

“Redeeming the Time”-An Essay on the Pastor’s Stewardship of Time

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Foreword

Time is immensely valuable and utterly irretrievable. Without doubt, it is one of the most valuable commodities we have. No one has more or less time than you and I. To each of us is given the 1440 minutes per day and the 168 hours per week. This is true whether we are laborer, homemaker, farmer, or preacher. But there is an urgency attached to time. Our Lord Christ felt it when he said, “I must work the works of Him that sent me while it is day, the night cometh when no man can work” (John 9:4). In regard to this same thought, someone has said, “We shall have all eternity to celebrate our own victories, but we have only one short hour before the sunset in which to win them.” That “one short hour” is the time of grace our heavenly Father has allotted to us. It is totally perishable. The only variable available to us is the use that we make of our finite supply of time.

Time is but a measurement - a dimension. Thus it, per se, can scarcely be our problem. When we look into the matter of time and its management, all roads ultimately lead back to ourselves. We need to be about the business of ‘redeeming the time’ as Saint Paul writes to the Colossians. If we examine this passage more closely we find that the root word for “redeem” is *agora*, which is a ‘market’. The verb *agorazo* is that activity of the market place, namely, ‘to buy.’ Saint Paul uses this word relative to our ‘being bought’ in the sense of our redemption. When the prefix *ek* is added to the word, the meaning actually remains the same, but the emphasis shifts to the thought of freedom from that which formerly held that which was bought. It can also mean an ‘intensive buying’, i.e., a buying which exhausts the possibilities available. This is the way the word is used here in Colossians 4:5. It refers to the opportunities offered by time. These are to be tirelessly snapped up and used at the expense of effort. The word for ‘time’ means a “fit” or “critical” time, a “season” or “an opportunity.” It is generally a reference to time that is limited or defined. Hence, to ‘redeem the time’ simply intensifies the fact that we need to “work the works of Him that sent” us, while it is day. We need to grab every opportunity of time available to us.

Why is there such an emphasis on time? The answer is simple. As time passes, more and more souls are slipping into eternity. “It is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the Judgement” (Heb.9:27). Unfortunately most of them are passing into a state of horror and terror in eternal damnation. “For wide is the gate, and broad is the way that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat” (Matt.7:13). This is unfortunate because there is a way to escape for everyone. The way is through repentance and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. To ‘redeem the time’ in connection with this thought, we must seize every chance afforded to warn the world-of the doom that is to come and to point to Jesus Christ as the only source of hope.

The Lord also instructs us in 1 Corinthians 4:1, “Let a man so account of us, as of the ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God.” This is really a call to excellence. There is no higher standard of performance than that something should be done in the name of Jesus. And yet we must admit that there are large segments of our life where this is not our experience. What is the answer? How can we as Christians ‘redeem the time’ and do so according to the standard of excellence set before us?

The answer to these questions is found in the same place that that standard itself is set forth, the Word of God. What we propose to do in this paper, then, is search the Word of God for His direction for us in “Redeeming the time”, so that we may be found of Him “working-the works of Him that sent” us.

The thought that first comes to mind is that the proper use of time finally boils down to the efficient scheduling of the time available. This is perhaps what some of you envisioned this paper to be about. When is the best time of the day or week to hold the adult instruction class? What portion of time should be allocated for home visitation of the members? - for confirmation instruction, for new comer visitation, for shut-in calls, what time for Guild meetings, boys club, girls club, men’s club, etc?

But as was stated above, we want to look at these questions in the light of the sacred Scriptures. And the first passage that presents itself is Acts 6:2-4. There we find that the apostles were faced with basically the same

question. How should they divide their time to get everything in? The conclusion they arrived at was that there was a good amount of work which was necessary but it was not necessary for them to do personally. There were tasks that others could do just as effectively, which if they were to become involved in them, would only rob them of time they could use more profitably. This is the point they are making when they say, "It is not reason that we should leave the Word of God, and serve tables."

There is this danger for us also. We can get ourselves so involved and become so busy that we simply don't have any time left for personal study, for our family, or for rest and relaxation. We can get ourselves so busy that we don't even realize our time could be used differently. And perhaps just as much to the point - how many of us have not felt guilty because we were not out 'doing' something rather than sitting in our study catching up on our reading or taking a few hours to spend with our families?

What we should learn from the passage referred to above is that there are a few things which must be put at the top of the list of 'things to do.' The apostles speak of two priorities.. "But we will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the Word."

Our first responsibility in the ministry is the souls God places in our care. But how are we going to properly exercise this responsibility if we don't first commit ourselves and them to God in prayer? How shall we effectively serve them if we do not lead them into the Truth of God's Word? And how can we effectively lead them in God's Word, if we are not at home in it ourselves and if we have not committed our whole ministry of the Word, as well as the individual application of it, to God in prayer? President Naumann understood this concept of first importance. At the conclusion of assignment of the seniors and vicars, he addressed the student body in the Seminary dining room and he told us who were being assigned that many of our calls involved new fields which would require a tremendous amount of work, But then he added that we would have to "steal time" in our daily schedules, for our personal study of the Word. The implication was that if we failed to do this our ministry would be lacking in power and vitality. Let us then, as far as this paper is concerned, put first things first and consider what God's Word has to say about our study of Scriptures.

