



## Matthew Henry on Redeeming the Time

### *Ephesians 5:1-20*

We had several important exhortations in the close of the foregoing chapter, and they are continued in this: particularly, I. We have here an exhortation to mutual love and charity, ver. 1, 2. II. Against all manner of uncleanness, with proper arguments and remedies proposed against such sins: and some further cautions are added, and other duties recommended, ver. 3-20. III. The apostle directs to the conscientious discharge of relative duties, from ver. 21, throughout this, and in the beginning of the next chapter.

1 Be ye therefore followers of God, as dear children; 2 And walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet smelling savour.

Here we have the exhortation to mutual love, or to Christian charity. The apostle had been insisting on this in the former chapter, and particularly in the last verses of it, to which the participle *therefore* refers, and connects what he had said there with what is contained in these verses, thus: "Because God, for Christ's sake, has forgiven you, therefore be you followers of God, or *imitators* of him;" for so the word signifies. Pious persons should imitate the God whom they worship, as far as he has revealed himself as imitable by them. They must conform themselves to his example, and have his image renewed upon them. This puts a great honour upon practical religion, that it is the imitating of God. We must be holy as God is holy, merciful as he is merciful, perfect as he is perfect. But there is no one attribute of God more recommended to our imitation than that of his goodness. Be you imitators of God, or resemble him, in every grace, and especially in his love, and in his pardoning goodness. *God is love; and those that dwell in love dwell in God and God in them.* Thus he has proclaimed his name, *Gracious and merciful, and abundant in goodness. As dear children,* as children (who are wont to be greatly beloved by their parents) usually resemble them in the lineaments and features of their faces, and in the dispositions and qualities of their minds; or as becomes the children of God, who are beloved and cherished by their heavenly Father. Children are obliged to imitate their parents in what is good, especially when dearly beloved by them. The character that we bear of God's children obliges us to resemble him, especially in his love and goodness, in his mercy and readiness to forgive. And those only are God's dear children who imitate him in these. It follows, *And walk in love,* v. 2. This godlike grace should conduct and influence our whole conversation, which is meant by walking in it. It should be the principle from which we act; it should direct the ends at which we aim. We should be more careful to give proof of the sincerity of our love one

to another. *As Christ also hath loved us.* Here the apostle directs us to the example of Christ, whom Christians are obliged to imitate, and in whom we have an instance of the most free and generous love that ever was, that great love wherewith he hath loved us. We are all joint sharers in that love, and partakers of the comfort of it, and therefore should love one another, Christ having loved us all and given such proof of his love to us; for *he hath given himself for us.* The apostle designedly enlarges on the subject; for what can yield us more delightful matter for contemplation than this? Christ gave himself to die for us; and the death of Christ was the great sacrifice of atonement: *An offering and a sacrifice to God;* or an offering, even a sacrifice—a propitiatory sacrifice, to expiate our guilt, which had been prefigured in the legal oblations and sacrifices; and this *for a sweet-smelling savour.* Some observe that the sin-offerings were never said to be of a sweet-smelling savour; but this is said of *the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.* As he offered himself with a design to be accepted of God, so God did accept, was pleased with, and appeased by, that sacrifice. Note, As the sacrifice of Christ was efficacious with God, so his example should be prevailing with us, and we should carefully copy after it.

3 But fornication, and all uncleanness, or covetousness, let it not be once named among you, as becometh saints; 4 Neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor jesting, which are not convenient: but rather giving of thanks. 5 For this ye know, that no whoremonger, nor unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God. 6 Let no man deceive you with vain words: for because of these things cometh the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience. 7 Be not ye therefore partakers with them. 8 For ye were sometimes darkness, but now *are ye* light in the Lord: walk as children of light: 9 (For the fruit of the Spirit *is* in all goodness and righteousness and truth;) 10 Proving what is acceptable unto the Lord. 11 And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove *them.* 12 For it is a shame even to speak of those things which are done of them in secret. 13 But all things that are reprov'd are made manifest by the light: for whatsoever doth make manifest is light. 14 Wherefore he saith, Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead and Christ shall give thee light. 15 See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, 16 Redeeming the time, because the days are evil. 17 Wherefore be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord *is.* 18 And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit; 19 Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord; 20 Giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ;

