BUILT DIFFERENT

LESSON EIGHTEEN

COMMENTARY

COMMENTARY NOTES

1 CORINTHIANS 15:35–41

Thomas Schreiner, in the *Tyndale New Testament Commentary*, explains Paul's analogies to the resurrection:

35–36a. The discussion shifts to the nature of the resurrection body. In and of themselves the questions seem to be quite innocent, reflecting the kinds of questions anyone might ask about a future resurrection body: How is the body raised? And what will the resurrection body look like? Paul's answer in verse 36, by which he brands them as fools ('Fool!', NRSV), indicates that the questions are not innocent or genuine (cf. Job 22:13; Ps. 73:11; John 3:4, 9). The questions are raised to dispute the credibility of the resurrection (see also Ps. 14:1). They are taunts by those influenced by Graeco-Roman paganism, and they throw down the gauntlet to anyone who espouses the resurrection. Paul identifies those who ask them as fools since they have not truly reckoned with God's power.

36b–38. The first example defending the resurrection stems from the world of seeds. A seed does not come to life unless it is first planted in the ground (cf. John 12:24). Strictly speaking, of course, seeds are not dead, but the argument is phenomenological since seeds give every appearance of being dead. When a seed is sown or planted in the ground, one does not see what will come from it in the future. All one sees is the seed, and it seems that there is no potential life in it. Still, the plant that emerges from the seed is what God willed. Actually, Paul uses the word *body* since he draws a connection between the resurrection of the body and seeds. The great variety of plants that emerge from seeds represents God's sovereignty and power (cf. Gen. 1:11–12), and if God can produce such amazing plants from seeds, he can certainly give human beings a new body. Paul's argument about the resurrection is actually quite similar to Jesus' words to the Sadducees: 'You are in error because you do not know the Scriptures or the power of God' (Matt. 22:29). The God who can cause such wondrous plants to emerge from seeds is able to raise the dead.

39–41. Another example of God's power is found in the world he created. The *flesh* of different creatures is considered, and what is striking is the variety and differentiation. The distinctions are obvious. The flesh of human beings differs from the flesh of animals, and birds and fish yet again are clothed with different flesh (cf. Gen. 1:20–22, 24–26). And the differences do not end there, as Paul returns to the word *bodies*. There are *heavenly bodies* and *earthly bodies*, and they have their own unique beauty and *splendour*. Anyone who looks up into the sky perceives that the *splendour* of the sun differs from that of the moon, and that the stars do not all shine with the same intensity (cf. Gen. 1:14; Psalms 8:3; 148:3). What is Paul's point in these illustrations? It is that the God who has endowed the creatures and entities with such diversity and beauty is certainly able to raise the dead.[1]

1 CORINTHIANS 15:42–49

William Baker, In the *Cornerstone New Testament Commentary*, discusses our present bodies and future bodies:

In 15:42–44, Paul develops his seed-plant analogy from 15:36–37 now in relation to humans and resurrection. He makes the common practice of placing dead bodies in the ground (or in caves), truly naked in a physical sense like seeds, a metaphor for actually describing the nakedness of human beings *before* their death and burial, the point at which even the seeds were naked in 15:37. The planting of seeds, then, is a metaphor for human burial, and human burial then becomes a metaphor for human life. The word "sown" (*speiro* [4687, 5062]), translated by the NLT as "planted in the ground" in 15:42, and then "buried" the three times thereafter, holds a series of four contrasts together. It could refer to people being sown on the earth rather than in the earth, as many interpreters advocate (Asher 2001:102; Garland 2003:734; Hays 1997:271; Soards 1999:344). The point

[1]Thomas R. Schreiner, 1 Corinthians: An Introduction and Commentary, ed. Eckhard J. Schnabel, vol. 7, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (London: Inter-Varsity Press, 2018), 320–321.

is that live human bodies bear the characteristics Paul names (15:42–43), in some ways more than dead ones do.

The first characteristic, lost in the NLT's rendering of 15:42, is often translated "corruptible" or "perishable," referring to the decaying process of a corpse; but this process of decay begins from the inception of life and becomes apparent before most people die. The second characteristic, translated "brokenness" by the NLT in 15:43, is usually translated "dishonor." This could apply to an essentially "naked" human corpse, but it applies equally to the shame and disrespect people experience many times over in their lives. The third characteristic, translated "weakness" by the NLT in 15:43 along with most translations, would apply in an absolute sense to a lifeless corpse, but would seem to be a more fitting characteristic of living human bodies with their vulnerabilities and limitations.

