



Sunday School Lesson
Eph. 5:6-21
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Taking Care of Time



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Quick Links to the Study

I. Context

- a. Historical
- b. Literary

II. Message

- a. The Vanity of Life, Ecc. 3:1-15
- b. The Value of Life, Eph. 5:6-21

The Formations Sunday School lesson series shifts themes beginning with this lesson. The theme title is "Taking Care of Business," with five Bible studies that attempt to combine an Old Testament and a New Testament text. Such an endeavor is risky business and treads on the edge of defeat and trivialization of scripture texts, since such an approach would of necessity have to be so broad as to be virtually meaningless and could never hope to build successful, detailed exegetical bridges between the two religious perspectives on most topics. To be certain, some themes in the New Testament are extensions and outgrowths of earlier expressions in the Old Testament, but these mostly have to do with issues related to salvation and a few very limited topics on ethical behavior. When one ventures beyond these topics, any bridging of Old and New Testaments under a common theme becomes risky. One will enviably face the dilemma of today's study where the Old Testament perspective has to be pitted against the New Testament perspective, as one of the few ways of pulling the two religious viewpoints together.



Because of these difficulties, we will mostly zero in on either the Old Testament or the New Testament viewpoint, with but minor consideration of the perspective found in the other testament of the Christian Bible.

The general emphasis of today's lesson has to do with using time. The idea of time, both philosophically and religiously, needs to be explored in both a modern western perspective and in an ancient Judeo-Christian perspective in light of the contemporary Greco-Roman idea. The modern and the ancient views are dramatically different from one another in most aspects.

Two areas of difference have to do with both the calculation of time and the significance of time. At a point of general similarity between ancient and modern there exist some basic units of time. These are charted out below with modern calculations as the controlling point:

Modern:	Hebrew (OT):	Greek (NT):
year	שנה (<u>she-nah</u> [Aramaic]) יָוֹם (<u>yowm</u>)	ε[το]ς (<u>etos</u>) ἐνιαυτός (<u>eniautos</u>)
month	חֹדֶשׁ (<u>chodesh</u>) יָרַח (<u>yerach</u>)	μήν (<u>men</u>)
week	שָׁבוּעַ (<u>shabuwa'</u>)	σαββατον (<u>sabbaton</u>)
day	יָוֹם (<u>yowm</u>)	ἡμέρα (<u>hemera</u>)

hour	-----	ώρα (hora)
minute	-----	-----
second	-----	-----

Quite a number of terms will be used for many of these designations in both Hebrew and Greek. For instance, some [25 different Hebrew and Aramaic words](#) can be translated as “year.” But most of these can also be translated by other designations, such as “time,” “day,” “era,” etc. Some [29 different Greek words](#) can be translated as “day” in the New Testament, although one or two of them are the most frequently used words. The Bible translator must carefully determine the appropriate English word from signals of specific meaning provided in the surrounding context of the Hebrew text.

With the broader terms like year and month, the ancient Jewish world and early Christian world functioned off a lunar calendar based on solar movements, as indicated in the web site, [A Walk Through Time](#): “Celestial bodies — the Sun, Moon, planets, and stars — have provided us a reference for measuring the passage of time throughout our existence. Ancient civilizations relied upon the apparent motion of these bodies through the sky to determine seasons, months, and years.” Consequently, the accuracy of these measurement references is not high; rather, a broad designation is indicated by them. Measuring instruments such as a sun dial tracking the moving shadow of the sun were the primary instruments of determining time. Not until the invention of the modern clock in the late Middle Ages in Europe did more precise measurements arise. Then, it exploded with the emergence of the “[atomic clock](#)” in the 1950s based on measuring electromagnetic waves.

With the New Testament an additional challenge surfaces. Some NT writers will use the Roman designations of time, while others will use the more traditional Jewish designations. Occasionally a NT writer will jump back and forth between these two systems. This can be illustrated by the word for “day.” The Romans measured the idea of day from sunup to sundown, while a “day” in Jewish thinking was from sundown to the next sundown, including both daylight and night time.

The net effect of this is that in the ancient world indications of precise clock-kind of time wasn’t very important. But in modern Western culture, we place enormous stress on precise measurements of time, down to a millisecond.

