

Be Strong
1 Corinthians 16:13-14

Introduction

- A. As that great saint, the Apostle Paul, closes his first lengthy letter to the troublesome church in Corinth he writes these words as a terse, summary statement to the brothers:

1 Corinthians 16:13-14 (ESV) Be watchful, stand firm in the faith, act like men, be strong. 14 Let all that you do be done in love.

- B. We are looking at these 5 statements one by one because they serve us as a wonderful summary of the masculine Christian life (some similarities, some differences to ladies).

1. Be watchful (don't drift, don't sleep)
2. Stand firm in the faith (not weak, not passive)
3. Act like men (not pansies)
4. Be strong (tonight)
5. Let all that you do be done in love (Nov 16)

- C. The Word of God says to each one of us men ... be strong. Why? How?

1. Why is because God created man as the stronger sex.

1 Peter 3:7 (ESV) Likewise, husbands, live with your wives in an understanding way, showing honor to the woman as the weaker vessel, since they are heirs with you of the grace of life, so that your prayers may not be hindered.

2. Why is because as men go so goes the church (or family or nation). We men bear the onus of headship and leadership.

Ex: The African-American community is struggling because men are largely absent.

3. Because we agree on the authority of the Word of God we agree we should be strong. My title is **Be Strong**. How do we fulfill this command from God? 3 points:

- The necessity of conviction
- Marks of weakness
- Marks of strength

I. The necessity of conviction.

- A. When God lays claim to our lives through electing grace the gospel invades our heart. Our lives are changed. When the gospel invades our heart we experience conviction.

1. The Apostle Paul says this to the church in Thessalonica:

1 Thessalonians 1:4-5 (ESV) For we know, brothers loved by God, that he has chosen you, 5 because our gospel came to you not only in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction. You know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake.

2. The conviction we experience in coming to Christ is first our need for a Savior (we see our sin and His forgiveness). Second, Jesus is our Lord (King of His kingdom).

3. We have this new desire to live for Jesus and the glory of God. This desire, as it matures, is fashioned into convictions (plural) about how we live for God's glory.

B. The Bible (the Word of God) is the origin of our convictions (they hold us).

We need to approach the Bible with a deep, settled conviction that it accurately expresses the mind of God and the will of God as to how we are to live. Jerry Bridges in *The Discipline of Grace*, p. 169

1. What is a conviction? Best definition I have:

A conviction is a determinative belief: something you believe so strongly that it affects the way you live. Someone has observed that a belief is you hold, but a conviction is what holds you. You may live contrary to what you belief, but you cannot live contrary to your convictions (this doesn't mean you never *act* contrary to your convictions, but that you do not consistently violate them). Jerry Bridges in *The Discipline of Grace*, pp. 162-163

2. This matters because God's Word says to men these two words. Be strong.

C. Is this your conviction (be strong)? Is this your desire? Is this your aim? Is this your prayer? Nowhere does the Bible tell us to be weak.

1. I mention this because you may be familiar with the writings of the Apostle Paul and you may think Paul advocates for weakness. For example:

2 Corinthians 12:10 (ESV) For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

Ex: Context is thorn, not elated (proud), Paul didn't want folks to think more highly of him than they ought, his weakness is in his experience against the super-apostles.

2. They boast and Paul knows boasting is out place (his weakness is his experience).

1 Corinthians 1:26-29 (ESV) For consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. 27 But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; 28 God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, 29 so that no human being might boast in the presence of God.

3. The Apostle Paul is not saying he is weak. Instead, Paul knows he is dependent on Jesus Christ. He is what he is by the grace of God. To Philippi:

Philippians 4:12-13 (ESV) I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. 13 I can do all things through him who strengthens me.

D. Paul is not weak. He knows John 15:5 (apart from me you can do nothing). Paul is dependent.

1. In another context he will say that to the weak he is weak so as to win them.

1 Corinthians 9:22-23 (ESV) To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all people, that by all means I might save some. 23 I do it all for the sake of the gospel, that I may share with them in its blessings.

