

# Mandates for Christian Ministry

(1 Corinthians 16:13-14)

## Introduction

➤ The church – the true church of Jesus Christ – is under attack. In one sense, this is not surprising because this is nothing new. Christ’s church has always been assaulted by Satanic forces, and will continue to be until Christ returns. The Bible assures us that Satan is a defeated foe (Jn.12:31; Heb.2:14-15; 1Jn.3:8; Rev.20:7-10), and that Christians need not fear him nor his spiritual attacks. Every true Christian is eternally saved and secure in Christ (Jn.10:28-29; Rom.8:28-30, 37-39; Eph.4:30; Jd.1:24). Jesus Christ has already defeated, and will finally defeat Satan, and has promised victory for all those who are in Christ.

However, while may not be surprising to hear that the church is under spiritual attack, it can be more than a bit disheartening to see so many (professing) Christians who refuse to engage in the battle, and seem to be content to surrender their allegiance to the church. Today, for all too many Christians, church takes a backseat to family, sports, hobbies, sleep, work, chores, and leisure. Many Christians merely attend church (i.e., do not serve in the church), and only attend when they feel the need or have nothing else to do. In fact, many Christians do not view the Christian life (or the church) as a spiritual battlefield.

➤ One of my most all-time-favorite dead people is John Charles (J.C.) Ryle (May 10, 1816 - June 10, 1900). In 1880, J.C. Ryle became the first bishop of Liverpool. He was a faithful man of God, who displayed a fierce loyalty to the truth of God’s Word, and a resolute commitment to the church. Though deeply compassionate, Ryle was also unyieldingly courageous. His successor in Liverpool described him as “the man of granite with the heart of a child.”

In his book, “Warnings to the Churches”, Ryle described the work of Satan in two general ways:

“Outside the Church, he is ever persuading men to maintain sinful lives, and destructive superstitions. Human sacrifice to idols, gross revolting, cruel, worship of disgusting and abominable false deities, persecution, slavery, cannibalism, child murder, devastating religious wars – all these are a part of Satan’s handiwork, and the fruit of his suggestions! Like a pirate, his object is to ‘sink, burn, and destroy!’

Inside the Church [Satan] is ever laboring to sow heresies, to propagate errors, to foster departures from the faith. If he cannot prevent the waters flowing from the Fountain of Life, he tries hard to poison them. If he cannot destroy the remedy of the Gospel, he strives to adulterate and corrupt it. No wonder that he is called ‘Apollyon, the destroyer.’” (J.C. Ryle; Warnings to the Churches:

“All kinds of strange teachings”).

➤ There is a spiritual battle going on all around us. We must not walk through life as if we are going to a picnic, but as if we are going to war (Eph.6:10-16).

✓ Illust: John Piper explained it this way:

“Most people show by their priorities and their casual approach to spiritual things that they believe we are at peacetime, not wartime. In wartime, the newspapers carry headlines about how the troops are doing. In wartime, families talk about the sons and daughters on the front lines and write to them and pray for them with heart-wrenching concern for their safety. In wartime, we are on the alert. We are armed. We are vigilant. In wartime, we spend money differently ... We all cut back. The luxury liner becomes a troop carrier” (“*Let the Nations be Glad*”; p.67-68).

➤ While victory for the Christian is assured, the Christian’s battle still goes on! As Christians, we must continue to be prepared to engage in the battle with, and for, their faith. What is of grave concern today is the reality that many churches act and talk as if there is no battle at all. The so-called contemporary evangelicalism of our day boasts “a church” that seems more content to have fun than to fight; a church that seeks comfort over courage, and support groups over Bible studies or prayer groups; a church that seems to expend most of its energy battling against one another than battling with Christ; a church that

acts more like individuals than an army and more like civilians than soldiers; a church that desires to be more clothed like the world than dressed in the armor of God; a church that thinks their going to a picnic and not going to war.

✓**Illust:** Reverend Sabine Baring-Gould (SAY-bin BAIR-ing GOOLD) recognized this dilemma on Pentecost Sunday in 1865. Sabine searched through the hymnbooks for a “marching song” to sing as the children marched in their white baptismal robes down to the river to be baptized. Finding nothing, he quickly scribbled on a piece of paper these words: “Onward, Christian soldiers, marching as to war, With the cross of Jesus going on before.” When he was done, he had written the entire hymn we call “Onward Christian Soldiers”:

Onward, Christian soldiers, marching as to war / with the cross of Jesus going on before.  
Christ, the royal Master, leads against the foe / Forward into battle see His banners go!

