

Victory in Jesus!

(1 Corinthians 15:50-58 ~ Part 2)

Introduction

➤ In the Bible, the Christian life is described in terms of service and self-sacrifice. Both virtues, which seem to be grossly absent from all too many professing Christians today, were biblically and historically hallmarks of the Christian life. Hospitals, schools, universities, and churches were established for Christ. Christian missionaries traveled across the globe, to the most remote and most dangerous places, to proclaim the Gospel of Christ. Christians risked imprisonment, humiliation, ostracization, persecution, and even martyrdom for sake of Jesus Christ. In the New Testament, we find the apostles and disciples of Christ literally risking their livelihoods and lives for the sake of the Gospel (see Acts 7:58; 2Cor.11:24-27; Heb.11:35-38).

- ♦ **Henry Martyn** (1781-1812), an Englishman, served as a missionary in India and Persia in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Upon his arrival in Calcutta he cried out, “Let me burn out for God.” As he watched the people prostrating themselves before their pagan idols and heard blasphemy uttered against Christ, he wrote, “This excited more horror in me than I can well express. ... I could not endure existence if Jesus was not glorified; it would be hell to me, if He were to be always thus dishonored” (John Stott, *Our Guilty Silence* [Downers Grove, Ill: InterVarsity Press, 1967], pp. 21, 22).
- ♦ **David Brainerd** (1718-1747), the great missionary to the American Indians, who died while still in his twenties, said, “Oh, that I were a flame of fire in my Master’s cause.” His selfless obedience proved the sincerity of that desire, and God gave him a burning heart for lost souls that has few parallels in the history of the church.
- ♦ Like David Brainerd, **Robert Murray M'Cheyne** (1813-1843) died before he was thirty. Of him Courtland Myers wrote: “Everywhere he stepped Scotland shook. Whenever he opened his mouth a spiritual force swept in every direction. Thousands followed him to the feet of Christ.” Visitors who came to see the church where M'Cheyne had preached were shown a table, chair, and open Bible. They were then told how that man of God spent hours with his head buried in the Bible, weeping for those to whom he would preach. Myers then comments, “With such a passion for souls, is it any wonder that the Holy Spirit gave M'Cheyne a magnetic personality which drew so many to the Savior?”
- ♦ **John Knox** (c. 1514-1572) pleaded before God, “Give me Scotland or I die.”
- ♦ As the young **Hudson Taylor** (1832-1905) contemplated the fate of the unreached multitudes of China, he earnestly prayed, “I feel that I cannot go on living unless I do something for China.”
- ♦ **Adoniram Judson** (1788-1850), the famed missionary to Burma, spent long, tiresome years translating the Bible for that people. He was eventually put into prison because of his work, and while there his wife died. After being released, he contracted a serious disease that sapped what little energy he had left. Nevertheless he prayed, “Lord, let me finish my work. Spare me long enough to put the saving Word into the hands of the people.”
- ♦ **James Chalmers** (1809-1892), a Scottish missionary to the South Sea Islands, was so burdened for the lost that someone wrote of him, “In Christ’s service he endured hardness, hunger, shipwreck and exhausting toil, and did it all joyfully. He risked his life a thousand times and finally was clubbed to death, beheaded, and eaten by men whose friend he was and whom he sought to enlighten.”
- ♦ Although he was unable to go overseas, **Robert Arthington** (1823-1900) enabled countless others to go. By working hard and living frugally he managed to give over \$500,000 to the work of foreign missions. He testified, “Gladly would I make the floor my bed, a box my chair, and another box my table, rather than that men should perish for want of the knowledge of Christ.”
- ♦ The martyred missionary **Jim Elliot** (1927-1956) once prayed, “Lord, make my life a testimony to the value of knowing You.” Soon after graduating from college, Jim Elliot wrote in his diary: “God, I pray Thee, light these idle sticks of my life that I may burn for Thee. Consume my life, my God, for it is Thine. I seek not a long life but a full one like You, Lord Jesus.” God answered that prayer, and in the flower of young manhood Jim Elliot’s life was cut short by the spear of an Auca Indian as he and several other young men sought to take the gospel deep into the jungles of Ecuador. Jim Elliot, mentioned earlier in the chapter, wrote, “He is no fool who gives up what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose.”

