

Wise living

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[0 : 00] ...ful but as wise, redeeming the time because the days are evil. Therefore be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is.

I think that I've often said here that the Apostle Paul has a particular pattern in writing his letter. And generally speaking after he gets over the welcome that he gives to his reader, he dives into the depths of the theological message that he has to share with the church.

And very often that theology will go on for some chapters of the epistle. And then after he has dealt with the main burden of the epistle, he turns to more practical matters.

And this teaches us that the gospel isn't just given to us to tickle our fancies. It's not given to us even to stretch our intellect.

[1 : 35] It's given to us in order that it might be applied in our everyday living. And we fail miserably in our hearing and in our studying of scriptures unless we realize that the Bible is given to us in order that we might apply it to our everyday life.

And the three verses that we have tonight are taken from this part of Paul's letter to the Ephesians. Now I'm sure all of you are aware of the real burden of Paul's writing in this letter. Because here he's been teaching the great message, the doctrine of the church, the glorious body of Christ. But Paul, even as he has taught this great message to the saints of Ephesus, turns that message to a practical import, to a practical application.

And here there are three ways in which the apostle is applying this message to human life in the nitty gritty of living for Christ in Ephesus.

[3 : 02] And he's saying to these believers at Ephesus, first of all, that it's important that you walk carefully in the world. It's important that you walk circumspectly as a Christian. That's the first thing.

And then secondly, he's dealing with the great question of the importance of how we do without eyes as Christians in the world.

And then thirdly, and finally in verse 17, he's dealing with the importance of understanding God's will.

And these are the three topics that I want tonight to deal with for practical living for us, for our Christians. The importance of a careful walk. The importance of our use of our time.

And thirdly and finally, the importance of understanding God's will. The importance of understanding God's will. Now, firstly, Paul has been talking to these believers at Ephesus.

[4 : 19] And he said to them, Awake thou that pleases, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give you life. You see, he has said to these believers before now, that they who have been dead, and Christ shall give you life.

Have been quickened together with Christ. And that it is by grace they are saved. There are saved people. There are loving people. And yet, he's dealing with these people almost as though they're just like the world.

And he's saying to them, Awake thou that pleases. Isn't that strange? Friends, isn't it strange that men who have been transformed by the grace of God, who have been wrought upon by the wonder of God's salvation, should fall back into a situation where they're just like the world.

Remember the story that Jesus told about the ten virgins with their lamps going to meet the bridegroom. And five were wise, and five were foolish.

And the difference between them was that the wise virgins got oil in their lamps. And they trimmed their lamps, and they were ready for the coming of the bridegroom.

[5 : 42] And yes, you know, you've got an anomaly in that story. You've got the anomaly of this, that in the middle of it all, the wise virgins slumbered and fled.

And Paul is saying to them then, Awake thou that sleepest, and see that you walk circumspectly. Do you realize, those of you who are the Lord's children in this place tonight, that the world is looking on at the way you live your life.

The world is a world of every single step that you take as a Christian. And the Lord's people ought to be very conscious, day by day, that we're living in the presence of a watching world.

And you know, Francis Schaeffer, one of the great authors of the 20th century, has a book which is titled, *The Church Before the Watching World*.

And you know, that's something that you should never let yourself forget. You're living in the church, but the church is living before a watching world.

[7 : 05] And therefore, you should be careful, and I should be careful, in the way in which we walk. Now Paul has a very winning way of dealing with all these problems that arise in the life of a Christian.

And very often Paul treats all these problems in the same way. He begins by dealing with it negatively. And then he comes to the positive application of how we are to live our lives.

And this is what he says, See that you walk circumspectly. See that you walk carefully. Not as fools, but as wives.

And I want to deal with the negative first, and then to deal with the positive, as to how we are to walk, as Christians, in this world.

We are to walk, he says, not as fools. How does the fool walk? Well, I think it would be important for us first of all, to ask the question, what is the source of an uncircumseced walk?

[8 : 27] Because you know this, it is possible for a Christian to be a Christian, to be born again, to be a lover of the Lord, and have an uncircumseced walk.

To have a walk that isn't an example to the world. And how could that be? It could be when we walk just like the fool.

What's the source of a fool's walk? What's the source of an uncircumseced walk? I'll tell you what it is. It's the philosophy of atheism.

The philosophy that stays in its heart, there is no God. You know that's the way you can live with an uncircumseced walk.

