

Walk in Wisdom

Colossians 4:5

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Continue earnestly in prayer, being vigilant in it with thanksgiving; meanwhile praying also for us, that God would open to us a door for the word, to speak the mystery of Christ, for which I am also in chains, that I may make it manifest, as I ought to speak. Walk in wisdom toward those who are outside, redeeming the time. Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned with salt, that you may know how you ought to answer each one.

Let's come before the Lord in prayer.

Father, we ask that You would send the Holy Spirit at this hour to open the eyes of our understanding, to stir our hearts to love and to fear Your name. I pray, Heavenly Father, that You would see to it that Your people and I myself, Lord, would be filled with the Holy Spirit, that we would respond well to the word of God, and that we would hear the word of God and rejoice with joy unspeakable, full of glory. Thank You for the word which is quick and powerful and sharper than any two-edged sword. I pray that the piercings of the sword would touch our hearts and that the blood of Jesus Christ will cleanse us, and that our conscience would be soothed by the mercies of God through the Holy Spirit who will whisper comfort to our souls. We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.

All right, we're going to consider verse number five today of chapter number four. And we are here at the last section of this epistle, which is a section that has some final exhortations followed by some final greetings. The last two Sundays, we considered the final exhortation to prayer that the Apostle Paul was concerned that the church would continue in prayer. But not only that they would continue in prayer, but they would be a people that would pray specifically and use prayer and understand prayer as an instrumental means by which God accomplishes His purpose in advancing the gospel throughout the world. And we considered that last week in particular.

But now we come to this text of Scripture that deals with walking in wisdom toward those who are outside. What Paul wants us to realize is that the Christian's responsibilities do not only extend to his personal life, to his family life, or even to his church life, but the Christian's responsibilities

extend to a public life, if I could say, a life that goes beyond the four walls of the church, a life that goes beyond the covenant community of the people of God.

And this is evident firstly by the fact that Paul is asking for prayer for himself and for the gospel in a realm that's outside the church. He's asking for an advancement of the gospel to the unbelieving ear. But now he brings it even closer and says we need to now walk in wisdom, not only proclamation of the gospel, we need to walk in wisdom towards those that are outside, to those to whom the message is going. There must be also the accompanying life toward those same very same people.

You see, the Bible teaches us that Christians are little lights. Jesus said it in Matthew 5:16, "Let your light so shine before men," that's the outside world, "that they may see your good works and glorify your Father which is in heaven." And Jesus wanted His disciples to know that if you're going to follow Me, we have responsibilities to the unbelieving world as a witness, as a light that reflects the light of Jesus Christ and the glorious gospel of Jesus Christ.

And so it's important to realize that as we come to it, that the Christian is as the moon is to the sun. The Christian is as the moon is to the sun, so is the Christian to Jesus Christ. You see, the moon has no light of its own; all the light of the moon comes directly from the sun. The moon reflects the light of the sun to give light to those who are in darkness. And in the very same way, the Christian is that way. He receives a light that is not his own. Jesus, the light of the world, the light of the glorious gospel, shines in unto him. And him being filled with the light of the knowledge of the truth of Jesus Christ is a little light, as it were, that goes about shining in the darkness so that those that sit in darkness may see a great light, as was the ministry of Messiah, which He now carries on even through the life of His people.

You see, most people that live in spiritual darkness will only see as much light of Christ as is emanated from your reflection of Him. Most unbelieving people will only see as much light as emanates from the light of the believer in the way that he lives, in the way that he carries himself, in the way that we reflect Jesus Christ.

But the truth is that many Christians are ignorant of this reality, and they think the only thing that the Christian is called to do is to speak. But the Bible teaches us otherwise: that the Christian, yes, is called to speak, but he is called to walk. He's called to live. He's not only called to word; he is called to deed. He's called to a life of godliness, a life of holiness, to reflect the righteousness and the life of Jesus Christ and the light of the gospel.

And Paul was particularly concerned about this. Yes, he was concerned that the gospel would advance, but he was concerned that the gospel that would advance would not be undone by the foolish behavior of those that profess Jesus Christ. So he tells them, "Walk in wisdom toward those who are without."

