

Be Steadfast and Immovable

1 Corinthians 15:58 – page 962 in the pew Bibles

Prayer

The Sentinels at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier are completely dedicated to their duty of guarding the Tomb. In fact, line eight of the Sentinel's Creed refers to the "discomfort of the elements". Because of their dedication, the weather does not bother them. In fact, it is considered an honor to walk the mat during inclement weather. It gets cold, it gets hot - but the Sentinels never budge. And they never allow any feeling of cold or heat to be seen by anyone. They remain at their posts during rain, snow or shine, and extreme weather is not a concern. They are steadfast and immovable. They remained at their posts during Hurricanes Isabel and Irene as well as the 2010 blizzard, nicknamed "Snowmagedon," that shut down the capital for days. The Tomb is guarded 24 hours a day, 7 days a week without fail. In fact, there has been a Sentinel on duty in front of the Tomb every minute of every day since 1937.

As we turn to today's passage of 1 Corinthians 15:58, I want to set it in its context. When we look through the whole chapter of 1 Corinthians 15, we see that Paul is talking about the resurrection. First he establishes the sureness and historicity of Christ's resurrection. He then goes on to say that since Christ rose from the dead, we who believe will also rise and be resurrected in the last day. This is our hope. Our earthly bodies will be changed, and we will have a new, resurrected body. All sin and sickness and disease and death will be gone. This is the victory that Christ has wrought.

In reading today's passage, I want to back up a few verses and read beginning in verse 50 to kind of set the tone. Please follow along with me as I read.

⁵⁰ I tell you this, brothers: flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. ⁵¹ Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, ⁵² 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. ⁵³ For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality. 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."

⁵⁵ "O death, where is your victory?

O death, where is your sting?"

⁵⁶ The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. ⁵⁷ But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

And then we come to verse 58 which says, *because of this truth, because of this hope that we have,*

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.*

This is typical Pauline fashion, where he lays down a lengthy theological foundation, and then says, in light of these truths, this is how you need to act. It shows us that theology and doctrine are not just relegated to the stuffy halls of academia, but are intended to be very practical in their working out in our lives.

So, I have three points of action to bring to your attention from this passage. These points lead off with three verbs, three imperatives, that Paul is commanding us to put into action in light of the hope that we have because of Christ's resurrection and victory over sin and death.

1. Be steadfast and immovable in the faith.

- The word "steadfast" alludes to our *internal* resolve and faithfulness. Being steady. In other words, don't be carried about by personal whims. This is very much saying, "don't let YOU move you."

Between the years 1722 and 1723, Jonathan Edwards wrote a series of *Resolutions* that he read once a week in order to keep his mind on his duty before God. It's no secret that we humans, being the finite, sinful creatures that we are, are prone to have our minds and affections wander to various worldly pursuits that vie for our attention and allegiance. Jonathan Edwards knew that he, no less than anyone else, was susceptible to this, and so he wrote these in order to discipline his mind and continually renew his commitment before God to live for Him and Him alone.

I just want to read a few of them for you.

4. Resolved, never to do any manner of thing, whether in soul or body, less or more, but what tends to the glory of God;

17. Resolved, that I will live so as I shall wish I had done when I come to die.

28. Resolved, to study the Scriptures so steadily, constantly and frequently, as that I may find, and plainly perceive myself to grow in the knowledge of the same.

But Edwards also knew something else very important when he wrote these resolutions. He knew that he, by himself, was unable to keep them. How many times have we made New Year's resolutions to do certain things, or to stop doing certain things, only to utterly fail a few weeks into it? That's why Jonathan Edwards began his *Resolutions* with this preamble:

Being sensible that I am unable to do anything without God's help, I do humbly entreat him by his grace to enable me to keep these Resolutions, so far as they are agreeable to his will, for Christ's sake.

It's important to note that for Edwards, these resolutions were an anchor for him. They helped him stay focused on being steadfast in the faith. And yet, although he was completely committed to being faithful in his walk with the Lord, he was also completely dependent upon God's grace and strength to keep these resolutions. He didn't write them and then proceed using sheer willpower. He was ever cognizant that it was only through God's help that he would ever be successful at keeping them and faithful in living them out.

So be steadfast in the faith, relying on the grace of God to give you the strength to do so. But along with being steadfast, the passage also says, be *immovable*.