What was far more important in both the Old and New Testaments was the significance of time, rather than the counting of time. As E. Jenni in the article “Time” in the *Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible* reminds us, what’s in time is the issue rather than the abstract idea of time itself:

The biblical conceptions of time and their terminology can be adequately understood only if one takes care not to assume unconsciously our modern Western scientific or philosophical interpretation of time in the Bible or to carry it over into the Bible. This will be made clear at the beginning by two examples:

a) We usually conceive of time as an abstract dimension, as a frame within which events take place. In this we were influenced, in the last analysis, by Greek thought. The OT, and also the NT, does not know this abstract phenomenon “time” as an idea of general validity. “Time” is understood there essentially from the point of view of time content, not as a dimension in itself, which is filled with all kinds of content. Let I Chr. 29:30: “the times [הַעֲתִידִים] that went over him” (KJV), serve as a graphic example. The text becomes more intelligible if one substitutes for “time” the content of the time, which is included with it in the Hebrew word: “the circumstances that came upon him” (RSV).

b) We like to consider time in contrast to eternity. In this usage the term “eternity” is usually understood, not only quantitatively as endless time, but also qualitatively as timelessness. The OT and the NT are not acquainted with this conception of eternity as timelessness. God, according to Rev. 1:4, is the one “who is and who was and who is to come”; and if in Rom. 16:26 (the only time in the NT) he is called the “eternal [αἰώνιος] God,” this does not mean that as a timeless God he would have nothing to do with time, but rather that he is also Lord of the greatest spans of time, which he uses in his revelation (vs. 25).

As these examples show, it is necessary to clarify carefully the linguistic usage of the OT and the NT with regard to time, eternity, and related concepts. On the basis of this investigation it will then, perhaps, be possible to make some statements as to the biblical conception of time as compared with ours and that of the old oriental cultures or Hellenism.

So as we focus on the idea of “time” in this lesson it is important to not read our modern understand-

ings of time back into the Bible. The process is supposed to work the opposite direction: from the Bible to us. In this way alone is the Bible truly an authoritative Word of God.

I Context

The use of a passage from both the Old and New Testaments doubles our responsibility in treating the settings for both passages. That, especially in this instance when the viewpoints are so far from one another. We will give some attention to the context of Ecclesiastes 3:1-15, but more to the Ephesians 5:6-21 passage.

a. Historical Ecclesiastes

In trying to determine the historical setting for Ecclesiastes, let me draw upon the insights of James M. Efrid, “Ecclesiastes,” *The Old Testament Writings*, (iPreach):

Another of the speculative wisdom books is that of Ecclesiastes. Commonly known as Koheleth (i.e., one who calls or speaks to an assembly) the identity of the author of this collection of speculative musings is quite unknown. He seems to have been a teacher in a wisdom school, but exactly where is highly debated. Suggestions range any where from Phoenicia to Alexandria in Egypt to Palestine to Jerusalem, but the most probable place is Jerusalem. And the time of writing is also debated. Most scholars, however, date the work from 300—200 B.C.

It is well-known that the book of Ecclesiastes had perhaps the most difficult time of all being admitted into the canon of the Old Testament. The skeptical nature of its contents and the sometimes depressing tone of the arguments give to the work an aura of “anti-orthodoxy.” Had it not been attributed to Solomon and had it not been for the last few verses (12:9-14) added by Koheleth’s students the book would not have been included among the authoritative writings. Many find in it only extreme pessimism and negativism, but upon close scrutiny there is more positive material than one may have thought at first glance.

Harvey H. Guthrie, Jr., “The Book of Ecclesiastes,” *Interpreter’s One Volume Commentary on the Bible* (iPreach) adds some additional insights:

Name and Place in Canon.

The Hebrew title of the book is “Koheleth” (“Preacher”; see below in 1:1), and Ecclesiastes is the LXX translation of it. After a good deal of controversy, Eccl. was included in the Writings, the final section of the Hebrew Bible. It is one of the 5 Scrolls and is read in the synagogue on the 3rd day of the feast of booths.

Date and Authorship.

Although the book is attributed to Solomon (see below on 1:1), language and style indicate a 3rd-cent. B.C. origin. In spite of some opinion to the contrary, it is probably basically the work of one author, his disciples being responsible for certain additions, including the 2 epilogues (12:9-11, 12-14).

Perhaps helpful to understanding this background would be the text of the two concluding epilogues of the book:

12:9-11 (NRSV).

9 Besides being wise, the Teacher also taught the people knowledge, weighing and studying and arranging many proverbs. 10 The Teacher sought to find pleasing words, and he wrote words of truth plainly. 11 The sayings of the wise are like goads, and like nails firmly fixed are the collected sayings that are given by one shepherd.

12:12-14 (NRSV).

12 Of anything beyond these, my child, beware. Of making many books there is no end, and much study is a weariness of the flesh. 13 The end of the matter; all has been heard. Fear God, and keep his commandments; for that is the whole duty of everyone. 14 For God will bring every deed into judgment, including every secret thing, whether good or evil.

These texts underscore the importance of the wisdom tradition among exilic and post-exilic Jews. Unlike many who want religion to provide clear, simple and authoritative answers to all of life’s problems, the Jewish wisdom tradition recognized that life is full of mysteries and simplistic answers seldom, if ever, are correct. Thus the reflections of the Teacher challenge us to not become overly dogmatic in our religion, and

to always be open to life's mystery and unanswerables.

