

## **Ready for Battle**

### **1 Corinthians 16:13-14**

We reach the end of this letter and this series today. We started back in March, so it's been about 11 months in one book with a few breaks along the way. I hope you've found it helpful to spend so much time in one book, looking at the circumstances in a very real church that had a lot of issues to work through. This is the kind of stuff that helps Scripture come to life for me because I can see that these are real people in a real church with very real problems. It also helps me to see what God's will is for our lives in a very real and practical way as we see what Paul says to them about the different issues they had.

The verses I want to look at today give kind of a final challenge to the people in the church and it's a great way for us to end this series. Since it's been a long time since we looked at some of the things he wrote in the letter I want to give a little summary of some of the main issues so that we see this closing challenge in the right context.

The first big issue Paul dealt with was the division that was happening in the church related to a worldly way of looking at popular preachers. They were taking sides against each other based on who their favorite preachers were, even though those preachers were all united under Christ and teaching the same gospel. So Paul chastised them and reminded them they were to follow Christ and not preachers.

He then dealt with some major problems related to idol worship that were a huge part of their culture and former lifestyles. There were issues related to sexual immorality, going to idol feasts, and eating meat sacrificed to idols. They were kind of all over the place in what they thought and were doing, so he clarified how they should live to honor Christ.

He also wrote about several problems with how they were treating one another in the church – taking one another to court, condemning one another for having different convictions, not being considerate of where others were coming from, and the rich were humiliating the poor when they came together to eat. So Paul confronted them about all these things.

He then focused on dealing with their disfunction related to spiritual gifts where they were putting all the attention on certain gifts and their own personal experience and not on loving and serving one another to build up the church. So he redirected their focus to be on others and not just themselves when they gathered for worship.

Then finally, the past few weeks we've seen him address those who were denying the resurrection of the dead, pointing out how foolish they were and teaching the whole church about what will happen when Jesus returns.

If you look at it as a whole, you can see there was a lot of worldly thinking and behavior, lots of self-centeredness, lots of sin. I imagine for Paul it would have been very troubling to see so many problems especially since he had devoted so much time to establishing that church in the first place. I get the impression that they were being pounded on every side by Satan who wanted nothing more than to see their light snuffed out. And they were falling into his schemes. They were getting caught up in worldly thinking and behavior and ruining the reputation of Christ, ruining relationships with one another, and breaking up the church.

And that's the context I think we need to understand as we look at Paul's closing challenge – not just so we can understand what he was writing to them, but because we're in the same battle as they were. We have the same enemy and he hates Christ, hates the church, and hates you. Every day you and I walk into a battle. When you go to school, when you go to work, when you go to the grocery store – there is a spiritual battle for our souls. Satan wants to destroy us. He wants us to fail. He wants to lead us down a path of worldly thinking and behavior, to live only for ourselves and not for Christ so that we mar the reputation of Christ, ruin our relationships with one another, and break apart the church. He wants our light to be snuffed out. So Paul's closing challenge to the church in Corinth is the same challenge we need to hear today. Are you ready for the battle you're living in? Paul's words today can help.

There are a lot of verses in 1 Corinthians 16. Most of them contain final instructions about specific situations, details about travel plans, or personal greetings. But there are two verses that contain a closing challenge and those are the ones I want to focus on today.

Read 1 Corinthians 16:13-14.

<sup>13</sup> *Be watchful, stand firm in the faith, act like men, be strong.* <sup>14</sup> *Let all that you do be done in love.*

These are the things we need to do to be ready for the spiritual battle we're living in. Paul gives 5 commands and I want to look at each of them.

First, we need to be watchful. Peter wrote something similar in 1 Peter 5:8: *"Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour."* We need to be watchful so we can see what Satan is doing to try to devour us. Satan is a deceptive predator. He likes to hide in the bushes and lure people into an ambush. Is that happening to you?

