End Times
Watchfulness

NEW AND IMPROVED

END TIMES WATCHFULNESS

Joseph M. Jacowitz

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PREFACE

I am deeply concerned about how many professing Christians are unprepared for the cost of remaining faithful to Christ. We can speak confidently about our faith while the conditions around us allow that faith to remain largely untested. But what happens when obedience threatens our comfort, our income, our relationships, or our freedom? What will sustain us when following Christ becomes the very reason we suffer?

Those questions weigh upon me as a pastor. They are a principal reason I have written this book.

I believe we are living in a generation that needs to take the Bible's warnings about the last days with renewed seriousness. Increasing hostility toward Christ and His people will demand more than familiarity with Christian language. A neglected prayer life, a careless attitude toward sin, and a loose attachment to the local church will not suddenly become sources of spiritual strength when pressure increases. We need to attend now to the condition of our souls.

My concern is not that a weak believer must become strong enough to save himself. A trembling faith resting upon Christ has a faithful Savior to depend upon. My concern is that so many who profess His name appear content to remain spiritually careless, assuming that they will stand when the test comes. Confidence about tomorrow can conceal disobedience today. I want this book to disturb that false security and direct the reader toward the grace that produces genuine readiness.

Jesus said, "But he who endures to the end shall be saved" (Matthew 24:13, NKJV). A promising beginning is not the whole story of a Christian life. We must finish faithfully. The question is not merely whether we once made a profession, felt conviction, or began with enthusiasm. Are we continuing in faith, repentance, love, and obedience to Christ? His words require us to consider where our present way of life is leading.

By finishing faithfully, I do not mean that every believer will escape imprisonment, suffering, or death. Scripture prepares the church for

persecution, including martyrdom. A Christian may lose his earthly life without abandoning his Lord. The survival I am concerned about is perseverance in the faith: continuing to trust and follow Christ whatever obedience may cost. My hope is that God will use the biblical principles in these pages to help His people endure in that way.

The burden behind this book is the same burden that directs my other writing. I want the truth of God to reach beyond the reader's understanding into the heart, conscience, and conduct. Correct doctrine is indispensable, but agreeing with doctrine must lead somewhere. It must shape what we love, what we refuse, how we worship, and how we treat the people God has placed in our lives. I am seeking more than an informed reader. I am praying for a changed life and for Christ to be glorified in it.

For that reason, this book joins biblical teaching to practical obedience and then presses further into how that obedience can become a continuing pattern. Many believers know what they ought to do but need help seeing how to begin, where to seek support, and how to continue when their first resolve weakens. I have tried to address those needs plainly. You will find searching questions, concrete applications, and principles intended to be studied, discussed, and lived.

Read them with your Bible open. Test what I have written by Scripture. When the Word exposes something that needs to change, do not rush past it to finish another chapter. Pause. Pray. Bring the matter honestly before the Lord. If you need help, seek a faithful pastor or mature believer in your local church. The truth has begun doing its intended work when it reaches the decision you have been avoiding.

I also want you to hear hope throughout these warnings. Jesus commands us to "Watch therefore, and pray always" (Luke 21:36, NKJV). He calls us to dependence, not self-sufficiency. The Savior who warns His people is the Savior who gave Himself for them. His grace forgives, teaches, strengthens, and sustains. No book can take His place, and no arrangement of spiritual disciplines can accomplish what only His Spirit can do.

If you are weary, I do not want to add an unbearable load to your shoulders. I want to point you to Christ and to the means He has provided for your help. If you are careless, I do not want to soothe you into remaining so. Love must sometimes speak urgently. The church cannot afford to treat watchfulness as an optional interest for believers who enjoy studying prophecy. Our Lord commands it because our souls face real dangers and His coming is certain.

My prayer is that you will leave these pages more watchful, more prayerful, more firmly joined to Christ's people, and more ready to obey Him when obedience is costly. Above all, I pray that you will keep "looking unto Jesus" (Hebrews 12:2, NKJV). We need Him at the beginning, through every trial along the way, and at the end.

Let us prepare now, by His grace, to be found faithful then.

Joseph M. Jacowitz

INTRODUCTION

Learning to Live Ready for Christ

A warning can wake you without preparing you. You may recognize the danger, speak urgently about it, and still leave untouched the weakness through which temptation will reach you. Knowing that a storm is coming does not repair the broken latch. Someone must get up and secure it.

The same problem confronts us spiritually. We may follow world events closely while neglecting prayer, excuse a familiar sin while condemning public wickedness, or discuss persecution without learning to bear a small loss for Christ. The danger has caught our attention. Has the warning changed our conduct?

This book concerns that change. Its subject is end-times watchfulness, but its purpose reaches beyond helping you recognize troubled times. It is written to help you trust Christ, guard your heart, fulfill your calling, and remain faithful when obedience becomes costly. We must learn to live ready for the Lord we expect to meet.

What Does It Mean to Watch?

Spiritual watchfulness is the believer's alert, prayerful attention to the condition of the heart, the dangers that threaten faith and obedience, and the duties Christ has entrusted to us. It means remaining awake to God's Word when sin, distraction, weariness, or fear would make us careless. The watchful Christian does not merely notice danger. He turns to Christ for strength and responds with obedience.

Jesus makes this duty unmistakably broad: "And what I say to you, I say to all: Watch!" (Mark 13:37, NKJV).[1] Watchfulness belongs to every Christian in every generation. No age has been so safe that believers could afford to neglect their souls.

Yet Scripture also describes severe trials surrounding the approach

of Christ's return. Deception, lawlessness, hostility, and the cooling of love will test those who profess His name. End-times watchfulness brings the church's continuing duty into those intensified conditions. The command remains the same, but the pressure against obedience grows. Believers must understand the danger and depend more earnestly upon the Savior who commands them to stand.

This book approaches those warnings with seriousness. It does not offer a date for Christ's return or require readers to identify every troubling event with a particular prophecy. We do not need to settle every question about the timetable before obeying the Lord's plain command to watch.

The Warning Reaches the Heart

Luke 21:34–36 gives this book a governing passage:

> "And take heed to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting, and drunkenness, and cares of this life, and so that day come upon you unawares. For as a snare shall it come on all them that dwell on the face of the whole earth. Watch ye therefore, and pray always, that ye may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of man." (KJV)[2]

Notice where Jesus directs our attention: to ourselves and our hearts. He names indulgence and drunkenness, but He also names the cares of ordinary life. A heart can become so crowded with its concerns that the coming of Christ scarcely governs its decisions. We can be busy, informed, and outwardly respectable while growing spiritually drowsy.

His warning therefore reaches into the life we already live. How we handle fear, desire, disappointment, possessions, relationships, and responsibility matters. Watchfulness must enter the home, the workplace, the church, and the private hours no one else sees. The Lord is preparing a people who will stand before Him, not merely a people who can discuss the events preceding His appearance.

Three Parts, One Purpose

The book moves from understanding the truth to practicing it and then to establishing faithful patterns of life. These are not three unrelated projects. What we believe must govern what we do, and what we learn to do must continue when the first enthusiasm fades.

Part One, chapters 1–7, establishes the biblical foundations of watchfulness. We consider the Lord who calls us to watch, the seriousness of His warnings, and the grace by which His people persevere. This foundation matters because strong resolutions cannot sustain a soul that has little understanding of Christ or His promises. We need convictions deep enough to withstand temptation and suffering.

Part Two, chapters 8–14, brings those truths into the duties of Christian life. Guarding the heart, prayer and worship, submission to Scripture, commitment to the local church, faithful service, costly obedience, and gospel witness belong together. Each must be understood in relation to the approaching Day. The question is not simply whether we value these duties, but whether we are practicing them when competing demands press against us.

Part Three, chapters 15–20, helps turn conviction into lasting change. We move through honest examination, repentance, concrete steps of obedience, consistent habits, mutual help, preparation for testing, and renewed dependence upon Christ. Knowing what ought to change is not the same as knowing how to begin. This final part supplies worked examples and practical guidance so that a sincere intention can become a faithful response.

Read with Your Bible Open

Do not hurry through a chapter merely to reach the next one. Read the Scripture passages in their setting. Test the teaching by the Word of God. Let the questions interrupt your excuses as well as stimulate your thinking. James warns us to "be doers of the word, and not hearers only" (James 1:22, NKJV).[3] Agreement that never reaches obedience leaves the central work undone.

The Questions for Further Study can guide personal study or discussion with others. The Practical Applications identify steps to take. Chapter Axioms gather important truths into brief statements you can remember. The fifteen-principle doctrinal sections provide concentrated teaching to revisit, discuss, and use when particular needs arise. These features are tools for a watchful life, not assignments to complete for their own sake.

Where the Word exposes a neglected duty, name it plainly. Where it uncovers sin, confess it and seek Christ's help to forsake it. Where a problem persists, invite a faithful pastor or mature believer to help you act on what you have learned. Change often requires more than

a private resolution. God has placed believers in churches where they can receive correction, encouragement, and practical care.

Keep Christ before You

None of this begins with confidence in our own strength. The grace that saves also trains us. Titus describes that training as "denying ungodliness and worldly lusts," while "looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ" (Titus 2:12–13, KJV).[4] Present obedience and future hope belong together.

We are preparing to meet a Person, not merely to endure a period of trouble. Christ is our righteousness, our strength, and our hope. His mercy calls us to repent; His promises encourage us to continue; His coming gives weight to what we do today.

Bring your weakness to Him as you begin. Ask Him to expose what needs correction, strengthen what has grown faint, and make you willing to obey. Then read with this question before you: What must change in my life because the Master is coming?

Notes

1. Mark 13:37, NKJV.
2. Luke 21:34–36, KJV.
3. James 1:22, NKJV; quoted portion. The verse continues by warning against self-deception.
4. Titus 2:11–14, KJV; quoted portions from verses 12–13.

PART ONE

Established in Christ

The Foundations of Watchfulness

CHAPTER 1

The Master Is Coming

Understanding the Believer's Call to Spiritual Watchfulness

"Blessed is that servant whom his master will find so doing when he comes." (Luke 12:43)

The lamps are burning. The servants are dressed for work. Their master is returning from a wedding, and they are ready to open the door when he knocks. Jesus commands, "Let your loins be girded about, and your lights burning," and describes servants waiting so "that when he cometh and knocketh, they may open unto him immediately" (Luke 12:35–36, KJV). Nothing in the household can tell the servants exactly when their master will arrive. Yet his return shapes what they do before he gets there.

That is where Christ's coming must begin to change us. We can follow events across the world while neglecting the soul that will meet Him. We notice a threat to the church but excuse the bitterness in our own hearts. We want to know what happens next while postponing what God has already commanded. Jesus turns our attention from the hour we cannot discover to the faithfulness He requires today.

The Master is coming. Knowing that He will return is no substitute for being ready to meet Him.

Watching without Predicting

A warning can be false without making the danger imaginary. When a preacher announces a date for Christ's return, he claims knowledge God has withheld. When Christ commands His people to watch, He

calls them to obey what God has revealed. We must refuse the presumption without refusing the command.

Matthew 24:42 (NKJV): "Watch therefore, for you do not know what hour your Lord is coming."[1] The unknown hour is part of Christ's reason for vigilance. We cannot turn it into a reason for neglect. Nor may we claim that our generation must witness His appearing. Scripture gives us a promise to trust and duties to perform, not permission to announce how much time remains.[2]

This distinction protects the conscience. A frightening headline does not acquire divine authority because someone places a Bible verse beside it. A preacher's urgency does not excuse careless interpretation, financial exploitation, or demands for unquestioning loyalty. Test what he says by Scripture. Refuse what Scripture does not authorize.[3]

But do not let another man's misuse of the truth decide how much of that truth you will receive. False predictions cannot cancel Christ's promise. Manipulation cannot make His warnings unloving. The answer to abuse is faithful teaching that brings us under the Lord's authority rather than another person's control.

We should therefore ask what our expectancy produces. Does it send us searching for another prediction, or bring us back to the sin we must forsake, the person we must help, and the Savior we must trust? That is where watchfulness begins to take hold of a life.

What Scripture Means by Watchfulness

The servants in Luke 12:35–48 teach us more than expectancy. Their readiness reveals whether their master's authority still governs them while he is away. What does it mean, then, to watch? Scripture's original words uncover the inward readiness from which faithful service grows.

Shamar and Natsar: Guard the Heart

Shamar means to keep or guard. Deuteronomy 4:9 commands, "keep thy soul diligently, lest thou forget the things which thine eyes have seen" (KJV). Truth once received can cease to govern its hearers. Natsar likewise means to guard or preserve. It appears in the command, "Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life" (Proverbs 4:23, KJV). The heart is no harmless inner chamber where corruption can remain contained. What possesses the heart begins to direct the life.[4]

Tsaphah and Shaqad: Attentive to God

Tsaphah means to look out or keep watch. A form of this word describes Ezekiel's calling: "I have made thee a watchman unto the house of Israel: therefore hear the word at my mouth, and give them warning from me" (Ezekiel 3:17, KJV). His watchfulness is governed by God's word; he may neither invent dangers nor soften His warnings. Shaqad means to be wakeful. Wisdom pronounces a blessing on the attentive hearer: "Blessed is the man that heareth me, watching daily at my gates" (Proverbs 8:34, KJV). Watchfulness welcomes wisdom as well as recognizing danger.[5]

Grēgoreō: Awake to Spiritual Danger

Grēgoreō means to be awake or watchful, with its formation reaching back to being roused from sleep. Jesus uses it when He commands, "Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation: the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak" (Matthew 26:41, KJV). He uses it again concerning His return: "Watch therefore: for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come" (Matthew 24:42, KJV). The same alertness faces present temptation and the coming meeting with Christ. A person may be physically awake yet spiritually unresponsive to danger God has plainly named. The warning must awaken the soul.[6]

Agrypneō: Attentive to the Soul's Condition

Agrypneō also means to keep awake or remain alert. Jesus commands, "Watch ye therefore, and pray always," with the purpose of being ready "to stand before the Son of man" (Luke 21:36, KJV). Just before this, another verb, prosechō, introduces His warning: "take heed to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting, and drunkenness, and cares of this life" (Luke 21:34, KJV). Both indulgence and consuming worries can weigh down the heart. Hebrews applies agrypneō to church leaders: "for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account" (Hebrews 13:17, KJV). The coming day matters, but so does the soul that must meet it.[7]

Nēphō: Clear-Minded before Eternal Realities

Nēphō means to be sober; its New Testament uses concern sober-mindedness. Paul writes, "Therefore let us not sleep, as do others; but let us watch and be sober" (1 Thessalonians 5:6, KJV). By joining "watch" with "be sober," Paul shows that a soul can be stirred by danger and still lack the clear judgment needed to face it faithfully.

Peter connects this sobriety with prayer: "be ye therefore sober, and watch unto prayer" (1 Peter 4:7, KJV). Here nēphō is rendered "watch." He also directs us to "be sober, and hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 1:13, KJV). The watchful mind sees danger clearly without losing sight of the coming Savior.[8]

The Heart Kept for Christ

Watchfulness, then, is God-dependent vigilance that guards the heart and continues in sober faithfulness while awaiting Christ. Scripture warns, "except the LORD keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain" (Psalm 127:1, KJV). Our security rests in the Shepherd who says, "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand" (John 10:27–28, KJV). We depend upon Him; we do not become our own saviors.[9]

Before the Master's return finds us ready at the door, His Word must find us awake within.

Ready When He Knocks

Return to the servants with their burning lamps. They are not preparing to greet a stranger. They belong to the master whose arrival they await, and they have made themselves ready to receive him. Their waiting has a purpose: when he knocks, they will open at once. Love for their master and obedience to his wishes give shape to the hours before his return.

We cannot separate that readiness from the way we live. A man may speak eagerly about seeing Christ while refusing to make peace with his brother. A woman may long for the end of suffering while defending a habit that dishonors her Savior. The hope is on our lips, but a command remains unanswered in our lives. What obedience are you postponing that would trouble you if Christ came today?

Thomas Manton described watchfulness as "a care to get and keep ourselves always ready, and in a posture to receive him for our Lord."[10] We are expecting our Lord, not merely a welcome change in circumstances. He has purchased us for Himself. Readiness means receiving His rule now, including where it crosses our desires and interrupts our plans.

Jesus makes that readiness urgent: "if the goodman of the house

had known what hour the thief would come, he would have watched," followed by the command, "Be ye therefore ready also: for the Son of man cometh at an hour when ye think not" (Luke 12:39–40, KJV). A householder who knew the hour could prepare for it. We have not been given the hour. Christ does not leave us guessing about our duty, however. We must be ready. The uncertainty that tempts us to postpone obedience is the very reason He gives for obeying now.

Perhaps you have been waiting for a quieter season to pray earnestly, confront a persistent sin, or repair a neglected relationship. You can already picture the circumstances in which obedience will be easier. But those circumstances may never arrive. Christ has given you a command for today, not a promise that tomorrow will cost you less.

The Welcome We Could Never Demand

Then Jesus shows us the welcome awaiting His faithful servants. In verse 35, they prepare themselves to serve. In verse 37, their master prepares himself to serve them. The same Greek verb for girding appears in both verses. Jesus promises "that he shall gird himself, and make them to sit down to meat, and will come forth and serve them" (Luke 12:37, KJV).[11] To sit down to meat means to take their places at the meal. They have kept themselves ready to receive him; now he invites them to sit while he serves.

The servants do not seize places of honor. Their master gives them those places. They do not demand that he serve them. He chooses to do it. Jesus could have ended the scene with a master approving work well done. Instead, He gives us this astonishing picture of generous love. The Lord we are waiting to serve promises to welcome us in a way we could never earn or require.

Let that promise correct a fear-filled view of the future. We are not waiting merely for trouble to stop. We are waiting for Jesus Christ, who gave Himself to save us. The end of our waiting is not an empty world from which every danger has been removed. It is life with Him. The Savior who knows our sins and sorrows will receive His people into His presence.

This hope does not make holiness less important. It makes holiness personal. Paul joins Christ's appearing to the purpose of His death:

> "For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world; Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious

> appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ; Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works" (Titus 2:11–14, KJV).

A peculiar people means a people belonging especially to Him. Notice what grace teaches: we deny sinful desires, live godly lives, and become eager to do good. The One who will welcome us is already freeing us from the sins that would ruin us. His return must change more than our expectations. It must change our conduct.

We therefore cannot cherish sin without resisting His love. He did not shed His blood so that we could feel safe while remaining content with what enslaved us. He died to set us free. When His Word exposes a secret indulgence or a stubborn refusal to forgive, the Savior is not robbing us of happiness. He is calling us away from what dishonors Him and harms us.

And when obedience grows costly, remember the table. Christ has not forgotten the believer who keeps serving through grief, the parent who prays with tears, or the Christian who refuses a sinful advantage and bears the loss. You may finish a difficult day with no praise and little strength. His promise still stands. You are waiting for Someone who will not disappoint you.

The Work That Shows We Are Watching

Peter asks, "Lord, speakest thou this parable unto us, or even to all?" (Luke 12:41, KJV). Jesus answers with a question about the faithful steward appointed over the household "to give them their portion of meat in due season" (Luke 12:42, KJV). His task is to feed them at the proper time. The teaching now brings other people into view. Readiness cannot remain a private concern about the condition of our own souls. The master has entrusted people to the steward, and those people must be fed.

The blessing quoted at this chapter's opening falls on the servant found doing his work (Luke 12:43). Jesus adds, "he will make him ruler over all that he hath" (Luke 12:44, KJV). He is not rewarded for predicting the arrival. He has carried out his responsibility, and the master entrusts him with more. The coming that he could not schedule finds him fulfilling the duty he already knew.

J. C. Ryle makes the point unmistakable: "It is not the servant who is found wishing and professing, but the servant who is found 'doing'

whom Jesus calls 'blessed.'"[12] Good intentions do not feed the household. Faithfulness puts the master's instructions into practice.

Pastors and teachers, this reaches directly into our ministries. Christ's people need His Word. They need instruction that strengthens faith, warnings that expose sin, and patient care when they stumble. We may speak confidently about the future and still neglect the frightened believer sitting before us. We have not prepared the flock for Christ's return if we have left them without the truth they need to follow Him today.

Nor does responsibility make the flock ours to use. The household belongs to the master. Its members are not material for the steward's reputation or servants of his ambitions. The authority Christ gives us must serve the good of those He loves. His return will test not only what we taught but how we treated the people who heard us.

Every believer has a place in this faithful service. A child needs patient instruction. A discouraged friend needs someone to listen and pray. A difficult duty needs to be finished honestly, although no one may notice the care it requires. We need not escape these tasks to prepare for Christ. Obeying Him within them is part of our preparation.

Spurgeon put the duties together: "Work, and wait, and watch!"[13] In Mark 13, Jesus describes a master who "gave authority to his servants, and to every man his work, and commanded the porter to watch." He then warns, "Watch ye therefore: for ye know not when the master of the house cometh" (Mark 13:34–35, KJV). The unknown hour does not leave them with nothing to do. It gives urgency to the work already in their hands. Expecting Christ should make us more faithful to people, not less available to them.

The Danger Hidden in "Later"

Then Jesus shows us the steward who fails: "But and if that servant say in his heart, My lord delayeth his coming; and shall begin to beat the menservants and maidens, and to eat and drink, and to be drunken" (Luke 12:45, KJV). Before we see his cruelty, we hear the thought that permits it: his master is taking a long time to return. The delay has not changed his duties. It has changed how seriously he takes them.

He need not deny that his master is coming. He only needs to place the return far enough away to do as he pleases now. That makes this warning searching for people who believe the right doctrine. We can confess Christ's return without allowing it to disturb a single sinful

habit. "Later" can become our way of refusing Him while assuring ourselves that we intend to obey.

John Owen urged believers: "cease not a day from this work; be killing sin or it will be killing you."[14] A sin we keep postponing does not remain harmless while we wait. Paul tells us where the power for this battle comes from: "if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live" (Romans 8:13, KJV). To mortify is to put to death. Resist sin now, depending on the Spirit rather than your own resolve.

Meanwhile, others suffer. The steward appointed to feed the household begins to strike its members. His pleasure matters more to him than their welfare. Jesus traces the damage from a thought within the servant to the people under his care. When we treat accountability to Christ as a distant concern, those nearest us may bear the cost of the freedom we claim.

The master's arrival ends that freedom. He comes when the servant does not expect him, and the opportunity to prepare is gone. Jesus warns that the master "will come in a day when he looketh not for him, and at an hour when he is not aware, and will cut him in sunder, and will appoint him his portion with the unbelievers" (Luke 12:46, KJV). This is a warning of severe judgment, not a minor disappointment. His position in the household cannot protect him from its owner. Religious responsibility does not make the abuse of others safer; it makes the betrayal more grievous.

Are you relying on tomorrow to excuse something Christ commands you to change today? Do not shelter behind His patience. Paul asks whether we despise God's patience, "not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance?" (Romans 2:4, KJV). His kindness calls us to repent, not to begin another season of defiance. Every day that He gives you is an opportunity to turn to Him. Do not use it to grow more practiced in resisting Him.

What We Know Will Matter

Jesus presses the warning further: "that servant, which knew his lord's will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes." He contrasts this with the servant who did wrong without that knowledge, then states the principle: "For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required" (Luke 12:47–48, KJV). Both are accountable, but the one who knew

bears greater responsibility. The truth he received makes his refusal more serious, not less.

James commands, "But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves" (James 1:22, KJV). Thomas Watson wrote, "The word preached is not only to inform you but reform you."[15] That is the response we must seek when we hear Scripture: not simply a better explanation of obedience, but a life brought under Christ's commands.

This should arrest those of us who have heard sound teaching for years. We may recognize a biblical command immediately, explain it accurately, and defend it against error. Yet the Lord sees whether we have obeyed it. Knowledge can help us repent, but it cannot repent for us. No amount of correct speech turns a cherished sin into faithfulness.

Think of a sermon that exposed your conduct. You understood the passage, felt the force of it, and perhaps thanked the preacher afterward. Then the week began, and nothing changed. The problem was not that the sermon failed to reach you. It reached you, and you left its demand unanswered. Watchfulness brings that unfinished response back before God.

An alarm can wake you without getting you out of danger. You can recognize its sound and understand exactly what it means, yet remain where the fire can reach you. So it is with a warning from Scripture. Understanding the danger is not the same as turning from it.

Repeated neglect can make this easier the next time. A warning that once troubled us becomes familiar enough to hear calmly. Yet familiarity has not removed the danger or released us from the command. We need the Lord to keep our consciences tender, so that greater understanding produces greater obedience rather than greater skill in speaking about it.

Paul made pleasing Christ his aim: "Wherefore we labour, that, whether present or absent, we may be accepted of him. For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ" (2 Corinthians 5:9–10, KJV). His aim was to please the Lord whose judgment he would face. That meeting gives weight to what we do when no one is watching. Christ knows the opportunities we received, the motives we concealed, and the duties we refused. He also knows the costly obedience no one thanked us for. Nothing hidden from human eyes is hidden from His.

Before He Comes

Jesus has brought us from burning lamps to a searching judgment, and He has shown us a welcome that should fill our hearts with hope. We must hold all of it together. The Master who promises to serve His faithful servants is the Master who will judge the unfaithful. His love does not cancel His authority. His warnings do not cancel His grace.

Do not turn this call to watchfulness into another truth you admire and leave untouched. Bring the sin His Word has exposed into confession. Return to the duty you have neglected. Seek forgiveness where you have harmed someone, and begin to care for those you have overlooked. You do not need to settle every question about the future before obeying what Christ has made clear.

And do not attempt it without Him. Scripture promises, "Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them" (Hebrews 7:25, KJV). The Savior who gave Himself for sinners lives to intercede for them. Bring Him your weakness as honestly as your guilt. Ask Him for cleansing, a willing heart, and strength to take the next faithful step. Watchfulness grows through dependence on Christ, not confidence in the strength of our promises.

Then look again at the Lord who will welcome you. He has not called you to spend the waiting years consumed by dread. He has given you His Word to guide you, work to do, and Himself to trust. Keep His promise before you when the wait seems long. The Master is coming, and the life you are living today is the life He calls you to make ready.

Questions for Further Study

Read Luke 12:35–48 before answering. For individual study or group discussion, support your answers from the passages rather than from opinion alone.

1. In Luke 12:35–40, what shows that the servants are ready, and why does the unknown hour of their master's return require continued watchfulness?
2. Compare Matthew 26:40–41 with Luke 21:34–36. How does Jesus connect watchfulness with prayer, and what dangers does He tell His disciples to resist?
3. Read 1 Thessalonians 5:1–11. How should belonging to Christ shape the way believers prepare for the day of the Lord?

Notice Paul's teaching about sobriety, faith, love, hope, and mutual encouragement.

4. In Luke 12:41–46, how do the faithful and unfaithful stewards treat the people entrusted to them? Explain how the unfaithful servant's thinking about his master's delay affects his conduct.
5. What does Luke 12:47–48 teach about the relationship between knowing God's will and being accountable to Him? Compare James 1:22–25 to distinguish hearing the Word from obeying it.
6. Read Luke 12:37 and Titus 2:11–14 together. How do Christ's promised welcome and His redeeming work encourage both joyful expectation and holy living?

Practical Applications

1. Obey the command you have been postponing.

Choose one clear duty you already know you have neglected. It may be confessing a dishonest act, seeking reconciliation, or turning from a sinful habit. Name it before God, ask Christ for forgiveness and strength, and take the first concrete step today. Do not confuse another moment of conviction with obedience. Before the week ends, review what you have actually changed. (Luke 12:40, 45–48; James 1:22.)

2. Care faithfully for someone God has entrusted to you.

Identify one person whose care you have neglected in your family, church, or ministry. Set aside time this week to listen, pray, teach, or give practical help according to your responsibility. Pastors should consider whether someone in the flock needs instruction or personal attention that has repeatedly been delayed. Let the expectation of Christ's return make you more faithful to people, not less available to them. (Luke 12:42–44; 1 Peter 5:2–3.)

3. Bring your weakest area into watchful prayer.

Read Luke 21:34–36 and identify what most dulls your attention to Christ: sinful indulgence, consuming worries, or another recurring temptation. Pray specifically about it each day this week, and make one change that addresses it. Remove an opportunity for sin, bring a persistent worry to God in prayer, or ask a mature believer to help you

remain faithful. Keep Christ's promised welcome before you as you pray. Watchfulness grows through dependence on Him, not confidence in your own resolve. (Matthew 26:41; Luke 12:37; 21:34–36.)

Chapter Axioms

1. Spiritual watchfulness means guarding our hearts while trusting God to keep us. Proverbs 4:23; Psalm 127:1; John 10:27–29.
2. Because we do not know when Christ will return, we must be ready now. Luke 12:35–40.
3. The Savior we await gave Himself to free us from sin and make us His own people. Titus 2:11–14.
4. Watching for Christ includes faithfully doing the work He has entrusted to us. Luke 12:41–44; Mark 13:32–37.
5. Believing that Christ will return does not excuse living as though His commands can wait. Luke 12:45–46.
6. The more clearly we know the Lord's will, the greater our responsibility to obey it. Luke 12:47–48.

The Master is coming, and His command to watch leaves no room for a careless life. But good intentions alone will not keep us faithful when temptation presses and courage weakens. Christ supplies the strength He commands us to exercise. He establishes us upon Himself, teaches us through His Word, and joins us to people who will help us stand. We must now look closely at that foundation and at the church He is building upon it. Readiness for His return must become more than a private resolve; it must shape our life together.

Notes

1. Matthew 24:42, NKJV. The verse explicitly connects the command to watch with ignorance of the hour.
2. Matthew 24:36; Mark 13:32–37; Acts 1:7. The statement concerns the absence of a revealed date or a promise identifying our generation as the final generation; it does not attempt to settle disputed prophetic sequences.
3. Acts 17:11; 1 John 4:1; 1 Peter 5:2–3. These passages support testing teaching and rejecting greed or domination, not an accusation against an identified minister. Adapted from original booklet sections I–IV.
4. Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament, entries shamar, H8104 (https://biblehub.com/hebrew/8104.htm), and natsar, H5341 (https://biblehub.com/hebrew/5341.htm).
5. Brown–Driver–Briggs, entries tsaphah, H6822 (https://biblehub.com/hebrew/6822.htm), and shaqad, H8245 (https://biblehub.com/hebrew/8245.htm).
6. Joseph H. Thayer, A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament, entry grēgoreō, G1127 (https://biblehub.com/greek/1127.htm).
7. Thayer, entry agrypneō, G69 (https://biblehub.com/greek/69.htm). Its spiritual significance here follows the contexts of Luke 21:34–36 and Hebrews 13:17.
8. Thayer, entry nēphō, G3525 (https://biblehub.com/greek/3525.htm), explaining its figurative New Testament use for sober-mindedness.
9. Psalm 127:1 and John 10:27–29 supply the biblical basis for dependence upon God's keeping. This is a theological conclusion, not an additional dictionary meaning.
10. Thomas Manton, The Parable of the Wise and Foolish Virgins, Sermon X on Matthew 25:13, opening explanation of the duty of watching; Monergism electronic edition, PDF page 176 (page index 175). https://www.monergism.com/thethreshold/sdg/manton/The%20Parable%20of%20the%20Wise%20and%20Foolish%20-%20Thomas%20Manton.pdf
11. Scripture quotations marked KJV are from the public-domain King James Version, used for fuller textual support. The opening quotation from Luke 12:43 remains New King James Version; the brief familiar phrases "watch" and "be sober" in the lexical explanation are also retained. Surrounding exposition is commentary, not quotation. The girding language in Luke 12:35 and 37 uses forms of the same Greek verb, perizōnnymi: periezōsmenai in verse 35 (perfect passive participle), and perizōsetai in verse 37 (future middle indicative). See William D. Mounce, Greek New Testament Dictionary, entry perizōnnymi, G4024, including the verse-level forms and parsings. https://www.billmounce.com/greek-dictionary/perizonnymi
12. J. C. Ryle, Expository Thoughts on the Gospels: St. Luke, exposition of Luke 12:41–48, first practical lesson. https://www.studylight.org/commentaries/eng/ryl/luke-12.html
13. C. H. Spurgeon, "Watching for Christ's Coming," April 7, 1889, Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit, volume 39, section II, paragraph discussing ordinary duty. Spurgeon Library transcription. https://www.spurgeon.org/sermons/watching-for-christs-coming
14. John Owen, Of the Mortification of Sin in Believers, chapter II, opening discussion of the continuing duty of mortification for believers. https://ccel.org/ccel/owen/mort.i.v.html
15. Thomas Watson, The Ten Commandments, exposition of the fourth commandment, directions for hearing the Word, subsection [7]. The quoted clause precedes a semicolon in the original. https://ccel.org/ccel/watson/commandments.iv.iv.html

CHAPTER 2

Built on Christ, Built Together

How Christ Strengthens His People to Remain Faithful until He Comes

"For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ." (1 Corinthians 3:11, NKJV.)[1]

A warning can wake a man without making him strong. He can see the danger, feel the fear, and still lack the strength to resist it. The call to end-times watchfulness must therefore do more than sound an alarm. We need to know how Christ prepares His people to stand when error becomes persuasive, obedience becomes costly, and other professing Christians begin to turn away.

Jesus names those dangers plainly: "And many false prophets shall rise, and shall deceive many. And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold. But he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved" (Matthew 24:11–13, KJV). Deception reaches the mind. Abounding wickedness chills love. The danger presses beyond our circumstances into our faith and affections. We must remain true to Christ there.

The Lord has not left us to face that danger with frightened determination. He establishes us upon Himself, feeds us with His Word, and joins us to people who must help us persevere. These provisions belong at the center of our preparation. The believer who studies approaching dangers while neglecting the means of endurance is like a man studying the weather while leaving his house unrepaired.

Hebrews gives our preparation its direction: "not forsaking the

assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching" (Hebrews 10:25, NKJV). As the day approaches, our care for one another must deepen. We must become more firmly established in the truth, more responsive to correction, and more deliberate in strengthening the brethren beside us.

This is how the church's foundation and fellowship serve end-times watchfulness. Christ is preparing a people to remain His people under pressure, all the way to His appearing.

A Foundation That Will Not Leave with the Preacher

The Corinthians had fastened their confidence to favorite teachers. One group claimed Paul; another claimed Apollos. Their loyalties became rivalries, and the rivalries exposed their immaturity. Paul tells them, "I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase." He then identifies the congregation: "you are God's field, you are God's building" (1 Corinthians 3:6, 9, NKJV).[2]

The ministers serve; God gives life. That distinction becomes precious when a trusted leader dies, fails, or is taken from his people. If our faith has learned to lean chiefly upon a familiar man, his absence can shake convictions we thought were settled. A teacher may have introduced us to the truth without our having learned to stand upon it ourselves.

Paul therefore directs them beyond himself: "I have laid the foundation, and another builds on it. But let each one take heed how he builds on it" (1 Corinthians 3:10, NKJV). The foundation is Jesus Christ. Paul laid it by preaching Him; every later teacher must build upon the same gospel. No personality can take Christ's place, and no crisis makes Him insufficient.

We need this settled before the pressure comes. A threatened livelihood cannot decide whether Christ is Lord. A persuasive teacher cannot alter what His cross accomplished. The withdrawal of public approval cannot cancel His resurrection. These truths must become convictions we live by, not statements we recognize when someone reads them aloud.

Consider the believer who expects faithfulness to secure a comfortable life. When obedience brings rejection instead, he may conclude that Christ has failed him. The weakness was already present in his understanding of the gospel. He had attached a promise of ease to a Savior who calls His disciples to follow Him. Faithful teaching

must uncover that false expectation before suffering turns it into an accusation against God.

The true gospel prepares us differently. Christ "bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness" (1 Peter 2:24, NKJV). He saves us from the guilt and dominion of sin. We belong to the Redeemer who purchased us, and obedience to Him remains right when it becomes painful.

Paul explains both the gift and the life it produces: "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast" (Ephesians 2:8–9, KJV). Then: "For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them" (Ephesians 2:10, NKJV).[3]

Our endurance rests upon God's saving work in Christ, not a flattering estimate of our courage. That frees us to confess weakness and seek help before we fall. We do not have to pretend that temptation leaves us unmoved. We must bring it to the Savior and obey the truth He gives us against it.

Hebrews shows why that dependence can continue through the whole struggle: "Therefore He is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them" (Hebrews 7:25, NKJV). Our living High Priest does not abandon His people halfway through their need. His continuing intercession gives us reason to draw near when shame and fear tempt us to withdraw.

That matters to watchfulness because despair can become an excuse to stop resisting. A fallen believer may think further obedience is pointless; a frightened believer may assume he will never endure. Christ directs both away from their own sufficiency and toward His. Confess the sin, seek His help, and resume the duty. The Savior who intercedes for His people is a stronger ground for perseverance than their best day of courage.

Spurgeon writes, "The strength of a living church is the living Christ."[4] Our Lord is alive when familiar supports collapse. He remains our righteousness when conscience accuses, our authority when the world threatens, and our hope when obedience costs us what we hoped to keep. Watchfulness begins by knowing whom we must never surrender.

Build Now for the Day of Examination

Paul does not permit the church's builders to rest content with having named the right foundation. Their work must agree with it:

> "Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble; Every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is." (1 Corinthians 3:12–13, KJV.)

The coming day will expose the quality of ministry. Paul is speaking especially to those who build up the congregation through their teaching. The examination is God's, and applause cannot influence it. He continues, "If any man's work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward. If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire" (1 Corinthians 3:14–15, KJV). The builder is saved, yet his unworthy work is lost.[5]

That coming examination must govern present preparation. We are teaching people who will meet Christ. We must therefore build into them what He requires: knowledge of His truth, faith in His promises, hatred of sin, love for His people, and obedience that does not depend upon favorable conditions.

A congregation can be kept busy without being made ready. It can become accustomed to excitement while remaining unable to endure an ordinary season of discouragement. It can hear repeated announcements about the world's decline without learning how to resist the same world's attractions. Alarm has filled the room, but the people have not been strengthened where temptation will strike.

Think of a builder hiding damaged timber beneath a handsome finish. The house may impress everyone who visits it. Yet the weakness remains where the weight must be carried. Ministry does similar harm when it cultivates an appearance of spiritual strength while avoiding the sins, false beliefs, and neglected duties that undermine the congregation.

Pastors must ask a harder question than whether people enjoyed the sermon: What truth are they now better able to believe and obey when their faith is tested? Teaching on God's providence should prepare them to trust Him in loss. Teaching on holiness should help them refuse sin when it offers relief. Teaching on Christ's return

should strengthen their willingness to endure present hardship rather than purchase peace through compromise.

This preparation reaches into the pastor's own life. Richard Baxter urges, "For your people's sakes, therefore, look to your hearts."[6] A shepherd who excuses his own hidden sin weakens the watch he keeps over others. He cannot faithfully train a congregation to resist the world while allowing its approval to govern his preaching.

The coming day gives weight to patient, uncelebrated work. Explaining a difficult passage, correcting a cherished error, praying with a frightened believer, and returning to a neglected duty may attract little notice. But these are the places where truth enters a life and prepares it to endure. Build for Christ's examination, and you will take the preparation of His people seriously now.

A Household Stronger than the Fear of Rejection

Pressure often works through our desire to belong. A person may know what Scripture teaches yet begin to retreat when obedience threatens friendships, acceptance, or his place among respected people. The fear of standing alone can make disobedience seem reasonable.

Christ answers that fear with a belonging purchased at the cross. Paul tells the Ephesians that He reconciled Jews and Gentiles "to God in one body through the cross" (Ephesians 2:16, NKJV). People divided by deep hostility now share one Savior and access to the same Father. Paul announces the result:

> "Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God; And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone." (Ephesians 2:19–20, KJV.)[7]

The world does not possess the power to make a Christian homeless before God. It may withdraw its welcome, but it cannot erase his place in the Father's household. That truth gives courage to the believer whose obedience leaves him unwelcome elsewhere. He has not lost his deepest belonging.

The household rests upon Christ and the apostolic truth that makes Him known. Its members do not invent a more acceptable faith whenever the surrounding culture objects. They receive the Lord who reconciled them and the Word through which He governs them. Their unity has substance because it rests upon His truth.

Paul continues, "In whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord: In whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit" (Ephesians 2:21–22, KJV). God is building a holy people together. Fellowship must strengthen holiness, and holiness must shape fellowship.

Calvin contrasts that fitting together with "a confused mass."[8] A pile of stones may contain good material, but it cannot shelter anyone as a house can. Believers likewise need more than a shared interest in religious subjects. They need relationships in which truth is spoken, burdens are carried, and a departure from obedience is noticed.

Suppose a Christian is pressed to conceal his faith to retain acceptance at work. A congregation that knows him can pray with him, help him think biblically, and support him through the consequences of faithfulness. If he has kept everyone at a distance, his fear has fewer truthful voices to challenge it. Isolation allows the immediate threat to occupy almost the whole field of vision.

This is why refusing to be known is dangerous. A man can listen to sermons for hours while hiding the very temptation that threatens to master him. Christ's provision includes brethren who can bring the truth close enough to interrupt that secrecy. Let faithful people know where you are struggling. The church cannot bear a burden you are determined to conceal.

Coming to Christ When the World Rejects Him

Peter describes the same people as a spiritual house:

> "To whom coming, as unto a living stone, disallowed indeed of men, but chosen of God, and precious, Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ." (1 Peter 2:4–5, KJV.)[9]

Notice the verdicts. Men reject Christ; God declares Him chosen and precious. The believer must learn whose judgment governs his own. If public approval determines what he values, hostility toward Christ will become pressure to be ashamed of Him. Peter teaches us to see our rejected Savior as the precious One God has appointed.

That is more than a defense against an argument. It strengthens affection. We endure for someone we love and esteem. When the world's contempt grows loud, the church must continue setting Christ's worth before its people: His holiness, His mercy, His

faithful obedience, His atoning death, His victorious resurrection. A soul increasingly occupied with His glory has a reason to refuse the world's bargain.

Peter begins with "Coming to Him" (1 Peter 2:4, NKJV). We do not outgrow our need to come to Christ. His people receive their life from Him, and their worship reaches God through Him. Their spiritual sacrifices are acceptable "through Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 2:5, NKJV). Even when others despise their service, the Lord receives what is offered through His Son.

This steadies a weary believer. Public usefulness may shrink through age, illness, exclusion, or persecution. Yet prayer, obedience, worship, and love offered through Christ have not become worthless. The world cannot determine the value of what God receives. Continue coming to the Savior, and continue serving Him in the place He has given you.

Peter also identifies the power that keeps believers: they "are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time" (1 Peter 1:5, NKJV). Through faith. God's preserving power does not make trusting Him unnecessary; it sustains His people in that trust. He keeps us looking to Christ when fear urges us to look elsewhere for safety.

Teaching That Makes Deception Harder to Accept

Jesus warned that false prophets would deceive many. Paul explains one way Christ strengthens His church against that danger. He gives ministers, including "pastors and teachers," for "the edifying of the body of Christ" (Ephesians 4:11–12, NKJV), with this stated purpose:

> "That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive." (Ephesians 4:14, KJV.)[10]

The instability is spiritual, not merely intellectual. What a person believes shapes what he will tolerate, fear, desire, and obey. A teaching that makes sin seem harmless weakens resistance to it. A teaching that promises safety through disobedience recruits fear against faith. Deception becomes especially dangerous when it offers permission for something the heart already wants.

Christ gives faithful teaching to develop settled judgment. The hearer learns what a passage means, how it agrees with the rest of

Scripture, and what submission to it requires. He gains more than a conclusion to repeat. He begins to recognize why a persuasive claim contradicts the truth.

This is essential preparation for the last days. Excitement about a prediction is no substitute for understanding the gospel. Familiarity with a speaker is no guarantee that his teaching is sound. The question is whether Scripture establishes his claim and whether the Christ he presents is the Christ whom the apostles preached.

Paul's farewell to the Ephesian elders makes the connection between teaching and watchfulness unmistakable. He warns that wolves will enter the flock and that men from among them will speak distorted things to draw disciples after themselves. Then he commands:

> "Therefore watch, and remember, that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears. And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified." (Acts 20:31–32, KJV.)

Watch, warn, build up. Paul's tears did not replace teaching, and his teaching did not remove the need for warning. He loved these people enough to name the danger and establish them in the truth that would help them withstand it after his departure.

Strong preaching serves this purpose. Its strength lies in the faithful force of God's Word upon the conscience. It must explain truth clearly, expose error honestly, and press obedience where the hearer is tempted to resist. A sermon that comforts us while leaving our favorite evasions untouched may be pleasant to hear and inadequate to prepare us.

Receive searching exposition as provision for your endurance. When Scripture exposes an excuse, surrender the excuse. When it overturns a belief, correct the belief. When it commands a costly duty, seek grace to perform it. Repeatedly admiring the truth while refusing its claims trains the heart to hear without yielding. That is a dangerous preparation for stronger temptation.

Paul's aim is growth into Christ: "speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head" (Ephesians 4:15, NKJV). The resulting maturity includes discernment, courage, humility, and love. We are being equipped to remain faithful to a Person, not merely to win disputes about His teaching.

Protect the Love That Pressure Would Destroy

Jesus places abounding wickedness beside the cooling of love. We must therefore prepare for more than deceptive ideas. We must guard against becoming hard, suspicious, and cruel while defending the truth. A church can recognize enemies outside and wound its own members within.

Paul confronts that danger in the disputes over food and days at Rome. Believers were despising or condemning one another where they should have sought one another's good. He directs them to "pursue the things which make for peace and the things by which one may edify another" (Romans 14:19, NKJV). Then he explains how spiritual strength should be used:

> "We then that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves. Let every one of us please his neighbour for his good to edification. For even Christ pleased not himself." (Romans 15:1–3, KJV.)[11]

The immediate dispute concerns matters of conscience, but the duty reaches directly into our preparation for hardship. Strength is entrusted to us for the good of weaker brethren. We must learn to carry weakness without contempt, correct error without needless injury, and surrender preferences when love requires it.

The frightened believer does not become courageous because we ridicule his fear. He needs truth patiently applied until God's promises begin to govern what he sees. The confused believer needs careful instruction. The exhausted believer may need practical help before he can give sustained attention to the counsel we offer. Love takes the trouble to understand the person it seeks to strengthen.

"for his good" (Romans 15:2, NKJV) prevents this patience from becoming indulgence. We must not encourage a brother to sin simply because obedience frightens him. Nor should we confuse agreement with help. The aim is to strengthen him in Christ so that he can obey, not to relieve the discomfort of a necessary decision by calling compromise harmless.

Such care must become familiar before severe trial arrives. If minor disagreements already make us withdraw from one another, we should not assume that greater pressure will produce steadfast love. Repent of contempt now. Repair needless breaches now. Learn to speak honestly and remain patient with a brother who needs time

to understand. End-times preparation includes the way we treat one another this week.

Exhort One Another before Sin Hardens the Heart

The danger is deeper than temporary discouragement. Hebrews names it:

> "Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God. But exhort one another daily, while it is called To day; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin." (Hebrews 3:12–13, KJV.)

Sin deceives before it hardens. It supplies reasons for disobedience, makes delay appear sensible, and teaches the conscience to accept what once troubled it. A person can call his retreat a temporary adjustment while the heart is becoming less willing to return. By the time the departure is public, much of the surrender may already have taken place in secret.

God appoints mutual exhortation against that process. "daily" (Hebrews 3:13, NKJV) gives urgency to the care. We must not wait until a brother announces that he has abandoned the faith before we speak about the sin that is drawing him away. Patient questions, fitting Scripture, prayer, and honest correction may interrupt a course he is failing to recognize.

Who knows you well enough to speak when your explanations begin protecting your sin?

We can become absorbed in identifying deception across the world while keeping our own evasions beyond the reach of correction. The Lord calls us to take heed to the heart, and He gives brethren to help us do it. Welcome truthful care before your desire for secrecy becomes a settled defense.

Hebrews then carries this responsibility toward the approaching day:

> "Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering; (for he is faithful that promised;) And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works: Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching." (Hebrews 10:23–25, KJV.)[12]

Hold fast. Consider one another. Keep assembling. Keep

exhorting. The commands belong together because perseverance is being strengthened through shared attention to the truth. God's faithfulness supplies our confidence, and Christ's approaching day intensifies our care.

These readers already knew the cost of allegiance to Him. They had endured reproach and affliction, stood beside mistreated believers, and suffered the loss of possessions. The writer reminds them of their better, lasting inheritance and urges, "Cast not away therefore your confidence, which hath great recompence of reward. For ye have need of patience, that, after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise" (Hebrews 10:35–36, KJV).

Their need was endurance after suffering had already begun. Yesterday's courage did not remove today's temptation to retreat. They still needed the promises, the fellowship, and the exhortation that would help them hold fast. We should not expect to outgrow those same provisions.

Then comes the promise that gives endurance its horizon: "For yet a little while, And He who is coming will come and will not tarry" (Hebrews 10:37, NKJV). Our labor is not endless, and our waiting is not empty. Christ will come. The church strengthens its members to meet Him faithfully by teaching them to trust His Word, resist sin, love one another, and continue in obedience now.

This is preparation worth pursuing with all our strength. Become firmly established in Christ. Receive the preaching that searches and strengthens you. Let faithful brethren know your burdens. Bring truth and patient love to theirs. As the day approaches, give yourself more fully to the help your Lord has provided. He has not called you to watch alone.

Questions for Further Study

1. Read Matthew 24:11–13 and Hebrews 10:23–25. What inward dangers accompany the approaching end, and how does the command to exhort one another answer those dangers?
2. Read 1 Corinthians 3:5–15 and Ephesians 2:8–10. How does dependence upon Christ differ from dependence upon a teacher or upon our own courage? How should the coming examination of ministry shape what a church teaches now?
3. Read Ephesians 2:13–22 and 1 Peter 2:4–5. How do belonging to God's household and valuing the Christ whom men reject strengthen a believer against pressure to conform?

4. Read Ephesians 4:11–16 and Acts 20:28–32. What does faithful teaching build into believers that makes deception harder to accept? How do warning, love, and the Word of grace work together?
5. Read Romans 14:19–15:3 and Hebrews 3:12–14. How can patient care for weaker believers and timely correction help a congregation resist spiritual decline? What distinguishes such care from either indulgence or harshness?
6. Read Hebrews 10:19–39. How do Christ's sacrifice, God's faithfulness, the approaching day, and the promise of His coming sustain believers who have already suffered for their faith?

Practical Applications

1. Identify the pressure most likely to move you from obedience.

Name it plainly: rejection, financial loss, a cherished sin, a persuasive teaching, or disappointment with a Christian leader. Read the relevant Scripture in context and write down the truth that must govern your response. Bring any confusion to a faithful pastor. Then identify the obedience required now, before the pressure grows. Prepare your conscience to follow Christ rather than waiting to negotiate with temptation in the moment of crisis. (1 Corinthians 3:10–11; Ephesians 4:11–15.)

2. Bring one concealed danger into faithful Christian fellowship.

Speak this week with a mature believer who will pray, listen, and tell you the truth. Explain where you have begun excusing sin, withdrawing from fellowship, or fearing the cost of obedience. Ask for a specific follow-up conversation. Receive correction without hiding behind general assurances that you are doing well. Let the Lord's provision reach the place where you need it. (Hebrews 3:12–14; 10:23–25.)

3. Strengthen one believer for continued faithfulness.

Choose someone facing discouragement, confusion, or pressure to compromise. Listen carefully, bring a fitting promise or command from Scripture, and offer practical help you can sustain. Follow up. Your aim is to help that person keep trusting and obeying Christ, not merely to feel better after a conversation. If your impatience has

weakened the relationship, begin by acknowledging it. (Romans 14:19; 15:1–3; Hebrews 10:24–25.)

Chapter Axioms

1. End-times readiness requires a faith established in Christ that does not collapse with the loss of human supports. 1 Corinthians 3:5–11.
2. The coming examination of ministry requires us to prepare souls for faithfulness rather than cultivate appearances of strength. 1 Corinthians 3:12–15.
3. Belonging to God's household strengthens believers to obey Christ when the world withdraws its welcome. Ephesians 2:13–22; 1 Peter 2:4–5.
4. Faithful preaching equips the conscience to resist deception and obey the truth under pressure. Ephesians 4:11–16; Acts 20:28–32.
5. Patient love and timely correction help protect believers from the deceitfulness of sin. Romans 15:1–3; Hebrews 3:12–14.
6. As Christ's day approaches, His people must deepen their fellowship and strengthen one another's endurance. Hebrews 10:23–25, 35–37.

Holiness through Christ

Fifteen Foundational Truths about Sanctification

Christ does not merely command holiness from a distance. He gave Himself to make His people holy, and He supplies the life and power they need to obey Him. Faith depends upon Christ; His Spirit produces the transformation; the believer responds with willing, persevering obedience.

1. Christ Himself is the source of our holiness.

God has made Christ our sanctification. We cannot receive spiritual life from Him and then become holy independently of Him; every step of genuine growth depends upon the Savior to whom we belong. (1 Corinthians 1:30; John 15:4–5.)

2. We are set apart to God through faith in Christ.

Jesus describes His people as those "sanctified by faith in Me." Holiness begins with coming to Christ, not with making ourselves worthy to approach Him; the faith that receives Him begins a life of dependence upon Him. (Acts 26:18.)

3. The Savior who justifies us also sanctifies us.

God's verdict of acceptance and His work of transformation are distinct blessings that belong to the same salvation. We do not become holy to purchase His acceptance, but those He receives in Christ He also begins to change. (Romans 5:1; 1 Corinthians 6:11.)

4. Christ purchased our holiness with His blood.

The cross secured more than release from punishment: Christ died to cleanse a people for Himself. To excuse the sin He died to overthrow is to resist the very purpose of our redemption. (Hebrews 13:12; Titus 2:14.)

5. Union with Christ breaks sin's right to rule us.

Believers share in the benefits of Christ's death and resurrection, so their former slavery no longer defines their lives. Faith takes God's declaration seriously and refuses to surrender the body to the old master. (Romans 6:4–14.)

6. The Spirit gives us freedom that human resolve cannot produce.

Romans 8:2 locates our liberation in "the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus." God does not leave us facing sin with nothing stronger than yesterday's failed promises; His indwelling Spirit supplies power for a new walk. (Romans 8:2–4.)

7. What begins through faith cannot be perfected through self-reliance.

Paul rebukes the attempt to begin by the Spirit and finish by the flesh. Christian maturity deepens our dependence upon Christ rather than graduating us beyond it. (Galatians 3:2–5; Colossians 2:6–7.)

8. Continued fruitfulness requires continued dependence upon Christ.

A branch cannot manufacture the life it receives from the vine.

Christ's words, "without Me you can do nothing," expose the spiritual emptiness of even impressive discipline when it is detached from Him. (John 15:4–5.)

9. The Spirit makes God's love known in our hearts and nourishes our answering love.

Romans 5:5 concerns God's love for us, poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit and demonstrated in Christ's death. Faith receives that love, and gratitude gives obedience a motive that bare fear of exposure cannot supply. (Romans 5:5–8; 1 John 4:19.)

10. Christ sanctifies His people through the truth they believe and obey.

The Word exposes sin, corrects our judgment, and teaches us the character of the Savior. Faith welcomes that correction because holiness cannot grow where we continually defend ourselves against God's truth. (John 17:17; 2 Thessalonians 2:13; James 1:21–25.)

11. Sin must be put to death by the Spirit's power.

Romans 8:13 joins our responsibility to the Spirit's enabling: believers must actively kill the sinful practices they once protected. Dependence upon Christ sends us into battle against sin, not into negotiations with it. (Romans 8:13; Colossians 3:5.)

12. True holiness includes new affections, not merely controlled appearances.

The Spirit produces love, joy, peace, patience, and the other fruits of a renewed life. Faith in Christ reaches beneath respectable behavior to change what we desire, cherish, and pursue when nobody is watching. (Galatians 5:6, 16, 22–25.)

13. God's inward work strengthens our outward obedience.

We exert ourselves because God works within us, shaping both our willingness and our actions. Prayer, self-denial, and disciplined obedience are therefore expressions of dependence upon His grace, not substitutes for it. (Philippians 2:12–13; Titus 2:11–12.)

14. Faith uses God's promises to pursue cleansing and returns to Christ when we fall.

His promises give us reason to abandon defilement rather than surrender to it. When sin is exposed, the believer confesses it and seeks cleansing through Christ instead of hiding behind excuses or pretending to have attained perfection. (2 Corinthians 7:1; 2 Peter 1:3–4; 1 John 1:8–2:2.)

15. Hope in Christ's return produces present purity.

The expectation of seeing Him moves His people to cleanse their lives now, while God's faithfulness assures them that His sanctifying work will reach its appointed completion. End-times watchfulness therefore requires more than recognizing danger: it requires trusting Christ, resisting sin, and pursuing holiness until He comes. (1 John 3:2–3; 1 Thessalonians 5:6–10, 23–24.)

The governing truth is this: We cannot prepare to meet Christ by trying to become holy without Christ. The Savior we await is the Savior upon whom we must depend today.

Christ has given His people a firm foundation and abundant help. His warnings must now receive the same serious attention as His provisions. What happens when a person hears the call to prepare but remains unready? Jesus answers with a wedding, an arriving bridegroom, and a door that closes. We must listen while that warning can still move us to repentance.

Notes

1. Brief Scripture quotations and short quoted phrases use the New King James Version (NKJV); the longer expository passages use the King James Version (KJV). Each passage is identified accordingly. Short phrases revisited in the exposition use NKJV even when the preceding longer passage uses KJV. Explanatory wording outside quotation marks is the author's exposition, not a revised Bible quotation. Scripture taken from the New King James Version®. Copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson. Used by permission. All rights reserved. KJV quotations are from the public-domain text.
2. Matthew 24:11–13 identifies deception, cooling love, and endurance in Jesus' teaching about coming trials and the end. These dangers govern the chapter's application without making every supporting passage a prediction about the final generation.

1 Corinthians 3:1–11. Paul's building metaphor addresses the Corinthian congregation in the setting of divisions over teachers. The description of ministers as planters and waterers establishes their subordinate service and God's power to give growth.

3. 1 Peter 2:24, Ephesians 2:8–10, and Hebrews 7:23–25. Hebrews grounds Christ's complete saving ability in His continuing priesthood and intercession. Its application here encourages coming to God through Him rather than retreating into despair or self-reliance.

1 Peter 2:24 and Ephesians 2:8–10. The order is salvation by grace through faith, followed by the good works for which believers are created in Christ. The chapter's appeal to obedience rests upon this order.

4. C. H. Spurgeon, "The One Foundation," September 14, 1879, Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit, volume 25, exposition of 1 Corinthians 3:11, section discussing the church's support in the living Christ. Quotation checked against the Spurgeon Library transcription. https://www.spurgeon.org/sermons/the-one-foundation
5. 1 Corinthians 3:10–15. The work is tested at "the day"; verse 15 distinguishes the builder's salvation from the loss of work that does not endure. The passage must not be reduced to a prediction of a particular earthly catastrophe or treated as saying that the saved builder is condemned.
6. Richard Baxter, The Reformed Pastor, chapter 1, "The Oversight of Ourselves," section 1, point 2, concluding appeal concerning the effect of a minister's spiritual condition upon his people. The quotation is reproduced from the Reformed Reader transcription; apostrophe typography has been regularized. https://www.reformedreader.org/rbb/baxter/reformedpastor/trpch1s1.htm
7. Ephesians 2:13–22. The immediate setting is the reconciliation of Jews and Gentiles through Christ's cross. The foundational role of apostles and prophets concerns the church's establishment through the revelation entrusted to them; compare Ephesians 3:4–6.
8. John Calvin, Commentary on Galatians and Ephesians, translated by William Pringle, exposition of Ephesians 2:21. Calvin explains the fitting together of believers and contrasts a building with "a confused mass." The brief quotation is exact; its surrounding explanation here is a paraphrase and application. https://ccel.org/ccel/calvin/calcom41/calcom41.iv.iii.vi.html
9. 1 Peter 1:5 and 2:4–5. The preserving power of God operates through faith; this supports active dependence rather than self-reliance.

1 Peter 2:4–5. "Lively stones" is the KJV's wording for living stones. The spiritual life of believers, their corporate identity, and their worship through Jesus Christ govern the application of Peter's image here.

10. Acts 20:28–32 directly joins watchfulness, warning against false teachers, and the

Word's power to build up the church. The application to present and future dangers follows that explicit connection.

Ephesians 4:11–16. Christ gives ministers for the saints' equipping and the body's growth, with doctrinal stability and growth into Christ as stated purposes. The closing verses connect that growth with truth, love, and the service of the whole body.

11. Romans 14:19–15:3. The immediate issue concerns disagreements over food and days and the treatment of weaker consciences. The application here follows Paul's demand for the neighbor's good and does not treat every doctrinal disagreement as a matter of indifference.

12. Hebrews 3:12–14 and 10:19–39. Mutual exhortation confronts the hardening deceit of sin and supports perseverance. Hebrews 10 grounds its commands in Christ's priesthood and sacrifice, explicitly connects assembling and exhortation with the approaching day, and reminds readers who have already suffered that they still need endurance. The discussion distinguishes protective fellowship from the saving work of Christ upon which it depends.

CHAPTER 3

When the Door Is Shut

The Eternal Consequences of Being Unready

"Those who were ready went in with him to the wedding; and the door was shut." (Matthew 25:10, NKJV.)[1]

The door closes while people who expected to enter are still outside. They have lamps. They know whom they are waiting for. They have spent the night among those who will be welcomed. But when the bridegroom comes, their preparations fail them. By the time they return, the opportunity to enter has ended.

Jesus does not tell this story to satisfy our curiosity about a wedding. He tells it to awaken people who expect to meet Him but have not made ready. Their danger is real, and the consequence is final. He brings us to the closed door now so that we will not discover its meaning only when we stand outside it.

We cannot teach watchfulness faithfully while concealing what happens to the unready. Christ's warnings are part of His care for our souls. The Savior who promises a glorious welcome also speaks of exclusion, judgment, and everlasting punishment. We must hear Him without turning away from the words that disturb us most.

The Difference the Midnight Cry Reveals

Jesus begins with ten virgins going out to meet a bridegroom. They belong to the same wedding party and carry the same kind of equipment. Yet a crucial difference already exists:

"And five of them were wise, and five were foolish. They that

> were foolish took their lamps, and took no oil with them: But the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps. While the bridegroom tarried, they all slumbered and slept." (Matthew 25:2–5, KJV.)

All ten sleep. The contrast is therefore not between people who never become tired and people who do. The wise have prepared for the bridegroom's arrival; the foolish have not. Their outward association with the ready cannot supply what they lack.

That is a searching warning for the church. We may sit beside believers, know the language of faith, and take part in the congregation's work while leaving our own relationship to Christ unsettled. Familiarity can make the question seem unnecessary. We have been among Christians for so long that we scarcely imagine ourselves outside the kingdom.

But the bridegroom's arrival reveals what appearances concealed:

> "And at midnight there was a cry made, Behold, the bridegroom cometh; go ye out to meet him. Then all those virgins arose, and trimmed their lamps. And the foolish said unto the wise, Give us of your oil; for our lamps are gone out." (Matthew 25:6–8, KJV.)

The cry awakens everyone, but it does not make everyone ready. The foolish now recognize their need with an urgency they did not show before. Recognition has come, yet the time for preparation is slipping away.

Their companions cannot solve the problem for them: "No, lest there should not be enough for us and you; but go rather to those who sell, and buy for yourselves" (Matthew 25:9, NKJV). Jesus drives home the personal character of readiness. We cannot borrow another person's standing before God. A faithful spouse cannot repent for us. A godly parent cannot transfer faith to us. A pastor's care cannot make our refusal to trust Christ harmless.[2]

Perhaps someone has prayed for you for years. Thank God for that mercy, but do not mistake being prayed for for being reconciled to Him. The people who love you are calling you to the Savior; they cannot take His place.

Then comes the sentence that should stop every careless reader: "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" (Matthew 25:10, NKJV).

The bridegroom does not wait for them to finish what they neglected. His arrival determines the moment of entrance. Their intention to obtain what they need does not hold the door open.

"Lord, Lord" on the Wrong Side of the Door

The foolish return with an urgent appeal:

> "Afterward came also the other virgins, saying, Lord, Lord, open to us. But he answered and said, Verily I say unto you, I know you not. Watch therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of man cometh." (Matthew 25:11–13, KJV.)

Notice the word "afterward." There is a time when they want entrance, but wanting it then does not secure it. They address the bridegroom respectfully and plead earnestly. The answer remains unchanged.

Jesus ends with "Watch therefore." The warning about the shut door is His reason for commanding watchfulness. We do not know when He will come, and we have no promise of another opportunity after He comes. Readiness cannot be left to the moment that reveals our need of it.

Spurgeon stated the consequence plainly: "When 'the door was shut,' the exclusion was final."[3] Our Lord gives no hint that persistence outside will eventually reverse the verdict. The warning is severe because the loss is irreversible.

Luke records another closed-door warning. Someone asks Jesus whether only a few will be saved. He directs attention from the number of the saved to the hearer's own need to enter:

> "Strive to enter in at the strait gate: for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able. When once the master of the house is risen up, and hath shut to the door, and ye begin to stand without, and to knock at the door, saying, Lord, Lord, open unto us; and he shall answer and say unto you, I know you not whence ye are." (Luke 13:24–25, KJV.)

Their defense is familiarity: "We ate and drank in Your presence, and You taught in our streets." His answer exposes what their familiarity did not change: "Depart from Me, all you workers of iniquity." Then He declares, "There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth," as they see others in God's kingdom "and yourselves thrust out" (Luke 13:26–28, NKJV).[4]

They heard Him teach. They were close enough to describe encounters with Him. Yet they remained workers of iniquity. The truth had reached their ears without bringing them into obedient faith.

We need to let that warning search our own refuges. A history of attending church is not a history of repentance. Enjoying strong preaching is not the same as submitting to it. We can remember spiritual occasions warmly while continuing to defend the sins those occasions exposed.

What are you trusting to make you welcome when Christ comes? If your answer rests upon the Christians you know, the ministry you have supported, or the years you have spent hearing the gospel, His warning calls you to examine it. You need Christ Himself. No religious history can substitute for being known by Him.

The Return That Ends a Servant's Defiance

Jesus joins the same urgency to a servant's conduct. He commands, "Watch therefore, for you do not know what hour your Lord is coming," and adds, "Therefore you also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect" (Matthew 24:42, 44, NKJV).

He then contrasts a faithful servant who feeds the household with an evil servant who abuses it. The evil begins with a private conclusion about the master's delay:

> "But and if that evil servant shall say in his heart, My lord delayeth his coming; And shall begin to smite his fellowservants, and to eat and drink with the drunken; The lord of that servant shall come in a day when he looketh not for him, and in an hour that he is not aware of, And shall cut him asunder, and appoint him his portion with the hypocrites: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth." (Matthew 24:48–51, KJV.)

This is not merely a warning about losing praise for poorly performed work. The servant receives his portion with hypocrites, accompanied by weeping and gnashing of teeth. Luke's account says that the master will "appoint him his portion with the unbelievers" (Luke 12:46, NKJV).[5] The Lord exposes a life whose conduct contradicts its claim to belong to Him.

The servant's position did not make him safe. He was inside the household, entrusted with responsibility, and familiar with his master's authority. Yet he treated the delay as permission to satisfy himself

at the expense of others. When the master returns, his title cannot defend his cruelty.

That should sober everyone who holds religious responsibility. A pulpit, an office, or a reputation for service cannot shelter unrepented wickedness. Christ sees the people we have harmed as clearly as He sees the duties we have performed. His patience is not His approval.

The servant's error also reaches beyond leaders. We make the same bargain whenever we assume there will be time to obey later. The sin is excused, the conscience quieted, and the familiar duty postponed. Each delay makes another delay easier. Meanwhile, Christ's command has not changed.

The returning Master will not ask whether we found our excuses convincing. His arrival will expose what we did with His words.

Neglect Is Not a Safe Middle Ground

The next parable describes servants entrusted with their master's money. Two put it to work. One buries it. When the master returns, the unfaithful servant explains his conduct and hands the money back. He has preserved what he was given, but he has refused the service for which it was entrusted to him.

His master's judgment is "You wicked and lazy servant." The sentence ends, "And cast the unprofitable servant into the outer darkness. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth" (Matthew 25:26, 30, NKJV).

The two faithful servants had different amounts entrusted to them, yet both received the same welcome into their master's joy. The issue is faithfulness, not equal results. The rejected servant's defense cannot turn deliberate neglect into obedience.[6]

J. C. Ryle warns, "Let us beware of a do-nothing Christianity."[7] That description reaches people who assume they are safe because their lives contain no spectacular scandal. They have not violently attacked the gospel; they have simply left its claims unanswered. They intend no open rebellion, but they will not yield.

Hebrews refuses to treat neglect as an innocent condition: "Therefore we must give the more earnest heed to the things we have heard, lest we drift away." It then asks, "how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation" (Hebrews 2:1, 3, NKJV). The greatness of the salvation increases the seriousness of neglecting it.

A person in danger does not have to hate the rescuer to perish. He may listen respectfully and continue refusing the offered help. So a

hearer may agree that the gospel is true while declining to entrust himself to Christ. Respectful delay leaves the need unresolved.

Nor can impressive religious activity take the place of obedience. Jesus says:

> "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity." (Matthew 7:21–23, KJV.)

These people bring extraordinary works as their defense. Christ names their continuing iniquity. Their claim to have acted in His name cannot overrule His judgment of their lives. He says, "I never knew you," not that a moment of weariness erased a saving relationship. His warning strips away false assurance so that hearers will seek the real salvation found in Him.[8]

When the Warning Comes to a Church

Christ does not reserve searching warnings for people outside the visible church. To Sardis He says, "I know your works, that you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead" (Revelation 3:1, NKJV). He follows that exposure with a command:

> "Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die: for I have not found thy works perfect before God. Remember therefore how thou hast received and heard, and hold fast, and repent. If therefore thou shalt not watch, I will come on thee as a thief, and thou shalt not know what hour I will come upon thee." (Revelation 3:2–3, KJV.)[9]

The church has a living name and a deadly condition. Other people may speak well of it, but Christ's knowledge reaches beyond its reputation. His command to watch calls it back to what it received, what it heard, and what it must obey. Repentance is the required response to His diagnosis.

This should change how we evaluate spiritual health. Activity can continue after earnest prayer has withered. Familiar words can remain after the heart has grown cold. A congregation may retain its schedule while losing the seriousness with which it once heard God. The Lord

does not confuse the continued operation of religious life with spiritual life itself.

His warning is also mercy. He tells them what is wrong and commands them to respond. They must not defend the reputation He has exposed. They must repent while His word is calling them back.

Mark records the breadth of His summons: "Take heed, watch and pray; for you do not know when the time is." Jesus describes a master who leaves each servant work to do, then warns, "Watch therefore, for you do not know when the master of the house is coming," and "lest, coming suddenly, he find you sleeping." He concludes, "And what I say to you, I say to all: Watch!" (Mark 13:33–37, NKJV).

We have no authority to narrow that command to unusually devoted Christians. The Lord addresses all His hearers. Watchfulness belongs to the life of discipleship, not to an optional course for those interested in prophecy.

And the dangers He names are often painfully familiar:

> "And take heed to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting, and drunkenness, and cares of this life, and so that day come upon you unawares. For as a snare shall it come on all them that dwell on the face of the whole earth. Watch ye therefore, and pray always, that ye may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of man." (Luke 21:34–36, KJV.)

Excess and drunkenness can dull the heart. So can consuming anxieties about ordinary life. Jesus names both. The heart can become so occupied with pleasures or pressures that the coming meeting with Him scarcely governs it. We may have many explanations for our distraction, but the command remains: take heed, watch, and pray.

What Exclusion Finally Means

The shut door tells us that the unready are excluded. Other passages tell us plainly what final condemnation involves. We must allow those passages to speak with their own force rather than reduce Christ's warning to disappointment at missing a celebration.

Later in Matthew 25, the Son of Man comes in glory, sits upon His throne, and separates those gathered before Him. He welcomes those on His right into the kingdom. Their care for His brethren expresses an allegiance the King Himself acknowledges: "inasmuch as you did it

to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me" (Matthew 25:40, NKJV).

Then He addresses those on His left:

> "Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels: For I was an hungred, and ye gave me no meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me no drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me not in: naked, and ye clothed me not: sick, and in prison, and ye visited me not." (Matthew 25:41–43, KJV.)

They ask when they failed to minister to Him. He answers, "inasmuch as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to Me." The passage concludes, "And these will go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into eternal life" (Matthew 25:45–46, NKJV).[10]

The King takes their treatment of His brethren as treatment of Himself. Their failure is not hidden from Him because it consisted of things left undone. He judges neglect as well as visible acts. The life reveals the allegiance, and His verdict uncovers it.

The punishment is everlasting. Jesus places it beside eternal life in the same concluding sentence. He does not describe a temporary setback followed by a second opportunity to enter the kingdom. We must not promise an escape beyond the judgment that He has not promised.

Paul speaks with equal clarity about Christ's revelation from heaven:

> "And to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, In flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power; When he shall come to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in all them that believe (because our testimony among you was believed) in that day." (2 Thessalonians 1:7–10, KJV.)[11]

The same appearing brings relief to afflicted believers and judgment upon those who reject God and His gospel. Christ is not uncertain about the difference. The Lord whose patience has been despised will appear in a glory that no one can dismiss.

These words should govern our tone when we speak of the lost. We must neither joke about their end nor describe it with cold

satisfaction. The warning concerns people with names, faces, families, and souls. Some sit beside us in church. Some are dear to us. The truth that moves us to speak firmly should also move us to plead.

The Lake of Fire

John shows the final judgment with a solemnity that leaves no place to hide:

> "And I saw a great white throne, and him that sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away; and there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works.
>
> "And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them: and they were judged every man according to their works. And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire." (Revelation 20:11–15, KJV.)[12]

Small and great stand before God. The distinctions that command attention now cannot secure exemption then. Wealth cannot purchase another hearing. Influence cannot conceal the record. Death itself does not remove a person from accountability. The Judge summons the dead, opens the books, and gives a righteous verdict.

The final sentence is not vague: whoever is not found in the book of life is cast into the lake of fire. This is the eternal danger against which the gospel warns us. Being interested in spiritual matters, being respected by believers, or intending to repent cannot replace life in Christ.

Jesus speaks of hell with an urgency that demands decisive action against sin: "And if thy hand offend thee, cut it off: it is better for thee to enter into life maimed, than having two hands to go into hell, into the fire that never shall be quenched" (Mark 9:43, KJV). His forceful image commands radical separation from sin, not bodily injury. Something we prize must be surrendered if keeping it means continuing in rebellion against God.[13]

We often reverse that judgment. We treat the sinful pleasure as indispensable and obedience as a loss we cannot bear. Jesus teaches

us to reckon with eternity. No indulgence is worth the soul's destruction. No advantage gained through disobedience can compensate for being shut out from His presence.

A warning this serious cannot be answered with a passing feeling. The Lord is calling us to turn from the sin we have been protecting and to trust the Savior we have been postponing. We must not read about the lake of fire while quietly reserving the right to continue on the road of unbelief.

The Warning Is Mercy While We Can Still Hear It

The same Scriptures that announce judgment explain why it has not yet fallen. Peter writes that the Lord "is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9, NKJV).

His patience has a purpose. The time we have received is time in which to repent. It is not evidence that the warning was exaggerated or that God has changed His mind about sin.

Peter immediately adds, "But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night." He describes the passing of the present heavens and earth, then presses the consequence: "what manner of persons ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness." Looking toward God's promised new creation, he commands, "be diligent to be found by Him in peace, without spot and blameless" (2 Peter 3:10–14, NKJV).[14] The promised future lays a claim upon our present conduct.

We can misuse even the fear these warnings awaken. A person may become frightened, seek relief, and then return to the very sin that troubled him. Thomas Watson observed, "There may be trouble of mind where there is no grieving for the offence against God."[15] Fear of punishment alone is not the whole of repentance. God calls us to confess the evil of our sin, turn from it, and seek mercy in Christ.

That mercy is not offered reluctantly. Jesus declares, "the one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out" (John 6:37, NKJV). The One who warns of a closed door invites sinners to come to Him now. His invitation and His warning agree. Both call us away from the fatal presumption that we can safely remain as we are.

Come with the guilt you cannot remove and the weakness you cannot conquer. Christ "bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness" (1 Peter 2:24, NKJV). He did not merely announce a rescue; He gave Himself

to accomplish it. His death answers our guilt, and His grace changes the life that sin has ruled.

Paul holds watchfulness and this saving hope together. After warning that sudden destruction will overtake those who cry, "Peace and safety," he tells believers, "But you, brethren, are not in darkness, so that this Day should overtake you as a thief." His command follows: "Therefore let us not sleep, as others do, but let us watch and be sober" (1 Thessalonians 5:3–6, NKJV).

Then he gives the ground of their hope:

> "For God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ, Who died for us, that, whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with him. Wherefore comfort yourselves together, and edify one another, even as also ye do." (1 Thessalonians 5:9–11, KJV.)[16]

The believer's hope rests upon Christ who died for him. That hope summons him to sobriety, faith, love, and perseverance. The warnings do not send a repentant sinner away from Christ to manufacture safety through flawless vigilance. They drive us to Him and teach us to reject the carelessness that would dishonor Him.

If you have grown careless, hear His warning and return. If your profession has concealed an unconverted heart, stop defending the appearance and seek the reality. If you are struggling against sin and grieving over it, bring that struggle to the Savior rather than hiding from Him. The answer to this chapter is not to become more skillful at reassuring yourself. It is to come to Christ, believe His gospel, and follow Him.

The door in the parable closes. The warning on this page is still reaching you. Do not waste the mercy of hearing it before it is too late.

Questions for Further Study

1. Read Matthew 25:1–13. What do the wise and foolish virgins have in common, and what distinguishes them? How does the fact that all ten sleep help us understand the readiness Jesus requires?
2. Compare Matthew 25:11–13 with Luke 13:24–28 and Matthew 7:21–23. What claims do the excluded make? Why do familiarity, religious speech, and impressive activity fail to establish that a person belongs to Christ?
3. Read Matthew 24:42–51 and Luke 12:45–48. How does the

servant's thinking about delay affect his conduct? What words show that the warning reaches beyond a minor loss of reward?

4. Read Revelation 3:1–6, Mark 13:33–37, and Luke 21:34–36. What does Christ command those who hear His warnings to do? Which dangers can hide beneath a respectable religious appearance?
5. Read Matthew 25:31–46, 2 Thessalonians 1:7–10, and Revelation 20:11–15. What does each passage explicitly teach about judgment? Distinguish what these passages say from details the parable of the ten virgins does not itself explain.
6. Read 2 Peter 3:9–14, John 6:37, and 1 Thessalonians 5:1–11. How do God's patience, Christ's invitation, and the believer's hope strengthen rather than cancel the call to repent and watch?

Practical Applications

1. Examine the foundation of your assurance.

Read Matthew 7:21–23 and Matthew 25:1–13 prayerfully. State honestly why you believe you will be received by Christ. Do not substitute a religious history for present faith in Him. If you recognize that you have relied upon appearances while resisting His gospel, confess that directly to God and seek counsel from a faithful pastor. Do not postpone coming to Christ until you can make your past look better.

2. Stop sheltering a known sin beneath the promise of "later."

Identify one sin you have repeatedly excused or one clear duty you have continually refused. Bring it into confession today and take the first concrete step of repentance. End a dishonest practice, seek forgiveness, or remove an opportunity for repeated temptation. Ask a mature believer to help you remain accountable. Treat God's patience as mercy leading you to change, not permission to continue. (Matthew 24:48–51; 2 Peter 3:9.)

3. Receive the warnings and promises together in watchful prayer.

Read Luke 21:34–36 and 1 Thessalonians 5:1–11 during your daily prayer this week. Name what is weighing down your heart and ask the Lord for a sober, obedient response. Thank Him for salvation through Christ, then pray for one person who is neglecting the gospel. Where

you have opportunity, speak plainly and compassionately about both the danger and the Savior. Let the warning deepen faithfulness rather than end in passing alarm.

Chapter Axioms

1. Christ's command to watch requires readiness before His arrival, not preparation postponed until afterward. Matthew 25:1–13.
2. Fellowship with believers cannot substitute for personal faith in Christ. Matthew 25:8–12; Luke 13:24–28.
3. Religious responsibility cannot protect unrepented wickedness from the Master's judgment. Matthew 24:45–51; Luke 12:45–48.
4. Neglecting salvation is perilous even when it wears a respectful religious appearance. Hebrews 2:1–3; Matthew 7:21–23.
5. Final exclusion from Christ's kingdom is everlasting judgment, not a temporary loss followed by another opportunity. Matthew 25:41–46; Revelation 20:11–15.
6. God's patience calls us to repentance, and Christ's saving grace strengthens us to watch. 2 Peter 3:9–14; 1 Thessalonians 5:6–11.

The Doctrine of Hell and Judgement

Fifteen Solemn Truths about the End of Those Who Die in Their Sins

Jesus ends His warning about the shut door with this command: "Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour in which the Son of Man is coming" (Matthew 25:13, NKJV). The danger is not imaginary, and the consequence is not temporary. Those who persist in unbelief, refuse repentance, and neglect the Savior's warnings are moving toward a judgment they cannot cancel. These truths tell us why watchfulness must never become a casual interest.[17]

1. Death will not release the sinner from accountability.

The grave cannot hide anyone from Christ. Those who die in their sins will hear His summons and rise to judgment; death ends their earthly opportunities, but it does not erase their guilt. The person who has spent his life avoiding God will finally stand before Him with nowhere else to go. (John 5:28–29; Hebrews 9:27; Revelation 20:12–13.)

2. The hidden life will be exposed before a perfectly righteous Judge.

God will judge the secrets people concealed, the deeds they excused, and the words they thought would never matter again. Reputation will not rewrite the record, and human approval will not overturn the truth. The sins successfully hidden from everyone else have never been hidden from Him. (Ecclesiastes 12:14; Romans 2:16; Matthew 12:36–37.)

3. Delayed preparation will end at a door that will not reopen.

The foolish virgins finally seek entrance, but their urgency comes after the bridegroom has arrived. Their pleading cannot recover the opportunity they neglected:

> "And while they went to buy, the bridegroom came; and they that were ready went in with him to the marriage: and the door was shut. Afterward came also the other virgins, saying, Lord, Lord, open to us. But he answered and said, Verily I say unto you, I know you not." (Matthew 25:10–12, KJV.)

They expected to enter. They addressed him as Lord. Yet they remained outside. An intention to repent someday offers no protection against the arrival of the day when preparation is over.[17]

4. The condemned will lose the blessed fellowship of Christ and His kingdom.

The King's sentence removes them from the welcome, joy, and inheritance enjoyed by His people. They will not merely lose possessions or earthly opportunities; they will be excluded from the saving fellowship for which they were created. To reject Christ is to lose the One in whom every lasting good is found. (Matthew 25:41; 2 Thessalonians 1:7–10.)

5. Outer darkness will replace the joy they presumed would be theirs.

Jesus contrasts entrance into the Master's joy with expulsion into darkness. The unfaithful servant does not receive a quieter place at the celebration; he is cast outside it. The image strips away the comforting assumption that everyone will somehow enjoy a place

in God's kingdom despite refusing His rule. (Matthew 25:21, 30; Matthew 22:13.)

6. Weeping and gnashing of teeth reveal terrible anguish.

Christ describes distress that cannot be reduced to mild disappointment or peaceful resignation. Those under judgment will not discover that His warnings were exaggerated. The pleasures that made obedience seem inconvenient will offer no comfort when their end is grief and anguish before the Judge. (Matthew 13:41–42; Matthew 22:13; Matthew 25:30.)

7. The unquenchable fire declares a punishment its victims cannot extinguish.

Jesus joins the fire that is not quenched with the worm that does not die. His words make surrendering a cherished sin immeasurably better than keeping it and entering hell:

> "And if thine eye offend thee, pluck it out: it is better for thee to enter into the kingdom of God with one eye, than having two eyes to be cast into hell fire: Where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched." (Mark 9:47–48, KJV.)

This is a summons to decisive separation from sin, not physical injury. Whatever obedience costs now, continuing in rebellion will cost more.[18]

8. Final judgment reaches the whole person, body and soul.

Jesus warns that God has authority over both body and soul in hell, and He teaches that the dead will rise to face His judgment. The body once used to serve sinful desires will not remain forever beyond accountability in the grave. The whole person who rejected God must answer to Him. (Matthew 10:28; John 5:28–29.)

9. Scripture portrays conscious suffering after death, not relief through oblivion.

In Jesus' account of the rich man and Lazarus, the rich man remains aware of his misery and begs for the smallest relief:

> "And in hell he lift up his eyes, being in torments, and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom. And he cried and

> said, Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame." (Luke 16:23–24, KJV.)

This scene describes Hades before the final resurrection. Its warning is unmistakable: the man's earthly abundance has ended, but his conscious existence and suffering have not. He who once enjoyed so much now pleads for a drop of water.[19]

10. No human power can carry the condemned from torment into comfort.

The rich man cannot buy passage, command assistance, or cross the gulf by pleading. The answer reveals the fixed boundary:

> "And beside all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed: so that they which would pass from hence to you cannot; neither can they pass to us, that would come from thence." (Luke 16:26, KJV.)

Jesus gives no permission to promise another opportunity beyond death to those who persist in rejecting God's Word now. The time to heed His warning is while we are hearing it.[19]

11. The punishment is the righteous wrath of God against unrepented evil.

Hell is more than the natural disappointment of a wasted life. It is divine judgment upon rebellion. Paul describes the impenitent as accumulating wrath for the day of judgment, when indignation, distress, and anguish fall upon those who obey unrighteousness. Every day of refused repentance adds seriousness to the account; it does not wear down the Judge's opposition to sin. (Romans 2:5–9; Hebrews 10:26–31.)

12. Revelation describes torment without rest for those who give their allegiance to the beast.

The passage names the objects of this warning, those who worship the beast and receive his mark, and then announces their punishment:

> "The same shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out without mixture into the cup of his indignation; and

> he shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels, and in the presence of the Lamb: And the smoke of their torment ascendeth up for ever and ever: and they have no rest day nor night, who worship the beast and his image, and whosoever receiveth the mark of his name." (Revelation 14:10–11, KJV.)

Compromise may promise safety from persecution, but this warning exposes its final cost. The next verse commends the endurance of the saints who keep God's commandments and their faith in Jesus. End-times watchfulness must reckon with both sides of that contrast.[20]

13. Greater knowledge rejected brings greater punishment.

The servant who knew his master's will and refused to prepare is more accountable because he knew. Jesus says:

> "And that servant, which knew his lord's will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes. But he that knew not, and did commit things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few stripes. For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required." (Luke 12:47–48, KJV, excerpt.)

The sermons we heard, the warnings we understood, and the truth we could explain will not excuse our refusal to obey. Greater light is a greater privilege, and rejecting it is a greater offense.[21]

14. Resurrection will expose the wicked to everlasting shame and contempt.

Daniel contrasts the awakening to everlasting life with an awakening to shame and everlasting contempt. The sinner will not emerge from death vindicated by the admiration he once enjoyed. God's judgment will disclose the disgrace that pride concealed, and no applause from this world will restore the honor forfeited through rebellion against Him. (Daniel 12:2; John 5:28–29.)

15. The final sentence is everlasting punishment in the lake of fire.

Jesus places everlasting punishment beside eternal life in His

account of the final judgment. Revelation identifies the lake of fire as the second death:

> "And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire." (Revelation 20:14–15, KJV.)

This is not a temporary exclusion that will eventually give way to welcome. The final judgment does not begin another period of probation. The condemned lose the kingdom, endure God's righteous punishment, and have no promised end to their sentence. That is why Christ commands us to watch before He comes. (Matthew 25:46.)[22]

These truths should make us earnest, not cruel. They concern people we love, people we teach, and people who may be reading these words while assuming they are safe. We must not conceal the danger, and we must not conceal the Savior. Christ receives sinners who come to Him. Turn from the sin you have been defending and trust Him now. The warning is reaching you while there is still time to respond. (John 6:37; 2 Corinthians 6:2.)

