

EPHESIANS: THE CHURCH FROM START TO FINISH
"Part XI: Opportunistic Living In View Of Our Urgent Mission"
(Ephesians 5:14-17; Colossians 4:2-6; 1 Peter 3:15; 2 Timothy 4:2)

Introduction: (To show the need . . .)

Last Tuesday, July 21st, at 5:00 in the morning, I went outside my front door to pick up the newspaper bundle. I was substituting for Nadine who helps with the paper route as she was away in Michigan with Connie for Connie's medical appointment.

I noticed that, in spite of the clear sky, it was dark outside -- something it had not been in the recent times I had helped on the route. I felt strangely cheated, for normally we have our summer vacation by the time the daylight gets that short. However, this year, due to Connie's Michigan appointment, our vacation starts August 3rd, explaining my reaction to the lack of daylight.

It made me think of the ceaseless march of **TIME**, and of how *fleeting* this life really is, and how important is *every DAY* we have!

Accordingly, when I got to the office to begin preparing for this week's message, instead of basing today's sermon on the Ephesians 5:18 text that talks about overcoming alcoholism, the text I had told David Slate last Sunday I would do today, I got absorbed in studying verse 16. It says, "**redeeming the TIME, because the days are evil.**"

It was after I had typed up the first page of these sermon notes that the call came in from Judy Ruhm about Bill Coughlin's passing that morning. I was amazed, for Nadine and I had been out to visit Bill and Marie just a few weeks before, and then he seemed quite healthy. His passing came so **SUDDENLY!** I was happy for all involved that Bill had made his confession of faith in Christ, and was by now with the Lord in glory, but I with the others was not **prepared** for his departure!

I then realized the Lord had been working on me since 5 a.m. to get me to focus on the **urgency** we are to have with our life's **mission** as mentioned in Ephesians 5:14-17.

Incidentally, this fact was later confirmed at Bill's wake in a conversation I had with Duane Doot. He shared that his father-in-law's quick passing reminds us to make the most of the days that we have.

This was **again** confirmed when a party told me after Bill's funeral that Frank Tolisano had passed away 3 months to the **day** before Bill Coughlin had gone to be with the Lord!

So, INSTEAD of Eph. 5:18, today we will view Eph. 5:14-17 on the brevity of this life and how we are to make the most of it!

(We turn to the sermon's "Need" section . . .)

Need: "I wonder WHAT my life's focus should be. We are to WAIT for God's Son to return for us (Titus 2:11-13) -- does that mean we are to sit around, or be busy? If the latter, what are we to DO?!"

- I. **The Apostle Paul quoted several Old Testament texts to admonish Christians to "awake" from "sleeping" in Ephesians 5:14.**
- II. **Then, he urged us to use what opportunities we had to DISCIPLE as the TIME is SHORT and the state of the lost is DESPERATE!**
 - A. Having given the charge for believers to wake up in verse 14, Paul connected this call to an order to walk **carefully**, **redeeming the time**.
 1. The KJV's "see then that ye walk circumspectly" lit. is "Therefore look that you walk carefully (*akribos*)," 5:15; B.K.C.,N.T., p. 639.
 2. This **careful** "walk" is performed by "making the most of every opportunity" as the NIV properly puts it, cf. Eph. 5:16a.
 - B. The **reason** one should walk **carefully** and use each opportunity is the need to **disciple** the lost who have a **short time** left to be saved:
 1. Paul was concerned about the days being evil as the motivation behind his call for believers to use life's opportunities, Eph. 5:16b.
 2. In looking at his similar phrase in his "cousin" Colossian epistle, we can tell that Paul is concerned to reach the desperately needy lost:
 - a. As noted once before, evidence shows Ephesians and Colossians were written at the same time, Guthrie, N.T. Intro., p. 492-499.
 - b. Paul's Eph. 5:14-16 theme on using opportunities in light of evil days is picked up in Colossians 4:5 with this explanation: the evil of unsaved people signals they are in **eternal** danger, and we need to live carefully to use every chance to evangelize them.
- III. **Examining Ephesians 5:14-17 with its companion Colossians 4:2-6 text in view of other passages, we arrive at the following WAY of "Opportunistic Living In View Of Our Urgent Mission":**
 - A. In view of the plight of the unsaved and our limited time to witness, we must **prepare ourselves beforehand** so that **when** the opportunity arises, we **have** something of **value** to share in our witness, 1 Pet. 3:15

