



BASIC TRAINING

*Be ready to do without the comforts of life,
as one of the army of Christ Jesus. – 2 TIMOTHY 2:3 BBE*

Brother in Christ:

Look at the verse at the top of this page. Read it. Think about it. Then ask yourself the following questions:

- Are you ready to do without the comforts of life? To suffer a little hardship, a little inconvenience for the sake of the cause of Christ?
- What would you be willing to sacrifice for the kingdom of God?
- Do you see yourself as a soldier in the army of Christ Jesus?
- Is your life marked by battle against the enemies of God or are you attempting to live as if it's peace time?
- What are the things in your life that you really believe are worth fighting for?
- Who or what are you willing to give your life for?

Tough questions, huh? But we can't ignore them. They demand answers. Honest, cut-to-the-chase answers that will separate the men from the boys, the real soldiers from the posers, fakers and wannabes. We live in dangerous times. We're at war with a real enemy who is out to destroy us. So what are we doing about it? Well, I don't think we can just keep doing business-as-usual – attending Bible studies, sitting in church services, showing up for small group, and occasionally reading our Bibles – hoping that it all turns out OK. Because we've been doing that for some time now and the results are less-than-stellar. No, it's time we got down to business – the business of fighting for the cause of Christ, defending the body of Christ, and spreading the kingdom of Christ.

So how are we going to do it? By going back to the basics. We're going to take a long, hard look at what we say we believe. We'll explore how our beliefs should be changing our behaviors and impacting our actions. We'll discover what it means to be a servant of Christ, how to live with integrity where our faith influences every area of our life. And we'll see how every one of us has a specific God-ordained calling on our life that has eternal significance.

You ready? Then sign up. But don't do it if you're not going to show up. We're looking for guys who are serious about seeing God make a difference in their lives and the world in which they live. This isn't going to be easy. But it is going to be life-changing. Welcome to BASIC Training.

In Him,



Ken Miller
Minister to Men / Grow Pastor

A close-up photograph of a person's chest. They are wearing a white t-shirt. A black chain with a single metal dog tag hangs from their neck. The dog tag is blank and has a standard military shape. The background is a soft-focus green, possibly foliage.

BASIC TRAINING

SPIRITUAL FORMATION
PLANNING TOOL

Periodic evaluations are helpful tools in just about every area of life. But while you may be quick to assess your business, financial, or physical health, you may be less likely to assess your spiritual well-being. The 40 questions in this planning tool are designed to help you get a picture of where you are spiritually and what you need to do to get where you want to go. This not a score card. It is simply a tool designed to help you determine what next steps you may need to take to give your spiritual formation a jump-start. In the space next to each statement, simply write the number that corresponds with the word best representing your honest response. The key to this tool being of any benefit is that you be honest regarding your answers. Don't inflate your scores. Don't give answers that reflect what you *aspire* for your answer to be.

When you're done, follow the directions at the end to compile your score. Remember, this tool is only designed to show you areas you might need to work on in your spiritual life. Your composite score will give you a "big picture" look and the individual scores will reveal areas of weakness. Don't let this get you down. Instead, view it as an opportunity to better focus your efforts at spiritual growth and maturity.

NAME _____ EMAIL _____ CELL # _____ HOME # _____

BELIEF		1 = Rarely 2 = Seldom 3 = Sometimes 4 = Usually 5 = Frequently	RESPONSE
1.	Peace and contentment characterize my life rather than worry and anxiety.		
2.	I believe the Bible is a reliable resource for every area of my life.		
3.	I evaluate cultural ideas and lifestyles to see if they are consistent with the Bible.		
4.	I regularly read and study the Bible, looking forward to that time with Christ.		
5.	My life shows regular evidence that I am a new creation with the power of the Holy Spirit at my disposal.		
6.	When making choices, I look for God's guidance first.		
7.	My relationship with God is motivated more by love than duty or fear.		
8.	When God makes me aware of His specific will in an area of my life, I follow His leading.		
ACTIONS		1 = Rarely 2 = Seldom 3 = Sometimes 4 = Usually 5 = Frequently	RESPONSE
1.	My life exhibits Christ-like character in my speech, attitudes, and behavior.		
2.	I experience God's presence during church worship and recognize changes needed in my life as a result.		
3.	My actions demonstrate a desire to build God's kingdom rather than my own.		
4.	I trust Christ to help me through any problem or crisis I face in life.		
5.	I remain confident of God's love and provision even during difficult times.		
6.	I take full responsibility for my own sins, instead of blaming others.		
7.	When the Bible exposes an area of my life needing change, I respond to make things right.		
8.	My prayers focus on discovering God's will more than expressing my own needs.		
SERVANTHOOD		1 = Rarely 2 = Seldom 3 = Sometimes 4 = Usually 5 = Frequently	RESPONSE
1.	I view myself as a servant of God, and eagerly try to do His will.		
2.	I regularly serve others expecting nothing in return.		

3. I admit my errors in relationships and humbly seek forgiveness from the one I've hurt.	
4. I forgive others when their actions harm me.	
5. I live in harmony with other members of my family.	
6. Others would say that my life is characterized by an attitude of humility more than pride.	
7. I place the interest of others above my self-interest.	
8. I understand my spiritual gifts and use them to serve others.	
INTEGRITY 1 = Rarely 2 = Seldom 3 = Sometimes 4 = Usually 5 = Frequently	RESPONSE
1. I allow other Christians to hold me accountable for spiritual growth.	
2. I live my life in a constant state of confession and repentance.	
3. I expect God to use me every day in His kingdom work.	
4. I strive to be holy and blameless in every area of my life.	
5. I tend to view myself as a participant more than a spectator when it comes to spiritual matters.	
6. I find it easy to compartmentalize my life into the spiritual and secular.	
7. I am being equipped by the church to do the work of the ministry.	
8. I depend on my relationship with God to make me a better father, husband, friend, and employee	
CALLING 1 = Rarely 2 = Seldom 3 = Sometimes 4 = Usually 5 = Frequently	RESPONSE
1. I share my faith in Christ with non-believers.	
2. I regularly pray for non-believers I know.	
3. I make my faith known to my neighbors and others I meet on a regular basis.	
4. I intentionally maintain relationships with non-believers in order to share my testimony.	
5. When confronted about my faith, I remain consistent and firm in my testimony.	
6. My actions demonstrate a belief in and commitment to the Great Commission.	
7. I sacrificially contribute my resources to help others in my church and community.	
8. I pursue spiritual maturity in my life rather than settle for mediocrity.	
TOTAL:	
Divide by 40	
COMPOSITE SCORE:	

INSTRUCTIONS:

- Add up all the numbers in the right-hand column and write down your TOTAL.
- Divide that number by 40 to get your COMPOSITE SCORE.
- Highlight all your scores of 2 or less. These lower scores are a great place to concentrate your attention.
- Prayerfully consider what NEXT STEPS God would have you take in order to improve your spiritual health.
- Complete the NEXT STEPS goal sheet on the back of this form.

NEXT STEP GOALS FOR THE YEAR

Now that you know some areas you need to work on, set some realistic goals to help you in taking the next step in your spiritual formation plan. We've given you one example for each area to help get you started. Keep them simple and achievable. Don't over-commit or try to take on too much. Spiritual growth, like physical exercise, is about moderation, variety, consistency, and small victories. Finally, consider making a copy of your NEXT STEP goals and sharing them with a friend who will help keep you accountable.

BELIEF

1. Spend at least 15 minutes each morning reading the Bible
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____

ACTION

1. Set aside a regular time for prayer each day
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____

SERVANTHOOD

1. Take the S.H.A.P.E. class at Christ Chapel this year
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____

INTEGRITY

1. Begin reading the Bible with my kids and my wife
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____

CALLING

1. Find one other man to meet with on a regular basis for spiritual accountability & encouragement
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____



A MINISTRY OF CHRIST CHAPEL BIBLE CHURCH
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WEEK ONE – Back to B.A.S.I.C.s

NOTES

Christ Chapel Bible Church, Fort Worth, TX

- We are not being His ambassadors
- We are not being reconcilers

NOTES

- **Zealous for God, but lacking in knowledge**

- We mean well
- We are well-intentioned
- We want to please God
- We work hard, but find that it's hardly working
- Paul had something similar to say to the Pharisees in Romans 10:

"For I can testify that they are zealous for God, but their zeal is not in line with the truth. For ignoring the righteousness that comes from God, and seeking instead to establish their own righteousness, they did not submit to God's righteousness." – Romans 10:2-3

- Listen to what Jesus had to say to the same group

"These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me." – Matthew 15:8
[quoting from the book of Isaiah]

- They were guilty of going through the motions
- They said all the right things
- They did all the right things
- They were outwardly religious
- But they were missing something on the inside

- **Back to BASICS**

- BASICS stands for five things:

1. Belief

What is it we say we believe and why don't our beliefs make a difference in the way we live our lives

- You say you believe God is in control
But your life is marked by fear, doubt, autonomy, and idolatry
- You say you believe true life change is the work of God
But you live your life as if you can change yourself
- You believe there is only one God
But live your life serving a multitude of gods of your own making

- [illegible]

The application of our beliefs so that they impact our actions, attitudes, speech, and conduct – in other words the incarnation of the gospel

The non-negotiable requirement of servant-leadership, including aspects of surrender, submission, humility, service, relationships, and community

Will cover the idea of living a complete or holistic life, where my relationship with God impacts every area of my life – wholly and completely

Will explore our calling as sons of God. This will include our identity in Christ, our responsibility as His ambassadors, and our purpose for existence

1. Make a commitment
 - Take it seriously
 - Make it a priority by showing up
 - Take at least one NEXT STEP each week
2. Utilize the Spiritual Formation Planning Tool
 - Do it this week
 - Set aside some time to do it
 - Pray before you do
 - Share the results with a friend or your wife

- ## NOTES

This image shows a blank sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

NEXT STEPS

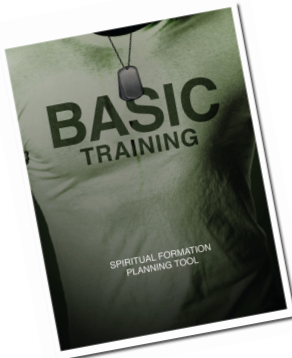
WEEK 1

...keep your eye on what you're doing; accept the hard times along with the good;
keep the Message alive; do a thorough job as God's servant.

— 2 TIMOTHY 4:5 (MSG)

Now what?

Each week we're going to give you some NEXT STEPS to take in your spiritual formation journey. These are only suggestions. It's completely up to you to choose what it is you want to do in terms of your NEXT STEP. But we hope you'll choose something that will stretch and challenge you. We'll try to give you a range of options, but you may decide that you want to do something else altogether. That's fine with us. This week we ask that you consider doing the Spiritual Formation Planning Tool. We believe this is an important NEXT STEP that will give you a better idea of where you are spiritually and the kinds of things you might want to set as priorities in your spiritual life.



1. COMPLETE THE SPIRITUAL FORMATION PLANNING TOOL

Take a few minutes to complete the tool found in the front of your notebook. When you're done follow the directions to complete the NEXT STEPS section on the back page. Be sure and share this with at least one other person who can help hold you accountable to the goals you set.

2. READ ONE OF THE FOLLOWING ARTICLES

You'll find these articles in your notebook. Choose one to read and think about this week. Take your time. Write down your thoughts.

Putting Beliefs Into Practice: The Real Test for Christian Students
By Rick Wade

Practical Christianity – Part 2: Progress in the Christian Life
Chapter 4 – Heart Work
By Arthur W. Pink

Practical Christianity – Part 2: Progress in the Christian Life
Chapter 5 – Sleep Saints
By Arthur W. Pink



3. FIND YOUR BASIC TRAINING PARTNER

Begin praying about who you might ask to be your partner in this exciting journey. Ideally, choose someone with whom you already have a good relationship and who you know would be willing to commit to going through this material with you each week.

4. READ 1 TIMOTHY 3:15 – 4:16

Take some time this week to read this passage several times taking note of what Paul has to say to Timothy about spiritual growth, belief, life, and doctrine.

Putting Beliefs into Practice: The Real Test for Christian Students

Rick Wade

Why Do You Get Up in the Morning?

"Why do you get up in the morning?"

That's a question Steven Garber likes to ask college students. It might sound like a rather silly question at first. We get up in the morning because there are things to be done that won't get done if we lie in bed all day. But Garber wants to know something more important. What are the things that lie ahead of us that make it worth getting out of bed? What do we intend to accomplish? Are our ambitions for the day worthy ones? More importantly, How do they fit with our view of life, or our world view?

Wait a minute. This is getting rather heavy. Should the activities of our day--routine and non-routine--be tied somehow to a world view? This implies that our basic beliefs are significant for the way we live, and, conversely, that what we do with our days reflects what we really believe.

