

WALKING WITH WISDOM

Sermon by Pastor Scott Lowther

Ephesians 5:15-21

October 9, 2011

We are going to talk today about a few things. We are going to continue on Paul's admonition for us to walk in a worthy manner. We are going to look at how that applies with wisdom. By the way, if you want to make good decisions don't follow some of the precepts in the bible. It's not whether or not you have an open or closed door, because if you study those out Paul did 2 missionary journeys without an open door. It's not whether you hear that still small voice, because that's not always accurately reflective in the way you make choices. It's not whether or not you have a peace about it, that's so often a cop-out for being lazy. So the way to make biblical decisions is none of those things. The way to make a biblical decision is God's admonition to us to be wise and to use wisdom and not to look for a sign, or roll the dice or say "I don't know where I'm supposed to go but I saw a license plate that says Wyoming, so I guess I am supposed to go there." That's not how you live your life. That's superstition. You live your life on the truth of God's word by walking in wisdom. So today we are going to look at the contrast that Paul lays out between somebody who is wise and somebody who is foolish. It doesn't have anything to do with intelligence; it has to do with certain biblical criteria. So we'll look at the biblical definition of those. We're going to see a contrast between being spirit-filled and being drunk. We're going to talk a little bit about drinking so if you are a person who simply likes to tip the bottle, I'm just telling you what the scripture says on the topic – take it up with the author. Then we are going to look at a very strong admonition at the end of our text from the last couple of verses we will look at today, regarding worship. Not just people who participate in worship but people who lead worship. So it's got a lot of content so we'll get right to it.

Jesus in Matthew 9:5 is talking to the layman and he said "**rise and walk**". For some of us I think God's exhortation to us by his spirit this morning will be "rise and walk". It's time to start moving on; it's time to begin to move. The Christian life is called "the walk"; it's not called "the sit". You know what happens when you sit, you get all hardened in your arteries and in your joints, and you just can't walk. Faith is faith of movement. Paul compares it to a race but today he is talking to us as a walk. So there's a direction we need to be going, there's a path we need to be on. Paul's continuing to exhort us from chapter 4 on what he called "the worthy walk". So today's walk will be a "walk of wisdom".

Ephesians 5:15-21: 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.

So again we are going to have these great contrasts in our text today. Why is it we should be walking carefully while at the same time he exhorting us to act as if the battle is already over and singing and rejoicing in what's done? Why is he saying I should be alert and filled with the spirit as opposed to being under the influence of something else? Why is he comparing a fool with a wise person and what does that mean biblically as opposed to just a world's way of looking at it? So we are going to break this down verse by verse and I think there are 3 major sections we will look at. The first one is we are going to contrast biblical wisdom and biblical foolishness. It's not an exhausted study today because if you were doing that, it would take months. So I am just going to give you selective highlights of an overview of what that looks like. Probably the worst thing you could call a Christian is a fool, if you understand what the bible means by it. That's one of the most derogatory things that can be said of any human being because a biblical fool is a person outside of Jesus Christ. So let's look at the text and see what God would speak to us about. We'll break it down verse by verse.



VERSE 15

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

In Matthew 7:14 Jesus tells us that we walk on a narrow path. We enter by a narrow gate. By the way, narrow here doesn't mean necessarily restrictive, it means compressed. It means a path that's compressed. So why is that important? Why should I care that the path is compressed? Why should I care that the path, the narrow one, is trod well? Because it's a place of stability. So when Paul is saying walk carefully, the word "carefully" means accurately, without deviating, to be careful, to not stumble. It means walk on that compressed path because that path is solid. It may be narrow but it's solid. And if you walk it, you will not fall on it because it is compressed. If you get off the path you are going to get your feet tangled up and any kind of number of things but Paul's strong admonition to us is to walk in a careful manner.

Now I want to compare wisdom or wise to fools or foolish. I've give you Webster's definition first. By the way, when you interpret the bible you don't go to the world's definitions for your terms. But I am going to tell you what the world says and then I want to compare it to what God's word says. I'll think you will see a strong difference. So if you think a fool is a court jester or just somebody who is goofy or doesn't have a lot going on up top, I'll tell you that's not what the bible means at all.

FOOL

Webster: A silly or stupid person. A person who lacks common sense.

WISE

Webster: Is nobody's fool. Judging properly as to what is right or true or possessing judgment or discretion.

Let's not use those terms. When I'm saying foolish don't think that way. Don't ever bring your secular definition into God's word. It doesn't work hardly ever and it leads to a lot of confusion. God when he says "fool" isn't talking about intelligence, he's talking about something else.

So let me give you an overview of what a biblical fool is. We'll define it and then we'll see a biblical wise person and wisdom from that and then we'll see the applications of how we are to live.

So everyone in this world when you are born, you are born a fool biblically. You are afflicted with the terminal, congenital, foolishness to the core. Otherwise known as the sin nature. So foolish sin nature are equivalent. We know that from scripture because **Proverbs 22:15** says **"Foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child."** A kid isn't born on the straight and narrow and all of a sudden becomes foolish. We are born foolish biblically. So again, don't think "My kid is not a court jester", it's not what I am talking about. We are talking about a biblical definition of folly or foolishness.

I've got a lot of scriptures here. I know people are always asking for them. Some people say "You use too much scripture". I'm sorry, it's what we are supposed to talk about, isn't it? So the place to begin to understand God's definition of fool is right here.

Psalms 14:1 "The fool says in his heart, "There is no God." They are corrupt, they do abominable deeds, there is none who does good." The word fool here simply means empty-headed. It means the airhead says there is not God. It is not a complimentary term you throw out to somebody. When you say biblical fool to somebody, it's very derogatory. It goes against their pride but it hits right at the heart of the matter. God's first assessment of somebody who is foolish is somebody who says "there is no God".

