

## ***'Watch'***

### **Introduction**

According to its Greek origin, the word 'watch' occurred about 22 times in the New Testament.

The Greek word is: γρηγορεω transliterated 'grigoreo'. It means: to be vigilant, fully awake, circumspect, or greatly attentive.

The word has different important usages and meanings in the New Testament. We want to study these meanings and dimensions and understand their importance for our spiritual life.

I will first explain the usages and meanings of the word in the New Testament and then discuss how we can acquire this watchfulness in our spiritual life.

### **First: The different usages and meanings of the word in the New Testament:**

The Greek word occurred about 22 times as we mentioned; yet, it was used to highlight various meanings and dimensions.

We need to know these meanings as they reveal to us the purpose of the Lord where the word 'watch' is mentioned.

- 1. According to the Greek origin, the word occurred in the talk of Jesus about His second coming and our need to watch in order to discern His coming because He will come like a thief in the night. In other words, only those who are watchful will discern it. He will also come as a Bridegroom for the Bride who awaits His coming.**

In Mark 13: 33 – 37, we read:

*'Take heed, watch and pray; for you do not know when the time is. It is like a man going to a far country, who left his house and gave authority to his servants, and to each his work, and commanded the doorkeeper to watch. Watch therefore, for you do not know when the master of the house is coming—in the evening, at midnight, at the crowing of the rooster,*

*or in the morning— lest, coming suddenly, he find you sleeping. And what I say to you, I say to all: Watch!” (Mark 13: 33 – 37).*

We notice that the word ‘*watch*’ is repeated three times in this passage (it is the same Greek word).

We also notice that Jesus said these words not only to His disciples but to everyone – including those who will come after them. The words are directed to the believers in every generation.

The same word with this same meaning occurred in Matthew 24: 42; Matthew 25: 13; and Luke 12: 37.

The word also occurred in 1Thessalonians 5: 6, 10 where the reference in this passage is primarily to the need to be watchful because His coming will be like a thief in the night.

The same word is mentioned with the same meaning in the book of Revelation 16: 15.

Therefore, we need to acquire this grace, the grace of spiritual watchfulness; so that our hearts and souls may become ready for His coming as the Bridegroom –whenever He comes because He has warned us that His coming will be sudden.

Let us; therefore, wake up and watch!

## **2. The second meaning by which this word occurred is: *Watchfulness as a fellowship of suffering with the Lord.***

**It occurred in the talk of Jesus with the disciples who were with Him in Gethsemane.**

In Matthew 26: 38, we read:

*“Then He said to them, “My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even to death. Stay here and watch with Me” (Matthew 26: 38).*

The same meaning occurred also in Mark 14: 34.

It is quite remarkable that in His suffering, the Lord invites us to partake with Him, saying: ‘*Stay here and watch with Me*’.

If we acquire this grace of spiritual watchfulness, we will have fellowship in the Lord's suffering. We will be able to discern the suffering in the heart of the Lord. We will also be able to enter into the fellowship of His suffering without being disturbed but rather sense the distinctness and great closeness to Him as He tells us: *'Stay here and watch with Me'*.

**3. The third meaning which is revealed to us through the use of this word in the New Testament is:**

***The watchfulness which we need in order to be saved from the temptations and the wars of the enemy.***

In Matthew 26: 41, we read:

*'Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak'* (Matthew 26: 41).

This same sentence is repeated in Mark 14: 38.

Also, in 1 Peter 5: 8, we read:

*'Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour'* (1 Peter 5: 8 –NKJV).

*'Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour'* (1 Peter 5: 8 –ESV).

It is thus clear that without the grace of spiritual watchfulness, we will not be kept or protected from the temptations nor will we be able to be saved from the traps of the devil.

Don't we remember what is written in the Scriptures referring to our enemy as: *'the accuser of our brethren, who accused them before our God day and night'* (Revelation 12: 10)! Doesn't this indicate that even while we are asleep, doing nothing, the accuser does not cease to accuse us and bring charges against us!

