

A Close Watch on Doctrine

by C.J. Mahaney

C.J. Mahaney emphasizes the critical importance of closely monitoring both personal life and doctrine for effective pastoral ministry.

Duration: 43:55

Scripture: Proverbs 4:23, John 15:5, Galatians 5:17, 1 Timothy 3:1-7, 1 Timothy 4:16, 2 Timothy 2:15, Titus 1:5-9, Hebrews 13:17, James 1:22, 1 Peter 5:2-3

Topics: "Doctrine", "Importance of Doctrine", "Pastoral Accountability"

Description

C.J. Mahaney emphasizes the critical importance of closely monitoring both our lives and doctrine as pastors, drawing from 1 Timothy 4:16. He highlights that personal piety and sound doctrine are inseparable, and neglecting either can have serious consequences for both the pastor and their congregation. Mahaney encourages pastors to seek accountability and feedback from trusted friends and family to help identify blind spots in their lives. He stresses that effective pastoral ministry is rooted in the grace of God and the centrality of the Gospel, reminding us that our character must be more persuasive than our speech. Ultimately, he calls for a persistent commitment to self-examination and doctrinal integrity to fulfill our pastoral responsibilities.

Transcript

Thank you very much. What a privilege, what an honor, what a joy to be here and to serve you men. Much more I'd like to say, but I'm on the clock this morning, and I understand I have 30 minutes, and I want to be very respectful in relation to the schedule, and I'm very grateful for the clock that is just below me, reminding me of the schedule.

So if you would please turn in your Bibles to 1 Timothy chapter 4, 1 Timothy chapter 4. We are going to confine our attention this morning to a single passage, 1 Timothy chapter 4 and verse 16. Scott has asked me to address you on this topic, and I think that request is really a reflection of not only his gift of leadership, but his care for all of us who are attending this conference. Pastoral priorities is our topic.

Watch your life and doctrine. Verse 16, keep a close watch, keep a close watch on yourself and on the teaching. Persist in this.

Persist in this, for by so doing you will save both yourself and your heroes. If my historical hero Charles Spurgeon were present, and let's be clear, if he were present he would be speaking right now, but if he

were present this morning and could address us just once at this conference, I think there is a strong possibility that he would address us this morning from this very passage. For in his classic Lectures to My Students, which is a compilation of his lectures to his much-loved Pastor's College students, this compilation of lectures begins with a lecture from this passage.

Open to the first lecture in that book, and you will encounter a lecture entitled, The Minister's Self-Watch, from 1 Timothy chapter 4 and verse 16. This message to his students really reveals his care for his students, and it confirms the importance of this passage for all pastors. Much more important than the compelling example of Charles Spurgeon is the canonized example of Paul and his care for his son in the faith, Timothy, as revealed in this particular passage.

Paul is familiar with Timothy's weaknesses and the challenging assignment that he has delegated to Timothy. Paul writes Timothy to equip him for his leadership responsibilities in Ephesus, and he cares for Timothy personally as his father in the faith. From the outset of this letter, Paul has been addressing important issues related to doctrine and leadership, but it appears a definite transition occurs beginning in chapter 4 and verse 6. Because beginning in verse 6, Paul addresses Timothy very personally.

A father. A father is addressing the spiritual son he deeply loves. And this morning, we have the privilege in effect of overhearing this divinely inspired fatherly communication.

And as we listen in on this divinely inspired fatherly communication, we discover that we are being addressed as well. We were in effect in Paul's peripheral vision as he penned this passage. And most important, we this morning are by the grace of God included in God's peripheral vision as he inspired and preserved this particular passage.

And this morning, God wants to have a very personal word with each of you. This morning, God wants to address each of you. I believe the Savior wants to interrupt our preoccupation with church planting, our possible preoccupation with the impending Sunday sermon, our possible preoccupation with ministry responsibilities we have left behind but will soon return and have to address.

This morning, I believe the Savior wants to care for you men and your wives and prepare you in effect for your return so that by the grace of God, you are discernibly different upon your return. Now in this one verse, this verse alone, we really have a succinct summation of our job description as pastors. Keep a close watch.

