



Act Like Men, Act in Love

New Covenant Living Series #34

I Corinthians 16:12-24

Pastor David Sunday

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In his booklet called *Sacrifice*, Howard Guinness ends with a stirring plea:

“Where are the men and women of this generation who will hold their lives cheap, and be faithful even unto death? Where are those who will lose their lives for Christ’s sake—flinging them away for love of Him? Where are those who will live dangerously, and be reckless in his service? Where are his *lovers*—those who love him and the souls of men more than their own reputations or comfort, or very life?

“Where are the men who say ‘no’ to self, who take up Christ’s cross to bear it after him; who are willing to be nailed to it in college or office, home or mission field; who are willing, if need be, to bleed, to suffer, and to die on it?

“Where are the men of vision today? Where are the men of enduring vision? Where are the men who have seen the King in his beauty, by whom from henceforth all else is counted but refuse that they may win Christ? Where are the adventurers, the explorers, the buccaneers for God who count one human soul of far greater value than the rise or fall of an empire? Where are the men who glory in God-sent loneliness, difficulties, persecutions, misunderstandings, discipline, sacrifice, death? Where are the men who are willing to pay the price of vision?

“Where are the men of prayer? Where are the men who, like the Psalmist of old, count God’s Word of more importance to them than their daily food? Where are the men who like Moses of old, commune with God face to face as a man speaks with his friend, and unmistakably bear with them the fragrance of the meeting through the day? Where are God’s men in this day of God’s power?”

—Howard Guinness, *Sacrifice*, pp. 68-69

Have you ever asked that kind of question? As you hear those questions being asked, don’t you sense within you a stirring, a longing to rise up and say, “I would be such a man; I would be such a woman; I would be God’s man in this day of God’s power”? Do you ever get a little troubled at what appears to be the gap between New Testament Christianity and 20th Century Christian experience? Do you ever get tempted to be discouraged by what seems to be a mediocre level of Christianity in your own life, or a defeated experience of Christian living? Do you want to be God’s man in this day of God’s power?

In these final verses of [1 Corinthians](#), Paul is wrapping up this letter, and in his final words he is saying the things that really matter to him. He is expressing some themes here that

he wants to make sure we hear before the letter comes to its close. He issues these final exhortations, and as he does so the apostle Paul is summoning the church to attention. He is like a commanding officer, and he is issuing our marching orders. He's saying,

[O Church arise and put your armor on;](#)
[Hear the call of Christ our captain;](#)
[For now the weak can say that they are strong](#)
[In the strength that God has given.](#)

Remember, as we listen to these exhortations in [1 Corinthians 16:13](#) to the end of the chapter, just 15 verses earlier in [1 Corinthians 15:57](#), Paul has announced a great triumph—a gospel triumph. He says in [1 Corinthians 15:57](#), *“But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.”* And we need to hear everything that Paul is commanding us to do in chapter 16 with those words ringing in our minds and hearts. We need to understand that God is not just asking us to do things in order to gain victory, but instead He is telling us that a victory has been won and an outcome is secure. In Jesus Christ, [we are more than conquerors through Him](#). We have victory over sin and over death through our Lord Jesus Christ.

The Christian life is a life not marked by defeat but by victory in Jesus. These verses in 1 Corinthians 16 are teaching us how to embrace, enjoy and live in the final experience of victory here in this fallen world; how to live exceptional lives in the ordinary realities of day-to-day living, and how to be God's men in this day of God's power.

There are five exhortations that flow out of that victory that Christ has won for His people that I want to highlight this morning.

1. Be Watchful

Look at [1 Corinthians 16:13](#). *“Be watchful.”* Wake up! Keep your eyes open! Watchfulness involves alertness to dangers that are threatening your church, your family and your soul. When he says, *“Be watchful,”* he is saying, “Don't let yourself be lulled into a false sense of security. Don't become lethargic. Don't think yourself as beyond vulnerability.” You are most vulnerable precisely at the moment you think that you are most un-vulnerable—when you feel so secure. That's when you are in danger of being ensnared by some sinister scheme of the enemy.

Watchfulness is a military image. What happens to the army when the sentries go to sleep? What will become of your soul, your family or your church unless you keep yourself awake and alert spiritually? Always have your eyes open to the possibility of temptation and of evil encroaching, [taking heed if you think you stand lest you fall](#).

