

Redeeming the Time

By Jim Davis

“Therefore be careful how you walk, not as unwise men, but as wise, making the most of your time, because the days are evil” Ephesians 5:15-16.

A friend declared in a recent conversation that he believed that time is speeding up. While modern appliances, transportation and technology have provided us with more free time they may also take it away. Today we can do many things in many places in a short period of time. Most of the people I know are struggling with the problem of over-commitment. Christians battle between the priority of maintaining a relationship with God and family and the easily misguided value of achievement. Making the most of our time is mistakenly translated into engaging in a daily blur of activities. This kind of busyness is unhealthy for us both spiritually and physically. If we are to make the most of our time we must look carefully to how we live.

Look Carefully

Paul commands believers to beware or take careful consideration for the way they walk. We must beware that we look accurately or consider diligently how we live our lives. He desires for us to be precise in our decision-making. Are we living wisely? Are the decisions we make based upon temporal values or eternal values? The Christian should not be timid or fearful but we should look carefully at the eternal value of the decisions we make.

One of the major obstacles to perceiving accurately how we walk is *setting wrong priorities*. We know we are looking carefully when we maintain focus on God’s purpose for our lives. This is impossible to do unless we are looking to the authority of God’s word to structure our values and determine our priorities.

Another obstacle to looking carefully is *ordering our priorities in the wrong way*. God loves things done decently and in order. When we over-commit, even to good things, we are not honoring Him. The Christian minister that seeks success in his ministry yet violates the biblical command to “love his wife as Christ has loved the church” or “raise up his children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord” is not looking at life carefully with godly priorities.

In keeping the priorities we have set, we must work to avoid being controlled by the urgent. Remember that priorities are revolving. If our top priorities dominate in such a way that lesser priorities are totally neglected, we are not taking careful consideration in our walk. We may get involved in some important Christian ministry but this priority should not dominate in such a way that we never have time to take care of our responsibilities such as maintaining the lawn or washing the car. When we order our priorities properly there should be a place for the urgent, the important, and the necessary things in our lives.

Walk Wisely

Walking wisely means skillfully living our lives according to divine perspective. Paul addressed moral decisions earlier in the book of Ephesians. Here we are not considering

right or wrong but wise or unwise. Considering how we walk is often a decision between better and best instead of wrong or right. There is a discipline involved in walking wisely. We must learn to judge the amount of time that is required for the commitments we make. Those who walk wisely have well-defined priorities. They learn to say no to activities that create any extended imbalance in those priorities. We need to give our time only after we have prayed and evaluated (or determined) the cost involved.

Walking wisely is more than just having divine perspective. It is the skillful application of divine perspective to all areas of our lives. This is a goal that can only be accomplished by the indwelling Holy Spirit. The Scriptural definition of a Spirit-filled believer in action is one of discipline in light of biblical priorities. Today, walking in the Spirit has been redefined to mean some form of existential experience that happens to those who wish hard enough. But Paul teaches us that there is an exercise of discipline to those who walk wisely and are filled with the Spirit. Those who walk wisely apply God's values and God's methods to their daily experience by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Walk Redeeming the Time

If we look at over-commitment properly we understand that it actually destroys the thing we are seeking. Those who are careful to walk wisely make the most of their time. Making the most of our time has sometimes been misconstrued (even among Christians) as doing more things than the other person does. We have bowed down before the gods of Achievement, Success, and Praise of Men secretly expending our relationships with our Lord, our spouses, and our children.

The word translated "making the most" is sometimes translated "redeeming". Paul painted a word picture to help us understand. When we go to the market place we inspect what we purchase. If it is produce we make sure that it is fresh. If it is merchandise we check to see that it is good quality. We do this because we understand that certain things in life are temporal. They are passing and if we do not take hold of it in the moment it will be gone. When we are careful to walk wisely, redeeming the time, we become skilled in using those things in life that are temporal and necessary in order to achieve that which is eternal. If we try to horde the good produce it spoils and if we buy merchandise that we do not need it becomes burdensome. I think this is what happens to many Christians in ministry. There are so many needs and we fear we will lose some eternally valuable opportunity. We start out seeking a good thing but are easily distracted to pursue men's interests instead of God's interests.

When Jesus came in the flesh He did not heal everyone. He did not see everything. He did not travel to every country nor try to minister to every person. And neither should we. We must learn to live our lives in light of God's sovereignty. If we do not rest in this way, we end up in a panic rushing off to the market place of life constantly seeking after our own will and not God's will. God sovereignly controls the events of our lives. We need to learn to be content and not try to horde opportunities that are not ours.

We are to redeem the time because the days are evil. Those who walk wisely recognize that the days are evil. But they are also skilled to know what to do in those evil days. Many Christians live with a siege mentality about life. The world is evil so we must find a fortress where we may hide. If we spend all our time in holy huddles, we are all in danger of missing out on passing moments that could produce eternal results. We may lack the courage to tell a family member, a friend, or a neighbor about the gospel and it may be the last

opportunity.

The evil days are both an obstacle and an opportunity. They become an obstacle if our flesh gets ensnared in the pursuit of pleasure or materialism or success. But they are an opportunity if we look with compassion upon those whose lives have become empty in the pursuit of pleasure or materialism or success.

Conclusion

It seems to me that many of God's people live with too much stress. We get over-committed and lose sight of what it is that we need to pursue. We redeem the time and walk wisely when we understand the will of the Lord. We understand His purpose for our life. We set our priorities and balance those priorities in light of God's word. It is a learning experience. It is a venture of faith in God. It is a quest for the eternal things in the temporal moments that God has ordained for us.