2. We begin, the vast majority of us, from a lowly place. But brothers, we are called to be strong in

Christ. What is going on when we're not strong?

II. The marks of weakness (the negative, then the positive).

A. When we come to faith in Christ we receive gifts. One of those gifts is the Holy Spirit.

2 Timothy 1:7 (ESV) For God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control.

1. This verse helps us understand the spirit we've received. Power, love and self-control.
2. When we are weak (not doing be strong) we will find a lessening effect or even perhaps the absence of power, love and self-control (realms are spiritual, physical, and internal).

Ex: Don't quench (1 Thess 5:19) or grieve (Eph 4:30) the Holy Spirit.

B. Before examining the weak in more detail the Scriptures instruct us that the weak will be among us and they are to receive our help (the aim is to bear with but not stay there).

1. I'm inclined to say that many of us will have moments or seasons of weakness. Why? Because the majority of us will encounter adversity.

Proverbs 24:10 (ESV) If you faint in the day of adversity, your strength is small.

Ex: Beth and me learning about vacations and family night (my tears weren't helpful).

2. Whether a day of adversity or not, we are to help the weak.

Romans 15:1 (ESV) We who are strong have an obligation to bear with the failings of the weak, and not to please ourselves.

1 Thessalonians 5:14 (ESV) And we urge you, brothers, admonish the idle, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with them all.

3. The weak are momentarily (and sometimes the moment is long) in over their heads. They lack strength. The inclination is to give up. To quit.

C. In their weakness life seems like a loss. They are defeated. In this condition:

1. They are often unaware of the power of the Holy Spirit.

· Perhaps they are not asking, seeking, knocking.

Luke 11:9-13 (ESV) And I tell you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. 10 For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened. 11 What father among you, if his son asks for a fish, will instead of a fish give him a serpent; 12 or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? 13 If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!"

2. They often lack love (for God or their neighbor).

· One of the first places unbelief rears it's ugly head is in our lack of love for people. In the last days the love of many will grow cold.

3. They often lack self-control.

Proverbs 25:28 (ESV) A man without self-control is like a city broken into and left without walls.

- D. This is where community and fellowship are so useful. The gift encouragement (put courage into) and exhortation is urgently needed.

Hebrews 3:12-13 (ESV) Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God. 13 But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called "today," that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.

III. The marks of strength.

- A. When we are exhorted to "be strong" to what are we called? It is the exact opposite of the marks of weakness. We keep in step with the Holy Spirit.

1. To be strong is to live in and by the power of the Holy Spirit (Gal 5 fruit). The list that Paul uses to describe being filled with the Spirit in Eph 5:18-21 is this:
 - Sing psalms (the Word), hymns, and spiritual songs together
 - Make music in your heart unto the Lord
 - Give thanks
 - Walk in submission to authority
2. When we are strong we live a life of love.
 - Not discouraged (self-pity, self-focus, self-everything) but other-focused.
3. We are strong when we exhibit the fruit of the spirit like self-control. Remember meekness? Strength under control.

Ex: No manipulation, no physical (or other) abuse, we live the Golden Rule.

- B. When we are strong there is always a growing trust in God's promises.

1. This is high on the list of reasons we desperately need God's Word.

Ex: Abraham (Rom 4)

Ex: David (see 1 Sam 30:6) ... but David strengthened himself in the Lord his God.
2. The Apostle Peter offers this important summary (includes self-control):

2 Peter 1:3-11 (ESV) His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence, 4 by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire. 5 For this very reason, make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue, and virtue with knowledge, 6 and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with steadfastness, and steadfastness with godliness, 7 and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love. 8 For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they keep you from being ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. 9 For whoever lacks these qualities is so nearsighted that he is blind, having forgotten that he was cleansed from his former sins. 10 Therefore, brothers, be all the more diligent to make your calling and election sure, for if you practice these qualities you will never fall. 11 For in this way there will be richly provided for you an entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

1. The hinge? He forgot he was cleansed from former sins. The gospel is not functioning and the result is blindness which is weakness. Not strength.
2. It is utterly impossible to be strong without self-control.