We are in great need for spiritual watchfulness!

**4. Another meaning which is highlighted through the use of this word is:**

***The need to watch in order to stand firm in the spiritual life; and also, to be watchful in prayer and thanksgiving.***

In 1 Corinthians 16: 13, 14 we read:

*'Watch, stand fast in the faith, be brave, be strong. Let all that you do be done with love'* (1 Corinthians 16: 13, 14 –NKJV).

*'Be watchful, stand firm in the faith, act like men, be strong. Let all that you do be done in love'* (1 Corinthians 16: 13, 14 –ESV).

St. Didymus the Blind (4<sup>th</sup> century), who was the director of the school of theology in Alexandria and many of the saints were his spiritual disciples, commented on this verse saying:

Apostle Paul is teaching us to be soldiers who are trained and prepared for what we are called to.

Therefore, *watchfulness* transforms us into soldiers for the Lord; and hence, we can conquer in our spiritual battles.

Also, in Ephesians 6: 18, we read:

*'Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints'* (Ephesians 6: 18).

And in Colossians 4: 2, we read:

*'Continue earnestly in prayer, being vigilant in it with thanksgiving'* (Colossians 4: 2 – NKJV).

*'Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving'* (Colossians 4: 2 – ESV).

*'Be devoted to prayer, keeping alert in it with thanksgiving'* (Colossians 4: 2 –LEB).

We can thus see that the grace of spiritual watchfulness does not only require us to be soldiers who are enlisted; but also, to continue steadfastly in prayer with the spirit of thanksgiving and to remember to pray for others with perseverance.

## **5. The final meaning that we find for this important word is related to the matters of ministry and caring for the flock of the Lord.**

In Acts 20: 31, we read:

*'Therefore watch and remember that for three years I did not cease to warn everyone night and day with tears' (Acts 20: 31).*

This was the recommendation of apostle Paul to the bishops of Ephesus before departing, because he wasn't going to see them again. He exhorted them to watch over their flock.

The same meaning occurred also in Revelation 3: 2, 3 where apostle John commands the angel of the church of Sardis to watch over himself and over the flock who were spiritually weak as they were in a state of spiritual death.

We find the same meaning also in Hebrews 13: 17 where Apostle Paul commands those who are served to be watchful and steadfast in obeying their leaders who keep watch over them, saying:

*'Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you' (Hebrews 13: 17).*

After this quick study of this important word, as we have seen in the various biblical passages where the word occurred, we would surely find ourselves asking:

*How then can we acquire this great grace, the grace of spiritual watchfulness?*

This is the second point of our talk.

Yet, before I move to the second point, let us listen to some of the sayings of the fathers of the church about 'watchfulness' as a distinct spiritual gift –after we have learned about 'watchfulness' from the Scriptures.

- **St Hesychios of Sinai (7<sup>th</sup>/8<sup>th</sup> centuries) from the Philokalia:**
  - *'Guard your mind and you will not be harassed by temptations'.*
  - *'Watchfulness is a continual fixing and halting of the thoughts at the entrance of the heart'.*

- *'Watchfulness, when practised over a long period, completely frees us –by God's help –from impassioned thoughts, impassioned words, and evil actions'.*
  
- **St John of Damascus (7<sup>th</sup>/8<sup>th</sup> centuries):**
  - *'Without the attentiveness and watchfulness of the intellect, we cannot be saved and rescued from the devil who walks about "like a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour"'*.
  
- **St Philotheos of Sinai (8<sup>th</sup> century) from the Philokalia:**
  - *'If attentiveness and prayer are daily joined together, they become like Elijah's fire-bearing chariot (2Kings 2: 11), raising us to heaven!'*

### **Secondly: How can we acquire the gift and grace of spiritual watchfulness?**

To answer this question, we have some practical highlights:

1. The inner spiritual building of the soul
2. Acquiring an undivided heart and a good conscience
3. Watching over the unity among the members of the one body
4. The spiritual sensitivity in relation to the end times and the second coming of the Lord
5. The responsibilities of the Kingdom of God

Let us talk briefly about each of these points:

#### **1. The inner spiritual building of the soul**

The first and foremost vigilance or watchfulness that we need to practice in order to receive and acquire the gift of spiritual watchfulness with all its blessings and features, as we heard from the Scriptures and the sayings of the fathers of the Church, is to *watch over building our souls*.