Many people hear a lot of things today. There are a lot of things going on in the world today. I mean, I'll share a little personal experience. Natalie and I, as many of you know, have been battling issues with fertility for many years. We've been battling with issues of fertility. And one thing that you commonly receive when you're struggling with these things is a lot of remedies, if I can say. I just got one the other week, you know, apparently oysters will solve all the problem or whatever it may be.

But the one thing that I am constantly feeling whenever I hear of these testimonies, you know, and this is it, this will do it, this will do it, and they've always got a few little testimonies at the bottom, you know. One thing I feel like saying to the people that, in good heart and good manner, send this to us, I feel like saying, "I'd love to meet those people. And I wouldn't just like to meet one of them; I would like to meet a host of them. And I would like to see that testimony fleshed out in a reality."

And I think it's the same way amongst all the professing religions of the world. I think it's the same way amongst all the voices out there of philosophy, of legalism, of religion. They all have paths and ways of which there is the answer. And here they have the answer, here they have the answer, and the unbelieving world hears it all the time. They see the Jehovah's Witnesses on the street there; they see the Mormons; they see the Muslims saying that they have the answer; they see the Hindus and the Buddhists saying that this is the way of life.

But really, unless they see the life that is confessed and taste and see Jesus Christ emanated in a Christian life, only then will they truly be attracted to that which we profess. And I think it's very important as the Christian church to realize that our concern for the gospel does not only extend to evangelizing by word; it does not only extend to praying for the advancement of the gospel in the world, but what it extends to also is the living of a life of wisdom toward those who are outside.

The testimony of the early church has always been subjected to slander. Jesus was slandered, and all His apostles also were slandered. In fact, the Bible teaches that they tried to get false witnesses against Jesus so that they could crucify Him, but they found none. But then they found these two people later and said, "Oh, this man said He wants to destroy the tem-

ple of God." And so then they found something and someone to just throw an accusation at Him to send Him to the cross.

Stephen, the same: he was a godly man preaching in the fear of God, preaching the Word of God, and all of a sudden, the people gathered up false witnesses to testify against him and saying, "This man speaks against Moses and against the law," and the people stoned him to death.

What the Bible teaches us is that the disciple is not above his teacher, nor the servant above his master. And so what has been evident in the early church, even to the present day, is slander. So as we talk about the Christian testimony, we're not talking about the fact that there would never be slander. In fact, Jesus says, "Woe unto you if all men speak well of you." That's the reality: that not all men will speak well of Jesus and His followers.

However, the church was subject to many slanders. In the early church, William Hendrickson says, "In the days of the early church, believers were often slandered by outsiders. For example, they were called atheists because they served not visible gods. They were called unpatriotic because they did not burn incense before the image of the emperor and immoral because of necessity they would often meet behind closed doors. In fact, they were charged with cannibalism because of taking of the Lord's Supper. They were charged with incest because they would call each other brother and sister. And then they would have love feasts, which were really just meals sharing together. But because they were persecuted, they did that all in secret." And so, the enemies of the cross started to slander the Christian church.

They were slandered so much that the attacks leveled against them were so unreasonable and almost unfathomable that even Nero himself accused the Christians for the great fire of Rome and persecuted them vastly. But how was the Christian church to respond to such slander? Well, the Bible teaches us that they weren't to give a defense for why they did everything. They weren't to try and defend themselves all the time and say, "Oh well, no, no, that's not really it," and spend their whole lives going about trying to iron out all the slander that was against them.

Peter says this is what you are to do. He says in 1 Peter 2:12, "Having your conduct honorable among the Gentiles, that when they speak every evil against you as evildoers, they may by your good works which they observe, glorify God in the day of visitation." You know what he said? You just keep living a life that shows that what they say is not really true of you.