1. The Apostle Peter urged believers always to be ready to give an "apologetic" (lit. *apologian*, UBS Grk. N.T., p. 798), a defense that would be credible even before a court of law (B.K.C., N.T., p. 850 which shows Paul's *apologian* recorded in Acts 22:1ff).
 2. Well, to make such a **credible** defense, we must do what **Paul** did in his Acts 22 *apologian*: (a) we must **know** our facts *beforehand* (Acts 22:2-3), and (b) **live** credibly as did Paul (Acts 22:17-21).
- B. In view of their plight and our limited time to reach the lost, we should pray, asking **God** for *opportunities* to disciple, Col. 4:3.
- C. In view of their plight and our limited time to reach the lost, we should **pray**, asking **God** for the right *words* to use, Col. 4:3-4.
- D. In view of their plight and our limited time to reach them, as Paul told Timothy, we must **always** be *ready* to witness to the lost, both in opportune **and EVEN seemingly INOPPORTUNE** times:
1. Though there are times when it **appears** that there may be **no** opportunity to witness for the Lord, yet such opportunities can *suddenly* arise, making the **unvigilant** believer *ineffective*!
 2. Well, since opportunities to disciple are at a *premium*, and the stakes are so **high**, so we must be *ready* at **ALL times**. 2 Tim. 4:2!
- E. In view of their plight and our limited time to reach them, we must use **gracious** but *penetrating words WHILE* witnessing, Col. 4:5-6:
1. To buy up the limited time we have exposed to the lost, we should be pleasing in the words we use to attract them to our message.
 2. However, once they are attracted, we must clarify the truth the lost so desperately need that they may believe and be saved, Col. 4:6.
 3. Specifically, if the lost **question** us, we must always be prepared to **answer** them with words that point them to Jesus Christ, Col. 4:6b.
 4. Depending on the Spirit makes this work, Jn. 14:26; Matt. 10:19f.

Lesson Application: *In view of the stakes and the time involved, if we have not done so, (1) BELIEVE NOW on Christ to have eternal life -- this may be our last chance to do so, Jn. 3:16; Heb. 9:27! (2) Then, as a believer, (a) fellowship with Jesus Christ through (a) confession of sin (1 Jn. 1:9) and (b) dependence on the indwelling Sp irit (Gal. 5:16-23) to (c) heed Scripture, 1 Jn. 2:3-6. (3) In particular, heed God's call through Peter to (a) LEARN about defending our faith to be able to DO so when opportunities to witness arise. (b) Then, LIVE a godly LIFE to add CREDIBILIT Y to our witness and (c) PRAY for the opportunity and WORDS to say when they arise. (c) Be READY for any SUDDEN chance to say a word. (e) WHEN it comes, speak winsome words that yet penetrate so that people may see their need for Christ! (f) NOTE: Such living does NOT mean we stop our other duties in life to become all street evangelists! Rather, we ADD a sense of urgency to what God has ALREADY led us to do to be READY to witness at any time!*

Conclusion: (To illustrate the sermon lesson . . .)

Last Sunday evening, a party full of questions about the Christian faith showed up to take the opportunity afforded in the informal, less-attended service to ask those questions.

Well, Nadine was in Michigan, so I wasn't about to make the 7 of us there sing without the piano. Thus, I chose to open up our first half hour usually devoted to the hymn sing for sharing or asking questions, a kind of "Nepaug-Spiritual-Show-And-Tell" time!

Thus, the party who I knew wanted to ask questions began to ask them. As the time came near for our usual Bible study time at 6:30 p.m., the party was asking questions that I could tell were those **special** ones, questions asked regarding life-long concerns.

Well, the others there I knew were all understanding believers, and since we had taken the **opportunity** that Nadine's **absence** afforded to use the **first** half hour to get "going", it seemed only logical to **keep answering** the questions! So, instead of our Acts 20 lesson, we kept going for another 45 minutes! The Acts 20 lesson would have to wait a week! (Little did I know at the time I would **need** the study time **saved** by not having to prepare **that** lesson this past week so we could attend Bill's funeral! **God** knew that Sunday night -- that's all that mattered!)

Upon preparing this morning sermon later, a message on the importance of every moment we have in this life, I was glad that we had chosen to keep fielding questions Sunday night! It is as though the Lord has signaled, "Don, the low attendance in the Sunday evening service PLUS Nadine's absence due to Connie's illness provided this SEARCHER a chance to feel confident enough to come and get ANSWERS. I can use such times to draw people to Myself. So, STAY ALERT, Don, GO with such opportunities with everything you've got!"

Accordingly, I urge every other believer to live CAREFULLY so as to DISCERN and TAKE ADVANTAGE of EVERY OPPORTUNITY created by God to minister for Him!

After all, "ONLY ONE LIFE, 'Twill SOON BE PAST; ONLY WHAT'S DONE FOR CHRIST WILL LAST!" To close with our text, 'redeem the time, because the days are evil'!