*Onward, Christian soldiers, marching as to war, with the cross of Jesus going on before.*

At the sign of triumph Satan’s host doth flee / on then, Christian soldiers, on to victory!  
Hell’s foundations quiver at the shout of praise / brothers lift your voices, loud your anthems raise.

*Onward, Christian soldiers, marching as to war, with the cross of Jesus going on before.*

Like a mighty army moves the church of God / brothers, we are treading where the saints have trod.  
We are not divided, all one body we / one in hope and doctrine, one in charity.

*Onward, Christian soldiers, marching as to war, with the cross of Jesus going on before.*

What the saints established that I hold for true / what the saints believed, that I believe too.  
Long as earth endureth, men the faith will hold / kingdoms, nations, empires, in destruction rolled.

*Onward, Christian soldiers, marching as to war, with the cross of Jesus going on before.*

Crowns and thrones may perish, kingdoms rise and wane / but the church of Jesus constant will remain.  
Gates of hell can never ‘gainst that church prevail / we have Christ’s own promise, and that cannot fail.

*Onward, Christian soldiers, marching as to war, with the cross of Jesus going on before.*

Onward then, ye people, join our happy throng / blend with ours your voices in the triumph song.  
Glory, laud and honor unto Christ the King / this through countless ages men and angels sing.

*Onward, Christian soldiers, marching as to war, with the cross of Jesus going on before.*

➤ This is the parting message that the Apostle Paul is giving to the Corinthian church. In 1 Corinthians 16:13-14, Paul makes an immediate transition from teaching a model for Christian ministry to instructing the mandates for Christian ministry. Following the brief description of his ministry plans, and his delay in coming to Corinth, Paul (as he so often does) exhorts the Christians in Corinth in how they should live. In fact, in just brief two verses, Paul gives them five final mandates for Christian ministry.

**1 Cor 16:13-14** ~ “Be watchful, stand firm in the faith, act like men, be strong. <sup>14</sup>Let all that you do be done in love.”

➤ As we saw last week, every Christian is a minister, and every Christian should have a ministry. If we apply each of these mandates to our lives, we will see God transform a church of individual Christians into the army of the Living God!

## 1. **Be Vigilant**

➤ The first mandate for Christian ministry is to be vigilant. Paul wrote, “*Be watchful*” (*grēgoreō*; vs.13). This one-word command (imperative verb) literally and figuratively refers to “being on the lookout”, “staying awake”, and “being alert or cautious.” This is the same word Jesus used when, before His arrest, He commanded His disciples to stay awake:

**Matt 26:40-41** ~ “And he came to the disciples and found them sleeping. And he said to Peter, ‘So, could you not watch [grēgoreō] with me one hour? <sup>41</sup>Watch [grēgoreō] and pray that you may not enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.”

Luke 22:45-46 ~ “And when he rose from prayer, he came to the disciples and found them sleeping for sorrow, <sup>46</sup>and he said to them, ‘Why are you sleeping? Rise and pray that you may not enter into temptation.’”

- As Christians, we are to be always spiritually awake, alert, and attentive. We are to be ever-vigilant against spiritual attacks – whether passive or active. The Corinthian Christians lacked spiritual vigilance, and they were consequently victims to many various spiritual attacks – division, immorality, false teaching, and pride. They were lulled into a false sense of security. Their hearts were hardened by worldliness and selfishness. Their minds were dulled by carnality and vanity. They were, figuratively speaking, asleep at the wheel which led to great spiritual wreckage.
- Christians are commanded to be spiritually vigilant. Searching this word (*grēgoreō*), and synonyms, throughout the New Testament, we can find six specific (practical) ways in which we are to be “watchful”:

- ◆ Be vigilant against Satanic attack ~

**1 Peter 5:8** ~ “Be sober-minded; be watchful [grēgoreō]. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.”

- ◆ Be vigilant against temptation ~

**Mark 14:38** ~ “Watch [grēgoreō] and pray that you may not enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.” (cf. 1Cor.10:12)

- ◆ Be vigilant against spiritual apathy and lethargy ~

**Rev 3:1-3** [to the church in Sardis] ~ “... I know your works. You have the reputation of being alive, but you are dead. <sup>2</sup>Wake up [grēgoreō], and strengthen what remains and is about to die, for I have not found your works complete in the sight of my God. <sup>3</sup>Remember, then, what you received and heard. Keep it, and repent. If you will not wake up [grēgoreō], I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what hour I will come against you.”

