

CFBC Hymns Class 43

J Edwin Orr (1912-1987)

“In a sea of antinomian easy believism, watchfulness is a five-alarm fire bell calling us all to work out our salvation with fear, trembling, and effort”—Todd Friel

“Many Christians today are unaware of one of the most fundamental spiritual disciplines necessary to advance in the Christian life, namely, watchfulness”—Steven J. Lawson

“We need constant reminders to be watchful lest we fall”—Derek W.H. Thomas

“Spiritual watchfulness consists in watching over the soul in a careful and circumspect manner in order that no evil may befall her”- Wilhelmus A’Brakel

1 Corinthians 10:12...

Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed that he does not fall. NASB 1995

Therefore let anyone who thinks he stands [who feels sure that he has a steadfast mind and is standing firm], take heed lest he fall [into sin]. Amplified Bible

So let the man who feels sure of his standing today be careful that he does not fall tomorrow. J B Phillips Paraphrase

Revelation 2:1-7...

To the angel of the church in Ephesus write:

The One who holds the seven stars in His right hand, the One who walks among the seven golden lampstands, says this:

2 ‘I know your deeds and your toil and perseverance, and that you cannot tolerate evil men, and you put to the test those who call themselves apostles, and they are not, and you found them *to be* false; **3** and you have perseverance and have endured for My name’s sake, and have not grown weary. **4** But I have *this* against you, that you have left your first love. **5** Therefore remember from where you have fallen, and repent and do the deeds you did at first; or else I am coming to you and will remove your lampstand out of its place—unless you repent. **6** Yet this you do have, that you hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate. **7** He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, I will grant to eat of the tree of life which is in the Paradise of God.’

Psalm 139:23,24...

Search me, O God, and know my heart;
Try me and know my anxious thoughts;
And see if there be any hurtful way in me,
And lead me in the everlasting way.

Search Me, O God, by J Edwin Orr

1 Search me, O God, and know my heart today;
Try me, O Savior, know my thoughts, I pray.
See if there be some wicked way in me;
Cleanse me from ev'ry sin and set me free.

2 I praise thee, Lord, for cleansing me from sin;
Fulfill thy Word, and make me pure within.
Fill me with fire where once I burned with shame;
Grant my desire to magnify thy name.

3 Lord, take my life and make it wholly thine;
Fill my poor heart with thy great love divine.
Take all my will, my passion, self, and pride;
I now surrender; Lord, in me abide.

4 O Holy Ghost, revival comes from Thee;
send a revival—start the work in me.
Thy Word declares Thou wilt supply our need;
for blessings now, O Lord, I humbly plead.

Excerpts from “Search Me”- A Study of J Edwin Orr’s Hymn "Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin" (Ps. 51.2)

A hymn which asks God to wash us from our iniquity is "Cleanse Me" (#408 in *Hymns for Worship Revised*). The text was written by James Edwin Orr, who was born on Jan. 12, 1912, in Belfast, Ireland (now in Northern Ireland). His father was an American, and his mother was British. Receiving his education from universities in Europe, Asia, Africa, and America, he was awarded the Doctor of Philosophy degree from Oxford University. In addition to being an evangelist and a noted scholar of the revival movements of history, he authored a number of books, both popular and scholarly, with a circulation of more than a million copies in English and a dozen other languages, including a best seller in the 1930's.

In 1936, he was conducting a spring revival campaign in Ngaruawahia, New Zealand.

The fervent spirit spread and characterized later conventions at Wellington, Christchurch, Dunedin, and Auckland.

As he was leaving, four Aborigine girls approached and sang for him the beautiful Maori Farewell Song, "Po Atu Rau." He was so impressed with the beauty of this Polynesian melody that he determined to produce new words for it, and did so in less than five minutes on the back of an envelope in the post office at the little town of Ngaruawahia. This simple yet challenging hymn calls upon the Lord to see the needs of our spirits and provide for them.

I. Stanza 1 asks the Lord to search our hearts

"Search me, O God, and know my heart today; Try me, O Savior, know my thought, I pray.

See if there be some wicked way in me; Cleanse me from every sin, and set me free."

