

Timely Speech: A Christian's Occasion

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Abstract

How ought we speak the truth of Christ into our world? Within Paul's numerous instructions about Christian speech in Ephesians chapters 4 and 5, he provides specific instruction about the strategic timing (*kairós*) of speech in 5:15-16. Notably, Paul's approach to the *kairos* of Christian discourse contrasts with the ideal of strategic timing celebrated in classical rhetorical theory. By examining this contrast, we identify a fundamental orientation toward time that directs Christians to foreground within their speech God's coming kingdom. The distance between a secular view of strategic speech and Paul's is the difference between *kairos* understood centripetally—as a moment fulfilled within the speaker's sphere of influence—and *kairos* understood centrifugally—as a moment in which Christians speak from within their calling to be imitators of God's love and in grateful attentiveness to the redeeming victory of Christ. I illustrate centrifugal speech by briefly reflecting on Angelina Grimké's persuasive letter published in a 19th century US abolitionist newspaper. By speaking within the *kairos* of God's salvation, Grimké's discourse exposes darkness and shines the light of Christ into the midst of a deeply divided society.

Now is The Day

The Gospel reaches us in the right way and at the right time. This is the evidence of scripture: the Samaritan woman's unexpected encounter with Jesus revealed spiritual yearning and spiritual need (John 4:5-30); the criminal's last-ditch appeal for salvation was occasioned by his crucifixion next to Christ (Luke 23:39-43); the Ethiopian Eunuch pondering the Hebrew prophets found Philip to be a willing and able interlocutor (Acts 8:26-39). Indeed, this power of the Gospel remains available for all who believe: to be re-created by divine grace within a specific time that seems both wholly unpredictable and yet, in the wake of the new birth, fully and consummately prepared. As Paul proclaims, "now is the day of salvation" (2 Cor. 6:2).¹ The occasion of our salvation—of anyone's salvation—is effectuated through the Spirit's working amidst numerous circumstances to bring about a miraculous transformation in ways that, retrospectively, fit beautifully together.

¹ All scripture quotations are from the New Revised Standard Version.

As messengers of reconciliation (2 Cor. 5:19), the question arises then as to how we participate within these occasions of salvation. How do we fit our own witness within the divine timing? This is a question of strategic sensibility, of discerning God's timing and communicative responsiveness. That we need such a sensibility at this moment in history seems painfully obvious: to speak in right ways often appears to be hopeless, especially within the politicized and polarized cultural currents of our time. How do we approach our world, now, with the truth of Christ?

Of course, the question of speaking the Gospel encompasses a wide range of theological, sociological, and rhetorical issues, far too many to cover in anything short of a multi-volume history of Christian mission and witness. But within this vast range of topics, focusing on this matter of timeliness seems, indeed, to be timely. Regardless of the medium whether by sermons or neighborly conversations or regardless of context, whether enculturated or, transcultural Gospel presentation, our proclamation occurs within, and in relation to, a specifiable moment of time. What is this moment? How do we discern it? I will focus my argument on the singular notion of communicating with a sense of timeliness, looking specifically at Paul's reference to time in Ephesians 5:16. To set Paul's reference to time in historical context, I will contrast it with the secular rhetorical concept of timely persuasion.

Classical Rhetoric

Within the secular history of persuasive communication, the moment wherein a speaker's message effectuates a desired audience response is both an elusive ideal for any persuader and a studied prerequisite for the rhetorical arts. The classical Greeks cherished those moments ripe for decision and action. They referenced this serendipitous moment as timeliness (*kairós*). In classical Greek, *kairos* referenced an appropriateness, aptness, or proportionality and was applied to practices of judgment in politics, athletic competition, warfare, ethics, mathematics, and seamanship. Thus, the term was used to mean variously the appropriate amount, a fitting response, a decisive moment, or the right time (Kinneavy 2002). In the 5th century BCE, the increasing demand for persuasion in democratic Athens highlighted the importance of *kairos* to the specific occasions in which an oration found its suasive potency. Through *kairos*, the Greeks conveyed the temporal intimacy and the temporal potentialities involved through the unique interaction binding together speaker, message, and audience. To speak effectively was to speak in ways that seemed temporally fitting; to grasp the moment was a hallmark of oratorical mastery.

