

Be Steadfast, Immovable

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Preacher: Colin Horne

[0 : 00] 1 Corinthians 15, Pastor Colin will be finishing up this chapter tonight.! We'll be reading verses 50 through 58.

! 1 Corinthians 15, 50 through the end of the chapter. 1 Corinthians 15, verse 1.

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1 Corinthians 15, verse 1. Therefore, 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.

1 Corinthians 15, verse 1. 1 Corinthians 15, verse 1. 1 Corinthians 15, verse 1. We're very near to the end of 1 Corinthians, but we're not quite there yet.

[1 : 56] After tonight, we'll only have chapter 16 left, and there Paul will give some final directions, some instructions. He'll share his travel plans and some last greetings.

And then that's it. The end of 1 Corinthians. But we're not there yet. Tonight, we end, though, chapter 15. A chapter that Paul has devoted to one topic in particular that we've already had our hearts prepared for as we've sung tonight.

Here in this chapter, Paul is now wrapping up his thoughts on the topic of the resurrection. Now, this has been Paul's pattern in his letter to hone in on one topic at a time and to work through that issue.

Or, as we see here, false teaching that had crept up into the church. Remember, Paul has been responding all through this chapter to this false teaching that was saying, there is no resurrection. Well, if that's true, then our faith is in vain, Paul says. If that's true, then Christ himself has not been raised. If that's true, well, Paul says, why have I been living in danger and suffering for my faith?

[3 : 10] Why would we live in danger and suffer for ours either? And so Paul has rebuked those in the church of Corinth who have accepted and embraced in some part this false teaching.

He exhorted them in verse 34, Wake up from your drunken stupor, as is right, and to not then go on sinning. So you see, this is no small matter.

Resurrection life in the eternal state. We need to have right doctrine about the future. And as we've already seen in this chapter, what we believe very much impacts how we live.

We'll see that yet again tonight. What we believe, what we believe about the future, very much impacts how we live today. So our sermon has three points this evening.

I'll give them to you right now up front. First, we'll consider the change for entrance. Then the checkmate of death. And finally, the charge to us.

[4 : 15] So let's begin with the change for entrance. And I'll read again verses 50 to 53. I tell you this, brothers. Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God.

Nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. Behold, I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed. In 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. For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality.

So Paul begins very much where he left off in the last passage that we were in here in chapter 15.

Here in verse 50, he's talking about resurrection bodies and the contrast.

Again, we saw this in the last passage. The contrast between our present natural bodies and our future spiritual bodies. What is of this life, and what is of the life to come.

[5 : 22] And yet again, like the last time we were in this chapter, Paul is drawing on the words of someone else. The very words of the Lord Jesus. Remember when Nicodemus came to Jesus at night, and Jesus told him, You must be born again.

Well, Nicodemus was confused, and he asked, How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born? And then listen to what Jesus said.

And hear those words now, even as we're in 1 Corinthians. Very truly I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the Spirit.

Well, Paul is making the same point here.

No entrance into the kingdom in this perishable body corrupted by sin. And that's what Paul means by flesh and blood. He means the natural body.

[6 : 26] Now again, when he speaks of the spiritual body, he doesn't mean a disembodied spirit. No, he means a glorified body. The body that has put on the imperishable.

So the natural body cannot enter and inherit the kingdom. We need these bodies to be made imperishable. We need these bodies to be made gloriously perfect.

Our bodies must be changed before we enter in. Before we inherit the kingdom prepared for us to share in with God's beloved Son for all of eternity.

We can't go in with these bodies. They must be changed. And we've already talked much about that change, that transformation. Look back at verse 43. Here he's talking about our bodies and he says, It is sown in dishonor.

It is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness. It is raised in power. It is sown a natural body. It is raised a spiritual body.

[7 : 29] Well, now in our passage tonight, Paul is shifting his emphasis. From emphasizing what that change will be like, to emphasizing when that change will happen.

When it will occur. And we see this as Paul gives us these words here. In a moment. In the twinkling of an eye. At the last trumpet.

So it's clearly unexpected and instantaneous. So that's what Paul's driving at when he says, In a moment. In the twinkling of an eye. But this is also a glorious transformation that will take place in the most public of ways.

Because it is at the last trumpet. It's not going to happen quietly. In secret. A trumpet is so often used in God's word to, well, draw attention.

Like Joel 2 verse 1. Blow a trumpet in Zion. Sound an alarm on my holy mountain. Let all the inhabitants of the land tremble. For the day of the Lord is coming.