A. Just as David did, each of us should ask the Lord to search our hearts: Ps. 139.23-24

B. The fact is that God knows even our very thoughts: Ps. 139.1-6

C. When we let the Lord do this and give our lives to Him, He offers us cleansing: Eph. 5.26

II. Stanza 2 asks the Lord to cleanse us from sin

"I praise Thee, Lord, for cleansing me from sin; Fulfill Thy word, and make me pure within.

Fill me with fire, where once I burned with shame; Grant me desire to magnify Thy name."

A. Because all have sinned, we need to confess our sins and seek for God to cleanse us through the blood of His Son Jesus Christ: 1 Jn. 1.7-10

B. Then, having been cleansed, we must let Him fulfill His word and make us completely pure by refraining from sin: 1 Tim. 5.22

C. Only in this way can shame be removed from our hearts and can our lives magnify the Lord: Phil. 1.20

III. Stanza 3 asks the Lord to take our lives and make them wholly His

"Lord, take my life, and make it wholly Thine; Fill my poor heart with Thy great love divine.

Take all my will; my passion, self, and pride, I now surrender; Lord, in Me abide."

A. The Lord takes our lives and makes them wholly thine as we are crucified with Him and live by faith: Gal. 2.20

B. As we have the attitude of Jesus that not our wills but the Father's be done, the Lord will fill our hearts with His great love to shed abroad: Lk. 22.42, Rom. 5.1-5

C. Thus, if we hope to serve the Lord faithfully, we must have the attitude of complete submission to Him in denying self, taking up the cross, and following Him: Matt. 16.24-26

IV. Stanza 4 asks the Lord to start a revival in our lives

"O Lord above, revival comes from Thee; Send a revival—start the work in me.

Thy word declares Thou wilt supply our need; For blessing now, O Lord, I humbly plead."

(Note: The original began "O Holy Ghost." I assume because of many brethren's opposition to addressing songs to the Holy Spirit, both *Church Gospel Songs and Hymns* and *Praise for the Lord* omit the fourth stanza entirely, and *Hymns for Worship* changes the opening to "O Lord above.")

A. Some people do not like the term "revival" because of its association with denominational religious meetings of overworked emotions; however, it is a scriptural term and concept, and since we all have low periods and even fall into sin, we need to be revived from time to time: Ps. 85.6

B. Furthermore, our culture, the entire world, and sometimes even churches, need spiritual reviving, so like the prophet, we can ask God to send a revival (and let it begin in us!): Hab. 3.2

C. In accomplishing this work, God's word promises to supply our need: Phil. 3.19 Orr's concern was that the study of revivals of interest in the Spirit-revealed scriptures would be neglected or have a humanist interpretation of evangelism applied to them instead. Therefore, his work was done with the hope that Bible believers would be stirred to pray for yet another awakening. This hymn helps in this aim by reminding us that true revival can begin only after God's people recognize their own sin, receive forgiveness, and surrender their will to the Lord. To participate in this great work, I must first ask the Lord to "Cleanse Me."

<https://hymnstudiesblog.wordpress.com/2008/04/26/quotcleanse-mequot/>

WordWise Hymns Comments on "Search Me"

This lovely (and convicting!) hymn takes its theme from Psalm 139:23-24 which says:

"Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me, and know my anxieties [my anxious thoughts]; and see if there is any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting."

Many times we lack the sensitivity to perceive the true sinfulness of our hearts, or to view our conduct as truly sinful—whether it involves a sin of commission or omission. This psalm of David's shows a humility of spirit, as he asks the Lord to identify anything in his life that would hinder their relationship, or his service for God.

CH-1) Search me, O God,
And know my heart today;
Try me, O Saviour,
Know my thoughts, I pray.
See if there be
Some wicked way in me;
Cleanse me from every sin
And set me free.

In the Bible, much is said about cleansing from sin, about the need for God not only to forgive us, but to purify our inward selves.

“Have mercy upon me, O God, according to Your loving kindness; according to the multitude of Your tender mercies, blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin” (Ps. 51:1-2).