Remember, Paul spoke to that in [1 Corinthians 10](#). Keep a careful watch over the thoughts and the motives of your heart, a careful and minute scrutiny over the affections of your soul, a habit of self-examination, constantly examining your thoughts and motives. And

more importantly, constantly bring yourself before the Lord and sing, ["Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts! And see if there be any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting!"](#)

Be watchful. Make your thoughts and motives show their passport before allowing them entrance into your mind. Inspect every vessel that comes into the harbor of your soul. Don't let it park there—don't let it embark there—unless you've given it a clean bill of health. Be watchful. And be willing in watchfulness to take necessary action to confront the enemies of Christ in His gospel in your life. Be willing to take necessary action to kill sin at its first encroachments. Be watchful.

Be watchful over enemies which are often subtle and hard to identify. Be vigilant, knowing that the time is short. [1 Peter 5:8-9](#) says "*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...*" That's essential to standing firm in the victory that Christ has won for us. We cannot assume that the victory means there are no longer any battles to be faced. No. The outcome is secure, but the war is still raging, so we must be watchful.

Think of guards outside [Buckingham Palace](#)—how they stand there at attention with their gazes fixed. They're trained. They're well-manicured. You watch those guards in their form and vigilance, and you would think there is absolutely no way anyone would ever be able to break into that palace. But in fact on Friday, July 9, 1982, in the wee hours of the morning, Queen Elizabeth woke up to find a strange man sitting at the end of her bed and it wasn't Prince Philip. This man had broken in to Buckingham Palace and wanted to engage the Queen in conversation. I read that it took over ten minutes for anyone to show up as the queen had to call the front desk twice. The police were not notified and finally a chambermaid came into the room and was shocked. Somehow there was this appearance of security that was actually compromised.

We saw this in the United States back on [November 24, 2009](#), when three intruders snuck into a state dinner with [President Obama](#) and the [Prime Minister of India](#). You wonder how these things happen. Someone wasn't watchful. There was a compromise of security. On the outside it looked great. And maybe on the outside of your life things look just fine. But if people could see behind the scenes into your private life when you're off on your own or when you're on a business trip, and if they could see what's really going on in your life, they'd realize that your security system is compromised.

This command "*Be watchful*," causes us to consider what damage can be done in just one unguarded moment. It should cause us to tremble a bit—to think of the damage one unguarded moment could bring about.

Remember King David and his [unguarded moment](#), looking out on the rooftop when his troops were in battle and finding there a beautiful woman, Bathsheba, and the rest of the story of his life is the tragedy of one who let down his guard—who was not watchful at that moment. Think of [Peter denying Christ](#)—not watchful! Think about how your marriage can be imperiled; your children can be corrupted; your career can be sabotaged; your Christian testimony compromised—all because of failure to obey this command, “*Be watchful.*” As you think about that say, [“Thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.”](#) There is no reason why we need to succumb to temptation or why we need to be dragged down into defeat because the victory is ours yet, we must be watchful!

2. Stand Firm in the Faith

Secondly, we must “*stand firm in the faith*” ([1 Corinthians 16:13](#)). Now if the first command has not been heeded, we’re not going to be able to fulfill the second command either. If we’re not watchful, if we don’t have our eyes fixed on Jesus, and don’t watch over our souls, there’s not going to be a steadiness in our lives.

If you’re walking along on a busy street and someone bumps into you unexpectedly and you’re caught off guard, you could be knocked over pretty easily. But if you are watchful and keep your footing and you see the person coming, you would hold yourself firm. You would be poised so as not to fall over when the assault comes. So we need to be watchful in order that we may stand firm. And notice, we are to stand firm “*in the faith.*”

In the revelation of God in Jesus Christ, in that which is recorded in Holy Scripture: this is what we are to stand firm in. We are to hold our ground in spiritual battle. Not surrendering; not running away when fearful opponents come against us, but standing firm in the faith because this faith that’s delivered [once for all to all the saints](#) is firm enough to withstand any opposition. There’s nothing that the devil can throw at you that cannot be extinguished with this shield of faith. Every fiery dart will fall apart when it hits up against the faith that is in Christ Jesus.

We must listen to this faith as its being taught to us. We must learn it well—the content of the gospel—because this is what we stand in. Remember [1 Corinthians 15:1-4](#) “*Now 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, if you hold fast to the word I have preached to you—unless you believed in vain. For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures.*” Stand firm in this faith. This is your firm foundation. This is your source of assurance and security. Stand firm in it.

I'm thankful that it's not so much my grasp of the truth that keeps me firm but it's the truth that I grasp that keeps me firm. It's the content of the gospel—the truth that has laid hold of me—that if my faith is in the truth that has been revealed in our Lord Jesus Christ, that faith will keep me firm. We enjoy singing,

[Though foes are mighty and rush upon me,](#)
[My feet are firm held by His grace.](#)

Be watchful. Stand firm in the faith. This is how to embrace, enjoy and live in the experience of the victory that is in Jesus.

