

1Co33 – Stand Firm, Be Courageous, - In Love – 1 Corinthians 16:5-24
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Open your Bibles. Let's have a Bible study. Title of the message, "Stand Firm, Be Courageous – In Love." We are finishing after a mere thirty-three weeks the study of 1 Corinthians today. I'm thrilled about it. We're in verses 5-24 of 1 Corinthians 16.

What a book 1 Corinthians has been. A lot of people shy away from teaching 1 Corinthians on Sunday morning because it tells the real story of how messed up the Church is. But we already knew, so it wasn't a shock to us. But it's been a great Bible study.

We called this study "Life As The Church" – not life *IN* the Church. If you say Life *IN* the Church you have to say it in a positional way, like we are *in Christ*. But we are talking about *BEING* the Church. 1 Corinthians has made it clear that being the church is hard.

What we've seen in 1 Corinthians that the combination of our sin nature (the flesh) and the world greatly influence in a tremendously destructive way our ability to *be the Church*. Because every single one of us who *are the Church* we all have a sin nature – the old man that Romans 6 says is rendered inoperative, but we tend to breathe life back into that old nature.

Every single one of us deal with what I believe is the most vicious enemy that we face prior to being glorified. The most vicious enemy we face during our transformation process of our salvation, the most vicious enemy we struggle with is our own flesh. By and far, far and away our worst enemy is called *self*.

And over and over again 1 Corinthians has dealt death blows to the seemingly unbeatable enemy of self. Paul has directly confronted the effects of our sin nature in the church and the urgent and critical need for us to make God's *agape love* the *foundation* and the *highest priority* of all we do. He has made it clear that is the answer to overcome the destruction that self and the flesh brings into the church and to enable us to live supernaturally, *as the Church* in order to be a testimony for the people.

Today, he's simply going to wrap up his letter with some very strong encouragement.

Let's pray. *Lord Jesus, please, as we wrap up this book it's a radical book. So many sections, so many messages Lord can be so life transforming. We pray you would inspire us as we close to return to the book, to return to the teachings, to just soak in your Word*

in these areas. That we would be transformed from living in the flesh and attending church to actually being the church. By the power of your Spirit and your agape love inspire us with it today, we pray in your name Jesus, amen.

We are starting today in verse 5. We are coming off the very practical section about giving that we looked at in our last message together. And we start today in that same context of Paul planning to get to Corinth to collect that offering.

1 Corinthians 16:5–8 (NLT)

5 I am coming to visit you after I have been to Macedonia, for I am planning to travel through Macedonia.

6 Perhaps I will stay awhile with you, possibly all winter, and then you can send me on my way to my next destination.

7 This time I don't want to make just a short visit and then go right on. I want to come and stay awhile, if the Lord will let me.

8 In the meantime, I will be staying here at Ephesus until the Festival of Pentecost.

Macedonia (verse 5) is Northern Greece where both Philippi and Thessalonica are. So Paul says, I'm hoping to head up to Philippi and Thessalonica, see how they are, collect their offerings, then come see you, and when I get there I want to *stay a while* with you (verse 7 says).

But when we read of these same plans again in 2 Corinthians (and a little in Acts) things are very different. In 2 Corinthians Paul is still trying to get to Corinth but has faced more and more difficulties both personally and with the flesh-filled Church at Corinth. But through it all Paul did ultimately make it to Corinth although not how or when he had hoped he would. But it was *as the Lord allowed* and it was in the face of many difficulties and hardships.

And please hear me when I say, that is the exact same way. We complete the plans and purpose God has *for us*. It is in the Lord's timing – it's as the Lord allows and it is through many difficulties and hardships. It's the only way we see God's purpose accomplished in the Bible. Why in the world would we think otherwise? Paul would say "welcome to the ministry."

Then Paul explains *why* he is staying in Ephesus until Pentecost (as he said in verse 8) and watch how he places the good and the bad on the table together. More importantly still notice the different levels of emphasis he gives to the good versus the bad.

1 Corinthians 16:9 (NLT)

9 *There is a wide-open door for a great work here* (praise the Lord, I can't believe it, God is doing great things here, it's incredible), ***although many oppose me.*** (which is a fact-of-life when serving the Lord)

There *was* a great, wide-open door for Kingdom work in Ephesus and Paul did step through that door and God met him there in a great way. But we also know by reading Acts that the difficulties never left Paul during his *great opportunity* in Ephesus.