- ◆ Be vigilant against false teachers / Christians ~

**2 John 7-9** ~ “For many deceivers have gone out into the world, those who do not confess the coming of Jesus Christ in the flesh. Such a one is the deceiver and the antichrist. <sup>8</sup>Watch [blepō] yourselves, so that you may not lose what we have worked for, but may win a full reward.”

- ◆ Be vigilant about your Christian life and doctrine ~

**1 Tim 4:14-16** ~ “Do not neglect the gift you have, which was given you by prophecy when the council of elders ~ laid their hands on you. <sup>15</sup>Practice these things, immerse yourself in them, so that all may see your progress. <sup>16</sup>Keep a close watch [epechō] on yourself and on the teaching. Persist in this, for by so doing you will save both yourself and your hearers.”

- ◆ Be vigilant against Christ’s Second Coming ~

**Matt 24:42-44** ~ “Therefore, stay awake [grēgoreō], for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming. <sup>43</sup>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 [grēgoreō] and would not have let his house be broken into. <sup>44</sup>Therefore you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.” (see 1Thess.5:10)

➤ The Bible calls us to be vigilant. Always paying attention to what God wants us to do, how God wants us to act, and who God wants us to be. One must not make the grave mistake of calling him/herself a Christian while living like a non-Christian.

✓ **Illust:** “Alexander the Great, one of the greatest military generals who ever lived, conquered almost the entire known world with his vast army. One night during a campaign, he couldn’t sleep and left his tent to walk around the campgrounds. As he was walking he came across a soldier asleep on guard duty – a serious offense. The penalty for falling asleep on guard duty was, in some cases, instant death; the commanding officer sometimes poured kerosene on the sleeping soldier and lit it. The soldier began to wake up as Alexander the Great approached him. Recognizing who was standing in front of him, the young man feared for his life. ‘Do you know what the penalty is for falling asleep on guard duty?’ Alexander the Great asked the soldier. ‘Yes, sir,’ the soldier responded in a quivering voice. ‘Soldier, what’s your name?’ demanded Alexander the Great. ‘Alexander, sir.’ Alexander the Great repeated the question: ‘What is your name?’ ‘My name is Alexander, sir,’ the soldier repeated. A third time and more loudly Alexander the Great asked, ‘What is your name?’ A third time the soldier meekly said, ‘My name is Alexander, sir.’ Alexander the Great then looked the young soldier straight in the eye. ‘Soldier,’ he said with intensity, ‘either change your name or change your conduct.’”

**Col 4:2** ~ “Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful [grēgoreō] in it with thanksgiving.”

## 2. **Be Perseverant**

➤ The second mandate (imperative verb) for Christian ministry is to be perseverant. When Paul wrote, “*stand firm in the faith*” (stēkō; vs.13), he was not calling Christians to be stagnant, passive, or inactive, but immovable, resilient, and perseverant. As Christians, we must not waver or stumble in our faith. We must not give in to the pressures or pleasures of worldliness. We must not be deceived by false teaching or led astray by false teachers. We must not be moved by the storms of life, or “*tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes*” (Eph.4:14).

**1 Cor 15:58** ~ “Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast [hedraios], immovable [ametakinetos], always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.”

➤ A common and unfortunate misconception among Christians is that we are called to advance against the armies of Satan. In other words, many Christians believe that it is the churches job to attack Satan and his demons at every corner and under every rock. However, this simply is not true. The Bible never commands us to “bind Satan”, to pray to Satan, or to chase after demons. It is not our responsibility to advance against the Devil and all his minions. We are called to stand (in the power and truth of God)! We are commanded to persevere in our faith in Christ while He wages war against His enemies. We are called to stand in our faith against all the attacks of the evil one. While Satan cannot destroy saving faith he can, and will, seek to disrupt and discourage our faithful walk with Christ. That is why we are called to put on the armor of God:

