

Wherefore, Gird up Your Minds and be Sober

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In the first chapter of 1st Peter, verse 13, 1st Peter 1:13. Wherefore, gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

You who attend here regularly know that we have been going over Peter almost phrase by phrase, and we have just arrived here now at verse 13, with that word, wherefore. Gird up the loins of your mind, and be sober, and hope for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

Now, there isn't ever a word in the Scriptures that is simply padding. In human speech, that is, in ordinary workaday language, there are many words that are just padding. They are there because custom has ordained, they be there. But, when you come to the Word of God, you're safe in assuming that this divinely inspired book has no padding in it. If it should not be there, it's not there. It is there because it has a function to perform, even in translation itself.

So, when we come to the word, wherefore, here, we come to the word that means because of the foregoing. Wherefore, looks back at something that has been said and forward to something that is to be done. Always it's so.

And here again we see the biblical method. The Bible, like everything else God made, has method in it. And you may be sure that you will not go far astray if you look for that method. That is, if you don't pry for it, but notice it as you go along. And here is the biblical method: it is to lay down strong foundations of truth.

And these foundations of truth are declarations of God. Declarations mostly of what God is doing or has done or both. And then after this strong foundation of truth has been laid, then show that this truth constitutes a moral obligation.

I think I should emphasize this again, though I suppose this would constitute a certain repetition, that one of the difficulties in the modern church is that we are content to lay down foundations of truth and leave them there without giving them a moral application. This was never meant to be so.

The great American evangelist Charles Finney went so far as bluntly to teach that it was sinful to teach the Bible without moral application. That is, simply take a course in the Bible, find out what it teaches, with no thought that there is any obligation hanging there, that you are obliged to do anything as a result of what you learned. That we call Bible classes.

And I am convinced that a great many Bible classes are nothing more than a means whereby men are deepened and settled in their religious prejudices. But when we have moral application, then we are using the Bible way in our method. He says, now this is

what God did, and this is what God did, and this is what God did, therefore this is what you ought to do. And that is always the Bible way. And there is never any other way in the Scriptures. There isn't one single lonely book of the Bible that doesn't have exhortation that I can think of. There isn't one.

It simply says, now here, I want you to learn this, I want you to get this, pack this into your cranium, and then let's go. Always the Bible gives you the Truth and then says, now if this is true, then you ought to do something about it, and gives it moral application. That's what the word wherefore and therefore is doing in the Epistles.

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy, hath begotten us again unto a living hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, unto an inheritance unfading. And then he says, now because He has done that, therefore you ought to do this.

Now, he says here that we are to gird up, and we'll look at this little expression, gird up our loins. It's drawn from a figure, of course, it's an analogy, as there's much of that in the Bible, figures of speech and analogies and similes, and here's one, gird up the loins of your mind.

Now you and I would have to learn what that word gird up means, but they didn't have to learn it then. They saw it, it was right there, just as when the Bible says that the Lord will make our sins whiter than snow, you and I don't have to be taught, we look out the window almost any winter day and we know what whiter than snow would mean. There are places in Africa where the missionaries can't use the word whiter than snow because they have no way to tell, no way, the heathen have never seen snow and have no remote conception of what it's like.

So, when we come to the word, gird up, you and I will have to have that explained to us, because we do not now dress the way they did then. There were tunics in those old days, great Mother Hubbard affairs, and they were of course always in the way. Some of these tunics, they were simply like a blanket with a hole cut in the middle and then strung down over you.

And of course, you can imagine working around or walking or doing anything with that, it was always in the way, any direction you backed or went sideways or forward or raised your hand, you always had your tunic in the way.

Well, the way they handled that was this, if they were very poor, they simply took a chunk of leather, a piece of leather, dry leather, and they cut that out and tied it around their waist and pulled it into a loop and they were girded. Then their tunic was not in their way, then they could run or walk or travel or climb or work, and their girdle held the tunic out up so tight so that it didn't bother their feet nor their hands.

