

300 “the man with the Holy Ghost”

You and I are being watched! What each of us says, does and really “is” in terms of our true character is being constantly observed. God our Father is watching what we are, including our hidden thoughts, and a day will come when He “shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ according to my gospel”, that is, the gospel preached by Paul (Romans 2.6, KJV).

We are also being watched, less deliberately but just as inevitably, by those among whom we live – family, fellow-Christians, neighbours, colleagues, acquaintances, strangers. What do they actually see? And more importantly, what do they actually see, via us, of the Lord Jesus Christ whom we seek to serve as His ambassadors (II Corinthians 5.20)?

In the light of our being in this “public eye” we concentrated last week on the key aspects of our behaviour among other Christians, with whom we share both a common faith in Jesus Christ as Lord, and a shared membership in the local “body of Christ”. Humility is central, as we all seek to hold the right balance between our oneness in Christ on the one hand, and our allowing for distinction of character, gifts and roles on the other (eg., Romans 12.4-5 / Ephesians 4.1-7, 11-16).

This time we come on to consider our behaviour among those who, for whatever reason, make no profession of Christian faith or allegiance - that is therefore most of the people around us these days. In the Epistles such folk are often termed “them that are without” in the KJV. These people are in a three-fold state of “without”: without faith in Christ; without, as in outside, the membership of the Church, the body of Christ; and crucially they are currently without peace with God, the peace that comes by our being “justified by faith ... through our Lord Jesus Christ (Romans 5.1).

“Those who are without” thus face eventual divine judgement– are their names in “the book of life” or not (eg., Revelation 20.11-15)? Put like this, those of us who by God’s grace are “within” clearly carry serious responsibility towards “those are without”: perhaps without our realising it, we are either putting them off Christ, or drawing them closer to Him.

We see from God’s Word, first, that it is fitting that we spend time naturally among such people, making no deliberate effort to shun them even though their lifestyles may be far from what they should be (eg., I Corinthians 5.9-13). Please God, our Christian presence and character will restrain sinfulness and bring blessing.

We see the effect of such Christian presence in the example of Rees Howells in the early 1900s in South Wales during the Welsh Revival; (please see if you wish “Rees Howells, Intercessor” by Norman Grubb). Rees was from a respected, God-fearing family and, like most other men in the community, worked down the local pit. Rees’s character, and his many self-sacrificial deeds of kindness among real “hard-cases” in the area, notably violent drunks, were noticed – they could not help but be noticed in those tough times. The effect was that during Rees’s shifts underground - dangerous work among hard-drinking, foul-mouthed men - there would be a restraint of speech and behaviour in his presence, at times even a hush, as those men, who were so deeply “without”, were confronted with the reality of a truly Christian life. They

watched; they saw; they changed; they were blessed. Men would take their hats off when they passed Rees in the street. A stranger arriving at the local railway station asked where “the man with the Holy Ghost” lived, and was directed to Rees’s home. What a witness, and, in the Lord’s gracious hands, what widespread, unforeseen effects of such a witness then followed.

Next, in Colossians 4.5 we are bidden to “walk in wisdom toward them that are without, redeeming the time”, and in I Thessalonians 4.11-12 we are to “study to be quiet”, to mind our own business and to work with our own hands, “that we may walk honestly toward them that are without”. Walking is twice mentioned in these verses. A life lived at walking pace suggests a settled life of consistency and assurance; can we imagine for instance that the Lord Jesus ever felt the need to run?!

Finally we read in I Timothy 3.7 that those being considered for a leadership role in the church “must have a good report of them which are without; lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil” – a reminder that, yes, we are always being watched, and what we really are as Christian people makes a difference around us, for good or ill.

In whatever company we may find ourselves, by our humbly “looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith” (as in Hebrews 12.2), please God, people will see in us a good dose of what the Lord Jesus wants them to see.

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