

LESSONS FROM THE PARABLE OF THE VIRGINS

Marshall Stiver, July 17, 2021

Not surprisingly, given the time we're living in, we've heard quite a number of messages recently that have prompted us to question ourselves. We just heard another one in the sermonette. We question ourselves in a healthy way as to whether we're spiritually fired up or not, if we're spiritually awake. To illustrate the urgency from God's perspective (and that's the perspective we care about the most) Christ, toward the end of His life, said 'When I come, will I really find faith on the earth?' It was a genuine question. Will He really find faith?

In a world that increasingly hates God (we hear it all the time in the news, we're very well aware of it) and we see people bowing down to science and to self-will, Christ is wondering, "Will My people still be looking to Me with the attitude of a little child?" at His return. Will they be trembling at His word because they believe it and because it's becoming a part of them, they're internalizing it? Will they be walking in the light, which is certainly what I know our Head, Jesus Christ hopes for. Or will they be stumbling in the darkness.

God's plan of salvation was set in motion for a tremendous purpose and that was to bring us into the light; to offer that opportunity to all men so that they could receive the Holy Spirit and so that we could grow in knowledge, wisdom and understanding. Not of the world, but the knowledge, wisdom and understanding of God!

Through that Spirit we're able to discern and understand things, the difference between good and evil. It gives us the power to overcome the darkness. Those of us who have been baptized and received the Holy Spirit know what I'm talking about. We've experienced it in our lives. We know the difference. A tremendous difference.

So why did Christ say what He did? Did He say what He did because it was a genuine question? Given all that we have come to know and understand since the time we were called, why did He make that statement?

I think we know. It's because our adversary, Satan the devil, knows that he has but a short time. He doesn't have a lot of time to interfere with God's plan of salvation. So he's pulling out all the stops, he's doing everything he can do to unleash and attack God's plan. Paul spoke quite a lot on this particular theme, and for good reason. Because he understood the dangers.

Ephesians 6:10 Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might.

Not in the power of reasoning, the power of science or the power of self-will. But in the power of God's might. That's what we are to be strong in.

11 Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.

What Paul is telling us, inspired by God, is that Satan is brilliant, he is wily, he's very shrewd, he's brilliant in the art of destruction. He has many tactics. Some of them are incredibly obvious and some are extremely subtle. Things that just catch us off-guard and take our breath away. He uses these things to get us to separate ourselves from God.

12 For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places.

All these things he's talking about are unseen. The bottom line he's coming to is that we're fighting a spiritual battle. That's what he wanted the brethren to be aware of.

Physical battles and spiritual battles have some similarities and they have some differences. In either battle, life or death is on the line. It makes no difference. We're talking physical life or spiritual life. In a physical battle, and we've all seen them on TV. We've seen reenactments and we've probably seen film clips from World War II, things of that sort. We know what it's like. You can see the guns, you can see the flash coming from the ships or whatever the case may be. You see all of that. Or perhaps you've seen fists flying and projectiles being thrown at people, etc.

And because you can see what's happening, a person can see those things, we can perceive them because we can see with our eyes what it does to us. It gives us an adrenal alertness, doesn't it? It can cause us to want to reposition or whatever the case, make ready because we can see it. And so, we have this adrenal alertness.

But the thing is, spirit cannot be seen. It's like the wind. We can observe when the wind blows because we see things move. Things move in the wind, obviously. It can stop. The wind can stop and everything is still. We don't see it and we don't feel its effect in that case. Sometimes we can feel the effect, but we can't see it.

So what I'm saying is, we're fighting a battle in which we can't see the power or the maneuvering of a brilliant tactician. And that tactician is our adversary the devil. It's a battle that cannot be seen. And when we can't see what's happening around us, brethren, will we be on a spiritual adrenal alert? I like to put it that way. We know what an adrenal alert is like when we're in a physical altercation. We understand that. But will we be on a spiritual adrenal alert?

