



## 1 Corinthians - Chapter Fifteen

### Summary of Chapter Fifteen

This chapter forms a great climax to the whole letter. Paul is still trying to get the Corinthians to understand where they are in God's long story of humanity.

It appears that the Corinthians had raised some doubts in their letter over the certainty of the resurrection of believers and Paul argues convincingly the historical accuracy of Jesus' resurrection and therefore the eventual eternal state for all who have placed their hope in him. After all, if there is no resurrection then Christian faith is futile and nonexistent.

### **VI. 1 Corinthians 15:1-58 - The Futility of Faith If the Dead Are Not Raised**

Many people in the ancient Greco-Roman world believed that death extinguished life completely or led to a permanent but shadowy and insubstantial existence in the underworld. The concept of a physical, embodied existence after death was known mainly from popular fables and was thought laughable by the educated.

Paul deals with the Corinthians' denial of and confusion about the future, bodily resurrection of Christians. These issues were probably raised in their letter to him; refer to 1 Corinthians 7:1.

#### **VI.a 1 Corinthians 15:1-11 - The Resurrection of Christ**

Paul first establishes the historical reliability of Jesus' resurrection in order to lay a firm foundation for his argument that it was only the first step in the resurrection of all deceased Christians.

<sup>1</sup> Now I should remind you, brothers and sisters, of the good news that I proclaimed to you, which you in turn received, in which also you stand,  
<sup>2</sup> through which also you are being saved, if you hold firmly to the message that I proclaimed to you – unless you have come to believe in vain. <sup>3</sup> For I handed on to you as of first importance what I in turn had received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the  
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scriptures, <sup>4</sup> and that he was buried, and that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures,

### 1 Corinthians 15:1-4

The good news that I proclaimed to you is the Gospel message. Yet, this was not new as it had been the message from old: <<*Get you up to a high mountain, O Zion, herald of good tidings; lift up your voice with strength, O Jerusalem, herald of good tidings, lift it up, do not fear; say to the cities of Judah, 'Here is your God!'*>> (Isaiah 40:9), and: <<*Look! On the mountains the feet of one who brings good tidings, who proclaims peace! Celebrate your festivals, O Judah, fulfil your vows, for never again shall the wicked invade you; they are utterly cut off*>> (Nahum 1:15).

You in turn received, I handed on to you. Paul is using commonly recognised language for handing on, intact, a body of information that one has received from others: <<*then you no longer permit doing anything for a father or mother, thus making void the word of God through your tradition that you have handed on*>> (Mark 7:12-13a), <<*just as they were handed on to us by those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and servants of the word*>> (Luke 1:2), <<*for we have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place and will change the customs that Moses handed on to us*>> (Acts 6:14), <<*I commend you because you remember me in everything and maintain the traditions just as I handed them on to you*>> (1 Corinthians 11:2), <<*For I received from the Lord what I also handed on to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, 'This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me'*>> (1 Corinthians 11:23-24), <<*Keep on doing the things that you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, and the God of peace will be with you*>> (Philippians 4:9), and: <<*Beloved, while eagerly preparing to write to you about the salvation we share, I find it necessary to write and appeal to you to contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints*>> (Jude 3).

Raised on the third day. The Jews used a method of inclusive counting. Jesus was crucified on Friday, day one; remained unseen on the Saturday, day two; and was encountered in his risen form on Sunday, day three. Jesus had made this clear even before he was arrested: <<*From that time on, Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and undergo great suffering at the hands of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised*>> (Matthew 16:21).

What did the word 'resurrection' itself mean for Paul and his hearers? It did not mean 'life after death'. It was never a general term for any and every belief about what might happen to people after they die. It meant, very specifically, that people already dead would be given new bodies, would return to an embodied life not completely unlike the one they had had before. That is, it is not about some ephemeral existence but real life as it has always been understood by mankind.

In accordance with the Scriptures. The OT was an authoritative guide, not just concerning the character and values of God, but as a revelation of the Messiah that was to come. The climax to the long story of Israel's history bursts forth with the coming of their Messiah, his suffering, his death and subsequent resurrection: <<Jesus answered them, 'Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.' The Jews then said, 'This temple has been under construction for forty-six years, and will you raise it up in three days?' But he was speaking of the temple of his body. After he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this; and they believed the scripture and the word that Jesus had spoken>> (John 2:19-22), <<And Paul went in, as was his custom, and on three sabbath days argued with them from the scriptures, explaining and proving that it was necessary for the Messiah to suffer and to rise from the dead, and saying, 'This is the Messiah, Jesus whom I am proclaiming to you'>> (Acts 17:2-3), and: <<Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God, which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy scriptures, the gospel concerning his Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh and was declared to be Son of God with power according to the spirit of holiness by resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord>> (Romans 1:1-4). Paul may be thinking especially of Isaiah 53:3-12, which describes the substitutionary death and the vindication, after death, of God's servant, but he may also be thinking of other OT passages.

