

The Letter Of Paul To The Ephesians

*⁷In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, ⁸which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight ⁹making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ ¹⁰as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.
(Ephesians 1:7-10. ESV)*

Message 21

Careful Christian Living

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Ephesians 5:15-18

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Introduction:

Good morning! Open your Bibles to Ephesians 5:15. This morning we begin looking at the final section of paraenesis in Paul's Letter to the Ephesians. You will recall that after 3 chapters of theology where Paul laid out for us the good news of what God has done in Christ to secure our salvation, he turned the corner at 4:1 and began to admonish the Ephesians to LIVE in a manner WORTHY of their calling. Because God has done this for you, you ought to live this way unto him.

¹I **therefore**, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to **walk** in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called (Ephesians 4:1. ESV)

The word "therefore" combined with the word "walk" serves to link theology to ethics. We see that at several other new sections in Paul's moral admonition and we see it here at 5:15:

¹⁵Look carefully **then** how you **walk** (Ephesians 5:15. ESV)

In English that looks different, with "then" instead of "therefore" but in Greek it is the same. It is the Greek word *oun* which means "therefore" just as it was in 4:1. Once again, Paul is grounding his moral imperatives in Gospel indicatives. He is saying: because this is true for us in Christ, we must live this way. In this final section he uses three positive and negative couplets; not this but that; almost as though he is trying to tune us in with fine adjustments such that he leaves us

firmly established in the groove of Christian living. We can think of these three couplets as the coordinates of careful Christian living.

Forest Level Observations:

Before we get to these coordinates I just want to make a forest level observation from this section of text as a whole by the wording of the opening verse. Look at verse 15:

¹⁵**Look carefully** then how you walk (ESV)

The ESV has done a good job trying to capture the sense of this in the English but it is not easy to do. In Greek the word translated “look” is an imperative – meaning that it is a command. It actually means “beware” or “see that” as in “see that you do such and such”. The word translated as “carefully” is the word *akribos* which means “exactly” or “circumspectly” or “precisely”. If we were to favour precision over intelligibility we would translate this: “You beware and walk with exactness”. That doesn’t sound good but that’s the sense of it. Here’s the point I’m trying to make; the Bible seems to operate under the assumption that exactness and attention and effort are good and necessary for the Christian who desires to live worthily before God. I find that fascinating! The Bible’s definition of grace apparently does not preclude EXACT and PRECISE EFFORT. That’s interesting to me because often in Evangelical circles you get the idea that grace and effort don’t go together. We need to let go and let God. We need to rest in the Gospel. According to the Bible, resting in the Gospel requires intense vigilance and EFFORT! That’s why Jesus can say:

²⁴“**Strive** to enter through the narrow door. For many, I tell you, will seek to enter and will not be able. (Luke 13:24. ESV)

Or Paul can say:

¹⁰But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me was not in vain. On the contrary, **I worked harder** than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me. (1 Corinthians 15:10. ESV)

Or Hebrews can say:

¹¹Let us therefore **strive** to enter that rest (Hebrews 4:11. ESV)

Grace and work are not opposites. You have to STRIVE to REST. I share all of that just to suggest that you need to make sure that your definition of grace is not “gracier” than the Bible’s definition of grace. Paul is calling on us here to be exact and precise and careful in our Christian living. That’s not legalism, that’s wisdom and worship and we would do well to imitate that in this place. With that said, let’s jump right into the text.

Coordinates Of Careful Christian Living:

These are “coordinates” if you will of careful Christian living. Look at verses 15-16 for the first one:

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

1. Not as UNWISE but as WISE

As I said these three coordinates are all given as positive and negative couplets; not this but that. He is tuning us in to the EXACT spot. Not here but here. Not as unwise but as wise. Let’s pull this one apart. The word for “wisdom” in the Bible is used in a variety of different ways and so the first thing we need to do is check how it has been used already in this Letter. We meet it first in 1:7-9:

⁷In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, ⁸which he lavished upon us, **in all wisdom** and insight ⁹making known to us the mystery of his will (1:7-9. ESV)

Next in 1:17 Paul prays and asks that God give them:

a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him, ¹⁸having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you ... ¹⁹and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe... (1:17-20. ESV)

Lastly in 3:9-10 Paul says that he has been preaching the Gospel to the Gentiles concerning the unspeakable riches that are theirs now in Christ and seeking to:

bring to light for everyone what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things, ¹⁰so that through the church **the manifold wisdom of God** might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places. (3:9-10. ESV)

