

## 1 CORINTHIANS 16:13, 14

### ACT LIKE MEN

“Be watchful, stand firm in the faith, act like men, be strong. Let all that you do be done in love.”<sup>1</sup>

**T**he Christian Faith is a woman’s religion; and I’m glad this is so! Historically, women were excluded from religion. In the pagan religions extant at the time the Master presented Himself as a sacrifice for sinful people, women might be used as religious accoutrements in what was called worship, but they really did not have a part in religious exercise. In the various non-Christian religions in this day, women are seen as inferior and unworthy of having a voice in conduct of religious exercise. Jesus, however, invited women to share in both the worship and the rewards of the Faith.

During the past several decades, however, the Christian Faith has been feminised. The churches are frequently devoid of young men. Increasingly, the churches of North America are taking on the appearance of British congregations. A few older women are scattered throughout the pews as an aging pastor drones on about some inconsequential matter. Men have increasingly withdrawn from active participation in the Faith—they appear leery either of promoting the Faith or of openly practising the Faith.

The transformation among the churches during the past several decades was preceded by women demanding a greater role in the conduct of worship; and as their demands were met they indelibly stamped the face of the Faith with their own signature characteristics. Yet, when we read the accounts of the Master, He seems virile, manly, exhibiting the attributes esteemed by all. The Master does not appear as a Casper Milquetoast character; rather, He presents Himself as strong, resolute, capable.

To be certain, Jesus could be compassionate and gentle. You will recall that on coming ashore on one occasion, “He had compassion on [the crowds], because they were like sheep without a shepherd” [MARK 6:34]. He responded by teaching them, knowing that their great need was to hear the voice of the Living God. When it grew late, and the people had listened all day without eating, He instructed His disciples to feed them [see MARK 6:35-44].

Yet, He could be forthright, abrupt, blunt. He did not accept the distortion of religious people who sought to advance their own private agendas; and He never minced words when speaking to those who thought they could be casual about following Him. Jesus cannot be said to have pandered to the expectations of the throngs crowding about Him. Recall the exchange between the Master and several who thought they wanted to follow Him. “As they were going along the road, someone said to him, ‘I will follow you wherever you go.’ And Jesus said to him, ‘Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head.’ To another he said, ‘Follow me.’ But he said, ‘Lord, let me first go and bury my father.’ And Jesus said to him, ‘Leave the dead to bury their own dead. But as for you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God.’ Yet another said, ‘I will follow you, Lord, but let me first say farewell to those at my home.’ Jesus said to him, ‘No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God’” [LUKE 9:57-62].

“I’ll follow you anywhere, Jesus,” the young man said.

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<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from **The Holy Bible: English Standard Version**. Crossway Bibles, a division of Good News Publishers, 2001. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

“Are you quite certain about that? What will you sacrifice in order to stand with me?”

“Follow Me,” He commanded another.

“Let me arrange my life to satisfy my family; then I’ll follow you, Jesus.”

“Then, I’m not first in your life. You cannot be My disciple.”

“Unlike others, I’ll follow you, Jesus” the man affirmed. “Only let me arrange my life to my satisfaction.”

“You cannot be My disciple while pining for what might have been.”

The Master never attempted to make the Faith a non-threatening, non-demanding excursion into mere religious exercise. **MATTHEW 10:16-25** records the cautionary words delivered to the disciples He was about to send out into service in His Name. His words seem strange to modern adherents; yet they echo through the ages down to this very day. “Behold, I am sending you out as sheep in the midst of wolves, so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves. Beware of men, for they will deliver you over to courts and flog you in their synagogues, and you will be dragged before governors and kings for my sake, to bear witness before them and the Gentiles. When they deliver you over, do not be anxious how you are to speak or what you are to say, for what you are to say will be given to you in that hour. For it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you. Brother will deliver brother over to death, and the father his child, and children will rise against parents and have them put to death, and you will be hated by all for my name’s sake. But the one who endures to the end will be saved. When they persecute you in one town, flee to the next, for truly, I say to you, you will not have gone through all the towns of Israel before the Son of Man comes.

“A disciple is not above his teacher, nor a servant above his master. It is enough for the disciple to be like his teacher, and the servant like his master. If they have called the master of the house Beelzebul, how much more will they malign those of his household.”