Ephesians

Paul's letter to the Ephesians stands traditionally as one of the letters written by the apostle during a time of imprisonment, thus it is one of the [Prison Letters](#). These letters include Philippians, Ephesians, Colossians and Philemon. The [last three letters](#) are closely related to one another via contents and references to individuals, and thus were probably written in a close proximity to one another. The place of writing -- and thus the time etc. -- vary between the early 60s when Paul was under house arrest in Rome (cf. [Acts 28:30-31](#), NRSV, "30 He lived there two whole years at his own expense and welcomed all who came to him, 31 proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness and without hindrance.") or the late 50s when Paul was imprisoned in Caesarea Philippi awaiting the outcome of his trial before the Roman governors Felix and Festus (cf. Acts 24:27, NRSV, "After two years had passed, Felix was succeeded by Porcius Festus; and since he wanted to grant the Jews a favor, Felix left Paul in prison."). For more details, see the earlier [Bible study on Ephesians 2:1-10](#) at Cranfordville.com under Bible Studies: New Testament.

b. Literary

Ecclesiastes

In seeking to understand the setting of chapter three, again the introductory comments of James Efrid (*The Writings of the Old Testament*) are helpful:

It is a standing comment among interpreters of Koheleth that the book defies outline and organization. There is little agreement either as to the central theme of the book. If there is one, most commentators believe, it has to be the overarching idea of despair, "Vanity of vanities! All is vanity." The simple fact is that the book is a loose collection of sayings from this wisdom teacher which are somehow connected with the meaning of life. The sage attempts to be realistic about the world and its nature. Is there meaning in life? If so, where? Can one be happy in the midst of a world like this? If so, how? He attempts to make sense from the nonsense of life!

The first few verses (1:2-11) set the stage for the remainder of his reflections. Koheleth argues that there is in the world a certain regularity which demonstrates little except the futility of change. These ideas are then followed by what seems to be an attempt to find purpose and meaning in life. Such meaning can be sought in wisdom, work, pleasure, power, and wealth, but none of these separately nor all together can give final fulfillment and purpose of life. All of these pursuits are useful but ultimately break apart on the harsh reality of the world as it really is.

Harvey H. Guthrie, Jr., "The Book of Ecclesiastes," *Interpreter's One Volume Commentary on the Bible* (iPreach) provides a helpful summation of the essential theme of the book:

Eccl. represents a reaffirmation of the central thing in ancient wisdom—an acknowledgment of the limits of human understanding (cf. the oft-repeated motto "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom"). Thus it is not necessary to assert Greek influence in the book. The author never denies the sovereignty of God. What he does deny is the ability of finite man to grasp the meaning of life. His assertion is that man's perspective is too limited (see below on 1:3-11) to permit any pronouncement on the meaning of things, too partial to formulate any theory in regard to the individual occurrences of life, but that they are repetitive (see below on 3:1-8, 9-15). His counsel, therefore, is that the ambiguity of life is to be accepted for what it is, not evaded by pompous orthodoxy (cf. 5:18-20; 7:15-22; 8:1-9).

Eccl. thus represents, in terms of a specific time and culture, a protest against the ever-present temptation of faith to shore up its own uncertainty with dogmatism and against the constant tendency of human understanding to overrate its potentiality. The inclusion of Eccl. in a canon that also contains writings against which it protests is a witness to the Bible's location of divine revelation in the givenness of an empirical, conditioned, human history.

Without this literary and historical background, chapter three of Ecclesiastes would be very difficult to understand correctly. The negativism of these verses must be taken against the backdrop of the larger picture of the entire book. Although much of the document has negative tones, some positive aspects are a part of its message as well. More importantly, an understanding of the role that Jewish wisdom was to play in the Hebrew religious heritage helps explain why this material is in the book and how it can be of

value even to Christians today.

Ephesians

Eph. 5:6-21 stand as [parenetical material](#) in its literary genre. These verses contain admonitions to a certain pattern of behavior predicated on being saved and committed to Jesus. Contextually, this material is a part of the [Body](#) proper of the letter (2:1-6:22), which develops religious belief expressions largely in the beginning part and then moves mostly toward moral admonition in the later segment. In a manner typical in the Pauline letters, belief and behavior are closely linked together. The right kind of behavior grows out of correct belief, and when false belief is present wrong behavior is one of the consequences.

II. Message

We will treat the two passages separately with the Ecclesiastes passage not receiving as much attention as the Ephesian passage.

a. The Vanity of Life, Ecc. 3:1-15

The most natural breakdown of these fifteen verses, which stand together as a cohesive unit, is 3:1-8 and then 3:9-15. The first eight verses are in poetic Hebrew structure, but not verses nine through fifteen.

