

# The Heart of the Gospel: Gethsemane to the Burial of Christ

## Chapter 2: The Imperatives of Gethsemane—Watch and Pray

[Brian Schwertley](#)

As we have looked upon our Lord in Gethsemane, one of the striking things that we have seen is our Lord's love and concern for His disciples. Even as He suffers extreme anguish, three times He goes to His disciples to admonish them to watch and pray with Him. Matthew 26:41 reads, "Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak." As we examine this text there are a number of things that we need to consider: (1) How do these imperatives apply to the disciples in the immediate context? (2) Why is watching and praying necessary for the Christian? (3) What does it mean to enter into temptation? (4) What are some specific things that Scripture requires us to watch or be on guard for? (5) Why and how is prayer connected to watching and fighting against temptation?

(1) The command to "keep on watching" and "keep on praying" (the imperatives are in the present continuous tense) given to the disciples comes almost immediately before the arrest and trial of Jesus. During this time of bold persecution, the disciples could be placed in situations where they would be strongly tempted to deny the Savior in order to save their own necks. In fact, at the arrest of Jesus "all the disciples forsook Him and fled" (Mt. 26:56) and a little later Peter will deny Christ three times (Mt. 26:69-75). Interestingly, our Lord told the apostles at the last supper only a few hours before, that in accordance with prophecy, "All of you will be made to stumble because of Me this night, for it is written, 'I shall strike the Shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered'" (Mk. 14:27; Mt. 26:31). Jesus also told Peter of his coming threefold denial (Mk. 14:30, Mt. 26:34). Therefore, we must view these imperatives as warnings to be spiritually on guard and pray for God's assistance not to betray the Son of God at this crucial hour. Christ's warning has to do with the temptation to abandon the cause of the kingdom of God, to backslide and move toward apostasy. "Jesus, who had been successfully waging war on the kingdom of Satan (cf. Mark 1:7-8; 3:27, where by inference Jesus is understood as the one stronger than the strong man, Satan), now anticipates a fearful counteroffensive."<sup>1</sup> The Savior repeatedly warns His disciples because their behavior indicates that they do not truly understand the great spiritual danger they are about to face. They should be watching and praying instead of sleeping.

What is particularly interesting regarding our Lord's warning is that it proves the full responsibility of secondary agencies in God's providential dealings with men. Jesus obviously knew the prophecies about the coming failure of the apostles, for He quotes Zechariah 13:7 at the holy supper. Also, He had just prophesied in amazing detail the fall of Peter. Yet, He does everything He can to lift the apostles out of their spiritual stupor and prepare them for the coming conflict. "He knew what sore temptations were about to assail them, so he would have them doubly armed by—watching unto prayer."<sup>2</sup>

(2) After our Lord commanded His disciples to watch and pray, he gives a distinct reason why such spiritual exercises are necessary. Christ says, "The Spirit indeed is willing but the flesh

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<sup>1</sup> Craig A. Evans, *Mark 8:27-16:20* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2001), 415.

<sup>2</sup> Charles H. Spurgeon, *Matthew*, 386.

is weak” (Mt. 26:41; Mk. 14:38). By “spirit” Jesus simply means the human spirit, soul or mind of the disciples. The disciples, in their hearts, were willing to do their duty. They wanted to watch and pray with the Savior and they even expressed a willingness to die with Him if necessary (Mt. 26:35; Mk. 14:31). Thus, in this explanation of the disciples’ failure to watch, Christ “gives them the praise of *willingness*, in order that their weakness may not throw them into despair, and yet urges them to *prayer*, because they are not sufficiently endowed with the power of the Spirit.”<sup>3</sup> Our Lord corrects these erring disciples graciously and gently as a loving father does his own children. This admonition should not be viewed as an excuse for failure but rather as a reason for diligence.

The term “flesh” (*sarx*) in this context is viewed by most commentators as not simply the fleshly part of man but as the whole nature of man weakened by the fall. “‘Flesh,’ as here meant is the human nature considered from the aspect of its frailty and needs, both physical and psychical.”<sup>4</sup> So, Jesus’ warning includes the disciples’ physical weakness, mental exhaustion and emotional strain that caused them to fall asleep. Interestingly, the term flesh in Scripture is often used to describe the frailty and weakness of men and animals in contrast to God, who is all powerful and unchanging (e.g., “Now the Egyptians are men, and not God, and their horses are flesh, and not spirit,” Isa. 31:3; “Cursed is the man who trusts in man and makes flesh his strength,” Jer. 17:5; cf. Isa. 40:5-6; Jer. 25:31; Zech. 2:13).<sup>5</sup>

The question that naturally arises regarding the term “flesh” (*sarx*) is: does this term in this context merely refer to human weakness as a result of the fall in a non-moral sense; or, does it also have the meaning we so often find in Paul’s epistles where the term “flesh” (*sarx*) refers to the sinful pollution or corruption of human nature as a result of the fall? According to Paul “flesh” is the seat of sinful lusts which wage war against the Spirit. The apostle warns believers in Romans 7 about “the sin that dwells in us” (v. 17), “the flesh” (v. 18) or “lusts” (vs. 7-8), “the law of sin in our members” (v. 23). He says that our corrupt nature—our sinful inclinations—draws us toward what is evil and “wars against the law of our minds” (v. 23). Paul even discusses this struggle in his own life: “For what I will to do, that I do not practice; but what I hate, that I do. If, then, I do what I will not to do, I agree with the law that it is good. But now, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me” (vs. 15-17; cf. Gal. 5:17).

Almost all commentators believe that Christ’s phrase “the flesh is weak” (Mt. 26:41; Mk. 14:38) refers not to moral depravity but rather simply to weakness related to fatigue. In favor of this interpretation, they note that Jesus contrasts not the sinful flesh against the Holy Spirit as does Paul, but the human spirit’s determination to do the right thing which (in the immediate context) is impeded by falling asleep.

However, even if physical and mental weakness which leads to sleep is the only culprit our Lord had in mind in this particular admonition, we must not forget that, by way of application, it certainly applies to the term “flesh” in the Pauline sense. We can say this for the following reasons: a) The disciples are commanded to watch and pray against temptation. The threat they face is a failure to endure in a time of trial. Therefore, just as the command to stay alert and watch has clear spiritual connotations (i.e. they are to be not just physically but also spiritually alert), the weakness of the flesh that leads to slumber does also. Indeed, sleeping becomes a metaphor in the New Testament for giving in to the sinful flesh and leading a wicked

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<sup>3</sup> John Calvin, *Commentary on a Harmony of the Evangelists, Matthew, Mark, and Luke*, 3:236.

<sup>4</sup> William Hendriksen, *The Gospel of Mark*, 590.

<sup>5</sup> See Craig Evans, *Mark*, 415.

lifestyle (e.g., “Therefore, let us not sleep as others do, but let us watch and be sober” [1 Th. 5:6-7; cf. Eph. 5:14]).

b) The greatest impediment to our own spiritual faithfulness is not the desire for physical sleep, but our fleshly natures. Because of the remaining effects of the fall upon us, spiritual exercises are often laborious and difficult. Our spirits are willing but we continually find ourselves swimming upstream against our own carnal desires. The unregenerate man experiences no struggle because he happily follows his own fallen inclinations. He gladly swims down the stream of his own lusts.