Keep a close watch on yourself and on the teaching. Persist in this. And not only do we have a summation of our job description as pastors, we also have a most sobering reminder, a sobering reminder of the eternal consequences of our pastoral ministry when we read at the end of this verse, for by so doing, you will save both yourself and your hearers.

Brothers, it would be appropriate for us to pause for just a moment and feel the weight of this verse upon our souls. Feel the weight of this verse upon our souls and the implications of this verse upon our souls. Here's what's at stake.

Here's what's at stake this morning for those who are called to pastor through a God-appointed means. Here's what's at stake. Here's what's at stake.

The preservation of yourself and your congregation is at stake in your obedience by the grace of God to this single verse. That's what's at stake this morning. So let's feel the weight afresh of what's at stake and

the eternal implications revealed in this passage.

Faithful pastoral ministry couldn't be more important, and the implications couldn't be more serious. The implications are eternal. So three points I want to bring to your attention.

Hopefully in this section we will get to the first point. I am told that then there is going to be a time of discussion and application for which Scott and the leadership are to be commended for creating that context. Then I have the privilege to return to you for ten more minutes, and hopefully then I can finish this sermon.

Three points, all I trust, derived from the text and obvious to you in the text. Point one, watch your life. Watch your life.

Keep a close watch on yourself and on the teaching. Now, really, as an expression of God's wisdom and for our good, we are commanded to keep a close watch on our life and doctrine. So we must give full attention to both.

They are inseparably related, but it is appropriate for us to distinguish between them. One cannot watch one's life accurately or effectively apart from sound doctrine, and one should not study doctrine apart from applying doctrine to one's life. So we must give full attention to both.

We must give equal attention to both. We must not watch our life to the neglect of sound doctrine, and we must not exclusively concentrate on the study of doctrine to the neglect of watching our heart and life, and the application of doctrine to our heart and life. Both.

Both are to be daily priorities. Both are to be daily passions. And both must be watched closely.

Not casually. Not occasionally. Closely.

And persistently. Both. But in my personal experience, here's what I find.

I find the easier command to neglect is the command to watch my life closely. I find that command, the command in this passage, that is easier to neglect. I find it much easier to study doctrine than to study my heart.

I find reading and studying much more appealing than examining the motives of my heart. I find it much easier to apply myself to a specific text in preparation for a sermon than I do applying that text specifically to my heart and life. Perhaps you can relate.

Perhaps you do as well. I think these are common temptations for pastors. We devote careful attention to sermon preparation, but little attention to heart evaluation.

We watch over the souls who are trusted to our care, but we neglect our own soul. We are all tempted to devote more time and energy to public ministry than we are personal piety. And aware of this tendency and temptation, God has wisely given us this command as pastors.

Keep a close watch on yourself. Now, my friends, here is the sobering reality. Skillfulness in public ministry, even fruitfulness in public ministry, skillfulness in public ministry and fruitfulness in public ministry, are no substitute for a deficiency in personal piety.

There is no substitute for personal piety. According to Scripture, clearly according to Scripture, it is a man's godly character that is the fundamental qualification for pastoral ministry. I mean, just scan the passages that outline the qualification for pastoral ministry, 1 Timothy 3 and Titus, and what you will find in each passage is a profile primarily of godly character.

Yes, please don't misunderstand. You must be able to teach. You must be able to teach in order to effectively pastor.

And you must accurately and skillfully handle the word of truth. Pastoral ministry involves doctrinal discernment and doctrinal precision. But the foundational assumption of Scripture is that the pastor provides the congregation with a godly example, not a perfect example, not a flawless example, but a godly example, an authentic example of godly character for the people he serves.

In that sermon I mentioned by Spurgeon, a minister self-watched, he makes the following statement to his students. Our churches, or our character, he said, our character must be more persuasive than our speech. Our character must be more persuasive than our speech.

Brothers, listen, the requirements of godly character are not only the means of qualification for pastoral ministry, they also form the means of continuing evaluation for pastoral ministry. So the presence or the absence of these godly requirements in Scripture reveal whether we are closely and carefully watching our heart and life. Brothers, listen, if we neglect this command to watch our life closely and persist in this, there are consequences and they couldn't be more serious.

More serious in nature or their effect on our families and the church. I've observed the effect on a pastor, family, pastoral team in a church, when this command has been neglected. I stand before you now as an older man with some 34 years of pastoral ministry and experience.