Steven Garber believes both are true. Garber is on the faculty of the American Studies Program in Washington, D.C. In 1996 he published a book titled *The Fabric of Faithfulness: Weaving Together Belief and Behavior During the University Years*. [{1}](#) The purpose of this book is to help students in the critical task of establishing moral meaning in their lives. By *moral meaning* he is referring to the moral significance of the general direction of our lives and of the things we do with our days. What do our lives mean on a moral level? "How is it," he asks, "that someone decides which cares and commitments will give shape and substance to life, for life? This question and its answer are the heart of this book." [{2}](#)

In this article we will look at the three significant factors to which Garber draws attention, factors that form the foundations for making our lives fit our beliefs: convictions, character, and community. [{3}](#)

For many young people, college provides the context for what the late Erik Erikson referred to as a *turning point*, "a crucial period in which a decisive turn *one way or another* is unavoidable." [{4}](#) College students no longer have Mom and Dad looking over their shoulders; their youth pastors are back home; their friends and other significant adults are not around to keep those boundaries in place that once defined their lives. They are on their own, for the most part. *In loco parentis* was the place the university once held in students' lives: "In the place of the parents." No more. One writer says tongue in cheek that the new philosophy is *non sum mater tua*: "I'm not your mama."

Even worse for Christian students, when they are on campus they don't find themselves on their own in a perfectly innocuous environment that seeks to continue in the students' lives what their parents began. Professor J. Budziszewski, a faculty member at the University of Texas at Austin, says that "The modern university is profoundly alienated from God and hostile to Christian faith." [{6}](#) Thus it is that in the college environment Christian students are really put to the test. Given the loss of the support group at home, on the one hand, and the input of new ideas and activities that are antithetical to their faith, on the other, how will they not only stand firm in their faith, but actively move forward in developing a life that is consistent with what they believe?

Before considering what Garber says about convictions, character, and community, let's think about beliefs and practice in general.

Telos and Praxis

Many students think of the college years as their chance to finally break loose of the constraints of home and have a good time--a *really* good time--before settling down into the hum-drum routine of adult life. They see education simply as a means for getting good jobs. Thus, academics are too often governed by the marketplace. Students who

try to discuss ideas and issues outside the classroom are often put down by their peers. The attitude seems to be to do just enough to get the grades, and let the party begin! [{7}](#)

Is this why we send our children to college? Just to get good grades to get good jobs? For the Christian student this question is ever so vital.

Hear how Jacques Ellul expands the message of Ecclesiastes chapter 12:

Remember your Creator during your youth: when all possibilities lie open before you and you can offer all your strength intact for his service. The time to remember is not after you become senile and paralyzed! Then it is not too late for your salvation, but too late for you to serve as the presence of God in the midst of the world and the creation. You must take sides earlier--when you can actually make choices, when you have many paths opening at your feet, before the weight of necessity overwhelms you. [{8}](#)

Students don't understand the pressures that will come with career and marriage and family and all the other ingredients of adult life. The time to think, choose, and begin acting is when the possibilities still lie open before them.

Steven Garber uses two Greek words to identify the two aspects of life which must be united: *telos* and *praxis*. *Telos* is the Greek word for the end toward which something is moving or developing. It isn't just the end in the sense of the final moment in time; it is the goal, the culmination, the final form that gives meaning to all that goes before it. The goal that defines all human life is the time when Christ will return and reign forever and believers will be conformed to His image completely. This *telos* or goal should govern our actions. In fact, the adjectival form of the word, *teleios*, is the word Paul and James use when they call us to be perfect or complete (Col. 1:28; James 1:4).

Garber's second word, *praxis*, means action or deed. [{9}](#) In Matthew 16:27, for example, Jesus speaks of us being repaid according to our deeds or *praxis*.

The question we all need to ask ourselves is whether we are ordering our *praxis* in keeping with our *telos*. Does the end toward which we are heading as children of God define the activities of our lives?

While everyone engages in some kind of *praxis* or deeds, in the postmodern world there *is* no *telos*, no end toward which everything is moving. Westerners no longer even look for the perfection of man, as in modernism. College students are told in so many different ways that their lives are either completely open--the "freedom" of existentialism³ or completely determined--in which case freedom is an illusion. So either there is nothing bigger than us to which we might aspire, or we're just being carried along by forces we can't control. In either case, how are students to make any sense of their lives in general or their studies in particular? Emotivism and pragmatism rule. We choose based upon our own feelings or desires--which can change frequently⁴ or in accordance with what works or both. And what "works" is what gives them the best chance in the marketplace. Is there anything bigger that should give students a focus for their studies and their lives?

Convictions – The Foundation of Basic Beliefs

Foundational to how we live is the body of basic beliefs we hold. I noted earlier Garber's use the words *telos* and *praxis* to refer to the end toward which we are moving and the practice or deeds of our lives. The matter of *telos* or end points to the content of our faith, or our world view, which forms our basic convictions. Let's look more closely at the importance of convictions.

When we think of our end in Christ we're thinking of something much bigger and more substantive than just where we will spend eternity. We're thinking of the goal toward which history is marching. In His eternal wisdom God chose to sum up all things in Christ (Eph. 1:10). Here's how J. B. Lightfoot puts it. It speaks of "the entire harmony of the universe, which shall no longer contain alien and discordant elements, but of which all the parts shall find their centre and bond of union in Christ." [{10}](#) It is the *telos* or end of Christians to be made perfect parts of the new creation.

This isn't mere philosophical or theological speculation, however, for we have the reality of the historical presence of God in Christ on earth which gave evidence of the truth of these beliefs of a sort we can grasp. This is so important in our day of religious pluralism, an approach to religion that abstracts ideas from various religions in the search for ultimate truth. Christianity isn't an abstract set of beliefs; it is true religion grounded in objective, historical events. Historical events and revealed meanings provide the objective ground for our convictions. And these convictions provide the ground and direction for the way we live.

It is critical, then, for students to understand Christian doctrine thoroughly and its meaning and application to the various facets of life.

This whole matter of doctrine grounded in historical fact is troublesome in itself today because there has been a rift created between fact and value. Facts are those things that can be measured scientifically. All else, especially religion and morality, is considered value; it is subjective and varies according to personal preference, culture, etc. Students are told that their most basic beliefs are "nonscognitive emotional responses or private subjective preferences." {11} They are told that it doesn't matter whether what they believe is objectively true; all that matters is whether it is meaningful to them. But as Garber notes, "What is real?" informs "What is true?" which informs "What is right?" {12} Our beliefs and actions find their ultimate meaning--apart from how we might feel about them--in the fact that they are based on reality.

Garber tells the story of Dan Heimbach who, among other things, served on President Bush's Domestic Policy Council. Heimbach was raised in a Christian home, but sensed a need while in high school to be truly authentic with respect to his beliefs. He wanted to know if Christianity was really true. When serving in Vietnam he began asking himself whether he could really live with his convictions. He says:

Everyone had overwhelmingly different value systems. While there I once asked myself why I had to be so different. With a sense of tremendous internal challenge I could say that the one thing keeping me from being like the others was that deep down I was convinced of the truth of my faith; this moment highlighted what truth meant to me, and I couldn't turn my back on what I knew to be true. {13}

Likewise, when some of Jesus' disciples left Him, He asked those who remained if they would leave also. Peter answered, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have words of eternal life" (Jn. 6:68). It was what Peter believed that kept him close to Jesus when circumstances called for retreat.

What we believe gives meaning to our existence; it provides an intellectual anchor in a world of multiple and conflicting beliefs, and it gives broad direction for our lives. For a student to live consistently as a Christian, he or she must know what Christianity is, and be convinced that it is "true truth" as Francis Schaeffer put it: the really true.

Character – Living One's Beliefs

So convictions grounded in reality are significant for the way we live. But convictions alone aren't enough in the Christian life. They need to be matched by character that is worthy of the One who redeemed us, the One whom we represent on earth. It can be hard for students, though, to feel encouraged to develop Christ-like character given the attitudes of people all around them.

Steven Garber sees the TV show *Beavis and . . .* (well, that other guy) as symptomatic of the attitude of many young people today. He quotes a Harvard student who described the show this way: "Two teenaged losers . . . mindlessly watch videos, and they snicker. . . . [They] help us understand what the next century will be like. The founding principle will be nihilism. Rampant disregard for other living things . . . will be in. Taking responsibility for one's actions will be out. . . . It's proof that there is a whole new generation out there that completely understands all of this society's foibles. And can only snicker." {14}

How shall we inspire our students to develop character in keeping with their convictions so they don't end up "getting all A's but flunking life," in Walker Percy's words? {15} How can we turn them away from the destructiveness of a nihilistic world view in which nothing has meaning?

Having abandoned the Christian *telos* our society is characterized by "an ethic of emotivism, one which asserts that all moral judgments are nothing but expressions of preference." {16} This goes back to the split between fact and value I spoke of earlier. Values are person-centered; they have no force beyond the individual's power to live them out and impose them on others. They aren't grounded in anything more ultimate than an individual or at best a particular society.

What has this gotten us? We're free to construct our reality any way we wish now that God is supposedly dead. But what have we done with our freedom? Henry Grunwald, former ambassador to Austria and editor-in-chief of Time, Inc., said this:

Secular humanism . . . stubbornly insisted that morality need not be based on the supernatural. But it gradually became clear that ethics without the sanction of some higher authority simply were not compelling. The ultimate irony, or perhaps tragedy, is that secularism has not led to humanism. We have gradually dissolved—deconstructed the human being into a bundle of reflexes, impulses, neuroses, nerve endings. The great religious heresy used to be making man the measure of all things; but we have come close to making man the measure of nothing. {17}

Morality is inextricably wedded to the way the world is. A universe formed by matter and chance cannot provide moral meaning. The idea of a "cosmos without purpose," says Garber, "is at the heart of the challenge facing students in the modern world." {18} It provides no rules or structure for life. Christianity, on the other hand, provides a basis for responsible living for there is a God back of it all who is a moral being, who created the universe and the people in it to function certain ways, and who will call us to give an account in the end.

Bob Kramer was a campus leader for student protest at Harvard in the '60s. He wanted to bring about social change, but when he discovered in his classes that his basic beliefs about right and wrong, truth and justice were wrong, he dropped out. "There was no real foundation for what I believed," he says, "beyond that I believed it." {19}

If we accept that Christianity does indeed provide direction and firm foundations for the development of character in the individual, still we must ask how that development comes about. Can we expect students to just read the Bible and go out and live Christianly? For Steven Garber, this leads us to consider the importance of a mentor, a person under whom the student can learn how to live as a person of high moral character.

Garber tells the story of Grace Tazelaar who graduated from Wheaton College and then went into nursing. She then taught in the country of Uganda as it was being rebuilt following the reign of Idi Amin. At some point she asked a former teacher to be her spiritual mentor. Says Garber, "This woman, who had spent years in South Africa, gave herself to Grace as she was beginning to explore her own place of responsible service. At the core of her teacher's life, Grace recalls, 'I saw much love amidst trauma.'" "Those lessons," says Garber, "cannot be taught from a textbook; they have to be learned from a life." {20}

The White Rose was a group of students in Germany who opposed Nazism. Brother and sister Hans and Sophie Scholl were strongly influenced in their work by Carl Muth, a theologian and editor of an anti-Nazi periodical. One writer noted that, "The Christian Gospel became the criterion of their thought and actions." {21} Their convictions carried them to the point of literally losing their heads for their opposition.

The development of moral character was once an integral part of education. Christians must once again seek the development of the whole person in education. That means, on the one hand, finding adults who are willing to become mentors for students, and, on the other, drawing students out and interesting them in forming significant relationships with adults, whether they be relatives, professors, pastors, or perhaps professionals in their fields of interest. This involves more than teaching students how to have quiet times. The kind of pietistic Christianity which pulls into itself to simply develop one's own spiritual experience won't do if we're to have an impact on our world. Students need to be shown how to apply the "do not's" in Scripture, but also how to find the "do's" and . . . well, do them. They need to see how Christianity is fleshed out in real life, and they need encouragement to extend themselves in Jesus' name to a world in need using their own gifts and personalities.

Community-Finding and Giving Support

If convictions provide our foundations and our instructions, mentors can be our guides as we see in them how those convictions take shape in someone's life. Community, the third element, then provides a context within which to practice . . . our practice!

