

- **\*READ I Corinthians 16:13,14/PRAYER\*** As Paul is concluding his first letter to the brethren in Corinth, would you notice what is said in **vv.13,14**? "Be on alert, stand firm in the faith, act like men, be strong. Let all that you do be done in love." I'm particularly drawn to a few words in the middle of that reading, "act like men, be strong." Now, as far as I can tell, this church in Corinth was made up of more than just men. Early in this letter there are admonitions even to the women who seem to be a part of this church. So surely Paul isn't writing and telling them that they ought to act like men, right? I think we can all agree that isn't the case here. There must be some broader application.
- But just suppose for just a moment that Paul was writing to just men. When he writes something as "act like men", what exactly is he saying? Is this a call from the Apostle for greater levels of masculinity? Is he saying that they need to hit the weights a little more, drive a bigger truck, eat more red meat, grow longer beards, own more guns, or something else that is often associated with a man's level of masculinity? Again, I don't think that is quite what the Apostle Paul had in mind.
- So what might that broader application be? What might Paul be saying in this text when he tells all people to act like men? Let me suggest that Paul is calling for the reader to reach for a higher level of maturity in their lives. You might say that Paul is calling for all people to "man up!" or "step up!" their service to God and their neighbor. We could consider this thought in respect to all people, but with this being Fathers' Day, I would like to relate these thoughts specifically to the gentlemen who are here and those who might listen later on, no matter if you are a father, or whether you're married, single, or still in your youth. A few weeks back I focused on the ladies, and how they can be Wonder Women in their lives, and I don't want anyone to think that I'm going to let the guys off without any sort of admonition to grow and excel in their faiths, as well.
- In reality, this lesson will be a little easier for me to deliver because I myself am a man. Because this is the case and I am not a woman, presenting any lessons focusing on women brings at least a small sense of concern because I don't want to seem like I actually know what it is like to be a woman. However, when it comes to lessons focusing on the guys, well I know a thing or two about being a guy. I know God's expectations for us as men, and I am keenly aware of the fact that men are failing at being men! Far too many of us are failing to live up to God's expectations for us as men. Sure we might be men because of who we are as far as gender goes, but God demands more than for us to just lean upon our gender as men. He calls us, through the Apostle Paul, to act like men and be strong. He calls us to be strong men and possess the type of maturity that will help us to fulfill God's will in our lives. This morning, I want to call all men to step up and man up in their lives and be who God demands that we be by looking at what Paul includes in these two verses of **I Corinthians 16:13,14**.

**I. Strong men are alert and watchful.**

- A. The good Bible student might find these words by Paul to be very familiar sounding. If you're thinking they sound familiar then you might be thinking of what Paul said to the Ephesian shepherds as he is preparing to leave them after having spent some time with them. There in **Acts 20:28-30**, Paul is admonishing them to be protectors of those who are in their charge.
- B. As men, we are to be alert and watchful of all that is around us. We are truly to "be careful how we walk" as Paul puts it in **Ephesians 5:15**. We don't walk carefully only for ourselves, but we walk carefully considering all those who are around us, especially those whom we have been charged with protecting such as our families and even those around us who cannot care for themselves...the young, the old, or the disabled person.

- C. This idea of being alert, watchful, and being protectors ought to be evident in all areas of our lives. Certainly, we would all agree that in this context Paul is referring to spiritual matters. If we see danger in the form of temptation or sin then we must do whatever is necessary to defend those around us from it. But let me also suggest that as men, we be the first ones to put ourselves between our loved ones or other innocent people and any true danger we might run across in this life.
- D. God calls us to be alert and watchful at all times no matter the danger. This means that we are aware of what is around us as we mentioned earlier. (**I Peter 5:8**) It means that we have a grasp on reality and our minds aren't constantly away from us focused on other things. Men, let's act like strong men and be alert and watchful and serve as the protectors that God demands that we be.

## II. Strong men are firm in their faiths.

- A. A firm faith is not developed passively. We make this point often when we talk about growing in faith but I just don't think that it is something we can be reminded of enough. We **MUST** be actively putting forth effort if we are wanting to grow. So what does that mean? It means that we must live up to the admonition of Paul towards Timothy that we be disciples who work hard in knowing God's Word so that we can handle it accurately. (**II Timothy 2:15**)
- B. But it's not just that we know God's Word well, but it is that we are then able to stand firm in our faith's when push comes to shove. We ought to be so thankful to God constantly for the church that we are members of that allows us to be built up in such a way that what Paul says in **Ephesians 4:14** isn't true about us. As men, we ought not be like those "children" who are tossed here and there by waves of false doctrines and temptations of man. Instead, we need to be men! We must be strong men!
- C. So practically speaking what does this look like? It looks like men who have backbones. Men who are firm in their convictions and not willing to move just whichever way the wind blows. We don't settle for the path of least resistance. But instead, we are willing to dig our heels in when the need arises. Especially those of us who have families, it is imperative that we we not allow begging wives or crying children to sway us from what we are convinced is right and necessary to please God. There is a time for us to bend when it comes to things that just don't matter or are a point of preference. But when it comes to a matter of truth and error or life and death...we must be strong men with backbones who stand firm in our faiths.

## III. Strong men act like men, they're leaders.

- A. Why must we be these type of men with strong backbones who are firm in our faiths? To build upon our last point, let me suggest that strong men act like men, they're leaders. While some might object to the idea that men are charged with being leaders in our homes, communities, and churches...let me suggest that is isn't because men designed for things to be this way, but God established male leadership in the very beginning. Notice that Paul references the beginning when discussing how women ought to conduct themselves in submissive godliness in **I Timothy 2:9-14**. They are to take on this role because of things that happened back in **Genesis 3**. In the beginning we see that man was created first, and that it was women who was deceived and fell into transgression first. Because of these facts, consider what is said in **Genesis 3:16** as part God's punishments for the sin of man and woman.
- B. So what can help us to be strong men who are strong leaders? Firstly, consider that we need to be men who have the courage to step up and take on the role of leadership. Being a leader isn't something that means we get everyone else to do the heavy lifting for us, but instead being a strong leaders requires that we get out in front and lead. To be out in front demands courage because it puts us right in the firing line of whatever it might that is coming down the line. Nonetheless, strong men are men of courage who get out in front and lead those who are in his charge.

- C. Secondly, we need to commit to being men who are honorable in our conduct and character. Part of being a good leader is putting forth yourself as being someone who is worthy of being followed. No one wants to follow a coward. No one wants to follow a hypocrite. No one wants to follow someone who only cares for themselves. No one wants to follow someone who is divisive or is not reliable or trustworthy. If we are wanting to be strong leaders then men, we ourselves must acknowledge these truths and then we willing to make sure that we are not men who can be described in these ways. We must be better than this! We must seek to be the type of men that others want to follow. We must be kind, loving, considerate, and selfless. We must be mature and strong men of good courage and honor! So many of the great leaders in the Bible were men of courage and honor. They weren't perfect, but they gave every effort to lead as God would have them to lead, and God demands that exact same effort from us as strong men.

#### IV. Strong men are lovers of God & others.

- A. So what can help us to be men who are alert, firmly faithful, and willing leaders? Let's begin to conclude by recognize that all of this is done by us being men who do everything because of our love for God and others. Our motivation must be love, and if it is anything else then we will fail God and those around us. (**I Corinthians 13:1-3**)
- B. As strong men, we are willing to submit to the true strength of the God of heaven who even allows us to occupy the positions that we find ourselves in in this life. Without God's blessings and initial love towards us, we would be nothing. Therefore, we love Him because He first loved us and that love ought to be spread to all of those who are around us. (**I John 4:19**)
- C. It is fitting that Paul would finish up with an admonition that these people be committed to love. As we saw in **I Corinthians 13**, love was lacking and they needed to refocus on it and how it can could be spread among this group. Leading the charge needed to be the men who were to lead this group. Instead of having a divisive attitude toward the Apostle Paul, elevating and degrading one another based upon their gifts, and showing a lack of love in many other ways...this church needed to show love and it needed to start with its leaders.
- D. Men, we must strive for a level of maturity that causes us in all things to focus our love for others above our love for ourselves. If we can consistently live up to that standard then I am confident based upon the Apostle Paul's words that we can be strong men in God's sight.

On a day when we give some special attention to our fathers, I hope that we will recognize those who are worthy of being praised as strong men as such. The fact that the Apostle Paul is having to tell this group of people to act like men tells me that some of them were still acting as children and not living up to God's standard. Men...may God help us to live in such as way that we would be called strong men by Paul and our Lord Jesus. Ladies...might I encourage you to demand that the men in your lives live up to this godly standard. These attributes take effort, and may each of us encourage one another to live up to it each day. May God be praised and honored as we live our lives as strong men!