

Chapter Twelve (12:1-59)

THE SON OF MAN ADMONISHING SPIRITUAL ALERTNESS

IDEAS TO INVESTIGATE:

1. Why did Jesus liken the hypocrisy of the Pharisees to "leaven" (12:1)?
2. How can anyone who speaks a word against the Son of man be forgiven (12:10)?
3. What is the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit (12:10)?
4. Is it wrong to lay up treasure for oneself (12:21)?
5. Does Jesus mean we should not care whether we have anything to eat or wear or a house to live in (12:22-34)?
6. If the Son of man is coming at an hour you do not expect, why are there so many modern-day prophets who say they know when He is coming (12:40)?
7. Are there to be degrees of reward and punishment (12:48)?

SECTION 1

Arguments for Alertness (12:1-12)

12 In the meantime, when so many thousands of the multitude had gathered together that they trod upon one another, he began to say to his disciples first, "Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy. ²Nothing is covered up that will not be revealed, or hidden that will not be known. ³Therefore whatever you have said in the dark shall be heard in the light, and what you have whispered in private rooms shall be proclaimed upon the housetops.

⁴ "I tell you, my friends, do not fear those who kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do. ⁵But I will warn you whom to fear: fear him who, after he has killed, has power to cast into hell; yes, I tell you, fear him! ⁶Are not five sparrows sold for two pennies? And not one of them is forgotten before God. ⁷Why, even the hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not; you are of more value than many sparrows.

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8 "And I tell you, every one who acknowledges me before men, the Son of man also will acknowledge before the angels of God; ⁹but he who denies me before men will be denied before the angels of God. ¹⁰And every one who speaks a word against the Son of man will be forgiven; but he who blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven. ¹¹And when they bring you before the synagogues and the rulers and the authorities, do not be anxious how or what you are to answer or what you are to say; ¹²for the Holy Spirit will teach you in that very hour what you ought to say."

12:1-3 Deceptions: Having faced down the hostile opposition of many enemies, Jesus takes occasion to warn His disciples that they must be alert since they will face the same attacks upon their spirituality. Having just denounced the hypocrisy of the Pharisees and lawyers, He warns His own disciples to beware of the "leaven" of the Pharisees. Months earlier He had warned of the same thing (cf. Mt. 16:4-12; Mk. 8:13-21). The Pharisaic way of life was especially deceptive. The seductive unbelief which appears outwardly to be religious, while hiding inner rebellion and wickedness is the "leaven" Jesus was talking about. Hypocritical self-deception is the most insidious form of evil. It works like leaven—unseen by the one upon whom it is working, but permeating the "whole lump" (cf. I Cor. 5:6-8). Even disciples of Jesus may be "leavened" with hypocrisy if they do not remain spiritually alert!

Jesus warns the day would come when everyone would see that His evaluation of the Pharisees was correct. The day did come when the hidden hypocrisy of the Pharisaic religion was exposed. The judgment upon their way as false was plainly confirmed in the death and resurrection of Jesus. Furthermore, it was the fanatical hypocrisy of the Pharisees which agitated the Jewish rebellion against Rome and resulted in the destruction of Pharisaic Judaism. The whole world saw that happen and knew their hypocrisy caused it. On the other hand, what the disciples of Jesus had to learn from Him in the "dark" ("whispered" secretly in privacy) would be common knowledge (proclaimed upon housetops) throughout the world. Two thousand years of history since Jesus made this warning have confirmed His predictions time and again. Hypocrisy like that of the Pharisees continues to be exposed over and over (I Cor. 1:20 . . . "where is the scribe?"). No man can long "play-act" at religion until he is found out. Truth cannot long be forced into hiding—it will always have to come out into the open and be acknowledged. Truth will always win out! So, let the disciple of Jesus be spiritually alert and always on the side of truth.

12:4-7 Dangers: The call to spiritual alertness is a serious matter. Jesus warns that the time will come when His disciples will be declaring the

truth "from the housetops" and they will be threatened with death. The truth of Christ's way forever exposes the hypocritical way of self-righteousness. This is precisely what happened to Christ's disciples in the first century (cf. Acts 4:5-22; 5:27-41, et al). Jesus warns His followers that even when they are threatened with their lives (as they shall surely be in every generation) they had better not *pretend* something they are not. No pressure is great enough that the Christian should cave in to fear and play the part of a hypocrite.

Enemies of the truth may kill human bodies, but they cannot kill the soul, the eternal person. So, be spiritually alert and remember that only God has the power to punish with eternal death. If the Christian is to fear, let him fear God! To fear God is spiritual watchfulness! The Greek word *geennan* is translated *hell* in the RSV, but it is really the name of a valley to the south of the city of Jerusalem (the Valley of Hinnom). It was in this valley the ancient Jews practiced the worship of Moloch (which involved human sacrifice). King Josiah expressed his abhorrence of idolatry by throwing corpses of dead idolaters into this valley. The valley also became a city "dump" (cf. II Kings 23:4ff) where pagan idols and other paraphernalia were burned along with the bodies of dead people. It became such a good illustration of "hell" in the minds of the Jews that rabbinical tradition used it to symbolize the place of eternal punishment. Hobbs says, "In Jesus' day this valley was the garbage dump of the city. Into it were thrown the dead bodies of animals and of executed criminals whose bodies were unclaimed. Maggots worked ceaselessly in the garbage. To consume it, fires burned day and night. At night wild dogs snarled and gnashed their teeth as they ate edible portions of the garbage." Eternal hell will be infinitely worse than the valley of Hinnom, for there the "smoke" of man's torment will go up forever and ever (Rev. 14:9-11).

