1 Corinthians 15.1-58 Pillar NT Commentary, Ciampa + Rosner

V. THE RESURRECTION AND CONSUMMATION, 15:1–58

Paul's first letter to the Corinthians is framed by Christ's crucifixion and resurrection. Paul stresses Christ's crucifixion in the opening chapters of the letter (esp. 1:13–22) and now brings the main body to a conclusion with an extended discussion of the resurrection. This chapter serves, in many ways, as the climax of the letter as a whole. In November of 1919 Karl Barth wrote a letter to Eduard Thurneysen in which he said, "Yesterday and today I sat over 1 Corinthians 15, but I came to a dead stop in the earliest stages as I started to work through it thoroughly.… The chapter is the key to the entire letter with its profound disclosures on this and that, which have their source in ultimate wisdom. Some of them have struck us recently like shocks from an electric eel." This same perception has been affirmed in a variety of ways by different authors since then.

Some scholars have found in this chapter the ultimate evidence for the view that the Corinthians held to an overrealized eschatology reflected in its perceived emphasis on future eschatology. In fact, this chapter reflects a balance between realized and future eschatology. The gospel is summarized in terms of realized elements of eschatology. The Messiah has already died, and the resurrection of the dead has already begun with him (v. 4). The promise of the future resurrection of the dead is firmly established by the reality of the resurrection already realized in the person of Jesus Christ (vv. 12–23). Christ already reigns, but all things have not yet been put in complete submission to him (vv. 24–28). Paul's understanding of the nature of our future resurrection bodies is based primarily on the model of Christ's resurrection body (vv. 43–49).

In the Introduction (21–28) we touched on the way this chapter fits into a theological structure reflected elsewhere in Paul's thought in more concise forms.[4] In 1 Thessalonians 1:9–10 Paul reminds his readers how they "turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead." Paul's summary of the Thessalonians' narrative moves from the rejection of idolatry to the proper worship of the one true God and then to a combination of future and realized eschatology based on Christ's resurrection from the dead. In this letter Paul now moves from the subject of turning from idols (chs. 8–10) and the worship of the living and true God (chs. 11–14) to that of the hope of the resurrection and the final establishment of Christ's kingdom (waiting for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead). The connection between these subjects is reflected in Wright's comment: "If the road to true humanity is true worship, the end and goal of God's renewed humanity is of course resurrection." It is through and at the resurrection that our transformation into God's renewed humanity, which has begun in this life and which is both reflected in and promoted by our worship of God (chs. 11–14), will be brought to its ultimate completion. Wright also points out that "[f]aith in the resurrection power of God, according to Paul, is the alternative to idolatry: it assigns to the creator God the power and glory which are properly his, the very things that idolatry characteristically denies, and, by denying, courts death."

In one sense all of chapters 5–15 have to do with the body in one way or another. While chapters 5–7 focus primarily on the body's sexual purity (or lack thereof), and chapters 8–11 focus on eating and drinking, in chapters 12–14 the body serves as a metaphor for the healthy

functioning of a church and its worship. While chapters 5–14 deal with the sanctification of the individual and corporate bodies of believers in this "time-between-the-times," chapter 15 looks forward to and relates all of that earlier material about what it means to be God's holy people in this present age to God's ultimate plans for the complete transformation of our bodies (= ourselves) and of our world and the final glorification of God in and through his creation.

This chapter provides tremendous resources for Christian theology and ethics. For Paul, the doctrine of the resurrection of the dead is at the heart of the gospel message (vv. 1–15), gives meaning to our life and service to Christ in this present age (vv. 16–19, 29–32), and serves as a fundamental basis for perseverance in Christ (v. 58). It also clarifies (as do some other New Testament texts) the relationship between protology and eschatology (the beginning and the end of the human story, vv. 24–28, 45–49) and the relationship between Christ's experience of resurrection and glory/reign and God's intentions for the rest of his people (vv. 20–28). The doctrine of the resurrection of the dead, more fully expounded here than in any other part of Scripture, makes it clear that God's purpose has never been simply that of "saving souls" for a disembodied existence in heaven, as though creation itself was of merely temporal usefulness and significance. Creation turns out to be not simply the context in which God is working out his redemptive work, but reflects instead the breadth of God's redemptive concern and plan. Physical, earthly, and bodily existence have to do with the nature of creation as God made it and, in a completely redeemed and transformed version, is part of the nature of the context and existence that God has in mind for us and the rest of creation throughout eternity. Our life in this world matters, in part, because it turns out to be not merely a waiting room in which we pass our time until being invited into the rest of the building where we will really live. Our life in this world establishes the starting chapters for a story that will continue and flourish in radically new ways (and not merely begin for the first time) upon the resurrection of the dead.

As Oliver O'Donovan has argued, "Christian ethics depends upon the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead":

> In proclaiming the resurrection of Christ, the apostles proclaimed also the resurrection of mankind in Christ; and in proclaiming the resurrection of mankind, they proclaimed the renewal of all creation with him. The resurrection of Christ in isolation from mankind would not be a gospel message. The resurrection of mankind apart from creation would be a gospel of a sort, but of a purely Gnostic and world-denying sort which is far from the gospel that the apostles actually preached.

O'Donovan also points out that "[t]he resurrection of Christ, upon which Christian ethics is founded, vindicates the created order in this double sense: it redeems it and it transforms it." The proclamation of the resurrection of Christ "directs us forward to the end of history when that particular and representative fate is universalized in the resurrection of mankind from the dead … (15:23). The sign that God has stood by his created order implies that his order, with mankind in its proper place within it, is to be totally restored at the last." This message gives meaning and significance to this present life, making it clear that our "life on earth is important to God; he has given it its order; it matters that it should conform to the order he has given it. Once we have grasped that, we can understand too how this order requires of us both a denial of all that threatens to become disordered and a progress towards a life which goes beyond this order without negating it."[12]

The most difficult exegetical problem faced in this chapter is the question of the meaning of "baptism for the dead" (v. 29) and how Paul expects his reference to it to advance his argument. More generally, 1 Corinthians 15 raises the issue of Paul's understanding of the nature of the resurrection body.

The historical situation which gave rise to Paul's writing this chapter is difficult to pinpoint with absolute certainty. Common to all mirror readings of the chapter is the recognition, based on 15:12 ("some of you say there is no resurrection of the dead"), that some within the Corinthian congregation were skeptical about the concept of a future resurrection of believers. It is not that this group did not believe in any postmortem existence, since in 15:29 Paul speaks of a "baptism on behalf of the dead," which, though puzzling for us, was apparently quite acceptable to them. Rather, the notion of *bodily* resurrection seems to have been in dispute. If in 15:1–34 Paul contends that the resurrection of the dead is central to the gospel, in 15:35–58 he explains how the *bodily* resurrection of believers is neither unintelligible nor inconceivable. Indeed, the double question of 15:35, along with Paul's word of stern rebuke in 15:36, indicates that it was the very possibility of the body's involvement in the afterlife which some in Corinth denied. "With what kind of body do they come?" (15:35) is at the heart of the dispute, suggesting that some had philosophical or scientific objections to the idea of the resurrection of the body. It is not clear whether Paul has been made aware of this rejection of the resurrection through oral reports from Corinth or through some comment in their letter. Paul does not use the expression he has used elsewhere to introduce a subject raised by the Corinthians in their letter ("now concerning"), implying that he probably is responding to some other report.

Unlike Greco-Roman philosophy, which expressed thoroughgoing skepticism regarding any place for the body in the afterlife, Paul's Jewish inheritance affirms a sturdy belief in the resurrection of the body. While explicit affirmation is reserved for certain Old Testament prophets, its foundations, as Richard Bauckham argues,[16] are firmly laid in the Old Testament portrayal of God as Sovereign Creator, Righteous Judge, and Divine Warrior.

Whereas some Old Testament texts use resurrection language to refer to national restoration (e.g., Ezek. 37:1–14), at least two declare a resurrection of the dead as a personal hope of life after death which is bodily in nature: Isaiah 26:19 promises a resurrection ("your dead shall live") which is explicitly corporeal ("their corpses shall rise"), and Daniel 12:1–3 speaks of the awakening of "many who sleep in the dust of the earth … some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt."

Jewish intertestamental writings from almost every quarter include resurrection as central to their beliefs. Among apocalyptic texts, *1 Enoch* 51:1; 62:14–16; *4 Ezra* 7:32–33a; and *2 Baruch* 50:2, 4 describe resurrection in terms of the place where the dead are kept (variously in Sheol, hell, the earth, dust, and the chambers), "giving back" the deceased. In these texts those who rise eat, rest, and are clothed. *2 Baruch* 49:2 poses almost the same question as does Paul (1 Cor. 15:35b), framed in a prayer: "In what shape will those live who live in your day?" A prominent example of testamentary literature which reflects on the afterlife is the *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs*. For example, *Testament of Judah* 25:4–5 affirms the resurrection of those who have died in sorrow, poverty, or on account of the Lord, and *Testament of Benjamin* 10:6–10 mentions a resurrection in which "all are changed," with some to expect glory and others dishonor. As an example of historical literature, Josephus in the *Jewish War* speaks of "the revolution of the ages" in terms of a new habitation of a chaste body (3.374). In *Jewish War* and *Antiquities* he describes

the belief of the Pharisees of a soul passing from one body to another (cf. 2 Macc. 7:10–13). A marked difference between Paul and this Jewish background is that from Paul's Christian perspective the general resurrection of the dead is preceded and indeed made possible by the resurrection of Christ: "For one man alone to be raised is a great surprise in the Jewish apocalyptic framework."

Besides the general Old Testament and Jewish background regarding the resurrection of the dead, Paul shows dependence upon Genesis 1; 2:7; Psalm 8; 110:1; Isaiah 22:13; 25:8; and Hosea 13:14. He also cites the Greek poet Menander. His argument seems to be especially dependent upon the creation material (Genesis 1–2, Psalm 8) for its way of telegraphing what God's original intentions were for humanity and, therefore, where the story of creation must be headed. As Wright puts it, "The argument is, in fact, an exposition of the future resurrection of all those who belong to the Messiah, set out as an argument about new creation. Genesis 1–3 forms a subtext for the whole chapter, and even when Paul appears to be merely offering illustrations of his point, these, too, are drawn from the creation stories." He also points out that in both vv. 20–28 and vv. 42–49 "the place of Adam, and the reversal and undoing of Adam's fall and its results, is central" and that while in the former passage Paul quotes from Psalm 8 and its reference to creation, in the latter passage "he concludes triumphantly, as does the account of creation in Genesis 1, with humans bearing the 'image'—though now the image they bear, as in Romans 8:29, is the image of the truly human being, the Messiah." He concludes that "there can be no doubt that Paul intends this entire chapter to be an exposition of the renewal of creation, and the renewal of humankind as its focal point."[21] Indeed, we should not be surprised that a chapter that expounds the relationship between the preaching of the good news of Christ and the resurrection of the body should do just that.

Like each of the earlier major sections of the letter (see 1:18–2:5 [neg.] and 2:6–3:4 [pos.]; 4:18–6:20 [neg.] and 7:1–40 [pos.]; 8:1–11:1 [neg.] and 11:2–14:40 [pos.]), this one is also marked by a negative argument followed by a positive one. The negative argument is found in vv. 12–19, where Paul deals with the negative consequences of denying the doctrine of the resurrection of the dead. That is followed in vv. 20–28 by a positive exposition of the consequences of admitting that Christ has been raised from the dead (and thus the reality of the resurrection). The structure of the argument as a whole may be outlined as follows:

V. The Resurrection and Consummation (15:1–58)
   A. Affirmation of the Central Role of the Resurrection of Christ in the Gospel Message (15:1–11)
   B. Explanation of the Consequences of Denying the Resurrection of the Dead (15:12–19)
   C. Explanation of the Significance of Christ's Resurrection (15:20–28)
   D. Exhortation in Light of Positive and Negative Responses to the Resurrection of the Dead (15:29–34)
   E. Answers to Philosophical Objections to Belief in the Resurrection of the Body (15:35–49)
   F. Explanation of the Necessity of the Resurrection for the Realization of God's Ultimate Victory (15:50–57)
   G. Final Appeal in Light of the Affirmation of the Resurrection (15:58)

A. Affirmation of the Central Role of the Resurrection of Christ in the Gospel Message, 15:1–11

> *[1] Now, brothers and sisters, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand. [2] By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain.*
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> *[3] For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, [4] that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, [5] and that he appeared to Cephas, and then to the Twelve. [6] After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers and sisters at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep. [7] Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles, [8] and last of all he appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born.*
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> *[9] For I am the least of the apostles and do not even deserve 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 to me was not without effect. No, I worked harder than all of them—yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me. [11] Whether, then, it is I or they, this is what we preach, and this is what you believed.*

Paul defends the central role of the resurrection in the gospel message primarily through the narration of several episodes, including Christ's death, resurrection, and appearances (vv. 3b–8), his personal experience of Christ in his conversion and ministry (vv. 8–11a), and the Corinthians' own experience of the good news of Christ and his resurrection (vv. 1b–2, 11b).

15:1–2 In these two verses Paul is not only preparing to introduce the topic of the resurrection (through its crucial place in the gospel message itself) but is also reminding the Corinthians of the fact that their spiritual standing has been dependent upon Paul's ministry from the beginning, in part evoking the questions he asked in 14:36. *Now, brothers and sisters, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand. By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain*. The word of God did not originate with the Corinthians; it came to them through Paul's preaching. The word translated *remind* (by the TNIV, NIV, ESV, NRSV, RSV, NLT) means "to cause information to become known: *make known, reveal*" (BDAG). BDAG indicates that the word is used here despite the fact that Paul is dealing with something "already known" because his instruction "evidently introduces someth[ing] new." As Conzelmann points out, the evidence of 1 Corinthians 12:3, Galatians 1:11, and 2 Corinthians 8:1 suggests that Paul uses the word "as a ceremonious introduction." That is, the opening phrase "solemnly heralds the initial subject—the gospel Paul preached."[28] Robertson and Plummer may also be right in suggesting that "[t]here is a gentle reproach in the word. He has to begin again and teach them an elementary fact, which they had already accepted."

Paul elaborates on *the gospel* through a series of four relative clauses that combine to emphasize the crucial importance of the gospel (and, thus, of the resurrection) in the Corinthians' lives. The gospel (1) was preached to them by Paul; (2) they received it; (3) they stand[31] on it; and (4) they are being saved through it. The four points seem to progress in chronological order, starting from their first experience with the gospel and moving to the process of salvation which they are presently experiencing and which God would bring to completion at the end (cf. Phil. 1:6). They have had such a significant history and sufficient experience with the gospel that they

should not really need to have Paul clarify its nature or implications for them. Paul will expand on the contents of the gospel he preached to them in vv. 3–8.

As discussed in the comments on 11:23, the language of "receiving" was used for the transmission of traditional material. Just as the Corinthians had received the tradition of the Lord's Supper from him, they had also received the gospel message and entered into their Christian identity through Paul's ministry. "In both instances, the reminders of the tradition he passed on to them imply that they have veered off course."

The Greek sentence becomes awkward at the end. The part translated *if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain* seems to be a qualifier Paul felt the need to add after having made such a strong statement about the Corinthians' assured benefits from the gospel. It contains "a caveat implicitly warning them not to deviate from" the gospel.

I preached to you in v. 2 repeats the same line found in v. 1. In v. 1 Paul's line of thought followed a purely positive track leading to the Corinthians' salvation. Here Paul goes back to where he started in v. 1 to allow for the frightening possibility that they may *have believed in vain*, if they fail to *hold firmly to the word* (here *the word* refers to *the gospel* mentioned in v. 1) preached to them by Paul. Those who believe in the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints and those who reject that doctrine both agree that people who do not persevere in the gospel have no true claim on its promised blessings and benefits. Paul generally assumes that those who confess Christ will remain faithful to that confession (thus the positive tone of v. 1), but he also acknowledged the tragic truth that not all ended up doing so.

15:3–8 Having introduced the gospel in terms of Paul's role in bringing it to the Corinthians and its fundamental importance as the key to their salvation, Paul now details the main points of its contents, giving special emphasis to the place of the resurrection in the gospel message: [3] *For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance*[37]: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, [4] *that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures*, [5] *and that he appeared to Cephas, and then to the Twelve*. [6] *After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers and sisters at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep*. [7] *Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles*, [8] *and last of all he appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born*.

Christ is the subject of all the verbs from v. 3b to v. 8 except for the two in the relative clause of v. 6b (regarding the five hundred witnesses). In several cases it was necessary to adopt passive constructions ("he was buried" rather than "they buried him," etc.) to maintain that consistency. Paul's recounting of the gospel message reflects the fact that it is first and foremost a message about Jesus Christ and what he has done for us, rather than being a message primarily about us and how we can be saved. It is Christ's story which gives meaning to our lives, not our story which gives meaning to Christ's life. Dietrich Bonhoeffer understood this and expounded it well in discussing our role as "participants in God's action in the sacred story" recounted in Scripture, "the history of the Christ on earth":

> It is not that God's help and presence must still be proved in our life; rather God's presence and help have been demonstrated for us in the life of Jesus Christ. It is in fact more important for us to know what God did to Israel and in God's Son Jesus Christ, than to discover what God intends for us today. The fact that Jesus Christ died is more important than the fact that

I will die. And the fact that Jesus Christ was raised from the dead is the sole ground of my hope that I, too, will be raised on the day of judgment. Our salvation is "from outside ourselves." I find salvation not in my life story, but only in the story of Jesus Christ. Only those who allow themselves to be found in Jesus Christ—in the incarnation, cross, and resurrection—are with God and God with them.

Paul had used the language of "receiving" and "passing on" traditions in 11:23 with respect to the Lord's Supper. The information about the gospel had been passed on as being *of first importance*. While the expression could mean "at first" (and Paul undoubtedly shared this with the Corinthians very early on in his ministry among them), the nearly unanimous preference of English translations (first in importance) is probably correct.

The fact that he had *received* this information about Christ does not contradict his point in Galatians 1:12 that he received his gospel "by revelation from Jesus Christ." While the basic gospel message was received by revelation from the Lord, the formulation he used in preaching the gospel included elements that had been passed on to him by those who were Christians before him, perhaps including the fact that *Christ died for our sins* and that it was *according to the Scriptures*, that his resurrection took place *on the third day* and that that was also *according to the Scriptures*, and the information about the witnesses to Christ's resurrection.

Scholars are divided as to whether the main contents of vv. 3b–5 or 3b–7 originate from prior creedal material that Paul has adopted, or whether he himself is responsible for this particular formulation of the tradition. While Paul constantly mentions Christ's death and resurrection in his letters, various terms or expressions in these verses either do not appear elsewhere in his writings, or only in other texts that many also perceive to be based on traditional material. On balance, it seems likely that Paul has constructed this particular summary out of traditional pre-Pauline creedal material that would have been familiar to the Corinthians and other early Christians. Even if the expressions are not common expressions for Paul and if the material is constructed from previously existing traditional material, there is not even the slightest reason to suggest that it is anything other than what Paul himself takes to be a precise restatement of the key facts behind the gospel message.

Paul uses four key verbs to summarize the gospel: Christ died, was buried, was raised, and was seen (or appeared). The most prominent verbs are the first and third (died and was raised)—the two modified by "in accordance with the Scriptures." The second and third verbs (was buried and was seen) each seem to reinforce and confirm the verb that precedes. Christ's burial reinforces the fact that he truly died. The fact that Christ was seen by witnesses after his resurrection confirms the fact that he had truly been raised from the dead.

Paul reminds the Corinthians that the death and resurrection of Christ, the central events of his gospel (v. 2), are *according to the Scriptures*. The fact that Paul rarely refers to "the Scriptures" in the plural (1 Cor. 15:3–4; Rom. 1:2; 15:4; 16:26; cf. Gal. 3:10) suggests that the expression serves as a general reference to them here; normally when a specific text is in mind, it is referred to in the singular as "the Scripture." Barrett understands the point of vv. 3–4 to be: (1) that the cross is the climax of the events of salvation history as they are revealed in the Old Testament; and (2) that the message of the cross must be understood through the Old Testament categories of sacrifice, atonement, suffering, vindication, and so forth. It is important to remember that *according to* does not have any connotation of doubt as it often does in English (as in, e.g.,

"according to Henry we're all fools"). The Greek preposition used serves as a "marker of norm of similarity or homogeneity" and could be translated (with that meaning in mind) as "according to, in accordance with, in conformity with" (BDAG). Here it introduces the Scriptures as the norm which governed Christ's death and resurrection.

Jesus had indicated that his followers should have known ahead of time, based on the Scriptures, that he, as the Messiah, would die and then be vindicated by being raised by God from the dead. Luke 18:31–33 says that Jesus told his disciples that "everything that is written by the prophets about the Son of Man will be fulfilled. He will be delivered over to the Gentiles. They will mock him, insult him and spit on him; they will flog him and kill him. On the third day he will rise again." After the resurrection Jesus told the disciples, "This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms." Luke says that Jesus then "opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures" and told them "This is what is written: The Messiah will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance for the forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem" (Luke 24:44–47).

A crucial part of the Old Testament background for understanding Christ's death and resurrection appears to be found in the ubiquitous prophetic tradition of Israel's own prophesied and then historical exile and (promised) restoration and the early Christian understanding (originating with Christ himself) that the Messiah's destiny was bound up with that which God had appointed for Israel, the nation he led and represented. As Wright has pointed out, in the resurrection of Jesus, God has done for the Messiah, in the middle of history, what he had been expected to do for all his people at the end of history.

Notwithstanding a general reference to the Old Testament, the statement that Christ's death was *for our sins* may be an allusion to, or echo of, the portrayal of the Suffering Servant in Isaiah 53:5–6, 11–12. Several psalms provided background via a prefiguring (at least) of the resurrection of Christ, especially those that praise God for delivering the righteous sufferer; see the use of Psalms 110 and 8 in 1 Corinthians 15:24–28 (cf. Ps. 16:9b–10 in Acts 2:24–31).

As pointed out above, the statement that Christ was buried serves to reinforce the fact that he died. As the gospels make clear, to be buried, in this and many other instances, does not mean to be placed in a grave and covered in dirt, but buried in the sense of being entombed, placed in a sepulcher as a final resting place (cf. Gen. 23:4–19; 50:5, 13). Wright points out that it also indicates "that when Paul speaks of resurrection in the next phrase it is to be assumed, as anyone telling or hearing a story of someone being raised from the dead would assume in either the pagan or the Jewish world, that this referred to the body being raised to new life, leaving an empty tomb behind it. The fact that the empty tomb itself, so prominent in the gospel accounts, does not appear to be specifically mentioned in this passage, is not significant; the mention here of 'buried, then raised' no more needs to be amplified in that way than one would need to amplify the statement 'I walked down the street' with the qualification 'on my feet.' "

The rest of the chapter makes it clear that Paul's special interest in this exposition of the underlying facts of the gospel, for this present context, is found in the third verb: *he was raised*. Paul is establishing the crucial importance of the resurrection for the heart of the Christian faith, the very gospel of our salvation. Without the resurrection Christ's death and burial would not be part of a story of good news and salvation. For the place of the resurrection in the broader

theological argument of this letter and in the broadest conception of the redemption of fallen humanity and creation see our comments introducing this chapter.

The reference to *the third day* in v. 4 brings to mind Hosea 6:2 and Jonah 1:17. However, the phrase, "according to the Scriptures," may simply modify "was raised" and exclude the temporal reference (cf. similar syntax in 1 Macc. 7:16).

Just as the affirmation of Christ's death was followed by the reference to the confirmation of that event in his burial, the reference to Christ's resurrection is followed by a reference to the confirmation of that event through his series of appearances to his followers. Since the truth and importance of the resurrection is what is at issue in this chapter, it is not surprising that the section on the confirmation of the resurrection receives much fuller treatment by Paul than the previous ones. The fourth verb, *he appeared*, is the only one of the series that is repeated. In fact, it appears four times in short order: once each in vv. 5–8 as Paul catalogues a series of key appearances made by Christ after his resurrection. Witherington points out that the term Paul uses "speaks to the objectivity of the appearances: Jesus 'appeared,' not 'they claimed to see him.' "

Paul's selection of postresurrection appearances is unusual and calls for special comment. He indicates that he is listing the appearances in chronological order but does not suggest that the list is complete. He seems to be exclusively interested in appearances to the apostles. Unless there were no apostles among the five hundred mentioned in v. 6 (and it would be difficult to imagine a group of that many followers of Christ gathered without apostolic representation in its midst at that point of the early church), Paul's select list of appearances is certainly limited to those entailing apostles. There are only three individuals mentioned: the two most important leaders of the Jerusalem church (Peter and James) and Paul himself.

There seems to be a pattern in which Peter is followed by "the Twelve" and James by "all the apostles." In this way the chief of Christ's band of followers (Peter) is tied to the whole group of the earliest apostolic leaders *(the Twelve)* and then the subsequent leader of the Jerusalem church (cf. Acts 15) is related to the slightly enlarged group of apostles that seems to have included James and some others. As implied in the previous sentence, *the Twelve* refers not to the precise number of disciples since Judas was no longer among them, but to the name that had become attached to Christ's closest followers who originally were of that number. Acts 1:15–26 indicates that Matthias was added to the group after Christ's ascension.

In between the references to Cephas and the Twelve and to James and all the apostles Paul mentions Christ's extraordinary appearance to more than five hundred believers: *then he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers and sisters at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep*. The fact that most of the five hundred *are still living* is probably mentioned because Paul is especially interested not just in listing apostles and groups with apostles who saw the risen Christ, but in a list of authoritative witnesses who were still living and able to confirm the testimony. Other than James, the son of Zebedee (one of the Twelve killed by Herod; Acts 12:2), and some of the five hundred who had since "fallen asleep," it seems likely that all those listed by Paul were still living and testifying to the resurrection when he wrote this letter.