[8 : 34] It is near. Well, here is that trumpet blast again. On the day of Christ's return. In fact, Paul describes this trumpet on that day in another letter that he wrote.

1 Corinthians chapter 4. He says, beginning in verse 13. But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about those who are asleep. That you may not grieve as others do who have no hope.

For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep. For this we declare to you by a word from the Lord.

That we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God.

And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever.

[9 : 41] And as Charlie said already, therefore, encourage one another with these words. That's that trumpet blast that Paul now is describing in 1 Corinthians 15.

And at that blast, we who are alive will be changed. And so too will the dead in Christ be changed. The perishable will be clothed with the imperishable.

And those with resurrection bodies, we will enter into the kingdom of God. And so that's the first point tonight, the change for entrance.

Let's consider now the second, the checkmate of death. Verse 54. When 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.

O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting? The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

[10 : 53] So death is done for. It will be swallowed up in victory fully. Finally, on that last day when Christ returns, and the dead are raised in glory, then it is checkmate for death.

That day, though, is not yet here. You see that Paul is talking in the future in these verses. He says, then shall come to pass.

And then he quotes Isaiah 25, Hosea 13. Those Old Testament prophecies will be fully and finally fulfilled when the perishable puts on the imperishable.

When the perishable is clothed with the imperishable. When we receive our resurrection bodies. On that day, death will be totally defeated.

And then Paul helps us here. He helps us to better understand death and what is to happen to death by showing its relationship first to sin, and then showing sin's relationship to the law.

[12:02] This is a bit of a chain reaction, you might say. So let's unpack this chain reaction together. Beginning actually at the end, and working backwards through Paul's line of reasoning.

So let's consider the law and its relationship to sin. Where law is given, we now have commands to keep. Obedience is required.

We see this all the way back in the Garden of Eden in Genesis chapter 2. Adam was told what he was able to do, and Adam was told what he was not to do.

He was able to eat of any tree in the garden except one, and of that one he was not to eat. Well, we too have been told by God.

As he's given us his law, what we are to do, what we are not to do. And with this knowledge of God's law comes a knowledge then of the times that we obey, and of the times that we disobey.

[13:02] And of course, when we disobey, that is sin. We have his moral commands written down for us in God's word. We know when we sin because God has given us his law.

So we have knowledge of our sin because we have knowledge of God's law. That's really just what Paul says in Romans chapter 3, verse 20.

Through the law comes knowledge of sin. Or you could say through the law comes consciousness of sin. It is through the law that we become aware of our sin.

Again, in Romans, Paul says this same thing in chapter 7. And then he even gives an example. So he says first in verse 7, That's the same idea as Romans 3, verse 20.

Through the law comes knowledge of sin. If it had not been for the law, I would not have known sin. And then now here he gives the example. For I would not have known what it is to covet.

[14:13] If the law had not said, you shall not covet. So the law brings knowledge of sin. That's one way that the law and sin are connected.

Through the law, we become aware of our sin. But here's another way that the law and sin are connected. Paul goes on to say this in Romans 7, now verse 8.

But sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, produced in me all kinds of covetousness. So the law, in some sense, good.

Yet through the law, sin was stimulated. Again, in Romans 7, verse 11, Paul explains this stimulating effect. He says, For sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, deceived me.

And through it, killed me. So sin is drawing its power from the goodness of the law. Sin is getting its power from the law. It gets stirred up by the reality of the law that is given.

[15:19] As one commentator says, people enjoy transgressing commands in order to demonstrate their independence. How often is it that you have no desire to do something until someone tells you that you can't?

And then, oh, well now we're tempted to do it. We have no trouble seeing this in small children.

They have no interest in the hot pan sitting on the counter until you draw their attention to it.

Out of an abundance of caution, you give the command to that small child. No touch. They weren't looking at it. They weren't anywhere near it. But maybe you're walking away from the counter for a moment and you just want to make sure that my small child knows that that pan is hot.

But they don't hear that as a kind warning and thank you for giving it to them. They hear that as a challenge and they now want to put you to the test. Let's see how quickly I can get my little hands on that now.

Before the command was given, no interest. Oh, but after the command, now their sinful hearts are very interested. And this isn't just a problem for children.

[16:31] It's been a problem for the human race going all the way back to the Garden of Eden. Sin takes something that is good, the law that is given, and draws its power from it.

There's temptation. There's desire where there was none before. Here is the standard. And sin says, how about we break that standard? I didn't really want that thing before the law was put in place.