The inner man who is built in the Spirit bears within it the grace and virtue of watchfulness. It is a sign of the maturity of the inner man.

Therefore, after Peter confessed that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God Jesus said to him: *'I will build My Church'* (Matthew 16: 18). Jesus cares much about building our souls as they are the primary and principal unit of the Church.

In the epistle to the Hebrews, we read:

*'For this One (referring to Christ) has been counted worthy of more glory than Moses, inasmuch as He who built the house has more honour than the house. For every house is built by someone, but He who built all things is God'* (Hebrews 3: 3, 4).

Paul also calls himself *'a wise master builder'* (1Corinthians 3: 10) because he cares about the spiritual building and edification of the churches that he serves.

***This spiritual building requires from us:***

- To keep our fellowship with God alive, renewed and growing through walking in the Spirit daily;
- To give the word of God its due place in our daily life, in our conduct and in our words.

Sometimes our conduct is so much similar to the people of the world! Also, sometimes our words are negative or wrong, for example, judging others, coarse jesting, or gossip.

This indicates that the first area of watchfulness that is available to us is to *keep our daily conduct in the Spirit* –as is fitting and according to what glorifies our God and makes us seen by others as true children of God.

The Psalmist said:

*'Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in Your sight, O Lord, my strength and my Redeemer'* (Psalm 19: 14).

When we watch over the things that are available to us, the Lord grants us what is not in our ability. He grants us grace and virtue out of His goodness and mercy.

It is written: *'add to your faith virtue'* (2 Peter 1: 5).

## 2. Acquiring an undivided heart and a good conscience

Our hearts are often divided between God and the world. This hinders the purity of the heart because in this case the heart would be filled with the desires and passions of the soul and is thus divided.

In James 1: 8, we read:

*'He is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways'* (James 1: 8).

Other translations of this verse help us more in understanding this division. Let us look at some of them, focusing on the phrase '*a double-minded man*'.

The Coptic translation, one of the oldest translations, says: '*a double-hearted man*'.

Another translation: Young Literal Translation, says: '*A two-souled man is unstable in all his ways'* (YLT). Here we see a clear reference to the interference of the soul, hindering the purity and unity of the heart.

In another translation: New Living Translation, we read: '*Their loyalty is divided between God and the world*' (NLT).

Therefore, in Psalm 86: 11, the Psalmist prays saying:

*'Unite my heart to fear Your name'* (Psalm 86: 11).

There is a biblical example which presents to us a picture of the spiritual sensitivity of the heart and conscience: David whose heart was spiritually so sensitive that it immediately struck him if he sinned.

In 1 Samuel 24: 5, we read:

*'And afterward David's heart struck him, because he had cut off a corner of Saul's robe'* (1 Samuel 24: 5 –ESV).

Also, in 2 Samuel 24: 10, we read:

*'And David's heart condemned him after he had numbered the people. So David said to the Lord, "I have sinned greatly in what I have done; but now, I pray, O Lord, take away the iniquity of Your servant, for I have done very foolishly"'* (2 Samuel 24: 10).

In the first instance, we may wonder why would David's heart strike him for cutting off a corner of Saul's robe when Saul was chasing him and causing him much pain and suffering! He did not kill Saul; he only cut off a corner of his robe! Yet, this reflects a spiritually sensitive heart which is filled with the fear and love of God.

We may also wonder why would David's heart strike him for merely numbering the people! Wouldn't it be possible that he wanted to know the power of the people in battles! Yet, this again reflects the spiritually sensitive heart that was purified from evils and that knew that conquering in the battles is based on the goodness of the Lord who strengthens His people and not based on the power of the people.