The James Paul mentions is undoubtedly the brother of the Lord, who became an important leader of the church in Jerusalem. James, the brother John and son of Zebedee, would have been included in the Twelve (we would expect "appeared again to James" if he were in mind). It is not

clear who would have been included in "all the apostles," but presumably it included James and the remaining members of the Twelve. Among others who may have been included in the group we might mention Matthias, Barnabas (Acts 14:14; 15:2), Andronicus, and Junia (Rom. 16:7).

Paul places himself at the end of the list of Christ's appearances to apostles. Although neither Paul nor any other New Testament author ever suggested that Paul took Judas's place or became one of the Twelve, he clearly saw himself as an apostle as fully authorized as any other and of strategic importance similar to that of Peter himself (cf. Gal. 2:7–9). He is the only person listed who was not a believer at the moment of Christ's appearance. The list starts and ends with the two people who serve as God's apostolic "point men" for the ministry to Jews and Gentiles respectively (Cephas/Peter and Paul). That it ends with Paul, to whom Christ appeared *last of all*, reminds the readers that the author of this letter, the founder of their church, is one of an extremely select group of people who were privileged to see the resurrected Lord, an experience that no one in their church could claim for themselves. "The Corinthians had had every kind of spiritual experience imaginable, as the previous chapters have made clear; but they had not seen the risen Jesus, nor did either they or Paul expect that they would do so."

Paul says that Christ appeared to him *as to one abnormally born*. The word translated *abnormally born* usually refers to an abortion or miscarriage, although BDAG gives its meaning as "a birth that violates the normal period of gestation (whether induced as abortion, or natural premature birth or miscarriage …, or birth beyond term)" and proposes a gloss here of "untimely birth." Here the idea of a "birth beyond term" seems to be appropriate since the appearance to Paul was later than that of others *(last of all)* and came only after a period of opposition on Paul's part. It may conjure up the image of Paul as a grotesque infant whose birth experience was far from what might normally be expected. The "for" with which the next verse begins suggests that it provides the explanation for Paul's unusual simile here.

15:9 Paul explains what he had in mind in referring to himself in the previous verse as "one abnormally born:" *For I am the least of the apostles and do not even deserve to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God*. In the very act of demonstrating his humility *(least of the apostles)* Paul simultaneously refers to his place of authority over the readers—after all, like the others listed, he is also *an apostle*, even if he does not feel deserving. It is not a question of whether he—or anyone else—thinks that he is deserving, but of what God has graciously chosen to do. Like the new birth (cf. John 1:13), the office of apostle (and Paul's "untimely birth") is not based on a human decision or human will, but is something given only by God himself. Paul clearly saw that the very thing that served as Paul's *bona fides* as a zealous, committed Jew (cf. Gal. 1:13–14; Phil. 3:4–7) made him the least qualified to be an apostle. Of all the people in his list of those who had seen the resurrected Lord, he is the only one that we know for certain was not a believer at the moment of Christ's appearance. He was not merely an unbeliever, but a persecutor of the church. As the following verse makes clear, the fact that Paul does not deserve to be an apostle serves to highlight one of his constant themes: God's surprising and unreasonable grace, in this case that remarkable grace shown particularly to him in his apostolic calling.

15:10 How could one who persecuted the church end up being so critical for the church's prosecution of its mission? The answer is obvious to Paul: the grace of God. *But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect. No, I worked harder than all of them—yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me*. Paul is an apostle, and the apostle to the

Gentiles in particular. It was not in cooperation with the grace of God, but *by the grace of God* that Paul is what he is (i.e., an apostle). Elsewhere Paul speaks at length on his calling to apostleship and gifting as a special manifestation of God's grace in his life (cf. Gal. 1:15–16; 2:7–9; Eph. 3:2, 7–9; Rom. 1:5; 12:3, 6; 15:15–19; 1 Cor. 3:10). The word translated *without effect* (others, "in vain") appears four times in this chapter (here, twice in v. 14, and one last time in v. 58) and nowhere else in this letter. Here it has to do with something "being without purpose or result" (BDAG). Some translations, like the TNIV, translate it differently in each case, masking Paul's use of the word as a motif in this chapter. Verses 14 and 58 make it clear that in Paul's view everything turns out to be in vain if there is no resurrection. Paul's preaching, the Corinthians' faith, and all labor carried out in obedience to God are for naught if there is no resurrection of the dead. God's grace, of course, should not be expected to be to no purpose or result and was certainly not to no purpose or effect in Paul's life and ministry.

Paul's humble assertion in v. 9 that he was the least of the apostles finds a counterbalancing statement here in Paul's declaration that he *worked harder than all of them*. By *them* Paul means all the apostles listed in vv. 5–7, and he makes it clearer that that list was especially focused on apostolic witnesses to the resurrection. Luke 7:41–47 indicates that the greater the sense of forgiveness received, the greater the love and commitment of the forgiven toward the Lord who has forgiven them. Paul's sense of infinite debt to the God who had showed him such grace fueled a profound passion to spread the fame and glory of that gracious and forgiving God. No sooner has Paul strongly affirmed how hard he worked, however, than he corrected himself and pointed out that it was not to him that his untiring work should be attributed but to the grace of God. And Paul does not describe his hard work as a matter of cooperating with God's grace but entirely as an effect of God's grace. What was on display was not a manifestation of Paul's capabilities or efforts *but* of *the grace of God* that was with him.

15:11 Having spent a moment discussing God' grace in his own life and calling, Paul returns to his main point, the fact that early Christian leaders consistently placed the (cross and) resurrection at the heart of their gospel proclamation; thus it was at the heart of the message that led to the conversion of the Corinthians. *Whether, then, it is I or they, this is what we preach, and this is what you believed*. Paul brings together two different but related issues here. First, he has referred to the other apostles as witnesses to Christ's resurrection as a way of strongly confirming the historical reality of that event. He takes the opportunity here to point out that the gospel message he preached to the Corinthians was no different from that preached by all the other apostles he mentioned. They were witnesses to the resurrection event that was central to the gospel tradition passed on to and through Paul, and it played the same role in their proclamation that it did in his own. In saying *this is what we preach* Paul is making the point that all of the apostolic witnesses are on the same page and that the gospel message received and believed by the Corinthians would have had the same basic content regardless of which apostle had first preached it to them. To reject the message of the resurrection of the dead is not to reject some idiosyncratic pet theme of Paul's but to reject a core plank in the gospel message on which their salvation stood. The very fact that they are now members of the church in Corinth means that they had come to believe the gospel and that the resurrection was an essential part of that message. To walk away from that would be to walk away from the gospel itself. In the following passage Paul will clarify the consequences of a denial of the resurrection since some of the Corinthians have failed to perceive the magnitude of their theological and spiritual error.

B. Explanation of the Consequences of Denying the Resurrection of the Dead, 15:12–19

> *12 But if it is preached that Christ has been raised from the dead, how can some of you say*
> *that there is no resurrection of the dead? 13 If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not*
> *even Christ has been raised. 14 And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and*
> *so is your faith. 15 More than that, we are then found to be false witnesses about God, for we*
> *have testified about God that he raised Christ from the dead. But he did not raise him if in fact*
> *the dead are not raised. 16 For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised either.*
> *17 And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins. 18 Then those*
> *also who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost. 19 If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we*
> *are to be pitied more than all others.*

We find a negative argument followed by a positive argument in this chapter just as we have in earlier sections of the letter. In vv. 12–19 Paul catalogues a series of negative consequences that would follow if in fact it were true that there is no resurrection of the dead. In short, the consequences would be that Christ never rose from the dead, Christian preaching and faith are for naught (and the Corinthians are still culpable for their sins), Paul and the rest of the apostles have given false testimony, Christians who have died are lost, and (in hyperbolic terms) Christians are the most pitiable people of all. While this is not exactly an example of *reductio ad absurdum*, Paul's enumeration of such drastic consequences is intended to show the untenability of the negative position. Verses 20–28 will take the positive side and explain the actual significance of the fact that Christ has indeed been raised from the dead (and thereby established and vindicated the doctrine of the resurrection of the dead). Corinthian skepticism concerning the place of the body in the afterlife is perfectly understandable in a Greco-Roman setting since his Gentile contemporaries had no notion of bodily resurrection. As Wright puts it, "Christianity was born into a world where its central claim was known to be false. Many believed the dead were non-existent; outside Judaism, nobody believed in resurrection."[66] In the Roman world, "everybody knew dead people didn't and couldn't come back to bodily life."

How does Paul's teaching on the resurrection body look against the backdrop of views in the ancient world? As we shall see, Paul's teaching on this subject is framed in sharp relief by such contrasting Greco-Roman views, sketched in outline from biblical and Jewish sources but given its distinctive hues from the palette of the risen Christ. To use a different metaphor, when it comes to conceiving of resurrection bodies, Paul swims against the tide of Greco-Roman teaching and with the flow of the Old Testament and its Jewish interpreters, but rides the wave created by the coming of Jesus.

15:12–13 In the previous verses of this chapter Paul has established the essential role of the resurrection in the proclamation of the gospel. In these two verses he begins to point out that that fact raises a fundamental problem with any suggestion that there is no resurrection of the dead: 12 *But if it is preached that Christ has been raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead?* 13 *If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised*. Paul has already pointed out that it is in fact preached—by the numerous witnesses of the fact listed in vv. 5–8—that *Christ has been raised from the dead*. The conditional clause *(if it is preached)* does not suggest any doubt about the matter, but refers back to a reality that Paul has just established in the previous argument. Paul's argument here seems so clear that it hardly seems to merit comment on first reading but causes one to ask how the Corinthians

could possibly have held to such a self-contradictory position. One can only assume that they had misunderstood Paul's preaching (and other early Christian teaching) about Christ's resurrection and its implications for Christians.

Perhaps they assumed that the language of resurrection was used by Christians to refer to an improvement in one's spiritual status either in this life or in a disembodied postmortem existence. Pythagoreans held to a notion of "the soul being released from the body at death, with good souls flying to the upper realms."[71] Similarly, Plutarch saw the soul attaining the realm of the gods by freeing itself from the attachment to the senses and becoming "pure, fleshless, and undefiled" (*Romulus* 28.6).

It is also possible that the Corinthians thought that references to Christ's resurrection had to do with an improvement in his spiritual status similar to the apotheosis which the Roman emperors were believed to experience, being promoted to divine rank or stature after their death. If so, they may have understood the Christian hope of resurrection to be a way of referring to an expectation that they would also be granted divine stature by God after they died. This was not the hope offered by Christ and the apostles, but only a shadowy parody of it. The gospel message was wrapped up in the bodily resurrection of Christ and its promise of the restoration and renewal of human life and creation, not an escape to some disembodied, ethereal world. (We refer the reader to our introduction to this chapter and to O'Donovan's comments on the relation between Christ's resurrection and the redemption and transformation of the created order which are found there.)

15:14 Paul follows the two conditional clauses in the previous two verses with a third one in which draws out another consequence of denying the resurrection. This one depends directly on the conclusion pointed to in v. 13b, which asserted that if there is really no resurrection, it would mean that Christ was never raised from the dead. *And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith*. Paul has no room for some "spiritualized" view of the resurrection and recognizes that any such message has nothing to do with what Christ himself and his apostolic representatives had claimed about his death and resurrection and its place in the redemption of humanity and creation. Perhaps there would be some other religious leader promoting a message along the lines of what the Corinthians had in mind, but it was not Christ or his disciples. Christian preaching and Christian faith are only as valid and credible as the resurrection message on which they are founded. The word translated *useless* is the same one translated "without effect" in v. 10 (where it was pointed out that it has to do with "being to no purpose or result"). It actually appears twice in this verse (literally, "our preaching is in vain [or for naught] and your faith is in vain [or for naught]"). The word will appear again in v. 58, where Paul guarantees that Christian labor is not in vain (or for naught). Wright draws out the implications that would follow if Christ had not been raised:

> The crucial point is not just that they are believing rubbish about the resurrection, and about Jesus, but that *the new age in which sins are left behind has not after all been inaugurated*.… For Paul the point of the resurrection is not simply that the creator god has done something remarkable for one solitary individual (as people today sometimes imagine is the supposed thrust of the Easter proclamation), but that, in and through the resurrection, 'the present evil age' has been invaded by the 'age to come', the time of restoration, return, covenant

renewal, and forgiveness. An event has occurred as a result of which the world is a different place, and human beings have the new possibility to become a different kind of people.

The resurrection gives meaning to Christian proclamation and faith, as it does to all work done in the Lord (v. 58), and it is the root of the Christian hope.

15:15–16 It would be bad enough if Christian preaching and faith were simply mistaken and useless. Paul points out (assuming the readers accept the reality of the God of Israel) that there would also be even greater negative consequences: *More than that, we are then found to be false witnesses about God, for we have testified about God that he raised Christ from the dead. But he did not raise him if in fact the dead are not raised. For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised either*. As *false witnesses about God*, Paul and the other apostolic preachers of the gospel would stand under his judgment. Of course, to give false witness is an offense against the Ten Commandments (Exod. 20:16; Deut. 5:20), one which was cited by Christ himself (Mark 10:19; Matt. 19:18; Luke 18:20). According to Proverbs 19:5, "A false witness will not go unpunished, and whoever pours out lies will not go free." The first line is repeated four verses later: "A false witness will not go unpunished, and whoever pours out lies will perish" (v. 9). Given the seriousness of such an offense, God-fearing people like Paul and the other apostles could hardly be expected to knowingly give false testimony about God. Of course, Paul's statement also implies that if the apostles have not given false testimony about God (because he did raise Christ from the dead and the dead are raised), then those who say that there is no resurrection of the dead are guilty of being false witnesses against God and should not expect to go unpunished.

These verses also hold a subtle key to understanding Paul's language throughout much of this chapter. Paul usually uses the passive voice when referring to the resurrection. That is, he speaks of the dead being raised or of the dead who are raised, as he does here of Christ having been raised. These passive verbs are used with the understanding that if they were reworded in the active voice, God would be named as the subject of the verb. This usage of the passive voice is usually called the "divine passive" because God's agency in the action is implied. There are three divine passives in these two verbs. *If in fact the dead are not raised* (= if God does not raise the dead); *if the dead are not raised* (again, = if God does not raise the dead); *Christ has not been raised either* (= God has not raised Christ either). This must be kept in mind as one reads this whole chapter since it would be a mistake to think that Paul or his readers would expect the dead to rise up on their own. In v. 15 Paul states explicitly what is implicit everywhere else. That it is *God* who *raised Christ from the dead*. What remains implicit but also understood in each of the dozens of references in this chapter to the dead being raised (passive voice) is that it is God who raises the rest of the dead, just as it is God who raised Christ.

15:17 As Paul continues his listing of the negative consequences that would hold true if there were no resurrection of the dead, he reflects an Old Testament/Jewish view of the condition of Gentiles apart from Christ (which would apply to unbelieving Jews apart from Christ as well): *And if Christ has not been raised*, *your faith is futile; you are still in your sins*. If there were no resurrection, it would mean that God would judge and condemn them for their sins. Paul had pointed out that Christ died "for our sins" in v. 3, but if God had not vindicated him by raising him from the dead, there would be no reason to believe that those sins had been dealt with. The Corinthians would be, as Ephesians 2:1–3, 2:11–12, and 4:17–19 describe their former life, "excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope

and without God" (Eph. 2:12). Paul's understanding of faith and its role in our justification is fully developed in other places in his letters (especially Galatians and Romans) but it is also clearly reflected in his verse. If faith were futile, believers would still be in their sins (culpable for them and standing under divine judgment). The clear implication is that since Christ has been raised, Christian faith is not futile but effective and believers no longer stand under God's judgment for their sins but have been forgiven, justified, and set free from their sins (cf. Acts 13:38–39; Rom. 6:7).

15:18 Continuing his list of consequences, if there were no resurrection of the dead, Paul points out, *Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost*. Paul has already used the common euphemism of "falling asleep" several times in this letter (7:39; 11:30; 15:6, 18, 20, 51; cf. 1 Thess. 4:13–15), the most recent being in v. 6. In commenting on 7:39, we pointed out that it had been used as a polite euphemism among Greeks for centuries, but had come to serve as an allusion to the hope of the resurrection among Christians (cf. Eph. 5:14, where a different Greek verb is used for the same euphemism and where it is explicitly tied to the resurrection hope).[79] As 15:54–55 shows, it is based on the conviction that Christians face death as the last enemy, which has "lost its sting" because of Jesus Christ. In 1 Thessalonians 4:13–18 it is Christian confidence in the resurrection of the dead that serves to encourage believers in the face of those who have died ("fallen asleep") in Christ and which keeps them from grieving like people with no hope. The Christian hope is a hope tied up with the resurrection of the dead. If that were to turn out to be a false hope, there would be no reason to expect deceased believers to have any further existence. They would simply have perished.

15:19 Paul uses a bit of hyperbole as he considers the challenges of following Christ in light of the consequences that would follow (which he just outlined in the previous verses) if there were no resurrection of the dead: *If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all others*. This is not to say that the Christian life does not have benefits besides the hope that goes beyond this life (joy, peace, purpose, forgiveness, meaning, etc.), but what ultimately underwrites our such blessings, especially in the face of the tremendous challenges and opposition that committed Christians have often found throughout history, is the knowledge of what God has in store for us in the resurrection. In other texts Paul refers to this as "the hope of glory" (Col. 1:27), or the full knowledge of Christ that includes experiencing both "the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings …, attaining to the resurrection from the dead" (Phil. 3:10–11). This is "the goal" of God's calling in Christ (Phil. 3:14). It is related to "the hope to which he has called [us], the riches of his glorious inheritance in his people, and his incomparably great power for us who believe" (Eph. 1:18–19). Earlier in this letter Paul referred to the time "when completeness comes," when we shall see [God] face to face" and "know fully, even as [we are] fully known" (13:10–12).

The full logic behind this verse is most clearly seen in Romans 8 and in a later part of this very chapter. In Romans 8 Paul says that "our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us" (Rom. 8:18). Were it not for that future glory (which he identifies with our participation in the resurrection), our present sufferings would need to be interpreted through a very different calculus. Similarly, in 2 Corinthians 4:17 Paul writes that "our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all." So again it is the eternal glory, not merely the present benefits of faith in Christ, which counterbalances the suffering that Christians may expect to endure in this life. The "light and momentary troubles"

are seen as light and momentary only in the light of the eternal glory that awaits us (cf. Paul's description of them in 1 Cor. 4:9–13 and 2 Cor. 4:7–16; 6:3–10; 11:23–29). In the following verses in this chapter we find the same logic repeated. In vv. 30–32 Paul will ask, "why do we endanger ourselves every hour? I face death every day.… If I fought wild beasts in Ephesus with no more than human hopes, what have I gained?" The answer is given in vv. 51–53: "the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality." That is, a perishable, dishonored, and weak body is raised in glory and power as an imperishable spiritual body (vv. 42–44).

In 1 Thessalonians 1:9–10 Paul commends his readers since they had "turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead—Jesus, who rescues us from the coming wrath." What they expected to take place when their wait for the resurrected Jesus was over is not made explicit there, but in Romans 8:23 Paul says that "we wait eagerly for our adoption, the redemption of our bodies." Evidently it is that message that led the Thessalonians to welcome the gospel message "in the midst of severe suffering with the joy given by the Holy Spirit" (1 Thess. 1:6).

Through most of this letter Paul has been pushing his readers to embrace the partial renewal of humanity which Christ and the Spirit are working within us even now, as we reject the world's false wisdom and the idolatry and immorality that flow from it and reflect Christ's wisdom and purity and the proper worship of the one true God in Christ. But all of this is just the first taste of our ultimate complete renewal to which the resurrection of Christ points us.

Looking back at the previous verses, we can reconstruct a positive version of Paul's soteriology out of his negative statements: Christians are not in a pitiable situation but a desirable and enviable one; they are not lost but saved; they are not in their sins but forgiven and justified; finally, they do not merely have hope for this life, but look forward to the eternal glory that will accompany their resurrection from the dead.

C. Explanation of the Significance of Christ's Resurrection, 15:20–28

> *20 But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen*
> *asleep. 21 For since death came through a human being, the resurrection of the dead comes*
> *also through a human being. 22 For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive. 23 But*
> *in this order: Christ, the firstfruits; then, when he comes, those who belong to him. 24 Then the*
> *end will come, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all*
> *dominion, 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 he "has put everything under his feet."*
> *Now when it says that "everything" has been put under him, it is clear that this does not*
> *include God himself, who put everything under Christ. 28 When he has done this, then the Son*
> *himself will be made subject to him who put everything under him, so that God may be all in*
> *all.*

Having delineated the consequences which would follow if there were no resurrection of the dead (as some Corinthians had affirmed), Paul now moves from that negative argumentation to a positive exposition of the meaning and significance of the fact that Christ has indeed been

raised from the dead. As Wright points out, this passage "takes the form of a small apocalyptic account of the coming of God's kingdom, establishing God's rule over the world and defeating all the enemies of his kingdom, much as Daniel 7, itself drawing on the creation account in Genesis 2 [*sic*, 1], in which the human race was set in authority over the beasts, envisages YHWH's kingdom as a new creation." Paul's discussion reflects a contrasting typology in which Christ, the ideal human and final representative of the human race, reverses the corruption introduced by the first human and original representative of the human race and restores things to the way they were originally intended, with God's dominion perfectly expressed in the restored creation such that he is perfectly glorified as the one who is "all in all."

Thiselton points out that commentators tend to "emphasize the existential assurance of vv. 20–25: because Christ was raised, those in Christ will be raised, since he is the firstfruit of the whole harvest still to come." He acknowledges that the point is valid but perhaps misses Paul's main emphasis, since "vv. 20–25 prepare the way for vv. 26–28, which is about God and God's purposes, as is this whole chapter."

15:20 Paul indicates that he is now starting out on a contrasting line of thought, this time focusing on how things really are as opposed to how they would be if the Corinthians were right:[85] *But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep*. That Christ has indeed been raised from the dead was established in vv. 4–8, through the listing of apostolic eyewitnesses, most of whom still lived to confirm the fact.

Firstfruits is a metaphor "derived from the OT where it denotes the first portion of the crop (or flock) which is offered in Thanksgiving to God. As such, the term signifies the pledge of the remainder, and concomitantly, the assurance of a full harvest … the first installment of that part which includes, as by synecdoche, the whole." By way of this metaphor Paul underlines the link between our fate and the fate of Christ; Christ's resurrection is not an isolated event but guarantees something even more stupendous. Theologically it suggests that our resurrection is not wholly separate from Christ's resurrection, but earlier and later parts of the same event, with the earlier part serving as a promise and guarantee of that which is yet to come. "[T]he whole point of Paul's argument … is that in the destiny of Jesus Christ, the one 'raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep' (1 Cor 15:20), is our destiny."

There is also a cultic and representative logic at work in the firstfruits metaphor. The firstfruits were a part of the sacrificial vocabulary of the Old Testament. It "has to do with the flawless firstfruits of natural products, the firstfruits of human beings, animals, and plants …, all of which are owed to Yahweh (or the sanctuary)."[90] The firstfruits is connected to the larger group (harvest, offspring, etc.) it represents so that what is done with it has implications for the status that the rest has before God. "As a representation of the rest, the [firstfruits] were offered to the deity as the necessary consecration of the possessions before further use was allowed." Paul's use of the metaphor suggests that "Jesus has been raised as the first and the representative of those who will be raised."[93]

As the Messiah, Christ is not only the King and Lord of his people, but also the ideal representative of his people, such that the destiny of his people is directly tied to his own destiny. In Romans 11:16 Paul alludes to Numbers 15:17–21 and seems to mix the metaphor of firstfruits with the concept of leaven to suggest that they have a similar kind of relationship. Just as the introduction of leaven into dough ends up changing (leavening) the rest of the dough (cf. 1 Cor. 5:6), what is done with the firstfruits also changes the status of the larger group that it represents:

"If the part of the dough offered as firstfruits is holy, then the whole batch is holy." In a general sense the status of Christ's followers is changed by whatever their firstfruits undergoes, and in the specific case of the resurrection their resurrection is not merely parallel or similar to Christ's but is preauthorized, promised, guaranteed, and initiated by it. As Thiselton points out, with the firstfruits metaphor we have at least three interrelated ideas: "(1) prior temporality; (2) representation of the same quality or character; and (3) promise or pledge of more of the same kind to come."

15:21–22 In these two verses Paul unpacks some of the logic of his use of the firstfruits metaphor, showing the similarity and difference between Adam and Christ and how they functioned as representatives of the human race. Each verse begins with "for," implying that they provide a further explanation for Paul's statement in v. 20, and each maintains a strongly parallel syntax which highlights the comparisons and contrasts they highlight: *For since death came through a human being, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a human being*. In v. 21 no particular people are named but we are told that two contrasting realities (death and resurrection) were both introduced "through a human being." That is what they have in common. It goes unmentioned but is also understood that death and resurrection were brought to human beings by those representative human beings. Paul is presenting the most concise form of the story of redemption imaginable: the archetypal problem of sin finds its eschatological resolution through the climactic breakthrough of the resurrection accomplished by Christ. As Wright puts it, "by asserting in verses 21–22 that Jesus is the true human and the Messiah, Paul explains both *that* his resurrection is the beginning of a larger harvest and *how* that harvest will be accomplished."

Translations are divided as to whether the key term should be translated *a human being*, as by the TNIV, NRSV, NAB, and NET alternative reading, or "a man" as in the NIV, CSB, ESV, NASB, NLT, and main text of the NET Bible. Of course, the persons being referred to were both men, as v. 22 makes clear. But while the term used is grammatically masculine, it does not refer to a man as opposed to a woman, but refers to a member or members of the human race. Where "man" is understood in a purely generic sense (as it used to be), it may be an acceptable translation. In many cases, however, it either sounds very gender specific or is even proposed to have a gender-specific significance and therefore may be misleading. The point here is not the gender of the people who serve as our representatives (Adam and Christ), but that they do in fact serve as members and representatives of the larger group of human beings who find their identity and their destiny in the one who represents them.

