

Putting off the old man

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[0 : 00] A portion of God's word we have read. 1 Corinthians, and the 15th chapter, and verse 58, the last verse in the chapter. For for my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labor is not in vain in the Lord.

In this chapter, the apostle deals exhaustively with a doctrine that is absolutely basic to a Christian faith, the doctrine of the resurrection of the body.

He recognizes quite properly that if once the resurrection of the body is called in question and excluded from Christian belief, that the whole structure of the Christian system will crumble and will fall.

The resurrection cannot simply be taken in isolation and dealt with in isolation. It must be conjoined with all the other pillars of the Christian faith and considered in its relation to them.

And he commences his argument by asserting the bodily resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ and referring to the number of credible witnesses who had seen him after he had risen.

[1 : 37] Peter and the rest of the apostles, they were those who were eyewitnesses of his resurrection. He then turns his attention to those who denied the doctrine among the Corinthian believers.

How say some of you that there is no resurrection of the dead? Verse 12. It may well be that these Corinthians might have been influenced by the heathen thought of the Greek philosophers who didn't believe, of course, in the resurrection of the body, although they believed in the immortality of the soul.

So it may well be that these believers at Corinth were in some way influenced by this heathen thinking. Then he proceeds to take up his argument in detail and he shows them how a denial of the resurrection goes to the very root and undermines the whole scheme of Christian belief and Christian hope.

Verse 16. For if the dead rise not, then is Christ not raised. And if Christ be not raised, your faith is vain. You are getting your sins. Then they also which have fallen asleep in Christ have perished.

If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are, it is, of all men most miserable. Then the latter part of the chapter is taken up with asserting the reality of the resurrection of men and the effect which it will produce.

[3 : 12] He makes particular mention of the great and glorious change which it will bring to pass on the bodies of believers. It is sown in faith in corruption. At verse 42, it is raised in incorruption.

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.

And then at verse 55, he bursts into this great song of victory. O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law.

But thanks be unto God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. And he ends the chapter by exhorting the people of God to stand fast in the day of testing.

Well, for my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as you know that your labor is not in vain in the Lord.

[4 : 16] And so we come to the steadfastness to which we are called in the light of the denials of infidels, especially and particularly with reference to the resurrection.

For the problem, remember, is with us today just as surely as it was in the past, just in perhaps an even more intensified form than it was in previous ages.

And steadfast adherence is imperative by God's people. Because, for one thing, the denial of the resurrection, it overthrows the very authority of the Lord Jesus Christ himself.

An authority which he himself claimed without any ambiguity, without any uncertainty, whatever. You remember how he speaks in John chapter 10 with reference to his own life.

No man, he says, take it from me. I have authority to lay down. I have authority to take it again. And when he rose from the empty tomb is an evidence, a proof that he had this authority and that he executed this authority in his victory over the grave.

[5 : 42] In Romans chapter 1, the apostle there refers to the resurrection of our Lord as a declaration of his deity.

Where he says at verse 3, Jesus Christ, our Lord, which was made of the seed of David according to the flesh and declared to be the Son of God with power according to the Spirit of holiness by the resurrection from the dead.

And of course, this is an intimate bearing on his whole authority as in every other direction for the authority which he claimed if it failed to materialize in reference to the resurrection.

Is there any ground for believing that it has not likewise failed in every other sense? If the resurrection was not a declaration of his deity and so of his authority, then what validity have we for accepting those words spoken at his baptism?

This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased. Hear ye him. The denial then of the resurrection overthrows the authority of Christ himself.

[7 : 03] And of course, the denial of the resurrection, it also overthrows the credibility of the witness of scripture. And this indeed is a matter which is recognized by the apostle in the course of his argument in this chapter.

At verse 14, for instance, it says, if Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain. And your faith is also vain. Yea, and we have found false witnesses of God because we have testified that God raised up Christ, whom he raised not up, if so be that the dead rise not.

If those who were in the most intimate association with him during his earthly pilgrimage, if they are not to be trusted, if their testimony is not to be received, who are we going to believe?

But in effect, is what the apostle is saying. Luke, you remember, he begins his pre-tite, his gospel to Theophilus by making reference to the fact that he, that is Christ, showed himself alive after his passion by many infallible proofs, being seen of them forty days, and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God.

It is significant, I think, that in this chapter, Paul emphasizes very forcibly the witness of scripture. At the beginning of the chapter, where he says that he died according to the scriptures.

[8 : 35] Verse 3. He was buried and rose again according to the scriptures. And so then, a denial is to overthrow the credibility of the witness of the word of God.

