

Do Not Be Foolish

Scripture: Ephesians 5:15-17

Code: 49-31

Well, we're going back to the Word of God, as always, but back in particular to Ephesians after some time off. And I need to say a thank you to all the men who so ably preached the Word while I was away for a bit. But we'll return to where we left off in Ephesians chapter 5; and this is a very brief passage, and yet it opens up for us a vast, vast amount of biblical revelation. It's almost unsearchable in what it maintains, in terms of its scope, but you'll understand that as I read verses 15 to 17.

Ephesians 5:15-17, "Therefore be careful how you walk, not as unwise men but as wise, making the most of your time, because the days are evil. So then do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is." Here, we have the comparison between wisdom and foolishness. This is a very, very prominent subject in Scripture. In fact, this may be the simplest way to understand the difference between the children of God and the children of the devil. The children of God are wise; the children of the devil are foolish. It's that simple. All real wisdom resides with those who know God; and with those who do not know God, they are bound in folly and foolishness. This is the way to understand the difference between a believer and a nonbeliever: One possesses wisdom from God; the other is a fool.

So let's start with the negative aspect of it and maybe ask the question, What is a fool? And the definition is obvious to everyone. We can use synonyms to explain the definition of fool. We think of it as someone who is ignorant; that is, someone who doesn't know truth, doesn't know reality. We can think of a fool as someone who is irresponsible, who is indifferent to the normal responsibilities of life. We can think of it as a person who lacks education, lacks insight. Or we can go all the way to more familiar words like *stupid* and *moronic*, more pejorative words. But we all know what a fool is: someone who is without knowledge, without responsibility, without wisdom, without guidance, someone left to himself in the folly of his own mind. That's sort of a general definition with which we can all be familiar. But I want to dig a little deeper than just the typical definition even with those synonyms and show you the real definition of a fool.

So turn in your Bible to Psalm 14, Psalm 14, and we're going to have a Bible study this morning—not so much a sermon, but really a Bible study. I want to try to help capture for you this marvelous and critical distinction between the wise and the foolish—distinction, by the way, that is found all throughout Scripture in the Old and the New Testament. But let's start with the foundational statement about what it is to be a fool.

Psalm 14 and verse 1 says, "The fool has said in his heart, 'There is no God.'" So there is the essential pathology of foolishness: a rejection of God. It may not be outward and overt, it may be something that you say in the heart, but there is in the heart the sense that there is no God. That's a theological conclusion: "There is no God."

This is the person who can look at the universe, in all of its vastness and complexity in the macro-

creation and the micro-creation, and say it was made by no one. This is a person who can acknowledge personhood and personality and intellect and the full range of emotions and say all of that came from nothing, didn't come from another person. This is the practical atheist who can say, "I acknowledge there is right and wrong in the world, I acknowledge there is truth and error in the world, I acknowledge that there is the real and the false in the world, I acknowledge there are moral laws that are clear across the globe to all humankind; and yet I reject the idea that that moral law came from a moral being or, in fact, that it came from any being at all. I'm content with *nobody times nothing equals everything*—and the everything encompasses personhood and morality, and still it came from nothing." That is a fool. That is the foundational insanity of all insanities, to say the greatest cause, the universe—the greatest, I should say, effect—the universe—had no cause. So just talking from a philosophical standpoint, to deny God, to deny the source of everything that exists, is foolish.

But there's more here than that. "The fool has said in his heart, 'There is no God,'" not because he's come to an intellectual or rational conclusion—that is neither intellectual or rational. The rest of the verse explains why: "They are corrupt, they have committed abominable deeds." Here lies the real issue: Sinners don't want God because they don't want a just Judge; they don't want accountability; they don't want an evaluation of their behavior; they don't want punishment; they don't want condemnation.

So the fool says in his heart—not because it's intellectually sensible but because he doesn't want to have to be accountable to any transcendent, supernatural deity—"There is no God, and that lets me be satisfied in my corruption and the committing of abominable deeds."

