

Walk Circumspectly

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Bible Text: Ephesians 5:15-17
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On the occasion of the baptism that we have witnessed tonight, we read the Holy Scriptures in Ephesians 5. We'll read the first 17 verses reading God's word in Ephesians 5.

1 Be ye therefore followers of God, as dear children; 2 And walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweetsmelling savour. 3 But fornication, and all uncleanness, or covetousness, let it not be once named among you, as becometh saints; 4 Neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor jesting, which are not convenient: but rather giving of thanks. 5 For this ye know, that no whoremonger, nor unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God. 6 Let no man deceive you with vain words: for because of these things cometh the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience. 7 Be not ye therefore partakers with them. 8 For ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord: walk as children of light: 9 (For the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness and righteousness and truth;) 10 Proving what is acceptable unto the Lord. 11 And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them. 12 For it is a shame even to speak of those things which are done of them in secret. 13 But all things that are reprov'd are made manifest by the light: for whatsoever doth make manifest is light. 14 Wherefore he saith, Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light.

And now our text for this evening, verses 15 through 17,

15 See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, 16 Redeeming the time, because the days are evil. 17 Wherefore be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is.

May God bless his holy word to our hearts.

Each one of us as members of the church, the body of Christ, have a tremendous influence and leave a lasting mark upon the children that are gathered with us tonight.

The theme of this beautiful book of Ephesians is the church, the body of Christ, and how the members connected to each other all are used to edify, to build up each other, and that is seen especially in the mark that is left by each one of us upon the boys and girls, the infants, the young people of our church. That's true of the pastor. That's true of the elders. That's true of the deacons. That's true of the adults. That's true of our teachers in our Christian schools. That's true of you as young people, especially you as young people, leave an impression, a mark upon the children and that is supremely true of you as parents.

This afternoon in going over my sermon, I made a hot cup of coffee and I put that hot cup of coffee where I sit on the end table and I knew I'd better not put it on the wood. I put it down on the little book that I have my sermon notes on. It was hot and I thought, "Wait a minute, I'd better not put it on that." I picked it up, that impression is there now, it won't come off. The impression upon the souls of your sons and the souls of your daughters is being made every day by you. God, God does this through you. You leave upon them a mark.

When we become married, we become aware of how much our parents have left their mark and influence upon us but we're so busy with our own children that we're aware of that and sometimes deny that but it's true. We realize that it's true here as well. But then when your children are out of the home and your own parents die and you get older, you realize more and more of the impression upon your life that God made through your parents. Your father sits on your shoulder. Your mind goes back to your childhood and your parents cast a shadow and affect your thinking. God uses you as parents to make an impact, an impression upon the souls of your children, therefore, parents, all of us, walk circumspectly. Do not become careless or frivolous as the world wants us to be careless and frivolous but walk circumspectly, understanding the will of the Lord for your family.

Perhaps when we hear this as parents, it becomes overwhelming, and I trust that for you as young families with children and all of us with our growing children and young people and young adults, I trust that it weighs so heavily upon us, our sins and what we perceive so often as our weaknesses and failures, but I want us to hear this word of God not in dread but in confidence.

For this epistle, we stopped reading at verse 17, assures us that in the body of Christ is the Spirit. Ephesians also talks powerfully of the work of the Holy Spirit in the body and because of the Holy Spirit, we have the mind of Christ and, therefore, we are in Christ and as promised now in this sacrament, we are able by grace to bring up our children in the fear of God. I call your attention, then, to the exhortation to all of us and especially to parents, walk circumspectly. We follow the three verses, verse 15, the point will be: wise up. Verse 16, the point will be: wake up. And finally verse 17 briefly: watch out.

We read, "See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise," and there God is calling us to a careful look at ourselves, not at others; to pay attention to what we are doing; to pay attention to the consequences of our words, of our attitudes and of our actions. As a parent then, not to be clueless about the impact of what our marriage has

upon our children even when they're young. Not to be, as parents, out of touch and oblivious to what our attitudes and what our conduct and what our discipline is doing to our children. Walk circumspectly. Be aware.

We read, "See then that ye walk circumspectly." The words "See then" have the force of "see to it then." See to it then that you walk circumspectly and it's throwing us back into the context and the context that we read at verse 8 was, "ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord: walk as children of light." In light of what God has done, that he brought you out of the darkness of your own depraved heart and has shined into you the light of Jesus Christ, in light of what he has done especially in verse 14, "Awake thou that sleepest, and Christ shall give thee light," that's the irresistible awakening grace of God in our hearts, if this has happened, and it has, that you are now in the light, see to it then that you are walking circumspectly.

The word "walk" does not refer here simply to the exterior visual parts of our life but "walk" in this epistle is our life as it proceeds from our heart. That's our walk. Our walk tonight is not what you can see externally in a suit and in my outward appearance, and even in my voice, but my walk is always what my heart is doing.

