7-7-19

Ephesians 5:15-17

Paul has just made an important series of points: That we are to be imitators of God; that Christ loves us and gave Himself up for us; immoral people have no inheritance in the Kingdom of God; that we are children of light. He begins this next section with the word “Therefore”. So, it is because of all these things that he has just mentioned, that we are to “be careful how you walk”.

Now certainly, our walk is our life; it is how we live our lives and it encompasses everything about our life. Our walk is what we do, it is how we think, it is our values; how we walk in this life truly reflects our deepest values. It is the part that will be exposed over time; even if we try to hide it from others.

The word “walk” has already been used several times in this letter: We are called to walk in the good works that God had prepared for us from the beginning of the world; we are to walk in a manor worthy of our calling as Christians; we are to cease walking as the Gentiles walk; we are to walk in love; we are to walk in the light; and now, Paul tells us to walk as people who are wise. Remember what Jesus told us in Matthew 16:24, “If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me.”

To follow Jesus means to walk as He did. It’s a tall order. First, we must be willing to deny ourselves; put Jesus first and others before ourselves. Next, we must take up our cross. Being a Christians requires carrying a heavy burden. We live counter to the culture and our own fleshly desires. The world works against us. Following Jesus means being His disciple; we are to learn His ways and live our lives accordingly.

The interesting thing is that we can’t do these things on our own, but when we have Christ as our Saviour, we are given the Holy Spirit who enables us to walk with Jesus. With the Holy Spirit, it becomes a joy to deny ourselves and bear our cross; we receive the peace that only Jesus Himself can provide. Beyond that, we have the promise of eternal life; that sure hope that it will all be worth it beyond anything we can imagine.

In all this, we must be careful how we walk. The Holy Spirit gives us the ability and strength, but we have our part, too. We are constantly tempted by satan, the world, and our own flesh; it is up to us to refuse these temptations. We are to say no; walk away; run away; get rid of whatever it is that brings us to be tempted. When we succeed, we not only avoid sin, but we glorify God and Jesus Christ who died for us. Besides avoiding temptation, we perform good works when we can; always being on the lookout for them. God has prepared these for us from eternity past. Remember that whatever we do for the least of Jesus’ brothers, we do the same for Him. We follow His commands, Jesus told us that if we love Him, we will follow His commands.

We must be careful how we walk so that we don’t defile ourselves, because we are the church, the bride of Christ. We must be careful that we give glory to God in what we do and say. We must be careful because the world is always watching: Sometimes to try to learn the reason for our hope, sometimes to have a reason to speak bad about our Saviour. We want our lives to shine in order to draw others to us and, ultimately, to Jesus. That is one of the major reasons for the Christian to live. We don’t want to give the world opportunity to criticize Christianity on account of us. They are all too ready to spread bad reports about Christians.

Because of all these things, Paul tells us specifically to walk “not as unwise men but as wise”. I think we all have a pretty good grasp of what wisdom is; it comes down to the ability to use knowledge in the best way. We’ve all encountered people with lots of knowledge but very little wisdom. This is an effect of the fall; when a person’s mind is darkened by sin, they cannot have this primary attribute of God: wisdom.

There are lots of people throughout history that have been counted as wise. Lots of philosophers that are still being read. They have grand ideas regarding the human body and the mind and even the soul. But when we compare these ideas with what we are told in the Bible, we find that they are foolishness. Our inner workings, what takes place with our spirits, these can only be revealed by our Creator.

There is also a worldly wisdom; it involves dealing with others in ways that takes advantage of them or makes sure things turn out to one’s own advantage. James speaks of this in chapter 3, verse 15. “This wisdom is not that which comes down from above, but is earthly, natural, demonic.” This is a kind of wisdom that comes more naturally to people but we can see that its source is something we want to avoid.

In the previous quote, James mentioned the kind of wisdom we want, the kind Paul is talking about. It is that wisdom which comes down from above. It is wisdom that comes from God; it is a spiritual gift; it is for those who have had their spirits reborn and are now children of light instead of darkness. James speaks of this wisdom also in chapter 1, verse 5. “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.”

This is true spiritual wisdom. It draws us to God and it draws us to Jesus. It gives us understanding in God’s word. It helps us to understand why the world is as it is. It gives us the patience to endure what we must until Christ returns. As James tells us, God is happy to bestow it upon His children; but we must be careful about our motives. It cannot be for our own glory, but must be for God’s. Solomon was the perfect example. God offered him anything he desired when he became king of Israel.

2 Chronicles 1:10

“Give me now wisdom and knowledge, that I may go out and come in before this people, for who can rule this great people of Yours?”

Solomon asked for wisdom in order to carry out God’s will and we must be careful to do the same. It is pleasing to God to ask Him for wisdom, just be sure the motivation is right.

