

REDEEMING THE TIME

Ephesians 5:15-17

Intro: The passing of the old year, and the beginning of a new year, always makes us think about how time is passing, and passing very quickly. And it seems that the older we get, the faster time seems to move.

But it is not just older people who feel it; there are times when everybody would like to stop the clock. We look forward to holidays and the time that they give us with our families, and before we know it, that time which we anticipated so much is history.

One consolation for us all is that, however time may pass for us, whether fast or slow, it moves at the same rate for all of us. We all have the same number of minutes in every hour, the same number of hours in every day, the same number of days in every month, and the same number of months in every year. We don't all have the same number of years, but in day to day living, each one of us measures time in the same way. And this is true around the world in every generation, and it has been so since the beginning of time.

Those of us who know the Lord know that *time is a gift from God*. It is a stewardship that we have from the Lord, and we are all responsible to Him as to how we use our time. It is very apparent that Moses was very aware of the swift passing of time when he wrote this prayer in Psalm 90, verse 12: "So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom." He knew that the Lord is the One Who sets the number of our days, and that we are responsible to Him for the way we use the time that He gives us. We will have no more time than what the Lord gives us, and so we must use it for Him.

The Apostle Paul, in Eph. 5:16 said this about our use of time: "Redeeming the time, because the days are evil."

What did he mean by this?

I. REDEEMING THE TIME (Eph. 5:16a).

He told the Colossian believers the same thing. Cf. Col.4:5. "Walk in wisdom toward them that are without, redeeming the time." And the Apostle Paul used the same verb in both passages. It is the Greek verb,

ἐξαγοράζω. It means *to rescue from loss* or *from misapplication*. It means *to secure time for our own use*, not to squander selfishly the way we want to live, but to make the wisest possible use of our time for the glory of God.

I think it is interesting that twice in the book of Galatians the Apostle Paul used this same word to describe our salvation. Listen as I read them. I am sure you will recognize them as familiar verses:

Gal. 3:13: Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree:

Gal. 4:4-5:

4 But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law,
5 To redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons.

Now we all know that our Lord paid a terrible price to redeem us, to redeem us for Himself, to rescue us from loss and the wasting of our lives. And if we are going to redeem the time which the Lord has given us, it will cost us something too, not money, and not a sacrifice like the Lord made for our salvation, but it will mean forgoing our will and choosing to do the will of God. But this is often where we struggle. Our sinful nature makes us determined to do what we want to do, and it is often very difficult for even a Christian to surrender his will to the will of God. We see people every day who are wasting their lives, throwing their lives away for nothing. God in His grace has redeemed us from our sin and from sinning, and now He calls upon us to trust Him so that we can redeem our lives from being wasted. And the joy of doing the will of God is so great and so profitable, that it is foolish to compare it with what we might have done with our lives if the Lord had not changed us, and set us on His way.

But now let us ask why the Apostle Paul was so concerned about this.

II. THE APOSTLE'S REASON FOR THIS EXHORTATION (Eph. 5:16b).

He made it very clear: "Because the days are evil." Now we know that our time is made up of days, days in which we are called upon to live in this world. And if we simply follow what other people are doing, we are going to get involved in all kinds of evil. This is an evil world. As one of

our hymn writers has said, it does not help us on to God. There is no encouragement in this world to live lives that are pleasing to God. This is not even in the thoughts of the average worldling. And so living in the environment of this world we have to be on our guard continually against “evil.”

The word which Paul used here for “evil” is a word which speaks of the evil effect of the world’s way of living. A person can amass a fortune, but what good is it if it keeps him from seeing his special need before God, if it keeps him from seeing his need of God and of Christ.

So the world is going one way; we as the Lord’s people are going in the opposite direction. The way of the world will keep us from a life of real fellowship with the Lord. The people of the world live for pleasure. Their goal is to have a lot of possession, things which they think will make them happy, but they do not know what the Lord said on one occasion when a man wanted the Lord to intervene for him with his brother. In Luke 12:15 we read our Lord’s response: “Take heed, and beware of covetousness: for a man’s life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth.” And yet people continue to think that they will find happiness in material possessions.

Think of the multiplied millions that are spent on the pursuit of pleasure! But God has a more excellent way for His people so that we can come to the end of a year, or the end of our lives, rejoicing that we have lived our lives as He has wanted us to, and not as we would have lived if the Lord had not “redeemed” us from our sinful lives and secured us for Himself.

But, knowing what the Lord wants us to do, *to redeem OUR time, yours and mine*, how do we do it?

III HOW DO WE REDEEM OUR TIME?

The Lord never tells us what we are to do without telling us how. And for the “how” I want to take you to verse 15, and then to verse 17.

