

'Perilous Times'



By John Owen
(1616 - 1683)

*Umbra refert fragiles, dederint quae solum
Rerum sacris servantem limina veri.
Reliquias, studijs ajs iduusqz labor.*

Votis supplicibus, qui dedit, ille videt.

Who Was John Owen?

The booklet is a sermon by John Owen, one of the greatest Puritan statesmen and theologians. It was preached on November 3 1676 during the reign of Charles II.

John Owen was born in 1616 and educated at Queen's College, Oxford. He was a supremely gifted scholar and rose to be Dean of Christ Church, Oxford, one of the most prestigious Oxford colleges. He was also Vice-Chancellor of the University. He was a wholehearted supporter of the Parliamentary cause during the civil war and was held in the highest regard by Oliver Cromwell. After Cromwell's death his son, Richard Cromwell, dismissed Owen as vice-chancellor of Oxford. He was removed from the deanery of Christ Church by the Presbyterian party in the House of Commons shortly before the restoration of Charles II in 1660. When the Act of Uniformity was passed in 1662 Owen refused to sign. His opportunity for ministry was thus severely curtailed. However he did not suffer as much as other dissenters because of the respect in which he was held by many in high office. He used his influence on behalf of John Bunyan and continued to write and preach. He was even asked by the Lord Chancellor to write a critique of a work called 'Fiat Lux' – a popular defence of Roman Catholicism written by a Franciscan friar. His commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews was completed shortly before his death. He died in 1683 towards the end of the reign of Charles II.

The political background to this sermon is important. Under Charles II there had been a national repudiation of the biblical standards of conduct and doctrine upheld by the Puritan movement. Most, although not all, Puritans had refused to conform and were exposed to severe penalties. Protestantism was divided. Doctrinal standards had slipped. National morals were corrupt. In addition there was a serious external threat to the cause of the gospel. James, Duke of York, Charles' younger brother and the heir to the throne had converted to Roman Catholicism and had refused to sign the Test Act of 1673 which required holders of public office publicly to renounce Roman Catholic errors. Britain was confronted with the possibility of the first Roman Catholic monarch since 'Bloody' Mary Tudor. It is against this background, similar in so many ways to the situation facing Christians today, that Owen preached this sermon.

“PERILOUS TIMES”

by John Owen (1616-1683)

‘This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come.’

II Timothy 3:1

These words contain a warning of imminent dangers and there are four important points in them: Firstly, the manner of the warning: ‘**This know also,**’ Secondly, the evil itself that they are warned of: ‘**Perilous times.**’ Thirdly, the way of their introduction: ‘**They shall come.**’ Fourthly, the time and season of it: ‘**They shall come in the last days.**’

Firstly. The manner of the warning: ‘**This know also**’ – ‘Thou Timothy, in addition to the other instructions which I have given thee, how to behave thyself in the house of God, whereby you may be set forth as a pattern unto all gospel ministers in future ages, I must also add this, ‘**This know also.**’ It belongs to thy duty and office to know and consider the impending judgements that are coming upon the churches.’ And so, as a justification of my present design, if God enable me, I shall here premise that it is the duty of the ministers of the gospel to foresee and take notice of the dangers which the churches are falling into. And, may the Lord help us, and all other ministers, to be awoken unto this part of our duty! You know how God sets it forth (Ezekiel 33) in the parable of the watchman, to warn men of approaching dangers, and truly God hath given us this law: If we warn the churches of their approaching dangers, we discharge our duty; but if we do not, their blood will be required at our hands. The Spirit of God foresaw the negligence apt to grow upon us in this matter; and therefore the Scripture identifies the duty on the one hand, and on the other it requires the people's blood at the hands of the watchmen, if they perform not their duty. So speaks the prophet Isaiah, 21:8, ‘*He cried, A lion: My lord, I stand continually upon the watch-tower.*’ A lion is an emblem of approaching judgment. ‘*The lion hath roared; who can but tremble?*’ saith the prophet Amos. It is the duty of ministers of the gospel to give warnings of impending dangers.

