

Redeeming the Time

Time is our greatest commodity. The interesting thing about time is that we all have the same amount of time every day. 24 hours. 1440 minutes. 86,400 seconds. Everyone's day is exactly the same! Quite often, we observe how much someone else accomplishes, and wonder how they could possibly have time to do so. The answer often lies in time management skills. It is not that they have more time to accomplish their work, but rather that they are more efficient in the way that they use their time. They focus on what is important and devote themselves to accomplishing those things.

We can see these principles pretty clearly in the secular world. Those that are successful in the business world all have one thing in common: they are very good at time management. They have a schedule and they keep it, while focusing on the most important actions for their business. We should be able to take a similar approach when it comes to our spiritual lives. We realize that there is no separating our spiritual life from our work, school, or family life. All of these are a part of our spiritual life and must be controlled by our spiritual perspective. How are we to use the time we have to be able to accomplish and achieve all that God expects of us?

Redeeming the time...

The idea of redeeming time comes from Paul's instructions to the Ephesian brethren:

See then that you walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be unwise, but understand what the will of the Lord is (Ephesians 5:15–17).

The phrase that is translated as “redeeming the time” is an interesting one. It means:

ἐξαγοράζω [exagorazo /ex-ag-or-ad-zo/] v. From 1537 and 59; TDNT 1:124; TDNTA 19; GK 1973; Four occurrences; AV translates as “redeem” four times. 1 to redeem. 1A by payment of a price to recover from the power of another; to ransom, buy off. 1B metaph. of Christ freeing the elect from the dominion of the Mosaic Law at the price of his vicarious death. 2 to buy up, to buy up for one's self, for one's use. 2A to make wise and sacred use of every opportunity for doing good, so that zeal and well doing are as it were the purchase money by which we make the time our own.¹

Vine's Expository Dictionary adds this:

in the middle voice, “to buy up for oneself,” Eph. 5:16 and Col. 4:5, of “buying up the opportunity” (RV marg.; text, “redeeming the time,” where “time” is kairos, “a season,” a time in which something is seasonable), i.e., making the most of every opportunity, turning each to the best advantage since none can be recalled if missed.²

Strong's says:

ἐξαγοράζω ἔξαγοράζω, ex-ag-or-ad'-zo; from 1537 and 59; to buy up, i.e. ransom; fig. to rescue from

¹ Strong, James. *Enhanced Strong's Lexicon 1995* : n. pag. Print.

² Vine, W. E., Merrill F. Unger, and William White Jr. *Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words 1996* : 515. Print.

*loss (improve opportunity):— redeem.*³

These definitions help to explain why the New American Standard Bible, as well as some other more modern translations, translate this phrase, which is an idiom, a bit differently:

Therefore be careful how you walk, not as unwise men but as wise, making the most of your time, because the days are evil. So then do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is (Ephesians 5:15–17).

Paul's admonition is that the Christian is to make the most of his time. The idea of "redeeming the time" is that we are rescuing that time from loss or waste (see Strong's definition above). Paul said that the days are evil. When we are not consciously addressing our use of time, it will be squandered away for purposes that are not focused on godly things.

This brings us to the question of what activities represent a proper redemption of time? How can we know when we are using our time as God would have us to, as opposed to wasting time? This is not an easy question to answer, and we want to make sure that we approach this question from a biblical standpoint.

Balancing our time...

As we seek to redeem our time, a big part of doing so is understanding that God expects us to be doing many different things, all of which consume time. Our task is to determine the best use of our time, and to balance between the tasks that we are responsible for. We are judged, spiritually, for the way that we use our time. I believe we will see that there are no concrete answers to how, exactly, we are to use our time in a given day. We will all have to make some judgments on what is efficient and effective for the tasks at hand. Sometimes we will make the wrong judgments, and we will end up wasting our time when we could do something more important.

It may be easy for us to think that we can never do anything fun, or recreational because we could be doing something more important spiritually. After all, how can I enjoy a hobby if I know there is someone out there that needs to hear the gospel? Such thinking would make it impossible for us to accomplish all that God wants us to do (as we will see). It also would make it impossible for us to enjoy the life that God has given us, as we would be so anxious about every moment that we would be consumed by guilt.

