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Walking In Wisdom Ephesians 5:15-21

Intro: Ch5 opens up with an exhortation for believers to imitate God, just as a child would unconsciously imitate the chief characteristics of a parent. The first way believers can imitate God is by walking in love. The specific details of this lifestyle of love were laid out in 4:25-32. The second way believers are to imitate God is by walking in light. The result (or fruit) of walking in light is succinctly described as being seen in all goodness, righteousness and truth. But walking in light has an additional result and this is what our study will focus on today – walking in wisdom.

15 – See then... As you read through this list of exhortations to certain lifestyles, one might assume Paul is merely presenting believers with a buffet of choices that we can pick through and select the one or ones that suit our particular liking or temperament but that would be a wrong assumption. No where in this passage, from 1-14, has Paul even hinted at these things being optional. On the contrary, he emphatically implies that if you are a child of God, then this is how you should live. And that implication continues into this new section. By using the conjunction then right here, Paul's indicating that this new instruction is directly linked to what has preceded: *because* you have been enlightened, *because* you walk in the light, *because* you ARE light – walk in wisdom! But what is wisdom?

When someone comes to Christ, it's natural for them to want to know more about their Savior and what He has done for them. They pour over the Bible, they attend church, they listen to teaching – they pursue greater knowledge of spiritual things. They also seek the experience of Christ in their lives – watching themselves being transformed by the Holy Spirit, seeing their faith grow as they experience God working in them, around them and even through them. But Christian knowledge and experience, while extremely important and necessary, are not, in themselves, wisdom. Wisdom is actually the ability to take the Biblical facts and spiritual knowledge you have learned and the spiritual skills you have acquired through experience and apply them rightly in your life.

The Bible was given that we might gain spiritual knowledge and experience

but it also calls for a pursuit of wisdom by those who serve God. The first third of the book of Proverbs pictures Wisdom standing in the streets, crying out for the wise and godly man to pursue her. The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding, she declares (**Prv 9:10**). In the NT Paul deplores the so-called wisdom of the Greeks, calling it foolishness, saying, (**1 Cor 1:23-25**). There are 2 parts to this wisdom: 1) content, centered in the knowledge of God through Jesus Christ; 2) practical application of that content. It's this 2nd aspect of wisdom that specifically concerns the apostle Paul in this next section of Ephesians.

In effect, what Paul is saying here is simply this: because this light of God has been given to us, we should walk circumspectly; an old English word derived from 2 Latin words that mean "looking around." The Greek word carries the idea of precision and accuracy. Paul's saying, "See that you walk carefully, with exactness." The converse would be to walk carelessly without proper guidance or forethought. This exhortation is that the entire life of the believer, the saint, the child of God is to be governed by wise choices. Only a fool drifts with the tide, a wise man mars out his course, sets his sails and guides the rudder until he reaches the desired destination.

Lest we be unclear as to what these choices may be or should look like, Paul provides 3 specific things Christians are to do in order to ensure that they walk in wisdom. Of all the things he could have mentioned, Paul chose these 3.

16 – The first explicit implication of living wisely is the believer's use of time. Redeeming refers to making the most of the time. Redemption language originally had commercial overtones, referring to buying something. This meaning was eventually extended to refer to buying people or to deliver or liberate people. The idea behind redeeming the time is that you buy up opportunities like a shrewd businessman; making the most of every opportunity for Jesus.

Sadly, most Christians don't consider time as important as it really is. It's 1 of the 2 things that establish our calling to serve God: space and time. These 2 fix us at a particular point in God's vast plan of salvation. Space fixes us as to location. We're in Houma, LA and what we're going to do for God we must do here. But, we're not in Houma in the 18th century, when so many of the Christian institutions of today were just getting started, or in the

19th century, with its great missionary movements. We're living in the early years of the 21st century; our problems and opportunities are unique. The wise man is the one who recognizes this and applies himself accordingly.

