



"Knowing God is your single greatest privilege as a Christian."
—Sinclair Ferguson

06-Jul-12

The Relationship Deficit (Part One)

In the unsettling letter to the [church of Laodicea](#), [Jesus Christ](#) paints a picture of Himself in relation to the end-time church. Notice the figure He uses in [Revelation 3:20](#): "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."

A nearly identical scene is described in the Parable of the Faithful and Evil Servants. By comparing the two, we can home in on the meaning of the instruction to Laodicea:

Let your waist be girded and your lamps burning; and you yourselves be like men who wait for their master, when he will return from the wedding, that *when he comes and knocks they may open to him immediately*. Blessed are those servants whom the master, when he comes, will find watching. Assuredly, I say to you that he will gird himself and have them sit down to eat, and will come and serve them. And if he should come in the second watch, or come in the third watch, and find them so, blessed are those servants. ([Luke 12:35-38](#))

In both scenes, Jesus is shown knocking and waiting for His servants to open. Those who are faithful are rewarded with the Master—the very Creator of the universe—coming in and having a meal with them. There are conditions to this taking place, though. In [Revelation 3:20](#), it depends upon hearing His voice and opening the

door. In Luke 12, it is dependent, not only on the servants opening the door, but also on "watching." While these conditions are not exactly the same, they both describe different aspects of the same approach to one's relationship with Christ. As we will see, that is a repeated theme in the letter to Laodicea.

In [Luke 12:37-38](#), Jesus commends those servants whom He finds "watching." The Greek word used here has nothing to do with "observing." In the biblical sense, "watching" is an *internal activity* involving the will, rather than an external activity involving the eyes. To "watch" means to be sleepless, to take heed to oneself, to be vigilant regarding one's spiritual state, and to be in a constant state of readiness (see [1 Corinthians 16:13](#); [Colossians 4:2](#); [1 Peter 5:8](#)).

Watching or being in a state of readiness does not stand on its own; there must be an object or a goal. In this case, the "readiness" is being prepared to spend eternity with the Father and the Son in a truly unified relationship. Being prepared means [God](#) is not a stranger. We have taken on enough of His character image that we will not be out of place in eternity—because we are living the way He lives. The way we watch and take heed to ourselves demonstrates whether we truly want that relationship for eternity or whether other things are more important to us.

Thus, in verse 37, it is not that the faithful servants are looking down the road to observe when the Master returns. Instead, they are being vigilant and taking heed to their duties, so that *no matter when He returns*, they will be ready. There is no scrambling at the last minute to get the house in order, since they have kept it in order all along. While the timing of the Master's return is an unknown, it is essentially immaterial because the watchful servants are themselves ready for His return, whenever it should occur.

Our success or failure in "watching" depends greatly on our desire—on how important it is to us to please the Master. We can go through the motions of praying, studying, and attending [Sabbath](#) services, yet not really have our hearts in pursuing this invaluable opportunity that has been given to us. Especially in these hectic times, so many things compete, not just for our time, but also for our affections. It is our affections—our hearts—that God desires and not just the works that He has ordained. So, if we are truly watchful, it is because our desire to please and be useful to Christ is greater than the other pulls and distractions that inevitably come our way.

In [Revelation 3:20](#), those who *hear His voice* and open the door will dine with Him, reminiscent of [John 10:27](#): "*My sheep hear My voice*, and I know them, and they follow Me." When we were called and converted, we were given the ability to hear His voice, but that ability to hear Him is not absolute or permanent. Just as it is possible to become

spiritually sleepy and relax our watchfulness, it is also quite possible to become "dull of hearing"—become spiritually deaf—so that, when He is at the door, we do not recognize His voice.

This, too, results from neglecting the relationship. It happens when we are not actively listening for Christ's voice or are tuning Him out—perhaps because we do not like what He is saying. It happens through being so accustomed to the world's multitude of voices that His voice seems strange, even foreign, to us. This test of hearing comes at the very end, yet success or failure in passing this test depends on what we do in the whole time leading up to it. The person who takes heed to himself all along will be prepared because he will be familiar with and following the Shepherd's voice.

The Old Testament contains a parallel scene in the Song of Songs, described by the Shulamite:

I sleep, but my heart is awake; it is the voice of my beloved! He knocks, saying, "Open for me, my sister, my love. . . ." I have taken off my robe; how can I put it on again? I have washed my feet; how can I defile them? My beloved put his hand by the latch of the door, and my heart yearned for him. I arose to open for my beloved. . . . I opened for my beloved, but my beloved had turned away and was gone. . . . ([Song of Songs 5:2-6](#))

Notice that the Shulamite is not entirely distant or cold toward her Beloved (representative of Jesus Christ). He is, after all, her Beloved, and her heart does yearn for Him. Yet, she hesitates; the relationship contains a flaw, demonstrated by the moment of self-interest when she, awakened from her sleep (compare [Matthew 25:5](#)), must decide whether seeing Him is worth getting out of bed. She has already settled in for the night, already comfortable, so on some level His arrival is inconvenient to her.

She eventually comes to the right conclusion: Yes, it is worth the trouble to open the door for Him. However, this test reveals her heart: She loves Him, but not more than *everything* else. She ultimately makes the right decision, but it is not immediate because her heart still holds enough self-interest that she experiences an internal tug-of-war instead of an immediate, positive response. She has a relationship with her Beloved, but it does not mean everything to her.

- David C. Grabbe

From the Archives: Featured Sermon

[Intimacy with Christ \(Part 1\)](#)

by John W. Ritenbaugh

John Ritenbaugh warns that the narrow "pay and pray" mentality experienced by many in our previous fellowship took our attention away from the more important overcoming and growing aspect, preparing for the Kingdom of God. We desperately need to become immersed in a cause, yielding to God's creative power, personally and individually, getting us ready for God's Kingdom. We must guard our time, not allowing busy-ness and involvement with activities of the world to prevent us from forming a deep intimacy with God. Developing this intimacy requires walking by faith, going beyond the superficial academic into an intense, in-depth practical application of actively searching for, yielding to, and obeying God.

From the Archives: Featured Article

[Five Teachings of Grace](#)

by John W. Ritenbaugh

The Protestant world presents grace as "free." John Ritenbaugh shows that God expects a great deal of effort from us once we receive it.

If you would like to subscribe to the C.G.G. Weekly newsletter, please visit our [Email Subscriptions page](#).
