

ESSAY DELIVERED AT THE 58th ANNUAL CONVENTION

by

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Redeeming the Time with Respect to the Training of Future Pastors

Introduction

This introduction is going to be a little different. Normally, we are loathe to cite personal anecdotes in doctrinal essays; but this example is particularly relevant and telling. So here it is: The time? Thirty-three years ago. The place? A Voters' Assembly meeting in Tinley Park, Illinois, Gloria Dei Lutheran Church, the home of my seminary program. I was a new voter and seminary student (20 years old). My professor was the pastor of this independent Lutheran congregation. My fellow students and I had just finished initial sermon writing and delivered some of those rookie sermons during the Lenten season at this very place. A motion was offered: "I move that only ordained Lutheran pastors be allowed to preach in our pulpits." It was seconded. My heart ached and my stomach followed with that sick feeling one gets when terrible news arrives. I had never spoken in a Voters' meeting to that point in time. But I had to speak. I did. "Gentlemen, if this motion passes, where do you expect the seminary students to learn to preach?" The emotion in my voice was obvious to all. One man quickly spoke: "Mr. Worley, we weren't thinking about excluding you!" Huh? Immediately the light bulb went on over my head. Some of the men were very unhappy with some of the students and hoped to relay that message this way. Their "respect of persons" was thus revealed. The motion was soundly defeated shortly thereafter without a single "aye" vote. I was very relieved. By the grace of God, the Godly men were moved both to will and to do of God's good pleasure for the sake of the future ministry in their midst. God had used us "to redeem the time," to buy back from the power of the sinful flesh the opportunity for God's work to continue in our midst. The men were willing to endure "rookie" sermons and "rookie" student preachers. It *cost* them, because you always *pay a price to redeem* the opportunity. They would "put up" with our struggles in the pulpit for the sake of the greater good, the long-term gain, the future benefit: trained *c.r.m.*'s [*candidati reverendi ministerii*, candidates of the reverend ministry].

Obviously, your essayist has a personal, emotional connection to this incident. But it is important for each of *you* to become invested, personally and emotionally, with heart and mind, in our vital subject matter here presented on the basis of God's own Holy Word. I

implore you to “redeem this time” for yourself and your children, to buy back this opportunity, lest the devil, the world and your own sinful flesh steal it away. It will cost you, but it is worth it. Redeem this precious opportunity to hear what God has to say to all of us about the task set before us, namely, **“Redeeming the Time with Respect to the Training of Future Pastors.”**

The essay will be divided into two main sections:

I. The Scriptural Doctrinal Imperative of Ephesians 5:16

II. The Scriptural Application to the Training of Future Pastors under three points:

A. Training them both qualitatively and efficiently — making the most of their time without sacrificing solid preparation (Isaiah 6:8; II Timothy 2:15)

B. Providing for the temporal needs of our students -- recognizing their sacrifice by sharing their burden with our support (I Corinthians 9:11; II Corinthians 8:13-14)

C. Setting them (and our people) the example of wise priority-setting -- giving *first* consideration to the nourishment of our *souls* in the hearing of God’s Word (Galatians 6:7-9; Amos 8:11-12; Romans 10:14-15).

Let us ask our Lord to bless our study. We pray: Dear Savior, open our hearts and minds to Thy Word and the cogent applications thereof, that each of us may be moved to will and to do of Thy good pleasure in redeeming the time for Thy glory and to the spiritual and eternal benefit of Thy Church. To this end, bless this opportunity to our souls for Thy gracious Name’s sake. Amen.

I. The Scriptural Doctrinal Imperative of Ephesians 5:16

Our theme verse and basis for our Convention motto is also our chief text upon which this entire essay is based, namely, Ephesians 5:16. We shall also consider the context, Ephesians 5:15-17: *“See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil. Wherefore be ye not unwise but understanding what the will of the Lord is.”* At once we see how the Holy Ghost, through the Apostle, calls upon us to do a spiritual assessment, a critical self-examination, a real inspection, regarding our Christian life. *“See then,”* Paul begins. These mild words are actually words of warning: *“Take heed, therefore!”* This is the same word we find in such verses as I Corinthians 10:12: *“Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall.”* (cf. Hebrews 3:12). In other passages this word is used of a very stern warning and is translated *“Beware”* (cf. Philippians 3:2; Colossians 2:8). In our text it has the meaning that we find in II John 8 where John exhorts and warns: *“Look to yourselves, that we lose not those things which we have wrought, but that we receive a full reward.”* John then goes on to warn against false teachers and against becoming partakers of their evil deeds. So every use of this word contains the element of warning. Jesus Himself uses it in this manner: *“Take heed therefore how ye hear; for whosoever hath, to him shall be given; and whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken even that which he seemeth to have”* (Luke 8:18). Here Jesus warns against hypocrisy, warning us not only to hear God’s Word but to hear it mixed with faith and then to act accordingly.

