

Ephesians 5:15-20

In the 70's a well known Cleveland playboy was killed in a wreck
He hit a tree - his car was totaled and so was he
I remember this incident because in writing about him the Plain Dealer said
He died as he lived – his motto was
Live fast – play hard – die young – and leave a good corpse
I had never heard that phrase before and I thought – yeah that's it
That's the way to live – that's the way to go
When I was young I used to believe strongly that life held a purpose
This couldn't be it – this couldn't be all there is
There had to be more to life than I was experiencing
I thought about God a lot
But over time sin and disappointment changed all that
By the time I was in my twenties Leonard Cohen might have said
My heart was as cold as a new razor blade
And my life verse might have been
La, la, la, la, la. Let's live for today
I really didn't have a plan – I responded to what each day brought
I just lived for pleasure and took what I could - giving nothing
I lived my life as if there was no God
I was the classic definition of a Biblical fool
And all I left behind me were train wrecks
It took the persistence of a friend and a mighty act of God for me to be saved
I bring this up because I was living my life the exact reverse
Of how Paul tells us we ought to live
I paid a price because of it and those who were around me paid a price also
You see the Bible doesn't have some good ideas
Equal with all the myriad of good ideas you might find in this world
In the Bible we find wisdom to live our lives in such a way

As to maximize joy and minimize pain

Even the prohibitions of the Bible are for our good
And the wisdom of the Bible stands apart and above
All the other wisdom in this world

The Book of Proverbs pictures Wisdom standing in the streets
Crying out for men to pursue her

Solomon lets us know that - **The fear of the Lord is the beginning of Wisdom, and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding**

And Godly wisdom is infinitely better than the wisdom of the world

In his writings Paul deplores the so-called wisdom of the Greeks

Instead he says – **We preach Christ crucified – to the Jews a stumbling block – to the Greeks foolishness, but to those whom God has called, Christ is the power of God and the wisdom of God**

I have discovered that the world is full of smart people

There are a huge number of men and women much smarter than I am

But what the world lacks is Biblical wisdom

That is why you hear intelligent people make inane remarks

And you think to yourself – these people are morons

Well they are not morons – they are fools – they lack wisdom

Specifically they lack God's wisdom

Biblical wisdom has two parts - its content and its application

Its content is centered on the knowledge of God through His Son Jesus

Application is the practical aspect of wisdom

Practical wisdom is living out our knowledge of God and Christ

In the daily marketplace of our lives

In today's passage it is application that concerns Paul

READ 5:15-20

There are three areas in which Paul encourages us to exercise wisdom

First of all Paul wants us to redeem the time

Be careful then, how you walk – not as unwise men, but as wise, making the most of your time, because the days are evil

Most of us do not consider time as important as it really is

But time is one of the two things we have going for us in our calling to serve God

We have been given this time to serve God

And we have been given this location - we have space and we have time

We are here in a given period of time at a certain location

Time fixes us at a particular point in God's plan of salvation

Space fixes us at a certain location

We live in what Frances Schaeffer called space-time history

You are not alive now in history living where you live by accident

You have been given this time to serve the Lord and this place to do it

So Paul encourages you to make the most of every opportunity

It is almost impossible to overemphasize the importance of time

The religion of the Bible is a historical religion and history means time

Both the Old and the New Testaments are rooted in history

When God made Abraham a promise

He vowed to fulfill it in time in history through Abraham's descendents

God promised David that in time

His descendent would sit forever on the throne of Israel

God promised Isaiah that a Child would be born a Son would be given

This was to take place in space time history

And only God can make unbreakable promises in history

For God alone controls the events of history

Then in Galatians we read – **When the fullness of time had come, God sent His Son**

No other belief system is anywhere near as occupied with time as we are

Are we currently looking forward to some future event in history

You bet we are! We are waiting for the sure and certain return of Jesus

And we can be sure and certain that He is coming for He said He would

And every other event that must take place prior to Jesus return has already taken place

Just as God said it would

God works in space time history and He is asking you to work as well

Now what time are we being asked to redeem
The church is to redeem the time between Christ's ascent and His return
Left to themselves the days are evil
How does that saying go – idle hands are the devil's playground
I heard a missionary speak about the period we are now in
She told of her work and the impact of souls won for Christ
She was asked – what should we be doing
And she answered - I paraphrase – **Occupy your time with God's work**
History as we know it is drawing to a close
Someday the curtain will be drawn on this world
And time will matter no more

But right here and right now it does matter - and you matter **(SAY ALOUD)**

Herbert Butterfield wrote this – Every instant of time becomes more momentous than the one before – every instant is eschatological, or as one person put it, like the point in a fairy tale when the clock is about to strike 12. There is no chance that an absentee God is leaving mankind to chance. A real drama is being enacted on the stage of human history. And something is being achieved irrespective of our current success or failure.