In v. 22 the particular human beings are named (Adam and Christ), and it is made explicit that they bring other human beings into the death and resurrection that they themselves experienced: *For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive*. Paul has moved from metaphor to typology, clarifying the point made in v. 20. The fact that he introduces Adam into his argument without any clarifying explanation suggests that he assumes some knowledge of the biblical story found in Genesis 1–3. He may have taught it to them himself when he founded the church in Corinth. To be *in Adam* is to be part of the group which finds in Adam its representative and leader, which finds its identity and destiny in Adam and what he has brought about for his people. To be *in Christ* is to be part of the group which finds in Christ its representative and leader, which finds its identity and destiny in Christ and what he has brought about for his people. All humans who have not yet found redemption through faith in Christ

remain *in Adam*. Those who have entered into the promise of new life, the life of Christ, are *in Christ*, and will find that their initial experience of the newness of life was but a foretaste of the ultimate restoration of life that awaits them in the resurrection. The expressions *in Adam* and *in Christ* reinforce the idea of corporate solidarity that is found in the firstfruits metaphor as well. Paul's use of the future tense—*will be made alive*—stresses the future, as-yet-unfulfilled aspect of Christ's redeeming work, in keeping with where the argument is going in vv. 23–28, where we are brought right to the ultimate consummation in which the reign of sin and death is completely demolished. The following verse makes it clear that by "being made alive" Paul has in mind the resurrection since those who belong to him will be made alive (= resurrected) "when he comes."

As in Romans 5:12–21, Paul stresses the differences between Adam and Christ. The consequences of the resurrection of Christ (life for all) correspond antithetically to the consequences of Adam's sin (death for all). The former has broken the power of the latter. However, Paul is not teaching universalism (see 1 Cor. 1:18); the unqualified "all" of v. 22 who will be made alive is clarified by v. 23 with the phrase "those who belong to him."

15:23 Having affirmed in the previous verse that "in Christ all will be made alive," Paul now clarifies what he meant, including the timing, participants, and nature of the life to which he was referring: *But in this order: Christ, the firstfruits; then, when he comes, those who belong to him*. The first clause *(But in this order)* is literally "each one in its/his/their own class/group." Paul's delineation of the two classes or groups who would participate in the resurrection to power and glory may have had a powerful impact on any Corinthian Christians who thought of themselves as important because they belonged to some high-status social group in the city of Corinth (and may have been tempted to be embarrassed by or look down upon members of the church of more humble means), as well as on any who may have thought of themselves as unimportant due to their lack of worldly power or influence (including, e.g., slaves). The two orders of priority are Christ himself and then *all who belong to him*. There is no further class distinction that is relevant to the order to or benefits of the resurrection.

Christ was already identified as *the firstfruits* in v. 20 (see our comments on the metaphor there). He was already made alive (resurrected) "on the third day" (v. 4), while his people will experience the same at the *parousia (when he comes)*. The word used for *when he comes* was used as a technical term in both religious (sacred) contexts and official administrative contexts. "It refers to both the epiphany of God or a god … and to the official visit of an emperor or some other high-ranking official to a provincial city." When used in reference to Christ, it is "nearly always of his Messianic Advent in glory to judge the world at the end of this age" (BDAG). As Radl suggests, it is difficult to determine whether the usage of the term in early Christianity is influenced primarily by its prior use in official contexts (suggested by the Christian usage in relation to the coming of the "Lord") or sacred contexts (suggested by the Christian usage in relation to the coming of the "savior"): "Since, however, the emperor, too, could be received not just as a ruler, but also as a savior, official [*parousia*] terminology with its sacral elements probably stands closest to Christian usage."

The fact that Christ, the firstfruits, has already been made alive clarifies that the new life of which Paul speaks is the resurrected life which has been the subject of this entire chapter. It also becomes evident that Paul is not concerned in this chapter with any resurrection of the unrighteous to judgment, but is fully focused on the question of the resurrection of the righteous, and of Christians in particular. *Those who belong to him* clarifies that not all the dead will enjoy

the resurrection life Paul is describing here, but only those who are Christ's (presumably including the faithful people of God who died before Christ's first coming). The expression also reinforces the idea of corporate solidarity that was already introduced with the firstfruits metaphor in v. 20 and reiterated in the concept of "in Adam" and "in Christ" in v. 22.

There is no suggestion that Christ would come to take his people away (as in dispensational eschatology); the idea is that believers (and creation) will experience their ultimate renewal and glorification upon Christ's return.

15:24 The timing implied by this verse is ambiguous, but the main point remains clear: the story ends with all things in perfect submission to the Father. *Then the end will come, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority and power*. There has been some disagreement over the timing implied by the first word of this verse. In v. 23 there is a time gap between the resurrection of Christ and that of those who belong to him. The word translated *then* in this verse is different from the one translated "then" in v. 23, but they both mean "being next in order of time." Premillennialists (those who believe that Revelation 20 refers to an extended reign of Christ after his second coming) believe *then* here, as in v. 23, allows for a great expanse of time, so that the millennial reign of Christ may take place between the "then" of v. 23 and the "then" of v. 24 just as two thousand years have taken place between the resurrection of Christ and the "then" of v. 23. Amillennialist interpreters believe that Paul suggests here that the reign of Christ concludes when his people are raised from the dead and Christ immediately turns the kingdom over to the Father. The words used for "then" give no clue as to whether there is any delay between events. In the case of v. 23 the fact that there is a delay between the resurrection of Christ and that of his people is known through other means. It is not at all clear that Paul had any expectation that Christ would have a distinct millennial reign as opposed to an ongoing role reigning with his people forever. Paul himself never gave a hint that he had all the details worked out on exactly how God's kingdom would unfold.

While Revelation 20 speaks of a thousand-year reign of Christ (often referred to as the millennium), the oldest and widest of biblical traditions indicate that the Messiah's reign will never end (cf. 2 Sam. 7:16; 1 Chr. 17:14; Isa. 9:7; Ps. 89:36–37; Dan. 7:14, 18; Heb. 1:8; Rev. 11:15; 22:3), and of course Genesis 1:26–28 shows that God's original intention was to have a human vice-regent reigning over all of creation in a perfect reflection of his own righteous authority. We will grapple with this tension in our interpretation of the following verses. Theodoret (who is navigating the christological issues of his own day) was on the right track: "In handing over the kingdom to the God and Father he is not himself stripped of the kingdom; rather, he brings into subjection the tyrannical devil and his assistants, and forces all to do obeisance and acknowledge the God of all."[110] Similarly, Thiselton recognizes the importance of seeing that "since God and Christ as Lord are 'One,' this emphasis is not upon a 'discontinuation' of Christ's lordship as such, but upon its culmination within the terms of its purpose for this world and Christ's kingdom here."

We must address the question of the identity of the *he* who *has destroyed all dominion, authority and power*. A strong scholarly consensus affirms that it must be Christ, since he is clearly the one who hands over the kingdom to the Father and the syntax gives no hint that the subject has changed. On the other hand, the fact that vv. 25–28 suggest that this verse reflects Paul's gloss or interpretation of Psalm 110:1 and Psalm 8:6 would point in a different direction. His more

explicit interpretations of the references to putting enemies or everything under the king's feet in Psalms 110 and 8 in the following verses indicate that he understands those texts to say it is God who does that. That this would mean God's placing everything under Christ's feet is here put in terms of his destruction of all (competing) dominion, authority, and power. The question of the relationship between this line and the allusions or citations of the Psalm texts becomes more critical once we understand that Paul does not merely cite them to support a view he derives from some other source, but rather that what Paul knows about this subject he knows based on what he has discovered in those texts.[114]

Things become more ambiguous, however, when we recognize that although the Psalms speak of God's putting his enemies (or all things) under the feet of his royal king, it was understood that in actual practice the king was expected to go out as the instrument through whom God would act and display his strength and power over enemies. That is, God would put the king's enemies under his feet by giving him victory over them in battle. So, as Holleman says, "the idea that Jesus destroys every rule, authority, and power (v. 24c) is not necessarily in discord with the idea that God places the enemies under Jesus' feet (vv. 25b and 27). Paul certainly regards God as the subject of the subjection of the enemies under Jesus' feet (vv. 25b, 27)." It is true that the syntax would lead one to think that Christ is still the subject of the final verb of the verse (destroyed), and Holleman is right that this is not "in discord with the idea that God places the enemies under Jesus' feet." The logical relationship between this verse and the biblical texts, however, suggests that the very idea of an "end" that comes with an ending of or transition in the Lord's reign (the handing over of the kingdom) *after* someone does something would lead us to look to Psalm 110 and find in the motif of reigning "until" God does something that he gives up that reign *after* God does that thing. Paul may have been perfectly happy to express himself in such a potentially ambiguous manner, given his understanding (consistent with the psalm) that God acts through Christ, and Christ is the agent of God's reign.

Verses 24–28 reflect the motif of a dominion gone astray and needing to be crushed so that the proper dominion might be restored. The general idea would have been familiar to anyone in the Roman Empire. Just as a Roman emperor would send out his leading general to put down seditious movements and rebellious vassal states and restore the emperor's authority throughout the empire, God has sent Christ to subdue all rebellion and opposition, to destroy all the enemies of God's kingdom, and to restore all of creation to its proper submission to the Father for his glory and the good of all creation. As Wright points out, this description of Christ's role in reigning over all creation reminds us that Christ, "as the final Adam, the start of the renewed human race (compare Colossians 1:18b), is not only the model for the new type of humanity. He possesses the authority to bring it into being."

Paul's description in this verse reflects the Old Testament and Jewish understanding of what would happen when God finally stepped in to put the world to rights again. It seems likely that early Jewish and Christian conceptions of God's coming kingdom were shaped by Israel's and the church's knowledge and experience of world-dominating pagan suzerains.[120] The pretensions of pagan rulers were seen to parody the kind of sovereign rule that God himself is expected to exercise on behalf of his people one day, even as those same pagan reigns may well have informed Jewish and Christian understanding (by both comparison and contrast) of what such a reign might look like. To give an example of a similar pattern in the Old Testament, we note that the language of the submission of "peoples, languages, and nations" that is used in relation to

the "one like a son of man" in Daniel 7:14 relates to the use of the same language with respect to Nebuchadnezzar in 3:4, 7, 29; 4:1, to Belshazzar in 5:19, and to Darius in 6:25.

Remarkably, the words translated *dominion* and *authority* in 1 Corinthians 15:24 are found in the ancient Greek version of Daniel 7:14, "and to him was given the dominion and the honor and the kingship, and all peoples, tribes, languages shall be subject to him. His authority is an everlasting authority, which will not pass away" (NETS translation of Theodotion's version). The words translated *dominion* and *authority* are found in both the Old Greek and Theodotion's version of the text. They also appear in both the Old Greek and Theodotion's version of the depiction of the end in terms of the termination of violent, wicked, and oppressive world powers and the establishment of God's kingdom in Daniel 7:27: "Then the sovereignty, power and greatness of all the kingdoms under heaven will be handed over to the holy people of the Most High. His kingdom will be an everlasting kingdom, and all rulers will worship and obey him" (TNIV). Earlier, in Daniel 2:44 we had learned that after a series of pagan world empires have had their day, "the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that will never be destroyed, nor will it be left to another people. It will crush all those kingdoms and bring them to an end, but it will itself endure forever."

Clearly, by *all dominion, authority and power* Paul means all the competing, corrupted, and perverted dominions, authorities, and powers that have been unleashed through Adam's idolatrous perversion of the reign given him by God in Genesis 1. An anti-imperial ideology is clearly at work here, as in the texts from Daniel cited above. As Witherington suggests, "Paul is trying to supplant the imperial eschatology which was clearly extant in Corinth and which looked to the emperor as the father and benefactor … with an eschatology that involves Christ and a truly divine Father." The dominions which seemed to hold sway in the political, religious, and spiritual realms would all be destroyed in the face of the glorious appearance of the fullness of God's kingdom. This would also apply to the tendency in every human heart to assert one's own ultimate autonomy as a kingdom of one. No rebellious dominion, authority, or power may be allowed to stand if true peace, liberty, and righteousness are to reign. It is in this environment that God's oppressed and marginalized people may finally experience the freedom, righteousness, and peace for which they have hungered and thirsted. As Barth insists, "In the Resurrection of Jesus Christ man is once for all exalted, and appointed to discover with God his right against all his foes and thus set free to live a new life." That is, to live "the life for which God has set him free in the death of Jesus Christ."[122]

The two words from this verse that are found in the Greek versions of Daniel mentioned above also appear together several times in Pauline letters and suggest that for Paul the primary referents are spiritual or demonic powers. In Ephesians 1:20–21 Paul says that when God raised Christ from the dead, he seated him "at his right hand in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion." In Ephesians 6:12 Paul notes that "our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms." And in Colossians 2:15 Paul adds that Christ "disarmed the powers and authorities" and "made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross." Even if the primary referents are rebellious spiritual powers, Paul's point must not be restricted to them. Psalms 8 and 110 refer to the submission of enemies (Ps. 110:1) or all things (Ps. 8:6) to the king. Paul's language should be understood in a

similarly comprehensive manner, so that it includes "any kind of structural opposition to God, whether social, political, economic, ethical, spiritual," or other.

Paul hints at the point that Adam, who was given dominion by God in Genesis 1:26–28, introduced a dominion of sin and death rather than the dominion of righteousness and life which would bring glory to God. This is more explicit in Romans. Romans 5:14 says, "death reigned from the time of Adam…." Romans 5:17 states that "death reigned through that one man…." The dominion of death is tied to that of sin. Romans 5:21 asserts that "sin reigned in death," Romans 6:12 warns that we are not to "let sin reign" in their mortal bodies, and 6:14 affirms that "sin shall no longer be your master." These texts, and especially 1 Corinthians 15:26, suggest that Paul has the dominions of death and sin particularly in mind, with sin and death personified such that they stand for all of the corrupt spiritual powers let loose in the world by Adam. The power of death and sin is to be utterly *destroyed* as Christ brings the kingdom of God to its climactic consummation. As pointed out in our opening comments on this verse, this is Paul's interpretation of Christ's fulfillment of Psalms 110:1 and 8:6. Thus, "destroying" his enemies is Paul's interpretation of what is in mind when the Psalms say that God will put them under Christ's feet (note the alternation between "putting under his feet" and "destroying" again in vv. 25–27). Their power and influence in the world are to be finally abolished.

Unfortunately, this portrayal of Christ's role in the world has too often served to underwrite violent and oppressive rule on the part of those who see themselves as agents of God's kingdom. While Christians may well have significant concerns about the ideological criticism of Scripture itself, they must always be prepared to engage in the ideological criticism of interpretations and applications of Scripture lest it continue to be used for evil in the guise of righteousness, oppressing the weak and powerless for the sake of the agendas of the powerful. The validity of this theology and expression of political power is wholly dependent upon the infinite wisdom and righteousness of the one who destroys all other opposing powers and imposes his own kingdom on the world. When such a project is carried out (even on a lesser scale) by powerful (but not infinitely wise or righteous) human leaders and governments, whether under the Babylonian, Persian, Greek, Roman, or even modern empires, it is done in the name of righteousness and peace and often with a claim to divine (or natural) mandate. But it always ends up reflecting a parody of the perfect kingdom of righteousness and peace that could be established only by the infinitely wise and righteous King known for his self-sacrificial love for all his creatures, especially the weak and powerless. It is a sad irony that texts such as this one which speak of the ultimate condemnation of all empires but God's have nevertheless sometimes come to empower those who falsely perceive themselves to be following a divine model suited to their own ambitions.

15:25 The *for* at the beginning of this verse suggests that it is the basis for Paul's statement in the previous verse: *For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet*. Paul's wording conflates the language of Psalm 110:1 with that of Psalm 8:6. Wright notes that "[t]his is not a mere 'appeal to scripture', as though Paul were mounting an argument about something else and needed to drag in a few proof-texts":

> He is thinking his way through a theology of creation and of humankind, and the biblical allusions indicate the narrative of which the resurrection of Jesus now forms the climax, helping the story to its intended goal…. [T]he failure of humankind ('Adam') to be the creator's wise, image-bearing steward over creation has not led the creator to rewrite the

vocation, but rather to send the Messiah as the truly human being. The purpose is that in his renewed, resurrected human life he can be and do, for humankind and all creation, what neither humankind nor creation could do for themselves.

He must reign reflects both "You … crowned him" and "made him ruler" from Psalm 8:5–6 and "sit at my right hand" (the position of a co- or vice-regent) in Psalm 110:1. Paul's reference to *all his enemies* reflects a conflation of "all things" from Psalm 8 and "your enemies" from Psalm 110. The reference to reigning *until* his enemies have been subdued comes from Psalm 110:1 ("Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet"). Psalm 8:6 contributes "put all … under his feet" (110:1 LXX has, "as a footstool for your feet"). Both 110:1 and 8:6 mention the king's feet.

The two texts clearly are dealing with a parallel thought and share parallel language (all things or enemies being submitted to the feet of the royal figure). Thus we are dealing with a type of *gezerah shawah* (a traditional Jewish technique of interpreting two texts with shared terms or expressions [or sometimes merely shared themes] in light of each other), although it must be kept in mind that there is not just a lexical link between the two texts but a strong thematic connection as well. While Psalm 8 has Genesis 1 in mind and refers in the first place to the role for which God created humanity and Psalm 110:1 has the role of the Davidic king in mind, it would be a mistake to think the two texts are therefore unrelated. Psalm 110 states that God has in mind that the king will fulfill his original (and ultimate) intentions for humanity. The use of the Psalms suggests that the referent of *he has put* is God, and this is confirmed in vv. 27–28. Hays comments that in 15:25–27 Paul "alludes to Ps 110:1 and Ps 8:6 as prophecies of Christ's enthronement at the right hand of God and ultimate authority over all creation. Thus Paul offers the earliest documentation of a christological exegesis of these psalms." Together the psalms to which Paul alludes support his claim that all powers and authorities will be placed under Christ's feet and thus be subjected to God. In vv. 27–28 Paul's language follows Psalm 8 rather than 110, but both are clearly in mind here. Psalms 8 and 110 are also found together in Ephesians 1:20–22 and Hebrews 2:5–8.

In Psalm 110:1 YHWH promises to make the king's enemies a footstool for his feet. To "makes someone a footstool for someone else" means to "subject one pers[on] to another, so that the other can put a foot on the subject's neck." The idea of defeated kings being treated like a footstool may be found in Joshua 10:24 (and less precisely, Isa. 51:23). As Allen indicates, "reflection of an ancient Near Eastern cultural pattern is evident: in the El Amarna letters vassals refer to themselves as the footstools of Pharaoh, while a similar promise features in an oracle from Marduk to the Assyrian king Esarhaddon." What Psalm 110:1 has in mind by making the king's "enemies a footstool for [his] feet" is clarified in vv. 5–6 of the same psalm, which say, "The Lord is at your right hand; he [i.e., the Lord at the king's right hand] will crush kings on the day of his wrath. He will judge the nations, heaping up the dead and crushing the rulers of the whole earth." The Psalm's focus on crushing and judging kings, nations, and rulers is consistent with Paul's own reference to the destruction of all dominion, authority, and power in the previous verse.

The idea that this verse suggests that Christ's reign would come to an end was one that the Fathers regularly sought to correct. Jerome asks, "Will the Lord rule only until he has put all his enemies under his feet? Will he then stop ruling?" His answer? "Obviously it is only then that he

will really begin to rule in the full sense of the word!" Cyril of Jerusalem argues, "If he is king before he has finally defeated his enemies, must he not be all the more king when he has completely mastered them?" Theodoret supports the same view, arguing that "*until* here does not suggest time, but brings out that he will subject absolutely everyone" (presumably in both the psalm and Paul's use of it). Gregory of Nazianzus also deals with the meaning of *until:*

> Must he cease to be king or be removed from heaven? Why, who shall make him cease, or for what cause? What a bold and very anarchical interpreter you are, and yet you have heard that of his kingdom there shall be no end. Your mistake arises from not understanding that "until" is not always exclusive of what comes after but asserts up to that time, without denying what comes after it. To take a single instance, how else would you understand "Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world"? Does it mean that he will no longer be so afterward?

While that may well be a stress that is easily missed, it seems the word "until" in Psalm 110:1 governs and accounts for much of the language of temporal sequence in 1 Corinthians 15:24–28, including "the end," "when he hands over the kingdom," and "after he has destroyed" in v. 24; "until he has put" in v. 25; and "when he has done this" in v. 28. The influence of the psalm on Paul's theology and wording should not be underestimated. For an attempt to do justice to the valid points made by the Fathers (and the biblical texts listed in the second paragraph of our comments on v. 24, which also guided the Fathers) as well as the fact that this passage suggests some transition in or end to Christ's reign once his enemies have been destroyed, see our comments on v. 28 and the quotations from Augustine found there.

15:26 Paul brings his discussion of the destruction of God's enemies back to the theme of death which was introduced in v. 21. *The last enemy to be destroyed is death*. The word *enemy* comes from Paul's allusion to Psalm 110:1 in the previous verse, and the idea of a *last* enemy suggests reflection on Psalm 110 (and the point at which the "until" mentioned there would be reached) enhanced by Psalm 8 (that Psalm 110 had all the king's enemies in mind is understood to be implicit, while Psalm 8 more explicitly mentions "all things"). Paul's paraphrase in the previous verse mentioned "all his enemies," which prepared for this reference to the last of them. *Destroyed* comes from Paul's paraphrase of Psalm 8/110 in v. 24 (where "destroy" = "put under his feet"). The reference to and focus on *death* clarifies the relevance of this whole discussion of Christ's victory over enemies for the issue of the resurrection that governs this chapter. It is not just that Jesus reigns to bring in the fullness of the kingdom, but that his mission includes the destruction of death itself, and for death to be completely undone resurrection is required. A disembodied postmortem existence or the immortality of the soul would support an essentially Gnostic and quite limited victory over death, while resurrection bespeaks an absolute victory over and destruction of death. This will be Paul's point in vv. 54–55: "When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: 'Death has been swallowed up in victory' " (v. 54). Then the victory taunt may be sung: "Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?" (v. 55).

In Genesis 2:17 death was threatened as the consequence of the original sin against God and for his glory. In our comments on v. 24 we pointed out that in Romans 5:14 Paul says, "death reigned from the time of Adam," and that in Romans 5:17 he says, "death reigned through that one man." Romans 5:21 suggests that the dominion of death is tied to that of sin since "sin

reigned in death." While sin brought death into the world, it may be argued that since sin first brought death into the world it has been the universal experience of spiritual death that has led to the flourishing and reign of the first sin in death.

15:27 Paul has been interpreting Psalm 110:1 in light of Psalm 8, especially focusing on the former text's reference to the putting down of the king's enemies (see our comments on v. 25). Now he shifts his focus to the language of Psalm 8 in particular. The first sentence, *For he "has put everything under his feet,"* probably relates directly to v. 26. The *For* explains that even if the readers may not have intuitively thought of "death" as a dominion, authority, or power that would be put down (v. 24), Psalm 8, with its language of *everything* being placed in submission, means that we should think in the most comprehensive terms possible, that even death must be destroyed (thus the need for resurrection, as pointed out in our comments on v. 26). But once the idea of a comprehensive submission of everything to Christ is raised, it leads to the refinement Paul provides here. Will absolutely everything and everyone be made to submit to Christ? The answer is found in the psalm itself. There could only be one exception. If we are told that someone will place everything under Christ, presumably that someone is not included in the "everything": *Now when it says that "everything" has been put under him*, *it is clear that this does not include God himself, who put everything under Christ*. The words *when it says* make it clear that Paul is citing Scripture (Ps. 8:6), as most English translations indicate with quotation marks around *"has put everything under his feet"* in the first part of the verse. Paul has explained why death is to be destroyed (v. 26), or, more accurately, how human beings, through whom death came (v. 22), can exercise dominion over all things through their participation in resurrection along with Christ. If with Psalm 110 authority and dominion are considered in relation the enemies of God and his king, with Psalm 8 they are considered in relation to all of creation.

Psalm 8 is a psalm of descriptive praise for God's majestic work in creation. Verses 3–8 allude to Genesis 1:26–30 and comment specifically on the creation of humankind in the image of God and their function as God's vice-regent over the earth. The theme of the reign of God over all creation through his human vice-regent, and his glory displayed in that dominion, governs the psalm. That the king's reign is authorized by and serves as a reflection of God's reign is suggested in the psalm by the fact that it is God who does the crowning and gives the rule to the Adamic figure. The image is of a great king and suzerain who has the power and authority to grant other kings the right to reign over all or part(s) of his realm. It would be understood that the great king granting that right to reign would never be subject to the one to whom it is granted. Wright sees clearly that Paul is using the Psalms "to build a theology of new creation as the fulfilment of the intention for the old."

The Adamic dominion motif from Genesis 1 also underwrites numerous Old Testament and Jewish texts about the idealized universal dominion to which the Davidic king was destined (e.g., Psalms 2, 65, 68, 72, 89, 98, 102, 138, and 148, Micah 7, Zechariah 9, and Daniel 7), although a messianic interpretation of Psalms 8 and 110 is not evident in the Jewish literature.

