

Walking Wisely
Ephesians 5: 8-21

Last week we looked at one of the obstacles we must overcome in our journey of faith. In fact, it is much more than an obstacle, it is truly a barrier that will prevent us from receiving the blessing of God's forgiveness. Forgiveness is the healing salve that mends and restores broken relationships, the special bond we have with God and with one another. As we walk in faith and learn to be forgiven people, one of the most difficult things is acknowledging that forgiving others is something that God requires us to do, whether we want to do it or not. It is a Biblical absolute found in Mathews Gospel 6:14, it is a truth that stands alone, a truth without any ifs, ands or buts. If we do not forgive others, God will not forgive us.

Few of us like absolutes. To be more specific, few of us like absolutes that we find objectionable. To be sure, one of the things some find objectionable about Christianity in general is that it is both absolute and exclusive in nature. That is the case for some of us who claim to be disciples of Jesus as well as for those who embrace other views. Even so, if we are to grow in faith and walk in love, we will need to embrace Biblical absolutes and discern how God would have us be in submission to them.

We begin with the understanding that **Biblical absolutes are not given to be a burden but a benefit.** **1 John 5:3** *For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome*". That would also mean that those absolutes are not legalism in disguise. A good working definition of legalism is trying to earn favor with God, trying to earn our way into heaven. Legalism is a burden. No matter how hard we try, no matter how hard we work at it, our works cannot make us holy. They cannot make us holy because they cannot fix the problem of sin. That is an absolute. **Romans 3:20.** The only way to get past the pain of our sinfulness to the joy of God's holiness is through Jesus and His work on the cross. That is an absolute. Acts 4:11-12.

Jesus already did the heavy lifting. He carried our burden, our sin, on His shoulders for our benefit. He said it this way in Mathew **11:28-30**. One way to understand that word picture is to view the easy yoke of Jesus as repentance. It connects us to Him. Part of repentance is admitting our need for a Savior and then confessing our Savior to be Jesus Christ. It's easy in that no nails will be required to be driven into our hands and feet. The light burden is learning from Him, or better said learning to live like Him. Part of that burden is learning to love His absolutes, allowing ourselves to be controlled by the One holding the reins.

We often forget that there is a yoke and a burden until we feel its constraint. It is then we are reminded that when we choose to be yoked to Jesus, we are not truly free to go where we choose when we choose. That is a good thing, a benefit, as He keeps us from wandering someplace that may cause harm to our soul. That brings us to chapter 5 of Ephesians.

Throughout human history, there have always been those who would have us believe that there are no absolute truths. The strange thing is that they themselves believe that to be absolutely true. They would make the claim that truth and morals are related to and even determined by cultural or social beliefs. In other words, to each his own, to each her own, to each their own. That is the polar opposite of legalism, and in the end, it will be just as deadly to the soul. Here are some examples. When a particular culture believes it is OK for men to take women by force to be their wives and our culture doesn't, who are we to say they are wrong? Or, if a small segment of society believes there is nothing morally wrong with a 50-year-old man having a sexual relationship with a 10-year-old boy and the rest of us don't, who are we to judge? If part of society believes it is OK to kill a baby because it has black hair instead of blond or brown eyes instead of blue and we don't, who are we to stop them? Those are examples of moral relativism. They result from the denial of absolute Biblical truths that God decreed to govern humanity, including the denial of the absolute Biblical truth of eternity and damnation. Granted those are extreme examples but renaming darkness light is by no means uncommon.

We now live in an age where inclusiveness, justice and equity are the holy words of the day and absolutes are nothing more than obstacles to freedom and choice. Fewer and fewer people are hearing that Jesus is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. Few are hearing that they “have to” believe in Jesus to obtain eternal life. Few are hearing that we are all sinful people that are doomed without a Savior. Few are hearing that we must forgive others if we want to go to heaven. The end result is that even fewer people believe we must love our neighbors as ourselves and share our blessings with others in need. Like them or not, those are absolute truths that define the Christian faith. **Without them, we remain like the rest of the world, living in darkness and calling it light.**

Paul warned the early churches about those who teach that light and darkness are relative terms. **Col 2:8 Eph 5:6-** let no one deceive you with empty words. His warning is still in force and relevant today to the church at Millcreek. Have nothing to do with those that call darkness light and light darkness. Do not become partners with them. The apostle Paul describes such people as foolish and unwise, and he has some words of advice for them and for us: **“be careful”**. Verse 15

That is good advice. We are taught from a young age to be careful because we live in an evil world. We look both ways before crossing the street. We stay out of dark alleys. We are leery of those people who promise us an easy way to get rich quick. We don't take candy from strangers. We count our change when buying something at the store. We check the bag before leaving the drive thru window to make sure everything we ordered is in there. You get the idea. Yet even when we are careful bad things can happen. We can be the safest of drivers and be killed by a careless or inattentive driver or someone driving drunk or high on drugs. We can be at the right place at the wrong time or the wrong place at the right time and be killed by a bullet meant for somebody else.

Paul is right- we need to walk wisely because this world is a dangerous place. We do need to be careful. It is not an exaggeration to say evil is more unleashed now than at any other time in human history. One reason for that is technology and social media are helping the devil's cause. More people than ever before are seeing, hearing, and then believing corrupted versions of the truth. With hatred and violence added to the mix, the world has become a very dangerous place to walk and to live.

We are also called to expose those works of darkness, expose those who corrupt the truth and lead people to a false understanding of the Scriptures with legalism or moral relativism. **verse 11** The way to dispel the darkness of tomorrow is by shining the light of Scripture on it today. People live in darkness and blame the light for their problems because they don't know the truth. They don't believe or can't believe there is a better way. The good news is that we can help change that. That means we must have courage to share Jesus, share His absolutes, and share His love with a world that loves living in darkness. I pray we will have grace to do it in love. Yes, the risks are great, but the rewards are greater. **One way we become wise people is by embracing Biblical absolutes, especially the one that says Jesus loves us.**

So let us heed Paul's advice. Let us be careful, for the day will come when we walk this dangerous earth no more. God is the only one who knows just when that moment will come. Let us make a commitment to spend time with God in the Scriptures every day and choose to be in fellowship with other true believers. Let us pray for those who call darkness light and light darkness. Let us walk wisely with our Savior. Amen