

“Buy Back ‘Evil’ Days”

Ephesians 5:8-21

The apostle Paul makes the statement in Eph. 5:16 that the ‘days are evil’. What was true in his day is still true today sadly. The word ‘evil’ means morally corrupt, wicked. We are seeing a growing anger and rejection of Christian values. So are our days ‘evil’ also? I would say yes as God defines evil. But Paul said we can ‘buy back’ evil days. He wrote for all God’s people in Eph. 5:14 to

¹⁵ Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise, ¹⁶ making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil.

We need to understand the times in which we live are ‘evil’ but we need to understand even more so that we as God’s people can ‘redeem the time’; literally buy time back from evil to demonstrate that evil, in the end, will not win. That goodness, righteousness and God’s love win in the end. And if they win in the end we can victories today. How do we do that?

Paul wrote the letter of Ephesians from prison. He was imprisoned for his faith yet, he didn’t let the evil of prison win. He redeemed his time in prison for holy reasons and wrote encouraging, faith building letters to believers and churches who read them. Like we’re doing now. The letter of Ephesians has an easy structure to it: Ch.’s 1-3 explain what God has done for us. He’s chosen us, saved us, seals us, unites us, forgives us and believes we can be full to the fullness of Christ as we bring glory to God who can do exceeding abundantly beyond whatever we ask of Him.

Because of what God has done for us (1-3), then Paul explains in 4-6 what we should be doing. And Ch.4 emphasizes our need to be united as the body of Christ, using God’s gifts for the building up of each other. He summarizes this in 4:14-16,

¹⁴ Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming. ¹⁵ Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ. ¹⁶ From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.

From this point on he challenges believers to stop living as if you’re still in darkness and sin and put off the ‘old man’ and put on the ‘new man’ that God has made you to be. He expands on this by saying take off the old clothes/the old sinful characteristics and put on the new clothes and new spiritual characteristics of how God has changed you. But we still struggle with things like anger and unforgiveness which grieve the Holy Spirit – who dwells in us – and imitate God who forgives us unconditionally and repeatedly. Even though we have a chapter division at 4:32/5:1 there really isn’t one because 4:1-6:9 is one long section of explaining how a changed life lived for God results in unity in the church, unity in your marriage, unity in your family and unity in your workplace. When we understand mentally what God has done for us in saving us (Ch. 1-3) it should result in a changed and holy life (Ch.’s 4-6) that shows an evil world that there is light in the world and we don’t have to be evil. People can change. Our communities can change. Our world can and will change.

So “live in the light” becomes Paul’s latest metaphor in 5:7.

Therefore do not be partners with them. ⁸ For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light ⁹ (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth)

Paul reminded the believers of their own past and what's constantly around them, tempting them away from living in the light.

Understand Evil Exists All Around Us **(5:7-14)**

'You were once darkness but now you are light'. He doesn't say we were in darkness but that we were darkness. He already explained this back in 2:1-3,

As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, ² in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. ³ All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath.

The evil that exists all around us is because the ruler of the kingdom of the air, Satan, was tossed out of God's presence in heaven long ago and continues to encourage sin and darkness to be the normative of life here. And when we're tempted to shake our heads at the darkness and evil around us, let's not forget most of us

Used to belong to it (vv.1-8a)

All the sins Paul lists in 5:1-7 for the believer to avoid, they (and we) used to belong to. We were once Satan's followers even though we never knew it at the time. Because he disguises himself as an angel of light convincing each of us we're better than most based on our good works. So why are we told not to do the things we used to do? Because if we used to do them the temptation is still there.

³ But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God's holy people. ⁴ Nor should there be obscenity, foolish talk or coarse joking, which are out of place, but rather thanksgiving. ⁵ For of this you can be sure: No immoral, impure or greedy person—such a man is an idolater—has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God. ⁶ Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of such things God's wrath comes on those who are disobedient. ⁷ Therefore do not be partners with them.

These characteristics belong to those who won't be in heaven. Some of them are obvious but some are still a problem for us. 'Greed' is covetousness. Course joking is putting up with and being involved in lude comments. The phrase means 'turning normal conversation into a sexually derogatory comment.' And that is rampant in our society. Whole TV shows are based on this type of speech. "*Let no one deceive you with empty words*" could be a reference to unbelievers telling us 'Oh, its not that bad. Everyone does it.' Well no, not everyone does it and just because most do [remember the days are evil] doesn't mean it's right.