Even though according to Romans Chapters 1 through 3, it says God has revealed himself to every man so that man is without excuse. Man has exchanged that knowledge of God for the glory of himself. He has turned from the worship of God to the worshipping of himself. So even though the fool may know in his mind intellectually that there is a God, he lives as if there is no God that has any right over him. So we are not just talking about somebody here who is an atheist, you can actually have a right profession of faith but a person who lives as though God has no rights over them is what God says is a fool. So again it's not just somebody who is an atheist.

I talked to somebody the other day who is an agnostic. Atheists don't want to say that because that seems so narrow minded. So they like to gravitate towards, "*You know, I'm an agnostic.*" I go, "*Man, do you know what you just said?*" "*No, what did I say?*" I said, "*The Latin equivalent is "ignoramus" so I'm when I asked you if you know anything about God you're saying, "No, I'm an ignoramus". So that's all the more reason for me to tell you about him, isn't it?*" So the point is it's trying to ignore the Lord. "*I'm not sure if he is there or not, I think he might be but I refuse to acknowledge that he has any right over me.*" That's being foolish. So it's not just whether you know the Lord by faith; it's not just what you profess; it's whether you acknowledge him as sovereign over your life. "***Why do you call me Lord, Lord and don't do what I say***", would be the equivalent of what Jesus is saying here. The person who says I call you Lord and ignore you, "***depart from me I never knew you***" is your response. The other response will be "***fool***" so that's a very strong condemnation.

Proverbs 14:9 says "***Fools mock at the guilt offering.***" In other words a fool biblically is a person who makes light of sin or who blows it off or says it doesn't exist or says, "*Whatever you think is right for you is good enough.*"

Proverbs 12:15 says "***The way of a fool is right in his own eyes.***" In other words, "*My path is my path, don't you judge me. Don't tell me what I should or shouldn't do. There are no absolutes. If it feels good to me, then that's the way it is because I determine everything and because there is no outside force that will force or subject me to its morality.*"

The fool also in ***Proverbs 16:22*** says "***The instruction of fools is folly.***" So not only do they gravitate towards folly and foolishness and God ignoring ways but they promote and teach others to do the same. That's why the world's education system is vastly used by the enemy to indoctrinate people into false

beliefs of every kind of way, shape and form. It's why you can turn on the Discovery Channel and go "Oh, I love these shows about nature" but they talk about what happened billions and billions of years ago and they weren't there. They don't know. The Lord was there and the Lord knows. But it's the world's way to indoctrinate you into a false belief system and to erode the facts and say, "There is no God and even if there was we've been around billions of years." "Really?" Even though the more serious research and reading that you do you realize that there are giant gaping holes in this stuff. To even say that you get people turning on you as if you are a fool and the reality is the fool is the one who says differently.

Proverbs 15:5 "A fool despises his father's instruction." So when I read those the Book of Proverbs, which by the way is a place you should learn about wisdom. **"Thirty-one proverbs and a proverbs a day keeps foolishness away."** There you go, your tip for the day. Have a proverb every day, foolishness will go away.

So I have a summarization here through the Book of Proverbs. This is what it says is true of a fool.

A fool denies God's ownership of his life.

A fool makes up his own morals.

A fool mocks the Christian world view in the bible.

A fool is undiscerning of truth. A fool hates God.

A fool justifies his life. A fool laughs at sin.

A fool seeks his own glory. A fool seeks his own glory.

A fool speaks of insignificant things.

A fool repeats fruitless behavior.

A fool lives the life of evil darkness and insignificance
and his affections are set on the things of this world.

I can just summarize this: **A FOOL IS A PERSON WITHOUT JESUS CHRIST.** That's a biblical fool. The issue here is not intellectual, it's a moral issue. It's not how you score on you SAT or what your IQ is. It's how you score on, *"Do I know the Lord? Have I been redeemed? Have I been forgiven?" Is the message of the cross that is foolishness to those who are perishing, did that become the power of God in my life? Have I passed from death to life because I see the value of the king of kings now where before all I saw was stupidity?"* That's the definition and distinction between being foolish and being wise. To be a biblical fool you don't have to be unintelligent.

Steve Jobs, the guy from Apple just died this week. I'm very disheartened over the matter. Some of the things that bothered me were well-know Christians and leaders. I'll quote one but I won't mention his name. He said:

"STEVE JOBS CONTRIBUTED TO SOCIETY IN THE ADVANCEMENT OF THE GOSPEL."

Steve Jobs was a Buddhist. He didn't contribute to the advancement of the gospel unless you consider that some of his Mac's were used for bible study programs. In that sense maybe, but his intent was not to spread the gospel. I only see those kinds of things as people throwing out compliments, jockeying for position to fight over his \$6.4 billion estate. If you read Jobs life you see story after story that says, **"He had somebody come in on his last days. He wouldn't have anybody visit him. He was too tired and weak but he wanted somebody to come in to write his life story. The guy asked him "why do you want me to write your life story?" Jobs said, "Because I want my children to know me."** One of his comments which echoed so much in my own heart was **"You know, I didn't spend a lot of time with them and I want them to know why."**

I'll tell you wisdom here is **Mark 8:36 "For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and lose his soul?"** Incredibly gifted, incredibly foolish. **"To those have been given much, much is required."** You have a man who is brilliant, who failed to use his brilliance for the glory of the Lord and he perished and without Jesus Christ he went to hell. That is the truth of the word of God. And though he might be admired by many and though we may love his product, the truth of the matter is his life was a waste because it wasn't used for the glory of the Lord. That's reality. So the world looks at the Christian and says, *"Look man, the Christian's are foolish because they believe all this nonsense."* The reality is they are the fools because as I said, the preaching of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing. So if you give the gospel to somebody and they say *"that's really foolish"* it's like, *"Man, you just condemned yourself. You just told the truth that you are a biblical fool and do you not realize the intensity of that and the results of that and the consequence of that. What does it profit you if you gain everything financially and monetarily and have esteem and the praise of lost men, then you die and go into a Christ less eternity where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth. And your family fights over your estate and the world lines up with its hand out."* It's tragic and we should lament over the loss of a human that was given so much and perished without the Lord and now is without hope. I think if we do that we will in turn grow in wisdom because part of being wise is discerning the time.

