

Christian Retirement

Part 48

By [Thomas Reade](#)

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ON WATCHFULNESS

This life is a state of probation. Hence trials are necessary in order to prove us, as gold is tried in the fire. God cannot be tempted with evil, neither does he tempt any man; but we are tempted when we are drawn aside of our own lust and enticed. Satan works upon our corrupt nature, and there he finds materials ready prepared for his destructive purpose.

While we are in an unrenewed state, we are under the dominion of sin. We naturally love it, and are captivated by it; for our heart is only evil continually.
honorable

Common prudence and worldly interest, as well as natural conscience, may prevent an unconverted man from committing many crimes which would outrage society. The fear of punishment and the dread of public infamy may operate to the prevention of those evils, which would bring a man under the lash of the violated laws of his country. The certain consequence of disease and poverty attendant on some vices, proves a partial check to their commission; though, alas! too weak to arrest the general torrent of licentiousness.

Thus, by the constant operation of these inferior motives, and through the goodness of a restraining providence, we are happily preserved from that inundation of iniquity, which would otherwise destroy the fabric of society.

There are, it is true, many amiable characters to be found, even among those who are hostile to the spirit of the Gospel, who may be considered as ornaments in the midst of surrounding depravity and pollution. Polite education and civilized society can varnish over the old Adam! But these amiable worldlings reject, as fanatical, those unwelcome declarations of Scripture, which assert the radical corruption of our nature, and the absolute necessity of being born again of the Spirit. In the midst of all this boasted morality—this vaunted amiability of temper—this studious endeavor to appear honorable in the eyes of each other—we perceive no filial fear of God; no hatred of sin; no delight in holiness; no cordial reception of the blessed Jesus as the only Savior from guilt and pollution;

no self-aborrence; no watchfulness against the sins of the heart; no deadness to the vanities and smiles of the world.

Under every garb, whether plain or splendid, the carnal mind is enmity against God. This truth cannot be too much impressed upon the mind and conscience. Hence we see the necessity for renewing grace; for, until we are united to Christ by a true faith, we cannot receive those powerful principles of love and fear, which operate as perpetual excitements to holy obedience, and constant checks to presumption and carnal security.

When we are thus savingly united to Jesus, we receive out of his fullness every needful grace. Being "accepted in the beloved," we have peace with God; we are adopted into his family; are sealed by the Holy Spirit of promise; enjoy sweet fellowship with the Father and the Son; and, experiencing the strengthening consolations of the Spirit, are enabled to resist the world, the flesh, and the devil, and to perfect holiness in the fear of God. Such is the character, walk, and privilege of every true believer. "Lord, make me a branch in Jesus, the living vine. Create my soul anew, and fill me with every holy, pure, and heavenly affection."

Great, indeed, is the character of a child of God; yet, he is renewed but in part. The Canaanites are still in the land. Satan knows this well, and tries most assiduously to regain possession of that heart from which grace has dislodged him. To effect his purpose, he studies tempers, natural constitutions, weaknesses, and peculiar situations in which believers are placed; and thus endeavors to suit his temptations to the vulnerable parts of the Christian citadel.

How needful, then, is the duty of watchfulness! If an army, passing through an enemy's country, appoints its out-posts and sentinels to observe the motions of the inhabitants, lest it should be surprised by an opposing force, and unexpectedly defeated; surely it behooves the Christian soldier to obey the command of the great Captain of his salvation; "watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation."

Through the slothfulness and unwatchfulness of believers, Satan too often makes sad inroads into their peace and purity.

Mr. Winter, in one of his letters, makes this striking observation: "Watchfulness and prayer form the Christian's entrenchment. These are the lines our enemy cannot break. Be the person who uses them ever so weak, he will be sure to stand; be the person who neglects them ever so strong in himself, ever so judiciously taught, or ever so extensive in his knowledge, he is liable to fall." The farther the experienced Christian advances in his earthly pilgrimage, the more he learns how needful to his safety are watchfulness and prayer.

There are some who treat as legal this circumspection and self-distrust. But the real believer well knows, that the more lively his faith is, the more alive he himself

is to the motions of his spiritual enemies, lest he should be overcome by some sudden temptation.

