

Taking Heed Lest We Fall

*“Wherefore let him
that thinketh he
standeth take heed
lest he fall.”*

*—I Corinthians
10:12*

WE BEGIN PART TWO OF

our consideration of this important subject by recognizing that, in order to “take heed,” we must examine how we are listening to the Word of God. We must hear the message of truth with an understanding heart, and with a spirit of appreciation, else it will fail to have the desired effect in our lives. Jesus said, “Take heed therefore how ye hear: for whosoever hath, to him shall be given; and whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken even that which he seemeth to have.” (Luke 8:18) “Whosoever hath,” and “whosoever hath not,” seems to imply there is an important responsibility associated with that which we hear from the Lord. If we take heed how we hear the truth it will mean that we recognize our hearing of it imposes the further need to be “doers of the word, and not hearers only.”—James 1:22

Hearing the word of truth should, above all things, have an effect upon the growth of our Christian

character. Jesus said that we are to be sanctified by the truth. (John 17:17) This sanctifying work of the truth in our hearts is twofold. Through its precepts, our lives should be more and more conformed to the high standards of righteousness and godliness exemplified in God's law. Then, these transformed lives are to be devoted to the service of God, as directed by the truth. We are in the school of Christ to learn and apply the truth. Thus, we can be equipped to serve as ambassadors of Christ now, and through faithfulness to the divine will, be worthy to serve as joint-heirs with him in the future work of the kingdom.—II Cor. 5:20; Rom. 8:17; James 2:5

If we hear the truth with appreciation, our love for it will be demonstrated by the amount of energy we exert in its service and defense. Our hearing of the truth should so inspire us that we are willing to sacrifice all “for the witness of Jesus, and for the word of God.” (Rev. 20:4) Each day should find us busily engaged in using the truth to glorify God, in proportion to our talents and opportunities. Failing in this full appreciation of the privilege that is ours of hearing the voice of God speak to us through the truth, we become more or less subject to the deceptive influences of the Adversary, by which he is endeavoring to bring about our fall from divine grace and favor.

A proper taking heed to the manner in which we first heard the truth, and continue to hear it, is illustrated in the parable of the sower. (Luke 8:5-8) Some of the seed fell by the wayside. In this case there were no hearing ears at all. Other seed fell among the rocks. Here the message was heard, but

soon forgotten. The hearers did not take heed how they heard or what the hearing really meant, and the heat of opposition and persecution soon stopped their growth. Some of the seeds of truth “fell among thorns.” Here was a class that heard with some appreciation, but the cares of this life, the spirit of the world, and various other adverse influences, eventually choked the growth that should have taken place in their hearts.

The seed which fell on the “good ground” represents the true hearing of appreciation and heart understanding. The good ground hearers are those who take heed what they hear and how they hear, with the result that fruitage is produced to the glory of God. These become sanctified by the truth and serve faithfully as its ambassadors, letting their light shine, rather than keeping it hidden under a bushel.—Luke 11:33

TAKE HEED AGAINST DECEPTION

Deception is the method frequently used by Satan to lead God’s people into his various snares and pitfalls. He usually practices his deceptions through human agencies. Hence, we are warned by Jesus to “take heed that no man deceive you.” (Matt. 24:4) Noting the prophetic context of this chapter, the Lord’s warning seems to be particularly appropriate for the present time—“the end of the age.” (vs. 3, *Wilson’s Emphatic Diaglott*) We have seen how most professed followers of the Master have been deceived along the lines of God’s times and seasons. If it were possible, Jesus further reminds us, the “very elect” would also be deceived. (vs. 24) However, this is not possible, because they are the faithful

ones who take heed, and are not deluded by the doctrines of men.

The Apostle Paul also reminds us of the necessity of taking heed lest we be deceived. He says, “Let no man deceive you with vain words: for because of these things cometh the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience.” (Eph. 5:6) “Vain words” would be those not in harmony with the plan and will of God, especially those words which appeal to human vanity. Flattery is one of the Adversary’s chief methods of deceit. If we are properly taking heed, we will stop and exercise great caution when we hear the voice of flattery appealing to us to turn to the right hand or to the left.