On the other side, it is also very easy to get sucked in to time wasting activities that consume far more of our day than we would often like to admit. Something that we think we will just take a moment to check out ends up taking away an hour. We end up allowing large chunks of our day to be stolen from us, and we don't accomplish anything of value.

So, how do we figure out the balance in our time usage? How do we choose what to use our time on at any given moment in the day? This is not always an easy plan to make, and certainly not an easy plan to keep. Recognizing the need to balance our time will be the first step in making sure we are on the right path.

Use of our time...Things of importance

There are many things that require the use of our time. All of these are approved of by God, and are necessary for our existence and wellbeing (both physically and spiritually). It is not that these have to be attended to that causes the problem, but rather the balance between all of them to be

³ Strong, James. *The New Strong's Dictionary of Hebrew and Greek Words* 1996 : n. pag. Print.

efficient and effective. There are, of course, many things on which we could spend time that are always wrong. We should not be spending time in sinful practices, as that is always a waste of the time God has given to us! Let's take a look at some of the things we should be spending our time on.

Spiritual Endeavors. We'll start with what should be most important to us. Perhaps one way to convey this idea is to consider the parable of the talents: Matthew 25:14-30.

Jesus told this parable about something of value that had been given to the servants, and with which the master expected them to be profitable. We often think of this in terms of money, which is the most obvious application. However, money is not the only thing that is given to us by God with an expectation of being industrious.

God has given us certain responsibilities that we are supposed to be diligent about fulfilling. He has placed in our hands His word, and expects that we are going to be busy about spreading that message.

And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." Amen. (Matthew 28:18-20)

As Jesus left the apostles, He left them with this great responsibility: Make disciples of all nations! That would not be done quickly or easily. It was going to take a lot of both time and effort. This responsibility continues to fall to all who are the children of God. We should consider this task of the utmost priority.

Far too often, we become so busy with other things that we cannot find time to be teaching others about Christ. We allow our time to be so filled with other responsibilities (even when those things are not sinful in and of themselves) that we are not being effective in spreading the gospel.

Spiritual endeavors are not limited only to spreading the gospel to the lost. If we return our thoughts to the parable of the talents, it is evident that God has given us all different "talents" by which we can serve in His kingdom. Paul wrote this to the Roman brethren:

For as we have many members in one body, but all the members do not have the same function, so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another. Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, let us prophesy in proportion to our faith; or ministry, let us use it in our ministering; he who teaches, in teaching; he who exhorts, in exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness. (Romans 12:4-8)

We should be setting aside time to do what we can in the kingdom. Whatever our talent might be, let us make sure we are spending time fulfilling our responsibilities. Not everyone is cut out for the same job. But that does not excuse us from taking time to do what we can, and even develop our talents in better ways for the future.

It is impossible to separate many of our "every day" tasks from our "spiritual endeavors". Things that should become a part of who we are, and therefore a part of our regular tasks, are founded in our spiritual growth and being. For example, when we dedicate time to serve others who need us, we do that because of who we have become spiritually. That time is used in service before God. We will talk later about our responsibilities as it pertains to work and jobs, but realize that even the way we approach our jobs should be reflective of our spiritual attitude and dedication. Paul wrote, concerning those who served as slaves:

Bondservants, be obedient to those who are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in sincerity of heart, as to Christ; not with eyeservice, as men-pleasers, but as bondservants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart, with goodwill doing service, as to the Lord, and not to men, knowing that whatever good anyone does, he will receive the same from the Lord, whether he is a slave or free. And you, masters, do the same things to them, giving up threatening, knowing that your own Master also is in heaven, and there is no partiality with Him. (Ephesians 6:5–9)

As we think about the use of our time, every action needs to be planned in the scope of our spiritual responsibility. Everything we do should be done in a way that reflects who we are and what we believe.