These verses contain a caution against all manner of uncleanness, with proper remedies and arguments proposed: some further cautions are added, and other duties recommended. Filthy lusts must be suppressed, in order to the supporting of holy love. *Walk in love, and shun fornication and all uncleanness.* *Fornication* is folly committed between unmarried persons. *All uncleanness* includes all other sorts of filthy lusts, which were too common among the Gentiles. Or *covetousness*, which being thus connected, and mentioned as a thing which should not be *once named*, some understand it, in the chaste style of the scripture, of unnatural lust; while others take it in the more common sense, for an immoderate desire of gain or an insatiable love of riches, which is spiritual adultery; for by this the soul, which was espoused to God, goes astray from him, and embraces the bosom of a stranger, and therefore carnal worldlings are called adulterers: *You adulterers and adulteresses, know you not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God?* Now these sins must be dreaded and detested in the highest degree: *Let it not be once named among you*, never in a way of approbation nor without abhorrence, *as becometh saints*, holy persons, who are separated from the world, and dedicated unto God. The apostle not only cautions against the gross acts of sin, but against what some may be apt to make light of, and think to be excusable. *Neither filthiness* (v. 4), by which may be understood all wanton and unseemly gestures and behaviour; *nor foolish talking*, obscene and lewd discourse, or, more generally, such vain discourse as betrays much folly and indiscretion, and is far from

edifying the hearers; *nor jesting*. The Greek word *eutrapelia* is the same which Aristotle, in his Ethics, makes a virtue: pleasantness of conversation. And there is no doubt an innocent and inoffensive jesting, which we cannot suppose the apostle here forbids. Some understand him of such scurrilous and abusive reflections as tend to expose others and to make them appear ridiculous. This is bad enough: but the context seems to restrain it to such pleasantries of discourse as is filthy and obscene, which he may also design by that *corrupt*, or putrid and rotten, communication that he speaks of, ch. iv. 29. Of these things he says, *they are not convenient*. Indeed there is more than inconvenience, even a great deal of mischief, in them. They are so far from being profitable that they pollute and poison the hearers. But the meaning is, those things do not become Christians, and are very unsuitable to their profession and character. Christians are allowed to be cheerful and pleasant; but they must be merry and wise. The apostle adds, *But rather giving of thanks*: so far let the Christian's way of mirth be from that of obscene and profane wit, that he may delight his mind, and make himself cheerful, by a grateful remembrance of God's goodness and mercy to him, and by blessing and praising him on account of these. Note, 1. We should take all occasions to render thanksgivings and praises to God for his kindness and favours to us. 2. A reflection on the grace and goodness of God to us, with a design to excite our thankfulness to him, is proper to refresh and delight the Christian's mind, and to make him cheerful. Dr. Hammond thinks that *eucharistia* may signify gracious, pious, religious discourse in general, by way of opposition to what the apostle condemns. Our cheerfulness, instead of breaking out into what is vain and sinful, and a profanation of God's name, should express itself as becomes Christians, and in what may tend to his glory. If men abounded more in good and pious expressions, they would not be so apt to utter ill and unbecoming words; for shall *blessing and cursing, lewdness and thanksgivings, proceed out of the same mouth?*

I. To fortify us against the sins of uncleanness, &c., the apostle urges several arguments, and prescribes several remedies, in what follows,

1. He urges several arguments, as, (1.) Consider that these are sins which shut persons out of heaven: *For this you know, &c.*, v. 5. They knew it, being informed of it by the Christian religion. By *a covetous man* some understand a lewd lascivious libertine, who indulges himself in those vile lusts which were accounted the certain marks of a heathen and an idolater. Others understand it in the common acceptation of the word; and such a man is an idolater because there is spiritual idolatry in the love of this world. As the epicure makes a god of his belly, so the covetous man makes a god of his money, sets those affectations upon it, and places that hope, confidence, and delight, in worldly good, which should be reserved for God only. He serves mammon instead of God. Of these persons it is said that they *have no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God*; that is, the kingdom of Christ, who is God, or the kingdom which is God's by nature, and Christ's as he is Mediator, the kingdom which Christ has purchased and which God bestows. Heaven is here described as a kingdom (as frequently elsewhere) with respect to its eminency and glory, its fullness and sufficiency, &c. In this kingdom the saints and servants of God have an inheritance; for it is the *inheritance of the saints in light*. But those who are impenitent, and allow themselves either in the lusts of the flesh or the love of the world, are not Christians indeed, and so belong not to the kingdom of grace, nor shall they ever come to the kingdom of glory. Let us then be excited to be on our guard against those sins which would exclude and shut us out of heaven. (2.) These sins bring the wrath of God upon those who are guilty of them: *Let no man deceive you with vain words, &c.*, v. 6. Let none flatter you, as though such things were tolerable and to be allowed of in Christians, or as though they were not very provoking and offensive unto God, or as though you might indulge yourselves in them and

