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

Paul continues by encouraging the congregation to be watchful. The concept of being a watchman is well seen in the Old Testament, especially when it comes to being watchful for the Day of the Lord. Thus, even in the New Testament it can have an eschatological end times overtone to it.   
 However, there are also places in the New Testament where to be watchful is not eschatological but to be on guard against sinfulness and false teachings. In this sense, to be a watchman is to be watching for an enemy who seeks to destroy. To be on guard against things that would seek to turn away from the truth of the faith.  
 Hence, to stand firm in the faith makes sense in this capacity. The faith is the same faith described throughout I Corinthians, it is the Gospel itself. That we are saved, by grace, through faith, in Christ Jesus alone. That salvation does not entail utter liberty to do whatever we want whenever we want, but that it leads to freedom from sin and death through this Jesus who saves.  
 Hence the next two admonitions, act like men, be strong. Therea re two ways to look at this, the first we have a responsibility to be brave against the battle before us. To not cower when false teachings arise, or when sinfulness is seen, but to combat it both in ourselves and the congregation. Oftentimes we can fear the repercussions of calling “sin” sin, but instead we should be strong in recognizing that we have a firm foundation for calling “evil” evil and “good” good which is God Himself. Like the men who go to battle to defend their homes and families, so too should we act when it comes to the faith.  
 The second way Paul can mean to act like men is in regards to maturity. Towards the end of I Corinthians 13 Paul says when he became a man he put childish ways behind him. In becoming mature we cease to think like we once did. We no longer think and behave as children, but as mature adults. In both cases we find the need to be more than what we once were.  
 There is, however, a recognition in verse 14. While we do act like men, while we are strong, while we do defend and be watchful, and while we stand firm on the faith. That does not mean we act however we want. Instead, we do so in love. Love as described in the entirety of chapter 13.

15 Now I urge you, brothers—you know that the household of Stephanas were the first converts in Achaia, and that they have devoted themselves to the service of the saints— 16 be subject to such as these, and to every fellow worker and laborer. 17 I rejoice at the coming of Stephanas and Fortunatus and Achaicus, because they have made up for your absence, 18 for they refreshed my spirit as well as yours. Give recognition to such people.  
  
 Paul now makes a request from the Corinthians. The household of Stephanus were among the first to become believers in Achaia. That Paul calls them the first may represent the first fruits motif found in Levitical feast of first fruits, where the first fruits represent the coming harvest. Since coming to the faith they had been faithful in their devotion in their service to the saints. What that service looks like we are unsure, whether it was hospitality, providing a place of worship in their house, preaching, and teaching, or perhaps much of the above.  
 Still, Paul encourages in verse 16 that the rest of the congregation be subject to people who are faithful to their calling. Not only is Paul recognizing the Stephanus household, a wise choice seeing as they are from Corinth and thus can provide an example to the Corinthians in real time, but also every fellow worker and laborer. This may be an encouragement to receive Timothy with peace as mentioned above.[[1]](#footnote-1)  
 The ultimate point is that the faithful should have the most respect in a congregation when it comes to leadership. Those who labor in faith, regardless of age, regardless of gender, regardless prosperity, should be the ones the congregation lifts up as the examples for the congregation. We are to look around and see the faithfulness of others and seek to emulate such things in our midst.  
 He now mentions Stephanus, Fortunatus, and Achaicus specifically. It appears that these three were the ones who brough the letter to Paul. In having them come he has been blessed with their presence, and that which was lacking, that is the rest of the Corinthians, has been filled in him. Despite the somewhat hostile nature of the letter, Paul never ceases to love the Corinthians as fellow believers.  
 He concludes with this notion with verse 18. Here he recognizes that he has been refreshed by these fellow believers and their fellowship with one another. He can’t help but notice that these same believers provide the same refreshment to the Corinthians from which they come. A reminder that faithful people leads to a refreshment among the people of God.  
 Thus, such individuals of the faith who have continued in such a manner, should be recognized among the congregation. Again, faithfulness should be rejoiced over, it should be emulated. When we see the faithful among us we should seek to say, “How can I be more like that?” We provide the examples for each other in each other’s midst, and as such we rejoice in each other’s faithfulness and seek to encourage faithfulness in each other.  
  
Main Point: The main point of these verses are for Paul to encourage the Corinthians to be mature rather than immature in their ways. Maturity looks like being watchful, standing firm, acting like men, and being strong, doing it everything in love. Paul then requests that the Corinthians seek those such as the Stephanus household to be subject to, and also to emulate, as individuals who were the firstfruits as well as the faithful in their midst.  
  
