

## Jason Upchurch - 1 Corinthians 16:13-14 - Five Final Commands

Before we dive in here this morning, I want to correct something I said last week in regards to the timeline of Paul's missionary journeys and the writing of his letters to Corinth.

I'll be honest, sometimes these are difficult to put together because we have to reconstruct history from different places in the Bible, nevertheless I should be much more careful than I was.

I said that Paul had written 1 Corinthians with the intention of going to Corinth the following year, but that that trip never panned out. That's not accurate.

What seems to have happened is that Paul wrote 1 Corinthians and sent it with Timothy to Corinth to sort things out. When Timothy got there, things were much worse than Paul imagined. There were false apostles in Corinth doing everything they could to undermine Paul and tear the gospel and the church apart. Timothy seems to have written to Paul about this and so it seems that Paul came to Corinth right away.

That visit was a painful visit. Paul mentions a painful visit in **2 Cor. 2:1**. It seems as though he came, and was rejected immediately and he came right back to Ephesus. It was a result of that visit that Paul wrote the severe letter that I mentioned last week. And it was the severe letter that caused the Corinthians to repent.

But as best I can tell he still did not visit the Corinthians after Pentecost, but they did repent from their sin as a result of the severe letter that Paul wrote.

If you've ever tried to put timelines together in the Bible you know it can be tricky.

As mentioned last week, the closing chapters of Paul's letters are often a little bit of a grab bag. There's usually closing commands, greetings to the person or church that's receiving the letter, greetings from the church where Paul is writing. There's often a benediction. So sometimes these closing chapters can feel a little like Proverbs in that one section is not necessarily connected to the next.

This morning we look at a rapid succession of 4 commands that Paul gives, and then a qualifier to all of the commands.

The commands are: be watchful, stand firm in the faith, act like men, be strong.

And then the qualifier to all of those is: let all that you do be done in love.

Before we jump in, why these commands? And why here?

We've had 16 chapters worth of commands. Why these ones and why now? Well, the other commands were related to very specific situations in the church. How to handle sin or how to ensure spiritual gifts are done in a manner that is edifying.

This is much more generic in nature. That doesn't mean they're meaningless, but it does mean that Paul seems to be stepping back a little bit and giving more generic fatherly advice. Almost like what a father would say to their kids right before going on a road trip "listen to your mom, be good til I get back." These are important, but more I think they're endearing commands from a spiritual father to his spiritual children.

Paul often gives people a small exhortation at the end of his letters that is somewhat specific to their situation and I think that's what this is. And I think this little verse is an encouragement to all of us in our faith.

### 1) Be watchful or some of you have be on guard. **Read 13**

What does that mean? Be on guard for what?

In Greek, the word is a single word - gregoreo- where we get the name Gregory or Greg. And it does generically mean watchful, ready, alert. And the word itself gives a sense of constant vigilance. Constant readiness and alertness.

But ready for what? Interestingly, in the NT specifically, this word is almost always applied to 2 situations: it is applied to prayer and it is applied to the coming of Jesus.

It's often applied to prayer.

**Matt. 26:38:** When Jesus was in the Garden of Gethsemane praying the night before he died he told Peter, James and John: "My soul is very sorrowful, even to death; remain here and watch with me."

Jesus is saying "earnestly pray with me!" Remember when he goes back to them and they're sleeping he says "Could you not watch with me one hour? Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation."

Being on guard and watchful includes fervent prayer.

Paul uses this word again in **Col. 4:2:** continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful - gregoreo - in it with thanksgiving.

Constant, fervent prayer.

**1 Pet 5:6:** humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you, casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you.

We know that, pray to God, give him your burdens. But listen to what comes next: "Be sober-minded, be watchful." They're not disconnected. Peter is encouraging us to constantly pray to God because the devil is prowling around.

The way Christians stay on guard is to pray.

But second way the Bible uses this word is in regard to the coming of Jesus.

Jesus himself uses it concerning his coming to destroy Jerusalem in **Matthew 24.**

**Matt. 24:42-43:** Therefore, stay awake (gregoreo), for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming. But know this, that if the master of the house had known in what part of the night the thief was coming, he would have stayed awake (gregoreo) and would not have let his house be broken into. Therefore you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.

He's actually just talking about the destruction of Jerusalem. But interestingly, the apostles pick up that language and also use it in light of the second coming:

**1 Thess. 5:6,10:** Talking about the second coming: So then let us not sleep, as others do, but let us keep awake and sober."

