

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. Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another with psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit. Sing and make music from your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil. The word for “be very careful” was also used by King Herod when he told the wise men to make a careful search for the child. He wanted them to look very closely and do a thorough search for Jesus so he could murder Jesus. In this case, Paul told us to do a thorough search for how you are living. Examine your habits and your patterns.

Not as unwise, but as wise. Wisdom is the key throughout the Scriptures. The book of Proverbs in our Old Testament lesson contrasts wisdom with simplicity. To have wisdom is to have insight - to look at things from a deeper perspective. A simple way of life is to be driven by things on the surface and to only use your senses and your emotions to live by. An unwise person will only spend money for instant gratification. He won’t ask inconvenient questions like, “Do I really need this? Can I afford this? Are there better things I could be spending my money on?” The simple person judges things only by whether it looks good, tastes good, feels right, sounds nice.

Wisdom doesn’t come just from looking under a microscope or going to school. There are plenty of very smart people who are still considered to be fools in God’s sight. The book of Proverbs says, “**The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.**” Paul writes in today’s text that wisdom comes when you **understand what the Lord’s will is.**

If you understand something it means that you use your mind to read it or listen to it and you think about it. But the mind is limited. You need insight from the One who created the mind and created the world to tell you more. So you examine what God’s Word says about life; about relationships; about how you find your identity; about work; rest; faith; works; anger; joy; marriage; heaven and hell. You need to listen to what people are telling you and examine what they are doing and saying in light of God’s Word.

Think about the current war against sexuality and what a man is and what a woman is. What does it mean to be male? What does it mean to be female? How do I express myself as a man or as a woman? How does a boy become a man? Does he put his hat on backwards and walk around with his pants down around his ankles? How does a young girl become a woman? Does she walk around with her breasts hanging out and her bikini underwear showing? Does she shake her head back and forth and threaten others with violence?

But wisdom is more than just a rulebook for what to do. It goes deeper than that. It talks about sin I was born with. It talks about what makes God angry or pleases God. It tells me of an eternal heaven and an eternal hell; and of the God that I must stand before on Judgment Day. It shows me the depths of misery Jesus was willing to go through to pay for my sin. It shows me how much this God desired me to be saved and how He had to save me. He had to punish sin and He in His holiness could not back down from His threat of hell. So He

became man; took on flesh; and humbly went to the cross. That God-man Jesus Christ shows me how merciful my God is. He shows me where salvation is found. He shows me how gracious He is; He gives it to me free of charge. He is wisdom Personified.

In looking at Jesus I can even learn what a Godly Man is. He was a bold man and a straight shooter. He prayed a lot. He knew His Scriptures well. He learned what God's Word said in the Old Testament. He took a lot of time to care for the hurting. But He didn't just accept everyone and everything. He lovingly called people to repentance. He took sin so seriously that He was willing to be damned for it and die for it. He was willing to suffer unjustly for the ones He loved. He was willing to love the unloveable in a sacrificial way.

If I believe God made me a man, then I want to be a God pleasing man. He has given me a wife, so I want to take care of her and bring her to Christ; the One I worship and love. I want to feed her and take care of her. I want to love her and my children and bring them up in God's Word. I don't want to pretend I'm a woman or act like a boy. I want to be the man and fulfill the duties God calls me to do. I want to try and be like Christ.

What is the will of God for women? God uses the example of Sarah and the church. He talks about submission and love for a husband. He talks about a humble and gentle spirit. He doesn't show pictures of women punching each other out and cursing out each other. He doesn't picture for you women that are angry and bitter and hate men. He talks of modesty in dress. He speaks of a hard working woman in the 31st chapter of Proverbs who provides for her family by engaging in the market place. He talks about a woman who loves her children and respects her man; wanting him to be the best Christian man and leader she can have.

Wisdom comes from studying these things and examining who we are in the light of God's Word. We need to explain them to our children.

Clear confessions and wisdom are drowned out with unclear thinking and bad examples at home and on the television. Paul especially warns against drunkenness that pollutes clear thinking. Paul warns, **Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit.** Debauchery means recklessness. You throw your caution to the wind.

Younger people tend to get drunk to let loose. It might seem like fun at the time. Your friends laugh. They take video. Then, when you sober up - you find out that you said some pretty stupid and embarrassing things. Girls pass out at parties and are groped or maybe even raped. They wet their pants and throw up on themselves or sleep next to a toilet all night. Sometimes that alcohol becomes addictive; it becomes your god that you depend on in order to be "fun" or to release your guilt or stress. So much for freedom.

Older people might get drunk to let go - to try and relieve themselves of their feelings of guilt or loneliness and hurt; to numb the pain and try to forget about for an hour or two. It becomes a routine and goes from the weekend to the weekdays, from evening to morning. It becomes your new spouse and friend; leaving your children, grandchildren or spouse in the dust. So alcoholics learn to live their lives in a blind stupor, refusing to face the harsh realities of responsibility and guilt and failure. In the meantime it never offers long lasting relief from anything. It only kills more brain cells and makes you feel more worthless in the end.