Again: the apostle, in speaking unto Timothy, speaks also to us all, '***This know ye also***'. It should be the great concern of all Christian professors and believers, of all churches, to have their hearts very much fixed upon both present and approaching dangers. We have inquired so long about signs, tokens, and evidences of deliverance, and I know not what, that we have almost lost the benefit of all our trials, afflictions, and persecutions. The duty of all believers is to be intent upon present and imminent dangers. '*O Lord,*' say the disciples, Matt. 24:3, '*what shall be the sign of thy coming?*' They were fixed upon His coming. The Saviour answers, 'I will tell you:

- 1 There shall be an abounding of errors and false teachers: many shall say, '*Lo here is Christ,*' and, '*Lo, there is Christ.*'
- 2 There shall be an apostasy from holiness: '*iniquity shall abound, and the love of many shall wax cold.*'
- 3 There shall be great distress of nations: '*Nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom.*'
- 4 There shall be great persecutions: '*And they shall persecute you, and bring you before rulers; and you shall be hated of all men for my name's sake.*'
- 5 There shall be great tokens of God's wrath from heaven: '*Signs in the heavens, the sun, moon, and stars.*"

The Lord Christ did acquaint believers how they should look for His coming; He tells them of all the dangers. Be intent upon these things. I know you are apt to overlook them; but these are the things that you are to be intent upon.

Not to be sensible of a present perilous season, is that security which the Scripture so condemns; and I will leave it with you, in short, under these three things:

- i It is that frame of heart which, of all others, God doth most detest and abhor. Nothing is more hateful to God than a secure frame in perilous days.
- ii I will not fear to say this, and take it, as to my opinion, to the day of judgement: A secure person, in perilous seasons, is assuredly under the power of some predominant lust, whether it appears so or not.
- iii This secure, senseless frame is the certain pressage of approaching ruin. This know, brethren, pray know this, I beg of you, for yours and my own soul, that you will be sensible of, and affected with, the perils of the season where into we are now cast. What they are, if God help me, and give me a little strength, I shall show you by-and-by.

Secondly. There is the evil and danger itself thus forewarned of, and that is hard times, perilous times, times of great difficulty, like those of public plagues, when death lies at every door; times that I am sure we shall not all escape, let it be where it will. I will say no more of it now, because it is that which I shall principally speak to afterward.

Thirdly. The manner of their introduction, ‘shall come.’ We have no word in our language that will express the force of the original. The Latin expresses it by ‘immineno, incido,’¹ - as the coming down of a fowl unto his prey. Now, our translators have given it the greatest force they could. They do not say, ‘Perilous times will come,’ as though they prognosticated future events; but, **‘Perilous times shall come.’** This is the positive hand of God; they shall so come, be so instant in their coming that nothing shall keep them out; they shall instantly press themselves in, and prevail. Our great wisdom, then, will be to eye the displeasure of God in perilous seasons; since there is a judicial hand of God in them, and we see in ourselves reason enough why they should come. But when shall they come?

¹ - ‘to threaten, to occur’

Fourthly. They ‘shall come in the last days.’ The words ‘latter’ or ‘last days’ are taken three ways in Scripture: sometimes for the times of the gospel, which followed the Judaical church-state; as in Heb. 1:2, ‘*Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son*'; and elsewhere it may be taken for days towards the consummation of all things and the end of the world. It also may refer to the latter days of churches; I Tim. 4:1, ‘*Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith*'. This rendered the season perilous and whether this is such a season or not, you can judge. And, I must say, we may and ought to witness against it, and to mourn for the public sins of the days wherein we live. It is as glorious a thing to be a martyr for bearing testimony against the public sins of an age, as in bearing testimony unto any truth of the gospel whatsoever.