A Poem about Times, Ecc. 3:1-8

NASB

1 There is an appointed time for everything. And there is a time for every event under heaven --
2 A time to give birth and a time to die;
A time to plant and a time to uproot what is planted.
3 A time to kill and a time to heal;
A time to tear down and a time to build up.
4 A time to weep and a time to laugh;
A time to mourn and a time to dance.
5 A time to throw stones and a time to gather stones;
A time to embrace and a time to shun embracing.
6 A time to search and a time to give up as lost;
A time to keep and a time to throw away.
7 A time to tear apart and a time to sew together;
A time to be silent and a time to speak.
8 A time to love and a time to hate;
A time for war and a time for peace.

NRSV

1 For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven:
2 a time to be born, and a time to die;
a time to plant, and a time to pluck up what is planted;
3 a time to kill, and a time to heal;
a time to break down, and a time to build up;
4 a time to weep, and a time to laugh;
a time to mourn, and a time to dance;
5 a time to throw away stones, and a time to gather stones together;
a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing;
6 a time to seek, and a time to lose;
a time to keep, and a time to throw away;
7 a time to tear, and a time to sew;
a time to keep silence, and a time to speak;
8 a time to love, and a time to hate;
a time for war, and a time for peace.

NLT

1 There is a time for everything, a season for every activity under heaven.
2 A time to be born and a time to die.
A time to plant and a time to harvest.
3 A time to kill and a time to heal.
A time to tear down and a time to rebuild.
4 A time to cry and a time to laugh.
A time to grieve and a time to dance.
5 A time to scatter stones and a time to gather stones.
A time to embrace and a time to turn away.
6 A time to search and a time to lose.
A time to keep and a time to throw away.
7 A time to tear and a time to mend.
A time to be quiet and a time to speak up.
8 A time to love and a time to hate.
A time for war and a time for peace.

Comments:

The clear point of this poetic expression is the appropriateness of events in our daily lives. The key

concept is the meaning of “time” in these verses. Harvey H. Guthrie, Jr., “The Book of Ecclesiastes,” *Interpreter’s One Volume Commentary on the Bible* (iPreach) has some helpful observations:

The author here turns from life’s setting and content to the times marking its movement. Two words in vs. 1 are central to the poem. **Season** has connotations of “being determined,” “fixed,” “appointed” (cf. Ezra 10:14; Neh. 10:34). **Time** basically means “occurrence”; it refers to the given moments of existence, definable in terms of their content. The use of *season* at the beginning implies that, for the author, the moments of life enumerated in the poem with concise beauty are fixed in an unchangeable way. Given vss. 9-15, the implication is that God is responsible for this.

The contextual background for this is clearly the perspective in [2:12-26](#), and especially 2:24-26 (NRSV, “24 There is nothing better for mortals than to eat and drink, and find enjoyment in their toil. This also, I saw, is from the hand of God; 25 for apart from him who can eat or who can have enjoyment? 26 For to the one who pleases him God gives wisdom and knowledge and joy; but to the sinner he gives the work of gathering and heaping, only to give to one who pleases God. This also is vanity and a chasing after wind.”).

The issue of the appropriateness of events also raises the issue of determinism? Are these things predetermined to happen and thus will happen anyway regardless of human choice and desire? Some have read Ecclesiastes this way, along with this passage. But signals of human initiative abound in the various events depicted here. The ancient Jewish mind would not have come at life with the much later fatalism that characterizes Islam even to this day. As W. Sibley Towner, “Ecclesiastes,” *New Interpreter’s Bible Commentary*, (iPreach) notes:

The tension between a radical predisposition of all things into an inexorable sequence of times and seasons, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, a small but secure place for human choice has troubled adherents of Islam—that most predestinarian of the Western religions. The tension is exemplified in the seventy-third stanza of the Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám:

With Earth’s first Clay
They did the Last Man knead,
And there of the Last Harvest sow’d the Seed:
And the first Morning of Creation wrote
What the Last Dawn of Reckoning shall read.

In this view, nothing happens that was not already determined on the day of creation. That cannot easily be squared with any human initiative in happiness. What a way to make a world!

Omar’s sad yearning to reorganize the world along very different lines, expressed in his 99th stanza, might have struck a chord of response in Qohelet, too:

Ah Love! could you and I with Him conspire
To grasp this sorry Scheme of Things entire,
Would not we shatter it to bits—and then
Re-mould it nearer to the Heart’s Desire!

Some fatalism, to be sure, does exist in Ecc. 3:1-8, but not at the same level as with Islam.

The challenge of these verses to us today is to recognize both the appropriateness of events in our lives, along with the providential hand of God that guides us through life and helps set up these moments in our lives. We do not stand as the captain of our own fate with absolute control over events in our lives. But neither are circumstances in the hands of an angry God who plays with us like a cat with a mouse before the kill -- pretty much the Islamic picture of their god, Allah. In Christian understanding, the love of God is that which motivates His providential hand over our lives, and thus as Paul declared in Rom. 8:28 (NRSV): “28 We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose.”