Paul warns us regarding this conflict in Galatians 5:17, “For the flesh lusts [or sets its desires] against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish.” The reason that we must watch and pray is that our lives are like a violent war. The reason that watching and praying is so important and necessary to the Christian life is because we are in a continual, life-long struggle with the flesh, the body of sin, or the old man, which represents all the corrupt principles, propensities, lusts and passions of our fallen nature.

(3) Jesus instructs the disciples to watch and pray, lest they enter into temptation. What does it mean to enter into temptation? In order to answer this question properly we need to consider: a) the meaning of the Greek word for temptation; b) what entering into temptation does not mean; c) biblical expressions that describe entering temptation; and, d) the meaning of the expression in the context of our Lord’s injunctions.

a) The Greek word for temptation (noun—*peirasmos*, or the verb *peirazein*) can have two different, yet related meanings. When the word is used to describe God’s activity towards His people, it refers to a testing or proving and not a tempting or seducing toward sin. James says, “Let no one say when he is tempted, ‘I am tempted by God;’ for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone” (1:13). In the Greek translation of the Old Testament, Deuteronomy 8:2 and 16 use the same Greek word to describe Israel’s period of testing in the wilderness. Moses’ covenant renewal preaching in Deuteronomy chapters 1 through 11 presents the wilderness wanderings as a time of testing to prepare the covenant people for nationhood in Canaan. Testing by God must always be viewed by believers as something positive. Jehovah sends us trials or tests to mature us, to cause us to grow in sanctification. In Genesis 22 God tested Abraham in order to show the genuineness of his faith and help bring it toward perfection (22:1-18; cf. Jas. 2:21-23).

The word *peirasmon*, in its purely negative sense, refers to a direct and actual solicitation to do evil. Temptation by Satan or a pagan would entail a direct request, prodding, urging or arguing to commit a sin or sins against God. This is what the devil did with Eve in the garden and Christ in the desert. “Temptation can refer to anything—whether a person, a thing, or place, state, way or condition—that upon any account whatsoever, has a force or efficacy to seduce, to draw the mind and heart of a Christian from the obedience God requires of him, into any degree of sin.”<sup>6</sup>

The reason that God cannot tempt or entice a person to sin is that it would be contrary to God’s nature, which is infinitely holy, just and good. Although God does not tempt us to sin, this reality does not mean that God does not sovereignly lead us into conflicts with evil that we would consider temptations. “Our God and Father may, for wise ends, which shall ultimately subserve his own glory and our profit, lead us into positions where Satan, the world, and the

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<sup>6</sup> John Owen, “What is it to Enter Temptation?” in *Works* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1974), 6:96.

flesh may tempt us.”<sup>7</sup> However, “God in no sense leads men into temptation as to have any share in the blame of their sin if they fall into it.... The devil tempts men that he may ruin them; God tries men and puts them where Satan may try them, but he leads them into temptation for probation, that the chaff may be sifted from the wheat, that the dross may be separated from the fine gold.”<sup>8</sup>

Some may argue that the terms trial, or test as opposed to temptation are words without a real distinction. While these words are obviously closely related, it is important that we uphold the distinction that Scripture makes between God testing a person and the devil tempting someone. This distinction upholds God’s nature and character, preserves His absolute sovereignty and explains how we can pray “lead us not into temptation” (Mt. 6:9). The Pelagian or crass Arminian who argues that God has no control over evil actions whatsoever, if consistent, could not even pray the Lord’s prayer. God is sovereign over all affairs, even bad things that happen. However, God does not directly tempt anyone to sin, nor is He in anyway responsible for evil.

b) In order to better understand the expression “enter into temptation,” it will be helpful to first identify what it does not mean. It does not refer to the common everyday temptations that accompany our lives. “Temptation in general is comprehensive of our whole warfare; as our Lord calls the time of his ministry the time of his ‘temptation,’ Luke xxii 28. We have no promise that we shall not be tempted at all; nor are we to pray for an absolute freedom from temptations.”<sup>9</sup> If we were not to be tempted at all, we would have to leave this world altogether. Papists, under the influence of asceticism, attempted to leave off all temptation by entering monasteries and nunneries. They, of course, soon discovered that temptations accompanied them behind the stone walls because their hearts and lusts could not be left outside the fortifications. Therefore, entering into temptation is something more than temptation itself. It is a temptation or trial so great that it ensnares a believer to the point that he *may* fall into sin. Also, it does not mean to be conquered by temptation. “A man may ‘enter into temptation,’ and yet not fall under temptation.”<sup>10</sup> God can make a way for a man to escape or conquer such an ensnarement. Jesus entered into temptation in the wilderness (Mt. 4:1-11; Mk. 1:12-13; Lk. 4:1-13) and again in Gethsemane, yet He prevailed over it. Therefore, entering into temptation must not be confused with committing sin.

c) There are a number of biblical expressions that help us understand what it means to enter temptation. Paul warns Timothy saying, “Those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare” (1 Tim. 6:9). The expressions “fall into” (*empiptousin*) and “snare” (*pagis*) are used figuratively to describe circumstances that trap a man in strong temptation. We picture a man walking in the woods who falls into a pit and is trapped in it. He is entangled and does not know how to escape. We find a similar expression in 1 Corinthians 10:13: “No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man.” The image here is of a man overtaken and held fast by a beast of prey. The apostle Peter tells a persecuted church, “The Lord knows how to deliver the godly out of temptations” (2 Pet. 2:9). The image here is that of a man trapped in the mire or locked in a cell. Such a person needs God to deliver him out of such a dire situation.

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<sup>7</sup> Charles H. Spurgeon, “Lead Us Not into Temptation” in *Expository Encyclopedia* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), 14:387.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> John Owen, “What is It to Enter into Temptation?” in *Works*, 6:97.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

d) The context of our Lord's injunctions to the apostles supports our contention that entering into temptation is something much more serious and dangerous than everyday temptations. The imperatives are given to the disciples because they were about to enter into the temptation of persecution. At this time they were especially vulnerable because they would not have the presence of the Savior to uphold, encourage and rebuke them; the Holy Spirit was not yet poured out; and, the disciples were scattered and could not depend on mutual encouragement. Similarly, when Jesus speaks to the church of Philadelphia He promises them: "Because you have kept My command to persevere, I also will keep you from the hour of temptation which shall come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth" (Rev. 3:10). The hour of temptation describes a distinct period of time of extreme testing for the saints.

