

As we begin another new year, the words of the 17th century preacher John Bunyan that often haunted him. He imagined the devil lurking nearby, not as a raging dragon but as a patient and calculating snake, as one who waits until an opportune time, cf. Luke 4:13, “**When the devil had finished every temptation, he left Him until an opportune time.**” The Authorized Version translates that as “for a season” which means I’ll wait until the right time arrives. In the book “Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners”, “**What care I the tempter says, though I be seven years in chilling your heart and as continual rocking will lull a crying child to sleep, but I will have my end accomplished.**”

Most of us know we have an enemy that wants to destroy us, tempt us, and lead us into some devastating sin that corrupts the home, church, and our testimony. The devil uses many weapons against our soul, but one that is often overlooked and never considered is – time. Consider the “war” we endure over our lifetime as Christians. The battles may seem lighter or not active at times, but the devil isn’t finished, he’s lurking, waiting and patiently looking for a moment to pounce. James 4:7, “**Submit therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you.**” That’s a command and we understand this. And in our resting he will flee. But in this long war we endure, this command isn’t just for a moment or second or minute, it’s for a lifetime. And the danger in a long period of battle is we become comfortable, callused and unaware of danger.

In our text we are warned of a fleeing awareness of danger. First, we must pay close attention to what we have heard. Don’t think the words of Scripture are just nominal reading. What we hear is in teaching, preaching, reading and praying. And there’s a huge reason for this. So that, we do not drift away from it. From what? From what we have heard. The great danger in drifting is it’s often slow and unnoticeable. Proverbs 4:23 gives us the great warning, “**Watch over your heart with all diligence, for from it flow the springs of life.**” This watching isn’t a few days a week or a few hours a day. It’s everyday. Every moment. Every second. Thus we must be careful of drifting. A few questions arise for us.¹

POINT 1 - WHAT’S THE CONDITION OF YOUR HEART: DO YOU DESIRE GOD?

From it flow the spring of life, so what your heart desires is what you love. If this fountain is polluted, all is polluted. If the heart is lost, all is lost. And at the center of a healthy heart its strong beat and lifeblood is deep desire for God, Deuteronomy 6:5, “**You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.**” What does your heart look like now? What does it desire? Does it desire God and His holiness, purity, and obedience? Or have other things implanted there? It will be evident by how we live. Can you say as the Psalmist does in Psalm 73:25, “**Whom have I in heaven but You? And besides You, I desire nothing on earth.**” Is this desire for God second or third or fourth in your life?

Do you hunger and thirst for Him? Do you faint and year for Him? Psalm 42:2, “**My soul thirsts for God, for the living God; when shall I come and appear before God?**” Psalm 63:1, “**O God, You are my God; I shall seek You earnestly; my soul thirsts for You, my flesh yearns for You.**” Of course, our delight in God rises and falls throughout this fallen life. Not even the most mature saint lives with a continual sense of God’s nearness. But as Don Whitney writes, “**It’s one thing to long for a sense of God’s presence while not experiencing it, and another to live routinely with no awareness of his absence.**” Are you drifting?

POINT 2 - WHAT ARE THE HABITS IN YOUR LIFE?

It is true with a physical health of one's heart, your habits, what you eat and put into your body determine the health of your heart. And the health of our heart can be contributed to what our intake is spiritually, and a cold and numb heart can be at the fault of a closed Bible. Public habits such as corporate worship are crucial for a healthy spiritual heart, but private habits are ones to pay much closer attention to. Do you spend more time of trivial things than in the Scriptures? Do you pray and seek His guidance in every thing in your life? It's these private habits that erect a fortified wall to keep the lurking enemy out.

So consider a few things in the past month or two. How much time have you mediated on the word of God, prayed and sought Him. How much has taken priority in your life that's temporal? Are you like Robert Murray M'Cheyne who lived in the 19th century that said, "Rose early to seek God, and found him whom my soul loveth, who would not rise early to meet such company?"

POINT 3 - DO YOU LIVE HEAVENLY MINDED?

This body that we inhabit and care for and exercise and color hair or make up is not eternal and no matter our efforts is falling apart, creaking and wearing out. Near the heart of our faith lies the hope that one day soon, we will live with God in a world without end. We will shed this mortal body for one immortal, these tears for songs of joy, this thorn-cursed land for a better country, Hebrews 11:16, "But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God; for He has prepared a city for them." That's our longing joy and how we endure through trials and griefs and trouble here. 1 Corinthians 13:12, "For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face; now I know in part, but then I will know fully just as I also have been fully known."

When someone asks why we're joyful can we response, heaven. Does the weight of the coming glory put our griefs, pain, suffering, trials and anxieties into perspective? Or can we say as 2 Corinthians 4:16-5:2 says, "Therefore we do not lose heart, but though our outer man is decaying, yet our inner man is being renewed day by day. For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison, while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal. For we know that if the earthly tent which is our house is torn down, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For indeed in this house we groan, longing to be clothed with our dwelling from heaven." The sinful thoughts, struggles, doubts, and battles are not just for a day but lifelong, and our groaning is to be clothed in His righteousness. Do you live like this? If not, is it because your heart is being tugged in a temporal direction?

