

Wise and Foolish Living **Eph.5:15-17**

Intro. Regardless of what you've heard, forgetfulness isn't such a bad thing. Call it geriatric rationalization, but here's what I mean...I'm glad I can't remember every dumb thing I've done in the course of my life! In that regard, forgetfulness is a good thing! But don't you agree? Foolishness is pandemic among human beings! Raise your hand if you remember doing something stupid? Doesn't it feel good to get that off your chest? This picture represents just another day in public education. But that poor kid could be any one of us. Pride keeps them from being best sellers, but this universal condition prompted Dr. Larry Samuel to write a book entitled, 563 Stupid things people do to mess up their lives and a second book called, "You can't spell Stupid without U."

This morning we can only touch on a vast subject addressed throughout the Bible...the subject of wisdom. Five books of the OT called the Wisdom Literature, are dedicated to the subject. These books are **Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Solomon.** In the Gospels, Jesus often spoke about the wise man and the foolish man. Then in the NT letters, wisdom and encourage-ments to be wise appear with regularity.

Before we consider our text, let me try to define what wisdom is. I'm sure you realize that wisdom isn't the same as knowledge, learning, or the accumulation of information. This is proved by many brilliant intellectuals who are very foolish. **Psa. 53:1** identifies the fool as anyone who denies the existence of God. **The fool says in his heart, "There is no God."** On the other hand, the Bible declares, **The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom; all who follow his precepts have good understanding. - Psa. 111:10.** So according to the God who is all-knowing, all-wise and never made a dumb mistake...to acknowledge His existence and show respect for His person is first base in the quest for wisdom. And the wonderful thing about wisdom is this...it's available. God shares His wisdom with all who trust Him. For the born again Christian, there's no excuse for foolish behavior because as **I Cor. 2:16b** declares...**we have the mind of Christ.**

But to make our definition more practical so we can get a handle on it, wisdom is the application of truth to our lives. Wisdom is the ability and willingness to apply intelligence, learning, and knowledge to the ordinary matters of everyday life. Wisdom is the God given ability to see with discernment, to view life as God perceives it. One dictionary defines wisdom as *the ability to make sensible decisions and judgments based on personal knowledge and experience.*

The opposite of wisdom is foolishness. A foolish person is typically governed by feelings / desires / instincts / or raw excitement. The wise person is governed by reason and truth. An unwise person doesn't give adequate thought to decisions. He doesn't think ahead to consider the consequences. The unwise are concerned only for the moment. They tend to be impulsive and impatient and fail to seek God's will. These are the distinctions Paul has in mind when he speaks of being wise and unwise. So let's look at

our text in **Eph. 5**. Let's read **vs.15-17** together out loud. **Be very careful, then, how you live--not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord's will is.**

To put this verse in context, **Eph. 1, 2 and 3** reveal the eternal plan and purpose of God for His Church. **Chaps. 4, 5 and 6** then describe the conduct of the Christian. Our conduct is to be the outgrowth of our identification with Christ and His people. Five times in his letter to the Church at Ephesus, Paul specifically instructs believers how we ought to live and order our behavior.

4:1 - I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received...

4:17 - ...you must no longer live as Gentiles do, in the futility of their thinking

5:2 - ...live a life of love just as Christ loved us...

5:8 - Live as children of light...

Now in **5:15 - Be very careful, then, how you live - not as unwise but as wise...**

v.15 starts out...**Be very careful, then, how you live.** The word **then**, or **therefore** (as the KJV has it) refers back to **v.8**. Let me read these two verses together. **v.8 - For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light...**

v.15 - Be very careful, then, how you live - not as unwise but as wise... In these verses, the walk or lifestyle of the Christian is characterized 3 ways. First, we must live...

1. v.15 - Carefully and Intentionally - Be very careful, then, how you live - not as unwise but as wise...