But Paul's characterization of the human body in these ways goes beyond even a living human body as such. Corruption, dishonor, and weakness apply to human beings in their essence with respect to their immorality and sin. Their sinful natures are incorporated into their bodies as Paul puts it in Romans 5. They are corrupt (Rom 8:21; Gal 6:8; Col 2:22), dishonorable (4:11–13; 2 Cor 6:8), and weak (2 Cor 4:16; 12:9–10) because of immorality and sin (Barrett 1968:373; Garland 2003:733–734). Thus, it is not just the physicality of their terrestrial existence in life or in death that makes the gap to an extraterrestrial body uncrossable; it is also a nature through and through that is sinful. Paul, in fact, sees the gap as a gorge, even more impossible to cross than his debate partner believes.

With such an impossible expanse to overcome, Paul's characterization of the risen human seed seems even more magnified. Repeating the image four times as the positive mirror of a sown body, without using the word "body" until the fourth and last time, Paul describes a human body that reverses the three characteristics of the sown body. This raised body is no longer corrupt, dishonored, or weak, but rather imperishable (NLT, "to live forever"), glorified and powerful. This raises the question of how these human seeds could possibly transform into such awesome bodies fit for extraterrestrial life. The yet-unspoken implication is that God alone can do this because he is the one who fits all species for their purposes in his creation.

Yet Paul makes a fourth point in 15:44 about these dichotomous bodies that launches him into how the necessary eradication of human sinfulness is to be accomplished. He describes the sown bodies as "natural," using the adjective form of the word often translated as "soul" (*psuchikos* [5591, 6035]). Yet the raised bodies are "spiritual" (*pneumatikos* [4152, 4461]; perhaps better translated "supernatural" to highlight the reversal). Immediately, he observes that this positive opposite follows logically as the climax to the three previous opposites. However, he knew this was not sufficient to carry his point. So, in 15:45–49 he follows up to show how certain it must be that such supernatural bodies will come from natural ones.

Paul bases his proof on the theological dichotomy that exists between Adam, the first created human, and Christ, whom he terms as the last Adam. In doing this, he was developing the point he made earlier in 15:21–22 (developed extensively in Rom 5) that Christ's resurrection reverses Adam's sin in humanity so that it is possible for those in Christ to overcome death.

In 15:45, Paul first quotes Genesis 2:7 (from the Septuagint), which describes Adam as becoming a "living person" after God breathed into his nostrils the breath of life. The word "person" (*psuche* [5590, 6034]) is the noun form of the word "natural" (*psuchikos* [5591, 6035]) in 15:44, which explains why Paul used that distinguishing terminology to begin with. This quotation about Adam is followed by Paul's poignant application to his argument that Christ as the last Adam is "a life-giving Spirit." This description of Christ is jolting. After depicting raised human bodies as supernatural or "spiritual," we expect Paul to say that Christ is spiritual or has a spiritual body. But instead—echoing God's breathing life into Adam—he says that Christ in effect can breathe his spirit into people in such a way that they are transformed from corpses (dead in their sin) to new, living beings, with new bodies to match (B. Schneider 1967:462). *These* bodies Paul calls "spiritual" in 15:44. All people, since all are descendant from Adam, have natural or "soulish" bodies. Only those in Christ will receive this "spiritual body" after Christ comes; so Paul says it "comes later."

In 15:47, Paul explains why this is so. Again relying on Genesis 2:7, Paul says that Adam was formed from earth, from its dust. Human bodies *are* terrestrial. However, Christ and only Christ can release the power to transform them because he is the only man who has come from heaven, the extraterrestrial place, beyond the stars. He brought with him in his person this extraterrestrial power to transform dead human bodies into resurrected spiritual bodies (Padgett 2002:161). Not only did he bring it with him, he now gives it away to those who believe the gospel that tells of his own resurrection from the grave to new life. When this happens—upon their death, burial, and resurrection in the form of confession of faith and baptism—they, too, become "heavenly," as 15:48 says. Those who do not receive Christ as life-giving Spirit will return to the earth untransformed.

