

Sermon outline and notes © Dr. Stephen Felker, Pastor
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1 Corinthians 16:13-14 “Principles for Powerful Living”

Intro. There is a war going on! I’m not talking about one in the Middle East. I’m talking about a spiritual war, right here in America, and elsewhere. Many of the participants in this war are unseen, but we are able to see the results. Families are the foundation of church and society, and yet many are being broken up with devastating results. Many are caught in the bondage of sin, and they can’t break free. Whole communities have become corrupt and gang infested. Many children can quote the filthy words of a rap song but can’t quote hardly anything Jesus ever said. Many souls are being led away to eternal destruction. Your children, grandchildren, or other loved ones could become the next to fall victim in this war.

What I’m talking about today is the war between the kingdom of darkness and the kingdom of God. At times it sure looks like Satan is winning. The kingdom of darkness uses falsehood and lies. It seeks to suppress the truth of the Lord Jesus, which will set people free. Satan substitutes hatred and immorality for true love. It appeals to the lusts of our lower nature. And the battle rages on.

Knowing the spiritual war that is going on, Paul concludes his letter to the Corinthians by giving a few, brief commands, like a commanding general. In fact, the language of v.13 is fitting for the military. That is because the Christian life is sometimes compared to warfare (e.g. Eph. 6:10-18). It’s not that we are to battle with guns and bombs. Rather, we are involved in *spiritual* warfare. And whether we win or lose each battle will largely be determined by how well you obey these commands of my text.

Recently I saw a Facebook post that makes the point that the church is to engage in spiritual warfare. Notice what it says: What kind of church do you go to? A battle ship or a cruise ship? Are we entertaining the saints or are we equipping and calling the saints to battle?

Soon we will conclude this service and return to our homes, and in many cases, return to work. And this week we begin VBS, a time when we will seek to rescue boys and girls from the kingdom of darkness. So I want to rally the troops as we face a new week of spiritual battles. I want to give you God’s plan for victory. I hope you will give heed to the 5 commands found in our text. The first command that we are to obey is this:

I. BE WATCHFUL

This is a military metaphor. One strategy in winning a military battle is to catch the enemy by surprise. So being watchful is an important defensive strategy, for what would become of an army if the guards go to sleep?

Back in the days of the Civil War, some soldiers were assigned to picket duty hundreds of yards outside the camp. They were to stay awake and watch for any threat of danger, and sound the alarm if an enemy approaches. It could be dangerous duty, for at times they were quietly attacked by the enemy and overpowered.

And so Paul calls upon us to be watchful for spiritual danger. The word translated “watch” (*gregoreo*) means “to watch, be alert, be vigilant.” We are to be looking for danger and the attacks of the enemy. It is the opposite of being spiritually indifferent, careless, asleep, or easily deceived.

So how are we to watch for spiritual dangers? Well note with me the fact that we should:

A. Watch for Danger Prayerfully – We are to think less of literally watching with our eyes, and more about watching with spiritual perception. One way we do that is with prayer. In Mk. 14:38, Jesus said that we should watch and pray. The two go together. Also, in Eph. 6:18, in a context of discussing spiritual warfare, Paul says, “praying always with all prayer ..., being watchful to this end with all perseverance....” Also, Col. 4:2 says, “Continue in prayer, and watch in the same with thanksgiving.” This is an interesting paradox. We generally pray with our eyes closed, and yet prayer is one of the best ways to watch. Why? It is because in prayer we ask for a heightened spiritual awareness. For example, Jesus taught us to pray, “And lead us not into temptation....” So you can’t be watchful and spiritually alert apart from a regular prayer life.

You see, there are many spiritual enemies. They are many ways you can come under attack, and so we must watch, and pray that God will help us be aware of the attacks.

At one time our Associational prayer ministry was called, “The Gate Keepers.” How appropriate! We are to watch and pray, and we will keep our spiritual enemies from storming our gates.

