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WALKING WISELY

Ephesians 5:15-17

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Ephesians Lesson 43

Walking Wisely
Ephesians 5:15-17

Billy Graham was asked what he was most surprised by in life. He answered, "Its brevity." (*Christianity Today* [Oct., 2006], p. 90.) Graham has lived a relatively long life, but he still feels the sting of life's shortness.

The older you get, the more you think about using your time wisely in light of eternity. You try to evaluate what really matters. Moses must have been feeling this when he wrote Psalm 90. He had spent his first 40 years as a son of Pharaoh's daughter, living in the comfort of the palace. He spent his next 40 years as a fugitive shepherd, wandering around the Sinai Peninsula. He spent the last 40 years of his long life leading a rebellious bunch of Israelis out of slavery in Egypt, but not quite into the Promised Land.

As they were camped somewhere in the wilderness, shy of that goal, he wrote Psalm 90, reflecting on the brevity of life and the severity of God's judgment. In verse 12 he prayed, "So teach us to number our days, that we may present to You a heart of wisdom." He concluded the Psalm with the prayer (v. 17), "Let the favor of the Lord our God be upon us; and confirm for us the work of our hands; yes, confirm the work of our hands." The poignant repetition of his final plea shows that even Moses was afraid that his life's work would amount to nothing, unless God confirmed it, or [NASB margin] gave permanence to it.

Our text tells us how to walk wisely, so that we make the precious years that God allots to us count for His purpose and glory. There is a paradox in that God is the sovereign over time. He has a divine will (5:17) and He "works all things after the counsel of His will" (Eph. 1:11). And yet at the same time, He allots time to us to use responsibly to bring about His sovereign will. We must walk carefully and redeem the time that He gives us (5:15-16). To make your life count for eternity, you must give careful thought to how you spend your time.

When we think about being godly, we probably think about holiness in the moral realm. But do we think about being people of godly purpose? The fact that God is a God of purpose means that if we are to be like Him, we will be people of purpose in line with His purpose. Jesus lived to accomplish the Father's purpose and knew that He had done so as His short life neared the end. He prayed (John 17:4), "I glorified You on the earth, having accomplished the work which You have given Me to do." Jesus knew the Father's purpose and He lived according to it. To be like Jesus, we must follow His example by being people of godly purpose.

The apostle Paul was also a man of godly purpose. He lived to exalt Christ and to know Him (Phil. 1:20-21; 3:8-16). He purposed to preach the gospel to the lost and to disciple the saved (1 Cor. 9:24-27; Col. 1:27-28). He told Timothy to discipline himself for the purpose of godliness (1 Tim. 4:7-8; see also, 2 Tim. 3:10). As he faced execution, Paul knew that he had fought the good fight, finished the course, and kept the faith (2 Tim. 4:7). In our text, he shows us how to walk wisely, so that we make the most of our lives in light of God's will, His plan for the ages (5:17):

To walk wisely, you must know what God wants you to be, what dangers to avoid, and how to take advantage of the opportunities that God gives you.

1. To walk wisely, you must know what God wants you to be and how to get there.

Some popular TV preachers will tell you that God wants to help you fulfill your dreams. But that's backwards, because it leaves you as the lord of your life and makes God your servant. The Bible is clear that God is the Sovereign and we are His servants. We exist to fulfill His will, not vice versa! So it is vital to know from Scripture, where does God want us to go with our lives? Much more could be said, but note these four things:

A. What God wants you to be:

- (1) God wants you to please and glorify Him with your life.

As we saw in verse 10, we are "to learn what is pleasing to the Lord." Colossians 1:10 says that we are "to please Him in all respects." Paul said (2 Cor. 5:9) that his ambition was "to be pleasing

to Him." He wrote (1 Cor. 10:31), "Whether, then, you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God." As the Westminster Shorter Catechism puts it, "The chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever." To glorify God, in simple terms, means to make Him look good, as He truly is. You extol, magnify, and exalt His person and attributes through praise, honor, thanksgiving, trust, and obedience. To do this requires a second goal:

(2) God wants you to know Him more deeply.