Among the classical Athenian rhetors, though, the term reflected differences in their pedagogical and philosophical assumptions. *Kairos* was considered by the sophists, such as Gorgias (483-375 BCE), to be a moment created by the rhetor through the poetical crafting of words to affect a willing response. It worked like magic (Sullivan 1992; de Romilly 1975, 16). In its less mysterious formulation, *kairos* depended on a studied interdependence between speaker and audience. Thus, it was not 'magic' but the result of a rigorous education that provided students the resources to grasp the contingency of the

moment (Cahn 1993); orators schooled themselves within the cultural values and civic ideals applauded by audiences so they could admirably meet the occasion with appropriateness (Isocrates [c. 390 BCE] 2000, 64-65). Variances in how best to understand and achieve the impact of timely persuasion have continued to this day (as I will highlight later in this essay), but by the time of Cicero's Roman Republic (1st century BCE) or Quintilian's Roman Empire (1st century AD), oratorical excellence was tightly bound to this latter emphasis on studied adaptation within given circumstances (Baumlin 2002). A persuader's eloquence (Lt. *eloquentia*) depended on the appropriateness of fit to the occasion (Lt. *decorum*; Gk. *prépon*), and this involved the full constellation of rhetorical skillfulness in speech development, structure, style, and delivery.

Thus, within the secular teaching of classical rhetoric at the time of the New Testament, speaking kairotically was a strategic benchmark for the trained orator. To the extent that oratorical excellence was defined according to the appropriateness of an oration within cultural values and civic ideals, *kairos* also was an ethical term. Indeed, within the civic tradition of Isocrates and Cicero, fitting the speech within a given moment required, and thus cultivated, an orator's formation into the moral expectations of the society (Remer 2017, 54).

Within the classical rhetorical tradition, then, we find resources for conceptualizing and practicing timely communication. Could these resources be useful for Christian witness? Within the earliest conception of *kairos* among the sophists, the ideal of an inspired power of persuasion could characterize Gospel proclamation as an act of God's Spirit, working as if by "magic" to effectuate both the speaker's voice and listener conversions. Or, within the tradition of civic education, the ideal of speaking within a carefully cultivated understanding of the audience serves well the desire of Christians to contextualize witness, not only for broad cultural understandings but also for the specific adaptations within any given occasion. We find in the New Testament, though, a use of *kairos* that alters the calculations of speaker, audience, and occasion.

***Kairos* in Ephesians**

Kairos appears frequently in the New Testament and often retains the classical connection to that decisive moment in time calling forth judgment and action (Delling 1965).² And this decisive moment is, profoundly, divinely ordained. As Alexandra Brown (2018) describes, Paul views *kairos* time as a "gathered" time within a cosmic context (1 Cor. 7:9); this is the "'now' of salvation that is neither a pious hope for future deliverance nor a backward longing for restoration, but a genuine, awakening encounter with the spontaneous activity of God in Christ" (47). Thus, *kairos* is not enabled, crafted, or seized by

² Within the many NT appearances, *kairos* also is used in ways that does not seem to carry a weighted sense of decisive opportunity but merely reference a season or a specific stretch of time (e.g., Matt. 11:25; Acts 12:1). For a helpful additional source on *kairos* in the NT, see Sipiora (2002).

either educational preparation or by individual talent or gifting. Rather, it is recognized spiritually, presenting itself as the occasion for right response (e.g., Rom. 13:11; Gal. 6:10) or as the divinely weighted timing of God's plans, upon which believers are faithfully dependent (1 Cor. 4:5; 1 Pet. 4:17).

