

Sunday, December 28, 2025

Walk Circumspectly And Be Filled With The Spirit

This is the twelfth in a series of sermons through the book of Ephesians, and today we will be covering 5:15-21. We've had a lot going on in the last several months and it's been some time since the last sermon, so I think it would be helpful to get our bearings and remember where we are in the epistle. Chapters 1-3 lay the foundation of God's sovereign grace in choosing, redeeming and adopting us in and through Christ. He's raised us from spiritual death and united us with Christ, also uniting Jews and Gentiles together as one man and one holy temple according to His eternal purpose in Christ Jesus our Lord. The eternal and immeasurable love, power, grace and glory of God with respect to the church is put on full display in these chapters. Based on that foundation, we are called to live as children of God ought to live. That is, in lowliness, meekness, unity, forbearance, love, peace, using our God-given gifts to edify the body so that we would grow up to be like Christ. We are to not walk as other Gentiles walk but must put off the old man and put on the new man. We are to forgive one another even as God has forgiven us in Christ, imitating God and walking in love as Christ has loved us. We are to walk as children of light, not having anything to do with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather we are to reprove them in word and deed. Many practical examples have been given along the way. Today's passage continues Paul's practical guidance on how we are supposed to be living our lives.

See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, Redeeming the time, because the days are evil. Wherefore be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is. And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit; Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord; Giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ; Submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God.
(Ephesians 5:15-21)

Let us pause for a moment and talk about this word "walk." It's a major theme throughout the book, and this is the last time that we encounter it. When he says "walk" he simply means how you live your life. It encompasses the whole spectrum of your existence. How you think, act, speak. We're first introduced to the word in chapter 2 where he compares how we used to walk (worldly, fleshly, satanically) with God ordaining us to walk in good works. He begins fleshing that out in chapter 4. We're ordained to "walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called," to "walk not as other Gentiles walk," to "walk in love," to "walk as children of light." And today, we add to "walk circumspectly." This is how God has ordained us to walk, and therefore Paul commands us to walk this way. He's saying, "God has chosen you to be His

children, and this is how He expects you to live your lives.” This is how you should be living in order to be consistent with what you are. And this is how a child of God should WANT to live, despite sinful inclinations and backslidings. A person’s physical walk is one of the easiest ways to recognize him. Before you can see any facial or other detailed features, you can tell a person’s gait from large distances. “And the watchman said, Me thinketh the running of the foremost is like the running of Ahimaaz the son of Zadok.” (2 Sam. 18:27). Similarly, a person ought to be able to take a look at your walk and recognize that you’re a child of God. Further, a walk involves forward progression – there should be advancement in your spiritual life.

Walk Circumspectly

See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, Redeeming the time, because the days are evil. Wherefore be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is. (Ephesians 5:15-17)

This little word “then” points back to the previous section, where we are told to walk as children of light, reproofing the unfruitful works of darkness, “Wherefore he saith, Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light.” (Eph. 5:14). The idea is that you better be very careful about your own walk if you’re going to be going around reproofing the unfruitful works of darkness and telling people to wake up and rise from the dead. You are unfit to do that work if your own walk isn’t in order. To “see” means that you’re giving your undivided attention to your walk. You examine it. You scrutinize it. To walk “circumspectly” means that you live carefully, diligently, accurately according to the word of God. You focus on the details. You’re intentional about it. You’re not haphazard or thoughtless. You know what you’re doing and why you’re doing it. You simply cannot live a holy life without taking care and caution and being watchful and making changes along the way as you discern this or that sin in your life. Remember that you are in enemy territory, so watch out for landmines! Now, when we look at the sister passage over in Colossians, we see this: “Walk in wisdom toward them that are without, redeeming the time.” (Col. 4:5). This walk is with respect to those people who are outside of (“without”) the church. The way that you live impacts the power of your testimony of Christ to a fallen world. If your own life consists of impenitent works of darkness while you are reproofing other people about their works of darkness, I don’t think I can stress enough what an awful reproach this brings on Christ. Why should anyone listen to you, a sleeping man telling other sleepers to wake up?