Study

"A workman that needeth not be ashamed"

The general instruction given to all Christians is to "continue in my Word." This, of course, is a reference to the fact that Christians who love the Lord also love His Word and demonstrate such love by their 'activity' in His Word. Jesus Himself said, "They that are of God hear God's Word." In Colossians 3:16, Saint Paul instructs us, "Let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord." Hence, our continuing in the Word should not be a casual or haphazard exercise. The word 'dwell' means to inhabit. The Word of Christ is to inhabit us as though we were its home. To this thought is added the word 'richly,' which intensifies the meaning of the word 'dwell.' Consequently, what Paul is saying is that the Word of Christ is to inhabit us in every way. It is to dwell in every part of us filling us with its blessings. In order for this to take place, our use of the Word will have to be frequent, regular, and in depth.

To this general instruction to all Christians now let us add some of the thoughts that are specifically directed to the ministry. Here we would quite naturally turn to the qualifications of the office of the ministry as in 1 Timothy 3:1-13 and Titus 1:6-11. It is not our purpose to consider all of these qualifications that God has set forth in these verses. We want to concentrate on just one of them, which Paul refers to in 1 Timothy 3:2 and repeats in 2 Timothy 2:24. This particular qualification has a direct bearing on the subject before us. The Apostle states that the servant of the Lord must be "apt to teach."

Writing on this qualification, Pastor Silas Krueger in a paper titled *The Teacher as Student* states the following: "Both the *New American Standard Bible* and the *New International Version* render this phrase as

“able to teach.” While such translations might have a more current ring to them, they do not appreciably increase our understanding of Paul’s meaning. Telling us that we must be ‘able to teach’ does not also inform us regarding what constitutes such aptitude. It will be necessary, therefore, to delve into the meaning of the Greek of these texts.

In the Greek there is only one word for our English, three-word phrase, “Apt to teach.” The Greek word is *didaktikos*, which in New Testament writings appears only in these two verses of Paul’s letters to Timothy. When we look into extra-biblical literature from the same period, we find that only Philo uses this word. Thus we have to spend a little time going back into the linguistic history of *didaktikos* in order to arrive at a precise understanding of the meaning.

Didaktikos comes from *didasko*, a word which is rather consistently translated “teach” in both New Testament and classical literature. *Didasko*, in turn, is commonly thought to come from the time of Homer and derives from the root, *da(s)*, which had the dual meaning of “to teach” and “to learn.” This root denotes teaching or instructing in the widest sense, whether the point is in the imparting of information, the passing on of knowledge, or the acquiring of skills. What is especially important for the subject we are considering is that the root word calls attention to two different but closely related aspects of education! The word *da(s)* refers to the knowledge possessed by the instructor as well as to the insight gained by the person instructed. In other words, being able to teach presupposes that the teacher is one who is able to learn himself, before he passes his learning on to others.

In 1 Timothy 4:13, Saint Paul encourages his young colleague to “give attendance to reading.” In Greek this exhortation reads, *proseche to anagnosei*. The word *anagnosei* has behind it the basic meaning of “knowing exactly” or “recognizing.” Then as the word developed in its meaning it was used in reference to “learning through reading” or simply “reading.” In the New Testament usage it is most often a reference to public reading relative to the public reading of the Scriptures in the worship service. Reference is made to this practice in Luke 4:16-30 where Jesus attended worship services in His home city of Nazareth. From what we learn in this account an explanation and application accompanied the reading of the Scriptures. This is supported by the practice noted in Acts 13:15 where Paul is asked to give a “word of exhortation for the people,” following the reading of the Scriptures by the ruler of the synagogue in Antioch in Pisidia. Again quoting Pastor Krueger, “From this it should be apparent what Paul has in mind when he counsels his partner in the ministry to ‘give attendance to reading’. He who would be a teacher of others in God’s kingdom must first of all be a student of God’s Word himself. He is to be an individual who has learned the message of the Gospel from his own study of that Word of Truth; and, having demonstrated his ability to learn that message for himself, he is then able to share its meaning with others.

Let us not think for a moment that there can be anything superficial or perfunctory about the way in which a teacher fulfills this requirement of the ministry. Paul shows that our concern with the study of the Word is an on-going, never-ending concern. When the apostle exhorts Timothy to ‘give attendance to reading,’ he uses the present imperative tense. This denotes a progressive, continuing action, an action which can never be considered completed as long as the minister is laboring-in the work of the ministry. As long as we ministers live, we are to live as students of God’s Word.”

Why do we put-so much stress on the study of God’s Word when we are directing our attention to the concept of a pastor’s use of time? This should become clear from the reminder that Paul gave to Timothy when he said, “study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the Word of Truth.” (2 Timothy 2:15) “Approved unto God.” There is no higher desire than to be pronounced acceptable by the One who has called us into His service. It is His judgment of our performance that is all that will matter in the final analysis. If, therefore, we are going to use our time wisely, it will be in pursuit of being “approved unto God.” But how do we show ourselves “approved unto God”? How do we become workmen who “needeth not be ashamed”? The answer that Saint Paul gives is by “rightly dividing the Word of Truth.”

There are two popular interpretations of the origin of this expression, “rightly dividing.” The Greek word is *orthotomeo*. Literally this means to “cut rightly.” Some linguists say that this word can be traced back

to agriculture or some of the other trades. In this sense it referred to plowing a straight furrow, hewing square stones, or laying out a direct (straight) road. Accepting this explanation, Paul's meaning is that Timothy is to spend his time studying the Word of Truth as his one and only source of direction for faith and life. He is not, as so many around him (cf. 2 Tim 1:15; 2:4,14), to wander down the seemingly pleasant but really irrelevant bypaths of contemporary heresies.

