

1 CORINTHIANS 16:13, 14

MUSCULAR CHRISTIANITY

Christianity has been feminised in our day. I don't mean that men are unwelcome among the churches or that there is overt feminist anger toward men. What I do mean is that acting manly—accepting responsibility to provide guidance and to build up the penitent, maintaining vigilance while standing firm against wickedness (incipient and blatant), performing difficult tasks without grumbling, protecting the vulnerable and the marginalised—is penalised. Personal comfort is of greater importance to contemporary saints than is personal integrity. Ease of life is to be sought rather than fidelity to the Word among modern Christians.

The pulpit is seemingly unwilling to address the emasculated, enfeebled and enervated condition of contemporary Christianity. Contemporary preaching is anaemic, flaccid, insipid. Someone has said, quite accurately, I fear, that modern churches demand that their preachers prepare sermonettes for Christianettes—a recitation of pious platitudes that offends no one and threatens only vague phantoms incapable of materialising. Tragically, the modern sermon may best be described as a bland individual reciting bland statements blandly urging bland parishioners to be more bland.

During the past five decades we witnessed churches making a concerted effort to make the Faith friendly to women; however, those efforts have had the effect of marginalising men by penalising them for being manly. Consequently, the Christian Faith is suffering a deficit of godly manliness. When we take seriously the New Testament, we are confronted with a virile Faith that is rejected by most churchgoers today. The demands of the New Testament are too great to be welcomed by the banal and bored occupants of the modern pew.

What is lacking, and what is desperately required if the churches of this day will again reflect the dynamic faith found among apostolic saints, is a return to manly Christianity. Such faith is revealed through the encouragement provided in the writings of the New Testament writers. One such place is found in the concluding remarks the Apostle to the Gentiles penned to the troubled and troublesome congregation of the Corinthians. There, Paul commanded the believers, “Be watchful, stand firm in the faith, act like men, be strong. Let all that you do be done in love.”¹

THE URGENCY OF THE COMMANDS — We are prone to forget that this is a letter to problematic Christians. Only centuries after he had written the letter was it divided into chapters and verses. I bring up that issue because Paul is speaking about the resurrection. Then, without pausing he speaks of the giving anticipated as a mark of the worship of believers. Just as precipitously, he speaks of his immediate plans for service and provides some general instructions concerning his co-workers. Then, without hesitation, he issues the commands that are our focus in this message.

¹ 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.

What should be apparent when reading the final chapters of this book is the urgency characterising the Apostle's words—an urgency that is absent from much of the preaching in this day. Whereas much of the preaching in this day sounds almost academic, Paul's words are energised with earnestness that reveals a singular desire that Christians should excel in godliness. This intensity is seen throughout all of his letters to the saints. Consider but a few examples.

In a later missive to this same congregation, the Apostle speaks of his intense desire for the believers to excel in godliness and righteousness. "I feel a divine jealousy for you, since I betrothed you to one husband, to present you as a pure virgin to Christ" [**2 CORINTHIANS 11:2**]. Such language reveals the passion of the Apostle's heart, and humbles contemporary preachers as we are compelled to confess the deficit of passion for God's glory in our own service.

The Apostle was not, as so often is the case in this day, a preacher content to say, "Repent, after a fashion, and believe, such as it were, or be damned in a measure." To the Ephesian elders he could state without fear of contradiction, "I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable, and teaching you in public and from house-to-house, testifying both to Jews and Greeks of repentance toward God and of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ." Shortly after making this declaration, he boldly stated, "I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all of you, for I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole counsel of God" [**ACTS 20:20, 21, 26, 27**]. This is bold preaching, unlike some who imply to church bosses, "Tell me what you want to hear and I'll say it!" Frankly, the Apostle would not be welcome in many of our churches because his message would appear so demanding. There would be no comfortable pew so long as Paul was preaching.

Listen to other places where the Apostle speaks passionately of his concern for the people of God. "The appointed time has grown very short. From now on, let those who have wives live as though they had none, and those who mourn as though they were not mourning, and those who rejoice as though they were not rejoicing, and those who buy as though they had no goods, and those who deal with the world as though they had no dealings with it. For the present form of this world is passing away" [**1 CORINTHIANS 7:29-31**].