Therefore, St Tikhon, Patriarch of Moscow (19<sup>th</sup> century) said:

*'Virtue is not true virtue when it is Not in the heart. When evil is not in the heart, it will not appear outwardly. The hands will not do evil; the feet will not walk toward evil; the tongue and lips will not speak evil; the eyes will not look upon evil; and so on, because the will and the heart will not desire it'.*

Therefore, if we watch over our heart, keeping it from evil and division, we will acquire a pure heart and a spiritually sensitive conscience.

Haven't we read about king Josiah who sent to Huldah, the prophetess, to inquire of the Lord about the state of his people after reading what was written in the book that was found in the temple; and she answered him saying:

*'Because your heart was tender, and you humbled yourself before God when you heard His words against this place and against its inhabitants, and you humbled yourself before Me, and you tore your clothes and wept before Me, I also have heard you," says the Lord. "Surely I will gather you to your fathers, and you shall be gathered to your grave in peace; and your eyes shall not see all the calamity which I will bring on this place and its inhabitants"' (2 Chronicles 34: 27, 28).*

We are in great need to see the state of our heart which has become hardened and is no longer soft or tender regarding God's matters or the suffering of the people around us; and hence, our tears have also dried up!

Haven't we heard the prophet Joel say:

*“Turn to Me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning.” So rend your heart, and not your garments; return to the Lord your God, for He is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness; and He relents from doing harm’ (Joel 2: 12, 13).*

**And now, let us listen to God’s words about the good conscience:**

- 1 Timothy 1: 5

*‘Now the purpose of the commandment is love from a pure heart, from a good conscience, and from sincere faith’ (1 Timothy 1: 5).*

- Also, in one of his defences before the Jewish council, apostle Paul said:

*‘Men and brethren, I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day’ (Acts 23: 1).*

- The apostle confirmed the same thing again in the following chapter, saying:

*‘This being so, I myself always strive to have a conscience without offense toward God and men’ (Acts 24: 16).*

- Addressing his disciple Timothy, apostle Paul says:

*‘I thank God, whom I serve with a pure conscience, as my forefathers did, as without ceasing I remember you in my prayers night and day’ (2 Timothy 1: 3).*

- Drawing our attention to the importance of avoiding an evil conscience, the apostle says:

*‘Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water’ (Hebrews 10: 22).*

The evil conscience is that which allows the negative experiences against others to accumulate and settle in it due to lack of love and forgiveness. This hinders us much in our life and ministry.

Therefore, apostle Paul asks those whom he serves to pray for him, saying:

*'Pray for us; for we are confident that we have a good conscience, in all things desiring to live honourably' (Hebrews 13: 18).*

After hearing these divine words, we can perceive that we are in great need to acquire soft and tender hearts; and acquire good consciences, pure and void of any evil; so that, we may walk in the fear of God and truly walk in the Spirit.

Hence, we become prepared and qualified to acquire this great virtue of spiritual watchfulness which is of great importance in our time because of the evils that surround us, and which are extensively increasing in the end times.

### **3. Watching over the unity among the members of the one body:**

I spoke about the *unity* before, but I want to add some highlights here.

I believe that this area is one of the main fields of the work of the enemy in our days where he tries to destroy or weaken any unity so that it would lose its spiritual authority and its manifold privileges.

What probably, or even mostly, happens is that the enemy makes the senses, the eyes and the ears, see or hear deceitful things about others; while, we do not examine or check their accuracy; and so, we lose the purity of our conscience towards others.

Then, the barriers start to be formed and the true love that connects the hearts is lost.

What may remain would only be superficial outer relationships; while, the hearts and consciences are contaminated and closed.

Therefore, we need to be watchful regarding these evil economies and keep our hearts pure and our consciences clear towards others.

The dissociation among the members of the body certainly causes dissociation from the Head of the body, Christ Himself. As a result of this dissociation from the Head, Christ, we lose much of the blessings, the spiritual authority, and the continuous flow of the Spirit of God.