So, what does Christ breathe into bodies now equipped for heavenly existence? Though he does not say directly, Paul must mean the Holy Spirit (Abernathy 2002:9; Dunn 1973:133–134, 141). Translations are divided about whether to capitalize "spirit," as the NLT has done. In effect, what Christ gives surely is the Holy Spirit, but in Paul's depiction in 15:45, it is Christ's Spirit which is capable of imparting life to dead men, like the famous Old Testament depiction of God's doing so in Ezekiel 37 (B. Schneider 1967:157–159).

The result of receiving Christ's breath is the imparting of the Holy Spirit and eventual transformation into the likeness of Christ. In 15:49, Paul says that "we" (meaning believers in Christ like Paul and the Corinthians), though currently bearing the likeness of Adam—meaning in our natural bodies dead in our sin—have the sure promise of becoming like Christ, meaning that our natural bodies will be transformed into supernatural, spiritual bodies perfect for residing in heaven with him. In making this climactic point, Paul deftly employs the word "image" (eikōn [1504, 1635]), drawing once again from Genesis, which says that Adam's descendants bore his image (Gen 5:3) and that humans were created in the "image" of God (Gen 1:27; Collins 1999:572). And thus, in Christ, we realize the complete potential of our original creation by God.[2]

1 CORINTHIANS 15:50–58

Gordon Fee, in the *NICNT*, shows how Paul connects the resurrection of Christ with our assurance of triumph:

50 Although some have seen this sentence to be the conclusion of what has preceded (vv. 45–49), there can be little question that it serves rather to introduce this final paragraph.366 This is confirmed by (a) the conjunction *de* (= "now"); (b) the vocative, "brothers and sisters"; (c) the opening assertion, "This I say … that," which is identical to an earlier similar instance (7:29), in which a new thought is also begun; and (d) its clear linguistic ties to what follows. On the other hand, of course, it picks up the argument to this point and begins to carry it to its final conclusion. Paul's point is the same that he has been making from the beginning (v. 37), that "the body that will be" is a transformed expression of the one that was "sown." He now spells that out in terms of its present incompatibility with the future. What is said negatively here will very soon be reasserted positively (v. 53).

The two lines are most likely to be understood as synonymous parallelism, so that the second makes the same point as the first.370 Together they declare most decisively that the body in its present physical expression cannot inherit the heavenly existence just argued for (vv. 47–49). Of the two terms that describe present physical existence, the second, "the perishable," was already used earlier in the present argument (v. 42) and will be repeated three times in this paragraph. Contrary to some (p. 883 n. 369 above), it does not refer to what is already dead, but to that which in its present form is subject to decay, which in itself rules out its possibility for eternal longevity.

This is probably also how we are to understand the more ambiguous "flesh and blood." On the one hand, this could refer to the *composition* of the present body; a body so composed cannot enter the Eschaton. Very likely a dimension of this understanding must be included. On the other hand,

[2] William Baker, "1 Corinthians," in *Cornerstone Biblical Commentary: 1 Corinthians, 2 Corinthians*, vol. 15 (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2009), 232–234.

Jeremias (see p. 883 n. 369) popularized the view that it means "the living" in contrast to "the dead";372 the living cannot enter the kingdom as they are. Although this seems to move in the right direction, both of these proposals are probably too narrowly conceived. Most likely the term refers simply to the body in its present form, composed of flesh and blood, to be sure, but subject to weakness, decay, and death, and as such ill-suited for the life of the future.

The description of the future in terms of "inheriting the kingdom of God" indicates how varied was the language Paul used to describe the future. This language had already occurred much earlier in the letter (6:9–10, q.v.); its appearance here echoes an earlier moment in the present passage (vv. 24–28), where the future is described in terms of the Son's handing over the kingdom to God the Father (v. 24) so that God may be "all in all" (v. 28). Thus those who are currently in Christ's kingdom (v. 25) are thereby also destined for God's final eschatological kingdom. There can be little question that in Paul's view this refers to our final heavenly existence, in which believers "inherit" the "heavenly" likeness of Christ himself (vv. 48–49).