(4) Now that we have some understanding of what it means to enter temptation, let us turn our attention to the means of preventing entering into temptation by our Lord. He tells us to "watch and pray." These imperatives (biblically defined) comprise the whole duty for a believer's preservation from temptation. It is our great duty as Christians to be very diligent in these two injunctions, so that we will not fall into temptation. If we are not diligent, we will enter into temptation and entering temptation is the path that can lead to sin, backsliding and even apostasy. Jesus knew the very dangerous nature of falling into temptation, for one of the subjects that He gave us for our daily pleading with God is: "Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil" (Mt. 6:13). We are to pray that God would deliver us from the evil that accompanies our entering into temptation. Although these two imperatives are interrelated and interdependent, we will consider each command in turn for the sake of organization and clarity.

## Keep on Watching

As we turn our attention to the duty to watch, we need to emphasize from the start that success in this endeavor is dependent on a solid knowledge of the sacred Scriptures. It is God's word that tells us about our weaknesses, gives us examples of saints and apostates who have failed in this area, and warns us about circumstances in life that lead us into temptation. Therefore, when we stand upon our watchtower, the Bible must be our light and lens to illuminate and focus our hearts upon all that may assail us. Solomon says, "Keep your heart with all diligence, for out of it spring the issues of life" (Prov. 4:23). "Keep it with all keepings. Keep it from getting evil, as a garden is kept; keep it from doing evil, as the sea is kept at bay from reclaimed netherlands. Keep it with the keeping of heaven above, and of the earth beneath—God's keeping bespoken in prayer, and man's keeping applied in watchful effort. The true principle on which an effectual restraint can be put upon the issues of the heart is indicated in the 21<sup>st</sup> verse—'Keep' my words 'in the midst of thine heart.'"<sup>11</sup>

Our watching must be applied to a number of different areas.

(1) Watching must involve a continuous, careful and close examination of our own hearts. Many professing Christians enter into temptation because they fail to consider the weakness of their own hearts. We have already briefly considered the corruption of our natures that all Christians must contend with. It is for this reason that Solomon says, "He who trusts in his own heart is a fool" (Prov. 28:26); and, "Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding" (Prov. 3:5). Jeremiah says, "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it?" (17:9). Our hearts cannot be trusted; therefore, they

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<sup>11</sup> William Arnot, *Studies in Proverbs: Laws from Heaven for Life on Earth* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, [1884] 1978), 127.

must be diligently watched. Owen writes, “If a castle or fort be never so strong and well fortified, yet if there be a treacherous party within, that is ready to betray it on every opportunity, there is no preserving it from the enemy. There are traitors in our hearts, ready to take part, to close, and side with every temptation, and to give up all to them; yea, to solicit and bribe temptations to do the work, as traitors incite an enemy.”<sup>12</sup> We must understand that watching against entering temptation must always occur on two different levels—one inward, the other outward. There are a number of areas that we must carefully watch in our own hearts.

First, we must carefully watch our emotions and attitudes. When Peter was told by Jesus that all the apostles would be scattered like sheep after His arrest, he boldly proclaimed, “Even if all are made to stumble because of You, I will never be made to stumble” (Mt. 26:33; cf. Mk. 14:29; Lk. 22:33; Jn. 13:37). The apostle had supreme confidence in his heart. Instead of boasting he should have been praying. The Bible says, “When pride comes, then comes shame” (Prov. 11:2); and, “Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall” (Prov. 16:18). If we do not watch our hearts and pride comes, we will be ensnared by it. We will find ourselves saying and doing things contrary to Scripture if pride is not identified and removed.

How many young gifted men have entered into temptation and even embraced damnable heresies because of pride? It is pride and love of respectability that causes men to depart from the simple old gospel and embrace the latest human theological fantasy. It is pride that leads men away from the biblical worship of our covenanted forefathers to the latest fad and gimmick. Do you not see the constant need to watch our deceitful hearts?

We must also pay careful attention to our affections. When we become angry, we must carefully watch ourselves so that anger is not given free reign in our hearts. Paul says, “Be angry, and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your wrath” (Eph. 4:26). The apostle’s injunction presupposes that if anger is not dealt with immediately in a biblical manner, then the result will be a severe temptation to commit sin. The person who holds anger inside coddles it, nourishes it and inflames it until it boils over into an unlawful response. Note the wisdom of Solomon on this matter: “He who hates, disguises it with his lips and lays up deceit within himself” (Prov. 26:24). “Whoever has no rule over his own spirit is like a city broken down, without walls” (Prov. 25:28).

Second, we must carefully watch against self-deception. People enter into temptation when they lie to themselves regarding their condition, behavior, motives or corruptions. Many people enter into temptation voluntarily by rationalizing away the truth of Scripture and godly counsel. Anyone who has served in the ministry for any length of time has met people who through godly counsel stayed on the straight path, but then, after a time, essentially talked themselves into disobedience. They entered temptation by trusting their own wisdom, counsel and reason instead of Scripture and the biblical advice of elders. Very often it is these types of people who totally apostatize from the faith. Because they are not honest with themselves, they rush headlong into temptation and sin all in the name of truth, love, concern and piety.

Note also that it is important for us to see how these areas of watchfulness are interrelated. For example, a man who has a problem with pride is often unwilling to honestly evaluate his own weak areas. Also, pride is very intimately connected to self-deception. It is pride that leads a man to falsely believe he is strong when he is weak. It is pride that convinces a man that he can go into areas where he will be tempted without danger. Pride goes before a fall because it deceives us into thinking we can defeat the enemy in our heart and the allurements of this world while violating the biblical principles relating to inward corruption, temptation and

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<sup>12</sup> John Owen, “Means of Safety in Temptations,” in *Works*, 6:104-105.

outward allurements. Humility says, “Don’t trust yourself; don’t ever voluntarily place yourself in a situation of temptation; don’t depend on pop psychology, Prozac and humanistic solutions—trust in God and His Word alone.”

Third, we must study ourselves and identify our weak or problem areas. For it is in these areas where a Christian is the most vulnerable to attack and is most likely to fail. Therefore, we must watch and be acquainted with our souls, our temperament, our most common lusts and corruptions, and our spiritual weaknesses. “There is a weakest point in every one of us; and remember, the strength of a rope is to be measured, not according to its strength in its strongest but in its weakest part. Every engineer will tell you that the strength of a ship should always be estimated, not according to her strongest but her weakest part, for if the strain shall come upon her weakest part, and that be broken, no matter how strong the rest may be, the whole ship goeth down.”<sup>13</sup> The French had their Maginot line to keep out the Germans in 1940, but the Germans attacked through the Ardennes where there were no fortifications, virtually no heavy armor and only small amounts of troops. We all know the result; France was defeated in only six weeks.

Once we identify our weakest areas, then we must carefully watch them while we build up our spiritual fortifications in that area. For example, if a person has a problem with anger and often lashes out against others, he should memorize passages of Scripture about anger and repeatedly practice a biblical response. Some people have an excessive love of material things and have a problem with contentment. These people need to study passages about contentment, staying out of debt and the many spiritual dangers associated with great wealth. Some men are prone to laziness, irresponsibility and self-induced poverty. These men need to study what the Bible says about work, property and providing a good inheritance to one’s godly children and grandchildren. A very common problem with men is the lust of the eyes and temptations relating to sexual matters. Such men must be very vigilant in avoiding images and sights that would stimulate lusts and tempt them to sin. In this sex-saturated culture we must do everything we can to guard the eye-gate and ear-gate.