So in every use of the word in this letter it refers to seeing and understanding what God is doing in the plan of redemption with respect to that which was once hidden and is now revealed in Christ. Wisdom, in this letter, means seeing and understanding what God has done and where this is heading. That's why Paul goes on to say in verse 16 of our text:

¹⁶making the best use of the time, because the days are evil. (ESV)

If you know where this is going you will spend your time accordingly – THAT'S WISDOM!! Paul is saying that for the wise man, what he knows about the future changes how he lives in the present. That's wisdom. He uses a fascinating word here in verse 16. The phrase "making the best use of the time" translates the Greek word *exagorazo* which literally means "to buy out or from the market". That's why the old versions would say: "redeeming the time". Redeem meaning to purchase. Paul is saying that our urgency should be like those who shop when things are on sale for a limited time. Think Black Thursday. Think of all the people pressed up against the doors of Best Buy waiting to get in there in order to take advantage of some crazy 24 hour sale on iPads. That's the idea. We should live like that because of what we know about where this is all going in God's Sovereign Plan.

I want to park here for a minute – the other points are smaller and quicker so just relax. This one is important. Let's ask the question: what do we know about where this is all going in God's Sovereign Plan? How does this story end? Our kids know. Let me show you what we teach our kids about how this ends. I'll read you 7 questions from our catechism; one from the section on Jesus and the rest from the section on death and the end of all things.

17. Will Christ come to this earth again?

Yes, He will come to judge the world at the last day.

Revelation 22:12

1. What becomes of the righteous after death?

Their body returns to the dust and their spirit goes to be with the Lord.

2 Corinthians 5:8

2. What becomes of the wicked AFTER death?

They suffer punishment while they are kept by God for the day of judgment.

Luke 16:22b-23a

3. Will the dead be raised to life again?

Yes, all the dead shall be raised when Christ comes again.

1Thessalonians 4:16

4. What will become of the wicked (unrighteous) in the day of judgement?

They shall be cast into the lake of fire, a place of dreadful and endless punishment (hell).

Revelation 20:15 / Mark 9:47-48

5. What will become of the righteous in the day of judgement?

They shall enter the Father's kingdom in the new heaven and new earth.

Matthew 25:34

6. What is the new heaven and new earth?

The place where God will dwell forever with His people.

Revelation 21:3

That's what we teach our children here about how this story ends. If you believe that –if you really believe that and you don't think this is just fairy tales for little kids – then raise your hand. Ok now if you really believe that, if you have insight into the mystery of God's redemptive purpose then WISDOM would dictate you live a certain way. I think there are at least 4 brutally obvious implications for Christian living in light of what we say we believe. Wise Christians who know what we say we know:

i. Are lightly invested in the things of this world.

They are not totally uninvested. I'm not telling you to stop buying RESPS because if the Lord tarries and you get old you're going to be living at my house! Stay a little bit invested, but be lightly invested. This could all be over in a year or 5 years and what good will that money be then? Choose your indulgences carefully. You are going to have to explain that cottage or that boat or that vacation – I'm not pointing the finger, my luxuries are smaller than some but larger

than some others, we're all going to have to explain those things against the backdrop of people screaming out for mercy as they are dragged down into hell. Make sure you have a story that you will feel comfortable shouting over their cries.

Wise Christians who know what we say we know:

ii. Are highly invested in the progress of the Gospel.

Listen, I have a mortgage and five kids and two of them wearing braces now and all of them expecting to go to university one day so I know that money is tight. I know that. But after you tithe and after the mortgage is paid and after the groceries are bought and after the medical expenses are paid and you've tucked some money away for school – what has first call on what's left? Is it the Gospel? Is it some missionary somewhere preaching to people who've never heard any of this stuff before? Is it Bible translation or sending your kid on a mission trip so that she gets fired up about the Gospel? A person who knows what happens to unsaved people when they die wants to reach those people with the Gospel before they die – don't they?

Third, wise Christians who know what we say we know:

iii. Are minimizing rest and recreation

Now notice that I did not say “eliminating”. You have to rest. You can't go 24/7, you just can't. You need to exercise and you need to spend time with your family – I get that and I need that too. But a wise Christian who knows what we know takes what rest and recreation he needs and no more. He battles with the issue. You know that my family and I just went on vacation. I agonized over that decision. Taking 5 kids anywhere is expensive. We don't go every year. But as a father who wants my kids to love Jesus and to not view the church as the place where daddy is imprisoned, I know that I have to do that. But I want to agonize over it. I don't ever want spending that money or that time to feel easy to me. I want to take what rest and recreation I need and no more; because I know what I know and I think about it a lot.