I have, over the past 34 years, I've observed men, men who began in ministry sincerely and passionately, and yet, this day, they no longer serve in pastoral ministry. And they no longer serve in pastoral ministry because this command. That's why they neglected this command.

And listen, here's my concern for all of us this morning. I don't want you to be numbered among them. I don't want anyone here to be numbered among those men.

So, what I'd like to briefly do this morning is review the content of this passage with you and review what I've learned from this passage. Over the past 34 years, I've had the privilege to serve in pastoral ministry. What have I learned from this passage? And what have I learned from my experience of applying this to my life and observing when someone has not applied this to their lives? Here, number one, I've observed the limitations of sound doctrine.

The limitations of sound doctrine. Again, please don't misunderstand. I love sound doctrine.

I'm passionate about sound doctrine. Sound doctrine is not optional. Sound doctrine is essential.

Knowledge of Scripture is essential and not optional. But knowledge of Scripture, while essential, is not sufficient. Because knowledge of Scripture alone, apart from grace-motivated obedience to Scripture, is insufficient and, according to James, potentially deceptive.

Hearers only, not doers, deceiving themselves. So, this conference, what a gift this conference is to us all. It provides us with this context to make, by the grace of God, some serious progress in personal godliness and ministry effectiveness.

But, let's be clear, this conference can also be a means of progressive self-deception. If we think, if we assume that merely being present at this conference and listening to messages at this conference is sufficient and satisfies God, then we have already begun a process of deception in our souls. If we assume that merely being present, listening, and being moved subjectively is sufficient and secures our future growth in godliness, then we are already experiencing some degree of deception upon our souls.

Listen, it is essential to have a high view of Scripture. It is essential to have a high view of expository preaching. But, we must also have a high view of the importance of specific application of truth to our lives.

Truth must be proclaimed and applied, heard and obeyed, preached and practiced. And, we must recognize that we haven't truly heard or learned until we have practiced. John Owen wisely reminds us why we learn and how we learn when he wrote the following, As we learn all to practice, so we learn much by practice.

Exactly right. We learn all to practice. And, we learn much by practice.

In other words, until you practice truth, you haven't really learned the truth. And, until you practice the truth, you won't experience the transforming effect of truth. And, as pastors, it is possible for us to just assume we're growing because so much of our time is taken up with and devoted to reading Scripture and studying Scripture and teaching Scripture.

So, I can assume that because I read as much as I do and study as much as I do and preach as often as I do, that I must be growing. But, here's what I've discovered. No, it's possible for me to study and to teach and to counsel while neglecting to apply the truth of God's Word to my own souls.

And, as pastors, actually, our lives can be filled with reading and studying and sermon preparation and sermon proclamation and counseling, leaving actually little time to practice truth. So, watching our life closely involves recognizing the limitations of sound doctrine and making the personal practice of truth a priority. Number two, the war within never ends.

No, it does not. The war within never ends. Because within each of us is, well, within each of us this morning is a deadly companion that is actively opposed to God and to our pursuit of godliness.

Paul vividly describes the reality of this opposition for us in Galatians 5.17 when he writes, For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh. For these are opposed to each other to keep you from doing the things you want to do. Let's be clear.

This isn't a pre-conversion description of the non-Christian. This is clearly a post-conversion description of the war within the regenerated heart and life. Indwelling sin or remaining sin, brothers, is present.

It's present. It's active in each of us. It is hostile to the grace of God and the pursuit of godliness.

Listen, we are commanded to watch our lives closely because of this enemy within. There is no pastoral privilege in relation to sin. There's no suspension of sin or exemption from sin because I'm in pastoral

ministry.

No. Actually, there is only a pastoral responsibility to consistently oppose and weaken sin. And there's only more consequences if we don't, given our role and responsibility.

Read James 3.1 to be freshly sobered. So, watching our hearts and lives is an invaluable means of protecting our hearts from the subtle, constant, pervasive, deceptive opposition of sin. Listen, if you don't watch, you will weaken.

If you don't do heart work, you will weaken. And heart work is hard work. Heart work's hard work.

Heart work's hard work. Heart work's humbling work. And heart work is necessary work because sin is always at work.