Approached by a crowd wanting to crown Him their King, Jesus rebuked them, saying, “Truly, truly, I say to you, you are seeking me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves. Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you. For on him God the Father has set his seal” [**JOHN 6:26, 27**].

To the religious and civic leaders that thought they could use religion to advance their own interests, Jesus identified them as “hypocrites,” “blind guides,” “blind fools,” “serpents” and a “brood of vipers” [see **MATTHEW 23:1-36**].

Undoubtedly, the Master was strong—physically and emotionally. He endured physical deprivation, emotional anguish and unimaginable torture without whining or whinging. He bore up in a most envious manner. Of His passion, Peter would say, “To this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps. He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth. When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly. He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed” [**1 PETER 2:21-24**].

We can say without fear of contradiction that the Faith of Christ the Lord welcomes women to share in the adoption into the Family of God. To be certain, we would be impoverished without the gentleness expected of women who restrain the savage impulses of men. However, we have too often forgotten the exhilarating raw nature of wildness that accompanies bold men who advance this most holy Faith. Undoubtedly, we would be better if we understood what was meant by the call to “Act like men.”

**ACT LIKE MEN** — “Act like men.” Many people imagine this command to be a gender specific command directed exclusively toward males. However, that would not at all be how the Corinthians would have understood what the Apostle was saying. The word he used was *andrízomai*. The word is a figurative extension that did indeed carry the meaning “to be manly” or “to become a man.” This particular word occurs only here in the New Testament; however, the word appears frequently in the Septuagint—the Greek translation of the Old Testament Scriptures. Reviewing how the word is translated in that ancient translation will give a fuller understanding of what the first readers would have understood the Apostle to mean.

The first instance for consideration is in Deuteronomy. **DEUTERONOMY 31:6** commands, “Be strong and courageous. Do not fear or be in dread of them, for it is the LORD your God who goes with you. He will not leave you or forsake you.” In this verse, the word in question is translated “Be strong.” The command to “be strong” is iterated in **DEUTERONOMY 31:7**. Interestingly enough, the identical verb is translated “to be courageous” in **JOSHUA 1:6, 7, 9 AND 18**. In **PSALM 27:14** the verb is again translated “Be strong.”

“Wait for the LORD;  
be strong, and let your heart take courage;  
wait for the LORD!”

Thus, it would be proper to understand that the word conveyed a gender-neutral expectation that Christians are to strive “to be strong” or “to be courageous.”

To be certain, there are expectations for both males and females who follow the Master. In several places, the writers of Scripture establish specific gender expectations. For example, Paul instructs Titus, “As for you, teach what accords with sound doctrine. Older men are to be sober-minded, dignified, self-controlled, sound in faith, in love, and in steadfastness. Older women likewise are to be reverent in behavior, not slanderers or slaves to much wine. They are to teach what is good, and so train the young women to love their husbands and children, to be self-controlled, pure, working at home, kind, and submissive to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be reviled. Likewise, urge the younger men to be self-controlled. Show yourself in all respects to be a model of good works, and in your teaching show integrity, dignity, and sound speech that cannot be condemned, so that an opponent may be put to shame, having nothing evil to say about us” [**TITUS 2:1-8**].

Clearly, there are expectations for the conduct of men, even expectations that are dictated by the age of adherents to the Faith. The expectations are related to conduct and character. Similarly, there are expectations for women, again related to the age of the women and their time as members within the Faith. Women are to endeavour to train other women, and they are to exhibit a demeanour that builds the family and honours the Lord who has redeemed us.

The instructions are not so different from what Paul wrote Timothy concerning men and women. “I desire then that in every place the men should pray, lifting holy hands without anger or quarreling; likewise also that women should adorn themselves in respectable apparel, with modesty and self-control, not with braided hair and gold or pearls or costly attire, but with what is proper for women who profess godliness—with good works. Let a woman learn quietly with all submissiveness. I do not permit a woman to teach or to exercise authority over a man; rather, she is to remain quiet. For Adam was formed first, then Eve; and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor” [**1 TIMOTHY 2:8-14**].

Note in this instruction that men are to take leadership in prayer, a facet of Christian life that seems woefully neglected in this day. In the same instructions, Paul states that women are to focus on inner beauty expressed through good works. In this vein, the Word encourages women to cultivate a quiet spirit, such gentleness reflecting a woman's maturity and godliness. Women are not to be promoted to eldership, but rather they are to learn in quietness in the church.

