

The Duties of a Watchman

*“have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness,
but rather reprove them” (Eph. 5:11)*

There is a particular feature common to both our Old and New Testament readings for the day, following the *Bible Companion*. It is a feature of the Gospel that would sit very uncomfortably with many of our contemporaries, who choose either to ignore it, or to regard it as being outdated, and no longer relevant to a multi ethnic civilisation whose overriding doctrine is toleration for all – all that is, just so long as they do not attempt to foist their beliefs upon others. This aspect of the Gospel is to do with its exclusiveness - that being Yahweh’s word, it is therefore Truth (Jno. 17:17) – and by definition therefore, those notions and philosophies that are not in accord with it’s principles are not Truth, or, False. The aspect to which we refer, as indicated in our opening citation, is that of *Reproof*. Though it be considered to be politically incorrect by the Humanistic civilisation in which we sojourn, if we are to be like Paul, standing with all good conscience in declaring the whole counsel of God (Acts 20:27) before men, it is an aspect of our preaching that *reproof* must be given. It is part of the gospel that “God shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ” (Rom. 2:16), and it is therefore part of the disciples’ duty to inform men of their true standing in the sight of God, that they might therefore repent before that day comes.

Ephesians 5:11, cited above indicates that the true believer in Christ, being a child of light (1 Thes. 5:5), cannot mix with a world of darkness. Separation is called for, but not only separation: a form of reproof is also needed, so that those who walk in darkness might have the opportunity to turn to the Light by way of repentance and baptism. And our reading in Ezekiel 33 likewise describes and emphasizes this responsibility of the Watchman:- the issuing of a warning of impending destruction upon the godless. Ezekiel was told concerning the Watchman’s responsibilities:

“If the Watchman see the sword come, and blow not the trumpet, and the people be not warned; if the sword come, and take any person from among them, he is taken away in his iniquity; but his blood will I require at the watchman’s hand. ***So thou, O son of man, I have set thee a Watchman unto the house of Israel;*** therefore thou shalt hear the word at my mouth, and warn them from me” (Eze. 33:6-7).

Here we see the principle lying behind the required “reproof”. It is not so much for the condemnation of the wicked - although that be an involved element - for in this same chapter Yahweh states: “As I live ... I have ***no pleasure*** in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live” (verse 11). The purpose of reproof then, is to enable the wicked to perceive their true standing, and by so doing, bring them to repentance.

Again, Ezekiel chapter 3 provides the same instruction:

“Son of man, I have made thee a watchman unto the house of Israel: therefore hear the word at my mouth, and give them warning from me” (Ezek. 3:17).

For Ezekiel – as with all the prophets of Old, his duty was to declare the whole counsel of God, however unpalatable it may have been, but with the prime objective being that individuals might repent before the day of judgment come.

Although in the present dispensation, there are no divinely appointed Watchmen, we can be sure that the principles hold true in our situation as with theirs. There is a vital need in the benighted age in which we live to “hold forth the word of life” (Phil. 2:16), shining as a lampstand to enlighten any who may yet open their eyes to the things of the Spirit. There is a need, as our reading from Ephesians indicates, to give reproof to an evil and adulterous generation – and if the Truth-holders do not fulfil that task, who will? It is not enough then, to say that we believe the principles of the Gospel, and let the matter rest like that. We have a duty to fellow man to show them the way of salvation, and thereby reprove them of their sin, that they might find their way to repentance, and join us on our journey down the narrow way that leads to everlasting life. And if the duties of the Watchman are anything to go by, should we not fulfil this task, the consequences of such neglect shall be required of us.

But involved with this, is the need to give a clear and unequivocal trumpet-blast of a warning that no man can mistake: “for if the trumpet give an uncertain sound, who shall prepare himself to the battle?” (1 Cor. 14:8). To speak frankly in such a manner is most frowned upon in today’s generation, yet it is deemed by our Master to be a necessary work in His Service.

The aspect of *watching* is something that the Master refers to on a number of occasions. Matthew chapter 24 records his words:

“Watch therefore: for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come. But know this, that if the Goodman of the house had known in what watch the thief would come, he would have watched, and would not have suffered his house to be broken up. Therefore be ye also ready: for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh” (Mat. 24:42-44; see also Mark 13:34-35).

Again, the context is to do with a coming day of judgment, and the need to remain alert and ready for that time to come. But there is another sense in which Christ’s brethren need to “watch”. Not only is it to sound a warning before the coming Day of Yahweh upon all the nations – it is also to watch over the wellbeing of the flock. So the Apostle exhorted the believers at Ephesus:

“also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them. **Therefore watch**, and remember, that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears” (Acts 20:30-31).

Here, the idea is that of watching over the ecclesia like a shepherd caring for the flock under his charge. Again, we do not have divinely ordained shepherds in the way that the 1st Century believers did, but the principles remain the same. There is a need to watch over, and care for the affairs of the flock of God. There is a need to stand against the wolves, whether they arise from within, or without, for the ultimate wellbeing of the flock. The task is a thankless one so far as men are concerned, for to dare to wield the Spirit’s Sword against the imaginations and vanities of the flesh will invariably attract

the wrath and reprobation of many who hold such things dear to their hearts. Even undiscerning elements of the flock may criticise the actions of those who withstand the inroads of apostasy – yet such a work is necessary to preserve a people ready and waiting for the appearance of their Master, the Great Shepherd. Those who refuse to withstand the wolves are but “hirelings” according to our Master (Jno. 10:12-13), who do not care for the flock, but who are solely concerned with their own self-interest.