The heavenly minded are known by their stubborn joy in sorrow, their modest expectations for this world, their stability in societal chaos, and their willingness to risk and sacrifice like heaven will make up for every lost comfort here.

POINT 4 - WHAT DOMINATES YOU?

We have both human enemies and demonic ones too. But our most dangerous enemy isn't these, it's our flesh. 1 Peter 2:11, "Beloved, I urge you as aliens and strangers to abstain from fleshly lusts which wage war against the soul." Here the usage of the word flesh is described as a war against the life of

the spirit and the life of the flesh, which never seeks to glorify God. As Christians we don't walk according to the flesh, Romans 8:4, "So that the requirement of the Law might be fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit."

We know it's war, but often times the things that dominate us aren't black and white, but they are dangerously grey. Christian liberties such as scrolling through social media, watching reels, following influencers, noticing another person's beauty, posting thoughts online etc, all can be under the realm of liberty and be innocent and lawful, but they can become dangerously domineering. 1 Corinthians 6:12, "All things are lawful for me, but not all things are profitable. All things are lawful for me, but I will not be mastered (domineered under the power of) by anything."

We must be careful about allowing the grey areas of liberty to be the dominating areas of our life. And grey always leads to lukewarm. If we wonder whether any activity, pleasure, or line of thought holds undue sway over us, we might ask ourselves, Could I give this up for the next year? If the answer is no, or if the answer is yes in our head but no in our heart, then we are no longer dealing with something lawful. We are dealing with a dominator, an enemy dressed in innocence. And the slow drift begins.

POINT 5 - ARE YOU AN INFLUENCER - BUT NOT A SOCIAL MEDIA ONE

We are our brother's keeper, members of one body and seeing one drift is not legalistic for us to ask why or how or share with them the truth, it's a responsibility. As you remember the last year at church, can you think of specific Christians who are more holy, more Christlike, because of your presence in their life? Have you spoken any words bracing enough to bring back a wandering soul? What do people see about Christ when they observe your life? Is He a priority? Is He everything to you? Does He come first?

POINT 6 - IS CHRIST KNOWN BECAUSE OF YOU?

Making disciples and making Christ known may look different in your married life with kids than it did when you were single. But no life stage exempts us from the grand adventure of the Great Commission. Nor can a genuinely Christian heart rest satisfied on the sidelines of God's kingdom advance. You don't have to be in leadership, or a missionary or a teacher, but you should be making Him known, and making Him known isn't teaching a bible study, it's living every single moment in your life so that no matter the circumstances, Christ is glorified. And even in the midst of a busy life — with little kids or elderly parents or heavy work demands — do you nevertheless yearn to somehow make Jesus known?

Maybe you have drifted, allowed something to gain the forefront in your heart, your desire is not for God anymore, a little cold, a little lukewarm. You didn't really notice it because a slow drift isn't clear until you find yourself far from shore. We can dare to deal honestly with our sins because Jesus has already dealt mercifully with us. And so He always will.

The purpose of these questions or points in this sermon is not to condemn, but rather to expose, as in my own life, where I am drifting. John Piper refers to these moments of drifting as cooling one degree at a time, and it's not noticeable until you're cold. Where, then, have you grown cold? In heart, in habits, in hope? Toward your enemies, your friends, your neighbors? Take this coldness to Jesus. Come and ask Him to refine you to be more like Him in everyday things, and be aware of the drift from the

fire of glory. I am often reminded of the Laodicean church in Revelation 2. They seem to be adrift. Neither hot nor cold, but the dangerous lukewarm. Yet, mercy existed for them and for us. His advice to them, Revelation 3:19, "Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline; therefore be zealous and repent." Or the church at Ephesus that had drifted from the first love, Revelation 2:5, "Therefore remember from where you have fallen, and repent and do the deeds you did at first."

What do you desire? What habits in your life draw you more like Christ or drift away? Is your mind heavenly focused? Or temporally focused? What controls your life today? God? Prayer? Do people see God as the substance and hope and rock and first importance in your life or do they see a fair-weather Christian?

Be careful little eyes what you see
It's the second glance that ties your hands
As darkness pulls the strings
Be careful little feet where you go
For it's the little feet behind you
That are sure to follow

Be careful little ears what you hear
When flattery leads to compromise
The end is always near
Be careful little lips what you say
For empty words and promises
Lead broken hearts astray

The journey from your mind to your hands
Is shorter than you're thinking
Be careful if you think you stand
You just might be sinking

It's a slow fade
When you give yourself away
It's a slow fade when black and white have turned to grey
And thoughts invade, choices made
A price will be paid
People never crumble in a day

¹ These questions were adapted and revised from Desiring God Ministries Managing Editor, Scott Hubbard 1.1.25