We can see some of the effects of the spiritual war. There's no question about that. But by the time we see the effect (and I'm talking about in our own lives), by the time we see the effect, we've been hit, we've been injured. We've taken some impact, haven't we?

We're going to go to the parable of the wise and foolish virgins. What we've just described is the dilemma that the ten virgins, who are to meet Christ at His second coming, had. Let's read through this entire parable just to get the facts fresh in our minds. And then we're going to draw some vital lessons that can bolster our ability to be on a spiritual adrenal alert and to strengthen us in this war that we are waging.

Matthew 25:1 “Then the kingdom of heaven shall be likened to ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom.

2 Now five of them were wise, and five were foolish.

3 Those who were foolish took their lamps and took no oil with them,

4 but the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps.

5 But while the bridegroom was delayed, they all slumbered and slept.

6 “And at midnight a cry was heard: ‘Behold, the bridegroom is coming; go out to meet him!’

7 Then all those virgins arose and trimmed their lamps.

8 And the foolish said to the wise, ‘Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.’

9 But the wise answered, saying, ‘No, lest there should not be enough for us and you; but go rather to those who sell, and buy for yourselves.’

10 And while they went to buy, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in with him to the wedding; and the door was shut.

11 “Afterward the other virgins came also, saying, ‘Lord, Lord, open to us!’

12 But he answered and said, ‘Assuredly, I say to you, I do not know you.’

13 “Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour in which the Son of Man is coming.

We've all read this parable many times, but now we have it fresh in our minds. Let's review some of the vital facts. We'll cover most of them. I'm sure we could draw more points than what I'm going to bring out. We're going to cover some of the most basic things for the sake of the benefit of review because review can help us to be alert. Let's go Revelation 14 to begin. Here John identifies the virgins.

Revelation 14:4 These are the ones who were not defiled with women, for they are virgins. These are the ones who follow the Lamb wherever He goes. These were redeemed from among men, being firstfruits to God and to the Lamb.

The meaning of those not defiled with women is that these are virgins, in the spiritual sense. Whatever past affiliations they may have had in the spiritual realm, in other words, with belief in God or not belief in God, whatever the case may be, those things they repented of prior to baptism and through the remission of sins, they were washed, and they were made clean. They became spiritual virgins, being prepared now for Jesus Christ. They now are followers of Jesus Christ. Paul follows in this vein to a degree.

2 Corinthians 11:2 For I am jealous for you with godly jealousy. For I have betrothed you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ.

We understand that the apostles had a huge responsibility in the care of God's people. They were the senior pastors, so to speak. They were apostles. In Ephesians chapter 6, as here, Paul knew full well that it is a spiritual war that we individually and collectively fight.

Here he reaffirms who the virgins are. We have been espoused, a future wedding to our future husband, Jesus Christ, awaits. These are members of Christ's body, which is also the Church of God. Paul's concern is that we each become not just virgins, but he makes it very clear, *chaste* virgins. Chaste means clean, modest, innocent, perfect and pure.

The one thing we all know is that there is a lot that happens in our lifetime between baptism, the time that we first initially become a virgin in Christ's eyes, and our being presented to Him at the end as a chaste virgin. There's a lot that happens in that course of time.

In Ephesians 5:26, Paul speaks about how Christ gave Himself for the Church to prepare her for Himself.

Ephesians 5:26 that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word,

We know what the "washing of water" is. That is just simply symbolic of the baptismal water that we go down into and come back up out of. It was all done according to the word. That word is God's word, and we know that within God's word that there are certain doctrines. The doctrine of repentance from dead works, faith toward God, baptism, the laying on of hands to receive the Holy Spirit. The word, God's word, also points to going on to perfection. Of course, I've been referencing Hebrews 6 there with the doctrines. It talks about going on to perfection.

That is what the chaste virgins do. They are in the process of going on to perfection, getting completely cleaned up. Perfection, as we well know, is a process. It's not a magic pill. It's not an emotional thing. So many in the world think, "Well, I gave my heart to Christ" and that's all there is. No. This is far more than that. This is a process that we go through to become the bride of Christ.

