

PRINCIPLES FOR CHRISTIAN LIVING
1 Corinthians 16:13-24
July 30, 2006 – Grace Covenant Baptist Church

We come this morning to Paul's final words in what is really his second letter to the church at Corinth. You will remember that he had written one letter to which the Corinthians responded that is not recorded in Scripture. That first letter was written in an effort to correct the contamination and confusion in this early church. However, the tone of this letter shows that the first letter did not have much effect.

In these closing words, which unfortunately are skipped over entirely or hit with nothing more than a lick and a promise, contain what for Paul is a straightforward exhortation to these at Corinth. His conclusion summarizes all that he had written to them in the letter. John MacArthur notes that here Paul gives a list of imperatives that are in many ways the positive side of what in earlier chapters the apostle had told the Corinthians *not* to be [*1 Corinthians*, 471]. Paul accomplishes this by giving ten principles regarding *how the Christian is to behave towards both those outside the church as well as those in the church*.

I. Commands Concerning Those Without (16:13-14)

Paul understood that the Corinthians were immature in the faith and lacked knowledge of sound doctrine. In many ways, Christianity was new to them. They also faced persecution from those who had not trusted in Christ savingly, from both religious Jews and from irreligious pagans. So Paul sets forth five principles to help guide them against the onslaughts of the wicked.

1. Be watchful (v. 13a)

We are familiar with watchfulness in our culture. The events of 9/11 fostered a heightened alertness in our country against the schemes of terrorists. Our government is now more watchful towards groups that militate against our nation. We now have a color-coded security alert system that informs us of security threats. The goal of the Department of Homeland Security is not only to protect our borders from these evil men, but also to keep a heightened awareness of security fresh in our minds.

Paul exhorts the Corinthians to **“be on the alert.”** It is a command to be watchful. Negatively, it means that the believer is never to let his guard down but always be on the alert for danger. It is a warning against *carelessness* in the Christian life. In order to be watchful, we must be able to recognize the enemy, those who premeditatedly and systematically attempt to tear Christianity down. These attacks come both against the church locally and against the church universally. They also come against individual believers. John MacArthur notes four critical things that we are to **“be on the alert”** for as found in the New Testament (*1 Corinthians*, 472-473). These are the enemies of which the Christian must be on guard.

First, we are to be on the alert against Satan. “Be of sober *spirit*, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour” (1 Pet. 5:8). We must be able to recognize the schemes of the devil. He preys upon the sinful heart of the believer. John recognized this in 1 John 2:16 where he wrote that Satan latches onto “the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life.” We must know our sinful tendencies in order to stand watch against the devil and his minions.

Second, we must be on the alert against temptation. In Mark 14:38, Jesus told the disciples in the Garden of Gethsemane, “Keep watching and praying that you may not come into

temptation; the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.” Jesus was not as concerned about the disciples’ physical weariness as He was about their spiritual slumber. Jesus told them to “keep watching and praying.” We too must constantly watch and fervently pray that the Lord would deliver us from temptation lest we fall into a spiritual stupor.

Third, the Christian must **“be on the alert”** against apathy and indifference. I suppose this forms our greatest enemy because these sins are often unrecognizable. The church at Laodicea was a church that was lukewarm, neither hot nor cold. They were simply indifferent to the things of God and Christ. The church at Sardis was also an example of apathy and indifference. They thought they were alive but they were dead. What was their warning? “So remember what you have received and heard; and keep *it*, and repent. Therefore if you do not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what hour I will come to you” (Rev. 3:3).

Fourth, Christians should **“be on the alert”** for false teachers. “But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will also be false teachers among you, who will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing swift destruction upon themselves” (2 Pet. 2:1). These false teachers are so subtle and convincing that they can even deny Christ and get away with it. We have such today that deny God’s omniscience in open theism and those who deny the doctrine of justification by faith alone in the New Perspective on Paul. These deny the nature and character of God and His decree of salvation for the lost.

Against all of these, Satan, temptation, apathy and indifference, and false teachers, we must **“be on the alert.”** We must not be careless because, as we have seen, the warnings have been sounded in Scripture. You would not remain in an upstairs bedroom if you heard warning sirens and knew a tornado was barreling down your street, would you? Neither should you neglect the call to be alert in these areas.

