

As it was mentioned last Sabbath there are other sermons that need to be given here right now at this particular time and not just what we have been looking at in the sense of Chapter 6 and being prepared for the material that's there. So last week I referred to some of what needed to be addressed, and in the next couple of sermons we're going to focus on what's needed most right now as far as God's Church is concerned. And I thought I'd mention that I'm not sure I'm going to be able to do this in one sermon today. The plan is to get through this one entirely, but there is so much material here it may take two. But they're, for sure, two different subjects that we're going to be going into as we cover some of this material.

And the reason we're going to do this is because in some areas of our lives, as we tend to do within the Body, within the Church, we go through various cycles. It's always been that way. And we have good moments, bad moments, in between moments, and a mixture of all that. Right now we are at a point in time where we need to take a focus, a look (if you will), a special focus on where we are and what we need to be doing. And God is making it very clear what we need to look at this particular point in time and where our strengths are and where some of our weaknesses or where some things are coming in that would tend to be weaknesses that need to be addressed. And this is a good time for doing that.

So these sermons will point out things that we're not fully aware of in the sense of the depth of their importance in our lives at this specific moment in time. And that's why we're going to go into this, because it's something that we may tend to overlook very easily, because we may think we're doing much better in a particular area than what we really are. And not just that but we can go along at a particular point in time and then God says it's time to go on and grow more in a particular area. And that's really what this is very much about here today. So we simply need to look more deeply into a spiritual mirror to see what needs to be recognized, for what it is that needs to be cleansed, and then address those things and wash ourselves thoroughly from any unclean areas, from any dirt that needs to be washed away spiritually.

Many of the things that will be covered in this sermon today are known by us and we are pretty familiar with them; some of the scriptures we're going to go through here, we're very familiar with those. We've heard them many, many a time, but again, they're specific to what we need to focus upon now, right now at this particular time. And we need to do so a little more deeply than in times past. We can kind of become a little slack in this particular area from time to time.

So, as I mentioned here about next week, next week, if I'm able to get through this sermon today without making it a Part 2, we're going to follow up on this material covered here today and we're going to focus on some of the things that have happened within the ministry, that we're ever going to be learning about this process of what we've gone through since about 2008 and things that have

happened within the ministry, additions and retirements, and everything else that has really brought a lot to the surface in the sense of things we can focus upon more easily. Because if we didn't go through all this we wouldn't be able to learn much of what we have the capacity to be shown by God. And if we hadn't of gone through some of these things they wouldn't be able to be seen as easily.

So again, it's awesome how God works with us, how He molds and fashions us, and the things we go through in order to learn much, much more in our lives.

So this sermon today is entitled, *To Be Watchful*, which is about a focus we need right now at this very specific time in God's Church, that we need to come to see more deeply concerning what it is that we need to be more watchful.

And this word "watchful," obviously, is a word that has to do with "being alert, being on guard, being ready spiritually." Many of those words are used and translated from a single Greek word oftentimes.

Let's turn over to Matthew 24. Again, scriptures that have become very familiar over time because they apply to the end-time in a very powerful way and events that take place. But we're going to focus on a specific section here that is needful because of the subject matter.

Matthew 24:42—Watch, therefore. Now, over and over again that's the admonition that we've been given. And there are different ways we have to apply that in our life. **Watch, therefore, because you do not know what hour your Lord come.** Now, this, as I've mentioned in times past, especially when doing some of the radio broadcasts, or radio interviews, I should say, and answering various questions concerning the books, especially the second book because of having a date that was set and specific, some would ask about some of these things, about not knowing the time, the day, or the hour, and there is only so much you can go into in an interview and be able to discuss, or be able to explain, or to teach because they don't understand what these things mean.

Most of the time, most all of the time when this is used it is not about a matter of not knowing the specific day or the specific time that Jesus Christ is returning. It has to do with something that has gone on for the last 2,000 years as to *your* spiritual condition, if you were called into the Church at any point in time during that past 2,000 years - if an individual, I should say, was called during that time period - they, they're being told, "You don't know when he's going to come." In other words, don't be caught off guard, because for you, ever how you live your life, it's as good as him having come, if you begin to let down and leave or go away from the truth that God has given to you. So for you, if you let down and something happens in your life and you become apart or disfellowshipped (I should say), or separate from the Body, or you leave the Church, then for you, as far as God is concerned, as far as what He's telling you, is Christ has returned. He's come. He's come as a thief in the night as far as your life is concerned. And there is no opportunity in those cases if they're not able to repent, to be able to address any more in their life until the last Hundred-years, if they're able to at that time.

So again, we'll talk about some of this as we go forward.

I want to just read another verse here that has to do with some of this. This word "thief" is used oftentimes throughout scripture, and what it has to say, there is a scripture in **Revelation 16:15** (you can just jot that down). It says, **Behold, I come as a thief.** He said it over and over and over again. That's applied to everyone, again, over the past 2,000 years. **I come as a thief. Blessed is he who watches,** stays alert and on guard, **and keeps his garments,** a responsibility that God gives to us to keep our garments. What does that mean, "to keep your garments?" I think of the part we've gone through in times past here now back in Genesis, about "dressing" or... what is the word that we are trying to... We're trying to zero in on words that are able to be better translated, and especially in different languages. And, "cultivate," that can be done not just having to do with agriculture, but it has to do with your life and your mind and how you live your life and what you work into it and so forth - "to cultivate and keep."

But, again here, we're "to keep our garments," what we wear. What do we think of when we think of "our garments?" Well, the desire that they be clean, that they be white, that they be free from sin, that they not be dirty. That's why I started the sermon the way we did. There are certain things at times in our life we have to look at and see if there is dirt, if there are things that are not clean that need to be washed away. Same thing is true in the garments. They need to be white in the sense of that which is righteous before God. And so ever striving for that in our life in what we wear. We also have talked about that which we're to put on as far as something to wear - not necessarily a garment to be clothed by, but additional things that we are to wear - speaking of the armor of God. And those things we must have as a part of our life, day in and day out, to strive for those things.

So again, things to guard, to watch over in our life, **lest he walk naked,** meaning that which is spiritual, that which has to do with how we're clothed, to be clothed properly before God. Otherwise, before God we are naked in the sense of our sins and the sense of the shame. And it goes on to say that... **and that they see his shame.** "Lest he walk naked and they see his shame."

So again here, "I come as a thief." And that expression, again, is used in large part because if we don't do what we're supposed to do, what we *think* we have, or what we thought we had, or what we did have at one time, we no longer have. It's taken away. It's taken away, like a thief, quickly. And that's our own fault. If we let up, if we let down, if we don't do the things we're supposed to do, what we have... Look at all the people that have come and gone! Look at all the people who have come and gone just since 2008 - not even counting what happened during the Apostasy and even before that. Because ever since I've been in the Church a lot of people have come and gone. *A lot!* Thousands and thousands and thousands! Hundreds and a few thousand have come and gone since we began as PKG, just in this body alone. Incredible! For them, Jesus Christ came as a thief in the night, at a time when they were not expecting it. They weren't on guard. They weren't alert in their spiritual lives.

So everything they had is now gone, taken from them. They don't have it any longer. And that's the context of these things that is being told to us on a spiritual plane that we have responsibility before God to watch, to be on guard in our lives spiritually.

Going back here in **Matthew 24**, continuing on, **verse 44—Therefore, be you also ready.** It's talking about on a continuing basis. Not ready... the past 2,000 years, these verses, it wasn't talking to the people during Pergamos or Thyatira to be ready for Christ's return, actual coming! It wasn't about that whatsoever! Nada! Nothing to do with that! It had to do with the context of what I'm discussing with you today, that if you don't *keep* what God has given to you, if you don't watch, and be on guard spiritually he will come as a thief as far as your spiritual life is concerned and you will have no part in what you were called to in the first place. And that's the context.

Who then is a faithful and wise servant... So that's the admonition here. With what we've been given we're to be faithful *and* wise with what God has given us. Wisdom has to do with living with the knowledge and understanding that we're able to glean through time. We first begin with knowledge. We don't understand it yet. We may be told in the very beginning about the Sabbath. It can take a long, long time (and it does) to really grasp and understand the purpose of God's Sabbath. Week by week, and year by year, the yearly Sabbath's. It's not something we readily grasp in the sense of a spiritual plane of what it means in our life and how God uses it to benefit us, to work with us. And so wisdom has to do with growing, then, through experience. It takes time to develop experience.

Same thing as with tithing. We're told in the very beginning obey it, and we begin to do it. We may not understand it in the beginning but we have the knowledge God says it's something required. And so whether it be the Sabbath or the Holy Days or tithing or other things that God gives to us, we then begin to live it. And through that experience we begin to grow in understanding of why God has given us that knowledge, of *what* God is doing.