You can only extol, magnify, exalt, and glorify God to the extent that you truly know Him as He has revealed Himself in His Word. Martyn Lloyd-Jones often lamented that our chief problem as believers today is that we do not know God as deeply as we ought. Paul said that he counted everything else in life as loss and rubbish in order that he might know Christ (Phil. 3:7-8). The only way that we can know Him is as He has revealed Himself in His Word. So as you read the Bible over and over, from cover to cover (not just your favorite verses!), ask God to open your eyes so that you come to know Him more deeply. With Moses (Exod. 33:18), pray, "show me Your glory."

(3) God wants you to be a godly person.

You can only glorify God to the extent that you display His holiness through your obedient life. As 1 Peter 1:14-16 puts it, "As obedient children, do not be conformed to the former lusts which were yours in your ignorance, but like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all your behavior; because it is written, 'You shall be holy, for I am holy.'" Jesus said (Matt. 5:6), "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied." To walk wisely, so that your life counts for eternity, ask God to give you that hunger and thirst after His righteousness. He promises that you will be blessed and satisfied when you pursue that course. Sin always brings pain and sorrow.

(4) God wants you to proclaim His excellencies by your life and words.

First Peter 2:9 says, "But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light." Or, as Paul has told us (Eph.

5:8), “you were formerly darkness, but now you are Light in the Lord; walk as children of Light.”

Thus God wants you to be growing in the direction of pleasing and glorifying Him with your life. You will do this as you come to know Him more deeply and grow in godly character. He wants to use your transformed life (from darkness to light) to display His excellencies, both by your behavior and your words as you bear witness to the saving grace of the Lord Jesus Christ.

B. How to get there:

Again, much more could be said, but note three things:

- (1) You must discipline yourself for the purpose of godliness.

You can sit around wishing that you were godly for the next ten years, but it won't happen! You must discipline yourself for the purpose of godliness (1 Tim. 4:7). In all of my years of pastoral ministry, I would say that the presence or absence of self-discipline is one of the most determinative factors in whether a person will do well or have serious problems in his Christian life. Self-control or discipline is a fruit of the Holy Spirit. (I must be brief here, but I devoted an entire message to it [12/31/2006, “Learning to Control Yourself”] if you want more.)

Paul compares discipline for godliness with physical exercise and the analogy is helpful in thinking about how to do it. The athlete sets a goal and then works hard to reach that goal. By definition, self-discipline means going against your feelings for a higher goal. The athlete wants to win, so he works out every day and controls his diet even when he doesn't feel like it, so that he might win the prize. Also, discipline is an ongoing process and not a quick fix. You must set aside all hindrances, keep your eye on the goal, and manage your time in line with your goal.

Many Christians will hear this and say, “That sounds like legalism!” But it is not legalism if your motive is right. Sure, if your motive is to take pride in how spiritual you are because you had your quiet time, you're being legalistic. But if your motive is to love and know God so that you might please Him because He saved you by His grace, that is not legalism. It is a fruit of the Holy Spirit who is working in your life to make you godly.

- (2) Godly discipline includes the disciplined intake and application of God's Word.

Paul says that we should walk as wise people, not as unwise. Proverbs 2:6 tells us where wisdom comes from: "For the Lord gives wisdom; from His mouth come knowledge and understanding." He has given us His wisdom in the Bible and especially in the message of the cross (1 Cor. 1:18-25). To be a godly person who glorifies Him through your life, you must be getting a steady intake of His Word. As Psalm 1 pictures it, the godly man meditates on God's Word day and night, so that he is like a tree planted by a river. His deep roots sustain him in times of drought. You should have a plan to read constantly and consecutively from both the Old and New Testaments. I also try to read a daily portion from the Psalms or Proverbs.

But note that I said, "the disciplined intake *and application* of God's Word." The bottom line for every portion of Scripture (even the genealogies!) is, "How should I then live?" How does this Scripture affect the way I should think, feel, behave, and relate to God and to others?