Now let’s consider the ways that we may come under attack. So:

B. Know the Dangers to Watch For - The specific object of this watchfulness is not declared. But in this context it must refer to being watchful of our spiritual enemies. The enemies of our faith are always at hand, and we are never safe from attack. In general, it refers to any enemy of our faith and progress in the gospel. But from Scripture we can glean some specific objects of our watchfulness. Our greatest enemy is:

1. Satan –1 Peter 5:8 says, “Be sober, be vigilant [or watchful: *gregoreuo*]; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour.” Lions quietly sneak up on their prey and then spring forth to attack. If I were walking through a jungle, I am aware of the fact that I could come under attack by a lion or a deadly snake. So I would be very watchful for the dangers! Even so, this world is like a jungle, and Satan is always on the prowl, looking for opportunities to attack us or our children. It is also helpful to be aware of his strategies. He often works through these three avenues: “the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life” (1 Jn. 2:16). And it’s sad to say that Satan has access to most every home in America through television, the Internet and other media. We need to watch out regarding what we allow to be seen and heard in our homes.

But we have a problem here. Many people do not even believe that Satan exists! Christian pollster George Barna says that even many born-again Christians don’t believe that Satan is real [Source: *SBC Life*, Jan. ‘04]. Now, how are you going to fight a war when you don’t even believe there’s an enemy?

Now there are 3 other specific means of attack that Satan uses, and we are to be on the lookout for these attacks:

2. Temptation - In Mk. 14:38 Jesus warned Peter to “watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation....” That was the night that Peter denied Jesus three times. Jesus knew that Peter would be severely tempted that night, and so He said, “Watch and pray.” We must always be spiritually alert and be able to recognize temptation when it comes. And when we see temptation, we should flee from it, having no confidence in the flesh. But if we *can’t* avoid it or flee from it, then we should pray for strength to resist it.

3. Trials – We usually watch out for troubles and trials and try to avoid them. When

you are driving you had better keep your eyes on the road and constantly watch out for other drivers. But sometimes trials and difficulties are unavoidable. You or someone you know has lost a job, or become seriously ill, or had an accident. When trials and troubles come our way, we also need to watch out for the spiritual dangers they bring. Trials can turn into temptations to sin. When troubles and trials come to some people, they are shaken in their faith in the goodness of God and sometimes turn against the Lord. They quit coming to church or quit serving God. Watch out for how Satan will use trials to harm you spiritually.

4. False Teaching - In 2 Pet. 2:1 Peter warned of “false teachers among you, who secretly shall bring in destructive heresies...” Therefore, we must watch. Some of the Corinthians had fallen into doctrinal error, as chapter 15 indicates. They had allowed their previous pagan ideas and habits to come back into their lives and destroy their faithfulness to the Lord and their fellowship with each other. They were like some of the Ephesians who were being “carried about by every wind of doctrine” (Eph. 4:14). Only through diligent watching can the dangers of such teachers be avoided. So you must be watchful and careful concerning whom you listen to on TV, the Internet or radio. If not, they may get you to believe some false doctrine. After all, most TV and radio stations will put anyone on who pays the money, and literally anyone can get on the Internet! And just because someone is a best-selling author does not mean they are free from doctrinal error. After all, 2 Cor. 11:14-15 says, “For Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light. Therefore, it is no great thing if his ministers also transform themselves into ministers of righteousness...” You need to be careful who you listen to, including those who come knocking at your door.

Now when you see spiritual dangers that you can't avoid, you need to give heed to the second command:

II. STAND FAST

Paul also says in v.13, “Stand fast in the faith.” Likewise, in 15:58 he said, “Be steadfast, immovable...” Paul said in Eph. 6:11 that we are to “stand against the wiles of the devil.” Too many Christians are lured away by false doctrine. Too many easily fall to temptation. Too many drop out of church. Too many are like yo-yos. They're up and down, up and down. But God wants us to stand firm, be faithful, and persevere.

Now there is a connection between these first two commands. If there has not been any watchfulness, it is not at all likely that there will be much steadfastness. You see, if you are aware of an attack, you will be able to stand against the attack much better. I believe that I could run and push [biggest strongest man] off his feet and on to the floor if I caught him by surprise. But if he was watching, saw me coming, and braced himself, I believe I would bounce off of him and fall to the floor! So we must watch in order that we may stand fast against the enemy.