Let's continue. I'll give you the two definitions of wisdom as we contrast that. There's the Hellenistic or the Greek view. The Greek's view of wisdom was very different. As a matter of fact the Greek word for wisdom is "sophia". Some of you have named your children that. If you have a daughter it's a great name, meaning wisdom. It's a beautiful name if you look at it from God's wisdom. If you look at it from worldly wisdom or the Greek view, it's not so hot at all. Have you heard of the term, philosophy? Philos is a Greek word too. It means love, it means strong affection. So philosophy is the love of wisdom. The Greeks, they weren't big on behavior, they were big on sitting around and thinking a lot. So they had all these philosophers. When you talked wisdom to a Greek it meant theories, or philosophies or understanding or *"Let's talk about something so incredibly thought provoking that our heads hurt."* That was their idea of wisdom. Wisdom to them was intelligence. Now that's how most people view wisdom today. It's how smart are you? As I said, if you read the email I sent out, I asked a little kid at the church, *"What do you think wisdom is?"* He said it was *"The owl from Winnie-The-Pooh."* I said, *"Oh, that's very wise of you"* because wisdom means old, wisdom means attained or acquired knowledge. Biblically that's not so, so don't take the Greek mindset here. Throw that one out.

The Hebrew mindset was completely different. It was all about behavior. They viewed wisdom in regards specifically not to philosophy or high and lofty thinking. They view wisdom in behavior. The Book of Proverbs comes along and it is a code of moral ethics written not to the nation but to the individual. I think that's really profound. It's one of the only Old Testament books that is written to the individual. It's not, *"Hey did you read this Proverb and then point it to the person across the aisle."* It's you read the Book of Proverbs and God put his finger on you and says *"You need to grow here, you to learn this, you need to know that."* The first 8 chapters in Proverbs are on wisdom personified. Wisdom personified as a woman crying out in the street, ***"Follow me, follow me, avoid the harlot."*** ***"Seek me as you do treasure. Seek me and find me."*** It is constantly exhorting us to pursue after wisdom. So wisdom is God's remedy for foolishness, wisdom is God's way for making decisions not superstition, wisdom is God's way for making decisions corporately, wisdom is God's way for choosing all areas of your life and what you should do: How you should live, who you should marry, what should you do with your life. Those decisions aren't to be based by superstitious methods of fleeing.

As a matter of fact I mentioned to you this before, Gideon's fleece was not an expression of faith, it was an expression of doubt. Gideon's expression of doubt should not be mimicked. You should model Paul who walked in wisdom. He didn't say, *"The Lord hasn't given me this so therefore I am not doing it."* He said, *"Look, there's a faithful door open but now I can't go and I wanted to do this and I was prevented but nobody told me to do my other two missionary journeys but I did them anyway"* and God blessed him in doing them. But if he stood around waiting for a sign, he may have sat there for the rest of his life. He walked in wisdom and we are called to do the same. So he is admonishing us, remember what he said ***"Follow me as I follow Christ"***. He's telling us to walk the way that he did. Paul walked in wisdom. He didn't walk in science, he walked in wisdom.

Now let's look at a biblical wise person. ***Proverbs 9:9 "A wise person receives instruction"***. So in other words, they are teachable; they don't think they know everything. They don't go, *"You know what, I am a massive storehouse of every grain of intelligence in the entire universe."* Its like, *"No, you're*

really not.” **“A wise person receives instruction.”** They are teachable; they receive things from other people. They don’t say *“You’ve only been a Christian for a year; you obviously have nothing you can contribute to my life.”* They are willing to be taught. They are willing to receive and study and test the word by what they have been taught to see if it’s true. A wise person is constantly in the “I need to grow” mode.

Proverbs 13:20 “A wise person walks with the wise”. That means they don’t make friends with fools. Making a friend with a fool is fine for evangelism purposes; making a friend with a fool is not fine for hanging out all the time. Bad company will corrupt good character all the time. I tell that to you guys all the time because I recognize as I meet with people, this is people’s biggest mistake. They unequally yoke themselves with unbelievers and wonder why they keep behaving badly. Well, because you don’t heed God’s call. Don’t be yoked with them. **2 Corinthians 6:17 “Come out from among them, and be ye separate.”** If you are going to them, go to them with the gospel. Then you’ll find how good of a friend they really are when they tell you to *“hit the road”*. So listen to the word of God and follow God’s way. A wise man walks with wise people. Find somebody in your life who knows the ways of the Lord and say, *“I want to hang out with you.”* If Paul was a member of your Church, he should be the most popular guy in your church. You should say *“Man, where’s my Paul, where’s my Timothy, where’s my John. I want to hang with them because I want to hang with people who walk with the Lord because I will grow in wisdom as I hang out with people who are wise.”* So that’s a good trait for all of us to do.

Proverbs 14:16 “A wise person turns away from evil.” That means they are constantly in the repenting mode. *“Lord, is it me? Show me the errors of my life that I need to keep growing, I need to keep turning from.”*

Proverbs 16:21 “A wise person is discerning.” If there is any gift that is needed in the church today, it is discernment. Discernment is not simply the ability to tell what’s right from what’s wrong. Discernment is the ability to discern and tell the difference between what’s right and what’s almost right. Do you hear the difference? It’s not just between what’s right and wrong. It’s between what’s right and almost right. Discernment is a tremendously needed gift and we should gravitate towards people who have discernment. There are people in this church who have very strong discernment. I don’t want to point them out so that they are boastful over them but you should find them and hang out with them because you can learn to be discerning by hanging out with people who are. You can see the way that they think, you can see the way they rationalize, and you can see what makes them tick. It’s not a trait you can learn from a book. You learn it from observation from godly people. The Holy Spirit gives you discernment as a gift, if you are willing to do what he calls you to do once he gives it to you. He won’t make a bad investment; he wants his return on investment. So he’s not going to give it to you if you are not going to do anything with it. That’s what James talks about when he says **James 1:5-6 “If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives liberally to all without finding fault, and it will be given him. ⁶ But let him ask in faith, with no doubting.”** So it’s not doubting that God won’t give you wisdom, because he will, it’s doubting that once you have the wisdom, you’re not sure you want to do something with it. *“I want this decision, now I’ve got wisdom, oh that way is very*

clear, I want it this way.” That’s doubting. Then that man shouldn’t think he’ll receive anything from the Lord. God knows whether you are going to act. So pray for the working in me to will and to do before you ask for the wisdom. Pray for the strength to do what God calls you to with the wisdom regardless of whether you like it or not, you will do well.

