

"UNLOCKING OUR SPIRITUAL BANK ACCOUNT"

PART 12: EPHESIANS 5:15-21

In our passage this morning, Paul starts out contrasting the unwise and the wise. This distinction of unwise and wise (Paul is being kind when he says "unkind," he is talking about a fool) is throughout the Bible. We are all familiar with the book of Proverbs and how it contrasts wisdom and foolishness. We need to understand the [biblical] definition of a fool and a wise person. So, we will start with Psalm 14:1, which says this: "The fool says in his heart, 'There is no God.' They are corrupt, they do abominable deeds, there is none who does good." A fool is one who rejects God. He or she can look around at the wonders of creation and conclude that it all "just happened" and that it is going nowhere. It is just out there. They see no mighty purpose, no immutable law, no intelligence underlying it all.

Now, [the book of] Proverbs gives us many characteristics of fools. Let me just summarize a few of them: They joke around about sin. They don't take it seriously (Proverbs 10:23). The fool doesn't need advice. They know it all (Proverbs 12:15). A fool flaunts his folly. They are proud of their sin (Proverbs 13:16). Fools tend to be destructive and often are self-destructive (Proverbs 14:1). Fools are deceptive (Proverbs 14:8). Fools mock sin (Proverbs 14:9). Fools are rebellious and reject authority (Proverbs 15:5). Fools do not learn from their mistakes and failures (Proverbs 17:10). Fools tend to be immature (Proverbs 22:15). Fools are irrational. They have twisted thinking (Proverbs 26:4). Fools lose their temper and vent their anger (Proverbs 29:11). And we could go on and on and on. You get the idea.

[Note: the above-referenced passages in Proverbs indicate that a wise person does the exact opposite of a fool].

OK then, how does a foolish person become wise. Are they stuck in their foolishness or is there a way out? Where does one get wisdom from? Proverbs 1:7 says, "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge..." It starts with acknowledging God's existence and then doing what He says,

right? First Corinthians 1:30 says, "And because of Him [God] you are in Christ Jesus..." That is the whole reason you are saved, because of God. We talked about that earlier in Ephesians. We are saved today because of the work of God in our lives. Paul goes on to say that Jesus "became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption..."

So, that is where wisdom comes from.

Let me give you one last scripture reference before we delve into our passage in Ephesians. This is out of Titus Chapter 3, New Living Translation: "Once we, too, were foolish and disobedient. We were misled and became slaves to many lusts and pleasures. Our lives were full of evil and envy, and we hated each other." That was US at one time. "But—[something changed] When God our Savior revealed His kindness and love, He saved us, not because of the righteous things we had done, [that sounds like Ephesians, doesn't it?] But because of His mercy. He washed away our sins, giving us a new birth and new life through the Holy Spirit. He generously poured out the Spirit upon us through Jesus Christ our Savior" (Titus 3:3-6 NLT). Isn't that a great passage?

Paul says that we are no longer fools who are lost in our sin. We now have the mind of Christ. And as we have read through Ephesians, we also have the Teacher of truth, the Holy Spirit, indwelling us. And, of course, we have the complete canon of holy scripture readily accessible (multiple translations, multiple languages, many forms). So then, not only did we go from death to life when we got saved, but we went from foolishness to wisdom. Our lives were completely changed because of Christ!

So, that is my little background leading into Ephesians. This is how our passage begins – Paul says, v 15...

READ Ephesians 5:15-17.

Paul is following this logical progression as he goes through Ephesians. Now he has come to the part [of the letter] where, now that we are saved, which he has established; now that we have repented of your old way of life, now that we are right with God – that is all where our Christian life

starts, right there – then, v 15, “Look carefully how you walk...” If you recall from last time, we talked about what walking means; we said that “walk” refers to our daily conduct, our lifestyle. Paul says, “from this point forward be careful how you live your life. Make the right choices. Spend your time wisely...” Paul says walk “...NOT as unwise [not as fools], but as wise.”

As I started this lesson out, I just painted a broad stroke of biblical differences between how wise people live and how fools live (those scriptures out of Proverbs). The differences go beyond merely head knowledge or personal beliefs or even political ideology. There is a difference in their behavior. Paul tells the Ephesian believers and us, “You need to walk carefully, not as fools, but as wise people.” As Christians, we are to walk differently from the world. We are to live differently. We are to be different, stand out. “You need to walk CAREFULLY.” That is the word Paul uses.