We don't like that. We think God if you're in it – it should be smooth sailing. Everything should just flow and the bad should fall out of the way. We never see that in the Bible, which makes us want a different Bible.

Why is it then that so many Christians today – *bail out, give in and give up* – at the first sign of any difficulty? That must not be God because I have to actually work. That must not be God because I have to actually be broken. Because I actually have to be humble. Because I have to learn to cling to the Lord. No – that's the proof it *is* the Lord.

If you are serving the Lord today (please hear me)

- 1) God *will* give you wide-open doors for ministry
- 2) There will be difficulty and hardships

and then far too many of us quit, giving the enemy great pleasure. Don't join the masses who quit when it gets hard. It's supposed to be hard. We're trying to win a world that is going to hell and we have an enemy that wants more than anything else to take us out. And he's been doing it a lot longer than we've been trying to follow Jesus.

And that is in line with Paul's concern for Timothy in the next two verses.

1 Corinthians 16:10-11 (NLT)

10 *When Timothy comes, don't intimidate him* (Lit: don't cause him to fear you). ***He is doing the Lord's work, just as I am.***

11 *Don't let anyone treat him with contempt* (meaning disrespect, or, not worthy of consideration). ***Send him on his way with your blessing when he returns to me. I expect him to come with the other believers.***

Here Paul is not worried about *unbelievers* driving Timothy from the ministry. He's worried about *believers* driving Timothy from the ministry. Some scholars say Paul is concerned about Timothy's weakness here, but I think Paul has legitimate concern about how the church is going to treat Timothy when he comes.

So, Paul says, *don't intimidate this leader*. Don't try to make him fear you (common still today) and *don't let anyone treat him with contempt* (disrespect him). Instead, treat him with respect and love and *send him on his way with your blessing* which is probably a reference to both spiritual and financial blessing as he returns to Paul in Ephesus.

And so, after all of Paul's instruction through this entire letter, he *still* has to say, "Come on you guys. Get it right. Crucify your self-interest and your sin nature and allow God's agape love to truly guide your actions."

It seems Paul understands the Church in Corinth is still *growing* in their *spiritual maturity*.

Next Paul bring up Apollos and it seems he's trying to clarify something there. Remember there was all that "*I'm of Paul, I'm of Apollos*" junk in the beginning of this letter and so, here Paul makes it clear Apollos is with him in Ephesus and it seems there's no conflict between them.

1 Corinthians 16:12 (NLT)

12 Now about our brother Apollos—I urged him to visit you with the other believers, but he was not willing to go right now. He will see you later when he has the opportunity.

Paul felt none of the rivalry the church was manufacturing between those two leaders. Paul wanted Apollos to return to the church but for some reason, Apollos wasn't ready to go *just yet*.

And now comes the capstone to the entire book. These next two verses sum up everything Paul has been trying to convey to this flesh-filled, struggling church and these five commands sum up everything it takes to continue to "Live Life As The Church!"

They sum up everything it takes. This is not *the source*. We know what that is. We know that God's the source through the work and the Person of Jesus Christ empowered by the Holy Spirit. This is *how you live through it*. This is how you survive. This is how you make it *as the Church*. Being the Church. How you continue to "Live Life As The Church" without being taken out by the enemy's schemes. Please don't miss it.

Please don't miss what we are about to see.

A surprising large percentage of what the Bible clearly says most Christians never receive and never apply. Please don't do that with these verses. We need to apply these to our lives.

After all of Paul's exhortation – correction – and encouragement – this is the capstone, the final command that he puts on the entire letter.

1 Corinthians 16:13-14 (NLT)

13 Be on guard. Stand firm in the faith. Be courageous. Be strong.

14 And do everything with love.

Five commands that encompass every single event and every single circumstance in the Christian faith. Five commands that *if* we would genuinely *receive, embrace and apply* them they would set our path *successfully* through every circumstance, every situation we face in the Christian life.

#1) BE ON GUARD

If you are serving the Lord today in any fruitful way, the enemy is after you and if we are living as a fruitful church in any way today, the enemy is after us. He will come in through *any door* we crack open and he comes only to steal, kill and destroy and what he wants to destroy the most is your fruitfulness for God.

