

Series: **“Being the Church in a World Gone Wild”**

CDOBC – beginning on 1/28/18

Today’s Title: **“Strength and Love”**

February 10, 2019 - 1 Corinthians 16:13-14

Objective: To help people’s faith grow and their love increase.

Opening prayer

Paul is in the final stretch - finishing his letter to the church in Corinth.

It’s been a difficult letter for him to write as he’s had to confront so many of their sinful practices and their incorrect beliefs.

He’s dealt with their divisions and their arrogance (chapt 1-4).

He’s dealt with their sexual permissiveness which made the pagans blush (chapt. 5).

He’s confronted their practice of bringing lawsuits against others in the church and their lax sexual boundaries (chapt 6).

He’s cleared up their confusion (chapt. 7) regarding sexual practices within marriage - and helped them work through issues related to divorce, remarriage and singleness.

(chapt. 8-9) ***He’s corrected*** their views concerning food sacrificed to idols, their support of church leadership and the priority of preaching the gospel in ways that makes sense to their audience.

(Chapt. 10-11) ***He instructed*** them about the myths and dangers of idols, women’s involvement in the church and corrected their abuses of the Lord’s Supper.

(Chapt. 12-15) ***He helped them*** see the immense value in every person in the Body of Christ, the highest importance of love, the role of prophecy and tongues, and the certainty of future, bodily resurrection.

Now, we're in **Chapter 16** - in the last ½ of this closing chapter, and like parents who are sending their son/daughter off to summer camp or saying good-bye to their college freshman in the dorm, he is trying to leave them with a succinct, essential thought - what is vital for them to know.

In our verses today, we have only 21 words - which convey 5 imperatives / commands.

There's nothing to temper these commands - nothing to ease into them - nothing to soften the edges. Paul just fires them off in rapid succession - hoping to drive home one last time how they can live out their faith in a world that had gone wild. The city of Corinth - the region of Achaia - was a world which was far from God - immersed in pagan religion and humanistic philosophies. The excesses of the Greek culture were no less than our modern American excesses - and likely dwarfed our current excesses!

Living as followers of Jesus - as '*Christians*' - in that culture was no easy thing - especially for those who were raised in the pagan, gentile world, which many in the Corinthian church were.

Turn to 1 Corinthians 16:13-14

“Be watchful, stand firm in the faith, act like men, be strong.

14 Let all that you do be done in love.”

There is no fancy or complicated outline here - just 5 imperatives which we can unfold.

1. Be watchful

Greek term means: *be alert / be awake*

This is a common directive we see throughout the N.T.

We're told to be watchful for evil - for the devil himself.

1 Peter 5:8

“...be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.”

But the overall context of **1 Corinthians** doesn't focus so much on spiritual warfare as it does on knowing the truth of Christ and being aware of the philosophies, promises and beliefs of the world and how they undermine and work against the Gospel and truth of Christ. I realize this is certainly an aspect of spiritual warfare as Paul states in **2 Cor. 10:4-5**

“For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds.

5 We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God...”

This command to “be watchful” (1 Cor. 16:13) is more similar to the command Paul gives to the elders from Ephesus:

Acts 20:30-32

“...and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them.

31 Therefore be alert, (same Gr. word) remembering that for three years I did not cease night or day to admonish everyone with tears.”

This is one of our biggest challenges today. We live in not only a post-Christian culture, but a post-truth culture.

“Indian man to sue his parents for giving birth to him ‘without his consent’, wants to be paid for his life”

Mumbai businessman Raphael Samuel told the BBC that it's wrong to bring children into the world because they then have to put up with lifelong suffering.

Mr. Samuel's belief is rooted in what's called anti-natalism - a philosophy that argues that life is so full of misery that people should stop procreating immediately. (Sources: Fox News & BBC)

Determining what is right and wrong - true or false - will be increasingly difficult for Christians and churches. As more and more Americans are raised without objective truth, without a base-line knowledge of the bible along with selective and often false beliefs and views of the Church and Church history, the truth will become more difficult to attain to and agree on. As followers of Christ, we must “be watchful” for these unavoidable realities and know how to respond. As Peter said,

“...always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect, 16 having a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame.” (1 Peter 3:16)

2. Stand firm in the faith

The verb / command is “stand firm” - which means *to persist, persevere*.

Visual Illustration:

When a hurricane makes landfall, the weather channel sends reporters out into the storm - because that's more interesting than looking at radar pictures - and the reporters have to brace themselves against the wind to keep from getting blown over. (Fake)

This is a call to stay committed to the truth - to not waiver from what they had been taught. Paul had already encouraged them to remain faithful to what he had taught them.