So, are you watching? Are you watching closely? Are you watching daily? Are you watching persistently? Because if you don't watch, you'll eventually weaken. Finally, we can't effectively watch ourselves by ourselves. You can't effectively watch yourself by yourself.

I mean, if we understand even to a small degree the limitations of sound doctrine, the active presence of remaining sin, we should be sufficiently and decisively convinced that we need others because we can't effectively watch our life by ourselves. We need others. In His wisdom, God has designed it so.

We need the discerning eyes of our wives and friends upon our hearts and lives in order to fulfill this command to watch our life closely. Here's what I'm convinced. I'm convinced that left to myself, seeking to grow by myself, there will be a deficient discernment of my sin within and therefore limited growth in godliness in my life.

Actually, left to myself, I will resemble the man being observed and described in the following story. As I sat with my family at a local breakfast establishment, I noticed a finely dressed man at an adjacent table. His Armani suit and stiffly pressed shirt coordinated perfectly with a power tie.

His wingtip shoes sparkled from a recent shine. Every hair was in place, including his perfectly groomed mustache. The man sat alone, eating a bagel as he prepared for a meeting.

As he reviewed the papers before him, he appeared nervous, glancing frequently at his Rolex watch. It was obvious he had an important meeting ahead. The man stood up, and I watched as he straightened his tie and prepared to leave.

Immediately, I noticed a blob of cream cheese attached to his finely groomed mustache. He was about to go into the world, dressed in his finest, with cream cheese on his face. I thought of the business meeting he was about to attend.

Who would tell him? Should I? What if no one did? Here's the harsh reality, brothers. Every one of us has cream cheese on our face. Cream cheese we don't discern.

Cream cheese we need the help of others to discern. I've got decades of cream cheese moments in my life. I could entertain you for hours.

Hopefully encourage you and give you hope as well. Certain ones stand out vividly. Let me just draw from one.

It was one of our small group meetings among the pastoral team for the purpose of accountability and applying this passage, Watch Your Life, to our lives. Two patterns of sin I wanted to inform the other men that I had the privilege to serve with who are my friends and care for my soul. Thought I fully grasped the first one, so that was merely introductory.

Wanted to transition to the second sin to draw them in and to invite their counsel. Communicated the first one, communicated my perception of it, communicated the occasion of it, communicated what I'd learned from it, communicated the root issue as revealed in Scripture. Thought I had effectively and thoroughly and completely communicated, was in the midst of transitioning to acknowledging another sin where I desired their counsel when one of them interrupted me and began to ask questions about what I had just communicated and described.

I politely listened initially. That was followed by another question. And then others had questions.

And now my politeness was transitioning into irritation. Because I had flawlessly described it. It doesn't need to be reviewed.

I left no questions unanswered. Here's how arrogant I am. I mean, I'm feigning humility.

Yes, and what would your question be? When inside I'm irritated and angry. I'm thinking, how could you not have gotten that? I mean, that was a clinic on humility. Right there, right before your eyes.

And you appeared to have missed it. Well, eventually in this conversation, I began to lecture them. I began to give them a teaching.

The guy who initially was confessing his sin began to teach. Now, fortunately, those I serve with, they aren't afraid of me. They don't have fear of seizure.

So they weren't going to be dismissed. I wasn't going to be able to employ evasive action. Now, you know what? You know what? I know you thought you got it all.

You didn't. There's a rather sizable blob right here. And we want to help you.

As I began to realize through their correction my arrogance and my assumption. As I asked God's forgiveness and eventually their forgiveness. Do you know what? As they described what they observed, God gave me the gift of sight.

You know, conviction is a gift. I couldn't have seen on my own. And conviction isn't an expression of God's frustration with me.

It's an expression of His mercy toward me. But as I sat there, I also realized this didn't come to me while praying alone this morning. By divine design, this came to me with my friends.

I need them. I need their eyes on my soul. Because here's what I wrongly assume.

I assume that because I can see their sins, I got mine covered as well. Because I can see your sins so clearly, I then assume, oh, I see mine. Oh, no, not true.

No, I don't have the same discernment about my sins as I do about your sins. I need you to help me with my sins in order to perceive my sins. Listen to this just outstanding quote reinforcing this point from Paul

Tripp's excellent book, Instruments in the Redeemer's Hands.