The Value of Work?, Ecc. 3:9-15

NASB

9 What profit is there to the worker from that in which he toils? 10 I have seen the task which God has given the sons of men with which to occupy themselves. 11

NRSV

9 What gain have the workers from their toil? 10 I have seen the business that God has given to everyone to be busy with. 11 He has made everything suitable for

NLT

9 What do people really get for all their hard work? 10 I have thought about this in connection with the various kinds of work God has given people to do. 11 God has

He has made everything appropriate in its time. He has also set eternity in their heart, yet so that man will not find out the work which God has done from the beginning even to the end. 12 I know that there is nothing better for them than to rejoice and to do good in one's lifetime; 13 moreover, that every man who eats and drinks sees good in all his labor -- it is the gift of God. 14 I know that everything God does will remain forever; there is nothing to add to it and there is nothing to take from it, for God has so worked that men should fear Him. 15 That which is has been already and that which will be has already been, for God seeks what has passed by.

its time; moreover he has put a sense of past and future into their minds, yet they cannot find out what God has done from the beginning to the end. 12 I know that there is nothing better for them than to be happy and enjoy themselves as long as they live; 13 moreover, it is God's gift that all should eat and drink and take pleasure in all their toil. 14 I know that whatever God does endures forever; nothing can be added to it, nor anything taken from it; God has done this, so that all should stand in awe before him. 15 That which is, already has been; that which is to be, already is; and God seeks out what has gone by.

made everything beautiful for its own time. He has planted eternity in the human heart, but even so, people cannot see the whole scope of God's work from beginning to end. 12 So I concluded that there is nothing better for people than to be happy and to enjoy themselves as long as they can. 13 And people should eat and drink and enjoy the fruits of their labor, for these are gifts from God. 14 And I know that whatever God does is final. Nothing can be added to it or taken from it. God's purpose in this is that people should fear him. 15 Whatever exists today and whatever will exist in the future has already existed in the past. For God calls each event back in its turn.

Comments:

Ecc. 3:9-15 begins with a question and the rest that follows supplies the answer to the question. The question is (NLT): "What do people really get for all their hard work?" The preacher then answers essentially with God's intent is that they gain enjoyment from their hard work. Harvey H. Guthrie, Jr., "The Book of Ecclesiastes," *Interpreter's One Volume Commentary on the Bible*, (iPreach) has some helpful observations:

The answer to the question of vs. 9 is central to the author's philosophy. The stuff of life described in the poem, men's business (vs. 10), is not something about which the author is utterly skeptical. He asserts that everything is beautiful (the word denotes fittingness of arrangement) in its own time, and that God has made it so (vs. 11a).

3:11b is the most controversial sentence in the book. The crucial word is eternity. Some have tried to defend the KJV translation "world" (cf. the KJV and RSV translations of the Greek equivalent *aion*, source of English "eon," in Matt. 28:20). Others have suggested various emendations (e.g. "toil," "mystery," "forgetfulness"). But it is best to take the text as it stands. God has put eternity, an intimation of the wholeness of which the recurrent times are parts, into man's mind. Yet it is only intimation, and man is unable to corroborate it on the basis of honest observation of the succession of times he knows here under the sun. Thus the author is not absolutely skeptical. He has faith in the meaning of the totality of things under God. But he is rigorously skeptical of any human claim to state that meaning. Man's wisdom can neither add nor subtract anything from the totality of what God has ordained (vs. 14).

A couple of links to today emerge from these verses. First, finding enjoyment in our work is important and God ordained. To work a lifetime at something that brings no pleasure or enjoyment borders on being a pretaste of Hell. There is nothing wrong about work. It's not inherently bad. Our challenge is to take whatever work handed to us and find enjoyment from it.

Also, a certain mysteriousness about life will always exist. We will never completely figure out the twists and turns of our life, no matter how smart we may be. For the nonreligious all can be explained on the basis of dumb and smart choices by us humans. But for the Preacher in Ecclesiastes, and for us as Christians, life ultimately lies in the hands of our God, who is guiding and directing the events of our lives and helping us make the best of whatever comes. We're not smart enough to figure it all out, but we can place our life in God's hands and trust Him to lead us.

b. The Value of Life, Eph. 5:6-21

In moving to the New Testament an entirely new perspective surfaces. No pessimism is present; rather, the optimism of positive experience through the leadership of the Holy Spirit is assumed. In the Greek text Eph. 5:6-21 hangs together as a cohesive expression of thought, and subdivides itself into verses 6-14 and verses 15-21.

One quick note about verses 21. Many recent translations attach it to the following verses dealing with husband/wife relations (vv. 22-33). While the participle phrase in the Greek text helps set the tone for these verses, in reality it stands as the fifth qualifying participle phrase modifying the admonition, "Be filled with the Spirit" in 5:18. Being submissive to one another inside the community of faith is one of the identifying traits of the fullness of the presence of God's Spirit in us. That same trait then establishes the foundation for husband/wife relationships inside a Christian family.

