

“The Moving Immovable Follower of Christ” 1 Corinthians 15:58

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Text

1 Corinthians 15:58

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.

Introduction

In 1955, science fiction writer Walter M. Miller, Jr., wrote a short story entitled “The Hooper.” It was a story about a space explorer named Hogey Parker who returns home after many years in space. He had neglected his wife and family, re-upping time and again for one tour of duty after another, and had been gone way too long. In addition to this, Hogey is depicted in the story as staggering homeward in a drunken stupor upon his return from space. When he is in sight of his house he decides to sit down and rest his feet in some wet mud. He falls asleep and upon awakening realizes with horror that the wet mud was actually wet concrete. The story ends with the ultimate irony: the space explorer Hogey Parker, crying on the ground, his feet stuck in hard concrete while he looks up to the heavens in the direction of Mars. Miller writes:

He sat there with his feet locked in the solid concrete of the footing, staring out into Big Bottomless while his son's cry came from the house and the Hauptman menfolk came wading through the tall grass in search of someone who had cried out. His feet were stuck tight, and he wouldn't ever get them out. He was sobbing softly when they found him.

(Source: Miller, Walter M. (2010-07-27). *Classic Science Fiction by Walter M. Miller, Jr.* (Unexpurgated Edition) (Halcyon Classics) (Kindle Locations 796-798). Halcyon Press Ltd.. Kindle Edition.)

Hogey Parker is in so many ways a perfect picture of the church today: we are made for and called to great things but through our own foolishness we are stuck in the hardening concrete of mediocrity and ineffectiveness. We are called to rise to new heights of faithfulness, obedience, and service, but we are stuck fast to the ground because of our short-sightedness and pride.

Interestingly, Paul called upon the Christians of Corinth to be firmly planted in solid ground and to be “immovable,” but the immovability Paul spoke of did not lead to stagnation and the abandonment of our mission. Rather, it paradoxically leads to greater and greater heights of service and Christ-likeness, for the firm footing into which we are called to plant our feet is the

life-giving gospel of Jesus Christ! Put another way, Paul says that we rise higher only when our feet are firmly buried in the truth of the good news of Jesus Christ.

I. Our feet must be so deeply grounded in the gospel of Jesus that we cannot be moved from it.

The Apostle Paul views a life of ministry and mission as being possible only when we are deeply grounded in the good news of Jesus Christ!

^{58a} Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable

In its immediate context, 1 Corinthians 15 is speaking specifically of the resurrection of Jesus. The cross and resurrection of Jesus are, of course, at the very heart of the gospel. So Paul is calling upon the believers in Corinth to be so deeply grounded in the gospel that they cannot be moved from it. He is not speaking of having an angry and stubborn temperament. Rather, he is speaking of having deep conviction concerning the truthfulness of the gospel of Jesus!

Key Word Studies

“steadfast”—Greek *hedraios*—“literally refers to being seated, and therefore to being settled and firmly situated”

(Source: John MacArthur, *1 Corinthians*, The MacArthur New Testament Commentary, p.447)

“immovable”—Greek *ametakinetos*—“carries the same basic idea but with more intensity”

(Source: John MacArthur, *1 Corinthians*, The MacArthur New Testament Commentary, p.447)

In calling the believers to be “steadfast” and “immovable,” Paul is pointing to the exact opposite sentiment of the lack of steadfastness that James condemned in James 1:

⁵ If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him. ⁶ But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind. ⁷ For that person must not suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; ⁸ he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.

Our day is a day marked by a lack of steadfastness and a lack of conviction. D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones bemoaned the lack of true conviction in many who profess to be Christians when he wrote:

These are the people who decide to take up Christianity instead of being taken up by Christianity. They have never known this feeling of constraint, this feeling of, “I can do no other, so help me, God”, that they must, that everything else has to be excluded, that the truth has so come to them that they must accept it.