“I will cleanse them from all their iniquity by which they have sinned against Me, and I will pardon all their iniquities by which they have sinned and by which they have transgressed against Me” (Jer. 33:8; cf. Ezek. 37:23).

The cleansing, purifying work of God is inward and deep (Ps. 26:2; 51:6). Just as sin begins deep inside us, so does righteousness need to reside there. The Pharisees made the mistake of judging themselves and others merely on the basis of outward behaviour. But the Lord Jesus said of them: “You Pharisees make the outside of the cup and dish clean, but your inward part is full of greed and wickedness” (Lk. 11:39).

As the saying goes, we need to keep short accounts with God. That is, not allow sin to gain a foothold in our lives, but to deal with it quickly. David tried to hide his adultery with Bathsheba by having her husband killed and marrying her. But God knew all about it, and David spent months struggling with the misery of conviction.

When I kept silent, my bones grew old through my groaning all the day long. For day and night Your hand was heavy upon me; my vitality was turned into the drought of summer. Selah [Think of that!]” (Ps. 32:3-4).

As Christians, we are called to “confess” our sins to the Lord. The word means to agree or acknowledge—to agree with God about the evil nature of the sin, and the urgent need to get it out of our lives. And here is His promise:

“If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (I Jn. 1:9).

CH-2) I praise Thee, Lord,
For cleansing me from sin;
Fulfil Thy Word,
And make me pure within.
Fill me with fire
Where once I burned with shame;
Grant my desire
To magnify Thy name.

<https://wordwisehymns.com/2012/06/08/cleanse-me/>

Excerpts from...”Watchfulness in the Christian Life- A Study of Wilhelmus a’Brakel’s Contribution to Reformed Spirituality”

By Rev. Charles R. Biggs, PRTS ThM Paper

Watchfulness in the Christian life is a prayerful and carefully circumspect attitude and focus in living out one’s faith. Watchfulness is concerned with always being on guard to the grace and glorious promises of the LORD, and waiting for them. But also watchfulness is concerned with being sober and reminding oneself constantly of the gospel warnings and sober admonitions of Holy Scripture. Watchfulness is an attitude that realizes that as a Christian, one is still in danger and has not made it completely home yet, although eternal life and glory has dawned in the heart of the believer through the Holy Spirit (cf. Rom. 5:3-5). The watchful Christian is making progress in holiness because watchfulness is an aspect of, or fruit of one’s holiness in Jesus.

...Believers should be growing in grace to become more effective and fruitful in our knowledge of the Lord Jesus. Although we are saved by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone, we nevertheless, are to be committed to growing, and striving strenuously to make progress in the Christian life. A mature Christian, Brakel understood, was one who understood that they had made but a small beginning in holiness. Although in regeneration and in our union with Jesus Christ, the Christian is positionally holy in Christ (1 Cor. 1:30; 6:11), nevertheless holiness must be pursued because there remains much corruption within the Christian.

Growing in the grace and knowledge of the Lord Jesus is at the heart of true Christianity, the focus of experiential theology, and the reason why it is important to seek to hear and apply all of the teaching of Scripture, by the Holy Spirit, to our hearts. As we are taught in 2 Peter 1:3-8:

“His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence, by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire. For this very reason, make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue, and virtue with knowledge, and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with steadfastness, and steadfastness with godliness, and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love. For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they keep you from being ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

...The growing Christian is watchful and careful and prayerful and circumspect, all in dependence upon the Lord’s grace and strength. Although we are to watch and pray, and to seek sanctification, it is important for us to remember that anything we have received, any progress we make, is because of the work of God in us (Phil. 2:12-13; 1 Cor. 4:7).

...One of the blessed privileges and graces of our union with Christ is that we have the ability to be on our guard against all kinds of dangers, and to keep our focus on Jesus Christ, our Lord and Pioneer in this wilderness and to endure until the end where we shall meet our Lord face to face.

