

The Duty of redeeming the Time in evil
Days, illustrated and enforced.

A

S E R M O N,

Preached at ETRICK, May 27, 1722, being the Lord's
Day immediately following the rising of the General
Assembly that year.

BY THE

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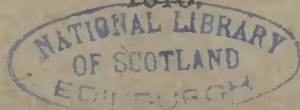
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EPHESIANS V. 16.—*Redeeming the Time, because the Days are
Evil.*

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S E R M O N.

IN the preceding verse, the apostle exhorts the Ephesians to *walk circumspectly*, that is, accurately, exactly, and precisely, endeavouring in the most minute things in their walk to be regular and holy; shewing withal, that true wisdom requires such exactness of life. Our text points out one thing wherein their spiritual wisdom should especially appear, *viz* "Redeeming the time, because the days are evil." In which words we have,

1st. A duty enjoined, *redeeming the time*. The expression is metaphorical, taken from merchants who wait the market, improve the season of making gain; and if at any time they have lost by their negligence, they bestir themselves to catch the season again when it offers. Thus should we do with the time, or season of grace and good works, the season for doing or getting good. That time is oftē mispent, the season is slipt; and we must endeavour to buy it back again, by doubling our diligence in the present time, as the traveller, who has gone too slow through the day, labours to redeem the time by mending his pace, when it grows towards evening.

2d. The reason of the duty, "because the days are evil." Not that any days are in themselves evil or unlucky, more than others; but that they were days wherein much evil fell out and was to fall out. The days the apostle speaks of were evil, in respect of the great evils going on in them among men, which put professors in hazard of sinning or suffering. They were ensnaring days, both in respect of principles and practices; false doctrine was vented by many, the resurrection was denied, justification by faith alone opposed, and the purity of the gospel overthrown by many: scandalous practices were introduced: and persecution was raised in several places, and was on the growing hand.

The scope and meaning of the words may be summed up in the following doctrinal note, *viz*.

Doct. *When men's lot falls in evil days, the evil of these days calls aloud to them to redeem time, and double their diligence.*

For the illustration of this doctrine, I shall shew,

I. What it is to redeem time.

II. Why the evil of the days wherein men's lot is cast should remove them to redeem time.

III. *Lastly*, Apply the subject in an use of exhortation and of reproof.

I. The first thing proposed is, to shew what it is to redeem time. It imports,

1st. A conviction of mispending of time, and misimproving seasons of grace. Those who will never set themselves so redeem time, who are not duly convinced of their squandering it away, selling it off, and not enriching themselves with the price. We have seen better days than now they are; glorious days of the Son of man have been in Scotland, in purity, plenty, and peace. But may not the looking back to the improvement made of them, fill us with convictions of misimprovement? And,

(1.) How many are there, who to this day are out of Christ, and have no saving interest in the covenant of grace, but are "aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world?" Eph. ii. 12. If the market of free grace were closed, they poor souls, have as yet bought none of Christ's wares, for as long as they have stood in the market-place.

(2.) What have ye done for God, and what have you done for eternity, in the time which we have had? God's glory is the end of your creation; the work he has put in your hand to fill up your time with, is to "work out your own salvation with fear and trembling," Phil. ii. 12. Ye were not set down in the world, as the leviathan in the sea, to play yourselves; but to honour God, and see to your eternal salvation. Now much of that time is over. Ye have done much to advance your worldly interest, to satisfy your lusts, to dishonour God, and to ruin your own souls; but what have ye done for God's glory and your souls salvation?

(3.) Who of us all have done for God, what we might

have done, and what we have had opportunity to have done! Have we not slipt many precious occasions that might have been improved for the honour of God? Has not a vain world often cheated us and spiritual slothfulness cast us into a deep sleep, and an inactive frame and disposition, while fair and promising occasions have slipt through our fingers?

(4.) Has any one of us got that victory over our corruptions, or made such advances in holiness of heart and life, as are answerable to the time that we have had under the means of grace? Have we grown up in grace, answerable to the years of our standing in the Lord's vineyard?

(5.) Are ye provided for a time of trial, and furnished for a wilderness-journey? If not, surely it is neither for want of warning, nor want of time and opportunity; but by mispending of time. A day of common calamity seems to be making haste upon us; but are our chambers of protection provided by us to enter into? A darkness, a mist is arisen in the way to Zion; are you so acquainted with the way in the clear day, as to be capable to know the road even in a mist?

(6.) Lastly, Are your evidences for heaven clear? We know not how soon we are to pass off into another world; but, alas! it is to be feared, that many have no evidences at all for a better world; and that such as have, theirs are very dark. These things may suffice to convince of mispending of time; the redeeming of which imports a conviction of.

2d. To redeem time, imports activity and application to our great work which we have to do in the world. Thus we find the spouse setting herself to redeem time, Cant. iii. 1, 2. "By night on my bed I sought him whom my soul loveth: I sought him but I found him not. I will rise now, and go about the city in the streets; and in the broad ways I will seek him whom my soul loveth." We must at length bestir ourselves, shake off sloth, be denied to our carnal ease, and ply our work in good earnest. Merchants who through their own slothfulness have missed their market at a time, will do so that they may get their loss made up: and Christians must do so too, who

mind to redeem their time; for there is no getting sleeping to heaven.

