

THE SOVEREIGN GOD AND THE MYSTERY OF HIS WILL: A STUDY OF EPHESIANS

(LESSON EIGHTY-EIGHT)

“REDEEMING THE TIME”

EPHESIANS 5:8-16

8 For ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord: walk as children of light.

9 (For the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness and righteousness and truth;)

10 Proving what is acceptable unto the Lord.

11 And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them.

12 For it is a shame even to speak of those things which are done of them in secret.

13 But all things that are reprov'd are made manifest by the light: for whatsoever doth make manifest is light.

14 Wherefore he saith, Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light.

15 See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise,

16 Redeeming the time, because the days are evil.

In verse 15 Paul writes, “See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise.”

The **New English Translation** renders the verse in the following way:
“Therefore consider carefully how you live—not as unwise but as wise.”

The words, “*See then,*” in the **King James Version**, or the word “*Therefore*” in the **New English Translation**, introduce a logical result or inference from what the Apostle had previously written. We are drawn back to the immediate context (verse **14**), in which Paul had given the believers in Ephesus the command, “*Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light.*” But Paul probably intends for this “*Therefore*” to draw his readers back, not only to the immediate context, but to the very beginning of the **practical** section of the letter. At the beginning of **Lesson 37** we made the following introductory remarks:

“With chapter **4**, we come to an important dividing point in this letter. The first three chapters contain **doctrinal instruction**, the last three chapters contain **exhortation**. This is always the proper order, for it is in doctrine that believers are informed about their exalted position in Christ, which alone makes the exhortation to live holy lives a reasonable one....

Accordingly, in the first half of the letter (chapters **1-3**), Paul informs the Ephesian Christians about what God has accomplished for them in Christ, and as a result, all that they have become in Christ, as well as the resources that He has placed at their disposal to help them to live victorious Christian lives.

In the second half of the letter (chapters **4-6**), he exhorts the saints living in Ephesus, to conduct their lives in a manner which would demonstrate that they understood and appreciated all that God had done for them in Christ, all that they had become in Christ, and all the spiritual resources that were now at their disposal.”

In chapter 4 and verse 1 Paul wrote, *“I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye **walk** worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called.”* In verse 17 of the same chapter he wrote, *“This I say therefore, and testify in the Lord, that ye henceforth **walk** not as other Gentiles **walk**, in the vanity of their mind.”* In these verses he emphasized the importance of the believers’ **“walk”** or **“manner of life”** and he continues to do so in chapter 5.

In verse 2 of chapter 5 he wrote, *“And **walk** in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweetsmelling savour.”* And in verse 8 he wrote, *“For ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord: **walk** as children of light.”*

In verse 15, Paul returns to the theme of a worthy **walk**. He says, *“See then that ye **walk** circumspectly.”* The word *“walk”* is a translation of the Greek word **peripateó**: (**per-ee-pat-eh’-o**). It is one of the key words in the book of **Ephesians**, being used 7 times by Paul. The word literally means, *“to walk around.”* Later, **peripateó** came to mean, *“to make one’s way, to make progress, to make due use of one’s opportunities.”* Finally, the word came to mean, *“to regulate one’s life, to conduct one’s self.”* Most of the New Testament uses of the word reflect this meaning.

The word *“circumspectly”* is a translation of the Greek word **akribos**: (**ak-ree-boce’**), which means *“exactness, thoroughness, precision, accuracy.”* The idea associated with the word is that of looking, examining, and investigating something with great care and alertness. According to **Vine’s Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words**, the word **akribos** expresses that accuracy which is the outcome of carefulness.

In the context of this verse, **akribos** refers to ethical behaviour with a focus on careful attention especially regarding the dangers and deceptions that continually assault the believer from our 3 great enemies, the **world**, the **flesh** and the **devil**.

Our English word “**circumspect**” is derived from a Latin word which conveys the **literal** picture of looking around, and **figuratively**, the idea of being cautious. One who is walking “*circumspectly*” is one who is “looking around as he or she walks,” carefully considering all the circumstances and possible consequences **before** making a decision. The word reminds us of the old saying “**Look before you leap!**”

In his commentary on **Ephesians**, **John Phillips**, illustrates the idea of walking “*circumspectly*:” “In some European countries, property is often protected by a high wall, the top of which is covered with embedded broken glass to discourage intruders who might try to climb over it. One can sometimes see a cat walking along the top of such a wall. The cat walks *circumspectly*, carefully, precisely, and assiduously. It picks up one paw and carefully places it where there is no glass. When that paw is in place, the cat reaches forward tentatively and gingerly with the next one.”