Be smart as you walk through life, 5:6-14

Greek NT

<5:6> Μηδεὶς ὑμᾶς ἀπατάτω κενοῖς λόγοις· διὰ ταῦτα γὰρ ἔρχεται ἡ ὀργὴ τοῦ θεοῦ ἐπὶ τοῦς υἱοὺς τῆς ἀπειθείας. <5:7> μὴ οὖν γίνεσθε συμμετοχοὶ αὐτῶν· <5:8> ἦτε γὰρ ποτε σκότος, νῦν δὲ φῶς ἐν κυρίῳ· ὡς τέκνα φωτὸς περιπατεῖτε <5:9> - ὁ γὰρ καρπὸς τοῦ φωτὸς ἐν πάσῃ ἀγαθῶσύνῃ καὶ δικαιοσύνῃ καὶ ἀληθείᾳ - <5:10> δοκιμάζοντες τί ἐστὶν εὐάρεστον τῷ κυρίῳ <5:11> καὶ μὴ συγκοινωνεῖτε τοῖς ἔργοις τοῖς ἀκάρποις τοῦ σκότους, μᾶλλον δὲ καὶ ἐλέγχετε. <5:12> τὰ γὰρ κρυφῆ γινόμενα ὑπ' αὐτῶν αἰσχρὸν ἐστὶν καὶ λέγειν, <5:13> τὰ δὲ πάντα ἐλεγχόμενα ὑπὸ τοῦ φωτὸς φανεροῦνται, <5:14> πᾶν γὰρ τὸ φανερούμενον φῶς ἐστὶν. διὸ λέγει, "Ἐγειρε, ὁ καθεύδων, καὶ ἀνάστα ἐκ τῶν νεκρῶν, καὶ ἐπιφάνουσι σοὶ ὁ Χριστός.

NASB

6 Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. 7 Therefore do not be partakers with them; 8 for you were formerly darkness, but now you are Light in the Lord; walk as children of Light 9 (for the fruit of the Light consists in all goodness and righteousness and truth), 10 trying to learn what is pleasing to the Lord. 11 Do not participate in the unfruitful deeds of darkness, but instead even expose them; 12 for it is disgraceful even to speak of the things which are done by them in secret. 13 But all things become visible when they are exposed by the light, for everything that becomes visible is light. 14 For this reason it says, "Awake, sleeper, And arise from the dead, And Christ will shine on you."

NRSV

6 Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes on those who are disobedient. 7 Therefore do not be associated with them. 8 For once you were darkness, but now in the Lord you are light. Live as children of light— 9 for the fruit of the light is found in all that is good and right and true. 10 Try to find out what is pleasing to the Lord. 11 Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them. 12 For it is shameful even to mention what such people do secretly; 13 but everything exposed by the light becomes visible, 14 for everything that becomes visible is light. Therefore it says, "Sleeper, awake! Rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you."

NLT

6 Don't be fooled by those who try to excuse these sins, for the terrible anger of God comes upon all those who disobey him. 7 Don't participate in the things these people do. 8 For though your hearts were once full of darkness, now you are full of light from the Lord, and your behavior should show it! 9 For this light within you produces only what is good and right and true. 10 Try to find out what is pleasing to the Lord. 11 Take no part in the worthless deeds of evil and darkness; instead, rebuke and expose them. 12 It is shameful even to talk about the things that ungodly people do in secret. 13 But when the light shines on them, it becomes clear how evil these things are. 14 And where your light shines, it will expose their evil deeds. This is why it is said, "Awake, O sleeper, rise up from the dead, and Christ will give you light."

Comments:

This first section focuses on not being led astray by false teachers. In the larger context of chapter five, which struggles largely with the question of how a Christian ought to live in the world, these verses (5:6-14) admonish the believing community to avoid getting trapped by folks teaching that moral purity is no longer important in the Christian life. Ralph Martin in the *Interpretation Commentary* (iPreach) has a helpful summation of these verses:

Yet another title is “children of light” (vv. 8-14). This title is interesting not only for its association with the community of the Dead Sea scrolls who also used this description to set off their group from the surrounding “children of darkness” but for the example in verse 14 of a baptismal reminder. At the commencement of their new life as believers these men and women had been brought into the full light of Christ. We may overhear the very terms of their initiation in a three-line baptismal chant contained in verse 14:

Awake, o sleeper,
And get up from among the dead;
And Christ’s light will shine on you!

The life situation of this snatch of early hymnody is evidently baptism, which was frequently known in the church as a person’s “enlightenment” and depicted as the rising of the new convert from the death of sin into union with the living Lord (Heb. 6:4; Rom. 6:4-12). The writer harks back to this experience as a reminder to his readers that they should now make good their baptismal profession by walking in Christ’s light and stirring themselves to active witness. Romans 13:11-14 makes the same point.

