1 Corinthians 15 is the most comprehensive statement on the subject of resurrection in the New Testament. In this chapter, Paul declares the historical fact of the resurrection of Jesus Christ, explains the preeminence of the resurrection to Christian theology, and teaches the practical implications of the resurrection in the life of the believer.

In Paul’s New Testament writings, doctrinal declarations inevitably lead to practical directives. 1 Corinthians 15 is not exception. There are two great exhortations in this chapter. The first is an exhortation to live as a Christian. In verses 33-34, Paul writes: Do not be deceived: “Bad company ruins good morals.” Wake up from your drunken stupor, as is right, and do not go on sinning. For some have no knowledge of God. I say this to your shame. The second is an exhortation to labor as a Christian. In verse 58, Paul writes: “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 call to duty is immediately preceded by a shout of praise. In verse 57, Paul writes, “But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.” Paul did not dispense Christian truth in a detached manner. He taught with head and heart. Doctrine bled into doxology. Paul praised as he preached. Yet he concludes this chapter with exhortation, not celebration. In so doing, Paul shows us that the evidence that you have embraced truth is found in your work, not merely your worship. Authentic faith is active faith. True faith works. Real Christians give thanks to God. But they don’t stop there. They glorify God with the lives as well as their lips. We are to “be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.”

1 Corinthians 15:58 is often preached at pastoral ordinations or installations, which is definitely appropriate. But it is a word that speaks to more than pastor-teachers. It is call to every professing believer to authentic his or her claim of faith by a life of service. This little verse gives three reasons why every Christian should be actively involved in the work of the Lord.

I. The Binding Contract

1 Corinthians 15:58 begins with the word “Therefore.” What a powerful word! It has a conjunctive force, which links what has been said and what will be said. More specifically, it indicates that what has been said serves as the basis for what will be said. In this verse, “therefore,” possibly connects verse 58 to verse 57. But it probably connects verse 58 to the entire chapter, where Paul explains the historical resurrection of Christ and the future resurrection of Christians.

There is no true contention between doctrine and practice in the Christian faith. The two are inextricably tied together. We live what we believe. So all true Christian service is based upon and shaped by a proper understanding of the
Christian faith. R.C.H. Lenski commented: “Doctrine is a statement of divine facts. When these facts are apprehended they automatically shape the life.” Paul demonstrates this truth in this chapter. After explaining the importance of the resurrection, he exhorts the saints to give their lives to the work of the Lord.

Paul had proclaimed the good news of the risen Savior in Corinth. And a church was born as the Corinthians believed the gospel. But some time after Paul’s departure, their faith in the resurrection began to waver. Influenced by their pagan backgrounds, some in the church of Corinth claimed there is no resurrection from the dead. Paul writes this chapter to refute this grave error.

Paul confronts this misunderstanding of the resurrection on two grounds. First, the claim that there is no resurrection creates a problem concerning Christ. 1 Corinthians 15:12 says, “Now if Christ is proclaimed as raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection from the dead?” This is the key verse of the chapter. It states what’s at stake in the doctrine of resurrection in the clearest terms. Christianity is Christ. That is, the viability of the Christian faith rests on the truth of the Person and Work of the Lord Jesus Christ. Verse 13 says: “But if there is no resurrection from the dead, then Christ is not risen from the dead.” If you just live until to die then Jesus is still in the grave. And if Christ is still in the grave, we have a very big problem. Verses 14-19 explains: “And if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain. We are even found to be misrepresenting God, because we testified about God that he raised Christ, whom he did not raise if it is true that the dead are not raised. For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If in this life only we have hoped in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied.”