(2) We must be on guard regarding external causes of temptation. In other words, to the best of our ability, we need to control our environment. This point is very obvious, yet professing Christians violate it all the time. For example, young believers who would loudly proclaim their strong opposition to fornication in our culture often engage in the modern pagan practice of non-chaperoned dating. By doing so they are placing themselves in a situation of temptation. The results of this practice are seen in various polls of evangelicals which place their fornication rates only slightly lower than the heathen.

Guarding against external temptation has a number of different aspects. First, we must watch and be alert against every circumstance that may provoke or stimulate sinful thoughts, words or actions. If you have a prior pattern of drinking alcoholic beverages to excess, then obviously you need to avoid bars, taverns, pubs or parties that will tempt you to drink. If you are weak in this area, you should not keep company with people who will tempt you to drink and you certainly should not keep alcoholic beverages in your home.

If you have problems with sexual lust, then you must not visit magazine shops or video stores that sell or rent pornography. This means you don’t ever even walk inside the door, for the moment you do you have placed yourself into temptation. Further, cable channels that carry lascivious programming must be totally avoided. If you are tempted by internet pornography, then you must either get rid of your computer or put it in a public area of the home and have excellent filters installed so that access to lewd websites is impossible. Internet pornography is a

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<sup>13</sup> Charles H. Spurgeon, “Lead Us Not into Temptation,” 14:394.

huge problem for many professing Christian men. Remember, don't trust yourself. Stop ungodly images before you backslide and become ensnared. "A man may not be led where the sparks are flying. If I have a heart like a bombshell, ready to explode at every moment, I may well pray God that I may be kept from the fire, lest my heart destroy me."<sup>14</sup>

We must imitate Job who made a covenant with his eyes not even to stare at young women. This godly patriarch was scrupulous in avoiding all the occasions of temptation. Job understood that the eyes are often the first instrument of sin. Therefore, he made an agreement with himself to avoid temptation. He planned ahead and made strict rules that even extended to his thought life. He took steps to avoid not just the outward act of adultery, but also the impure imaginations and desires that are the roots of uncleanness.

When Peter described false teachers that plagued the church, he said that they "indulge the flesh in corrupt desires...having eyes full of adultery" (1 Pet. 2:10, 14). In our perverse culture where sexual images permeate the visual media; where many women dress like prostitutes with their tattoos and belly button rings; where sex is used to sell everything from cars, to beer, to shampoo, we must watch by making non-negotiable rules that help us avoid temptation. As Paul says, "Put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill the lusts thereof" (Rom. 13:14). We must put on Christ in our everyday life and do everything we can to deprive sin of an opportunity.

Second, we must be on guard against keeping company with anyone who would lead us into temptation. The Bible repeatedly warns us that evil company (i.e. making friends with and "hanging out" with pagans or even hypocritical "Christians") is a corrupting force on covenant people. Paul says, "Do not be deceived: 'Bad company corrupts good morals'" (1 Cor. 15:33). Keeping company with evil companions has a corrupting influence on our attitudes and behavior. Interestingly, the apostle's injunction comes in the middle of an argument against professing Christians who are denying the resurrection from the dead. Even fellowshiping with people who have heretical doctrine can have dire consequences. Therefore, Paul warned the Ephesian elders to watch out for false teachers. "From among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves. Therefore watch, and remember that for three years I did not cease to warn everyone night and day with tears" (Ac. 20:30-31).

In Second Corinthians Paul argues that separating ourselves from evil involves separating ourselves from the heathen and their influences. "Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness?" (6:4; cf. Lev. 19:19; 22:10). The apostle is not saying that we should enter a monastery or avoid all interaction with the heathen, but that we should not make them yokefellows, companions or close friends. If we want to avoid entering into temptation we must not form a business partnership with the heathen; join clubs or associations with them; join with them in a pragmatic manner to fight against abortion (e.g., Romanists, Unitarians, Mormons); and, we must not attend heretical churches (Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, Arminian, dispensational, etc.). To do so is to deliberately place oneself in harm's way, spiritually. As Solomon says, "Do not be envious of evil men, nor desire to be with them; for their heart devises violence, and their lips talk of trouble-making" (Prov. 24:1-2). "He who goes about as a talebearer reveals secrets; therefore, do not associate with one who flatters with his lips" (Prov. 20:19).

Psalms 1 tells us how companionship with the wicked can lead to three degrees of departure from God. "Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor stands

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

in the path of sinners, nor sits in the seat of the scornful; but his delight is in the law of the Lord, and in His law he meditates day and night” (vs. 1-2). Note that the person is corrupted by accepting the advice of unbelievers. Then, the rebellion progresses as that person now leads a lifestyle in accord with the heathen. Then, finally, they become the most obstinate and scandalous of sinners; they are scoffers. They end up mocking the truth and the way of righteousness. They trample the cross under foot as apostates. How many Christian parents have put their own children into temptation by putting them in a state school or secular university? The rate of apostasy for the children of evangelicals in America is shocking. We must watch against temptation if we want to persevere. “He who walks with wise men will be wise, but the companion of fools will be destroyed” (Prov. 13:20).

Third, we must watch for providential conditions beyond our control and prepare our hearts to meet them. There are a number of things in life that are beyond our control that lead us into temptation; things such as calamity, financial catastrophe, disease, persecution, unexpected riches, a spouse who turns out to be an ungodly malcontent, a wicked Christ-hating boss and so on. When Christ commanded the disciples to watch and pray, the immediate context suggests that they were to watch even though the coming events were outside their sphere of influence. That is why watching is frequently linked with prayer. We pray if it is God’s will, that these times of temptation would be removed. But we also pray that if we must endure such trials, we will be given the grace to endure them.

The fact that Jesus told the disciples to watch under their uncontrollable circumstances means that watching also has the sense of being spiritually prepared to deal with all situations that may arise. Paul uses the term in a similar manner in 1 Corinthians: “Watch, stand fast in the faith, be brave, be strong” (16:13). Here watching is coupled with a steadfast belief in true Christian doctrine. In 1 Thessalonians Paul couples watchfulness with spiritual and ethical sobriety or wakefulness. “We are not of the night nor of darkness. Therefore let us not sleep as others do, but let us watch and be sober” (5:6). Also, the many parables and passages in Scripture that teach watchfulness or preparedness for the second coming of Christ essentially teach us to be ready by being faithful to the Word of God. Those who are not watching are not doing the work of the Master, but rather are sleeping (Mk. 13:34-37; cf. Mt. 24:42 ff.; 25:13; 1 Th. 5:6; Rev. 3:3; 16:5). Given all these passages, the watching involved for events beyond our control is more offensive than defensive. It obviously involves a saturation of our minds with Scripture and also a habitual practice of obedience to what the Bible requires. Our Lord put it best with his illustration of two builders and two different foundations. He says, “Therefore whoever hears these sayings of Mine, and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the rock: and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it did not fall, for it was founded on the rock. But everyone who hears these sayings of Mine, and does not do them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand, and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it fell. And great was its fall” (Mt. 7:24-27). Given all this, there is simply no substitute for reading, studying, memorizing, mediating upon and obeying the holy Scriptures. The main reason that many professing Christians in America wilt and fall under pressure is that they don’t know the Scriptures, Christian doctrine or biblical ethics. Beloved, the storms are coming: Watch and pray!