What, to me, one of the most exciting things of all as time has gone on, especially in the last few years, and even the last several months, is to gain a deeper appreciation of understanding of things that God gives us to live by. To me that's such an awesome, exciting thing, the more understanding He gives us, of why He is doing what He does in the way that He is doing it. Just like with what we've been going through in preparation for Chapter 6 - to understand those things. To know them is one thing. To have the knowledge is one thing. To have the knowledge of what changed between 2008 and 2019 is one thing, but to understand it and to "*see*" what God is going and why is *awesome*! To understand more the way God works when it comes to things to do with prophecy is incredible! Because we haven't seen these things in times past! We haven't known them! And God just continues to reveal to us more and more and more. And that's an *awesome* thing to experience in life. And then as you experience it you grow in understanding. And then how you apply it in your life and how you use that becomes a matter of wisdom, a matter of character that you live then fully what God gives to you. You exercise it.

And so God says then, where it says here, Christ said, **Who then is a faithful and wise servant.** Faithful. Now, the Church has been tried, very powerfully so. We discussed that recently in a sermon, especially mid-2008 and then later, 2011 on the Last Great Day. Incredible what we went through and what we learned. And as a result of those things we have become much stronger in the area of faith. Much stronger. The Church has been the strongest I've ever seen it in my life since I've been in the

Church since 1969 - living by faith, what has been given to us. And what we've been given is far, far more than what we had back in 1969. Living it, well, that's a different matter, living it because you believe what God has given to you.

"...and wise servant." Living what God gives to us. This is an area we need to focus a little bit on. It has to do with what we're discussing right now and getting ready to go into, because we have to be faithful and wise. Wisdom, again, has to do with applying what we have learned through time, living it in the sense of the knowledge that God gives of how we're to live. Faith is one thing, to believe God and then live according to that, but to live according to the experiences we are given, as far as certain specifics about how to live, is another matter. And this will become clearer as we go along, what we're focusing upon today.

So again, "Who then is a faithful and wise servant whom the Lord has made ruler." Ruler! Look at what God's called us to, to be a part of in His Family and the service that's there and what it means for the future and what it's going to mean on into the Millennium and beyond. Because we're given *awesome* opportunity! To be a part of 144,000 is an awesome thing. But to be in the beginning of the Millennium and to be at the, if you will, at the foundational part of that era of time and the opportunities that are there, that's incredible! That's *awesome*! To understand what we're being given or what people are being offered and the opportunity to serve in very powerful ways that you have no knowledge of yet. You do not grasp yet the magnitude of what God has called you to.

Who then is a faithful and wise servant, whom his lord will make ruler, in other words, "to set in order, to help set in order," in charge, in that respect, to help put things in order. This is a part of what we're talking about, the Millennium. You're going to be a part of helping to set things in order, to put things in their proper order, to re-establish things that need to be re-established on this earth and to help people in that process in very powerful ways.

So **whom his lord has made ruler over his household**. It's about the Body of Christ, the Church of God. "Over *His* household," not ours! You know, when preparing sermons and the like I have no idea what to give. I have learned long ago to rely on God because it's *His Church! His Church! His people!* We belong to God! And it must come from God, then, what must be given. It can't come from us and how we think. It has to come from God. And we learn to live like that, then, in our lives.

So again, "over His household." So how we think about His household is awesomely important to God... *awesomely important to God*.

...**to give them meat in due season**. So again, the blessing of being fed, and the blessing of continuing to grow, and so forth. **Blessed is that servant, whom his lord when he comes shall find so doing**. Being faithful and wise in the areas, basically, in essence in concerning God's household, the Church, one another.

So again, this matter of so doing has to do with watching, but watching has a great deal to do with how we address the Church, how we think about the Church, how we act toward the Church. And I'm

bringing a lot more in than what is just covered in these verses because it's covered in the entire context here of Matthew 24 and Matthew 25. And on and on it goes.

So, we have work that has been given to each of us. Every one of us has work to do. And a lot of that work has to do with this matter of being on guard, being watchful. And it *is* work. It is work. It's not something that can be done in a passive way. It isn't something that just happens. It isn't something we can just kind of slide through in life. It is something we have to work at.

[Mark 13:34 (partial)] **And gave authority to His servants, and to every person their work.** We all have work to do. And so much of it has to do with the very subject matter of what we're talking about, about what it means to be watchful and alert and on guard spiritually. **And commanded the porter to watch.** So, I like this parable in an awesome way because of what it says here. There's "the porter." We're to watch. It's showing that each one that's called has a work to do, and then you're given a job. You have a job to do. In this particular case, even the example of a porter and what it means, to be watchful, to be alert, to be on guard - in your own life and within the Body, to be helpful, to be there to serve, to be there to do whatever it is we're supposed to do as far as that work. And we'll go on and discuss that.

Watch you, therefore, for you do not know when the master of the house comes. *This is not about him coming on a specific day, on a specific year.* That's not what this is discussing. It isn't what it was discussing when these verses were given by Christ to be for God's Church for the past 2,000 years. So again, **Watch, therefore, for you do not know when the master of the house comes, at even, or at midnight, or at the cockcrowing.** You don't know when a trial is going to come along in your life! And if you're not watchful and on guard it can take you right out! You don't know when things are going to come along to try you. You don't know when certain things in this world are going to happen around you in relationships or whatever it might be, that all of a sudden your eyes begin to be blinded by and things happen in your life and all of a sudden it's gone! That's what we're being warned of. We have to be alert and on guard on a continuing basis. And God has had much mercy with us in bringing us through all these things. He truly has. Because if He didn't do it we couldn't make it. You don't have the power and the ability to come through everything you have come through. God has a purpose and God has a plan and He works with us all individually as a part of His choosing, as to how He is going to work with us and how He's going to lead us and bring us to where He wants to bring us. We have the choice to respond. And how we respond has much to do with how He continues to work with us, that relationship we build with Him and with one another.

Because how we treat one another, how we think about one another has *everything* to do with how we think about God and how we treat God, how we treat Jesus Christ. Sometimes we don't realize that. How we think about one another within the Body has everything to do with our attitude toward God; truly does.

So, **you don't know when the master of the house comes, at even, or at midnight, or at the cockcrowing, or in the morning.** You don't know. **Lest coming suddenly he find you sleeping.** His

desire is to come continually in our life - present progressive, always. We are the ones that let down. We are the ones that can stumble. We are the ones that can fall. And if we get into a particular rut, way of thinking, that can be overpowering, and in time if we're not watchful and alert, we fall into a state of sleep, only God can bring us out of that. And we have seen that. We have experienced that in the Church after the Apostasy. The Church was asleep. When it happened the Church was asleep. And we had to repent of those things. And God began to awaken individuals at different times. Some almost immediately. Some in a month. Some in a year. Some in several years up the road, and all of a sudden they were awakened and they could see it all as plain as day. It's like a calling almost, except it's being awakened out of a spiritual sleep. Only God has the power to do that. Very few have such opportunity in life. But God had a purpose in that, in allowing an entire Church to fall asleep and then to awaken some to be a remnant. Otherwise we wouldn't be here. Nearly all others who have ever gone asleep spiritually have remained asleep, in the past 2,000 years.

Lest coming suddenly he find you sleeping. And what I say unto you I say unto all, Watch. Be alert. Be on guard.

So what are we to be alert to and on guard for? We understand, obviously, our relationship with God. We can see that oftentimes more clearly as far as prayer life, as far as what we do to draw closer to God in our spiritual lives. But sometimes we become lax in another area that's so important, and it is about our relationships. It's how we think toward one another. It's how we treat one another. And that's an area we need to focus upon, to do a better job of being watchful, to being alert. And this is really a time for an opportunity to grow more. That's what God is showing us. It's an opportunity to go beyond where we are now. And that's why we're focusing on some of this at this point in time - besides the fact that some of this has become a little lax.

Over three years I saw it. I saw things happening because of what I was being told because of information I received back. Because, still, God gave me a pulse of the Church throughout that three years. And through that period of time I saw conditions, situations that I knew would be addressed in time and God would give us help in time to be able to address them. But it was given as a period of time that if we're not careful we can begin to drift into a certain, well, at a certain level and begin to be content with that and not see the need to go beyond it. We're at a point in time where we need to go beyond where we are on a spiritual plane in our relationships. We are at a plane where we're doing very well as far as living by faith and the things that have been given to us as a matter of faith. Those are not the same. They are different.

Faith is very much involved in the other, but when I'm talking about faith I'm talking about because of who we are, because of what we are, because of everything that God has given us to see, to believe, to understand, all the truths that we have and the faith that we continue to move forward because we "see" and we believe. That's one thing as far as it affects your life and you live accordingly. And we have, and we have done that exceedingly well, in that respect because God has brought us to that ability. And that's discussed in the book. You'll find it exciting as you go through and read some

of those things, of what God has done with us and how He's done it. It's an awesome thing. But there's more. And that "more" is what we're discussing here today.