Be very careful...means we must order our behavior as people walking in a dangerous place where every step is critical. The Greek word translated **careful** is **akribos**. **akribos** has the idea of precision and accuracy. We might think of a soldier crossing a mine field...(or trying to avoid pot holes while driving on a Michigan road.) Every sensory organ is engaged. Each step is taken with caution because a misstep could have serious consequences.

My thoughts take me back to the jetties we fished from along the East Coast. The boulders that form these jetties are covered with algae and salty slime. Wet from ocean spray, the jetties are slippery and dangerous. Fishermen have fallen and sustained serious injuries when walking these jetties.

The word translated **live** is **peripateo** which means to walk about. So **v.15** urges us to take each step with utmost care. As we live day to day, we must recognize the seriousness of each choice. We must consider the impact of our thoughts / words / motives and actions. A connection emerges when **v.15** is combined with the verse that precedes it. In **v.14** Paul quotes Isaiah where the prophet urges **sleepers to wake up**. It seems that some of the Ephesian believers were **sleep-walking!** They were unconscious of life's seriousness. They were unaware of the dangers posed by the

culture around them. They were living carelessly with their minds disengaged. Have you noticed that whenever a dumb mistake is made, someone invariably asks, "*What were you thinking?*" The better question might be... "*Why weren't you thinking?*" Maybe like this girl, our brain was temporarily "out of order."

But sleep walking can be dangerous. In our former church there was a dear old fellow named S.E. Warrington. S.E. was hard of hearing. He's the fellow who prayed, "*Thank you Lord for this beautiful Sabbath morning*" ...right after I preached a message hoping to convince the congregation the Lord's Day is not the same as the Jewish Sabbath. (You wonder how I lost my hair...) Along with his hearing impairment, S.E. was a frequent sleep-walker. One night he got up in his sleep and did some bowling. Unfortunately his bedroom wasn't deep enough for his typical 3 step approach and follow through. His wife watched in disbelief as he kicked the bed's footboard and fractured his leg. (By the way...that woke him up! I suppose we could say he was "*bowling for hollers.*") But make a note of this...pain is often the stimulus God uses to awaken sleep-walkers! Pain has a way of awakening us to life's realities and the need to get serious with God. That's learning the hard way. I don't recommend it.

So Paul insists that Christian living demands that we stay spiritually awake and alert. Each step of our lives should be taken carefully and intentionally. This message is vital for us today because so many believers are walking around in a state of spiritual grogginess. Not many of us set aside time for Bible study and prayer. More time and energy is invested in looking good than in training ourselves to do good. That's why many cave in when temptation comes. That's why our testimony for Christ isn't brighter and more effective. If we lived the way fishermen walk jetties, or the way soldiers walk through mine fields, there would be fewer casualties among God's people. Our lives would be more attractive to the unsaved / family units would be stronger / and the church would be relieved to invest less time and energy in "damage control."

v.14 challenges any who are carelessly strolling through life like sleep-walkers. The Holy Spirit says, **wake up**. Stay awake and alert to matters that are truly important. Keep your eyes open to the dangers...the temptations...the stumbling blocks that so easily trip us up. In a parallel passage Paul wrote, **...We do not belong to the night or to the darkness. So then, let us not be like others who are asleep, but let us be alert and self-controlled. - I Thess. 5:5, 6** Only with our eyes open to God, will we have the light needed to keep from making stupid choices that mess up our lives.

So **v.15** says, don't live as **unwise but live as** those who are made **wise** by wisdom from God. The verses at the bottom of the sermon notes list some traits of people who are wise. God's wisdom applies to every area of our lives. To name just a few...we must be wise concerning the things we value and set our hearts on / wise in our handling of money / wise concerning priorities and time management / wise concerning morality / wise concerning the value of relationships / and wise concerning our choice of friendships and associations.