Permit me point out the evident urgency of the apostolic message in yet another passage drawn from that same letter. "Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one receives the prize? So run that you may obtain it. Every athlete exercises self-control in all things. They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. So I do not run aimlessly; I do not box as one beating the air. But I discipline my body and keep it under control, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified" [**1 CORINTHIANS 9:24-27**].

In the Second Letter to the Christians of Corinth, the Apostle pleaded for active engagement of the Christians with the culture in which they lived, presenting Christ and living wholly for His glory [**2 CORINTHIANS 4:13-18**]. "Since we have the same spirit of faith according to what has been written, 'I believed, and so I spoke,' we also believe, and so we also speak, knowing that he who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus and bring us with you into his presence. For it is all for your sake, so that as grace extends to more and more people it may increase thanksgiving, to the glory of God.

“So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.”

Consider but a few other instances in his letters where the Apostle spoke of the urgency of the hour. To the churches of Galatia, he would pointedly write, “I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel—not that there is another one, but there are some who trouble you and want to distort the gospel of Christ. But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, so now I say again: If anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to the one you received, let him be accursed” [GALATIANS 1:6-9].

Or, consider the plea issued in the letter we have received as the Book of Ephesians. “Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, making the best use of the time, because the days are evil” [EPHESIANS 5:15, 16].

Permit me to point to one final note of urgency found within the letters of the Apostle. “[God] we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ. For this I toil, struggling with all His energy that He powerfully works within me” [COLOSSIANS 1:28, 29].

Two aspects of Paul’s writings stand out as you read his instructions to the churches: his passion for God’s glory and the urgency imposed by the brevity of time. Until we recapture that passion and that urgency, modern churches will be a caricature of the New Testament model.

FIVE COMMANDS — There are five commands issued in these two verses. It is not unusual for the Apostle to include a fusillade of commands at the conclusion of his letters;² the commands actually reveal something of the ongoing concern that he had for the people to whom he wrote. In this instance, Paul is deeply concerned that the congregation possess, for want of a better term, muscular faith. He is concerned that their faith and practise express virile Christianity. They were living in the midst of a world that was hostile to the Faith of Christ the Lord and which sought to seduce them from their secure position in the Lord. The situation was not unlike that in which we find ourselves in this day.

Let’s do a little housekeeping before we actually examine the apostolic commands. Take note that each of the verbs used in these commands is a present imperative. The import of this somewhat obscure fact is that Paul is commanding the Christians to adopt attitudes for life. These are not momentary attitudes that are enjoined upon us as believers in the Son of God; rather, Paul is describing a continuing state that is expected of believers in the Risen Master.

² See, e.g., **1 THESSALONIANS 5:16-22** (“Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ for you. Do not quench the Spirit. Do not despise prophecies, but test everything; hold fast what is good. Abstain from every form of evil.”) and **2 CORINTHIANS 13:11, 12** (“Finally, brothers, rejoice. Aim for restoration, comfort one another, agree with one another, live in peace; and the God of love and peace will be with you. Greet one another with a holy kiss.”).

Note, also, the martial theme—the first four commands are actually military orders and the fifth is an overarching direction that is necessary to ensure that the first four are not distorted. What should be apparent is that Paul is not offering suggestions to ensure that we have a happy life. It is a general truth that God loves you and offers a wonderful plan for your life, as presented in a well-known spiritual tract. However, we dare not imagine that this means that we can ignore the will of God once we have received Christ Jesus as Lord. I have often said, and I shall undoubtedly say again, either Jesus is Lord of all, or He is not Lord at all.

Let me expand that observation to stress the importance of what was just said. Contemporary Christianity treats God as though He were some sort of a cosmic busboy who always stands ready to satisfy every craving we may have. The emphasis in modern church life is the happiness of parishioner. Church members anticipate that they can waltz to heaven without any real commitment to Christ and without any trouble in their lives. They can participate in the life of the Body if they feel like it, and if their own desires are in conflict with the demands of Christ, well He will just have to understand that we must have time for recreation because we work so hard! We focus on our comfort rather than on advancing His Kingdom, and God would never interfere in our pursuit of what makes us happy.

