

Walk In The Spirit – Eph 5:15-21 (Part 2)

Eph 5:15-21

This is part 2 of a little mini-series, in the midst of our study of the book of Ephesians, focusing on how to walk in the Spirit. That's the admonition. Found in the very first verse of this paragraph. V15. You follow along.

[15] Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, [16] making the best use of the time, because the days are evil. [17] Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is.

[18] And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit, [19] addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart, [20] giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, [21] submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ. (ESV)

Time is short and the way is narrow. The way of righteousness. That's the context from the *previous* paragraphs. So whatever you do, walk in the Spirit. That's the point. Look carefully at how you walk, v15, filled with the Spirit, v18. In other words, live your life under the influence of his power and presence. Walk in him.

The question is how. And Paul gives us 3 ways. The first, from last week, is:

Examine your life (v15-16)

Examine it . . .

- To live wisely (v15b) and
- To live with a sense of urgency (v16a)
- Because time is short (v16b)

The days are evil (16b). And there might not *be* a better time to walk in the Spirit, and proclaim the Gospel, and build the church.

Which brings us to v17 and the *second* way to walk in the Spirit. And that is . . .

Understand God's will (v17)

If you're going to walk in the Spirit, you need to understand his will. His *desires* for your life. V17. *Therefore* [because the way is narrow, the days are evil, and time is short] *do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is*. The will of the Lord, referring to both his *moral* will for our lives – to live right and be holy – and his *specific* will for our lives. What to do. Where to go. When. How. Understand it, Paul says.

And notice he contrasts it with foolishness. *Do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is*. Implying that *failure* to understand, is foolish. Unwise. Irrational. Even ridiculous at times.

You see it in some of the perspectives these days on social issues. From preferred pronouns and defunding the police, to open borders and closed schools. It's foolishness. Because most advocates of such things, and most decision makers, have no *clue* what God's will is.

That's the first implication of this verse. Failure to *know* God's will, is foolishness.

➤ The second implication, is that there's more to understanding the will of God than just knowing it. It also includes the appropriate *application* of that knowledge. Because knowledge without application is also foolish.

But let's start with the first. To understand God's will, you first have to . . .

• Know it

Understanding the will of God for your life, starts with *knowing* the will of God for your life. And while that includes God's *moral* will, doing what's right and avoiding what's wrong, I'm talking about his *specific* will.

We already know his moral will. It's written in black and white. But how do we determine his *specific* will for our life? For the various *decisions* that come our way. The options we have. How do we know?

The answer lies in 4 practices. 4 ways that I mentioned briefly a few weeks ago, and want to expound. Because it keeps coming up.

The first, is:

1. Read the Word of God in front of you. (Ps 119:105)

In order to know God's *will* for your life, you have to read God's *Word* for life.

Ps 119:105. Well known, but not very well understood. Or applied.

Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.

Not the path *you* chose, but the path *God* chooses. And God's Word, the Bible, is a *lamp* to it. A lamp to light the way of God's *will*. God's path for your life.

It's a one sentence summary of an entire *chapter* on the topic, found in **Prov 2**. Where it says . . .

My son, if you receive my words and treasure up my commandments with you, making your ear attentive to wisdom and inclining your heart to understanding . . . Then you will understand . . . every good path; for wisdom will come into your heart, and knowledge will be pleasant to your soul; discretion will watch over you, understanding will guard you. (Prov 2:1-2, 9-11)

The whole chapter is about the lamp of this book, to light our way. *God's* way for our life.

You don't have to be a hyper-spiritual *genius* to know God's will, you just have to read his Word. And open your heart. To let it inform you; and instruct you; and light your path.

➤ Now, is that to say that every situation and decision you face is specifically *addressed* in the Bible? No. But every situation and decision is *indirectly* addressed. With the principles and precepts found in the Bible. The perspective found there. The worldview. The examples.

So if you're going to know God's will for your life, you have to read his Word. The Word of God in front of you.

Second, you have to . . .

2. Heed the Spirit of God within you. (Jn 14:16-17, 26)

As in, pay attention to him. Take notice. Follow his lead.

Jesus said in **Jn 14:16-17** . . .

I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper [in addition to himself], to be with you forever, [17] even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you.

And sure enough, he was poured out at Pentecost. On all who believe (Acts 2:1-4). So that now, *everyone* who confesses Jesus as Lord is indwelt by the Holy Spirit. (Rom 8:9b)

➤ The question is, for what purpose? *Why* does the Holy Spirit dwell within us? One of the reasons, is to teach us and show us God's *will* for our lives. **Jn 14:26**. Jesus said: *The Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name [with my backing], he will teach you all things [all things] and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you.*

If you're going to know God's *will* for your life, you have to heed the *Spirit* of life. The Holy Spirit of God who dwells within you, teaching you *all things*. Including his will. You have to listen to what he says, and do what he wants.

➤ You say, "Great, but how do I *know*? How do I *know* the Holy Spirit is teaching me. How do I *know* he's prompting or nudging me? How do I *know* he's leading me?"

When it's crystal clear, and you're compelled. When you know exactly what you should do, and you can do no other. When it feels like a no-brainer, and becomes the overwhelming desire of your heart. You know the Holy Spirit is leading, when.

And sometimes it's instantaneous. Or *nearly* so. Like the house we bought when we moved here 17 years ago. Becky had done a bunch of research, and thought it was the one. But after being in it 5 minutes, and seeing a little puddle of water in the basement, I was like, "Hon, get your purse, get the kids; we're out of here."

But the next morning, I woke up and couldn't get it out of my mind. And basically drove there on auto-pilot. And when I turned on to the street, Becky was like, "What are you doing?" And I said, "I don't know. I just think we should buy this house." So we looked in the windows one more time, made a ridiculously low offer, and the rest is history.

