

Wise Men Still Sing Hymns

Ephesians 5:15-21 November 15, 2023

Ephesians 5:15-21 - ¹⁵Pay careful attention, then, to how you walk—not as unwise people but as wise—¹⁶making the most of the time, because the days are evil. ¹⁷So don't be foolish, but understand what the Lord's will is. ¹⁸And don't get drunk with wine, which leads to reckless living, but be filled by the Spirit: ¹⁹speaking to one another in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, singing and making music with your heart to the Lord, ²⁰giving thanks always for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, ²¹submitting to one another in the fear of Christ.

"What's the best way to get there?" If you've been a driver for any length of time, you've asked that question. You ask it when you type in a destination in your Maps app. You can toggle a switch to avoid tolls or highways. You choose a route based on which is the fastest or has the fewest turns.

We're on our way somewhere. Your life is progressing toward certain outcomes. If you're a Christian, the Lord has placed you on His highway of holiness and, in the end, you will be conformed into the image of Jesus Christ. As we go, we participate and cooperate with Him.

In Ephesians, Paul shows us the best way to go. It's more than his opinion or just *one* way of doing things. These are *commands*. Paul knows what he's talking about. He was inspired by the Holy Spirit to deliver the Word of God to us. *And* he lived out one of the most powerful testimonies ever. He *knows* the best way to get there. And the best way is to walk like a wise man.

Ephesians 5:15 - ¹⁵Pay careful attention, then, to how you walk—not as unwise people but as wise—

For the fifth and final time, Paul talks about walking. Walk worthy. Don't walk like the Gentiles. Walk in love. Walk as children of light. And now, *pay careful attention* to *how* you walk. Your version may say to walk "circumspectly." That's not really a term we use very often. Bible dictionaries will tell you that the word means to walk, "more exactly, more accurately, with more thorough investigation."¹

Does that make you feel overwhelmed? As if we need to walk *perfectly*? God *does* call us to His high standard. But, our Lord is a God of grace. We're not *going* to walk perfectly, *but* we have everything we need to walk in power and victory and to be bearing all sorts of spiritual fruit as we go. And, what we do matters. Paul has been reminding us of how important the choices we make are. Our words and our conduct and our perspectives really matter and they lead to outcomes and consequences in our lives. They impact our families and our church and our community. Our walk can please God or can grieve Him. We need to pay careful attention to our lives, not just stumble through as life happens to us.

¹ NASB Dictionaries

Paul says, “walk like the wise men.” We can look at the *Christmas Wise Men* as an example of these things. In Matthew 2, when Herod spoke to the Wise Men, he said to them, “Go and search *carefully* for the Child.” He used the same word Paul uses here.

As the Wise Men traveled, they did not have all the answers. They didn’t know exactly what they would encounter. But they they followed the light and, in the end, there was Jesus. They weren’t overwhelmed by the difficulty or the doubt or the obstacles on the road. They pressed on, step by step in faith, and we’re told, when they saw the star, they were overwhelmed *with joy*.²

So, as Christians, we’re to walk as the wise and we’re to pay careful attention as we go. Normally, we don’t pay close attention to routes we’ve taken many times over. There are probably times that you don’t actually remember your drive from work to home. “Did I run that stop sign?”

We don’t want to develop that kind of inattentive mentality in our spiritual lives. Paul calls us to attention and precision. We’re meant to be testing what is pleasing to the Lord. We’re meant to be working out our salvation. We’re meant to be moving *past* simply knowing things into actually *doing* something with what we know.

Ephesians 5:16 - ¹⁶making the most of the time, because the days are evil.

Psalms 90 tells us we develop wisdom by numbering our days.³ Your Bible may say redeeming the time. The phrase means to buy up time like a shopper finding a great bargain in the marketplace.

One commentary says it this way: “*Gobbling up every available opportunity*.”⁴ Did you know that we live in the land of opportunity? I mean *spiritual* opportunity. We look around and are disgusted by the evil around us. It’s our natural inclination to want to flee to somewhere *less* evil. But that’s not always the best choice for God’s people.

Light is most effective in the dark, right? Rescuers are most necessary where there are people who need rescue. “It is not those who are well who need a doctor, but those who are sick.”⁵

Ray Stedman said, “*Most of us look at evil days as obstacles, as defeating circumstances, as pressures which tend to make us unable to be Christians...[But] evil days create opportunities, and, therefore...we must make the most of those opportunities which are created by evil days.*”⁶

Hearing this we might feel pressured again. “*Ok, I guess God wants me to keep a ledger of every minute I spent today. Wow... 1 out of every 3 minutes I was asleep? I better cut that down to 2 hours a night since I have to buy up the time...*”

² Matthew 2:10

³ Psalm 90:12

⁴ Thomas Neufeld *Ephesians*

⁵ Mark 2:17

⁶ Ray Stedman *Watch How You Walk (Ephesians 5:15-20)*

That's not the way we're supposed to feel. In fact, Paul specifically used the term *kairos*, not *chronos*. Linguists explain that *chronos* refers to specific amounts of time. *Kairos* means the *right* time, the *opportune* time, the *appointed* time.⁷

As we walk, we pay careful attention to the opportunities around us to be light in the dark, conduits of grace, broadcasters of His truth, ambassadors of Christ's love. When you're on the hunt for a deal at a garage sale, you don't buy every item you see. You buy the *right* items.

