Are You Spiritually Asleep?

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If you've ever studied the Gospel accounts of Christ's ministry while He was on Earth, you're probably aware of the fact that when Christ spoke to the general population of His time, He most often spoke in parables. In fact, He states in Matthew 13 that the reason He did this was specifically to hide the meaning of what He was teaching from the general population so that what He was teaching would only be understood by those He was specifically calling as Firstfruit Christians.

There's one particular parable that Christ gave that is a warning to us as Firstfruit Christians, specifically about the dangers of allowing ourselves to fall into a state of being spiritually asleep. And what we're going to do today in the sermon is take a close look at this parable to understand this warning and to also see what we can learn from this in terms of clues or symptoms, you might say, that we should use to examine our own lives to see if we might be falling into a state of being spiritually asleep. So, if you'd like a title for this sermon it's:

Are You Spiritually Asleep?

Now, the specific parable that I'm referring to is the Parable of the 10 Virgins that you find in Matthew 25. So, if you turn over to this parable, we'll take a look at this. Now, if you have a ribbon in your Bible, you're probably going to want to place it here in this chapter. Because we're going to spend a lot of time turning back and forth in the Bible today, coming back and forth to this particular chapter. And it'll make it a lot easier for you if you have a ribbon and you just place it there.

But what we're going to do first of all is just read through the parable to get the general overview. Then we're going to break this down verse by verse to see the lessons that we can learn from this parable. So, to start off with, let's start reading in Matthew 25 in verse 1.

> **Matt 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."* (NKJV)

Again, that's going to be an important point for us today. Notice that the wise and the foolish, they all fell into a state of being asleep.

> *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.” (NKJV)

So, obviously in the last verse there, Christ is referring to His return. Now you can see this is a very serious warning. Because when He says to the foolish, "I do not know you". As we know from other verses in the New Testament, that's referring to Christ rejecting an individual, and they wind up going in the lake of fire. So, this is a very serious warning that we need to take very seriously.

Now what we're going to do is to go through this parable kind of verse by verse to see all the different symbolic meanings that are here. Because this is a parable. This is not just a literal story. There's a lot of symbolic meaning in this that we need to unpack to understand what He's getting at here. But what we're going to spend the majority of our time focusing on is this concept of being spiritually asleep. So, to start off with let's just read verse 1 again.

Matt 25:1 *“Then the kingdom of heaven shall be likened to ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom.”* (NKJV)

So, as we know from reading through all of this parable, this is about going to a wedding. It’s referring to virgins that are going to meet a bridegroom. So, what it's referring to is these virgins are the bride, and they're going to meet the groom that they're going to marry. Now if you turn over to 2 Corinthians 11, we can just let the Bible explain to us exactly what this is obviously referring to here. We'll see here where Paul uses this exact same symbolism to make an important point here regarding Firstfruit Christians. In other words, those called to salvation prior to the return of Christ.

2 Cor 11:1 *“Oh, that you would bear with me in a little folly—and indeed you do bear with me. 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.”* (NKJV)

See what he's referring to here is the Church at the resurrection. That account is in Revelation 19. We won't take the time to read through that today. But you'll see there it's directly describing the marriage of the Lamb. In other words, Christ as the Lamb is marrying the Firstfruit Christians who've made it into the Kingdom. Who've made it to the resurrection to eternal life. And there is a marriage. There's a relationship that's established between the Firstfruit Christians and Christ that's described as a marriage. Christ being the Husband and the Firstfruit Christians being the wife.

Obviously, we can see from Matthew 25 -- just turn back over to this chapter -- but we can see in verse 1, that's who's being addressed here. So, when it says all these virgins are on their way to a wedding, obviously, what it's referring to is these are all individuals who are called to salvation. Who are given the opportunity to be a part of that marriage that's described in Revelation 19. So again, this is a parable specifically to the Church of God. To those called prior to Christ's return. That is who He's talking to here. This isn't a parable that's just teaching a lesson about the world in general. *That's not who's being addressed here*. And as we unpack the symbolism here further as we go forward, this will become more and more obvious. So now pick up in verse 2.

> **Matt 25:2** *"Now five of them were wise, and five were foolish. 3) Those who were foolish took their lamps and took no oil with them,"* (NKJV)

So, as we know, what we're talking about here is all of these virgins have a lamp. And they all have oil in them. Now, we'll get into the difference between the wise and the foolish here in a moment. But obviously, even the foolish have oil in their lamps. Because as we read previously, there's a point where their lamps go out. That means their lamps were previously burning, which means they obviously had oil in them previously. So, all of the virgins that are in this parable here all have a lamp, and they all have oil in them.

We need to understand, what is this referring to? Because again, there's a symbolic meaning in all of this. Again, keep your finger here in Matthew 25 because we're going to come right back. But turn over to Psalm 119, and we'll let the Bible interpret all the symbols for us. We'll read verse 105.