The psalmist goes on to further describe the pathology of human depravity. All human beings come into the world in this condition: They are corrupt, and they begin by committing abominable deeds. And the reason is the end of verse 1: "There is no one who does good." Again, this is a statement about universal human depravity.

Verse 2 says, "The Lord has looked down from heaven upon the sons of men to see if there are any who understand, who seek after God." And the conclusion: "They have all turned aside, together"—collectively, all of humanity—"have become corrupt; there is no one who does good, not even one." Now there you have the pathology of human depravity. They reject God because they are so bound in their sin and aware of what sin is, and possessing the guilt because God's given them a conscience and the fear of punishment built into the human psyche. They deliver themselves from that guilt and the fear of punishment by eliminating God altogether.

This is universal. In fact, it's so universal that Paul borrowed this passage in Romans 3 when he described human depravity. His language comes right out of this psalm: "There is no one who does good"; "there is no one who understands, there is no one who seeks after God; they have all turned aside, together they have become corrupt. No one does good, not even one." Paul quotes that in Romans 3, describing the sinfulness of man. You notice the word "all" appears a number of times, as does the word "none." It's the alls and the nones that make the indictment universal. So the defining character of the person called a fool is the rejection of the existence of God—any God who has any authority over his life, any right to judge his or her life—and the desire to be freed up to express corruption in every form. The defining character, then, of a fool has a theological component—a rejection of God—and a moral component—they do abominable deeds.

We all were once in this condition, and that becomes clear in the language of Titus 3:3. I'll just read you that verse. It says this: "For we also once were foolish ourselves, disobedient, deceived, enslaved to various lusts and pleasures, spending our life in malice"—which is a word for "evil"—and envy, hateful, hating one another." That's what foolishness is. It starts with rejecting God because there's a love of abominable deeds. It can then be characterized, as it is by Paul, as disobedient, deceived, enslaved to various lusts, pleasures, spending our life in evil and envy, hateful, and hating one another.

In Romans chapter 1 we have a further description of the fallenness of man. Listen to the words of Paul in Romans 1:21, "For even though they knew God"—and this is universal; everyone with a rational mind must postulate a cause for the massive effect of the universe, a cause for personhood that must be personal, a cause for morality that must be moral, a cause for righteousness that must be righteous. So "they knew God"—"they did not honor Him as God or give thanks, but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing to be wise, they became fools."

It's not that they're not religious; they are. The next verse says, "[They] exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible man and birds and four-footed animals and crawling creatures." They worshiped idols. Yeah, man is an inveterate worshiper, but it is his nature to reject the true God because he doesn't want to accountability to God's moral law, and to invent a god after his own making in the form of some animals, some created creature that he perceives in some sense as less than himself. What is foolishness? Foolishness by definition is the absence of faith in, trust in, and knowledge of the true and living God. The whole world is full of fools.

In 1 Corinthians, Paul helps us with filling out our definition. First Corinthians chapter 2 and verse 14, "A natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him." They are foolishness to him. God is foolishness to him because he is a fool. A fool sees through his foolish eyes and turns everything into foolishness.

In 1 Corinthians 3 and down in verse 18 we read this: "Let no man deceive himself. If any man among you thinks he's wise in this age, he must become foolish, so that he may become wise." This is sarcasm. If you think you're wise when you're a fool, you need to become a fool to be wise. The wisdom of this world is foolishness before God. And verse 20 says, "The Lord knows the reasonings of the wise, they are useless"—futile in their speculations, airheads.

So this is the foundational pathology of what it means to be a fool: You reject God and all that is true about God, and in its place you put yourself and the gods of your own making. Proverbs 12:15 says this: "The way of a fool is right in his own eyes." That is the ultimate folly, to think you are the determiner of truth and reality and wisdom. And Proverbs 14:9 says the fool will mock at sin. He mocks sin; and by mocking sin he mocks God, who condemns him for that sin.