Garber notes that "community is the context for the growth of convictions and character. What we believe about life and the world becomes plausible as we see it lived out all around us. This is not an abstraction, though. Its reality is seen in time and space, in the histories and circumstances of real people living real lives." Working together with other believers "allows for young people to make stumbling and fumbling choices toward a *telos* whose character is not altogether known at the time; it also allows for grace, which is always a surprise." {22}

Christian doctrines can seem so abstract and distant. How does one truly hold to them in a world which thinks so differently? When Donald Guthrie, who has worked with the Coalition for Christian Outreach, was asked what makes it hard to connect beliefs with life's experience, he replied, "The cynical nature of our culture, as it permeates the lives of people around me--and me. And only community can stand against that." {23} "We discover who we are," he continued, "and who we are meant to be--face to face and side by side with others in work, love and learning." {24} Bob Kramer, whom we spoke of earlier, said he and his wife believed it was important to surround themselves with people who also wanted to connect *telos* with *praxis*. He says, "As I have gotten involved in politics and business, I am more and more convinced that the people you choose to have around you have more to do with how you act upon what you live than what you read or the ideas that influence you. The influence of ideas has to be there, but the application is something it's very hard to work out by yourself." {25} "My best friend's teachers were my best friends. We were all trying to figure this out together." {26}

The Christian community, if it's functioning properly, can provide a solid plausibility structure for those who are finding their way. To read about love and forgiveness and kindness and self-sacrifice is one thing; to see it lived out within a body of people is quite another. It provides significant evidence that the convictions are valid.

During the university years, if they care about the course of their lives, students will have to make major decisions about what they believe and what those beliefs mean. "Choices about meaning, reality and truth, about God, human nature and history are being made which, more often than not, last for the rest of life. Learning to make sense of life, for life, is what the years between adolescence and adulthood are all about." {27} Says the Preacher, "Remember also your Creator in the days of your youth."

Convictions, character, community. Three major ingredients for producing a life of meaningful service in the kingdom of God. Students who would put together *telos* and *praxis*, the goal of life and the practice of life, must know what they believe and determine to live in accordance with those beliefs. They should consider finding a mentor and learning from that person how one weaves faith and life. And they should embed themselves in a group of Christians equally committed to living the Christian life fully. "Somewhere, deep in the mysteries of how we learn to see and hear, and what we learn to care for and about, there is a place where presupposition meets practice, where belief becomes behavior," says Steven Garber. {28}

Let me encourage you to get a copy of Steven Garber's book, *The Fabric of Faithfulness*, both to read yourself and to give to your students. It's published by InterVarsity Press. You might also want to consider how to apply what it says in your church. Let's make it our common aim to help our young people be and live the way God intended.

Notes

1. Steven Garber, *The Fabric of Faithfulness: Weaving Together Belief and Behavior During the University Years* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996).
2. Ibid., 27.
3. Ibid., 37.
4. Erik Erikson, *Insight and Responsibility: Lectures on the Ethical Implications of Psychoanalytic Insight* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1964), 138, quoted in Garber, 17.
5. David Hoekema, *Campus Rules and Moral Community: In Place of In Loco Parentis* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Pub., 1994), 140, cited in William H. Willimon and Thomas H. Naylor, *The Abandoned Generation: Rethinking Higher Education* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 51.
6. J. Budziszewski, *How to Stay Christian in College: An Interactive Guide to Keeping the Faith* (Colorado Springs: Navpress, 1999), 25.
7. For an alarming look at the attitude of students and especially the importance of alcohol on campus, see Willimon and Naylor, chaps. 1 and 2.
8. Jacques Ellul, *Reason for Being: A Meditation on Ecclesiastes* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 282-83, quoted in Garber, 39.
9. Colin Brown, s.v. *Work* by H.C. Hahn.

10. Colin Brown, s.v. "Head," by C. Brown.
11. Richard Bernstein, *Beyond Objectivism and Relativism: Science, Hermeneutics and Praxis* (Philadelphia: University of Philadelphia Press, 1983), 18, quoted in Garber, 53.
12. Garber, 56.
13. Ibid., 122.
14. Joe Matthews, "Beavis, Butthead & Budding Nihilists: Will Western Civilization Survive?" *Washington Post*, October 3, 1993, p. C1, quoted in Garber, 40-41.
15. Walker Percy, *The Second Coming* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1980), 32, 93, quoted in Garber, 43.
16. Alister McIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), 11-12, quoted in Garber, 50-51.
17. Henry Grunwald, "The Year 2000," *Time*, March 30, 1992, 75, quoted in Garber, 54.
18. Ibid., 61.
19. Ibid., 130.
20. Inge Jens, ed. *At the Heart of the White Rose: Letters and Diaries of Hans and Sophie Scholl* (New York: Harper and Row, 1987), xi, quoted in Garber, 167.
21. Garber, 146.
22. Ibid., 147.
23. Ibid., 147.
24. Ibid., 149.
25. Ibid., 152.
26. Ibid., 175.
27. Ibid., 174.

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PRACTICAL CHRISTIANITY

Part 2: Progress in the Christian Life

Arthur W. Pink

Chapter 4

HEART WORK

As well might a poor man expect to be rich in this world without industry, or a weak man to become strong and healthy without food and exercise, as a Christian to be rich in faith and strong in the Lord without earnest endeavour and diligent effort. It is true that all our labours amount to nothing unless the Lord blesses them (Ps. 127:1), as it also is that apart from Him we can do nothing (John 15:5). Nevertheless, God places no premium upon sloth, and has promised that "the soul of the diligent shall be made fat" (Prov. 13:4). A farmer may be fully persuaded of his own helplessness to make his fields productive, he may realize that their fertility is dependent upon the sovereign will of God, and he may also be a firm believer in the efficacy of prayer; but unless he discharges *his own duty his barns will be empty*. So it is spiritually.

God has not called His people to be drones, nor to maintain an attitude of passiveness. No, He bids them work, toil, labour. The sad thing is that so many of them are engaged in the wrong task, or, at least, giving most of their attention to that which is incidental, and neglecting that which is essential and fundamental. "Keep thy heart with all diligence" (Prov. 4:23): *this* is the great task which God has assigned unto each of His children. But oh, how sadly is the heart neglected! Of all their concerns and possessions, the *least* diligence is used by the vast majority of professing Christians in the keeping of their hearts. As long as they safeguard their other interests—their reputations, their bodies, their positions in the world—the heart may be left to take its own course.

As the heart in our physical body is the center and fountain of life, because from it blood circulates into every part, conveying with it either health or disease, so it is with us spiritually. If our heart be the residence of impiety, pride, avarice, malice, impure lusts, then the whole current of our lives will largely be tainted with these vices. If they are admitted there and prevail for a season, then our character and conduct will be proportionately affected. Therefore the citadel of the heart needs above all things to be well guarded, that it may not be seized by those numerous and watchful assailants which are ever attacking it. This spring needs to be well protected that its waters be not poisoned.

The man is what his heart is. If *this* be dead to God, then nothing in him is alive. If *this* be right with God, all will be right. As the mainspring of a watch sets all its wheels and parts in motion, so as a man "thinketh in his heart, so is he" (Prov. 23:7). If the heart be right, the actions will be. As a man's heart is, such is his state now and will be hereafter: if it be regenerated and sanctified there will be a life of faith and holiness in this world, and everlasting life will be enjoyed in the world to come. Therefore, "Rather look to the cleansing of thine heart, than to the cleansing of thy well; rather look to the feeding of thine heart, than to the feeding of thy Hock; rather look to the defending of thine heart, than to the defending of thine house; rather look to the keeping of thine heart, than to the keeping of thy money" (Peter Moffat, 1570).

"Keep thy heart with all diligence, for Out of it arc the issues of life" (Prov. 4:23). The "heart" is here put for our whole inner being, the "hidden man of the heart" (1 Pet. 3:4). It is that which controls and gives character to all that we do. To "keep"—garrison or guard—the heart or soul is the great work which God has assigned us: the enablement is His, but the duty is ours. We are to keep the imagination from vanity, the understanding from error, the will from perverseness, the conscience clear of guilt, the affections from being inordinate and set on evil objects, the mind from being employed on worthless or vile subjects; the whole from being possessed by Satan. This is the work to which God has called us.

Rightly did the Puritan John Flavel say, "The keeping and right managing of the heart in every condition is the great business of a Christian's life." Now to "keep" the heart right implies that it has been *set right*. Thus it was at regeneration, when it was given a new spiritual bent. True conversion is the heart turning from Satan's control to God's, from sin to holiness, from the world to Christ. To *keep* the heart right signifies the constant care and diligence of the renewed to preserve his soul in that holy frame to which grace has reduced it and daily strives to hold it. "Hereupon do all events depend: the heart being kept, the whole course of our life here will be according to the mind of God, and the end of it will be the enjoyment of Him hereafter. This being neglected, life will be lost, both here as unto obedience, and hereafter as to glory" (John Owen in *Causes of Apostasy*).

1. To "keep" the heart means *striving to shut out from it all that is opposed to God*. "Little children, keep yourselves from idols" (1 John 5:21). God is a jealous God and will brook no rival; He claims the throne of our hearts, and requires to be loved by us supremely. When we perceive our affections being inordinately drawn Out unto any earthly object, we are to fight against it, and "resist the devil." When Paul said, "All things are lawful unto me, but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but I will not be *brought under the power* of any" (1 Cor. 6:12), he signified that he was keeping his heart diligently, that he was jealous lest *things* should gain that esteem and place in his soul which was due alone unto the Lord. A very small object placed immediately before the eye is sufficient to shut out the light of the sun, and trifling things taken up by the affections may soon sever communion with the Holy One.

Before regeneration our hearts were deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked (Jer. 17:9): that was because the evil principle, the "flesh," had complete dominion over them. But inasmuch as "the flesh" remains in us after conversion, and is constantly striving for the mastery over "the spirit," the Christian needs to exercise a constant watchful jealousy over his heart, mindful of its readiness to be imposed upon, and its proneness unto a compliance with temptations. All the avenues to the heart need to be carefully guarded so that nothing hurtful enters therein, particularly against vain thoughts and imaginations, and especially in those seasons when they are apt to gain an advantage. For if injurious thoughts are suffered to gain an inroad into the mind, if we accustom ourselves to give them entertainment, then in vain shall we hope to be "spiritually minded" (Rom. 8:6). All such thoughts are only making provision to fulfil the lusts of the flesh.

Thus, for the Christian to "keep" his heart with all diligence means for him to pay close attention to the direction in which his affections are moving, to discover whether the things of the world are gaining a firmer and fuller hold over him or whether they are increasingly losing their charm for him. God has exhorted us, "Set your affections on things above, not on things on the earth"

(Col. 3:2), and the heeding of this injunction calls for constant examination of the heart to discover whether or not it is becoming more and more dead unto this deceitful and perishing world, and whether heavenly things are those in which we find our chief and greatest delight. "Take heed to thyself, and keep thy soul diligently, lest thou forget the things which thine eyes have seen, and lest they depart from thy heart" (Deut. 4:9).

2. To "keep" the heart means *striving to bring it into conformity with the Word*. We are not to rest content until an actual image of its pure and holy teachings is stamped upon it. Alas, so many today are just *playing* with the solemn realities of God, allowing them to flit across their fancy, but never embracing and making them their own. Why is it, dear reader, that those solemn impressions you had when hearing a searching sermon or reading a searching article so quickly faded away? Why did not those holy feelings and aspirations which were stirred within you last? Why have they borne no fruit? Was it not because you failed to see that your heart was duly affected by them? You failed to "hold fast" that which you had "received and heard" (Rev. 3:3), and in consequence your heart became absorbed again in "the care of this life" or "the deceitfulness of riches," and thus the Word was choked.

It is not enough to hear or read a powerful message from one of God's servants, and to be deeply interested and stirred by it. If there be no diligent effort on your part, then it will be said that "your goodness is as a morning cloud, and as the early dew it goeth away" (Hosea 6:4). What, then, is required? This: earnest and persevering prayer that God will fasten the message in your soul as a nail in a sure place, so that the Devil himself cannot catch it away. What is required? This: "Mary kept all these things, and pondered them in her heart" (Luke 2:19). Things which are not duly pondered are soon forgotten: meditation stands to reading as mastication does to eating. What is required? This: that you promptly put into practice what you have learned, walk according to the light God has given, or it will quickly be taken from you (Luke 8:18).

Not only must the outward actions be regulated by the Word, but the heart must also be conformed thereto. It is not enough to abstain from murder, the causeless anger must be put away. It is not enough to abstain from the act of adultery, the inward lust must be mortified too (Matt. 5:28). God not only takes note of and keeps a record of all our external conduct, but He "weighteth the spirits" (Prov. 16:2). Not only so, He requires *us* to scrutinize the springs from which our actions proceed, to examine our motives, to ponder *the spirit* in which we act. God requires truth—that is sincerity, reality—in "the inward parts" (Ps. 51:6). Therefore does He command us, "Keep thy heart with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life."

3. To "keep" the heart means *to preserve it tender unto sin*. The unregenerate man makes little or no distinction between sin and crime; as long as he keeps within the law of the land, and maintains a reputation for respectability among his fellows, he is, generally speaking, quite satisfied with himself. But it is far otherwise with one who has been born again: he has been awakened to the fact that he has to do with *God*, and must yet render a full account unto Him. He makes conscience of a hundred things which the unconverted never trouble themselves about. When the Holy Spirit first convicted him he was made to feel that his whole life had been one of rebellion against God, of pleasing himself. The consciousness of this pierced him to the quick: his inward anguish far exceeded any pains of body or sorrow occasioned by temporal losses. He saw himself to be a spiritual leper, and hated himself for it, and mourned bitterly before God. He

cried, "Hide Thy face from my sins, and blot out all mine iniquities. Create in me a clean heart., O God; and renew a right spirit within me" (Ps. 51:9, 10).