- ◆ **George Whitefield** (1714-1770) prayed, “O Lord, give me souls or take my soul.”
 - ◆ When he was about to board a ship to India to begin missionary service there, some of **William Carey’s** (1761-1834) friends asked if he really wanted to go through with his plans. Expressing his great desire for their support in prayer, he is said to have replied, “I will go down [into the pit itself] if you will hold the rope” (S. Pearce Carey, *William Carey* [London: The Carey Press, 1934], pp. 117–18). Known today as the “father of modern missions”, William Carey spent thirty-five years in India and saw only a handful of converts. Yet every Christian missionary who has gone to India since that time owes a debt to Carey. He planted so that they could harvest. He translated the Word of God into Indian dialects, so that virtually all missionary effort in India has been based to some extent on his pioneer work. Most of the fruits of his labor he saw only by faith.
 - ◆ **John Bunyan** (1628-1688) was told to quit preaching or be thrown in prison. He knew that if he went to prison his wife and children would be left destitute. They had little enough to eat and wear when he was free; but if he were imprisoned they would be totally impoverished. Yet he knew he must preach the gospel God had called him to preach. Because he refused to stop preaching, he was imprisoned; and from his cell he wrote, “The parting with my wife and poor children hath often been to me in this place as the pulling of the flesh from my bones ... But yet, recalling myself, thought I, I must venture all with God, though it goeth to the quick to leave you. Oh, I saw in this condition, I was a man who was pulling down his house upon the head of his wife and children; yet thought I, I must do it. I must do it.”
 - ◆ **William Tyndale** (c. 1494-1536), the man responsible for getting the New Testament translated into the English language in 1525, was in prison facing martyrdom. He wrote a letter to the governor-in-chief, asking that these possessions be sent to him: a warmer cap, a warmer coat, and a piece of cloth to patch his leggings. Then he said, “But most of all I beg and beseech and entreat your clemency to be urgent with the commissary, that he will kindly permit me to have the Hebrew bible, Hebrew grammar, and Hebrew dictionary that I may pass the time in that study” (J. E. Mozley, *William Tyndale* [N.Y.: MacMillan, 1937], p. 334).
 - ◆ **Polycarp** (69-155 A.D.), one of the great early church fathers, who was martyred in A.D. 155, having been a Christian for eighty-six years. As his enemies prepared to burn him at the stake in Smyrna, they gave him one last chance to deny the Lord and save his life. Polycarp responded with quiet assurance and a steady voice, “Eighty-six years have I served Him, He’s never done me any harm; why should I forsake Him now?”
- For many professing Christians today, their greatest “sacrifice” for Christ is going to church once or twice a month (or once or twice a year) – but only if the sanctuary is properly heated/cooled, the seating is comfortable, the service is entertaining, the sermon is encouraging (inoffensive), and the ministries are beneficial to the family. Survey after survey reveals the fact that many (if not most) “Christians” in America today are not involved in any Christian ministry whatsoever, and do not give any money to any Christian ministry or any church.

While this has probably always been true, to one degree or another, it seems to have reached epidemic status in “Christianity” in America today. In our day, this Americanized Christianity is often marketed as prosperous, beneficial, self-indulgent, and harmless – a “Christianity” without self-sacrifice and without self-denial.

The faithful Christian must fight against any form of a self-serving or egocentric Christianity. For true Christianity is not about self-promotion or narcissistic self-interests. Rather, it is marked by Christlike humility, service, self-denial, and self-sacrifice.

Mark 10:43-45 ~ “But it shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant,⁴⁴ and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all. ⁴⁵For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”

Luke 9:23-24 ~ “And [Jesus] said to all, ‘If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. ²⁴For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it.’”

Phil 2:3-8 ~ “Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. ⁴Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. ⁵Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, ⁶who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, ⁷but emptied himself, by taking the form of

a servant, being born in the likeness of men. ⁸And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.”

- To put it bluntly, the world does not need more Christians who are content to sit back and do as little as possible for the sake of the kingdom, or “Christians” who talk-the-talk but do not walk-the-walk. The resurrection of Christ should compel and propel us to serve God with everything we are and everything we have. Our money, time, energy, talents, gifts, bodies, minds, and emotions should be heavily invested in the work – doing the will – of our Lord and Savior.

Eph 2:8-10 ~ “For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, ⁹not a result of works, so that no one may boast. ¹⁰For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.”

Heb 10:24-25 ~ “And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, ²⁵not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.”

James 2:26 ~ “For as the body apart from the spirit is dead, so also faith apart from works is dead.”