3. Act Like Men

Thirdly, act like men! (That applies to women in this context too—it's not just for the men.) Act like men. First of all, grow up! Throughout this book of [1 Corinthians](#), Paul has had to rebuke the Corinthians because they are so immature. He tells them in [1 Corinthians 3:1](#), "You are infants in Christ"—you're not quite ready for solid food. You're quarreling and full of jealousy. You act like you belong in the nursery, but you're forty years old! Grow up! Act like men!

Look at [1 Corinthians 14:20](#) for another reminder of this theme that's run throughout the letter. "*Brothers, do not be children in your thinking. Be infants in evil, but in your thinking be mature.*" Act like men. The victory that is ours in Christ—the truth that has been delivered to us in Christ—is a truth that will make you grow. It's a truth that doesn't allow you to stay where you are. It's a truth that fights against stagnancy. It's a truth that ensures there will be a maturity that will be developing in your life. And if you're not maturing in Christ, there's something that's gone wrong and has retarded your progress.

Paul says to act like men. The first exhortation was "wake up." The second exhortation is "stand up." This third exhortation is "grow up." Act like men. And then as a grown up man, man up. Be a man! That's one of the distinguishing marks of mature manhood. Courage. A grown-up man is expected to faithfully carry out his responsibilities, even in the face of danger or oppositions. He does not shrink back in the face of frightening circumstances. He doesn't allow fear or hopelessness to grip his soul so that he gives up. He's courageous. He's manly.

When an intruder breaks into the house in the middle of the night, a grown-up man doesn't lean over and say "Honey, would you please go downstairs and check who's here?" He's courageous. He takes responsibility. He rises up to face the foe. He defends his family. He protects them. And we can do this because we know what we believe and we're standing firm on the unshakeable foundation of the gospel of Jesus Christ. If this is where we stand, we must be prepared to defend it at any cost and not shrink back from it.

A grown-up man is not dependent on the approval of others. A true man is not always looking around, wondering what other people think about what he believes, how he behaves and how he lives. He knows in Whom he believes; he understands God's purposes for his life and he is willing to walk the path that God has put before him—even if he has to walk it alone. He doesn't wait for others to affirm. He's willing to face their disapproval. He's willing to weather misunderstandings. He will stand true to the mission of his master and be loyal to Jesus Christ. He's a man of gospel courage. Gracious, but unyielding. His conscience is held captive by the Word of Christ. That's what Paul is talking about when he says, "*Act like men.*" ["Thanks be to God who has given us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."](#) The gospel, the victory that is ours in Christ, can make a man out of a natural wimp. It can make you strong.

4. Be Strong

[1 Corinthians 16:13](#) says, "...*be strong.*" Without strength you cannot act like men. Joshua is called to succeed Moses and to lead God's people into the Promised Land which involved the destruction of a lot of enemies. They faced great fears and giants. God said to Joshua several times in [Joshua 1](#), "*Be strong and very courageous.*" I'm giving you the land. I was with Moses, "*I will be with you. I will not leave you or forsake you... Be strong and courageous. Do not be frightened, and do not be dismayed, for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go.*" This is a gospel-driven commandment. Victory has been secured—now be strong in it!

To be strong is to be empowered to do what is right without fear and to be willing to confront what is wrong; to identify and correct that which is awry. Today I fear we've become so tolerant in our culture and so afraid of offending that we are too willing to turn a blind eye and a deaf ear when we should be standing up with strength and saying, "This isn't right!" While standing firm in the gospel we need to be lovingly but firmly confronting that which is in opposition to Christ, taking every enemy of the gospel captive and making it obedient to Christ.

A lack of strength and a lack of vigilance in the church can cause a cancer to grow in the church, your home or in your own soul. And this is probably the source of many divisions in Corinth. There were godly people in this church who could see what was in error—who could see what was wrong. But there was a lack of strength, a lack of courage, and a lack of willingness to stand up and oppose that which was wrong—to do so in love. So he says, "*Be strong.*"

It can be pretty discouraging if you feel your own weakness to have someone just come to you and say, "Man up; be strong," if there's not a source of strength, if there's not a way to have your weakness turned into strength. But we know from Scripture that there is a source! That's why we read in [2 Timothy 2:1](#) "*You then, my child, be strengthened by the grace that is in Christ Jesus.*" There's something about acquainting yourself with this gospel of grace that has

the effect of putting metal in your soul. It has the effect of bracing you and enabling you to be strong where otherwise you would be very weak.

