Ephesians 5:15-17

Understanding the Will of the Lord

15 Therefore be careful how you walk, not as unwise men but as wise, 16 making the most of your time, because the days are evil. 17 So then do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is.

Carrying on from the point of being imitators of God in the first verse of the chapter Paul has continued to talk about how position impacts condition. He is urging the believer to consider time, space, the whole person as created in the image of God, and stewardship throughout chapter 5. For the Jewish believers ‘the walk’ was about doing the right thing right now at every scale. For the gentiles it was about thinking about (but not doing) the right thing eventually. Seeking to reach out to his combined audience Paul has attempted to use several points of reference so that neither one would miss the point!

# Look Carefully

Verse 15 has been ‘smoothed’ in translation in the NASB to “therefore be careful how you walk,” but may more literally be translated as:

Therefore [Because you are spiritually awake and alive from the dead, in Christ], look carefully at how you walk.

This is written to the whole church (2nd person plural), but the appropriation is for the individual. As stewards of the lives God has given us, we have

* A sense of timeliness – YOLO
* A sense of place - where you’re walking is happening (at night, in secret?)
* A sense of stewardship – What resources that impact your walk (along with time and space) are we given?
* As a being created in God’s image, and made spiritually alive with Christ, we have a body, soul and spirit that are able to be used volitionally and completely.

## Not as Unwise, but as Wise

The close scrutiny of their walks would have two opposing descriptors that Paul was concerned with: being thought of as a wise man or being thought of as a fool. Paul knows there’s a spectrum of possible outcomes, but in comparison, what would that look most like? The Greek (AKA gentile) thinkers would have been rather insulted to be called fools. Intellectual prowess was part of their cultural bragging rights. Paul’s insinuation here is to get their attention.

When we consider what this looks like today where truth is treated as relative the secular world denounces absolute truth. Yet, when Christians are in the spotlight for some sin or crime we are held to this standard. As believers we need to know that this inconsistency is normative and not be surprise by worldly inconsistency.

# Making the Most of Your Time

When we consider the stewardship of our lives we can consider more carefully why Paul has built the letter up in the way that he has:

* Our position in Christ is secure
* We have been empowered by the Holy Spirit
* We are saved by grace because God loves us
* God’s love is something that we should be learning about and growing in together
* We should be working in unity by the Holy Spirit
* We should be teaching and growing together
* We should be seen as imitators of God’s righteousness
* We should be stewards of our time in light of this

If the Greek thinkers were not about testing the ideas, but merely talking about them hypothetically, then this would have been a challenge to understand their stewardship of time.

Stewardship of time as a believer is predominantly about the idea of being sanctified already. If we abide in Christ and He in us we know that as we mature and grow we’re going to see the fruit of the Holy Spirit in our own lives and should be seeing its impact in others.

## The Days are Evil

Paul’s assertion here that the days are evil can be off-putting on the surface. However, we wee in context here that we’re given the opportunity to be righteousness exemplified through the power of the Holy Spirit. We will contrast with secular living, secular thinking, and secular misrepresentation of goodness. As chapter six will paint all too clearly: we should be armored up to combat the darkness, but we’re armored together as a unit, fighting together as a unit, and we’re equipped with the Godhead against the world, the flesh, and the devil. The days are evil, but the time is the Lord’s.

# God’s Will Contrasts with Foolishness

So, not being foolish, we are to understand what the will of the Lord is. The Lord’s will is going to be explain further in the coming verses in Ephesians but we can see in light of God’s provision in the body that it is going to look a lot like the redeeming of the time, but at a global scale. The biggest gap in this sentence for most believers is in understanding. Understanding here is understanding together! Paul’s theme of unity is not buried to the Greek reading recipients, but for those reading a translation this could be missed.

We need to come together in understanding and we need to be making the most of our time, and we need to be walking in God’s wisdom and growing and coming together.