Our character gets tested repeatedly, over and over again on every imaginable level. There are many levels. We often think that tests are just tough things, hard things. No. We make very small decisions sometimes, too. And those small ones will lead to bigger ones. Every decision we make is an important decision.

27 that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish.

We change as we go along. As we go on to perfection we're obviously going to change. We overcome little by little and we get to every spot, every wrinkle. Again, this is spiritually speaking. Those things get removed over time, and that is the ideal. That's how this works. That's the process.

I really appreciate the following quote on this particular verse, because it was illuminating to me. The *Jamieson, Fausset and Brown Commentary* says this:

"Holiness and glory are inseparable, cleansing is the necessary preliminary to both. Holiness is glory internal; glory is holiness shining forth outwardly."

That really paints a picture for us. It makes it very easy to understand. The very reason that we go through the process is so that we can become holy internally. Then that holiness comes forth from us as light to give God glory. That glorifies God to those around us. It shows what the people of God are really like. But it requires the consistent growth of a maturing mind that is always alert. A mind that doesn't go on autopilot. Paul speaks about the maturing process that we go through.

Philippians 2:12 Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling;

God called them through Paul. The brethren here had been called through Paul, just as those in Corinth. He wanted to present them to Christ as a chaste virgin. That's what every minister of God has as a desire, not only for themselves, but also to help the flock to be able to present as that chaste virgin.

So, what Paul is telling them here is, he's leading them to spiritual maturity. He says, "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling." In other words, use the tools that you hear about all the time. We all hear messages and because we have the streaming capability that we do, we get to hear a lot of really good messages from a lot

of different people. We have the tools put in front of us. He says use them. Then he reminds them:

13 for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure.

It's not about our willpower, our reasoning or any other thing. It's about God working in us. That's what he's pointing them to. He said, "Don't look to me and don't look to yourself. Look to the power that God has put in you." In other words, the oil. The oil that we were talking about in the parable, are you using it? Are you developing with it?

14 Do all things without complaining and disputing,

15 that you may become blameless and harmless, children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world,

These last two verses really are about that perfecting and that testing process that we go through. We have things that we have to overcome. To not murmur or dispute means that we really have to think our way through to right conclusions, to find answers to these kinds of problems. We have to develop self-control, we learn to go where others are in their minds in order to help them. Instead of wanting other people to come to be just like we are, we begin to mature. We begin to take on the mind of God and we go to where they are so we can begin to understand them. How can we help them? We therefore find the best way that we possibly can to stir up love and good works. That's how the process goes.

Little by little and bit by bit we consciously, and I say consciously because it does require conscious thought on our part because it's an internal thing. It's a spiritual thing. We consciously get rid of the spots, the wrinkles and the blemishes. The more we do it, the more God's glory is going to shine forth from us as light to those around us. That is what the chaste spiritual virgins do. That's the formula for us today. These are the ones who will gain entry to the wedding with Christ, the Bridegroom. Paul obviously has concerns. He says:

2 Corinthians 11:3 But I fear, lest somehow, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, so your minds may be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ.

4 For if he who comes preaches another Jesus whom we have not preached, or if you receive a different spirit which you have not received, or a different gospel which you have not accepted—you may well put up with it!

In other words, you might not be spiritually alert enough to know the difference and there you'll be. And you won't be where you need to be, with Christ. Paul was intent on presenting the brethren as chaste virgins to Christ, but he knew that Satan has many tactics. We all know that's true, and that he is brilliant at corrupting pure minds.

He warns against another Jesus here, which we understand would be a false Jesus. He warns against a false Jesus. We know that among many so-called Christian religions, Christ is almost always presented as the one who's done away with the law. But that's another Christ. That's not the Christ that we know. The real One fulfilled the law. We all know the scripture that relates to that. He did it by keeping the letter and the spirit of it. He made it more binding than anyone ever understood before. That's why He came down to teach it. He taught the internal application of the law. That goes to the spirit, that goes to the realm that we can't see in. It is intended to show us how we should be internally so that we can, in fact, radiate that light. We have to know.