In Ephesians 5:16, Paul relies on this sense of cosmic time to specifically instruct believers about their communication. This passage, then, is particularly helpful in drawing a contrast between the secular sense of oratorical *kairos* and the timing of Christian witness.³

Paul's reference to *kairos* in 5:16 occurs within his larger section on the practices of new life in Christ, beginning at 4:1, that includes multiple specific instructions about speaking.⁴ In chapter 4, for instance, the manner of life (verbal and non-verbal behavior) is rooted in the believer's calling to "lead a life worthy" of that calling" (v. 1). This involves speaking through the gifts of Christ for the purpose of unity and maturity (vv. 11-13), speaking truth (v. 25), using words that give grace rather than promote evil (v. 29), and being kind (v. 32).

In chapter 5, Paul grounds the believer's behavior in the imitation of God, which begins with love and extends outward toward others. In a series of striking contrasts, Paul distinguishes between those practices that are "out of place" (v. 4) and those that are "proper among saints" (v. 3) with multiple references to speaking: contrasting immoral talk with thanksgiving; deceptive and empty words with living in the light; shameful speech with that which exposes the darkness, foolishness and drunkenness with spiritual songs, melodies, and giving thanks (vv. 3-20). The Christian's discourse, therefore, remains guided by a sense of decorum (*prépo*, v.3) that contrasts with the conventions of secular life and is, instead, appropriate within their status as "saints" and "beloved children" of God (v.1). Paul shifts the focus of how speech fits the occasion from the immediate expectations of one's cultural surroundings to one's identity within God's kingdom. This is a shift that undermines any possible suasive benefit of conversationally relevant banter. Rather, the speech "exposes" (*élegchō*; v.11) and sings (v.19). Paul sees his readers as influential participants in a new way of living; their speaking makes visible new life in Christ and promotes Christ-like character for selves, others, and relationships.

³ In Colossians 4:5 Paul uses the same *kairos* phrasing: "Conduct yourselves wisely toward outsiders, making the most of the time [*tòn kairòn éxagorázomeno*]." The context here also refers directly to Christian speech, with Paul requesting prayer for openings and clarity in proclaiming the Gospel (4:3-3) and for his readers to be gracious when answering others (4:6). Indeed, the Colossians passage focuses more directly on Christian speech toward outsiders whereas Ephesians clearly has an emphasis on speech within Christian community. However, as Andrew Lincoln (1990) notes, the contrasts between virtue and vice in Ephesians 4 and 5 indicate that believers had ongoing interactions with unbelievers (e.g., 320-321). Believers speaking to one another as God's redeemed children should continue to speak as redeemed children to those outside the church.

⁴ Paul holds together the sequence of exhortations in chapters 4 and 5 by the verb *peripatéō* ("walk"), which NRSV translates as "live." This verb references "how people live in every aspect of their daily lives" (Arnold 2010, 229). Thus, the entire sequence conveys Paul's insistence that believers live according to their "new identity in Christ" (341).

Within this extended account of appropriate speech, then, Paul situates Christian practice within the decisive timing of Christ's redemptive victory over deception and darkness: "Be careful then how you live, not as unwise people but as wise, making the most of the time [*éxagorazómenoi tòn kairón*] because the days are evil" (5:15-16). The command to live carefully is specified as living wisely, which, in turn, is specified through two subordinate phrases. The term translated "making the most" is the Greek term for redemption with its roots in the buying activities of the marketplace (the agora). In secular literature, it was frequently used to speak of manumitting a slave through payment (Büchsel 1964, 124); Paul elsewhere uses it to speak of God's activity through Christ to buy us away from our slavery to the Law (Gal. 4:5). In Ephesians, Paul speaks not of Christ's redemptive payment but of the believers' approach to *kairos*. Paul uses an intensified verb form which probably means "a buying which exhausts the possibilities available" and, thus, is practiced "tirelessly" (Büchsel 1964, 128). That which believers are supposed to buy, to redeem using all available energy, is *kairos*. Doing so is crucial because the days - "an age characterized by an abundance of evil and dominated by powerful supernatural forces (Gal 1:4; Eph 2:3)" - are evil (Arnold 2010, 346). According to Paul, speaking kairotically is acting within those decisive moments when the darkness is exposed through the light of Christ.

