

REDEEMING THE TIME

...Ephesians 5:15-17 says, "Not as unwise, but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is." The best way to redeem the time is to follow a schedule. If a person desires to obtain the most benefit from his education, he needs to follow a schedule so that time is not wasted. As human history developed, an educational system also was developed, beginning with kindergarten and advancing through elementary school, junior high school, high school, college, and graduate school. Every country in the world, almost without exception, follows such a system, because through experience this system has been proven to be effective.

Private education in China in the past typically involved one person teaching a group of children to recite ancient literature. There was not much educational advancement with this method because the classes consisted primarily of memorization, recitation, and some writing. However, educational methods have changed, and now most countries follow a schedule that goes from kindergarten to graduate school. This system helps to redeem the time. Without this system, a person could be in school for many years and not advance very much.

In the past twenty-eight years we have been speaking of truth and life in a general way, yet even now many people cannot speak some basic truths. This shows that our way needs to be improved. Over three thousand "students" have been meeting several times a week, but when they speak on the essential Spirit, the economical Spirit, the cross, and the breaking of the flesh, it is as if they are like the students who recite ancient literature. After twenty-eight years I am concerned that we do not have many elementary school graduates, much less university graduates. An elementary school graduate at least understands some basic arithmetic, but many saints among us cannot speak even a basic word on the truth of justification, sanctification, or redemption. This shows that our time needs to be redeemed by using a schedule.

INCLUDING A SCHEDULE IN A PROPER PLAN

Some sisters are housewives, and after seeing their children off to school and their husbands off to work, their main responsibilities relate to household matters. If these sisters do not have a schedule to complete the things that need to be done during the day, they can easily waste time and accomplish nothing. Similarly, it is difficult to read the Bible consistently without a schedule. Even though we love the Lord very much, there are only twenty-four hours in a day. If we are busy with other things and do not have a scheduled time to read the Bible, we will not be able to find the time to read the Bible. If we love

the Lord, we should live to the Lord by making a schedule; otherwise, our day will pass by in a flash, and before the Lord, we will regret our failure to redeem the time.

We must consider our physical condition when we set up a schedule for work and rest. If a person is not healthy, he must care for his body for the Lord's sake and set aside sufficient time for rest. Then everything else that needs to be done in a day should be included in a schedule, including reading newspapers. In this way we will have time to read the Bible, pray, and serve the Lord. Without a schedule we will read the Bible unceasingly when we are happy and put the Bible aside when we are not happy. It is difficult to work with a person who is controlled by his moods rather than a schedule, and even his completed work is not helpful because it has been done improperly. A person who cannot get things done properly cannot serve the Lord.

When I first began to serve the Lord, I was very busy and I frequently received letters. However, I often had little time to reply because I did not know how to arrange my time. When I was able to reply, I would begin by apologizing for not writing sooner. At first my conscience was not bothered by this, but the more I repeated this excuse, the more my conscience was bothered. One day I asked myself, "Were you really busy, or did you just not arrange your time well? If you were 'busy' only because you did not manage your time, you are lying." After this, whenever I was late in replying to a letter, I could only say, "I am sorry for not replying until now." Even though this was an honest word, I still was not truly peaceful because a late reply is never good. This is an example of our need to schedule everything in a proper way.

I believe many saints have had similar experiences. For example, if we decide to read a certain number of chapters in the Bible every day, but do not set a schedule, we will soon stop reading the Bible. Although we can excuse ourselves by saying that we have been busy, the real reason is that we have not set a schedule to manage our time. When we have a schedule, there will always be time to read the Bible.

Often we see sisters running to the meeting in a rush because they love the Lord and do not want to be late. But since they love the Lord, they should not waste time, and then there would be no need to rush. They rush to a meeting because they have no schedule, and then they linger long after a meeting because they have no schedule. This shows our need to redeem the time according to Ephesians 5:16. Redeeming the time involves scheduling our time. We need to consider our use of time and make a schedule; otherwise, we will lose many opportunities to redeem the time. A schedule enables us to seize our time and redeem it.