Sometimes the Spirit's leading is that fast; that quick.

➤ Other times, we have to wait. In fact, that's the norm. Waiting for the Holy Spirit's clarity and compulsion almost always involves a delay. At least from our perspective. And that waiting doesn't come naturally. At least for me. It tests my trust, and it tests my patience.

My trust, that we have a God who acts on behalf of those who wait for him. Is 64:4. And my patience, to wait in peace. Content. Not forging ahead on my own. *Manufacturing* that clarity and compulsion. *Convincing* myself of God's will. We're prone to that, aren't we?

Fortunately, I've made enough *poor* decisions in my life *without* waiting, and enough good ones when I *have*, that I've learned to be patient.

Sometimes the Spirit's leading is instantaneous, mostly it's not.

➤ But when the clarity does come, there's nothing better. Like when I start thinking about a new preaching series; a new book of the Bible to work through. Which I'm doing right now. I usually have several in *mind*, but I'm not sure which one to choose.

And one of two things happens. I either wake up in the morning, or in the middle of the night, or the middle of prayer; and just know. Just like that. Crystal clear and compelling. Or, the sense of direction will slowly build, and the desire of my heart along with it, so that I can do no other. Either way, it's deeply satisfying, and almost *always* after a long time of waiting.

So whatever you do, heed the Spirit of God within you, and don't rush him. That's the second way to know God's will.

Third, is to . . .

3. Listen to the people of God around you (Acts 15:12)

Those who think biblically and love you. Like the Apostles and elders at the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15. Paul and Barnabas had just returned from their first missionary journey, when a dispute arose over whether the Gentiles had to be circumcised and keep the Law. So they gathered with the leaders of the church, to discern God's will.

And it says in **Acts 15:12**.

They listened to Barnabas and Paul as they related what signs and wonders God had done through them among the Gentiles.

The Apostles and elders *listened*. And then they listened to James, the half-brother of Jesus, who led the *Jerusalem* church.

Why? Why all the listening? To know God's will. That the Gentiles *didn't* have to keep the Law. A massive *turning* point in the history of the church, that could have gone the wrong way. Had they *not* listened to one another.

Read God's Word, heed God's Spirit, and listen to God's people. The people of God around you and over you. That's the third way to know his will.

And then 4th, is to . . .

4. Observe the ways of God about you. (Jonah 1:11-12)

The circumstances of your life. The situations and events that he ordains or allows. If you want to know God's will, you have to observe them; pay attention to them.

Like Jonah, for instance. Who ran from the Lord on a ship to Tarshish, until a life-threatening storm arose. (**Jonah 1:11-12**) And the sailors said in Jonah 1:11 . . .

"What shall we do to you, that the sea may quiet down for us?" For the sea grew more and more tempestuous. [12] He said to them, "Pick me up and hurl me into the sea; then the sea will quiet down for you, for I know it is because of me that this great tempest has come upon you."

Jonah observed the ways of God about him, and knew instantly what God's will was.

That's not to suggest that you're the cause of the next Derecho. It is to say, that God sometimes uses the *events* in our lives – whether natural or *man-made* – to get our

attention, direct our steps, and conform us to his will. But we have to pay attention. We have to observe them.

➤ Especially the *obstacles* in our life. I call it the Balaam Principle; from Numbers 22. Part of observing the ways of God about you, is to pay attention to the obstacles in your life. Something Balaam failed to do.

When his donkey saw the angel of the Lord in his path and turned aside, Balaam got mad, and forced him on. Until the angel finally appeared to Balaam as well. Changing his course and changing his approach, instead of striking him dead.

Better to observe the ways of God in the first place. Including the obstacles in your life.

➤ 4 ways to know God's will. To be considered together, at the same time. This isn't a sequential thing, it's a concurrent one. Like sitting on a stool. You don't first sit on one leg, and then another, and finally all 4. Or sit on one to the exclusion of the others. You sit on all four at the same time.

Same for knowing God's will. If you focus on one way, and forget the others, you're on shaky ground. Like trying to balance a stool on one leg.

Focus on *two* of the ways, and it's not much better (try to balance the stool on two legs).

But use three of them, and you have a fighting chance. Four, and you're on solid ground.

The bottom line being, in order to *understand* God's will, you first have to *know* it.

And then . . .

- **Apply it**

That's the second implication of v17. Because knowledge without application is useless. And makes you just as foolish as those who *don't* know his will.

If you know how to drive, but never do it, your knowledge is useless. And your lack of application, foolish. Because of all the amazing possibilities. Places to go and people to see.

By the same token, if you know God's *will* but fail to do it, that too is useless and foolish. Because it's the best thing you *could* do in life.

True understanding includes knowing *and* doing God's will. Knowledge *and* application. If you know it but don't apply it, you don't really understand it. You don't get it.

Like stumbling upon a treasure of great price as Jesus said; referring to the kingdom of God (Mt 13:44). If you don't give up everything in order to get it, you don't really understand it's value. Or in our day, if you know there's a thousand *Bitcoin* buried in a field somewhere, and you don't take a bulldozer to find it, you don't get it (\$55M). Literally *and* figuratively.

Understanding God's will, means *knowing* what's right and best, and *doing* what's right and best. It's the second way to walk in the Spirit; conduct your life under the influence of

his power and presence. *Do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is.* (17)

Prayer – Father, thank you for giving us your Spirit. We want to walk in him. And we certainly want to know your will for our lives. So help us as we wait. Give us clarity as we read, and heed, and listen, and observe. And compel us to apply it. Make it the overwhelming desire of our heart.

You Are Loved