

Sermon outline and notes prepared by:

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1 Corinthians 16:13-14 “How to Win Our Spiritual Battles”

Intro. There is a war going on all around us, even right here in America. Many of the participants in this war are unseen, but we are able to see many of the results. Homes are broken up and destroyed. 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 words of a rap star, but can't quote hardly anything Jesus ever said. Many souls are captured, and doomed to eternal destruction. Your children or other loved ones could become the next to fall victim in this war.

This is a war between the kingdom of darkness, and the kingdom of God, and at times it 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. And the battle rages on. So as Paul concludes his letter, he gives 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. It's not that we are to battle with guns and bombs. Rather, we are involved in spiritual warfare. That is why the Christian life is not easy. It takes strength and courage to win each battle. And so whether you win or lose will largely be determined by how well you obey these commands.

There is something of a contrast in v.14. Though we have spiritual enemies that we must fight, even so, 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. Furthermore, Jesus taught us to love our enemies, though we may oppose their sin. 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.”

Now there are 5 commands in our text that I want to share with you today. The first command that we are to obey is:

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 so important, for what would become of an army if the guards go to sleep?

A. The Meaning of Watchfulness – 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, or easily deceived.

B. The Means of Watchfulness – 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 that is one of the best watch to watch. Why? It is because in prayer we ask for spiritual awareness and attain a heightened spiritual awareness. And you can't be watchful & 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. Who are we to watch for? And what are the ways that we may come under attack?

C. The Objects of Our Watchfulness - 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.

1. Satan - 1 Pet. 5:8 says, "Be sober, be vigilant [*gregoreuo*]; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour." 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. So it is helpful if we are 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 & other media. We need to watch out regarding what we allow to be seen & heard in our homes.

But we have a problem here. Many people do not even believe that Satan exists! Christian pollster George Barna even says that 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. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak." 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 & 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. Someone said, "Keeping away from the mud hole is easier than scraping off the mud.". 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. But sometimes they are unavoidable. Then we must watch out for trials turning 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. Watch out! Trials may do you more harm than in just the physical realm.

4. False Teaching - In 2 Pet. 2:1 Peter warned of "false teachers among you, who secretly shall bring in destructive heresies..." 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 or radio. If not, they may get

you to believe some false doctrine. After all, most TV & radio stations will put anyone on who pays the money. And 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 among those who come knocking at your door.

II. STAND FAST

Paul also says in v.13, “Stand fast in the faith.” Likewise, in 15:58 he said, “Be steadfast, immovable....” 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 & push Bobby Moore off his feet and on to the floor if I caught him by surprise. But on the other hand, if he was watching, saw me coming, and braced himself, I believe I would bounce off of him and fall to the floor!

So how 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 - In that Ephesian passage, Paul says that they can avoid the problem of being spiritually immature and unstable through the ministry of pastors and teachers who teach the Word of God. Knowing the Word of God provides a solid foundation upon which to stand, and not be moved. Knowing the Word will help you recognize temptations and false doctrine. But you cannot be firm if all you have are the philosophies of the world. They change all the time. They are either just based upon human opinion, or tradition, or even inspired by demons (1 Tim. 4:1).

What you need to do is to learn the truths of the Bible. This is “the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints” as Jude 3 says. 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 1 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, looking at everything and judging everything by God’s truth and standards.

I have not faced very many trials in my adult life, but I’ve had my share. 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.

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

B. Have a Confident Faith in these Doctrines - We are to have faith without wavering, uncertainty, or doubt. I 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 & 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."

III. BE MANLY

"Be brave" (*andrizesthe*) literally means, "Be men constantly!" (present tense). The word refers to having positive masculine qualities. That is why it is translated, "Be brave!"¹ On the other hand, if it is "Be like a man in contrast with being like a boy", then it would be an appeal for maturity. Both apply. To be a strong Christian, you must have the maturity of a full-grown man. Being a true Christian is not easy. It takes strength to take a stand for righteousness, and to resist the peer pressure of the world. So spiritually speaking, this command involves the following 3 characteristics of manliness:

A. Spiritual Maturity - 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 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.

B. Courage - In the spiritual battles of life, you must have courage. Paul is referring to the virtue of Christian manliness with its strong connotation of bravery and unflinching courage. 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." They were to behave in the midst of battle like men and not like cowards or youths. There is no place for a spiritual coward in the army of the Lord. Christianity has spread all over the world only because of the courage of some strong missionary Christians. Oh, the courage of those who have died as martyrs for the Lord! But note that both sexes are to show this characteristic.

John Wesley, the founder of the Methodist Church, once said, "Give me 100 men who fear nothing but sin, and desire nothing but God, and I will shake the world: I care not a straw whether they be clergymen or laymen; and such alone will overthrow the kingdom of Satan and build up the Kingdom of God on earth."²

Our church will not move forward unless we have men and women with courage in visitation and in sharing their faith. May God help me and all the rest of us to be more courageous! 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 sing a solo, or give a testimony! God can give courage, for He is greater than any enemy

¹ It is found in the LXX of Ps. 31:24 in such a way (ανδριζεσθε και κραταιουσθω η καρδια υμων).

² Paul Lee Tan, *Encyclopedia of 7700 Illustrations*, #875 (Rockville, Maryland: Assurance Publishers, 1979), 282.

or task that you face.

A third characteristic of mature manhood is:

C. Strength - We are to play the man's part in the battle and strike with all the force of our spiritual muscles. So this leads to our next command, which is found in the last of v.13:

IV. BE STRONG

Paul is not talking about physical strength, but spiritual strength. You need strength of character. 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 to win the spiritual battles of life. We need strength to resist temptation. We need strength for faithful service. Phillips Brooks has well said, "Oh, do not pray for easy lives. Pray to be stronger men. Do not pray for task equal to your powers. Pray for powers equal to your tasks."

And how do we obtain the strength we need? "Be Strong" is actually a passive. We cannot strengthen ourselves. We are commanded to be strengthened for battle. Only a strong spirit can successfully battle and overcome the flesh. We can only "be strong in the Lord, and in the strength 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. 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.

Finally, not only must we watch, stand fast, and be strong, courageous, and mature, but we must also:

V. BE LOVING

Paul says in v.14, "Let all that you do be done with love."

A. The Meaning of Love – What is love, anyway? Love is meeting the needs of others. Love is being considerate of others. Love is putting others above self. Love is giving and sacrificing for the sake of others. Love is all about others!

B. The Need for Love - 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.

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?"³

Also, in this context we see a need for this admonition. Without love, watchfulness can deteriorate into a judgmental spirit. Without love these commands could make us militant and

³ Gregory McNamee, quoted in *Reader's Digest*, May 2000.

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.

The need for love is great. Will you heed the call, and show love for others? Jesus warned in Mt. 24:12 that in the last days, "the love of many will grow cold."

C. The All-Inclusiveness of Love - Again, v.14 says, "Let all that you do be done with love." This means "in all your affairs." 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: 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 & 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. 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. 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?

By the way, young man, if you want to attract a good woman, then be the kind of man described here: mature, strong, brave, and yet loving. In a world that is rushing toward the feminization of men, it is time that Christian men stand up and be the men that God intended!

Sources: Steve Felker (sermon tapes of 11/23/86 & 8/12/90); 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 [CD-ROM]* (Ontario: Timnathserah Inc., 1996); Jerry Vines, *God Speaks Today: A Study of I Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1979); Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Wise: I Corinthians* (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1983). Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from *The New King James Version* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1982).