Making the most of time is to enter into the conflict

And make a contribution for good

Even when it doesn't seem to work out
When God reviews the history of planet earth
His history books read different than ours
He doesn't focus on the great deeds of men and women
He focuses on the acts of obedience and service of His church
Those are the true history changing events
For they change eternal history

First Paul encourages us to exercise wisdom and redeem the time

The second area we are to exercise wisdom

Is to understand what the will of the Lord is

Usually when we talk about knowing God's will

We stress knowing and following the precepts and teachings of Scripture

God's will is primarily revealed in His Book

That is the plumb line from which all other statements about God or life are measured

You don't measure the Book by what people say

You measure what people say by the full content of the Book

That is why Paul in 1 Thess right after warning us not to quench the Spirit

Nor despise prophetic utterances

Then tells us that we need to examine everything carefully

A lot of wrong is said out there and many use the church of Jesus to say it

To examine a statement

Means to place it in context with the rest of Scripture

And not get carried away by how good it sounds to your particular desires

So study God's Word and

Allow the Holy Spirit to illumine Scripture and talk to you directly

That is the basics

But here Paul is not just talking about God's revelation

He is discussing God's wisdom which is more than acquiring facts

Paul wants us to understand what God is doing in history

And respond wisely to it

Saul was dead David had been chosen by God to be king of all Israel

As David consolidated power

He gathered around himself men from every tribe

Among them were men from Issachar who are described this way

1Chron 12 – the sons of Issachar, men who understood the times, with knowledge of what Israel should do

These men recognized that God was in this thing

And they adjusted their lives according to that knowledge

Paul wants us to understand the times and know what we should do

In his book Experiencing God, one of Henry Blackaby's principles is

See where God is working and join Him

That could be Mr. Blackaby's translation of

Understand what the Lord's will is

God is never sitting around with nothing to do
He is not an absentee landlord letting the world run by chance
And He is not a puppeteer and we are the puppets
He does not control every thought and activity

But God uses the activities of men to fulfill His plans

**Proverbs - The heart of the king is like channels of water in the hands of the Lord;
he turns it any way He wishes**

God moves the events of history

And He moves through the events of history

He moves within the hearts and minds of kings and presidents
And He moves within the hearts and minds of ordinary men and women

Paul says - Be sensitive to God's voice and respond to His call

First Paul wants us to redeem the time

Then Paul wants us to understand the will of the Lord

For the times in which we are living

Finally Paul says – keep on being filled with the Spirit

It's important to note that Paul is not talking about gifts here

Some teach that the only evidence of being Spirit filled is having a certain gift

Other teach that that certain gift doesn't exist anymore – both are wrong

Before I came to Cleveland I went to a very conservative church

They decided to put in their constitution that one of the gifts didn't exist

As an elder I stopped them from doing it – but I stepped down

A few months later it was put to a congregational vote

The elder presenting it said

We are all in agreement on this so let's just vote by yea's and nay's

All in favor – the whole congregation said yea

All opposed – my lone voice said nay

Later I met with the elder board on this position

I said this couldn't possibly be Biblical

We were not in a position to tell God what gifts He could give or not

And millions of born again believers who have this gift
Couldn't all be lying or misled
During my meeting it came out that every elder agreed with me
But they had approved the amendment and then voted for it
We need to be very careful about spiritual yardsticks
But Paul isn't discussing gifts
Paul is comparing how the world lives to how the church ought to live
Paul contrasts being Spirit filled with being drunk
And it is a valid contrast

The world's church is the bar

The unredeemed go to bars to find fellowship be filled with spirits and fulfill fleshly desires

Believers go to church to find fellowship be filled with the Spirit and fulfill God's will

I know that's a little simplified but it's not far off

Something or someone is in control of you

It is your fleshly desires

Which can overwhelm you particularly when fed by alcohol or drugs

Or it is the Holy Spirit

Being filled with the Spirit means to be under the Holy Spirit's control and leading

What the Holy Spirit says – you hear and do

When the flesh controls you

You will exhibit many of the characteristics of the flesh

Gal 5:16-21 (READ)

When you are Spirit filled your life will change dramatically

Being filled with the Spirit means that our thoughts and life will be devoted to Jesus

And we will exhibit many of the characteristics of Christ

GAL 5:22-23 (READ)

