

Ephesians Series

16. Live not as unwise but wise

We are getting close to the end of Ephesians. Let's review where we have got to and what this letter is about.

First of all we were told who we were:

We are children of God

- *chosen by the Father*
- *redeemed by the Son*
- *sealed by the Spirit*

- *we have been saved by grace through faith*

So as God's people we should

- *walk according to the calling we have received*
- *be mature and not be blown around by every wind of doctrine*

So we should act in the following way

- *as new people*
- *as imitators of God and*
- *as children of light*

And that's where we have got to. We've already seen how we live to different standards from the world around us. Most of these were negative things - showing how we shouldn't live.

What Paul is trying to stress here are not commandments, but attitudes. If we are God's people our attitude should be to imitate Him. The first verse we had read to us this morning sums this up nicely.

Be very careful, then, how you live--not as unwise but as wise, 16 making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil. (NIV)

For a change, the Authorised Version has the best translation of this verse and gets the meaning of it spot on, although we do need to unpack it a bit still

15 See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, 16 Redeeming the time, because the days are evil. (AV)

Walk circumspectly. Take care how you walk. Watch your step! God wants us to live wisely not as fools

Our walk should be as wise men and women - not fools.

These words *wise* and *foolish* are significant words in scripture and they are used here with great significance.

If you look in the book of Proverbs and even in many Psalms, there is verse after verse that describes the actions of a foolish man versus the actions of a wise man. I believe Paul is using the same kind of contrast here. What is the definition of wise and foolish?

Prov 2: 6 (C) For the LORD gives wisdom, and from his mouth come knowledge and understanding. 7 (C) He holds victory in store for the upright, he is a shield to those whose walk is blameless, 8 for he guards the course of the just and protects the way of his faithful ones. 9 (C) Then you will understand what is right and just and fair--every good path. 10 (C) For wisdom will enter your heart, and knowledge will be pleasant to your soul.

All wisdom comes from God. So who is the wise man, someone who walks in a way that's blameless and just and faithful. Paul explains it clearer I think as we go along but the call to be wise isn't a call to be sensible, but it's always a call in scripture to walk blamelessly, uprightly and faithfully before God. That's what being said. The alternative is to be foolish.

And a fool?

Psalm 14:1 The fool says in his heart, "There is no God." They are corrupt, their deeds are vile; there is no one who does good. 2 The LORD looks down from heaven on the sons of men to see if there are any who understand, any who seek God. 3 All have turned aside, they have together become corrupt; there is no one who does good, not even one. 4 Will evildoers never learn-- those who devour my people as men eat bread and who do not call on the LORD?

A fool is always a moral deviant - but more than that, one who lives in a way that is godless and morally corrupt.

We are called to be the people of God - so don't walk in the same way as other men. What has most come across to me in the weeks we have been looking at chapters 4 and 5 is that those that live as fools are not merely those who clearly live morally questionable lifestyles - prostitutes, criminals, drunks, druggies or the rest, but respectable pillars of the community that uphold the law and live respectable lives. But they are godless lives, lives lived for self, lives lived for personal pleasure. The hurt nobody (except themselves), and they sit and enjoy the pleasures that life in a nice town like Swaffham offers the. But without Christ and without hope.

Not only are we called not to live like criminals or the morally lax - we are called to be wise - that live according to God's will, that walk blamelessly uprightly and faithfully before God.

The trouble is that we have made a virtue of being wealthy, respectable and keeping ourselves to ourselves - we decry those who preach prosperity ministry; that say trust God and He will make you prosper - yet we live according to their values.

As we saw last Sunday evening, there's nothing wrong in things which we have, in respectable lifestyles, nice things or valued relationships - it just becomes foolish when these things become gods - idols and then that's sin; that's foolishness.

We are called to be as wise and not fools. So what is wise versus foolish. Paul is very helpful here as he gives us three examples of what wise living is about.

1. Make the Most of every opportunity

Translators have a problem with this one and the NIV almost certainly does it no service. The correct translation falls to the AV again.

16 Redeeming the time, because the days are evil. (AV)

Redeeming the time. Redeeming means buying back, getting back time. What can that mean? The last phrase helps us - for the days are evil. For people who live in the world around us their time is theirs and they use it as they please as much as they like.

We have been redeemed by Christ, therefore we need to buy back that time for the glory of God. Did you know that there are 1440 minutes in a day? And you sleep for about 8 hours - 480 minutes of them? What about the rest? Who gave you that time? Who has extended His grace towards toward you to have that time - God? And whose son or daughter are you? These are God's minutes, we are God's people.

The days are evil, let's not waste time on things that do not bring God glory, that satisfy ourselves and our senses. We can either spend our time on foolish things - things that seem right to us - or we can redeem that time for God - we can make the most of every opportunity.

Let's examine our day before our Lord and our God this morning. Are we wasting His time? Are we wasting our time? Where is the focus of our lives. Are our lives spent as the wise, pleasing God and doing His will - or are we doing something else. We are His children, we are His redeemed people.

2. Know the Lord's will

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

If we are not to be like the world around us who say "There is no God" then we must act according to God's will. We must understand what God's will is. How? Why don't you come back this evening when our subject will be Spiritual Direction.