But there is another problem. If there is no resurrection from the dead, there is no reason to live a moral, ethical, or spiritual life. Verse 32b says: If the dead are not raised, “Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die.” If there is no life on the other side then there is no reason to seek to live for God on this side. But that’s the point of Paul’s argument in this chapter. Christ did, in fact, rise from the dead. And the resurrection of Jesus Christ is our guarantee that we, too, will one day rise again. Did you get that? Every piece of evidence for the historical resurrection of Jesus is evidence for our future resurrection. Paul closes the chapter by celebrating this fact. Verses 54-57 says: “When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written: “Dead is swallowed up in victory.” “O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?” The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Then verse 58 begins with the word “Therefore” that introduces a call to duty. The connection between explanation and exhortation makes the point that the resurrection of Jesus Christ changes everything! The resurrection of Jesus Christ changes everything! Because Jesus rose from the dead, we know that we will rise to meet him one day. So we cannot just “eat and drink.” We must make sure that we
are living in a way that will please the Lord. If you believe Jesus is risen Savior and Lord, you are duty bound to love and serve and obey and trust and follow and worship and praise him. The resurrection of Jesus is the binding contract that compels us to spend our lives serving him.

II. The Job Description

Verse 58 says: “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.” The job description of the Christian disciple is stated here in five words: “the work of the Lord.” What is the work of the Lord? Paul does not specify. This phrase may point forward to chapter 16, where Paul exhorts the saints of Corinth to give to help the needy saints in Jerusalem. Most likely, it points back to the defense of the gospel Paul makes here in chapter. The work of the Lord is gospel work that both saves and sanctifies. C.K. Barrett comments: “What is meant is the Christian labor of calling the church into being and building it up.”

We are called to this work. But it is not ours. The work does not belong to the pastors or deacons or members of the church. It is the Lord’s work. The Lord initiated the work. The Lord owns the Lord. The Lord supplies the work. The Lord oversees the work. And the Lord examines the work. 2 Corinthians 5:10 declares, “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil.” Here Paul exhorts us to faithful do the Lord’s work with a call to doctrinal integrity and external courage.

A. A Call to Doctrinal Integrity.

This great exhortation begins with two negative imperatives: “be steadfast, immovable.” These terms teach us two doctrinal requirements for faithful Christian service.

Christian service requires internal convictions. Paul exhorts: “be steadfast.” This verb is derived from a word that literally means “to sit.” It means that which is settled, stable, or situated. It is to be one who is firmly situation in what he or she believes. We should not be like water that is tossed to and fro by every wind of doctrine. We should not be like sand that easily moved. We should not be like the chaff that the wind drives away. We should be steadfast in what we believe. You need to know what you believe. And you need to know why you believe what you believe. And the verb is in a grammatical emphasis that denotes continual action: “keep on being steadfast.”

Christian service requires external courage. Paul exhorts: “Be steadfast, immovable.” These are complimentary terms. Steadfast refers to the reality of one’s settled convictions. Immovable refers to the resolve of one’s settled convictions.

B. A Call to Devotional Intensity.
First, Paul calls the saints to be faithful in **negative** terms: “be steadfast, immovable.” Then he calls the saints to faithfulness in **positive** terms: “always abounding in the work of the Lord.” How can you know if you are steadfast and immovable? Answer: You will also be always abounding in the work of the Lord. True Christian faith results in diligent Christian service. Note that this verse does not actually command us to do the work of the Lord. It assumes these believers are doing the Lord’s work, shaking convictions and carnal ways. Paul’s concern is about how the work of the Lord is done. Two words are used here to describe how the work of the Lord should be done: “always” and “abounding.”

**WE SHOULD BE ALWAYS AT WORK.** Paul exhorts the saints to be “always abounding in the work of the Lord” The word “always” means, “at all times.” The point is real simple. Nothing should ever stop you from doing the work of the Lord.

- **You may be new or seasoned.**
- **You may be young or old.**
- **You may be single or married.**
- **You may be wealthy or poor.**
- **You may be supported or alone.**
- **You may be affirmed or ignored.**

But nothing should ever stop you from serving the Lord. In Mark 6:31, Jesus said to his disciples, “Come away by yourselves to a desolate place and rest a while.” Every disciples needs to hear this call to rest at some time or another. If you do not come apart you will fall apart. But we must not use the need for rest as an excuse for putting worldly, temporal things ahead of the work of the Lord. JOHN MACARTHUR comments here: “Leisure and relaxation are two great modern idols, to which many Christians seem quite willing to bow.”