He writes the following, Since each of us still has remaining sin within us, listen to this, we will have pockets of spiritual blindness. We all do, brothers. Everyone present here has a pocket of spiritual blindness.

Because of sin. Because sin deceives. Sin blinds.

And the first person sin blinds is what? God. So there's pockets of spiritual blindness. Our most important vision system is not our physical eyes.

Because you can be physically blind and live quite well, but when we are spiritually blind, we cannot live as God intended. Physically blind people are always aware of their deficit and spend much of their lives learning to live with its limitations. Listen, but the Bible says that we can be spiritually blind and yet think that we see quite well.

I'm all too familiar with that arrogant attitude. We even get offended when people act as if they see us better than we see ourselves. Yes, we do.

Yes, I did. On that day, I did. I was offended.

I'm offended that you guys think you see my sin clearer than I do. But they did. Much clearer.

The reality of spiritual blindness, Tripp writes, has important implications for the Christian community. And he's writing in relation to the Hebrews passage, which informs us about the deceitfulness of sin and the necessity of guarding one another on a daily basis. And he says the Hebrews passage clearly teaches, listen, that personal insight is the product of community.

Yes, it is. Personal insight. Personal insight is the product of community.

I need you in order to really see and know myself. Otherwise, I will listen to my own arguments, believe my own lies, and buy into my own delusions. And then he writes, this is brilliant, My self-perception is as accurate as a carnival mirror.

And if I'm going to see myself clearly, I need you to hold the mirror of God's word in front of me. Because we all, in effect, have cream cheese somewhere on our face. And we can't see it, but your friends do see it.

So let me conclude with this. Here's what we need to do. We need to ask them.

We need to ask, beginning with our wife and those we serve with on the pastoral team or trusted friends in the congregation, we need to ask them to describe what they see. Because I have pockets of spiritual blindness. And my self-perception is as accurate as a carnival mirror.

So, it would be unwise and arrogant for me to limit the evaluation of myself to myself. I must humbly and, I would add, aggressively pursue others. Wife, pastoral team, trusted friends.

Because, here's what you can assume. Walk away assuming this. You can assume your friends have observations.

You can safely assume this. Safely assume they have observations. And you know what else you can safely assume? You can safely assume they are reluctant to share those observations with you.

Normally, if you want these observations, you must ask for these observations and you must create an unhurried period of time in order to draw them out and receive these observations. And it also helps at the outset to inform them. If I didn't become angry, how would you answer the following questions? And listen, here's what I've learned about my heart.

If I have any reluctance to aggressively pursue these observations, it reveals simply the presence of pride in my heart and life. And I, like you, want to put that to death. And here's a way to put it to death.

So, let me recommend that you ask your wife and those you serve with for their observations and evaluation. Ask them. Ask them, where is their cream cheese on my face? Give your wife this gift.

When you return home, give your wife this gift. Create an unhurried context where you can ask her, how can I effectively serve and lead you? One category, first category, most important category, second, and the children. I got to apply this to my life just yesterday morning.

I'm sitting in our bedroom and having a final conversation with my wife, who I have the privilege to come here and be with you. And in the course of the conversation, Carolyn very graciously and humbly began to share an observation, a concern. Now, I know you'd like to know the specifics and the details, and if there were time, I would be glad to give them to you.

See me privately, I'd be glad to share them with you. But in essence, she was identifying selfishness in my life. And I asked her a few questions.

Initially, I wasn't happy about the correction. I said, this isn't the kind of support your man needs. Not at this time.

Your man's going to serve. Your man's going to serve other pastors. Well, the divine perspective would be, that's exactly why this man needs this correction.

Because if he's going to serve effectively, he's going to have to do so humbly. So, her correction was a gift from God. As I drew her out and asked her questions, I saw, I had that gift of sight thing.

Initially, I wasn't sure her observation was accurate. Eventually, I saw, all she was doing was saying, Dear, there's some cream cheese, and I don't want you to go to the Dwell Conference with it on your face. Allow me to address it.

So, you don't take it there? I would not appreciate it if you didn't bring it back either. So, here are some questions I want you to ask. Beginning with your wife and those you serve with.

Do I specifically and consistently confess my sin? Follow up with this question. Do I specifically and consistently confess specific instances of sin? I'm talking about just in general. It's not sufficient to say, I am the worst sinner I know.

