

*1 Corinthians 16:13-18*

## PREFACE

**Read 1 Corinthians 16:13-14.**

## v13-14

*Be on the alert, stand firm in the faith, act like men, be strong.*

Like bullets being fired from a Gatling gun, the apostle fires off a string of staccato imperatives to the church in Corinth. Each one is brief, but heavy with meaning for the members of that church, and every verb is a command to not just do this, but to make such behavior a regular way of life—i.e., don't just do this once; I want you to *live* this way.

*Be on the alert,*

This phrase is very often used in an eschatological context—e.g., *Be watchful, stay awake, for the Lord could return at any time*. Considering the situation in the church, however, and Paul's counsel in the first fifteen chapters of this letter, it is best to consider this from that overall context—as do the NIVs, with “Be on your guard”—as well as the phrase that follows: “stand firm in the faith.” That is, *Be alert to those things that will do harm to your faith*.

We know that a critical weakness of the church was its susceptibility to corrosive outside influence. Paul here reminds them, *Watch out for that. Don't let it occur*. much as he did when bidding goodbye to the Ephesians, as recorded in Acts 20. Here he goes into greater detail.

**Read Acts 20:28-31.** (The wolves are just outside the church door)

**Aside:** It seems to me, were I a parent I would want to read those verses to every child of mine heading off to be on their own in the world.

*stand firm in the faith,*

These two are opposite sides of the same coin. Part of remaining alert to threats to one's faith is standing firm on the truths *of* that faith; and we stand firm by remaining watchful *for* those threats. This is the tail end of a recurring theme in this letter. Here the word translated “stand firm [or fast]” is *stekete*, the root of which is *steko*, which is almost an *onomatopoeia*. What do we call it when a gymnast lands a routine without moving his or her feet? We say that they “stick” their landing. That's what *stecko* means: be stationary. Paul has been on this repeatedly in this letter. He raised it in his discussion on familial behavior in 7:37, and He encouraged them by praising what little “firmness” they did have in 11:2. Then Paul bookends the previous chapter (15) with calls for them to stand fast on the word he delivered to them.

## Read 1 Corinthians 15:1-2, 56-58.

*act like men, be strong.*

The Greek *andrizethe* means “be manly.” I love the KJV: “quit you like men.” I suppose in this confused world we live in there are those who wouldn’t even understand this—and if they do, are surely offended by such a statement. Well, tough. With these two imperatives Paul is telling the Corinthians of either sex (yes, there are only two) to act like a strong, determined man when it comes time to defend the gospel and your faith in it. This need not be a specific reference to the male of the species; it might also imply, *Grow up! Stop being so wishy-washy. Take responsibility. Stand strong for that which you claim to believe.* Hence the title of this study: *Standing Firm in a Slippery World.*

*Let all that you do be done in love.*

We can think back on all the dirty laundry we have been reading of in this letter and understand right off what Paul is saying with this. His wonderful sermon on *agape* in Chapter Thirteen is connected to his discussion of spiritual gifts in Chapter Twelve by its last verse: “But earnestly desire the greater gifts. And I show you a still more excellent way.” That “way” is *agape*—not just one more gift among many, *but the manner by which we administer our gifts.* Love for his brothers and sisters in Christ is to be the Christian’s way of life. Here is one of the more applicable lessons from this letter: Collect up all the noxious goings-on in the Corinth church; “if they were to ‘do all things in love,’ then these other things would not be happening” (Fee).

Our love for each other in the body of Christ is to permeate everything we do, everything we say, and every purpose we pursue. It is to be the “way” we live. It is to be the motive behind our use of every Spirit-gift we have.

## Read 1 Corinthians 16:15-18.

### v15-18

*Now I urge you, brethren (you know the household of Stephanas, that they were the first fruits of Achaia, and that they have devoted themselves for ministry to the saints),*

By my lights this last paragraph of our passage is clumsily organized. One has the impression that as he neared the end of this long letter his mind was working out of sync with his mouth as he dictated to his amanuensis. Let’s first figure out who he is talking about.

**Stephanas** is the principal character. He is the head of a “household” (i.e., **more than just a family of kin**). Most commentators conclude that he is probably the one that brought the letter *from* Corinth to Paul—the letter he has been answering—and he is the one who has just delivered *this* letter from Paul to Corinth (i.e. our First Corinthians). So he and his fellows are there as the letter is being read.

