Watch . . . Stand Fast . . . Be Strong

By Horatius Bonar

"Stand therefore" (Eph. 6:14).

"Be vigilant" (1 Pet. 5:8).

"Be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus" (2 Tim. 2:1).

"Watch ye, stand fast in the faith…be strong" (1 Cor. 16:13).

The Apostle Paul says to us as soldiers, *"Stand,"* and *"Stand fast"*; flee not; be brave; keep your ground. He says to us as teachers and witnesses, *"Be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus."* The Apostle Peter says to us as sentinels, *"Be vigilant"*; never off your guard for a moment; never giving way to slumber.

It is specially the last of the four passages above that we mean to notice, but in connection with the varied exhortations contained in the rest. We shall find them all bearing on each other, and all of them summoning us to a life of courage, and vigilance, and hardihood, and persevering energy. No softness, no sloth, no cowardice, no sheathed swords, no turning back in the day of battle, no shrinking from the heat and burden of the day.

Watch Ye

The servant takes up the Master's words – *"Watch ye"*; for these are specially Christ's words, and of the twenty-one times that they occur in the New Testament, twelve are in the Gospels. The Lord saw that His church would need such a word, as her watchword and motto. Our tendency is to be off our guard, to fall asleep; therefore we are exhorted to watch. We are to watch against things both within and without. We are to watch constantly. One unwatchful hour may work unspeakable evil, to ourselves and to others. Were a ship's pilot to fall asleep at the helm, or the keeper of the lighthouse, or the engine man on one of our expresses, what would be the consequences? We are to watch –

(1) Against ourselves, our unbelief, our carnality, our indolence, our selfishness, our covetousness, our bad temper, our vanity, our worldliness.

(2) Against the world, its errors, its follies, its gaieties, its temptations, its open sins, its idle companionships.

(3) Against Satan, his wiles, delusions, arguments, fiery darts. Against all these there must be vigorous, honest, brave, incessant, uncompromising watchfulness. No truce with the enemies of Christ; no friendship with the seed of the serpent; no alliance with this present evil world.

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Stand Fast in the Faith

The word here is simply *"stand"*; maintain your position; and the stress is laid on *"the faith,"* the things most surely believed. The exhortation takes for granted that we have believed; and it calls on us to adhere to the truths which we have thus received. It is not of the quantity or quality of our own faith that the apostle is speaking, but of the excellency, and fullness, and trueness, and sufficiency of the things believed. For it is out of these, and not out of our own acts of faith, that we extract all the peace and strength and holiness to which we are called by the Gospel. This "standing" is not founded on ignorance, but on knowledge. It is intelligent and reasonable. It is not obstinacy, or crotchety adhesion to one's own notions. It is large-minded, large-hearted cleaving to what is revealed, and so ascertained to be true, divinely true. *"Stand fast"* in these days, when so many are falling, or stumbling, or departing from the foundation. *"Stand fast"*; but be sure that it is in *"the faith,"* the old apostolic faith.

Be Strong

The word *"strong"* denotes vigor and power, whether of soul or body. It is the word used of John and of Jesus: *"The child grew and waxed strong in spirit"* (Luke 1:80; 2:40). We are to be strong in every way and in every sense; strong in mind, strong in will, strong in purpose, strong in faith. Not feeble, cowardly, compromising, yielding, vacillating, timid; afraid to face danger, or difficulty, or toil, or loss, or shame. *"Endure hardness as a good soldier of Jesus Christ"* (2 Tim. 2:3).

A true saint is no coward, no mere soldier on parade; but ever ready for the field; not turning back in the day of battle. Christian strength is a real thing. Christian vigor is one of those things by which we glorify God. Christian bravery is that in which we are followers of primitive saints, of martyrs, reformers, and covenanters. While men deride us as professors of the "soft theology," let us show what true strength is; enduring hardness, and fearing no foe.

…The old enemy still marshals his hosts against the saints of God; he still launches his fiery darts, the artillery of hell. He braves us to the conflict. And we must fight and watch and toil; our swords unsheathed, our armor clasped round us, our faces to the foe. No thought of coward flight. No wish to come to terms with the enemy. On on! Fight the good fight of faith. The Captain will soon be here; and His appearance on the battle field will be the ending of the campaign, the signal for victory. Then comes the conqueror's recompense; the warrior's wreath of triumph; the song of victorious battle; the entry of the bannered host through the gates into the city.

– Taken from *Light and Truth: The Lesser Epistles* by Horatius Bonar.

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