

Sermon: The Life and Times of a Christ Follower
Ephesians 5:15-21

This morning our study of God's word is Ephesians 5:15-21.

And in these verses, Paul carries forward his description of the new life in Christ. Ever since we turned the corner in Ephesians 4:17, our focus has been on the life of a Christian. The last 3 chapters of Ephesians are **laden** with moral and ethical commands.

Identity, Status and Relationship

All of these commands arise out of a fixed identity. This is an important detail that we simply must understand.

Our identity is fixed when we have faith in Christ. Before we had faith, we were simply part of the world. No different from the world in any respect. But when we heard the Gospel and believed, we were given a new status, a new identity, a new relationship. And these are all summed up as being in Christ. In Christ we have every spiritual blessing.

I cannot stress this enough and I want this to be the cornerstone in your way of thinking about the faith.

If you are in Christ, you have every spiritual blessing.

Ephesians 1:3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places,

In Christ, we have a completely new and unalterable status:

2 Corinthians 5:17 Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.

This truth of a new identity, a new status and a new relationship needs to be the foundation for every believer.

And the reason this is so important is because as fallen human beings, we innately feel the need to achieve God's kindness and love.

We naturally think that it takes a good life to get God to be kind to you.

Yet when we learn the amazing grace of the gospel, we see that a good life is a response.

We love because he first loved us.

We obey because Christ was obedient for us.

The Gospel foundation is the grace and love of God in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Having this foundation, This SECURITY is also important because in this second half of Ephesians, Paul just lays on one command after another.

And if you don't have the right foundation, you will never be able to bear the weight of these commands.

So, with this in mind, we will read Ephesians 5:15-21 which gives us several commands on how to live for Christ.

Hear the word of God:

Ephesians 5:15 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.

Say: This is God's word.

The grass withers and the flower fades but the word of our God stands forever.

Our passage of Scripture deals with the life and times of the Christ follower.

You have a sermon outline in your bulletins and the first point there is:

I. Walking in Wisdom (15-17)

In verses 15-17, Paul writes:

Ephesians 5:15 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.

As Christians we are to walk in wisdom.

So what is wisdom?

The dictionary defines wisdom as: the quality of having knowledge, experience and good judgment.

This is a really good definition because, to be wise, you really have to have all three elements.

You have to have knowledge, experience and the resulting good judgment.

If you lack one of these elements, you won't really be wise.

And when we apply this to spiritual life, a wise person is one who has the right knowledge.

And that means knowing the truth of God's word.

Knowing the stories, the commands and the main ideas in Scripture.

It means hiding God's word in your heart and having it rattling around in your head.

Yet you can know God's word and still not be wise.

Because to really be spiritually wise, you have to apply it.

You have to experience the truth of God's word.

It's one thing to know something in your head.

It's quite another thing to believe it in your heart.

And typically God's truth makes its way from our heads to our hearts through trials.

We can be spared so much heart-ache in life if we would just hear and apply God's word.

We read it this morning in our scripture reading from Psalm 119:9:

**9 How can a young man keep his way pure?
By guarding it according to your word.**

God's word is the truth that will lead us on the path of wisdom.

Psalms 119:105 Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.

And it is only when we **know God's word** that we can test it in our lives and watch God's prove himself true. When we know God word and apply it, especially in difficult circumstances, this gives us spiritual experience.

Then when we are armed with this **knowledge and experience**, we are prepared to make right spiritual decisions.

This is wisdom.

Wisdom does not come naturally. It has to be learned.

Paul says in 1 Corinthians 2:14:

1 Corinthians 2:14 The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned.

Paul is telling us here that the ability to accept the truth of God's word is a spiritual blessing in and of itself.

This is not a natural thing.

Believing God's word is a gift of his grace and if we apply it, we will be walking in wisdom.

But one thing we must notice is that we have to be intentional about this.

Paul says:

15 Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise...

This command to look carefully means that we have to be **intentional**.

Walking wisely does not come naturally.

It requires that we **spiritually deliberate, pray, talk** to other believers and consider the best course.

And this we are to do, with large decisions and small until walking in wisdom becomes our way of life.

Again in verse 17, Paul says:

17 Therefore do not be foolish, but **understand** what the will of the Lord is.

The word here for **understand** does not simply mean "**know**."

Rather it means to grasp something that challenges your thinking or practice.

It's very much like English word: "learn."

When we learn something, we are admitting that there was a time when we did not understand it.

And so when Paul tells us to understand what the will of the Lord is, he wants us to first recognize that we don't naturally know what his will is.

