

1. Be vigilant!

- a. Paul uses this very phrase with the Ephesian elders before he leaves them to travel (having come from Corinth, in Greece, Acts 20:1-4) in Acts 20:28-31
 - i. He uses it to warn the leaders to be vigilant to protect God's people from "wolves among you", i.e. those who would destroy the flock by "speaking twisted things to draw away the disciples after them." (v30-31)
 - ii. The connection with Ephesus and Corinth in Paul's ministry is common.
- b. Paul had already discussed “fighting with wild beasts” in Ephesus, and being “last of all, men sentenced to death, having become spectacles to the world” (4:9), “held in disrepute...when reviled, we bless; when persecuted, we endure; when slandered, we entreat. We have become, and are still, like the scum of the world, the refuse of all.” (4:10b-13)
- c. How do we keep watch? Our vigilance is theological awareness.
 - i. There is a tendency in the church to think that being vigilant is keeping our eyes on the world and its values creeping into the life of the church.
 - ii. While that is an element of vigilance, it is much more important to keep our eyes on the One who reveals what is ultimately true and valuable: God.
 - iii. Thus, vigilance is theological: knowing God as He has revealed Himself
 1. 1 Cor 2:9-12
 2. Eph 4:11-14
- d. If we are not keeping our eyes on what God has revealed, do you think that the Enemy of God and His people is equally complacent for our demise?

2. Stand firm “in the faith”

- a. There is always the need to remind one another to stand firm, to lock arms, to set the feet of our hearts and minds to the revelation of God in the Scriptures
 - i. “Stand firm” means to hold your ground that God has already gained through Christ Jesus
 - ii. It does not mean “march out and conquer” – It is a defensive term, not an offensive term.
- b. It is to never give up the Truth of the Gospel of the Kingdom of the Christ
 - i. The threats that the Corinthians were under was of a gospel devoid of atonement, full of licentiousness, self-determined wisdom, minds set on earthly things
 - ii. When the gospel is altered or changed, particularly away from the substitutionary atonement of Jesus Christ and on the holiness that the Cross and the Empty Tomb call us towards, we are to stand firm and resist
 1. Instead, imitate those who walk like heavenly citizens, glory in Christ's cross, are ashamed of their sin, repenting with joy b/c we know the certainty of God's acceptance through the blood of Jesus, with minds full of hope set on His return to finally and ultimately transform us to be like Him
 2. In this way, we are to stand firm for the faith of the gospel (1:27)
- c. This phrase, "in the faith", clarifies what Paul means by the command to stand firm: there are threats to the faith, calling us to move aside, turn around, change or alter the faith to be more in line with prevailing cultural values
 - i. This is not any less untrue in pagan Greece than it is in pagan America and a paganized “church”
 1. 46% of self-identified ‘evangelicals’ believe that God accepts the worship of all religions (thestateoftheology.com)
 2. 36% believe that their good works contribute something to their salvation
 3. 61% ‘strongly disagree’ that even the smallest sin deserves eternal damnation
 - ii. There are daily increasing pressures to lay aside the faith that was passed down and to 'reform' it into something which is tolerable to the world
 1. Still calling it "Christian", but devoid of the historical message of biblical Christianity.
 2. Erotic liberty, self-defined moral truth, unprincipled uniformity for the sake of autonomous unrestraint, all being syncretized with Christian forms, traditions, or

language, but devoid of the gospel of the crucified, risen, and absolutely reigning Christ who rules in holiness.

- d. Following Christ, ministering the gospel of His resurrected reign, is not for cowards
 - i. 45.7 million Christians were martyred for their alliance with Jesus in the 20th century. This is 65% of all known Christian martyrs in history.
 - ii. This courage being required is not only for the 1st century church; it remains a necessity for the Church today.
 - 1. There are wolves who wear the name Christian, who deny the Master who bought them, claiming that purchasing wasn't necessary.
 - 2. There are false teachers denying the holiness of God, the nature of sin, the effectiveness of grace, the exclusive authority of Christ, and the sufficiency of His sacrifice.
 - 3. Be aware, O Church! Be watchful and discerning! Do not be caught ignorant or unaware of the Devil's schemes.
- e. How do we stand firm? – We know the power of God in Christ Jesus!
 - i. Peter gives us the foundation of our apologetic and ability to endure in the phrase, “and sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts” (1 Pet 3:15) and “for Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God” (1 Pet 3:18)
 - ii. Christ our Victor is our hope, and as we recognize His authority over all things, we are able to stand firm in the faith and endure the scorn and suffering of the gospel of our crucified King.

3. Act like men (middle)!

- a. If "stand firm" is the action, then "act like a man" is the attitude.
- b. Be *courageous* to defend - bravery in the face of threat and danger!
 - i. While the word does contain the word "man" or "male", it is not an exclusively male term, as if women aren't courageous
 - ii. It draws attention, however, to how men are supposed to act when the community is threatened: protectors of the mistreated and threatened and exploited.
 - 1. It is a very 'image-of-God' quality of courageous defense of the orphan, the widow, the immigrant; those who are powerless in society and unjustly abused by those with power.
 - 2. It means to use one's power to provide and protect for those whom God has placed you near.
 - a. This does not mean that we ignore limitations (you are not God!), but it does mean that we expend our resources of strength in the ways that we are able, by the grace of God, and do not stand idly by, passively.
- c. Be courageous in the face of threats and danger and be ready to take actions that will cost you dearly...like your Savior who laid down His life for you.