A denial, too, is to overthrow the validity of what we ourselves believe, of what Christians themselves believe.

For we believe that, do we not, that Christ bore our sins in his own body? That his suffering unto death was, that his suffering unto death was an essential part of that transaction?

That his overcoming death and rising again was integral in his atoning ministry? That his suffering, if therefore any part, whatever, of that work was not completed, then the whole of the transaction must have fallen.

A failure to complete even one aspect of the work would have immediately nullified the whole. And the apostle asserts this when he says at verse 14, Then at verse 17, Then they also, which are fallen asleep in Christ, they are perished.

[10 : 01] The whole structure of faith is undermined by a denial of the resurrection from the dead. Then there is no longer any basis for believing. If we deny that death was an integral part of his atoning work, we are thereby denying that death came by sin.

That it was part of the punishment which God meted out to our first parents, our first covenant head. That God didn't really carry out a threat concerning their eating of the forbidden fruit.

So the denial of the resurrection undermines and overthrows the validity of what God's people themselves believe. And of course too, this denial overthrows the expectation of the life to come.

This would clearly seem to be suggested in what the apostle writes here at verse 18, Then they also, which are fallen asleep in Christ, are perished.

If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable. In other words, deny the resurrection and man become simply a higher form of the brute creation around him.

[11 : 20] Basically, he is not in any way different from them. He may have advanced somewhat further in his so-called evolutionary development, but he is essentially one of them and dies as one of them and goes into oblivion as all of them do.

This, of course, is a perfectly natural and legitimate deduction from a denial of the resurrection. And this, sadly, is the fond expectation of the vast multitude of people in our own day.

How essential, then, how absolutely imperative that we remain steadfast and unmovable in this matter. That we defend the position of Scripture with all our strength and with all our might.

That we refuse to yield one inch to the enemies of truth with regard to this vital doctrine of the Christian faith. This is the duty, this is the call of Scripture and the duty of God's people.

To be steadfast and unmovable in the face of unbelief and the attacks of infidels. But then we have the duty to which we are directed in the face of this opposition, in the face of these matters.

[12 : 50] And that duty is to be always abounding in the work of the Lord. Not only are God's people to defend by God's grace, the great doctrines of grace, God's people are also to assert by the grace of God, the faith that God has given to them.

They are to abound in the work of the Lord. They are to go forward in the strength of his grace and engage in the battle of their Lord.

They are certainly to stand in the day of testing and to defend with all their might those great scriptural truths and doctrines committed to their trust.

But they are to do more. They are to go on the offensive. They are to abound in every good work. And this is a duty to which they are called here, whatever they may be confronted with in the course of life.

And my friends, we are encouraged to do this for several times. We are encouraged because of the example of the Lord Jesus Christ himself.

[14 : 05] He came into the world to do a specific work. And he himself said, How am I straightened until it be accomplished? He never at any point deviated from the path of duty.

And when the moment arrived, when he should make himself an offering for sin, we read that he set his face steadfastly to go to Jerusalem.

We know that he could have desisted from the work at any moment. He could have overthrown his enemies at a word. He could have, as he himself says, called on twelve legions of angels to come to his assistance, to come to his aid.

But how then could all righteousness have been fulfilled? How could a complete answer have been given to the demands of God's law? How could justice have been satisfied?

He steadfastly, he abounded in the work that was committed to him. And in this, he is your example and mine. By viewing him, we are encouraged to abound in the work that God has committed to our trust.

[15 : 21] He is our great example in this regard. But then too, we are also encouraged by the demand of God's holy word.

For that word insists that whatever our hands are trying to do, we are to do it with our might. And that it should be done in all cases to the glory of God.

Without his word, what direction have we as to how we should engage ourselves in any task. Without a scripture to be a lamp to our feet and a light to our path.

In what direction shall we go or can we go? The word of God has an immeasurably indirect beneficial influence on any society where that word is given its rightful place.

In Western society generally, we are seeing the damaging and harmful effect which the absence of this authority is having on life and on morals generally.

[16 : 29] For this, by the way, for the believer, the word of God is paramount in respect to the performance of whatever duty he is called to. It is to the law and to the testimony that he must turn.

If he would keep a straight course and adhere in the narrow way of life. And so in seeking to abound in the work of the Lord, the believer is encouraged as he turns to God's own word.

The infallible rule of truth. But then too, we are encouraged because of the conduct of God's people in bygone ages. And how they abounded in the work of the Lord in the face of the most appalling persecutions and oppositions and difficulties.