Now, let me illustrate this from my own experience, what “walking carefully” means. My wife and I enjoy hiking together. Back in the summer of 2019, we spent the day hiking up to the top of Guadalupe Peak. That is the highest point in Texas. It was a very challenging trail – 4.2 miles up to the top, an elevation increase (from the parking lot to the summit) of nearly 3000 feet. Then, of course, once you made it to the top, then you had the 4.2-mile walk back down. It was an all-day thing. I will tell you that. On the trail there were places with big rocks and steps that we had to negotiate. There were some smooth parts, but there were a lot of rocky parts. To help us maintain our balance on the uneven terrain, we used walking sticks. So, let me tell you, we walked carefully! We were not in a hurry. Our eyes were focused down on the path in front of us and then slightly ahead. Every step was deliberate and carefully made. It was challenging going up the mountain, but it was just as challenging coming back down. You could very easily trip and fall and hurt yourself if you did not walk carefully. As you can see, we made it to the top. Our endeavors were successful that day, but afterwards, we could barely walk. We went

to a restaurant and we could barely get into the restaurant. It was a hike. It was quite a day. So, from my own personal experience, that is my vision of walking carefully.

I think Paul is painting a vivid picture about the Christian life in general when he says "walk carefully." Every step we take needs to be well thought out. It is important that we pray about and pay close attention to the details of our life. We should fully understand the consequences for a missed step, for making a bad decision. There is an old expression that "fools rush in where angels fear to tread." It is in your own best interests to walk carefully, isn't it? So, in our day-to-day Christian lives, we are to walk wisely being very careful to stay on the right path and to make wise decisions.

In v 16 Paul says, "making the best use of the time, because the days are evil." So, make the most of the time you have been given. The writer of Hebrews puts it in different terms. He talks about running a race. "Running with endurance the race that is set before us" (Hebrews 12:1). So, life is like a race. It has a definite length and a course predetermined by God. It has a beginning and an end. James in his letter describes our life as "a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes" (James 4:14). All we have is now. Yesterday is gone. It is behind us. Good, bad or anything in between, as my mom used to say, "it is what it is." There's nothing we can do about it. It is over. And tomorrow, well, tomorrow may never come. That is even more depressing. There is no guarantee that we have tomorrow. Listen, all we have is right now. All we have is today.

At the end of v 16 Paul says, "the days are evil." We are living in an evil time. [Is there] any argument about that? Just watch the news! Crime and all these bad things that are happening in our government and elsewhere in the world! Paul is saying this back in his day and age. It has not changed. The days are still evil. It was the case with the Ephesians back in the First Century. It is the case with us here today in Rockwall, Texas. The days are evil. The sins that Paul mentioned earlier in Ephesians Chapter 5 (that we looked at last time) – sexual immorality, impurity,

greed, filthiness, foolish talk – sound familiar? These are rampant in our world. And things are not getting any better, are they?

Second Timothy 3:13 says, “evil people and impostors will go on from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived.” So then, given all of that, depressing as it is, what are we Christians to do? Well, Paul tells us in Galatians 6:10, “as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith.” We are different from the rest of the world. By the way, when I read that in Second Timothy, it reminds me of what Paul said back in Ephesians 2:10. We always quote Ephesians 2:8-9, but we forget about Ephesians 2:10, “For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works...” So, good works are important. That is why we were created. They do not save us, but they are important. So then, make the most of the time you have left. There is a sense of urgency in Paul’s words here.

And then there is that little word, “therefore” that Paul uses throughout Ephesians connecting his thoughts...

“Therefore,” v 17, “do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is.” It is interesting that our pastor talked about God’s will in his sermon. What is God’s will? Well, let’s keep this simple. First and foremost, He wants us all to get saved, right? That is the first one. That is His will. Be saved. Hopefully you all have all done that. That is where it starts. But it does not end there, does it? Look at v 18...

READ Ephesians 5:18-21

When I was reading this passage and preparing for this lesson, it just popped into my mind, First Thessalonians 5:16-18: “Rejoice always; pray without ceasing; in everything give thanks; for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.” That is what it reminded me of.

V 18 says, “And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery...” It is a waste of time. It is not a good thing. “BUT [here it is...] be filled with the Spirit.” That is the contrast.

How many in here have ever seen a person who is drunk? When a person is drunk or high, as the case might be, we call it "being under the influence" of [whatever it is – alcohol or drugs or some medication the person is on]. That substance is controlling their mind and causing them to exhibit "erratic" behavior. By contrast, we are to be controlled, under the influence of the Holy Spirit.