However, the New Testament model is considerably different. Listen to a couple of instances where New Testament Christianity is presented. “Do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord, nor of me his prisoner, but share in suffering for the gospel by the power of God, who saved us and called us to a holy calling, not because of our works but because of his own purpose and grace, which he gave us in Christ Jesus before the ages began, and which now has been manifested through the appearing of our Saviour Christ Jesus, who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel, for which I was appointed a preacher and apostle and teacher, which is why I suffer as I do. But I am not ashamed, for I know whom I have believed, and I am convinced that he is able to guard until that Day what has been entrusted to me. Follow the pattern of the sound words that you have heard from me, in the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. By the Holy Spirit who dwells within us, guard the good deposit entrusted to you” [2 TIMOTHY 1:8-14].

Soon after writing these stirring words that demanded the utmost of Timothy, the Apostle wrote: “You then, my child, be strengthened by the grace that is in Christ Jesus, and what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also. Share in suffering as a good soldier of Christ Jesus. No soldier gets entangled in civilian pursuits, since his aim is to please the one who enlisted him. An athlete is not crowned unless he competes according to the rules. It is the hard-working farmer who ought to have the first share of the crops. Think over what I say, for the Lord will give you understanding in everything.

“Remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead, the offspring of David, as preached in my gospel, for which I am suffering, bound with chains as a criminal. But the word of God is not bound! Therefore I endure everything for the sake of the elect, that they also may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory. The saying is trustworthy, for:

“If we have died with him, we will also live with him;
if we endure, we will also reign with him;
if we deny him, he also will deny us;
if we are faithless, he remains faithful—

for he cannot deny himself” [2 TIMOTHY 2:1-13].

Listen to another instance when the Apostle spoke of the demands of the Faith. He said, “Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one receives the prize? So run that you may obtain it. Every athlete exercises self-control in all things. They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. So I do not run aimlessly; I do not box as one beating the air. But I discipline my body and keep it under control, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified” [1 CORINTHIANS 9:24-27]. The Christian Faith is active—if it is real. The Faith we have received is dynamic, demanding our most strenuous investment of life. Thus, the Apostle enjoins believers to accept the commands listed.

“Be Watchful!” The concept conveyed is alertness, vigilance. Figuratively, the command is to “be alive,” as in 1 THESSALONIANS 5:10 (where “awake or asleep” refers to being alive or dead. However, in this instance, it should be clear that the Apostle is commanding Christians to be spiritually alert as opposed to being apathetic or lethargic. Go back in your mind to the condition of the Corinthian Christians. Many seemed to normally be in a spiritual or moral stupor—and sometimes the stupor was physical, as when they were drunk at the Lord’s Table [see 1 CORINTHIANS 11:21]! The Corinthians had permitted their congregation to be infiltrated by the very ideas they professed to have forsaken when they came to faith in the Son of God. They had tolerated the substitution of human wisdom for God’s Word [see 1:18-2:16]. They had become factious [see 1:10-17], tolerated immorality [5:1-13], and grown litigious [6:1-8]. Many within the fellowship held confused and ungodly ideas concerning marriage, divorce and celibacy [7:1-40]. The church had become self-indulgent [10:1-13] and indifferent to the welfare of some of their own members [10:23-33]. They were guilty of abusing spiritual gifts [12:1-14:40]. Above all else, they were unloving—embracing and exemplifying all that love is not [13:1-6].

What must Christian watch for? What things demand vigilance of Christ’s followers? Follow me in this, for it is vital to vibrant Christian faith. At least four dangers threaten the saint and demand vigilance; and two aspects of our walk require vigilance.

In the first place, Christians must be on watch **against Satan**. Peter instructs believers, “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” [1 PETER 5:8, 9]. Believers must know the strategies of the evil one; and they must also recognise the points at which we are most susceptible. Those areas of vulnerability are described by John, who warns believers, “All that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride in possessions—is not from the Father but is from the world” [1 JOHN 2:16].

