

1 Corinthians 15:57-58

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[0 : 00] Let's turn again to 1 Corinthians 15 and the words we find there in verse 57.

1 Corinthians chapter 15 and verse 57. But thanks be to God, he gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

The Apostle Paul had known many discouragements, not least from his own fellow Christians.

And perhaps above all from such a church as this, the church at Corinth. He himself had planted that church. He had seen the church grow.

He had seen the many gifts that God had conferred upon it. And he saw it sometimes a great deal to admire. But he also saw many problems develop quickly within this young Christian community.

[1 : 14] There was disunity. There was confusion in their public meetings. There was an abuse of gifts. There was disorder at the Lord's Supper.

There was even sometimes blatant demorality. And Paul felt all these very keenly. This was, in many ways, his own spiritual child.

And yet, it was proving so disappointing and so wavered. But in many ways, there was one overarching problem which indeed dwarfed all the others.

And that was this great error. And that was this great error referred to in this chapter. Their denial of the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

It wasn't a simple denial. They said, yes, he has risen. But not physically. It was simply some spiritual thing.

[2 : 17] And likewise, they too would rise one day. Or had risen already, in fact. But only again in some spiritual sense. Not in some physical sense.

And so it seemed to Paul that the whole faith was in jeopardy. The dead would not rise. Christ had not risen.

His preaching was in vain. Their faith was in vain. And they had hope only for this life. And no hope for the life or for a life to come.

And that's why Paul devotes to this great subject. The whole of this mighty chapter. To prove that Christ has risen.

And that as a consequence, we too will one day rise. And his argument culminates in this great affirmation. God has given us victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

[3 : 18] Christ, thanks be to God. And I want for a moment tonight to negotiate what Paul is saying to us here.

This word that God is giving to us. This word of our victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Sometimes we seem so gloomy and so despondent.

And so overcome by circumstances. And then there is this great alternative mission that Paul gives us. This great hope. This assurance of victory through our Lord Jesus.

Let's reflect for a moment, first of all, on the forms of this victory. Paul has fought and is fighting so many battles.

And in all these battles he is saying, God is giving us a victory. At one level, Paul was fighting circumstances.

[4 : 19] Sometimes these were very hard. In the Romans 8, it reminds us of his own situation. Famine, nakedness, and peril, and sword.

But he was on to say that in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. And sometimes our own circumstances do seem to so threaten our faith.

It's hard to believe in God's love and God's purpose for our own lives. In the midst of sometimes so much adversity. And I'm not alone in verse.

And sometimes it is the suffering of others that seems so overwhelming. But Paul is saying to us, no, in all these things, in all these situations, all these circumstances, we are not only conquerors, but we are more than conquerors.

We are hyper-conquerors in the one who loved us. Far from those situations, eclipsing your faith and extinguishing your hope, we emerge from them, Paul says, with a stronger faith and a clearer hope.

[5 : 38] We know, he says to those same Romans, that in all things God works together for the good of those who love him. We have come to know it.

We have learned this lesson in all those adverse circumstances. And so here, as he copes with his own situations, his own different situations, he says that through grace, he is more than conqueror.

And tonight, wherever we stand, perhaps feeling so defeated, and not knowing what to do, how often one hears that, I just don't know what to do.

But in all these things, God gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Sometimes, you feel that you'll never smile again, but God gives us the victory, hyper-conquerors through our Lord Jesus Christ.

But then too, Paul was fighting the battle against sin and himself against indwelling sin. Yet he was, he was a new man, a new creature in Christ.

[7 : 01] He was renewed by the grace of God. Yet he was, and God had raised him up with Christ. God had filled his life with new energy.

And yet still, for this new creature, for this new person, for this new self, this dreadful problem of the sin that remained within him, this law and his members, this law that meant that when he will to do good, even he says, was present with him.

He so wanted to be quit of it. He so wanted to live every moment for the glory of God. But always there was this other law.

There was, he said, the law of my mind, the law of my mind that wants to fulfill the law of Christ. And there is the law in my members, which is not the law of my mind, but it's a law in my members, when I would do good evil as present with me.

And Paul knew his own moments of defeat. This great battle between the flesh and the spirit. And sometimes Paul probably felt he was losing that battle because the flesh, with its unbelief and its world-centeredness and time-centeredness, seemed to be again in the upper hand.

[8 : 31] But Paul knew a day would come when he would stand before God without spot or blemish, all love of sin gone, all propensity to sin vanquished.

He would win this battle. Of course the battle mattered to him. Part of my problem as I come to preach in the churches today is the discomfiting one feels as one realizes that one's message is not a modern message any more than Paul's was.

