

A Series on Ephesians
Sub-Series: Gospel Driven Change
“Foolishness to Wisdom”
(Ephesians 5:15-18)
August 1, 2010
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I. Introduction

Good morning! Welcome to New City! My name is Kevin Haah, and I am the lead pastor here.

We've been studying the book of Ephesians. We are in a middle of a series called Gospel Driven Change. Today's message is on wisdom.

Have you ever done anything stupid? I was thinking about many many potential *personal* illustrations I have to kick off this message. I am just going to tell you one of them.

This is a story that so embarrassed me that I didn't really share this with anyone for a long time. I went to UC Davis for college. The first thing I did there was to join the UC Davis Marching "Band-uh." That's what we called ourselves. I used to play the snare drums for the marching band in high school but when I got to Davis, the snare line was really good, too good for me. So, they had me play the cymbals. So, we were at our first football game. There was a stadium full of people. The band was in the middle of its song during half time, I think. The cymbals were heavier than I thought. I was struggling with them. Then, in the middle of the song, I dropped a cymbal, and it started to roll down the field. Up to here, I just made a mistake. What I did next was stupid. I started to chase the cymbal. And the cymbal continued to roll. I could hear people laughing. I remember thinking, "I don't think I am supposed to chase the cymbal." It was bad. The band leader was not happy. It was very embarrassing. I left the marching band shortly afterwards. I forget exactly what happened. It's a blur.

Anyway, today's message is not on stupidity but on wisdom.

Let's read Ephesians 5:15-18:

¹⁵Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise, ¹⁶making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil. ¹⁷Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord's will is. ¹⁸Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit.

We are going to be looking at (1) some characteristics of wisdom; and (2) the source of wisdom.

II. So, what are some characteristics of wisdom?

A. Wisdom is about our day to day life.

Verse 15 says: “Be very careful, then, how you live, not as unwise but as wise.” Literally, this passage says, “look accurately at how you walk around.” The KJV says, “*walk* circumspectly.” The wisdom that Paul is talking about is how we walk around. It’s about what we are like when we go about our day to day lives. When we go to work. When we talk to our children or our spouse or our friends. What are we like? How and who do we date or marry? Which job should we take? Should we confront someone now or just let it pass? Walking around has to do with how we make our real life decisions. Wisdom is not about knowing more stuff. It’s not about information. We can know a lot of stuff but not know how to use the stuff. Sometimes, we may know a lot of information, principles, or even theological stuff about the Bible, but it doesn’t give us wisdom because we don’t know how to apply it in our lives. Wisdom is about knowing how to apply information into our daily lives.

B. Secondly, Paul says, look accurately at how you walk around—walk *circumspectly*.

It means to examine your life. Look carefully and accurately at how you live your day to day life. Face the realities of who you are. One of the things that some people do before they go to bed is to practice a spiritual practice called “examine.” What they do is to turn on a candle (and this is great to do with your spouse) and ask: What was something that lifted you during the day? What was one thing that made your spirit go down? You can ask a simple question: In what ways was I not consistent with who I am today? In what ways was I consistent with who I am today? Sometimes, people write

journals to reflect on their day. The point is that wisdom calls us to be introspective and reflective. If you don't know who you are, what you are like, you are not wise. Do you know when you talk too much? Do you know when you talked too little? Do you know when you were too pushy? Do you know when you were too shy? Too cold? Too touchy? Too abrasive? Do you know when you offended people? I am not necessarily saying that we should never offend people (Jesus often offended people, particularly the religious leaders). I am saying, do you know when you were careless? When you discouraged someone during the day? You know, I thank God for Grace because Grace helps me, no, actually forces me to look accurately at how I walk around. I think that is one reason we need to live in community and develop relationship with one another. When we live in authentic community, we are able to see ourselves beyond how we as individuals see ourselves. When we live in a community of brothers, when we offend one another's cultural sensibilities, for example, we are able to correct one another. New City is a diverse place in every way. We are able to help each other see ourselves better. When you live only with people like you, you never know a part of yourself. You never know how you act with someone very different than you. You learn more.

C. Thirdly, Paul says in verse 16, wisdom means to “make the most of every opportunity.”

What does he mean by that? Eugene Peterson in the Message translates this like this: “Make the most of every chance you get.” In other words, make every moment count. Now, how do you do that?