Peter also says in 1 Peter 3:16, "Having a good conscience, so that when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be

put to shame." So, it's inevitable that slander will come. The Christian church was slandered, but what was Peter concerned about? What was Paul concerned about? They were concerned about the believers living a life that reflected wisdom. They walked in wisdom, they walked in holiness, in conduct that was careful so that the unbelieving world, although they were slandered, all the attention that was received from their slander would turn to the praise of God because as their slanderers would spread this message and make people curious as to these people, those people that would look upon them would start to say, "No, no, these people are not what they're saying they are," and they would discover that they are true, loving, Christlike individuals.

And so, this is the way that the Bible teaches us about walking in wisdom and the importance of walking in wisdom. But when we come to verse number five of this text, Paul specifically commands the church at Colossae to walk in wisdom towards those who are outside, redeeming the time. And he says to them, he's basically saying to them, "The gospel is going out; we're praying for the gospel to go out, but as people look on and look at you, let them see incarnate what we preach. Let them see in life what we say."

But what is wisdom? Well, wisdom is the proper application and out-working of knowledge. Wisdom is not knowledge in and of itself; wisdom cannot exist without knowledge, but wisdom is discernment, it's an understanding heart, it's knowing the best course of action to take in certain circumstances. One man put it this way, and I liked it, he said it's "a crucial intermediate state between thought and action." That's the time for wisdom; that's where wisdom kicks in. You have a thought, you have an action, there's judgment that comes between thought and action, and that judgment is discernment, that judgment relates to knowledge and discernment and decision-making, which is where wisdom is to be found or where wisdom is meant to be applied.

And so, Paul says to the church at Colossae, "You walk in wisdom toward those who are without." But I think it would be unwise for us to take a view of wisdom that's not necessarily and only found in outside sources, but consider what actually wisdom is in Colossians.

If you've been following through this series, you'll find that we talked a lot about wisdom in several chapters where wisdom was mentioned in Chapter 1 and in Chapter 2, and here again, it appears in Chapter 4. In Chapter 1, Paul is praying that the people would be filled. He says, "I don't cease to pray for you, that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will," he says, "in all wisdom and in spiritual understanding." But he doesn't finish there, "that you may walk worthy of the Lord." He's saying, "I want you to

know the knowledge of God's will, that you might have discernment in how you might fully please Him in everything."

And Paul is simply praying for them that they might have wisdom, which the fruit of that is walking in a way that is fully pleasing to Him. And in Chapter 2, Paul encourages the church at Colossae. He says, "Don't be taken by false wisdom. Don't be taken by this false philosophy; it's an empty deceit." But realize this, that in Christ Jesus are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

All the treasures of wisdom and knowledge will not be found in philosophy, not be found in empty deceit or the traditions of men or in the thoughts of others, but he's saying all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are hidden there in Christ, not hidden from us but hidden for us, that we might come to Him and open the treasure chest of the wisdom of God in Christ Jesus and take and receive and know what wisdom truly is in looking to Jesus Christ.

And Paul, in between these instructions on telling us that Jesus is all wisdom and don't be deceived by the wisdom of this world, encourages us to walk in Him, to walk under His authority, to walk under His rule. And here, then, we come to this final charge of wisdom or thoughts regarding wisdom, and he tells us now to walk in wisdom.

Now, if in Christ is hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge, and wisdom really is the submission to the will of God and the ways of God, what then is Paul referring to when he says to us to walk in wisdom? Yes, it means taking the best course of action, but how should we then know what the best course of action is in a certain situation?

Well, evidently, what he's referring to here is that we walk as Jesus Christ, that we look to Jesus Christ to derive what true wisdom is, as Corinthians says, "He is made unto us wisdom from God." What Paul is trying to help us understand here is that walking in wisdom, in light of the entire epistle, really means walking as Jesus Christ in the world.

And isn't that so fitting, especially in the context of the proclamation of the gospel? The gospel is the preaching of the message of the cross of Jesus Christ. Paul says, "Pray for us; we're trying to uphold this Savior. We want a door of effectual open unto us so that when Jesus is lifted up, the world might know and the world might see Him in the preaching of the message of the cross." But he says to the believers there at Colossae, "Listen, as we preach Him, you live Him; you walk as Him so that what we say of Him may be seen in you. What we say that He may do for your soul sees evidence in your life. We declare Him as a Savior from sin; therefore, live

a life that is free from sin. We declare Him as a Savior who satisfies our hungerings and our thirstings; then be satisfied in Him. We declare Him as a sufficient Savior; then do not seek other things."

