

Redeeming the Time

“Teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom.”

—*Psalms 90:12*

OUR LIVES ARE ASSOCI-

ated with substance, distance, color, heat, cold, and sound. Our five senses make contact with each of these elements.

We touch substance, and discover whether it is hot or cold; smooth or rough; hard or soft. We taste the substance we call food, and find it bitter, sweet, sour, or otherwise. Our sense of smell also helps us to appraise the nature of substances. We see color, and hear noise. With our five senses we learn to properly use these tangible elements.

Equally important to all of us, especially as New Creatures in Christ Jesus, is the element of time. Time is not tangible in the sense that we can feel, taste, see, hear, or smell it. However, we can use time to great advantage or disadvantage. We can utilize time wisely, or we can waste it. Paul indicates that we can “redeem” time. That is, through the sacrifice of certain less important interests, we can find more time to serve the Lord. He wrote,

“See . . . that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, Redeeming the time, because the days are evil.”—Eph. 5:15,16

In the rush and stress of the world we are living in today, many undertake to do more than one thing at a time. The world speaks of this as “multi-tasking.” Doing so may be necessary at times in order to accomplish the more mundane things of life, such as at our job. However, it is not a practical, nor a wise, way to conduct our life in general, particularly as it pertains to the accomplishment of our overall goals and objectives, whether they be of a spiritual or temporal kind. To use a simple illustration from daily life, one cannot simultaneously listen to the news on television, and to a conversation around the dinner table, and get very much out of either.

The wise man set forth the same viewpoint with respect to the use of time, when he wrote, “To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven: A time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up that which is planted; A time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to break down, and a time to build up; A time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance; A time to cast away stones, and a time to gather stones together; a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing; A time to get, and a time to lose; a time to keep, and a time to cast away; A time to rend, and a time to sew; a time to keep silence, and a time to speak; A time to love, and a time to hate; a time of war, and a time of peace.”—Eccles. 3:1-8

Here Solomon discusses the element of time as it affects the experiences of a natural man,

and also what is often referred to as “timing.” There is a proper time to speak and a proper time to refrain from speaking. However, one cannot speak and be silent at the same time, nor is it possible to gather and scatter at the same time. Thus, even the natural man, and much more so the Christian, if alert, will seek to use time wisely and effectively.

DEVOTED TO GOD

Those who have devoted themselves to the doing of God’s will are particularly concerned that every fleeting moment of their lives is used to his glory. Our feet, our hands, our tongues, our strength, our money, our all, are consecrated to the Heavenly Father. It requires time for our feet to run swiftly on errands for the great Creator. It takes time for our hands to render the services his providences entrust to us. The consuming of our strength in sweet service for God takes time. It takes time to acquire the means we devote to the furtherance of the Lord’s cause. Time is indeed involved in every aspect of our consecrated lives.

David, in a prayer to the Lord, requested: “My times are in thy hand: deliver me from the hand of mine enemies, and from them that persecute me.” (Ps. 31:15) We may properly take two thoughts from this expression. First, David had given over his entire life to God—his time, and everything he possessed. Second, and by contrast, on account of his full devotion, David was willing for God to deliver him from his enemies whenever it was his [God’s] due time.

As consecrated followers of the Master this should be our attitude. Have we placed our time in God's hands for him to use as may seem good? When in our prayer at the time of our consecration to the Father, we said, "I bring to thee my all," that surely included our time, and therefore he has made us stewards over our time. As stewards, we are responsible to use it wisely for him, even as he has done with respect to everything else that was included in our consecration. As to how long we will serve him this side of the veil, and the extent to which his providences make possible the use of our time directly in his service, we leave in his hands. Just as we are willing to go where he wants us to go; say what he wants us to say; do what he wants us to do; and be what he wants us to be—so we want to serve as long as he wants us to serve. In addition, the truly consecrated heart does not ask why the load is so heavy, neither is it concerned as to how long the burden must be borne.

When Jesus said, "He that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved," he was speaking of time. (Matt. 24:13) James wrote, "Be patient therefore, brethren, unto the coming of the Lord. Behold, the husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, and hath long patience for it, until he receive the early and latter rain." (James 5:7) This also refers to the element of time in carrying out our consecration. To patiently wait on the Lord is to leave our all in his hands, both from the standpoint of using it wisely in his service, and of being content to wait for his due time to finish our earthly course, that we may be forever with him.

