SESSION 11
WALKING WISELY

EPHESIANS 5:15-21

15 Pay careful attention, then, to how you live — not as unwise people but as wise — making the most of the time, because the days are evil. 16 So don’t be foolish, but understand what the Lord’s will is. 17 And don’t get drunk with wine, which leads to reckless living, but be filled by the Spirit: speaking to one another in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, singing and making music with your heart to the Lord, giving thanks always for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, submitting to one another in the fear of Christ.
1. **BE WISE** (Eph. 5:15-17)
   - Paul warned his readers about the need to be wise and careful in all things, including how they invest their time.
   - Believers are to focus on living according to God’s will.

2. **BE FILLED** (Eph. 5:18)
   - Paul urged all believers to be controlled by the Holy Spirit, not by things that lead to reckless living.
   - Explain that all believers are sealed with the Holy Spirit and receive Him at conversion.
   - Interpret “being filled with the Spirit” in terms of being directed and influenced by the Holy Spirit.

3. **BE GENUINE** (Eph. 5:19-21)
   - Paul identified actions that resulted from being filled with the Spirit: singing and speaking God’s Word, having an attitude of thanksgiving, and submitting to other believers.
   - Characterize these actions as expected actions for all believers.

**SUMMARY STATEMENTS**
God calls believers to walk wisely, depending on the Holy Spirit for direction.
- God calls believers to live carefully in light of God’s wisdom.
- God calls believers to surrender to the control of the Holy Spirit.
- Believer’s attitudes are impacted by the Holy Spirit living in them.
FOCUS ATTENTION
What advice would you give someone about walking in the dark?
• When you walk in the dark, shine a flashlight, and step carefully and deliberately. Don’t wander off alone; stay on the path with others.
• Paul told believers to walk as children of light in a dark world (Eph. 5:8), and then he gave instructions on how to walk wisely in the dark.

EXPLORE THE BIBLE
EPHESIANS 5:15-17
Why must believers pay careful attention to how we live?
• As believers, we must pay careful attention to how we live. We’re not to wander aimlessly but to make wise choices that lead to glorifying God and becoming like Jesus.
• There’s much in this evil world that can trip us up. We need to be aware of what’s going on around us and seek God’s wisdom on how to respond.

What are wise ways to use time?
• Wise believers will make the limited time they’ve been given count for God’s purposes and glory.
• Making the most of the time doesn’t mean frantically filling up every minute. A wise use of time could be reading, resting, or running. It will at times be working, waiting, and witnessing.
• We should snatch up opportunities to know Christ better and shine His light in this dark world.

What’s the focus of a wise life?
• Wise believers pay careful attention to understanding and living according to God’s will.
• Although Paul was speaking of understanding God’s will of summing up all things in His Son, wise believers also invest effort into discerning and living out God’s specific will for their lives.

EPHESIANS 5:18
Compare and contrast being drunk with being filled by the Spirit.
• Drunk people are under the control of the alcohol in their bloodstream, potentially negatively influencing them to reckless actions.
• When believers are filled with the Spirit, He directs and influences them, giving them wisdom beyond natural human capabilities.
• Alcohol is a depressant; the Holy Spirit stimulates us to understand and do God’s will.

How should we understand the phrase “filled by the Spirit”?
• The verb Paul used carries the idea of continuing to be filled by yielding to the Spirit on a regular basis.
• Being Spirit-filled is for all believers, not an elite few.
• The verb is imperative. Being filled is a command, not an option. We aren’t commanded to be sealed with the Spirit—that’s a completed action God took at our conversion (Eph. 1:13).
• The verb is passive. Being filled by the Spirit isn’t something we work up ourselves. God fills us with His Spirit when we yield control to Him.
• The verb is present-tense, indicating a continuous action. Believers are to go on being filled, continually surrendering to the Spirit’s control.

EPHESIANS 5:19-21
List characteristics of Spirit-filled believers. What does each look like in daily living?
• Spirit-filled believers sing even if it’s just a “joyful noise.” Biblically-based lyrics teach theology and Christian living. When we sing Christian music in its various forms, we speak God’s truths to each other, and express praise and gratitude to God.
• Spirit-filled believers thank God for being victorious over evil, being with us in this dark world, and sovereignly working His purposes in the midst of sorrow and suffering.
• Since the Spirit of Christ is humble, all who are filled with Him are humble. In a spirit of mutual submission, we set aside our rights and serve one another in love.
• This is how wise believers live genuinely every day, not just at church and small group.

SUMMARIZE & CHALLENGE
Describe a wise walk “in the dark.”
• A wise walk is Spirit-led, Spirit-dependent, and Spirit-filled.
• A wise walk deliberately makes lifestyle choices that lead to spiritual transformation.
• We walk carefully by using time wisely, taking advantage of every opportunity to know God’s will, and working for His purposes.
• A wise walk is a joyful walk. We sing, give thanks continually, and build positive relationships through mutual submission.
• Personal Challenge: Is your walk best described as wandering or wise? How will you pay more careful attention to lining up your priorities with God’s purposes? In what ways will you make better use of your time? What steps will you take to yield control of your life to the Spirit?
A COMIC STRIP

Display two large poster boards side-by-side on a focal wall. Ask adults if they ever read “Goofus and Gallant” in Highlights for Children magazine. Invite volunteers to describe the premise of “Goofus and Gallant.” This comic strip consisted of two side-by-side panels with a drawing and brief description of each boy’s actions. It was intended to teach children moral lessons by contrasting the bad actions of Goofus with the good actions of Gallant.

Write Goofus and Gallant at the top of the two boards. Explain that Paul created his own positive and negative contrasts with some “not … but” commands. Invite adults to identify the first “not … but” command in Ephesians 5:15. Write “not unwise” on the Goofus poster and “but wise” on the Gallant poster. Guide the group to determine from verses 15-16 specific actions and attitudes of people who live unwisely and wisely. Record responses on the appropriate posters.

Request someone identify Paul’s second “not … but” command in verse 17. Write “don’t be foolish” under Goofus and “but understand the Lord’s will” under Gallant. Guide the group to contrast foolish and wise people, recording responses on the posters.

Ask the group to state Paul’s third “not … but” command from verse 18 and record them on the posters. Once more, guide the group to determine specific actions and attitudes of being drunk and also of being filled with the Spirit. Write responses on the appropriate posters.

Urge adults to silently consider which poster best describes their lives. Explore how each participant can become a wise “Gallant.”

SINGING IN SCRIPTURE

One of the more unique elements today’s church has is congregational singing. As a pastor in the Northeast, those without a church background often mention this to me. Yet people aren’t put off by it, but they’re intrigued. Why do we sing corporately?

Paul told the church that instead of using our words for harmful things (Eph. 4:29), we should use our words for holy things that honor the Holy Spirit (v. 18). Particularly, we’re encouraged to speak “to one another in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, singing and making music with your heart to the Lord” (Eph. 5:19). In our singing in worship, there are two particular elements that Paul brought up: what we sing and to whom we sing.

For some, the topic of what to sing in church may cause discomfort or disagreements. However, it ought not be so, if we just follow Paul’s instructions. There are three specific musical elements mentioned in Ephesians 5 (also in Col. 3:16). These are “psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs.” Psalms refer to the Book of Psalms, which God’s people sung in worship both in the Old Testament and in the New Testament. They also sang hymns, most famously after the last supper when Jesus and His disciples sung a hymn before heading “out to the Mount of Olives” (Mark 14:26). Hymns likely refer to songs that praise God, which have their roots in Scripture and biblical truth. Spiritual songs may refer to songs that are “voicing holy aspiration.”

Each of these three types of songs would have a dual audience: God and each other. Our primary audience is God when we gather for worship. As Colossians 3:16-17 tells us, “Let the word of Christ dwell richly among you, in all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another through psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts. And whatever you do, in word or in deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.”

While of course we worship God when we gather, it should have the effect, similar to the sermon and the Lord’s Supper, of building each other up.

1. F. F. Bruce, The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians, TNICNT (Grand Rapids: Berdms, 1984), 159.

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