

## **“TAKE HEED LEST YE FALL”**

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Text—1 Cor. 10:12, “Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall.”

Beloved brethren and friends: This is indeed a most solemn and timely warning which the great Apostle Paul gave to the church at Corinth, and which I think is very appropriate for all the Lord’s dear people, especially at this time. In order to impress the thought upon the minds of the brethren, the Apostle called their attention to the career of Fleshy Israel in their wilderness journey from Egypt to Canaan, using them as a type of Spiritual Israel—the Church of Christ, the Church of the living God. Now let us take a view of these same things written aforetime for our learning that we may know how to apply our hearts unto wisdom.

First of all they were led out of Egypt “with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm,” being impelled by the bitter experiences of a life of bondage which lasted about one hundred years. Before them was the Canaan of rest and peace and freedom, a land that was figuratively said to be flowing with milk and honey. What a wonderful magnet this must have been, or should have been to Israel! How it should have pulled them right over all their difficulties, the dangers and trials of the way! Yes, the grand prospect of rest and freedom should have so magnetized them that they should have been almost if not quite oblivious of the wilderness surroundings, specially since God had made a bountiful provision for them in what the Apostle calls “spiritual meat and spiritual drink.” And in addition to this “they were all baptized into Moses.”

But alas! in spite of all this—in spite of the terrible conditions behind them, the tender care of a wonderful leader beside them, and the glorious prospects before them, there follows the sad, the mournful but true statement that “with many of them God was not well pleased.” therefore many of them were overthrown in the wilderness. Right here the Apostle seems to have been a little timid in expressing the matter as strongly as he might have done, for we think he could have said “with most of them God was not at all pleased because out of 600,000 or more who left on that memorable journey, only two—Caleb and Joshua—reached the land of Canaan.”

Then follows a long list of Israel’s misdeeds at the close of which we find the important statement that “all these things were written for our admonition, especially for us upon whom the ends of the ages are come.” Then our text with its solemn warning: “Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall.”

Dear brethren, we, like Israel our type, have been miraculously delivered from slavery also; but it was a much greater slavery than that of literal Egypt, even the slavery of sin. We, like Israel, were delivered from this Egyptian bondage, as it is written, "Out of Egypt have I called my son." We too, dear brethren, are travelling through this great antitypical wilderness of sin and sorrow; and were we not also impelled by Pharaoh's galling yoke to flee out of Egypt? Have we not a much more wonderful magnet than natural Israel had? Is not the eternal weight of heavenly glory to which we are hastening of far more importance than all earthly treasures? Are not the prospects ten thousand times more transporting? In fact we have the advantage of Fleshy Israel in that we are partakers of the **real spiritual meat**, even the living bread which cometh down from heaven, much superior every way to the manna which they ate. "Your fathers did eat manna in the wilderness and are dead, but this is the bread which cometh down from heaven, that a man may eat thereof and not die." (John 6:49, 50)

We also partake of the **real spiritual drink**, even the water of life which flows from that true Rock; and this water follows us. Oh yes! how well we are able to sing with the poet:

"I heard the voice of Jesus say, Behold I freely give  
The living water, thirsty one, Stoop down and drink and live.  
came to Jesus and I drank Of that life-giving stream;  
My thirst was quenched, my soul revived, And now I live in Him."

Another thought. We, like natural Israel, have also been baptized into our great antitypical Moses; we were baptized into his death; we have put on Christ. (Rom. 6:3, 4) All of this and much more is true concerning us: but I wonder if it is not also true with us as it was with them, "But with many of them God was not well pleased"? It is here that our text gathers force: "Let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed."

The scripture says truly that "No man taketh this honor unto himself," and surely the various weaknesses of our fallen flesh prevent us from laying claim to any worthiness on our part; nevertheless the Lord's people should be quite certain as to their standing in Christ: dear brethren we cannot afford to go on through life merely thinking, hoping, trusting, or believing that all is well. These things are good in themselves and beneficial when rightly used; we have nothing to say against them, but we wish to say that these are not sufficient; we wish to have that degree of certainty which the scripture calls the "full assurance of faith," because it is possible for us to think foolishly, we can have false hopes, we can believe a lie, we can trust in the uncertain, the unreal. You remember how on one occasion when Joseph and Mary went to Jerusalem with the Child Jesus they began to return without seeking for Him and taking Him along with them. The account tells us that they started away merely **supposing** that He was in the company and so traveled a whole day without Him, they were satisfied to believe that Jesus was in the company. And now, dear brother, how is it with you, are you going on in the Christian

way merely supposing that all is well? Are you satisfied with the mere belief that Jesus is in the company of those with whom you associate as Christians? Or are you trying to take Him along with you individually?