Living wisely, then, is a matter of discerning those moments when the speech that imitates God's love also is the speech that participates in Christ's victory over darkness. *Kairos* is cosmologically loaded time. The timeliness of our persuasive speech is wisely discerned as opportunity for bringing forth the fruit of God's light rather than trafficking in the words and deeds of immorality. The timeliness of our communication is not that of the day-to-day patter of self-serving interests. We ought not see time as the mere passing of the calendar days but as occasions of a divine opening. As Snodgrass (1996) states: "Time is going by, and evil will use it if Christians do not" (288). We ascertain these opportunities by carefully attending to how we live (Eph. 5:15), comprehending God's plan for living (5:17), and depending on God's Spirit (5:18).⁵

Furthermore, Paul's instructions about redeeming the *kairos* are directed to the plurality of believers within the Ephesus church. Thus, in contrast to the individualized achievement of kairotic speaking found in classical rhetorical theory, Pauline kairotic speaking emerges from within a redeemed community and, in turn, nurtures that community. It is not skill distinguishing gifted communicators but a characteristic

⁵ Paul's phrasing in 5:15 to "be careful how you live" directs believers to "look carefully" (Merkle 2016, 171-172). Given that Paul expounds upon this carefulness by referencing *kairos*, the notion that one ought to pay close attention makes sense as a communication practice; namely, to speak kairotically required a high level of attentiveness to the variables constituting any occasion. Thus, it makes sense that Paul would emphasize careful observation (contrary to Hoehner's [2002] claim that the emphasis "is not how carefully one is to observe but how carefully one is to walk" [691]).

pattern of living among God's people. Together, believers ought to be wisely discerning. Gombis (2010), in his study of Ephesians, articulates the centrality of the church to kairotic speech well:

In each unanticipated situation, then, churches can ask, 'In this precise situation, given this unique set of circumstances, how can we make a way forward that radiates redemptive dynamics?' (173).

Indeed, this is the question that operationalizes judgments of timely speaking. Importantly, Paul's instructions in Ephesians 4-5 further sharpen and direct any such question within the body of Christ. We radiate redemptive dynamics by speaking truth, grace, kindness, forgiveness, and thanksgiving, which is in marked contrast to self-serving practices of the day-to-day (cf. Lincoln 1990, 333). This is to happen "moment by moment, in the practical decisions of everyday life" (Thielman 2010, 357). To speak Christ in a timely manner, then, is to expose the darkness and to encourage living in the light of Christ, and this only can be done by speech that is appropriate for members of a community imitating the love of God.

Centrifugal Speech

Recent scholarship on *kairos* within rhetorical studies continues to reflect the secular classical heritage in ways that differ from Paul's view of kairotic speaking. The contrast is instructive, for it clarifies the distinctive work of Christian speech in relation to secular assumptions that all-too-often substitute as Christian strategy.

As I surveyed above, the classical views of *kairos* and persuasion tended to fall along two conceptual trajectories. Rhetorical scholar Carolyn Miller (2002) characterizes these according to differing conceptions of the occasion in which a speaker acts kairotically. The occasion associated with sophists is unique and unexpected; each moment is sufficiently different that to speak kairotically is to work creatively in ways that cannot be anticipated through training or preparation. The occasion associated with the civic ideals of Isocrates and Cicero, on the other hand, is marked by social conventions and expectations; orators work within a range of relatively predictable lines of argumentation, stylistic norms, and accepted values to fit within the moment. Thus, orators can learn to speak appropriately, adapting their discourse to the moment in ways that are creative and relevant (xii-xiii). Of course, as Miller carefully notes, these trajectories are not mutually exclusive; the complexity of human persuasion seems to require both skillful adaptation and serendipitous inspiration. Nonetheless, across both of these trajectories, the emphasis continues to fall upon the speaker—as the locus of persuasive engagement—as pursuing strategic achievement by fitting speech within the immediate occasion. In Paul's view of kairotic speaking, though, the locus is God's victory over darkness and the speaker fits discourse within that reality. In the classical rhetorical tradition, the occasion is a resource to be used by a speaker, whether through creative inspiration or studied preparation, for the speaker's persuasive objective. The secular orator is the agent of transformation who grasps the occasion through temporal appropriateness. For Paul, the occasion is God's kingdom breaking into the temporal through the speaker's attentive and committed availability.