In each use of this word of warning, we find that we are exhorted to be concerned about our spiritual welfare; such is the case in our text where we are exhorted and warned to see to it that we take heed to *“walk circumspectly.”* We are to maintain a certain walk of life, a specific type of conduct and behavior, namely a *circumspect* walk. *“Circumspectly”* is an adverb which modifies the verb *“walk;”* it tells us how we are to conduct ourselves in this life. And since the verb *“walk”* is a present imperative, we are exhorted to maintain a continuous walk that is, always and ever, circumspect. What then does *“circumspect”* mean? Our English word is derived from the Latin and literally means *“to look around,”* to be careful and on guard, watching every direction. As such it is a good word to use to

translate the Greek word found in our text; it is derived from a root word meaning “accurate or exact.” Therefore Paul exhorts us to inspect ourselves to see how exactly, accurately, diligently and strictly we are walking. How careful are you in your walk in life? Paul says: “*Be constantly taking heed how accurately you are conducting yourselves.*”

To do so we need a standard to go by, something we can use to check if we deviate from the norm. The only objective standard Christians have is that one given by God: the perfect, immutable and infallible Law of Almighty God. It is also interesting to note that sin, by definition, is *deviation from God’s norm, lawlessness*; sin is the *transgression of God’s Law*. We see this in the literal meanings of the words for sin, such as: *transgression* = “to overstep legal bounds;” *trespass* = “to stray into forbidden territory,” for the narrow path is clearly marked by “thou shalt” and “thou shalt not.” Iniquity is “in-equity,” literally “unevenness.” God’s Law gives us the straight path and reveals our crooked ways; the plumb line of God’s Law clearly reveals every moral deviation from God’s true line. The most common verb used for sin is simply translated “*to sin*” and literally means “to miss the mark;” sin then is “a missing of the mark.” The target of God’s Law demands an accurate shot, for the bull’s-eye is nothing less than absolute perfection. How accurate are we in our lives? How often we miss the entire target of God’s Law, let alone hit the bull’s-eye of perfection? We don’t even come close! This little three-letter word, “sin,” is an accurate assessment of our walk in this life in every thought, word and deed. S-I-N. We should stress the only vowel, yea, capitalize it, because each and every one of us has to admit “**I** sin” in thoughts, words and deeds. *Every mouth* is stopped by God’s Law, and *all the world* becomes guilty in His sight. So the result of applying God’s Standard, His Holy Law, to our life to see how carefully, accurately, and exactly we walk brings us to acknowledge the absolute truth of I John 1:5-10: “*This then is the message which we have heard of Him and declare unto you, that God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth. But if we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship one with another; and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin. If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His Word is not in us.*”

There is not a single Christian in this world then who can say, “I don’t need constantly to inspect my life; I don’t need to walk more carefully and accurately according to God’s Holy Law.” We all need this exhortation of Paul to walk circumspectly; and, as Paul explains, this means to walk “*not as fools.*”

What is a fool? In our text the word is simply the word for “wise” with a negative in the front, literally “un-wise,” “not wise.” A fool, by God’s definition, is one destitute of *Christian wisdom*. This is seen in a fool’s thoughts, words and deeds. How does a fool walk? Knowing that our heart controls our thoughts, words and deeds, let’s first examine a fool’s heart: God tells us, “*The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God*” (Psalm 14:1a). A fool is more than a philosophical atheist; he is a practical atheist; he not only believes there is no God; he lives as if there were no God. “*They are corrupt, they have done abominable works, there is none that doeth good*” (Psalm 14:1b) (cf. 2-3). A fool therefore lacks spiritual perception and understanding, lives for himself alone, and is too proud to allow anyone to instruct him, although he certainly is ready to teach all others their business (cf. Psalm 92:6, Proverbs 18:2 and 12:15).

