

FIRST CORINTHIANS

Victory Through Christ I Corinthians 15:50-58

There is victory in Christ. Victory is to triumph, to conquer, to vanquish, to win. Victory is to be successful in a struggle or to defeat an opponent by overcoming obstacles. Jesus Christ is the Victor over sin and death, and it is He who gives us the victory progressively today and completely on that great day of resurrection.

The whole theme of I Corinthians 15:50-58 is that of victory. Paul's point is that because of Christ's death for sin and resurrection from the dead victory is already won, victory is already done and victory has already begun. This passage teaches us about the biblically based victorious Christian life.

In I Corinthians 15:35-49 the Apostle Paul dealt specifically with the resurrected body the Christian will receive at the Second Advent of Christ. A sovereign, miracle working God will have no problem resurrecting a decomposed body or a cremated body on the great day of resurrection for God's people. The resurrected body will be a spiritual body adapted to the spirit world but it will not be ghost-like. It will be a real body with the individual identity and personality of each person. It will be an imperishable body, one of great supernatural power with enlarged mental capacities. It will be a body like Christ's resurrected body, fully equipped to exist in the eternal state. Paul's whole point is that our present human body is not adapted for the heavenly home of Christians. No earthly, human body is prepared for heaven.

VICTORY OVER FLESH AND BLOOD 15:50

I declare to you, brothers, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. Paul is saying that "flesh and blood" of which this present body is composed is not adapted to the future, eternal state nor is it fitted for the heavenly world. The human body as it presently is cannot enter into God's spiritual kingdom.

The human body which is perishable cannot inherit that which is imperishable. No human being has an acceptable body for heaven, but God will give a new body to believers in Christ that will allow them to live a heavenly existence. For the human body to be fit for heaven, it must be changed. Because Jesus Christ rose from the dead, which is the most remarkable and revolutionary act which ever took place on planet earth, there is a great, wonderful, dynamic, supernatural change coming for all true Christians at the second advent of Christ. We will be given a supernatural space suit called a spiritual body designed for eternity.

VICTORY FOR THE LIVING AT CHRIST'S COMING 15:51

Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will be changed. A mystery is a truth which man cannot figure out by his own ingenuity but must be revealed by God. Quite often it is a truth not spoken about in the Old Testament but revealed in the New Testament.

The mystery Paul is speaking about here is that not all Christians will die physically. There is a future generation of Christians who will never have to die. At the second advent of Christ, living Christians will be changed suddenly as they are caught up to meet Christ in the air. Their bodies will not be resurrected but will be transformed. Those believers who died shall get spiritual and glorified bodies through resurrection and those who are alive at the second advent shall get spiritual and glorified bodies through transformation. This same truth is taught by Paul in I Thessalonians.

Brothers, we do not want you to be ignorant about those who fall asleep, or to grieve like the rest of men, who have no hope. We believe that Jesus died and rose again and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him. According to the Lord's own word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left till the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever. Therefore encourage each other with these words (I Thess. 4:13-18).

It should be pointed out that the mystery here is not a pretribulation rapture (the church caught up to be with Christ before the beginning of the Tribulation period) but it is the mystery that some future generation of Christians will not have to pass through the portals of death. This is a revealed truth and was not known in the Old Testament scriptures. Let us remember that all Christians believe in a rapture of the Church. They do not all agree as to when it will happen-before the tribulation, in the middle of the tribulation, at the end of the tribulation or just simultaneously with the second coming of Christ at end of the world as we know it.

There is total victory over sin and death for those Christians living at the time of Christ's return. It will be a unique victory because they will not have to face the last enemy which is physical death. Perhaps we are that last generation!

VICTORY FOR THE DEAD AT CHRIST'S COMING 15:52-53

In a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality. The transformation of the living saints and the resurrection of the dead saints will happen instantaneously. The word "flash" is the Greek word from which we derive the English word "atom." For the Greek, the smallest possible particle which could not be divided up or cut up was the atom. We know differently today but Paul's point is that in the smallest fraction of time, transformation and resurrection will take place. It will take place quicker than we can blink the eye or flutter the eyelid.

In the words, "at the last trumpet," we have a hint as to when this transformation and resurrection will take place. It seems to me that there is one basic last trumpet which will blast forth at the second advent of Christ.

"Immediately after the distress of those days 'the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from the sky, and the heavenly bodies will be shaken.' At that time the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and all the nations of the earth will mourn. They will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky, with power and great glory. And he will send his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of the heavens to the other" (Matt. 24:29-31).

