

17. 4 wise lessons we must heed

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A couple of weeks ago, Karen and I were watching an old movie "Karate Kid" where Mr. Miyagi told Daniel-San to do the same movement "Wax on, wax off" for day in, day out. Daniel didn't know that those boring movements were the same basic movements of the martial art.

That reminded me of my own martial art classes that I took when I was young. Our instructor also made us to do the same movements over and over and over. We were young hyper kids, we wanted to do sparring, jump-kicking, breaking boards with fists, etc – something fancy, not these boring basic movements. Our instructor wanted us to get the basics done so well that they should be like our second nature.

Spiritually, we need to practice what we already know. Apostle Paul gives us 4 simple wise lessons we must heed. These lessons are not something we can read and then forget about them. As the followers of Christ, we must practice them everyday, actually every moment while we live on this earth. I am quoting another martial artist and actor late Bruce Lee:

"Knowing is not enough; We must apply. Willing is not enough; We must do."
Though I don't care for his eastern philosophy, I agree with him for what he said here.

A. LESSON NO. 1 – TIME

Ephesians 5:15-16 See then that you walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise, 16 redeeming the time, because the days are evil.

The word "therefore" connects us with Paul's previous thought that we are now "Light in the Lord," called to "walk as children of Light... trying to learn what is pleasing to the Lord" in v8 and v10. Since God has enlightened us and made us His lights in this world, we need to conduct ourselves with care rather than live carelessly; walk wisely instead of foolishly.

I asked you to underline the word 'circumspectly.' This word comes from two Latin words which mean "looking around." The Greek word "akribos" carries the idea of precision and accuracy. "See that you walk carefully, with exactness" is the meaning. The opposite would be walking carelessly and without proper guidance and forethought. In military terms, it would be "being aware of the surroundings and expecting the enemy's attack, paying attention to detail." After all, we are living in the enemy territory – the earth that belongs to satan.

To grow in wisdom in Christ means making the most of every opportunity that time provides. The Greek phrase "redeeming time" includes the idea of rescuing it from waste or abuse. Just as Christ redeemed us, rescuing us from a futile existence and giving us new life empowered by His Spirit, so we now have the privilege of using our time for the Lord's purposes while the world wastes their limited time in sins. In other words, God wants us to reclaim time for Him.

You see, if you lose money in your business or stock market, you might be able to gain it back and even more. But once you waste your time, you will never gain it back again, ever. But if we learn to redeem our time by using our time on this earth for God's glory, not on wasteful and ungodly things, that is a wise thing to do.

Of course, I am not saying that we have to work for God every single waking moment. He doesn't expect us to do that.

We humans are prone to extremes: we tend to either:

- 1) **Waste away our time in procrastination, poor choices, and idleness or**
 - 2) **Drive ourselves and others mercilessly and never relax, rest, and play .**
- Interestingly, both of these extremes leave out God. The first resists His purposes for us, and the second disregards the joy of His love.

We can overcome the first extreme with "DISCIPLINE" – prioritizing our time and directing our energies into what matters. Discipline involves sacrifice, but it 's also a form of taking care of ourselves. It helps us accomplish the dreams God gives us and protects the things our hearts value most, like our God and our family . Through discipline, we keep sight of how important and useful our lives are to God.

The second extreme can be countered with "DISCERNMENT" – recognizing that we're not engines but human beings created for relationships with God and family and friends. God has fashioned us to find refreshment in beauty , restoration in sleep, and renewal in laughter. Even working in ministry can be too much unless we learn to take time off properly.

B. LESSON NO. 2 – DECISION MAKING

Ephesians 5:17 Therefore do not be unwise, but understand what the will of the Lord is.

Please note the word 'understand'. It means that it requires our conscientious and determined effort to know the will of the Lord.

"Understanding" suggests using our minds to discover and do the will of God. Too many Christians have the idea that discovering God's will is a mystical experience that rules out clear thinking. Besides, they want to know what will happen next for curiosities and selfish reasons that have nothing to do with the will of God. Somehow they have a concept of knowing God's will for them is a hocus pocus crystal ball guessing game. I call it "voodoo theology."

Knowing God's will for us should not be a guessing game. It is clearly written in the Bible. We don't have enough time to go through every verse that mentions about the will of God. I will give you quick three points from this Book of Ephesians:

- 1) **To unite everything in heaven and earth under one Head – His Son, Jesus Christ in chapter 1.**
- 2) **To accomplish this unity through reconciling people to Himself and to each other by the sacrificial death of His Son in chapter 2.**
- 3) **To glorify in our lives His grace, which makes reconciliation and unity possible. This is written in all over this Book.**

Again, two human extremes often arise when it comes to God's will: we either run ahead of Him like a speeding horse or we resist Him like a stubborn mule.

- 1) **Caused by a lack of patience**
- 2) **Results from the presence of pride**

Both extremes flare up when we're responding to God's general will for all Christians, which is to love the Lord with all our heart, soul, strength, and mind; to treat our neighbors as we want to be treated; to spread the word about His saving

grace; to feel the joy that comes with giving; to experience the empowerment that comes through obedience; to know the strength that comes by testing .