2. Be steadfast (v. 13b)

Paul then says the believer is to **“stand firm in the faith.”** This is one of Paul’s favorite phrases in referring to the constancy with which believers should persevere in the faith. It is a warning against *fickleness* in the Christian life. We have seen that one of the areas the Corinthians had failed to take a stand was the doctrine of the resurrection. They, like the Ephesians, were “being carried about by every wind of doctrine” (Eph. 4:14).

The **“faith”** that Paul refers to here is not saving faith, but faith in the content of the gospel. As we saw in chapter 15, one of the bedrock doctrines of the gospel is the resurrection of the dead, which some at Corinth were led to deny. Because of this, they were unable to **“stand firm in the faith”** because their doctrine was incorrect. They lived the Christian life with a great deal of uncertainty.

This is why it is crucial that the believer immerse himself in the Word of God and seek to understand God’s truth. Many Christians waver in their faith because they are not rooted and grounded in the Word. They are fickle because they are ignorant. Paul wrote to the Colossians, “Therefore as you have received Christ Jesus the Lord, *so* walk in Him, having been firmly rooted *and now* being built up in Him and established in your faith” (Col. 2:6-7). That is, having been firmly rooted in the saving truths of the gospel, *and now* being built up in Him or growing in your understanding of that gospel, then, being established in your faith, you have the ability **“stand firm in the faith.”**

It never ceases to amaze me how often a professing believer does not understand the importance of a daily, meditative immersion in the Word of God. They struggle with doubt and uncertainty. They continue to give into temptation. They are, as Martyn Lloyd-Jones calls them,

spiritually depressed. This happens because some are not really Christians at all. But some are believers and continue to live in this depression because they do not seek to understand God's Word. Let me be blunt here – if you don't know God's Word, you cannot, and I repeat, cannot grow in the Lord and **“stand firm in the faith.”** You must have a daily, prayerful appetite to know and understand God's truths. God's Word must truly be “more desirable than gold” and “sweeter than the honey” to you (Ps. 19:10).

3. Be mature (v. 13c)

Paul then exhorts them to **“behave like men.”** This is a warning against *immaturity* in the life of the Christian. A man has courage and maturity that a child does not have. Paul had earlier exhorted the Corinthians to be mature, “Brethren, do not be children in your thinking; yet in evil be infants, but in your thinking be mature” (1 Cor. 14:20). In other words, the believer is to act like a responsible adult. While we are always to have a childlike dependency on God, we are not to be childish. And again, like steadfastness, this maturity comes by longing “for the pure milk of the word, so that by it you may grow in respect to salvation” (1 Pet. 2:2).

We would do well to remember here what the Corinthians were up against. As Charles Hodge points out, “They had to withstand the contempt of the learned and the persecutions of the powerful” [*1 Corinthians*, 369]. They found themselves constantly having to defend their faith against the intellects and magistrates in their culture. Yet, Paul exhorts them, **“behave like men.”**

May I remind you this morning that the Scripture never teaches that the Christian life is a bed of roses. Many pulpits today proclaim that it is never God's will for the Christian to suffer. But nothing could be further from the truth. Suffering and persecution are a part of the Christian life. Hear Paul in Romans 5:1-5:

Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ,² through whom also we have obtained our introduction by faith into this grace in which we stand; and we exult in hope of the glory of God.³ And not only this, but we also exult in our *tribulations*, knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance;⁴ and perseverance, proven character; and proven character, hope;⁵ and hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us.

Paul indicates that if you as a believer do not face tribulation and persecution that proves your character then you might want to check your Christianity at the door. The Christians hope lies in overcoming these persecutions “through the Holy Spirit who was given to us.” That is what Paul here commands the Corinthians, and all believers. In the face of persecution, be mature.