Frequently, these verses are linked to an emerging form of religious belief at the close of the first Christian century known as Gnosticism, which began making inroads into Christianity during the second half of the first century. Often -- at least in the more fully developed ‘Christian’ versions at the beginning of the second century -- this kind of thinking set forth the idea that since saved the Christian’s soul was perfect and untouchable by sin, then the individual Christian had no need to pay any attention to living a disciplined life morally. If such a strand of teaching was beginning to make inroads into the Christian community at Ephesus, then Paul’s strong admonition to them should be taken as a warning about the seriousness of sinful conduct in the eyes of God and that believers should have nothing to do with individuals teaching such ideas.

The connection here is manifold. Sin still matters to God. His wrath will come down on sinners, even Christian sinners. Since God’s light of salvation has given us an informed view about the danger of sin, we should live in that light, and not be trapped by those in darkness. We have a responsibility to expose both sin for what it is and to expose those who teach that sin doesn’t matter any more for the believer. Eventually in final judgment everything and everyone will be exposed to the divine light of final judgment. Our living in the light now is in anticipation of facing that scrutiny in eschatological judgment.

Be careful how you walk through life, 5:15-21

Greek NT

<5:15> Βλέπετε οὐν ἀκριβῶς πῶς περιπατεῖτε μὴ ὡς ἄσοφοι ἀλλ’ ὡς σοφοί, <5:16> ἐξαγοραζόμενοι τὸν καιρὸν, ὅτι αἱ ἡμέραι πονηραὶ εἰσιν. <5:17> διὰ τοῦτο μὴ γίνεσθε ἄφρονες, ἀλλὰ συνίετε τί τὸ θέλημα τοῦ κυρίου. <5:18> καὶ μὴ μεθύσκεσθε οἴνῳ, ἐν ᾧ ἐστὶν ἀσωτία, ἀλλὰ πληροῦσθε ἐν πνεύματι,

NASB

15 Therefore be careful how you walk, not as unwise men but as wise, 16 making the most of your time, because the days are evil. 17 So then do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. 18 And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit, 19 speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, sing-

NRSV

15 Be careful then how you live, not as unwise people but as wise, 16 making the most of the time, because the days are evil. 17 So do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. 18 Do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery; but be filled with the Spirit, 19 as you sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs among your-

NLT

15 So be careful how you live, not as fools but as those who are wise. 16 Make the most of every opportunity for doing good in these evil days. 17 Don't act thoughtlessly, but try to understand what the Lord wants you to do. 18 Don't be drunk with wine, because that will ruin your life. Instead, let the Holy Spirit fill and control you. 19 Then you will sing

<5:19> λαλοῦντες
ἑαυτοῖς [ἐν] ψαλμοῖς
καὶ ὕμνοις καὶ ᾠδαῖς
πνευματικαῖς, ᾄδοντες
καὶ ψάλλοντες τῇ
καρδίᾳ ὑμῶν τῷ κυρίῳ,
<5:20> εὐχαριστοῦντες
πάντοτε ὑπὲρ πάντων ἐν
ὀνόματι τοῦ κυρίου
ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ τῷ
θεῷ καὶ πατρί, <5:21>
ὑποτασσόμενοι
ἀλλήλοις ἐν φόβῳ
Χριστοῦ.

ing and making melody
with your heart to the
Lord; 20 always giving
thanks for all things in the
name of our Lord Jesus
Christ to God, even the
Father; 21 and be sub-
ject to one another in the
fear of Christ.

selves, singing and mak-
ing melody to the Lord in
your hearts, 20 giving
thanks to God the Father
at all times and for every-
thing in the name of our
Lord Jesus Christ. 21 Be
subject to one another
out of reverence for
Christ.

psalms and hymns and
spiritual songs among
yourselves, making mu-
sic to the Lord in your
hearts. 20 And you will
always give thanks for
everything to God the
Father in the name of our
Lord Jesus Christ. 21
And further, you will sub-
mit to one another out of
reverence for Christ.

Comments:

In these verses, 5:15-21, the emphasis focuses on living in the wisdom that the light of salvation has provided. The conceptual foundation for this kind of thinking is the ancient Jewish wisdom tradition, as Ralph L. Martin (*Interpretation Commentary*) notes:

The appeal to wisdom in 5:15-18 marks out this section as indebted (if indirectly) to the sapiential tradition of the Old Testament. Israel's sages in Proverbs and Sirach sought to guide their contemporaries by recourse to a way of life patterned on wisdom, that is, obedience to God's law and loyalty to his cause in everyday circumstances. Terms like "wise," "foolish," and maybe "filled with the Spirit" indicate how this wisdom instruction may have entered Christian moral theology at an early stage. The point is that believers are cautioned not to wander aimlessly through life's maze or become victims of a moral stupor (hence v. 18a: "Do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery," leading to stupefaction). Rather, wisdom's call is to leave "dame Folly" (as in Prov. 5—7) and to follow the path of sobriety and seriousness, based on a conscious effort to ascertain the divine mind and to employ one's opportunities to best advantage (v. 16). The prudential element in this ethical admonition should not be overlooked or despised. People today need to have some ethical advice clearly spelled out for them and set down in manageable and easily understood terms.