Others feel that Paul is employing a Jewish liturgical term and is taking as his point of reference the proper "cutting" of the sacrificial animals. Apparently there was someone responsible to see that the animals of sacrifice were cut up properly to insure that each part was correctly apportioned either to be offered on the altar as a sacrifice or to be eaten by the priests as part of their allotment. If this is what Paul is referring to, then Paul is telling Timothy to use the proper portion of Scripture in dealing with his members. He is to know the Word so well that he can offer God's truth as the needs of the person with whom he is dealing dictate. Pastor Krueger sums up these two explanations by saying, "Perhaps it is best to use both possible explanations to enlighten our understanding of this passage; we, as teachers, are to go directly to God's Word and are to make that our only source of faith and life. We are not to be turned aside by whatever is religiously popular or appealing for the moment, but are to dig deeply into the Bible as the one way of knowing the true God and what He asks of us. In addition, we are to be so conversant with and at home in the Word that we can offer each who comes before us the particular portion of Scripture that his spiritual condition requires. Some may need the sharpness of the Law, while others may need the sweetness of the Gospel; one party may require a stern rebuke to turn him to repentance, while another may need an evangelical word of encouragement; this person may hunger for comfort and consolation, and that one may desire guidance and strengthening. But whatever the individual needs are, we should go straight to the Word of Truth and fill the various needs of those committed to us."

This fits right in with the Great Commission, doesn't it? We are to "go and preach the Gospel to every creature," to "teach all nations ...all things whatsoever I have commanded you." This is an awesome responsibility. Regardless how well we manage our time as far as scheduling is concerned, keeping all our appointments, seeing everyone we planned on seeing, not missing any of our classes - if we do all these things and yet fail to rightly divide the Word of Truth, we have not made use of the opportunities presented to us and we have not "redeemed the time." We have not done what Saint Paul exhorted the elders of Ephesus to do, "Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock over that which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God which He hath purchased with His own blood."

When the price paid for each soul is considered, the imperative to deal as wisely and effectively with each one stands before us in bold relief. The precious blood of Jesus Christ has cleansed all people from their sins. The universal will of God for all men is that He will "have all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the Truth." The individual becomes the recipient of these blessings of redemption when he personally is led to faith. The means by which this is done is, of course, the Gospel and the Holy Spirit's operation through it. But it is not at all true that since the Spirit is the One through whom faith is instilled and preserved, that we are therefore excused from responsibility. Just look at what Jesus says in John 15:26-27, "When the Counselor comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father, He will testify about me; but you also must testify, for you have been with me from the beginning." (NIV) We also are to testify, but what shall we say? Under what circumstances shall we speak and when shall we remain silent? The direction the Master Shepherd Himself gives is for us to go to his Word. As we direct God's people to His Word for strength, comfort, and peace, so we are also directed to the Word for our wisdom, strength, comfort, and peace in exercising the office to which He has called us. Jesus promises that if we "continue in His Word," we shall "know the Truth." Thus we concur when Parker says, "Not that the Spirit's presence in men's hearts makes patient study of the text unnecessary. The Spirit is not given to make Bible study needless, but to make it effective."

This is the case because through the Word the Holy Spirit will make us fit to carry out the responsibilities of our office. God has always done this. He always gives the gifts necessary for the task that He

assigns. Take the building of the ark of the covenant as an example. We read in Exodus 31:2-6, “See I have called by name Bezaleel the son of Uri, the son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah; and I have filled him with the spirit of God, in wisdom, and in understanding, and in knowledge, and in all manner of workmanship, to devise cunning works, to work in gold and in silver, and in brass, and in cutting of stones., to set them and in carving of timber, to work in all manner of workmanship. And I, behold, I have given with him Aholiab, the son of Ahisamach, of the tribe of Dan: and in the hearts of all that are wise hearted I have put wisdom, that they may make all that I have commanded thee.” God had the men ready for the task. So it was also in the preparation of Moses as leader of Israel. So He prepared His apostles, the Reformers, our fathers, and today the lot falls to us.

Although historical and systematic presentations of God’s truth have been necessary in every age, it is also true that each generation must really write its own summa. We can understand why this is so if we consider a subject such as dogmatics in its historical perspective. When the fathers wrote the confessions contained in *The Formula of Concord* or when men such as Francis Pieper put together their *Christian Dogmatics*, they did so in response to an urgent need in their time. There were issues both inside the church and without that had to be met, examined and evaluated in the light of the Bible. These were burning questions that demanded biblical answers, and it was in the heat of those questions that our dogmaticians labored to find God’s own answers for His puzzled people. In short, dogmatics in its historical context is the living, vital, and urgent application of the Word of God to the pressing issues of the day. It is imperative that we become dogmaticians as the fathers did - by studying the Scriptures first-hand. Perhaps the difference between being a student of dogmatics and a student of God’s Word can best be illustrated by referring to the life of Luther. There was a man who was truly on the firing line. He was under attack constantly from “the devil, the world, and his flesh.” As a result, he was ‘forced’, in his own words, to go into the Scriptures and to go through a close study of God’s Word. Then, after Luther was endued with both the thought and spirit of the Bible, God used him to gather or to supervise the gathering of the various doctrines of the Bible in a systematic presentation.