To put watchfulness a bit more positively, it is an opportunity to grow in precision in holiness, and to deepen our knowledge and need of God our Savior, and to trust God's promises through our daily experiences. How many Christians daily fall and backslide because they are not careful in their walk due to a failure of being watchful? We must all rest securely in Jesus, or as 'a Brakel said it so beautifully on his deathbed, let us "rest in my Jesus," remembering that Jesus is particularly our Savior who helps us to be watchful and careful.

The inclusion of this important aspect of piety and sanctification in watchfulness was surely due to our Lord's concerned warnings to His own dear ones, and the often times watchfulness is taught in the Holy Scriptures. At our Lord's time of greatest temptation and testing in Gethsemane, he teaches His disciples the importance of being watchful and careful in their following Him. Perhaps this was due to the fact that our whole lives would be characterized by tribulation and spiritual enemies in this wilderness world (John 16:33; cf. Rev. 1:9). It would seem right that our Lord soberly warned His disciples in the Garden, because all believers stand at every moment upon the precipice of faithful service and worship of our King in His humiliation and exaltation, and the temptation to the denying of Him due to careless, unbelief, hard-heartedness, and other sins that so easily beset us.

"Spiritual watchfulness consists in watching over the soul in a careful and circumspect manner in order that no evil may befall her."

...The soul is precious to the believer, and must be guarded and kept. As the Proverbs teach in a different way, the heart, or the internal focus of the soul, must be constantly guarded at all times: "Keep your heart with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life" (Prov. 4:23). As our Lord Jesus said to sober His listeners, "For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his life? For what can a man give in return for his life [Gk. soul]?" (Mark 8:36-37). The soul is precious and the heart of man must be guarded lest we be deceived. The heart or soul of man is the very habitation of God for the Christian; we are the temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 3:16). This calls for a careful and constant examination of what goes in our ears, our eyes, a careful watch over our entire lives.

Spiritual watchfulness pertains to "all that issues forth from the soul, such as thoughts, words, deeds, lest the soul be injured by any sin."

The person who is spiritually watchful also keeps an "eye out for all that enters the soul, so that no enemy will steal in to harm his spiritual life. He knows his enemies—the devil, the world, and his flesh—and he knows their wickedness and their tireless activity."

Watchfulness is a grace that causes us to take seriously our dangerous plight here in this world. Watchfulness is being cautiously and carefully circumspect, realizing that we are in a dangerous spiritual war (Eph. 6:10-20). Watchfulness helps Christians to remember that we have many enemies “above”, many enemies still “within” us (even though we are united to Jesus Christ we still have remaining, indwelling sin that we must fight against), and many enemies without (such as the devil, the world, and sinful company that can influence carelessness).

Upright, true believers are willing to acknowledge their remaining corruption and seek for sincerity and truthfulness from the heart. The upright believer acknowledges their impotence and powerlessness apart from the Holy Spirit; As Jesus reminded believers: “Apart from me you can do nothing” (John 15:5). The upright believer pays careful attention to one’s own heart, and when there is insincerity, they grieve over it and confess it. The upright believer remains in continual acknowledgment of walking ‘coram Deo’ or in the presence of God.

We so easily fall into hard-heartedness and temptations to pride and hypocrisy. Hebrews 3:8 warns all believers to be cautious of unbelief that leads to hard-hearts. “...Do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion, on the day of testing in the wilderness...”. The old nature in the redeemed soul still strives to sin and gain strength. The old man or old nature gains strength in the soul primarily through recklessness and carelessness in the Christian. “A person will bring himself into situations, knowing from experience that they have repeatedly ensnared him,” and thus it is important to be watchful in our daily walk. The old nature is always engaged in keeping man from doing what is good. The new nature in contrast, is infused with the blessed Holy Spirit, and it is watchful against sin. Sin robs the soul of nourishment and opportunity, and the converted, watchful soul has learned to which sin her nature is most inclined and which circumstances will cause sin to arise the most, as well as render it strength.