> **Ps 119:105** *"Your word is a lamp to my feet And a light to my path."* (NKJV)

See it's comparing the word of God to a lamp. If you just think about this, you can see the concept it's trying to get at here. Because it's like you're trying to make your way through a dark world. The word of God, if we're leaning to it and looking to it for understanding, it can show us the way. It's analogous to trying to walk in the dark somewhere. If you carry a lamp with you -- and it's providing light for you -- it shows you the way to go. It shows you how to how to walk and not stumble and trip over something. And you can take the right path to get where you're going. This is what it's trying to teach us here, comparing the word of God to a lamp. If we effectively use it, it lights our path. It shows us the direction to go.

But the Bible itself, all by itself, if we don't have the Holy Spirit, doesn't provide a lot of light for us. Because lots of people have the book itself. But if we don't have the Holy Spirit to help us interpret it and to understand what it's really saying to us, it's not going to provide a lot of light. It's not going to show us where to go. Because see, that's what is being referred to here as the oil in the lamp. Because you have to have both for this to be an effective light to show us the path of how to live our lives.

And to see that, turn over to 1 Corinthians 2, and we'll see here it's the Holy Spirit that enables us to understand the word of God. To be able to correctly interpret it and comprehend it. That's what lights our path. That's what shows us how to live our lives. This is 1 Corinthians 2, and we'll start reading in verse 9.

> **1 Cor 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. 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."* (NKJV)

In other words, without the Holy Spirit, we can't correctly understand the Bible. We can't correctly interpret it and know how to apply it in our lives. Again, that's why it's described as the oil in the lamp. Because we can have the Bible. We can have the word of God. But if we don't have the Holy Spirit to show us what it means and to enable us to follow it, it's not going to light our paths and show us how to live our lives.

And again, if we just think about the symbolism here, this again confirms for us that the parable of the 10 virgins -- the group that's being addressed here, these are all Christians. Because again, if they have the lamp and the oil in the lamp -- what this is telling us is the audience that's being addressed, these are people who have not only been called and given the opportunity to receive salvation at this time. They've been baptized and received the Holy Spirit. These are people who've made a covenant with God and are pursuing that way of life. *That's the group that's being addressed here*.

So now let's turn back over to Matthew 25. Let's see here what the difference is between the wise and the foolish. Because in my experience in the Church of God, this is oftentimes a lesson that kind of gets misinterpreted or missed here. And what I mean by that is oftentimes the way that this gets interpreted -- because we're going to see here it's going to refer to the "vessel". That the wise had oil in the vessel, but the foolish didn't have that. And oftentimes this is interpreted like it's really just you're preparing for the long haul. Or just realizing it's going to be a long journey, so you take extra supplies with you. And that really misses the lesson of what this is getting at. But just notice here again in verse 4.

> **Matt 25:4** *"but the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps."* (NKJV)

Now again, if you just look at this literally in terms of having an oil lamp and taking an extra container of kerosene with you, so you can then fuel your lamp. Again, that makes sense in that regard. But that really misses the spiritual lesson of what this is getting at.

Because this isn't really about preparing for the long haul and having extra supplies. There's a more important lesson that's being taught by this. And to understand this, we need to realize that oftentimes the Bible uses the term "vessel" symbolically to refer to a person's life or how they live their life. It even refers to how we can be a vessel for honor

or for dishonor. In other words, meaning that we can live our lives in a righteous manner following God and be a vessel for honor. Or we can be a vessel for dishonor by living a life of rebellion. And to see what I'm referring to here, turn over to 2 Timothy 2. We'll start reading in verse 19.

> **2 Tim 2:19** *"Nevertheless the solid foundation of God stands, having this seal: "The Lord knows those who are His," and, "Let everyone who names the name of Christ depart from iniquity." 20) But in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and silver, but also of wood and clay, some for honor and some for dishonor. 21) Therefore if anyone cleanses himself from the latter, he will be a vessel for honor, sanctified and useful for the Master, prepared for every good work."* (NKJV)

The lesson here is obvious. It's saying, if you're following Christ and you're pursuing righteousness you become a vessel for honor rather than a vessel for dishonor. But the point I want you to see here is it's using the symbolism of a vessel to refer to a person's life. To how they live their lives. The Bible also uses this same analogy, to refer to a person being a vessel to fulfill God's will.

In fact, if you'll turn over to Acts 9, we'll see where this is directly stated in regards to the Apostle Paul. This is Acts 9. Now we're picking up in the account here where Paul gets struck down on the road to Damascus. You're probably familiar with that story. Because, prior to this particular account in chapter 9 here, Paul was actively persecuting the Church and attacking and killing Christians. Then he gets struck down blind, and God gets his attention here and turns his life around. Let's pick up here in verse 10. This is after Paul has been struck blind, and now Ananias is being given instructions to go to Paul, and to baptize him. But now notice here in Acts 9:10.

> **Acts 9:10** *"Now there was a certain disciple at Damascus named Ananias; and to him the Lord said in a vision, "Ananias." And he said, "Here I am, Lord." 11) So the Lord said to him, "Arise and go to the street called Straight, and inquire at the house of Judas for one called Saul of Tarsus, for behold, he is praying. 12) And in a vision he has seen a man named Ananias coming in and putting his hand on him, so that he might receive his sight." 13) Then Ananias answered, "Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much harm he has done to Your saints in Jerusalem. 14) And here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who call on Your name." 15) But the Lord said to him, "Go, for he is a chosen vessel of Mine to bear My name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel. 16) For I will show him how many things he must suffer for My name's sake."* (NKJV)

So, notice here how He's referring to Paul as he's going to be a "vessel" to carry out My will. He's referring to Paul's life. To how he lives his life.