The shut door warns us about the end, but it demands obedience now. We cannot leave these warnings on the page and return unchanged to the habits that dull our souls. Watchfulness begins where we live: with the temptation we excuse, the truth we neglect, and the prayer we postpone. Christ has required this vigilance of every generation of His people. The final trials will intensify the danger; they will not introduce our duty. Before we consider that greater pressure, we must understand the watchfulness required throughout the Christian life. The question is not only whether we expect Christ to return, but whether His promised return governs how we live today.

Notes

1. Short Scripture quotations are from the New King James Version (NKJV); extended passages are from the King James Version (KJV). Translation labels identify each quotation. Scripture taken from the New King James Version®. Copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson. Used by permission. All rights reserved. The chapter draws upon principal readiness warnings and related final-judgment texts; it does not claim to quote every biblical passage about judgment.
2. Matthew 25:1–13. Verse 5 says that all ten virgins slept; the decisive distinction is preparedness. The parable does not explicitly identify the oil with one particular spiritual reality. The application concerns personal readiness for Christ, not an elaborate allegory of every detail.
3. C. H. Spurgeon, "Number 2,500; or, Entrance and Exclusion," preached May 21, 1885, Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit, volume 43, section II, discussion of the finality of exclusion. Quotation verified against the Spurgeon Library transcription; nested quotation marks have been adjusted typographically. https://www.spurgeon.org/sermons/number-2500-or-entrance-and-exclusion
4. Luke 13:23–30. The immediate question concerns the number of those saved. Jesus directs the hearers toward entering while opportunity remains and exposes reliance upon proximity to Him without repentance. This passage reinforces the closed-door warning but does not contain the word "watch."
5. Matthew 24:42–51 and Luke 12:45–48. Matthew assigns the evil servant a portion with hypocrites; Luke says unbelievers. Their severe judgment must not be reduced to the loss of a reward described for a saved builder in 1 Corinthians 3:15.
6. Matthew 25:14–30. A talent in the parable is an entrusted sum of money, not the modern English term for a personal ability. The servants receiving five and two talents both receive the same commendation in verses 21 and 23. The application is faithfulness with what the master entrusts, not a claim that financial success purchases salvation.
7. J. C. Ryle, Expository Thoughts on the Gospels: St. Matthew, exposition of Matthew 25:14–30, concluding paragraph. Quotation checked against the public-domain StudyLight transcription. https://www.studylight.org/commentaries/eng/ryl/matthew-25.html
8. Hebrews 2:1–3 and Matthew 7:21–23. The quotation from Hebrews 2:3 is the opening question, not the whole verse. Matthew 7 identifies the excluded as workers of iniquity whom Christ never knew; it does not describe the loss of salvation through an isolated lapse of attention.
9. Revelation 3:1–6. Christ's threatened coming upon Sardis may denote a punitive visitation; it should not automatically be equated with the final advent in every detail. The application here concerns His searching knowledge, the command to watch and repent, and the danger of a living reputation concealing spiritual death. Mark 13:33–37 and Luke 21:34–36 directly connect vigilance with readiness for the coming Lord.
10. Matthew 25:31–46. The passage connects the King's verdict with the treatment of His brethren and concludes with everlasting punishment and eternal life. The King identifies Himself with His brethren and judges their treatment as treatment of Himself.
11. 2 Thessalonians 1:7–10. The passage explicitly contrasts relief for afflicted believers with punishment upon those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel.
12. Revelation 20:11–15. "Hell" in verses 13–14 renders Hades, which is itself cast into the lake of fire; the terms should not be treated as interchangeable at every occurrence. Additional explicit final-judgment passages include Revelation 21:7–8 and Matthew 13:40–43, 47–50.

13. Mark 9:43. Christ's severe bodily imagery teaches decisive rejection of sin, not physical self-mutilation. The same warning continues through verses 45–48. Its immediate subject is the danger of sin and hell, not a separate use of the verb "watch."
14. 2 Peter 3:9–14. The KJV expression "holy conversation" is rendered "holy conduct" in the NKJV. Peter connects God's patience with repentance, the coming day with holiness, and the promised new creation with diligence. The cosmic fire of verse 10 is not itself called the lake of fire.
15. Thomas Watson, The Ten Commandments, section 4.2, "Repentance," discussion of counterfeit repentance, subsection [2], "Legal terrors." Quotation checked against the Christian Classics Ethereal Library transcription. https://ccel.org/ccel/watson/commandments/commandments.vi.ii.html
16. 1 Thessalonians 5:1–11. Paul distinguishes those overtaken in darkness from believers who are children of the day, commands watchfulness and sobriety, and grounds hope in salvation through Christ. The waking/sleeping language in verse 10 is commonly understood as living or dying and must not casually be equated with spiritual negligence in verse 6. John 6:37 supplies Christ's promise to receive those who come to Him; 1 Peter 2:24 joins His sin-bearing death with a life of righteousness.
17. The ten virgins and final judgment passages connect readiness, exclusion, and everlasting punishment. The opening brief quotation uses the NKJV wording of Matthew 25:13. All ten virgins slept; the decisive distinction is readiness, not physical sleeplessness.
18. Mark 9:43–48 supplies the fire-and-worm imagery. The application rejects sin; it does not prescribe bodily harm or invent details about the mechanics of punishment.
19. Luke 16:19–31 distinguishes the rich man's torment from Lazarus's comfort. Hades in this account should not be confused with the final lake of fire in Revelation 20.
20. Revelation 14:9–12 explicitly identifies beast-worshippers as the subjects of this judgment and follows the warning with the saints' perseverance.
21. Luke 12:45–48 connects knowledge, preparation, conduct, and measured accountability. The quotation stops within verse 48; it does not reproduce the entire verse.
22. Revelation 20:11–15, read with Matthew 25:46, supports the finality of judgment. These principles concern persistent unbelief and impenitence, not the claim that an isolated lapse in a believer's vigilance earns damnation.

CHAPTER 4

Watchfulness Belongs to Every Generation

Living Ready for Christ before the Final Crisis

"Therefore let us not sleep, as others do, but let us watch and be sober." (1 Thessalonians 5:6, NKJV.)[1]

A crisis can arrive in a moment. The habits we carry into it have usually been growing for years. Consider a believer suddenly pressured to conceal the truth at work. He wants to think of this as his first serious test. Yet he has been adjusting the truth in smaller matters whenever honesty threatened his comfort. The demand is new in its severity; the temptation is familiar.

Something similar can happen in our preparation for the end times. We imagine a future hour when the choice will become unmistakable and we will stand firmly for Christ. Meanwhile, we excuse compromises that appear too small to matter. We expect danger to make us serious after comfort has taught us to postpone obedience.

The final crisis does not create our need for watchfulness; it exposes whether we have been watchful. Greater pressure reaches convictions, affections, and habits already taking shape. It may uncover a neglected weakness or reveal a faith that has learned to obey at a cost. We must not assume that the arrival of trouble will supply the preparation we have refused.

This is why watchfulness belongs to every generation. No Christian has permission to neglect his soul until world events become

sufficiently alarming. The Lord's commands already address us. The question is whether we are answering them before the cost of obedience rises.

The Command Has Already Been Given

Jesus describes servants entrusted with work while their master is away:

> "For the Son of man is as a man taking a far journey, who left his house, and gave authority to his servants, and to every man his work, and commanded the porter to watch. Watch ye therefore: for ye know not when the master of the house cometh, at even, or at midnight, or at the cockcrowing, or in the morning: Lest coming suddenly he find you sleeping." (Mark 13:34–36, KJV.)[2]

The servants do not receive their assignments when the master returns. They receive them before he leaves. His arrival will reveal what they have done with the responsibilities already placed in their hands.

That order matters. We sometimes want further information about the future before giving our full attention to a present command. We want to know how close the danger is, how much time remains, and whether the circumstances justify unusual seriousness. But a servant does not need another message from his master before carrying out the instructions he already possesses.

Christ closes His teaching with a summons that reaches beyond the few disciples listening: "And what I say to you, I say to all: Watch!" (Mark 13:37, NKJV.) Every generation must receive that command as its own. It is not held in reserve for the Christians who finally identify themselves as the last generation.

J. C. Ryle writes of true Christians, "They should strive to be always ready for their Master's return."[3] Always ready means that obedience cannot depend upon the level of alarm we feel. A quiet season does not release us from the Master's authority any more than a frightening season places us under it for the first time.

Imagine a servant leaving his assigned work untouched because he has heard no approaching footsteps. Each quiet hour becomes his excuse for another quiet hour of neglect. Yet the silence has changed nothing about his responsibility. He has mistaken the absence of an interruption for permission to disobey.

We do the same when we postpone repentance until something shakes us. The unresolved wrong, the neglected prayer, and the duty

we keep evading do not become serious only when the world becomes dangerous. Christ has already spoken. His word is sufficient reason to respond.

The Last Days Have Begun but Have Not Ended

Some believers hear the words last days and think only of the final years before Christ returns. Others know that the apostles were already living in the last days and conclude that little remains to be said about readiness. Scripture gives us no reason to make either mistake. Christ's first coming began the era in which we now live; His return will bring it to its appointed fulfillment.

At Pentecost, Peter explained the outpouring of the Spirit by pointing to Joel's prophecy. Acts 2:16–17 (KJV): "But this is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel; And it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh."[4] Peter was identifying God's work before his hearers' eyes. The last days had already begun.

Hebrews makes the same point from another direction. The God who spoke through the prophets has spoken to us in these last days through His Son. Peter likewise describes Christ as manifested in the last times for His people's sake.[5] These passages prevent us from treating the last days as an era into which the church has only recently entered. The coming of the Son, not our assessment of the latest crisis, establishes where we stand in God's saving purpose.

Yet the Savior who came has promised to come again. His death and resurrection are accomplished; the resurrection of His people and the renewal of creation still await their fulfillment. An era can have begun without having reached its end. We live after the decisive victory of the cross, but we still bury believers whose bodies await the victory of resurrection. The distinction reaches the graveside, not merely the classroom.[6]

It also helps us read Paul's warning about perilous times. Second Timothy 3:1 (KJV) says, "This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come." Paul then describes sins Timothy must already recognize and commands him to turn away from those who practice them. The warning had an immediate claim upon Timothy; it was not an instruction reserved for a distant generation. But its immediate relevance does not mean that the danger expired when Timothy died. The evils Paul names continue to threaten the church, and his counsel

directs us to steadfast faith and the Scriptures rather than confidence in our ability to date the final crisis.[7]

The long wait does not weaken that counsel. Second Peter 3 answers those who treat the passing years as evidence against Christ's promise. Peter directs them to God's patience and then insists that the Day will come. He carries the argument into holy conduct, godliness, and readiness to be found at peace with the Lord.[8] Time has not made obedience unnecessary. It has given us further opportunity to obey.

We do not need to prove that we are the last generation before receiving the commands given to every generation. Neither should we let the length of the Christian era make Christ's coming feel unreal. The believers who first heard these warnings needed to watch, and so do we. The question before us is whether the time God has given is making us more faithful or merely more accustomed to postponing faithfulness.

Do Not Wait for Darkness to Make You Live in the Light

Paul tells the Thessalonians how the approaching day must affect them:

> "But ye, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief. Ye are all the children of light, and the children of the day: we are not of the night, nor of darkness. Therefore let us not sleep, as do others; but let us watch and be sober." (1 Thessalonians 5:4–6, KJV.)[9]

The believers' duty is already established by their relationship to the light. Paul does not tell them to wait until the surrounding darkness becomes unbearable. They must live now as people who know the truth about God, sin, and Christ's coming.

There is a practical danger in waiting for conditions to deteriorate before we become careful. During the waiting, we are still learning ways of thinking and acting. We are either receiving the truth or finding reasons to resist it. An uneventful month can contain a great deal of spiritual movement, though nothing dramatic appears on the surface.

A person who repeatedly conceals an inconvenient fact is becoming more practiced in concealment. A person who receives correction and admits the wrong is learning to value truth above saving face. Neither response remains sealed inside that one occasion. Each helps establish how the person is accustomed to answering the claims of God.

Such choices matter to end-times readiness because greater pressure

often strikes an existing attachment. The craving for acceptance becomes more dangerous when public hostility increases. The love of comfort becomes more costly when faithfulness threatens security. The unwillingness to be corrected becomes more perilous when error arrives in persuasive language.

We must therefore resist those sins before circumstances give them greater force. Paul calls the children of light to live awake now. He does not describe an emergency conversion from ordinary carelessness to sudden faithfulness when the final alarm sounds.

Paul also names the protection the waiting church must wear. He tells them to be sober, "putting on the breastplate of faith and love, and as a helmet the hope of salvation" (1 Thessalonians 5:8, NKJV).[10]

Faith, love, and hope must be exercised before the test becomes severe. Faith is practiced when we believe God's word against a convenient excuse. Love is practiced when another person's good requires something of us. Hope is exercised when obedience costs a present advantage and we continue because our future belongs to Christ.

These are not small matters merely because they happen in ordinary circumstances. They are occasions for living by the very graces Paul calls our armor. We cannot strengthen readiness for the last days by neglecting them while pursuing more information about the last days.

What the Passing Years Require

The lapse of time can quietly alter our response to a warning. What once arrested our attention becomes familiar. Because Christ has not yet returned, we may begin to live as though His return has grown less certain. Paul teaches the opposite conclusion:

> "And that, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep: for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed. The night is far spent, the day is at hand: let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armour of light." (Romans 13:11–12, KJV.)[11]

The passing years bring the completion of salvation nearer, not farther away. The church has not received an extension of permission to be careless. Its hope is advancing toward fulfillment. Paul uses that prospect to press immediate obedience upon believers who were living long before our generation.

Their duty did not depend upon having our circumstances. Nor does ours depend upon first settling every disputed question about

the final crisis. The approaching day already gives weight to the life we are living.

Paul makes the response concrete:

> "Let us walk honestly, as in the day; not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envying. But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof." (Romans 13:13–14, KJV.)

The older terms include sexual immorality and shameless indulgence. But Paul also names strife and envy. His warning enters the respectable home where resentment is carefully preserved and the church conversation where rivalry disguises itself as concern.

The final crisis will not be the first occasion on which such sins threaten faithfulness. A heart accustomed to nursing hostility will carry that hostility into a harsher world. A person who feeds envy during prosperity will not find deprivation an easy cure. Greater trouble may expose what calmer circumstances allowed us to conceal.

Paul therefore commands us to stop providing for sinful desires. We must not arrange access, opportunity, and excuses for the very things that weaken our obedience. The purpose is not to congratulate ourselves on discipline. It is to stop protecting an enemy of the faithfulness Christ requires.

What are you preserving now that would make obedience harder if its cost increased tomorrow? The question reaches beneath whether we expect difficult days. It asks whether we are preparing our lives to answer them.

Good Intentions Cannot Replace Present Dependence

Gethsemane exposes the distance between anticipating courage and preparing for temptation. Peter had declared that he would not deny his Lord even if faithfulness cost him his life. Yet when Jesus returned from prayer, He found the disciples sleeping. He addressed the weakness their intentions had not removed:

> "Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak." (Matthew 26:41, NKJV.)[12]

Peter's confidence looked forward to a costly test. Christ's command required something of him in the hour before it. That is

precisely where our own preparation can fail. We may sincerely intend to stand when the threat is great while neglecting the dependence Christ requires before the threat arrives.

The Lord's instruction was not merely to strengthen their resolve. They needed to watch and pray. They had to take their weakness seriously enough to seek His help rather than assume that love, intention, and confidence made vigilance unnecessary.

John Owen writes, "he that would be little in temptation, let him be much in prayer."[13] Prayer before the crisis confesses a need we must not wait for failure to discover. It brings our present weakness to God instead of reserving dependence for the moment when our confidence collapses.

This should sober the believer who imagines himself firm under persecution but will not risk mild disapproval now. It should also search the believer who speaks of surrendering everything for Christ while refusing a present sacrifice of convenience. The future promise sounds strong; the present refusal tells us where attention is needed.

Scripture gives no encouragement to trust our record as though it made us incapable of falling:

> "Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall. There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it." (1 Corinthians 10:12–13, KJV.)[14]

The warning guards preparation from becoming pride. Years of discipline do not make us our own preservers. God's faithfulness remains our hope, and taking heed remains our duty. We prepare for stronger trials by learning dependence, not by building a flattering estimate of ourselves.

A neglected past is therefore a call to repent, not a reason to surrender. God's grace is not exhausted because we have been careless. We must seek Him now and obey the word He gives us now. The mercy that enables a fresh beginning gives us no reason to postpone it.

The Heart Is Becoming More Teachable or More Resistant

Hebrews shows why postponement is dangerous even before outward pressure increases:

> "Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God. But exhort one another daily, while it is called To day; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin." (Hebrews 3:12–13, KJV.)[15]

Sin works through deceit. It gives disobedience an explanation that makes it seem reasonable. This command can wait. This resentment is justified. This warning is meant for someone else. The excuse relieves the immediate discomfort, and the heart becomes a little more accustomed to refusing the truth.

Repeated refusal can make the next refusal easier. A word that once pierced the conscience begins to irritate it instead. The hearer may still recognize the teaching as biblical while resisting its application to himself. He has not necessarily changed his stated beliefs, but he is becoming harder to reach with them.

The wilderness history behind Hebrews gives this warning its weight. People who witnessed God's works still resisted His voice. Their extraordinary privileges did not remove their responsibility to believe and obey. The readers must therefore heed the warning personally rather than admire it as a lesson about someone else's failure.

Notice the timing of the remedy. They are to exhort one another daily. A hardening heart must not be left undisturbed until some future emergency makes its condition obvious. God sends needed words into ordinary days because the danger is already at work there.

This connection to end-times preparation is direct. A believer who habitually dismisses correction is not preparing to discern persuasive error. He is learning to reject whatever threatens his preferred conclusion. If he carries that resistance into a period of deepening deception, the danger will meet a heart already practiced in defending itself against truth.

By contrast, receiving a faithful correction now is an act of preparation. We learn to let Scripture overturn our explanations. We confess rather than conceal. We discover that admitting wrong does not destroy us, and that submitting to truth is better than preserving an appearance of being right.

Hebrews carries this present response all the way to the end:

> "For we are made partakers of Christ, if we hold the beginning of our confidence stedfast unto the end; While it is said, To day

> if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts, as in the provocation." (Hebrews 3:14–15, KJV.)

The end is before us, but today is where we answer God. We cannot obey tomorrow's command in advance. We can cease resisting the command He has already brought home to our conscience. That is where perseverance must become more than a subject we affirm.

Use the Time You Have

Every generation has received time in which to hear, repent, believe, and obey. No generation has received permission to waste that time because a greater trial may come later. The ordinary days are part of our preparation, not an interruption of it.

The final crisis does not create our need for watchfulness; it exposes whether we have been watchful. It will not make cherished sins harmless, turn self-confidence into dependence, or make a resistant heart teachable simply by increasing the pressure. Those are matters we must bring before God now.

We do so with hope, not with confidence in an unblemished record. Paul grounds the waiting church's future in the Savior:

> "For God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ, Who died for us, that, whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with him." (1 Thessalonians 5:9–10, KJV.)

Christ has not given us this hope so that we may neglect His commands. He gives it so that we may follow Him without surrendering to fear. Take the next act of obedience seriously. Receive the correction you need. Seek His help where your confidence has concealed weakness. The Lord who will meet you at the end is the Lord whose voice you must hear today.

Questions for Further Study

1. Read Mark 13:32–37. When do the servants receive their responsibilities? How does that order challenge the belief that earnest obedience can wait until the master's return appears close?
2. Read 1 Thessalonians 5:4–8. What present obligations follow from belonging to the light? How can ordinary choices prepare a believer to exercise faith, love, and hope under greater pressure?

3. Read Romans 13:11–14. What conclusion does Paul draw from the passing of time? Which sinful provisions might weaken faithfulness before an extraordinary crisis ever arrives?
4. Read Matthew 26:31–41. Compare Peter's promise about a future test with Christ's command in the garden. What does the passage expose about sincere intentions and present dependence?
5. Read 1 Corinthians 10:12–13 and Hebrews 3:12–15. How can both self-confidence and repeated resistance leave a believer vulnerable? What responses do these passages require now?
6. Read 1 Thessalonians 5:9–11. Why must preparation remain rooted in Christ rather than confidence in a record of discipline? How should His saving work encourage a careless believer to repent without postponement?

Practical Applications

1. Stop waiting for a crisis to make one neglected duty urgent.

Name a clear act of obedience you have postponed. Take the first honest step today, whether that means confessing a wrong, fulfilling a responsibility, or receiving correction. Identify the excuse that has allowed delay, and answer it with the command of Scripture. Christ does not need to send a crisis before His word deserves your attention. (Mark 13:32–37; Romans 13:11–14.)

2. Examine a present compromise in light of greater pressure.

Consider one recurring choice in which comfort, approval, or advantage has outweighed obedience. Ask how continuing that pattern could weaken you if the cost of faithfulness increased. Confess the compromise, stop making provision for it, and seek God's help for the next faithful response. Do not replace dependence with a promise that you will simply be stronger next time. (Romans 13:13–14; Matthew 26:41; 1 Corinthians 10:12–13.)

3. Answer a correction you have been resisting.

Recall a warning from Scripture, faithful preaching, or mature counsel that you have repeatedly explained away. Examine whether the correction is sound. Where it is, acknowledge the wrong and act upon it rather than rehearsing your defense. If you remain uncertain,

seek wise counsel with a willingness to be corrected. Becoming more responsive to truth now is part of preparation for more difficult days. (Hebrews 3:12–15.)

Chapter Axioms

1. Christ assigns the duty before the crisis; His people must not postpone obedience until danger becomes unmistakable. Mark 13:32–37.
2. Quiet circumstances do not suspend the obligation of the children of light to watch and be sober. 1 Thessalonians 5:4–6.
3. The faith, love, and hope needed under severe pressure must be exercised in present obedience. 1 Thessalonians 5:8.
4. Providing for sin now weakens the faithfulness required as the day approaches. Romans 13:11–14.
5. Preparation requires continuing dependence upon God, not confidence that sincere intentions or past discipline make failure impossible. Matthew 26:41; 1 Corinthians 10:12–13.
6. Receiving God's word today resists the hardening that threatens perseverance to the end. Hebrews 3:12–15.

The Perseverance of the Saints

Fifteen Core Principles

Preservation is God's work of keeping His people in Christ. Perseverance is the believer's continuing in faith, repentance, holiness, and obedience until the end. They are inseparable, but they are not interchangeable: God preserves His people by sustaining their perseverance, not by making perseverance unnecessary. We do not earn salvation by enduring; we endure because His saving grace continues to work in us.

1. We persevere because God preserves us.

Everyone truly brought to Christ will be kept in His grace to the end; no true believer will finally perish. He guards them through faith, sustaining their trust in Christ rather than carrying them to heaven in settled unbelief. When approaching troubles expose our weakness,

the answer is not confidence in our stamina but dependence upon His keeping power.[16]

> 1 Peter 1:5 (NKJV): "who are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time."

2. The promise belongs to Christ's sheep, not to an empty profession.

Jesus joins the safety of His sheep to their hearing His voice and following Him. A remembered decision, a baptismal certificate, or years of church attendance cannot make persistent rejection of His word safe. The question is not merely whether we once claimed Christ, but whether we are trusting and following the Shepherd now.[17]

John 10:27–28 (KJV): "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand." See also 1 John 2:19.

3. The Father's saving purpose does not stop short of glory.

Paul carries the same people from God's purpose through calling and justification to glorification; none disappears between His mercy and its promised completion. Our preservation rests upon His unchanging love, not upon a divine decision that must be renewed whenever our circumstances change. The world may become unrecognizable, but the Father's purpose for His children will not.[18]

> Romans 8:30 (KJV): "Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified."

4. Christ's intercession secures the people His blood redeemed.

The Savior who died for us lives to intercede for us. Our endurance is not an unfinished part of salvation that His sacrifice leaves us to purchase; His continuing priestly ministry secures our final salvation. When accusations grow loud and courage grows faint, remember that the voice pleading for you before the Father belongs to the risen Son.[19]

Hebrews 7:25 (KJV): "Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them." See also Romans 8:32–34.

5. The indwelling Spirit keeps us for the day of redemption.

The Holy Spirit is not a passing visitor whose presence depends upon the steadiness of our emotions. He seals believers for redemption, and the very verse declaring that security commands us not to grieve Him. His abiding presence gives us both confidence for the future and a powerful reason to put away today's bitterness, falsehood, and corrupt speech.[20]

Ephesians 4:30 (NKJV): "And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption." See also Ephesians 4:25–32; John 14:16–17.

6. God's covenant supplies the fear that keeps His people near Him.

God's covenant promise reaches deeper than protection from enemies outside us: He puts His fear within us. He preserves His people by making His displeasure weighty and His fellowship precious, so that grace changes what they love and dread. Reverence is therefore not the enemy of security; it is one of the gifts by which God keeps us from wandering.[21]

> Jeremiah 32:40 (KJV): "And I will make an everlasting covenant with them, that I will not turn away from them, to do them good; but I will put my fear in their hearts, that they shall not depart from me."

7. Preserving grace produces active obedience, not spiritual idleness.

God's work within us is the reason to act, not an excuse to wait. We must resist temptation, confess sin, and obey the command before us because He supplies both the desire and the strength to please Him. A man who refuses today's obedience while waiting for extraordinary courage tomorrow has misunderstood how grace prepares a Christian.[22]

> Philippians 2:12–13 (KJV): "Wherefore, my beloved, as ye 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. For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure."

8. Perseverance includes holiness, not merely survival of a religious claim.

Christ saves His people from sin's dominion as well as its condemnation. Holiness does not purchase our place in heaven, but everyone whom Christ brings there is being taught to hate the sin that once ruled him. We cannot call ourselves ready to meet a holy Savior while defending the very practices His word commands us to forsake.[23]

Hebrews 12:14 (NKJV): "Pursue peace with all people, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord:" See also Titus 2:11–14; Romans 6:14.

9. Scripture's warnings are instruments of God's keeping care.

God's warnings do not contradict His promises; they wake His people to the dangers from which He preserves them. Sin deceives before it hardens, which is why believers need correction while a compromise can still look reasonable. Receive the warning that searches your conscience as a mercy, not as an interruption of your assurance.[24]

Hebrews 3:13 (NKJV): "but exhort one another daily, while it is called 'Today,' lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin." See also Hebrews 3:12–14; 10:23–25.

10. God ordinarily sustains enduring faith through ordinary means.

The Word, prayer, fellowship, and the Lord's appointed ordinances are not accessories for unusually devoted Christians. Through these means He feeds the faith that will be tested when obedience becomes costly. Neglecting them while expecting to stand in a crisis is refusing nourishment while planning a long journey.[25]

Acts 2:42 (NKJV): "And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers." See also John 17:17; Hebrews 10:24–25.

11. True believers can fall grievously and suffer grievous consequences.

Perseverance does not mean that a Christian cannot disgrace his confession, wound others, or bring painful discipline upon himself. Peter's denial should destroy our confidence in untested boasts, and David's fall should silence every suggestion that forgiven sin is harmless. Watchfulness is necessary precisely because remaining sin can do terrible damage in someone whom God will ultimately restore.[26]

1 Corinthians 10:12 (NKJV): "Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall." See also Matthew 26:69–75; 2 Samuel 12:9–14.

12. God restores His fallen children through repentance.

Before Peter denied Him, Christ spoke of both the preservation of his faith and his return. The promise was not that Peter could settle comfortably in denial, but that his failure would not have the final word. God's keeping mercy brings His wandering children back to confession and renewed obedience, not to a theological excuse for remaining where they fell.[27]

Luke 22:32 (NKJV): "But I have prayed for you, that your faith should not fail; and when you have returned to Me, strengthen your brethren." See also Luke 22:61–62; John 21:15–19.

13. Assurance may be shaken without Christ's hold being broken.

A believer may lose the felt comfort of God's favor without losing the Savior in whom he trusts. Scripture directs the God-fearing person who walks in darkness to lean upon God, not to manufacture a brighter mood before coming to Him. The trembling Christian must look to Christ's promise; the careless professor must not mistake indifference for peace.[28]

Isaiah 50:10 (KJV): "Who is among you that feareth the LORD, that obeyeth the voice of his servant, that walketh in darkness, and hath no light? let him trust in the name of the LORD, and stay upon his God." See also Romans 8:16; 1 John 5:13.

14. Preservation promises final salvation, not escape from suffering.

Paul names persecution, hunger, danger, and the sword among the troubles that cannot separate believers from Christ's love. Their presence is not evidence that His keeping has failed; He may preserve a Christian's faith through the very trial that takes his life. Readiness for the last days therefore means willingness to remain faithful to Christ, not certainty that faithfulness will leave us comfortable or alive.[29]

Romans 8:35 (KJV): "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?" See also Romans 8:36–39; Revelation 2:10.

15. We continue to the end, looking to the Savior who will receive us.

Perseverance ends not merely with the exhaustion of our trials but with our joyful entrance into Christ's presence. The One who commands us to watch is able to bring us safely to that meeting, cleansed of every sin that now makes vigilance necessary. Keep looking to Him, keep obeying Him, and let the certainty of His faithfulness strengthen yours.[30]

Jude 24 (KJV): "Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy," See also Jude 20–25; Philippians 1:6; 1 Thessalonians 5:23–24.

The duty has always been ours, but the pressure will not always remain the same. Jesus warned of conditions in which hearts would become burdened and people would be overtaken unready. We must now hear that warning in Luke 21:34–36. Having considered the preparation that must begin before the crisis, we turn to the intensified dangers that make such preparation urgent: pleasures that dull the soul, cares that overwhelm it, and the approaching day before which Christ commands us to watch and pray.

Notes

1. Short quotations are from the New King James Version (NKJV); extended quotations are from the King James Version (KJV). Scripture taken from the New King James Version®. Copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson. Used by permission. All rights reserved. The opening quotation is 1 Thessalonians 5:6.
2. Mark 13:32–37. The comparison entrusts work to servants while withholding the hour of the master's arrival. The application concerns continuing responsibility and readiness; it does not establish a detailed chronology of the discourse.
3. J. C. Ryle, Expository Thoughts on the Gospels: St. Matthew, exposition of Matthew 24:36–51. The quoted sentence refers to true Christians and follows Ryle's watchman illustration and appeal to 1 Thessalonians 5:6. The excerpt is used for its teaching about continuing readiness, without adopting every eschatological conclusion in the surrounding discussion. https://ccel.org/ccel/ryle/matthew/matthew.xxiv.iv.html
4. Acts 2:16–17, KJV; Joel 2:28–32. The quotation contains verse 16 and the opening portion of verse 17; the excerpt's closing punctuation is adapted. It identifies Pentecost with the promised last-days outpouring without claiming that every detail of Joel's prophecy was exhausted at Pentecost.
5. Hebrews 1:1–2; 1 Peter 1:20, paraphrased. The latter identifies Christ as foreordained before the foundation of the world and manifested in the last times for His people.
6. 1 Corinthians 15:20–28, 50–57; Romans 8:18–25; 2 Peter 3:13. Distinguishes Christ's accomplished redemption from the future resurrection and renewal without imposing a disputed timetable.
7. 2 Timothy 3:1, KJV; 3:2–5, 10–17. The description of present relevance is grounded in Paul's direct instruction to Timothy; ongoing relevance is a theological application to the church, not a claim that every generation experiences identical conditions or intensity.
8. 2 Peter 3:3–14, especially verses 9–14, paraphrased. This passage answers scoffing, explains divine patience, announces the Day, and requires holy conduct. Adapted from original booklet sections III, V, and XV.
9. 1 Thessalonians 5:1–6. Paul contrasts believers' identity as children of light with the darkness of those overtaken by the day, then draws a moral conclusion: watch and be sober. The sleep of verse 6 is figurative moral carelessness, not ordinary bodily rest.
10. 1 Thessalonians 5:8–10. The application of the armor emphasizes cultivating Paul's named graces before pressure intensifies. Waking and sleeping in verse 10 are commonly understood as living and dying, in continuity with 4:13–18; this expression must not be used to cancel the command against moral sleep in 5:6.
11. Romans 13:11–14. Paul addresses believers and points toward the approaching completion of their salvation. His exhortation joins expectation with concrete holiness. The KJV expressions “chambering and wantonness” concern sexual immorality and licentious conduct; the list also includes strife and envy.
12. Matthew 26:31–41. The immediate setting is Gethsemane before Jesus' arrest, not a prediction of the final generation. Its teaching about willingness, weakness, prayer, and temptation supplies a principle of vigilance applicable throughout discipleship.
13. John Owen, Of Temptation, chapter V, paragraph beginning “Weigh these things severally.” The excerpt joins watchfulness with prayerful dependence in Owen's exposition of Matthew 26:41. Exact wording checked against the Christian

Classics Ethereal Library transcription. https://ccel.org/ccel/owen/temptation/temptation.i.viii.html

14. 1 Corinthians 10:1–14. Paul's warnings draw upon Israel's wilderness failures and lead into the command to flee idolatry. Verse 13 promises God's faithfulness and provision within temptation; it is not a promise that believers will never experience circumstances exceeding their unaided emotional or physical strength.
15. Hebrews 3:7–15. The writer draws upon Psalm 95 and the wilderness generation to warn against unbelief and hardness. The passage joins mutual exhortation, present responsiveness, and perseverance to the end. The chapter's examples of repeated excuses are pastoral applications of the stated danger of sin's deceitfulness, not additional details claimed for the historical narrative.
16. Westminster Confession of Faith 17.1, on the certain final perseverance of those accepted in Christ, called, and sanctified. Orthodox Presbyterian Church: https://www.opc.org/wcf.html
17. John Calvin, Institutes of the Christian Religion, III.24.6–7, Henry Beveridge translation, on Christ's protection of His sheep and the distinction between apparent adherence and saving faith. Primary text reproduced here: https://abv.hristianski.net/plib/CCEL/C/CALVIN/INSTITUT/BOOKIII/BKIII28.HTM
18. Westminster Confession 17.2, on the unchangeable divine purpose and love underlying perseverance. https://www.opc.org/wcf.html
19. Calvin, Institutes III.24.6, on Christ's prayer for His people; Westminster Confession 17.2, on the efficacy of His merit and intercession. https://abv.hristianski.net/plib/CCEL/C/CALVIN/INSTITUT/BOOKIII/BKIII28.HTM ; https://www.opc.org/wcf.html
20. Second London Baptist Confession (1689), 17.2, on the abiding Spirit. https://www.the1689confession.com/1689/chapter-17
21. Second London Baptist Confession 17.2 and its Jeremiah 32:40 proof text, on the covenant of grace. https://www.the1689confession.com/1689/chapter-17
22. Westminster Confession 16.3, on the Spirit's enabling and the believer's duty not to grow negligent. https://www.opc.org/wcf.html
23. Canons of Dort, Fifth Head, articles 1–2, on deliverance from sin's dominion alongside continuing conflict with remaining sin. https://www.ccel.org/creeds/canons-of-dort.html
24. Canons of Dort V.14 explicitly includes exhortations, threats, and promises among God's means of preservation. https://www.ccel.org/creeds/canons-of-dort.html
25. Canons of Dort V.14, on Scripture and sacraments as means of preservation; Acts 2:42 supplies the accompanying church practice of fellowship and prayers. https://www.ccel.org/creeds/canons-of-dort.html
26. Westminster Confession 17.3, on serious falls and their consequences; Canons of Dort V.4–5 names David and Peter. https://www.opc.org/wcf.html ; https://www.ccel.org/creeds/canons-of-dort.html
27. Second London Baptist Confession 17.3 explicitly joins renewed repentance to preservation through faith; Canons of Dort V.6–8 explains God's restoration of His fallen people. https://www.the1689confession.com/1689/chapter-17 ; https://www.ccel.org/creeds/canons-of-dort.html
28. Westminster Confession 18.2–4, on grounds of assurance and its interruption; Calvin, Institutes III.24.5, directs believers to Christ rather than speculation about God's hidden counsel. https://www.opc.org/wcf.html ; https://abv.hristianski.net/plib/CCEL/C/CALVIN/INSTITUT/BOOKIII/BKIII28.HTM
29. Canons of Dort V.12, on assurance producing patience and constancy in suffering.

The distinction between preservation and physical escape is drawn directly from Romans 8:35–39 and Revelation 2:10. https://www.ccel.org/creeds/canons-of-dort.html

30. Second London Baptist Confession 17.1, on final salvation and the believer's purchased inheritance; Jude 24 and 1 Thessalonians 5:23–24 supply the concluding promise. https://www.the1689confession.com/1689/chapter-17

CHAPTER 5

When the Pressure Intensifies

Take Heed to Yourselves

Luke 21:34 (NKJV): "But take heed to yourselves,"[1]

A Christian can become so occupied with what is happening to the world that he scarcely notices what is happening to his own heart. He recognizes hostility to the truth, follows reports of approaching trouble, and urges others to prepare. Yet his prayers grow hurried, his patience thins, and the people nearest him receive more of his irritation than his love. He may be right about dangers outside his home while overlooking the danger taking hold within it.

Imagine such a man finishing another evening of alarming reports. His Bible remains closed beside him. When his wife asks a simple question, he answers sharply. He tells himself that she does not understand how serious the times have become. But the seriousness of the times is precisely why he must answer her as a Christian. His concern about tomorrow has begun to excuse his disobedience today.

Jesus knew that approaching trouble could do more than threaten His disciples' safety. It could absorb their attention, exhaust their affections, and make them less responsive to the very words intended to preserve them. His warning therefore reaches beyond events to the people watching those events. Take heed to yourselves.

The previous chapter established that watchfulness belongs to every generation. Here the question becomes more searching: what happens when the pressures surrounding believers intensify? An accustomed pleasure may become a refuge from fear. A necessary

concern may become a consuming preoccupation. An alarming report may occupy the place that prayer should have held. The danger grows when trouble supplies a persuasive excuse for whatever the heart already wants to do.

Christ prepares us for that danger before it overtakes us. He does not merely tell us what the world will face. He tells us how to live before Him while we face it.

Hear the Warning in Its Setting

The discourse in Luke 21 begins with people admiring the temple's stones and offerings. Jesus announces that the building they regard with wonder will be demolished. Their question concerns when this will happen and what sign will precede it. His answer includes false claimants, wars, upheavals, persecution, Jerusalem surrounded by armies, distress among the nations, and the coming of the Son of Man.[2]

We must hear the distinctions Jesus makes. In verse 12 He speaks of persecution before the events just described. In verses 20–24 He gives instructions concerning Jerusalem and Judea. In verses 25–28 He speaks of worldwide distress and the Son of Man coming in glory.

Jesus Himself guards His hearers against premature certainty. They must refuse deceivers who announce their own claims in His name, and they must not conclude that wars mean the end has arrived immediately. Discernment must remain obedient to the whole discourse. The same Lord who warns of distress forbids the credulity that follows every confident announcement.

His closing command brings the message home:

> Luke 21:34–36 (KJV): "And take heed to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting, and drunkenness, and cares of this life, and so that day come upon you unawares. For as a snare shall it come on all them that dwell on the face of the whole earth. Watch ye therefore, and pray always, that ye may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of man."

The danger is personal, the coming day is certain, and the commanded response is watchful prayer. Jesus addresses people who have heard His teaching. Exposure to prophecy does not place them beyond the need for warning. They must attend to the condition of their hearts while attending to what He has foretold.

I believe our generation is confronting end-time pressures that make this warning especially urgent. The inducements to indulge ourselves, the anxieties that compete for our attention, and the cost of confessing Christ demand sober attention. That conviction does not give me a date for His return. It gives me reason to press His commands upon the church with earnestness. If we believe the pressure is increasing, our response should be deeper prayer, firmer obedience, and greater love, rather than greater confidence in our predictions.

A Burdened Heart Can Still Be Busy

Jesus names the heart as the place where danger takes hold. He is speaking about more than a passing mood. Our desires, judgments, fears, and purposes shape the way we answer God. When the heart becomes weighed down, a person may continue many outward activities while becoming increasingly unresponsive to spiritual realities.

The word "overcharged" in the KJV describes a heart burdened or weighed down. The picture is not of someone who knows nothing. It is of someone whose inward life is so loaded that the coming day finds him unready. Knowledge may remain in his mind while other things govern his response.

This helps explain why a person can discuss Christ's return without living in readiness for it. He may possess the correct vocabulary and defend the right doctrine, yet allow desire or fear to determine what he does with both. He keeps the teaching as an opinion while denying it authority over his evenings, his purchases, his conversations, or his plans.

Notice the strange company Jesus places together: indulgence, drunkenness, and life's cares. One person becomes absorbed in enjoyment; another becomes absorbed in keeping disaster away. Their outward lives may look very different. One appears carefree, the other painfully responsible. Yet both can become so occupied with this life that they cease to answer the claims of the life to come.

Our usual distinctions can hide this danger. We readily question the man whose excess is obvious. We may praise the man who never stops worrying as though his anxiety proved his devotion. Christ examines what each condition is doing to the heart. A respectable explanation does not make spiritual neglect harmless.

The question is not whether we have things to enjoy or burdens to carry. God gives good gifts and entrusts real responsibilities. The danger appears when those things so command us that prayer, truth,

and obedience are continually displaced. What began as part of life begins to govern the whole of it.

Indulgence Offers Relief at the Cost of Readiness

The first two dangers Jesus names concern excess and intoxication. "Surfeiting" is an older term connected with the excesses of overindulgence; drunkenness makes the warning unmistakable. We must not soften this into a general complaint about having a busy schedule. Christ warns against appetites allowed to dull judgment and weaken self-government.

Trouble does not automatically cure those appetites. Sometimes it gives them a new defense. The indulgent person no longer says merely that he wants pleasure. He says that he needs relief. His distress may be genuine, but he begins treating it as permission to seek relief in what God forbids.

Consider the progression. Fear makes an hour of escape attractive. Repeated escape makes returning to ordinary duty unpleasant. Duty begins to feel like an intrusion upon the relief he now expects. Eventually, the habit that was supposed to help him bear life makes him less willing to meet life's claims. The burden has not been removed; his readiness to carry it has weakened.

John Owen observes, "Prosperity and temptation go together."[3] His warning concerns a season in which plentiful comforts supply opportunities for sin. The principle also exposes a mistake about approaching distress: a troubled world does not mean that every avenue of indulgence has disappeared. People can be surrounded by ominous events while still finding abundant ways to avoid thinking seriously about God.

The refuge may involve actual drunkenness. It may also involve other habits that serve a similar purpose of deliberate evasion, though those applications should not replace the sins Jesus expressly names. A person can keep arranging distractions so that no quiet moment remains in which a neglected duty can trouble his conscience. He wants enough awareness to discuss the danger, but not enough stillness to face what must change.

Christian rest restores us for obedience. Sinful escape increasingly resents obedience. The distinction becomes visible when Christ's word interrupts what we want: do we receive His command, or defend the pleasure from which He calls us away?

Do not wait for indulgence to destroy your reputation before

taking its spiritual effects seriously. A practice can damage prayer, honesty, and tenderness long before anyone else knows its name. The Lord who warns you sees the loss already, and His warning is mercy while repentance remains possible.

When Responsibility Becomes Consuming Care

Christ's third warning reaches people who would never defend drunkenness. They rise early, attend to obligations, and carry concerns that others scarcely understand. Their danger is harder to recognize because it can grow among legitimate duties.

The cares of this life include matters that genuinely require attention. Food, work, shelter, family, illness, and the safety of those we love are not imaginary concerns. Jesus does not command neglect of them. He warns that they can weigh down the heart until their urgency excludes His authority.

That change often takes place through a seemingly reasonable condition: I will give myself to prayer when this matter is settled. But another matter follows. The heart begins to demand a settled world before it will seek God with an undivided purpose. Since this world never supplies that condition, prayer remains postponed and anxiety keeps its authority.

In the parable of the sower, Jesus describes the same danger through a different image:

> Luke 8:14 (KJV): "And that which fell among thorns are they, which, when they have heard, go forth, and are choked with cares and riches and pleasures of this life, and bring no fruit to perfection."[4]

The hearers do hear. Their exposure to the word is real. But other concerns choke its fruitfulness. Nothing in that description requires an open declaration that God's word is false. A person can continue affirming its truth while allowing competing demands to prevent its effect.

Richard Baxter counsels, "Keep these things loose about thee like thy upper garments, that thou mayest lay them by whenever there is need."[5] Earthly concerns must remain subject to God, ready to yield when obedience requires it. Anxiety reverses that order when it demands our entire attention and makes every other claim wait. We may confess that God rules, yet behave as though constant mental rehearsal were the only thing preventing catastrophe. Our thoughts

return to the same possibilities without producing either useful action or believing prayer.

A frightened believer needs patient help, not an accusation every time fear returns. Severe anxiety can involve suffering that cannot be dismissed by a sharp command to calm down. Yet tenderness must still lead us toward Christ. We can name the burden honestly, receive appropriate help, and refuse to let fear authorize cruelty, falsehood, or the abandonment of known duty.

The same distinction applies to attention to public events. Learning what has happened may enable wise decisions and specific intercession. Continually consuming another opinion about what might happen can leave us agitated and no better prepared to obey. Has our concern made us more faithful to the people God has entrusted to us, or merely harder for them to live with?

The care becomes spiritually dangerous when it insists that everything must yield to it. Christ bids us bring that demand itself before Him. We may be unable to remove the threatening circumstance. We must not therefore grant it unrestricted rule over our hearts.

The Day Does Not Wait for Us to Finish

Jesus joins the burdened heart to the sudden arrival of the day. He does not speak as though a person will always receive one final, unmistakable opportunity to put his inner life in order. The day comes upon the unready as a snare.

A snare does not wait until its victim feels prepared. Its force lies in the difference between what is happening and what the unsuspecting creature supposes is happening. Christ's warning strips away the assumption that our ordinary sense of having more time can be trusted.

The words about the whole earth forbid a small, private view of the coming reckoning. We cannot make ourselves exempt by belonging to a well-informed circle, living far from a particular conflict, or possessing an explanation of prophecy. The passage directs every hearer toward readiness before the Son of Man.[2]

A person may even be expecting a crisis in general while remaining unprepared for Christ Himself. He has considered interruptions to his income, changes in government, shortages, and threats to his comfort. But he has not faced the resentment he excuses or the sinful relief he protects. He has prepared for the loss of familiar circumstances without preparing to meet their Lord.

This is one reason practical foresight cannot bear the weight of

spiritual readiness. Wise provision may serve our neighbors and help us fulfill our responsibilities. It cannot cleanse a guilty conscience, restore neglected communion with God, or make unbelief safe. The decisive question reaches beyond what we can preserve in this world to whether we are following the Savior who will judge it.

Do not mistake the time God gives you for a guarantee of more time. His patience makes repentance possible now. It does not put the coming day under your control.

Watchfulness Must Become Prayer

Jesus does not leave His disciples with a warning and an instruction to become stronger people. He commands them to watch and pray always. The answer to a heart overwhelmed by this life includes sustained dependence upon the God who governs it.

Watchfulness notices what is gaining influence. Prayer carries our discovered need to God. When these are separated, self-examination can become an endless inspection of weakness, while prayer can become a recitation that never touches the temptations we are actually facing. Christ joins attention and dependence because we need both.

To pray always is to maintain this dependence through changing circumstances. It does not require neglecting work or refusing bodily sleep. It requires refusing a life in which prayer is postponed until everything else has claimed its share. We need God while the pressure is being exerted, while the appealing excuse is forming, and while a difficult choice is still before us.

Peter gives the church the same connection between the approaching end and sober prayer:

> 1 Peter 4:7–10 (KJV): "But the end of all things is at hand: be ye therefore sober, and watch unto prayer. And above all things have fervent charity among yourselves: for charity shall cover the multitude of sins. Use hospitality one to another without grudging. As every man hath received the gift, even so minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God."[6]

The prospect of the end should make prayer clearer and love more active. Peter moves from sobriety to love, hospitality, and service. The church must remain capable of receiving a person at its door, bearing with a fellow believer, and using what God has given for another's good.

These commands expose an end-times interest that makes us increasingly unavailable to others. If our concern leaves us too suspicious to love, too preoccupied to serve, and too agitated to pray, we must examine the way we are receiving the subject. Scripture's teaching about the end has not failed. We have allowed fear or fascination to interrupt its intended fruit.

Prayer also corrects what we ask from God. We should seek His protection and ask Him to spare us from evil. But we must also ask for truthfulness when dishonesty offers safety, tenderness when fear makes us harsh, and courage when obedience threatens what we value. Readiness requires more than asking that nothing difficult happen. It includes asking that difficulty not turn us from Christ.

Escape and Stand before the Son of Man

The petition in Luke 21:36 contains both deliverance and a meeting: to escape the coming things and to stand before the Son of Man. We must retain both. Jesus teaches His disciples to seek real deliverance, and He directs their hope beyond the immediate threat to their reception before Him.

Being counted worthy does not mean earning acceptance by maintaining an unbroken record of alertness.[7] The praying disciple comes as a dependent person. Christ's saving work provides the ground of acceptance; the readiness He commands is the life of faith answering His grace. A careless refusal of His warning cannot be defended by appealing to grace, and a trembling response to His warning must not be turned into an attempt to purchase salvation.

Nor may we turn escape into a promise that every faithful Christian will avoid persecution or bodily death. Earlier in this very discourse Jesus says that some of His followers will be put to death. He then assures them of His preserving care and calls them to endurance. The passage holds together costly suffering and ultimate safety under His authority.[2]

It is right to pray for deliverance from particular dangers. Jesus' instructions concerning flight from Jerusalem also show that obedience may require practical action to escape. But the closing petition does not authorize us to promise every believer a painless path or to settle the sequence of all end-time events from this verse alone. Its culminating concern is that we stand before the Son of Man rather than be overtaken unready.

That prospect changes the scale by which we judge safety. A

believer may lose possessions, reputation, liberty, or life and still be kept for Christ. Another person may preserve every earthly advantage by surrendering to evil. The second outcome looks safer only while we leave the Son of Man out of the account.

Keep Him in view. The One before whom we must stand is the Savior who calls His people to pray. He has not disclosed their need in order to mock their weakness. He summons them to the help they cannot supply themselves.

Let Approaching Redemption Govern Your Response

The discourse gives frightened disciples a command that anxiety alone could never produce:

> Luke 21:28 (NKJV): "Now when these things begin to happen, look up and lift up your heads, because your redemption draws near."

Jesus places redemption within their view of approaching distress. They must see more than what threatens them. The Son of Man who comes in power is bringing His people toward the completion of their deliverance. His return ends the rule of the evils that now seem so difficult to resist.

That hope must protect our love. Matthew records a particular danger as wickedness increases:

> Matthew 24:12–13 (KJV): "And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold. But he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved."[8]

The increase of evil can tempt us to adopt the very coldness we deplore. Betrayal encourages suspicion. Repeated outrage encourages contempt. Fear narrows our concern to our own survival. We may continue denouncing wickedness while permitting it to determine the temper of our hearts.

Christ calls us to endure in allegiance to Him. The growing cost of love does not cancel His command to love. We must keep telling the truth without learning to delight in another person's ruin. We must resist evil without allowing it to teach us hatred. Our expectation of His coming should make us more recognizably His.

Peter likewise carries the certainty of judgment into present conduct and future hope:

> 2 Peter 3:13–14 (KJV): "Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness. Wherefore, beloved, seeing that ye look for such things, be diligent that ye may be found of him in peace, without spot, and blameless."[9]

We are waiting for a world in which righteousness dwells. To cherish unrighteousness while claiming to long for that world is to resist the character of the very future we profess to desire. Hope should loosen our defense of sin and strengthen our willingness to obey.

The pressures may intensify. Christ's claims will remain. Do not give indulgence the right to dull you or anxiety the right to govern you. Receive His warning, seek His help, and attend to the person you are becoming while you wait for Him. You are preparing for more than a difficult hour. You are preparing to stand before your Savior.

The apostles warn that the peril of the last days will enter through our desires, not merely through events beyond our doors. Paul declares in 2 Timothy 3:1 that "in the last days perilous times will come," describing people in verse 4 as "lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God." Peter foretells last-days scoffers in 2 Peter 3:3, "walking according to their own lusts," while Jude 17–18 recalls the prediction of mockers following "their own ungodly lusts." These desires include more than sexual sin, but 2 Peter 2:14, 19 exposes false teachers with "eyes full of adultery" who promise freedom while remaining "slaves of corruption."[10] Pornography gives this rebellion an alarmingly accessible form: repeated indulgence in secret beneath a respectable public life. Its damage can become catastrophic, hardening the heart against correction, corrupting our regard for others, and devastating marital trust. A. W. Pink warns, "No real communion with God is possible while sinful lusts remain unmortified."[11] Knowledge of the end times cannot sanctify a deliberately indulged appetite. Steve Gallagher directs us to the weapon God supplies: "It is only the 'Sword of the Spirit' that can sever the head of the serpent of porn."[12] Confess the sin, remove its provisions, seek faithful help, and turn to the Savior whose grace cleanses and teaches obedience. Do not cherish in secret what you profess to want Christ to overthrow.

Questions for Further Study

1. Read Luke 21:5–36. What different events and warnings appear in the discourse? Which commands remain clear even where

Christians disagree about the relationship between particular events?

2. Read Luke 21:34 and Luke 8:14. How can indulgence and consuming care produce similar spiritual effects? What is the difference between hearing the word and allowing it to govern a response?
3. Read Luke 21:34–35. Why does being informed about approaching trouble not necessarily make a person ready for Christ? What assumptions about having more time does the image of a snare challenge?
4. Read Luke 21:36 and 1 Peter 4:7–11. How should expectation of the end affect prayer, love, hospitality, and service? What would reveal that our attention to events is undermining those duties?
5. Read Luke 21:16–19, 20–21, and 36. How do these verses help us distinguish deliverance, prudent action, endurance through suffering, and final acceptance before Christ?
6. Read Luke 21:28, Matthew 24:12–13, and 2 Peter 3:11–14. How should approaching redemption govern our response to increasing evil? What does hopeful readiness require beyond concern for our own survival?

Practical Applications

1. Identify what pressure is persuading you to excuse.

Name one indulgence, harsh response, or neglected duty that you have defended because the times are difficult. Bring the particular wrong to Christ without denying the difficulty. Forsake the excuse and take the corresponding step of obedience. Distress needs His help; it does not grant exemption from His word. (Luke 21:34; Matthew 24:12–13.)

2. Bring one consuming care into specific prayer.

State the burden plainly before God. Distinguish an action you can responsibly take from an outcome you cannot control. Seek needed counsel or assistance, and ask for grace to remain faithful while the outcome is unsettled. Do not make relief from uncertainty a condition for resuming prayer or love. (Luke 21:36; 1 Peter 4:7–11.)

3. Judge your attention to the times by its effect on obedience.

Consider whether your recent reading and conversations have helped you pray, discern truth, and serve others, or have mainly fed irritation and fear. Reduce an unfruitful source of agitation where needed, and use the recovered attention for a neglected responsibility or a person who needs your care. The purpose is readiness before Christ, not ignorance of the world. (Luke 21:34–36; 2 Peter 3:13–14.)

Chapter Axioms

1. Approaching distress requires attention to our hearts as well as to the events surrounding us. Luke 21:34–36.
2. Indulgence and consuming care can both leave a hearer of truth spiritually unresponsive. Luke 21:34; Luke 8:14.
3. Awareness of danger does not guarantee readiness for the Lord whose day will come suddenly. Luke 21:34–35.
4. Expectation of the end must deepen prayer and strengthen love rather than consume the attention they require. Luke 21:36; 1 Peter 4:7–11.
5. Christ's preserving care reaches beyond bodily survival to the believer's final standing before Him. Luke 21:16–19, 36.
6. The hope of approaching redemption calls for present holiness and steadfast allegiance to Christ. Luke 21:28; Matthew 24:12–13; 2 Peter 3:11–14.

Mortification of Sin and the Crucifixion of Lust

Fifteen Doctrinal Principles for Resisting Sexual Temptation

A person can speak urgently about the last days while quietly making arrangements for his next sin. Pornography makes that contradiction painfully concrete: the same screen can carry a warning about Christ's return and an invitation to forget His presence. The church must address this evil plainly, without treating those caught in it as beyond Christ's mercy. The question reaches beneath what we watch to what we have allowed ourselves to want, conceal, and defend.

1. We fight sin because we belong to Christ.

Galatians 5:24 (NKJV) declares that “those who are Christ’s have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.” Conversion brings a

decisive break with sin's dominion, yet the surrounding commands to walk by the Spirit show that the conflict continues. We do not conquer lust to purchase Christ's acceptance; having received Him by faith, we must refuse the rule of what He died to overthrow. Remaining sin is a reason to fight, never a permission to surrender.[13]

2. Mortification requires the Holy Spirit, not confidence in our resolve.

Romans 8:13 (NKJV) joins the duty to its source of power: "if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live." To mortify sin is to put it to death, and Paul makes believers responsible to act in dependence upon God's power rather than wait passively for temptation to disappear. Pray when desire begins to bargain, bring Scripture against its promises, and take the obedient step you would prefer to postpone; the Spirit's help makes obedience possible, not unnecessary.[14]

3. Put sinful desire to death instead of merely keeping it out of sight.

Colossians 3:5 (NKJV) commands believers to "put to death" the sins associated with their former life. Someone may stop viewing pornography while continuing to treasure its imagined scenes, resent the restrictions, and look forward to an opportunity to return. Genuine repentance reaches that inward consent: it asks God to change what the heart welcomes, not merely what another person can discover.[15]

4. Honor the body Christ has purchased.

1 Corinthians 6:20 (NKJV) declares, "you were bought at a price." The body and sexual desire are not inherently evil; the evil lies in directing God's gifts against His will, as though desire gave us ownership of ourselves or another person. Paul commands us to flee sexual immorality because our bodies belong to the Lord and are indwelt by His Spirit; holiness therefore honors the body rather than despising or injuring it.[16]

5. Receive Christ's judgment upon lust before it becomes an outward act.

Matthew 5:28 (KJV): "But I say unto you, That whosoever

looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart."

Jesus exposes the deliberate look that cherishes forbidden desire; He does not teach that noticing someone's appearance or encountering an unwanted image is already the same as choosing lust. Pornography is no refuge from this command merely because the viewer never touches the person displayed. The heart can consent to what the hands have not done, and Christ claims authority over both.[17]

6. Interrupt temptation where desire begins making its case.

James 1:14–15 (KJV): "But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death."

James takes away the excuse that the opportunity alone made us sin: temptation finds an answering desire within us. A hard day, loneliness, or disappointment may explain when pornography becomes appealing, but none can turn its use into a necessity. Bring that need to God and seek honest help before you begin calling disobedience relief.[18]

7. Refuse pornography's reduction of people to objects for consumption.

Genesis 1:27 (KJV): "So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them."

A person displayed on a screen remains a person made in God's image, never a body placed at the viewer's disposal. Pornography invites us to separate sexual gratification from the honor, responsibility, and love we owe our neighbor; where coercion or exploitation is involved, that wrong becomes more grievous still. Repentance must therefore include concern for the people being used, rather than concern only about what the viewing has done to us.[19]

8. Govern your looking before temptation becomes a private appointment.

> Job 31:1 (NKJV): "I have made a covenant with my eyes; Why then should I look upon a young woman?"

Job's resolve brings the eyes under an obedience already settled before God. Applied to pornography, that means refusing the searching, lingering, and seemingly innocent browsing by which a person deliberately approaches what he later claims surprised him. Close the page, turn away, and surrender the supposed right to one more look; an unexpected exposure need not become a chosen return.[20]

9. Remove the arrangements that keep sin available.

Romans 13:14 (NKJV) commands us to "make no provision for the flesh." Keeping a hidden account, saved material, or a familiar route back to pornography while asking God for victory leaves desire supplied for its next demand. Remove those provisions and use practical safeguards where they help, but remember that a filter can obstruct access without teaching the heart to love purity.[21]

10. Accept the cost of obedience without harming yourself.

> Matthew 5:29 (KJV): "And if thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell."

Christ's startling language is forceful hyperbole, never an instruction to mutilate the body or injure yourself. His warning requires a decisive separation from what leads us into sin, even when that separation costs convenience, entertainment, or access we have grown unwilling to lose. If a particular habit repeatedly carries you toward pornography, stop negotiating to preserve it; the inconvenience of obedience is not the danger Jesus tells you to fear.[17]

11. Let repentance restore love where secrecy has injured it.

> Ephesians 5:25 (NKJV): "Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her,"

Pornography can cultivate comparison, concealment, and demands that make a spouse bear the cost of another person's indulgence; neither marriage nor a spouse's greater availability can repent in the

sinner's place. Where trust has been betrayed, repentance requires truthfulness, patient repair, and an end to blaming the wounded person for the sin. Seek wise pastoral help in addressing that injury, and do not demand that forgiveness instantly restore the trust your conduct has damaged.[22]

12. Receive the help of believers who will tell you the truth.

> Hebrews 3:13 (NKJV): "but exhort one another daily, while it is called 'Today,' lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin."

Secret sin becomes easier to defend when no one is allowed to question the defense. Tell a trustworthy pastor or mature believer enough truth to receive meaningful help, without graphic detail, and welcome questions about what you are actually doing rather than merely how ashamed you feel. Christian accountability should help you return to Christ and obey Him, never make humiliation the price of being helped.[23]

13. Flee temptation toward a life worth giving yourself to.

> 2 Timothy 2:22 (KJV): "Flee also youthful lusts: but follow righteousness, faith, charity, peace, with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart."

Paul joins departure from sinful desire to the pursuit of righteousness, faith, love, and peace in the company of believers. Freedom from pornography must make room for prayer, Scripture, honest friendship, useful service, and the duties that secrecy displaced. The aim is more than an unused screen: it is a person learning to love God and others with the attention once surrendered to lust.[24]

14. After a fall, confess promptly and return to Christ without bargaining.

> 1 John 1:9 (NKJV): "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

Name the sin honestly, forsake the excuse, and take the next necessary step of obedience instead of using yesterday's failure to

authorize today's surrender. Christ's forgiveness is neither a reward for an impressive record nor an advance permission to continue; the same apostle who points sinners to their Advocate writes so that they will not sin. Repeated failure calls for renewed repentance and more searching help, not the conclusion that Christ can no longer receive the one who comes to Him.[25]

15. Let the hope of seeing Christ make purity urgent and hopeful.

> 1 John 3:3 (NKJV): "And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure."

The hope of Christ's appearing reaches into the room where no one else is watching. We cannot faithfully prepare to meet Him while protecting an arrangement for disobeying Him, yet neither must we imagine that our struggle is stronger than His saving grace. The Savior who will complete our holiness calls us to pursue it now, with our eyes upon His purity and our confidence in His power.[26]

The believer who has stopped excusing his sin still needs strength to refuse it when temptation returns. As pressure increases, fear alone cannot sustain the obedience Christ requires. We need to know how His grace works in the very places where we have been yielding. Titus 2:11–14 brings that help into view: the Savior who gave Himself to redeem us teaches us to reject ungodliness, live faithfully now, and await His appearing with hope. Our attention must reach beyond the sins we are leaving to the Lord we are preparing to meet. We turn now to the grace that trains us and the hope that strengthens our obedience.

Notes

1. Scripture quotations are identified as either the New King James Version (NKJV) or the King James Version (KJV). The opening is a clause from Luke 21:34, NKJV; Luke 21:28 is also quoted from the NKJV. Scripture taken from the New King James Version®. Copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson. Used by permission. All rights reserved.
2. Luke 21:5–36. The chapter distinguishes the temple's destruction, persecution, Jerusalem's siege, the distress of nations, and the coming of the Son of Man without proposing a comprehensive chronology. Christians differ over the relationship of these features and the scope of "this generation" in verse 32. Those interpretive questions are acknowledged without using them to evade the commands or force every detail into current headlines. Verses 16–19 must be read together: Christ explicitly allows for the death of some disciples while promising His preserving care. The hypothetical examples and applications to contemporary information habits are pastoral applications, not details supplied by Luke.
3. John Owen, Of Temptation, chapter VI, first discussion of particular seasons of temptation: unusual outward prosperity. Exact excerpt checked against the Christian Classics Ethereal Library transcription. Owen is cited for the spiritual dangers attending comfort, not as an interpreter of Luke's prophetic chronology. https://ccel.org/ccel/owen/temptation/temptation.i.ix.html
4. Luke 8:14. Jesus explains the seed among thorns in the parable of the sower. This passage supports the discussion of cares and pleasures obstructing the fruitful reception of God's word; it is not presented as a direct prediction of the final crisis.
5. Richard Baxter, The Saints' Everlasting Rest, "Directions How to Lead a Heavenly Life upon Earth," subsection on an earthly mind, in the abridged electronic edition reproduced by Christian Classics Ethereal Library, chapter XII. Exact quoted words checked in that text; terminal punctuation is adapted to the excerpt. Baxter warns against earthly absorption. The application to anxious calculations is the chapter author's, not a claim that Baxter was discussing modern news consumption. https://ccel.org/ccel/baxter/saints_rest/saints_rest.iii.XII.html
6. 1 Peter 4:7–11. Peter joins the nearness of the end with sober prayer, fervent love, hospitality, and the stewardship of gifts. The surrounding chapter also addresses suffering for Christ; it does not promise freedom from such suffering.
7. Luke 21:36. The KJV and NKJV render the reading concerning being counted worthy; the NKJV's textual note records "NU have strength to." The manuscript difference is acknowledged without making a doctrinal conclusion depend on an English rendering alone. Neither reading makes spiritual self-sufficiency the answer: Jesus commands prayer for what His disciples need. The prayer's culmination is standing before the Son of Man. Acceptance through Christ and grace-enabled obedience should also be read in the light of Titus 2:11–14 and Jude 20–25, developed in the following chapter.
8. Matthew 24:9–14. Jesus joins tribulation, betrayal, deception, increased lawlessness, cooling love, endurance, and gospel proclamation. The application concerns resisting the corrupting effect of surrounding evil, not assigning these verses to a particular current event.
9. 2 Peter 3:10–15. The promise of a new heavens and earth governs the exhortation to holy conduct, peace, and blamelessness. Hope in God's promised future supplies a reason for present obedience.
10. Scripture excerpts in this paragraph are NKJV. Matthew 24:9–14; Luke 21:34–36; 2 Timothy 3:1–5; 2 Peter 2:14, 18–19; 3:1–4; Jude 17–23; Romans 13:11–14; 1 Corinthians 6:18–20. Paul, Peter, and Jude expressly connect future or last-days

conditions with rebellious desire, while addressing dangers already confronting their readers. The sexual-corruption details in 2 Peter 2 concern false teachers; their application to pornography does not make every reference to lust exclusively sexual or claim an explicit prediction of digital pornography. The paragraph makes no unsupported quantitative comparison with previous centuries. Jude's word rendered "sensual" in the KJV (verse 19) refers to people without the Spirit, not narrowly to sexual behavior. The language about catastrophe describes the potential seriousness of harm, not a universal outcome or a statistical estimate.

11. A. W. Pink, The Holy Spirit, chapter 20, "The Spirit Cleansing," subsection "True Mortification." Quotation verified in the Monergism PDF, PDF page 141 of 252; no printed page number is supplied. Pink's discussion concerns continuing mortification through the Spirit and communion with God, not a claim that a justified believer loses justification whenever sin occurs. https://www.monergism.com/thethreshold/sdg/pink/TheHolySpiritAWPink.pdf#page=141
12. Steve Gallagher, "The Serpent of Pornography and How to Crush it," Pure Life Ministries, March 7, 2016, final sentence. The quotation is from Gallagher's signed article, not from At the Altar of Sexual Idolatry. Inner quotation marks are changed to single marks for nesting; wording is unchanged. The sword image refers to God's Word and spiritual resistance to pornography, not physical violence. https://www.purelifeministries.org/blog/the-serpent-of-pornography-and-how-to-crush-it
13. Galatians 5:16–25; Romans 6:1–14. The completed crucifixion of the flesh in Galatians 5:24 is read alongside the continuing conflict and commanded walk in the same chapter, not as a claim of sinless perfection. Westminster Confession of Faith 13.1–3 distinguishes the destruction of sin's dominion from the continuing weakening of remaining corruption. The confession supplies historical corroboration, not authority above Scripture. https://www.opc.org/wcf.html/index.html?pfriendly=Y
14. Romans 8:9–17. Paul addresses those indwelt by the Spirit and connects mortification with life and adoption. Dependence upon the Spirit does not remove the believer's commanded activity.
15. Colossians 3:1–17. The command rests on the believers' union with Christ and is followed by the putting on of renewed conduct. John Owen, Of the Mortification of Sin in Believers, chapter II, emphasizes the continuing duty of believers to mortify remaining sin. The contemporary pornography application is the author's, not Owen's. https://ccel.org/ccel/owen/mort.i.v.html
16. 1 Corinthians 6:12–20; Genesis 1:27–31; 2:24–25. Paul's language about sinful flesh must not be confused with a declaration that the physical body itself is evil. His argument here includes the body's resurrection, belonging to Christ, and indwelling by the Holy Spirit.
17. Matthew 5:27–30. The discussion concerns heart adultery and the seriousness of resisting sin. The language about removing an eye or hand is understood as forceful figurative instruction demanding costly renunciation, never literal self-injury. Its application to pornography is pastoral application of the command, not a claim that Jesus addressed digital technology.
18. James 1:13–18. James denies that God tempts anyone to evil and traces the operation of sinful desire. This does not identify every unwanted thought or unchosen exposure with the deliberate consent described in principle 5.
19. Genesis 1:27 supplies the controlling doctrine of human dignity. The paragraph makes a moral argument about objectification; it does not claim that every pornographic production involves coercion or supply an unsupported prevalence estimate.
20. Job 31:1, read in Job's declaration of integrity. The application concerns deliberate

governance of one's gaze, not a claim that unavoidable exposure makes a person guilty of choosing it.

21. Romans 13:11–14 places practical resistance to sinful desire within the summons to awaken because salvation is nearer. Digital safeguards are applications of the command, not substitutes for conversion or the Spirit's sanctifying work.
22. Ephesians 5:25–33 establishes the husband's duty of self-giving love; the application to pornography and damaged trust follows from that duty. The paragraph does not place responsibility for one spouse's sin upon the other.
23. Hebrews 3:12–14 concerns mutual exhortation against unbelief and hardening. The application to concealed pornography is one instance of the broader duty.
24. 2 Timothy 2:22–26. Youthful lusts are not restricted to sexual temptation; the surrounding passage includes disputes, gentleness, and instruction. The sexual application preserves the text's positive pursuit and communal dimension.
25. 1 John 1:5–2:2 holds together honest confession, cleansing through Christ, the rejection of sinless claims, the command not to sin, and Christ's advocacy for those who do. Forgiveness does not automatically remove earthly consequences or establish fitness for a position of trust.
26. 1 John 3:1–3 connects present purification with the hope of seeing Christ and being like Him. This is the section's explicit link between mortification and watchfulness for His appearing.

CHAPTER 6

Kept by Grace, Strengthened by Hope

Learning to Live for the Savior We Await

Titus 2:13 (NKJV): "looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ,"[1]

A believer can sincerely fear falling away and still misunderstand how he is to stand. He hears the warnings, recognizes his weakness, and resolves to become more careful. Then a familiar temptation returns. His resolve gives way, and the failure seems to confirm his deepest fear: if obedience already costs him this much, how will he remain faithful when the pressure grows?

The question deserves more than another demand to try harder. We need to understand what Christ supplies to the people He commands to watch. Otherwise, we may turn every warning into a fresh promise to ourselves and every failure into a reason to hide from Him.

Titus 2:11–14 brings the Savior into precisely that need. His grace does more than receive us when we have sinned. It trains us to refuse sin, teaches us how to live while evil surrounds us, and directs our expectation toward His glorious appearing. The Christian waiting for Christ is also being taught by Christ. We have not been left alone with an alarming future and our own inadequate strength.

Grace Has Something to Teach Us

Paul has been instructing Titus about the conduct of older men, older women, younger women, younger men, and servants. Sound teaching

must become visible in self-control, fidelity, love, and useful service. Then he gives the reason such a life belongs to every Christian:

> Titus 2:11–14 (KJV): "For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world; Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ; Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works."[1]

The passage begins with what God has done, proceeds to the life His grace teaches, and lifts our eyes to the Lord who will appear. We must keep those truths together. If we hear only the commands, obedience can become a frightened attempt to secure our acceptance. If we hear only that grace has appeared, we may overlook the very change that grace has come to produce.

Paul speaks of grace bringing salvation to people across the distinctions he has just addressed. The older believer needs it; so does the young. The person with authority lives by it; so does the servant with little control over his circumstances. No class of Christians possesses enough natural strength to dispense with this instruction. Nor does an obscure position place anyone beneath the Savior's concern.

The grace that saves also teaches. Here teaching includes training: an education that reaches our judgments, desires, and conduct. We do not merely learn how to describe the Christian life. We learn to live it. A person may explain forgiveness accurately while still resisting what forgiveness teaches him about the sin he wants to repeat.

This is crucial to end-times watchfulness. Increasing danger does not make spiritual self-reliance more effective. We need more than a clear view of the enemy; we need a teachable response to our Savior. The Christian who asks Christ for help must also receive Christ's correction. Grace does not strengthen us to preserve the excuses He commands us to abandon.

Living between His Two Appearings

Our present life is bounded by two great acts of the Lord. He has appeared in saving grace, and He will appear in glory. The first gives us the ground of our confidence; the second gives us the direction of our hope. Neither depends upon how reassuring the present moment feels.

C. H. Spurgeon puts it simply: "Behind us is our trust; before us is our hope."[2] We look back to Christ's accomplished redemption and forward to His promised coming. The interval between them is the place where grace trains us.

This changes how we receive disturbing news. Events can tell us something about the difficulties we face. They cannot tell us whether Christ's sacrifice remains sufficient or His promise remains certain. If our confidence rises and falls entirely with the latest report, we have asked present circumstances to settle matters that Christ has already settled by His work and word.

A threatening age therefore need not become a spiritually empty age. The same Lord who will end it is teaching His people within it. He has not suspended His care until His return. He instructs, corrects, sustains, and equips believers who must answer Him today.

We should expect that training to disturb us at times. A cherished habit may be exposed; a judgment we defended may have to change. Yet correction from the Savior is not evidence that He has withdrawn His grace. It is one way His grace addresses what threatens our faithfulness. The prospect of His appearing makes us more willing to learn because we are preparing to meet the One who teaches us.

Learning to Refuse What Once Ruled Us

Paul first names what grace teaches us to deny: ungodliness and worldly desires. Ungodliness reaches deeper than an openly irreligious life. It includes treating God's authority as an interruption rather than the rightful rule of our decisions. Worldly desires seek their satisfaction according to the values of this passing age, without submission to Him.

The two belong together. Once God's claim is pushed aside, desire begins supplying its own permission. The craving for approval tells us when to conceal the truth. The appetite for advantage tells us whom we may exploit. The longing to remain comfortable tells us which command can wait. A person need not deny God's existence to exclude Him from a particular decision.

Yet the believer's struggle begins with what Christ has already accomplished:

> Romans 6:6 (NKJV): "our old man was crucified with Him ... that we should no longer be slaves of sin."[3]

Our union with Christ brings a decisive break with sin's dominion.

We do not crucify our old man afresh each time we resist temptation; we resist because we have been joined to the crucified and risen Savior. John Owen locates our strength in Him: "We have all our mortification from the gift of Christ."[4] Christ supplies His Spirit, enabling us to put remaining sin to death rather than submit to it as our master.

Grace brings that decision back under His authority. It teaches us to refuse what we once accepted as necessary: I must be admired. I must have my own way. I must protect this pleasure. The claims feel powerful because we have obeyed them before. Their familiarity does not make them rightful masters. C. H. Spurgeon describes the change grace produces: "We have an abhorrence of those things wherein we formerly placed our delight."[5]

Consider a believer facing pressure to join in contemptuous talk about another Christian. His desire to belong offers a quick argument: silence will make him look disloyal to the group. The gospel teaches him to regard Christ's claim as weightier than their approval. He can refuse the slander without insulting the people who invite it. The refusal may cost him favor, but he is learning to live as someone who belongs to a different Lord.

That is the kind of training we will need as hostility deepens. The danger is not merely that people may demand our allegiance. It is that their demand may find an appetite already willing to trade obedience for acceptance. Grace teaches us to recognize and refuse the exchange. Owen presses the urgency of this continuing duty: "be killing sin or it will be killing you."[6] We cannot prepare for the tests ahead while granting present sin an undisturbed place to grow.

This refusal involves more than fear of being discovered. We begin to see the offense against the Savior who gave Himself for us. What once looked like relief is exposed as a return to bondage. What once looked like an indispensable advantage becomes too costly because it requires disobedience to Christ. Richard Baxter counsels, "Love Christ, and thou wilt hate that which caused his death."[7]

John Owen directs our confidence to the Savior: "Set faith at work on Christ for the killing of thy sin."[8] The lesson may have to be practiced repeatedly. Remaining temptation does not mean that grace has ceased teaching. But we must distinguish being tempted from defending surrender. We bring the recurring desire to Christ, receive His judgment upon it, and obey Him while the desire is still demanding a hearing. Watchfulness includes learning whose voice deserves our consent.

A. W. Pink makes the continuing conflict plain: "Those lusts cannot be eradicated, but they can (by the Spirit's enablement) be refused."[9] Remaining sinful desires will trouble believers in this life, but their presence does not compel our consent. We must neither expect sinless perfection now nor surrender the obedience the Spirit enables.

Paul therefore moves from our union with Christ to a command that reaches the use of our bodies:

> Romans 6:12–13 (KJV): "Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof. Neither yield ye your members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin: but yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God."[10]

The hands, eyes, tongue, and strength once placed at sin's disposal must now serve God. Refusing evil makes room for righteous action: the tongue that withholds slander can speak truth, and the hands that refuse dishonest gain can serve another person's need. This is the life grace trains us to live while we await our Lord.

Learning to Live in the Present Age

Grace teaches a positive life as well as a decisive refusal. Paul names sobriety, righteousness, and godliness. These words bring the whole person under instruction: our self-government, our dealings with others, and our life before God.

> 1 Peter 1:15 (NKJV): "but as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct,"[11]

God's holiness reaches every part of the life we are preparing to bring before Him. No religious interest, including our interest in the last days, releases our ordinary conduct from that claim.

To live soberly is to exercise sound judgment and self-control. We need this when fear urges haste, anger demands expression, or excitement makes an untested claim attractive. A watchful believer must remain capable of receiving the truth even when falsehood arrives with the urgency of an emergency. Grace does not make us less serious about danger. It teaches us not to surrender our judgment to it.

To live righteously is to deal rightly with other people. An unsettled world does not make dishonesty useful to Christ or cruelty necessary for His defense. We must pay what we owe, speak truthfully, honor

our commitments, and refuse to take advantage of another person's distress. Readiness for the righteous Judge must be visible in the way we treat the people He has placed near us. J. C. Ryle writes, "A holy man will follow after faithfulness in all the duties and relations in life."[12]

To live godly is to live with reverence toward God, receiving His authority and seeking His pleasure. We may possess strong opinions about the world's rebellion while giving little attention to our own dependence upon Him. Godliness brings us back to His word, His presence, and His claims. The coming of Christ becomes something we receive before God, rather than merely a subject we discuss before others. Thomas Watson gives godliness its measure: "As God's nature is the pattern of holiness, so his will is the rule of holiness."[13]

Paul places this entire life in the present age. We are not waiting for a more favorable world in which to practice it. Grace trains believers where ungodliness is already offering its alternatives. The difficult conversation, the unfair demand, and the unnoticed opportunity to do good become places where we answer the Lord we expect to see.

Paul joins that expectation to growing love:

> 1 Thessalonians 3:12–13 (KJV): "And the Lord make you to increase and abound in love one toward another, and toward all men, even as we do toward you: To the end he may stablish your hearts unblameable in holiness before God, even our Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all his saints."[14]

His prayer makes holiness before the returning Lord inseparable from love toward people now. We cannot prepare faithfully for Christ's coming by allowing the troubles of this age to make us indifferent to our neighbor.

These three directions also keep our watchfulness from becoming lopsided. A restrained person may still be unjust. A socially helpful person may neglect God. Someone devoted to religious activity may remain governed by temper or appetite. The grace of Christ claims the whole life, leaving no protected corner where we may continue under another rule.

We should therefore ask what His instruction is producing, not merely how much instruction we have heard. The aim is a believer who can remain clear-minded, upright, and reverent when surrounding conditions encourage the opposite. That is preparation fitted to a difficult age.

The Savior Gave Himself to Make Us His Own

Verse 14 takes us to the cost and purpose of this training. Christ gave Himself for us to redeem us from all iniquity and purify a people for Himself. He did not merely send assistance. He gave Himself.

The One whose glory will fill our view at His appearing is the One who willingly bore the cost of our redemption. Paul identifies Him as our great God and Savior. His majesty does not make His mercy remote, and His mercy does not reduce His authority. We await the Lord who has already laid claim to us through His self-giving love.

He has promised to bring His people into His presence:

> John 14:2–3 (KJV): "In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also."[15]

The promise is personal: He will receive us to Himself. Our blessed hope rests on the faithfulness of the Savior who has pledged to return, not on our success in predicting the course of events. C. H. Spurgeon says that "the Redeemer's coming is the desire of the entire church."[16] We long for the Lord who purchased us, because His presence is the heart of what He has promised.

Redemption means that sin's mastery is part of what He came to overthrow. We cannot reduce His work to relief from punishment while treating continued slavery as acceptable. His purpose reaches into our allegiance and conduct. The people He purchases are to become a purified people who eagerly do good.

The older expression "a peculiar people" means a people belonging especially to Him. It does not commend strange behavior for its own sake. Our distinction lies in whose we are and how we therefore live. Under end-time pressure, the church must resist becoming merely another frightened group protecting its interests. We belong to the Savior who gave Himself for others. His claim reaches even the bodies in which we now suffer and serve:

> Philippians 3:20–21 (KJV): "For our conversation is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ: Who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself."[17]

"Conversation" here means citizenship, and "vile body" describes our present lowly condition, not a body evil in itself. The returning Savior will transform the bodies that now bear weakness, pain, and mortality. His redemption will leave no part of His people beyond the reach of His restoring power. We can therefore honor Him with our bodies now, knowing what He has promised to make them.

His people are to be zealous for good works. Their eagerness should reach beyond avoiding contamination to seeking another person's good. A congregation awaiting Christ should still notice the hungry household, the discouraged member, and the lonely person who needs patient attention. The troubles of the age make such service more necessary, not less.

Christ's redeeming purpose also corrects a hidden question that can govern our obedience: How little must I do to remain safe? Love begins asking what would please the Lord who bought us. The person once searching for permission to withhold himself begins offering himself for useful service. Grace changes not only what he refuses but what he becomes willing to give.

This is why good works cannot purchase our acceptance. In Paul's order, the Savior gives Himself, redeems His people, and purifies them for fruitful service. Their works follow His redeeming initiative. Yet those works are not an optional ornament. They belong to the purpose for which He redeemed them.

Help for the Hour of Need

A believer may agree with all this and still feel the force of his weakness. He knows what should change; he fears that he will fail again. Scripture does not answer him by pretending that the struggle is small. It directs him to a living High Priest:

> Hebrews 4:14–16 (KJV): "Seeing then that we have a great high priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession. For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need."[18]

The command to hold fast stands beside the invitation to come near. Christ's sympathy is not permission to abandon obedience. It is encouragement to seek the help we need for it. He understands

temptation without sharing our sinfulness, and His sinlessness makes Him a sufficient Savior rather than a fellow captive.

The Lord's answer to Paul gives weakness a promise to rest upon:

> 2 Corinthians 12:9 (NKJV): "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness."[19]

Paul's thorn was not removed, but the Lord's grace was sufficient within the affliction. We may seek relief while trusting Him for strength when the difficulty remains. George Müller expresses that dependence: "He delights in making His strength perfect in our weakness, and therefore will I also, though so weak, look for His strength."[20] Increasing pressure need not leave us waiting helplessly for stronger feelings before we obey.

We often seek this help late. We attempt to bear the temptation alone, surrender, and then approach Christ with our failure. His mercy receives the repentant, but His invitation also addresses the hour in which obedience is being tested. We may come while the pressure is upon us, before the harsh answer, before the dishonest concession, before the choice we will later regret.

> 1 Corinthians 10:13 (KJV): "There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it."[21]

God's faithfulness answers the claim that this temptation leaves us no choice but to sin. His provision may require us to leave an occasion of temptation, refuse a demand, or endure a cost we hoped to avoid. The escape He supplies is a way to remain faithful, not a promise that obedience will feel easy.

Imagine two believers who have failed in a known duty. One decides that he must first recover a respectable record before praying with any confidence. His shame keeps him away from the help he needs. The other confesses the wrong, receives the promise of mercy, and returns to the duty in dependence upon Christ. Neither failure is harmless. But only the second response treats the throne of grace as the refuge Scripture declares it to be.

When I fail, do I return to Christ, or try to earn my way back before approaching Him? That question matters to perseverance. A habit of hiding after failure can turn one act of disobedience into a season of

prayerlessness and neglect. Prompt repentance interrupts that retreat. We come without defending the sin and without pretending that our sorrow can atone for it.

After acknowledging his own failure, Hudson Taylor wrote, "I looked to Him for pardon for the past, and for grace and strength to do His will in the future."[22] That is the direction repentance must take: toward Christ for both forgiveness and renewed obedience. Yesterday's failure must not become today's reason for staying away.

The grace we seek is help to obey, not merely help to feel better. Sometimes the next faithful step is painfully plain: acknowledge the falsehood, resume the neglected responsibility, or receive correction without an argument. Confidence in Christ brings us back to that step. It does not carry us around it.

> Psalm 46:1 (NKJV): "God is our refuge and strength, A very present help in trouble."[23]

His help is present in trouble, not reserved for the hour after it has passed. As the dangers of the age press upon us, we can seek Him where we are and obey the word He has given. The refuge is God Himself; we do not have to make the world safe before we can come.

God Keeps His People through Their Persevering Faith

Jude writes to believers endangered by ungodly influences and reminds them of the apostles' warning about mockers in the last time. His instruction joins their responsibility to their dependence:

Jude 20–21 (KJV): "But ye, beloved, building up yourselves on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Ghost, Keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life."[24]

These are active commands. Believers build themselves up in the faith, pray in dependence upon the Spirit, remain in the love of God, and await Christ's mercy. They are not told to become the source of God's love or to purchase it by effort. They must continue in the believing, obedient fellowship to which His love has brought them.

Then Jude directs their praise to God:

Jude 24–25 (KJV): "Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy, To the only wise God our Saviour, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen."

God's keeping and the believer's persevering are not rival

explanations. He preserves His people, and they persevere through the faith and obedience His grace sustains. His promises encourage their effort; His warnings awaken their attention; His word and Spirit strengthen their response. We must neither assign His preserving work to ourselves nor use His preserving power to dismiss our commanded activity.

Paul makes the same relationship clear:

> Philippians 2:12–13 (KJV): "Wherefore, my beloved, as ye 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. For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure."[25]

God's work within them is Paul's reason for urging them to act. Their effort is real, and their dependence is complete. The surrounding instructions bring that effort into humility, unity, and conduct without grumbling, while Paul looks toward the day of Christ. Divine help reaches the ordinary frictions through which a waiting church can weaken or strengthen its witness.

Obedience also purchases no exemption from suffering. God's keeping power reaches its glorious conclusion when He presents His people before Him. Some will arrive through severe loss. Their suffering will not mean that grace failed to preserve them. The Savior's promised outcome is greater than uninterrupted earthly safety.

Learning to Want His Appearing

Paul calls Christ's appearing a blessed hope. We must not let our concern about the last days rob that word of its comfort. The end of this age brings the manifestation of the Savior's glory. The church is waiting for a Person, not merely the termination of a crisis.