(3) We must be on guard against the first motions and movement of temptation and sin within us the moment they appear. The longer a believer waits to deal with temptation or lust, the more likely that that believer will fall into sin. “If you fail to deal with it at that stage, it will

overcome you. Nip it in the bud, deal with it at once, never let it get even a moment's foothold. Do not accept it at all. Perhaps you feel inclined to say, 'Ah well, I am not going to do the thing.' Ah, but if you accept it in your mind, and begin to fondle it there, and entertain it in your imagination, you are already defeated."<sup>15</sup> If we play with lusts in our mind, contemplate the pleasures of sin and start debating whether or not to commit the act itself in our spirit, then we have lost the battle. Not only have we begun to sin in our hearts, but we have purposely placed ourselves where the outward act itself is almost inevitable.

Think for a moment about King David. David goes up to his roof to relax and sees a beautiful woman taking a bath (King David had the biggest house in the neighborhood with the best view). Did the king know that it was sinful to watch another man's wife take a bath? Yes, he certainly did! Did David then go immediately back into his house to avoid this passion-inflaming sight? No. The king stayed on the roof, stared, fantasized and then planned a course for adultery and eventual disaster. The moment he saw Bathsheba, he entered temptation and should have fled for his spiritual life. But, tragically he did not. This failure to deal with the first motions of temptation scarred him the rest of his life.

Let us contrast David's behavior with that of Joseph. In Genesis 39 we read about the hot pursuit of Joseph by Potiphar's wife. In verse 9 Joseph empathically tells this wicked woman: "How then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?" Then in verses 11 and 12, we read how she springs her trap and Joseph enters into temptation. Note his response: "Now it happened about this time, when Joseph went into the house to do his work, and none of the men of the house was inside, that she caught him by his garment, saying, 'Lie with me.' But he left his garment in her hand, and fled and ran outside." Unlike David, Joseph was on the alert for the first motion of temptation. He was prepared for battle; he knew what to do immediately. He didn't even have to think about the matter; he was out the door in a split second.

Another instructive contrast between entertaining temptation and immediately quenching it can be seen in the examples of Eve and Christ. When Eve was tempted by the devil, she debated within herself on the reasonableness of Satan's word versus God's Word. She toyed with temptation, took it into her heart and coddled it. The result was sin and the fall of mankind. Jesus, on the other hand, was alert to the danger of temptation. He was prepared for it and abruptly conquered it. Whenever Satan tempted Christ by challenging Scripture, the Savior always immediately responded with an emphatic, "It is written" (Mt. 4:4, 7, 10; Lk. 4:4, 8, 12) and finally, "Get thee hence" (Mt. 4:10).

Why is stopping temptation the moment it appears so important? Because even though at one time or another all men will be affected by strong temptation, the giving in to temptation always begins in the mind. The mind is always the first battlefield in our confrontation with sin. Therefore, we must be aware of this fact and prepare our defenses ahead of time. We must not be caught off guard as if God has not warned us repeatedly of this matter. Remember, Satan and the forbidden fruit did not force Eve to commit sin. She dialogued with her tempter, rationalized her lust, contemplated the benefits of sin, made excuses for it and consented to it in her mind before she ate the fruit.

Further, giving in to temptation and committing sin can have disastrous spiritual consequences that we do not yet comprehend. Some historians say that the careless use of a lamp near a cow led to the destruction of most of Chicago. Entering temptation and giving in to what may be considered a small sin often becomes the spark that starts a great conflagration in the life of that person. David's pornographic sight-seeing led to adultery, murder, the death of a child

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<sup>15</sup> Martin Lloyd-Jones, *Romans: Exposition of Chapter 8:5-17* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1974), 146.

and a family history of rebellion and heartache. An angry word or two spoken in haste has led to murder, wars and the downfall of empires. Plumer writes, “Till we see the end of a thing, we cannot tell whether it is to be great or small in its effects.... Our greatest rivers have their rise in little springs whose streams are often buried under leaves and shrubs. The causes now at work in forming men’s character seem contemptible to many. But a leak though not larger than a rye straw, will sooner or later sink a ship. The smallest opening made by a mole in the bank of a canal will of itself grow to a waste of all its waters. One weak link in a chain cable causes the vessel to drift on the rocks.... A scratch has brought inflammation that ended in death. A glance of the eye has led to crimes that will not be forgotten while eternity endures.”<sup>16</sup> The importance of stopping the first movements of temptation and sin the moment they appear cannot be overemphasized. We must deal with temptation and sin the moment they land on the shore of our hearts before they have time to bring in reinforcements. The longer we wait, the stronger our enemy will become.

(4) We must watch against lukewarmness in our hearts toward our spiritual walk with Christ. The strength of Christians (which is observed in the actions of the principle of grace and holiness in believers) is subject unto various kinds of decay. This sad reality can be seen in Jesus’ admonition to Sardis: “Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die, for I have not found your works perfect before God. Remember therefore how you have received and heard; hold fast and repent. Therefore if you will not watch, I will come upon you as a thief, and you will not know what hour I will come upon you” (Rev. 3:2-3). “Sardis was built on a mountain, and an acropolis was constructed on a spur of this mountain, which was all but impregnable. Yet twice in the city’s history it had been taken unawares and captured by enemies. The parallel with the church’s lack of vigilance and its need to wake up lest it fall under judgment is striking.”<sup>17</sup>

Watchfulness, then, refers not merely to alertness to the dangers of inward lusts and outward circumstances of temptation but also to our spiritual state itself. If we do not strengthen our spiritual state and remember the blessed gospel and the means of grace, we, like Sardis, will be conquered. Watchfulness against entering temptation involves a daily assessment of our own spiritual growth and strength.

What are we to do when we detect that our love, fervor and diligence toward Christ and His cause is not what it once was? We must cultivate all the means of grace, especially prayer. There is a reason that watchfulness and prayer are companions. In times of weakness, temptation and backsliding, we must renew our strength. As Isaiah says, “He gives power to the weak, and to those who have no might He increases strength.... Those who wait on the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount with wings like eagles. They shall run and not be weary. They shall walk and not faint” (40:29, 31). God will take us from the depth of our weaknesses, our grief and difficulties and cause us to soar on high.

In our study of watchfulness, we have learned that spiritual alertness first involves being on guard against entering temptation itself. If we are to fear and avoid sin, we must begin with the door to sin which is temptation. We must do everything in our power to avoid it, prepare for it and anticipate it. This involves a careful, continuous examination of our own hearts, weaknesses, environment and every occasion that may lead us into temptation. We must be on guard against the first motions of temptation as well. We need to stop the enemy on the beaches

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<sup>16</sup> William S. Plumer, *Vital Godliness: A Treatise on Experimental and Practical Piety* (Harrisburg, VA: Sprinkle [1864] 1993), 300-301.

