

Walk Wisely by the Spirit

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[0 : 00] Well, welcome back. It'd be great if you could have a Bible with you. I am going to put the verses on the screen as well in case you've got an outline from the website that you want to write on.

But I do wonder where you go for wisdom to live life and relationships, as that question just said, including how to relate in marriages.

And I went where most people go these days. I went to Google or as one in my Bible study group said, Dr. Google, who seems to have all the answers. And I found some advice about love and marriage from kids. And so when asked who they should marry, Kirsten, age 10, said, God decides way before and you find out later who you're stuck with.

Or when asked when it's OK to kiss someone, Pam, aged seven, said, when they're rich. I'm a bit worried about her. And when asked why people date, Lynette, aged eight, said, people use dates to get to know each other.

Even boys have something to say if you listen long enough. Thank you, Lynette. Well, as we come to the next part of Ephesians, we're told to live or walk carefully, not as unwise, but as wise.

[1 : 21] And then we're given wisdom about how to do that, including in marriage. And now I realize not everyone listening will be married.

But even if not, it's helpful to know what the Bible says about marriage in case one day you are or you know how to relate and encourage and pray for those who are.

Candice will be talking a bit more about that later when we ask her. But first, let me remind you of the big picture so far. The first half of Ephesians, you might remember, is showing our privileged place in God's Christ-centered plan, especially for us Gentiles.

You know, non-Jews. Remember, we were once no hopers, but now we are family members with every spiritual blessing in Christ.

And then the second half of Ephesians was all about how to live in response to that privileged calling. And so on your screens, you might remember chapter four, verse one is the turning point of the letter.

[2 : 24] I urge you, says Paul, to walk or live in a manner worthy of the calling you have received, which as we've seen means no longer walking as the Gentiles do, but walking in love.

That is with God's help at putting off our old life and putting on the new life that God has given us. And we also saw it meant walking as children of the light.

And today, walking carefully, not as unwise, but as wise. And so point one, verse 15 in your Bibles are on the screen.

Paul writes, You see, we're to live or walk carefully as wise.

Well, shorthand, walk wisely. And the verses there seem to parallel each other to help us know what that means. So on your screens, verse 15 seems to parallel verse 17.

[3 : 41] You know, not unwise, not foolish, but wise, understanding the Lord's will. And so wisdom for life comes from understanding the Lord's will.

And where do we find the Lord's will? Well, you know, don't you? Right here in the Bible. So rather than Dr. Google, we're to go to the Bible for wisdom, to walk wisely in life.

And in this letter of Ephesians in the Bible, we've already been told what God's big plan or his big will is for the world. And so on your screens, remember chapter one.

God's will is to bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ, under his lordship. And that's God's big plan.

And that's what God is on about in our world, bringing people together in Christ and under his loving lordship. And so that's what it means to live carefully or to walk wisely.

[4 : 44] We're to walk wisely by walking in light of his will. You know, living under Christ's loving lordship and helping others to do the same.

Whether that's helping them to believe in Jesus by praying for them or sharing the good news of the gospel with them. Or whether it's helping people to grow as Christians by encouraging them as well as praying for them.

This is what it means to walk wisely. This also helps us to know what verse 16 means. Here we're told to make the most of every opportunity because the days are evil.

But every opportunity to do what? You know, to eat chocolate because the days are evil and chocolate might run out like toilet paper did last year. Or to enjoy life because the days are evil and we don't know when we'll go back into lockdown or whatever.

Well, the verses either side of verse 16 help us to know what it means. It means making the most of every opportunity to live wisely, to live according to the Lord's will.

[5 : 49] Again, that's helping people and ourselves to live under the lordship of Christ. You see, because the days are evil, then we are bombarded with stuff from the world that pushes us away from Christ.

You know, it tells us not to believe in Jesus, not follow Jesus. And so we have to take every opportunity to keep living his way so that we're not pushed downstream to live the world's way.

You know, back to our old Gentile way of life. It's kind of like, have you seen those salmon jumping upstream in a river? Now, take a look at this. You see, if they didn't take every opportunity to keep jumping up against the current, what happens?

Well, they're pushed back downstream. Similarly, if we don't take every opportunity to live Christ's way and helping others do the same, then we can be pushed back downstream by the evil days we live in.