So how else are we to stand firm in the faith, so that false doctrine, or temptation, or trials do not move us?

A. Learn the Doctrines of our Faith – Again, Paul did not just say, “Stand fast.” He said, “stand fast in the faith.” The definite article before the word “faith” makes it almost certain that Paul has in mind the Christian faith, that body of truth that we believe. Jude 3 talks about “... the faith which was once delivered unto the saints.” So in order to stand fast in the faith, we need to know the doctrines of our faith by knowing God's Word. You see, knowing the Word of God provides a solid foundation upon which to stand, and not be moved. Knowing God's Word will

help you become spiritually strong. Knowing the Word will help you recognize temptations and false doctrine.

So I challenge you to learn the truths of the Bible. In 2 Thess. 2:15 Paul commanded us to “stand firm and hold to the traditions which you were taught.” This is the gospel that was preached to us, which we have received, and in which we stand, as I Cor. 15:1 says. Phil. 1:27 says that we are to stand firm in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel. If we are to be firm in the faith, we must be well taught in the Word, evaluating everything by the standard of God’s truth.

I have faced many trials in my adult life, and I can testify to you that my knowledge of the Word of God has given me stability and hope in the midst of my trials. It really makes a difference. Knowing the Word of God has certainly helped me resist temptations.

Not only must you learn the Word of God, but you also need to:

B. Have a Confident Faith in these Doctrines – We stand firm against all attacks by faith. We are to have faith without wavering, uncertainty, or doubt. 1 John 5:4 says, “...and this is the victory that overcomes the world, even our faith.” As we believe with confidence upon these doctrines, we are able to stand against any attack from the devil or any other enemy. We can stay morally pure, as our doctrine is pure. But remember, our ability to stand has more to do with the doctrines that we stand upon than the size of the faith we have. Faith is only as good as the object of our faith. I am thankful that Christ and His Word is the rock upon which we stand. And you can stand upon His Word with absolute confidence because of His absolute perfection and truthfulness. God cannot lie. And Paul expressed such confidence in 2 Tim. 1:12, “...for I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day.”

Now the third command is this:

III. BE MANLY

“Be brave” (*andrizesthe*) literally means, “Be manly!” The word refers to having positive masculine qualities, for the Greek word is a verbal form of the word for a man or male (*ανηρ=anar*). Now by way of analogy, what spiritual qualities should both men and women have that characterize manly men? First of all, we should:

A. Attain Spiritual Maturity – Boys will be boys, but boys should grow up to become men. Paul said in 1 Cor. 13:11, “...when I became a man, I put away childish things.” So Paul wrote in Ephesians that God has given pastors to equip us with the Word of God, “until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the [full] knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ” (4:13). As already indicated, we grow in maturity by the Word of God. 1 Pet. 2:2 says, “as newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby” (cf. 2 Tim. 3:16-17). But many of the Corinthians were immature and needed this admonition. Paul already had pleaded with them, “Brethren, do not be children in understanding; ... but in understanding be mature” (14:20). These Christians needed to grow up (cf. 3:1-2).

Are you spiritually mature? Or are you at least growing toward maturity each year? That needs to be your goal. You can through learning the Word of God, believing the Word of God, and obeying the Word of God. The author of Hebrews says in 5:12, “For though by this time you ought

to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God; and you have come to need milk and not solid food.” You need to mature to the point that you are not just a disciple of Jesus, but a disciple maker!

Paul’s command here also means:

B. Be Brave and Courageous – Based on the context, that may be the primary meaning. Paul is referring to the virtue of Christian manliness with its strong connotation of bravery and unflinching courage, especially in battle. You see, in the spiritual battles of life, you must have courage. We need to have courage to carry out the missionary mandate. Christianity has spread all over the world only because of the courage of some strong missionary Christians. Think of the bravery of our missionaries who are serving in Muslim countries. It takes courage to stand for Christ when the world is opposing your Christian morals, or your faith. Think of the courage of those who have died as martyrs for the Lord! Jesus said to His disciples in Luke 12:4, “My friends, be not afraid of them that kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do.” There is no place for a spiritual coward in the army of the Lord.