**Other pointers to the resurrection of Christ include:** <<After two days he will revive us; on the third day he will raise us up, that we may live before him>> (Hosea 6:2), <<But the Lord provided a large fish to swallow up Jonah; and Jonah was in the belly of the fish for three days and three nights>> (Jonah 1:17), and: <<For just as Jonah was for three days and three nights in the belly of the sea monster, so for three days and three nights the Son of Man will be in the heart of the earth>> (Matthew 12:40); and for the OT in general pointing to Christ: <<Then he said to them, 'Oh, how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared! Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?' Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures>> (Luke 24:25-27).

What Paul wants above all else is to make the Corinthians, and indeed anyone in the church, realise that they belong to the story that has unfolded in the OT. After all, Jesus' death and resurrection were crucial in dealing with the issues of sexual immorality in Chapter 6, they were fundamental in remembering him through the Lord's Supper in Chapter 11, and the deepest point in Chapter 13 is that love is the thing which will last into the new world that God will make. The fact that there is a new world, that it has already been launched in Jesus' resurrection, and that all God's people will be given new bodies in order to share in it, is basic to everything Paul has said.

<sup>5</sup> and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve.

### 1 Corinthians 15:5

Cephas is the Aramaic name for the apostle Peter and has been favoured by Paul in this letter. He and John were the first of the men who followed Jesus to know that his tomb was empty: <<*But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him, just as he told you*>> (Mark 16:7), <<*But Peter got up and ran to the tomb; stooping and looking in, he saw the linen cloths by themselves; then he went home, amazed at what had happened*>> (Luke 24:12), and: <<*He bent down to look in and saw the linen wrappings lying there, but he did not go in. Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen wrappings lying there*>> (John 20:5-6).

The twelve includes Judas Iscariot's replacement, Matthias: <<*And they cast lots for them, and the lot fell on Matthias; and he was added to the eleven apostles*>> (Acts 1:26).

<sup>6</sup> Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers and sisters at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have died.

### 1 Corinthians 15:6

He appeared to more than five hundred is excellent testimony to the resurrection of Jesus. It would be impossible to coerce so many people without the story unravelling if it were not true. Many of these witnesses were still alive when the NT Gospels and letters were written, and therefore able to give firsthand testimony to the truth of this tradition.

Though some have died or fallen asleep. Paul is careful not to exaggerate: <<*To the married I give this command – not I but the Lord – that the wife should not separate from her husband (but if she does separate, let her remain unmarried or else be reconciled to her husband), and that the husband should not divorce his wife. To the rest I say – I and not the Lord – that if any believer has a wife who is an unbeliever, and she consents to live with him, he should not divorce her*>> (1 Corinthians 7:10-12), where he carefully distinguishes between his own words and Jesus' words, evidence of the great care that early Christians took in their preservation of the historically accurate details about the life, death and resurrection of Jesus.

<sup>7</sup> Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles.

### 1 Corinthians 15:7

James was the half-brother of the Lord, or the son of Mary, at least: <<*but I did not see any other apostle except James the Lord's brother*>> (Galatians 1:19), and leader of the Jerusalem church: <<*He motioned to them with his hand to be silent, and described for them how the Lord had brought him out of the prison. And he added, 'Tell this to James and to the believers.'* Then he left and went to another place>> (Acts 12:17), <<*After they finished speaking, James replied, 'My brothers, listen to me'*>> (Acts 15:13), <<*The next day Paul went with us to visit James; and all the elders were present*>> (Acts 21:18), <<*and*

*when James and Cephas and John, who were acknowledged pillars, recognised the grace that had been given to me, they gave to Barnabas and me the right hand of fellowship, agreeing that we should go to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised>> (Galatians 2:9). Refer also to the comments made on 1 Corinthians 9:4-5.*

All the apostles. The group of apostles was larger than ‘the Twelve’ (v.5), including, among others, James and Paul (v.8). One of the qualifications for apostleship was seeing the Risen Lord Jesus: *<<Am I not free? Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord? Are you not my work in the Lord?>> (1 Corinthians 9:1).*

<sup>8</sup> Last of all, as to someone untimely born, he appeared also to me.

### 1 Corinthians 15:8

Last of all. Sandwiched between v.7 and v.9, this suggests that Paul thought there would be no more apostles chosen after him.

To someone untimely born literally means ‘torn from the womb’; Paul illustrates that he was almost too late to be a part of this most momentous of occasions in the history of the world. Yet he was chosen to be the last one to encounter the Risen Lord Jesus, or the last who had not known him in life, at least. No one should ever think they were born outside of God’s plan for them: *<<Perhaps you have come to royal dignity for just such a time as this>> (Esther 4:14b).*

He appeared also to me. Paul encountered the Risen Lord on the Road to Damascus, as recorded in Acts 9:3-6, thus making Paul an apostle. Refer to the comments made on 1 Corinthians 1:1.

<sup>9</sup> For I am the least of the apostles, unfit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God.