3d. It imports catching of seasons that offer themselves again for procuring or increasing our spiritual stock. We must "be sober, and watch unto prayer," 1 Pet. iv. 7. We must do as Benhadad's servants did, 1 Kings xx. 33. "Now the men did diligently observe whether any thing would come from him, and did hastily catch it." As men who being to go a long voyage, but have slept while wind and tide served, and so missed the occasion of setting off, will watch the first opportunity thereafter, and lay hold on it when it comes. Many a fair occasion for Immanuel's land has been neglected; O that at length we were wise to let no more slip!

4th. Lastly, It imports improving the present time diligently, as men who have a great loss to make up. Thus did the spouse, Cant. iii. 4. "It was but a little that I passed from them, but I found him whom my soul loveth: I held him, and would not let him go, until I had brought him into my mother's house, and into the chamber of her that conceived me." There is no other way of redeeming past time, but by better improving the present time while it is among our hands. We should then be more frequent and more fervent in spiritual exercises, carefully laying out ourselves, that the time remaining may be filled up to the best advantage. Time is precious, let us not be lavish of it any more.

II. The second head of discourse is to shew, why the evil of the days wherein men's lot is cast should move them to redeem time.

1st. Because it is the mispending of time and misimproving the seasons of grace, that bring such evil days on a church or people called by the name of Christ. That is the fixed rule of God's dispensations towards his church, 2 Chron. xv. 2, 'The Lord is with you, while ye be with him, and if ye seek him, he will be found of you; but if ye forsake him, he will forsake you.' Misimproving of seasons of grace makes sinning times, and sinning times make ensnaring and suffering times. And what is the reason of all the evils of our day, but unfruitfulness under

the glorious gospel? The light has been abused, and darkness therefore comes on: we have long had light without heat and warmth of affection, and therefore the light itself is on the declining hand. And it is highly reasonable, that smarting under mispending of time we be stirred up to redeem it.

2d. Because such days threaten the removal of opportunities of doing and getting good as formerly, Eccl. xi. 2. "Thou knowest not what evil shall be upon the earth." The days of Noah and Lot were evil days; and they redeemed time, the one by preparing an ark timely, the other by a timely escape out of Sodom: and had they not done so, the one had been carried away by the deluge, and the other had perished in the flames of Sodom. They that will not do when they may, may come to see the time when they shall not have opportunity when they would. When men have no use for God's candle set up among them to let them see to work, he will readily take it away, or at least it shall burn very dim. Redeem time; for God is plainly saying to you, "Who among you will give ear to this? Who will hearken, and hear for the time to come?" Isa. xlii. 23.

3d. Because such days are dangerous and ensnaring days, and therefore people have the more need to be on their guard: And if they do not set themselves to row against the stream of the day, they will be fair to be carried down the stream with others. Therefore our Lord says, "Because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold," Matth. xxiv. 12. When a land or country is infected with the plague, every one sees himself obliged to take more than ordinary care about himself, lest the spreading contagion catch hold of him; now, spiritual infection in principles and practices are visibly spreading at this day: and we are like men in a throng, if we do not forcibly press forward, we cannot miss to be carried off our feet, and carried backward by the croud. The cause of truth and holiness is so fully on the field against a declining generation; that no man can stand neutral, but he must lose ground to the enemy.

4th. Because God is much dishonoured in such days; and that should touch our hearts very nearly. This was

David's practice, Psalm cxix. 136. "Rivers of waters run down mine eyes; because they keep not thy law." It is very natural for the children of God, when they see their father remarkably dishonoured, that their hearts stir within them, as was the case of Paul, when he was at Athens, and "saw the city wholly given to idolatry," Acts xvii. 16. Remarkable is the story of the dumb son of Cræsus, king of Lydia, who, seeing a soldier, when his father's capital city, Sardis, was taken by Cyrus the Persian, ready to give the king, who he did not know, a stroke upon the head with his scimitar, made such a violent effort and struggle, out of fear and tenderness for the life of his father, that he broke the strings of his tongue, and cried out, "Soldier, spare the life of Cræsus." The further others go from him, they will endeavour to draw the nearer to him. At such a time there is a special call from Heaven, saying, "Who is on my side?" And when the honour of God so lies at stake, in the conspiracy of a generation against it, it is sad for men to be asleep; nay, it is high time to awake.

5. Because as redeeming of time is always seasonable, so it is in a special manner seasonable when the days are evil. There is a peculiar beauty in it to be best when others are worst, to be awake when the virgins round about are slumbering and sleeping. God takes special notice of such; as in the case of Noah, of whom it is said, Genesis vi. 9. "Noah was a just man, and perfect in his generations, and Noah walked with God;" and also in the case of Lot, of whom the apostle Peter says, 2 Epist. ii. 7, 8. "God delivered just Lot, vexed with the filthy conversation of the wicked: for that righteous man dwelling among them, in seeing and hearing, vexed his righteous soul from day to day, with their unlawful deeds." Redeem time in these evil days, so shall ye outshoot Satan in his own bow, and turn the cannon upon him, who endeavours to carry you away with the stream. To take occasion from good to do evil is devilish, but to take occasion from evil to do good is divine.