As we pointed out in our comments on v. 25, Psalms 8 and 110 are linked by both *gezerah shawah* and an organic thematic connection. Paul deftly conjoins the two psalms. He had already incorporated the key word "all/everything" into his allusion to Psalm 110 in v. 25, and he had reduced "make a footstool for … feet" from Psalm 110 to "put under … feet" as in Psalm 8. He interprets this psalm as applying to the Messiah as the one who brings to fulfillment God's intentions for humanity. His point is that Christ as the last Adam retrieved the situation the first

Adam lost. It is an explicitly christological use of the Old Testament, with the Old Testament notion of corporate representation as its presupposition; Christ represents his people (see 15:22–23). The glorious destiny of humankind to be crowned and receive dominion, which we failed to grasp, is fulfilled for us through Jesus. The relationship between vv. 26 and 27 makes it clear that Paul "interprets 'all things' to include 'death.' "

15:28 Paul now brings us to the climax of the whole biblical narrative, where God's sovereign rule over all is perfectly reflected: *When he has done this, then the Son himself will be made subject to him who put everything under him, so that God may be all in all*. Paul continues to interpret Psalm 110:1 and Psalm 8:6 together (see the comments on vv. 24–27). *When he has done this* (literally, "when all things have been subjected to him") reflects the influence of the "until" in Psalm 110:1 (the king would reign until his enemies were in subjection or had been destroyed). That God *put everything under him* comes from Psalm 8:6. That the king in question would be God's son would be understood from the suzerain-vassal relationship implied by a great king granting another king authority to rule, as well as by the promise to David in 2 Samuel 7:14, reflected also in Psalm 2:7.

This verse must be interpreted with care to avoid a few possible misunderstandings. First, on a quick surface reading it could be taken to suggest that Christ is not subject to the Father at present—that he is somehow acting in an autonomous and even disobedient manner. Of course that is not what Paul means, and his meaning must inform what he said earlier about Christ reigning until everything was in submission to him. To understand Paul we will return to the analogy of a Roman emperor who sends out his top military general to quash a rebellion in the empire, raised in our comments on v. 24. While the general is out executing the war, he is surrounded by the symbols and instruments of power, and it is he who serves as the physical expression of the power of the empire in his battles against the rebels. Once he has accomplished his mission, however, he is expected to return to Rome, acknowledge that he is in submission to the emperor, and show that he does not intend to use the power of his armies to take over the empire by force. He does not cease to be a general or to have great power and influence, but the mission for which he was commissioned has been accomplished, and in a sense he becomes somewhat like a sword which has been returned to its sheath. As a general engaged against the enemies of the empire, he exercised shock- and awe-inspiring power. Once the mission is accomplished, there is no need for him to continue to wield such power. It was, in theory at least, all about reasserting the authority, dominion, and glory of the empire and emperor, not about gaining power for himself.

As Augustine says, "It is necessary for Christ's kingdom to be manifested to such a degree until all his enemies confess that he does reign." That is, "He reigns forever. However, in respect to the war waged under him against the devil, this conflict will obviously continue 'until he has put all his enemies under his feet.' But afterward there will be no conflict, since we shall enjoy an everlasting peace."[146] As pointed out above, Christ's reign was not a matter of simply holding the office of king for an extended period, but of reasserting God's kingly power against the disobedient and rebellious powers of this present age. The time will come when that particular form of or approach to reigning (the putting down of the enemies) will naturally come to an end. That time will be once the last enemy has been destroyed.

This verse was also problematical for the church fathers in that it was used by heretics to argue that since Christ would be made subject to the Father, he must not share the same divinity

as the Father and must not be of the same essence as the Father. The standard response is summarized well by Augustine: "The rule of Catholic faith is this: when the Scriptures say of the Son that he is less than the Father the Scriptures mean in respect to the assumption of humanity. But when the Scriptures point out that he is equal, they are understood in respect to his deity."

Modern commentators have suggested that Paul's concern was "to avert any mistaken impression that somehow God becomes subject to Christ or that Christ's reign infringes on God's absolute sovereignty." Schweizer, for example, points out that "whenever 'the Son' is used absolutely, it calls to mind the contrast to 'the Father' and at the same time it describes a subordinate position in relation to the Father. In the same way, 1 Corinthians 15:28 uses this expression in an eschatological context to warn against the misunderstanding of Christ the Lord of the end-time as a second God alongside the Father." Others have proposed that Paul's line of thought reflects either the fact that it was common in the Roman and Corinthian context for one to focus their worship on some personally preferred deity and to neglect "any serious reverence for a supreme, central deity over the universe" or that the Corinthian believers in particular (following such a tendency) were tempted to overplay the significance of Christ at the expense of recognizing the centrality of God the Father.[151]

Such mirror-readings are unnecessary and not supported by the evidence. It seems more likely that the focus on God's being all in all is a natural conclusion to Paul's own theological panorama. Richardson is certainly right in pointing out that the focus here on God the Father is "in line with Paul's theology elsewhere." In Philippians 2 Paul starts with God's exaltation of Christ: "God exalted [Christ] to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord." But the story does not end there, for this glorification of Christ turns out to be "to the glory of God the Father" (Phil. 2:9–11; cf. Rom. 16:27; Gal. 1:3–5).

Since the language of "Father" and "Son" is covenantal language, it reminds us that the Son's role in the biblical and covenantal meta-narrative was always that of restoring and reflecting the glorious reign of the Father over all of his dominion. Paul simply takes us to the ultimate conclusion of the biblical narrative of redemption and restoration, which is that the creation which went astray and which the Son was commissioned to redeem and restore has come full circle to its complete submission to God—and beyond. But it was always about bringing creation to perfect submission to God. As Barth puts it, "To bring about the 'God who is all in all' *such* is the mission and significance of Christ." This verse does not demean or marginalize Christ, but emphasizes that his mission will be fully and perfectly accomplished.

Our analysis of the structure of this letter has pointed out the programmatic structural role played by 1 Corinthians 6:20 and 10:31. As Paul approached the conclusion to the extended sections focusing on sexual immorality (chs. 5–6) and idolatry (chs. 8–10) and looked forward to the following sections in which a positive exposition would be given of principles of sexual purity (ch. 7) and instructions for the proper worship of the one true God (chs. 11–14), he introduced the glory of God as a fundamental warrant for the purity that should reflect our lives. At the point of transition in the discussion of sexual immorality and sexual purity Paul called on his readers to glorify God with their bodies (6:20). At the point of transition in the discussion of idolatry (esp. food offered to idols) and proper worship, Paul says, "whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God" (10:31). While this verse does not explicitly use the language of

glory, Paul's climactic statement that Christ's submission to the Father after all of creation has been brought into full submission to him would be so that *God may be all in all* reflects a similar idea. The context suggests that for God to be all in all is for his reign to hold full sway, for his will to "be supreme in every quarter and in every way." In other words, it is for God to be perfectly honored such that his glory is not diminished in any way but fully recognized and reflected in all creation.

Christ's resurrection and subjection or destruction of all his and God's enemies was and is essential to the realization of the renewed creation in which God is, as he ought to be, *all in all*. Augustine muses: "God will be the consummation of all our desiring—the object of our unending vision, of our unlessening love, of our unwearying praise. And in this gift of vision, the response of love, this paean of praise, all alike will share, as all will share in everlasting life." Of course, if Christ does all that he does (including dying for our sins, v. 3) so that *God may be all in all*, certainly there is nothing in all the universe that ought to distract us from seeking to do the same. Sampley shows how critical the notion of Christ belonging to God is to the letter: "As he sketches the grandeur of God's culminating purposes, Paul's language drifts toward doxology: In the end, even Christ will be made subject to God, who is already in 3:23 credited as being the one to whom all else, including Christ, belongs and who in 8:6 is declared to be the one from whom are all things and for whom people exist (cf. 11:3)."

D. Exhortation in Light of Positive and Negative Responses to the Resurrection of the Dead, 15:29–34

> *[29] Now if there is no resurrection, what will those do who are baptized for the dead? If the dead are not raised at all, why are people baptized for them? [30] And as for us, why do we endanger ourselves every hour? [31] I face death every day—yes, just as surely as I boast about you in Christ Jesus our Lord. [32] If I fought wild beasts in Ephesus with no more than human hopes, what have I gained? If the dead are not raised,*
>
> *"Let us eat and drink,*
> *for tomorrow we die."*
>
> *[33] Do not be misled: "Bad company corrupts good character." [34] Come back to your senses as you ought, and stop sinning; for there are some who are ignorant of God—I say this to your shame.*

Paul begins with a series of rhetorical questions (four in all) intended to show how absurd it would be to think that the resurrection is not at the heart of the Christian message. It is a key foundation for Christian baptism and for Paul's courageous and self-sacrificing work on behalf of the gospel. Paul is moving toward an even stronger use of the diatribal style in vv. 35–49, where he will introduce an imaginary or hypothetical interlocutor or debate partner whose viewpoint he will dismantle.

While the hypothetical situation, "if the dead are not raised," is behind this passage as it was behind vv. 12–19, here Paul does not focus on what the consequences would be if there is no resurrection. He focuses, rather, on the impossibility of explaining certain kinds of Christian behavior apart from their grounding in the resurrection teaching (vv. 29–32a) and on the need

for the Corinthians to validate those same behaviors rather than adopting a position that would warrant corrupt living rather than the life of God's renewed humanity (vv. 32b–34). Along the way Paul cites Isaiah 22:13 (v. 32) and a line from the Greek dramatist Menander (v. 33). As he has done at numerous points throughout the letter (esp. in chs. 3–4 and 9) Paul uses himself as an example for the Corinthians once more here (vv. 30–32).

The first verse of this passage is undoubtedly the most difficult verse to interpret in the whole letter (with over forty different interpretations). Understanding its relationship with the rest of this passage, and the role of this passage as a whole within the chapter, is also challenging. We will need to pay close attention to the contextual clues to provide an interpretation that is reasonable and convincing.

15:29 Certain Christian behaviors, Paul argues, are inexplicable apart from their grounding in the resurrection of the dead. In a moment he will come to his own dangerous decisions (vv. 30–32). He begins, however, with an ambiguous reference to baptismal practice which has raised questions ever since: *if there is no resurrection, what will those do who are baptized for the dead? If the dead are not raised at all, why are people baptized for them?* Paul has already discussed the serious moral, theological, and existential implications that would follow *if there is no resurrection*. Here he raises the issue of the incongruence between such a view and the practice of people *who are baptized for the dead*.

The question *what will those do?* may be understood in a variety of ways, but Garland rightly points to the context for the clue to its meaning: "The parallel in 15:32, 'What does it profit me?' suggests that it implies, 'What good will it do them?' If there is no resurrection of the dead, nothing could possibly accrue from that rite." Similarly, the NAB translates the phrase "what will people accomplish?"

A quick and unreflective reading of the words *baptized for the dead* would seem to suggest that people are allowing themselves to be baptized in the place of and for the benefit of others who are already dead. It has frequently enough been claimed that that is "the plain and necessary sense of the words."[162] Key arguments against this view include the fact that there is no biblical or historical evidence of any precedent or equivalent practice in the earliest church or in its pagan context. References to vicarious baptism in the early Fathers are found in condemnations of Gnostic misunderstandings of this verse. That is, there is evidence that vicarious baptism may have been adopted by some heretical groups through the misinterpretation of this verse, but there is no evidence that anyone had ever thought of or practiced such a thing before Paul wrote this verse. Such an interpretation is also so out of step with Paul's own understanding of baptism as it is reflected elsewhere in his writings that it is extremely difficult to believe that he would refer to such a practice without condemning it or at least distancing himself from it. It seems that whatever practice he is referring to here is one that reflects, like his own life-choices mentioned in vv. 30–32, an appropriate course of action given the fact that the dead will be raised.

Most other interpretations of the verse entail differing interpretations of one or more of the key terms: especially the word translated "for" and/or the word translated "the dead." These interpretations usually understand baptism here to be the normal Christian baptism that people experience as part of their conversion experience. The expression the TNIV and other versions translate as *for the dead* is taken to refer to a motivating factor behind their baptism (i.e., behind their conversion). First, while the most common usage of the word translated *for* is as "a marker indicating that an activity or event is in some entity's interest" (the first definition given by BDAG,

with suggested glosses including "for, in behalf of, for the sake of someone/someth[ing]"), it is also used as a "marker of the moving cause or reason" (the second definition given by BDAG, with suggested glosses including "because of, for the sake of, for"). Another gloss that has been proposed by scholars that is consistent with this definition is "on account of."

This second possible meaning opens up a host of interpretive possibilities, especially once various potential referents for *the dead* are considered. If "the dead" are not the dead in general, but particular Christians who had left their marks on others who later converted to the faith, the idea could be "people who are baptized (as part and parcel of their conversion) on account of the influence of believers who are now deceased." Some scholars have suggested that their parents or other beloved family members may have converted shortly before their death (whether from natural causes or by martyrdom), and now these young believers have also joined the body of believers via baptism out of love and admiration for their family members and a desire to see them again in the resurrection. Others have proposed that *the dead* here refers to other apostolic witnesses who have since passed away, suggesting a link between this verse, the reference to loyalties reflected in or based on one's baptism in 1:12–17, and the reference to some apostolic witnesses who have since gone to be with Christ in 15:6, so that it would be on account of the witness given by an apostolic witness or missionary who has since died that someone agreed to be baptized as a way of honoring them.

Some interpretations hold that Paul uses the word translated "dead" with two different referents (and meanings) in this same verse. O'Neill takes the first reference to mean "corpses" or "dead bodies" and the second to refer to people who are "completely dead," so that the meaning is: "What do those hope to achieve who are baptized for their dying bodies? If the completely dead are not raised, why then are they baptized for themselves as corpses?" White's interpretation also depends on there being two different referents. He takes the first reference to *the dead* to be a metaphorical reference to the apostles who, while still living, are sometimes presented by Paul as "dead men walking" (to use a modern expression). In his view, the second reference is to those who are truly dead. White then argues that the verse should be understood as follows. "Otherwise, what will those do who are being baptized on account of the dead (that is, the dead figuratively speaking; that is, the apostles)? For if truly dead persons are not raised, why at all are people being baptized on account of them (that is, the apostles)?"[173]

We think that the best approach is to translate the key phrase, "those who are baptized on account of the dead," and to understand the reference to the dead in light of the usage of the word throughout this chapter (see vv. 12 [2x], 13, 15, 16, 20, 21, 29 [2x], 32, 35, 42, 52). In every instance except the first usage in this verse the word "dead" either modifies "resurrection" (as in vv. 13, 21, 42), serves as the subject of the verb "are raised" (vv. 16, 29 [second appearance], 32, 35, 52), or refers to Christ being raised "from the dead" (vv. 12, 20). We note first that in every other instance in this letter "the dead" are people who have died. This is especially to be expected in a discussion of the bodily resurrection of the dead. Unless there are clear indications to the contrary, the reader should expect that a reference to "the dead" would be a reference to the dead who will be raised in the resurrection, the dead to which the resurrection is expected to apply. We also note that while the two verses in the last category are ambiguous, the other usages, and the discussion as a whole, make it quite clear that Paul is not interested in all dead people, but in those who will benefit from being raised to glory. That is, his references to "the dead" have the righteous dead (i.e., dead who will be raised to glory) in mind. Paul is concerned

with the resurrection of those "who have fallen asleep in Christ" (v. 18), those who "belong to" Christ and will be raised "when he comes" (v. 23). Those are the "all" who "will be made alive" (v. 22) that are his concern here. Paul is not concerned with the dead in general, but with the dead who will "bear the image of the heavenly man" (v. 49) and "inherit the kingdom of God" (v. 50), the ones who "will be raised imperishable" (v. 52). "The dead" Paul has in mind are those who will be "raised imperishable"; "raised in glory"; and "raised in power" (vv. 42–43). When he says that people are "baptized on account of the dead," we may assume that he means that they are baptized on account of the righteous dead, those who will be raised in power and glory. This, then, is more specific than dead people in general, but it does not suggest something as specific as living or deceased apostles or specific loved ones who have recently passed away.

We suggest that for believers to be baptized on account of the dead who will be raised in glory means that they have heard about these dead being raised up (to new life and glory) and that they want to be part of that group. As Keener puts it, this may be Paul's "roundabout way of saying 'baptized so as to be able to participate in eternal life with Christians who have already died,' hence baptized in the light of their own mortality as well." Of course, Paul strongly ties baptism to the hope of the resurrection of the dead in Romans 6:3–13 as well: "all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life. If we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly also be united with him in a resurrection like his" (vv. 3–5). Baptism itself is tied to the resurrection hope by way of its integral role in the conversion experience. It is not that baptism per se brings salvation, but baptism is understood to be the initial confirmation of faith and act of initiation into the body of Christ. Certainly this text echoes the theme of other baptism texts that indicate that baptism is part and parcel of the process of entering into Christian life and fellowship.

Thus we would paraphrase the verse as follows: "Now, if there is no resurrection, what will be accomplished by those who get baptized because of what they have heard about how our dead will be raised? If the dead are not raised at all, why are people undergoing baptism on account of them?"

Our proposal comes close to the suggestion that some others have made that Paul's text entails an ellipsis and that "baptism on account of the dead" means "baptism on account of the resurrection of the dead," but it is not quite the same thing. We are not implying that there is an ellipsis or that the real subject is the resurrection (as others have held), but that while readers are tempted to think that the topic is simply the resurrection and "the dead" should merely play the role of a modifier, Paul's language suggests otherwise. In vv. 15, 16, 29, 32, 35, and 52 Paul uses the verb "are/will be raised" with "the dead" as the subject of the sentence. That is, at times Paul focuses precisely on "the dead" and what happens to them as his topic rather than merely reflecting a broad interest in the subject of the resurrection.

It may be that Paul describes the people to whom he is referring in the third person rather than first- or second-person plural ("those who are baptized on account of the dead" rather than "you/we who were baptized for the dead") because different people find different things about the Christian message particularly appealing. If so, Paul has in mind those who were particularly concerned about the afterlife and whose primary motivation in responding to the gospel message was its promise that those who trust in Christ need not fear death, since the dead in Christ will

be raised in glory and power. Paul has already demonstrated that the resurrection of the dead is at the heart of the Christian message. Fear of death and dying may have played a significant role in the conversion of many, who may have been impressed with the confident hope of Christian believers. Paul indicated his own attitude toward death in Philippians 1:21: "For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain." And in 2 Corinthians 5:2 he said that he longed "to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling."

Hull highlights how this understanding relates to much else earlier in this chapter: "Paul presents the ongoing acceptance of baptism by one group within the Corinthian community as a praiseworthy example for the whole community. Baptism is an act of faith whereby they profess conviction in what Paul preached in Corinth, viz., Christ is raised from the dead and the dead in Christ are destined for resurrection." Hull thinks (tying in a reference to v. 34 at the end) that we "can almost hear Paul bellowing: 'Look at those eager baptismal candidates. Look at their faith. It was once yours. They believe all that I preached about Jesus. They do not doubt that many persons including myself have seen him alive after death. They do not doubt that those among us who have fallen asleep will rise on the last day. As a matter of fact, it is their firm faith in the resurrection of Christ and of his death that moves them to baptism. That is what they believe. That is what you once believed. Come back to your senses!' "

The people of whom Paul speaks in this verse are like him in that their actions, like his own, amount to an act of faith in the resurrection: "[T]hose who are undergoing baptism on account of the dead affirm the resurrection by their actions. Just so, Paul affirms the resurrection by his actions. But the group in Corinth whom he addresses directly does not. The message is clear: the resurrection of the dead rightly motivates [those undergoing baptism on account of the dead] and Paul." Of course Paul's calling led him to suffer tremendously for Christ (as we shall see in the following verses). We should not forget, however, that those undergoing Christian baptism in Paul's day were not entering into a socially dominant and respectable religion, but were identifying themselves with a religious movement that was known both for the suffering of its resurrected Lord and for the suffering and opposition that his disciples could expect to endure.[181]

15:30–31 Having stated that those who affirm the resurrection do so through their commitment to being baptized, in vv. 30–32 Paul uses his own actions as another example of behavior that affirms the resurrection and makes no sense apart from it: *And as for us, why do we endanger ourselves every hour? I face death every day—yes, just as surely as I boast about you*[183] *in Christ Jesus our Lord*. Paul is employing "hardship talk, which Paul often employs as a sign of his endurance and trustworthiness, but here it is used to highlight the question: Why go to all this apostolic trouble if death has the final word? Paul's answer lies in his deep conviction that in sharing Christ's death believers become one with his suffering, and the powers of the old age vent their anger against the believers so that there is always … end-times suffering and tribulation."

Paul uses a bit of hyperbole, speaking at first of being in danger *every hour* and then of (literally) "dying" *every day*. Christ himself had said in Luke 9:23–24 that whoever wanted to be his disciple must "deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will save it."

We know from the catalogs of his sufferings that he presented earlier in this letter (4:9–13) and those he will present elsewhere and that will figure prominently in 2 Corinthians (cf. 2 Cor. 1:8–10; 4:7–12; 6:4–10; 11:23–29; 12:10; Rom. 8:35) that Paul did indeed face constant danger

and intense challenges due to his faith and apostolic calling. In 2 Corinthians 11:23 Paul says that he has been "often near death" (NRSV). One example is given in Acts 14:19, which says that Paul was stoned and then left for dead outside the city of Lystra. In Acts 9:16 the Lord told Ananias that he would show Paul "how much he must suffer for my name." Paul constantly exposed himself to danger because he knew that the dead are raised. He would remind the Corinthians of this in 2 Corinthians 1:8–9, where he said that he did not want them to be ignorant "about the troubles we experienced in the province of Asia. We were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired of life itself. Indeed, we felt we had received the sentence of death. But this happened that we might not rely on ourselves but on God, who raises the dead."

Although Paul had not yet fully experienced death (despite "dying daily"), he lived as though he had already died and had nothing more to suffer from it (see our comments on "dead men walking" [v. 29]). That is, he faced death differently, and lived his life in a radically different manner, because he knew that he had already been baptized into Christ's death and was destined to be raised with Christ in the end. In this (only in a more radical way) he is similar to those baptized and committed to following Christ on the basis of the promise that the dead in Christ will rise again and of their desire to be among them when that happened. In pointing out that the apostles are in constant danger from opponents of the gospel, Paul echoes the language of Psalms 44:22 and 119:109.

Paul reinforces his claim that he constantly exposes himself to grave dangers for the sake of his apostolic calling by invoking his boast in the Corinthians as a similar manifestation of Christ's empowering work in his ministry: *yes, just as surely as I boast about you in Christ Jesus our Lord*. The word translated *yes, just as surely as I* is a "marker pointing to the basis on which someth[ing] is strongly affirmed," which is typically followed, as here, by a reference to the "pers[on] or thing by which one swears, affirms, or invokes sanction" (BDAG). Paul swears or invokes divine sanction by his boast about the Corinthians in Christ the Lord. Fee points out that Paul's boast "probably does not so much refer to his telling others about the Corinthians as to their very existence as the result of his apostolic labors (cf. 9:2, 15–16)." And it is, as Fee says, a very "telling oath": "To make sure that they understand the truth of his constant facing of death, he swears by that which is dearest to him, their own existence in Christ, which also came about by labors that had exposed him to such dangers."[189] Thiselton argues that people "swear or affirm only by divinity [or] by something of *ultimate importance* to them." Following Fee's suggestion that the expression indicates what is most dear to the speaker, Thiselton incorporates the idea into his translation of the text: "Oh yes, by all the pride in you that I hold dear in Christ Jesus our Lord, I so affirm!"[191] He points out that Paul's unusual language here provides insight into his pastoral heart: "Here is a succinct pastoral theology of the *risks, fragility*, and *dearest, deepest concerns* of a pastor who is willing to sacrifice all for the gospel in the light of the gathering together of all at the resurrection."

Paul's statement that his boasting about the Corinthians is *in Christ Jesus our Lord* clarifies that it "is not self-serving nor self-exalting. It rests completely on what Christ had done among them through his labors (cf. vv. 9–10). Thus they are his boast; but for Paul that ultimately means boasting in Christ."

15:32 Paul continues his discussion of how the hope of the resurrection has empowered him as he has repeatedly faced danger and death, now making a reference to a particularly harrowing

experience in Ephesus: *If I fought wild beasts in Ephesus with no more than human hopes, what have I gained?* This may be a different episode from the one he will mention in 2 Corinthians 1:8–9, where he refers to "the troubles we experienced in the province of Asia. We were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired of life itself. Indeed, we felt we had received the sentence of death. But this happened that we might not rely on ourselves but on God, who raises the dead." The reference to Asia in that text may simply reflect that the struggles he faced in Ephesus (from where he is writing; 16:8) continued as he moved to other parts of Asia, so that the two texts may be referring to overlapping tribulations. While the near context has led some interpreters to think that Paul's reference to fighting wild beasts should be taken literally and as the climax of the list of the dangers he has faced, it is very unlikely that Paul, a Roman citizen, would have been forced to fight wild animals in an arena or other context. Balz agrees: "An actual *damnatio ad bestias* [case of being condemned to the beasts], which was decreed only with capital offenses against persons of lower status, would at any rate stand in conflict with Acts 22:25–29, according to which Paul is said to have stood on his rights as a Roman citizen.… Moreover, Paul would hardly have remained silent about such a condemnation in his catalogs of suffering." It is possible to take the verb literally as "a contrary to fact (unreal) conditional sentence: 'if I had fought w[ith] wild animals' " (BDAG), but it seems unlikely that Paul would use a hypothetical case rather than one of his actual experiences of suffering as an example.