And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him. (Colossians 3:17)

Bondservants, obey in all things your masters according to the flesh, not with eyeservice, as men-pleasers, but in sincerity of heart, fearing God. And whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance; for you serve the Lord Christ. (Colossians 3:22–24)

So, as we discuss further topics, we should not be thinking that these things are separate from our spiritual endeavor, but rather an extension of it!

Family Responsibility. We all have a responsibility to our families. Fulfilling these responsibilities obviously is going to consume time. In fact, with the responsibilities that God has given to us, it is evident that, in a family where we are all doing what He wants, we will have a great amount of time obligations!

Paul gave instructions for husbands and wives (though writing about the relationship of the church to Christ):

Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body. Therefore, just as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything. Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish. So husbands ought to love their own wives as their own bodies; he who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as the Lord does the church. For we are members of His body, of His flesh and of His bones. "For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh." This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church. Nevertheless let each one of you in particular so love his own wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband. (Ephesians 5:22–33)

These are daunting responsibilities that are given to both husbands and wives, and they cannot be fulfilled without spending the time necessary to cultivate the relationships expressed. It is easy to become complacent, or comfortable with our family situations, and neglect the time that it takes to cultivate what God expects. Do we as husbands do what is necessary to show our wives that we love them as God has instructed here, in the same manner as Christ loves the church? Do we as wives show respect for husbands as they should? Neither of these are easy tasks that have been conferred upon us by God. They are tasks that are shown, not told. Showing love, and showing respect take time and effort! In our current busy society, it is easy to be completely consumed with other endeavors, and these basic family responsibilities fall by the wayside. When we allow that to happen, the rest of our family relationships will also suffer because most are based upon our foundation found in our own homes.

Parents are given instruction for how they are relate with their children as well:

Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. "Honor your father and mother," which is the first commandment with promise: "that it may be well with you and you may live long on the earth." And you, fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord. (Ephesians 6:1-4)

Notice particularly the last phrase of Paul's admonition. Fathers are to "bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord." This is a process that takes time. There is no way to achieve what Paul demands in this passage without taking the time to do so. Training or discipline are processes through which the child must be led in order to be prepared for life in the real world, but also to be prepared for eternal life. While we will discuss family roles in a future lesson, for the time being we want to realize that this process must take time. Passing the responsibility off to someone else, or simply ignoring the responsibility in hopes that it will happen by accident sets us up for complete failure.

Job and work-life responsibility. We know that God expects that we are going to have to provide a way for our families to be taken care of financially.

For you yourselves know how you ought to follow us, for we were not disorderly among you; nor did we eat anyone's bread free of charge, but worked with labor and toil night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you, not because we do not have authority, but to make ourselves an example of how you should follow us. For even when we were with you, we commanded you this: If anyone will not work, neither shall he eat. For we hear that there are some who walk among you in a disorderly manner, not working at all, but are busybodies. Now those who are such we command and exhort through our Lord Jesus Christ that they work in quietness and eat their own bread. (2 Thessalonians 3:7-12)

But if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever. (1 Timothy 5:8)

Providing for the physical wellbeing of our families is an important task. Clearly, this could not be accomplished without spending time on it. We trade our time for money in the job market. We need to make sure that we don't lose perspective on how to balance this trade. For example, if we are spending so much time to make money that we neglect the other important responsibilities that we have, then we are out of balance. Many families have been destroyed spiritually because the man and leader of the home chose to focus more on earning money than on the spiritual wellbeing of the family. What is more important to us? Working those double shifts on Sunday for the benefit of the big pay check, or making sure our family is worshiping with the saints?

Sometimes some very difficult choices must be made concerning our employment. What do we choose to do when job opportunity conflicts with our spiritual health? Do we choose to perhaps take a lower paying job to make sure we can do what is necessary for our spiritual growth? Do we reject a job because we know that it will conflict with other more important endeavors? Do we choose to move to an area where there is no church just because there is a good job there? How do we prioritize when our physical desires conflict with our spiritual needs?