But now that you mention it, I sure do want what you say I can't have. Sin seizes the opportunity presented by the law. So Paul says, the power of sin is the law.

Well, now let's back up. One more phrase in chapter 15, verse 56, and we learn something else about sin. We learn that sin is death's stinger.

So if the law is sin's power, well, sin is death's stinger. Or you could say, and this is probably the simplest way, just as the power of sin is the law, so also the power of death is sin.

[17 : 39] If sin draws its power from the law, well, death draws its power from sin. So let's talk about now the relationship between sin and death.

Death must be faced because of sin. But before sin entered into the world, there was no death. Romans 5 teaches us this. But with sin came death.

And so now we must face death because of sin. And what's more, without Christ, emphasis on without Christ, we would fear death because of sin.

Death is a terrifying reality for the lost. The thought of standing before Almighty God with my sin still clinging to me, with my record of debt still very much unpaid, that would make death to have a great sting.

But in Christ, there is a very real sense in which that sting has been removed. We have now no fear of death.

[18 : 44] Yes, we still face it. Yes, there is pain, and there is sorrow in that, even for the believer in this fallen world. But we do not need to fear it as we once did apart from Christ.

That's a very important distinction for us. We face it, yes, but we do not fear it because Christ was stung by death for us.

Kids, have you ever been stung by a bee? It's not a very fun time. You feel a sharp pain. There's a little bit of panic. What just happened? I feel something on my toe. It hurts.

You look down. And it's throbbing from that sting. Now, kids, what happened to that bee after it stung you? Do we know our bug information?

Did I hear anything? It died. That bee died. And why did that bee die? Because you're looking down at your toe, and there's a stinger still stuck in your toe that got ripped off of its abdomen, and that bee cannot survive when its abdomen has been ripped apart from the stinger.

[19 : 54] No more sting attached to that bee. Well, Jesus, He was stung by death. And like a bee, death lost its stinger.

That stinger stayed in Him, and it was ripped from death. And so, for the Christian, there's no more need for fear of death. It's gone for us.

Why? Because our sin is taken care of. The payment has been made. My sin, oh, the bliss of that glorious thought, my sin not in part, but the whole has been nailed to the cross, and I bear it no more.

Praise the Lord. Praise the Lord. Oh, my soul. Amen. If you are in Christ, then sin has been dealt, your sin has been dealt with in full.

Death has indeed lost its sting. It has lost that fear-inducing power over you. Death we do not fear, because death is now simply the avenue to glory.

[20 : 58] And John Bunyan represents this truth well in the Pilgrim's Progress. The river of death is that last final obstacle before entrance into the celestial city for Christian.

And Christian, as he approached that river, was scared. He struggled with the fear of death.

Nobody had hopeful with him. And what did hopeful say at that river bank?

He said, Be of good cheer, my brother, for I feel the bottom, and it is firm. So hopeful is saying, Don't be afraid of death. There's no uncertainty here.

There's no dark abyss that awaits. I feel the bottom of the river. It's firm, Christian. And he walked upon it into glory. Now, the Apostle Paul gives us this very proper perspective on death.

He said, To live is Christ, and to die is gain. For the lost, there is nothing to be gained in death, and only everything to lose.

[21 : 59] Sin that has not been paid for on the cross will be paid for in all of eternity. That is the great sting of death. That is what makes death such a fearful reality.

Do you fear death tonight? Unless the Lord returns, we will all face it. But do you fear it? If you are in Christ, to die is gain.

To die is to simply be away from the body and at home with the Lord. Lord, there's no fear in that. That's actually something to rejoice in. But if you are not in Christ tonight, the thought of death

should terrify you.

Because your sins have not been forgiven. You still owe a debt that you could never repay. But there is a Savior who died for sinners such as you, who died for sinners such as me.

Turn to him this very hour, and death will lose its sting for you. You know, right now it looks like death has won. It looks like death is victorious.

[23 : 04] Every headstone in every graveyard gives the impression that victory belongs to death. But don't be deceived by appearances.

Death was defeated upon the cross. The victory over death belongs to Jesus, the one who has been raised from the dead in glory already. And so when Christ returns, death will not just be brought to an end, but all that death has done will be undone for us who are in Christ.

Death will not just be stopped, but its effects will be reversed. It's not just that, well, the living at the time of Christ's return, they will happen to avoid death for themselves, but all Christians who have been in the clutches of death will be released, and dead, decaying bodies will be brought to life in great splendor and glory.

