

Courage And The Dog Soldier

by Mike Ford

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"Watch, stand fast in the faith, be brave, be strong." —I Corinthians 16:13

One night recently, as I sat at my computer and caught up on emails, I was struck by the number and intensity of the threats that face us: swine flu and the unproven vaccine, purported internment camps ready for those who defy the authorities, government bailouts and handouts, creeping socialism, and the annulling of our various freedoms one by one. There are just as many problems on the spiritual side, such as continuing personal and doctrinal disagreements, splintering of church groups, and prayer requests of all sorts. Seeing it all, I wanted to crawl in a bathtub and pull a mattress over my head!

God says through the apostle Paul:

No temptation has come your way that is too hard for flesh and blood to bear. But God can be trusted not to allow you to suffer any temptation beyond your powers of endurance. He will see to it that every temptation has its way out, so that it will be possible for you to bear it. (I Corinthians 10:13; J.B. Phillips' translation)

God always supplies. He is faithful. God will—at all times—do His part, but what about us? What is our part, small though it may be? We cannot control what the government may or may not do. We cannot control who stays and who goes in our church groups. Outside of ourselves, we actually control very little, so what is our responsibility here?

Later in his epistle, Paul instructs us: "Watch ye, stand fast in the faith, quit you like men, be strong. Let all your things be done with charity" (I Corinthians 16:13-14; King James Version). Several generations ago, "quit you like men" was a frequently heard phrase in English-speaking countries. To modern ears, *quit* means "to stop" or "to give up," but it can also mean "to conduct oneself in a specified way."

The phrase the King James Version translates as "quit you like men," James Moffatt renders as "play the man"; the Revised Standard Version, "be courageous"; and *The Amplified Bible*, "act like men." Phillips, however, separates verses 13-14 into a paragraph of their own, giving it a sub-heading that says, "A little sermon in a nutshell!" He translates the verse as follows: "Be on your guard, stand firm in the faith, live like men, be strong! Let everything that you do be done in love."

The Greek word translated as "quit you like men" is *andrizomai*, which is used just this one time in the Bible. It is an imperative, a word of command, and it literally means "be men."

Be Strong

Now, the women and teens reading this should not bail out at this point because Paul is giving instructions here to Christians in general, not just men, as we see in I Corinthians 1:1-2:

Paul, called to be an apostle of Jesus Christ, through the will of God, and Sosthenes our brother. *To the church of God* which is at Corinth, *to those who are sanctified in Christ* Jesus, called to be saints, *with all who in every place call on the name of Jesus Christ* our Lord, both theirs and ours. [Emphasis ours]

Is he talking to just the men here? I think not.

At the end of I Corinthians 16, Paul is closing out his rather long letter and giving his final exhortation. Right after this "little sermon in a nutshell," he mentions Aquila and Priscilla in verse 19. This husband-and-wife team are mentioned six times in Paul's letters, always fondly and always together. They are as one. Thus, right after Paul tells us to "be men," he writes warmly of his good friend, Priscilla.

Lastly, Paul teaches in Galatians 3:28 that there is neither male nor female, but we are all one in Christ Jesus. So if men must "get in touch with their feminine side," as we are so often told in today's feminized society, then the ladies in the church should pay attention, along with the men, to how being a man is necessary to our Christian life!

As many know, the Old Testament was originally written in Hebrew, and it was later translated into other languages. The translation into Greek, called the Septuagint, is one of the oldest of these, the earliest parts dating from around 300 BC. The Greek word *andrizomai*, used only once in the Greek New Testament, appears 25 times in the Septuagint. A few verses from the book of Joshua will show how *andrizomai* was translated from the Hebrew into Greek and then again into English, giving us a better understanding of what Paul was saying in I Corinthians 16:13:

Be strong and of good courage. . . . Only be strong and very courageous. . . . Have I not commanded you? Be strong and of good courage . . . be strong and of good courage."
(Joshua 1:6-7, 9, 18)

Here, *andrizomai* is translated "be . . . of good courage." A literal interpretation of *andrizomai* would be, as we saw above, "play the man," "live like men," "act like men," or simply "be men"—and that is what Paul is saying: Be men. He is writing to a church living at the same time as he, speaking the same Greek language, and having the same cultural influences, and he could expect his audience to know what he meant. They certainly did.

But we are nearly two millennia removed from those days, which is why the Septuagint is helpful. Paul is telling us to have courage. When Paul says, "Quit ye like men," it is the same as telling us to be courageous. Commentator Albert Barnes says in his *Notes* that Paul means a man is not "a coward, or timid, or alarmed at enemies, but [is] to be bold and brave." This applies to all Christians, no matter the age or gender. The idea is summed up in the word "courage."

Spartans and Dog Soldiers

Recall that Paul is giving us a command here, an imperative, but it actually goes further. In I Corinthians 16:13, there are *four* imperatives in this one verse, which is itself just six words in the original Greek: 1) watch, 2) stand fast in the faith, 3) be men (courageous), and 4) be strong.

The word *watch* means "to keep awake, be vigilant, be watchful." For us, that means keeping an eye on the world around us and more importantly, paying attention to our spiritual condition. To *stand fast in the faith* means "to be stationary (anchored), to persevere, to be convicted of our beliefs." As we saw, to *be men* is "to be courageous," but not so much in a physical sense as in the convictions of our spiritual life. Finally, to *be strong* implies "to increase in vigor, to be strengthened, to increase in faith."