### 1 Corinthians 15:9

I persecuted the church of God. This verse is not a statement made in false humility for Luke’s historical account and Paul’s own confessions support this as a factual statement: *<<Then they dragged him out of the city and began to stone him; and the witnesses laid their coats at the feet of a young man named Saul. While they were stoning Stephen, he prayed, ‘Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.’ Then he knelt down and cried out in a loud voice, ‘Lord, do not hold this sin against them.’ When he had said this, he died. And Saul approved of their killing him. That day a severe persecution began against the church in Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered throughout the countryside of Judæa and Samaria. Devout men buried Stephen and made loud lamentation over him. But Saul was ravaging the church by entering house after house; dragging off both men and women, he committed them to prison>> (Acts 7:58-8:3), <<Meanwhile Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest and asked him for letters to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any who belonged to the Way, men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem>> (Acts*

9:1-2), <<You have heard, no doubt, of my earlier life in Judaism. I was violently persecuting the church of God and was trying to destroy it>> (Galatians 1:13), <<as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless>> (Philippians 3:6), and: <<even though I was formerly a blasphemer, a persecutor, and a man of violence. But I received mercy because I had acted ignorantly in unbelief>> (1 Timothy 1:13).

<sup>10</sup> But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace towards me has not been in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them – though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me.

### 1 Corinthians 15:10

The grace of God. Paul considered his conversion from ‘persecutor’ to ‘apostle to the Gentiles’ to be a free and wholly undeserved gift of God: <<Nevertheless, on some points I have written to you rather boldly by way of reminder, because of the grace given me by God to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles in the priestly service of the gospel of God, so that the offering of the Gentiles may be acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit>> (Romans 15:15-16), <<But when God, who had set me apart before I was born and called me through his grace, was pleased to reveal his Son to me>> (Galatians 1:15-16a), <<Of this gospel I have become a servant according to the gift of God’s grace that was given to me by the working of his power. Although I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given to me to bring to the Gentiles the news of the boundless riches of Christ>> (Ephesians 3:7-8), <<and the grace of our Lord overflowed for me with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus>> (1 Timothy 1:14). God’s grace did not lead to passivity, however, for it prompted hard work on Paul’s part.

His grace towards me has not been in vain is not so much to do with Paul’s hard work but his faithfulness in responding to Jesus’ call on his life: <<That night the Lord stood near him and said, ‘Keep up your courage! For just as you have testified for me in Jerusalem, so you must bear witness also in Rome’>> (Acts 23:11). He had similar encouragement during a violent storm at sea that led to a shipwreck on Malta: <<For last night there stood by me an angel of the God to whom I belong and whom I worship, and he said, “Do not be afraid, Paul; you must stand before the emperor; and indeed, God has granted safety to all those who are sailing with you”>> (Acts 27:23-24).

I worked harder than any of them. Paul worked as a tentmaker to earn his keep among the churches he planted: <<You remember our labour and toil, brothers and sisters; we worked night and day, so that we might not burden any of you while we proclaimed to you the gospel of God>> (1 Thessalonians 2:9), <<and we did not eat anyone’s bread without paying for it; but with toil and labour we worked night and day, so that we might not burden any of you>> (2 Thessalonians 3:8). He worked even harder at spreading the Gospel: <<Are they ministers of Christ? I am talking like a madman – I am a better one: with far greater labours, far more imprisonments, with countless floggings, and often near death>> (2 Corinthians 11:23), and: <<For this I toil and struggle with all the energy that he powerfully inspires within me>> (Colossians 1:29).

<sup>11</sup> Whether then it was I or they, so we proclaim and so you have come to believe.

### 1 Corinthians 15:11

I or they. Paul does not care who gets the credit for the Gospel's advancement, only that it advances. This is confirmed in: <<*I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth*>> (1 Corinthians 3:6), and: <<*the others proclaim Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely but intending to increase my suffering in my imprisonment. What does it matter? Just this, that Christ is proclaimed in every way, whether out of false motives or true; and in that I rejoice. Yes, and I will continue to rejoice*>> (Philippians 1:17-18).

### VI.b 1 Corinthians 15:12-34 - The Resurrection of the Dead

Paul next argues that there is a seamless connection between the resurrection of Christ in the recent past and the future resurrection of believers on the final day.

<sup>12</sup> Now if Christ is proclaimed as raised from the dead, how can some of you say there is no resurrection of the dead?

### 1 Corinthians 15:12

Raised from the dead. Some of the Corinthians were denying not that Jesus rose from the dead, for they believed this (v.11), but that his followers generally would be raised. Paul emphasises four times in vv.12-19 that those who deny the physical and bodily resurrection of believers also deny the bodily resurrection of Christ, even if they claim the latter is true, for the two are inseparable.

The resurrection of the dead was a long held expectation of the Jews: <<*And you shall know that I am the Lord, when I open your graves, and bring you up from your graves, O my people*>> (Ezekiel 37:13), and: <<*Many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt*>> (Daniel 12:2). It was confirmed by Jesus: <<*This is indeed the will of my Father, that all who see the Son and believe in him may have eternal life; and I will raise them up on the last day*>> (John 6:40). It was the belief of Martha after her brother Lazarus had died: <<*Martha said to him, 'I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day'*>> (John 11:24). However, it was disputed by the Jewish leadership group, the Sadducees: <<*The Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, or angel, or spirit; but the Pharisees acknowledge all three*>> (Acts 23:8). Paul was, of course, a Pharisee.