We do not have to search far in the New Testament to see examples of fools. Turn to Luke 12 with me, Luke 12:16-21 — “*And He spake a parable unto them, saying, The ground of a certain rich man brought forth plentifully. And he thought within himself, saying, What shall I do, because I have no room where to bestow my fruits? And he said, This will I do: I will pull down my barns and build greater; and there will I bestow all my fruits and my goods. And I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry. But God said unto him, Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be*

required of thee; then whose shall those things be which thou hast provided? So is he that layeth up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God."

A fool considers that a man's life consists in the abundance of the things he possesses, and he puts his trust in those things, not realizing, understanding, or even thinking about his Creator, his God! God is not in all his thoughts! He lives his life as if this were all there is; his concerns are for this life and temporal pleasure, his family, his job, and, most of all, himself (Romans 1:22). He often works hard and plans for his immediate future, striving to improve his lot in life, and may even be a model citizen. Only one main thing is missing in his heart and life: God. So when he comes to die, the one thing needful is missing, with no Word of God in his heart, no Good News of his Savior, and therefore, no faith; he dies a fool's death and is damned for his unbelief; the wrath of God abides upon him, body and soul, forever. Paul warns us to take heed to ourselves, lest we become such a fool and walk as he does.

Here we see why Jesus was not afraid to call a fool a fool; He did this for the sake of the fool and for *our* sakes because He *loves* us. He not only called the hypocritical and work-righteous scribes and Pharisees fools (Matthew 23:17,19; cf. Romans 2:20, Luke 11:40); He even called some of His disciples "fools," so much did He love them, so much did He desire to deliver them from their foolhardy and soul-endangering ways, saying: "*O fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken.*" (Luke 24:25). We act the fool every time we neglect our spiritual welfare and are slow of heart to believe God's Word. These disciples did not become fools overnight; instead they slowly allowed their human reason to judge their faith and forgot the words of their Lord; being caught up with carnal thoughts and cares of this world, their faith became past history. We too are made of the same flesh and blood as these two disciples. How often do we follow their foolish example?

Instead of walking as fools, Paul exhorts us to walk "*as wise.*" We are to live as those taught by God, furnished with Christian wisdom; we are to be wise in a practical sense: Using our knowledge of God's will and applying it to all our thoughts, words and deeds, always governed in any decision by our devoted service to God, asking ourselves, "Is this the best way I can serve Him?" James expounds this wisdom in his third chapter, saying: "*Who is a wise man and endued with knowledge among you? Let him show out of a good conversation his works with meekness of wisdom. But if ye have bitter envying and strife in your hearts, glory not, and lie not against the truth. This wisdom descendeth not from above but is earthly, sensual, devilish. For where envying and strife is, there is confusion and every evil work. But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be intreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy*" (James 3:13-17).

This is essentially what Paul says to the Roman Christians: "*I would have you wise unto that which is good, and simple concerning evil*" (Romans 16:19b). God would not have us wise, as the world is wise, wise in *evil* (cf. I Corinthians 1:18-20), but as He is wise, in that which is good. And since we are God's children, we should be wise in this regard; for He is the only-wise God, our Savior (Jude 25) (cf. Romans 16:27, I Timothy 1:17). God's wisdom is seen in the fact that He forms the best plans and uses the best means for their execution. This is especially seen in how He wrought our salvation in history. "*For what the Law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh*" (Romans 8:3). "*But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth His Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons*" (Galatians 4:4-5).

The Father sent His Son as our substitute under the Law. He, by His holy life, perfectly kept the Law for us and by His holy death paid the penalty of our guilt by offering the perfect sacrifice: the holy and precious blood of God (cf. Ephesians 5:2). This blood forever blots out our sins from God's memory, so that before God each and every one of us stands holy and unblameable and unreprouvable for the sake of Jesus' blood and righteousness. And, as God formed the best plan and used the best means for the execution of our salvation, we shall do the same, by Gospel grace, in our Christian life, out of thankfulness and gratitude to Him

who redeemed us for all eternity, washing us from our sins in His own blood. We shall walk as wise, as verse 16 tell us, “*redeeming the time, because the days are evil.*” The Holy Ghost tells us basically the same thing in Colossians 4:5, “*Walk in wisdom toward them that are without, redeeming the time.*” Applying Christian wisdom, we are ever to be “*redeeming the time.*” The Greek verb (*exagoradzo*) means “to recover from the power of another by paying a price.” It is used only four times in this exact form, in the Colossians passage above and these two in Paul’s letter to the Galatians: “*Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree*” (Galatians 3:13); “*But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth His Son, made of a woman, made under the Law, to redeem them that were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption of sons*” (Galatians 4:4-5).