4. Be strengthened (passive)!

- a. The passive form here is unique in the list.
 - i. This word is only used 4 times in the NT, all are in the passive form
 - 1. 2x used of Jesus to describe his growth as a child to a man
 - a. Luke 1:80 – “the child grew and became strong in spirit...”
 - b. Luke 2:40 – “the child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom. And the favor of God was upon him.”
 - 2. 2x used by Paul (companion and travelling partner with Luke)
 - a. This passage and in his prayer for the Ephesians
 - b. Eph 3:16ff – Paul prays that the Ephesians would be strengthened (passive) in their ‘inner person’ *by the Holy Spirit* so that they would really grasp the immensity and totality of the love of Christ
 - ii. This word seems to be particularly associated with the growth of wisdom, the strength of spirit associated with God's empowering presence for the purpose of redemption/revelation

1. Jesus wasn't just growing strong in general, but "with wisdom" and the "grace of God" or "favor of God"
 2. This wisdom showed itself in his grasp of the Scriptures and the knowledge of the Father (Luke 2:41ff)
 3. Thus, Paul's usage of the term shows the same context: wisdom of the Spirit in the growing knowledge of God in Christ Jesus
- b. The command, then, is not merely to be strong, but to be strong in the growth of wisdom which is found in the knowing the greatness of the glory of God in the face of Jesus.
 - i. 2 Cor 3:18; 4:6-7
 - ii. 'be filled up to all the fullness of God' (Eph 3:19)
 - c. If we are to be watchful (action), stand firm (action), have courage (attitude), then we must be strengthened from the outside, empowered by another.
 - i. Here is where our hope lies, and this particularly true in the light of the following command: There is strength outside of you which enables you to do these courageous and loving things
 - ii. Thus, we derive such strength by knowing God according to His revelation of Himself by the empowerment of the Spirit
 - iii. This is why Paul prays in such a way: the Spirit must do such empowering to wisdom and the knowledge of God – and He does!!
 - d. This is the foundation source of the ability to do all the actions above: the Holy Spirit of God granting us strength to keep watch, stand firm, and be courageous.
 - i. Again, Peter: "you who *by God's power* are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time." (1 Pet 1:5)
 1. It is God's power that guards us, that holds us, that secures the ground which Christ has won.
 2. If we engage this battle believing that it is up to us to see every danger, to hold every inch, to gather every courage, then our battle becomes tenuous, despairing, and man-centered.
 3. We might begin to think that warding off the wolves is really in our hands, dependent upon our efforts, on whether or not we can defend the faith.
 4. But God defends us while we defend – it is *through* faith, not *on* faith.
 - a. Our apologetic defense is not our shield.
 - b. Our defense of the faith is dependence upon God, i.e. faith in which we cling and stand firm.
 - e. How do we 'be strengthened?' – Daily entrust yourself to the sovereign goodness of God and the promise of His Holy Spirit to fulfill His promise of strength and security to you.
5. Let all of who you are exist in love (v14)
 - a. Like chapters 12-14, the subject of 'love' takes a prominent place in the closing of the letter
 - i. V22 as well, with a dire warning: "If someone does not love the Lord, let him be accursed. Come, Lord Jesus!"
 - ii. V24 – "My love is with you all in Christ Jesus."
 - b. The command here is "carry out" or "let them be"
 - i. Oddly, it is simply the verb of existence, "to be, to become" in a command form, i.e. "Let it exist"
 - ii. Thus, the command is not simply a command to action, but a command that, literally, 'all your things' should exist in the category of love.
 1. I would argue that the structure of the command is such that we are to bring *every aspect of our existence* under the control of love
 2. Love, then, ought to control our actions, to be sure, but also our motives, our affections, our delights, our thoughts, our emotions, etc.
 3. "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength, and love your neighbor as yourself."
 4. Do you see, then, how absolutely terrifying this command really is?!!
 - c. What does it mean to bring all our existence "in love"?
 - i. Note that it is not 'towards love' or 'through love' or 'with love'

