

# FIRST CORINTHIANS

## Chapter 15

### *The Resurrection of Christ*

**Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, 2 and by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you—unless you believed in vain. 3 For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, 4 that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, 5 and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. 6 Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. 7 Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. 8 Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me. 9 For I am the least of the apostles, unworthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. 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. 11 Whether then it was I or they, so we preach and so you believed.**

**15:1-4** Paul will now show that the word of the cross (1 Cor 1:18–19) is the basis of the resurrection hope (chapter 15). He opens this new topic with a gentle rebuke (15:1–2). There is one more area in which the Corinthians have a lamentable lack of knowledge (cf. 10:1; 12:1; 14:38). This he now intends to remedy. According to reports he has received, some of them had failed to grasp the implications of the Gospel for the Christian’s hope. So he recites in credal form the “ABCs” of the Gospel—the things he had delivered to them as the vital “mother’s milk” of the faith (15:3–4)—as if they had never heard it before (cf. 3:1–2; Heb 5:12–13). Nevertheless, it was the same Gospel which Paul had preached to them some years earlier and which they had embraced at that time. Furthermore, it was to that same Gospel that they owed their present status as Christians (cf. Rom 11:20), and by that same Gospel that their present and future salvation was being secured (1 Cor 15:2; cf. 1:18). (CC pp. 551-52)

Paul adds that he wishes to make known “in what terms” (15:2) he had preached the Gospel to them. But before doing so, he voices his pastoral concern, saying in effect: “Are you retaining the Gospel? Surely you didn’t receive it in vain?” (15:2). (CC pp 552)

On the road to Damascus the risen Christ had revealed himself to Paul in blazing light from heaven and in a voice calling him to account for his sin (Acts 9:3–5). That personal encounter with Jesus convinced him that the one he had persecuted was the Son of God (Acts 9:20). Of course, the Christian message was by no means entirely new to Paul. After all, he had heard Stephen’s address and witnessed his martyrdom (Acts 7:1–8:1); no doubt Paul had learned other details about the faith from Christians he had interrogated. Later, after his conversion, he would have had the opportunity to flesh out his understanding of the basics when he spent two weeks with Cephas in Jerusalem (Gal 1:18). Paul remained adamant, however, that he had not received the Gospel from any human source (Gal 1:11–24) but through God “revealing his Son in me” (Gal 1:16; cf. Gal 1:12). The reception of Christ Jesus as Lord was central (Col 2:6; cf. 1 Cor 12:3). (CC p. 552)

This Gospel of the living Christ, then, Paul had faithfully transmitted to the Corinthians. What were the main terms of Paul's Gospel (τίνοι λόγῳ εὐηγγελισάμεν ὑμῖν, 15:2)? Paul summarizes its content in four clauses, each introduced by ὅτι ("that"): "*that* Christ died ... *that* he was buried ... *that* he has been raised ... and *that* he appeared" to many (15:3–8). (CC p. 552)

Among the Gospel's foremost features was, first of all, Christ's atoning death according to the Scriptures. That "Christ died for taking away our sins" (15:3) lay at the heart of the Gospel. These five words—six in the Greek original—indeed form one of Scripture's most succinct Gospel statements (cf. Rom 5:8, "Christ died for us"). Thus, in his great resurrection chapter, Paul begins with the sacrificial death of Christ, which he does not see as an event far removed from the resurrection, but as the first act in the drama of our salvation. Here Paul echoes his earlier statements on the Gospel word of the cross as the power of God (1 Cor 1:17–18). Without the powerful death of Christ, we would still be "in our sins" (Jn 8:24). (CC pp. 552–53)

Christ's atoning death took place "according to the Scriptures" (1 Cor 15:4). No doubt Isaiah 53, which is cited or echoed frequently in the NT (e.g., Mt 8:17; Acts 8:32–33; 1 Pet 2:22–25), would have been one of the chief texts in Paul's mind. But numerous other portions of the OT are cited in connection with aspects of the crucifixion narrative (e.g., Psalms 22; 69; Zech 12:10; 13:7). (CC p. 553)

According to all four gospels, the account of Christ's burial (1 Cor 15:4) underlines the reality of his physical death on the cross. Both the Apostles' Creed and the Nicene Creed testify that he "was buried." He had truly become a νεκρός ("a dead person, a corpse") who had to be disposed of in the usual manner. (CC p. 553)

The sequence of aorist tenses ("Christ *died*," "he *was buried*," 15:3–4) suddenly gives way to a significant and climactic perfect: "he *has been raised*" (15:4). From among the corpses Christ has been raised "by the glory of the Father" (Rom 6:4 completes the divine passive by naming God as the agent of the action) and continues to live as the risen one "forever and ever" (Rev 1:18). His resurrection took place "on the third day according to the Scriptures" (1 Cor 15:4). Earlier he had told his disciples that he "must" be killed and rise again on the third day (e.g., Mt 16:21), implying that this must happen to fulfill the Father's will as laid down in the OT Scriptures. The apostles and evangelists found the Messiah's resurrection foretold specifically in passages such as Ps 16:8–11; 110:1; Is 53:10–12; and far more broadly in other passages. (CC p. 553)

That it would happen on the third day seems to have its roots in Hos 6:2 and Jonah 1:17 (MT. LXX 2:1). What makes the Jonah passage particularly pertinent is that Jesus himself declared that Jonah's three days and three nights in the fish's belly was a prophecy of the Son of Man's three days and three nights in the heart of the earth (Mt 12:39–40). While there is no NT text which directly cites Hos 6:2 as a prophecy of Christ's resurrection on the third day, its wording suggests that the early church may also have found here one of the key OT *testimonia*. The prophet expresses the hope of all Israel: "*After two days* he will revive us; *on the third day* he will raise us up, that we may live before him." (CC p. 554)

In raising his Messiah on the third day, God also raises and bestows life on all those who are in Christ. Baptism into Christ's body (1 Cor 12:13) is Baptism into his death and resurrection (Rom 6:1–11; Col 2:11–13). (CC p. 554)

**15:1** *I would remind you* – gnoρίζω – To make known, reveal. I want you to know. Proud of their knowledge (gnosis, 8:1, 7, 10, 11), the Corinthians still need to learn or relearn the basics of the Gospel. (CC p. 549)

Lit, “make known.” He is “recalling it into memory” (Chrys, *NPNF* 1 12:226) because they had learned it before. (TLSB)

*received.* Paul first preached the Gospel in Corinth c AD 50 (Ac 18:1–18a). (TLSB)

*in which you stand* – εν ο και estakate – To stand or be in grace. (CC p. 549)

Just as they are saved by the Gospel, they stand firm and live by the Gospel. (TLSB)

**15:2** *you are being saved* – sozesthe – The passive present tense, denoting continuous action, indicates that the Corinthians are in the process of being saved. Christ’ ministry, death, and resurrection accomplished everything necessary for their salvation. However, their faith is under assault, and Paul must correct and educate them. If they fail to hold to the Gospel, then they would have “believed in vain.” So they are in the process of being saved in the sense that they are being preserved in the faith as God brings them closer to the day of resurrection, when their eschatological Christian hope will be fully realized. (CC pp. 549-50)

Though saved now through faith, the fullness of salvation is still to come in eternity. (TLSB)

*if you hold fast.* katechete – You will stand and find salvation only if you cling to the Gospel. (CC p. 550)

*the word I preached.* The Gospel. (TLSB)

*believed in vain.* † Not persevering in the Christian faith (cf. Judas Iscariot, who eventually showed that he did not remain a believer). (CSB)

The Corinthians stand by the Gospel, though it is also possible to fall away from it. (TLSB)

**15:3–5** Two lines of evidence for the death and resurrection of Christ are given here: (1) the testimony of the OT (e.g., Ps 16:8–11; Isa 53:5–6, 11) and (2) the testimony of eyewitnesses (Ac 1:21–22). Six resurrection appearances are listed here. The Gospels give more. (CSB)

**15:3-7** The fourth and final ὅτι (“that”) clause in 1 Cor 15:3–5 supplies the supporting evidence that Christ had really risen (ὄντως ἠγέρθη, Lk 24:34) on the third day. These four clauses state the foundational facts of the Gospel: “that Christ died for taking away our sins ... that he was buried ... that he has been raised ... and that he appeared” (1 Cor 15:3–5) to many witnesses. Luke relates that Jesus “presented himself alive after his suffering by many convincing proofs, appearing to them [the apostles] over a period of forty days” (Acts 1:3). Thus the church’s faith in Christ’s resurrection rests on eyewitness testimony. (CC p. 554)

OT law stipulated that legal evidence should be corroborated by the testimony of two or three witnesses (Deut 17:6; 19:15). The resurrection of Christ is so vital a fact for the Christian faith that God supplied an abundance of witnesses. Fittingly, the first eyewitness on Paul’s list is the first of the twelve apostles, Simon Peter or, as Paul calls him by the Aramaic equivalent, Cephas ( Ⲛⲉⲫⲏϥ, “stone, rock”; cf. Mt 10:2; Lk 24:34). Christ’s appearance to him must have been reassuring to Cephas after his shameful denial, and it prepared him for his leadership role in the days after Christ’s ascension (e.g., Lk 22:32; Acts 1:15; 2:14). (CC p. 554)

Jesus' appearances to "the Twelve" (1 Cor 15:5) took place on the evening of the first Easter Sunday (Lk 24:33–36; Jn 20:19) and again a week later when Thomas was present (Jn 20:24–29). Although only ten members of the original Twelve were present on the first occasion (Judas Iscariot was dead and Thomas was absent), and only eleven the following Sunday, Paul is using the term "the Twelve" in a technical sense for those who constituted the original apostles whom Jesus called during his earthly ministry (Mt 10:2–4 and parallels). (CC pp. 554-55)

Continuing in chronological sequence, Paul comes to Jesus' appearance to "more than five hundred brothers" (1 Cor 15:6). Since the evidence of two or three witnesses was sufficient to prove the veracity of an event, the presence of more than five hundred constitutes overwhelming testimony. There is no way of knowing when this event took place. One suggestion which fits the sequence is that it happened in conjunction with Jesus' Great Commission to the eleven apostles prior to his ascension (Mt 28:16–20). Although Matthew does not mention that others were present, it seems that the apostles usually were accompanied by a larger group of Jesus' disciples (cf. Lk 24:33; Acts 1:14–15; 13:31). (CC p. 555)

If anyone was still skeptical about these appearances of the risen Christ, he could easily check out the story himself by consulting some of these five hundred eyewitnesses. For most of them were still alive, though some had "fallen asleep" in Christ (1 Cor 15:6). This euphemism for Christian death is found again in 15:18, 20, and 51. It should be preserved in English translations because of its allusion to the resurrection. (CC p. 555)

The Lord's next appearance was to James. This James was his half-brother, the second oldest son in the family (Mt 13:55). James and his younger brothers had initially refused to believe in Jesus (Jn 7:5), but this post-resurrection appearance proved to be a turning point, it seems, not only for James but also for his brothers. Thus in the days between the ascension and Pentecost they joined the other believers at prayer in the upper room (Acts 1:14). Subsequently, James became the leader of the Jerusalem church (Acts 15:13; 21:18). Paul counted him among the "apostles" (Gal 1:19) and "pillars" (Gal 2:9) of the church universal. (CC p. 555)

Then Jesus appeared to "all the apostles" (1 Cor 15:7). If this includes "James" (15:7, the Lord's brother) and possibly others in the five hundred, then it was a wider group than "the Twelve." It would be James and the rest of Jesus' brothers and men like Barnabas, Andronicus, Junias, and others able to add their testimony as eyewitnesses of the risen Christ and commissioned to do so (cf. Acts 14:4, 14; Rom 16:7). Paul himself was later included in this wider apostolic group. How he came to be included in their number he will explain in the next pericope (1 Cor 15:8–11). (CC p. 555)