Ecclesiastes 10, verse 2, says, "The heart of the wise inclines to the right, but the heart of the fool to the left." The picture there is of the fool being a wayward individual, wandering away from the path that is right. Isaiah 32 says fools make evil plans. Proverbs 26:11, this is dramatic: "As a dog returns to its vomit, so fools repeat their folly." Graphic. So when we're talking about a fool, we're not just talking about somebody who's ignorant or somebody who's irresponsible or somebody who's stupid or somebody who's uninformed or unintelligent; we're talking about a fool in the sense that God has defined a fool and designated a fool—that is, one who rejects Him.

Proverbs 1:7 says this: “Fools despise wisdom.” That’s why we have so much trouble connecting to the world around us, because we are the people who hold the wisdom of God, and we are living in a world of fools. And it all starts when you’re born. Proverbs 22:15, “Foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child.” You come into the world as a fool. This foolishness is defined many ways in Proverbs; and we could take a lot of time doing that, but I’ll just give you some highlights.

Proverbs describes the fool, the one who rejects God in favor of his own abominable deeds, in these very simple terms. Fools hate knowledge. Fools find no pleasure in understanding. Fools enjoy wicked schemes. Fools proclaim foolishness. Fools spurn a parent’s discipline. Fools speak perversity. Fools are quick-tempered. Fools get in trouble with their proud speech. Fools mock at sin. Fools are deceitful. Fools despise their mother. Fools bring grief to their parents. Fools commit sexual immorality. A foolish woman tears down her own house. Fools are ruined. And fools are dangerous. And we’re living in a world of fools.

This doesn’t bode well for fools, and Proverbs 1 shows us that. Proverbs 1, toward the end of the chapter, verse 29, we read this: “Because they hated knowledge and did not choose the fear of the Lord.” And by the way, Proverbs 9:10 says, “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.” That’s where wisdom begins. If you don’t fear the Lord, you have no wisdom. Wisdom begins—the beginning of wisdom is the fear of the Lord.

So verse 29 says, “[Fools hate] knowledge and didn’t choose the fear of the Lord.” They don’t choose to worship God. “They would not accept my counsel”—that is the counsel of wisdom—“they spurned all my reproof.” Here wisdom is personified. It says, as if wisdom is speaking, they wouldn’t accept wisdom’s counsel; they wouldn’t accept the reproof that wisdom brought. “So,” verse 31, “they shall eat of the fruit of their own way”—so much like Romans 1; they rejected wisdom, and God turned them over to the consequences of their own choices. Verse 31 says, “[To] be satiated with their own devices. For the waywardness of the naïve will kill them, and the complacency of fools will destroy them.”

Verse 33, “But he who listens to me shall live securely and will be at ease from the dread of evil.” You want to stop being a fool? Listen to God. What to stop being a fool? Turn to His revelation in His Holy Word. If you continue to be a fool, you have your end laid out: death and destruction. A fool is the person who rejects God, His gospel, and His Word.

“Fools die,” says Proverbs 10, “for lack of a heart of wisdom.” I don’t care what you know; I don’t care how many degrees you have. You may profess to be wise, but apart from God and the knowledge of God and the fear of God and the knowledge of Christ and the gospel and salvation, you are a fool. And you are a fool willingly, by choice, because you choose your sin. That is the ultimate expression of folly.

This foolishness is so deep in humankind that in 1 Corinthians chapter 1, when somebody comes along to preach the gospel, 1 Corinthians 1:18, “The word of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing.” When someone brings the truth, they see it as foolishness. This is how profound the deception is: They are fools who think they’re wise, and they think the ones who are wise are the fools.

And then the writer, Paul, of 1 Corinthians quotes from Isaiah 29, where God says, "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the cleverness of the clever I will set aside." When you come before God, and you spout what you think is wisdom, the question is posed, "Where's the wise man? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?" In God's eyes the wisdom of the world is folly. But sinners relabel their folly as wisdom, as wisdom. By human wisdom you can't know God. The only way to know God is through the foolishness of the preaching of the gospel.