THE WILL OF GOD

We have already quoted Paul's admonition to redeem the time "because the days are evil." In the next verse, he adds, "Wherefore be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is." (Eph. 5:16,17) From this it is evident that a proper redeeming of time requires an understanding of the will of the Heavenly Father and a wise, consecrated application of that comprehension. The thought of redeeming the time is to buy it back from other purposes for which it was formerly used. The word "buy" suggests that this is not done without cost. Indeed, it may well be very costly in terms of earthly pleasures and comforts. This, of course, is what we expected when we devoted our lives to the Lord. To present our bodies a living sacrifice is certain to be costly. (Rom. 12:1) To take up our cross and follow Jesus costs us our lives. (Matt. 16:24) To be "beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the word of God" costs us everything we have, including life itself.—Rev. 20:4

The daily fulfillment of our consecration is a matter of determining, as stewards of the Lord, just how we will use that which we have devoted to him—including our time. Before we were drawn to the Father and dedicated ourselves to the doing of his will, we governed our lives with the thought foremost in mind of making the best provisions possible for the well-being of ourselves and our families. This is proper and good. Through the drawing power of the Truth we have come to realize that, having been bought with a price—even the precious blood of Jesus Christ—we no longer belong to ourselves. No more can we

properly do with our lives simply what might appeal to our fleshly mind—even if noble and honest. Instead, our lives belong totally to the Lord. It is this “answer of a good conscience” that leads us to devote our all to God and to the doing of his will, as step by step he reveals it to us.—I Pet. 3:21

We are to remember that we have consecrated only ourselves to the Lord—not our families. Indeed, prior to being drawn to God through the power of the Truth, many of the Lord’s people had already assumed family responsibilities of one kind or another. They may have had husbands or wives—they may have had children—or there might have been others properly dependent upon them. The Heavenly Father takes all of this into consideration, and has clearly revealed it to be his will that we continue to recognize these obligations with loving devotion.—I Tim. 5:8

The Heavenly Father is particularly interested in the heart devotion of his people. He needs nothing that we could give to him, not even our time. However, when we give our hearts to him, this includes everything else. We prove this dedication by the manner in which we use our substance and time in harmony with the spirit of our consecration.

In keeping with Paul’s admonition to redeem, or buy back, time, the Lord is interested in how serious a consideration we give to this aspect of our lives. Consecration requires change in our habits of living, or else it is in name only. True, there is an erroneous viewpoint of the Christian life which makes it a matter of merely believing on the Lord, and little else except the giving up of

sinful habits. However, to take up one's cross and follow the Master means much more than this.

BUYING BACK THE TIME

There is the need for time to study the Word of truth. Where can we buy time for this? What can we give up which we were doing before consecration that will give us time to study the Scriptures so that we may grow in grace and in the knowledge of the Lord? The Christian also needs time to assemble with those of like precious faith, his brethren in Christ. We must buy time for this.

There is also the privilege of bearing witness to the Truth. Whether we do this by giving a personal testimony to our friends, or neighbors, or by some other means, it requires time. If we proclaim the kingdom message through the distribution of booklets, tracts, or other forms of the printed message, it takes time. Even the methods available to us today of spreading the Gospel message via the Internet, e-mail, or other electronic media, take time to formulate and implement. Here again, we must buy back time for these endeavors.

Prior to consecration our time was indeed fully consumed. Now, as the consecrated people of God, we have a new outlook on life, having found more important ways to use our time. The question naturally arises: Where can we find time to devote to the service of the Lord and to his people? It can only be found by "buying it" through the sacrifice of earthly interests. In this regard, we are to remember that it must be our own individual interests that are sacrificed, not the interests of those who properly depend upon us for care and attention.

How appropriate then, is the prayer of our opening text, “Teach us to number our days.” The thought here is not simply to count the days of our lives as they go fleeting by, but to consider them units of time in which we can seek to know and to do the Lord’s will. The thought in the Hebrew language is to “weigh out,” or to “allot.” There are twenty-four hours in each day. A certain number of these hours is necessary for rest and sleep, and there are other physical needs which also require time. With many of God’s people, a goodly portion of their waking hours is accounted for in meeting responsibilities which are properly theirs—those of family, home, and job—and which the Lord expects them willingly and gladly to assume.

UNTO THE LORD

What a happy thought it is to realize, as the Scriptures reveal, that the doing of those necessary things which devolve upon us as natural men and women is recognized by God as service rendered to him, if done in the right spirit. This is a wonderful provision of divine grace.—Eph. 6:5,7; Col. 3:22,23

We are admonished to work out our own salvation with the assurance that God works in us to will and to do of his good pleasure. (Phil. 2:12,13) One way in which we can work out our own salvation is by numbering our days. We do this by profiting spiritually by the ordinary experiences which come to us in the daily routine of life. By seeking the Lord’s guidance and help, the very ordinary, perhaps even drab and monotonous, duties of life will help us to reach higher grounds of spiritual attainment. Such time is well spent if it

results in spiritual growth and development of Christian character.

