

Watch!

Watch ye therefore: for ye know not when the master of the house cometh, at even, or at midnight, or at the cockcrow, or in the morning: 36 Lest coming suddenly he find you sleeping. 37 And what I say unto you I say unto all, Watch. Mark 13:35-37 KJV

These verses carry a soul-searching message. Perhaps we all have had experiences in life where we were not watching and something bad happened or could have happened; caught off guard in a time when we should have been careful.

Our Sunday School lesson is titled "Watch!" and the lesson scriptures are taken from Mark 13:32-37, and 1 Thessalonians 5:2-8. As I read this lesson, I considered a few different aspects of watching. I believe the lesson is primarily interested in watching for the Lord's return, which ultimately is the reason for living a careful Christian life. To watch is to be aware that sooner or later something is going to threaten me or something that I or we have, which is a danger or a risk to our future. This includes watching for our personal salvation, as well as the salvation of our fellow brothers and sisters, and those in the world around us.

Backing up a little with our thinking, what is the basis of our watching? In true form, the Lord wants us to be aware and dependent on the voice of the Holy Spirit, which is our personal watcher, quietly warning us of impending spiritual danger. Without this Holy Spirit enlightenment, we do not have what it takes to properly be a watchman or watchwoman. When we depend on Him, we have a solid foundation to rest on. This also means that my heart is open to the flow of God's love, mercy, and acceptance. It also means that I love the Lord and carry a deep concern that my relationship with Him, as well as others' relationships with Him are alive and vibrant. When watching through the Holy Spirit, I will carry a Godly concern, filled with love and concern for my spiritual family, as well as a concern of the preservation of the truth. This may not always be easy or the accepted way of thinking to those who are less inclined to that thinking around us, but it is God's way. It is important though, that my life first falls under that canopy of God's love, before we address others. This way is timeless, as well as open minded to change.

Another way of watching is based in tradition, and personal opinion. Sometimes this way can seem pretty right and legitimate. It is also the easiest way to look at things by judging the present by the past, or by my personal agenda or opinion. Whither we are aware of it or not, all of us are predisposed to this method of watching, which is dangerous ground if it is not enlivened by the Holy Spirit.

Tradition and culture are very important; especially thinking of spiritual or church culture. However, culture in itself, is simply an acceptable way of doing things in a nation or group which has developed over time and prescribed values. If it is influenced by God, it can be a good thing which helps people be saved by providing an environment conducive to God's truth and values. On the other hand, sinful and ungodly peoples create cultures that are self-serving and anti-God.

There is a movement today towards destroying Christian values and truth, thinking it is dogmatic and outdated. Some constituencies have even left off Biblical doctrine, saying the same of it. However, one needs to be very careful to not disconnect from history by disregarding the tried and true. Things and truths which have stood the test of time cannot be just disregarded without implications. In our short sighted view of today, we may be chiseling away at a foundational pillar on which the building stands. The church culture and practice has evolved by those who were concerned, "Watching" for the return of the Lord.

There is much value in culture as it predisposes us to accept a way of life, and in this case, a life lived for the Lord; and is often anchored in the doctrine of the Word of God. By the same token one must be careful lest he or she put their salvation in culture. It therefore becomes a challenge for us to combine what our culture and social norms deem right and wrong and living a Holy Spirit life; dependent upon His leading.

I had an experience that happened to me a while ago which made me realize I was basing my opinions on an attitude which hindered me from being open-minded. This was not something spiritual, just a decision that was being made in our congregation. As I was thinking about it one day, I think I was praying about it to, it struck me that I did not even know what it would be like. Then and there, something changed in my heart and I realized I had been basing the thoughts in my heart on my attitude, rather than what really mattered. This realization brought peace to my heart. I was basing my judgment on my opinion, and attitude. When the Lord removed those things, my heart changed and I could support the direction. I thank the Lord for doing that work in my heart. Perhaps we could say that it was the Holy Spirit watching out for me.

Our intellect alone does not give us spiritual and spirit led vision of sin. Neither does it have keeping power. It is true that there are things which God's word and the Holy Spirit have taught us which are sin and to be avoided. However, intellectual knowledge of sin, will not get us into heaven's door. Unless knowledge and experience is coupled with the Holy Spirit, and our lives are under the blood of Jesus Christ, they are empty works. Without this Holy Spirit led vision, we may tend to view change as drift. If so, we need to sound the warning to who ever is affected by it. Then again sometimes we may need to talk about it to prove the difference between change and drift.

History can contain priceless examples to help us make proper decisions. I have seen it happen in discussions time and again where brethren will relate experiences they have been through which give light to a present situation. But we must remember that God did not intend for the gospel to be locked in a time capsule. We must also remember that God placed us in this age to live and navigate these challenges, using the Holy Spirit as our guide. It is also important to bear in mind that God placed our fathers in the era in which they lived and prepared them to face the challenges of their day, by giving them the same Holy Spirit as their guide. It is possible that they made some mistakes, but then again, tomorrow's generation will say the same about us. In every generation humanity still needs the Holy Spirit, and at times makes decisions that could have been made differently. This is where God's grace enters in to the equation. With His grace, we cannot look back and blame other generations for our current failures. God is a God of today, and blame is Satan's game of trying to keep us living in the past with it's mysteries, mistakes, and failures. God would have us cast off those weights and live today; after all, had we lived in our father's generation, we likely would not have done any differently than they did. By living with our focus on the past, God cannot lead us in the future; neither can we properly watch for our souls and the souls of those around us.

May we put the past behind us, looking forward in confidence, aware of the evil one's tactics. By grace we will one day stand among the faithful on that last great day.

Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, 14 I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. 15 Let us therefore, as many as be perfect, be thus minded: and if in any thing ye be otherwise minded, God shall reveal even this unto you. Philippians 3:13-15 KJV

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