Obviously, Christ paid the full price to redeem us out of the power of the curse of the Law, eternal damnation. His work is finished! His work is our salvation, received by God-wrought faith alone. How, then, do we “*redeem the time*”? The Greek verb is comprised of the root “to buy up,” literally, “to go to the market (*agora*),” and the preposition (*ek*) “out of,” giving us “to purchase (with a price) or redeem out of” the power of another. We are to “buy up” something lest it be lost to the power of another, to “rescue from loss.” What are we redeeming lest it be lost? “*Time*,” not chronological time (Greek = *chronos*), clock time, the “tick-tock” progression of seconds, minutes, hours and days, but “**the time**” (*kairos*), the fixed, set, proper time viewed as opportunity for good. The word translated “*time*” here refers to the opportunities God gives us throughout our earthly lives when decisions must be made for the Lord, or this time will be lost to the world, the devil and our own sinful flesh. It is not merely “don’t waste your clock time” (*chronos*), nor simply “make the most of your day” (i.e. *carpe diem*, “seize the day”), not even “recognize when opportunities come calling,” but “*buy back* into **God’s exclusive** use” the opportunities God presents to you *constantly* before the night comes when no man can work! Pay the price to consecrate your life to God’s will and work! Matthew Henry comments: “Time is a talent given by God, and it is misspent and lost when not employed according to His design.” (*Commentary on the Whole Bible*, Vol. VI, Acts to Revelation, p. 713, F. H. Revell Co., Old Tappan, New Jersey, undated printing).

Yes, we must by God’s grace and power ever be redeeming or buying up time for our Lord’s sake and advantage by the payment of a price and so recover the time from the power of the devil, the world and the flesh, which steal every moment and opportunity in the interest of sin. We are always to make wise and sacred use of every opportunity for doing good, so that our zeal and well-doing are, as it were, the ransom payment by which we make time our own to be used by our Lord. Paul writes to the Colossians: “*Walk in wisdom toward them that are without, redeeming the time*” (Colossians 4:5). Remember that the word for time in our text is not the general word for time as such, but time regarded as to its strategic importance, an opportunity we might say. The point is not simply to make the best use of time as such, which everyone knows we should do in the sense of not wasting it, but of taking advantage of **opportunities** as they present themselves. God often either places us in situations or allows us to end up in circumstances where we have opportunities to do good that might never occur again. We are to make the most of them.

Look at our Lord as He hangs on that wretched tree. He took that time to pray and preach a man into Paradise (Luke 23:43), not thinking of Himself but the welfare of someone who had blasphemed and mocked Him to His face! Look at Paul and Silas in Acts 16, after having been beaten with countless lashes of the Roman scourge and thrust into the worst dungeon in the prison and fastened into torturous stocks, we read of them: “*And at midnight Paul and Silas prayed and sang praises unto God; and the prisoners heard them*” (Acts 16:25). God used their testimony of God’s Word to convert the very jailer that kept them, together with his entire family (v. 34). These examples should put us to shame for all the times God opened the door for us to preach His Word and to testify to others at very special opportune times, and we failed because we could only think of our own personal welfare in self-pity or fear. God presents us with numerous times and seasons, golden opportunities to apply the Golden Rule: “Do unto others as ye would have them do unto you” (cf. Matthew 7:12); but

how often do we make the most of them? Where is our Christian care and concern for the welfare of precious redeemed souls? What if no one had taken the time to care about *your soul*? Say to yourself, “But for the grace of God, that unbeliever is *I myself!*”

Make the most of your time by setting the right priorities: God first; family second; job third. For if God is first, you *will* make the most of every opportunity to do good also for the sake of your family and in your job, too! It’s not simply a matter of spending your time *wisely*, but determining the *best* way to use every opportunity that comes along. That was the question in controversy one day in a suburb of Jerusalem, in the little town of Bethany, when Jesus came to call: “*Now it came to pass, as they went, that He entered into a certain village; and a certain woman named Martha received Him into her house. And she had a sister called Mary, which also sat at Jesus’ feet, and heard His Word. But Martha was cumbered about much serving, and came to Him, and said, Lord, dost Thou not care that my sister hath left me to serve alone? Bid her therefore that she help me. And Jesus answered and said unto her, Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things. But one thing is needful; and Mary hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her*” (Luke 10:38-42).