Now it is the duty of the Christian, and part of the task which God has set him, to see to it that this sense of the exceeding sinfulness of sin be not lost. He is to labour daily that his heart be duly affected by the heinousness of self-will and self-love. He is steadfastly to resist every effort of Satan to make him pity himself, think lightly of wrongdoing, or excuse himself in the same. He is to live in the constant realization that the eye of God is ever upon him, so that when tempted he will say with Joseph, "How then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?" (Gen. 39:9). He is to view sin in the light of the cross, daily reminding himself that it was *his* iniquities which caused the Lord of glory to be made a curse for him; employing the dying love of Christ as a motive why he must not allow himself in anything that is contrary to the holiness and obedience which the Saviour asks from all His redeemed.

Ah, my Christian reader, it is no child's play to "keep the heart with all diligence." The easy-going religion of our day will never take its devotees (or rather its *victims!*) to heaven. The question has been asked, "Who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord? or *who* shall stand in His Holy place?" and plainly has the question been answered by God Himself: "He that hath clean hands, and a pure heart," etc. (Ps. 24:3, 4). Equally plain is the teaching of the New Testament, "Blessed are the pure in heart: for *they* shall see God" (Matt. 5:8). A "pure heart" is one that hates sin, which makes conscience of sin, which grieves over it, which strives against it. A "pure heart" is one that seeks to keep undefiled the temple of the Holy Spirit, the dwelling-place of Christ (Eph. 3:17).

4. To "keep" the heart means *to look diligently after its cleansing*. Perhaps some of our readers often find themselves sorrowfully crying, "Oh, the vileness of my heart!" Thank God if He *has* discovered this to you. But, dear friend, there is no sufficient reason why your "heart" should *continue* to be vile. You might lament that your garden was overgrown with weeds and filled with rubbish; but need it remain so? We speak not now of your sinful *nature*, the incurable and unchangeable "flesh" which still indwells you; but of your "*heart*," which God bids you "keep." You *are* responsible to purge your mind of vain imaginations, your soul of unlawful affections, your conscience of guilt.

But, alas, you say, "I have no control over such things: they come unbidden and I am powerless to prevent them." So the Devil would have you believe! Revert again to the analogy of your garden. Do not the weeds spring up unbidden? Do not the slugs and other pests seek to prey upon the plants? What, then? Do you merely bewail your helplessness? No, you resist them, and take means to keep them under. Thieves enter houses uninvited, but whose fault is it if the doors and windows be left unfastened? Oh, heed not the seductive lullabies of Satan. God says, "Purify your hearts, ye double minded" (James 4:8); that is, one mind for Him, and another for self! one for holiness, and another for the pleasures of sin.

But *how* am I to "purify" my heart? By vomiting up the foul things taken into it, shamefacedly owning them before God, repudiating them, turning from them with loathing; and it is written, "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to *cleanse* us from all unrighteousness." By daily renewing our exercise of repentance, and *such* repentance as is spoken of in 2 Corinthians 7:11; "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." By the daily exercise of faith (Acts 15:9), appropriating afresh the cleansing blood of Christ, bathing every night in that "fountain" which has been opened "for sin and uncleanness" (Zech. 13:1). By treading the path of God's commandments: "Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit" (1 Pet. 1:22).

We now point Out what is obvious to every Christian reader, namely that such a task calls for Divine aid. Help and grace need to be earnestly and definitely sought of the Holy Spirit each day. We should bow before God, and in all simplicity say, "Lord, Thou requirest me to keep my heart with all diligence, and I feel utterly incompetent for such a task; such a work lies altogether beyond my poor feeble powers; therefore I humbly ask Thee in the name of Christ graciously to grant unto me supernatural strength to do as Thou hast bidden me. Lord, work in me both to will and to do of Thy good pleasure."

"Man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart" (1 Sam. 16:7). How prone we are to be occupied with that which is evanescent, rather than with the things that abide; how ready to gauge things by our senses instead of by our rational powers. How easily we are deceived by that which is on the surface, forgetting that true beauty lies within. How slow we are to adopt God's way of estimating. Instead of being attracted by comeliness of physical features we should value moral qualities and spiritual graces. Instead of spending so much care, time and money on the adorning of the body we ought to devote our best attention to the developing and directing of the faculties of our souls. Alas, the vast majority of our fellows live as though they had no souls, and the average professing Christian gives little serious thought to the same.

Yes, the Lord "looketh on the heart": He sees its thoughts and intents, knows its desires and designs, beholds its motives and motions, and deals with us accordingly. The Lord discerns what qualities are in our hearts: what holiness and righteousness, what wisdom and prudence, what justice and integrity, what mercy and kindness. When such graces are lively and flourishing, then is fulfilled that verse, "My beloved is gone down into his garden, to the beds of spices, to feed in the gardens, and to gather lilies" (Song of Sol. 6:2). God esteems nothing so highly as holy faith, unfeigned love, and filial fear; in His sight a "meek and quiet spirit" is of "great price" (1 Pet. 3:4).

The sincerity of our profession largely depends upon the care and conscience we have in keeping our hearts. A very searching example of this is found in 2 Kings 10:31, "But Jehu took no heed to walk in the law of the Lord God of Israel with all his heart." Those words are more solemn because of what is said of him in the previous verse: "And the Lord said unto Jehu, Because thou hast done well in executing that which is right in Mine eyes, and hast done unto the house of Ahab according unto all that was in Mine heart, thy children of the fourth generation shall sit on the throne of Israel." Jehu was partial in his reformation, which showed his heart was not right with God; he abhorred the worship of Baal which Ahab had fostered, but he tolerated the golden calves which Jeroboam had set up. He failed to put away all the evil.

Ah, my reader, true conversion is not only turning away from gross sin, it is the heart forsaking *all* sin. There must be no reserve, for God will not allow any idol, nor must we. Jehu went so far,

but he stopped short of the vital point; he put away evil, but he did not do that which was good. He heeded not the law of the Lord to walk in it "*with all his heart*." It is greatly to be feared that those who are heedless are graceless, for where the principle of holiness is planted in the heart it makes its possessor circumspect and desirous of pleasing God in all things—not from servile fear, but from grateful love; not by constraint, but freely; not occasionally, but constantly.

"Keep thine heart with all diligence." Guard it jealously as the dwelling place of Him to whom you have given it. Guard it with the utmost vigilance, for not only is there the enemy without seeking entrance, but there is a traitor within desirous of dominion. The Hebrew for "with all diligence" literally rendered is "above all"; above all the concerns of our outward life, for, careful as we should be as to that, it is before the eyes of men, whereas the heart is the object of *God's* holy gaze. Then "keep" or preserve it more sedulously than your reputation, your body, your estate, your money. With all earnestness and prayer, labour that no evil desire prevails or abides there, avoiding all that excites lust, feeds pride, or stirs up anger, crushing the first emotions of such evils as you would the brood of a scorpion.

Many people place great expectations in varied circumstances and conditions. One thinks he could serve God much better if he were more prospered temporally; another if he passed through the refining effects of poverty and affliction. One thinks his spirituality would be promoted if he could be more retired and solitary; another if only he could have more society and Christian fellowship. But, my reader, the only way to serve God better is to be content with the place in which He has put you, and therein get *a better heart*! We shall never enter into the advantages of any situation, nor overcome the disadvantages of any condition, until we fix and water the root of them in ourselves." Make the tree good, *and* the fruit good" (Matt. 12:33): get the heart right, and you will soon be superior unto all "circumstances."

"But how can I get my heart right? Can the Ethiopian change his skin or the leopard his spots?" Answer: you are creating your own difficulty by confounding "heart" with "nature"; they are quite distinct. It is important to recognize this, for many are confused thereon. There has been such an undue emphasis upon the "two natures in the Christian" that often it has been lost sight of that the Christian is *a person* over and above his two natures. The Scriptures make the distinction clear enough. For example, God does not bid us keep our "nature," but He does our "hearts." We do not believe with our "nature," but we do with our "hearts" (Rom. 10:10). God never tells us to "rend" our nature (Joel 2:13), "circumcise" our nature (Deut. 10:6) or "purify" our nature (James 4:8), but He does our "hearts"! The "heart" is the very center of our responsibility, and to deny that we are to improve and keep it is to repudiate human accountability.

It is the Devil who seeks to persuade people that they are not responsible for the state of their hearts, and may no more change them than they can the stars in their courses. And the "flesh" within finds such a lie very agreeable to its case. But he who has been regenerated by the sovereign grace of God cannot, with the Scriptures before him, give heed unto any such delusion. While he has to deplore how sadly neglected is the great task which God has set before him, while he has to bemoan his wretched failure to make his heart what it ought to be, nevertheless he wants to do better; and after his duty has been pressed upon him he will daily seek grace better to discharge his duty, and instead of being totally discouraged by the difficulty and

greatness of the work required he will cry the more fervently to the Holy Spirit for His enablement.

The Christian who means business will labour to have a "willing" heart (Ex. 35:5), which acts spontaneously and gladly, not of necessity; a "perfect" heart (1 Chron. 29:9), sincere, genuine, upright; a "tender" heart (2 Chron. 34:26), yielding and pliable, the opposite of hard and stubborn; a "broken" heart (Ps. 34:18), sorrowing over all failure and sin; a "united" heart (Ps. 86:11), all the affections centered on God; an "enlarged" heart (Ps. 119:32), delighting in *every* part of Scripture and loving all God's people; a "sound" heart (Prov. 14:30), right in doctrine and practice; a "merry" heart (Prov. 15:15), rejoicing in the Lord alway; a "pure" heart (Matt. 5:8), hating all evil; an "honest and good heart" (Luke 8:15), free from guile and hypocrisy, willing to be searched through and through by the Word; a "single" heart (Eph. 6:5), desiring only God's glory; a "true" heart (Heb. 10:22), genuine in all its dealings with God.

The Time of Heart Work

The duty of keeping the heart with the utmost diligence is binding upon the Christian at all times; there is no period or condition of life in which he may be excused from this work. Nevertheless, there are distinctive seasons, critical hours, which call for more than a common vigilance over the heart, and it is a few of these which we would now contemplate, seeking help from above to point out some of the most effectual aids unto the right accomplishment of the task God has assigned us. General principles are always needful and beneficial, yet details have to be furnished if we are to know how to apply them in particular circumstances. It is this lack of definiteness which constitutes one of the most glaring defects in so much modern ministry.

1. *In times of prosperity.* When providence smiles upon us and bestows temporal gifts with a lavish hand, then has the Christian urgent reason to keep his heart with all diligence, for that is the time we are apt to grow careless, proud, earthly. Therefore was Israel cautioned of old, "And it shall be, when the Lord thy God shall have brought thee into the land which He swore unto thy fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give thee great and goodly cities, which thou buildest not, and houses full of good things, which thou filledst not, and wells digged, which thou diggedst not, vineyards and olive trees, which thou plantedst not; when thou shalt have eaten and be full; *then beware* lest thou forget the Lord" (Deut. 6:10-12). Alas that they heeded not that exhortation.

Many are the warnings furnished in Scripture. Of Uzziah it is recorded, "When he was strong, his heart was lifted up to his destruction" (2 Chron. 21:16). To the king of Tyre God said, "Thine heart is lifted up, because of thy riches" (Ezek. 28:5). Of Israel we read, "And they took strong cities, and a fat land, and possessed houses full of all goods, wells digged, vineyards and olive yards, and fruit trees in abundance: so they did eat, and were filled, and became fat, and delighted themselves in Thy great goodness. *Nevertheless* they were disobedient, and rebelled against Thee, and cast Thy law behind their backs, and slew Thy prophets which testified against them to turn them to Thee" (Neh. 9:25, 26). And again, "Of their silver and their gold have they made them idols" (Hosea 8:4).

Sad indeed are the above passages, the more so because we have seen such a tragic repetition of them in our own days. Oh the earthly-mindedness which prevailed, the indulging of the flesh, the sinful extravagance, which were seen among professing Christians while "times were good!"

How practical godliness waned, how the denying of self disappeared, how covetousness, pleasure and wantonness possessed the great majority of those calling themselves the people of God. Yet great as was their sin, far greater was that of most of the preachers, who, instead of warning, admonishing, rebuking, and setting before their people an example of sobriety and thrift, criminally remained silent upon the crying sins of their hearers, and themselves encouraged the reckless spending of money and the indulgence of worldly lusts. How, then, is the Christian to keep his heart from these things in times of prosperity?