John Calvin observes that "Christ is held out to us as our 'Savior,' who will also be our judge."[26] His coming is solemn, but believers need not imagine that His return will cancel His redeeming love. The Judge they await is the Savior in whom they trust. Their hope rests upon His faithfulness, not upon their ability to maintain an uninterrupted feeling of confidence.

That distinction matters for anxious and grieving Christians. A naturally cheerful temperament does not prove stronger faith, and tears do not disprove hope. Paul teaches the Thessalonians about Christ's return because believers have died and those who remain

need comfort. He grounds that comfort in Jesus' death and resurrection, then declares what His coming will accomplish:

> 1 Thessalonians 4:16–18 (KJV): "For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord. Wherefore comfort one another with these words."[27]

The culmination is life with the Lord. Death cannot exclude His people from that gathering. The grave does not hold a believer beyond the reach of His summons. Such hope gives courage to Christians who cannot secure their future by earthly means.

It also changes the force of temptation. Sin insists that we cannot afford to lose the pleasure, approval, or advantage it offers. The promise of life with Christ exposes how small that offer is beside what He will give. We may feel the present loss keenly and still refuse to trade obedience for something that cannot last.

Hope strengthens watchfulness by making Christ desirable. We want to be ready because we want to see Him. His appearing will end our divided obedience, our susceptibility to deception, and the grief of offending the One we love. Until then, His grace teaches us to live increasingly in keeping with that future.

Let the warnings make you attentive, but let the Savior Himself hold your expectation. You do not have to manufacture the strength that will carry you to His coming. You must receive His instruction, seek His help, and continue in the faith He sustains. The Lord who gave Himself for you has not finished caring for you.

Questions for Further Study

1. Read Titus 2:1–14. How does Paul's teaching about saving grace supply the reason for the conduct he has commanded? What happens when grace's saving work and training work are separated?
2. Read Titus 2:12. How do ungodliness and worldly desires work together? How do sobriety, righteousness, and godliness answer different aspects of that danger?
3. Read Titus 2:13–14. What does Christ's self-giving reveal about

the purpose of redemption? How should belonging to Him affect our conduct as we await His appearing?

4. Read Hebrews 4:14–16. Why does the command to hold fast belong beside the invitation to approach the throne of grace? How should this shape our response both during temptation and after failure?
5. Read Jude 17–25 and Philippians 2:12–16. How do these passages distinguish God's preserving work from the believer's responsibility while keeping them together?
6. Read 1 Thessalonians 4:13–18. What makes Christian hope stronger than a cheerful outlook? How does the promise of being with Christ strengthen obedience when faithfulness brings loss?

Practical Applications

1. Receive one lesson grace is pressing upon you.

Name one desire that has been overruling a clear duty. Read Titus 2:11–14 and identify both the refusal and the positive obedience the passage requires in your circumstances. Ask Christ for help, then take that obedient step without waiting for the desire to disappear. Treat His correction as part of His care, not an interruption of it.

2. Bring your need to Christ before attempting to outgrow it.

Use Hebrews 4:14–16 to pray specifically about a present temptation or recent failure. Confess what is sinful without calling your ordinary limitations sin. Receive His mercy and resume the duty before you; do not impose a waiting period in which you must first prove yourself worthy to approach Him.

3. Let hope release you for useful service.

Read Titus 2:13–14 and 1 Thessalonians 4:13–18. Name an earthly loss you fear, and bring it under the promise of life with Christ. Then undertake one fitting act of good toward someone whose need your fear has made easier to overlook. Serve within your actual capacity, trusting Christ rather than using activity to prove your readiness.

Chapter Axioms

1. The grace that saves believers also trains them to refuse sin and obey Christ. Titus 2:11–12.
2. Christ's first appearing establishes our confidence, and His glorious appearing directs our hope. Titus 2:11–14.
3. Readiness for Christ includes self-control, righteousness toward others, and reverence toward God in the present age. Titus 2:12–13.
4. Christ redeemed a people for Himself whose eagerness to do good expresses His saving purpose. Titus 2:14.
5. God's preserving power sustains, rather than replaces, His people's persevering faith and obedience. Jude 20–25; Philippians 2:12–13.
6. The hope of being with Christ strengthens present faithfulness without promising freedom from suffering. 1 Thessalonians 4:13–18.

Fifteen Principles of the Doctrine of Grace

How God Sustains His People through End-Times Sufferings and Temptations

Grace is God's undeserved favor toward sinners in Christ, expressed in the saving and sustaining help He freely supplies. We will not outgrow our need of it as the last days grow darker: the grace that brings us to Christ must keep us faithful to Christ.

1. Grace begins with God's generosity, not our deserving.

> Ephesians 2:8 (NKJV): "by grace you have been saved through faith"

God does not save us because He discovers something worthy in us; He acts in mercy toward the undeserving. When suffering exposes how little strength we possess, we need not manufacture a claim upon His help: grace was never a reward for being strong.[28]

Supporting Scripture: Romans 11:6; 2 Timothy 1:9.

2. Grace comes through Christ's costly redemption.

Romans 3:24 (NKJV): "through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus"

God's favor does not overlook our guilt; Christ's sacrifice satisfies divine justice and secures our forgiveness. When the pressure to compromise becomes fierce, the cross tells us both how dearly we belong to Christ and why the sin offering relief cannot be harmless.[28]

Supporting Scripture: Ephesians 1:7; 1 Peter 1:18–19.

3. Grace gives the new life from which faith grows.

Titus 3:5 (NKJV): "the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit"

The Spirit does what fear, information, and willpower cannot: He gives spiritually dead sinners new life and enables them to believe in Christ. Accurate knowledge of end-time dangers cannot substitute for conversion; we need a living relationship with the Savior, not merely an informed opinion about His coming.[28]

Supporting Scripture: John 3:3–8; Ephesians 2:4–10.

4. Grace establishes our acceptance before God.

Romans 8:1 (NKJV): "no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus"

Justification means that God pardons believers and counts them righteous for Christ's sake, not because their obedience has become flawless. Under accusation or persecution, we stand upon Christ's righteousness rather than exhausting ourselves trying to turn our suffering into payment for our sins.[28]

Supporting Scripture: Romans 5:1–2; Philippians 3:9.

5. Grace breaks sin's dominion.

Romans 6:14 (NKJV): "sin shall not have dominion over you"

United to Christ in His death and resurrection, believers are no longer sin's slaves, though they must still resist its desires. Temptation may still be forceful, but neither an old habit nor a threatening world has authority to demand the obedience we owe our Redeemer.

Supporting Scripture: Romans 6:4–6; Colossians 1:13–14.

6. Grace trains us to refuse ungodliness.

Titus 2:12 (NKJV): "denying ungodliness and worldly lusts"

Saving grace changes what we welcome, reject, and pursue; it never offers forgiveness as permission to remain comfortably rebellious. The private refusals we learn today prepare us for public pressures tomorrow, when obedience may cost more than reputation or convenience.[29]

Supporting Scripture: Titus 2:11–14; 1 Peter 1:14–16.

7. Grace enables effort rather than replacing it.

Philippians 2:13 (NKJV): "it is God who works in you"

The Spirit strengthens our willing and doing, enabling us to put sin to death and obey when obedience is costly. Dependence therefore moves us to action: waiting for temptation to disappear while refusing the duty before us mistakes spiritual inactivity for trust.[30]

Supporting Scripture: Romans 8:13; 1 Corinthians 15:10.

8. Grace meets us in humility.

James 4:6 (NKJV): "God resists the proud, But gives grace to the humble."

Spiritual self-confidence refuses the very help endangered believers need, while humility receives correction and confesses dependence. Knowing much about prophecy does not make us immune to deception; the watchful Christian remains teachable before God's Word.

Supporting Scripture: 1 Corinthians 10:12; 1 Peter 5:5–9.

9. Grace opens access to timely help.

Hebrews 4:16 (NKJV): "find grace to help in time of need"

Through our sinless, sympathetic High Priest, we may approach God while the pressure is upon us, not merely after we have surrendered. Prayer brings our actual need to Christ before fear becomes dishonesty, anger becomes cruelty, or desire becomes consent.

Supporting Scripture: Hebrews 2:17–18; Ephesians 2:18.

10. Grace remains sufficient when suffering remains.

2 Corinthians 12:9 (NKJV): "My grace is sufficient for you"

Christ did not remove Paul's thorn, but supplied strength within his weakness. In persecution, deprivation, or grief, grace may sustain obedience without ending pain; continuing affliction does not prove that Christ has withheld His care.

Supporting Scripture: 2 Corinthians 4:16–18; 1 Peter 4:12–14.

11. Grace provides a faithful response to temptation.

1 Corinthians 10:13 (NKJV): "will also make the way of escape"

God's faithfulness denies temptation's claim that sin has become our only possible choice. His provision may require flight, refusal, or costly endurance, so we must take the escape He supplies rather than insist upon one that preserves every comfort.

Supporting Scripture: 1 Corinthians 10:12–14; Hebrews 2:18.

12. Grace strengthens us through God's appointed means.

Hebrews 10:25 (NKJV): "not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together ... but exhorting one another"

God nourishes faith through His Word, prayer, the Lord's Supper, and the fellowship of His people, not through religious self-sufficiency. As Christ's day approaches, withdrawing from these provisions leaves us neglecting the very help through which He equips us to endure.[31]

Supporting Scripture: Acts 2:42; Hebrews 3:12–13.

13. Grace restores the repentant after failure.

Luke 22:32 (NKJV): "I have prayed for you, that your faith should not fail"

Peter's denial was grievous, but Christ's intercession secured his return rather than excusing his sin. When fear has carried us into

disobedience, grace calls us out of concealment to confession, forgiveness, and renewed obedience, not to despair or self-defense.

Supporting Scripture: 1 John 1:9–2:2; John 21:15–19.

14. Grace preserves believers through persevering faith.

1 Peter 1:5 (NKJV): "kept by the power of God through faith"

God's preserving power sustains our continued trust; it does not make watchfulness, repentance, and obedience unnecessary. The believer endures because God keeps him, and God's keeping brings him through the conflict to salvation, not necessarily around suffering or death.[32]

Supporting Scripture: Jude 20–24; Hebrews 10:35–39.

15. Grace will complete its work in glory.

1 Peter 1:13 (NKJV): "rest your hope fully upon the grace that is to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ"

The Savior who supplies grace now will bring His people into the fullness of salvation at His appearing. That promised future loosens the world's hold upon us: we can refuse its sinful bargains because losing what it offers cannot deprive us of what Christ will give.[33]

Supporting Scripture: Philippians 3:20–21; Romans 8:18–25.

Grace is indispensable because Christ is indispensable. We overcome neither by escaping every wound nor by discovering sufficient strength within ourselves, but by trusting the Savior who forgives, strengthens, and keeps His people until they see His face.

The grace that keeps us faithful does not promise to keep us from pain. We must therefore learn how to trust Christ when the suffering we prayed against becomes the suffering we must endure. Trials can expose an expectation we scarcely knew we held: that obedience should secure a safer life. When that expectation breaks, bitterness may question God's goodness, fear may silence our witness, and compromise may offer relief at the cost of faithfulness. Watchfulness must reach those dangers too. First Peter 1:6–7 teaches us to see tested faith in the light of Christ's appearing. We turn now to suffering, not to glorify pain, but to understand how our Savior sustains His people through it and prepares them for the glory He has promised.

Notes

1. Titus 2:1–15, especially verses 11–14. Short Scripture quotations use the New King James Version (NKJV); extended Scripture quotations use the King James Version (KJV). Scripture taken from the New King James Version®. Copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson. Used by permission. All rights reserved. The chapter reads the universal reach of the gospel alongside Paul's instructions to different groups, without treating verse 11 as a promise that every individual is finally saved. "Teaching" includes moral training; "peculiar" in verse 14 denotes a people belonging to Christ. The description of Jesus as our great God and Savior follows the identification expressed in Titus 2:13. Contemporary examples are hypothetical pastoral applications.
2. C. H. Spurgeon, "The Two Appearings and the Discipline of Grace," Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit, volume 32, sermon 1894, April 4, 1886, section I. Spurgeon Library transcription. Spurgeon's discussion concerns the Christian's position between Christ's appearing in grace and His appearing in glory. https://www.spurgeon.org/sermons/the-two-appearings-and-the-discipline-of-grace
3. Romans 6:6, NKJV, excerpted with an ellipsis marking the omitted middle clause. Read in Romans 6:1–14, the crucifixion of the old man concerns the believer's union with Christ and the breaking of sin's dominion; the commands that follow require continuing obedience rather than a repeated crucifixion or a claim of present sinlessness.
4. John Owen, Of the Mortification of Sin in Believers, chapter III, section 2(2), in the Christian Classics Ethereal Library transcription. Exact excerpt from a longer sentence, with terminal punctuation adapted. Owen explains Christ's communication of the Spirit and His gifts as the source of mortification. https://ccel.org/ccel/owen/mort.i.vi.html
5. C. H. Spurgeon, "The Two Appearings and the Discipline of Grace," Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit, volume 32, sermon 1894, April 4, 1886, section II. Spurgeon Library transcription. Spurgeon describes grace teaching believers to renounce their former delights. https://www.spurgeon.org/sermons/the-two-appearings-and-the-discipline-of-grace
6. John Owen, Of the Mortification of Sin in Believers, chapter II, in the Christian Classics Ethereal Library transcription. Exact excerpt, retaining its lowercase opening. The surrounding exhortation addresses believers and their continuing duty to mortify remaining sin. https://ccel.org/ccel/owen/mort.i.v.html
7. Richard Baxter, A Christian Directory, Part I, chapter III, Grand Direction VIII, "How to Hate Sin," Direction II, p. 89, in the Project Gutenberg transcription. Baxter connects hatred of sin with love for Christ and consideration of His suffering. https://www.gutenberg.org/files/41633/41633-h/41633-h.htm
8. John Owen, Of the Mortification of Sin in Believers, chapter XIV, p. 79, in the Christian Classics Ethereal Library transcription. Owen directs faith to Christ as the source of strength for putting sin to death, not to unaided resolve. https://ccel.org/ccel/owen/mort/mort.i.xvii.html
9. A. W. Pink, Spiritual Growth, chapter 10, "Its Decline," Part I, in the Grace Gems transcription. Pink concerns remaining sinful desires in the believer's present life, not their permanence in glory; his stated means of refusing them is the Spirit's enablement. https://gracegems.org/Pink/spiritual_growth.htm
10. Romans 6:12–13, KJV. The command rests upon the believer's union with Christ and directs bodily activity away from sin and toward righteousness. "Members" denotes the parts of the body placed at the service of sin or God.
11. 1 Peter 1:14–16, with verse 15 quoted from the NKJV. Peter connects obedience, the

renunciation of former desires, and holiness throughout one's conduct with the holiness of the God who calls His people.

12. J. C. Ryle, Holiness, chapter III, "Holiness," section I, item (k), in the Christian Classics Ethereal Library transcription. Ryle illustrates holiness through faithfulness in the ordinary duties and relationships of life. https://ccel.org/ccel/ryle/holiness.iii.iii.html
13. Thomas Watson, A Body of Divinity, "The Holiness of God," Use Three, in the Christian Classics Ethereal Library transcription. Watson identifies God's holy nature as the pattern and His will as the rule of holiness. https://www.ccel.org/ccel/watson/divinity.vi.vii.html
14. 1 Thessalonians 3:12–13, KJV. Paul's prayer joins increasing love toward fellow believers and all people with hearts established in holiness before God at Christ's coming.
15. John 14:2–3, KJV. Jesus comforts His disciples with His promised return and their reception into His presence. The application emphasizes fellowship with Christ rather than a timetable for His return.
16. C. H. Spurgeon, "The Double 'Come,'" sermon 1608, July 10, 1881, section I, in the Spurgeon Library transcription. Exact mid-sentence excerpt concerning the church's desire for Christ's return; terminal punctuation is adapted. https://www.spurgeon.org/sermons/the-double-come
17. Philippians 3:20–21, KJV. The older rendering "conversation" denotes citizenship; "vile body" concerns the body's lowly present condition, not inherent bodily evil. Paul places believers' expectation in the Savior's power to transform their bodies in conformity to His glorious body.
18. Hebrews 4:14–16, read after the searching description of God's word and knowledge in verses 12–13. Christ's sympathy and sinlessness support both holding fast and approaching God for help. The passage does not make His sympathy an endorsement of sin.
19. 2 Corinthians 12:7–10, with the Lord's promise in verse 9 quoted from the NKJV. The answer to Paul's repeated prayer does not remove the thorn but supplies sufficient grace and displays divine strength in weakness.
20. George Müller, A Narrative of Some of the Lord's Dealings with George Müller, Written by Himself, Third Part, opening paragraph of the narrative, in the Project Gutenberg transcription. The cited electronic text reflects a later revised presentation; no claim is made that it reproduces the first edition unchanged. https://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/22148/pg22148.html
21. 1 Corinthians 10:13, KJV, read with the warning against self-confidence in verse 12 and the command to flee idolatry in verse 14. God's promised faithfulness and provision sustain resistance and endurance; the verse does not promise freedom from painful circumstances.
22. J. Hudson Taylor, A Retrospect, third edition, chapter XIII, "Man Proposes, God Disposes," p. 87, entry dated August 6, 1856, in the Project Gutenberg transcription. Exact excerpt from a longer sentence, with terminal punctuation adapted. Taylor acknowledges anger following a difficult journey and describes turning to the Lord for pardon and grace to obey. https://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/26744/pg26744-images.html
23. Psalm 46:1, NKJV. The psalm confesses God's help amid upheaval and danger. Its assurance rests upon His presence and power rather than the absence of trouble.
24. Jude 17–25. The commands to build, pray, keep, and look follow the warning about last-time mockers and precede the doxology praising God's ability to keep and present His people. The chapter distinguishes divine preservation from human perseverance without separating them or attributing God's work to unaided human effort.

25. Philippians 2:1–16, particularly verses 12–16. Paul's exhortation addresses the believing community and follows Christ's humiliation and exaltation. Working out salvation is read as dependent obedience, not earning salvation; the surrounding commands concern communal conduct as well as individual responsibility.
26. John Calvin, Commentary on Timothy, Titus, Philemon, commentary on Titus 2:13, in the Christian Classics Ethereal Library transcription. Exact excerpt verified; the internal quotation marks around Savior are changed to single marks for nesting. Calvin identifies the coming Judge as the believer's Savior. His quotation is used for that pastoral point, not as a claim of agreement on every detail of his exposition. https://ccel.org/ccel/calvin/calcom43/calcom43.v.iv.iii.html
27. 1 Thessalonians 4:13–18. Paul grounds comfort concerning believers who have died in Christ's death, resurrection, and coming. The chapter preserves the passage's promise of resurrection, gathering, and enduring fellowship with the Lord without using it to establish a detailed chronology of end-time events.
28. Westminster Confession of Faith, 10.1–2 and 11.1–3, on effectual calling and justification. Scripture governs these formulations; the confession supplies historical theological corroboration. https://www.opc.org/wcf.html
29. C. H. Spurgeon, "The Two Appearings and the Discipline of Grace," sermon 1894, April 4, 1886, especially his treatment of Titus 2:11–14. No direct quotation from Spurgeon is used here. https://www.spurgeon.org/sermons/the-two-appearings-and-the-discipline-of-grace
30. John Owen, Of the Mortification of Sin in Believers, chapter III, especially the concluding discussion distinguishing the Spirit's work from our neglect of duty. Paraphrased, not quoted. https://ccel.org/ccel/owen/mort.i.vi.html
31. Westminster Confession of Faith, 14.1, on the Word, sacraments, and prayer as means by which faith is strengthened; Hebrews 3 and 10 establish the accompanying mutual encouragement. https://www.opc.org/wcf.html
32. Westminster Confession of Faith, 17.1–3. Preservation does not deny serious falls or the consequences of neglecting God's appointed means. https://www.opc.org/wcf.html
33. John Calvin, Commentary on Timothy, Titus, Philemon, exposition of Titus 2:13–14, on resurrection hope sustaining holy living. Paraphrased, not quoted. https://ccel.org/ccel/calvin/calcom43/calcom43.v.iv.iii.html

Scripture quotations are from the New King James Version (NKJV) and the King James Version (KJV), as identified. Excerpt boundaries do not imply that the surrounding context is dispensable.

CHAPTER 7

Watchful through the Fire

Believers' Suffering in the End Times

Revelation 2:10 (NKJV): "Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life."[1]

A Christian may be prepared for the world to turn against him and still be unprepared for God to let it happen. He knows that unbelievers can be cruel. What unsettles him is that his heavenly Father does not stop them. He has prayed, sought to obey, and trusted the promises. Yet the loss comes. Beneath his grief, another question begins to trouble him: What happened to the protection I thought God had promised?

That question can become more dangerous than the suffering that awakened it. Pain may take away something we love; a mistaken view of God's promises can then persuade us that He has taken away His love as well. We need Scripture to separate those losses. Otherwise, the very hour in which we most need Christ may become the hour in which we begin to distrust Him.

Jesus told the church at Smyrna that suffering was coming. He knew about its affliction, its poverty, and the accusations against it. His knowledge did not produce a promise that prison would remain empty. He called His people to faithfulness even if obedience cost them their lives, and He promised life that death could not take away. The Savior who had died and lived again was preparing them to trust Him beyond the point where earthly protection might end.[1]

This is essential to end-times watchfulness. We must learn to

recognize Christ's faithfulness when it comes to us as sustaining grace rather than immediate escape. A church taught only how to expect deliverance from trouble will struggle to recognize deliverance through trouble. Before the pressure increases, we must let the Lord tell us what His keeping actually means.

Christ Called Us to the Cross from the Beginning

Suffering is normal for the true Christian who counts the cost of following Christ. It is not a strange addition to a life that was supposed to remain comfortable. Our Lord included the cross in His call to discipleship before His disciples understood how much that call would cost them.

> Luke 9:23–24 (KJV): "And he said to them all, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: but whosoever will lose his life for my sake, the same shall save it."[2]

The cross was an instrument of death. Jesus was calling people to surrender their claim to govern their own lives, even when obedience brought shame, rejection, or death. The word daily brings that surrender into the present. We cannot reserve it for some future crisis while insisting that today's obedience must leave our comfort untouched.

Counting the cost means receiving these terms honestly. We do not earn salvation by suffering; we follow the Savior who purchased it. But we cannot receive Him as Lord while privately deciding which losses would cancel His right to our obedience.

> Luke 14:27–28 (KJV): "And whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple. For which of you, intending to build a tower, sitteth not down first, and counteth the cost, whether he have sufficient to finish it?"[3]

Jesus goes on to insist that His disciple relinquish every competing claim upon his allegiance. Counting the cost is therefore more than imagining difficult circumstances. It is settling whom we will obey when keeping something we treasure requires disobedience to Christ. The cost is real, but so is the Savior's worth. We follow because belonging to Him is better than preserving everything without Him.

Peter states the calling plainly:

> 1 Peter 2:21 (NKJV): "For to this you were called, because

> Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps:"[4]

The surrounding passage concerns suffering unjustly while doing good. Peter does not tell believers that obedience has somehow taken them outside God's purpose. He tells them that Christ has gone before them. Suffering for righteousness belongs within the Christian calling; it is not evidence that the calling has failed.

Martin Luther wrote, "Let him who would be Christ's brother, and joint-heir with him, remember he must also be a joint-martyr and joint-sufferer with Christ."[5] Sharing Christ's rejection belongs to following Him, though not every believer will be called to die for Him.

Jesus also explains why the world resists His followers:

> John 15:18–20 (KJV): "If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you. If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you. Remember the word that I said unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you; if they have kept my saying, they will keep yours also."[6]

Belonging to Christ changes our allegiance, and that change can provoke the hostility He received. Christians do not all suffer in the same way or to the same degree. Yet no disciple has been promised a life in which faithfulness will never hurt. We must not build our expectations upon an exemption our Master never offered.

> John 16:33 (NKJV): "In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world."[7]

Christ gives courage without concealing the trouble. His victory is our confidence within it. That is where preparation for the last days must begin: not with the hope that discipleship will become less costly, but with trust in the Lord who has already told us what following Him means.

The Trial Christ Told Us to Expect

First Peter addresses believers whose allegiance to Christ has made them strangers in the society around them. Former companions are surprised that they no longer share their sinful conduct and speak evil

of them for refusing it. Their obedience has not made everyone grateful. It has made some people hostile.[8]

Within that setting Peter declares that the end of all things is at hand and calls the church to sober prayer, earnest love, hospitality, and faithful service. Then he speaks directly about suffering. The connection matters: expectation of the end does not suspend the church's duties, and suffering does not prove those duties have failed.

> 1 Peter 4:12–13 (KJV): "Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you: But rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy."[8]

Peter calls them beloved before he calls their experience a fiery trial. Their suffering has not expelled them from the circle of God's affection. Nor should they interpret hostility as an unexpected defect in the Christian life. The apostle is correcting their expectations so that the trial will not overturn their confidence in the One they follow.

He is especially concerned here with suffering for Christ's name. Not every hardship is persecution. Disease, bereavement, and the weakness of aging also burden people who do not confess Christ. Those sorrows require compassion, not an inflated label. But when obedience to Christ itself becomes the reason for rejection or punishment, believers must understand the connection. The world is resisting the Lord to whom they belong.

Jesus had prepared His disciples for this. In John 16:1–4 He warned them about exclusion and even religiously justified killing so that they would not stumble when it came. He wanted them to remember that He had already told them. Fulfilled warnings would then testify to His truthfulness instead of appearing to disprove His care.[9]

The prophetic warnings make this preparation more urgent. In Matthew 24:9–13, Jesus foretells affliction, hatred among the nations, betrayal, and the killing of His followers. In Luke 21:12–19, He speaks of imprisonment, hostile rulers, betrayal within families, and death. The extraordinary distress surrounding His return will not make the world more willing to receive His authority. His people must be prepared for hostility that hardens into persecution and, for some, martyrdom.[10] [11]

Revelation describes that hostility as open war against the saints:

> Revelation 13:7 (KJV): "And it was given unto him to make war with the saints, and to overcome them: and power was given him over all kindreds, and tongues, and nations."[12]

The beast's assault is directed against people who belong to God. Their holiness does not make them immune to his violence. Yet the apparent conquest is not the final outcome: Revelation also shows believers overcoming through the Lamb's blood and remaining faithful even unto death (Revelation 12:11). Their enemies may take their lives without taking them from their Savior.[13]

Persecution, Suffering, and Calamities Facing End Times Believers

Scripture describes both persecution directed against Christians and wider calamities amid which they must remain faithful. Not every believer will experience every suffering, but all must prepare to trust Christ when obedience becomes costly.

1. Hatred because of allegiance to Christ.

Believers will face widespread hostility because they bear His name. Loyalty to Jesus will provoke opposition from those who reject His authority. Matthew 24:9; Luke 21:17.

2. Betrayal amid increasing hostility.

As persecution intensifies, many will turn against one another, betray one another, and hate one another. The danger will include the collapse of relationships once considered dependable. Matthew 24:9–10.

3. Organized persecution by anti-Christian powers.

The beast will wage war against the saints and temporarily overcome them. Daniel likewise describes a persecuting power oppressing God's people. Their enemies may prevail outwardly without separating them from Christ. Daniel 7:21, 25; Revelation 13:7.

4. Compulsory false worship under threat of death.

Those who refuse to worship the beast's image will face execution. Believers will be confronted with demands they cannot obey without betraying their Lord. Revelation 13:15.

5. Exclusion from buying and selling.

Refusal to receive the beast's mark will exclude believers from commerce, threatening their livelihoods and access to necessities. Faithfulness may carry a severe material cost. Revelation 13:16–17.

6. Martyrdom for faithful testimony.

Some believers will be killed for their allegiance to Christ. Revelation specifically describes those beheaded for their witness to Jesus and God's Word, who refused the beast's worship and mark. Matthew 24:9; Revelation 20:4.

7. Wars and international conflict.

Believers will live amid wars, threats of war, and conflict between nations. These upheavals will challenge their security and require steadfast trust rather than surrender to fear. Matthew 24:6–7; Luke 21:9–10.

8. Famines and food shortages.

Jesus identifies famines among the calamities preceding His return. Believers living amid these conditions may face hunger, scarcity, and the strain of obtaining daily necessities. Matthew 24:7–8; Luke 21:11.

9. Pestilences and widespread disease.

Outbreaks of disease will add sickness, loss, and disruption to these troubled conditions. Christians will need grace to endure their own afflictions and love to care for others. Luke 21:11.

10. Earthquakes and their devastation.

Jesus foretells great earthquakes in various places. Believers living in affected communities may share the destruction, displacement, and grief these disasters bring. Matthew 24:7–8; Luke 21:11.

Jesus calls the wider calamities the beginning of sorrows, not proof that the end has already arrived. His warnings prepare believers for endurance, not date-setting. The question is not merely whether we can identify these troubles, but whether we will remain faithful to Christ when they threaten our relationships, possessions, safety, and lives.[14]

If suffering belongs to ordinary discipleship, how much more must

we prepare when hostility becomes fierce and widespread. The unusual conditions do not introduce a new Christian calling; they make the cost of the original calling harder to evade. We must count that cost before fear offers to count it for us. Peter therefore directs those suffering according to God's will to entrust themselves to their faithful Creator while continuing to do good (1 Peter 4:19). Their suffering has not released them from obedience, and it has not released God from His promise to keep them.[15]

Think what that does to the question, How could the Lord let this happen? Christ has never concealed the cost of following Him. The shock may arise because we have allowed a comfortable season to revise His teaching. We have begun treating a mercy He granted for a time as a condition He must maintain forever.

John Bunyan put his finger on that hidden boundary: "For a man is not prepared to suffer, further than he thinketh the enemy may be permitted to go."[16] We can profess unlimited trust while privately deciding that God must never allow a particular loss. When that loss approaches, the concealed condition appears. Watchfulness brings it before Scripture now, while we can still examine it without the full weight of the crisis upon us.

Kept Does Not Mean Untouched

Peter's instruction about suffering rests upon an assurance he has already given. God has brought believers into a living hope through Christ's resurrection. Their inheritance is reserved in heaven, and they themselves are guarded by God's power through faith for the salvation to be revealed. Immediately afterward, Peter acknowledges their grief under trials. Divine keeping and present distress occupy the same paragraph.[17]

> 1 Peter 1:6–9 (KJV): "Wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations: That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ: Whom having not seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory: Receiving the end of your faith, even the salvation of your souls."[17]

The keeping concerns their arrival at the salvation God has

promised. It does not mean that nothing can reach their bodies, possessions, relationships, or feelings. Peter's readers can be deeply grieved without being abandoned. They can lose what is temporary without losing the inheritance their Father has secured.

Jesus makes the same distinction impossible to avoid in Luke 21. He tells His disciples that some will be put to death, and then assures them that not a hair of their heads will perish. We must read the assurance beside the deaths, not erase the deaths with the assurance. His complete care reaches beyond their enemies' power to kill. Their lives cannot finally be lost to Him.[10]

> Luke 21:16–19 (KJV): "And ye shall be betrayed both by parents, and brethren, and kinsfolks, and friends; and some of you shall they cause to be put to death. And ye shall be hated of all men for my name's sake. But there shall not an hair of your head perish. In your patience possess ye your souls."[10]

A promise of ultimate preservation is stronger than a promise of temporary shelter. Shelter may spare us one danger while leaving death ahead. Christ's salvation reaches through death itself. He does not merely preserve a few more years for His people; He secures their life with Him forever.

Consider a believer who has tried to be faithful and then suffers a devastating loss. He may begin searching his conduct for the failure that supposedly explains it. Scripture certainly calls us to examine ourselves, and God does correct His children. But suffering alone does not identify a particular sin. Jesus rejected the assumption that the man born blind must have been suffering because of his own sin or his parents' sin (John 9:1–3). A wounded Christian must not be handed an accusation God has not made.[18]

Nor should he conclude that stronger faith would necessarily have prevented the loss. In Hebrews 11, faith is exercised both by those who escape the sword and by those who are killed with it. The chapter honors both. We must not invent a standard of victory that would dismiss the believers God commends.[18]

What Is Being Tested

Peter tells us that faith is more precious than gold. We tend to reverse that judgment when pressure comes. Possessions are visible; income pays the bills; approval opens doors. Faith can seem like the thing we must soften in order to preserve everything else. God calls

faith the treasure whose tested genuineness will be acknowledged at Christ's appearing.

The trial exposes a question easier circumstances may leave unanswered: Do I trust Christ Himself, or have I been trusting Him mainly to preserve the life I prefer? A comfortable Christian life can contain genuine faith and unrecognized dependence upon comfort at the same time. When the comfort disappears, the dependence becomes visible. God does not need the discovery; we do.

Yet testing is not merely exposure. James 1:2–4 teaches that the testing of faith produces endurance. Trust exercised under pressure develops a steadfastness that agreement in an easy hour cannot supply. We learn that Christ remains worthy of obedience when the immediate result is painful. We learn to wait without changing masters. Such lessons prepare us for greater pressure because they deepen our knowledge of the Savior, not our admiration for our own toughness.[19]

George Müller urged believers to receive that training: "If we, indeed, desire our faith to be strengthened, we should not shrink from opportunities where our faith may be tried, and, therefore, through the trial, be strengthened."[20] We cannot ask God to deepen our trust while insisting that He leave every dependence undisturbed.

C. H. Spurgeon states the point sharply: "Your faith is the target that all the arrows are shot at."[21] What happens to your confidence in Christ matters more than whether your circumstances still look successful. Satan would gladly leave a Christian outwardly respectable if fear could make his allegiance negotiable.

The trial does not create the Savior's worth. It can expose the poverty of our former estimate of Him. We may discover that we have spoken warmly of eternity while treating a few years of security as indispensable. The correction is painful, but it is merciful to discover a false dependence before entrusting our souls to it.

Peter locates the outcome at the appearing of Jesus Christ. That future governs the present test. We cannot judge the value of tested faith by the approval it receives now, because the people applying the pressure may despise precisely what Christ will commend. The believer's final assessment will not be written by the employer who threatened him, the crowd that mocked him, or the relatives who rejected him.

This also explains why suffering must never become a substitute savior. Pain does not wash away guilt. Endurance does not purchase acceptance. Christ has accomplished the redemption for which no

human suffering could pay. The faith tested in affliction receives Him and His promises; its preciousness lies in its relation to the precious Savior. We prepare for His appearing by depending upon Him, not by presenting our wounds as payment.[17]

When Pain Begins to Argue

Suffering presses upon the body, but it can also press an interpretation upon the mind. The loss is real; the conclusion drawn from it may be false. God has forgotten me. Obedience has been pointless. I cannot remain faithful unless circumstances change. Watchfulness must reach that conversation within us.

Jesus describes the moral dangers that accompany persecution:

> Matthew 24:9–13 (KJV): "Then shall they deliver you up to be afflicted, and shall kill you: and ye shall be hated of all nations for my name's sake. And then shall many be offended, and shall betray one another, and shall hate one another. And many false prophets shall rise, and shall deceive many. And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold. But he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved."[11]

Jesus establishes a direct connection between persecution and spiritual danger. External hostility can be accompanied by betrayal, deception, hatred, and the cooling of love. A watchful church must recognize more than the people threatening it. It must recognize what their threats may tempt it to become.

Bitterness can begin as a demand that God explain Himself before we will trust Him again. The sufferer has a real wound, but gradually turns the wound into authority to judge the Father. Prayer becomes a repeated prosecution. Other mercies become harder to acknowledge because they do not answer the one demand. Honest questions belong in prayer; a settled refusal to trust God unless He submits to our terms threatens the faith prayer should nourish.

Fear argues differently. It makes immediate relief appear morally necessary. A forbidden concession begins to look responsible because it might protect income, reputation, or family stability. The question quietly changes from What does Christ require? to What can I say that will make them stop? The threatened cost is then allowed to decide what counts as obedience.

Deception offers to resolve the tension. A teacher promises a way to secure immunity, predicts an escape Scripture has not promised, or

explains that costly biblical convictions no longer apply. The attraction is not always intellectual. Sometimes a false teaching becomes welcome because it offers the safety we have begun to demand. Pain can make an unbiblical promise sound compassionate.

Then love may cool. A person can remain accurate about his enemies and become increasingly harsh toward his brethren. Every disagreement sounds like betrayal; every weakness looks like disloyalty. Suspicion takes the place of fellowship, and the people who could strengthen him are kept at a distance. He may still speak urgently about Christ's coming while becoming less like the Christ he expects.

We must not assume that every sufferer follows this course. Many cling quietly to Christ through trials others scarcely understand. Nor should we mistake exhaustion, tears, or a need for rest for spiritual retreat. The danger is more specific: suffering can become an argument for distrusting Christ, excusing sin, or withholding love. Peter therefore joins vigilance to steadfast faith:

> 1 Peter 5:8–9 (KJV): "Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour: Whom resist stedfast in the faith, knowing that the same afflictions are accomplished in your brethren that are in the world."[22]

The adversary is real, but this passage does not authorize us to diagnose every illness or tragedy as a direct demonic assault. Its command is clear without such speculation: remain alert, resist the devil, and stand firm in the faith. Peter also reminds the isolated sufferer that he has brethren. The struggle is personal, but it is not his alone.

Fellowship with the Rejected and Risen Christ

Peter's deepest comfort is that suffering for Christ joins believers to the course their Lord Himself traveled. The world rejected Him before it rejected them. To belong to Him is to belong to One whose righteousness did not prevent His condemnation by men, and whose condemnation by men did not overturn His Father's delight in Him.

John Calvin directs us to the whole course: "we are always to bear in mind this transition from the cross to the resurrection."[23] Stop at the cross, and the world appears to have succeeded. Follow Christ to the resurrection, and its verdict is overturned. Christian suffering must be read in the light of the risen Lord and His coming glory.

Participation in His sufferings does not mean sharing His unique

work of bearing our sins. Peter has already distinguished that work: Christ suffered for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring us to God (1 Peter 3:18). We do not add anything to His atonement. We share the rejection that belonging to Him brings, and we learn obedience along the path He has made holy by walking it before us.[24]

Romans 8:28–29 sets God's purpose for His people within that same Christ-centered frame. The good toward which He works includes conformity to His Son. We should not interpret that good as a guarantee that every painful event will produce a visible earthly advantage. Some losses remain losses until death. Yet they cannot prevent God from completing His purpose in those He has called.[25]

Spurgeon explains that "affliction makes us ready to feel the word, but the true pruner is the word in the hand of the Great Husbandman."[26] Pain alone cannot make us holy; we need the Holy Spirit to bring God's truth home to the heart.

Here is a reason to remain watchful when hostility intensifies: the pressure to save ourselves by compromise is also pressure to abandon the likeness of Christ. His enemies did not persuade Him to become false because truthfulness was costly. Our Father is forming His children for fellowship with His Son, not merely arranging more comfortable circumstances for people who retain their old allegiances.

The Spirit's presence makes this more than an impossible ideal. Peter tells believers reproached for Christ's name that they are blessed, because:

> 1 Peter 4:14 (NKJV): "the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you."[27]

While opponents heap shame upon them, God acknowledges His own. The Spirit who belongs to the coming glory is present with the suffering believer now. We must not measure His nearness only by relief. His help may be evident in the continued confession of Christ, the refusal of revenge, or the love that has not died under repeated injury. None of these makes the wound unreal. They show that the wound has not become the ruler of the soul.

God's Purpose Does Not Excuse the Wrong

Peter refuses to call all suffering honorable. He warns against suffering as a murderer, thief, evildoer, or meddler, and then distinguishes suffering as a Christian. A person cannot make his conduct righteous merely by finding someone who opposes it. Sometimes criticism

exposes a fault that needs repentance. End-times seriousness must never become a religious shield against correction.[15]

He also speaks solemnly about judgment beginning with God's house:

> 1 Peter 4:17–18 (KJV): "For the time is come that judgment must begin at the house of God: and if it first begin at us, what shall the end be of them that obey not the gospel of God? And if the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?"[15]

God's searching dealings with His own household are not the same as the final condemnation of those who reject His gospel. The difficult passage of the righteous into salvation does not imply an inadequate Savior or an uncertain promise. It destroys the expectation of an effortless road. If God's own people pass through such testing, opposition to Him cannot provide the safety temptation advertises.

The persecutor's apparent advantage is temporary. He may avoid the suffering he inflicts while moving toward a judgment from which power and influence cannot shelter him. The Christian must not envy that position. Peter's warning makes compromise look as dangerous as it really is: it offers momentary acceptance from people who cannot protect us before God.

We nevertheless know God's purposes only as far as He reveals them. Scripture teaches that He tests faith, forms endurance, conforms believers to Christ, and gives opportunity for witness. It does not authorize us to identify the precise purpose of every death, illness, or betrayal. The sovereignty that comforts us should also humble our explanations. We can know whose hands hold us without knowing why this particular sorrow was permitted.

Nor does divine sovereignty transfer innocence to the wrongdoer. God's use of an evil deed does not make the deed good. Christians may seek medical treatment, flee persecution, report abuse, and use lawful protection. Jesus Himself told persecuted disciples to flee to another city (Matthew 10:23). No one has authority to turn a doctrine of endurance into a demand that another person remain available for preventable harm.[28]

The theological truth remains strong: evil cannot overthrow God's purpose. The moral truth remains equally strong: evil is to be resisted by lawful and righteous means, not excused because God is sovereign.

Watchfulness requires both convictions. Without the first we may despair; without the second we may help the oppressor.

Joy That Has Room for Tears

Peter acknowledges heaviness and joy in the same believers. That should protect suffering Christians from an unnecessary second burden: the belief that grief itself proves spiritual failure. They love the Christ they have not seen while mourning losses they can see painfully well. Their hope has not made them insensible; it has given their sorrow a future.

Psalm 13 provides language for the interval between distress and relief:

> Psalm 13:1 (NKJV): "How long, O LORD? Will You forget me forever?"[29]

The psalmist is telling God how abandonment feels, not establishing that God has actually abandoned him. His cry is addressed to the very Lord whose face he longs to see. Later in the same prayer, he confesses trust in God's mercy. Faith can speak from anguish without granting anguish the final word.

> Psalm 13:5 (NKJV): "But I have trusted in Your mercy; My heart shall rejoice in Your salvation."[29]

As trials intensify, a church that confuses faith with unbroken composure will teach its wounded members to hide. They will learn to report reassuring feelings instead of real needs. But concealment deprives them of fellowship precisely when Peter's letter calls believers to love and serve one another. A congregation preparing for Christ's return must have room for truthful sorrow, practical help, and hope spoken without impatience.

God's care is not less divine because it arrives through a believer who sits beside us, brings food, or prays when words are difficult. The Lord who commands His people to love also sustains them through that love. Readiness is therefore not an achievement of isolated spiritual toughness. Even the sufferer who can do little may receive help as a member of Christ's body and continue looking to Him.

Paul gives the waiting church a way to judge what it sees:

> 2 Corinthians 4:16–18 (KJV): "For which cause we faint not; but though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is

> renewed day by day. For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal."[30]

Paul calls affliction light in comparison with eternal glory, not because suffering is trivial. He speaks as a man whose body has borne the cost of ministry. The comparison enlarges hope; it does not authorize us to belittle another person's pain. The coming glory is so substantial that even severe suffering cannot outweigh it.

That is why watchfulness must include attention to the unseen promises of God. If we study only what threatens us, we may become exceptionally informed about danger and poorly nourished in hope. Paul looks beyond what is passing away because he knows which reality will remain.

Learning Contentment before the Trial Ends

Paul shows us what trust looks like while suffering remains. In 2 Corinthians 12:7–10, he describes a thorn given to keep him from becoming proud over extraordinary revelations. The apostle who had received great privileges still needed to be humbled. Even Satan's assault served a purpose he could not overthrow: God was teaching Paul dependence upon Christ.

Paul pleaded three times for the thorn's removal. Christ answered, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness" (verse 9).[31] The thorn remained, but Paul was not abandoned to endure it alone. Christ supplied what the suffering apostle could not supply for himself.

Do not hurry past the two transitions. Between verses 8 and 9, Paul moves from pleading for removal to welcoming Christ's power in the very weakness he wanted removed. The change occupies one verse on the page; Paul does not tell us how much time it took. What he does tell us is why he changed. The "therefore" in verse 9 makes his gladness a response to Christ's promise, not an unexplained burst of courage. Paul asked Christ to remove the weakness; Christ taught Paul to depend upon His strength within it. That answer turned the weakness he wanted to escape into an occasion for the Savior's power to rest upon him.[32]

Then the "therefore" of verse 10 carries the lesson beyond the thorn into insults, needs, persecutions, and distress endured for Christ. One

answered prayer has given Paul a way to understand many sufferings. He does not become strong only after weakness disappears; Christ's power sustains him while weakness remains. This is not a technique for talking ourselves into enjoying pain. It is faith receiving Christ's explanation and allowing that truth to govern our response. The wisdom we need is not a secret behind His words. It is the truth He has plainly spoken, believed deeply enough to change what we expect from Him.[32]

Notice the change in Paul's understanding. He now speaks of his weaknesses "most gladly" and says, "I take pleasure" in hardships endured for Christ (verses 9–10).[31] He had not learned to love pain. He had learned to treasure Christ's power working through his weakness. What humbled him became an occasion to experience his Savior's strength. His suffering no longer had to end before he could acknowledge God's goodness within it.

Here is the foundation of Christian acceptance, contentment, peace, and joy: Christ remains sufficient, and God's purpose remains good. Paul's faith did not merely help him survive the trial. It changed how he understood it. He could accept what he had asked God to remove because he now understood what Christ was supplying through it.

Facing the loss of his beloved wife, George Müller said, "What I have to do, as His child, is to be satisfied with what my Father does, that I may glorify Him."[33] Such contentment leaves room for a breaking heart; it refuses to make recovery the price of continued trust.

This is the spiritual understanding believers will need when end-times hostility intensifies into persecution and martyrdom. Revelation 13:7 describes the beast making war against the saints and overcoming them. Yet verse 10 declares, "Here is the patience and the faith of the saints."[34] Their endurance is not a guarantee that persecution cannot kill them. It is faithfulness to Christ even when obedience costs their lives. Paul's example prepares us for that test: we must not make escape the condition of our obedience. The strength we need will not come from our ability to withstand everything, but from the Savior whose grace remains sufficient when our own strength is gone.

The Verdict That Suffering Cannot Overturn

The return of Christ will do more than end our pain. It will reveal the truth about our allegiance. Faithfulness that was called foolish will be shown to have been wisdom. Trust that appeared unanswered will

reach the outcome God promised. Those who suffered for Christ will not need their persecutors to admit they were wrong before they can be vindicated.

> 2 Thessalonians 1:6–7 (KJV): "Seeing it is a righteous thing with God to recompense tribulation to them that trouble you; And to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels,"[35]

Paul places final relief and righteous judgment at the revelation of Jesus Christ. The waiting period does not mean that God has lost interest in justice. It means that the Judge has not yet brought history to its appointed conclusion. We can entrust vindication to Him without pretending the wrong does not matter.

Revelation gives a startling description of victory:

> Revelation 12:11 (KJV): "And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony; and they loved not their lives unto the death."[13]

Their overcoming is grounded in the Lamb's blood and expressed in faithful testimony, even when death is the cost. They do not defeat the accuser by proving themselves beyond the reach of suffering. They belong to the Savior whose sacrifice answers accusation and whose resurrection defeats death. The enemy can inflict a loss without obtaining the surrender he wants.

Romans 8 brings that assurance directly to the suffering believer:

> Romans 8:35–37 (KJV): "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written, For thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter. Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us."[36]

Paul does not remove the sword from the passage. He removes its power to separate believers from Christ's love. This is the confidence we need when the last days grow dark. Circumstances may become grievous; the Savior does not become unreliable.

While being beaten and dragged through a Chinese city, Hudson Taylor recalled, "To be absent from the body! to be present with the Lord! to be free from sin! And this is the end of the worst that man's

malice can ever bring upon us."[37] His captors could threaten his life, but they could not make death a separation from Christ.

Peter therefore closes his instruction by directing suffering believers to a faithful Creator:

> 1 Peter 4:19 (KJV): "Wherefore let them that suffer according to the will of God commit the keeping of their souls to him in well doing, as unto a faithful Creator."[15]

The One who made us is able to keep what we entrust to Him. We can continue doing good because the final outcome of our lives does not depend upon keeping every earthly advantage. This conviction will sustain the duties we consider next. Before we ask how to stand firm, we must know the Lord in whose faithfulness we stand.

You may not know what the coming trial will take from you. You do know what it cannot take from Christ. It cannot cancel His sacrifice, empty His risen life of power, or prevent His return. Bring your fear to Him without pretending it is small. Entrust yourself to Him without demanding that His care take only the form you prefer. The Savior who calls you to watch will not cease to be your Savior when faithfulness costs you something.

Questions for Further Study

1. Read 1 Peter 4:1–19. How do the commands connected with the approaching end prepare believers to understand the fiery trial? Why does Peter distinguish suffering for Christ from suffering for wrongdoing?
2. Read 1 Peter 1:3–9 and Luke 21:12–19. What does divine preservation secure, and what hardships does it not exclude? Which expectation of protection in your own thinking needs to be tested against these passages?
3. Read 1 Peter 1:6–9 and James 1:2–4. What does testing reveal and develop in faith? Why does Christ's appearing, rather than immediate relief or human approval, govern the value of that testing?
4. Read Matthew 24:9–13 and 1 Peter 5:8–10. Which spiritual dangers accompany persecution? How could a person remain alert to external enemies while overlooking a change in his own trust or love?
5. Read Psalm 13 and 2 Corinthians 4:16–18. How do lament and

eternal hope belong together? What distinguishes honest sorrow before God from making relief a condition of continued trust?

6. Read 2 Thessalonians 1:5–10, Revelation 12:11, and Romans 8:35–39. How do these passages define victory and vindication? What would have to change if you received their definition instead of measuring victory chiefly by earthly safety?

Practical Applications

1. Examine the protection you have been expecting.

Complete this sentence honestly: "If I remain faithful, I expect God to keep me from _____." Read 1 Peter 1:3–9 beside what you have written. Distinguish a mercy you may rightly request from an outcome He has actually promised. Bring the unsupported expectation to Him, asking for faith to trust His revealed promise rather than your private condition.

2. Identify the argument your suffering keeps making.

Name one conclusion a present or feared hardship presses upon you about Christ, obedience, or other believers. Test it against 1 Peter 4:12–19 and Romans 8:35–39. Confess any sinful conclusion without condemning honest grief. Share the struggle with a trustworthy believer who can help you keep the promise and the pain in their proper relationship.

3. Give coming glory a place in today's attention.

Read 2 Corinthians 4:16–18 and 2 Thessalonians 1:5–10 slowly enough to name what Christ's appearing will settle that your circumstances cannot settle now. Use those truths in prayer for yourself and one suffering believer. Let that expectation strengthen one present duty that fear has been making easier to postpone.

Chapter Axioms

1. Suffering for Christ is compatible with being beloved by God and kept by His power. 1 Peter 1:3–9; 4:12–14.
2. God's keeping secures His people's final salvation without promising immunity from persecution, loss, or death. Luke 21:16–19; Romans 8:35–39.

3. Tested faith is more precious than the earthly advantages compromise may preserve. 1 Peter 1:6–9; Hebrews 11:24–26.
4. Watchfulness must recognize the spiritual dangers within suffering as well as the hostility outside the church. Matthew 24:9–13; 1 Peter 5:8–9.
5. Christian hope makes room for truthful lament while refusing to let present pain pronounce the final verdict on God's faithfulness. Psalm 13; 2 Corinthians 4:16–18.
6. Christ's appearing will bring the glory, relief, and righteous vindication His suffering people cannot secure for themselves. 1 Peter 4:13; 2 Thessalonians 1:5–10.

The Doctrine of Suffering

Fifteen Principles

1. Following Christ means counting the cost of obedience.

Jesus calls His disciple to "take up his cross daily, and follow Me" (Luke 9:23). Suffering for His sake is not an unexpected addition to discipleship; costly allegiance belongs to the calling itself. We must settle whom we will obey before persecution makes obedience dangerous.

Scripture: Luke 9:23–24; 1 Peter 2:21–23.

2. Expecting exemption from suffering reveals an incomplete understanding of discipleship.

Peter commands, "do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you" (1 Peter 4:12). Spiritual depth does not prevent shock or grief; it teaches us not to mistake suffering for a betrayal of God's promises. Faith prepares for trouble because Christ told the truth about its coming.

Scripture: 1 Peter 4:12–13; John 16:1–4.

3. Resentment can blind us to God's purpose of making us holy.

The Father disciplines His children "that we may be partakers of His holiness" (Hebrews 12:10). When our question about suffering becomes an insistence that God should never have permitted it, we

resist the training through which He develops endurance, character, and hope. We may seek relief while submitting to His sanctifying purpose.

Scripture: Hebrews 12:10–11; Romans 5:3–5.

4. Suffering alone does not prove that God is punishing a particular sin.

Jesus rejected that explanation of a man's blindness: "Neither this man nor his parents sinned" (John 9:3). We should examine ourselves honestly, but we must not invent accusations against sufferers or conclude that stronger faith would have prevented their affliction. God's purposes are larger than the explanations we can see.

Scripture: John 9:1–3; Job 42:7–8.

5. The enemy's power remains subject to God's authority.

God set Satan's boundary: "only do not lay a hand on his person" (Job 1:12). Persecution can be fierce without becoming sovereign, and the enemy cannot cancel God's final purpose for His people. Divine permission does not make cruelty righteous or release its perpetrators from judgment.

Scripture: Job 1:12; Daniel 7:21–27.

6. Tested faith grows in endurance through continued trust.

James teaches that "the testing of your faith produces patience" (James 1:3). Trials expose what we depend upon and train us to obey when comfort no longer supports obedience. Their value is measured by faith strengthened for Christ's appearing, not merely by hardship survived.

Scripture: James 1:2–4; 1 Peter 1:6–7.

7. God uses weakness to humble even His most gifted servants.

Paul's thorn guarded him "lest I be exalted above measure" (2 Corinthians 12:7). Spiritual privileges do not remove our need for dependence, and usefulness does not make us safe from pride. The trial that reveals our limits may preserve us from trusting ourselves instead of God.

Scripture: 2 Corinthians 12:7; 2 Corinthians 1:8–9.

8. Christ's sufficient grace can change our response before circumstances change.

Christ told Paul, "My grace is sufficient for you" (2 Corinthians 12:9). Paul moved from pleading for removal to glad confidence in Christ's power within weakness. Christian contentment rests not in loving pain, but in trusting the Savior whose strength remains available while the trial remains.

Scripture: 2 Corinthians 12:8–10; Philippians 4:11–13.

9. Suffering for Christ deepens fellowship with the rejected Savior.

Peter says believers "partake of Christ's sufferings" (1 Peter 4:13). Opposition endured for His name identifies us with the Lord the world rejected; it does not mean that He has rejected us. Our suffering adds nothing to His finished atonement, but following Him includes sharing His reproach.

Scripture: 1 Peter 4:13–14; Hebrews 13:12–13.

10. Pain does not sanctify automatically; God changes us through His truth and Spirit.

Jesus prayed, "Sanctify them by Your truth" (John 17:17). Suffering is not a substitute for receiving Scripture, believing its promises, and yielding to the Spirit's work. The question is not merely what we have endured, but what truth we are learning to obey within it.

Scripture: John 17:17; 2 Thessalonians 2:13.

11. Honest lament and prayer for relief belong to faith.

Scripture invites us, "Pour out your heart before Him" (Psalm 62:8). Tears and anguished questions need not deny God's goodness; they may express our dependence upon Him. We can ask Him to remove the trial without making its removal the condition of our trust.

Scripture: Psalm 62:8; Matthew 26:38–39.

12. God's comfort equips us to strengthen other sufferers.

He "comforts us in all our tribulation" (2 Corinthians 1:4), so that we can comfort others. Suffering should deepen compassion rather than teach us to withdraw into ourselves. As hostility increases, Christ's people must receive help without shame and carry one another's burdens without impatience.

Scripture: 2 Corinthians 1:3–4; Galatians 6:2.

13. Watchfulness must guard love and faith, not merely physical safety.

Jesus warns that "the love of many will grow cold" (Matthew 24:12). Persecution brings inward temptations as well as outward threats: bitterness, fear, and compromise can exploit our pain. We must resist the enemy without becoming like him.

Scripture: Matthew 24:9–13; 1 Peter 5:8–10.

14. Faithful martyrdom is victory through Christ, not the failure of His keeping.

The saints "overcame him by the blood of the Lamb" (Revelation 12:11). The beast may take their lives without securing their worship or separating them from their Savior. Christian victory cannot be measured by survival when Scripture honors those who remain faithful unto death.

Scripture: Revelation 12:11; Revelation 13:7–10.

15. Coming glory and righteous judgment give suffering its final perspective.

Paul directs us toward "the glory which shall be revealed in us" (Romans 8:18). Christ will vindicate His afflicted people, judge evil, and bring them into the glory no persecutor can take away. Present suffering can wound us deeply, but it cannot separate us from His love or determine our eternal future.

Scripture: Romans 8:18–39; 2 Thessalonians 1:6–10.

The world's pressure often gains its advantage through something the heart already refuses to surrender. The love of approval makes rejection more threatening; cherished comfort makes compromise more attractive. Preparing to suffer for Christ therefore requires more than understanding our persecutors. We must examine what within us might welcome their terms.

The grace that sustains us under suffering also equips us to break with sin. Paul joins readiness for the coming day to this command: "make no provision for the flesh" (Romans 13:14, NKJV). We cannot prepare for costly obedience while deliberately feeding desires that resist it. Our next duty is to guard the heart and put sin to death, not through confidence in our willpower, but through dependence upon Christ and the power of His Spirit (Romans 8:13).

Notes

1. Revelation 2:8–11, especially the short closing promise in verse 10, NKJV. The risen Christ addresses Smyrna's actual suffering and prospective imprisonment; His promise is faithfulness rewarded with life, not exemption from death. Short Scripture quotations are identified as NKJV; extended quotations use the public-domain KJV.
2. Luke 9:23–24, KJV. Jesus connects following Him with daily self-denial and cross-bearing. The cost is the consequence of allegiance to Christ, not a payment for salvation.
3. Luke 14:27–33, with verses 27–28 quoted from the KJV. The illustrations of calculation culminate in relinquishing all competing claims to follow Christ. The chapter does not turn counting the cost into confidence in unaided human strength.
4. First Peter 2:19–25, with verse 21 quoted from the NKJV. The immediate context concerns unjust suffering while doing good; Christ's example is distinguished from His unique sin-bearing work.
5. Martin Luther, Epistle Sermons, Volume III, translated by John Nicholas Lenker, "Fourth Sunday After Trinity," "Consolation in Suffering, and Patience," section 3. The sermon was first printed at Wittenberg in 1535. Luther expounds Romans 8:17–22, grounding sonship in faith through Christ while rejecting the wish to share His inheritance without sharing His suffering. https://www.gutenberg.org/files/30619/30619-h/30619-h.htm
6. John 15:18–20, KJV. Jesus grounds the world's hostility in its prior hatred of Him and His disciples' changed allegiance. This does not equate all criticism of Christians with persecution or assert identical experiences for every disciple.
7. John 16:33, NKJV, exact concluding sentence excerpt. Jesus places His disciples' peace in Him alongside tribulation in the world and confidence in His victory.
8. First Peter 4:1–19, particularly verses 4, 7–13. The chapter's governing passage is 4:12–19; the earlier commands establish its end-oriented and congregational setting. Verses 12–13 are quoted from the KJV. Persecution for Christ's name is distinguished from ordinary affliction and from suffering caused by wrongdoing.
9. John 16:1–4. Jesus' advance warning prepares His disciples not to stumble when hostility comes. The pastoral application concerns the purpose of warning, not an assertion that every subsequent trial fulfills this passage in precisely the same way.
10. Luke 21:12–19, with verses 16–19 quoted from the KJV. The preservation promise is interpreted alongside the explicit prediction of some disciples' deaths. This supports ultimate security in God's care rather than guaranteed bodily immunity; no detailed end-time sequence is inferred.
11. Matthew 24:9–13, KJV. The passage belongs within Jesus' teaching about Jerusalem, coming distress, and His return; Christians differ over aspects of its chronology. The chapter preserves the connection among persecution, betrayal, deception, cooling love, and endurance without assigning contemporary events to particular verses or resolving the discourse's debated chronology.
12. Revelation 13:7–10, with verse 7 quoted from the KJV, read alongside Revelation 12:11. The chapter distinguishes the beast's outward conquest from the saints' victory through the Lamb. The application establishes intensified hostility and the need for endurance without identifying a contemporary ruler, calculating dates, or settling the chronology of the church's gathering.
13. Revelation 12:11, KJV. The chapter retains the Lamb's blood as the ground of victory and faithful testimony as its expression, including willingness to suffer death. No prophecy timetable is imposed on the verse.
14. The ten-item survey draws on Matthew 24:6–13; Luke 21:9–19; Daniel 7:21–27;

Revelation 13:7–17; and Revelation 20:4. References are supplied beside each item. The survey distinguishes persecution directed against believers from wider calamities in which believers may suffer. It does not claim that every believer experiences every event or use the warnings to calculate a date for Christ's return. Daniel's account places the persecuting power's temporary success within the final judgment and the saints' reception of the kingdom.

15. First Peter 4:15–19, with verses 17–19 quoted from the KJV in their respective places. The household's searching trial is distinguished from the final judgment of those disobedient to the gospel. "Scarcely" is understood in terms of the difficult passage through trial, not weakness in Christ's saving sufficiency.
16. John Bunyan, Seasonable Counsel: or, Advice to Sufferers (1684), "Use Seventh," in the George Offor-edited text reproduced by GospelWeb. Bunyan warns against privately setting the limit beyond which persecution must not proceed. This quotation is doctrinal counsel, not an inserted biographical testimony. https://gospelweb.net/John%20Bunyan/JohnBunyanSeasonableCounsel.htm
17. First Peter 1:3–9, with verses 6–9 quoted from the KJV. "Manifold temptations" denotes various trials in this setting; "the end" in verse 9 concerns faith's goal or outcome. The chapter reads suffering within Peter's preceding assurance of resurrection hope, reserved inheritance, and God's keeping power.
18. John 9:1–3; Hebrews 11:32–38. These passages are paraphrased, not directly quoted. John 9 refuses the proposed inference from congenital blindness to the man's or his parents' sin; Hebrews 11 commends faith both in escape from the sword and in death by the sword. Neither passage denies all connections between sin and suffering.
19. James 1:2–4. The passage connects testing with endurance and maturity. The chapter applies this to believers awaiting Christ without claiming that suffering automatically sanctifies apart from God's grace and faith's response.
20. George Müller, A Narrative of Some of the Lord's Dealings with George Müller, Third Part, discussion answering "How may I, a true believer, have my faith strengthened?", section II.3. Müller describes the strengthening of faith through dependence upon God in trial, alongside prayer, meditation on Scripture, and an upright conscience; this is not a direction to seek unnecessary danger. https://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/22148/pg22148-images.html
21. C. H. Spurgeon, "All Joy in All Trials," Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit, volume 29, February 4, 1883, introductory outline preceding section I. Exact opening clause verified; the original semicolon following "at" has been replaced by terminal punctuation. Spurgeon's text is James 1:2–4, and his point is that faith is particularly assailed under trial. https://www.spurgeon.org/sermons/all-joy-in-all-trials
22. First Peter 5:8–10, with verses 8–9 quoted from the KJV. The command to vigilance and resistance is read with the reminder of fellow believers' afflictions and the promise of the God of all grace. It is not used to identify the direct cause of a particular illness or tragedy.
23. John Calvin, Commentaries on the Catholic Epistles, commentary on 1 Peter 4:12–13, in the Christian Classics Ethereal Library primary-text transcription. Exact clause verified; terminal punctuation adapted from the longer sentence. Calvin's immediate argument connects fellowship with Christ's sufferings to participation in His glory and distinguishes present joy mingled with grief from joy at His revelation. https://www.ccel.org/ccel/calvin/comment3/comm_vol45/htm/iv.v.iii.htm
24. First Peter 2:21–25; 3:18. Christ's example in suffering is distinguished from His unique sin-bearing work. The chapter does not treat Christian affliction as an addition to atonement.

25. Romans 8:28–30, with verses 28–29 paraphrased. The promised good is read in connection with conformity to Christ and God's completed saving purpose, not as a guarantee of visible earthly compensation for each loss.
26. C. H. Spurgeon, "A Sharp Knife for the Vine Branches," sermon 774, Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit, volume 13, October 6, 1867, section II, on John 15:2–3. Exact concluding clause verified in the primary-text transcription, preserving its lowercase opening. Spurgeon distinguishes affliction itself from the sanctifying work of God's Word made effective by the Holy Spirit. https://www.spurgeon.org/sermons/a-sharp-knife-for-the-vine-branches
27. First Peter 4:14, NKJV, exact short excerpt. The promise concerns those reproached for Christ's name. Divine presence is not made dependent upon the cessation of persecution.
28. Matthew 10:23. The command to flee persecution establishes that endurance need not mean remaining in avoidable danger. The treatment of lawful protection and practical care is a pastoral application, not a claim that this one verse prescribes every response to abuse or illness.
29. Psalm 13, with the opening two questions of verse 1 and the whole of verse 5 quoted from the NKJV. Exact wording verified; verse 1 is a short excerpt, and verse 5 retains the capitalized opening of its second poetic line. The lament and the confession of trust belong to the same prayer. The psalm is used as a pattern for honest dependence, not a direct prophecy of end-time persecution.
30. Second Corinthians 4:16–18, KJV, read in the context of Paul's suffering ministry and resurrection confidence. The contrast concerns present affliction and eternal glory; it does not trivialize bodily suffering.
31. Second Corinthians 12:7–10, NKJV. The three short excerpts total 19 words and retain the verified wording. The thorn's identity is left unspecified; its humbling purpose, Paul's repeated request for relief, Christ's sufficiency, and Paul's changed response control the exposition. Acceptance, contentment, peace, and joy describe the pastoral implications of that response, not four terms all explicitly used in this passage.
32. Second Corinthians 12:9–10. The Greek inferential conjunctions oun (verse 9) and dio (verse 10), both rendered "therefore" in the NKJV, connect Paul's responses with Christ's sufficient grace and power in weakness. The first transition concerns his response to Christ's answer; the second extends the principle to the hardships listed in verse 10. Narrative compression does not establish the elapsed time of Paul's inward change. The closing application distinguishes receiving revealed truth by faith from discovering an esoteric technique.
33. George Müller, "Address on Psalm 119 v68," funeral sermon following his wife's death, recorded March 3, 1870, in The Writings and Teachings of George Müller of Bristol, page 26. Exact sentence verified in the collected address and corroborated in his autobiographical account. Müller is recalling his response during his wife's final illness, not claiming that contentment removes grief. https://www.georgemuller.org/uploads/4/8/6/5/48652749/the_writings_and_teachings_of_george_muller_of_bristol.pdf#page=26 https://www.uecf.net/books/autobiography-of-george-muller/chapter16-2.html
34. Revelation 13:7–10, NKJV, with the concluding sentence of verse 10 quoted exactly. "Patience" expresses persevering endurance. The passage's application to lethal persecution is read with Revelation 12:11 and does not promise immunity or predict that every believer will be martyred.
35. Second Thessalonians 1:5–10, with verses 6–7 quoted from the KJV. Christ's revelation brings righteous judgment and relief to His afflicted people. The promise is not used to authorize personal vengeance.

36. Romans 8:35–39, with verses 35–37 quoted from the KJV. The passage acknowledges lethal persecution while declaring that it cannot separate believers from Christ's love.
37. J. Hudson Taylor, A Retrospect, third edition, chapter X, "First Evangelistic Efforts," page 53. Taylor describes being seized, bruised, and dragged through T'ung-chau with Mr. Burdon; the following paragraph records their captors debating whether to kill them. The quotation expresses confidence in being with Christ, not a claim that Taylor was martyred. https://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/26744/pg26744-images.html Scripture taken from the New King James Version®. Copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

PART TWO

Faithful at Our Posts: The Duties of Watchfulness

Christ's saving work, promised return, and sustaining grace give weight to every duty He entrusts to us. Part Two brings those duties into sharper focus: guarding the heart, praying, receiving His Word, strengthening His people, and serving faithfully when obedience costs us something. Our concern now is to understand what the returning Master requires and why each responsibility matters to watchfulness. The detailed work of reshaping habits and carrying these duties through particular circumstances will follow in Part Three.

CHAPTER 8

Keep Your Heart and Break with Sin

Living in the Light of the Coming Day

"It is the hardest work. Heart-work is hard work indeed."

John Flavel[1]

Imagine a church member who hears that another man has been asked to teach. He congratulates him. He means to be gracious. Yet on the way home he begins reviewing the man's weaknesses, remembering his own years of service, and wondering why the elders overlooked him. By evening, another Christian's opportunity has become evidence of an injustice against himself.

Nothing scandalous has happened. No one has heard an angry accusation. But a gift that could have strengthened the church is being received as a personal loss. The man may still speak earnestly about the dangers facing Christians in the last days. Meanwhile, in the privacy of his thoughts, he is preparing to weaken the fellowship he will need when those dangers press upon him.

James 3:14–16 (KJV) brings the hidden matter into the open: "But if ye have bitter envying and strife in your hearts, glory not, and lie not against the truth. This wisdom descendeth not from above, but is earthly, sensual, devilish. For where envying and strife is, there is confusion and every evil work." The trouble begins before the angry conversation. Envy persuades a man to treat another servant's usefulness as a threat, then offers him respectable reasons to oppose it. Soon he may call his resentment concern for the church.

Describing a holy man, J. C. Ryle writes, "He will bear much, forbear much, overlook much, and be slow to talk of standing on his rights."[2] Ryle does not forbid us to report injustice. He searches the haste with which wounded pride declares an injustice. Has this brother been wronged, or has someone else been blessed? He needs an answer before his disappointment recruits other people to its cause.

The Lord's coming makes that question urgent. James 5:9 (NKJV): "Do not grumble against one another, brethren, lest you be condemned. Behold, the Judge is standing at the door!" The Judge at the door hears what we say about the brother across the aisle. Watchfulness cannot mean longing for Christ to settle the world's wrongs while asking Him to overlook our cherished hostility. A. W. Pink presses the connection: "In view of the fact that our Lord may return at any hour, how awful are divisions between the Lord's own people."[3] The approaching Lord gathers our attention back from the horizon to the person we have begun to resent.

Nor can polished conduct settle the matter. First Corinthians 4:5 (NKJV) says, "Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord comes, who will both bring to light the hidden things of darkness and reveal the counsels of the hearts. Then each one's praise will come from God." Paul is warning against premature verdicts upon Christ's servants; he is not suspending all moral discernment. The Lord knows both the brother we judge and the motives from which we judge him. We may win an argument about another man's deficiencies and still have to answer for the pleasure we took in finding them.

John Flavel writes, "There is only so much of worth in what we do, as there is of heart in it."[4] The courteous congratulations matter, but they cannot make a defended grievance faithful. The heart must come into the light with the words. Christ does not ask this man to manufacture a cheerful feeling. He calls him to confess his envy, receive grace, and seek the good of the brother whose appointment exposed it.

The foundations of watchfulness now lead us to its duties. We belong to Christ, His day approaches, and His grace equips us to obey. Our first concern is therefore close at hand: the heart from which our choices proceed. We must guard it, refuse to nourish its sinful desires, and put those desires to death by the Spirit. The Master we await must govern the person who is waiting.

The Coming Day Changes What We Do Tonight

> Romans 13:11–14 (KJV): "And that, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep: for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed. The night is far spent, the day is at hand: let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armour of light. Let us walk honestly, as in the day; not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envying. But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof."[5]

Paul gives the church an alarm, a reason, and a duty. Wake, because the completion of your salvation approaches; abandon the works of darkness, because you belong to the coming day. Knowing the time must change how we conduct ourselves within it. The apostle does not stop to calculate a date. He names the sins his readers must forsake.

That movement exposes a familiar evasion. We can spend an evening discussing what Christ's coming means for the nations while refusing to consider what it means for the quarrel in our own home. Paul brings sexual immorality, drunkenness, strife, and envy into the same daylight. Religious respectability cannot shelter the believer who condemns an obvious indulgence while feeding a quieter rivalry. The approaching Lord claims the conversation after dinner and the desire entertained before sleep.

C. H. Spurgeon puts it plainly: "watching for the Coming of the Lord means acting just as you would wish to be acting if he were to come."[6] That does not require abandoning ordinary work for a permanent posture of alarm. It requires doing ordinary work under Christ's authority. Would you willingly have Him find you composing that cruel reply, rehearsing that accusation, or returning to that private indulgence? The question interrupts the convenient division between a future we profess to expect and a present we intend to keep for ourselves.

Paul addresses people who have believed. Their approaching salvation is its future completion, not justification they must earn by improving their behavior. Ryle carefully distinguishes the blessings: "Sanctification gives us our meetness for heaven, and prepares us to enjoy it when we dwell there."[7] Meetness means fitness, not merit. Christ supplies our acceptance; His Spirit renews our desires for the life into which He will bring us. The hope of heaven cannot be

healthy while we insist upon keeping the sins that would make its holiness unwelcome.

Titus 2:11–13 (KJV) shows how this preparation takes place: "For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world; Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ;" Grace teaches us how to wait. The same grace that rescues us from guilt trains us to deny what once ruled us. Every obedient refusal is a lesson received from the Savior whose appearing we desire.

The night is passing, but its habits need not govern the people of the day. First Thessalonians 5:4–8 (KJV) says, "But ye, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief. Ye are all the children of light, and the children of the day: we are not of the night, nor of darkness. Therefore let us not sleep, as do others; but let us watch and be sober. For they that sleep sleep in the night; and they that be drunken are drunken in the night. But let us, who are of the day, be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love; and for an helmet, the hope of salvation." Notice the armor: faith, love, and hope. An agitated interest in prophecy that leaves us suspicious, loveless, and spiritually careless is poorly equipped for the very dangers it discusses.

Pink writes, "The Imminency of the Redeemer's second advent was revealed as an incentive to watchfulness and preparedness."[8] We are not given a date with which to postpone obedience. We are given a Lord whose promise makes obedience urgent. The question is not how long we can safely retain the works of darkness. It is why children of the day should want to retain them.

John carries this hope into our affections. We shall see Christ and become like Him. First John 3:3 (NKJV): "And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure."[9] Peter widens the prospect without loosening its claim upon us. Second Peter 3:11–14 (KJV): "Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness, Looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God, wherein the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat? Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness. Wherefore, beloved, seeing that ye look for such

things, be diligent that ye may be found of him in peace, without spot, and blameless."[10] The promised home of righteousness calls for righteous living before we arrive. As Pink observes, the Blessed Hope is intended "to check the spirit of self-pleasing and self-seeking in the believer and to promote holiness in the daily life."[11]

Yet the Lord does more than expose what must be forsaken. He teaches us to expect His welcome. Luke 12:35–37 (KJV): "Let your loins be girded about, and your lights burning; And ye yourselves like unto men that wait for their lord, when he will return from the wedding; that when he cometh and knocketh, they may open unto him immediately. Blessed are those servants, whom the lord when he cometh shall find watching: verily I say unto you, that he shall gird himself, and make them to sit down to meat, and will come forth and serve them." The servants are ready to open; astonishingly, the master is ready to serve them. Christian watchfulness has that gracious welcome before it. We refuse tonight's sin because the One who is coming is worthy of our obedience, and because no indulgence can give us what He has promised.

Guard the Place Where Your Choices Begin

> Proverbs 4:23 (NKJV): "Keep your heart with all diligence, For out of it spring the issues of life."[12]

The heart is the inward life from which we think, desire, judge, and choose. Guarding it means bringing that life under God's truth before a cherished desire begins directing our steps. The surrounding instructions concern words, eyes, and feet. Scripture guards the source because the source supplies the stream. What we permit ourselves to love eventually asks us to do something about it.

Jesus makes that inward duty essential to readiness for His coming. Luke 21:34–36 (KJV): "And take heed to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting, and drunkenness, and cares of this life, and so that day come upon you unawares. For as a snare shall it come on all them that dwell on the face of the whole earth. Watch ye therefore, and pray always, that ye may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of man." Gross indulgence is not the only danger named. The cares of this life can burden the heart until the coming day scarcely enters its calculations. A person may be busy, anxious, and outwardly respectable while becoming increasingly unavailable to God.

Consider again the overlooked church member. His first duty is not to convince everyone that he is untroubled. He must receive God's judgment upon the envy he has entertained. Another man's usefulness does not diminish Christ's kindness to him. The church does not exist to confirm his importance. Until he accepts those truths, even his prayers about the matter may become requests for God to vindicate his resentment.

John Owen warns us about the heart's capacity to rename its own disorder: "though it give all its distempers other names than what are their due, believe it not."[13] Ambition may call itself zeal; discontent may call itself discernment. Watchfulness asks what God calls the desire, not merely what explanation enables us to keep it. When Scripture contradicts our preferred account, we must yield the account rather than evade the Scripture.

This becomes especially urgent as outward pressure grows. A person who requires admiration gives the tempter something to threaten. A person who must remain in control may be tempted to disobey when faithfulness means trusting God with an uncertain result. Ryle describes the holy man's humility: "He knows his own heart is like tinder, and will diligently keep clear of the sparks of temptation."[14] The danger is not only that the world will grow more hostile. It is that hostility will discover an affection we have refused to surrender. The desire for approval that governs a small compromise today may be summoned to defend a greater one tomorrow.

Matthew 24:10–13 (KJV) makes the prospect searching: "And then shall many be offended, and shall betray one another, and shall hate one another. And many false prophets shall rise, and shall deceive many. And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold. But he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved." Betrayal, deception, lawlessness, and cooling love appear together in Christ's warning. One unwelcome feeling does not prove final apostasy. Nevertheless, we dare not treat a cultivated grievance as unrelated to the endurance of love. A heart steadily trained to resent other believers is being poorly prepared to stand beside them under pressure.

Flavel writes, "It is the watchful heart that discovers and suppresses the temptation before it comes to its strength."[15] The moment to deal with the grievance is not after it has enlisted our speech, friendships, and habits in its defense. Christ gives light now so that we may refuse its first requests. We cannot guarantee our own steadfastness, but we can stop treating the weakness He exposes as too small to matter.

Guarding the heart does not mean endlessly inspecting it alone. Hebrews 3:12–13 (KJV) says, "Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God. But exhort one another daily, while it is called To day; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin." God appoints the voices of other believers to interrupt the stories by which sin deceives us. The person whose correction irritates us may be helping us remain faithful. Withdrawal into wounded solitude can remove a protection we most need.

Bring the desire you recognize into the light. Receive correction, pray for help, and obey where God has spoken. We do not need to uncover every hidden weakness before refusing the one already before us. A guarded heart remains available to Christ, to His people, and to the duties through which He teaches us to endure.

Refuse to Supply What You Ask God to Destroy

Paul ends his appeal in Romans 13 with a command that reaches behind an outward fall to the arrangements that make it easier: "make not provision for the flesh."[5] The flesh here is our fallen inclination against God, not the physical body as though bodily existence were evil. Food, rest, and ordinary care are gifts to receive responsibly. Paul forbids supplying sinful desire so that it can achieve its purpose. Those awaiting Christ must stop financing the rebellion they ask Him to defeat.

Provision often begins without an obvious outward offense. Someone repeatedly recounts an injury to sympathetic listeners, selecting details that renew his indignation. He asks God to remove his bitterness while making sure he never runs short of reasons to keep it. Someone else returns to a purchase he cannot responsibly afford, less to consider its usefulness than to enjoy imagining the status it would confer. Desire is being served before any money changes hands.

James 1:14–15 (KJV) traces the movement: "But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death." We often become alarmed at the final act while remaining indulgent toward the desire preparing it. Yet the habit of granting desire an audience can make obedience seem increasingly unreasonable. By the time we announce that the temptation is overwhelming, we may have spent days strengthening its argument.

John Owen therefore counsels, "Consider what occasions, what

advantages thy distemper hath taken to exert and put forth itself, and watch against them all."[16] He is speaking of the sinful inclination and the opportunities that favor it. Which conversation do you prolong because it flatters resentment? Which comparison do you revisit because it feeds discontent? Which private excuse keeps dishonesty available? We need not wait for a dramatic crisis to begin watching. We can refuse the next known service to sin.

Christ's words leave no room for protecting an occasion merely because it is cherished. Matthew 5:29 (NKJV) says, "If your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and cast it from you." His forceful image commands decisive removal of what leads us into sin, not injury to the body. The setting is His warning against lust. Something useful, pleasurable, or convenient must be relinquished when we are using it to cultivate disobedience. Readiness for our Lord can cost us access we enjoyed keeping.

Temptation encountered, however, must be distinguished from temptation cultivated. A cruel remark may reach us uninvited. An unwanted suggestion may intrude upon the mind. A person we envy may receive praise in our hearing. Addressing distressed believers, Spurgeon says, "It may help such a person if I remind him that there is no sin in being tempted."[17] The intrusive suggestion is not the same thing as our consent. Faithfulness does not require control over everything we encounter; it requires that we refuse to welcome and develop what God forbids. Neither should we call a temptation unexpected after repeatedly arranging to meet it.

Another provision is more religious: we keep tomorrow's forgiveness ready as an excuse for today's disobedience. Flavel answers that misuse of mercy with a question: "If God be a God of so much mercy, how can I abuse so good a God?"[18] Mercy draws the repentant sinner home; it does not make deliberate betrayal reasonable. To presume upon pardon while preserving the sin is to enlist the gospel in the service of the very evil from which Christ saves us.

First Peter 2:11 (NKJV) identifies the opposing loyalties: "Beloved, I beg you as sojourners and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul". We are travelers under the care of Christ, moving toward the home He has promised. The desires we are tempted to shelter wage war against that life of faith. They cannot be treated as harmless companions simply because they have traveled with us for years.

As the day approaches, no imagined future resolve can make present

cooperation with sin safe. We cannot cultivate escape from Christ's commands and expect that habit to become loyalty when obedience grows costly. Refuse the opportunity, the excuse, or the indulgent conversation you already recognize. Ask for the Spirit's help and stop supplying what you are asking God to destroy.

Put Sin to Death by the Spirit

> Romans 8:12–14 (KJV): "Therefore, brethren, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live after the flesh. For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live. For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God."[19]

Mortify means put to death. Paul calls believers to oppose sin's activity rather than manage its reputation. A quiet outward manner may conceal a lively inward grievance. Silence can keep angry words from escaping while the heart rehearses them with pleasure. Such restraint is better than an outburst, but pressure can reveal how much resentment has survived beneath it. A church preparing to endure hostility needs more than believers who have learned to conceal their hostility toward one another.

The passage releases us from a false obligation. We are not debtors to the flesh. Sin may speak with the urgency of a creditor, insisting that we owe it relief, satisfaction, or revenge. It has no rightful claim. Christ has not delivered us from condemnation so that our former master may continue issuing lawful orders. The coming Lord is also our present Deliverer.

Yet this opposition exceeds unaided resolve. Owen writes, "All other ways of mortification are vain, all helps leave us helpless; it must be done by the Spirit."[20] Pride may suppress one vice to preserve another. Fear of exposure may restrain the hand while leaving desire untouched. The Spirit works more deeply, bringing us to grieve over sin as opposition to the God who loves us and to seek strength from Christ instead of confidence in ourselves.

Galatians 5:16–17 (KJV) names both the conflict and its appointed strength: "This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh. For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would." Conflict does not necessarily mean that grace has departed. The Spirit opposes what

the flesh desires. The question is whether we join that opposition or use the difficulty of the struggle to excuse surrender.

Nor does dependence mean waiting for God to obey in our place. Philippians 2:12–13 (KJV) commands, "work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure." We work out the salvation God gives; we do not work to purchase justification. His inward work supplies both willing and doing. Owen protects this distinction: "He doth not so work our mortification in us as not to keep it still an act of our obedience."[21] Dependence is exercised when we receive the Spirit's truth, ask for His help, reject the desire He exposes, and take the course He commands. Waiting for resistance to become effortless would turn divine help into an excuse for delay.

Ryle writes, "The Spirit never lies dormant and idle within the soul: He always makes His presence known by the fruit He causes to be borne".[22] Fruit may develop slowly, and weary believers must not confuse slow growth with no grace. But we cannot defend a settled refusal to repent by appealing to the Spirit's power. He is at work against the very evil we are defending. Spurgeon's warning belongs here: "Those men who despise holiness of heart are in direct conflict with God."[23] His target is contempt for holiness, not grief over failure. The believer mourning his weakness is being called to seek help; the person dismissing holiness is being called to abandon a dangerous falsehood about God.

Paul's warning about death must retain its force. Life according to the flesh leads toward death; the Spirit leads God's children against it. Each failure does not cancel adoption, but a profession of adoption cannot make the flesh our rightful ruler. The struggle belongs within sonship. Children of the Father are learning to hate what grieves Him.

This is preparation for endurance, not merely improvement during comfortable days. Ephesians 6:10–13 (KJV) says, "Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might. Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places. Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand." We need not identify the "evil day" with a particular predicted event to feel the command.

Acute pressure requires strength beyond our own. The Lord provides what His servants must actively take up.

Ryle states the duty plainly: "If we would be holy we must fight."[24] We watch for Christ as people engaged in His service, receiving His strength for the conflict already before us. The enemy does not become harmless because the battle is inward, and the believer does not become helpless because the battle is hard.

Put on the Lord You Are Waiting For

Paul's command in Romans 13 has a positive center: put on the Lord Jesus Christ.[5] We are preparing to meet a Person, not merely preparing to have fewer faults. Christ must govern what we pursue, how we treat others, and where we seek our satisfaction. Spurgeon explains, "You are every day continually more and more to wear as the dress of your lives the character of your Lord."[25] The dress is not a costume that conceals an unchanged heart. His character must become visible because His grace is renewing us within.

Colossians 3:1–5 (KJV) joins that renewal directly to His appearing: "If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth. For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory. Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry:"[26]

Believers have died and risen with Christ; their life is secure in Him; they will appear with Him in glory. Therefore they must put sin to death. Future glory supplies a reason for present purity. We refuse these sins because they contradict the life Christ has given and the likeness He will complete. The world's threats cannot take away the life hidden with Him, though they may expose how often we have sought our security elsewhere.

Paul continues in Colossians by naming anger, malice, corrupt speech, and lying, then describes the new man being renewed according to the Creator's image.[26] Christ does not merely teach the envious man to conceal his envy more skillfully. He teaches him to love the brother whose good had troubled him.

Ephesians 4:22–24 (KJV) describes the change: "That ye put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt

according to the deceitful lusts; And be renewed in the spirit of your mind; And that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness." The former "conversation" is the former manner of life. Putting off, inward renewal, and putting on belong together. We must learn to recognize the deceit in the old promise: that recognition, indulgence, or superiority will make us safe and satisfied. Christ offers more than a prohibition against those refuges. He gives Himself as our life.

Seeking things above therefore does not abandon earthly responsibilities. The heavenly Lord governs earthly obedience. An honest report, a patient answer, and sincere delight in another person's blessing become places where His authority is acknowledged. Our expectation of glory is tested when faithfulness costs us something we would once have insisted upon possessing.

Asked how the Spirit puts sin to death, Owen answers, "By causing our hearts to abound in grace and the fruits that are contrary to the flesh".[27] Holiness is fruitful opposition. Envy is resisted as we learn gratitude and love; revenge is opposed as we seek another person's good; self-display loses its hold as we discover the freedom of unnoticed service. Refusing sin releases attention that sin had claimed for itself.

Paul makes the replacement wonderfully concrete. Colossians 3:12–14 (KJV): "Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering; Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye. And above all these things put on charity, which is the bond of perfectness." Tender compassion, patience, forgiveness, and love belong to people already chosen and beloved. We do not practice them to persuade Christ to love us. We practice them because His love has changed whom we belong to.

Here the overlooked church member can begin again. He can pray for the teacher he envied, listen with a desire to learn, and offer help without maneuvering for recognition. Such acts must be sincere, not a more impressive performance of humility. Yet he need not wait until every trace of disappointment disappears. He can obey Christ while asking Him to reorder the affection that makes obedience difficult.