There is constant encouragement in the NT to live in light of the return of Jesus. To live in light of the coming of Jesus. Not in fear that somehow Jesus is going to disown us or be ashamed of us. But because we want to hear "well done good and faithful servant." To please the Lord while he is away.

Why this command? Because let's be honest, these are hard things to do. For most people they don't come naturally.

Not many people are prone to praying without ceasing. Or prone to praying deeply and routinely.

And how often do we really live our lives in light of Jesus returning? I mean where we evaluate our actions and our words and spending and our family decisions and recreation decision knowing that one day we will give an account for them?

Maybe we like arguing about eschatology, but do we really live it? Do we really live in light of being pilgrims on our way to glory? Just passing through this world for a brief moment seeking to live peaceful and godly lives for Jesus?

And do we really pray as though Jesus is listening and working?

Robert Murray M'Cheyne: "If I could hear Christ praying for me in the next room, I wouldn't fear a million enemies. Yet the distance makes no difference, he is praying for me."

That's a great comfort, but let me give it a twist. What if we prayed knowing that Christ heard us? If we knew Christ was in the next room listening to our prayers we would pray all the more boldly and all the more fervently. Yet the distance makes no difference, he hears us.

Stay watchful - earnestly praying and earnestly living until the Lord returns.

## 2) Stand Firm in the Faith. Read 13

This is one of the constant refrains throughout the NT. Stand firm, stand fast. And it almost always relates to the gospel.

Speaking of Christians who are tempted to go back to the Law and use it as a means of salvation Paul says:

**Gal. 5:1:** For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and not submit again to a yoke of slavery.

People love laws, they love external religion. They love doing things that earn them favor. Even we often get caught up thinking that God's favor on us is based on our performance. If we do a bunch of good things, God is happy. If we sin a bunch, God is mad at us. That's not the gospel.

The gospel is that God pours out his kindness and grace on us all because of Jesus, not at all because of our works, let alone adhering to the OT Law. But Paul says it takes resolve to keep ourselves from falling back into the trap of religion. So we have to stand firm and not go back to the Law. We hold to the gospel.

**1 Thess. 3:8:** For now we live, if you are standing fast in the Lord.

We stand fast in the Lord. Or stand fast in the faith. They are really the same thing.

In **1 Cor. 15:1** Paul says Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand.

It's not enough just to know the gospel. It's not enough to even say believe the tenants of the gospel are true or right or good. You must believe them to such a degree as they shape your whole life. Where you believe the truths and they transform you because the Holy Spirit has made you alive.

**And** you have to stand firm in those truths. What does it mean to stand firm? It means that we don't waiver in our commitment to the gospel. We don't waiver in our commitment to a body of truth.

There have always been pressures on Christians to waiver. In the early church there was pressure to abandon the simple gospel of salvation by faith alone in Christ alone for salvation by faith in Jesus plus keeping the Law and circumcision. I mean, what's the harm? The harm is that that is salvation by works. And it's a false gospel.

In our day there is a lot of wavering for political correctness. A lot of wavering because we don't want to sound bigoted. We don't want to sound narrow minded by claiming that faith alone in the grace of God through Jesus alone is the only way to the Father.

The world wants us to be open minded and compromise and calm down just a little. They don't want us to be "Christian nationalists" - whatever that even means.

But God calls us to stand. To stand firm. To stand against lies and sin and slander. To stand against popularity.

Believers from the earliest days are called to stand like a lighthouse in the middle of a hurricane because we stand on the bedrock of the truth and promises of the Word of God.

And that's Paul says. Stand firm. On what? In the faith. What is the faith.

**The faith** is not our subject beliefs. Everyone believes something, and many people believe something about God. Even those who are not Christians often believe parts of the Bible. But that's not what he says.

He says stand firm in **the faith**.

What is the faith? The faith is the gospel that saves us.

**1 Timothy 6:21** Paul says there are some that have swerved from the faith.

**1 Tim. 4:1:** The Spirit expressly says in later times some will depart from the faith, by devoting themselves to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons.