Christians are also warned in the Word to be alert not to fall into *temptations*. Facing the cross, Jesus cautioned His disciples, “Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation” [MARK 14:38]. If we fail to watch and pray, we will be susceptible and we may not know when we stumble into temptation. When we are not alert, we may easily stumble.

Jesus also warns that we are to watch, guarding against *apathy and lethargy in the Faith*. To the Church in Sardis, the Risen Master warned, “I know your works. You have the reputation of being alive, but you are dead. Wake up, and strengthen what remains and is about to die, for I have not found your works complete in the sight of my God. Remember, then, what you received and heard. Keep it, and repent. If you will not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what hour I will come against you” [REVELATION 3:1-3].

I am not harsh when I observe that most Christians are spiritually obtuse. It is a tragic observation that Scripture is generally ignored. However, the people of God cannot ignore the Word with impunity. To disregard Scripture invites spiritual decrepitude, leading to spiritual amnesia, moral lassitude and ethical somnolence. The Christian that is indifferent to the Word will soon become undistinguished from the world in which she lives. If we do not maintain vigilance, watching for what is given in the Word, we may shortly anticipate divine discipline.

Again, Christians must be vigilant against *false teachers*. It is not unloving for the people of God to expose error. In fact, that is our responsibility before God. The Apostle charges Christians, “Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them” [EPHESIANS 5:11]. Peter warns that “there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing upon themselves swift destruction” [2 PETER 2:1]. As he penned his final letter to Timothy, Paul looked forward to a dark day. “The time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths” [2 TIMOTHY 4:3-5]. Tragically, that day which he prophesied has come upon us.

There are two areas of diligence that are imposed upon all who are believers. Christians are to be *alert to pray*. We saw the command of the Master to “watch and pray” [MARK 14:38]. Prayer is part of the watchfulness enjoined upon us to avoid temptations, but it is also God’s appointed means to protect us against Satan’s attacks. When Paul is instructing believers to put on “the whole armour of God,” each piece of which is to be donned with prayer. To be precise, believers are charged to be “praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication.” Then, to ensure that we understand the importance of prayer, the Apostle appended this warning. “Keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints” [EPHESIANS 6: 18].

We have also received the joyous charge to be *alert for the Lord’s return*. Jesus said, “Stay awake, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming” [MATTHEW 24:42]. Concerning His return, He urged all who follow Him, “Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour” [MATTHEW 25:13]. Peter warns that “The day of the Lord will come like a thief.” And because the day will break suddenly, we must be alert, endeavouring to be holy and godly in our conduct in the world and before the eyes of the pagans [2 PETER 3:10-12]!

“Stand Firm in the Faith!” Standing firm was a major issue with the Apostle if what he wrote in his letters is any indication. Listen to just a few instances found in his several letters. “For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery” [GALATIANS 5:1]. “Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel” [PHILIPPIANS 1:27]. “Therefore, my brothers, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm thus in the Lord” [PHILIPPIANS 4:1]. “Now we live, if you are standing fast in the Lord” [1 THESSALONIANS 3:8]. And finally, “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” [2 THESSALONIANS 2:15].

Standing firm was obviously important in the estimate of the Apostle, and the sphere in which Christians were to stand firm was the Faith. The Faith speaks of the corpus of Christian truth, and not the trust that we hold. While we should indeed be firm in our faith toward Christ the Lord, we must know what we believe and adhere to that Faith. The Corinthians, like many contemporary Christians, were being “carried about by every wind of doctrine” [EPHESIANS 4:14]. We are responsible to know what we believe and to know why we believe. Too many Christians are like the deacon who when he was asked what he believed replied, “I believe what my church believes.” When asked to clarify that statement by stating the beliefs of his church, he replied, “They believe what I believe.”