First, seriously ponder the dangerous and ensnaring temptations which attend a prosperous condition, for very, very few of those who live in the prosperity and pleasures of this world escape eternal perdition. "It is easier [said Christ] for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 19:24). What multitudes have been carried to hell in the cushioned chariots of earthly wealth and ease, while a comparative handful have been shipped to heaven by the rod of affliction. Remember, too, that many of the Lord's own people have sadly deteriorated in seasons of worldly success. When Israel was in a low condition in the wilderness, then were they "holiness unto the Lord" (Jer. 2:3); but when fed in the fat pastures of Canaan they said, "We are lords; we will come no more unto Thee" (verse 31).

Second, diligently seek grace to heed that word, "If riches increase, set not your heart upon them" (Ps. 62:10). Those riches may be given to try you; not only are they most uncertain things, often taking to themselves wings and flying swiftly away, but at best they cannot satisfy the soul, and only perish with the using. Remember that God values no man a jot more for these things: He esteems us by inward graces, and not by outward possessions: "In every nation he that feareth Him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with Him" (Acts 10:35). Third, urge upon your soul the consideration of that awful day of reckoning, wherein according to our receipt of mercies so shall be our accountings of them: "For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required" (Luke 12:48). Each of us must yet give an account of our stewardship.

2. *In Times of adversity.* When providence frowns upon us, overturning our cherished plans, and blasting our outward comforts, then has the Christian urgent need to look to his heart, and keep it with all diligence from replying against God or fainting under His hand. Job was a mirror of patience, yet his heart was discomposed by trouble. Jonah was a man of God, yet he was peevish under trial. When the food supplies gave out in the wilderness, they who had been miraculously delivered from Egypt, and who sang Jehovah's praises so heartily at the Red Sea, murmured and rebelled. It takes much grace to keep the heart calm amid the storms of life, to keep the spirit sweet when there is much to embitter the flesh, and to say, "The Lord gave, and the Lord taketh away; blessed be the name of the Lord." Yet this is a Christian duty!

To help thereunto, first consider, fellow Christian, that despite these cross providences God is still faithfully carrying out the great design of electing love upon the souls of His people, and orders these very afflictions as means sanctified to that end. Nothing happens by chance, but all by Divine counsel (Eph. 1:11), and therefore it is that "all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to His purpose" (Rom. 8:28). Ah, beloved, it will wonderfully calm your troubled breast and sustain your fainting heart to rest upon that blessed fact. The poor worldling may say, "The bottom has dropped out of everything," but not so the saint, for the eternal God is *his* refuge, and underneath him are still the "everlasting arms."

It is ignorance or forgetfulness of God's loving designs which makes us so prone to chafe under His providential dealings. If faith were more in exercise we should "count it all joy" when we fall into divers temptations, or trials (James 1:2). Why so? Because we should discern that those very trials were sent to wean our hearts from this empty world, to tear down pride and carnal security, to refine us. If, then, my Father has a design of love unto my soul, do I well to be angry with Him? Later, if not now, you will see that those bitter disappointments were blessings in disguise, and will exclaim, "It is good for me that I have been afflicted" (Ps. 119:7 1).

"God is not the author of confusion" (1 Cor. 14:33); no, the Devil causes that, and he has succeeded in creating much in the thinking of many, by confounding the "heart" with the "nature." People say, "I was born with an evil heart, and I cannot help it." It would be more correct to say, "I was born with an evil nature, which I am responsible to subdue." The Christian needs clearly to recognize that *in addition to* his two "natures"—the flesh and the spirit—he has a heart which God requires him to "keep." We have already touched upon this point, but deem it advisable to add a further word thereon. I cannot change or better my "nature," but I may and must my "heart." For example, "nature" is slothful and loves ease, but the Christian is to redeem the time and be zealous of good works. Nature hates the thought of death, but the Christian should bring his heart to desire to depart and be with Christ.

The popular religion of the day is either a head or a hand one: that is to say, the laboring to acquire a larger and fuller intellectual group of the things of God or a constant round of activities called "service for the Lord." But the *heart* is neglected! Thousands are reading, studying, talking "Bible courses," but for all the *spiritual* benefits their souls derive they might as well be engaged in breaking stones. Lest it be thought that such a stricture is too severe, we quote a sentence from a letter recently received from one who has completed no less than eight of these "Bible study courses": "There was nothing in that 'hard work' which ever called for self-examination, which led me really to know God, and appropriate the Scriptures to my deep need." No, of course there was not: their compilers—like nearly all the speakers at the big "Bible conferences"—studiously avoid all that is unpalatable to the flesh, all that condemns the natural man, all that pierces and searches the conscience. Oh, the tragedy of this *head* "Christianity."

Equally pitiable is the *hand* religion of the day, when young "converts" are put to teaching a Sunday school class, urged to "speak" in the open air, or take up "personal work." How many thousands of beardless youths and young girls are now engaged in what is called "winning souls for Christ," when *their own* souls are spiritually starved! They may "memorize" two or three verses of Scripture a day, but that does not mean their souls are being fed. How many are giving their evenings to helping in some "mission," when they need to be spending the time in "the secret of the Most High"! And how many bewildered souls are using the major part of the Lord's day in rushing from one meeting to another instead of seeking from God that which will fortify them against the temptations of the week! Oh, the tragedy of this *hand* "Christianity."

How subtle the Devil is! Under the guise of promoting growth in "the knowledge of the Lord," he gets people to attend a ceaseless round of meetings, or to read an almost endless number of religious periodicals and books; or under the pretence of "honoring the Lord" by all this so-called "service" he induces the one or the other to *neglect* the great task which *God* has set before us: "keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life" (Prov. 4:23). Ah, it is far easier to speak to others than it is constantly to use and improve all holy means and duties to

preserve the soul from sin, and maintain it in sweet and free communion with God. It is far easier to spend an hour reading a sensational article upon "the signs of the times" than it is to spend an hour in agonizing before God for purifying and rectifying grace!

This work of keeping the heart is *of supreme importance*. The total disregard of it means that we are mere formalists. "My son, give Me thine heart" (Prov. 23:26): until *that* be done, God will accept nothing from us. The prayers and praises of our lips, the labour of our hands, yea, and a correct outward walk, are things of no value in *His* sight while the heart be estranged from Him. As the inspired apostle declared, "Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not *love*, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not *love*, I am nothing: And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not *love*, it profiteth nothing" (1 Cor. 13:1-3). If the heart be not right with God, we cannot *worship* Him, though we may go through the form of it. Watch diligently, then, your love for *Him*.

God cannot be imposed upon, and he who takes *no* care to order his heart aright before Him is a hypocrite. "And they come unto thee as the people cometh, and they sit before thee as My people, and they hear thy words, but they will not do them; for with their mouth they show much love, *but their heart* goeth after their covetousness. And, lo, thou art unto them as a very lovely song of one that hath a pleasant voice, and can play well on an instrument" (Ezek. 33:31, 32). Here are a company of formal hypocrites, as is evident from the words "as My people": like them, but not of them. And what constituted them impostors? Their outside was very fair—high professions, reverent postures, much seeming delight in the means of grace. Ah, but their *hearts* were not set on God, but were commanded by their lusts, went after covetousness.

But lest a real Christian should infer from the above that He is a hypocrite too, because many times his heart wanders, and he finds—strive all he may—that he cannot keep his mind stayed upon God when praying, reading His Word, or engaged in public worship, to him we answer that the objection carries its own refutation. You say "strive all I may"; Ah, if you *have*, then the blessing of the upright is yours, even though God sees well to exercise you over the affliction of a wandering mind. There remains still much in the understanding and affections to humble you, but if you are *exercised* over them, strive against them, and *sorrow over* your very imperfect success, then that is quite enough to clear you of the charge of reigning hypocrisy.

The keeping of the heart is supremely important because "out of it are the issues of life"; it is the source and fountain of all vital actions and operations. The heart is the warehouse, the hand and tongue are but the shops; what is in *these* comes from *thence*—*the* heart contrives and the members execute. It is in the heart that the principles of the spiritual life are formed: "A good man out of the good treasure of his heart bringeth forth that which is good; and an evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart bringeth forth that which is evil" (Luke 6:45). Then let us diligently see to it that the heart be well stored with pious instruction, seeking to increase in grateful love, reverential fear, hatred of sin, and benevolence in all its exercises, that from within these holy springs may flow and fructify our whole conduct and conversation.

This work of keeping the heart is *the hardest of all*. "To shuffle over religious duties with a loose and heedless spirit will cost no great pains; but to set thyself before the Lord, and tie up thy loose

and vain thoughts to a constant and serious attendance upon Him: this will cost something! To attain a facility and dexterity of language in prayer, and put thy meaning into apt and decent expressions, is easy; but to get thy heart broken for sin whilst thou art confessing it, be melted with free grace, whilst thou art blessing God for it, be really ashamed and humbled through the apprehensions of God's infinite holiness, and to *keep* thy heart in *this* frame, not only in, but after duty, will surely cost thee some groans and travailing pain of soul. To repress the outward acts of sin, and compose the external acts of thy life in a laudable and comely manner, is no great matter—even carnal persons by the force of common principles can do this; but to kill the root of corruption within, to set and keep up an holy government over thy thoughts, to have all things lie straight and orderly in the heart, this is *not* easy" (John Flavel).

Ah, dear reader, it is far, far easier to speak in the open air than to uproot pride from your soul. It calls for much less toil to go out and distribute tracts than it does to cast out of your mind unholy thoughts. One can speak to the unsaved much more readily than he can deny self, take up his cross daily, and follow Christ in the path of obedience. And one can teach a class in the Sunday School with far less trouble than he can teach himself how to strengthen his own spiritual graces. To keep the heart with all diligence calls for frequent examination of its frames and dispositions, the observing of its attitude towards God, and the prevailing directions of its affections; and that is something which no empty professor can be brought to do! Give liberally to religious enterprises he may, but give himself unto the searching, purifying and keeping of his heart he will not.

This work of keeping the heart is *a constant one*. "The keeping of the heart is such a work as is never done till life be done: this labour and our life end together. It is with a Christian in this business, as it is with seamen that have sprung a leak at sea; if they tug not constantly at the pump, the water increases upon them, and will quickly sink them. It is in vain for them to say the work is hard, and we are weary; there is no time or condition in the life of a Christian, which will suffer an intermission of this work. It is in the keeping watch over our hearts, as it was in the keeping up of Moses' hands, while Israel and Amalek were fighting below (Exodus 17:12); no sooner do Moses' hands grow heavy and sink down, but Amalek prevails. You know it cost David and Peter many a sad day and night for intermitting the watch over their own hearts but a few minutes" (J. Flavel).

Consequences of Heart Work

Having sought to show that the keeping of the heart is the great work assigned the Christian, in which the very soul and life of true religion consists, and without the performance of which all other duties are unacceptable to God, let us now point out some of the corollaries and consequences which necessarily follow from this fact.

1. The labours which many have taken in religion are lost. Many great services have been performed, many wonderful works wrought by men, which have been utterly rejected by God, and shall receive no recognition in the day of rewards. Why? Because they took no pains to keep their hearts with God in those duties; this is the fatal rock upon which thousands of vain professors have wrecked to their eternal undoing—they were diligent about the externals of religion, but regardless of their hearts. How many hours have professors spent in hearing, reading, conferring and praying, and yet as to the supreme task God has assigned have done nothing. Tell me, vain professor, when did you spend five minutes in a serious effort to keep,

purge, improve it? Think you that such an easy religion can save you? If so, we must *inverse* the words of Christ and say, "Wide is the gate and broad is the way that leadeth unto life, and many there be that go in thereat."

2. If the keeping of the heart be the great work of the Christian, then how few *real* Christians are there in the world. If everyone who has learned the dialect of Christianity and can talk like a Christian, if every one who has natural gifts and abilities and who is helped by the common assisting presence of the Spirit and pray and teach like a Christian, if all who associate themselves with the people of God, contribute of their means to His cause, take delight in public ordinances, and pass as Christians were real ones, then the number of the saints would be considerable. But, alas, to what a little flock do they shrink when measured by *this* rule: how few make conscience of keeping their hearts, watching their thoughts, judging their motives. Ah, there is no human applause to induce men to engage in this difficult work, and were hypocrites to do so they would quickly discover what they do not care to know. This heart work is left in the hands of a few hidden ones. Reader, are *you* one of them?

3. Unless real Christians spend more time and pains about their hearts than they have done, they are never likely to grow in grace, be of much use to God, or be possessors of much comfort in this world. You say, "But my heart seems so listless and dead." Do you wonder at it, when you keep it not in daily communion with Him who is the fountain of life? If your body had received no more concern and attention than your soul, what state would it now be in? Oh, my brother, or sister, has not your zeal run in the wrong channels? God may be enjoyed even in the midst of earthly employments: "Enoch walked with God, and begat sons and daughters" (Gen. 5:19)—he did not retire into a monastery, nor is there any need for you to do so.