I. Now, where these things are, the season is perilous:

1. Because of the infection, Churches and professors are apt to be infected with it. The historian² tell us of a plague at Athens, in the second and third years of the Peloponnesian war, whereof multitudes died; and of those that lived, few escaped but they lost a limb, or part of a limb - some an eye, others an arm, and others a finger - the infection was so great and terrible. And, where this plague comes, through the practice of unclean lusts under an outward profession - though men do not die, yet one loses an arm, another an eye, another a leg by it. The infection diffuses itself to the best of professors, more or less. This makes it a dangerous and perilous time.
2. It is dangerous, because of the effects; for when predominant lusts have broken all bounds of divine light and rule, how long do you think that human rules will keep them in order? They break through all in such a season as the apostle describes, and if they come to break through all human restraints, as they have broken through the divine, they will fill all things with ruin and confusion.

² - Thucydides

3. They are perilous in the consequence: which is, the judgements of God. When men do not receive the truth in the love of it, but have pleasure in unrighteousness, God will send them strong delusion, to believe a lie. So 2 Thess. 2:10-11 is a description of how the Papacy came upon the world. Men professed the truth of religion, but did not love it, they loved unrighteousness and ungodliness; and God sent them Popery. That is the interpretation of the place, according to the best divines. Will you profess the truth, and at the same time love unrighteousness? The consequence is security under superstition and ungodliness. This is the end of such a perilous season; and the same may be said with regard to temporal judgments, which I need not mention.

Let us now consider what is our duty in such a perilous season:

1. We ought greatly to mourn for the public abominations of the world, and of the land of our nativity wherein we live. I would only observe that place in Ezekiel 9:4, God sends out His judgments, and destroys the city; but before doing so, He ‘sets a mark upon the foreheads of the men that sigh and cry for all the abominations that be done in the midst thereof’. You will find this passage referred to in the book of Revelation 7:3, ‘Hurt not the earth, neither the sea, nor the trees, till we have sealed the servants of our God in their foreheads.’ I would only observe this, that such only are the servants of God, let men profess what they will, who mourn for the abominations that are done in the land. And truly, brethren, we are certainly to blame in this matter. We have been almost well contented that men should be as wicked as they would themselves, and we sit still and see what will come of it.

Christ hath been dishonoured, the Spirit of God blasphemed, and God provoked against the land of our nativity; and yet we have not been sufficiently affected by these things for us to contend against them. I can truly say in sincerity, I bless God, I have sometimes laboured with my own heart about it. But, I

am afraid we, that is all of us, come exceedingly short of our duty in this matter. '*Rivers of waters*,' saith the Psalmist, '*run down mine eyes, because they keep not thy law.*' Psalm 119:136. Horrible profanation of the name of God, horrible abominations, which our eyes have seen, and our ears heard, and yet our hearts have been unaffected with them! Do you think this is a frame of heart that God requireth of us, in such a season - to be regardless of it and not to mourn for the public abominations of the land?

The servants of God will mourn. I could speak, but am not free to speak about those prejudices which keep us from mourning over public abominations; but they may be easily suggested in your thoughts, and particularly what they are that have kept us from attending more unto this duty of mourning for public abominations. Give me leave to say, that, according to the Scripture rule, there is not one of us that can have any evidence that we shall escape the outward judgements that God will bring for these abominations, if we have not been real mourners over them. This, then, is one part of the duty of this day - that we should humble our souls for all the abominations that are committed in the land of our nativity; and, in particular, that we have not mourned over them as we should.

2. Our second duty, in reference to this perilous season is, to take care that we be not infected with the evils and sins of it. A man would think it were quite contrary; but really, to the best of my observation, this is the frame of things, unless upon some extraordinary dispensation of God's Spirit preserves, that as some men's sins grow very high, other men's graces grow very low. Our Saviour hath told us, Matthew 24:12, '*Because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold.*' A man would think the abounding of iniquity in the world should give great provocation to love one another. 'No,' saith our Saviour, 'the contrary will be found true: as some men's sins grow high, other men's graces will grow low.'