Martha was not *wasting* her time nor using it *foolishly*. She did a good work by cooking dinner for the Lord. But she failed to follow the example of her sister Mary and to make the *most* of this *opportunity*, using the time to the *best advantage* for her *soul’s welfare*, for the *one thing needful* that shall endure beyond the grave, the Lord’s holy and precious Word. We often get caught up in the “*many things*” which in and of themselves may be good works and God-pleasing endeavors. But when we allow these to take precedence over hearing God’s Word, we walk as fools and are in need of the same divine reprimand Martha received for our own sake. Jesus was so concerned and grieved at Martha’s misguided priorities that He repeated her name twice. Even so, we must often hear *our* name echo from His lips because we often fail to redeem the opportunities He gives *us*. Think twice then when your pastor exhorts you to attend church and Bible class, and your excuse fits the category of family or job or recreation; and remember that “*one thing is needful*” (Luke 10:42).

We are especially to be redeeming the time, Paul says, for this very reason: “*...because the days are evil.*” The word evil here is not evil in the abstract sense of the word, but evil in active opposition to the good: Evil which is pernicious, malignant and corrupting, the positive activity of evil that radically affects and afflicts this life, the author of which is called “*that wicked one*” (I John 2:13, 3:12, 5:18) who rules this planet through deceit. The whole world lies in wickedness (I John 5:19); for every human being, *by fallen nature*, is filled with the malignant cancer of evil (Romans 1:29; Mark 7:22-23). Paul tells us in Ephesians 6:11-12: “*Put on the whole armor of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.*”

In order to redeem the time, we must pray “*deliver me from evil*” every day and live according to God’s Law, by His grace, comforted in the forgiveness of our sins. We are to “*abhor that which is evil (and) cleave to that which is good*” (Romans 12:9). We are to make the most of our time, knowing that Jesus prays for us in this regard: “*Father...I pray not that Thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that Thou shouldest keep them from the evil*” (John 17:15). Knowing that He “*gave Himself for our sins, that He might deliver us from this present evil world according to the will of God and our Father*” (Galatians 1:4), we also know that, if God be for us, who can be against us? His promise is sure: “*The Lord is faithful, who shall stablish you and keep you from evil*” (II Thessalonians 3:3).

But *how* shall the Lord do so? What *means* does He employ? How shall He continue to create and preserve faith in our hearts? Romans 10 gives us the answer: “*For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation. For the Scripture saith, Whosoever believeth on Him shall not be ashamed. For there is no*

*difference between the Jew and the Greek, for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon Him. For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach, except they be sent? as it is written, How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the Gospel of peace and bring glad tidings of good things! But they have not all obeyed the Gospel. For Esaias saith, Lord, who hath believed our report? So then faith cometh by hearing and hearing by the word of God” (Romans 10:10-17). Yes, “how shall they hear without a **preacher**” (v. 14c)? Here is where the application comes in!*

II. The Scriptural Application to the Training of Future Pastors

How best can we as believers use Christian wisdom to buy back the present opportunity in training men for the pastoral office? Remember that this is our God-given duty and privilege, as question #186c of our *Catechism Exposition* reminds us: “We use the doctrine of the Church properly — C. when we do all in our power to *maintain, promote, and extend* this Church by *prayer, personal service, and financial support*” (Acts 8:4, Matthew 28:19, I Corinthians 9:14). But how to do this *wisely*, to make the *best use* of what God has given us, to *redeem* the present *opportunity*? One of the chief purposes of the Concordia Lutheran Conference is: “The adequate training of pastors for the work of the ministry in our midst, and of parochial school teachers and other helps to the ministry (II Timothy 2:2; 2:15; 4:1-5; Titus 1:9; I Timothy 3:1-7; 4:12; II Kings 2:3-5)” (Article III: Objects of the Conference, #5; *Constitution of the Concordia Lutheran Conference*).