What Paul is simply saying here is walking in wisdom is walking in the ways of Jesus Christ, under His authority, under His rulership, under the sound of His voice. And this is what we are called to do as the church of Jesus Christ.

The implications are great. What Paul is simply saying to us, dear people of God, is that you and I are an embodiment of the gospel of Jesus Christ. We are the gospel, as it were, incarnate; we are the gospel fleshed out to the unbelieving world that they might see what the gospel truly does to those who believe it.

Positively, this means that we are to live as Christ to an unbelieving world, to walk in wisdom toward those that are without or outside. How do we do that? Well, look at Jesus. You show love. Love your neighbor as yourself. You know, the man said, "Who then is my neighbor?" trying to escape the question, and Jesus says, "I'll tell you who your neighbor is: that one who is your enemy." That Samaritan man that came and healed that Jewish man and helped him and put him in and paid for his stay, that man was an enemy to him. The Jews and the Samaritans had no dealings together. The Jews called the Samaritans dogs, but this "dog," as it were, treated this Jew as a neighbor and loved on him and helped him and showed him, and Jesus said, "Who is then my neighbor?" The man said, and Jesus said, "This is your neighbor."

Will you do to the Samaritan what the Samaritan would do to you, as it were? Will you love those that love you? What praise have you? Even the publicans and the heathens do the same. If you love your enemies, if you do good to them that despitefully use you, then you reflect the gospel of Jesus Christ.

What about Jesus' love and care and patience? He was a man of patience, demonstrated great patience, wisdom from God, endurance through such hardship. When He was reviled, the Bible says He reviled not again. When He was slandered, He didn't return slander for slander, but He submitted Himself to God, trusting Himself to the Heavenly Father.

How do we live as Jesus to the lost? Well, when sin and temptation come our way, as Jesus did, He withstood sin and temptation and Satan there in the desert. He did not yield to it. He was faithful, fully and completely to all the will of His Heavenly Father, did not turn to the left hand nor to the right, showing us, showing the world that His Father's will was best,

and He would yield Himself entirely to the will of His Heavenly Father. He did not use His liberty for an occasion for the flesh. He did not feel the sin of the lost nor pamper them in their corruptions. He drew clear lines marked by wisdom, yet at the same time, He was not fearful to be sitting, as it were, with the winebibbers and called out as a winebibber. He was not so afraid of slander so as not to love. He was not so afraid of slander and what people may say of Him so as not to care and to be patient and to endure. He was one who was not afraid of what men would say unto Him, and therefore He was free to love as He demonstrated for us.

He lived a life fully governed, as it were, by His Heavenly Master. He lived a life that was pure and holy and righteous, a life satisfied with the will of God. Negatively, He avoided things that were not good. He did not sit in the seat of the scornful, as it were, and He did not commit sin in any way. Did He yield ever once to temptation? He did not stumble the lost by living a life that showed that what He preached did not match His life. He was one who lived perfect, harmless, blameless, spotless, sinless Lamb of God. He was walking in perfect wisdom toward those who were outside.

And such a walk, no doubt, as we see in the Scripture, attracted many to Christ. "Who is this man? He's different. He speaks with words of wisdom and authority. His life is impeccable. They had no charge against Him. Is He a prophet? Is He the Messiah? Who is this one?" So unique because of the way that He carried Himself and lived His life and truly because He was God, of course, manifest in the flesh.

What we see here is that Christ set that example of how to live before the unbelieving world, and when Paul calls us to walk in wisdom, he essentially calls us to demonstrate and reflect Christ's likeness to the lost. Now, Paul gives us one of the ways in which we are to do this, or elaborate, should I say, on what this walking in wisdom toward those that are without looks like. He says in verse number five, "Walk in wisdom toward those who are outside," but he says here, "redeeming the time." Redeeming the time. This literally means to buy up the opportunities.