The persecuted disciple of Jesus might be tempted to think that the God who created such a vast universe would hardly have time to notice should he die a martyr's death. Furthermore a weak faith might see the soon-coming holocaust of paganism upon Christianity as evidence that God was unaware or indifferent. What is the death of one single Christian to a God who must be extremely busy running this infinitely huge and complicated universe? Christians were a minority religious group, swallowed up in a vast, powerful Roman empire where the major concern was politics. Temptation for Christians to view the Roman empire ("the beast") as invincible was strong (Rev. 13:4). Some might anticipate obliteration of the church. But the Heavenly Father knows their danger; He is aware. Believers are to trust their souls to His care (I Pet. 2:25; 4:19). Jesus illustrates: While five sparrows are worth only two pennies in the eyes of man, God does not forget a one of them. In fact, God probably has each sparrow named, just as He does the stars (Psa. 147:4). Now if God

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is so intimately related to each sparrow, how much more intimately will He guard the crown of His creation—man (cf. Mt. 6:26; 12:12)! God is interested and involved in every minute detail of man's existence. He has every hair of every human head numbered (cf. I Sam. 14:45; II Sam. 14:11; Lk. 21:18). The Greek word for numbered is *arithmeo* from which we get the English word, *arithmetic*. Jesus used an interesting Greek word for *value* here: the normal word for value is *time*, but Jesus used *diapherete* which literally means, "carry through." God does more than simply place a price-tag on man—He takes man up into His bosom to "carry" as a precious son, (cf. Isa. 46:3-4; 49:14-18; Hosea 11:3, 4, etc.). So, when danger comes, let the believer give reverence to God and not man.

12:8-12 Denials: Another argument Jesus has for spiritual alertness is the temptation to deny the historical fact of the incarnation of God in Jesus Christ. Everyone who acknowledges Jesus as the incarnate God before men, the Son of man will acknowledge in the presence of God. The Greek word translated *acknowledge* is *homologese* which literally means, "say the same as . . ." Everyone who *says the same as* God and Jesus say about Jesus, will have Jesus *say the same as* the Father and Son say about believers. To *say the same as* God says about Jesus is to say He is the Messiah, the Son of God, God in the flesh and Lord of all. To say that Jesus is not God in the flesh is to be anti-Christ (cf. I Jn. 2:22-25; 3:2-3). The Greek word for *deny* is *arnesamenos*, and means, "to contradict, disown, renounce." Whoever *contradicts* what Jesus has said about Himself, or what the Word of God says about Him, will be *disowned* by Jesus in the presence of God and His angels.

Why does Jesus interject what appears to be such an ambiguous statement (12:10) in the midst of this exhortation? Why would He warn against denying Him and then promise forgiveness to everyone who speaks a word against the Son of man? The earlier teaching of Jesus on this point must be studied here (cf. Mt. 12:22-32 and Mk. 3:22-30). Earlier Jesus said, ". . . every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven." Apparently Jesus means to warn that the time would soon come when God's redemptive plan would be so unquestionably validated and the deity of His Son so unequivocally confirmed, that to deliberately refuse Him would be to commit the unpardonable sin. While Jesus walked the earth in a human body the completed revelation of His deity had not been fully and undeniably demonstrated. That demonstration waited upon His resurrection. Before the resurrection, men might say a word against the Son of man and stumble at the idea of God dwelling in flesh. They might continue to have doubts about Jesus that would even lead many of them to crucify Him in their ignorance and unbelief (cf. Acts 3:17; Lk. 23:34; Acts 13:27; 17:30). This would be forgiven if, after the Holy Spirit came in His ministry of validating testimony, they should believe

and repent. But to sin against the Holy Spirit's complete, final, unquestionable testimony is the sin that cannot be forgiven.

To sin against God's Spirit is apparently a deliberate, willful, intentional perversion of truth. It is calling good evil and evil good (cf. Isa. 5:20). The Pharisees were apparently involving themselves in such calculated malice aforethought when they accused Jesus of casting out demons by the power of the devil. To say that something which is unquestionably good and righteous is evil is to blaspheme the Spirit of Truth. Perverse, reckless, malicious rejection of the truth makes the intellectual and moral nature of a person entirely incapable of dealing honestly with any truth (cf. Isa. 30:9-11; Jer. 6:16). Men may intentionally and deliberately reject truth and choose to believe a lie (cf. Micah 2:11; II Thess. 2:9-12; Rom. 1:22-28; Jn. 8:45; II Pet. 3:5, etc.). Men may choose to reject the blood atonement of Christ in favor of another hope, but the Bible says that makes it impossible for them to repent (Heb. 6:1-8; 10:19-31) because God accepts repentance *only* through faith in Christ. To seek justification before God through any religious system other than New Testament Christianity is to call evil what God has demonstrated is the only good. It takes an unforgivably wicked heart to ascribe evil to the One whose work and teaching stand only on the side of righteousness and merciful helpfulness to sinful, suffering humanity. To reject the perfect goodness and righteousness God has offered in Christ, now that it is finally demonstrated in the Cross and the Resurrection, is to sin against the ultimate best the Holy Spirit of God offers to the world. This is the "eternal" sin (Mk. 3:29) and the "sin unto death" (I Jn. 5:16). To have stumbled at the Incarnation while the Son was still in the flesh was forgivable, but to contradict and deny the complete and perfect testimony of the Holy Spirit is unforgivable. Wm. Barclay wrote, "If a man for long enough shuts his eyes and ears to God's way . . . and takes his own way . . . He comes to a stage when his own evil seems good . . . and God's good seems to him evil." Neither in this world (Jewish dispensation) nor in that to come (Christian dispensation) will that be forgiven (cf. Lk. 16:26; Heb. 3:13; Heb. 9:27; Gal. 6:7). Even Moses' law distinguished between unintentional sin and deliberate ("high-handed") sin (Num. 15:22-30; I Sam. 2:25; 3:14; Isa. 22:14). Paul told Timothy that in the Christian age some would turn away from listening to the truth and . . . never be able to come to a knowledge of the truth (II Tim. 3:7; 4:3-4). Fowler writes of the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit: "It becomes a deliberate insult to God for men to claim to be unable to distinguish His work from that vileness and rottenness produced by that vile, unclean spirit-being who is the antithesis of all that God stands for . . ." (*Matthew, Vol. II*, College Press, pg. 681). Examples of such blasphemy are contemporary. Bertrand Russell, late philosopher and mathematician wrote in his book, *Why I Am Not A Christian*, pg. 24, speaking of religion and Christianity, "I regard it as a disease born of fear and as a source of untold misery

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to the human race.” A contemporary, self-appointed female leader of atheism in the United States said of God: “A crutch like LSD, alcohol or marijuana”; of the church of Christ: “It has never contributed anything to anybody, and place, at any time”; of the Bible: “The . . . inconsistencies, wretched history, sordid sex, sadism in it . . . shocked me profoundly.” This woman said in an interview on one of America’s campuses, “I’d rather go to hell!”