- (3) You must learn to think biblically about all of life.

Walking wisely requires that you be a thinking person. But, not just thinking logically, but also thinking *biblically*. You should develop a biblical worldview, so that you filter news, movies, literature, moral issues, and all of life through a biblical grid. Both Francis Schaeffer and Martyn Lloyd-Jones did this well, and I commend their writings and their biographies to you.

Thus, to walk wisely, you must know where God wants you to go and how to get there. But there is another side to this:

2. To walk wisely, you must know what dangers to avoid.

Paul says that we are *not* to walk as unwise people, but as wise. We are to redeem the time, "because the days are evil." He warns us *not* to be foolish, but to understand what the will of the Lord is. As we saw last week, the Lord's will involves His purpose for the ages to sum up all things in Jesus Christ. If we don't live in light of that purpose, we are foolish. Again, more could be said, but note three things that characterize unwise people:

- A. Unwise people are oblivious to the dangers that fill evil days.

Certainly, all times are evil because the world is under the dominion of the evil prince of darkness (Eph. 2:2; 1 John 5:19). But it seems that some times and places are more evil than others are. The world I grew up in was evil, but you could not see sex scenes or hear profanity on television or even at the movies. But now it's hard to find movies or even TV shows that are not filled with filth and profanity. This very day, our city is featuring a celebration of homosexuality as if it were normal and wonderful! We live in especially evil times!

Psalm 1:1 says, "How blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked, nor stand in the path of sinners, nor sit in the seat of scoffers." Unwise people ignore such warnings and cavort with such people. Jesus said that we should pray that we not be led into temptation, but many believers play around with it as if it were a toy. In reality, it is a loaded gun.

- B. Unwise people adopt the world's relative system of morals and values.

As I said a couple of weeks ago, when you're around a bad odor for a while, your nose adjusts and it no longer smells so bad. When you're in an evil day, if you aren't careful, after a while you don't even notice how rotten things have become. After a while, even Christians absorb the world's values. We think it's okay to live together outside of marriage, especially if it saves money, because the world does so. We accept divorce for incompatibility, because after all, shouldn't we be happy? We tolerate gambling as innocent fun, because there are casinos and state lottery tickets everywhere. We begin to look just like the world, except that we go to church occasionally. But Paul calls such behavior unwise and foolish.

- C. Unwise people live for temporal fulfillment and pleasure.

In the Bible (especially in Proverbs), fools live for immediate gratification according to their feelings, impulses, and desires. Fools, like the rich man building bigger barns to store his goods, don't think about the fact that today could be their last and then they face God and judgment. Fools don't think about storing up

treasures in heaven. They are focused completely on the here and now. In short, they do not understand the will of the Lord.

The Bible warns us about these and many other dangers that can sabotage our walking wisely with the Lord. To walk wisely, you must know what God wants you to be and how to get there. And, you must avoid the spiritual dangers of this evil day. Finally,

3. To walk wisely, you must take advantage of the opportunities that God gives you.

As we saw last time, “making the most of your time” is literally, “redeeming the opportunity.” The idea is, being alert to the spiritual opportunities that God brings your way, so that you grab them as a wise merchant grabs a bargain. The reason that you are alert to these opportunities is that you are living wisely, with a view to eternity and God’s kingdom. As Paul puts it (2 Cor. 4:18), “we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal.”

Here are a few of the opportunities that God will bring your way. If you’re wise, you’ll grab them:

**Bible intake*—Read through your Bible each year. Listen to the Bible on CD’s while you drive. Study the Word in a more in-depth fashion. Take advantage of the many fine Bible teachers on the internet. Plug into our adult Sunday school or come on Sunday nights and interact on the sermon. The opportunities are abundant!

**Prayer*—Pray with your mate. Join a home fellowship. Join us on Sunday evenings for prayer. Form your own small group for prayer. Pray through our directory.