Ryle connects patience with the hope before us: "Why is a believer patient? because he looks for the coming of the Lord. He can bear hard things without murmuring."[28] The promised future loosens the

demand that every wrong be settled and every contribution recognized now. We can bear being overlooked because Christ will not overlook His servants.

First Thessalonians 3:12–13 (KJV) makes growing love part of readiness itself: "And the Lord make you to increase and abound in love one toward another, and toward all men, even as we do toward you: To the end he may stablish your hearts unblameable in holiness before God, even our Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all his saints." The Lord establishes hearts for His coming by increasing their love. Watchfulness that hardens us against people has lost sight of the character of the One we await. Putting on Christ leaves us ready to serve Him among those people today.

Separate from Sin without Deserting Your Neighbor

The darker the world appears, the easier it becomes to confuse faithfulness with withdrawal from the people in it. We may fear that remaining among unbelieving neighbors will endanger our hearts, then overlook the pride that accompanies us into a carefully protected religious circle. Distance can remove an occasion of sin; it cannot cleanse the person who leaves.

Jesus prayed for His disciples' preservation while sending them into the very world from which they needed protection. John 17:15–18 (KJV): "I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil. They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth. As thou hast sent me into the world, even so have I also sent them into the world."[29] Their allegiance distinguishes them; their mission brings them among people who need Him. Guarding our hearts must serve that calling rather than become an excuse to abandon it.

Ryle writes, "Sanctification does not consist in retirement from our place in life, and the renunciation of our social duties."[30] A believer awaiting Christ still has a neighbor, an employer, a family, and obligations of kindness. He may need to leave an association that requires participation in evil. He is not authorized to treat every unbelieving person as a contamination to be avoided.

Paul makes the distinction explicit in 1 Corinthians 5:9–10 (KJV): "I wrote unto you in an epistle not to company with fornicators: Yet not altogether with the fornicators of this world, or with the covetous, or extortioners, or with idolaters; for then must ye needs go out of the

world." The following verses concern discipline toward a professing brother persisting in evil. Paul does not dissolve that boundary, but neither does he command the church to sever ordinary dealings with everyone outside it. We must distinguish refusing sin from refusing the people to whom we are sent.

That distinction becomes costly when the surrounding culture demands agreement as the price of kindness. A Christian may decline a dishonest business practice while treating his colleagues patiently. He may refuse a degrading conversation without ceasing to seek the speakers' good. A family may reject entertainment that celebrates wickedness without teaching its children to despise the neighbors who enjoy it. The refusal should make Christ's authority clear, and the conduct should make His kindness visible.

Spurgeon describes the difference: "we are to be separated in reality rather than merely in appearance, to be separated by a higher tone of morals".[31] A severe manner cannot substitute for truthfulness, purity, mercy, and self-control. Neither can the appearance of friendliness justify joining in evil. The coming Lord tests both the compromise we fear and the contempt we excuse.

Matthew 5:16 (NKJV) gives our visible obedience its proper direction: "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven." We are not displaying our superiority. We are making the Father's goodness visible through the conduct He commands. A neighbor should not have to share our convictions before receiving our honesty, patience, or practical help.

The approaching day intensifies this duty. Philippians 2:14–16 (KJV) says, "Do all things without murmurings and disputings: That ye may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world; Holding forth the word of life; that I may rejoice in the day of Christ, that I have not run in vain, neither laboured in vain." Paul joins the day of Christ to faithful presence in a crooked society. The light remains among the people who need it. Even murmuring and disputing matter, because our manner can contradict the word of life we hold out.

Ryle writes, "A sanctified man will try to do good in the world, and to lessen the sorrow and increase the happiness of all around him."[32] Such kindness does not promise that unbelievers will approve of us. It keeps their approval from becoming the condition of our obedience. We can speak truth without purchasing peace through compromise, and endure rejection without making rejection a reason to stop loving.

We cannot prepare to meet our neighbors' Judge by ceasing to care about our neighbors. Their need is too serious, and the time given to us too precious. Separation from evil should free our hands for service, not fold them in satisfaction that we have kept our distance.

Let the Price of Your Redemption Govern Your Desires

When obedience grows costly, sin begins to sound economical. A concealed compromise may seem to preserve a position, spare an embarrassment, or secure a pleasure with little immediate damage. Watchfulness must challenge the calculation before we accept its conclusion. The price of faithfulness cannot be judged honestly while the price of our redemption is forgotten.

Peter joins hope in Christ's revelation to sober-minded holiness. First Peter 1:15–16 (KJV): "But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation; Because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy."[33] Here "conversation" means conduct, the whole manner of life. No private corner is excluded from the Father's claim. Peter then reminds believers that their redemption was purchased, not with silver or gold, but with Christ's precious blood. The Savior we await is the Savior who gave Himself to bring us out of the life we are tempted to protect.

First Corinthians 6:19–20 (KJV) brings that belonging into the body itself: "What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's." Paul's immediate concern is sexual purity. Redemption does not leave the body available for whatever desire can justify. Eyes, hands, habits, and private conduct belong to the Lord who purchased us.

Spurgeon writes, "A true price, most certainly paid, demands from us a practical surrendering of ourselves to the service of God."[34] The surrender is not our payment for redemption. It is the acknowledgment that redemption is real. We cannot confess that Christ bought us while retaining a private agreement that certain pleasures remain beyond His authority.

The cross also changes the question from what sin may cost us to whom it dishonors. We rightly fear the damage an indulgence can do. But if avoiding consequences is our deepest motive, temptation need only persuade us that the consequences can be avoided. Love has a stronger answer: this desire opposes the Savior who loved me and gave

Himself for me. Concealment cannot make the betrayal harmless to the conscience that remembers Him.

Second Corinthians 5:14–15 (KJV) says, "For the love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead: And that he died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again." Christ's death and resurrection end the claim of self-rule. The life He restores is life unto Him. Ryle describes the effect of true faith: "It makes him feel that he can never do too much for Him that died for him."[35] This is grateful love, not an anxious attempt to repay an unpayable debt. Faith looks at Christ's generosity until obedience ceases to appear an unreasonable demand.

That love does not leave us to manufacture holiness alone. Ephesians 5:25–27 (KJV) says, "Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish." Paul addresses husbands, but the ground of his instruction is Christ's actual love for His church. The Lord who gave Himself is cleansing the people He will present to Himself. His purpose carries us from the cross toward that holy presentation.

Spurgeon draws the two appearings together: "The manifestation of grace is preparing us for the manifestation of glory. What the law could not do, grace is doing."[36] Our present resistance to sin belongs inside that gracious purpose. We do not make ourselves acceptable so that Christ will finally receive us. We trust the Savior who receives sinners and works in His people to make them holy.

Therefore do not wait for hostility to become unmistakable before surrendering what you already know is wrong. Nor should you wait for an unusual warmth of feeling. Christ's worth has not changed because your affections have grown dull. Receive His verdict, ask for His strength, and obey in the matter at hand. What sin offers you for your disloyalty cannot equal what your Redeemer has already given to make you His own.

Return to Christ Instead of Protecting Your Failure

Some readers will recognize a sin they have resisted and fallen into again. The Lord's coming may now feel less like a hope than an accusation. You have heard the call to watch, and you know where you

have slept. Do not answer that knowledge by hiding. Concealment prolongs the very danger that frightens you; Christ calls you to return.

First John 2:1 (KJV): "My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous:"[37] John's purpose and comfort stand together. He writes to prevent sin; he directs those who sin to their Advocate. Christ's righteousness is the sinner's refuge. We do not improve our standing before approaching Him, and we do not use His advocacy to protect the conduct He forbids.

Owen directs the struggling believer toward the remedy: "Set faith at work on Christ for the killing of thy sin. His blood is the great sovereign remedy for sin-sick souls."[38] Your failure does not make Christ less sufficient. It shows why you must not attempt the battle apart from Him. Bring Him the sin itself, not a carefully edited account of why it happened.

Proverbs 28:13 (NKJV) says, "He who covers his sins will not prosper, But whoever confesses and forsakes them will have mercy." Confession and forsaking belong together. We have not dealt honestly with sin if we admit it in prayer while preserving the arrangements that invite its return. Yet forsaking does not mean we must first prove a long record of victory before asking for mercy. We come now, surrendering the defense and seeking grace for obedience.

Shame can tempt a believer to withdraw from prayer and fellowship until he feels worthy to return. That withdrawal leaves him more exposed. The concealed grievance grows without correction; the private habit survives without help; the neglected Scripture becomes harder to reopen. Failure begins to govern tomorrow as well as yesterday. Watchfulness interrupts that retreat by bringing the truth to Christ while the wound is fresh.

Hebrews 4:15–16 (KJV) gives us warrant to come: "For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need." Our High Priest is sinless, yet He is not indifferent to our weakness. We approach because of His sufficiency, not our recent success. Mercy meets our guilt, and grace supplies help for the obedience before us.

Spurgeon describes genuine returning as active repentance: "When the grace of God sets a backslider upon returning, he will stir up all the powers of his soul to seek after God."[39] Grace moves the returning

person; the exertion does not earn the grace. Seek needed help. Make the confession that honesty requires. Restore what your sin has damaged where you can. Resume the duty your failure interrupted. These are acts of dependence upon Christ, not substitutes for coming to Him.

The Lord Himself joins repentance to watchfulness in His warning to Sardis. Revelation 3:3 (NKJV): "Remember therefore how you have received and heard; hold fast and repent. Therefore if you will not watch, I will come upon you as a thief, and you will not know what hour I will come upon you." This is a warning of Christ's coming against a spiritually negligent church; we need not force it into a detailed timetable of His final advent to hear its demand. Remember, hold fast, repent, and watch. The proper response to the Lord's authority is neither concealment nor despair, but renewed obedience to what He has spoken.

Owen adds this counsel: "Raise up thy heart by faith to an expectation of relief from Christ."[40] Expect His help, not necessarily the instant disappearance of every temptation. The One who commands resistance has not sent you into battle without access to Himself. He receives the confession you would rather postpone and supplies strength you cannot produce.

A fall must not become a place to live. The Lord's coming will complete the holiness His Spirit now works within His people. Until then, guard the heart He has claimed. Refuse the provisions that nourish rebellion. Put sin to death through His Spirit, put on Christ, and keep loving the people He has placed before you. The One you are preparing to meet is also the One to whom you must come for help today.

Questions for Further Study

1. Read Romans 13:8–14. How does Paul connect love for our neighbors, the approaching day, and the sins Christians must forsake? What does that connection correct in your understanding of watchfulness?
2. Read Proverbs 4:20–27. How do the instructions concerning words, eyes, and feet explain what it means to keep the heart? Identify one inward desire that has begun directing your outward conduct.
3. What distinguishes temptation you encounter from temptation you cultivate? Using Romans 13:14, name one provision that can feed a respectable sin such as envy, resentment, or pride.

4. In Romans 8:12–14, who acts to put sin to death, and through whose power? Explain how the passage excludes both self-reliance and passive waiting.
5. Trace the argument of Colossians 3:1–10. How do union with Christ and His future appearing establish the duty to put sin to death and live as a renewed person?
6. Compare John 17:15–18 with 1 John 2:1–2. How can a believer remain engaged with neighbors, refuse evil, and return to Christ honestly after failure without weakening the call to holiness?

Practical Applications

1. Name the inward sin. Take one recent incident in which another person's success, criticism, or demand unsettled you. Identify the desire you actually welcomed, bring it before God without an excuse, and read the passage in this chapter that addresses it most directly.
2. Refuse one known provision. Stop one voluntary activity that is presently feeding that sin: rehearsing a grievance to a sympathetic listener, returning to a comparison that nourishes envy, or preserving an opportunity for deliberate dishonesty. Ask for the Spirit's help as you refuse it. Do not substitute a vague promise to improve for the obedience already clear.
3. Express the opposite allegiance. Do one fitting act of obedience for Christ's sake: give sincere thanks for the person you envied, correct your own misleading statement, or speak respectfully where pride wanted to belittle. Let the act serve the other person's good rather than advertise your repentance.
4. Test whose approval your heart requires. Before your next act of service, ask whether you would still do it if no one noticed or another person received the credit. The desire for encouragement is not itself wrong; making recognition a condition of obedience exposes a rival loyalty. Read 1 Corinthians 4:5, confess any bargaining for praise, and ask Christ to make His approval dearer to you than being seen. Then fulfill the duty without arranging to be noticed.
5. Bring a crowded heart back before the coming Lord. Read Luke 21:34–36 and name the concern that has occupied most of your thoughts this week. Is it helping you fulfill a responsibility, or has the demand to control its outcome begun displacing prayer, love,

and attention to Christ? Separate the duty God has given you from the outcome you cannot command. Bring both before Him in prayer, carry out the duty, and refuse to make certainty about tomorrow a condition of trusting Him today.

6. Let another believer help you see your heart. Read Hebrews 3:12–13, then ask a mature Christian who knows you well whether your recent words or reactions reveal a desire you have been defending. Listen before explaining yourself, and test the counsel by Scripture rather than by whether it feels flattering. Where the correction is sound, name the excuse you must surrender and ask for prayer that Christ will renew the affection beneath it. Receive faithful correction as help in remaining watchful, not an injury to your standing.

Chapter Axioms

1. The approaching day makes present holiness urgent. Romans 13:11–14.
2. The heart must be guarded because it directs the life. Proverbs 4:20–27.
3. We must refuse the provisions that help sinful desire achieve its purpose. Romans 13:14.
4. God's children put sin to death through the Spirit, not apart from Him. Romans 8:12–14.
5. Union with Christ joins hope of future glory to present obedience. Colossians 3:1–10.
6. Separation from evil must preserve our obedience to Christ's sending. John 17:15–18.
7. Christ's coming will expose the hidden motives that outwardly respectable conduct can conceal. 1 Corinthians 4:5.
8. Faith, love, and hope equip the heart to await Christ without growing careless or cold. 1 Thessalonians 5:4–8; 3:12–13.
9. Even legitimate cares can weigh down the heart until it loses sight of Christ's coming. Luke 21:34–36.
10. God uses His truth and fellow believers to interrupt the self-deception that hardens the heart. Hebrews 3:12–13.
11. Christ's redemption claims the whole heart for His service, leaving no desire exempt from His authority. 1 Peter 1:13–19; 2 Corinthians 5:14–15.
12. After failure, the heart must seek Christ's mercy and strength

rather than hide behind excuses or retreat into shame. Proverbs 28:13; 1 John 2:1–2; Hebrews 4:15–16.

What the Law Cannot Do, Christ Supplies

Fifteen Principles for Guarding the Heart by Grace

The dangers Christ foretells will search out the desires we leave unguarded; knowing what God forbids will not, by itself, give us strength to refuse them. As deception deepens and obedience grows costly, we must trust the Savior whose grace breaks sin's dominion and teaches us to await His coming.

1. The weakness is in our flesh, not in God's law.

Romans 8:3 locates the difficulty precisely: the law "was weak through the flesh." God's command is holy and good, but the fallen heart cannot be commanded into loving what it resists. When last-days pressures expose that resistance, our refuge is Christ's saving work and indwelling Spirit, never a lowered standard or a louder promise to reform ourselves. (Romans 7:12; Romans 8:4–9.)

2. Seeing the danger is not the same as receiving life.

Galatians 3:21 speaks of the law's inability to have "given life," exposing the false hope that sufficient warning can make a sinner new. We may accurately identify the world's lawlessness while remaining inwardly attached to its rewards; alarm can sharpen our opinions without changing our allegiance. The watchful heart brings its exposed need to Christ, receiving by faith the life and Spirit prohibitions cannot supply. (Galatians 3:2–5; John 15:4–5.)

3. Acceptance in Christ frees us to face our sin.

Because Romans 8:1 announces "no condemnation" for those in Christ Jesus, the believer need not hide corruption to preserve his standing before God. Justification is God's gracious verdict upon the sinner who believes, not a reward for successful watchfulness; sanctification is His renewing work within the sinner He accepts. Awaiting our Judge, we can confess honestly and fight earnestly because our acceptance rests in Christ. (Romans 5:1–2; Titus 2:11–14.)

4. God's commands tell us to resist sin; Christ gives us the power to resist it.

Romans 6:6 declares that "our old man was crucified with Him," grounding resistance to sin in Christ's cross rather than in the strength of our resolutions. Sin still troubles the believer, but it no longer holds the mastery it once exercised. As the world presses its claims, faith answers from our new belonging: we have died and risen with Christ, whose appearing reveals our life hidden in Him. (Romans 6:11–14; Colossians 3:1–5.)

5. God changes our hearts so we want to obey Him.

God promises to write His laws on His people's hearts (Hebrews 8:10), and He gives His Spirit to enable their obedience (Ezekiel 36:26–27). Jesus warns that increasing lawlessness will cause many people's love to grow cold (Matthew 24:12–13). End-times watchfulness therefore requires more than knowing God's commands: we must depend on His Spirit to keep our love for Christ alive and obey Him when those around us reject His ways.

Scripture: Hebrews 8:10; Ezekiel 36:26–27; Matthew 24:12–13.

6. The Spirit enables us to kill sin, not merely conceal it.

Romans 8:13 calls believers to "put to death the deeds of the body" by the Spirit, carrying the battle beyond outward restraint to the desires seeking expression. A quiet mouth can still shelter revenge, and a disciplined routine can still serve pride. Under hostility, we need more than a guarded reputation; we need the Spirit's power to refuse the inward evil before pressure offers it opportunity. (Galatians 5:16–24; Colossians 3:5–10.)

7. Christ gives us strength to obey when persecution makes obedience costly.

Jesus warns that hatred and betrayal will lead many to fall away, so guarding the heart includes resisting the fear that makes denying Him seem safer than obeying Him. Knowing our duty cannot give a frightened heart the strength it needs; we must trust the Lord who works within His people to strengthen their obedience. Watchfulness therefore means asking for His help and doing what He commands

without making immediate safety a condition of faithfulness. (Matthew 24:9–13; Philippians 2:12–13; Revelation 2:10.)

8. Stricter religious rules cannot protect us from end-time deception.

First Timothy 4:1–5 warns that deception in the latter times will sometimes look unusually strict, forbidding things God has given His people to receive with thanksgiving. Such human restrictions can impress the conscience without cleansing the heart; they must not be confused with God's holy commands or trusted to conquer sinful desire. We guard against this counterfeit by testing its demands against Scripture and depending on Christ, whose life enables the inward obedience that invented prohibitions cannot produce. (1 Timothy 4:1–5; Colossians 2:20–23; Colossians 3:1–5.)

9. Grace teaches us to obey Christ while we wait for His return.

In Matthew 24:48–51, the servant who assumes his master is delaying begins mistreating others and indulging himself, showing how presumed delay can make disobedience seem safe. Reminders of duty cannot, by themselves, cure a heart that wants the Master's absence to mean freedom from His authority. Titus 2:11–14 answers with grace that trains us to deny ungodliness while awaiting Christ: we seek His help to obey today because we desire His coming, not merely fear being caught. (Matthew 24:48–51; Titus 2:11–14.)

10. The approaching day makes it urgent to stop providing for sin.

Romans 13:11–14 calls us to wake because the day approaches, then names the drunkenness, immorality, strife, and envy that belong to the darkness. Knowing those sins are forbidden does not break their hold while we keep arranging opportunities to enjoy them. By faith we put on Christ and draw upon His strength to "make no provision for the flesh," refusing the indulgence or rehearsed grievance that leaves us unready for the Lord we expect. (Romans 13:11–14; Romans 6:11–14.)

11. Christ steadies the heart that fear for tomorrow threatens to overwhelm.

Jesus warns that ordinary cares can weigh down our hearts until His day overtakes us unexpectedly; concern about surviving troubled times can itself displace readiness to meet Him. A command to be

watchful cannot by itself release our grip on the security we crave. We therefore watch through prayer, entrusting our needs to the Father who cares for us, so that fear does not persuade us to neglect Christ's commands in order to protect ourselves. (Luke 21:34–36; 1 Peter 5:6–9.)

12. Growing in Christ protects us when false promises sound convincing.

Christ's warning about deceptive signs and wonders means that what impresses us cannot be allowed to govern what we believe. A list of forbidden errors will not keep the heart faithful if it still craves the relief, advantage, or excitement a deceiver offers; we need grace to surrender those desires as well as truth to expose the lie. Peter joins guarding against error to growing in Christ: we test what we hear by His Word and trust Him more than the promise that attracts us. (Matthew 24:23–25; 2 Peter 3:17–18; Colossians 2:6–8.)

13. As the day approaches, grace teaches us to receive help from other believers.

Hebrews 10:23–25 calls us to encourage one another increasingly as we see the day approaching, because readiness for Christ must not become a private resolve to stand alone. When reproach and loss tempt us to withdraw, knowing the command to endure cannot by itself keep discouragement from hardening into unbelief. Holding fast to Christ's faithful promise, we guard our hearts by receiving the truth other believers bring, allowing their encouragement and warnings to interrupt the unbelief we might otherwise defend. As the day approaches, you need a committed relationship with a biblical local church, serving faithfully as a member and receiving its care; if you have no such commitment, what is keeping you from it? Regularly place yourself under strong, searching biblical teaching and preaching that exposes your heart, corrects your errors, and strengthens your faith in Christ, so that increasing pressure does not find you spiritually unprepared. (Hebrews 10:23–25, 32–39; Hebrews 3:12–13; Hebrews 13:17; 2 Timothy 4:2.)

14. Christ's coming calls the fallen believer back to Him, not into hiding.

The warning against being ashamed at Christ's appearing makes dealing with concealed sin urgent, but fear can tempt a fallen believer

to hide the very failure he needs to confess. The law exposes his guilt without removing it; Christ's advocacy gives him reason to return honestly rather than spend the remaining time protecting his reputation. Watchfulness after a fall means confessing sin, receiving Christ's cleansing, and remaining close to the Savior we will meet, instead of treating shame as a reason to stay away. (1 John 2:28; 1 John 2:1–2; 1 John 1:9.)

15. God's keeping grace enables us to stay awake when the world feels secure.

First Thessalonians 5 warns that the coming day will overtake people speaking of peace and safety, so outward calm must never persuade us that our hearts need no guarding. Paul equips believers with faith, love, and hope, not confidence that knowing the warning will keep them alert. We watch in dependence on the God who promises to preserve His people for Christ's coming, trusting His faithfulness while actively resisting the complacency that would send us back to sleep. (1 Thessalonians 5:1–8, 23–24; 1 Peter 1:5.)

Transition to Chapter 9

The duty to keep our hearts soon exposes how much help we need. We can recognize a sinful desire and still feel its pull; we can resolve to obey and meet a pressure stronger than we expected. The Lord therefore joins watchfulness to prayer. We turn next to the duty of bringing our weakness, our dangers, and the needs of others before the God whose strength sustains His servants.

Notes

1. John Flavel, On Keeping the Heart, American Tract Society abridgment, first main section, printed p. 6 (PDF p. 10). Wording verified in this edition; not represented as a checked quotation from the unabridged Works. https://www.ccel.org/f/flavel/keeping/cache/keeping.pdf
2. J. C. Ryle, Holiness: Its Nature, Hindrances, Difficulties, and Roots, chapter III, "Holiness," I(d), printed p. 36. Ryle describes a holy man's meekness and patience. https://www.ccel.org/ccel/ryle/holiness.iii.iii.html
3. A. W. Pink, The Redeemer's Return, chapter V, section 3, paragraph beginning "The Return of our Lord is presented as a motive to brotherly love." https://ccel.org/ccel/pink/return/return.ch5.iii.html
4. John Flavel, On Keeping the Heart, American Tract Society abridgment, first main section, point 3, printed p. 6 (PDF p. 10). Wording follows this abridgment. https://www.ccel.org/f/flavel/keeping/cache/keeping.pdf
5. Romans 13:11–14, KJV; surrounding context, Romans 13:8–14. The exposition treats approaching salvation as its future completion, not initial justification earned through conduct.
6. C. H. Spurgeon, "Watching for Christ's Coming," preached April 7, 1889, Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit, vol. 39, sermon 2302, section II, paragraph beginning "To put it very plainly." https://www.spurgeon.org/sermons/watching-for-christs-coming
7. J. C. Ryle, Holiness, chapter II, "Sanctification," III(g), printed p. 31. Ryle distinguishes justification, our title to heaven, from sanctification, our fitness for it. https://www.ccel.org/ccel/ryle/holiness.iii.ii.html
8. A. W. Pink, The Redeemer's Return, chapter V, section 3, paragraph beginning "The Return of our Lord might not have been revealed at all." https://ccel.org/ccel/pink/return/return.ch5.iii.html
9. 1 John 3:2–3, NKJV. Verse 2 is paraphrased; verse 3 is quoted. The hope of seeing Christ and being like Him is joined explicitly to present purification.
10. 2 Peter 3:11–14, KJV. The complete passage is quoted. "Conversation" in verse 11 means conduct; the promised new creation supplies the context for Peter's call to holiness and diligence.
11. A. W. Pink, The Redeemer's Return, chapter V, "The Imminency of the Redeemer's Return," section 3, "Why was the fact of our Lord's Return presented in the language of Imminency and the exact date withheld?" Exact excerpt from the paragraph following Titus 2:11–13, immediately before Pink's reference to 1 John 3:3. Verified against the CCEL transcription of Pink's work; the quoted words are Pink's own exposition, not a saying he attributes to another writer. https://ccel.org/ccel/pink/return/return.ch5.iii.html
12. Proverbs 4:23, NKJV; context, Proverbs 4:20–27, KJV.
13. John Owen, Of Temptation, chapter VII, first direction concerning knowledge of one's heart, paragraph beginning "How many have all their comforts blasted." The quoted pronoun refers to the heart. https://www.ccel.org/ccel/owen/temptation.i.x.html
14. J. C. Ryle, Holiness, chapter III, "Holiness," I(h), printed p. 37. Ryle describes purity of heart and humility about susceptibility to temptation. https://www.ccel.org/ccel/ryle/holiness.iii.iii.html
15. John Flavel, On Keeping the Heart, American Tract Society abridgment, second main section, reason 6, printed p. 11 (PDF p. 15). Wording follows this abridgment. https://www.ccel.org/f/flavel/keeping/cache/keeping.pdf
16. John Owen, Of the Mortification of Sin in Believers, chapter XI, sixth direction, printed

pp. 61–62. "Distemper" refers to the sinful inclination under discussion. https://www.ccel.org/ccel/owen/mort.i.xiv.html

17. C. H. Spurgeon, "Comfort for the Tempted," preached September 27, 1883, Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit, vol. 45, introductory discussion before division I. The quotation distinguishes unwanted temptation from consent to sin. https://www.spurgeon.org/sermons/comfort-for-the-tempted
18. John Flavel, A Saint Indeed, Ninth Season, argument 5, response 2, printed p. 204. Flavel rejects anticipated pardon as an excuse for deliberate sin. https://ccel.org/ccel/flavel/saintindeed/saintindeed.v.iii.ix.html
19. Romans 8:12–14, KJV. The command is addressed to brethren and is followed by the identification of those led by the Spirit as God's sons.
20. John Owen, Of the Mortification of Sin in Believers, chapter I, point 3, printed p. 7. https://www.ccel.org/ccel/owen/mort.i.iv.html
21. John Owen, Of the Mortification of Sin in Believers, chapter III, concluding answer to the second question, point [2], printed p. 20. https://www.ccel.org/ccel/owen/mort.i.vi.html
22. J. C. Ryle, Holiness, chapter II, "Sanctification," I(3), printed pp. 18–19. The quoted sentence continues "in heart, character, and life." https://www.ccel.org/ccel/ryle/holiness.iii.ii.html
23. C. H. Spurgeon, "Threefold Sanctification," February 9, 1862, Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit, vol. 8, introductory discussion of the value God sets upon real holiness. https://www.spurgeon.org/sermons/threefold-sanctification
24. J. C. Ryle, Holiness: Its Nature, Hindrances, Difficulties, and Roots, chapter IV, "The Fight," opening discussion, printed p. 52. Ryle distinguishes spiritual warfare from quarrelling with other Christians. https://www.ccel.org/ccel/ryle/holiness.iii.iv.html
25. C. H. Spurgeon, "Christ Put On," February 23, 1890, Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit, vol. 36, introduction, paragraph distinguishing justification from sanctification. https://www.spurgeon.org/sermons/christ-put-on
26. Colossians 3:1–10, KJV. Verses 1–5 are quoted; verses 8–10 are summarized. Paul's command rests on the believers' union with Christ and expectation of appearing with Him.
27. John Owen, Of the Mortification of Sin in Believers, chapter III, answer to "How doth the Spirit mortify sin?", first means [1], printed p. 19. https://www.ccel.org/ccel/owen/mort.i.vi.html
28. J. C. Ryle, Holiness, chapter XX, "Christ Is All," III(d), printed p. 319. Lowercase "because" follows the source transcription. https://www.ccel.org/ccel/ryle/holiness.iii.xix.html
29. John 17:15–18, KJV. Christ's prayer concerns disciples sanctified by the truth and sent into the world.
30. J. C. Ryle, Holiness, chapter II, "Sanctification," II(4), printed p. 26. https://www.ccel.org/ccel/ryle/holiness.iii.ii.html
31. C. H. Spurgeon, "Abraham's Double Blessing," preached November 8, 1885, Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit, vol. 43, introductory application, paragraph beginning "Our Lord Jesus Christ was the most perfect man among men." https://www.spurgeon.org/sermons/abrahams-double-blessing
32. J. C. Ryle, Holiness, chapter II, "Sanctification," II(9), printed p. 28. https://www.ccel.org/ccel/ryle/holiness.iii.ii.html
33. 1 Peter 1:13–19, KJV. Verses 15–16 are quoted; the surrounding exposition joins expectation, holiness, reverent conduct, and redemption through Christ's blood.
34. C. H. Spurgeon, "Bought with a Price," sermon 1004, August 6, 1871, division II,

paragraph contrasting real redemption with merely fanciful consecration. https://www.spurgeon.org/sermons/bought-with-a-price

35. J. C. Ryle, Holiness, chapter II, "Sanctification," I(1), printed p. 17. The pronoun "It" refers to true faith. https://www.ccel.org/ccel/ryle/holiness.iii.ii.html
36. C. H. Spurgeon, "The Two Appearings and the Discipline of Grace," April 4, 1886, Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit, vol. 32, division II, paragraph beginning "So then, first of all, grace has a discipline." https://www.spurgeon.org/sermons/the-two-appearings-and-the-discipline-of-grace
37. 1 John 2:1–2, KJV. Verse 1 is quoted; verse 2 grounds the following assurance in Christ's atoning work.
38. John Owen, Of the Mortification of Sin in Believers, chapter XIV, first direction, printed p. 79. https://www.ccel.org/ccel/owen/mort.i.xvii.html
39. C. H. Spurgeon, "The Backslider's Way Hedged Up," September 18, 1864, Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit, vol. 10, division IV, paragraph beginning "Observe that it is an active repentance." https://www.spurgeon.org/sermons/the-backsliders-way-hedged-up
40. John Owen, Of the Mortification of Sin in Believers, chapter XIV, first direction, subpoint (2), printed p. 80. The relief sought is Christ's help in opposing sin. https://www.ccel.org/ccel/owen/mort.i.xvii.html

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CHAPTER 9

Watch and Pray

Depending on Christ as the Day Approaches

"The Christian's armour will rust except it be furbished and scoured with the oil of prayer."

William Gurnall[1]

Imagine a believer who knows which pressures Christians may soon face. He has followed the reports, compared the warnings, and thought about what his family might lose. Yet when he kneels to pray, he discovers that he has spent far more time considering his enemies than speaking to his Father. The danger has become familiar; dependence upon God has become hurried.

His concern may be justified. Christians must not close their eyes to persecution or dismiss the deceptions Christ foretold. But knowledge of a threat does not supply strength to withstand it. John 15:5 (NKJV) brings us back to Christ's warning: "without Me you can do nothing."[2] A man may understand exactly why others compromised and still discover, when his own security is threatened, how persuasive their excuses have become. He needs more than an accurate warning. He needs the Lord.

Jesus joins watchfulness to prayer because He knows the people He commands to watch. Fear can narrow our attention until survival seems more urgent than obedience. Repeated disappointment can wear down our willingness to serve. Hostility can make us resemble the people whose cruelty we condemn. The returning Christ calls

us to bring these dangers before Him while they are still asking for our consent.

Yet we come for more than protection. The Savior who keeps us is worthy of our love. Prayer must make room for adoration when persecution makes worship costly, and for praise when gifts we treasured have been taken away. We are preparing to meet Christ Himself. If our concern about the last days leaves us thinking constantly about what may happen to us and scarcely at all about His glory, our preparation has become dangerously small.

Pray Because the Lord Is Coming

> First Peter 4:7 (KJV): "But the end of all things is at hand: be ye therefore sober, and watch unto prayer."[3]

Peter draws a practical conclusion from the approaching end: pray with a clear mind. He does not tell the church to become absorbed in calculations that leave it unable to love, serve, or think soberly. What God has revealed about the future should bring us into His presence with greater seriousness about the life He has entrusted to us now.

The surrounding commands explain the kind of readiness Peter seeks. First Peter 4:8–10 (KJV): "And above all things have fervent charity among yourselves: for charity shall cover the multitude of sins. Use hospitality one to another without grudging. As every man hath received the gift, even so minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God."[3] Prayer belongs beside earnest love, open homes, and the use of God's gifts for others. The believer who rises from prayer more willing to serve a difficult brother has understood something about the approaching end that a merely agitated observer has missed.

This matters when persecution makes other people's needs inconvenient. A threatened church may become preoccupied with preserving what it has. Hospitality may seem too costly; another family's trouble may feel like one burden too many. Peter directs us to the strength God supplies for service. Prayer brings our reluctance before Him and asks for the grace to remain generous when fear advises us to keep everything for ourselves.

We must also remember whom we will meet. Luke 21:36 (KJV): "Watch ye therefore, and pray always, that ye may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of man."[4] Christ directs attention beyond surviving

events to standing before Himself. We must not turn His words into a guarantee that prayer will spare every believer bodily injury or death. The same discourse speaks plainly of persecution and the death of some disciples. His servants need preserving grace, and their final hope reaches beyond what persecutors can do to their bodies.

The day is not ours to arrange. Our readiness cannot wait until we decide that the signs have become sufficiently convincing. Pray now for the loyalty you will need when obedience costs more than you expected. Ask that fear will not make you cruel, that deception will not detach you from Scripture, and that prolonged trouble will not teach you to excuse lovelessness. These are dangers Christ has identified, not anxieties we must invent.

Nor should the certainty of God's purpose make prayer seem unnecessary. The Lord who promises His return also commands His servants to pray. His sovereignty gives us someone to trust; it does not release us from the means He appoints. We bring our actual weakness to the God who rules the coming day and supplies today's obedience. The future is in His hands, and so are the frightened people who must live faithfully until it comes.

This dependence belongs especially to the pastor preparing a church for difficult days. Charles Bridges writes, "The Christian Ministry is a work of faith; and, that it may be a work of faith, it must be a work of prayer."[5] A minister may recognize the approaching dangers and explain them accurately while trying to sustain his people through the force of his own concern. He must seek from God the wisdom, courage, and love that warnings alone cannot produce. The congregation needs a shepherd who prays for its steadfastness, not merely one who can describe its enemies.

Ask for Help before the Test Comes

In Gethsemane, the disciples' willingness was real, but their understanding of their weakness was painfully incomplete. Jesus found them sleeping while the hour of betrayal approached. Mark 14:38 (KJV): "Watch ye and pray, lest ye enter into temptation. The spirit truly is ready, but the flesh is weak."[6]

Christ did not commend their good intentions as sufficient preparation. He directed them to prayer. We should hear that distinction whenever we confidently describe what we would do under persecution. The answer may be sincere, yet sincerity does not tell us how fear, weariness, loneliness, or sudden danger will work upon us. We cannot

prepare for a costly test merely by admiring the courage we expect ourselves to display.

The warning belongs first to that night in Gethsemane; it is not a prediction that every exhausted believer is about to deny the Lord. Ordinary sleep is a gift, and bodily weakness requires care. But the disciples had received a particular command in a particular hour of danger. Their failure exposes our need to listen when Christ tells willing people to seek help. Knowing that we love Him must not become an excuse for neglecting the prayer by which we acknowledge how much we need Him.

John Owen writes, "he that would be little in temptation, let him be much in prayer." He immediately explains why: "This calls in the suitable help and succour that is laid up in Christ for us".[7] The help comes from Christ; the words are not a charm against trouble. Prayer confesses our need and seeks the grace by which we resist what trouble tempts us to do. An accurate understanding of persecution cannot replace that dependence.

Consider a possible pressure at work. A Christian knows that speaking truthfully may bring hostility or cost him advancement. Before the meeting, he imagines several ways of avoiding a direct answer. Each sounds prudent until he notices that all of them depend upon concealing the truth in order to mislead. Appropriate confidentiality or prudent silence is a different matter; here he is preparing to create a false impression. Here is a matter for prayer before the decision, not merely confession afterward. He can ask for wisdom, courage, and words that are truthful without being needlessly provocative. Then he must speak honestly. Prayer does not make the lie permissible while he waits to feel brave.

We must prepare equally for the temptation to retaliate. When Christian convictions are mocked, resentment may disguise itself as zeal for God's honor. We may ask for freedom to speak while secretly wanting freedom to wound. A watchful prayer brings that motive into the light: help me confess Christ without using His name to excuse my pride. The coming Judge will not overlook cruelty because it was committed by someone defending a true doctrine.

Jesus' own prayer gives us the pattern of submission without reluctance to ask. Mark 14:36 (KJV): "Abba, Father, all things are possible unto thee; take away this cup from me: nevertheless not what I will, but what thou wilt."[6] His cup belongs uniquely to His saving mission; we do not share His atoning work. Yet His obedient prayer teaches

us that asking for relief and submitting to the Father belong together. We may earnestly seek deliverance without making deliverance the condition of our loyalty.

As hostility grows, begin with the weakness already known. Do not wait to discover every danger in your heart before praying about the one presently directing your thoughts. Ask before the conversation, before the opportunity to conceal your faith, before bitterness finds an audience. Christ warns us in mercy. The warning is an invitation to seek strength before we have to mourn the consequences of trusting ourselves.

E. M. Bounds writes, "Prayer makes the man; prayer makes the preacher; prayer makes the pastor."[8] The shepherd must prepare for pressure as a man who needs grace himself. Before he calls his people to remain faithful, he must bring his own fear of rejection, loss, and suffering before Christ. A pastor who learns to confess those fears in prayer is being prepared to help frightened believers seek the same Savior. His ministry under persecution begins with the dependence he practices before the test arrives.

Pray about What Is Weighing Down Your Heart

Some threats enter through open opposition; others take possession of our attention. Luke 21:34–35 (KJV): "And take heed to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting, and drunkenness, and cares of this life, and so that day come upon you unawares. For as a snare shall it come on all them that dwell on the face of the whole earth."[4]

The cares of this life stand beside gross indulgence in Christ's warning. A person can be sober in his outward habits and still become so occupied with protecting tomorrow that he ceases to live before God today. Concern for food, housing, employment, or family is not sinful in itself. The danger develops when securing those things becomes the condition upon which we are willing to obey.

Imagine a parent who fears what increasing hostility toward Christians may mean for his children. He keeps reading, planning, and rehearsing possible conversations. Yet he grows impatient when the children interrupt him. He scarcely prays with them because he is so busy considering how to protect them. His love is real, but fear has begun directing its expression. The danger he anticipates is now helping him neglect a duty already in his hands.

Prayer brings that confusion before the Father. First Peter 5:7

(NKJV) directs us to entrust our cares to Him, "for He cares for you."[9] What responsibility has God actually given this parent? What outcome is he trying to guarantee? He can make prudent arrangements, seek counsel, and teach his children the truth. He cannot secure a life in which faithfulness never costs them anything. He must ask God to prepare them to love Christ, not merely arrange for them never to need courage. That prayer may expose how deeply he has confused their safety with their highest good.

Deception also finds opportunity in a frightened heart. Someone who promises certainty, immediate relief, or a painless path through coming trouble may become attractive precisely because he says what we desperately want to hear. Matthew 24:11–13 (KJV): "And many false prophets shall rise, and shall deceive many. And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold. But he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved."[10] Christ prepares us for deception and endurance, not for believing whichever voice makes us feel safest.

We should therefore pray about the desire that makes a false promise persuasive. Lord, make me willing to receive the truth even when it gives me no date, no guarantee of comfort, and no permission to avoid costly obedience. Help me test what I hear by Your Word. Prayerful dependence does not replace examination; it seeks a heart willing to submit to what examination reveals. A reassuring message does not become divine because we felt calmer after hearing it.

George Müller described prayer sustained after "the inner man has been nourished by meditation on the word of God".[11] He was explaining how receiving Scripture nourished his communion with the Father. That counsel matters when alarming reports have supplied nearly all our thoughts: we must give attention to what God says, not merely bring Him what fear has been saying. His Word teaches us what to trust, what to refuse, and how to pray when a persuasive voice offers safety at the expense of truth.

There is comfort here for the believer whose anxiety returns. Repeated fear is not proof that prayer has failed or that God has abandoned you. Bring the burden again, receive the help available, and fulfill the duty presently clear. Christ's command calls you away from surrender to fear, not into shame because you have felt it. As the day approaches, a heart kept before Him can learn to obey without first possessing an explanation of everything that may happen.

Pray for Believers Who Are under Pressure

Persecution can shrink our prayers to the boundaries of our own household. We ask that our work, our freedom, and our children be protected, while scarcely remembering believers who have already lost what we fear losing. Paul teaches a wider watchfulness. Ephesians 6:18 (KJV): "Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints".[12]

These words conclude the call to stand in the Lord's strength, equipped with the armor He supplies. Prayer is not an admission that His provision is insufficient. It is the exercise of dependence upon the One whose truth, righteousness, gospel, and salvation enable His people to stand. To pray in the Spirit is to depend upon His help and seek what accords with God's will, not to measure the strength of prayer by unusual feelings or impressive speech.

Romans 8:26–27 (KJV) meets believers precisely where weakness interrupts expression: "Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. And he that searcheth the hearts knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit, because he maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God."[13] The believer who struggles to find words is not beyond the Spirit's help. We may bring a suffering brother before God with more dependence than eloquence.

Paul makes the need concrete. Ephesians 6:19–20 (KJV): "And for me, that utterance may be given unto me, that I may open my mouth boldly, to make known the mystery of the gospel, For which I am an ambassador in bonds: that therein I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak."[12] The imprisoned apostle asks for bold speech. His bonds have not canceled his commission. Those praying for him must seek more than the end of his discomfort; they must seek faithfulness in the responsibility that remains.

So pray for the believer whose employer presses him to compromise, for the convert whose family rejects her, and for the pastor whose congregation wants comforting evasions instead of truth. Hebrews 13:3 (NKJV) commands, "Remember the prisoners as if chained with them".[14] Their suffering must enter our prayers as the burden of people to whom we belong. Ask for protection, wise counsel, daily provision, and lawful relief. Ask also for patience, honest speech, freedom from hatred, and courage to confess Christ. These are people

to love, not examples with which to measure our own seriousness about prophecy. Do not circulate their private troubles as material for alarming conversation.

Private prayer gives us room to bring particular needs honestly before God. Household prayer teaches those present to look beyond their own security and to trust the Father together. Congregational prayer allows the church to carry shared burdens and ask for courage as a body. These expressions will differ with circumstances. A believer alone in an unbelieving household is not barred from this duty, and a caregiver's brief petition is not inferior because it cannot resemble an uninterrupted meeting.

Bridges presses the pastor's need further: "Prayer therefore is one half of our Ministry; and it gives to the other half all its power and success."[15] The pastor's public work must be sustained by private dependence upon God. A pastor facing persecution must bring his preaching, his fearful members, and his own temptation to soften the truth before the Lord. The work still requires careful preparation and faithful visitation; prayer acknowledges whose grace must make that work spiritually fruitful.

As the pressure intensifies, pray before deciding that another Christian's weakness makes him useless. The person who needs encouragement today may stand beside you when your own resolve trembles. Intercession resists the isolation by which fear leaves believers easier to discourage. We await one Lord, and He has taught us to seek one another's good while we wait.

Keep Praying While You Wait

A sudden threat may drive us to prayer; a long trial tests whether we will continue. At first the need has urgency. Later the same circumstances remain, the same request returns, and words begin to feel worn. We may still say that God hears prayer while withdrawing from Him because His answer has not come as we hoped. Our request may rightly change as we understand His will; what must not change is our dependence upon Him. The danger is allowing disappointment to persuade us that there is no longer any reason to come.

Colossians 4:2–4 (KJV): "Continue in prayer, and watch in the same with thanksgiving; Withal praying also for us, that God would open unto us a door of utterance, to speak the mystery of Christ, for which I am also in bonds: That I may make it manifest, as I ought to speak."[16] Paul again writes from confinement. He asks for an

opportunity to speak of Christ while circumstances remain difficult. The obstacle has become a reason for prayer, not permission to abandon his calling.

Thanksgiving protects this perseverance from becoming an account of everything God has not yet changed. Remembering received mercy does not make present suffering unreal. It refuses to let the latest hardship supply the whole account of God's dealings with us. The Savior has redeemed us, His Word remains true, and His people still have access to the Father. We can give thanks for particular mercies without pretending that all our requests have been granted.

George Müller counseled that "we must patiently, believingly continue in prayer until we obtain an answer".[17] Such continuance rests in the God who hears, not in our power to require the outcome we prefer. We seek His will and receive His answer, even when He supplies strength to endure rather than the immediate relief we requested. Under prolonged hostility, patience keeps bringing the burden to Him instead of letting disappointment determine what we believe about His care.

Continued prayer is especially necessary when hostility becomes ordinary. A cruel remark, a closed opportunity, or another strained conversation may no longer seem worth mentioning. Yet repeated injuries can accumulate into settled bitterness. Bring them to God before they harden into a reason to stop loving. Ask Him to expose both the wrong you have suffered and the wrong you are tempted to justify because of it. The approaching Lord calls for endurance that preserves obedience, not merely the ability to survive while becoming increasingly resentful.

What if neglected prayer itself has become a source of shame? Do not spend another week trying to become worthy to return. Hebrews 4:15–16 (KJV): "For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need."[18] Our access rests in Christ, not in the consistency of our recent devotion. Confess the neglect and come for the help you have been refusing yourself.

Continuance will not always look like uninterrupted concentration. Illness, caregiving, grief, and exhaustion affect what a person can do. The duty is real, but we must not invent a duration God has not prescribed and use it to condemn the weak. Return as you are able,

seek help where it is needed, and keep bringing actual needs before Him. The Lord who commands perseverance is also the High Priest through whom weary believers receive mercy.

Bounds also observes, "The preachers who are the mightiest in their closets with God are the mightiest in their pulpits with men."[19] When opposition grows, private prayer sustains the pastor's courage to speak publicly under Christ's authority. He brings before God the passage he must preach, the people who need its truth, and the temptation to make the message more acceptable by leaving its demands unspoken. The coming Lord must govern both what he says and whose approval he seeks. Prayer keeps that accountability before him when a faithful sermon may cost him the welcome of his hearers.

We do not know how long a particular trial will last. We do know whose servants we are until it ends. Keep asking for the grace to do His will, for the spread of His gospel, and for His coming kingdom. Waiting becomes faithful when it remains occupied with the Lord rather than merely with the passing of time.

Worship Christ for Who He Is

The furnace in Daniel 3 was meant to settle whom three men would worship. Nebuchadnezzar had offered a terrifying choice: bow before his image or be burned. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego did not answer by bargaining for an easier form of disobedience. Daniel 3:17–18 (KJV): "If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of thine hand, O king. But if not, be it known unto thee, O king, that we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up."[20]

Their refusal came before their rescue. They confessed God's power without granting the king authority over their worship if rescue did not come. That is a searching preparation for persecution. If our praise depends upon God keeping obedience comfortable, an enemy needs only to make obedience painful to challenge our allegiance. Adoration prepares us to refuse that demand because we have come to love the Lord whose honor is at stake.

Then the king saw four figures walking in the fire. Daniel 3:25 (NKJV) describes the fourth as "like the Son of God."[20] Read as a picture of Christ's presence with His suffering people, their companionship in the furnace teaches us to seek more than escape. The fire that displayed the king's cruelty also became the place where God's

servants were not alone. We need not invent their conversation to receive that comfort. Through Christ, believers may draw near to God while the trial continues, loving Him in circumstances from which they still earnestly ask to be delivered.

The end-times significance of such worship must not be missed. Revelation 13:15 describes deadly coercion against those who refuse to worship the beast's image.[21] Worship is a matter of allegiance, not merely a private source of comfort. The enemy demands what belongs to God. A church preparing for that kind of pressure needs more than well-developed requests for protection. It needs hearts occupied with the worth of the Lord they must not deny.

Revelation 5:12 (KJV) gives heaven's judgment: "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing."[22] His worth does not rise and fall with our circumstances. The Lamb who gave Himself for us deserves adoration before the threatening voice is silenced. We praise His holiness because no evil stains Him, His wisdom because no ruler outwits Him, and His redeeming love because He purchased us at the cost of His blood.

Spurgeon writes, "He who singeth a song to Christ in the night, singeth the best song in all the world, for he singeth from the heart."[23] He is describing praise offered amid darkness and opposition. Such love does not wait for the surrounding world to admire Christ. It acknowledges His glory when others despise Him. Our prayers should give voice to that love, rather than mentioning His name only when we need a circumstance changed.

Speak to Him about who He is. Psalm 63:3 (NKJV) declares God's lovingkindness "better than life" and makes that truth a reason for praise.[24] When persecution threatens life itself, this confession brings the worth of God's love before the frightened heart. Tell Him that His mercy is precious, that His righteousness is beautiful, and that His fellowship is better than the approval you are tempted to buy through compromise. Such prayer is not a technique for producing courage. It is love answering the Savior's worth. Courage grows where the heart learns that betraying Him would lose something more precious than the comfort betrayal promises to preserve.

The three men were delivered from the furnace. Other faithful believers have glorified God through suffering that ended in death. Their different earthly outcomes do not divide Christ into a faithful Savior for one and an absent Savior for another. His presence and

final salvation are not measured by immediate escape. As we await His appearing, let persecution find us already accustomed to loving Him. We must not postpone the worship He deserves until the world makes it safe to offer.

Bless the Lord When His Gifts Are Taken Away

Persecution threatens what we love, and sometimes the threatened loss becomes real. Employment ends. A relationship breaks under hostility to Christ. Possessions, freedom, or familiar companionship disappear. The question then presses beyond whether we will ask God for help: will we still bless Him when His gifts are no longer in our hands?

Job's worship came before any restoration. Job 1:20–22 (KJV): "Then Job arose, and rent his mantle, and shaved his head, and fell down upon the ground, and worshipped, And said, Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return thither: the Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord. In all this Job sinned not, nor charged God foolishly."[25]

His children had died and his possessions were lost. Scripture lets us see the torn robe and the bowed body. Job did not honor God by pretending that the gifts had meant little to him. He mourned deeply, and he worshiped. The Lord's worth had survived the loss of what Job had received from His hand.

That distinction exposes a bargain the heart may never have spoken aloud. We gladly praise God while His kindness arrives in forms we can readily enjoy. But if praise ceases whenever those gifts are removed, have we begun treating worship as payment for favorable circumstances? Job's confession does not forbid our sorrow. It calls us to love the Giver without requiring Him to preserve every gift as the price of our continued praise.

Spurgeon urges, "Dear friends, let us never rob God of his praise, however dark the day is."[26] Praise offered in darkness confesses that the darkness has not told us everything about God. His goodness cannot be judged solely by what we have lost.

We must not use Job to silence a suffering person. The book records anguish, questions, and struggles far beyond the initial confession. Its opening scene is not a command to achieve immediate emotional composure after devastating news. Nor does it authorize us to tell someone why God permitted a particular loss. It shows that grief can

fall before God rather than turn away from Him. We may have tears to bring and still have reason to bless His name.

Habakkuk 3:17–18 (KJV) gives that praise words amid failed provision: "Although the fig tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines; the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls: Yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation."[27] The prophet does not rejoice because empty stalls are pleasant. He rejoices in God when the usual grounds of earthly security have failed.

That faith prepares believers for economic pressure without making deprivation desirable. Revelation 13:15–17 joins coerced allegiance to restrictions upon buying and selling.[21] The possibility of losing ordinary provision makes the question of worship terribly concrete. Will I treat disobedience as necessary because it promises to restore what faithfulness has cost? Prayerful praise brings us back to the God whose salvation cannot be replaced by the security a persecuting power offers.

Praise does not forbid seeking lawful protection, receiving material help, or grieving with the church. Those may be gifts through which God sustains us. But neither relief nor restoration must become a payment we demand before acknowledging His goodness. Through Christ we can bring our emptiness to the Father and honor Him while it remains empty. The cross assures us of a love deeper than the circumstances we cannot explain.

The Lord we bless in loss is the Lord whose appearing will complete our salvation. We will not always pray amid threats, tears, and unfinished struggles. Until that day, ask for His help, intercede for His people, adore His Son, and bless His name. He has not ceased to be worthy because waiting has become costly. The Savior who calls us to watch is Himself the One we are waiting to see.

Questions for Further Study

1. Read 1 Peter 4:7–11. Why does Peter join the approaching end to sober prayer, earnest love, hospitality, and service? How might fear of persecution tempt a church to neglect the very duties that prayer should strengthen?
2. Read Mark 14:32–42. What does Christ's command reveal about the difference between willingness and preparedness? How does

His own prayer hold earnest petition together with submission to the Father?

3. Read Luke 21:34–36 and Matthew 24:9–13. How can concern about coming trouble become an inward danger? What desire might make a false promise of safety attractive to an otherwise informed believer?
4. Read Ephesians 6:18–20 and Colossians 4:2–4. What does Paul ask churches to seek for him while he is imprisoned? How should his requests enlarge our prayers for persecuted Christians?
5. Read Daniel 3:16–28 alongside Revelation 5:9–14 and 13:15. What makes worship an issue of allegiance under pressure? Why must Christ's worth, rather than the certainty of immediate rescue, govern our praise?
6. Read Job 1:20–22 and Habakkuk 3:17–18. How do these passages distinguish worship from denial of grief? What does it mean to honor the Giver when a treasured gift has been removed?

Practical Applications

1. Bring one pressure before Christ before your next decision. Name the loss you fear and the temptation that accompanies it. Read the passage in this chapter that most directly addresses that temptation, ask for the Spirit's help, and take the obedient step already clear. Include praise for a truth about Christ that the threat has tempted you to forget. Do not make feeling fearless a condition of obeying.
2. Pray for one believer facing costly faithfulness. Seek enough reliable information to pray specifically without intruding or spreading private details. Ask for needed protection and provision, and also for courage, truthful speech, patient love, and continued usefulness. Where appropriate, offer a practical kindness or join the church in praying for that person. Let intercession move you toward love rather than leave you observing the hardship from a distance.
3. Worship God in one unresolved burden or real loss. Bring Him the sorrow honestly; do not manufacture cheerful feelings. Read Job 1:20–22 or Habakkuk 3:17–18, name a truth about His character and saving work that remains unchanged, and bless Him for it. Ask for grace to continue honoring Christ while you

wait, receiving the help He provides without making restored comfort the price of your praise.

Chapter Axioms

1. The approaching end calls believers to clear-minded prayer that strengthens love and service. 1 Peter 4:7–11.
2. Willingness to obey must be joined to dependence upon God before temptation presses its advantage. Mark 14:32–42.
3. Concern for coming trouble becomes dangerous when earthly security begins governing obedience. Luke 21:34–36.
4. Prayer must seek a heart willing to receive God's truth, not merely a message that promises relief. Matthew 24:4–13; Ephesians 6:17–18.
5. The Spirit helps weak believers pray, and watchful intercession seeks the faithfulness of all God's people. Romans 8:26–27; Ephesians 6:18–20.
6. Persevering prayer rests upon access through Christ and continues with thanksgiving while hardship remains. Hebrews 4:14–16; Colossians 4:2–4.
7. Christ deserves worship for who He is, even when refusing false worship threatens our lives. Daniel 3:16–28; Revelation 5:9–14; 13:15.
8. Grief and praise can stand together because the worth of the Giver does not disappear with His gifts. Job 1:20–22; Habakkuk 3:17–18.

The Doctrines of Worship and Prayer

Fifteen Principles for Keeping Faith and Love Alive until Christ Comes

Jesus identifies a danger that reaches inside the church: "the love of many will grow cold" (Matthew 24:12). Increasing lawlessness will threaten more than our safety. It will threaten our love. And after teaching His disciples to persist in prayer, Jesus asks whether He will find faith on the earth at His coming (Luke 18:8). These warnings call us to examine the life within us, not merely the events around us.

A living prayer life is one of God's appointed means of strengthening the faith and love that pressure, temptation, and neglect threaten

to weaken. We need prayer that persists, worship that treasures Christ, and hearts that refuse to settle into spiritual coldness.

1. God alone deserves our worship, whatever faithfulness costs.

Worship acknowledges God's supreme worth and our complete dependence upon Him. No earthly power has the right to demand the allegiance that belongs to our Creator. Revelation brings this issue into sharp focus: when false worship becomes a condition of survival, the believer must still belong wholly to God. We prepare for that test by refusing to make comfort, approval, or security our master now.

Scripture support: Matthew 4:10; Revelation 13:15–17; Revelation 14:6–7.

2. We draw near to God through Christ, not through our own worthiness.

Jesus opens the way to the Father and supplies the mercy and grace His people need. Persecution may close a church building, separate us from friends, or take away our freedom, but it cannot remove our High Priest. When danger exposes our weakness, we must approach God through Christ rather than retreat in shame. Our welcome rests upon His sacrifice, not the strength of our performance.

Scripture support: Ephesians 2:18; Hebrews 4:14–16; Hebrews 10:19–22.

3. True worship must come from the heart and be governed by God's truth.

God seeks worshipers whose inward devotion agrees with His revealed truth. Religious excitement cannot replace either. As deception spreads, sincerity alone will not protect us from worshiping a false picture of Christ. Scripture must govern whom we worship, what we believe about Him, and what we ask of Him. A heart moved by error is still being led away from the truth.

Scripture support: John 4:23–24; Matthew 15:8–9; Matthew 24:24–25.

4. Worship loves God for who He is, not merely for what He gives.

Adoration turns our attention from our immediate needs to God's holiness, goodness, and glory. This matters profoundly when faithfulness brings loss. The three young men refused idolatry before they

knew whether God would rescue them from the furnace. End-times worship must have that same allegiance: Christ remains worthy when obedience becomes costly and deliverance does not come as we hoped.

Scripture support: Psalm 63:1–4; Daniel 3:16–18; Revelation 5:12–13.

5. The Holy Spirit helps us pray when suffering leaves us weak.

Prayer depends upon the Spirit's help, not our ability to produce impressive words or powerful feelings. Romans 8 places His intercession within the suffering and weakness of believers awaiting redemption. When persecution exhausts us, we may struggle to express our needs, but we are not abandoned to our own resources. Bring the weakness to God. Do not let it become a reason to stay away.

Scripture support: Romans 8:18–27; Ephesians 6:18; Jude 20–21.

6. Persistent prayer exercises the faith Christ calls us to maintain.

The parable in Luke 18:1–8 begins with the duty to keep praying and ends with Christ's searching question about faith at His coming. The connection is deliberate. When relief is delayed and injustice continues, persistent prayer continues to trust the God whose answer we cannot yet see. The believer who keeps coming to the Father refuses to let prolonged suffering have the final word about His faithfulness.

Scripture support: Luke 18:1–8; Romans 12:12; Hebrews 10:35–39.

7. We must pray for love to increase when the world encourages it to grow cold.

Jesus warns that increasing lawlessness will cool the love of many. Paul, by contrast, prays that believers' love will increase and overflow, and connects that growth with their readiness at Christ's coming. We must ask God to preserve tenderness toward Him and genuine love for others when betrayal, cruelty, and disappointment tempt us to become hard. Recognizing the world's wickedness must not become an excuse for losing Christian love.

Scripture support: Matthew 24:12–13; 1 Thessalonians 3:12–13; Philippians 1:9–11.

8. The approaching end makes sober prayer more urgent, not less.

Peter joins the nearness of the end to clear-minded prayer and earnest love. He does not direct believers toward panic or endless

speculation. We must recognize danger without allowing fear to govern our thoughts. The more unsettled the world becomes, the more deliberately we must bring its pressures before God. Studying the signs while neglecting prayer leaves us informed about the danger but unprepared to meet it.

Scripture support: 1 Peter 4:7–8; Luke 21:34–36.

9. Watchful prayer seeks strength before temptation gains control.

Jesus told His disciples to watch and pray because willing intentions do not overcome the weakness of the flesh. We must bring our particular vulnerabilities to God before pressure exploits them. In the last days, anxiety, indulgence, and the desire for safety can make compromise appear reasonable. Pray now about what you fear losing, what you struggle to refuse, and where obedience is already becoming negotiable.

Scripture support: Matthew 26:40–41; Luke 21:34–36; Hebrews 4:15–16.

10. Prayer must include honest confession and a willingness to forsake sin.

We cannot cultivate fellowship with God while deliberately protecting what grieves Him. Confession brings the hidden sin into the light and seeks the cleansing Christ supplies. When surrounding lawlessness makes disobedience seem ordinary, this honesty becomes especially urgent. Do not measure your heart against a colder world and congratulate yourself. Bring it before God and ask Him to expose what you have begun to excuse.

Scripture support: Psalm 66:18–20; Psalm 139:23–24; 1 John 1:9.

11. Faithful prayer seeks God's will even when obedience includes suffering.

Jesus prayed for the cup to pass while submitting Himself to His Father's will. His example teaches us to seek relief without making relief the condition of obedience. End-times believers will need this settled conviction when persecution threatens their possessions, freedom, or lives. Ask boldly for deliverance, and ask just as earnestly for strength to remain faithful if the trial continues.

Scripture support: Matthew 26:39–42; 1 John 5:14–15; Revelation 12:11.

12. Thanksgiving keeps loss from becoming our entire view of God.

Job grieved deeply and still blessed the Lord. Habakkuk anticipated devastated fields and empty stalls, yet resolved to rejoice in God. Their worship directs suffering believers to goodness that remains when comforts disappear. Under end-times deprivation, thanksgiving recalls the mercy we still possess in Christ. We can mourn what has been taken without forgetting the Savior who has given Himself to us.

Scripture support: Job 1:20–22; Habakkuk 3:17–18; 1 Thessalonians 5:16–18.

13. Intercession keeps persecution from turning us inward.

God commands us to pray for all His people, not merely for our own protection. Paul sought prayer for bold gospel witness while he was in chains. As hostility increases, we must remember those enduring imprisonment, bereavement, temptation, and fear. Naming their needs before God resists the shrinking concern that thinks only of personal survival. A watchful church carries its suffering members in prayer and practical love.

Scripture support: Ephesians 6:18–20; Hebrews 13:3; Acts 12:5.

14. Worshiping and praying with the church strengthens us to persevere.

God has not designed believers to face spiritual danger in isolation. Scripture connects assembling together with stirring one another toward love and good works, especially as Christ's Day approaches. Commit yourself to a faithful local church, its biblical preaching, and its shared prayers. When pressure makes fellowship costly, we need its strengthening help all the more. Withdrawal can remove the very encouragement God intends to use.

Scripture support: Acts 2:42; Hebrews 10:23–25.

15. Worship and prayer keep our hope fixed on Christ Himself.

The Christian waits for a Person, not merely for the end of unpleasant conditions. Jude joins growth in faith, prayer, remaining in God's love, and expectation of Christ's mercy. Revelation closes with prayer for the Lord Jesus to come. As the world grows more hostile, communion with Him nourishes our desire to see Him. We persevere

through His keeping power, looking toward the Savior whose presence will complete our joy.

Scripture support: Jude 20–25; Revelation 22:17, 20; 1 Peter 1:8–9.

The warning that love will grow cold is a summons to vigilance, not permission to become cold ourselves. Keep coming to Christ. Worship Him when circumstances give you little comfort. Pray when waiting becomes wearying. Ask Him to strengthen the faith and love you cannot sustain in your own strength. End-times watchfulness requires more than knowing what may happen next. It requires living fellowship with the Lord who is coming.

Transition to Chapter 10

We have asked the Lord to guard us from deception, strengthen our obedience, and keep our hearts faithful under pressure. We must now attend to the Word through which He teaches, warns, and steadies His people. A watchful believer does not ask God for guidance while refusing the truth God has already spoken. We turn next to receiving the biblical preaching that prepares us to stand before Christ.

Notes

1. William Gurnall, The Christian in Complete Armour, Direction XI, introductory exposition of Ephesians 6:18, before "First General Part." The quotation's image concerns continuing dependence on God while using the armor He supplies. https://www.sermonindex.net/books/writings-of-william-gurnall/17
2. John 15:5, NKJV excerpt. Christ identifies Himself as the vine and makes continued fruitfulness dependent upon abiding in Him.
3. 1 Peter 4:7–11, KJV. Verses 7–10 are quoted; verse 11 supplies the paragraph's emphasis upon God-given strength for service.
4. Luke 21:34–36, KJV, read within the whole discourse. Compare verses 12–19, especially verse 16, before making claims about physical escape. This chapter does not settle the chronology of Jerusalem's judgment and the final advent.
5. Charles Bridges, The Christian Ministry, sixth edition, corrected and enlarged (London: Seeley, Burnside, and Seeley, 1844), Part I, chapter VII, section III, "Habits of Special Prayer," printed p. 63 (PDF p. 84). https://s3-us-west-2.amazonaws.com/apuritansmind.com/PDF/pastoral/CharlesBridgesTheChristianMinistryPDF.pdf#page=84
6. Mark 14:32–42, KJV. Verses 36 and 38 are quoted. Christ's unique atoning mission is distinguished from the believer's imitation of His obedient dependence.
7. John Owen, Of Temptation, chapter V, paragraph [4], printed p. 126. The two excerpts occur in consecutive paragraphs. The first retains the lowercase opening of the source sentence. Owen cites Hebrews 4:16 and Ephesians 6:18 to explain Christ's help and persevering prayer. https://ccel.org/ccel/owen/temptation/temptation.i.viii.html
8. E. M. Bounds, Prayerful and Powerful Pulpits (FirstLove Publications; copyright 2017, 2023; ISBN 9781953151308), chapter 1, "Men of Prayer Needed," printed p. 5 (PDF p. 15). https://www.firstloveministries.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/EM-BOUNDS-Prayerful-and-Powerful-Pulpits-Print-Ready-File-013023.pdf#page=15
9. 1 Peter 5:7, NKJV excerpt, within Peter's call to humility, vigilance, and resistance amid shared suffering.
10. Matthew 24:4–13, KJV. Verses 11–13 are quoted; the immediate setting includes deception, persecution, betrayal, hatred, and endurance.
11. George Müller, The Life of Trust, edited by H. Lincoln Wayland, chapter XIII, entry for May 7, 1841, printed p. 209. Exact excerpt from his account of Scripture meditation nourishing prayer; the historical source is an edited narrative, not an unedited diary facsimile. https://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/27288/pg27288-images.html#Page_209
12. Ephesians 6:10–20, KJV. Verses 18–20 are quoted. Paul's request for boldness belongs to his imprisonment and gospel commission; the passage is applied to preparedness without identifying its "evil day" with one particular predicted event.
13. Romans 8:26–27, KJV. The Spirit's help is promised to believers in weakness, not merely those who can express their requests fluently.
14. Hebrews 13:3, NKJV excerpt. Remembering the imprisoned and mistreated involves solidarity and practical concern; prayer is one expression of that duty.
15. Charles Bridges, The Christian Ministry, sixth edition (1844), Part III, chapter VI, "Neglect of Retirement," printed p. 148 (PDF p. 169). His emphasis upon prayer's necessity is not treated as a mechanical promise of visible results. https://s3-us-west-2.amazonaws.com/apuritansmind.com/PDF/pastoral/CharlesBridgesTheChristianMinistryPDF.pdf#page=169

16. Colossians 4:2–4, KJV. The passage joins perseverance, thanksgiving, and gospel opportunity while Paul remains imprisoned.
17. George Müller, The Life of Trust, edited by H. Lincoln Wayland, chapter XXII, "Reaping in Joy," printed p. 405. Exact excerpt from his counsel on patient, believing perseverance in prayer. The application does not promise the petitioner's preferred result. https://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/27288/pg27288-images.html#CHAPTER_XXII
18. Hebrews 4:14–16, KJV. Verses 15–16 are quoted. Access and perseverance are grounded in the person and ministry of Jesus the Son of God.
19. E. M. Bounds, Prayerful and Powerful Pulpits (FirstLove Publications), chapter 5, "Prayer: The Great Essential," printed p. 21 (PDF p. 31). https://www.firstloveministries.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/EM-BOUNDS-Prayerful-and-Powerful-Pulpits-Print-Ready-File-013023.pdf#page=31
20. Daniel 3:17–18, KJV; Daniel 3:25, NKJV excerpt, in the setting of Daniel 3:16–28. The fourth figure is used as a Christ-centered picture of divine presence. In verse 28 Nebuchadnezzar calls the deliverer God's Angel; the NKJV note on verse 25 offers "a son of the gods." Personal identification as the preincarnate Christ is an interpretation, not an explicit identification by the narrator. Daniel records no conversation in the furnace and no description of fiery eyes. The latter belongs to Revelation 1:14, not this scene.
21. Revelation 13:15–17, KJV. The chapter draws the explicit themes of coerced worship and economic pressure from the text without identifying a present ruler, system, or policy as its fulfillment.
22. Revelation 5:9–14, KJV. Verse 12 is quoted. The Lamb's worthiness is joined to His redeeming death and universal praise.
23. C. H. Spurgeon, "Songs in the Night," sermon 2558, Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit, vol. 44, section III, printed p. 105. The issue was intended for reading February 27, 1898; that is not represented as a preaching date. Verified against the primary transcription and original published scan. https://www.spurgeon.org/sermons/songs-in-the-night https://www.spurgeon.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/10_Songs_in_the_Night.pdf
24. Psalm 63:3, NKJV excerpt. God's lovingkindness supplies the psalmist's reason for praise amid wilderness longing.
25. Job 1:20–22, KJV. Mourning and worship precede restoration. Job's later anguish must not be erased by treating this initial response as uninterrupted emotional composure.
26. C. H. Spurgeon, "Job's Resignation," sermon 2457, Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit, vol. 42, section IV. Delivered March 11, 1886; issued for reading March 22, 1896. The sermon's opening rejects stoicism and recognizes the reality of grief. https://www.spurgeon.org/sermons/jobs-resignation
27. Habakkuk 3:17–18, KJV. The prophet's joy rests in God amid the loss of ordinary agricultural provision.

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CHAPTER 10

Receive the Word That Prepares You

Hearing and Obeying as Christ's Day Approaches

On the Scriptures

Charles Spurgeon: "In them is revealed all the light and power the mind of man can need in spiritual things."[1]

Hear the Word before the Coming Judge

A frightened congregation may welcome a preacher who promises that nothing terrible will happen to them. A faithful preacher cannot make that promise. He must help them know the Lord well enough to trust Him if terrible things do happen. Before the next threat arrives, they need truth that will survive it.

Paul places that responsibility before Timothy with the coming of Christ in view. 2 Timothy 4:1–2 (KJV): "I charge thee therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom; Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all long suffering and doctrine."[2] The preacher answers to the One who will judge the living and the dead. The congregation must hear with that same appointment in mind. A sermon may please everyone in the room and still leave them unprepared to stand before Christ.

This does not give the pastor permission to frighten people into accepting his opinions. Paul tells him what to preach: the Word. He also tells him how to teach: with patience. Biblical authority belongs to the truth being faithfully explained, not to the preacher's volume, personality, or ability to make disagreement uncomfortable. A church

awaiting its Lord needs enough courage to hear an unwelcome command and enough discernment to reject a command the Lord never gave.

That distinction reaches into the worship of the congregation. Sam Waldron writes that "worship must be ordered according to sola scriptura."[3] The Latin expression means Scripture alone. The church receives its direction from God rather than granting its traditions the right to settle what He will accept. The regulative principle means that God determines how His church worships Him: we include what Scripture commands or necessarily requires, rather than inventing acts of worship ourselves.

We do not establish that authorization merely by showing that a practice attracts people, moves them deeply, or has not been forbidden by name. In Matthew 15:7–9, Jesus condemns worship in which human commandments have been elevated into divine teaching.[4] The worshipers' religious activity did not make the substitution harmless. We must ask whose authority gives a practice its place in the church's worship. Martyn Lloyd-Jones urges, "All of us are called upon to re-examine everything in the light of the teaching of the New Testament itself."[5] That examination includes practices we inherited and innovations we find attractive. Neither age nor novelty settles what Christ requires.

This matters as the pressures of the last days intensify. A church accustomed to adjusting its worship whenever people become dissatisfied may find it difficult to hold its course when dissatisfaction becomes a threat. The question will no longer concern whether the service is appealing. It may concern whether faithfulness will cost the congregation its reputation, livelihood, or freedom. Learning to receive God's direction now prepares us to recognize demands that no earthly power has the right to make.

The sufficiency of Scripture addresses a related need. God has given the revealed truth necessary for salvation, faith, and obedience. We need not supplement His Word with a new revelation to know whom we must trust or how we must serve Him. These doctrines belong together without becoming identical. Scripture's sufficiency concerns the completeness of God's revealed provision; the regulative principle concerns His authority to appoint the worship His church offers. Together they teach us to seek His direction and trust the provision He has made.

Christ does not leave His church to devise a worship strong enough

to withstand the age. He gives His people His Word and commands them to hear it. The sermon that exposes our false security may be the kindness through which He prepares us for a danger we have scarcely understood.

Continue in Scripture When Deception Spreads

Paul does not answer perilous times by telling Timothy to search for a more advanced revelation. After describing the evils of the last days, he directs him back to the truth he has learned. 2 Timothy 3:13–15 (KJV): "But evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse, deceiving, and being deceived. But continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them; And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus."[6]

Notice where Paul locates Timothy's help. Deceivers will become worse; the Scriptures will not become inadequate. Timothy must continue in them because the God who knows the danger has already supplied the truth by which His servant is to live. The contrast is searching. When alarming events make us feel that familiar biblical teaching can no longer be enough, we may begin looking beyond the very provision God tells us to keep receiving.

Paul continues in 2 Timothy 3:16–17 (KJV): "All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works."[6] Scripture teaches us what is true, exposes what is wrong, directs us back to the right path, and trains us to walk there. B. B. Warfield writes, "Scripture must needs be fulfilled, for what is contained in it is the declaration of the Holy Ghost through the human author."[7] He is explaining Scripture's divine authority. Its words are dependable because the Spirit speaks through the human writers. That authority makes its correction more than a counselor's preference.

Its sufficiency includes correction. We cannot claim to trust the Bible's adequacy while refusing the part of its ministry that contradicts us.

The Bible does not give us tomorrow's address, every detail of a coming crisis, or the date when a particular hardship will end. Its completeness must be measured by the purpose for which God gave it. It brings us to Christ and equips us for the obedience He requires.

John MacArthur warns against treating "our riches in Christ, including Scripture, prayer, the indwelling Holy Spirit" as inadequate.[8] Danger does not impoverish Christ or make those gifts obsolete. We still gather reliable facts, listen to wise counsel, seek lawful protection, and make prudent arrangements. None of those activities may supply a competing rule of faith or turn a human judgment into a command from God.

Consider a believer told that a new message from God identifies the only place Christians will be safe. Fear may make the claim feel urgent before its authority has been examined. Scripture's sufficiency enables him to stop and ask what warrant the speaker possesses. A pressing need does not turn an unsupported claim into revelation. We may act prudently without surrendering our conscience to someone who says he knows what God has not disclosed.

Nor does confidence in Scripture make dependence upon the Holy Spirit unnecessary. We need Him to open our understanding, overcome our resistance, and enable our obedience. Psalm 119:18 is a prayer for opened eyes to behold what God has given, not a request to replace it.[9] Illumination helps us understand and receive the written Word. It does not make our impressions an additional Bible. The Spirit who inspired Scripture does not require us to escape its authority in order to follow Him.

As deception grows, ask more of the preaching you receive than an explanation of the latest alarming report. Ask whether it is teaching you to know God, understand His promises, recognize error, and obey when obedience hurts. A congregation may possess an elaborate account of coming events and remain unable to explain why a persuasive religious claim is false. Sustained biblical teaching prepares believers to make that distinction before fear begins pressing for an immediate answer. The troubled believer needs that light brought to bear upon his situation. He must not be taught to leave it behind in order to become better prepared.

Refuse the Message Your Fear Wants to Hear

The danger does not always enter against the congregation's wishes. Sometimes the congregation goes looking for it. 2 Timothy 4:3–4 (KJV): "For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables."[2] Paul describes hearers who

choose teachers according to their desires. They still want religious instruction, but they no longer want truth to govern what they are willing to hear.

A desire for reassurance can become one of those demands. We may welcome a teacher because he promises that faithful Christians will never face the suffering we dread. Or we may prefer the opposite sort of message: one that keeps us alarmed, makes us feel unusually informed, and treats our suspicions as evidence of spiritual insight. Comfort and alarm can both become appetites. The question is whether Scripture remains free to correct the message we favor.

Jesus warns in Matthew 24:24 that false christs and false prophets will employ impressive signs in their deception.[10] We therefore cannot judge a ministry's truth by the intensity of its effects. A stirring gathering may contain serious error; an unadorned sermon may bring us face-to-face with a command we have avoided for years. Strong feelings require interpretation. They cannot bear the weight of establishing divine authority.

This also explains why God-governed worship belongs in a chapter about watchfulness. Waldron says that "nothing substantial should be added" to the elements God has appointed.[11] A congregation must not invent a new act of worship and require it because someone claims it will secure special protection during the coming crisis. Neither the fear surrounding the practice nor the sincerity of those who propose it supplies God's authorization. We must not teach people to trust a religious act He has never commanded. Here the regulative principle becomes a practical safeguard: in worship we offer what God has authorized, rather than devise something we hope will persuade Him to protect us.

John Calvin writes, "In short, every adventitious invention, by which men desire to worship God, is nothing else than a pollution of true holiness."[12] By an adventitious invention, he means something brought in from outside God's appointed worship. His language is severe because human invention is being offered under the appearance of honoring God. A crisis cannot make that substitution faithful.

Here we need care. The regulative principle does not require a separate verse naming the hour of a service, the arrangement of its seats, or the means by which a preacher's voice is heard. Those are practical circumstances in which commanded worship takes place. They are to be ordered wisely under biblical principles, including edification and order in 1 Corinthians 14:26, 40.[13] A meeting place may change

under persecution while the church continues to hear Scripture, pray, sing, and observe Christ's ordinances. Changing the circumstances of obedience is different from inventing a new object or act of worship.

Nor does this principle give church leaders the right to regulate every ordinary decision in a believer's life as though it were an element of public worship. Scripture governs all of life, but pastors must distinguish God's commands from their own counsel. Fear makes people vulnerable to leaders who claim more authority than Christ has entrusted to them. Faithful shepherds show their warrant and acknowledge its limits.

We should welcome that restraint. Waldron's statement that "the church must be God-regulated" rests on the church's belonging to God.[14] It is His possession, not a platform upon which a religious personality may build an obedient following. The same truth restrains the congregation from redesigning worship around its preferences. Neither the pulpit nor the pew may take the place of the Lord.

Which voice becomes hardest for you to question when you are afraid? Does it offer biblical reasons for confidence, or simply promise what you cannot bear to lose? A watchful hearer must be willing to release even a cherished reassurance when God's Word will not support it. Christ's true promises will still be there after the false one is gone.

Receive Correction before Obedience Becomes Costlier

We can examine other people's teaching with considerable energy while protecting our own disobedience from examination. A sermon may be entirely biblical, and we may praise it, quote it, and recommend it without doing the thing it requires. The truth has reached our vocabulary without being allowed to govern our conduct. A. W. Pink writes, "The Word of God is the sole rule and ground of their faith."[15] God's testimony supplies the warrant for what we believe. If we acknowledge that rule only where it leaves our conduct untouched, we have narrowed its authority to protect ourselves.

James 1:22–24 (KJV) addresses that danger: "But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves. For if any be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass: For he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was."[16] The mirror has shown him something real. His failure lies in walking away as though seeing it had completed his responsibility.

Imagine a believer who listens carefully to a sermon about truthful speech. He agrees that Christians must not deny Christ when persecution comes. Yet he continues shading the truth at work because an honest answer might cost him approval. He is not preparing for a greater test merely by admiring courage in the abstract. The present evasion needs confession and correction. The Word is addressing the habit through which fear is already gaining influence over his obedience.

Earlier Christians understood that receiving God's Word could become costly. In John Wycliffe's Trialogus we read that "the truth of Scripture is of infinitely greater authority than that of any person now living, or of any community that could be named."[17] John Hus urged the people of Prague, "Diligently and thankfully listen to God's word".[18] These voices bring authority and grateful hearing together. As we await Christ, we need both: confidence that no human threat can overrule what God has spoken, and a willingness to receive His truth while it is being taught to us.

William Tyndale describes what that truth supplies: "So now the scripture is a light, and sheweth us the true way, both what to do and what to hope for; and a defence from all error, and a comfort in adversity that we despair not, and feareth us in prosperity that we sin not."[19] Scripture prepares us for danger by exposing error and sustaining hope; it also searches us while life remains comfortable. Hus and Tyndale paid with their lives; Wycliffe's enemies burned his remains after his death.[20] Their witness presses a question upon believers preparing for coming trials: will we receive and obey God's Word when keeping it costs more than admiring it? The comfort we will need in adversity belongs to the same Word whose correction we need today.

The same question belongs before a congregation. If people have come to expect worship to reassure them without searching them, a pastor may feel pressure to keep difficult passages out of the sermon. Eventually, protecting the hearers from discomfort can begin protecting them from repentance. End-times preparation requires the opposite kindness. The shepherd must teach the truths by which his people can recognize a demand to compromise, even when those truths expose compromises already present among them.

Come to preaching ready to be helped in that fuller sense. Ask what the passage establishes, what it exposes, and what response follows. Where your conscience is uncertain, seek explanation rather than pretending agreement. Martin Luther states the proper authority plainly:

"The Word of God shall establish articles of faith, and no one else, not even an angel."[21] No teacher may demand faith in a claim merely because he speaks with confidence. Where the command is clear, do not keep postponing obedience until a sermon makes it feel inexpensive. The Lord who corrects you is also the Savior who receives the repentant and supplies strength to begin again.

Remain under the Word as the Day Approaches

When pressure increases, withdrawing from the congregation may appear to offer relief. We can avoid another searching sermon, another reminder of duties we feel too weary to fulfill, or the discomfort of being known. Yet Scripture joins the approaching Day to a renewed determination to receive and give encouragement among God's people.

Hebrews 10:23–25 (KJV): "Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering; (for he is faithful that promised;) And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works: Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching."[22] The One who promised is faithful. That assurance supports perseverance, and the gathered church is one of the places where His people are reminded of it.

Christ's provision includes pastors and teachers. Ephesians 4:14–15 (KJV) describes the intended growth: "That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive; But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ."[23] Stability grows through truth received in the body Christ supplies. A believer who continually abandons sound instruction for the next urgent religious voice is surrendering an important protection against deception.

The Bible's sufficiency therefore gives us reason to value faithful teachers. It does not make them unnecessary. Their task is to help us understand and obey what God has revealed, while remaining subject to it themselves. Acts 17:11 commends the Bereans for examining the Scriptures as they received the message.[24] A pastor who directs people to the text strengthens their confidence in God rather than making his own personality indispensable to their faith.

Seek and receive faithful biblical instruction as your circumstances permit.

The regulative principle remains simple at the end of the argument: God directs His church's worship, and His people honor Him by offering what He has appointed. We need neither a new ritual to secure His favor nor a new revelation to make His Word sufficient. MacArthur writes, "There's no need to search for something more."[25] His point is the adequacy of our riches in Christ, not the end of careful study or growth. We continue learning the depth of what God has already given.

If public hostility deprives a church of conveniences it has long enjoyed, the Word of God has not lost its power. Scripture can still be read and explained. Believers can still confess their need, sing God's praise, and remember Christ's death as He appointed. We should value these gifts before deprivation teaches us how much we depended on things the Lord never made necessary. God-governed worship steadies us by directing our confidence toward what He has actually given.

Above all, the truth we receive brings us to a living Savior. Scripture makes us wise unto salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. He bore the judgment His people deserved, rose from the dead, and will return to receive them. His Word does more than expose the dangers around us. It tells us whose we are, where mercy is found, and why obedience will not finally be wasted.

Do not measure the worth of a sermon only by how you feel when it ends. Ask whether it has helped you hear your Lord more clearly and follow Him more faithfully. The coming Day will reveal the kindness of warnings we once found uncomfortable and the strength of promises we almost neglected. Receive His Word now. The Savior who speaks through it is preparing His people to meet Him.

Questions for Further Study

1. Read 2 Timothy 4:1–5. How does Christ's appearing govern both the preacher's responsibility and the hearer's response? Why must courage, patience, and biblical authority remain together?
2. Read 2 Timothy 3:1, 13–17. Why does Paul direct Timothy to continue in Scripture as deception increases? What does this passage promise Scripture will equip him to do, and what does it not promise to disclose?
3. Read Deuteronomy 12:29–32 and Matthew 15:7–9. What do these passages reveal about God's right to govern worship? Explain the regulative principle in ordinary language, then

distinguish an act of worship from a practical circumstance in which worship occurs.

4. Read Matthew 24:24 and Acts 17:11. Why are impressive effects and confident speakers insufficient tests of religious truth? How can eager hearing and careful examination strengthen one another?
5. Read James 1:21–25. Where might admiration for biblical preaching conceal resistance to obeying it? How could receiving correction now prepare a believer for a costlier decision later?
6. Read Hebrews 10:23–25 and Ephesians 4:11–16. How does Christ use His Word within His church to strengthen believers as the Day approaches? Why does Scripture's sufficiency increase, rather than remove, our need for faithful instruction?

Practical Applications

1. Test one message that has strongly influenced your expectations about the future. Identify its actual claim and read the biblical passage offered in support, including its context. Distinguish what God has promised from what the speaker has inferred or merely asserted. If necessary, ask a faithful pastor to help you examine it. Do not keep repeating a claim simply because it calms your fears or confirms your suspicions.
2. Return to one clear duty you have admired without obeying. Revisit the passage, name the excuse that has delayed your response, and ask Christ for forgiveness and strength. Take the next faithful step the text actually requires. If the obligation is unclear, seek careful counsel rather than imposing an invented rule upon yourself.
3. Consider one part of your congregation's worship in the light of Scripture. Ask what biblical warrant supports it and whether you are examining an act of worship or an ordinary practical arrangement. Approach questions humbly and discuss them with the church's leaders rather than making an accusation from an incomplete understanding. Thank God for the means He has appointed, and consider whether you would continue valuing them if familiar conveniences were removed.

Chapter Axioms

1. Christ's appearing places preaching and hearing under His judgment, not the audience's approval. 2 Timothy 4:1–5.
2. Increasing deception makes continued attention to Scripture more necessary; it does not make God's revelation insufficient. 2 Timothy 3:13–17.
3. God determines how His church worships Him; religious sincerity does not authorize human inventions. Deuteronomy 12:29–32; Matthew 15:7–9.
4. Practical arrangements may change while the church remains faithful to the worship God commands. 1 Corinthians 14:26, 40.
5. A hearer's desires can help select the very teaching that deceives him. 2 Timothy 4:3–4.
6. Receiving biblical correction now addresses compromises that greater pressure may exploit. James 1:21–25; Hebrews 2:1–4.
7. The Holy Spirit enables us to receive God's truth; our impressions do not become additional Scripture. Psalm 119:18; 1 Corinthians 2:10–14; 2 Timothy 3:16–17.
8. Faithful teaching strengthens the church against deception and directs its confidence toward Christ. Ephesians 4:11–16; Hebrews 10:23–25.

