

Walking Wisely
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Ephesians 5:15-21

“That is a wise person!” What characteristics would cause you to say that?

No one wants to look foolish or live foolishly. Okay, maybe your favorite comedic actor has made a fortune being foolish on the screen, but in real life even they don't want to look foolish or live foolishly. No one wants to live foolishly, but because of our rebellious tendency to do things our own way we all sometimes live foolishly and not wisely. Christ-followers can live wisely not foolishly!

In the middle of Ephesians five the Apostle Paul gives us several warnings/action steps to help us access the power of the Holy Spirit so we can “walk wisely.” He addresses our conduct, time management, decision-making, and issues of control and submission.

Big Idea: Jesus has given His followers everything we need to live wisely if we'll simply follow the direction of the Holy Spirit living in us.

Let's begin by reading these seven verses, Ephesians 5:15–21 (ESV)

¹⁵ Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise,

¹⁶ making the best use of the time, because the days are evil.

¹⁷ Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. ¹⁸ And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be

filled with the Spirit, ¹⁹ addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your

heart, ²⁰ giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, ²¹ submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ.

- Verse fifteen is a warning that calls for a decision.
- The warning: be careful in how I live (*“Circumspect comes from two Latin words which mean “looking around.” The Greek word carries the idea of precision and accuracy.”*)ⁱ Do we spend

more time planning how we will spend our next vacation than charting a course for how we will live?

- The decision: Have I decided to live my life and conduct myself in a way that is wise and not unwise? Those really are the two choices.
- Charles Stanley wrote a book called “Walking Wisely.” The first words of the introduction read, *“There are only two ways to walk in this life --- wisely or unwisely. There are only two types of choices – wise or unwise. Throughout Scriptures God admonishes His people to walk wisely.”*ⁱⁱ
- He goes on to say, *“The person who walks in wisdom experiences God’s presence, power, and wonderful, boundless approval...if you choose to walk unwisely, you can expect a far different set of outcomes.”*ⁱⁱⁱ
- We need to decide to conduct our lives depending on God’s wisdom.
- In the following verses Paul gets very practical starting with our time.
- Verse sixteen tells us to “make the best use of the time, because the days are evil.” Your translation may say, “redeeming” the time. We love that word redeem because Christ redeemed us! **What does “redeem” mean?**
- Paul is saying we should pay attention to how we use our time so we don’t squander opportunities God gives us, investing our time in a way that honors God. 1 Cor. 10:31 (ESV) says, “So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.”
- **What are some examples of using our time wisely to honor God?**
- Chuck Swindoll writes, *“We’re either procrastinators or workaholics. The first extreme passively resists God’s purposes for our lives; the second disregards the joy of peace and rest... We can overcome procrastination with discipline—directing our energies into what really matters... We overcome the extreme of restless workaholicism with discernment—recognizing that we were not created as machines to accomplish endless tasks but as works of art molded by God’s own hands to serve and glorify Him (Gen. 1:26-27; 2:7).”*^{iv}

- “The days are evil” can be interpreted two ways, we can “*use our time wisely and carefully in order to counter the evil in this world. Or it may refer to the way the evil world tempts us toward wasting our time...*”(Swindoll)^v
- We need balance in how we invest our time. The way to achieve that balance is to hand our calendars over to God asking Him to direct us on how we use our time for work, rest, and relationship.
- What about decision-making? Verse seventeen says we need to “understand what the will of the Lord is.”
- We could do a whole series of lessons on the mystery of God’s will.
- Does God want me to do this or that? Do I take this job or that job? Do we move to this city or that?
- Paul’s point here is simply to acknowledge God’s will in the decisions you make in life. Sadly, many professing believers barely acknowledge God when making decisions.
- How can I discern God’s will? Start by applying his “revealed” will. Obey the things that are not a mystery but are clear in scripture.
- In the gray areas pray for guidance, talk to wise believers who have made similar decisions, preferably those who don’t have a “dog in the fight” – anything to gain or lose by your decision. Don’t engage in “hocus pocus” looking for mysterious signs. Be open to whatever God has in mind.
- Verse eighteen contrasts being drunk with alcohol versus being filled with the Holy Spirit. We know how to spot an intoxicated person and can easily see the contrast. Would you trust your future to “Otis” the town drunk (as lovable as he might be)? Of course not!
- Let’s consider the other extreme. **What are the characteristics of someone who is “filled” with the Holy Spirit of God? How do verses 19-20 give us a clue about someone who is “Spirit-filled?”**
- [Here’s a good article from Chip Ingram:
<https://livingontheedge.org/2016/06/01/how-do-you-know-if-youre-filled-with-the-holy-spirit/>]
- Swindoll describes those who are filled with the Holy Spirit, [Their] ...*minds are clear to see all that Christ has done and is*

doing. Their hearts are filled with joy as their lips overflow with praise. The Spirit of God fills their hearts with gratitude as their mouths speak in “psalms and hymns and spiritual songs” (5:19). In fact, their entire lives are directed to God the Father through the Lord Jesus Christ (5:20) and by the power of the Holy Spirit.”^{vi}