The real Christ also made possible the power by which we could be cleaned up internally as we continually overcome through life. That power, of course, is the Holy Spirit. That's the oil that we read about in the parable. By that brethren, we can do anything. We can do all things through Christ. We can virtually accomplish whatever it is we need to accomplish.

A false spirit would and will inspire something false, just as the Holy Spirit can give us inspiration and strength to do the good things. A false spirit can inspire cowardly compromise so that we're willing to compromise with God's law, instead of the courage to continually overcome. Because we know that the real Jesus overcame the world. Our Elder Brother, who set the example for us, overcame the world. The real Holy Spirit gives us the power to do the very same thing, to overcome whatever is in front of us. And the true gospel, which is about God's plan of salvation, the good news, leads us to Christ and to His spirit.

We need to understand that what Christ opened to us through the Holy Spirit is a perception of things not seen. That's the difference between the spirit of this world and the spirit we've been given. And that's where the war for our minds is being fought, where we cannot see. The unseen is a very special realm for spiritual virgins. We need to appreciate it. We need to think about just how special this is.

1 Corinthians 2:9 But as it is written: "Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him."

10 But God has revealed them to us through His Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God.

Most people don't realize that mankind's potential is to become a literal spirit-born member of His family. We understand it. We're able to comprehend that. God imparts to His begotten ones the deep things, the things about Him, about how His mind works. He imparts His way of life that others without the Holy Spirit cannot grasp. It's not because of our greatness, but because of His goodness to us. He called the weak of the world. We know that's true. But it's because of His goodness.

11 For what man knows the things of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God.

12 Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit [which] is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God.

13 These things we also speak, not in words which man's wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual. (That's an important key.)

14 But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.

The spirit that God put in man gives him intellectual understanding. We understand that. I'm referring to the spirit in man. It gives him intellectual understanding of physical things so that he can reason, come to conclusions, etc.

Then there's the spirit of the world, which we know comes from Satan, which is the spirit that can mesh with the human spirit.

But God's spirit, which He gives to believers at baptism, leads them to be able to compare spiritual things with spiritual. In other words, unseen things. We can compare unseen things. We can come to compare Satan's false rendition of Christ with the real Christ. Where does that false Christ come from? It comes from the spirit of the world. We can compare it with what we know is true through the power of the Holy Spirit and we can come to a right conclusion, and we can act on it.

We can see to compare the fruits of Satan's spirit with the fruits of the Holy Spirit, and we can come to choose and to develop the fruits of God's spirit. All of that comes from an unseen source. The fruits of the flesh, of the world, come from the air. Satan puts his thoughts into our minds. The Holy Spirit does the same thing. It comes through the air. But we can see the difference. We can compare spiritual with spiritual.

To give you an example, without the Holy Spirit, holding a grudge seems like a natural and reasonable thing to do. Not a big deal. Or "getting even" with somebody seems like the natural thing to do. Apart from the Holy Spirit, it does seem reasonable. But it is not reasonable to God. It's not reasonable to any one of us. God's perspective that He gives us compares spiritual things with spiritual. He says:

Leviticus 19:18 You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the children of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the LORD.

We understand that sin originates in the mind. We know that from what James taught us. It originates in the mind and it's identified by the spirit of the law, not by a physical act. We don't want to misunderstand what I'm saying here. The physical

expression or the act of sinning is sin. No question about that. We need to realize, brethren, that is the injury that is suffered in a spiritual war. But the war is being fought internally, inside our minds.

If we don't stop grudges and vengeance internally, where it can't be seen, then obviously love can't grow -- which is the end product of everything that God is and everything He desires for us. God sees the spiritual and that's what we're given the capacity to do. He can see what's in our minds and He can see what should and what can be in there. That's comparing spiritual things with spiritual. That's what we have to be able to do.