Make no mistake, when Christ returns, he will finish off death once and for all. Death will be put in checkmate, game over, swallowed up in victory.

Along with its great stinger of sin, death will be no more for all of eternity. So yes, we no longer fear death now, and we will no longer face death in that glorious day when it's swallowed up forevermore.

[24 : 28] That's the checkmate of death. Now let's consider the third and the final point together, the charge to us. Just verse 58. Therefore, 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.

Here is the very clear application of not just this passage, but really of the entire chapter.

Remember Paul here. He's been correcting false doctrine in the church.

He's been meticulously proving that there is indeed a resurrection that is to come, a bodily resurrection, and there's very practical ramifications. Don't for a second think that doctrine doesn't really matter.

Paul is showing us that it absolutely does. If there is no resurrection, how will we live? Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die.

And that is just how the world lives. Get out of life all that I can. Get all that I can have. For who? For myself. Some believers do work really hard.

[25 : 43] Unbelievers work really hard. But who do unbelievers work really hard for? Just themselves. If I work hard, it's just for me. Whatever effort I put into life, it's for my benefit.

It's for my gain. And really that motto, let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die, really that motto is just aiming to diminish the value of hard work.

That motto is all about comfort and pleasure and ease. It encourages laziness and apathy. That lifestyle, where can it then be traced back to?

To wrong doctrine about the resurrection. Bad theology leads to bad living. But right doctrine about the resurrection ought to produce an entirely different outlook on life.

An entirely opposite outlook in every way. One that isn't about getting for self, but the giving of self. It's a life that isn't self-consumed, but rather it's wrapped up in serving the Lord.

[26 : 49] Right doctrine about the resurrection doesn't promote laziness, but instead perseverance and endurance. You see how Paul makes that connection.

Therefore, he says, meaning in light of these glorious truths about resurrection life and the eternal state, in light of the fact that God will come to dwell with us and will enter into His kingdom with glorified bodies, will inherit the kingdom with glorified bodies, will see our God, the King. And we'll be filled with a joy that we truly can't fully comprehend now because of all of those glorious truths about the future.

Here is the charge for how we ought to live right now. Those glorious truths very directly impact us now. Christian, beloved brother, beloved sister, be steadfast, immovable.

Or as Psalm 125 says, those who trust in the Lord are like Mount Zion, which cannot be moved, but abides forever. As immovable as that mountain, you who trust in the Lord, who trust in what His Word says about the future, you will not be moved, and much like Mount Zion, you will abide forever.

[28 : 17] Be steadfast. Be immovable. Paul goes on to say, always abounding in the work of the Lord. Now this isn't the first time or the last time in Paul's letter that he'll talk about the work of the Lord.

Back in chapter 3, he described his own ministry saying very simply, for we are God's fellow workers. You are God's building, or God's field, God's building.

Then he goes on to describe his work, saying that he laid a foundation and someone else is building on it. And he's very clearly talking about his missionary efforts, his labors to plant that very church there in Corinth, and now others are building on the foundation that he laid.

And this is very much ministry language. Paul continues to use this language to describe his own personal ministry, even right here in chapter 15. He says, But by the grace of God, I am what I am, and His grace toward me was not in vain.

On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me. All of this work that Paul describes, all of this ministry that he has done to see the gospel spread, to see sinners saved by God's grace and church is planted.

[29 : 42] And Paul's saying, I'm not stopping anytime soon in this work. He says as much in chapter 16. We'll see this soon enough. He's writing from Ephesus. And he says, I'm going to stay here for a while longer.

Well, why is that? Because there is a wide door for effective work that has opened to him. I mean, we could say, wow, Paul was a man who was always abounding in the work of the Lord.

But then we come to this charge and Paul is saying, it's not just for me to do. This work isn't just for the apostles and the prophets in the first century church.

This work isn't just for the missionaries sent out or the pastors shepherding the flock. This work is for you, dear Christian. Not every Corinthian was in the ministry as Paul was.

Not all of us are either. But here is the charge. Be steadfast. Immovable. Always abounding in the work of the Lord. So this work is for every Christian and every sphere of life that God has placed us in.

[30 : 49] Remember all the way back to chapter 7. I know that's a challenge. All the way back to chapter 7. What did Paul say there? Only let each person lead the life that the Lord has assigned to him and which God has called him.

So not all our pastors, not all our missionaries, not all our evangelists or church planters, but all of us with the life that God has assigned to us are to always abound in the work of the Lord.