It is most urgent that we do not confuse reading about Scripture with delving into Scripture. The history of the Church clearly shows that a Church body becomes susceptible to aberrations in doctrine when its leaders fail to be real students of God’s Word. When God’s Word is no longer the dynamic, life-giving, first-hand source of truth for those called to teach the truth, those teachers will search for their ‘life’ in man-made perversions of the truth. (Krueger) It should be significant for those of us who sat at the feet of Professor Meyer that the reason he always gave for not writing a dogmatics text was that he wanted the succeeding generation quoting the Bible and not Meyer. Church bodies which have fallen into error did not do so suddenly in mass, The Spirit deals with each and every one of us on an individual basis. And false teachings have come into these church bodies, which have strayed from the Truth, by way of individuals; for so the devil operates.

It would be very easy for us to draw the conclusion that these injunctions of the Word which we have considered, while very much in place, are already being heeded by us. After all, most of us attended Sunday School and Christian Day School, Lutheran High School, Northwestern College, and the Seminary. In addition, we regularly dip into the Word for our sermon preparation, Bible class study and our instruction classes. We may even have been assigned a conference paper which required us to search the Scripture apart from our daily routine. Finally, we can also find a good bit of comfort in the fact that we are laboring in a church body that has its anchor solidly set in the Word of God. But just think back for a moment. Has our use of the Scripture involved the kind of careful study that Paul directs us to with the injunction, “Study to show thyself approved of God”? Of all that training we have had, how much has been exegetical? Though we have had some work in exegetical study, in most instances we have been taught the skills of study and been given the background so that once we were called into the work of the ministry we might be able to be good students of God’s Word.

“Therefore, the call is: Watch, study, *attende lectioni* (attend to reading). In truth, you cannot read too much in Scripture; and what you read you cannot read too carefully, and what you read carefully you cannot understand too well, and what you understand well you cannot teach too well, and what you teach well you cannot live too well, *Experto crede Ruperto* (Believe a man who has found this out). It is the devil, it is the world, it is our flesh that are raging and raving against us. Therefore, dear sirs, and brethren, pastors and

preachers, pray, read, study, be diligent. Truly, this evil, shameful time is not the season for being lazy, for sleeping and snoring. Use the gift that has been entrusted to you, and reveal the mystery of Christ.” (Luther #3547)

Let us now look at an example of this from the Bible itself. First let us see what Christ’s attitude was about the Scripture. In John 7:16 we read, “Jesus answered them and said, My doctrine is not mine, but His that sent me.” In the 12th chapter, verse 49-50, Jesus says, “For I have not spoken of myself; but the Father which sent me, he gave me a commandment, what I should say, and what I should speak. And I know that his commandment is life everlasting whatsoever I speak therefore, even as the Father said unto me, so I speak.” Jesus here sets the example for us of the authority of the Scripture as the final and only rule and norm for faith and life. When He said, “it is written”, that was final. There is no appeal against Scripture, for “the Scripture cannot be broken.”

Now what about the spiritual leaders of Jesus’ time, the interpreters of the law? Jesus constantly upbraids them for their ignorance and neglect of the Word; “Are ye not in err, because ye know not the Scriptures, neither the power of God”, Mark 12:24; “have ye not read what David did ... or have ye not read in the law how that on the sabbath...”, Matthew 12:3,5; “but go and learn what this means...”, Matthew 9:12. R.V.G. Tasker in *The Old Testament in the New Testament*, page 32 says, “Our Lord came into conflict with the Pharisees not because He was opposed to the written word of the Law, to which both He and they appealed, but because in His judgment the formalism and the casuistry of the legal system which the Pharisees had superimposed upon the Law rendered them insensitive to the living Word of God; ...What roused His antagonism were such things as the casuistry which justified the practice of *Corban*; the false deduction that the command to love one’s neighbor implied that one should hate one’s enemies; the limiting of the divine prohibition of murder and adultery to the specific acts of murder and adultery; the assumption that the only oaths which need to be taken seriously were those made by the actual use of the divine name; and the extension of the exception clause in the law of divorce so as to permit divorce for ‘any cause whatever’.” Jesus on the other hand made it clear by word and deed that His purpose was in no way one of setting aside the law, “think not that I am come to destroy the law”... “Verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled.” Matthew 5:18. Any criticism of Christ to the contrary or of His disciples, for that matter, simply shows a poverty of understanding. From their criticism of Christ and His disciples and from the things listed above, it is evident that the spiritual leaders of Jesus’ day were by no means theological giants. The reason for this Jesus Himself points to as an ignorance of the Word. Oh, not that they could not recite it, but they had very limited understanding of it.

Perhaps the greatest danger for us as individuals and as a church is to think that we are secure from such a thing ever happening to us as it happened to the Scribes and Pharisees. The church is always under attack from the devil and his forces, Satan is always “walking about seeking whom he may devour.” This is why God has given us so many warnings to “watch and pray”, to “be sober, be vigilant” and to be always combat-ready in the full armor of God. Jesus said to His disciples, “I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves: be ye therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves” Matthew 10:16. This wisdom that is so vitally necessary for us to deal with the issues of life is the wisdom of the cross. It is a wisdom that does not come to us naturally, but that is a gift of the Holy Spirit presented to us through the study of the Bible. It is a wisdom that appears foolish to the sin-darkened mind, but it is wisdom indeed. It is the wisdom of God and with this message of the cross God builds and sustains His church.. Saint Paul says that it is, “The power of God unto salvation unto everyone that believeth.” In Ephesians he says that Christ is building His church on the foundation of the Apostles and prophets with Himself (Christ) as the Chief Cornerstone, and Jesus forever bound His church to the Word as the means of grace when He prayed in His High Priestly prayer, “Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word” John 17:20.