Of course, there are extended instructions for husbands, wives and children provided in various places in the New Testament [e.g. **1 CORINTHIANS 11:3-16**; **EPHESIANS 5:22-6:4**; **1 PETER 3:1-7**]. What I would urge you to see at this time is that there are characteristics, though generally applicable to all Christians, that are specifically assigned either to males or to females. Regardless of gender, there are some character traits which are to be cultivated in each believer.

For instance, writing the Thessalonian Christians, the Apostle reminds them of his actions when he was with them, indicating that gentleness is to be fostered and valued in our dealings. "You yourselves know, brothers, that our coming to you was not in vain. But though we had already suffered and been shamefully treated at Philippi, as you know, we had boldness in our God to declare to you the gospel of God in the midst of much conflict. For our appeal does not spring from error or impurity or any attempt to deceive, but just as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, so we speak, not to please man, but to please God who tests our hearts. For we never came with words of flattery, as you know, nor with a pretext for greed—God is witness. Nor did we seek glory from people, whether from you or from others, though we could have made demands as apostles of Christ." Now, take special notice of what follows. "But we were gentle among you, like a nursing mother taking care of her own children. So, being affectionately desirous of you, we were ready to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own selves, because you had become very dear to us" [**1 THESSALONIANS 2:1-8**].

If we are to take seriously the repeated command of the Apostle, we consider both his instruction and his example. Paul urged the Philippians, "Brothers, join in imitating me, and keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us" [**PHILIPPIANS 3:17**]. This command was iterated shortly after this when the Apostle wrote, "What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me—practice these things" [**PHILIPPIANS 4:9**]. This command reproduces the command Paul gave the Corinthians, "Be imitators of me" [**1 CORINTHIANS 4:16**].

Assuredly, Paul and the missionaries who accompanied him were bold, just as he averred. Their boldness impelled them to declare the Gospel despite a history of severe opposition to their message. They sought to please God, rather than concerning themselves with how mere mortals might react to the message. They did not use flattery; but rather they spoke the truth in love. They had no desire to enrich themselves, using those whom they served. Moreover, they sought no personal aggrandisement in serving others. In this, the missionaries anticipated Peter's command that elders are to be "examples to the flock" [**1 PETER 5:3**]. Having said all this, Paul then indicates that overarching his service was the hallmark of gentleness comparable to that of a nursing mother, tenderly solicitous of the welfare of those whom he served.

Set against his comparison of acting in gentleness comparable to that of a nursing mother, the Apostle compares his actions to those of a father dealing with his children. He reminds them, "You remember, brothers, our labor and toil: we worked night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you, while we proclaimed to you the gospel of God. You are witnesses, and God also, how holy and righteous and blameless was our conduct toward you believers. For you know how, like a father with his children, we exhorted each one of you and encouraged you and charged you to walk in a manner worthy of God, who calls you into his own kingdom and glory" [**1 THESSALONIANS 2:9-12**].

To summarise the Apostle's words: we expended ourselves for your benefit. We recognised that our very lives were to model Christian character. We constantly urged you to excel in righteousness, in godliness, in Christian maturity. We always reminded you to remain focused on the prize of the high calling in Christ. I believe most sensible people recognise that fathers may be gentle; but we certainly anticipate that a mother exhibits gentleness toward her own children. Likewise, sensible people understand that mothers will exhort and encourage their children, urging them to excel. However, fathers who exhibit the highest ideals of fatherhood assuredly act in this manner. A wise father will discipline his children when necessary, but always out of love and with the evident desire to see his children excel in life. Thus, we dare not say that the characteristics are restricted to one gender or another, but we do recognise that mothers exhibit some ideals that distinguish them as mothers, and fathers exhibit characteristics distinguishing them as fathers. There are gender-specific ideals that are adopted within the Faith and applied in a way that defies cultural norms.

**MANLY CHARACTER** — “Be watchful, stand firm in the faith, act like men, be strong.”

Interestingly enough, these are military commands. However, you are surely aware that Paul frequently used language that would have been familiar to anyone affiliated with the military. He also used illustrations that reflected a military culture. This fascinating insight must not be passed by in a casual manner as though it were unimportant. We Christians are engaged in warfare, though we do not wage war with physical arms. On a daily basis, Christians engage a very real enemy using spiritual weapons of truth, and prayer, and witness.