If the verb is to be taken metaphorically, as seems most likely, it would mean "to be in a position of having to contend with [formidable] adversaries" (BDAG). Beasts or wild animals were used repeatedly as symbols or metaphors for pagan rulers in Daniel 7. Philo uses it for pagan officials in *On the Life of Moses* 1:42. Later, Ignatius used it of the soldiers who held him captive in his *To the Romans* 5:1. Paul uses the metaphor of animalistic biting and devouring for destructive behavior between humans in Galatians 5:15. Fighting wild beasts is probably a euphemism for contending with dangerous, powerful political opponents or "bloodthirsty human antagonists who would eagerly tear him to pieces." Garland points out that Paul's Roman citizenship "did not provide him protection from mob violence, but only the right to certain formal procedures."[196]

The phrase translated here as *with no more than human hopes* is capable of being interpreted in various ways, as is reflected in the great diversity of English translations. The NRSV ("with merely human hopes") and CSB ("with only human hope") are similar to the TNIV. Others suggest "humanly speaking" (ESV), "so to speak" (NAB), "from human motives" (NASB), "from a human point of view" (NET), "for merely human reasons" (NIV), "in a purely human perspective" (NJB), or "after the manner of men" (KJV). BDAG gives the meaning as "like an ordinary man" as opposed to "as a Christian sure of the resurrection." This same idea is reflected in Héring and Garland: "with a horizon limited by earthly humanity, that is, without hope of the resurrection." This is almost certainly correct and is intended to stand in contrast with the actual background to Paul's willingness to expose himself to such dangers since he has made it clear that everything he does he does "in expectation of the future resurrection."[199] Paul's description of the scene entails both real and unreal elements. It is clear that he did grapple with extremely dangerous and fearsome opponents in Ephesus (metaphorically described as wild animals), but he did not do so with a horizon limited by earthly humanity, but as one whose life is founded on the hope of the resurrection.

The expression translated *what have I gained?* actually lacks a verb in Greek and is literally, "what to me the advantage/benefit/profit?" with the verb tense and mood to be determined by the reader in the context. The question is what would he have possibly hoped to gain from "sticking his neck out" for the cause of Christ—and the sake of those Ephesians who, like his Corinthian readers, came to Christ through him—if he believed death had the final word. By God's grace he knew and acted in a way consistent with the fact that, thanks to Christ, life has the last word, not death.

Paul now follows through on the point that there is nothing to be gained from putting one's life in death-defying situations for the sake of the Christian gospel and its advancement if there is no resurrection: *If the dead are not raised, "Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die."* Paul cites Isaiah 22:13 (which also happens to reflect a motif in the Greco-Roman world) to point to the utter futility of a life without the direction and motivation given by the resurrection of Jesus Christ. It leads to a dissipated lifestyle. He already cited his own positive example of how one ought to live in the light of the resurrection in vv. 30–32a. Here he refers to the polar opposite. Isaiah 22:13 depicts the reaction of the inhabitants of Jerusalem while being besieged by Assyria and facing the grim prospect of their impending annihilation (22:12–14). Instead of repenting, they decide to "party like there is no tomorrow." Paul uses Isaiah 22:13 to underscore the depravity of the human condition, "without hope and without God in the world" (Eph. 2:12). He uses the text as a way of summing up the logical entailment of denying or forgetting about resurrection. The Corinthians who doubt the resurrection are like the Jerusalemites who failed to live out of the resources of their own faith. The author of Hebrews points out that "without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him" (Heb. 11:6). The reward Paul has in mind here is that which is ultimately dependent on the reality of the resurrection hope. Apart from that there is no sound basis for the moral life of the Christian.

Although Paul is citing an Old Testament text (albeit without a quotation formula to explicitly mark it as such), it is not necessarily important for his readers to recognize it as a scriptural quotation. The sentiment expressed in the line is widespread in both the Jewish and Greco-Roman worlds. As we pointed out in the comments on chapter 10, eating and drinking are often associated with idolatrous behavior in Old Testament and Jewish texts. In Luke 12:19 the rich fool says to himself, "You have plenty of grain laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry." But God said to him, "You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?" (v. 20). Fee points out that "[i]n Plutarch's anti-Epicurean writings … the language of 'eating and drinking' was a formula for the dissolute life" and that that was in keeping with "contemporary anti-Epicurean sentiments, which (not altogether fairly) believed the Epicureans taught this very philosophy." It is quite likely that the Corinthians Paul has in mind would be repulsed by the dissolute life popularly associated with and attributed to Epicurean philosophy. This letter suggests that they are more likely to be influenced by the more popular Stoic points of view. Paul's argument proposes a line of thought such as, "If you deny the resurrection, you might as well be an Epicurean!" with the expected repulsion at that thought serving Paul's rhetorical purpose. Paul had already criticized the Corinthians for moral and spiritual problems related to eating and drinking in the context of pagan dinners and temples in chapter 10 and of the Lord's Supper in chapter 11. This passage may have brought those criticisms to mind again at this point.

Paul effectively accuses the Corinthians who deny bodily resurrection of having a flawed basis for a lifestyle that pleases God, which will lead them to idolatrous and immoral behavior. Garland uses a beautiful turn of phrase: "Resurrection means endless hope, but no resurrection means a hopeless end—and hopelessness breeds dissipation."

15:33 Paul now moves from a biblical text with an anti-Epicurean thrust (v. 32b) to a quotation from the third- to fourth-century Athenian dramatist Menander: *Do not be misled: "Bad company corrupts good character."* The warning *Do not be misled* is the same expression used in 6:9 and translated there as "Do not be deceived." It suggests that "they will be held accountable" and therefore need to take the warning to heart. But, as Chrysostom indicates, Paul is also trying "to make some allowance to them for the past with a view to their return, and to remove from them and transfer to others the greater part of his charges, and so in this way also to allure them to repentance." That is, he opens the possibility that some of the responsibility lay with anonymous others who have misled them.

The epigram from Menander's *Thais* was a popular one in Paul's day and would probably have been known to any educated Corinthian. Thus, as others have pointed out, we cannot assume that Paul has read Menander "any more than one can assume that a person who cites a famous line from a Shakespeare play has read Shakespeare. It had become a cliché, perhaps even before Menander."[208] Paul's use of the quotation, rather than being a clue to the sources of his own thought, as Martin points out, indicates Paul's sense of where the ideas he is countering come from:

> The abrupt interjection of the saying in Paul's argument may indicate that he believes the Corinthians' skepticism to be due to influences from other sources—in fact to persons who have only "ignorance of God" (v. 34), a designation often used by Jews to refer to Gentiles.… All this suggests that Paul attributes the Corinthians' doubts [about bodily resurrection] to Greek philosophy.

Witherington rightly points out that "[t]he rhetorical force of Paul's use of this proverb is powerful: These Gentile Corinthians are condemned out of the mouth of their own cultural heritage even apart from Scripture and apostolic tradition."

The fact that Paul quotes an epigram dealing with the theme of corruption in a chapter dealing with resurrection, God's victory over corruption (see Acts 2:27, 31; 13:34–37), calls for attention. In 15:42 Paul will assert that the human body is sown in corruption and raised incorruptible. In Romans 8:21 Paul says that we are looking forward to the day when "the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God" (ESV). In Galatians 6:8 Paul says, "the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life" (ESV). Christ came to undo all forms of corruption, including the corruption of creation, the corruption of the human body, and moral corruption. The gospel is to bring about the manifestation of God's renewed humanity, freed first from its addictions to false wisdom and to its corrupting influence in the forms of various vices, especially idolatry, sexual immorality, and greed, that flow from that false wisdom, and freed ultimately from even physical corruption at the resurrection from the dead. Any association with moral corruption is a clear sign that people are moving along the wrong trajectory.

In Witherington's view the *bad company* Paul is concerned about would have included "pagan friends at dinner parties in the temple and elsewhere." According to Garland, Paul is presumably calling on the readers to "shun … those who deny the reality of death, who do not share the Christian hope of resurrection, and who behave disreputably."[214] But this raises the question of how the Corinthians, and we later readers, are expected to apply Paul's warning. Were the Corinthians (and are we) actually to shun or strictly avoid such people? Much of this letter has dealt with the question of how Christians are to navigate their various relationships as Christians living in the world but not being of it or becoming conformed to it. In 5:9–11 Paul said, "I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people—not at all meaning the people of this world who are immoral, or the greedy and swindlers, or idolaters. In that case you would have to leave this world." He went on to say: "But now I am writing to you that you must not associate with any who claim to be fellow believers but are sexually immoral or greedy, idolaters or slanderers, drunkards or swindlers. With such persons do not even eat" (v. 11). If Paul has in mind here (in 15:33) people "who claim to be fellow believers but are sexually immoral or greedy, idolaters or slanderers, drunkards or swindlers" (5:11), then they are indeed expected to break fellowship with and strictly avoid them. But if he has in mind unbelievers with whom some Corinthians are spending too much time and who are having a negative influence on them, the application must be more nuanced. In 9:22 he gives himself as an example of one who has "become all things to all people so that by all possible means" he might save some. In 10:27 Paul makes it clear that believers are free to accept dinner invitations from unbelievers as long as they exercise careful judgment in how they engage with the people and food around them. And, of course, Christ himself was (in)famous for spending time with people who behaved disreputably. It is extremely unlikely, then, that Paul wants or expects the Corinthians to shun or strictly avoid unbelievers who deny the reality of death, who do not share the Christian hope of resurrection, or who behave disreputably. He has already indicated that that would be a misunderstanding.

What are we to make, then, of the warning, *"Bad company corrupts good character?"* As Thiselton points out, the word Paul uses for *company* "conveys the notion of a *clique*, a *group*, or a *'gang'* who regularly do things together and to which people 'belong.' " And the word here is qualified as *bad* company, suggesting not all such groups are necessarily corrupting. The point is to be aware (and beware) of the corrupting influence that comes from extended intimate fellowship with others and to take steps to make sure that (1) we are spending sufficient time in extended intimate fellowship with people who know and love God and are known by him; and that (2) in our relationships with those who do not yet know Christ we are being a positive influence as salt and light (Matt. 5:13–16). It is of utmost importance to guard our hearts and the influences upon our moral compass. As we have argued throughout this commentary (as have others), some Corinthians were being overly influenced by the dominant values and thinking of the Corinthian city and of Roman culture and insufficiently influenced by their knowledge of Christ and of the basic moral and theological teachings of the Christian faith. They needed to learn how to be in the world without acting as people of the world. They needed to learn not to "conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed" by the renewing of the mind and thus "be able to test and approve what God's will is" (Rom. 12:2). The clearest indication of what Paul had in mind is found in the following verse; as always, context is all important.

As things are, the Corinthians who deny the resurrection of the dead are themselves in danger of being *bad company* corrupting the good character of other believers who may more readily follow through with the moral implications of their denial of the resurrection.

15:34 How are the Corinthians to respond to Paul's arguments about the resurrection and the quotations from Isaiah and Menander in particular (vv. 32–33)? As Fee puts it, "In typical diatribe style, the *argumentum ad absurdum* turns truly *ad hominem*, and becomes a word of exhortation for the Corinthians to mend their ways": *Come back to your senses as you ought, and stop sinning; for there are some who are ignorant of God—I say this to your shame*. The word translated *Come back to your senses* is used literally "of one recovering from a drunken revel, 'sober up' " (BDAG). Here it is being used figuratively, but it reminds the reader of v. 32b and suggests that if the Corinthians are not physically drunk, they still need to sober up spiritually. BDAG indicates that the whole first clause[218] should be translated "sober up for uprightness," while the NRSV has, "come to a sober and right mind." As Chrysostom puts it, Paul addresses them "[a]s if he were speaking to drunkards and madmen."[219]

The logical relationship between the first two verbs in this verse (*come back to your senses* and *stop sinning*) is presumably that the readers Paul has in mind have been sinning due to the spiritual stupor they are in and that it is only when they sober up spiritually that they will stop their sinning. Sampley points out that the Corinthians were probably very surprised "that Paul should construe their actions as in any way representing sin."[221] What sins did Paul have in mind? A moment ago he mentioned "eating and drinking" as part of a dissolute lifestyle that failed to reflect the truth about God or about our life before him. This letter has already highlighted the vices of sexual immorality and idolatry, as well as greed, which had left their marks on the community. The relationship between chapters 1–4, chapters 5–7, and chapters 8–14 (as we argue in the Introduction, 21–25) suggest that a lack of true wisdom and a commitment to false wisdom lead to those and other vices. The near context points to an understanding of sin that further illuminates the source of the Corinthians' problems. The reason that the Corinthians need to come back to their senses and stop sinning is that *there are some who are ignorant of God*. On a first reading one may decide that the point is that the Corinthians have been lax in their evangelistic emphasis and that their bad behavior has made their faith noncontagious. But it seems more likely that something else, something more fundamental, is at stake here.

Chrysostom helpfully relates the failure to know God to the failure to believe in the resurrection, which makes sense given that that is the problem Paul has been addressing throughout this section. For a starter, Paul's reference to *some who are ignorant of God* is unlikely to be a reference to unbelievers. Of course there are unbelievers who do not know God! Rather, the *some* "picks up the resonance to the Greek ear of the 'some' of 15:12 who have, in effect, been the 'opponents' for the whole of the treatise from 15:1 up to this point." Chrysostom thinks that this is Paul's way of deliberately transferring some of the responsibility to others to save face for the Corinthians but that really their doubts about the resurrection reflect a lack of knowledge about God and his infinite power: "See how again he transfers his accusations to others. For he said not, 'You have no knowledge,' but, 'some have no knowledge.' Because disbelieving the resurrection is the temper of one not fully aware that the power of God is irresistible and sufficient for all things. For if out of the things which are not He made the things that are, much more will He be able to raise again those which have been dissolved." In other words, "those who have no knowledge of God are those who do not believe in the resurrection of the dead."[224] If

they knew God the way they should, their doubts about the resurrection would evaporate in the light of his glory and power. Jesus said as much in Mark 12:24 (and the parallel in Matt. 22:29): the Sadducees denied the resurrection, he said, because they did "not know the Scriptures or the power of God" and thus had gone astray.

Thiselton reminds us that "Paul regularly regards 'sin' less in terms (if at all) of *acts* (plural) of commission or omission than as an *attitude, stance, and state*." He has in mind "an *attitude, stance, and state* in which the human will is granted 'autonomy' to turn away from God and to seek self-gratification as the chief end of human life." That is undoubtedly true, but we may also see the Corinthian sin as an attitude or stance with respect to God that fails to fully respect the extent of his sovereign power over all things.[227] Verse 28 serves as a kind of climax to the prior section in its bold assertion that all things will be made subject to God so that he "may be all in all." And as Paul goes on to discuss the foolishness of those who mockingly ask what kind of body the resurrection body will be, he points out that it is God who gives each thing its body, whichever kind it might have (vv. 35–38).

Some Corinthians are guilty of sexual immorality, idolatry, and/or greed; of a dissolute lifestyle. But those sins are a reflection of false wisdom and a reduced, sinful view of God and his power, the One who will destroy everything that is not submitted to him (6:13; 15:24–28). Much of this letter serves to provide a clearer picture of God and of his sovereign power exerted in and through Christ that is the ultimate solution to problem behavior.

Knowledge and ignorance (the lack of knowledge) are key themes throughout this letter. Some Corinthians evidently prided themselves on their vaunted knowledge. They claimed, "We all possess knowledge" (8:1), but Paul responded, "Those who think they know something do not yet know as they ought to know" (8:2). Evidently they thought that they were particularly strong in the area of knowledge about God, since they knew that "An idol is nothing at all in the world" and that "There is no God but one" (8:4). Paul's suggestion that those who doubted the resurrection (undoubtedly on the basis of intellectual problems they had with the idea) were not actually knowledgeable but rather lacked true or sufficient knowledge of God must have come as a shock to them. His language would typically be used of pagans who had no real knowledge of God whatsoever.[229] The contrast between their self-perceived knowledge and Paul's claim that they lack knowledge of God is undoubtedly part of what Paul has in mind when he adds, *I say this to your shame*. The whole verse reflects an extraordinary affront to the puffed-up Corinthians. They think that they are marked by intellectually superior knowledge and insight. Paul says that they need to wake up from their stupor and stop sinning since their unbelief in the resurrection reflects a lack of knowledge for which they should feel ashamed.

Sampley is sensitive to the rhetorical impact of the verse as a whole, suggesting that it all adds up to Paul "pushing the hearers to the limits" and "trying to shock them back to their (better) senses."

> Why? Because he has come to the heart of the matter: Life in this world, immersed as it is in suffering and brokenness, and work in behalf of the gospel, can all be reduced to folly if there is no resurrection of the dead, if indeed death has the victory, and if indeed death has the last word. Human striving and achieving, even if inspired by the grace of God, is emptied of all its significance if death is the final verdict. How is one's work, indeed one's very essence, one's innermost being more than a whisper if it all ends in death? Paul posits that the

resurrection of the dead, which is the logical and necessary outcome of the already-accomplished resurrection of Christ, gives life in the present its meaning, allows and even demands that one enter struggles on behalf of the gospel, and assures that life's struggles and hardships have meaning, a meaning that is ensured by God and that will survive death's sting.

E. Answers to Philosophical Objections to Belief in the Resurrection of the Body, 15:35–49

[35] But someone will ask, "How are the dead raised? With what kind of body will they come?" [36] How foolish! What you sow does not come to life unless it dies. [37] When you sow, you do not plant the body that will be, but just a seed, perhaps of wheat or of something else. [38] But God gives it a body as he has determined, and to each kind of seed he gives its own body. [39] All flesh is not the same: Human beings have one kind of flesh, animals have another, birds another and fish another. [40] There are also heavenly bodies and there are earthly bodies; but the splendor of the heavenly bodies is one kind, and the splendor of the earthly bodies is another. [41] The sun has one kind of splendor, the moon another and the stars another; and star differs from star in splendor.

[42] So will it be with the resurrection of the dead. The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised 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] So it is written: "The first Adam became a living being"; the last Adam, a life-giving spirit. [46] The spiritual did not come first, but the natural, and after that the spiritual. [47] The first man was of the dust of the earth; the second man is of heaven. [48] As was the earthly man, so are those who are of the earth; and as is the heavenly man, so also are those who are of heaven. [49] And just as we have borne the image of the earthly man, so shall we bear the image of the heavenly man.

Paul moves into diatribe style, introducing a hypothetical or imaginary debate partner to represent a perspective he has undoubtedly encountered before (it would be a common one in the Greco-Roman world) and which he imagines has now found a home within the Corinthian church (vv. 35–36a). After explaining that the seed sown must be distinguished from that to which it gives birth and establishing the great diversity of types of bodies found in creation (vv. 36b–41), Paul answers the original question in a series of antithetical contrasts between the body sown in death and the one raised up by God (vv. 42–44a) and finishes with an explanation of how those two bodies reflect the image of the first (earthly) and second (heavenly) Adams respectively (vv. 44b–49), so that the ultimate answer to the question is that it will have a body like Christ's. The passage as a whole reflects considerable reflection on Genesis 1–2, presupposing the idea that in protology (the study of creation's beginning) we find the keys to eschatology. It is understood that in many ways the last things will be like the first things, only even better.

15:35 Paul adopts a diatribal form of teaching, introducing a hypothetical debate partner who undoubtedly represents a viewpoint he has actually encountered in other contexts and which may be shared by some of his readers. It gives him an opportunity to provide a preemptive response to an objection that might have already been raised in Corinth or that might be likely

to arise if not addressed here: *But someone will ask, "How are the dead raised? With what kind of body will they come?"* We pointed out in our comments on v. 12 that the idea of the resurrection of the dead was not a familiar one in the Greco-Roman world. Acts 17:18 depicts utter miscomprehension on the part of Epicurean and Stoic philosophers who mistook Paul's preaching of good news about "Jesus and the resurrection" as advocating "foreign gods" (note the plural). That Paul felt it necessary to explain at length, "With what kind of body will they come?" is explicable precisely because his Gentile contemporaries had no notion of bodily resurrection. Since Paul would certainly have encountered similar skepticism about the resurrection earlier in his ministry, it may be that his response to this question in the following verses is one that he had developed earlier in his ministry and which he has used on other occasions.

As Theodoret recognizes, Paul's question "is twofold, about the manner of the resurrection and about the future quality of the body." And Theodoret's summary suggests that the question, *"How are the dead raised?"* is not asking, "How is it possible?" (to which the obvious answer would be that God does it miraculously). Rather, the word translated *how* often has the idea "in what manner" or "in what way (exactly)?" so that (literally) "How do you read it?" (Luke 10:26) is not a question about how reading could happen but about the particular way the text is read (cf. Luke 10:26; John 9:10, 26; Rom. 4:10). So the question, "How are they raised?" is probably expecting an answer like "As reanimated corpses"; or "By the reassimilation of the disintegrated body parts." The second question, then, *"With what kind of body will they come?"* flows from the first and is related to it. It is a natural question that continues to be asked, perhaps even more skeptically, in the modern age. Dead bodies decompose and become part of the nutrients in the ground, and their molecules find their way into other living things. If those bodies have disintegrated and have been incorporated into other creatures, how can they be raised again? Will the dead *come* back in completely different and unrelated bodies? Or *will they come* in patched-up versions of their old bodies? As Ramsay MacMullen points out, "Resurrection in the flesh appeared a startling, distasteful idea, at odds with everything that passed for wisdom among the educated."

Paul's response in the following verses does not answer scientific questions or explain all of the details (he never suggested that he knew or understood all of the details) but focuses on countering the crude and unimaginative perspective that is likely to underlie such a question by showing that the doctrine of the resurrection entails elements of both strong continuity and remarkable discontinuity between the dead and the resurrected body. The short answer to the *how* question is that the resurrection body will take place in a way similar to that in which a seed produces a plant or tree. The short answer to the question about the *kind of body* is that the resurrection body will be incorruptible, glorious, powerful, spiritual—that is, it will be like Christ's resurrected body.

Both questions are posed as asked not by someone who is genuinely interested in knowing what a resurrected body would be like or how it would be constituted or accomplished, but as a challenge from someone who thinks that the whole idea is ludicrous and is looking forward to seeing the speaker make a fool of himself as he tries to give a credible answer. Paul is not embarrassed. For him it is clearly the questioner who is the foolish one.

15:36 While the questions to which Paul will respond presume the foolishness of the resurrection hope, Paul intends to show the foolish arrogance that the questions themselves

reflect: *How foolish!* The term translated *How foolish!* is the substantival use of the adjective "foolish" which was used many times in the LXX to address or refer to the "fool." Thus many translations translate it, "You fool!" (NASB, NAB, KJV; cf. ESV, "You foolish person!") or simply, "Fool!" (NET, NRSV). *How foolish!* (TNIV, NIV, NJB; cf. NLT, "What a foolish question!") seems to underplay the rhetorical impact somewhat. Paul's scornful rebuke, "Fool!" echoes Psalm 14:1—a psalm from which Paul quotes in Rom. 3:11–12—and evokes the whole Old Testament motif of the fool as one lacking spiritual and moral judgment. Whereas in the psalm the fool fails to acknowledge any accountability to God, here Paul's derision is occasioned by a failure to take account of the power of God in contemplating the possibility of a resurrected body.

What you sow does not come to life unless it dies. Paul's letters show that (unlike most modern and secular people) he usually thinks of life as that which will follow death rather than something that precedes it. So also here, the seed must die before it can really live. Paul's comment about life following death confronts the common Greco-Roman view that even if people do have some kind of postmortem existence, it is likely to be but a dark, colorless, and shadowy existence compared to the fullness of our experience in our bodies prior to death. Paul knows that the point of the resurrection of the dead is that for God's people the fullest life is yet to come. The afterlife to which Christians ultimately look forward is not like the experience of a leaf after it has died and fallen from a tree only to rot away, but more like the experience of a seed that germinates and then enters into a flourishing life of color and beauty to which its previous existence is hardly capable of being compared (cf. Rom. 8:18; 2 Cor. 4:16–17, etc.).

A specialist might point out that germination is not actually about a seed dying. Paul is not speaking as a horticulturist or agronomist, of course, but as one who, starting out from what he knows about death and resurrection, has found a helpful analogy in the relationship between a seed and what grows from the seed following germination. The fact that the seed is buried in the ground like a dead body but (like one resurrected from the grave) refuses to just lie there but rather sends life rising up from the ground undoubtedly encouraged the analogy. Christ himself had used the same analogy to make a similar point. In John 12:24 he says, "unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit" (NRSV).

Much of the following discussion is clearly dependent upon Genesis 1–2, and Paul's interest in seeds as an analogy may also have grown out of his reading of Genesis 1 (see esp. Gen. 1:11, 12, 29). Jesus himself frequently used agricultural metaphors when discussing eschatological concepts (sowing and reaping, workmen, harvest, separating wheat from tares, etc.), and the early church seems to have followed suit. Paul will use the language of sowing repeatedly in the following discussion (see vv. 37 [2x], 42, 43 [2x], 44). He finds several parallels between the life of a seed and the resurrection of the dead. The fact that the more abundant life of a plant or tree emerges only after the apparent destruction of the surface integrity of its seed is just the first of them.

15:37 Paul points out that seeds are not just smaller or older versions of the things that grow from them, but are something quite different and seemingly less than what they will be, but full of potential: *When you sow, you do not plant the body that will be, but just a seed, perhaps of wheat or of something else*. Paul mixes together language that is normally applied to seeds or plants with that which is applied to bodies and, in doing so, strengthens the conceptual relationship between the two ideas. "Now it was very appropriate for him to use different terms:

he did not say, It does not sprout unless it dies; instead, he used our terms of the seeds to bring out from them our resurrection." By *the body that will be* Paul means the plant or tree that will grow from the seed, but since he has in mind a resurrected body—the point of the discussion—he refers to the life/growth that emerges from the ground as *the body*. The point is that "bodies of plants … are different in kind fr[om] the 'body' of the seed which is planted." The word *body* is also used in the general sense of *"any corporeal substance,"* "*the body* or *whole* of a thing" or "generally, *the whole body* or *frame* of a thing" (LSJ).

Then when Paul refers to what is placed in the ground, he does not merely refer to a seed, but, literally, to "a naked seed" (TNIV, *just a seed*), once again taking language appropriate to a body and applying it to a seed. Although it is planted as a "naked" seed (i.e., body), it will one day be clothed with incorruptibility and immortality, as Paul emphasizes in vv. 53–54. Since there is a clear parallel with 2 Corinthians 5:3–4, Wright makes the intriguing suggestion that "behind both passages stands the nakedness of the first humans in Genesis 2 (the passage which, quoted in verse 45, reveals itself as having been in Paul's mind for some while)."