<sup>13</sup> If there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ has not been raised; <sup>14</sup> and if Christ has not been raised, then our proclamation has been in vain and your faith has been in vain.

### 1 Corinthians 15:13-14

Your faith has been in vain. Paul argues that the general resurrection of the dead is as assured as the resurrection of Jesus. Either both or neither of them is true. This is a fundamental aspect of the Christian faith and without which there can be

no such faith. Paul was convinced of this truth: <<*For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have died*>> (1 Thessalonians 4:14).

<sup>15</sup> We are even found to be misrepresenting God, because we testified of God that he raised Christ – whom he did not raise if it is true that the dead are not raised. <sup>16</sup> For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised.

### 1 Corinthians 15:15-16

**Misrepresenting God.** It is not Paul's or the other apostles' reputation that is at stake, it is that of God Almighty. If they were falsely claiming **of God that he raised Christ** they would actually be breaking the first commandment and would be judged accordingly: <<*You shall not make wrongful use of the name of the Lord your God, for the Lord will not acquit anyone who misuses his name*>> (Exodus 20:7). Breaking such a command would be unthinkable for a man like Paul.

<sup>17</sup> If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins.

### 1 Corinthians 15:17

**Still in your sins.** The proof that Christ's death was an effective substitutionary sacrifice for sins: <<*For I received from the Lord what I also handed on to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, 'This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.'* In the same way he took the cup also, after supper, saying, 'This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me'>> (1 Corinthians 11:23-25), lies in Jesus' resurrection from the dead: <<*who was handed over to death for our trespasses and was raised for our justification*>> (Romans 4:25). If, in fact, Christ has not been raised, then his death did not pay for sin, and there is no hope for life with God in heaven (vv.18-19).

**This passage does not mean that Christians are free from their sinful nature. That battle will continue for most of us during this life. What Jesus did for those who believe in him was to free us from the guilt and shame of our sin, allowing us to appear in God's presence as though we are innocent, even though we are in fact guilty.**

<sup>18</sup> Then those also who have died in Christ have perished. <sup>19</sup> If for this life only we have hoped in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied.

### 1 Corinthians 15:18-19

**Then those also who have died in Christ have perished.** This means eternally gone or no longer in existence, in the way modern humanists understand death.

If for this life only. Although Paul believed that those who died went to be with their Lord immediately after their death and prior to their resurrection: <<*Yes, we do have confidence, and we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord*>> (2 Corinthians 5:8), and: <<*For to me, living is Christ and dying is gain. If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labour for me; and I do not know which I prefer. I am hard pressed between the two: my desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better*>> (Philippians 1:21-23), he also conceived of the believer's eternal existence as an embodied existence. If there is no such existence, then there is no eternal life.

We are of all people most to be pitied. Paul views that the idea that Christians would place their hope in a lie would be far worse than having lived without hope at all!

<sup>20</sup> But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have died.

### 1 Corinthians 15:20

Christ has been raised from the dead. Christ's resurrection, grounded in the truth of eyewitness testimony (vv.4-8), changes everything. For it follows that there will also be a general resurrection of the dead into a time of judgement and reward: <<*The Father judges no one but has given all judgement to the Son, so that all may honour the Son just as they honour the Father. Anyone who does not honour the Son does not honour the Father who sent him. Very truly, I tell you, anyone who hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life, and does not come under judgement, but has passed from death to life*>> (John 5:22-24).

If God raised Christ from the dead, then Christ truly was the first fruits: <<*The choicest of the first fruits of your ground you shall bring into the house of the Lord your God*>> (Exodus 23:19a), <<*Speak to the people of Israel and say to them: When you enter the land that I am giving you and you reap its harvest, you shall bring the sheaf of the first fruits of your harvest to the priest*>> (Leviticus 23:10), <<*The first fruits of your grain, your wine, and your oil, as well as the first of the fleece of your sheep, you shall give him*>> (Deuteronomy 18:4), and: <<*We obligate ourselves to bring the first fruits of our soil and the first fruits of all fruit of every tree, year by year, to the house of the Lord*>> (Nehemiah 10:35); or the first of many others who would also be raised from the dead: <<*For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn within a large family*>> (Romans 8:29), and: <<*He is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that he might come to have first place in everything*>> (Colossians 1:18).

The term first fruits, Greek *aparchē*, refers to a first sample of an agricultural crop that indicates the nature and quality of the rest of the crop; therefore, Christ's resurrection body gives a foretaste of what those of believers will be like.

<sup>21</sup> For since death came through a human being, the resurrection of the dead has also come through a human being; <sup>22</sup> for as all die in Adam, so all will be made alive in Christ.