Live your life as though God didn't matter to you. As though God doesn't really exist. You know my friend, the moment you lose sight of the omniscient eye of your God on you in this world.

[9 : 39] I'll tell you this, you can go anywhere. Your conscience will go to sleep. You won't really bother how you walk. You'll be like the world.

The Bible says, love not the world. And if you allow yourself to fall into the philosophical thinking of the fool who has said in his heart that there is no God, nobody knows where you might end in the uncircumseced and the lack of care and the careless walk that you may have.

I think it was Robbie Duncan somewhere who said that at the heart of all unbelief is the philosophy of the atheist. At the heart of all sin is atheism.

And you know my friend, that's the way to live carelessly in the world. Just live as though God doesn't matter. As though God doesn't exist.

As though God doesn't care. As though God isn't watching you. Live on and go on as though God isn't there. And I'll tell you one thing.

[10 : 59] You'll have a very careless walk in the world. And you will not be an example to your fellow men in the world. Because you'll live as though God isn't seeing you.

But the Christian dare not live like that. The hallmark of the true living Christian ought always to be. Thou Lord seest me.

Remember Joseph? Remember Joseph in Potiphar's house? Remember Joseph in Egypt with Pharaoh? What was the motto of his life? The motto of his life was this.

Thou Lord seest me. And my friend, never forget. That whoever might be seeing you. And whoever might not be seeing you.

The Lord is watching your footsteps. The Lord is looking over your life. Not as fools. The fool hath said in his heart. There is no God.

[11 : 59] Oh, for that sin. The temptation to atheism really is. It's the heart of all sin. It's the heart of all unbelief. But then notice the character of an uncircumspect walk.

And I think you've got that laid down for you in the fourth chapter. And in verse 17. This I say therefore and testify in the Lord.

Notice the way Paul speaks there. This I say and testify in the Lord. It's so important. He's making this testimony in the Lord.

What's he saying? That henceforth you who have been born again. You have the grace of God in your heart. That you walk not as other Gentiles walk.

In the vanity of their mind. What's the character of the walk of a careless Christian?

[13:04] What's the character of that Christian? The character of the careless Christian is vanity. Paving yourself over to the vanity of this world.

Do you want me to define vanity for you? Listen. I'll try and define vanity in scripture terms for you. Because scripture has given us threefold definition of vanity.

Listen to it. Vanity is the lust of the flesh. The lust of the eye. The pride of life. That's vanity. My dear friend as a Christian.

If you or I dare to live our lives on that level. The level of the lust of the eye. The lust of the flesh. The pride of life. What are we doing? We're living our lives in the character of an uncircumsect life.

[14:11] That's what we're doing. Know how the Bible prefixes that warning about the lust of the flesh. And the lust of the eye. And the pride of life.

Listen to it. The Bible says to Christians in 1 John 2. It says, Love not the world. Neither the things that are in the world.

What else in the world? Says John. The lust of the flesh. The lust of the eye. And the pride of life. That's what's in the world.

And here is the great apostle of the Gentiles saying to us Christians. Love not see that you live not uncircumspectly. Not as fools.

But rather as wise. And I want to ask another question about the uncircumsect walk. Before I leave it.

[15:11] And it's this. What is the goal of an uncircumsect walk? What's the goal of a careless professor of religion? Well do you remember the way Paul spoke about the churches of Galatia?

I think every Celts should read the letter to the Galatians at least two or three times a year. Because these Galatians they were really Celtic people. That's what they were.

They were Celts. And those of us who are Celts may well have in our genes something of what these Celts of Galatia had.

And in the letter to the Galatians Paul warns again and again and again of an uncircumsect walk. Of a careless walk. And you know my friends as Christians we are always in danger. You know there is a word that you whisper in your ear as a Christian every day you live.

[16:14] Let him who thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall. Have you ever afraid that you'll fall? Well my friend if so never never get rid of that fear.

Never never never do away with that fear. It's a good friend. And it's a friend that will keep you till the end of your journey here.

What is the goal of our careless walk? The goal of our non-circumpect life? The goal of our personally professes Christianity without living up to it?

The broad road that leads to destruction. My friend I want to remind you of something. There's a world of a difference between professing the true religion and living the true religion.

The easy part of it is professing. The life work of the Christian is living. And how am I to live?

[17:26] I am to live not as fools but as wise. And that brings me to the positive side of this first injunction here.

