

Ephesians 5 (15-17) – Walking in Wisdom, pt.2

We have seen that wisdom is a path that we walk on, not simply a place that we arrive at. Wisdom is the ability to connect Scripture to life, to see how it applies to our situations, and to live accordingly. Wisdom is the opposite of foolishness, and it is the essence of foolishness to be godly in our doctrine yet worldly in our living. Biblically speaking, to have wisdom you must have a reverence for God, and you cannot have wisdom without humility. Everything we need to walk in wisdom we already have, as a result of our relationship with Jesus Christ. But we must learn to live in the truth, because we are still capable of living foolishly.

A major obstacle to walking in wisdom is when our former pattern of life creeps back in and governs our thoughts and actions. Another battle we face is the philosophies and traditions that would lead us away from the sufficiency of Christ and the Word of God. Wisdom always starts with the teaching and authority of the Bible. This doesn't mean that all we need for every situation is explicitly given in the Bible. We need to use the Bible as our "eyes" to examine other sources of knowledge. It is sufficient to help us read this world and learn from it, to be able to separate the true from the false, and to make use of what God has revealed in His creation.

We examined the 4 different Hebrew words that reflect subtle differences in "types" of fools. We looked at the simple fool, who lacks discernment, and needs to learn; the silly fool, who lacks discretion, and needs to be limited; the subversive fool, who lacks discipline, and needs to listen; and the steadfast fool, who lacks devotion, and needs a new life. We saw that one example of a foolish life is when people are largely governed by their feelings and desires. Another is when people put zeal and sincerity ahead of truth. Biblical wisdom is not about "following your heart"; it is about learning and living the truth. Wisdom is humble, while foolishness is proud.

The wise person wants to learn, even when it means chastisement. The wise person is careful with their speech, and concerned about people's souls. Their conduct is a strength, and their counsel quiets contention. They consider their ways in the light of God's truth; they don't just follow their heart. The world tells you to follow your heart, but Jesus tells you to follow Him. So what does walking in wisdom involve? We see 4 marks of a wise walk here in vs.15-17.

The wise person walks carefully (vs.15 – *Look carefully then how you walk*). The wise person wants to avoid the spiritual pitfalls and unnecessary detours, distractions, and deceptions. They want to see things accurately, and they want to respond to things properly. They are looking to incorporate wisdom into their lives, and so they have standards and principles by which they live. The Word of God is their standard, and its application drives their actions. They give thought to how they live, and they want to study, and to learn, so that they can apply the Word of God in all manner of situations, and not simply rely on "cookie cutter" answers. What do you do when you don't have a verse? The wise person can still use Scripture to find out and live it out.

The people who walk in wisdom are people who are awake and alert, they take action, and they are not apathetic. Of course, the truth is that there are times when any of us have been going through life in a dreamy and drowsy fashion. Still, the wise person wakes out of their slumber, because they aren't intent on sleeping through life, they are sober minded. They are paying attention to what's going on and where they are going.

Many people don't grow wise because instead of walking carefully they walk carelessly. They're not paying attention to where they're going spiritually. They're not serious, and they don't grow mature, they just stay the same, going round and round in circles, spiritually speaking. There is no gravity to them, they're just blown about by every wind of doctrine and they fall for every fad and fraud that shows up. But when you walk in wisdom you realize that your walk isn't just about you. You walk "circumspectly". Walking circumspectly means you know that others are watching to see if you walk rightly; that's your witness to the world. It also means that others need to see you walking rightly; that's your model for other disciples to follow. The wise person is careful about their walk, both public and private. They know it matters.