Did you ever hear the line... "**Fools rush in where angels fear to tread?**" Though you may have heard it in a song or a movie, the quotation dates back to 1711. It first appeared in an essay written by the English poet, Alexander Pope. But God, in His own words, said this before poet or songwriter did. **Prov.22:3** says, **A prudent man sees danger and takes refuge, but the simple keep going and suffer for it.** The wisdom we need to avoid the dangers and pitfalls of this present life is **wisdom from God.** The truth that makes us wise and keeps us from stumbling is the Word of God. **Psa.119:105** - **Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path.** Second, we must live...

2. v.16 - Opportunistically and redemptively - ...making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil.

v.16 relates wisdom to our use of time. The Greek word *chronos* refers to clock time that goes round and round and continues with no end in sight. That's the way many people approach their lives. They live as though they have all the time in the world. But *chronos* isn't the term used here in the Greek text. The concept of time in **v.16** is expressed by the Greek word, *kairos*. *Kairos* denotes a measured / allocated / or fixed amount of time. God has pre-determined the amount of time each human being has on planet earth. Our earthly lives have a beginning and an ending. Solomon said, **there is a time to be born and a time to die.** The time between these markers constitutes our season of opportunity. Because our lives have a predetermined duration, **Psa. 90:12** says, **Teach us to number our days aright, that we may gain a heart of wisdom.** Wisdom realizes we only have so many days to glorify our Lord and Savior. Wasted time is gone forever and can never be retrieved. Opportunities forfeited can never be regained. Unlike a DVR, we can't stop the recording, rewind, or repeat a single moment. Because this is true, the wise live strategically and opportunistically. They see every moment as an opportunity to honor God...an opportunity that will never come around again.

The ancient Greeks had a god named Caerus. I'd show you a picture of his statue but like so many works of art, somebody snatched his britches. But Caerus had wings on his feet, a large lock of hair on the front of his head, and no hair at all on the back. Beneath the statue is this inscription: *"Who made thee? Lysippus made me. What is thy name? My name is Opportunity. Why hast thou wings on thy feet? That I may fly away swiftly. Why hast thou a great forelock? That men may seize me when I come. Why art thou bald in back? That when I am gone by, none can lay hold of me."* Greek wisdom missed the boat by a long shot but it was right about this. One of Satan's master strokes has been to fill the world with amusements to consume and waste our time. Those who are wise recognize time and energy-wasting things for what they are. They seize the moment instead of letting them slip by.

The words **making the most of** are the Greek word, **exagorazo**. The **agora** was the ancient market-place and the prefix **ex** is the preposition **out of** or **from**. So **exagorazo** conveys the idea of buying something from the marketplace. The Greeks used this term to describe the purchase of a slave. Because we were slaves to sin, **exagorazo** became synonymous with redemption. By the sacrifice of Himself, Jesus has redeemed us from the marketplace of sin and death. He purchased us at great cost. So when we

reassemble these thoughts, **to make the most of** means to redeem or buy up the time we have and devote it to the Lord. Do you approach the moments of your life that way? Are you like an aggressive shopper on Black Friday? Do you grab up every opportunity to do good and glorify the Lord? **Gal. 6:10** says, **Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.**

When making reservations for our recent flights to Florida, I found two seats remaining on a flight scheduled to depart at 3:30 and arrive in Ft. Lauderdale at 7:45 in the evening. That allowed us just the right amount of time to get to Detroit Metro after Peggy's Tuesday morning Bible Study. In the few minutes it took me to clear the dates with my mother and my wife, the seats were claimed by some other customer. They were gone! The only remaining option was a flight that landed after midnight. I'm sure you have stories just like that... opportunities that slipped away because you delayed. That's what the wise understands about time. It's fleeting. Opportunities knock only once. We procrastinate and foolishly think we'll have time to serve God at a more convenient time. But no time is more convenient than the present. **Jas. 4:5** says, **Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes.**

So **v.16** exhorts us **to make the most of every opportunity**...but opportunities to do what? In a parallel passage, Paul anticipates that question. In **Col. 4:5, 6** he wrote, **Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity.** Then immediately following this challenge he gave an example of what he was talking about...**Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone.** Paul directs our focus to **outsiders**...the unsaved around us. Paul echoed Jesus who said, **open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest...** So here Paul turns our attention to people who need to hear the message of God's love and grace. Each time we have contact with unsaved people is a God-provided opportunity to engage in conversation that is full of grace and seasoned with purifying impact like salt. Are we making the most of these opportunities? Are we planning and preparing ourselves to seize these opportunities when they arise?