Proverbs 29:11 “A wise man controls his emotions.” That means you are not exploding all the time. It means you’re able to keep your emotions in check. Not just anger but lust or any emotion. Emotions are healthy until they explode out and cause sin. Any emotion can explode out and be sinful. A wise man is able to keep his emotions in check. That’s a mark of a wise person. If you know somebody who blows up all the time, they are not very wise. They would be categorized on the other side of the coin.

Matthew 7:24 “A wise man builds his life on Jesus Christ and God’s word.” You remember the analogy. **“The wise man builds his house on a rock.”** A wise person builds his life on the precepts of scripture, builds his thought life on the word of God, builds his decision making on what has God said, and builds his priorities based upon God’s priorities. That’s a wise person.

Proverbs 13:1 “A wise man heeds his father’s instruction.” A fool would not receive instruction from his father. So don’t just think about your earthly dad because maybe you are like, “My dad didn’t have any good wisdom.” I’m talking about your heavenly father who is wisdom. **Romans 16** says of God as the **only wise God**, so the only source of wisdom is God. If you want to be wise you are not getting it anywhere except from him and as he gives that to you, he shares with you that communicable attribute of his and you can be wise. You are not going to find wisdom from UCLA, USD or any school. You are going to get it from the Lord.

Wisdom is a synonym for living by divine biblical standards. So here’s my first definition of wisdom for you:

Wisdom is the means by which the believer can discern and apply biblical knowledge to decisions and circumstances in the most God-honoring and God-glorifying way.

So where does wisdom come from? I’ve got a few verses then we are going to move on with our contrast.

Proverbs 2:6 “For the LORD gives wisdom.” And I have already quoted **James 1:5: “If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God.”** So if you lack knowledge, go to school. If you lack wisdom, get on your knees. Substantially different, isn’t it? You ask can I learn wisdom from a book? No. You get wisdom from God. And again Proverbs says you should seek it. It means there’s an active participation. You will be rewarded with wisdom as you pursue it. If you don’t pursue it, you are not going to get any. You need to go after it. The only reason you’ll ever go after it is if you see it as worth pursuing. If you don’t see it as worth pursuing, then that’s another mark of somebody who’s a fool. So if you are like, *“I don’t care much about wisdom, I just want to go to heaven someday and I’m not seeking it.”* God’s definition is: **“That’s foolish”**. Or as Proverbs would say in the Old King James: **“That is folly.”** Don’t do that.

Discernment again is not discerning just between right and wrong; good and evil. It is discerning between what's right and almost right. Discernment comes as a gift from God as you seek wisdom in his word with a willingness to heed what God gives you.

VERSE 16

“Making the best use of the time, because the days are evil.”

This is the major emphasis here; this is the reason why we should be walking in wisdom. The Holy Spirit is good in the way he constructs the scripture. Scripture in the Greek there's a thing called a definite article. Definite article is often translated as the word “the”. So it means something specific. So where scripture says not everybody has “the” faith, it has the definite article there. It doesn't mean not everybody has faith because everybody believes in something but the text means not everybody has saving faith, “the” faith.

Now Paul here, by the Holy Spirit writing through him, says you need to redeem “the” time. A specific amount of time and there's a specific season of time you are to discern. A wise man is constantly redeeming the time. You say, *“What does that mean?”* Let me give you a little definition of a few of these words, which are really powerful. As a matter of fact you can have two Greek words for “time” in the bible. You have the word “chronos”. You get the word chronology from that and that's a series of events. Like on the History Channel. Or you can have “chronometer” and that's a watch that tells time. That's one way to use the word time.

That's not the word that Paul uses here. He uses the word “kairos” and that means opportunity. It doesn't mean time, it means opportunity. So the text says ***“Making the best use of the opportunity because the days are evil.”*** We need to be discerning and we need to be wise and we need to be seizing and redeeming the opportunity the Lord lays out for us.

The word evil here is not the normal Greek word for evil which is “kakos”, which just means bad like rotten. This is “poneros” which means a calculated evil. It is not just something that goes bad by nature, it is something that is intentionally designed to be evil and inflict trouble. So he's not saying, *“You better learn to manage your time well because you live in a bad day.”* That's not what he is saying. He is saying this, *“You better learn to seize the opportunity God gives you because there is active evil trying to destroy it. There are not many great opportunities with the Lord in this evil day. And you better see them and grab them.”* Why is it that an opportunity looks so much greater after it is passed than when it is coming? Have you ever thought that through? It's like you see it coming and go *“Ah, I can get along without that. It's not that big of a deal.”* And then it goes by and you say *“Whoa, what was I thinking?”*

Mark Twain, the great theologian (not really) said this: **“I was seldom able to see an opportunity until it seized to be one.”**

What it is telling us here is that God gives us many things without limit: His love, his mercy, his compassion, his grace, his kindness. He gives us one thing with a very, very tight limit and that is time. Do you not know that your life is but a vapor? That it is here today and gone tomorrow. Do you not

know that there is a limited amount of opportunities that come your way and if you are not on that compressed path and you are dilly-dallying about the things of the world, you won't see it and there aren't many that will come your way. Discern the time for the days are evil. Seize those opportunities as they come because if you don't seize them when they are coming your way, you'll reach for them in vain after they've passed. There is active evil designed to prevent you from seeing them, from desiring them and to generate fear so that you won't pursue them. A wise man listens to none of that; a wise man listens to the Lord and jumps all over them because he is wise.