4. It is high time the Christian reader set to this heart work in real earnest. Do not you lament, "They made me the keeper of the vineyards; but mine own vineyard have I not kept" (Song of Sol. 1:16)? Then away with fruitless controversies and idle questions; away with empty names and vain shows; away with harsh censuring of others—turn upon yourself. You have been a stranger long enough to this work; you have trifled about the borders of religion too long; the world has deterred you from this vitally necessary work too long. Will you now resolve to look better after your heart? Haste you to your closet.

Advantages of Heart Work

The heart of man is his worst part before it be regenerate, and his best part afterwards; it is the seat of principles and the source of actions. The eye of God is, and the eye of the Christian ought to be, principally fixed upon it. The great difficulty after conversion is to keep the heart with God. Herein lies the very pinch and stress of religion; here is that which makes the way to life a narrow way, and the gate of heaven a straight one. To afford some direction and help in this great work, these articles have been presented. We realize their many defects, yet trust that God will be pleased to use them. No other subject can begin to compare with it in practical importance.

The general neglect of the heart is the root cause of the present sad state of Christendom; the remainder of this article might readily be devoted unto the verifying and amplifying of that statement; instead, we merely point out briefly one or two of the more prominent features. Why is it that so many preachers have withheld from their congregations that which was, so obviously, most needed? Why have they "spoken smooth things" instead of wielding the sword

of the Spirit? Because their own hearts were not right with God: *His* holy fear was not upon them. An "honest and good heart" (Luke 8:15) will cause a servant of Christ to preach what he sees to be the most essential and profitable truths of the Word, however displeasing they may be unto many of his people. He will faithfully rebuke, exhort, admonish, correct and instruct, whether his hearers like it or not.

Why have so many church members departed from the faith and given heed to seducing spirits? Why have multitudes been led away by the error of the wicked, turning the grace of God into lasciviousness? Why have so many others been attracted to companies of notional professors, which, despite their proud boasts of being the only people gathered together in (or unto) the name of Christ, are, for the most part, people who have only an acquaintance with the letter of Scripture and are strangers to practical godliness? Ah, the answer is not far to seek: it was because they had no *heart* acquaintance with the things of God. It is those who are sickly and diseased who fall easy victims unto the quacks; so it is those whose hearts are never rooted and grounded in the Truth who are tossed about with every wind and doctrine. The study and guarding of the heart is the best antidote against the infectious errors of the times. And this leads us to point out some of the *advantages* of keeping the heart. For much of what follows we are indebted to the Puritan, John Flavel.

1. The pondering and garrisoning of the heart is a great help to the understanding of the deep things of God. An honest and experienced heart is a wonderful aid to a weak head. Such a heart will serve as a commentary upon a great portion of the Scriptures. When such a one reads the Psalms of David or the Epistles of Paul, he will find there many of his own difficulties stated and solved: he will find them speaking the language of his own heart—recounting *his* experiences, expressing *his* sorrows and joys. By a close and regular study of the heart he will be far better fitted to understand the things of God than graceless rabbis and inexperienced doctors—not only will they be clearer, but far sweeter unto him. A man may discourse orthodoxly and profoundly of the nature and effects of faith, of the preciousness of Christ, and the sweetness of communion with God, who never felt the impressions or efficacy of them upon his own spirit. But how dull and dry will these *notions* be unto those who have *experienced them*.

Ah, my reader, experience is the great schoolmaster. Much in Job and Lamentations will seem dull and uninteresting until you have had deeper exercises of soul. The seventh chapter of Romans is not likely to appeal much unto you until you make more conscience of indwelling sin. Many of the later Psalms will appear too extravagant in their language until you enjoy closer and sweeter fellowship with God. But the more you endeavour to keep your heart, and bring it into subjection unto God, to keep it from the evil solicitations of Satan, the more *suited to your own* case will you find many chapters of the Bible. It is not simply that you have to be in the "right mood" to appreciate, but that you have to pass through certain exercises of heart ere you can discover their appropriateness. Then it is that you will have "felt" and "tasted" for yourself the things of which the inspired writers treat. Then it is that you will have the key which unlocks many a verse that is fast closed unto masters of Hebrew and Greek.

2. Care in keeping the heart supplies one of the best evidences of sincerity. There is no external act which distinguishes the sound from the unsound professor, but before this trial no hypocrite can stand. It is true that when they think death to be very near many will cry out of the wickedness and fear in their hearts, but that signifies nothing more than does the howling of an

animal when it is in distress. But if you are tender of your conscience, watchful of your thoughts, and careful each day of the workings and frames of your heart, this strongly argues the sincerity of it; for what but a real hatred of sin, what but a sense of the Divine eye being upon you, could put anyone upon these secret duties which lie out of the observation of all creatures? If, then, it be such a desirable thing to have a fair testimony of your integrity, and to know of a truth that you fear God, then study, watch, keep the heart.

The true comfort of our souls much depends upon this, for he that is negligent in keeping his heart is generally a stranger to spiritual assurance and the sweet comforts flowing from it. God does not usually indulge lazy souls with inward peace, for He will not be the patron of any carelessness. He has united together our diligence and comfort, and they are greatly mistaken who suppose that the beautiful child of assurance can be born without soul pangs. Diligent self-examination is called for: first the looking into the Word, and then the looking into our hearts, to see how far they correspond. It is true that the Holy Spirit indwells the Christian, but He cannot be discerned by I-us essence; it is His operations that manifest Him, and these are known by the graces he produces in the soul; and those can only be perceived by diligent search and honest scrutiny of the heart. It is in the heart that the Spirit works.

3. Care in keeping the heart makes blessed and fruitful the means of grace and the discharge of our spiritual duties. What precious communion we have with God when He is approached in a right frame of soul: then we may say with David, "My meditation of Him shall be sweet" (Ps. 104:34). But when the heart be indisposed, full of the things of this life, then we miss the comfort and joy which should be ours. The sermons you hear and the articles you read (if by *God's* servants) will appear very different if you bring a *prepared* heart to them! If the heart be right you will not grow drowsy while hearing or reading of the riches of God's grace, the glories of Christ, the beauty of holiness, or the needs-be for a scripturally ordered walk. It was because the heart was neglected that you got so little from attending to the means of grace!

The same holds good of prayer. What a difference there is between a deeply exercised and spiritually burdened heart pouring out itself before God in fervent supplication and the utterance of verbal petitions by rote! It is the difference between reality and formality. He who is diligent in heart work and perceives the state of his own soul is at no loss in knowing *what* to ask God for. So he who makes it a practice of walking with God, communing with God, meditating upon God, spontaneously worships Him in spirit and in truth: like David, he will say, "My heart is inditing a good matter" (Ps. 45:1). The Hebrew there is very suggestive: literally it is "my heart is boiling up a good matter"; it is a figurative expression, taken from a living spring, which is bubbling up fresh water. The formalist has to rack his mind and, as it were, laboriously pump up something to say unto God; but he who makes conscience of heart work finds his soul like a bottle of new wine—ready to burst, giving vent to sorrow or joy as his case may be.

4. Diligence in keeping the heart will make the soul stable in the hour of temptation. The care or neglect of the conscience largely determines our attitude toward and response unto solicitations of evil. The careless heart falls an easy prey to Satan. His main attacks are made upon the heart, for if he gains *that* he gains all, for it commands the whole man! Alas, how easy a conquest is an *unguarded* heart; it is no more difficult for the Devil to capture it than for a burglar to enter a house whose windows and doors are unfastened. It is the watchful heart that both discovers and suppresses the temptation before it comes in its full strength. It is much like a large stone rolling

down a hill—it is easy to stop at first, but very difficult after it has gained full momentum. So, if we cherish the first vain imagination as it enters the mind, it will soon grow into a powerful lust which will not take a nay.

Acts are preceded by desires, and desires by thoughts. A sinful object first presents itself to the imagination, and unless *that* be nipped in the bud the affections will be stirred and enlisted. If the heart does not repel the evil imagination, if instead it dwells on it, encourages it, feeds on it, then it will not be long before the consent of the will is obtained. A very large and important part of heart work lies in observing its first motions, and checking sin *there*. The motions of sin are weakest at the first, and a little watchfulness and care then prevents much trouble and mischief later. But if the first movings of sin in the imagination be not observed and resisted, then the careless heart is quickly brought under the full power of temptation, and Satan is victorious.

5. The diligent keeping of the heart is a great aid to the improving of our graces. Grace never thrives in a careless soul, for the roots and habits of grace are planted in the heart, and the deeper they are radicated (cause to take root) there the more thriving and flourishing grace is. In Ephesians 3:17, we read of being "rooted and grounded in love": love in the heart is the spring of every gracious word of the mouth and of every holy act of the hand. But is not *Christ* the "root" of the Christian's graces? Yes, the originating root, but grace is the derivative root, planted and nourished by Him, and according as *this* thrives under Divine influences, so the fruits of grace are more healthy and vigorous. But in a heart which is not kept diligently those fructifying influences are choked. Just as in an uncared-for garden the weeds crowd out the flowers, so vain thoughts that are not disallowed, and lusts which are not mortified, devour the strength of the heart. "My soul shall be satisfied as with marrow and with fatness; and my mouth shall praise Thee with joyful lips: *when* I remember Thee upon my bed, and meditate on Thee in the night watches" (Ps. 55:5, 6).

6. The diligent care of the heart makes Christian fellowship profitable and precious. Why is it that when Christians meet together there are often sad jarrings and contentions? It is because of unmortified passions. Why is their conversation so frothy and worthless? It is because of the vanity and earthiness of their hearts. It is not difficult to discern by the actions and converse of Christians what frames their spirits are under. Take one whose mind is truly stayed upon God; how serious, heavenly and edifying is his conversation: "The mouth of the righteous speaketh wisdom, and his tongue talketh of judgment: the law of his God *is in his heart*" (Ps. 37:30, 31). If each of us was humbled every day before God and under the evils of his own heart, we should be more pitiful and tender toward others (Gal. 6:1).

7. A heart well kept fits us for any condition God may cast us into, or any service He has to use us in. He who has learnt to keep his heart lowly is fit for prosperity; and he who knows how to apply Scripture promises and supports is fit to pass through any adversity. So he who can deny the pride and selfishness of his heart is fit to be employed in any service for God. Such a man was Paul; he not only ministered to others, but looked well to his own vineyard (see 1 Cor. 9:27). And what an eminent instrument he was for God: he knew how to abound and how to suffer loss. Let the people defy him, it moved him not, except to indignation; let them stone him, he could bear it.

8. By keeping our hearts diligently we should the soonest remove the scandals and stumbling-blocks out of the way of the world. How the worthy name of our Lord is blasphemed because of the wicked conduct of many who bear His name. What prejudice has been created against the Gospel by the inconsistent lives of those who preach it. But if we keep *our* hearts, we shall not add to the scandals caused by the ways of loose professors. Nay, those with whom we come in contact will see that we "have been with Jesus." When the majestic beams of holiness shine from a heavenly walk, the world will be awed and respect will again be commanded by the followers of the Lamb.

Though the keeping of the heart entails such hard labour, do not such blessed gains supply a sufficient incentive to engage diligently in the same? Look over the eight special benefits we have named, and weigh them in a just balance; they are not trivial things. Then guard well your heart, and watch closely *its love for God*. Jacob served seven years for Rebekah, and they seemed unto him but a few days, for the love that he had unto her. The labour of *love* is always delightful. If God has your heart, the feet will run swiftly in the way of His commandments: duty will be a delight. Then let us earnestly pray, "So teach us to number our days, that we may *apply our hearts* unto wisdom" (Ps. 90:12)—as we "apply" our hands unto manual tasks.

Let me now close with a word or two of consolation to all serious Christians who have sought to give themselves faithfully and closely to this heart work, but who are groaning in secret over their apparent lack of success therein, and who are fearful that their experience falls short of a saving one. First, this argues that your heart *is* honest and upright. If you are mourning over heart conditions and sins, that is something no hypocrite does. Many a one is now in hell who had a better head than mine; many a one now in heaven complained of as bad a heart as thine.

Second, God would never leave you under so many heart burdens and troubles if He intended not your benefit thereby. You say, Lord, why do I go mourning, all the day having sorrow of heart? For long have I been exercised over its hardness, and not yet it is broken. Many years have I been struggling against vain thoughts, and still I am plagued by them. When shall I get a better heart? Ah, God would thereby show you what your heart by nature is, and have you take notice of how much you are beholden to free grace! So, too, He would keep you humble, and not let you fall in love with yourself!