We all have a temperament that biases the way we make decisions. Remember taking the Myers-Briggs Test? It's a test to discover a person's temperament. Whether one is more a thinker or a feeler. Some of us are more intellectual and the way we make decision is based on the analysis. But, we tend to be cold. Some of us are more feelers, more emotionally sensitive. We tend to be more touchy feely. We emphasize the importance of how we feel or how others feel. “If loving you is wrong, I don't want to be right.” Some of us are introvert vs. extrovert. We avoid doing things because we are introverted. Or, we are way too talkative because we are extroverted. Some of us like to plan everything vs. be spontaneous. Some of us are more concrete vs. theoretical. Some

of us focus on being pragmatic, practical. While some of us are more of a dreamer. It's always interesting to see your own personality/type. The way we make our decisions is affected and often ruled by our personality or type or how we habitually respond to the world. But, if you think about it, wisdom is not being ruled by your habitual patterns of decision making. **It is to be flexible and adaptable to make the most of every opportunity.** Sometimes, you can't make decision based alone on your intellectual analysis. You have to go with your feelings, instincts. Sometimes, you can't make decision based on your feelings, you have consider all of your thoughts. Sometimes, you can't do things based on planning everything. You have to go with your gut instinct and allow spontaneity to drive you. Sometimes, however, you have to plan things out. You can't just be pragmatic/practical in every situation. Being pragmatic might lead to taking unethical shortcuts. But, sometimes, you have to be practical. Wisdom calls for flexibility.

In the OT, there is a collection of books called Wisdom Literature. They include books like Proverbs. And Proverbs is an interesting book. Some of the things it says are very thoughtful but only sometimes true. For example, Proverb 11:25 says: "A generous man will prosper." This is a wise proverb for kingdom wisdom, but it is not always true. Sometimes, giving means hurting and sacrificing and you will not prosper. But, generally, the proverb is true. By the way, you have to distinguish between commands, promises, and proverbs in the Bible. Commands are like "love the Lord God with all of your heart." There is no exception to that. Promises are things are "Nothing can separate us from the love of God." There are no exceptions. But, proverbs are not meant to have no exceptions, but just to give general wisdom to apply in the right situation. That's why sometimes, they say contradictory things. It's in English proverbs as well:

- Opposites attract.
 - Birds of a feather flock together.
- Or:
- Absence makes the heart grow fonder.
 - Out of sight, out of mind.

In Proverbs 26:4-5, it says:

⁴ Do not answer a fool according to his folly,
or you will be like him yourself.

⁵ Answer a fool according to his folly,
or he will be wise in his own eyes.

So, are we supposed to answer a fool according to his folly or not? Let's say, someone does something really stupid to you or to himself. Let's say you see someone just drugging himself. Are you supposed to answer him or not? Verse 4 says to not answer him because you will be like him. Verse 5 says exactly the opposite because he will be wise in his own eyes. What are you supposed to do? Well, sometimes you answer him and sometimes not. That's what wisdom is. It is to be flexible and adaptable to make the most of every opportunity.

That's how Jesus was. Remember when Lazarus died, and Jesus came to see them. Lazarus had two sisters: Mary and Martha. When Martha went out to meet him, she said (in John 11:21): "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died." And Jesus responded to Martha by saying (John 11:23, 25), "Your brother will rise again." ... in verse 25 "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live even though he dies." But when Mary came up to him and said the same thing in verse 32, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died." Jesus saw her weeping. It says in verse 33 that he was "deeply moved in spirit and troubled" and then in verse 35 it says, "Jesus wept." That's how he responded to Mary. He wept. But, that's not how he responded with Martha. You see Jesus had wisdom. His wisdom led him to make the most of every opportunity—to respond to each person in the way that they needed to be responded to. Maybe Martha was more of a thinker, a more task oriented person (remember she was worried more about cooking when Jesus came to visit?), and she needed concrete answers. And maybe Mary was a more relational and emotive, feeling kind of person, and she needed emotional connection.

I think this wisdom is so important when we talk to people about Jesus. We have a tendency to either be so synchronistic with the world that we can't say anything that disagrees with the world's view. We don't want to offend them. But, sometimes, we get so into pointing out sin and wrong in the world and in the people that we end up being

condemning and judgmental. If you look at the life of Jesus, he rarely condemned sinners, tax collectors, and prostitutes. The kind of sinners we often point out, he rarely condemned. But, he was constantly pointing out the sin of the religious leaders, their spiritual pride, their moralism, their claimed righteousness. What I am saying is that we have to seek wisdom. We can't just go out and assume that God wants us to condemn sin in everyone, but we can't just remain silent either. We need wisdom.

Wisdom means we are flexible and make the most of every opportunity.