We can never get anywhere in life without discipline, be it in arts, business, athletics, or academics. This is doubly so in spiritual matters. Kent Hughes in *Disciplines of a Godly Man*, p. 15

3. Discipline is not legalism.

Ex: The athlete must practice (Michael Jordan, Tiger Woods). The musician or artist must practice (practice creates consistency). Discipline is practice.

But underlying much of the conscious rejection of spiritual discipline is the fear of legalism... But nothing could be farther from the truth if you understand what discipline and legalism are. The difference is one of *motivation*: legalism is self-centered; discipline is God-centered. The legalistic heart says, "I will do this thing to gain merit with God." The disciplined heart says, "I will do this thing because I love God and want to please Him.... If we confuse legalism and discipline, we do so to our soul's peril. Kent Hughes in *Disciplines of a Godly Man*, p. 17

- C. The strong practice discipline. They train (it doesn't just happen). The strong exercise various muscles so they are fit for the fight.

1 Timothy 4:7-8 (ESV) Have nothing to do with irreverent, silly myths. Rather train yourself for godliness; 8 for while bodily training is of some value, godliness is of value in every way, as it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come.

1. This training in godliness will focus in at least 3 areas (no order):
 - fellowship (care groups, relationships)
 - the Word of God (private and public)
 - prayer

Do you pray? I ask whether you pray, because *diligence in prayer is the secret of eminent holiness...* There are some of the Lord's people who seem *never able to get on* from the time of their conversion. They are born again, but they remain babes all their lives.... There are others of the Lord's people who seem to be *always advancing...* How now can we account for the difference which I have just described? What is the reason that some believers are so much brighter and holier than others? I believe the difference, in nineteen cases out of twenty, arises from different habits in private prayer. I believe that those who are not eminently holy pray *little*, and those who are eminently holy pray *much*. J.C. Ryle in *A Call to Prayer*, pp. 18-19

2. It involves putting on the whole armor of God.

Ephesians 6:10-13 (ESV) Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. 11 Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. 12 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. 13 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 firm.

- D. The strong seek wisdom and grow in wisdom (this springs from humility).

1. You watch people (especially young folks) make decisions that are foolish. In all your getting ... get wisdom.

Ex: Solomon knew the benefits of wisdom (though he didn't listen to himself).

Ecclesiastes 7:19 (ESV) Wisdom gives strength to the wise man more than ten rulers who are in a city.

2. It is impossible to be strong when we play the fool.

E. The strong know this life is not the end game.

1. Eternity looms large and we live with that day in view.

Ex: This world is not my home, I'm just passing through (Norman).

2. God's word to folks like this is that He is not ashamed to called their God. We pray that God is not ashamed to be called our God.

Hebrews 11:13-16 (ESV) These all died in faith, not having received the things promised, but having seen them and greeted them from afar, and having acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth. 14 For people who speak thus make it clear that they are seeking a homeland. 15 If they had been thinking of that land from which they had gone out, they would have had opportunity to return. 16 But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared for them a city.

3. The strong sacrifice now, in joy, because they know that life to the full, with pleasures forevermore, awaits.

F. Finally, the strong look to Jesus.

Hebrews 12:1-3 (ESV) Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, 2 looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God. 3 Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted.

A little knowledge of God is worth more than a great deal of knowledge about Him. J.I. Packer in *Knowing God*, p. 21

Close

A. I'll give Isaiah the final words:

Isaiah 40:27-31 (ESV) Why do you say, O Jacob, and speak, O Israel, "My way is hidden from the Lord, and my right is disregarded by my God"? 28 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.

B. Be strong. We are not commanded to be weak. May our strength as Christian men increase for the glory of God. May we be found faithful.

1. Husbands (love your wives ... learn to encourage yourself).
2. Fathers (your children are best served when you hold their respect).

3. Singles (grow and mature).
4. Young men (what you practice is what you will be).

C. Men ... be strong.

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