Today the Lord still asks: “*Whom shall I send, and who will go for Us?*” (Isaiah 6:8a). Today the Lord still enjoins the congregations to call only those fit or qualified for the office and work based on God’s clear standards (see I Timothy 3:1-7; Titus 1:6-9). Today we need to train and examine men who may meet these requirements under God’s blessing and grace, without whom we can do nothing and who alone makes able ministers of the New Testament (cf. Acts 1:24-25; John 15:4-5; II Corinthians 3:4-6 and II Corinthians 4:7). In the beginning of the Apostolic Church, the apostles used men like Timothy to train others. St. Paul writes to him: “*Thou therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also*” (II Timothy 2:1-2). To become what Timothy had become, an able minister of the New Testament, a man needed ever to “*study to show [himself] approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the Word of Truth*” (II Timothy 2:15).

Only under God’s blessing, having learned the doctrine and how to inculcate it, could a man fulfill these injunctions as pastor: “*Holding fast the faithful word as he hath been taught, that he may be able by sound doctrine both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers*” (Titus 1:9); “*in all things showing thyself a pattern of good works; in doctrine showing uncorruptness, gravity, sincerity, sound speech that cannot be condemned; that he that is of the contrary part may be ashamed, having no evil thing to say of you*” (Titus 2:7-8). The time required is obvious, as Paul told Timothy: “*Till I come, give attendance to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine. Neglect not the gift that is in thee, which was given thee by prophecy, with the laying on of the hands of the presbytery. Meditate upon these things; give thyself wholly to them, that thy profiting may appear to all. Take heed unto thyself and unto the doctrine; continue in them, for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself and them that hear thee*” (I Timothy 4:13-16).

When your essayist was a young man of 19, he began seminary studies while still enrolled full time in college (1974), continued through two full-time jobs (Harlem Enco and American Motors Corporation), got married (1976), and then did all the work of a pastor for more than two straight years at St. Mark’s, Sauk Village, Illinois, as a vicar, finally finishing up in June of 1979. His seminary training was not nearly as complete nor as thorough as it should have been. He made many mistakes because of his lack of adequate training and still plays “catch-up” in some areas today more than thirty years since he was ordained! What he would have

given to attend the seminary program now extant in our midst! What he would have given to study full-time! To be able to concentrate on seminary work exclusively without the distraction and exhaustion of other work entering in, now that would have been something else! “But Pastor Worley, you survived!” someone might say. That is a good way of putting it. But should we employ a “survival of the fittest” scenario for our seminary students and professors? Should we make it as difficult as possible to “keep them humble”? Surely we may cause some to become “extinct,” but “the strongest” will survive. We can make it so daunting a task that only a few would even dare to try, and many of them might fail. But is that *wise*? Is that *redeeming* the *opportunity* set before us? But what if we were willing and able, by the enabling grace of Christ’s empowering Gospel (Philippians 2:13), to change the *future* for the better by changing what we are doing *today*? We do not *need* to continue to have seminary students divide their time between their studies and secular jobs, making the professor’s job even harder and less efficient due to interrupted and long-extended programs! We dare not change *what* we teach; we cannot sacrifice solid preparation of our future *c.r.m.*’s! But we *could*, if God so moved and blessed us, change for the better *how long* it will take to prepare them. God wants your *heart*, first and foremost, and then also your *support* by prayer, personal service and financial support. St Paul writes to the Corinthians: “*But this I say, He which soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly; and he which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully. Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give, not grudgingly, or of necessity; for God loveth a cheerful giver. And God is able to make all grace abound toward you, that ye, always having all sufficiency in all things, may abound to every good work (as it is written, He hath dispersed abroad; He hath given to the poor; His righteousness remaineth forever. Now He that ministereth seed to the sower both minister bread for your food and multiply your seed sown and increase the fruits of your righteousness) being enriched in everything to all bountifulness, which causeth through us thanksgiving to God. For the administration of this service not only supplieth the want of the saints but is abundant also by many thanksgivings unto God, whiles by the experiment of this ministration they glorify God for your professed subjection unto the Gospel of Christ, and for your liberal distribution unto them and unto all men, and by their prayer for you, which long after you for the exceeding grace of God in you. Thanks be unto God for His unspeakable gift*” (II Corinthians 9:6-15). What should move and motivate us? Paul exhorts us: “*I speak not by commandment but by occasion of the forwardness of others and to prove the sincerity of your love. For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that ye through His poverty might be rich. ...Now therefore perform the doing of it, that, as there was a readiness to will, so there may be a performance also out of that which ye have. For if there be first a willing mind, it is accepted according to that a man hath, and not according to that he hath not. For I mean not that other men be eased and ye burdened, but by an equality; that now at this time your abundance may be a supply for their want, that their abundance also may be a supply for your want, that there may be equality, as it is written, He that had gathered much had nothing over; and he that had gathered little had no lack*” (II Corinthians 8:8-9, 11-15). Be as the Macedonian believers, of whom the apostle testifies: “*Moreover, brethren, we do you to wit of the grace of God bestowed on the churches of Macedonia, how that, in a great trial of affliction, the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded unto the riches of their liberality. For to their power, I bear record, yea, and beyond their power, they were willing of themselves, praying us with much intreaty that we would receive the gift and take upon us the fellowship of the ministering to the saints. And this they did, not as we hoped, but first gave their own selves to the Lord, and unto us by the will of God*” (II Corinthians 8:1-5).

