

## Come On! You're Smarter Than That!

*Ephesians 5:15*

I sure made a lot of mistakes growing up. Sometimes I would ask a really dumb question or say something foolish. Sometimes I would get stumped on a math problem, or bring home a test paper with less than an impressive grade. My Dad would often look at me and say, “Come on, Rock. You’re smarter than that!” At first, I remember feeling hurt. Dad was scolding me, and I never wanted to be scolded, especially by him. As I got a little older, though, I realized that Dad was telling the truth: I *was* smarter than that! It was a wonderful day when I determined that I was going to leave the bumbling, stumbling era of my life behind, and live as though I really was intelligent after all.

It would be a very loose translation, but that’s essentially what Paul was saying here in Ephesians 5. “*Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise, but as wise.*” Take a good look around you as you move through life. Keep your eyes open, and be careful how you live. Don’t get caught up in the ways of the darkness around you—you’re smarter than that! Don’t be foolish—be wise! Paul says to us that we have to apply the principles of God’s Word to our lives. We have to know what God says, but more than that—we have to do something with what we know.

Staff members of a church were having a meeting, when an angel suddenly appeared! The angel told the pastor that in return for his unselfish and exemplary behavior, the Lord would reward him with his choice of infinite wealth, wisdom or beauty. Remembering the story of Solomon in Scripture, the pastor selected infinite wisdom. “Done!” declared the angel, and disappeared in a cloud of smoke and a bolt of lightning, as suddenly as he had arrived. The heads of everyone in the room whipped back toward the pastor, who sat completely surrounded by a faint halo of light. After a few moments of stunned silence, one of the staff members whispered, “Say something.” The pastor, now endowed with infinite wisdom, looked at them and said, “I should have taken the money.”

We may chuckle at that little story, at the idea that the first piece of wisdom that came from the pastor’s mouth was that he should have taken the money. But deep inside each of us we all know that wisdom is much more than that. Robert Nozick once wrote, “Wisdom is an understanding of what is important.” One definition of wisdom I saw years ago was that “Knowledge is being aware that fire will burn. Wisdom is remembering the blister.”

Charles Spurgeon’s insight was that “Wisdom is the right use of knowledge,” that wisdom is properly using what we have learned. He said, “Many men know a great deal, and are all the greater fools for it. There is no fool so great a fool as a knowing fool. But to know how to use

knowledge is to have wisdom.” Being smart is not the same thing as being wise, so to paraphrase my Dad, “Come on! We’re wiser than that!”

In his letter to the Ephesians, Paul has been giving instructions to these new believers on how to live for Christ. They had grown up in a completely pagan, immoral society, and were still surrounded on all sides by darkness. He has used one word over and over in his attempts to help them. Some translations used the word “walk,” while others use the word “live.” Let’s take a quick look at them so we can get a grasp of where we are in our exploration of Ephesians.

### **Ephesians 4:1**

*“As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to **live** a life worthy of the calling you have received.”*

### **Ephesians 4:17**

*“So I tell you this, and insist on it in the Lord, that you must no longer **live** as the Gentiles **do**, in the futility of their thinking.”*

### **Ephesians 5:1-2**

*“Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children, and **live** a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.”*

### **Ephesians 5:8**

*“For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. **Live** as children of light.”*

### **Ephesians 5:15**

*“Be very careful, then, how you **live**—not as unwise but as wise.”*

Look at your Bible now, and imagine that word “walk” or “live” glowing on the page. You see how many times Paul used it? That must be important. So once we get the overview, here’s what we have:

Make sure you **live** like you’re supposed to (4:1)

Don’t **live** like those do who do not know Christ (4:17)

In order to cope with everything going on around you, here’s how you should **live**:

**Live** in love, the way Christ loved us (5:2)

**Live** in light, and be light in the darkness (5:8)

**Live** in wisdom (5:15)

He’s saying to them, “OK, you’re smarter than that. You know the right thing to do. You know those old habits of futile thinking, speaking falsehood, unresolved anger, stealing, bitterness, rage, immorality, greed, or any kind of impurity—that none of those things should be a part of

your life. Get rid of them. Now use a little wisdom. Apply what you know to your life.” The Scriptures are telling us that applying these principles to our lives is not a hit-or-miss proposition; it must be done deliberately and with great care.

That probably is where most of us fall short. We know a lot more than what we actually do. We know to pray; we just don’t. We know that we are to read God’s Word and study it for ourselves; we just don’t. We know not to gossip and say unkind things about others, but we do it anyway. We know that unresolved anger and bitterness are not fitting for a Christian and that they even cause us physical harm, yet we hang on to them anyway. We know that we are to treat others with respect and love; we just don’t. We know not to allow these futile ways of thinking that are so prevalent out there in the world to influence us, but we let them into our heads anyway. We know more than what we actually do.

In stark contrast to the way we actually live, Jesus said in Matthew 7:24-25 *“Therefore everyone who **hears** these words of mine and **puts them into practice** is like a **wise man** who built his house on the rock. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock.”*

We’ve heard those words so many times that perhaps we don’t **hear** them anymore. Rephrase it: *the wise man is the one who applies God’s Word to his life, who actually does what God says to do.* We need to understand something: the Word of God gives high priority to this whole concept and teaching of wisdom in the life of the believer. In fact, there is an entire portion of the Bible devoted to sharing wisdom. We call it the book of Proverbs. If you were to ask, “What is the main theme of Proverbs?” the answer would have to be “wisdom.” There are only 31 chapters in Proverbs, yet the word wisdom is found in that book 125 times! The purpose of the book of Proverbs is to help us attain wisdom by applying practical principles to our daily living. God considers wisdom to be such an important issue for us that He liberally sprinkled the concept and teachings on it throughout His Word, from beginning to end.