As growing Christians we desire to love God from our hearts and so we must be aware of our thoughts, our intentions, our affections as well as our actions. It is important to remember that all of our actions result from inward thoughts, motives, intentions, and affections of the heart. If we are to truly change as Christians, we must do more than try to behave better externally. We must have a heart change. We must ask the Holy Spirit to forgive us of our remaining sins, and the wickedness we still get glimpses of in our thoughts, intentions and affections. In being able by God’s Spirit to see the frightening sinfulness still remaining in the believer’s thought-life, one is humbled, and able to pray for greater help and is encouraged to deeper dependence upon Jesus. Brakel, in his excellent section on the Lord’s Prayer, applying his thoughts to “Lead us not into temptation, but delivers us from evil,” wrote:

“What is implied when the godly pray: ‘Lead us not into temptation’? ...The petition is as follows: ‘Neither let the temptation get a hold of nor have power over us; do not withdraw Thy Holy Spirit from us; do not give us over to ourselves when opportunities for sin manifest themselves. When the enemies assault us

and seek to toss us to and fro and to sift us as wheat, let us then not be overpowered by the temptation.

Do not let us be ensnared so that unrighteousness would gain the upper hand; neither give us over to evil inclinations nor to the lusts of the corrupt heart...”

It is also important to note, that while a Brakel warns us against our indwelling sin, and the importance of being watchful over our hearts, sin no longer has dominion over us. Christ Jesus has not only died in our place as our substitutionary atonement to take away our sins, but He has died and risen again to give us victory over our sins. Let us be encouraged by a Brakel’s pastoral admonishment:

“Time and again [in the Christian walk, no matter how many times one stumbles] there is a new resolve to do battle against sin; there is prayer for strength, and, desiring to be strengthened, there is a receiving of Jesus by faith unto sanctification. The godly fear that sin may take them by surprise and thus they seek to be watchful....Sin has no dominion when this union results in delight, a love for, and a desire to do whatever pleases the Lord.”

We are by nature drowsy.

Be moderate. Seek others who will be alert and watchful with you, and to awaken you if you fall asleep in warfare. Be busy in serving Christ and others: “Therefore, stay awake, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming.....Blessed is that servant whom his master will find so doing when he comes” (Matt. 24:42, 46).

The enemies of our soul are never-ceasing and tireless in their temptations and taunts. Watchfulness understands that there is a constant danger from our enemy, the devil.

1 Peter 5:8 Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.

We must be constantly watchful against enemies “above” or personal, wicked spiritual beings, and enemies of all good who are called in Scripture the “devil and his angels” (Matt. 25:41). The Bible tells us to be watchful against the Devil and his schemes or wiles or tricks (2 Cor. 11:3; Eph. 6:11). Brakel lists three primary ways of Satan’s assaults on believers that we should be aware of. He wrote:

“The methods of Satan’s assaults are manifold. They can, however, be reduced to three main headings. (1) Sometimes his activity is focused upon man’s five senses. He does so either by impeding their function while simultaneously stimulating the imagination—whereby a person is of the opinion to have truly seen those things—or his presence is audibly or visibly perceived due to a physical appearance. (2) Sometimes he only stimulates the imagination, be it when man is either awake or is dreaming—during daylight or darkness.

(3) Sometimes he operates by speaking directly to the soul, which is all the more evident when he presents nonphysical matters and arguments to the soul.”

“The devil would focus his temptations upon where the believer is weak.”

“He knows the constitution of the body as well as its vulnerability; he knows the sin most likely to be committed, and he knows in what circumstances we must at all times be to do so. Along with this he interjects thoughts and mental images in our imagination whereby he endeavors to make us think about such thoughts, stimulating our lusts by such reflections.”

All the evil one can do is to suggest, entice, and create situations, but we must be watchful and on guard against His evil schemes! We are to overcome the evil one by being much in prayer, by leaning upon and depending upon Jesus’ strength in our weakness. We are to look to Christ by eyes of faith, and behold the Lamb of God, and the Strong Savior for Sinners in the conflict. We are to pray and then wait upon Him for our deliverance; He is faithful. Though we are watchful, we need never fear our enemies. We are more than overcomers through Him who loved us...

Watchfulness must be accompanied by the spiritual exercises of seeking after God by means of prayer, reading and meditation on Scripture.³⁷ Brakel teaches how this brings a tender heart in the redeemed soul that is characterized by watchfulness and spiritual wrestling.