It becomes apparent then that we will want to live our lives according to the exhortation of Saint Peter, “If any man speak, let him speak as the oracle of God” (1 Peter 4:11). This, of course, dictates a study of God’s Word. No one can speak as the oracle of God unless he first goes to the Scriptures himself as a student of the

Word. This study of the Word of God is a very prime, integral part of our calling as “Stewards of the mysteries of God.” It is important for us to be reminded that the same Spirit who works in the hearts of our members works in our hearts also by means of the same Word. As a result, the time spent in study is time well spent. It is profitable in that it builds us up in the faith and gives us understanding. It equips us to carry out the responsibilities of our calling. Without this stewardship of time for study in its proper priority the rest of our ministry will be weak and anemic at best. Furthermore, it is through the study of the Scriptures that we receive the knowledge and ability to divide the rest of our time so that we make the best use of it in seizing every opportunity to “redeem the time.”

Prayer **“The Christian’s Vital Breath”**

Looking back to Acts 6:4, we note that the second emphasis on the use of our time rests on prayer. Are you familiar with the expression, “we can always pray!” The implication is that when we have tried everything else that comes to mind, when we have exhausted all other alternatives, then as a last resort we can turn to prayer. This attitude and practice is certainly not in keeping with what we find in the Scriptures. There is no passage that presents God responding to prayer by saying, “Why are you always running to Me? Why don’t you use your own common sense? Put your own talents and skills to work and then if all else fails, ask Me and I will help you.” On the contrary, God pleads with us over and over again, “Come unto me...ask ... seek....knock.” This is His desire of us whether we are in need or in plenty and whether we are afflicted or strengthened. In other words, under all circumstances of life, God wants us to come before Him in prayer.

There is a definite wholesome spiritual attitude that can express itself by this practice. Whenever we come to God in prayer, it should be to worship Him as the only true God and therefore the only One to whom we can come. Our coming should also always flow from our faith and repentance, recognizing that of ourselves we are capable of nothing. Only by His grace and blessing will our efforts prove fruitful. Luther expresses this proper attitude very succinctly in his Sacristy Prayer, which most of us probably have hanging in our studies. “Only do not Thou forsake me, for if I am left to myself, I will certainly bring it all to destruction.” Without question, it was this knowledge of his own frailty that caused the Reformer to spend hours in prayer. God was for him a “refuge and strength.” It is significant also that Luther never felt this time spent in prayer was time lost. For him it was vital to wrestle with the issues of life in his daily prayers seeking God’s counsel and His comfort. For Luther, the only way to effectually use his time was to first go to God in prayer and then he could proceed in confidence that the remainder of his efforts would prove fruitful through God’s benediction. He says “Let our responsibility be merely to speak in accordance with the Word; let, it be God’s responsibility to grant the success and the increase ... Therefore, putting aside the foolish confidence as though we had some ability to help the Word along in the hearer, let us rather engage in the prayer that without us He alone may perfect in the hearer what He speaks in the teacher. For it is He who speaks, and it is He who hears and works all in all people. We are His vessels and instruments, powerless either to receive or to give unless He Himself gives and receives.” (Luther #3569) We can be led to prayer as such a cherished part of our daily activity by the same means of the Holy Spirit as was Dr. Luther.

It should be significant that not only were the patriarchs of the Bible great men of faith, they were also men who were fervent and frequent in prayer. The two go hand in hand. We will only cite a few. Abraham pleaded with the Lord for Sodom and Gomorrah bringing the needed number of believers down to ten in order to spare the cities, Jacob wrestled with God and prevailed, being blessed by Him. Moses spent 40 days and 40 nights on Sinai interceding for the idolatrous children of Israel. Samuel prayed all night over the matter of King Saul turning away from God. Many more examples could be used but let these suffice.

In light of these examples of believers in whose lives God moved mightily in response to their petitions perhaps we should question whether our ministries today are mediocre at best is simply because, “Ye have not, because ye ask not.” If this is the case, it surely is something of which we will want to repent. The almighty,

gracious God makes Himself available to us through prayer. He invites us "Ask and it shall be given you."

What

are the problems, tasks, joys, or temptations of your ministry? What area of work needs bolstering? What soul seems to be slipping clean away and we aren't getting to these things as we know we ought? God pleads with us, "seek the Lord and His strength, seek His face continually" (1 Chr. 16:11). When we view time and its opportunities in the light of consecrating it, ourselves, our tasks to God through prayer, then the truth might rudely manifest itself that we have not "redeemed the time" as we ought. We have not sought the Lord early according to the example of King David, "O God, thou art my God; early will I seek thee: my soul thirsteth for thee, my flesh longeth for thee in a dry and thirsty land, where no water is."

Surely, there is ample encouragement for us to call upon the name of the Lord in all that we do. To teach us the significance of regular prayer our Lord spoke the parable of the unmerciful judge. The persistence of the widow paid off. Even though the judge had no regard for what was right, he answered the woman simply because she kept after him. Jesus says that this should teach us, "Men ought always to pray and not to faint." When you look at the context of this statement in Luke 18:1, it becomes clear that this is a continuation of the thought in the preceding chapter. Jesus had just described a picture of man's forgetfulness of God. The Son of Man has been rejected; He has gone from view; the masses are plunged in gross worldliness; men of God are become as rare as they were in Sodom in the days of Abraham. What, then, is the position of the Church? That of a widow whose only weapon is incessant prayer! It is only by means of this intense concentration that faith will be preserved. But such is precisely the disposition which Christ fears may not be found even in the Church at His return!

