

GOD'S BUGLE-CALL

"Watch ye, stand fast in the faith, quit you like men, be strong." I Corinthians 16:13.

Paul was approaching the end of his epistle to the Corinthians when he wrote this text. His thoughts came thick and fast as he wrote. He compacted them into as few words as possible; and thus this verse contains truths which might be expanded into a volume of appropriate exhortations.

These are stirring words. After the lapse of so many centuries they still have power to quicken the heart's throb; they appeal powerfully to all that is noblest and truest in the soul of any genuine person. They belong to the twentieth century as truly as to the first century. They contain the counsel of a brave and experienced warrior, who was writing to a little company of comparatively untried Christian recruits in the city of Corinth. Their church was besieged by continual assaults of their Jewish foes. It was torn with internal divisions. It was honeycombed with deadly heresies. It was defiled by sensuality. Nearly all the members of the church were of obscure origin and standing, and many of them were slaves. It was to this little company of Christian recruits that Paul sent this challenging letter in which is found the rousing bugle-call of our text.

I. Be Alert.

"Watch ye." This is a military metaphor, derived from the duty of those who were stationed to guard a camp or to observe the motions of an enemy. Already there were many evils in the Corinthian church — dissensions, heresies, incontinencies, intemperance, etc. There was great danger that their faith should be corrupted, so Paul had to speak the arousing words. Likewise, a Christian is always in danger; therefore he should always be on the watch.

1. What Must we watch over?

- (1) Our thoughts.
- (2) Our affections.
- (3) Our words.
- (4) Our actions.

2. What must we watch for?

- (1) Opportunities of doing good.
- (2) Death.
- (3) The coming of Christ.

A mature Christian is one whose senses are exercised to discern good and evil. To him, all things are not alike. He is able to distinguish between light and darkness, between truth and error. Religiously we are surrounded by temptations to do evil, by allurements to go wrong, while within there are tendencies to slip and fall. Hence our Lord said, "Watch and pray, lest ye enter into temptation." We must be constantly on the watch against foes within and foes without.

The word watch is a common word for Christians — used twenty-three times in the New Testament. The picture in this word is that of a sleeping man rousing himself. "Wake up and watch," is a needed word for Christians in a world of war against spiritual welfare. "Wake up and watch" against hidden motives and open sins; also, against Satan's temptations and for Christ's coming.

II. Be Steadfast.

"Stand fast in the faith." It is plain that even in that early day there was a system of truth or a body of doctrine to which they were to adhere. Christians must continue to believe in Christ and in Christian truth. They must have a devotion to Him sufficient to enable them to stand for Him. They must have a conviction of truth and then stand for it.

"Stand fast in the faith" is a call to a lonely stand. It is not a call to shrink from, but it is a call that we must respond to with humility and courage.

What does this standing fast involve?

1. Stand by your Captain.

Be true to Christ who has saved you. We cannot be true or loyal or steadfast unless we are right in our hearts toward Him. We must know Him better. We must love Him more. We must follow Him closer.

2. Stand at your post.

Where God has placed you, stand fast. There are times when God calls us to new positions and to other spheres of labor for Him. But to everyone of us God says stand fast where you are. The tendency is to lose heart after doing the same monotonous work without any seeming advance. Some may be saying, "How much better work I might do somewhere else!" Beware of that spirit. When God thinks you can do better work somewhere else, He will call you there, but you must wait for His call. In the meantime, He says, "Stand fast"; persevere; carry on.

3. Stand by the Word of God.

God has put His Word into your hands. Stand fast by the old truth which that Word reveals. "Stand fast in the faith." Do not let anyone move you from it or laugh you out of it. Stand fast for Christ in Whom you believe and for Christian truth in which you believe.

III. Be Manly.

"Quit you like men." This is a striking and stirring exhortation. In the Greek it is but one word; however it is impossible for us to translate it in one word. This word occurs nowhere else in the New Testament. Paul means, "show yourselves men: act the manly part; be brave; be true; be courageous. Do not be like children, tossed to and fro with every wind of doctrine."