- This is the essence of the verse (1 Corinthians 15:58) that we will be studying this morning. To remind us of the immediate context, let me read 1 Corinthians 15:50-58.

1 Cor 15:50-58 ~ “I tell you this, brothers: flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. ⁵¹Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, ⁵²in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. ⁵³For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality. ⁵⁴When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written: ‘Death is swallowed up in victory.’ ⁵⁵‘O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?’ ⁵⁶The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. ⁵⁷But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

⁵⁸Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.

- In this passage, we discover four glorious truths concerning the Christian’s final resurrection to come when Christ Returns.

1. The necessity of the final resurrection (vs.50)

- Paul first reminds the Corinthians that without resurrected bodies, Christians cannot spend eternity in heaven. The reason is that *“flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God”* (vs.50). Our physical, corrupted, and mortal bodies simply cannot dwell in the spiritual dimension of heaven; let alone dwell in the presence of the holy God. In the words of the apostle: *“the perishable”* (*phthora*; corruptible, mortal) cannot *“inherit the imperishable”* (*aphtharsia*; vs.50).

Our human bodies simply cannot coexist with the blazing splendor of God’s divine glory! We cannot survive the penetrating radiance of His absolute holiness (see Ex.33:18-23; 34:29-35; 2Cor.3:7; 1Tim.6:16).

1 John 3:2 ~ “Beloved, we are God’s children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is.”

Phil 3:20-21 ~ “But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, ²¹who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself.”

2. The mystery of the final resurrection (vs.51-53)

➤ Secondly, Paul describes the mystery of the final resurrection. He wrote, *“Behold!”* (vs.51; *idou*), which means “Listen!”, “Look!”, or “Pay attention!” He wanted to ensure that he had the full attention before he revealed a portion of one of life’s greatest mysteries – the mystery of Christ’s Second Coming, and the resurrection of those who are in Christ: *“Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, ⁵²in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. ⁵³For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality”* (vs.51-53).

To be sure, there is still great mystery regarding all the events, and the chronology of events, surrounding Christ’s Second Coming (see 1Thess.4:13-18; Acts 1:9-11; 2Pet.3:10). What we know for sure is most important. Christ will indeed come again, and when He does those who are in Christ (dead and alive) will be resurrected with Him in glory for all eternity: *“For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality”* (vs.53).

3. The victory of the final resurrection (vs.54-57)

➤ The third glorious truth is the victory of the final resurrection. *“⁵⁴When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written: ‘Death is swallowed up in victory.’ ⁵⁵‘O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?’ ⁵⁶The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. ⁵⁷But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ”* (vs.54-57). The outcome of Jesus’ resurrection is the death of (spiritual) death for all who have received Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior.

Thankfully, Jesus Christ died on the cross to pay the full penalty of all sin for all who would ever believe. Jesus’ sinless (righteous) life perfectly and eternally satisfied the demands of the law for all who truly receive Him, by faith, as their Lord and Savior. While death is not gone, its deadly sting is. This does not mean that Christians will no longer sin, but that any sin we commit is already forgiven through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Through Christ, believers no longer bare the fatal sting of sin. Christ alone bore the sting of sin for all who believe. While death is still an enemy in this life, it is an enemy with no stinger – declawed, defanged, disarmed, and destroyed – powerless to harm those who are in Christ. There is victory over sin, but that victory comes only in and through Jesus Christ (Jn.14:6; Acts 4:12)!

4. The tenacity because of the final resurrection (vs.58)

➤ The last glorious truth in this passage, one that serves and a conclusion as well as application, is the tenacity that Christians are to have because of the final resurrection. In his teaching on the resurrection Paul gave imperative commands for the Christian.

In other words, if we truly believe that Jesus Christ is risen from the dead and freed us from the penalty sin (justification), and the power of sin (sanctification), and one day the very presence of sin (glorification), we will strive to serve Him faithfully and resolutely. If we truly believe that we will be resurrected unto glory, because He Himself is risen from the dead, then we will be devoted to tenaciously living according to the will and Word of the Lord.