Just as Jesus had been threatened and blasphemed by His evil opposers so His disciples would be brought before wicked rulers and threatened and hear the name of their Lord blasphemed. They may stand against these threats, however, and they will have the assistance of the Holy Spirit to do so. They need not fear; they must not deny Him. The Holy Spirit was promised as a *miraculous* Guide for the Apostles (Jn. 16:13-14; 20:30-31), but not for every believer. The Holy Spirit guided the Apostles infallibly into all the truth God wished man to know for salvation and the Apostles left this complete truth in a written record. Any believer now who faces falsehood, unbelief, temptations, and persecutions may know the truth and speak the truth by knowing and speaking what the New Testament says. Jesus’ promise (12:11-12) was fulfilled a number of times in the first century (cf. Acts 4:8, 13, 19, 20).

SECTION 2

Astuteness in Alertness (12:13-34)

13 One of the multitude said to him, “Teacher, bid my brother divide the inheritance with me.” ¹⁴But he said to him, “Man, who made me a judge or divider over you?” ¹⁵And he said to them, “Take heed, and beware of all covetousness; for a man’s life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions.” ¹⁶And he told them a parable, saying, “The land of a rich man brought forth plentifully; ¹⁷and he thought to himself, ‘What shall I do, for I have nowhere to store my crops?’ ¹⁸And he said, ‘I will do this: I will pull down my barns, and build larger ones; and there I will store all my grain and my goods. ¹⁹And I will say to my soul, Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; take your ease, eat, drink, be merry.’ ²⁰But God said to him, ‘Fool! This night your soul is required of you; and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?’ ²¹So is he who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God.”

22 And he said to his disciples, “Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you shall eat, nor about your body, what you shall put on. ²³For this life is more than food, and the body

more than clothing. ²⁴Consider the ravens: they neither sow nor reap, they have neither storehouse nor barn, and yet God feeds them. Of how much more value are you than the birds! ²⁵And which of you by being anxious can add a cubit to his span of life? ²⁶If then you are not able to do as small a thing as that, why are you anxious about the rest? ²⁷Consider the lilies, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin; yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. ²⁸But if God so clothes the grass which is alive in the field today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, how much more will he clothe you, O men of little faith! ²⁹And do not seek what you are to eat and what you are to drink, nor be of anxious mind. ³⁰For all the nations of the world seek these things; and your Father knows that you need them. ³¹Instead, seek his kingdom, and these things shall be yours as well.

32 "Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. ³³Sell your possessions, and give alms; provide yourselves with purses that do not grow old, with a treasure in the heavens that does not fail, where no thief approaches and no moth destroys. ³⁴For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.

12:13-21 Foolishness: One of the multitude was very alert. He caught quickly the authoritative manner of Jesus. Jesus had spoken with the presence of a rabbi—as one who honestly and clearly stood for truth and fairness. When He paused, a man in the crowd ordered Jesus (Gr. *eipe*, imperative mood verb, *Tell!*) bid his brother to divide the inheritance with him. The Greek word *kleronomia* means literally, "to portion by lots" and is translated, "inheritance" (cf. Mt. 21:38; Mk. 12:7; Lk. 20:14) or "birthright" (cf. Gal. 4:30; Heb. 1:4; 12:17). This man may have been a younger brother, dissatisfied with the handling of his father's estate (cf. Lk. 15:11-32). Oftentimes an elder brother, according to Jewish custom, was given a double portion (cf. Deut. 21:15-17). Perhaps this man was being cheated in the division of the family estate. Whatever his complaint, he recognized in Jesus a "teacher" who would judge fairly. In Jesus' day it was Jewish practice to have rabbis make civil and judicial decisions. Moses appointed leading men to help him make such judgments at the founding of the nation of Israel (cf. Ex. 18:13-27; Deut. 16:18ff.). This authority probably passed to the "scribes" as early as the days of Ezra (cf. Ezra 7:1-28). In orthodox Judaism today a few similar judgments are still made by rabbis.

But this Rabbi will not be drawn into the man's family dispute. Why did Jesus refuse, almost curtly, this opportunity to rectify an apparent injustice? Actually, Jesus provided the only real solution to the man's

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problem with His subsequent admonition. Jesus refused to make a judgment because:

- a. His primary mission on earth was not to personally judge in social things. He was no social activist. His primary mission was to save, to regenerate the hearts of men.
- b. He refused to make a moral judgment or force a moral action that the individual should make for himself. To do so would violate freedom of the human will and preclude the possibility of moral development of the individual.
- c. He has already spoken about the most important "inheritance"—the eternal inheritance. Men were neglecting that. Had they given that first priority, they could easily settle all earthly disputes about material things.
- d. He will speak of the heavenly treasure more explicitly. If men will only become true members of the kingdom of God they will treat all men as God intended they should be treated (cf. Mt. 7:12; Col. 3:16, etc.).

Jesus went right to the heart of the man's problem—covetousness. The Greek text translated literally would have Jesus command the crowds, "Be continually on the lookout and guard yourselves from all desires to have more." The Greek word *pleonexia* is from *pleion* (more) and *echo* (to have), and is translated *covetousness*. Covetousness is the all-consuming desire to have more of something. It is the urge to acquire gone mad, unrestrained, unconcerned with the will of God. It is the attitude that material possessions will satisfy all human needs. Covetousness is called idolatry (Col. 3:5) because the covetous person worships (depends on) things—not the Person, God. One out of every six verses of the Gospels has to do with man and his possessions! That is because acquisition of wealth is the chief ambition of the majority of men. Wealth impresses men with its pseudo-power. Covetousness is probably the chief barrier to man's acceptance of the Lord's philosophy of what life is all about. The Lord's truth about life is this: There is more to life than a material inheritance. Life does not consist (hold-together) in the abundance of material possessions. This life and this world is temporary; the eternal treasure is infinitely more to be desired (cf. II Cor. 4:16-18). To illustrate His truth, Jesus told a parable about a farmer God called a fool.