In saying that one does *not plant the body that will be* but only a naked *seed*, Paul draws our attention to the fact that the seed looks nothing like the body (plant or tree) that will come from it. Unless we have already seen what particular plants or trees grow from what particular seeds, we could not possibly be expected to guess what any particular seed would end up producing. While there is an organic relationship between the seed and the plant, there is also a tremendous discontinuity between the appearance and characteristics of the seed and the appearance and characteristics of the plant that grows from it. Similarly, Paul would have us know, we would be foolish to look at a failing or decaying body and think that we could actually discern from its present appearance what it might look like in the resurrection. The difference between the two will be as dramatic as night and day or seed and flower.

Wright points out that Paul's distinction between the "naked" seed and *the body that will be* suggests that part of the answer to the question about what kind of body will be resurrected is that "the sort of body that it will involve is like the fully clothed version of something which at present is 'naked.' "

15:38 Now Paul explains what determines the kind of "body" any given seed will have and how they get those bodies: *But God gives it a body as he has determined, and to each kind of seed he gives its own body. It* here is the seed mentioned in the previous verse. God gives the seed that was sown a body. And he gives each seed *its own body*. There is an organic relationship between the seed and the thing that grows out of the seed, but it is *God* who *has determined* what kind of body it gets.

In Genesis 1:11–12 we are told that the reason there are "plants bearing seed according to their kinds and trees bearing fruit with seed in it according to their kinds" (v. 12) is that "God said" it should be that way (v. 11). We note, as it seems Paul did as well, that the text distinguishes between seeds that are found within the fruit to which it belongs and other kinds of seeds, and that "according to their kinds" modifies both groups, so that there are varieties of both kinds and *each kind* has its own particular seed. For Paul this is another way of saying that each seed has *its own body* and that in each case it is *God* who *gives it [that] body*, who *has determined* what kind of body each will have. As Garland suggests, that God *determined* (or "willed") what body each seed would have probably "refers to the apparent laws established for plants in creation."[252]

The expression *as he has determined* was already used with respect to the distribution of spiritual gifts within the body of Christ in 12:18 (where the TNIV translated it, "just as he wanted"). In both places Paul is emphasizing the theme of God's sovereign rule over creation, just as he does in other places using other language. That certainly has been a theme in the earlier part of this chapter, especially in vv. 24–28, where we are told that all things will be in full submission to God once Christ's redeeming and restoring work is fully accomplished. *God* is given slight emphasis by being fronted in the Greek text. As we pointed out in our final comments on vv. 15–16, God's role in the resurrection is indirectly intimated in the dozens of passive verbs referring to the dead who are raised (by God—"divine passives"). These will be highlighted again in vv. 42–44 and 51–52. God's central role in that is more clearly indicated in v. 57. Here, in the middle of his analogy based on seeds and bodies, Paul makes explicit that which he normally leaves implicit: it is *God* who *gives* each *a* resurrection *body*. That he does so *as he has determined* reinforces the theme of his sovereignty, particularly as it is reflected in his ultimate power over creation demonstrated both in the way nature works in this present creation (where each seed develops into whatever body God has determined) and in the way his ultimate power over creation will be demonstrated in the resurrection of the dead.

Paul's language stresses not only God's sovereignty but his sovereign grace in particular as the only sure ground of Christian hope, an appropriate climax to the epistle as a whole. This theme was introduced with reference to Paul's own conversion and calling in 15:8–11 (where "grace" is repeated three times), and in this verse it is the ultimate explanation for how the dead are raised (cf. 15:35a): "*God gives* it a body" (which is not unlike the affirmation in 2 Cor. 5:1, "we have a building *from God*"). The notion of resurrection as a free gift is expressed in Romans 4, with ultimate reference to the resurrection of Jesus, where Abraham is said to have believed in God "who gives life to the dead" (4:17; cf. 4:25b). The need for the grace of God is nowhere more evident than in the case of resurrection, where the recipients self-evidently can contribute nothing whatsoever.

Paul has already seen Christ's resurrected body and probably spent some time thinking about why it shares the particular similarities with and differences from Christ's earthly body that it does. Clearly God had determined or willed just what a resurrected human body would be like, and that conclusion was manifest in the body Paul had been privileged to see for himself.

15:39 In this verse and the following two, Paul's comments suggest that his thinking on this subject is shaped by his reading of the very first passage in Genesis: *All flesh is not the same: Human beings have one kind of flesh, animals have another, birds another and fish another*. The bodies mentioned in vv. 39–41 correspond to three of the days of creation in reverse order, the sixth and fifth in v. 39, and the fourth in vv. 40–41. His point is that there are various kinds of bodies and different levels of splendor for each (so it would be a mistake to think a human body would always have to be the same kind of human body, with the same level of splendor). He starts by pointing to different kinds of flesh (v. 39). Next he will distinguish earthly bodies from heavenly bodies (v. 40a), and then degrees of splendor or glory between the different bodies (vv. 40b–41). He will apply those distinctions to the resurrection in vv. 42–44. The opening clause, *All flesh is not the same*, is the key to everything else in vv. 39–41. The point is that since there are so many different kinds of bodies in the world, the skeptical Corinthian should not assume that a resurrected body is just like our present bodies. It may be quite different. Different creatures have different body compositions and characteristics. As anyone who enjoys a variety of foods

would recognize, Paul might have mentioned the differences in, between, or within the bodies (flesh or meat) of different kinds of animals (e.g., sheep, cattle, and pigs), birds (e.g., even the difference between dark and white meat within a chicken or turkey), and fish (e.g., oily and white fish). His thinking, however, is oriented by his reading of Genesis 1, and the fact that it describes God creating the world in terms of creatures designed to live and move in particular habitats: fish in the water and birds in the sky (both in Gen. 1:20–21, day 5), and animals on the ground (Gen. 1:24–25, day 6), and then humans also to live on the land (Gen. 1:26–28, also on day 6), but designed differently so as to have dominion over the others.

As we mentioned, Paul presents the bodies in the reverse order from that in which they are mentioned in Genesis. He begins with humans since the real issue is the nature of the human body (as it is at present and as it will be in resurrected form), and then he works backward through the other broad categories of creatures mentioned in Genesis 1 to make the point that it would be simplistic to think "a body is a body is a body."

15:40 In this and the next verse Paul moves from days six and five of the creation narrative in Genesis 1 (the background to v. 39) to day four, introducing the idea of heavenly and earthly bodies and then the idea of various shades of splendor (or levels of glory) for various kinds of bodies, a point which will be useful when he gets to v. 43: *There are also heavenly bodies and there are earthly bodies; but the splendor of the heavenly bodies is one kind, and the splendor of the earthly bodies is another*. Dale Martin has asserted that Paul's use of earthly and heavenly terminology in this verse and the next reveals his indebtedness to a hierarchical conception of matter, as found in some Greco-Roman thought. Thus, Paul begins at the lower end of the spectrum, with "earthly bodies," and moves on to higher "heavenly bodies." However, as we have already seen in vv. 38–39, Paul's comments reflect his reliance on the biblical tradition of creation, especially Genesis 1. Paul is walking backward through the various bodies mentioned in Genesis 1:14–28 (days 4, 5, and 6) and has now come to the lights that God placed in the sky "to give light on the earth" (1:15). We have already seen that day three of the creation narrative (Gen. 1:11–13) seems to have played a role in Paul's thinking in vv. 37–38. The following chart reflects the full set of relationships:

1 Corinthians 15	**Day of Creation**	**Element of Creation**
vv. 36–38	3 (Genesis 1:11–13)	Seed-bearing plants and trees
v. 39a	6 (Genesis 1:26–28)	Humans
v. 39b	6 (Genesis 1:24–25)	Animals
v. 39c	5 (Genesis 1:20b, 21b)	Birds
v. 39d	5 (Genesis 1:20a, 21a)	Fish
vv. 40–41	4 (Genesis 1:14–19)	Heavenly lights (sun, moon, and stars)

Paul had been talking about earthly bodies; now he goes back to the heavenly bodies mentioned in Genesis 1:14–16, which were to provide light for those living on the earth. The fact that the heavenly bodies (which Paul will identify as the sun, moon, and stars in the following verse) provide light for those on earth (although to different degrees and in different ways, as will be pointed out in the next verse) suggested that the former have greater splendor or glory than the latter.

Although BDAG gives the word *heavenly* (used twice in this verse) two different meanings, either "pert[aining] to being in the sky or heavens as an astronomical phenomenon" or "pert[aining] to being associated with a locale for transcendent things and beings," this verse is the only evidence provided for the first definition. It will be clear when we get to vv. 48–49, where Paul uses the same word three more times, that he wants to exploit the fact that the Greek word for "heaven" may be used either for that part of creation which is distinguished from the earth, or for the dwelling place of God and those (angels, etc.) who live in his presence. Here he has in mind not the uncreated original or primary "locus" of the divine presence but the created habitat of *heavenly* astronomical bodies, but when he comes back to the idea of spiritual and heavenly bodies in vv. 44–49 it will be in the normal (divine) sense of *heavenly*, so that our bodies will be like Christ's heavenly body.

Paul's use of the word *earthly* here differs in an important way from his use of the word in vv. 47–49, translated "of the earth" or "earthly" in those verses. As Wright points out, the word Paul uses here suggests " 'upon-the-earth-ly', a word principally of location rather than composition," while the word used in vv. 47–49 is " 'earthy', a word describing physical composition." The heavenly/earthly dichotomy Paul finds in Genesis 1 and refers to here will be exploited in vv. 47–49 by transitioning to a slightly different kind of *earthly*-ness in contrast with what is *heavenly* in the divine sense.

Paul will also exploit two different meanings of the word translated *splendor*, which appears four more times in the following verse (with the same meaning as in this one) and then will appear again in v. 43, but with a different meaning. It is the word more commonly translated "glory" (as the TNIV translates it in v. 43 [along with the NIV, CSB, NAB, and NJB], masking the relationship between the texts), which may mean either "the condition of being bright or shining" (with "brightness, splendor, radiance" as possible glosses for this meaning), as it does here and in the following verse, "a state of being magnificent" (with possible glosses being "greatness, splendor"), or "honor as enhancement or recognition of status or performance" (with potential glosses being "fame, recognition, renown, honor, prestige"). While BDAG places Paul's usage in v. 43 under the first definition as it does the usages in this verse and the next, its antithetical relationship with "dishonor" in that verse clearly indicates that glory in the sense of (majestic) honor is in mind, not luminescence, although it will certainly involve magnificent splendor as well.

Paul's usage of the word for "glory" in this verse and the next and the distinction he makes here between the glory of earthly bodies and the glory of heavenly ones prepares the way for his introduction of the concept of the "image" of the earthly man and the heavenly man in v. 49. In 11:7 Paul tied together the concepts of "image" and "glory," as he also does in Romans 1:23 and in 2 Corinthians 3:18; 4:4. In the case of human beings, at least, a body's glory is directly related to the image it bears.

Bonneau and Garland have helpfully suggested that in vv. 39–41 Paul "highlights the distinction that exists between below and above. The 'below' is characterized by the use of the

term ‘flesh’; the ‘above’ is characterized by the use of the term ‘glory.’ This creates a hierarchy of opposites: ‘earthly/below/lesser’ and ‘heavenly/above/greater.’ ” This is essentially correct, although in this particular verse the term “glory” (or “splendor”) may be applied in different degrees to both heavenly and earthly bodies since “the splendor of the heavenly bodies is one kind, and the splendor of the earthly bodies is another.”

Paul’s exploitation of the differing meanings of the words translated *heavenly* and *splendor* or “glory” and the fact that his argument will move from one word for “earthly” to another with a somewhat different meaning reflect the fact that he is not proving his point from Genesis 1 but has found the ideas of heavenly lights versus less glorious earthly creations to provide a useful analogy which he hopes will also be useful to the Corinthians for grasping something of the difference(s) between our present bodies (or Christ’s pre-resurrection body) and the resurrected bodies that await us (and the one that Christ already has). As Wright puts it, “Paul is careful not to imply that the analogies he is offering in [these verses] are actually analyses of how the resurrection itself will be. He is here setting up a network of metaphor and simile, not metonymy.”

15:41 Paul has already referred to a distinction in splendor or glory between earthly and heavenly bodies. He reinforces his thought by pointing out the obvious difference in brightness between the sun, the moon, and the various stars. He continues to show the influence of Genesis 1, now the heavenly bodies or lights created on the fourth day of creation: “God made two great lights—the greater light to govern the day and the lesser light to govern the night. He also made the stars. God set them in the vault of the sky to give light on the earth” (Gen. 1:16–17). *The sun has one kind of splendor, the moon another and the stars another; and star differs from star in splendor*. The Genesis passage made a distinction in splendor or glory in referring to the sun and moon as “the greater light” and “the lesser light,” with the stars being mentioned in a way that suggests lesser splendor than the first two. That the sun and stars have their own light and the moon has reflected light, if Paul even considered the distinction, is irrelevant to his argument. While Paul applied the word “flesh” first of all to various earthly bodies, he used the word *splendor* or “glory” primarily for heavenly bodies (see our comments on v. 40 on Paul’s exploitation of the somewhat different meanings of the word translated *splendor* or “glory”).

When Paul uses this material in vv. 42–43, it will be to point out that the resurrected body, a kind of heavenly body, is marked by glory (analogous, at least, to the sun, moon, and stars). Whether he is thinking of distinctions in glory between Christ and believers or between one believer’s glory and that of another is not at all clear. The former idea at least may be in the back of his mind, but if it is, he does not develop the thought. He will make only the point that our new bodies will have glory that our present ones do not.

We will note in our comments on vv. 42–43 that the reference to luminescent bodies (“shine like the brightness of the heavens”) and stars in the description of the resurrection in Daniel 12:2–3 may have encouraged or reinforced Paul’s use of the references to heavenly bodies in Genesis 1 to explain the nature of the resurrection body in terms of shining heavenly bodies.

15:42–44 Paul hasn’t explicitly mentioned the resurrection since v. 35. Verses 36–41 were dedicated to developing an analogy based on distinctions within creation reflected in the Genesis 1 narrative. The points he made along the way include: God decided what each seed should become, and each seed undergoes radical transformation to become the plant or tree God designed it to grow into; even earthly bodies reflect different kinds of flesh (so it is not the case

that “a body is a body is a body”); heavenly bodies have differing degrees of splendor or glory; and there is a radical difference between earthly and heavenly bodies (the former have different kinds of flesh, and the latter have different degrees of splendor or glory). Now the time has come to apply all of that to his explanation of the nature of the resurrection body: *So will it be with the resurrection of the dead*. The first clause of v. 42 (separated out as a sentence in most English translations) lacks a verb, and a form of the verb “to be” should be supplied. The TNIV and the NIV are virtually the only translations to supply the verb in the future tense *(it will be)*, and that is probably a mistake. It would be better to go with something like the NRSV, “So it is with the resurrection of the dead,” or the NET, “It is the same with the resurrection of the dead” (cf. NLT), which use the present tense, as do most translations. Throughout this chapter it has been clear that the future resurrection of the dead is organically tied to Christ’s own resurrection and that the same principles apply.

What Paul says in these verses applies equally to Christ’s resurrection and to the future resurrection of the dead. In fact, what Paul knows about the resurrection body he probably knows in large part due to his own personal exposure to Christ in glory, even if he and other Jews would have some prior expectations informed by the role the resurrection was expected to play in the broader scriptural narrative of the redemption of creation. That Paul’s conception of the resurrection body of believers ultimately owes its origin to the resurrected Christ, “the life-giving spirit” (15:45), “the heavenly man” to whose “image” believers will conform (15:49), is strongly suggested by vv. 45–49. This would be natural, considering the impact Christ’s appearance had on his life and ministry. Paul makes the same connection elsewhere: at the Parousia “the Lord Jesus Christ … will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be *like his glorious body*” (Phil. 3:20–21); for “we will certainly be united with him in a resurrection *like his*” (Rom. 6:5b; cf. 6:8b). Christ, the eschatological Adam, is the founder of a new and better humanity. It is thus no coincidence that the words Paul uses to describe believers’ resurrection are roughly the same as when he speaks of the resurrection of Christ. As will be noticed in our comments below, some of Paul’s key ideas about the resurrection body in 1 Corinthians 15 can be seen plausibly to derive from the prototypical resurrection of Jesus, specifically what he has to say about the power, glory, and spiritual nature of the resurrection body.

In the light of this, Paul’s view of the resurrection body as encompassing both continuity with and transformation of the present body, what Murray Harris calls “identity with difference” may well find its best precedent in the accounts of the resurrection appearances of the Jesus in the New Testament Gospels. Here Jesus is recognizable to his followers but clearly has a different mode of existence, to which adjectives like imperishable, powerful, glorious, and spiritual are appropriate.

Even if, like much else in vv. 36–41, Paul’s distinction between earthly and heavenly bodies is dependent on Genesis 1, the tie between resurrection bodies and the lights in the heavens was probably also encouraged or inspired by the most explicit passage on bodily resurrection in the Old Testament, Daniel 12:2–3: “Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake: some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt. Those who are wise will shine like the brightness of the heavens, and those who lead many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever.” The Old Greek of v. 2 speaks of those who will “light up like the luminaries of heaven,” while Theodotion’s version has “shine like the splendor of the firmament”[272] in the same place (both translations from NETS). Both versions of the verse indicate that either the same or another

group will shine like "the stars." The theme of the splendor or luminescence of the righteous in the resurrection is quite clear. Since Daniel's text is the clearest reference to the subject, one assumes that its influence on Jewish thinking on the matter would have been quite significant.

Throughout these verses Paul builds on his introduction of the agricultural motif of sowing seed which was last mentioned in vv. 36–37: *The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable; it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body*.

What, exactly, is it that *is sown*, and what does it mean to sow it? The Greek text has no explicit subject (literally, "it is sown perishable," etc.). Although some have suggested that what is *sown* is simply the dead corpse being buried in the ground, it seems more likely that Paul has in mind the human being who experiences decay and death.[274] The subject of the verb should be understood to be a body, based on both vv. 37 and 44, which explicitly refer to the sowing of bodies. But Paul seems to be referring not to the body as a dead corpse (even if it is that), but identifying the body which is buried with the qualities which marked its existence prior to death. The body which is buried is that of one whose life was marked by perishability, dishonor, weakness, and the (very limited) animating power of the human soul (see on v. 44), qualities that are typically on greatest display as one passes from life to death.

The expression translated *perishable* is literally "in corruption/decay," and the expression translated *imperishable* is literally "in incorruptibility/immortality." The literary parallelism between the first three antithetical statements reflects the repeated emphasis on the condition in which the body is sown or raised, and then the last antithetical parallelism (natural/spiritual) describes the basic orientation (as we shall see) of each body. The difference between *in* and *is* is unlikely to be crucial, but reflects the following antithetical parallelisms.

The body is *sown in* …	The body is *raised in* …
• Corruptibility	• Incorruptibility
• Dishonor	• Honor/Glory
• Weakness	• Power
The body sown *is* …	The body raised *is* …
• Natural	• Spiritual

As Wright's analysis suggests, the first antithesis deals with the nature of the bodies (as corruptible or incorruptible), and the last addresses the animating power of the bodies (*natural* human nature or God's Spirit). Those two frame the inner two antitheses which relate to issues of status and abilities of the bodies (honored/dishonored, powerful/weak). As we shall see, all four characteristics of the resurrection body reflect Paul's knowledge of Christ's own resurrection body based on both personal experience and scriptural reflection, and much of his description of the body which is *sown* may also be based on reflection on Christ's experience and on his

crucifixion in particular, as well as Paul's own experience of weakness and dishonor as one following in Christ's footsteps.

The word translated *perishable* appears in Wisdom 14:12, which says that "the idea of making idols was the beginning of fornication [*porneia*], and the invention of them was the corruption of life." Here we have idolatry leading inexorably to *porneia* (sexual immorality) and corruption. Paul uses the same word in Romans 8:21 when he refers to creation's "bondage to decay." He uses the word in conjunction with the metaphor of sowing in Galatians 6:8 when he says that those who sow to the flesh "will reap corruption from the flesh" (NRSV). He will use the same word a few lines down in this same discussion when in v. 50 he declares, "the perishable [will not] inherit the imperishable." Corruption, or the condition of being perishable, is a result of the fall of humanity. In Genesis 3:19 God told Adam, "By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return." And the rest of creation has been subject to decay and corruption due to the same fall. A slightly different cognate word for corruption plays a key role in Psalm 16:10 (15:10 LXX) and its use in relation to Christ's resurrection in the book of Acts (Acts 2:27, 31; 13:35, 37). The psalm has a promise that the Lord will not let his holy or faithful one see decay (or corruption). Peter says that the psalmist "spoke of the resurrection of the Messiah, that he was not abandoned to the realm of the dead, nor did his body see decay" (Acts 2:31). Paul quotes the same text in Acts 13:35 to point out that while David "was buried with his ancestors and his body decayed, … the one whom God raised from the dead did not see decay" (vv. 36–37). Although it was a corruptible body that was placed in Christ's tomb, it was not given the opportunity to experience corruption, but, as our bodies will also do (cf. vv. 53–54), it was clothed in incorruptibility. The undoing of the fall of humanity and of creation would be fully achieved only if corruption and decay were also completely overcome.

The word translated *imperishable* entails the negation of corruptibility and as such was also a common word for immortality, although the more literal word for immortality[279] will feature along with this word in the climactic vv. 53–54. Immortality in one form or another had become a religious ambition for many Jews and Gentiles as well (see 4 Macc. 9:22; 17:12; Wis. 2:23; 6:18–19). Using the same word, Wisdom 2:23 states, "God created the human for immortality," and then the text explains how death and corruption came into the world. In Romans 2:7 Paul says that God gives eternal life to "those who by persistence in doing good seek glory, honor and immortality." 2 Timothy 2:10 notes that Jesus Christ "has destroyed death and has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel." The word will reappear in vv. 50, 53, and 54. In those verses Paul will affirm that the perishable cannot inherit the imperishable, but that "the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable." As our comments on *perishable* or "corruptible" suggested, the book of Acts indicates that incorruptibility was a key feature of what it meant for Christ (or anyone else) to experience bodily resurrection. The resurrection completely swallows up the broadest and deepest effects of the fall of creation and humanity.

When Paul says that the body *is sown in dishonor*, one is reminded of what he said earlier in this letter about his own experience of being dishonored: "You are honored, we are dishonored! To this very hour we go hungry and thirsty, we are in rags, we are brutally treated, we are homeless. We work hard with our own hands. When we are cursed, we bless; when we are persecuted, we endure it; when we are slandered, we answer kindly. We have become the scum

of the earth, the garbage of the world—right up to this moment" (4:10–13; cf. 2 Cor. 6:8). Of course Paul's personal experience followed the pattern established by Christ himself, whose passion consisted in large part of a series of events in which Christ was dishonored, whether by the religious or political authorities, by his own disciples, or by the others who were crucified beside him. Paul summarizes Christ's experience in Philippians 2:7–8 as one of taking on "the very nature of a servant" and "becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross!" Paul's catalogues of his sufferings (including the part just cited) suggest that he fully embraced the dishonor to which he was constantly exposed, knowing that it was the natural prologue to experiencing glory modeled after that into which Christ himself entered after his experience of dishonor (cf. Phil. 2:9–11). Of course the dishonor experienced by Christ, Paul, and every other human being is a result of Adam's sin and the dishonor that sin brought on the whole human race and which is being overcome through Christ's redemptive work.

After being sown in dishonor, the body *is raised in glory*. Genesis 1 suggested, as poetically expressed in Psalm 8, that God had "crowned [humanity] with glory and honor" (Ps. 8:5). But humanity had lost most of its glory and would regain it again only in the resurrection. Jung Hoon Kim has pointed out the association between garments of glory and the resurrection or eternal life in early Jewish literature.[282] *1 Enoch* 62:15–16 reads: "The righteous and elect ones shall rise from the earth and shall cease being of downcast face. They shall wear garments of glory. These garments of yours shall become the garments of life from the Lord of the Spirits." In *2 Enoch* 22:8 the Lord tells Michael to "Go and extract Enoch from his earthly clothing" and "anoint him with my delightful oil, and put him in the clothes of my glory." As a result he became "like one of the glorious ones" (22:10). This is the reverse of what happened at the fall. In the *Apocalypse of Moses* 20:1–5 Eve says that after she ate of the forbidden fruit, "my eyes were opened, and I knew that I was naked of the righteousness with which I had been clothed," and recognizes, "I have been estranged from my glory with which I was clothed" (cf. Rom. 3:23). Kim seems to overlook the possibility that this motif may have found its source in Psalm 8 and its description of humanity being crowned with glory and honor.

The word translated *glory* here is the same one that was translated "splendor" in vv. 40–41. As we pointed out in our comments on v. 40, BDAG mistakenly places the usage in this verse under the meaning "the condition of being bright or shining" (with "brightness, splendor, and radiance" as possible glosses for this meaning). The word's antithetical relationship with "dishonor" in this verse clearly indicates that glory in the sense of (majestic) honor is in mind, not luminescence, although it will certainly involve magnificent splendor as well.[283]

Although Paul and the rest of us must wait to experience this part of the story, Paul had already seen and experienced the glory of the resurrection body when Christ appeared to him (cf. v. 8). The themes of Christ's glory and the glory that awaits believers were important ones for Paul, and they grew out of his personal experience of Christ. As Paul approached Damascus, "a light from heaven flashed around him" (Acts 9:3; cf. Acts 22:6) and the Lord appeared to him. In fact, the light was so brilliant (Paul would describe it as "brighter than the sun" in Acts 26:13) that it blinded him (Acts 22:11). In Romans 6:4 Paul says, "Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father." Earlier in this very letter Paul spoke of God's wisdom which he "destined for our glory before time began," and said that if the rulers of this age had understood it, "they would not have crucified the Lord of glory" (2:7–8). In 2 Corinthians 3:18 Paul says that we "contemplate the Lord's glory" and "are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing

glory." In Colossians 1:27 Paul speaks of the mystery which is "Christ in you, the hope of glory." In Romans 8:18 he says that "our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us." In Romans 8:21 he declares that the creation itself will be "brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God." Christ, the firstfruits, has already entered into glory via the resurrection. His people can look forward to experiencing glory through the resurrection as well.

