

Bible Study for March 13th and March 15th

The Disciplined Use of Time

Godliness is the result of a disciplined spiritual life. But at the heart of a disciplined spiritual life is the discipline of time.

Use time wisely “because the days are evil.” To use time wisely “because the days are evil” is a curious phrase embedded in the inspired language of the Apostle Paul in Ephesians 5:15-16. The days are evil still. Even without the kind of persecution or opposition known by the Christians of Paul’s day, the world we live in is not conducive to use time wisely, especially for purposes of spirituality and godliness.

The natural course of our minds, our bodies, our world, and our days lead us toward evil, not toward Christlikeness. Thoughts must be disciplined, otherwise, like water, they tend to flow downhill or stand stagnant. Our bodies are inclined to ease, pleasure, gluttony, and sloth. Unless we practice self-control, our bodies will tend to serve evil more than God. Finally, our days are days of active evil because every temptation and evil force is active in them.

Time is short. Time would not be so precious if we never died. But since we are never more than a breath away from eternity, the way we use our time has eternal significance. But even if you have decades of life remaining, the fact is, “For what is your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away” (James 4:14). Even the longest life is brief in comparison to eternity.

Time is passing. Not only is time short, but what does remain is fleeting. The rest of your life is not like a small block of ice you can take from the freezer and use when you are ready. Instead, time is very much like the sands in an hourglass—what’s left is slipping by. If you don’t discipline your use of time for the purpose of godliness now, it won’t be any easier later.

The remaining time is uncertain. Not only is time short and passing, but we do not even know how short it actually is or how quickly it will pass. That’s why the wisdom of Proverbs 27:1 is, “Boast not thyself of to morrow; for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth.” Obviously, we must make certain kinds of plans as though we were going to live for many more years. But there is a very real sense in which we must use our time for the purpose of godliness as though it were uncertain that we would live tomorrow, for that is a very certain uncertainty.

Time lost cannot be regained. Once it is gone, it is gone forever. God has offered you this time to discipline yourself for the purpose of godliness. Jesus said in John 9:4, “I must work the works of him that sent me, while it is day: the night cometh, when no man can work.” The time for the works of God, that is, Godly living, is now, while it is “day.”

You are accountable to God for your time. There’s hardly a more sobering statement in Scripture than Romans 14:12 – “So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God.” The words “every one of us” apply to Christians and non-Christians alike. And though believers will be saved by grace and not by works, once in Heaven our reward will be determined on the basis of our works. The wise response to such truth is to evaluate your use of time now and spend it in a way that you would like to hear at the Judgment. And if you cannot answer your conscience regarding how you use your time in the growth of Christlikeness now, how will you be able to answer God then?

Time is so easily lost. Except for the “fool,” no other character in the book of Proverbs draws the scorn of Scripture like the slothful “sluggard.” The reason? His lazy and wasteful use of time. Time appears to be so plentiful that losing much of it seems inconsequential. Yet time is infinitely more precious than money because money can’t buy time. But you can minimize the loss and waste of time by disciplining yourself for the purpose of godliness.

We value time at death. As the one who is out of money values it most when it is gone, so do we at death value time most when it is gone. If additional years were given to us at death, it would profit nothing unless we made a change in how we used our time. So the time to value time is now, and not just at death.

The Disciplined Use of Money

The Bible relates not only the use of time to our spiritual condition, but also our use of money. Why is a biblical use of our money and resources so crucial to our growth in godliness? For one thing it’s a matter of sheer obedience. A surprisingly large amount of Scripture deals with the use of wealth and possessions. If we ignore it or take it lightly, our “godliness” will be a

Legislators’ Weekly Bible study meets each Tuesday (except following a Monday holiday) and Thursday in Capitol Annex Room 436 from 12:00-12:30 pm. It is the same study both days to allow flexibility for everyone’s committee schedules.

sham. But as much as anything else, the reason the use of money and the things it buys is one of the best indicators of spiritual maturity and godliness is that we exchange such a great part of our lives for it. Because we invest most of our days working in exchange for money, there is a very real sense in which our money represents us. Therefore, how we use it expresses who we are, what our priorities are, and what's in our hearts. Growth in godliness will express itself in a growing understanding of these New Testament principles of giving.

