

Church of God, The Eternal

P. O. Box 775
Eugene, Oregon 97440
www.cogeternal.org

The late Raymond C. Cole
Founding Pastor
Jon W. Brisby
Pastor, Director

Offices in:
United States
Philippines
Switzerland

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Dear Brethren:

"Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage" [Babylon, confusion, the way of the flesh] (Galatians 5:1).

From all the Texas brethren, we send our love and warm greetings to all the scattered brethren around the world, those God is teaching, testing, and preparing for rulership—the lights of the world. How could so many let their fires (their lights) go out and become entangled again in the bondage of this world? Did they fail to watch?

We Are Told to Watch!!

For what should we watch? Should world news be at the top of our watch list? After all, Christ Himself warned there would be turbulent times in the last days, and there certainly is no question whether or not we are in the last days (whether months or years, no one knows). We have almost instant news coverage today on nearly anything that occurs on planet Earth. Obviously, they did not have such coverage in Christ's day. However, Christ warned them and us to watch.

To be watchful means to be alert, aware, awake, enlightened, to be sober-minded. What is the condition of spiritual drunkenness or sleepiness? The *Good News Bible* gives this paraphrase to describe those who accepted the changes in doctrine, and have strayed from the truth.

Go ahead and be stupid! Go ahead and be blind! Get drunk without any wine! Stagger without drinking a drop! The Lord has made you drowsy, ready to fall into a deep sleep. The prophets should be the eyes of the people, but God has blindfolded them (Isaiah 29:9–10, *GNB*).

They reel to and fro, and stagger like a drunken man, and are at their wits' end (Psalm 107:27, *KJV*).

They even lost knowledge of how to properly count Pentecost. The ministers no longer teach the truth as it was revealed to Mr. Armstrong. Let us read again from the *Good News Bible*:

In my covenant I promised them life and well-being, and this is what I gave them, so that they might respect me. In those days they did respect and fear me. They taught what was right, not what was wrong. They lived in harmony with me; they not only did what was right themselves, but they also helped many others to stop doing evil. It is the duty of priests to teach the true knowledge of God. People should go to them to learn my will, because they are the messengers of the Lord Almighty. But now you priests have turned away from the right path. Your teaching has led many to do wrong. You have broken the covenant I made with you (Malachi 2:5–8, *GNB*).

I have thanked God many times for Mr. Raymond Cole. Out of over five hundred ministers he was the only one that would not budge and cave-in to the changes in the doctrine. He was not concerned with a prestigious office and a large paycheck. I first met Mr. Cole in 1962, and believe me, he was very watchful (awake and aware) as to what was taking place and was not about to change and set himself above God and start teaching false doctrine as did so many others.

Watch, Beware of Spiritual Sleepiness and Drunkenness!

The ministry became spiritually drunk. Therefore, they became derelict in their responsibilities of watching over the flock. "Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints" (Ephesians 6:18).

For the Lord hath poured upon them a spirit of *deep sleep*. They stagger and stumble at the word, not understanding its meaning. This, brethren, at least in part, is what caused such a great falling away. The shepherds began deceiving the flock and they scattered in all directions.

Those God has enlightened have no excuse to be in a spiritual stupor, drunkenness, or sleepiness. It is a natural tendency of the human mind to want to sleep and if it is not monitored (staying awake, aware), it will slip into spiritual darkness, suffering loss of the Holy Spirit.

I believe Christ's experience recorded in Matthew was intended as a warning to the called of God in these last days just as much, if not more so, than for Peter and the two sons of Zebedee. Otherwise, why did Christ take just those three with Him to a remote place and tell them to watch? Those three, and all the others for that matter, had no idea what was about to become the most crucial, the most humiliating and painful experience, of their entire lives.

And he took with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and began to be sorrowful and very heavy. Then saith he unto them, My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death: tarry ye here, and watch with me [If you have seen the *Passion of the Christ* movie, then you will know why His soul was exceeding sorrowful]. And he went a little further, and fell on his face, and prayed, saying, O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt. And he cometh unto the disciples, and findeth them asleep, and saith unto Peter, What, could ye not watch with me one hour? (Matthew 26:37–40).

For what was Christ telling them to watch? Christ knew they could not stop the soldiers from taking Him, and the disciples did not even know the soldiers were coming, so why should they watch? Their eyes were heavy. They could see no imminent danger. They did not know how long Christ would be away, so why not just get a little shuteye and be rested when Christ returned?

Christ Is Telling Us

"Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation" (verse 41). *Prayer must be at the top of our watch list to avoid falling prey to temptation!* Were Peter and those with him tempted to fight? Yes indeed, the flesh is weak and will drift into spiritual drunkenness—sleep. Christ is using this traumatic experience to show us we must not fall asleep when it comes to our spiritual responsibilities—prayer, Bible study and fasting—diligently seeking to understand, and learning to love the way of the Lord.

Sleepiness and spiritual drunkenness are very closely related. Both are tools Satan will use in trying to get us to deny Christ, just as we have seen happen to so many in the past. They simply went to sleep and followed their spiritually-drunken shepherds right back to be entangled again with the yoke of bondage—this world.

Mr. Richard Litz, in one of his sermons, gave a good definition of the thief in Matthew 24:43.

But know this, that if the goodman of the house had known in what watch the thief would come, he would have watched, and would not have suffered his house to be *broken up* (Matthew 24:43) [Emphasis mine].