Paul's concern in these verses is with the consequences of rejecting the teaching of the resurrection, and not with divisions among the Corinthians. Still, it appears from the evidence of earlier chapters that some Corinthians may have been tempted to think of themselves as people of honor or glory and of others among them as people of dishonor (due to their social status and the kinds of tasks that were incumbent on them). If so, this verse would remind them that all (fallen) human life is marked by dishonor to one degree or another and that the ultimate distinction between dishonor and glory is not one of those which Corinthians made on a daily basis, distinguishing between various people in their city, but one that distinguishes between those who will know only the glory of this present world (which is itself marked by dishonor in comparison with the glory of the world to come) and those who know the divine glory in store for those who are known not by the important people in the city of Corinth, but by God himself (8:3).

Having highlighted the differences between our present earthly bodies and Christ's resurrection body (and our future resurrection bodies) in terms of the tremendous difference with respect to their relative (or absolute) (in)corruptibility and (dis)honor, Paul now points out that a similar contrast pertains to the immeasurable difference between the strengths of the body before and after its resurrection: *it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power*. While Paul sometimes makes different distinctions between the weak and the strong (e.g., the weak in conscience mentioned in 8:7–12), here he has in mind weakness as the common condition of human life in its fallen state. As he will make clearer in 2 Corinthians, Paul actually celebrates his human weaknesses (2 Cor. 11:30; 12:5, 9–10; 13:9), knowing that through them he identifies with Christ's own weakness, and that in both cases God makes his own power known through such human weakness. He also knows that, as in the case of Christ, one day his weaknesses will give way to a spectacular and definitive demonstration of God's power in him. Paul's thought here is nicely paralleled in 2 Corinthians 13:4, where he says that Christ himself "was crucified in weakness, yet he lives by God's power." Earlier in this letter Paul had said that "[b]y his power God raised the Lord from the dead, and he will raise us also" (6:14). Romans 1:4 asserts that Jesus Christ is declared to be or designated the Son of God "in power" by his resurrection from the dead. In the same way, it is *in power* that believers will be raised from the dead on the last day. Psalm 110 had applied the Adamic dominion motif to the Davidic king in language that is worth recalling here, especially given its double usage of the key word *power*, found in this verse: "A rod of power the Lord will send out from Sion. And exercise dominion in the midst of your enemies! With you is rule on a day of your power among the splendors of the holy ones" (Psalm 109:2–3 LXX, NETS translation). The reign of the Davidic king is a demonstration of God's power through him. So also God destroys all competing powers and raises us up with the power that he has demonstrated in the defeat of those other awesome but ultimately much lesser powers. And the bodies he gives us in that resurrection are also marked by his power.

Some Corinthians had a mistaken understanding of strength and weakness, and in doubting the resurrection they showed a particularly grave underestimation of God's power. They may have thought of themselves as powerful people, but like the rest of us, they were infinitely weak in comparison with the power of those who will be raised up with Christ. A distinction between strong and weak people was common in the Roman world, but Paul reemploys the weak-powerful dichotomy so that it no longer reflects a line drawn through the middle of the church of Corinth, but is one in which both rich and poor, humble and elite find themselves on the same side both in this world and the next. Master and slave, the socially powerful and the socially powerless, were to recognize that even the greatest of human strength was weakness in comparison with the power to be displayed in each one of them (cf. 1:25). They have much more important things in common with each other than either group has in common with their unbelieving social peers in the city of Corinth and its environs.

The next antithesis Paul provides has been the cause of great confusion in the history of interpretation as the polarity of Paul's own theology has been interpreted through the prism of ontological polarities of later periods of history. Paul says that the human body *is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body*. In the modern, post-Enlightenment context, the words *natural* and *spiritual* are often taken, popularly at least, to suggest a distinction between the material and immaterial, or between the physical and the spiritual (so NRSV). But scholars have pointed out that the material/immaterial dichotomy is a modern one and that in Paul's world soul and spirit were not considered to be immaterial but of a lighter, thinner material than visible stuff. Still, people thought of matter in terms of very different categories of physicality, in a way that approximated the modern physical/spiritual dichotomy. But in such dichotomies both of the words Paul employs here would normally be used to refer to the thinner, invisible kinds of stuff.

The word translated *natural* is the adjective form of the word "soul" or "life" (thus BDAG indicates that the adjective means "of the soul/life"). The scriptural basis for Paul's word choice here is given in the following verse when he quotes Genesis 2:7 in a modified form. There Adam is described as a "living being/soul." Paul contrasts "natural" or "soulish" people with "spiritual" people in 2:14–15, and, as Wright points out, he is certainly not dealing with a distinction between people who are physical and people who are not! Rather, Paul's usage suggests a distinction between people who "are living at the level of life common to all humankind" versus those who "are indwelt, guided and made wise by the creator's Spirit." In this passage as well the distinction has to do with the difference between ordinary human life and life empowered by God's Spirit. The adjectives Paul uses describe "not what something is composed of, but what it is animated by. It is the difference between speaking of a ship made of steel or wood on the one hand and a ship driven by steam or wind on the other."[290] Wright follows Hays in pointing to the helpfulness of the Jerusalem Bible's translation of the verse: "When it is sown it embodies the soul, when it is raised it embodies the spirit. If the soul has its own embodiment, so does the spirit have its own embodiment."

Elsewhere Paul's language reflects what is called inaugurated eschatology, including the idea that Christians have already begun to experience the blessings and realities of the last days, including the Spirit, such that they may be called "spiritual." Here, however, for the sake of the point he wants to make about the radical contrast between the two types of bodies, he describes a strict dichotomy between the life animated by the soul, or ordinary human life, and life fully animated by God's Spirit, which are two mutually exclusive experiences. To live in a resurrected

body is to experience a new mode of existence, life directed and empowered by the Spirit, suitable to the age to come, in a body untainted by sin and death in any sense.

As Wright suggests, Paul's reference to a spiritual body appears to be "the most elegant way he can find of saying both that the new body is the *result* of the Spirit's work (answering 'how does it come to be?') and that it is the appropriate *vessel for* the Spirit's life (answering 'what sort of a thing is it?')."

In Romans 6 the "resurrection like his" which believers await (6:5) is not only one that guarantees mortal transformation but also moral transformation, that we "may live a new life" (v. 4), an existence that begins in the present. The fact that Paul tells us elsewhere that we have been sealed by the Spirit (cf. 2 Cor. 1:22; Eph. 1:13; 4:30) and that the Holy Spirit is the firstfruits (Rom. 8:23) and the "first installment, deposit, down payment" (2 Cor. 1:22; 5:5; Eph. 1:14) on what we are to experience once our redemption has been fully consummated suggests that our resurrection experience could not be anything other than an existence in which the Spirit has full sway and through which the Spirit is fully manifest in and through us as it is in Christ himself. The contrast that Paul has in mind in this verse and the next is clarified in vv. 47–49, where Paul shifts to the contrast between the "earthly" and the "heavenly" man, implying a contrast between one who lives out of (merely) earthly power or resources and one who lives out of heavenly power and resources.

15:45 Paul provides scriptural support for the distinction he made between a spiritual body and a natural body in v. 44 by referring once again to the creation narrative in Genesis. This time he refers to Genesis 2:7. Paul has already compared and contrasted Adam and Christ in vv. 21–22. Here he will do so again in order to explain how the poles of the earthly and heavenly are bridged through Christ: *So it is written: "The first Adam became a living being"; the last Adam, a life-giving spirit*. This is "one of the most controversial passages in the New Testament," and yet Paul's use of scripture here is relatively straightforward. Genesis 2:7 focuses on the creation of humankind. The verse says "the LORD God formed a man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being." Paul's snippet quotation includes some subtle changes to the single clause he quotes, which would otherwise simply read, "and the man became a living being." First, he omits the initial "and," a typical omission to conform the quotation to its new context. Secondly, he adds "first"[296] to "the man," an addition which, as Stanley notes, "brings to formal expression the fundamental contrast between Adam and Christ as the first and last Adam (v. 45b) that forms the backbone of the ensuing argument." Though the addition finds no textual support, it would not be out of place in the original text and could hardly be considered objectionable in itself. Thirdly, Paul adds "Adam," so that his version now reads, "the *first* man *Adam* became a living being," where the LXX reads simply, "the man became a living being." While none of the LXX MSS have the word "Adam," both Theodotion and Symmachus have "the Adam man" (the reverse word order to Paul) at this point in their texts. The dual rendering in both these texts and in 1 Corinthians 15:45 is probably due to the ambiguous sense of Hebrew word used, which can be a generic noun (human/man) or a proper name (Adam). On the other hand, the man who is referred to in the text is later called Adam so that the dual rendering of Paul's gloss serves as a simple reminder of the identity of that original man in Genesis 2:7.

The connection with the previous verse is not as clear in English translation as it is in Greek. The word translated *being* is the noun usually translated "soul" or "life," which corresponds to

the adjective “of the soul/life” (natural) used in the previous verse. Adam became a living soul, a (normal) living human being, the archetypal example of a “natural” or ordinary human life and Paul’s biblical proof that such is a category of existence.

Philo’s exegesis of Genesis 2:7 (*Allegorical Interpretation* 1:31) has some interesting things in common with Paul’s. In commenting on Genesis 2:7 Philo suggests that Genesis 1–2 describes both “the heavenly man” and “the earthly man.” For him the heavenly man is the one described in Genesis 1:26–28 who is made in God’s image (and not formed from the ground) and destined to have dominion over all creation, and the earthly man is the one described in Genesis 2:7 who is formed from the dust of the ground and shares in a “corruptible and earthly substance.” The linguistic parallels are remarkable, but in the end the differences outweigh the similarities. Philo allegorizes the text, suggesting that it refers to two different kinds of people in the world. He takes Adam’s becoming a living soul to mean that God breathed into his corruptible, earthlike mind the power of real life. For Paul, however, the earthly man is Adam and the heavenly is Christ. Of course, Paul’s Christology seems to be particularly dependent upon those traditions that recognized in Genesis 1 God’s intention that all of creation be ruled by a human vice-regent who would perfectly reflect God’s own righteousness, truth, and glory. That is, the dominion motif of Genesis 1:26, 28 undergirds texts such as Psalms 2, 8, and 110, Daniel 7, and others. These very texts were evoked in vv. 24–28 of this chapter.

Interestingly, Philo states that “the divine Spirit had flowed into [the first man] in full current” (*On the Creation of the World* 144). Paul might have agreed with him. The great difference is that even if the Spirit flowed into the first Adam, Paul declares that it flowed out of the second Adam in life-giving ways since rather than being simply “a living being” he is “a life-giving spirit.”

What Paul knows about Adam being a “living being/soul” he knows from Genesis 2:7. How does he know that the second Adam became “a life-giving spirit”? The idea of a life-giving spirit comes from reading Genesis 2:7 in light of Ezekiel 37 (esp. vv. 6, 9, 10, 14). In Genesis 2:7 it is when God breathed into the man that he came to life. In Ezekiel 37:6, 9, 10, 14 God repeatedly says, echoing Genesis 2, that it is by putting his breath or Spirit (the same word in both Hebrew and Greek) in his people that they would be brought to life. Ezekiel 37 describes “a life-giving spirit” in the context of the resurrection of the dead, or the restoration of Israel described as a resurrection of the dead. As Garland recognizes, “ ‘Giving life’ is synonymous with raising the dead (Rom. 4:17; 8:11; 2 Cor. 3:6).”

Jesus Christ is the true resurrection of the dead, the one whose Spirit brings the rest of us to resurrection life. Of course, Paul does not know this simply through his study of the Old Testament, but also through his own personal experience and the experience of other believers, all of whom experienced true life through Christ’s own presence in them by the indwelling Spirit. Paul did not simply deduce that “an opposite presupposes its counterpart” and that “if there is a natural body, then there is also a spiritual one.” He had personally encountered Christ as the powerful, glorious, wholly spiritual, life-giving spirit and knew himself and other humans to be something other than and less than what he had encountered in Christ. Our perishable, weak, inglorious, and unspiritual condition becomes transparent in the light of Christ’s imperishable, powerful, glorious, and wholly spiritual resurrection state.

This verse affirms the distinction Paul made in v. 44 between natural and spiritual bodies by pointing out that Adam was (merely) a living soul or being (with a natural body), as Genesis 2:7 attests, while Christ’s resurrection body was (as Paul experienced it and the Old Testament

background might lead one to expect) wholly spiritual. Adam received life as an embodied soul in a natural body (cf. Wis. 15:11); Christ gives life as a life-giving spirit. Paul uses Genesis 2:7 to set up one side of the contrast and to lead into the other. Paul's references to the first and last Adam will lead into the point he makes in vv. 46–47, namely, that there is an order to these things (cf. v. 23), and that the natural comes first and then the spiritual.

This verse serves as the opening shot in a complex argument stretching through vv. 45–49, in which Paul's allusion to Adam as "the first man" and "the man of dust" (both twice) and his use of Genesis 2:7 point to the significance of Jesus Christ, whose bearing is just as universal as that of our first ancestor. In the process Paul makes it clear how anthropology, Christology, and eschatology are all integrally and organically related, so that Christ is the one who brings about the consummation of the story of creation by bringing humanity from the state in which it has found itself under Adam's leadership to the state that God has had in mind for it since the beginning. The contrasts that Paul will develop out of the contrast between Adam and Christ may be easily reflected in a chart:

The first Adam was:	The last Adam was:
• Living being	• Life-giving spirit
• Natural ("soulish")	• Spiritual
• First man	• Second man
• Dust/of the earth	• Of heaven
• Earthly man	• Heavenly man
His people are those who are of the earth and bear his image.	His people are those who are of heaven and shall bear his image.

15:46 As in v. 23, Paul points out that he is not discussing a static and eternal contrast, but that a particular chronological order has been reflected in the history of creation and new creation. As it turns out, that order is also reflected in the experience of all who come to know true life in Christ: *The spiritual did not come first, but the natural, and after that the spiritual*. The relationship with v. 45 makes it clear that by *the spiritual* Paul refers to Christ, the last Adam, and *the natural* refers to the first Adam. The language Paul uses here *(natural/spiritual)* goes back to v. 44. The flow of Paul's argument makes it clear that the difference between our present bodies and our resurrection bodies (v. 44a) parallels the difference between Adam's bodily existence and Christ's resurrected body (v. 45), the two figures that establish the very difference between a normal human body and a spiritual (resurrected) body (v. 44b). The order in which we experience the "natural body" and the "spiritual body" (v. 44) mirrors the order in which the two figures mentioned in v. 45 (Adam and Christ, the last Adam) appeared in human history. We do not know whether or not any Corinthians said that they had already entered into a wholly spiritual existence, but Paul's point is that (1) there are two very different kinds of bodily

existence; (2) so far they have experienced only the one that is common to all of Adam's children; thus (3) they should look forward to the bodily existence that comes only after this first one (and is experienced only by God's own people).

15:47 Having referred to a first and a last Adam in v. 45 and established their distinctive natures and reiterated the order of their appearance in v. 46, he now speaks of them in terms of a *first* and *second man* and highlights the distinctive origin of each: *The first man was of the dust of the earth; the second man is of heaven*. Starting in this verse, Paul shifts from his extended contrast between the "spiritual" and the "natural" to an extended contrast between *earth* and *heaven* (v. 47), between the "earthly" and the "heavenly" (vv. 48–49). The second contrast helps clarify what Paul had in mind by the first, and builds on it by stressing the differing origins of the two men and the life that they brought/bring and that they represent. Paul had already distinguished between earthly and heavenly bodies, in a different sense, in v. 40. Now that distinction is being used to explain the difference between Adam's body and Christ's resurrection body. As Wright points out, here "Paul draws into the discussion the most fundamental aspect of creation, heaven and earth, as in Genesis 1:1, showing how the new creation represents, at last, the Jewish dream of the kingdom, embodied in the new humanity that, as in Philippians 3:20–21, comes 'from heaven.' " The word translated *man*[305] (twice) is not gender specific but is used of "a person of either sex, w[ith] focus on participation in the human race, *a human being*" (BDAG). Of course, in this instance both people are known to be males, but Paul is interested in them not as two different examples of men (male human beings), but as two types of human being: the type coming from Adam's line and the type modeled after Christ's resurrection.

That Adam was *of the dust of the earth* refers once again to Genesis 2:7, which Paul had just cited in v. 45. Here and in the next two verses Paul uses a rare adjective based on the noun "dust" found in Genesis 2:7. In fact, as Balz indicates, the word "might have been constructed directly (by Paul?) from ["dust"] (Gen 2:7 LXX). Thus it emphasizes that a person is made from dust and will return to dust, and thus lives only through the Spirit of God within (cf. in addition to Gen 2:7 also 3:19; Job 4:19; 8:19; 10:9; Eccl 3:20; 12:7; Pss 22:30; 104:29; 146:4; Dan 12:2)." It underscores Adam's (and humanity's) perishability and earthy origin in contrast with the resurrected Christ's eternal nature and heavenly origin. Throughout vv. 45–47 Paul has worked through a series of polar oppositions (see the chart in our comments on v. 45) to draw stark lines of distinction between Adam and (the resurrected) Christ as two different kinds of human being. All of this leads up to vv. 48–49, where he will argue that human beings may share in both kinds of humanity. He will build on the Adam/Christ distinction to distinguish between what it means to participate in Adam's kind of humanity and what it means to participate in the new (renewed) humanity Christ has brought about through his resurrection from the dead.

15:48 In this verse and the next Paul now makes the link between the two kinds of humanity represented by Adam and by the resurrected Christ and raises the question of the nature of the resurrection bodies which believers will enjoy: *As was the earthly man, so are those who are of the earth; and as is the heavenly man, so also are those who are of heaven*. As pointed out in our comments on v. 47, Paul had already distinguished between earthly and heavenly bodies in a different sense in v. 40, and v. 47 suggests that such a distinction may also be applied to Adam and Christ (in his resurrection). Now Paul applies that same distinction to others based on their relationship with Adam and Christ. In context, *those who are of the earth* would be all humans in that they share an earthly origin and existence, while *those who are of heaven* would be those

who receive their renewed bodies from God through the resurrection of the dead. Here *of heaven* does not mean that they are originally from heaven or that they are headed to heaven (again, this is not about some ethereal heavenly existence but about the resurrection of the dead in the new creation). It has to do with "being associated with" heaven (BDAG). In this context Paul asserts that just as we have been marked by the earthly realm through our Adamic origin, thanks to Christ we will be marked by the heavenly realm through our resurrection from the dead. As Wright puts it, "The point is not … that the new humanity will exist in a place called 'heaven'. Rather it will originate there, where Jesus himself currently is in his own risen and life-giving body; and it will transform the life of those who are presently located on earth and earthy in character."

Paul has already indicated in vv. 42–44 what it is to be like *the earthly man* or the heavenly man. To be like the former is to live a life marked by a lack of permanence, strength, glory, and unmitigated spirituality while to be like the latter is to enjoy all of those qualities in a resurrected body like Christ's own.

The Corinthians are to recognize themselves in the references to *those who are of heaven;* that is, the *we* who shall *bear the image of* Christ (v. 49), *the heavenly man*, includes all believers. This subtly reinforces the hope that all believers (including all Corinthian believers) share in common, a hope that separates them from all other peoples and groups of the world. If any Corinthian clique were tempted to think of themselves and their non-Christian friends as being somehow superior to their poorer and less powerful brothers and sisters in Christ (including the slaves) among them, this would be one more text reminding them that even their slaves will share a glorious future with Christ that their unbelieving social peers in the city could not dream of.

15:49 Paul reinforces the point of v. 48 by bringing in the idea of two different images that we might bear: *And just as we have borne the image of the earthly man, so shall we bear the image of the heavenly man*. Like so much of what Paul says in vv. 38–49, the motif of the image also goes back to the opening chapter(s) of Genesis. While Genesis 1:26–27 (cf. Gen. 5:1) tells us that God "created human beings in his own image" (v. 27), Genesis 5:3 says that Adam had his children "in his own likeness, in his own image." This latter verse is surely the background for Paul's statement that *we have borne the image of the earthly man*. Genesis 5:3 does not suggest that Adam's descendants no longer reflected God's image. Genesis 9:6 indicates that humans continued to bear God's image, and in this very letter Paul has affirmed that man "is the image and glory of God" (11:7; see our comments there). The image of God has not been lost but merely tarnished or distorted. It does not need to be regained, but to be perfectly restored/renewed.

In 11:7 Paul tied together the ideas of God's image and glory (see also Rom. 1:23; 2 Cor. 3:18; 4:4), and in v. 48 he distinguished between the splendor or glory of heavenly and earthly bodies. In v. 43 he spoke of human bodies being sown in dishonor and raised in glory. The concepts of glory and *image* are probably linked throughout these texts such that we are to understand that *the image of the earthly man* lacks the glory with which it was previously created and is now an image of impermanence, weakness, ignobility, and of earthy humanness while *the image of the heavenly man* reflects God's glory in its incorruptible, powerful, honorable, and spiritual nature (cf. vv. 42–44). We spend these lives in bodies that reflect Adam's state after the fall; we will spend the rest of eternity in bodies that reflect Christ's state after his resurrection from the dead.

Paul's other references to the image we bear merit our attention for the light they may shed on Paul's point here. In 2 Corinthians 4:4 Paul says that the gospel "displays the glory of Christ,

who is the image of God." Similarly, in Colossians 1:15 he declares that Christ "is the image of the invisible God." Paul tells the Colossians to "put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator" (Col. 3:10), and in 2 Corinthians 3:18 he states that as believers contemplate the Lord's glory we "are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory." In Romans 8:29 Paul affirms that God predestined believers "to be conformed to the image of his Son." Putting these texts together, we can understand Paul's point in this verse against the more complete picture the combined texts provide. The *image of the heavenly man*, as one would expect from Genesis 1:27–28 (cf. Gen. 5:1; 1 Cor. 11:7), is the perfectly restored image of God, the image which we were intended to bear and which Christ bears without blemish (2 Cor. 4:4; Col. 1:15). God's plan of redemption entails, among other things, restoring the perfect reflection of his image in his people, now by conforming them to the image of his Son, Jesus Christ (Rom. 8:29). These points could be deduced from what Paul writes in these verses, but they are clarified by his other texts. Colossians 3:10 and 2 Corinthians 3:18 make it clear that the process of conforming us to Christ's image (the perfect and unblemished image of God) is one that begins as believers grow in Christ and are transformed by his presence in their lives even now. The process that begins in this life comes to its final consummation at the moment of the resurrection when our bodies experience their complete transformation and the rest of our ultimate transformation is also achieved (cf. Rom. 8:21–23).

Paul's argument in this chapter leaves out the initial phase of the transformation process—inaugurated eschatology—in order to reflect the starkness of the contrast between life under Adam's regime and life under Christ in the resurrection. Of course, part of the point of this chapter, as it relates to the first fourteen chapters of this letter, is that although we should already be reflecting God's renewed humanity as we learn true wisdom as it is found in Christ (chs. 1–4) and reject sexual immorality (chs. 5–6) and idolatry (chs. 8–10) in favor of glorifying God with our bodies and in our worship, and in all we do (chs. 7, 11–14), the complete and ultimate manifestation of God's renewed humanity in Christ will be fully realized only when God raises us from the dead, as he raised Christ, and makes us like him. While that process has begun, we "eagerly wait for our Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed" (1:7) because we know that that is when it will be brought to completion (cf. Phil. 1:6).

The word translated *bearing* means to wear apparel and is being used figuratively here, suggesting that believers wear the image of Adam or of Christ on our bodies as we would wear a robe, crown, or other external apparel. The clothing motif goes back to v. 37, which spoke of a "naked" seed. The motif will be employed again in vv. 53–54, which speak of the perishable clothing itself with the imperishable and the mortal clothing itself with immortality. Kim thinks it "likely that this language of the wearing of the heavenly man's image reflects the concept of being clothed with garments of glory that is attested in Jewish apocalyptic literature (e.g. *1 Enoch* 62.15–16; *2 Enoch* 22.8–10). These documents use the imagery of clothing to describe the righteous and Enoch receiving a heavenly and immortal mode of existence. Furthermore, it should be noticed that, like the preceding verses, verse 49 has been influenced by the Adam story in Genesis." In our comments on v. 43 we noted that the poetic interpretation of Genesis 1 found in Psalm 8:5 may have encouraged the motif.

We have all worn the (perishable and mortal) image of (fallen) Adam, but we will end up clothing ourselves with the (imperishable and immortal) image of Christ (the new Adam), in the resurrection from the dead. Gordon Hugenberger has pointed to evidence that the donning of

clothing is a common part of an inheritance motif. In the next verse (v. 50) Paul will talk about the possibility of inheriting the kingdom of God, inheriting the imperishable. The way that verse is tucked between references to clothing in this verse and vv. 53–54 raises the possibility that Paul is comparing our resurrection bodies to clothes given as evidence of our status as God's heirs. Certainly the motif of God's grace is involved in that it is God who changes us (v. 52) and who gives us the victory we need (v. 57). It is God who gives us the clothing of imperishability and immortality to wear.