Psalms 90:12 "Teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom." If you're not wise one of the reasons you are not even pursuing it is because you don't discern that the days are evil. You go *"Each day goes on like before."* That's the mark of a fool, that's not wise. We live in an evil day. We live in a day that is vehemently opposed to the ways of the Lord and grows in it daily. We live in a day when the love of many waxes cold. We live in a day when people gravitate towards teachers that tell them what their itching ears want to hear.

I didn't sleep at all last night. I sat up till midnight watching Joel Osteen being interviewed by some guy and I'm pulling out what little hair I have left out of my head. I thought, *"How is it that people can believe this fool?"* He's a fool. He's anti-salvation. He does a lot of talking but he won't touch sin and he won't touch truth. If you are not talking about sin, the Holy Spirit is not working in your ministry – period. The Holy Spirit's job is to convict us of sin, of righteousness and of judgment. Not to sing "Kumbaya" with the Muslims. He calls us to be distinct. So that's God's heart here. That's what the Lord is after here. He calls us to be discerning. Again, if you are not discerning your life is vaporous. You are not redeeming the time.



I said last night to be kind of funny, I have issues with all kinds of products because of the way they affect me and my thinking and it's not because I'm ADD or because I'm Special Ed or any of those other things. I have a deal like the problem with the bite out of the Apple. I have another problem with a furniture company that I can't buy. It's called La-Z-Boy. I'm sure they are really great and comfortable and wonderful but I can't sit myself in something called Lazy Boy because a verse keeps coming in my head, ***"Redeem the time because the days are evil"***, get out of your La-Z-Boy, lazy boy! I just can't do it! So I'm very limited. The Lord is just always limiting everything I have. *"Lord, can I have this chair?"* *"Who name is on it?"* *"Nobody's – you can have that one."* That's just how I have to function because

the Lord is always dealing with me about something. So the Lord doesn't want me to sit in a La-Z-Boy and be a lazy boy. He doesn't want me to watch 10 hours of TV a day. It might be fine for you, but it's no OK for me.

I just had this major birthday and I'm going, "*Man, my life is half over.*" Don't let anybody fool you. Middle age isn't like 40-50. Middle age is like 38. Do the math. Middle age isn't 70. Do the math. It's a wile of the devil to convince you that you have plenty of time to get your act together somewhere down the road. Don't you remember in the bible where Jesus is talking and he says, "*There's a guy and he amasses a bunch of stuff and he said "Look, I'll build myself a bigger barn and house all this stuff and just sit in my Lazy Boy" and Jesus says "You fool, this night your life is required of you."* Redeem the time. Teach us Lord to number our days of right that we would gain our wisdom.

This is probably not very healthy but I started looking at a calendar. I figured the average lifespan is 78 years so I'm looking at 78 for me. I'm going I've got x amount of days left and every day I tick one off. I'm sure it's not healthy to do that but it really makes me think about how I am going to live this day. And if this is my last day do I want to have spent something on something ridiculous, do I want to spend my time watching something ridiculous, or would it be better if I say, "*Lord, is there an opportunity coming my way that I can see and jump on that would somehow bring glory to you because if it is coming, I don't want to miss it by being asleep. I don't want to miss it by forgetting. I don't want to miss it by being pre-occupied on the broad path. I want to make sure I am attentive and alert.*" That is Paul's admonition to us so if you spend 80% of your time focusing on the opportunities of today and tomorrow and no time looking back at your problems of yesterday, you'll do well. The past is the past – you can't change it, you need to move on and go on. You cannot change it. The future you don't know you have. All you have is this little sliver that God gave you today and it's a day that God ordained to give you and you should redeem it. The world, the flesh and the devil try to steal it and waste it. God says "**Redeem it**".

I've give you one of my thoughts of wisdom. We are all blessed with opportunities, with tremendously great opportunities. You say, "*I don't see them.*" God brilliantly disguises them as trials and tribulations.

C.S. Lewis said "**You know when opportunities come our way but they are dressed in coveralls and they look like work so we run from them.**" Opportunity comes to your way in trial and tribulation. It comes to your way as work. It comes to your way as a lot of things but God says, "*See it for what it is. It is an opportunity to glorify me. I am not wasting time. I gave you a limited amount and I want maximum return.*" So you say, "*Lord, teach me to be discerning of my days.*" So when a man plays a fool, he is most foolish with the time that he wastes. If you see a man who throws money out his window you would say, "*Man, that guy's a fool.*" If you see a man take his watch and huff it out of his car, you would say, "*What a fool.*" If you see a person take all their electronics and push them out in the street and say "free", you would say, "*What a fool.*" I'll tell you what, if that's what it takes so the man cannot be a fool then he's not a fool, he's a wise man because the fool is the person who wastes time under the false assumption that they have an endless supply. They don't discern the time and they don't understand that the Lord has called them to number their days.

The greatest category of foolishness biblically is the misuse of time and the failure to seize opportunity. You can't go back and change the past but you can certainly grasp an opportunity that comes your way today but if you don't number your days you won't see it. If you think, "*Well, maybe when I'm 30 or 40 or 70 or Haggai started his work when he was 90 years old so when I hit 90 I'm ready to get serious about the Lord.*" You fool. You don't know if you will be here next week. You don't know if you will be here next year. Don't buy into foolishness, buy into truth. Number your days right that you might gain a heart of wisdom. Why don't we see the days as evil? Most of us don't. We don't see the days as evil. We go, "*Oh, it's a great day. I can go surfing, I can do all this stuff.*" We don't see it as evil actively trying to disarm the good opportunities the Lord will send our way. That's something we need to weigh in our own hearts and minds.