Now, one could say that living wisely with respect to time could simply be a matter of wise time management, but this would simply put a rather modern twist to the phrase, reflecting our current obsession with managing time rather than wasting it. But, Paul's not talking about time in general. The Bible uses plenty of words to indicate time, 2 of which are *chronos* (*time*) and *kairos* (*season*). Of them all the most important is the word *kairos*, the word used in our text.

The significance of this word is best seen by contrasting it with *chronos*. Both words refer to time and are frequently translated as "time" in the Bible but *chronos* refers only to the flow of time, the following of one event upon another; it's the idea involved in our word "chronology." *Kairos* refers to a moment that is especially significant or favorable. It is used this way of the coming of Christ. Peter wrote of the prophets searching intently with great care to discover what circumstances or what manner of time (*kairos*), the Holy Spirit was pointing to when He predicted the sufferings of Christ (1 Pt 1:11). Jesus used the same word when He said, "My time is at hand" (Mt 26:18).

This means that time is to have this full, meaningful element for the wise Christian. They're to redeem it or make the most of it precisely for that reason. Paul's not telling us to make the most of every moment, although that is good advice. He's telling us to seize every opportunity for the glory of Christ. It's not to make the most of time but to make the most of the time. Left to themselves the days are evil. But they can be redeemed from evil for good by Christian people. Believers are to make the most of any opportunity to speak of their hope in Christ; they're to make the most of every opportunity to be light in a dark world. Redeeming the time is less about time management and more about the wise conduct of light in the dark.

17 – The next implication of walking in wisdom is to avoid foolishness. "Therefore" points back to the previous verse so Paul is saying "because the days are evil, avoid foolishness." While Paul doesn't describe the foolishness we are to avoid, the implication is that given the spiritual reality that our current age is a domain of darkness in which unbelievers follow the ways of this world as children under of wrath, believers are to *resist* this

foolishness.

How are we to do we do this? By understanding what the will of the Lord is. In other words, foolishness in this context should be understood as conduct that fails to reflect an apprehension of the Lord's will. In another passage, Paul says foolishness is boasting in worldly accomplishments (II Cor 11:1-21). In general, foolishness is living as though ignorant of the will of the Lord. But, how do we accurately determine what the will of the Lord is for our lives?

Paul's exhortation to understand suggests using our minds to discover and do the Lord's will. Too many Christians think that discovering God's will is a mystical experience that excludes clear thinking. This is wrong – and dangerous.

Usually, when we talk about knowing God's will, we stress knowing Scripture, for God's character and precepts are revealed there as they are nowhere else. If we want to know what God's will is, we don't need some special mystical experience. We can find it by studying the Bible, allowing the Holy Spirit to illuminate it to our understanding and apply it to our heart and life. That's basic and Paul's likely assuming it here. But in this context, Paul's interested in more than just knowing God's will as revealed in Scripture. He's concerned with wisdom, which is more than the gathering of facts. He's concerned with our perception of what God's doing in history and our wise response to it.

If it were just a matter of knowing what God says in Scripture, the proper exhortation would be to study the Bible. "Learn what God says and live by it," Paul might say. But that's not the way this passage is going. Paul's talking about wisdom and about making the most of that specific historical time God gives to us. It's as if he's asking: "What are we to do with our moments? How are we best to spend this day, this hour, this minute? What does God want us to be doing?" Against this background, Paul seems to be encouraging us to perceive what God is doing now and act in accordance with it. God doesn't want us to simply know His will; He wants us to understand it. Wisdom consists in perceiving where God is going and then jumping on His bandwagon.

18 – The 3rd implication of walking in wisdom is to avoid drunkenness. In the previous verse, Paul emphasized the importance of understanding the

Lord's will so drunkenness is to be avoided since it impairs the cognitive functions of the brain. When cognitive function is impaired, people are less likely to act with care and are more prone to act recklessly. Everywhere it is mentioned, the Bible condemns drunkenness without reservation. Here, Paul calls it dissipation which means excess or waste. Drunkenness is a waste of resources that should be submitted to - and put to better use for - Jesus Christ and His kingdom.

