

*If there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ has not been raised;  
and if Christ has not been raised, then our proclamation has been in vain and your faith has been in vain.<sup>1</sup>*

**I SPEAK TO YOU IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER, THE SON, and the HOLY SPIRIT. AMEN**

### **OPENING:**

St. Paul WAS on a roll in his 1<sup>st</sup> Letter to the Corinthians. He had the ‘Body Passage’ in Chapter 12, the ‘Hymn to Love’ in Chapter 13; in 14 he talks about Spiritual Gifts, and he sums it all up here in the final chapter by talking about Resurrection.

But, at least in this section, his writing starts to get really repetitive, it sounds like he is trying to get to a word count by repeating himself over and over. And, he almost seems to be attacking the Corinthians in this passage.

This is the ‘Paul’ (quote unquote) that sometimes people don’t like. The “Paul” whose wordiness and intensity form a contrast with Jesus. The ‘Paul’ that also says objectionable things about women and gay people.

My New Testament Professor used to say:  
“You may need to fight with Paul and that’s OK, though I should warn you that Paul can hold his own in almost any conversation, even though he has been dead for 2000 years.”<sup>2</sup>

Paul is arguing with the Corinthians about Resurrection, whether they will be resurrected as Jesus was, and whether it’s our bodies that get resurrected.

For the Corinthians, it had been 20 years or so since Jesus had died, and they were starting to have some doubts about the Resurrection. It’s been 2000 years for us, and we have the same doubts. Did it happen? Does it matter?

Don’t tell Paul that, here he’s full throttle. Here, he draws a proverbial line in the sand that makes me uncomfortable.

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<sup>1</sup> 1 Corinthians 15.13

<sup>2</sup> Kathy Grieb notes (11/2/2015)

## CORINTH

Paul is writing this letter to the church in Corinth, where the Isthmian Games were held, an athletic competition second only (in Ancient Greece) to the Olympic Games themselves. Paul's writings, of course, are full of athletic metaphors, talking about running, boxing, fighting, etc.

But here is a physical description of what Paul looked like:

*he was a man of middling size, and his hair was scanty, and his legs were a little crooked, and his knees were projecting, and he had large eyes and his eyebrows met, and his nose was somewhat long...<sup>3</sup>*

Therefore, when he starts yelling at the Corinthians about whether or not they believe in the Resurrection, and you have that visual image, it's not very flattering. Can you imagine this bald, ugly, unathletic man picking such fights?

## PAUL

I want to know, of course, what's behind it all, how does Paul get the confidence, the *chutzpah*, the integrity, the courage to proclaim the Gospel so forcefully.

I want to know, partly, because he's so unlike me.

I love Paul. His writing is so captivating to me because we are so different.

I am an Enneagram 9—my strategy is to get everyone to like me, then see if they will listen or it might rub off.

Paul's an 8. His strategy seems to be to do the opposite: proclaim the gospel, be as annoying as possible about it, then get out of town before you get thrown in jail or they kill you, both of which eventually happened to him.

How did Paul become the way he was?

We know why, of course, it's because he was so gob-smacked on the way to the Damascus Road.

The cynic in me though says "Congratulations Paul.... If only all of us had such a moment like that..."

Paul would reply though, that that none of that make him a spiritual Olympian, none of that makes him a champion in God's eyes.

He would be the first to say, actually, the exact opposite. That "chief among sinners" is he.<sup>4</sup> That he is powerless without God working through him.

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<sup>3</sup> [https://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Acts\\_of\\_Paul\\_and\\_Thecla](https://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Acts_of_Paul_and_Thecla)

<sup>4</sup> 1 Timothy 1.15

## OLYMPICS

Speaking of the Olympics, the United States has gotten off to a little bit of a rough start in Beijing 2022, we are currently in 7<sup>th</sup> place in the Medal Count. Not our best showing so far, and I am rooting for us to turn it around.

The most interesting thing for me, however, of these Games has been the very public disappointments and failures of our most gifted athletes.

For example, the incredibly talented, incredibly beautiful, Mikeala Shiffrin, 2-time Gold Medalist in Alpine Skiing, mess up.

She failed. She lost. She could not do the INCREDIBLY HARD thing that she had been training her body/ mind/ soul her whole life to do.

After her run, to make it worse, they stuck a microphone in her face and asked how she was processing it and she said: "Everything I thought I knew" was wrong.<sup>5</sup>

That follows up last Olympics where Simone Biles, an even more decorated Gold Medal Olympian, the greatest of All Time gymnast, deciding not to compete in the sport that she had dominated in previous years.

Instead, if you remember, Biles had the courage to reveal her pain, to trust in her teammates, to acknowledge her weakness—if we want to even call it that.

There was something heroic in that, something Olympian in her failure, as there was in Shiffrin's honesty and vulnerability,

I am sure that they did not wish that this happened, and I don't either, but there is something beautiful about them falling apart.

Are they ever, or is anyone, ever more real, more whole, more holy when they fail?

## GOSPEL:

Against that, the Corinthians understood winning as we do, in terms of power, success, achievement, beauty, strength.

Paul is the proverbial cold shower, he tells them that, in terms of your relationships, your worship, your diet, your sex lives, don't trust your own ability to thrive.

I have this mental image of Paul going into the modern-day Olympic Village—seeing all these examples of physical excellence and.... just being... difficult, reminding them of the Gospel truth, about sin and death and life, and am about losing yourself to gain everything.

And then him getting run out on a rail!

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<sup>5</sup> [Shiffrin questioning 'everything I thought I knew' after DNF | Winter Olympics 2022 | NBC Sports - YouTube](#)

## **SPORTS:**

Ironically, and unfortunately, athletes LOVE to quote St. Paul and the Pauline writings.

His quotations are tattooed literally across the bodies of all major sports athletes, Paul's athletic metaphors, are also ubiquitous in gyms and workout spaces and motivational memes with the most popular among athletes definitely being: Philippians 4.13. "I can do all things through God who gives me strength."

The message is something like:

"Work harder because God wants you to, work harder and God will reward you."  
It's an erroneous one. Again, Paul is actually saying the exact opposite.

Paul is saying that from his defeats, from his losses, from prison in fact, from his experience being beaten, from his failures in ministry, from the knowledge of the sins of his previous life as a persecutor of Christ, that's where he finds God's grace, that's where he finds his power.

Through his suffering, through his pain.

That's the context.

Not "you are good, with God you can be better."

Rather, he is telling the Corinthians:

"You are not so good, God loves you anyway."

## **CONCLUSION**

Paul is telling the Corinthians, you have to die. You have to give of yourself for others. The Corinthians are saying, no we would rather not. "We want to prove that we can do it ourselves, we will never die, or that our bodies don't matter."

Instead Paul keeps repeating himself, over and over and over. You will be resurrected, not because you achieved something, but because of what Christ did on the cross. Resurrection is victory, resurrection is life, resurrection is everything.

**AMEN**