I think we should not consider time in this passage as mere seconds. And I don't think this is a call, although it is important, to be faithful in our time management. I believe this even deals with time management, but it's not a call to fearfully watch every second. I think what Paul's trying to say here is to understand that our life and every moment of life presents to us opportunities. And the job of the Christian is to redeem the opportunities. The job of the one who walks in wisdom is to seize the opportunities.

In fact, it's been said that this word "to redeem the time" has the idea of buying up the bargains. My wife's a bargain hunter and always snaps

a good bargain. She takes advantage of the opportunities that are there. We'll wait for the right time, for the right opportunity.

And I think the word "time" here refers to occasions and opportunity, just like the saying, "We're having a lovely time today." We're not talking about the seconds; we're talking about the occasion, the opportunity. And what Paul is instructing us and encouraging us to do is to snap up the opportunities that are before us like they were a mega sale. Limited time, limited stock, therefore make the most of the opportunities that are before you. This is what it means to walk in wisdom.

The world says time is money. The Christian says time is opportunity. The Christian does not see this world as an end in and of itself. They do not see this world as that which is the end. They see this world as a means to an end. They see this world, therefore, through the eyes of opportunity. They see that there is a bank account in heaven, as it were, a treasure chest in heaven, and they lay up in store now for that day.

They're not like that man who has much and says, "Ah, my soul has ease, so I'll build bigger barns and put all my stuff in those barns." They realize that the barns they build here will one day come to naught and collapse. But they realize that the life they are living has an eternal view, and that this life now has, therefore, eternal value as they live out their days with a view to that day that is coming.

And so, when Paul encourages the church to redeem the time, he's simply encouraging them here to realize that their life is filled with opportunity. Don't be indifferent to the affairs of your day. Realize, look, watch for the opportunities that are before you. Avail yourself and lay hold of the opportunities before you.

What does that mean? Well, every time you and I are presented with a temptation, there is, at that time, an opportunity to redeem it for the glory of God. If you are tempted and you stand your ground and yield and commit yourself to God, you redeem that opportunity as an opportunity to the praise, honor, and glory of God.

When you are slandered and you say, "God is my defense," as opposed to defending yourself, as it were, unnecessarily, then what you're doing there is you're buying up that opportunity. That opportunity comes to you even through the negative.

When you are hated by your enemies, there stands your opportunity to love and to support and to serve. When you have times of joy, there's your opportunity to praise and thank and magnify the Name of Jesus Christ,

who has given you that which you do not deserve. When you are in trial and in testing, there is your opportunity to hold fast to the Word of God, to claim the promises of God, to trust that He will heal, mend, and restore that which is broken and that which the locust has eaten.

You see, the Bible is teaching us here that if we are to walk in wisdom, we are living as Christ in all the opportunities that life presents before us, and we are redeeming them by living out and responding well to all that life comes and throws our way. You see, the world's motto is a purposeless motto, as the Scripture tells us, "Eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we die." For the unbelieving world, they think tomorrow we die; tomorrow, therefore, is the end. So what we must do today is enjoy the moment today in that we eat, drink, and be merry. And the eating, drinking, and being merry all have to do with self-satisfaction and the seeking of self-pleasure.

What the Bible is teaching us here is that the Christian's life is not "eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we die," but "eat and drink for the glory of God, for tomorrow we live." And in Him, we live and move and have our being, and we're going to one day give an account of ourselves to God. And so, therefore, we don't view this time as a time of self-satisfaction to our own grave, but we view this time as a time to walk in wisdom. We view all the things that life presents us as times of opportunity to praise the name of Jesus and to bear the Gospel of Jesus to a lost and dying world. This is the attitude of those who truly walk in wisdom toward those who are outside.

You see, turn with me for a moment, actually, to Deuteronomy chapter 4. Deuteronomy chapter 4, what Paul is saying here, is essentially what Moses was saying to the children of Israel regarding their witness to the nations. And in Deuteronomy chapter 4, verse 6, Moses encourages the children of Israel, teaching them the statutes and ways of God, and he says to them in verse 6, listen to what he says here:

"Therefore be careful to observe them, for this is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the peoples who will hear all these statutes and say, 'Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.' For what great nation is there that has a God so near to it as the Lord our God is to us, for whatever reason we may call upon Him?"