Obviously, we need wisely to consider how to redeem our opportunities *now* in providing for the temporal needs of our seminary students, as we recognize what they are willing to do for the Lord’s cause, namely, to devote themselves entirely to the work of the Lord for *our* sakes! Truly an investment in their present training is an investment in the future of soul-care for ourselves, our families, and our congregations. The Gospel moves us to *want* to give ourselves, our prayers, our time, our support in word, deed and pocketbook out of thankfulness for God’s grace in Christ. The apostle reminds the Corinthians: “*If we have sown unto you spiritual things, is it a great thing if we shall reap your carnal things?*” (I Corinthians 9:11).

In redeeming our present opportune time to support the men enrolled in our seminary, we are to set a good example in wise priority setting. First consideration must be the nourishment of our souls in the hearing of the Word, the wholesome milk of our gracious God. “*As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the Word, that ye may grow thereby, if so be ye have tasted that the Lord is gracious*” (I Peter 2:2-3). Our theme verse tells us to walk as *wise men*, always “*redeeming the time*” for the Lord’s use “*because the days are evil.*” As the world rushes headlong toward Judgment Day, evil men will grow worse and worse, and deception will abound (II Timothy 3:13); and we will need faithful shepherds to feed, lead and protect our precious flocks of Christ’s sheep and lambs (I Peter 5:2-3; Hebrews 13:17). In many ways the famine of hearing the Word (Amos 8:11-12) is already extant in most of the world. We need good soldiers of Jesus Christ, able to endure hardness (II Timothy 2:3). The apostle reminds Timothy how good soldiers must fight: “*No man that warreth entangleth himself with the affairs of this life, that he may please Him who hath chosen him to be a soldier*” (II Timothy 2:4). If we can support our seminary students so they can devote their full attention and energy to their studies and can avoid becoming entangled with the affairs of this life, why wouldn’t we? For we should love a good pastor and highly esteem him in love for his work’s sake (I Thessalonians 5:12-13); and, out of love for future pastors, we should support our seminary students in love.

One final thought: When Gehazi asked Naaman, the Syrian general healed of his leprosy by the Lord through Elisha, to gift two young men of the sons of the prophets, he out of gratitude freely gave (II Kings 5:21ff.). We have even *greater* reasons to gift our students with the support they need and require, having been delivered from deadly *spiritual* leprosy. Is it time to solicit and receive money for the support of the future pastoral ministry in our midst? Is it time to redeem the opportunity set for us? Or should we neglect the pressing need and fail to do good while we can, by God’s grace?

The apostle tells Titus: “*Bring Zenas, the lawyer, and Apollos on their journey diligently, that nothing be wanting unto them. And let ours also learn to maintain good works for necessary uses, that they be not unfruitful*” (Titus 3:13-14). Will **you** not redeem the time by using what **you** have to bring *our students* on *their* journey diligently, that nothing be wanting unto *them*? Will **you** not learn anew to maintain good works for necessary uses, to engage in good deeds for pressing needs, that **you** be not unfruitful? God grant it, for the dear Savior’s sake! Amen!