The manly bravery of early Christians proved to be a great witness for the Lord. There was a young Roman by the name of Adrian, a Praetorian Guard under Emperor Galerius Maximian. Andrian had been a fanatic persecutor of the Christians. But the calmness and courage of those he put to the torture impressed him. Adrian, brave himself, admired bravery. In these Christians he saw heroism greater than any he had seen in battle.

It was the year 280 and Adrian was twenty-eight years old. His skill and daring had led to one promotion after another. Yet, he could not get over his admiration for these followers of Christ. One day he asked one of the Christians being tortured: “What gives you such strength and joy in the midst of your sufferings?” The martyr replied, “Our Lord Jesus Christ, in whom we believe.” In a flash Adrian made an important decision. He stepped to the heathen judge and declared: “Put down my name among those to be tortured. I also shall become a Christian.” For twenty-three years after his conversion Adrian suffered much, but he never flinched from his loyalty to Christ. In 303 he was killed at Nicomedia. Later he became the patron saint of soldiers. “Put down my name,” was said with true Christian courage.¹

Our church will not move forward unless we have men and women with courage in sharing their faith. That’s the only way we are going to “rescue the perishing.” May we trust God to endow us with courage! May God help our young people to have the courage to resist peer pressure, and to stand alone if necessary for Christ. Some of you will need courage to profess Christ as your Savior! Some need courage to stand against a group of peers who want to sin against God! God can give courage, for He is greater than any enemy or task that you face.

A third characteristic of mature manhood is actually our 4th command:

IV. BE STRONG

That’s the last command of v.13. Paul is not talking about physical strength, but spiritual strength. The Greek word used here for “be strong” (*krotos*) refers to strength in action (as distinguished from *ischus* which is strength merely in possession). So we’re to do something with this strength from the Lord.

What, then, are we to do? We’re certainly not to use it destructively, or to harm someone. We need strength of character. We need strength to win the spiritual battles of life. We need

¹ Paul Lee Tan, *Encyclopedia of 7700 Illustrations*: #6286 (Rockville, Maryland: Assurance Publishers, 1979).

strength to resist temptation. We need strength for faithful service.

And how do we obtain the strength we need? Well, we gain spiritual strength by learning God's Word. 1 John 2:14 says, "I have written to you, young men, because you are strong, and the word of God abides in you, and you have overcome the wicked one." I would also point out that "Be Strong" is actually a passive. We cannot strengthen ourselves. We are to "be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might" (Eph. 6:10). Paul prayed in Eph. 3:16 that we would be "strengthened with might by His Spirit in the inner man." God the Holy Spirit is the source of our strength. Thus Paul said, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me" (Phil. 4:13). There is no excuse for weakness in the battle. And the weaker you are in yourself, the more God wants to fill you with His power, for God told Paul, "My strength is made perfect in weakness" (2 Cor. 12:9; cf. v.4, 7). So we need not be like some poor little sailing boat that is at the mercy of the winds and the waves, but we can be like the ocean liner which has power from within to face any storm and still reach the destination.

Now even though we are engaged in spiritual warfare, Paul gives us one more command that we must obey. He says:

V. BE LOVING

Paul says in v.14, "Let all that you do be done with love." Though we have spiritual enemies that we must fight, yet love should characterize all that we do. The two verses are not contradictory. One of the most loving things you can do is fight against evil, for evil is harmful and destructive. You may hate the sin but love the sinner. So as we engage in spiritual battle, we should do so with love. You see, without love, watchfulness can deteriorate into a judgmental spirit. Without love these commands could make us militant and hardhearted. Love keeps our firmness from becoming hardness and our strength from becoming domineering. It keeps our maturity gentle and considerate. It keeps our right doctrine from becoming obstinate dogmatism and our right living from becoming smug self-righteousness. Furthermore, Jesus taught us to love our enemies, though we may oppose their sin, and destructive influence. We must be sure that while we fight for God and for righteousness, we love at all times. Rom. 12:21 says, "Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good."

