

Always Give Yourselves Fully to the Work of the Lord  
1 Corinthians 15:50-58

It must have been difficult to follow Christ in the city of Corinth. Christianity was a new faith, little known and generally, radically counter-cultural. In fact, the Way of Jesus opposed much that was common in the life and culture of these Christians. The Roman and Greek religious cults of the day were full of self. Worship of the Graeco-Roman pantheon was often characterized by extreme self-denial or extreme self-indulgence as attempts to win the favor of the gods. Sacrifices and rituals for self-protection against others, the forces of nature, the ravages of time and the arbitrary winds of fate and chance abounded. Extreme self-serving conduct to exalt oneself over others and often at the expense of others in order to make your way in the world. The culture virtually forced its people into selfishness and pride for survival.

It must have been difficult to follow Christ in the city of Corinth given the political climate where the emperor thought he was God and soldiers roamed the street an authority unto themselves in the everyday lives of the subjected. It must have been difficult to follow Jesus in the city of Corinth where economic viability was often a matter of intrigue and innuendo, where integrity floundered and nice guys often finished last. Where lawsuits were not about justice but social status and where marriage was often a sales deal and a means of promotion rather than a covenant of honor and love.

It must have difficult to follow Christ in the church of Corinth. The church was newly born from the working of the Holy Spirit through the gospel preached by Paul and Apollos and others who faithfully testified to the saving grace of God in Jesus Christ, God's Son and our Savior. The applications of the gospel, the ethical and spiritual transformation of the heart and mind and will, crucifying the flesh and bringing the self into conformity with the sovereign will of God through submission to the Word and the Spirit, how this must have challenged all the day to day assumptions about life and worship and relationships with which each Corinthian Christian had grown up and learned to maneuver from their earliest days of childhood.

It must have been difficult to follow Christ in the church of Corinth where what you knew of Jesus through the gospel was more important than who you knew was preaching the gospel. It must have been difficult to follow Christ in the church of Corinth where the division and factions that drove Corinthian society sabotaged the unity expected of the fully integrated Body of Christ. It must have been difficult to follow Christ in the church of Corinth where serving was leading and leaders served rather than requiring service.

It must have been difficult to follow Christ in the church of Corinth where tolerance of sin was considered as wicked as the sin itself, where proud cultural norms for self-advancement were rewritten in humility, where marriage was exalted and where covenantal honor was praised and human fickleness frowned upon. It must have been difficult to follow Christ in the church of Corinth where concern for others outranked concern for self, even in the exercise of personal freedoms. It must have been difficult to follow Christ in the church of Corinth where idols, once treasured, were now rejected as spiritual trash, where social constraints either served Christ in His glory or were discarded.

It must have been difficult to follow Christ in the church of Corinth where love, not self, was the primary motive for every thought and action of life, where the love embodied in Christ was the sole ambition of the Body of Christ. It must have been difficult to follow Christ in the city and in the church of Corinth. **And yet there must have been something that made the effort utterly worthwhile because just as we follow Jesus in the difficulties inherent in our time and culture, they followed him with their whole hearts. There must have been something.**

That something, that reward, that benefit that made the transition from Corinthian sinner to Corinthian saint not only appealing but possible was **the hope of a personal resurrection guaranteed through the life, death, and personal, bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ.**

In his life, Jesus Christ fulfilled every expectation the sovereign Creator God has for His human creation. Every act of faith, every expression of love, every surrender of will and pursuit of obedience, every opportunity to honor God through total reliance on God in complete harmony with God, every jot and tittle of the intent of the divine Law, Jesus faithfully, gladly, purposefully, and intentionally fulfilled, in love, for the glory of God. Luke tells us in the opening pages of his gospel that even as a child, ***“Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature and in favor with God and man” (Luke 2:52, ESV)***. The gospel writers also recount God’s own public evaluation of Jesus, ***“This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.”*** Jesus lived in unbroken communion and fellowship with God, sinless, guiltless, perfectly fulfilling the relational purpose for which God created human being in the first place.

In his voluntary, undeserved death on the cross, Jesus answered every single requirement of justice, righteousness, holiness, mercy, and compassion inherent in the infinite and eternal character of Almighty God who alone is worthy of praise! Jesus accepted the wages of sin, death, for the labor of sin he never committed. Infinitely innocent of guilt, he delivered himself to death on behalf of the infinitely guilty, each of us, all of us. He gave himself up for us as a pleasing sacrifice. He bled. He hurt. He died. For the glory of God and the good of man. He became sin for us. Peter reminds us that, ***“He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness” 1 Peter 2:24 (ESV)***. Paul declares that ***“for our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God” 2 Corinthians 5:21 (ESV)***. God, in the death of Christ on the cross has cancelled ***“the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross” (Colossians 2:14, ESV)***.

In his life, Jesus Christ fulfilled every expectation the sovereign Creator God has for His human creation. In his voluntary, undeserved death on the cross, Jesus answered every single requirement of justice, righteousness, holiness, mercy, and compassion inherent in the infinite and eternal character of Almighty God.

In his resurrection from the dead, Christ gained eternal hope for every man, woman, and child who would put their faith and trust in him! When God raised Jesus from the dead, He did more than simply reward Jesus for his faithfulness to God’s plan to fill the earth with the knowledge of His glory. As the God-appointed representative of the entire human race, He restored the opportunity for sinful man to enter once again into eternal life and fellowship with God through

faith in Him. In his resurrection from the dead, Jesus gave us a living motivation for the present and a powerful promise of hope for the future.