Matthew 25; going on here in the next chapter, verse 1. Going to go through this, part of it, fairly rapidly. I don't want to get bogged down in the parable itself. It is a parable. There are parts that apply to certain things at certain times in our lives and there are other parts that are given that are in the context of a parable that are a little unique. But we're going to look at this in the context, as much as we can, as to how it applies, has applied to us in the past and how it applies to us now. And that's what we have to do.

It's kind of like Revelation when it begins to talk about the seven eras of God's Church. Every era can benefit from what it says to each era. You can go back there and you can read things said to each era that you can benefit from on a spiritual plane. However, one of those things has applied in times past to specific eras. It was the predominant spirit and attitude of the Church. It was a particular time period, as well, that the Church went through. But all of those characteristics have always existed. All seven have existed in God's Church always. They exist now. There are certain aspects of some of those that exist now, though we're not in a specific era of time now, as those Church era's applied to back then - talking about Ephesus, beginning in the Church, and then later some of the others that came along. And I think of the longest period of time, Thyatira, that went on for many hundreds of years, if not over a thousand years. It appears to be what God has revealed to us in those areas. But there's much more we have to learn about those things.

But anyway, **[Matthew 25:1]—Then shall the Kingdom be like unto ten virgins, who took their lamps, and went forth to meet the bridegroom.** Well, this is everybody in the Church through time, through the past 2,000 years in the Church. People that have, when God calls us, when He draws us that's what we're to do. We're to take our lamps with oil. We're to have them burning. We're to be a light to the world, that light that is to be burning brightly. So this is a part of an example or a parable, I guess, that's being given here, if you will, that helps us to learn about that process, a part of that process. So, they "went forth to meet the bridegroom." Everybody does. That's what, especially the 144,000, and the others do as well because... at the end here it's a little different, but still doing the same thing spiritually on a spiritual plane that will come in time.

And five of them were wise, and five were foolish. So it's giving an example here of a specific period... Not necessarily a specific period of time, but again, this is a parable to learn from. But it does apply and has applied in our lives. I think of a period... I was thinking of this last night. Five were wise and five were foolish. And looking back at our history since I've been in the Church, there was a period of time when I feel that this applied more than any other. And it was at a time when Mr. Armstrong was being brought back from bad health and working to put the Church back on a right track. But Laodicea had crept in and it was creeping in more and more because that period was coming next and it was leading up to that. And I think of toward the end of that period of time even, before Mr. Armstrong died he blurted out in one sermon one time, he says, "I wonder if even 10%," in essence, "get it," in the sense of still being a part of Philadelphia. Because the context was of a spirit

of Laodicea that had been creeping its way into the Church. And I believe that. I believe that as we got closer and closer more of Laodicea began to creep in until finally that became what we were. We were in that period of time and we were full blown Laodicean. After Mr. Armstrong died the Church was Laodicean. It was no longer Philadelphian. And that's a toughie for people who think they're still Philadelphia to address. God will help them to address that one day, because a lot of people still think they're Philadelphian who are scattered. They don't "see" themselves, just exactly what Laodicea says. They can't "see" themselves. They don't "see" themselves for what they really are.

So it says, "they took their lamps, went forth to meet the bridegroom. Five were wise and five were foolish." Meaning, in essence, that we were at a point in time where some were applying - a half of a body here - applying the things they needed to do to grow. Their prayer life, their study life, other things that were involved there as a part of making them, helped to make them wise as far as how you should live your life. Five were foolish. They weren't applying. They weren't doing the things they should. The oil was going out. They weren't trying to renew it. They weren't doing the things they should do to be strong and to have a strong relationship with God and with Jesus Christ. And so it's just talking about an example there then of what happened.

Those who were foolish took their lamps, and took no oil with them. So I just mentioned that. So, they didn't do what they should be doing. They weren't. They just... They were in the courtyard! What a great example! When we finally went in Revelation and looked at that example there about the temple and about the courtyard and about those who are out in the courtyard, but they're not really a part of the temple - but they act like they are. They're putting on the airs like they're part of the temple, but they're really not in the temple worshipping. They're really not doing the things they should be doing. Another example of the wise and the foolish. And what did God do with those in the courtyard here during this period, if you want to talk about it, of a specific period of time that was given to the Church in the sense of measuring the temple? Those in the courtyard, they were cast to the gentiles! No longer a part. Because God isn't going to allow those things to exist. Either we do what we need to be doing, we grow in the way we should be, we apply ourselves in the way we should be *or we will be on the outside*, period. That's just the way it is.

And that hasn't necessarily stopped. That can continue on. Hopefully it doesn't. Hopefully through the period of time in dedicating ourselves in the manner we did in that following year, or the last year, I should say, up to November there, middle of November. Hopefully we have practiced things to a degree that to let up now doesn't feel good. To let down now or to back off from that doesn't... Because we know what the experience is like and what it means in our lives to draw closer to God and what it was like when you went through various trials. I have heard from so many people that have talked about so many things they were bombarded with during that year - *bombarded with!* And it's because of what they did spiritually, on a spiritual plane, that they had the help, the ability to deal with what they went through during that period of time. I hope we see that and hope we understand that.

And so now if we were to back off of that, mightily - it doesn't mean we have to do it in the same manner to the same degree, necessarily, but I hope we're learning that by backing away from some of that, because it isn't something we've been asked to do, that we recognize a void in our lives that's not the same if we're not doing it. And that's something spiritual. Good lesson. Don't have to call it a "Year of Dedication." Our lives should be dedicated to God, mightily, powerfully to the time Christ returns - whenever that is! It doesn't matter. We go forward and we follow what God gives to us, and we strive to live this way of life fully, completely, mightily, truly in spirit and in truth.

Verse 4—But the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps. So they were going through and doing the things they should be doing. Like the example between the... It's like the example between the courtyard and the temple again.

Verse 5—While the bridegroom tarried, "spent time, to take time, to delay," wasn't time yet to return. And even as this applies to some of us right now, there is more of a tarrying because it has changed. **While the bridegroom tarried, they all slumbered and slept.** You don't want that to happen in your life. "While the bridegroom tarried, they all slumbered and slept." So there came a point in time spiritually where all, it says, slumbered and slept. Well, that did happen to the Church right up to the time of the Apostasy when God began to shake the Church. So as far as happening, by an example of something we can look at, we can see where it did happen. But again, this is a parable to teach us, and everybody in different ages of time in the past 2,000 years could apply this to their lives and learn from it - how foolish it is to be foolish; how important it is to be wise. How needful it is never to be, to get into a position where you're slumbering and sleeping on a spiritual plane. To understand the importance of being watchful, to be alert and on guard. That's what it teaches.

...they all slumbered and slept. And at midnight there was a cry made, Behold, the bridegroom comes; go you out to meet him. I think of that happening on a literal plane within the Church. There came a point in time where literally... we were called. We were told to, you know, whenever we were called, doesn't matter over the past 2,000 years, people were to take their lamps and their oil with them and to be spiritually strong, to be spiritually on guard, alert, watchful. But there came a point in time in the Church where literally a cry went out. It was a cry! We didn't know it was. We didn't grasp it. We had to be told that it was later on. We had to be told that that's what took place on December 17, 1994. Did I get that right? Right. Okay. I get those dates messed up. We need the first part of the month, or last, but not so close... But the Apostasy. Think what took place! The Apostasy. And yet what took place was the very thing that Thessalonians, that Paul talked about. In essence, that would be what was given there as a sign that, "Christ is coming. Now go out to meet Him. He is on his way." It was a, to be a wake-up call. And so that's what it's talking about here as a part of this example of a parable here. "Go you out to meet him."

Then all those virgins arose. I didn't have time to go into all the Greek words here that are used, but this is not a good translation. But basically, without even having to go into that, just by looking at it for us and how that applied to us we should know what that means. **And all those virgins arose and trimmed their lamps.** If you want to look at that specific time, what happened? All the virgins,

all who were called by God didn't arise and trim their lamps. But only those that God awakened from the sleep, they did. See? Some that were wise and some that had been foolish before. And that's the importance here, to learn from this. Sometimes we try to push into parables here things that are specific about numbers and whatever, and sometimes they apply and sometimes they do not. But we strive to do because we strive, we're wanting to learn, we're wanting to know, "What is God saying here?" But this is literally something that did happen with us. And so "they arose and trimmed their lamps."

And the foolish said unto the wise, Give us of your oil; for our lamps are going out. But the wise answered, saying, No, lest there is not going to be enough for us and you. But rather, go to them that sell, and buy for yourselves. I think of sermons that have been given at times and not long after that and what continued to go on and people that were coming along and things that were being done and a reality here that you need to get your life in gear. You are responsible for your life, not someone else. You are responsible for your choices and where you are and where you go and what you do. You're responsible in your obedience to God and what you choose and what you don't choose.