Are You A Watchful Christian?

Are you a true and growing believer, watchful and careful and prayerful and circumspect in your life? Do you care about the honor of God, and the precious value of your soul? Do you know of the Christ who died for you, and does it grieve you deeply to grieve such a wonderful and glorious Savior?

Are you in touch with your sinful carelessness, and your spiritual apathy? Does the sins of your thought life, motivations, and love of the world cause you to repent and cry out to God for more help and the power of His Spirit?

It is very important to examine yourself to see if you be in the faith (2 Cor. 13:5). Have you truly been regenerated? Are you born again by the Holy Spirit of God and living before the face of God? Search yourself closely. You are either a child of God or a slave of satan; either a privileged and blessed heir of the Heavenly Kingdom or a depraved soul awaiting the just sentence of a holy God into everlasting hell fire and wrath. Have you asked yourself: “Master, Is it I?!” who denies you with my life and doctrine?

If we do not examine ourselves, we become careless. Are you bearing fruit for God? While your thoughts and intentions are tainted by sin, do you offer to God your works in Christ through a sincere faith, a pure heart, and a clear conscience (1 Tim. 1:5)? Are you conscious of the evils that dwell in your heart? If so, are you aware of your great need for Christ’s strength, blessed love, joyful presence, and constant forgiveness?!

Remember there are many who will say to the Lord on that Day of Great Judgment: “Lord, Lord,” and Jesus will say “I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of iniquity” (Matt. 7:21-23). As our Lord Jesus asks probingly of the sinners, “Why do you call me ‘Lord, Lord’ and not do what I tell you?” (Luke 6:46).

Let us progress in our sanctification by God’s grace, in reliance upon the work of the Holy Spirit, and because of the privileges granted to us in the Covenant of Grace by God the Father through the Eternal and Blessed Son! Let us progress in our effectiveness and fruitfulness in the Christian life for the glory of Jesus, coming to the place of enjoying joyful assurance, by making our calling and election sure (2 Pet. 1:7-11). As Brakel wrote as a warning against carelessness and a sober admonition to watchfulness:

“ Even though it is possible to come to this realization by the grace of the Holy Spirit, not every one does. Many thousands will go to hell who imagine that they will enter heaven. There will also be many, however, who will enter heaven who feared that they would not arrive there...In some true partakers of the covenant of grace there is still much darkness, so that they do not have a clear perception of what constitutes sufficient light and life...So much of the old man yet remains in them—a fact upon which they focus to such an extent that they question whether this can coexist with grace—that they live between hope and fear...Consider...how necessary it is that we scrutinize our hearts and examine ourselves as to who and how we are.”

“Therefore, brothers, be all the more diligent to make your calling and election sure, for if you practice these qualities you will never fall. For in this way there will be richly provided for you an entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.” (2 Peter 1:10-11).

http://www.ketocin.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/12/ThM.PRTS_.2014.2015.Watchfulness-in-the-Christian-Life.Study-of-a-Brakel.final-draft-to-print.pdf

Watchfulness: Recovering a Lost Spiritual Discipline

Brian Hedges

The Value of the Heart

Watchfulness is needful because the heart is valuable. According to A. W. Pink, keeping the heart is “the great task which God has assigned unto each of His children.”^[1] In the words of Solomon: “Keep your heart with all diligence, for out of it spring the issues of life” (Prov. 4:23). Solomon is not talking about the blood-pumping organ in your chest, but the control center of your life. He is talking about your soul.

Your heart, or your soul (the biblical words are synonymous), is the most important part of you. It is command central. It is the seat of your thoughts, affections, and desires.

In *The Holy War* John Bunyan pictures the heart as the central palace in the city of Mansoul:

There was reared up in the midst of this town a most famous and stately palace; for strength, it may be called a castle; for pleasantness, a paradise; for largeness, a place so copious as to contain all the world. This place, the King Shaddai intended but for himself alone, and not another with him. . . . This place Shaddai made also a garrison of, but committed the keeping of it only to the men of the town.