There are three evils against which we should earnestly pray to be preserved: indecision—indifference—and insensibility. When the mind begins to be first affected with the importance of religion, many things are done, which were before omitted. But no sooner is the religious feeling of the heart made known to the world by this outward change of conduct, than the artillery of Satan is directed against the young professor; and too often, alas! proves successful in shaking the newly formed purpose of taking up the cross and following Christ.

The enemy of souls now plies his warlike engines with Satanic violence. Worldly interest—carnal ease—false shame—the fear of man—the frowns of relations—and the raillery of sinful companions, are all employed with consummate skill to undermine his good resolves. These powerful attacks, if not resisted through the energy of almighty grace, soon produce indecision in the purpose: from indecision, the step is easy to indifference; from indifference to the voice of conscience the transition is quick to insensibility; from insensibility to the threatenings of God, how short is the road to obduracy—the very seal of perdition. Who can contemplate this awful progress of declension, and not acknowledge the immense importance of watchfulness and prayer?

There cannot be a more humbling representation of the fallen state of man, than in the falls of those eminent saints whose lives are recorded in the pages of Scripture. The Almighty, in his wisdom, may have permitted these falls, to humble the best of men, by leading them to feel that their steadfastness in holiness does not depend upon their strength, but on his grace, that their resistance of evil is not from any natural power of their own, but entirely from the communicated influence of the Holy Spirit upon our hearts.

When Noah lived, before the flood, he testified as a "preacher of righteousness" against the prevailing iniquity of the age. He walked with God in faith, fear, love, and obedience, and found grace in his sight. But when safe in the bosom of his family, a monument of mercy, after the tremendous deluge, he drank wine and was drunken, and lay uncovered in his tent! Can this be Noah—the holy Noah? Then let him that thinks he stands, take heed lest he fall.

Lot, whose righteous soul was vexed from day to day with the filthy conversation of the wicked, when rescued by the hand of mercy from the devoted cities of the plain, and safely sheltered in the mountain, fell into the combined atrocity of drunkenness and incest. This speaks with awful voice, "do not be high-minded, but fear."

David, the man after God's own heart, who never once defiled his soul by heathen worship, when raised to the throne of Israel, and enjoying rest in his

palace, was enticed by deceitful lusts into the dreadful sins of adultery and murder.

Solomon, who was honored with the name of Jedidiah, (beloved of the Lord), who built a splendid temple for the worship of Jehovah, and whose wisdom attracted the Queen of Sheba to Jerusalem; when grown old, and after having witnessed the faithfulness of God in the promises made to him on ascending the throne, "was turned after other gods," through the allurements of "his foreign wives;" and erected "high places" for the abominations of the heathen. Surely we must say, "Lord, what is man, that you should be mindful of him!"

Hezekiah, so mercifully raised from a bed of death, was lifted up with pride, perhaps on account of the stupendous miracle wrought on his behalf.

Peter, so zealous and confident, denied his Lord with oaths and curses.

Abraham, so eminent for faith, betrayed the evil of mistrust, showing that the fear of man brings a snare.

Jacob, under the semblance of piety and filial affection, with a lie obtained his father's blessing.

Moses, so renowned for meekness, was condemned to die in the wilderness, because he spoke unadvisedly with his lips.

Aaron, the high priest of the Lord, made a golden calf, around which the people danced to their shame.

How faithful is the pen of inspiration; what indubitable marks of divinity are stamped upon the holy Scriptures! Here, Truth with impartial hand dips her pencil, now in the brighter, now in the darker colors, and thus draws her characters to the very life. Here we see man, just as he is, both by nature and grace. If characters so eminent for holiness have been stained with sin, where shall we find sinless perfection in this lower world? All need the blood of Jesus; all need the preserving grace of God; all need the constant exercise of watchfulness and prayer.

Those who take encouragement from these painful instances of corruption in the best of men, to trifle with sin; who, like Ham, delight to sport with the spiritual nakedness of God's children; who despise the truths of the Bible, because some holy characters recorded in it have been drawn by Satan and their own hearts into grievous crimes; evidence a total ignorance of their own hearts, and a total destitution of that grace, which, through the blessed truths of Scripture, leads men to holiness, to happiness, and heaven.

While infidels tauntingly expose the sins of believers, let them behold with solemn awe the displeasure of the Almighty, as manifested in their temporal afflictions and those heart-rending sorrows, which, like piercing thorns, sprang out of their iniquities. And when believers contemplate these Scripture characters, let them seek for grace to avoid their falls, and to copy their unfeigned repentance.