Downstream to our old way of life, our old Gentile way of life. And so walk carefully, not as unwise, but as wise, making the most of every opportunity to follow Christ in his way, because the days are evil and they try and push us downstream.

[7 : 20] But it's not always easy, is it? But yet the great news is it's not all up to us. We have God's spirit who helps us.

And so point to verse 18, Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the spirit. Now, just to be clear, the Bible is not against alcohol.

Jesus turned water to wine. Paul tells Timothy to drink some wine. But it is against getting drunk. Why? Well, because we're told that people lose self-control and they don't generally act wisely, do they?

It rather leads to debauchery. That is unrestrained behavior. You hear stories of this, sadly, don't you? Where people do crazy things when they're drunk.

Or you see in movies how they wake up the next morning and regret what they did last night while drunk. Now, I know alcohol can be an issue and it can be addictive.

[8 : 23] And if you are struggling with it, then sincerely, please ask for help. Talk to me and I'm more than happy to help you get help. But here we're to be filled not with wine, but with God's spirit or perhaps better by God's spirit.

You see, when we believe in Jesus, we are already filled with God's spirit. But the spirit then can fill us with other things. So at times with boldness to share the gospel or with strength to endure hardship or with joy to help us give thanks to God.

And the spirit is also working all the time to fill us with God's character, godliness. That's what Paul's already prayed for back in chapter 3, verse 19, that we might be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.

See, we are to be filled with God's character, like God, being imitators of God by the spirit. That's what the spirit does.

How are we to let the spirit do this? Well, by letting him do his work. For example, by reading the Bible, because that's primarily how the spirit speaks.

[9 : 45] And as we read the Bible, the spirit speaks to our heart and encourages us to grow in godliness. But if we don't ever read the Bible, then we're not letting the spirit do his work as much as he could.

Or we can listen to the spirit speak through our conscience. Cartoons often represent it like this, you know, with the devil on one side and the angel on the other, or the Holy Spirit.

But it's a similar idea, even though it's not exactly how it works. And so when the spirit prompts our conscience, we're to listen to him. But if we don't, if we ignore our conscience and keep persisting in that particular sin, well, as we heard earlier, we can grieve the Holy Spirit.

You see, to be filled by the spirit with God's character means letting the spirit do his work, whether by reading the Bible or in prayer or listening to our conscience. But having said that, the bigger point here is we're not alone when it comes to walking wisely.

We have the spirit's help if we're open to it. And if we are, then the spirit will help us walk wisely, doing the Lord's will, living a godly life, and, verse 19, speaking to one another with psalms, hymns and songs from the spirit, singing and making music from your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ.

[11:18] Being filled by the spirit will lead us to speak, sing, give, submit. We looked at singing and giving last week, so let me just unpack verse 21.

Living wisely means we'll submit to one another out of reverence for Christ. And now to submit means to voluntarily obey someone in a particular role, which is a little bit different to the straight out obey that the kids are told in chapter 6, verse 1, which is why it's a different word.

We're adults, we have a choice, unlike kids and slaves, yet we're to choose to voluntarily submit ourselves to one another out of reverence for Christ. Now that doesn't mean, you know, two Christians come to a doorway and they say, after you.

No, after you. No, after, you know, and it keeps going all day. It's not talking about submitting to each other at the same time. It's talking about submitting in various roles we have out of reverence for Christ.

And it could mean we submit to one person in one role and then a bit later, they submit to us in a different role. For example, you know, when we come back here to church and the welcomer is at the door and they say, can you show us that you've checked in?

[12:36] Then we submit and we show them our phones or whatever so that they can serve us by helping us obey the law. But then later on, when we're on morning tea and they come up to get, they come up to get a cup of tea, we say, no, we have to pour the milk for you.

And they submit and say, okay. And they let us serve them. That's how it's supposed to work. Or in the service, they both submit to the service leader. The service leader says, please stand and they stand.

This is how the serving and submitting is meant to work in church. And it actually does make things work. I know our world thinks the word submit is dirty, but that's because it's often been misused. When done rightly, it is good. I mean, if people don't submit to the road rules, cars crash and there's chaos. Or think about playing game with your kids or grandkids, you know, it might be fun, but if everyone doesn't submit to the rules, it ends up in utter chaos, doesn't it?

And that submission is actually a good thing and it makes our world work. And it's the same in church. The problem with our world is it's also confused.