To walk circumspectly is to not walk as fools, but to walk as wise. Listen – you have found Christ. You have found “the wisdom of God.” (1 Cor. 1:24). You are in Christ Jesus, and God has made Him “unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption.” (1 Cor. 1:30). He is your wisdom. The only people on the planet who are truly wise are those

who have found Christ; everyone else is a fool. He's saying here that you're wise, so don't act like fools! This dichotomy between the wise and the foolish is found all over the scripture. The amount of passages is overwhelming. But I highly recommend that you do a word search for words like "fool" and "folly" and "foolish" vs. "wise" and "wisely" and "wisdom." You'll find a lot of verses that you've forgotten about. Compare yourself to those verses – "see then that ye walk circumspectly." You have no excuse – you have a Bible in your pocket with a search function. The "wise" in this passage are those who know how to apply the knowledge of the will of God to particular circumstances. The "fools" and the "unwise" in this passage are the opposite of that – they lack wisdom, are without understanding, lack cognitive facilities, and are simply stupid when it comes to anything important. They may be geniuses otherwise, but when it comes to God and godly living, they are mindless.

Let me take just one example that seems to be apropos to the context: "The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life; and he that winneth souls is wise." (Prov. 11:30). Do you buck at this verse? Do you mock it? Is it even on your radar? I say it's apropos because "he saith, Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light." (Eph. 5:14). In my last sermon, I asked you if you had the heart of David to "teach transgressors thy ways; and sinners shall be converted unto thee." (Ps. 51:13). And today I ask you if you have the heart of Paul who said, "I made myself servant unto all, that I might gain [i.e., win] the more...I am made all things to all men, that I might by all means save some." (1 Cor. 9:19, 22). Both these men had the heart of Christ. Is this your heart? Or is this a foreign concept to you? Or, God forbid, are you hostile to it? Do you not think it's your duty to "win" and "gain" and "save"? If so, in the best case, you are playing the fool. In the worst case, you have the heart of Satan, not Christ, and you don't even realize it. Of course, I'm talking about the heart and the motives and the posture, not about the results. And of course, everyone knows that we are tools in God's hand; it is God who actually does the saving.

A hallmark of wisdom is that you redeem the time and that you understand what the will of the Lord is. The word "redeem" means "to buy up." There is an allusion to a merchant who will carefully and diligently search for the opportunity to make a good purchase. Trapp: "*As wise merchants, trading for the most precious commodity, and taking their best opportunity. The common complaint is, We lack time; but the truth is, we do not so much lack it as waste it.*" The implication here is that to "redeem the time" means that a price must be paid, and the price you pay may be that you have to exercise a little bit of self-discipline and make sacrifices. Time is a precious and valuable commodity, and there is an urgency attached to it because it is in limited supply. The reason given here for redeeming the time is "because the days are evil." Yes, they are. Behind these evil days is Satan, energizing all the world's vain philosophies and practices. There is an endless supply of evil things that can steal your time in a day. This can be overtly evil things, or more subtle time sinks like "infinite scrolling," chasing