For each of us to win the spiritual war we must be able to compare those things the very same way that God can do it, through His spirit. That brings us back to the parable of the virgins. Half of them could not compare the spiritual with the spiritual because they were foolish.

Let's go to Ephesians 5, verse 8. We're progressing down the road just a little bit here, one step after the next. None of those virgins were foolish initially after their baptism. Paul says here:

Ephesians 5:8 For you were once darkness (at one point in time that was very true), but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light

There's this transition and he says, "Walk as children of light", which is the same as saying, "You've been cleaned up. Now, go on to perfection." Same thing that we know from Hebrews. All who truly repented were baptized and received the Holy Spirit and became spiritual virgins, every single individual. All who truly repented. That is an absolute guarantee. They became light in the Lord.

At that point, we are each to walk in the light. We're to live our life in the light, apart from sin. In other words, what does that mean? We're going to be perfect? That means we're going to be changing, continually growing, developing.

Now, we've established that light shines forth from something that is internally clean. Light shines from something that's clean and bright, in other words, our hearts, our minds. And the only way that they can stay clean is when we're able to compare spiritual things with spiritual and then act on it. Paul gets into this.

9 (for the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness, righteousness, and truth),

10 finding out what is acceptable to the Lord.

11 And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather expose them.

The wise virgins use the oil, or the spirit, for light to prove what is good. Obviously, that's what we are here to do. And to prove that which is a work of darkness. We

should be able to look at those things and distinguish them very clearly, compare spiritual things with spiritual. That's how we can stay in a state of spiritual adrenal alert, by continually comparing the spiritual with the spiritual inside our own minds.

But we know from the parable that the foolish ones had no oil to light them up internally. And over time what did they become? They became foolish. They gradually ceased comparing the spiritual with the spiritual. They got back into that physical realm. Solomon talks about the light. He says:

Proverbs 4:18 But the path of the just is like the shining sun, that shines ever brighter unto the perfect day.

The path of the wise virgins keeps getting brighter and brighter as their life progresses. Their life is comparable to how a day dawns. We know how a day dawns. Light begins to shine, and it only intensifies as it rises in the sky. It intensifies until it hits its full intensity, which is the perfect day. That's how our lives are to be. That's the path of our lives.

The more we understand in the spiritual realm, the more that we can take the grace that God gives us and grow in it. And each time that we course correct, the brighter the light becomes. When you think about it, I think I've often talked about how some can perceive it as a negative thing. Think of it this way, it is light. Overcoming increases the light in our lives. The more we reflect our Father's image, it increases that light. That's what Christ is going to recognize at His return. The point to be made here is that just as the light of the wise intensifies, so does the darkness of fools. It goes both ways.

19 The way of the wicked is like darkness; They do not know what makes them stumble.

They don't know what's happening in their minds. They have no idea. They don't realize the battle that's being fought. They become oblivious to it. The fool will, over time, only come to see the turmoil they've brought upon themselves. Not knowing -- or in the case of the foolish virgins, not remembering -- the unseen battle that's raging inside their minds. The reason that they won't remember is because the oil, which is the Holy Spirit, is in the process of being quenched. That's the process that's happening in the process of losing it.

Solomon describes the shallowness of a fool. This is a very pithy proverb:

Proverbs 18:2 A fool has no delight in understanding, but in expressing his own heart.

I want you to listen to the *Albert Barnes Commentary* on this one because, again, very succinct, very helpful.

“Another form of egotism. In understanding, i.e. self-knowledge, the fool finds no pleasure; but self-assertion, the talking about himself and his own opinions, is his highest joy.”

This brings us to a point that we want to recognize. One of the greatest dangers for a spiritual virgin is selfishness. We know what selfishness looks like. It has many ugly manifestations. All of those things can lead to spiritual death. Why does it do that? Because it allows almost no room for introspection to get to know what’s really in there.