**Col. 1:23:** continue in the faith.

**1 Tim. 3:9:** hold to the mystery of the faith.

**Turn to Jude.** Jude 3 is helpful for us to understand this concept.

Jude identifies himself in **Vs. 1** as the "Brother of James" which means he was the half brother of Jesus. They had the same mother, but not the same Father. Nevertheless, for Jude, Jesus is not primarily his older half-brother, but the Lord Christ whom he worships as his Savior and who is worthy of glory, majesty, honor and dominion because he is God over all. Listen to what he says in **Vs. 3-4. Read**

Jude seems to be writing to a church or a group of churches and although he had planned to dive deeper into theology, maybe like Romans or Hebrews, something had come up that required more urgent attention. He had to encourage them to contend - to fight - for **the faith**.

He says contend - fight - for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints.

The faith, the body of truth. This faith was once for all delivered. What does that mean? Once for all means completely, finally. I'm going to clean this room once and for all. This is the definitive faith that God has handed down decisively, for all time.

There is nothing else to be added. There's no golden tablets buried somewhere like the Mormon church claims. There's no papal edict that adds to our salvation like the Roman Catholic Church says. There's no continuing prophet we need to listen to for divine revelation pertaining to salvation, there's no lost books of the Bible, no secret revelation or DiVinci code that we need to worry about. Why?

Because the complete faith - everything we need for salvation and godly living - has been handed down to us by God through the apostles and entrusted to the saints for all time. And we fight for it.

Contend - the Greek word means exert intense effort, extreme, Olympic level exertion to win against all opponents.

Usain Bolt was the Jamaican sprinter and the fastest man on the planet, and in every race he gave 100% and he blew the competition away. They didn't even have a chance.

That's the type of effort Jude is telling us to exert against opponents of the faith. So what is this faith?

Well, this faith is contained in the Holy Bible - the 66 books which comprise the inerrant, infallible Word of God. There is no other revelation or other philosophy or ideology that supersedes the Bible. This is God's very Word.

His Word tells specifically who God is. The eternal, glorious, triune creator God of the universe who is worthy of all worship and honor and obedience. He reveals himself as eternally Father, Son and Holy Spirit - three in one, one in three.

His glory is most fully manifest in the Father sending his Son Jesus to take on flesh, live a perfect sinless life, die on a Roman cross in the place of all who would believe in him and rise on the third day. All those who trust that Christ is the risen Lord, who died to make atonement for their sins are saved. Not only are their sins paid for on the cross, but the Lord Jesus credited to us his righteousness.

I was talking to a man this week. He's a Mormon, or claims to be. I asked him what salvation was - what do you have to do to be saved? And he said, that's a good question. He wasn't quite sure what the answer was. So I asked him a different question. I said, when we talk about salvation - what are we in need of being saved from? When we say "save" - what does that mean? Usually saving involves harm, from destruction. He thought that was a really good question and didn't know the answer. So I told him.

The salvation that God has brought about through faith in Christ is actually salvation from God's own holy wrath. The Bible says we are totally depraved sinners deserving damnation and who could do nothing on our own to merit God's favor. Because God is infinitely holy he must punish sin in infinite magnitude. The wages of sin is what? Death. Not just physical death, but an eternity of torment under the wrath of the Lamb in the lake of fire forever. Torment, flames, weeping and gnashing of teeth.

Heaven is described as the place where there are no more tears and no more pain. Hell is the exact opposite: only weeping and gnashing of teeth; only torment forever.

Through faith in Jesus, God has saved us from himself. He has saved us from his own holy wrath. In his own grace he has given us eternal life and hope through faith in Jesus. God in his mercy has satisfied his own wrath toward us, by giving his Son.

And through faith we are now adopted into the family of God, part of the Church universal and the church local. We join the ranks of all the saints of all the ages, and we gather among the saints here every Sunday morning. And we live to proclaim the risen Lord until he comes in glory.

That's the faith. That's what we hang on to. That's what we are standing for.

That message is what the world hates. That is an intolerant message. But it is the message, the faith, that we are called to stand firm on.

**Back in 1 Cor.** This is part of Paul's final exhortations.

Pray earnestly and live earnestly until Jesus comes. And stand firm in the faith - in the gospel truths.

### 3) Act like men. Read 13

You might have caught on by now, but the Bible is not very politically correct. God has actually assigned 2 and only 2 genders: men and women. Those genders are tied completely to biology down to the chromosomal level and manifesting themselves in physical biological differences.

That, of course, is not lost on God. He designed us the way we are on purpose. He did that in the Garden. And although our country has completely been given over to the Spirit of the Age in regards to that, God's design still stands.