Paul didn't preach to the first century men and women. That's not what they were. They weren't typical of their own age.

They were the saints of God in Corinth, the Lord who called on the name of the Lord. If you had preached to typical first century men and women, you wouldn't have touched their problems because they had very special problems as Christians.

Tonight, you're my contemporaries, but I'll not preach to contemporary problems, but the problems of believers, a very odd minority in this modern world, people who are wrestling with indwelling sin.

[10 : 13] I'm not asking, are you contemporary or are you modern? But do you have this problem? Does this problem matter? It's not your taste in music.

It's not your taste in sport or art or poetry, but this problem indwelling sin, Christian problem.

Every book of the New Testament is addressed to Christians. Very odd people in their own age, in our age, in every age, but he was one great area of Paul's concern, this battle with sin, your battle with sin.

And Paul is saying, yes, one day you'll win the victory. You'll be more than conqueror over this as well. That's what the promise that Paul holds out.

Then above all, this other great problem. Yes, we face the problem of our own circumstance, the problem of our own indwelling sin. But this great last battle, this great last enemy, death itself, one day they knew that death would get them.

[11 : 31] And one day they would lie dumb, unimpotent, and unresponsive in the grave. And that grave would hold them.

It would keep its prey. That's what they thought. Ah, yes, they said Christ rose, but Christ was only spiritually. And we rose too, but only spiritually.

In some conversion experience, then we came alive spiritually. But one day death will get us, and death will hold us.

That's what they said. But Paul says, no, please no. They said the dead don't rise.

Paul said the dead do rise. Christ rose. Christ rose. Christ rose physically.

[12 : 34] Christ rose bodily. And Christ so rose as to be seen. That was Paul's great message, Paul's answer to all this dreadful error but had called this young church, this young apostolic church, so dreadfully wrong on this great fundamental doctrine of resurrection of our Lord and Savior.

Christ rose, Paul says. And Peter and James and John saw him. And Mary Magdalene saw him. And those in the road to Emmaus, they saw him.

And one day 500 brothers and sisters saw him. And once 500 saw him. And one day I saw him.

And I heard him, and I conversed with him on that Damascus road. And I said, Who are you, Lord? And he said, I'm Jesus. And you were persecuting.

I saw him. And Paul's whole life was staked upon that experience. And he says, Faith found its origin in that one great moment when he saw the risen Lord.

[13 : 48] And he said, Yes, they buried him. And he was dead, dead. He was very dead. And they sealed the tomb. And they thought, It will never trouble him again.

They would never see him again. But he rose from the dead. He conquered death. He secured this great victory over death and over the grave. And he rose, Paul says, not simply for himself, but he rose as the first fruits of a great harvest.

And all his people will rise with him. Not in some spiritual sense, but in this great physical sense. And one day, God will give us glorious new bodies.

And Paul defines those bodies for us in this chapter. This body is sown, he says, it's sown. That's perishable. It's raised imperishable.

It's sown. It's buried in weakness. It's raised in power. It's raised, it's sown. In dishonor, it's raised in glory.

[15 : 04] It's sown an earthly, fleshly body, but one day will be raised a spiritual body. And into that body, poor God will put all his own creative energy.

He gives us a body or gives it a body as it pleases him. We ought to ponder that. God creating, planning, designing your resurrection body as it pleases him.

And all his imagination, all his knowledge, all his wisdom, all his power, all his craftsmanship, all those marvelous hands that God has will go into fashioning that body for you and for me.

It will be God's masterpiece modeled on the body of a risen Savior. God wants you to look as glorious as he can make you.

And so God will work at it. God give you a body as it pleases him. And that is where Paul wants us to stand. God gives us the victory over circumstances, over indwelling sin, over death and the grave.

[16 : 37] One day God will give us the victory. And as we face death for ourselves, we face bereavement for ourselves and for others.

There is our hope, there is sure and certain hope of the resurrection. We are called upon to be practical Christians.

There is nothing so practical as a good theory. And this here is greatest of all theories. this fact, this doctrine of the resurrection.

It's our hope in death. It's our hope in bereavement. The dead do rise. Christ rose. And we who are in Christ will one day rise with them.

God gives us a victory. And then Paul gives us this great taunt. You find it there in verse 55. Where or death is your victory?

[17 : 43] Where or death is your sting? He's almost mocking it. Death had been so proud the grave would hold him. The grave would hold Jesus of Nazareth.

It would hold him. Though Paul says it didn't hold him. And it won't hold you. Do we believe that? Does that fact sustain us?

In our own daily lives. Paul is here mocking death. Dare you mock death? Where or death is your sting? Where or grave?