6th. Because mens' own interest lies in it. They that are awake in a way of duty while others sleep shall rest in a way of privilege when the peace of others shall be broken, Hab. iii. 16.———"I trembled in myself, that I

might rest in the day of trouble." To stand at a distance from sinful courses, in a sinning time, is the way to safety and comfort in a suffering time. Hence is the commission from the Lord in favour of his people, Ezek. ix. 4. "Go through the midst of the city, through the midst of Jerusalem, and set a mark upon the foreheads of men that sigh, and that cry for all the abominations that be done in the midst thereof." It is pleasing to the flesh to go with the multitude, in a time of God's patience with a sinful generation: but when the Lord comes to plead his controversy with the generations, there will be a dreadful reckoning, and they will then come off with loss. But "thou hast a few names even in Sardis, which have not defiled their garments: and they shall walk with me in white: for they are worthy," Rev. iii. 4.

7th. Lastly, This is a rational way of acting, and so do wise men in their temporal affairs. If a harvest day be cloudy or windy, do not men the more vigorously handle their sickles? If a dearth be feared, are not men the more careful to provide for themselves? Even the very ants are busy in harvest, while the winter is approaching. But, alas! the children of this world are wiser in their generation than the children of light; and the sluggard needs to be set to school to learn of the ants.

I come now to the application of this doctrine, which is the principal thing I had in view. *And*

Use I. shall be of exhortation. O let us be stirred up to redeem time, because our days are evil. Alas! our days are evil days with a witness, and they are still growing worse and worse; and the progress in the way of evil is so swift, that we seem to be very near arrived at that pitch, at which the Lord's anger may be expected to break forth into a flame. Our days are evil days in several respects; in respect of corruption of doctrine and principles of religion;——in respect of abounding sin;——in respect of the hiding of the Lord's face;——in respect of threatened wrath and impending judgments; and in respect of the guilt of former times yet unpurged away.

First, Our days are evil days in respect of corruption of doctrine and principles of religion. The tares are sown and grow apace in the Lord's field. Papists are spread-

ing their poison, and Prelatists theirs, without due check or control. A spirit of apostasy from the faith once delivered of the saints, appears eminently in these our unhappy days, wherein the very foundations of religion are struck at, and the mysteries of it called to an account before the bar of corrupted reason, and measured with the crooked reed of man's natural light. And at this day is that fulfilled amongst us in this church, which the apostle addressed to the elders of the church of Ephesus, "Also of your own selves shall men arise speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them," Acts xx. 30. The spring of gospel-doctrine, which sometime ran clear, is now disturbed, truth is fallen in our streets, and equity cannot enter, and Zion's wounds are multiplied in the house of her friends. The days are evil on this account: for,

1st, It is very dishonourable to our Lord Jesus Christ, the purchase of whose blood gospel-truths are; for of them we should never have heard, had not he given himself to the death for lost sinners. And the more they are obscured and veiled, the more is the Mediator's glory eclipsed; which may be matter of mourning to those who love his name.

2d. It is an evidence that the saviour of the glorious gospel is much lost, and that the glorious truths thereof, on which exercised souls have often sweetly fed, are much disrelished. And so it speaks soul exercise to be very rare, and the experience of the power of truth on men's spirits to be fallen very low.

3d. It is a fore-token of the work of conversion, which has long been very rare, its being yet more rare. The gospel is the great mean of conversion of sinners unto God, Gal. iii. 2. and therefore Satan strives with all his might to pervert it, and so to make it the more unfit for reaching for its end.

4th. It is a sad prognostic of the further woful decay of practical godliness. The doctrine which is of God is "according to godliness," Tit. i. 1. and that which hath not a tendency to promote real godliness, is not a doctrine from God. The law in its due place leading sinners to Christ, and leading them as a rule of life in Christ, tends to this end; but when it is put out of its due place, it is

perverted, and will never produce more like holiness; but a carcase of formal performances unacceptable to God, in some; and more licentiousness and unkindness in others, as may be observed in the lives of those who so handle the law as to confound it with the gospel, John vii. 19. "Did not Moses give you the law, and yet none of you keepeth the law?"

5th. There is a bias in the corrupt nature of man in a very eminent measure, whereby people are ready to entertain corrupt principles, and so they are ready to be subverted by them. For there is not an error vented in the world, but it has some one list or other akin to it in the hearts of men. And there is a peculiar bias to legalism, which is the temptation and snare of our days.

6th. Human learning is highly advanced in our days, and power of godliness is under a great decay. And none are so capable to do a mischief to religion as those learned men, who are strangers to the power of godliness. This is it by which religion comes to be moulded in a suitability to carnal reason, and so is perverted.