[13:51] They think, they want to uphold that we're all equal, especially with agendas these days and so on. And we are, but they then attach our worth to our role.

Have you ever noticed that? I mean, if you meet a new person at a dinner party or something, you invariably asked, what do you do? What's your role in society?

And if you say, I'm a doctor, oh, wow, they treat you with respect. They tie your worth to your role and perhaps even then show you their mole.

Is this okay, doc? But if you say, I'm a church minister, they respond with, oh, interesting, which is code for, I'm getting out of here. And they find someone else to talk to.

But our role does not determine our worth. Whether we are all equal worth in God's sight, we're all made in God's image, including man and woman, bone of my bone, flesh of my flesh, equal.

[14:57] Rather, we just have different roles where we sometimes serve and sometimes submit. Now, I'm assuming you can see where I'm going with all this because verse 22 follows closely on from verse 21.

It's as though Paul double clicks on verse 21 and up pops three examples of submission. I will look at the other two next week. But Paul begins with wives and husbands this week because it's the same kind of voluntary submission on view.

So point three verse 22. Wives, submit yourselves to your own husbands as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the saviour.

Now, as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything. Now, don't switch off. I know you may be feeling uncomfortable at this point, but that's because I think this passage has so often been misapplied.

Let me tell you what it's not saying. It's not saying that husbands tell their wives to submit. Paul is not talking to husbands at this point. He's addressing wives, isn't he?

[16:12] I remember one time messing up big time when I was first married to Michelle. That was our first year of marriage and like a lot of newlyweds, we're trying to work it all out and how it all kind of fits together and at one point I pulled out Ephesians 5 and said, you must submit.

I'm still shaking my head at it. I can't believe I said that. Needless to say, it didn't go down well and I had to ask for forgiveness because it's not my job to get my wife to submit.

Paul is talking to wives, not husbands here. And it's certainly not saying that wives are to submit with their husbands and say something contrary to God. You know, why don't you go next door and steal that plant from the neighbour?

That would be good for our garden. No, we must obey Christ above all. Nor are wives to submit to violence and abuse. And can I say very clearly this passage is never to be used to justify domestic violence or abuse.

And if you are stuck in a marriage like that, then please get out and get help. Please talk to me and I'll help you. Get out and get help both for you and your spouse.

[17:20] God has called us to live in peace. Nor is the passage saying that wives cannot express opinions, make decisions, run things or are inferior.

In fact, Michelle did way better at school than I ever did. Rather, what the passage is saying is that while we have equal worth, we have different roles in marriage, just like different roles at church. Only for marriage it's about different roles that complement each other and reflect the marriage between Christ and the church. So for wives, it means verse 24, as the church submits to Christ, so also wives submit to their husbands.

Even if their husband is not a Christian or grumpy that day or sometimes gets it wrong or even if you sometimes disagree because it's about respecting his role as the head and letting him serve you.

And for husbands, it means then they are to serve. They are to have a servant headship like Christ. Verse 25, Husbands, love your wives just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word and to present her to himself as a radiant church without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish but holy and blameless.

[18:56] Husbands are to love their wives as Christ loved the church. How did Christ love the church? Well, we just saw he gave himself up for her at the cross. He served sacrificially for our good to make us holy and blameless.

And so husbands are to have that servant headship that sacrificially serves their wife for her good, her physical, emotional and especially her spiritual good like Christ.

and as heads God will hold husbands accountable for that. For whether we've served sacrificially for our wife's good. And if we end up dying for our wife's good in the process then we're not a hero, we're simply doing our job, our role.

On the 15th of August last year a husband jumped onto a great white shark to save his wife. Take a look. He came face to face with a juvenile great white repeatedly punching it to save his wife's life. But whatever you do, don't call Mark Rapley a hero. The brave husband is tonight counting his blessings as his wife Chantel recovers from surgery after she was mauled at Portna Quarry.

[20:15] To Mark Rapley what he did was simple. You see the mother of your child and your support, everything that's who you are and so you just react.

I don't think Mark is a Christian but he got it. He's not being a hero even though the news article called him a hero. He was just doing his job as the servant head.

And as one woman said, if a husband uses his headship to serve like that, then I'm happy to submit to him. It's no problem. And to emphasize this kind of servant headship that makes it easier to submit to, Paul goes on to say, husbands are to care for their wives as their own body, like Christ cares for the church.