Recall the apostolic assessment of life as a believer. “We put no obstacle in anyone's way, so that no fault may be found with our ministry, but as servants of God we commend ourselves in every way: by great endurance, in afflictions, hardships, calamities, beatings, imprisonments, riots, labors, sleepless nights, hunger; by purity, knowledge, patience, kindness, the Holy Spirit, genuine love; by truthful speech, and the power of God; with the weapons of righteousness for the right hand and for the left; through honor and dishonor, through slander and praise. We are treated as impostors, and yet are true; as unknown, and yet well known; as dying, and behold, we live; as punished, and yet not killed; as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, yet possessing everything” [2 CORINTHIANS 6:3-10].

More specifically, refresh your memory of Paul's statement defining our spiritual conflict. “Though we walk in the flesh, we are not waging war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds. We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ” [2 CORINTHIANS 10:3-5].

In the Ephesian encyclical, the Apostle has written these instructions to we who believe. “Be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. 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. 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. Stand therefore, having fastened on the belt of truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and, as shoes for your feet, having put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace. In all circumstances take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one; and take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God” [EPHESIANS 6:10-17].

The point needs to be made powerfully—we are at war. In an earlier letter to the Thessalonian Christians, Paul wrote, “You are all children of light, children of the day. We are not of the night or of the darkness. So then let us not sleep, as others do, but let us keep awake and be sober. For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk, are drunk at night. But since we belong to the day, let us be sober, having put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation” [1 THESSALONIANS 5:5-8].

The ideal of strength—especially moral strength, or of courage in the face of opposition is esteemed in both men and women. What is important for the purpose of the message is recognition that this quality is not exclusively the domain of males, though it should be valued among men. In the case of the Corinthian believers, moral strength or courage would be especially valuable. Remember, this congregation faced some daunting opposition. The faith of these Christians was despised by Jewish worshippers and ridiculed by pagans who considered themselves learned in contradistinction to their portrayal of the Christians as ignorant.

Early in this particular letter, the Apostle urged the Corinthian Christians, “Consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, so that no human being might boast in the presence of God” [1 CORINTHIANS 1:26-31].

Paul wrote these words because the Corinthians were immersed in a culture in which their Jewish co-religionists despised them as heretical and in which the pagans ridiculed their faith in an unseen God. The Jews demanded signs that could serve as proof that Jesus was the Anointed One and the pagans sought wisdom according to their own definition. However, as the Apostle wrote, “Since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe. For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men” [1 CORINTHIANS 1:21-25]. Of course, the Jews would define what signs would suffice, and the pagans would define wisdom to meet their own twisted standards. In this respect, the world in which the Corinthians served was not so very different from our own world.

Things haven’t changed much in the ensuing two millennia since the Apostle wrote. Religious leaders who love the praise of men more than the praise of God still oppose those who teach the Word. The pagans of this fallen world seem intent on restricting the practise of the Faith to what is done within four walls on a Sunday morning. Under such conditions, we need again to hear the encouragement given by the Apostle to the Gentiles.

Like a general preparing his forces for combat, Paul issues a fusillade of sharp commands. “Be watchful, stand firm in the faith, act like men, be strong. Let all that you do be done in love.” These are not suggestions; they are not recommendations—they are commands. Paul understood that the Corinthians faced a vicious enemy intent on destroying them if he could. Just so, we who follow the Master in this day know that we face a determined adversary. We are warned, “Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world. And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you” [1 PETER 5:8-10].

“*Be watchful*,” commands the Apostle. It seems, in light of the entire letter, and especially as we consider the closing chapters, that Paul command to be watchful directs believers in two areas—to avoid becoming casualties and to be alert to the return of the Master. In this, he echoes Jesus’ command to disciples, “Stay awake, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming” [MATTHEW 24:42].

The theme of watchfulness was iterated frequently by our Lord, and perhaps needs to be heard among the churches again. Here is one example to consider. “Be on guard, keep awake. For you do not know when the time will come. It is like a man going on a journey, when he leaves home and puts his servants in charge, each with his work, and commands the doorkeeper to stay awake. Therefore stay awake—for you do not know when the master of the house will come, in the evening, or at midnight, or when the rooster crows, or in the morning—lest he come suddenly and find you asleep. And what I say to you I say to all: Stay awake” [MARK 13:33-37].