You can measure the enemy's success by your fruitfulness for God. The less fruitful you are for God the greater the enemy's success in your life.

#1) BE ON GUARD

#2) STAND FIRM IN THE FAITH

It means don't be so easily shaken. Are all of God's plans and purposes so easily washed away when one storm blows through your life?

Stand firm in the faith

Know that *God* has absolutely *got a hold of you*
and *Know* that *God* is absolutely *at work for good*.

The fact that God has you has nothing to do with your circumstance. It has to do with your relationship. And if your relationship is right with God, he has you. You are in the shelter of his wings. (Read Psalm 91 it's not just for soldiers). You are in the protective covering of the Lord. He has you. And you would say, Yeah, but the circumstances don't look like it.

So what! So what! We do not see God through our circumstances. We see our circumstances through God! And God has us and God's at work for our good! God is at work in the present situation for your good.

So trust him and stand firm and allow God to bring you through the storm.

#2) STAND FIRM IN THE FAITH

#3) BE COURAGEOUS

This is my personal favorite because out of the ten different translations I use to study, four of the ten say here **act like men!** Which makes perfect sense *for all the men.*

Imagine the saltiest, leatherneck, drill instructor in the military and he's leaning in one inch from your face and he is loudly encouraging you.

SON – YOUR MOTHER IS NOT HERE – YOU ARE IN THE ARMY OF THE LORD NOW – AND YOU BETTER ACT LIKE A MAN!!!

Why is that drill instructor spitting in your face as he's screaming at you? Because every recruit that he trains that goes of and gets himself killed, he carries home at night.

So, he is trying with everything he's got to get you

To BE ON GUARD for the enemy

To STAND FIRM and

To BE COURAGEOUS

so that you might actually live through your first battle!

And, by the way the "Be Courageous" term equally applies to all women as well. The Lord's Army is an equal opportunity army.

#3) BE COURAGEOUS

#4) BE STRONG

Do you see a consistent theme here?

BE ON GUARD - STAND FIRM - BE COURAGEOUS – BE STRONG

These are all battle-ready commands. These are all commands that would be used in boot camp training for those going into battle.

But – so we see "Living Life As The Church" in battle terms? And maybe you would say – Yeah, I'm always at war with the people in the church (but that's not what I'm talking about).

I mean, are we ready for the battles that the enemy constantly and routinely uses to take Christians out of “active duty” for the Lord?

And so, after all that encouragement – BEING ON GUARD, STANDING FIRM, BEING COURAGEOUS, BEING STRONG – what is the offensive weapon God gives us to send the enemy back to his hole in the ground? What is the nuclear weapon that Paul commands us to use to be *consistently victorious* in this battle?

COMMAND #5) is in

1 Corinthians 16:14 (NLT)

14 And do everything with love.

Guys, this battle is fought in AGAPE LOVE and this battle is won with AGAPE LOVE. Because agape love *crucifies self* which eliminates the enemy’s #1 tool to take out a Christian.

The fiercest spiritual battle in each of our lives will always be the war against our own flesh and if we will “Be Controlled” by God’s *agape love* in everything we think and say and do then we will walk in victory in the fiercest spiritual battle of our lives (with our flesh).

Please listen again to verses 13-14 because to me they are a condensed summary of this entire book.

1 Corinthians 16:13–14 (NLT)

13 Be on guard. Stand firm in the faith. Be courageous. Be strong.

14 And do everything with love.

And then Paul goes right into two examples of people in the church who have been living victoriously in God’s agape love.

1 Corinthians 16:15-16 (NLT)

15 You know that Stephanas and his household were the first of the harvest of believers in Greece (Literally Achaia) . . .

15 . . . and they are spending their lives in service to God’s people. I urge you, dear brothers and sisters, 16 to submit to them and others like them who serve with such devotion.

This is a household of *leaders* in the church. This is a family that has given their lives in service to God’s people. This is a family with *no fleshly motives – no self-motives* – who

serve *with extreme devotion*. And Paul says, “I urge you to *submit to them* and others like them.”

The word “SUBMIT” here means *to come under – to support – to line up with*. God says *look* for people *like this* and come under them and support them – line up with them.

And then, in the second example Paul says in 1 Corinthians 16:17-18,

1 Corinthians 16:17-18 (NLT)

17 I am very glad that Stephanas (already mentioned), Fortunatus, and Achaicus (wrong pronunciation) have come here. They have been providing the help you weren't here to give me.