**Eph 6:10-19** ~ “Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. <sup>11</sup>Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand [histēmi] against the schemes of the devil. <sup>12</sup>For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. <sup>13</sup>Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand [anthistēmi] in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm [histēmi]. <sup>14</sup>Stand [histēmi] therefore, having fastened on the belt of truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, <sup>15</sup>and, as shoes for your feet, having put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace. <sup>16</sup>In all circumstances take up the shield of faith, with which you can

extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one; <sup>17</sup>and take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, <sup>18</sup>praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints”

**James 4:7-10** ~ “Submit yourselves therefore to God. **Resist** [*anthistēmi*; stand against/withstand] the devil, and he will flee from you. <sup>8</sup>Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. <sup>9</sup>Be wretched and mourn and weep. Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom. <sup>10</sup>Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you.

**1 Peter 5:8-9** ~ “Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. <sup>9</sup>**Resist** [*anthistēmi*; stand against/withstand] him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world.”

- It is no coincidence that of the six pieces of armor listed in Ephesians six, are all primarily defensive weapons. Only one, the sword of the Spirit (God’s Word), is also used offensively in battle. As Christian’s we are to be dressed in the armor of God so that we can stand firm in the faith.
- To “**stand firm in the faith**” (*stēkō*; vs.13) is to not lose ground or be knocked down. That is, to never surrender our belief in the doctrinal (biblical) truths of Christianity; to never compromise the truths of the Gospel. This, of course, is becoming increasingly difficult in our culture as many believe that “there is no absolute truth (“my truth”), and that there is no objective morality. In a world that believes in no absolute truth and holds to no absolute moral (Biblical) convictions, it is difficult to stand for the truths of God. It is certainly not easy today, to “**stand firm in the faith**” (*stēkō*; vs.13). But in that faith we must unwaveringly stand!

**2 Thess 2:15** ~ “So then, brothers, stand firm [*stēkō*] and hold to the traditions that you were taught by us, either by our spoken word or by our letter.”

- We are engaged in a battle. The battle for the truth. It is the greatest battle that we can fight. No other battle, on the face of the earth, is important or as urgent, and the church needs to be willing to stand persevering in their faith.
  - ✓ **Illust:** Dr. Albert Mohler said, “The minister of the gospel is going to face opposition far more intense [and] far more dangerous than that faced by the military soldier in battle ... The stakes are so much higher. In battle, life and lives are hanging in the balance. In the spiritual battle, eternity is hanging in the balance. That is a sobering reality.”

### 3. **Be Courageous**

- The third mandate (imperative verb), that Paul gave for Christian ministry is to be courageous. The English phrase “**act like men**” (*andrizomai*; vs.13) translates one word in the Greek – with could literally read “act manly” or in today’s (politically incorrect) expression “be a man” (or “man up”). The basic (euphemistic) idea here is a call to be courageous. Culturally speaking, it was the man’s primary responsibility to (courageously) protect his family.

Paul is calling Christians to be brave, and not timid or fearful. For Christians, living in a non-Christian world – a world that was, in 1<sup>st</sup> century Palestine (and increasingly in 21<sup>st</sup> century America, intolerant of and hostile toward Christians and Christianity – can be more than a little intimidating and fearful. Courage is not the absence of fear, but moving ahead in spite of fear!

- ✓ **Illust:** I can still remember a time when my wife and I were living in Monmouth, in an old parsonage next to the church where I was pastoring, with our new-first-born child. All our bedrooms were upstairs, and the nursery was right across the hall from our master bedroom. In the middle of the night, I heard what I thought was someone – presumably a burglar – creeping up the old split-level

wooden staircase toward our bedrooms. It was at that moment that I had a decision to make: Do I allow this person to make it all the way up the stairs and find me cowering in my bedroom, under my bed, or do I get up and try to protect my family by confronting this person on the stairs? In that moment, I determined that if I was going to die it would be on the stairs and not in bed. So, I got up, filled with as much courage as I could muster, and I made a move into the hallway and flicked on the light – only to find our cat batting a balled-up piece of paper back-and-forth mezzanine level of our stairs.

➤ Paul is admonishing the church to have courage. We need to be brave (courageous), and not timid and fearful. Christians are called to never give up the fight of faith, to never cave to the pressures and pleasures of worldliness, and to never surrender the truth of God.