Another apostolic warning states that “of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them.” (Acts 20:30) The deception of human leadership is perhaps one of the most subtle with which the saints of God have to contend. There is the constant temptation, especially upon elders and teachers, to gain a following among the brethren. There can also be the willingness on the part of some of the Lord’s people, because of human weakness, to be led. To these, it may seem so much easier to follow the Lamb if they can see him represented in some human head or leader. How flattering it is also to an individual, or group of individuals, to believe that God is leading his people through him, or them. Surely, we need to take great heed along this line!

To the elders at Ephesus, and to those in all ecclesias today, Paul said: “Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Spirit hath made you overseers, to feed the

church of God.” (Acts 20:28) The Apostle Peter similarly admonished: “Feed the flock of God which is among you.” This is the elders’ privilege and responsibility. However, Peter adds, they are not to be “lords over God’s heritage,” nor assume headship in the church. Rather, they are to be “ensamples to the flock.”—I Pet. 5:2,3

All in the church should take heed how and what they are fed. We should not shift our individual responsibilities upon the elders of the class. How much difficulty could be avoided simply by all the brethren taking heed not to encourage ambition for leadership within the church. Such an ambitious spirit is not necessarily manifested in a desire for a large following. The desire to lead is often satisfied by having a mere handful of followers, perhaps just one or two. However, these small groups may be led to separate themselves from others in an ecclesia simply because they have allowed themselves to be influenced by the enticing words of an ambitious leader. Let us remember however, that “one is your Master, even Christ; and all ye are brethren.”—Matt. 23:8

TAKE HEED HOW WE BUILD

The Apostle Paul wrote: “We are labourers together with God: ye are God’s husbandry, ye are God’s building. According to the grace of God which is given unto me, as a wise masterbuilder, I have laid the foundation, and another buildeth thereon. But let every man take heed how he buildeth thereupon. For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones,

wood, hay, stubble; Every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is."—I Cor. 3:9-13

The manner in which a Christian builds for the future, as a coworker with God, is thus clearly outlined. First, there must be the foundation of Jesus Christ, the ransom for all. This means that everything built thereon must square with the ransom. Upon this must be built the solid superstructure of faith and character. If we take heed how we build, and do so as coworkers with God rather than along lines of our own choosing, our building will be capable of withstanding all the storms which are permitted to test us. It will endure the fiery trials too, which shall "try every man's work of what sort it is."

Since the foundation of this building of God is the great doctrinal fact of the ransom and our own acceptance and conformity thereto, the things which are built upon that foundation must be the other doctrines of God's plan, together with the outgrowth of Christian character resulting therefrom. Hence, a proper taking heed as to how we build implies a carefulness in our study of the truth and its proper application in our lives. In other words, we cannot ignore the doctrines of the truth, and expect to build acceptably to God. Together with the ransom, the other doctrines are the framework around which, by God's grace, we must carefully build with personal works of faith and love. If, in this manner, we take heed how we build, we will have a structure that will stand up against all the winds of false doctrine and withstand the fire of this day of special trial.

DEPARTING FROM THE LIVING GOD

In Hebrews 3:12, Apostle Paul mentions another manner in which we should take heed. He says, "Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God." The context here refers to the unbelief of Israel in the wilderness. That unbelief was manifested in their tendency to so soon forget the miracles God had wrought on their behalf, and their disposition to turn away from him to the worship of other gods. Thus, through lack of appreciation, they departed from the living God.

We must soberly ask ourselves: Have God's blessings which came to us through the truth become commonplace? Do we still appreciate the miracle of his grace to us as it abounded, and still abounds, through Christ Jesus, or have we permitted the trials of the way to mar the sweetness of God's loving watchcare over us? Do we still hear the voice of God speaking to us through his truth, or are we listening for other voices? Are we desirous of hearing voices which bid us to walk in a way less narrow and in paths more pleasing to our flesh? Let us take heed that we do not depart from the living God through failure to appreciate constantly the miracle of his truth revealed to us. Let us not count as commonplace the fact that he has taken us into his confidence and revealed to us the secrets of his glorious plan.