And there are these reasons for it:

- a) In such a season, we are apt to have light thoughts of great sins. The prophet looked upon it as a dreadful thing, that upon Jehoiakin's throwing the roll of Jeremiah's prophecy into the fire, till it was consumed, yet they were not afraid, nor rent their garments, neither the king, nor any of his servants that heard all these words,' Jer.36:24. They were grown senseless, both of sin and judgement and where men (be they in other respects ever so wise) grow senseless of sin, they will quickly grow senseless of judgement too. I am afraid the great reason why many of us do not have an impression upon our spirits of danger and perils in the days wherein we live, is because we are not sufficiently sensible of sin.
- b) Men are apt to countenance themselves in lesser evils, having their eyes fixed upon the greater abominations of other men they daily behold. There are those who pay their tribute to the devil - walking in such and such abominations, and so countenance themselves in lesser evils. This is part of the public opinion, that they "do not run out into the same excess of riot that others do," though they live in the omission of duty, and conform to the world in the fulfilment of many foolish and hurtful lusts. They comfort themselves with this, that others are guilty of greater abominations.
- c) Pray, let such remember this, who have occasion for it (you may know it better than I, but yet I know it by rule, as much as you may do by practice), that general converse in the world, in such a season, is full of danger and peril. Most professors become influenced by those with whom they converse.

This is the first thing that makes a season perilous. I know not whether these things may be of concern and use to you; they seem so to me, and I cannot but acquaint you with them.

II. A second perilous season is when men are prone to forsake the truth and seducers abound to gather those up that are so; and always these things go together. Do you see seducers abound? If so you may be sure there is a proneness in the minds of men to forsake the truth; and when there is such a proneness, they will never want for seducers. That is, those that will lead the minds of men away from the truth; for there is both the hand of God and Satan in this business. God judicially leaves men, when He sees them grow weary of the truth, becoming prone to leave it, and Satan uses the occasion, and stirs up seducers. This makes a season perilous.

The apostle describes it, I Tim. 4: 1, '*Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times*' (these perilous days) '*some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils.*' And so Peter warns those to whom he writes, II Peter 2:1, 2, that '*there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction; and many shall follow their pernicious ways.*' There shall come times full of peril, which shall draw men from the truth into destruction.

If it be asked, how may we know whether there is a proneness in the minds of men, in any season, to depart from the truth? There are three ways whereby we may judge it:

1. The first is that mentioned, II Tim 4:3, '*For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears.*' When men grow weary of sound doctrine - when it is too plain, too heavy, too dull, too common, too high, too mysterious, and one thing or another displeases them, and they would hear something new or something that may please them - it is a sign that they are in such an age when many are prone to forsake sound doctrine.

- When men have lost the power of truth in their conversation, and are as prone and ready to part with it in their minds, do you see a man retaining the truth in his worldly conversation? He only wants enticement from temptation, or a seducer, to take away his faith from him. An inclination to hearken to novelties, and the loss of truth in conversation, is a sign of one's proneness unto declension from the truth. Such a season, you see, is perilous. And why is it perilous? Because the souls of many are destroyed by it. The apostle tells us directly, 2 Peter 2:1, of '*false prophets also among the people,.... who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction.*'

Does it stop there? No:

'And many shall follow their pernicious ways; by reason of whom the way of truth shall be evil spoken of.' 2 Peter 2:2. Brethren, while it is well with us, through the grace of God, and our own houses are not in flames, do not let us think the times are not perilous, when so many turn into pernicious errors, and fall into swift destruction. Will you say the time of the public plague was not perilous, because you were preserved alive? No. Was the great fire not dreadful, because your houses were not burned? No; you will, notwithstanding, say it was a dreadful plague, and a dreadful fire.³ I pray you to consider, is not this a perilous season, when multitudes have an inclination to depart from the truth, and God, in just judgment, hath permitted Satan to stir up seducers to draw them into pernicious ways, and their poor souls perish in hell forever?