rabbit trails of randos on X or TikTok, etc. Picture evil with a tight grip on time, and your job is to buy that time back and use it for something good instead. This fleshes out what it means to walk circumspectly. Of course, it includes that you shouldn't be lazy, that you shouldn't waste time, that you shouldn't spend your days carelessly or aimlessly, etc. But added to that is that you ought to not miss opportunities to glorify God. Keep your eyes peeled for opportunities to glorify God. Let's say you get in a yelling match, wrangling with someone on the streets. That's almost guaranteed to be a lost opportunity. "The beginning of strife is as when one letteth out water: therefore leave off contention, before it be meddled with." (Prov. 17:14). You didn't glorify God there. You didn't redeem the time. There are only so many of those opportunities, and then they're gone. The context, remember, is that we're called to walk as children of light and reprove the unfruitful works of darkness – don't miss opportunities to do that. Let me put it this way: Jesus redeemed the time. He never missed an opportunity. He walked as the light of the world and reproved the unfruitful works of darkness. And He had a particular effect on the sinners He encountered. Some of them He repelled (those who were righteous in their own eyes), but some of them He attracted (those heavy laden with their sins). Something about Christ attracted those sinners. If you're always repelling and never attracting because you have only one tool in your toolbox, you're not like Christ, and you're not redeeming the time. Like those whom Jesus chastises in Luke 11:52, there are people who act like their whole reason for existence is to do everything in their power to stand in between a person and Christ. Likewise, there are people who give a lot of lip service to loving God and their neighbor, but the last thing they'd ever do, or even think about doing, is to direct a sinner to the Savior, like they're embarrassed or ashamed of Him. We shouldn't be like those people.

The second hallmark of wisdom is that you understand what the will of the Lord is. Because the days are evil, it is all the more important that you understand what the will of the Lord is. Part of redeeming the time is spending it in understanding what the will of the Lord is. The will of Jesus Christ is the only thing that is important – your will is not; your thoughts are not; your desires are not; your opinions are not. You could spend a lot of frenetic, feverish time keeping very busy with doing your own will by your own wisdom, but it's God's will that is important. Some times, you have to just slow down and make sure that what you're doing is His will. Did He tell you to do that? Did He tell you to say that? Just because you've been doing or saying something for a long time doesn't mean you've been doing God's will. Are you doing and saying what He delights in? Or what you delight in? And there is but one way to know what the will of the Lord is, and that is to read the Bible! Meditate on the Bible! And then apply it to your circumstances. Take some of the time that you're currently spending on ingesting poison and foolishness and use that time to read the Bible. Don't let a day pass. You wouldn't go a day without drinking water, would you? Don't go a day without reading the Bible. It's the only way that you can see things as Christ sees them. Please, don't read the Bible with a so-called "confirmation bias" lens (that is, don't read it to try to find support for some idea or

practice that you've manufactured, some pet doctrine that you're obsessed with, some novel interpretation that you're proud of; don't painfully twist it to justify something you're doing or saying; don't abandon the plain meaning of the passage just because it would mean that something you hold dear, or something you have a lot of time invested in, is wrong). Rather, read it to find what God's will is – to see things as God sees things. To see what God delights in. Even if that means that you lose face.

Even the Lord Jesus, in His earthly walk, grew in wisdom (Lk. 2:41-52). And if He had need of growing in wisdom, don't you think you need to also? There's no other way to know the will of the Lord than reading the Bible. "For this is the will of God, even your sanctification." (1 Thess. 4:3). We find that right here in this chapter – no fornication, no uncleanness, no covetousness, etc. His will is "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you." (Mt. 28:19-20). Or, as we find in Luke: "Thus it is written, and thus it behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day: And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem." (Lk. 24:46-47). His will is to "give[] to us the ministry of reconciliation" and to "commit[] unto us the word of reconciliation." (2 Cor. 5:18-19). Are you doing His will? Our passage today says that wisdom requires "understanding what the will of the Lord is." But it isn't understanding just for the sake of understanding. Wisdom is applied knowledge and understanding. It's taking your knowledge and understanding and applying it to the situation on the ground. It's one thing to know His will. It's another thing to talk about His will. It's another thing to say that you're following His will, perhaps thinking you are in good faith but contrary to reality. But it's another thing altogether to actually do His will. "If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them." (Jn. 13:17).

I'll conclude this section with the final verse of one of the greatest passages in all scripture on wisdom: "And unto man he said, Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom; and to depart from evil is understanding." (Job 28:28)

Be Filled With The Spirit

And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit; Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord; Giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ; Submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God.

