

Sermon – 01/02/2009 am

Walk in Wisdom

Study Text: Ephesians 5:15-17

In this chapter the Apostle Paul is teaching the Christians at Ephesus how they are to live the new life now they are children of God. They are to walk in love, love for God and love for one another. They are to walk as children of light since their hearts have been enlightened by the Light of Life who came down into his world from the Father of lights. In these verses we have now come to he tells them to walk circumspectly or carefully. To walk in wisdom involves making proper use of knowledge and of time.

What Is Wisdom?

We live in days of a 'knowledge explosion'. It is wonderful to know so much about this world in which we live. But has there been an accompanying explosion in wisdom? With two world wars and many wars going on still today, with fighting, oppression and abuse going on at every turn and every level in society, where is wisdom to be found.

The world turns to the scientists but they say we are just animals living as animals do. It turns to the politicians but they say 'I must keep my position of power and not upset anyone'. It turns to the sportsmen who spend half their time chasing or hitting a ball and the other half in the pub. Where can wisdom be found?

Firstly we ask 'what is wisdom'? There are two types of wisdom: worldly wisdom and heavenly wisdom (James 3). Paul is thinking of the latter here in this passage. Worldly wisdom is characterised by selfishness and bitter envy, by pride and boasting. It is wisdom about how to get rich and how to get power.

Jesus described worldly wisdom in a parable. He told of a man who had a great harvest so he built bigger sheds to store his crop. He promised himself an easier life with more time to party. He did what millions of people in the world today would do without a second thought, including many churchgoers. But what did God say? Fool! You are a fool because tonight you are going to die. What harsh judgment you might say. Why was this man regarded as being unwise, as being a fool?

The fool says in his heart 'there is no God' (Psalm 14) . The fool takes no thought to death or eternity. The fool thinks only of himself and this world. But the wise man fears God. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom (Psalm 111:10) . The wise man sees all he has as the gift of God and gives thanks. He sees time as the gift of God and uses it accordingly.

Wisdom from above, wisdom that God gives, is the only true wisdom. Heavenly wisdom is pure and without hypocrisy, it is gentle and gracious, it is peaceable and without partiality (James 3:17). Such wisdom is seen in the life of Christ, and it is Christ who gives this wisdom to us. It is to be seen in good deeds done in humility. It is to be shown by living in obedience to the commands of Christ.

Christ is *the power of God and the wisdom of God* (I Corinthians 1:24). The Corinthian church was near to the world centre of philosophy and learning in New Testament times. The Greeks sought after wisdom. They spent their time looking for some new idea because they had nothing they could really trust in. All they could say was ‘there is probably no God’. Probably the world started like this. Maybe there is life after death. God in Christ has made foolish the wisdom of this world.

Wisdom is not knowledge. Knowledge is there and we do not turn our backs on knowledge. There is of course a lot of useless knowledge floating around but we do not reject all science and technology; we do not despise history or geography. We learn all we can but understand everything in the light of God’s creation, redemption and judgment as revealed in the Bible.

The apostle Paul was a most knowledgeable man. He was a highly educated Jew. But where did that education lead him. It led him to violent fuming against the Christians. He had knowledge but what about wisdom? It was only worldly wisdom. He did not know the wisdom of Christ. But when he was converted he was given heavenly wisdom. The wisdom of the lawyer, the wisdom of the philosopher, and the wisdom of the scientist he regarded as foolishness. Christ Jesus became for him *wisdom from God* (I Corinthians 1:30).

‘Wisdom is the ability to process knowledge into practical ability to apply to life situations and circumstances’ (Ferguson). Wisdom is the ability to use knowledge for the benefit of man and the glory of God. Wisdom is not learned – it is the gift of God. You may have a piece of paper telling what you have learned but you do not have a paper telling you are wise. Wisdom is God’s gift in Christ and it is judged by the way you live.

Walk in Wisdom

Jesus was not telling a parable but preaching on the mountain when he said that whoever hears these words of mine and does them is like a wise man who built his house on a rock. Jesus uses the picture of building whereas Paul uses the metaphor of walking. The wise man listens to the words of Jesus and he obeys them. The wise man is a good listener. He listens carefully especially to the Word of God. He listens and he does what Jesus says. If it seems simple then it is, yet how many fail to do either and how often we also fail. Paul explains why – because we live in evil days (5:16).

The world, the flesh and the devil are against us. Paul wanted to obey but he struggled against the flesh. *What I will to do I do not practice* he said (Romans 7:15). He tells us in the next chapter of Ephesians of the battle we have against the devil. The world is constantly seeking to lead us astray. We must remember the words of the Psalmist not to walk in the way of the wicked. ‘Walk in wisdom’ is what Paul urges upon us – or as the New International Version has ‘be careful how you live – not as unwise but as wise’.

We have all seen how children run off at full speed when they go to do something. We teach them to be careful when they cross the road or they will get hit by a car. Stop and look we say. Well it is the same in the Christian life. Be careful and do not run into sin by hasty words or actions. Stop and listen. Listen to what God says in his word. Listen to the Holy Spirit confirming that word in your heart. Listen, listen, and listen! Be quick to listen and slow to act. This is the wisdom of God.

A wise person does not act or react according to their feelings or their emotion. That is what the world says – ‘if it feels good do it’. We see the outcome of such wisdom all around. We see broken relationships, we see people who are deeply hurt and even abused because others do what feels good. Jesus says ‘obey my commands’. Wisdom from heaven is pure, it is not selfish and does not seek to harm.

A wise person keeps a steady course. If we are obeying God’s word we will follow a steady course, not swerving to the right or to the left. Have you tried to walk behind a child with a torch? They wave the torch all over the place leaving you to stumble along in the dark. Do not be like that in your Christian walk. Shine the light brightly on the path ahead that others may follow with confidence.

Walking in wisdom is how we are to witness to the world. See how the crowds followed Jesus. It was not just his miracles or his words. It was that he cared for people. It was that he spent time listening to people like the woman at the well and Zacchaeus. His listening and his conversations were directed towards their healing and their salvation. Jesus did not engage in frivolous time wasting conversation.

Redeeming the Time

We may be familiar with these words, ‘redeeming the time’, but what do they mean? Other translations have ‘make the best use of the time’ or ‘make the most of every opportunity’. Time is precious. Time is a gift of God. There is a time for everything says the wisdom writer (Ecclesiastes 3). A feature of the fool is poor use of time. A wise person does not waste time any more than God’s other gifts.

A wise person will number their days. They will remember that the grave awaits us all. Our life in this world is but a breath in the big picture of eternity. The wise person will consider not only their own end but also the end of the world. This world is passing away and only the kingdom of God will remain. With knowledge of these truths make the best use of the time.

The rich fool failed to do this. He failed to consider eternity. He failed to consider God and the judgment. All his time was spent in making money and spending it. Never in the history have we spent so much time spending money to acquire things as we do today. If the rich farmer was called a fool, what about people today? He gave no thought to his eternal destiny, to the reality and finality of death. Jesus said ‘seek first the kingdom of God not the things of this world.

Time is precious yet so many just waste it and some just try to kill time. The world offers us many ways to kill time, ways which kill the soul in the process. Futile and fruitless activities so easily fill our time. But the wise person looks to the Lord and looks for opportunities to please him. Like Jesus they will reach out to the lost. They will draw alongside and listen to them as Jesus did on the Emmaus road. They will, in the opportune time, share the gospel of Jesus Christ and pray for the salvation of relatives, friends, neighbours and any whom the Lord sends them to.

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