

+ Ephesians 5:15-20 + Live in Appreciation of the Grace of God +
+ 13th Sunday after Pentecost + 30 August 2009 +

It's just around the corner! It's coming soon! You know what I'm talking about. In just over a week, schools across the region will open their doors to thousands of students for a new school year. Lockers will fly open. Classrooms will fill and teaching will begin again. Children from preschool to high school will hopefully learn what they need to know as adults in the real world. Many of those kids are smart and many think they're smart, but how many are "wise"? Many know how to get through a class, but hopefully amidst all the reading, writing and arithmetic, the students will gain some wisdom from their teachers and learn how to use what they learn.

It's not just young people who usually lack wisdom, though. I'm sure each of us here can recall those times even as adults when we've lacked "wisdom". Now "wisdom" for a Christian is more than just "common sense". You see, through the Word of God, you and I have received "wisdom" like no other, "wisdom" that comes as a gift from God through faith in Jesus, that marvels at his grace shown in our Savior Jesus. It's "wisdom" you can easily lose or forget however. Only with God's help can you truly have and hold onto that "wisdom". So how do you live wisely and hold on that "wisdom" from God? **LIVE IN APPRECIATION OF THE GRACE OF GOD.**

To live in appreciation of the grace of God, you need to understand the will of the Lord. We find Paul reminding his readers to be "**children of light**". He gets very specific as he warns about sexual immorality, impurity, greed, obscenity, foolish talk and coarse joking. He, then, turns from powerful warnings to powerful encouragement for "wise" children of light. "**Be very careful, then how you live—not as unwise but as wise...**" The word translated as "**live**" actually has the idea of walking around. Paul is saying, "**Be very careful, then, how you walk around—not as unwise but as wise...**" He's not talking about watching your step as you walk to your car or down the stairs, but precisely watching your step on the walk of life.

Sounds simple, right? Unfortunately, it's not, because if you don't understand the will of the Lord, it's impossible. Imagine you have to escape a deadly enemy, but have to go through an overgrown field littered with mines ready to explode at the first sense of pressure. You can't see them, so if you don't know how to get through, you won't get very far before setting one off. Paul's picture is not much different. "**Be very careful, then, how you walk around—not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil.**"

How do you walk carefully? You make the most of every opportunity. Literally, you "**buy back the time**". Paul uses a term where the buyer gets the most for his money. In a similar way "**make the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil.**"

You and I often wring our hands about how awful our world is and where it's going, but how much have we bought into these evil days? In the last week, as a child of light, have you made the most of every opportunity? When an opportunity arose to share the comfort or peace of the Savior with someone you know or to stand up for what God's Word really teaches, did the words fail to pass through your lips because you were worried about what others might think of you? When an opportunity arose to teach your son or daughter or grandchild that repentance is more than a forced "I'm sorry", were you satisfied with the "I'm sorry" because it got the kids out of your hair? When an opportunity arose for you to live as a child of light and turn your back on the temptation to put your wants ahead of your family's needs or those of your spouse, did you still pat yourself on the back when you got your way? How often haven't you and I failed to "**buy back the time**"?

How often aren't you willing to completely abandon the path of life to indulge in these evil days? How often don't you let opportunities to live as a child of light slip through your fingers and disappear forever? When you think about it, all you can do is hang your head in shame because to waste even one God-given opportunity is to slap him in the face.

It really makes you appreciate the grace of God, when you realize how amazing it is that your Savior didn't waste a single opportunity for you. That he even bothered to take time for you is amazing. From the moment of his conception to his last breath, Jesus walked perfectly. He knew how evil the days were. He could identify and avoid every attempt to sabotage his walk of life on your behalf. He made the most of every opportunity to obey his Father's holy will and to proclaim the "wisdom" of salvation to the "unwise" lost in sin. Then when the time was right he took the opportunity to rescue you and me and all mankind from our sinful foolishness. On the cross he even took the time to forgive you for those times when you've remained quiet about your faith or failed to teach your children his way or put your selfish desires first. Jesus made the most of his opportunity, so you could become "wise" and truly appreciate his grace.