I think of one particular area we were invited to (two particular areas) early on, invited to - one in Arizona and one up in Minnesota. And I went up there and talked to different groups of people. They'd gotten different groups from all the different groups that had been scattered to meet. And I told them about the Passover, because the 14/15th was a big thing at that time. And I told them what was going to happen to them as a group if they didn't get everything together, not try to build bridges and make things work, of things that are wrong in life. You can't build a bridge with a 14/15^{er}. They didn't like what they heard. Never heard from them again. Not a one in all the people that were gathered in both of those places. And I understand why. They didn't like what they heard. And so you've got to do what you must do before God if you want oil in your life. Otherwise, you're just going to continue to live foolishly. And that's what they chose to do.

And so we all had a responsibility. Are we going to, with the chance and opportunity God's giving us, to hear, to listen, to hear what we need to do, are we going to do what we are told? What God tells us to do? Or are we going to go about it "some other way?" I think of John, what is it? John 10? Where Christ said, "All who have come up before me are thieves." Thieves. They want to come up some other way. They want to do it some other way. That's human nature - for those who seek to do something in a wrong way. Those who are the sheep - which we all are - those who humble themselves, those who follow and hear his voice and stay in tuned to that will be able to go forward, do what we need to do.

Verse 10—And while they went to buy, the bridegroom came. And they that were ready went with him to the marriage. And the door was shut. It doesn't say how many, does it? Wasn't a lot. It wasn't a lot. **Afterward came also the other virgins, saying, Lord, Lord, open to us.** It's going to be a bit of a shocker. It's going to be a bit of a shocker for some when they come to a point in time and realize, when Jesus Christ returns on the day of Pentecost, standing on the Mount of Olives with

144,000 with them, and they're not there. Because some will come all the way to that point. They'll begin to see certain things. They'll begin to change certain things in their life. But there are going to be some that are going to be allowed to live on that are going to be allowed to come so see that and realize, and Christ is going to say, "I never knew you," in the sense of what's happened over the past many years. Did he know them at one time? Yes. I guess, better said here he says it this way, **But he answered and said, Verily I say unto you, I do not know you.** Not never, but I do not know you. Right then, in a sense of a relationship, he didn't. That's the point.

Watch, therefore, be alert, be on guard, for you know neither the day nor the hour when the Son of man comes. Again, not about a specific day or hour. It is everything about how we're living our lives and whether we remain watchful. Because at the time we're not, when the time when you're not alert and on guard, that's the time that a roaring lion has power. That's a time that through some trial or other thing that takes place in one's life that a person can be moved, motivated, worked with, be drawn in a different direction and lose it all. And for them, in essence, Christ has come. They are going to lose... (as a thief). They are going to lose what they had.

I think of what took place when the Apostasy came. I think of all... I tell you what. We had the highest phone bills - astronomical - at the point in time after the Apostasy until the point in time that things had totally separated. So the first two or three months, high, high phone bills. And most of it was within the ministry, talking with different ministers. And I think of talking to some. I think of talking to one, one day, and basically on the same page of things that had taken place and what needed to be addressed in our lives and what we needed to do as a Church. Then between that and the next day that I talked to him he had a long two to three hour conversation - I don't remember exactly what, but he told me how long - conversation with Joe Jr. And I didn't know him. The next day I talked to him *I did not know him*. He was different. That's why I think of the term we began to use about "the invasion of the body snatchers," that old science fiction thing, because all of a sudden it was a different person. It wasn't the same person. What they were talking about now, I'd never heard that come out of their mouth before. They were a different person. They had lost *everything!* *Everything* they had been given. Like a thief in the night it came upon them. The day he talked to Joe Jr. Amazing!

So those things have happened in God's Church. They do happen. And I've seen it repeated over and over and over again. Some can lose it just that quick. Some, maybe not as clearly as quickly, but it doesn't take long. And it doesn't take long people are back to putting up Christmas trees. Doesn't take long and people are right out at the restaurant eating as much pork and shrimp as they can. Mmmm. Mmmm. Mmmm. Good. Good. Good. Amazing what can take place in the human mind. Incredible! Lose - just like a thief taking it away from them - what they had before. Astounds the mind.

Luke 21:34—And take heed to yourselves. "Take heed to yourselves." Be on guard. Be alert. Be watchful. Take heed to yourselves. This is not a small encouragement or admonition here. This has incredible importance in our lives spiritually. He says, "Take heed to yourself." You need to. We all

need to! ...lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting, going to excess and living, basically, we can think of it in sense of partying, but it doesn't have to be that. It can be just in a pursuit of seeking to please yourself, whatever it is you want to do that may not be, obviously, what God wants you to do. But pleasing the self and what you want to do while ignoring God. ... **overcharged with surfeiting and drunkenness, and the cares of this life, and so that day come upon you unaware.** That day, it can come upon you unaware. He's talking about the same thing. Because you can lose it that quickly. And that's what the admonition is here.

For as a snare; just like a trap! That's the way it works. When a thief comes, it's just like a trap. It happens all of a sudden. You don't know it's there. You don't know when it's going to happen because you're not on guard, because you're not alert. You get caught in a trap slowly but surely, and then you lose what you had. **For as a snare, it shall come upon all those who dwell on the face of the whole earth.** It's going to catch the whole earth. They don't know what's coming. Now, we know. We've been told. In this time now. So as it applies to us. But this has applied for the last 2,000 years to God's Church. And it's the same kind of warning, to be alert, to be on guard because you can lose everything that He's given to you. How precious? I think of this often in prayer. I think of the riches of life that God has given to us, the knowledge, the understanding, the insight we have more than any other age because He's progressively revealed these things through time. And we live at a time when most of it is built up to this time, to give so much more at this time, because it's just before His Son returns.

Watch you, therefore, and pray always. And I'm going to tell you an interesting way that this has been interpreted a long time for many, many years by the Church and by the ministry that's wrong, and the right way it should be interpreted and seen and understood.

Watch you, therefore, and pray always that you may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass. It is not telling you... There is one thing it is telling you and there's another thing it isn't. Let me read the whole verse... **and to stand before the Son of man.** "Watch, therefore, and pray always." You're not to be praying, in essence, to be counted worthy to escape what's coming to pass. Because that's what many people believe you should pray for, to be counted worthy to escape it. But you're to pray so that you *will* be accounted worthy by God, by Jesus Christ, so that your relationship is one of desiring to draw closer to God so that when the time comes God will account you as worthy, to be brought along, to be continued to work with. That's what it's talking about. It's about a relationship with God. It's about relationships - and it isn't just with God - if we understand what a relationship with God entails. Because a relationship with God and with Jesus Christ isn't just about a relationship with them in prayer. It's about a relationship with the Body of Christ as well. Because how we have the Body, how we are in a relationship with the Body of Christ determines and says everything about a relationship with God and Christ. It truly does. It reflects it powerfully, because that's what it's all about. How we think about God's people, those whom God has called, those whom God justifies, those whom God listens to their prayers and forgives. See? And should we do any less? Should we do any less? Because we tend to by human nature.

So again, a right way to pray and a wrong way, but the admonition here, again, is "watch you, therefore, and pray always." Always be in a right relationship with God. Don't let that part of your life slide. Don't let that relationship slide in any fashion or form. And if you're letting up in it, recapture it, build upon it, strengthen it. And I'm not talking about how some thought that we.... It's like some thought if you don't put in a half-an-hour on a particular day, if you don't put in an hour on a particular day.... We had... Right here there were sermons given like that. Not in this room, not right here at this spot. But in this city. I heard them. It was almost like there were things you can do in order to be righteous, by how much you do various things. There's a lot more to the story than that... a lot more to the story. It's not about saving ourselves by what we do. It's about looking to God who can save us and our desire and our understanding of that. And because of that we grow in a relationship and draw closer to Him.

Let's turn over to Luke 12. Back to Luke 12. We were in 21; back up a few chapters. So this admonition to watch is for us right now, to understand it has a very specific focus that we need to see more clearly. And that's a bit of what I've been saying here about the Body of Christ and how we see one another. So we should, indeed, be seeking to improve our lives and our spiritual condition through, as we just looked at, even our prayer life. We can always work upon those things. And even considering some of the things that I've talked about, the Year of Dedication, and not just now to throw fasting out the window and not do it. We should include those things in our lives as a matter of a relationship with God and with Christ. We should be seeking to continue in some of our practice to do those things more zealously, obviously, as we did during that period of time.

However, for now we need to have a watchfulness in a very specific area of our lives. And this is spoken of as well when the admonition to watch is given in these particular scriptures. Beginning in **Luke 12:34—For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.** And so again, this can be applied in so many different ways, but we're going to begin looking at some of this as far as our relationships. "For where your treasure is." How much do we treasure, in essence, one another? Concerning the time we spend, our time, our energy, our efforts, our work, our finances, whatever it might be in life, it doesn't matter because it all works together, because it involves what our treasure is, as to where we're focused. And is it very much so on the Body of Christ, upon the Church of God? Upon one another in our lives?