And in the 30th verse of 1 Corinthians 1 there's a marvelous statement: Christ Jesus has become to us wisdom. The day that you opened your heart to Christ, you became wise. That was an expression of obedience to the fear of the Lord. You turned to God, and you acknowledged God who said, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased; listen to Him." When you turn to Christ, you honor God by honoring His Son. Jesus said, "If you honor Me, you honor My Father." And at the moment you turn to God through Christ, you became wise; you became wise because, 1 Corinthians 1:30 says, "Christ Jesus . . . became to us wisdom from God." You passed from death to life, but you also passed from foolishness to wisdom.

The world doesn't recognize that. They don't want us; they don't want our wisdom. It's not natural, because "the natural man cannot understand the things of God, they are foolishness to him." His mind is dark, his heart is dark, because he loves his sin. But when you come to Christ, you come to wisdom.

Listen to what Paul said in 2 Timothy 3:15, talking to Timothy; and he says that Timothy—"From childhood you have known the sacred writings"—the Scripture—"which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus." And then, "All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, reproof, correction, training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work." "Timothy, when you heard the sacred writings, the Scripture, and when you believed the Scripture, you received the wisdom of salvation, and you entered into the capability to understand the Word of God. The natural man cannot, but you can because you have the mind of Christ and the indwelling Holy Spirit."

In fact, John in 1 John chapter 2, verse 20, says, "You have an anointing from the Holy [Spirit], and you all know." The reason you know what is true and what is wisdom is because you not only have the Word of God, you not only have a new creation that can apprehend the Word of God, but you have a resident truth teacher in the Holy Spirit.

First John 2:27 adds this: "As for you, the anointing which you received from Him abides in you"—the Holy Spirit—"you have no need for anyone to teach you; but as His anointing teaches you about all things, and is true and not a lie, and just as it has taught you, you abide in Him." Amazing. Christ came to you and became to you wisdom. Your life was transformed; you became alive, alive to the mind of Christ revealed in the Word of God, and you became the temple of the Holy Spirit who's the truth teacher. So from Christ, from Scripture, from the Holy Spirit, you have been given access to the truth.

In the book of James there's a familiar passage, it's in the third chapter of James, and just looking at verse 13, "Who among you is wise . . .?" Who's wise? Who has understanding? Here's the answer: "Let him show by his good behavior his deeds in the meekness of wisdom." Wisdom is behavior. It's not something in your head, it's something manifest in your life.

And James goes on to say if your life is marked by “bitter jealousy, selfish ambition in your heart, do not be arrogant and so lie against the truth.” That’s not true wisdom. “This wisdom is not that which comes down from above, but is earthy, natural, and demonic.” Earthy wisdom is natural wisdom is demonic wisdom. Did you get that? So this is the condition of the whole human race. They are fools. The only wisdom they have is wisdom that is earthy wisdom, natural wisdom, and demonic wisdom, which means they are excluded from having divine wisdom. And you wonder why so many people do such stupid things.

What else can you do, if you’re a fool? “Where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there is disorder and every evil thing.” What characterizes the fools of the world is their inability to have meaningful relationships with each other. On the other hand, the wisdom that is from above isn’t just head knowledge. No. It is “pure . . . peaceable, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy, good fruits, unwavering, without hypocrisy.” It is expressing itself in “righteousness . . . in peace.” Those that are wise have all those characteristics.

So true wisdom is to fear God, to know God through the knowledge of the gospel; and through the knowledge of the gospel comes the knowledge of Christ, and Christ becomes to us wisdom. And then we are transformed to be able to see the wisdom of Scripture where before we couldn’t see it, and we are given the Holy Spirit to become our resident truth teacher. We have wisdom from above, that is, wisdom on the issues that are spiritual, moral, divine, supernatural, theological. That’s what it means to be a Christian. We are the wise in the world. That helps me to understand why I have so much trouble with what people decide and what they do and how they behave in this world. But what else would we expect, right? This is the pathology that is laid out for us.