Now let's tie what we can see here back to the Parable of the 10 Virgins and see what it's telling us as far as the chief difference between the wise and the foolish. Because

again, as I mentioned, oftentimes we misinterpret this lesson and think it's really just about preparing for the long haul and taking extra supplies. That really misses the spiritual lesson of what it's saying. Because see, it tells us that both sets of virgins -- both the wise and the foolish -- they both have the lamp. They both have the word of God. They have the Bible, as we call it today. They both have oil in their lamps. They both have the Holy Spirit. That's true of both groups. But the wise, they have it in their "vessel". They have it in their lives.

In other words, they've internalized it. It's gone deeper than just knowledge. Because just think about how your life as a Christian works. Initially, when you're first called or when you first understand something, it becomes head knowledge. It becomes something that you understand. Here's what I'm supposed to do. Or here's what I'm supposed to stop doing. Maybe, prior to your conversion, you were eating unclean meat. You were working on the Sabbath. You had various sins in your life. And then you realized those things were wrong and I've got to stop doing that. And then you also realize I need to be keeping the Sabbath. I need to be keeping the Holy Days. There's lots of things I need to start doing that I'm not doing. There was a point where it had to go beyond just the knowledge, and then you put it into action.

And then more than just going through the motions, there's a point where if we're really pursuing righteousness and it's really changing who we are. It starts changing our character. It starts changing our motivations, and our heart starts changing and being molded to be more like God. See, that's the primary difference here. It's telling us that the wise, they were internalizing it all. And the Holy Spirit was changing their heart. It was changing who they really are as individuals. It went beyond just knowledge and understanding and maybe just going through the motions. It became deeper conversion. That's the primary lesson of what it's getting at here as far as the difference between the wise and the foolish.

But as I mentioned previously, what we want to focus on today is the lessons we can learn about the concept of being spiritually asleep. Because if you notice when we read through the parable before, this was something that was said to affect both groups. Both the wise and the foolish. So now let's turn back over to Matthew 25. Let's pick up now in verse 5. Because again what we want to focus on today is the concept of being spiritually asleep. And what we can learn about this to examine ourselves to make sure that we're not falling into a state of being spiritually asleep. So now pick up in verse 5.

> **Matt 25:5** *"But while the bridegroom was delayed, they all slumbered and slept."* (NKJV)

Now, as we're going to see as we dig into this, we're not talking about physical slumbering and sleep. This is a spiritual lesson that we're going to learn here. But if we think about this again in terms of the physical applications of this, it can give us some insights into the spiritual lessons of what it's getting at here. Because notice it refers to slumbering and sleep. Now, basically what it's referring to here is questions of degree.

And what I mean by that is, let me share with you the meaning of the Greek words here that are translated into English as “slumbered” and “slept”. Now the Greek word that's translated as “slumbered” here in English is translated into the English as “nustazo”. It's Strong's # 3573, and the definition I'm going to give to you comes from The Complete Word Study Dictionary of the New Testament by Spiros Zodhiates. Now, as we go through this sermon, I'm going to use a number of New Testament definitions today. They all come from Zodhiates, just to make this simpler. But this particular word is defined by Zodhiates as:

> *“To slumber, doze, nod off….”*

Now, if you think about it in terms of nodding off -- as I mentioned, if we think about this in terms of the literal physical applications, we can learn some lessons here about the spiritual lessons that this is teaching us. Now, when you think about nodding off -- maybe this has happened to you, or you've witnessed this happening to a family member. The family's all sitting around the couch, watching TV or watching a movie. And maybe you yourself or maybe one of the other members of the family, they've had a long day. And as the movie goes on, they start nodding off and falling asleep and you look over and you see their head bobbing. Because they're not fully falling asleep, but they're fighting sleep, and they're coming in and out of consciousness.

Or maybe they nod off for a few minutes and then they annoy the rest of the family by saying "What did I miss? What's going on in the show? What's happening here?" Because they missed some of the context of what has led up to this part of the movie, and now they're confused as to what's going on. Again, that's not full sleep. That's nodding off.

But just think about what that does to us physically. We're not aware of what's going on around us. We've lost awareness of what all is happening, whether it's the TV show or conversations that are going on around us. We're losing awareness of what's taking place. And see, that's an important thing to remember when we think of this spiritually.

But now to share with you the definition of “slept” here. It’s what you would expect. It means sleeping. But the Greek word here is “katheudo”. It's Strong's # 2518. And again, the definition I'm going to give you comes from Zodhiates. He defines it as:

> *“To sleep, fall asleep, be fast asleep…; to sleep the sleep of death…. To be spiritually asleep, i.e., secure and unconcerned in sin, or indolent and careless in the performance of duty….”*

Now, pay particular attention to that when he says to be unconcerned in sin or not taking our duties as seriously as we should. As we're going to see, that really applies when we apply this spiritually. But again, just to think of this in terms of the physical application. When someone nods off, they're typically losing awareness for short periods. And then they wake back up, and then they're aware of what's around them.