15:1-2 “Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, 2 and by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you...”

14:2 “Now I commend you because you remember me in everything and maintain the traditions even as I delivered them to you.”

For the Corinthians, this was a call to remain faithful to the truth - faithful to what they had been taught by the

Apostle. Remember, 1 Corinthians was one of the earliest N.T. letters written - around 55 A.D. - the gospels hadn't been written yet - they had some access to parts of the O.T. - so what the Apostle had taught them was about all they had regarding Jesus and godly living post-cross and resurrection. They needed to follow Paul's teaching and not mix it with pagan or secular ideas and philosophies - they needed to "stand firm".

We're faced with the same temptations - to mix biblical truth with our own views - modern philosophies.

This happens on both extremes - *liberals* water down biblical truth choosing to abide by the commands and truths they agree with and ignoring or declaring uninspired those they disagree with or run counter to their modern viewpoints.

Conservatives typically do the opposite - and add to what the bible says. They do this thinking it needs to be buttressed - given more support or clarification so modern issues can be clearly dealt with.

Notice that "stand firm" is qualified. We're to "stand firm in the faith." Paul doesn't use "faith" in a generic way - he's not encouraging you to have "faith" in something - anything - as long as you have faith in something. He's telling you to "stand firm in *the* faith". The definite article

is before faith - which means Paul is talking about a specific faith - faith in Christ - the Christian faith.

This means you must know what the Christian faith believes - it's truth claims - the life-view it promotes - the values it upholds - the heart attitudes it elevates - what it says about the value and dignity of human life - what it says about sex and sexuality, marriage, parenting, finances, work, health, wealth, poverty, suffering, serving, pride, humility, education, wisdom, the environment, immigration, abortion, justice, government institutions and civic authority, respect and love - just to name a few topics.

“Stand firm in *the* faith”!

3. Act like men

This doesn't exclude women - but was a word / phrase used by Paul to elevate the Corinthians to a higher calling - a higher ethic - a higher way of living.

Some other translations:

HCB - “be brave and strong”

NLT - “be courageous”

KJV - “quit you like men”

Manhood - masculinity is under attack in our culture today. In some ways, it's deserved. The hyper-masculine - bravado / macho / ultra-testosterone-infused grunting, muscle-flexing, beer can crushing, sex-

obsessed version of men - is not healthy, not helpful to families or society, and it's not a Christian / biblical view of manhood.

One part of our society has gone overboard in emphasizing these kind of traits, while another part of our society has gone overboard in demonizing all men - no matter who / what they are.

Our society says you're a man by what you do - by what you look like. You're *'male-ness'* is what others see from the outside - and there is little-to-no consideration of a man's character.

But this is not a biblical picture of male-ness.

“Being a man is not dependent on what one does; rather, a man is a man because he is made in the image of God. That's it.

Focusing masculinity on what a man does makes it something to be proved. Masculinity does not need to be proved; it needs to be affirmed.”

Man Enough: How Jesus Redefines Manhood by: NATE PYLE

There is nothing wrong with being a man - just as there's nothing wrong with being a woman.

What's wrong is when our identity as a man or woman is separated from what Scripture teaches about human identity and value.

When Paul says, “act like men”, he’s not saying we should all take on male tendencies - or act like overly-macho caricatures of men. He’s actually calling all of us - not just men - to rise to maturity - to be courageous in life.

Proverbs 28:1

“The wicked flee when no one pursues, but the righteous are bold as a lion.”

“act like men” is about those characteristics that distinguish the mature man who has left boyhood behind him - and the mature woman who has left girlhood behind. This verb is plural - so Paul’s commanding everyone in the church to “act like men” - boys, girls, men and women.

For the Corinthians, they were adapting and accepting the world’s definitions and descriptions of what men and women should be - and they were embracing the world’s philosophy and practices and ignoring Jesus’ teaching on the subject.

Jesus taught a man’s strength is measured by meekness, gentleness, mercy, purity and peacemaking (**Matt. 5:5-9**)
...manhood develops most appropriately when we pursue the kingdom of God rather than the idol of masculinity itself (and manhood differs from masculinity on account of its focus on maturity)

Feeling and showing emotion is not contrary to manhood.

Boasting, domineering, raucous behavior, sexual innuendo, and machoism are capitulations to the world's view of masculinity.

Also, “act like men” is in the *middle voice* which means it's something the subject initiates and participates in. This only happens when you determine it will happen - when you determine to make it a reality in your life. This is something you do because it will benefit you - it's the right thing to do.

4. Be strong

Following the command “act like men” you might think this is referring to human / male strength, but you would be wrong. This has nothing to do with human strength - this is not connected with physical exercise.