Part of the reason we are to walk as wise people is to make, “the most of your time”. This is sometimes translated “redeeming the time”. And the reason is “because the days are evil”. Let’s start with the second part of this, that the days are evil. There is little doubt, from the Christian perspective, that the days are evil. It would be unfair to say that this is a recent occurrence. God once flooded the world due to evil. Paul is using the present tense when he says the days are evil and that was almost 2000 years ago. History shows that satan has had great influence over this world ever since the Garden of Eden.

Is it worse now? Maybe. But certainly, we now see a more concentrated effort among nations to turn away from God in rebellion against Him. This is the same thing that was taking place during the days of Noah; all the nations and people had turned from God, down to one man. Noah was the only one righteous. It is close to that today except we have the church. The true church is righteous in Christ.

Without question, the world is at least as evil as it has ever been; and so, we are to make the most of our time; we are to redeem our time. Remember that redeem is what Jesus did for us; He bought us back. We belonged to satan and Jesus bought us back. Christians are to take back our time from those things that would steal it; we are to make the most of the time we have in this evil world.

So, how do we make the most of our time? This is where wisdom comes in. We see people who are driven to work, they make the most of every moment to advance their careers, have more power, and make more money. The world holds these people in high esteem. But they have wasted all that time. In the end, what have they gained? Jesus asks in Matthew 16:26, “For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul?”

Making the most of our time involves looking with spiritual eyes; it means thinking in terms of eternity. One’s lifetime is far too short-sighted. Once we become a Christian, we make the most of our time by advancing the Kingdom of God: Spreading the Gospel, loving others, doing those good works that we find to do, spending time in God’s word and with God in prayer. Yes, there are things we must spend our time on just to live in this world, but even these can be done to the glory of God.

Ephesians 6:7

With good will render service, as to the Lord, and not to men

These days are evil; bad things happen; but the Christian is to focus on Christ and live as a citizen of His Kingdom, not of this world.

Paul follows this up with the admonition: “So then do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is.” Foolish can also be considered “mindless”; and this is a common accusation against Christians by non-believers; that we don’t think and simply believe whatever the Bible tells us. The thing is, there is no way to understand the Bible without thinking. And, of course, it is by thinking and prayer that the Holy Spirit will illuminate Scripture to us; that God will grant us that wisdom we ask for. Paul tells this to Timothy in 2 Timothy 2:7, “Consider what I say, for the Lord will give you understanding in everything.” The things that Paul is currently saying to Timothy are Scripture. By considering it, the Lord will give him understanding.

So, we are not to be foolish, but we are to work to understand the what the will of the Lord is. It is natural for us to desire to know what the will of the Lord is for our own lives; what we are to do with our lives, what our particular ministry is to be. While this is good and necessary, we must be careful, we must be wise. It would be very easy to become focused on ourselves; to focus solely on trying to find our purpose instead of focusing on the Lord. If we focus on the Lord in obedience to His revealed will, His will for our lives will become obvious.

The Lord’s revealed will is contained in the Bible. This is why it is so important to read and study the word. The life of Jesus reveals God’s will. We are to live life as Jesus did; it is our goal to become more like Jesus. All of His commands are of God’s will; love God, love your neighbor, obey God, submit to the rule of Christ, spread the good news of the Gospel and make disciples of all nations. As Christians, we don’t do these things because they are rules, we do them because we love Jesus. Obeying Him is the way we show our love and His commands are not burdensome to us.

Specifically, in Ephesians, Paul talks of the revealing of a mystery in the divine will.

Ephesians 1:9-10

He made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His kind intention which He purposed in Him with a view to an administration suitable to the fullness of the times, *that is*, the summing up of all things in Christ, things in the heavens and things on the earth.

Because of the fall, God’s creation has gone its separate ways. Evil and sin have spoiled what He made. But God has determined to make it all right by bringing all things together in His Son, Jesus Christ. An important part of this is told to us in Ephesians 3:4-7. In these verses, Paul speaks again of the mystery of God’s will that has been revealed, which is to make one people of the Jews and the Gentiles. We see here a sub-part of bringing all things together in Christ.

Because we know that this is the will of God, this is what we are to work for: bringing all things together in Christ Jesus. This involves spreading the Gospel to bring others into the Kingdom and working toward unity in the church; unity in truth. We can have a small influence in our day to day lives, but our greatest impact will be in prayer. It is always pleasing to God to pray that His will be done.

Prayer

Lord God, we are Your people, we are Your children; help us to walk in the ways of Your word; in the ways of our Saviour Jesus. Give us spiritual wisdom, open our eyes and ears, but may it only be for the building of Your Kingdom and for Your glory.

May Your Holy Spirit guide us that we do not walk in the paths of foolishness. Keep forefront in our minds the necessity to make the most of our time; to be productive for Christ. Don’t let us be lulled into thinking that this world is a kind and gentle place; it is ruled by satan who is merciless and hostile.

Use us, Lord, to build Your Kingdom. Use us to bring about Your will of bringing all things together in Jesus. We ask for unity in this church; unity in a desire to be pleasing to You in all things; unity in following Your word, the Bible.

We do pray these things in the name of Jesus our Lord

Amen