Did you ever wonder why the Lord didn't just Rapture us to Heaven the day we trusted Him? Just think of all the trouble He might have avoided! Think of all the failures, the church fights and heart-ache He might have avoided if He just snatched us up the moment we were saved. The trouble is, there wouldn't have been a Church on earth. There wouldn't have been anyone to glorify Him. God would have left Himself and the world without a witness. And that's something God has never done. He has never left the world without a witness of His love and grace! As miserable as we are, we are the light of the world. The opportunities referred to in these verses are opportunities to glorify God and let our light shine before others. God left us here to serve as His ambassadors. We are witnesses of Jesus Christ and the Gospel that saved us. It takes careful, consistent, wise living to have the light and life others will notice and desire for themselves. The sleepy Christian who makes dumb choices and messes his life up,

won't be very effective in reaching his family or friends. A stumbling, bungling Christian is written off as a loser. But the wise are careful how they walk. They live their lives in obedience to God's Word. God's Word illumines the path before them and keeps them from falling.

In the context of the last days, **Daniel 12:3** sums up Paul's exhortation. **Those who are wise will shine like the brightness of the heavens, and those who lead many to righteousness, like the stars for ever and ever.**

Our commission is to lead others to the righteousness available through faith in Jesus. We should start each day asking God to use us to represent Jesus and His love to those we meet.

But **Eph.5:16** reveals another attribute of a wise Christian. He makes the most of every opportunity, because he knows something. He knows **the days are evil**. The wise Christian understands what time it is. He understands that evil is rapidly advancing. In the same **12th chap. of Daniel, vs. 9, 10** says -"**Go your way Daniel, because the words are closed up and sealed until the time of the end. Many will be purified, made spotless and refined, but the wicked will continue to be wicked. None of the wicked will understand, but those who are wise will understand.**"

Through Daniel, God said the wise will understand in the end times, but the unwise will not. The wise will understand what time it is while the unwise are deceived into thinking they have all the time in the world. The wise will understand the prophetic Scriptures as they relate to current events. As Jesus said to His disciples, when the fig tree puts forth its leaves, those who are wise will know summer is near. The wise will recognize the similarities between Noah's generation and their own. Based on the teachings of Jesus, they'll be convinced His coming is near. Even though no miraculous signs signal the return of Christ for His Church, the wise will know what time it is and understand when Christ is standing at the door! But more than being a prophecy guru, what they know will trigger action. That's what wisdom does...it stimulates and motivates action.

The noted Puritan, Col. Hutchinson, foresaw the approach of the Civil War when no one else did. He deliberately gave up certain things and reordered his priorities for such a time. As we see the day approaching, we would do well to ask ourselves, "*what is appropriate for a time such as this?*"

I wonder if we really sense the rise of evil in our times? I wonder if we really understand the lateness of the hour? Do we really comprehend how near we are to the Rapture when Christ calls us home and the unsaved world is abandoned to endure the Great Tribulation? The clock won't allow me to list the many prophetic markers fulfilled in our generation. Let me just say this...either we are at the thresh hold of Christ's return, or the greatest coincidence in history is happening before our eyes. Either the ultimate **evil** of the Great Tribulation is imminent, or the Bible isn't true. Ancient prophecies are being fulfilled everywhere in the world. Daniel reads like Time magazine and vice versa. The wise Christian will make the most of every opportunity because he knows what time it is and he knows evil is rapidly approaching.