A fool has no pleasure in understanding their own heart. We know why. Because it might mean personal change. The opposite is entirely true of the wise.

Proverbs 9:8 Do not correct a scoffer, lest he hate you; Rebuke a wise man, and he will love you.

9 Give instruction to a wise man, and he will be still wiser; Teach a just man, and he will increase in learning.

That’s the way of the wise virgin. Our present culture is full of those who literally hate those who correct them. They don’t just hate correction, they hate the people that correct them. It is so common. It’s like all restraints have been cast off by some that we see in the media. I’m talking about those who make the news. It is so common.

But the wise love those who point out a failing simply because they know they’re going to learn from it. They know that their light is going to get brighter, their life will get better and lead to a more abundant life.

Let’s go to Psalm 141 and look at David’s attitude. This is the attitude of a wise virgin. A beautiful verse here.

Psalm 141:5 Let the righteous strike me; It shall be a kindness. And let him rebuke me; It shall be as excellent oil; Let my head not refuse it. (And then the King James Version says this:) For yet my prayer also shall be in their calamities.

To the wise, correction is a kindness. It’s like somebody opening the door for you. Or telling you, “Hey, did you know your tire is almost flat.” Or whatever. “Your dog is sick in your back yard.” Some kind of kindness. And he compares the correction of a righteous man to an excellent oil. That takes us straight back to our parable and excellent oil, the oil of the Holy Spirit.

When a foolish virgin rejects correction, that person is rejecting the oil of the Holy Spirit. That rejection doesn’t have to be open and inflammatory. It can be. But most generally I would say, among actual, spiritual virgins, it will be more of a tight-lipped resolve. Just stick with the course and ignore the correction.

But the wise appreciate righteous correction so much that they make it a point to remember the kindness because it stirs them. When someone has done us a good

deed, we want to give back. And we can offer up intercessory prayers for such a good friend who will get us back on track. When they're in need we can offer up prayers on their behalf. That's what David was talking about. What a tremendous contrast this is.

What we've just come to is a wise virgin embraces correction and those who give it. A foolish virgin will reject righteous correction, either openly or by ignoring it. Thinking back to the parable we know that half were in a state of readiness to meet Christ and half weren't. Half of them were not alert. Half of them were not in tune with the war that was being fought. Paul speaks to this thing of being alert, making use of the time.

Ephesians 5:15 See then that you walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise, 16 redeeming the time, because the days are evil.

Circumspectly means diligently, perfectly, exactly. We get the message. It means fully aware. In other words, a spiritual adrenal alert.

Reading this, when we think back to the virgins we know that half of them weren't being diligent. They were not alert, they were not prepared. They were being influenced, ironically, by one of the most diligent beings in the universe, Satan our adversary. He is diligent. Look at all he can accomplish. Look at what's happening in the world today. I don't care where you look. Anywhere. And it's amazing how much destruction is taking place. He's diligent in destruction, whether it's in the short term or whether it's over the span of centuries. Whether it's long term, it makes no difference.

In John 8 we get Christ's view of the adversary. Speaking to the Pharisees he says:

John 8:44 You are of your father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own resources, for he is a liar and the father of it.

This has been true of him from the beginning. Those are Christ's words. From the time that Lucifer became Satan (and that was the transition period, obviously) until now, he has been diligent in destruction. We know the first destruction was among the angels. We can look at the planets and we're always amazed. We have something rolling around on Mars taking pictures. It's all destruction. It's all just dead. That's how it is all around us and that's because there was a war fought. There was destruction. And now he's focused in on human destruction, because we have the potential of becoming part of God's family. We are the enemy.

So, the fitting question for us then, brethren, as those begotten of God in this end time, are we as diligent in doing those things that lead to life as our mortal enemy is in trying to end our lives? Do we have the same diligence? He doesn't waste any time. Are we redeeming the time? Are we making use of it every minute?