For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also. Let your loins be girded about, and your lights burning. We just talked about the lamps, didn't we? "And your lights burning." I think of those verses back there that talked about trimming their lamps. It's for the desire that the light burns bright. And that's what we should always be doing, striving that a light is burning bright in the sense of God living in us, in the sense of Christ living in us, and especially toward one another. "Let your loins be girded about and your lights burning." So, again, dress properly, groom properly, yes, as far as wearing that which is white spiritually, but also what we put on as concerning the whole armor of God.

...and your lights burning. And you yourselves like unto those who wait for their lord, when he will return from the wedding; that when he comes and knocks, they may open to him immediately. Blessed are those servants, whom the lord when he comes shall find so watching. So again here, it's not just a specific moment in time, but it's very much about how we are living our lives and this matter of watching. **Verily I say unto you, that he shall gird himself, and make them to sit down to meat, and will come forth and serve them.**

Verse 38—And if he shall come in the second watch, or come in the third watch, and find them so, blessed are those servants. So again here, it's just talking about you don't know. You don't know when things are going to happen in your life. Think of the past. Think of back to 2008 and people you've known. They didn't know. Think of people who changed over a short period of time. I saw people change over a fairly short period of time. It came to a point in time where God said, "No more." Where He allowed them to continue to go in a direction that wasn't right. He could have prevented that in the sense of dealing with certain things in their life. But it was because of their choices. People make choices. And there are times when you can continue to make certain choices in your life and God will say, "I've given you every opportunity," and He makes a judgment. "No more. Not now. You're disqualified." Or whatever, ever how it's done. There are scriptures that talk about some of those things in the sense of what we do to ourselves - not that we're qualified in any manner whatsoever spiritually. But God works with us so that we can be at a certain level spiritually, so that we can be of a certain mindset in how we're to live our lives, how we're to conduct our lives.

And this know, that if the good man of the house had known in what hour the thief would come, he would have watched, and would not have allowed his house to be broken through. I think of this, of how it applies to the Church. I don't want things to happen that would hurt anybody in the Church, for the house to be broken up in any fashion or form. There are many sermons that have been given through time that God has blessed me to give just so that won't happen beyond what it otherwise is going to happen with some because they're just going to make certain choices no matter what in their life - as matters of warning, as matters of admonition that are given, whether it be in sermons or whatever.

Verse 40—Be you, therefore, ready also. For the Son of man cometh at an hour when you do not think. That applies to every one of us. We know the day! We know the time! We *know* when he's going to stand upon the Mount of Olives. At least we believe we do at this time. That's exactly where we are in time. I believe it with all my being as much as I did 2012. And I didn't know that it had been changed. Not in 2013. Not into 2014. But at some point there it began to change and God began to reveal what had happened and why. Slowly but surely, and not all at once, a little bit at a time. That's why Chapter 6 had to be rewritten three different times, because He was still showing. We don't learn everything all at once but He begins to give things, we begin to see it, but it's not fully there yet. It's still cloudy. And then again. And then again. And then it's there. That's how He works with us. We can't "see" everything all at once. It takes time. The more that's given, the longer it can take, some of that.

Let's go back to Matthew 24 in the context of what these things have been saying up to this point in time. We began with the verses there in Matthew 24, but we didn't focus on all of them. And that's what we're going to begin doing right now to pick up more of the context. This is what we read earlier: **Matthew 24:44**, these verses through 46 where it says, **Therefore, be you also ready** - you know, watchful, alert, on guard, ready, always ready, prepared. "Prepared." What a beautiful word! Same thing - prepared, ready. We're ready for what takes place in life spiritually. **...for in such an hour as you do not think the Son of man comes.** So again, it's this context here that if we do things that we're not to do then that can happen to us on a spiritual plane.

Who then is a faithful and wise servant, whom his lord has made ruler over his household, to give them meat in due season? Blessed is that servant, whom his lord when he comes shall find so doing. Verily I say unto you (verse 47), That he shall make him ruler over all his goods. Depending on how we do now. Depending on how we live now, obviously. We understand that. **But and if that evil servant shall say in his heart, My lord delays his coming.** "My Lord delays His coming..." You know, it's not wrong to look at a matter, even for us, because I think of this verse now - we can apply this in a way that it's never been able to be applied in times past. You know, you want to go back to Philadelphia and Ephesus, and different periods. Well, anyway... different periods of time. It's an attitude of mind. It's a way of thinking. **But and if that evil servant shall say in his heart, My lord delays his coming, and shall begin to smite,** word means "to beat, to strike, to wound," **his fellow servants.** Something can happen spiritually to people in their lives when, depending on sometimes even length of time that they're living a certain way, doing a certain thing. And this way is not easy. Living this way in this world is not easy. It is a constant battle. If you want it, you have got to fight for it. Because if you don't fight for it you're going to make up excuses and reasons and things will happen and you will be gone. You'll be gone. That's just the way it is. If you want it, if you believe what He says is ahead of you, then you've got to fight for it. We've been told this from the very beginning of time as far as when we were called - more so in the last many years.

...and he shall begin to smite his fellow servants and to eat and drink with the drunken. Those intoxicated, in other words, by the world around them. In other words, if the world, if we begin to rub shoulders a little more with the world and when there are certain things in the world we want to have and we want to bring those in with us, into church. A little bit here and a little bit there. Facebook! We just, we want what everybody else has out there and we can't stand up to them. You know, I'm amazed at what's happened with that example and how information has been used and abused and misused by people. Once you put it out there, it's out there. And we live in an age where you really don't want it out there. There are a lot of sick, sick, sick, perverted people in this world, and what they do with things that are out there is not good. Much of it is incredibly evil. And yet people will open themselves up to it because they heard someone say you shouldn't be on Facebook but they're... "I don't want that. I don't believe that. I can do it. Pfft! What's it going to hurt me?" You don't know the hurt it's done to you. People don't realize that by involving themselves to certain things in the world that what they're doing is going more and more into the world at a time, especially, when you've been warned that you shouldn't do it. Because there's a warning there.

There's something that's not healthy for you. But it doesn't mean you understand it. You don't understand it. That's why you're warned. That's why God warns us about things, because we don't understand it. We don't get it. We're told not to do certain things in life, and it's like, "Pfft! That's not going to bother me. I can handle that!" And we don't realize the spiritual danger in things.

I mentioned here - I don't remember what week it was since I've gotten back - but things of technology are going to change drastically in how they're used in the world. They really are. They're going to change dramatically in how they're used, mightily. And some people are going to have difficulty with some of that. Probably some of the best of it is it's not going to be available anyway no matter what for a long period of time. And that will help to be able to teach them there's a better way. There's a better way to have technology and use it in ways that are rewarding and beneficial, but not lopsided like it is today.

So people today, young people especially in this whole world around us, they have a difficult time dealing with others. The ability to communicate with others. The ability to carry on a simple conversation in life that isn't what it was ten years ago or twenty years ago. It's changing. Anyway, I'm so thankful that we're going to come, we're coming to a time when things are going to change dramatically. And so we're told things, that we're to be on guard, that we're to be watchful for. And we either listen or we don't. But the tendency of human nature is, often times, we want to rub shoulders with the world because that's where it is. We get pulled into it and we begin to rub shoulders with it, whether it be on the job or with different friends we make, or whatever.

Our best friends should be in this body. If our best friends aren't in this body we have spiritual problems. If our very best friends aren't here, something is wrong with us on a spiritual plane. They should be. They should be. And we're to grow in that now ever more so. Now, there was a time within the body where we had several hundred in a particular area. I don't remember what was totally here, but around 1500, wasn't it, on a Holy Day? 1500 in the Cincinnati area. It was easier to have more friends, people that you could spend time with, people that you could get to know and so forth. Now it's a little more challenging because we're farther apart, we're spread out more. But we have these opportunities, like on the Sabbath.

This is my family. It's not on the outside. Hasn't been since 1969. Not since 1969. My family has been the Church. Everything has revolved around God's Church, been in God's Church. That's our life. That's my life. Prayerfully that's everyone's life. And I believe, in large part that it is. The world, friends in the world, family in the world, different things can pull you away from a relationship with God. And that relationship is a relationship with one another as well. Truly is.

I've seen this. People become weary. The attitude of mind - not saying it, "My Lord delays his coming." We have more time ahead of us, whether we knew it or not. Time continues on. Ever since I've been in the Church my life has revolved around the fact that I believe that Jesus Christ is returning. Every car we ever bought, it was with the hope that this is the last one. Every car! Every vehicle I've ever owned it was a matter of, "This is probably the last one." I've had a lot of cars...had a

lot of cars. Lot more than I ever wanted to have. And we're still waiting. We're still looking for that time. And that's fine. That's good. Nothing wrong with that, because we have the truth. We have a way of life that God continues to give to us and teach us and give us more and more and more. And no matter what we've gone through, no matter what we've experienced He just gives us more and more and more. It's awesome!

But I've seen others who began to mistreat one another, began to mistreat their fellow servants, began to mistreat God's people. And that can't be. God does not tolerate that because it's mistreating Him. It's an attitude toward Him. It's an attitude toward Christ. An attitude that God judges us in mightily, as to how we think about and treat one another.