### 1 Corinthians 15:21-22

For as all die in Adam. Since Adam was held responsible for his part in original sin and is the first man from whom all others are biologically descended, then all people have imputed sin from that relationship. Elsewhere, Paul provides a more detailed account: *<<Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death came through sin, and so death spread to all because all have sinned – sin was indeed in the world before the law, but sin is not reckoned when there is no law. Yet death exercised dominion from Adam to Moses, even over those whose sins were not like the transgression of Adam, who is a type of the one who was to come. But the free gift is not like the trespass. For if the many died through the one man’s trespass, much more surely have the grace of God and the free gift in the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, abounded for the many. And the free gift is not like the effect of the one man’s sin. For the judgement following one trespass brought condemnation, but the free gift following many trespasses brings justification. If, because of the one man’s trespass, death exercised dominion through that one, much more surely will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness exercise dominion in life through the one man, Jesus Christ>>* (Romans 5:12-17).

All will be made alive in Christ as just noted, as well as in: *<<so that, just as sin exercised dominion in death, so grace might also exercise dominion through justification leading to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord>>* (Romans 5:21), *<<Therefore we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life>>* (Romans 6:4), and: *<<even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ – by grace you have been saved – and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus>>* (Ephesians 2:5-6). By divine appointment, Adam represented the whole human race that would follow him, and his sin therefore affected all human beings. Similarly, Christ represented all who would belong to him, and his obedience therefore affected all believers, as seen in v.23.

<sup>23</sup> But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ.

### 1 Corinthians 15:23

At his coming. When Christ returns, all his people from all time will receive resurrection bodies, never again subject to weakness, illness, aging, or death. Until that time, those who have died exist in heaven as spirits without bodies: *<<But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, and to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God the judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect>>* (Hebrews 12:22-23), and:

*<<When he opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slaughtered for the word of God and for the testimony they had given>> (Revelation 6:9).*

Those who belong to Christ demonstrates that the ‘all’ in relation to Christ in v.22 does not imply universalism, that is, the concept that all will be saved irrespective of whether they have chosen Christ or not.

<sup>24</sup> Then comes the end, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father, after he has destroyed every ruler and every authority and power. <sup>25</sup> For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. <sup>26</sup> The last enemy to be destroyed is death. <sup>27</sup> For ‘God has put all things in subjection under his feet.’ But when it says, ‘All things are put in subjection’, it is plain that this does not include the one who put all things in subjection under him.

### 1 Corinthians 15:24-27

When he hands over the kingdom to God. The Kingdom here is God’s original creation, where the King has been mostly absent since the fall. Yet it was always known that it would be taken back by God: *<<Those who have been saved shall go up to Mount Zion to rule Mount Esau; and the kingdom shall be the Lord’s>> (Obadiah 21).*

The reign of Christ and the subjection of all things under his feet is reflected in other Scriptures, including: *<<You have given them dominion over the works of your hands; you have put all things under their feet>> (Psalm 8:6),* quoted in v.27, which speaks of Jesus’ human nature, and: *<<The Lord says to my lord, ‘Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies your footstool’>> (Psalm 110:1);* this verse is the one identified as being quoted in v.25 and refers to the Messiah.

**Other NT verses related to Paul’s theme here include:** *<<God put this power to work in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the age to come>> (Ephesians 1:20-21), <<He disarmed the rulers and authorities and made a public example of them, triumphing over them in it>> (Colossians 2:15), <<Now God did not subject the coming world, about which we are speaking, to angels. But someone has testified somewhere, ‘What are human beings that you are mindful of them, or mortals, that you care for them? You have made them for a little while lower than the angels; you have crowned them with glory and honour, subjecting all things under their feet.’ Now in subjecting all things to them, God left nothing outside their control. As it is, we do not yet see everything in subjection to them, but we do see Jesus, who for a little while was made lower than the angels, now crowned with glory and honour because of the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone>> (Hebrews 2:5-9), <<Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our*

*faith, who for the sake of the joy that was set before him endured the cross, disregarding its shame, and has taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of God>> (Hebrews 12:1-2), and: <<For Christ also suffered for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, in order to bring you to God. He was put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit, in which also he went and made a proclamation to the spirits in prison, who in former times did not obey, when God waited patiently in the days of Noah, during the building of the ark, in which a few, that is, eight people, were saved through water. And baptism, which this prefigured, now saves you – not as a removal of dirt from the body, but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers made subject to him>> (1 Peter 3:18-22).*

The last enemy to be destroyed is death. When believers are finally raised from the dead, the destruction of death will be complete (vv.54-55). This is also reflected in: <<*And he will destroy on this mountain the shroud that is cast over all peoples, the sheet that is spread over all nations; he will swallow up death for ever. Then the Lord God will wipe away the tears from all faces, and the disgrace of his people he will take away from all the earth, for the Lord has spoken>> (Isaiah 25:7-8), <<Since, therefore, the children share flesh and blood, he himself likewise shared the same things, so that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by the fear of death>> (Hebrews 2:14-15), <<And the sea gave up the dead that were in it, Death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and all were judged according to what they had done. Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire>> (Revelation 20:13-14), and: <<he will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away>> (Revelation 21:4).*

The theme of Genesis chapters 1-3, picked up in many of the Psalms, is that death is the enemy. Anyone who pretends otherwise is contradicting the goodness of God's creation. This is not saying that accepting death is not part of life or that it is tragic. It has to be faced for what it is - the consequence of sin.