Where or death is your victory? Twice as were death. Oh death, oh death. And Paul is reminding us of course that what gives death its right is sin.

And what gives sin its strength is the law. death can hold them because they're sinners. Death can hold you and me because we're sinners. It has in Paul's background it has a legal right.

[18 : 52] It has a warrant. Death comes with a warrant. Death comes with a warrant, a legal warrant. This man is a sinner. And he must come with me because he's a sinner.

I have a warrant for his arrest. And I must take him and I must hold him and hold him and hold him. I have a warrant to that effect. But my Lord and Savior, he came, he came with an interdict.

And he said to death, I have an interdict, I have another warrant. A warrant that says this man is not a sinner. this man had all his debts remitted, all his sins forgiven.

He said to a sinner, I bore a sin. I carried a sin. And my Lord flourishes the interdict, the law. Ah, death, sorry, but you no longer have a legal right to hold him.

You are interdicted. You must let him go. You must let him free. I have the warrant here, for his liberation and for his freedom.

[20 : 07] And my Lord says imperiously, let him go. And death will let him go. The interdict demands that we be let go.

Where, oh, death is your victory? Where, oh, grave is your sin? He's not a sinner. The law says you can't hold him.

You're interdicted. You must let him go. That's where Paul stands. And then Paul goes on to give us a great exhortation in verse 58.

Therefore, my dear brothers and sisters, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Let's take it word by word here because every word is so important.

my dear brothers and sisters, prove yourselves a moveable stand firm. And in many ways, it's a purely doctrinal point.

[21 : 13] They were giving up on this fundamental doctrine. There had been those great teachers who had come, great eloquent, great charismatic figures who delivered it with Paul in the shade.

they were great communicators and they had come with this novel doctrine and these converts of the apostles, they had been enticed and seduced and they had gone after them.

So Paul is saying, prove yourselves steadfast and stand firm and let nothing move you. Please prove yourselves in this respect.

Paul had come both two great doctrines. Christ died for our sins and Christ rose again. And he wants them to be steadfast in those two areas too.

Absolutely fundamental fundamentals. Stand firm there. And if we move from that foundation which again is a doctrinal foundation, it's a theory in so many ways.

[22 : 20] And yet you're to stand firm there. Stand prove yourselves firm on this great doctrine. Stand firm on the deity of Christ. Stand firm on the atoning death of Christ.

Stand firm on the resurrection of Christ. Stand firm on these things. And if you hold these things steadfastly and firmly then everything else will hold.

So prove yourselves steadfast, Paul says. And then he says, always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord.

Always abounding, said the older version, always abounding in the work of the Lord. And again here, every word counting.

Abound in the work. These Corinthians, they love disputations. Abound, he says, not in disputations, but abound in work.

[23 : 24] And it is the work of the Lord. And we need to be careful how we ourselves handle that. Because that work is so diverse and wide ranging.

And every one of us has their own role to play. Each one has their own work. Those gifts God has given you. Are you abounding in deploying those gifts?

Are we playing our own part in witness to Jesus Christ? Playing our own part in the life of this congregation?

Different roles. Some very public, some very private. but each one with the work, the calling, God has given us to do.

And Paul is saying to us, are we always doing it, always doing it fully? Giving your minds to it, whatever, however humble the task may be, our own role, our own work.

[24 : 36] Yes, some are called upon to be great missionaries, some evangelists, some in very prominent public roles, others in more humble ones.

Remember what Paul said to the church in Thessalonica, he says, warn those who are unruly, strengthen the weak, comfort the feeble minded.

We are all of us our brothers keepers, abounding in the work of the Lord. That's what Paul is saying to us.

I'll go back again to that great, in some ways, terrible picture, the sheep and the goats in Matthew 25. The work of the Lord there, feed the hungry, clothe the naked, visit those in prison.

It's not just about being what we call witnesses, witnesses, always pouncing on the chance to proselytize or to evangelize, important though this may be.

[25 : 51] But the kind of work the Lord did as he went about doing good, he says, that's what you do, you abound in the work of the Lord, working for the Lord, working for the Lord's people, working the way the Lord himself worked, work like he worked.

And life may give us changing roles, it may retire us from some, it may set us aside, but still always abound in what God himself has called us to or calls us to at this present moment.

and so he says, Christ has conquered death, I can mock death, I can mock the grave. And so always abound in the work of the Lord because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain.

Nor is the word labor. Oh, you say, I find it hard, I don't have a gift for this. If I had, it wouldn't be a labor.

But that's how Paul experienced it. It was indeed toil, it was labor, labor in the Lord. Yes, there are some, for him it all seems so easy, whatever the task is.