Let's turn over to 1 Thessalonians. Well, let me continue on in this verse here. I didn't finish it. **[50] The lord of that servant shall come in a day when he is not looking for him, and an hour when he is not aware.** Because we don't know when certain things are going to come along, some kind of a trial, some kind of a hardship. You don't want those kinds of things in your life, where God's going to bring something to the surface and deal with it in a moment's time. Because He does those things. And so we can go through various trials successfully, because we'll go through trials no matter what, but if we go through trials because we bring them upon ourselves, because of a refusal to listen to God, after a while God may have mercy on us for a time, and does have oftentimes and brings us through those things and brings us to repentance. But after a while, if we're not seeking repentance or not repenting of things we're doing wrong, after a while He lets us have it, what we want. He lets us have what we want. And it's in that day, *that day* that he comes as a thief in the night and we no longer have what we had before. And to get it back is not a simple thing, to be brought to a point where one might be able to get it back.

I think of an incident that happened not too long ago. Someone right now that's on the outside - still has, perhaps, a desire to come back, not really sure about that at this point. They began to smite their fellow servants. Began to mistreat others. Began to even curse and swear at others. That can't be in the Body of Christ. God will not tolerate that. So it has to be repented of. Whether they will or whether they won't, whether they have or haven't, not evident, obviously, yet, but in order to be back with the Body, that is going to have to take place. Because there are things that God will not allow and He takes personally to Himself. And so it should be.

It's like us. We should be there to defend one another at a moment's notice. We should stand up for one another. That's the way it should be. And I know that we are, as a whole, I'm just speaking openly about different things that have happened and do happen in the Body, and that haven't ended fully yet, as I just gave the example. So we have to be ever so careful how we think toward one other and how we treat one another.

And so, **he'll come in an hour when he is not aware, and shall cut him asunder, and appoint him his portion with the hypocrites.** Because either... you know, either we're living this way of life, either we think right toward one another or we don't. And if we're out in the courtyard wandering

around acting like we're a part of the temple, that is the height of hypocrisy, and God will not tolerate that long. It has to be gotten rid of! It has to be repented of! It has to change! So we want to make sure that we are cleansing our lives in every facet, in every form that we can in these areas and build upon this and go to another plateau now. That's what we're really focusing on upon right now. We're at a certain plateau. And I believe within the Body that people feel like, that people believe we have very good relationships within the Body. I've been told that many of many of times. It can be better. Because it's there now we can grow beyond that. We can grow well beyond that. And that's exciting to me. When you can begin to see and grasp how you can make that richer and better, you'll be rewarded for it, you'll be rewarded in it powerfully so. And to me that's exciting. And that's what God is offering us right now, an opportunity to go from one plateau now to another plane spiritually. And that's what we need to strive for. And we'll learn how to do that better as time goes forward. And, candidly, when we go into some very difficult times we'll have those opportunities more than what we can know.

1 Thessalonians 5. So we need to focus a lot more on our relationships within the Church and refine how we look at one another, how we think about one another, and how we treat one another. Because we can improve, no matter how good it is! You might (and I believe this to be the case), individuals listening to day and thinking, "I've never known a time when we haven't been closer and felt closer to everyone and to people and one another, or whatever." And I believe there are going to be people like that in some cases. You can grow in that. You can grow way beyond that. And that's what God is offering us within the Body.

1 Thessalonians 5:1—But of the times and the seasons, brethren, you have no need that I write unto you. For yourselves know perfectly well that the day of the Lord shall come as a thief in the night. That same example. Now, I don't know that they fully understood what that meant. Perhaps they did. Perhaps some did. Perhaps not. Because they were very much focused still on Christ's return and Christ's coming and everyone being able to be watchful and making it to that point in time - being there. He did address, already, things about antiChrist and what was... He didn't call it that, Paul didn't, but when you read about some things there that... (Let me go over there. I can't believe this. Every once in a while it's good to crack the page open just to make sure where you are. Yes, 2 Thessalonians.) He's *going* to address it, about the Apostasy and so forth, of things that were going to happen. But before that, very much so, they were very much focused on Christ coming back. They were still going to be alive when he came back. So that entered into their thinking a lot, but, yet, we have learned, God is showing, has shown that these principles apply spiritually as to what happens when we let down and aren't watchful and alert and on guard, that we can lose what we have.

So he says, again, **But of the times and seasons, brethren, you have no need that I write unto you. For yourselves know perfectly well that the day of the Lord comes as a thief in the night. For when they shall say, Peace and safety...** It's a way of thinking. It's not just a matter of some things we put together sometimes with things that are prophetic or whatever. It says, **then sudden**

destruction shall come upon them, as travail upon a woman, and they shall not escape. This is really an admonition, even just to brethren within the Church, and not just to the world around them, but it's something we can apply even spiritually to ourselves. But he's also making the contrast that, indeed, this is the way of the world and this is how the world thinks. But we can do the same thing spiritually in our minds, think that things are going along really well. And when things are going along really well in our lives, and perhaps feeling very, very close as a Body, as hopefully we do feel that and feel that things are going well, that peace and safety. And that's not a state to be in. We want to continue to grow. We want to continue to grow beyond that. And that's what we're looking at.

So it talks about here how destruction comes upon them as travail upon a woman with child, in labor. So just like a thief. **...and shall not escape. But you, brethren, are not in darkness.** So again here, spiritually for us. We're not in darkness. There's a way of life we're to live. **...and that that day should overtake you as a thief.** We are to be watchful. We're being told that. We understand that. We're to be, you know, just like the things that they read as well, of what Christ said, to be watchful, to be alert, to be on guard spiritually.

You are the children of light, and the children of the day: and not of the night, nor of darkness. And this has to do with things of sin, things of the world around us. Don't let them into your life. Fight against it! **Therefore, let us not sleep, as do others; but let us watch and be sober.** And so again, this matter of being sober. Sometimes we're just not sobered enough to the realities of what is around us and we can begin to think that things are going along fairly well - peace and safety. Things are going along fairly well in our life and we are going to be able to get where we're going. And we don't recognize, no, we need to grow! You know, you can't stop growing! You can't get to a point where you don't grow any longer and be satisfied with where you are. It doesn't work that way in the Church. It's like anything that's planted, it continues to grow, it bears the fruit, and a cycle just continues on and on and on, more fruit, more fruit, more fruit. And that's the way we have to look at our lives.

[8] But let us, who are of the day, be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith, and so I mentioned here earlier that we, as a Body, have done very well in that. **...and agape** (God's love). We can grow in that. God has brought us to a point in time where faith is strong, and love is good, but we can grow in that, brethren. And that's the admonition of what God is giving to the Church right now, that we can focus upon this thing of His love in our lives and recognize where we are spiritually at this point, that we need to grow more. I know that I need to grow more in that area of life. I know that I don't have the same kind of mind that Christ had when he saw people around him, when he saw people in the world and how they were living their lives. I don't have it to that degree by any measure! On the contrary! Oftentimes I become frustrated with what I see. And we're in a unique time. But I have to be, as we all have to be, very careful of how we think about others even in the world around us. To desire that people be able to be saved, but to recognize, you know, there is a fine balance in there that's so difficult. Truly is. And that's where we have to examine our own lives

on a spiritual plane. Maybe, you know, if you don't have a working out here at a particular job, if you're retired or if you're not at work yet in a work environment, whatever it might be. But if you're in a work environment out there you see what the... you see a lot of the world. You see what people are like and what's going on, and how much worse it's gotten in the past 10 years. Much, much worse than what it was ten years ago. Much worse than what it was back in 2008.

And so there's a fine line there. Because, you see, my prayers, and my prayer this morning was, about a conversation with God in the context of wanting this kind of mind that loves to the degree and level that God does because of His plan for them. See, there's a difference there because you see and know what the potential is if they will respond, if they will listen to God. And that's the way we all were before we were baptized, of the kind of mindset that we had as individuals that wasn't good. And God is offering us and gives the ability to have more of His love within us in how we think and we see that potential. God saw that potential in us and He gave us the opportunity to be baptized. Because He sees ahead. He sees His Family.

Now, I know His family, in the sense I believe it. I know it's there, and I see the Church. I see what God's doing within the Church and I desire that for the world, but I realize the world is so far from that. And so dealing with it becomes difficult at times. And there's a fine line there. Because my desire is for this country, and for others, is that they go through some horrible things - not to hurt them, not for the purpose of seeing them hurt or having to suffer, but to know that the only way they'll ever change and begin to listen to God is if those things do happen. That Thunders become stronger, more powerful. I asked for that this morning, very powerfully so, that those things be increased in this country alone many fold over. Because *only then* can people begin to examine their own lives and begin to seek the right way of life, a change.