It should also be noted that Paul never says that a person passes through death into heaven. What Paul is saying here is that, at that final moment, death itself will be conquered. And, since death is the unmaking of God's creation, resurrection will be its remaking. That, and nothing less, is the Christian hope.

<sup>28</sup> When all things are subjected to him, then the Son himself will also be subjected to the one who put all things in subjection under him, so that God may be all in all.

## 1 Corinthians 15:28

The Son himself will also be subjected. Jesus is one with God the Father and equal to the Father in deity: <<*The Father and I are one*>> (John 10:30), <<*Jesus said to him, ‘Have I been with you all this time, Philip, and you still do not know me? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, “Show us the Father”?’*>> (John 14:9), <<*yet for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist*>> (1 Corinthians 8:6), and: <<*But of the Son he says, ‘Your throne, O God, is for ever and ever, and the righteous sceptre is the sceptre of your kingdom*>> (Hebrews 1:8); yet functionally subordinate to him: <<*He said, ‘Abba, Father, for you all things are possible; remove this cup from me; yet, not what I want, but what you want’*>> (Mark 14:36), <<*I can do nothing on my own. As I hear, I judge; and my judgement is just, because I seek to do not my own will but the will of him who sent me*>> (John 5:30), and: <<*I glorified you on earth by finishing the work that you gave me to do*>> (John 17:4). This verse shows that his subjection to the Father will continue for all eternity.

So that God may be all in all, not in the sense that God will be everything and everything will be God, as some Eastern religions imagine, but in the sense that God’s supreme authority over everything will be eternally established, never to be threatened again.

<sup>29</sup> Otherwise, what will those people do who receive baptism on behalf of the dead? If the dead are not raised at all, why are people baptised on their behalf?

## 1 Corinthians 15:29

Receive baptism on behalf of the dead. Some interpreters throughout the centuries have thought this referred to vicarious baptism on behalf of deceased people, probably those who had believed in Christ but had not been baptised before they died, such as the thief on the cross next to Jesus: <<*He replied, ‘Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise’*>> (Luke 23:43). But the interpretation is uncertain, and whatever the practice is, Paul reports it without necessarily approving it, and is clearly not commanding it.

Baptism on behalf of the dead is an important part of Mormonism, but the Bible gives no support to the idea that anyone can be saved apart from personal faith in Christ.

Other interpreters argue that by the dead Paul means the bodies of living Christians, which are subject to death and decay: they are baptised on behalf of their dying bodies, showing hope that their bodies will rise again. On this view, Paul argues here that the baptism of perishing bodies is useless if the dead are not raised.

<sup>30</sup> And why are we putting ourselves in danger every hour? <sup>31</sup> I die every day! That is as certain, brothers and sisters, as my boasting of you — a boast that I make in Christ Jesus our Lord. <sup>32</sup> If with merely human

hopes I fought with wild animals at Ephesus, what would I have gained by it? If the dead are not raised,

‘Let us eat and drink,  
for tomorrow we die.’

<sup>33</sup> Do not be deceived:

‘Bad company ruins good morals.’

<sup>34</sup> Come to a sober and right mind, and sin no more; for some people have no knowledge of God. I say this to your shame.

### 1 Corinthians 15:30-34

Why are we putting ourselves in danger every hour? Paul’s life in Christ was one long struggle against the persecution and rejection he faced: <<*on frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from bandits, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brothers and sisters*>> (2 Corinthians 11:26). However, Paul was confident that the Lord would preserve him for the service he was called to undertake: <<*The Lord will rescue me from every evil attack and save me for his heavenly kingdom. To him be the glory for ever and ever. Amen*>> (2 Timothy 4:18).

My boasting of you. Paul would write again of this boasting to other churches about the Corinthians: <<*Now it is not necessary for me to write to you about the ministry to the saints, for I know your eagerness, which is the subject of my boasting about you to the people of Macedonia, saying that Achaia has been ready since last year; and your zeal has stirred up most of them*>> (2 Corinthians 9:1-2).

I fought with wild animals at Ephesus. This is unlikely to be a literal reference, unlike the gladiators who had to fight for their lives in places like the Coliseum in Rome. It most likely refers to spiritual battles fought in prayer, moral battles against the culture of his day, or the political and religious battles he faced, such as the time when a mob led by the silversmiths marched into the city baying for Paul’s blood. Refer to Acts 19:21-41. Paul was, of course, writing this letter from Ephesus and he encountered enormous opposition to the Gospel whilst there.

Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die is a quotation from Isaiah 22:13, and bad company ruins good morals is similar to: <<*Make no friends with those given to anger, and do not associate with hotheads, or you may learn their ways and entangle yourself in a snare*>> (Proverbs 22:24-25). However, it is actually a quotation from the Greek poet Menander. What Paul is saying - and quoting a pagan poet is a heavily ironic way of making the point - is that the Corinthian Christians, who ought by now to be able to show and tell the truth of the one living God to their pagan neighbours, are instead continuing to allow the pagan thought-forms of those neighbours to distort and even deny the central beliefs they should be gladly holding.

Risk-taking activities for the sake of the Gospel are done in vain if there is no resurrection. No knowledge of God manifests itself in denial of the bodily resurrection of believers. That Paul can state I say this to your shame could indicate either their shame at doubting the general resurrection or that their behaviour has prevented others from accepting the Gospel at all!

