

Act like Men, Be Strong
I Corinthians 16:13-14

On Mother's Day I challenged you as parents to honor the teachings contained in **Deuteronomy 6:4-9**. So let me now, on this Father's Day weekend, in preparation for this morning's message, once again read this passage for you.

And what does **Deuteronomy 6:4-9** say? It says this, "**Hear, O Israel! The Lord is our God, the Lord is one! You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. (6) These words, which I am commanding you today, shall be on your heart. (7) You shall teach them diligently to your sons and shall talk of them when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way and when you lie down and when you rise up. (8) You shall bind them as a sign on your hand and they shall be as frontals on your forehead. (9) You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.**" Hopefully we remember these verses and the admonitions that these verses contain. But even more importantly, hopefully we are presently seeking to honor these admonitions in the way we are choosing to live our lives.

In others words, hopefully we are, by the way we are choosing to live our lives, demonstrating our supreme love for God and His word; through our communication to our children and through our actions; both in our homes and in our community, just as these verses admonish us to do.

How important is it that we honor these admonitions? Totally important! If we fail to honor these admonitions we will not only fail the Lord and fail ourselves but we will also fail our children by not giving them the opportunity to see the joy and the overflowing blessedness that comes to those who choose to live their lives fully devoted to the Lord and to His service. May God give us the grace to see the truth of what I am sharing with you and the determination to make it happen.

But if we choose to do this as Christian parents, to live our lives according to the admonitions spelled out for us in **Deuteronomy 6:4-9**, don't think that it will be easy. We will be opposed but by whom? The spiritual forces of darkness will oppose us, which is clear to us from **Ephesians 6**. Therefore in

light of this opposition we must put ourselves in the very best position to succeed and this means that we must seek out and establish close intimate fellowship with other like-minded believers.

And this leads us to the question that we will be seeking to answer this morning. And what is that question? The question that we will be seeking to answer this morning is this: what do we need to know in order to successfully establish close intimate fellowship with other like-minded believers? This is the question that we will seek to answer.

And what is my hope for this morning's message as we seek to answer this question? My hope is this: that we will not only better understand the importance of seeking out and establishing close intimate fellowship with other like-minded believers but that we might act on this better understanding, not only on behalf of ourselves but also on behalf of our children as well.

So, what is the first thing we need to know about establishing close intimate fellowship with other like-minded believers?

Seeking out and establishing close intimate fellowship with other like-minded believers is commanded (Hebrews 10:24-25).

Let me read for you **Hebrews 10:24-25**. **“And let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, (25) not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near.”**

What was the context for these two verses? The Jewish readers in this particular epistle were having a hard time breaking with the Old Covenant. Their initial attraction to Christ was being threatened as they, because of persecution, contemplated a return to Judaism and to its Levitical system.

And now hopefully, with a better understanding of the context, we can fully appreciate where the author of this epistle was coming from when he exhorted his readers not to forsake the assembling of themselves together as was the habit of some.

The author genuinely felt, under the inspiration of the Spirit, that one of the best ways for them to be protected from any erosion of their devotion to Christ and their subsequent return to Judaism and to its Levitical system was to be in close intimate fellowship with like-minded believers. Where they themselves, in the sphere of that fellowship, could love and be loved could serve and be served.

Seeking to love God supremely and to be devoted to His word, as Deuteronomy 6:4-9 encourages us to do, is not an easy thing. We will be opposed, just as these Hebrew Christians in **Hebrews 10:24-25** were being opposed, and where did the author of this epistle think that these Hebrew Christians needed to be in the midst of that opposition? He felt that they needed to be in close intimate fellowship with other like-minded believers. And the same thing is true for us as well.

We need to be assembling together with the saints. Our children need to be assembling together with the saints. This should not be considered an option. It should be considered mandatory not only because it is commanded, but for another very important reason.

Seeking out and establishing close intimate fellowship with other like-minded believers is necessary.