When we go into a sound sleep, we're typically completely unaware of what's going on around us. Especially if you're someone like me who can be a very heavy sleeper. Something that used to be kind of a joke between me and my wife -- back when she was living years ago -- I'm a person that, if I get good and asleep I'm just like the dead. There were numerous times when there was a storm that happened at night, and the next morning, my wife would comment to me. She's like, "Man, did you hear all that thunder last night and all that wind and that ruckus storm that we had?" And I'm like, "What storm?" I didn't hear any of it. Because when I would be out. I would be just completely unaware of anything that was around me. I was just like the dead.

Again, that's something we should take into consideration when applying this in a spiritual sense. Because that's the concept of what it's trying to teach us here. If we allow ourselves to be spiritually asleep, we become unaware of ourselves and what's going on around us. And particularly in terms of our spiritual condition. As we read from Zodhiates, "to be comfortable, unaware and unconcerned living in sin". That's what can happen to us. We can become unaware and even delusional about our own spiritual condition. We can also become unaware of just being able to accurately assess events in the world around us.

And to see this covered in scripture, turn over to Revelation 3. We'll see a warning that Christ gives in His letter to Laodicea warning about the state of the end time Church. And I would definitely argue that this is very applicable to our lives today, because I think we are very much in the end times.

If you're familiar with the letters in Revelation 2 and 3, there are letters to seven Churches. Now there are several ways to apply these letters. But one of them is what's referred to as Church "eras". In other words, these letters address the predominant conditions that would exist in the New Testament Church all throughout Church history. From the time of Christ, all the way up to the end.

If you look at it from that perspective, at the very end time the letter to Laodicea would be what would describe the general condition of the Church at that time. If we read through this, as we're going to see here, it doesn't specifically use the word "sleep". But when you think of this in the context of sleeping, when someone is spiritually asleep, they're out of touch with their own spiritual condition. Obviously, this is what Christ is referring to here in the letter to Laodicea. So, pick up here in Revelation 3 in verse 14.

> **Rev 3:14** *"And to the angel of the church of the Laodiceans write, 'These things says the Amen, the Faithful and True Witness, the Beginning of the creation of God: 15) "I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot. I could wish you were cold or hot. 16) So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth."* (NKJV)

Now, this is a little more bluntly worded in a number of translations. It says, "I'm about to vomit you out of my mouth." In other words, what He's saying here is you're about to be ejected out of the body. He's telling the end time Church, "You're in danger of losing

your salvation." Because think about it, if you're ejected out of the body of Christ, that means being excluded from salvation. And if we read through the rest of this, it's obviously what He's saying here. So, pick up in verse 17.

> *“17) Because you say, “I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing’—and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked— 18) I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined in the fire, that you may be rich; and white garments, that you may be clothed, that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed; and anoint your eyes with eye salve, that you may see. 19) As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore be zealous and repent. 20) Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me. 21) To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne. 22) “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.” ’ ”* (NKJV)

Now notice the picture here, how Christ frames all of this. He creates a picture where He's on the outside of the door knocking, trying to get in. Now, that's a frightening picture. Because basically what that's saying is, this is a Church that basically kicked Christ out of their life. They're in a state of self-delusion. They think they're in a wonderful condition. That they've got everything they need and there's nothing that they need to do or overcome. They understand all there is to know. They're in a great spiritual condition, and they just need to sit back and wait for Christ to return and the Kingdom to come. That's what He's saying is the general condition.

But He's saying in reality they're in a state of delusion. They're in a horrible condition, and they don't hear Christ knocking at the door. Again, that's someone who's asleep. I was joking about myself earlier that I'm a heavy sleeper. I can sleep through a storm and not even hear it. Think about that. In the same way, if someone who's a heavy sleeper like that is asleep and someone's knocking at the door, are they going to hear them? No, they're going to be completely unaware and not even realize that it's happening. That's what Christ is saying is the state of the end time Church. They're in a state of delusion, completely unaware of their own spiritual condition. They're comfortable in their sin.

See, being in a state of spiritual sleep can not only make us delusional about our own spiritual condition. It can make us totally unaware to read the signs of what's happening in the world around us. Because the Bible doesn't tell us when the end's going to come. It doesn't give us a way to set dates and to be able to know when Christ is going to return. But Christ tells us there's general signs that we can watch for. And if we're paying attention, we won't be caught totally unaware. Turn over to 1 Thessalonians 5, and we'll notice here where Paul gives us the warning of how being spiritually asleep can cause those of us, even in the Church of God, who know the general signs to look for, to be totally unaware. Again, it's 1 Thessalonians, and we'll start reading chapter 5 and verse 1.

> **1 Thess 5:1** *"But concerning the times and the seasons, brethren, you have no need that I should write to you. 2) For you yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night. 3) For when they say, "Peace and safety!" then sudden destruction comes upon them, as labor pains upon a pregnant woman. And they shall not escape. 4) But you, brethren, are not in darkness, so that this Day should overtake you as a thief."* (NKJV)

In other words, Christians who are called as Firstfruits, we should know the general signs to look for. Again, we're not going to figure out the formula to be able to set dates, but we should be aware of what's going on. But again, as we're going to see here as we keep reading, being in a state of spiritually being asleep will cause us to be totally unaware and caught by surprise.