So when Paul comes along and says act like men, he actually means something by that. He means for men to act in accordance with God's design for them. What is that design?

I assign a fair amount of reading in Pre Marital counseling from John Piper's book This Momentary Marriage. I commend it to you. Piper makes the case - and I agree - that there are essentially 4 categories that men lead in. Piper specifically has marriage in mind, but I think it's safe to broaden it out to men in general.

Spiritual provision / spiritual protection / physical provision / physical protection.

We are to provide spiritual nourishment to our families, to our neighbors, to our church. The onus on leadership throughout the Bible is on men. That's not to say that women cannot participate or have a role. They can. But throughout the Bible we see the emphasis is on the loving spiritual provision of godly men. Encouraging, teaching, admonishing, leading people to the Lord in more and more godliness.

Men are also called to spiritually protect. It's not just enough to ensure our family and friends are growing on good spiritual food, we need to protect them from harmful food as well. We need to lovingly warn people about the dangers of things that could be spiritually harmful.

We also are called to provide and protect physically. In the Garden God called Adam to work the ground and cultivate the Garden before Eve was created. And even now, Paul says that if any an won't work, let him not eat. We are called to be the main physical providers.

We are also called to be the main physical protectors. The Bible says that women are the weaker vessel - that's not a slam, that's just the reality - and God has called men to physically protect those in danger.

To be clear, women can participate in some of these things as well. They can help provide, they can help protect. There's a reason if weird people get around your kids that mama bear instinct rises up. And of course ladies can disciple one another and warn each other. But the point is that the leadership in these areas has been given to men.

If you look at other areas of the Bible that give this similar command what's being said is have courage.

**1 Sam. 4:9:** the Philistines encourage each other by saying: Take courage and be men, O Philistines, lest you become slaves to the Hebrews as they have been to you. Be men and fight.

**1 Kings 2** when David is passing the torch to Solomon, he says to act like a man. Being a king is difficult. There were many weak and cowardly kings in Israel. David wanted Solomon to act like a man, to be courageous.

Men, we are called to courageously lead in life. That's the call God has given us in accordance with his design. We are to act like men and fulfill the roles God has given us.

#### 4) Be strong. Read 13

Interestingly, a lot of people connect "act like men" and "be strong" as though they are connected. I don't think they are. I don't think Paul is saying that we need to hit the gym and drink protein powder here.

The form of this word is literally "be strengthened" - he's not saying go get strong, he's saying let yourself be strengthened. How do we do that?

Throughout the NT we see that we are strengthened by grace.

**Hebrews 13:9** says we are strengthened by grace.

**2 Tim. 2:2:** be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus.

I think this is similar. Physical strength is good, but what we really need is to be strengthened by grace. By being reminded of our sinfulness before God and his mercy toward us anyway. When you blow it and someone shows you grace it encourages your heart. That's what we need here.

We do need to be warned and obey commands, God has called us to that. But we don't strength from obedience to commands. We get strength and encouragement by being reminded of the grace of God in Christ.

One time I was working for a guy and said something completely inappropriate. Like really bad. And I apologized right away. I thought he;d probably fire me. But he chose not to. Instead he showed me grace.

And you know what that did? It encouraged me to be all the more faithful, it strengthened me and gave me motivation to be the best employee I could be.

The same is true with God's grace. Have you blown it? God still loves you. He still accepts you. As much as Jesus is his Son, you are his child and he will never leave you or forsake you.

#### 5) Do all things in love. **Read 14**

I think this is a qualifier for the other commands. We watch in love. Our prayers, our waiting for Jesus - all in love.

We hold to the truth of the gospel in love. There's a lot of people who get really excited about doctrine and doctrinal purity. And I'm all for doctrinal purity. But they're rude and grating. We're called to love.

Our conduct as men should be in love. There's a patriarchal movement in conservative churches where male leadership is held up all the time. I don't necessarily have a problem with that, the problem is it often tends toward abuse and chauvinism. Women are degraded and disrespected. And men give excuses "Well, this is how God made me." No. Men lead and provide in love.

And we strengthen each other in grace out of love.

All things are done in love.

Paul says in 1 Tim. 1:5 the aim of his charge is love.

If you target for the Christian life with all the things we should be doing all over the target. The very center, the bullseye, would say love. That's what we aim at in all we do, for the glory of God.

**Pray**