yet escape with impunity. These are *vain words*." Observe those who flatter themselves and others with hopes of impunity in sin do but put a cheat upon themselves and others. Thus Satan deceived our first parents with vain words when he said to them, *you shall not surely die*. They are *vain words* indeed; for those who trust to them will find themselves wretchedly imposed upon, *for because of these things cometh the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience*. By *children of disobedience* may be meant the Gentiles, who disbelieved, and refused to comply with, and to submit themselves to, the gospel: or, more generally, all obstinate sinners, who will not be reclaimed, but are given over to disobedience. Disobedience is the very malignity of sin. And it is by a usual Hebraism that such sinners are called children of disobedience; and such indeed they are from their childhood, going astray as soon as they are born. *The wrath of God comes upon* such because of their sins; sometimes in this world, but more especially in the next. And dare we make light of that which will lay us under the wrath of God? O no. *Be not you therefore partakers with them*, v. 7. "Do not partake with them in their sins that you may not share in their punishment." We partake with other men in their sins, not only when we live in the same sinful manner that they do, and consent and comply with their temptations and solicitations to sin, but when we encourage them in their sins, prompt them to sin, and do not prevent and hinder them, as far as it may be in our power to do so. (3.) Consider what obligations Christians are under to live at another rate than such sinners do: *For you were sometimes darkness, but now, &c.*, v. 8. The meaning is, "Such courses are very unsuitable to your present condition; for, whereas in your Gentile and your unregenerate state you were darkness, you have now undergone a great change." The apostle calls their former condition *darkness* in the abstract, to express the great darkness they were in. They lived wicked and profane lives, being destitute of the light of instruction without and of the illumination and grace of the blessed Spirit within. Note, A state of sin is a state of darkness. Sinners, like men in the dark, are going they know not whither, and doing they know not what. But the grace of God had produced a mighty change in their souls: *Now are you light in the Lord*, savingly enlightened by the word and the Spirit of God. *Now*, upon your believing in Christ, and your receiving the gospel. *Walk as children of light*. Children of light, according to the Hebrew dialect, are those who are in a state of light, endued with knowledge and holiness. "Now, being such, let your conversation be suitable to your condition and privileges, and accordingly live up to the obligation you are under by that knowledge and those advantages you enjoy—*Proving what is acceptable unto the Lord* (v. 10), examining and searching diligently what God has revealed to be his will, and making it appear that you approve it by conforming yourselves to it." Observe, we must not only dread and avoid that which is displeasing to God, but enquire and consider what will be acceptable to him, searching the scriptures with this view, thus keeping at the greatest distance from these sins.

2. The apostle prescribes some remedies against them. As, (1.) If we would not be entangled by the lusts of the flesh, we must bring forth *the fruits of the Spirit*, v. 9. This is expected from the children of light, that, being illuminated, they be also sanctified by the Spirit, and thereupon bring forth his fruit, which *is in all goodness*, an inclination to do good and to show mercy, *and righteousness*, which signifies justice in our dealings. Thus they are taken more strictly; but, more generally, all religion is goodness and righteousness. And in and with these must be *truth*, or sincerity and uprightness of heart. (2.) We must have no fellowship with sin nor sinners, v. 11. Sinful works are works of darkness: they come from the darkness of ignorance, they seek the darkness of concealment, and they lead to the darkness of hell. These works of darkness are *unfruitful works*; there is nothing got by them in the long run, whatever profit is pretended by sin, it will by no means balance the loss; for it issues in the utter ruin and destruction of the impenitent sinner. We must therefore *have no fellowship* with these unfruitful works; as we must