[27 : 19] They have such charisma, they have such facility, whatever they do. But please take on board this great word here, this word labor. You'll toil, your sweat, your blood, your toil, your tears.

These are not in vain in the Lord. And I think that in many ways, it registers a very, very tender spot in Paul's psyche, in Paul's psychology.

Had it been in vain. Had he preached the wrong message? Had he falsified the character of God?

Had he given false hope to the dying and to the bereaved? Had he misled men and women to put their faith in a risen, crucified Messiah?

Had he been in vain his own sacrifice? He'd given up everything for the gospel, absolutely everything. All his prospects, all his hope, all his old friendships, his career, everything had been surrendered.

[28 : 38] On the altar of Christian service, now to be thine, yea thine alone, O Lamb of God, I come. Had that been in vain? He had persuaded others to make the same sacrifice, to take up their cross and follow Christ.

He had planted those churches, his church in Corinth, this church at Corinth. This church in Corinth was out of vanity, was it of futility, was his whole works just some idle, idle pastime?

yes, Christ had not risen. Christ had not risen, then it was all, it was all vain, all vain, all utterly vain, all futile, all false, and all fruitless, but Christ has risen.

Paul wants to, wants to proclaim, wants to say it out loud, I was not wrong to proclaim that Christ has risen.

I was not wrong to give hope to the dying and comfort to the bereft. I was not wrong to proclaim that the unseen is more important than the seen, or to proclaim that the eternal temporal, is more important than the temporal, or that the after, that great and sometimes terrifying, terrifying after, that after, is more important than the now.

[30 : 27] true. I was not wrong to proclaim that. I was not wrong to proclaim that one day we shall all stand, we shall all stand before the judgment seat of the Christ who rose.

us. I preached that. I was in wrong that was in vain, that is great and glorious truth. Christ has risen, and we shall one day stand and give our account before him.

I was in wrong to us men and women to put their faith in him, to pin their hopes on him, and ask them to give up all and to follow him.

this Lord gave himself, loved me, and gave himself for me. Yes, I asked him, I am responsible for the fact that this one here gave up her career, and this one here gave up his fortune, and so on, yes.

But that was in vain, because my Lord is risen, and my Lord is our Redeemer. God will hear him say to me, I shall hear him say to me, well done, good and faithful servant.

[31 : 57] I will hear it not from some abstract voice, from some impersonal source, others. But I shall see him as his, and hear him say to me, well done.

So it wasn't vain. And tonight, if it's not vain, if Christ has risen, then I can call for deadly seriousness, that you serve God seriously, and I must also say that you enjoy him seriously.

Because that's hugely important, that you enjoy him. Because God wants you to enjoy him, to love his company, to love his world, to love his people, to love the fact that he loves you.

That's the joy. Be serious in that joy. Just one final thing. The labor is not in vain, because it's fruitful.

It bears fruit for time and for eternity. Paul had a strange calling, an intolerant preacher.

[33 : 27] In his own judgment, Paul didn't do it very well. Others did it far better. He had no presence. His speech was contemptible.

He wasn't a great orator, as many of those false teachers were. Maybe his technique wasn't of the best.

Maybe he broke the rules. But Paul had one great thing and this church has it too. And you hovered each one of you.

He had a message. That's what he had. In a way, it didn't seem to matter much to Paul how you preached it.

He did it in weakness and fear and much trembling. Wasn't good at it. He wasn't a great messenger, but it was a great message.

[34 : 35] Christ died for our sins. Christ rose again. in some ways it doesn't matter how you tell it. It's what you tell.

It's a story itself. And I want to ask you tonight, as you know, one is conscious of one's about to go off stage, have we confidence in that message?

In the message. In the message itself. In the word. In the gospel. In the good news.

However, it's got a cross by whom servant proclaimed. If this word, if this messenger is content, to repeat God's gospel, to tell the old, old story, that word, that message, is the power of God unto salvation.

Please believe it will change your lives. Believe it will change other lives. Let's verify the ways of putting it where it has to go in our own modern world.

[36 : 04] world. But there is no contemporary gospel. There is no modern gospel. We are bound by tradition, by apostolic tradition.

I deliver to you what I also received. God. God, I got it from Jesus. I got it from Paul.

And in some small way, you get it from me. And you deliver it. And you believe it is indeed the saving power of God.

May this congregation increasingly know the power of that message. And if sometimes that power seems to be withheld, I beg you be patient.

because God's time will come and this message will tell. After all, it's God's story about his own son.

[37 : 31] Let's join in prayer. Amen. Let's join in prayer. Amen. Let's join in prayer.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.