Since y'all want to know how to understand God's will, here are some steps you need to take:

- 1) We PRAY with an OPEN heart.
- 2) We READ His Word, the Bible prayerfully and intelligently.
- 3) We SEEK the counsel of respected Christians.
- 4) We WAIT, listening to His voice in the church's teaching, in its songs, in wise counsel.
- 5) When we've discerned His will, we OBEY it.

We may not get everything perfectly, but if we did with the right heart, the Lord will guide us to the right direction with His grace, mercy, and love.

C. LESSON NO. 3 – CONTROL

Ephesians 5:18-20 And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit, 19 speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord, 20 giving thanks always for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ,

Since I was a child, I encountered so many drunkards – starting with my uncle who used to threaten my mother day in, day out so that he could get more money out of her for his next drink to a prison yard full of DUI offenders where I ministered as a lay pastor, to the mangled bodies and wreckages of cars on the streets due to drunk drivers where my deputy sheriffs and I arrived.

If our federal government is really concerned about saving lives from the next shootings by banning weapons from law-abiding citizens even though what they are doing is against the Constitution of the United States, then they should also ban all the alcohol so that we won't have almost 10,000 people getting killed by drunk driving accidents each year and many broken families and ruined lives. Because alcohol does not make anyone happy, it is a depressant.

When people are drunk, the things they say usually benefit no one. Their words are either garbled, slurred nonsense or angry vulgarities. When we're controlled by the Holy Spirit, however, our minds are clear to see all that Christ has done and is doing, and we overflow with praise that lifts the hearts of others as well as our own and that honors the Lord. Rather than having a drunken bitter and sad heart, we need to let the Holy Spirit fill us with joyful gratitude.

"Be filled with the Spirit" is God's command, and He expects us to obey. The command is plural, so it applies to all Christians and not just to a select few. The verb is in the present tense – "keep on being filled" – so it is an experience we should enjoy constantly and not just on special occasions. And the verb is passive. It means that we do not fill ourselves, because we cannot but allow the Holy Spirit to fill us.

By the way, the Bible never, ever tells us to be drunk with the Holy Spirit like some Charismatic Bible teachers teach, rather it says clearly, "do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit."

When a believer of Jesus Christ is filled with the Holy Spirit by being obedient to God's Word, as the Lord controls his life, he experiences a deep joy that he is not afraid to express for the glory of God and gets to have a beautiful self-control that is

really God in control. Joy and self-control are among the aspects of the fruit of the Holy Spirit as it is mentioned in Galatians 5:22-23.

Galatians 5:22-23 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law.

The secret to a victorious Christian life isn't trying to suck out one sin at a time, but to be filled to the brim with the Holy Spirit. There's no room for anything else.

D. LESSON NO. 4 – SUBMISSION

Ephesians 5:21 submitting to one another in the fear of God.

This verse provides a natural setup for Paul's next section, which deals with the relationships within family and workplace. But it's beneficial to include it here too, because it highlights the integral part humility plays in wise living.

If all of us continually fought to do and have things our way, where would we be? Nowhere. Especially within the body of Christ, the church, we need to exercise this lesson to one another all the time.

Often I find some pastors who act like dictators as if God is dead and left them in charge; some elders and deacons who think that they are in charge to hire and fire pastor instead of waiting upon the Lord – I call this kind of church "deacon-possessed church"; and there are many congregation that don't care about helping others who are in need as long as their spiritual appetite get filled.

Why are they having so many problems? No, let me rephrase that. Why are we as the one body of Jesus Christ having so many problem with one another? Because we don't want to submit to one another.

The verb "submit" is "hypotasso" in Greek and it occurs twenty-three times in Paul's letters. I am sure that it was not difficult for Paul to come up with that particular word when he was chained to Roman Emperor's Praetorium guards 24/7.

Can you just imagine a church that the entire congregation actually practice submission to one another out of love and respect for others and in the fear of God? When someone in the church needs help, the people from the church would line up to help; there would not be any shortage for the nursery or child care ministry volunteers; or every available person will show up on church work days.

I can only dream about that kind of day.

Mark 10:42-45 But Jesus called them to Himself and said to them, " You know that those who are considered rulers over the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. 43 Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you shall be your servant. 44 And whoever of you desires to be first shall be slave of all. 45 For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many."

John 13:14 If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet.

By nature, we want to promote ourselves, but the Holy Spirit enables us to submit ourselves. But the wise person, the one who acknowledges God in all his or her ways, will gently honor and serve others, because in doing so, Christ is honored.

E. APPLICATIONS

- 1) The time we have on this earth is limited and given by the Lord. Use it wisely for the Lord, don't waste it in worthless and ungodly things.
- 2) Pray for God's will in our life, receive it from His Word, obey it with all of your heart.
- 3) Fill our hearts and lives with His Holy Spirit's presence so that joy may overflow out of our lives to others.
- 4) When we are submissive to one another, our Lord Jesus Christ is honored.