

Staying On Point

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There is something that we do in virtually every prayer at the beginning of services, and that is that we ask for God's blessing on the electronics. I certainly agree with that; we need to be doing that because, as an invention of men, it is fraught with some problems—perhaps that we built right into them.

I think that most of us would strongly tend to look upon the electronics' revolution that has taken over our times as being a godsend. Is it really, though? There is no doubt that God is sovereign and He has purposely allowed it to exist in our world. Maybe He even made sure that it exists in our world at this time for His own purposes. God passed on it, allowing it to exist at this critical time in mankind's history. What was God's purpose in allowing it to exist right now?

Perhaps we need to perceive it as something different than an being an outright blessing. In this brief essay, I am suggesting that maybe some of us—maybe all of us—need to revise our awareness and usage of it.

The *English Standard Version* (ESV) translates Matthew 24:42-44 in this way:

Matthew 24:42-44 (ESV) “Therefore stay awake, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming. But know this, that if the master of the house had known in what part of the night the thief was coming, he would have stayed awake and would not have let his house be broken into. Therefore you also must be ready, for the Son of man is coming at an hour you do not expect.”

I do not know how sharp and clear, that is, how thorough Jesus' perception of the times just before His return, would be. I think we can perceive from what He said as He reached this point in delivering this Olivet Prophecy that

He knew enough that the use of time by His people was going to be exceptionally critical to them just prior to His return.

Consider the issue in this illustration He uses of a thief breaking into the house and stealing something of great value to the master that the master left unprotected. The house in this illustration is the master's domain. Everybody has this domain. It encompasses our life in terms of holding what is valuable to us. In this parable, it is the master's responsibility to appreciate, and thus treasure and protect, what is valuable to him.

The master in this illustration is you. The valuable object the thief steals from you within your house is your personal possession of your conversion. The thief represents whatever it is that surreptitiously enters into the master's life, and with the master not alertly protecting it, steals away what is valuable. Staying alertly aware, informed and awake, is the key to protecting what is valuable in this illustration.

I believe this parable is especially appropriate to this time in the life of the church, considering what has happened to and within the church over the past thirty years or so. What God has done by scattering the church is to make us far more aware of the issue of personal responsibility on each person regarding his salvation. Each converted person, as master of his house, is responsible for his house—that is, himself and his conversion. We can no longer comfortably hide within a large organization and surreptitiously circulate within it because the large organization no longer exists. Growth and salvation are much more clearly seen for what it is: It is the personal responsibility of each converted person to the One—Jesus Christ—he is eventually to marry.

Back to electronics. Electronics are so ubiquitous in our world that one can wonder how we ever got along without them. How many people do you see, each and every day, walking about but bent over their phone?

News programs—driven by electronics—come on each and every hour, and some stations are beaming information 24 hours a day, seven days a week, and we are hearing them. Not all the time, but we are hearing them. Entertainment is provided 24 hours a day.

Is all this concentration via electronics really all that helpful? It burns time at a horrific rate, somewhat akin to gasoline being thrown on an already-burning fire. Is what is given to your mind through electronics really on a profitable level? Is any of it, considering that probably somewhere near to around 90 to 95% is not only given by the world and intended for the world, and those producing all that noise almost never have a thought about the kingdom of God, so how profitable can it be?

And all the while, the hands on the clock keep moving toward our death. I don't know whether you realize it, but brethren, time might just be the most difficult of all things to profitably control because it never stops, and electronics have moved into a high-ranking usage position among all things that burn time in our life.

I see electronics as a servant that is somewhat like the camel in the fable that got its nose under the flap of the tent and ended up taking over the entire tent, at least in relation to burning time. Young people especially seem almost totally captivated by it to such an extent I wonder whether they can live without it.

You might be interested to know that TV watching is actually declining. Not substantially, but by a few minutes a day. However, other electronic instruments are moving in to make use of the time no longer spent on TV.

Actually, TV watching dropped in 2016 (the latest year we have figures for) by about 19 minutes a day. However, Americans are still watching it over 5 hours a day, all of it delivered by electronics. The most popular hours to watch the boob tube is between 8 and 10 in the evening. Among racial groups in the United States of America, African Americans watch TV just short of 7 hours per day, Hispanics watch 4 hours per day, and Asians watch 2 1/2 hours per day. Is that possibly a reason why they produce so many mathematicians and scientists? Maybe.

Recall that just a few minutes ago I said that TV watching is declining. At the same time, involvement with other electronically-driven devices is moving in to take up the time. Brethren, we are losing the battle.

Remember I said the average American spends about 5 hours a day watching television. But when surfing the web is added to that, using your iPhone is added on top of that, listening to the radio is added on top of that, using an app is added on top of that, the Nielsen rating company said that in 2016, Americans spent ten hours and 39 minutes a day using electronic devices. Ten out of twenty four. That is almost 50% of the time that is being used on electronics.

Over a lifetime how much of our life is consumed with electronics? Based on figures gathered in 2014, the average person watches 141 hours of television a month. This is just TV. That is 1,692 hours per year. Assuming you live to age 78 (which was just about the average in 2014), that's about 15 years of your life are going to be spent watching television. That is mind-boggling—mind-numbing. Fifteen years in a lifetime!

I see the electronic era as perhaps more of a challenge to overcome than an outright blessing. We need to think this through.