- ii. The category is 'in' – existing within the boundaries of love
 - 1. Love is to be the boundary of all of our personhood (affections, emotions, thoughts, action).
 - 2. Particularly in the context of the first four verbal commands, which are almost militaristic verbs of strength and power, it is imperative that these actions and attitudes be constrained by the reigning principle of love
 - a. 2 Corinthians 5:14-15 – love for Christ constrains our lives, so that we are not free men, but are constrained by love for Christ and must declare the gospel regardless of whether or not people regard us “as out of our minds”
 - b. Here we see the principle that love always binds us to that which is beloved
 - i. If we love Christ, we are bound to our desire to please Him and other pursuits and endeavors will be subjected to this superior affection
 - ii. 2 Timothy 2:1-7
 - 3. “all of your [things]” are to be contained within these boundaries
 - a. "Could it be that even though you are God's child, you still think of your life as belonging to you? When you think of your life this way, then ministry is about stepping out of your life, giving God a little bit of your time, energy and money, and then stepping back into your life ... if you are God's child, you've been called to forsake your "my life" mentality and daily live with a moment by moment ministry mentality. (Eph. 4:1-16; 1 Cor. 12; Col. 3:12-17)." - Paul David Tripp
- iii. Therefore, every effort made to be vigilant, be courageous, and to be strengthened is to be done under the constraint of love
 - 1. Love for the Lord, which seeks above all things to please Him, rather than man
 - a. Holiness and obedience
 - 2. Love for the saints, which protects from harm and evil so that His people find their joy in Him
 - a. Revelation and Redemption
 - 3. Love for our enemies, for it is for our enemies' ill to continue in opposition to God through rebellion, sin, and error.
 - a. Love speaks the truth
 - b. “True courtesy to my fellow man’s soul makes me speak to him if I believe that soul to be in danger.” –Spurgeon
- iv. Interestingly, the first command “to see” and the last command regarding love are intricately related
 - 1. Love begins with seeing.
 - 2. We cannot love what we do not apprehend, at least in part.
 - a. Compassion begins with seeing a hurt.
 - b. Mercy begins with seeing brokenness.
 - c. Grace begins with seeing a need.
 - d. Love moves towards what it sees to respond with appropriate truth.
 - i. “[Jesus] saw a great crowd, and he had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. And he began to teach them many things.” (Mark 6:34)
 - 3. Worship, the highest love, begins with seeing the beauty of God.
 - a. Exodus 34:6-8
 - b. 2 Chronicles 20:15-18
 - i. Note, too, the words “stand firm” “watch” and “be courageous”
 - ii. Their response was worship, the highest love of one’s most valued object.

Conclusion:

Therefore, the empowering to love in all things, to stand firm and be courageous, to never give up or give in regarding the faith handed down, is rooted in seeing the glory of God in the face of Jesus.

So, what is so beautiful about Him?

- a. He created all that exists by His own volition (Ps 33:9/Rev 4:8-11)
- b. He upholds all that exists by His own sovereign Word (Isa 41:13/Heb 1:3)
 - i. There is no power too great and no threat that will have the ultimate word over His.
- c. He reveals Himself to us that we might know Him (Isa 41:6/1 John 5:20)
 - i. He is far off, but near to us; not hiding for us to find him, but having uncovered His face that we might know Him.
- d. He is holy and wholly right in all that that he is, thinks, and does (Isa 6:3/Rev 4:8)
 - i. His commands are for our best good, and His holiness is the joy for which we were made.
 - ii. We can trust him even when the world hates us, rejects us, chases us down, and kills us.
- e. He is compassionate and patient with sinners (Ex 34:6-7)
 - i. There is nobody too far gone for the death of Christ to reach and the life of Christ to redeem.
 - ii. My greatest guilt cannot surpass His initial mercies.
- f. He does not leave the guilty unpunished (Ex 34:6-7)
 - i. I do not have to take revenge, but can stand firm in the face of injustice without taking up a sword. He will deal with evil.
- g. He rejoices over His people with dancing and singing (Zeph 3:17)
 - i. My God delights in me, though I am a mess of child, with joy and exuberant satisfaction in Christ Jesus.
- h. He loves with the unique redemptive love of GRACE – THE GOD WHO DIES FOR HIS PEOPLE AND IS RAISED UP TO RULE THEM FOREVER AS THE KINDRED KING

Stepping into the kingdom only takes one step, but it must be taken with a face set like flint and with eyes fixed on the King who reigns over all the earth. We rejoice in the promised Holy Spirit in the here and now, the down payment of His presence, to help us stand firm, suffering well the slings and arrows of the enemy, to rejoice in the promise, to love in the midst of rejection, and to hope for the return of the King. It is the joy of the hopeful with eyes gazing into the far country, where our inheritance is being kept by the power of God, guarded, to be revealed upon His return that all things might work to the praise of His glory and honor on that day. We would see Jesus and know Him more, glorious over all. We enter the kingdom no other way, for there is no other king. And as we behold Him, we see our neighbors with compassion in order to proclaim the renewing reconciling mercies of the King over all powers-that-be.

We follow a King who died to bring us all the way home. The stories are true. We have before us, in the promise of our resurrection, a kingdom that never ends, with no suffering or sorrow or pain or sickness or death. No separation and no sin. That is a glorious future of grace. And we receive this kingdom because the Son of God, with all the richness of His glory, laid aside His crown and picked up a cross to bear the price of all evil and horror and injustice, was crucified according to the sovereign plan of the Father who loves His chosen ones, you, so that you and I might worship Him in the fullness of joy forever and ever. And we follow Him in this walk, our crosses retrieved before our crowns are received. Yet, the stories are true. Let us remember the King's determination to stand firm in vigilance, in the strength and courage of the Holy Spirit. See the depth and the costly love that he showed us, fixing our eyes keenly upon Him, to set our faces like flint upon His glorious face and be utterly transformed in the seeing to never look back and never give in.