The man Jesus told about was rich but he was a fool. The Greek word translated *fool* is *aphron* and means literally, "without mind." Someone has defined the word as "the lack of commonsense perception of the reality of things natural and spiritual—or the imprudent ordering of one's life in regard to salvation." The farmer certainly made serious mental and moral misjudgment about the priorities of life.

- a. His life centered in himself. Twelve times in five verses, "I," "My" and "Mine" appear in this tiny tragedy. The Greek text translated literally would stress his self-centered ego even more.
- b. He thought to feed his soul on things. He exchanged truth, generosity, conscience, love and helpfulness for things. He made earth and its riches his business so completely, heaven and spirituality would have bored him.
- c. In seeking a way to deal with his prosperity he reasoned with his natural inclinations and did not seek God's word on the subject. Even the Old Testament could have given him divine guidance in proper use of his wealth.

Someone has rightly observed, "This parable shows an honest man in the act of being executed by his own estate." It was where he thought it came from and what he did with it that made him forfeit his life for it. Jesus did not say that the possession of wealth was wrong; it was the wrong use of it that He condemned. It is all right for a man to possess things—but not right for things to possess a man.

Covetousness is the desire for the wrong things. Men are not to covet their neighbor's possessions (Ex. 20:17). Christians are to seek and to rejoice at the gain of a neighbor like we would at our own gain (Rom. 12:15; 15:2; I Cor. 10:24, 33; II Cor. 12:15). Men are not to desire worldly possessions for their own sake to the neglect of higher things. Men are not to desire worldly possessions for their own use only, for ". . . those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and hurtful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction . . ." (I Tim. 6:9). "The love of money is the root of all evils . . ." (I Tim. 6:10):

- a. It caused Judas to betray Christ, lose his life, his self-respect and his eternal soul (Jn. 12:4-6; Mt. 26:14-16).
- b. It caused Ananias and Sapphira to lie to God and receive sudden death (Acts 5:1-11).
- c. It caused Achan to steal at Jericho and all Israel to be defeated at Ai, and for it he and his family were destroyed (Josh. 7:1ff.).
- d. It caused a young man to reject Christ and to go away sorrowful (Mk. 10:17-22).
- e. It caused some to teach things they ought not (Tit. 1:11; II Pet. 2:1-3).
- f. It caused some to turn God's house into a house of merchandise (Jn. 2:14-15) and a den of robbers (Mt. 21:12-13).
- g. It caused Elisha's servant to lie, and to be made a leper (II Kings 5:22-27).
- h. It caused Saul to disobey God who gave him victory in war (I Sam. 15:9-23), and for it Saul was rejected.

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- i. It is the root of all kinds of evil (I Tim. 6:10); including murder (Ezek. 22:12), and many foolish and hurtful lusts (I Tim. 6:9).
- j. It is the cause of domestic troubles (Prov. 15:27).
- k. It causes some to be led astray from the faith (I Tim. 6:10).
- l. It causes some to be pierced through with many sorrows (I Tim. 6:10).

“There is great gain in godliness with contentment” (I Tim. 6:6). The man of God (every Christian) must shun all covetousness (I Tim. 6:11), because covetousness:

- a. Chokes the word of God in many hearts and causes the life to be unfruitful (Mt. 13:22; Mk. 4:19).
- b. Robs God (Mal. 3:7-10).
- c. Neglects the needy (I Jn. 3:17).
- d. Leaves many unevangelized, to die without God and without hope; it defies the great commission.
- e. Will drive the love of God out of our hearts (Lk. 16:13).
- f. Makes a man unfit to be an overseer in the church (I Tim. 3:3; Titus 1:7).
- g. Is not to be tolerated and overlooked in one that is named a brother, but to be rebuked and corrected (I Cor. 5:10-13).
- h. It is mentioned in the N.T. as among the worst of sins (Eph. 5:3; II Tim. 3:2).
- i. Is idolatry (Col. 3:5).
- j. Will damn the soul (I Cor. 6:10; Lk. 16:19-31).
- k. Is certainly unnecessary and unfitting for a follower of Christ (Mt. 6:33; Heb. 13:5-6; Phil. 4:11-19).
- l. Consider: Balaam (Num. 22-24; 31:16; Rev. 2:14; Jude 11); and Ahab (II Kings 21).

“As for the rich in this world, charge them not to be haughty, nor to set their hopes on uncertain riches but on God . . .” (I Tim. 6:17). Covetousness or the desire to be rich with this world’s goods is foolishness in the light of eternity. Every man and woman faces the certainty of death. Of course, if there is no life after death, then we should “eat and drink, for tomorrow we die . . .” (I Cor. 15:32). However, the certainty of life after death has been established historically and empirically by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. Therefore, we ought to come to our right mind and sin no more (I Cor. 15:34), realizing that sooner or later, our soul will be required of us. We brought nothing into this world, neither can we carry anything out of this world (I Tim. 6:7). What then is the point in devoting all our time, energy and capabilities to accumulating “things” of this world? This world’s goods certainly are not an end in themselves. The only reason for worldly possessions is that through them a man might

serve the Lord by serving his fellow man! To accumulate worldly possessions for any other reason is foolishness!

We may even covet (be greedy for more) time. Christians must use *time* wisely (Eph. 5:15-16; Col. 4:5; Jn. 9:4). We are not to covet the past (Lk. 9:62); we are not to covet the future (Mt. 6:34); *now* is the time with which we are to be concerned (II Cor. 6:2). How we invest our time in the bank of eternity will determine the dividends of the future. Every person has the same twenty-four hours. Time comes indiscriminately and simultaneously to every inhabitant of earth. We may covet time by spending it mostly on ourselves, or we may be rich toward God with it by spending it in His service by serving others. Time is a possession—time is a stewardship!

Being rich is never condemned by the Lord—nor even growing richer. Poverty does not necessarily insure righteousness. The man is a fool who is not rich toward God whatever his financial situation in this life may be. How is one to conquer covetousness and be rich toward God?