**BE ABUNDING IN THE WORK.** Paul exhorts us to be “always abounding in the work of the Lord.” The word “abounding” means to be overflowing or exceeding. It is superfluity. It is to overdo it. It is that which is boundless, endless. In John 10:10, Jesus says, "The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I am that they may have life and have it abundantly.” The Christian life is an abundant life. There is nothing narrow, limiting, or restrictive about it. In Ephesians 1:7-8, Paul writes: “In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight.” We are saved because God has lavished his grace upon us. We are saved by grace to a life that is abundant. But we are also saved by grace to a labor that is abundant. This is a rebuke to those who work and giver and pray and witness and suffer for Christ as little as possible. We should do the work of the Lord with zeal and passion and excellence. It is wrong to have an attitude toward the Lord’s word that says, “What’s the least I can do?” The Lord can never ask too much of us. We should sing Psalm 116:12: “What shall I render to the Lord for all his benefits to me?” To be always abounding in the work of the Lord is to live with the knowledge that the God who gave everything to save us can never ask too much.
III. The Workers’ Compensation

Paul ends this chapter by circling back to where he began. In verses 1-2, Paul writes: *Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, and by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you – unless you believed in vain.* Now in verse 58, Paul writes: *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.* Paul was concerned about the stability of the Corinthians. His concern was twofold. Paul was concerned about the stability of their Christian faith, expressed in verses 1-2. He was also concerned about the stability of their Christian service, expressed in verse 58.

A key business principle is called R.O.I. – return on investment. A person or group make a financial investment with confidence that their investment will yield a return. The greater the possible return, the more one is willing to invest. But an investor pulls out when stocks drop or prospects change. The Corinthians needed to know that there would be a return on the investment they made in the work of the Lord. But this issue is not unique to them. Any person who is truly devoted to the Lord’s work will go through seasons when you ask yourself, “Is this really worth it?” So Paul closes this verse with a word of assurance: “knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.”

The third reason why every Christian should be actively involved in the work of the Lord is because of what we know. This little word, “knowing,” is a subtle rebuke of sensual Christianity. True Christianity cannot be lived out on the basis of what you feel. Our emotions are too fickle. Sometimes we feel like doing the work of the Lord. But there will be many times that you do not feel like doing the Lord’s work. What do you when we you don’t feel like doing the work of the Lord? You must work on with the assurance of what you know.

In fact, Paul does not even say what we believe our labor is not in vain. He says we know it. In Christ we are beneficiaries of a know-so-salvation. *Job: 19:25-26* says: “For I know that my Redeemer lies, and at the last he will stand upon the earth. And after my skin has been thus destroyed, yet in my flesh I shall see God.” *Romans 8:28* says: “And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.” *2 Corinthians 5:1* says: “For we know that if the tent that is our earthly home is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.” *James 1:2-3* says: “Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness.” And *1 John 3:2* says: “Beloved, we are God’s children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is.”

Any work of the Lord that is done in the Lord can no more perish than can he.

The word *vain* refers to that which is empty, useless, or without worth.
It is the picture of a workman that has labored on a projected, only to have his work rejected as faulty and is therefore not paid for his labor.

The bottom-line is that God will not allow your faithfulness to him to go unrewarded. Hebrews 6:10 says: "For God is not unjust so as to overlook your work and the love that you have shown for his name in serving the saints, as you still do."

The service of Jesus true pleasure affords,
In Him there is joy without an alloy;
'Tis heaven to trust Him and rest on His words;
It pays to serve Jesus each day.

It pays to serve Jesus, it pays every day,
It pays every step of the way,
Though the pathway to glory may sometimes be drear,
You'll be happy each step of the way.