As we've seen before in Ephesians, doing God's will is not merely following law. Because law cannot cover all eventualities. It might help us to make moral decisions that were never thought of when the Bible was written be they issues like abortion, drug-taking, GM crops or the like. But what about God's will for my life. How for example do I use my time constructively as a Christian? We've had a call to make the most of every opportunity: to use time wisely. But what is wise use.

Our relationship with God is a personal one. We are His children; He is our Father. How do we discern His will in our lives?

Ephesians helps us again here. Like all of Paul's letters, it has integrity in itself which means many of the important issues are answered in the letter as a whole. So what are we told?

God's will for us is to walk worthy of the calling that God has called us with (Ephesians 4:1).

God's will for us is to be no more children tossed to and fro with every wind of doctrine by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness where they lie in wait to deceive, but to speak the truth in love, that we may grow up in Him in all things (Ephesians 4:14 and 15).

God's will for us is to be followers of God as dear children and walk in love as Christ has loved us (Ephesians 5:1 and 2).

God' s will for us is to have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather to reprove them (Ephesians 5:11).

We have already seen all these points before. These are general points and in those sermons I tried to see how they would apply to us personally. Why?

Because we are not looking at law here. We're looking at life and the whole statement of Ephesians is that we have become into relationship with the living God. He is our Father; we are His children. How do I find out what my earthly father desires of me. Do I look at his letters or books he has written. I'd be looking in vain. We always speak to one another. It's the same with our heavenly Father.

Do you want to know His will - then communicate. Let's read that bit from Proverbs 2 again

Prov 2: 6 (C) For the LORD gives wisdom , and from his mouth come knowledge and understanding. 7 (C) He holds victory in store for the upright, he is a shield to those whose walk is blameless, 8 for he guards the course of the just and protects the way of his faithful ones. 9 (C) Then you will understand what is right and just and fair--every good path. 10 (C) For wisdom will enter your heart, and knowledge will be pleasant to your soul.

The ways of God are known to His people. I have often heard Christians criticise others saying - "I hate the arrogance of so and so - because they talk as though they have a hotline to heaven". Whereas some people can be very glib in their talk about their relationship to God, the truth is, if you are a child of God then you DO have a hotline to heaven. When you speak you address Abba, Father. it's a truth.

If you don't know what God's will is in your life, then pick up the phone and ask - pray that God will reveal His will to you.

Just in case you think that it is arrogant to talk like that then look at the next verse.

3. Be filled with the Spirit

18 (C) Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit.

Be filled with the Spirit. Be filled is not quite the sense here: the idea in the Greek is keep on being filled with the Holy Spirit. If you are a Christian here this morning, then you have the Holy Spirit in your life - He's there as a seal of your inheritance that you are a child of God.

One of these days I shall do a session in the Holy Spirit and we shall look into some of the more controversial aspects. But for now we'll just consider this verse in the context it's given. How do we know God's will. How might we understand and do that will? we are weak and fallible.

Verse 18 is about mind control. What controls your mind. I frequently watch real-life police programmes on telly. The majority of petty assault crimes happen in situations were people are drunk. And you see people, who I'm sure are reasonable people when sober making total idiots of themselves. I don't think Paul is making a statement about alcoholism here. He's questioning where we

get our satisfaction in life. We are called to do God's will. But what controls our minds. Many people get joy out of life by going to events where alcohol is consumed in large quantities. If you have seen programmes on telly about what young people do - dancing, night clubs, Ibiza uncovered and all that you find that the people involved are often respectable young people - yet satisfaction in life is got by mind altering drugs, not only too much alcohol. But what fools they make of themselves when their state of mind is altered - or worse, they commit acts of violence, indecency, rape or worse. Decent people brought down by a drug that causes them to do things that they would never do if they were sober.

And here we have the challenge, what is filling your mind, what is controlling it? The encouragement is to be filled with the Spirit. We can either choose to try to satisfy our minds as the world does - and be ruined or be filled with the Holy Spirit. It's a good comparison, because the implication, quite correctly is that when you are filled with the Spirit you also go through a mind altering experience - you get conformed into doing the will of God! You can start doing things through the Spirit that you could never do - like do the will of God. Start performing acts of faith that you never thought you could do. Starting to deal with habits you never thought you could conquer. Doing things in God's service that you never thought you could do. Understanding the things of God in a way you never thought you could. Seeing God deal with issues in your life you thought you could never deal with.

The Spirit of God alters who we are so we are transformed into the image of Christ. We become imitators of God, we act as the children of light, we live according to the new nature - we live worthy of our calling! In fact all those things we have come across in previous weeks.

I'm aware here that I'm speaking to people who are not heavy drinkers and we have people in our Fellowship who are teetotal. If you are then fine - we'll never see you on Police File.

The trouble is that our Churches are full of people who are spiritually teetotal. They may or may not consume alcohol, but they certainly aren't full of the spirit either. By all means be teetotal on wine, but don't be teetotal spiritually - be filled, keep on being filled with the Holy Spirit. Why? Because we need to be wise, we need to do the will of God.

And that's the challenge we come to this morning. This scripture was written to Ephesians: to young Ephesians, old Ephesians, married, parents, children slaves, masters, free - everybody. This word is for everybody. If you are a Christian this morning then the call God is to you. Live worthy of your calling, be mature, be imitators of God, live as children of light. Be wise, discern the will of God and live by it so be filled with the Spirit.

Let's pray.

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