**Fortunatus** (a common Latin name) and **Achaicus** (lit., “one who is from Achaia”) are the companions of Stephanas and members of his household. Most seem to think they were either slaves or freedmen; both, we can safely assume, were believers and fellow ministers with Stephanas, serving alongside with him.

We might think of Stephanas and his household as part of the founding members of the Corinth church, for Paul here says that the church knows that “they were the first fruits of Achaia”—that is, they were the first to be converted and baptized, since Paul states in v1:16, “Now I did baptize also the household of Stephanas.” Achaia was the Roman designation for most of their Grecian province, but Paul probably uses the term “Achaia” here to refer to the immediate area around Corinth, which was the capital of the province.

More than just being the “first,” Paul says they were the “first fruits,” which carries with it the expectation and promise (as with the resurrection of Christ) that there will be more to follow. The members of his household “have devoted themselves for ministry to the saints.”

**Note:** The KJV bizarrely translates v15, “...and that they have **addicted** themselves to the ministry of the saints.” I suppose we could give the translators the benefit of the doubt; perhaps they meant that, like someone addicted to strong drink, Stephanas and his household felt strongly called to minister in the church, that they *had* to do it. The phrase *etaxan heautous* means that they appointed themselves (in an orderly fashion). This shouldn’t be read as “self-centered forwardness” on their part, or arrogance, but that “they set themselves aside for service to other Christians” (Garland).

*(v16) ...that you also be in subjection to such men and to everyone who helps in the work and labors.*

Located after the parenthetical interruption, this statement completes the thought that began in v15 with “Now I urge you, brethren...” Verse 16 makes it clear that Stephanas and the men in his household were more than just solid members of the congregation performing good deeds, but were spiritual leaders, almost certainly having a responsibility for teaching and perhaps preaching the word. Because of this they were due honor and respect for the work they were doing in and for the church. That respect would include their submission—“submission in the sense of voluntary yielding in love” (BDAG).

(v17) *I rejoice over the coming of Stephanas and Fortunatus and Achaicus, because they have supplied what was lacking on your part.*

There are, essentially, two ways to interpret this remark, literally, “to fill up your lack”:

1. A few commentators read this as Paul being critical of the church, that they had in some regard been deficient in their response to, or support of, Paul. Considering the tension and repeated conflicts between the church and Paul, this is a possible interpretation.
2. The more common interpretation, however, is best represented by the ESV and TLV (even though it borders on commentary): “because they have made up for your absence.” That is, it was impossible for the entire church to come visit Paul in person, so the apostle sees these three men as filling the role that the church, realistically, could not.

The word translated “coming” is *parousia*, meaning presence or being near, and is the familiar word to describe the physical return of Christ—i.e., He will now be *present*. So one can acknowledge the poetic symmetry of the ESV: the church was “absent” from Paul, but the three men were “present.”

**Note:** If Paul had meant “absence,” however, the normal word for him to use would have been *apousia*; instead he used *hysterema*, which means a lack or deficit. This suggests that his being away from the church had left a gap in his life. He may have been feeling a bit down, perhaps even depressed of late. Why was Paul “rejoicing” over their presence?

(v18) *For they have refreshed my spirit and yours. Therefore acknowledge such men.*

Being away from the Corinthians, not being there in person to fellowship with them had taken away something good and encouraging in Paul’s life. His spirit needed reviving, and the arrival of and fellowship with Stephanas, Fortunatus and Achaicus brought the refreshment he so needed.

The word used in all of our versions is “refreshed,” which is not inaccurate, but is actually the *result* of what the Greek word *anapausan* means, which might be better translated, in the noun form, as a “respite,” for the word means to cause to cease, to give rest, an intermission from labor. I think one reason Paul was refreshed by their visit is that it afforded him a brief vacation from his work. These were faithful friends from Corinth, and fellowship with them—along with learning from them how things were going in Corinth—was like a cold drink of lemonade in the shade on a hot day. And when these men returned to Corinth, they would do the same for the church. And because of this, Paul expected the church to recognize, to commend them for this vital work of being the faithful umbilical between them and the apostle.