The all-conquering Lamb, who fought and overcame Satan by dying upon the cross for our redemption, will not allow him to exult with shouts of final victory. He raises the fallen believer through an act of inconceivable, unmerited mercy; fills him with shame and self-abhorrence; leads him to the fountain of his own most precious blood; imparts to him a fresh supply of his Holy Spirit; and thus enables him to renew the conflict with unabated vigor, in deep humility, self-distrust, and simple reliance on his almighty power, combined with constant vigilance against the motions of every inward and outward foe.

But the soul which shall dare to presume upon such mercy, and so indulge in sin, is in the utmost peril of falling into perdition; for this very spirit of daring proves a man to be a self-deceiver, an enemy of all righteousness.

A true believer may fall into sin; but he cannot sin on the principle that grace may abound, or because Jesus has said, "my sheep shall never perish;" well knowing that the character of Christ's sheep is, that they hear the Shepherd's voice and follow him.

A true believer may fall into sin; but he cannot sin habitually, or with continued delight—well knowing that "whoever is born of God does not commit sin; for his seed remains in him, and he cannot sin, because he is born of God." To do so, would prove him a hypocrite, and not a child of God. The grace of the Gospel gives no license to iniquity. To imagine for a moment that it grants the slightest accommodation to sin, is to cast a foul reproach upon the spotless purity of that Holy Being from whom all grace proceeds.

That evil men should abuse this revelation of mercy, is no more marvelous than that they do every hour abuse the choicest blessings of providence. It is strange to think how incorrectly men reason, in general, about spiritual things. They can invent a thousand objections against what they do not love; which objections they would instantly repel, if brought against some favorite worldly scheme.

I perceive, then, that there is great need to watch against the false reasonings of my own mind. If I feel tempted to parley with sin, to grow lukewarm in religion, or to draw back into the world, let me ask myself these solemn questions—Is my heavenly Father less kind and gracious than when I first knew the Lord? Is my Savior less lovely and precious in the eyes of saints and angels? Is the Divine Spirit less holy and comforting to the tried believer? Is sin less hateful in the sight of God, and less destructive to the soul? Is Satan less watchful and subtle

against the sheep of Christ? Is the world less vain and deceitful in its nature and pursuits? Is the heart less vile and treacherous in its inward workings? Is heaven less glorious and desirable to the weary pilgrim? Is hell less dreadful and tormenting to the perishing sinner?

Have any of these objects changed their nature, since first the light of truth broke in upon my mind? If not, then why should I begin to change my views and feelings respecting them? Why grow lukewarm and indifferent? Oh! what need for suspicion, lest all should not be right! What need for watchfulness, self-examination, and prayer.

If these realities are still the same—if the truths of God are immutable—then why should I be less vigilant, less prayerful, less anxious about these infinitely momentous truths? Time is rapidly receding; eternity is rapidly advancing. My state must soon be irrevocably fixed in a world of happiness or misery. Then why am I so cold, so indifferent to the highest interests of my immortal soul? Is it not owing to the prevalence of inward corruption, and the workings of Satan in my depraved heart?

"Blessed Jesus! look in mercy upon a wretched, lost creature. Were I to be crushed, as in a moment, and sent quick into hell, it would be righteous judgment. But you are gracious, you are full of compassion, you came to seek and to save rebellious sinners. Lord, save me—help me—undertake for me. Snatch me as a brand out of the burning fire. Deliver me from the jaws of that roaring lion, who is ever going about, seeking whom he may devour. Lord, give me not over to him as a prey. Allow me not to be carried captive by him at his will. Fill me with a constant dread of sin; make me ever watchful and vigilant. Bear me in your arms of love, through all the dangers of my earthly course, until, safe removed from every storm, I serve you in your everlasting kingdom."

Oh! gracious Friend of sinners,
Sanctify my guilty soul;
Speak the word, Almighty Savior,
And your servant shall be whole.

Save me from corruption's power,
Save me from Satanic wiles;
Spread your guardian wings around me
Cheer me with your heavenly smiles.

As I wander through the desert,
Be my constant help and stay:
Shine upon my path, and lead me
To the realms of endless day.

Then, Oh then, in sweetest rapture,

Free from danger, loud I'll sing,
In the grand celestial chorus,
Glory to the Immortal King.

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