The Lord’s return has been a constant refrain throughout the First Corinthian Letter. Early in the letter, Paul wrote of the blessing poured out on the Corinthians, “So that [the Corinthian Christians were] not lacking in any gift, as [they] wait[ed] for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ, who will sustain [us] to the end, guiltless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ” [1 CORINTHIANS 1:7, 8]. These saints were cautioned that their work would be revealed by fire that will test each individual’s labour [see 1 CORINTHIANS 3:12-15], before Christ’s Bema. They had heard the Apostle speak of the salvation of the soul though the flesh might be destroyed when one was put out of the assembly [see 1 CORINTHIANS 5:4, 5]. In light of these various admonitions, the cautionary warning issued by the Master and recorded in the Apocalypse takes on added urgency. “Behold, I am coming like a thief! Blessed is the one who stays awake, keeping his garments on, that he may not go about naked and be seen exposed” [REVELATION 16:15]!

We cannot dismiss that Paul had in view the need to be watchful against spiritual assault. We are surrounded by multiple spiritual enemies; we dare not become complacent. Until Jesus comes, we must watch that we do not stumble, ceding the field to the enemy. There is no doubt that the enemy of the soul would destroy each follower of the Master, leading us to compromise purity, to embrace modernity, to reject righteousness, to accommodate the expectations of the world, to surrender the Faith to those who despise the Master.

In light of this danger to the saints, this latter meaning will accord with Paul’s second command: “*Stand firm in the Faith*.” Assuredly, there is need for Christians to know the mind of God, to hold the teachings of the Faith with a clear conscience. The Corinthians were constantly assailed by false teachers, just as believers today are beset by false teachers who handle the Word of God deceitfully [see 2 CORINTHIANS 4:2; 11:1-14]. The Christian must not think of every point of doctrine as an open question. Matters of faith for which we have a clear revelation are to be considered settled; these must no longer be matters of dispute.

All Christians hold to the teaching that Jesus is truly and fully God. We believe with a perfect faith that He was born of a virgin and that He presented His life as a sacrifice for sinful people. We believe that He was buried and that on the third day He rose to life and was seen by those to whom He revealed Himself, thus leaving a witness. He ascended into Heaven where He is now seated at the right hand of the Father. From there, He will return to receive His people to Himself. Now, by faith in Him—the Risen, Reign Son of God—we have the forgiveness of sin and adoption into the Family of God. It is through faith that the benefits of His resurrection become real to all who receive Him as Master over life. And the Bible is a perfect record of the mind of God, given that we might know His will. This Word is to be received as accurate and true, a perfect revelation from God. These are incontrovertible truths for all Christians.

All around are found professed believers who once walked with us in the Faith; yet, today, these erstwhile believers have deserted the Faith. They grew weary because the conflict was long, or because the enemy seemed determined, or because some loved one was offended by their adherence to the Faith, or because of some other reason that means nothing in the long run. They fulfil the picture presented in the Parable of the Sower of seed that fell on the rock, or of seed that fell among thorns. They quickly sprouted up and quickly fell away; or they appeared to flourish until the cares and riches and pleasure of life choked them into senescence [LUKE 8:5-15]. For this reason, you need to receive the command to “Stand firm in the Faith.”

Make yourself familiar with the great truths of the Faith. Think on them. Embrace them. Live them out in your life each day. Let the reality of this Word saturate your life. If you received the Good News, you received the Faith. Now, stand in that Faith. Paul reminded the Corinthians, “I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, and by which you are being saved” [1 CORINTHIANS 15:1, 2].

“*Act like men*”; “show courage.”<sup>2</sup> Facing the pressures of that ancient world, the Corinthians needed courage; and so do we. They would be required to withstand the contempt of the learned and the persecutions of the powerful. Rather than seeing this as an admonition to act like males, I suspect that we have often missed a clue to what is actually being said. Perhaps you will recall the Love Chapter that concludes in this fashion. “Love never ends. As for prophecies, they will pass away; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will pass away. For we know in part and we prophesy in part, but when the perfect comes, the partial will pass away. When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I gave up childish ways. For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known” [1 CORINTHIANS 13:8-12]. These instructions anticipate the plea that would shortly be issued, “Brothers, do not be children in your thinking. Be infants in evil, but in your thinking be mature” [1 CORINTHIANS 14:20].