God Directs Our Worship and Supplies the Truth We Need

Fifteen Principles of God-Governed Worship and the Sufficiency of Scripture

The regulative principle teaches that God determines the worship His church offers. The sufficiency of Scripture teaches that He has supplied the revealed truth necessary for our salvation, faith, and obedience. As Christ's Day approaches, these truths keep us from treating fear as permission to invent new worship or to seek a new word from God. They also direct us toward the riches He has already provided.

1. God appoints His worship; we receive His direction.

> Deuteronomy 12:32 (KJV): "What thing soever I command you, observe to do it: thou shalt not add thereto, nor diminish

from it." Matthew 15:9 (KJV): "But in vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men."

The first passage forbids Israel to borrow the nations' worship and alter God's command; the second condemns human teaching imposed as divine obligation. Together they require us to seek God's authorization, not merely the absence of a named prohibition. Under end-times pressure, a proposed ritual does not become acceptable because it promises protection. We must be able to explain why it belongs in Christ's worship.

2. Acceptable worship joins reverence to truth.

John 4:24 (KJV): "God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth." Hebrews 12:28 (KJV): "Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear."

Correct outward arrangements do not excuse a careless heart, and strong feelings do not excuse falsehood. We approach the holy God through Christ, grateful for an unshakable kingdom. When surrounding institutions tremble, reverent worship reminds us that God's authority has not trembled with them. We need His truth to govern us more than we need a service to distract us from danger.

3. Christ's authority limits what leaders may require.

Colossians 1:18 (KJV): "And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence." Matthew 28:20 (KJV): "Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen."

Ministers teach Christ's commands as servants under His headship. They may offer wise counsel, but they must not attach His authority to their own preferences. As fear increases, believers may become vulnerable to controlling religious voices. Knowing the difference between a biblical command and pastoral advice helps us receive genuine shepherding without granting a man the place of Christ.

4. Practical circumstances serve worship without becoming new acts of worship.

   1 Corinthians 14:26 (NKJV): "Let all things be done for edification." 1 Corinthians 14:40 (NKJV): "Let all things be done decently and in order."

Paul's directions require the gathered church to build up its members and proceed in an orderly way. Such principles guide choices about place, time, and practical arrangements; they do not authorize us to invent elements of worship. Persecution may force a congregation to change its meeting place or schedule. Faithfulness requires preserving what God commands while adapting circumstances wisely, rather than confusing familiar arrangements with divine law.

5. Scripture makes Christ known for salvation.

   2 Timothy 3:15 (KJV): "And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus." John 20:31 (KJV): "But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name."

The Bible's saving purpose is to bring us to faith in Jesus Christ. Its sufficiency does not mean that possessing a Bible saves us or that knowing prophetic details gives us life. When false messiahs and false hopes multiply, the written testimony directs us to the true Son of God. Our readiness rests in belonging to Him, not in possessing information unavailable to other Christians.

6. God supplies what His people need for faithful obedience.

   2 Timothy 3:16–17 (KJV): "All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works." 2 Peter 1:3 (KJV): "According as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue."

Paul establishes Scripture's equipping ministry; Peter celebrates God's provision through knowing Christ. Together they give endangered believers reason to seek instruction rather than despair of being prepared. God has not supplied every detail of the future, but He has supplied the truth by which we must face it. New pressures do not require a new moral authority.

7. We need the Spirit to understand and receive the Word.

> Psalm 119:18 (KJV): "Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law." 1 Corinthians 2:12 (KJV): "Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God."

The psalmist seeks opened eyes, and Paul explains our dependence upon God's Spirit to know His gifts. This dependence makes us prayerful students, not seekers after a replacement for Scripture. In confusing times, ask the Spirit to make God's truth clear and effective in your life. An intense impression must still be tested; feeling certain does not make us inspired writers of Scripture.

8. No new message may revise the apostolic gospel.

> Galatians 1:8 (KJV): "But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed." Jude 3 (KJV): "Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints."

The church receives and defends a given faith. It does not await a superior gospel for a more dangerous age. Claims of heavenly origin cannot excuse contradiction of the apostolic message. If a teacher announces that extraordinary times require a new saving doctrine or allegiance, these passages give believers reason to refuse it, however extraordinary his claimed credentials.

9. Test teachers by the Word they are meant to explain.

> Acts 17:11 (KJV): "These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so." Isaiah 8:20 (KJV): "To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them."

Eager hearing belongs beside careful examination. Isaiah directs people to God's testimony rather than forbidden sources of guidance; the Bereans examine the message they receive. In an age crowded with confident predictions, we must ask what the text actually establishes. This protects us from credulity without teaching us to despise the faithful teachers Christ gives.

10. Impressive signs do not overrule God's revealed truth.

> Matthew 24:24 (KJV): "For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall shew great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect." Deuteronomy 13:3 (KJV): "Thou shalt not hearken unto the words of that prophet, or that dreamer of dreams: for the Lord your God proveth you, to know whether ye love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul."

In Deuteronomy, even a sign that occurs cannot authorize following other gods. Jesus likewise warns that impressive signs can serve end-times deception. Neither amazement nor an apparently successful prediction gives a teacher permission to redirect our allegiance. Examine what is being taught and whom we are being called to worship before treating an extraordinary effect as divine approval.

11. The church must keep preaching the Word when people resist it.

> 2 Timothy 4:2 (KJV): "Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all long suffering and doctrine." Acts 20:27 (KJV): "For I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God."

Paul charges Timothy to preach and tells the Ephesian elders that he has not withheld God's counsel. A congregation facing hostility needs that same honesty. Omitting difficult truth to preserve

approval leaves believers less prepared to recognize compromise when it is demanded. Patience should govern the manner of teaching; fear of losing an audience must not determine its content.

12. Hearing must lead to obedience, not merely familiarity.

> James 1:22 (KJV): "But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves." Hebrews 2:1 (KJV): "Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip."

We can become familiar with warnings while neglecting their claim upon us. James exposes self-deception, and Hebrews calls for earnest attention to the message already received. As the Day approaches, neglected truth becomes a serious liability: we may recognize the right words while continuing the compromise they condemn. Receive the next clear correction as an opportunity to obey, not merely another lesson to remember.

13. Biblical comfort prepares us for suffering without promising immunity.

> John 16:33 (KJV): "These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world." Romans 8:35 (KJV): "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?"

Christ promises peace in Himself, and Paul denies that suffering can sever His people's bond with Him. Neither passage promises that danger will never reach us. Receiving these truths before persecution comes protects us from mistaking suffering for the failure of God's Word. We may earnestly seek deliverance while trusting the love that remains sure if relief is delayed.

14. The approaching Day increases our need for the Word among God's people.

> Hebrews 10:25 (KJV): "Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one

another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching." Colossians 3:16 (KJV): "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord."

God appoints a shared life in which His truth is heard, taught, sung, and brought to bear upon need. Increasing danger gives us more reason to value those means. Where circumstances genuinely limit gathering, seek the instruction and fellowship available rather than surrendering to isolation. A fearful believer needs more than a stream of alarming reports; he needs Christ's Word dwelling richly among Christ's people.

15. God's enduring Word sustains our expectation of Christ Himself.

1 Peter 1:25 (KJV): "But the word of the Lord endureth for ever. And this is the word which by the gospel is preached unto you." Revelation 22:20 (KJV): "He which testifieth these things saith, Surely I come quickly. Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus."

Human strength passes away; the gospel's promise does not. The church waits for the Lord Jesus on the authority of His own testimony. When predictions fail and familiar securities disappear, we need not invent another basis for hope. We continue hearing His Word, offering the worship He appoints, and looking for the Savior who will fulfill what He has spoken.

Transition to Chapter 11

The Word that prepares us to stand before Christ also teaches us to care for those who must stand beside us. We receive its instruction as members of His body, with gifts to use and burdens to share. A watchful believer cannot be content to grow stronger while leaving others unattended. We turn next to the duty of strengthening the church through which Christ strengthens us.

Notes

1. C. H. Spurgeon, The Greatest Fight in the World (April 1891), "Our Armoury." The opening pronoun refers to the Scriptures. https://www.romans45.org/spurgeon/misc/gfw.htm
2. 2 Timothy 4:1–5, KJV. The charge is given before Christ the coming Judge and includes both patient teaching and endurance.
3. Sam Waldron, How Then Should We Worship? The Regulative Principle and Required Parts of the Church's Corporate Worship (Evangelical Press / EP Books, 2021), chapter 1, "What is the Point?," p. 13. ISBN 9781783973118. The excerpt concerns worship ordered by Scripture rather than autonomous church tradition. https://uk.10ofthose.com/assets/product_downloads/7351/9781783973118_sample.pdf
4. Matthew 15:7–9, KJV, read within Jesus' criticism of tradition that displaces God's command.
5. D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, "Worship: Ancient and Modern," sermon 3318, Romans 12:6–8, preached March 25, 1966. The April 9, 2026 date on the transcript platform is a rebroadcast date. https://www.mljtrust.org/sermon/worship-ancient-and-modern/ https://www.oneplace.com/ministries/living-grace/listen/worship-ancient-and-modern-1277218.html
6. 2 Timothy 3:13–17, KJV, in the setting of the last-days warning in 3:1 and the persecution described in 3:10–12. The chapter applies this teaching without identifying a particular modern event as its fulfillment.
7. B. B. Warfield, "The Biblical Idea of Inspiration," in Revelation and Inspiration, paragraph discussing Acts 1:16; PDF p. 89. The statement establishes divine authority and fulfillment; it is not treated as a complete independent argument for sufficiency. https://www.monergism.com/thethreshold/sdg/warfield/Vol%201_Revelation%20and%20Inspiration_Warfield.pdf
8. John MacArthur, Our Sufficiency in Christ (Crossway, 1998), Preface. Ebook ISBN 9781433516740. The excerpt names provisions whose adequacy Christians are tempted to doubt. The electronic preview has no verified print-page locator. https://www.everand.com/book/361889576/Our-Sufficiency-in-Christ https://www.crossway.org/books/our-sufficiency-in-christ-ebook/
9. Psalm 119:18, KJV. The prayer asks for understanding of God's given law.
10. Matthew 24:24, KJV. Jesus warns of deceptive false christs and false prophets and their signs.
11. Waldron, How Then Should We Worship?, chapter 1, p. 15. The statement concerns the substantive elements of worship, not the denial of ordinary circumstances needed to carry them out. https://uk.10ofthose.com/assets/product_downloads/7351/9781783973118_sample.pdf
12. John Calvin, Institutes of the Christian Religion, IV.10.25, translated by Henry Beveridge. The warning concerns invented worship, not a requirement that every practical circumstance be specified individually in Scripture. https://www.ccel.org/ccel/calvin/institutes.vi.xi.html
13. 1 Corinthians 14:26, 40. The chapter draws the principles of edification and order from Paul's directions for the gathered church. Its use does not identify every first-century manifestation described in the chapter as an enduring element of worship.
14. Waldron, How Then Should We Worship?, chapter 1, p. 17. The statement concerns God's ownership and government of His church. Its application to intensified end-times pressure is the present chapter's pastoral application. https://uk.10ofthose.com/assets/product_downloads/7351/9781783973118_sample.pdf

15. A. W. Pink, Spiritual Growth, chapter 9, "Its Means," paragraph beginning "Thus Christ is revealed." https://www.monergism.com/thethreshold/sdg/spiritualgrowth.html
16. James 1:21–25, KJV. Verses 22–24 are quoted in the narrative. The mirror exposes the difference between hearing and doing.
17. John Wycliffe, Trialogus, IV.6, in Tracts and Treatises of John de Wycliffe, translated and edited by Robert Vaughan (London: Wycliffe Society, 1845), p. 147 (PDF p. 259). The words occur in the speech of Alithia in the dialogue. https://oll-resources.s3.us-east-2.amazonaws.com/oll3/store/titles/1838/0882_Bk.pdf
18. John Hus, Letter XXI, "To the People of Prague," December 1412, in The Letters of John Hus, translated by R. Martin Pope and edited by Herbert B. Workman (1904). The quoted words are the opening clause of an exhortation to hear God's Word and put it into practice. https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/The_letters_of_John_Hus/Letter_21,_To_the_People_of_Prague
19. William Tyndale, "Prologue to the Book of Genesis" (1530), in Doctrinal Treatises and Introductions to Different Portions of the Holy Scriptures, edited by Henry Walter (Cambridge: University Press, 1848), p. 399 (PDF p. 473). Wording and spelling follow this edition. https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/8/8d/Doctrinal_treatises_and_introductions_to_different_portions_of_the_Holy_Scriptures._%28IA_03565678.emory.edu%29.pdf
20. Historical distinctions: Hus was condemned for heresy at the Council of Constance and burned alive on July 6, 1415. Tyndale was executed for heresy in 1536 by strangulation before his body was burned. Wycliffe died following a stroke in 1384; his remains were exhumed and burned in 1428. Their cases are not presented as identical charges or as executions solely for translating the Bible. https://reformation500.csl.edu/jan-hus/ https://www.hertford.ox.ac.uk/associate/william-tyndale-1494-1536/ https://exhibitions.lib.cam.ac.uk/reformation/artifacts/a-fragment-of-john-wycliffes-gown/
21. Martin Luther, Smalcald Articles, Part II, Article II, paragraph 15. The quotation concerns the authority to establish articles of faith. It is not offered as evidence that Luther held every aspect of Calvin's position on worship. https://thebookofconcord.org/smalcald-articles-single-page/
22. Hebrews 10:23–25, KJV. The command to gather and encourage is explicitly strengthened by the approaching Day.
23. Ephesians 4:11–16, KJV. Verses 14–15 are quoted; the context joins Christ's gifts, maturity, doctrinal stability, and growth in love.
24. Acts 17:11, KJV. Eagerness to receive the message and examination of Scripture are commended together.
25. MacArthur, Our Sufficiency in Christ, Preface. This excerpt occurs separately from the earlier quotation; the two are not consecutive sentences. https://www.everand.com/book/361889576/Our-Sufficiency-in-Christ

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CHAPTER 11

Strengthen the Church That Strengthens You

Helping One Another Stand as Christ's Day Approaches

On Christian Love and Fellowship

"If we be not acted and influenced by this love in all we do, there is no communion."

John Owen, Gospel Charity[1]

A Christian can prepare himself for persecution and still overlook the frightened believer sitting beside him. He studies the warnings, settles his convictions, and asks God for courage. All of that matters. But the Lord who commands him to stand also commands him to consider his brethren. Someone nearby may be facing the very pressure he has been studying. She needs more than his understanding of the times. She needs his help.

Christ has placed us among people whose perseverance should matter to us. As persecution intensifies, watchfulness requires more than protecting our own spiritual life. We must strengthen the fearful, restore the wandering, bear costly burdens, and remain faithful to one another.

A. W. Pink expressed the privilege of such belonging: "Hence, next to being saved, the writer deems it his greatest privilege of all to belong to one of His 'churches.'"[2] We should learn to prize what persecution

may tempt us to hide. These people are a gift from Christ before their needs become a cost to us.

This duty changes how we enter the life of the church. We come to receive the Word, but also to notice who is struggling to obey it. We come needing encouragement, but also ready to give it. We look for Christ's appearing with people whose names, sorrows, temptations, and responsibilities become dear to us. A congregation grows stronger when its members begin asking what faithfulness will cost the person beside them and how they can help him bear that cost.

Charles Hodge explained why Christian duties require a shared, recognizable life: "God has imposed duties upon his people which render it necessary for them thus to associate in a visible organized body."[3] Commands to watch over, serve, and encourage one another require people who know where they belong and for whom they are responsible.

The coming trial must not find us strangers to one another. Nor should we wait for a crisis to discover that fellowship requires more than being in the same room. The Lord is giving us opportunities now to learn the patience, generosity, courage, and tenderness that His people will need when obedience becomes harder.

1. Draw Near to Christ Together

Before Hebrews commands believers to consider one another, it shows them why they may approach God at all.

> Hebrews 10:19–22 (KJV): "Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, By a new and living way, which he hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, his flesh; And having an high priest over the house of God; Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water."[4]

Our fellowship begins with a Savior who has opened the way. The strong believer and the trembling believer enter by the same blood. Neither approaches on the strength of his courage, his usefulness, or his record of endurance. Christ is the ground of their acceptance, and Christ remains their High Priest when the pressure upon them increases. We must remember this when fear makes us ashamed to admit weakness. Our brethren do not need us to pretend that we are sufficient. They need us to draw near with them to the One who is.

The passage then binds our hope to our responsibility for each other.

> Hebrews 10:23–25 (KJV): "Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering; (for he is faithful that promised;) And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works: Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching."[4]

Consider one another. Give thought to actual people. Who has grown quiet? Who has begun apologizing for convictions he once confessed gladly? Who is carrying responsibility that others have stopped noticing? Such attention takes us beyond exchanging pleasant words. We begin learning what would strengthen this person to love Christ and obey Him today.

Sam Waldron warns about leaving new believers without this fellowship: "It is neither safe nor principled for new Christians to be allowed to be without a church home."[5] A new believer should not have to discover alone how to endure ridicule, answer temptation, or receive correction. The church must make room for him in its actual care.

The approaching Day supplies urgency. As the world becomes more hostile to Christ, believers need the company of those who confess His name. A man who has spent the week being told that his faith is foolish needs to hear the congregation sing what God has promised. A woman whose family resents her obedience needs to sit among people who rejoice that she belongs to Jesus. The church's shared worship brings truths into their hearing that the world has spent the week trying to drown out.

Peter describes believers as living stones being built into a spiritual house (1 Peter 2:4–5). Christ places us in a life larger than our private concerns. He gives us people to love and people through whom His love reaches us. We impoverish ourselves when we insist on receiving only the help that leaves our independence undisturbed.

Spurgeon put the obligation plainly: "If you belong to Christ, you should belong to Christ's church."[6] His appeal urged believers to join the particular assembly through which they had been fed. Receive your place among Christ's people with the willingness to remain, contribute, and be known.

James Bannerman warned, "But for parties to separate wantonly, and on insufficient grounds, from the communion of the visible

Church, is a grave and serious offence against the authority of Christ in His house."[7] Our fellowship deserves more than the loyalty we give an arrangement that suits us. Christ's authority should govern our commitment when remaining becomes difficult.

Under persecution, association with Christians may itself become costly. Fear will offer reasons to become less visible, less involved, less available. The answer begins with remembering whom Christ has joined together. These are His people, purchased by His blood. Their troubles deserve our attention because they belong to Him. Draw near with them now, and let the fellowship you cultivate in ordinary days prepare you to remain beside them in dangerous ones.

2. Speak before a Brother Grows Hard

Sin seldom introduces itself by announcing what it intends to take away. It offers relief, privacy, an easier arrangement, a temporary exception. Under pressure, compromise can sound like sensible self-preservation. A believer may begin defending what he once resisted because resisting has become expensive. His friends hear the change, but hesitate to disturb the conversation. Meanwhile, the excuses become easier to repeat.

Hebrews speaks directly into that danger.

> Hebrews 3:12–13 (KJV): "Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God. But exhort one another daily, while it is called To day; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin."[8]

The command to exhort one another belongs beside the warning about a departing heart. God appoints truthful, timely encouragement as a means of resisting sin's deceit. The brother who speaks may help us recognize a surrender we have learned to call a necessity. The sister who asks a careful question may interrupt an excuse before it becomes our settled position.

Commenting on this passage, John Calvin wrote, "He also pointed out the remedy, so that they might not fall into this wickedness, and that was, to exhort one another."[9] The wickedness in view is unbelief and its hardening effect. God sends us toward one another with words that oppose it. A loving warning belongs among His provisions for perseverance.

This requires love brave enough to risk an uncomfortable moment. We may dislike appearing intrusive. We may fear being misunderstood.

Yet silence also makes a choice. When a friend is defending a course that Scripture condemns, our concern should reach beyond keeping the exchange agreeable. We must care about where his reasoning is taking him.

Suppose a believer begins withdrawing after being mocked at work for his faith. At first, he says he is tired. Later, he dismisses Christian fellowship as another demand upon him. A friend can respond with irritation, or he can make time to listen. What happened? What is he afraid of losing? Which truth has become difficult to trust? Understanding the pressure allows the friend to bring Scripture to the actual wound rather than deliver a rebuke to an imagined one. He can acknowledge the humiliation while refusing to endorse the retreat from Christ.

Such care includes comfort. A troubled conscience may need assurance of forgiveness; an exhausted Christian may need someone to help him carry a responsibility. Paul places encouragement within his instruction about the coming Day.

> 1 Thessalonians 5:11 (NKJV): "comfort each other and edify one another"[10]

Richard Sibbes described "holy communion, whereby one Christian heateth another".[11] Fellowship can warm a heart chilled by repeated hostility. A brother's settled confidence in Christ, patiently expressed, may help us recover the courage that a week of contempt has worn down.

We strengthen watchfulness by bringing God's truth to bear upon the need before us. Sometimes that means warning. Sometimes it means reminding a weary believer that the Lord has not abandoned him. Often it requires both: do not surrender this obedience, and do not imagine that you must bear its cost alone.

Describing the Holy Spirit's sanctifying work, Martin Luther wrote, "And for that purpose He has appointed a congregation upon earth by which He speaks and does everything."[12] The Spirit uses the church's ministry to bring God's truth to His people. We should be slow to dismiss the help He sends through a faithful brother.

We must also become willing to receive the care we commend. If every question meets a defense, friends eventually learn to leave us undisturbed. That may feel like freedom while quietly removing a protection God has supplied. Thank the person who loves you enough to speak. Open the Scriptures together. As deception and persecution

increase, we need relationships in which truth can reach us before self-justification closes the door.

3. Restore the Fallen and Put Away Bitterness

A church preparing for hard days must know what to do when one of its members stumbles. Shock is easy. Gossip is easy. Restoring a person requires patience, humility, and a clear view of Christ's mercy. The fallen believer needs people who will take his sin seriously enough to help him turn from it and his soul seriously enough to refuse to leave him there.

> Galatians 6:1–2 (KJV): "Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted. Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ."[13]

The spiritual person approaches with an awareness of his own vulnerability. He does not stand over the fallen as though grace had never been necessary for him. He remembers temptations resisted only because God sustained him, mercies received when he deserved rebuke, and sins forgiven through the same Savior to whom he now directs his brother. That remembrance gives firmness a tender voice.

Persecution may expose weaknesses we have not yet faced. Someone may speak rashly, conceal his allegiance out of fear, or turn his anger upon those nearest him. We must help him confess what he has done, seek forgiveness, and return to obedience. A church that can only express disappointment leaves the repentant believer wondering where he can go. Christ's people should know how to take his hand and help him begin again.

Jeremiah Burroughs described the value of committed fellowship: "the more one Christian opens his heart to another, and binds himself to walk in the ways of Christ with another, the more comfortable it is, and helps to edification".[14] Such commitment gives a stumbling believer reason to seek help rather than conceal his fall. We have undertaken to walk together; his recovery matters to us.

Restoration also requires us to deal with the resentments that make fellowship cold. We may speak earnestly about standing together while keeping a private account of every slight. When the person who offended us needs help, we discover that our willingness to serve has conditions. We would gladly strengthen the church if it did not include him.

> Ephesians 4:31–32 (KJV): "Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice: And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you."[15]

Describing Christian love, J. C. Ryle wrote, "It will make him patient under provocation, forgiving when injured, meek when unjustly attacked, quiet when slandered."[16] Such restraint requires strength from God. It keeps another person's wrong from governing our own response.

God places the mercy we have received beside the mercy we must extend. Remember what your forgiveness cost Christ. Remember how much He has forgiven. Then ask whether the grievance you keep rehearsing deserves the authority it now exercises over your speech, your prayers, and your willingness to love.

Reconciliation often begins with plain words spoken without a speech in our own defense. I was wrong to say that. I have allowed resentment to govern how I treat you. Please forgive me. Where another has sinned, we pursue truth and repentance rather than spreading the offense through the congregation. Forgiveness never requires us to conceal abuse or prevent the protection of those endangered by it. It does require us to surrender personal vengeance and obey Christ in the way we seek what is right.

The pressures of the end times will supply enough suffering without our adding the injuries of an unforgiving spirit. Repair what you can while there is opportunity. The believer you avoid today may be the one beside whom you must endure tomorrow. Receive Christ's mercy deeply enough that it changes how you handle another person's weakness.

4. Share the Cost of Another Believer's Faithfulness

Persecution reaches beyond the moment of confrontation. When a Christian loses his livelihood, the consequences come home with him. There is still food to buy, rent to pay, and a family trying to understand what will happen next. A congregation may admire his courage while leaving him alone with the bill. Scripture calls us closer than admiration.

Earl Blackburn states the mutual obligation of membership: "When you join a church, you not only commit yourself to the church, but the church commits itself to you."[17] That promise of shared care

becomes especially precious when a believer's obedience brings loss. His need should summon the congregation's attention rather than leave him wondering whether anyone will stand beside him.

> Hebrews 13:1–3 (KJV): "Let brotherly love continue. Be not forgetful to entertain strangers: for thereby some have entertained angels unawares. Remember them that are in bonds, as bound with them; and them which suffer adversity, as being yourselves also in the body."[18]

Remember the prisoner as though bound with him. Let his condition enter your thoughts with enough force to affect your conduct. What would you need if the door had closed behind you? Who would care for those dependent upon you? What would it mean to learn that the brethren were still speaking your name in prayer and making sure your family was not abandoned?

The readers of Hebrews had already shown costly solidarity. Some suffered public disgrace; others became companions of those who were treated that way. The passage remembers both kinds of faithfulness.

> Hebrews 10:33–34 (KJV): "Partly, whilst ye were made a gazingstock both by reproaches and afflictions; and partly, whilst ye became companions of them that were so used. For ye had compassion of me in my bonds, and took joyfully the spoiling of your goods, knowing in yourselves that ye have in heaven a better and an enduring substance."[19]

Their hope in an enduring inheritance loosened the grip of possessions upon them. They could lose what they held on earth because God had secured something better. This hope also gave them courage to remain associated with suffering believers. They refused to make another Christian's disgrace a reason to keep their distance.

The same question will confront us as hostility increases: Will helping this person cost me something I would rather keep? It may cost money, time, convenience, or the approval of people whose goodwill we value. Faithful love brings those costs into the presence of Christ and asks what obedience requires. Our resources have been entrusted to us by the Lord who identifies His people as brethren.

Practical care should take a form the sufferer can actually use. A family may need groceries rather than another general offer of help. An elderly member may need transport and company. A threatened believer may need trustworthy counsel and someone willing to sit

with him while he considers his responsibilities. Love listens closely enough to discover the difference.

Receiving help belongs to this shared life as surely as giving it. Shame may urge a struggling Christian to conceal his need until the burden becomes unbearable. Let your brethren know enough to serve you. Christ has not required you to preserve the appearance of self-sufficiency at the expense of the fellowship He provides.

George Müller treated receiving believers into fellowship as a congregational responsibility: "As to the reception of brethren into fellowship, this is an act of simple obedience to the Lord, both on the part of the Elders and the whole Church."[20] The whole church receives a brother. His subsequent troubles must not become the concern of the elders alone.

The church cannot promise to remove every loss. It can refuse to treat another believer's suffering as none of its concern. When the world makes faithfulness costly, Christ's people should make their love unmistakable. Watchfulness asks what danger threatens our brethren and what mercy the Lord has placed within our reach.

5. Use What Christ Has Given You until He Comes

Talk about the end can become an excuse for leaving ordinary service to someone else. We may follow reports of gathering trouble closely while overlooking work through which the church would be strengthened today. Peter gives approaching judgment a very different effect upon our lives.

> 1 Peter 4:7–10 (KJV): "But the end of all things is at hand: be ye therefore sober, and watch unto prayer. And above all things have fervent charity among yourselves: for charity shall cover the multitude of sins. Use hospitality one to another without grudging. As every man hath received the gift, even so minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God."[21]

Jeffrey D. Johnson writes, "God calls His people to be active and faithful members of a local church."[22] A name on the membership roll does not perform the work Christ entrusts to His people. As the end approaches, we must contribute dependable service rather than leave every burden to someone else.

The end is at hand; therefore pray, love, welcome, and serve. Expectation should make us more attentive to the people God has

entrusted to us. Peter directs our eyes from the approaching end to the brother who needs our help. We cannot claim to have understood his urgency while neglecting the duties he names.

A gift is received before it is exercised. Its usefulness is entrusted to us for others. This frees the church from making public prominence the measure of service. The member who listens carefully, teaches patiently, gives generously, welcomes warmly, or quietly completes necessary work may strengthen people whose struggles he scarcely knows. Christ sees what the congregation may overlook.

As persecution disrupts familiar arrangements, this willingness becomes especially important. A congregation may lose access to a meeting place. A family may need somewhere to stay. An experienced teacher may be unavailable, leaving another believer to explain a passage to a small group. The Lord has not distributed His gifts so that all usefulness must stop when familiar arrangements fail. We should learn now to recognize and encourage the service He supplies through different members of His body.

Peter also names the spirit in which we serve: hospitality without grudging. An open door can be accompanied by a closed heart. We may offer help while making the recipient feel the weight of our inconvenience. Love asks God to deal with that resentment. The brother welcomed into our home should not have to repay the welcome by pretending he has no needs.

Our strength, however, is received as surely as our gifts.

> 1 Peter 4:11 (KJV): "If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God; if any man minister, let him do it as of the ability which God giveth: that God in all things may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom be praise and dominion for ever and ever. Amen."[21]

God supplies the strength, and God receives the glory. Dependence upon Him keeps service from becoming a performance of our importance. It also encourages the weary. We are called to use what He gives, not to imagine that the whole church rests upon our shoulders. Christ remains its Head.

John Owen identified a central purpose of organized church life: "The joint celebration of all gospel ordinances and worship is the great and principal end of the evangelical church-state."[23] We gather to offer Christ the worship He appoints. When public allegiance

becomes costly, continuing to worship together confesses that His claim upon us has not weakened.

At the Lord's Table, our shared life is directed again to His death and His coming.

> 1 Corinthians 11:26 (NKJV): "you proclaim the Lord's death till He comes"[24]

The church waits for the Savior who gave Himself for us. His sacrifice supplies the pattern of love, and His return gives our labor its horizon. Keep serving the people for whom He died. Let Him find your gifts in use, your affection alive, and your hands occupied with the good He has placed before you.

6. The Prayer Meeting

> Isaiah 56:7 (KJV): "Even them will I bring to my holy mountain, and make them joyful in my house of prayer: their burnt offerings and their sacrifices shall be accepted upon mine altar; for mine house shall be called an house of prayer for all people."[25]

God speaks here of welcoming foreigners who join themselves to Him. Those who might fear exclusion receive His promise of acceptance and joy. Jesus appealed to this passage when He cleansed the temple (Mark 11:17). Through His finished sacrifice, we now approach God without bringing another offering for sin. Our access rests in Christ, wherever His people gather. The church should treasure what God welcomes us to enjoy: drawing near to Him together.

George Müller urged, "As children of God we should also seek to meet with other children of God in prayer, such as prayer meetings."[26] The Father who receives us individually also calls us into fellowship with His other children. We should welcome the opportunity to seek His help together.

A frightened Christian may arrive at a prayer meeting carrying a burden he can scarcely describe. Then another believer begins asking God to sustain him. Someone else pleads for his family. The danger remains, but he hears his trouble carried into the presence of God by people who intend to stand beside him. He has come among brethren who will help him look toward Christ when fear keeps turning his eyes toward the threat.

The early church knew this need. In Acts 4:23–31, Peter and John returned to their own company after being threatened by the

authorities. The believers answered together in prayer. They began with the God who made heaven and earth, brought the rulers' hostility under the light of Scripture, and asked for boldness to keep speaking His Word. Threats intended to silence two apostles drew the congregation into united pleading. God answered by filling them with His Spirit, and they spoke with boldness.[27] Their persecutors had power to threaten; they did not have power to dethrone the Lord to whom the church appealed.

A. W. Pink observed, "That united prayer was practiced by the early Christians is clear from many passages in the Acts (see 1:14; 2:42; 6:4; 12:5; 16:13)."[28] The threatened congregation belongs within that larger pattern. When opposition came, believers sought God together.

Here we learn to reason with God from His own Word. We bring Him His promises, confess our need, and ask Him to accomplish what He has taught us to desire. Lord, You have commanded us to bear witness; give our fearful brother courage to confess Christ. You have taught us to love one another; show us how to care for his children. Such pleading takes God at His word while submitting to His wisdom. Faith needs neither bargains nor pressure when the Father has invited His children to come.

E. M. Bounds distinguished these occasions of prayer: "The prayer-closet is for individual prayer. The house of God is for mutual prayer, concerted prayer, united prayer."[29] In the prayer meeting, a brother hears others pleading for the courage he has scarcely been able to ask for himself.

Hebrews 4:14–16 directs us to the throne of grace through our great High Priest, who understands our weakness. That changes what we do with one another's distress. In our supplications, we acknowledge helplessness together. In our petitions, we name particular needs. In our intercessions, we take another person's grief seriously enough to make it our concern before God. We plead for endurance, deliverance, daily bread, wisdom, and faithful testimony. As we pray, love acquires names and circumstances. We begin to see whose cupboard needs filling, who needs a visit, and which weary believer needs someone beside him tomorrow.

Spurgeon treasured this gathering: "The prayer-meeting is an institution which ought to be very precious to us, and to be cherished very much by us as a Church, for to it we owe everything."[30] As persecution

intensifies, we must cherish the fellowship in which we seek from God what none of us can supply for himself.

When Peter was imprisoned, the church continued praying for him (Acts 12:5). Paul likewise told the Corinthians that their prayers helped him, and that God's answer would draw many into thanksgiving (2 Corinthians 1:11). Shared prayer joins the church in the burden and afterward in gratitude. Even while relief is delayed, the sufferer knows he has not been forgotten.

Spurgeon warned, "Believe me, if a church does not pray, it is dead." He urged, "Instead of putting united prayer last, put it first."[31] A congregation can become so occupied arranging its activities that it neglects to ask God for the life and strength those activities cannot supply. Under persecution, that neglect becomes perilous. We need more than one another's resolve. We need the mercy and power of God.

Hebrews 10:24–25 presses mutual encouragement upon us increasingly as the Day approaches. Make room for the church's united prayers. As end-times hostility grows, we cannot afford to neglect this gathering of needy people before their sufficient Savior. Come ready to bear a brother's burden. Come willing to have your own borne. The Lord who calls us to stand together has opened His throne to us together.

Questions for Further Study

1. In Hebrews 10:19–25, how do Christ's blood and priesthood establish our approach to God before the passage commands mutual encouragement? Why does the approaching Day increase our responsibility for one another?
2. According to Hebrews 3:12–13, how does sin deceive and harden? What makes timely exhortation an act of love, and how does the coming-Day setting of 1 Thessalonians 5 strengthen that duty?
3. What does Galatians 6:1–2 require of the person restoring a fallen believer? How should the forgiveness described in Ephesians 4:31–32 change the way a church handles grievances under pressure?
4. What does it mean to remember prisoners as though bound with them? How did the believers' hope of an enduring possession in Hebrews 10:32–34 enable costly identification with those who suffered?

5. Why does Peter connect the nearness of the end with love, hospitality, and the use of gifts in 1 Peter 4:7–11? How does proclaiming Christ's death until He comes give continuing service its direction?
6. In Acts 4:23–31, what truths governed the church's prayer after persecution? How do shared petitions, intercession, and Scripture-grounded pleading strengthen a congregation without becoming attempts to bargain with God?

Practical Applications

1. Strengthen one person you have begun to overlook.

Name a believer whose withdrawal, discouragement, or growing compromise deserves your attention. Make contact this week, listen before drawing conclusions, and bring a fitting passage of Scripture into the conversation. Offer one form of help you can actually give. Also tell a trusted believer where you need encouragement, so that your own struggles are not hidden behind your usefulness to others. Hebrews 3:12–13; 1 Thessalonians 5:11.

2. Remove one obstacle to costly love.

Identify either a grievance you have been nursing or a burden you have left someone else to carry. Take the next obedient step: confess your wrong, seek a needed conversation, provide practical assistance, or give from resources you have been protecting for yourself. Name what that step will cost and bring your reluctance honestly to Christ. Galatians 6:1–2; Ephesians 4:31–32; Hebrews 13:1–3.

3. Take your place in the church's united prayers.

Prepare for the next opportunity to pray with your congregation. Bring specific needs, a Scripture that gives direction to your pleading, and a willingness to become part of the practical care you ask God to provide. Afterward, follow through with someone whose burden you have shared. Pray for the courage of threatened believers and for your own readiness to stand beside them. Acts 4:23–31; 2 Corinthians 1:11; Hebrews 10:24–25.

Chapter Axioms

1. Christ's blood opens the same way to God for the strong and the trembling; our fellowship begins in His sufficient priesthood. Hebrews 10:19–22.
2. The approaching Day makes thoughtful encouragement and faithful gathering more urgent, not less necessary. Hebrews 10:23–25.
3. Timely encouragement helps expose sin's deceit before a brother's excuses harden into settled resistance. Hebrews 3:12–13.
4. Those sustained by mercy must restore the fallen gently and put away the bitterness that wounds fellowship. Galatians 6:1–2; Ephesians 4:31–32.
5. Hope in an enduring inheritance frees believers to share the earthly cost of one another's faithfulness. Hebrews 10:32–34; 13:1–3.
6. Christ gives His people gifts to serve one another and strength to use them for His glory until He comes. 1 Peter 4:7–11; 1 Corinthians 11:26.
7. United prayer carries the church's burdens before its sufficient Savior and strengthens believers to face opposition together. Acts 4:23–31; Hebrews 4:14–16.
8. Receiving faithful help belongs to life in Christ's body as surely as giving it; no member can rightly dismiss his need of the others. 1 Corinthians 12:21–26; Galatians 6:2.

Christ Holds the People He Calls Us to Love

The church's hope rests in the Savior who gave Himself for it. Our love is often weak, our courage uneven, and our understanding of another person's suffering incomplete. Christ knows His people fully and remains faithful to them. We serve from His mercy, seek His strength, and return to Him when our failures humble us.

Look again at the brethren He has placed beside you. Some will need your warning; others will need your patience, your table, your resources, or your prayers. You will need theirs. Christ has given us a shared life in which His truth is spoken, His mercy is remembered, and His care reaches people through willing hands. Let His love make you available. As His Day approaches, help His people keep looking for Him.

The Doctrines of the Local Church and Christian Fellowship

Christ has not told us to await His return as strangers who happen to believe the same things. He gathers a people whose shared life helps them remain faithful. These doctrines show why the church belongs within our preparation for His coming, and why another believer's perseverance must become our concern.

1. Christ owns the church and governs its life.

> Colossians 1:18 (NKJV): "He is the head of the body, the church." Acts 20:28 (KJV): "feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood."[32]

The church belongs to its crucified and risen Savior, not to its strongest personality or most generous supporter. When hostility makes obedience costly, neither fear nor popularity may revise His commands. The frightened believer beside us belongs to Christ at the price of His blood. We cannot honor the Head while treating the care of His people as expendable.

2. Believers confess Christ and take their place among His people.

> Acts 2:41 (KJV): "Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls." Ephesians 2:19 (KJV): "fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God."[33]

Faith in Christ brings us into a family; baptism openly confesses our allegiance, and local church membership gives that belonging recognizable responsibilities. A name on a roll cannot create spiritual life. Yet genuine faith should not seek permanent anonymity. When pressure tempts us to disappear, known relationships make it possible for someone to notice, inquire, and help us stand.

3. Gathering becomes more necessary as the Day approaches.

> Hebrews 10:25 (KJV): "Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together"; "exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching." Acts 2:42 (KJV): "they

continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers."[34]

Gathered worship is not a dispensable addition to private faith. Here believers hear truth together, pray together, and become available to one another. Persecution may change where or how we meet; it does not make fellowship unnecessary. Cultivate faithful participation now, so that disruption does not find us without people who know our needs.

4. The church must preserve the truth it has received.

1 Timothy 3:15 (KJV): "the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth." Jude 3 (KJV): "earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints."[35]

The church supports and declares God's truth; it does not invent a more convenient gospel. Deception becomes especially dangerous when it promises Christians relief from costly obedience. A congregation grounded in apostolic teaching can recognize the bargain: safety is being offered in exchange for faithfulness. Loving fellowship therefore includes testing teaching together, correcting error, and refusing reassurance that Scripture does not give.

5. Christ gives shepherds who must answer for their care.

Hebrews 13:17 (KJV): "they watch for your souls, as they that must give account." 1 Peter 5:3–4 (KJV): "Neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being ensamples to the flock. And when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away."[36]

Spiritual oversight prepares souls to meet Christ, not merely to keep an institution running. Believers should receive faithful pastoral care, and pastors must lead under Scripture rather than demand unquestioning loyalty. In dangerous times, a shepherd must know who is wavering, teach what steadiness requires, and exemplify the courage he asks of others.

6. Every member needs the other members.

> 1 Corinthians 12:21 (KJV): "the eye cannot say unto the hand, I have no need of thee." Hebrews 3:13 (KJV): "exhort one another daily, while it is called To day; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin."[37]

Christ's body has no place for proud self-sufficiency. The believer who can explain prophecy may still need a quiet friend to recognize his growing bitterness or fear. God uses mutual exhortation to expose sin before its excuses harden. Letting others know us, and receiving their truthful concern, belongs to watchfulness as surely as warning them does.

7. Christian unity grows through truthful, forgiving love.

> Ephesians 4:3 (KJV): "Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." Ephesians 4:32 (KJV): "forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you."[38]

The Spirit joins believers to Christ; we must not make resentment the governing power in their relationships. Under pressure, old grievances can become reasons to withhold help precisely when brethren most need it. Forgiveness releases personal vengeance without concealing wrongdoing or excusing abuse. Seek reconciliation honestly now. A church already divided by cherished offenses enters coming trials weakened by wounds it has refused to address.

8. Church discipline seeks holiness and the recovery of sinners.

> Matthew 18:15, 17 (KJV): "if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother"; "if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church." Galatians 6:1 (KJV): "restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted."[39]

Christ commands a patient, truthful response to sin, including congregational action when a person persists in refusing correction. Neither gossip nor indifference fulfills that duty. When pressure draws someone toward compromise, loving intervention refuses to call his departure harmless. Restoration seeks repentance, not humiliation; watchfulness cares where a brother is going while there is still opportunity to help him turn.

9. The Word must dwell richly among the people.

> Colossians 3:16 (KJV): "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another." 2 Timothy 4:2 (KJV): "Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all long suffering and doctrine."[40]

Christ strengthens His church through Scripture preached, taught, sung, remembered, and applied. When frightening reports fill every conversation, believers need more than shared alarm. They need promises strong enough to trust and commands clear enough to obey. A congregation nourished by the Word can help its members distinguish a genuine warning from speculation and patient endurance from passive surrender.

10. Shared prayer acknowledges our dependence upon God.

> Acts 4:24 (KJV): "they lifted up their voice to God with one accord." Acts 4:29 (KJV): "grant unto thy servants, that with all boldness they may speak thy word." 1 Peter 4:7 (KJV): "the end of all things is at hand: be ye therefore sober, and watch unto prayer."[41]

The threatened church prayed for courage because determination alone could not supply it. Approaching judgment should make our prayers more sober, not our predictions more confident. In united prayer, another believer's danger becomes our petition, and his endurance becomes something we seek from God rather than merely expect from him.

11. The Lord's Table keeps Christ's death and return before us.

> 1 Corinthians 10:17 (KJV): "For we being many are one bread, and one body: for we are all partakers of that one bread." 1 Corinthians 11:26 (KJV): "For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till he come."[42]

At the Table, the church remembers the sacrifice that secured its life and awaits the Savior who will return. Our unity is purchased, not improvised. Fear must not make us forget whose people we are.

Coming together to remember His death confronts the selfishness that would receive Christ's mercy while refusing costly fellowship with those who share it.

12. Spiritual gifts are entrusted to us for one another.

> 1 Peter 4:10 (KJV): "As every man hath received the gift, even so minister the same one to another." Ephesians 4:12 (KJV): "For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ."[43]

Christ equips His people to strengthen His body, not to compete for notice. Peter places this service within his warning that the end is at hand. When familiar arrangements fail, the church still needs teaching, encouragement, practical help, and willing hands. Learn to use what God has entrusted to you before a crisis reveals how much work you expected others to carry.

13. Fellowship includes sharing homes and material resources.

> Romans 12:13 (KJV): "Distributing to the necessity of saints; given to hospitality." 1 John 3:17 (KJV): "whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him?"[44]

Shared life reaches the cupboard, the spare bed, and the money we intended to keep. When obedience costs a believer his livelihood, practical care can ease the pressure to surrender his convictions. We must make sure that his brethren are considering what he needs to remain faithful, rather than admiring his courage from a comfortable distance.

14. Suffering believers remain our concern, even when association costs us.

> Hebrews 13:3 (KJV): "Remember them that are in bonds, as bound with them." 1 Corinthians 12:26 (KJV): "whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it."[45]

Persecution tries to isolate its victims as well as intimidate those

watching. The fellowship of Christ's body forbids treating an endangered Christian as someone else's problem. Prayer, provision for dependents, and faithful companionship give substance to our solidarity. As hostility grows, we must resist the temptation to protect our reputation by becoming strangers to brethren whose confession has brought them shame.

15. The church waits for Christ by remaining holy and bearing witness.

> Philippians 2:15–16 (KJV): "That ye may be blameless and harmless"; "among whom ye shine as lights in the world; Holding forth the word of life." 1 Corinthians 1:7–8 (KJV): "waiting for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ: Who shall also confirm you unto the end."[46]

Our waiting is neither withdrawal from the world nor accommodation to it. Christ keeps His people, and their shared life should display the gospel they proclaim. Help one another resist compromise, speak of the Savior, and continue doing good when fear urges silence. The Lord who will receive His church is sustaining it now; our care for one another rests in His faithfulness.

Transition to Chapter 12

The love that strengthens the church must also govern the responsibilities waiting when we return home. The coming Lord has entrusted us with work to do, promises to keep, households to care for, and resources to use faithfully. Readiness follows us into those ordinary duties. We turn next to the faithfulness Christ requires in daily life.

Notes

1. John Owen, "Gospel Charity," Sermon XXI, preached June 5, 1673, printed p. 266. "Acted" here means moved or impelled. The passage distinguishes outward participation in church ordinances from communion animated by Christian love. https://ccel.org/ccel/owen/sermons/sermons.iv.xxiv.html
2. A. W. Pink, "The Churches of God," concluding paragraph, in The Arthur Pink Anthology, PDF p. 127. The context concerns a local body of regenerate, baptized believers. Inner quotation marks around "churches" are presented as single quotation marks within the enclosing quotation. https://www.monergism.com/thethreshold/sdg/pink/The%20Arthur%20Pink%20Anthology%20-%20A.%20W.%20Pink.pdf
3. Charles Hodge, Systematic Theology, volume III, chapter XX, "The Means of Grace," §10, "Infant Baptism," First Proposition, "The Visible Church is a Divine Institution," printed p. 547. The immediate discussion describes believers associated for public worship and mutual watch and care. This quotation supports organized Christian fellowship, not an endorsement of Hodge's baptismal position. https://ccel.org/ccel/hodge/theology3/theology3.iii.vi.x.html
4. Hebrews 10:19–25, KJV. The access, assurance, and mutual-exhortation sequence governs Section 1.
5. Sam Waldron, "Shall We Baptize Children? Part 2: Scriptural Foundations," July 10, 2025, Covenant Baptist Theological Seminary, §I, point 7. The sentence specifically concerns new Christians and their need for a church home; its scope is retained in the chapter. https://content.cbtseminary.org/shall-we-baptize-children-part-2-scriptural-foundations-sam-waldron/
6. C. H. Spurgeon, "The Best Donation," sermon 2234, Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit, volume 37, preached April 5, 1891, section II. The context explicitly urges joining a particular assembly through which the hearer has received spiritual nourishment. https://www.spurgeon.org/sermons/the-best-donation
7. James Bannerman, The Church of Christ, volume I (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1868), Part I, chapter IV, "The Church as Catholic and Local," printed p. 48, PDF p. 74. The argument condemns groundless separation while recognizing that departure can become a duty in cases of apostasy or sinful terms of communion. https://www.monergism.com/thethreshold/sdg/bannerman/The%20Church%20of%20Christ%20-%20James%20Bannerman.pdf ; original scan text: https://archive.org/download/churchofchristtr01bann/churchofchristtr01bann_djvu.txt
8. Hebrews 3:12–13, KJV.
9. John Calvin, Commentary on Hebrews, at Hebrews 3:13, first sentence. The quoted "wickedness" refers to unbelief and hardening in the preceding discussion. https://ccel.org/ccel/calvin/calcom44/calcom44.ix.ii.html
10. 1 Thessalonians 5:11, NKJV, read within the Day-of-the-Lord instruction in 5:1–11.
11. Richard Sibbes, The Bruised Reed and Smoking Flax, in The Complete Works of Richard Sibbes, volume I, printed p. 74, PDF p. 43. "Holy communion" here concerns Christian fellowship as a means by which Christ preserves and strengthens grace, not a separate argument for formal membership. https://digitalpuritan.net/Digital%20Puritan%20Resources/Sibbes%2C%20Richard/The%20Complete%20Works%20of%20Richard%20Sibbes%20%28vol.1%29%20Ind%20Works/%5BRS%5D%20The%20Bruised%20Reed%20and%20Smoking%20Flax.pdf#page=43
12. Martin Luther, Large Catechism, Part II, Third Article of the Creed, §61, translated by F. Bente and W. H. T. Dau (1921). "He" refers to the Holy Spirit; the passage describes His work of sanctification through the congregation and its ministry. It is not a claim

that every providential act of God occurs exclusively through church activity. https://www.ccel.org/l/luther/large_cat/large_catechism.html

13. Galatians 6:1–2, KJV.
14. Jeremiah Burroughs, Irenicum, to the Lovers of Truth and Peace (London: Robert Dawlman, 1653), printed p. 70, PDF p. 82. This contiguous excerpt concerns explicit or implicit congregational covenant and mutual commitment; historical long-s characters are normalized. The surrounding argument resists rigid exclusion over polity. https://digitalpuritan.net/Digital%20Puritan%20Resources/Burroughs%2C%20Jeremiah/Irenicum%20to%20the%20Lovers%20of%20Truth%20and%20Peace.pdf#page=82
15. Ephesians 4:31–32, KJV.
16. J. C. Ryle, Practical Religion, chapter VII, "Charity," section II, printed p. 171. The pronoun "It" refers to Christian love. https://www.gutenberg.org/files/38162/38162-h/38162-h.htm
17. Earl Blackburn, Why You Should Join a Church, Reformed Baptist Publications / ARBCA, undated, point 7, printed p. 7, PDF p. 9. The quotation describes the reciprocal commitment of the member and the congregation. https://gfbcconroe.com/media/2egbgr5k/why-you-should-join-a-church-binder-english-2013-01-29.pdf
18. Hebrews 13:1–3, KJV.
19. Hebrews 10:33–34, KJV, read with verse 32. This historical example supplies a pattern of costly solidarity; the chapter applies it to approaching persecution.
20. George Müller, A Narrative of Some of the Lord's Dealings with George Müller, Second Part, March 6 entry, church-order discussion, §II on reception and discipline, PDF p. 62. The passage treats admission to fellowship as shared obedience by elders and congregation. It is not cited as an endorsement of strict Baptist admission qualifications. https://www.georgemuller.org/uploads/4/8/6/5/48652749/narratives_george_muller_part_2.pdf ; https://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/22034/pg22034.html
21. 1 Peter 4:7–11, KJV.
22. Jeffrey D. Johnson, published as Jeff Johnson, Church Membership: Why Bother?, Chapel Library authorized excerpt, printed p. 3, §1, "The Priority of Worship," from The Church: Why Bother? (Free Grace Press, 2015). https://www.chapellibrary.org/api/books/download?code=cmwb&format=pdf
23. John Owen, An Inquiry into the Original, Nature, Institution, Power, Order, and Communion of Evangelical Churches, chapter IV, printed p. 264. The immediate context concerns particular churches; "church-state" means organized church life. https://ccel.org/ccel/owen/evangelicalchurches/evangelicalchurches.i.ix.html
24. 1 Corinthians 11:26, NKJV.
25. Isaiah 56:7, KJV, read within verses 3–8; compare Mark 11:17.
26. George Müller, The Writings and Teachings of George Müller of Bristol, "Counsel to Christians," "Praying and Watching," printed p. 72 (PDF p. 72). The surrounding discussion treats personal, family, and corporate prayer in connection with Ephesians 6. https://www.georgemuller.org/uploads/4/8/6/5/48652749/the_writings_and_teachings_of_george_muller_of_bristol.pdf#page=72
27. Acts 4:23–31, the church's united prayer after the apostles were threatened.
28. A. W. Pink, An Exposition of the Sermon on the Mount, chapter 23, "Prayer," Matthew 6:5–8, PDF p. 109. Pink explains that Matthew 6:6 does not prohibit congregational prayer. The biblical references within the quotation are Pink's own. https://www.holybibleinstitute.com/files/Pink_Arthur_-_Sermon_on_the_Mount.pdf#page=109
29. E. M. Bounds, The Necessity of Prayer, chapter XIV, "Prayer and the House of God," fifth prose paragraph. https://ccel.org/ccel/bounds/necessity/necessity.xv.html
30. C. H. Spurgeon, "Prayer-Meetings," sermon 3421, Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit,

volume 60, section II; preached August 30, 1868, published August 27, 1914. https://www.spurgeon.org/sermons/prayer-meetings
31. C. H. Spurgeon, The Greatest Fight in the World, Pastors' College Conference address, April 1891, "Our Army." https://archive.spurgeon.org/misc/gfw.php
32. Local-church principles, point 1. Colossians 1:18, NKJV; Acts 20:28, KJV.
33. Local-church principles, point 2. Acts 2:41–42; Ephesians 2:19–22, KJV.
34. Local-church principles, point 3. Hebrews 10:25; Acts 2:41–42, KJV.
35. Local-church principles, point 4. 1 Timothy 3:15; Jude 3, KJV.
36. Local-church principles, point 5. Hebrews 13:17; 1 Peter 5:2–4, KJV. The wording "ensamples" in verse 3 follows the KJV 1900 edition.
37. Local-church principles, point 6. 1 Corinthians 12:21–26; Hebrews 3:13, KJV.
38. Local-church principles, point 7. Ephesians 4:3–12, 32, KJV.
39. Local-church principles, point 8. Matthew 18:15–17; Galatians 6:1, KJV.
40. Local-church principles, point 9. Colossians 3:16; 2 Timothy 4:2, KJV.
41. Local-church principles, point 10. Acts 4:24–29; 1 Peter 4:7–10, KJV.
42. Local-church principles, point 11. 1 Corinthians 10:17; 11:26, KJV.
43. Local-church principles, point 12. 1 Peter 4:7–10; Ephesians 4:12, KJV.
44. Local-church principles, point 13. Romans 12:13; 1 John 3:17, KJV.
45. Local-church principles, point 14. Hebrews 13:3; 1 Corinthians 12:21–26, KJV.
46. Local-church principles, point 15. Philippians 2:15–16; 1 Corinthians 1:7–8, KJV.

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CHAPTER 12

Be Found Faithful in Ordinary Life

Caring for What Christ Has Entrusted to Us While We Await His Return

On Waiting for Christ through Faithful Service

"That is the way to wait for the Lord, ready for service, that, when he comes, he may never find you idle."

C. H. Spurgeon, Watching for Christ's Coming[1]

Imagine a man who can explain the latest alarming report in considerable detail. He knows what happened, who said what, and how it might fit the troubled days ahead. Yet a promise he made to his wife remains unfulfilled. An aging parent is still waiting for his call. His attention has traveled around the world while his obedience has scarcely moved across the room.

The danger is painfully ordinary. We can mistake being informed about coming trouble for being prepared to meet the coming Lord. Our concern may be sincere; the neglected duty remains. Someone must still prepare the meal, finish the work honestly, care for the dependent person, or do what was promised. Christ has not removed these responsibilities from our hands because we have begun thinking about His return.

Indeed, His return gives them greater weight. The One we expect to see is the One who entrusted them to us. A household, an occupation, a modest income, an unfinished obligation: each belongs within

the life He has redeemed. Watchfulness follows us into the kitchen and the workplace. It governs the money we spend and the words on which another person relies.

We must begin with the grace that makes this obedience possible.

> Titus 2:11–14 (KJV): "For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world; Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ; Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works."[2]

Christ gave Himself to make us His own. In the older language of this passage, a peculiar people means a people belonging especially to Him. We await His appearing as those He has purchased, and His grace teaches us how to live during the waiting. The same gospel that lifts our eyes toward His glory directs our hands toward the good He has given us to do.

This chapter therefore asks something more searching than whether we have kept busy. What has Christ entrusted to us, and what will He find us doing with it?

1. Let Him Find You Doing What He Entrusted to You

In Luke 12, Jesus pictures servants waiting for their master to return. Their lamps are burning; they are ready to receive him. But as His teaching unfolds, readiness takes a form we might easily overlook: someone is making sure the household is fed.

> Luke 12:42–44 (KJV): "And the Lord said, Who then is that faithful and wise steward, whom his lord shall make ruler over his household, to give them their portion of meat in due season? Blessed is that servant, whom his lord when he cometh shall find so doing. Of a truth I say unto you, that he will make him ruler over all that he hath."[3]

The steward does not choose the hour of his master's arrival. He does know when the household needs its food. Jesus joins the unknown hour to the known duty. While the servant cannot settle the first, he must remain faithful in the second. How often we reverse

those priorities, spending our strength upon what God has withheld while postponing what He has plainly commanded.

The Lord's question concerns a faithful and wise steward. A steward handles what belongs to another. His authority is received, his assignment is defined, and his work will be examined. That truth reaches both the person responsible for many people and the person whose present duties occupy a single room. We do not have to become important in the world's eyes before our obedience matters to Christ.

> 1 Corinthians 4:2 (NKJV): "Moreover it is required in stewards that one be found faithful."[4]

Paul is speaking directly about those entrusted with the mysteries of God. The requirement he names also helps us understand Christ's household steward: the entrusted person must be trustworthy. He is not free to treat the master's possessions as material for his own convenience. Our abilities, opportunities, and responsibilities must be received in that same Lordward spirit.

J. C. Ryle presses the difference between intention and obedience: "It is not the servant who is found wishing and professing, but the servant who is found 'doing' whom Jesus calls 'blessed.'"[5] Wishing may leave the work untouched. Faith receives the Master's authority and attends to what He has assigned.

Jesus also shows where neglected stewardship can lead. The servant begins to reckon upon his master's delay and then abuses those placed under his care (Luke 12:45–46). The problem has moved beyond unfinished tasks. A belief about the absent master has become permission to mistreat the household. Delay has been turned into moral distance: because the master is not visible, his authority feels less immediate.

We should fear that reasoning wherever it appears in us. Tomorrow can become the shelter under which today's disobedience rests. We mean to put the account right, apologize for the deception, or begin taking our responsibility seriously. Meanwhile, someone else bears the consequences of our postponement. Christ's coming tears away the assumption that an indefinite future belongs to us.

Ask where you have been waiting for a more dramatic assignment before becoming faithful in the one already given. The coming crisis does not make present obedience beneath you. A person who learns to evade responsibility in comfortable days will need more than alarming circumstances to make him dependable in dangerous ones. Seek

Christ's grace now to become trustworthy where He has placed you. What duty have you repeatedly postponed even though no uncertainty about it remains?

2. Care for the People Who Depend on You

The household in Christ's parable must eat at the proper time. Its needs do not pause while the steward considers the future. Neither do the needs of those God has placed within our care. A child needs patient instruction today. A dependent parent needs help today. A weary husband or wife needs the promised share of responsibility today.

> Matthew 24:45–46 (KJV): "Who then is a faithful and wise servant, whom his lord hath made ruler over his household, to give them meat in due season? Blessed is that servant, whom his lord when he cometh shall find so doing."[6]

Within a chapter filled with warnings about suffering, deception, and the coming of the Son of man, Jesus directs attention to a servant providing for others. Such care is not an interruption of readiness. It is among the things the returning Lord commends. That should correct the believer who imagines that attention to household needs takes him away from more spiritual concerns.

Matthew Henry observes that Joshua "did not make his necessary application to public affairs an excuse for the neglect of family religion." The man who led Israel also declared his household's allegiance to the Lord (Joshua 24:15). We should beware of a concern for world events that leaves no attention for the spiritual welfare of our own home.[7]

Paul makes the obligation especially plain when he addresses the care of widows.

> 1 Timothy 5:4 (KJV): "But if any widow have children or nephews, let them learn first to shew piety at home, and to requite their parents: for that is good and acceptable before God."[8]

The word nephews here refers to descendants, including grandchildren. Paul places practical care within the expression of godliness. The family must consider what it owes to those who once cared for its members. A profession of faith does not become more convincing because it can speak warmly about heaven while refusing an available duty at home.

> 1 Timothy 5:8 (KJV): "But if any provide not for his own, and specially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel."[8]

These are severe words because a real contradiction is involved. Faith professes allegiance to the God who commands this care. Willful neglect denies that profession in practice. Paul is confronting refusal of responsibility, not condemning the person whose resources or strength have failed. God knows the difference between an unwilling heart and empty hands.

John Gill puts the duty plainly: "It is the duty of children to take care of their parents in old age, and provide for them, when they cannot for themselves."[9] The years that reduce a parent's independence do not diminish the child's responsibility to consider that parent's needs.

As persecution increases, the fear of leaving dependents exposed may become a powerful temptation. A Christian may be pressured to speak falsely, conceal his faith, or participate in wrongdoing to preserve his income. Love for his household is real, but it cannot make disobedience to Christ safe. The Lord who commands provision also forbids evil. We must seek lawful means of caring for those entrusted to us, and receive help when needed, without pretending that their welfare requires us to abandon Him.

John Bunyan places provision among the duties of a household head: "That it lieth upon thee to care for them that they have a convenient livelihood."[10] In the same discussion, he warns against anxious worldliness. Both counsels are needed when persecution threatens a family's livelihood: we must take their needs seriously without letting fear govern our obedience to Christ.

Preparation begins before that pressure arrives. Learn what your household actually needs. Put necessary information in order. Speak honestly about commitments and resources. Carry your share of ordinary labor without making someone plead repeatedly for what you promised. Such faithfulness cannot guarantee that the future will be painless, but it can spare your family the added burden of preventable neglect.

The dependent person also belongs within this picture of faithfulness. Receiving necessary care, telling the truth about a need, and thanking those who help are fitting responses to the Lord's provision. Christ does not measure a suffering believer's devotion by the independence illness has taken away.

For parents, faithful care also reaches beyond the needs a child can

name. J. C. Ryle urges, "No interest should weigh with you so much as their eternal interests."[11] Teach your children why Christ is worth trusting when His people suffer. Let them hear His promises before fear supplies its own explanation of what lies ahead.

Consider the people who must arrange their lives around your word. What does your expectation of Christ's return mean to them? They should be able to see its fruit in greater truthfulness, steadier care, and a willingness to bear responsibility. Let them encounter your readiness in the way you love them.

3. Keep Working Honestly While You Wait

Paul did not place ordinary work in one Christian life and resurrection hope in another. In 1 Thessalonians 4, his instruction moves from holiness and brotherly love to responsible labor, and then to the comfort of Christ's return. The believer who will meet the Lord in the air is also called to work honestly on the earth.

> 1 Thessalonians 4:11–12 (KJV): "And that ye study to be quiet, and to do your own business, and to work with your own hands, as we commanded you; That ye may walk honestly toward them that are without, and that ye may have lack of nothing."[12]

A quiet life can require considerable discipline. We must resist the appetite for everyone else's affairs long enough to attend to our own. The next report may feel urgent because it is new; the task before us may feel unimportant because it is familiar. Yet novelty supplies no reliable measure of duty. God may require our attention precisely where excitement has worn away.

Paul's concern includes our conduct before outsiders. People who do not share our hope still encounter the quality of our work, the accuracy of our accounts, and the truthfulness of our explanations. They may reject the gospel, but we must not give them good reason to call our profession a cover for negligence. Readiness should make an employee more trustworthy and an employer more just. What would those who work beside you learn about your hope in Christ from the honesty of your work?

Explaining the eighth commandment, John Flavel writes, "It requires of every man diligence in a lawful calling, to get and preserve an estate for his own and other's good." Honest work serves people beyond the worker. Hostility toward the gospel must not be given the added excuse of dishonesty among those who profess it.[13]

Only a few verses later Paul writes:

> 1 Thessalonians 4:16–18 (KJV): "For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord. Wherefore comfort one another with these words."[12]

Diligent work and expectant hope belong together. The promise that we shall always be with Christ strengthens the life we live for Him now. Death cannot destroy that hope; repetition should not make us forget it.

Richard Baxter found dignity in labor through its relationship to God: "This interest of God in your lowest, and hardest, and servilest labour, doth make it honourable, and should make it sweet."[14] A task need not impress our neighbors to belong within our service to the Lord. His interest in it gives us a reason to do it well.

Second Thessalonians makes the distinction between willing labor and chosen idleness unmistakable.

> 2 Thessalonians 3:10–12 (KJV): "For even when we were with you, this we commanded you, that if any would not work, neither should he eat. For we hear that there are some which walk among you disorderly, working not at all, but are busybodies. Now them that are such we command and exhort by our Lord Jesus Christ, that with quietness they work, and eat their own bread."[15]

Paul says "would not," not "could not." Refusal is in view. Disability, involuntary unemployment, and work that earns no wage must not be swept into that rebuke. Caring for a dependent relative can consume more strength than a paid occupation. A Christian denied employment because of his convictions needs help, not a careless accusation of laziness.

Honest work also has limits set by the Lord we serve. If an employer demands fraud, profitable obedience to that employer becomes disobedience to Christ. A believer must refuse the wrongdoing, seek a lawful remedy or alternative where possible, and entrust the consequences to God. Faithfulness can cost the very position through which we have tried to be faithful. That possibility makes preparation

necessary: settle whose approval governs your conduct before pressure offers to buy your silence.

> Colossians 3:23–24 (KJV): "And whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men; Knowing that of the Lord ye shall receive the reward of the inheritance: for ye serve the Lord Christ."[16]

Paul originally addressed servants in a hard social setting. His words direct their labor beyond human oversight to Christ. Our circumstances differ, but His lordship remains. Work carefully when no one inspects it. Refuse dishonest gain when others excuse it. Take appropriate rest as a creature dependent upon God, rather than treating exhaustion as proof of devotion. The coming Lord deserves obedience, not a performance that destroys our ability to fulfill the responsibilities He has given.

4. Use What You Have without Making It Your Security

Money can quietly acquire authority over a believer's decisions. At first he wants enough to meet his responsibilities. Then he begins to feel that no amount is sufficient to make obedience safe. Before long, a command of Christ is being weighed against the reserves it might reduce. Provision has become a condition under which he will obey.

Jesus addresses treasure immediately before His teaching about servants awaiting their master.

> Luke 12:33–34 (KJV): "Sell that ye have, and give alms; provide yourselves bags which wax not old, a treasure in the heavens that faileth not, where no thief approacheth, neither moth corrupteth. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also."[17]

The connection reaches deeper than our spending habits. Our hearts follow what we count as treasure. If the whole weight of our hope rests upon what can be seized, lost, or exhausted, threats against possessions become threats against our confidence itself. Watchfulness requires us to notice when concern for provision has begun displacing trust in the Father.

Jesus does not leave His people with the command to release earthly treasure and no assurance of His care. Just before these words He tells the little flock that their Father delights to give them the kingdom (Luke 12:32). Generosity grows within that promise. We

can use temporary goods faithfully because our lasting inheritance rests with God.

George Müller states the governing measure: "Money is really worth no more than as it is used according to the mind of the Lord."[18] The amount tells us what is available; the Lord's will tells us what faithfulness requires. Possessing more cannot excuse obeying less.

Paul gives corresponding instruction to believers who possess wealth.

> 1 Timothy 6:17–19 (KJV): "Charge them that are rich in this world, that they be not highminded, nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy; That they do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate; Laying up in store for themselves a good foundation against the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life."[19]

The passage allows thankful enjoyment while commanding generosity and forbidding misplaced trust. It does not tell us to despise a meal, a home, or a useful possession. It directs us to receive them from God without expecting them to perform God's work. Savings can meet an expense; they cannot become our savior. Careful planning can serve a household; it cannot guarantee immunity from suffering.

Thomas Watson brings possessions under the prospect of a coming account: "we are but stewards; and our Lord and Master will ere long say, 'give an account of your stewardship.'" A larger reserve brings more to answer for, not greater freedom from the Owner. The question is what use of His gifts will bear His examination.[20]

This distinction will matter when faithfulness becomes costly. The believer accustomed to letting possessions govern his decisions may find every threat to them an argument for compromise. He tells himself he is merely being responsible. Yet responsible stewardship begins with obedience to the Owner. We cannot preserve His gifts faithfully by denying His authority over their use.

Look closely at what your present arrangements require of you. Have unnecessary commitments made you feel unable to refuse what you know is wrong? Has fear of future scarcity closed your hand against a present need? Are you storing resources for a danger you can imagine while overlooking a duty you can see? These questions should lead to sober correction, not panic. Put obligations in order, reduce avoidable burdens where possible, and let generosity have an actual place in your plans.

Some believers have very little to rearrange. Their faithfulness may consist in careful use of a small amount, honest acknowledgment of need, and resisting bitterness when others have more. Christ knows both the gift and the cost. The heart that trusts Him is not measured by the size of its account.

> Hebrews 13:5–6 (KJV): "Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have: for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee. So that we may boldly say, The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me."[21]

The writer joins contentment with courage before human threats. God's promised presence gives us reason to resist both the greed that demands more and the fear that would surrender obedience to protect what remains. As we await Christ, our confidence must rest in the Lord who will never forsake us, even when faithfulness brings loss.

We cannot purchase readiness. We can refuse to let earthly security become the price of our obedience. The Lord who is coming has already told us where treasure can be kept beyond the reach of loss.

5. Keep Your Commitments When Faithfulness Goes Unnoticed

Much of what Christ gives us to do must be done again. The dependent person needs care tomorrow. The workplace requires fresh honesty. A promise still needs to be fulfilled after the warmth of making it has passed. Repetition can expose a hidden bargain: we were willing to serve as long as service felt rewarding.

Richard Sibbes counsels patience when obedience begins without a sense of encouragement: "In and after duty we find that experience of God's presence which, without obedience, we may long wait for, and yet go without." We must not make a welcome feeling the condition of continuing. Seek the Lord in the duty itself, leaving the timing of encouragement in His hands.[22]

Resurrection hope reaches that weary place. Paul concludes his great chapter on the resurrection by bringing future victory to bear upon present labor.

> 1 Corinthians 15:57–58 (KJV): "But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, unmoveable, always

> abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord."[23]

The therefore carries the weight of everything Paul has said about death overcome and God's people raised. Christian labor is not swallowed by the grave. What is done in the Lord belongs to a future secured by the risen Savior. Its worth does not disappear because the person who benefited failed to thank us or because we cannot yet see its fruit.

John Calvin connects perseverance with the promise Paul has unfolded: "for the hope of a resurrection makes us not be weary in well doing."[24] We need that hope when the work outlasts our enthusiasm. Christ has given us a reason to continue that neither weariness nor human indifference can overturn.

This hope gives dignity to work that leaves little visible evidence. A parent patiently explains the truth again. A Christian keeps an agreement that has become inconvenient. Someone caring for an ill spouse performs a task that will need repeating before the day is done. These duties may not attract notice, but Christ's promise frees us from having to make our service conspicuous before we believe it matters.

Keeping our word deserves particular attention. Another person may have planned around it. When we quietly abandon a commitment, we hand that person both the unfinished work and the burden of discovering our withdrawal. Truthful speech requires honest follow-through. If circumstances make a promise impossible to fulfill, we should say so promptly, acknowledge the consequences, and seek a responsible arrangement. Silence must not become the means by which we escape an uncomfortable conversation. Who is still carrying a burden you promised to share?

Such habits prepare us for more serious pressure. Persecution seeks to make faithfulness costly enough that we will call surrender reasonable. Ordinary inconvenience is not persecution, and we should not pretend it is. Yet learning to obey when obedience costs comfort can expose the excuses we may later use when greater losses threaten. We need Christ's grace in both settings, and we should ask for it before the cost increases.

> Galatians 6:9–10 (KJV): "And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not. As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith."[25]

Paul's assurance does not promise immediate recognition or an easy return upon every act of kindness. It teaches us to continue in

the prospect of God's harvest. We are responsible for the opportunity He gives, not for forcing the outcome we prefer. This protects us from both resentment and pride: resentment when we are overlooked, pride when our work succeeds.

The returning Lord will see what others missed. Let that certainty settle you in the next duty. Make the promised call. Correct the dishonest entry. Carry the needed meal. Ask forgiveness where your neglect has hurt someone. Then continue, drawing strength from the Savior whose faithfulness has carried you farther than your own resolve ever could.

Questions for Further Study

1. In Luke 12:35–44, how does Jesus connect readiness for an unknown hour with responsibility for a known task? Which duty have you been postponing while seeking more information about the future?
2. How does Titus 2:11–14 connect Christ's redeeming work, present obedience, and His appearing? What goes wrong when we attempt these duties as a way of earning acceptance with God?
3. What does 1 Timothy 5:4–8 reveal about godliness at home? Who depends on your care or your word, and what evidence would that person give of your faithfulness?
4. Read 1 Thessalonians 4:9–18 and 2 Thessalonians 3:10–13 together. How should resurrection hope affect ordinary work? Why must we distinguish unwillingness to work from inability or lack of opportunity?
5. What is the difference between using resources wisely and trusting them for security? According to Luke 12:32–40 and 1 Timothy 6:17–19, how would that difference become visible if obedience threatened your income or possessions?
6. How does the resurrection support Paul's command in 1 Corinthians 15:58? Which unnoticed responsibility or inconvenient commitment needs the encouragement of that promise today?

Practical Applications

1. Put one neglected responsibility right.

Choose a specific duty toward a person who depends on you. Acknowledge any neglect without hiding behind your intentions,

agree upon a realistic next step, and carry it out. If you cannot fulfill the duty alone, ask for the help needed to meet it responsibly. Let Matthew 24:45–46 govern the action: the Lord commends the servant attending to the household when He comes.

2. Examine one point where security is competing with obedience.

Consider your work or use of money. Identify a dishonest practice you have tolerated, a needless obligation that increases pressure to compromise, or a present need fear has made you unwilling to consider. Take the appropriate truthful step, trusting the living God rather than uncertain riches (1 Timothy 6:17–19). Do not make a rash financial gesture; make an obedient decision.

3. Complete one promise and continue one quiet duty.

Review what you have told another person you would do. Fulfill it, or speak honestly and promptly if circumstances require a different arrangement. Then identify an ongoing responsibility whose repetition has discouraged you, and ask Christ for grace to continue without demanding notice. Read 1 Corinthians 15:57–58 before returning to that work.

Chapter Axioms

1. The unknown hour of Christ's return makes faithfulness in known duties urgent (Luke 12:35–44).
2. The grace that saves us also teaches us to live obediently while awaiting our Savior (Titus 2:11–14).
3. Care for dependent family members belongs to the practice of godliness (1 Timothy 5:4–8).
4. Expectation of Christ's return belongs alongside honest, responsible work (1 Thessalonians 4:9–18).
5. God distinguishes refusal to work from inability; faithful stewardship answers to the strength and opportunity He supplies (2 Thessalonians 3:10–13; 2 Corinthians 8:12).
6. Earthly resources are gifts to use under God's authority, never a substitute for trust in Him (Luke 12:32–40; 1 Timothy 6:17–19).
7. Christ's victory over death assures His people that their labor in Him is not empty or lost (1 Corinthians 15:57–58).

Return to the Faithful Savior

Perhaps these duties have brought a particular failure into view. Someone waited while you postponed. Your work concealed a dishonesty. Fear persuaded you to keep what love should have shared. Do not turn the discovery into another promise to become a better person by sheer determination. Bring the sin to Christ, confess it plainly, and seek His grace to put right what you can.

The Lord who will examine our stewardship is the Savior who gave Himself for our redemption. His cross is sufficient for the guilt of neglected duties as well as more conspicuous sins. His resurrection supplies the hope that makes renewed obedience worthwhile. We return to our responsibilities as people who need His forgiveness and strength, never as people who have outgrown them.

Nor should the weary believer hear this chapter as a demand to carry every burden in the world. Christ knows what He has entrusted to you. He knows the strength you no longer possess and the costly obedience no one else has seen. Receive His care through the means He provides, and seek to please Him within the life He has actually given you.

Tomorrow's duties may look much like today's. You will enter them with the promise that the Lord is coming and that your labor in Him is not in vain. Let His faithfulness steady yours. When He comes, may He find you loving the people, honoring the commitments, and tending the responsibilities He placed within your care. What obedience will you begin today because you expect to see Him?

The Doctrine of Faithfulness

Fifteen Duties to Maintain as Christ's Day Approaches

Faithfulness is continuing to trust Christ and obey what He has entrusted to us, even when obedience becomes costly. His grace produces it; His Word directs it; His return gives it urgency. The approaching crisis does not cancel ordinary Christian duties. It makes our continued obedience more necessary and, often, more costly.

1. Remain faithful to Christ before every other loyalty.

All Christian faithfulness begins with belonging to Christ and depending upon Him. We cannot remain spiritually fruitful apart from the Savior who gives us life. When pressure forces a choice between His approval and our security, allegiance to Him must

govern the answer. Revelation 2:10 commands, "Be faithful until death" (NKJV). Christ does not promise His suffering people that obedience will preserve their earthly lives; He promises life beyond the reach of their persecutors. Every duty below must be fulfilled through Him and under His authority.

Scripture: John 15:4–5; Revelation 2:10; Matthew 10:37–39.

2. Honor your marriage covenant in conduct, affection, and purity.

Faithfulness to a spouse includes sexual purity, truthful speech, sacrificial love, respect, and dependable care. A marriage must not become the place where we excuse the harshness we conceal from everyone else. As lawlessness spreads and pressure enters the home, husband and wife need to resist both betrayal and the bitterness that makes them strangers under one roof. Watchfulness includes guarding the relationship God has joined, not merely monitoring dangers beyond it.

> Ephesians 5:33 (KJV): "Nevertheless let every one of you in particular so love his wife even as himself; and the wife see that she reverence her husband."

Scripture: Ephesians 5:25–33; Hebrews 13:4; Matthew 24:12.

3. Teach your children to know, fear, and obey the Lord.

Parents must bring their children up in the "training and admonition of the Lord" (Ephesians 6:4, NKJV). This requires patient instruction, correction, prayer, and an example they can examine at close range. Prepare them to trust Christ when following Him makes them unpopular. Children who hear only that God will make life pleasant are being left unprepared for the hostility Jesus foretold. Are you teaching them why Christ is worth obeying when obedience costs them something?

Scripture: Ephesians 6:4; Deuteronomy 6:6–7; 2 Timothy 3:12–15.

4. Remain committed to the gathered church and public worship.

The command to assemble becomes more urgent "as you see the Day approaching" (Hebrews 10:25, NKJV). We gather to hear God's Word, worship Him, pray together, receive His appointed ordinances, and strengthen one another. Cultivate faithful participation now rather than training yourself to withdraw whenever attendance

becomes inconvenient. When opposition makes gathering costly, the church needs believers who understand why being together matters. A frightened congregation is strengthened when its members refuse to abandon one another.

Scripture: Hebrews 10:23–25; Acts 2:42; Colossians 3:16.

5. Use your spiritual gift to strengthen the local church.

A gift from Christ is a responsibility to serve His people. Peter connects the approaching end with sober prayer, fervent love, hospitality, and the faithful use of gifts. When persecution exhausts some and fear silences others, neglected service leaves real people without needed help. Offer what God has given you, under biblical order and in the strength He supplies. Do not wait for a conspicuous role before becoming useful.

> 1 Peter 4:10 (KJV): "As every man hath received the gift, even so minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God."

Scripture: 1 Peter 4:7–11; Romans 12:4–8.

6. Give practical help to the poor and needy.

Christian compassion must reach the person's actual need. John challenges the believer who possesses resources but closes his heart against a brother in distress. As hardship and persecution increase, food, shelter, transportation, and other ordinary help may become costly expressions of loyalty to Christ. The possibility of tomorrow's trouble must not make us indifferent to suffering before us today. Give thoughtfully according to what God has supplied, remembering those who suffer for His name.

> 1 John 3:17–18 (KJV): "But whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him? My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth."

Scripture: 1 John 3:17–18; Hebrews 13:3, 16; Galatians 6:10.

7. Support the local church with willing, dependable giving.

Those who receive faithful teaching should share in supporting the work that brings it to them. Plan generous support for your biblical local church rather than leaving its ministry to whatever remains after every preference has been satisfied. If hostility reduces a congregation's resources, its need for sound preaching, pastoral care, and gospel labor does not disappear. Give willingly according to your means, trusting God rather than allowing fear to decide what His work is worth.

> 1 Corinthians 9:13–14 (KJV): "Do ye not know that they which minister about holy things live of the things of the temple? and they which wait at the altar are partakers with the altar? Even so hath the Lord ordained that they which preach the gospel should live of the gospel."

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 9:13–14; Galatians 6:6; 2 Corinthians 8:12; 9:7.

8. Pray faithfully for the pastors who watch over your soul.

Pray for their holiness, wisdom, courage, protection, and clear proclamation of the Word. Paul asked believers to pray that imprisonment would not prevent him from speaking boldly. As opposition intensifies, pastors may face pressure to soften truths their people urgently need. The congregation must bring its shepherds before God, asking Him to keep them faithful. How regularly do you pray for the men whose preaching you expect to strengthen you?

> 2 Thessalonians 3:1–2 (KJV): "Finally, brethren, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may have free course, and be glorified, even as it is with you: And that we may be delivered from unreasonable and wicked men: for all men have not faith."

Scripture: Ephesians 6:18–20; 2 Thessalonians 3:1–2; Hebrews 13:17–18.

9. Work diligently and honestly as a servant of Christ.

Christ's return gives ordinary work lasting significance. Fulfill your responsibilities carefully, whether your labor earns a wage or meets a need within the home. Do not allow fascination with approaching events to become an excuse for unfinished work. If obedience threatens your employment, refuse dishonesty without surrendering diligence.

Your employer may control your position, but Christ remains Lord of your conscience.

> Colossians 3:23–24 (KJV): "And whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men; Knowing that of the Lord ye shall receive the reward of the inheritance: for ye serve the Lord Christ."

Scripture: Colossians 3:23–24; 1 Thessalonians 4:11–18; Ephesians 6:5–9.

10. Maintain private communion with God through Scripture and prayer.

Public courage needs the nourishment of private communion with God. Read His Word attentively, consider what it requires, confess your sins, and pray over the truth you have received. Jesus joins watchfulness to prayer because temptation must be faced in dependence upon God. Do not let a steady stream of alarming reports consume the time in which Scripture should be steadying your heart. A neglected prayer life leaves fear with far too much room to speak.

> Matthew 6:6 (KJV): "But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly."

Scripture: Matthew 6:6; Psalm 1:1–3; Luke 21:34–36.

11. Seek fresh strength, grace, and love from God each day.

We need the Holy Spirit to strengthen our inner life and deepen our knowledge of Christ's love. Past encouragement cannot replace present dependence. Jesus warns that abounding lawlessness will cause the love of many to "grow cold" (Matthew 24:12, NKJV). Watch for that coldness in your own heart. Return to the Lord in prayer, repentance, and faith, asking Him to renew your love and sustain willing obedience when the surrounding world becomes harder and more hostile.

> Ephesians 3:16–19 (KJV): "That he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man; That Christ may dwell in your hearts

> by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, May be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; And to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God."
>
> Scripture: Ephesians 3:16–19; Matthew 24:12–13; 2 Peter 3:17–18.

12. Hold firmly to sound doctrine when error becomes attractive.

Faithfulness requires loyalty to the truth God has revealed, not merely attachment to a teacher we enjoy. Paul places his warning about rejection of "sound doctrine" beside Christ's appearing and judgment (2 Timothy 4:1–3, NKJV). In deceptive times, a comforting error may feel easier to receive than a searching truth. Test what you hear by Scripture and remain teachable under its authority. A doctrine does not become safe because it reduces your discomfort.

Scripture: 2 Timothy 4:1–5; 2 Thessalonians 2:1–3, 15; Hebrews 13:9.

13. Tell the truth and keep the promises others depend upon.

Truthfulness makes our ordinary word dependable. Do not promise care, money, work, or prayer merely to end an uncomfortable conversation. Fulfill what you undertake; if circumstances prevent it, explain promptly and seek to put matters right. James places truthful speech within his exhortations to people awaiting the Lord. As deception and betrayal spread, Christians must resist the habit of saying whatever protects their immediate interests.

> James 5:12 (KJV): "But above all things, my brethren, swear not, neither by heaven, neither by the earth, neither by any other oath: but let your yea be yea; and your nay, nay; lest ye fall into condemnation."
>
> Scripture: James 5:7–12; Ephesians 4:25; Psalm 15:4.

14. Repent promptly and pursue holiness while awaiting Christ.

Faithfulness cannot coexist peacefully with cherished sin. The hope of seeing Christ calls us to purity now, while Paul's announcement of the approaching day summons us to cast off darkness. Confess the sin you have begun defending and remove the provision you keep making

for it. As temptation grows more aggressive, postponed repentance becomes increasingly dangerous. Do not prepare to resist public pressure while secretly yielding the same ground in private.

> Romans 13:11–12 (KJV): "And that, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep: for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed. The night is far spent, the day is at hand: let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armour of light."

Scripture: Romans 13:11–14; 1 John 3:2–3; 1 John 1:9.

15. Continue bearing witness to Christ when others oppose Him.

Jesus describes the spread of the gospel in the same discourse that warns of hatred, betrayal, and endurance to the end. Hostility does not cancel the church's witness. Be ready to explain your hope with gentleness, a clear conscience, and confidence in the Savior you proclaim. Pray for openings and use them faithfully. The coming judgment gives urgency to loving the very people who may reject your message.

> 1 Peter 3:15 (KJV): "But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear:"

Scripture: Matthew 24:9–14; 1 Peter 3:14–16; Colossians 4:5–6.

These duties will not become easier merely because the hour becomes darker. Christ supplies the grace to continue them, and His promise gives us reason to begin where we have neglected them. Which responsibility must you take up again today so that, when He comes, He finds you doing what He entrusted to you?

Transition to Chapter 13

Faithfulness in ordinary life prepares us to face a harder question: will we continue obeying Christ when obedience brings suffering? The duties He entrusts to us may become more costly as hostility grows. We turn next to the patience, courage, and hope His people need to stand firm without letting go of their Savior.