- a. Believe that what God's word says about it is right and to be obeyed!
- b. Pray that you enter not into temptation.
- c. Give generously, cheerfully and systematically to the Lord's church (II Cor. 8-9; I Chron. 29:6-19; I Cor. 16:1-4, etc.).
- d. Invest your time and money in people by helping their needs (Lk. 16:9; James 1:27; 2:1-26; I Jn. 4:7-21; Heb. 13:1-6).
- e. Be content with what you have (Lk. 3:14; Phil. 4:11ff.; I Tim. 6:7; Heb. 13:5).

12:22-34 Faithfulness: The Greek word for *anxious* is *merimna* and is probably connected with *merizo* which means, "to draw in different directions, to be distracted." The anxious person is one who is mentally tossed to and fro like a leaf in the wind. The anxious person is one who rides an emotional roller-coaster—up and down, up and down. Anxiety is a result of divided loyalty. Covetousness is really at the bottom of all avarice and anxiety. The covetous rich man is filled with avarice; the covetous poor man is overcome with anxiety. It is only a matter of circumstances whether covetousness shows itself as greed or worry. A survey taken in a national periodical found that seventy percent of all our worries are about money! A Gallup poll indicated that most people believe they would have no more financial worries if they could increase their income by only ten percent. Some physicians believe that anxiety causes or contributes to a myriad of physical illnesses such as ulcers, colitis, asthma, migraine, stroke, paralysis, arthritis, fatigue, hypertension, diabetes. Researchers have stated that more than half our hospital beds are occupied by anxiety-ridden patients. Doctors think that one out of every twenty Americans now living will spend part of his life in an institution for the mentally-ill because of anxiety.

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Covetousness, greed, and anxiety are causes for much of our social evil such as theft, embezzlement, robbery, murder, suicide, marital problems, even war (James 4:1-3).

When Jesus says, "Be not anxious . . ." He is not advocating financial dereliction. The disciple of Jesus is not permitted to be shiftless, reckless or thoughtless. Believers are admonished to work, if physically able, to provide their own living (cf. Prov. 6:6-8; II Cor. 12:14; I Tim. 5:8; II Thess. 3:6-15; I Thess. 4:10-12; Col. 3:22-25; Eph. 6:5-9, etc.). They are also taught by Jesus to be wise stewards of their material possessions (Lk. 16:1-13). Jesus and His apostles taught that honest labor deserves honest wages (cf. I Cor. 9:3-14; Mt. 10:10; Lk. 10:7-8). But the lust for accumulating things which would distract the believer's mind and heart from his first priority—the revealed will of God—is the "anxiety" Jesus forbids. It is significant that the Greek word *merimnate* is in the imperative mood and means that Jesus is *commanding* us, "Be not anxious!" If we say we know Him and we are anxious, we are not being truthful (I Jn. 2:4) because we are not keeping His commandment. What Jesus says to His disciples about anxiety is more than just suggestion—it is an order!

Anxiety is *unnecessary*. Jesus appeals to our *reason* to tell us so. Any honest-minded meditation will tell us that Life is more than the body. The *psyche* is more than *soma* (flesh). The spirit of man is sustained without anxiety over food and clothing. Jesus proved that in His incarnation. "Man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God" (Mt. 4:4). Jesus points to *nature* to demonstrate that anxiety is unnecessary. Birds and flowers do not worry, and God sustains them. They function according to their God-given capacities and He provides their needs. Men are of more value than these. Finally, the Lord says *experience* should teach man that anxiety is unnecessary. In all our fretting and fuming and worrying we do not add one "cubit" to the length of our lives. As a matter of fact, worrying probably shortens life!

Anxiety is *unworthy*. It is unacceptable for a Christian to be distracted. The disciple who is anxious about worldly affairs is not fit for the kingdom (cf. Lk. 9:57-62). Anxiety is a display of faithlessness and *disobeys* the specific commandment of Christ prohibiting it. It is shameful for a Christian to worry because it is *pagan*. The heathen are tossed about by their anxiety over sustaining the flesh. The Greek word *meteorizesthe* is translated "anxious mind." This word is used nowhere else in the N.T. In classical Greek it is used to mean, "tossed up and down, or suspended, like a boat in a stormy sea." Christians must not be in suspense about life. Anxiety is characteristic of heathen unbelief. Ceremonial orthodoxy and evangelistic zeal are only hypocrisy if in the financial affairs of life we do not trust God completely. The Christian is a citizen of God's kingdom. His King is absolutely beneficent. The heavenly Father is infallibly aware

of His children's needs. He has infinite power to equip every individual with everything needed. He promises to do so. If the Christian will seek the kingdom of God as his first (cf. Mt. 6:33) priority, God promises to make possible all the physical necessities for such seeking. The cure for anxiety is simply—believe God keeps His promises!

Why would Jesus say "Fear not *little* flock"? Because there will be few who will ever take seriously His admonitions about worldliness and anxiety! Does Jesus intend His command, "Sell your possessions . . ." to be taken literally? Yes! That should be qualified, however, by a consideration of other scriptures. The Lord does expect us to "earn our own living" (II Thess. 3:12). He does expect us to work at our jobs with our best craftsmanship (cf. Col. 3:22-23). The Lord expects us, if we are able, to earn our own food, our clothing and our shelter. He will provide health and opportunities to do so. And whatever is necessary (a house, tools, transportation, etc.) to earn our living we should not feel compelled "to sell." Should we have more than this, more than we may use for our living, we should sell and give to the poor, or to the work of the kingdom. Anything above what we need is "riches." Jesus counsels every would-be follower of His to sell his "riches" and give them as "alms," so the poor may be fed both; physical and spiritual food. We certainly cannot hoard riches in order to buy our way into His kingdom. It is His good pleasure to *give* us the kingdom. All of His kingdom we shall ever have shall be that which is given as a gift.