F. Explanation of the Necessity of the Resurrection for the Realization of God's Ultimate Victory, 15:50–57

> *50 I declare to you, brothers and sisters, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of*
> *God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. 51 Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will*
> *not all sleep, but we will all be changed—52 in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last*
> *trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be*
> *changed. 53 For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with*
> *immortality. 54 When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal*
> *with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: "Death has been swallowed*
> *up in victory."*
>
> *55 "Where, O death, is your victory?*
> *Where, O death, is your sting?"*
>
> *56 The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. 57 But thanks be to God! He*
> *gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.*

In vv. 50–57 Paul explains how God's ultimate victory over his last enemy (v. 26) depends on the resurrection of the dead, and how that resurrection takes place. In our present state entrance into God's kingdom would be impossible. It is impossible for those characterized by perishability or mortality to experience it (v. 50). God must, and will, bring about such a dramatic change that mortal and perishable people gain immortality and imperishability (vv. 51–53). That is what the resurrection of the dead is all about. When God brings about that change, death is brought to its ultimate defeat and we enter into Christ's complete victory over death achieved through his cross and resurrection from the dead (vv. 54–57). In this passage Paul is dealing with the fundamental issue raised by those who doubt that the dead could be raised—their proper understanding that even if the bodies of dead people were brought back to life, they would not be capable of experiencing the everlasting, immortal life to which Christians aspire. Paul's argument up to this point has been dedicated to establishing that there are different kinds of bodies in the world. The Corinthians are correct to think that bodies such as we now have, perishable earthly bodies, are not the kind that could endure and enjoy the blessings Paul has in mind. Paul has made the point that it would be a heavenly body, a wholly spiritual body, like the one he knows Christ has, that would be necessary. In these verses Paul explains that it is only by a dramatic, God-given change (like the change a seed goes through to become a plant or a tree, vv. 37–38) that the kind of resurrection Paul and the other apostles have in mind can take place. God must transform our

bodies from the kind that they are now to the kind that they need to be. It is that act of inconceivable power that makes the inconceivable conceivable.

Paul's discussion of the ultimate defeat of death will build on the motif of victory over death in Isaiah 25:8 and Hosea 13:14.

15:50 Paul introduces both this verse and the next with a speech orienter, an introductory clause that highlights the importance of what is about to be said. The words *I declare to you* are, literally, "I say this," and the "this" points forward to what is about to be said. The expression adds nothing to the content of what Paul has to say, but it stresses the importance of what follows. The vocative, *brothers and sisters*, also suggests a new start in the passage and adds extra stress.

So what is it that Paul wants to underscore by introducing it in this way? It turns out to be a point that may very well have been stressed by those Corinthians who found the idea of the resurrection of the dead incredible. He agrees with them *that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable*. The combination *flesh and blood* is a Jewish idiom for a human being with a "strong emphasis on ephemeral character, shortsightedness, and moral weakness" or "in contrast to gods." The two clauses seem to have a nearly synonymous relationship, suggesting that the ephemeral character of human life is foremost in mind in the reference to *flesh and blood*. Taken together, the two clauses imply that *perishable* humanity *(flesh and blood)* cannot inherit the *imperishable kingdom of God*.

Paul's repeated use of the language of inheritance in this verse reflects a development in the Old Testament and Jewish theology of the land which had taken place in earlier Jewish thought and was confirmed by Jesus and the apostles. While the Old Testament speaks over and over again of inheriting the land, Jews began to speak more and more of inheriting the earth (same word but with a broader meaning), God's kingdom,[324] or eternal life. It became clearer and clearer that God's intention was not simply to give Israel the Promised Land in the Middle East, but to bring his people into the new heavens and the new earth, to bring them into eternal life and an everlasting kingdom. Thus the promises about the land are swallowed up in the resurrection teaching so that all that was hoped for in terms of the restoration of Israel to the land and the restoration of the land (and all of creation) to an Edenic condition now finds its ultimate consummation in the resurrection of the dead and the complete renewal of creation that accompanies it. While some Corinthians assumed that the fact that the perishable cannot inherit the imperishable settled the question of the possibility of a resurrection of the dead in a negative way (even if they might have inconsistently held to the possibility that perishable people could inherit an imperishable, non-bodily existence), Paul understands that the objection is not insurmountable. In vv. 51–53 he explains how the human incapacity to enter into the imperishable kingdom of God is overcome.

15:51–52 The previous verse began with a speech orienter highlighting Paul's agreement with a basic plank of the Corinthians' objection to the resurrection of the dead. Verse 51 also begins with a speech orienter: *Listen, I tell you a mystery*. This time it introduces the explanation of how it is that the point made in v. 50 can be true and yet resurrection can still take place and should be affirmed. The key is change, and Paul indicates that the change involved is a *mystery* that was revealed. A *mystery* is something that is unknowable apart from divine revelation and which was therefore formerly unknown. But God has now revealed it to and through his prophets (and the

apostles). Evidence suggests that such revelation often came by way of inspired biblical interpretation.

What is the *mystery*? *We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed—in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet*. On *sleep* as a euphemism for death, see our comments on 7:39; 11:30; 15:6, 18, 20. Paul's statement that we will not all sleep should not be taken as a promise that some would not die, but indicates that death was not inevitable for the Christian. Certainly Paul expects some believers to be living when Christ returns, so that while it is possible that only some will die, all (believers) will certainly be changed.

Paul understands that in order for any human being to enter into God's imperishable kingdom, they must first *be changed*. Such a change will need to be experienced both by those who have died by the time Christ returns and also by those who are still living. That change will come suddenly. Paul uses two expressions to stress the suddenness of the event. The expression translated as *In a flash* by the TNIV and NIV ("in a moment" by NRSV, ESV, NASB, NET, NLT, CSB, and "in an instant" by NAB ["instantly" by NJB]) is one that refers to something that "cannot be cut, esp[ecially] because of smallness (e.g. particle of matter, uncompounded word)" (BDAG).[329] So the idea here is of the smallest unit of time, with the exact unit or measure being left to the reader's imagination. The word translated *twinkling* suggests "the shortest possible time necessary to 'cast' a glance." Paul's language here is a particular way of reflecting an understanding that goes back to the Old Testament, that God's eschatological intervention to save and judge would happen suddenly (see esp. Isa. 29:5–6; 48:3 and Mal. 3:1; also Isa. 30:13; 47:11; Jer. 6:26; 15:8; 18:22; 49:19; 50:44; 51:8; Mark 13:36; Luke 21:34).

The *trumpet* as a sign of the day of the Lord in 15:52 recalls Isaiah 27:13, Joel 2:1, and Zephaniah 1:14–16 (cf. 2 Esdr. 6:23). In 1 Thessalonians 4:15–17 Paul indicates that his teaching about the relationship between the resurrection and the trumpet call is based on dominical teaching:

> [15] According to the Lord's word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left till the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. [16] For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. [17] After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever.

The Lord's word that Paul has in mind is presumably similar to that recorded in Matthew 24:31, where Jesus says that at the time of the coming of the Son of Man "he will send his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of the heavens to the other." Matthew 24 and 1 Thessalonians 4 simply indicate that the trumpet call brings about the gathering of God's people at the end, without explicitly indicating how either dead or living people could enter into the new life initiated by that trumpet call. The last clause of v. 52 makes it clear that Paul understands that that trumpet call must bring about the radical change required for mortal human beings to enter into the immortal life of the resurrection: *For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed*. The association between the trumpet call and the resurrection is traditional; Paul simply recognizes that the resurrection must entail a radical change in the nature of the resurrected body. Psalm 101:27 LXX may have played a role in Paul's thinking here. Speaking of the heavens and the earth,

the psalmist says, “They will perish, but you will endure, and they will become old like a garment. Like clothing you will change them, and they will be changed” (NETS).[331] This passage is quoted in Hebrews 1:11–12. Kim holds that the idea is that “as a worn-out garment is replaced by a new garment, so the present cosmos when it is dissolved will be exchanged with a new one (cf. Isa. 65:17; 66:22).” In Romans 8:19–23 Paul makes it clear that our resurrection is tied in with the restoration and renewal of the rest of creation. That may provide the key to Paul’s understanding of what will happen to our bodies. If the old cosmos is to be exchanged for a new one as in putting on a new garment, it would be natural to assume that the same will take place with the bodies of the redeemed.

A trumpet blast was often a warning of danger or attack, but it could also signal any one of a number of different things, including attack. While the word used for victory in vv. 54–55, 57 could refer to victory in a contest or a war, the idea of victory over death suggests a victorious battle and the reference to a *trumpet* blast in this verse is then better understood to be the announcement of the Lord’s arrival in battle, a battle that does not last more than a moment in time. It is the Lord’s act of changing us from perishable to imperishable, of making us people over whom death has no power whatsoever, that constitutes death’s defeat and our victory over it.

15:53–54 Here Paul moves from the simple language of change that he used in vv. 51–52, to the metaphor of clothing oneself in a new and different set of qualities. These two verses reflect a close parallelism of language which is broken by the TNIV’s decision to avoid the strict repetition. The first four lines literally read:

For	the perishable	must	clothe itself	with imperishability,
and	the mortal	[must]	clothe itself	with immortality.
When	the perishable	has been	clothed	with imperishability,
and	the mortal	has been	clothed	with immortality….

Perhaps Paul’s high prose here is influenced by the fact that he is about to quote some poetic lines in vv. 54b–55.

Paul had already introduced the figurative use of the language of being *clothed* with the reference to the *naked* seed in v. 37. In v. 42 he had said that in the resurrection the body is changed from being perishable to being imperishable; now he makes the same point by way of the figure of putting on a new set of clothing (cf. 2 Cor. 5:1–4): *For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality*. As Kim suggests, Paul’s use of the imagery of clothing oneself with imperishability and immortality “shows a close affinity to the idea of the attirement of the righteous (who rise from the earth, that is, enter the heavenly order by escaping from the earthly order) with garments of glory or life (*1 Enoch* 62.15–16). The imagery also resembles the description of Enoch’s transformation from an earthly to a heavenly mode of existence as the replacing of earthly with heavenly clothes (*2 Enoch* 22.8–10). These

parallels suggest that the resurrection-clothing imagery in 1 Corinthians 15 is probably a product of Paul's recognition of the contemporary Jewish transformation idea, described by clothing symbolism."

The perishable body *must clothe itself* with an imperishable one. This is the only way mortal and perishable human beings can inherit the imperishable kingdom of God (v. 50). Paul often uses the language of clothing or changing clothes figuratively for the transforming work of God through Christ in the lives of believers (besides vv. 53–54, see Rom. 13:12, 14; Gal. 3:27; Eph. 4:24; 6:11, 14; Col. 3:10, 12; 1 Thess. 5:8). We pointed out above that Hugenberger has suggested that the gift of special clothing is often associated with inheritance or the identification of a special heir in biblical and ancient Near Eastern thought.

Verse 54 explains (metaphorically) how the earthly body becomes fit for heavenly existence at the Parousia and how relates it to God's final victory over death: *When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: "Death has been swallowed up in victory."* Death is vanquished by the resurrection. Paul supports this assertion with a quotation from Isaiah 25:8. The verse from which Paul quotes is part of an oracle of salvation (Isa. 25:6–10a) which envisions God's universal salvation of "all peoples" (25:6, 7; cf. "all nations" in 25:7) and the ultimate destruction of the power of death. The verse is frequently cited in rabbinic literature, where it is taken to be a divine promise that death would be no more in the age to come (*Moʾed Qaṭan* 3:9; *Exodus Rabbah* 15:21; 30:3; *Deuteronomy Rabbah* 2:30; *Lamentations Rabbah* 1:41; *Ecclesiastes Rabbah* 1:7; *b. Pesaḥim* 68a; *b. Ketubbot* 30b).

Paul's *"Death has been swallowed up in victory"* differs markedly from the LXX, which reads literally, "death, being strong, swallowed (them) up" (the context suggests that the nations have been swallowed up by death). However, Aquila, Theodotion, and Symmachus have differing variants, some of which are quite close to Paul's citation.[334] Paul was probably following a preexisting Greek text (Rev. 21:4 cites the same tradition). Alternatively, as Hays indicates, Paul may have altered "punishment/penalty" in Hosea 13:14 LXX to "victory"[336] and inserted it in his quotation of Isaiah 25:8 to create a word link with the next verse. It is also possible that the Isaiah citation supplies the word "victory" to the Hosea text (see below).

The metaphor of "swallowing up" suggests the destructive power of an overwhelming force or creature. Death may have its sting (vv. 55–56), but if it is *swallowed up* as prey it has more than met its match, like a mouse being swallowed up by a predator (1 Pet. 5:8 provides the image of "a roaring lion looking for someone to devour"). Once it is swallowed up, no trace of its existence is left behind. The victory over the swallowed victim is complete and uncontestable. In 2 Corinthians 5:4, in a similar context of discussing the overtaking of mortality by immortality, Paul expresses the desire "to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life."

In Paul's mind, the final destruction of death requires the resurrection of the dead. In citing Isaiah's eschatological vision Paul ties God's triumph over death (and universal salvation) to the resurrection of the body. For Paul, resurrection is the necessary outcome of what God has done in Christ and what he intends to do for his people. Paul's personification of death, following the lead of both Isaiah 25:8 and Hosea 13:14, depicts it not as the inevitable and benign fate of all humans but as "an alien, inimical power," nothing less than a tragedy. In the words of Isaiah 25:7, death is "the shroud that is cast over all peoples, the sheet that is spread over all nations." Death

for Paul is a power that casts its ominous shadow over us all and must be not just removed but defeated. A key emphasis of this whole chapter has been that what is required for complete victory over God's enemies includes the total defeat of death, "not a compromise in which death is allowed to have the body while some other aspect of the human being (the soul? the spirit?) goes marching on."

15:55–56 Paul's quotation from Isaiah 25:8 leads him to another Old Testament text about victory being taken from death as he celebrates God's final victory over death, both in the resurrection of Christ and in its implications for all his people. He quotes from Hosea 13:14 and then comments on that verse to show the relationship between victory over death and victory over sin (and its use of the law). Like the first four lines in vv. 53–54, the two lines of v. 55 reflect a tight parallelism:

> *55 "Where, O death, is your victory?*
> *Where, O death, is your sting?"*
> *56 The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law.*

Hosea 13:14 is part of a prophecy of judgment upon Ephraim: "The guilt of Ephraim is stored up, his sins are kept on record" (Hos. 13:12). Verse 14 contains four rhetorical questions. The first two expect a negative answer: "Shall I ransom them from the power of Sheol? Shall I redeem them from death?" Paul quotes the last two, which act as a summons to personified Death and Sheol: "O Death, where are your plagues? O Sheol, where is your sting?" (ESV).[341] In the LXX the lines read, "Where is your punishment/penalty, O death? Where is your sting, O Hades?"

Paul's quotation of Hosea 13:14 raises the question of death's *sting*. In the psalm the sting seems to be in synonymous parallelism with "plagues" in the Hebrew text and "punishment/penalty" in the LXX. In Paul's citation "plagues/punishment" is transformed into "victory" so that there appears to be a synonymous parallelism between death's *victory* and its *sting*. Paul goes on to say that the sting of death is sin. If this is correct, it means that we should understand sin to be both death's victory and death's sting.

Con Campbell has argued that *the sting of death* would be better translated "the stinger of death" and that sin is not death's sting in the sense that it is the consequence of death, but rather, as Paul is usually understood to argue elsewhere, death is the result of sin. Death uses sin as a scorpion or bee might use its stinger to accomplish its purpose. But BDAG points out, in commenting on the word for "sting" used here, that Paul's use of the imagery is "transcultural: a friend of a teacher named Theodoros records in an epitaph that he felt a[n] … 'unceasing sting'[344] because of his death." This suggests that death's sting was thought of as the shadow of its lingering effects. Isaiah 25:8, quoted by Paul in v. 54, fits with this in that there the swallowing up of death is tied to the promise that the Lord "will wipe away the tears from all faces" and "remove his people's disgrace from all the earth." Thus it seems best to maintain the translation "sting of death" and recognize that Paul may alternate between seeing death's power behind sin's throne and seeing sin as the power behind death's throne. God will destroy death as well as even the shadow of its effects on us or creation. Paul's argument in this chapter starts with Christ paying the penalty for sin and moves to the destruction of all of God's enemies, including the presence and power of sin in our lives and death itself, the "last enemy," which is both a result of sin and the great promoter of sin. On the last day believers will find themselves both innocent of the guilt of sin and free of the power and presence of sin. This chapter is ultimately about the

execution of God's plan, secured by Christ's death and resurrection and guaranteed by his continuing reign and ultimate destruction of his enemies, to bring about the complete renewal of humanity and creation. Not only will the ultimate enemy, death, be destroyed, but every trace of its causes and consequences, every one of its allies and partners will be removed.

Of course, for Paul, as in the teaching found in Ezekiel 36–37, it is spiritual death, manifest in the weakness of the flesh, that explains the human incapacity to resist sin's temptation. Romans 7–8 explicitly lays the responsibility for our death at the door of sin. Sin was even able to use the law/commandment, despite the fact that it is holy, righteous, and good (7:12). Sin "used what is good to bring about my death" (7:13). So clearly sin brings about death. But how did sin manage to use God's holy and spiritual law to bring about our death? It is not because sin is the ultimate evil power. It is due to the fact that "I am unspiritual, sold as a slave to sin" (7:14). It is "sin living in me" that causes me to sin (7:17, 20). There is something in me that is "waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within me" (7:23). The law was powerless "because it was weakened by the sinful nature" (Rom. 8:3). As Paul puts it in Ephesians 2:1–3, our sinful lives are grounded in the fact that we are "dead in [our] transgressions and sins." So in a very basic sense sin is the result of death just as death is (originally and ultimately) the result of sin. Paul had already said that "[t]he last enemy to be destroyed is death" (1 Cor. 15:26). Clearly for Paul it is death that uses sin for its purposes, and not the other way around.

Paul employs an eschatological hermeneutic in his use of Hosea 13:14, turning a text about judgment into one declaring salvation, for we are not under the law and the resurrection of Christ signals the beginning of the new age of redemption. "Paul projects an eschatological vision of a stingless death precisely because Jesus Christ has himself absorbed the sting on the basis of how his death and resurrection addresses the problem of human sin and the law." Interpreting the passage from the perspective of the resurrection of Christ, Paul turns the summons to death into a taunt. The rhetorical questions now sneer defiantly at death's impotence in the face of God's powerful act of mercy and forgiveness in Christ. In Hosea death is called on to punish sin, but thanks to Christ such a role is no longer needed (1 Cor. 15:3, 17). Death's dominion over the whole earth has been ended, its "sting" drained of potency.

Paul provides an extremely concise commentary on his quotation of Hosea 13:14 in v. 56. He suggests that the sting of death mentioned in Hosea 13:14b LXX has to do with sin, and points out that the law ended up reinforcing the power of sin and death over human lives. Paul's epigrammatic statements in v. 56 consist of two maxims, the second being built upon the first. The nexus between sin and death is prepared for by the allusions to the fall in 15:21–22. Vlachos argues convincingly that rather than originating from an issue in the Corinthian church, Paul's assertion that *the power of sin is the law* may also arise out of an edenic context. There is evidence that Paul found the triad of law, sin, and death present in the Garden of Eden. That law plays a catalytic role in Eden is implicit in the story depicted in Romans 7:7–11. There, as in Romans 5:12–14, the fall is the prototype for sins under the Mosaic law.

Paul gives further evidence of his understanding of the relationship between sin and death in Romans 5:12, 21; 6:16, 23; 7:5, 13; 8:2. It seems that in Paul's thinking sin leads to spiritual death, and spiritual death is also, for everyone other than Adam, at the root of all post-Adamic sin.

15:57 Having mentioned the power of sin and the sting of death in the previous verse, Paul switches back to the main theme—the fact that through the resurrection of the dead death has

been robbed of victory and has been swallowed up by God's victory over it (and all enemies mentioned in vv. 25–26) through Christ: *But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ*. The motif of victory was introduced in vv. 54–55, where it was announced that rather than being able to claim victory death itself had been swallowed up in victory. Now Paul leaves no doubt whatsoever about where that inversion came from—how it is that victory has been stolen out of death's jaws and has swallowed up death itself. It is all *thanks … to God*.

The word translated "thanks" is the word that is usually translated "grace" but which in contexts like this one serves as a "response to generosity or beneficence," is used "mostly of gratitude to God or Christ," and "refers to appropriate response to the Deity for benefits conferred" (BDAG). It is appropriately translated "thanks." As BDAG points out, in this usage it is common for the basis for the thanksgiving to be indicated in a participle agreeing with "to God" (e.g., 2 Cor. 2:14; 8:16; Josephus, *Antiquities* 6.145; Philo, *On Dreams* 2:213) such as is found in the Greek text here (in the TNIV the participial clause modifying "to God" is translated as a separate clause: *He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ*).

In v. 38 Paul pointed out that "God gives" the naked seed a body. That verse was already pointing forward to this one, where the idea is further unpacked. God's giving resurrection bodies to his people is part and parcel of what it means for him to give us the ultimate victory through Christ. Verses 20–28 made it clear that it is the resurrected Christ whose reign over all things brings God's enemies to their proper end and guarantees the ultimate conclusion in which God is "all in all." That is, Christ (more specifically, as here, the "*Lord* Jesus Christ") guarantees the Father's ultimate victory. Here Paul makes it clear that God's victory is also our victory. It is the victory that God *gives us … through our Lord Jesus Christ*. In a strange paradox, the Christian needs to learn that "it's not about me" but about Christ the Lord and his agenda. Once that has been properly grasped, one may go back and recognize that, as it turns out, God's agenda has been that of redeeming us (and the rest of his creation) and giving us the ultimate victory over the enemies of his righteous reign.

G. Final Appeal in Light of the Affirmation of the Resurrection, 15:58

Paul introduces his conclusion to the chapter with a concluding conjunction and a vocative: *Therefore, my dear brothers and sisters*…. This is followed up with a call to "be/become"[350] three things: "steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord." (The TNIV separates the three points into three distinct sentences with the final clause of the sentence seemingly modifying just the clause before it rather than the sentence as a whole: *Therefore … stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain*.) The first two terms are synonyms, the first "pert[aining] to being firmly or solidly in place" and the second meaning "immovable." The third part clarifies the precise manner or issue with which Paul would have the readers remain so steadfast and immovable, namely, in their constant involvement in the work of the Lord. The theme of constancy found in the first two terms is reflected in a slightly different way in the word "always" in "always abounding in the work of the Lord." To "abound" in the Lord's work, in context, is to be constantly giving oneself to that work (as suggested by the TNIV). To hesitate in, desist from, or carry out the Lord's work in a halfhearted manner would be to reflect a lack of firmness or steadfastness; it would be to be movable rather than immovable.

The logical relationship between the final clauses of the verse makes it clear that *the work of the Lord* here is the same as the readers' *labor in the Lord* in the final clause. What counts as the work of the Lord (or labor in the Lord) and what (if anything) does not? Paul refers to the work of or in the Lord in 1 Corinthians 3:13–15; 9:1; 16:10. He refers to things done out of service to Christ as labor in 1 Corinthians 3:8; 2 Corinthians 6:5; 10:15; 11:23, 27; Galatians 6:17; 1 Thessalonians 1:3; 2:9; 3:5; 2 Thessalonians 3:8. By *labor* is meant Christian ministry above all (see 3:8, where Paul uses the same word and speaks of reward for labor as he does in this verse), but probably also includes any activity that would be undertaken out of commitment to Christ, especially any "activity that is burdensome," that is, any activity that one would not naturally engage in were it not for their faith in Christ. Back in v. 19 Paul had said that "[i]f only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all others," presumably because we willingly engage in burdensome and/or dangerous activities for the sake of Christ or others that we might not be willing to do were it not for our resurrection-based faith.

The reason Paul gives at the end of the verse, *because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain*, applies to all of the exhortations at its beginning. It is because they know that their labor is not in vain that they should remain steadfast, unmovable, and always abounding in the work of the Lord. Paul uses the figure of litotes, a type of understatement in which an affirmative is expressed by negating its opposite. To say that our labor is not in vain is to say that our labor will be fully rewarded.

What Paul says about their labor here he already said would apply to their faith and his preaching (vv. 14, 17). He has already established that all of life is in vain if there is no resurrection. As it is, our life and labor are not in vain but have meaning, purpose, direction, and their proper final reward. The life of true wisdom which rejects sexual immorality, greed, and idolatry in favor of a life of integrity before the Lord who was raised from the dead and whose reign will consummate God's redemptive plan is the only life with ultimate meaning in that it reflects the continuity between God's renewed humanity both before and after the resurrection:

> The final verse of the chapter could be felt as an anticlimax, but only if we had allowed ourselves to forget the multiple ways in which this extensive discussion of the resurrection was linked to the rest of the letter.... [Paul] redirects [the readers'] gaze to the present time, to the tasks awaiting attention and the call to be "steadfast and immovable" in them. The point of it all has been that, despite the discontinuity between the present mode of corruptible physicality and the future world of non-corruptible physicality, there is an underlying continuity between present bodily life and future bodily life, and this gives meaning and direction to present Christian living.

In 1 Corinthians 3:8–14 and 9:17–18 Paul spoke of God's reward for faithful service. The rewards to which Paul and his readers could look forward were mainly postmortem or post-resurrection rewards (as v. 19 made clear). This is in keeping with the model of Christ which Paul holds out in Philippians 2:5–11. We are to "have the same attitude of mind Christ Jesus had." He took "the very nature of a servant" and "humbled himself by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross! Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." Christians do not expect to be given "the name that is above every name," but they do

understand that as God has done with Christ he will also reward them for their own sacrificial and servant-like obedience to the gospel, and exalt them in the time of their own resurrection. In a similar vein the author of the Letter to the Hebrews exhorts us to fix our eyes on Jesus, "the pioneer and perfecter of faith": "For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such opposition from sinners, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart" (Heb. 12:2–3). This whole chapter serves as a call to faithful Christian service in the assurance that comes from the resurrection—the assurance that sacrifices made for Christ and his kingdom are not made in vain, but will be richly rewarded in the fullness of that kingdom.[1]

[1] Ciampa, R. E., & Rosner, B. S. (2010). *The First Letter to the Corinthians* (pp. 736–839). William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company.