Steven Cole says, “If you’re a soldier on patrol in a minefield, you must...be careful to avoid them. Paul is saying that we must walk that way as believers. We must choose our steps carefully, because the enemy has strewn the path with dangerous obstacles that will cause us serious harm if we are careless. The days are evil! And yet, many Christians just saunter through the minefield with no awareness of the grave danger that they face.”

The idea of the word **akribos** is that our walk must be in strict conformity to a standard, and as such it calls for carefulness against any departure from the standard. In the context of the believer’s walk, the standard is the Word of God. The Bible is our **only** standard for testing everything that claims to be true regarding God, His person and His operations. It is our **only** safeguard against false teaching and it is our **unfailing** source of guidance for how we should live.

The Scriptures are our **only** source of knowledge about how we can be saved and be pleasing to God. We must therefore ensure that we lay the

basis of all that we teach, believe and practice upon the clearly established revelations of God's Word. We must not suppose that we can find within ourselves better moral illustrations, or more comprehensive principles of action, than we will find within the pages of the Bible.

Walking "*circumspectly*" carries the idea of looking around carefully so as not to stumble. Paul equates this with walking intelligently and not in ignorance.

Brothers and sisters, we are to walk "*not as fools, but as wise.*" The Greek word translated "*fools*" is **asophos**: (**as'-of-os**), which means, "without wisdom, silly, foolish." The word describes one who lacks the power of proper discernment.

The word "*wise*" is the translation of the Greek word **sophos**: (**sof-os'**), which describes the ability to use knowledge for correct behaviour. **Sophos** is the practical application of acquired knowledge.

We see both the **asophos** (foolish) person, and the **Sophos** (wise) person depicted in **Proverbs 22:3**. The King James Version translates the verse as follows: "*A prudent man foreseeth the evil, and hideth himself: but the simple pass on, and are punished.*"

In the realm of moral living, "wisdom" refers to skill in living. The "*wise*" person lives with moral skill so that something of lasting value is produced from his or her life. In **Deuteronomy 4:5-6**, Moses addresses the Israelites and says,

5 Look! I have taught you statutes and ordinances just as the LORD my God told me to do, so that you might carry them out in the land you are about to enter and possess.

6 So be sure to do them, because this will testify of your wise understanding to the people who will learn of all these statutes and say, "Indeed, this great nation is a very wise people."

(New English Translation)

In verse **6**, Moses refers to the statutes and ordinances given by God as Israel's **wisdom**.

To walk "wisely" then, is to walk in the light of our exalted position and privilege as beloved children of God. To walk in an unwise manner means to descend from that exalted position and privilege to order our lives in a manner that is inconsistent with biblical principles.

The English theologian **John Stott**, commenting on **Ephesians 5:15**, made the following observations: "Paul's next little paragraph is based upon two assumptions, first that Christians are...wise people, not fools—and secondly that Christian wisdom is practical wisdom, for it teaches us how to behave. His word for to 'behave' throughout the letter has been a Hebrew concept, to 'walk'. Our Christian walk or behaviour, he has written, must no longer be according to the world, the flesh and the devil (**Ephesians 2:1-3**), or like the pagans (**Ephesians 4:17**). Instead, it must be 'worthy' of God's call, 'in love', and 'as children of light' (**Ephesians 4:1; 5:1; 5:8**). Now he adds a more general exhortation to us to behave like the wise people he credits us with being: look carefully how you walk, he writes. Everything worth doing requires care. We all take trouble over the things which seem to us to matter—our job, our education, our home and family, our hobbies, our dress and appearance. So as Christians we must take trouble over our Christian life. We must treat it as the serious thing it is."

Brothers and sisters, let me ask us, "Are we walking according to Paul's exhortation in **Galatians 5:16**, "*So I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh?*" It is only by the Holy Spirit's

supernatural power and guidance that we will be able to consistently “*walk circumspectly!*”

In verse **16**, Paul informs the believers as to how they are to walk wisely and not foolishly. It is by **making the most of their time**. He writes, “*Redeeming the time, because the days are evil.*”

The **New English Translation** furnishes this rendering of the verse: “*taking advantage of every opportunity, because the days are evil.*”

The Greek word translated “*Redeeming*” is **exagorazó**: (**ex-ag-or-ad’zo**), which means, “to redeem by payment of a price to recover from the power of another, to ransom, buy off.” Paul uses the word here to refer to making a wise and sacred use of every opportunity for doing good. Believers are to use time wisely and ensure that they take advantage of every opportunity to glorify God. An unmistakable sign of wisdom is the sensitive use of time.