These four imperatives can be viewed in military terms, and Paul uses such terms quite often in his epistles. Living in the days of Roman rule, he commonly saw Roman legions in his travels. His audience, also living within the Empire, was quite familiar with soldiers and their duties.

We can imagine a sentry on guard duty, at attention, peering into the night, listening intently for any unusual noise. He has to fight off sleep lest the enemy sneak up on him and kill him, opening the camp to attack. We can realize how this applies to Christian life.

The other imperatives—standing fast in the faith, being strong, and living like men—are also better understood as military imagery. Many are familiar with the story of the Battle of Thermopylae in 480 BC, when Sparta's King Leonidas and his 300 Spartans, along with 700 Thespians, 400 Thebans, and perhaps a few hundred others, fought to the death against the million-man army of Persian Emperor Xerxes. King Leonidas and his men knew that they would die; they knew the odds were overwhelmingly against them. But they felt compelled to try to stop the enemy and save their country.

Certainly, this encapsulates these four imperatives!

As stunning as that example is, we should bring it down to a more personal level: to an army of one. Outnumbered as they were, the Spartans and their allies still had other warriors fighting with them on either side, at least until the very end. What if we were absolutely by ourselves?

The Cheyenne Indians of the 1800s, living on the Great Plains of the United States, had six warrior societies. Perhaps the greatest of these was known as the Dog Soldiers. English journalist Henry Stanley, upon viewing them, described the Dog Soldiers as the "Spartans of the plains." Each one wore a sash around his waist, called a dog rope, with a picket pin at the end. This picket pin was a pointed stake, typically tied to the end of a rope, that could be driven into the ground to tether a horse, which could then graze but not wander off.

In the case of the Dog Soldiers,

the pin was driven into the ground as a mark of resolve in combat. When a Dog Soldier was staked to the ground in order to cover the retreat of his companions, he was required to remain there even if death was the consequence. The Dog Man could pull the pin from the ground only if his companions reached safety or another Dog Soldier released him from his duty. (Richard S. Grimes, "Cheyenne Dog Soldiers," <http://www.manataka.org/page164.html>).

This is a great example of watching, standing fast, as well as being strong and courageous. Try to imagine being a Dog Soldier. The tribe is under attack by a strong enemy, and the battle has turned against it. Everyone must flee to preserve his life and the lives of his loved ones, but the enemy is pressing the fight, eager to wipe out every man, woman, and child. So, despite being alone against hundreds, perhaps thousands, we turn to face the adversary, uncoil our dog rope, and drive our pin

into the ground, prepared at least to delay the enemy so that others can escape. The hope is to slow down the foe for as long as possible, if just for a moment or two.

Realistically, what chance do we have? Maybe it would be best to pull the pin or untie the dog rope and turn and run. But we cannot, for we are Dog Soldiers and had committed to give our lives, if necessary, when we were welcomed into the warrior society. We are convicted of our beliefs.

Strong and Loving

Sound familiar? Are we not in a similar, but spiritual, fight? Do we not face an adversary that wants to destroy us? Have we not committed ourselves to give our lives, if necessary? Matthew Poole, who published his commentary in 1685, makes a good point when speaking of "quit ye like men":

. . . you are as soldiers fighting against the world, the flesh, and the devil; do not behave yourselves like children, whom the least opposition will terrify and throw down; but like men, with a spiritual courage and fortitude, becoming such who have so good a Captain, and so good a cause.

The "captain of their salvation" (Hebrews 2:10) is our commanding officer in battle. Our Captain has given us the equipment we need to carry out our duties: these four imperatives. All of them—watching, standing firm in the faith, acting like men, and being strong—can be considered as masculine traits due to the military analogies; but they are not limited to men, nor should they be.

Satan has perverted the minds of today's world to the point that these traits are regarded negatively. Feminists might concede that men are strong and courageous, in some cases, but **foolishly** so. We are told that women are loving and nurturing and these qualities are to be preferred. So much so that homosexuality is considered normal and a man that truly acts like a man is abnormal—a Neanderthal. It is a mixed-up world indeed.

However, these traits are not mutually exclusive! Notice what Paul says in verse 14: "Let all that you do be done with love." Verse 13 is not for lumberjacks, and verse 14, for women and sensitive, new-age males! Not at all. As Christians, we are to "be men" *and* do all with love. Is not love showing concern for others? In the analogy of the Dog Soldiers illustrating the Christian fight, are not watching, standing in the faith, exhibiting courage, and being strong—in order to protect their loved ones, their tribe, and their way of life—showing love? Certainly!

The entire book of I Corinthians is, as Henry Halley says, "Mainly about Certain Church Disorders." Brethren met in their homes and small halls in one of the largest, richest, and most important cities of the Roman Empire. The brethren there were faced with decadence, temptation, and vices of every sort. They experienced corruption on a grand scale. There were factions and competing groups. Sound familiar? Truly, "there is nothing new under the sun" (Ecclesiastes 1:9).

This past year has been a difficult one, and more tough times lie ahead. We know that God will provide. God is faithful (I Corinthians 1:9), and we do not need to worry about *how* He will do it. Instead, we need to take care of our end of the deal: to be ever-vigilant, standing firm in the faith, courageous and strong, doing everything in concern for others. All this is summed up by *andrizomai*: quit ye like men!