We see this admonition all throughout the bible. Most prominently in **Joshua 1:6, 7, 9, 17:**

“Be strong and courageous” is repeated 4x in that chapter - and it had more to do with spiritual strength and trust in God - than physical or military strength.

Fear is an overwhelming emotion / thought every Christian must confront and defeat.

As the culture becomes more opposed to Christians, many Christians will become more and more fearful of being marginalized or persecuted for their faith.

We will pay a higher cultural price for being biblical Christians.

Fear will creep in and tell you, *‘Blend in...don’t let your faith be known.’ ‘As long as you believe, it’s OK to make sure you’re safe - and it’s OK to keep your faith secret.’*

This already happens - and it will happen with more frequency - and the more it happens, the less Christians can be salt and light in the world - and the further and faster the world will move away from and against Christ.

The solution is not to go lift weights and get bigger biceps.

Ephesians 6:10

Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might.”

Our strength is in the Lord - not in ourselves.

Our faith is in the Lord - not our ability to save or protect ourselves.

This command is in the passive voice - which means this is not in our power to do. God must do this - we can only “be strong” when we have God’s strength - and He strengthens us!

The same verb tense is used by Peter when he says: “but as He who called you is holy, you also **be holy** in all your conduct...” (1 Peter 1:15)

“be holy” is in the passive voice. It certainly involves our will - our choices and decisions, but our will, choices

and decisions are dependent upon the power of God and His Spirit to work in our life and help us to “be holy”.

“be strong” only happens when God strengthens us!

These 4 commands are to build our spiritual awareness, spiritual stability, spirit maturity and our spiritual strength.

How do you “be strong”?

Through Christian disciplines which you incorporate into your daily life - your regular pattern of living.

- Last year we encouraged you to read through the Bible - this would have helped you gain spiritual strength. Have you continued this in 2019?
- Make worship with God’s people a high priority for your week - come to worship ready to give - not just to receive / consume - and you will gain spiritual strength.
- When you commit to being with other Christians - in a small group - praying for each other - studying and thinking about God’s Word - encouraging and loving one another - you will gain spiritual strength.
- When you serve and give yourself to the cause of Christ and share your faith with those in your Circle - you will gain spiritual strength.

There’s no shortcut to spiritual strength.

If you're spiritually weak today, you won't be spiritually strong by next Sunday, but you can start gaining strength today.

Isaiah 40:28-31

“Have you not known? Have you not heard? The LORD is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He does not faint or grow weary; His understanding is unsearchable.

29 He gives power to the faint, and to him who has no might He increases strength.

30 Even youths shall faint and be weary, and young men shall fall exhausted;

31 but they who wait for 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.”

5. Let all that you do be done in love

If Paul didn't include this final command in the list, it would be easy to become mechanical - crusty - even militant in the faith.

Love protects the Body of Christ from harmful and hurtful behavior and speech, but love is not just preventive or protective - it's also appealing and attracts non-believers to Christ.

The whole point of spiritual strength is not just protection from evil, but to be a vital and thoughtful ambassador /witness for Christ in the public square.

If you're spiritually weak, struggling with sin and multiple vices and live in dysfunctional ways and treat

others with rudeness, cruelty and are inconsiderate and selfish, your life will not only be miserable and unfulfilling, but it will attract nobody to the gospel.

But if you're spiritually strong, reflecting goodness and righteousness, living in healthy relationships and you treat others with kindness, grace and you're loving toward others in all you do, then your life will be not only joyful and full of depth and substance, but it will be attractive to non-believers.

"be done" - verb - is in the middle voice - which means we must decide to do this - it's within our will to do everything in love - love must be intentional - love is a choice. You can't say, '*God made me this way...I'm just not very loving.*'

In fact, the opposite is true. When you put your faith in Christ, you are His child - a member of His family - and you take on His traits. Paul says you are *in Christ and Christ is in you*. So, if Christ is in you, and Christ is love - then you have every capacity to love as God loves. Will you love others...and let all that you do be done in love?

Apply it...

Ultimately, these commands are essential if we're going to be a Great Commission and Great Commandment church.

These 5 things will help you grow spiritually...they will help you mature in the faith.

If I can point out the obvious...since each of these are commands - it means our spiritual growth / maturity rests in our lap - it's within your control!

Spiritual growth takes effort...intentional living...it doesn't happen automatically because you go to church. These 5 commands are in addition to gathering with other believers for worship.

It's not an option for us to choose 1 of these and ignore the rest, but in order to make these our regular practice in life, you need to start with 1 of them - which one will you start with?

Be watchful

Stand firm in the faith

Act like men

Be strong

Let all that you do be done in love.

Close in prayer