

## **LET THE CHURCH, BE THE CHURCH** **THE MARKS OF A MATURE CHURCH**

### **I. INTRODUCTION**

Gene A. Getz, in his book, *The Measure of a Church*, asks the question, “What is the measure of maturity in the church?” And he lists what others believe are the measure of maturity:

1. An active church (involving people in meetings and programs).
2. A giving church (supporting the church and efforts financially).
3. A growing church (new people coming and staying).
4. A soul-winning church (leading unbelievers to faith and baptism).
5. A smooth-running church (efficient and orderly).
6. A missionary-minded church (supports missionaries around the world).
7. A Spirit-filled church (enthusiastic, emotional).
8. A big church (large attendance, with many programs).

Paul gives us his answer in today’s passage. Let’s read:

### **II. TEXT: 1 Corinthians 16:13-14**

### **III. EXPLANATION**

<sup>13</sup> Be watchful, stand firm in the faith, act like men, be strong. <sup>14</sup> Let all that you do be done in love.

Γρηγορεῖτε, στήκετε ἐν τῇ πίστει, ἀνδρίζεσθε, κραταιοῦσθε. <sup>14</sup> πάντα ὑμῶν ἐν ἀγάπῃ γινέσθω.<sup>1</sup>

“A sudden fusillade [firing of several guns] of commands often appears at the conclusion of Paul’s letters (a similar battery of five imperatives appears in 2 Cor. 13:11).”<sup>2</sup> These are “a series of generalized admonitions that could fit any of Paul’s letters; at the same time, however, some of them in particular seem to reflect the Corinthian situation.”<sup>3</sup>

These five seriatim [one after another in series] imperatives

1. **γρηγορέω** [*gregoreuo* /gray-gor-yoo-o/] **VERB/PRESENT/ACTIVE/IMPERATIVE**, watch, be vigilant, be cautious, take heed, etc.

---

<sup>1</sup> Holmes, M. W. (2011–2013). [\*The Greek New Testament: SBL Edition\*](#) (1 Co 16:13–14). Lexham Press; Society of Biblical Literature.

<sup>2</sup> Garland, D. E. (2003). [\*1 Corinthians\*](#) (p. 765). Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic.

<sup>3</sup> Fee, G. D. (2014). [\*The First Epistle to the Corinthians\*](#). (N. B. Stonehouse, F. F. Bruce, G. D. Fee, & J. B. Green, Eds.) (Revised Edition, p. 914). Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company.

2. **στήκω** [*steko /stay-ko/*] **VERB/PRESENT/ACTIVE/IMPERATIVE**, stand firm, persevere, persist, etc.—in the faith.
3. **ἀνδρίζομαι** [*andrizomai /an·drid·zom·ahee/*] **VERB/PRESENT/MIDDLE or PASSIVE/IMPERATIVE**, show yourself to be a man, be brave, etc.
4. **κραταιόω** [*krataioo /krat-ah-yo·o/*] **VERB/PRESENT/ MIDDLE or PASSIVE /IMPERATIVE**, strengthen, be strong, grow strong.
5. **γίνομαι** [*ginomai /ghin·om·ahee/*] **VERB/PRESENT/ MIDDLE or PASSIVE /IMPERATIVE**, to become, to come to pass, to come into existence, etc. – love

My paraphrase of the verses, reflecting the tense, could read this way: ***“keep on being alert, standing firm in the faith, show yourself to be a grown up, courageous and loving in all that you do.”***

#### IV. THE MARKS OF A MATURE CHURCH

##### 1. CONTINUING TO BE ALERT

The Greek word means to be awake as opposed to being asleep. Now there were times in this letter that Paul had to “wake them up”. Often when he wrote things like “don’t you know”, he was doing that. He wrote:

- “Do you not know that you are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit dwells in you?” (1 Corinthians 3:16, ESV)
- “Do you not know that we are to judge angels? How much more, then, matters pertaining to this life!” (1 Corinthians 6:3, ESV)
- “Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality,” (1 Corinthians 6:9, ESV)
- “Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall I then take the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute? Never!” (1 Corinthians 6:15, ESV)
- “Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one receives the prize? So run that you may obtain it.” (1 Corinthians 9:24, ESV)

Now the problem in Corinth is that they were in a spiritual sleepiness. The opposite is to be awake – to be spiritually discerning. Another way of saying this is that a mature Church always looks at issues and things evaluating them in spiritual ways. Apart from those things that are clearly wrong, Paul had counseled the Church this way:

*“All things are lawful,” but not all things are helpful. “All things are lawful,” but not all things build up. Let no one seek his own good, but the good of his neighbor.”* (1 Corinthians 10:23–24, ESV)

The second mark of a mature Church is ....