This is not just my opinion. This is what the Scriptures clearly communicate to us. God has designed His church in such a way that it can only effectively function both individually and corporately in close cooperation with one another (1 Corinthians 12:13-18).

Let me read for you **1 Corinthians 12:13-18**. “**For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of One Spirit. (14) For the body is not one member, but many. (15) If the foot says, ‘Because I am not a hand, I am not a part of the body,’ it is not for this reason any the less a part of the body. (16) And if the ear says, ‘Because I am not an eye, I am not a part of the body,’ it is not for this reason any the less a part of the body. (17) If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole were hearing, where would the sense of smell be? (18) But now God has placed the members, each one of them, in the body, just as He desired.”**

If we have come to Christ and have by faith embraced Him as our Lord and savior, and we have been joined to His life know this; we have been placed into His body or His Church, just as He has desired. Some of us may be an eye, some of us may be an ear, some of us may be a leg but be assured of this, we are something and by virtue of God's design something special and therefore necessary for the proper functioning of the body of Christ or His church.

The reason why we as Christ's church can only function effectively both individually and corporately in close cooperation with one another is because each of us has been uniquely placed into the body Christ.

If you believe this to be true, then how often would we want to get together with our brothers and sisters in Christ, knowing that we need each other and are dependent upon one another in respect to doing the will of God both individually and corporately? Let me share with you what I believe.

Knowing that close fellowship with like-minded believers is not only commanded but is also necessary, we need to be with each other as much as possible (Acts 2:44-47).

Doesn't this make sense! If you were an "arm," wouldn't you want to be connected with the other members of your body more than just once in a while? I certainly would think so.

We need to set the bar, in terms of our desire for close fellowship, very high. In fact, we need to set the bar as high as possible! And if we do this we will not be disappointed. Let me read for you **Acts 2:44-47**. **"And all those who had believed were together and had all things in common; (45) and they began selling their property and possessions and were sharing them with all, as anyone might have need. (46) Day by day continuing with one mind in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart, (47) praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved."**

So, what do you think? Do you think these believers understood the importance of close intimate fellowship? Absolutely! And were they striving to achieve it? Absolutely! And were they being blessed for it! Absolutely!

And so will we! And this is the kind of close intimate fellowship that we need to be striving for.

So, what will this mean for us practically? This is what it means. If it is at all possible for you to come to our Sunday services every week, then come. If you can go to our Sunday School classes each week, then come. If you can come to the softball games at City Park, then come. If you can come to a mid-week growth group or mid-week youth activities, then come. Come to as many gatherings as you can. And if you can't come at those designated times then invite people from our fellowship to do things with you and to come into your home for the purpose of prayer and mutual encouragement.

At this point in the message I am hoping that you are even now in the process of making the decision to become far more involved in the lives of fellow Christians.

And why am I pressing you so hard for a decision in this area of your life and the life of your family? The spiritual vitality of your life, your family's life and the life of this church depends upon this because it places you and your family in a position to be spiritually successful. It places you in a position to follow through on your desire to love God supremely and to be devoted to His Word.

So, what have we learned so far about the pursuit of a close intimate fellowship with other like-minded believers? We have learned that it is commanded. And we have learned that it is necessary. But there is one more thing that I would like to share with you.

Seeking out and establishing close and intimate fellowship with other like-minded believers will not just happen (1 Corinthians 16:13).

In order to help you understand what I mean by this I would like us to read Paul's words to the Corinthians in **1 Corinthians 16:13**. But before I read his words I would like to set the scene.

Of all the churches to which Paul wrote in the New Testament, there was none in such trouble as Corinth, none so sinful, none that had failed so badly. And in response to their failure Paul rebuked them strongly throughout his epistle in the hope that they would turn and go in a new and

better direction. But Paul wanted them to know that going in a new and better direction would not just happen which led to the following series of admonitions in **1 Corinthians 16:13**. **“Be on the alert, stand firm in the faith, act like men, be strong.”**

This counsel, I believe, is just as apropos for us, as we also like Corinthians hopefully will seek to move in a new and better direction as we seek to establish closer and more intimate fellowship with other like-minded believers.

