a disciplined use of time.”⁸

B. *By Understanding the Will of the Lord (5:17)*

And second, Christians walk in wisdom by understanding the will of the Lord.

Paul said in verse 17, **“Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is.”** Christians walking in wisdom understand the will of the Lord. In fact, this is supremely demonstrated by Jesus himself when he prayed, in the Garden of Gethsemane, as he was facing the crucifixion, “Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me. Nevertheless, not my will, but yours, be done” (Luke 22:42). Jesus also taught Christians to pray, in the famous prayer known as “The Lord’s Prayer,” “Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven” (Matthew 6:10b).

Commentator John Stott writes:

Nothing is more important in life than to discover and do the will of God. Moreover, in seeking to discover it, it is essential to distinguish between his “general” and his “particular” will. The former is so called because it relates to the generality of his people and is the same for all of us, *e.g.* to make

⁸ John R. W. Stott, *God’s New Society: The Message of Ephesians*, The Bible Speaks Today (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1979), 202.

us like Christ. His particular will, however, extending to the particularities of our life, is different for each of us, *e.g.* what career we shall follow, whether we should marry, and if so whom. Only after this distinction has been made can we consider how we may find out *what the will of the Lord is*. His “general” will is found in Scripture; the will of God for the people of God has been revealed in the Word of God. But we shall not find his “particular” will in Scripture. To be sure, we shall find general principles in Scripture to guide us, but detailed decisions have to be made after careful thought and prayer and the seeking of advice from mature and experienced believers.⁹

John MacArthur puts it this way, “Although [God’s] plans and directions for each believer are not found in Scripture, the general principles for understanding them are there.”¹⁰ And then he suggests several ways that Christians may **understand what the will of the Lord is**.

First, God’s will is that we be saved. Paul wrote in 1 Timothy 2:3–4, “This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.”

Second, God’s will is that we be Spirit-filled. In the very next verse of our current text, Paul wrote in Ephesians 5:18, “And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit.”

Third, God’s will is that we be sanctified. Paul wrote in 1 Thessalonians 4:3a, “For this is the will of God, your sanctification.”

Fourth, God’s will is that we be submissive. Peter wrote in 1 Peter 2:13–15, “Be subject for the Lord’s sake to every human

⁹ John R. W. Stott, *God’s New Society: The Message of Ephesians*, 203.

¹⁰ John F. MacArthur Jr., *Ephesians*, 226.

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institution, whether it be to the emperor as supreme, or to governors as sent by him to punish those who do evil and to praise those who do good. For this is the will of God, that by doing good you should put to silence the ignorance of foolish people.”

Fifth, God's will may include suffering. Peter also wrote in 1 Peter 3:17, “For it is better to suffer for doing good, if that should be God’s will, than for doing evil.”

And finally, God's will is that we be satisfied. Paul wrote in 1 Thessalonians 5:18, “Give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.”

So, when a person is saved, Spirit-filled, sanctified, submissive, suffering, and satisfied, he understands what the will of the Lord is. He is walking in wisdom by understanding the will of the Lord.

Conclusion

Therefore, having analyzed the command to imitate God in Ephesians 5:15-17, let us walk in wisdom.

I would like to conclude with the following from John MacArthur:

Jesus is our supreme example for fulfilling the commands of Ephesians 5:15–17. He always functioned according to the divine principles established by his Father: “Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of himself, unless it is something he sees the Father doing; for whatever the Father does, these things the Son also does in like manner” (John 5:19; cf. v. 30). Second, Jesus knew that his time of earthly ministry was short and would soon be cut off, as seen in frequent sayings such as “My time has not yet come” and “My

time has come.” He always functioned according to his limited privilege of time and opportunity, using every moment of his life in his Father’s work. Third, Jesus always functioned according to his Father’s purposes. “My food is to do the will of him who sent me, and to accomplish his work” (John 4:34).

“Therefore,” Peter said, “since Christ has suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same purpose, because he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin, so as to live the rest of the time in the flesh no longer for the lusts of men, but for the will of God” (1 Peter 4:1–2).

The words of David sum up the proper reaction to this teaching: “I will sing of mercy and judgment: unto thee, O Lord, will I sing. I will behave myself wisely in a perfect way” (Psalm 101:1–2, *KJV*).¹¹

So, let us commit ourselves to walk in wisdom. That means that we make the best use of the time and that we understand the will of the Lord. May God help each one of us to accomplish this goal. Amen.

¹¹ John F. MacArthur Jr., *Ephesians*, 227.

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and membership in his church family,
develop them to Christlike maturity,
equip them for their ministry in the church
and life mission in the world,
in order to magnify God's name.*

Sermons by Rev. Freddy Fritz

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