The Wise Men didn't drive their camels around the clock. But they cared a lot about progress. They kept pace with this light that was leading them. Around the campfire, they didn't say, "It doesn't matter if we get off track today." They had a focus and a goal and did the work, watching the path, reading the terrain, keeping an eye on their supply and making sure they weren't going in circles.

Ephesians 5:17 - ¹⁷ So don't be foolish, but understand what the Lord's will is.

What *is* the Lord's will? We often ask, "what is the will of God for my life? What career? What spouse? Where should we live?" Those sorts of things. Those are good questions to ask. But,, God's Word reveals a lot about God's will right here, right now, concerning who you are supposed to *be*. It's His will to make you like Himself. It's His will for you to do good.⁸ It's His will for you to avoid sexual immorality.⁹ It's His will for you to bring praise to His glory and for you to give thanks in all circumstances. More on that in a few moments.

We *know* enough of God's will to fill our days. And then, as we walk in His will, we discover the *particular* paths that He sets before us individually.

But, here is the contrast: Don't be a fool, be wise. Don't walk with the world, walk with the Lord. Foolish here means *senseless*. The Greeks used it to describe a crazed, frantic person. It may also describe someone with a petrified heart.¹⁰ It's another comparison to the cult of Dionysus - one of the very popular mystery cults that some of these Ephesians may have come out of or *may have still been a part of!*

The cult of Dionysus had wild rituals. In some, people would *walk* up a mountain "in the Dionysus gait which involves staggered walking, backward head flip, and loud chanting" while drunk.¹¹

Paul says, "Don't be crazed. That's foolish. Be wise." To live in this wild way is ungodly.

Ephesians 5:18 - ¹⁸ And don't get drunk with wine, which leads to reckless living, but be filled by the Spirit:

⁷ <https://www.billmounce.com/greek-dictionary/kairos>

⁸ 1 Peter 2:5

⁹ 1 Thessalonians 4:3

¹⁰ Markus Barth *Ephesians 4-6: Introduction, Translation, And Commentary*

¹¹ <https://ancient-literature.com/dionysian-ritual/>

Dionysus was a god of wine and drunkenness and insanity, among other things. Plato suggested “that the Dionysian festivals were symbolic of the joys of the afterlife.”¹² One scholar writes, “to live a riotous, wanton, debauched, drunken life was characterized as a ‘Dionysian mode of life.’”¹³

Paul says, “No! That’s *NOT* the way to live!” Reckless is the *opposite* of careful. The mystery cults were the *opposite* of what the Church should be. The mystery cult was about excess and perversion and personal gratification. The *Church* is about a family, growing together in love and harmony, building one another up, under the direction of a true and loving God, Who fills us with His power and His character and His grace.

Your Bible may say being drunk leads to “dissipation.” The term means riotous or wasteful.¹⁴ It’s pictured by the Prodigal Son. His life was dissipation. That’s reckless living, leading to the pig pen.

But, intoxication was a major part of Roman life. Pagan Gentiles viewed drunkenness as a means of unity with the spiritual world.¹⁵ Christianity is *totally* different than human culture.

We’re not to be out of control, we’re to be *self*-controlled. We’re not to be filled with toxins and chemicals that bring out the worst in us, we’re to be filled by the Spirit. Literally, the words say, “Be filled in spirit.”¹⁶ Contextually, Paul has been talking about the filling of the Holy Spirit, but we’re to be filled with the word of God, the grace of God, the peace of God, the character of God, His Divine nature, which we are partakers of.

Paul’s words here are that we Christians are to “go on being filled’ by the Spirit.¹⁷ A person filled full of the Lord should show the effects of His presence. A drunk person certainly demonstrates the presence of alcohol. So, are we a joyful people? Are we a spiritually exuberant people?

As for alcohol, Paul does *not* say “you can’t drink it.” But the Bible does want us to be careful about ingesting things that can inebriate us. It’s a sin for a Christian to be drunk or high. And, as people who are called to wisdom and understanding, we should take verses like Hosea 4:11 to heart:

Hosea 4:11 - ¹¹ Promiscuity, wine, and new wine take away one’s understanding.

Ephesians 5:19 - ¹⁹ speaking to one another in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, singing and making music with your heart to the Lord,

Are these things ways that we fill ourselves with the Spirit or are they the *result* of being filled? The truth is, you can make the case either way. So, if we’re Spirit-filled, we’re going to be a singing, worshipping people. And if we want to be filled full, then be a singing, worshipping people.