##### 2. KEEP STANDING FIRM IN THE FAITH

Notice the definite article: stand firm in THE faith. This is not subjective faith like, “keep trusting God”. This is standing solid in THE faith. Listen to Jude: *“Beloved, although I was very eager to write to you about our common salvation, I found it necessary to write appealing to you to contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints”* (Jude 3, ESV) [Emphasis mine].

In other words stand firm in the body of Christian doctrine known as Christianity. Stand firm in the Gospel. Stand firm in the revelation of the Bible. Back in Chapter 1, some Corinthians were dismissing the truth claims of the Gospel and the Cross for human wisdom. And then we look over to Chapter 15 where some believed the resurrection had already occurred. This error denied the truth of the Gospel. Paul appealed to them, *“Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, and by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you—unless you believed in vain.”* (1 Corinthians 15:1–2, ESV).

The content of what we believe is important. Christian doctrine is not up for grabs. The immature Church says, “It doesn’t matter what you believe. Just believe in Jesus and let’s all get along in unity.” The Church that is mature in Christ is a Church that holds fast to the Truth.

### 3. **SHOW YOURSELVES TO BE GROWN UP**

“The third and fourth exhortations are closely related so I take them together. Paul told the Corinthians to be men of courage and to be strong.”<sup>4</sup> It makes sense to treat them as one. We shouldn’t get all bent out of shape as Paul calls the Church to “act like men”. First of all we would do well to remember that this exhortation is written to the whole church. The intent of Paul is to call the Church to be manly in the sense of ideal masculine courage. Anthony Thiselton<sup>5</sup> argues that the word does not stand in contrast to femininity but in fact emphasizes qualities like maturity and courage, in contrast to childishness.

Childishness plagued this Church in Corinth:

- Their divisions were childish. *“But I, brothers, could not address you as spiritual people, but as people of the flesh, as infants in Christ.”* (1 Corinthians 3:1, ESV)
- Their lack of love was childish. *“but when the perfect comes, the partial will pass away. When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I gave up childish ways.”* (1 Corinthians 13:10–11, ESV)
- Their misuse of spiritual gifts was childish. *“Brothers, do not be children in your thinking. Be infants in evil, but in your thinking be mature.”* (1 Corinthians 14:20, ESV)

---

<sup>4</sup> Pratt, R. L., Jr. (2000). [\*1 & 2 Corinthians\*](#) (Vol. 7, p. 286). Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

<sup>5</sup> Thiselton, Anthony C., *The First Epistle to the Corinthians: A commentary on the Greek text*, The New International Greek Testament Commentary, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., Grand Rapids, MI, 2000, Page 1336

As we noted when we looked at these things, childishness takes the form of self-centeredness and selfishness. Paul's call to "man up" is really a call to that maturity that seeks the good of others above self.

And lastly ....

#### **4. LOVING IN ALL YOU DO**

Because of our recent treatment of 1 Corinthians 13 this should make sense. "Love will pour balm into the wounds of their schism, their lawsuits, and their mistreatment of the 'have-nots' at the Lord's Supper. It should superintend the exercise of their spiritual gifts and should override any selfish desires to eat idol food, since such an action could destroy fellow Christians and fails to witness to unbelievers that there is only one God."<sup>6</sup>

What a great balance! Can you imagine a Church that is spiritually acute, doctrinally precise, strong and courageous? Without love, they might become a weapon that destroys. With only so-called love and not truthful strength of character they become mush. So Paul writes, "*Let all that you do be done in love.*" (1 Corinthians 16:14, ESV).

#### **V. APPLICATION**

There is a distinct sense where 1 Corinthians 16:13-14 is the summation of the entire letter. If someone were to ask us what this letter is all about, these two verses provide a general appeal to the Church. The question we need to ask ourselves is this:

As a Church are we spiritually discerning (knowing right from wrong); do we seek doctrinal purity; have we grown past childishness and have become courageous in our efforts; and is all that done with great doses of love? That is a mature Church.

---

<sup>6</sup> Garland, D. E. (2003). [1 Corinthians](#) (p. 767). Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic.