

1 Corinthians Series #41
“Strong Love” - 1 Cor. 16:13-14

I. INTRODUCTION

A. Letter Writing

1. Don't know how many of you like to write letters
2. I find that I write quite a few
3. Have noticed that I'll get going on a letter, and all too often lose a sense of time
4. Then suddenly I'll realize I have something else to do and will draw the letter to a quick end
5. Yet there are usually several other things I wanted to say so they all get thrown into the last paragraph in short little choppy sentences

B. Paul's Letters

1. We see that same kind of thing at the conclusion to many of Paul's letters.
2. For the body of the letter, he lays out his thoughts in clear and logical order
 - a. developing his case for whatever subject he knew needed to be addressed
 - b. then he would turn and apply it to his readers lives in a careful and loving way
 - c. but several of his letters end with short statements of things they need to do and blessing he longs to convey on them.
3. 1 Corinthians is one of these kinds of letters
4. Today, as we conclude our study in this letter, we'll be taking a look at just a couple of his final comments to the church at Corinth.

II. TEXT

A. Vs. 13

13 Watch, stand fast in the faith, be brave, be strong.

1. Paul almost sounds like a general addressing his troops
2. And that really is the picture the words he uses paints
3. Paul spoke of the Christian in different roles, depending on who they were dealing with
 - a. in our relationship with God, we are His children

- b. in our relationship with the world, we are ambassadors of the Kingdom of God
 - c. in our relationship with Jesus Christ, we are His bride
 - d. in our relationship with one another, we are family
 - e. in our relationship to the devil and the powers of hell, we are soldiers
4. It is of this last relationship that Paul speaks here
 5. This picture of the Christian as soldier was one of Paul's favorites . . .
 - a. spiritual warfare and the armor of God in Eph. 6

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Eph 6:10-13 “Be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places. Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand.”

- b. to his close friend Timothy he wrote . . .

2 Tim 2:3-4 You must endure hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. No one engaged in warfare entangles himself with the affairs of this life, that he may please him who enlisted him as a soldier.

6. You and I have a very real adversary
 - a. he is crafty and subtle
 - b. he is a master at warfare
 - c. he knows when to attack and when to lay low
 - d. he has 6000 years of experience in human behavior
 - e. and he knows just how to infiltrate our ranks and work his ruin
 - f. his name is Satan, and he and his armies of hell are set in opposition against us
 - g. we are indeed engaged in a spiritual battle
 - h. the prize to be gained or lost is human souls
7. If there is no spiritual battle going on in your life, then there is one of three possible reasons . . .
 - 1) the devil is afraid of you because you have arrived at a place of complete spiritual perfection and

- every time he attacks you you whoop him.
- 2) the devil is laying low right now, trying to soften you up for a later attack
 - if he can get you to think that things aren't really all that bad
 - that you are a lot farther along in spiritual growth than you really are
 - then the tendency is to lower your guard
 - then watch out, because he will come in with a major attack and you won't be ready
 - 3) you're not born again, so you are already safely within his camp
8. Paul knows that devil never, ever lets up.
- a. if there was anyone who knew the devil doesn't quit it was he
 - b. so he warns the Corinthians
 - c. he reminds them of the spiritual battle]
 - d. and gives them specific instructions in what posture to take
9. The first thing he says we are to do is **“Watch!”**
- a. one of the most common commands in the NT
 - b. it means to be *awake* and *ready*
 - c. RR = 1 Pet 5:8 “Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour.”
 - d. one of the most important duties a soldier can be assigned to is lookout
 - e. in fact, so important is this duty that if a soldier is found asleep at his post, in many armies, he is summarily executed, in others he is court-martialed and jailed.
 - f. history is filled with stories of cities that fell because the watchmen were not at their posts or were snoozing on the job
 - g. another thing we are to awake and ready for is the return of the Lord
 - Mat 24:42 “Watch, for you do not know what hour your Lord is coming.”
 - 1 Th 5:6 “Therefore let us not sleep, as others do, but let us watch and be sober.”
 - Rev 16:15 “Behold, I am coming as a thief. Blessed is he who watches.”

- remember when you were a kid; couldn't go to sleep on Christmas Eve because of the excitement of the next day?
- the Lord's return should motivate us to live a holy life even more than Christmas excites a child

- h. the question is: How can we be watchful?
- Col 4:2 "Continue earnestly in prayer, being vigilant in it with thanksgiving."
 - in Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus asked the disciples to watch with Him in prayer.
 - to be watchful means to look at life through the eyes of prayer
 - to be spiritually awake by staying in fellowship with God
 - we must not look at life merely through our physical eyes, we must learn to look at life with spiritual eyesight
 - you see, prayer isn't just getting away alone with God, closing your eyes, folding your hands and uttering a few religious sounding words
 - private prayer alone with God is important but prayer shouldn't end there
 - in 1 Thess 5:17 Paul says, "Pray without ceasing!"
 - we can live in the posture of prayer
 - meaning every moment is lived in the conscious presence of God
 - that is how we can watch!

10. Second Paul says we are to "**stand fast in the faith.**"
- a. being open-minded and tolerant are fast becoming the chief virtues of our society
- we are told that if we want to be enlightened people we must not be so narrow minded about our religious convictions but must learn to be more tolerant of lifestyles the bible calls sin
 - even in the church we are told that we must not be so strident in our defense of biblical

- truth but must learn to embrace one another for the sake of unity
- men and women who dare to call attention to the heretical teachings of false prophets are labeled as “dividers of the body of Christ”
- b. indeed it is good to be open-minded about things that are open for debate
- but we are not to be so open minded that our brains fall out
- c. Paul says we are to stand fast in the faith
- we are not to be one bit open minded about what constitutes the gospel
 - the bible is not open for debate
 - there is no room for open-mindedness here
 - only a tough minded determination to stand in the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints
 - God does not change His mind
 - there is no Holy Bible, Part 2
- d. Christian, we must stand our ground in the faith
- we must not give an inch
 - we must yield no quarter to the devil
 - or to the enemies of the faith who would tell us we are being narrow minded and intolerant
 - it is good to be narrow minded about some things
 - like driving
 - we are narrow minded about the truth because it is the truth
- e. went to see Gettysburg a few months ago.
- f. one scene in which a group of Union soldiers from Maine under the leadership of a man named Chamberlain were told they had to defend their position to the last man
- they were the end of the line
 - they were told that if they were routed or retreated, the whole Union line would cave in
 - the man who gave them their orders told them they had to stand their ground, even to the

last man

- retreat was not an option for them

- they failed, thousands would die

g. we remember that engagement today as the Battle of Little Round Top

h. wave after wave of Confederate soldiers attacked the Union forces, but each wave was beaten back

i. finally, out of ammunition and seeing the Confederate troops massing for another attack, Chamberlain ordered his men to fix their bayonets for a charge down the hill

j. every one of those men knew it was a death charge

k. but they had to stand their ground; their courage was their final gift to their fellow soldiers and the cause of liberty

l. down the hill they went; out of ammo, but not without of a sense of duty

m. the Confederates were taken by complete surprise and surrendered

n. what had seemed like certain death was turned into a glorious victory

o. there have been countless men and women who have stood firm in the faith in past ages

- rather than give an inch to the devil, they were willing to lay down their lives

- they were willing to defend their faith with their lifeblood

- but they lived and died, not only for themselves but for those that would come after

- they knew that if they caved in and compromised with the spirit of the world, who would proclaim the truth to the next generation

- you and I are the heirs of their faithfulness and courage

- we too owe the next generation to truth of the gospel

- we are the end of the line for this generation

- we must stand firm, even to the last man!

11. Third Paul says we are to **“be brave.”**

a. the word really means to act like a man, and was

- often used in terms of courage
- b. throughout the letter, Paul had rebuked them for the immaturity
 - it seems they were acting as selfish, spoiled little babies
 - now he tells them to strike the posture of a soldier who is faced with an enemy that must be defeated
 - "It's time to grow up," he says; "It's time to grow up and start acting like a man."
- c. About a year ago, Time Magazine came out with a cover story about how our society is turning into a bunch of Crybabies and Busybodies; in fact, that was the title of the front cover.
- d. we see this problem in the church; we are all acquainted with it.
- e. we expect that when people first come to the Lord, they will go through a period of spiritual infancy
- f. but it should be short; they should go on to maturity
- g. why is it then that there are so many Christians who are still acting as babes years after their conversion?
 - they whine and cry when they don't get their own way
 - they're selfish, thinking only about their own needs and desires
 - if they're hurt by someone, rather than doing the hard thing of restoring the relationship, they just leave and spread rumors
- h. Paul saw all this in Corinth and so he says, "Act like men! Stop being such spiritual wimps."

12. Fourth he writes, "**Be strong.**"

- a. The English translation misses a subtle nuance of the Greek language here
- b. this would be better translated as, "Be strengthened!"
- c. the difference is this;
 - Paul is not telling the Corinthians to start lifting weights so they can bulk up
 - nor is he telling them to pump up their spiritual muscles

- the command means to receive strength by abiding in Christ for he is the source of our strength
 - Eph 6:10 “Be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might.”
 - 2 Tim 2:1 “Be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus.”
 - d. Paul is thinking about our battle with the flesh
 - Jesus said, “Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.” Mat 26:41
 - Gal 5:16 “Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh.”
 - e. only a strong spirit can resist the evil tendencies and habits of our flesh.
 - f. the way to be strengthened in the Spirit is by communion with the Lord
 - that means regular study of His word
 - regular prayer
 - regular fellowship with other believers who are growing in the Lord
13. I played football my freshman year
- a. before each game, coach would bring us in to the team room and give us a speech
 - b. go over a few special plays
 - c. go over the scouting report
 - d. would end with rousing speech in which we would all get fired up
 - e. then he'd turn us loose and we'd hit the door leading out to the field screaming like a hurricane
14. Paul has just given a rousing speech to the troops, but he doesn't want them going out onto the streets of Corinth with their spiritual swords swinging, knocking people down in their zeal to win the war.
15. So in v. 14 he writes . . .

B. V. 13

14 Let all that you do be done with love.

1. In our relationship to the devil, we are to be watchful, strong, courageous soldiers who don't give an inch
2. But in our relationships with others, we are to be filled

- with love
- 3. Love keeps our Firmness in the faith from becoming hardness.
- 4. It keeps our strength from becoming pushy and domineering
- 5. It keeps our courage from becoming showy
- 6. It fills the duty of being awake and ready with eager anticipation
- 7. 1 Pet 4:8 “Above all things have fervent love for one another, for ‘love will cover a multitude of sins.’”
- 8. Love is the crowning virtue of the Christian life
- 9. If we love God, we will fulfill our duty to Him
- 10. If we love one another, we will fulfill our duty to each other

III. CONCLUSION

A. Strong Love

- 1. The Christian life is one of a watchful love
 - a. just as the young man who’s in love watches his girlfriend to make sure she’s happy and constantly seeks to be with her
 - b. so the Christian is awake and ready in his or her love of Jesus
 - ready to promptly obey the Lord’s bidding
 - watchful of the enemies attempts to cool that love of Christ
- 2. The Christian life is one of a faithful love
 - a. the world will howl against and threaten the Christian who dares to hold fast to God’s word
 - b. but the true Christian will mark the derision of this world as a sign of their fidelity to Christ
- 3. The Christian life is one of a mature and courageous love
 - a. let the hosts of hell assemble themselves against the believer
 - b. let them lay their plots; let them take their best shot
 - c. it does not matter, for greater is he who is with us than he who is against us -- and who can separate us from the love of Christ?
- 4. The Christian life is one of strong love
 - a. no matter what challenges life presents us,
 - b. no matter what obstacles or troubles may lie before us

c. Christ is sufficient and he will not leave us nor forsake us

B.