<sup>17</sup> G. R. Beasley-Murray, *The Book of Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, [1978] 1981), 94.

before he can break out and build up his forces. This involves a thorough knowledge of Scripture and anticipating various circumstances of temptation.

Beloved, *watch*, that you do not grieve the Spirit of God. *Watch*, so that you will persevere in holiness. *Watch*, so that you would not bring reproach upon the name of Christ. *Watch*, so that the church of God would not be put to an open shame. *Watch*, so that you will adorn the Savior's gospel and win jewels for the resurrected King's crown.

## Keep on Praying

In our text, watching is only half the equation; the other half is our duty to continually pray. These two must always be together for we can only be protected and preserved by the power of God. There are a number of things to note regarding our prayers for deliverance from temptation.

(1) The prayer for deliverance is a prayer of humility. It is an acknowledgment that there are trials, sufferings and temptations that are beyond our present ability to handle. When we pray for deliverance from temptations, we are acknowledging that we are weak, feeble and untrustworthy while God is sovereign, powerful and faithful. We are to pray, "Save me, O Lord, from such trial and sufferings as may lead me into sin."<sup>18</sup>

We know from Scripture that Satan and various circumstances in life can go no further in tempting us than God allows. He is sovereign. Thomas Watson writes, "A whole legion of devils could not touch one swine till Christ gave them leave. Satan would have sifted Peter till he sifted out all grace, but Christ would not suffer him. 'I have prayed for thee,' &c. Christ binds the devil in a chain, Rev. xxi. If Satan's power were according to his malice, not one soul should be saved; but he is a chained enemy."<sup>19</sup>

Therefore, in our prayer for deliverance from temptation we must ask God to remove providential conditions that would lead us into temptation. We see this type of petition in the words of Agur, the son of Jakeh. "Two things I request of you (Deprive me not before I die): Remove falsehood and lies far from me; give me neither poverty nor riches—feed me with the food allotted to me; lest I be full and deny You, and say, 'Who is the LORD?' Or lest I be poor and steal, and profane the name of my God" (Prov. 30:7-9).

If we are placed in a situation of poverty or even of financial crisis, we may be tempted to compromise biblical ethics by taking an unethical job that uses deception and fraud in its business practices. Many sales jobs are founded upon distortion, exaggeration and blatant deception. We may be tempted to cut corners and give people less than they expect in order to make a living. This is the practice of a number of contractors. And, we may even be tempted to break the Sabbath. In third world countries where real poverty exists, deprivation often leads to theft, the dealing of drugs and prostitution. Thus we pray, "Lord lead us not into the temptation of poverty."

Interestingly, Agur also prays against the temptation associated with being rich. I doubt that there are many Christians in this country that pray such a prayer. Yet, there are many temptations that can come with being rich. We all know the debauchery and destruction that very often clings to the rich and famous in Hollywood. Many of us have heard the sad stories of people whose ethical and family lives were turned upside down by winning the lottery. There is a reason that Jesus said, "Assuredly I say to you that it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom

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<sup>18</sup> Charles H. Spurgeon, "Lead Us Not into Temptation," 14:138-139.

<sup>19</sup> Thomas Watson, *The Lord's Prayer* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, [1692] 1960), 288.

of heaven. And again I say to you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God” (Mt. 19:23-24; cf. Mk. 13:22). Both Scripture and history teach us that prosperity, honor, material things and luxuries often lead to carelessness regarding spiritual things, worldliness, forgetfulness of God, a reliance on our own strength and self-conceit. This common reality, of course, is not true of everyone (e.g., Abraham, Job, Moses, etc); however, it is a recurring theme of Scripture. Our Lord spoke of those who hear the Word, but “the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word” and they become unfruitful (Mt. 13:22). “Oh Lord, deliver us from the temptations associated with being rich.”

Biblical prayer is based on a humble acknowledgment that we are saved and sanctified by Christ alone and that we are totally dependent on the efficacy of Jesus’ redemptive work for progress in holiness. Prayer is crucial because keeping and preserving ourselves from sin is not within our own power. We are dependent on our union with the Savior, the intercession of Christ and the assistance of the Holy Spirit. Peter says that Christians “are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time” (1 Pet. 1:5). We must pray that the Lord will deliver us from every evil work and preserve us for His heavenly kingdom (2 Tim. 4:18). Like David before us we must cry, “Create in me a clean heart, O God” (Ps. 51:11) and look to Him, “the author and finisher of our faith” (Heb. 12:2). “To call upon God is the chief exercise of faith and hope; and it is in this way that we obtain from God every blessing.”<sup>20</sup> Calvin writes,

Words fail to explain how necessary prayer is, and in how many ways the exercise of prayer is profitable. Surely, with good reason the Heavenly Father affirms that the only stronghold of safety is in calling upon his name [cf. Joel 2:32]. By so doing we invoke the presence both of his providence, through which he watches over and guards our affairs, and of his power, through which he sustains us, weak as we are and well-nigh overcome, and of his goodness, through which he receives us, miserably burdened with sins, unto grace; and in short, it is by prayer that we call him to reveal himself as wholly present to us. Hence comes an extraordinary peace and repose to our consciences. For having disclosed to the Lord the necessity that was pressing upon us, we even rest fully in the thought that none of our ill is hid from Him who, we are convinced, has both the will and the power to take the best care of us.<sup>21</sup>

(2) Prayers for divine intervention regarding temptation must be accompanied by faith or a hearty trust in God and His Word. Jesus said, “Therefore I say to you, whatever things you ask when you pray, believe that you receive them, and you will have them” (Mk. 11:24). “And whatever things you ask in prayer believing, you will receive” (Mt. 21:22). James concurs, “If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him. But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind. For let not that man suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord...” (Ja. 1:5-7). The author of Hebrews says, “But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to Him must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him” (11:6). Calvin writes, “If we would pray fruitfully, we ought therefore to grasp with both hands this assurance of obtaining what we ask, which the Lord enjoins with his own voice, and all the saints teach by their example. For only that prayer is acceptable to God which is born, if I may so express it, out of such presumption of faith, and is

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<sup>20</sup> John Calvin, *Commentary on the Epistles of Paul to the Galatians and Ephesians* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1981), 340.

<sup>21</sup> John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960), [III:XX:2] 2:851.

grounded in unshaken assurance of hope.”<sup>22</sup> Therefore with the psalmist we should say, “When I cry out to You, then my enemies will turn back; this I know, because God is for me.... In God I will put my trust; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me” (Ps. 56:9, 11)?