How am I to live? How is my life to be lived then? If I'm not to be moved by the philosophy of the fool that says in his heart there is no God.

How am I to live? How am I to live? How am I to live? And to live my life as a wise man? What is the source of true wisdom?

Go to your Bible and ask. What does the Bible say about the source of true religion? The source of true wisdom? Wisdom's beginning is God's fear.

God's fear. God's fear. I'm going to guarantee you something. That every real Christian in this gathering tonight begins his walk with God under the influence of the fear of God.

[18:31] The fear of God is the beginning of wisdom. Do you know anything of the fear of God in your heart? Do you know anything of the awfulness of the presence of God?

Do you know anything of the wonder of living with everlasting burning? That's the child of God's life. Because wisdom's beginning is God's fear.

You know, I would dare go so far as to say tonight that one of the elements that seem to be largely lacking in 1991 in the religion of our day is the element of the fear of God.

I think it's WGT Shed, who has a great sermon in either sermons to the natural or sermons to the spiritual man. One of his volumes of sermons.

Shed has a sermon which is entitled, The Use of Fear in Religion. The Use of Fear in Religion. The Fear of God is the beginning of wisdom.

[19 : 41] So that's the source of true wisdom to live your life, the fear of the Lord. Do you have it in your life? Has God come into your heart in such a way that he has led you to fear him?

And then secondly, the character of true wisdom. You know what the book of Proverbs says about true wisdom? Wisdom is better than rubies.

And all the things that may be desired are not to be compared to it. Wisdom is better than rubies.

Oh, the preciousness of wisdom. You know my friend, wisdom, true spiritual wisdom is a real, a real blessing and a real pleasure in this world.

Because it's very rare, very rare. It's better than rubies and more to be desired than anything that you can desire through wisdom.

[20 : 49] Do you remember Solomon, the early life of Solomon? When he came to the throne? What did Solomon desire from God? He desired wisdom.

That was his desire. And he was commended by God. And God blessed him in his desire. Because he asked after wisdom from God.

And I wonder, my friend, if you're one of those who bowing his knee day by day at the throne of grace. And asks God for wisdom by which to live.

Wisdom for everyday life. Are you bowing your knee? Are you crying to God and asking him for this wisdom by which you might live?

Walk therefore, see then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise.

[21 : 52] In the end, the goal of the wise man's walk is surely the path of the just that is like a shining light that grows brighter and brighter unto the perfect day.

That's the goal of the wise man's life. It's heaven. Heaven itself. My friend, the only proof that you can have that you're on the way to heaven in this world is that you live for Christ.

And that you live circumspectly in Christ. Carefully in Christ. And that brings me to the second injunction in this text.

And it is regarding the importance of our use of time. Redeeming the time because the days are evil.

Now, every Christian, you and I, we ought to be becoming more concerned as to how we use our time. How we use our time.

[22 : 57] You know, so much of our time we seem to fritter away on second-rate matters in this world, don't we? We seem to waste so much of our time in the world, but that's not the way we should be as Christians.

Listen, what is the Christian's attitude to this present world? Well, the Christian's attitude to this present world is that the days are evil.

Redeeming the time because the days are evil. Now, I hope that there are Christians in this gathering tonight who are readers.

I hope you read the books of the past and the books of the present day. I hope you read Christian literature. You know, we should be spending our time in the cultivation of godliness.

Godly living and holy living, it takes time, my friends. Take time to be holy. There are some people, and you think, you know, that holiness is just a quick fix with them.

[24 : 16] Something they'll get somehow or other from heaven, and they don't need to bother about how it's going to come. But do you know this? It seems to me that sanctification, holiness, is something that is going to be in your life or in my life, because we give time to it.

And I think as you look back in the rosy past, and you think of the great Christians that you've known, maybe one of the great differences between the quality of their living and the quality of our living is this, that they took time to be with the Lord and to be in the things of God.

Took time to consider their religion and took time to do the things of the Lord. Why? Because they were desperately conscious that they were living in an evil world.

That's why. They were dead scared of being contaminated by the world in which we're living. Are you afraid that your spiritual life will be contaminated in the world in which you live?

Or are you quite content living in the world and touching the world and reaching out to the world day by day? And oh, my friend, are you quite content almost to be assimilated into that world in which you live?

[25 : 49] See, the Christians of the past go right back to Paul and he talks about the world as this present evil world.

Redeeming the time. Why? Why did he have to be concerned about his time in the world? Because the days are even. That's why.