Schools set a schedule and have a system so that students will not waste time. A school schedule involves the number of days in a week, semester, and year; the number of hours per day and the length of time for each course, which is usually fifty minutes with a ten minute break between classes for each course; and the number of hours required for study at home. All students are given this schedule and are expected to follow it. They cannot come to school late simply because they had only a few hours of sleep; they must get up at six o'clock every morning, arrive at school by seven-thirty, and begin classes exactly at eight o'clock. By following this schedule day after day, week after week, they gradually learn. Thus, they learn to redeem the time.

Many young people can follow a schedule when they are in school, but once they graduate, they become loose. I know of a young sister who kept a schedule quite diligently when she was in school, but after graduation she was unable to get out of bed to go to the meetings. During winter and summer breaks many students do not rest according to a schedule; as a result, time flies away. If we truly love the Lord, we must have a plan and a schedule for our time.

GOD'S CREATION BEING ACCORDING TO A SCHEDULE

God's creation is based on a schedule. The phrase *there was evening and there was morning* is used repeatedly in the record of God's creation (Gen. 1:5, 8, 13, 19, 23, 31). This refers to a schedule in God's creation. God did not use His almighty power as an excuse to not keep a schedule. God did not create the heavens and the earth and then relax and wait for a good mood to create the animals. If God's creation occurred in such a casual manner, how many days would it have taken Him to create all things?

If we read the Bible carefully, we will acknowledge that the first One who kept a schedule was our God. He is the almighty One, but He is not loose or careless in regard to time. He created according to a precise schedule of six days; moreover, these days were evenly divided into evening and morning. Every evening includes twelve hours, and every morning includes twelve hours. God's work of creation was done according to a schedule.

Our efforts to keep a schedule cannot match God's ability, because He is able to "redeem" every second. One of the primary requirements of the training is that people would be in their seats five minutes prior to the scheduled time of a meeting. This speaks of our need to keep a scheduled time. Some people think that it is easy to arrive on time, but this is not the case. Although we desire to arrive five minutes early for the meeting on the Lord's Day, we often arrive

late. The training surely has helped because often fewer than twenty, and sometimes no one, arrive late to a meeting now. The trainees are not late because they must follow the training's schedule, not their own schedule. If a trainee was able to set his own schedule, he would change the meeting time from nine o'clock in the morning to ten o'clock in the morning so that he could sleep longer. The training also set a rule that whoever arrives late three times will be dismissed automatically. Therefore, all the participants in the training dare not arrive late; they come to meetings in fear and trembling. Even traffic conditions are not an excuse for arriving late. Even though it takes thirty minutes to get to the meeting under normal traffic conditions, there is always the possibility of encountering a traffic jam. Thus, the trainees learn to leave their homes earlier in case they encounter a traffic jam. There is a need for guidelines and limitations because our human nature is so degraded. A schedule provides us with some of these needed guidelines.

God relied upon a schedule in His creation, and even the things He created follow a schedule. For example, human beings are born after nine months of pregnancy according to a schedule, and the harvesting of fruit is according to a schedule. These schedules are set by God. He does not allow freedom to produce chaos. The universe exists because God's creation operates according to a schedule. If the earth did not orbit the sun according to a set schedule, it would be impossible to sustain life on earth. The universe has order because God has set a schedule. We are God's children, and as imitators of God (Eph. 5:1), we should have a schedule related to all matters. Without a schedule, time slips away. In order to redeem the time, we must have a schedule.

Young people often work unceasingly without rest, but when they are finished with their work, they want to sleep unceasingly. Such a pattern of work will not lead to success. People who are successful schedule their time for working, eating, exercising, and resting. It is the same with spiritual matters. We need to read a set number of chapters or verses in the Bible at a set time in order to maintain this necessary spiritual practice. We should not read a large number of chapters when we are happy but nothing at all when we are unhappy.

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