God calls us to Himself with the gospel, adopts us into His own family and then tells us to bring all of our cares and concerns to His loving attention. Thus Paul bids us to: “Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus” (Phil. 4:6-7). Further, on the basis of our Savior’s high priestly work God enjoins us to: “come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need” (Heb. 4:16). Since the command to pray for deliverance from temptation comes from the lips of our loving Savior, we must use the means of grace that He has given; we must believe His promises and we must expect results. We must follow Paul’s injunction to “take up the shield of faith with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one” (Eph. 6:16).

When we speak of faith, we do not mean a faith in faith itself. We mean a belief in and hearty trust in God and His infallible Word. When we pray for relief from temptation we must trust in God’s loving, trustworthy, righteous character. God is faithful. Jehovah is a covenant-keeping God—He is not like us. God himself forced wicked Balaam to say, “God is not a man, that He should lie, nor a son of man, that He should repent” (Num. 23:28). Jesus promised us, “I will never leave you or forsake you” (Heb. 13:5; cf. Josh. 1:5). “My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand” (Jn. 10:27-28). God is faithful. God is sovereign. Do you believe His promises? Do you treat God as unfaithful by acting as though these promises are not true? God forbid. God has repeatedly and emphatically stated His faithfulness to us so we would trust and lay all our cares before Him. Note Paul’s trust in the faithfulness of God in his prayer for the Thessalonians. “Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely; and may your whole spirit, soul and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. He who calls you is faithful, who also will do it” (1 Th. 5:23-24). God hates sin because He is righteous and He has promised to deliver us from evil and present us before His throne as glorified, perfect Christians.

We must also look to God’s Word which has specific promises regarding deliverance from temptation. For example, Paul says, “No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it” (1 Cor. 10:13). What a blessed promise! God does not merely provide “a” way of escape in some random fashion, but by divine arrangement “the” way of escape. God’s faithfulness to His people is perfect even though our faithfulness to Him is very imperfect. If we are to pray in faith (Rom. 10:14) and faith respects God’s promises (Heb. 4:1; Rom. 4), then we must lay hold of these precious promises and use them in our prayers against temptation.

The use of God’s promises relating to temptation is further strengthened by another promise. John writes, “Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we have asked of Him” (1 Jn. 5:14-15). If we are not acquainted with God’s promises because we do not read and commit Scripture to memory and if we neglect to stand on these promises when we pray, then we are guilty of going into battle without the

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid, 2:865.

armor that God has so graciously given us. Pink notes that God “requires our concurrence and cooperation—not to assist Him, but for the discharge of our responsibility, and especially for the calling into exercise of those spiritual graces which He has imparted to His children. We must ask if we would receive. And we must ask expectantly, for according to our faith will it be unto us.... In answer to importunate [urgent] prayer God gives of His best to us. David was in sore straits, but he knew where to turn for relief: ‘In the day when I cried thou answerest me, and strengthenest me with strength in my soul’ (Ps. 138:3).”<sup>23</sup>

A prayer for the increase of our faith also must include a petition for increased faith in the efficacy of the Savior’s redemptive work regarding our sanctification. Believers are frequently taught about the necessity of faith for justification, but rarely about the relationship of faith to sanctification. When Paul discusses our need for godliness, he always roots our holiness in Jesus’ redemptive work in history. The apostle teaches that, when our Lord died on the cross, we (by virtue of our union with Him) also died to the reigning, enslaving, defiling, power of sin (read Romans 6:1-7:6). Further, when Christ rose from the dead we arose to a new life of holiness (cf. Jn. 17:17; 1 Cor. 1:30-31; 6:11; Eph. 2:1-7; 5:25-27; Tit. 2:13-14; Heb. 13:12; etc). On this basis Paul says, “Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom. 6:11; cf. 6:12-14, 18, 22; 7:4, 6).

The apostle says that, as partakers with the Savior, we must maintain a full conviction of who we really are in Him. We must have a living, vibrant faith in this historic, salvific reality and we must constantly live in terms of it. We must keep our eyes focused on Christ in order to present our bodies as living sacrifices unto God. Jesus and His blessed work are the foundation on which our victory over sin rests. A continuous walking in sin is rendered impossible by the bloody cross and the empty tomb. “[T]hat believers are in principle dead to sin and alive to Christ, must become the abiding conviction of their hearts and minds, the take-off point for all their thinking, planning, rejoicing, speaking, doing. They must constantly bear in mind that they are no longer what they used to be. Their lives from day to day must show that they have not forgotten this.”<sup>24</sup> The volume 1 of our lives is closed; we are now living in volume 2. If we coddle temptations and give in to sin, then we are living inconsistent with reality. We are living as though our death and resurrection had never taken place. Given all this, we must pray and study God’s word to cultivate our faith in Christ. “So the major secret of holy living is in the mind.... We are to recall, to ponder, to grasp, to register these truths until they are so integral to our mindset that a return to the old life is unthinkable.”<sup>25</sup> In our fight against temptation we repeatedly see that biblical prayer can never be severed from knowledge of Scripture or doctrine.

But what do we do if we find ourselves in a situation of temptation? We must pray and lay hold of the promise that “the Lord knows how to deliver the godly out of temptations” (2 Pet. 2:9). Temptation should quicken a spirit of prayer in us. “When Paul had a messenger of Satan to buffet him, he was more earnest in prayer. ‘For this I besought the Lord thrice.’ 2 Cor. xii 8. The thorn in his flesh was a spur in his side to quicken him in prayer. The deer when shot with the dart runs faster to the water so a soul that is shot with the fiery darts of temptation runs the faster to the throne of grace; and is earnest with God, either to take off the tempter, or to stand by him when he is tempted.”<sup>26</sup> If we are serious about holiness, the temptations and trials that buffet us should bring us closer to Christ and should be providential means of increasing our

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<sup>23</sup> Arthur W. Pink, *Gleanings from Paul: Studies in the Prayers of the Apostles* (Chicago: Moody, 1967), 165.

<sup>24</sup> William Hendriksen, *Exposition of Paul’s Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980, 81), 201.

<sup>25</sup> John Stott, *Romans: God’s Good News for the World* (Downer’s Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1994), 180.

<sup>26</sup> Thomas Watson, *The Lord’s Prayer*, 289.

sanctification. “Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time, casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you” (1 Pet. 5:6-7).