Christian persuaders are not the agents of transformation but the agencies of Christ's light; they are not the locus of persuasion but a site through which God's redemptive power is evidenced.

In more recent rhetorical theory, the emphasis on speakers as either inspired or rhetorically equipped agents is reduced in favor of seeing *kairos* as an occasion that nearly subsumes the speaker into time itself. Although this newer emphasis may provide a point of productive similarity to a more Pauline approach to *kairos*, in which the persuader's agency is constituted within the temporal opening, the secular conception of time remains, in the final analysis, an opening in which the persuader navigates that opening in more or less skillful ways according to the persuader's desired outcomes and the appropriateness of fit between actions and cultural circumstances. This more recent view of *kairos* develops from a radical and progressive view of social life; *kairos* references the opportunities available within an occasion in which those social conventions, values, or institutions that would otherwise provide the social stability needed for persuasion are themselves malleable. So, to speak into a moment of time, persuaders cannot operate as masters of strategy but as cunning tacticians who are deeply attuned to, and find themselves changing within, the fluctuating circumstances. This is a radicalized sophistry in which the persuaders' own desired outcomes are often altered, distorted, or even abandoned as they immerse themselves within the instability of fleeting time (Trapani and Maldonado 2018, 284). Where might we see this sort of rhetorical practice? Trapani and Maldonado see this happening in disruptive social and political activism; the activists will invent new tactics on-the-fly in response to the institutional power seeking to rebuff the activism. These tactics may or may not be successful; if they fail, they spawn new tactics, some of which may not have been conceived prior to the moment of resistance. In the process of active resistance, then, the persuaders are working pragmatically to secure some sort of victory. They will use whatever is at hand as a resource, submerging themselves into an unpredictable drama of protest (282-284).

The radical contingency of cunning activism, indeed, pushes beyond the received rhetorical traditions of kairotic speech. Yet, radicalizing the temporality of any given occasion does not alter the deep logic of the secular tradition; the improvised tactics, albeit contingent and unpredicted, can be understood as tactics only through some sense of the persuader's desired outcome and in terms of their appropriateness for effecting that outcome. Within this more radical sense of *kairos* the speaker's goal may be subject to greater variance than in the traditional views, and the speaker no longer featured as the primary actor within the complex of any temporal moment, but a sense of decorum between tactics and the immediate social and cultural circumstance still prevails. Thus, the rhetorical action of speaking into the moment is caught up within, and effected in relation to, the constituent variables of that moment. We could say, then, that the practice of secular kairotic speaking is guided by a sort of centripetal movement; whatever speakers are doing makes sense as kairotic in and through the temporal "force" of the immediate circumstances and the speaker's constitution as agent within that moment.

For Paul, though, the rhetorical action of Christian speakers is not enclosed within the cultural and social variables of any given occasion but opens 'outward' into God's divine time. We could characterize Christian speech, then, as centrifugal. Christians are pulled by a 'force' away from the immediate circumstances and outside of any self-mastered outcomes. Within a divinely available occasion, Christians are constituted as persuasive participants in God's redemptive work.⁶

Angelina Grimké's Timeliness

To illustrate the difference, I will return briefly to a hallmark of kairoic speech in US history in which opponents of slavery generated timely messages within a range of volatile and varying circumstances. One of these noteworthy messages was by Angelina Grimké.⁷