¹² Annang Assuming *Be Filled With The Spirit And Not With Wine: Echoes Of The Messianic Banquet In The Antithesis Of Ephesians 5:18*

¹³ *ibid.*

¹⁴ *Vine’s Complete Expository Dictionary Of Old And New Testament Words*

¹⁵ Klyne Snodgrass *Ephesians*

¹⁶ *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary, Volume 11: Ephesians Through Philemon*

¹⁷ Ben Witherington *The Letters To Philemon, The Colossians, And The Ephesians*

After all, we are the Temple of the Holy Spirit. What happens in a Temple? Praise and prayer and offering and thanksgiving.

We learn here that our singing of Godly songs has two audiences: The Lord and each other. As you come in to church and sing the praises of Jesus, the people around you are able to witness His goodness and see your faith in action. We show our kids that we don't just sit there with apathetic hearts, we adore God for Who He is and magnify His greatness and thank Him for His love.

Markus Barth writes, "*Early Christian congregations were singing, jubilant, exulting assemblies.*" They were writing songs and going back to the Psalms. A few Sundays ago, our pastor challenged us to start writing songs about the Lord. It's said that Charles Wesley wrote 6,000 hymns during the Wesleyan Revival.¹⁸ In his letter to the Corinthians, Paul indicated that everyone was coming to church with a new song they wrote!¹⁹

Worship is an important thing. It's supposed to be our mode of life. We speak these songs to each other. And it says "making music," or your version may say, "making melody." Our friends in the Church of Christ will cite this verse as a proof text that churches should *not* have instruments in their worship. The fact of the matter is that the term "making music" originally meant "pluck a string,"²⁰ or even to "twang!"²¹

Let's be a twangin' people! Let's make it our business to show our kids, show our brothers and sisters, show the world around us the power of songs sung to the Lord.

Ephesians 5:20 - ²⁰giving thanks always for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ,

Always for everything. Wow. Paul can't actually *mean* that, right? It can't be done!

The truth is, it *can* be done. Paul said, "I've *learned* how to do it. I've learned how to be content in every circumstance."²²

Complaining is a cancer to the spiritual life. The Lord warns us about it so many times. Can you imagine the Wise Men complaining on the road? If they did, we'd say, "Stop it! You're about to see Jesus face to face and be a part of one of the most glorious stories of all time!"

When we see the disciples complaining in the Gospels, we think, "Stop it! Don't you realize what a wonderful story you're a part of?"

¹⁸ R. Kent Hughes *Ephesians: The Mystery Of The Body Of Christ*

¹⁹ 1 Corinthians 14:26

²⁰ F.F. Bruce *The Epistle To The Ephesians*

²¹ *NASB Dictionaries*

²² Philippians 4:11-13

We need to convince ourselves that complaining *is* the stone in our shoes. We get upset about our circumstances, and we get frustrated and complain. That's human nature. But complaining is the problem. And it causes damage down the line. It chokes out thankfulness, just like thankfulness chokes out complaining. But when we walk away from thankfulness, it has a very bad impact on us. In Romans 1, Paul said:

Romans 1:21-22 - ²¹ For though they knew God, they did not glorify him as God or show gratitude. Instead, their thinking became worthless, and their senseless hearts were darkened. ²² Claiming to be wise, they became fools

Ah, and now we're back to wisdom and foolishness. Walking in wisdom means giving thanks always for everything. Circumstances will *not* always be good, but *God* is always good and we can always be thankful.

Ephesians 5:21 - ²¹ submitting to one another in the fear of Christ.

Submitting is a military term meaning to rank under.²³ A Christian is to think of others more highly than he does himself. In Roman culture, servility was not a virtue.²⁴ Paul *keeps* commanding counter-cultural things in these passages. There aren't status levels in God's Church. We're all brothers and sisters. There are roles and assignments, some of which we'll see in the coming verses, but we all have equal standing in the Lord's family. And churches should behave that way.

But, how does it work if everyone is submitting to each other all the time? Well, it helps me to think back on the Wise Men. Sometimes as they traveled I'm guessing they were side by side. In some cases one was out front. During another stretch, that same guy might be bringing up the rear. But they were all going together. And, depending on the terrain and the experience and the way things shook out, one would be leading, another would be following, or they would be pushing a wagon over a hill together, or they would be scouting out a resting spot. It was a harmonious group effort.

One commentator writes, "*Submission describes the placing of oneself in response to another or to something.*"²⁵ We are called to walk attentively, responding to each other, responding to the Lord's leading with the Lord's fullness. We're called to make the most of these days, knowing this road we're on leads us to the presence of the Messiah. Biblical Christianity, in action, is not only the *best* way to get there, it's the *only* way to get there. Let's get going together, singing as we go.

²³ *Vines*

²⁴ Neufeld

²⁵ Darrell Bock *Ephesians: An Introduction And Commentary*