- If "steadfast" spoke of our internal resolve and faithfulness, "immovable" alludes to being unsusceptible to *external* influences. Things that would discourage us in persevering in the faith. Just like the Sentinels at the Tomb of the Unknowns who would not be moved even in bad weather, God calls us to be immovable.

In Matthew 13, Jesus told the parable of the sower, which describes four types of people in their relation to the kingdom of God. The first is like seed being scattered on the path and the birds coming to eat it. The second is like seed that falls on rocky ground which is shallow and the young plant springs up quickly, but when the sun came up it was scorched. The third is like seed falling among thorns that choked the young plant, and the fourth is like seed that falls in good soil that grows up healthy and bears fruit. In verses 18-23, Jesus interprets this parable, and I want to draw your attention especially to the second of the four, in verses 20-21:

²⁰ As for what was sown on rocky ground, this is the one who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy, ²¹ yet he has no root in himself, but endures for a while, and when tribulation or persecution arises on account of the word, immediately he falls away.

Notice it says, "yet he has no root in himself." Consequently, this person "endures for a while," but "when tribulation or persecution arises on account of the word, immediately he falls away."

This is a somber warning to all of us, especially in these last days. Are you rooted in the faith? Are you committed to following Christ no matter what the world says or does or whatever tribulation may come against you?

In Revelation 2:8-11 we read of what Jesus said to the church at Smyrna, as I read from the NASB:

⁸ *"And to the angel of the church in Smyrna write:*

The first and the last, who was dead, and has come to life, says this:

⁹ *'I know your tribulation and your poverty (but you are rich), and the blasphemy by those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan. ¹⁰ Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to cast some of you into prison, so that you will be tested, and you will have tribulation for ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life. ¹¹ He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. He who overcomes will not be hurt by the second death.'*

So there is a solemn warning to persevere, to be faithful and not be moved, and yet it's important to know that, just as Jonathan Edwards trusted in God's grace to strengthen him for faithful living, we must know that there is an unlimited supply of grace available for those who are truly God's children. Not only that, but God himself has promised to keep us and that not one of His children will be lost in the end.

John 10:27-29 ²⁷ *My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me.* ²⁸ *I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand.* ²⁹ *My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand.*

But this morning I'd like to address another issue about being steadfast and immovable which applies to today's time, and that's the issue of church hopping.

You hear frequently of people leaving a church because they don't like the style of music, or they don't like the style of preaching or they don't like the style of the building, or they don't like the fact that they use an organ. If I may be so bold in the Lord, and I believe I have the authority of Scripture to say this, to those of you who have a tendency to do this, "STOP IT!"

Many churches today have done little more than cater to a consumerist culture, where the spiritual has been replaced with the pragmatic. Where instead of feeding the sheep with the milk and meat of the Word of God, they entertain them with snacks and sugary treats in order to please their fleshly appetite. It's become little more than a popularity contest between which church can offer the latest and greatest gimmick to charm you into attending. And they fill their services up with large numbers of attenders, and they are a mile wide and an inch deep. And then you have a congregation full of people who become just like the parable with the rocky soil, where they spring up, but they have no root in themselves. And so they stay at that church for a little while until it ceases to satisfy them and then another church comes along offering the latest and greatest gimmick. Cool music that caters to their fleshly excitement, a snazzy sermon preached by a hip-looking "pastor" that tickles the ears and tells you what you want to hear.

I praise God that we don't have a big problem with church hopping here at Grace Fellowship. For most of you, you're here because this is where God has you and you're faithful in it. What you get from me and Pastor Rob are songs that focus on the person and work of Christ, and that bring glory to God, and sermons that are grounded in the Word of God and explained from their original intent, and applied faithfully to your lives so that we may feed you good spiritual food.

You need to recognize that what we do here is not an accident, but it is very purposeful. Pastor Rob and I are very cognizant of both what and how we feed you week in and week out. Know that the reason we do this is because we love you and we seek to be faithful to the Lord and faithful to the Word of God which alone has the power to transform our lives into Christ-likeness. To raise you up to abound in the work of the Lord.

And that brings me to the second point this morning.