This age calls for men noted for bigness -- men who love great undertakings; men who go forth under the drumbeat of great convictions; men who do not seek neutrality in issues of right and wrong; men who love God more than money and pleasures. This muddled world gasps for breath. Evils that would lead all graces to the grave abound. Many sins exist that have sent nations to their doom. Our land muddled by riotous living, by scramble for gain, by campaigns for increased consumption of liquor, has multiplied thousands of known criminals and the largest prison population in our history. More lives were lost in the last decade by murder, suicide, homicide and wrecks than in all the wars we ever fought. We have multiplied marital messes, an annual crime bill of fifteen billion dollars and a liquor bill of nine billion dollars a year. Such a world lives in the day of judgment but likewise in a day of grace.

If we discharge our obligations like men, we will be magnificent -- like Enoch, who "walked with God;" like Abraham, the friend of God, who had prayer power; like Moses,

who "chose to suffer affliction with God's people"; like Caleb, who "followed the Lord fully"; like Job, who, amid calamities, had faith in God; like Elijah, who faltered not when opposed by superior numbers; like Daniel, who would not defile himself with booze; like John the Baptist, who preferred duties he owed God to dangers that came from man; like Barnabas, who was "A good man, full of the Holy Ghost and faith."

We need people who sell Christianity by sample and not by symbol. One cannot sell faith if he is a doubter, or sobriety if he drinks liquor, or truth if he is a liar. We must not seek to advertise ourselves but so to live as to publicize God.

Our age needs people who are magnificent in money matters. Money is that by which you live in service beyond personal action. Money testifies in Orphanages and Seminaries as to Christianity's meaning. Money tells whether you are merciful or miserly, covetous or Christ-like -- whether you prefer transient values to permanent good. Money may deny your declarations of loyalty to Christ -- give the lie to your profession by saying that you love God less than money. Money is always a good servant but a bad master -- like wind, water, and fire. Selfishly hoarded or unchristianly used, money cankers the soul, neutralizes faith in God and destroys the vitals of Christian life.

Our Lord would have us to quit ourselves like men through membership in the church, which offers solutions to life's problems, strength to the weak and life to the dying. The church has been called to win people to a saving knowledge in Jesus -- not to solve political problems, foster civic affairs, chaperone worldly saints, or to institute mere reforms which lack regenerative force. We need men who are doers of the Word and not hearers only; men who "adorn the doctrines of God our Saviour in all things"; who, "denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world."

Bringing people into right relationship with God is the greatest work that man can do -- greater than writing a best seller, making a fortune, winning a high political office or leading an army to victory. Winning men to faith in Jesus is the greatest work that ever moved God's heart in compassion, or laid claim on Christ's ability -- the only work big enough to cause Jesus to come down from the heights of deity to the depths of humanity, to call sinners to repentance and to give His life a ransom for many. Why sing "Throw out the life-line" and not throw it? Why sing "I love to tell the story" and not tell it?

It is basely wicked to reject Christ. But it is great for a sinner to come to Christ and be saved, and to be mastered by the Master Who Himself mastered stormy seas so that they became whispers, mastered demons so that they gave up their habitation in men, mastered Satan until he fled like a booted cur, mastered death so that the dread enemy yielded his prey, and mastered the grave so that it became a gate that opens from a desert into a garden. If you will repent of your sins and turn your heart to God in humble trust in the Lord Jesus Christ, God will forgive you.

For ten years a man walked so low through sin that he was utterly forsaken, even by his own wife. One night he wandered into a mission and heard about the Saviour. He went back every night for a week to listen. Chords that were broken began to vibrate once more. After the service one night, he groped his way through the darkness to a board fence near the house where his wife lived. There behind the fence he threw himself down, hoping that he might peep through the cracks and see through the window yonder his little girl whom he was no longer permitted to visit. At sunrise, weary, hungry, lonely and heartsick, he crept to the feet of Jesus and trusted Him as his Saviour. A great joy filled his heart. He got back a good business position and also his former home. Everywhere he went, he told of what a dear Saviour he had found.

Are you away from God, homesick and sinsick, with your soul in darkness? Then creep up to Christ's pierced feet and trust Him. He will forgive you, and save you, and love you, and bless you, and use you. Then, mastered by Him, make His will your law, His command your joy, and His marching orders the music of your life, until the pierced hands that open to you the gates of grace shall open to you the gates of glory.