For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first (I Thess. 4:16).

The blast of a trumpet was common to the Roman world because it was heard frequently in the Roman army. When a Roman camp was to break up, whether in the middle of the night or day, a trumpet was sounded. The first blast meant, "Strike tents and prepare to depart." The second blast meant "Fall in line," and the third, which was called the last trumpet, meant "March away." There is a day coming when all living and dead believers in Christ will be called up and caught away to be with the Lord forever. That will be total victory over sin and death for the Christian.

Somewhere I read a cute but true story. In a certain Bible College, it was the habit of six young men to gather for a prayer meeting right at the crack of dawn each day. They would kneel and pray in a special room at the end of their floor in a dormitory. One of these college students would always fall asleep while praying. The others thought they would play a practical joke on him, so one morning they planted a fellow student with a trumpet outside the window of the room in which they prayed. They all knelt to pray and the young man fell asleep on his knees as always. The others quietly got off their knees and tiptoed away,

hiding in the last room way down the hall. The trumpeter then gave a huge blast on the trumpet. The young man awakened from his sleep to find his friends had all disappeared. He concluded that the rapture had taken place and he was left behind. He began to shake and sweat. He got up, ran down the hall and looked in every room but found no one. When he came to the last room and found his friends doubled up with laughter, the young man literally passed out on the spot due to fear. What kind of fear will grip the unsaved when the rapture does occur and they are left only to face the angry wrath of God?

VICTORY OVER DEATH 15:54-55

When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: "Death has been swallowed up in victory." "Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?" When we Christians get our new bodies, we will fulfill the Old Testament hope that is set forth in Isaiah 25:8 which says, "He will swallow up death forever." Death held sway over Old Testament and New Testament saints for thousands of years, but that will come to an end at the second advent. At that time, death will be a defeated and conquered foe. This is our hope as Christians, and we are of all people most blessed with assurance and confidence that death will be defeated for us. We Christians have victory over death.

F.B. Meyer, on his deathbed, wrote to his dear friend Dr. Finley and said, "To my surprise I have just been told that my days and hours are numbered. It may be that before this letter reaches you, I will have gone into the Palace. Don't trouble to write. We shall meet in the morning. With much love. Yours affectionately, F.B. Meyer.

For the Christian, death has no spiritual sting. It is conquered. Again Paul quotes from the Old Testament in Hosea 13:14 which says, "I will ransom them from the power of the grave; I will redeem them from death. Where, O death, are your plagues? Where, O grave, is your destruction?" Death can have no ultimate victory over the Christian and all those who have been held in the grip of physical death will be released. Death temporarily is like the fatal sting of a scorpion. Yet for the Christian the sting of physical death is only for a moment then it is face to face with Jesus Christ. We will step out of time and space into eternity where there is no past, present or future and the next time-space event we will experience is the receiving of our resurrected bodies at the second advent of Christ.

VICTORY THROUGH THE LORD JESUS CHRIST 15:56-57

The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. What makes death sting? It is sin. If it were not for sin, we would not die, but sin is a reality and the eternal moral law of God points out to men that they are sinners. Men have broken the holy law of a holy God.

We are often afraid of death because it is an unknown over which we have no human control. We cannot escape or evade it, for it is beyond us. As men pass into eternity, they sense they are in the grip of other forces, and they are being plunged into accountability to God. Beyond death lies a settling of accounts and answering for where we have been and how we have lived and what we have done on this earth. Sin must and will be accounted for before a holy God, and those who have no Savior shall face the wrath of an angry God who never lets sin go unpunished in His universe.

While the Christian will face the physical sting of death because of sin, he will never face the spiritual sting, for Jesus Christ has given him the victory through His death for sin at Calvary and His resurrection from the dead. Jesus Christ broke the power of sin for any and all who trust Him as Savior and Lord. Therefore, the Christian does not have to fear death as a dreaded enemy. That is why the Apostle Paul said, "But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." Notice carefully the present tense which could be translated, "He continually and repeatedly gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." While total, final and complete victory will be ours at the second advent of Christ, we do not have to wait until resurrection day to experience to some degree the victory we already have in Christ. Every day we can experience the death of Christ for our sins and share His resurrection life by faith.