51–52a The concern of Paul's argument is with the nature of the body that believers will assume *at the resurrection*. The contrasts that have been set up, however, are not between the corpses of the dead and their reanimated bodies, but between bodies in their present earthly expression vis-à-vis their transformation into the likeness of Christ's glorified body. Thus he has just asserted (v. 50) that the body *in its present form* cannot "inherit the kingdom." Even though this may still refer to the body "that is sown," the logical consequence is that what is true of the dead is equally true of the living. The perishable body, either dead or alive, cannot inherit the imperishable life of the future. Paul, therefore, now turns to emphasize that point with regard to the living. They, too, must be changed before they are fitted for immortality. The Corinthians, of course, would have been plumping for a nonsomatic immortality; but for Paul the resurrection of Christ and his present somatic heavenly existence exclude their option. Hence the solemn asseveration: "Listen, I tell you a mystery."

As elsewhere in the Pauline corpus, "mystery" does not refer to what is currently hidden, but to what was once hidden but has now been revealed through Christ. The heavenly existence of Christ in a *pneumatikon soma* ("super-natural body") means that yet another "mystery" is now revealed to God's people. The content of that mystery is found in the pair of clauses that follow, the first of which probably sustains a concessive relationship to the second: "*Even though* we will not all sleep,377 *nevertheless* we will all be changed." Two further observations need to be made.

First, Paul has already expressed himself similarly in his earliest preserved letter (1 Thess. 4:13–18). There in particular it is difficult to avoid the plain sense of the language, that he expected to be among the living at the Parousia. That does not mean that he lived in intense, eager anticipation of it, as is sometimes maintained, but that he simply expected it to happen within his lifetime. Similar language prevails here, but on an even lower key in terms of expectation. He uses "we" chiefly because nothing else would make sense, especially in the first clause. In a letter where he easily falls in and out of this usage, especially when he wants to include himself with them in the benefits of salvation, it is hardly possible that this clause could have been expressed in either the second or third person. Thus it says very little about Paul's expectations with regard to the Parousia; what it says is that he is *currently* among the living!

Second, Paul's emphasis is on the necessary "change" that will happen to all, both the living and the dead. Not all will die, since by the nature of things some will be alive at the return of Christ; but *all*, including those alive at the time of the Parousia, must be transformed so as to bear the likeness of the man of heaven. It is probably this latter reality that is the content of the "mystery." It may be that Paul is pressing this point as a direct word against the Corinthian point of view; however, it is just as possible that it flows naturally as the logical concomitant of the argument to this point. In either case, such a word is unlikely to have been received enthusiastically in Corinth.

With the three prepositional phrases that begin this sentence Paul indicates the nature and time of the transformation. It is clear from his similar earlier usage (1 Thess. 4:16) that he intends the time of the Parousia. However, since the emphasis here is on the transformation that all experience, there is

no mention of the coming of the Lord himself or of believers' rising to be with him. Thus, in place of language referring to the shout of victory, the emphasis here is on the instantaneous nature of the transformation: "We will all be changed in a flash,383 in the twinkling of an eye."

What will mark the Parousia is the blowing of "the last trumpet," imagery that had been taken up into Jewish prophetic-apocalyptic in a variety of senses to herald the Eschaton: to sound the last battle cry (e.g., Jer. 51:27), to warn of the approaching day of judgment (Joel 2:1), to announce the coming of the Lord (Zech. 9:14), to summon the people of God from the four corners (Isa. 27:13). Since it is such common imagery for the heralding of the End, it may carry no metaphorical freight whatever in this instance. On the basis of the next clause, however, it is arguable that the imagery is that of summoning the dead from their graves. It is the "last" trumpet not because it is the final in a series, but because it signals the End.

52b With an explanatory "for," this next clause basically repeats the immediately preceding concerns (vv. 51–52a) by spelling out what they entail. First, "the trumpet will sound," repeating what has immediately preceded. With that, second, "the dead will be raised imperishable." Although this language has not been frequent in this section of the argument (vv. 35–58), its appearance here, as earlier (v. 42), indicates that this has been the concern right along. People die partly because they live in perishable bodies. But with the coming of Christ, all of that changes. They are raised, still with bodies, but bodies that have been made over into their "imperishable" form. Third, along with the resurrected dead, "we [= the living] will be changed." These last two clauses, which in their own way repeat what was said at the start, have no interest in chronology, although they are expressed in the same order as in Paul's earlier letter (1 Thess. 4:16–17). For all practical purposes the events transpire basically at the same time—at the sound of the eschatological trumpet.