- We are commanded to “be filled with the Holy Spirit,” so let’s clarify that.
- When we’re saved we receive all of the Holy Spirit. I realize some sincere Christians don’t see it that way but I believe scripture indicates that the Spirit of God indwells a believer at the point of salvation (regeneration.)
- Biblical proofs: *“Romans 8:9, if a person does not possess the Holy Spirit, he or she does not belong to Christ. Ephesians 1:13-14 teaches us that the Holy Spirit is the seal of salvation for all those who believe...”^{vii}*
- When we’re saved we receive all of the Holy Spirit, the question is when does the Holy Spirit receive all of us?
- A car only has one steering wheel and only one driver at a time. Who’s steering my life, me or the Spirit of God? Do I give it up and take it back?
- **Based on these verses, how can I check my own life for evidence that I am following the direction of the Holy Spirit? How can I spot when conduct is from me or from Him? Why don’t most believers live this way?**
- Quoting Charles Stanley again: *“If a person chooses habitually to walk apart from wisdom, he can expect God’s disapproval of his life. If he walks without wisdom long enough and excludes God from his life until the day he dies, he will die without Christ as his Savior and spend eternity separated from God.”^{viii}*
- That’s a warning for unbelievers; Paul was writing to followers of Christ.
- We might take comfort in knowing that our eternal destiny is secure but miss the point of these verses. Being saved doesn’t automatically mean we are living our lives “filled with the Holy Spirit” and “walking wisely.”
- Verse twenty-one is a transition to what we will study in the rest of Ephesians five. We don’t live the Christian life alone, we live

it with others. That means we have to put their needs ahead of our own.

- Next week we'll talk about family relationships.

So, What's the Takeaway?

- No one wants to live foolishly. Without a plan, all of us will live unwisely.
- It's human nature to want to "call the shots" with no advice. Frank Sinatra's song "My Way" was a big hit but it's not a plan for wise living.
- Some people consider themselves "free spirits" and just want to drift from thing to thing. The first clue that that's a problem is that they are focused on their spirit and not the Holy Spirit.
- Paul has given us some principles to point us to the power of God's Holy Spirit so we can live wisely and not unwisely. Let's do a quick review:
 - Decide to live wisely in the power of the Holy Spirit. That means being "careful" to slow down and pay attention to how we live.
 - Be intentional about how we use our time. Am I "buying back" time that might be wasted? Am I turning my calendar over to God? Is my use of time balanced so I'm neither a procrastinator nor a workaholic?
 - When I have a decision to make in life do I seek God's will before I just plow ahead? Do I start with the things He has made plain in scripture as His will for me and my life?
 - Am I "intoxicated" with all the distractions and foolishness of this world or am I allowing my personality and conduct to be controlled by the Holy Spirit? If I'm saved I already have ALL of the Spirit. The question: does He have all of me?
 - No one wants to live foolishly. Followers of Christ don't have to.
 - Jesus has given His followers everything we need to live wisely if we'll simply follow the direction of the Holy Spirit living in us.

ⁱ Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). [*The Bible exposition commentary*](#) (Vol. 2, p. 47).

ⁱⁱ Stanley, Charles F. "Walking Wisely: Real Guidance for Life Journey." *Walking Wisely: Real Guidance for Life Journey*, Thomas Nelson Inc., 2006.

ⁱⁱⁱ ibid

^{iv} Swindoll, Charles R.. Insights on Galatians, Ephesians (Swindoll's Living Insights New Testament Commentary Book 8) (p. 275). Tyndale House Publishers, Inc.. Kindle Edition.

^v ibid

^{vi} ibid

^{vii} <https://www.gotquestions.org/receive-Holy-Spirit.html>

^{viii} Stanley, Charles F. "Walking Wisely: Real Guidance for Life Journey." *Walking Wisely: Real Guidance for Life Journey*, Thomas Nelson Inc., 2006.