I want to conclude this point with the words of the Scriptures from Hebrews 10: 24, 25:

*'And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works (which means: instead of focusing on the negative things, criticising and judging), 25 not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching'* (Hebrews 10: 24, 25).

#### **4. The spiritual sensitivity in relation to the end times and the second coming of the Lord:**

Though I repeatedly spoke about this matter, today, I would like to put before you some highlights and questions:

Do you know that the Spirit of God wants to reveal to the children of God very special matters related to the end times? For He, as Jesus said, *'will teach you all things'* (John 14: 26).

If we do not learn from Him regarding the end times, we will remain constrained, paralysed, and imprisoned in weakness and fluctuation.

He cannot teach us unless we were living according to what the Scriptures say: *'walking continually in the Spirit'*; or, as apostle Paul said:

*'Not lagging in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord; 12 rejoicing in hope, patient in tribulation, continuing steadfastly in prayer'* (Romans 12: 11, 12).

Each phrase in these verses has special importance. We need to think about each of these phrases, reviewing ourselves accordingly; otherwise, we will remain as we are in a state of fluctuation and being lukewarm. The Spirit of God made me understand that this state is considered, according to the biblical description, a state of *'spiritual captivity or exile'*, like the exile in Babylon.

There is much which the Spirit of God wants to reveal in these days. Yet, unfortunately, these are matters that cannot be explained or taught but are received and inspired mystically and spiritually in the hearts; and then, are revealed to the minds of those who received them. Thus, they are given a grace that transforms their life and brings them out of the spiritual captivity.

Again, I repeat the phrases of Apostle Paul because of their great importance:

*'Not lagging in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord; 12 rejoicing in hope, patient in tribulation, continuing steadfastly in prayer'* (Romans 12: 11, 12).

We notice here that there are two sets of triads that are connected.

Let us perceive the mysteries of the Spirit deposited in the words of the Spirit of God:

**The first triad:**

- *Not lagging in diligence*

It means being in a state of spiritual diligence which is not interrupted, not being lazy but hard-working and striving.

- *Fervent in spirit*

We lose the *fervency of the spirit* because we are *lagging in diligence*. Diligence kindles our spirit, making us fervent in spirit.

- *Serving the Lord*

If the spirit is fervent, it lifts us up immediately to the presence of God; and so, we become worshipers, serving or worshipping the Lord.

**The second triad:**

- *Rejoicing in hope*

The spiritual worshipers of the Lord become filled with the power of resurrection which is the source of the constant Living Hope. It is a hope that is fixed on the Risen Christ, that draws from Him the power of resurrection, and that dwells by the heart and spirit in the heavenly places.

- *Patient in tribulation*

As long as there is living hope through the resurrection of Jesus, tribulation will not besiege or overwhelm the person; but, on the contrary, it will draw him closer to God. Because the person would have become soft and malleable because of the fervency of his spirit, it becomes easy to shape that person. Hence, tribulation becomes a tool for shaping and transformation into the image of Christ. Therefore, the apostle says in

another passage, *'but we also boast in our afflictions'* (Romans 5: 3 –LEB), or, *'but we also glory in tribulations'* –NKJV). He even takes pleasure in infirmities and tribulations so that the power of Christ may rest upon him (refer to 2 Corinthians 12: 9, 10).

- *Continuing steadfastly in prayer*

As a result of these triads that are connected and which lead the person towards God and eternal life more and more, prayer becomes a continual state in the heart and the whole being, before being uttered by the mouth and lips.

**Another point about the second coming and the spiritual sensitivity in relation to the end times is:**

***Not fearing death and the victory over death inside one's heart:***

Since death is our inevitable inheritance, it became implanted within the human soul and surrounded by much fear.

Also, the bible says: *'the last enemy that will be destroyed is death'* (1Corinthians 15: 26).

Yet, Jesus has overcome death. He confronted it in His flesh, defeated it, and was risen from death. Therefore, in the book of Acts, we read:

*'Whom God raised up, having loosed the pains of death, because it was not possible that He should be held by it'* (Acts 2: 24).