VERSES 17 & 18

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.

Here again we have the discussion of being foolish. This is what gets interesting, this is probably a reference to what one of the Roman gods, Bacchus, who was a god of fertility and the god of wine. The Greeks picked up on him and they called that god Dionysus, who is the god of fertility and the god of wine. The Greeks also had a goddess of fertility and wine. The worship of this deity participated in getting together and having drunken orgies where you would get so hammered that you would work yourself up into ecstatic speaking, and start banging on cymbals. That's how they worshipped. They got hammered, had sex and passed out. If you guys have been around for a while there used to be a club in Kearny Mesa back in the 80's - 90's called The Bacchanal. Do you remember it? Some guy told me last night, "*I use to get hammered at The Bacchanal.*" I said, "*Do you realize the name Bacchanal came from the worship of Bacchus in a drunken orgy?*" The night of drunken passion was called "The Bacchanal". So this club was named after this and it shows that Solomon was right there's nothing ***new under the sun*** it's just a regurgitation of paganism every few years.

When Paul wrote **1 Corinthians 13** he is writing about speaking in tongues, "***If I speak in the tongues of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal.*** He is making a direct reference to that. So if you don't know that context you would wonder why I am talking about cymbals. That's what they did. He's saying, "*Look, the problem with this Bacchus worship of partying, getting hammered and having sex all over the place was so predominate that if somebody comes in your assembly and you sound like you are doing the same thing with your speaking in tongues, they are going to say you are insane and they are going to think they are in the wrong place. That's why you must be doing things decently and in order and if there's not an interpreter you've got to be quiet because (Paul is saying) I don't want the people to think you are worshipping Bacchus here.*" That's his point. He is alluding to that here with his terminology "don't be foolish". Foolish here simply means to not be out of control. Don't be out of control but

understand what the Lord's will is. Some people say, *"I don't know what God's will is."* Well the first thing here is God's will for you is not to be drunk. Don't get hammered all the time, don't get hammered at all. God doesn't want you under the influence of anything except his spirit. That's what he wants you under the influence of. If you ever had a colorful past and you ever drank too much, did you make wise decisions? Were your decisions in alignment with godly wisdom, which we talked about, or were they more in aligned with the foolish things? God says, *"Don't let your brain under the influence of something that's going to drive you back to folly."*



I want to spend a minute to talk about drinking. There are two camps. There's a camp that would even say Jesus never drank wine. They say total abstinence is the way you should live. You should never even have wine. Then they want to debate and argue as to whether or not Jesus had wine. Let's just think mathematically. Did they have refrigeration back in Jesus' day? No. When was the Passover? Spring. When was the wine harvest? That would be in the fall. How would you keep grapes from going rancid between the fall and the spring? That would be wine. If it was just grape juice it would go putrid so you had to ferment it to make wine. So there is wine in the bible and yes Jesus drank some. But I'll tell you what, Jesus never got drunk. We're talking about an area where there are some strong opinions on both sides so I am going to give you a basic bible way of looking at it. If you want a glass of wine with your meal, great. Nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving – have one. If

you want to have a bottle of wine with no meal – don't. So here's the best way I can put it to you biblically:

Understanding God's will

Be under the influence of his spirit

Alcohol is outside of God's will when we over drink or get drunk (1 Corinthians 6) or

When we become addicted to it and have to have it (1 Corinthians 6:12).

So again God doesn't want you to be addicted to anything except him. **1 Corinthians 16: "Imitate the household of Stephanas who have addicted themselves to the work of the ministry."** So you need to be a Jesus junkie not a bottle junkie. You need to be addicted to Christ and say, *"I've got to serve him. I'm getting all twitchy, I've got to go out and do something for the Lord because I can't take it anymore."* That's the kind of addiction God wants you to have. Twitchy, twitchy for the Lord. Not twitchy for a cork.

If you cause other people to sin in your drinking (Romans 14:21) then it's sinning. If you cause someone to sin by your lack of control, that is sinning. Or if you hurt someone, yourself or other people (1 Corinthians 6:20) then drinking in that context is wrong. If you cause your brother to stumble, it's wrong. So if you are a person who likes to have a beer on occasion, you know what, if you can do it as unto the Lord, great – do so. But I read "don't be drunk" and I know drinking gets drunk so if you can control it and know when to say when – good for you. I also think that once you start to serve and go up in ministry then you limit your freedom so you don't stumble your brother. So if you are leader and you want to have a beer, do it at home, don't do it at the church picnic. Are we good? We're moving on. OK? That's a basic overview. It's a disputable matter but do it in a God-honoring, God-glorifying way and you don't have to worry about it. If the spirit directs you and guides you and you're not convicted about it, then moderation and doing it with thanksgiving to the Lord, then that's appropriate. If it is anything other than that, don't do it because you'll be sinning and it will pull you into a path of foolishness.

The word "debauchery" in verse 18 doesn't mean what a lot of people think. It simply means wasteful. You see the contrast now. Wise - not wasting. Drunk – wasteful.

VERSES 19-21

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.

This passage here is loaded with stuff on corporate worship. I'm going to share 5 quick points on it. If you are a person who leads worship, you should listen. If you are a person who participates in worship, which is the rest of us, you should listen too. So it's not pointing at somebody, it's really discerning what God's heart is in the worship department. I don't mean worship dept. CBC, I mean in the worship area in all of our lives. God's goal in redeeming people is what Jesus said when he's talking to the woman at the well, **"God desires worshippers."** It's not just singing, it's how you live. The part of how we live is living a worshipful life.