Remember that when Mary began to seek for Him she found, to her bitter disappointment, that He was not even in the company where she supposed Him to have been; and so, dear brethren, let us strive henceforth to be certain that He is with us individually. It may be that some of us have been travelling for some time not directly in the presence of the Master but merely supposing that He is somewhere in the company of your professed Christian associates. You have noticed the mistake which Joseph and Mary made in not taking the Child Jesus along with them but started away merely trusting, hoping, believing that He would follow after; and so, dear ones, if any of you have started off on your journey without taking the Lord with you, then you may be sure that He is not with you, and you, no doubt, will soon find that out. You will find out, perhaps, that He is not even in the company where you supposed Him to be.

Now then what will you do should you discover that He is not with you. Will you go on believing that He will come after you? No, dear friends, you should do just what Mary did. She returned and sought for Him and found Him just where she left Him. It cost her two or three days of anxious searching to find Him. We know not how much it will cost those of us who find ourselves in the same kind of dilemma; doubtless it depends upon how far you have left Him behind. In any case, immediately, as you find out that He is not with you, go back and search for Him and receive the blessed assurance that Jesus is yours; that He is with you; that you are walking in His immediate presence; that you are under His direct control; that you no longer have a false hope; you wish to be certain about your relationship to God; you wish to “know in whom you have believed.”

You may belong to a flourishing assembly where the spirit of the Lord is operating indeed, and upon which the blessings of God seem to rest; but that should not make you feel contented, dear brethren, you need to have the Lord’s spirit and blessings in your own heart and life, not Jesus in the company but Jesus in the soul will bring the desired blessing.

But someone will say “Oh, I am alright, I have been in the Truth a long time, I am an old brother, an old sister.” Well yes, we do love and esteem old brethren, old in the Truth. We remember how reverently the great Apostle Paul spoke of one Mnason, “an old disciple” of Cyprus, but, dear friends, that is not a sufficient guarantee that you are standing; it is usually the old disciple who develops headiness, it is oft-times the old disciple who is walking disorderly. You may have been in the Truth a long time and now you may be retrograding; therefore, “Old disciple,” take heed lest you fall.

Another will say, “Well, I think I am pretty alright, I am engaged in the service and am contributing much labor to the Lord’s work.” That is very good, dear brother, “God is not unrighteous to forget your works and labor of love which you have shown toward His name, in that you have ministered to the saints and still do minister.” Nevertheless that is not a sufficient guarantee that you are standing, for remember the Apostle Paul was afraid lest while he preached to others he himself should be a castaway. (1 Cor. 9:27)

Another will say, “Well, I think I am pretty safe for I have a first class knowledge of the Truth. I understand a thing or two, and I do not believe God would reveal His Truth to any but His own people, for the prophet says only ‘the wise will understand.’” Yes, we are sure that a correct understanding of the Truth is an essential foundation for the Christian faith superstructure, but excellence in knowledge is by no means a sufficient guarantee that you are standing for you may have knowledge without the spirit of Truth, which would be worse than useless. So the Apostle says: “Though I may understand all mysteries, and have all knowledge but have not love I am nothing.” “If any man have not the spirit of Christ he is none of His,” and so brethren of knowledge and ability, take heed lest you fall.

Another thought, dear brethren. It is not only those who think they stand that need the admonition of our text, but also those who know what is their standing in Christ, who can truly sing “On Christ the solid Rock I stand”; and perhaps these should take more heed. When Bro. Paul sent from Miletus to call the elders of Ephesus and delivered to them his parting message, he did not tell them that they were alright and that all their time and energy should be spent upon the flock committed to their charge. Rather he said to them first of all, “Take heed unto yourselves.” (Acts 20:28) And if the elders of Ephesus who were nearly 2,000 years nearer perfection than we are, needed such counsel, be it known unto you dear brethren, that the elders of Kingston and of Camberwell and of Hillside and of Montego Bay and of every place are much more in need of this solemn warning, “Take heed unto yourselves.”

Which is the successful elder? Is it the one who gets all the flock committed to his charge into the Kingdom but does not get himself in? Well, I prefer to be the one who is successful enough to get himself in, though he may not be very successful in assisting many of the flock to get in.

There is a practice among drinkers of spirituous liquors called “drinking another’s health.” The story is told of a certain young man who was asked to drink the health of certain friends in whom he was interested. He declared that he had already drunk the health of so many friends that his own was almost destroyed. And so, dear elders while you “drink the health” of the flock committed to your care, be careful to preserve your own.

It is said of our dear Lord that “when He putteth forth His own sheep **He goeth before them.**” He does not put them before Him, but He leads the way, and His under-shepherds must do likewise. You should go before them in Godly examples and with holy precepts lead them, while you take heed unto yourselves. Should they refuse to follow, that should not hinder you from gaining an abundant entrance into the Kingdom.