So with that in mind, let’s go back to Ephesians, and in chapter 5 remind ourselves of what Paul says: “Therefore be careful how you walk, not as unwise”—you’re not unwise; you’re wise. So walk “as wise, making the most of your time, because the days are evil. So then do not be foolish, but [understanding] what the will of the Lord is.”

Back in chapter 4 at the beginning of the chapter, Paul called all believers to walk worthy of the calling with which they were called. In verse 1 of chapter 4, he says, “Walk worthy.” In verse 2 of chapter 4, he says, “Walk humbly.” Starting in verse 3, he says, “Walk in unity.” Later in chapter 4, he says, “Walk in righteousness, separated from sin.” He comes into chapter 5, and he starts in chapter 5, verses 1 through 7 and says, “Walk in love.” And then in verse 8 to 14 it’s, “Walk in light. Walk worthy. Walk humbly. Walk in unity. Walk in righteousness. Walk in love. Walk in light.” And here’s the cap of the whole thing: “Walk in wisdom. Walk in wisdom.”

These three verses give us a very simple outline. There are three things you have to see to understand your responsibility to walk in wisdom. First, you have to see life’s priority, life’s priority. And here is the priority in verse 15: “Therefore be careful how you walk, not as unwise men, but as wise.” You can sum up the whole Christian life in that command: “Walk wisely. Walk wisely.” Walk in the wisdom that is from above, in the wisdom that came to you through the knowledge of the gospel, through the Word of God, through the Spirit of God, through the presence of Christ. Walk in that divine light.

Colossians, really in chapters 3 and 4 we have similar injunctions for walking—we’ll see some of

those in a moment. So this is not just the only place where this is stated; very parallel to Colossians 4 and verse 5.

Now what do we mean by life's priority? It's just summed up this way: "Therefore." Now let's notice that if there's "therefore," then it's drawing on something just said. What was just said in verse 14 was this: "Awake, sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you," quoting from the Old Testament.

So the point here is you've been raised from the dead. You've been given new life. You are now alive; the light of Christ shines on you and through you. "Therefore be careful how you walk." You're no longer walking in the darkness you're walking in the light. You're no longer participating "in the unfruitful deeds of darkness," back in verse 11; you're no longer doing those things that are so disgraceful you shouldn't even speak about them. You are walking in the light; everything is visible; you have come alive. "Therefore"—since you are walking in the light, since everything you are and everything you do is exposed clearly—"be careful how you walk." And "be careful" is really "look"—look, observe, watch, examine your steps. You have been transformed.

Titus 2:11 and 12 says, "For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men, instructing us that, denying ungodliness and worldly desires, we should live sensibly, righteously and godly in this present age." That's how we are to live. That's living wisely.

Now remember, everything we need to know is in Christ. "In [Him] are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge," Colossians 2:3. We have all wisdom in Christ and in His Word and by the work of the Spirit in us.

Back in Ephesians chapter 1, just notice two verses to substantiate this. Chapter 1, verse 8—well, we can look at verse 7, "We have redemption through [the blood of Christ. We have] the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace which He lavished on us." And then this: "In all wisdom and insight." This is talking about what happened to you at your salvation. You were introduced into the world of wisdom.

Down in verse 18, Paul says, "I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, that you will know what is the hope of His calling, and what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints." How would you know that? Verse 17, "[I pray that God will] give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him." Well, you have the Holy Spirit. But Paul is saying, "I'm hoping, I'm praying that you will respond to the work of the Holy Spirit on your human spirit so that you can literally live in the wisdom that is yours by the work of Christ—the presence of Christ, the presence of the Spirit, and through the Word of God."

Now for a moment, over to Colossians chapter 1, and just a couple of verses, verses 9 and 10: "For this reason also, since the day we heard of it, we have not ceased to pray for you and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so that you will walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please Him in all respects, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; [further] strengthened with all power, according to His glorious might, for the attaining of all steadfastness and patience; joyously giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints in Light." This is amazing. This is a truckload of promises.