BIBLICAL WORSHIP AND BIBLICAL SINGING - Flows out of being filled with the Holy Spirit. This means Christian singing or Christian worship is not natural. It's supernatural. True, God-honoring, biblical worship is supernatural because it's a result of being spirit-filled. If you go to some churches they say, *"Oh, we had such great spirit-filled worship."* It's like you either had spirit-filled worship, which was worship, or you had nothing. It's not you have worship that's not spirit-filled, that's carnal. As a matter of fact if you want to do some side studying you can go to the Book of Amos Chapter 5 and you can read about where God says *"You know what, you're singing drives me nuts. Your worship service stinks. They drive me nuts and I won't put up with them."* So what defines acceptable worship? We spend a lot of time working on our philosophy of worship I think that's really accurate and good but I want to give you biblical background and precedent for it.

- 1) It flows out of being filled with the Holy Spirit**
- 2) Christian worship is to be from the heart**
- 3) Give thanks always**
- 4) Sing so people hear**
- 5) Submitting out of reverence**

Verse 19 "Singing and making melody in your heart". We are talking about affections. Worship is the essence of valuing God in the affections and then expressing them corporately. That's biblical worship. Anything else isn't. Worship is expressing our affections corporately. This passage really points to the necessity of corporate worship. Somebody says, "Well, I can worship God my hugging a tree." I give them a bible and say, "Show me." They say, "Well, it's in there somewhere." "No, you are just in rebellion against associating with God's people. And I'll tell you and show you and in the bible where it says that you are a fool. Do not forsake the assembling of yourselves together as is the custom of some but all the more as you see that day approaching because you need to walk on the compressed narrow path and you won't do it without the help of the saints. You will gravitate towards the easy broad path that leads to destruction. So we are to exhort each other in that. One of the exhortations the body has

as we get together isn't just that you get a message from me or another pastor or that you hear a worship team lead you. The exhortation that you have one to another is the corporate worship.

Look at our text. Worship is to be undergirded by a deep theology of God's sovereignty. I'm taking this from verse **20** ***"giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ."*** If you don't have a good, solid, theological understanding of God's sovereignty that **God works everything after the counsel of his will for the good of his people**, if you don't believe that, you will never be a good worshipper because you will always be bitter wondering why God treats you the way that he does instead of saying, *"The Lord treats me with loving kindness. He treats me as a vessel of mercy and if he disciplines me, praise the Lord that he does."* No discipline seems pleasant but it produces a peaceable fruit of righteousness if I let it train me. I understand that he works in me that which is pleasing. If he didn't discipline me, he hates me. So he's conforming me into the image of His Son, so life makes sense. So without that deep understanding of a theology of sovereignty, you are not a good worshipper. Give thanks always for this is God's will for you, in everything, because he can work it for good.

This is sensitive for some worship guys. In worship we are to hear the other people sing, not just loud noise. Now I know the Heritage guys are going to go "Amen" really loud. Look at the text, ***"speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual song, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart."*** We should sing so that the people around us hear. See that's part of this exhortation of one to another. Did you notice today in the last little section when we sang almost acapella? Did you sense the presence of God in that? Did something happen when the noise faded and all of a sudden you just hear the saints sing? There's nothing more beautiful than hearing somebody who can't sing, that's 90 years old, singing "Amazing Grace". There is nothing more edifying or stirring. Paul says, "This is to take place. Don't drown out the saints. Let them exhort each other in psalms and hymns and spiritual song so that they are edified."

One of the things that I am really trying to do is we want to "mike" the congregation. We're going to figure out how to "mike" it and feed it into board so that we can hear the people sing. That's the difference between a concert and worship. It's the difference between participation and observation. We are to participate. We are to worship the Lord not watch other people do it for us. If we want God working in our midst we have to comply with his way. Paul is telling us "Look sing to be heard." Horizontal songs are appropriate. Psalms and hymns and spiritual songs. The style may vary but the content must be true. We can sing "How Great Thou Art" if you like that kind of music. Or we can sing "It is Well With My Soul", a horizontal song. "It is Well With My Soul" with words "When peace like a river attendeth my way, when sorrows like sea billows roll." I'm sure you've guys heard that, it's a song that is horizontal. We can also sing those vertical songs, "How Great You Are Lord. Worship the Lord in the splendor of his holiness" it's all those things. All of them are appropriate. The style doesn't matter. What matters is are we hearing and exhorting each other in that so that we are growing and singing to one another in psalm and hymn and spiritual song, singing and making melody out of the affections that boil over from our heart. That's the exhortation.

In Verse 21 is a very strong admonition. I want to give you a different perspective than maybe a lot of people would give you. **“Submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ.”** Some people try to take this verse and slap it down with a husband and wife. I’m not going there because I don’t think that’s where it goes. As a matter of fact I am positive it doesn’t go there. I’m positive it goes with the verses that precede it. It’s part of the spirit-filled walk. So being spirit-filled (Yes) you should be walking in wisdom. To be spirit-filled (Yes) you should be walking in light. But to be spirit-filled you should be walking in submission. Why is submission here in the first place? Because it’s the final expression that Paul is going to use on our text here before Ephesians 6 about being a spirit-filled Christian, walking in wisdom. It’s really important if you follow this.

The word “submit” means to rank under. It’s a military term. It means to come in alignment with. It literally means a renunciation of initiative; it means you agree to come in alignment with. What am I coming in alignment with, Paul? Husbands and wives later? No, that’s different, that’s not a corporate exhortation. He is telling us all to submit to one another. What does this mean, Paul? It means I am to take his admonition that he is giving me about worship and I am to submit myself to it. See what I am saying? I am to submit my ways to it. So if I’m a musician, it’s not about me being the center of attention, it’s about the Lord being the center of attention. If I’m mixing the music, it’s not about drowning out the people who can’t sing. Aesthetically that may be preferable, but biblically that’s immoral. You see the difference? If you focus on making things perfect, then you are making things perfect aesthetically so that certain people would be pleased but the one who is not pleased is the Lord. If you make things biblical, it doesn’t matter if somebody in the congregation sounds like a quacking duck, that’s the way God made them. If God wanted them to sing better, he would have given them a better voice. God wants them to be heard. I’m really stressing this.