The Greek word translated “*time*” is not **chronos**: (**khron’-os**), which refers to chronological or sequential time, but **kairos**: (**kahee-ros’**), which refers to time as regarded in its strategic, epoch-making, opportune seasons. It is a fixed and definite time. It means a moment or period as especially appropriate for a certain action. It signifies a proper or opportune time for action. The function of **kairos**, is to characterize the content and the quality of the time it indicates. In other words, whatever the duration of **chronos** time may be, whether it is brief or extended, **kairos time** highlights the significance of that brief or extended period of **chronos** time. The following 3 verses, all reflecting the rendering of the **New English Translation** clearly indicate that this is indeed so:

Romans 5:6

“*For while we were still helpless, at the **right time** (**kairos**) Christ died for the ungodly.*”

2 Corinthians 6:2

*“For he says, ‘I heard you at the acceptable time, and in the day of salvation I helped you.’ Look, now is the **acceptable time (kairos)**; look, now is the day of salvation!”*

Ephesians 5:10

*“toward the administration of the **fullness of the times (kairos)**, to head up all things in Christ—the things in heaven and the things on earth.”*

Thus Paul’s idea is not so much that we make the best use of **chronos** time, which we should do in the sense of not wasting it, but his idea is more of taking advantage of **kairos** time, the opportunities that present themselves. The idea of **kairos** is not clock time but what one writer calls “kingdom opportunities,” those openings for ministry that often come at inconvenient times; a friend who wants to talk, a child with a problem, the chance to lend a hand to someone in need. Paul is encouraging us to keep our lives uncluttered so that we can respond when the need arises—because kingdom opportunities can get squeezed out of an overly tight schedule.

It is of **kairos**, these strategic, epoch-making, opportune seasons that our Lord spoke in **John 9:4-5**,

4 We must perform the deeds of the one who sent me as long as it is daytime. Night is coming when no one can work.

5 As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.”
(New English Translation)

It is of **kairos**, these strategic, epoch-making, opportune seasons that **Shakespeare** wrote in **Act 4, Scene 3** of “**Julius Caesar**.”

*“There is a tide in the affairs of men,
Which, taken at the flood, leads on to fortune;
Omitted, all the voyage of their life
Is bound in shallows and in miseries.”*

There is a sense in which **kairos** alludes to the brevity of life, which begs us to pause and reflect on the fact that life is like the grass of the field, here today, gone tomorrow. In light of this truth we should take a sincere, sobering inventory of our daily activities of thought, word and deed! As Moses wrote in **Psalm 90:12**, “*So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom*” (**King James Version**).

In **Ecclesiastes 9:10** Solomon wrote, “*Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave, whither thou goest*” (**King James Version**).

Concerning this matter, **Warren Wiersbe** wrote the following: “How foolish to stumble along through life and never seek to know the will of the Lord! Instead of walking 'accurately' (which is equivalent to 'circumspectly'), they miss the mark, miss the road, and end up suffering on some detour. God wants us to be wise and understand His will for our lives. As we obey His will, we 'buy up the opportunities' (redeem the time, verse **16**) and do not waste time, energy, money, and talent in that which is apart from His will. Lost opportunities may never be regained; they are gone forever.”

The Puritan **Thomas Watson** said, “What are our golden hours for—but to attend to our souls? Time misspent is not time lived—but time lost!”

It is said that the management consultant **Antonio Herrera**, once asked the participants of a seminar he was conducting the following questions: “If we had to buy time, would there be any difference in how we would spend it? Would the days of our lives be used more wisely?” Then **Dr. Herrera** became more specific. He asked, “What if you had to pay in advance \$100 an hour for the time allotted to you? Would you waste it?”

Of course, we cannot put a price tag on the seconds, minutes, and hours we possess. They are given to us freely. But that does not excuse us

from using them conscientiously, carefully, and wisely. The giver of these seconds, minutes, and hours is God Himself, and that places a far greater value upon them than any monetary figure could suggest. We must therefore “*redeem the time,*” taking advantage of every opportunity to serve the Lord and to do His will.

John MacArthur observes that, “God has set boundaries to our lives, and our **opportunity** for service exists only within those boundaries. It is significant that the Bible speaks of such times being **shortened**, but never of their being **lengthened**. A person may die or lose an opportunity before the end of God’s time, but he has no reason to expect his life or his opportunity to continue after the end of his predetermined time. Having sovereignly bounded our lives with eternity, God knows both the beginning and end of our time on earth. As believers we can achieve our potential in His service only as we maximize the time He has given us.”