**15:3** I delivered to you...*what I also received*. Here Paul links himself with early Christian tradition. He was not its originator, nor did he receive it directly from the Lord. His source was other Christians. The verbs he uses are technical terms for receiving and transmitting tradition. What follows is the heart of the gospel: that Christ died for our sins (not for his own sins; cf. Heb 7:27), that he was buried (confirmation that he had really died) and that he was raised from the dead. (CSB)

Though Paul had much to teach the Corinthians, nothing was more important than the Gospel. This is always true. The Gospel predominates in Christian teaching. (TLSB)

*that Christ died ... with the Scriptures*. These words form the heart of the Apostles' Creed, which summarized the Gospel for the early Christians. "He suffered, died, and was buried so that He might make satisfaction for me and pay what I owe" (LC II 31). (TLSB)

**15:4** *was raised* – egagertai – Paul switches to the perfect tense in order to express the ongoing significance of what happened on the third day. Not only was Jesus raised on that day, but he remains a risen Savior still today. (CC p. 550)

*on the third day.* Cf. Mt 12:40. The Jews counted parts of days as whole days. Thus the three days would include part of Friday afternoon, all of Saturday, and Sunday morning. A similar way of reckoning time is seen in Jn 20:26 (lit. “after eight days,” NIV “a week later”); two Sundays are implied, one at each end of the expression. (CSB)

**15:5** *Cephas ... the Twelve.* The appearance to Peter is the one mentioned in Lk 24:34, which occurred on Easter Sunday. The appearance to the Twelve seems to have taken place on Sunday evening (see Lk 24:36–43; Jn 20:19–23). “The Twelve” seems to have been used to refer to the group of original apostles, even though Judas was no longer with them (notice, however, that the 11 disciples, the 11 apostles or “the Eleven” are referred to in Mt 28:16; Mk 16:14; Lk 24:9, 33; Ac 1:26). (CSB)

Lit, only 11 disciples at the time of the resurrection. However, “twelve” meant “the company of the apostles” for early Christians. (TLSB)

OT law stipulated that legal evidence should be corroborated by the testimony of two or three witnesses (Deut. 17:6; 19:15). The resurrection of Christ is so vital a fact for the Christian faith that God supplied an abundance of witnesses. (CC p. 554)

**15:6** *more than five hundred ... at one time.* The appearance to this large group may be mentioned to help bolster the faith of those Corinthians who evidently had some doubts about the resurrection of Christ (cf. v. 12). This appearance may be the one in Galilee recorded in Mt 28:10, 16–20, where the Eleven and possibly more met the risen Lord. (CSB)

Scripture records numerous appearances of Jesus over the 40 days after the resurrection. Paul recounts six examples here. Apostles were not always alone when Jesus visited them (cf Lk 24:33; Ac 1:14–15; 13:31). Paul does not specifically appeal to the women who first saw Jesus after the resurrection. This may be because in Roman culture the testimony of women was not regarded as fully reliable. (TLSB)

*some have fallen asleep.* A common expression at that time for physical death (cf. Ac 7:60). (CSB)

Physical death. (TLSB)

*James ... apostles.* James, Jesus’ half brother, is singled out because he came to lead the Jerusalem churches. (TLSB)

**15:7** *James.* Since this James is listed in addition to the apostles, he is not James son of Zebedee or James son of Alphaeus (Mt 10:2–3). This is James, the half-brother of Jesus (Mt 13:55), who did not believe in Christ before the resurrection (Jn 7:5) but afterward joined the apostolic band (Ac 1:14) and later became prominent in the Jerusalem church (Ac 15:13). It is not clear in Scripture when and where this appearance to James occurred. (CSB)

*to all the apostles.* For example, Ac 1:6–11. (CSB)

**15:8-11** Paul concludes the list of eyewitnesses who can attest to the fact of Jesus' resurrection, which is the foundation of the Gospel. In deep humility, he finally mentions himself. The Lord had appeared to him "last of all" (1 Cor 15:8). Thus on one important count he was not qualified to be an apostle in the strictest sense: he had not accompanied the other disciples during the three years or so that the Lord Jesus "went in and out" among them (Acts 1:21–22). Like a "premature birth" (ἔκτρωμα), he had not had the benefit of a full gestation period; he had been thrown into his apostleship in a sudden and unexpected fashion. Yet even he—a premature birth (1 Cor 15:8), a former persecutor (15:9)—had been given the privilege of becoming an eyewitness of the resurrected Christ. (CC pp. 556-57)

In 15:9–10 Paul now elaborates on what he has just said about himself as "last of all," a premature birth (15:8). He considered himself the least of the apostles; indeed, in his epistle to the Ephesians, he called himself "the very least of all the saints" (Eph 3:8). To be a Christian at all was a high privilege for one who saw himself as "nothing" in God's sight (2 Cor 12:11; see also 1 Cor 3:7); to be a "called apostle" (κλητὸς ἀπόστολος, Rom 1:1; 1 Cor 1:1) was a sign of unfathomable grace. Like Jacob in his later years, he knew he was not worthy of the least of the mercies God had shown his servant (Gen 32:10). (CC pp. 557)

Paul's consciousness of personal unworthiness was sharpened by the painful memory of the way he had persecuted the church of God. He acknowledged that he shared responsibility for the murder of the Lord's disciples (Acts 26:10; cf. Acts 9:1). In attacking God's saints, he had attacked the Son of God himself (Acts 9:4). For that affront to the divine Majesty, he knew he deserved death and eternal condemnation. But instead of condemnation, this chief of sinners had been privileged to receive God's astounding grace, mercy, and longsuffering love (μακροθυμία, 1 Tim 1:12–16; cf. 1 Cor 13:4), so that he had become the person he was: not only a saint, but even an apostle. Totally insufficient for these things in himself, the sufficiency of God had conferred this ministry on him and equipped him for it (2 Cor 2:16; 3:5–6; 4:1). (CC p. 557)

God's unmerited grace toward him had born rich fruit. Indeed, he had labored "more than them all" (1 Cor 15:10). Commentators debate whether this means "more than all the other apostles put together" or "more than any one of them"; probably it is the latter. Called by the One who came to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many (Mk 10:45), Paul devoted long hours to wearisome toil and endured great hardships in his Master's service. (CC pp. 557-58)

While it was no empty boast but the simple truth that he had labored harder than anyone else, Paul refrains from continuing in this vein (cf. 2 Cor 12:6), lest anyone think he wanted the credit for himself. No, he says that "the grace of God that was with [him]" (1 Cor 15:10) was the master workman laboring alongside him. All the glory belonged to God alone and to Christ, who had worked in him and through him to bring the Gentiles to the obedience of faith (Rom 15:18; Gal 2:8). Apart from God's grace in Christ, Paul knew he could accomplish nothing. In 1 Cor 3:6–7 he stated, "I planted, Apollos watered, but God was giving the growth. So neither the planter is anything nor the waterer, but only God, who does the growing" (cf. Jn 15:5). As one commentary aptly observes: "The Apostle's satisfaction with his own labours 'from a human point of view is as the joy of a child who gives his father a birthday present out of his father's own money.'" (CC p. 558)

Thus Paul's joy and confidence in the risen Christ had inspired him to fruitful labor in the Lord's service. The chapter ends with his appeal to the Corinthians to follow the pattern he had shown them, abounding in the Lord's work in the confidence that their labor, no less than Paul's, would not be in vain (1 Cor 15:58; cf. 3:12–15). (CC p. 558)

Paul now rounds off this first section of the chapter in 15:11. The other apostles and eyewitnesses had labored before him; he, as an untimely birth, had joined that great cloud of witnesses and entered into that same labor. So whether it was Paul himself or Cephas or the Twelve or any of the others Paul had listed (15:5–7), they all preached the same Gospel of Christ’s death and resurrection (15:3–4). And it was to that common Gospel that the Corinthians owed their faith and hope of resurrection to eternal life. (CC p. 558)

**15:8** *last of all.* † See Ac 9:1–8. This appearance to Paul came several years after the resurrection (perhaps c. A.D. 32 or 33). (CSB)

In his epistle to the Ephesians, Paul called himself “the very least of all the saints.” (Eph 3:8) (CC p. 557)

*one untimely born.* Paul was not part of the original group of apostles. He had not lived with Christ as the others had. His entry into the apostolic office was not “normal.” Furthermore, at his conversion he was abruptly snatched from his former way of life (Ac 9:3–6). (CSB)

Medical term for a premature birth, including stillbirth, miscarriage, and abortion. Possibly this insult was used by Paul’s opponents to tear down his authority. Earlier, Paul asserted his authority; now he purposely humbles himself to emphasize God’s grace (cf v 10). (TLSB)

ektromati – Untimely birth, miscarriage, to abort or any kind of premature birth. (CC p. 556)

**15:9** *church of God.* In persecuting the church, he was actually persecuting Christ (see Ac 9:4–5). (CSB)

**15:10** *not in vain* – kena – Without result, without profit or without reaching its goal. (CC p. 556)

*grace of God that is with me* – The master workman laboring alongside him. All the glory belonged to God alone and to Christ, who had worked in him and through him to bring the Gentiles to the obedience of faith (Rom. 15:18; Gal. 2:8). (CC p. 558)

*I worked harder* – ekopiasa – To work to the point of weariness. (CC p. 556)

**15:11** *so we preach.* Paul now ranks himself with the other apostles, demonstrating unity with them despite conflicts about his apostleship. (TLSB)

**15:1–11** Because of zeal for more knowledge, the Corinthians have neglected what has first importance: the simple truths and application of the Gospel. How great is the temptation for us to overlook the Gospel today! A multitude of contemporary issues can crowd out the Gospel of life and forgiveness in Jesus until it grows unclear in our minds. Praise God for the wonderful creeds that our forebears have handed down across the centuries, which take up Paul’s very words, summarize the Holy Gospel, and etch it into our memories. • Holy Jesus, You died to take away my sins and rose to fulfill all the Father’s promises in Scripture. Send now Your Holy Spirit so that by Your grace I may stand in this faith always. Amen. (TLSB)

*The Resurrection of the Dead*

**12 Now if Christ is proclaimed as raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? 13 But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. 14 And if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain**

**and your faith is in vain. 15 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. 16 For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised. 17 And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins. 18 Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. 19 If in Christ we have hope[b] in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied. 20 But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. 21 For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. 22 For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. 23 But each in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ. 24 Then comes the end, when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power. 25 For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. 26 The last enemy to be destroyed is death. 27 For “God[c] has put all things in subjection under his feet.” But when it says, “all things are put in subjection,” it is plain that he is excepted who put all things in subjection under him. 28 When all things are subjected to him, then the Son himself will also be subjected to him who put all things in subjection under him, that God may be all in all. 29 Otherwise, what do people mean by being baptized on behalf of the dead? If the dead are not raised at all, why are people baptized on their behalf? 30 Why are we in danger every hour? 31 I protest, brothers, by my pride in you, which I have in Christ Jesus our Lord, I die every day! 32 What do I gain if, humanly speaking, I fought with beasts at Ephesus? If the dead are not raised, “Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die.” 33 Do not be deceived: “Bad company ruins good morals.” 34 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.**

**15:12–19** Some at Corinth were saying that there was no resurrection of the body, and Paul draws a number of conclusions from this false contention. If the dead do not rise from the grave, then (1) “not even Christ has been raised” (v. 13); (2) “our preaching is useless” (v. 14); (3) “so is your faith” (v. 14); (4) we are “false witnesses” that God raised Christ from the dead (v. 15); (5) “your faith is futile” (v. 17); (6) “you are still in your sins” (v. 17) and still carry the guilt and condemnation of sin; (7) “those also who have fallen asleep [have died] in Christ are lost” (v. 18); and (8) “we are to be pitied” who “only for this life ... hope in Christ” (v. 19) and put up with persecution and hardship. (CSB)

Paul demonstrates thorough skill in classic logic and rhetoric (the art of persuasion) by using careful arguments. His if-then sentences test impossible notions and show the foolish implications of the Corinthians’ doubts about the resurrection. (TLSB)