**1 Tim 6:12** ~ “Fight the good fight of the faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called and about which you made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses.”

**2 Tim 2:3** ~ “Share in suffering as a good soldier of Christ Jesus.”

➤ We, the church, are engaged in a battle. It’s a battle that attacks at the very foundation of our faith – at the truths of God. We must fight courageously, and we must fight in unity. What is the source of our courage? What encouragement do we have to fight bravely?

Joshua 1:6-9 illustrates for us two answers: 1) We have the promise (Word) of God, and 2) We have the presence (Spirit) of God. Before Joshua would fight the mighty Canaanites, to inhabit the Promised Land, God gave him these marching orders:

**Josh 1:6-9** ~ “Be strong and courageous, for you shall cause this people to inherit the land that I swore to their fathers to give them. <sup>7</sup>Only be strong and very courageous, being careful to do according to all the law that Moses my servant commanded you. Do not turn from it to the right hand or to the left, that you may have good success wherever you go. <sup>8</sup>This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success. <sup>9</sup>Have I not commanded 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.”

➤ Like Joshua, Christians are called to be courageous because they too have 1) the promise (Word) of God, and 2) the presence (Spirit) of God. It is our turn to carry the torch – the truth of God – into a world that seeks to extinguish it. We must put on the uniform of a Christian soldier who is fighting the Christ’s army. It is our turn to strap on the armor and wield the sword in the Lord’s battle. It is our turn to courageously “fight the good fight of faith.”

**Jude 3** ~ “Beloved, although I was very eager to write to you about our common salvation, I found it necessary to write appealing to you to contend [*epagōnizomai*; to contend strenuously (“agonizingly”)] for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints.”

#### 4. **Be Strong**

➤ The fourth mandate (imperative verb) for Christian ministry is to “*be strong*” (*krataioō*; vs.13). That is, to be empowered or to be strengthened. Christians are to be strong in their faith and faithfulness, not anemic or weak. But this cannot happen apart from the Lord. We never called to be strong in or from ourselves – apart from the Spirit there is no “power within” from which we can draw strength (which is a heretical doctrine that is taught within Transcendental Meditation, New Age, and other false religions).

It is only the power of the Holy Spirit working in us – that indwells all true believers at the moment of genuine conversion – that enables us to be spiritually strong. To be spiritually strong is only achieved by being strong in the Lord.

**Eph 1:15-23** ~ “For this reason, because I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints, <sup>16</sup>I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers, <sup>17</sup>that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him, <sup>18</sup>having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, <sup>19</sup>and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power [*dunamis*] toward us who believe, according to the working [*energeia*] of his great [*kratos*] might [*ischus*] <sup>20</sup>that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, <sup>21</sup>far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come. <sup>22</sup>And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church, <sup>23</sup>which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.”

**Eph 3:14-17** ~ “For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, <sup>15</sup>from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, <sup>16</sup>that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened [*krataioō*] with power [*dunamis*] through his Spirit in your inner being, <sup>17</sup>so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith ...”

**Eph 6:10** ~ “Finally, be strong [*endynamoō*] in the Lord and in the strength [*kratos*] of his might [*ischus*].”

**Phil 2:12-13** ~ “Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out [*katargazomai*] your own salvation with fear and trembling, <sup>13</sup>for it is God who works [*energeō*] in you, both to will and to work [*energeō*] for his good pleasure.”

**Phil 4:13** ~ “I can do all things through him who strengthens [*endynamoō*] me.”

**Col 1:29** ~ “For this I toil, struggling with all his energy [*energeia*] that he powerfully [*dunamis*] works [*energeō*] within me.”

**1 Tim 1:12** ~ “I thank him who has given me strength [*endynamoō*], Christ Jesus our Lord, because he judged me faithful, appointing me to his service”

**John 15:4-5** ~ “Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. <sup>5</sup>I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.”

➤ We become strong in the Lord spiritually like we become strong physically. Through hard work, rigorous training, and self-discipline. For the Christian, this comes from faithfully studying God’s Word, spending intimate fellowship with God in prayer, and consistently exercising your faith.