Fourthly, wise Christians who know what we know:

- iv. Are maximizing study and service and prayer and proclamation

I started keeping a running list of the books I've read in 2013 to hold myself accountable. I far too easily fall into the couch to watch a hockey game or a baseball game after a hard day's work. You work 9-10 hours, you have dinner, you do devos with the kids, you do bath time and you say prayers and when 8:30 rolls around you want to DIE – I know that – I feel that EVERY NIGHT! And my flesh SCREAMS OUT: WATCH THE GAME!!!! For the sake of all that is good and merciful – WATCH THE GAME!!! And sometimes I do – sometimes I need to. But I know what I know and so I try and kick myself into my hard wooden chair and I try to read a chapter or two of theology so that I can be better at saving souls. At the end of my work week I look at my list of phone calls and visits and I try and meet with one more person or call one more person or write a card and take it to one more person. I want to sleep till nine but you set the alarm for 5:45 so that you can wake up and PRAY. This is hard stuff and it only makes sense if we know what we know about where all this is going. If this is all true then living like this is WISE. If it isn't then living like this is insane. But if its true, living any other way is heartless and faithless and cruel.

A wise Christian greets each day with her face pressed up against the glass, pressing forward to save souls while time remains because the days are evil and wrath is soon to come.

Secondly, Paul says in verse 17:

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

2. Do not be FOOLISH but UNDERSTAND

After the message of verse 16 Paul understands that we may want to charge off and “do something” and so here he cautions us to add understanding to our urgency. Be urgent WITH understanding. That is absolutely critical. Very frequently in church life we get fired up about something and we just want to DO SOMETHING but very little time is spend thinking about WHAT we should do. Several years ago a lady came to me here and said that it was absolutely imperative that all the churches in Orillia join with her in doing random acts of kindness to show the city the love of Jesus. She was all fired up but she did not seem to have much of a plan for

how this was going to be executed. I was just to recruit a bunch of people on a certain day and we were going to explode into the neighbourhoods of Orillia “doing good”. I asked a few questions around permits and liability and coordination and how this was going to accomplish the goal of bringing people to saving knowledge of Jesus Christ and my questions seemed to be received as lack of enthusiasm. Just do it, we need to DO SOMETHING to show Orillia that we are together and that God is good. Hmmm. Urgency is good. Foolishness is bad. What we need is urgency WITH understanding.

The phrase “what the will of the Lord is” is another example of needing to define words and phrases according to how they are used in the letter. In the first half of this letter when the topic is salvation the “will of the Lord” refers to the plan of salvation, in the second half when the topic is how to live as a Christian, it refers to the godly way of doing things. See for example Ephesians 6:6:

⁵Slaves, obey your earthly masters with fear and trembling, with a sincere heart, as you would Christ, ⁶not by the way of eye-service, as people-pleasers, but as servants of Christ, **doing the will of God** from the heart (ESV)

Doing the will of God here refers to the godly way of being a servant and in our passage in 5:17 it refers to the godly way of living urgently. The point is that all of our urgent activity should be governed by all of our Christian theology. We don’t want to get worked up into a lather and just start digging wells somewhere for Jesus. We want to ask the question: “Where is this well most needed?” “What is the most cost effective way of bringing water to these people?” “How will we help them see past the physical water to the water of life that is Jesus Christ?” If you are not asking those questions then you are not showing urgency with understanding.

Thirdly, Paul says:

¹⁸And don’t get drunk with wine, which leads to reckless actions, but be filled by the Spirit (HCSB)

3. Don’t get DRUNK, but be FILLED by the Spirit

Of all the verses we’ve read this morning my guess is that you are most familiar with this one either because someone used it to talk to you about the sin of drunkenness or because you have an interest in what it means to be filled with or by the Spirit. We have to be careful about

parachuting into a text with a specific agenda – this text is clearly not motivated by a concern to teach on alcohol consumption. Paul is referring to that by way of contrast – don’t be drinking wine – but rather be ever being filled by the Holy Spirit. The comment on alcohol is not the main idea of the text and so we need to be careful. Parenthetically, sure, let me agree with Paul and say: “Don’t be a drunk!” Don’t be addicted to anything. You’re probably very wise to not drink at all but I don’t want to talk about that because that isn’t what Paul’s talking about. The key to understanding what Paul is concerned with here is the word “filled”. There is all kinds of filled and fullness talk in Ephesians. Let’s remind ourselves of it:

We first meet this word in Ephesians 1:22-23:

²²And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church, ²³which is his body, **the fullness of him who fills all in all**. (ESV)