[At this point a class member pointed out a passage of scripture that he felt explained why so many people act foolishly. "For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. For it is written, 'I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart.' Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe. For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles" (1 Corinthians 1:18-23). So, there is a contrast made in the scripture about how the world acts, whether they be Jews or Greeks. Gentile or Jew, it does not matter. They just have their different hangups. But we (Christians) are different [because we possess the wisdom of God].]

The book of Ephesians is divided into two parts. The first part is theology and the last part is practical application. We are in the application part of it. Before we started the practical application part of his letter, at the end of Chapter 3, Paul prayed something for the Ephesian believers. I pointed this out several times because it is kind of a hinge-point in the book. He prayed, "that you [believers] may be filled with all the fullness of God" (Ephesians 3:19). We described what that was. It meant that the Holy Spirit takes full control of every aspect of our life -- "filled with the Spirit," right? All aspects of our life turned over to Him. So, the picture that Paul paints here of being drunk with wine is appropriate. It is a good one. It is one that they would have all understood. In the same way that alcohol

controls a person who is drunk, the Holy Spirit should control us, should direct our behavior.

Now, back in v 17 he talked about understanding what the will of the Lord is. The first thing was being saved. The second thing was being filled with the Spirit, which we just talked about. IF you and I are filled with the Spirit and we are letting Him control us, then everything else that Paul is going to mention from v 19 to the end of Ephesians will take care of itself. The natural bi-product of a spirit-filled life is what v 19 and 20 say. You will have a life full of praise and thanksgiving and joy and gladness and then, as you see in v 21, humility.

Speaking of v 21, it says, "submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ." I want you to remember that verse because he is going to talk about submission of the wives to husbands. That is just an example he uses. Here he is saying "submit to one another." Don't forget that. It is not just one group that is submitting. We are all submitting one to another out of reverence for Christ – because of what Jesus did for us. So, this verse, v 21, is the key to the relationships that Paul is getting ready to discuss (we will look at next time). [He will start with the relationships between] husbands and wives. Then he will talk about relationships between children and parents. And then, slaves and masters / employees and bosses. Every spirit-filled Christian, man, woman, boy, girl, young or old, middle-aged, is to be a humble person, a submissive person.

Charles Ryrie in his commentary says this: "The subjection [Paul is talking about here in Ephesians] is to be mutual and based on a reverence for God. The differing responsibilities [because we all have different roles, right?], if followed, bring harmony, but, if ignored, they bring difficulties." I have seen examples of both in churches. So, there is this mutual submission even though we all may have different roles to play within the body [of Christ]. We will talk more about that next time with husbands and wives. I just wanted to introduce this next section with v 21.

In the last few chapters, we have covered a lot of ground. As Christians, we are to walk in a manner worthy of our calling (4:1); we are to maintain our unity (4:3); we are to build up the body of Christ (4:12); we are to put off our old self, the way we were before we were saved (4:22); we are to put on the new self with the new attitudes (4:24); we are to imitate God, to be like Him (5:1) and of course Jesus is our example; we are to walk in love (5:2); we are to walk as children of light (5:8); we are to walk carefully with a sense of purpose and focus (5:15); and we are to be filled with the Holy Spirit (5:18). We are to do something, right? So, Christianity is more than just believing the right stuff.

I want to close with a question – do you know what God’s will for your life is? Here it is (the things I just mentioned). Can we do this? Paul says, “Yes. Absolutely!” But, to do so is a matter of turning over our will to His. [It is] a daily submission. We cannot do it ourselves. We need His help, right? We need His power. We need His wisdom. But the days are short, Paul says. And the race is almost over. We do not know for us when the finish line is coming. It is coming though. My admonition for all of us is that we finish strong together.

The very last verse that our pastor read out of Matthew Chapter 12 was v 50. And it ties right in with knowing and doing God’s will. Jesus Himself made this statement at the end of Chapter 12: “For whoever does the will of My Father in heaven is My brother and sister and mother.” If you are indeed related to Christ, if you have a relationship with Him, you WILL do the will of the Father. That is what Jesus said. So, I guess as your teacher (whenever I prepare these lessons you know I am always teaching myself too because God is actually the Teacher), examine your life.

What do I need to do? There may be some things that you need to do to take that step of submission. And I am just going to leave that up to you, between you and the Lord, as to what that is.