Submission is often thought about as control. A husband should be controlling of his wife. He makes the decisions. That’s what people think submission means. This is not talking about control. It’s talking about humility, being able to humble yourself and consider others better than yourself so that they could be used by God too. How many people say, *“I’d love to join the Worship Team but I don’t have a talent.”* You don’t need a talent to join the Worship Team; you just need to open your mouth. The Worship Team is the congregation. These guys administer that. They are a tool that God uses to get us all there. If it is anything other than that, it’s extremely dysfunctional and God isn’t in it and then God isn’t glorified and his people aren’t edified. Then worship becomes something people decide they don’t want to show up for and they all come late. That’s how you know you are not doing it right. So we need to change all that.

Let me read you a quote from John MacArthur: **“As we are otherwise to be filled, otherwise to sing and otherwise to rejoice, so also we are to otherwise behave. Not blustering or letting our voices or abilities rise in selfish vaunting as most others do but subjecting and controlling our gifts in humility so that all may be used.”**

Do you see the difference? Why don’t churches do that? One word – pride. This is back where we started, **Proverbs 11:2** *“When pride comes, then comes disgrace, but with humility comes wisdom.”* It is very hard when you have been given a very tremendous gift to restrain it for the common good. Isn’t

it? It's very hard. People are like, "Oh, you are quenching the spirit". No, we are trying to release the spirit upon people. People are edified when they hear the saints' worship together. People are edified when they see somebody next to us raise their hands and worship the Lord. People are edified when they see somebody get on their knees and say, "God how great you are" and when it's a person next to us and not somebody we pay to do that for us. Do you see the difference? Paying people to do it for you causes there to become a chasm that you can't bridge. Doing it biblically and restraining and controlling ourselves, not singing above other people's abilities so they can't participate, but singing in a fashion that enables them to participate, is where humility kicks in and where God's honor and glorify is established in the people. Those are things that are critically important.

So the submission comes down to the way we behave as we assembly together. If I can't hear my brother next to me worshipping the Lord, I'm being robbed of a blessing that God would otherwise have given me. If I can't hear that, if I can't see that, if we don't have time to participate in that, we are going against the grain of what Paul is teaching us.

Here's my closing application for us. There's a way to discern biblical missed opportunities. The biggest one I could think of when I was preparing was the Ark. Noah builds the Ark 100 years. Nobody repents. It begins to rain, the Ark's door is shut – it's too late. That is the biggest in mankind's history. The biggest missed opportunity. How many of us miss opportunities?

John Piper said this **"If there are any regrets in heaven, they will only be that we did not use our earthly time more for the glory of God and for his growth in grace. If this is so, this is heaven's only similarity with hell which will be filled with agonizing laments over time that was wasted."**

You hear it? It is very wise. Charles Frances Adams was a 19th Century Politician. It's a famous story. He took one day off to go fishing with his son. In his memoirs he wrote "*Took my son fishing. A day wasted.*" His son has a diary that is still in existence today, you can see it on the internet. He said, "*Went fishing with my dad today. . . best day ever.*" Why did his dad say it was a wasted day when his son said it was the greatest day? Because his dad didn't understand the purpose of why God made him. Why is it that Steve Jobs would say, "*I want someone to write a book about me so my kids would know me and understand why I didn't spend time with them*"? Because he didn't understand the purpose God created him. God didn't create him to make a Mac. God created him and gave him children to become a godly father. God created him to glorify him. Not make billions with an iPod and neglect his family. God made him to honor him and he chose foolishness instead. Learn from them and don't repeat their behavior.

Let's pray together.

Father thank you so much for your word today. Lord, it is strikingly powerful. Yet Lord it does nothing if it is not applied. I pray that your spirit would move through this place and would search out each heart and would call us to that place where we begin to redeem the time. Teach us Lord to number our day's right. That we would gain a heart of wisdom. Maybe you are here today and you don't know the Lord. The first thing I will tell you biblically is you need Jesus Christ. Man looks at the outside, God looks at the heart. I'm giving you an opportunity today to exchange a life of foolishness for a life of

meaning. An opportunity to pass from doing your own thing, walking in the ways of the world or coming to faith and trust in Jesus Christ and receiving forgiveness and the path of wisdom and it will be laid before you. God doesn't care so much about your past and he's concerned right now about your future. Where are you going? If you don't know the Lord, today is your opportunity. With our heads bowed and our eyes closed, how many of you would say, "You know what, I'm here today. I was invited by a friend or I came by for a free donut, whatever reason I'm here, God brought me here, and today I feel him speaking to me." If that's you, don't over analyze it, God wants you to respond to him. You don't need to know everything but you do need to respond. So with our head bowed and our eyes closed, how many would say, "I want to receive Jesus Christ today. I never have. I would like to." If that's you, just raise your hand, look at me, I want to pray for you. I'm not going to embarrass you. God Bless You. Is there anybody else? Anybody else? Ok, for you it's a simple prayer. A man looks at the outside, God looks at the heart. It's a simple turning your life over to him saying, "Father, I turn from my old way. It's clear to me that it's foolish. I receive your gift of salvation and life in Jesus Christ. I turn from my sin. I thank you for forgiving me; I thank you for receiving me. Now help me to walk with you in wisdom all the days of my life. In Jesus' name." For the rest of you my exhortation is this. Do you walk in wisdom? Do you walk seizing the opportunity or is your life vastly wasting away? You don't know how long you have. If today you hear his voice don't harden your heart. When will you share your faith? When will you use your gifts? When will you use your life for the kingdom? When will you get off the fence and jump in with both feet? If not today then when? Then when? I think today the Lord is calling all of us to step out with him and not look back. To move on with him. Even if we are not comfortable with it but to know with whom – we don't have to know where we are going – but we know with whom we are going. It is going to be fine. So Father would you just stir our hearts in such a way that we no longer are passive in our walks with you, but we are active, we are moving, because you are leading. So Father may we hear your voice, may we walk with you, and may we walk in it. We thank you in Jesus' most beautiful name. And everybody said "Amen".