To teach us that prayer ought to be made on behalf of all men, Saint Paul wrote in Ephesians. 6:18, "Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints." To Timothy he wrote, "I exhort therefore, first of all supplication, prayers and intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men." Oh, we pray for ourselves, our families, and for people at their sick bed or in our offices, but how many times don't we say that we will remember someone in our prayers and then promptly forget about it-out of sight, out of mind! Because God would have us keep bringing our people before Him in prayer, this should be part of our regular stewardship of time. One more thought should be added here. If we are not going to use the general prayer in the worship service, we should be sure that its substitute includes petitions for all men in the varying conditions and circumstances of their lives.

Finally, we who are under-shepherds ought to give careful attention to the example of the Great Shepherd, Jesus Christ. In His ministry under His heavenly Father He sets a pattern for our dedication to prayer. Prayer was an integral part of His life. We can cite the many references there are in the Gospels to the fact that Jesus prayed. He got up early in the morning and went to a solitary place and prayed (Mark 1:35, Luke 5:16). He went apart into the mountain in the evening and prayed (Mark 6:12). In Luke 6:12, we are told that He prayed all night. While on the cross in the depth of the passion He uttered three different petitions to His heavenly Father and His prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane was so intense that we are told that, "He sweat as it were great drops of blood." From these references it can be seen that prayer took a regular portion of His time and not infrequently He spent long hours in prayer. His life of prayer was of such a nature that the disciples asked Him to teach them to pray as He did. The Lord's Prayer is His answer to their request.

From the Lord's prayer, given as a model prayer, we can gather that in all those hours which He spent in communion with His heavenly Father, the concerns that He set forth were concerns relative to the kingdom, that He would continue to perfectly do the will of His Father, that His word would be heard and believed. This is emphasized again for us in the high priestly prayer He spoke on Maundy Thursday night. There are two things in this prayer that merit our emulation. The first is the concern that in all we do we bring glory to the Father. We need to see our whole life in the shadow of the cross. Every moment, thought and activity has been redeemed to God. If we are going to use it properly we will have to do so in the spirit of Luther's explanation to the Second Article. "That I might be His own and live in Him in His kingdom and serve Him in everlasting

righteousness, innocence and blessedness.” We will want to plead with the Father that He would bless our efforts in His name in order that through us He might be glorified in the world.

The second thing that is emphasized in this prayer is that we carry in our hearts the concern of the whole Christian Church. Isn't it even logical that if the focus of our work is on the salvation of souls, then we would keep asking God to hold and preserve those in the faith whom the Holy Spirit has quickened? Wouldn't we want to ask God who guides all things that He would so look upon our efforts and bless them that they might prove to be the way in which He reaches into the hearts of the unbelievers to whom we bring the Word of Life? We will also want to petition God for His Holy Spirit as our guide in the study of His Word. Saint Paul writes, “My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power, so that your faith might not rest on men's wisdom, but on the apostolic word preached; and no more to the apostolic writings than to the rest of the written Word of God. The Spirit, who was its author, is also its interpreter, and such understanding of it as men gain is His gift” (2 Cor.2:1ff NIV). Shall we not beg God for His Spirit to lead us to understanding and to accompany our preaching and teaching to do the same in the hearts of our hearers? We not only should, but we will when we remember that if we proceed without Him, we are headed for certain failure and our ministry will be a hollow shell without the power thereof. Let us therefore “keep after” God in prayer in the manner of the Syrophenician woman. Her persistence was such that Jesus not only gave her the desire of her heart, but honored her because of her faith by having her account entered in the Sacred Record.

Let us follow the instruction of Luther when he says, “you are to despair straightway of your understanding and reason, for thereby you will accomplish nothing. To the contrary, through such rashness you will hurl yourself and others with you from heaven into the abyss of hell... .. But rather, so thou kneel down in thy little chamber and call upon God with true humility and sincerity, that He would through His dear Son grant thee and give thee understanding. For you will observe that in the above named psalm (Psalm 119) David repeatedly prays: “Teach me, O Lord, instruct me; guide me, show me.” And finally it is still true that the effectual “fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much”(James 5:16)!

Accountability

“It is required in stewards that a man be found faithful.”

Study and prayer are basic for us in the proper use of time. These are really the foundation upon which the God-pleasing stewardship of time rests. Obviously, then, our discussion cannot stop here with the foundation. We need also to examine the superstructure. Our calling is not that of a monk whose only function is study, prayer and meditation. We are ministers of the Gospel. We are stewards of the mysteries of God. As such we do not want to be servants who bury the talent and miss the opportunities God sets before us to properly “redeem the Time”. The “talent” that God has placed in our charge and for which we are accountable and responsible is the Gospel of Christ. Faithfulness is the only requirement of God in the discharge of this responsibility, and one who is faithful in meeting and carrying out the responsibilities of his calling is also one who will properly “redeem the time”. Consequently, in this section we want to examine what it means to be faithful stewards of the mysteries of God. Lenski says that faithful here really means trustworthy. One to whom you can give something and go on your way confident that person will take care of that which has been given to him as if it were his very own. In this regard, we might refer to the parables of our Lord where He speaks of servants who were given responsibility over their master's business while he was in another country. A trustworthy servant is one who can be trusted to do what is expected of him. What is required of ministers of the Gospel is neither brilliancy, nor eloquence, nor profound knowledge, nor success, but only fidelity. This is undoubtedly why the pastoral epistles are replete with reminders to faithfully proclaim and trust in Jesus Christ and Him crucified. In Second Peter, chapter one, for example, the apostle is most emphatic about keeping focus on the Word of God. In verses 12 to 15 he says no less than three times that his responsibility is to keep reminding his readers of the “great and precious promises” by which they are made “partaker of the divine