➤ As a means of application [as often indicated by the word *“Therefore”* (vs.58)], Paul gave three imperative commands [all stemming from the imperative verb *“be”* (*ginomai*; to be or become)] as responses to the doctrine of the resurrection. Since Jesus Christ is risen from the dead, and since those who are in Christ will be resurrected with Him ...

a. Be **STEADFAST**

➤ First, we are to be “*steadfast*” (vs.58). The Greek word (*hedraios*) translated “*steadfast*” literally means to “be seated” and figuratively means to “be settled.” The opposite is to be erratic, fickle, or unstable. The faithful Christian is not unsteady or doubleminded. They are settled in their Christian faith, and steady in their Christian walk.

Col 1:23 ~ “if indeed you continue in the faith, stable and steadfast [*hedraios*], not shifting from the hope of the gospel that you heard, which has been proclaimed in all creation under heaven, and of which I, Paul, became a minister.” (also 1Cor.7:37)

James 1:6-8 ~ “But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind. ⁷For that person must not suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; ⁸he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.”

Eph 4:14 ~ “so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes.”

Heb 10:23 ~ “Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful.”

➤ Christians are not to be easily deceived false doctrine, or seduced by immorality or ungodliness. We are not to be gullible or prone to doubting. We are not to be anxious or unhinged. We are not swayed or distracted by circumstances. We will not compromise or quit. We are to be unwavering in our faith, and resolute in our faithfulness.

✓ **Illust:** “Be steadfast in your doctrine. Hold the truth, and especially the solemn truth of resurrection; hold it firmly, as with an iron grip. Be steadfast in holiness, let nothing move you ... Be steadfast in your profession; do not blush, do not hide your candle under a bushel. The glory that is to be revealed will make good amends for you for all the shame and abuse that the reproach of Christ may bring on you. Be steadfast in everything that is a matter of faith to you – steadfast in your firm belief of Christ’s redemption of your souls – steadfast in the full conviction that you are the adopted children of your heavenly Father – steadfast in your continual perseverance in sanctification, that you may be prepared for the embrace of your Lord. Be steadfast like mountains that never move ... be everlastingly steadfast” (Charles H. Spurgeon; sermon: “A Challenge and a War Charge”; July 13, 1862).

b. Be **IMMOVABLE**

➤ Second, we are to be “*immovable*” (vs.58; *ametakinētos*). Virtually synonymous with the previous command, to be “*immovable*” is even more intensified. This is a righteous obstinacy. This is a godly determination. A holy resolve. To be immovable is to remain deeply rooted in Christ, no matter how vicious or volatile the storm. It is to remain faithful to Christ no matter the obstacle or suffering, to never “look back” with longing for what is in the past, or “shrink back” in fear of what lies ahead.

Luke 9:62 ~ “Jesus said to him, ‘No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God.’”

Gen 19:26 ~ “But Lot’s wife, behind him, looked back, and she became a pillar of salt.”

Heb 10:38-39 ~ “‘but my righteous one shall live by faith, and if he shrinks back, my soul has no pleasure in him.’ ³⁹But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who have faith and preserve [*peripoiēsis*] their souls.”

➤ The immovable Christian does not give in to the pressures or lures of worldliness. The immovable Christian is unyielding to the pressures and philosophies of the world. The immovable Christian does not compromise for the sake of comfort or acceptance. The immovable Christian does not follow Christ only when it is beneficial or easy or convenient. The immovable Christian does not turn their “faith” on

or off depending on their situation or relationships. The immovable Christian is not easily discouraged and will never be defeated. The immovable Christian does not retreat in the face of opposition, persecution, or even martyrdom.

✓ **Illust:** “The ancient city of Pompeii is well known in history, as the Roman city that was literally buried under an outpouring of volcanic eruption. The date was August 24, 79 A.D. when Mount Vesuvius blew its top, resulting in one of the most catastrophic natural disasters that has ever been recorded in history. Mount Vesuvius spewed a deadly cloud of volcanic gas, and molten rock and ash, at the rate of 1.5 million tons of debris per second. This explosion released thermal energy one hundred thousand times greater than the atomic bomb that was dropped on Japan in WWII. Volcanic ash was blown twenty-one miles up into the atmosphere. And the result was that the city of Pompeii was immediately buried in debris anywhere from thirteen feet deep to as high as twenty feet deep.

Human bodies were immediately frozen in suspended action. Some were found in cellars as if they had run into basements for security. Some were found in upper rooms of buildings. But one most notable discovery, as archaeologists have begun to dig, was coming across one Roman sentinel. He was found buried in ashes at the city gate, where he had been placed to guard the city. And as they peeled back the layers of the ashes [they found him standing at attention], with his spear in hand, guarding his position, not running in the midst of the chaos. There while the earth shook beneath him, there while the flood of ashes and cinders covered him, he held his position; he stood his post. And there after two-thousand years, this faithful man was still found as though [he was] still on duty.