This thief was the false minister looking for those who had fallen asleep and were not watching. This false minister was not looking for wealth, but wanted to break up the goodman's house. One cannot help but wonder how many homes were broken up after the change on divorce and remarriage in 1974. Read also Luke 12:37–42:

Blessed are those servants, whom the lord when he cometh shall find 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. And if he shall come in the second watch, or come in the third watch, and find them so, blessed are those servants. And this know, that if the goodman of the house had known what hour the thief would come, he would have watched, and not have suffered his house to be *broken through* [or broken up]. Be ye therefore ready also: for the Son of man cometh at an hour when ye think not. Then Peter said unto him, Lord, speakest thou this parable unto us, or even to all? And the Lord said, Who then is that faithful and wise steward, whom his lord shall make ruler over his household, to give them their portion of meat in due season? [emphasis mine].

Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me (Revelation 3:20).

That faithful and wise steward is the one feeding God's people in due season and not placing himself above God by changing what was revealed to His end-time servant. Note again what God has to say about those watchmen who have *turned on the people, leading them away from the truth*, rather than feeding them His word in due season.

His watchmen are blind: they are all ignorant, they are all dumb dogs, they cannot bark; sleeping, lying down, loving to slumber (Isaiah 56:10).

Good stewardship, however, does not end with the ministry. Christ, in the parable of the talents in Matthew, chapter twenty-five, explains that after receiving that Spirit, He expects us to put our talents to good use producing the *fruits* of the Holy Spirit, *staying steadfast in the faith, never putting our hand to the plow and turning back*. This is what He wants to find us doing when He returns.

Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour (1 Peter 5:8).

And take heed to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting, and drunkenness, and cares of this life, and so that day come upon you unawares. For as a snare shall it come on all them that dwell on the face of the whole earth. Watch ye therefore, and pray always, that ye may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of man (Luke 21:34–36).

Being Spiritually Alert and Sober-minded

Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus (Philippians 2:5).

For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind (2 Timothy 1:7).

And that, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep: for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed (Romans 13:11).

We cannot help but be reminded of the parable of the ten virgins. Five were wise, five were foolish.

Then shall the kingdom of heaven be likened unto ten virgins, which took their lamps, and went forth to meet the bridegroom. And five of them were wise, and five were foolish. They that were foolish took their lamps, and took no oil with them: But the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps. While the bridegroom tarried, they all slumbered and slept. And at midnight there was a cry made, Behold, the bridegroom cometh; go ye out to meet him. Then all those virgins arose, and trimmed their lamps. And the foolish said unto the wise, Give us of your oil; for our lamps are gone out. But the wise answered, saying, Not so; lest there be not enough for us and you: but go ye rather to them that sell, and buy for yourselves. And while they went to buy, the bridegroom came; and they that were ready went in with him to the marriage: and the door was shut. Afterward came also the other virgins, saying, Lord, Lord, open to us. But he answered and said, Verily I say unto you, I know you not. *Watch* therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of man cometh (Matthew 25:1–13) [emphasis mine].

There is a profound message to the *Church of God, The Eternal* in this parable. It is telling us these individuals were attending the same church, hearing the same sermons, keeping all the Holy Days, reading all the monthly letters, and believing that Jesus Christ was going to return, and all would be attending the wedding. Otherwise, why would all of them think they were ready to go into the wedding chamber? Something went dreadfully wrong right at the last minute. Notice, they all fell asleep and at midnight the cry went out, the bridegroom is coming, they all arose and trimmed their lamps. Now comes that critical moment when half of them realized they did not have enough oil (Holy Spirit), so they asked the wise to give them of their oil. The wise, of course, refused. Had they given of their oil, they too would have been foolish—all the light would have gone out.

Why were some foolish there in the first place? They were attending church right along with the others. They would always show up on the Holy Days. They attended all the church functions. They were even partaking of the Passover and observing the Days of Unleavened Bread. So why did not all of them take a vessel full of oil?

It Is Very Foolish to Become Lukewarm

I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot. So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth. Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked (Revelation 3:15–17).

The indication here is that the foolish were not always in that state of mind. At the beginning of their calling they were zealous for the truth, they loved this new treasure they had found. This new truth was so exciting, they had never been so happy, and this zeal continued for quite some time. But what happened? Did you notice in the scripture above how God had blessed them with not only His Holy Spirit, but with this world's goods as well? They were blessed so much they thought they had need of nothing. All was going so well they did not notice the spiritual drowsiness that was creeping into their lives. They were losing their first love, they had let their lamps burn out of oil (the Holy Spirit). They had become lukewarm, not only falling asleep physically, but spiritually as well. They were no longer profitable servants, not so willing to go the extra mile. They did not pass the test of being so blessed with this world's riches.

These words stand as a warning to God's people. What happened to the foolish could happen to any one of us if we are not watching (staying alert spiritually), and seeking God in prayer to deliver us from the temptations of this world and this human nature that so often pulls us contrary to the will of God.

But the salvation of the righteous is of the LORD: he is their strength in the time of trouble. And the LORD shall help them, and deliver them: he shall deliver them from the wicked, and save them, *because they trust in him* (Psalms 37:39–40) [emphasis mine].

But the God of all grace, who hath called us unto his eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after that ye have suffered a while, make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle you (1 Peter 5:10).

With much love and affection to all of you from all of us here in the heart of Texas.

In Christ's service,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "John R. Byrd". The letters are fluid and connected, with a prominent capital 'J' and 'B'.

John R. Byrd