Third, God will shortly put a blessed end to these cares, watchings and heartaches. The time is coming when your heart shall be as you would have it, when you will be delivered from all fears and sorrows, and never again cry, "O my hard, vain, earthly, filthy heart." Then shall all darkness be purged from your understanding, all vanity from your affections, all guilt from your conscience, all perversity from your will. Then shall you be everlastingly, delightfully, ravishingly entertained and exercised upon the supreme goodness and infinite excellency of God. Soon shall break that morning without clouds, when all the shadows shall flee away; and then we "shall be *like Him*, for we shall see Him as He is" (1 John 3:2). Hallelujah!

PRACTICAL CHRISTIANITY

Part 2: Progress in the Christian Life

Arthur W. Pink

Chapter 5

SLEEPY SAINTS

What an anomaly! Drowsing on the verge of eternity! A Christian is one who, in contrast to the unregenerate, has been awakened from the sleep of death in trespasses and sins, made to realize the unspeakable awfulness of endless misery in hell and the ineffable joy of everlasting bliss in heaven, and thereby brought to recognize the seriousness and solemnity of life. A Christian is one who has been taught experientially the worthlessness of all mundane things and the preciousness of Divine things. He has turned his back on Vanity Fair and has started out on his journey to the Celestial City. He has been quickened into newness of life and supplied with the most powerful incentives to press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. Nevertheless, it is sadly possible for him to suffer a relapse, for his zeal to abate, his graces to languish, for him to leave his first love, and become weary of well-doing. Yea, unless he be very much on his guard, drowsiness *will* steal over him, and he will fall asleep. Corruptions still indwell in him, and sin has a stupefying effect. He is yet in this evil world, and it exerts an enervating influence. Satan seeks to devour him, and unless resisted steadfastly will hypnotize him. Thus, the menace of this spiritual "sleeping sickness" is very real.

Slumbering saints! What an incongruity! Taking their ease while threatened by danger. Lazing instead of fighting the good fight of faith. Trifling away opportunities to glorify their Saviour, instead of redeeming the time: rusting, instead of wearing Out in His service. We speak with wonderment and horror of Nero fiddling while Rome was burning, but far more startling and reprehensible is a careless Christian who has departed from God, bewitched by a world which is doomed to eternal destruction. Such a travesty and tragedy is far from being exceptional. Both observation and the teaching of Scripture prove it to be a common occurrence. Such passages as the following make it only too evident that the people of God *are* thus overcome. "It is high time to awake out of sleep, for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed" (Rom. 13:11). "Awake to righteousness, and sin not" (1 Cor. 15:34). "Awake thou that sleepest" (Eph. 5:14). Each of those clamant calls is made to the saints. So, too, is that exhortation addressed to them, "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 Thess. 5:5,6). Our Lord gave warning of the same phenomenon in Matthew 25:1-13, which points some very searching lessons upon the subject now before us. We do not propose to give an exposition of those verses, still less waste time on canvassing the conflicting theorizing of men thereon. Instead of indulging in useless speculations upon what has been termed the "prophetic" applications of that passage, we intend to dwell upon what is of far more practical importance and profit to the Christian's walk. First, let it be duly noted that this parable of the Virgins was delivered by Christ not to a promiscuous multitude, but to His own disciples: it was *to them* that He said, "Watch, therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of man cometh" (verse 13). Therein He exhorted His followers to maintain an attitude of the utmost alertness and diligence, to be on their guard against a sudden surprisal, to see to it that they were

in a constant state of readiness to welcome and entertain Him at His appearing. In that thirteenth verse Christ clearly indicated the principal design of this parable, namely, to enforce the Christian duty of watchfulness, particularly against the tendency and danger of moral drowsiness and spiritual apathy in the performance of our duties.

Second, we would here earnestly warn the reader against placing any restrictions on the words of Holy Writ. In the light of the Analogy of Faith, that is the general tenor of Scripture, it is quite unwarrantable for us to *limit* the words "wherein the Son of man cometh" to His ultimate appearing at the end of this age or world. It is our duty to make use of the Concordance and carefully observe the different senses in which the "coming" of Christ is referred to in the Word, and distinguish between them. For example, the communications of grace to God's people in the administration of His Word and ordinances is spoken of thus, "*He shall come down* like rain upon the mown grass, as showers that water the earth" (Ps. 72:6, and cf. Deut. 32:2). Again, there was a *judicial* coming of the Lord in the destruction of Jerusalem, when He made good the threat, "What shall the Lord of the vineyard do? *He will come* and destroy the husbandmen, and will give the vineyard to others" (Mark 12:9)—He came not literally in Person, but instrumentally by the Romans! Then there is also a "coming" of Christ to His people in the renewed manifestations of His love: "If a man love Me, he will keep My words; and My Father will love him, and We will *come* unto him" John 14:23).

Christ has come to His people *vicariously*: as He declared unto the apostles, "I will not leave you comfortless: *I will come* to you" (John 14:18), where according to the preceding verses the principal reference is plainly to the public descent of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost. Again, Christ often visits His people in the chariot of *His providence*: sometimes favorably, at others adversely, as in "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" (Rev. 2:5, and cf. verse 16). Again, He "comes" *instrumentally* by the ministry of the Gospel: "And that He might reconcile both unto God in one body by the Cross, having slain the enmity thereby, and *came* and preached peace to you which were afar off" (Eph. 2:16, 17, and cf. Luke 10:16). Again, He comes *spiritually* to those who yearn for and seek after fellowship with Him: "I will come in to him, and sup with him, and he with Me" (Rev. 3:20). Finally, He will come literally and visibly (Acts 1:11; Rev. 1:7). Thus it is a serious mistake to jumble together the communicative, judicial, manifestative, vicarious, providential, instrumental, and spiritual "comings" of Christ; as it also is to *restrict* to His second advent every verse where it speaks of His "coming" or appearing.

In like manner, it is equally wrong for us to limit our Lord's "Watch therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of man cometh" to a "looking for that blessed hope and the glorious appearing of our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ." Most of the other seven things mentioned above are *not* to be excluded therefrom. We are to be on the *qui vive* (or alert) for His approaches to us in the means of grace, attentive to His appearances before us in providence, recognize Him in the ministry of the Gospel, and expectantly wait His visits of intimate fellowship. The Christian's continuance in this world is the period of both his "watching" and his "waiting" for removal therefrom; and since he knows not whether that will be by death or by his being caught up to meet the Lord in the air, he is to be prepared for either event—if he be so for the former, he will be for the latter. This call for him to "watch" signifies that he is to "keep his heart with all diligence" (Prov. 4:23), "Keep himself from idols" (1 John

5:2 1), "Keep himself in the love of God" (Jude 21). It bids us "Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation, knowing that [though] the spirit be willing, the flesh is weak" (Matt. 26:41). In a word, that exhortation requires us to attend to the interests of our souls with unremitting diligence and circumspection.

"Then shall the kingdom of heaven be likened unto ten virgins, which took their lamps and went forth to meet the Bridegroom" (Matt. 25:1). This is not said to be a similitude of the attitude of "the Bride" toward her Bridegroom, for the scope of it is wider, taking in the whole sphere of Christian profession. Hence in what follows the "Virgins" are divided into two groups—the regenerate and the unregenerate. Thus it would have been inaccurate to designate the whole of *them* "the Bride"! It is therefore a *discriminating* parable, like that of the wheat and tares, and that of the good and bad fish in Matthew 13. If it be asked, Why should Christ address such a parable unto the apostles, the answer is, Because there was a Judas among *them*! It is outside our present scope to consider the "foolish" virgins: suffice it to say that *externally* they differed not from the "wise" ones. They represent not the irreligious and immoral, but unsaved church members, those who have "escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the [not "their"!] Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ" (2 Pet. 2:20), but who have never experienced a miracle of grace in their hearts. Though having lamps in their hands, they had no oil "in their vessels" (verses 3 and 4)—no grace in their souls! This calls for writer and reader to make honest and careful examination of themselves, to "give diligence to make his calling and election sure" (2 Pet. 1:10).

"Then shall the kingdom of heaven be likened unto ten virgins." Many and varied are the figures used to describe the disciples of Christ. They are spoken of as salt, as lights, as sheep, as living stones, as kings and priests. When complete, and in its corporeal capacity, the Church is referred to as the Lamb's "Wife," but individually they are termed "the virgins, her companions" (Ps. 45:14, and cf. Song of Sol. 8:13; Rev. 1:9). They are called "virgins" for the purity of their faith: for none—no matter how pleasing is his personality or irreproachable his outward conduct—who is fundamentally unsound is to be regarded as a Christian. Thus the apostle, when expostulating with a local church for giving a hearing to false teachers, told them, "For I am jealous over you with godly jealousy: for I have [ministerially] espoused you to one Husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ" (2 Cor. 11:2). Again; they are called "virgins" for the purity of their worship. God is a jealous God and will not brook any rival, and therefore we find, all through Scripture, that idolatry is expressed as harlotry, hence the vile and corrupt Papacy is designated "The mother of harlots" (Rev. 17:5). Once more: they are called "virgins" for the purity of their walk, refusing friendship and fellowship with the adulterous world, cleaving to Christ—"they are virgins: these are they which follow the Lamb whithersoever He goeth" (Rev. 14:4).

The saints are expressly bidden *to go forth* to meet the Bridegroom. "Go forth, O ye daughters of Jerusalem, and behold king Solomon with the crown wherewith his mother crowned him in the day of his espousals" (Song of Solomon 3:11)—an exceedingly interesting and blessed verse which we must not dwell upon. It is the antitypical Solomon, the prince of peace, who is here in view. His "mother" is the natural Israel, from whom according to the flesh He sprang—a figure of the spiritual Israel, in whose hearts He is "formed" (Gal. 4:19). The "day of his espousals" was when Israel entered into a solemn covenant with the Lord (Jer. 2:2, and see Ex. 24:3-8, for the historical reference), adumbrating our marital union with Christ, when we "gave our own selves

to Him" (2 Cor. 8:5) and were "joined unto the Lord" (2 Cor 6:17), crowning Him the King of our hearts and lives. Here the "daughters of Jerusalem"—the same as the "virgins"—are bidden to "behold" their majestic and glorious King: to attentively consider the excellency of His person, to be engaged with His perfections, to admire and adore the One who is "Altogether Lovely." But in order thereto there must be active effort on their part. Not to the dilatory does Christ reveal Himself (Song of Sol. 3:1).

"Which took their lamps, and went forth to meet the Bridegroom." The taking of their lamps signifies making an open profession of their faith. They were not secret disciples, hiding their light under a bushel, but those who were unashamed to be known as the followers of Christ. Luke 12:35, serves to explain this force of the figure: "Let your loins be girded about, and your *lamps* [more literally] burning, and ye yourselves like unto men that wait for their Lord." Of His forerunner Christ said, "He was a burning and shining lamp" (John 5:35). But other thoughts are suggested and things implied by these virgins taking their lamps. It tells us they availed themselves of suitable means, making provision against the darkness which they would encounter. The principal means for the Christian is the Word, which is "a lamp [same Greek word as in Luke 12:35, and John 5:35] that shineth in a dark place" (2 Pet. 1:19). It also shows they had no intention of going to sleep, but purposed to remain vigilant; which renders more searching what follows. It also intimates they were sensible of the difficulty of their task. Only one who, after a full day's work, has sat out the night by a sick bed knows how hard it is to keep alert throughout the long hours of darkness.

It needs to be clearly realized by the believer that the Word is supplied him not only as "bread" to feed upon, a "sword" for him to employ in repulsing the attacks of his enemies, but also as an illuminator: "Thy Word is a lamp unto my feet" (119:105), revealing those paths in which I must walk if I would meet with the eternal Lover of my soul. "And went forth to meet the Bridegroom." *That* must ever be our object in the use of means and attendance upon the administration of the Divine ordinances. That going forth to meet the Lord is to be understood as expressing both external and internal action. Externally, it signifies separation from the world, especially its pleasures, for Christ will not be met with while we waste our time engaging in them. "Be not unequally yoked together with unbelievers ... come out from among them" (2 Cor. 6:14-17) must be heeded if we would "meet the Bridegroom." More particularly, their going forth denoted a turning of their backs upon the apostate ecclesiastical system: Christ had informed His disciples that he had abandoned a Judaism which had rejected Him (Matt. 23:37, 38), so if they would meet with Him, they too must "go forth unto Him outside the camp" (Heb. 13:15). The same is true now.

If the Christian would meet with and have blessed fellowship with Christ, he must not only walk in separation from all intimacy with the profane world, but turn his back on every section of the religious world which gives not Christ the pre-eminence. That calls for the denying of self and "bearing His reproach." Our readiness so to do will depend upon how highly we esteem Him. *Internally*, it signified the activity of their affections. It imports their delight in Him, that He was the Object of their desires and expectations. It connotes the exercise of their graces upon Christ, an outgoing of the whole soul after Him; *such* a going out after Him as David had: "One thing [supremely] have I desired of the Lord, that will I seek after: that I may dwell in the house of the Lord [the place of communion] all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord" (Ps. 27:4). There can be no soul-satisfying beholding of His excellency unless there be deep longing

for and earnest seeking after Him, which is what is purported by the "went forth to *meet* the Bridegroom!"

