

Walking Wisely

Ephesians 5:15-17
Halifax: 29 June 2008

Introduction

Today, we pick up again in our Ephesians Sermon Series with Ephesians 5:15-17.

- We have had a rather long break from Ephesians...
- One of the difficulties in a series like this is that you are only looking at a few verses in each sermon,
 - and that can make it easy to lose sight of the flow of the text...

I have tried to avoid this by continually reminding you about the overall context of this excellent Epistle...

- You can see from the word “then” at the beginning of verse 15 that this is especially important today.
- Paul, the apostle who wrote Ephesians, is calling for a reasonable response to the things he has just been talking about...
 - It is almost like one of those “whereas” statements that you use in an official petition...
 - You know, something like a mother might use to tell her son to take out the garbage...
 - Whereas, we dwell together in this house...
 - Whereas, we desire our dwelling to be comfortable and attractive...
 - Whereas, we want our home to be a pleasant and respectable place for those who visit us...
 - Whereas, the garbage has been overflowing in the kitchen for two days...
 - Whereas, this is unsightly and is starting to cause a stench...
 - See then that the garbage is removed from the premises without delay...
- Paul is showing us how we ought to respond to the things he has just been talking about.
 - It is as if he is saying...
 - Whereas, you were darkness but now are light in the Lord...
 - Whereas, you are now living in God’s own household by the Spirit, producing fruit in all goodness, righteousness, and truth...
 - Whereas, you live among a people who are yet in the darkness and who commit deeds in secret of which it is shameful to even speak...

- See that you walk circumspectly... not as fools, but as wise... redeeming the time...

Oh Christian, don't you see!

- You have been given a whole new life to live as God's children!
 - You have been completely forgiven of all your sins
 - and He has given you His Spirit so that you may live a new life...
 - You have been brought into God's own household to live with the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit forever and ever...
 - You are an heir of glory, and God is working in you so that you can live as His children ought to live—in a way that is fitting!
 - He is enabling you to put off all the corruption, the immorality, the bitterness, the malice, the coldness toward your God, the rotten words, the greed, the dishonesty, the anger and impatience,
 - and to live as Jesus lived—
 - giving your life for others—
 - delighting in your God and serving Him with joyful fervency...
- But you live in a world of darkness that hates the true and living God...
 - You live in a world that does not want to submit to the law of God...
 - And the reality is that that world still has a certain attraction to you.
 - There are still those times when you would rather respond selfishly than to give yourself for your neighbour...
 - There are those times when ungodly anger wells up in you, or when you are tempted to distort the truth or to harbour bitterness...
 - There are those thoughts of envy and discontent when your neighbour achieves something that you did not achieve...
 - or when he is noticed and you are ignored...
 - or when he seems to have a better marriage or more financial freedom...
 - And there is that continual struggle with gratitude...
 - For the people around don't regard the gospel and they do not give thanks to God for what He has done...
 - And it is easy for you to start to count what He has done as rather unimportant and insignificant.
 - It's a terrible thing to do, but you are drawn in to this attitude...

- You just don't appreciate the wonderful things that God has done for you in Christ and live in a spirit of constant praise and gratitude the way you should.
 - You are far from really grasping the depth and breath and height and length of Christ's love.
- The darkness has a certain pull on you— the one who wants to walk in the light of God...and who has been called to live in the light of God...
 - You don't really want to return to the darkness—but you still struggle with it...
 - It is always there, as long as you are in this world,
 - It is always a threat.

And so it only makes sense that you should be careful about the way you walk...

- You need to be careful that you are not pulled back into the darkness...
- And so the scripture tells us in verse 15 (and this is our first point):

I. See then that you walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise...

A. Circumspect walking is the kind of walking you do when there are dangers...

1. It is careful walking—walking that is alert and aware of the dangers around you.
 - It is the kind of walking that you do when you are in the kitchen and you just dropped a tray of drinking glasses that shattered all over the floor...
 - You don't go running across the floor to the broom closet in your bare feet...
 - You walk circumspectly, watching every step...
 - unless you are a fool of course...
 - A fool doesn't consider the danger...
 - A fool does things without thinking about the consequences.
 - He does things like spending up all his money on frivolous things without thinking about how he will pay the bills...
 - The fool in view here does not think there are any real threats to his Christian walk...
2. My brothers and sisters,
 - a. You need to understand that the Christian life is not like a stroll through Public Gardens...