See then that you are walking as children of light from your heart in your walk, circumspectly. The word means accurately. Be accurate and, of course, if you're going to be accurate, every carpenter knows, every bricklayer knows if you're going to be accurate, you'd better be careful. You have to be careful. Circumspectly, be careful of what you're doing. Look around yourself. Take into account what you're doing. Thus to walk circumspectly is not what we sometimes make it, to walk on pins and needles, to walk afraid, to walk uncertainly, but it means walk in such a way that you are aware as a mother, as a father, that you are aware of what you're doing with the children that God has entrusted to your care, that you portray the truth.

Why? Well, the answer to that question is obvious for all of us but for parents, walk circumspectly because little eyes, impressionable eyes and little ears and little feet are following you and growing sons and daughters and young women going into puberty and young men going into puberty and young people who are questioning and asking questions, they are watching you because God has entrusted you with the covenant children. Walk, as a parent, circumspectly.

The Scriptures that we read together tonight have taught us already the one most basic truth of a child. The world shows its ignorance, its folly when they reject God because the world tonight does not even know, they don't know what a child is but the Scriptures tell us. Verse 1, "Be ye therefore followers of God." That word "followers" is "imitators of God, as dear children." Predicated in that verse is that God made us spiritually his children but that God has made children to be imitators. Children imitate, therefore, walk circumspectly. Wherever you as a mother, as a father, wherever you step, you are stepping on soft clay and you are leaving an imprint on clay that will harden in the child's life. Wherever you walk, you are stepping into soft wax. In your attitude, in your responses, in your discussion, in your talking with each other, as the children are listening

to you. Children are imitators. They are soft wax. You, their parents as God's servant, are leaving lasting impressions.

"Therefore," says the verse, "walk circumspectly not as fools, but as wise," and we understand that these are the only two alternatives that the Scriptures give to us. There is nothing in between those two. It is either we walk as a fool apart from God in ourselves, or we walk as wise in Jesus Christ. And the word "fool" and "wise" here are equivalent in the context to darkness and light. The fool, according to Scripture, walks in darkness. That's why he is a fool. He does not take into account the light of the Lord Jesus Christ. And we know that we all and our children by nature, are born in the darkness. The book of Proverbs says, "Foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child." That natural foolishness, that darkness is in us to set God aside; to believe that we are God; to corrupt the way of God; to hate the light. That is what we are by nature, but the apostle has said, "Now are ye light in the Lord." The light, wisdom, has shined into our hearts by his grace and through his word.

We read a very beautiful passage in 2 Corinthians 4:6 where the apostle speaks of our being born in the light and he uses the imagery of the first day of creation, and we think of the first day of the creation when there was nothing, there was darkness, total darkness. There is nothing and God spoke and said, "Let there be light and there was light." Apart from God's grace, there was nothing. Darkness. Unbelief. But he has spoken his living word, "Let there be light," therefore, you as in the light, wise up, walk in that light. As a parent, don't walk in what everybody is saying on Facebook. Don't walk in bringing up your children with the accepted wisdom of this world. Don't take the cultural or the conventional wisdom. Don't be swayed by what the world is constantly changing about their philosophy of what a child and how a child is to be raised. Don't do that. Walk in wisdom. Walk in the word of God. Wise up.

Now we ask the question: what exactly, then, is this wisdom? And the word "wisdom" in both the Old and in the New Testament means "skilled craftsman." Skilled craftsman. And we remember the workmen on the Old Testament tabernacle of Moses. Their names were, if you remember, Bezaleel and Aholiab, and we read in Exodus 36:1, "Then wrought Bezaleel and Aholiab, and every wise hearted man, in whom the LORD put wisdom and understanding to know how to work all manner of work for the service of the sanctuary, according to all that the LORD had commanded [Moses]." Picture it in your mind, God had commanded Moses to build the tabernacle. They had to build that ark of the covenant; that wasn't a shabby thing, that was a beautiful thing, metal and gold inlaid. They had to build the altar of incense and the candlestick and then the whole tabernacle. There had to be the canvas painted with palm trees and lions, and there had to be the outside altar of sacrifice and the brazen altar, all of it meticulously made. God said, "Moses, you make this." And Moses came to Bezaleel and Aholiab and said, "Now make this."

And they were in the worst desert you could possibly be in. There's no worse desert than the wilderness of Sinai. They couldn't go to the store, they couldn't just jump over to Lowe's for a minute to get the exact part they were looking for. They needed to get

everything they needed to build this tabernacle from a vagabond group of nomads; to these people who were slaves, who have just recently come out of Egypt and all of their possessions are in a wicker basket on their back. So Moses calls them to contribute and the people bring before Aholiab and Bezaleel all that they could give: golden rings; perhaps a badger skin; something they dug out of what we would call junk, maybe a tin cup. They brought maybe what they found in Egypt, a piece of iron, and they spread it all out before Aholiab and Bezaleel, a bunch, you would say, a flea market at best, a bunch of, well, there's value there but a bunch of "junk" and Moses said, "Do you see, Aholiab and Bezaleel, do you see a tabernacle here?" And they said, "Yes. Yes, God has given us wisdom and we see how we can take all of this and build a tabernacle to the Lord."

Do you have that wisdom, that love, that wisdom in God's word, that love for your children, that you look at them, these two little girls? Are there young women here, these two little girls, to serve the Lord in the beauty of holiness and to do so as the end of the world is approaching? Young women and girls steadfast in their faith to the glory of God and not like the daughters of this world? Do you see that there? Yes, but you see, it takes wisdom, it takes prayer, it takes the word of God. It takes that skill of the love of the heart to equip you as parents to do the work of God; to make a sanctuary, by his grace, a sanctuary in their hearts.

"See that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools," frittering away, "but as wise." That means, then, that wisdom that we need as parents is the Holy Scriptures which are able to make us wise as Paul says to Timothy, unto salvation. That means that our devotional life as married people is the most important thing, it's the best thing that we can bring to our family. That means that you in your marriage must be committed to having the word of God mature, that is, come over your heart through a prolonged exposure. The word of God, not a verse or two, not here and there, but the word of God continually brought upon your heart through your own devotion.

Wisdom cannot be had by the impatient. You don't acquire the wisdom of God as a parent or as any one of us by a crash-course, and we have this book in the church called "Wisdom for Dummies," and you get it real quick. The acquirement of wisdom is not painless. It's not effortless. It's not quick. It's a life-long apprenticeship in the school of God with our Holy Scriptures. Therefore, wise up and wake up.

Verse 16, "Redeeming the time, because the days are evil," and the connection here is natural; there is no connective word because it flows. The Bible teaches that wisdom is especially to know the value of time. It's the fool who always thinks they have time. It is the fool who God fills his hand with time but it's like sand that just goes through his fingers and he's got nothing at the end to show for it. The wise person who is walking circumspectly redeems the time.

You could take that verse 16, "Redeem the time, because the days are evil," as it follows verse 15, and you could pare that verse down to one word with three letters, "See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, now, right now, do that right now." There the word of God is pointing out to us in verse 16 that there are two things that

experience and God's word tells us time after time, time is short, that's the first thing; and evil is abounding. Redeem the time because the days are evil. Time is as if we are cut and bleeding out. Time is always bleeding out and evil in this world is always abounding and you have less and you have less time as a parent to do your work, and while there's less time, there's more and there's more evil opposing the work that you must do with your children. Therefore the word of God says, "Wake up. Wake up, people of God. We need to wake up. We must not be frittering our time. Your time with your children in your home to teach them and to influence them, your time with that junior high girl which only comes for a brief window, your time with that preschooler, no time for childcare, daycare, that time is so short with those little ones. The time with that 12th grade about to graduate high schooler is so tiny. It's slipping away. You have never, people of God, God speaks, you have never been so short of time as you are right now and the wise in Christ understand it and put it to use.

Then there's the addiction of our devices and of the cell phone and all of these different things and the madness that is coming over us, and that now they're even in our families or you're riding in the car and you don't talk. You don't talk. Do you know how little time we have to be at our tables with our family? Do you know how short that is? Do you know how little time we have to wrestle with them, no television in the den? Do you know how few nights? Do you know how few nights you have before they go to bed early for school? Do you know how little time, little time to talk with that teenager who's struggling tonight? Do you know how little your time is?

At the same time, are we aware that evil is increasing? For the days are evil, they are ever increasing. How evil has this world grown with respect to our children and with respect to our young people, and how evil is it continuing to grow at this very moment? Therefore the devil says, "If you don't want to use the time, I will." For the devil and the world are the economists of time. They do not waste time. The kingdom of darkness does not waste time for the devil knows that he has a short time. Therefore, wake up. Redeem the time.

That word "time" is not referring to our clock time, it's not referring to a calendar, but it's referring to a period, to a season of time, to an opportunity. A period of time in the life of your child that comes and goes and you can't get back is a window of time. The time when a certain need is present in your child, when a certain phase of their development is there, when a certain situation is right that it's there and it's not coming back. They'll never go off to kindergarten again. That time is soon to be done when they're in kindergarten. They're not going to always be so spontaneous and so forthright. That time when they're 15 and 16 as boys and girls, that comes just once, or 12 or 13, before the world gets their digs in there. That time, you need to use that time because you won't get it again. The window that is open that you have with your children, redeem the time. The window that is open with your child, you might not have, you won't have tomorrow.

Redeem the time. "Redeem" means "purchase; buy it," and when you buy something, you have to give, and what you have to give is your comfort, your own convenience. Their questions come most often at a time that is inconvenient. You've been waiting for them

and you were ready, they didn't ask the question, and now the house is busy and in an uproar and you're busy, you've got to clean, this is your cleaning day, and then they ask the question. You need to purchase it. You need to purchase that time by selling your own self.

We're familiar with Ecclesiastes 3:1-8, "To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven: A time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up." God tells us there are these times that come. God says to us as his servants in Jesus Christ, God says to us as parents, "We work on his clock. He does not work on ours." We don't set the teaching moment. We don't put on the calendar, "On this day, my child will be ready for me to teach this." We don't do that, God arranges those moments and those moments are continually changing and they keep changing every day and in every phase of their life. There is a time to discipline and there is a time to say to the child, "We'll talk later." There is a time to rebuke and there is a time to teach. There is a time to play dress-up with your little girl and there is a time to tell them of the vanity of fashion and to tell them about their body and how God will be glorified in it. There is a time to encourage them and there is time to scold. There is a time to laugh and there is a time to mourn. There is a time to embrace them and there is a time to restrain from embracing. And beloved, there are no mulligans, there are no do-overs.

It's very common in our weddings that there will be a slideshow of the couple. It used to be a slide projector that had the click each frame, now it's the PowerPoint. There everybody is present but nobody looks at those pictures at that time as do the parents. Nobody looks at them the way a parent will look at those pictures. There she was. This slide comes up. A newborn baby in the neonatal and before you can process it all, the next picture. There he was. You were feeding him a bottle. There she was, first birthday with cake all over her face. There he was riding his bike. There he was fishing. There she was playing the piano. There we were on our vacation. I said it used to be that between each one of these slides there was an audible click. There he is, eighth grade graduate. Trying to take it in. Click. Next scene. There she is driving the car with you there with terror in your eyes. Click. There you are waiting for her to come home from her first date, as a father. Click. And there they are. There he stands in his tuxedo with his square shoulders, and there she is in her beautiful wedding dress, and they're going to speak their vows. Click.

The time is passing quickly. It's not as long as you think. Redeem the time. Don't be controlled by time. Redeem it. Buy it as parents, to build faith and truth and conviction and godliness and love for the church. Do it now for the days are evil.

"Wherefore be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is." Wise up. Wake up. And watch out. The last verse there is a summary. That last verse is telling us that to walk circumspectly involves that we're always, in a sense, looking ahead. We're looking for something and what we're looking for is not, as parents, a position for ourselves in this world, we're not looking for a promotion. Yes, we want to be diligent, the Bible speaks to that, but we're looking ahead that we are prepared with the Holy Scriptures to be able to teach what the will of the Lord is at each point in their life.

"Wherefore," watch out, "be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is." "The will of the Lord" there is not a reference to his decree; it's not asking us to try to figure out his decretive will, that's in his gracious hand; it's not that now tonight you've got to figure out if they're going to be a nurse or a doctor or anything like that, or an accountant; but it means that you understand in your heart that you are ready to teach them what the will of God is in each phase of their life. You need to be prepared. You need to watch out. You need to understand what the will of the Lord is at each phase of their life: as a toddler; at preschool; at first grade; at intermediate; junior high and high school. You need to understand, you need to be ready to teach the will of the Lord for all of these things. You have to be ready to lay it out to them. You have to understand the will of the Lord for them when he comes home and says, "Well, all the neighbors are doing this, why don't we?" Or even when they come home from school and say, "All the kids get to do this." Or when at eight years old they say to you, "Just why are we going to church tonight?" You need to understand the will of the Lord, what the will of their Lord is, and your Lord, and you need to be ready to answer them and to teach them and to show them what God's will is for their life as a covenant redeemed child, intermediate, high schooler, whatever it is.

Therefore walk circumspectly. Wise up. Wake up. Watch out. You have been appointed by God in his marvelous grace and mercy to be the guardians of their soul and to bring these between you, seven children. You can't do anything of yourself. Your strength is promised to you in God and in his word. Your strength for your children will be in your marriage and living together before them godly in your marriage. That will be your strength and all of your life with these children, that short time, be committed that you will mold them and prepare them in obedience to Christ with joy in your heart and confidence that they will live on this earth and in heaven as a child of God. Beloved in the Lord, see to it that you walk circumspectly. Amen.

We thank thee for thy word spoken to us in weakness but it is thy word. We pray that we may not be fools but that we may be wise, redeeming every opportunity with our children. Fill us with the wisdom day by day, fill us with wisdom and humility. Bless these homes and all of our homes. For Jesus' sake. Amen.