(Source: *Spiritual Depression: Its Causes and Cure* (David Martyn Lloyd-Jones) – Highlight Loc. 740-42 | Added on Wednesday, May 26, 2010, 08:34 AM)

Against such lack of conviction, Paul, in our passage, is saying that *no great thing is attempted for God when the truth of the gospel is not held to be the absolute truth from which we will not be moved!*

II. Deep groundedness in the gospel enables us to go above and beyond for Jesus!

True, grounded, faith, however, opens the floodgates for great things!

^{58b} always abounding in the work of the Lord

The qualities of the mission and ministry that arises out of deep grounding in the good news of Jesus is powerfully described by Paul as “always abounding.”

Key Word Studies

“abounding”—Greek *perisseuo*—“carries the idea of exceeding the requirements, of overflowing or overdoing”

(Source: John MacArthur, *I Corinthians*, The MacArthur New Testament Commentary, p.447)

We were made for great, *great* things! Jesus spoke of this in John 14.

¹² “Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes in me will also do the works that I do; and greater works than these will he do, because I am going to the Father.

¹³ Whatever you ask in my name, this I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. ¹⁴ If you ask me anything in my name, I will do it.

We were made to do more and to be more for Jesus Christ! The 4th century Christian leader John Chrysostom said, “We ought not merely to labor in the Lord but to do so abundantly, to overflowing.” (Source: *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture: New Testament*, vol. VII, p.184)

III. True meaning and a lasting legacy are found only in Christ-focused Spirit-empowered efforts for the glory of God.

When conviction and faith give rise to joyful effort then a lasting fruit and labor that truly matters ensues.

^{58c} knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.

So much of our society is marked by vain labors, but nothing that is truly done in the name and for the glory of Jesus Christ is ever in vain! A lesser known 16th century reformer named Tilemann Hesshus said it well when he wrote, “All our labors, exertions, efforts, struggles, duties, illustrious deeds, troubles, and punishments that are experienced apart from faith in Jesus Christ are going to perish forever and are fruitless. (Source: *Reformation Commentary on*

Scripture: New Testament, vo. IXa, p.408). Jesus warned against such misdirected efforts on things that will not last in Luke 12.

¹⁶ And he told them a parable, saying, “The land of a rich man produced plentifully, ¹⁷ and he thought to himself, ‘What shall I do, for I have nowhere to store my crops?’ ¹⁸ And he said, ‘I will do this: I will tear down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods.’ ¹⁹ And I will say to my soul, ‘Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.’” ²⁰ But God said to him, ‘Fool! This night your soul is required of you, and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?’

Do not spend your years in vain labor! I am not speaking of fulfilling our responsibilities to do our jobs, to pay our bills, and to care for our families. I am talking about becoming fixated on things that do not last, that do not matter.

“In the Lord,” Paul says, “your labor is not in vain.” “In the Lord” is the great qualifier that makes all the difference in the world. Are you doing what you are doing for the Lord and in His name? If not, then you “labor in vain.” If so, then “your labor is not in vain.” C.T. Studd put it beautifully when he wrote:

Two little lines I heard one day,
Traveling along life’s busy way;
Bringing conviction to my heart,
And from my mind would not depart;
Only one life, twill soon be past,
Only what’s done for Christ will last.

Do not waste your life on things that are illusory and that do not matter! Grow deep into the things of Jesus so that you can soar high in beautiful service in His name!

Conclusion

A beautiful illustration of one who rose to new heights of service and faithfulness because his feet were so deeply grounded in the gospel was the great missionary hero William Carey. He envisioned a great missionary enterprise in which the Baptists of England would literally go throughout the world and take the gospel to a world in need. He envisioned this because the gospel was the truth to William Carey and it was a truth from which he refused to be moved. Carey overcame great opposition, surprisingly from within his own church, including one man who said to him, “Young man, sit down! You are an enthusiast. When God pleases to convert the heathen, he'll do it without consulting you or me.” But Carey did not sit down! Rather he rose up and pressed on with what God had called him to do. As a result, Carey took the gospel to India and the modern missionary enterprise was inaugurated.

Carey preached a sermon in which he made one of the truly great statements of our day: “Expect great things from God; attempt great things for God!”

That is what Paul is talking about in 1 Corinthians 15:58. Plant your feet deeply in the truth of the gospel and then soar to new heights as you follow Him!