The Christian is to have a purse that does not grow old. In other words, he is to wear his purse out rapidly from continually opening it to give "alms" or dispense his riches to others. The Christian is to provide himself with a treasure in heaven that never depreciates, is never lost, never stolen and lasts forever. The only way the Christian can do that is to invest his "riches" (everything he has left from his basic living) in *people* (cf. Lk. 16:9), because people are all that shall survive this world. The rich man who died and went to "torments" realized too late that he should have invested his riches in the salvation of others (cf. Lk. 16:27-31), rather than squander them on himself. It is a fundamental principle that man gives his life to that which he values most. If one values spiritual things most, his whole heart will be devoted to acquiring spirituality. If a man values the same things heaven values, he will invest his life in things, and heaven is where his desires will focus. We must look to Jesus, who for the *joy that was set before Him*, endured the cross (Heb. 12:1-2). Let us set our minds on things above (Col. 3:1-4). As one commentator has said, ". . . it is the Master's will that his followers should sit loose to all earthly possessions, possessing them as though they possessed not." The Christian will pray that the Lord give him neither poverty nor riches (Prov. 30:8-9)!

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SECTION 3

Action as Alertness (12:35-48)

35 "Let your loins be girded and your lamps burning, ³⁶and be like men who are waiting for their master to come home from the marriage feast, so that they may open to him at once when he comes and knocks. ³⁷Blessed are those servants whom the master finds awake when he comes; truly, I say to you, he will gird himself and have them sit at table, and he will come and serve them. ³⁸If he comes in the second watch, or in the third, and finds them so, blessed are those servants! ³⁹But know this, that if the householder had known at what hour the thief was coming, he would not have left his house to be broken into. ⁴⁰You also must be ready; for the Son of man is coming at an unexpected hour."

41 Peter said, "Lord, are you telling this parable for us or for all?" ⁴²And the Lord said, "Who then is the faithful and wise steward, whom his master will set over his household, to give them their portion of food at the proper time? ⁴³Blessed is that servant whom his master when he comes will find so doing. ⁴⁴Truly, I say to you, he will set him over all his possessions. ⁴⁵But if that servant says to himself, 'My master is delayed in coming,' and begins to beat the menservants and the maidservants, and to eat and drink and get drunk, ⁴⁶the master of that servant will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour he does not know, and will punish him, and put him with the unfaithful. ⁴⁷And that servant who knew his master's will, but did not make ready or act according to his will, shall receive a severe beating. ⁴⁸But he who did not know, and did what deserved a beating, shall receive a light beating. Every one to whom much is given, of him will much be required; and of him to whom men commit much they will demand the more.

12:35-44 Watchful Servants: In describing what spiritual alertness is, Jesus makes a parabolic contrast between wise and wicked servants. These two parables continue His teaching about proper attitudes toward the things of this world. No servant of the Lord knows when the Lord will return. The Lord's servant must be constantly alert to his spiritual servanthood. In the first parable the lord (Gr. *kurion*) of the house went away to a marriage feast. Hour after hour passes, and the master does not return. This man's faithful servants never go to sleep nor even relax while he is gone. They are watchful. The Greek word *gregorountas* is translated *awake*; it means "watchful, alert, vigilant." It is the word from which we get the English name, Gregory. Watchfulness in the N.T. means spiritual alertness (cf. I Cor. 16:13; I Pet. 5:8; Col. 4:2; Acts 20:31; I Thess. 5:6, 10; Rev. 3:2-3; 16:15, etc.). Watchfulness involves:

- a. *Preparation*: Common dress in those days (and even among some Arabs today) was long, loose-flowing outer robes. When strenuous labor and alacrity was required, these robes had to be gathered up and the skirt fastened under the belt (girdle). Lamp wicks must be constantly trimmed of the black, sooty burnt portion lest the flame sputter and smoke and the lamp's light grow dim.
- b. *Maturity*: "Be like men . . ." not like boys, playing at the job. The watchful servant must have enough maturity to stay awake and on the job. They spend their time readying the house for the master's return. They do not have to be supervised like children; they involve themselves in all kinds of activities even though the night wears on and on.
- c. *Alertness*: In Jesus' day the old Jewish division of the night into three "watches" had given way to the Roman division of four watches, divided thusly: first watch from six to nine p.m.; second watch from nine to midnight; third watch from midnight to three a.m.; fourth watch from three to six a.m. The faithful servants, and especially the house-master (Gr. *oikodespotes*, "despot-of-the-house") or chief-servant, are on guard even in the midnight hours. Any chief-servant worth trusting would know you cannot anticipate when the thief will decide to break in (Gr. *dioruchthenai*, "dig through" the adobe walls of Palestinian houses). The master's servant must be on guard every moment.

The servants who are watchful will be ready to receive their master the very moment he returns. The master, pleased to find such faithful servants, will treat his servants as friends and equals bidding them to sit (Gr. *anaklinei*, recline) at his own table and he will minister to their wants. (cf. Rev. 3:21, "To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne").

Jesus abruptly applies the lesson of the parable to His own Second Coming. All the servants of Christ must constantly apply the principles of these two parables to their discipleship. The Lord's Second Coming will come as a thief in the night, unexpectedly, unanticipated (cf. I Thess. 5:1-2; II Pet. 3:10; Rev. 3:3; 16:15; Mt. 24:36—25:30).

Peter, impressed by the part of the parable that pictured the "lord" serving the "servants," wants to know if this glorious promotion to equality with the Lord was going to be given to all the apostles, or just a few (like himself). Peter evidently anticipated the same kind of promotion to equality when Jesus was trying to teach humility by washing Peter's feet (Jn. 13:6-9). Jesus, apparently disregarding Peter's ambitious question, goes on with His parable, actually answering Peter by correcting his concept of *who* deserves to be rewarded:

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- d. *Following Instructions*: “Who is the faithful servant?” It is interesting to note how the Lord started the parable by using the word for slave (Gr. *doulos*—v. 37) and now uses the word for steward or house-servant (Gr. *oikonomos*—v. 42) and the word for attendants (Gr. *therapeias*, from which we get the English word *therapeutic*, but translated, “household” in v. 42). Faithful servants of the Lord are of more value than mere bond-slaves, but they are servants nonetheless. The servants who are considered true friends by the Master are those who administer His affairs (“give them their portion”) according to His instructions (“at the proper time”). They do not presume to change the portion or the time on their own—they follow His will, realizing they are only stewards—not masters.
- e. *Serving*: “Who is the faithful servant . . . ?” The one found “so doing.” Blessedness will come to those who “do” faithfulness. Faithfulness starts with an attitude but does not end there—it ends in *doing* and *being*. “If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them. . .” (Jn. 13:17). When the Lord returns and finds His servants being faithful in the small stewardship they have been given, He will then put them in charge of everything He has, for whoever is *faithful* in very little is faithful also in much (cf. Lk. 16:10).