If they were rich, they had woven girdles of various kinds, just narrow belts, we use the word belt now, exactly the same thing, a man has a belt around his waist. Some people don't feel they're dressed unless they have a belt holding them, and that's quite scriptural and quite in order, and they had those belts in those days.

John the Baptist, you'll remember, came wearing camel's hair, that was the great big old tunic, but he had to get around so much that he had to gird it with a leather girdle, he was a poor man, he couldn't afford silk woven girdles or linen, so he had an ordinary piece of leather cut out narrow and put around his waist and tied in a hard knot, that was to give him foot freedom so he could walk.

Now that's the explanation of it, so when it says gird up the loins of your mind, the loins being your waist, gird up the loins of your mind, we now know what it means, though we'd never guess it in a thousand years if we didn't have scholars to explain it to us, because people nowadays in this country don't dress like that. But he says gird up the loins of your mind.

Now, as applied to the inner life, that is the mind, let's put it like this, that as natural men, as ordinary men born into the world and grow up in it, educated or uneducated, black or white, handsome or homely, rich or poor, just common, plain people, sons and daughters of Adam and Eve, we are by nature careless and disorganized in our inner life, and indifferent.

And we tend to accept the popular way of life, whatever it may be. The popular way of life is accepted by the average man, not because he thinks at all, but because he doesn't think. Even a sinner if he thinks rebels against the tyranny of the popular way.

Men like Emerson and Henry David Thoreau and Bruno and many such men, they rebelled against the day in which they lived. Occasionally you'll find a stern old New Englander yet who stands upon his own strong hard feet and refuses to bend. They have to bend to him, I admire that, because it's individuality, it's independence of spirit, but you don't find it much.

It takes a thinker to stand up and refuse to bow and bend. But the average man doesn't think, he only thinks, I wonder if there's enough time on that meter while I run into the store. Or he wonders, I wonder if Dresden will manage the Dodgers this year, or will Pee Wee Reese manage them? Or he thinks of something where it doesn't mean touch character, it doesn't touch a life at all, it doesn't touch him inside, it's only a surface thing. He never wades deep, he only plays on the shallow surface of his life. That's the sinner. He's all careless and disorganized and indifferent.

And if there's some field where he has to tighten up his belt, say the mathematician or the scientist or the industrialist or the businessman that has to do some careful thinking, it's never moral thinking, it's never thinking that touches his inner life or his conduct, it's only thinking that touches his business, his profession, his occupation. That is all, the mathematician or the physicist working over the atom bomb does some mighty fine thinking, but it doesn't necessarily mean it has anything to do with his moral life. His moral life is all ungirded and loose and ragged and at a loose end, even while he is carefully thinking in his own little prescribed field.

And so, with the author, the writer, the playwright, the scenarist, I don't know, I've forgotten how to pronounce that word that they used to call, they used to give to a man who wrote movie plays. But anyway, they think, but they don't think anything that touches their moral lives.

Now, the Bible says here that we are to gird up the loins of our mind. When we are converted, well, that's one of the first things we begin to do. We become sensitive to eternal values, and we want activities that will endure, and readiness for flight, because that's why they girded themselves in the Old Testament. Ordinarily, they just slopped around in their old tunic, but when they wanted to work or travel, they girded themselves.

And Paul, or Peter here, uses the phrase, Paul used it too, but Peter uses it meaning you Christians ought to get ready to do two things, labor and travel, one or both. So, he says, gird up the loins of your mind, activity, that is labor, and readiness for sudden departure, that is travel. Those are the two things that people do, travel or work, and they had to be girded for.

And then we begin to grieve for the way we're living, the lax, thoughtlessness of our lives, the sinfulness, not sinfulness in its overt way, maybe as Christians, but aimlessness and futility.