Our life should be a life of service to God. A life of service to our King whose kingdom we will one day inherit. So then the question isn't, has God given me work to do?

The question is, what is that work that God has given to you? How are you living faithfully in service to your King? In your home? In your church?

In your place of employment? At the ballpark? On the soccer field? In the gym? In your neighborhood? Are you living a life of service to your King?

[31 : 57] What does Paul tell us in 2 Corinthians that we've been entrusted with? The message of reconciliation. So who are you bringing that message to? Who are you encouraging with that message?

Who are you investing yourself in? Among both unbelievers and believers, there is work to be done. And here's the wonderful encouragement to us. Here's the reminder that we need to persevere in the work.

It is not in vain. That's what Paul says there at the end of the charge. Knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain. Of course it's not in vain.

Paul has pounded that home to us in all that he said in chapter 15. Look at the eternal consequences of your work. So Sunday school teachers, Wednesday night teachers, those verses that you're memorizing with your students, that work is not in vain.

Fathers and mothers, those devotions you're doing with your kids, not in vain. The co-worker that you've been sharing Christ with, not in vain. The friend that you've been doing the Bible study with, the neighbor that you've been seeking to encourage with verses, all of those endeavors are not in vain because there is a life to come.

[33 : 18] And yes, it's true, we of course can't ensure the salvation of another, but we can be faithful in what God has called us to do. To some, we're a fragrance from life to life.

To others, a fragrance from death to death. But what work has God called us to? Not that we would smell good to all, but that we'd be faithful in spreading the knowledge of God everywhere.

There is work to be done in the lives of others with eternity in mind. And there is great reward in that. Paul, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that his labor wasn't in vain, was looking to the reward.

And what was the reward? He says multiple times, it's the very people that he poured into. As he called the Philippians, his crown and joy.

Or perhaps even more pointedly, he wrote in 1 Thessalonians 2, For what is our hope or joy or crown of boasting before our Lord Jesus at His coming? Is it not you?

[34 : 29] For you are our glory and joy. So do you see how the sure hope of eternity, it colored the lenses through which Paul saw all of life.

He could always abound in the work because he knew it wasn't in vain. There's an eternity to be enjoyed in the presence of the Lord and in His presence we will see the fruit of our labors.

Brothers and sisters with whom we'll worship the Lord forever. So is the therefore of 1 Corinthians 15, 8, is it guiding your life?

Is the therefore directing how you live? You know, Satan would love to get our eyes off of heavenly things, to see us get our eyes fixed on earthly things, passing pleasures.

Instead of being immovable, he would love to get you and I moving, to be drifting, to be turning aside, to seek after those temporary fleeting wisps of pleasure.

[35 : 36] You could say eating and drinking, making merry instead of getting to work. Now let's not just think about the work of the Lord as it relates to others, but what about ourselves?

This work is this all-encompassing term for living out the Christian life. So yes, ministering to others, but also growing in grace ourselves. What does God tell us to do in Philippians 2?

Work out your salvation with fear and trembling. So your own pursuit of holiness, that's not in vain. Not if there's a resurrection.

Of course, if there is no resurrection, then it does beg the question, why work so hard to put off the old self and to put on the new? Why put on Christ every day?

Why seek the things that are above? If there is no resurrection, what good does your sanctification do? But indeed, there is a resurrection. So strive for holiness now because without holiness, no one will see the Lord.

[36 : 42] Or as Paul says in 1 Timothy 4.8, for while bodily training is of some value, godliness is of value in every way as it holds promise for what?

For this life and for the life to come. Your labors in your own life, your labors in the lives of others, they are not in vain. So press on, brothers and sisters, be steadfast, immovable, for those who trust in the Lord are like Mount Zion, which cannot be moved, but abides forever.

Let's pray together. Father, we need you. We are reminded every time that we are in your word of how we need your spirit to be at work in our hearts, to be our help.

we pray, Father, that you would help us, that we would not be complacent and lazy, but that we would be ever abounding in the work that you've given to us.

So help us to be purposeful with our time, to redeem the time, and to live lives that are pleasing to you, investing in others, seeking to grow in grace, being a blessing to one another, encouraging each other, sharpening each other, walking in this life together towards the new heavens and new earth, all of eternity spent with you.

[38 : 03] Thank you for the glorious truths that you've laid out for us in 1 Corinthians 15, reminding us of the hope that we have, the sure hope of eternal life with you, with resurrection bodies.

Now help us that we would always abound in the work of the Lord in this life as we look to the next. And we pray all this in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen.