
The Transforming Power of Walking in Wisdom

Ephesians 5:15-21

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Note: this was not intended to be a complete manuscript. I strongly recommend that you listen or watch the sermon.

Everyone wants to know what God's will is...

Almost always this is in terms of personal decision making...

Almost always this in reference to God speaking to us, particularly in prayer...

Paul has been writing about our lifestyle, the way we live. He uses the word, "walking in..."

We are to walk in love... (v.1-2)

¹ Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. ² And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

This is the conclusion to chapter 4. In our relationships we are to walk, to live in love. And it opens the discussion in the next section.

We are to walk in light... (v.8b)

At one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light

We must not merely avoid sinful deeds; we must also be willing to expose them.

¹¹ Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them. ¹² For it is shameful even to speak of the things that they do in secret. ¹³ But when anything is exposed by the light, it becomes visible, ¹⁴ for anything that becomes visible is light. Therefore it says, "Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you."

Our lifestyle as Christians then is in the sphere of love and light, relationships and righteousness. This is what Paul will move to in the next few paragraphs. How do we, who are to walk in love and light, live in God's will and wisdom? Three important commands move us to living in godly wisdom. There is a sense that we are commanded to live wisely in our relationships.

Walking according to God's will and God's wisdom is the bridge between our general lifestyle and our struggles in our relationships.

Governing your Lifestyle (v.15-16)

¹⁵ Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, ¹⁶ making the best use of the time, because the days are evil.

The paragraphs are connected by a “then”. It is a “therefore”. Since what has gone before is true, then here is command needed to execute it.

Employing God’s Wisdom (v.15)

The wisdom God gives is to govern and guide the way we live...

With careful intention...

Too many Christians live casually and therefore often, carnally. But Paul is commanding is to be intentional, not casual. We must choose wisdom, or we will live foolishly.

This intentional wisdom is cultivated through a habit of wise choices. Day by day, in large and small choices, you think through what is best, what is wisest, what would please God in this.

In how you live...

Wisdom is to be a lifestyle. Not merely big issues or large decisions but rather many small wise decisions that grow are the fabric of how you live.

Within the field of wisdom

There are some questions raised that are not answered in this text. We could pause and think about these almost as a whole sermon.

What is wisdom? Wisdom is living in God’s world, obeying His will, and seeking what is best in all things recognizing that choices have consequences.

Why do we need it? The Bible presents either the life of folly or the life of wisdom. There is no middle ground; you are living within one of those two spheres.

Where do we find it? Wisdom first is framed in God’s Word and found primarily there. But there is a subject aspect that God helps us in our souls to simply choose what is best. Remember, we are not talking about sin. We are talking about decisions where God has not specifically commanded. Wisdom often found in counsel. Ask others. Listen to others. Seek advice, not just from people who agree with you but from people who do not.

What does God promise us about it (James 1:5–8)

⁵ If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him. ⁶ But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind. ⁷ For that person must not suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; ⁸ he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.

Following a Helpful Example (v.16)

Paul illustrates his command in terms of how we use our time. This is not merely a time-management verse. It is that. Too many Christians, particularly during this past year, have frittered away hours and hours of time in useless and even unspiritual activity. Christians should live with a sense of purpose for their day and days. Get up, set your day. Go about your work. Make time for thinking, reflecting, reading God’s Word. Make your day profitable. Don’t drift from thing to thing...

Why? We live in the context of living in an evil age. What is the connection? Simply that one aspect of wise living is a sober, realistic understanding of the day in which we live. The world is not neutral. Outside of Christ and His community of people, the world is evil. We don’t really believe that. We think of truly evil people, truly evil things as being the exception. This is not how the Bible portrays it. We live in an evil age... and that Biblical fact should govern much of how we live including how we govern our time.

We are to order our lives wisely so as to make good use of the time God has given us. In the midst of evil days, Christians are to keep our focus in pleasing God and not letting the world eat up more and more of our time. In our own busy, busy days, some of you need to think about this. How much chasing around are you doing that is keeping you from ministry, serving or even just from church and family?

Understanding God's Will (v. 17)

¹⁷ Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is.

So, all of the commands constitute God's will. We can understand what God's will is, what His moral directives to us are by wisely living the truth and obeying His commands. God's redeeming plan gives rise to God's transforming will.

In its Importance

To not know what God's will is leads to being foolish. God's will is not about your personal, in the moment, decision making. It is not so much about what car you buy, what job you have, where your kids go to school and so on. Yet, knowing God's will is critical.

With its Contrast

Wisdom living is always within the will of God. The will of God must be obeyed wisely. We will illustrate this.

Through its Content

You must know what "it" is. What is it that God forbids and God requires?

God's will is in three major categories:

God's Sovereign Will

This is what God has decreed, what He has ordained to come to pass. This can only be known either before it comes to pass through prophecy or after it comes to pass as history.