Finally, the Apostle commands, “*Be strong*.” To be certain, the Corinthians needed to grow up, just as many among the churches today need to grow up. However, courage, or maturity, is not enough; the child of God needs not only to be manly, but mighty. The believer needs strength to grapple with the enemy and to bear up under the trials that are certain to come. Pagan society will pressure us to cannibalise faith and practise through syncretism. To resist this pressure, we need to be strengthened.

Let me give insight into what the Apostle wrote. The word that is translated “be strong,” is passive voice. This means that it would be understood to mean, “Be strengthened.” In other words, Paul is not calling on us to make ourselves strong through some action we initiate; rather, he is urging believers to permit the Lord to give us strength. The person who imagines she is strong will shortly be shown to be weak. We will do well to remember the apostolic warning, “Let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall” [1 CORINTHIANS 10:12]. We can only “be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might” [EPHESIANS 6:10]. We who are followers of the Master must “be strengthened by the grace that is in Christ Jesus” [2 TIMOTHY 2:1].

The Corinthians were weak in the flesh. They acted like mere men [1 CORINTHIANS 3:3, 4]. They thought themselves wise, and those who were dedicated to serving Christ were seen as fools [1 CORINTHIANS 3:18]. What a pitiful contrast Paul draws between them and the missionaries. “We are fools for Christ’s sake, but you are wise in Christ. We are weak, but you are strong. You are held in honor, but we in disrepute” [1 CORINTHIANS 4:10].

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<sup>2</sup> The NET Bible First Edition (Biblical Studies Press, 2006)



**MANLY RESTRAINT** — “Let all that you do be done in love.” What the Corinthians had forgotten was that everything must be tempered by love. Tragically, the Corinthians were anything but loving in their relationships with one another. Even the “Love Feast,” the potluck meal associated with the Lord’s Table, was marked by dissension, disdain and disrespect. Paul’s command to be loving is reminiscent of Peter’s instruction to the saints of the Diaspora, “Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins” [1 PETER 4:8]. Love is the principle that keeps our firmness from becoming hardness, and keeps our strength from becoming domineering. Love ensures that our orthodoxy does not become unyielding dogmatism and that our godliness doesn’t degenerate into self-righteousness.<sup>3</sup>

It is perhaps significant that the command to ensure that every act is permeated by love is followed by the command to recognise those who labour among the Corinthians. “I urge you, brothers—you know that the household of Stephanas were the first converts in Achaia, and that they have devoted themselves to the service of the saints—be subject to such as these, and to every fellow worker and laborer. I rejoice at the coming of Stephanas and Fortunatus and Achaicus, because they have made up for your absence, for they refreshed my spirit as well as yours. Give recognition to such people” [1 CORINTHIANS 16:15-18].

I am not being self-serving when I tell you that those who labour among the people of God are many times neglected by those whom they serve. When the servants of God are forced to resist those who are self-seeking, they don’t often feel the love. When the elders are compelled to speak against error, it is almost inevitable that feathers will be ruffled. I know that some have thought I speak too plainly on occasion, and perhaps that is correct. However, I have a great fear of becoming so concerned with the feelings of those to whom I speak that I fail to address the real issue. I fear God, and I fear failing in my responsibility before Him to speak the truth. To be certain, I recognise the need to speak the truth in love; but I strive to speak the truth, regardless.

Five commands! “Be watchful, stand firm in the faith, act like men, be strong. Let all that you do be done in love.” They anticipate that those to whom they are addressed, and that is each Christian, is engaged in the battle for truth. Are you enlisted? Have you accepted the responsibility to follow our Sovereign in advancing His Kingdom? If not, why not?

God now calls you to faith in the Living Son of God. He gave His life because of your broken, fallen condition. You see, the Word of God teaches us, “God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God. For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life” [ROMANS 5:8-10].

Now, He calls you to believe the message of life that Christ Jesus died because of your sin and that He was raised from the dead to make you right with the Father. Therefore, we are taught, “If you confess with your mouth, ‘Jesus is my Master,’ believing in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be set free. It is with the heart that one believes and is made right with God, and with the mouth that one confesses and is set free” [ROMANS 10:9, 10].<sup>4</sup> This is the promise of God to you, “Everyone who calls on the Name of the Lord will be saved” [ROMANS 10:13]. Believe this message and be saved. Do it today; do it now. Amen.

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<sup>3</sup> John MacArthur, **1 Corinthians** (Moody Press, Chicago, IL 1996) 476

<sup>4</sup> Author’s translation