**15:12** *Christ is proclaimed as raised.* Christ was raised historically on the third day. Paul uses this same verb form (that expresses the certainty of Christ’s bodily resurrection) a total of seven times in this passage (vv. 4, 12–14, 16–17, 20). (CSB)

*no resurrection.* Greek learning and culture opposed the idea that the body could rise from the dead. Some Greeks believed that the body and physical things were inherently bad but that the spirit was inherently good. Members of the Corinthian congregation continued to hold these opinions, even though they seem to have accepted that Christ rose from the dead. (TLSB)

**15:16** Paul repeats his main premise (v 13). (TLSB)

**15:17** *still in your sins.* Christ’s sacrifice on the cross redeemed us from sin and from death. But if Christ had remained in the grave, His victory over sin would be incomplete. The complete act



of redemption—called the Gospel—is the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of our sins (cf vv 3–4). (TLSB)

**15:18** *perished*. Destruction beyond hope of redemption. (TLSB)

**15:19-28** Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians addresses specific problems and questions that the early church encountered there. Under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, Paul deals with these challenges in a straightforward Law/Gospel approach. Present-day pastors confront many of the same problems and challenges, i.e., sexual immorality, marriage and divorce, strife, division in the church, abuse of the Lord’s Supper, spiritual gifts, and the resurrection of the dead. This epistle is timely and particularly relevant for us today. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 1, Part 2)

In the 15th chapter, Paul deals with the question of the resurrection of the body. He also assures his readers that because Christ was raised in his body, we too shall have a bodily resurrection at his return. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 1, Part 2)

**15:19** *most to be pitied* – If for this life only we have hoped in Christ, we are of all men most to be pitied,” and we are also the greatest fools, for we alone renounce all goods and comforts, all joy and happiness of this life and of all creatures, we expose ourselves to every peril of life and limb in vain and for nothing and to the terrible and unspeakable terror of hell, so that we have to live in contempt and in misery before the world and in eternal fear before God. (Luther)

εἰ ἐν τῇ ζωῇ ταύτῃ ... ἡλπιότες ἐσμὲν μόνον—Some interpreters take the adverb μόνον, “only,” with the verb immediately preceding it: “If in this life we have only hoped”—that is, we have no certainty, only a hope that is an empty shell, a hope which ultimately disappoints us. But the NT does not speak of hope in that negative way. More likely the adverb “only” modifies the whole sentence, and above all the phrase “in this life.” That is the consensus of the English versions; cf. RSV: “If for *this life only* we have hoped in Christ ...” (emphasis added). (CC p. 560)

Indeed, Paul continues, if the skeptics are right, Christians have lost both the present and the future. They do not enjoy present forgiveness in Christ, nor do they have any hope that extends beyond the veil into heaven (15:19; cf. Heb 6:18-20). Their hope is only good for this life. Contrary to what Paul maintained in 1 Cor. 13:13, hope would not endure and be fulfilled in eternity. With such limited hope, Christians would be “of all people most miserable. They would have staked their lives on a great delusion. Even more did this apply to Paul and his coworkers. When they could have been “living it up,” eating and drinking, they had subjected themselves to extraordinary dangers and labors because of their resurrection hope (15:30-32; cf. 2Cor 6:4-10; 11:23-29). Was their hope merely a mirage? (CC p. 564)

### **Practical Implications**

For Paul, Christ’s resurrection is inseparably connected to the future resurrection of Christians; they are two sides of the same coin. Through Baptism Christians have become members of Christ’s own body (1 Cor 12:13). Consequently, the bodily resurrection of Jesus guarantees the resurrection of the believers’ bodies. And that resurrection will be the fulfillment of the gift of salvation accomplished through Christ’s death and inaugurated by Christ’s own bodily rising. Paul’s entire argument hinges on the unbreakable connection between Christ’s resurrection and the resurrection of believers on the Last Day. (CC p. 564)

Here is profound and direct insight for our proclamation of Christ’s Easter victory. Easter means that the victory has been won by Christ. At the same time, for God’s people the full participation

in that victory is yet to be experienced. Easter is, then, an eschatological event with end-time implications that the church must never forget if she is not to lose her hope. (CC pp. 564-565)

Contemporary Christians, including preachers, sometimes seem to forget that the final Christian hope is not just for the soul to enter Christ's presence after the death of the body. It is surely true that the Christian's soul goes "to be with Christ" immediately upon death (Phil 1:23; see also Lk 23:43; 2 Cor 5:8; Rev 6:9). At times, however, it seems as though this has become the only goal in the minds and hearts of believers, and that the return of Christ Jesus and the resurrection of the body do not play as vital a place in everyday living, believing, and hoping. (CC p. 565)

But the great hope toward which the church and indeed all creation looks is the renewal of that creation and the resurrection of the body. On that day, God will receive the full harvest of which Christ's own bodily resurrection is the firstfruits (1 Cor 15:20). For Christ will on the Last Day "raise me and all the dead and will grant eternal life to me and to all who believe in Christ. This is most certainly true." Without this hope, the Gospel proclaimed by Paul would collapse. Faith would be futile, sin and its consequences would remain, fellow Christians who have died would have perished, and humanity should look upon us Christians as people who are wasting their time. (CC p. 565)

Paul has led the Corinthians from their view—that there is no final resurrection of the body—to the place of despair to which such a view inevitably leads. Next, with the glorious rhetorical pivot of "but as it is ..." (15:20) Paul will move them from despair back to hope. (CC p. 565)

**15:20** Leaving behind the depressing hypotheses which filled the previous paragraph (1 Cor. 15:12–19: "if there were no resurrection of the dead ..."), Paul gives a ringing affirmation: "But as it is [vov̄i δέ], Christ has been raised from the dead" (15:20). The Corinthians should never doubt this basic tenet of their creed, nor should they doubt its implications for their own resurrection. For the risen Christ is not the only one who would rise; he is the "firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep" (15:20; cf. Rev 1:5). Just as the Israelites brought the sheaf of firstfruits to the Lord on the "Sunday" after Passover as a sign that the whole harvest belonged to him (Lev 23:9–15), so Christ's resurrection was the pledge that all who had fallen asleep in him would be physically raised as he was. (CC p. 568)

*but – nuni – But now, just now, but as it is, meaning that it is a fact and this is the end of all speculation. (TLSB)*

*Christ has indeed been raised.* Paul's categorical conclusion based on his evidence set forth in vv. 3–8. (CSB)

"Christ has indeed been raised." The verb *hegēgertai* is the perfect passive of *hegeirō*, "to raise." This verb form expresses the certainty of Christ's bodily resurrection as an accomplished fact. This is the 7th occurrence of the verb in this chapter. "Make no mistake," Paul is saying, "Christ has been raised!" It is done! We know it and believe it! (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 1, Part 2)

But He came forth alive from the grave in which He lay and destroyed and consumed both devil and death, who had devoured Him. He tore the devil's belly and hell's jaws asunder and ascended into heaven, where He is now seated in eternal life and glory." This is to be comfort and defiance. For on His name we are baptized, and we hear and profess His Word. After Him we are called Christians, and for His sake we suffer every misfortune and grief from the hand of the devil. For this is not aimed at us but at Him and His kingdom, whose enemy the devil is. He tries to destroy

it, and he treats us so roughly and wearies us with pursuit, harassment, and death so that we might forsake Christ. (Luther)

The apostle comes now to the triumphant assertion of the fact, the proof of which he has already stated. (CB)

*firstfruits*. The first sheaf of the harvest given to the Lord (Lev 23:10–11, 17, 20) as a token that all the harvest belonged to the Lord and would be dedicated to him through dedicated lives. So Christ, who has been raised, is the guarantee of the resurrection of all of God’s redeemed people (cf. 1Th 4:13–18). (CSB)

The earliest portion of a harvest, which Israel sacrificed to God in thanks for the full harvest to come. (TLSB)

The first of any crop, herd or family was given to the Lord. This represented all the rest of the crop, herd or family. In this case it means that Christ’ resurrection includes the resurrection of everyone else.

This is the perfect passive. This verb form expresses the certainty of Christ’s bodily resurrection as an accomplished fact. This is the 7<sup>th</sup> occurrence of the verb in this chapter. “Make no mistake,” Paul is saying, “Christ has been raised!” It is done! We know it and believe it!

ἀπαρχή—This is one of the Greek words the LXX uses (e.g., Ex 23:19; Ezek 44:30) to translate עֲרֵבֹת, the “firstfruits” God commanded the Israelites to offer to him (e.g., Ex 23:19; 34:22, 26; Lev 23:17, 20). The “firstfruits” were the first produce from the harvest, with the full harvest yet to come. The LXX also uses the word to translate בְּכוֹר, the “firstborn” son and “firstborn” animals that were to be offered to God (e.g., Ex 22:28; Deut 12:6, 17). The NT regularly uses this term of a first installment which betokens a greater fullness to come (Rom 8:23; 11:16; 16:5; 1 Cor 15:20, 23; 16:15; 2 Thess 2:13; James 1:18; Rev 14:4). Cf. LXX Lev 23:10. (CC p. 566)

And what is more than that, by calling Christ “the Firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep” Paul wishes to signify that the resurrection is to be viewed and understood as having already begun in Christ, indeed, as being more than half finished, and that this remnant of death is to be regarded as no more than a deep sleep, and that the future resurrection of our body will not differ from suddenly awaking from such a sleep. For the main and best part of this has already come to pass, namely, that Christ, our Head, has arisen. But now that the Head is seated on high and lives, there is no longer any reason for concern. (Luther)

**15:21-22** Luther: “St. Paul is still speaking only about those who are Christians. These he wants to instruct and console with this article. For although also the non-Christians must all arise, this will not be to their comfort and joy, since they will arise for judgment and not for life... I will say nothing of that great vulgar throng which seeks its pleasure and consolation only here, which [despises] God’s Word and cares not a mite for God and His kingdom. It is not surprising that such people are annoyed to hear of the blessed resurrection; for us, however, it is pure joy, because we hear that our greatest Treasure, over which we rejoice, is already in heaven above, and that only the most insignificant part remains behind; and that He will awaken this, too, and draw it after Him as easily as a person awakens from sleep” (AE 28:114–15). (TLSB)

**15:21** by a man came death. Through Adam (Ge 3:17–19). (CSB)

δι' ἀνθρώπου θάνατος ... δι' ἀνθρώπου ἀνάστασις—Literally, “through a man death ... through a man resurrection.” The Greek is succinct; there are no verbs and no definite articles. The translation of ἄνθρωπος as “man” (KJV, NIV, RSV) rather than “human being” (NRSV) is defensible not only for its succinctness but also because of the referents, Adam and Christ (15:22). (CC p. 566)

“In Adam all die.” All who are in Adam—his descendants, meaning all people—must suffer death because they have inherited his sin and its consequences. This is why Paul reminds us that the last enemy to be destroyed is death (v 26). Since all human beings are physical descendants of Adam, all are heirs of the physical result of his disobedience: death. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 1, Part 2)

Through one man’s disobedience, the tragedy of human suffering and death had become the common lot of all (1 Cor 15:21–22) (See also, e.g., Gen 2:17; 4:8, 23; 5:5). It was fitting, then, that it would be through the obedience of another man, the second Adam, that resurrection and life would come to all men. Later Paul would spell this out more fully in his epistle to the Romans (5:12–21). Here he sketches the Adam-Christ typology in the briefest terms. Just as Adam’s sin and death affected not only himself but all humanity, so the Corinthians needed to appreciate that Christ’s resurrection was not only for his own benefit; through this Man the resurrection from the dead had become the destiny of all believers. For just as Adam was the head of the old humanity, so that his fall left a legacy of sin and death to all, so Christ stands as head of the new humanity to be made alive in him. And—to use Luther’s fine analogy from the birth of humans and animals—“after [the head] is born, the whole body follows easily.” (CC pp. 568-569)

Cf. LW 28:110:

For the main and best part of this has already come to pass, namely, that Christ, our Head, has arisen. But now that the Head is seated on high and lives, there is no longer any reason for concern. We who cling to Him must also follow after Him as His body and His members. For where the head goes and abides, there the body with all the members must necessarily follow and abide. As in the birth of man and of all animals, the head naturally appears first, and after this is born, the whole body follows easily. (CC p. 569)

*the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man.* Through Christ, the second Adam, “the last Adam” (v. 45; cf. Ro 5:12–21). (CSB)

Here St. Paul places these two types over against each other. He wants to say: “Through one man, Adam, so much was effected that all men must now die, both he and all of us who, after all, did not commit or perpetrate the offense but came into sin and death solely because we are descended from him.” Although this happens after the Fall, yet it is no longer the sin of another, but it becomes our own when we are born. That is a miserable deal and an awful judgment of God; and it would be still more terrible if we were all to remain in death eternally. But now God placed a second Man, called Christ, over against the first one, so that, just as we die without any fault of our own by reason of the first man, we shall live again by reason of Christ and without our merit. And as we in Adam have to pay solely for the fact that we are his members or his flesh and blood, so we enjoy our advantage here in Christ also solely by virtue of His being our Head. It is pure grace and gift, so that we have no works or merits to boast of here. (Luther)

“In Christ all will be made alive.” The verb *zōiopoieῦσονται* is first future passive indicative of *zōiopoieō*, “to make alive.” Paul contrasts the present reality of death with the future reality of

resurrection. Though physical death is a certainty for everyone, it is equally certain that those in Christ will be made alive. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 1, Part 2)

**15:22** *in Adam all die.* All who are “in Adam”—i.e., his descendants—suffer death. (CSB)

ἐν τῷ Ἀδάμ ... ἐν τῷ Χριστῷ—The definite articles point to both Adam and Christ as specific historical persons. (CC p. 566)

*in Christ all shall be made alive.* † All who are “in Christ”—i.e., who are related to him through faith—will be made alive at the resurrection (cf. Jn 5:25; 1Th 4:16–17; Rev 20:6). (CSB)

ζωοποιηθήσονται—See this verb also in 15:36, 45. In the LXX God “is almost always the subj[ect] of ζωοποιεῖν.” He kills and *makes alive* (2 Ki 5:7; cf. 1 Sam 2:6). In the NT the subject may be God the Father (Jn 5:21; Rom 4:17; 8:11) or God the Son (Jn 5:21; 1 Cor 15:45) or God the Spirit (Jn 6:63; 2 Cor 3:6). The verb is strongly soteriological and eschatological, pointing to the triune God’s unique power in making alive through the Gospel those who are spiritually dead, and raising those who are physically dead. In Jn 5:21 and Rom 8:11 it parallels ἐγείρω. Compare Rev 20:4–6, 12–15, which portrays “the first resurrection [ἀνάστασις]” (Rev 20:5) as the spiritual resurrection of Christians in this life, when they are made alive through the Gospel. The second resurrection is the bodily resurrection of all people on Judgment Day. (CC pp. 566-567)

This latter clause in 1 Cor 15:22 (“so also in Christ all will be made alive”) must not be understood in a universalistic sense. Only “those who belong to Christ” (οἱ τοῦ Χριστοῦ, 15:23) through baptismal incorporation (“we all were baptized with one Spirit into one body,” 12:13) and by faith will receive the gift of resurrection to eternal life. Unbelievers too will be raised bodily but then will be cast into the lake of fire, which is “the second death” (Rev 20:14–15; cf. Dan 12:1–3). (CC p. 569)

The verb is first future passive indicative, “to make alive.” Paul contrasts the present reality of death with the future reality of resurrection.

Therefore the grace, the consolation, and the joy are as great here as the misery and sadness are there, indeed, even greater. The benefit surpasses the harm done by far. If someone inflicts a slight injury on me and another compensates me richly for this, what cause for complaint do I have? It is as if a thief had stolen ten florins from me and a rich man reimbursed me with one hundred florins. Therefore when the devil kills my body with all sorts of evil, Christ again restores this to me in a state much more glorious, beautiful, and brilliant than the bright sun. Therefore we must not be concerned about our reluctance to die, but against this we must vividly picture the happiness and the joy that will be ours in yonder life. This will be inexpressibly greater and more glorious than the damage and the woe which we now suffer from Adam. (Luther)

This clause must not be understood in a universalistic sense. Only “those who belong to Christ” (15:23) through baptismal incorporation (“we all were baptized with one Spirit into one body,” 12:13) and by faith will receive the gift of resurrection to eternal life. Unbelievers too will be raised bodily but then will be cast into the lake of fire, which is, “the second death” (Rev 20:14–15; cf. Dan 12:1–3), (CC p. 569)

**15:23** *each in his own order.* † Christ, the firstfruits, was raised in his own time in history (c. A.D. 30), and those who are identified with Christ through faith will be raised at his second coming. His resurrection is the pledge that ours will follow. (CSB)

ἐν τῷ ἰδίῳ τάγματι—The word τάγμα is related to words like τάσσω, ὑποτάσσω, and τάξις, all of which have to do with “order.” A τάγμα can designate a military division; a group like the Sadducees or Essenes; or a position someone assumes, a rank. Here the context (“firstfruits, then ... then”) seems to require the meaning listed under BAGD, s.v. τάγμα, 2: “order, turn, arrangement.” (CC p. 567)

That is what is meant here when we read: “each in his own order.” These words differentiate between His resurrection and ours. For the order demands that He be the first; He must blaze the trail and produce life. After that He will gather all those who are His members and belong to the resurrection, one after another, so that they all come forth together on one day appointed by Him and live with Him eternally. (Luther)

Paul goes on to encourage the Corinthians to be patient. The end is not yet; their loved ones must still rest in the grave for a time. But everything will surely happen in its proper order. Christ’s resurrection is the great first step, the firstfruits holding the promise of everything else. Then His resurrection leaven will work through the whole church lump, as those who belong to Him (cf. Gal 5:24) will be raised when He descends from heaven on the Last Day (1 Thess 4:16). At no point in 1 Cor 15:2-28 does Paul refer to the fate of unbelievers; his concern is to bring comfort and hope to the believers (cf 1 Thess 4:18). (CC p. 569)

*at his coming* – Gk *parousia*; commonly described a royal visit. Used 18 times in the NT for Christ’s reappearing in glory. (TLSB)

παρουσία—Of its twenty-four occurrences in the NT, παρουσία is used six times of the arrival or physical presence of people (e.g., Stephanas, Fortunatus, and Achaicus, 16:17), and eighteen times of Christ’s second coming in glory—its meaning here, which the English transliteration “parousia” conveys. Deissmann showed that the word was commonly used for a royal visit. (CC p. 567)

*belong to Christ* – The dead in Christ. (TLSB)

**15:24** *the end*. The second coming of Christ and all the events accompanying it. This includes his handing over the kingdom to the Father, following his destroying all dominion, authority and power of the persons and forces who oppose him. (CSB)

τὸ τέλος—J. Weiss and H. Lietzmann held the view that τὸ τέλος here means a third group or τάγμα after Christ and the redeemed. But J. Hering has shown that τέλος never means a group of people. τὸ τέλος means “the end,” particularly in the sense of God’s great goal or purpose of redemptive history. (CC p. 567)

All things on earth will come to an end, and that which we together with all saints have desired and waited for since the beginning of the world will be ushered in, namely, that God Himself will be Lord alone and rule alone in us, His children. To this rule there will be no end. He Himself explains what He means with the end when He says that He will abolish every rule and power and will alone be all in all. (Luther)

*he delivers* – Christ, as a conquering general, now wars against sin, death, and the power of the devil. He will present His conquest to His Father, who has given Him authority to wage this war (v 28). (TLSB)

ὅταν παραδιδῶ ... ὅταν καταργήσῃ—The change from the present subjunctive παραδιδῶ in the first clause to the aorist subjunctive καταργήσῃ in the second may be significant; the aorist here indicates prior action. Thus Christ’s subjugation of the powers will precede his delivering the kingdom to the Father. The kingdom (βασιλεία, 15:24) is the *activity* of ruling, as indicated by the verb βασιλεύω in 15:25. (CC p. 567)

At the appointed time, *then* Christ’s second coming will usher in the consummation of the age (1 Cor 15:24). The conjunction “then” (15:24) does not necessarily indicate that there will be a marked interval between his return and his handing over the kingdom to the Father. Rather, the triumphant Messiah may be compared to a nobleman who had journeyed to a far country to receive a kingdom and then to return (Luke 19:12). All authority had been entrusted to him for this assignment (Matthew 11:27; 28:1). In the course of His campaigns against the enemies of the kingdom, he had bound up the “strong man” (Satan) and plundered his goods (Mark 3:22-27), so that Satan’s former possessions now belong to the conqueror. The He hands over His people to His God and father, having deposed all spiritual and temporal authorities and powers (1 Cor. 15:24). (CC p. 569)

*to God the Father – τῷ θεῷ καὶ πατρί*—Literally this phrase reads “to the God and Father.” This is a good example of Sharp’s rule: “When the copulative καὶ connects two nouns of the same case, ... of personal description, ... if the article ... precedes the first of the said nouns or particles, and is not repeated before the second noun or particle, the latter always relates to the same person.” (CC p. 567)

There is no personal pronoun “his” in the Greek phrase. But Jesus often referred to God as “my God” (e.g., Mt 27:46) and “my Father” (e.g., Mt 10:32). Since the plural pronoun ἡμῶν (“our”) is not used, Paul probably has in mind Jesus’ unique relationship with the Father. That relationship is indicated by inserting “his” in the translation above. (CC p. 568)

*every rule and every authority* – Spiritual powers that manifest themselves in sinful institutions and orders on earth. (TLSB)

The texts parallel to 15:24 make it clear Paul has in mind primarily hostile spiritual powers: the devil and his forces (Cf. Eph 1:21; 2:2; 3:10; 6:12). But his terminology is comprehensive, and he may well have been thinking also of hostile human authorities: kings, rules, and all anti-Christian forces who under the influence of demonic forces range themselves against the Lord and His Anointed. (CC p. 570)

Psalm 2; Acts 4:25–28; 2 Thess 2:8; Rev 19:19. Revelation portrays the anti-Christian forces as consisting of an unholy trinity, composed of Satan—the dragon (Revelation 12)—and two beasts (Revelation 13). The second beast later becomes “the false prophet” (Rev 16:13; 19:20; 20:10) and also the “harlot” (Rev 17:1, 5, 15–16; 19:2). The harlot riding the beast represents Babylon (Rev 17:1–6), which would refer to Rome, and to every oppressive power, especially when a false religious power unites with a governmental power to persecute the church. See the commentary on Rev 17:1–6 and the excursus “Is the Harlot the Antichrist?” in L. Brighton, *Revelation*, 435–45, 481–83. (CC p. 570)

Hays finds in the terms “ruler,” “authority,” and “power” (1 Cor 15:24) not only a reference to “cosmic spheres or forces” but also “concrete political implications” (*First Corinthians*, 265). While Hays’ suggestion that this text has “political implications” and that Paul’s doctrine of the resurrection is “subversive” outruns the evidence, he is

probably right in maintaining that Paul would include among the powers whose days are numbered “the ideology of imperial Rome” with its cities “replete with statues and temples dedicated to the glory of the Roman rulers.” (CC p. 570)

Christ’s triumph over these powers (1 Cor 15:25) fulfilled God’s plan as it had been laid down in Ps 110:1. David says: The Lord says to my Lord: “Sit at my right hand, till I make your enemies your footstool.” (CC p. 570)

Paul cites the psalm freely to show the divinely ordained necessity that Christ should triumph over death and ascend to the Father’s right hand, where he is enthroned and rules in the midst of his defeated foes (Ps 110:2). (CC p. 570)