In the underlying Greek text these verses are made up of three sentences: vv. 15-16; v. 17; vv. 18-21. These form three admonitions for this section: (1) be careful how you live; (2) become smart, not dumb; (3) don't be drunk but be filled with the Spirit.

The first sentence, vv. 15-16, contains the phrase "redeeming the time" and provides the basis for the Sunday School lesson link to today's lesson. This phrase, however, stands as a modifier of the admonition, "be careful how you walk" (NASB). "How we walk" is a word picture for "how we live" as is reflected in the NRSV and NLT translations. Careful living incorporates two fundamental things in this admonition: (1) spiritual insight and wise use of opportune moments. The reason for this is given as "because the days are evil." We live in a time of evil influence. Therefore, we must ἐξαγοραζόμενοι τὸν καιρὸν which is translated correctly as "making the most of the time" (NRSV), and even better as "Make the most of every opportunity for doing good" (NLT).

Secondly, we should not turn into morons but become wise people as we live life (v. 17). At the heart of this is determining the will of God for our living. That is, deciding how God wants us to live. As Thomas R. Yoder Neufeld, "Ephesians," *Believer's Church Bible Commentary* (iPreach), suggests,

"To be wise is to know the will of the Lord (5:17). Here Lord is not restricted to Christ (contra Best, 1998:506; Lincoln: 343), even if it includes Christ. The phrase has both a large and a specific meaning. On one hand, it refers to knowing the height, depth, width, and length of the mystery of the will of God as revealed in Christ, which is to gather up all things in Christ (cf. 1:9–10; cf. 3:18–21). This entails an appreciation for God's gracious intentions for the disobedient (2:1–10), specifically for Gentiles (2:11–22; chap. 3). It also means understanding what kind of behavior God expects from the community that constitutes God's home. It means imitating God and Christ

(4:32—5:2). It means *learning Christ and the truth in Jesus* (4:20–21). All this can be summarized as discerning what gives God pleasure (cf. 5:10).

Thirdly, we are to be filled with the Holy Spirit (vv. 18-21). Rather than drunken immoral behavior, Christians should have the presence and leadership of God's Spirit in their lives. The central affirmation of this comes through worship as is reflected in the five qualifying participle phrases of the basic affirmation: (1) speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, (2) singing and (3) making melody with your heart to the Lord; (4) always giving thanks for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God, even the Father; and (5) being subject to one another in the fear of Christ.

Ralph Martin (*Interpretation Commentary*) provides helpful insight on the musical aspects of verses 19-20:

The cameo of 5:19-20 is again of interest in allowing us to take a peep at the early churches in their worship practices. Hymnic praise has always conveyed the note of thanksgiving to God, which is par excellence the noblest use of the human voice (v. 4). When Augustine defined a hymn as "a song of praise to God" he had primarily in view certain of the Old Testament psalms and Christian compositions that celebrated God's creating and redeeming purposes in Christ. The latter creations, for example, the Te Deum, which tradition ascribes to Augustine's period, go back to New Testament precedents in Revelation 4—5 and to such memorable examples as Phil. 2:6-11; Col. 1:15-20; and John 1:1-18, all three notable hymns to Christ that announce his cosmic role and salvific mission in bringing heaven and earth together. They are essentially hymns devoted to the theme of reconciliation. "Spiritual songs" has the more general term, "odes," to suggest a range of Spirit-inspired pieces that operate on the horizontal plane as exhortations to one's fellow believers to spur them on in the journey of life. Hence the verb in verse 19 is "addressing one another." Augustine's definition is seen now to be too constricting. Our use of "words sung to music" in modern worship should make room for this third type of public utterance and give our fellow worshipers a chance to express their deep-felt feelings in a way somewhat more relevant to our hopes, fears, and struggles than traditional hymns perhaps allow. This is a much canvassed area of debate, and we are all self-appointed experts in the field of liturgical and corporate praise. "The best hymns are the ones I like" expresses an apparently irrefutable opinion, and wise pastors will make certain allowances to take in a wide variety of taste and religious experience.

Most of all, the presence of the Holy Spirit is evidenced by our attitudes toward one another (v. 21). The appropriate posture is that of servanthood, just as Jesus characterized his own ministry, "For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many" (Mk. 10:45, NRSV).

Thus "Taking Care of Time" means to recognize that God is in charge of our lives and orders the events of our life. Our challenge is to wisely use every opportunity He provides us to serve him. Such service walks a path away from sinful indulgence and under the direction of the Holy Spirit in doing what pleases our God.