

The Church Militant in This War-Zone World

1 Corinthians 16:13-14

Introduction – There are five exhortations in these two short verses. The first four sound like the kind of things a general would say to his troops as he sends them off to battle. And as Paul finishes his letter, having laid out a battlefield full of spiritual minefields and worldly traps, that is just what Paul is doing. The topics of this letter reveal that the Corinthians need to be more vigilant and courageous in standing against the negative leavening influence of the pagan culture around them. Their carnal divisions, their sexual perversions and confusions, their misuse of liberties, lawsuits against one another, their idolatry and self-centeredness in their worship and use of spiritual gifts, along with what Paul knew was a growing and certain persecution of the church, demanded their full and militant attention. And a militant church requires soldiers who are well equipped and prepared for battle. For we really are in a battle (Eph 6:10-13, 2 Cor 10:3-5) and we really may not be friends with the world (James 4:4).

Watch – Not like “sit back passively and watch,” this command is to “*be vigilant, give strict attention.*” Jesus uses it when he warns his disciples to watch for the coming judgment upon Jerusalem (Mark 13:35) and when he exhorted them to pray with Him in the Garden of Gethsemane (Mark 14:34, 38). This is a call to vigilant prayer while giving attention to all that is going on. This is what a soldier is to be doing on his “night-watch” even though it may appear all is calm (1 Pet 5:8). But we aren’t looking for boogey-men in the closet. We are to be watching carefully what the unbelieving world is saying, how it is attacking the truths of scripture, and whether we and our people are standing firm...

Stand Firm in the Faith – In Peter’s epistle, he continues in v9 with “*resist him, steadfast in the faith.*” John tells us that “our faith” is the victory that overcomes the world (1 John 5:4) but he doesn’t mean our feelings of trusting in something or someone. He means standing firm on what the scriptures teach against what the world is teaching. In our day, we must stand firm on the teaching that Jesus is God, that He is the only Way, and in the liberty by which Christ has made us free (Gal 5:1). We must hold fast to the doctrine of creation (by God, ex nihilo, and in six days), to the doctrine of the creation of Man (male and female and not by accident), the doctrine of sexual fidelity (and the fruit of sexuality, the preborn child), gender, and roles in marriage, the warp and woof of society. Today, the world tells us Christianity is not modern enough, scientific enough, cool enough, woke enough, or tolerant enough. We must stand firm like the house built upon a foundation that can weather the storm (Matt 7:24-27), like the oak tree beside the waters of grace (Psalm 1).

Be Brave – This verb is only used in the New Testament here and literally means “play the man,” and while the whole church is to be brave in this way, certainly the men and the leadership of the church must lead the way. This command is given to a church that also had to be told that “*soft men,*” the *malakoi* (effeminate) will not inherit the kingdom of God (1 Cor 6:9). Men “play the man” when they take covenantal responsibility for everything in their home. They are soft when they point their finger, muttering their excuses, like Adam, at others. Men are hard when they protect and provide, when they come between their people and those who would seek to harm them. They are *malakoi* when they go along with all the gender blending, androgyny, and the many sexual perversions that follow (Deut 22:5). They are brave whatever the cost. Daniel’s friends would not compromise their loyalty to the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (Dan 3:16-17). Ridley and Latimer were examples when, refusing to compromise the Gospel of the Reformation went to the stake to be burned. “Be of good comfort, Master Ridley, and play the man! We shall this day light such a candle, by God’s grace in England, as I trust shall never be put out.” In 1 Cor 4:10-14, Paul made clear he didn’t care that his teachings and actions meant dishonor in the eyes of compromisers and the world. He fought wild beasts in Ephesus (15:30-32). Following Christ is not for the faint of heart and not only in the first century. It is a known fact that there were more Christian martyrs in the last century than in all the previous centuries combined.

Be Strong – This is not a command to find it deep within yourself or to be arrogant about yourself (Gal 6:14). John the Baptist became strong in spirit (Luke 1:80). Jesus grew and became strong in spirit (Luke

2:40). Paul prays that God “*would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man...*” (Eph 3:16). This strength is a confidence in the Lord, in God’s promises to you in spite of your weaknesses; a confidence in His love, His grace and mercy (2 Cor 12:9-10).

Let All That You Do Be Done with Love – If we obey Paul according to what the words mean and how Paul is using them in verse 13, we will be charged with being unloving when we call out sins in the church, and when we call out sin in the world. And that simply means that our (or their) definition of love is not that of scripture. To be loving, as Paul means, is to be vigilant, steadfast, masculine, and strong – for the glory of God and for the good of others. We are lovers because we are liberators and liberators are at war with this world. We are the church militant because we love the world as God loved the world (John 3:16). And we are the church militant because we do not love the world, nor the things of the world (1 John 2:15).

The Church Militant – The church was once just two people and they were told to go multiply, fill the earth, subdue it and have dominion over it (Gen 1:28). And then war broke out between the seed of the serpent and the seed of the woman. When the Seed of the woman defeated the seed of the serpent, He gave the same command to the church. Go and disciple, baptize (fill), and teach (subdue and taking dominion) all nations (Matt 28:18-20).

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