Besides, there is a great aptness in such a season for indifference to be in the minds of those who do not intend utterly to forsake the truth. Little did I think I should ever have lived in this world to find the minds of professors grown altogether

³ - *The Great Fire of London and the London Plague in 1665/6 where an estimated 100,000 people perished.*

indifferent as to the doctrines of God's eternal election, the sovereign efficacy of grace in the conversion of sinners, justification by the imputation of the righteousness of Christ; but many have become indifferent as to all these things. I bless God I knew something of the former generation, when professors would not hear of these things without the highest detestation; and now our high professors begin to be leaders in it, and is it much of a concern among the best of us? We are not so much concerned for the truth as our forefathers were; I wish I could say we were as holy.

3. This proneness to depart from the truth is a perilous season, because it is the greatest evidence of the withdrawing of the Spirit of God from His church: for the Spirit of God is promised to this end, '*to lead us into all truth*'; and when the efficacy of truth begins to decay, it is the greatest evidence of the departing and withdrawing of the Spirit of God. I think that this is a dangerous thing; for if the Spirit of God departs, then our glory and our spiritual life departs also.

What, now, is our duty in reference to this perilous season? Forewarnings of perils are given us to instruct us in our duty.

1. The first, is, not to be content with what you judge to be a sincere profession of truth; but to labour to be found in the exercise of all those graces which are particularly in respect to the truth. There are graces with regard to truth that we are to exercise; and if these are not found in our hearts, all our profession will issue in nothing.

And these are:

- a) Love: '*Because they loved not the truth.*' They made a profession of the gospel; but they received not the truth in the love of it. There was a want of love for the truth. Truth will do no man good where there is not the love of it. '*Speaking the truth in love,*' is the substance of our

Christian profession. Pray, brethren, let us labour to love the truth; and remove all prejudices from our minds, that we may do so.

- b) It is the great and only rule to preserve us in perilous times, that we labour to have the experience of the power of every truth in our hearts. If so be ye have learned the Lord Jesus. How? So as to '*put off....the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts*'; and to '*put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness,*' Eph. 4: 22-24. This is to learn the truth and the great grace that is to be exercised with reference to it in such a season as this. It is to exemplify it in our hearts in the power of it. Do labour for the experience of the power of every truth in your own hearts and lives.
 - c) Zeal for the truth. Truth is the most proper object for zeal. We ought to contend earnestly for the truth once delivered to the saints; and to be willing, as God shall help us, to part with our name and reputation if necessary, and to undergo scorn and contempt, all that this world can cast upon us, in our giving testimony unto the truth. Everything that this world counts dear and valuable is to be forsaken, rather than the truth. This was the great end for which Christ came into the world.
2. Cleave unto the means that God hath appointed and ordained for your preservation in the truth. I see some are ready to go to sleep, and think themselves not to be concerned with these things. May the Lord awaken their hearts! May we keep to the means for the preservation of the truth - the present ministry of the Word of God. Bless God for a ministry of the truth, and cleave unto it. There seems little influence upon the minds of men on this ordinance and institution of God, in the great business of the ministry. But, there are those that seem to have

better abilities to dispute than you: more knowledge, more light, better understanding than you. If you know no more in the ministry than disputing, you will never have benefit by it. The Words of God are God's ordinance; the name of God is upon them and God will be sanctified in them. They are God's ordinance for the preservation of the truth.

3. Let us carefully remember the faith of them who went before us in the profession of the last age. I am apt to think there was not a more glorious profession for a thousand years upon the face of the earth, than was among the professors of the last age. And pray, what faith were they of? Were they half Arminian and half Socinian; half Papist and half I know not what? Remember how zealous they were for the truth how little their holy souls would have borne with those public defections from the doctrine of truth which we see, and do not mourn over, but make nothing of, in the days wherein we live. God was with them; and they lived to His glory, and died in peace: '*whose faith follow*,' and their example pursue. And remember the faith they lived and died in: look round about, and see whether any of the new creeds have produced a new holiness to compare with or exceed theirs.