> *"5) You are all sons of light and sons of the day. We are not of the night nor of darkness. 6) Therefore let us not sleep, as others do, but let us watch and be sober. 7) For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk are drunk at night. 8) But let us who are of the day be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love, and as a helmet the hope of salvation. 9) For God did not appoint us to wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, 10) who died for us, that whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with Him. 11) Therefore comfort each other and edify one another, just as you also are doing."* (NKJV)

See, what he's warning us here is if we allow ourselves to fall into a state of being spiritually asleep, what we'll wind up doing is falling into what I covered in my last sermon. What I covered last time was, 2 Peter 3, where he talked about how people will basically just think, "Oh, everything has always worked out okay. It's always going to be like it always has been. We're not going to lose national prominence in the US and the Western nations. Everything's all going to work out fine because it always has." That's the state that we'll be in, and we'll keep denying the reality of what's taking place around us until we're caught by surprise. Because that's the state of being spiritually asleep.

As we can see here, if we wind up in a state of being spiritually asleep, we're probably not going to be aware of it. We're probably going to be delusional, as Revelation 3 tells us. We'll wind up thinking we're okay. Thinking we're in great shape and not realizing it. So how do we know then if we're falling into that? If we turn back over to Matthew 25, we'll see here, if we break down the other details of this parable, it gives us some important clues here to look for so we can assess ourselves to see if maybe we're falling into that state. If we're allowing ourselves to slip into a state of being spiritually asleep and not realizing it.

Because let's notice here what all of the virgins do when they wake from the state of being asleep. Because when we see what actions that they take when they're waking up out of being asleep, that gives us clues to see what would be indications that we're falling into a state of being spiritually asleep. And to notice this, let's pick up now in verse 6 of Matthew 25 here.

Matt 25:6 *“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.”* (NKJV)

Now notice the first thing they all do when they're shaken up out of a state of being asleep is they all trim their lamps. Now this is an important clue that's going to give us some concepts here that might be indicators to look at to assess whether or not we've allowed ourselves to fall into a state of being spiritually asleep.

Now looking at verse 7 here, I have to admit for a number of years in my life, I kind of scratched my head over this particular verse. And about 30 years ago, I started digging into this particular parable trying to understand all of the details. When I got to verse 7, I was kind of scratching my head. Because I understood that the lamp is obviously symbolically referring to the Bible, to the word of God. The oil is obviously referring to the Holy Spirit. Now if you look at what it means to literally trim an oil lamp, the way you do that is you have the wick that over time gets burned to where it kind of gets useless. And what happens is you cut off part of the wick and toss it aside to get a fresh part of the wick that'll burn better and then be able to give more light.

Now, if you think of that literally, if you're looking at the lamp as the word of God you wouldn't take any part of the word of God and cut it off and toss it aside. Obviously, that wouldn't be the application of this. So, I kind of scratched my head and thought, "Okay, exactly how do you apply trimming the lamp?" If you look then at the Greek word that's translated as “trimmed” here, this gives us some insight as to what this actually means. Now the Greek word here is translated into English as “kosmeo”. It's Strong's # 2885, and again, the definition I'm going to give you comes from Zodhiates. He defines it as:

“To order, set in order…”

Now again you wouldn't cut off part of the Bible and toss it aside. But setting it in order is something that you would do. Again, just to give you another definition, Strong's Concordance defines this word as:

“To place in proper order.”

I think that even more clearly gets at the concept here. Because if you think about the fact that the lamp is symbolically referring to the word of God, you wouldn't cut off part of it and toss it aside. But you definitely would place it in proper order.

There's a couple of ways that we can do that. One is just properly understanding how to put the pieces together. One of the things the Holy Spirit does is reveal to us how to connect scripture together and to properly interpret it. But there's also just the issue of placing the Bible in proper order in terms of priorities in our life. Making a priority of it to study God's word and to be looking to it to guide our lives. And see this is an important concept that Paul covers here in 2 Timothy. Turn over to 2 Timothy 2, we're going to read verse 15 here.

> **2 Tim 2:15** *"Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth."* (NKJV)

Now, if you think about it, obviously the "word of truth" is a reference to scripture. To God's revealed instructions here in the Bible. You might say the owner's manual that He's given to us for our lives. That's really what the Bible is. It's like the operator's manual, to show us how to live our lives. When it refers to "rightly dividing", if we look at the meaning of the Greek word here, it can help us understand just exactly what Paul is getting at here. Now the Greek word here is "orthotomeo". It's Strong's # 3718. And Zodhiates defines it as:

> *"to cut or divide. To handle correctly, skillfully; to correctly teach the word of truth…"*