I also realize there are people out here that aren't going to choose it, don't want it no matter what, that are going to hate God to the very end. And so we... It's difficult. I think of Christ when he looked down over the city and he wept. "How often I would have taken you in under my wings." Because he had the mind of God and what was expressed from God through him. "Taken you in" - protected you, helped you, intervened for you - "but you wouldn't." People have to be brought pretty low before they'll do that, before they'll actually cry out to God in earnest.

So again, I don't have that to the same degree, but I pray for it - the mind, the kind of love that was in Christ. Because it's the love of God.

And so we have it and we experience it in our lives to a certain degree, but we don't have it to that level by any measure. So we can grow more, can't we? We can do better. And that's what you need to examine in your life: where it is you can do better. Each one of us has to look at it in that light.

And so it says here that we are "children of the light; children of the day," **and not of the night, nor of darkness. Therefore, let us not sleep, as do others; but let us watch and be sober.** Be of that sober mind. Be sobered by these things that are being said. **For those who sleep, sleep in the night;**

and those who are drunk are drunken in the night. Those who are part of the... in other words, they're intoxicated in the world. They see the lights of the world. It's like Christmas. You can't say those lights look bad, you know. At least I don't! I think they look... They're appealing. But what they represent is hideous. And so there are things that are not bad in this world, in one... but it's how they're used. The things of technology and so forth. And it's what people are doing with it. Those things have to be changed.

Well, I hope we're getting the gist of what's being said here, in part, that there are things we can improve in. There are things I can improve in. There are things you can improve in when it comes to yielding yourself to a love that we need more of in our lives. And so much of that is going to be experienced and learned in how we think toward everyone in the Body - everyone in the Body, in the Church - how we think toward one another.

And I thought it would be good at this point... I have so much material here. I don't know how far I'll get through some of this, but I thought I'd go through the rest of this today by focusing on something that I don't know that anyone's ever done in their own life, but there are different kinds of behavior patterns. They call it, sometimes psychologists call it "Communication Styles." But there are behaviors that people have in their life, and so much of it having to do with how we grew up, how different ones grew up, what they experienced in their life and whatever. And so sometimes it's hard to understand where a predominant behavior is in us that we need to address. It's kind of like the seven eras of the Church. There are seven eras, but each era was for a specific time because it was predominantly known by the qualities or characteristics of what is stated for each era, and yet all that was in all those eras could be applied to people's lives at different times or within the Church at any time. All those things of those eras existed within the Body. Always have. Still do. Because they're characteristics spiritually, on a spiritual plane. There are also things that happen physically that we may have different tendencies toward and so forth.

And anyway, I mention some of this because I guess when I hear of different battles that some have with others, with one another, maybe in a marriage - often within a marriage, often with children or with parents - and I hear of the things that are going on, I hurt inside. I just ache in part. I think, "How frivolous! How disgusting!" There should never be anything like that in a body, in a family. Within our own families? Now, if someone is not in the Body, that's one thing, but if it's in a family where everyone's in the body - but even then, how we deal with our own families even when others aren't in the Body (the Church), how we deal with those things, we have to be careful that we don't take on wrong characteristics and wrong thinking and wrong actions toward them. But even more so if we're in the Body, and how we think, and even more so of how we work with and treat one another. And so there's room to grow in this, mightily - *mightily* within the Body, within the Church, of things that *do* need to be repented of and changed. And no matter how good things might be in the sense of where we are at this point we need to grow on, grow on beyond where we are. And that's what God is offering and that's what God is telling us is going to happen. It's going to happen. One way or another. And hopefully it's with all of us together.

So I'm going to read through some publications here, couple publications about some of these styles of dysfunction in life. Some of them aren't dysfunction. Some of them are... one of them is a right thing to try to achieve, to accomplish. But we find, oftentimes, that we don't have these. So somewhere, each one of us in this room, each one of us out there listening today, probably fits into a particular category more than the others. Like the seven eras. We probably fit into one of these categories more than the others. And we may practice different ones or have different ones that pop up in our life from time to time. And some can be used in a right way, but so often we tend to use them in a wrong way.

So this first publication the author is speaking of dysfunctional families and says, "Those of us who grew up in dysfunctional families may have never learned," and candidly, most of the world is dysfunctional. So families in the world have pretty much been dysfunctional, on a spiritual plane, obviously, but even in real life that's just the way it is; some form of dysfunction exists.

"Those of us who grew up in dysfunctional families may never have learned to communicate effectively in relationships." Now, this author, this book or publication is going through and discussing this on a form of a level of communication. It's really about behavior. It's just like the Bible. It talks about how we live, but oftentimes it talks about things that come out of the mouth, because that reflects what's in the mind which has to do with behavior, doesn't it? How we live. How we think. And so that's really what a lot of this is about. Now, there's been enough time over the past several decades where some things have become better in the ability of some to recognize that there are certain patterns that we just fall into as human beings. It's behavior. Not that they have the solutions to those things, because they leave God out of the picture so they don't have the right answers. They try to do it on their own. We know how that goes.

So it goes on to say: "We may be passive and not advocate for ourselves, aggressive and attempt to run roughshod over others, or passive-aggressive and smile while sabotaging others behind their backs." That's a toughie, and that's a biggie. Passive-aggressive. Now, if you don't know what these things are, maybe look them up on a computer. If you think that maybe a few of these things might be something you can look into in your life and you can pray about them then and ask God for help to reveal them more to you so you can see maybe your own behavior more. To see how maybe things you battle with you haven't understood what they were you were battling with. And so there is this passive-aggressive behavior that I think within the Church, if we're not careful, people can begin to latch on to a little bit. Because we have a way of life that God says we're to live, and if we're not careful we can begin to incorporate some of these things into our life - this thing of being passive-aggressive - because we want the air of being seen, of doing what's right and living what's right toward someone else. So, anyway, hopefully that becomes a little more clear as we go along.

It goes on to say, "No wonder we have so many problematic relationships and feel so isolated. In order to build healthy relationships we must learn to be assertive. That is to be clear, direct, and respectful of how we communicate." These are Biblical principles! Those are Biblical principles. They just don't include God

in there so they do it on a physical, in a physical plane totally. But there are things to be learned from this. "In other words," and we should be able to learn far more because of God's spirit. "In other words, we must learn to say what you mean, and mean what you say, but don't say it mean." There's a lot said there! There's a lot said right there. It's a very difficult thing for human beings to do. It's very difficult for many brethren to do, if not most, because of our lives, because of society, because we don't want to offend someone, because we want to be seen in a certain way, and blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah.

I want to say that again, "To learn to say what you mean, and mean what you say, but don't say it mean." Don't be mean in how you do it. That's awesome!

It goes on to say then that there are four basic styles of communication. One being - and it's really behavior - passive, aggressive, passive-aggressive, and assertive. Now, assertive is the one we just talked about, about don't be mean about what you do, mean what you say, say what you mean, mean what you say, but don't say it mean. See, there's a lot said there. So assertive behavior is a good one to latch on to as to how to do things. Just be open about it, plain about it, clear about it.

Here's one on passive communication. It says, "It's a style in which individuals have developed a pattern of avoiding expressing their opinions or feelings, protecting their rights, and identifying and meeting their needs. Passive communication is usually born of low self-esteem. These individuals believe, 'I'm not worth taking care of.'" Sometimes we can feel that way, human beings can feel that way. "As a result," it goes on to say, "passive individuals do not respond overtly to hurtful or anger-inducing situations. Instead, they allow grievances and annoyances to mount, usually unaware of the build-up. But once they have reached their high tolerance threshold for unacceptable behavior, they are prone to explosive outbursts, which are usually out of proportion to the triggering incident. After the outburst, however, they feel shame, guilt, and confusion, so they return to being passive." So if anybody hears anything of a certain name, go look that up. Plug it into Google, "Passive Communication," or "Passive Behavior" and read about it. And see if there are some things that, yeah.

Because you know what? We have to understand ourselves. We have to see ourselves for who we are, for what we are, for how we think - for how we *think* - which is how we behave. And *then* and *only then* can we begin to repent of the wrong in those things and begin to do what is right. Otherwise, we just find ourselves basically doing a little bit of what it says here; when an incident happens, we repent of it. But we should go farther than that! We should go beyond that to understand what's causing it in the first place so that we can address the cause!

It's kind of like doctors today, you know, patching over certain things, giving you something rather than you're really being able to have certain things taken care of in your life, in your body, to address it in the way God made it to be in the first place. We're so far beyond that... I don't want to get into that. Anyway. It's like putting a Band-Aid on something. And that's not even a good example. Yeah, I think the other one was better.

Anyway, passive communications. This is under this particular section, "Passive communicators will often fail to assert for themselves, allow others to deliberately or inadvertently infringe on their rights, fail to express their feelings, needs, or opinions" because we're more concerned with something else. And so people don't express themselves like they should, openly. "... tend to speak softly or apologetically, exhibit poor eye contact and slumped body posture." So it has a lot to do with their life, how they grew up, how they see themselves, how they perhaps were treated and molded into what they became. All those things can change. God didn't call the great and the mighty of the world, but He did call us to change to become great and mighty.