Instead of being drunk, Paul says the wise alternative is to be filled with the Spirit! There's a common misconception among believers with this statement, which we will get into, but as it stands – what does it mean to be filled with the Spirit? The verb fill has nothing to do with contents or quantity, as though believers are empty vessels that need a required amount of spiritual fuel to keep going. This is part of the misconception about the Holy Spirit. We've had long-standing people leave this church because they "didn't feel the Spirit in the worship service." If you've accepted Christ as your Savior then you have as much of the Holy Spirit as you're ever going to have. He's the down-payment, the earnest of your salvation and the constant companion of the believer.

The worship service isn't some Holy Ghost pep rally where down-trodden or carnal Christians are revived and rejuvenated back into fellowship with Christ and primed up to go back into the world to fight the good fight for a few days until you get sucked back into the ways of the world to be defeated until next Sunday. No! The Worship service is where believers come together to celebrate what God has accomplished in their lives over the course of the previous week! We celebrate, rejoice and express our gratitude for all that the Lord is doing in our lives. The only Spirit you're going to feel during the worship service is the One you bring with you from your house.

In the Bible, being filled means being controlled by. We see this in [Lk 4:28-29](#) - filled with wrath means the people were controlled by wrath and attempted to kill Jesus. In [Acts 13:45](#), being filled with envy means the Jews were controlled by envy to oppose the ministry of Paul and Barnabas. To be filled with the Spirit means to be constantly controlled by the Spirit in our mind, emotions and will. Understand that Paul's not offering the Spirit as an alternate substance with which we're to be filled – as though, instead of being filled with wine we're to be filled with the Spirit. The Holy Spirit is not a

substance; He's the controlling influence of God within the believer's life.

This understanding of the Spirit is reinforced in the original Greek since the language of filling followed by the preposition "in/by/with" doesn't indicate content; at least not in Biblical Greek. Thus, the translation of, be filled by the Spirit would be better as it implies that the Holy Spirit is the agent doing the filling rather than just the content of the filling. If this is correct, it means the Spirit is the one who fills believers with something. So, naturally, the next question is: With what does the Spirit fill believers? The most sensible (and most encouraging) answer is found in the verses that follow: the spirit fills believers with a song in the heart, thanksgiving on the lips and mutual submission in their thoughts and attitudes.

This is where the contrast between the spirit and wine is properly appreciated – while wine dissipates one's capacity for good and enables (promotes) recklessness; the Spirit *increases* the believer's capacity for holy and good things. The drunk who is controlled by alcohol wastes away his time, finances and life while the believer who is filled by the Spirit is able to live wisely, understanding the Lord's will.

19 – The 1st thing the Spirit fills believers with is music; they're lives are characterized by speaking Psalms, hymns and spiritual songs to each other. Each of these is more or less synonymous so the rhetorical effect is to give a sense of overflow – believers filled by the Spirit will overflow with songs of praise. The Book of Psalms, containing 150 psalms, testifies to the importance of song, praise and worship of the Lord for the people of God. It reminds us that our relationship with God doesn't just consist of biblical truths, covenant agreements and obedience. Its central reality is one of worship and praise: as God's children directly express their love and devotion and magnify His holy name. Such praise and worship will overflow in those who know God in Christ.

Note how this worship is to take place: speaking to one another... As believers overflow with spiritual songs of praise, their worship is not solo; nor is it expressed solely to the Lord. It's a communal activity. Believers speak the content of these songs to one another, even as they direct their praise to God. In this way, believers' overflow of praise and worship is an encouragement to one another.

20 – The 2^d item that the Spirit fills believers with is thanksgiving. Those filled by the Spirit are characterized by an overflow of thanksgiving. To be sure, all of us are grateful for some things at certain special occasions – the present National Holiday notwithstanding; but Paul's exhortation here is for believers to be thankful for all things at all times. This in itself proves our need for the Holy Spirit because in our strength we could never obey this command. Having said this, to give thanks for always for everything can't be pressed upon us literally, as if we could give thanks in our sleep! Paul is using hyperbole here to characterize Spirit-filled believers as generally thankful people. They express the default posture of gratitude toward God as they receive all things with thanksgiving.