So, in other words it's handling it appropriately. It's appropriately understanding God's word. It's putting it in proper order in terms of putting the scriptures together to come up with the right conclusions. To be able to be skillful at that, what do we need to be doing? Well, if we notice here at the beginning of this verse -- now, in my New King James, it says, "Be diligent to present yourselves approved to God." Now, if you look at this in an old King James, the way it's translated I think gets a little more clearly at exactly what he's referring to here. Because instead of saying "be diligent", it uses the word "study". Now again if we look at the meaning of the Greek here, and particularly put it in the context, what you're going to see is the concept of studying is really what it's getting at here. Because the Greek word here is transliterated into English is "spoudazo". It's Strong's # 4704 and Zodhiates defines it as:

> *"To be diligent, earnest, or eager….To make every effort to do one's best, to be eager,…"*

Now, again, obviously, he's defining it to as "be diligent", which is how the New King James translates this. But think about this. If you're going to make every effort to do your best at skillfully handling the Word of God, how are you going to do that? Obviously, you're going to be spending time studying God's Word. That's why I say the old King James translation of this that uses the word "study" is a more exact way to get at the concept of what Paul is referring to here.

And see this gives us something that we can then use to examine ourselves to see could we possibly be falling into a state of being spiritually asleep? Because as I mentioned before, if we've allowed ourselves to fall into a state of being spiritually asleep, we're probably like what's described in Revelation 3 with the Laodicean Church. We think we're in great shape, but we're really not.

So, if that's the case, what indicators should we look at to see, maybe we're not in as good a shape as we think we are? Ask yourselves the question: How much of a priority do you make out of studying God's word regularly? Now, we all have busy lives. We all have lots of things that pull at our time. But just think about it like this, do you find

yourself getting into a state where your Bible comes out during services when you're at Church and you're diligently looking up the scriptures when you're following along with the sermon. But after services, does it get closed and put aside, and the next time you open it is when you're back at Church again, and you're ready to listen to a sermon again? Is that the norm of your life?

Because again we all have weeks where there's a lot going on. You're pulled in lots of directions because you're slammed with lots of other responsibilities, and you don't take time to sit down and study. We all have those weeks. That happens. I'm not referring to those exceptions. I'm saying, has that become the norm of your life? Is your normal behavior that you just don't really ever find time to study the Bible? You have time to spend on your hobbies. You have time to keep up with the latest social media posts or to watch your favorite TV program. You always seem to somehow make time for that. You just never seem to find time to sit down and study at all. Again, we all have those weeks, but has that become the norm in your life?

Because if you stop and honestly look at your life, if your norm is your Bible gets open when you're at Church listening to a sermon and really doesn't get open much during the rest of the week, and that's the norm, then it's time to seriously consider that maybe you're falling spiritually asleep. Because what's going to happen here is -- obviously from your behavior -- God's word is not a top priority in your life. Because see, if it is a top priority in our life, we're going to make a priority of studying God's Word.

What we need to be doing is following the example of the Bereans. So, if you'll turn over to Acts 17, we'll take a look at the example of the Bereans. Now, you're probably familiar particularly with verse 11. I think we've all heard quoted many times, "The Bereans searched the scriptures every day." But let's make sure we get the full context here to understand everything about this example. Start here in verse 5 of chapter 17.

> **Acts 17:5** *"But the Jews who were not persuaded, becoming envious, took some of the evil men from the marketplace, and gathering a mob, set all the city in an uproar and attacked the house of Jason, and sought to bring them out to the people. 6) But when they did not find them, they dragged Jason and some brethren to the rulers of the city, crying out, "These who have turned the world upside down have come here too. 7) Jason has harbored them, and these are all acting contrary to the decrees of Caesar, saying there is another king—Jesus." 8) And they troubled the crowd and the rulers of the city when they heard these things. 9) So when they had taken security from Jason and the rest, they let them go. 10) Then the brethren immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea. When they arrived, they went into the synagogue of the Jews. 11) These were more fair-minded than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so."* (NKJV)

Now notice here it's comparing the Bereans to the brethren in Thessalonica. It's not just making the point that the Bereans made a point of reading the scriptures every day.

Yes, it's making that point. It's making a broader point here as well. Because consider the fact that Paul's going around to the synagogues and he's preaching that Christ is the Messiah. Now, what he's preaching is very much in line with scripture. But to put it in modern-day terminology, what he was presenting to the people was not what we would say in our modern-day terminology, “what I've always been taught”. In other words, he was presenting concepts to these people that kind of stretched their world. This was not something that they were familiar with. And the brethren at Thessalonica had a very negative, very violent reaction to this. They were very resistant to having their understanding challenged, to learning anything new. And they were very violent and very hostile to it.

He's comparing the brethren in Berea -- that they were more open-minded. But notice the response that the Bereans had. They didn't just take in Paul and go, "Wow, he's teaching something new. I love to hear something new." And they just embraced it. No, they listened with an open mind. They heard what he had to say, and then they went and searched the scriptures and proved it out. In other words, they were open to having their understanding challenged. But they didn't just accept anything because they liked to hear something new. They went and dug out the scriptures to see if it was right.