In the early 19th century, northern abolitionists were facing an uphill battle against the political and economic power of slaveholders in the southern states of the Union. Furthermore, not all northerners were sympathetic to the abolitionist cause, so abolitionists also faced rejection and harassment from many in their own communities. Looking for any rhetorical advantage he could find, the abolitionist writer and speaker William Lloyd Garrison published a letter from an unknown daughter of a southern slaveholding family in his weekly newspaper, *The Liberator*. Having migrated north from South Carolina with her older sister, Sarah, thirty-year old Angelina Grimké had written a personal letter to Garrison expressing her admiration for his unwavering stance against slavery and her gratitude to God that recent anti-abolitionist violence had not deterred his work. Grimké wrote from a decidedly Christian stance, expressing her conviction that standing against slavery was "holy ground" and committing herself to pray for abolitionists, specifically that God would preserve "their minds in humility and patience, faith, hope, and *charity*" in the face of persecution (Grimké [1835]; emphasis in original). Struck by the "sublime" and "Christ-like" convictions revealed in this letter, Garrison published it. Angelina had no expectation that her letter would appear in *The Liberator*, but its publication served to propel Angelina to prominence as a speaker and writer.

⁶ Abraham Wu (2020) uses the centripetal/centrifugal imagery to characterize how the double-movement of the Eucharist transforms the church: pulling the church together and sending it out. Although I differ from Wu by applying the metaphor of centripetal to the inward force of secular persuasion, I share his sense of centrifugal movement to characterize the church and I add the persuasive communication of its members as a "missional community" moving outward "in participation with the missional God" (Wu 2020, 8).

⁷ The letter is published under the title given by William Lloyd Garrison, which includes his introductory comments and Angelina Grimké's letter itself, addressed to "Respected Friend" and dated August 30, 1835. It is available in Ceplair (1989); a copy of the original newsprint is available online: *The Liberator*, 19 Sep 1835, www.newspapers.com. All quotations will be from this online reproduction.

In his introduction to the letter, Garrison referenced the author's identity as a Grimké, a noted southern slaveholding family. Angelina, who had left her family home for the freedom of conscience that comes from being a northern Quaker, had been spurred into rhetorical action by the reports of violence against abolitionists, as well as by Garrison's own published exhortation to stay the course. She passionately agreed with Garrison and advanced her view that suffering for the cause of abolition is scripturally sound and a spiritual calling. "If persecution can abolish slavery," she wrote, "it will also purify the Church." With this conviction, Angelina sensed the timeliness of offering encouragement to Garrison. Her opening paragraph is worth quoting in full:

It seems as if I was compelled at this time to address thee, notwithstanding all my reasonings against intruding on thy valuable time, and the uselessness of so insignificant a person as myself offering thee the sentiments of sympathy at this alarming crisis.

Although marked by the conventional solicitousness of an unknown (female) reader to the prominent (male) editor, the appeal was received by Garrison as deeply sincere. Angelina's sense of time derived from her gratitude for the specific way that God was working redemptively for the betterment of slaves, society, and church. Thus, Angelina was "compelled" to speak even though she had no social standing or rhetorical credentials warranting her voice. Angelina's letter, therefore, can be situated within a Pauline view of *kairos*. She addressed Garrison by carefully attending to the opportunity for speaking encouragement in Christ's work and gratitude to God for the eternal value of this work.

Given the historical importance of her letter, and the fact that it was a propitious moment both for the abolitionist movement and the contributions of women within American public discourse, rhetorical scholars have provided substantive critical analysis of the Grimké sisters and their contributions to church and society. In particular, noted rhetorical critic Stephen Browne (1996) has produced a full study of the 1835 letter, rightly emphasizing how Angelina rhetorically reconstructed the anti-abolitionist violence as a sacred opportunity. We see in Brown's analysis, though, the implicit sense of timing consistent with the secular rhetorical tradition. For Brown, Angelina constructed for herself a prophetic public voice and transformed her readers into a community of suffering servants. By this rhetorical craftsmanship, then, Angelina seized the opportunity, writing her letter at the right time in the right place to affect attitudinal change. The particularity of her voice, as a Christian woman from the South speaking out against slavery, and her specific appeals, urging abolitionists to pursue God's justice and righteousness, sparked Garrison's response, which in turn provided a distinctive and satisfying account for abolitionist readers of how their steadfastness amidst violence leads to the purification of their Christian faith.