Too often, we justify poor decisions based on a skewed perspective. We say something like, "God told me to provide for my family, and that's all I'm doing!" The instruction is misconstrued to support disobedience in other areas under the guise that we are being obedient in this one arena. Obeying God here does not relieve us of responsibilities in other areas! The Jews evidently attempted to make the same kind of argument in the first century, and Jesus was quick to set them straight on their responsibilities:

He said to them, "All too well you reject the commandment of God, that you may keep your tradition. For Moses said, 'Honor your father and your mother'; and, 'He who curses father or mother, let him be put to death.' But you say, 'If a man says to his father or mother, "Whatever profit you might have received from me is Corban"—' (that is, a gift to God), then you no longer let him do anything for his father or his mother, making the word of God of no effect through your tradition which you have handed down. And many such things you do." (Mark 7:9–13)

They tried to substitute one instruction for another, and Jesus' response was that they were not acting in accordance with God's instructions at all. When we declare we are neglecting one set of instructions because we are so diligent about another set, we have missed the point. God's expectation is that we are going to be busy about all of the responsibilities He has given to us. We must, therefore, prioritize in a way that allows us to fulfill all of the instructions He has provided. This takes planning and purpose. When we find that we are neglecting something, then it is imperative that we reevaluate what we are doing, and refocus on what is important.

It is certainly easy to become so wrapped up in making a living that we forget (or at least put to the back burner) other important responsibilities. We convince ourselves that the job requires so much of us that it justifies allowing the other things to fall by the wayside. Let's make sure that we remember our responsibilities in every aspect of our lives!

Having looked at the balance of our lives, and the importance of our work life in that balance, we also need to consider how we view our time spent on the job. Earlier, we cited Colossians 3:22-24 and Ephesians 6:5-9, both of which are an important consideration for how we present ourselves in the workplace. Paul, in these passages made it clear that when we work for others, we should consider it as if we are working for Christ. Clearly, in giving these instructions, Paul was not telling us that we should work like we are working for Christ only when our employer treats us just as Christ would treat us. The context of those passages is the servant or slave's relationship to his master. While Christian masters would be required to show proper treatment to their servants, this was not something that would be expected from every worldly master. Even when the master mistreated them, christian servants were instructed to serve as if serving the Lord.

This principle should be easily extrapolated to our current society. Christian employees have a responsibility to do their work as if they were working for Christ Himself. What does this mean? There are several applications that should be considered.

First, it means that we work without complaining or grumbling. We have the blessing in our society to choose what kind of work we want to do, and who we want to work for. While that may not be absolute (supervisors or ownership may change), for the most part we have a lot of flexibility to do what we want to do. The Christian should not be a source of problems and discouragement in the workplace. If conditions are not what we want to be involved in, in our society we have the ability to make a change. There is no reason for the Christian to be sour about the work they are doing, with constant complaining and grumbling over circumstances.

Second, the Christian should always give his best effort and work to his employer. Sometimes, when people feel like they are being underpaid, they choose to only provide what they believe the employer deserves for the wage. Remember, Paul said for slaves to serve their masters just as serving the Lord. Our effort for our employer is a reflection of how we view our responsibility to the Lord Himself! We have the obligation to provide the very best job we can for our employer. If we think we deserve more money for the job that we do, we can again (in our society) exercise freedom by either negotiating a raise, or moving to another job that pays what we believe our labor is worth. Even if these options are not available to us, that does not change what God expects us to do in

fairness to our employer! When we take on a job, we have the responsibility of working “as to the Lord.” When we are not providing our best effort, we are not showing the proper respect to our employers. If our work is to be as to the Lord, what are we saying when we find excuses to give less than our best when on the job?