“I pray for you that you’ll have all spiritual wisdom so that you can walk worthy, so that you can please the Lord, so that you can bear fruit, so that you can increase in knowledge, so that you can be strengthened with power and might, so that you can obtain steadfastness and patience, and experience joy and be grateful.” All of that comes from the wisdom that is made available at salvation through the Son, the Spirit, and the Word. It’s all there.

So we are the wise of the world. The world thinks we are the fools and they are the wise. The truth is they’re the fools, and we are the wise. So walk consistently in that wisdom. Order your daily steps wisely. “Be careful how you live,” is another way to say that. Be careful how you walk.

We’re not going to always be wise. Even David admitted that in 2 Samuel 24 when he numbered the people to parade his power. And then divine conviction came over him, and he was broken and guilty, and it says in 2 Samuel that David was so guilty for walking foolishly that he said this: “[Lord,] I have sinned greatly in what I have done. And now [I beg you,] O Lord, take away the iniquity of Your servant, for I have [done] very foolishly.” Moses, in Deuteronomy 32, calls out to Israel. And what does he say? Remember in verse 6, “O foolish people and unwise.” Even our Lord had to say to the disciples on the road to Emmaus, “Fools and slow of heart to believe all that the Scripture has revealed.”

There’s plenty of folly still available to believers if they don’t know the Scripture, OK. You have access to all wisdom, but you can ignore it, for you can have a superficial understanding of it—and you will play the fool. The Galatians did. Paul wrote to them, and in chapter 3 he says, “O foolish Galatians, who has bewitched you?” “Who has tricked you? You must know better.” Jesus said in John 7:17, “If you are willing, you shall know the truth.” It’s there. It’s there.

Paul wraps up the book of Romans with a simple reminder. He says, “Be wise in what is good and ignorant in what is evil.” What’s that saying? That’s saying you ought to know a whole lot more about what is good than you do about what is evil. And you live in a world where you are drowning in overexposure to what is evil. The one who is saturated by the Word of God is wise, and he walks in wisdom. Colossians 3:16 puts it this way: “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly.” “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom,” “in all wisdom.”

We know what God’s will is. We know what He desires. We know what pleases Him. We know about Him. We know His character. We know the truth revealed in Scripture. We understand Satan’s traps. We know how to resist the devil, defeat temptation. We know how to walk wisely. That’s life’s priority: Walk in wisdom—and the blessings will just be poured out on you.

But secondly, not only does the believer know life’s priority, he knows life’s brevity. Look at verse 16, “making the most of your time”—that modifies the walking wisely; he understands the brevity of life—“making the most of your time, because the days are evil.” You don’t have time to be foolish. You don’t have time to waste. You don’t have time for folly. That’s why the psalmist said in Psalm 90 and verse 12, “So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our heart to wisdom.” You have to take account of the brevity of your life. Number your days. Time and wisdom go together. Wisdom doesn’t waste time.

It’s not easy because the days are evil. And evil days inevitably are going to be short days. I mean,

you could say that our lifespan is short because of evil. We're under the curse of sin. Life is full of the dangers that evil has perpetrated. All days are full of evil. The whole world is full of evil. Evil is everywhere. Paul has been saying that throughout the book of Ephesians. He said it in chapter 2: "Walked according to the course of this world . . . [that is under] the power of the prince of the air, the spirit that works in the sons of disobedience." We function in a world that is driven by lust and passion and wickedness.

Chapter 4, verse 18, he says the world can be defined as ignorant, hard-hearted, callous, sensual, impure, and greedy. And all of that shortens up everybody's lifespan and makes the challenge to live wisely very difficult. There's evil all around us, and evil shortens up everything. That means that the people around you don't have a lot of time. You don't have a lot of time. You must take every moment.