But now you are "light". Jesus said this too. We are light and salt. What does light do?

Now we're called to expose the darkness (vv.8b-14)

V.11 commands us not to participate in evil but to expose it. How do we do that?

Let our light shine (vv.8b-10)

Since we are 'light' when we live in obedience to God's Word its evident. When you enter a dark room and flip on a light, what happens to the darkness? It's no longer visible. The light overpowers it. Light exposes darkness. Paul here tells us to "live in the light". 'Live' is literally 'walk'. Walk refers to our everyday coming and going. Every step we take, every place we go can make a difference in the darkness around us. The 'fruit of light'; fruit is the evidence of internal, unseen growth. When we're walking with God, goodness, righteousness and truth will show in our life. We'll do the right thing according to God. We'll treat people well, doing good to and for them. We will speak truth into their lives and show them they are valued and at the same time their need for Christ. This pleases God (v.10).

We also expose the darkness by

Refusing to fellowship with darkness (vv.11-14)

¹¹ Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them. ¹² For it is shameful even to mention what the disobedient do in secret. ¹³ But everything exposed by the light becomes visible, ¹⁴ for it is light that makes everything visible. This is why it is said: "Wake up, O sleeper, rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you."

"Have nothing to do with" is literally, 'Don't have fellowship with'. That doesn't mean don't interact and communicate with unsaved people. 'Fellowship' means shared common bond. We have fellowship with believers because we share the common bond of faith in Christ and the Holy Spirit. 'Have nothing to do with' means don't partner with people in sinful behaviour. That makes it look like you and I belong with them. Obviously, some believers in Paul's day – as some are in our day – were making poor choices. The commands here are stated in the Greek 'Put a stop being partners with darkness' (v.7) contrasted with v.8 'Start walking in the light'. And again in v. 11 'Stop being involved in the fruitless deeds of darkness now' but instead start exposing them now.'

That's a clear command and application. If you are involved in sinful behaviour that makes it look like you are living in darkness, stop doing it. How? By starting to do the things God wants you to. You can never just stop a sinful habit. You must replace it with its counterpart, God-honouring spiritual habit. Knowing this 'stop' and 'start' language can help us understand v.14. V. 14 is not an Old Testament quote. It was a saying or even a song in Paul's day that either referred to the believer to stop doing sinful dead' things (asleep) and wake up and do the right things or by the believer letting his/her light shine, those spiritually dead (asleep) will rise and come to faith in Christ.

Paul moves now to the more positive side of spiritual activity that will help stop the momentary associations with the evil culture around us. The best way we can buy back evil days is to

Live Like Jesus Has Already Defeated Evil **(5:15-21)**

Which of course He has.

¹⁵ Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise, ¹⁶ making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil. ¹⁷ Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord's will is.

A quick reminder about how not to live and then he emphasizes us to live wisely. And wise living is to follow God's will. But too often God's people are looking for God's will outside of Scripture. As if its some mythical thing that falls from the sky and tells you where to go and what to do. While God directs us at times and answers prayer about His directional will in our lives, He already told us His moral will. Live wisely. V.10, live to please the Lord. V. 11 have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of the darkness. In other words, to do God's will is to

Believe and obey God's Word (v.15)

That's what wisdom is. Solomon defined wisdom in Prov. 1:7 as

⁷ *The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and discipline.*

Wisdom, discipline and knowledge are all synonymous here. Believing the knowledge of God found in His Word. To live above evil we need to remember we are already conquerors in Christ. Jesus defeated Satan at the cross. Heb. 2:14-15

¹⁴ *Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil—¹⁵ and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death.*

Satan and evil no longer have power over us. We give them power when we fall into sin. We have to remind ourselves of truths like this when the evil around us seems overwhelming. But remember what Jesus said when He taught about final judgment concerning the sheep (disciples) and goats (non-believers). He said in Matt. 25:41,

⁴¹ *“Then he will say to those on his left, ‘Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.*

And we're given a snapshot of that into the future when John is told in Rev. 20:

¹⁰ *And the devil, who deceived them, was thrown into the lake of burning sulfur, where the beast and the false prophet had been thrown. They will be tormented day and night for ever and ever.*

So we can believe and live by the Word of God because it is true. If it's true about the future – based on what Christ did in the past [died for our sins, rose from the dead] – then its true about the present. Any command He gives us now is to be obeyed because it will strengthen us and give us greater joy than any sin could temporarily give us. This is what Paul means in v.16,

¹⁶ making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil. ¹⁷ Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord's will is.