"Went forth to meet the Bridegroom" denotes a craving for fellowship with and a definite seeking after Him, and where *they* be absent it is vain to think we are among those who "love His appearing." Those words refer to the exercise of the believer's graces, so that he can say "My soul followeth hard after Thee" (Ps. 63:8). Of *faith*, acted upon its Object, viewing Him as His person and perfections are portrayed in the Word. Of *hope*, expecting to meet with Him, for Him to "manifest Himself unto us" (John 14:21), as well as being for ever with Him. Of *love*, which desires its Beloved and cannot be content away from Him. It is for the affections to be set upon things above where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God, resulting in a stranger and pilgrim character on earth. It is a going out of self, absorbed with the One who loves us and gave Himself for us. Only so can He be experientially encountered, beheld with delight, fellowshiped. That "went forth to meet the Bridegroom" is *such* a going forth of the affections and exercise of our graces upon Him as made Paul to say, "But what things *were* gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ: yea doubtless, I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord" (Phil. 3:8, 9).

"While the Bridegroom tarried, they all slumbered and slept" (Matt. 25:6). How pathetic! How searching and solemn! The season of *His* tarrying was the time of *their* failing. They did not continue as they began. Their graces were not kept in healthy exercise. They ceased to attend unto the great business assigned them. They grew weary of well-doing. Instead of occupying our heads with the "prophetic" fulfillment of the verse, we need to bare our hearts and suffer them to be searched by it. Instead of saying, Those words now accurately describe the present condition of Christendom as a whole, we need to inquire how far they pertain to each of us individually. Far more to the point is it to ask myself, *Am I* a slumbering and sleeping Christian? Nor is that question to be answered hurriedly. If on the one hand I need to beware of thinking more highly of myself than I ought, or pretend all is well with me when such is not the case; on the other, God does not require me to act the part of a hypocrite, and in order to acquire a reputation for humility claim to be worse than I am. Peter was not uttering a presumptuous boast when he said unto Christ "Thou knowest that I love Thee." But Judas was an impostor when he greeted Him with a kiss.

But before we can truthfully answer the question, Am I spiritually asleep? we must first ascertain what are the marks of one who *is* so. Let us then, in order to assist the honest inquirer, describe some of the *characteristics* of sleep. And since we are not making any effort to impress the learned, we will be as simple as possible. The things which characterize the body when it is asleep will help us to determine when the soul is so. When the body is asleep it is in a state of inactivity, all its members being in repose. It is also a state of unconsciousness, when the normal exercises of the mind are suspended. It is therefore a state of insensibility to danger, of complete helplessness. Spiritual sleep is that condition wherein the faculties of the believer's soul are inoperative and when his graces no longer perform their several offices. When the mind ceases to engage itself with Divine things, and the graces be not kept in healthy exercise, a state of slothfulness and inertia ensues. When the grand truths of Scripture regarding God and Christ, sin and grace, heaven and hell, exert not a lively and effectual influence upon us, we quickly become drowsy and neglectful.

A slumbering faith is an inactive one. It is not exercised upon its appointed Objects nor performing its assigned tasks. It is neither drawing upon that fullness of grace which is available in Christ for His people, nor is it acting on the precepts and promises of the Word. Though there still be a mental assent to the Truth, yet the heart is no longer suitably affected by that which concerns practical godliness. Where such be the case a Christian will be governed more by tradition, sentiment, and fancy, rather than by gratitude, the fear of the Lord, and care to please Him. So too when his hope becomes sluggish, he soon lapses into a spiritual torpor. Hope is a desirous and earnest expectation of blessedness to come. It looks away from self and this present scene and is enthralled by "the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him." As it eyes the goal and the prize, it is enabled to run with patience the race set before *us*. But when hope slumbers he becomes absorbed with the objects of time and sense, and allured and stupefied with present and perishing things. Likewise when love to God be not vigorous, there is no living to His glory; self-love and self-pity actuating us. When the love of Christ ceases to constrain us to self-denial and a following the example He has left us, the soul has gone to sleep.

Where those cardinal graces be not in healthy exercise, the Christian loses his relish for the means of grace, and if he attempts to use them it is but perfunctorily. The Bible is read more from habit or to satisfy conscience than with eager delight, and then no impression is left on the heart, nor is there any sweet meditation thereon afterwards. Prayer is performed mechanically, without any conscious approach unto God or communing with Him. So in attending public worship and the hearing of the Word: the duty is performed formally and without profit. When the body sleeps it *neither eats nor drinks*: so it is with the soul. Faith is the hand which receives, hope the saliva which aids digestion, love the masticator and assimilator of what is partaken. But when they cease to function the soul is starved, and it becomes weak and languid. The more undernourished be the body the less strength and ability has it for its tasks. In like manner, a neglected soul is unfit for holy duties, and the most sacred exercises become burdensome. Thus, when a saint finds his use of the means of grace wearisome and the discharge of spiritual privileges irksome, he may know that his soul is slumbering Godwards.

In the parable itself four *causes* of spiritual sleep are indicated. 1. *Failure to remain watchful*. In its wider sense "watching" signifies an earnest taking heed unto ourselves and our ways, realizing how prone we are to "turn again to folly" (Psa. 85:8). So long as the saint be left in this world, he is in constant danger of bringing reproach upon the holy Name he bears, and becoming a stumbling-block to his brethren. Watchfulness (the opposite of carelessness) is exercising a diligent concern and care for our souls, avoiding all occasions to sin, resisting temptation (Matt. 26:41). It is to "stand fast in the faith, quit you like men" (1 Cor. 16:13)—be regular in our duties. When we be lax in serving the Lord, in mortifying our lusts, and less fervent and frequent in prayer, then slumber has begun to steal over us. Ultimately, it respects "looking for that blessed hope," which is a very different thing from awaiting the fulfillment of prophecy or the accomplishing of an item in God's "dispensational program." It is far more than expecting an important event, namely, the second advent of Christ Himself, and that implies delight in Him, yearning after Him, practical readiness for His appearing: Luke 12:35, 36.

2. *The Bridegroom's delay* resulted in lack of perseverance on their part. Since we know not how soon or how long deferred will be our call to depart from this world, we need to be unremitting in duty, in a state of constant readiness. Not only a desirous expectation but a "patient waiting for Christ" (2 Thess. 3:5) is required of us. "Blessed are those servants whom the Lord when He

cometh shall find watching. . . If he shall come in the second watch, or come in the third watch, and find them so, blessed are those servants. And this know, that if the good man of the house had known what hour the thief would come, he would have watched and not have suffered his house to be broken through" (Luke 12:37, 38). It was because Moses tarried so long in the mount that Israel grew weary of waiting and gave way to their lusts—a warning to us not to relax our vigilance. How long had the Old Testament saints to wait for His first advent! "Behold the husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth and hath long patience for it . . . be ye also patient: stablish your hearts" (James 5:7, 8), exercising faith and hope. See Luke 21:36.

3. *Intimacy with graceless professors.* The wise virgins failed because they were in too close contact and fellowship with the foolish ones. That is confirmed by the Divine warning "Be not deceived: evil companionships [the verbal form of that Greek word is rendered "communed with" in Acts 24:26] corrupt good manners," which is immediately followed by "Awake to righteousness, and sin not" (1 Cor. 15:33,34), showing us that intimacy with the Christless produces lethargy. "We are more susceptible of evil than good: we catch a disease from one another, but we do not get health from one another. The conversations of the wicked have more power to corrupt than the good to excite virtue. A man that would keep himself awake unto God, and mind the saving of his soul, must shake off evil company" (Manton). See Psalm 119:115. It is not the openly profane, but the loose and careless professor who is the greatest menace to the Christian. Hence "having a form of godliness but denying [inaction] the power thereof, from such *turn away*" (2 Tim. 3:5).

4. *Inattention to the initial danger:* they "slumbered" (a lighter form) before they slept! How that shows the need for taking solemn and earnest heed to the beginnings of spiritual decline! If we yield to a spirit of languor we shall soon lapse into a sound sleep. One degree of slackness and carelessness leads to another: "Slothfulness casteth into a deep sleep" (Prov. 19:15), Once our zeal abates and our love cools, we become remiss and heedless. If we do not fight against a cold formality when engaged in sacred exercises, we shall ultimately cease them entirely. All backsliding begins in the heart! Sin stupefies before it hardens. If we cease to heed the gentle strivings of the Spirit, conscience will become calloused. "David, when he fell into adultery and blood, he was like one in a swoon. . . We have need to stand always upon our watch. Great mischiefs would not ensue if we took notice of the beginnings of those distempers which afterwards settle upon us" (Manton).

Other causes of spiritual sleepiness which are not directly indicated in this parable are specified in or may be deduced from other passages. For example: "Turn away mine eyes from beholding vanity; quicken Thou me in Thy way" (Ps. 119:37). The apposition of those two petitions clearly connotes that an undue occupation with worldly things has a deadening effect upon the heart. Nothing has a more enervating influence on the affections of a believer than for him to allow himself an inordinate liberty in carnal vanities. Again, "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 . . . Watch ye therefore, and pray always" (Luke 21 :34..36). Gluttony not only dulls the senses of the body but renders the mind sluggish too, and thereby the whole man is unfitted for the discharge of spiritual duties, which call for the engaging and putting forth of "*all* that is within us" (Ps. 103:1); equally so do carking (burdened) cares which engross the attention and stupefy the understanding and render the affections torpid. Yet more searching is it to observe that "*be sober*" *precedes* "*be vigilant*" in 1 Peter 5:8. Sobriety is

freedom from excesses, particularly a sparing use made of the lawful comforts of this life. Any form of intemperance breeds inertia. If, then, we are able to keep wide awake, we must be "temperate *in all things*" (1 Cor. 9:25).

The *consequences* of spiritual sloth are inevitable and obvious. Space allows us to do little more than name some of the chief ones. (1) Grace becomes inoperative. When faith be not exercised upon Christ, it nods and ceases to produce good works. When hope languishes and becomes inactive, the heart is no longer lifted above the things of time and sense by a desirous expectation of good things to come. Then love declines and is no longer engaged in pleasing and glorifying God. Zeal slumbers and instead of fervour there is heartless formality in the use of means and performance of duties. (2) We are deprived of spiritual discernment, and no longer able to experientially perceive the vanity of earthly things and value of heavenly, and the need of pressing forward unto them. (3) A drowsy inattention to God's providences. Eyes closed in sleep take no notice of His dealings with us, weigh not the things which befall us. Mercies are received as a matter of course, and signs of God's displeasure are disregarded (Isa. 42:25).

(4) Unconcernedness in the commission of sin, so that we cease mortifying our lusts and resisting the Devil. Spiritual stupidity makes us insensible to our danger. It was while David was taking his ease that he yielded to the Devil (2 Sam. 11:1, 2). (5) The Holy Spirit is grieved and His gracious operations are suspended and His comforts withheld. (6) So far from us overcoming the world, when our spiritual senses be dulled, we are absorbed with its attractions or weighted down by its cares. (7) We are robbed by our enemies (Luke 12:39)—of God's providential smile, of our peace and joy. (8) Fruitlessness: see Proverbs 24:30, 31. (9) Carnal complacency: peace and joy being derived from pleasant circumstances and earthly possessions, rather than Christ and our heritage in Him. (10) Spiritual poverty: see Proverbs 24:33, 34. (11) Indifference to the cause and interests of Christ: it was while men slept Satan sowed his tares, and abuses creep into the church. (12) A practical unpreparedness for Christ's coming: Luke 21:36; Revelation 16:15.

Let us now point out some of the *correctives*. 1. Spiritual sleepiness is best prevented by our faith being engaged with the person and perfections of Christ; it is not monastic retirement, nor the relinquishment of our lawful connection with the world, but the fixing of our minds and affections upon the transcendent excellency of the Saviour, which will most effectually preserve us from being hypnotized by the baits of Satan. A believing and adoring view of Him who is "Fairer than the children of men" will dim the luster of the most attractive objects in this world. When the One who is "altogether lovely" is beheld by anointed eyes the flowery paths of this scene become a dreary wilderness, and the soul is quickened to press forward unto Him, until it sees the King in his beauty face to face. 2. Especially will a keeping fresh in our hearts the unspeakable sufferings of the Saviour draw us away from threatened rivals, and inspire grateful obedience to Him. "For the love of Christ [particularly His dying love] constraineth us" (2 Cor. 5:14). 3. By praying daily for God to quicken and revive us. 4. By being doubly on our guard when things are going smoothly and easily. 5. By maintaining a lively expectation of Christ's appearing (Heb. 9:28). 6. By attending to such exhortations as Hebrews 12:2, 3, allowing no abatement of our vigor. 7. By putting on the whole armor of God (Eph. 6:13-18).