God's Permissive Will

This is when God allows what He forbids. This is not contrary to His Sovereign will. It is a useful category, but we must never think of this as an area in which God's purposes and plans are thwarted. It helps us to discern where sin goes against God's revealed will but still follows the trajectory of God's purposes and plans.

God's Revealed will

This is God's prescriptive will. This is what God has revealed in the Scriptures, particularly the commands He has given for any particular age. For us, God's revealed will are the commands of the New Testament. This is what Paul has in mind. We must know what God has commanded.

By a Simple Model

So there is a large field of wisdom. Everything outside the fence is what God has forbidden. These are His "do not..." commands. Everything inside the fence is what God requires and what He allows. Below the line are His positive commands, His "You must do..." Above the line is freedom in wisdom in all God allows and we do what seems best. Paul brings us back to this in the midst of this long ethical section. We are reminded that we to be pleasing to God by carefully obeying His commands and living in the freedom of wisdom He has granted.



Applied to a Particular Issue (v. 18-20)

God's will are God's commands...

¹⁸ And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit, ¹⁹ addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart, ²⁰ giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, ²¹ submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ.

The Commands (v.18)

I am putting this all under one heading because of the connection between Paul's command and the expression of that command. There is a negative and positive aspect of this command. Do get drunk with wine; instead be filled with the Spirit. This is consistent with the Bible as a whole. But the point here is that we ought to be filled with the Spirit so that we are under His control.

Do not Get Drunk (v. 18a)

The sense here is that of being under the control – don't be controlled and therefore depressed by alcohol.

The Bible does not forbid alcoholic drinks; it forbids being drunk. For some, it is unwise to drink at all. But the command assumes self-control in how much, not abstinence.

Paul was focused on wine, but we also should think also of drugs and anything else that allows us to lose our self-control.

Do be Filled with the Spirit (v. 18b)

Do be controlled and thus enabled by the Spirit. The filling of the Spirit is the same idea as wine – filled with wine and filled with Spirit means to be controlled by wine or the Spirit. But the effect is the opposite. It is a contrast. Alcohol causes us to lost self-control. The Spirit enables and strengthens self-control. The manic activities of some who claim the filling of the Spirit is the opposite of what is being commanded.

Make no mistake... this is a command. You must be filled with and controlled by the Holy Spirit so that you will live in a way that is pleasing to God. All the commands that will follow this text are expressions of being filled with the Spirit. Do you want to know if you are filled with the Spirit? Obey all the commands in the rest of this chapter particularly the commands to submit within the roles God has established.

Being filled with the Spirit does not produce ecstatic *charismata*. It produces sober, thought-through, diligent, wise obedience.

The Expressions

See the "ing" verbs? What are these? These are expressions of the filling of the Spirit...

Singing to one another...

Music is an integral part of the Christian life. The Spirit's filling produces speaking or singing to one another in all the categories of musical expression. Paul probably has gathered worship in mind here. But we live in a day where, with some discretion, we can also receive the benefits intended through the technology we have.

But I want to maintain Paul's focus here. In gathered worship, you are singing to and for one another. There is a distinct "horizontal" aspect to our singing. This is why we sing songs that encourage, exhort and speak to each other.

If you are filled with the Spirit, this is one expression of the filling. You sing to one another in psalms, hymns and spiritual songs...

Making melody to God...

We also sing to God. This is the vertical aspect of our gatherings. But you can sing to God anywhere (ok, within reason) and anytime. God is a singing God. God loves to hear His people sing. A Biblical theology of worship has singing and making melody to God as a major aspect.

If you are filled with the Spirit, this one expression of that filling. You make melody in your heart, you sing with others, to God.

Giving thanks in all...

The environment, the atmosphere of singing and making melody is a grateful heart. A grumbling, discontented heart with situations and people is sin. Plain, pure and simple. But the Biblical antidote to discontent and grumbling is gratitude.

...giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ,

Sometimes we are told to be thankful "in all things." We put the emphasis on "in". We are to have hearts of gratitude no matter what the situation may be. But here Paul is very clear. In the context of walking in love and light, in relationships and righteousness, we are to continually be giving thanks for always and for everything. Someway, somehow, we are to cultivate a grateful heart that allows us to give thanks to God for all.

Now we think that our situation now is a real challenge. But Paul is going to parachute us right into where being filled with the Spirit really challenges us.

Submitting to one another...

It is God's will that Christians wisely submit to one another. The next paragraphs in Ephesians are going to define the "one another" part of this call to submission.

This is NOT some kind of egalitarian, mutual submission that override or denies roles in the home and in the church. This is the general poise of a Spirit filled Christian – a poise to submit to those God has placed over us.

Reflect and Respond

Do you live a life of thought through, intentional, Bible-informed wisdom.

What is God's will?

To live a life of self-control...

To live a life filled with the Spirit...

To live a life overflowing with joy...

To live a life textured with gratitude....

To live a life submitted to one another...

What we are experiencing then is authentic worship. Faith, obedience, the filling of the Spirit that brings our lives under the Lord's control and enables real joy in our relationships.