Have you noticed that death has pains?

Yes, they are deep and hidden or buried pains that may sometimes appear as illnesses, weaknesses, feebleness; or, as fear, dread, and sadness.

In these end times, the Spirit of God wants us to receive victory over death. This means that He may allow a battle with death that may take different forms, like: illnesses, sadness, and temptations; so that, He may open the insight of the person to reveal to him that it is the battle of the power of death. If the person perseveres in this battle, walking in the Spirit, as we explained, he would then be granted a portion, a share, of the power of resurrection and overcoming death.

This is an essential and inseparable part of the preparation related to the end times!

The Spirit of God groans, wanting us to wake up and be attentive; so that, He would teach us and give us from the inheritance of Christ who has overcome death.

There is a big difference between our generation that fears death so much and the previous generations of faith who did not fear death.

Why is this difference?

Why and how did the martyrs stand firm in the midst of suffering?

Why and how did evangelism extend in the early centuries?

All this was due to overcoming death!

Let us listen to the Scriptures:

*'And with great power the apostles gave witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And great grace was upon them all' (Acts 4: 33).*

Let us also read what apostle Paul wrote to the people of Corinth:

*'If Christ is not risen, then our preaching is empty and your faith is also empty' (1Corinthians 15: 14).*

*The martyrs have thus overcome!*

*The saints have thus strived and the grace was transfigured in them!*

*The servants of the Lord ha thus evangelised from generation to generation; and so, the doors of faith were opened for salvation in places where darkness and the devil dominated.*

*The evangelism of the resurrection transformed the situations and the individuals, and even the nations and the peoples.*

The question now is:

*Where do we stand from all this?*

This question requires absolute earnestness and continual pondering on in the spirit of prayer. If we pay attention to it for a time and then turn away, as usual, to being

preoccupied with other matters, how difficult our situation will be regarding the confrontations of the end times!

Let us remind ourselves again of the words of the Lord when speaking about the end times with His disciples, saying:

*'And what I say to you, I say to all: Watch!'* (Mark 13: 37).

## **5. The Responsibilities of the Kingdom of God**

I do not want to speak much about this point also because I highlighted this matter numerous before; but I only want to focus on few points.

All the things that we have received in relation to the life of the Spirit and the teaching of the gospel is a deposit which is committed and entrusted to us. We should live according to it; and then, invest it for the sake of the Kingdom of God and that is by passing it on to others as well.

Let us remind ourselves of the Scriptures and obey what it written:

*'And the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also'* (2Timothy 2: 2 -NKJV).

*'And what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men, who will be able to teach others also'* (2Timothy 2: 2 -ESV).

Also, in the book of Revelation we read the words of the Lord Jesus to the angel of the church of Sardis, saying:

*'Remember therefore how you have received and heard; hold fast and repent. Therefore if you will not watch, I will come upon you as a thief, and you will not know what hour I will come upon you'* (Revelation 3: 3).

This is on one hand.

On the other hand, our life should bear witness to this generation. Being called as consecrated communities for the Lord, we should be like a city that is set on a hill (Matthew 5: 14), attracting the people upwards, away from the deceits and evils of the world; and also strengthening the believers as the Scriptures say: *'Strengthen the weak*

*hands, and make firm the feeble knees. Say to those who are fearful-hearted, "Be strong, do not fear!"*" (Isaiah 35: 3, 4a).

Can't we see that this is a commandment!

And to whom was it written but to those who have been set apart for the Lord so that they would be a blessing and a help for their brethren who are around them!

**Finally:**

Let us remember that we will soon start the season of the Nativity fast, the fast of the season of incarnation.

These times of prayer and fasting are the most suitable times:

*To examine our hearts and consciences;*

*To review the message of the Lord to us and pray with it;*

*So that it would seep through and settle deep within us;*

*So that we may live by it; and then hand it down to others, according to the economy of the Spirit of God;*

*So that the Kingdom of God may extend and the name of the Lord may be glorified.*

+ Amen +