4. Be strong (v. 13d)

Closely related to **“act like men”** is to **“be strong.”** This is a warning against *weakness* in the Christian life. Paul understood that man, by his very nature, is weak. He also understood that the believer is often weak in spirit. That is why he encourages these at Corinth to **“be strong.”** It is not a reference to physical strength, but spiritual strength. But just as it takes discipline to gain physical strength, the same is true with spiritual strength. Our spiritual strength does not come by osmosis. We must take care in the spiritual disciplines to **“be strong.”**

I fear that today Christianity could be characterized by “retreat” rather than “fight.” And while there may be times that we should retreat, there are more often times that we should engage and flex our spiritual muscles in a particular situation. However, the Christian is often like electrical current, taking the path of least resistance. This is a sign of weakness and cowardice, not strength. How often do we find ourselves in the midst of turmoil and rather than confront it, we do nothing, hoping it will simply go away? We must understand that when dealing with the adversary, we must **“be strong.”** If not, then the adversary can gain a foothold and cause all sorts of chaos, both in our lives as individuals and in the live of the body corporately.

5. Be loving (v. 14)

The last principle that Paul gives to the Corinthians regarding those without is to be loving. He writes, **“Let all that you do be done in love.”** Paul had already devoted an entire chapter of this letter to this topic (1 Cor. 13). The Corinthians were a proud and divisive group for which this reminder to be loving was of utmost importance, particularly in dealing with those outside the church. Their arrogance and division proved to be a stumbling block to those outside the fold. So Paul again reminds them to do all things **“in love.”**

At times, this exhortation proves to be extremely difficult for us. On the one hand, we are to *protect* the gospel from all of the things we have mentioned, while at the same time *proclaiming* the gospel to the very ones that are trying to tear us down. Often, our patience grows thin and suddenly, though our intent is to proclaim the truth in love and gladness, we are in the midst of an argument that we know is bringing no glory to the kingdom. Have you ever been there? However, we are not to fight *about* the gospel, we are to fight *with* the gospel. We are not to bicker about the gospel; we are to broadcast the gospel.

So here is Paul’s exhortation towards those without in the nutshell: Be watchful, not careless, in love; be steadfast in the faith, not fickle in the faith, in love; be mature, not childish, in love; and be strong, not weak, in love. In so doing, you act to *protect* the gospel as well as *proclaim* the gospel in a way that honors and glorifies the Lord.

II. Commands Concerning Those Within (16:15-24)

Paul now turns his attention to five more principles that should guide the believer in their actions towards those in the body. He does so by appealing to them one last time as **“brethren”** (v. 15).

1. Be devoted (v. 15)

Paul begins by commending the household and ministry of **“Stephanas.”** He refers to them as **“the first fruits of Achaia,”** signifying not only that they were the first converts to Christianity among the Corinthians, but also that they were united in Christ to all who converted after them. **“Stephanas”** was visiting Paul in Ephesus at the time he wrote this letter and was one of the few people that Paul had baptized in Corinth (1 Cor. 1:16). His **“household”** would have included not only immediate members of his family but his servants as well.

Paul’s emphasis here is on their devotion to **“the ministry of the saints.”** The word here translated **“devoted”** is translated “addicted” in the Authorized Version. As Roger Ellsworth points out, “The word Paul used and the tense it is in give us to understand that at a certain point in their lives, Stephanas and his household *decisively* and *deliberately* dedicated themselves to

serving others. They set themselves apart, not for positions of leadership, but for service” [*Strengthening Christ’s Church*, 266, italics mine]. John MacArthur echoes this thought,

Devoted themselves is in an intense form of the Greek, emphasizing that Stephanas and his household served *entirely on their own initiative*... Stephanas and his household did not wait to be appointed. *They appointed themselves* to the **ministry** of service to fellow believers. They spontaneously assigned themselves to help meet any need they saw among **the saints**. Their service was self-motivated and self-assigned. Though it was sometimes necessary for the early church to assign tasks, as with the appointment of deacons, most of the work was and still is done by those who simply see a need and meet it. [*1 Corinthians*, 480, italics mine].

So Paul, using Stephanas and his household as an example, exhorts the Corinthians (and us as well) to a life of service, of devotion, to the body. You might have heard it said of the church today that less than 10 percent of the people do 100 percent of the work. This should not be the case. If a church’s leadership is providing ministry opportunities so that believers can exercise their spiritual gifts, then this certainly should not be true. But even if they are not, the Christian is encouraged to find a need and meet it, to faithfully serve the body.