The Faith is that body of doctrine that “was once for all delivered to the saints” [JUDE 3]. Paul would testify to the Corinthians that it is “the Gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand” [1 CORINTHIANS 15:1]. We Christians are to “fight the good fight of the Faith” [1 TIMOTHY 6:12]. Paul longed to hear that the churches were “standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the Faith of the Gospel” [PHILIPPIANS 1:27]. As a soldier stands ready to repel assaults against the nation, so the Christian is responsible to stand against assaults against the Faith.

Let me say that the evil one cannot snatch away the faith we have in the Risen Son of God. He can, and does, however, often render us ineffective by creating doubt and confusion concerning the content of what we believe. We can be corrupted through the pressure of friends and family members who are uncomfortable standing on the Faith. They seek to induce us to compromise so that they will not feel condemned by how we live. Other times, we want to present ourselves as wise according to the standard of this dying world. Therefore, we embrace the philosophies and attitudes of the world so that we won’t appear to be foolish. We need to be convinced of the truth of the Word that teaches, “Let no one deceive himself. If anyone among you thinks that he is wise in this age, let him become a fool that he may become wise. For the wisdom of this world is folly with God” [1 CORINTHIANS 3:18, 19]. Too often we attempt to sit in judgement on the Word rather than permitting the Word to judge our own lives. We foolishly imagine that we can apply the best concepts of dying men to bring about righteousness; however, we deceive ourselves and ensure that we jettison any hope of power with God or with man.

“Act Like Men!” There is some controversy about what Paul is advocating. It is certainly possible that he is calling them to be courageous in the face of the difficulties of being godly. There are challenges we face as Christians. It does require courage to be righteous in the midst of an unrighteous world. However, most scholars understand that the Apostle is urging the Corinthian Christians to grow up! He is calling on them to be mature. To be certain, he does say, “Be manly” [literal translation of the Greek]. However, this appears to be an idiom referring back to the fact that they were being immature in their spiritual walk.

You will remember that Paul confronted these believers with the scathing denunciation, “But I, brothers, could not address you as spiritual people, but as people of the flesh, as infants in Christ. I fed you with milk, not solid food, for you were not ready for it. And even now you are not yet ready, for you are still of the flesh” [1 CORINTHIANS 3:1-3a]. A mature saint uses his gifts as tools with which he builds, and not as toys to play with or trophies of which he can boast. Moreover, the mature person is known by diet. The immature play at church, imagining that singing and dancing is worship even as they rebel against the solid food of the Word. The Corinthians, much as is true of many of the professed saints of this day, were in desperate need of becoming mature. They needed to be confronted and warned to “grow up.”

In urging believers to grow up, the Apostle is continuing a theme that has been presented several times already. He spoke of his own maturity, implying the immaturity of the Corinthians, when he said, “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” [1 CORINTHIANS 13:10, 11]. It is not a compliment when the Apostle writes, “Brothers, do not be children in your thinking. Be infants in evil, but in your thinking be mature” [1 CORINTHIANS 14:20]. It is exciting to meet Christians who are newborn in the Faith. However, there is something dreadfully wrong with an infantile Christian that is still acting as she did when she was newborn in the Faith. I urge all who hear this message to heed the counsel to “grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ” [1 PETER 3:18].

“Be strong!” This is the fourth command issued by the Apostle as he pleads for Christian living among the readers of this letter. The strength that is needed is not strength that we are able to work up within ourselves; the strength that we need is the strength that comes from standing in the Faith of the Son of God. This is the meaning of the admonition for Christians to “be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might” [EPHESIANS 6:10], just as it is the basis for the instruction to “be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus” [2 TIMOTHY 2:1].

Christians must stand against the pagan society in which they live. They must stand apart, refusing to succumb to the pressures applied by their culture to compromise for the sake of personal comfort for the pagans. Acting out of conviction leads inevitably to testing, and the testing can be quite severe. The Corinthians had been tolerant when they should have been strict, and they had been intolerant and unloving when they should have been manly enough to strengthen those who were weak. They had not always been aware of the risks inherent in compromise with the world, nor willing to accept their responsibility as mature believers. Thus, they had weakened the congregation and jeopardised their witness among the pagans.