One of the hardest things that I've had to get over, or hardest things to understand, is to find so many Christians that are living aimless lives. They're not shooting at anything, so if they hit it, they won't know it anyhow. And their lives are all apart, they're not girded up. They have a great many talents,

I know a number of men; I'm thinking right now of a great man, I say he's a great man because he has great nobility of character, and one of the most tremendous thinking machines that I have ever seen in my life, or ever come in contact with. He makes me feel like a little boy when I'm around him, because of the utter size and range of his intellect.

And I have never known him to do or even utter anything that is not noble, and yet he has been, he's a minister, and he's been a total failure from the time I've known him, a total failure. He goes from one church to another, has a run-in there, and then goes to the next one, and starts something, and it peters out, and then goes somewhere else and tries that, and it peters out, and it's because he's not girded. He has tremendous mind, but he's not girded up. It's like a man with a beautiful Stradivarius violin that isn't tuned. He's not taking time to sit down and tune his violin, so he doesn't get any melody. People won't stay to listen.

And yet, he's a tremendous preacher with a great mind and a noble character, but he's no good, because he's not girded. Now that's one extravagant, extreme example, but I find many of God's people, I go back after twenty years, now twenty years, just nothing to me anymore, just tossed around like that. Used to be, you know, and I thought twenty years would be a lifetime, but twenty years, you know, you just toss it around. I go back after twenty years, and there he is, same old fella, little bit thicker, little bit balder, little bit heavier, but nowhere, he didn't get anywhere, because his mind was never girded.

Peter says that we are to gird up the loins of our mind, and that carelessness and aimlessness should all go out of a Christian. The average Christian won't think when it touches his moral life, and he won't think when it touches his spiritual life, and

meditates a little enough to solve his conscience, and then lives his aimless life. He is a puppet of circumstances, being tossed around like a cork on the wave, but not plowing through like a ship on her way to harbor.

Gird up the loins of your mind, he says, and stop this wastefulness, this lax thoughtlessness. I said not sinfulness, maybe, but only aimlessness, laxness, and futility. But I wonder how far you can go, and how long, in living an aimless life, and not border on sin pretty soon. I think it becomes sinful after a while. When we get so prodigal with our talents, and so careless with our time, and so aimless with our activities that we get nothing done, it becomes sinful after a while.

The Book of Proverbs tells us about the man that lies on his bed and turns on his bed like a door on its hinges, but the weeds grow up in his garden and choke and kill his crops. And when the fall comes, he has nothing, and then he has to beg. Now that's not overtly sinful, but I wonder if it isn't sinful after all. I wonder if it isn't sinful to be lazy. I think it is. It's sinful to be intellectually lazy. I believe it's sinful to be intellectually lazy.

A man that won't use his head doesn't deserve to keep it. And a great many people don't use their heads. And if a preacher gives them anything else except a few stories about a little girl that went to church and then came home and she said, Mama, if you get any deeper than that, they say he's too deep, he goes over the heads of the people. What are their heads there for?

Any preaching I do that they charge I go over their heads, I deny it. I may go through their heads if there's nothing there to stop it, but I don't go over their heads. God Almighty gave you a head there, brother, and you ought to use it. You ought to take it out, oil it up, and rub the rust off of it, and begin to use that head of yours. I believe we ought to be theologians.

I was reading this morning, just this morning, about old Nicholas Herman, that godly brother Lawrence, who recommended, he said, nourish your heart on high and noble thoughts of God. Nourish your heart on high and noble thoughts of God. You got to use your head a little bit to nourish your heart on noble thoughts of God. You can't live on yellow tracts and stories. You got to think some.

Well, gird up your mind, he says, gird up your mind, and we begin to pull our lives together then, and we eliminate carelessness. We eliminate carelessness in word and thought and deed and activity and interest.

I suppose that if I could know every one of you, could know every one of you, and I speak now of our own people, not any chance visitor who might be with us, but if I could know every one of you as God knows you, I would experience two tremendous shocks. One would be this; I'd find so many of you so much better than I thought you were. I believe that. I believe that.