1 Corinthians 16:13 – "*Be watchful*" means to be alert, to stay awake. The NT tells us that we are to be watchful about Christ's return (Matthew 24:42), temptation (Matthew 26:41), apostasy (Acts 20:29-31), our prayer life (Ephesians 6:18 / Colossians 4:2), living in the world (Romans 13:11-14 / 1 Thessalonians 5:4-6), the enemy of our souls (1 Peter 5:8-9 / 1 Timothy 3:6-7), and spiritual apathy (Revelation 3:1-3). The wise, careful, alert, sober minded walk means that these things actually occupy a prominent place in our thinking (cf. 2 Timothy 4:5 / 1 Peter 1:13, 4:7). We will be committed to these things. We live our lives in the light of these things, sensing their importance and taking action. Many say they are awake but they really aren't, because they are not active. They aren't careful they are careless. That isn't walking in wisdom.

A wise Christian lives their lives "*Coram Deo*"; consciously aware that their entire life is lived in the presence of God, under the authority of God, to the honor and glory of God.

The wise person walks redemptively (vs.16 – *making the best use of the time*). The wise person knows that their lives are an example and a stewardship (cf. Colossians 4:5). Paul challenges us to invest our time wisely. This phrase "*making the best use*" is rendered "redeeming" in some versions. The Greek word for "redeem" means "to buy up", or "to purchase", or "to rescue from loss". The Greek word "*time*" in this passage is not the word "*chronos*", measurable in hours or minutes, but the word "*kairos*", which means "opportunities" or "possibilities". The NET renders this phrase as "*taking advantage of every opportunity*". We are to be alert to all the possibilities that come our way, and to make the most of every opportunity (cf. 1 Peter 3:15). A wise person doesn't let the devil steal their day. Instead, they make their time on earth count for eternity.

We often hear that people are too busy, that they simply don't have time for prayer, studying the Bible, learning, apologetics, evangelism, involvement in the church, or whatever else. Certainly many people have hectic schedules. It can be hard to find the time with so many necessary responsibilities. We might think that we would be willing to be involved in a certain spiritual thing, but we can't because we are unwillingly busy; we have to do this or that other thing in order to meet our responsibilities. And if this is truly true, then it is most certainly understood. However, are these responsibilities actually necessary? You see, sometimes we create necessity because we entered into something that wasn't, at the expense of our spiritual life. The notion of busyness is most often not a question of time, but of passion and priority.

For example, if people choose to work extra hours, even though they don't need to, but because they want extra money, are they *unwillingly* busy? No. They're just replacing one use of time with another. If one person spends a few hours in the evening watching television, while another

spends a few extra hours on his job when he has no need for working those extra hours, both are willingly involving themselves in those activities. It isn't that we need to spend every waking hour in pursuit of the things of God. It is that we shouldn't neglect the pursuit of God by pursuing the things of the world. Sometimes people aren't neglecting God, the Bible, the church, apologetics, evangelism, and other important matters because they're unwillingly busy. They're neglecting those matters because they're willingly busy with less important things, often things that are unnecessary, and perhaps trivial, and sometime even immoral. That isn't wise.

If you won't walk redemptively you will walk rebelliously. Many think they own their own time, they don't see it as given by God to use for His purposes. They steal time from God who gives it to them. They busy themselves with any other thing rather than the things of God. Many waste their time with riotous living. Some waste their time with responsible living, which may be responsible in the natural sense, but wasteful in the spiritual sense. They aren't giving their lives for God who gave His life for them. They act as if God bought them a free pass for pleasure. To them, living like a real Christian would be the most miserable existence they can think of. But to redeem the time is to rejoice in God. The wise walk discovers the delight of God.

The wise Christian isn't a fearful, legalistic, miserable person performing "spiritual duties". Instead, they learn and live the joy that comes from valuing the things of God above all else.

The wise person walks perceptively (vs.16 – *because the days are evil*). The wise person sees this world for what it really is, and these days that they live in for what they really are. The world is full of evil, and we are the agents for goodness, righteousness, and glorifying God.

The wise person knows where they came from (cf. Ephesians 2:1-3), and they don't look longingly at their past life before Christ (Ephesians 4:17-19). The wise person wants their new life to look as radically different from their former life as possible (Ephesians 4:20-24). The wise person doesn't envy the life of a lost person, they look on them as they are, lost, blind, dead in sin, and on their way to hell, unless and until they repent and place their faith in Christ. The wise walk includes a burden for personal sanctification.