Instead, Paul said to be filled with the Spirit; the Spirit who captivates your soul with a deeper love; a sacrificial and eternal love; a love in Christ that paid for all of your sins; that tells you to find your identity in him; a love that is good for you and seeks your best interest; that is willing to say the tough but necessary things. In the Word you find a blunt and yet refreshing honesty about what you have done. You have failed. You have sinned. But Jesus died for sinners. Jesus wants sinners to come back to Him and trust in HIM for their forgiveness; to identify with HIM for who they are in God's sight. The love of Christ and forgiveness of grace allows you to fail and even to be a failure in this world; to be free from the world's standards and to live under God's standard, "**Come to me all you who are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest.**"

In order to obtain such wisdom Paul commands us to literally "**redeem the time.**" Think about that picture. Redeem means to "buy back." When you want to buy something; you plan ahead for it and save up for it so that you can pay for it and it can be yours. You keep track of your savings. You set a date for when you want to purchase it. He tells us to do that with time - the time that we have to become wise in Christ.

Time isn't something you can hold in your hand or carry around with you. How do you buy it? The NIV translates for us to make the most of the opportunity. So when we are thinking in terms of saving and buying; we are to budget our time; so that we have time to be wise. Time is precious, especially in today's society. It would seem that we have become terrible stewards of our time; slaves to success; to material possessions we don't need; to sports; to entertainment; time that we could or should spend in the Word. Every summer attendance drops, and then once school starts up again we have better attendance. But I know there are plenty who aren't gone every weekend of the year; who could have made it more than they had, if they had planned to redeem the time.

Why is worship so important? "I can read my Bible from at home. I listen to Christian radio." How does Paul say to be filled with the Spirit? **Instead, be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another with psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit. Sing and make music from your heart to the Lord.** Paul uses a command that is speaking not just to each individual Christian - but to the church as a whole - all of them within the Ephesian congregation. He told them that the way they can be filled with the Spirit is through singing the word to each other in their psalms, hymns and songs. Who are you singing to in the car? To the Lord? Ok. But not to each other.

Last Sunday the congregation sang hymn 542. It was a hymn of prayer that the Lord would give his servants faithfulness to Him. I heard you singing that hymn as I went up to the pulpit, and it gave me great joy and encouragement to hear you singing to God for me and Pastor Starr and the pastors in our synod. Sometimes people ask, "How can I serve in the church? What do you want me to do?" It's simple. Come to worship and sing! Come to Bible class and learn. This is the greatest thing you can do for the Lord and for each other.

Remember too that you are singing these songs **from your heart to the Lord.** When David brought back the ark he took off his outer garments and was dancing in joy. His wife made fun of him and mocked him for it. David was angry and defensive over what she said to him. Why? Because he was dancing to glorify his God in joy. He was so overjoyed with the return of the ark that he was willing to praise the Lord with a reckless abandon - he didn't care what people thought. He wasn't doing it for show. He was dancing primarily to the Lord.

Wisdom enables us to do something incredible as Paul encourages us that we would be **always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ**. When we read the Bible we see that God wants everyone to be saved. We know that He has the hairs of our heads numbered. We know that He directs our lives with one primary purpose; that we end up in heaven by clinging to Christ. So whatever He allows; whatever He directs; is to get us to heaven. When we know this, even in the midst of our worst sorrows; we can thank God. Even in the middle of a funeral we can thank God for the promise of the resurrection. With sorrowful hearts we can still be thankful and praise God with our tears. This is all because of Jesus Christ. He is why we celebrate the Eucharist, which means to “give thanks,” as Jesus did on the night he was betrayed.

Worship gives us opportunity to show our thankfulness and express it. I would love it if you all sang loudly with the worst voices in the world; if it was so loud in here when you sang that you drowned out the organ. There was a young toddler who couldn't speak hardly at all. But since he went to worship he loved to sing! When it came time to sing, he would just kind of yell with the people. His parents loved it. When people sing, in key or not, it shows to me a reckless abandon of people who are filled with joy to their Lord. There's something refreshing about hearing everyone sing to the Lord. Let the people participate! We sing to each other and to the Lord.

There is a saying that goes, “I would rather do few things well than many things badly.” It was predicted back in 1930 renowned economist John Maynard Keynes that we would only have to work 15 hours a week due to all of the inventions that would come about. He was worried about what we would do with all of our free time. The exact opposite has happened. We are busier than ever. But that doesn't mean we have no free time. What are we busy doing? What has become a priority in your life?

Wisdom has built a house with seven pillars. Jesus Christ is the cornerstone. There are sixty six books in this house of the Word that you can go through. There are chapters that you could read a hundred times over and still not completely comprehend. The house is high on a hill. It is beckoning to you; calling you to come. When Paul says to take a careful search of your life; to redeem the time; and then he connects it to worship and your growth in wisdom; how are you doing? How have you been prioritizing your time and your priorities? What or Who has been taking first place? Understand what the Lord's will is by seeking your wisdom in Jesus Christ alone. Amen.