Once in a while, somebody will tell me, you should have heard so-and-so pray, or you should know what so-and-so is doing, and I never knew they were like that. We walk around here, and I shake your hand, greet you, but you're better than I think you are. Some of you are. But I think, on the other hand, over against that to offset it, I would find

some far worse than I dream they are, careless, loose, lax in their thoughts and words and activities and interests, anything but spiritual. Between Sunday and Sunday, there isn't a thought of God. Between Sunday and Sunday, there isn't an hour spent in prayer. Between Sunday and Sunday, there aren't three verses of the Scriptures read. We can get away with that before pastors and boards, but we can't get away with that before God. That's loose living. That's laxness.

Now, the Scripture says in Luke 12:35, 36, let your loins be girded and your lights burning, and ye yourselves like unto men that wait for their Lord to come back from the wedding, so that when he cometh, they may get up immediately and open to him.

And now, in Isaiah 11 and Ephesians 6, we learn what we gird our loins with. It says, righteousness shall be the girdle of his loins, and faithfulness the girdle of his reins. And Paul says, let yourselves be girded round with truth.

So, we have righteousness, faithfulness, and truth as the beautiful threads of silk and linen and perhaps gold that we gird ourselves with. God doesn't mean us to be girded in our minds only with cheap leather. He wants us to be girded with the fine linen of righteousness and faithfulness and truth. Pull that tight around you so your mind isn't loose. Righteousness, that's right living. Faithfulness, that's loyalty to something.

When we invented the conception that the church was a mistake, as we did at the turn of the century in around 1910 up to 1920 in this country, when we invented the idea that the church is a mistake and that it's only tabernacles and preaching centers and come when you please and leave when you must and belong to nothing and look to nobody and submit to no one and no thing, we played straight into the hands of that master of all disorganization, the devil. Right into his hands we played. And in the name of freedom and liberty and the deeper life, we went a long way to destroy the church of Christ in America.

Remember my brethren, it's better to be faithful to something than have loyalty for something, for the good it does you. Sometimes denominations carry that too far. I never could be loyal to anything that didn't command my loyalty. Some denominational churches impose loyalty by decree. They'll never catch me in that net. Nobody's ever going to demand that I be loyal to something, but if they'll get good enough to command my loyalty and I don't give it to them, then I'm the sinner, not they. But when they try to impose loyalty on me, they're all wrong.

I will not honor a man that does not deserve honor, and I will not withhold honor to them from the man that does. I will not be loyal to a denomination that has cast the blood of Jesus out and denied the deep truths of the Scriptures. But if any church anywhere is spiritually worthy, then I want to be loyal to that church.

Now, faithfulness and truth. Then it says be sober. Now what does it mean by sober? We know a little more about that. Sobriety is when the calm reason is in control, the mind is balanced and cool, and the feelings are subject to reason. And for that reason, I do not believe much in any kind of spiritual experiences that dethrone reason. Men sometimes act unreasonable and then excuse it on the ground that they were moved by the Spirit. I doubt it. I doubt that the Holy Ghost ever dethrones reason in any man's mind.

I know in my own personal life, the highest, loftiest, and most God-beholding moments of my spiritual experience have been so calm that I could write about it, calm that I could tell about it, analyze it. The human reason must always be in control, blessed and warmed and refreshed and shining with the love of God, but always in control.

Now drunkenness is the opposite. When reason has been dethroned, you know what, you go down to the corner here and you'll find a fellow comes staggering out. Reason has been dethroned and the judgment has been impaired.

Who was it, Shakespeare or Robert Burns? It's said that Robert Burns called liquor, liquid damnation. And I think it was either Shakespeare or someone else who talked about a man opening his mouth and drinking down something that made his brains go out. He probably said it more gracefully than that, but that's the meaning of it.