We did a whole sermon on this back in June. What Paul is saying here is that the glory of God is on full display in Jesus Christ and the glory of Jesus will FILL the church and through the church will fill all things in heaven and on the earth. So all of the glory of God is in Jesus and this glory is filling us and through us is filling all the earth. Flip forward to Paul’s great prayer in chapter 3:19 and following; Paul says “I’m praying that you will:

know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, **that you may be filled with all the fullness of God**. (ESV)

Alright, that’s the FULLNESS part, what about the Holy Spirit part? So far we’ve been told that ultimately this fullness is the fullness of God. We meet it IN CHRIST who is FILLED with the fullness of God and we leak it into all the earth as part of the redemptive plan of God. So that’s God, Jesus and us with respect to filling – what is the role of the Holy Spirit? We find that in 1:13 and in 4:30:

¹³In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, **were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit** (1:13. ESV)

³⁰And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, **by whom you were sealed** for the day of redemption. (4:30. ESV)

I’ll be brief here because we preached a sermon on this back on June 16th, if you are confused you can grab that off the website. A seal implies two things: first it implies ownership – we are

marked as belonging by our possession of the Holy Spirit. If the Holy Spirit is inside you that MARKS you as belonging to God. Secondly, it implies connection. I've described this as being like a hose that connects us to the tank wherein are found all the blessings of God. God is the source of every good thing. Because of the obedience and death of Christ, Jesus now has access to all those blessings and through the seal of the Holy Spirit he downloads those things into us. So when Paul says: "Be ever being filled by the Holy Spirit" he is telling us to maintain and steward our connection. Keep your lips sucking on that hose and don't put your lips around the wine bottle.

Now, there is some disagreement among scholars as to whether the dative here in verse 18 should be translated as "with the Holy Spirit" or "by the Holy Spirit" and I've become convinced that the stronger evidence is for "by the Holy Spirit". I think Paul is stressing the agency of the Holy Spirit who fills us with all the fullness of GOD through contemplation of Jesus Christ. When we are tuned to Jesus, when we have our lips sealed to that pipe, we are changed by one degree of glory to the next and that glory leaks out of us into all the world – this is the work of the Lord, the Spirit – 2 Corinthians 3:18. That being said, I don't think its worth fighting over because if the Spirit is filling us with the fullness of God and the Spirit is God then we are being filled WITH the Holy Spirit anyway but I do think that is better translated as "by the Holy Spirit".

Don't be a drunk. Don't put that garbage in your body, instead keep your lips on the Spirit hose and be filled with that. Here is the point friends: What you imbibe predicts the overflow of your life. That is what Paul is saying, in pure, simple, street level English. If you suck up drugs and stick that poison in your body – you will DIE. You will slowly but surely descend into hell. Don't do it! On the other hand, if you keep your lips on the Spirit hose – if you go to church, sit under sermons, read your Bible – do the RMM plan, go to Small Group, let people speak into your life – if you do that – the Spirit will pump into you all the fullness of God and you will change and you will SHINE – you will LEAK GLORY and you will fill the earth with the fragrance of God. That's what he's saying.

Forward Look:

Now before we close I just want to show you where we are going over the next few weeks by highlighting for you the internal architecture of this passage. This verse, verse 18 contains the

main verb for all that follows through chapter 6 verse 9. Let me draw this for you. In this final paracletic, Paul is tuning us in with precision to the proper place of Christian living by means of three coordinates.

1. Not as unwise but as wise
2. Not foolish but understanding
3. Not drunk but being ever filled by the Holy Spirit

Now what follows in verses 19-21 are a set of 5 participles which explain the result of being filled by the Holy Spirit. They are not new points they are subpoints of point 3. We would draw them like this:

- 3i. Preaching/speaking in Psalms, hymns and songs
- 3ii. Singing
- 3iii. Making music
- 3iv. Giving thanks (prayer)
- 3v. Submitting to one another

Those 5 things are all results of being filled by the Holy Spirit. A Spiritual church responds to what comes in by overflowing in these 5 things – we'll talk about that next week.

Then Paul talks in specifics about 3 categories where we need to submit to one another with the Spirit's help. Think of these points as 3v.a, b and c.

- 3v. Submitting to one another
 - a. In marriage
 - b. In parenting
 - c. At work

We'll give a week to each of those topics because of their complexity and cultural sensitivities. All of these things, and by extension all of the content of the next 4 sermons in this series are treated as results of being ever filled by the Holy Spirit. If we keep our lips on this hose, if we keep our faces tuned to Jesus and if the Holy Spirit keeps filling us with all the fullness of God the worship in here will change forever. Our marriages will be a witness to the world. Our kids

will surpass us in the faith and our workplaces are going to be harvest fields for the glory of God. That's where this is going and this is the Word of the Lord. Let's pray together.