Note how Paul differs from LXX Ps 109:1 (MT/ET 110:1) by inserting πάντα (“all his enemies”) and by altering the LXX’s ὑποπόδιον (“footstool”) to ὑπὸ τοὺς πόδας (“under the/his feet”). Paul may have effected these changes in order to make Psalm 110 (cited in 1 Cor 15:25) and Psalm 8 (cited in 1 Cor 15:27) echo one another according to the rabbinic method of *gezerah shawah* (“equal category”). Compare the citation of both Ps 110:1 and Ps 8:5–7 in close proximity in Heb 1:13–2:9 and in early Christian writings. See, for example, D. Hay, *Glory at the Right Hand: Psalm 110 in Early Christianity* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1973). On *gezerah shawah* (הַגְּזֵרָה שְׁוָה), see R. Longenecker, *Biblical Exegesis in the Apostolic Period*, second ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans 1999) 20. (CC p. 570)

His regency would continue until *all* his enemies had been subjugated completely. Paul adds “all” to the quote in 1 Cor 15:25 and places “all” first in the Greek of 15:27 to emphasize it. (CC p. 570)

**15:25-27** *He. Christ. last enemy ... death.* Contrary to notions of death as friendly and suicide as a solution, the Bible describes death as our enemy. The Lord created us for life, not death. Death is destroyed by the gift of eternal life in Christ. *subjection under His feet.* Paul applies these verses to Jesus. He is the man by whom God fulfills His purposes for all humankind. “There is and remains in Christ only one divine omnipotence, power, majesty, and glory, which is peculiar to the divine nature alone. But it shines, manifests, and exercises itself fully—yet voluntarily—in, with, and through the received, exalted human nature in Christ. In glowing iron there are not two kinds of power to shine and burn. But the power to shine and to burn is a property of the fire. Since the fire is united with the iron, it manifests and exercises this power to shine and to burn in, with, and through the glowing iron. From this union also the glowing iron has the power to shine and to burn without changing the essence and the natural properties of fire and iron. This guides how we understand the testimonies of Scripture that speak of the majesty to which the human nature in Christ is exalted” (FC SD VIII 66–67). (TLSB)

**15:25** *For he must reign.* † During this process of Christ’s destroying all dominion and handing over the kingdom to the Father, Christ must reign (Rev 20:1–6). Some take this to mean that Christ will literally reign with his saints for 1,000 years on the earth. But this refers to Christ’s reign over the course of history and in the lives of his people, who are spiritually raised, or born again. This reign is viewed as continuing throughout the present age. (CSB)

*under his feet.* An OT figure for complete conquest. Verse 25 is an allusion to Ps 110:1 (cf. Mt 22:44). (CSB)

Paul cites the psalm freely to show the divinely ordained necessity that Christ should triumph over death and ascend to the Father’s right hand, where He is enthroned and rules in the midst of His defeated foes. His regency would continue until all His enemies had been subjected



completely. Paul adds “all” to the quote and places “all” first in the Greek of 15:27 to emphasize it. (CC p. 570)

For through the Gospel and through Christendom He strikes the factious spiritually, repels the devil, dethrones the tyrants, subdues the raging and raving of the world, deprives sin and death of their strength and might, etc. This is His work which He pursues and in which He engages until the Last Day, only that He now does this piecemeal and by degrees. Then, however, He will knock the bottom out of the barrel and put an end to everything at one time. (Luther)

**15:26** *the last enemy* – This destruction of death will occur at the end of the second-coming events after Christ conquers his enemies (Rev 19:11–21; 20:5–14), at the great white throne judgment (when death and Hades will be thrown into the lake of fire). (CSB)

ἔσχατος ἐχθρὸς καταργεῖται ὁ θάνατος—Literally, “death is destroyed as last enemy.” “Death” is the subject of the sentence because it is preceded by the definite article, while “last enemy” (without the article) is the complement. The verb applies to a future event, but the verb’s present tense “strikes a note of vividness and certainty.” (CC p. 568)

A little later Paul will call death an “enemy” with a vicious sting,” “the sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the Law” (1 Cor 15:56). Humankind fears death as a hostile and destructive force (Heb 2:15) and the punishment for sin (Rom 6:23). (CC p. 570)

Luther sees death as “the last enemy” (15:26) because it outlasts the Christian’s other enemies (the flesh, the devil, the world, sin, and the Law): “Thus these enemies can deal with us only here on earth; after that they have to cease. Death, however, survives all the others and holds us in his power” (LW 28:136). (CC p. 570)

As long as people continue to die as the wages of their sin, inherited from Adam, who rebelled against the Creator, God’s good and gracious will for His creation is not yet brought to completion. But after all Christ’s people have been raised to life at His second coming, there will be no more death (Rev. 21:4). (CC p. 570-571)

The fact that death is our spiritual enemy has immense significance for Christian existence and Christian funerals. Sometimes at funerals one hears comments such as these: “We shouldn’t be sad; we should only rejoice. This is a victory celebration.” To be sure, there is a sense in which that is true. But death, the last enemy and sign of sin’s universal dominion over fallen humanity, will not be swallowed up until the Last Day (1 Cor 15:54), and Christians are free to grieve at the death of their loved ones. God never intended the pain of separation and the heartache that attends death. That sharp pain of grief can be an entirely appropriate manifestation of the biblical understanding that death is the enemy that has not yet been fully overcome. And so Christians may and should mourn at funerals—but not as those who have no hope (1 Thess 4:13–18). (CC p. 571)

Paul’s depiction of death as “the last enemy” to be defeated finds a graphic parallel in Revelation, where the unholy trinity of the beast, the false prophet, and the devil are thrown into the lake of fire, to be followed at last by “death” and Hades (Rev. 19:20; 20:10, 14). (CC p. 571)

See the commentary on those verses in L. Brighton, *Revelation*, 522, 575–76, 586–87. To speak of death as an “enemy” is important both for Paul’s culture and for our own. Just as ancient Stoics and Gnostics welcomed death as the soul’s release from the body, so today advocates of euthanasia and suicide speak of death as a “friend.” (CC p. 571)

**15:28** *the Son himself will be subjected to him.*† The Son will be made subject to the Father in the sense that administratively, after he subjects all things to his power, he will then turn it all over to God the Father, the administrative head. This is not to suggest that the Son is in any way inferior to the Father. All three persons of the Trinity are equal in deity and in dignity. The subordination referred to is one of function. The Father is supreme in the Trinity; the Son carries out the Father's will (e.g., in creation, redemption); the Spirit is sent by the Father and the Son to vitalize life, communicate God's truth, apply his salvation to people through the means of grace and enable them to obey God's will (or word). (CSB)

*so that God may be all in all.* The triune God will be shown to be supreme and sovereign in all things. (CSB)

Luther: "Everybody will find all wants that are now satisfied by all things satisfied in God Himself. When He will reveal Himself, we will be satisfied in body and soul and will no longer stand in need of so many things as we now do here on earth" (AE 28:141–42). (TLSB))

**15:29–34** From frustration, Paul resorts to sarcasm and even mockery. (TLSB)

**15:29** *being baptized on behalf of the dead.*† The present tense suggests that at Corinth people were currently being baptized for the dead. But because Paul does not give any more information about the practice, many attempts have been made to interpret the concept. Three of these are: 1. Living believers were being baptized for believers who died before they were baptized, so that they too, in a sense, would not miss out on baptism. 2. Christians were being baptized in anticipation of the resurrection of the dead. 3. New converts were being baptized to fill the ranks of Christians who had died. At any rate, Paul mentions this custom almost in passing, using it in his arguments substantiating the resurrection of the dead, but without necessarily approving the practice. Possibly Paul is citing an improper practice, similar to that of modern Mormons, as an example of people who believe in the resurrection. Probably the passage will always remain obscure. (CSB)

Lit, "What will the ones being baptized do over the dead?" Dozens of interpretations have been offered. Paul points out the irony that some Corinthians did not believe in the resurrection, yet held an opinion or practice based on the resurrection. He only alludes to the opinion or practice, which could have been (1) conducting Baptisms in graveyards to express hope in the resurrection of those who die in Christ (similar to Easter sunrise services held in church graveyards); (2) requests for Baptisms because of the inspiring examples of those who died; or (3) Baptisms that would somehow benefit those who had already died (though Paul never mentions a specific benefit). Gnostic groups developed practices based on this last interpretation (consider Mormon practices, which also misapply this text). Take note—Paul's ironic questions are no basis for novel practices. Instead, Christians should base their baptismal practices on Christ's clear command in Mt 28:19–20 and rejoice in the hope of the resurrection expressed through Baptism (Rm 6:3–5). (TLSB)

**15:30** *why are we in danger ourselves every hour?* If there is no resurrection, why should we suffer persecution and privation for Christ every day (cf. 2Co 11:23–29)? (CSB)

Paul asks rhetorically, "Why would I risk my life for things I don't truly believe in?" Cf Ac 18:5–6, 9, 12–13. (TLSB)

**15:32–33** To his Greek detractors, Paul quotes two Greek opinions: (1) a gross hedonist view that the good in life is only in pleasure, with no hope of an afterlife; (2) a saying by the Greek comic poet Menander that refutes gross hedonism. Even the Greek tradition gave helpful examples and warnings, which the Corinthians ignored. (TLSB)

**15:32** *I fought with beasts in Ephesus.*† This statement can be taken literally or figuratively. Although from Ac 19 we have no evidence of Paul suffering imprisonment and having to face the lions, Luke’s account is highly selective. The events recorded in Ac 19 could have occurred within three weeks of Paul’s three-year stay. (CSB)

*Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die.* See Isa 22:13; a fitting philosophy of life if there is no resurrection. (CSB)

**15:33** A quotation from the Greek comedy *Thais* written by the Greek poet Menander, whose writings the Corinthians would know. The application of the quotation is that those who are teaching that there is no resurrection (v. 12) are the “bad company,” and they are corrupting the “good character” of those who hold to the correct doctrine. Cf. Pr 13:20. (CSB)

**15:34** *do not go on sinning.* The sin of denying that there is a resurrection and thus doubting even the resurrection of Christ, all of which had a negative effect on the lives they were living. (CSB)

*some who have no knowledge of God.* Even in the Corinthian church. This, Paul says, is a shameful situation. (CSB)

Sarcasm and hyperbole. Such sins were certainly affecting some in the congregation, but Paul shames them all alike. (TLSB)

**15:12–34** The Corinthians take pride in their wisdom, but Paul tears apart their arguments with basic logic and rhetoric. Logic, rhetoric, and even sarcasm have their uses in preaching and teaching the Gospel. Yet all our powers and wisdom must remain subject to the Lord, who is “all in all.” The Lord refuted sin, death, Satan, and all our foes—not with reason but with acts: His death and resurrection for our redemption. • Victorious Savior, daily put to death my foolish pride and wisdom, and teach me the way of humility and self-sacrifice. In the daily repentance and renewal of Baptism, may I partake of Your sufferings so that I may partake of Your resurrection. Amen. (TLSB)

### *The Resurrection Body*

**35** But someone will ask, “How are the dead raised? With what kind of body do they come?” **36** You foolish person! What you sow does not come to life unless it dies. **37** And what you sow is not the body that is to be, but a bare kernel, perhaps of wheat or of some other grain. **38** But God gives it a body as he has chosen, and to each kind of seed its own body. **39** For not all flesh is the same, but there is one kind for humans, another for animals, another for birds, and another for fish. **40** There are heavenly bodies and earthly bodies, but the glory of the heavenly is of one kind, and the glory of the earthly is of another. **41** There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars; for star differs from star in glory. **42** So is it with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown is perishable; what is raised is imperishable. **43** It is sown in dishonor; it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness; it is raised in power. **44** It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body. **45** Thus it is written, “The first man Adam became a living being”; the last Adam became a life-giving

**spirit. 46 But it is not the spiritual that is first but the natural, and then the spiritual. 47 The first man was from the earth, a man of dust; the second man is from heaven. 48 As was the man of dust, so also are those who are of the dust, and as is the man of heaven, so also are those who are of heaven. 49 Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the man of heaven.**