We sometimes hear a person remark, "I didn't have a dull moment all day today," meaning that something interesting and exciting was happening all the time. Each day of our consecrated life should be like this, not in the sense that our experiences are in themselves necessarily unusual, but because we can see in them opportunities to grow in grace. Likewise, those unforeseen experiences which we encounter day by day should be viewed as opportunities for the exercise of faith and patience. "Dis-appointments" can, by faith, be viewed as "His-appointments." Thus, all our time should be counted as affording occasions for making our calling and election sure.

Our opening text says that the object of numbering our days is to apply our hearts unto wisdom. The *Marginal Translation* reads "cause to come," or "to attain" hearts of wisdom. Another translation reads "that we may obtain a heart endowed with wisdom." (*Leeser Translation*) The heart is the seat of affection, or emotion. By nature our emotions and affections are not especially wise, but David suggests that by numbering our days we can attain heart wisdom.

Our affections, by nature, are centered on earthly affairs. However, as New Creatures in Christ Jesus we are to set our affections on things above—spiritual or heavenly things. (Col. 3:1-3) This transfer of our affections does not come about naturally. It is accomplished at great cost to the flesh and its interests, particularly in connection with the use of our time, our talents, our strength, and our means.

While we rejoice that the Lord accepts all that we do as unto him, this does not relieve us of the responsibility of buying whatever time we can to devote directly to his service. The cost of this redemption of time will be the sacrifice of fleshly interests of one sort or another. As we progress in the narrow way, and our hearts become more in tune with the Heavenly Father and with the spiritual privileges which he holds out to us, these sacrifices will seem less costly. The joys of fellowship with the Lord and with his people, together with the opportunities of laying down our lives in his service, will more than compensate for every sacrifice we make.

NOT MUCH TIME

Nearly two thousand years ago the Apostle Paul wrote, "The time is short." (I Cor. 7:29) This is even more true today. In Paul's day, the time for each follower of the Master to make his calling and election sure was no longer than his natural span of life. This is also true now. However, today, because of the many demands upon our time, it might well be even shorter than then. Thus, to the fully consecrated, there is a degree of urgency in numbering the days, hours, and moments as they fly swiftly by.

The psalmist raised the question, "What shall I render unto the LORD for all his benefits toward me?" His answer was, "I will take the cup of salvation, and call upon the name of the LORD. I will pay my vows unto the LORD now in the presence of all his people." (Ps. 116:12-14) Our vows of consecration encompass all that we have and are, including our time.

How well the psalmist emphasized the importance of time in the paying of our vows. This, he said, we should do "now." There have been many failures in every walk of life caused simply by putting off the doing of things which should have been done "now." Each present moment of life is the only one about which we can do anything. Yesterday has gone. We can, and should, rejoice if we used its moments wisely, and to the glory of God. If through negligence we failed to any extent, there is little or nothing we can do about it today, aside from striving to do better than we did yesterday.

We can resolutely determine that we will not waste the moments and hours which will make up tomorrow, and it is good to look ahead with such a determination to be faithful. However, today is when we are living. We should make sure we are faithful now. There is little use of singing, "Take my moments and my days; let them flow in constant praise," if we put off until tomorrow what we could have done today to praise the Lord and serve his people.

The idea that tomorrow may never come, need not be true. Indeed, it will not be true if we make faithful use of the privileges which are before us today. Doing this, tomorrow will not only come, but it will be a brighter tomorrow because we will be better prepared to meet its responsibilities and to rejoice in its blessings. If tomorrow finds us beyond the veil with our Lord, that also will be because we have been faithful today.

While there is, as Solomon wrote, a time to every purpose under heaven, to us who have taken up our cross to follow the Master there is, in reality,

time for only one thing. Paul wrote, “This one thing I do,” and he could just as truly have added, “I do this one thing all the time.” This “one thing” is pressing toward the mark for the greatest prize ever offered, the prize of the High Calling of God in Christ Jesus. (Phil. 3:13,14) No runner in a race ever won a prize by taking time out to do other things. If it be our heart’s desire truly to attain the “mark for the prize of the high calling,” let us diligently do this “one thing,” remembering to number our days and redeem our time in the wisest manner possible. ■