Evil people get worse and worse, 2 Timothy 3:13. The world is going to get worse and worse. It's accelerating in its evil as time goes on. We're headed toward evil times in the Great Tribulation. We're headed toward horrendous evil under the rule of the Antichrist in that era of redemptive history. We're headed toward divine judgment, the short-circuiting of lives by the very fury of God. Time is short; hell is forever. You don't have time not to be wise and to walk in wisdom and to communicate that wisdom.

What does it mean when it says, "Make the most of your time"? It's not *chronos*, it's not chronology, it's not chronometer time, clock time. It's the word *kairos*; it means "eras," "periods," "epochs." The days are evil; make the most of whatever era you're in.

In a word, *kairos* means the zeitgeist of any given cultural moment. Take stock of the evil of the moment you're living in, and make the most of that opportunity. It's the opposite of waste. Your life, says James, is only a vapor that appears for a little time and vanishes away. You can't even say, "Tomorrow we'll do this and that." You can only say, "If the Lord wills, tomorrow we'll do this and that." If there's some unfinished business with regard to divine wisdom, you'd better get after it.

Opportunity is in respect to time, as time is in respect to eternity. Opportunity is the smallest piece of eternity, and the only piece you hold in your hand is what you have right now. Shakespeare said, "There's a tide in the affairs of men which, taken at its flood, leads to fortune; omitted, all the voyage of their life is bound in shallows and in misery." Opportunity is what we're talking about. Opportunity.

We read in the Bible statements like this: "The door was shut," or, "The night comes when no one can work," or, "You will die in your sins," and, "Where I go, you'll never come," or, "I will remove your candlestick," even spoken to a church. Make the most of the epoch, the saga, your piece of history. Make the most. "Work," Jesus said, "while it is day, for the night comes when we cannot work."

There's a third reality that must be recognized. You must understand life's priority, life's brevity, and life's sovereignty. At this point you might be saying, "OK, I want to live wisely, I want to walk wisely; what do I do?" In verse 17 he answers that: "So then do not be foolish"—and here's the opposite of foolish—"understand what the will of the Lord is." That's life's sovereignty.

You're not in charge, right? You're not in charge. We just read that from Colossians. Paul says, "I pray that you would in all wisdom understand what the will of the Lord is." Urgency is no excuse for

some kind of panic. You say, “Well, how do I know the will of the Lord?” It’s written on the pages of Holy Scripture. So to walk wisely, you have to understand that’s your life priority. You have to understand life’s brevity—you don’t have time to waste—and life’s sovereignty. You need to know what God wills; and He’s laid it out in Scripture in detail.

Your model for this is our Lord Jesus, who was wisdom personified, who also understood the brevity of life. He knew when His time had not come, and He knew when His time had come; and it was the one driving reality in His life that is summed up in what He said in John 4:34: “My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me and finish His work.” And that’s got to be your life.

Walk in wisdom; that’s your priority. Make the most of your opportunity, and fill your life with what is His will, and finish His work. Come to the end, you can say with Paul, “I finished the course, I’ve kept the faith.” Let’s pray together.

Lord, sometimes we can get caught up in making things more complicated than they need to be; and an experience like this portion of Scripture takes all the complexity out of it and reduces us down to something we can grasp and understand. And wonderfully and gratefully, we are in awe of the fact that You have not asked us to do what we cannot do, but You have only asked us to do what we can do. And we have literally the capability to live wisely because we have been given the wisdom that is from above, the wisdom of the gospel, the wisdom of the Son of God, the wisdom of the Spirit of God, the wisdom of the Scripture. It’s all available to us. Help us to walk in wisdom; and in so walking, we walk worthy, and we bring honor and glory to Your name, and we make the gospel attractive, and we open doors to present that saving gospel to those around us who see the wisdom in our life.

We thank You for such a repository of treasure, that in Christ all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are hidden, and Christ is hidden in us. So we are wise in the world. Give us opportunity to live that wisdom and proclaim that wisdom to Your glory, we pray. Amen.

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