We read in [Colossians 1:11-12](#) “*May you be strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy, giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light.*” And [Isaiah 40](#) tells us from where that strength comes. It comes from the One who never grows tired or weary, who gives understanding and strength to them who have no might. It ends by saying, “*They who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint.*”

When it says, “*Be strong,*” it’s saying to go to the One who can give you the strength! Continually rely on Him! He can take the weakest of believers and make him fearless, mighty and strong. A few years ago I was struggling with fears. I found some statements that [Oswald Chambers](#) made and I wrote them down from *Oswald Chambers Penetrating Observations on Fear and Faith*. And they’ve stuck with me now for years. I want to read to you a couple of things that he said.

“The love of God in Christ Jesus is such that He can take the most unfit man – unfit to survive, unfit to fight, unfit to face moral issues – and make him not only fit to survive and to fight, but fit to face the biggest moral issues and the strongest power of Satan, and come off more than conqueror.”

I thought, “Yes! If You can do that for the weakest man then You can do that for me, Lord.” He also said,

“The devil is a bully, but when we stand in the armor of God, he cannot harm us; if we tackle him in our own strength we are soon done for; but if we stand with the strength and courage of God, he cannot gain one inch. One strong moral man will form a nucleus around which others will gather; and spiritually, if we put on the armor of God and stand true to Him, a whole army of weak-kneed Christians will be strengthened.”

So take your weaknesses. It’s essential that you be strong. It’s essential that you don’t accept a position of defeat in the Christian life, that you don’t resign yourself to mediocrity. You must “*be strong in the Lord and in the power of his might.*” But in order to do that, you have to go to God and say, “Here I am in my weakness.” “[Here in our weakness you find us falling before your throne.](#)” An Almighty, infinite, Father, in your faithful love would you strengthen us? [Your grace is sufficient for us. Your strength is made perfect in our weaknesses.](#)

Be watchful. Wake up. Stand firm in the faith. Stand up. Act like men. Grow up. Man up. Be strong. Be built up in the grace of God. Those are four exhortations—vital, essential—but not enough. You could have all of those things in your life. You could have guardedness, firmness,

courage and strength; but if that's all you have, you're missing the most important thing which is in [1 Corinthians 16:14](#).

5. Love

The fifth exhortation is "[*Let all that you do be done in love.*](#)" This is the fifth imperative, but it's not *just* the fifth imperative. This is the bloodstream that runs through the whole body. This is, in [Alastair Begg's](#) wording, "the very seasoning in which all of the other ingredients are cooked." It permeates the whole atmosphere.

When you go to a restaurant and order a salad and ask for the salad dressing, you might say, "Can I have that on the side please so that I can just put on a little bit?" You cannot have love on the side. Love isn't just the little ingredient that you sprinkle on to the Christian life. It's not just something you're supposed to be able to look for and discern in the body amongst a bunch of other things. Love is the very ingredient in which the whole meal is prepared.

It's like olive oil in an Italian meal. You can't have it on the side. That's what we cook it in. Or garlic in an Italian meal—don't put it on the side. It's prepared in garlic! And when you eat the meal, everyone else in your life knows that you ate it for the next twenty-four hours because it permeates your whole system. It starts to ooze out of you.

That's what Paul is saying here. "[*Let all that you do be done in love.*](#)" Love is supposed to permeate the whole life of the church. When people walk in the door, they're supposed to smell this gospel fragrance called love. And that brings us right back to the beginning of this series. Remember what [1 Corinthians](#) is all about? It's about the church being re-calibrated by the gospel so that the gospel penetrates every aspect of the church's life. Whatever room you walk into in the church, you smell the fragrance of the gospel. It's just everywhere!

Paul is bringing a lot of correction to bear upon the Corinthian church so that the church's life can be re-calibrated by the gospel. And now he's making very clear what he has said throughout this letter: that if there's one distinguishing mark of that fragrance of the gospel, it is love.

What does the gospel smell like when it permeates the church? It smells like love. If there's no love, then all these other things aren't going to come across right. You can manage and be a very watchful person without love, but what does that make you? Suspicious. And I'll tell you, suspiciousness in Christians is not a gracious quality. It's not a Christ-honoring quality when we're always suspicious of one another. So be watchful; be guarded in love.

You could be a person who is very firm in the faith. You've met people like this who are firm in the faith—they know what they believe and they are not moving from it! But they're missing love. What does that make them? Rigid and cold. You could be a person who is very

courageous and manly but have no love. That makes you abrasive. You could be a person who is strong but without love, that makes you oppressive and dictatorial.