This is the very kind of resilience that God requires of each and every one of us, that where He has placed us there we must hold our position and serve the Lord. We are presently, in this age in which we live, being buried under an avalanche of cultural upheaval and rank paganism; under the ashes of a sexual revolution that is overwhelming the culture in which we live. Nevertheless, we cannot run to the hills. We must hold our position. We must guard our post. We must be found faithful in being steadfast in the midst of the changing culture. And, as it were, holding the spear of the Word of God and being a dynamic witness for the Lord Jesus Christ” (Steven J. Lawson; sermon: “Steadfast Saints in a Changing World”; January 6, 2019).

➤ The immovable Christian is one who remains resolute in the faith and faithfulness to Christ.

c. Be EXCEEDINGLY PRODUCTIVE (in ministry)

➤ Thirdly, we are commanded to be “*always abounding in the work of the Lord*” (vs.58; *pantote perisseuō ergon*). Other translations give us the full sense of this exhortation: “*Always be outstanding in the work of the Lord*” (NET); “*Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord*” (NIV); “*always excelling in the Lord’s work*” (HCSB).

As Christians, we are to be working hard and wholeheartedly for the Lord. We are not to be apathetic or lazy about the Lord’s work, and we never to be insincere or hypocritical. Rather than give the Lord nothing, or just the bare minimum, or our “leftovers”, we are to be “*abounding*” (*perisseuō*; exceeding, overflowing, or superabounding) in our service to the Lord.

Col 1:28-29 ~ “Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ. ²⁹For this I toil [*kopiaō*], struggling [*agōnizomai*] with all his energy [*energeia*] that he powerfully works [*energeō*] within me.” (1Cor.15:10)

Col 3:23 ~ “Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men”

➤ It is important to note that this command, and all three of these commands, were not specifically for apostles, preachers/pastors, or missionaries, but to every single Christian. This is not “extra credit”, or an elective, for those Christians who have nothing better to do. This command is, these commands are, for everyone who calls themselves a Christ; everyone who claims to be a follower (disciple) of the Lord Jesus Christ.

➤ There will undoubtedly be times in our lives, I know this has been true for me, when it is tempting to quit; when it seems as though all your ministry is in vain; when it seems that your labor in the Lord is ineffective and unappreciated; when you feel discouraged or even defeated.

Paul gave this assurance that transcends our feelings and circumstances: *“knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain”* (vs.58). This is something that we can know, for certain, even if we do not see it or feel it. Our sincere and godly *“labor”* (*kopos*; lit. to cut; difficulty or toil) in the Lord is never *“in vain”* (*kenos*; empty). While it may seem like it is empty labor, it is not.

1 Cor 15:10 ~ “But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me was not in vain [*kenos*]. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me.”

1 Cor 15:14 ~ “And if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain [*kenos*] and your faith is in vain [*kenos*].”

➤ Why is our labor in the Lord not in vain? Because the tomb is empty, our faithful labor in Christ is not. If, however, Jesus’ tomb is not empty – if Jesus did not rise from the dead – than everything we do would be in vain: our preaching (vs.14), our faith (vs.14), and our works (vs.58).

Conclusion

➤ If someone were to observe your life, would they conclude that Jesus is your number one passion and priority? Does your life reflect the truth that Jesus, who is risen from the dead, is both your Lord and Savior? Is loving, worshipping, and serving Him your greatest priority and pleasure? Or has “Christianity” become merely a half-hearted profession and not a whole-hearted obsession? Does Christ take a “backseat” to your family, your job, your hobbies, your activities, your entertainment, your leisure?

Do you and I pray, as George Whitefield did, “O Lord, give me souls or take my soul”? Do we earnestly proclaim, as Henry Martyn did, “Let me burn out for God”? Do we cry out, as David Brainerd did, “Oh, that I were a flame of fire in my Master’s cause.” Do we pray, as Jim Elliot did, “Lord, make my life a testimony to the value of knowing You”?

➤ We must not let Satan deceive us into thinking that we do not need to serve the Lord. We must not let the world convince us that there are more important things to be doing. We must not falter nor quit, because we serve a risen Savior – who has won the victory – and who is coming again! And He will raise to eternal glory all those who belong to Him.