image.” Later, in chapter three, he says, “This second epistle, beloved, I now write unto you; in both which I stir up your pure minds by way of remembrance; that ye may be mindful of the words which were spoken before by the holy prophets, and of the commandments of us the apostles of the Lord and Savior.” The emphasis is always back to the Gospel, isn’t it? This is also true of the ministry of St. Paul. After congregations were established in the cities visited on the first missionary journey, we are told that they revisited those cities, “confirming the souls of the disciples, and exhorting them to continue in the faith.” The point here is that faithfulness on their part meant that they viewed everything from the perspective of the cross of Christ. Every occasion in which they found themselves was an opportunity under God’s grace to introduce someone new to the message of salvation or to underline it in the hearts of those who already had heard it. Paul at Philippi is a good example of this. Here we can see how the apostle viewed every situation in the light of the humiliation, pain and shedding of blood, and death of our Savior, the “suffering servant.” In this example we can also come to a clearer understanding of what it means to “redeem the time” and to make the most of every opportunity within the framework of excellence that stewardship before God necessitates.

Acts 16:25 reads, “About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening to them.” (NIV). For all they knew, they were going to be in prison for days, but they used the time in a God pleasing way by praying and singing hymns. This is all they were physically able to do, because the over-zealous jailer had put them in the inner prison and had put them in stock as well. Then when a person is inclined to ask, “What can possibly happen next?” it did. There was such an earthquake that the foundations of the prison were shaken so that the doors of the prison swung open. But now listen to this. Paul’s attention is drawn to the jailer. Here was a man who was about to be “twice dead” by taking his own life. Paul didn’t have to stop and debate what His Savior would have him do. The fruits of the faith which the Holy Spirit has worked in him were such that he called out to the jailer that no one was escaping. There was no need for him to commit suicide. This, then is the meaning of the message of God’s grace to us in Christ Jesus, regarding which Paul wrote while in prison, “By grace are ye saved, through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is a gift of God: ... we are His workmanship created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God has before ordained that we should walk in them.” To say that Paul had concern for the jailer would be grossly understating what the Scripture indicates Paul felt toward the welfare of this man’s soul. Here (Acts 16:28) Scripture shows that Paul felt great agitation and fear for the man. “But Paul cried with a loud voice, saying, Do thyself no harm, for we are all here.” In the next verse of Luke’s witness we see the results of the labors of a “good and faithful steward” of the mysteries of God. This is just one example of many that God has given us in His revealed Word of how a faithful servant of the Word offers himself as a living sacrifice, “holy and pleasing to God”, which is our spiritual worship. No longer being conformed to the patterns of this world, but being “transformed by the renewing” of our minds, in order that we can “test and approve what God’s will is” (Rom. 12:1, 2).

If we compare what Paul wrote in another of his “captivity letters” to the example God has given of Paul’s actions while in jail in Philippi, we can see that Paul was practicing what the Holy Spirit caused him to record at a later time. In Colossians 4:2-6, we are counseled “devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful. And pray for us, too, that God may open a door for our message, so that we may proclaim the mystery of Christ, for which I am in chains. Pray that I may proclaim it clearly, as I should. Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders, make the most of every opportunity. Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, as that you may know how to answer everyone.” Need we say more? Let us follow Paul’s example as we are urged to do. Hear what Paul says in Ephesians 4:1, “As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received.” In verses 7-12 we read, “But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it. This is why it says: When he ascended on high, he led captives in his train and gave gifts to men.” And in verses 11-12 it states, “It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God’s people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up.”

We have indeed been given an awesome responsibility, and it is to God we must give account as our Lord Jesus warns us now, just as He warned His disciples in Luke 12:35-48: “Be dressed ready for service and

keep your lamps burning, like men waiting for their master to return from a wedding banquet, so that when he comes and knocks they can immediately open the door for him. It will be good for those servants whose master finds them watching when he comes. I tell you the truth, he will dress himself to serve, will have them recline at the table and will come and wait on them. It will be good for those servants whose master finds them ready, even if he comes in the second or third watch of the night. But understand this: If the owner of the house had known at what hour the thief was coming, he would not have let his house be broken into. You also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him.

“Peter asked, ‘Lord, are you telling this parable to us, or to everyone?’” The Lord answered, “Who then is the faithful and wise manager, whom the master puts in charge of his servants to give them their food allowance at the proper time? It will be good for that servant whom the master finds doing so when he returns. I tell you the truth, he will put him in charge of all his possessions. But suppose the servant says to himself, ‘My master is taking a long time in coming,’ and then begins to beat the men and women servants and to eat and drink and get drunk. The master of that servant will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour he is not aware of. He will cut him to pieces and assign him a place with the unbelievers. That servant who knows his master’s will and does not get ready or does not do what his master wants will be beaten with many blows. But the one who does not know and does things deserving punishment will be beaten with few blows. From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked.” (NIV)

So we can see from this that everyone will have to stand before the Judgment seat and give account. But pastors will have a greater accountability. “Not many of you should act as teachers, my brothers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly.”