7th. It is a great sign of the Lord's anger against a sinful generation, for their not receiving the truth in love. Hence says the apostle, 2 Thess ii. 10, 11.—"With all deceivableness of unrighteousness, in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie." This calls aloud to you to redeem the time; and;

1st, To labour to get the knowledge of the truth, to know what we believe, and to understand the principles of the religion which we profess; and for this cause to improve the means of knowledge. Ignorance is dangerous at all times, especially in such evil days.

2dly, To study to know why you believe, and to understand the reasons of your principles. Hence the apostle Peter exhorts, "Be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear," 1 Pet. iii. 15. Many have been too easily satisfied with the principles which they have learned, without inquiring into the scripture-grounds of them: but surely this calls aloud to the practice of the

Bereans, who were "more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so," Acts xvii. 11.

3dly, Labour to be experimental Christians, to feel the power of truth in your own souls; to "know Christ, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable to his death," Phil. iii. 10. Raw unfelt notions in the head are easily parted with in a day of trial; but experience of the power of truth rivets in the heart: which is the true reason why many simple men and women hold fast the truth, when learned divines let it go; for all the human learning in the world will not give men such a hold of the truth as Christian experience will give. These duties the case of our day calls for at all hands.

But for your further direction, as to what is your duty at this day, when the harmony in the song of the watchmen is marred, and some are destroying what others build up, and a spirit of error is undoubtedly gone forth, I would say,

(1.) Be not ye unconcerned with the public state of affairs in that point. For the honour of God and the cause of truth, lie at stake: and there is a wo denounced against such careless ones, Amos vi. 1. "Wo to them that are at ease in Zion." Some, if they get their own worldly affairs right, they are little concerned to know what way it goes with the church and interest of Christ; they think it none of their business, Phil. ii. 21. "For all seek their own, not the things which are Jesus Christ's." Some, from a profane and wicked principal of looseness, look on the confusions of the day with satisfaction, saying in their hearts, Aha, so would we have it, like the children of Edom, who said in the day of Jerusalem's distress, "Rase it, rase it, even to the foundation thereof," Psal. cxxxvii. 7. Others shew concern about them; but the great thing with them is, thereby to gratify their curiosity, or some particular humour of theirs: but their hearts are not affected with them as kindly children of Zion.

But I would advise you to a cordial concern, in your most secret retirements before the Lord, in these matters.

Take to heart the dishonour done to God thereby, the wounds given to truth, the stroke reached to true religion, and the danger to the souls of men. Shew such sympathy with Gods interests, as you may be capable to say before the Lord, "The zeal of thine house hath eaten me up; and the approaches of them that reproacheth thee, are fallen upon me, Psal. lxxix. 9. If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget her cunning. If I do not remember thee, let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth; if I prefer not Jerusalem above my chief joy." Psalm cxxxvii. 5, 6. Mourn over these things in secret, as the select Jew in Jerusalem did, Ezek. ix. 4. forecited. Wrestle with God, in prayer for his appearance, for his return to the land, to ordinances, and to the spirits of his ministers and people. Hear what the Lord says, "I have set watchmen upon thy walls, O Jerusalem, which shall never hold their peace day nor night: ye that make mention of the Lord, keep not silence; and give him no rest, till he establish, and till he make Jerusalem a praise in the earth, Isa. lxii. 6, 7.

(2. Let your hearts be impressed with awful thoughts of the anger of God against the generation, appearing in that matter, Hab. iii. 16. It is an awful thought, that Zion-builders are now turned like Babel-builders, through the anger of God, that they cannot understand one another. It was a sad sign to Jerusalem, when coals of fire were taken from between the cherubims, and scattered over the whole city, Ezek. x. 2. And when the angel took fire off the altar, and cast it on the earth, Rev. viii. 5. fearful confusions ensued. These coals of fire are scattered among us, and the prospect of the issue may cause a serious observer to tremble.

(3.) Be duly affected with the hazard of your own souls in such a time. There is danger on every hand, when the anger of the Lord seems to be against the whole multitude of us. Let no man adventure to lodge the causes of wrath in one party. Some may be deeper than others in the sinful course; but all have a deep hand in the provocation. Hear what the Lord says to Israel, Ezek. vii. 12, 13, 14. "The time is come, the day draweth near: let not the buyer rejoice, nor the seller mourn: for wrath

is upon all the multitude thereof. For the seller shall not return to that which is sold, although they were yet alive: for the vision is touching the whole multitude thereof, which shall not return: neither shall any strengthen himself in the iniquity of his life. They have blown the trumpet, even to make all ready, but none goeth to the battle: for my wrath is upon all the multitude thereof." There is a danger of straying both to the right and left hand in this time of the Lord's anger. And if the Lord do not pity, there may be frightful monuments of the Lord's anger on both hands, giving up men to strong delusions.