TAKE HEED TO THE MINISTRY

"Take heed to the ministry which thou hast received in the Lord, that thou fulfil it." (Col. 4:17) In this particular apostolic injunction, taking heed

is enjoined in order that we might fulfill the ministry. The Apostle Paul seemed to have realized that there would be a danger of our neglecting to be ministers, or servants of the truth. How easy it is to fall away from our steadfastness along this line. Satan is always active in his endeavor to draw us away from witnessing to the plan of God. However, if we are properly taking heed, we will recognize his cunning devices, his misleading philosophy, and not be affected thereby.

Jesus, our perfect example, came into the world to serve, to be a minister in the great work of reconciling mankind to God. Our calling is to cooperate with Jesus in this ministry or service. No matter how faithfully we may be meeting all the other requirements of the truth, if we neglect the ministry we fall short of the very purpose of our calling. Let us, indeed, take heed to the ministry, proclaiming the Gospel as far and wide as it is possible for us to do, that we “fulfil it.”

Taking heed to the ministry also includes an important responsibility in connection with the manner in which it is conducted—especially our part in it. Note the apostle’s words: “Giving no offence in any thing, that the ministry be not blamed.” (II Cor. 6:3) Paul, throughout this chapter, gives important admonitions along this line, going into detail concerning the things to which we should take heed in order that the ministry be not blamed.

Purity of faith and practice, longsuffering, patience, love, self-sacrifice, and the whole armor of righteousness, are among the things to which we should take heed, according to the apostle, if we are not to bring reproach upon the ministry. (vss. 4-7) Separateness

from temples of idols is another prerequisite which he mentions. There are many so-called creed idols today, as well as character and moral idols of unrighteousness. Our God has bid us to “come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you.” “Be ye clean, that bear the vessels of the Lord.”—II Cor. 6:17; Isa. 52:11

Indeed, this is our ministry, to “bear the vessels of the Lord,” the vessels that contain the pure water of his truth. How vital it is that we keep those vessels clean, so that those who drink therefrom may be truly refreshed with the living waters of divine truth, and refreshed with the glorious knowledge that “God is love.” (I John 4:8) Only as we minister the truth of God’s plan can we hope for his blessing upon our efforts. Only as we keep that truth pure in our own minds and hearts, and give it forth in its purity to others, are we truly taking heed to the ministry.

TAKE HEED TO THYSELF

Paul admonished Timothy, saying, “Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine; continue in them; for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee.” (I Tim. 4:16) Here we have a summary of all that is involved in our taking heed lest we fall. It means to take heed to ourselves, in every way, and to take heed to the doctrines of the truth. As indicated by the apostle, we take heed unto ourselves by continuing in the doctrine. However, to do this means much more than to merely give mental assent to them. To continue in the doctrines or teachings of the Gospel means to believe them,

to defend them, and to be guided by them in our daily Christian conduct and ministry.

Failure to do this would mean missing the mark in the development of divine love in our hearts and lives. Even though our ministry might be couched in the pleasing sound of “men and of angels,” it would be, in God’s sight, but as “sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal.” (I Cor. 13:1) Therefore, a proper taking heed to ourselves is possible only as we make certain that the doctrines of truth are taking full control of our lives, and producing in us the peaceable fruits of righteousness. (Heb. 12:11) Only in this way can we fully read in the Scriptures the shining words of God’s love and be inspired with the determination to be like him.

By taking heed unto ourselves and unto the doctrines, we will become equipped with the armor of God, and will be enabled to go forth as valiant soldiers of the cross. (Eph. 6:10-18; II Tim. 2:3) Then we will be able to defend the faith “once delivered unto the saints,” in love. (Jude 3) Our words will minister grace to the hearers, all those who have a hearing ear for the simple truth of the Gospel. (Eph. 4:29) In this way, as we take heed in the divinely prescribed manner, we will buttress and make sure our standing in the Lord. Our ministry of the truth will be continually blessed with the refreshing smile of our Heavenly Father’s approval. ■