Wrapping up a series of admonitions to godly living, **Rom. 13:11, 12** says, - **And do this, under-standing the present time. The hour has come for you to wake up from your slumber, because our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed. The night is nearly over; the day is almost here. So let us put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light.** v.17 adds a third instruction. We must live...

3. v.17 - not haphazardly, but thoughtfully - Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord's will is.

The command **do not be foolish**, repeats and reinforces the previous plea for believers **not to be unwise**. As we saw earlier, the essence of being unwise and foolish is to say there is no God or to live as though God doesn't exist. In **Psa. 53:1** the Hebrew word translated **fool** signifies a moron or an idiot who has taken leave of his senses. As Jerry Clower once said, "*this guy's bread isn't quite done.*" Foolish living is haphazard, unguided, unprincipled, and random. It's doing what feels right instead of doing what is right. Its decisions made and action taken without counting the cost or considering the consequences. It's impulsive / prayerless / sometimes irrational / and often regret-table. And the tragedy is...many Christians who profess to believe in God are living this way. While professing Christ is Lord, many live like atheists. Christ's actual lordship over their lives means very little. Once again, our time this AM only allows a quick "fly over" of a vast subject. But here are a few examples of the foolishness Christians must avoid. It's foolish to...

- *think we can do what others are doing with impunity (getting away with)*
- *think God is unaware of our secret sins*
- *ask God to bless our plans instead of asking Him to establish our plans*
- *ignore the counsel of those who are older and wiser*
- *determine right and wrong by majority rule*
- *think we can play with fire and not be burned*
- *believe close friendships with the unsaved will not affect us*
- *procrastinate and waste time*
- *live without a budget and spend more than we earn*
- *think Jesus won't come because He hasn't come yet*
- *think time and energy wasted today won't matter in eternity*

In contrast with foolish living the wise Christian **understands what the Lord's will is**. Here is a significant difference between believers and un-believers. Unbelievers can't know the will of God, but believers can and do. In the catalogue of blessings listed in **Eph. 1, vs. 9, 10** say, **And He made known to us the mystery of His will according to His good pleasure, which He purposed in Christ to be put into effect when the times will have reached their fulfillment - to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ.**

Listen friends...we know what God is up to! We know His eternal purpose and how His story will end! We know the desire of God's heart for His people on earth. To the

impatient and the skeptic, Peter wrote, **The Lord is not slow keeping His promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance. - II Pet.3:9**

Then after assuring us the Day of the Lord is sure to come, he wrote, **So then, dear friends, since you are looking forward to this, make every effort to be found spotless, blameless and at peace with him. - v.14** He ends that chapter by challenging us to live carefully. So we come full circle. The Christian who is wise lives *carefully and intentionally*. At the same time, the wise Christian lives *opportunistically and redemptively*. The wise Christian makes the most of every opportunity to let his light shine to the glory of God. Finally, the wise Christian won't live *haphazardly but thoughtfully*. We know what time it is. We know evil is advancing and punishment is ahead for the unsaved world. And finally, those who are wise will understand and live according to God's will for their lives.

Let me finish with an anecdote from Chuck Swindoll. *"We try to hide our lack of wisdom. Like the man who bought a yacht. His wife was nervous because he had no experience sailing. But was confident and knew he could handle it. For weeks he had practiced in the harbor before taking it out to sea. Finally, he coaxed his nervous wife into sailing on the yacht with him. Gingerly, she stepped on board. Out into the harbor they headed and he tried to put her at ease. He said, "Honey, look, I practiced in this harbor to know where every rock, every reef, and every sandbar is." At that very moment a huge hidden rock beneath the surface made a horrific crunching sound that traveled from stem to stern. "There, he said, with a sheepish grin, "is one of them going by now."*

Don't hide your lack of wisdom. It's common to all of us. God has what we need. The Bible in our hand and the Christ in your heart constitute a treasure house of wisdom. In **Jas.1:5** God has promised - **If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him.**