(4.) Give yourselves solemnly away to Christ, to be by him carried safely through the wilderness in the dark and cloudy day. Say with the prophet, "Therefore I will look unto the Lord; I will wait for the God of my salvation, my God will hear me," Micah vii. 7. In consideration of your danger, take him anew for your guide and leader, saying with the spouse, Cant. i. 7. "I'll me, O thou whom my soul loveth, where thou feedest, where thou makest thy flock to rest at noon: for why should I be as one that turneth aside by the flocks of thy companions?" Our own wisdom is not to be trusted at any time, especially when the days are evil. Now when you see the mist arising, take fast hold of him; when you see the storm a-coming, chuse him for your pilot, and commit yourselves to his conduct through the waves.

(5.) Keep up habitually a holy jealousy over yourselves, and confidence in the promise of direction, and a conscientious believing use of the means of his appointment. That holy jealousy is necessary in respect of the snares in the evil day, and the corruption of our hearts so ready to entangle us in them. "He that trusteth in his own heart, is a fool," Prov. xxviii. 26. The promises are many on which faith is to be exercised; as, "The meek will he guide in judgment: and the meek will he teach his way." Psalm xxv. 9. "I will instruct thee and teach thee in the way which thou shalt go: I will guide thee with mine eye," Psalm xxxii. 8. "Thine ears shall hear a word behind thee, saying, This is the way, walk ye in it, when ye turn to the right hand, and when ye turn to the left," Isa. xxx. 21. And you must use the means in confidence of

the promise, Cant. i. 7, 8. When the spouse prayed for direction *Tell me, &c* quoted above, the Bridegroom replied, "If thou know not, O thou fairest among women, go thy way forth by the footsteps of thy flock, and feed thy kids beside the shepherds tents." Go ye and do likewise.

(6.) Beware of those things particularly, which leave men to be a prey to delusion in evil days, and for which God leaves them to be carried away with the torrent. And these are,

[1.] Worldly-mindedness, denoted, Rev. vii. 3. by *the Earth*. Carnal earthly professors are ready to get a cast in such a day; they whose god is the world, will be sure to hold by it, when Christ and the world part. Why has the cause of God so few friends, but because the world has so many? The world's ease, advantage, good word, and its multitude, have a great sway with men, to the prejudice of their duty, as in the case of Demas, 2 Tim. iv. 10 who forsook the apostle Paul, "having loved this present world."

[2.] Instability and wavering, denoted, Rev. vii. 3. by *the Sea*. They that have itching ears after novelties, are ready to be caught in the snare. And hence it is, that at this day old solid truths are loaded and disrelished, and the land-marks set by our fathers are removed.

[3.] Pride and self-conceit, denoted, Rev. vii. 3. by *the Trees*. None are readier to fall into the snare than those who are high in conceit with themselves. The humble soul lies fairest to make its way fairly through, while the stormy wind blows, and casts down many tall cedars.

[4.] A secret disgust of the truth, through a love to unrighteousness, 2 Thess. ii. 10. forecited. When practical religion decays in a generation, and sin abounds, the truth cannot long miss to be departed from. Lusts secretly entertained in the heart, prepare men for quitting of truth in their judgments.

[5.] Formality, Rev. xi. 2. Those that worship in the outer court, are ready to become a prey to delusion.

(7.) Be much conversant in the scriptures, "Search the scriptures," says Christ, John v. 39. and there notice what the Spirit of the Lord teaches. The scripture is the reed for measuring the sanctuary; it is the infallible word, the

only foundation of divine faith. Try what ye hear by it, as the noble Bereans did, for which they are highly commended.

4 (8.) Lastly, Be tender and holy in your walk. "If any man will do his will," says our Lord, John vii. 17. "he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself." Where men are conscientious to practise known truth, there is hope of being led into all truth; while otherwise the Spirit of the Lord being grieved departs.

Secondly, Our days are evil days, in respect of abounding sin. The generation wherein we live hath signalized itself for looseness and licentiousness, and our iniquity is gone up into the heavens, and the measure of it is fast, very fast filling up. Our "land (we may say) is filled with sin against the holy One of Israel," Jer. li. 5. The abounding of sin in our day appears in that,

1. Sins of all sorts are to be found amongst us, whether against the first or second table. The truth is, contempt of God and of religion hath made most fearful advances: the gospel is despised, the holy laws of God are violated, his bands are broken and his cords cast away. The land is defiled with idolatry, superstition, sinful swearing, Sabbath-breaking, unfaithfulness in all relations, murders uncleanliness, dishonesty, and fraud, lying, and covetousness. And what can be found among a people professing the name of Christ to bring wrath on them, that is not to be found in Scotland at this day? Particularly, there are two signs of a generation posting to ruin, that have appeared of late more than for many years before.

(1.) Horrid blasphemies, shewing what height the generation is come to in contempt of God. Not only is there a fearful outbreaking of blasphemous principles, overturning the foundation of Christianity; but many fearful blasphemies and blasphemous practices have been occasionally vented and set up of late, to fill up the measure of the iniquity of the land.