Notes

1. C. H. Spurgeon, "Watching for Christ's Coming," Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit, volume 39, preached April 7, 1889, on Luke 12:37–38, section II, discussion of readiness for service. https://www.spurgeon.org/sermons/watching-for-christs-coming
2. Titus 2:11–14, KJV. Christ's redeeming work, grace-taught obedience, and expectation of His appearing govern the chapter.
3. Luke 12:42–44, KJV; read within Luke 12:35–48. The household steward illustrates accountable service during the master's absence.
4. 1 Corinthians 4:2, NKJV; read with verses 1–5. Paul's immediate subject is ministerial stewardship; the chapter applies the principle of trustworthiness alongside Christ's household parable.
5. J. C. Ryle, Expository Thoughts on the Gospels: Luke, exposition of Luke 12:41–48, third paragraph. Ryle applies the warning to ministers and other professing Christians. Inner quotation marks have been converted to single marks. https://www.studylight.org/commentaries/eng/ryl/luke-12.html
6. Matthew 24:45–46, KJV; read within verses 42–51. The application to daily family care follows the parable's requirement of faithful provision and the explicit instruction in 1 Timothy 5.
7. Matthew Henry, Commentary on the Whole Bible, Joshua 24:15–28, I.1.(1), on Joshua's resolution for his household. https://www.biblegateway.com/resources/matthew-henry/Josh.24.15-Josh.24.28
8. 1 Timothy 5:4, 8, KJV. In verse 4, the older English "nephews" means descendants, particularly grandchildren, not merely the modern relationship of a sibling's children. The Greek term is ekgona. See John Gill's exposition at verse 4, cited below.
9. John Gill, Exposition of the New Testament, at 1 Timothy 5:4, discussion of piety at home. This is a continuous excerpt from a longer sentence; its concluding colon is changed to a period. https://biblehub.com/commentaries/gill/1_timothy/5.htm
10. John Bunyan, Christian Behavior, "Duties of the Master of a Family," "Second, Touching the outward state of thy family," point 1. The following sentence cites 1 Timothy 5:8; subsequent counsel warns against anxious worldliness. "Convenient" here concerns a suitable livelihood. https://www.biblebb.com/files/bunyan/christianbehavior.htm
11. J. C. Ryle, The Upper Room, chapter XVI, "The Duties of Parents," section IV, first paragraph. The quotation concerns the eternal welfare of children. Its application to preparing children for costly allegiance to Christ is the chapter's own pastoral application. https://ccel.org/ccel/ryle/upper_room/upper_room.xviii.html
12. 1 Thessalonians 4:11–12, 16–18, KJV; read within verses 9–18. The chapter joins responsible living to resurrection hope without asserting that every instance of idleness was caused by a mistaken view of prophecy.
13. John Flavel, An Exposition of the Assembly's Shorter Catechism, Questions 73–75, eighth commandment, subsidiary Question 2. The answer cites Proverbs 13:11 and Ephesians 4:28. https://bpc.org/jfq7375 ; parallel PDF checked for the spelling of preserve: https://christian-publishers.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/Exposition-of-the-Catechism-by-John-Flavel.pdf
14. Richard Baxter, A Christian Directory, Part I, chapter X, "Directions for the Government of the Body," Part I, title 2, "Directions against Idleness and Sloth," Direction VII, printed p. 382. The passage describes God's interest in ordinary lawful labor. https://www.gutenberg.org/files/41633/41633-h/41633-h.htm
15. 2 Thessalonians 3:10–12, KJV; read through verse 13. Paul rebukes unwillingness to work, not involuntary inability.

16. Colossians 3:23–24, KJV. The immediate address is to servants; the application retains the passage's Lordward motive without equating every modern employment arrangement with the ancient setting.
17. Luke 12:33–34, KJV; read within verses 22–40. The Father's provision and promise of the kingdom precede the commands concerning treasure and readiness.
18. George Müller, A Narrative of Some of the Lord's Dealings with George Müller, Third Part, concluding teaching on calling and stewardship, PDF p. 168. The quotation is a continuous clause concerning the use of money according to the Lord's will. https://www.georgemuller.org/uploads/4/8/6/5/48652749/narratives_george_muller_part_3.pdf#page=168
19. 1 Timothy 6:17–19, KJV. The passage commands trust in God, thankful enjoyment, good works, and generous sharing.
20. Thomas Watson, The Art of Divine Contentment, chapter XI, section X, on the nature of a prosperous condition, point 3. Continuous excerpt; concluding colon changed to a period. https://www.biblebb.com/files/TW/tw-contentment.htm
21. Hebrews 13:5–6, KJV. The command concerning contentment rests on God's promised presence and leads directly to confidence before human threats. Read also Hebrews 10:32–39 for the letter's setting of loss, endurance, and expectation of the coming One.
22. Richard Sibbes, The Bruised Reed, chapter 8, "Duties and Discouragements," subsection "We Should Persist in Duties," point 4. Wording follows the linked readable edition; section numbering varies across editions. The passage concerns perseverance despite inward reluctance, not a guarantee of immediate emotional reward. https://www.monergism.com/thethreshold/sdg/bruisedreed.html
23. 1 Corinthians 15:57–58, KJV; read within verses 51–58. The assurance of fruitful labor rests upon Christ's victory over death.
24. John Calvin, Commentary on the Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians, exposition of 1 Corinthians 15:58. The quotation is a continuous clause linking resurrection hope with perseverance in well-doing. https://biblehub.com/commentaries/calvin/1_corinthians/15.htm
25. Galatians 6:9–10, KJV; read with verses 7–8. The harvest promise encourages continued good works rather than promising immediate recognition or material repayment.

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CHAPTER 13

Stand Firm When Faithfulness Costs You

Obeying Christ When Fear, Loss, and Hostility Press In

"Dare I violate my conscience to save my flesh?"

John Flavel, A Saint Indeed[1]

The pressure may arrive with an offer of relief. Keep quiet about Christ, and the argument can end. Sign what you know is false, and the position can remain yours. Withdraw from the believers others despise, and you may be left alone. The temptation gives disobedience a practical voice. It asks you to call surrender wisdom.

Such choices can come quietly, long before a Christian faces a prison door. We begin explaining why a clear duty must wait, why a harmless lie is necessary, or why loyalty to Christ has become too expensive. The threatened loss occupies our thoughts until we scarcely consider what we would lose by yielding. We calculate the cost of obedience while leaving the cost of disobedience unexamined.

Jesus prepares His people for this danger. His warnings about the closing troubles of this age concern more than what others will do to us. They concern what pressure may tempt us to become. In Matthew 24:9–13, hatred, betrayal, deception, and increasing lawlessness surround the warning that love will grow cold. The believer must therefore watch both the approaching danger and the response forming in

his own heart. Suffering can threaten our safety; temptation seeks our surrender.[2]

We have already considered why believers suffer and how God uses their trials. Now we must face the decisions those trials bring. How do we remain obedient when truth costs us approval, fellowship exposes us to hostility, and faithfulness fails to bring immediate relief?

James speaks directly into that struggle. After condemning those who defraud laborers and oppress the righteous, he turns to the brethren. He neither denies the wrong nor tells them that their suffering is beneath God's notice. He directs them toward the Lord who will come to judge.

> James 5:7–8 (KJV): "Be patient therefore, brethren, unto the coming of the Lord. Behold, the husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, and hath long patience for it, until he receive the early and latter rain. Be ye also patient; stablish your hearts: for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh."[3]

The command reaches beneath our outward behavior. Establish your hearts. A frightened heart needs more than an instruction to look brave. It needs a settled confidence in Christ, a clear understanding of its duty, and a hope persecution cannot destroy. The Lord's return supplies a reason to stand when everything around us urges retreat.

1. Settle Whom You Will Obey before Fear Answers for You

Fear can sound remarkably sensible. It lists the bills, names the people who might reject us, and reminds us how difficult life could become. Those concerns may be real. The danger begins when they are allowed to decide whether Christ should be obeyed.

A believer does not become watchful by pretending that threats are harmless. Jesus spoke to disciples who could be killed. He taught them to weigh the threat in the presence of God.

> Matthew 10:28–31 (KJV): "And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell. Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? and one of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear ye not therefore, ye are of more value than many sparrows."[4]

Notice what Christ places together: the authority of God and the

care of the Father. We must fear the One before whom every persecutor will answer. We may also trust the Father who knows every hair upon the head He commands us to lift. Courage grows as both truths become real to us. We are accountable to God, and we are precious to Him.

The threat becomes spiritually overpowering when the person making it fills our whole field of vision. His anger, influence, or authority seems immediate; God's judgment seems distant. Jesus corrects that distortion. Human power has a boundary. God's authority reaches beyond death. The person who can injure your body cannot overrule the Savior who has claimed your soul.

This is why we must settle the question of obedience before the pressure peaks. We need to know what Scripture requires, pray over the loss we fear, and speak honestly with faithful believers who can help us stand. A vague intention to be courageous will not serve us as well as a clear conviction about the duty before us.

The apostles faced an explicit prohibition against teaching in Jesus' name. Their answer in Acts 5:29 placed obedience to God above obedience to men. That was no appetite for needless conflict. They had received a command from Christ that the council was demanding they break. In the same way, end-times watchfulness requires us to distinguish an inconvenience we may bear patiently from a demand we must refuse faithfully.[5]

Flavel's opening question belongs here. Before yielding to escape discomfort, consider what the escape would require of your conscience. Would it require you to deny the Lord, conceal the truth, endorse a lie, or abandon a duty He has made plain? Relief purchased at that price would bring a deeper trouble into the soul.

James 5:8 (NKJV) gives the needed instruction: "Establish your hearts".[6] We establish them by receiving Christ's authority before fear attempts to replace it. What threatened loss makes you most tempted to bargain with obedience?

2. Do Not Let Their Cruelty Teach You to Sin

A persecutor may fail to silence our confession and still succeed in poisoning our response. We continue saying that we belong to Christ, but anger begins to govern our words. We exaggerate an accusation, rehearse a revenge, or take pleasure in an enemy's humiliation. The wrong done to us becomes our excuse for doing wrong ourselves.

Watchfulness must reach this danger. We need protection from

becoming like the people whose conduct we condemn. Christ shows us how to resist their evil without adopting it.

> 1 Peter 2:21–23 (KJV): "For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps: Who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth: Who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously".[7]

The passage does not describe a Savior who was indifferent to injustice. It describes a Savior who entrusted judgment to the One who would judge rightly. He refused the lie and the threat because His Father remained righteous when His accusers did not. Their wickedness never became His rule of conduct.

That is the point at which our own response is tested. We may know that vengeance belongs to God and still keep a private account of the punishment we would like to administer. We imagine that surrendering revenge would leave evil unanswered. Scripture assures us otherwise.

> Romans 12:19–21 (KJV): "Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord. Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink: for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head. Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good."[8]

Evil overcomes us when it recruits us into its own conduct. The enemy has then done more than hurt us; he has persuaded us to answer under his rules. Paul sends us in another direction. Leave vengeance with God and attend to the good God commands. Even an enemy's need remains a summons to mercy.

John Bunyan's counsel to sufferers includes these direct words: "love for his hatred to thee".[9] He calls the injured believer to answer hatred with love. Such love requires deliberate dependence on Christ. We must pray for the person we would rather punish, refuse the falsehood that might damage him, and resist the pleasure of nursing resentment.

This does not forbid seeking protection or exposing wrongdoing truthfully. Paul challenged an unlawful beating in Acts 22:25. Refusing revenge does not require us to assist abuse. It requires that Christ govern the means we use and the spirit in which we use them.[10]

As hostility toward believers intensifies, many voices will encourage a matching hostility in return. The church must refuse that invitation. Our Lord will judge evil without needing us to become evil on His behalf. Will the words you speak about your opponent show that Christ still governs your heart?

3. Do Not Turn against the People Who Must Stand beside You

James follows his command to establish our hearts with a warning we might not expect. He does not speak first about the persecutor. He speaks about the way suffering believers treat one another.

> James 5:9 (KJV): "Grudge not one against another, brethren, lest ye be condemned: behold, the judge standeth before the door."[11]

Pressure outside the church can produce cruelty inside it. An exhausted believer becomes impatient with another believer's fears. A family that has suffered loss resents a family that has not. One member demands that everyone respond exactly as he does; another withdraws because he feels misunderstood. Soon people who need one another begin carrying grievances against one another.

James will not let us hide that conduct behind the suffering that provoked it. The Judge is at the door. The coming Christ sees the injustice we endure, but He also sees the bitterness we spread. His return comforts the oppressed and searches the conduct of the oppressed. We must not claim the comfort while refusing the correction.

A church under strain needs believers who can listen without inflaming suspicion, speak truth without humiliating the weak, and correct wrong without treating every disagreement as betrayal. Our fellow members may need patient help precisely when we feel least able to give it. We must ask Christ for strength to bear their burdens rather than demanding that they first make our burden easier.

> Hebrews 10:24–25 (KJV): "And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works: Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching."[12]

The approaching Day increases our obligation to one another. It does not give us permission to become suspicious spectators of everyone else's endurance. To consider one another is to give thought

to what would strengthen another person's obedience. A word of encouragement, practical help, a patient conversation, and prayer with a frightened member can serve that purpose.

> Hebrews 12:14–15 (KJV): "Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord: Looking diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you, and thereby many be defiled".[13]

Hebrews warns against a poisonous turning from God that can corrupt others as well as the person who begins it. Resentment must therefore be taken seriously before it becomes hardened resistance to His Word. A repeated complaint can become the atmosphere in which a whole group breathes. Under end-times pressure, a church cannot afford to cultivate the very resentment that weakens its mutual courage.

If you have wounded a brother or sister because you were frightened, tired, or angry, seek reconciliation. Explain the strain without using it to excuse the sin. The people beside you are not the enemy simply because they cannot remove the trial. Christ has placed you together so that you may help one another endure it.

4. Keep Doing Good When Obedience Brings Loss

Suffering can narrow our attention until staying safe seems to be our only remaining duty. We stop asking whom we might help. We postpone service until circumstances improve. We may even begin to resent the responsibilities that remain, as though trouble has released us from the call to love.

Peter joins trust and continued obedience in a single command.

> 1 Peter 4:19 (KJV): "Wherefore let them that suffer according to the will of God commit the keeping of their souls to him in well doing, as unto a faithful Creator."[14]

We commit our souls to God while continuing to do good. The entrusted soul does not become an idle soul. Because God is faithful, we need not control every consequence before taking the next obedient step. We can speak honestly, care for a dependent person, pray for a threatened believer, or share what remains with someone in greater need.

The church addressed in Hebrews had already learned something of this costly goodness.

> Hebrews 10:32–34 (KJV): "But call to remembrance the former days, in which, after ye were illuminated, ye endured a great fight of afflictions; Partly, whilst ye were made a gazingstock both by reproaches and afflictions; and partly, whilst ye became companions of them that were so used. For ye had compassion of me in my bonds, and took joyfully the spoiling of your goods, knowing in yourselves that ye have in heaven a better and an enduring substance."[15]

Some suffered public reproach; others stood beside those who did. They refused to make another Christian's disgrace a reason to keep their distance. Their compassion was stronger than their desire to remain unnoticed. That is a searching measure of our own readiness for persecution. We may imagine ourselves standing bravely for Christ while quietly avoiding people whose faithfulness could make association with them costly.

Bunyan rejected the deliberate pursuit of trouble, yet prayed, "if godliness will expose me to them, the Lord God make me more godly still".[16] His desire was that suffering should not be allowed to set a ceiling upon obedience. When faithfulness brings trouble, the answer is deeper faithfulness, supplied by the Lord whose cause we serve.

Revelation 14:12 (NKJV) identifies the saints by their endurance and by this description: "those who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus."[17] The surrounding warning concerns worship of the beast. The saints do not preserve their allegiance by merely disliking evil. They continue obeying God and holding to Jesus when false worship demands submission.

This is end-times watchfulness with its hands at work. The believer remains alert to opportunities for obedience while others urge him to think only of survival. What good have you stopped doing because obedience became costly?

5. Trust Christ When Obedience Costs What You Cannot Afford to Lose

Faithfulness is continuing to obey; faith rests in Christ who enables us to continue. That distinction becomes urgent when obedience threatens something we feel unable to lose. A command tells us what is right. Faith receives the Lord who gives us strength to do it.

Imagine a believer whose honesty has endangered his livelihood. He knows the right answer, but he also knows the amount due at the end of the month. Simply telling him to try harder leaves his deepest fear untouched. He needs to bring that fear before the living God, receive His promise, and ask for grace to obey without seeing how every need will be met.

The believers in Hebrews faced the loss of possessions. Their confidence rested upon a better inheritance that would endure. The writer then urges them to continue in that same faith.

> Hebrews 10:35–39 (KJV): "Cast not away therefore your confidence, which hath great recompence of reward. For ye have need of patience, that, after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise. For yet a little while, and he that shall come will come, and will not tarry. Now the just shall live by faith: but if any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him. But we are not of them who draw back unto perdition; but of them that believe to the saving of the soul."[18]

Their threatened possessions were visible. Their lasting inheritance was not. Faith enabled them to treat God's promise as more certain than the security their opponents could take away. The coming Lord had not ceased to be trustworthy because obedience had become expensive.

Moses faced a choice that exposed the same difference between what could be seen and what God had promised.

> Hebrews 11:24–27 (KJV): "By faith Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter; Choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; Esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt: for he had respect unto the recompence of the reward. By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king: for he endured, as seeing him who is invisible."[19]

Moses refused, chose, valued, and endured. Faith acted through those decisions. He could reckon the reproach of Christ above Egypt's treasures because he looked toward God's reward. The visible wealth was real, but it could not last. The invisible God was more real still, and His promise would not fail.

As end-times persecution threatens employment, reputation,

freedom, and life, we will need that same settled judgment. Faith must become more than our explanation of how we were converted. We must depend upon Christ in the decision before us now. We must believe that His favor outweighs human approval, His inheritance outlasts our property, and His keeping power reaches beyond the threats we cannot overcome ourselves.

C. H. Spurgeon urged, "Be willing to be a loser for Christ, and so prove thou art his genuine follower."[20] He was contrasting present loss with eternal gain. We must not turn that hope into a promise that every earthly loss will soon be restored. Our confidence rests in Christ Himself and in what He has actually promised.

Peter tells suffering believers where their security lies.

> 1 Peter 1:4–7 (KJV): "To an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you, Who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. Wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations: That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ".[21]

God keeps the inheritance, and God keeps His people through faith. Our task is not to generate enough inner strength to secure ourselves. We depend upon His power, receive His Word, and continue trusting the Savior we have not yet seen. The tested believer can grieve over a genuine loss while still rejoicing in a salvation that loss cannot destroy.

When obedience becomes costly, which promise of Christ will govern your next decision? Name it. Read it in its context. Bring the threatened loss before Him in prayer. Faith grows practical when His promise begins to govern what fear has been governing.

6. Wait for Christ without Setting Him a Deadline

The first act of courage may be followed by a long season of weariness. We refuse the compromise, endure the loss, and expect relief to follow. When it does not, another temptation appears: perhaps we have been faithful long enough.

Suffering can then become an unspoken bargain. We will continue obeying if God changes the circumstances by a date we have quietly

chosen. When that date passes, disappointment hardens into accusation. The heart begins to treat His delay as permission to withdraw.

James gives us the farmer's patience. The seed has been planted, but the farmer cannot command the rain or hurry the harvest. He continues attending to what is his to do while waiting for what only God can give. End-times readiness requires this patience because we know the Lord will come without knowing the hour at which He will end our waiting.

> James 5:10–11 (KJV): "Take, my brethren, the prophets, who have spoken in the name of the Lord, for an example of suffering affliction, and of patience. Behold, we count them happy which endure. Ye have heard of the patience of Job, and have seen the end of the Lord; that the Lord is very pitiful, and of tender mercy."[22]

The older word pitiful here means deeply compassionate. James does not leave the weary believer staring at a calendar. He directs him toward the character of God. The Lord who calls us to endure is compassionate; His purposes do not become cruel because we cannot yet see their outcome.

We may ask Him to shorten the trial. We may seek lawful relief and receive help from His people. But we must not make obedience conditional upon receiving the answer we prefer. Christ's command remains true on the morning after our hoped-for deliverance fails to arrive.

Hebrews directs exhausted believers toward the Savior who endured before them.

> Hebrews 12:2–3 (KJV): "Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God. For consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds."[23]

Consider Him. Give sustained attention to His endurance, His finished work, and His present glory. He knows the hostility of sinners. He bore the cross and now reigns at the Father's right hand. The Lord we await has already passed through suffering to victory; His people are not waiting for someone whose power or compassion remains untested.

This is how hope strengthens watchfulness during prolonged trouble. We return to Christ when our attention has become trapped within the trial. We remember His promise when exhaustion tells us that nothing will change. We ask for today's grace and take today's obedient step. We do not need to know how many difficult days remain before we can be faithful in this one.

Questions for Further Study

1. Read James 5:1–11. How does the account of oppression in verses 1–6 help explain the commands in verses 7–11? What does Christ's coming require believers to guard within themselves?
2. In Matthew 10:28–33, how do the fear of God and the Father's care work together to strengthen courage? What would be missing if we taught only one of those truths?
3. Compare 1 Peter 2:21–23 with Romans 12:19–21. How does entrusting judgment to God free a believer to refuse revenge and continue doing good?
4. Read James 5:9, Hebrews 10:24–25, and Hebrews 12:14–15. Why does pressure make mutual care more urgent? What conduct could weaken a congregation from within while it faces hostility from outside?
5. Study Hebrews 10:32–39, Hebrews 11:24–27, and 1 Peter 1:3–9. What did faith enable these believers to value, refuse, and endure? How do these passages connect present loss with Christ's appearing and the promised inheritance?
6. Read James 5:7–11 alongside Hebrews 12:2–3. What distinguishes patient endurance from passive resignation? How does looking to Christ sustain active obedience during a long trial?

Practical Applications

1. Identify the compromise a present fear is urging you to make.

Write down the specific duty, the threatened loss, and the Scripture that governs your response. Bring the matter to Christ in prayer and, where needed, to a faithful pastor or mature believer. Decide upon the next obedient step without waiting for every consequence to become clear. The aim is to obey Christ thoughtfully, not to create needless conflict. Matthew 10:28–33; Acts 5:29.

2. Protect one relationship that pressure has begun to damage.

Examine how you have spoken to or about a fellow believer during your trial. If you have spread suspicion, withheld necessary kindness, or wounded someone with resentment, confess the specific wrong and seek reconciliation. Ask how you can help that person remain faithful. The approaching Day makes this repair urgent. James 5:9; Hebrews 10:24–25; 12:14–15.

3. Pair one costly duty with one promise you will trust.

Choose a good work you are tempted to abandon because it has become difficult. Identify a promise that truly addresses your need, and pray over it before taking the next step. At the end of the week, examine whether you obeyed and where you needed help, rather than measuring God's faithfulness by whether the pressure disappeared. 1 Peter 4:19; Hebrews 10:35–39; 1 Peter 1:3–9.

Chapter Axioms

1. The cost of obedience does not cancel the authority of Christ. Acts 5:29; Matthew 10:28–33.
2. The Father's care gives us reason to resist the fear of those who threaten us. Matthew 10:29–31.
3. Persecution threatens the soul when it persuades the believer to justify disobedience. Matthew 24:9–13; Hebrews 10:35–39.
4. Trusting God's judgment frees us to refuse personal revenge. 1 Peter 2:21–23; Romans 12:19–21.
5. Suffering does not excuse bitterness toward fellow believers. James 5:9; Hebrews 12:14–15.
6. As Christ's Day approaches, mutual encouragement becomes more urgent. Hebrews 10:24–25.
7. We entrust our souls to God while continuing to do good. 1 Peter 4:19; Revelation 14:12.
8. Faithfulness continues in obedience because faith depends upon Christ. Hebrews 10:35–39; 12:2–3.
9. A lasting inheritance gives believers reason to endure temporary loss. Hebrews 10:34; 1 Peter 1:3–9.
10. God preserves His people through faith, not apart from their continuing trust in Him. 1 Peter 1:5; Hebrews 10:39.
11. Patient endurance leaves the timing with God while attending to present duty. James 5:7–11; Hebrews 10:36–37.

12. The Savior who endured the cross supplies the hope that keeps His weary people from giving up. Hebrews 12:2–3.

Keep Your Eyes on the Savior Who Will Come

Dear believer, the Lord has not asked you to face the coming darkness with confidence in your own toughness. He calls you to Himself. Your courage may tremble; His faithfulness does not. Bring Him the fear you have been hiding, the resentment you have been feeding, and the duty you have been postponing. His grace is sufficient for real people facing real losses.

The Christ who bore our sins now leads us in righteousness. Peter joins those truths rather than separating them.

> 1 Peter 2:24 (KJV): "Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed."[24]

He gave Himself to rescue us from the sin that persecution now tempts us to embrace. We cannot make peace with that sin while claiming to prepare for His return. Come to Him for cleansing where you have yielded and for strength where obedience still lies before you. His mercy gives the fallen believer reason to repent; His lordship gives the restored believer a path to follow.

The next faithful step may be quiet. Tell the truth. Refuse the retaliation. Stand beside the frightened believer. Resume the good you have neglected. Trust Christ with what you cannot protect, and continue waiting for Him. When pressure asks you to loosen your hold upon His Word, what will your next decision say about the Savior you expect to meet?

The Gospel Principle and Doctrine of the Cost of Discipleship

Fifteen Truths for Following Christ as His Day Approaches

Jesus never concealed the cost of following Him. He spoke of a cross, divided households, surrendered possessions, hatred, and death. He also promised His presence, sustaining grace, resurrection, and everlasting life. End-times watchfulness requires us to receive both sides of His teaching: the cost is real, and Christ is worth it.

1. Salvation is God's free gift, but the saved life belongs to Christ.

We do not purchase forgiveness by suffering. Christ has paid for our redemption, and His grace produces a people willing to obey Him. A gospel that offers escape from judgment while leaving us free to reject His authority misrepresents the Savior. As pressure increases, we must remember whose we are before calculating what obedience might cost.

> Titus 2:14 (KJV): "Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works."

Scripture: Ephesians 2:8–10; Titus 2:11–14; 1 Corinthians 6:19–20.

2. Count the cost before enthusiasm is tested by trouble.

Jesus tells the would-be disciple to "count the cost" (Luke 14:28, NKJV). Admiring Him in a welcoming crowd does not settle whether we will follow Him into rejection. His warning prepares us for thoughtful allegiance, not a hurried profession built upon pleasant expectations. Before hostility reaches your door, consider what your confession means for your ambitions, relationships, possessions, and safety. The cost should drive you to His grace, not toward a cheaper version of Christianity.

Scripture: Luke 14:25–33; Matthew 13:20–21; Luke 21:12–19.

3. Deny yourself the right to overrule Christ.

Christ requires the disciple to "deny himself" (Mark 8:34, NKJV). Self-denial reaches deeper than surrendering an occasional pleasure. We relinquish our claim to make comfort, reputation, or personal desire the final judge of duty. End-times pressure will repeatedly offer reasons why obedience should become optional. The watchful believer must recognize who is being asked to surrender authority: Christ, or self. Which one governs when their demands conflict?

Scripture: Mark 8:34–38; Romans 12:1–2; 2 Corinthians 5:14–15.

4. Take up the cross daily, before the final crisis arrives.

Jesus commands His follower to "take up his cross daily" (Luke 9:23, NKJV). The cross speaks of shame, rejection, and death, not merely the inconveniences everyone experiences. Daily discipleship means accepting the consequences of belonging to the crucified Lord. We must not postpone surrendered obedience until persecution

becomes dramatic. The habits we cultivate now either prepare us to follow Christ under pressure or train us to excuse retreat.

Scripture: Luke 9:22–26; 1 Peter 2:21–24; Galatians 6:14.

5. Love Christ above even the people dearest to you.

Our love for family must remain under Christ's authority. When a loved one demands that we abandon His truth, their displeasure cannot become our permission to disobey. Jesus warned that betrayal could come from within the household. Prepare your heart to love relatives faithfully without giving them the place that belongs to the Lord.

> Matthew 10:37 (KJV): "He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me."

Scripture: Matthew 10:35–39; Luke 21:16–17; Ephesians 6:1–4.

6. Hold every possession under Christ's authority.

Jesus refuses discipleship on terms that reserve our possessions from His claim. We must use what we have as His stewards and be willing to lose it rather than deny Him. When economic pressure rewards compromise, a cherished possession can become the price offered for our obedience. Decide now that nothing you own has the right to decide whom you worship.

> Luke 14:33 (KJV): "So likewise, whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple."

Scripture: Luke 14:33; Hebrews 10:32–34; Revelation 13:16–17; 14:9–12.

7. Expect rejection because you belong to the rejected Savior.

Christ did not promise His followers a welcome from the world that hated Him. Opposition for His name must therefore be understood within our relationship to Him, not automatically treated as evidence that obedience has failed. This becomes crucial as the hatred described in Matthew 24 intensifies. We must not revise His message merely to recover the acceptance He warned we could lose.

John 15:20 (KJV): "Remember the word that I said unto you,

> The servant is not greater than his lord. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you; if they have kept my saying, they will keep yours also."
>
> Scripture: John 15:18–21; Matthew 24:9; 1 Peter 4:14–16.

8. Confess Christ when silence would protect your reputation.

The desire to remain respectable can become a temptation to conceal our allegiance. Jesus connects being ashamed of Him and His words with His own coming in glory. We cannot prepare to welcome Him while treating identification with Him as an embarrassment. When public hostility makes confession costly, speak truthfully and wisely, remembering whose acknowledgment will matter at the last.

> Matthew 10:32–33 (KJV): "Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven. But whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in heaven."
>
> Scripture: Matthew 10:32–33; Mark 8:38; 2 Timothy 1:8.

9. Leave sinful pleasures even when former companions turn against you.

Following Christ requires us to leave the pleasures He condemns. Peter describes people who malign believers because they no longer join their former excesses. As lawlessness spreads, refusing sin may bring ridicule, exclusion, or accusation. Watchfulness requires a settled answer before the invitation arrives: acceptance purchased by returning to sin would cost us the obedience Christ requires.

> 1 Peter 4:2 (KJV): "That he no longer should live the rest of his time in the flesh to the lusts of men, but to the will of God."
>
> Scripture: 1 Peter 4:1–5; Titus 2:11–13; Matthew 24:12–13.

10. Trust Christ's promises when you cannot protect the outcome.

Costly obedience requires living faith. Moses could turn from Egypt's treasures because he valued God's reward more highly; believers in Hebrews could endure confiscation because they possessed a lasting inheritance. When end-times pressure threatens what we cannot replace, faith rests in the Lord whose promise cannot be taken

away. We obey because He is trustworthy, not because we can guarantee a painless result.

> Hebrews 10:35–36 (KJV): "Cast not away therefore your confidence, which hath great recompence of reward. For ye have need of patience, that, after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise."

Scripture: Hebrews 10:34–39; Hebrews 11:24–27; 1 Peter 1:3–9.

11. Surrender revenge without surrendering righteousness.

Discipleship costs us the supposed right to repay cruelty with cruelty. Christ commands love for enemies, and His own suffering shows us how to entrust judgment to God. As persecution intensifies, bitterness may feel like courage. Watch your heart: your confession of Christ must govern how you treat the people who oppose Him. Seek truthful protection where needed, but leave vengeance with the righteous Judge.

> Romans 12:19 (KJV): "Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord."

Scripture: Matthew 5:44–45; Romans 12:19–21; 1 Peter 2:21–23; Acts 22:25.

12. Share the burdens of believers whose suffering could become yours.

Love for Christ binds us to people the world may despise. The Hebrews stood beside publicly mistreated believers rather than protecting themselves through distance. End-times fellowship will require more than sympathy expressed from safety. It may require our time, possessions, reputation, and willingness to be identified with the threatened church. Whose burden are you avoiding because helping might cost you something?

> Hebrews 13:3 (KJV): "Remember them that are in bonds, as bound with them; and them which suffer adversity, as being yourselves also in the body."

Scripture: Hebrews 10:24–25, 32–34; Hebrews 13:3; 1 John 3:16–18.

13. Continue following when the trial outlasts your expectations.

An earnest beginning does not replace perseverance. Jesus describes hatred, betrayal, and cooling love, then identifies the one who "endures to the end" (Matthew 24:13, NKJV). We must not turn years of service into permission to abandon present obedience. When relief is delayed, return to Christ's promises and receive strength for the next faithful step. His coming fixes the direction of our hope; it does not place the timing under our control.

Scripture: Matthew 24:9–13; Hebrews 10:35–39; James 5:7–11.

14. Be willing to lose your life rather than forsake the Lord of life.

Christ commands, "Be faithful until death" (Revelation 2:10, NKJV). The prospect of martyrdom exposes the deepest demand of discipleship: our earthly survival cannot become the condition upon which we obey. Revelation describes believers overcoming through the Lamb's blood and their testimony, refusing to love life above allegiance to Him. We do not seek death. We seek faithfulness to the Savior whose resurrection has broken death's final claim upon His people.

> Revelation 12:11 (KJV): "And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony; and they loved not their lives unto the death."

Scripture: Revelation 2:10–11; Revelation 12:11; Mark 8:35; Philippians 1:20–23.

15. Measure the cost in the light of Christ and everlasting glory.

Discipleship can strip away real earthly goods, but it cannot make Christ a poor exchange. Paul counted his former gains as loss because knowing the Savior surpassed them. As the final troubles threaten what passes away, keep the promised glory before you. The question is not whether obedience costs something precious. It is whether anything we surrender can outweigh the Lord we gain.

> 2 Corinthians 4:17–18 (KJV): "For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things

which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal."

Scripture: Philippians 3:7–11, 20–21; 2 Corinthians 4:16–18; Matthew 5:10–12.

The Savior who calls us to bear the cost first bore our sins. His grace supplies what our resolve cannot. What are you still treating as too precious to surrender if faithfulness to Christ requires it?

Transition to Chapter 14

Standing firm keeps persecution from turning us away from Christ. Yet our duty toward those who oppose us reaches further than refusing their demands. They too must face the Lord whose coming we await. We must learn to speak of His mercy without surrendering His truth, and to offer the gospel to people whose hostility may tempt us to remain silent. The next chapter turns to that urgent responsibility: bearing witness while mercy is still offered.

Notes

1. John Flavel, A Saint Indeed, "Eleventh Season: How a Christian May Keep His Heart from Relapsing under Sufferings," question 2, p. 230 in the CCEL edition. The section begins with Matthew 24:8–10. https://www.ccel.org/ccel/flavel/saintindeed.v.iii.xi.html
2. Matthew 24:9–13. The paragraph summarizes the sequence of persecution, stumbling, betrayal, deception, lawlessness, cooling love, and endurance in Christ's discourse.
3. James 5:7–8, KJV. Read with James 5:1–6 for the preceding denunciation of oppression.
4. Matthew 10:28–31, KJV. Verses 32–33 continue with confessing or denying Christ before men.
5. Acts 5:27–32, especially verse 29. The council's prohibition directly conflicts with the apostles' commission to bear witness to Christ.
6. James 5:8, NKJV, excerpt.
7. 1 Peter 2:21–23, KJV. The quotation ends at verse 23; verse 24 explains Christ's sin-bearing work.
8. Romans 12:19–21, KJV.
9. John Bunyan, Seasonable Counsel, or Advice to Sufferers (1684), "To the Christian Reader." Both excerpts are from Bunyan's own address, not George Offor's introductory advertisement. The later excerpt occurs within a sentence that first rejects deliberately running into suffering. https://www.biblebb.com/files/bunyan/sufferers.htm
10. Acts 22:25–29. Paul appeals to his Roman citizenship before an unlawful scourging.
11. James 5:9, KJV.
12. Hebrews 10:24–25, KJV.
13. Hebrews 12:14–15, KJV. Compare the poisonous-root image in Deuteronomy 29:18–19; the warning concerns corrupting departure from God, not merely an unpleasant mood.
14. 1 Peter 4:19, KJV.
15. Hebrews 10:32–34, KJV. The quotation preserves the KJV reading of verse 34.
16. Bunyan, Seasonable Counsel, "To the Christian Reader"; see note 9.
17. Revelation 14:12, NKJV, excerpt. Read with Revelation 14:9–13 for its context of the beast, false worship, judgment, and the saints' endurance.
18. Hebrews 10:35–39, KJV.
19. Hebrews 11:24–27, KJV.
20. C. H. Spurgeon, "A Visit to the Harvest Field," sermon no. 1025, Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit, vol. 17 (1871), on James 5:7–8, section I. https://www.spurgeon.org/sermons/a-visit-to-the-harvest-field
21. 1 Peter 1:4–7, KJV. Verses 3 and 8–9 connect the inheritance with Christ's resurrection, love for the unseen Savior, believing, joy, and salvation.
22. James 5:10–11, KJV.
23. Hebrews 12:2–3, KJV.
24. 1 Peter 2:24, KJV.

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CHAPTER 14

Bear Witness While Mercy Is Offered

Speaking of Christ While We Await His Coming

"Here are souls perishing, and something shall be done."

J. C. Ryle, Practical Religion[1]

The neighbor who laughs at your faith will stand before Christ. So will the relative who changes the subject whenever you mention Him, the colleague who thinks Christians are dangerous, and the friend who intends to think about eternity when life settles down. Their opinions may trouble us. Their souls should trouble us more.

As the world becomes more hostile, we can begin to see unbelieving people mainly as threats. We notice what they oppose, fear what they may do, and discuss how much worse things could become. All the while, a terrible change can pass unnoticed in our own hearts: we stop wanting to reach the people we have learned to fear.

That is a failure of watchfulness. We may defend the truth while losing the compassion that should carry it to others. We may prepare to suffer for Christ while neglecting to speak of Christ. The Lord has not told His church to spend the remaining days merely protecting itself. He has sent us to make disciples, and He has promised to remain with us to the end of the age.[2]

The previous chapter asked how we will stand when faithfulness becomes costly. This chapter asks what we will do for those who still need the Savior. Some may welcome our words; others may reject

them. Neither response changes the message entrusted to us. Christ died and rose again. Sinners must repent and believe. The Judge is coming, and mercy is still being offered.

1. See the Lord's Patience as an Opportunity to Speak

Peter places the coming Day and the patience of God before us together. Scoffers treat the passing years as evidence that Christ will never return. Peter teaches believers to read those years differently. God has not forgotten His promise. His patience has a saving purpose.

Second Peter 3:15 (NKJV) tells us to "consider that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation".[3] The same Lord who will bring judgment is patiently gathering His people. His delay is not empty time. The gospel is being preached, sinners are being called to repentance, and people who once despised Christ are learning to love Him.

That changes the way we look at another ordinary day. The person who has refused to listen is still alive to hear. The conversation we feared is still possible. We must not use God's patience to excuse our own postponement.

Peter also insists that the Day will come. Its certainty removes the excuse for indifference; its unknown date removes the excuse for calculating how long we can put off obedience. We cannot promise anyone another year, another month, or another clear opportunity to hear the truth. We can speak faithfully while the opportunity is before us.

Paul presses the present hour upon his readers: "Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation" (2 Corinthians 6:2, NKJV).[4] The force of that word now must reach our witness as well as the sinner's response. A Christian can acknowledge the urgency of repentance and still speak as though there were no urgency in helping anyone understand it.

Preaching on God's patience in this very passage, Spurgeon urged, "God calls upon us, until the world is utterly destroyed with fire, to go on saving men with all our might and main."[5] The certainty of the end gives urgency to the work that remains. We should be using the time His patience allows.

Imagine a person who sees smoke entering a neighbor's house. He may not know how far the fire has spread or how many minutes remain. That uncertainty will not persuade him to keep the warning to himself. He knocks because the danger is real and the neighbor matters. Our knowledge of coming judgment should produce a

concern at least as serious, joined to the wonderful news that Christ receives sinners who come to Him.

This concern has names and faces. Your brother is not merely an example of unbelief. Your daughter is not simply evidence of the times. The man who mocks the church is more than an argument to be defeated. Each is a person who must answer to God.

Whom have you learned to worry about without speaking to or praying for? Bring that person before the Lord. Ask for a fitting opportunity, wisdom to recognize it, and courage to use it. The approaching Day should deepen our concern for particular people, not bury them beneath our concern about world events.

2. Know the Gospel You Are Called to Proclaim

We cannot guard a message we barely understand. Nor can we explain the cross clearly if we know only that Jesus died, without knowing what His death accomplished. End-times watchfulness requires more than recognizing that false teachers exist. We must know the truth well enough to recognize what they remove, distort, or replace.

Jesus warns of false christs and false prophets in Matthew 24:24. Paul warns the Corinthians about receiving a different Jesus and a different gospel in 2 Corinthians 11:3–4.[6] A familiar name does not guarantee a faithful message. Teaching may speak warmly about Jesus while leaving sinners without an answer to their guilt. The doctrines of the cross show us why His death is the heart of our hope.

Thomas Watson warned, "Justification is the very hinge and pillar of Christianity. An error about justification is dangerous, like a defect in a foundation."[7] These doctrines determine what we tell a guilty person to trust. They deserve patient study because souls need a sure foundation, especially when persuasive teachers offer a different gospel.

Substitution means that Christ took the place of sinners.

The eternal Son truly became man, yet remained without sin. He did not die for wrongdoing of His own. He willingly bore the judgment deserved by His people. First Peter 2:24 says that He "bore our sins in His own body on the tree" (NKJV). Isaiah 53:5 explains that He was wounded for our transgressions and bruised for our iniquities.[8] Our sin was the reason for His suffering. His innocence made Him the spotless sacrifice we could never provide for ourselves.

This is more than an inspiring example of courage. Christ endured what guilty people deserved so that those who trust Him would not

bear their condemnation. Remove His substitution, and the sinner still has his guilt with no sufficient sacrifice to answer for it.

Imputation means that God reckons our sin to Christ and Christ's righteousness to those who believe in Him.

Second Corinthians 5:21 does not mean that the holy Savior became morally corrupt. He remained sinless while bearing responsibility for the sins laid upon Him. Nor does it mean that believers are accepted because they have already become sinless. Romans 4:6 speaks of the person to whom "God imputes righteousness apart from works" (NKJV).[9] God counts the believer righteous in Christ. Our acceptance rests upon the Savior's righteousness, not upon how far our character has improved.

Christ's active obedience means His perfect fulfillment of God's law on our behalf throughout His life. His passive obedience means His willing endurance of suffering and the penalty of sin, culminating in the cross. Philippians 2:8 says He became "obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross" (NKJV). These are two aspects of His one obedient life, not separate stages. Passive does not mean inactive: He willingly obeyed as He suffered.[10]

Christ both fulfilled the obedience we owed and bore the judgment we deserved. Romans 5:19 declares that by "one Man's obedience many will be made righteous" (NKJV). His righteousness is counted as ours through faith, not earned by our performance.

This truth protects the anxious conscience and guards the gospel we proclaim. We must not invite people to trust Christ and then send them back to their own performance for the basis of God's acceptance. In a time of spiritual confusion, the church must be clear about whose righteousness can stand before His judgment.

Propitiation means that Christ's sacrifice satisfied God's righteous judgment against sin.

God does not forgive by pretending that evil is harmless. His holiness is not relaxed at the cross. His justice is satisfied there. The Father sent the Son in love, and the Son willingly gave Himself; the sacrifice is God's own gracious provision for sinners.

> Romans 3:24–26 (KJV): "Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God; To declare, I say, at this time

his righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus."[11]

Notice the words just and justifier. God remains righteous while declaring the believer righteous in Christ. The cross does not ask us to choose between His justice and His mercy. It shows how He saves sinners without ceasing to be holy. As the final judgment approaches, this truth gives our warning its seriousness and our invitation its hope.

Redemption means that Christ purchased our release at the cost of His life.

Ephesians 1:7 declares, "In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins" (NKJV). Galatians 3:13 explains that Christ redeemed us from the law's curse by becoming a curse for us.[12] We were not released because the debt was imaginary or because our later obedience paid it. Our deliverance cost the Savior His blood. The gospel therefore directs us away from attempts to purchase acceptance and toward the Redeemer who has paid the price.

Reconciliation means that Christ brings sinners into peace with God.

Sin is not merely a personal weakness. It sets us against our Maker. Romans 5:10 speaks of enemies being reconciled to God through His Son's death. First Peter 3:18 explains the purpose of Christ's suffering in these words: "that He might bring us to God" (NKJV).[13] The gospel offers more than relief from frightening events. Through Christ, enemies are welcomed into fellowship with the God they have offended.

Justification means that God declares the believer righteous on the basis of Christ's righteousness, not the believer's merit.

The death of Christ does not automatically place every person in a right standing with God regardless of unbelief. Scripture calls us to receive Christ through faith. Romans 4:5 contrasts working for acceptance with believing in the God who justifies the ungodly. Romans 5:1 declares, "having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (NKJV).[14] Faith does not pay for forgiveness. It rests upon the Savior who accomplished our redemption.

Second Corinthians 5:21 holds together Christ's sinlessness, His bearing sin for us, and our righteousness in Him. Calvin draws the conclusion: "there is no return to favor with God, except what is founded on the sacrifice of Christ alone".[15] A sinner's confidence belongs there, not in the strength of his resolutions, the size of his gifts, or the length of his religious service.

Sanctification means that Christ sets His people apart for God and makes them holy.

Titus 2:14 (KJV) describes the Savior as the One "Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works."[16] Peculiar here means a people belonging especially to Him. The cross purchases more than release from punishment. Christ claims His people and cleanses them for His service.

Hebrews 10:10 grounds our being set apart in the once-for-all offering of Christ's body. Verse 14 joins the sufficiency of that offering to the sanctification of His people. Justification is God's declaration that we are righteous in Christ; sanctification includes His work of making our actual lives holy. We must distinguish them without separating them. We are not justified because our progress deserves acceptance, and those Christ saves are not left content to serve sin.[17]

This is essential to end-times witness. As lawlessness spreads, a message that offers safety while leaving people at peace with deliberate rebellion misrepresents the Savior. First Peter 2:24 connects His bearing our sins with our dying to sins and living for righteousness. The Christ we proclaim both forgives and changes the people who come to Him.

These truths belong to the living gospel. The Christ who died has risen. First Corinthians 15:17 says that without His resurrection our faith would be futile and we would remain in our sins. He now commands repentance and faith, as Mark 1:15 declares.[18] We must turn from sin and trust Him. We do not bring repentance as a payment or faith as a personal achievement. We come to a sufficient Savior because we cannot save ourselves.

Learn these truths until you can explain them without hiding behind the terms. What did Christ bear? What did He purchase? How can a guilty person have peace with a holy God? Clear answers will strengthen your own faith and help you recognize a counterfeit gospel. When deception grows and judgment draws near, the church must know exactly why the cross is good news.

3. Tell Them about Christ, Not Merely about Coming Trouble

Knowing the gospel prepares us to explain it, but that explanation must actually reach another person. We can discuss the danger around us at length while leaving the person beside us unsure of what Christ

has done. He may become frightened about the future without understanding how a guilty sinner can be forgiven.

We must therefore bring the truths we have learned into plain conversation. Paul identifies the heart of his message in 1 Corinthians 15:3–4: Christ died for our sins, was buried, and rose again according to the Scriptures. Explain what those words mean. Do not assume that the person listening understands sin, forgiveness, or faith simply because the words are familiar.[19]

Acts 17 joins that call to the coming judgment.

> Acts 17:30–31 (KJV): "And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent: Because he hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead."[20]

The resurrection is not an interesting detail added to a warning about the future. It identifies the living Lord before whom the world will answer. We must help people understand their need of Him. Their deepest danger is not that they may suffer in a troubled world. It is that they may face a holy God with their sins unforgiven.

Writing to William Bull about a preacher, John Newton gave this counsel: "it is not worth while to preach, unless we preach Jesus and him crucified."[21] The same focus should govern our personal witness. We may discuss many things on the way to the gospel, but we must not stop before we reach Christ and what He has done for sinners.

Listen for the burden beneath the person's words. Someone who thinks he is too wicked to be forgiven needs to hear what the sufficiency of Christ means. Someone who trusts his good intentions needs to understand why righteousness must come from Christ rather than himself. Second Corinthians 5:21 supplies the truth in both cases. We do not change the gospel to fit the person. We explain the same gospel carefully enough to address the misunderstanding before us.[22]

Paul's concern did not spring from an appetite for arguments. The NKJV gives his motive plainly: "the love of Christ compels us" (2 Corinthians 5:14).[23] The Savior's love had taken hold of him. He could no longer regard his life as something to spend entirely upon himself.

Commenting on this passage, John Calvin writes, "we owe to Christ our life and death, because he has wholly bound us to himself".[24] That

belonging reaches our speech. The mouth Christ redeemed is not ours to close whenever His name becomes unwelcome.

This gives end-times witness its proper center. We do not offer ourselves as experts who can explain every event. We speak as forgiven sinners who know the Savior. We tell the truth about judgment because He told it, and we offer the hope of reconciliation because He has provided it. If someone remembers your warnings but cannot explain what you believe about Christ, something essential has been left unsaid.

4. Pray for an Open Door, Then Use It

Paul connects watchfulness directly to the spread of the gospel. He asks believers to persevere in prayer, remain alert, and pray for an opportunity to speak of Christ. His own imprisonment does not narrow his concern to escape. He wants the Word to go forward.

> Colossians 4:2–4 (KJV): "Continue in prayer, and watch in the same with thanksgiving; Withal praying also for us, that God would open unto us a door of utterance, to speak the mystery of Christ, for which I am also in bonds: That I may make it manifest, as I ought to speak."[25]

Notice the request. Paul needs an open door, and he needs to speak clearly when it opens. Those are still fitting prayers for a watchful Christian. We need God to provide opportunities and help us recognize them. We also need Him to deliver us from confused explanations, unnecessary arguments, and the fear that makes us say everything except what matters most.

Fear of man can silence us before anyone objects. We imagine the sneer, the awkward pause, or the damaged relationship, and another person's approval begins to govern our obedience. Proverbs 29:25 warns, "The fear of man brings a snare" (NKJV). Whose approval is deciding whether you speak about Christ? As end-times hostility grows, trust the Lord who sends you and cares for you more than you trust the safety of silence. Threatened believers in Acts 4 prayed that "with all boldness they may speak Your word" (NKJV), and the Holy Spirit strengthened them to speak. Ask Him for that help, and take the next faithful opportunity even if your voice trembles. Have you given more thought to avoiding an awkward conversation than to helping this person understand the Savior?[26]

E. M. Bounds writes of gospel laborers, "Prayer opens wide their

doors of access, gives holy aptness to enter, and holy boldness, firmness, and fruitage."[27] He joins the opportunity to speak with the readiness and courage to use it. Ask God for both.

A door may open through an honest question, a shared sorrow, a conversation about death, or someone's surprise at the hope we express. We should listen carefully enough to understand the person before us. A rehearsed speech that ignores his question is not the same as a clear answer that addresses it.

Paul carries the connection into ordinary conduct. Colossians 4:5–6 instructs believers to act wisely toward outsiders, make good use of their opportunities, and speak graciously. Watchful prayer prepares us for thoughtful conversation. It does not replace it.[28]

Consider a believer who spends an hour each evening following reports of hostility toward Christians. He can describe the danger in detail, yet has put off speaking with his unbelieving brother for months. He has told himself that the right moment has not arrived. Meanwhile, ordinary visits, questions, and shared concerns have come and gone. His attention to the times has grown while his attention to his brother has diminished.

The remedy is not a louder warning about the world. It is repentance over a neglected duty, renewed prayer, and a loving willingness to speak. A simple question may begin the conversation: Have you thought about what Christ's resurrection means for you? The aim is not to force a speech upon someone. It is to stop using discomfort as a reason for perpetual silence.

Spurgeon would not tolerate a situation in which "Christ should be unknown through our silence, and sinners unwarned through our negligence".[29] His words search the excuses we can make sound so reasonable. We may not know how someone will respond, but we know the Lord has entrusted His truth to His people.

Romans 10:14 asks how people will believe in the One of whom they have not heard. The church sends and supports gospel preachers because hearing matters. That same truth should move us to invite people under faithful preaching, share a suitable gospel book, and explain our hope when conversation allows.[30] As the Day approaches, prayerful alertness should make us more ready to speak, not merely more ready to discuss the danger.

5. Do Not Let Their Hostility Kill Your Compassion

Jesus describes hatred, betrayal, deception, and growing lawlessness in

Matthew 24. He warns that "the love of many will grow cold" (verse 12, NKJV). In the same passage He declares that the gospel will be proclaimed among the nations before the end.[31] Hostility and gospel witness stand together in His teaching. A hostile world is not a reason for the church to abandon its mission.

The connection searches our hearts. We may find it easier to defend ourselves against an unbeliever than to desire his salvation. His contempt feels immediate. His eternal danger seems distant. Soon we want the satisfaction of answering him sharply more than we want an opportunity to tell him about Christ.

Peter addresses believers who may suffer for righteousness and tells them how to answer.

> First Peter 3:15–16 (KJV): "But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear: Having a good conscience; that, whereas they speak evil of you, as of evildoers, they may be ashamed that falsely accuse your good conversation in Christ."[32]

The answer must be ready, but so must the heart giving it. Peter begins with the Lord's place within us. Christ must govern our response before we open our mouths. Then the hope we explain and the manner in which we explain it belong together.

Spurgeon states the matter simply: "Love is the true way of soul-winning".[33] Such love does not make us conceal sin or soften Christ's claims. It keeps us from treating a person's condemnation as a victory. We speak truth because we want him delivered from the judgment we believe is coming.

Second Timothy 2:24–26 describes the Lord's servant as gentle, patient, and able to teach. Even correcting opponents is to be done with a view to their repentance and recovery from the devil's snare.[34] Their opposition is real, but their present condition is not a warrant to give up on them. God can grant repentance where we see only resistance.

John Newton wrote of an unconverted opponent that "he is a more proper object of your compassion than of your anger."[35] That judgment is worth remembering when hostility sharpens. The person may be wrong, offensive, and dangerous, yet still desperately in need of the mercy that reached us.

Paul himself is a striking reminder. First Timothy 1:13–16 recalls his blasphemy and persecution, then sets forth the mercy he received

as a display of Christ's patience. The former persecutor became a preacher of the faith he had tried to destroy.[36] We do not know which present opponent may yet become a brother.

Has anger at what people are doing silenced your concern for where they are going? Pray for the person whose words most provoke you. Ask the Lord to keep you truthful without making you cruel. The coldness Christ warned about must not be allowed to settle into our own witness while we point it out everywhere else.

6. Let Your Conduct Support the Gospel You Speak

People who resent the Christian message often watch the Christian messenger. They notice how we handle money, treat an inconvenient person, respond to criticism, and behave when we think no one important is looking. Our failures do not make the gospel false. They can, however, give people another excuse not to listen.

Peter understands this danger. He first urges believers to resist the desires that war against the soul, then addresses the life unbelievers can see.

> First Peter 2:12 (KJV): "Having your conversation honest among the Gentiles: that, whereas they speak against you as evildoers, they may by your good works, which they shall behold, glorify God in the day of visitation."[37]

Here conversation refers to conduct. Peter does not promise that honorable behavior will prevent accusation. He tells believers to live honorably while accusation is taking place. Their opponents must encounter a life that contradicts the charge.

This matters deeply in end-times watchfulness. When hostility intensifies, a believer may feel entitled to exaggerate, ridicule, or use a dishonest shortcut against those he regards as enemies. Such conduct damages the very witness he claims to defend. The Lord who commands us to stand for the truth also commands us to live truthfully.

Baxter warned ministers, "lest you unsay with your lives, what you say with your tongues".[38] His warning reaches every Christian's witness. We may speak of grace while refusing to forgive, speak of truth while shading the facts, or speak of Christ's compassion while ignoring a need we could meet. Our conduct then argues against our words.

Jesus tells His people to let their light shine so that others may see their good works and glorify their Father (Matthew 5:16). Titus

2:9–10 applies that principle even to the conduct of servants: honesty and faithfulness commend the teaching about God their Savior.[39] Ordinary obedience has a place in gospel witness. A returned overpayment, a kept promise, or patient help to a difficult neighbor can make the next conversation about Christ less easily dismissed.

Mercy must remain mercy. We do not help someone only while he seems likely to accept our beliefs. We serve because Christ commands love, and we speak because love must not conceal the truth. A person who refuses the gospel today may still need practical kindness tomorrow.

> Proverbs 11:30 (NKJV): "The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life, And he who wins souls is wise."[40]

The proverb describes the life-giving influence of righteousness and wisdom. That wisdom finds a powerful expression when believers bring the gospel to people who need Christ. We must want more than the satisfaction of winning an argument. We seek the person's eternal good. As the Day approaches, let your life bear fruit that helps others hear the truth, and let your words point them plainly to the Savior.

Spurgeon asks, "How can you serve the Lord with your lips if you do not serve him with your lives?"[41] The question reaches the habits that people see when our religious conversation ends. A watchful witness must remain faithful there too.

Examine the life that accompanies your words. Is there an apology you owe, a dishonest practice you must abandon, or a neglected duty that keeps undermining your testimony? Correcting it is part of watchfulness. We are waiting for a holy Lord, and we want the people around us to hear His gospel without having to climb over our hypocrisy.

7. Keep Appealing, and Trust God with the Result

Urgency can become distorted when we begin to think that another person's conversion depends upon our ability to produce an immediate response. We push harder, repeat ourselves without listening, and mistake pressure for spiritual power. Soon the person feels managed rather than loved.

Scripture gives us a better foundation. Paul describes planting and watering, then says, "but God gave the increase" (1 Corinthians 3:6, NKJV).[42] The labor matters, and the life comes from God. We are responsible to speak faithfully; we are not able to create a new heart.

When praying about establishing an orphan house, George Müller described his dependence this way: "I asked in submission to His will, and without fixing a time when He should answer my petition."[43] That same submission belongs in prayer for the lost. We should ask earnestly for their salvation without acting as though God must work according to our timetable.

That truth should strengthen patient effort. We can explain again when someone misunderstands, pray when words have been rejected, and remain kind when gratitude does not follow. We need not choose between urgent appeal and patient love. We can earnestly desire a person's salvation now without pretending that we control his response.

Paul's appeal remains direct: "be reconciled to God" (2 Corinthians 5:20, NKJV).[44] We should not bury that call beneath endless discussion. People need to know that the gospel addresses them. Christ calls them to repent and trust Him, not merely to admire Christian ideas or agree that the world is in trouble.

Jesus also gives urgency to the invitation through His parable of the great supper. When the first guests make excuses, the master sends his servant farther out.

> Luke 14:23 (KJV): "And the lord said unto the servant, Go out into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in, that my house may be filled."[45]

The servant must go to people who would not otherwise come. The force of the invitation calls for earnest persuasion, not coercion. We should explain, plead, and urge people to receive the mercy offered in Christ. A casual mention that leaves the hearer unaware of his danger does not express the weight of this appeal. The approaching end should send us toward neglected people with greater concern, not make us content to remain among those who already agree with us.

Ryle brings the present duty into focus: "Whatever you do must be done now."[46] Our opportunities belong to this life. The fact that we cannot count them is a reason to value them, not a reason to despair over them.

We must also remember who sends us. The risen Christ possesses all authority. His command to make disciples is joined to His promise of continuing presence.

> Matthew 28:18–20 (KJV): "And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth.

> Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen."[47]

Christ's authority gives the command its force. His church must go, make disciples, baptize them, and teach them to obey Him. We have not been commissioned merely to announce that the world is growing darker. We have been sent to proclaim the Lord who saves. The promise reaches to the end of the age because the work continues until He brings it to its appointed completion.

The church does not carry its witness toward the end of the age alone. Christ has not sent His people into a hostile world and withdrawn His help. His authority remains, His gospel remains true, and His presence remains promised. We may speak with trembling voices and still speak in obedience to a reigning Lord.

Let that promise steady you. The future is not beyond His rule, and the person before you is not beyond His power. Pray, speak clearly, keep loving, and leave the work of giving life with Him. When Christ comes, will He find that our expectation of His return made us more willing to speak of Him?

Questions for Further Study

1. Read 2 Peter 3:8–15. How does Peter connect the certainty of judgment, the patience of God, and the conduct of believers? What attitudes does that connection correct?
2. Study Romans 3:24–26, Ephesians 1:7, Romans 5:1–10, and 2 Corinthians 5:21. What do substitution, imputation, propitiation, redemption, reconciliation, justification, and sanctification explain about Christ's saving work? How would you express those truths in ordinary language?
3. In Colossians 4:2–6, how do watchful prayer, clear speech, wise conduct, and ordinary opportunities belong together? Which part of that connection have you most often neglected?
4. Study Matthew 24:9–14 alongside 1 Peter 3:14–16. What dangers does hostility create for our witness? How should the coming end affect both our courage and our compassion?
5. Read 1 Peter 2:11–12 and Titus 2:9–10. How can conduct

either support or hinder the hearing of the gospel? Why can a good example never replace explaining Christ?

6. Compare 1 Corinthians 3:5–7, 2 Timothy 2:24–26, and Matthew 28:18–20. How do God's power and Christ's authority free us to witness urgently without trying to control another person's response?

Practical Applications

1. Pray for particular people and a clear opportunity.

Name a few people you know who need Christ. Pray for their salvation, an appropriate opportunity to speak, and wisdom to explain the gospel plainly. Include someone whose opposition has made you reluctant to care. When an opportunity comes, do not let the familiar excuse of discomfort decide for you.

2. Prepare to explain the gospel in ordinary language.

Use Romans 3:24–26, 1 Corinthians 15:1–4, and 2 Corinthians 5:18–21 to review what you would say about sin, what Christ accomplished on the cross, His resurrection, repentance, and faith. Practice explaining it to a mature believer who can help you remove confusion. The aim is a truthful conversation, not a polished performance or an argument about predictions.

3. Correct one obstacle in your conduct and continue in kindness.

Ask whether dishonesty, impatience, resentment, or a neglected obligation is weakening your witness to someone. Put the wrong right where possible. Continue appropriate kindness without making it conditional upon a favorable religious response. Let the person hear the truth and see that your concern is genuine.

Chapter Axioms

1. The certainty of judgment makes faithful gospel witness urgent. (Acts 17:30–31; 2 Corinthians 5:10–11.)
2. God's patience gives us an opportunity for obedience, not an excuse for delay. (2 Peter 3:9, 15; 2 Corinthians 6:2.)
3. Knowing what Christ accomplished on the cross protects

believers against a counterfeit gospel. (2 Corinthians 11:3–4; 1 Corinthians 15:1–4.)
4. Christ bears our guilt, supplies our righteousness, and sets His people apart for a holy life. (2 Corinthians 5:21; Titus 2:14.)
5. End-times warnings must lead people to the crucified and risen Christ. (Acts 17:30–31; 1 Corinthians 15:3–4.)
6. Watchful prayer prepares believers to recognize opportunities and speak clearly. (Colossians 4:2–6; Ephesians 6:18–20.)
7. Growing hostility must not be allowed to extinguish concern for the lost. (Matthew 24:9–14; 2 Timothy 2:24–26.)
8. Gentleness serves the truth when it expresses a sincere desire for repentance. (1 Peter 3:15–16; 2 Timothy 2:24–25.)
9. Our conduct should support the gospel our lips proclaim. (1 Peter 2:11–12; Titus 2:9–10.)
10. Practical kindness does not replace gospel speech, and gospel rejection does not cancel the duty to love. (Romans 10:14–17; Matthew 5:44.)
11. God gives spiritual life; believers must keep speaking and serving faithfully. (1 Corinthians 3:5–7; 2 Timothy 4:2.)
12. Christ's presence sustains His church's witness to the end of the age. (Matthew 28:18–20; Acts 18:9–10.)

Keep the Savior before Them

The people around us need more than our alarm about what is coming. They need the Christ who came to save sinners and will come again to judge the world. He is the reason we can speak with hope even when we must speak about judgment. The door of mercy has not been opened by our eloquence or kept open by our courage. We proclaim the Savior who shed His blood, conquered death, and calls sinners to Himself.

Come back to His love when your concern grows tired. Remember the patience that reached you. Ask Him to make your words clear, your conduct faithful, and your heart tender toward people who may give you little encouragement. The world's increasing hostility does not lessen their need of Christ. It makes a loving, truthful witness more costly and more necessary. Do not let the fear of rejection silence your concern for another person's soul. The Savior who gave Himself for you can strengthen you to speak of Him; entrust the response to His hands. Who needs to hear from you about Him while this day of mercy remains?

The Doctrines of Personal Evangelism and Making Disciples

The church must never become so occupied with surviving the last days that she forgets why Christ has left her in the world. We are here to bear witness to Him and help others follow Him. These duties belong together. The gospel calls sinners to Christ; discipleship teaches them to live under His lordship until He comes.

1. Christ commands us to make disciples until He returns.

Jesus commands His church to "make disciples of all the nations" (Matthew 28:19, NKJV). His authority establishes the duty, and His promised presence sustains it through the end of the age. Increasing hostility does not cancel that commission. In His teaching about the end, Jesus places worldwide gospel witness alongside persecution and endurance. We must therefore watch for opportunities to speak, not merely for signs of approaching trouble. Every believer has a place in the church's witness, according to the gifts and opportunities Christ supplies. Are we using ours?

Scripture: Matthew 28:18–20; Matthew 24:9–14.

2. The gospel we proclaim must remain the gospel God gave.

Paul identifies its center: "Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures" (1 Corinthians 15:3–4, KJV). We announce the crucified and risen Savior, not a method of improving life without surrendering to Him. Explain sin, Christ's saving work, and the forgiveness found in Him. As false prophets multiply, vague religious language becomes especially dangerous. People need enough truth to distinguish the real Christ from a counterfeit. Watchfulness guards the message before it carries that message to others.

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 15:1–4; Matthew 24:11–14.

3. Call people to turn from sin and trust Jesus Christ.

The apostolic appeal was "repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ" (Acts 20:21, NKJV). Repentance turns from sin to God; faith rests upon Christ for salvation. Neither can be replaced by excitement, agreement with a preacher, or a remembered religious decision. We must explain what we are asking people to do, then urge them to come to Christ. Peter connects the Lord's patience with repentance and immediately warns that His day will come. The

opportunity is precious because it will not remain open forever. Do not confuse delaying judgment with abandoning it.

Scripture: Acts 20:20–21; 2 Peter 3:9–10.

4. Only God can give spiritual life to those we address.

Salvation comes "Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost" (Titus 3:5, KJV). We speak God's Word; His Spirit must awaken the sinner. That truth frees us to plead earnestly without trying to manufacture conversion through pressure or manipulation. When opposition grows and visible results seem small, do not exchange God's gospel for something easier to sell. The Word that works in believing hearts has not lost its power because the age has grown darker.

Scripture: Titus 3:4–7; 1 Thessalonians 2:13; Matthew 24:14.

5. God's patience gives us an opportunity we must not waste.

Peter writes, "The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9, KJV). The apparent delay of Christ's return should stir our witness, not soothe us into postponing it. Another conversation, another visit, another Lord's Day may become an occasion for someone to hear the gospel. We do not know how much time remains. We do know what Christ has commanded us to do with the time He gives.

Scripture: 2 Peter 3:9–15; Matthew 28:18–20.

6. Prayer must sustain our witness when courage runs thin.

Paul joins vigilance to gospel prayer: "Continue in prayer, and watch in the same with thanksgiving; Withal praying also for us, that God would open unto us a door of utterance, to speak the mystery of Christ" (Colossians 4:2–3, KJV). He asks for an opening while imprisoned. Difficulty has not displaced his concern for the gospel. Pray for particular people, clear speech, and courage to use the opportunities God gives. As the last days bring colder love and stronger hostility, a neglected prayer life will leave our witness weak precisely when steadfast faith is needed most.

Scripture: Colossians 4:2–4; Matthew 24:9–14.

7. Make the truth understandable to the person before you.

"Walk in wisdom toward them that are without, redeeming the time. Let your speech be always with grace, seasoned with salt, that ye may know how ye ought to answer every man" (Colossians 4:5–6, KJV). Listen carefully enough to discover what the person believes and misunderstands. Explain unfamiliar words. Answer the actual question. Christian witness is not a speech delivered without regard for its hearer. Under suspicion and hostility, patient clarity becomes particularly important. People must understand why we hope in Christ, not merely discover that we disagree with the world.

Scripture: Colossians 4:5–6; 1 Peter 3:15–16; Matthew 24:9.

8. Seek the salvation of opponents, not the satisfaction of defeating them.

"And the servant of the Lord must not strive; but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient, In meekness instructing those that oppose themselves" (2 Timothy 2:24–25, KJV). Paul's concern is their repentance and rescue from the devil's captivity. Our manner should serve that purpose. When hostility increases, the temptation to answer contempt with contempt will intensify. Watch your own heart while addressing another person's unbelief. Cold love can hide beneath correct doctrine. Speak plainly, withstand falsehood, and continue to desire the salvation of the person who resists you.

Scripture: 2 Timothy 2:24–26; Matthew 24:9–12.

9. Let your conduct give weight to your testimony.

Peter calls for an honest life among unbelievers: "that, whereas they speak against you as evildoers, they may by your good works, which they shall behold, glorify God in the day of visitation" (1 Peter 2:12, KJV). A dishonest witness obscures the truth he speaks. Keep your promises, admit wrong, refuse retaliation, and show the mercy you commend. As accusations against Christians increase, our neighbors should encounter lives that contradict the charges. Good conduct does not explain the cross by itself; it should accompany a clear explanation of our hope in Christ.

Scripture: 1 Peter 2:12; 1 Peter 3:15–16; Matthew 24:9.

10. Teach new believers to confess Christ through baptism.

Jesus includes baptism in His commission: "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost" (Matthew 28:19, KJV). Those who received the apostolic message were baptized and joined the believing community. We must explain this commanded identification with Christ rather than leave new believers uncertain about their next step. In a hostile age, confessing His name may carry a price. Teach them to measure that cost in light of the Savior who will acknowledge His people before His Father.

Scripture: Matthew 28:19; Acts 2:41–42; Matthew 10:28–33.

11. Bring new disciples into the life of a faithful local church.

Scripture commands, "And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works: Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together" (Hebrews 10:24–25, KJV). The passage presses this duty more urgently as Christ's day approaches. A new believer needs preaching, fellowship, prayer, the Lord's Supper, and the care of faithful shepherds. Personal discipleship should help establish those relationships, not become a substitute for them. When deception and persecution threaten, leaving a young Christian isolated is dangerous neglect. Introduce the person, make room, and help him begin sharing the life of the church.

Scripture: Hebrews 10:23–25; Acts 2:41–42; Acts 14:21–23.

12. Teach obedience, not merely the ability to repeat doctrine.

Grace trains believers to live faithfully while awaiting Christ: "Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world; Looking for that blessed hope" (Titus 2:12–13, KJV). Christ commands us to teach people to observe His commands. Explain how truth governs speech, worship, work, relationships, and private conduct. Help the learner obey what he understands. End-times readiness grows through this living submission to Christ. A person who can describe the Christian life but habitually refuses it needs more than another lesson to memorize.

Scripture: Matthew 28:20; Titus 2:11–14.

13. Give disciples patient care and a life they can observe.

Paul describes his affection: "we were willing to have imparted

unto you, not the gospel of God only, but also our own souls, because ye were dear unto us" (1 Thessalonians 2:8, KJV). Disciple-making involves people, not completed assignments. Pray with them, hear their struggles, demonstrate repentance, and show how faith responds when obedience costs something. Paul followed his converts with concern when affliction threatened their stability. Believers facing end-times pressure need this same thoughtful care. They should see in us the patient trust and practical holiness we urge upon them.

Scripture: 1 Thessalonians 2:7–12; 1 Thessalonians 3:1–5.

14. Prepare disciples to endure suffering and resist deception.

The apostles strengthened converts by "exhorting them to continue in the faith, and that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God" (Acts 14:22, KJV). They did not conceal suffering to make Christianity attractive. Christ likewise warned of hatred, false prophets, and the need to endure. Teach young believers these truths before the trial arrives. Show them how to examine teaching by Scripture and seek help when faith is shaken. A disciple who expects only comfort may mistake persecution for Christ's failure. Prepare him to recognize it as a setting in which Christ requires faithfulness.

Scripture: Acts 14:21–23; Matthew 24:9–14.

15. Train faithful people who will teach others in turn.

Paul instructs Timothy, "the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also" (2 Timothy 2:2, KJV). Gospel truth must pass through faithful lives into other lives. Help growing believers learn to explain Scripture, care for others, and take their place in the church's work. As persecution threatens to silence individual voices, this multiplying ministry carries the witness forward. Christ's commission reaches to the end of the age. Who is better prepared to bear witness and help another disciple because you have invested in them?

Scripture: 2 Timothy 2:1–3; Matthew 28:18–20.

Transition to Part Three

We have considered the duties that keep believers watchful as Christ's Day approaches. Those duties must now enter the hours, habits, and relationships of our actual lives. Knowing that we should pray, guard

our hearts, remain faithful, and bear witness is not the same as doing so. Part Three will help us face that difference honestly and take deliberate steps toward obedience. We begin where real change begins: asking God to show us the truth about the life we are living.

Notes

1. J. C. Ryle, Practical Religion, chapter VIII, "Zeal." https://www.gutenberg.org/files/38162/38162-h/38162-h.htm
2. Matthew 28:18–20.
3. 2 Peter 3:15, NKJV; see verses 8–14 for the patience of God, certainty of the Day, and required holy conduct.
4. 2 Corinthians 6:2, NKJV.
5. C. H. Spurgeon, "God's Long-Suffering: An Appeal to the Conscience," sermon 1997, preached autumn 1886, section II, on 2 Peter 3:15. https://www.spurgeongems.org/sermon/chs1997.pdf
6. Matthew 24:24; 2 Corinthians 11:3–4.
7. Thomas Watson, A Body of Divinity, "3. Justification." https://www.ccel.org/ccel/watson/divinity.ix.iii.html
8. John 1:1, 14; Hebrews 4:15; 1 Peter 2:24, NKJV; Isaiah 53:5.
9. Romans 4:6, NKJV; 2 Corinthians 5:21; Philippians 3:9.
10. Galatians 4:4–5; Philippians 2:8, NKJV; Romans 5:19, NKJV. See Second London Baptist Confession (1689), 11.1–3, https://www.the1689confession.com/chapter-11; Orthodox Presbyterian Church, Report of the Committee to Study the Doctrine of Justification, section on the active and passive obedience of Christ, https://opc.org/GA/justification.html.
11. Romans 3:24–26, KJV; see 1 John 4:9–10 for the Father's love in sending His Son.
12. Ephesians 1:7; Galatians 3:13.
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14. Romans 4:5; 5:1.
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19. 1 Corinthians 15:1–4.
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PART THREE

Putting Watchfulness into Practice

A Handbook for Steadfast Living

Consider a father who finishes a chapter on guarding his heart. He agrees with every warning. He underlines a sentence about anger, bows his head, and asks God to help him change. That evening, his child interrupts him, and the familiar sharp answer comes out. He feels ashamed. By morning he has promised himself to do better. Yet he has never stopped to consider what keeps feeding his anger or what obedience would require the next time he is interrupted.

He needs help carrying the truth into that moment.

We have laid the foundation of watchfulness and examined the duties Christ gives His servants. Now we must bring those truths into the rooms where we live, the decisions we postpone, and the habits we defend. James 1:22 commands us to "be doers of the word." His picture of a man who looks into a mirror and then forgets what he saw exposes a danger familiar to every churchgoer. We can receive a clear view of our condition and leave it unchanged.

That danger grows more serious as we consider the pressures awaiting Christ's people. Fear can silence witness. Loss can feed resentment. The need to survive can crowd prayer out of the day. Jesus places His warning about weighed-down hearts within His teaching about the approaching Day: "take heed to yourselves" (Luke 21:34). We must learn to recognize what is happening within us while we still have opportunity to respond.

This part of the book will help you begin. We will examine an ordinary week, name an avoided duty, and work through the steps of repentance. We will consider how to give prayer and Scripture a

dependable place in a demanding life, how to ask a pastor or mature Christian friend for useful help, and how to prepare for decisions that may become costly. We will also return to what we have begun and ask whether anything has actually changed.

The strength for this work comes from Christ. He supplies grace to confess what pride conceals, abandon what sin protects, and resume obedience after failure. Bring Him your actual life, including its weakness and unfinished work. You do not have to hide either from your Savior.

Which truth have you welcomed in these pages but kept outside your daily conduct? Begin there. The Lord who commands watchfulness knows where you are weak. Ask Him to search you, receive what His Word exposes, and take the next faithful step while today is still yours.

CHAPTER 15

Begin with an Honest Look at Your Life

Asking God to Show Us What Must Change before Christ Returns

"I came up here to be judged of God's Word, and not to judge God's Word myself."

C. H. Spurgeon[1]

An open Bible can sit beside a closed subject. We welcome its promises, defend its authority, and enjoy hearing it preached. Then it touches the resentment we have nursed, the duty we have postponed, or the pleasure we will not surrender, and suddenly we have explanations. We are tired. The situation is complicated. Someone else started it. We intend to deal with it when life settles down.

But the Lord has brought His Word to that very place.

We have reached a point in this book where another explanation of duty will not be enough. We must ask where the truths we have studied meet the life we are actually living. Christ will not find us living in our intentions. He will find us in our homes, our relationships, our work, and our habits. The readiness He commands must reach those places.

That makes honest examination an act of watchfulness. Jesus warned His disciples about hearts weighed down before the approaching Day. A believer can recognize danger in the world while overlooking the

fear, indulgence, or resentment gaining ground within him. Prophetic awareness cannot excuse personal neglect.

We begin, then, with a prayer. We will look at a few real moments from an ordinary week, bring them under Scripture, and identify what must change. The purpose is to return to Christ with the truth about ourselves and receive grace to obey Him. He already knows what we are about to discover.

1. Ask God to Show You the Truth

> Psalm 139:23–24 (KJV): "Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: And see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting."[2]

David has already confessed that God knows his sitting down and rising up, his thoughts and words, his movements and resting places. He cannot hide in darkness or escape God's presence. Yet he ends by asking God to search him. He wants the God who knows him completely to expose what he himself may be refusing to see.

There is courage in that prayer. David gives God no list of subjects to avoid. He does not ask for a flattering account of his strengths. He asks to be searched and led. The discovery has a destination: a life brought into God's way.

Make that prayer your own before you begin this examination. Ask the Lord to correct both your excuses and your mistaken accusations against yourself. Ask Him to show you what His Word actually requires. Then read with a willingness to be corrected. If you already know a matter you have been evading, do not search for something less costly to confess.

Scripture can reach what our explanations conceal. Hebrews 4:12 calls God's Word "a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart" (NKJV). The passage then brings us to our great High Priest and invites us to seek mercy and timely help (Hebrews 4:14–16).[3] The God who uncovers the wound directs us to the Savior who can cleanse and heal it. Honest examination should bring us nearer to Him.

This matters especially when we think about the last days. Our Lord does not direct every warning outward. Luke 21:34 begins, "But take heed to yourselves" (NKJV). He names the danger of a heart burdened by indulgence and daily cares, then commands watchfulness

and prayer in view of the coming Day.[4] We must hear the personal address. The heart needing attention may be the one reading this page.

Begin with a brief, definite request: "Lord, show me where I am resisting what You have already made clear." Then keep the Bible open. A vague feeling of failure cannot tell you what to change. A biblical command applied to an actual choice can. If you have spoken cruelly, let God's command about your speech name the wrong. If you have withdrawn from fellowship because someone corrected you, let His Word test the reason you give for staying away.

Which part of your life would you be relieved to leave out of this prayer? Bring that part before Him too. The Lord's searching is too valuable to waste on the faults we already find easy to discuss.

2. Look at the Week You Actually Lived

> James 1:22–25 (KJV): "But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves. For if any be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass: For he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was. But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed."[5]

The man in James's picture has seen something real. His failure comes when he walks away. He carries no faithful response into the life beyond the mirror. James exposes the self-deception of hearing without doing: we can mistake our attention to the truth for our obedience to it.

Choose a recent, ordinary week. You do not need to reconstruct every hour. Recall three or four moments that reveal how you responded to a known duty: a disagreement at home, an interruption at work, a sermon that searched your conscience, an opportunity to pray or help someone. Look at what happened before explaining why it happened.

Consider a hypothetical father who wants to become more patient. During the week, his daughter asks for help while he is reading. He answers sharply. Later, his wife asks him to put away his phone during their conversation, and he becomes defensive. On Sunday he hears teaching about love, agrees with it, and decides that he should spend more time reading Christian books.

More reading may help him, but the week has already brought a particular duty into view. The people nearest him have been treated as interruptions. He needs to consider what happened when his preference met their need. Did he listen? Did he answer kindly? Did he acknowledge the hurt he caused? These questions bring the teaching out of the book and into the room.

J. C. Ryle wrote, "A holy man will endeavour to shun every known sin, and to keep every known commandment."[6] That word "known" makes the matter immediate. We do not have to master every difficulty in prophecy before obeying the truth already before us.

For each remembered incident, ask three things. What did I actually do? Which teaching of Scripture bears on it? What response would have honored Christ? Keep the answers plain. "I spoke harshly when asked for help" gives you something to confess. "I need to become a better person" leaves everything vague.

Include mercies as well as failures. Perhaps you resisted a temptation, received correction without arguing, or kept a promise at personal cost. Thank God for that grace. Honest examination receives the truth about His work as well as the truth about our sin. We are looking for accuracy, not the darkest account we can produce.

Galatians 6:4 directs each person to examine his own work.[7] Your task is not to prove that your week was better than someone else's. Nor must you borrow another believer's strength, health, or responsibilities as the measure of your obedience. Examine the trust Christ has placed in your hands.

Such a review prepares us for greater pressure by bringing present weaknesses into the light. If small interruptions repeatedly uncover resentment, take that resentment seriously now. If modest criticism silences your witness, bring that fear to Christ now. We cannot assume that a harsher trial will automatically produce the faithfulness we are unwilling to practice today.

3. Name the Sin without Disguising the Struggle

> Lamentations 3:40 (NKJV): "Let us search out and examine our ways, And turn back to the LORD."[8]

The call joins examination to return. We are not invited to admire our skill in diagnosing ourselves. We are summoned to come back to God. That requires honest names for what we find.

Return to the father in our example. He concludes that he has been

irritable because he is tired. That may be true as far as it goes. He has taken on too many commitments, has been sleeping poorly, and has little quiet time. Those are real burdens. But they do not make a harsh answer loving or a resentful heart innocent.

He needs two kinds of correction. He should confess the resentment and seek forgiveness for the way he spoke. He should also examine whether unnecessary commitments are leaving him needlessly exhausted. Repentance deals with the sin; practical wisdom deals with the avoidable strain. Both may be needed. Neither should be used to hide the other.

Ephesians 4:31–32 names bitterness and anger, then directs believers toward kindness and forgiveness in light of God's forgiveness in Christ. Galatians 6:2 commands us to carry one another's burdens.[9] These passages help us distinguish a wrong to forsake from a burden to share. Calling all weariness disobedience will not make a weary believer faithful. Calling all disobedience weariness will not bring him to repentance.

A believer enduring illness may be unable to maintain a former routine. That loss does not prove a loss of love for Christ. The appropriate response may be shorter periods of prayer, help receiving biblical teaching, and gratitude for a friend who visits. But if pain has become a reason to speak cruelly and refuse correction, that cruelty must be confessed. The difficulty is real; so is the duty.

This distinction will become increasingly valuable under end-times pressures. Displacement, loss, persecution, and heavy responsibilities may disrupt the arrangements through which we once served. We must learn to seek help without shame and repent without excuses. Our circumstances may change what we are able to do. They do not change whom we belong to.

Ask yourself, "What am I calling this, and what does Scripture call it?" Perhaps "being careful" has become a cover for refusing generosity. Perhaps "keeping informed" has become hours of anxious consumption that crowd out prayer. Perhaps "needing space" has become a refusal to forgive. Do not force an accusation where the facts do not support it. But when the Word makes the wrong clear, stop bargaining over its name.

Psalm 32 records the misery of concealed sin and the relief of bringing it to God. David's confession in verse 5 includes this resolve: "my iniquity I have not hidden" (NKJV).[10] There is freedom in ending the

defense. You no longer have to protect the account of yourself that repentance requires you to abandon.

A truthful sentence can begin that freedom: "Lord, I have been nursing this resentment, and I have blamed everyone but myself." Speak honestly, then bring the sin to Christ. The purpose of naming it is to forsake it, not to wear its name for the rest of your life.

4. Find Where Fear and Comfort Are Weakening Obedience

> Luke 21:34–36 (KJV): "And take heed to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting, and drunkenness, and cares of this life, and so that day come upon you unawares. For as a snare shall it come on all them that dwell on the face of the whole earth. Watch ye therefore, and pray always, that ye may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of man."[11]

Notice what Jesus puts beside indulgence: the cares of life. A heart can become unready through the burdens it carries as well as the pleasures it pursues. Work, money, health, and family require attention. But concern can grow until obeying Christ seems impossible whenever obedience threatens our control of them.

We should therefore ask more than whether we have committed an obvious wrong. We should ask what we are afraid to lose. Does fear of disapproval keep us silent when truth needs to be spoken? Does fear of scarcity close our hands to a need we could meet? Does attachment to comfort make every costly duty seem unreasonable?

John Owen warned, "Let them take heed of self-confidence who have any mind to take heed of sin."[12] He was considering Peter, whose confident promises did not prepare him for temptation. It is easy to imagine ourselves standing bravely in a future crisis. The more useful question is whether we are taking today's temptation to Christ.

The father in our example may discover that he has begun to treat uninterrupted leisure as something his family owes him. His anger guards that claim. Once he sees it, he can address more than his tone of voice. He can confess the demand beneath it and receive his family's needs as part of the service Christ has entrusted to him. A right to rest must not become a right to despise the people who need us.

In Matthew 24:12–13, Jesus connects increasing lawlessness, cooling love, and the necessity of endurance.[13] Our response must reach beyond lamenting the coldness of the age. Where is love

growing cold in us? Have we become impatient with needy believers, contemptuous toward unbelievers, or unwilling to spend ourselves for anyone? A heart being trained to protect its comfort needs correction before greater pressure comes.

Hebrews 3:12–13 warns against an unbelieving departure from God and the hardening deceit of sin. Its remedy includes daily encouragement among believers.[14] Sin does not always announce the full consequence of the compromise it proposes. It offers a convenient exception and teaches us to defend it. Repeated exceptions can make obedience seem optional.

Select one actual vulnerability. You may know it from a conversation you avoid or a duty you keep postponing. Name the feared cost, place it beside Christ's command, and ask for grace to obey. We will consider difficult decisions more fully later. For now, refuse to let an imagined future faithfulness conceal a present refusal.

5. Bring What You Find to Christ, Repent, and Take One Definite Step

Self-examination has brought us to a doorway. We have recognized something that must change. Now we must pass through it. Repentance means turning from sin to God through His grace. Our judgment changes: we agree with God about the sin. Our heart turns against what we once defended. We seek His pardon and strength, resolve to forsake the wrong, and begin to obey Him. Confession tells the truth about our sin; repentance includes a genuine turning from it.[15]

Where Repentance Begins

After hearing what God had done among the Gentiles, the believers in Jerusalem glorified Him. Acts 11:18 records their conclusion: "Then God has also granted to the Gentiles repentance to life" (NKJV).[16] God grants what He commands. Second Timothy 2:25 likewise directs the Lord's servant to correct opponents gently in hope that God will grant repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth.[17]

The Holy Spirit awakens us to the evil of our sin and turns our hearts toward Christ. We truly repent, but we do not create this grace out of our own spiritual strength. Ask God for it. When you find yourself defending the wrong, ask Him to break that defense. When your heart seems cold, bring its coldness to Him rather than waiting until you have produced an acceptable sorrow.

Paul explains what godly sorrow produces

In 2 Corinthians 7:8–11, Paul describes the Corinthians' response to his corrective letter. He had grieved over the pain it caused. Now he rejoices because their sorrow led to repentance. They did more than feel wounded by correction; they responded to it. Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 7:8–11 (KJV):[18]

> "For though I made you sorry with a letter, I do not repent, though I did repent: for I perceive that the same epistle hath made you sorry, though it were but for a season.
>
> "Now I rejoice, not that ye were made sorry, but that ye sorrowed to repentance: for ye were made sorry after a godly manner, that ye might receive damage by us in nothing.
>
> "For godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of: but the sorrow of the world worketh death.
>
> "For behold this selfsame thing, that ye sorrowed after a godly sort, what carefulness it wrought in you, yea, what clearing of yourselves, yea, what indignation, yea, what fear, yea, what vehement desire, yea, what zeal, yea, what revenge! In all things ye have approved yourselves to be clear in this matter."

Paul's reference to repenting in verse 8 describes his earlier regret over the pain his letter caused. The repentance produced in the Corinthians was their turning from the wrong he had exposed.

Sorrow and repentance therefore belong together, but they are not identical. A person may bitterly regret disgrace, damaged relationships, or lost advantages while still wishing to keep the sin. Godly sorrow brings the offense against God into view and leads us to turn from it. Tears alone cannot tell the whole story. We must ask where the sorrow is leading.