Because Jesus walked perfectly for you, through his Word he gives you the “wisdom” to recognize the influence these evil days can have. He enables you to understand his will. **“Do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord’s will is.”** With that God-given wisdom, you can avoid senseless decisions that buy into what our world has to say. Rather than let the evil times make you thoughtless, you can constantly ask, “Am I doing the will of my Lord? Is what I’m about to do pleasing to my Savior? Will it cause him to cringe or fill him with anger or will he smile in joy?”

How can you possibly know the Lord’s will? You can only know the Lord’s will through the regular study of Scripture. In Psalm 1, we read about the “wise” man of God, **“But his delight is in the law of the LORD and on his law he meditates day and night. He is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither. Whatever he does prospers.”** Such daily meditation on God’s Word leads you to understand God’s will and then live in appreciation of his grace.

Living in appreciation of the grace of God is more than just understanding the will of the Lord though. It also means giving thanks for the grace of God. That, too, is only possible through the study of Scripture through which the Holy Spirit fills you with thanks for God’s grace.

Paul gives an example of the wrong type of filling up. In fact, this way of filling up deadens the senses and leaves one open to reckless foolishness. **“Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery.”** Drunkenness, much like today, was a common problem. It’s easy to have “one too many” and let sin’s natural foolishness take the driver’s seat. Soon the “wisdom” of Christ is out the window. So Paul sounds this warning, but he doesn’t leave a vacuum. **“Instead, be filled with the Spirit”**

How is that possible? We live a life of worship. **“Keep on speaking to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord...”** You may not realize it, but through the psalms, hymns and spiritual songs that we sing, we actually teach and encourage one another! They’re not just old songs Pastor makes you sing on Sunday mornings. When you have a chance, take a closer look at the words of the hymns or the words of the canticles we sing in the liturgy. Through music we proclaim that wonderfully “wise” message of Christ’s victory to ourselves and to one another. Through music we teach the “wisdom” of God to our children and are personally encouraged with the psalms, hymns and spiritual songs we have learned over the years. How many of you here can think of a favorite hymn that brings comfort or joy or peace? How many hymns do we belt out that express God’s “wisdom” in all its truth and beauty? Whether we regularly sing this music, listen to it or recall it in our hearts, it leads us to a life of worship. Through such a life of worship, the Holy Spirit fills the “wise” child of light to such a point that there’s no room for spiritual foolishness, but it’s about more than just music.

“Instead, be filled with the Spirit...always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.” If the days are evil as Paul wrote in verse 16, then how can a “wise” child of light give thanks for God’s grace in everything? You have abundant reasons to thank God from the bottom of your heart because of the Lord’s rich grace which shines on and brightens your whole life, even in the face of difficulties. Even when faced with crosses like financial problems, serious illness or suffering for the Lord, you can rejoice, because as Paul points out in Romans 8, **“In all things God works for the good of those who love, who have been called according to his purpose.”**

Giving thanks for God’s grace is more than giving thanks once a year on Thanksgiving Day! We are to give thanks **“always”** for **“everything”**. That means living a life of thanksgiving for the undeserved, self-sacrificing loving-kindness of your Savior Jesus, who by his grace earned all blessings for you and continues to bestow them on you. Where you find such thanksgiving, there you will find a heart filled with the peace and joy of the Holy Spirit—the true “wisdom” that gives thanks for the grace of God.

As quickly as school starts, it comes to an end. For those who complete the curriculum after 12 or 13 years, who have gained knowledge and wisdom along the way, they will receive a diploma. Someday when you and I come to the end of our lifelong course on the “wisdom” of God, you and I will receive something even greater than a piece of paper. We will receive a golden crown purchased with the innocent blood of Christ, a gift we couldn’t possibly earn or deserve. May the loving grace of our Savior Jesus Christ grant us his wisdom and strength to complete the course and join him with all his “wise” people for eternity! Amen.