- It is more like a trek across a battle field...
 - There are enemies all around and there are mine fields that you can easily set off...
- b. It is a constant battle...
- The Devil is a roaring lion seeking to devour you...
 - The tempter is constantly seeking to ensnare you—looking for weakness.
 - There is a struggle between the Spirit and the flesh...
 - You are just plain dishonest if you do not admit to this...
 - There are things you are drawn to that you would be ashamed for any one else to know about.
 - You are at war!
- B. You have to be careful... because the days are evil...
1. You see those words at the end of verse 16... “because the days are evil”
 - a. They don’t just go with verse 16...
 - They also go with verse 15...
 - “See that you walk circumspectly... because the days are evil.”
 - b. It was evil days for the Ephesians because there was so much immorality and so much disregard of God and lack of interest in His salvation...
 - There were people all around the Ephesian believers—
 - people among whom they lived and worked everyday—
 - who were following their own lusts and who had no interest in doing God’s will...
 - It was easy to get be influenced by this...
 - c. Do you face anything like that in our society!
 - Of course you do!
 - There are real dangers because the days are evil.
 - Be watchful, or you will be drawn in.
 2. There is a certain resistance to this idea that there are real dangers—we want to think that we are immune to all that...
 - a. But the Bible is full of warnings from Genesis to Revelation.
 - 1) Consider in the Old Testament...

- Adam was told the guard the Garden of Eden—he did not do it...and the world was plunged into apostasy...
 - Real danger with real consequences—devastating consequences.
- Moses warned Israel to be careful to keep God’s way lest they follow the abominable practices of the Canaanites...
 - He told them that they would fall into apostasy if they did not guard themselves...
 - They did not listen, and soon they were living just like the Canaanites.
 - Many of them were cut off from God’s covenant as a result!
- The Kings of Israel were warned not marry foreign wives lest they be ensnared by their gods...
 - They did not listen and this became a cause of the nation’s downfall into apostasy...
 - The whole nation was brought into captivity, and many of the covenant fell into idolatry and unbelief.
- And after the restoration from exile, the prophets warned the covenant people about empty religion—outward form without sincerity...
 - But when Jesus came, that was exactly what he found among the people...
 - They were in such a sorry state that they did not even see their need to be saved from sin...
 - They were keeping all the outward forms, but their hearts were far from God!
 - The result?
 - They rejected their own Messiah!

TRANS> The Old Testament is full of real warnings about real dangers with real consequences.

- The people were called to walk circumspectly, but they did not.
 - They lived as if there were no real dangers.
- 2) And the warnings continue in the New Testament...
- a) Jesus constantly warned his hearers of the dangers of hypocrisy...
 - He warned that many would fall away because of persecutions...
 - and that others would fall away because of the cares of the world and deceitfulness of riches...

- He told His disciples to watch in the Garden of Gethsemane lest they be tempted—
 - but they were foolish and they slept—
 - They did not believe the threat to be real...
 - They fell...

- b) The Apostles themselves constantly warn of the world, of Satan, of the deceptions of the flesh...
 - James warns us not to be satisfied with mere hearing... and of forgetting to apply what we have heard...
 - Peter warns us to beware of false teachers who will lead many into error and destruction...
 - Paul warns about being enticed and led away from the simplicity of Christ...
 - In Hebrews, we have the powerful warning...
 - Heb 3:12-13: Beware, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God; but exhort one another daily, while it is called "Today," lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.
 - John, in Revelation, warns some of the seven churches of their particular dangers—
 - and tells them that they will lose the gospel if they are not careful—that the lampstand will be taken away...
 - and it was...
 - Many of the churches are not more...
 - They fell away because they did not hear the warnings.

TRANS> I tell you, warnings are on almost every page of scripture—

- They are there because we need them!
- There are real dangers that lead to real apostasy!
- It was real people in real churches—just like this church—that were given these warnings...
 - people that professed Christ just like we do...
 - but who thought there was no danger!