Paul is urging the believers in Ephesus to seize and use every opportunity to “*walk as children of light,*” “*because the days are evil.*” The Greek word translated “*evil*” is **ponéros**: (**pon-ay-ros**’), which refers to “active evil” or evil in active opposition to good. **Ponéros** describes that which is actively harmful, hurtful, evil, in effect or influence.

Paul says, “*The days are evil.*” The verb is in the **present** tense, indicating that the days in which Paul and the Ephesian believers were living were continually evil. They were characterized by active evil. I am of the view that we are living in a similar era right now and unless I am greatly mistaken, it is not going to get any better.

Brothers and sisters, the fact that there is active evil opposing that which is good, lends a sense of urgency to redeem the time. And the fact that there is active evil opposing good, means we must not try to accomplish this redemption of time by depending on our good intentions but by seeking enlightenment from God’s Word, and power from His Spirit!

Ray Stedman commented that, "These are **evil days**, not only because of the widespread fears and tension and violence, but also because of the materialism that creates such hollowness and emptiness within. But what is the result? It is the evil days that make people want to know the truth about God. It is the evil days that give us opportunity to demonstrate Christian life. Therefore, buy up the opportunities. Understand, as you look at life, that this is the way life is."

William Law wrote the following sobering words: "Where did we come up with this concept of 'spare time,' anyway? Is there any time for which we aren't accountable to God? Is there any time during which God doesn't care what you are doing? No Christian has ever had spare time. You may have spare time from labor or necessity, you may stop working and refresh yourself, but no Christian ever had time off from living like a Christian."

In the following excerpt from one of his sermons on **Ephesians**, **Wayne Barber** gives us some practical advice on how we can "redeem the time:"

"What do you mean, '*redeem the time*'? Purchase it. To purchase it, I have to have the collateral. Not only do you have to have the collateral, you have to have the right kind of collateral if you are going to purchase anything. So what is the collateral to purchase time? It is my **choices**.

We have to understand this. Life is filled with one choice after another choice after another choice...You have to continue all day long to make those choices.

What are those choices motivated by? They are motivated by what the Word of God has taught us. They are motivated by our respect for God. Now to be the right choice it has to be a choice that honors

Christ and His Word. That is the way I purchase time. I have only got one time around, and I have to learn to make proper choices."

Barber references **1 Corinthians 3:12-15**. The **King James Version** translates the passage as follows:

12 Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble;

13 Every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is.

14 If any man's work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward.

15 If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire.

Barber then makes the following comments: "What is wood, hay and stubble? They are stupid, fleshly, religious choices. Sometimes they are not even religious. What are precious stones? They are choices that were made based on God's Word and my willingness to do what He tells me to do. We are making those choices, moment by moment by moment."

Brothers and sisters, it is only those who have handled **time** appropriately who will be able to fully appreciate **eternity**. So, instead of counting the days, let us make our days count!

We commenced our previous Lesson with an excerpt from a **Devotional** published by **Ligonier Ministries**. We will conclude this Lesson with an excerpt from another such **Devotional**.

"Walking in the light of Christ cannot be limited to purely 'religious' matters, as if it were possible to narrow the impact of the gospel and

the Spirit to matters of formal worship and acts of piety. Instead, the transformation that the light of our Savior brings impacts everything in our lives. This is seen in that living in light of the gospel carries implications for how we use our time (**Ephesians 5:15-16**). No matter what we do, we do it in time, so we cannot make the best use of our time unless the gospel touches and transforms everything that we do.

Paul urges us first of all to 'look carefully' regarding how we walk. The idea is that we must give much thought to our potential choices before we make them; we are to look before we leap. Every decision that presents itself to us can result in an almost endless number of consequences, some of them good, some of them bad. Oftentimes we and others suffer the ill effects of our choices only because we have not taken the time to ponder thoughtfully the potential ramifications of our actions. When we are appropriately cautious, however, and take the time to think carefully about our choices, we lower the risk of hurting ourselves and others.

Of course, merely taking the time to think a decision through does not mean that we will choose rightly. As Paul explains, we need godly wisdom to walk in a way that pleases God and benefits other people (**Ephesians 5:15**). Such wisdom, Scripture tells us, is grounded in the fear of the Lord, which pays heed to His Word and looks for the counsel of wise elders (**Proverbs 1:1-8**). Learning from Scripture and from those who have been shaped by the Bible gives us the wisdom to walk carefully.

Those who walk carefully make *'the best use of time, because the days are evil'* (**Ephesians 5:16**)...The opportunities we have for ministry today may not be there tomorrow, and we should take every possible opportunity to serve in order that people from all nations might become disciples of Christ."