(2.) Rampant oppression, to shew what a low pass humanity is at in these dregs of time. -I doubt if there be any alive that ever saw as much oppression in this land, when it was neither a time of war, nor of persecution, as

we have neither of them at this day. When was that so much verified as at this day, "The people shall be oppressed, every one by another, and every one by his neighbour: the child shall behave himself proudly against the ancient, and the base against the honourable." Isa. iii. 5. These things can hardly miss to fill our cup to the brim.

2. Corruption of manners has overspread all ranks in church and state; and it is come to that, Genesis vi. 12. "God looked upon the earth, and behold it was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted his way upon the earth," Not only religion, but sobriety is almost gone out of fashion with those of the greater sort, so that they have altogether broken the yoke, and burst the bones; and the meaner sort follow the example, alas! too much; and there is a visible growing untenderness among those whose character and office in the church obliges them to give a holy example to both. So that look after religion where you will, it will be found at a very low pass in the practice of it.

3 Religion is so much on the declining hand, that there is not so much as a standing still and not mending, but a growing worse and worse still. The generation is still growing forward in apostasy from God, and not going, but running further and further wrong. New causes of wrath are still produced in the progress of time; and Satan's kingdom is visibly increasing. The evil is growing worse and worse, and many sometime hopeful have taken off the mask, and appear in their native colours.

4. The sins of sons and daughters are more and greater than ordinary. They are so mixed with the men of the world, that they have learned much of their way, and have left their first love, Rev. ii. 4. There is a cloud even upon them, so that they have not that life, spirit, and tenderness that sometimes they had. And they that depart from evil make themselves a prey.

And what makes these days of abounding sin worse, is,

1st, That they are come in over the belly of much light. Our days have been days of much gospel-light, but the truth has been held in unrighteousness, and men have rebelled against the light: so the light is grown weaker, and the works of darkness have got the upper hand.

2dly, Our national hazards and deliverances have been many and signal; and behold the fruit of them, as if we had been delivered to do all these abominations. If either threatened judgments or merciful deliverances could have cured us, we had been in another case at this day: but all these things seem to have been blasted.

3dly, There are few, very few to stand in the gap, Ezek. xxii. 30. Few that have either heart or hand to oppose themselves to the torrent of wickedness: few mourners over the abominations done in the midst of us. I doubt not but there are some who truly sigh and cry for the abounding sin of our day. But I doubt if our Zion these many years has afforded fewer of that sort. These our provocations have been of so long continuance, that though at their first appearance they were moving, yet the horror of them seems to be abated by custom; besides that many of the sometimes mourners in Zion are themselves deeply involved in the backsliding courses of the day.

These things make our days evil days: for,

(1.) The dishonour done to God, and the provocation thereby given to the eyes of his glory, is great beyond expression: "The name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles, through you," says Paul to the Romans, chap. ii. 24. Our land has been singularly privileged, being married to the Lord in solemn covenant, and her renown has sometimes gone through many nations: But, ah! how is God dishonoured, and religion exposed, by such fearful departures from the Lord!

(2.) They are ensnaring days. O how hard is it for people to keep their feet in such a day, and not to be carried away with the stream? Rev. iii. 5. How hard is it to keep up a due horror of sin, while on every hand of us it is so lightly looked upon? Temptation is strong in such a day.

(3.) They are days that while they last, little good and great can well be expected in them. Hence said the Lord by the man of God unto Eli, "Them that honour me, I will honour; and they that despise me, shall be lightly esteemed," 1 Sam. ii. 30. A generation so much dishonouring God, it can be little expected that God will

honour. We would fain hope that the Lord will yet bring glorious days; but it is very probable that many of the present generation shall be shovelled out of the way in the first place. Hence saith the Lord, Ezek xx 37, 38. "I will cause you to pass under the rod, and I will bring you into the bond of the covenant. And I will purge out from among you the rebels, and them that transgress against me."

(4.) The consequences of them can hardly miss to be dreadful. "Shall I not visit for these things? saith the Lord: shall not my soul be avenged on such a nation as this?" Jer. ix. 9. Where sin comes to such a height, readily severe judgments quickly follow. And we can see nothing that may give any hope that we shall miss to see sad days, but that the Lord can pour out his Spirit, and turn us back: but, alas! in the mean time we look always the longer unlike such a merciful turn in our affairs.

(5.) Lastly, They have a sad aspect on posterity. The Jews crucified Christ above sixteen hundred years ago, and their children to this day are smarting under it. And sure I am, if matters continue in the course they are in at this day in this land any long time, the succeeding generation will be in a miserable plight.

These things call aloud to redeeming of time. And,

1. Consider well your own ways, that you may see if you be joined or not in the conspiracy against God with the generation; Hag. i 5. "Thus saith the Lord of hosts, Consider your ways." Alas! it may be easily seen, that most of us are deep in the score, and none of us can wipe our mouths, and say justly, we have not sinned, we have not had a hand in the general declining.

