

STEWARDS OF TIME

"Redeeming the time, because the days are evil." Ephesians 5:16.

Time is one of the most meaningful words in the vocabulary of Christians. Time has been divided into three parts -- past, present and future. Due to this division we have been given this timely advice,

"Do not worry about the future;
The present is all thou hast.
The future will soon be present,
And the present will soon be past."

Time is that period of one's natural life on earth, whereas eternity is the duration of one's existence beyond human limitations.

Time is a gift from God. Seneca said, "Nothing is ours except time." But certainly Seneca knew that time is ours only to use. It is given to us for a season or measured duration. We cannot create a minute. We cannot borrow a minute. We cannot destroy a minute. But we can use or misuse time.

Time is inexorable. It cannot be brought back, stored up, hurried up or slowed down. It is now or never. We may sigh and sing, "Backward, turn backward, O Time, in your flight," but time never turns backward, neither does it slow down nor stop. We merely turn backward in our imaginations or desires. Time moves on with twenty-four hours in every day, sixty minutes in each hour and sixty seconds in each minute. A French proverb states, "All the treasures of earth cannot bring back one lost moment." Just before his death Andrew Carnegie said that he would give two hundred million dollars for ten more years of life. When time has gone it can never be recalled.

Time is extremely valuable. Thomas A. Edison, the inventor of a hundred or more time-saving and life-enriching items, said, "Time is the most important thing in the world." Benjamin Franklin said, "Dost thou love life? Then do not squander time, for that's the stuff life is made of." Another has said, "The moments we forego, eternity itself cannot reprove."

God does not show any favoritism in the daily giving of time. Frequently people say, "I do not have time, ask somebody else who has more time than I have." But all of us have exactly the same amount of time every day. Here is one place where all are on a level. The difference is not in the amount of time we have, but in our use or misuse of the time we have.

Time is a divine entrustment as definitely as are the talents about which we studied in a previous service. Time is as much a sacred trust as life itself. It is a precious trust from God and ought to be used for His glory. It is a sin to squander or waste time.

At the end of a series of solemn and urgent moral counsels in Ephesians 5 we read, "See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, Redeeming the time, because the days are evil" (15-16). The word which is here translated "redeeming" has its base in the market-place. In the countries of the East the merchantman went to the market-place in the center of the town, taking his wares with him, there to transact his business. He watched the market and waited for a favorable opportunity either to buy or to sell as the case might be, and when the opportunity presented itself he acted, or transacted business. He bought up his opportunity, as the marginal reading indicates. "Buying up" is essentially a word of commercial life. It does not mean "redeeming" in the sense of buying back from slavery, but seeing a moment of advantage and seizes it. The merchant simply watches for a moment of advantage and seizes it. Paul teaches us that a man who sees an opportunity, seizes it and makes it his own thereby illustrates the Christian attitude toward time. Since life is a series of opportunities, it is a mark of wisdom to use them rightly.

The brevity of time gives added emphasis to its preciousness. Because our stewardship of time is limited at most to a few short years, it is important that we be diligent and faithful in the use of each day as it comes. We cannot do with time as some people do with money. We cannot save it by laying it away for use in the future. Time is of such a nature that if we do not use it as a trust from God immediately we can never souse it. When any time has gone it can never be recalled.

I. The Wrong Use Of Time.

1. In shameful idleness.
Many people sit in comfortable places morning, afternoon and night, wondering what is the matter with the world.
2. In trifling amusements.
When fondness for games and amusements causes one to neglect his duties and worthwhile work he has sinned.
3. In useless conversation.
Frivolous talk and senseless chatter are destructive of our days. Some talkers are like the brook in two respects, they carry very little freight and they appear to go on forever.
4. In loyal devotion to secondary things.
5. In positive wickedness.

II. The Right Use Of Time.

1. In refusing to waste time.
2. In gaining useful knowledge.
3. In earning an honest livelihood.
4. In walking circumspectly.
5. In doing good to others.
6. In conforming to God's will.

III. The Reasons For Using Our Time Rightly.

1. Time is short.

Every day reminds us of this fact. How quickly a day passes! One goes forth in the morning, and after a few hours of work he lies down again to rest. Sickness and weakness tell us that our time is short. Yet, most of us live as if we expected to abide here always. Seneca said, "We are always complaining that our days are few, and acting as though there would be no end of them." "All men count all men mortal except themselves."

All we know about our time is that our days are few. A merciful Providence conceals their number from us. But God has given us just so many days to live. These days are His, and not ours. They are ours only to use. They should be used for self-improvement -- physical, intellectual and spiritual -- for the welfare of society, and for the service of God. "So teach us to number our days that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom" (Psalm 90:12).

2. There is much to do.

So much remains to be done and we have so little time in which to do it. During the days that are allotted to us we are to do the work of our Lord and help our fellowmen in all the ways possible.

3. The days are evil.

Likely the leading men of Ephesus resented Paul's charge that they were living in evil days. They doubtless thought these were days of prosperity over which they might well rejoice. But we are to remember that Paul was writing to the children of God who were residing at Ephesus. The prosperity of the city meant the adversity of the church.

We are now living in an age of enlightenment and progress, but the days are far from easy and good for the advancement of the cause of Christ. We are urged to buy up our opportunities because of the evil days. Godless people constitute the opportunity for our godliness. We have been saved and separated unto the Lord in order that through the testimony and influence of our lives He may make others godly.

4. Momentous consequences depend on it.

If we use our time as we should, it will mean an eternity of bliss for others. Let us use every opportunity that God gives us while we have it. By doing so we shall have the approval and blessing of the Lord upon our efforts. It is a mark of wisdom to use rightly the opportunities which are given to us.