Hebrews chapter 11, for instance, is a veritable jewel in this connection in delineating for us the courage and devotion with which those men and women of God pursued their task.

No sacrifice was too great. No enemy was too formidable. No suffering was too fearsome. No demand was too exacting.

[17 : 44] We read, and if it don't shame us as we read these words, what shall I more say for the time would fail me to tell of Gideon and of Bera, of Jephthah, David also, Samuel and of the prophets, who through faith subdued kingdoms, brought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, waxed valiant in fight, turned to flight the armies of the aliens.

And we are required to emulate their faith. We are to follow their faith. We all know how the biographies of devoted men of the past will inspire us, missionaries of the cross, who counted not their own lives dear, that they might convey the knowledge of the truth to those who sat in darkness and in the shadow of death.

In other words, that they might always abound in the work of the Lord. Take this very apostle himself, what an inspiration he is as we read his letters.

What courage, what devotion, what self-sacrifice he manifested throughout his life. And what an encouragement he is to all the people of God as they seek to abound in the work of the Lord.

But then too, surely we are principally encouraged by the constraining love of the Lord Jesus Christ. The love of Christ constrain of us as the apostle.

[19 : 26] And this indeed is the most potent factor in the abounding of God's people in the work that God has given to them. The true Christian performer on the stage of time is not an actor who is giving a totally false impression to his audience as to his real self and as to his true feelings.

I do not say that there are not actors among Christian professors. There are. And there always have been and always will be. But remember that the true Christian performer does not put on an act.

Whatever men may think, his whole being is in the performance because the love of Christ has touched every fiber of his being and because the love of Christ is garrisoning his heart and inspiring him in the way of obedience and commitment.

It has gripped his affections and it has given purpose and meaning to his Christian activities. This more than anything else will encourage the Christian to persevere in well-doing.

He is inwardly motivated by the irresistible power of divine love. The love of Christ is constraining him to abound, in other words, in the work of the Lord.

[20 : 54] This, my friend, is a duty to which you are called, to which I am called, in the face of opposition, of difficulty, and of scoffing and of scorning by the powers of darkness.

But then, our text speaks of the certainty that the task thus performed will not be fruitless. For as much as we know, for as much as you know that your labor is not in vain in the Lord, what certainty the apostle, with what certainty the apostle speaks here.

How, you ask, can we be so assured? How can you know that your labor will not be in vain? Well, for one thing, you will know that your labor will not be in vain because you know whom you have believed.

And this is absolutely basic to our having an assurance such as we have expressed in these words of our text. You have had a personal encounter with the Lord in whose name you are now engaged.

He met you in a day of his power and he empowered you by his grace. And it is in his strength that you will be enabled to continue to the, that you have been enabled to continue to this hour and bear testimony to him.

[22 : 30] Your encounter may not have been in any way dramatic. In fact, there may have been little or no drama at all attached to it.

It was perhaps but a quiet inner persuasion that you are no longer the person you had been. And this has since been confirmed by the ministry of the word and the ministry of the spirit and your own entire attitude to the things that pertain to the gospel and to the kingdom of God.

I know, said the apostle, whom I have believed and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him. It isn't what he had believed that brought such confidence to him but whom he had believed.

And this more than anything else will confirm the believer that his labor will not be in vain in the Lord. You know whom you have believed.

You will also know, you will also be confirmed in this because you know that your Redeemer lives. That the one in whom you believe that he lives.

- [23 : 48] Whatever men may assert and whatever men may say to the contrary, the reality of his resurrection is an integral part of your own faith and no infidel will ever snatch this hope from you.

With the apostle in this chapter you can say, but now is Christ risen from the dead and become the first fruit of them that slept. Verse 20. And you are able with the church of God to give thanks to God who giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

You know that he is seated at the right hand of power and that in him, that to him all authority has been given in heaven and on earth and that on the basis of his authority he sends forth his people to minister and to witness.

Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. It is because of this that your labor will not be in vain. It cannot be in vain.

Remember, you are living and you are working as if he were by your side encouraging you, strengthening you, pointing you, enlightening you and carrying you forward.

- [25 : 07] You will be assured of the, that your labor will not be in vain because you know that your Redeemer lives and you know also by whom you have been called.

Every Christian is called by Christ to bear witness, to show him forth. We are all intended to be the epistles of Christ read and known of all men.

When Jesus spoke immediately before his ascension, it wasn't, we believe, to a select company of apostles that he spoke but to the church as a whole gathered at Jerusalem and this is what he said to them.

But you shall receive power after that the Holy Ghost has come upon you and you shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem and in all Judea and in Samaria and unto the uttermost power of the earth.