- b. There is a real resistance to warnings today among God's covenant people!
 - There is a truncated theology that takes the promises of God that He will keep us to the end...

- and then relegates all the warnings are given to those who are not true believers!
- But that is completely wrong!
- The truth is that the warnings are for God's elect more than for unbelievers!
 - They are for you who are sincere because you are the ones who will regard them.
 - If you are elect, God will cause you to pay attention to them so that you will not fall away!
 - God's keeping of us is a busy active thing—a thing that involves our right responses to His word.
 - That is the difference between a person who is truly saved and one who is only professing to be saved...
 - The one who is truly saved will walk circumspectly...
 - He will regard the warnings and take heed to them...
 - He will guard himself against the danger instead of running headlong into it.
 - If you are a true believer it is not that you don't need the warnings!
 - It is rather that you heed the warnings!
 - The Holy Spirit has given them to you to keep you!
 - If you do not hear them and heed them, you are one of the ones who is deceived!
 - If you are a true believer, God gives you a new heart that responds to His word...sincerely and earnestly...
 - And that includes receiving the warnings that are all through scripture!
- c. I don't mean that you should go around as one who is paranoid...
 - No, you need to go around as one who trusts God to keep you...
 - to keep you by graciously warning you and by drawing you back from danger...
 - by making you aware of the snares of the Devil and making you earnest in your prayers that you be led not into temptation...
 - Not paranoid, but that you watch and pray...
 - that you care about how you walk...

- that it is important to you to serve Christ and to keep serving Him...
 - that you don't trust yourself, but you trust in Him to keep you...
 - Your trust is not to be a presumptuous trust...
 - It is to be a trust that listens to Him and heeds His warnings and that looks to Him to keep you in the midst of danger.
- C. And so if you are sincere, you will be careful about how you walk—you will not be foolish, but wise...
- Let me give you some examples of how you will heed warnings...
1. You will watch yourself to see that you are not getting caught up with the cares of the world—
 - If your heart is dry and the word has lost its appeal and you are neglecting prayer...and you have little zeal to tell others about Christ...
 - You will care about this!
 - You will awaken to this!
 - You will say, "I am in great danger!"
 - You will cry out to God for help!
 - You will set apart time to seek the Lord—for prayer and fasting!
 - You won't just go on as if there is no danger...
 - You might even take a lower paying job if you find that your work is drawing you away from the Lord.
 2. If you find that your heart is constantly inflamed with a desire for sexual intimacy with someone other than your spouse...
 - You will guard your ways—
 - You pray for protection...
 - You will seek accountability with others...
 - You will focus on your spouse or on preparing yourself for marriage...
 - You will work on gratitude, considering all that God has done for you...
 - You will avoid unnecessary temptation (certain movies or books, certain associations)...
 - and you will prepare yourself in advance when you know that you are going to be put into a place of temptation.
 3. If you are in a place where there is false teaching,

- You will not go on in that place...
 - You will confront it, and if that does not bring correction, you will avoid it.
 - Some of you have had to do that recently and I commend you for it...
- I am amazed at how many believers will stay in churches that are full of false teaching as if there is no danger to them...
 - There are so many warnings in the Bible about this!
 - But they stay in and you can the consequences in their lives as they slip away into apostasy and destruction...
 - Just like Israel did!
 - It is just plain stupid to think you won't be affected!
 - That's what Paul is saying here...
 - Don't be foolish—Don't be stupid—Don't be a bone head!
 - If you are, it betrays an evil heart of unbelief.

TRANS> Do you see the point?

- If God has given you a new heart, you will be careful about your walk...
 - It will be your desire to walk with Him and you will guard yourself to see that nothing gets in the way of that!
 - It will matter to you!
 - You were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord and you don't ever want to go back to the darkness!
 - You have the marvellous privilege now of walking in the light—
 - of living a fruitful life for God's glory...
 - of living the way Jesus lived...
 - and you will not want to live a single moment for anything else!
- And this leads to the next thing that Paul says to the Ephesians...
 - or rather what the Holy Spirit says to you through Paul...
 - in verse 16...