Therefore we need to be **intentional** and **deliberate** about thrusting ourselves upon thoughts about what God's will is.

So, do you do this?

Our church has a high number of people that are in the early to middle stages of their adult lives.

And these stages are characterized by big plans and dreams that will effect the rest of your life.

Yet have you really put you plans and dreams before the Lord for his scrutiny and approval?

Have you really thought and prayed about the Lord's will for your life moving forward.

Have you measured it against scripture and are you really seeking first his kingdom and his righteousness?

"Understanding what the lord's will is" applies not only to the big decisions.

It applies even to the small ones.

From the words you use in a conversation to how you will spend your time when you come home from church.

The Lord wants us to be intentional, deliberate and purposeful.

"To not to be foolish, but to **understand** what the will of the Lord is..."

In verse 16, Paul tells us to:

16 make the best use of the time, because the days are evil.

And really this verse is richer than the ESV translates it. Because the word here literally in the Greek is **redeem**. We are to "**redeem** the time because the days are evil." To redeem something is to buy it back or to buy it out of its present situation.

When we redeem the time, we are buying it back from this evil age, just like Christ redeemed us out of our sin. The logic is simple, because Christ has redeemed us from evil, we are to redeem our time from evil.

And so we are to be thoughtful in how we buy the time back from this present evil age.

He wants us to do redemptive things.

Now in our house, there is this rut that we can occasionally fall into if we are not intentional about our time.

And almost always that rut involves the use of a screen. It takes effort to not just pass the time in our day and age.

Screens are everywhere and often they do not help us redeem the time.

Sometimes they do, but they can just as easily be a time waster or worse.

Whatever happened to writing letters or going on family walks?

Whatever happened to reading or praying outdoors?

Or lingering long over a meal? Or calling a friend just to catch up for an hour?

God wants us to be intentional in the way we use our time.

He doesn't want life and time to just happen to us. He wants us to be active in redeeming it.

So are you deliberate about redeeming the time?

Or do you waste your time or spend it mainly on investing in yourself and self-care?

Are your day dreams taken up simply with getting away to some place better or some more favorable circumstance?

God wants us to be careful in how we live, understanding his will and redeeming the time because the days are evil.

Paul is not concerned only with how we live but also how we are controlled.
And this brings us to our next point which is:

II. Being Controlled by the Spirit (18)

In verse 18, Paul writes:
18 And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit

In this verse, Paul contrasts two radically different controlling influences.
The first is that of alcohol.
He specifically commands the Ephesians to not get drunk on wine.

Now, we have to know that Paul did not give this command for no reason.
Remember that the Ephesians have been redeemed out of a life of paganism with all of its trappings.
In their day, just as in our own, parties and social gatherings were a big deal.
And at these gatherings, the wine flowed and everyone made themselves merry with it.
The problem was that the Gentiles regularly made themselves too merry with it and got drunk.

This drunkenness led them to lose control of themselves which led to further sin.
Paul warns us that drunkenness **is debauchery**.
The word debauchery refers to destructive living.
A debauched life is not simply one that is impure.
Rather it is a waste.
Drunkenness wastes life.

Often times people drink too much because they are bored or discontented with their lives.
Drinking is a way to escape.
The problem is that such escapism contributes to habits and addictions.
At its root, addiction is a spiritual problem.
And the only way we will finally be cured from any addiction is when we are filled with something or someone else.

And here in verse 17, Paul wants the Ephesians to exchange the controlling influences in their lives.
Instead of being drunk on wine, he commands them to be filled with the Holy Spirit of God.

The spirit is alive in every believer.
And if we let him, he will fill us.

But we first have to relinquish giving ourselves over to all other forms of control in our lives.
Addictions can take so many forms.
We can be addicted to shopping, food, work, the internet, the praise of people, video games, pornography, likes on Facebook, travelling and adventure, or fitness.
Just about anything can turn into an addiction.
And this is because we are creatures of habit.
If we are not intentional about how we spend our life and time, we will find ourselves being controlled by habits that are no good for us or anyone else.

And so, in order to be filled by the Spirit and controlled by the Spirit, we have to first relinquish those other forms of control in our lives.

Now, in no way do I want to minimize the complexity of addiction.

Yet as believers, we need to see that many of our behaviors can turn into addictions when we are not convinced that God is enough for us.
If we are not filled with God, we will seek to fill ourselves with something else- and that something else will take the form of an addiction.

When Paul tells us:
18 And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit,
He is concerned with who or what we are giving ourselves to be controlled by.

So what habits or behaviors are you controlled by that are not spirit led?