And significantly, significantly, these were the very last words that he uttered before he was received up to take his seat at the right hand of majesty.

- [26 : 24] He left his church with this challenge ringing in her ears, ye shall be my witnesses. And when the Christian endeavors, however faintly and imperfectly to project the Lord Jesus Christ, then he can draw the assurance from the fact that he is acting in accordance with the mind of the Lord himself in this matter.

And this in turn will give him the confidence that his labor cannot be in vain in the Lord. The Christian duty is to obey, to be faithful unto death, it is not for him to question.

You will know that your labor is not in vain in the Lord because you know by whom you have been called. And you will know also because you know by whom you will be adjudged.

And that the adjudging will be based on and the reward given not on the success that attended the labor, but on the faithfulness with which the labor was carried out.

And remember, we are not to judge the labor of grace by the measuring rod of sense. This perhaps is why God's people are so frequently despondent and dejected.

- [27 : 50] they use the measuring rod of sense to measure their own achievement and to their dismay they find that they have that they have no achievements to measure at all.

This is what men do as we know with regard to the Savior himself.

They measure his achievements with the measuring rod of sense and their conclusions are hopelessly inaccurate and way out. His greatest achievement of all namely his death is reckoned by men to have been a total disaster.

and you see how far out how completely wrong the measuring of men can be. My dear friend sense this no safe guy by which to measure anything in a spiritual realm.

Leave the measuring to the one who will make no mistakes. Your duty and mine your duty and mine is to be steadfast unmovable.

[29 : 03] always abounding in the work of the Lord for as much as you know that your labor is not in vain in the Lord. And as I close may I just leave these words with you.

You have descended from the holy mount of ordinance in recent days having witnessed anew to your love and devotion to the Lord Jesus Christ and he is now calling on you to continue that witness wherever he has in his providence placed you.

Remember you will find many discouragements as you go forward. Not least of them the discouragements that arise from your own feelings of impotence and ineffectiveness.

and remember that the devil is sure to aggravate those feelings by telling you all kinds of untruths and by suggesting to you that you should really keep your light hidden.

There is no point in you trying to give obedience to the word of God. I wouldn't minimize the discouragement and as you have already experienced them you will experience them more and more.

[30 : 19] But do not submit to them my friend and do not listen to the adversary. To do so is to walk by sense and not to walk by faith.

And if you allow yourself to walk by sense then you are sure to fall and you are sure to fail. And he asks you to encourage yourself in the Lord.

This is what we read of David when he was in great strength and in great difficulties at one point in his own life. As we're read the account of his life we see that sense sense was giving him very precarious and improper directions and advice.

And when he followed the path of sense it almost led him to complete disaster. It led him into in among the enemies of God's people and of God's cause man in with achish of gaff that God in his mercy dealt with him.

And when he saw God judging him at that moment we read that David encouraged himself in the Lord. And this is what you have to do this is what I have to do under all circumstances of life you have to encourage yourself in God.

[31 : 40] And you have to encourage yourself in God's word. Remember the promises of God are yea they are amen in Jesus Christ. Plead those promises for yourself.

Lay hold upon the promises of God. Believe that what God has promised he will perform. Search the scriptures daily for your edification and for your enlightenment and for your encouragement.

Turn to the word and the testimony wherever you are and whatever you are doing and seek inspiration from the word make it a lamp to your feet and a light unto your path.

In brief as the apostle says here seek see that you are steadfast see that you are unmovable see that you are always abounding in the work of the Lord and this is a promise that God himself has given you.

for as much as we know that your labor is not in vain in the Lord it cannot be. If God is pushing you into it and calling you to do so then he will ensure that your labor will not be in vain in the Lord.

[33 : 02] Take unto you then the whole armor of God and go forward in his strength and by his grace my friend and his grace alone will you prevail.

Amen. Let's unite in prayer. O Lord our God we give thanks unto thee for calling a people unto thyself and equipping that people and enabling them to witness a good confession in a day of reproach and small things we pray O God that thou rest so fortify the hearts of each one of thy people here as that they might be good and faithful witnesses of thine and that in due course they may hear thine own commendation well done good and faithful servant O Lord our God make us good and make us faithful and grant that we may so commit ourselves and our cares unto thee as that we would draw day by day out of the inexhaustible fullness of thy grace that we may stand in the day of testing and when we have done all things to stand bless us now as we join in singing our song of praise continue with us throughout the day minister to us again in the evening as we meet in thy name and graciously hide thy face from all our shortcomings in Jesus name

Amen