Can we really be thankful in times of suffering, disappointment and even bereavement? Keep in mind that Paul was a prisoner when he wrote these words and yet, he was thankful for what God was doing in him and for him. When a Christian finds himself in a difficult situation, they should immediately give thanks to the Father, in the name of Jesus, by the power of the Spirit to keep their heart from complaining and worrying. A complaining heart and the Holy Spirit just don't go together. The devil moves in when a Christian starts to complain, but thanksgiving in the Spirit defeats the devil and glorifies the Lord. The word gratitude comes from the same root word as grace. If we have experienced the grace of God, then we should also be grateful for what God has brought us.

21 – The 3rd item the Spirit fills believers with is a submissive heart. Some translations separate this verse and include it with the next paragraph as it also talks about submission but that's not exactly accurate. It's clear that submission is one of the attributes which with the Spirit fills believers, along with making music in their hearts and giving thanks to the Father. This verse is actually a pivot to what comes next as Paul elaborates on what this submission entails in the individual lives of believers as they relate to other believers. But what kind of submission is Paul actually talking about here? Is every person in church supposed to submit to every other person?

The answer, as we will see, is that in practice, no – there must be some kind of order and authority within the structure of the body of Christ; but in attitude, yes – Christians are to possess an attitude of submission to one another regardless of their role or position in the church. The exhortation is for each individual believer to no longer view themselves in an individualistic

way but to see themselves for what they actually are – a member of the Body of Christ, a member of a team. We should no longer cling tenaciously to our own will or opinions to the detriment of the unity and peace of the Body of Christ. We should be willing and ready to defer to one another and let love rule.

Ultimately, Christian submission is to be conducted in the fear of God. This describes what our motive should be for submitting to one another. The motive for submission isn't out of some sense of social kindness and it isn't the law of God. We submit to one another out of respect to God the Father and Jesus Christ. Our submission imitates the willful submission of Jesus Christ to the will of the Father. If we respect Jesus, we should then submit to one another because we love Jesus. Paul uses the term fear but it's a fear (respect) that is compatible with love. It's a fear of disappointing Jesus, of grieving Him. That's totally compatible with love. When you really respect someone, you care about pleasing them; you are afraid to disappoint them or let them down.

Just a few things before we close: notice how that Paul, in talking in detail about the attributes of being filled by the Spirit, never once mentions anything about performing miracles, or speaking in tongues or any other special; manifestations. He simply states that the Spirit-filled believer will be joyful, thankful and submissive. That says a lot about the current understanding of the work of the Spirit in the church today. So much focus and attention adversely pressed in the direction of secondary gifts detracts greatly from a proper focus on the actual attributes of being Spirit-filled. I'd venture to say if more believers honestly pursued the exhortations Paul makes in these verses with the intent of living them out by the power of the Spirit; there would be more manifestations of the Spirit's power naturally occurring in the church.

Earlier we discussed a couple of biblical words for time and contrasted *kairos*, a significant moment or opportunity, and *chronos*, time's duration. There is another biblical word we didn't mention then but will here as an appropriate closing: the word *nun*. It means "now," and it occurs in verses which show that the *kairos* in which we live, the pregnant present moment, is eternally significant. Who once were not a people, but are now the people of God; who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy (1 Pt 2:10). Blessed are you who hunger now, for you will be filled. Blessed are

you who weep now, for you shall laugh (Lk 6:21). Behold, now is the accepted time [of God's favor]; behold, now is the day of salvation (2 Cor 6:2).

If we are going to redeem the time, as wise saints, we had better do it now, because there may be no opportunity tomorrow. If we're to understand the will of God, now is the moment that counts. If we're going to be filled by God's Spirit, now is when we need that filling. Yesterday is gone and tomorrow is not promised. All we have is now – so what are we going to do with it? Redeem it or waste it? 😊