In verse 15 we are exhorted:

A. To “walk circumspectly” (Eph. 5:15).

Most of you have read Ephesians enough to know that the word *walk* is very prominent in this epistle. It is a word that is brought over into the NT from the OT. We are told in Gen. 5:22 and 24 that “Enoch walked with

God.” We are told the same thing in Gen. 6:9 about Noah. And in Gen. 17:1 the Lord told Abraham, “Walk before me, and be thou perfect.” It is a word in many instances which points to the way we live. Our walk is our life. We used to walk, or live, one way before we were saved; now that we are saved our walk, or our life, is different, and it is to be increasingly different.

Our past walk is described by the Apostle Paul in Eph. 2:2. (Read Eph. 2:1-3.)

Our present walk is described in Eph. 2:10; 4:1, 17; 5:2, 8, and our text in verse 15.

But right now we are concerned about what it means to “walk circum-spectly.” What does it mean?

It means, as we might say today, “Watch your step.” Haven’t you seen that sign in many different places. It means that there is danger ahead, and you need to be very careful about where you step. It means that you need to make sure of every step. The Greek word suggests that need to walk in the right way, to walk accurately, to be sure that you are doing the right thing before you do it.

This is a word which combines all of the references to our walk which have preceded this verse in this epistle.

But how can you tell what is right? Who determines what is right? Does society? If you follow society, you will get into plenty of trouble. Just because something is legal doesn’t necessarily mean that it is right. Paul was talking about what is right in the sight of God, that which is pleasing to Him! We are not to walk as fools, that is, as people who don’t know right from wrong. We are to be wise. How can this be?

Now let me take you to verse 17, and the second point that needs to be made in redeeming the time.

B. We need to understand “what the will of the Lord is” (Eph. 5:17).

Where can we learn what the will of the Lord is? There is only one place, and that is in your Bible. The Word of God gives us the will of God. And it would be hard to find a better place to start that right here in Ephesians.

But don't stop with Ephesians. Read all of Scripture. Let me especially recommend to you the daily reading of a chapter from Proverbs. There you find the will of God stated clearly and for our great encouragement. I trust that to every one of us the Bible is so extremely important to us that we will read it daily, and think about what we read, praying that the Lord will not only help us to understand how we are to live, but that He will give us the will to do His will instead of our own, and the power that we need to do it, regardless of how difficult it might be sometimes. None of us can get enough at our Sunday meetings, even if we add Tuesday and Wednesday to our schedule (and I would like to see all of you do that). We need to be feeding our souls on the Word of God every day. We must not let anything keep us from it.

What about planning to read a book a month this year, a book that will help you in your walk with the Lord, a book that will give you greater understanding of the Scriptures? This is surely a major way to redeem the time that the Lord has given us.

But we will find from Scripture that "redeeming the time" is not only a matter of *doing what pleases God*, but it is a matter also of *not doing what displeases Him*. The Bible deals with both.

Be careful about doing anything that makes you lose your desire for the Word of God. We need to be careful about friendships. The Bible in Proverbs tells us not to be friendly with an angry man because we might learn his ways. We need to be careful about the pleasure we pursue. When television first came into our homes, it was heralded as a great blessing for all. It instead has become one of our greatest curses. It is easy to watch on television what we would never want anyone else to know that we are watching. Or it is easy to waste hour after hour looking at all kinds of sports activities. Moderation may be OK. Each of us has to decide what is involved for us in using our time for God's glory. We all need diversion and relaxation, but how careful we need to be with our television sets. Perhaps all of us should paste on the front of our televisions, "Watch your step." It is a known fact that much of the violence that has become so distressing in our society, has been encouraged by much that is shown on TV or in movie theaters. There was a day when comedy was clean and funny, but it seems now that it has to be dirty in order to be successful.

Concl: Paul's instructions to us in Eph. 5:15-17 are not just optional suggestions; they are orders for us to obey. If there were ever a time when we as the people of God needed Eph. 5:16, it is today! "Redeeming the time, because the days are evil." I can't do it for you, and you

can't do it for me. This is personal with each one of us. We all get very upset by the way things are going in our country today, and we should be. But perhaps what is of even greater concern to the Lord is the way things are going in the lives of those of us who love Him, or who profess that we love Him. We all need to live like we would want every child of God to live. Television programs are rated as to whether or not they are fit for children to see. The Scriptures would have us understand that if it is going to be bad for my children, it can't possibly be good for me!

As we begin 1998 let us give serious thought to the way we are living, our walk. The highest honor that can be given to any Christian is that he, or she, walks with God. If we are walking with God, we are redeeming the time, the time that the Lord is giving us. If we are not walking with God, then precious time which can never be ours again, is slipping through our fingers.

Perhaps two good verses for us as we begin a new year are Phil. 2:12 and 13,

12 Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.

13 For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure.

With God working in us, there is real hope for a change.

1998 may be the year that the Lord will return for us. How grateful we will be to the Lord if He comes and finds us doing our utmost to redeem the time because we want Him to find us living to please Him.