Thus, Browne reads Angelina's letter with an eye toward its temporal significance within its specific historical moment; the letter had specific appeal to a specific audience at a specific time. Thus, in the terms of the classical rhetorical views of *kairos*, the letter was timely and, thus, rhetorically effective.

Yet, from a Pauline perspective on timely speaking, Angelina Grimké did something of greater consequence than produce a timely message effectuating persuasion. As we know not only through the letter itself but also through her other letters and subsequent speeches, Angelina developed her views of slavery and the abolitionist movement through a deep Christian piety (Weld, et al. 1970; Ceplair 1989). As a devout and serious believer, Angelina Grimké "made the most of the time" in ways consistent with Paul's commands in Ephesians 5. Amidst the evil days of violence and slavery, Angelina saw the light of Christ as an available in-breaking that exposes the darkness through loving appeal and a devoted thanksgiving. In her letter she placed herself in relation to other believers as a servant of God and of possible encouragement to them. Thus, she subordinated herself within the cosmic time of God's work, urging others and committing herself to be the people of God, living fully and without reservation in the light of Christ.

Through Paul's view of timely speech, then, we see Angelina's letter differently than does a critic limited to the secular conceptions of rhetorical appropriateness. Angelina wrote, first and foremost, from within her relationship to her Savior. Her letter was composed within a spiritually weighted moment in time. The moment of her action was redeemed through her wise attentiveness to the available opportunity of speaking God's new life. The distance between a secular view of timeliness and Paul's is the difference between *kairos* understood "centripetally" —as a moment fulfilled within the rhetor's social and cultural sphere of influence—and *kairos* understood "centrifugally"—as a moment that redeems the immediate social and cultural sphere of influence through the rhetor's love of others and thankfulness to God.

Conclusion

The days in which we act are evil, yet by orienting ourselves to our fundamental relationship with God through Christ, we can invest into the propitious opportunities of living Christ's love and, thus, spreading the victory of Christ. In what is likely the earliest 20th century lexical study of *kairos* in the New Testament, R. Martin Pope (1910-1911) puts it this way:

Christianity . . . regards time as an arena of self-sacrifice, where each life in its own way, by its particular ability and influence, gives contribution to the ultimate 'kingdom of heaven' (Pope 1910-'11, 553).

Rather than seeing *kairos* as a moment in which speakers bring listeners into the sphere of their influence or speakers conforming to the listeners' sense of appropriateness, *kairos* is the moment in which speakers actively and fully submit self to God's wisdom and extend self into the active love for others.

Paul commands us to always be ready for these opportunities. We are to speak with timeliness. However, the contrast between Pauline and secular rhetorical concepts of *kairos* expose our flawed views of timing that frequently shape our Christian witness. We tend to think of timeliness in terms of cultural relevance, of speaking in ways that capture the *zeitgeist*. Now, indeed, we may have warrant for culturally propitious communication elsewhere in scripture, but we do not find it in Paul's reference to timeliness in Ephesians. Rather, Paul commanded the Ephesian believers to fit their speech into the circumstances of their calling, not the circumstances of their listeners. Being called as imitators of God's love, the appropriateness of Christian witness has everything to do with the time of God's redemptive victory and not time conceived via the cultural conventions or social structures that set the conditions for persuasive efficacy.

The task of the Christian communicator, then, is to diligently consider how the love of Christ's victory can be uttered in ways that reflect a community of God's children, formed through God's gracious forgiveness and overflowing from a disposition of thankfulness. Paul's instructions challenge us precisely at this point: Our first and ongoing thought about our communication is not about its timely effectiveness in meeting the expectations or demands of an audience, but of being vessels for the in-breaking of God's redemptive light, love, grace.

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