(3) Watchful prayer involves praying for assistance by the Holy Spirit to search our own hearts to find out what is wrong in them. Knowing that our hearts are corrupt and deceitful, we pray for the inward sanctification of our faculties. We need daily supplies of grace to show us the power and deceit of sin within us. If we are guilty of pride and self-deception, we need the special assistance of the Holy Spirit to cause us to see our self-imposed blindness and to set us free from it. Since the battle over temptation always begins in the heart of man, our first defense must be internal purification and illumination. “Hereon David was not satisfied with the confession of his original and all known actual sins, Ps. li. 1-5; nor yet with an acknowledgment that ‘none knoweth his own wanderings,’ whence he desireth cleansing from ‘unknown sins,’ Ps. xix. 12; but, moreover, he begs of God to undertake the inward search of his heart, to find out what was amiss or [not] right in him, Ps. cxxxix. 23, 24, as knowing that God principally required ‘truth in the inward parts,’ Ps. li. 6. Such is the carrying on of the work of sanctification in the whole spirit and soul, 1 Th. v. 23.”<sup>27</sup>

(4) Our petitions for assistance in searching our hearts must also be accompanied by prayer for a right spiritual perception and a sound knowledge of the truth. Thus, Paul prayed that our love would be informed and controlled by the truth: “And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in knowledge and in all discernment, that you may approve the things that are excellent, that you may be sincere and without offense till the day of Christ” (Phil. 1:9-10). How many people have been overtaken by temptation and sin because they did not understand that biblical love cannot be separated from biblical law and moral discretion? “Love must be *instructed* if it is to be placed on legitimate objects and restrained from non-permissible ones, if it is to be rightly exercised on all occasions. And the needed instruction can [only] be obtained from God’s word.”<sup>28</sup> This prayer for knowledge and discernment presupposes a careful, diligent study of God’s Word and the daily application of that knowledge and spiritual insight to our lives. If we are to avoid entering temptation and committing sin, we must have godly discrimination. We must be able to discriminate between that which is good and true, bad and false. We must learn what God wants us to loathe and what God wants us to love and embrace.

We must pray that God would help us overcome the darkness and ignorance in our understanding regarding what the Bible teaches and the circumstances of life. Only a God-given wisdom can help us cope with trials and tribulations. We must beg God on our knees to reveal to us the secret workings of the lusts in our minds, to place them under the light of Scripture and defeat them. We must ask God to remove our stubbornness, obstinacy and any aversions in our will to good and spiritual things. We must pray that God would give us a holy hatred of sin so that we would fear the gate of temptation and the sin it leads to. We are to seek God’s grace for the removal of these weights on our souls and the daily renovation of our spirits. “It is the work of the Spirit of God alone to give us a due conviction of, a spiritual insight into, and a sense of the concernment of, these things.”<sup>29</sup>

(5) Our prayers against temptation must involve petitions for an increase in our fear of God for the fear of God is the great preservative against sin. Solomon says, “In the fear of the LORD there is strong confidence, and His children will have a place of refuge. The fear of the LORD is a fountain of life, to turn one away from the snares of death” (Prov. 14:26-27). “And by

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<sup>27</sup> John Owen, “The Nature of Prayer,” in *Works*, 4:274.

<sup>28</sup> Arthur W. Pink, *Gleanings from Paul*, 203.

<sup>29</sup> John Owen, “The Spirit’s Work As to the Matter of Prayer,” 4:278.

the fear of the LORD one departs from evil” (Prov. 16:66). When God increases fear or reverence, awe and love toward Him in our hearts, this fear stands as a granite wall against the fiery darts of temptation. The fear of Jehovah “is a bridle to sin and a spur to holiness. Fear puts a holy awe upon the heart and binds it to its good behavior. By the fear of the Lord men depart from evil. When the Empress Eudoxia threatened to banish Chrysostom, ‘Tell her,’ said he, ‘I fear nothing but sin.’ Fear...stands as a porter at the door of the soul and keeps sin from entering.”<sup>30</sup> Why do men rush headlong into lusts, temptations and sins? When Paul gives his final verdict regarding fallen man in Romans 3 he tells us, “They have all turned aside.... Whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness. Their feet are swift to shed blood.... There is no fear of God before their eyes” (vs. 12, 14, 15, 18).

We must not forget that an aspect of the fear of God is our love toward Him. Jesus said, “If you love Me, keep My commandments” (Jn. 14:15; cf. 1 Jn. 5:3). We pray for God to increase our love of Jesus for there is no greater motivation to live a holy life than our adoration and love toward God. When we are buffeted by trials and temptations, our love toward Christ will turn us from temptation. It will conquer sin as we think and live our love by faithfulness, by concrete acts of loyalty. We must love the Savior more than we love sin. Indeed, we must love Him more than our own lives. This godly fear and love of Jesus enables us to replace thoughts of temptation and betrayal with thoughts of the risen Bridegroom. When temptations come, do we want to grieve the Spirit of God? Do we want to betray our precious Lord who sweat drops of blood, was tortured, crucified, separated from the Father and endured the agony of hell for us? This love can turn our hearts from an attitude of carelessness and lukewarmness to fervent dedication where we think: “How dare I even contemplate this sin against my Savior? How dare I think about opening His wounds afresh and bringing shame to His holy name?” Paul says that biblical love “does not seek its own...does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth...endures all things...[and] never fails” (1 Cor. 13:5, 6, 7, 8). The more we love Christ, the more we will hate sin and flee from it. Oh, Lord, increase our love for your dear Son!

(6) When we petition God for deliverance from temptations we must also pray for God to forgive our sins. Whenever Jesus gave us the model prayer in the gospels, He always immediately preceded the petition regarding temptation with “forgive us our sins” (Lk. 11:4) or “forgive us our debts” (Mt. 6:12). According to Scripture what does the confession of our sins to God through Christ presuppose? It proposes a loathing of our sins, a forsaking of our sins and a spirit within us that wants nothing to do with sin whatsoever. “He who covers his sins will not prosper, but whoever confesses and forsakes them will have mercy” (Prov. 28:13).

If we are backslidden and serving our own lusts, then the petition to keep us out of temptation is hypocritical. If you are wedded to secret sins and have no intention of an immediate and sincere repentance, then how can you pray “deliver me from temptation” when you purposely enter it every day? “A man might pray to be kept out of the water, but a fish cannot, for it lives in it.”<sup>31</sup> Similarly, if you consciously embrace iniquity, or know what is the right thing to do, yet refuse to do it, then how can you honestly pray, “Lord keep me from entering temptation?” You need to confess your sin, repent of it and ask the Lord to give you the enabling grace to conquer it completely. You need to watch and pray—these two go together. You must watch against sin whether ethical or doctrinal and you must accompany that watching with diligent petitions for assistance. The backslidden believer has abandoned his watchtower.

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<sup>30</sup> Thomas Watson, *The Lord's Prayer*, 319.

<sup>31</sup> Charles H. Spurgeon, “Lead Us Not into Temptation,” 14:396.

He is leading the life of an antinomian. He needs to pray for repentance and chastising miseries. Then, after he repents, he can ascend the watchtower and pray not to enter into temptation.

If we are serious about our personal sanctification, communion with God, the reputation of the church of Christ, the progression of the Savior's kingdom and the spiritual state of our families, we must continually pray for God not to lead us into temptation that we cannot bear. We must petition our Father to deliver us from the temptations that we must face. We must be more like James, the brother of our Lord and the author of the epistle that bear his name, who according to the church fathers was nicknamed "Camel-knees." "James had been so slow of heart to believe that his brother, Jesus, could possibly be the Christ, that, after he was brought to believe, he was never off his knees. And when they came to coffin him, it was like confining the knees of a camel rather than the knees of a man, so hard, so worn, so stiff were they with prayer, and so unlike any other dead man's knees they had ever confined."<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Alexander White, *Lord, Teach Us to Pray* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1976), 68.