Jesus said the soul is more valuable than the world: “What profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?” (Matt. 16:26). He also taught that your words and deeds flow from this central part of your being: “Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks” (Matt. 12:34). Who you are in your heart is who you are. The various streams of your life flow from the fountain of your heart. If your heart is not watched, then your life will be a mess.

The problem is that our hearts have become sick, diseased by the deadly contagion of sin. In the words of the prophet Jeremiah:

The heart is deceitful above all things,
And desperately wicked;
Who can know it? (Jer. 17:9)

Until purified by God’s cleansing power and changed by God’s transforming grace, our hearts are incapable of true godliness. The good news for believers is that God has, in fact, changed our hearts: “For it is the God who commanded light to shine out of darkness, who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ” (2 Cor. 4:6). Into the darkness of our benighted minds, God brings light. Into the chaos of our inner worlds, He brings order. The Lord of new creation speaks the words of life and light to our dead, darkened souls. He cleanses our hearts through faith (Acts 15:9).

But even after new birth, our hearts must be kept. They must be guarded from fleshly desires that wage a relentless guerrilla warfare against our souls (1 Peter 2:11). Sin’s dominion over us is broken, but its seditious influence remains. The heart must be watched, for the heart hath a thousand wiles and deceits. Sin still dwells within.

In his book *Soul Keeping*, John Ortberg compares the soul to a beautiful, crystal-clear stream high in the Alps that strengthened and refreshed a mountain village. The stream was fed by mountain springs, which were tended by an old man called the Keeper of the Springs. His job was to remove branches, leaves, and other debris from the springs, lest they pollute the stream. One year the village decided to fire the old man and spend their money elsewhere.

With no one tending the springs, the water became polluted:

“Twigs and branches and worse muddied the liquid flow. Mud and silt compacted the creek bed; farm wastes turned parts of the stream into stagnant bogs.

Though no one noticed at first, eventually the village was affected. Some people got sick. Kids no longer played in the water. Its crisp scent and sparkling beauty were gone.

Finally, the council of the village reconvened and rehired the old man to clean up the springs. After a time, the springs were cleaned, the stream was pure, children played again on its banks, illness was replaced by health...and the village came back to life.”

“The life of a village,” Ortberg writes, “depended on the health of the stream.”

Are you keeping your soul? Is your innermost soul a palace cleansed and prepared for the dwelling of the king? Are the thoughts, words, and behaviors flowing from your heart pure and refreshing? Or have you neglected your watch? “The stream is your soul. And you are the keeper.”

<http://www.brianghedges.com/2018/03/watchfulness-recovering-lost-spiritual.html>

Stay Awake to Spiritual Danger

Jon Bloom

A lack of watchfulness is perilous to our souls — I mean very real peril, not metaphorical or virtual or poetical peril.

The apostle Paul knew the perils we would face while following Christ: Be watchful, stand firm in the faith, act like men, be strong. Let all that you do be done in love. (1 Corinthians 16:13–14)

The exhortation may seem somewhat out of place in a long list of personal updates (1 Corinthians 16:1–24), but the “out of place” lines in Scripture can be especially revealing. Paul clearly carries a serious burden that his readers be watchful and courageous, especially the men leading and shepherding the church and their households: “act like men.” The call to vigilance and courage, however, is a common one in Paul’s letters — one he makes to men and women alike. The Spirit, through the apostle, wants all Christians to act with courage, no matter where their Lord has placed them on the spiritual line of battle.

Through Paul’s burden for the Corinthians, the Holy Spirit is now calling us to courage — a call we in the West increasingly need to hear, because it is becoming increasingly costly — and therefore difficult — for us to “hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering” (Hebrews 10:23).

Be Watchful

In the New Testament, “watchful” (1 Peter 5:8) or “awake” (Mark 13:37) or “alert” (Acts 20:31) are terms writers frequently use to urge us not to neglect the significant danger surrounding us.

I saw this in a rabbit feeding early this morning just outside my office window. This rabbit was the epitome of watchfulness. It never let down its guard, no matter what it did; it was constantly on the alert. And for good reason. Dogs pass by regularly. A rabbit is vulnerable to dogs; a lack of watchfulness can end its life.