III. A third thing that makes a perilous season is, professors mixing themselves with the world, and learning their manners. And if the other perilous seasons are come upon us, this is come upon us also. This was the foundation and spring of the first perilous season that was in the world, that first brought in a deluge of sin and then a deluge of misery. It was the beginning of the first public apostasy of the church, which issued in the severest mark of God's displeasure Gen. 6:2. '*The sons of God saw the daughters of men that they were fair; and they took them wives of all which they chose.*' This is but one instance of the church of God, the sons of God, professors, mixing themselves with the world. This was not all, that they took to themselves wives; but this was an instance the Holy Ghost gives that the church in those days did degenerate, and

mix itself with the world. What is the end of mixing themselves in this manner with the world? Ps. 106:35, '*But were mingled among the heathen*'. And what then: '*And learned their works.*' If anything under heaven will make a season perilous, this will do it - when we mingle with the world and learn their manners.

There are two things I shall speak about under this heading:

1. Many Christian professors mingle themselves with the world in that wherein they become unnecessarily involved with the world. That which is more eminently and visibly of the devil, professors do not so soon mingle themselves withal; but in that wherein it is the world, in its own colours - as in corrupt communication, which is the spirit of the world, the extract and fruit of vanity of mind - that wherewith the world is corrupted, and doth corrupt. An evil kind of communication, whereby the manners of the world are corrupted - this comes from the spirit of the world. The devil hath his hand in all these things; but it is the world and the spirit of the world that is corrupt. And how hath this spread itself among professors! To spend one's life in light, vain, foolish communications is not of God. The habits and attire of the world are the things wherein the world doth show what it is. Men may read what the world is by evident characters, in the habits and attire that it wears. They are blind that cannot see the vanity, folly, uncleanness, luxury, in the attire the world putteth upon itself.

The declension of professors in imitating the ways of the world in their habits and garments, makes a season perilous. It is a mixture wherein we learn their manners; and the judgements of God will ensue upon it. In this, likewise, we are like the world, if we are regardless of the sins of the world, and not troubled with them. Lot lived in Sodom, but his righteous soul was vexed with their ungodly deeds and speeches. Live we where we will, if our spirits are deadened, then we will observe these worldly things, the greatest abominations, with the same spirit that the world doth have. Not to speak of voluptuousness of living, and other things that attend this woeful mixture with the world, that

professors have made in the days wherein we live - corrupt communication, gaiety of attire, senselessness of the sins and abominations of the world round about us, are almost as much upon professors as upon the world. We have mixed ourselves with the people, and have learned their manners.

But:

2. Such a season is dangerous, because such sins are contrary to the whole design and the mediation upon Christ in this world. Did Christ give Himself for us, that He might purge us from dead works, and purify us unto Himself a peculiar people (Titus 2:14)? “Ye are a royal nation, a peculiar people.” Christ hath brought the hatred of the devil and all the world upon and against Himself, for taking a people out of the world, and making them a peculiar people to Himself. Their throwing themselves upon the world again is the greatest contempt that can be put upon Jesus Christ. He gave His life and shed His blood to recover His people from the world. How easy were it to show that this is an inlet to all other sins and abominations, and that for which I verily think the indignation and displeasure of God will soon discover itself against professors and churches in this day! If we will not be differenced from the world in our ways, we shall not long be differenced from them in our privileges. If we are the same as the world in our walk, we shall also be so in our worship, or have none at all.

As to our duty in such a perilous season, let me leave three cautions with you, and the Lord fix them upon your hearts:

1. The profession of religion, and the performance of duties, under a world-like conversation, are nothing but the Devil’s means to lead men blindfold into hell. We must not speak of little things in such a great cause.
2. If you will be like the world, you must take the world's lot. It will go with you as it goes with the world. Inquire and see, in the whole book of God, how it will go with the world, what God's thoughts are of the world, whether it saith or not, “*If it*

lies in wickedness, it shall come to judgment,” and that “*the curse of God is upon it.*” If, therefore, you will be like the world, you must have the world’s lot; God will not separate.