The days are even. And it's amazing, you know. I happen to be one of these lovers of Scottish and English Puritanism.

And I think probably in all the history of British Christianity, the days of the Puritans are days that are filled with lust.

And as you read their books, you'll be amazed, you know, at reading about the spiritual life that these people had. And they wrote toms and they put out volumes of sermons.

[26 : 49] And they wrote so much because there was such a general love of God in their hearts. But you know, as we look back on the Puritans, we look back on a time, a rosy time, a blessed time.

How did the Puritans view their own day? One after another, brooks, mantel, sydps, all of them had the same thing to say.

We're living in an evil world. The same testimony. Every one of them. Every one of them. Live in an evil world. That's what they were conscious of.

And therefore they found it necessary to take time to cultivate godly living in their lives. You know what it was said of Richard Sibbes, one of these great Puritans.

They said about Dr. Sibbes, Heaven was in Dr. Sibbes ere Dr. Sibbes was in Heaven. Heaven was in Dr. Sibbes before Dr. Sibbes was in Heaven.

[28 : 03] Why? Because Dr. Sibbes gave time to the cultivation of holiness and the cultivation of godliness in his everyday living.

That's why. Don't think that you'll be holy if you don't give time to your Bible. Don't think that you'll be holy unless you realize what it is to give time to holiness.

Don't think of it. What is the Christian attitude to time? Well I think we can just sum it up with one little sentence. Time is precious.

Didn't you feel it when you were singing these words of the psalmist in Psalm 119? Rivers of water from mine eyes could flow down, and I saw how wicked men go on in sin and do not keep thy law. Why? Why were these rivers of waters flowing from the eyes of David? Why was he crying over lost souls? Why was he weeping for a lost world?

[29 : 09] Why was he crying over the light? Because he realized that the days were evil and that time is desperately, desperately precious. Oh Christian friend, do you feel that every moment is precious in the world?

the world. The last time that we have in this world, a few short years, it's not long for any of us. And do you know it's solid for most of us in this gathering that we've passed the halfway mark, some of us coming perilously close to the end of life. My friend, are we giving more and more time to cultivate godliness in our living as our time is getting shorter in the world?

I want to tell you a story about a man who lived in Lewis. I think his name was Alexander MacFarlane and he lived in Del Innes. And my good friend, the Reverend Verde MacRitchie, who was our minister in Stornoway, told me one day that he went about a fortnight before Mr MacFarlane had passed on to see that good man. And he said he was amazed when he saw that here was a man who had more or less shut himself away in his room with his Bible and a volume of spiritual sermons. And he said to him, oh he said Alec, why, why are you shut away here with your Bible and spiritual sermons?

Oh Mr MacRitchie, he said, I'm very, very busy. I'm preparing to go to be with Jesus. That's the cultivation of godliness. Listen to it in the life of Dr Lloyd-Jones. When Murray was trying desperately to get interviews with Dr Lloyd-Jones so that he might write his biography, Dr Lloyd-Jones said to him, Mr Murray, no I can't see you. I am preparing to go on the greatest and the most exciting journey in all of my life.

I'm preparing to go to be with Christ. Time is precious my friend and if we would be holy, time is desperately precious.

[31 : 39] And what is the Christian's use of time to be redeeming the time, redeeming it? You see the world, the picture we have in this text of the world is its line in the evil one.

The world is passing by with its affections and lusts. It's passing quickly. It's passing so quickly. But all the work of the Christian is to buy back your moments that God gives you. Buy them back for the Lord himself.

Is there anything too much for you to do for Christ? Is there anything too much to do for Christ? Last week I got a copy of a book. A book of letters that were written in this town by the Reverend Tom Swanson, who was the minister of the West Church. And that good man had some really wonderful things to say to his congregation.

Let me tell you one of the things he said. He drew a picture of the difference between contributing to religion and commitment to religion.

[33 : 10] And this is the difference he made. Contributing is just giving something. Commitment means crucifixion to something.

And you know my friends, when time becomes precious, and when time has to be redeemed by Christians, these men are men who realize that for them to live is Christ. And to live this Christ in such a way that you're identified with him, in all of his crucified agony. That's what Christian living means. That's what redeeming the time means.

Why? Why should the Christian redeem the time? Why should time be so precious to me as a Christian? Why should the cultivation of godliness take up so much of my attention? Why but simply because the night cometh, the day of your opportunity is running out of the world, the day of your opportunity is running out, my friend, running out, running out.