2. Bestir yourselves, and "save yourselves from this untoward generation," Acts ii. 40. Take another way than the common course of the day wherein you live. God is saying, "Come out from among them, my people, be ye separate, and touch not the unclean thing:" stand at a distance from their sinful ways, and be not partakers with their sins, lest ye partake of their plagues,

3. Live near God, and by your tender holy walking, give a practical testimony against the abounding sin of

the day. Advert to the saying of the wise man, Prov. xxviii. 4. "They that forsake the law, praise the wicked: but such as keep the law, contend with them"

4. Be mourners in Zion, wrestlers with the Lord in the case of the evil of the days. Mourn for your own sins and the sins of others.

5. Lastly, Strengthen and stir up one another in the way of the Lord. The people of God had need to animate one another in duty, in a special manner when the torrent of sin runs high, that so they may the better oppose it, and keep themselves from being carried away with it. Follow the practice of the Lord's people who lived in a very declining time of the Jewish church, recorded Mal. iii. 16. "Then they that feared the Lord, spake often one to another, and the Lord hearkened and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before him for them that feared the Lord, and that thought upon his name."

Thirdly, Our days are evil, in regard they are days of the hiding of the Lord's face. Well may say as Isa. xlv. 15. "Verily thou art a God that hidest thyself, O God of Israel the Saviour." The Lord's gracious appearances in the powerful operations of his Holy Spirit on the souls of men, make good days; and sometimes there have been such eminently good days: but, alas! our days are evil, being days of God's hiding his face; whereof take these evidences.

1. The little power and efficacy on the souls of men, that accompanies ordinances at this day. Well may we say, as Isa. liii. 1. "Who hath believed our report? and to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed?" A sound work of conviction is very rare, and the work of conversion is yet more rare. The word is heard, but where is the fruit of it? They that were filthy are filthy still. The profane are not reformed, the secure sinner is not awakened, the formal professor is not brought acquainted with the power of godliness, and they that have the root of the matter in them, are not so liberally fed as sometimes they were. Whence is all this, but that the Lord hides himself, and appears not in the assemblies of his people as sometime a-day? We have sinned away his presence, and provoked him to say, "Your new moons, and your ap-

pointed feasts my soul hateth ; they are a trouble unto me, I am weary to bear them," Isa. i. 14.

2. The great rarity of lively experienced Christians in our day. It is the promise, Mal. iv. 2. "Unto you that fear my name, shall the Sun of Righteousness arise with healing in his wings ; and ye shall go forth, and grow up as calves of the stall." Some such there are, but alas the number of them is very small. Most of the virgins are asleep ; deadness and formality, and estrangedness from the life of faith, prevail among those who are called by the Lord's name ; and soul exercise is rare to be heard of. The best that can be made of our case is that, Rev. iii. 4. "Thou hast a few names even in Sardis, which have not defiled their garments ; and they shall walk with me in white : for they are worthy."

3. The divisions, dissensions, and opposition one to another, that are to be found among the Lord's own saints and people. Sometimes there has been in our land a very fair separation betwixt the enemies and the friends of real godliness ; so that whatever difficulties the children of God had with the common adversary, they were at one among themselves : but now, alas ! it is otherwise ; the Lord's own children are fallen out by the way, and those who are dear to God, and shall meet in heaven, cannot hit it upon earth. For the Lord is hiding his face from us, and we are left in a mist.

4. The Spirit of counsel and wisdom is with-held. In the management of civil and church matters at this day, that seems to be much accomplished, Isa. xxix. 14. "The wisdom of their wise men shall perish, and the understanding of their prudent men shall be hid." We are rowed into deep waters, and instead of bringing us safe back, we are carried further and further into the depths. The Lord is provoked to withdraw, and so our wounds cannot be healed. The days must needs be evil in this respect : for,

1st, Such days cannot be thriving days for religion, and the cause and interest of God ; Psal. lxxxi. 12. "I gave them up," says JEHOVAH, "unto their own hearts' lust : and they walked in their own counsels." When the sun withdraws in the winter, nothing can be expected but

that the face of the earth will be barren: and when the Lord hides his face from a church, matters cannot prosper there. Backslidings are increased, all goes to wreck, for that which holds matters right is withdrawn.

2dly, Such a day is a day of spiritual plagues. As God's presence goes, all darkness, disorder, and confusion follows, according to the measure of the Lord's withdrawing. The gospel does men hurt instead of doing them good; the wild grapes of wickedness are brought forth instead of good grapes, &c.

This calls aloud for redeeming of time; and,

(1.) To bestir ourselves to lament after, and to lay hold upon a departing God and glory. We should make that our work, 1 Sam. vii. 2. "All the house of Israel lamented after the Lord." And let it not be said of us as Isa. lxiv. 7. "There is none that calleth upon thy name, that stirreth up himself to take hold of thee; for thou hast hid thy face from us, and hast consumed us, because of our iniquities." We should be as Jacob saying, "I will not let thee go, except thou bless me," Gen. xxxii. 26. and the disciples, "Abide with us, for it is towards evening, and the day is far spent," Luke xxiv. 29. And this we should be as we would not be esteemed to be of the Gadarene temper, who besought Christ to depart out of their coasts. O cry mightily, that the Lord may not leave us nor forsake us.