There is a theme here that must not be missed. We are to be watchful; but if we neglect the Word we will grow complacent. We must stand firm in the Faith; but without the preaching of the Word we will not be able to stand in the evil day. We must be mature; but so long as we feed on milk while neglecting solid food of the Word we cannot grow strong. We are to be strong; and the strength we need grows out of understanding of the Word. Writing to young men, John said,

“I write to you, young men,
because you are strong”

Do you wonder where they got this strength? John tells them that their strength arises because

“the Word of God abides in you”

[1 JOHN 2:14].

You will not grow strong feeding on spiritual pabulum and drinking milk. You need the solid food—sound teaching of the Word. Without such strong meat, you will never stand resolute against the wicked one.

Church youth programmes are notorious for succumbing to parental pressure to provide entertainment for the youth. However, when their children grow into their teen years and they want nothing to do with the Faith, those same parents, in desperation, are willing to do anything to entice their children to adopt the Faith, and the youth want nothing to do with either the Faith or the pleas of their parents. The children, untrained in the Faith, whine that church is boring; and the parents, because they have themselves long been fed on milk, are incapable of providing answers which the children need. Give your children sound teaching from their earliest days, and model the Faith in your own life. Show respect for the Word, attending the preaching of the Word, discussing the Word in your home, and feeding on the Word with your family, and you will raise children that make a difference and who embrace the Faith.

“Let all that you do be done in love!” I find it fascinating that a plea for love follows so closely to the imperatives for manliness. What should be apparent to even the most casual reader is that Paul is not advocating aggressiveness or self-assertion. Rather, he is seeking the strength that comes from love. Note the preposition “in.” The Apostle is concerned that the believers demonstrate the all-pervading nature of love. Nothing we do is outside the scope of love. Love is the very atmosphere in which the Christian lives and moves and has his being.

When love permeates our lives, it will ensure that the firmness we seek does not become hardness, and it will keep our strength from becoming domineering. Love will ensure that our maturity will be gentle and considerate, and it will lead us to avoid running roughshod over those that are struggling to grow up in Christ the Lord. The presence of love will keep our straight doctrine from growing into obstinate dogmatism, and it will keep the right lives we live from metamorphosing into smug self-righteousness.

A PLEA FOR BIBLICAL MANLINESS — On this day set aside to honour father throughout our nation, I set before you this plea from the Apostle. The plea is not gender specific, but it does seek to instil muscular Faith among our churches. The plea does not exclude women, for both men and women are called to shoulder responsibility to advance the Faith. The plea is restatement of the apostolic charge for all Christians: “Be alert. Be firm in the Christian Faith. Be courageous and strong. Do everything in love” [**1 CORINTHIANS 16:13, 14**].³

Isaac Watts penned many hymns that have blessed and challenged believers in the Risen Saviour. One hymn in particular seems appropriate for us to ponder as we consider the message we have just heard. Among the verses of the hymn are two that I leave with each believer.

“Are there no foes for me to face?
Must I not stem the flood?
Is this vile world a friend to grace,
To help me on to God?

“Sure I must fight if I would reign,
Increase my courage, Lord!
I’ll bear the toil, endure the pain,
Supported by Thy Word.”⁴

Of course, there can be no biblical manliness if you are not part of the Faith. Outside the Faith, you are under condemnation—excluded from grace and a foreigner to the Israel of God. Your first great need is to be born from above and into the Family of God. Christ died because of your sin, taking upon Himself all the punishment you deserve. If you will receive His sacrifice, He will offer you life. He is able to do this because He conquered death. Having giving His life as a perfect sacrifice because of sin, He broke the bonds of death and rose from the tomb. For this reason the Word of God invites all who are willing to receive Him as Master of life with these words, “If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved” [**ROMANS 10:9, 10**]. The Word of God invites all who are willing, saying, “Everyone who calls on the Name of the Lord will be saved” [**ROMANS 10: 13**].

May God recreate muscular Christianity in our day and in this place. May He grant you life, even as He has promised as you believe in the Risen Son of God. Amen.

³ **GOD’S WORD Translation** (Baker, Grand Rapids, MI 1995)

⁴ Isaac Watts, “Am I a Soldier of the Cross”