Every day that we're still drawing in air is a day that we should be buying up those moments, redeeming the time that so many seem to be throwing away because self has become so incredibly important. Self is so important today, we look in our own society, especially across the political divide. People can't work together any more. Too much hatred. It's all about self. It's what self wants and that's all that matters. That's why we do not want to participate in politics. It's a corrupt place.

So many are casting off restraints of a former belief in God. There was a time when many, a high percentage of Americans at least, proclaimed a belief in God. But because so many are casting off restraint it would be only so easy to be influenced and enticed along. There's a wave of evil that's happening around us.

So, time must be more precious to us than it is to our enemy. He knows he has a little time. And take a look, he's moving! Our time needs to be more precious to us than it is to him. What I'm saying is that now is the time to diligently search our God's will in every matter. As I said earlier, there is no frivolous matter. There's no tiny, inconsequential matter. Everything leads to something. It's always that way. In Romans 13, Paul reaffirms diligence and urgency.

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

From the parable of the virgins, what do we know? We know they all went to sleep. No question. They all went to sleep. But the time came when they needed to be wide awake. Brethren, now is that time! We're living in that time.

12 The night is far spent, the day is at hand. Therefore let us cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armor of light.

13 Let us walk properly, as in the day, not in revelry and drunkenness, not in lewdness and lust, not in strife and envy.

14 But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts.

All that we've just read applies to diligently redeeming the time. We could go on and on, and it goes without saying that if we're comparing the spiritual things with spiritual, if we're looking straight and true into our own minds with God's Holy Spirit as our guide and the spirit of His law as the instruction book, then we'll be diligently redeeming the time.

Let's consider one more particular principle on this point. Let's go to 1 Timothy chapter 6, verse 19. We're going to take a principle here out of context. The context is that Paul is addressing some of the wealthy members in the Church at that time. He's giving them instructions, etc. But we're going to extract this principle. It's a living principle. It doesn't just belong right there.

1 Timothy 6:19 storing up for themselves a good foundation for the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life.

We all must store up a good foundation for the time to come. I can remember as a young person, actually before I was baptized and wondering about the Holy Spirit and thinking to myself, that will be so wonderful when I receive the Holy Spirit. Then, about another year later, as I was listening, I realized the Holy Spirit isn't stagnant. You don't just bottle it up. You don't just get it and it's there forever and ever. You have to use it. It gets regenerated every day. We have to replenish it. But with it we can take on the mind and character of Christ, which is our foundation. We have to have a foundation for the time to come.

Let's go to Luke chapter 6. Christ is referring to a foundation here. We see that the foundation makes all the difference.

Luke 6:47 Whoever comes to Me, and hears My sayings and does them, I will show you whom he is like:

Christ is talking about those who have habitually and diligently sought God's word and His will and have acted on it. They've done just what they should do. They have redeemed the time diligently. When we redeem the time, brethren, that means we're always stretching. We're always willing to stretch, to take on the shape and the form of Christ and our Father. We're reaching out. We're looking for how we can develop.

48 He is like a man building a house, who dug deep and laid the foundation on the rock. And when the flood arose, the stream beat vehemently against that house, and could not shake it, for it was founded on the rock.

49 But he who heard and did nothing is like a man who built a house on the earth without a foundation...

He's comparing. You either have the foundation, so you're prepared for what lies ahead, or you don't.

49 ... against which the stream beat vehemently; and immediately it fell. And the ruin of that house was great."

The point here is that wise virgins diligently take on the mind of Christ every day as a foundation for what lies ahead. The mind of Christ in us is our foundation. But those who lacked that diligence, and therefore the character and mind of Christ, will come to spiritual ruin for the very reason that they didn't have a foundation. What this parable shows us is that eventually time runs out. Eventually the flood comes, the end comes. We could compare that flood to the end. As we see in the parable of the virgins, eventually time runs out for the virgins as well.