At verse 28, in the same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. After all, no one has ever hated their own body, but they feed and care for their body, just as Christ does the church, for we are members of his body.

For this reason, a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh. This is a profound mystery, but I am talking about Christ and the church.

[21 : 35] You see, as we heard in our first reading, in marriage, a husband and wife become one flesh, one body, just as Christ and the church are one body. In fact, Paul seems to apply that Genesis quote to Christ and the church.

And so just as Christ cares for the church as his body, so husbands that care for their wives as their body. When asked what is love, Rebecca, aged eight, said, it's when my grandmother got arthritis and couldn't bend over to paint her toenails anymore, so my granddad does it for her.

Isn't that sweet? The man who treats his wife as he might treat his own body, paints her toenails as though they are his own. Not that he would normally paint his own toenails, but you get the point, don't you?

He cares for her body as he would his own, just as Christ cares for us as his body. But the big point is, in marriage we're equal with different roles which reflect the marriage between Christ and the church.

In the church we are co-heirs, amazingly equal with Christ, did you realise? But we have different roles, so also in marriage, which means verse 33, however each one of you must love his wife as he loves himself and the wife must respect her husband.

[23 : 07] And so what does it look like day to day? Well, one example I've used before is, it means a husband saying, let me do the dishes and the wife submits and says, okay, husband serving sacrificially, wife submitting.

Or last night we had to pick up our daughter from a late shift at McDonald's, so I said to Michelle, you stay here, I'll pick her up, and she submitted by saying, okay. And no, I didn't do that just so I could use it today as an illustration, not this time, I must confess.

Or it means a husband not taking control of everything but making sure everything is under control. And so instead of disappearing to his man cave or disengaging from the family after work, it means asking, what can I do to help?

Or I'll do this if it helps. And the wife submitting by telling him, yes, do that or do this. It means talking to each other about decisions. The husband out of a desire to serve his wife and the wife out of a desire to respect her husband's headship.

It may look different for different couples, but the principle is husbands sacrificially serving for good and wives submitting to let them. Now, don't stress because I suspect most couples do this without even realising it's serving and submitting because how we're wired as men and women, actually.

[24 : 39] Though I know for me I could do better, so sometimes us husbands need to step up and take the initiative to serve, even if it's just checking in that our wives are okay. And wives, I know us husbands often get it wrong, but please be patient because if you don't ever let us serve, then we'll gladly disengage and sit on the couch, which is not good for anyone.

And what about decisions where you disagree? Well, again, the husband is to serve sacrificially for good, which means he may sometimes give up what he wants for his wife's good, like where to go on holidays or helping the kids with online kids church so that the wife can tune in to the online service.

And sometimes though, it may mean the wife submits even when she disagrees. And so if her husband is convinced, even after speaking with her, that this is for her good, then the wife is to submit and let him serve her for her good, even if she disagrees.

Now, maybe he's done more research on the property market and knows which place to go to. Or maybe he knows that although she's understandably tired from battling the kids and trying to get them to church and it's easy to stay at home, he knows how easy it is to be pushed downstream. And so he insists on going to church and helps get the kids ready too. Now, I doubt the disagreements will happen a lot in reality, but I've heard another couple in our church where the wife said for her, it's not about having the final say that's important, it's about being able to have a say that's important, to feel heard and valued.

[26 : 26] That's what matters to her, even if she disagreed because she knows that their marriage is to reflect the marriage between Christ and the church, which is for her good.

But again, the principle is husbands sacrificially serving for good and wives submitting to let them. Well, there's loads of advice on Google and I've just given loads from God's word, but it's actually more than advice in God's word, isn't it?

It's wisdom for our good. And so let's pray we might walk wisely by the spirit and in a manner worthy of our calling.

Let's pray. Our gracious father, we do thank you for your word and even this somewhat controversial passage today. Father, we pray that you would help us to take every opportunity to live under the loving lordship of Christ, that we might not be pushed downstream.

Help us, we pray, to be filled by the spirit, being open to his prompting in our conscience, reading your word, that we might grow in godliness. And help us, we pray, to listen and follow your wisdom for our relationships like marriage.

[27 : 49] Help us, we pray, knowing that you are good and you only give good wisdom. We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.