Verse 11 describes the Corinthians' earnest response: concern, indignation, fear, longing, zeal, and a determination to deal with the matter. Paul recognizes the fruits of repentance in their conduct. He is not assigning a sequence of emotions that every believer must reproduce, nor a penance that purchases forgiveness. He sees people taking the wrong seriously and acting upon correction.

Sincerity Changes the Direction of a Life

Acts 26:20 joins repentance, turning to God, and "works befitting repentance" (NKJV).[19] The actions fit the turning. A person who has

been dishonest begins telling the truth and addressing the harm. A person who has cherished resentment seeks grace to forgive. A person who has excused impurity stops treating access to temptation as something to preserve.

Sincerity is essential. We cannot honestly ask Christ to free us while secretly reserving the right to continue. Repentance is a reversal of allegiance, a 180-degree turn from serving sin toward serving God. First Thessalonians 1:9 describes believers who turned from idols to serve the living God; verse 10 places them in expectation of His Son's return.[20] Repentance and readiness belong in the same life.

This new direction does not mean that every sinful habit disappears at once. The battle continues, and believers may stumble grievously. But sincere repentance refuses peace with the sin. It returns to confession and renewed obedience rather than turning grace into a shelter for deliberate rebellion. The evidence is a life being changed, including the way we respond when we fail.

For the father in our example, the first step is no longer a general promise to become patient. He names his resentment before God, asks his daughter to forgive his harsh answer, and gives her the attention he withheld. He begins dealing with the claim that his convenience must govern the household. These acts do not pay for pardon. They give visible expression to the turning of his heart.

Psalm 119:59–60 (KJV) brings examination and action together: "I thought on my ways, and turned my feet unto thy testimonies. I made haste, and delayed not to keep thy commandments."[21] He considered his ways, turned his feet, and refused delay. Bring the particular duty to the throne of grace for the help promised in Hebrews 4:16, then act upon the light God has given.

Weak Faith Must Look to a Sufficient Savior

No one's repentance is perfect. We do not see every motive, feel every offense as deeply as we should, or obey with unmixed love. Even our grief needs cleansing. If acceptance depended on the perfection of our repentance, we would have nowhere to stand.

Christ is our standing before God. He does not merely supply the last small portion missing from an otherwise sufficient righteousness of our own. His obedience and sacrifice are the whole ground of our acceptance. We bring Him our sin, our deficient repentance, and our weak faith, trusting Him for pardon and for the grace to continue turning from evil.

Spurgeon wrote, "Do not regard your repentance as the cause of your remission, but as the companion of it."[22] Repentance accompanies forgiveness; it does not purchase it. Sincerity matters because we are truly returning to God, not because sincerity atones for anything.

Hebrews 12:2 directs us to be "looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith" (NKJV).[23] Weak faith has a strong Savior. Turn your attention from measuring the strength of your grasp to the One you are trusting. He endured the cross and now reigns at the Father's right hand. The mercy you need is grounded in His finished work, not in your ability to feel sufficiently penitent.

Richard Sibbes reminds bruised believers that "there is more mercy in Christ than sin in us."[24] That mercy gives us courage to confess honestly. We need not diminish our guilt to make it manageable. Christ's blood is sufficient for the guilt we could never remove.

A Cleansed Conscience Rests on Christ's Blood

Hebrews 9:14 (KJV) asks, "How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?"[25]

The cleansing comes through Christ's spotless offering, and it releases us for service to God. Hebrews 10:19–22 therefore summons believers to draw near through Jesus' blood, with sincere hearts and assurance of faith. The way into God's presence has been opened by Christ Himself.

> First John 1:9 (KJV): "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."[26]

Keep coming to God in sincere repentance and faith. Ask the Holy Spirit to apply the comfort of Christ's cleansing to your conscience. He bears witness to God's children and strengthens assurance through the truth of the gospel and the grace He produces in their lives (Romans 8:15–16; 1 John 5:13).[27] But do not make a particular feeling, inward voice, or sudden relief the permission you need to believe God's promise. The promise is true while a troubled conscience is still learning to rest upon it.

Forgiveness rests on Christ's blood; the felt enjoyment of forgiveness may grow more slowly. We persevere in looking to Him, using His Word, praying, and receiving wise help. We do not keep repeating a confession as though enough anguish would finally make the

sacrifice sufficient. Nor does repentance end once peace returns. The Spirit's comfort frees us to love God and continue obeying Him.[28]

This is vital preparation for end-times trial. Pressure may expose fresh weakness, and failure may tempt us to despair or hide. Learn now where to return. The Savior who cleanses the conscience also strengthens the servant to rise and serve again.

6. Ask for the Help That Will Keep You Moving

You should now be able to name one priority, one needed support, and one next action. Do not bury that clarity beneath an elaborate plan to repair your entire life by tomorrow. Begin with the duty that has become plain, and begin in dependence upon Christ.

The father's priority is to repent of resentful, harsh speech. His needed support may be a mature believer who will pray with him and ask a direct question about his conduct at home. His next action is to seek forgiveness for the words he spoke and respond to his daughter's actual need. A later conversation can consider the unnecessary commitments contributing to exhaustion. The immediate duty need not wait for a perfect schedule.

Another believer may discover a different starting point. She has withdrawn from church because she resents a correction. Her next action may be to request a conversation with a pastor, explain the matter honestly, and listen to Scripture's judgment. A housebound believer may need to ask for a visit and help maintaining fellowship. In each case the response follows the actual need. We do not strengthen watchfulness by prescribing the same arrangement to everyone.

Hebrews 3:13 (NKJV) urges believers to "exhort one another daily," guarding against sin's deceitful hardening.[29] God has given us people who can speak when our excuses sound convincing to us. A faithful friend's question may interrupt a pattern we have learned to overlook.

Choose someone who will bring Scripture, prayer, and patient honesty to the matter. Explain the particular struggle rather than offering a sweeping account of your inadequacy. You might say, "I have been speaking harshly at home. I am confessing it and seeking forgiveness. Will you pray with me and ask how I have responded when interrupted?" That gives a pastor or friend a real way to help.

The help should strengthen your responsibility before Christ, not replace it. You are not assigning another person the task of keeping your conscience for you. You are receiving a fellow believer's encouragement

while you obey the Lord. Share what is necessary without exposing someone else's private life unnecessarily. If the matter involves danger or serious harm, seek appropriate protection and qualified help rather than treating it as an ordinary accountability exercise.

Thomas Brooks counseled believers to dwell more upon one another's graces than their weaknesses.[30] That does not mean ignoring sin. It means that Christian help can recognize God's work as well as expose a fault. A friend may see a genuine change you have overlooked, help you thank God for it, and encourage you to continue.

Hebrews 10:24–25 calls believers to stir one another toward love and good works, refusing to abandon their assembling as they see the Day approaching.[31] The nearer our thoughts come to Christ's return, the less sensible solitary Christianity becomes. We need the searching preaching, worship, prayer, correction, and care of a biblical local church. Bring your next step into that life of fellowship.

Agree on a suitable time to return to the matter. Ask what actually happened, where help was received, and what remains undone. A short conversation may be enough. The object is faithful follow-through, not a spiritual score. Christ sees the obedience hidden from public notice, and His grace deserves our thanks wherever it has borne fruit.

The Master who is coming has given you this present opportunity to obey. Receive His help and take the step He has made plain.

Questions for Further Study

1. Read Psalm 139:1–12 and 23–24. Since God already knows David completely, why does David ask to be searched? How does the request to be led clarify the purpose of self-examination?
2. In James 1:22–25, what distinguishes the forgetful hearer from the faithful doer? Identify one way a believer might confuse agreement with a sermon and obedience to its teaching.
3. Read Luke 21:34–36 alongside Matthew 24:12–13. How can ordinary cares and cooling love threaten readiness for Christ's coming? What would it mean to take these warnings personally without speculating about a date?
4. Study 2 Corinthians 7:8–11 and Acts 26:20. How does Paul distinguish sorrow from repentance? What evidence shows that repentance has reached beyond emotion into conduct?
5. Read Hebrews 9:14; 10:19–22; 12:1–3; and 1 John 1:7–9. What cleanses the conscience, and where must weak faith look? How

can we seek the Spirit's assurance without making a particular feeling the foundation of forgiveness?

6. Compare Galatians 6:1–5 with Hebrews 3:12–13 and 10:24–25. How can a pastor or mature friend help without replacing personal responsibility? Why does approaching judgment strengthen the need for mutual encouragement?

Practical Applications

1. Examine three real moments.

Recall three incidents from a recent week: one involving a responsibility, one a relationship, and one a temptation. For each, identify what you did, a relevant passage of Scripture, and what faithful obedience required. Give thanks for grace as well as confessing sin. You may write briefly, answer aloud, or ask a trusted person to help you think clearly. The aim is an honest starting point, not an exhaustive record.

2. Name one sin and one next act of obedience.

Choose the matter Scripture has made clearest. Confess it specifically, seek Christ's mercy, and identify the next action that fits repentance. This may include asking forgiveness, telling the truth, returning to a neglected duty, or removing a provision for temptation. Do not confuse unavoidable weakness with willful refusal. Where a burden exceeds your strength, include a concrete request for help.

3. Bring the matter into faithful fellowship.

Ask a pastor or mature Christian friend to pray with you about the specific priority. Agree on one useful question and a realistic occasion to revisit it. Report honestly, receive correction, and thank God for actual progress. Keep the purpose before you: learning to remain faithful to Christ as the Day approaches, through His grace and within the care of His people.

Chapter Axioms

1. God's searching should lead us into His way, not leave us trapped in self-accusation. Psalm 139:23–24; Hebrews 4:14–16.
2. Hearing truth without practicing it can deceive us about our spiritual condition. James 1:22–25; Luke 6:46.

3. An ordinary week can reveal the particular duty that a vague intention leaves untouched. Galatians 6:4–5; James 4:17.
4. A burden to share and a sin to forsake require different responses; both must be named truthfully. Galatians 6:2; Ephesians 4:31–32.
5. End-times watchfulness includes examining the fears and desires that can weigh down our hearts now. Luke 21:34–36; Matthew 24:12–13.
6. God grants repentance, and the sinner truly turns from sin to Him. Acts 11:18; 2 Timothy 2:25; Acts 26:20.
7. Godly sorrow produces repentance; emotional pain alone does not prove that the heart has turned. 2 Corinthians 7:8–11.
8. Sincere repentance changes the direction and conduct of life without ending the believer's battle against sin. 1 Thessalonians 1:9–10; 1 John 1:7–9.
9. Repentance accompanies forgiveness but never supplies the payment for it. Hebrews 9:14; Acts 5:31.
10. Weak faith rests in a sufficient Savior, not in the perfection of its own repentance. Hebrews 12:2; Hebrews 10:19–22.
11. The Spirit strengthens assurance through God's truth; the promise of cleansing does not wait upon a particular feeling. Romans 8:15–16; 1 John 1:9; 5:13.
12. Honest help and definite obedience turn examination toward steadfastness as Christ's Day approaches. Hebrews 3:13; 10:24–25; Psalm 119:59–60.

Look to Christ and Begin

The Lord who has shown you the wrong has not sent you away to make yourself worthy of His help. Come to Him with it. His blood cleanses, His Spirit strengthens, and His Word shows the path before you. You may begin with a difficult confession, a quiet request for help, or an act of obedience that no one else notices. Let it be sincere. The Savior who calls you to watch is worthy of the truth about your life and the obedience of your heart. Before you leave this chapter, can you name the next faithful step? Ask Him for grace, and begin.

Do not dismiss your encounter with these truths as an accident. Perhaps the Lord is answering the prayers you have offered for help: "Search my heart. Show me what to do. Deliver me from this stubborn sin." What you could not untangle in your conscience or change in your conduct, He may now be bringing into the light. This is sovereign grace and mercy at work, drawing you back into fellowship

with Him and calling you to seek peace with those you have wronged. Receive His correction as mercy, and follow where His Word leads.

Scripture: Psalm 139:23–24; Romans 2:4; Matthew 5:23–24.

Godly Sorrow and Worldly Sorrow

Fifteen Principles That Help Us Recognize True Repentance

A person can weep over yesterday and still refuse to change today. Tears tell us that something hurts. They do not, by themselves, tell us whether we are turning to God.

Paul's corrective letter grieved the Corinthians. What brought him joy was the repentance that followed. His distinction is plain: 2 Corinthians 7:10 (NKJV), "For godly sorrow produces repentance leading to salvation, not to be regretted; but the sorrow of the world produces death."

The following principles unfold that distinction and apply it alongside other Scriptures. Paul describes the Corinthians' response, not fifteen stages every Christian must experience in order. Our concern is the direction sorrow takes us. Does it move us toward Christ and obedience, or leave us defending the sin that endangered us? That question becomes urgent as we prepare to meet our Lord.

Paul then names the evidence. 2 Corinthians 7:11 (KJV): "For behold this selfsame thing, that ye sorrowed after a godly sort, what carefulness it wrought in you, yea, what clearing of yourselves, yea, what indignation, yea, what fear, yea, what vehement desire, yea, what zeal, yea, what revenge! In all things ye have approved yourselves to be clear in this matter."

1. Godly sorrow grieves over sin against God.

Worldly sorrow can mourn the damage sin causes while leaving our rebellion against God untouched. Godly sorrow reaches the deeper offense: we have sinned against the One who deserves our love and obedience. David confessed in Psalm 51:4 (KJV), "Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight." His confession did not erase the people he had harmed; it acknowledged the God whose law he had broken. As lawlessness spreads, a watchful conscience must answer to God rather than borrow its standards from the crowd.

Scripture: 2 Corinthians 7:9–10; Psalm 51:3–4; Matthew 24:12.

2. Godly sorrow receives correction instead of silencing it.

The Corinthians allowed Paul's painful letter to correct them. Worldly sorrow may concentrate on the discomfort of being confronted and turn against the messenger. Godly sorrow asks whether the correction is true. Can you receive a biblical warning without making the person who brings it your enemy? Christ rebukes churches because He loves them. Believers preparing for His return need searching preaching and faithful friends, especially when flattering voices offer an easier Christianity.

Scripture: 2 Corinthians 7:8–9; Revelation 3:19; 2 Timothy 4:3–4.

3. Godly sorrow leads to a changed direction.

Paul rejoiced that they sorrowed to repentance. Feeling guilty and turning from sin are related, but they are not interchangeable. Worldly sorrow may leave a person miserable on the same road; godly sorrow moves him off it. Confession becomes a decision to forsake the wrong and obey the Lord. This is why end-times watchfulness must reach beyond alarm about the world. We can be deeply troubled by approaching judgment while refusing to abandon a sin that Christ has already named.

Scripture: 2 Corinthians 7:9–10; Proverbs 28:13; Revelation 3:2–3.

4. Godly sorrow produces earnest action rather than endless delay.

Paul saw diligence where there had been failure. The Corinthians' response had become active. Worldly regret can spend its strength discussing what ought to change; godly sorrow begins the necessary work. An apology is made. A dishonest practice stops. A neglected duty resumes. We need not repair everything in one afternoon, but we must stop using tomorrow to protect today's disobedience. Hebrews 3:15 (KJV) presses the present hour: "To day if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts, as in the provocation."

Scripture: 2 Corinthians 7:11; Hebrews 3:12–15; Luke 12:40.

5. Godly sorrow clears away wrongdoing, not merely suspicion.

Paul's reference to the Corinthians clearing themselves describes their earnest response to the matter he had confronted. It does not authorize denying guilt or manufacturing an innocent appearance. Worldly sorrow may seek a repaired reputation without a repaired life. Godly sorrow wants the wrong faced honestly and put right. Before Christ, a convincing explanation cannot replace obedience. The

watchful believer therefore refuses the cover-up, even when telling the truth costs him the respect he hoped to preserve.

Scripture: 2 Corinthians 7:11; Proverbs 28:13; 1 Corinthians 4:5.

6. Godly sorrow turns our indignation against the sin we tolerated.

The Corinthians became indignant about wrongdoing they had failed to address. Repentance changes what we are willing to defend. Worldly sorrow can resent exposure more than evil; godly sorrow stops treating the evil as a friend. This does not require hatred of ourselves as people, but a settled refusal to excuse our rebellion. When end-times lawlessness presses the church to call evil acceptable, repentance teaches us to hate what God condemns, including what has found shelter in our own habits.

Scripture: 2 Corinthians 7:11; Romans 12:9; Matthew 24:12.

7. Godly sorrow teaches us to fear God more than exposure.

Paul includes fear among the Corinthians' responses. Sin had ceased to look harmless. Worldly sorrow may fear disgrace while remaining careless about God's judgment. Godly sorrow awakens reverence before the Lord to whom we must give account. That fear prepares us for days when obedience may bring rejection and compromise may bring applause. If people's approval governs our repentance now, their threats will find us poorly prepared later. Christ must carry more weight with us than the crowd.

Scripture: 2 Corinthians 7:11; 2 Corinthians 5:10–11; Matthew 10:28.

8. Godly sorrow longs for restored fellowship.

The Corinthians' longing included renewed affection toward Paul, whose correction they had received. Their response was personal, not merely procedural. Worldly sorrow may want the dispute to disappear; godly sorrow wants relationships restored in truth. We seek forgiveness from God and reconciliation with people we have wronged. As hostility and betrayal threaten Christian fellowship, pride must not persuade us to live apart from the very believers whose prayers and counsel we need.

Scripture: 2 Corinthians 7:7, 11; Matthew 5:23–24; Hebrews 10:24–25.

9. Godly sorrow kindles zeal for obedience.

Paul saw zeal, not a temporary performance of distress. Godly sorrow brings renewed concern for what pleases the Lord. Worldly regret may fade as soon as the immediate consequences become bearable. The difference appears when ordinary choices return: what do we now pursue, refuse, and protect? Jesus warns that love will grow cold as lawlessness increases. Repentance resists that chill by bringing us back to the Savior's claims upon our actual lives, not merely our religious vocabulary.

Scripture: 2 Corinthians 7:11; Titus 2:14; Matthew 24:12–13.

10. Godly sorrow wants wrongs addressed without seeking revenge.

The Corinthians became willing to deal with the offense. Paul's final term in verse 11 concerns setting the matter right, not personal retaliation or self-punishment to purchase pardon. Worldly sorrow may look for someone else to blame; godly sorrow accepts rightful responsibility and appropriate correction. A church awaiting Christ must neither protect wrongdoing to preserve its image nor crush a repentant person to display its seriousness. In the same letter, Paul calls the church to forgive, comfort, and reaffirm love.

Scripture: 2 Corinthians 7:11; 2 Corinthians 2:6–8; Romans 12:19.

11. Godly sorrow seeks mercy through Christ rather than payment through pain.

Our grief cannot atone for our sin. Godly sorrow leads us to the Savior whose blood cleanses the conscience; worldly sorrow can leave us trapped in ourselves, measuring whether we have suffered enough. The gospel directs us away from that hopeless calculation. Christ's sacrifice, not the depth of our distress, supplies the ground of forgiveness. When the pressures of the last days expose our weakness, we must return to Him, not invent a punishment that supposedly makes us worthy to approach Him.

Scripture: 2 Corinthians 7:10; Hebrews 9:14; Hebrews 10:19–23.

12. Godly sorrow bears fruit that others can see.

Paul could point to evidence in the Corinthians' response. Their repentance had become visible. Worldly sorrow may speak movingly while leaving the old conduct protected. Genuine repentance changes

how we treat people, use authority, handle money, and respond to temptation. The fruit grows imperfectly, but it grows in the direction of obedience. As deception increases, dramatic professions will not make the church discerning. We must look for conduct that agrees with the confession, beginning with our own.

Scripture: 2 Corinthians 7:11; Acts 26:20; Matthew 24:11–13.

13. Godly sorrow accepts the loss that obedience may require.

Paul describes repentance that is not to be regretted. Turning from sin may still bring painful consequences, but returning to God is never a mistake. Worldly sorrow can wish the trouble would end while still wishing to keep the sinful advantage. Godly sorrow relinquishes that advantage because Christ is worth more. This distinction will matter when allegiance to Him threatens livelihood, safety, or belonging. We cannot prepare to surrender everything for Christ while making excuses for the one forbidden thing we refuse to surrender now.

Scripture: 2 Corinthians 7:10; Philippians 3:7–8; Revelation 13:16–17.

14. Godly sorrow strengthens continuing repentance, not a single emotional moment.

The Corinthians' response gave Paul grounds for confidence in their obedience. True repentance begins a changed course that must continue through fresh temptations and renewed discoveries of sin. Worldly sorrow can treat one painful episode as sufficient and then settle back into carelessness. The watchful Christian keeps returning to Christ for cleansing and strength. Stumbling calls for renewed repentance, not surrender. Readiness for His coming is nourished by continuing fellowship with Him, not preserved by remembering how deeply we once cried.

Scripture: 2 Corinthians 7:11, 15–16; 1 John 1:7–9; 1 John 2:28.

15. Godly sorrow leads toward life; worldly sorrow leaves us on the road to death.

Paul's contrast ends with salvation and death. The issue is far greater than whether we feel better after confessing. Sorrow that leaves us resisting God cannot deliver us from the judgment our sin deserves. Godly sorrow, through repentance, brings us back to the Lord whose mercy saves. This is why we must examine our response to conviction

before the final Day, not after it. Are we merely distressed about our condition, or are we turning to Jesus Christ and following Him?

Scripture: 2 Corinthians 7:10; Isaiah 55:6–7; 2 Peter 3:9–14.

These principles examine our response to sin; they do not condemn the tears of bereavement, illness, or persecution. Nor do they ask us to prove repentance by reaching a certain depth of anguish. Bring the sin into the light, abandon its defense, and look to Christ. The Savior who calls you to repent supplies grace to obey. Let the approaching Day find you turning toward Him, not making peace with what He died to cleanse.

Transition to Chapter 16

Honest examination brings a neglected duty or cherished sin into view. Repentance now requires us to deal with what we have seen. The next chapter will help us make that turning concrete: how to stop feeding a sinful pattern, practice the obedience it has displaced, and repair the harm within our power to repair. Christ's approaching Day gives urgency to the next step. We must not leave the mirror with a clearer view of ourselves and an unchanged way of life.

Notes

1. C. H. Spurgeon, "Self-Examination," sermon 218, October 10, 1858, introductory application. https://www.spurgeon.org/sermons/self-examination
2. Psalm 139:23–24, KJV. Read with Psalm 139:1–12: God's prior knowledge grounds the request for searching and leading.
3. Hebrews 4:12–16. The quoted clause from verse 12 is NKJV; verses 14–16 connect exposure by the Word with access to the great High Priest.
4. Luke 21:34–36, NKJV excerpt from verse 34. The passage addresses personal watchfulness within Christ's teaching about approaching events and the coming Day.
5. James 1:22–25, KJV. The mirror illustrates hearing without continued obedience, not a technique of exhaustive inward analysis.
6. J. C. Ryle, Holiness, chapter III, section I(b). https://ccel.org/ccel/ryle/holiness.iii.iii.html
7. Galatians 6:4–5. Personal examination is read alongside burden-bearing in verse 2, not as a denial of mutual help.
8. Lamentations 3:40, NKJV. The summons to examine and return arises within communal lament and acknowledgment of sin.
9. Ephesians 4:31–32; Galatians 6:2. The distinction between sinful response and limited capacity is pastoral application of these commands, not a claim that every difficulty fits only one category.
10. Psalm 32:3–5, NKJV excerpt from verse 5.
11. Luke 21:34–36, KJV. No date calculation or promise of immunity from bodily suffering is inferred.
12. John Owen, Of Temptation, chapter VI, fourth season: self-confidence. https://ccel.org/ccel/owen/temptation/temptation.i.ix.html
13. Matthew 24:12–13. The application connects Christ's warning about cooling love with present examination and endurance.
14. Hebrews 3:12–13.
15. Second London Baptist Confession, chapter 15, paragraphs 2–4, provides a historic doctrinal synthesis of grace-enabled repentance, faith in Christ, sorrow for sin, and the purpose and endeavor of obedience. https://www.the1689confession.com/1689/chapter-15
16. Acts 11:18, NKJV excerpt. The context is Peter's report of God's saving work among Gentiles.
17. 2 Timothy 2:24–26, especially verse 25.
18. 2 Corinthians 7:8–11, KJV, quoted in full. Paul's earlier corrective letter is not identified here with a particular surviving epistle. Verse 11 describes the Corinthians' earnest response, not a required mechanical sequence or personal vengeance.
19. Acts 26:20, NKJV excerpt. Paul describes his proclamation of repentance and the conduct fitting it.
20. 1 Thessalonians 1:9–10; 1 John 1:7–9. The change of allegiance has fruit in conduct and expectation of Christ; it is not a claim of immediate sinless perfection.
21. Psalm 119:59–60, KJV, quoted in full; Hebrews 4:16. Reflection leads to prompt obedience in dependence on promised grace.
22. C. H. Spurgeon, All of Grace, "Repentance Must Go with Forgiveness." https://ccel.org/ccel/spurgeon/grace/grace.xvi.html
23. Hebrews 12:1–3, NKJV excerpt from verse 2. Looking to Jesus serves endurance in the race appointed to believers.
24. Richard Sibbes, The Bruised Reed, chapter 2, "Who Are the Bruised Reeds?" The

quoted words occur within his warning against crushing tender souls while dealing thoroughly with sin. Modernized transcription: https://www.monergism.com/thethreshold/sdg/bruisedreed.html

25. Hebrews 9:14, KJV, quoted in full; Hebrews 10:19–22. Christ's sacrifice supplies access and conscience-cleansing for service.
26. 1 John 1:9, KJV, read with verses 7–8. Cleansing rests in Christ's blood; confession does not imply sinless perfection.
27. Romans 8:15–16; 1 John 5:13.
28. Second London Baptist Confession, chapter 18, paragraphs 2–4: assurance rests on Christ's blood and righteousness, the evidences of grace, and the Spirit's testimony; its enjoyment may be delayed or shaken. Repentance continues throughout life: chapter 15, paragraph 4. https://www.the1689confession.com/1689/chapter-18
29. Hebrews 3:13, NKJV excerpt.
30. Thomas Brooks, Precious Remedies Against Satan's Devices, "Satan's Devices to Destroy and Ensnare All Sorts and Ranks," III, "Device against the Saints," remedy 1. Paraphrase of his counsel, not a direct quotation from the modernized transcription. https://www.gracegems.org/Brooks/precious_remedies_against_satan8.htm
31. Hebrews 10:24–25. The approaching Day intensifies mutual encouragement and faithful gathering.

CHAPTER 16

Make Repentance Concrete

Turning from Sin and Practicing Obedience as Christ's Day Approaches

"Be changed in mind, confess your sin, and forsake it."
C. H. Spurgeon[1]

Consider a Christian who has asked God to forgive his spiteful words. The next morning, a message arrives in the same group conversation: another accusation against the person he resents. His thumb hovers over "Forward." Yesterday he confessed the sin. Today he must decide whether to feed it.

This imagined scene brings repentance into the place where it must work. The man needs to refuse the accusation, correct the false report he has already passed along, and begin speaking truthfully about the person he has injured. Christ calls him to love the neighbor his words have wounded. When Jesus warns that "the love of many will grow cold" (**Matthew 24:12**, NKJV), He prepares us to watch what happens within us as lawlessness increases around us.[2] The next conversation is one place to begin.

Chapter 15 brought us before God with the truth about our lives. Now we must act on what His Word has exposed. We cannot prepare for Christ's coming while deliberately protecting the arrangements that keep drawing us away from Him. Repentance must reach the next decision.

Bring the Particular Sin to Christ

A general resolution can leave a particular sin untouched. "I must become a better Christian" may sound earnest while giving us nothing definite to obey. The man in our illustration needs to say, "I have spread something untrue because I resented this person." Now the wrong stands in the light, and the next duty begins to become clear.

Paul addresses people who have learned Christ. Their new conduct grows from belonging to Him. **Ephesians 4:22–24** (KJV) says, "That ye put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts; And be renewed in the spirit of your mind; And that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness."[3]

"Conversation" here means the former way of life. Paul calls believers to leave that life behind and live according to the new life God has given them. Notice the renewal of the mind between putting off and putting on. We must learn to judge the sin differently, not merely find a more effective way to restrain it. The person I resented is a neighbor God commands me to love. My tongue belongs to Christ. The pleasure of discrediting someone cannot be reconciled with His command.

This gives the reader a definite place to begin. Name the sin Scripture condemns. Identify the good Scripture requires. Bring both to Christ: the guilt you cannot remove and the duty you cannot perform faithfully without His grace. Jesus says, "without Me you can do nothing" (**John 15:5**, NKJV).[4] Dependence does not postpone obedience until we feel strong. It sends us to Him for strength while we obey.

Romans 8:13–14 (KJV) makes the source of our strength plain: "For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live. For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God."[5] We act, and we act through the Spirit. We refuse the sin, seek the Lord in prayer, receive His Word, and trust His power rather than the force of our resolve.

John Owen directs us toward that living dependence: "Meet thy temptation in its entrance with thoughts of faith concerning Christ on the cross."[6] Remember whose blood purchased you and what your Savior endured for the sin now offering you pleasure. The coming pressures will not make Christ less necessary. They will expose how desperately we need Him.

Notice What Keeps Drawing You Back

Our imagined reader may insist that the message arrived without his asking. That is true, but it does not explain why he welcomed it. He enjoyed having something against the other person. He liked being included among those who knew the story. By the time he pressed "Forward," desire had already found an opportunity.

James 1:14–15 (KJV) describes that movement: "But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death."[7] James brings responsibility home. The conversation does not manufacture an innocent heart's sin. It offers something a sinful desire is ready to welcome.

Watchfulness therefore reaches farther back than the final act. Notice the place, company, subject, or hour in which you repeatedly become willing to disobey. Perhaps loneliness makes a flattering message particularly attractive. Perhaps fear of being disliked keeps you laughing at cruelty. Perhaps another person's success awakens a complaint you have rehearsed for years. The question is not merely, "What happened?" It is, "What was I willing to gain by doing wrong?"

Do this honestly and briefly. You need enough understanding to respond faithfully, not an endless investigation into every movement of your mind. Temptation can arrive uninvited. Your duty is to resist it, not accuse yourself merely because you were tempted.

Matthew 26:41 (KJV) gives Christ's instruction to His vulnerable disciples: "Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation: the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak."[8] Their willingness did not make prayer unnecessary. Neither does ours. Bring the particular danger before God before it gains the advantage: "Lord, I want their approval. Keep me from purchasing it with another person's reputation."

This matters as hostility toward Christ increases. Fear can make us desperate for acceptance; loss can make another person's prosperity seem unbearable. The same desires we excuse in easier days may find stronger invitations then. Learn their approaches now. What weakness keeps meeting the same opportunity while you continue calling the outcome a surprise?

Stop Making Room for the Sin

The man who has repented of spreading accusations must change what happens in that conversation. He can refuse the next rumor. He

can tell the others he will no longer circulate claims he has not established. If the exchange exists to ridicule and injure people, he can leave it. He does not need to remain within easy reach of the temptation to prove that he is strong.

Romans 13:11–14 (KJV) joins this refusal directly to the approaching Day: "And that, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep: for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed. The night is far spent, the day is at hand: let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armour of light. Let us walk honestly, as in the day; not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envying. But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof."[9]

Paul does not tell us to wait until we can calculate how little night remains. The approaching Day is reason enough to cast off darkness. His list reaches beyond obvious sensual sins to strife and envy. The bitter conversation and the cherished comparison belong under this warning too.

Making provision means supplying what the flesh will use. We can do that through a private arrangement, a repeated visit, a saved contact, or the permission we quietly give ourselves. A person may pray against lust while retaining unrestricted access to what repeatedly inflames it. Another may pray for contentment while spending every evening studying the comforts someone else possesses. The prayer should lead us to deal with the provision.

Thomas Brooks warns that "ordinarily there is no conquest over sin" unless we turn from the occasions that foster it.[10] Refusing the occasion does not mean we have conquered the heart. It means we have stopped defending an advantage we were giving to our enemy.

Closing an account or leaving a conversation cannot create a clean heart. Yet a heart that seeks cleansing should not defend every easy route back to its sin. Take the sensible step that obedience requires, and continue asking Christ to change the desire beneath the conduct. Where protection or wise counsel is needed, seek it. Guarding a soul is worth an inconvenient change.

Luke 21:34 (KJV) warns, "And take heed to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting, and drunkenness, and cares of this life, and so that day come upon you unawares."[11] Christ identifies things that burden the heart before the Day arrives.

Watchfulness acts while those burdens are gathering. What are you continuing to supply that you are asking God to help you resist?

Practice the Good That Sin Has Displaced

Stopping the wrong opens a question we must answer: what good belongs in its place? Paul supplies practical answers. **Ephesians 4:28–29** (KJV) says, "Let him that stole steal no more: but rather let him labour, working with his hands the thing which is good, that he may have to give to him that needeth. Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers."[12]

Follow the change in the former thief. The hands that took from others now work so that others may receive. His neighbor gains more than freedom from being robbed. He may receive help from the very person who once injured him. Repentance changes the use we make of our strength.

The same is true of speech. Our imagined reader must do more than become silent when the other person's name appears. He must tell the truth, refuse unfair insinuations, and speak what will serve the hearer's good. He can ask a sincere question instead of repeating an accusation. He can acknowledge what he knows to be worthy rather than suppress it because he dislikes the person. Christ claims the tongue for useful service.

J. C. Ryle writes, "He will not be content with doing no harm—he will try to do good."[13] That distinction reaches many of our most comfortable evasions. We congratulate ourselves for withholding the cutting remark while withholding every kindness too. Love requires something better.

Consider a second imagined reader. Each evening she looks through photographs of another family's travels and improvements to their home. She ends the night displeased with her own life. After recognizing the envy, she stops returning to the account that feeds it. But she also begins naming particular mercies before God, praying sincerely for that family, and using something she has to help someone with less. Gratitude, goodwill, and generosity give her obedience a definite direction.

These actions are not a fee she pays to silence her conscience. They express the new allegiance Christ has given her. **Colossians 3:12–14** (KJV) says, "Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness,

longsuffering; Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye. And above all these things put on charity, which is the bond of perfectness."[14]

This is preparation for the days when love grows cold. We learn to seek another person's good when envy, fear, and resentment urge us to turn inward. The world's hostility must not become our excuse for abandoning Christ's kindness. Whom should your repentance now begin to help?

Counterfeit faith never produces repentance as Scripture defines it: a sincere turning from sin to God that bears fruit in obedience. It may confess the wrong while protecting the practice. Jesus asks, "But why do you call Me 'Lord, Lord,' and not do the things which I say?" (**Luke 6:46**, NKJV).[15] What good would all the watchfulness in the world do if you remained deceived about your salvation? Recognizing danger cannot reconcile you to God. You must come to Christ Himself, trusting Him to forgive your sin and turn you from it.

Repair the Harm You Can Repair

A false report does not disappear because its author feels ashamed. Other people may still believe it. Repentance must consider their understanding and the injured person's reputation, not merely our desire to feel relieved.

Our imagined reader therefore returns to the people who received his message. He identifies the statement he should not have made, corrects what was false, and asks them not to repeat it. He does not add another round of private information to make his apology sound complete. Then, where appropriate, he seeks forgiveness from the person he injured. "I repeated something untrue about you. That was wrong. I have corrected it with the people I told." The words are plain because the responsibility is plain.

Matthew 5:23–24 (KJV) gives this duty urgency: "Therefore if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee; Leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift."[16] Jesus will not let religious activity become a hiding place from a duty toward an injured brother. We cannot use an earnest worship service to excuse an apology we refuse to make.

Thomas Watson writes, "Whosoever hath wronged others in their estate, by unjust fraudulent dealing, ought in conscience to make them

recompence."[17] He is speaking of injury to another person's property. Sorrow should move us to repay what we have wrongfully taken, not persuade us that feeling bad has settled the debt.

Zacchaeus's response to Christ also reached the people his conduct had affected. **Luke 19:8** (KJV) records, "And Zacchaeus stood, and said unto the Lord: Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor; and if I have taken any thing from any man by false accusation, I restore him fourfold."[18] His particular pledge is not a universal repayment schedule. It shows repentance becoming visible in generosity and restitution. If we have taken something, we should return what we owe. If we have left a responsibility undone, we should attend to it rather than offer regret in its place.

Some harm cannot be undone. Some relationships cannot safely be approached without help. Seek wise pastoral counsel about the repair you can responsibly make. Do not demand that an injured person immediately trust you, or treat a delayed response as permission to withdraw your confession. **Romans 12:18** gives responsibility its proper bounds: pursue peace so far as it depends on you.[19] Your part is faithful action; the other person's response is not yours to command.

Such repair matters to a church preparing for persecution. Outside hostility already threatens its members. We must not add the wounds of defended falsehood, unpaid obligations, and unacknowledged cruelty. When the Day approaches, we need to strengthen the people beside us. Repentance begins by dealing with the harm we ourselves have done.

When You Stumble Return and Resume

Perhaps the reader takes these steps, then catches himself joining another unkind conversation. The failure is real. He must not conceal it. Neither should he conclude that the only honest response is to abandon every effort and withdraw from Christ.

First John 2:1–2 (KJV) speaks directly to this situation: "My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous: And he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world."[20] John aims at obedience and directs the believer who sins to the righteous Savior. The provision for failure is Christ Himself.

Confess what happened. Receive God's promise of forgiveness and cleansing in **1 John 1:9**. Then return to the duty the failure

interrupted. Correct the new statement. Seek the help you avoided. Notice whether an opening remained that you had refused to close. Do not make yourself suffer for a week before approaching the One whose blood cleanses you.

Owen counsels the weary struggler, "Raise up thy heart by faith to an expectation of relief from Christ."[21] Take that counsel into the next hard moment. Ask for help before you answer. Believe that the Savior who receives you also supplies strength to obey. Your weakness is a reason to seek Him, not a reason to hide.

A useful review asks whether you are telling the truth, refusing the provision, practicing the neglected good, and repairing harm. Those are matters you can address. You cannot demand that temptation vanish on your schedule or that everyone recognize the change immediately. Keep following Christ in the conduct He has placed before you.

Titus 2:11–14 (KJV) holds together the grace, the training, and the hope: "For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world; Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ; Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works."[22]

Grace teaches us to deny what once ruled us while we wait for the Savior who redeemed us. His approaching return gives urgency to that training. Difficult days will not be endured by protecting yesterday's excuses. We need the grace that enables today's obedience, and we have a Savior to whom we may continually come.

Questions for Further Study

1. Read **Ephesians 4:20–32**. How does belonging to Christ govern the specific changes Paul commands? Identify three wrong practices and the good that replaces each one.
2. In **Romans 13:11–14**, how does the approaching Day give urgency to refusing provision for the flesh? Why does Paul include strife and envy beside sensual sins?
3. Compare **James 1:14–15** with **Matthew 26:41**. What should we notice before temptation develops into a chosen act? How does prayer express our dependence rather than merely our concern?
4. Read **Ephesians 4:28–29** and **Colossians 3:12–14**. How does

repentance benefit other people? Where might mere restraint leave a duty of love undone?

5. Compare **Matthew 5:23–24**, **Luke 19:8–10**, and **Romans 12:18**. What responsibility does a repentant person have to repair harm, and what results remain outside that person's control?
6. How do **1 John 1:9–2**:2 and **Titus 2:11–14** help a believer respond to failure without either excusing sin or abandoning hope? How does this prepare us to persevere as pressure increases?

Practical Applications

1. Deal with one provision before the temptation returns. Name a particular arrangement that repeatedly gives a known sin an advantage. Ask Christ for help, then make one definite change within your responsibility: decline the harmful exchange, remove the access you keep misusing, or seek help before the vulnerable hour. Test the change against Scripture rather than inventing a new rule for everyone else.
2. Put the displaced good into practice. Write or say plainly what obedience requires in the same situation. Replace the false statement with truth, the cutting remark with useful speech, or the envious comparison with thanksgiving and an act of generosity. Choose something real enough to do, not merely a better feeling you hope will arrive.
3. Begin the repair you have postponed. Identify one harm you can responsibly address. Correct what you misrepresented, return what you owe, or seek forgiveness without an excuse attached. Obtain wise help if the situation is unsafe or complicated. Follow through without demanding immediate trust or praise. The purpose is to honor Christ and serve the injured person.

Chapter Axioms

1. Repentance reaches the particular conduct that confession names. General regret must not shelter a specific wrong. **Ephesians 4:25–32**.
2. Christ supplies the life and strength for obedience; the believer must actively depend on Him. **John 15:4–5**; **Romans 8:13–14**.

3. Watchfulness notices the desire and opportunity before they become a chosen act of sin. **James 1:14–15**; **Matthew 26:41**.
4. Expectation of Christ's Day requires us to stop supplying the flesh. **Romans 13:11–14**.
5. Removing an opportunity serves repentance, but renewal of the heart remains essential. **Ephesians 4:22–24**; **Luke 21:34–36**.
6. Biblical change replaces sinful conduct with the good that conduct withheld. **Ephesians 4:28–29**; **Colossians 3:12–14**.
7. Practiced kindness helps us resist the cooling of love under increasing lawlessness. **Matthew 24:12–13**; **Ephesians 4:31–32**.
8. Repentance seeks to repair harm within our responsibility without attempting to control another person's response. **Matthew 5:23–24**; **Romans 12:18**.
9. A believer's failure calls for confession and renewed obedience through Christ, not concealment or self-punishment. **First John 1:9–2**:2.
10. The grace that saves us trains us to live faithfully while we await our Savior. **Titus 2:11–14**.

Take the Next Faithful Step

Dear reader, do not leave this chapter with your excuses intact. If you have seen the sin, bring it to Christ. If you know the duty, ask for His strength and begin. The Savior who shed His blood for sinners has not told you to make yourself worthy before seeking His help. **Hebrews 4:16** (KJV) calls us near: "Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need."[23] Come with the truth. Confess what you have defended. Ask His Spirit to strengthen you to forsake it.

I urge you to take the step you have postponed. Correct the false report. Return what you owe. Seek forgiveness. Close the opportunity you keep leaving open. Do not reserve obedience for a calmer season while the same sin keeps doing its damage. Christ is coming, and the pressures of the last days will give us more reasons to compromise, not fewer. What known duty will you put into practice today because you trust the Lord who commands it? His mercy gives you reason to come; His grace supplies strength to obey.

Restoring Broken Relationships

Fifteen Principles of Spirit-Empowered Humility, Love, and Forgiveness

We cannot prepare to stand together under persecution while refusing to face the sins that drive us apart. The Holy Spirit works humility, love, and forgiveness in Christ's people so that wounded relationships can be addressed truthfully and, where repentance is received, fellowship restored. These graces belong to watchfulness. Christ warned that increasing lawlessness would chill love; we must not give that coldness a welcome in our own homes and churches.

1. Begin with the forgiveness you have received in Christ.

Ephesians 4:32 (NKJV) directs us to forgive "even as God in Christ forgave you." The cross gives forgiveness its pattern and its source. You approach another sinner as someone who has needed mercy yourself. Remembering Christ's pardon loosens the grip of self-righteousness without making the other person's wrong harmless. **Matthew 18:21–35** exposes the terrible contradiction of receiving mercy while refusing to extend it. As hatred spreads in the last days, keep returning to the Savior who forgave you. Do not let another person's sin decide how much obedience you will give Christ.

2. Depend on the Spirit to change how you respond.

A clenched jaw may restrain an insult while the heart keeps rehearsing it. We need the Spirit's inward work. **Galatians 5:22–23** (KJV) says, "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, Meekness, temperance: against such there is no law." **Ephesians 4:30–32** joins the warning against grieving the Spirit to commands against bitterness and malice. Before a difficult conversation, ask Him to govern your desires as well as your words. Under end-times pressure, mere politeness will strain; the Spirit supplies patience that reaches beneath the surface.

3. Face your own sin without hiding behind theirs.

Jesus tells us to remove the beam from our own eye before attempting to help our brother (**Matthew 7:3–5**). **Galatians 6:1** likewise requires the person restoring another to watch himself. Examine what you actually did: the accusation you exaggerated, the truth

you withheld, the contempt you defended. Confess your wrongdoing without making your confession depend on theirs. This does not assign equal blame where equal blame does not exist. It makes you answerable for your own conduct. As the last days encourage blame and betrayal, watchfulness keeps another person's failures from becoming your excuse.

4. Listen before you defend yourself.

James 1:19–20 commands readiness to hear and slowness to speak and become angry. **Ephesians 4:2** adds humility and patient forbearance. Let the other person finish. Ask what you have misunderstood. Listen closely enough to describe the concern fairly before answering it. Are you trying to understand the wound, or merely preparing your defense? Fear and exhaustion can make believers quick to suspect one another when persecution intensifies. Patient listening refuses to turn every misunderstanding into another division. You may discover a wrong to confess, a false assumption to correct, or a burden you had never seen.

5. Tell the truth without using it as a weapon.

Ephesians 4:15 joins truth to love, while **1 Corinthians 13:6** teaches that love rejoices in truth rather than wrongdoing. Restoration needs both. Name the actual offense, distinguish facts from suspicions, and refuse insults disguised as honesty. Equally, do not call a harmful silence peace. Love seeks the person's good through the truth, not victory through humiliation. In a time of spreading deception, the church must practice this honesty within its own fellowship. We will not resist lies outside the church faithfully while protecting convenient lies inside it.

6. Take the first obedient step toward reconciliation.

In **Matthew 5:23–24**, Jesus directs the worshiper who remembers a brother's grievance to seek reconciliation. **Matthew 18:15** directs the offended believer to address the wrong with the aim of gaining his brother. Neither passage makes pride a reason to wait. Where you have sinned, say plainly what you did and ask forgiveness. Where you have been wronged, seek a wise, truthful conversation rather than recruiting an audience. Christ's approaching return gives urgency to

these duties. Why keep postponing an honest word while resentment grows stronger in its absence?

7. Repair the harm your repentance has exposed.

Zacchaeus's response to Christ included restitution (**Luke 19:8–10**). **Ephesians 4:28** takes the thief beyond stopping theft into honest labor and generosity. Repentance changes what other people experience from us. Return what you wrongfully took. Correct a false report with those who heard it. Keep the promise you can still honor. Repair does not purchase pardon; it shows that you have stopped defending the wrong. As end-times hardship places greater strain on households and churches, practical honesty matters enormously. People need more than your regret when your conduct has left them carrying the loss.

8. Use your speech to help the wounded recover.

Ephesians 4:29 (KJV) commands, "Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers." **James 5:9** warns against grumbling at one another while the Judge draws near. Stop repeating a grievance merely to keep it alive. Speak needed truth to people who can help, rather than feeding resentment through endless retelling. Under persecution, a congregation already burdened by hostile voices needs members whose words strengthen faith. Let yours make obedience clearer and hope easier to grasp.

9. Refuse revenge and entrust judgment to God.

Romans 12:17–21 forbids repaying evil with evil and calls us to overcome evil with good. **First Peter 2:21–23** places Christ before us: He suffered without retaliating and entrusted Himself to the righteous Judge. Forgiveness releases personal vengeance; it does not declare evil innocent or forbid truthful accountability. Refuse the cutting remark, the calculated exclusion, the pleasure of watching someone suffer. When hostility increases, revenge will offer itself as strength. Follow Christ instead. The coming Judge will not overlook evil, and you need not become its servant to prove that you were wronged.

10. Let love seek the good even of an enemy.

Matthew 5:44–45 calls Christ's disciples to love their enemies and

pray for their persecutors. **Romans 12:20** makes that love concrete through meeting an enemy's need. Christian love refuses to make another person's hostility its rule of conduct. Pray for repentance and salvation. Offer appropriate help without using generosity to purchase affection. This becomes especially searching when opposition to Christ costs us dearly. End-times watchfulness includes guarding the heart against becoming like its persecutors. We must remain people who desire another person's rescue, even while firmly resisting the evil that person does.

11. Restore the fallen with gentleness, not superiority.

Galatians 6:1–2 directs spiritual believers to restore the person caught in sin and bear burdens. **James 5:19–20** shows the seriousness of bringing a wanderer back from error. Approach the fallen as someone to recover, not someone whose failure makes you look stronger. Be direct about the sin, patient with honest questions, and practical about the next step of obedience. As deception and pressure threaten endurance, believers will need this faithful help. A church that only knows how to expose failure has not yet learned the full duty of restoring its members.

12. Give renewed trust time to grow through faithfulness.

Second Corinthians 7:10–11 describes repentance that produces earnest action, while **Ephesians 4:25–28** requires truthful speech and changed conduct. These are the kinds of fruit through which damaged confidence can begin to recover. If you broke trust, do not demand its immediate return as proof that you have been forgiven. Keep telling the truth. Accept appropriate accountability. Fulfill ordinary duties when no one applauds. As the last days multiply deception, discernment must accompany love. Reconciliation cannot be manufactured by pressure; patient faithfulness gives another person sound reasons to recognize genuine change.

13. Seek the church's help rather than surrendering to division.

Matthew 18:15–17 provides a path for addressing serious, unresolved sin, and **Hebrews 10:24–25** connects mutual encouragement with the approaching Day. Seek wise, trustworthy pastoral help when a conflict defeats your efforts. Ask for truth and restoration, not allies for your side. Serious abuse must not be hidden under the language

of reconciliation, nor should anyone be pressed into unsafe contact. The church's duty includes protecting the vulnerable and confronting wrong. As hostility grows outside, faithful shepherding helps keep wounded believers from being abandoned inside the fellowship where they should receive help.

14. Pray for the love that pressure threatens to extinguish.

First Peter 4:7–8 (KJV) says, "But the end of all things is at hand: be ye therefore sober, and watch unto prayer. And above all things have fervent charity among yourselves: for charity shall cover the multitude of sins." **James 5:16** joins confession to prayer for one another. Bring the strained relationship before God by name. Ask Him to expose your pride, grant repentance, restrain bitterness, and restore love where it has withered. Pray together when appropriate. Watchfulness makes prayer urgent because approaching trouble can harden hearts that ought to draw nearer to Christ and one another.

15. Do your part faithfully, and leave the outcome with Christ.

Romans 12:18 (NKJV) places responsibility "as much as depends on you." You can speak truth, repent, forgive, and seek peace; you cannot make another person repent or receive you. **Matthew 24:10–13** warns of betrayal, hatred, and cold love, then calls for endurance. An unsuccessful attempt at reconciliation must not become permission to surrender your own obedience. Continue in truth and love, with wise boundaries where needed. **James 5:9** (NKJV) reminds us, "Behold, the Judge is standing at the door!" Let Him find you faithful in what He entrusted to you, still seeking His grace, still refusing bitterness, still ready to obey.

From a Faithful Step to a Faithful Pattern

Now, dear reader, keep going. Do not let tomorrow quietly undo what you have faced before God today. Return to Christ in prayer, attend to His Word, stay close to His people, and carry out the duties He has entrusted to you. We need a pattern of faithfulness that can survive a difficult week, not a burst of resolve that disappears with the first interruption. The next chapter will help us build that pattern. Let us make room for these duties now, depending on Christ, so that increasing pressure finds us practicing obedience rather than still promising to begin.

Notes

1. C. H. Spurgeon, "So it is," November 30, 1890, Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit, volume 36, section III. https://www.spurgeon.org/sermons/so-it-is
2. **Matthew 24:12**, NKJV; see the surrounding warning about persecution, betrayal, and endurance in **Matthew 24:9–13**.
3. **Ephesians 4:22–24**, KJV; see **Ephesians 4:20–21** for the preceding reference to learning Christ.
4. **John 15:5**, NKJV.
5. **Romans 8:13–14**, KJV.
6. John Owen, Of Temptation, chapter VII, direction 4[3]. https://www.ccel.org/ccel/owen/temptation.i.x.html
7. **James 1:14–15**, KJV.
8. **Matthew 26:41**, KJV.
9. **Romans 13:11–14**, KJV.
10. Thomas Brooks, Precious Remedies Against Satan's Devices, section I, Device 7, Remedy 2; Complete Works, ed. A. B. Grosart, volume 1, p. 39. The quoted phrase retains the original wording; the remainder of the sentence paraphrases his counsel to turn from the occasion of sin. https://www.monergism.com/thethreshold/sdg/brooks/PreciousRemediesAgainstSatanThomasBrooks.pdf
11. **Luke 21:34**, KJV; see verses 35–36 for the Day and the command to watch and pray.
12. **Ephesians 4:28–29**, KJV.
13. J. C. Ryle, Holiness, chapter III, I(g). https://ccel.org/ccel/ryle/holiness.iii.iii.html
14. **Colossians 3:12–14**, KJV.
15. **Luke 6:46**, NKJV; **Acts 26:20** describes repentance as turning to God and doing works befitting repentance; **Titus 1:16** contrasts professing to know God with denying Him in conduct.
16. **Matthew 5:23–24**, KJV.
17. Thomas Watson, The Doctrine of Repentance, Useful for These Times (1668), chapter IV, section II, fifth qualification of godly sorrow; electronic transcription, PDF p. 21. Original spelling retained. https://exavius.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/The-Doctrine-of-Repentance-Watson-1668.pdf
18. **Luke 19:8**, KJV; see verses 9–10 for Christ's declaration of salvation and His seeking and saving mission.
19. **Romans 12:18**, paraphrased in the narrative.
20. **First John 2:1–2**, KJV; **First John 1:9** is paraphrased in the following paragraph.
21. John Owen, Of the Mortification of Sin in Believers, chapter XIV, direction 1(2); Works, volume 6, p. 80. https://www.ccel.org/ccel/owen/mort.i.xvii.html
22. **Titus 2:11–14**, KJV.
23. **Hebrews 4:16**, KJV.

CHAPTER 17

Build a Pattern You Can Keep

Practicing Daily Faithfulness as Christ's Day Approaches

"You are to be doing it all out of love to Christ, and as service for him."
Charles H. Spurgeon[1]

Picture a Bible on the table where it was opened on Sunday. By Wednesday, the house has seen meals, messages, work, and worry, but those pages have not moved. No one announced a decision to abandon the Lord. Other things simply kept deciding what received attention.

That can happen after genuine conviction. We recognize the sin, seek forgiveness, and take a needed step. Then ordinary life resumes. The appointment runs late. The phone demands an answer. We promise to pray when things settle down. Before long, the old neglect has returned without asking permission.

The previous chapter called us to act on repentance. Now we must learn to continue. A faithful step needs to become faithful practice. We need a way of living that gives God's Word, prayer, worship, and obedience their rightful place when enthusiasm fades and pressure rises. The Christian awaiting Christ cannot leave his spiritual life to whatever the day permits.

Colossians 4:2 (NKJV) commands, "Continue earnestly in prayer, being vigilant in it with thanksgiving;"[2] Continue. The apostle calls for something more enduring than an occasional burst of concern. Watchfulness must reach the ordinary arrangements of our lives.

1. Give First Place to What Keeps You Close to Christ

Before rearranging your day, settle what it is for. You belong to Christ. Your time is part of the life He purchased, not an independent possession from which you occasionally make Him a donation. Work, family responsibilities, rest, and service belong under His lordship. So does the attention you give Him in His Word.

Ephesians 5:15–17 (KJV) makes the connection between evil days and careful living unmistakable: "See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, Redeeming the time, because the days are evil. Wherefore be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is."[3]

Paul does not tell us to panic because the days are evil. He tells us to stop living thoughtlessly. Evil days make wisdom necessary. They expose the danger of drifting through hours we will never recover while remaining unsure what God requires of us.

Look at what you protect without being reminded. You make arrangements for work, appointments, and meals because those things matter. Yet prayer may wait for spare time, and preparation for worship may receive none. What keeps receiving the attention you say belongs to God?

First Peter 4:7–10 (KJV) describes the life that belongs beside the approaching end: "But the end of all things is at hand: be ye therefore sober, and watch unto prayer. And above all things have fervent charity among yourselves: for charity shall cover the multitude of sins. Use hospitality one to another without grudging. As every man hath received the gift, even so minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God."[4]

Notice how practical Peter becomes. The approaching end calls for prayer, earnest love, hospitality, and service. Readiness is not withdrawal from Christian duties into endless speculation. It is attending to those duties with a clearer sense of their urgency.

Begin by identifying what repeatedly pushes these things aside. Perhaps you accept unnecessary commitments before considering their cost. Perhaps entertainment expands until nothing else fits. Perhaps anxiety consumes the time you intended to spend seeking God's help. Name the obstruction honestly. Then make an arrangement that protects a real duty, not merely an attractive ideal.

You are not trying to squeeze Christ into an already crowded life. You are learning to order the life that belongs to Him. As hostility grows and obedience becomes costly, this settled allegiance will

matter more, not less. Give first place to what helps you know, love, and obey the Lord you expect to meet.

2. Give Scripture and Prayer a Place in Your Actual Day

A plan that works only when no one interrupts you will rarely survive contact with your household. Choose a dependable opportunity in the day you actually live. Prepare what you need. Put the Bible where you will use it. Silence avoidable interruptions. Then come to the Lord to hear and answer Him.

Scripture must do more than pass before your eyes. Read enough to understand the passage. Consider what it teaches about God, what it exposes in you, and what it calls you to believe or obey. Bring those truths into prayer. You are seeking fellowship with the living God, not completing a religious reading assignment.

George Müller learned something important about this after years of serving Christ. During a stay at Nailsworth in the spring of 1841, he reconsidered his morning devotions. For at least ten years he had ordinarily begun with extended prayer after dressing. Yet his thoughts often wandered, and considerable time could pass before his heart became engaged. He came to see that he needed nourishment from Scripture before giving himself to prolonged prayer. His concern was "to have my soul happy in the Lord."[5]

He still began by briefly asking God to bless His Word. Then he read and pondered the New Testament, seeking truth for his own heart rather than material for someone else. What he read stirred confession, thanksgiving, and requests for himself and others. Meditation became prayer. Instead of struggling to gather his thoughts without that nourishment, he spoke to God about the truths before him. Müller credited this practice, under God's blessing, with strengthening him through deeper trials.[5]

The order helped because Scripture supplied truth for faith to receive and prayer to answer. **John 15:7** (KJV) joins these things: "If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you."[6] Christ's words shape the desires we bring to Him. Prayer grows out of communion rather than running alongside a neglected Bible.

A command exposes something to obey. A promise gives faith something to grasp. A warning uncovers a danger you must not excuse. Suppose you read Peter's command to love fellow believers earnestly. Do not hurry past the person whose name comes to mind. Ask God

to expose your resentment and strengthen your love. Then consider the call, kindness, or reconciliation that obedience requires.

J. C. Ryle put it plainly: "That Bible is read best which is practised most."[7] The passage should accompany you beyond the chair where you read it.

Deuteronomy 6:6–7 (KJV) brings God's words into ordinary life: "And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart: And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up."[8] The truth first reaches the heart, then enters the conversation and movements of the household. A protected time of reading can nourish many later moments of remembrance and prayer.

This is urgently needed as Christ's coming draws near. Fear will give you plenty to think about; the world will give you plenty to resent. Let God's Word teach you what to believe and how to pray before those voices govern your response. Do not begin the day's pressures having heard every alarm except the voice of your Shepherd.

3. Carry the Preaching into the Week

Sunday's sermon can become Monday's forgotten conviction. You remember that it was searching. You may even praise its faithfulness. But the neglected duty remains untouched, and the sin it exposed remains comfortable. Hearing has become an experience rather than the beginning of obedience.

James 1:22–25 (KJV) confronts that danger: "But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves. For if any be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass: For he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was. But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed."[9]

The problem is not that the mirror failed. The man saw, walked away, and forgot. The Word showed him something true, but he made no faithful use of what he saw. That is a dangerous way to become accustomed to preaching. Repeated exposure can leave us feeling well taught while our conduct remains uncorrected.

Come to public worship expecting God to address you through His Word. Prepare your attention before the service. During the

preaching, listen for the meaning of the text, not merely a sentence you can admire. Afterward, identify what you need to believe, confess, or do. Return to the passage during the week and ask whether your response has reached your life.

Spurgeon urged his hearers, "Let not our finis be your finis; but let our ending be your beginning."[10] In plain terms, the preacher's conclusion should begin the hearer's response.

Imagine a sermon exposing selfishness toward believers in need. You recognize that a struggling church member has received your sympathy but no help. Before the week fills, ask discreetly what assistance would be useful. Decide what you can responsibly give or do, and follow through. The goal is not to manufacture an activity after every sermon. It is to refuse the habit of leaving an understood duty unperformed.

Hebrews 10:24–25 (KJV) places this shared life under the urgency of Christ's approaching day: "And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works: Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching."[11]

The nearer the Day, the greater our need for this ministry to one another. We must not become people who collect sermons while avoiding the church where truth searches us and love requires something of us. Keep gathering. Keep listening. Carry the Word home, and let its authority remain when the service has ended.

4. Protect Your Attention before Distraction Takes Over

The phone can deliver another warning before you have finished praying about the last one. A troubling report leads to a heated discussion, then another prediction. An hour disappears. You know more about the latest alarm, but your thoughts are unsettled, your temper is shorter, and the duty before you remains undone.

That is not the watchfulness Jesus commands. Information about danger cannot replace attention to your own heart before God.

Luke 21:34–36 (KJV) says, "And take heed to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting, and drunkenness, and cares of this life, and so that day come upon you unawares. For as a snare shall it come on all them that dwell on the face of the whole earth. Watch ye therefore, and pray always, that ye may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of man."[12]

Jesus names both sinful indulgence and the cares of life. A person can avoid drunkenness and still become so burdened with worry that prayer and obedience are pushed aside. Even concern about the last days can become a means of neglecting the readiness those days require.

Ask what your habits of attention are producing. Are you becoming more prayerful, truthful, loving, and ready to obey? Or more agitated, suspicious, and absorbed in arguments? Your answer matters more than the number of reports you have followed.

Philippians 4:8 (KJV) gives the mind a positive direction: "Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things."[13] God does not merely tell us to turn something off. He teaches us what deserves our sustained thought.

Set a reasonable limit where attention is being squandered. Check necessary information at a chosen time instead of answering every alert. Leave an argument that is feeding pride rather than serving truth. Put the device away when reading Scripture or speaking with someone who needs your care. Replace the abandoned distraction with something definite: a passage to consider, a person to pray for, a duty to complete.

These are small arrangements with serious spiritual consequences. What you repeatedly attend to influences what you fear, desire, and remember. As deception and hostility intensify, you will need a mind governed by God's Word, not one continually trained to react before it has prayed. Protect the attention through which truth reaches your heart.

5. Keep Seeking Christ When Your Circumstances Change

A dependable pattern must survive more than a quiet week. Work changes. Children need help. Illness reduces strength. Persecution can remove freedoms we once assumed would remain. We must learn which arrangements can change and which loyalties must not.

Richard Baxter cautioned, "Yet be not formal and superstitious to your hours, as if God had absolutely tied you to such a time".[14] He commended regular prayer without making one arrangement of hours a law for every Christian. The purpose is to seek God faithfully, not to defend a schedule after circumstances have made it unworkable.

Consider three ordinary situations. An employed parent might use a dependable period before work or after necessary household care for Scripture and prayer, then bring a truth from that passage into a brief conversation with the children. The opportunity should be realistic enough to repeat. Length alone will not make the reading fruitful; attention, understanding, and obedience matter.

A retired believer may have more freedom but less structure. Without deliberate choices, open hours can disappear into entertainment and errands. That believer could give an unhurried period to Scripture, remember particular people in prayer, and reserve time for useful service through the church. Freedom becomes fruitful when love gives it direction.

A believer with chronic illness may need a much smaller arrangement: a short passage, an audio reading when concentration allows, a prayer offered between treatments, or help from another Christian who reads aloud. Such a believer should not measure faithfulness by a healthy person's capacity. The Lord knows the cost of attention offered through pain. Receive the help of His people rather than carrying weakness in isolation.

First Peter 4:11 (KJV) tells the one who serves to do so "as of the ability which God giveth: that God in all things may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom be praise and dominion for ever and ever. Amen."[15] God supplies strength for service; we depend on Him in the capacity He gives.

Daniel shows what settled devotion can mean when pressure becomes persecution. Daniel 6:10 (KJV) records, "Now when Daniel knew that the writing was signed, he went into his house; and his windows being open in his chamber toward Jerusalem, he kneeled upon his knees three times a day, and prayed, and gave thanks before his God, as he did aforetime."[16]

The threat did not create his devotion. It confronted a devotion already established. Daniel continued seeking the God he had sought before the decree. We should learn that steadfastness without turning the details of his schedule into a rule for everyone.

Spurgeon's counsel is useful here: "If you change hours and times, as you may, yet keep up the practice of regularly recurring retirement, meditation, and prayer."[17] Keep the communion, even when you must change the arrangement. A pattern built around seeking Christ can adapt to hardship without surrendering to it.

6. Return to the Pattern without Waiting for a Perfect Restart

One interrupted day can become an abandoned week. We miss the planned reading and decide to begin again on Monday. Monday becomes the next quiet season. Meanwhile, the Lord's present call is postponed for circumstances that may never arrive.

Do not give an imperfect day that much authority. Attend to the next opportunity. If you have neglected prayer through carelessness, confess it and pray. If a necessary duty interrupted you, return when you can. The way forward is not a dramatic announcement about starting over. It is renewed dependence on Christ expressed in the next act of faithfulness.

Philippians 2:12–13 (KJV) holds effort and divine help together: "Wherefore, my beloved, as ye 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. For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure."[18]

God's work in us gives reason to act. We do not wait until obedience becomes effortless. We seek His help and obey because His grace supplies both the desire and the strength. A written plan cannot produce spiritual life. The living Savior sustains His people as they use the means He has appointed.

Occasionally review the arrangement itself. Was it realistic? Did an avoidable distraction keep defeating it? Are you attempting too much at once while neglecting a clear duty? Make the needed correction, then return to the work. The aim is steady obedience, not continual inspection of your own performance.

Galatians 6:9 (KJV) encourages persistence: "And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not."[19] Weariness does not make faithfulness useless. Much of its fruit grows where we cannot immediately see it: in a child hearing truth again, a resentment resisted, a promise remembered under pressure, a prayer offered when discouragement urges silence.

In the last days, interruption may become more severe than an inconvenient afternoon. That is why we must learn now to return to Christ rather than surrender to discouragement. Keep using the opportunities He gives. The next faithful act still matters.

Questions for Further Study

1. Read **Colossians 4:2–6**. How does persevering prayer connect with gospel opportunity, wise conduct, and gracious speech?

What would be missing from a devotional pattern concerned only with private feelings?

2. In **1 Peter 4:7–11**, which ordinary Christian duties does Peter connect with the approaching end? How does his emphasis correct both panic and spiritual passivity?
3. Compare **John 15:7** with Deuteronomy 6:6–7. How should Scripture shape prayer and enter the ordinary conversations of a household?
4. What distinguishes the forgetful hearer from the obedient hearer in **James 1:22–25**? How can a congregation help its members carry faithful preaching into the week?
5. Study **Luke 21:34–36**. Why must watchfulness include attention to worry as well as obvious indulgence? How might constant discussion of end-times danger become a distraction from Christ's commands?
6. Read Daniel 6:10 and **Philippians 2:12–13**. What can Daniel's established practice teach us about perseverance under pressure, and how does God's work enable our own faithful effort?

Practical Applications

1. Establish one dependable occasion for Scripture and prayer. Choose an opportunity that fits your real responsibilities and present strength. Read a passage with attention, then pray in response to what it teaches. Decide how you will resume if that occasion is interrupted. Seek communion with Christ, not an impressive record.
2. Carry one clear duty from preaching into the week. After the next sermon, write a brief sentence identifying something the text calls you to believe or obey. Return to the passage, pray for help, and take an appropriate step. Do not mistake admiration for the sermon for submission to its truth.
3. Recover attention from one recurring distraction. Identify the habit that most often displaces prayer, Scripture, or necessary service. Set a workable boundary and use the recovered opportunity for a definite duty. At the week's end, consider whether the change has helped you attend to Christ and love others more faithfully.

Chapter Axioms

1. Watchfulness must shape ordinary arrangements, not merely extraordinary concerns.
2. Evil days require careful obedience, not panicked speculation.
3. Scripture gives prayer truth to answer and faith promises to receive.
4. A dependable occasion helps protect a duty that good intentions leave exposed.
5. Faithful hearing continues after the sermon through belief and obedience.
6. Attention spent on every alarm can leave the heart inattentive to Christ.
7. Changing circumstances may require a different arrangement, not a different allegiance.
8. Faithfulness is measured in the responsibilities and strength God gives, not another person's capacity.
9. Established devotion prepares believers to continue seeking God under pressure.
10. An interrupted day calls for a faithful return, not the abandonment of the week.
11. God's sustaining grace enables the obedience our plans cannot produce.
12. The approaching Day makes prayer, love, and useful service more urgent.

Fifteen Spiritual Disciplines for Consistency and Holiness

Spiritual discipline is the deliberate practice of seeking and obeying God through the means He has given. These practices do not purchase His favor. They help us live by the grace we receive through Christ. **First Timothy 4:7** (NKJV) commands, "exercise yourself toward godliness." Verse 8 (KJV) explains, "For bodily exercise profiteth little: but godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come." As the Day approaches, we need more than intentions that collapse under pressure. We need practiced dependence on our faithful Savior.

1. Begin your duties by depending on Christ.

Do not begin with a promise about your strength. Begin by asking

for His. **John 15:5** (KJV) says, "He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing." **Philippians 2:13** (KJV) explains, "For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure." Before a difficult conversation or a familiar temptation, seek His help and act on His Word. End-times pressure will expose self-confidence. Daily dependence teaches us to seek the strength that will not fail when ours is exhausted.

2. Read Scripture to receive correction, not merely information.

Open the Bible expecting God to govern your life. **Second Timothy 3:16** (KJV) declares that Scripture is "profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness". **Psalm 119:9** (KJV) asks, "Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? by taking heed thereto according to thy word." Read a passage in context, identify what it teaches, and receive what it corrects. Do not skip the command that interferes with your plans. When deception grows persuasive, an obedient familiarity with Scripture will serve you better than a collection of unexamined opinions.

3. Keep God's words available to your mind.

Meditate on a truth until you understand its bearing on your life; memorize a passage you can recall when you need it. **Psalm 119:11** (KJV) says, "Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee." **Psalm 119:15** (KJV) adds, "I will meditate in thy precepts, and have respect unto thy ways." Choose a promise or warning relevant to your present struggle and return to it during the day. Rehearsed fears can dominate an unguarded mind. As hostility increases, stored Scripture gives faith something true to remember and obey.

4. Pray before pressure becomes panic.

Give prayer a dependable place, then carry it into the moments when fear, anger, or temptation rises. **Luke 21:36** (KJV) commands, "Watch ye therefore, and pray always". **Colossians 4:2** (KJV) says, "Continue in prayer, and watch in the same with thanksgiving". Name the temptation rather than offering only a general request for a better day. Pray for the person you fear, the patience you lack, and the courage obedience requires. Christ connects prayer directly with readiness for

His coming. Why wait until fear has governed your response before seeking your Father's help?

5. Practice praise and thanksgiving when circumstances disappoint you.

Hebrews 13:15 (KJV) directs us, "By him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to his name." **First Thessalonians 5:18** (KJV) commands, "In every thing give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you." Name what remains true about God when something painful has happened. Thank Him for a specific mercy, and praise Him for the Savior you have not lost. As end-times troubles multiply, gratitude helps keep grief from becoming settled accusation against God.

6. Confess known sin without protecting it.

Psalm 139:23–24 (KJV) prays, "Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: And see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting." **First John 1:9** (KJV) promises, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." Name the wrong plainly, seek Christ's cleansing, and take the required step away from it. Pressure makes excuses sound reasonable. A practice of honest confession helps us resist the compromises we might otherwise defend as necessary.

7. Remove what repeatedly invites temptation.

Romans 13:14 (KJV) commands, "But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof." **Second Timothy 2:22** (KJV) adds, "Flee also youthful lusts: but follow righteousness, faith, charity, peace, with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart." Close the access you keep using to feed sin. Change the conversation, refuse the dishonest arrangement, or leave the material that stirs lust. Then pursue the good you have neglected. When lawlessness spreads, holiness requires more than regretting temptation after deliberately welcoming it.

8. Respond promptly to a clear command.

Psalm 119:60 (KJV) says, "I made haste, and delayed not to keep

thy commandments." **James 1:22** (KJV) commands, "But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves." When you understand a duty, take the next responsible step. Make the apology, return what you owe, or begin the neglected task. Repeated delay can make disobedience feel like thoughtful consideration. As Christ's Day approaches, train yourself to respond to His authority rather than waiting until obedience becomes convenient. The right intention needs a real beginning.

9. Keep public worship and fellowship firmly in your life.

Acts 2:42 (KJV) records, "And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers." **Hebrews 10:25** (KJV) calls us to be "exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching." Arrange ordinary commitments around faithful participation in a biblical local church, rather than treating worship as whatever remains possible afterward. Receive preaching, join the prayers, and know the people you worship beside. If illness prevents attendance, seek the church's care. Increasing danger is a reason to strengthen fellowship, not quietly disappear from it.

10. Receive correction before sin becomes harder to recognize.

Hebrews 3:13 (KJV) says, "But exhort one another daily, while it is called To day; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin." **Proverbs 27:6** (KJV) explains, "Faithful are the wounds of a friend; but the kisses of an enemy are deceitful." Give a mature believer permission to speak honestly, and listen without immediately defending yourself. Compare the correction with Scripture and act where it is right. End-times deception will not always arrive through strangers. We need faithful people who can challenge the excuses we have begun telling ourselves.

11. Train your tongue to serve truth and love.

James 1:19 (KJV) commands, "let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath". **Ephesians 4:29** (KJV) says, "Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers." Pause before replying when anger rises. Refuse the unverified accusation; speak a needed truth without cruelty. Fear and hostility can turn

Christian conversation into continual outrage. A watchful believer must not let the world's bitterness determine the sound of his witness.

12. Practice contentment through generous use of what God gives.

Hebrews 13:5 (KJV) says, "be content with such things as ye have: for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee." **First Timothy 6:18** (KJV) instructs those with resources to be "rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate". Set aside something you can responsibly give, and meet a real need. Learn to distinguish necessary provision from fear-driven accumulation. When scarcity or threatened loss pressures believers to compromise, practiced generosity reminds us that possessions are entrusted to our care, not entitled to our allegiance.

13. Make useful service a regular expression of love.

First Peter 4:10 (KJV) commands, "As every man hath received the gift, even so minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God." **Galatians 6:10** (KJV) adds, "As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith." Undertake a fitting responsibility and carry it faithfully: encourage a struggling believer, help with a practical need, or use your gift in the church. Peter places service beside the approaching end. Watching for Christ should make us more useful to His people.

14. Test teaching before allowing it to shape your convictions.

Acts 17:11 (KJV) commends those who "received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so." **First Thessalonians 5:21** (KJV) commands, "Prove all things; hold fast that which is good." Examine the passage being cited, its context, and the claim made from it. Ask whether the teaching agrees with the gospel and promotes obedience to Christ. End-times watchfulness cannot survive on borrowed excitement. A confident speaker does not relieve you of the duty to discern.

15. Bring Christ's return into today's choices.

First John 3:3 (KJV) says, "And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure." **Second Peter 3:14** (KJV) urges, "Wherefore, beloved, seeing that ye look for such things, be

diligent that ye may be found of him in peace, without spot, and blameless." Remember His coming when deciding what to tolerate, pursue, or postpone. Ask whether the choice helps you live ready to meet Him. Christian hope does not merely comfort us about the future. It brings the promised meeting with Christ to bear on the life we are living now.

These disciplines belong together in a life of faith. Begin with neglected duties God has made plain, seek His strength, and continue. The purpose is not to admire your consistency. It is to remain near Christ, responsive to His Word, and faithful until He comes.

Keep Coming to the LORD Who Keeps You

Dear believer, do not let this chapter become another good intention laid beside an unopened Bible. The Lord has given you His Word, access to Him in prayer, and a place among His people. Use these mercies. Bring Him the day you actually have, with its duties, weakness, and unfinished business. Ask for help, receive His truth, and obey what He makes plain.

Christ says in **John 15:5** (NKJV), "without Me you can do nothing."[20] Your hope is not that you will finally construct a life that no longer needs His help. Your hope is that the Savior who commands you to remain in Him supplies what you cannot provide. Keep coming. When conviction searches you, repent. When hardship weakens you, seek His strength. When the world crowds your thoughts, return to His words. Will you give Him your attention today, rather than promising Him a better tomorrow?

From a Faithful Pattern to Faithful Help

A faithful pattern should draw you closer to Christ's people, not make you determined to manage without them. There will be burdens you cannot carry alone and faults you struggle to see. There will also be someone whose perseverance your love can strengthen. The next chapter takes us from arranging our own practice to seeking and offering faithful help: learning to receive correction, share burdens, and encourage one another as the Day approaches.

Notes

1. Charles H. Spurgeon, "Watching for Christ's Coming," preached April 7, 1889, Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit, vol. 39, section II. https://www.spurgeon.org/sermons/watching-for-christs-coming
2. **Colossians 4:2**, NKJV.
3. **Ephesians 5:15–17**, KJV.
4. **1 Peter 4:7–10**, KJV. Peter's commands join expectation of the end with sober prayer and active love.
5. George Müller, A Narrative of Some of the Lord's Dealings with George Müller, Written by Himself, Third Part, reflection following the May 7, 1841 entry; his stay at Nailsworth ran from March 20 to May 7, 1841. https://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/22148/pg22148-images.html. See also "The First Great and Primary Business," https://www.georgemuller.org/devotional/the-first-great-and-primary-business. The change occurred years after his November 1825 conversion, not immediately afterward.
6. **John 15:7**, KJV.
7. J. C. Ryle, Practical Religion, chapter V, "Bible-Reading," concluding practical counsel, paragraph (2)(d), p. 132. https://www.gutenberg.org/files/38162/38162-h/38162-h.htm
8. Deuteronomy 6:6–7, KJV.
9. **James 1:22–25**, KJV.
10. Charles H. Spurgeon, "Hearing with Heed," preached August 9, 1885, Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit, vol. 43, section I. "Finis" means the end. https://www.spurgeon.org/sermons/hearing-with-heed
11. **Hebrews 10:24–25**, KJV.
12. **Luke 21:34–36**, KJV.
13. **Philippians 4:8**, KJV.
14. Richard Baxter, A Christian Directory, Part II, chapter XVII, Direction V; Practical Works, vol. I (1846), p. 467. Excerpt ends before the original colon. https://www.gutenberg.org/files/43800/43800-h/43800-h.htm
15. **1 Peter 4:11**, KJV; quotation begins within the verse.
16. Daniel 6:10, KJV.
17. Charles H. Spurgeon, "Pray Without Ceasing," sermon 1039, March 10, 1872, Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit, vol. 18, section II. https://www.spurgeon.org/sermons/pray-without-ceasing
18. **Philippians 2:12–13**, KJV.
19. **Galatians 6:9**, KJV.
20. **John 15:5**, NKJV. Short NKJV quotations are used alongside longer KJV quotations. KJV passages are public domain.

CHAPTER 18

Ask for Help and Become a Help

Strengthening One Another as Christ's Day Approaches

"Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ."
Galatians 6:2 (KJV)

Imagine a believer who stays after church to straighten chairs, then goes home carrying a temptation he has never named to anyone. He is willing to help everyone else. He is afraid to be the person who needs help. His silence may look like strength, but it leaves him alone with a struggle that is growing stronger.

He knows the congregation would pray if he were ill. He is less certain what would happen if someone knew how near he feels to compromise. So he keeps the conversation pleasant, answers questions briefly, and promises himself that next week he will do better. Meanwhile, no one knows where he needs encouragement or warning.

Perhaps you recognize the habit. You believe in fellowship, yet keep your deepest struggle beyond its reach. Christ has placed you among His people, but you are attempting to carry alone what He commands them to help you bear.

Galatians 6:2 (NKJV) says, "Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ."[1] This command requires both someone willing to help and someone willing to receive help. The previous chapter taught us to establish faithful practices. Now we must learn to let other believers strengthen us in them, and to offer the same faithful care in return.

As deception spreads and obedience becomes costly, isolation will

not make us stronger. We need Christians who know enough about our lives to pray intelligently, speak truthfully, and stand beside us when faith is tested.

1. Ask for Help before the Struggle Becomes a Crisis

Sin seldom announces the full cost of its invitation. It offers relief, concealment, or a small compromise that seems manageable. When you keep discussing the matter only with yourself, your own excuses can begin to sound like settled wisdom.

Hebrews 3:12–13 (KJV) identifies the danger and the help God appoints: "Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God. But exhort one another daily, while it is called To day; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin."[2]

The warning concerns departure from the living God. The answer includes daily exhortation from other believers. God uses their words to interrupt the deceit we might otherwise continue believing. Asking for help is therefore an act of watchfulness. It brings a struggle into a place where truth can challenge it before compromise hardens into a defended way of life.

Choose someone whose character and counsel have proved trustworthy: a pastor, elder, or mature Christian who takes Scripture seriously. Explain the concern plainly. You might say, "I am under pressure to do something dishonest, and I am beginning to justify it. Will you help me think through the Scripture and pray with me before I answer?" That gives the other person something definite to address.

Consider a believer whose employer asks him to conceal a damaging fact from a customer. He fears losing his job. If he merely says that work is stressful, the counsel he receives may never reach the real temptation. When he explains the demand, a faithful Christian can help him consider an honest response, pray for courage, and seek practical support if obedience brings loss.

Proverbs 15:22 (KJV) says, "Without counsel purposes are disappointed: but in the multitude of counsellors they are established." **James 5:16** (KJV) joins honesty with prayer: "Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much."[3]

Speak to appropriate people, not to everyone. You need faithful help, not a public audience. But do not let the fear of being known

become a reason to remain unhelped. What are you carrying that a trustworthy believer should know about before the pressure increases?

Spurgeon observed, "It takes a great deal of friendship to be able to tell a man of his faults."[4] Seek the kind of friend who loves you enough to tell the truth. A person who will only confirm your explanations cannot provide the help you need.

2. Receive Correction without Making Your Excuses the Answer

The moment someone questions our conduct, an explanation may be ready before we have heard the concern. We know the pressure we faced, the insult we received, and the reasons the situation seemed unusual. Those facts may matter. They can also become a way of refusing the truth.

Proverbs 12:15 (KJV) says, "The way of a fool is right in his own eyes: but he that hearkeneth unto counsel is wise." **Proverbs 27:6** (NKJV) adds, "Faithful are the wounds of a friend".[5] A friend's correction may hurt because it touches something real. The discomfort itself does not prove that the friend has wronged you.

Begin by listening. Ask what the person observed rather than guessing at his motive. If he says that your conversation has become bitter, ask for an example. If he is concerned about your withdrawal from the church, let him explain the change he has noticed. Give truth enough room to reach you before supplying your defense.

Then examine the concern under Scripture. A friend may misunderstand a fact; a pastor may need more information. Explain what is necessary honestly, while remaining willing to admit what is true. Receiving correction means submitting to God's Word, not treating every human judgment as infallible.

James 1:19–20 (KJV) speaks directly to the temper we bring to these conversations: "Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath: For the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God."[6] Slow your reply long enough to hear. Anger may defend your reputation while obstructing the correction your soul needs.

Richard Baxter counseled his readers, "be not impatient if they cross your opinions, or open your ignorance."[7] We may learn something necessary from the very person whose correction we were preparing to dismiss.

Suppose a friend notices that frightening reports have made you increasingly suspicious of fellow Christians. Instead of answering that

he does not understand the times, consider whether your concerns have begun producing accusations without evidence. You can take end-times danger seriously while repenting of the bitterness with which you have responded to it.

Once a fault is clear, name it without hiding inside a long explanation. Thank the person for caring enough to speak. Identify what needs to change and ask for prayer. A faithful friend is not an enemy because he refuses to help you excuse sin. As deceit grows more persuasive, we will need such friends more urgently.

3. Restore the Struggling Believer without Looking Down on Him

Receiving correction requires humility. Giving it requires humility too. The person who sees another believer's fault must not imagine that clear sight has made him incapable of falling.

Galatians 6:1 (KJV) commands, "Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted." Verse 3 continues, "For if a man think himself to be something, when he is nothing, he deceiveth himself."[8]

Paul directs us toward restoration. The goal is not to win the conversation, secure an admission that we were right, or leave the person ashamed enough to avoid us. We seek his recovery to faithful obedience. The manner matters because a proud helper can turn a necessary warning into an occasion for displaying himself.

Begin with prayer and an honest examination of your own spirit. Speak about what you actually know, not what you have assumed. Choose a private setting when appropriate. In **Matthew 18:15** (KJV), Jesus says, "Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother."[9] The purpose is to gain a brother, not an audience.

Richard Sibbes wrote, "Weak Christians are like glasses which are hurt with the least violent usage, but if gently handled will continue a long time."[10] Gentleness does not make truth less necessary. It takes care that the person receiving truth is treated as someone we desire to restore.

Speak plainly enough that the wrong can be understood. "I am concerned about the statement you made because it was not true" is more useful than a cloud of hints. Listen to the answer. Open the

relevant Scripture. Then help the person consider repentance in concrete terms: correcting the false statement, seeking forgiveness, ending the dishonest practice, or returning to a neglected duty.

Bring Christ's mercy into the conversation with the same seriousness as His command. The person must see a way back through repentance and faith, not merely the disgrace of having failed. **James 5:19–20** (KJV) describes the stakes: "Brethren, if any of you do err from the truth, and one convert him; Let him know, that he which converteth the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins."[11] This is the work of turning someone back from danger, not casually improving his behavior.

In days when lawlessness is praised, Christians must not become so afraid of giving offense that they leave one another unchallenged. Nor may we imitate the world's cruelty when we speak. Tell the truth as someone who also needs grace. Help your brother return to the Savior you both need.

4. Carry a Real Burden, Not Just a Concern

Someone tells you that the strain is becoming difficult to bear. You express sympathy, promise to pray, and return to your own affairs. Sometimes prayer is the help you can give. At other times, you have the means to relieve a real need but never stop long enough to discover it.

First John 3:16–18 (KJV) puts love within reach of our hands: "Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. But whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him? My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth."[12]

John begins with Christ's sacrifice and moves to a brother's need. The cross teaches us to give ourselves, and an ordinary opportunity tests whether we mean it. Love must reach beyond a kind tone when useful help is available.

Ask a specific, respectful question: "Would a meal help this week?" "Do you need transport?" "Is there a task I could take care of?" Listen to the answer instead of insisting on the kind of help you prefer to give. Agree on something you can actually do, then follow through. An offer that requires an exhausted person to organize everything may add another burden rather than lift one.

Spurgeon pressed this point: "But this sympathy must show itself by actual assistance rendered wherever it is possible."[13] The question is not only whether you feel concern, but whether something within your ability would help carry the weight.

This has particular force when faithfulness brings persecution or financial loss. **Hebrews 13:3** (KJV) commands, "Remember them that are in bonds, as bound with them; and them which suffer adversity, as being yourselves also in the body."[14] We are to remember sufferers with an identification that refuses comfortable distance. Their trouble concerns us because they belong to Christ and share our human vulnerability.

The believer who refuses a dishonest demand may need more than praise for his courage. His family may need practical help while he looks for work. The elderly Christian frightened by hostility may need someone to accompany him, listen, and pray. A family under strain may need a quiet act of service that gives them room to breathe.

Such care does not remove every consequence of obedience. It shows the sufferer that he has not been abandoned to face those consequences alone. When pressure tempts believers to retreat from Christ, the faithful help of His people can make costly obedience less lonely.

5. Give the Help This Person Actually Needs

A person who is discouraged and a person who is defiant may both be absent from a needed duty. Their outward conduct can look similar while their spiritual needs differ. Love must listen carefully enough to know what it is addressing.

First Thessalonians 5:14 (KJV) says, "Now we exhort you, brethren, warn them that are unruly, comfort the feebleminded, support the weak, be patient toward all men."[15] The older word "feebleminded" here refers to the fainthearted or discouraged. Paul does not prescribe one speech for everyone. He calls for warning, comfort, support, and patience fitted to the person's need.

