# Ephesians 5:15-17 Walk in Wisdom April 5, 2009

# Introduction

In Ephesians 4-5, the Bible lays out exhortation after exhortation to help us live in the Christian way. In chapter 4, we were told to **walk** in unity (4:1-16) and to **walk** in holiness (4:17-32). In chapter 5, we’ve been told that believers must imitate God by **walking** in love, and not imitating the world (5:1-7), and that as a consequence of conversion, believers must **walk** in the light and shun the works of darkness (5:8-14). The words “therefore” and “walk” introduce the fifth major section of this part of Paul’s letter (4:1-6:9). Now, in 5:15-17, we see that Paul instructs us to **walk** wisely.

Here is my working translation:

15 Therefore, watch how carefully[[1]](#footnote-2) you walk, not as unwise but as wise,

16 making the most of the time, because the days are evil.

17 So, do not be unwise, but understand what the will of the Lord is.

Obviously, the idea of living with wisdom rises to the surface as a significant concept in the verses. We also pick up the important notions of time and days. Watching and understanding round out the trio of basic building blocks.

This section is closed allied with the next, 5:18-21, in which the believer is exhorted to be filled with the Spirit. There is a positive/negative contrasting pattern that ties all these verses together: “not as unwise BUT as wise,” “do not be unwise, BUT understand,” and “do not be drunk BUT be filled with the Spirit.”

# 1. Pay Attention! Live Carefully.

The word *watch* has the idea of paying attention to how you are living. But beyond that, the paying attention has to have a level of spiritual perception to it. We are not talking just about self-consciousness as to what you are doing, but a self-consciousness coupled with a spiritual evaluation in light of what pleases God and what is in accordance with the Scriptures. Have you ever had a “what am I doing?!” moment? A time when you realize something that you need to stop doing or change direction? At that point, you got some increased level of understanding about what your life should or should not look like and you likely made adjustments.

I suppose if we were automatically endowed with the skill to walk carefully, we would not have to pay close attention to how we are living because we would always be doing the right thing by nature; but alas, we do not have that endowment, so we have to be told to pay attention. “Watch your step” as the voice at the end of the airport moving walk tells you.

What we are paying attention to is that our life is lived *carefully*. In light of our surroundings, we need to watch carefully our living, which means we go in directions that are prudent given the lay of the land. There is the world, the flesh, and the devil (Eph. 2:1-3) all surrounding us, out to get us in a sense. So, we are to live carefully with respect to the standard God has set forth for us—in terms of being imitators and walking in the light and shunning all forms of evil, and walking in unity and holiness. This living carefully is to be our habit or practice. Watching carefully how we live encompasses all the areas we have discussed up to this point in Ephesians.

# 2. How: Living Wisely, v. 15

We first need to review what wisdom is all about. We would probably agree that wisdom is more than just knowledge. We all know people who “know better” but who make unwise choices in their lives. In that sense we might well wonder if they really “know” better. But for now, let’s just say that you can know something, like facts, and then there is the next level of being wise about those facts. It is a level of insight.

In the Scripture, wisdom is founded on God and used in real life. The Scriptures tell us that the fool says to himself that there is no God (Psalm 14:1). He lives without regard for God, even if he may suspect deep in his mind that God is there (Rom. 1:19). But the fear of the Lord is the beginning (foundation) of knowledge (Prov. 1:7) and wisdom (Prov. 9:10). So we must say that wisdom is more than just insight, but it is *spiritual* insight—insight that comes from God and revolves around God. James 3:17 taught us that wisdom from above is pure, peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and un-hypocritical. It produces righteous fruit.

Wisdom is also used in real life. Wisdom is spiritual insight that is applied to life. It is not a dry or abstract kind of philosophy (sophos = wisdom) but it guides us in real life situations.

# 3. How: Redeeming the Time, v. 16

Generally we must walk in wisdom, but specifically Paul tells us one way that works out. Namely, we should snap up every opportunity, take advantage of every chance we have, every occasion or opening that time affords us. Redeeming the time seems to have the idea of eking out or extracting with great effort all the good that one can from the time that one has.

We do this because it is right, for sure, but also because of the middle voice of the verb which tells us there is some advantage in it for us. It is not only good, but good for us. After all, remember that life is short and we all will be judged for our use of the opportunities God has provided to us.