Every Christian must be found doing the will of His Lord when that “day” comes, as Peter warns: (1 Peter 4:7, 10,11), “The end of all things is near. Therefore be clear-minded and self-controlled so that you can pray. Each one should use whatever spiritual gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God’s grace in its various forms. If anyone speaks, he should do it as one speaking the very words of God. If anyone serves, he should do it with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ” (NIV). This is what all believers must be taught, and must be found doing when our Lord comes. And in 1 Peter 5:1-4 a special appeal is made to pastors: “To the elders among you, I appeal as a fellow elder, a witness of Christ’s sufferings and one who also will share in the glory to be revealed: Be shepherds of God’s flock that is under your care, serving as overseers ... not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not greedy for money, but eager to serve; not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock. And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away” (NIV).

Our Lord Jesus never promised us an easy or soft ministry. Quite the contrary. He warns us, “Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves.” But with this warning He has given us the assurance in His Word that “He will go with us and never forsake us”, just as He has always promised His servants. That is why we must ever be looking to Scripture, ever studying the Bible, for it is there we find all these gracious promises. And we need to pray. For he has promised to hear and answer our prayer: Luke 11:9-13, “So I say to you: Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and him who knocks, the door will be opened. Which of you fathers, if your son asks for a fish, will give him a snake instead? Or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!”

And to this day our Lord Jesus continues to pray with us in the words of the Psalmist: Judge me, O Lord; for I have walked in mine integrity: I have trusted also in the Lord; and therefore I shall not slide. Examine me, O Lord, and prove me; try my reins and my heart. For thy loving kindness is before mine eyes; and I have walked in thy truth” (Psalm 26:1-3).

So far we have seen what faithfulness in our stewardship requires and who it is who will do the requiring in the final analysis. But I think it also appropriate here to point out that faithfulness in our ministry does not mean we can neglect our family and excuse such neglect saying that our calling comes first. It is true that our calling comes first, but there should be no conflict between our calling and our responsibilities as husbands and fathers. Everything that the Bible has to say about the relationship of a husband to his wife also applies to the pastor–husband. As a husband in the parsonage, our love for our wife ought to be a reflection of the love Christ expressed for the Church, as St. Paul teaches us in Ephesians 5:25, “Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for it.” To neglect this injunction to our personal lives is to be less than faithful in our calling. It is to neglect the proper care of that which is part of us. St. Paul says, “In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. After all, no one ever hated his own body, but he feeds and cares for it, just as Christ does the church” (Eph 5:28-29) (NIV). There are two things that have to be considered in this respect. The one is that our wives and family are also members of our flock. As such they should at least receive the same kind of treatment any one of the other members receives. The other point that needs to be stressed is that the Bible includes in the qualifications for the ministry the requirement that a man be “one that ruleth well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity.” The relationships of the members of the family in the parsonage are to be exemplary. What we would counsel a husband in the congregation to do to express his love for his wife, we should be doing by way of example in our own home. Similarly, whatever would be our counsel from God’s Word to the parents in our congregations over against their children should be exemplified in our relationship with our children. Eli in the Old Testament should stand as reminder and warning to us that God is serious about this whole question; “If anyone does not know how to manage his own family, how can he take care of God’s church?” (1 Tim. 3:5, NIV)

Neither can we employ the term “*corban*” in this regard. Jesus would not let that stand in His day as a practice which was pleasing to God, nor would He today. We might very easily fall into the practice of scheduling all of our time for congregational activities or private visitations, leaving no special time for our families, and justify this by saying that our calling comes first and all of our time is “dedicated” (*corban*). To do so is to make the Word of God of none effect as surely as did the Jews of Jesus’ day in regard to the Fourth Commandment. Another thing that faithfulness does not require is that we be at our work seven days a week with the exception of our vacation time. To take time off to get away for a day or even a half day is a wholesome thing. Jesus, Himself, would go off alone to seek the physical refreshment of relaxation. He certainly would not have done this if to do so would have been robbing the heavenly Father of time that could have been more profitably used. One of the basic concepts of the Old Testament Law of the Sabbath was that of taking time for physical rest. Though we are no longer under the obligation of the day, through the mediation of Christ, it is still a good practice to follow to regularly find time for rest and relaxation. The benefit of attacking the work load with renewed interest and energy is well worth the time invested.

Conclusion

In Acts 20:26, 27, St. Paul declares, “I am innocent of the blood of all men. For I have not hesitated to proclaim to you the whole will of God” (NIV). Having been a faithful servant of the Word in the area of Ephesus, he could therefore proclaim, “Now I commit you to God and to the Word of His grace, which can build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified” (NIV). Having been faithful to his calling, he was now convinced that the people there could stand on their own, having the same foundation of the “apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone stone”. Surely this is what every faithful minister desires as far as his ministry is concerned. So let us study, let us pray, and let us put into practice what the Holy Spirit teaches us. Let us “redeem the time” by looking at our whole life from the perspective of the cross, taking advantage of every opportunity to further spread the Gospel of Jesus Christ. This is the work that He has sent us to do. It is work that by His Grace can be done as He gives us the strength and the power. It is also work that is productive, either in the sense that the Word preached will be a savor of

life unto life or a savor of death unto death. Which it shall be in the individual case is known to God alone, but for us that is "*satis superque*". We are simply to do what he tells us. This is the very essence of Christian faith.