“Let all that you do be done in love,” Paul says. He’s getting to the heartbeat, the pulse, of Christianity here. [1 Corinthians 13](#) is not just a nice little excursus or detour—like things are getting a little too heated so he throws in this nice poem about love in the middle of the book. But 1 Corinthians 13 is the heartbeat of this book. It’s what this book is all about. If the gospel is re-calibrating our church it’s going to show itself in love.

So notice what love is: love is not naïve. It’s not a contradiction to say, “Be watchful and do all things in love.” Love is not naïve. Love does not pretend that there are no foes to face and no dangers in the world. Love is not sentimental. Love is not emptied of all truth content and just kind of a nice feeling like liberal Christianity wants to teach. Love is everything. But for liberal Christians, love is just some sentimental thing and it’s devoid of the content of the truth that is in the Word of God.

Paul says, [“Stand firm in the faith and do it in love.”](#) Love is not immature or infantile. It’s very possible to be a manly, grown-up, mature believer and to be very full of love. Love is not wimpy or weak. You can be strong in love. Love can be a very manly, masculine virtue. I think the most authentic model of masculinity is our Lord Jesus Christ. Is there a truer man than Jesus? Is there anyone more full of love than Jesus? *“Let all that you do be done in love.”*

A love that is active, like the love of these believers that we read about last week—[Stephanas, Fortunatus, and Achaicus](#)—is devoted to the service of the saints; a love that extends to other believers in other churches. Look at what Paul says here as he closes his letter, “Remember there are other churches out there that you are united with in the gospel. And if you’re a healthy church, if you’re a church that is centered on the gospel, you’re going to love other churches. You’re going to rejoice in what God is doing in other churches and you’re going to cherish the partnership you have with other churches.”

He brings these greetings from the church that meets in the home of Aquila and Prisca, and from all the brothers whose love extends to every believer in your church, too. That’s why he says in [1 Corinthians 16:20](#), *“Greet one another with a holy kiss.”* It’s a holy handshake in our culture. It’s an expression of warmth—we are one in Christ! You can’t go around the church, whatever your cultural expression, and greet everyone with this holy kiss or embrace everyone or shake everyone’s hand without a love for every single believer in that church.

True love does not just focus on your own little group of friends—or those who agree with you on every point, or those with whom you find it most easy to get along—but all the brothers and sisters, one another, for we are one in Christ! This is very important to Paul because as he closes his letter he takes over from his secretary and he writes something with his

own hand. What does he write? [1 Corinthians 16:22](#), “*If anyone has no love from the Lord, let him be accursed.*” Let him be anathema. Let him come under the eternal wrath and judgment of God! Love determines your eternal destiny! It’s not optional!

You can’t love the Lord and not love His people. And if you don’t love His people, you don’t love the Lord. And ultimately believing in Jesus is not just a mental, theological thing. It’s a very personal, very vital, very active love for your Savior. You love Him! Your heart is moved with a warm affection and a holy obedience to His commandments because you love your Lord.

What happens when you are brought into the presence of one whom you do not love? [Alexander Maclaren](#) said, “The unloving heart is always ill-at-ease in the presence of him who it does not love.” And when the Lord comes, which Paul prays for in [1 Corinthians 16:22](#), he says, “*Let him be accursed*” (anathema) if you don’t love the Lord and then he says, “*Our Lord, come*” (Maranatha). And when the Lord comes, those who do not love Him will shrink back in fear of His judgment. But those who love Him will be welcomed into the embrace of the Father through the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.

That would typically be where Paul ends his letters—with a word of benediction, a pronouncement of God’s grace upon God’s people. But only in [1 Corinthians](#) does he end the way he does here in [1 Corinthians 16:24](#) by circling back and affirming, very personally, his love for all the people in that church. And that is significant because this is arguably the most severe letter of the apostle Paul. It is full of correction and reproof, yet he wants to be very clear as he comes to the end of this letter: “All that I have said to you, all that I have written to you has been written in love. I love all of you people! Not just my fans in the church, but the ones who have given me grief—the ones who are stirring up trouble—*’my love be with you all in Christ Jesus.’*”

“*My love be with you all.*” In the end, nothing matters more than love. This is the battle cry that we hear. “[An army bold whose battle cry is “Love!” reaching out to those in darkness.](#)” If we want to experience God’s love, we need to be willing to embrace some reproof, some correction. If we need to give correction and reproof, we need to make sure we are doing it in love. All has been heard now from this book. We end now with this question: Do I love Christ and do I love His people?

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