Again, the Apostle writes

“Ye are all the children of light, and the children of the day: we are not of the night, nor of darkness. Therefore let us not sleep, as do others; but **let us watch and be sober**. For they that sleep sleep in the night; and they that be drunken are drunken in the night. But let us, who are of the day, be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love; and for an helmet the hope of salvation” (2 Thes. 5:5-8).

The exhortation is clear and plain: the world around us slumbers in spiritual indolence and slothfulness, and there is a real danger that members of the household of faith fall into the same position of apathy. Those who are not alert and watching, by definition, are those who sleep and are drunken, having their senses obscured by the wine of the Romish harlot. We must therefore consider our own standing in the light of these testimonies, and take any remedial action necessary.

Returning to the days of Ezekiel and other prophets, we find that though the Watchman’s trumpet sounded loud and long, it went largely unheeded by the general populace:

“Thus saith Yahweh, Stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls. **But they said, We will not walk therein**. Also I set watchmen over you, saying, Harken to the sound of the trumpet. **But they said, we will not hearken**” (Jer. 6:16-17).

Notice the parallelism here: the sounding of the Trumpet is equated with the exhortation to seek out the “good way”, to walk therein. The ways to be sought after are “the old paths”, not the new innovations devised by man. In an age which has seen ever so many so-called “advancements” in many areas of life, there are (so it appears), a dying few who long after the “old” ways. Men are constantly striving to ‘advance’ further, both in terms of new technologies and innovations, and also in new interpretations of religious texts and their relevance or otherwise to daily living in the 21st Century. The Way of Life however, does not change either in its destination or its width. Not being designed for the hoards who seek after their own affairs and the fulfilment of their own desires, “the good way”, according to our Master is a “strait,” or “narrow” way (Mat. 7:14). It is so by design, and though men may speak evil of us for upholding the principles that define it, the narrowness is not of our making, but God’s – and His Wisdom is greater than man’s.

In Israel, as in our generation of today, there were few who hearkened to the voice of the prophets. “They said” concerning “the good way”, “we will not walk therein,” and so they remained on the broad way that led them to certain destruction. So it was written of the cry of the Watchmen:

“They have blown the Trumpet, even to make all ready; *but none goeth to the battle*; for my wrath is upon all the multitude thereof” (Eze. 7:14).

Yahweh’s wrath rested upon the entire multitude that refused to hear – and how much more will it rest upon the indolence of our day? Notice also, the trumpet call of the prophets were designed to prepare the people for “the battle”. We saw this earlier in 1 Corinthians 14:8. We also are called upon to engage in the warfare of faith (1 Tim. 6:12). But how many are there amongst us who would willingly contend against the spiritual wickedness in high places, a contention which will only bring the reprobation from man?

But it was not only the people at large who refused to be moved; those who had the dominion over them also failed in their duty as watchmen:

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

We would ask the question: What of the Watchmen of today’s generation? As we have said, though it be true that there are no divinely appointed Shepherds or Watchmen in our day, the duties remain to be fulfilled. From whence comes the trumpet-soundings of our day? Where are the contenders for the faith, girded with the armour of light going forth and wielding the Spirit’s Sword against the high pretensions of men? In previous ages, such men were moved by the Word into action, by way of “reproof” and exhortation to repentance. Can this be said of the days in which we live? It behoves us all to consider our own individual circumstances by way of comparison to the pattern revealed to us in the holy writ. We can either be the children of light, or the children of darkness – there is no supposed “middle ground”. We are either engaged in the warfare in which our Master and Redeemer was engaged, or we are amongst those who sit on the sidelines sniping at those who contend against the wolves. The choice is ours, for only we can decide for ourselves where we stand on such matters.

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BLESSED IS HE THAT WATCHETH

“Blessed,” says Jesus, “is he that watcheth.” Now no one can watch without light. If the heavens be dark, the watchman must be provided with a light, or he cannot watch. By gazing at the natural luminaries as some professors are accustomed to do, no light can be derived, nor signs observed premonitory of the coming of the Lord. This is “the way of the heathen,” and “a custom which is vain” (Jer. 10:2-3). The natural heavens are impenetrably dark in relation to his appearing. The believer, or spiritual watchman, must take “the sure word of prophecy,” which is the only “light” capable of enlightening him in the surrounding gloom. This world is “a dark place” and its cosmopolites who understand not the prophetic word mere embodiments of fog. If we understand “the word of the kingdom” we shall “shine as lights in the world,” and be enabled to rejoice in the approach of “the day of Christ.” By the “shining light of prophecy” we shall be able to interpret the signs which God has revealed as appearing in the political heavens and earth. Events among the nations of the Roman habitable, and not atmospheric phenomena, are the signs of the coming of the Lord as a thief; whose nature, whether signs or not, can only be determined by “the testimony of God.””

(John Thomas, cited from Elpis Israel, Logos edition)