You know what Moses is telling the children of Israel? Your wisdom is the ways of Jehovah. He has laid them down for you in His law, and he says, "Therefore, walk in them, and you will be to the nations a people that they would look upon and ask, 'Look at these wise and understanding people.'" Our lives fall to bits because we don't obey the law of God, but they submit to the law of God and live, and that joyfully and satisfied.

And what is Moses saying? He is saying your life will reflect to the nations, just like the wisdom of Solomon given to him by God, so that the kings of the nations of the earth came together and looked upon Solomon and said, "I want to know about this wisdom," like the Queen of Sheba. It attracts people to the truth when they see wisdom personified in and through our lives.

And what the Bible is teaching us here is that One greater than Solomon is here: Jesus Christ, who is the true, the everlasting, the final, and full expression of the wisdom of God. And what Paul says to us, "Walk in Him, walk in wisdom, observe His ways, follow His commandments," and then the nations will look, as it were, and see the message that we preach is backed by the life and the life of freedom. True liberation is found in Jesus Christ.

And as they go through their times of sorrow and corruption and failings and fallings and bondage to sin, where shall they turn to find the answer? When they turn to psychology, they'll find it empty and vain. When they turn to religion, they will find that all it does is bring forth legalistic ways and behavior. But when they turn to see the Christians, they say, "What is this?" And we will say to them, "This is Jesus Christ. This is the wisdom of God manifest through His people."

You say, "I need this wisdom." Look to Jesus Christ. He is made unto us wisdom from God. You won't find it anywhere else. All the ways of transgression are foolish, the Bible teaches. But Jesus offers salvation, forgiveness, changed lives, a new heart that He gives to His people to have a new life in, whereby they will live to His praise. Where should I go for understanding? Go to the treasure chest of Jesus. Open it up. Read His life. Learn of Him. Come to Christ. Believe on His name and receive the joy of your sins forgiven and walk in the treasures of wisdom and knowledge that are found in Him.

I want to finish by just reading some of the passages that were read to us this morning and some others also. And I want us to just quietly hear for a moment the voice of wisdom. "Does not wisdom cry out, and understanding lift up her voice? Counsel is mine, and sound wisdom; I am understanding, I have strength. I love those who love me, and those who seek me diligently will find me. Now therefore, listen to me, my children, for blessed are those who keep my ways. Hear instruction, and be wise, and do not disdain it. Blessed is the man who listens to me, watching daily at my gates, waiting at the posts of my doors. For whoever finds me finds life and obtains favor from the Lord. But he who sins against me wrongs his own soul; all those who hate me love death."

"Wisdom calls aloud outside; she raises her voice in the open squares. She cries out in the chief concourses, at the openings of the gates in the city, she speaks her words: 'How long, you simple ones, will you love simplicity? Your scorers delight in their scorning, and fools hate knowledge. Turn at my rebuke; surely I will pour out my spirit upon you; I will make my words known to you. Because I have called and you refused, I have stretched out my hand and no one regarded, because you disdained all my counsel and would have none of my rebuke, I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your terror comes, when your terror comes like a storm, and your destruction comes like a whirlwind, when distress and anguish come upon you. Then they will call on me, but I will not answer; they will seek me diligently, but they will not find me, because they hated knowledge and did not choose the fear of the Lord. They would have none of my counsel and despised my every rebuke. Therefore they shall eat the fruit of their own way, and be filled with the fool of their own fancies. For the turning away of the simple will slay them, and the complacency of fools will destroy them. But whoever listens to me will dwell safely and will be secure, without fear of evil.'"

Christian, hear the voice of wisdom. Walk in wisdom. Do not walk in folly. Do not squander the opportunities that are presented to us. Do not be satisfied with the wells that run dry. Walk in her ways. Embrace her wisdom. Lay hold of the gospel. Lay hold of Jesus Christ and be, as Paul commands us, a light as it were to those who shine in darkness. For you are the light of the world, and a city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden. Let us pray.