Paul is making the point that, if there is no resurrection, then like the gladiators who would share a last supper together the evening before going into the arena to die, the struggle that Paul and many other Christians went through for the sake of the Gospel would be totally meaningless. Therefore, Paul is not arguing the case that the resurrection of Jesus is true; he wants his readers to think through the consequences for life if it is a lie!

#### VI.c 1 Corinthians 15:35-58 - The Resurrection Body

Apparently, the Corinthians did not understand how material bodies, subject as they were to sickness, death, and eventual decay, could live eternally. In this section, Paul explains that God will somehow change the bodies of believers to make them immortal.

<sup>35</sup> But someone will ask, ‘How are the dead raised? With what kind of body do they come?’ <sup>36</sup> Fool! What you sow does not come to life unless it dies. <sup>37</sup> And as for what you sow, you do not sow the body that is to be, but a bare seed, perhaps of wheat or of some other grain. <sup>38</sup> But God gives it a body as he has chosen, and to each kind of seed its own body. <sup>39</sup> Not all flesh is alike, but there is one flesh for human beings, another for animals, another for birds, and another for fish. <sup>40</sup> There are both heavenly bodies and earthly bodies, but the glory of the heavenly is one thing, and that of the earthly is another. <sup>41</sup> There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars; indeed, star differs from star in glory. <sup>42</sup> So it is with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown is perishable, what is raised is imperishable. <sup>43</sup> It is sown in dishonour, it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power.

#### 1 Corinthians 15:35-43

How are the dead raised? Using illustrations from various realms of the natural world, Paul explains that God will change the bodies of the deceased to make them appropriate for their new, imperishable existence. Verses 42-43 emphasise the discontinuity between present corruptible bodies and future immortal bodies.

What you sow does not come to life unless it dies. This is in line with Jesus’ statement about the meaning of his own life and death: <<*Very truly, I tell you, 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*>> (John 12:24). This is not meant to give the impression that a dead body can be buried and grow into something different; it speaks of the principle of transformation, of a new body in continuity with the old yet somehow different.

God gives it a body as he has chosen. God designed all bodies in creation. He has also demonstrated that he can resurrect that which has decayed. This was first demonstrated in the valley of the dry bones: <<*He said to me, 'Mortal, can these bones live?' I answered, 'O Lord God, you know'>> (Ezekiel 37:3). It clearly indicates that resurrection bodies are not part of some natural process but will come about by the power of God.*

When Paul writes of the glory of the heavenly bodies he is referring generally to their brightness. However, with regard to the resurrection body having glory it is opposed to shame, humiliation and dishonour.

Raised imperishable means they are no longer subject to physical decay or aging.

Sown in dishonour, raised in glory, sown in weakness, raised in power. These terms have to do with outward physical appearance: the Christian's resurrection body will be physically attractive and perfectly constructed beyond anything imaginable.

This passage is very much a reflection of Genesis Chapter 1 where God created the heavenly bodies and, on earth, all the plants with their seeds for continuity of the species. He now goes on to his crowning glory in creation: humankind made in God's very own spiritual image.

<sup>44</sup> It is sown a physical body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a physical body, there is also a spiritual body. <sup>45</sup> Thus it is written, 'The first man, Adam, became a living being'; the last Adam became a life-giving spirit. <sup>46</sup> But it is not the spiritual that is first, but the physical, and then the spiritual. <sup>47</sup> The first man was from the earth, a man of dust; the second man is from heaven. <sup>48</sup> As was the man of dust, so are those who are of the dust; and as is the man of heaven, so are those who are of heaven. <sup>49</sup> Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we will also bear the image of the man of heaven.

### 1 Corinthians 15:44-49

It is sown a physical or natural body. The Greek term is *psychikos*, the adjectival form of the noun *psychē*, which is translated being in v.45 and can also be rendered 'life' or 'animated existence'.

Paul's contrast between physical and spiritual has nothing to do with the physicality of a human body compared to what some may believe to be that of a ghost. It is a contrast between that which is temporally alive and that which has an eternal existence with God. That is, the contrast between a body animated by one type of life and a body animated by another type. Paul provides a similar contrast in: <<*If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through his Spirit that dwells in you*>> (Romans 8:11). Refer also to 1 Corinthians 2:14-3:3, and the comments made there.

Starting from the account in Genesis 2:7, Paul explains that God had created the first man, Adam from the dust and then animated him with divine breath. Christ,

however, is the last Adam, and his resurrection gave him a spiritual and therefore imperishable body: <<*He will transform the body of our humiliation so that it may be conformed to the body of his glory, by the power that also enables him to make all things subject to himself*>> (Philippians 3:21).

By spiritual body Paul does not mean an immaterial body but a body animated and empowered by the Holy Spirit.

Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we will also bear the image of the man of heaven. God has created and tested a prototype for this new creation in and through the resurrection body of Jesus. This passage does not imply that people die, go to heaven and take on this new resurrection body. It is about this new humanity coming down from heaven to earth at the time of the general resurrection. For all had borne the image of the old, perpetuated through the generations: <<*When Adam had lived for one hundred and thirty years, he became the father of a son in his likeness, according to his image, and named him Seth*>> (Genesis 5:3). There will come a time when believers will only bear the image of Christ: <<*For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn within a large family*>> (Romans 8:29). This will be the renewal of all things: <<*For I am about to create new heavens and a new earth; the former things shall not be remembered or come to mind*>> (Isaiah 65:17).

The overall point of the chapter is that, in the resurrection of Jesus himself, the power of the creator God was at work to bring about the renewal of the world, and that, through the work of the Spirit, this same creator God will give new, glorious, deathless bodily life to all his people.

<sup>50</sup> What I am saying, brothers and sisters, is this: flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable.

### 1 Corinthians 15:50

Corruptible bodies, i.e. flesh and blood, cannot inherit the Kingdom; hence, the need for resurrection.

Nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. Humans do not inherit eternal life through any work or merit on their part. Those who inherit the Kingdom of God receive it as a gift by accepting God's Son as their Lord and Saviour: <<*Then the king will say to those at his right hand, "Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world"*>> (Matthew 25:34).

<sup>51</sup> Listen, I will tell you a mystery! We will not all die, but we will all be changed, <sup>52</sup> in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. <sup>53</sup> For this perishable body must put on imperishability, and this mortal body must put on immortality.

### 1 Corinthians 15:51-53

I will tell you a mystery! Refer to the comments made on 1 Corinthians 4:1. Christians who are alive at the time of the resurrection will be transformed so that their bodies become spiritual and immortal like the bodies of those who are resurrected from the dead: <<**He will transform the body of our humiliation so that it may be conformed to the body of his glory, by the power that also enables him to make all things subject to himself**>> (Philippians 3:21). Refer also to 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18.

We will all be changed, in a moment. This transformation will be as mysterious as it is glorious. However, Paul is not so much interested in any physical change in this new resurrection body as the total transformation of the inner person as they become truly Christ-like in every aspect of their being.

<sup>54</sup> When this perishable body puts on imperishability, and this mortal body puts on immortality, then the saying that is written will be fulfilled:

‘Death has been swallowed up in victory.’

<sup>55</sup> ‘Where, O death, is your victory?

Where, O death, is your sting?’

### 1 Corinthians 15:54-55

When this perishable body puts on imperishability. Paul reaches a climax to this stage of the argument between a physical and spiritual body. It is a contrast between corruption, where the body decays and dies, and incorruption that will last forever; it is a contrast between shame and honour; it is the contrast between weakness and power!

Death has been swallowed up is taken from Isaiah 25:8, with the remaining quote taken from Hosea 13:14. Death has claimed a victory, and the pagan world shrugs its shoulders and acknowledges it. The Jewish world at its best declares that God remains the creator and will do a new thing. The Christian message is that he has already done the new thing in his Christ, Jesus; and that he will do it for all Jesus’ people through the power of the Holy Spirit.

<sup>56</sup> The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. <sup>57</sup> But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

### 1 Corinthians 15:56-57

Since Paul writes here the sting of death is sin and elsewhere: <<**For the wages of sin is death**>> (Romans 6:23a), there is clearly a circle of life that is bound by death. No wonder so many people live their lives in such hopelessness. Yet Paul always writes and lived in hope, with good reason: <<**but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord**>> (Romans 6:23b).

The power of sin is the law. This is almost a throwaway line and its importance could be missed. Paul gives detailed consideration to this in Romans 7:1-8:11. However, his main point is clear: through the Lord Jesus, the Christ, God has given believers the victory over all the powers that drag them down; he will give it to them in the future, and he is giving it to them here and now.

For far too long many Christians have been content to separate out future hope from present responsibility, but that is precisely what Paul refuses to do. He is calling on the Corinthians, and the church generally, to honour God each and every day of their lives, giving him the praise and worship he deserves for what he has done, what he is doing and what he is yet to do; believers cannot discount the present life, the present body and the present world as irrelevant!

<sup>58</sup> Therefore, my beloved, be steadfast, immovable, always excelling in the work of the Lord, because you know that in the Lord your labour is not in vain.

### 1 Corinthians 15:58

Therefore implies a practical application for the doctrine of the resurrection; that is, the work of the Lord, such as evangelism that Christians do for the Kingdom of God, will bring results that last forever.

In the Lord your labour is not in vain is based on the words of Paul's favourite prophet: <<*They shall not labour in vain, or bear children for calamity; for they shall be offspring blessed by the Lord – and their descendants as well*>> (Isaiah 65:23). The concept of fruitfulness in the Lord is captured in: <<*I am the true vine, and my Father is the vine-grower. He removes every branch in me that bears no fruit. Every branch that bears fruit he prunes to make it bear more fruit. You have already been cleansed by the word that I have spoken to you. Abide in me as I abide in you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me. I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing*>> (John 15:1-5), and: <<*Therefore, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed me, not only in my presence, but much more now in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who is at work in you, enabling you both to will and to work for his good pleasure*>> (Philippians 2:12-13).