18 They have been a wonderful encouragement to me, as they have been to you. You must show your appreciation to all who serve so well.

Again, Paul is giving direction by *positive* example these three saints have provided the help Paul needed which was certainly physical help and financial help – not to mention emotional and spiritual help. They have been a *great encouragement* to Paul as well as to the church and Paul says you must show your appreciation to *all* who serve like that (*in that way*).

And so now then, we come to the final greetings. 0

1 Corinthians 16:19 (NLT)

19 The churches here in the province of Asia send greetings in the Lord, as do Aquila and Priscilla and all the others who gather in their home for church meetings.

Aquila and Priscilla were a crucial part of *God* starting the church in *Corinth*. Paul worked with them as tent makers and lived with them while they were *starting the church*. They were crucial to the ministry, then. And now they're with Paul in Ephesus and *again* have started a church in their home, again.

Living “Life As The Church” in the first century was not that much different than living “Life As The Church” today, *especially a small church* like ours. The first century church was made up of households of Believers who met whenever and wherever they could. Sometimes just a few in a house – sometimes as many as could fit wherever they were able to meet, and Aquila and Priscilla held a special place for making that happen.

And then Paul sends greetings and love from *all the believers* in Ephesus.

1 Corinthians 16:20 (NLT)

20 All the brothers and sisters here send greetings to you. Greet each other with a sacred kiss.

The sacred kiss is the *normal greeting* in the Mid-East between people who have a deep respect for each other. It is *not a kiss* like we are familiar with, but more of a touching of each cheek and was usually don only with the same gender. It was the sign of *love, respect* and (interestingly) *forgiveness*.

Then Paul closes the letter in his own handwriting.

1 Corinthians 16:21-22 (NLT)

21 Here is my greeting in my own handwriting—Paul.

22 If anyone does not love the Lord, that person is cursed. Our Lord, come!
(Maranatha!)

First Paul writing in his own hand *validates the letter* and allows his friends to see his personal writing.

Then the word “cursed” (verse 22) means “*separated from God*” and Paul just wants to close with this simple truth in his own handwriting ***If anyone does NOT Love the Lord – they are SEPARATED from God - and under his wrath.***

And then the word made famous in the 1970’s Jesus Movement – ***MARANATHA***. It’s a combination of two Aramaic words (the language of the day) that mean – “***our Lord come.***”

(Pam made her parents a cross stitch wall hanging of that word when we were first saved).

And then two great encouragements to close.

1 Corinthians 16:23-24 (NLT)

23 May the grace of the Lord Jesus be with you.

24 My love to all of you in Christ Jesus.

What a great book 1 Corinthians has been. Thirty-three messages, including nine on the Holy Spirit. I’d encourage you to open up the phone app or wordbymail.com and review all the messages in this series. There are some really serious messages here. Messages that would radically change our lives if we would really dive into them and really apply them.

Some of my favorites have been:

Carnal Christians in Diapers

Is My Work Fuel For the Fire

Big Talk – Little Walk

It's My Body I'll do what I want

When your "Right" is "Wrong"

Run the Race to Win

AND of course – *AGAPE LOVE*.

Honestly, it's overwhelming to me how much life transforming truth comes out of a verse-by-verse study of God's Word like this. And it is also overwhelming to me to acknowledge the small percentage of Christians who will allow the *life transforming truth* of God's Word to *actually transform their lives*.

Can we just make a commitment right now to *BE* in that small percentage of Christians? Let's actually apply what the Word says and make it come alive in our lives and to be transformed.

Let's pray. *Lord Jesus, may we just make a commitment right now, Lord. May we understand that most of what we think and do is not according to your Word, that we have no natural tendency that lines up with your Spirit or with your Word. And Lord, may we be willing to have our self-will crucified. May we be willing, Lord, to have our pride crushed. And may we desire more than anything else in this life to be transformed by you, to be so transformed that people see a radical difference. That we become what you call us to be – witnesses. And when people see us that in some small way they will see you. We pray, Lord, that we would join the few that actually walk so close with you and apply your Word so radically that our lives would be changed. Thank you, Lord, for this book – for every difficult message. We pray you would transform us and that we would learn to "Live Life As The Church." For your glory Jesus and in your name, amen.*