The wise person isn't satisfied just because others are "happy", or not in any trouble. They continue to pray for and plead with loved ones. They know what is really going on, and they don't assume that people are Christians. They aren't just trying to get people to "clean up their act". And they know that lost people can be very happy in an earthly sense, and yet they are still as miserable as all lost people truly are. The wise walk includes a burden for the lost.

The wise person isn't thinking that life is what it needs to be as long as they have material, relational, or social prosperity. The enemy of some believers is affluence, comfort, and earthly success; it blinds them from wisdom. But the wise person knows that no matter how good their circumstances currently are that this world is not heaven and home. They live for today by having an eye for tomorrow, their gaze is upward, and they see beyond this world. The wise person wants to see others live wisely, and so the wise walk includes a burden for discipleship.

Many people don't walk perceptively because they walk deceptively. They really don't care about how the gospel applies to their lives. They don't care about all the lost souls out there.

They don't really see that they are in a spiritual war, that the devil is real, and the world is wicked, and their flesh is not a friend. They have said a prayer, walked an aisle, got dunked in some water, and it's all good from now on. They've got their eternal fire insurance, they've got their eternal retirement plan, but they don't want to hear about any marching orders, as if they aren't a soldier in the spiritual war. They are not perceptive, they are lazy, and they are deceived. Oh, they get along just fine in this world, "it's not so bad after all, and most people are good people, and we should really just let everyone be". They live in a world of moralistic therapeutic deism, in other words, they have the mindset of yeah, there is a God out there, and all He wants is for me to be good, and He's going to help me be the best me that I can be. Isn't that nice? But it isn't the truth. This is not wise; it is foolish to live your life with your spiritual blinders on.

The wise Christian doesn't live for this world, they are a light in the world, living for Christ, winning others to Christ, and edifying their brothers and sisters in Christ.

The wise person walks submissively (vs.17 – *Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is*). This is the summary of a wise walk; the person who is walking in wisdom wants to know and do the will of God. In other words, the all-encompassing goal of all Christians should be living to please God (cf. 2 Corinthians 5:9, 15) and the wise Christian submits before God in all things for the sake of that task (cf. Ephesians 5:10).

This means that the wise person submits to the Word of God in order to do the will of God. And learning the will of God through the Word of God is not simply a mechanical process of gaining knowledge from the Scriptures. Wisdom is not a simple set of rules, wisdom is a walk, and a wise walk will grow in wisdom. A wise walk is gained when a Christian lives humbly and reverently, looking to learn the Word so as to live in accordance with it in all things. It is then that they begin to walk carefully, seeing things accurately, and responding to things properly. They remain awake and alert, and they take appropriate action. They learn to make the most of every opportunity, they don't let the devil steal their day, and they make their time on earth count for eternity. They see the truth, and their godly values and burdens inform their passions and practices. They submit to God in all things that they might please Him.

Some are just the opposite, they don't walk submissively they walk defiantly. Their main concern is not about the will of God it is about pleasing themselves, and they won't let the Word of God stand in their way. They might submit to God as long as it fits their purposes, as long as it appeases their occasional pangs of conscience. But as soon as anything to do with God, His people, or His Word calls on them to deny themselves and take up their cross, they will not follow Jesus, not if it means they have to go without, feel some pain, lose out on some cherished pleasure, or give up their precious control. This person doesn't grow in godly wisdom.

The wise person walks carefully, watching what's going on, awake and alert. They walk redemptively, looking for an opportunity to shine the light and shine as a light. They are walking perceptively, realizing the situation and moved by burdens for sanctification, evangelism, and discipleship. And their walk is marked by submission, aimed at pleasing God. This is what it looks like to walk in wisdom, and it is how the wise grow in wisdom. The wise get wiser. Their relationship with the Lord is steeped in wisdom, their mind is marinated with wisdom, and they develop a wisdom that can sort things out biblically and spiritually even when others can't.