These include opportunities to evangelize those who are outside (the context of Col. 4:5 may indicate this). It includes opportunities to help each other. It includes chances to choose to do right rather than wrong. It includes every possibility of using our time most wisely instead of wasting it on less important or useless, not to mention sinful, things.

This buying up of opportunities must be our pattern of life **because** the days are evil. The time around us tries to eliminate any opportunity for good, so we need to seize those opportunities that we see. We are not to be paralyzed by the evil age, but to continue walking wisely in the midst of it. Paul was in prison, but he did not sulk. He grasped the opportunity to write letters. Thank God for those letters!

# 4. How: Understanding the Will of the Lord, v. 17

But Paul could have sat in prison, feeling sorry for himself, and not taken the chance afforded to him to do some other things—like writing letters, evangelizing the prison guards (Phil. 1:13, 4:22), etc. In other words, he could have been a fool about things, wasting what God allowed him to have. We can easily fall into this type of behavior as well and need to be reminded out of it.

The opposite of being unwise is understanding God’s will. This refers to accepting and perceiving with comprehension and godliness what God’s desires or wishes are.

What are those wishes? In other words, what is the will of Christ? In short, it is found in the Scriptures. In the past, I have taken a weeks-long Sunday school class to understand this more fully. But in short, the will of God is often viewed as some hidden individual set of directions that we have to discover by hook or by crook. Or, perhaps it is something that we have to discern from our feelings and emotions. None of that is true according to the Bible.

The will of God is objective. It is found in the Bible, and from rightfully-acting authorities that God has appointed in the Bible:

1. God says to be pure. So, that is God’s will for you.

2. God says husbands are the head of their wives. Apart from something sinful, if husband says “This is what we are going to do,” then that is God’s will.

3. God tells children to obey their parents. If dad and mom say “do this” then that is God’s will.

4. God gives authority to governments. If they say it is wrong to do something, or you must pay your taxes, that too is God’s will.

5. So it goes with employers, church leaders, etc.

The best way to know God’s will is to study your Bible, not your feelings. God’s will is Word-based and Spirit-based. You have to find legitimate principles in the Word of God that show you how to handle situations. If you don’t handle situations the right way, even if you do end up doing what is a good thing, you are not understanding the will of the Lord. Period. We will see how the work of the Holy Spirit connects to this when we study 5:18-21.

# Application

Let me give you some examples.

1. Do you buy a house and put it on a mortgage with a moving interest rate? What are the implications of doing that? Is that wise? I faced a decision of buying a house on a 15 year versus a 30 year mortgage. Which is better to choose?

2. Do you buy a $20,000 car or do you buy a $10,000 car and give $10,000 to the church? Which is wise?

3. Do you get into major debt in these areas, or with credit cards? Is that wise? (Prov. 22:7).

4. Do you marry someone whose salvation you are not totally sure of? Do you even date someone like that? Is that wise?

5. Do you watch 10 hours of TV a week or do you do something better with your time? Which is wise?

6. Do you decide to go to a school/college where the sports are the best, or the party scene is the best? Is that wise?

7. Do you dwell on sinful thoughts and desires? Is that very smart?

You can waste time on decisions because you mistakenly think that your emphasis, say, on choosing the *best* car or spending the exact right amount of *money*, equals wisdom. But you can waste twice as much time as you need to make the decision. Wisdom has to comprehend all the factors of life, not just money or the car with the absolute best Consumer Reports rating. Say you decide to take 50 hours to figure out what particular car to purchase. It would be better to spend 25 of those hours in the Word making sure you need a car, whether you should get in debt because of the car, or what else you could do with your money, etc., and then spend the remaining 25 hours actually doing the car search if you decide that’s what you need.

# Conclusion

Decisions about how you spend your time are critical. Time can be wasted away in evil things and useless things. If you do not live carefully, if you waste your time, and if you misunderstand the Lord’s will, this is the quickest three-step program to be foolish about your life.

Instead, we have to walk carefully, seize opportunities for good in the midst of evil times, and know God’s Word and follow His commands. This is the wise life.

 MAP

1. Some manuscripts switch the words “how” and “carefully.” I follow the Majority text here. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)