Someone refusing a known command needs a faithful warning. Someone crushed by fear may need a promise carefully explained and help taking one manageable step. Someone whose strength has been reduced may need assistance rather than suspicion. Ask what is happening before deciding what the person must hear.

Commenting on this verse, John Calvin wrote, "Towards the fainthearted another system of conduct must be pursued, for they have need of consolation."[16] Discernment keeps us from offering a rebuke

where encouragement is needed, or offering reassurance where repentance is required.

Imagine two believers withdrawing from church life. One admits that he simply prefers activities that repeatedly displace worship. The other has become exhausted caring for a sick relative and does not know whom to ask for help. They both need pastoral attention, but repeating the same rebuke to both would fail to understand the second person's burden. One needs to face a misplaced priority; the other may need someone to share a demanding responsibility.

At the same time, help must not erase personal responsibility. **Galatians 6:4–5** (KJV) says, "But let every man prove his own work, and then shall he have rejoicing in himself alone, and not in another. For every man shall bear his own burden."[17] Alongside bearing one another's burdens, Paul requires each person to examine his own work. Another believer can assist you, but cannot believe, repent, or obey in your place.

Second Corinthians 1:24 (KJV) guards the helper from assuming ownership of another person's conscience: "Not for that we have dominion over your faith, but are helpers of your joy: for by faith ye stand."[18] Even apostolic ministry served faith rather than replacing it with human domination. Offer counsel under Scripture, not control over decisions God has not assigned to you.

End-times pressures will bring different temptations to different people. Some will fear loss; others will become angry, suspicious, or weary. Faithful care takes these differences seriously while directing everyone to the same sufficient Christ. Patience gives us time to understand and strength to remain useful.

6. Keep Encouraging One Another When the Pressure Continues

A difficult conversation may receive generous attention on the first evening. The harder test comes later, when the trouble has not disappeared and the person still needs encouragement. Love must learn to remain after the urgency is no longer new.

Hebrews 10:23–25 (KJV) says, "Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering; (for he is faithful that promised;) And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works: Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching."[19]

The passage joins God's faithfulness, our perseverance, and our

care for one another. We hold fast because the One who promised is faithful. We also give deliberate attention to other believers so that love and good works are strengthened. The approaching Day intensifies this responsibility.

Remember what was shared. Pray specifically. At an appropriate time, ask how the person is doing with the agreed step. Celebrate actual obedience without demanding impressive results. If he has failed, help him face the failure honestly and return to Christ. Encouragement should neither excuse sin nor suggest that one fall has exhausted the Savior's mercy.

John Owen described this shared duty: "Mutually to bear with each other's infirmities, weakness, tenderness, failings, in meekness, patience, pity, and with assistance."[20] Patience does not merely tolerate another believer at a distance. It remains willing to help.

Handle what you learn with care. A private confession is not material for casual conversation or a disguised prayer request. Share only with those who properly need to help. Yet do not promise secrecy that would conceal abuse, criminal conduct, or serious danger. Protect those at risk and seek appropriate pastoral and civil help. Christian care must never become a hiding place for harm.

You may also need help in helping. A burden can exceed your knowledge, capacity, or proper responsibility. Bring in trustworthy pastoral support rather than pretending that faithfulness requires you to manage everything alone. A church shares care; it does not depend on one exhausted member being available without limit.

Galatians 6:9–10 (KJV) gives perseverance a purpose: "And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not. As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith."[21] Keep doing the good God places within reach. Under prolonged persecution, small acts of faithful care may become precious evidence that Christ has not left His people without comfort.

Questions for Further Study

1. Read **Galatians 6:1–5**. How do restoration, humility, burden-bearing, and personal responsibility belong together? What happens when one is emphasized while the others are neglected?
2. In **Hebrews 3:12–14**, how does mutual exhortation oppose sin's deceitfulness? Why should a believer seek help before compromise becomes an established habit?

3. Compare **Proverbs 12:15**, **Proverbs 27:6**, and **James 1:19–20**. What attitudes help a person receive correction without surrendering his responsibility to test counsel by Scripture?
4. How does **1 John 3:16–18** connect Christ's sacrifice with practical help? What might **Hebrews 13:3** require of a church whose members suffer for their faith?
5. Study **1 Thessalonians 5:14** and **2 Corinthians 1:24**. How can help be both discerning and respectful of the believer's responsibility before God?
6. What reasons for continued encouragement appear in **Hebrews 10:23–25**? How should the approaching Day affect the patience, attention, and practical care believers give one another?

Practical Applications

1. Bring one real concern to a trustworthy believer. Identify a struggle, burden, or pressure you have kept vague. Arrange an appropriate conversation with a pastor or mature Christian. Explain the concern clearly, ask for Scripture and prayer, and agree on a useful next step.
2. Receive one correction thoughtfully. Consider a concern someone has already raised about you. Revisit the relevant facts and Scripture without preparing a defense first. Where the correction is true, acknowledge it and take a definite step toward obedience. Ask for clarification where you do not understand.
3. Turn concern for one person into fitting help. Ask what would genuinely assist a struggling believer. Offer something within your ability, follow through, and remember to pray. Plan a suitable later conversation without making the person feel watched or controlled.

Chapter Axioms

1. Seeking faithful help is an act of watchfulness, not a denial of faith.
2. Sin's deceitfulness makes honest counsel a mercy we must not despise.
3. A clear description of a struggle makes specific prayer and counsel possible.

4. Correction should be tested by Scripture, not rejected because it hurts.
5. The purpose of confronting sin is restoration, not humiliation.
6. A helper must watch his own heart while seeking another believer's recovery.
7. Love becomes visible when concern leads to appropriate action.
8. The fainthearted, the weak, and the defiant do not all need the same response.
9. Shared burdens do not remove personal responsibility before God.
10. Faithful ministry strengthens dependence on Christ rather than control by people.
11. Trustworthy care protects confidence without concealing serious harm.
12. The approaching Day calls for more deliberate encouragement, not deeper isolation.

Serving One Another

Fifteen Principles of Christian Help and Mutual Care

"One another" means that believers give and receive care within Christ's family. The person who strengthens you today may need your encouragement tomorrow. These commands reach beyond warm feelings to shared prayer, truthful counsel, patient service, and costly love. We belong to Christ, and He teaches us to care for people who belong to Him.

Scripture also identifies "helps" among God's appointments in the church (1 Corinthians 12:28, NKJV). Believers do not all possess the same gifts, but none is excused from the duties of love. Some are especially equipped to assist others; all must seek another's good. As Christ's return approaches, this mutual care helps keep fear from isolating us and sin from hardening us.

1. Serve One Another with the Gifts God Has Entrusted to You.

1 Corinthians 12:28 (KJV) names "helps" among God's provisions for His church. First Peter 4:10 (KJV) commands, "As every man hath received the gift, even so minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God." Your ability is a trust to

use, not a possession to admire. Offer the practical assistance, understanding, or strength God has supplied. During unsettled times, a congregation needs faithful members doing their part, including work that attracts little notice. Do not leave necessary service undone while waiting for a more impressive assignment.

2. Love One Another When the World's Coldness Presses upon the Church.

John 13:34 (NKJV): "love one another; as I have loved you." Matthew 24:12–13 (KJV): "And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold. But he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved." Christ's love establishes our pattern; His warning exposes the danger. Repeated encounters with cruelty can tempt us to become cold ourselves. Refuse that surrender. Notice the overlooked believer, return the unanswered call, and make room for someone's trouble. Watchfulness includes guarding our love from the lawlessness we condemn.

3. Bear One Another's Burdens Instead of Merely Observing Them.

Galatians 6:2 (KJV): "Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ." Romans 15:1 (KJV): "We then that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves." Paul calls the strong to bear with those whose faith is weak, rather than insist on pleasing themselves. Strength becomes useful when it helps another person stand. Ask what part of the burden you can appropriately carry: transport, a necessary task, a difficult conversation, or time beside a weary caregiver. When obedience becomes costly, such help can remove a pressure that tempts a believer to compromise. Concern should become something the burdened person actually receives.

4. Pray for One Another's Endurance, Not Only for Easier Circumstances.

Ephesians 6:18 (KJV) calls for prayer while "watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints." Colossians 4:12 (KJV) describes Epaphras praying "that ye may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God." Pray for relief, but also ask for courage, discernment, purity, and steadfast faith. A changed circumstance cannot replace a strengthened soul. When persecution or deception threatens, bring particular believers before God by name. Ask Him to

keep them obedient where fear urges surrender. Your private prayers can serve people whose struggles you cannot personally resolve.

5. Encourage One Another before Discouragement Becomes Withdrawal.

Hebrews 3:13 (KJV): "But exhort one another daily, while it is called To day; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin." Hebrews 10:25 (KJV): "exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching." Encouragement has a protective purpose. Speak while the struggling believer is still listening, rather than waiting until absence becomes a habit. Recall a fitting promise, acknowledge a costly act of obedience, and invite an honest conversation. The approaching Day gives us greater reason to draw near, not greater permission to neglect each other.

6. Teach and Admonish One Another with the Word of Christ.

Romans 15:14 (KJV) describes believers "filled with all knowledge, able also to admonish one another." Colossians 3:16 (KJV): "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another." Helpful counsel needs more than confidence. Let Scripture identify the danger and direct the response. When alarming claims circulate, open the relevant passage together before repeating the claim. When conduct contradicts the gospel, speak plainly and kindly. In days of deception, we need friends who help us hear Christ rather than merely confirm what we already think.

7. Restore One Another Gently When Sin Has Gained Ground.

Galatians 6:1 (KJV): "restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted." James 5:20 (KJV) speaks of the one who "converteth the sinner from the error of his way." The aim is recovery, not victory in an argument. Name the wrong accurately, hear the person patiently, and urge a real return to Christ and obedience. Never confuse gentleness with permission to continue sinning. As lawlessness spreads, the church must neither discard the fallen nor make their fall seem harmless. Help them return while watching your own heart.

8. Forgive One Another Rather than Feeding Bitterness.

Ephesians 4:32 (KJV): "forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you." Colossians 3:13 (KJV): "even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye." Christ's mercy confronts the pleasure

we sometimes take in keeping a grievance alive. Refuse revenge, speak honestly about the wrong, and pursue forgiveness and reconciliation in truth. Serious harm still requires protection and proper accountability. Under pressure, old resentments can turn fellow believers against each other. Do not give an old injury permission to govern your present obedience or extinguish the love Christ commands.

9. Honor One Another, Especially Those Easily Overlooked.

Romans 12:10 (KJV): "in honour preferring one another." First Corinthians 12:22 (KJV): "those members of the body, which seem to be more feeble, are necessary." A church can praise usefulness while overlooking people whose limitations make their service less visible. Learn their names, hear their concerns, and recognize their place in Christ's body. Neither age, poverty, illness, nor lack of public influence makes a believer disposable. If outward security disappears, a church trained to honor only the impressive will struggle to care for the vulnerable. Practice Christlike regard before adversity exposes your preferences.

10. Welcome One Another without Making Hospitality a Performance.

First Peter 4:7, 9 (KJV): "But the end of all things is at hand"; "Use hospitality one to another without grudging." Hebrews 13:2 (KJV): "Be not forgetful to entertain strangers." Peter places an open home beside sober prayer as the end approaches. A simple meal, a seat at the table, or appropriate lodging can answer loneliness and practical need. Do not postpone welcome until your surroundings impress you. Make wise arrangements suited to your household, then offer what you can gladly. Believers facing displacement or exclusion need dependable kindness more than polished entertaining.

11. Supply One Another's Necessities with Practical Generosity.

First John 3:18 (KJV): "let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth." James 2:16 (KJV) asks what good kind words accomplish if "ye give them not those things which are needful to the body." Hunger cannot eat our good intentions. Discover the actual need and give responsibly, without embarrassing the recipient or demanding influence in return. As pressure threatens livelihoods, faithful giving can help a brother refuse a dishonest bargain. Consider what you could share now, rather than waiting until giving costs nothing.

12. Comfort One Another with the Comfort God Has Given You.

Romans 12:15 (KJV): "Rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep." Second Corinthians 1:4 (KJV) says God comforts us "that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble." Sit close enough to hear the sorrow before trying to explain it. Share the promise that sustained you without pretending every suffering follows your experience. End-times distress will call for believers who can grieve without abandoning hope. Sometimes faithful comfort begins with remaining beside a person after others have run out of things to say.

13. Pursue Peace with One Another Instead of Multiplying Suspicion.

Romans 14:19 (KJV): "follow after the things which make for peace, and things wherewith one may edify another." James 5:9 (KJV): "Grudge not one against another, brethren, lest ye be condemned: behold, the judge standeth before the door." The nearness of judgment should restrain our quarrels, not excuse them. Verify before accusing, speak directly rather than spreading insinuations, and distinguish biblical conviction from personal preference. A frightened congregation can become quick to suspect its own members. Watch your tongue so that your response to danger does not become another danger to the church.

14. Stand with One Another When Faithfulness Brings Persecution.

Hebrews 13:3 (KJV): "Remember them that are in bonds, as bound with them." Second Timothy 1:16 (KJV) says Onesiphorus "oft refreshed me, and was not ashamed of my chain." He did not let Paul's imprisonment make friendship embarrassing. Remember imprisoned believers, support their families, and seek wise, lawful ways to provide help. When hostility increases, association itself may carry a cost. Will fear make you disappear from the life of someone who stood beside you in easier days? Ask Christ for courage to remain a faithful brother or sister.

15. Keep Helping One Another with Patience and Dependence on Christ.

First Thessalonians 5:14 (KJV): "support the weak, be patient toward all men." First Corinthians 15:58 (KJV): "your labour is not in vain in the Lord." Patient help does not require one exhausted person to do everything. Share responsibilities, seek suitable support, and continue the good God has placed within your reach. Some

burdens last longer than our first burst of concern. Christ's resurrection and promised victory give lasting service its hope. As we await His coming, let us remain willing both to receive help humbly and to give it faithfully, trusting Him for fruit we cannot command.

Receive His Help, and Offer Yours

Dear believer, do not keep standing within reach of Christian love while refusing to let anyone know where you are struggling. Christ has not asked you to prove your strength by remaining silent. Bring the truth into an appropriate conversation. Ask for prayer. Receive the correction you need. The Savior who knows your weakness has given you brothers and sisters through whom His care can reach you.

And if someone needs your help, do not wait until you feel impressive enough to give it. Listen carefully, open the Word, pray sincerely, and do the good within your reach. You cannot become another person's savior. You can help him look to the Savior who gave Himself for you both.

Romans 15:7 (KJV) commands, "Wherefore receive ye one another, as Christ also received us to the glory of God."[22] Let His welcome teach you how to receive the struggling believer. Let His truth govern what you say. Let His patient love keep you from turning away when help becomes costly. Who needs to hear from you, and whom do you need to ask for help?

Prepare to Answer before the Pressure Arrives

Faithful help prepares us to face real decisions, not merely to discuss our struggles. A demand to compromise may arrive suddenly; fear may make a familiar truth seem difficult to obey. In the next chapter, we will work through concrete situations before the pressure is upon us: identifying the temptation, remembering what God has said, and considering a faithful response. We cannot rehearse every hardship. We can learn to bring the coming test under the authority of Christ before it comes.

Notes

1. **Galatians 6:2**, NKJV.
2. **Hebrews 3:12–13**, KJV.
3. **Proverbs 15:22** and **James 5:16**, KJV. James joins confession with mutual prayer in the setting of care for the sick; the passage does not authorize indiscriminate disclosure or promise that every illness will immediately end.
4. Charles H. Spurgeon, "The Best Friend," introductory paragraphs, delivered February 23, 1882, Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit, vol. 45. https://www.spurgeon.org/sermons/the-best-friend
5. **Proverbs 12:15**, KJV; **Proverbs 27:6**, NKJV, opening clause.
6. **James 1:19–20**, KJV.
7. Richard Baxter, A Christian Directory, Part IV, chapter XVI, Title 2, Direction XII. Excerpt begins within the sentence. https://classic-literature.net/richard-baxter-1615-1691/a-christian-directory-part-4-christian-politics/
8. **Galatians 6:1**, 3, KJV.
9. **Matthew 18:15**, KJV.
10. Richard Sibbes, The Bruised Reed, chapter 4, "Christ Will Not Quench the Smoking Flax," subsection "Support the Weak." https://www.monergism.com/thethreshold/sdg/sibbes/The_Bruised_Reed_-_Richard_Sibbes.pdf
11. **James 5:19–20**, KJV.
12. **1 John 3:16–18**, KJV.
13. Charles H. Spurgeon, "Burden-Bearing," section I, delivered August 26, 1886, Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit, vol. 49. https://www.spurgeon.org/sermons/burden-bearing
14. **Hebrews 13:3**, KJV.
15. **1 Thessalonians 5:14**, KJV. "Feebleminded" carries the sense of fainthearted in this context, not an assessment of intelligence.
16. John Calvin, Commentary on **1 Thessalonians 5:14**, translated by John Pringle, p. 268. https://ccel.org/ccel/c/calvin/calcom42/cache/calcom42.pdf
17. **Galatians 6:4–5**, KJV. Personal accountability and mutual assistance are complementary commands in the same paragraph.
18. **2 Corinthians 1:24**, KJV.
19. **Hebrews 10:23–25**, KJV.
20. John Owen, Eshcol: A Cluster of the Fruit of Canaan, second division, concerning mutual duties, Rule VII, p. 88. https://www.digitalpuritan.net/Digital%20Puritan%20Resources/Owen%2C%20John/The%20Works%20of%20John%20Owen%20%28vol.19%29/%5BJO%5D%20Eschol%20-%20A%20Cluster%20of%20Fruit%20of%20Canaan.pdf
21. **Galatians 6:9–10**, KJV.
22. **Romans 15:7**, KJV.

CHAPTER 19

Rehearse before the Test

Preparing to Obey Christ When Pressure Comes

"Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation."
Matthew 26:41 (NKJV)

Imagine a believer reading an email that asks him to approve something he knows is false. Yesterday, honesty seemed simple. Today, his income may depend on his answer. He still knows what Scripture says, but now he can hear what obedience might cost.

That is why we must prepare before the test. A familiar command can become difficult to obey when someone attaches a threat to it. Christ does not promise that faithfulness will always feel easy. He gives us His Word, His Spirit, and His people so that fear need not decide our answer.

Before His disciples faced the shock of persecution, Jesus spoke to them about it. John 16:1 (KJV) says, "These things have I spoken unto you, that ye should not be offended." He was preparing them not to stumble when hostility arrived. Verse 4 explains, "But these things have I told you, that when the time shall come, ye may remember that I told you of them."[1]

Notice the order. Christ gives the truth; the trial comes; the disciple remembers. The warning received beforehand becomes a help during the event. We should not spend our peaceful hours assuming that courage will appear whenever we need it. We should use them to listen to the Lord who knows what His people will face.

The following situations are illustrations, not predictions about

your particular future. They place familiar temptations inside pressures that Scripture teaches us to expect and resist. We will bring each choice under Christ's authority, consider what obedience requires, and ask where His grace and the help of His people are needed. The aim is readiness without self-confidence, seriousness without panic.

1. When Keeping Your Income Seems to Require a Dishonest Answer

Return to the email. Suppose your supervisor asks you to sign a statement saying that a required check was completed. You know it was not. He explains that the missing check is unimportant, the deadline is close, and everyone needs to be cooperative.

The pressure works by changing the name of the act. A false statement becomes cooperation. Refusing to sign becomes disloyalty. Soon you may find yourself defending a lie as a duty to your family.

Ephesians 4:25 (KJV) restores the plain meaning: "Wherefore putting away lying, speak every man truth with his neighbour: for we are members one of another."[2] The command does not become uncertain because the consequences are frightening. Begin by establishing the facts. Perhaps the check was completed and you were not informed. Ask. But once the demand is clear, do not keep searching for an explanation that will make falsehood innocent.

A faithful response might be, "I cannot confirm that this was completed because it was not. I can help arrange the check or submit an accurate explanation of the delay." That answer refuses the lie while offering useful work. You do not need to insult the supervisor to obey Christ.

Before answering, pray specifically: "Lord, keep me truthful. Help me speak without anger. Provide what my family needs, and do not let fear persuade me that sin is our only protection." If time allows, seek counsel from a trustworthy pastor or mature believer. Appropriate workplace advice may also clarify the facts and your options. Asking for help can steady your judgment without transferring your conscience to someone else.

Hebrews 13:5–6 (KJV) brings God's presence into the threatened loss: "for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee. So that we may boldly say, The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me."[3] The promise is not that every honest worker keeps his position. The promise is that obedience will not take you beyond the Lord's care.

Richard Baxter counseled, "Remember still that the pleasing of God is your business in the world."[4] Let that duty govern the answer before another person's displeasure governs your conscience.

If pressure continues, keep your answer truthful, record relevant facts appropriately, and seek lawful ways forward. Tell trusted believers if practical assistance becomes necessary. As hostility to Christian obedience increases, we must be prepared to lose an advantage rather than purchase it with a false conscience. What are you already tempted to call necessary that Christ has called wrong?

2. When Family Affection Becomes Pressure to Hide Christ

Consider a family gathering where a relative tells you, "We can all get along if you stop talking about Jesus and simply agree that everyone's religion is equally true." You want peace. You also know that agreeing would deny what you believe about the Savior.

First examine what is actually being requested. A request to stop interrupting every conversation is not the same as a demand to deny Christ. Receive legitimate correction about your manner. But do not confuse the duty to be considerate with permission to confess what is false.

Matthew 10:37 (KJV) says, "He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me."[5] Christ does not teach us to love our families carelessly. He denies them the place that belongs to Him. Family affection becomes disordered when we allow it to decide whether we will obey our Lord.

Luke 21:16–17 (KJV) prepares believers for a painful possibility: "And ye shall be betrayed both by parents, and brethren, and kinsfolks, and friends; and some of you shall they cause to be put to death. And ye shall be hated of all men for my name's sake."[6] The Lord knew that opposition could enter through relationships we cherish. We need His warning before rejection makes us think that faithfulness has somehow gone wrong.

You might answer, "I love you, and I want to be considerate when we are together. But I cannot say that Christ is unnecessary or that all religions teach the same truth. If you want to understand why I trust Him, I will gladly explain." Then keep showing love in ordinary ways. Help with the meal. Ask about the person's needs. Do not punish relatives with coldness because they reject your confession.

First Peter 3:15 (KJV) joins readiness with manner: "be ready

always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear."[7] A prepared answer should make Christ clearer, not make your courage the subject of the conversation.

Pray before the visit. Ask a faithful Christian to pray with you. If the relationship becomes threatening or unsafe, seek appropriate help and protection rather than remaining in danger to prove devotion. Our calling is allegiance to Christ, not the manufacture of a confrontation. Under end-times hostility, love must remain warm while conviction remains firm.

3. When an Alarming Claim Demands Immediate Belief

Imagine receiving a message from a persuasive religious speaker. He claims to know precisely what will happen next and insists that Christians must follow his instructions immediately. Those who question him, he says, are spiritually asleep.

His urgency may frighten you into treating examination as disobedience. Yet Christ's command to watch includes the duty to resist religious deception. A speaker does not become trustworthy because he accuses everyone else of being deceived.

Matthew 24:23–25 (KJV) says, "Then if any man shall say unto you, Lo, here is Christ, or there; believe it not. For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall shew great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect. Behold, I have told you before."[8] Once again, the Lord gives warning beforehand. Even impressive claims and apparent wonders must not displace His revealed truth.

First John 4:1 (KJV) commands, "Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world."[9] You are not required to believe first and examine later. Testing the message is obedience.

Begin with what the speaker actually said. Separate a biblical quotation from his interpretation and his prediction. Read the passage in its context. Ask whether the demand follows from Scripture or whether Scripture has merely been placed beside it. Then seek counsel from sound teachers who will examine the claim rather than flatter your alarm.

Acts 17:11 (KJV) commends those who "received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so."[10] Willingness to learn and willingness to test

belong together. Neither gullibility nor automatic suspicion is spiritual maturity.

Martin Luther stated the governing authority plainly: "The Word of God shall establish articles of faith, and no one else, not even an angel."[11] An extraordinary claim does not acquire the right to overrule the Scriptures.

A faithful response may be simple: "I will not pass this on or act on it until I have examined its claims by Scripture and checked the relevant facts." That decision also protects others. Forwarding an untested warning can spread the very confusion you hope to prevent.

You do not have to solve every disputed prediction to obey what Christ has plainly commanded. Continue praying, worshiping, serving, and speaking the truth while you examine the claim. Do not allow someone else's timetable to take command of your conscience. The Lord who warned about deception has not left us without a trustworthy Word.

4. When Fear of Scarcity Begins Making Your Decisions

Suppose your household income falls while essential expenses rise. You sit down to consider what must change. Some changes are necessary and wise. Others are prompted by a thought you may not yet have admitted: "If I do not secure everything myself, no one will care for us."

That thought can make generosity seem irresponsible and compromise seem prudent. The danger is not simply a smaller account. It is a frightened heart beginning to treat God's commands as luxuries for easier times.

Matthew 6:31–33 (KJV) says, "Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed? (For after all these things do the Gentiles seek:) for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things. But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you."[12] Christ speaks to anxious preoccupation, not responsible planning. He directs us to a Father who knows bodily need and calls us to put His kingdom first.

Begin with the facts: what is needed, what is available, and what can be reduced. Discuss the matter honestly with those who share the responsibility. Seek legitimate work, assistance, and wise counsel. Tell trustworthy church leaders when genuine need exceeds what you can

manage. Receiving help can be an act of humility rather than evidence that faith has failed.

Reflecting on a season of increased costs and reduced support for the orphanages, George Müller wrote, "it is the very time for faith to work, when sight ceases."[13] Faith looks beyond the resources we can presently count to the Father whose wisdom and care have not failed.

If you have enough to share, do not let an imagined future erase another believer's present need. First Timothy 6:18 (KJV) directs those with resources "That they do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate."[14] Generosity should be thoughtful and real. You need not make promises beyond your means to refuse a fearful, closed heart.

Revelation 13:16–17 (KJV) describes coercion through the ability to buy and sell: "And he causeth all, both small and great, rich and poor, free and bond, to receive a mark in their right hand, or in their foreheads: And that no man might buy or sell, save he that had the mark, or the name of the beast, or the number of his name."[15] This is a grave warning about allegiance under economic pressure. It does not authorize us to label every financial hardship or modern transaction as its fulfillment.

Its practical force is searching: earthly access must never become more precious than faithfulness to Christ. Prepare that conviction now. Learn to distinguish a hard providence from permission to disobey. Ask the Lord to keep your hands honest and, where He supplies the means, open.

5. When Trouble Lasts Longer than Your First Resolve

A believer can face the first week of difficulty with determination and begin drifting during the tenth. Suppose you have been carrying an exhausting burden for months. Prayer grows hurried. Fellowship becomes another demand. You tell yourself that you will return to your former habits when life becomes manageable.

The danger is easy to miss because nothing dramatic happens. You simply stop receiving the very help your soul needs. Weariness becomes a reason to withdraw, and withdrawal leaves weariness without support.

Luke 21:34 (KJV) warns, "And take heed to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting, and drunkenness, and cares of this life, and so that day come upon you unawares." Verse 36 commands, "Watch ye therefore, and pray always, that ye

may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of man."[16] Notice that the cares of life appear beside more obvious dangers. An overloaded heart can become an unwatchful heart.

Do not answer genuine weakness with an impossible program. Identify the neglect plainly and ask what faithful help would make obedience possible. You might tell your pastor, "I am becoming isolated, and my prayer life is shrinking. I need help remaining connected while I carry this responsibility." A congregation may help with transport, a practical task, or a visit that brings Scripture and prayer to you.

Hebrews 10:23 (KJV) says, "Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering; (for he is faithful that promised;)"; verse 25 calls believers to encourage one another "and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching."[17] The ground of perseverance is God's faithfulness. Mutual encouragement is one means He appoints for it. Pressure gives us greater need of that help.

John Owen warned against expecting the struggle with indwelling sin to end after a victory: "there is no way to have our work done but by always doing of it."[18] His point was continued spiritual vigilance. Yesterday's obedience does not remove today's need to depend on Christ.

Take the next manageable step without waiting for all your strength to return. Open a passage and turn its truth into a brief, honest prayer. Arrange appropriate fellowship. Receive necessary rest and practical assistance. These are not competing with watchfulness when they help you remain faithful within your actual circumstances.

Then look beyond the immediate strain. Christ will not always be unseen, and trouble will not have the final word. Prepare to continue when the first excitement of being courageous has faded. Much of endurance takes place in ordinary hours when no one is watching except the Lord.

6. When Mistreatment Makes Retaliation Feel Right

Imagine that someone publicly misrepresents your Christian convictions. You know how to answer the falsehood, but you also know a damaging fact about the person. You begin composing a reply that will make him feel what you have felt.

Before sending it, ask what you are trying to accomplish. Correcting a false statement serves truth. Humiliating someone to satisfy anger serves revenge. Both can appear in the same draft.

First Peter 2:23 (KJV) directs us to Christ: "Who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously."[19] Our Savior did not entrust justice to the sharpness of His reply. He entrusted Himself to the righteous Judge. Faith in God's judgment frees us from the supposed necessity of personal vengeance.

Romans 12:17–19 (KJV) says, "Recompense to no man evil for evil. Provide things honest in the sight of all men. If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men. Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord."[20]

Read the reply again in the light of those words. Remove the accusation you cannot establish, the private detail you have no right to expose, and the insult that adds nothing to the truth. You may need to state the facts, ask for a correction, use proper reporting channels, or obtain protection from serious threats. None of those duties requires malice.

Charles Spurgeon wrote, "Revenge is the delight of the wicked, but to do kindness in return for injury is the luxury of a Christian."[21] Such kindness requires strength that anger cannot supply. Seek it from the Savior whose example you are called to follow.

If anger is controlling your words, pause when circumstances permit and ask a mature believer to read the response. Pray for the person you are tempted to injure. That prayer does not make falsehood harmless; it places both the wrong and the wrongdoer before God rather than making your resentment their judge.

Romans 12:21 (KJV) gives the command its positive direction: "Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good."[22] Evil gains another victory when it recruits us into its methods. As hostility increases and love grows cold, we must guard more than the accuracy of our arguments. We must guard the love with which we speak and act.

7. When You Have Already Failed the Test

Perhaps you do not need to imagine a failure. You remember the conversation in which you concealed your faith, the statement you signed, or the angry words you sent. The pressure has passed, but shame remains. Now you are tempted to hide from the very people who could help you return.

Peter's story prevents both boasting and despair. Before his denial, Jesus said in Luke 22:31–32 (KJV), "Simon, Simon, behold, Satan

hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat: But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not: and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren."[23] Peter thought himself ready for prison and death. Soon he denied knowing the Lord.

His confidence in himself could not keep him. Christ's intercession was not defeated by Peter's fall. The Lord had spoken of his return and of service beyond it. That mercy did not make the denial small; it kept the denial from being the final word in Peter's life.

Begin where repentance begins: name what you did without hiding it inside the pressure you faced. First John 1:9 (KJV) says, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."[24] Confess to God. Where you have deceived or injured someone, take appropriate steps to correct the wrong and seek forgiveness. Do not create another falsehood to protect the first.

Suppose you told a relative that you no longer believed the gospel because you wanted an argument to end. A truthful return might sound like this: "What I said was not honest. I was afraid of the disagreement. I do trust Christ, and I am sorry I misled you." Such words may reopen an uncomfortable conversation. They also end the attempt to maintain peace through denial.

Richard Sibbes observed, "Peter was recovered with a gracious look of Christ."[25] The Lord whom Peter had denied was the Lord to whom he must return. Do not let shame persuade you to seek recovery somewhere other than the Savior you have grieved.

Receive faithful pastoral help and examine where the failure began. Was there a neglected warning, an unsupported burden, or a habit of pleasing people? Address that weakness without imagining that a perfect explanation will make you safe. You need renewed dependence on Christ and concrete obedience, not a more flattering account of yourself.

In John 21:17 (KJV), the risen Lord tells Peter, "Feed my sheep."[26] The restored disciple was called to serve again. If you have fallen, do not turn the prospect of harder days into an excuse to surrender now. Return to the Savior. Learn humility from the failure, receive His mercy, and take the faithful step before you.

Questions for Further Study

1. Read John 16:1–4. Why did Jesus tell His disciples beforehand about coming persecution? How should His purpose shape our preparation for end-times trials?

2. Compare Ephesians 4:25 with Hebrews 13:5–6. How does God's promise address the fear that can make dishonesty seem necessary? What does the promise actually guarantee?
3. Read Matthew 10:37 and 1 Peter 3:14–16. How can a believer remain loyal to Christ while answering family opposition with love, humility, and respect?
4. Study Matthew 24:23–25, 1 John 4:1, and Acts 17:11. What distinguishes biblical watchfulness from being easily alarmed by untested religious claims?
5. How do Luke 21:34–36 and Hebrews 10:23–25 address prolonged weariness? What forms of help might enable a burdened believer to remain prayerful and connected to the church?
6. Compare 1 Peter 2:23 with Luke 22:31–32 and John 21:15–19. What do Christ's conduct, intercession, and restoration teach us about responding to mistreatment and recovering after failure?

Practical Applications

1. Prepare for one pressure you actually face. Describe the situation in a few honest sentences. Identify the temptation and read a passage that directly governs it. Write a brief, faithful response you could give, then pray for the grace to act upon it.
2. Seek help before the decision becomes a crisis. Bring that situation to a trustworthy pastor or mature Christian. Ask the person to examine your reasoning by Scripture and pray with you. Discuss practical support if obedience could bring loss.
3. Repair one response that needs correction. Review a recent decision made under pressure. If you compromised, return to Christ in confession and take an appropriate step to correct the wrong. If you obeyed, thank Him and consider what help you need to remain faithful when pressure returns.

Chapter Axioms

1. Christ's warnings prepare His people to remember His truth when suffering comes.
2. A threatened consequence does not change the meaning of God's command.

3. Faithful preparation increases dependence on Christ rather than confidence in ourselves.
4. Love for family must never be allowed to govern allegiance to the Savior.
5. Religious urgency does not excuse the failure to test a claim by Scripture.
6. Financial pressure cannot make dishonesty or disloyalty to Christ necessary.
7. Prolonged cares can endanger watchfulness without looking like open rebellion.
8. Wise help and appropriate rest can support faithfulness within real limitations.
9. Defending truth does not authorize personal vengeance.
10. Christ's mercy calls the fallen believer back to confession, correction, and service.
11. Preparation must address continued pressure, not merely the first answer.
12. The coming Day gives present obedience its urgency and Christ's promises their sustaining hope.

Preparing to Be Found Faithful

Fifteen Principles of Watchful Stewardship

A steward cares for what belongs to someone else. Christ has entrusted His people with time, abilities, possessions, relationships, and opportunities to serve. Preparation asks what we should do with those trusts before pressure makes obedience costly. The question reaches beyond surviving trouble: will our Master find us faithfully doing His will when He returns? These principles direct preparation toward that meeting. We prepare as people redeemed by Christ, drawing upon His grace, not as people trying to purchase His welcome.

1. Begin with the Fact That You Belong to Christ.

1 Corinthians 6:20 (KJV) says, "For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's." That purchase settles whose interests govern our preparation. We cannot plan to preserve our comfort at the expense of our obedience. First Corinthians 4:2 (NKJV) adds, "Moreover it is required

in stewards that one be found faithful." Before a threatening demand arrives, settle this: my body, speech, and choices belong to Christ. End-times pressure will test that allegiance; it cannot cancel His ownership.[27]

2. Prepare to Obey at an Unknown Hour.

Luke 12:40 (KJV) commands, "Be ye therefore ready also: for the Son of man cometh at an hour when ye think not." Matthew 24:46 identifies the ready servant: "Blessed is that servant, whom his lord when he cometh shall find so doing." Readiness has work in its hands. Identify the duty you would regret leaving undone if Christ returned today, and begin attending to it. Uncertainty about the date should sharpen obedience, not suspend it. The servant who waits for a timetable before obeying has misunderstood the Master's command.[28]

3. Turn What You Already Know into a Prepared Response.

James 1:22 (KJV) says, "But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves." Jesus warns in Luke 12:47 about the servant who knew his lord's will yet "prepared not himself, neither did according to his will." Knowledge increases responsibility. Take one pressure you can reasonably foresee and bring a clear biblical command to bear upon it. Decide what obedience would require before fear begins negotiating. A well-marked Bible cannot excuse a deliberately unprepared life when Christ has already shown us what faithfulness means.[29]

4. Recognize Danger without Trusting Your Own Strength.

Proverbs 22:3 (KJV) observes, "A prudent man foreseeth the evil, and hideth himself: but the simple pass on, and are punished." Matthew 26:41 adds the indispensable spiritual command: "Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation: the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak." Notice the situation that repeatedly weakens your judgment, then seek the Lord's help before entering it again. Remove avoidable exposure and ask for counsel. Heightened danger calls for greater dependence, not brave speeches about what you would never do.[30]

5. Learn the Truth before a Convincing Counterfeit Arrives.

Second Timothy 1:13 (KJV) says, "Hold fast the form of sound words, which thou hast heard of me, in faith and love which is in

Christ Jesus." In Matthew 24:24–25, Jesus warns of false christs and false prophets, then says, "Behold, I have told you before." His warning gives us time to prepare. Learn what Scripture teaches about Christ, salvation, and His return before an urgent claim demands your allegiance. Keep listening to sound preaching. The Christian who knows why the gospel is true is better prepared to recognize an impressive lie.[31]

6. Decide Whose Command Will Govern When Obedience Threatens Your Security.

Acts 5:29 (KJV) records the apostles' answer: "We ought to obey God rather than men." Their refusal rested on God's authority, not personal defiance. Hebrews 13:6 supplies courage: "The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me." Consider where income, approval, or position could tempt you to violate a clear command. Seek counsel about an honest response and possible support before that pressure grows. Christ's help does not guarantee that you keep everything. It means you need not betray Him to be kept by Him.[32]

7. Use Today's Opportunity before Tomorrow's Restrictions Arrive.

Ephesians 5:16 (KJV) calls us to be "Redeeming the time, because the days are evil." Jesus says in John 9:4, "I must work the works of him that sent me, while it is day: the night cometh, when no man can work." His words concern His own mission; they also impress upon us the seriousness of opportunities that do not remain forever. Make the visit, speak the gospel, or encourage the wavering believer while access remains. Preparing for difficult days includes using the open doors God has given you now.[33]

8. Develop Your Gift so Others Can Depend upon Your Service.

First Peter 4:10 (KJV) commands, "As every man hath received the gift, even so minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God." Matthew 25:21 commends the servant who has been "faithful over a few things." Begin using what Christ has entrusted to you rather than waiting for a larger assignment. Learn to teach accurately, serve reliably, or offer practical help competently. Under end-times strain, a congregation needs members already learning to carry responsibility. A neglected gift leaves both the steward and the church less prepared.[34]

9. Prepare Your Resources to Serve People, Not Merely Protect Yourself.

First Timothy 6:18 (KJV) instructs those with resources to be "rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate." Here, communicating means sharing. Luke 12:34 exposes the heart beneath our arrangements: "For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also." Review your spending and obligations with generosity in view. Where possible, leave room to help someone whose faithfulness brings loss. Preparation becomes spiritually dangerous when every plan protects our possessions and none considers our neighbor. The coming Lord will examine how we used what He entrusted to us.[35]

10. Make Provision for the People Already Entrusted to Your Care.

Matthew 24:45 (KJV) describes the faithful servant's responsibility "to give them meat in due season." The household must be fed while the master is away. First Timothy 5:8 warns, "But if any provide not for his own, and specially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel." Do not become absorbed in distant crises while neglecting a dependent person nearby. Put essential responsibilities in order and discuss how care could continue if your circumstances change. End-times watchfulness should make a spouse, parent, caregiver, or church leader more dependable in the duties already assigned.[36]

11. Prepare to Explain Your Hope without Trying to Control Every Future Conversation.

First Peter 3:15 (KJV) calls believers to be "ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear." Yet Matthew 10:19 tells Christ's disciples, when delivered up, "take no thought how or what ye shall speak." Learn the gospel carefully, but do not rehearse imagined confrontations until anxiety rules you. Know whom you trust and why. Christ can supply help in the hour of pressure. Prepared understanding and present dependence belong together.[37]

12. Arrange Faithful Help before Isolation Becomes Dangerous.

Hebrews 10:25 (KJV) commands mutual encouragement, "and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching." Ecclesiastes 4:10 explains why companionship matters: "For if they fall, the one will lift up his fellow." Tell a trustworthy believer where pressure is building

before you are overwhelmed by it. Ask how you can support that person in return. Discuss practical help without exposing private matters unnecessarily. A steward prepares for weakness as honestly as for work. The approaching Day gives us greater reason to strengthen these relationships now rather than discover their absence in a crisis.[38]

13. Make Careful Plans While Leaving the Outcome with God.

James 4:15 (KJV) teaches us to say, "If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this, or that." First Peter 4:19 directs sufferers to "commit the keeping of their souls to him in well doing, as unto a faithful Creator." Plan what obedience requires, then surrender the results you cannot command. A faithful response may not secure a friendly answer, restored employment, or immediate relief. Preparation should help you continue doing good when the outcome disappoints you. In the last days, confidence must rest in God's faithfulness, not in our ability to forecast events.[39]

14. Prepare for Christ's Examination, Not a Favorable Public Impression.

First Corinthians 4:5 (KJV) says the coming Lord "will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts." Second Corinthians 5:10 adds, "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ." Examine the motive beneath your preparation. Are you protecting your reputation for courage while quietly excusing compromise? Bring hidden dishonesty into the light now. Correct what needs correction before pressure hardens the concealment. The Master sees more than the answer we give in public; He sees the heart from which it comes.[40]

15. Depend upon the Grace That Trains You and the Savior Who Keeps You.

Titus 2:12–13 (KJV) joins grace's training with our expectation of Christ: "we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world; Looking for that blessed hope." Jude 24 directs praise to Him who is "able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy." Do not finish preparing by admiring your plans or fearing their limits. Bring them to Christ. Ask Him to expose what you have missed, strengthen what is weak, and keep you faithful. The stewardship is yours to exercise; the sustaining grace is His to supply.[41]

Bring the Coming Test to Christ

Dear believer, do not leave these situations on the page. You may already know where fear is pressing you to bend. Bring that matter before the Lord while there is time to think clearly, seek counsel, and prepare an honest answer. A conviction that never reaches a decision will not help you when the decision arrives.

You do not come to Christ claiming that you are strong enough. Hebrews 4:15–16 (KJV) says, "For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need."[42] He knows the weight of temptation without sharing its sin. His throne is the place to seek mercy for past failures and grace for the next act of obedience.

Ask Him for a truthful tongue, a steadfast heart, and love that does not grow cold. Take the help He provides through His Word and His people. Then obey the light you have received. You cannot command the outcome of the test, but you can entrust yourself to the Savior who will judge rightly and keep His promises. What answer needs to change now because you belong to Him?

Keep Looking to the LORD You Are Waiting For

Preparation must become a continuing way of life. After one faithful decision, another day still needs prayer, repentance, encouragement, and obedience. In our final chapter, we will gather these lessons into a pattern of honest review and renewed faith, keeping our eyes on Christ rather than on our own performance. The aim is to remain watchful until the One we love and serve appears.

Notes

1. John 16:1, 4, KJV. "Offended" in this setting concerns stumbling under the hostility Jesus foretells.
2. Ephesians 4:25, KJV.
3. Hebrews 13:5–6, KJV. The quotation begins within verse 5.
4. Richard Baxter, A Christian Directory, Part I: Christian Ethics, chapter IV, subdivision IV, "Directions against inordinate Man-pleasing," Direction XI, printed p. 191. Opening clause excerpt. https://www.gutenberg.org/files/41633/41633-h/41633-h.htm
5. Matthew 10:37, KJV.
6. Luke 21:16–17, KJV. The promise in verse 18 must be read alongside the explicit warning that some disciples will be killed, not as bodily invulnerability.
7. 1 Peter 3:15, KJV, excerpt. See also verse 16 on a good conscience and faithful conduct.
8. Matthew 24:23–25, KJV.
9. 1 John 4:1, KJV. Verses 2–3 supply the immediate test concerning the confession of Jesus Christ come in the flesh.
10. Acts 17:11, KJV, excerpt.
11. Martin Luther, Smalcald Articles, Part II, Article II, "Of the Mass," paragraph 15. The immediate argument rejects grounds other than God's Word for establishing articles of faith. https://bookofconcord.org/smalcald-articles/ii/of-the-mass/
12. Matthew 6:31–33, KJV. "Take no thought" addresses anxious preoccupation rather than forbidding prudent provision.
13. George Müller, A Narrative of Some of the Lord's Dealings with George Müller, Fourth Part, reflection on the winter of 1846–47 immediately before the March 10 entry, PDF leaf 99. https://www.biblesnet.com/george-muller-narrative-part4.pdf
14. 1 Timothy 6:18, KJV. "Communicate" here means sharing material resources.
15. Revelation 13:16–17, KJV. Read with the worship and allegiance demanded in verses 12–15; no identification of a present technology or transaction is asserted.
16. Luke 21:34, 36, KJV. Watchfulness and prayer are not presented here as a promise that believers will never face persecution.
17. Hebrews 10:23, 25, KJV. The intervening verse joins mutual consideration with stirring love and good works.
18. John Owen, The Nature, Power, Deceit, and Prevalency of Indwelling Sin in Believers, chapter III, printed p. 175. Clause excerpt concerning persistent resistance to indwelling sin. https://ccel.org/ccel/owen/indwellingsin/indwellingsin.i.vii.html
19. 1 Peter 2:23, KJV.
20. Romans 12:17–19, KJV.
21. Charles H. Spurgeon, "The Maintenance of Good Works," section I, delivered September 2, 1888, Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit, vol. 34. https://www.spurgeon.org/sermons/the-maintenance-of-good-works
22. Romans 12:21, KJV.
23. Luke 22:31–32, KJV. "When thou art converted" concerns Peter's return after the failure foretold in the following verses; see Luke 22:54–62.
24. 1 John 1:9, KJV.
25. Richard Sibbes, The Bruised Reed and Smoking Flax (Edinburgh: Maclaren & Macniven, 1878), printed p. 81, PDF leaf 99. Clause excerpt in the discussion of recovery after falling. https://www.digitalpuritan.net/Digital%20Puritan%20Resources/Sibbes%2C%20Richard/%5BRS%5D%20The%20Bruised%20Reed.pdf

26. John 21:17, KJV. Peter's restoration to service does not establish automatic reinstatement to office for every fallen leader.
27. 1 Corinthians 6:20, KJV; 4:2, NKJV. The immediate contexts concern bodily holiness and ministers entrusted with God's mysteries; the application extends the biblical principle of stewardship to the believer's responsibilities.
28. Luke 12:40; Matthew 24:46, KJV. Readiness is expressed in faithful service, not knowledge of the date.
29. James 1:22; Luke 12:47, KJV. The preparation required in Luke concerns obedience to the master's known will, not a program of material stockpiling.
30. Proverbs 22:3; Matthew 26:41, KJV. Prudence does not guarantee avoidance of every danger.
31. 2 Timothy 1:13; Matthew 24:24–25, KJV. See also 2 Timothy 1:14 on guarding the deposit through the Holy Spirit.
32. Acts 5:29; Hebrews 13:6, KJV. The conflict in Acts concerns God's actual command, not personal preference or blanket rejection of human authority.
33. Ephesians 5:16; John 9:4, KJV. Jesus speaks directly of His own mission; the application to our opportunities is by analogy.
34. 1 Peter 4:10; Matthew 25:21, KJV. The talents in Matthew's parable are entrusted money; the application to spiritual gifts follows the broader principle of faithful use, not the original meaning of the word talent.
35. 1 Timothy 6:18; Luke 12:34, KJV. "Communicate" means sharing. Read Luke 12:34 with the concrete generosity commanded in verse 33.
36. Matthew 24:45; 1 Timothy 5:8, KJV. "Meat" means food. First Timothy addresses care for dependent relatives, particularly widows; inability through poverty is not equated with deliberate neglect.
37. 1 Peter 3:15; Matthew 10:19, KJV. Matthew addresses testimony when delivered to persecuting authorities; verse 20 identifies the Spirit's enabling.
38. Hebrews 10:25; Ecclesiastes 4:10, KJV. Hebrews specifically concerns the gathered church's mutual encouragement; Ecclesiastes commends companionship more generally.
39. James 4:15; 1 Peter 4:19, KJV. Humble planning and active obedience are joined with trust in God, not fatalism.
40. 1 Corinthians 4:5; 2 Corinthians 5:10, KJV. Christ's disclosure of motives does not forbid necessary moral discernment now.
41. Titus 2:12–13; Jude 24, KJV. These excerpts join grace-trained holiness and expectation of Christ with confidence in God's preserving power.
42. Hebrews 4:15–16, KJV.

CHAPTER 20

Keep Watching until He Comes

Review Your Life, Renew Your Obedience, and Keep Looking to Christ

"but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ."
2 Peter 3:18, NKJV[1]

You can close this book with a marked page and an unchanged life. You can also begin well, make several needed changes, and slowly surrender them when the first urgency fades. The temptation does not always announce itself. A neglected prayer becomes easier to neglect again. An old excuse begins sounding reasonable. The Lord who called you to watch has not withdrawn His command because the reading is finished. What will you do with the truth when these pages are no longer in front of you?

Perhaps you have already confessed a sin, repaired a wrong, restored a neglected duty, or sought help from your church. Thank God for that mercy. Then continue. Yesterday's obedience cannot answer today's temptation, and yesterday's failure need not govern today's response. Christ still calls you to hear His Word, trust His promises, and follow Him.

We come to the end of the book, but not to the end of watching. The aim now is to carry what you have learned into the changing circumstances of an unfinished life. Some days will bring sharp opposition. Others will look ordinary enough to lull you to sleep. Through both, the same Savior deserves your faithfulness and supplies your strength.

Let the Coming Day Keep Your Conscience Awake

Peter does not end his teaching about the coming Day by satisfying curiosity. He addresses conduct. Second Peter 3:14 (KJV) says, "Wherefore, beloved, seeing that ye look for such things, be diligent that ye may be found of him in peace, without spot, and blameless."[2] What we expect to meet should govern how we live before we meet it. The Christian who believes Christ is coming has a reason to examine what he is becoming.

The same passage contains a warning for people who already know the truth. Second Peter 3:17 (KJV) says, "Ye therefore, beloved, seeing ye know these things before, beware lest ye also, being led away with the error of the wicked, fall from your own stedfastness."[3] Knowledge does not make vigilance unnecessary. It makes our responsibility clearer. We can remember the right doctrine while allowing a contrary desire to govern our choices.

That danger deserves honest attention. Someone may follow every report about hostility toward Christians yet become impatient with the Christians in his own home. He may discuss the coming deception while quietly excusing his own dishonesty. Information about danger can occupy the mind without bringing the heart under Christ's rule. Watchfulness must reach the place where decisions are made.

Jesus directs us there in Luke 21:34 (KJV): "And take heed to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting, and drunkenness, and cares of this life, and so that day come upon you unawares."[4] Notice the cares of this life alongside open indulgence. A heart can become weighed down while attending to matters that seem entirely respectable. The issue is what those concerns are doing to our responsiveness to God.

We should therefore keep asking what is claiming authority over us. A responsibility needs attention; anxiety insists that it must occupy every thought. A possession has a legitimate use; attachment demands that obedience must never threaten it. A disagreement needs resolution; resentment begins deciding how we speak. The change may be gradual, but its direction matters.

The warning should awaken us without persuading us that we must face the future alone. John Bunyan encouraged the weary runner with Christ's care: "when thou hast run thyself down weary, then the Lord Jesus will take thee up, and carry thee."[5] The Lord who commands vigilance knows the weakness of His people. We heed His warning by depending upon Him, not by pretending we cannot tire.

Let the coming Day interrupt these quiet accommodations. Bring your arrangements, responses, and desires before the Word. Do not wait until an excuse has become a settled way of life. The Lord's warning is mercy addressed to people who still have time to heed it. What have you learned to tolerate that you would once have brought before Him in confession?

Review Your Life in the Light of God's Word

A useful review begins with a standard outside ourselves. Feelings change with sleep, pain, disappointment, and circumstances. God's Word tells us what is true and what obedience requires. We examine our conduct by that light, seeking correction rather than a flattering impression or a reason to condemn ourselves.

Psalm 119:59–60 (KJV) gives the movement plainly: "I thought on my ways, and turned my feet unto thy testimonies. I made haste, and delayed not to keep thy commandments."[6] Thought leads to turning, and turning leads to action. The psalmist does not remain occupied with the quality of his reflection. He changes the direction of his feet.

Make room for this kind of review. Consider a recent period of ordinary life, especially after a difficult decision or a change in circumstances. Ask what truth you have obeyed, what duty you have delayed, what sin you have begun excusing, and what help God has supplied. Be specific enough to respond. "I need to improve" leaves everything untouched. "I have repeatedly dismissed my wife when she needed to speak, and I must listen and ask her forgiveness" brings a real matter into the light.

Imagine a believer who becomes absorbed in troubling news. He checks updates before opening his Bible, carries alarming reports into every conversation, and resents interruptions from his family. He calls this watchfulness. During an honest review, however, he notices that his attention to possible future dangers has crowded out present obedience. The correction is not ignorance of the world. He limits his reading, returns to prayer, and gives his family the attention he has withheld. Scripture has changed what his next evening looks like.

James 1:25 (KJV) describes the person who continues in the Word: "But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed."[7] The blessing belongs with doing, not merely with having seen. This is where the book's teaching must

become practical: truth identifies the duty, faith receives God's help, and obedience follows.

J. C. Ryle begins his searching questions with a measured invitation: "I invite every reader of this paper to join me in calm, searching self-examination, for a few short minutes."[8] There is room for calmness because the purpose is to receive truth, not manufacture distress. Be thorough enough to be honest and practical enough to act.

Include thanksgiving in your review. If you answered honestly under pressure, resisted an old temptation, or received correction without anger, acknowledge the Lord's grace. Humility does not require denying His work. Gratitude gives you another reason to trust Him with the next difficulty.

Then leave the review and do what the light requires. If you are exhausted or ill, distinguish reduced capacity from deliberate neglect and seek wise help. Do not invent guilt where God has not charged you. Neither should you hide a chosen disobedience behind a general statement about weakness. A faithful review tells the truth and takes you back to Christ. Do not end it by promising vaguely to do better. Name the response His Word requires and begin.

Return Quickly When Love and Obedience Grow Cold

Some losses are difficult to notice because religious activity continues. We still attend, discuss doctrine, and perform familiar duties, but affection for Christ has weakened. We defend the truth more readily than we delight in Him. We notice another person's error more quickly than our own unkindness. The outward pattern survives while the heart begins withholding itself.

Christ's words to the Ephesian church expose that possibility. Revelation 2:4–5 (KJV) says, "Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love. Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent."[9] He had acknowledged their labor and discernment. Yet He would not accept these as substitutes for the love they had abandoned.

His remedy gives direction: remember, repent, and return to the works that belong with love. Do not wait for a dramatic feeling before resuming a neglected obedience. Open the Scriptures with a prayer for understanding. Return to the gathering you have avoided. Seek

peace with the person you have treated coldly. Speak to God honestly about the heart you have, asking Him to renew the love you lack.

This is particularly urgent in the setting Jesus describes in Matthew 24:12–13 (KJV): "And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold. But he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved."[10] Increasing lawlessness can tempt believers to become suspicious, harsh, or weary of doing good. We must resist that influence within ourselves while recognizing it around us.

Richard Baxter gives counsel that joins urgency with refuge: "Rise speedily after every fall by sound repentance, and a fresh recourse to the blood of Christ, covenant of grace, and his intercession."[11] Do not turn a fall into a place to live. Return to the Savior whose blood answers guilt and whose grace teaches you to leave the sin.

When the Lord exposes a wrong, confess it without bargaining. If another person has been harmed, make the appropriate correction. Do not defend yesterday's compromise merely because you have already committed it. The longer we protect a wrong, the more we are tempted to rearrange our reasoning around it.

Nor should shame persuade you that Christ has ceased to be your refuge. First John 2:1 (KJV) says, "My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous."[12] The command against sin and the provision for the sinner stand together. His advocacy calls you out of concealment and back into obedient fellowship. What neglected act of love needs to be restored rather than explained away?

Let Other Believers Help You See What You Miss

We cannot always see our own drift clearly. Familiar habits appear reasonable from inside them. A trusted believer may notice that our conversation has become bitter, our promises careless, or our worship irregular before we admit the change. That observation may be one of the Lord's mercies toward us.

Hebrews 3:12–13 (KJV) says, "Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God. But exhort one another daily, while it is called To day; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin."[13] Sin deceives as well as entices. We need another voice because the argument in our own mind may already favor the thing that is harming us.

Receiving help requires more than agreeing that accountability is valuable. Suppose a mature Christian tells you that you have begun

responding sharply whenever anyone questions your judgment. You may immediately remember the person's own faults. You may rehearse how much pressure you carry. But neither answer establishes whether the concern is true.

Listen long enough to understand it. Ask for a specific example. Consider the words you actually spoke and the command Scripture places upon you. If the concern is justified, acknowledge it plainly. Then discuss what should change and invite the person to ask you about it again. A brief, honest answer can accomplish more than a long defense of your intentions. Will you receive the correction you have been praying God would give, even when He sends it through another believer?

John Owen writes, "Let also the person admonished, with all Christian patience, accept of the admonition."[14] Patience matters when correction touches something we have defended. Give the truth time to be heard before pride prepares its answer. The person speaking may be helping you resist a danger you have stopped recognizing.

Such help should bring you under Christ's Word, not under someone's personal control. Test counsel by Scripture, preserve appropriate confidentiality, and involve faithful church leaders when the matter requires their care. You are seeking truth and help, not surrendering responsibility for your own obedience.

Hebrews 10:24–25 (KJV) joins this care to the approaching Day: "And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works: Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching."[15] Growing pressure is a reason to strengthen these ties, not retreat into private certainty. Stay within the reach of sound preaching, corporate prayer, and believers who know enough about your life to help you.

Receive encouragement as readily as correction. A discouraged saint may need someone to point out genuine growth that he has overlooked. God uses both warning and comfort to sustain His people. Let others help you continue, and become the kind of friend whose words make faithfulness easier to pursue.

Renew Your Strength by Looking to Christ

After examination and correction, where do your eyes settle? If they remain fixed upon your failures, you may begin treating spiritual life as an endless attempt to repair yourself before approaching God. If

they settle upon your progress, confidence may quietly shift toward your own performance. The Word directs us to a better object.

Hebrews 12:1–2 (KJV) says, "Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God."[16]

The command to lay aside sin does not end with a command to study ourselves more intensely. We run while looking to Jesus. His cross tells us where our guilt is answered. His throne tells us that the Savior who endured shame now reigns. His completed obedience gives faith something firmer to rest upon than the uneven record of our own.

Richard Sibbes reminds us that "in all directions we must look up to Christ the quickening Spirit, and resolve in his strength."[17] Every useful direction in this book depends upon that living source of strength. A plan may identify your duty; only the Lord can supply the grace by which you fulfill it.

This looking is active trust. Read what Scripture says of Him and bring your need to Him in prayer. When accused by a real failure, confess it and rest upon His atoning work rather than offering the intensity of your remorse. When facing a hard duty, ask for His strength and begin obeying. When weariness whispers that perseverance is impossible, consider the Savior who endured hostility and now supplies His people with grace.

Hebrews 12:3 (KJV) gives that very counsel: "For consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds."[18] The remedy for spiritual exhaustion includes remembering a Person. Christ understands costly obedience. He does not summon us to a road He refused to walk.

Dependence must continue after improvement as surely as after failure. John 15:5 (KJV) says, "I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing."[19] The branch does not become independent when fruit appears. Growth displays the life it receives. In the same way, increasing holiness should deepen gratitude and reliance upon Christ.

As end-times hostility intensifies, this dependence becomes more

urgent. Your arrangements may change, trusted supports may be interrupted, and the cost of obedience may rise. Christ will not become less sufficient because circumstances become more severe. Keep receiving His Word, using the help He provides, and fulfilling the duty before you. You are not required to supply tomorrow's strength today.

Keep the Joy of Meeting Him before You

A watchful Christian must remember whom he is waiting for. If we think only of deception, persecution, loss, and judgment, fear may crowd out the very hope that strengthens endurance. Christ's coming brings the believer to Christ Himself. We shall see the Savior whose mercy has carried us through every confession, every struggle, and every answered prayer.

First John 3:2–3 (KJV) says, "Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is. And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure."[20] The promised sight has a present effect. We resist sin because we long for likeness to the One we shall see.

Charles Spurgeon writes of Christ's return, "Let him come when he may, his coming will be full of love and joy to all who have trusted him."[21] The believer's hope is personal. We long to meet the One we have trusted without seeing, and that longing gives courage to obey Him now.

Keep that hope near the duties that feel small. The quiet act of service, the refusal to retaliate, the prayer offered through tears, and the truthful answer that costs you something all belong to a life lived before Him. You may see little outward result. He does not overlook faithfulness. The world's verdict will not be the final word upon the life entrusted to Christ.

Hope also strengthens us for a long wait. Jude 20–21 (KJV) says, "But ye, beloved, building up yourselves on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Ghost, Keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life."[22] Build, pray, keep, and look. These are living responsibilities, sustained by grace. We do not persevere by becoming passive.

Yet Jude ends by directing confidence toward God: "Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy, To the only wise God our Saviour, be glory and majesty, dominion and power,

both now and ever. Amen" (Jude 24–25, KJV).[23] God's preservation and our perseverance remain distinct and inseparable. He keeps His people, and by His grace they continue in faith and obedience.

The final prospect is exceeding joy. Sin will no longer distract our love, weakness will no longer burden our service, and no hostility will interrupt our fellowship with Him. Let that promised welcome strengthen present watchfulness. We are waiting for the Lord who purchased us, knows us, and will bring His work to completion.

Questions for Further Study

1. Read 2 Peter 3:10–18. How does Peter connect the coming Day with present diligence, resistance to error, and growth in Christ?
2. Compare Psalm 119:59–60 with James 1:22–25. What distinguishes an examination that leads to obedience from one that ends with information or feelings?
3. Study Revelation 2:1–7 alongside Matthew 24:12–13. What can continue outwardly while love weakens, and what response does Christ command?
4. Read Hebrews 3:12–14 and 10:24–25. Why does persevering faith require mutual encouragement, and why should that care increase as the Day approaches?
5. Examine Hebrews 12:1–3 and John 15:4–5. How do active obedience and continuing dependence upon Christ work together?
6. Read 1 John 3:2–3 and Jude 20–25. How should the prospect of seeing Christ shape holiness, prayer, assurance, and perseverance now?

Practical Applications

1. Review one real area of life by a clear passage of Scripture. Identify an obedience to continue, a wrong to confess, or a neglected duty to restore. Thank God for His help, and take the appropriate next step rather than extending the review indefinitely.
2. Invite a trustworthy believer to help you follow through. Share the specific concern, ask for prayer and honest counsel, and agree upon a suitable opportunity to speak again. Remain faithful in the life of your local church.
3. Keep a promise about Christ's return beside the duty that presently costs you most. Read it, pray over that duty, and obey in

dependence upon Him. Let hope strengthen the work rather than becoming an escape from it.

Chapter Axioms

1. The approaching Day gives present obedience its urgency.
2. Knowing the truth does not remove the need to heed its warnings.
3. Spiritual review must use Scripture as its standard and lead to a faithful response.
4. Thanksgiving for grace belongs beside confession of sin.
5. Religious activity cannot substitute for love toward Christ.
6. Prompt repentance refuses to turn yesterday's failure into tomorrow's excuse.
7. Mutual exhortation helps expose the deceptions we may overlook in ourselves.
8. Faithful counsel brings the conscience under Scripture, not under another person's control.
9. We run with endurance by looking to Jesus, not by continually measuring ourselves.
10. Growth in holiness increases our dependence upon Christ rather than ending it.
11. The hope of seeing Christ strengthens present purity and faithful service.
12. God preserves His people through grace that enables their active perseverance.

The Doctrine of the Blessed Hope

Fifteen Principles to Strengthen Watchfulness until Christ Comes

Christian hope rests upon what God has promised, not upon what we wish might happen. Titus 2:13 calls us to be "looking for the blessed hope" (NKJV). That hope centers upon the glorious appearing of Jesus Christ and the completion of His saving work in His people. It gives us more than relief from frightening thoughts. It gives us a Savior to expect, promises to trust, and powerful reasons to remain faithful when obedience becomes costly.

1. The Blessed Hope Centers upon Christ Himself.

Titus 2:13 (KJV) describes our expectation as "Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ." In John 14:3, Jesus promises, "I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also." The heart of our hope is His welcome into His presence. We certainly desire deliverance from suffering, but we are waiting for the One who redeemed us. As end-times troubles press upon you, keep asking whom you long to see, not merely what you long to escape.[24]

2. Christ's Return Is Certain Because His Promise Is Trustworthy.

Acts 1:11 (KJV) declares, "this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven." Hebrews 10:37 adds, "For yet a little while, and he that shall come will come, and will not tarry." Our confidence rests upon God's appointed fulfillment, not our estimate of how long waiting should last. Scoffing cannot cancel His word. When the wait seems long, refuse the thought that continued obedience has become pointless. Christ has not forgotten what He promised.[25]

3. The Rejected Savior Will Appear in Unmistakable Glory.

Matthew 24:30 (KJV) says people "shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory." Colossians 3:4 tells believers, "When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory." The world's contempt does not determine His worth or your future. His glory will expose the folly of treating Him as unimportant. Remember this when association with Christ brings ridicule or exclusion. Do not surrender allegiance to the coming King to purchase a brief welcome from those who reject Him.[26]

4. Believers Who Die before His Coming Will Rise.

First Thessalonians 4:16 (KJV) promises, "the dead in Christ shall rise first." First Corinthians 15:52 declares, "the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed." Christ will not leave His people in their graves. Death cannot remove a believer from the fulfillment of His promise. This truth gives courage when hostility threatens life itself. Faithfulness may cost earthly life, but it cannot cost the resurrection Christ has secured. Keep watch as

someone whose future lies beyond the power of those who can kill the body.[27]

5. Christ Will Transform Our Weak and Dying Bodies.

Philippians 3:21 (KJV) promises that Christ "shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body." First Corinthians 15:53 explains, "For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality." Our present bodily humiliation will give way to glory; the body is not worthless, but awaits redemption. Pain, exhaustion, and disease will not accompany the believer forever. When weakness limits your service during difficult days, offer Christ the faithfulness you can give. Your present limitations do not describe the body in which you will dwell with Him.[28]

6. Christ Will Gather His People to Be with Him Forever.

Second Thessalonians 2:1 speaks of "the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and by our gathering together unto him" (KJV). First Thessalonians 4:17 promises, "and so shall we ever be with the Lord." No final separation awaits the people He gathers. Our fellowship with Him will never again be interrupted by danger, weakness, or death. When persecution scatters believers or circumstances interrupt fellowship, remember that Christ will gather His own. Let that future strengthen your commitment to His people now, especially those who feel isolated or forgotten.[29]

7. We Shall See the Lord and Be Made Like Him.

First John 3:2 (KJV) says, "we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is." Revelation 22:4 adds, "And they shall see his face; and his name shall be in their foreheads." The believer's future includes unhindered fellowship with God and complete likeness to Christ in holiness. The sin that now troubles your love will no longer divide it. Keep this prospect before you when temptation offers a lesser pleasure. Why cherish what opposes the Savior whose face you long to see? Let anticipated fellowship deepen present devotion.[30]

8. Genuine Hope in Christ's Appearing Produces Present Holiness.

First John 3:3 (KJV) declares, "And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure." Second Peter 3:14 commands, "be diligent that ye may be found of him in peace, without

spot, and blameless." Hope has a cleansing effect upon conduct. A cherished expectation of Christ cannot make peace with cherished disobedience. Bring the sin you have excused under His Word and seek His grace to forsake it. As end-times temptations intensify, preparation for His presence must reach the habits you practice when no one is watching.[31]

9. The Promised Coming Strengthens Patient Endurance.

Hebrews 10:36 (KJV) says, "For ye have need of patience, that, after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise." James 5:8 urges, "Be ye also patient; stablish your hearts: for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh." Waiting can test faith as severely as a sudden crisis. The answer is continued obedience supported by a settled confidence in Christ. Do not abandon a known duty because its cost has lasted longer than expected. The coming Lord gives endurance its destination and assures us that faithful waiting is not wasted.[32]

10. Resurrection Hope Comforts Believers without Forbidding Their Grief.

First Thessalonians 4:13 (KJV) teaches us not to sorrow "even as others which have no hope." First Corinthians 15:54 announces the final victory: "Death is swallowed up in victory." Christians still weep when death separates them from those they love. Their grief, however, does not have the last word. Christ's victory promises a future beyond the loss. In days when persecution may multiply bereavement, speak these promises tenderly to one another. Do not demand that sorrow disappear before faith can be genuine. Help the grieving believer remember what death cannot take away.[33]

11. Christ Will Bring Righteous Judgment and Relief to His Persecuted People.

Second Thessalonians 1:6–7 (KJV) declares it righteous with God "to recompense tribulation to them that trouble you; And to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven." In Revelation 6:10, the slain saints cry, "How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?" Their cry rests upon His character. You need not take revenge to ensure that injustice matters. It matters to Him. Continue seeking what is right, and entrust final judgment to the Lord who will neither overlook evil nor judge unfairly.[34]

12. The Lord Will Recognize Faithfulness That the World Overlooks.

Second Timothy 4:8 (KJV) promises a crown "unto all them also that love his appearing." First Corinthians 4:5 directs us to wait for the Lord who will reveal hidden things, "and then shall every man have praise of God." His judgment will be true, reaching motives as well as visible acts. We do not purchase salvation through service, but our service is not forgotten. When obedience brings no applause, remember whose approval matters. Loving His appearing frees you to fulfill a quiet duty without demanding that others notice or reward it.[35]

13. Present Suffering Will Give Way to Glory and Lasting Relief.

Romans 8:18 (KJV) says, "the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us." Revelation 21:4 promises, "neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away." Scripture does not minimize the anguish believers endure. It places that anguish beside a future so glorious that suffering cannot outweigh it. Carry this comparison into the trial you cannot presently change. The last days may bring severe affliction, but they cannot turn affliction into the eternal condition of Christ's redeemed people.[36]

14. Our Hope Includes a Righteous New Creation and God's Abiding Presence.

Second Peter 3:13 (KJV) says, "we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness." Revelation 21:3 announces, "the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them." Our final home will not be another version of a world governed by corruption. God will dwell with His people in a creation fit for His holy presence. Resist the temptation to secure lasting satisfaction from what He has appointed to pass away. Live now as someone whose true home will be filled with righteousness.[37]

15. Grace Teaches Us to Wait with Active, Loving Obedience.

Titus 2:14 (KJV) says Christ gave Himself to "purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works." In Luke 12:37, Jesus declares, "Blessed are those servants, whom the lord when he cometh shall find watching." His redeemed people await Him while doing the work He has given them. Hope should make you more prayerful,

generous, truthful, and ready to serve, not less engaged in present duty. Dear believer, let the blessed hope take hold of the next decision before you. Trust His grace, obey His Word, and keep watching for the Savior who is coming for His own.[38]

Until We See His Face

Dear reader, I plead with you: do not give these truths your agreement and withhold your obedience. You have considered the dangers, the commands, the promises, and the mercy of Christ. Now bring them to the matter you have been postponing. What must change because the Lord has made His will clear?

Perhaps it is a secret sin you have learned to manage instead of forsake. Perhaps someone is still waiting for the apology you keep revising in your mind. Perhaps you have withdrawn from the church, neglected prayer, or allowed fear to silence your witness. Do not hide a particular duty beneath a general wish to be a better Christian. Name it before God. Ask for the grace to obey, and take the step that belongs to today.

You may need to close an avenue of temptation, make an honest confession, arrange a conversation, or call a faithful pastor and ask for help. Some wrongs require a careful process rather than an impulsive gesture. Begin that process. Let this reading result in something more than a stirring memory. The person you have wronged needs more than your private regret, and a temptation you keep feeding will not weaken because you have read a warning against it.

If these pages have exposed a profession without repentance, do not settle for a better religious routine. Come to Christ Himself. Confess your sin, abandon the refuge of appearances, and trust the Savior who died and rose again. If you are a weary believer, do not mistake your weakness for a command to withdraw. Seek His mercy, receive His help, and continue in the duties His Word makes plain. You do not need to become strong before you come to Him.

There will be days when watching feels costly. Remember then that the Master's absence is not His indifference. He knows His people and has not forgotten His promise. First Thessalonians 5:23–24 (KJV) says, "And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Faithful is he that calleth you, who also will do it."[39]

So keep your heart before Him. Stay close to His Word and His

people. Repent when He corrects you, give thanks when He strengthens you, and keep doing good when the world offers little encouragement. Tell a trustworthy believer what you intend to change and welcome help in following through. Refuse the quiet retreat from conviction into delay.

The book ends here, but your calling continues. Carry its truth into the home where you live, the church where you worship, the work you have been given, and the suffering you must endure. Let the Savior who loved you and gave Himself for you have the obedience you have been withholding. May He find us watching, with faith still resting in Him and love still answering His love.

"Even so, come, Lord Jesus" (Revelation 22:20, KJV).[40]

Notes

1. 2 Peter 3:18, NKJV, first clause. Other Scripture quotations in this chapter are KJV unless otherwise stated.
2. 2 Peter 3:14, KJV. The expectation concerns the coming Day and promised new heavens and new earth in verses 10–13.
3. 2 Peter 3:17, KJV. Read with verse 16's warning about the distortion of Scripture and verse 18's command to grow in Christ.
4. Luke 21:34, KJV. "Surfeiting" concerns indulgence or dissipation; the warning also explicitly includes ordinary cares.
5. John Bunyan, The Heavenly Footman, chapter III, "Motives to Pursue This Heavenly Course," Seventh Motive. Clause excerpt in counsel grounded in Christ's shepherdly care; it does not promise exemption from suffering. https://www.gutenberg.org/files/13750/old/13750-h/13750-h.htm
6. Psalm 119:59–60, KJV.
7. James 1:25, KJV; see verses 22–24 for the contrast with self-deceiving hearing and the forgotten reflection.
8. J. C. Ryle, Practical Religion, chapter I, "Self-Inquiry," introductory paragraphs before the ten numbered questions. The application to purposeful rather than endless review is editorial; Ryle is inviting serious self-examination. https://www.gutenberg.org/files/38162/38162-h/38162-h.htm
9. Revelation 2:4–5, KJV. Christ addresses the Ephesian church; His threatened visitation against that church is not here identified with His final return.
10. Matthew 24:12–13, KJV. Endurance accompanies genuine discipleship; it is not presented as the purchase price of salvation.
11. Richard Baxter, Farewell Sermon on Colossians 2:6–7, Direction 20; A Compleat Collection of Farewel Sermons (1663), "Mr. Baxter's Sermon," p. 101. Modernized spelling as transcribed at https://www.apuritansmind.com/the-puritan-era/farewell-sermons-by-the-puritans/mr-baxters-farewell-sermon-preached-august-17-1662-by-richard-baxter/ . Historical edition corroboration: https://quintapress.webmate.me/PDF_Books/Farewell_Sermons_1663v2.pdf
12. 1 John 2:1, KJV. Read with 1:9 and 2:2: confession, Christ's righteousness, and His atoning work ground the believer's recourse to Him.
13. Hebrews 3:12–13, KJV. The mutual exhortation belongs to persevering faith; verse 14 continues the call to hold confidence steadfast to the end.
14. John Owen, Eshcol: A Cluster of the Fruit of Canaan, mutual duties, Rule XIV, "Explication xiv," paragraph on receiving correction. Clause excerpt; the surrounding discussion also requires tenderness and permits a just defence. https://ccel.org/ccel/owen/eshcol.i.vi.xiv.html
15. Hebrews 10:24–25, KJV. "Provoke" here means stirring one another toward love and good works.
16. Hebrews 12:1–2, KJV. The witnesses of chapter 11 testify to the life of faith; the passage directs the runner's attention to Jesus.
17. Richard Sibbes, The Bruised Reed and Smoking Flax (Edinburgh: Maclaren & Macniven, 1878), printed p. 141, numbered point 6. Clause excerpt retaining lowercase from its original setting. https://www.digitalpuritan.net/Digital%20Puritan%20Resources/Sibbes%2C%20Richard/%5BRS%5D%20The%20Bruised%20Reed.pdf
18. Hebrews 12:3, KJV. "Contradiction" concerns the hostility or opposition He endured.
19. John 15:5, KJV. Fruitfulness arises through abiding in Christ; the image does not commend inactivity.

20. 1 John 3:2–3, KJV. The hope of Christ's appearing and likeness to Him produces present purification.
21. Charles H. Spurgeon, "An Ancient Question Modernized," section II, delivered May 14, 1890, Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit, volume 38. https://www.spurgeon.org/sermons/an-ancient-question-modernized
22. Jude 20–21, KJV. The commands describe continuing life within God's love, not earning that love.
23. Jude 24–25, KJV. The doxology follows, rather than cancels, the commands of verses 20–23.
24. Titus 2:13; John 14:3, KJV. The introductory five-word phrase from Titus 2:13 is NKJV. Christ Himself is the center of the promised hope.
25. Acts 1:11; Hebrews 10:37, KJV. The certainty of fulfillment does not authorize a human timetable.
26. Matthew 24:30; Colossians 3:4, KJV. Christ's public glory and His people's participation are the grounds of encouragement.
27. 1 Thessalonians 4:16; 1 Corinthians 15:52, KJV. These promises do not imply that all believers survive persecution physically.
28. Philippians 3:21; 1 Corinthians 15:53, KJV. "Vile body" denotes the present body's lowly condition, not the evil or worthlessness of embodiment.
29. 2 Thessalonians 2:1; 1 Thessalonians 4:17, KJV. The text affirms gathering and lasting fellowship without imposing a disputed tribulation timetable.
30. 1 John 3:2; Revelation 22:4, KJV. Seeing God and bearing His name belong to the final redeemed state; likeness to Christ is not deification.
31. 1 John 3:3; 2 Peter 3:14, KJV. Hope motivates holiness; holiness does not purchase salvation.
32. Hebrews 10:36; James 5:8, KJV. Endurance is active faithfulness while awaiting the Lord, not passive resignation.
33. 1 Thessalonians 4:13; 1 Corinthians 15:54, KJV. Paul distinguishes Christian grief from hopeless grief rather than forbidding sorrow.
34. 2 Thessalonians 1:6–7; Revelation 6:10, KJV. Revelation 6:11 anticipates further martyrdom before final vindication; no guarantee of bodily escape is asserted.
35. 2 Timothy 4:8; 1 Corinthians 4:5, KJV. Praise and reward belong to Christ's truthful assessment of His servants, not a blanket promise of divine approval to every person.
36. Romans 8:18; Revelation 21:4, KJV. The promised end of pain belongs to the consummated state, not a demand for present healing.
37. 2 Peter 3:13; Revelation 21:3, KJV. The new creation and God's dwelling with His people are affirmed without speculation about intermediate chronology.
38. Titus 2:14; Luke 12:37, KJV. "Peculiar" means a people belonging to Christ; the context of Titus joins saving grace, godly conduct, and expectant hope.
39. 1 Thessalonians 5:23–24, KJV. Paul's prayer and assurance crown instructions for active Christian obedience.
40. Revelation 22:20, KJV, concluding response.

Do Not Silence the Blessed Hope

A congregation can learn what its pastor considers important without ever asking him. The truths he returns to become familiar companions through the week. The truths he seldom mentions may remain in the church's doctrinal statement while disappearing from its prayers, its conversations, and its response to suffering. We should ask where Christ's return stands in the life our preaching is helping to form.

This is not a demand that every sermon become a sermon on prophecy. It is a plea that we give Christ's appearing the place Scripture gives it. A pastor can rightly reject speculation and still leave his people poorly prepared to meet the Lord. We have not finished protecting them when we have taught them which predictions to reject. They also need to know whom they are awaiting and how His promise bears upon their lives.

Teach What Paul Commands

Titus 2 joins saving grace to present obedience and future hope. Christ gave Himself to redeem and purify a people eager for good works. His grace teaches them to refuse ungodliness while they await His glorious appearing. Paul then tells Titus what to do with these truths. Titus 2:15 (NKJV): "Speak these things, exhort, and rebuke with all authority."[1]

The command reaches beyond supplying correct information. Exhortation urges people to act upon it; rebuke confronts the conduct that contradicts it. We must help the anxious believer trust the coming Savior, the compromised believer forsake his excuses, and the weary servant continue his work. If we teach grace while consistently

passing over the hope grace teaches us to cherish, we have narrowed the passage ourselves.

Paul's charge to Timothy likewise places preaching before Christ's appearing and judgment. Peter reminds elders that the Chief Shepherd will appear.[2] The preacher belongs among those awaiting examination. Before asking whether the congregation is ready to meet Christ, I must ask whether my ministry is preparing them for that meeting.

Our Baptist forefathers recognized the pastoral force of the unknown hour. The 1689 Confession, chapter 32, paragraph 3, says believers should "shake off all carnal security, and be always watchful."[3] The withheld date is meant to disturb complacency, not excuse it. We cannot claim the wisdom of restraint while withholding the very warning Christ uses to keep His people awake.

Refuse Abuse without Withholding Truth

Some hearers have been frightened by predictions that failed or pressured by teachers who used approaching judgment to secure money and loyalty. We must take that harm seriously. Explain plainly that no preacher possesses a private calendar from God. Refuse claims that outrun the text. Never make allegiance to a ministry the test of readiness for Christ.

Yet repeated biblical expectancy is not repeated failed prediction. A pastor who says that Christ will return and therefore His people must watch has not announced a date. He is repeating his Master's instruction. The years that pass do not turn that instruction into an error. Nor does urgency establish that a preacher is manipulating his hearers. Examine his message, his methods, and the evidence before assigning his motives.[4]

This also searches our own restraint. We may fear controversy. We may be embarrassed by the conduct of others. We may dislike disturbing people whose approval has become important to us. These possibilities are questions for honest self-examination, not accusations to throw at another pastor. Ask whether caution is helping you teach Scripture carefully or helping you avoid teaching what makes you uncomfortable.

What the Flock Loses through Silence

A grieving believer needs more than an assurance that other people care. He needs to know what Christ will do about the grave. Paul describes the resurrection and gathering of believers, then commands,

1 Thessalonians 4:18 (NKJV): "Therefore comfort one another with these words."[5] We should not allow fear of prophetic controversy to make us hesitant about the comfort God has expressly given.

The believer struggling with sin needs the same appearing pressed upon a different wound. First John 3:2–3 connects the hope of seeing Christ with present purification. This does not replace the cross as the ground of acceptance or make fear our only motive. It brings the promised sight of the Savior into the desires we cultivate now. A pastor who neglects that connection leaves one of Scripture's appointed helps unused.[6]

Those enduring injustice need assurance that their oppressor's verdict will not settle their future. Second Thessalonians 1:5–10 joins righteous judgment to relief for Christ's afflicted people. Such hope sustains endurance without granting permission for revenge. Meanwhile, the complacent professor needs the warnings of Matthew 24–25, where outward association with the master's household does not make disobedience safe.[7]

Silence about the appearing is not the sole explanation for a church's weaknesses. We should not make claims about its effects that Scripture does not require. But neither may we treat omission as harmless when God repeatedly uses this hope to comfort, purify, awaken, and strengthen His people. What truth have we left unused while wondering why the congregation struggles without it?

Examine the Ministry You Actually Give

Begin with the preaching your people have heard. Review your recent passages and applications. Have you explained Christ's commands to watch, the resurrection comfort of 1 Thessalonians 4, the training grace of Titus 2, and the holy conduct required by 2 Peter 3? Follow the text's own emphasis rather than forcing the subject into every sermon. Where a sustained omission appears, plan to teach the neglected passages with care. Let repentance become something the congregation can hear.

Carry that teaching into visitation. When sitting with a sick or aging believer, listen before answering. Do not use future glory to hurry someone past present grief. Bring a fitting promise about resurrection, Christ's presence, or the end of suffering, and pray it into that person's circumstances. At funerals, distinguish the believer's sure hope from unsupported assurances about every person who has died. The comfort must remain as truthful as it is tender.[8]

Examine your warnings. Do they arise from Scripture, identify real sin, and lead the hearer toward Christ? Or do they leave people frightened without understanding what repentance requires? Name the disobedience, explain its danger, and proclaim the Savior who receives repentant sinners. Never use the coming judgment to secure compliance with a preference God has not commanded.

Listen also to the congregation's prayers. Do we ask only for improved circumstances, or do we ask to remain faithful while awaiting Christ? At the Lord's Table, explain the forward look Paul gives it: the church proclaims the Lord's death until He comes. Help believers pray for that coming with understanding. Those words should grow from love for the Savior, not weariness with people we have ceased trying to serve.[9]

Finally, examine the example accompanying your teaching. Peter forbids elders to dominate the flock and calls them to lead by example.[10] Do your choices show patience under criticism, honesty about failure, generosity, and readiness to serve without applause? Where your conduct contradicts your exhortation, acknowledge the particular wrong and seek the help needed to change. The congregation does not need a performance of fearlessness. It needs a shepherd who is himself learning to obey Christ.

Prepare Them to Meet the Savior

Brother pastor, the Lord has not entrusted His sheep to us so that we may decide which of His promises and warnings they can do without. Teach the hope with the tenderness their suffering needs and the plainness their sins require. Keep the coming Christ before them as the Savior who has already given Himself for them.

If you have neglected this duty, return to Him yourself. His mercy gives you reason to confess without defending the omission; His grace gives you strength to teach what you have avoided. Open the neglected passage. Visit the discouraged believer. Let the church hear you ask the Lord to make you faithful until He comes. We must not speculate where God has remained silent, and we must not remain silent where God has spoken.

Notes

1. Titus 2:11–15; verse 15 quoted from NKJV, first sentence. "These things" concerns Paul's foregoing instruction; the application here includes the grace, godliness, and expectancy explicitly joined in verses 11–14 rather than restricting the command to one doctrine alone.
2. 2 Timothy 4:1–5; 1 Peter 5:1–4, paraphrased. The main book develops these passages in chapters 10 and 11.
3. Second London Baptist Confession (1689), chapter 32, paragraph 3. Exact nine-word excerpt verified against the text published by Redeemer Fellowship: https://www.the1689confession.com/1689/chapter-32 . The paragraph joins certainty of judgment with deterrence from sin and consolation in adversity, then joins the unknown hour with watchfulness. The confession is a historical witness, not the argument's final authority.
4. Matthew 24:36, 42; Mark 13:32–37; Acts 17:11; 1 Corinthians 4:5; 1 Peter 5:2–3. Distinguish the testing of a claim and observable conduct from unsupported judgments of hidden motives. No particular preacher or organization is accused.
5. 1 Thessalonians 4:13–18; verse 18 quoted from NKJV. Paul's consolation concerns believers who have died in Christ and the gathering of His people to Him.
6. 1 John 3:2–3; Romans 5:1–2; Titus 2:11–14. Hope's purifying influence does not supply the ground of justification.
7. 2 Thessalonians 1:5–10; Romans 12:19; Matthew 24:45–51; 25:1–30. These passages respectively ground vindication, forbid personal vengeance, and expose unfaithful or merely outward profession.
8. 1 Thessalonians 4:13–18; Philippians 3:20–21; Revelation 21:3–4. Pastoral applications, not reported incidents or promises about the salvation of an unidentified deceased person.
9. Matthew 6:10; 1 Corinthians 11:26; Revelation 22:20. The Lord's Table proclaims Christ's death until He comes; the application urges teaching and prayer, not a new required liturgical formula.
10. 1 Peter 5:2–4. The appendix adapts original booklet sections IV and X–XII, with supporting themes from XVI. It does not reproduce their overlapping doctrinal treatments.