In 1 Corinthians 6:12, Paul wrote:
1 Corinthians 6:12 "All things are lawful for me," but not all things are helpful. "All things are lawful for me," but I will not be dominated by anything.

So we need to ask ourselves what behaviors in our lives have control over us?
At what places are you not really in control of yourself?
These are the behaviors that the lord wants you to relinquish and instead be filled by the Spirit.

Finally, Paul gives us instruction about our life and times and how it pertains to worship.
And this brings us to the final point in our outline:

III. A Life of Worship and Gratitude (19-20)

Paul closes this section by guiding us in what should be the meditation of our hearts in worship and appreciation for all the good things he has given us.

He writes:
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

Now there are many points that could be made regarding these verses.
But I want to only briefly consider them in a general way.

And right off the bat, Paul tells us to be addressing one another- we are to remind one another of God's truth.
And what this means is that we need one another to be reminded and encouraged in the truth.

Without this constant reminder, we will grow cold and dull in our faith.
It's inescapable. We need one another.

Now, beautifully, Paul doesn't just tell us to talk to one another with normal speech.
Rather we are to "address one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart,"

Paul calls us to be a singing people.

And the reason for this is because we have something to sing about.

Indeed, God's people have long been called to sing. When God delivered his people through the Red Sea, Moses in Exodus 15, Moses led God's people by singing:

Exodus 15:1 ... "I will sing to the LORD, for he has triumphed gloriously;
the horse and his rider he has thrown into the sea.

2 The LORD is my strength and my song, and he has become my salvation; this is my God, and I will praise him, my father's God, and I will exalt him.

3 The LORD is a man of war; the LORD is his name.

God people are a singing people and this is not simply true in times of triumph.

The Psalms were Israel's songbook and they contain some of the saddest laments you could ever hear.

For instance, Psalm 137:

Psalms 137:1 By the waters of Babylon, there we sat down and wept, when we remembered Zion.

2 On the willows there we hung up our lyres.

3 For there our captors required of us songs, and our tormentors, mirth, saying, "Sing us one of the songs of Zion!"

Psalms 137:4 How shall we sing the LORD's song in a foreign land?

5 If I forget you, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget its skill!

6 Let my tongue stick to the roof of my mouth, if I do not remember you, if I do not set Jerusalem above my highest joy!

Our worship is to contain all of the moods and emotions of the Christian life, and here we see that there is a time even for lament and sadness.

Yet all of our songs must be informed by the hope that comes with the final victory of Jesus Christ.

This does not mean that we no longer sing laments or sad music in church.

Yet even in our saddest songs, we are to look to the victory of God in Christ.

Psalms 42:11 Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you in turmoil within me?
Hope in God; for I shall again praise him, my salvation and my God.

The worst case scenario for the believer is a hard life of suffering now, and eternal victory to come.

And this is because Christ has won the victory.

And so all of our singing, even the saddest songs, are only right if they look to the victory of God in Christ.

In the end, God wins.

Praise God that we have something to sing about.

The praise and worship of God is not something that we are to only be about in our corporate worship.

It is something that we are to do personally and privately as well.

Notice that in verse 19, Paul tells us to sing and make melody in our hearts to God.

Singing is supposed to be part of our private devotional life.

Is it part of yours?

One of the best pieces of advice I was ever given came from a roommate of mine in college.

He had a hymnal that he had purchased and I noticed that there was a good deal of wear on it.

He sang praises to God as part of his regular private worship and advised me to do the same.

God is the creator of music and he created it **not just for our enjoyment but also for our encouragement.**

Often times, the truth of God seeps into our souls through Godly lyrics in a way that simply reading the word does not.

And so Paul charges us to make singing praise to God not simply a Sunday morning practice.

We need to carry it into our families and private lives as well.

So let me ask you if Godly music is part of your life?

Have you memorized sections of the psalms?

Do you meditate on the truths contained in the hymns we sing?

Do you force yourself to listen to good Christian praise and worship music?

If not, you are missing out.

After calling us to sing, Paul lastly calls us to give

"thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ..."

Notice how comprehensive Paul is in what we should give thanks for:

We should give thanks "always and for everything."

This includes even the hard things in our lives.

The illnesses and the loneliness.

The times of difficulty and hardship- give thanks for it.

And also for the good things that we take for granted- force yourself to think on them and give thanks for them.

We have so much to be thankful for.

Not least of which is the final victory that we have in Christ.

In him, we have the promise of eternal life- when there will be no more sad songs.

No more lamenting and broken bodies.

No more loneliness and relational destruction.

In Christ, we are promised victory over the grave and in his name, we are to thank God always and for everything.

Amen.