When we fail, we claim His death. When we are weak, we claim His resurrection power. It is only partial, incomplete and progressive victory now and will be total, final and complete victory at the second advent of the Lord Jesus Christ. Because we Christians know we are victorious and will be victorious, we have hope in this world

The late Dr. George Truett recalled an incident which occurred in his ministry. He watched a mother and father say goodbye for the final time to their six year old daughter who had died. The father who was not a believer in Christ approached the little, white casket. He kissed his daughter on the cheek, curled her hair around her ear and turning away with tears flowing down his eyes, he said, "Goodbye forever." Then Dr. Truett watched the mother who was a believer in Christ approach the body of her baby girl. She too kissed the child and curled her hair around her ears. Then affectionately she said, "Though you have been with us only six years, life has been richer and sweeter, my darling little girl. Goodbye, I will be with you and our Lord in the morning."

VICTORY IN SERVICE FOR CHRIST 15:58

Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain. — Notice how affectionately Paul greets these Corinthians "My dear brothers." He loved them in spite of their carnality, in spite of their spiritual immaturity, in spite of their rebellion and in spite of their sin. He loved the Corinthians because Christ loved them. He had a pastor's heart for God's people.

Notice also the word "therefore." This goes back to the whole truth of resurrection taught in I Corinthians 15 which gives new meaning and purpose to life for the Christian. What is the use of life if its efforts and endeavors are made void by death and absorbed in the grave? The resurrection assures us that what we do for the Lord on this earth in time will be accredited to our account for rewards in eternity.

These Christians, as all Christians, were to "stand firm." They were to manifest doctrinal stability in regard to the truth of resurrection because they had been accepting the godless teaching of the unsaved Greek philosophers on resurrection. These Christians were also to be faithful in the ministry. They were to stick with it, persevere, hang in there, demonstrating faithfulness and dependability in the Lord's service.

They were to let nothing move them which speaks of faithfulness in the face of opposition. When things get hot, the Christian stands unmovable in the faith.

They were to be always giving themselves fully to the work of the Lord. The Christian delights to do the Lord's work. He serves with a good heart out of love for Christ and His people. Notice carefully it is "the Lord's work" we are to carry out. What is the Lord's work? It is reaching the lost for Christ and building the saints in Christ. There is to be a deep commitment to home and world evangelism, for without that we are not doing Christ's work. There is to be deep commitment to loving, teaching, building, exhorting, praying for and bearing the burdens of our brothers and sisters in Christ. To abound in the work of the Lord, each one of us must discover our spiritual gifts and put them to work, so that we as saints are doing the work of the ministry.

Notice the word "labor" which is toil which brings sweat. Christians should labor to the point of physical and emotional exhaustion as they seek to do the Lord's work. This shows the intensity we should have in doing the work of the ministry. We may get weary in the ministry but we must never get weary of the ministry. To toil in the ministry demands a disciplined life, a life committed to Christ and others. It is hard labor to do the Lord's work especially the menial tasks which receive little glory. Yet, it is the most satisfying life that one can experience.

The Apostle Paul reminds us that our labors in the work of the Lord are never in vain; that is, they are not empty of divine purpose. The things we do for Christ, motivated out of love for Christ, are not meaningless or futile. Spiritual work is never useless, no matter how routine, dull, small and unexciting it may seem. Why? Because everything we do has a divine purpose and will count for eternity. With this divine perspective, we Christians can have victory in our service for Christ. This divine attitude is made possible by our concept of Christ's resurrection from the dead and our future resurrection.

John G. Paton, a nineteenth century missionary to the South Seas, met opposition to his leaving home in Scotland and going to preach to the cannibalistic people of the New Hebrides Islands. A well-meaning church member moaned to him, "The cannibals, the cannibals! You will be eaten by the cannibals!" Without hesitation, he replied, "I confess to you that if I can live and die serving my Lord Jesus Christ, it makes no difference to me whether I am eaten by cannibals or by worms; for in that Great Day of Resurrection, my body will rise as fair as yours in the likeness of our risen Redeemer!"

CONCLUSION

Christ died to defeat sin and death, and by His resurrection He proved He was triumphant over sin and death. Christ is the Victor! He is the Conqueror! He is the Winner!

While Christ died for sinners and rose victorious over the grave by resurrection, the work of Christ is only effective for those who receive Him as Savior by faith and bow to Him as Lord by faith. Faith is the human key which unlocks the treasure chest of salvation in Christ Jesus.

Trust Christ and be saved. When you do, you will meet Him who is the Victor over sin, death and hell. You will immediately begin to enjoy to some degree the victory which Christ won for you at the Cross. Come to the Victor, Christ, and He will begin to give you the victory because victory is always through Christ.