How appropriate is the Apostle’s exhortation, “Take heed unto yourselves.” It will remind you of the fact that you are the special object of Satan’s opposition. When Ben-Hadad and Ahab had a battle at Ramoth-Gilead, Ben-Hadad commanded his army to fight neither with small nor great, save with the King of Israel. And so dear elders, we should not wonder if a similar command be given at this time by the great Adversary against the elders. See to it then that while you take heed to the flock under your care; while you discharge your duties toward them to the best of your ability; while you feed them, shepherd them, and lay down your life for them; do not forget to “take heed to yourselves.” Remember that the Lord is your elder, and that he is watching not only the outward performances but also the secret conditions of the heart; your position should be wings to lift you up and not weights to sink you down. And so elders and all who occupy prominent positions, “Take heed lest ye fall.”

And now, dear colporteurs, what about you, are you building upon your success in the output of books? We rejoice with you for what measure of success you may have in that way and we are always praying for you that you may be instruments of blessing to many; but success in the distribution of books is not a sufficient guarantee that you are safely standing in Christ. You too should take heed lest you be unsuccessful in making your calling and election sure.

You remember when the Apostles returned to the Master filled to overflowing with joy because of their wonderful success in the field even over demons, the Master put a flat upon the keynote of their rejoicing, saying “rejoice not because the demons are subject unto you but rather because your names are written in heaven.”—Luke 10:17, 20.

And so, dear colporteurs, you need to take heed unto yourselves as well as the books in your charge; remember that you are not a bookseller but an evangelist, a preacher of “the everlasting gospel”, and this you must do in your life whether you put out one book or not. You need to bring your “old man” in subjection “lest while you have preached to others you yourselves may become castaways”. Take heed, then, dear ones, lest ye fall.

Now then just a thought or two upon the word “fall.” We may view it from two standpoints—a fall **from** and a fall **into**. Dear brethren, we are apt to view it from the second standpoint and overlook the first. We are apt to think that all is well because we do not find ourselves fallen **into** any sin or error, or false doctrine; but remember that the great Judge of all is not viewing it merely from that standpoint but from the other also.

This is shown in His reproof of the Church at Ephesus; (Rev. 2:4, 5) nothing is said of their fall into sin or vice of any kind; on the contrary they were commended for several virtues; but what does he say afterwards? “Thou hast left thy first love, remember **from** whence thou hast fallen.”

Doubtless the Church of Ephesus never knew of her fall; perhaps she was thinking that all was well, that her love for the Lord was on the increase; this is because falling is a gradual thing, some little time intervenes its first and last stages; we may fall **from** some time before we fall **into**; we may leave some little time before we get into hatred; we may forsake righteousness some little time before we get into unrighteousness; we may leave virtue some little time before we get into vice; and of that little time and its most dreadful and destructive work we, like the Church at Ephesus, may be in total ignorance until the “angel” points it out. Let us be very careful then; let us take heed lest we mistake the spirit of indifference and slumber to be the spirit of a sound mind holding in subjection what the Apostle calls zeal without knowledge. In trying to regulate this zeal we are liable to fall into the other extreme of indifference. “Let him that thinketh take heed lest he fall.”

In conclusion let us remember, dear brethren, that we are in the “evil days” and Satan is doing all that lies in his power to make our pathway more slippery in order that we may fall. Sometime ago I was passing over a river upon a log thrown across to form a bridge. As I got on this narrow bridge a woman jumped into the water with a pan and dashed water upon the bridge all the way before me to make it slippery that I might fall into the river.

This is just what our Adversary is doing now while we walk upon this narrow bridge—the “narrow way”—over the river of death—the second death. Oh how much we need to take heed to ourselves lest the very next step should land any one of us into the river below. What carefulness, what watchfulness, what soberness is required of us at this time that we may reach the other side in safety!

Those who have read Bunyan’s “Pilgrim’s Progress” may remember that when the “pilgrims” reached a certain part of the way they came amongst the “snares,” and had to walk carefully paying every attention to their footing to avoid being caught; and so it is with us, dear brethren, we are now amongst the “snares” we are “oft in danger, oft in woe”, therefore “let him that thinketh he standeth, as well as him who knows that he standeth, take heed lest he fall.”

You will appreciate the following beautiful lines which make an appropriate conclusion:

“Christian walk carefully danger is near,  
On in thy journey with trembling and fear;

Snares from without and temptations within  
Seek to entice thee once more into sin.  
Christian walk carefully, Christian walk carefully,  
Christian walk carefully, danger is near.

Christian walk prayerfully oft wilt thou fall  
If thou forget on thy Saviour to call;  
Safe thou shalt walk through each trial and care  
If thou are clad in the armor of prayer.  
Christian walk prayerfully, Christian walk prayerfully,  
Christian walk prayerfully, fear lest thou fall.”