**15:35–49** In discussing the nature of the resurrection body, Paul compares it to plant life (vv. 36–38), to fleshly beings (v. 39) and to celestial and earthly physical bodies (vv. 40–41). (CSB)

**15:35–41** Paul provides three examples from God’s created order to illustrate the principle of resurrection. The main point is v 38: we have the body and life that God chooses. Just as our current existence depends on His choices at creation, our eternal existence depends on His choice in redemption: resurrection unto life. (TLSB)

**15:35–37** Paul presents the question not as an honest inquiry but as a foolish attempt to cast doubt on the resurrection. Just as the “death” of a seed produces something greater and more fruitful, our death and resurrection in Christ will produce still greater fruit. (TLSB)

**15:36–38** Plant organisms, though organized similarly in their own order, are different; the seed sown is related to the new plant that sprouts, but the new sprout has a different and genuinely new body that God has given it. (CSB)

**15:39** *All flesh is not the same.* Although there is much that is similar in the organizational character of fleshly beings, each species is different: man, animals, birds, fish. (CSB)

**15:40–41** Here the analogy involves inanimate objects of creation: the sun, moon and stars with their differing splendor, and the earthly bodies (possibly the great mountains, canyons and seas) with their splendor. In it all, God can take similar physical material and organize it differently to accomplish his purpose. (CSB)

**15:42–44** In applying these analogies, the apostle says that in the case of the resurrection of the dead, God will take a perishable, dishonorable, weak (and sinful) body—“a natural body” characterized by sin—and in the resurrection make it an imperishable, glorious, powerful body. “Spiritual body” does not mean a nonmaterial body but, from the analogies, a physical one similar to the present natural body organizationally, but radically different in that it will be imperishable, glorious and powerful, fit to live eternally with God. There is continuity, but there is also change. (CSB)

**15:42–44a** *perishable ... imperishable.* This wordplay describes how God transforms the body for heavenly existence. Paul mentions the brokenness of our bodies in death, but the whole force of argument compels respect for the body, as one respects and sows a seed anticipating greatness. The groundwork for respectful Christian funerals is laid in this passage. “The body is put to death (mortified) because of present sin that is still left in the flesh. Death itself serves this purpose, namely, to abolish this flesh of sin, that we may rise absolutely new” (Ap XIIB 55–56). (TLSB)

**15:44–49** The contrast here between the natural body and the spiritual body again follows from their two representatives (see notes on vv. 21–22). One is the first Adam, who had a natural body of the dust of the ground (Ge 2:7) and through whom a natural body is given to his descendants. The other is the last Adam, Christ, the life-giving spirit (cf. Jn 5:26) who through his death and resurrection will at the second coming give his redeemed people a spiritual body—physical, yet

imperishable, without corruption, and adaptable to live with God forever (cf. Php 3:21). It will be a body similar to Christ's resurrected, glorified physical body (cf. Lk 24:36–43).

**15:44** *natural ... spiritual body.* Seems contradictory, yet our new life will transform the way we live now and eternally in the body. The believer's body will rise and live because of the new spirit (cf v 45). (TLSB)

**15:45** *a living being.* The earthly and the heavenly are mingled in human life; God's breath and life distinguished humankind from all other earthly creatures. (TLSB)

*last Adam ... life-giving spirit.* Cf Gn 2:7. An even greater mingling of the earthly and heavenly appeared with Jesus' incarnation, with a still greater result: the hope of redemption and eternal life. (TLSB)

**15:46** Adam, the earthly man, and his descendants received natural, earthly bodies. Christ, the last Adam, the man from heaven who became incarnate in a human body, received a glorified, spiritual body following his resurrection. Similarly, his redeemed people will receive a spiritual body.

**15:47** *second man.* Jesus, who begins a new order of human existence. (TLSB)

**15:35–49** The body—corrupted by sin—declines, decays, and dies. Humanly speaking, we can extend our lives only by having children, whom we likewise corrupt with our inherited sin. But thanks be to God! He chose to establish a new order for us through Jesus' life, death, and resurrection. Jesus resisted all corruption and grants us His heavenly life. • Jesus, lead me to respect my body and to regard my funeral like a farmer sowing with resurrection hope. By Your grace, may I and my loved ones reap a harvest of heavenly life. Amen. (TLSB)

### Mystery and Victory

**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. 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.**

**15:50** Paul's final argument about the resurrection of the body: God's redeemed people must have newly organized, imperishable bodies to live with him. "Flesh and blood" stands for perishable, corrupt, weak, sinful human beings. (CSB)

Flesh and blood by nature inherit sin and death from the First Adam. Of ourselves, we cannot receive the benefits of God's reign held by the Second Adam, Christ. However, when the Lord adopts us in Christ and cleanses us body and soul in Holy Baptism, we inherit our Father's kingdom. (TLSB)

σὰρξ καὶ αἷμα—This pair of words denotes human beings in Gal 1:16 and also in the reverse order (“blood and flesh”) in Eph 6:12; in Heb 2:14 the phrase “blood and flesh” refers to the physical aspect of human existence, which Christ too participated in through his incarnation. Paul’s use of this expression reflects a “Semitic tendency to express complex phenomena by two complementary terms” (e.g., “heaven and earth,” Gen 1:1; “waste and void,” Gen 1:2). Because the fall brought physical death upon all humans, the phrase summarizes human “mortality and creatureliness.” Cf. Sirach 14:18: “Like the buds on a sprouting tree, of which one decays and the other opens, so are the generations of flesh and blood; the one perishes and the other grows up.” The rabbis also used the expression “chiefly where the corruptible nature of man ... is compared with the eternity and omnipotence of God.” (CC p. 596)

The scoffers in Corinth had demanded to know this: “How are the dead raised? And with what kind of body do they come?” (1 Cor 15:35). They could not conceive that God would take any further interest in the disfigured human corpse; in fact, they found the whole idea abhorrent. In response to these skeptics, Paul has been contending that there are many kinds of bodies. No one should imagine that the almighty Creator of the immense variety of earthly and heavenly bodies would be limited to resuscitating our bodies in the same form in which they were buried. The body that will be raised will not be “the same flesh” (ἡ αὐτὴ σὰρξ, 15:39) but radically “different” (ἄλλη, 15:39, 41). (CC p. 599)

Paul now sums up his argument as he moves toward the triumphant climax: “This [is what] I am saying, brothers” (15:50). Of course, the skeptics are right in thinking that flesh and blood cannot inherit God’s kingdom. For ever since humanity fell into sin “flesh and blood” marks what is most perishable about us, designating our natural limitations and weaknesses as human beings, our frailty as people “of dust” (15:47–48; cf. Heb 2:14; 4:15), who are doomed to die (Gen 2:17) and return to dust (Gen 3:19). Thus the phrase “flesh and blood” in 1 Cor 15:50a parallels “corruption” in 15:50b. Flesh and blood, corruption, dishonor, weakness, and natural limitations (cf. 15:42–44) characterize our lives in this fleeting world (7:31). They belong to the order of things that comes “first” (15:46), under the headship of Adam, “the man of dust” (15:47–49). But they have no place in the coming eschatological order under Christ. For “that which is born of the flesh is flesh” (Jn 3:6; see also Jn 3:3). To inherit God’s kingdom a person must be born anew of water and the Spirit (Jn 3:5). Through Holy Baptism the Christian is “baptized ... into one body” (1 Cor 12:13)—Christ’s body—and so the Christian will be raised bodily even as Christ was. (CC pp. 599-600)

Cf. Luther (LW 28:198–99): (CSB)

The flesh and blood which is baptized in Christ, even though it once was flesh and blood, is now never called flesh and blood, for it is born anew of the Spirit. In a natural way it is flesh and blood, but not spiritually, because it has been purified by Christ in Baptism and received into God’s kingdom. Therefore it can no longer simply be called flesh and blood, except in an external and physical sense. For the term flesh and blood really applies to the old man in accordance with reason, as descended from flesh and blood, ... who is without faith and God’s Word and without Christ. Thus Christ says to Peter in Matt. 16:17: “Flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, etc.” Therefore it does not belong [in] the kingdom of God. But it does not follow by any means ... that flesh and blood will not arise on the Last Day. ... For precisely because flesh and blood cannot enter the kingdom of God, it must end, die, and decay and rise in a new spiritual essence, so that it may enter heaven. Therefore St. Paul admonishes them as Christians to be such new men, lest they be found to be flesh and blood on that Day. (CC p. 600)

Only after his old flesh-and-blood self has been “washed,” “sanctified,” and “justified” (6:11) and clothed with incorruptibility, glory, and power, will he be able to enter his heavenly inheritance. (CC pp. 599-600)

Twice in 15:50 Paul states that the believer’s place in God’s kingdom is something he will “inherit” (κληρονομέω). The verb underlines that the believer receives eternal life purely as a gift. Just as Israel received Canaan as an inheritance, [Often the OT employs the verb יָרַשׁ, “to inherit,” (e.g., Ex 23:30; 32:13; Num 35:8; Deut 19:14; Josh 17:6; Is 57:13; Ezek 47:14) and the noun יְרֵשָׁה, “inheritance” (e.g., Num 16:14; Deut 4:21; 15:4; Josh 11:23; Judg 20:6; Is 58:14)] so believers receive new spiritual bodies and enter the kingdom not as something they have earned but as God’s gracious gift to his children (cf. Mt 25:34; 1 Pet 1:4). In 1 Corinthians 15 Paul does not develop the implications of “inherit.” Other passages in Scripture connect the reception of the inheritance to the express will of the testator (cf., e.g., Genesis 27; Numbers 36). The Lord’s institution of “the new *testament* in my blood” (1 Cor 11:25) may be connected to the idea of inheriting the kingdom in the resurrection in 15:50–58. The faithful reception of the body and blood of the crucified and risen Christ promises the communicant a share in the resurrection and in the heavenly inheritance guaranteed by Christ’s death and resurrection. (CC p. 600)

**15:51 mystery.** Things about the resurrection body that were not understood but are now revealed. (CSB)

With the exclamation ἰδοὺ (“see!”) in 15:51, Paul signals that he is about to say something of great significance. What he will tell them is a “mystery,” something that can only be known by divine revelation (15:51; cf. 2:7; 13:2; 14:2; and also Rom 11:25–36). In contrast to the similar revelation in 1 Thess 4:15–17, where “the word of the Lord” assures the congregation that those who die in the Lord will not be at a disadvantage in the parousia, here Paul’s concern is with those who are still living on earth when Christ returns. If the living cannot enter the kingdom in their corruptible flesh and blood, what will be the fate of those who are alive when the Lord returns? Some commentators have thought that the first person plural verbs in this text indicate that Paul expected Christ’s return in his own lifetime, but this is not necessarily the case. He may simply be identifying himself with those Christians who will be alive at that time. Not every Christian will fall asleep in Christ; some will still be alive when he returns. (CC pp. 600-601)

For the Corinthians, Paul’s message was indeed a great “mystery” (15:51). Convinced that they had already entered their full spiritual inheritance, they had no conception that God had such great plans in store for their bodies. (CC p. 601)

*We shall not all sleep.* Some believers will not experience death and the grave. (CSB)

πάντες οὐ κοιμηθήσόμεθα, πάντες δὲ ἀλλαγῆσόμεθα—This is the reading followed in the translation above. Some manuscripts (P<sup>46</sup> A<sup>c</sup> Origen) have the negative οὐ (“not”) in both clauses: “we will not all sleep, nor will we all be changed.” Others, including ⋈ (A\*) C 33 1739 it<sup>8</sup> arm eth, have the negative only in the second clause (“we will all sleep, but we will not all be changed”), which is the tradition followed by the Vulgate. According to that reading apparently Paul was understood to say that the unbelieving dead would not see the transformation of their bodies. The Jerusalem Bible calls the Vulgate rendering “incorrect.” Metzger states that “the reading which best explains the origin of the others is that preserved in B D<sup>c</sup> K P [which is followed by this commentary]. . . . Because Paul and his correspondents had died, the statement πάντες οὐ κοιμηθήσόμεθα [‘we will not all sleep’] seemed to call for correction.” (CC pp. 596-597)

we shall *all be changed*. All believers, whether alive when Jesus comes again or in the grave, will receive changed, imperishable bodies. (CSB)