See they were open to growing in grace and knowledge. They didn't just think if it's what I've always believed it's got to be right. It's what I've heard all my life. That was not their approach. They were constantly digging in the scriptures to see what they might not have seen before. Because if we're regularly studying the Bible, there's always more that we're going to see. There are always new insights, new nuggets of truth that we can learn. Things that we didn't see before. I know that's certainly been true in my life. There have been times in my life where I've even joked when I've seen something major that I didn't see before. I even joked, "I think somebody, snuck in at night and rewrote my Bible because I didn't see that before.” Because there would be things that are clearly on the page that I just didn't see before. But the only way that we learn these things is by regularly making a priority of studying God's Word.

So again, the question we need to ask ourselves is have we fallen into a normal habit? And I'm not just referring to just those weeks when you're really slammed and you're really busy. We all have those weeks. But if you've fallen into a pattern where studying God's word is just something you just never seem to make time for, that's a big red flag that you've fallen spiritually asleep. Because studying God's Word should be a major priority in our lives. Something that we make time for.

If we can make time for our hobbies, if we can make time to see our favorite TV show. Or to keep up on our social media posts, or whatever you like to do. If we can always find time to do that but we can't find time to study God's word, then we seriously need to ask ourselves, are we falling spiritually asleep?

And there's another concept that just naturally falls in line with this as well. Think about your conversations and how you fellowship with other brethren. Because there's an important principle that Christ taught us in Matthew 12. If you turn over to Matthew 12,

we'll see a concept that Christ laid out here that we can use as a measuring stick to examine our own lives to see are we falling spiritually asleep? It's Matthew 12, and we'll pick up here in verse 33.

> **Matt 12:33** *"Either make the tree good and its fruit good, or else make the tree bad and its fruit bad; for a tree is known by its fruit. 34) Brood of vipers! How can you, being evil, speak good things? For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks."* (NKJV)

In other words, if you listen to a person's conversation, and you listen to them over time, what's in their heart is going to come out of their mouth. And then pick up in verse 35.

> *"35) A good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth good things, and an evil man out of the evil treasure brings forth evil things. 36) But I say to you that for every idle word men may speak, they will give account of it in the day of judgment. 37) For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned."* (NKJV)

Now, the concept I'm getting at here is, if God's word is a major priority in our lives. Something that we like to study, that we're trying to mold and model our lives around. Then one of the things that's going to naturally come about, that we're naturally going to do -- because again, out of the abundance of the heart and the mouth speaks -- is when we get around other brethren who share similar interests in the Bible, who love it as well, we're going to want to talk about it. We're going to want to discuss it and share with other people what we've studied or things that we've learned. Or want to hear the insights of other people may mention from their studies. We're going to want to talk about it in our fellowship with each other.

Because just think about it. I'm sure outside of the Bible, you all have your own interests. We all have our own interests or hobbies or subjects that we really like. What happens when you get around someone else who shares a similar hobby or interest that you have? Your interest perks up, doesn't it? And you typically want to strike up a friendship with that person. Because you both like to talk about that particular hobby or interest that you have and you like to share it with the other person and that draws an interest with you.

If God's word is an interest to us, something that we're trying to model our lives around, that's what's naturally going to happen to us. And again, an indicator that we can look at is what's coming out of us in our conversations? Out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaks. If that's an important priority in our heart, it's going to come out in our conversation. So, one of the ways to think about this is, when you're around other brethren, particularly with others who share a similar interest in the Bible and would be on the same page in terms of the priority with it, do you want to talk about it? Or is it a subject that you avoid?

When you're with other brethren and fellowshipping with them, and the conversation gets to discussing issues about the Bible, do you find yourself interested and you want to be a part of the conversation? You want to listen to what they have to say and share your ideas? Or do you find it something that's uncomfortable? Do you find yourself getting bored or uncomfortable, and you just want to change the subject to anything else? To your job or your hobbies or just anything other than talking about the Bible?

Because if talking about the Bible makes you uncomfortable, that's a big red flag that you're falling spiritually asleep. Because if the Bible is important to us, and something we're trying to model our lives around, it's going to be similar to your favorite hobby. Because when you get around someone who enjoys the same hobby you do, what do you do? The conversation drifts in that direction and you get excited to talk about it and to discuss it.

Spiritual conversation should be the same for us as well. And if we find that's not the case, and we find that spiritual conversations are something we avoid or get bored with or uncomfortable around, again, that is a big red flag that we're allowing ourselves to spiritually fall asleep. Now let's turn back over to Matthew 25 and finish up the rest of the parable here. Because we're going to see some other important concepts that this parable covers for us. Let's pick up now in verse 8 of Matthew 25.

> **Matt 25:8** *"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."* (NKJV)

Now notice here, what the foolish did. They thought that they could get the oil, the Holy Spirit, that they could get what they needed and what was going to sustain them to make it in the Kingdom, that they could get that from the others around them. From their social circle, from the group that they were with.

Now think about how we can apply that in our lives today. One of the more obvious examples is -- I'm sure you've seen in our Church of God world today -- there are a number of groups who take the perspective of "God only works through this particular group". And if you want to be right with God you got to be attending with this group. Warming a seat in this hall and sending your tithe check to this particular organization. That's one aspect of this.

But it doesn't have to be in that type of self-righteous application. It can simply be the idea of going through the motions. Of thinking that as long as I'm going through the motions and I attend services every Sabbath. I watch the sermon every Sabbath. I

attend this group. I send my tithe checks into this organization. And think as long as I'm just kind of going along with the crowd and a part of this that makes me right with God. *That's definitely not the case*. It always comes down to our personal relationship with God and how we're living our lives and that we're willing to put God first.