3. Lastly, consider we have by this means lost the most glorious cause of truth that ever was in the world. We do not know if there hath been a more glorious cause of truth since the apostles' days, than what God hath committed to his church and people in this nation, for the purity of the doctrine of the truth and ordinances; but we have lost all the beauty and glory of it by this mixing with the world. I verily think it is high time that both the elders and ministers should consult together how to stop this evil, that hath lost all the glory of our profession. It is a perilous time, when professors mix themselves so much with the world.

There are other perilous seasons that I thought to have insisted on, but I will but name them.

IV. When there is great attendance on outward duties, but inward spiritual decay. Now herein, my brethren, you know how long I have been speaking of the causes and reasons of inward decays, and the means to be used for our recovery; I shall not, therefore, again insist upon them.

V. Times of persecution are also times of peril. Now, I need not tell you whether these seasons are upon us or not; it is your duty to inquire into that. Whether there be not an outward retaining of the truth under a visible prevalency of abominable lusts in the world; whether there be not a proneness to forsake the truth, and seducers at work to draw men from it; whether there be not a mingling of ourselves with the world, and therein learning their manners; whether there be not inward decays, under the outward performance of duties; and whether many are not suffering under persecution and trouble, judge ye, and act accordingly.

One word of use, and I have done.

Use 1. Let us all be exhorted to endeavour to get our hearts affected with the perils of the day wherein we live. You have heard a poor, weak discourse concerning it, and perhaps it will be quickly forgotten. Oh, that God would be pleased to give us this grace - that we may find it our duty to endeavour to have our hearts affected with the perils of these seasons! It is not time to be asleep upon the top of a mast in a rough sea, when there are so many devouring dangers round about us. And it is better to effect this how?

- a) Consider the present things, and bring them to rule, and see what God's Word says of them. We hear this and that story of horrible, prodigious wickedness and bring it in the next opportunity of our talk, and then lightly pass it over. We hear of the judgements of God abroad in the world; and bring them to the same standard of our own imaginations, and there it ends. But, brethren, when you observe any of these things, how is it with you? If you would have your hearts affected, bring it to the Word, and see what God saith of it: speak with God about it; ask and inquire at the mouth of God, what He saith about these prodigious wickednesses and judgements - this coldness that is upon professors, and their mixing with and learning the manners of the world. You will never have your heart affected by it, until you come and speak with God about it; and then you will find that it makes your heart ache and tremble. And then,
- b) If you would be sensible of present perilous times, take heed of centring in oneself. While your greatest concern is self or the world, all the angels in heaven cannot make you sensible of the peril of the days wherein you now live. Whether you pursue riches or honours, while you centre there, nothing can make you sensible of the perils of the day. Therefore do not centre in self.
- c) Pray that God would give us grace to be sensible of the perils of the day wherein we live. It may be we have had confidence, that though thousands fall at our right hand and at our left, yet we shall be able to carry it through. Believe me, it is great grace. Point your private, closet prayers, and your family

prayers this way; and the Lord help us to point our public prayers to it, that God would make our hearts sensible of the perils of the time whereinto we are fallen in these last days!

Use 2. The next thing is this, that there are two things in a perilous season - the sin of it, and the misery of it. Labour to be sensible of the former, or you will never be sensible of the latter. Though judgements lie at the door - though the heavens be dark over us, and the earth shake under us at this day, and no wise man can see where he can build himself an abiding habitation - we can talk of these things; and hear of other nations soaking in blood; and have tokens of God's displeasure and warnings from heaven above and the earth beneath; and no man is sensible of them! Why? Because they are not sensible of sin; nor ever will be, unless God make them so.

I shall range the sins that we should be sensible of under three heads:

- a) The sins of this poor, wretched, perishing world, in the first place.
- b) The sins of professors in general, in the second place.
- c) Our own particular sins and decays, in the third place.

And let us labour to have our hearts affected with these. It is to no purpose to tell you this and that judgement is approaching; - for your leaders, and those that are upon the watch-tower, to cry, '*A lion; my lord we see a lion.*' Unless God make our hearts sensible of sin, we shall not be sensible of judgements.