Gk *allasso*, “to make otherwise,” “to alter.” (TLSB)

ἀλλαγησόμεθα—This verb echoes the adjective ἄλλος (“other, another”), which occurs frequently in 15:39 and 15:41. According to Büchsel, “the basic meaning [of ἀλλάσσω] is ‘to make otherwise’ (from ... ἄλλος),” and thus “to alter or change” (Acts 6:14; Gal 4:20; cf. Heb 1:12). (CC p. 597)

But whether “we” are alive or in the grave on that day, “we will all be changed” (ἀλλαγησόμεθα, 1 Cor 15:51). This verb echoes 15:39 and 15:41 in a fine play on words: just as God’s ingenuity and his lavish generosity in creation has arranged for there to be one flesh of humans, “another” (ἄλλη) of animals, “another” of birds, and “another” of fish (15:39), and for the sun, the moon, and the stars each to have “another” brilliance (ἄλλη three times in 15:41), so by that same divine provision (note the divine passive, which implies that God is the agent) we will all be made totally “other” (ἀλλα-γησόμεθα, 15:51). (CC p. 601)

**15:52 in a moment.** † The change to an imperishable body will occur instantly at the last trumpet call, which refers to the “loud trumpet call” of Mt 24:31 or the seventh trumpet of Rev 11:15. Millennialists here see the rapture (the snatching away) of God’s people (cf. 1Th 4:16), which they hold will take place before Christ’s (and their) return to reign on earth (cf. Rev 19:11–16; 20:1–6). (CSB)

ἐν ἰσχύει—The adjective ἄτομος denotes something that cannot be cut (τέμνω), something “*indivisible* because of smallness” (BAGD) From it is derived the English word “atom.” In the modern world, however, where the atom has been split and time can be measured in infinitesimal fractions of a second, good renderings of Paul’s phrase would be “in a moment” or “in an instant.” (CC p. 597)

*twinkling of an eye* – ἐν ῥιπῇ ὀφθαλμοῦ—Cf. BAGD s.v. ῥιπή: “*throwing, rapid movement*, e.g. of the eyes; the ‘casting’ of a glance takes an extremely short time: ἐν ῥιπῇ ὀφθαλμοῦ *in the twinkling of an eye.*”

The transformation will take place in a flash (15:52). Paul uses colorful language to describe how instantaneously our bodies will be changed. The first phrase in 15:52, “in a moment,” literally denotes an instant of time that is indivisible. The second phrase in 15:52, “in the blinking of an eye,” or as most English translations have it, “in the twinkling of an eye,” denotes a movement of the eye that is so rapid it is almost undetectable. (CC p. 601)

*last trumpet* – σαλπίζει—The verb here is impersonal, with no subject: “it will trumpet,” or “there will be a trumpeting.” BAGD thinks “it is prob[ably] to be taken symbolically,” as in Mt 6:2. But it could be asserted with at least equal justification that the final trumpet blast will be more real than any blast from a human instrument. God’s trumpet blasts in Ex 19:13, 16, 19; 20:18 were real enough to terrify the Israelites. In Rev 8:2–9:21 and 11:15–19 John sees seven angels, each with a trumpet, and when the seventh sounds his trumpet, the kingdom of God fully arrives, inaugurating the eternal state (Rev 11:15–19). (CC p. 597)

Paul then adds a third phrase, “at the last trumpet” (15:52), to indicate that this great change will take place as the last trumpet sounds its triumphant blast. The trumpet heralds God’s victorious campaigns against his enemies and his salvation of his people. At Mt. Sinai loud trumpet blasts



from heaven signaled the Lord's descent to the top of the mountain and his proclamation of the Ten Commandments (Ex 19:13, 16, 19; 20:18). Later, Israel would advance through the desert and march against her enemies upon the signal from the two silver trumpets. These were also blown on days of rejoicing in God's redemption (Num 10:1–10). When God finally subdues all the enemies of his people, including death, "the last enemy" (1 Cor 15:26), and confers on believers the redemption of their bodies (Rom 8:23), it is fitting for the great moment to be heralded by a trumpet blast (cf. Mt 24:31; 1 Thess 4:16). (CC pp. 601-602)

*will be raised* – ἐγερθήσονται—Frequently ἐγείρω means to "raise" from the dead (BAGD) 1 a β). The passive can mean to "be raised" from death or to "rise" from death (BAGD, 2 c). ἐγείρω can also have the sense of waking, rousing from sleep (BAGD, 1 a α and 2 a; Mt 1:24; 8:25; 25:7; Mk 4:27; Acts 12:7; Rom 13:11). In the light of Paul's use of κοιμάω ("to sleep") nearby in 1 Cor 15:6, 18, 20, 51, and his use of ἐνδύομαι ("to put on clothes") in 15:53–54, ἐγερθήσονται here may well have the connotation of being "awakened" and "roused" from sleep, at which time a person would put on appropriate clothing. (CC p. 597)

*we shall be changed.* Paul lived in anticipation of Christ's return, as all believers should. (CSB)

Paul explains that God's trumpet will indeed sound and rouse the dead from their sleep. Their bodies, corrupted in the grave, will then be raised "incorruptible" (1 Cor 15:52). Furthermore, Paul assures the Corinthians again, "we"—that is, all Christians, whether dead or alive at the last trumpet—"will be changed" (15:52).

**15:53-54** *put on* – ἐνδύσασθαι—ἐνδύομαι is normally middle: "clothe oneself in, put on, wear" (BAGD) s.v. ἐνδύω, 2). BAGD, 2 b, adds, however, that "the mid[dle] sense is not always clearly right; the pass[ive] is somet[imes] better. ἀφθαρσίαν 1 Cor 15:53f. ἐξ ὕψους δύναμιν *be clothed w[ith] power fr[om] above* Lk 24:49." Oepke also notes that "the mid[dle] [of ἐνδύω] can have a passive sense," citing Lk 24:49 and 1 Cor 15:53–54. Thus ἐνδύσασθαι with the passive meaning "to be clothed" parallels the passive ἀλλαγησόμεθα ("we will be changed") in 15:51–52. (CC pp. 597-598)

Here Paul uses the verb in connection with putting on the new clothes of the resurrection body (cf. 2 Cor 5:1–4). In other contexts he uses it of putting on Christ (Rom 13:14), which takes place in Baptism (Gal 3:27), or of putting on "the new man" and his enduring qualities. (Rom 13:12; Eph 4:24; 6:11; Col 3:10, 12; 1 Thess 5:8) (CC p. 598)

Thus when he is roused from sleep at the dawning of God's kingdom, the believer must be clothed with the new outfit which goes with life in the eternal kingdom—a new spiritual body that is incorruptible and immortal (1 Cor 15:53–54). The God "who alone possesses immortality" (1 Tim 6:16) graciously confers immortality on his people. Freed now from the groaning and anxiety which have weighed them down as long as they lived in their earthly "tents," they see their mortality finally "swallowed up by life" (2 Cor 5:1–4). (CC p. 602)

**15:53** "When our sins and conscience oppress us, we strengthen ourselves and take comfort and say, 'Nevertheless, I am baptized. And if I am baptized, it is promised to me that I shall be saved and have eternal life, both in soul and body.' For that is the reason why these two things are done in Baptism: the body—which can grasp nothing but the water—is sprinkled and, in addition, the Word is spoken for the soul to grasp. Now, since both, the water and the Word, make one Baptism, therefore, body and soul must be saved and live forever" (LC IV 44–46). (TLSB)

After all, this transformation “is necessary” (15:53). It has the divine mandate. God’s plan to overcome death and restore his creation by first raising his Son and then raising believers is laid out in the OT Scriptures, and therefore *must* (δεῖ, 15:53) be fulfilled. According to this plan, “it is necessary” that there be continuity between God’s original creation and our newly recreated bodies. Almost as if he is regarding his own body as he speaks, four times in 15:53–54 Paul uses the demonstrative pronoun τοῦτο, “this.” It is precisely *this* perishable, mortal body of dust (15:47–49), the subject of so much weakness, humiliation, and affliction (cf. 2 Cor 12:7–10), that must be endued with “life and immortality through the Gospel” (2 Tim 1:10). The Christian will wear, so to speak, a new suit. (CC p. 602)

**15:54–55** Paul cites Isaiah’s prophecy that God swallows up death, which would consume our bodies. Paul adds questions from Hosea, who wrote a brutal appeal for death and the grave to snap their jaws in judgment on the Northern Kingdom of Israel. Paul transforms this appeal into a mockery of hapless death and the grave, for Christ shall snatch away their meal. (TLSB)

**15:54** *swallowed up* – κατεπόθη—Cf. BAGD s.v., καταπίνω, 2: “fig[uratively] *swallow up* w[ith] total extinction as a result.” The aorist subjunctive passive form καταποθῆ is found in 2 Cor 5:4. In using the passive and making death the subject in 1 Cor 15:54, Paul has departed from the Hebrew text of Is 25:8, which says, “He [God] will swallow up death for ever.” The LXX reads: “Death being strong has swallowed up [all the nations—the object at the end of Is 25:7].” Paul’s version is in accord with the recensions of the LXX by Aquila and Theodotion. Paul and those recensions preserve the point of the Hebrew original: death is swallowed up and destroyed. (CC p. 598)

When this investiture takes place, the prophecy of Isaiah will come true: “Death has been swallowed up in victory” (1 Cor 15:54, drawing on Is 25:8). The original prophecy has “the Lord of hosts” (Is 25:6) as the subject of this sentence: “He will swallow up death for ever, and the Lord God will wipe away tears from all faces” (Is 25:8; the latter part is quoted in Rev 21:4). But Paul inverts the grammar by making death (“the last enemy,” 1 Cor 15:26) the subject, thus bringing it into sharper focus as the evil force which will at last be swallowed up. Christ has won the final victory over death, bringing about its total subjugation and extinction. Therefore “there will be no more death” (Rev 21:4; cf. 2 Tim 1:10; Heb 2:14). (CC p. 603)

*in victory* – “Christ redeemed human nature as His work, sanctifies it, raises it from the dead, and gloriously adorns it as His work. But original sin He has not created, received, redeemed, or sanctified. He will not raise it, adorn it, or save it in the elect. In the <blessed> resurrection original sin will be entirely destroyed” (FC Ep I 6). (TLSB)

εἰς νῆκος—The Hebrew phrase עַדְעַד in Is 25:8 is normally translated “for ever” in our English versions. It consists of the preposition עַד prefixed to the noun עַדְעַד or עַדְעַד, “everlastingness, perpetuity” (see BDB s.v. 4, עַדְעַד). In rabbinic Hebrew and Aramaic this noun could also mean “success,” and related words can have similar meanings: וְעַדְעַד, “victory, strength”; וְעַדְעַד, “victor”; עַדְעַד, “to be victorious, win, prevail”; עַדְעַד, “to be victorious,” and in Pa‘el, “to conquer, overpower.” The LXX translated עַדְעַד in Is 25:8 in accord with these rabbinic Hebrew and Aramaic words as ισχύσας, “being strong,” the participle of ισχύω. But the LXX recensions of Aquila and Theodotion rendered it εἰς νῆκος, “in victory,” as does Paul in 1 Cor 15:54. Even if Paul’s translation is not a literal rendition of the Hebrew for “for ever,” it conveys the same basic message: God utterly destroys death. (CC p. 598)

**15:55** *O death where is your victory* – ποῦ σου, θάνατε, τὸ νῆκος; ποῦ σου, θάνατε, τὸ κέντρον—Compare Paul’s similar use of rhetorical questions beginning with ποῦ (“where?”) in 1:20.