II. That you must see to it that you redeem the time...

- That is part of your circumspect walking...
 - You walk carefully so as not to waste your time on useless things!

- A. The idea of redeeming the time involves buying it all up for yourself...
1. In the Bible times, when a slave was redeemed, he was purchased from his owner...
 - either to become the slave of the one who purchased him,
 - or to be given his freedom if the purchaser was a friend or relative that wanted to help him out...
 - Here, the middle voice is used in the Greek...
 - The middle voice is a voice that is used when you do something for yourself...
 - This is saying that you are to redeem the time for yourself—
 - You are to take ownership of it—
 - You are to make it your own—
 - Time is to become your servant.
 2. This is a very instructive idea...
 - a. We have all been given the same number of hours in a day—
 - and these hours can either be wasted or they can be used for good purpose.
 - b. And you who know Christ...
 - You have been brought into God's household to live in communion with Him...
 - to live as Jesus lived,
 - to love as He loved,
 - to walk as He walked!
 - You have been given the Holy Spirit so that you can now serve God!
 - You have been forgiven so that you can now please God!
 - The Spirit is working in you bring forth fruit that pleases God!
 - It is an outrageously wonderful thing.
 - You can use time that would have been wasted to serve God!

B. Surely you don't want to waste a moment!

1. Surely You want to buy up every minute for the glory of God—to bear fruit that pleases Him!
 - Surely, you are not interested in just letting life happen—just killing time as it were!

- You are laying up treasure in heaven for eternity!
 - This world is the great field where you bring forth fruit for God,
 - and the day of judgement is the day when the fruit is gathered in.
 - What you have on that day, you will have...
 - If you wasted time, then you will not have very much.
 - If you did not use your time to sow good seeds, your crop will be small.
 - but if you used your time well,
 - you will have an abundance by the grace of God.
2. I tell you, my friends, there are things God has given you to do while you are in this world that you will never have opportunity to do again...
- a. Most importantly, you will never have another opportunity to be saved from your sin...
- It is only while you are in this world that you have the opportunity to trust in Jesus Christ.
 - If you go on frittering away your life in your sin, and you don't repent and turn to Jesus for forgiveness,
 - the day of judgement will come and it will be too late...
 - You will cry out in anguish with all other fools:
 - Prov 5:11-13 says:
 - Prov 5:11:13: you mourn at last, When your flesh and your body are consumed, And say: "How I have hated instruction, And my heart despised correction! I have not obeyed the voice of my teachers, Nor inclined my ear to those who instructed me!
 - You have heard it from me today!
 - You cannot say you were not told!
 - There is no regret so dreadful as yours will be if you do not hear!
 - Now is the day of salvation!
 - You ignore this call at your own peril...

TRANS> But now a word for you who believe...

- You have already come to Christ...
 - You have trusted in Him and been given a new life...

- Why in the world would you fritter away your time when you might rather redeem it?
- b. It is here, in this world, that you are to bear fruit...
- 1) It is only here that you will have opportunity to bear the cross,
 - to go on serving God when you are persecuted...
 - to love those who treat you wrongfully...
 - to deny yourself for the good of your neighbour...
 - 2) It is only here that you will be able to minister patiently to those who are suffering...
 - to lay up treasure in heaven by giving to your neighbour who is in need—serving him, providing for him, blessing him...
 - to go on labouring for others when you don't feel like it, or when you have your own needs...
 - Soon the opportunity will be over to do such things...
 - 3) It is only here that you will be able to tell those who do not know Christ of his saving love,
 - to assist those who are struggling with sin to overcome...
 - to warn those who are going astray...
 - to tell your children of Christ and to instruct them in His way!
3. How many wonderful opportunities do you miss?
- a. When you might have acted for God's glory but instead you gave yourself over to pouting or to covetousness or to lust...
 - How many hours have you wasted that might have been redeemed?
 - How quickly the hours slip away—your life is but a vapour!
 - Number your days that you may apply your heart to wisdom!
 - They will soon be over.
 - b. I do not say this to make you feel guilty...
 - I say this to encourage you not to miss out on what is excellent!
 - By the grace of God, you can live for God's glory—you can please Him through Jesus Christ!
 - Don't miss out!