I'm learning to become a better deer hunter and to do that I have to think more like a predator. A predator doesn't just hit the woods and start running after its prey, it comes in quiet and tries to stay hidden. It tries to lure its prey in close so there's no escape. That's what I try to do in the woods and that's what Satan tries to do in your life. He lures you in with things that look so good – money, power, pleasure, popularity. He tries to convince you that they will make you happy, so you chase after them and follow them instead of Christ. He wants you to take the easy road like everyone else in our society. He doesn't want you to live for Christ, he wants you to live for yourself and live for what you can get out of this life.

But it's an ambush. The things of this world will never truly satisfy, and it's easy to see if you pay attention to what happens in the world. Their pleasure is short-lived and will always leave you desperate for more so that you chase after those things at the expense of others and end up ruining relationships and causing division. That's what was happening in Corinth and it will happen to us as well. And then comes the day when each of us will have to give an account for how we've lived our lives. Jesus tells us in Lk. 21:34-36: *"But watch yourselves lest your hearts be weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and cares of this life, and that day come upon you suddenly like a trap. <sup>35</sup> For it will come upon all who dwell on the face of the whole earth. <sup>36</sup> But stay awake at all times, praying that you may have strength to escape all these things that are going to take place, and to stand before the Son of Man."*

Satan wants you to waste your life and then fall on that day. He wants you to spend eternity in hell, separated from God and the only true and lasting joy and pleasure you could ever have. So be watchful. Don't fall into his ambush with

most people in our society. Watch for yourself and watch for others that you might save them from destruction.

Stand firm in the faith. This is the second command Paul gives. The way of the world leads to destruction and death, but there is another way that gives life and a solid foundation to stand on in the midst of the battle. We can stand firm in the faith – in the truth of the Gospel revealed in God’s Word.

In 2 Thess. 2:13-15 Paul wrote: *“But we ought always to give thanks to God for you, brothers beloved by the Lord, because God chose you as the firstfruits to be saved, through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth.”*<sup>14</sup> *To this he called you through our gospel, so that you may obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.*<sup>15</sup> *So then, brothers, stand firm and hold to the traditions that you were taught by us, either by our spoken word or by our letter.”*

We have the greatest source of security anyone could ever have in this life, and it’s the written Word of God we hold in our hands. God’s Word gives us the answers about where we come from, why we exist, who God is, who we are, what’s going on in this world, what God has done to save us, how we can be saved and experience true joy, and what’s going to happen to those who follow God and those who don’t.

Tax return time is soon upon us and all of us are going to have to do our taxes. Let’s say you want to try to do your taxes on your own, so you start to wade through all the forms and instructions. It’s complicated and overwhelming! There are so many rules, so many forms, so many instructions, and they’re always changing! How can you have any assurance that you’re doing it right? Well, you have to ask a tax expert – someone who does it for a living and knows all the answers. They can give you the security you need to know how to do it.

In God’s wisdom and mercy, he hasn’t left us alone to try to figure things out for ourselves. He’s given us the answers. He’s revealed himself to us through his Word. He’s told us who he is and what his will is for our lives. He’s shown us what he does for his people so we can trust him and have confidence. People who don’t know God, don’t know what to think. They either avoid the biggest questions of life altogether because they’re too troubling to think about, or they come up with some strange ideas that they or someone else have imagined.

There's no security in that. That's why people do what they do in this world. They don't have any security. But we do.

Stand firm in the faith. Are you standing firm in the faith? The only way you can do that is to spend time reading and studying the Scriptures. You're strengthening your foundation when you do that. Are you involved in a regular practice of Bible Study? Those troubling questions deep in your soul all have answers and they're in the Bible. Stand firm in the faith.

Number three: Act like men. I looked this up to try to understand what Paul had in mind. A more literal way to say it is "play the part of a man," and the definition points to the qualities of being mature and brave. So I think Paul may have had the spiritually immature behavior of the Corinthians in mind when he wrote this. Early in the letter he referred to them as "infants in Christ." If you send a bunch of infants into battle, they're not going to make it. They aren't ready. They're going to be easily defeated and shrink back in retreat. You need to be brave and mature.