Good. That's great. How is that evident to you? I want specific time and place.

I've got no problem this morning acknowledging total depravity. That's not difficult. You know what's difficult? It's being very specific with you about personal depravity.

Do those you serve with know your present areas of temptation and patterns of sin? Not just sin, present areas of temptation. Is there any secret sin no one else knows about? Finally, are you easy to correct? Or does somebody need to read Ed Welsh's book, when people are big and God is small, before they correct you? Are you easy to correct? Listen, are you honestly informing those you serve about your temptations and sins? Or are you presenting those people with a very carefully edited, flattering version of yourself? You are. Father, I thank you for these men.

I thank you for their humility. I thank you most of all for your son and his sacrifice on the cross for our countless sins. And I thank you for your word in this passage in particular and its relevance to all present.

I pray now that there would be grace present to apply this to our lives so that we might experience the grace present in this passage and the transforming effect of this truth on our lives as we apply it to our lives. All by your grace. All because of the cross.

All for your glory. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Thanks, CJ. We're going to transition to our time. I commend you for your humility that was evident in the discussion and the application of that passage to your life in those moments.

And I do want to encourage you that your heart should be filled with hope. We do this in the shadow of the cross. Applying the Doctrine of Sins to our lives is not an end.

It's a means. Ultimately, it's all about applying the Gospel to our lives. So I commend you for your immediate responsiveness.

Let me just describe for you briefly before I make mention of the final two points in this message the practice that we have created in Covenant Life Church and Sovereign Grace in order to watch our lives closely. In order to watch over one another closely. And before I do, let me just say, again, I'm looking back on 30 years of experience in this.

The fruit from these practices and these meetings in my life has been immeasurable. Immeasurable. Now, please don't misunderstand.

I'm going to describe our practices. I'm not recommending a strict emulation of our structure and practice. What I do hope is that this provokes the creation of some structure and practice for the application of this command in your life and in your church.

You're not required this morning to imitate our practice. But you do need to have some practice. If you don't create some practice, you will conveniently neglect this command.

And you will neglect this command in particular as you return to the revolving door of life and ministry. So, here is our practice, just for your consideration and provocation. It's very simple.

Over the past three decades, the pastoral team and their wives have always been in a small group together for the purpose of watching our lives closely. If I was to give you a broader understanding of the job description of a pastor, I would say watch really forms a primary word or primary category of responsibility. We're to watch over our heart with all diligence in Proverbs chapter 4. We are to watch our life in doctrine, 1 Timothy chapter 4. In Acts 20, Paul exhorts the elders to watch over each other.

And then in Hebrews 13, we are to watch over the souls of those entrusted to our care. So, watching is what pastoring is all about. So, we have created these groups as a means of applying this passage, watch our life in doctrine, watch over one another, to our lives.

And that's the purpose of these meetings. We meet monthly as couples. So, we meet monthly as couples.

And then there's a separate meeting, monthly as men. And a separate meeting, monthly as wives. So, there are three meetings each month.

The men's meeting I'm a part of took place last week, so did our care group. And if you were present in the men's meeting or in the care group, what you would have immediately discerned is that the purpose of this meeting is applying the gospel to our lives. The purpose of this meeting is growth in godliness.

The purpose of this meeting is to watch over our life closely. The purpose of this meeting is distinctly not strategic decisions for the church or the future of the church or the cultivation of ministry skills in order to serve the church. And as I've often said in the context of that small group, there is no more effective way we could serve the church we love the most than by what we are doing this evening.

That's attending to our souls so that we might, by the grace of God, provide them with a faithful example. So, each month, there's a couples meeting. That is an entire evening for us.

We devote a meal together and then usually, minimally, it's a two to three hour period. Men's meeting once a month, the wives meet as well. And each year, for three days, that small group pulls away for a three-day couples retreat.

So, ours is in October. So, this October, we will pull away three days, all the couples who make up the care group, so that we can give undivided, unhurried attention to each other and to each other's life in the context of a retreat that is geographically separated from where we live. The purpose of the meeting is care.

The purpose of the meeting is to care for one another. The purpose of the meeting is to grow by the grace of God in godliness, to grow in our marriages, to grow as parents. Preeminently, the purpose of the meeting is to apply the glorious gospel to our lives.