- Get going!
 - Redeem the time!
- c. Make the most of every moment... Set aside priorities
- 1) Don't waste another Sabbath—
 - God calls you to set aside one day in seven to spend in direct communion with Him,
 - laying aside your ordinary work, laying aside your ordinary recreations and studies...
 - It is a day to spend getting to know Him, meditating on His promises and His commandments, evaluating your life before Him, giving thanks and praise to Him, fellowshiping with His people...
 - Don't spend it doing mundane things—like work or school!
 - We need the Sabbath more than ever in our busy distracted society...
 - It is the market day of the soul.
 - What's more, God has commanded us to keep it and it is sheer disobedience to set aside his command.
 - 2) Don't neglect the daily morning and evening sacrifice—
 - a daily time of communion with God for you and your family...
 - a time to pray for grace and give thanks...
 - a time to prepare your heart to serve God all day...
 - a time to teach your household in the way of God...
 - a time to remember what Christ has done and to give thanks.
 - 3) And do your daily work heartily as unto the Lord...
 - Serve your neighbour as you would serve Christ,
 - Remember that what you do for them He receives as done for Himself...
 - Reach out to the needy and provide for your own...
 - Make your home a lovely place...
 - Train up your children, encourage your friends...
 - Look for ways to show love to your spouse...
 - Set apart time for what is most important!
 - You only have so many hours...

- Redeem them all

TRANS> But if you are going to redeem the time, there is one thing you must understand...

III. You must understand what the will of the Lord is.

A. You can see why this is essential!

1. If you do not know what is pleasing to the Lord, you may end up doing what He hates...
 - If you are commissioned to build a house for a king, you don't just go and start building...
 - You find out what he wants!
 - It would be foolish to just assume that you already know...
 - or to use your own blueprints when He has already drawn up what He wants you to do!
2. If you don't know His will, you don't even know how to come to Him...
 - a. You may think you can just come as you are...
 - Not knowing that you are sinner, a part of sinful fallen human race that has deeply offended God...
 - a fallen race in which each member cannot please God until he repents of his sin and comes to Christ for forgiveness...
 - a people so corrupt that our cleansing demands nothing less than that God's Son be offered up as a sacrifice in our place...
 - and until you repent and rely on Christ, everything you do that you think is pleasing to God is actually offensive to Him...
 - Just to think that you, a sinner, could please God without the sacrifice of Christ is an insult to God...
 - It is unacceptable—
 - b. And there are those who think that by bringing their good works or by participating in religious ceremonies,
 - God will be pleased with them...
 - But not unless they come to Him on the terms He has appointed in His covenant...
 - with faith in Christ who was slain for sinners...
 - Only then are their works acceptable to Him, and then not for the sake of the works themselves, but Christ's sake.

TRANS> And so you see the point...

3. It is stupid to come to the Lord unless you understand what He requires of you.
 - That is why Paul prefaces this verse with the words
 - “Do not be unwise...”
 - You need to know what God wants so that you can redeem the time and walk in His way...
 - being careful to do what He wants.
 - You have to be able to understand the difference between what is important and what is not important,
 - What is good and what is evil...
 - Not based upon your own corrupt judgement...
 - You are not the judge...
 - but based upon God’s judgement...

B. But how can you find out what the will of the Lord is?

1. There is no shortage of foolish answers to that question!
2. And because this is such an important topic, I am going to take it up next week in a separate sermon...
3. But for now, let me just give you the short answer...
 - You find out what the will of the Lord is from His Word.
 - In the Bible, He has given all we need to know.
 - That is where you learn what is pleasing to God.

Conclusion:

Christian, isn’t that what you want to do? To please the Lord?

- If you are a true Christian, it is...
 - You are one who wants to live the new life you have been given—life in communion with the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit...
 - You want to please God so you are careful to use all your time to do His will...
 - I have said a lot this morning,
 - but that is what it all boils down to:
 - Because you have been given new life in Christ,
 - be careful to use the time you have been given to do what God wants.