And the same is true for us in the spiritual battle we're in. We're not going to make it if we remain spiritually immature. We need to have minds that are transformed by the Spirit and the Word of God, and no longer live according to worldly patterns of thinking and behavior where we can get sucked into Satan's schemes.

Some people have been Christians for 10 years or more and are still infants in Christ. The goal that we're aiming for is in Ephesians 4:13-16 – that *"we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ,"*<sup>14</sup> *so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes.*<sup>15</sup> *Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ,*<sup>16</sup> *from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love."* That's maturity. That's what we need for the battle we're in.

Are you growing? Are you engaged in a process of spiritual growth? We spend a lot of time growing in other areas of our lives, but how much time do we spend

on our spiritual growth? One of the best ways to do this is through small groups. Small groups give you the opportunity to grow where you're at. Maybe you're a newer believer who needs to grow from Bible study with other believers. Maybe you're more mature and need to grow by leading a study or mentoring another believer. You could come on Wednesday nights and become a mentor for middle and high school students who desperately need mature believers to invest in their lives.

We get ready for battle by growing to maturity in Christ.

Paul's fourth command is: Be strong... Be strong. The way Paul wrote it is more like "be strengthened." Where does our strength come from? Strength for the battle that's before us doesn't come from ourselves. If we try to fight this battle in our own strength, we are going to lose. No matter how much willpower or how stubborn we are, we can't overcome the power of the enemy. Our strength doesn't come from ourselves, it comes from Jesus Christ.

Paul wrote about this in Ephesians 6:10-13: *"Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. <sup>11</sup> Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. <sup>12</sup> For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. <sup>13</sup> Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm."*

The armor he's talking about is everything Christ has provided for us. He's given us the truth, he's given us righteousness, he's given us the gospel, faith, salvation, the word of God, and prayer. All of these are ours in Christ and when we learn to take hold of them and use them as armor we are strong in the Lord. These are very real things. Truth is real and something we must use in the fight. Righteousness is real. The gospel, faith, salvation, the word of God, prayer – these are all real and they're all ours in Christ. As you grow in maturity as a Christian you will learn how to use them to be strong in the fight.

The last command Paul gives is: Let all that you do be done in love. Why love? I get why he gives the other commands, they're perfect for going into battle. But why love? I think he includes love for a couple of reasons. If you remember from earlier, Paul spent a whole section in this letter devoted to love because one of

the core problems in the people Corinth was that they were not loving one another. They were self-focused and didn't care about one another. Their lack of agape love was causing them to sin against one another in many ways and create major division. When you fight the spiritual battle, you need a church family to fight alongside you and the only way we're going to do that is love – willingly choose to do what is best for others even though it may cost you. We have to love one another in this way or we will end up fighting against one another and face the enemy alone.

Paul captures the importance of this in Colossians 3:12-14: *“Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience,<sup>13</sup> bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive.<sup>14</sup> And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony.”* Love is what binds us together in perfect harmony so that we can fight this battle together.

Love binds us together as a church family, but love is also central to our mission in the world. We have been called to love our neighbors, classmates, family members and friends who don't know Jesus yet – even our enemies. Our battle is not against flesh and blood – flesh and blood is the mission. When we love people around us, especially those who don't deserve it, we demonstrate the kind of love that God has shown us when he sent his Son to die on the cross for our sins.

So instead of being hardened by the battle and fighting against people in the world, we need to find our joy and hope in Christ and love them.

This is Paul's final challenge for the people in Corinth and I think it's a great closing challenge for us as well as we finish this great book. *“Be watchful, stand firm in the faith, act like men, be strong.<sup>14</sup> Let all that you do be done in love.”* Maybe there's one of these areas we've looked at today that God is laying on your heart. I encourage you to do something about it. The battle is already going on around us and won't come to an end until Christ returns. What do you need to do to be ready for it?