This command helps us to realize the battle we are to fight is not going to be easy. The victory in battle does not go to the weak, but to the strong. Only a fool would rush into a spiritual battle with armor thinking that the fight would be easy. Christians need to be strong for battle. They need to be filled with and led by the Holy Spirit, nourished and trained by God’s Word (1Pet.2:2), faithful in and devoted to prayer to God, and obedient and submissive to God in every aspect of their daily lives.

## 5. Be Loving

➤ The fifth, and final, mandate (imperative verb) is to be loving: “*Let all that you do be done in love*” (*pas ginomai agapē*; vs.14). To be sure, this command is last but not least. As Paul described in 1 Corinthians 13, without love we produce nothing, we are nothing, and we profit nothing.

**1 Cor 13:1-3** ~ “If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. <sup>2</sup>And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. <sup>3</sup>If I give away all I have, and if I deliver up my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing.”

To love is the first and second greatest commandments:

**Matt 22:37-40** ~ “And [Jesus] said to him, ‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. <sup>38</sup>This is the great and first commandment. <sup>39</sup>And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. <sup>40</sup>On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets.’”

Therefore, to love is one of the most evident marks of a Christian’s life:

**John 13:34-35** ~ “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. <sup>35</sup>By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”

- Failure to obey this command undermines all the previous mandates (1Cor.13:1-3). A Christian cannot be truly vigilant, perseverant, courageous, or strong in the Lord without the love of God flowing through them.

This “*love*” (*agapē*) is not a feeling or primarily emotional, and it is not based on conditions or circumstances. It is God’s love which comes only from God (1Jn.4:7, 19). It is sacred, selfless, and sacrificial. It not only conveys the attribute of God’s love but also the means of which God demonstrates His love. This love does not come from the world, nor is like the world’s love. God’s (*agape*) love is holy, perfect, and God-glorifying. It is not a feeling, but a conscious decision to be selfless and godly. *Agape* love is the purest and highest form or expression of love.

It is the word used to describe the love shared between the Father and the Son (Jn.15:10; 17:26); the word used to describe God’s love for His children (Rom.5:8; 8:39); the word used for the Christian’s love for Christ/God (1Pet.1:8; Matt.22:37); the word used to describe the love Christians have for one another (Jn.13:35); the word used to describe the Christian’s love for his/her enemies; and the word used to describe the Father’s divine attribute of love (1Jn.4:8).

When Christians fail to love, to “do everything in love” (vs.14), they fail in Christian ministry. God’s love must compel us to service, and it must be the means and motive of our Christian ministry. Everything else – no matter how successful or fulfilling it may appear to be – is vanity (1Cor.13:1-3).

- Our Christian love is often most tested when we encounter people we do not like (who do things we do not like), and definitely when we encounter an enemy (or an enemy of Christ). But this is where our Christian love is often most evident – when we love those who we find unlovable, and when we love those who hate and persecute us (see Matt.5:43-48; Lk.6:27-36). For this is how God loved/loves us:

**Rom 5:8-10** ~ “but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. ... <sup>10</sup>For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life.” (see Rom.8:7-8)

- We must remember that our battle is not against unbelievers, but the Enemy that has blinded them to the truth of the Gospel. This world is not our battlefield – it’s our mission field. Unbelievers are not the enemy – they are our ministry. We are to communicate the Gospel to them in love, realizing that if it were not for Christ we would be just as lost as they are (Tit.3:3).

✓**Illust:** William Barclay, the great British devotional commentator, writes, “It is often impossible to talk to some people about Jesus Christ. Their insensitiveness, their moral blindness, their intellectual pride, and cynical mockery ... may make them impervious to words about Christ. But it is always possible to show men Christ; and the weakness of the Church lies not in lack of Christian arguments, but in lack of Christian lives.”

- Love is the foundational cornerstone that holds all these things together. Without love we would only be religious, but with the love of God we can properly be called Christians.



## **Conclusion**

➤ One could soundly argue that, as a whole, the Corinthian church had failed to follow these five mandates: 1) Vigilant, 2) Perseverant, 3) Courageous, 4) Strong, and 5) Loving – and perhaps, most of all, they had failed to be loving (failed to love one another and failed to love unbelievers). May we not make the same mistakes. These commands are fairly easy to understand, but they are also very difficult to faithfully obey. So, we are reminded that we are completely dependent upon God for every good thing. May we respond with submissive, humble, and faithful obedience to God. May we be good soldiers in the army of the Lord!