When we are filled with the Spirit life is not about us

We will recognize that we have a higher calling and desire to serve others

We will decrease

And through that decrease the kingdom of God will increase

Which brings me to my last point

When we are filled with the Spirit we glorify God and exalt Jesus Christ

In the Book of the Acts there are 10 occasions

When someone was said to be filled with the Spirit

And on each occasion they immediately testified of Jesus Christ

Paul mentions three specific things which will occur

When we are living Spirit filled lives

I am separating them but these three things are all interconnected

When we are Spirit filled we will worship

That's what Paul means when he says

Speak to one another with Psalms, hymn and spiritual songs

I think this is worship through fellowship

An interconnecting between being with each other

And lifting our voices to God

Then when we are Spirit filled we will sing praise

Now there is all kinds of music out there

And I have to admit to liking a lot of it

But Paul says that the world's music will seem shallow – which it is

And it will seem chaotic – which it can be

I was listening to a well known radio pastor

Who scolded his congregation for listening to too much Christian music

He called it shallow and said the music of the world had more depth

That is the opposite of what Paul is saying

He wants us to surround ourselves with the things of Christ

Including the music of the church

Finally Paul says when we are Spirit filled we will be thankful

King Lear said – How sharper than a serpent's tooth it is, to have a thankless child

This is the age when thankless children are the rule not the exception

We live in an age of entitlement – our children think we owe them
Because we live like we owe them
And the more someone believes he or she is owed something
The less thankful they are when they receive it
Parents can't win today
The more you do for your children the more they believe you should do
The less you do for your children the more embittered they become
Because everybody else does more
How about you? Can God win?
Are you thankful for what He has done
Or are you angry with Him because you wanted more
Has God delivered up to your expectations
You become disappointed in God when you believe He owes you something
He has granted you salvation and He didn't owe you that
Everything you want from God in this life is temporary
Health wealth fun friendships – all temporary
Salvation is eternal

For God's grace we should be eternally grateful and sing His praises

Angels continually sing His praises and they did not have to be redeemed
How much more should we who have been given eternal life sing of God This is not
only an exhortation to be thankful worship and sing praise
This is a description of what life is like when we are Spirit filled
And it is also a description of how to become Spirit filled
If you are down and thinking how unkind and unfair this world is
The best way to come out of it is to remember all you have in Christ
And to begin praising God

As we close I want to point out two things

First the verb in this verse could be correctly translated

Do not be drunk with wine for that is dissipation, but keep on being filled with the Spirit

The filling of the Holy Spirit is not a one time for all time event

It has been well said that we are leaky vessels

We need to keep on being filled

To keep on being filled we must keep short accounts with God and obey Him

Keeping short accounts means that when you sin you repent and confess it

To obey God simply means you do what He says

And you don't do what He says not to do

The second thing I want to point out is the use of time in Paul's message

Be careful how you walk, making the most of your time for the days are evil

The word translated time literally means

A "significant moment" or "an opportunity"

Paul is really saying –be careful how you walk, making the most of your significant opportunity

The world's way of saying the same thing is carpe diem – seize the day

This present moment in which you live is pregnant with eternal significance

It may not seem like it but it is

At the age of 20 Jonathan Edwards wrote this in his diary

Resolved never to lose a moment of time, but to improve it in the most profitable way I can – He was going to redeem the time

Scripture stresses time

Particularly the moment we are currently experiencing

1Pet - Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy

Luke – Blessed are you who hunger now, for you will be satisfied. Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh

2Cor – Now is the time of God's favor; now is the day of salvation

If you and I are going to redeem time like wise men and women

We must do it now

There may be no opportunity tomorrow

If we are to understand the will of God – now is the hour that counts

If we are going to be filled with God's Spirit

Now is when we need filling

If we are going to do eternal things – now is the time to do them

Omar Khayam wrote

The moving finger writes, and having writ, moves on; nor all your piety nor wit shall lure it back to cancel half a line, nor all your tears wash out half a word of it.

How much of your life will you regret when it is too late to change even one hastily spoken word

God is busy writing history – what part will you have in it

Now is the time you have been given – you will get no other

Redeem it

Last thought

To be filled with the Holy Spirit is to be Spirit empowered Spirit led and Spirit controlled

And when you are Spirit empowered led and controlled

It will change your life

You are filled with the Spirit to receive God's joy

You are filled with the Spirit to receive God's peace

You are filled with the Spirit to be a profitable servant

You are filled with the Spirit to be a witness

You are filled with the Spirit to display God's glory