(2.) Endeavour to walk uprightly in such a crooked generation; for the worst of times such shall get good of the Lord's word, Micah ii. 7. "Do not my words do good to him that walketh uprightly?" The Lord never forsakes his people utterly; and the more that any do set themselves to be perfect in their generation, they may be sure it will go the better with their spirits.

(3.) Lastly, Double your diligence in secret duties; be much in prayer; and especially cry with much fervency to find a meal for yourselves in public ordinances. I think we ought to consider, when we are to go to ordinances, that this is a day of the hiding of the Lord's face, wherein he is angry with our mother, and therefore is but little seen in her house; and therefore we had need to be more importunate in setting the appointment.

Fourthly, Our days are evil, in regard they are days of threatened wrath and impending judgments. The clouds of wrath are hanging over our heads, and we have many sad presages of a stroke. We many here notice three things.

1. The sins of the generations are come to a monstrous height. And as the progress thereof is somewhat unordinary, so it seems to shew that the cup of these nations is near the brim.

2. The Lord's hand has been heavily laid on a nation abroad, from which these nations have taken an example of sinning, and the Lord may justly punish us accordingly.

3. Enemies are still busy in their contrivances to bring the nations into blood and confusion; and the increase of Popery, and the divisions in the nations on civil and sacred concerns, do expose us to be the more easy prey.

This calls aloud to the redeeming of time; and,

1st, To awaken out of sleep, and seriously to consider the signs of the time, the tokens of wrath gone out against us, that the day may not overtake us unawares, Matthew xvi. 3. We have had many warnings of an approaching stroke, but mercy has so often interposed for our delivery, that grace to improve them not coming along with them, we are generally more secure than formerly; and the more secure, the more likely is the stroke to be near: 1 Thess. v. 3. "For when they shall say, Peace, and safety; then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travel upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape."

2dly, To prepare for a time of trial, Amos iv. 12. "Therefore thus will I do unto thee, O Israel: and because I will do this unto thee, prepare to meet thy God, O Israel." The time should be improved as Noah did his, Heb. xi. 7. "By faith Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house." And the best preparation is that, Micah v. 5. "This man shall be the peace, when the Assyrian cometh into our land." Their case was sad in Noah's days who were without the ark; so when the Lord's anger goes through a land, the case of those must be very sad who are out of Christ.

3dly, To stay our too eager pursuit after the world, and be content with little, and rather to be taken up about our souls, and how to be carried through in the evil day. Let us regard what Jeremiah said to Baruch, Jer. xiv. 5. "Seekest thou great things for thyself? seek them not."

4thly, To labour to settle matters, and keep them clear between God and you, that there be no standing controversy betwixt the Lord and you.

5thly, and lastly, Our days are evil, in respect of the guilt of former times yet unpurged away. Our days are like those of Josiah, 2 Kings xxiii. 26. Notwithstanding, the Lord turned not from the fierceness of his great wrath, wherewith his great anger was kindled against Judah, because of all the provocations that Manasseh had provoked him withal." The perfidious treachery and apostasy of the land from the covenanted work of reformation, the blood of the saints shed for the cause of God, with the oppressions, violences, and persecutions on that score, are like the iniquity of Baal-peor, from which the land is not purged to this day. And this generation are serving themselves heirs to it, by the many pieces of defection fast carried on at this day. So that God seems to be about to reckon with the present generation for all together.

This calls to the redeeming of time, to be taking a backlook of the national controversies of old and of late, to be mourning over them, and the dishonour done to God by them; and to be preparing to meet the Lord in the way of his judgments.

I shall conclude all with another use, namely,

USE II. Of reproof to two sorts of persons.

1. To those who go with the stream of the evil days, and are themselves following the profane and backsliding courses of the day, that make the time so evil. Alas! how many are there, who are drawing on wrath on themselves and on the land by their irreligion, profaneness, and apostasy from God? Let such consider,

(1.) How dangerous it is to be found among those who are in a conspiracy against God, to provoke his wrath against a land. When the flood of dishonour to God runs so high, those that join themselves in the sinful courses of the day, they not only have a hand in provoking God

against themselves, But they are the Achans in the camp, the Jonahs in the ship, having a notable hand in bringing wrath on others too.

(2.) The higher one's hand is in a sinning time, the deeper may their share be expected to be in a time of suffering or calamity, when the Lord will appear to vindicate the glory of his name.

2. To those who weigh not the evil of the days, but live on carelessly, and are never stirred up to their duty thereby. They consider not how matters stand betwixt God and the generation. This is a common evil amongst us, and a sad evidence of the low state of religion at this day. O that such would be stirred up to consider their ways, and the grounds of the Lord's controvesy with the generation. Awake, O sleeper, and call upon thy God, lest thou perish in the furious storm, which is likely to break out upon us. It is not a time to live at ease and unconcerned, when so many marks of the Lord's displeasure are so visible, that he who runs may read. Awake therefore, shake off thy sloth, and betake thyself to the Lord Jesus by faith, as the only means of thy escaping the wrath that is to come,—*Amen.*