Now, when the emotions get out of control, and that's what happens to a drunk man, his emotions get out of control. He's either so happy that he's a bore or else he's so sad that he cries in his beer, or he's so affectionate he wants to hug you and move over you, or he gets so generous he gives everything away he has, or he gets so mean you can't live with it. So, it works, and I think it usually works that way in everybody. They start out by getting happy.

The French used to say that conversation was impossible without wine, that if you didn't have wine to stimulate you, you couldn't talk. I've been around a while, I've been talking, and I never had a taste of wine as much as a one gram or seven meter or whatever it is in my life, and I've managed to talk, and I think you have, but that's what they say.

They say you have to have wine in order to have sense enough to talk, but I have noticed that when a man gets too much alcohol in him, he gets too talkative and gets too happy. He's ready to tell stories and laugh and carry on, and then after that begins to wear off, he gets affectionate. You see a drunken fellow throw his arms around you and cry on your shoulder and tell you how he loves you, and twenty-five minutes before he didn't even know your name.

And then they get sad also. Emotions go out of control, and every bartender knows, though I am not exactly a friend, a too close a friend to too many bartenders, but I read a little, and every bartender knows the fellow who comes in, gets enough to make him sad, and then sits and tells how his wife doesn't understand him. And then generosity; people get too generous, too happy, too sad, too affectionate, too mean. All because their emotions have gone out of control, that's what liquor does. A man is drunk when he's like that.

Now the same thing is true in the Christian life, my brother. I do not believe we ever ought to allow our emotions to get out of control. The spirit of the prophet is subject to the prophet, and when the Spirit of God moves into a man's heart, it'll make him generous, but it'll never make a fool out of him. It'll make him happy, but it'll never make him silly. It may make him sad with the woe and weight of the world's grief, but

it'll never turn him into a cynic and a sad head. And it'll make him affectionate, but it'll never make him do things that he's ashamed of afterwards.

Gird up the loins of your mind and be sober. And if ever there was an hour when we need sobriety, this is the hour. This is the hour, brother. We need to be sober men, but spiritual men.

Now tombstones are the soberest of all things. Their gravity is perfect, and they sit through the years, they're neither affected by cold nor rain nor snow nor heat, nor changes of administration or coronations of kings, nor losses or winnings of battles. They just sit there and look straight ahead, faithfully reminding the passing onlooker Mr. John M. Jones, 1861-1932 lies there. And that's a tombstone.

So some churches, in order to keep sober, they just stay dead. And of course, you don't want anything to do with a church like that, neither do I. I believe in spirituality of the loftiest kind.

I believe we ought to be filled with the Holy Spirit, and that we ought to walk in heavenly places in Christ Jesus. But I don't believe that the sentinel we call reason ever ought to be dethroned, nor that our emotions ever ought to get out of control.

Now it says here, see how it is worded, to the end for the grace. But the margin says perfectly in the King James Version and all other versions I'm acquainted with says something like perfectly, I don't know how to the end got in there, but the translators can't decide whether Peter said, hope perfectly to the end or be perfectly sober and hope to the end.

Well, hope perfectly, is not an idiom we're familiar with, contrary to the genius of the English tongue. Nobody ever heard anybody say, he hopes perfectly, but you heard him say he's perfectly sober. So I think what he meant here was to be perfectly sober and hope to the end.

Now, the sober Christian is one whose reason is sanctified, and he can't be swept off his feet by the latest vogue, nor by scintillating personalities. If Bob Hope fires Arthur Godfrey, he doesn't run and read about it, he doesn't care. And if Giuliano Sabrosa, he's not humble enough, he doesn't care. He's got his mind set on higher things, and he's not going to be swept off his feet by the temporary glory of some national clown.

You say, you're an old meanie, I've been called worse things than that by better people, so I don't care. And yet I wonder where I'd go to find better people. But you can say amen to that, it's not proper. But anyway, scintillating personalities never sweep a man away, nor fear, nor feeling, nor love of anything earthly. He's sailing for the stars.