- Even if you are uncomfortable because you are an introvert, you are called to be bold and talk to that stranger and share God's love.
- Even if you are uncomfortable because you are an extrovert, you are called to stop, seek silence, and just do nothing, soaking in the presence of God.
- Even if you are uncomfortable because you are driven mostly by your intellect, you are called to be filled with the Holy Spirit and experience his presence in your life.
- Even if you are uncomfortable because you mostly operate in emotional and relational realms, you are called to understand the beauty of the gospel, understand the context of the Scripture, dig-in, do Bible study, analyze the passage, and let the power of the Word of God penetrate your heart.

D. Fourthly, wisdom understands the context of the world.

Verse 16 says, **“making the most of every opportunity because the days are evil.”**

What he means by saying that the days are evil is that the world that we live in is under the influence of evil. It is a dark place. So, to be wise means we understand the world's evilness, its darkness, its brokenness. Not just that the world is a bad place, a dark place, an evil place, but why. Why is the world the way it is? How did it get this way? One of the things we see among the downtown loft dwellers is that most people now have a very relativistic view of right and wrong. “Everyone has to decide what is right and wrong on their own. There is no absolute right and wrong. Everything is relative.” So, they get very offended by anyone who claims that there is a moral absolute. How did they get this way? How did the culture come to understand morality and right and wrong in this way? Did we always think like this? No. This is what people are calling post-modernism. We

need to understand how people think in order to share the gospel with them. We can't just take the position that we should just preach the word of God and push it down their throat even if they don't want to hear it. We have to understand their context. In order to make the most of every opportunity, we have to understand people and culture. We have to be a student of this world. That's wisdom.

III. Where do we get this kind of wisdom? What is the source of wisdom?

Verse 17 says, "Therefore, do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord's will is." So, the source of wisdom is understanding the Lord's will. It's interesting that he says "Lord" not God. Lord to Paul is Jesus. So, he is not just saying any will of God, he is saying the will as revealed through our Lord Jesus Christ. And this means, life, teaching, death, and resurrection of Jesus. Paul said, I resolved to know nothing other than Jesus and him crucified. So, when he said the will of the Lord, it means the gospel of the upside down kingdom of God where going down is going up, where to give to gain, where to serve is to lead, where we live by grace and not by our performance. To understand the will of Jesus is to understand the gospel of Jesus Christ, the truth and grace of Jesus. The reality of sins and the reality of his love. It is to internalize this. To make it overflow. It is to make the word of Jesus the source of all authority in our lives. To make the word food for our lives. Make it determine everything about who we are and how we live. Then, it will be a source of wisdom for us.

Grace and I have been married for 16 years now. I know what she thinks about almost everything. I don't even have to ask her. I actually hear her voice. Not literally, but I can hear what she thinks. I understand her will. I know her. I know what makes her tick. When I do something insensitive, I can actually feel Grace's encouragement to be more sensitive. Grace is very empathetic, whereas I am more task and vision oriented.

In a similar way, when we really understand the word of God, we I am not talking about just *knowing* the word. I am talking about *understanding* it, understand the movement of the Bible from the Old Covenant of the law to the new covenant of grace. We have to understand that everything points to Jesus, that he is the greatest and the fullest revelation of who God is. That's why we have to learn to read the Bible correctly.

You see, the Bible is like software. If we correctly understand the will of the Lord, if we have a correct understanding, without any software glitches, then we have wisdom. You see, wisdom has already come to us. Jesus has already come to us. He has come to free us. He has come to empower us. He has come to give us an amazing life in the presence of the Father. He has already brought us wisdom. It is our job to understand it. Internalize it. And let wisdom play forth from the software of the Bible.

Secondly, wisdom comes from being filled with the Holy Spirit. That's why Paul says in verse 18: **“Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit.”** I am going to talk about this more in a separate sermon. But, for now, I want us to understand that when we understand the gospel, the will of the Lord, when we experience the fullness of His presence of our lives—that's really what he means by being filled with the Holy Spirit—then, we will live in wisdom. We will live in wisdom. He guides us.

There are some people who just focus on the word of God. And there are some people who have a tendency to ignore the word of God, and just focus on the Holy Spirit, and the guidance that we receive from the compelling of the Spirit. Well, it's both. If our experience and guidance through the compelling of the Spirit is not in accord with the wisdom that comes from understanding the will of the Lord (the Bible), then, it is off. If we just seek to understand the will of the Lord through the Bible, but ignore the Spirit, we will also be off. We are called to seek both. That's where wisdom comes from.