That's what our lives are like. Have you ever seen a little sand glass that you turn bottom up in order that you boil an egg? And the trickle of sand is flowing and flowing and flowing and flowing. Before you know, half the sand has gone into the bottom of the dish. Before you know it, time has run out.

[35 : 02] I remember the story of two men walking to church. And as they passed the house of a friend, they saw their friend standing at the door of his house.

And he was in his dungarees and there was no preparation for going to church with him. And one of the fellows said to the other, Is your friend not going to church?

Oh no, said the other man. He's got no time. The first man replied, He's got all the time he's going to get.

And you know my friend, that's the way it is with you. The sand glass of time is running. It's running, it's running, it's running. Where will it find you tonight?

Does it find you in Christ? Does it find you in giving the time? Does it find you cultivating holiness? Does it find you in the work of faith and the labor of love and the patience of hope?

[36 : 10] Is that the kind of life you have? Redeeming the time because the days are evil. And then the importance of understanding God's will finally.

Be not unwise. How important it is for the Christian to have his ear open for the will of God, His eye open for what God would have for him.

How important it is for you to be listening out for the will of God in his word. Ah yes it is. Be not unwise.

And you know the Bible puts great emphasis on this. Be not unwise towards those that are without. You know every Christian here has a responsibility to be as wise as serpents towards those who aren't Christians.

Because as I began my sermon tonight, these people are watching you. And for some of these people in Inverness, do you know this?

[37 : 28] Your life is the only Bible that they'll ever read. Your life is the only Bible that these people will ever read. They've got no time for the Bible.

But they're watching you. And they're watching you as a representative of the Christ that you profess. They're watching your everyday living.

And how could I tonight be unwise towards those that are without? Well first of all I'm sure I could be unwise by giving those that are without a bad example.

A bad example. You know the corrupting influence of a bad example is terrible. Evil communications corrupt good manners.

And oh you know friend, your life and mine, they're an example to the world for good. Are you? Be not unwise.

[38 : 40] Be not unwise. And secondly, I think in the light of the injunctions of this text, we can be unwise in wasting our time.

We know we're living in a generation of Christians in which there's a fearful waste of time.

And I'm going to mention one particular way in which we as a generation of Christians are apt to waste a fearful amount of our time.

And that's by switching on our televisions and not switching them off.

All the time that every Christian in this room tonight has wasted in front of the moving pictures on your television screen. I'm afraid it's one of the robbers of the spirituality of our generation.

[39 : 49] The television screen. Now don't think for a moment that I'm saying that you're to put them out of your houses. I'm not saying that. Because I believe with all my heart that the sanctified use of all of God's gifts is good.

But I'm talking about an undue attention to anything that takes away from the spirituality of our lives and the holy living that should be ours.

Wasted moments, wasted time. And we can also be unwise I think by careless talking.

Listen to the beginning of this chapter. Fornication and all uncleanness or covetousness let it not be once named among you as becometh saints.

Neither filthiness. And you're saying of course we won't live like that. No Christian should live like that. But listen. Listen. Fornication and all uncleanness or covetousness let it not be once named among you as becometh saints.

[41 : 00] Neither filthiness. Nor foolish talking. Nor jesting. Which are not convenient. But rather giving of thanks.

My friend, will you not admit with me tonight that it's possible for the Christian to go into a situation where carelessly we use our tongue and we make a bad witness with the tongue that God gave us to witness for Christ. Careless talking and I think after all is said and done we can be unwise by unholy living.

Living our lives just like the world and be no different to the world. That's the height of class and wisdom. But then what's the antidote to unwise living?

The antidote to unwise living is understanding the will of the Lord. And you know friends, the secret of the Lord is with them that fear Him. The secret of the Lord is with them that fear Him.

I once had a friend in the city of Glasgow who worked for a bakery. And the bakery had a fleet of vans. And on the side of every van from that bakery were the words, Taste the secret. Taste the secret.

[42 : 47] My friend tonight, I'm telling you, the secret of which I talk can be tasted. Because the Bible says, All taste and see that God is good who trusts and Him is blessed.

How can you know the will of God tonight? You can know the will of God by the revelation that God Himself has given. It's a mystery. But it's a mystery with the lid taken off.

And where was the lid taken off? I'll tell you where. How can I know the secret? I can know it.