not practice them ourselves, so we must not countenance others in the practice of them. There are many ways of our being accessory to the sins of others, by commendation, counsel, consent, or concealment. And, if we share with others in their sin, we must expect to share with them in their plagues. Nay, if we thus have fellowship with them, we shall be in the utmost danger of acting as they do ere long. But, rather than have fellowship with them, we must *reprove them*, implying that if we do not reprove the sins of others we have fellowship with them. We must prudently and in our places witness against the sins of others, and endeavour to convince them of their sinfulness, when we can do it seasonably and pertinently, in our words; but especially by the holiness of our lives, and a religious conversation. Reprove their sins by abounding in the contrary duties. One reason given is, *for it is a shame even to speak of those things, &c.*, v. 12. They are so filthy and abominable that it is a shame to mention them, except in a way of reproof, much more must it be a shame to have any fellowship with them. *The things which are done of them in secret.* The apostle seems to speak here of the Gentile idolaters, and of their horrid mysteries, which abounded with detestable wickedness, and which none were permitted to divulge upon pain of death. Observe, A good man is ashamed to speak that which many wicked people are not ashamed to act; but, as far as their wickedness appears, it should be reproved by good men. There follows another reason for such reproof: *But all things that are reproved are made manifest by the light*, v. 13. The meaning of this passage may be this: "All those unfruitful works of darkness which you are called upon to reprove are laid open, and made to appear in their proper colours to the sinners themselves, by the light of doctrine or of God's word in your mouths, as faithful reprovers, or by that instructive light which is diffused by the holiness of your lives and by your exemplary walk." Observe, the light of God's word, and the exemplification of it in a Christian conversation, are proper means to convince sinners of their sin and wickedness. It follows, *For whatsoever doth make manifest is light*; that is, it is the light that discovers what was concealed before in darkness; and accordingly it becomes those who are *children of light*, who are *light in the Lord*, to discover to others their sins, and to endeavour to convince them of the evil and danger of them, thus shining as lights in the world. The apostle further urges this duty from the example of God or Christ: *Wherefore he saith, &c.* (v. 14); as if he had said, "In doing this, you will copy after the great God, who has set himself to awaken sinners from their sleep, and to raise them from the death of sin, that they might receive light from Christ." *He saith.* The Lord is constantly saying in his word what is more particularly expressed in Isa. lx. 1. Or, Christ, by his ministers, who preach the everlasting gospel, is continually calling upon sinners to this effect: *Awake, thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead.* The same thing in the main is designed by these different expressions; and they serve to remind us of the great stupidity and the wretched security of sinners, how insensible they are of their danger, and how unapt they naturally are to spiritual motions, sensations, and actions. When God calls upon them to awake, and to arise, his meaning is that they would break off their sins by repentance, and enter on a course of holy obedience, and he encourages them to essay and do their utmost that way, by that gracious promise, *And Christ shall give thee light; or Christ shall enlighten thee, or shall shine upon thee.* "He shall bring thee into a state of knowledge, holiness, and comfort, assisting thee with his grace, and refreshing thy mind with joy and peace here and rewarding thee with eternal glory at length." Observe, when we are endeavouring to convince sinners, and to reform them from their sins, we are imitating God and Christ in that which is their great design throughout the gospel. Some indeed understand this as a call to sinners and to saints: to sinners to repent and turn; to saints to stir up themselves to their duty. The former must arise from their spiritual death; and the latter must awake from their spiritual deadness. (3.) Another remedy against sin is circumspection, care, or caution (v. 15): *See then, &c.* This may be understood either with respect to what immediately precedes, "If you are to reprove others for their sins, and would be

faithful to your duty in this particular, you must look well to yourselves, and to your own behaviour and conduct" (and, indeed, those only are fit to reprove others who walk with due circumspection and care themselves): or else we have here another remedy or rather preservative from the before-mentioned sins; and this I take to be the design of the apostle, being impossible to maintain purity and holiness of heart and life without great circumspection and care. *Walk circumspectly*, or, as the word signifies, accurately, exactly, in the right way, in order to which we must be frequently consulting our rule, and the directions we have in the sacred oracles. *Not as fools*, who walk at all adventures, and who have no understanding of their duty, nor of the worth of their souls, and through neglect, supineness, and want of care, fall into sin, and destroy themselves; *but as wise*, as persons taught of God and endued with wisdom from above. Circumspect walking is the effect of true wisdom, but the contrary is the effect of folly. It follows, *redeeming the time* (v. 16), literally, *buying the opportunity*. It is a metaphor taken from merchants and traders who diligently observe and improve the seasons for merchandise and trade. It is a great part of Christian wisdom to redeem the time. Good Christians must be good husbands of their time, and take care to improve it to the best of purposes, by watching against temptations, by doing good while it is in the power of their hands, and by filling it up with proper employment—one special preservative from sin. They should make the best use they can of the present seasons of grace. Our time is a talent given us by God for some good end, and it is misspent and lost when it is not employed according to his design. If we have lost our time heretofore, we must endeavour to redeem it by doubling our diligence in doing our duty for the future. The reason given is *because the days are evil*, either by reason of the wickedness of those who dwell in them, or rather "as they are troublesome and dangerous times to you who live in them." Those were times of persecution wherein the apostle wrote this: the Christians were in jeopardy every hour. When the days are evil we have one superadded argument to redeem time, especially because we know not how soon they may be worse. People are very apt to complain of bad times; it were well if that would stir them up to redeem time. "Wherefore," says the apostle (v. 17), "because of the badness of the times, *be you not unwise*, ignorant of your duty and negligent about your souls, *but understanding what the will of the Lord is*. Study, consider, and further acquaint yourselves with the will of God, as determining your duty." Observe, Ignorance of our duty, and neglect of our souls, are evidences of the greatest folly; while an acquaintance with the will of God, and a care to comply with it, bespeak the best and truest wisdom.