Watchfulness is not trying to guess when the Master may return—but it is serving faithfully until He does return.

12:45-48 Wicked Servants: In the second parable (or the second part of the one parable) Jesus characterizes spiritual negligence:

- a. *Subjectivism*: The wicked servant “says to himself” (Gr. *en te kardia autou*, “in his heart”). The only righteous and infallible guidance for spiritual alertness is in the revealed will of the Lord—not in the subjective thoughts of a man’s own mind (cf. Jer. 17:5-6, 9-10). This was the wicked servant’s first mistake—and so it is of many a man. To follow human reason and human emotion is spiritual disaster.
- b. *Unbelieving*: The wicked servant said, “My master is delaying . . . he is not coming very soon . . .” This servant does not believe the master’s warning that he may return at any moment. This servant’s company is with the “unfaithful” (v. 46), the unbelieving, the distrustful and distrustful.
- c. *Exploitation*: The wicked servant began to cruelly abuse his fellow-servants. This wicked servant lives only by force. When his master is absent and no longer controlling him by force, he is ungovernable. Motivated only by force himself, he thinks that all others must be forced to serve. He is of a perverse and an unmerciful nature. He will use and abuse people and things for his own disadvantage.

- d. *Self-Indulgent*: The wicked servant began to eat and drink and get drunk. The master had left him in charge of his house to protect his possessions and promote the well-being of his estate. The wicked servant shows how little he cares for the master by indulging himself until he is senselessly drunk. The servant is not only of no benefit to his master, he is a menace.
- e. *Unprepared*: The wicked servant did not "make ready" (v. 47). How could he—he was too busy abusing the other servants and drinking himself into a stupor. Either the servant watches for his master's return which requires sobriety and honor and respect—or he becomes engrossed in watching out for himself. Self-indulgence tends to blind a person to reality. The master surprised the wicked servant.
- f. *Not Following Instructions*: The wicked servant did not act according to his knowledge of the master's will. All servants are responsible to know the master's will. If they do not know his will, they will be punished; if they do know his will and disobey it they will be punished.

Wicked servants who take what their master has entrusted to them as stewards and try to use it, abuse it and hoard it for themselves, will be punished. The Greek word translated *punished* is *dichotomesei* and means, "to cut asunder"—it is the word from which we get the English word, *dichotomy*.

Jesus makes it plain (v. 47-48) that reward will be according to faithfulness. Much has been conjectured about reward and punishment in the life to come. Certain things are clearly perceived from the scriptures:

- a. God does not judge according to human standards (cf. I Sam. 16:7; Isa. 55:8; Jn. 7:27; Jer. 17:10; II Cor. 10:12). God judges according to motives (cf. Mt. 6:1ff.; Mt. 23:27; Heb. 4:12-13), and intentions.
- b. Faithfulness is God's criterion for judgment; not how much was known or how much was accomplished. The wicked servant was punished because he was unfaithful to what he did know. The servants of the parables of the Talents and Pounds were rewarded according to faithful use of what they had been given—not according to what they had not been given.
- c. It is a fact of life that some people are given greater opportunities and capacities to know the will of God and to use it than others are. Perhaps reward and punishment will have to do with a man's capacity and opportunity to desire, appreciate and give himself to good—or to evil.
- d. One thing is certain—all who do not believe and prepare for the Master's return are considered to be wicked servants and they will be punished according to their choice to disregard His return.

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One very important thing a faithful servant will do continually is take inventory of how much he has been entrusted with in order that he may calculate how much he will be called to account for—and he will act according to his inventory!

SECTION 4

Attitudes That Aid Alertness (12:49-59)

49 "I came to cast fire upon the earth; and would that it were already kindled! ⁵⁰I have a baptism to be baptized with; and how I am constrained until it is accomplished! ⁵¹Do you think that I have come to give peace on earth? No, I tell you, but rather division; ⁵²for henceforth in one house there will be five divided, three against two and two against three; ⁵³they will be divided, father against son and son against father, mother against daughter and daughter against her mother, mother-in-law against her daughter-in-law and daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law."

54 He also said to the multitudes, "When you see a cloud rising in the west, you say at once, 'A shower is coming'; and so it happens. ⁵⁵And when you see the south wind blowing, you say, 'There will be scorching heat'; and it happens. ⁵⁶You hypocrites! You know how to interpret the appearance of earth and sky; but why do you not know how to interpret the present time?

57 "And why do you not judge for yourselves what is right? ⁵⁸As you go with your accuser before the magistrate, make an effort to settle with him on the way, lest he drag you to the judge, and the judge hand you over to the officer, and the officer put you in prison. ⁵⁹I tell you, you will never get out till you have paid the very last copper."

12:39-53 Determination: The incarnate work of redemption which Jesus Christ would accomplish on the cross and in the resurrection would be the ultimate touchstone between truth and falsehood—between good and evil. His death and resurrection would be the final judgment upon unbelief. He would bring the final separation between sheep and goats, saved and lost, wise and unwise. The "fire" Jesus says He came to bring probably refers to the prophecy in Malachi 3:1-4. There it is predicted that the Messiah will come to the world to sit as a "refiner's fire and fuller's soap" to "purify the sons of Levi." This prophecy predicts the Messiah's first coming because it is in the same context which predicts the coming of Messiah's forerunner (3:1). Fire, in this instance, symbolizes purging or purifying. Messiah's death purifies and purges all who will believe from all who will not believe. Messiah's death is the great crucible of humanity. God judges all humanity

according to its response to His Son. Those who obey the Son are God's precious possession; all who disobey the Son are dross and refuse to be destroyed.