Some people remind me of the young sailor that I heard about who was put up on, wherever they are, to steer the ship, and they said, keep that star a little off your port bow. And later on they came back and found him miles off course, and they said, why didn't you do what you're told? He said, I passed that star miles back. He lost his star, and a lot of the Lord's people are steering by a star, but they lose the star.

I look back and think, I can just look back now, over the past years, and remember all that came. There was the converted five-year-old swimmer, and he took the public eye for a while. And then here was the converted prize fighter, whose wife didn't know the difference between radium and radio, in a message she gave. And then here was the converted actress, and then the converted star from opera. And then there was the gospel in the stars, and then there was the gospel in the pyramids.

And the poor people with their loins ungirded and their minds all out of shape, they ran wild after these things. Cynical old Tozer sat back and looked the whole thing over and said, it's no good. And every one of those fellows have gone with the wind, every one of them, because they passed their star in the city.

By the grace of God, someone's kept the star ahead of us, and still there, and still steering by. We don't get as much popularity, nor as big a crowd, nor as much money, but it'll be in the long run something very precious to know, that when men's minds were all going to pieces, you kept yours girded by the Lord Jesus' help. That when others were getting drunk with money or depressions or booms or wars or something else, you're keeping sober, and hoping to the end.

Now I'll get that one word, hope, in five minutes and we're finished. And that word hope, it's a word we abuse terribly in our day, terribly, we use that word, hope. A man says, well, I'm hoping, there's been a Democratic landslide, and it's obvious that the Republicans are out and the word comes from headquarters, we're running behind but we're hoping, everybody else knows they're licked but them, or it turns around the other way and Eisenhower gets a landslide, and the Democratic headquarters says we're hoping. Somebody's obviously dying, and we say, I'm still hoping.

He said, I hope, that word hope is used loosely to mean I have a sort of a wish that it might be so, but in the Bible, hope never means wish. Tom, did you ever know that their word, wish, isn't used in the Bible ever in a good sense at all? If it's ever there? Nobody wishes in the Bible. You either don't want it or else you pray and get it, but you don't wish for it. Wishing is sloppy thinking.

He said, oh, I wish, no, no, brother, don't wish, hope, hope is not wish, hope is a confident expectation based upon sufficient reasons. For instance, it says that a man hopes for the morning, they that watch for the morning, Psalm 130, and the watchman hopes for the morning.

I used to work in a factory in Akron, Ohio, when I was a young fellow in my teens, worked twelve hours, all night, with a half hour out for lunch, standing on my feet. That's the reason I never got any bigger than I am. I wore myself out in my teens working in factories.

So, I'd stand there on my feet and watch the light come in the east in the morning, and know that after the light came, there'd only be a couple of hours or three hours until I could get out of that rat's nest and back onto the street and up to my home. And how I hoped for the morning. I was hopeful for the morning, but it wasn't a wish, it wasn't an uncertain possibility. Morning has broken every twelve hours, or twenty-four hours I

mean, every twenty-four hours since the Lord said, let there be light, morning has broken.

And so, when I hoped for the morning, I wasn't simply wishfully thinking, I had a confident ground of expectation. I knew the sun would come up, it never had failed. So a Christian has even a stronger ground for hope.

He tells us that Christ is coming, that there's to be a revelation of Him to the world, that He's coming for His bride. He's coming to raise the sleeping dead and change the living saints. That's not a dreamy wish, that's a confident expectation. We're looking forward to it because He said it and He can't lie.

So, a Christian isn't a dreamer wishing for something, he's a realist who knows what he has and what's coming, and so he's looking forward with expectation.

Now, I read this verse, and that's all for this morning. Listen to what the Holy Ghost says here in 1 Thessalonians: Therefore, let us not sleep as do others, but let us watch and be sober. For they that sleep, sleep in the night, and they that be drunken are drunken in the night. But let us, who are of the day, be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love and for a helmet, the hope of salvation. For God has not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.