II. In the three following verses the apostle warns against some other particular sins, and urges some other duties. 1. He warns against the sin of drunkenness: *And be not drunk with wine*, v. 18. This was a sin very frequent among the heathens; and particularly on occasion of the festivals of their gods, and more especially in their Bacchanalia: then they were wont to inflame themselves with wine, and all manner of inordinate lusts were consequent upon it: and therefore the apostle adds, *wherein*, or in which drunkenness, *is excess*. The word *asotia* may signify *luxury* or *dissoluteness*; and it is certain that drunkenness is no friend to chastity and purity of life, but it virtually contains all manner of extravagance, and transports men into gross sensuality and vile enormities. Note, Drunkenness is a sin that seldom goes alone, but often involves men in other instances of guilt: it is a sin very provoking to God, and a great hindrance to the spiritual life. The apostle may mean all such intemperance and disorder as are opposite to the sober and prudent demeanor he intends in his advice, to redeem the time. 2. Instead of being filled with wine, he exhorts them to *be filled with the Spirit*. Those who are full of drink are not likely to be full of the Spirit; and therefore this duty is opposed to the former sin. The meaning of the exhortation is that men should labour for a plentiful measure of the graces of the Spirit, that would fill their souls with great joy, strength, and courage, which things sensual men expect their

wine should inspire them with. We cannot be guilty of any excess in our endeavours after these: nay, we ought not to be satisfied with a little of the Spirit, but to be aspiring after measures, so as to be filled with the Spirit. Now by this means we shall come to *understand what the will of the Lord is*; for the Spirit of God is given as a Spirit of wisdom and of understanding. And because those who are filled with the Spirit will be carried out in acts of devotion, and all the proper expressions of it, therefore the apostle exhorts 3. To sing unto the Lord, v. 19. Drunkards are wont to sing obscene and profane songs. The heathens, in their Bacchanalia, used to sing hymns to Bacchus, whom they called the god of wine. Thus they expressed their joy; but the joy of Christians should express itself in songs of praise to their God. In these they should *speak to themselves* in their assemblies and meetings together, for mutual edification. By *psalms* may be meant David's psalms, or such composures as were fitly sung with musical instruments. By *hymns* may be meant such others as were confined to matter of praise, as those of Zacharias, Simeon, &c. *Spiritual songs* may contain a greater variety of matter, doctrinal, prophetic, historical, &c. Observe here, (1.) The singing of psalms and hymns is a gospel ordinance: it is an ordinance of God, and appointed for his glory. (2.) Though Christianity is an enemy to profane mirth, yet it encourages joy and gladness, and the proper expressions of these in the professors of it. God's people have reason to rejoice, and to sing for joy. They are to *sing and to make melody in their hearts*; not only with their voices, but with inward affection, and then their doing this will be as delightful and acceptable to God as music is to us: and it must be with a design to please him, and to promote his glory, that we do this; and then it will be done to the Lord. 4. Thanksgiving is another duty that the apostle exhorts to, v. 20. We are appointed to sing psalms, &c., for the expression of our thankfulness to God; but, though we are not always singing, we should never want a disposition for this duty, as we never want matter for it. We must continue it throughout the whole course of our lives; and we should give thanks *for all things*; not only for spiritual blessings enjoyed, and eternal ones expected (for what of the former we have in hand, and for what of the other we have in hope), but for temporal mercies too; not only for our comforts, but also for our sanctified afflictions; not only for what immediately concerns ourselves, but for the instances of God's kindness and favour to others also. It is our duty in *every thing to give thanks unto God and the Father*, to God as the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ and our Father in him, in whose name we are to offer up all our prayers, and praises, and spiritual services, that they may be acceptable to God.