One last point. We know that the foolish virgins finally come to the realization, it's right down to the wire, that their lights are going out. Right at the end they can see that

they've been foolish. They're pretty worried now because, look it really is true. We are at the end. They've been just drifting along in a self-centered world, thinking everything's going to be good.

They come to see that those whom they might have thought were maybe a little bit overly righteous, the ones who were diligent, those who were redeeming the time were actually right on course. That's where they should have been. They can see that.

The last point for today is that they lacked personal accountability. There were those who were personally accountable and they were the wise virgins. But these wanted someone else to be responsible for making things work for them. To make it come right for them in the end. They were looking for a handout. And what do we see in our country today? So many people have their hands out. They want something for nothing. They want somebody to make it for them and give it to them. But God's way of life is not a handout. It is a hand up.

Through God's calling, when we become personally accountable, we can see, "I need to turn my life around. I need to change my whole outlook, my attitude." When we're willing to face who we are and what we are and to turn from it, He gives a hand up in the form of forgiveness and the gift of His Holy Spirit. Then we are to use that gift in order to do good works, in order to work with it to go on to perfection. That's how that works. That's what the hand up sets in motion.

The foolish virgins had already had a hand up, but they slowly lost sight of the battle within. It was a progression of time, just as the wise choose to overcome continually and utilize their time, it was a progression for these others to lose sight of the battle. They lost their spiritual alertness and the perception of things not seen diminished. They lost their ability to compare spiritual things with spiritual. That's vital to us. They became increasingly selfish because they couldn't see the spiritual anymore. With the loss of appreciation for correction, their diligence melted away. They lost their diligence. They weren't redeeming the time. They lost their foundation in Christ of godly character and with that, they lost their personal accountability. They wanted someone to do it for them. Surely someone can save me! They thought up until the last that they were okay. But they didn't realize that they were slowly casting off restraint, like the world around them. That's what we see today! We see a casting off of restraint.

The parable of the virgins teaches us vital lessons. Paul follows up. He says:

Hebrews 12:15 looking carefully lest anyone fall short of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up cause trouble, and by this many become defiled;

If we aren't diligent brethren, if we're not redeeming the time, if we're not on spiritual adrenal alert, Paul just says it: we can fall from grace. It takes a lot of being absent from the spiritual realm, but it can happen.

16 lest there be any fornicator or profane person like Esau, who for one morsel of food sold his birthright.

17 For you know that afterward, when he wanted to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no place for repentance, though he sought it diligently with tears.

This is an echo of this parable. It can be sought after right at the last moment. After we've presented all of our character to God, we will have shown Him that we don't have the foundation. Eventually the door goes shut and our time is up. That's how it works and that's how it will work right at the end.

So now, we'll look at the good news. We know that the door was opened to the wise virgins.

2 Peter 3:14 Therefore, beloved, looking forward to these things, be diligent to be found by Him in peace, without spot and blameless.

Through our diligent use of the Holy Spirit as we compare spiritual things with spiritual in our own lives and in our own minds, even though they can't be seen physically we're looking at them and we're comparing them. The bride of Christ will be made ready. And that's how it's going to happen.

Just as Christ said in another place, "Whoever I find so doing" will be blessed at His return. "So doing" is preparing. It's going on to perfection. It's staying the course. It's redeeming the time.

Let's conclude in Revelation chapter 19. There is a wonderful time ahead for those who are a part of that marriage.

Revelation 19:6 And I heard, as it were, the voice of a great multitude, as the sound of many waters and as the sound of mighty thunderings, saying, "Alleluia! For the Lord God Omnipotent reigns!

7 Let us be glad and rejoice and give Him glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His wife has made herself ready."

A wedding is a wonderful event and she's made herself ready. This is what awaits those who are on a spiritual adrenal alert in their lives. We have to be alert. This is what awaits those who use the Holy Spirit to see the unseen and to compare spiritual things with spiritual and who diligently win the battle within. ◇