Application Points  
1). The Strong to Esteem: As we conclude I Corinthians, we have seen some specific applications given to the Corinthians. When it comes to giving, as well as Paul’s travel plans to visit them through the winter. Now we come to one of the final applications which is to be watchful, stand firm in the faith, act like men, be strong, all they do be done in love.  
 What I find interesting in this is what Paul then does. He gives an example among their congregation of what it means to do this. He speaks of the house of Stephanus as a model to the very kind of character which he wants them to emulate. They had been among the first of Achaia to believe, and have continued to stand firm in the faith since they first believed.  
 For them to be the ones whom the congregation subjects itself to, and to these being individuals who are to receive the recognition among the congregation, is important. It reminds us that it is not so much about who is the loudest, or who is most skilled, or the most accomplished, but the one who is the most faithful that we should be looking at when it comes to the congregation as a whole.  
 Those who watch and make sure that we are not falling into fallacy. Who are making sure that demonic thought isn’t influencing the congregation. That are examining what the culture is proclaiming and responding to it with the truth of the Gospel.  
 Those who are standing firm in the faith, the faith of Christ. Not only in regards to belief, but also in regards to responsibility. Recognizing we are only saved by grace through faith in Christ Jesus, but that this entails a responsible people who will live their lives out in faithfulness to what God has called them to do and to be.  
 Those who act like men, who are mature, who do not reason as a child thinking only of how to get what one wants, or only thinking and acting for oneself. Instead, recognizing that with the faith comes maturity and the need for us to let go of our childish ways, to grow up, be responsible, to act as we are supposed to act.  
 Those who are strong. Strong in regards to the Word, strong in regards to not allowing sin to lead, and who are willing to be obedient in the face of those who would oppose such obedience. Who are willing to say what needs to be said concerning evil and sinfulness not only in the world and culture, but also in our very midst. Those who persevere despite the world around them.  
 Finally, those who would do all these things in love. Who do not boast in themselves, or are proud in themselves, but those who honestly want what is best for their families, for the congregation, for the world itself. To stand firm in the face of evil, but to do so in love. Not in acceptance of the evil, nor in weakness or powerlessness, but in love which is “4 is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant 5 or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; 6 it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. 7 Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.”   
 As such, he describes the type of people they are to be. What he does next, however, is what has me fascinated. In a roundabout way, he gives them living breathing examples of what he means through the household of Stephanus. They have acted in the very ways which Paul has now described.  
 That Paul turns slightly and points out the Stephanus household is a reminder to us as well. Oftentimes we focus greatly on those who come from the Scriptures as our examples. We think of Peter, Paul, the Apostles, the Prophets, and think, “ah how I wish I could have met them and learned from them and been like them.”  
 I think that these things are good, they were unique individuals who lived and had their own faithfulness put to the test. However, what we need to also remember is that there are those around us who have accomplished the same in their own right. Paul does not immediately point to the apostles as the examples, but to those who they can see and experience first hand who have lived out in such obedience and faith.  
 As such, I wonder how often we look around at the faithful here, and think, “You know, Paul would have said something good about them.” How often do we see each other in the light and think, “These individuals are the ones who we should be learning from when it comes to faithfulness.” In other words, how often are we being watchful for the faithfulness that is in our midst seeking to emulate the strong among us?  
 I know for myself I am at the highest of advantages. I know everyone better than most here. I have encountered everyone in their faithfulness more so than others. I could write on and on about everyone here and the joy I have experienced in personal faithfulness, and also in seeing personal growth and maturity, which many here have shown. Indeed a great reminder that age has little to do with personal growth! To be honest, everyone here has shined brighter than the sun at times when it comes to faithfulness.  
 Oftentimes we think about the examples as being just the apostles and saints of old. I know, however, that there are many among us who are strong. I look around and I am able to see individuals who are doing exactly what they ought to be doing for the sake of Christ, and in this I look to them as examples and leaders within the congregation as a whole.  
 Indeed, we can simply look to each other much of the time to understand what faithfulness looks like in the present. We can see faithful husbands, faithful wives, faithful fathers, faithful mothers, faithful daughters, faithful sons, faithful preachers, faithful teachers, faithful prayer warriors, faithful individuals who show hospitality and love toward one another. We can see individuals who are utilizing their gifts not for their own glory, but for the glory of Jesus Christ. Seeking to grow in maturity, strength, being ever watchful.  
 Does everyone do it perfectly all the time? No. We all have our struggles to be sure, but that doesn’t negate the faithfulness and just how wonderful such faithfulness is to Christ. It shows each of us what it means to live this life here and now in the flux of the day for God’s glory. Everyone here has been an example in something and in such things we rejoice, and indeed to those who are most faithful we recognize as the leaders.  
 The leaders of the congregation are not the most eloquent, or the most knowledgeable, or even the ones who do the most things. No, the leaders of the Church are those who are faithful with what God has called them to do and therefore sets the example to the rest of us. Notice the way that Paul describes the household of Stephanus, they have been faithful to their service, faithful to what they were called to do and to be in this world.  
 It is no different for the leadership of the Church in the modern age. Unfortunately we have a habit of becoming star obsessed. We can think of those with great ministries and those who have travelled the world and have done so much. Yet, what of their faithfulness?  
 One of the most difficult things to happen to us is when someone we admire and respect falls. One such individual for me was Ravi Zacharius. He was an individual I respected greatly, someone who had done all the things that this world would call, “Good.” Was knowledgeable, kind, gracious.  
 When he passed away many were saddened. Then, as time went on, our sorrow turned to horror as we learned he had abused his station for the purpose of his own sinful gratifications. Where reports, turned into investigations, turned into secret sexual deviances being made public.  
 What does this remind us? It reminds us that it is not the most traveled, the most intellectual, the one who seemed to accomplish the most things we should emulate, but simply the most faithful among us. Those who look to the Scriptures in order to gain wisdom and knowledge as the way in which they are to live their lives in obedience with the One and only King of all Jesus Christ.  
 Let us not do either of the following. Let us not become too star struck by those who have accomplished much as to assume their faithfulness. Let us also not become content with our own faithfulness. Instead, let us seek to grow in faithfulness as obedient followers of Jesus and let us seek to honor Him above all else.  
 Let us also look around us to see the faithfulness of others so that way we might be able to better serve our Lord. To mimic the faithfulness of others around us so that we can honor Christ the way the faithful do. To see the shining glory found in the obedient faithfulness of each other, being only satisfied as we each continue to grow in that faithfulness to cover all of our lives.  
 Ultimately, each of us is called to be strong in the face of this world. We’re all called to stand firm on the truth, to be mature. As we do, let us shine brightly for God’s glory knowing we can light this dark world so that way we can share our strength with each other, trusting in the Lord of all things to guide us further into His glory.

1. An example of verses 13-14. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)