**Reading good Christian books*—Set a reading goal. I put on the church web site a bibliography for various areas of reading, plus another one for Christian biographies. If you’re currently reading no books per year, set a goal of two or three. If you meet that goal, up it to five or six. If you aim at nothing, you’re sure to hit it every time. So, aim at growing through reading.

**Discipleship*—Take a newer believer under wing and help him to grow to maturity. Get into a Forum of Four and after you’ve

been through one or two cycles, lead your own group. It will stretch you to grow!

**Witnessing*—If you've never been trained in how to share your faith, go through the Evangelism Explosion or Way of the Master training that is offered here from time to time. Be ready to give a defense for the hope that is in you (1 Pet. 3:15). The jail ministry or the international student ministry can always use more workers.

**Sharing material blessings*—If you are not consistently, faithfully giving more than a tithe, you're probably not being a good steward by laying up treasures in heaven. You should give enough that it crimps your lifestyle, where you have to ask God to provide the extras for you.

**Helping others in practical ways*—Take a meal to a family when the mom is in the hospital. Help an elderly person with yard cleanup or a ride. Cook or help clean up for the college ministry.

**Victory over sin*—You will face strong temptations to sin, which can either be a time of testing your faith, where you grow through victory; or a time of defeat. Be prepared, be armed, and grow through the testing.

**Suffering*—Suffering is an opportunity for ministry. As you trust in Christ and show His sufficiency through your trials, other believers will be strengthened and those who don't know the Savior will be drawn to Him.

Conclusion

Luis Palau tells a story from one of his evangelistic crusades in Paraguay many years ago (*Heart After God* [Multnomah Press], pp. 114-116). At each crusade they set up family counseling centers, where people could come for spiritual help. They trained local people to work in them, teaching them how to lead people to Christ and how to deal with common problems.

At this crusade, a man named Jose who took the training could not even read or write. But he loved the Lord and he had a fantastic memory. He passed the training exams because he had memorized all the answers. But because he was illiterate, the training director asked the receptionist not to assign Jose to anyone who looked like a professional person.

One day all the counselors were busy when a very sharp looking gentleman walked in. He was obviously upper middle class. The only one left with no one to counsel was Jose. The receptionist got flustered, but Jose was alert. He walked up to this gentleman and said, "I'll help you." The receptionist was too bashful and embarrassed to say no.

So, Jose took this gentleman into a room, talked with him, and led him to Jesus Christ. He turned out to be a medical doctor. Meanwhile, the receptionist had gotten through to the training director and explained the situation. When the doctor and Jose walked out of the session, the training director greeted the doctor warmly, but just got a quick, "Hello." He thought, "Jose must have blown that session." So he told the receptionist, "The next time a distinguished looking gentleman comes in, make sure he is assigned to another counselor. Don't give him to Jose. Even if I'm busy, call me anyway and I'll take care of it."

The next day the same doctor returned, with two men with him. These men were well-dressed, impressive looking men also. The center was busy, so the secretary rushed off to get the training director. He came out, turned on the charm and offered to help the man and his friends. But the man insisted that his friends talk alone with Jose.

So, they went and found illiterate Jose, and he took the men into a private room. Jose led the doctor's two friends, who were also doctors, to faith in Christ! And, the next day, the three doctors brought a fourth man who was having family problems and illiterate Jose led that man to Christ! The next week, the doctors had a party and the only one from the counseling staff that they invited was humble, uneducated Jose.

While all of our times are in God's hands (Ps. 31:15), He wants us to walk wisely, redeeming the time, in accordance with His sovereign will. No matter who you are, if you walk with Christ and grow wise through His Word, He can use you greatly for His eternal purpose.

Application Questions

1. Does your concept of being godly include being a person of godly purpose? Should it? What does this mean?
2. How can a person inclined to living impulsively by his feelings develop self-discipline? What steps should he take?
3. What is the difference between being self-disciplined and being legalistic? What warning signs should a person watch for?
4. Of the opportunities listed (under Point 3), which one or two should be at the top of your priority list?

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