2. Abound in the work of the Lord.

The passage says, “*Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord,*”

The good news is, because of the victory of Christ which Paul talked about in the first part of this chapter, God gives us enabling grace to abound in His work.

Look what Paul says back in verse 10:

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. (1 Corinthians 15:10)

This is the difference between legalism and the gospel. Look what it says in 2 Corinthians 9:8, Paul tells us,

And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work. (2 Corinthians 9:8)

That means that based on the grace that God gives us in Christ, He enables us to do more than just come to church and occupy a pew. We can be fully involved in the work of the Lord. He wants to see His people taking an interest in the things *He* is interested in. For us to see as important the things *He* sees as important.

And some of those things might surprise you. Like serving the children. What an honor it is to serve children! You get to have an impact on the coming generations. If you think the world is bad today and you want to see the future get better, go serve in children’s church or Sunday School! And because of the grace that God extends, you can serve with vision and joy, knowing that you are impacting young lives with the gospel! These kids are bombarded week in and week out with the ideas of the world. Many of them get far too little encouragement and instruction in the Word of God.

But some of you say, “But it’s an inconvenience for me. I’m not good with kids.” All the more reason for you to recognize that God is calling us to abound in the work of the Lord. Go to Him and ask that He change your heart, and give you the grace to serve Him in the things that are important to Him.

Abound in the work of the Lord!

Parents – You can abound in the work of the Lord at home as well. Far too many say, “Well it’s the pastor’s job or the Sunday School teacher’s job to teach my kids the Word of God.” NO! Parents, it’s YOUR job to bring your children up in the fear and admonition of the Lord. And that may mean serious implications in making decisions in your life. Such as how much time you spend doing other things or allowing your children to waste their time away in frivolous activities. And whether you make sure that your children are in church every Sunday. Or even where they go to school. It may mean making large sacrifices to ensure that your children are being trained up in the ways of the Lord and not being bombarded with worldly philosophy, filling their minds day after day with stuff that is not only contrary, but sometimes hostile to the Word of God.

Abound in the work of the Lord!

And this goes for proclaiming the gospel, too. Far too many of us say, “But it’s an inconvenience for me. I don’t know how to share the gospel. I’m afraid of being rejected.” All the more reason for you to recognize that God is calling us to abound in the work of the Lord. Go to Him and ask that He change your heart, and give you the grace to serve Him in the things that are important to Him.

Abound in the work of the Lord! God’s grace abounds to you so that you may abound in His work!

Thirdly, God wants you to...

3. Know that the Lord is using what you do.

It says, *always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.*

What does it mean when Paul says “in the Lord your labor is not in vain?” I think there are actually two things being said here:

First is what we talked about in the beginning concerning the resurrection. We have every reason to be motivated to be steadfast and immovable, and to abound in the work of the Lord *because* we are awaiting an eternal inheritance where God will make all things new and we will be raised, and sin will be conquered once and for all. Certainly we have a great reward awaiting us when that trumpet sounds and we are changed, and that motivates us to be steadfast and immovable and to abound in the work of the Lord.

But secondly, it encourages us when we know that even the little things we do in the kingdom are all working together for a larger, eternal purpose, and God is using those things for His glory.

Never think that even the little task that you do is not important. God knows, and He is using it! There are those of you who regularly labor week in and week out, sometimes tirelessly, sometimes thanklessly. But you remain faithful. You are steadfast and immovable. I want you to know that nothing you do is wasted! God uses every bit of it for His kingdom!

Even mowing the lawn. God uses it! Think of what this place would look like if the lawn never got mowed? What would it say about how seriously we take what we do here? Do you think people would want to come here if the grass was 5 feet tall?

Paul says in Galatians 6:9-10, “*And let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up. So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith.*”

The late 1800’s saw an evangelistic explosion in India. Entire provinces formally closed to the gospel were swept up a missionary movement perhaps unparalleled in history. This missionary

endeavor was focused on Northern India, which was firmly in the grips of the most oppressive forms of Hinduism. It was a place where the caste system was entrenched, and where headhunters ruled.

These provinces often prided themselves on the hostile reaction they gave foreigners. Dozens and dozens of these missionaries were martyred, but despite the opposition and violence (or perhaps because of it) the gospel made inroads into this previously off-limits area.