There are also responsibilities that come with being the boss when it comes to our work lives. Remember Paul’s admonition:

And you, masters, do the same things to them, giving up threatening, knowing that your own Master also is in heaven, and there is no partiality with Him. (Ephesians 6:9)

Those who are in positions of authority in the work place have the responsibility of treating those under them in a godly manner. Being in a position of authority does not give a person the right to mistreat others. The Christian is going to focus on doing the job to the best of his ability, but he is going to treat people right in the process. This does not mean he cannot do the job he is being paid to do, which may even mean he needs to discipline or fire personnel. He will not, however, mistreat those in his employ, or under his supervision. Most people live and work under a system where they are somewhere on the corporate ladder. There are many levels of supervision or bosses. This means that while a person may have some authority over certain employees, they most likely are also under some other authority. Recognizing this should make it easier to implement the golden rule: do unto others as you would have them do unto you. Treat those under you just like you want those over you to treat you! This also seems to be the point Paul was making in Ephesians 6. Even if you have no “master” over you, remember that you have a master in heaven who is watching all that you do...and “there is no partiality with Him.” Remembering this principle should help us to be more kind, compassionate, fair and merciful when it comes to how the Christian treats those in his employ.

Entertainment. We will examine the idea of entertainment more in a future lesson, but for the moment let us consider the idea of time spent pursuing entertainment. Like with all of the other areas we have been examining, our focus on how we entertain ourselves must be viewed through the lens of how we balance our time. There is nothing wrong with enjoying life, and being entertained. There are, of course, some things that people use to entertain themselves that are sinful, but that is not what we are considering here. There are many things that God has provided in this life, that He wants us to enjoy. He wants us to enjoy them, however, in a manner that does not detract from our spiritual wellbeing and growth. If we are so consumed by entertainment that we fail to do other things that God expects of us, then we are spending too much time on that endeavor.

It has become quite easy to waste time under the guise of our entertainment choices. We have so much technology at our fingertips that make it easy to become engulfed in entertainment. We have even developed new terminology to convey the idea of being consumed by entertainment. We talk about “binge watching” television shows through the multitude of streaming services we now have. In times past, a person may enjoy a show, but he only got one episode a week, and had to wait for the next time the program was scheduled. Now, we can watch 30 episodes of a program in a day, keeping up with and being engrossed with the storyline.

We also talk about “screen-time.” This is a phrase to capture how much time we are looking at mobile devices and computers, usually with some type of online activity. This phrase is often reflective of the time spent on social media sites, catching up with all the happenings of our friends and family. We also become consumed with all of the news happening in the world around us, which becomes increasingly consumptive during political cycles and campaigns. While there may be nothing innately wrong with any of these things individually, the problem arises when we end up spending hour

upon hour staring at our screen, unable to do anything else unless we've caught up on all the news and gossip of the hour. This is something that can be particularly difficult with our children in this generation. Most of them have grown up having access to all of the technology at their fingertips. When we as the adults have difficulties with putting it down, and not allowing it to consume far too much time in our lives, we should not be surprised that our children have the same difficulties.

Another aspect of our entertainment choices is our hobbies and pastimes. There are any number of things that people do simply for the enjoyment of it. Some people enjoy hunting or fishing, hiking or camping, collecting various things, following sports teams, and any number of other activities. These are a part of the way in which we choose to entertain ourselves. These things are not sinful of themselves, but we must again be careful as to how much time we spend dedicated to them. It is easy to allow ourselves to be consumed by the activities we enjoy so much, and we fail to keep up with all of the other responsibilities that we have.

The main point of what we should see throughout this study is that we have to learn to balance our time properly. We have all been given a finite amount of time in each day, and it is our responsibility to budget it appropriately. Every minute of every day is a blessing from the Lord, and we will have to give an account for what we have done with them. If we are wasteful, God will not be pleased with us. Let us consider our actions, and spend our time "as to the Lord" in everything. Let's be judicious in how we spend our time, dedicated to our service before God. Everything we do should glorify and honor Him!

Questions

1. What is meant by the phrase “redeeming the time”?
2. What are some of the ways that our time is used on a daily basis? What areas do we need to focus our time on regularly?
3. How can we balance our time between all of the obligations that God has placed upon us?
4. How does using time on one endeavor impact our ability to do other things?
5. What are some of the areas we should be time on in our spiritual endeavors?
6. How should we balance our “work life” with our “spiritual life”? How about with our “family life”?
7. How does technology impact our use of time in today’s society? How might we guard against these problems?
8. What are some practical suggestions for helping to budget or balance our time?