So, again, it's not a meeting that... We're just not talking about decisions related to the church. No, we're talking about our lives. And questions are being asked throughout the time so that we might evaluate, so that we might communicate, and so that we might receive the care and counsel of those we have the privilege to serve with.

And if you meet a Sovereign Grace pastor, I think, I'm certain, he will have his own story to tell, as will his wife, of the dramatic difference this has made in their personal life, their marriage, their parenting, and their pastoral ministry. I mean, the text itself really tells us clearly how we are to closely watch our lives. We're to do this persistently.

Persist. Persist in this. So it really is the persistent, not the occasional watching of our life, that makes all the difference.

And this structure ensures, by the grace of God, that we will persistently and closely watch our lives. Secondly, watch your doctrine. Watch your doctrine.

I'm not going to elaborate on this point at length because, as I understand it, and look through the notes we've been provided, so much of the conference is about this point, so you are going to be well served on this point. But I do want to just at least add my voice in accenting one aspect of Paul's admonition to watch our doctrine. And that would be as follows.

In watching our doctrine, we must never lose sight of what is central to our doctrine, the Gospel. Watching your doctrine must involve never losing sight of Calvary. Never losing sight of Calvary.

In his excellent book, *A Quest for Godliness*, J. I. Packer serves us well by presenting us with this distinctive of a Puritan pastor. He writes, The preacher's commission is to declare the whole counsel of God, but the cross is the center of that counsel. And the Puritans knew that the traveler through the Bible landscape misses his way as soon as he loses sight of the hill called Calvary.

So we have missed our way in our travel through the Bible landscape, in our preaching, if we lose sight in our study and preaching and counseling of the hill called Calvary. So, this Sunday, regardless of the text and topic, there must be in your sermon some sighting of Calvary in your sermon. When you have the privilege to counsel someone, though you are addressing sin in their lives, and kindly and humbly applying the doctrine of sin, in the midst of that counseling there must be some sighting of the hill called Calvary.

And your people should experience this amazing sight, this comforting sight, each and every time they have the privilege to hear you preach. Your people should come on Sunday anticipating this sighting in every sermon. They should anticipate this, especially if it's not immediately obvious in the text.

And I would also add, the non-Christian who is in attendance should be given this sighting at some point in every sermon. Watch your doctrine by never losing sight of that which is central, the cross. Finally, watch the Savior work.

Watch. Watch the Savior work. Just glance again at the end of verse 16.

A promise from God appears for leaders in an unexpected place and in a most unusual form. Persist in this, for by so doing you will save both yourselves and your hearers. Please don't misunderstand.

Paul isn't teaching self-atonement. We do not save ourselves. He isn't arguing for self-atonement.

But instead, he is accenting human agency in the experience of salvation. In this, we really encounter the importance of godly leadership and the effect of godly leadership. Calvin comments on this passage that although salvation is God's gift alone, yet human ministry is needed, as is here implied.

So, in this passage, we are reminded of the vital importance of human ministry and godly leadership as a means of grace. And in this passage, look at these words. We are assured that if we watch our life and doctrine closely and persist and persevere in these practices, we can expect God to preserve us and those we serve for that final day.

Here, in this passage, we find a promise of effective ministry in a most unexpected place. And, most importantly, what stands behind this profound promise? Now, what stands behind this profound promise? And the reason Paul can make this promise is the one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, that he has already referred to in chapter 2 and verse 5. The mediator stands behind this promise. What stands behind any effective pastoral ministry is the mediator Christ Jesus.

What stands behind our watching our life and doctrine, what empowers our watching our life and doctrine, what guarantees the effectiveness of watching our life and doctrine is the Savior. Listen, brothers and sisters, if it were not for the work of the Savior, the burden of this verse would be simply too much to bear. Because of the Savior, we have hope this morning for our pastoral ministry and in our pastoral ministry.

We have hope that our lives, by the grace of God, will, in an ever-increasing way, faithfully reflect the transforming effect of the gospel. We have hope that our preaching will faithfully proclaim our Savior. We have hope that our ministries will contribute to the preservation of ourselves and the congregation we serve.

So, as we watch our lives and as we watch our doctrine, we can be confident that we will also watch the Savior work.

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