Some manuscripts, including <sup>2</sup>ⲗ A<sup>c</sup>Ψ 075 1881 Majority Text sy<sup>(p)</sup>, read ἄδη (“Hades”) instead of θάνατε (“death”) as the vocative in 15:55b. This tradition reflects both the MT of Hos 13:14, which has “Sheol” at this point, and the LXX of Hos 13:14, which has ἄδη, “Hades, the underworld, the grave.” KJV and NKJV both follow the Majority Text (NKJV: “O Death, where is your sting? O Hades, where is your victory?”). Metzger believes the Majority Text tradition arose from scribal “assimilation to the Septuagint.” He notes that elsewhere Paul never uses ἄδης. Kistemaker suggests that Paul avoided that word because of the danger of it being misunderstood in the Hellenistic world: in Greek mythology Hades was the god of the underworld, and the underworld was called “the house of Hades.” (CC pp. 598-599)

*sting* – κέντρον—Related to the verb ἐκκεντέω, “to pierce,” in Jn 19:37; Rev 1:7, a κέντρον is “anything which pierces.” The word is used of bee stings in 4 Macc 14:19, of the goads, (A “goad” was a “wooden stick with metal points” used to drive beasts of burden (L. Schmid, “κέντρον,” *TDNT* 3:663), or pricks of conscience, Paul suffered before his conversion (Acts 26:14), and of the scorpion-like sting of the locusts in Rev 9:10. (CC p. 599)

Paul now sings a taunt song over this defeated opponent in 1 Cor 15:55, saying in essence: “Where, death, is all your power now? Where, death, is your ability to cause people so much pain?” His words are freely adapted from Hos 13:14. Christ has removed the sting of this malignant enemy; it is no longer able to harm Christian people. (CC p. 603)

**15:56** *The sting of death is sin.* It was sin that brought us under death’s power—it was Adam’s sin that brought his death and ultimately ours (see Ro 5:12). (CSB)

Piercing, mortal wound. Sin is the point of the spear that kills us. (TLSB)

Why, it may be asked, is death so painful if it is nothing but the transition to immortality? Paul explains in 1 Cor 15:56 that it is the power of sin that makes death a bitter “enemy” (15:26) which rules the human race with an iron hand.

L. Schmid, “κέντρον,” *TDNT* 3:667–68, asks this:

Is [Paul] thinking of the goad, so that we have a personification of death with the goad in his hand to rule and torture man? Or is he thinking of the poisonous tip [sting], so that death is a dangerous beast which gives man a mortal prick? ... [Either way,] death rules over the race. The reality of its awful rule rests on the reality of sin. ... When sin is overcome, death is robbed of its power. Like an insect which has lost its sting, it is helpless, just as he who drives a beast is helpless without his goad. (CC p. 603)

Sin stings the conscience of the dying person

Cf. Luther (LW 28:208):

When it [sin] is aroused and agitates the heart, it cuts and pierces, so that no man can endure the sting, even though it issues from a slight transgression, unless he is comforted and again healed by the Gospel. If you ask: “Where does death come from?” or: “How does death frighten people so easily and kill them?” you are told here that nothing else but sin does that. Sin is nothing but spear and cannonball, indeed death’s thunder and lightning, through which he carries out his work. (CC p. 603)

and is responsible for the painful breakdown of his body. The very separation of body and soul is an assault on our humanity, for human beings are not essentially only a body or a soul, but both,

joined together. Later Paul would write to the Romans: “The wages of sin is death” (Rom 6:23). The Christian knows that death came into the world through Adam’s sin and has spread to all people, including himself, because all have sinned (1 Cor 15:21–22; see also Rom 5:12). Thus the grim reaper harvests what the sinner has sown (cf. 1 Cor 15:37). However, while the Christian must still suffer the physical consequence of Adam’s sin, he does not die “in” his sins (1 Cor 15:17; cf. Jn 8:24). He dies absolved. Since the Christian is reckoned as sinless for Christ’s sake, death cannot hold him. (CC pp. 603-604)

*the power of sin is the law.* The law of God gives sin its power, for it reveals our sin and condemns us because of our sin. (CSB)

The Law, as the guardian of what is right, thrusts against our sinful conscience and damns us. (TLSB)

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In addition to sin, the other power that drives the engine of death is the Law (1 Cor 15:56). God’s Law, as Paul will insist in the letter to the Romans, is “holy and just and good” (Rom 7:12). The Law holds up a mirror to reveal to us our sins (Rom 7:7). Moreover, it actually arouses and stimulates sinful passions within the fallen person, giving them a bridgehead within a person’s heart (Rom 7:8–11). One commentator has expressed this colorfully: “The Law is the footstep of

God upon the grass that rouses the serpent sleeping there to life.” This rearing up of sin, in turn, arouses God’s wrath and condemnation (Rom 2:12; 4:15). Thus the Law “empowers sin,” making it into “a curse” (Gal 3:13) and “a deadly force.” (CC p. 604)

W. Gutbrod, “νόμος,” *TDNT* 4:1074. Cf. Luther (LW 28:209):

God is able to awaken [sin] effectively through the Law. When the hour comes for sin to sting and to strike, it grows unendurable in a moment. For the Law dins this into your ears and holds the register of your sins before your nose. ... Therefore sin requires nothing else than God’s law. Where that enters the heart, sin is already alive and able to kill man if it wants to, unless he lays hold of this victory, which is Christ, our Lord. (CC p. 604)

In order for death to rule the human race, the Law must be present and sin must be at work as transgressions of the Law incur the penalty of death. Before there was any divine Law, it was not possible for Adam and Eve to transgress it. But as soon as God issued his first command (Gen 2:16–17), the devil was able to launch his attack by tempting them to transgress the express will of God. Thus sin came into existence when Adam and Eve violated the Law, and the result was death (Gen 2:17; 3:19). (CC p. 604)

**15:57** *victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.* Victory over the condemnation for sin that the law brought (v. 56) and over death and the grave (vv. 54–55), through the death and resurrection of Christ (cf. Ro 4:25). (CSB)

Nevertheless, Paul continues, these grim forces themselves are doomed: God has been victorious over them. Through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ he has swallowed up death forever (Is 25:8). Death’s stinger has been withdrawn. Just as death can no longer harm Christ, so it cannot permanently harm those who are in Christ, for God has transferred the benefits of Christ’s conquest of death to us. Thus God “gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Cor 15:57; cf. 1 Jn 5:4). Thus Paul breaks out in doxology: “Thanks be to God!” This is the conclusion to Luther’s series of sermons on 1 Corinthians 15:

We can join in that song and in that way always celebrate Easter, praising and extolling God for a victory that was not won or achieved in battle by us—it is far too sublime and great for that—but was presented and given to us by the mercy of God. He had compassion with our misery, from which no one could rescue us, and He sent His Son and let Him enter the battle. He laid these enemies, sin, death, and hell, low and retained the victory. He transferred this victory to us, so that we may say it is our victory. ... We must keep this in our heart in firm faith and confirm ourselves in this and always be engrossed in such a message of thanks and sing of this victory in Christ. And in faith in this we must cheerfully depart this life, until we experience this victory also in our own body. May God help us to that end through the same dear Son. To Him be glory and honor forever. Amen. (CC pp. 604-605)

**15:58** *Therefore.* Because of Christ’s resurrection and ours, we know that serving him is not empty, useless activity. (CSB)

*beloved brothers.* Having rebuked the Corinthians with the Law and having proclaimed to them the Gospel, Paul appeals to them peaceably, mending their relationship to him. (TLSB)

A strong ὥστε (“so”) introduces the final verse of 1 Corinthians 15, inviting the reader to reflect on everything Paul has taught concerning the resurrection and to draw the proper conclusions. If Christ is risen, and your bodies are also to rise, “what kind of people ought you to be?” (2 Pet

3:11). Appealing to them tenderly as “my beloved brothers” (1 Cor 15:58), Paul exhorts them to be steadfast, in words very similar to Col 1:23: “Continue in your faith, founded and steadfast [ἐδραῖτοι] and not moved [μὴ μετακινούμενοι] from the hope of the Gospel.” He is concerned for them because their skepticism about basic doctrines like the resurrection has inevitably led to instability (cf. Eph 4:14). The Christian hope should provide them with a firm anchorage for their souls (Heb 6:19). (CC p. 605)

A classic depiction of the instability which can result from skepticism about the Christian hope is found in the trilogy *The Fortunes of Richard Mahony*, by the Australian author Henry Handel Richardson (a male pen name for Henrietta Richardson Robertson; Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England: Penguin, reprint 1976). In this biography of her father, an agnostic medical doctor, Richardson describes the “wayward, vagrant spirit” of a man with constantly changing aspirations, a man prone to vacillation and rash, hasty decisions because he is convinced that this life is all there is, that time is running out, and that he desperately needs to grab at everything or his life will end in fruitlessness and failure (quote from *Ultima Thule*, 279). (CC p. 605)

*work of the Lord*. One’s call or vocation. (TLSB)

*your labor in the Lord is not in vain*. Our effort is invested in the Lord’s winning cause. He will also reward us at his second coming (Mt 25:21; cf. Lk 19:17). (CSB)

ἐδραῖτοι—Cf. BAGD “firm, steadfast.” According to the Greek philosophers, the earth was the most solid (ἐδραιότατον στοιχεῖον) of the four elements (earth, fire, water, air). But the scriptural view is that this temporary creation will be shaken (Hag 2:6; Mt 24:29) and will pass away (2 Pet 3:10–12). However, Christ’s words, which are also the words of God the Father, will never pass away (Is 40:8; Mt 24:35). The Christian, whose abode is built on that Word, will not be shaken or swept away (Mt 7:24–27). Paul uses the adjective ἐδραῖτος three times (1 Cor 7:37; 15:58; Col 1:23) and the related noun ἐδραῖωμα once (1 Tim 3:15). (CC p. 599)

Furthermore, the Christian hope should foster fruitful service of Christ and the brother. Picking up themes from earlier in the chapter, Paul calls the Corinthians to be “always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your *labor* [κόπος; cf. ἐκοπίασα in 1 Cor 15:10] is not *in vain* [κενός; cf. κενή in 15:10] in the Lord” (15:58). In imitation of the apostle’s own pattern, the Corinthians are not to spend their days being ἄτακτος (1 Thess 5:14), “disorderly” or “idle, lazy” as frequently happens when Christians lose their eschatological vision (cf. 1 Thess 4:11–18; 2 Thess 3:6–13), but to devote themselves wholeheartedly to loving service of the Lord and others (cf. 1 Cor 16:10, 13–14; Col 3:17). The hope of the Gospel should energize them to labor diligently in their respective vocations, serving their families and neighbors wholeheartedly. The final phrase is significant: labor done “in the Lord” (1 Cor 15:58) is never in vain. The Christian on earth may not ever perceive the fruit of his labor. Hard and faithful work may go unrecognized by the church. But the Lord knows the labors of each of his servants, and the day is coming when each faithful servant will receive the commendation of his Lord and the eternal reward by grace (3:10–15). (CC pp. 605-606)

There is a striking thematic and linguistic similarity between 1 Corinthians 15 and 1 Peter 1. In both passages the exposition of the Christian hope, the assurance that there is an imperishable inheritance laid up for the believer in heaven (1 Cor 15:50–54; 1 Pet 1:3–5), leads to an appeal for Christian steadfastness, holy living, and brotherly love (1 Cor 15:58; 1 Pet 1:13–22; cf. 1 Cor 16:14). (CC p. 606)

**15:50–58** The justification Jesus provided is our only hope against sin, death, and the Law’s condemnation. Jesus delivers us from death’s jaws. He now equips us to serve in His Church and to live eternally in His kingdom. • Victorious Lord, Your nail-pierced hand drew me safely out of sin; Your pierced foot snapped shut the jaws of death. Teach me to stomp temptation. Swing wide heaven’s gates, that I may enter Your joy. Amen. (TLSB)