Use 3. Remember there is a special frame of spirit required in us all in such perilous seasons as these are. And what is that? It is a mourning frame of spirit. Oh that frame, that jolly frame of spirit that is so often upon us! The Lord forgive it, the Lord pardon it unto us; and keep us in a humble, broken, mournful frame of spirit; for it is a peculiar grace God looks for at such a time as this is. When He will pour out His Spirit, there will be great mourning, together and apart; but now we may say there is for the most part, no mourning. The Lord help us. We

have hard hearts and dry eyes under the consideration of all these perils that are before us.

Use 4. Keep up a church watch with diligence, and by the rule. When I say rule, I mean the life of it. I have no greater concern upon my heart, than that God should withdraw himself from his own institutions because of the sins of the people, and leave us only the form of an outward profession and order. What doth God give us prayer and watchfulness for? Is it for our own sakes? No; but that it may be a clothing for faith and love, meekness of spirit and compassion, watchfulness and diligence. Take away these, and farewell to all spiritual rule and order. Keep up a spirit that may live affected with it: get a spirit of church watch; which is not to look for faults in others, but diligently and out of pure love and compassion to the souls of men, to watch over them, to wait to do them all the good we can. As it was with a poor man, who took a dead body and set it up, and it fell; and he set it up again, and it fell; upon which he cried out, ‘There wants something within,’ to enliven and quicken it; - so is it with church order and rule; set them up as often as you will, they will all fall, if there be not a love to one another, a delighting in the good of one another, *‘exhorting one another daily, while it is called today; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.’* Heb 3:13.

Use 5. Reckon upon it, that in such times as these, all of us will not go free. When you find mention of a perilous season in Scripture, it always follows that some shall have their faith overthrown, others shall follow pernicious ways, and others shall turn aside. Brethren and sisters, how do you know, but you or I may fall? Let us double our watch, every one of us, for the season is come upon us wherein some of us may fall, and fall so as to smart for it. I do not say we shall perish eternally - God deliver us from going into the pit! But some of us may so fall as to lose a limb, or some member or other; and our works will be committed to the fire that shall burn them all up. God hath kindled a fire in Zion that will try all our works; and we shall see in a short time what will become of us.

Use 6. Lastly, take that great rule which the apostle gives in such times as those wherewith we are concerned, '*Nevertheless the foundation of God standeth sure,*' - Blessed be God for it! - *The Lord knoweth them that are His.*' 2 Tim 2:19.

What, then, is required on our part?

'Let everyone that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity.' 2 Tim 2:19. Your profession, your privileges, your light, will not secure you; you are gone, unless every one that nameth the name of Christ departs from all iniquity. What multitudes perish under a profession of religion every day! Oh, that our hearts could bleed to see poor deceived souls in danger of perishing under a religious profession!

Will you hear the sum of it all? Perilous times and seasons are come upon us; many are wounded already; many have failed. The Lord help us! The crown is fallen from our head, the glory of our profession is gone, the time is short, the Judge stands before the door. Take but this one word of counsel, my brethren: '*Watch ye therefore, and pray always, that ye may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of man*'. Luke 21:36

AMEN.

Slightly Abridged

Aims of Christian Watch

- To uphold the Protestant Reformed Faith upon which our National Constitution was established.
- To promote general awareness of our nation's departure from the laws of God as given in the Holy Scriptures.
- To convey the biblical message as it currently applies to our nation especially in respect to the unrighteous laws that have been passed by our Government in recent times.
- To inform Protestants of the possible loss of their religious liberties resulting from current and proposed developments and legislation within the UK and European Union.
- To encourage all who the Lord has awakened to the serious state of our nation, spiritually, morally and ethically, to warn others of the inevitable judgment of God unless true repentance is given, so that many will turn from their wicked ways to serve the Lord.

Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.

Mat 4:17

Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.

Luke 13:3

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