(Ephesians 5:18-21)

This sudden introduction of “be not drunk with wine” sounds rather jarring and out of place in the middle of all this. But think of it like this – a staggering drunk is the exact opposite of a wise man who is walking circumspectly, redeeming the time, and understanding the will of the Lord. “Wine is a mocker, strong drink is raging: and whosoever is deceived thereby is not wise.” (Pro. 20:1). So, it’s a good transition to reintroduce the Holy Spirit of wisdom, to remind us that He is the one who gives us the power to keep any of these commandments in the first place. If we compare and contrast being drunk with being filled with the Spirit, we can learn more about what it means to be filled with the Spirit.

Being drunk with wine impacts your whole being – how you walk, how you think, how you talk, how you act. So does being filled with the Spirit. When you are drunk, you are under the influence of something external to your being. So it is with being filled with the Spirit. In contrast, when you’re drunk, it leads to excess – debauchery, profligacy, riot, lack of self-control, exhaustion, unfulfilled promises. Note that the word is “drunk” – this isn’t talking about consuming a moderate amount of wine. After all, Jesus turned water into wine (Jn. 2:1-11), so wine isn’t in itself bad, but we can’t conclude that Jesus did that to enable people to get drunk! Paul told Timothy to drink a little wine for the sake of his stomach and his often infirmities (1 Tim. 5:23). But this passage is talking about drunkenness, and it leads to even more sins, but being filled with the Spirit leads to only good things – the examples given here are singing praises, thanksgiving, and submission.

Please observe here that “be filled with the Spirit” is a command. It’s not something where you sit back and relax and it just magically happens. But it’s a strange command – it is a passive command. The command isn’t “fill yourself with the Spirit” but rather “be filled with the Spirit.” Only God can fill you with the Spirit, but you have a responsibility to be filled with the Spirit. I hesitate to use words like “allow” or “yield” because those can make it sound like you’re the one in charge and the sovereign God needs your permission. But properly used, those words are fine and can help get the gist of the meaning. The way you fulfill this commandment is to stop kicking against the pricks! Stop fighting against Him! Get out of His way! Don’t grieve Him! Stop allowing your sins to hinder His work! It is also a continuous command – it is in the present tense. That is, he’s not telling us in this passage to look for some supernatural experience or for some special gift for a particular circumstance; He’s telling us that this should be an ongoing reality. This is how we should live our lives. You can never be too full of the Spirit. You shouldn’t be satisfied with just a little bit of the Spirit – you should seek after and crave to be filled more and more. There’s an allusion here to God filling the temple with His glory – remember that when Jesus came, He rendered the physical temple obsolete, and we are now the temple of God. This is also closely tied to the Word of God. In the similar passage in Colossians, it says, “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all

wisdom.” (Col. 3:16). A person who is filled with the Spirit will also have the word of Christ dwelling in their hearts. You do that by immersing yourself in the scripture. Read the Bible!

I believe that the next three verses are practical ways to facilitate being filled with the Spirit – singing, thanksgiving, submission. But I want to be very clear that this isn’t a 3-step mechanical process. You can’t go grab some stranger off the street and say, “if you just sing, be thankful, and be submissive, then you’ll be filled with the Spirit.” No! Every child of God is filled with the Spirit to one degree or another, and anyone who is filled with the Spirit to any degree will want to and will do these things. But doing these things also results in being filled even more with the Spirit. There is a reciprocal nature here: we do them because we’re filled with the Spirit, and we’re filled with the Spirit because we do them. The problem with it all is that we step in and hinder things with our sins. Note that this isn’t an exhaustive account of all the things that are involved in being “filled with the Spirit,” but if singing from the heart to God, giving thanks to the Father in the name of Jesus Christ, and submission in the fear of God aren’t in your life to some degree, you have no right to claim that you are filled with the Spirit.

“Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord.”