Some of our translations say 'redeem the time'. That's the literal reading which is helpful to understand here. The days are evil because Satan is leading the world in sin and darkness. But we are victors and already know Satan and evil are defeated and await a future in pain and torment. When he sees redeem the time he means

Make today (or moments during today) a spiritual victory (vv.16-17)

There are two main Greek words for time. Chronos means a long period of time, Kairos means the time in front of us. This present moment, or today or season. 'Redeem' means to buy back

something that's enslaved. When we obey God and live for Him and stand up to the darkness around us, we redeem this moment for God. What would have been a sinful experience turns into an opportunity for God to be glorified. An example:

You're at work, maybe on your break or maybe you're at a family gathering and you're the only or one of the few believers there. Somebody tells an immoral joke or story or makes a rude comment. Many laugh. You don't. People notice. They stop saying those things or apologize. What just happened? You redeemed a sinful moment and made people aware that you choose to live for God and that these things are not beneficial.

You're talking with a friend. They tell you they are worried about a situation in their life. You tell them you are going to pray for them or maybe you do right there. You just redeemed a hopeless moment/situation and gave someone a direction for hope. God. We buy back hopeless, sin-filled moments or opportunities in the course of our day and expose the darkness of fear, sin and hopelessness by pointing people to God through our words or actions.

Or you simply choose to do something spiritually edifying (read, pray, visit, call someone) rather than veg in front of a screen.

Maybe you're thinking, *"I don't do very well at that stuff. I miss so many opportunities or I let fear of what they'll think or say prevent me from saying something for Jesus."* So how do we make the most of those opportunities and redeem that moment from darkness for God?

In the power of the Spirit (vv.18-21)

¹⁸ Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit. ¹⁹ Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord, ²⁰ always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. ²¹ Submit[ting] to one another out of reverence for Christ.

Here again we see Paul's dual command of don't do this but do this instead. The former will help us understand the latter. And the first part is our part and the second part is God's part. So 'do not get drunk with wine' isn't necessarily only about drinking. Because my guess is, this isn't a problem for most of us. But, like we saw last week in Prov. 31, what does alcohol do? Desensitizes us. We talked how our entertainment choices can desensitize us to seeing the work of God around us. So Paul here is saying, don't let anything control and thus desensitize your mind so that you won't sense the Spirit of God wanting to fill your mind with the way God thinks. Be filled with the Spirit is in the passive sense. That means it's not something we do, it's something done to us, obviously by God.

The Spirit already dwells in us because we were sealed with Him at salvation (1:13-14). But we don't always allow Him to control the way we think or act. When we obey God's Word and get rid of sinful habits our minds and hearts are filled with joy in God resulting in

Transforming our relationships (vv.19-20)

Being filled with the Spirit means the Spirit is in control and we worship and grow together. Why are these people singing songs to each other? Because music was and still is used for worship but also for teaching truth. There weren't only three kinds of songs in that day but rather it's a poetic way of saying all kinds of Spirit-led and Spirit-infused songs. Speaking and singing and submitting are not separate commands but the predictable result of what happens when we allow the Spirit to guide

our lives through the truth of God's Word. We are worshipping, thankful growing people together as a body.

We see it in our transforming relationships ...

And our attitudes (v.21)

"Submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ". Every believer has the presence of Jesus with them. Each one of us are called to love and serve the other. V. 21 acts as a segue for Paul as he now talks about how being filled by the Spirit results in serving our spouses, children/parents and our employers and employees.

Yes, we live while the prince of the air has a strong foothold in this world. Evil abounds but evil doesn't win. God has secured the victory of the world and Jesus' kingdom will be established once and for all on this earth. We will serve with Him and enjoy in eternity a sinless, enemyless, perfect world where no pain or persecution will ever happen again. That should embolden us now to be Jesus' light when the opportunity arises for us to show how Jesus has changed us or to proclaim Jesus' Name or God's truth in the face of evil.

1 John 5:18 We know that anyone born of God does not continue to sin; the One who was born of God keeps them safe, and the evil one cannot harm them. ¹⁹ We know that we are children of God, and that the whole world is under the control of the evil one. ²⁰ We know also that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding, so that we may know him who is true. And we are in him who is true by being in his Son Jesus Christ. He is the true God and eternal life.

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If you have any comments or questions about this message please contact us at olivvet@rideau.net