That’s the kind of watchfulness the Holy Spirit, through Paul, is telling us to maintain. “Look out for the dogs” (Philippians 3:2). Beware the “fierce wolves [who] will come in among you, not sparing the flock” (Acts 20:29). A Christian, like a sheep, is vulnerable to the “dogs” and “wolves” of the evil one. Paul is using a metaphor for the embodiment of the threat, but not of the threat itself. These spiritual threats are greater to us than wolves are to sheep.

Therefore, the Spirit wants us to be sober-mindedly watchful of the devil’s activity (1 Peter 5:8). Do you really know what hunts you? Do you know where he is in relation to you (Galatians 6:1)? Do you know where he is in relation to your family and your Christian brothers and sisters (Ephesians 6:18)?

Our call is to protect one another, and part of that involves remaining steadfastly watchful in prayer (Colossians 4:2). We all know what that means, because any time we feel in real danger, our prayers get real earnest, real quick. A lack of watchfulness in us indicates we don’t believe danger is imminent. And that is a dangerous mindset for the vulnerable to have.

Stand Firm, Be Strong

“Stand firm in the faith.” This kind of resolve is no mere good intention or the flimsy New Year’s kind. This is true resolve: a holy, stubborn determination. It is drawing the line in the sand and not backing down. It is a will to hold the ground, come what may. Paul uses this phrase frequently (2 Corinthians 1:24; Galatians 5:1; Philippians 1:27; 2 Thessalonians 2:15). It is warrior language: “Take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm” (Ephesians 6:13).

Spiritual warfare is not a metaphor. It is very real and very dangerous. It is not for the faint of heart, though in the rage of battle every warrior feels the temptation to faint from the fight. Soldiers have to be reminded to stand firm. They must remember that there is a cause and comrades that need defending and an enemy that must be vanquished.

We must steel ourselves against whatever fear the threat provokes and resolve to stand our ground. That is what spiritual strength looks like on the ground. In Paul's mind, to "be strong" is to choose courageous action in the face of danger only in the strength and with the weaponry God supplies (Ephesians 6:10, 14–17). Faithless strength or weapons are of no use in this battle (2 Corinthians 10:4–5).

Let All Be Done in Love

At first read, we might wonder what the vigilant, and almost violent, admonitions to "be watchful," "stand firm," and "be strong" have to do with the exhortation to "let all that you do be done in love" (1 Corinthians 16:13–14). But there is no inconsistency whatsoever.

Love is the greatest power at work between God and man, and between man and man (1 Corinthians 13:13). Love is also the most destructive power against the domain of darkness. Jesus came "to destroy the works of the devil" (1 John 3:8). He did this primarily when "he laid down his life for us" as a propitiation for our sins, and then instructed us to "lay down our lives" for one another in the spirit of gracious, patient, sacrificial kindness (1 John 3:16).

Nothing demonstrates and communicates the gospel as clearly as love (John 13:35). Nothing is as relationally healing as love (1 Peter 4:8). And when love is lacking, it is the evidence of the influence of the devil (1 John 3:10).

So, "let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works" (Hebrews 10:24). For words and deeds of love, while being the most healing to the human soul, are the most spiritually destructive acts we can commit against our spiritual adversary. Love is the greatest spiritual gift (1 Corinthians 13:13), and love is the most powerful spiritual weapon (Romans 12:20–21).

Our Need for Watchfulness

We need this word from Paul right now — this almost offhanded admonition slipped into a list of logistical details. Because we need vigilant, courageous love. We always need it, of course, but we will feel our need of it increasingly as our society grows increasingly hostile to Christianity.

We need a holy watchfulness so that we don't allow the wolves of false teaching to graze on the flock of God. We need courage, not to fight as culture warriors, but as New Testament spiritual warriors. We need a holy, stubborn determination not to give an inch of true gospel ground, regardless of changes in societal values and government policy. And to ensure that our watchfulness and courage remain Christlike, we must let all we do be done in love.

<https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/stay-awake-to-spiritual-danger>