So let us take a closer look at these admonitions. If we are going to be successful in establishing closer and more intimate fellowship with like-minded believers, we will need to be alert. Alert against what? We will need to be alert to the lies of Satan.

What will be some of his lies? One of his lies might be that you are too tired to become more involved with like-minded believers at worship service or Sunday school classes or mid-week groups. Just sit back and relax.

So, what do you think? Is this a good excuse? It is a terrible excuse. If Christ had used this excuse, if the disciples of Christ had used this excuse, if the members of the early church had used this excuse, I doubt if they would have very often gotten together at all. The reality is that most everybody is tired.

If tiredness is what is keeping us from becoming more involved with like-minded believers then we have bought into Satan’s lie. We have not been alert.

What might be another lie of Satan? Another lie of Satan might be that you are too busy to get more involved with like-minded believers. If you were to do that you might not be able to stay involved in your bowling team, in your knitting group, in your garden club. If you do that you might not be able to spend all that extra time pursuing more money and more degrees. If you do that you might not be able keep up with all your sports programs or soap operas. You are simply too busy.

If the busyness that keeps us from getting more involved with like-minded believers is this kind of busyness then we have bought into Satan's lie. We have not been alert.

What might be another lie of Satan? Another lie of Satan might be that you don't want to seek to get more involved with like-minded believers because it is just too difficult. There will be people that are not like you. There will be people that you may not even personally like to be around. Worst of all, you might find yourself feeling alone or perhaps even bored.

If avoidance of difficulty in personal settings is what is keeping us from getting more involved with like-minded believers then we have bought into Satan's lie. We have not been alert.

When we step forward to go in a new direction, a righteous direction such as seeking to establish closer and more intimate fellowship with like-minded believers, we will need to be alert, but not only alert. What else does Paul say?

If we are going to be successful in establishing closer and more intimate fellowship with like-minded believers we will need to stand firm in the faith. Isn't this what Paul told the Corinthians?

In other words, when we encounter the lies of Satan we must be prepared to respond with the truth. When Satan says, "You are too tired, you are too busy, it will be too difficult for you personally," then we must be prepared to say to ourselves, "**It is written, we are not to forsake the assembling of ourselves together.**" We need say to ourselves, "**It is written we have been joined to the body of Christ and are individually members of that body and therefore need to be especially close to one another in order to accomplish His will and work.**" In other words, we need to respond in this way so that we might stand firm in the faith. But this is not all.

If we are going to be successful in establishing closer and more intimate fellowship with like-minded believers, we will need to act like men; or in other words, we will need to be courageous.

Isn't this exactly what Paul told the Corinthians after he had exhorted them to be alert and to stand firm in the faith? Absolutely! This is exactly what he said to them.

If we are going to be successful in establishing closer and more intimate fellowship with like-minded believers it will take some courage. We should not think it would be a cakewalk. Meeting people, getting to know people, inter-acting with people with greater frequency and intimacy, that we have not yet experienced, certainly will require some courage. But even more than this, if we are going to be successful in establishing closer and more intimate fellowship with like-minded believers, we will need to be strong. Let me once again read **1 Corinthians 16:13**. **“Be on the alert, stand firm in the faith, act like men, be strong.”** Once we courageously put ourselves in the fight, we must remain in the fight.

Seeking out and establishing close and intimate fellowship with other like-minded believers will not just happen.

Men, we must lead our families. We must put them in the very best position to love God and be devoted to His Word. This means that we must continually seek closer and more intimate fellowship with like-minded believers. This is not optional. It is a command and it is a necessary command in light of the fact that we are a part of Christ's body and individually members of it. Therefore, **“Be alert, stand firm in the faith, act like men, be strong.”**

May God give us the grace to lead our families into all the benefits and blessings that comes to those who seek closer and more intimate fellowship with like-minded believers.