First, there is no end to people debating about what the distinction is between psalms and hymns and spiritual songs. Frankly, I do not know for sure what the difference is. I think it’s safe to say that it encompasses different types and styles of songs used to worship God, from the psalms in the scripture, to hymns that we might find in the New Testament that praise Christ, to songs praising God or addressing other spiritual matters. I don’t think it excludes songs written by godly men and women, as long as they have sound doctrine. Whatever the case, the implication here is that WE WILL SING. There is an aspect that involves “speaking to yourselves” – that is, when we sing, we address, teach, admonish, edify, instruct, etc., one another. There is also an aspect that involves singing and making melody in our hearts to the Lord. That is, we sing and make melody with sincere hearts, directing our songs and praise to the Lord. God delights in hearing His children sing to Him...even if you aren’t particularly musically talented.

Music is a very powerful force. We were made to sing. The fallen nature of mankind means that music is very often abused and used for evil in so many ways...but humans were made to sing. It doesn’t matter where you go in this world; every culture has music. Mothers sing lullabies to babies in every culture. Rhythm exists in every culture. Music is used for social bonding and to express meaning in every culture. People often remember things better when they are put to music – there’s something about it that helps you internalize things better. Music can move us in a way that the spoken word can’t, leading to repentance, joy,

thanksgiving, etc. Even unborn babies respond to music. It is innate. I say we were made to sing. Did you know that there are physiological things that happen when we sing? When we sing together, our bodies produce oxytocin (the “bonding hormone”), drawing us closer together. Our bodies produce dopamine, creating an emotional high (which is why music is often described as “lifting the soul”). Our bodies mirror what is going on in the music, with heart rates moving faster or slower depending on the excitement level of the music, allowing us to feel what others are feeling. It is one of the few activities that engages the entire brain, and it is one of the few things that can immediately trigger a memory. Just make sure that you don’t get so caught up in the tune that you miss the words. Augustine: *“when I am more moved by the singing than by what is sung, I confess that I have sinned criminally and wish that I had not heard the singing at all.”* Singing good words, from the heart, to the Lord, has great spiritual benefits, including being an antidote to a hard heart – see Psalm 95.

It is clear that singing is baked into the creation. Singing was involved when this world was created: “When the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy...” (Job 38:7). God Himself sings, and we were made in His image. Did you know God sings? “He will joy over thee with singing.” (Zeph. 3:17). Jesus sings. “I will declare thy name unto my brethren, in the midst of the church will I sing praise unto thee.” (Heb. 2:12). That is an amazing verse. Were you aware that Jesus is with us in the midst of the church leading us in singing praises to God? When we come together to worship God, we are participating in the worship of God that is going on in heaven, and that involves singing praise. I’ve often wondered what that sounds like in heaven. What we have here is just a little taste.

“Giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

If you look back in verse 4, you’ll see that “giving of thanks” is the antidote to those sins that are enumerated at the beginning of the chapter (fornication, uncleanness, covetousness, filthy language). He uses large, expansive language to describe how we should be thankful – “always for all things.” There’s always something to be thankful for – He provides fresh mercies daily, and even our afflictions are mercies. There’s never a time that we shouldn’t be thankful, and there’s never a thing that we shouldn’t be thankful for...as long as the thanksgiving is given to God in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. “In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ” means that we recognize Him as our Mediator, we are praying on His merit, we are praying on His authority, we are praying recognizing that He is the one who has procured all our blessings for us, and we are praying for things that are consistent with His will and are things that He would pray for Himself as our Mediator. Therefore, being thankful for “all things,” for example, doesn’t mean we should thank God that we had success in sinning! But we can certainly thank and praise God for turning our sinful foolishness into a blessing, to the

praise of the glory of His grace. I'm not going to dwell here for too long, because Jon has been doing multiple sermons on this very verse.

Like singing, we were made to be thankful. It's baked into our DNA. There are health benefits to these bodies to have gratitude. And like singing, because of the fall of mankind, thanksgiving can and usually is turned into a sinful thing. We live in a generation of perpetually unthankful people (see 2 Tim. 3:2). But even when they are "thankful," it's for the wrong things, for the wrong reasons, and directed to the wrong place. Even if they mouth the words "thank God!" it's perverse and flippant. It's a generation marked by discontentment, envy, covetousness – all the antithesis of being thankful. If we're filled with the Spirit, we ought to be different.

"Submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God."

You might be able to tell the importance of this topic by the volume of words Paul has to say about it. This verse acts as a hinge. On the one side, it is one of the things involved in being filled with the Spirit; on the other side, it is the introduction to a long discourse on the topic of submission (running from 5:22-6:9). The word "submit" is a military term, referring to being arranged as a unit under a military leader. People who are in the military don't get to do whatever they want to do. They are under the authority of another. They must submit to another. For someone in the military to go rogue and not be in submission is not just dangerous, it is deadly. It's interesting that Paul introduces the concept of submission here, moves forward to flesh it out, and then moves straight into the "armour of God" section – another military metaphor. Remember that we're at war; don't get too comfortable.

This verse introduces the general rule of mutual submission. That doesn't erase the fact that there are different relationships that have different expectations for submission (he'll go on to talk about husband/wife, parent/child, master/servant), but the general rule that overshadows all of it is that we are to submit one to another. Even a person who is in a position of authority submits in a sense to those over whom he has authority, to serve and minister to them. I'm not going to spend a lot of time on this, because Sam did a sermon on this verse recently. But I will say that if you have a problem with submission, look at Jesus. The sovereign King of the world submitted and humbled Himself – see Phil. 2. He bowed down and washed the feet of His disciples and friends. I don't know that you need anything more than that.

I will also say that the submission must be done "in the fear of God." How many of you do or don't do things because you're worried about what other people in the church might think or say about you, or have some craven fear of how this or that person might react? And how

many of you operate in a way such that you've created an environment that when people see you coming, they're scared? That's a dysfunctional and legalistic mode of existence. That's not what the fear of God looks like. A healthy, trembling, reverential, filial fear is a proper fear of God. It's not a slavish fear where you're only doing it because you're scared that God might otherwise get mad at you and punish you. On the contrary, the fear of God at least involves you loving Him and fearing that you may disappoint or grieve Him, and it involves showing respect to Him and joyful trembling in His presence because He is in a position where He deserves it! Ps. 2:11 is really good – "Serve the LORD with fear, and rejoice with trembling." We don't do things because we have some vague notion that "it's the right thing to do." We do things because we fear God. This also militates against the notion of "submission at all costs." We can't blindly submit to those who peddle false doctrine or practice, for example, because that wouldn't be submission in the fear of God.

I'm sure I sound like a broken record, but humans were made to submit to one another. Like the other two, it is built into our DNA. There are health benefits to submitting to and selflessly serving others. And like singing and thanksgiving, the fall of mankind has perverted this such that the "self" reigns supreme. Even when people do condescend and serve others, if it's not done out of a fear of God, it is done ultimately for selfish and sinful reasons. We can't behave that way. We are children of God, and must fear Him, as a child fears a godly father, and submit to one another accordingly.

Like every other thing, Satan has his counterfeit versions of all these things. He has his worldly wisdom, which has replaced the wisdom of God. He has his versions of redeeming the time, singing, thanksgiving and submission. But what makes these things Spirit-filled for us is that the Lord is the center of it all. We're interested in what HIS will is. We sing to HIM. We thank HIM. We submit because we fear HIM. Otherwise, it's a cheap, superficial copy that may provide us some temporary benefits, but is no substitute for being filled with the Spirit. As we make our way as pilgrims, remember that even as we do these things, they are currently bogged down and mucked up by the presence of sin. But it won't be that way forever. When our Savior "appear[s] the second time without sin unto salvation," saving us to the uttermost (Heb. 7:25, 9:28), we will be able to do these things that He created us to do without hindrance.

Lord willing, next time, as Paul moves on into fleshing out the concept of "submission," I'd like to cover the first example he gives, which is the husband/wife relationship (Eph. 5:22-33).

**Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear: For our God is a consuming fire.
(Hebrews 12:28-29)**