Here are a few examples. We are told how valuable wisdom is in Job 28:18 *“The price of **wisdom** is above rubies.”* Proverbs 9:10 tells us how to get wisdom: *“The fear of the Lord is the beginning of **wisdom**, and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.”* Isaiah 33:6 reads, *“He will be the sure foundation for your times, a rich store of salvation and **wisdom** and knowledge.”* Who among us wouldn’t want that? But that Scripture goes on to tell us that *“the fear of the Lord is the key to this treasure.”*

A couple of examples from the letter of James will help us grasp this better. *“If any of you lacks **wisdom**, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him”* (1:5)

Then we read in James 3:13-18 “*Who is **wise and understanding** among you? **Let him show it by his good life**, by deeds done in the humility **that comes from wisdom**. But if you harbor bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast about it or deny the truth. Such “**wisdom**” does not come down from heaven but is earthly, unspiritual, of the devil. For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice. But the **wisdom that comes from heaven** is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere. Peacemakers who sow in peace raise a harvest of righteousness.*”

As plainly as it could be said, the Scriptures are telling us here that wisdom is demonstrated by the way we live. It says that it is not wise to be bitter or selfish, or to deny the truth. Paul was saying pretty much the same thing back in Ephesians. It is not wise to be influenced by the futile thinking of the world. It is not wise to gossip about others. It is not wise to tell falsehoods or to carry around anger that eats at our insides. It is not wise to allow unwholesome talk to come out of our mouths. It is not wise to pursue sexual immorality or greed. We’ve been given new life through Christ, and we’re *smarter* than that. We’re *wiser* than that. “*Who is **wise and understanding** among you?*” James asked. “***Let him show it by his good life**, by deeds done in the humility **that comes from wisdom**.*”

Look closer at Ephesians 5:15. We find a couple of things Paul gives us to help us be wise. He says, first, “*Be very careful.*” The KJV reads, “*See then that ye walk circumspectly,*” which may be a little truer to the original. The word translated “see” means to see something so as to understand it. It means to contemplate something, to turn your mind toward it, to focus on it—really *see* it. Have you ever seen a little child trying to get his mother’s attention? He’ll say “Momma, Momma, Momma, Momma.” I don’t know how those mothers do it. If that mother is sitting down trying to have a conversation with someone, the child might crawl up in that mother’s lap, put a hand on either side of his mother’s face, and turn her toward him. He’s saying, “Look at me, Momma. *See* me.” That’s the meaning of this word here. Turn your face toward this—*really see it*. And it’s present tense, meaning that this is something we are to be doing constantly.

Then, the word “careful” is not the normal word for careful. This word means “accurate, to be precise.” So the idea here is that since we are followers of Christ, we are to be constantly taking heed how accurately we are conducting ourselves. How closely are we actually living by the standards Jesus set for us as His followers? Since we’re following Him through a dark world, how precisely are we putting our feet down inside His footprints as we travel along? Do we really love each other the way He loved us? Are we really kind and compassionate to one another? Do we really forgive each other, just as in Christ God forgave us? That’s the standard—the pattern that we are to have for our lives. How accurately are we following it?

The wise person is the one who knows how to take the things in God's Book, and relate it to practical things, so that he can apply God's teachings to his life. Biblical wisdom is absolutely necessary if we want to know God better. Ephesians 1:17 says "*I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the **Spirit of wisdom** and revelation, so that you may know him better.*"

In Proverbs, chapter two, we find some very interesting words about wisdom, and I've chosen to conclude this message with these words from Scripture:

*Turn your ear to wisdom and apply your heart to understanding...then you will find the knowledge of God...you will understand what is right and just and fair—every good path. For wisdom will enter your heart, and knowledge will be pleasant to your soul. Discretion will protect you, and understanding will guard you. (2:2-3, 5, 9-11)*

Charles Swindoll has written, "Don't expect wisdom to come into your life like great chunks of rock on a conveyor belt. It isn't like that. It's not splashy and bold . . . nor is it dispensed like a prescription across a counter. Wisdom comes privately from God as a by-product of right decisions, godly reactions, and the application of spiritual principles to daily circumstances. Wisdom comes . . . not from trying to do great things for God . . . but more from being faithful to the small, obscure tasks few people ever see."

It is so important that we not depend on our own wisdom for living our lives! A few years ago, Antonio Lara must have thought he was a pretty wise fellow. He walked into a muffler shop in Chicago, Illinois, waved a gun around and announced a robbery. He was told the money was locked in a safe and the manager who knew the combination was not there. What to do? Any wise person would have not tried to rob the muffler shop to begin with, but Lara was in way over his head. He gave the store employees his cell phone number and told them to give him a call when the manager arrived. The employees did just that, but not until they called the cops, who arrested him when he arrived.

Not so "wise," was he? As my Dad would say, "Come on. You're smarter than that." Proverbs 3 tells us "*Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight. Do not be wise in your own eyes; fear the Lord and shun evil.*" These are choices that we make, and I'm asking you to make one today. Will you choose love? Will you choose light? Will you choose wisdom? Will you choose Christ?