Going on here it says, "The impact of a pattern of passive communication is that these individuals often feel anxious because life seems out of their control, often feel depressed because they feel stuck and hopeless, often feel resentful (but are unaware of it) because their needs are not being met, often feel confused because they ignore their own feelings, are unable to mature because real issues are never addressed." See, if we can see some of these things deep in our mind and our thinking then we can ask God for help to address those things. But if we don't see them and we just live life on and on and on, the way we are, and repent when things are done wrong and maybe start doing some of those things right, but the deeper thing is to get into here (in the mind) and to deal with that. That's what God's transforming, the way we think.

This section under "Aggressive Communication," it says, "is a style in which individuals express their feelings and opinions and advocate for their needs in a way that violates the rights of others. Thus, aggressive communicators are verbally and/or physically abusive. Aggressive communication (or behavior, if you will) is born of low self-esteem (often caused by past physical and/or emotional abuse), unhealed emotional wounds, and feelings of powerlessness."

"Aggressive communicators will often try to dominate others, use humiliation to control others, criticize, blame, or attack others, be very impulsive, have low frustration tolerance, speak in a loud, demanding, and overbearing voice, act threateningly and rudely, not listen well, interrupt frequently, use "you" statements," in other words, it's not about me, it's about you, you, you! "... have piercing eye contact and an overbearing posture." Now, these can be to differing levels, you know, in life. But, again, if we can see what they are then we can begin to address them.

"The aggressive communicator will say, believe, have or have an attitude that reflects: "I'm superior and right and you're inferior and wrong." It's just a way of thinking. We think we're right. Don't we, as human beings, tend to think we're right in the first place? Who thinks they're wrong? But this can go to an extreme. It goes on to say, "I'm loud, bossy, and pushy." In other words that's the way they... that's what the attitude they reflect. "I can dominate and intimidate you." "I'll get my way no matter what." That's like their motivation. That's the way they think. "You're not worth anything." "It's all your fault." To react instantly, to act like, "I'm entitled." Or have the attitude, "You owe me." "I own you."

I've known people like that. I've known people in the Church like that, that exhibit that to an extreme. And those that I've known like that are no longer with us that practice those things to the extreme.

Another one, "Passive-aggressive communication: It is a style in which individuals appear passive on the surface but are really acting out anger in a subtle, indirect, and behind-the-scenes way. People who develop a pattern of passive-aggressive communication usually feel powerless, stuck, and resentful – in other words, they feel incapable of dealing directly with the object of their resentments. Instead, they express their anger by subtly undermining the object (real or imagined) of their resentments. They smile at you while setting booby traps all around you." That's a toughie to deal with. I knew an elder like that in God's Church. Took time to come to understand he was passive-aggressive. Nice to you on a continuing basis. Found out later on what he was like behind the scenes and what he did to undermine and to destroy. Very aggressive but came across as being smiling at you and treating you nicely, while yet, deep down inside, he had bitter hatred toward me. Bitter hatred. Incredible.

It goes on to say about passive-aggressive communication: "... they mutter to themselves rather than confront the person or issue, have difficulty acknowledging their anger, use facial expressions that don't match how they feel, i.e., by way of smiling when angry." And sometimes we may think, "Well, I'm not angry. I don't get angry." Yeah. Well, sometimes we don't realize what anger is. Sometimes we don't realize what being upset is. Sometimes we don't realize stress that might be in our life, when in reality it is something to do with anger or resentment or frustration, which can express themselves in different ways. Going on, such a person, says, "... use sarcasm, deny there is a problem, appear cooperative when purposely doing things to annoy and disrupt, use subtle sabotage to get even." This is a toughie. It's a toughie to come to know individuals who have this, practice these things. This is one of the hardest to see in human nature. It's one of the hardest things for people to come to address in life. Truly is.

The next one here about assertive communication. It says, "It is a style in which individuals clearly state their opinions and feelings, and firmly advocate for their rights and needs without violating the rights of others." In other words, considerate of others, respectful of others. "Assertive communication is born of high self-esteem. These individuals..." I hate those words about "esteem," because, you know, for us in the Church it's not a matter of... it's just a matter of being right before God, with God, toward God in judgment and how we think. And it's a matter of seeking to be right, in other words, to live right, act right. It's not a matter of having to feel a certain way about ourselves. If we know who we are and we're living what is right, that's before God, then there should be peace in that. But it's not a matter of how you should feel... I hate these words, or low self-esteem, but I know those things exist and how they're talked about. But, again, for us it is different because of God's spirit. "These individuals," it says, "value themselves, their time, and their emotional, spiritual, and physical needs, and are strong advocates for themselves while being very respectful of the rights of others."

Goes on here, lists some things, "... state needs and wants clearly, appropriately, and respectfully, express feelings clearly, appropriately, and respectfully, communicate respect for others, listen well without interrupting,

feel in control of self." You know, that's what we should have. It is a matter of being in control of self. And then we should be at peace. "... have good eye contact." Think about that when you talk to people. Do you have good eye contact? Because sometimes if we don't there's something in us that we don't know about ourselves yet.

I had that when I went to Ambassador College, poor eye contact. I had one evangelist tell me, he says, basically, "Look me in the eye." He says, "You need to get used to this. You need to quit looking away." And, "...it was about inferiority that you have." I did. I didn't realize how much, because of how I thought about myself and my life and so forth. And I had it a big way, inferiority complex, if you want to call it... I guess that, I don't know. And finally started learning, to try to practice looking people in the eye, and realizing a lot of that didn't come but with time, with growth and living God's way of life and then the mind changing, being transformed into something different. It's a matter of being right with God.

"...feel in control of self, have good eye contact, speak in a calm and clear tone of voice, have a relaxed body posture, feel connected to others, feel competent and in control."¹ So that's something to strive for in a sense of how we deal with difficult matters in life.

The second publication adds a fifth style, but this also speaks of these styles in a manner of behavior. And I'm not going to talk about the fifth because it gets a little too complicated and I'm just trying to show here that there are some basic ways that people think, behave, if you will.

Going on here, "Behavior is a broad term, however, behavior in its simplest form is our style of communication. Behavior encompasses both verbal and non-verbal communication. Human behavior falls into," he says, "five types. There are the familiar four," and that's all I really want to talk about, "passive, aggressive, assertive, and passive-aggressive." So, anyway, I'm going to skip the one he talked about because it's kind of a combination of some things. And basically, that's the point. There are some things here in all these behaviors, there are times for their use that is right. But we're talking about, in large part, times that they're misused and not right. But there's a time to be assertive. There is a time to be passive. There is a time to be passive to help be able to deal with something that maybe is assertive coming at you, dealing with you in life. There is a time to express things in a different way. It's a matter of how we communicate. It's a matter of how we behave.

It goes on to say, "People confuse behavior with personality. Personality we are born with. Personality is related to genetics and life experiences. Behavior is not personality and it is learnt, and our behavior changes throughout life based on experiences, interactions, and our mood at any given time. There is no such thing as only being one type, as we in fact use all types of behavior. The more interactive your life with others, the greater the chance you use all types of behavior in a day." So we have all of them in a sense of how they might be used. But there is generally one that is predominant in our life.

"The ultimate goal is to be a primarily assertive person. That means, your primary form of communication is assertive, though you will use all types depending on environment. If your primary type of communication is not

assertive, then you have work to do. Even if your primary communication is assertive, we can all learn and improve." And that's really, basically, what we're talking about ourselves. We can all learn and improve; do better.

"Assertiveness does not come overnight, nor in a month..." And really, for us, learning to express ourselves properly, behave ourselves properly before others, with others in relationships, doesn't happen overnight. We constantly are changing from the day, from the time we're baptized through the time this is over with. We'll ever be growing and changing in those areas. And if we're not growing then we're not going to be there. We must have growth in our life. God's spirit demands growth. It produces fruit. If fruit isn't produced then we will go by the wayside.

"Assertiveness does not come overnight, nor in a month. It comes through constant self-evaluation of your communication on a case by case basis, ascertaining whether the communication engaged could be improved."²

And then it goes on in examples given of passive behavior by this particular author.

You know what? I think I might just stop there today. I've given you enough to think about here, but I think I'm going to stop and go with this author of this particular publication next week and begin discussing that again here and continue on. And there are just some things here that maybe by digesting some of what's been said to this point it'll be a little clearer as we continue on then with the other examples given. Because each author presents things in a different way. And maybe if just one little thing strikes you, say, "Man, I've got to address that," then that's good. We can start addressing it and asking God for help to change it. Because our minds are about being transformed, the way we think. And that has to do with the way we behave in our life. And that has everything, then, to do (especially with the Body, within the Church), of how we think towards one another and how we work with one another and how we think about and treat one another. And we can grow in that.

¹ <http://serenityonlinetherapy.com/assertiveness.htm>

² <https://www.myptsd.com/behavior/70/>