In the 1880's a Welsh missionary who had endured severe persecution finally saw his first converts in a particularly brutal village in the Indian province of Assam. A husband and wife, with their two children, professed faith in Christ and were baptized. Their village leaders decided to make an example out of the husband. Arresting the family, they demanded that the father renounce Christ, or see his wife and children murdered. When he refused, his two children were executed by archers. Given another chance to recant, the man again refused, and his wife was similarly stuck down. Still refusing to recant, the man followed his family into glory.

Witnesses later told the story to the Welsh missionary. The reports said that when asked to recant or see his children murdered, the man said: "I have decided to follow Jesus, and there is no turning back."

After seeing his children killed, he reportedly said, "The world can be behind me, but the cross is still before me." And after seeing his wife pierced by the arrows, he said, "Though no one is here to go with me, still I will follow Jesus."

According to this missionary, when he returned to the village, a revival had broken out, and even those that had murdered the first converts had since come to faith themselves. The Welsh man passed along these reports to the famous Indian evangelist Sadhu Singh, who later turned that father's final words in an Indian hymn which is still sung today. That Indian hymn eventually was rearranged to become the famous hymn that we sing, "I Have Decided To Follow Jesus."

The words to that hymn stand, not as an anthem describing our initial coming to faith as it has been traditionally sung, but rather as a reminder to us that no matter what circumstances we may face as followers of Christ, we are to be steadfast and immovable. Setting our resolve to stand firm in the faith, while relying on the faithful grace of God to sustain us.

It was in a garden on a dark night in an olive grove on the Mount of Olives. Knowing fully what was to come in the next few hours, Jesus prayed earnestly and fervently, so much so that his sweat became like drops of blood falling down to the ground. He envisioned the agony, the suffering, the anguish, the dreaded darkness of bearing the weight of the world's sin upon His shoulders. "Father, if You are willing, remove this cup from me." If ever anyone faced the full fury of terror, it was then.

And yet, deep in His spirit, in the depths of who he is, was a faithfulness like no other. He was steadfast, immovable. Scripture says that it is in those moments that Jesus looked, not at His circumstances, but "for the joy that was set before Him," he would endure the cross, despising its shame. It was then that He uttered those words of complete faithfulness, "Nevertheless, not my will, but yours be done."

What was “the joy that was set before Him?” Many say that it was the thought of all those who would be saved by what He was about to do. And that may be partly true. But I think, rather, that it was the joy of faithfully obeying the will of His Father, knowing that His Father was also faithful to use His obedience to accomplish His plan.

And so He gave His all, no turning back. He was steadfast and immovable.

And so we can give our all as well. For when we dare to give our all to the Lord, no turning back, we do so, not to a harsh task master of a God, who cares about nothing but our performance, but we find, rather, a God of love, a God whose love will not let you go until He has seen you through to the threshold of eternity, who loves us so completely that He gave His only Son to take the punishment that we deserve and die a sinner’s death on a cross.

Isaiah 53:10 says, Yet it was the will of the Lord to crush him; he has put him to grief; when his soul makes an offering for guilt, he shall see his offspring; he shall prolong his days; the will of the Lord shall prosper in his hand.

In obeying His Father, Jesus purchased your salvation and mine. He bore our punishment for our sins in our place, and nailed those sins to the cross. He faithfully died so that we might live and be forgiven of all our sins against God. And He was raised so that we can have new life, and one day also be raised with an incorruptible body, free from sin and shame, free from sickness, and He will make all things new. Do you know this Jesus? Has He changed you? The Scripture calls you to believe. To turn from your old life of sin to Christ who offers new life. To put your trust fully in Christ’s finished work and you will receive His righteousness. Jesus is steadfast in His love for you and His ability to save. You can trust Him with your life.

Maybe you’re here and God is working in your heart right now, calling you to a life of greater faithfulness in serving Him, calling you to greater steadfastness in your faith.

We’re going to sing one last song, and after we do, elders will be at the front here to pray with you. If God is working in your heart right now and you would like someone to pray with you, elders will be up at the front here standing ready to do just that. Let’s stand and sing.

Benediction:

And now, go from here, and be steadfast in your faith, immovable. Be faithful, always abounding in the work of the Lord, for you can be assured, He will, indeed, use every little bit of your faithfulness for His kingdom.

You’re dismissed.