It's not just that we're going through the motions and being a part of the herd and a part of the social group. No, it has to be the dominant force in our lives and God has to be most important to us. We have to put Him above everything else. Because Christ has covered in numerous of His parables that if we're not willing to put Him first above everything else in our lives, then that's not good enough. So just going through the motions and saying I attend services every week and I'm a part of the group, that's going to be good enough. And see Paul speaks about this in his letter to the Philippians. Turn over to Philippians 2. We'll start reading here in verse 12.

> **Phil 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; 13) for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure."* (NKJV)

See, Paul is telling them, even if you don't have a support group around you, you still have to put God first. But we also need to look at this as even if we do have a group, even if we are a part of a comfortable congregation and we're not isolated and alone, we have the same responsibility. We have to be putting God first in our day-to-day lives. And just going through the motions and just being a part of the herd is not good enough. It has to be the first priority in our lives and what we're willing to sacrifice everything for, even our own lives.

Because we also have to realize that our desire as human beings, as social animals, to be a part of the herd and to be accepted and popular, a part of our social circle, that can also be to our detriment as well. Because the Bible gives us a number of warnings that we have to put God first and not wind up putting our desire to be accepted into a social circle first. Because that can be a stumbling block for us.

And to see an example of this, turn over to John 12. Because we'll see an example here that occurred during Christ's ministry on earth that literally was a salvational issue. Individuals that understood that Christ was the Messiah. That He was who He said He was.

But realize that the popular Church at the time, amongst the society that Christ was living in, was the Pharisees. That was the predominant group at the time. If you're a part of the Jewish community and all your social circle is the Pharisees, and then you realize that Christ really is who He says He is -- but if I speak up and I act accordingly, I'm going to lose a lot of friends. I'm going to be ostracized. And all of a sudden my friends aren't going to want anything to do with me anymore. See we can face those same pressures in our environment today. But notice here the lesson in John 12 verse 43.

> **John 12:42** *“Nevertheless even among the rulers many believed in Him, but because of the Pharisees they did not confess Him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue; 43) for they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God.”* (NKJV)

See, one of the things that can trip us up is, we can be a part of a group and then realize that this group's kind of going in the wrong direction. They're allowing heresy to slip in and it's really going off course. But then you can feel the pressure of, "But if I stand up and do what I know is right, I'm going to lose my social circle here. I might lose some friends." And see, that's something that can really trip us up. We've got to remember to be spiritually awake. We've got to stand for the truth. We've got to do what we know is right and not allow our social circle to be a stumbling block and just go along with the herd because it's comfortable.

Because again, it doesn't have to be as blatant as this example here. Where you see Christ as the Messiah and they're directly rejecting Him. It can be more subtle. And Paul warns about this in 2 Corinthians 11. Turn back over to 2 Corinthians 11, and let’s pick up in verse 1.

> **2 Cor 11:1** *“Oh, that you would bear with me in a little folly—and indeed you do bear with me. 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. 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!”* (NKJV)

See what Paul is warning about here is being a part of the Church -- because he's addressing the Church in Corinth. But he's saying if you let false teachers slip in here and start slowly feeding you heresy and leading you astray -- one of the warnings he's giving them is, "Don't just sit there and put up with it and think, 'Oh, it'll all be okay. I don't want to lose my social circle. I want to be a part of the herd and not lose any friends.'" If you put that above doing what you know is right, what's happening is you're spiritually falling asleep. That is what he's saying.

And as we saw from Revelation 3 -- Christ’s warning to the end time Church -- allowing ourselves to slowly fall asleep can literally be putting our salvation at risk. So, we need to realize that we are in the end time Church. And the predominant condition is the description in the letter to Laodicea. It's a Church that is spiritually falling asleep and is in danger of losing its salvation. So, what we need to do is to heed these warnings and take a serious look at these indicators that we might be falling into that condition.

Because realize, as we saw earlier, if you are spiritually asleep, you're typically not aware that you're asleep. That's part of what comes with it. You allow yourself to slide into a condition where you're not even aware of what's happening. But if we start

looking at these indicators. Looking at our study. Looking at our conversation. Taking an honest assessment of ourselves. We can then see the indicators that might be a warning sign for us that we're allowing ourselves to spiritually fall asleep. What we need to do is heed Paul's warning in Romans 13 and realize that it's time to wake up. So, turn over to Romans 13. And we'll pick up in verse 11.

> **Rom 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. 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."* (NKJV)

So, brethren, as we go forward from this Sabbath, let's make an honest assessment of ourselves. Watch our conversations. Pay attention to how we fellowship. To how we respond. Are we enthusiastic to want to talk about God's word and to delve into it? Or is it something that we just keep finding a way to avoid? Is it something we just keep putting off and never making time for? Or do we find that we have let ourselves slip into a state where we're uncomfortable in spiritual conversations? Because if those things are happening, those are warning signs that you're spiritually falling asleep. And it's time to heed Paul's warning and get awake.