This holocaust of suffering the second death which the Perfect Son chose to endure constantly immersed Him in pressure. He was *determined* that it would be accomplished (cf. Heb. 5:8-9; 10:1-5; 12:1-2), but the longer it took to be completed, the more intense became the temptation to refuse it. The prospect of His suffering for the sin of the world was a perpetual Gethsemane for Jesus, (Jn. 12:27-28; Lk. 22:39-46). He would gladly have done with it immediately—but God's will decreed, "Not yet." The Greek word *baptisma* is used by Jesus to characterize His atonement. Jesus would be immersed in death: He would take all the second death, be immersed in punishment for sin; that is what the word *baptisma* means—*immersion*. Anything short of that meaning would be ridiculous respecting Christ's death. That is how the word should be exclusively interpreted when it refers to Christian baptism (*immersion*; not sprinkling or pouring).

The Greek word *sunechomai*, literally means, "come together with," and is translated "constrained." It means "press together" or "pressure." Jesus experienced *pressure* as no other human being ever experienced it. There was no reason for Him to die; He could claim eternal life by right of His perfect obedience to God's will. No one could take His life from Him—He had power to lay it down and take it up if He wished. It was not fair, not just, not right that He should die for someone else's sins. But it was perfect, infinite, unadulterated love that determined He would! What pressure!

This infinite love and grace becomes the infallible rule by which all mankind will be judged. Jesus' death divides the world into believers and unbelievers. Upon no other point (besides the resurrection, of course) are we to decide who are believers and unbelievers. Those who do not decide to believe and accept His blood for their sins will oppose and persecute those who do. Jesus' death does not bring "peace" (as men think of peace—absence of trial and testing)—it brings division and a sword (cf. Mt. 10:34). The servant who wishes to be found watching may have to choose against his own family if it is so required to remain faithful to Christ. The water of Christian baptism is thicker than human blood-ties. Not even genetic relationship must stand in the way of loyalty to Christ. The highest human relationships must become secondary to the highest of all relationships—sonship to God, through discipleship with Jesus. Immersion of oneself in such complete self-sacrifice will require the *determination* of faith Jesus Himself exercised in the "baptism with which He was baptized." Self must die; Jesus must be formed in us (Gal. 2:20-21; 3:26-27; 4:19).

12:54-59 Discernment: Jesus chides the multitudes with the admonition to use the same intensity discerning the spiritual time as they do in discerning

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the weather. Heat and drought, wind and rain, affected the prospects of wheat-harvest, the vine-yield, and the fruitfulness of orchards and olive trees. The Jews probably made amateur forecasts of the weather every day just as the modern farmer does. The weather of Palestine is less variable than in most European and American countries. Jewish farmers and others made it their daily routine to check and try to read the signs indicating what the weather would be. If a cloud rose in the west, it would be bringing rain in off the Mediterranean Sea; if a wind blew from the south and east, it would be bringing scorching, drying wind in off the desert. They paid attention to these signs. But, just like men today, they seemed to be oblivious to spiritual signals all around them.

Why is it that men exert great effort, display expertise and logic in forecasting the weather (practicing law, medicine, constructing machines and buildings) but cannot arrive at the historical, logical deduction that Jesus is who He claims to be—the divine Son of God, God in the flesh? It is a moral problem! The facts that pertain to the weather, etc., are facts that do not demand a moral commitment; the second are facts which do! The facts of agriculture and buildings have to do with selfish accumulation of worldly riches; the second facts demand renunciation of worldly riches. Jesus made this same criticism earlier in His ministry (cf. Mt. 16:3).

What signs should they have been able to discern of the spiritual crisis surrounding them? Undoubtedly Jesus was referring to the very plain fulfillments of Old Testament prophecies then occurring in His incarnation. Micah 5:2 predicted His birth and messiahship; Isaiah 52 and 53 predicted what countenance the Messiah would present to the world; Isaiah 61:1-3 predicted the Messiah's ministry (cf. Lk. 4:16-32); Malachi predicted the Messiah and His forerunner (Mal. 3:1-4; 4:5-6; Isa. 40:3-5); Daniel 9:24-27 predicted the precise time in history when the Messiah should be expected to appear and certain political signs that should be looked for. Then, there was the recent ministry of John the Baptist as a sign of the Messiah's time. Finally, there were all the miracles and teachings Jesus Himself had been doing (even raising the dead). How, in the name of all that is logical, empirical, honest and practical could men not interpret (discern) the "present time"?

The same admonition applies to the world of unbelievers today. Wake up, be alert and watchful, and apply your minds and hearts to discern the signs of history. Declare that God came in the flesh in the Person of His Son, Jesus Christ. God's Son accomplished redemption and offers it to all men by faith and obedience to His New Covenant terms. They are there in His divinely inspired New Covenant scriptures for all to read and understand. Judge for yourself what is right, true and final—while there is still time:

- a. Every man must judge what is right and true for himself—we cannot decide for one another.
- b. There is only a certain amount of time to make our choice about truth—Today is the only day we really have to choose.
- c. We must settle with “the Judge” about our sins before we are taken into the court of no appeal. We settle about our sins by accepting the blood of the Judge’s Son as atonement. We do this by faith and obedience to His commandments.
- d. It will be too late when we stand before the Judge. Then the only thing left is eternal imprisonment, because imperfect men can never pay the perfect price required for fellowship with a perfect God.
- e. The next discourses of Jesus (Luke, chapter 13) will tell men how to settle with the Judge about their sins.

STUDY STIMULATORS:

1. What is the “leaven” of the Pharisees? Since there are no longer any Pharisees, do Christians today need to beware of this? Why?
2. Do you think God is aware and involved in the minute details of your life? How does that make you feel toward God?
3. Have you ever been tempted to doubt or deny that Jesus was God in the flesh? What do you think made you be tempted—persecution? human opinions?
4. What is the “unpardonable sin”? Do you think it is possible to commit that sin today? How?
5. What is covetousness? Why does the Lord say it is idolatry? Why is a man a fool to covet? How may covetousness be overcome in your life?
6. Are you ever anxious? Is it a sin to be anxious? Can you help it? How?
7. Name five characteristics of a “watchful” servant of the Lord.
8. Characterize the “wicked” servant—have you ever been one? When?
9. Do you think the Lord will reward or punish all people the same? Why?
10. What are the two attitudes that aid spiritual alertness? Are you cultivating these two attitudes in your daily walk with Christ?