Something could also be said about a contrast between battling our spiritual enemies on the outside, but all the while we make sure we love our brothers and sisters inside the fellowship of the church. 1 Peter 4:8 says, "And above all things have fervent love for one another...."

So "let all that you do be done with love." What is love, anyway? Love is meeting the needs of others through giving and sacrificing. Love is being considerate of others. Love is putting others above self. Love is all about others!

Now note with me:

A. Such Love Is Needed - Certainly the Corinthian congregation needed this admonition. They were divided and bickering with one another. Love was terribly lacking in their lives. So Paul wrote a whole chapter on the subject of love (chapter 13).

An anthropologist once asked a Hopi why so many of his people's songs were about rain. The Hopi replied that it was because water is so scarce and then he asked, "Is that why so many of your songs are about love?"²

The need for love is great. Will you heed the call, and show love for others? You should

² Gregory McNamee, quoted in *Reader's Digest*, May 2000.

certainly show love in your church. Jesus warned in Mt. 24:12 that in the last days, “the love of many will grow cold.”

We not only see the need for love, but also:

B. We Should *Always* Love - Again, v.14 says, “Let *all* that you do be done with love.” This means “in all your affairs, in every situation.” When you are at home, show love to your family. When at work, show love to your co-workers. When you face hurt or rejection, show love as Jesus did. When you work for the Lord, do so in love. Even when you oppose enemies of the Gospel, we are to do so in love. Furthermore, we are not only to love in all situations, but also at all times. “Be done” is a present durative tense. We are to keep on doing what we do in love.

Conclusion: On Sept. 11, 2001 quite a few dedicated followers of radical Islam attacked our country, resulting in the deaths of over 3,000 innocent people. Afterwards, quite a few volunteered to join our military. They fought bravely, and several thousand gave their lives in service to our country.

So the Bible clearly teaches that there is a war going on, largely unseen by the human eye. The forces of evil are on the attack against the forces of God and righteousness. The world is full of temptations, trials, and lies. Will you stay alert to these spiritual dangers? Will you stand fast against the forces of darkness, and stand fast for God? Will you rely upon the Lord for strength and courage in the battle? And will you refuse to give in to bitterness and hatred, and always obey the greatest command, which is to love?

It is likely that some in my audience have been defeated by the forces of darkness. Some have not surrendered to the Lord, trusting in Christ as Savior. Some have not obeyed Christ and been baptized. Will you say with that Roman soldier, “Put down my name”?

Then what about us who are Christians. Some have recently yielded to temptation. Many have not had the courage to win souls for Christ. Some have failed to be loving. If I have just spoken a true statement about you, I call upon you to make things right this morning. And you can't win the battles of life alone. You need the support of other believers. If you need a church home, why not join this church today. Furthermore, I challenge you to consider if God is calling you to surrender to the ministry as a missionary or preacher. God is always calling out new recruits into His army. Is He calling you?

Sources: William Barclay, *The Daily Study Bible Series: The Letters to the Corinthians* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1954); C.K. Barrett, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (New York: Harper & Row, 1968); Craig Blomberg, *The NIV Application Commentary: 1 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994); Oliver B. Greene, *The First Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians* (Greenville: The Gospel Hour, Inc., 1965); Matthew Henry, *Commentary on the Whole Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1961); R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Paul's First and Second Epistles to the Corinthians* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1937); John F. MacArthur, Jr., *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary: 1 Corinthians* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1984); Alexander Maclaren, *Expositions of Holy Scripture*, Vol. 14 (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1977 reprint); Paige Patterson, *The Troubled Triumphant Church: an Exposition of First Corinthians* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1983); Larry Pierce, *Online Bible* [Ver. 5:30] (Ontario: onlinebible.net, 2017); A.T. Robertson, *New Testament Word Pictures, Vol. 14* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1931, accessed through *Online Bible*); Jerry Vines, *God Speaks Today: A Study of 1 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1979); Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Wise: 1 Corinthians* (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1983). Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from *The New King James Version* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1982). Robertson, McGee & American Commentary consulted, but not used. Nothing available from Spurgeon.