God owns everything you own. In 1 Corinthians 10:26, the Apostle Paul quotes Psalm 24:1, which reads, "The earth is the LORD's and the fulness thereof." God owns everything, including everything you possess, because He created everything. God wants us to use and enjoy the things He has allowed us to have, but as stewards of them we're to remember that they belong to Him and they are primarily to be used for His Kingdom. So the question is not, "How much of my money should I give to God?" but rather, "How much of God's money should I keep for myself?"

Giving is an act of worship. In Philippians 4:18, the Apostle Paul thanks the Christians in the Grecian city of Philippi for the financial gift they gave in support of his missionary ministry. He calls the money they gave "an odour of a sweet smell, a sacrifice acceptable, well-pleasing to God," comparing it to an Old Testament sacrifice people gave in worship to God. In other words, Paul says that their act of giving to the work of God was an act of worshipping God. Giving is much more than a duty or an obligation, it is an act of worshipping the Lord.

Giving reflects faith in God's provision. The proportion of your income that you give back to God is one distinct indication of how much you trust Him to provide for your needs. We will give to the extent that we believe God will provide for us. The more we believe God will provide for our needs, the more we are willing to risk giving to Him. And the less we trust God, the less we will give to Him.

Giving should be sacrificial and generous. Giving isn't sacrificial unless it's a sacrifice. Many professing Christians give only token amounts to the work of God's Kingdom. A much smaller number give well, while perhaps only a few actually give sacrificially. A Gallup Poll from October 1988 shows that the more money Americans make, the less sacrificial our giving becomes. I've never know anyone who gave sacrificially— whether through a one-time sacrificial gift or consistent sacrificial offerings— who regretted it. Sure, they missed having some things they could have had if they'd spent the money on themselves. But the joy and fulfillment they gained by giving away something they could not ultimately keep was more than worth it.

Giving reflects spiritual trustworthiness. This is a startling insight into the ways of God's Kingdom that Jesus reveals to us in Luke 16:10-13. If we are not faithful with the use of our money, and certainly that includes the giving of our money for Christ's Kingdom, the Bible says God will determine that we are untrustworthy to handle spiritual riches. The use of your money and how you give it is one of the best ways of evaluating your relationship with Christ and your spiritual trustworthiness. If you love Christ with all your heart, your giving will reflect that. That's why it's said that your checkbook tells more about you than almost anything else.

Giving—love, not legalism. God does not send you a bill. The church does not send you a bill. Giving to God and to the support of the work of His Kingdom isn't done in fulfillment of some "eleventh commandment." Your giving should be motivated by your love for God. How much you give should be a reflection of how much you love God. He wants your giving to be an expression of your love for Him, not of legalism.

Give willingly, thankfully, and cheerfully. "Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver" (2 Cor. 9:7). God doesn't want you to give with a grudge – that is, you give but you don't want to – resentfully, with a heart that isn't right no matter how much you give. He wants you to give because you want to. When you think of how God has given you the greatest possible gift in His Son, Jesus Christ, when you think of the mercy and grace He has given you, when you think of how He has provided all you have, and when you think that you're giving to God, you should be able to give thankfully and cheerfully.

Giving should be planned and systematic. Notice how the Apostle Paul directs the Christians to give in 1 Corinthians 16:1-2 – "Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given order to the churches of Galatia, even so do ye. Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him, that there be no gatherings when I come."

Notice three things about this planned, systematic giving. He told them to give "on the first day of the week." Second, note that he says "every one of you" should do this. All who claim to be believers are to express their stewardship of God's money this way. Third, he says that each is to give "as God hath prospered him." The more your prosper, the higher should be the proportion of your giving.

Generous giving results in bountiful blessing. Our Lord Jesus said in Luke 6:38, "Give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over, shall men give into your bosom. For with the same measure that ye mete withal it shall be measured to you again." God never says that if you give faithfully He will give you a lot of money, or some other specific earthly blessing. But he does say He will bless you in this life if you love Him enough and trust Him enough to be generous in your giving to Him.