2. Be submissive (v. 16)

Stephanas was just one among many who labored faithfully in the church at Corinth. Some did so temporarily, such as Apollos, Peter, and Paul himself (1 Cor. 1:12). Others labored among them daily as a part of the body. Paul exhorted the Corinthians to show gratitude by submitting “**to everyone who helps in the work and labors.**” Those in leadership in the church serve gladly and tirelessly. Often, however, as was apparently the case at Corinth, their labors go unrecognized. For this reason, we see numerous texts in the New Testament that encourage believers to honor their leaders.

1 Timothy 5:17 – The elders who rule well are to be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching.

Hebrews 13:17 – Obey your leaders and submit *to them*, for they keep watch over your souls as those who will give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with grief, for this would be unprofitable for you.

1 Peter 5:5 – You younger men, likewise, be subject to *your* elders; and all of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, for **GOD IS OPPOSED TO THE PROUD, BUT GIVES GRACE TO THE HUMBLE.**

Paul did not command blind obedience or indiscriminating submission. He had written earlier in this letter that every leader is accountable to Scriptural standards, “Let a man regard us in this manner, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. In this case, moreover, it is required of stewards that one be found trustworthy” (1 Cor. 4:1-2). But when the leadership is meeting these standards, Paul reiterates that the Christian should be submissive in all things, even when they might disagree, for the sake of the body.

3. Be respectful (vv. 17-18)

Along the same lines as being submissive is that of showing respect for those that labor in the church. Having honored “**Stephanas and Fortunatas and Achaicus**” for their efforts of “**supplying what was lacking on your part,**” Paul exhorts the Corinthians to do the same. They were to “**acknowledge such men**” because they had “**refreshed**” Paul’s spirit and theirs.

“**Acknowledge**” means to recognize something as it really is. In this case, the Corinthians were to respect the efforts of these men by recognizing these men as faithful workers among them. They were to appreciate their efforts. Paul had received a negative report from Chloe’s people concerning the church (1 Cor. 1:11), but these men brought positive, refreshing things about the church to Paul. One writer captures the respect that the Corinthians should have towards these men,

As a result, these men deserved recognition. From Paul’s special interest in the treatment of these men, it would seem that he feared the church might not receive them well. This worry may have been rooted in the church’s divisions, and in Stephanas’ association with Paul himself. Church leaders often become bitter and negative because they constantly deal with problems and troubles. It is rare and precious when leaders can keep their eyes fixed on the positive work of God in the church. Paul wanted the Corinthian congregation to be encouraged as he had been. [Richard Pratt, *1 Corinthians*, 484]

Paul’s exhortation here is simple. Godly men are chosen to lead the church and are accountable for how they do so. The rest of the church is to respect their leadership, and all are to work together for the glory of the kingdom of God.

4. Be hospitable (vv. 19-20a)

Paul writes, “**The churches of Asia greet you. Aquila and Prisca greet you heartily in the Lord, with the church that is in their house. All the brethren greet you.**” Here Paul exhorts the Corinthians to show the hospitality of other churches and individuals in the region. At the time that Paul wrote this letter, this would not have been Corinth’s reputation. With the divisions and strife that existed in the church, “hospitable” would not have been a word used to describe this church. They had become navel-gazers, concerned about only their church and even in that context, many were selfishly looking out for their own self-interests. This was not the case in other churches and people which Paul had associations. They showed their hospitality in their greetings and prayers for others. As we saw last week, one way that these at Corinth could show their hospitality was in their benevolent offering to the church at Jerusalem. Thoughtfulness and support, both prayerfully and financially, help foster an attitude of hospitality.

5. Be affectionate (v. 20b)

Paul’s last principle for Christian living is often misinterpreted in our culture. Paul encourages them to “**greet one another with a holy kiss.**” Some have gone so far as to use this as their basis for showing that Paul condoned homosexuality, though Paul’s writing in Romans 1 would prove to the contrary. Greeting one another in this way was a very normal part of the culture in Paul’s time. It was not unusual to see a man greet another man “**with a holy kiss.**” However, this would seem out of sorts in our culture. In our time, “**a holy kiss**” would be similar to a handshake, a customary greeting. The idea here is that the Christian should have a visible display of affection towards the brethren. This provides a visible display that our thoughts and intentions are towards others, not ourselves.