As Paul brings this hope for life and eternal life to bear on the everyday lives of Corinthian Christians, the Spirit brings this same hope to bear in our lives, for truly, sometimes, it must be difficult to follow Jesus in the city and in the church in Grand Marais. The Spirit through Paul offers **three facts** for our encouragement. **(1 Corinthians 15:50-58)**

First, he bids us take a good look at our lives and rejoice, for no matter what we see, “we shall all be changed.” **(1 Corinthians 15:51.)** No matter the weakness, no matter the conditions of life and or the struggles of the heart, if we remain faithful in Christ, God will accomplish in this life the necessary transformation required for resurrection and eternal glory in the Lord. What Paul writes here to the Corinthians he states slightly different to the Philippian Christians when he writes, **“And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ” (Phi. 1:6, ESV).**

Jesus said to Nicodemus, **“You must be born again.”** Paul wrote to the Romans, **“We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life” (Romans 6:4, ESV).** These verses and many more like them point us to the reality that every human must undergo a God-ordained, God-accomplished transformation in order to inherit eternal life in the kingdom of God. In Paul’s 2<sup>nd</sup> letter to the Corinthians he affirms, **“If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold the new has come” (2 Cor. 5:17, ESV).** **Listen, God is at work in you, through the Spirit and the word, to transform every true believer, through the events and seasons of life, into the likeness of Jesus thus preparing us to live eternally in the presence of God in all His glory.** And whether that work must be completed at death, or whether we are alive when Jesus comes, God will complete His work. We will all be changed.

Since God is at work in us, and since, when the day of Christ comes we will all be changed, whether alive or dead at the time, two amazing opportunities are set before us. One, that we can live our lives fully relying on the will and grace of God without fear of death. If the faithful dead are changed and the faithful living are changed by the grace of God for their eternal dwelling, then death becomes a non-issue.

Second, since flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God and since we will all be changed, we can live our lives wholeheartedly for the glory of God in Christ without fear of deficiency. We can live without the anxiety that somehow, in the end, our faith and faithfulness won’t be good enough. The last act of God for His people in this present world will be the final transformation by His will that will make all of us, despite all our frailty in this world, good enough for life in the next. Those who live by faith in Christ Jesus, giving Him their all to make God all in all will be changed, not by the quality of their work or the genuineness of their intent, but by the sovereign grace of God!

**1 Corinthians 15:51-54 (ESV) <sup>51</sup> Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we**

*shall all be changed,*<sup>52</sup> *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.*<sup>53</sup> *For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality.*<sup>54</sup> *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.”*

Second, the transformation that fits the individual for the kingdom of God comes only through faith in Jesus Christ. **(1 Corinthians 15:55-57)** Every human is subject to death on account of sin. Only through the one who conquered death by his death and resurrection can we be removed from subjection to slavery to sin and fear of death. Two obstacles stand between us and eternal life: the sting of sin and the power of sin. The sting of sin is death and the power of sin is the law. The law is God’s perfect will for our lives, a law Jesus summarizes as **“Love the Lord your God with all your heart, mind, soul, and strength, and your neighbor as yourself.”**

No one lives that law perfectly all the days of their lives. To violate that law of love even once, in one instance, is to violate the law in its totality. That makes us all lawbreakers, and lawbreakers are guilty, subject to judgment. **“But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Cor. 15:57, ESV).** We get victory over sin and death not just once at conversion, not just on the day we initially repent and trust in Christ for salvation. We get the victory over sin and death every moment of every day as we surrender in trust to Christ and follow Him with our whole heart, learning of him, trusting the Spirit who leads us to Him, and living in faith and obedience, certain that every promise God ever made to us is “yes” and “amen” in Christ.

Finally, providentially on this Labor Day weekend, the Spirit encourages us, on account of the guaranteed transforming work of God through the Holy Spirit and the effectual work of Christ on the cross, as witnessed by his resurrection, don’t give up. It may be difficult to follow Christ in the city and church in which you live because of a rapidly secularizing culture or imperfect Christians still being trained by the grace of God, but don’t give up. Paul writes, **“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 Cor. 15:58. ESV).**

The work of the Lord is the work Jesus did while on earth that pleased God. It is the whole of His life. So the first work we do, in which we endure, is the work of knowing Jesus. Whatever you have to do to know Jesus personally, in your mind, heart, and experience, continue in that pursuit, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain. The second work we do is the work of modeling the life of Jesus in the world. That means doing what Jesus did for the reasons and in the power that Jesus did it. We must be filled daily with the Holy Spirit and live in reliance on Him knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain. Jesus said, **“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor . . . Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing” (Luke 4:18-21 (ESV)).** The proclamation of the gospel as well as compassion and care for the broken people of this world were the hallmarks of Jesus’ work. This

is the work he did for the glory of God. This too is the work we will do for the glory of God as we follow Jesus in the world and do his work without giving up. You see in these words the two commandments Jesus summarized for us: Love the Lord your God with all your heart, mind, soul, and strength, and you neighbor as yourself. Jesus demonstrated that the life of faith is both personal and public, spiritual and ethical, an internal condition and external action. To do the work of Jesus is to actively love God AND to actively love one's neighbor.

Yes, sometimes it will be difficult personally, culturally, politically, to follow Jesus all along the way He will lead us, doing the work in our day that he did in his, but **don't give up**. Know this, that because we are being and will be transformed by the sovereign power of God who loves us, and because Jesus death actually frees from slavery to sin and the fear of death, we may remain steadfast, immoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord because we know in the Lord that our labor is not in vain.

Let's pray.