53 With yet another explanatory "for," Paul with these words brings closure to the present argument, that both the living and the dead must assume transformed bodies in order to enter their final, heavenly existence. In Christ Jesus, God has already decreed such; and therefore it must be so. Again, as before (v. 50), the two clauses are synonymous parallels, in this case made certain by the repeated demonstrative "this"389 and the neuter adjectives used as substantives (= "this perishable [body]"). Both lines emphasize the same reality, the first word in each case referring to our present existence in bodies that are *subject to* decay and death. Their opposites are bodies that are "clothed"392 in the likeness of Christ, with what is "imperishable" and "with immortality." The long chain of decay and death inaugurated by the first Adam will finally be broken irrevocably by the last Adam.

54 With the rhetorically powerful full repetition of the two clauses from the preceding sentence, Paul advances the argument by indicating the net results of the Parousia-resurrection-transformation process—the abolition of death itself. Earlier (vv. 23–28) he had argued that resurrection is a divine necessity, inaugurated through the resurrection of Christ, as God's way of destroying the last enemy, death. Now he returns to that theme, not so much in terms of its necessity as in personal exultation and triumph. "Take that, death," he exults, "for when mortality is clothed with immortality, you have lost both your victory and your sting!" No more can death tyrannize, because it has been "swallowed up" by resurrection.

Paul makes this point in significant fashion by citing two OT texts (Isa. 25:8; Hos. 13:14) that he understands as yet to be fulfilled: "Then the saying that is written will come true." This is the only instance of his citing yet unfulfilled prophecy; but as always he cites the OT in light of the death and resurrection of Jesus. So these two passages are in fact fulfilled in Christ; they simply have yet to be realized.

The citations themselves, both of which vary from the LXX, are brought into collocation by the key words "death" and "victory." It is of interest, therefore, that the word "victory" is not found in either OT passage. At this distance we can only surmise how all of this came about. The citation from Isaiah is the key and is most likely the "saying" (singular) to which Paul is referring. In this case the citation is precisely in keeping with its OT context, where the prophet proclaims that on the great day of

salvation "God will swallow up death forever," which Paul now reads as: "Death has been swallowed up in victory." In so doing he is reflecting a common LXX idiom for the translation of the Hebrew "forever"; but as the next citation makes clear, he means it finally in terms of "victory," not just "forever." At the resurrection-transformation God will abolish death forever, just as God promised in the words of the prophet.

55 In light of the swallowing up of death in the victory of the resurrection-transformation, Paul proceeds to taunt death in the language of Hosea (13:14, somewhat modified). Whether Paul intended to "cite" this passage as such, as part of the preceding "fulfilled" word, is moot. By a series of modifications, Paul seems to be taking over the text of Hosea so as to make it his own derision of death in light of the preceding affirmation (vv. 51–53) and the citation from Isaiah (v. 54). He does this in three ways: (1) by changing the LXX word *dike* ("penalty") to *nikos* ("victory"), thus bringing it into verbal agreement with the previous quotation from Isaiah; (2) by substituting in the second line the vocative "O Death!" for the "O Grave!" of the LXX, thus making both lines a derision of death itself; and (3) by bringing forward the possessive pronoun "your" to first position (after "where"), followed immediately by the vocative, thus emphasizing the personification (lit., "where your, O Death, Victory?" which replaces the LXX's "where the penalty of you, O Death?").

The net result is a powerful taunt of death that looks in two directions at once. First, it completes the argument of the paragraph as a whole as well as the citation from Isaiah. Even though Paul still lives in the "already," and in his own body experiences both the perishability and mortality of the present age that is passing away, the apostle has also seen the risen Lord. Thus with a clear vision of what is to be he mocks the enemy, whose doom has been sealed through Christ's own death and resurrection; and it is precisely because of Christ's victory that the mockery obtains, even if in the meantime believers "fall asleep." Thus this taunt is Paul's way of looking forward to the triumph of the ages. Death's victory has been overcome by Christ's victory; and death's deadly sting has been detoxicated—indeed, the stinger itself has been plucked—through Christ's resurrection. Death, therefore, is "powerless over the dead";398 God's people will be raised and changed into the likeness of the risen and ever-living Christ himself.

Second, even though the taunt has to do with the future resurrection of believers, it is expressed in the present tense, precisely because the beginning of the End has "already" set in motion the final victory that for us is still "not yet." The mention of the word "sting," therefore, leads Paul from the future to the present; what is to be has in effect already begun. Thus, he concludes this exalted description of the "not yet" with an appropriate reminder of the victory that is "already" theirs in Christ (vv. 56–57). It has been well said, "Death is also powerless over the living."

56 Anyone who has heard this paragraph read at a Christian funeral senses the dissonance these follow-up words seem to bring to the argument. For *our* present purposes the preceding taunt is climactic; but *Paul* is not quite finished. Granted that the argument *per* se is now over, much as in an earlier moment (vv. 33–34), however, the final word is one of application to the Corinthian believers' present situation. That word will come partly by way of the exhortation (v. 58). Before that, however, the preceding words of taunt (v. 55) apparently touch off a theological chord that must be given a moment's hearing. With a piece of step-parallelism, Paul moves from the final line of the Hosea "quotation" to a brief compendium of his own theology as to the relationship of sin and the law to death. Not only has *death* been overcome by resurrection; but *mutatis mutandis* so have the enemies that have brought death to all—sin and the law. Thus:

"Where, O *death*,		is your sting?"
Now		
(1) the *sting*	of *death*	is sin;
and		
(2) the power	of sin	is the law.

COMMENTARY NOTES

The first line requires little comment. In Pauline theology *sin* is the deadly poison that has led to death. Although this word group has not occurred frequently in the present letter to describe the Corinthian behavioral aberrations,404 there can be no question that Paul considered their actions sinful and in need of divine forgiveness. The word occurs with greater frequency in this chapter than anywhere else. The reason Christ died is "for our sins" (v. 3); and if he did not rise, the Corinthians are still in their sins (v. 17). In the exhortation that concludes the first section of the argument, they are urged to "stop sinning" (v. 34). For later readers the full explication of this sentence will emerge in the Epistle to the Romans; its appearance here in this fashion is the sure indication that this essential dictum of Pauline theology had long been in place. Although something of an aside, it is not difficult to see its relevance. Sin is the deadly sting that has led to death. Thus, Christ's victory over the latter is evidence that he has overcome the former as well.

The second line is the puzzler, especially since in this Gentile community the relationship of sin to the law has not seemed to emerge as a problem. Nowhere do the issues that have arisen, either between him and them or between them internally, reflect concern over the law. This almost certainly means that the statement belongs to the first line as a theological construct, not as an issue in this church. If so, this also means that the essential matters that surface in a thoroughgoing way in Galatians and are spelled out at length in Romans had been essential to Paul's theology long before the Judaizing controversy erupted—at least in the tangible form in which we know it from Galatians. Its point is simple, and will later be spelled out in detail in a later letter (Rom. 7: the relationship of law to sin is that the former is what gives the latter its power). In that same letter Paul will explain that "sin is not charged against anyone's account where there is no law" (5:13). That is, the law not only makes sin observable as sin, but also, and more significantly, demonstrates that one's actions are finally over against God, and thus leads to condemnation (cf. 2 Cor. 3:6). The law, which is good, functions as the agent of sin because it either leads to pride of achievement, on the one hand, or reveals the depth of one's depravity and rebellion against God, on the other. In either case, it becomes death-dealing instead of life-giving.

Paul's point in this theological aside is that death is not simply the result of decay through normal human processes. Rather, it is the result of the deadly poison, sin itself, which became all the more energized in our lives through acquaintance with the law. Hence, in exulting in Christ's victory over death, Paul is reminded that that victory is the *final* triumph over the sin that brought death into the world, and over the law that has so frequently emboldened sin. But since both sin and the law have already been overcome in the cross, this compendium prefaces a final doxology that thanks God for present "victory" as well.

57 As just noted, this final doxology first of all expresses gratitude that God through "our Lord Jesus Christ" presently gives the people of God victory over sin and the law, which lead to death. At the same time, however, it embraces the entire argument, especially as it climaxes in this paragraph. Thus, Paul exults in God's victory over death through resurrection (v. 55) and now in the conquest of the sin that leads to that death (v. 57). As at the beginning (vv. 3–5), so at the conclusion, Christ is the one through whom God has wrought this triumph.

58 In light of the sure hope of resurrection, and now especially in light of Christ's triumph over sin and the law as well, Paul concludes, as is his wont, on a strong word of exhortation. The opening "so then" (NIV, "therefore") is the last of the long series of these inferential conjunctions in this letter.408 For its use with this vocative see two earlier moments (11:33 and 14:39). The vocative in this case is accompanied by the term of endearment, "my dear [= beloved] brothers and sisters."410 Despite Paul's misgivings over their theology and behavior, and despite their generally anti-Paul stance on so many issues, from his own point of view they are ever his "dear brothers and sisters," and that because, even though in one sense they are his dear children in the Lord (4:15), in the much greater sense predicated on the theology of the preceding doxology he and they are brothers and sisters, because they have the same divine parent.

The surprising feature of this exhortation is that, unlike before (vv. 33–34), it is not directed toward ethical behavior as such, but toward the work of the gospel. Probably, therefore, it is to be

understood as a word to the congregation as a whole vis-à-vis those who are leading them astray by denying the "resurrection of the dead" (v. 12). On the contrary, Paul urges, not only must they not go that route because of what Christ has effected (vv. 20–28, 45–49, 54–57), but they must in general remain loyal to the gospel as he preached it among them. He makes this point in two ways.

First, on the negative side, "Let nothing move you." This translation combines two Greek words, "steadfast" and "immovable,"412 which together urge that they not "move from the hope held out in the gospel … that you heard" (Col. 1:23). This urgency is almost certainly in direct response to the denial of the resurrection by some. It urges by way of exhortation what was affirmed at the beginning of the present issue (vv. 1–2), that the gospel of Christ is that on which they have in fact taken their stand.

Second, on the positive side, "Always give yourselves fully414 to the work of the Lord." It is not absolutely certain what kind of activity Paul had in mind by the phrase "the work of the Lord." Minimally, it may refer more broadly to whatever one does *as a believer,* both toward outsiders and fellow believers. But along with the next word, "labor," Paul frequently uses "work" to refer to the actual ministry of the gospel. Probably in their case it covers the range but leans more toward the former. That is, there are those kinds of activities in which believers engage that are specifically Christian, or specifically in the interest of the gospel. This seems to be what Paul has in mind here.

Finally, with a marvelous stroke of genius, whether intentional or not, Paul concludes on the same note with which he began this whole "reminder" (vv. 1–2). There he was concerned, because of the denial of the resurrection by some, whether his own "labor"—namely their own existence in Christ—was in vain. Now, after the strong evidence for the resurrection presented throughout, he concludes with such faith as the ground for their continued labor: "because you know that your (own) labor in the Lord is not in vain." Thus with this language the entire chapter is tied together. The implication in all this, of course, is that if they continue their present route, they have good grounds for lacking any confidence that what they do as believers has any meaning (vv. 14–19). But Christ has been raised from the dead, and they too shall be raised to share his likeness; therefore they may not only abound in his service, but know assuredly that what they do is not in vain.

It is of some interest that Paul's own moment of hesitation at the very beginning (vv. 1–2) is answered for him by his own arguments, so that this concluding paragraph exudes with confidence and triumph. There is little doubt as to why it is read regularly at Christian funerals. Read without comment, it has its own power. Here the Word has its own regenerative power because it expresses the truth of Christ himself. But here, too, it is a word for all seasons. Our present existence in Christ, and our present labors, are not in vain. Standing beneath them is the sure word of Christ's own triumph over death, which guarantees that we shall likewise conquer. Victory in the present begins when one can, with Paul, sing the taunt of death even now, in light of Christ's resurrection, knowing that death's doom is "already/not yet." Because "death could not hold its prey, Jesus our Savior," neither will it be able to hold its further prey when the final eschatological trumpet is blown that summons the Christian dead unto the resurrection and immortality. What a hope is this. No wonder Paul concluded on a note of exhortation that we may confidently continue on our way in the Lord.[3]

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Mark A. Taylor, *1 Corinthians*, New American Commentary
Gordon Fee, *1 Corinthians*, New International Commentary of the New Testament (NICNT)
Anthony Thiselton, *1 Corinthians*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (NIGTC)
Leon Morris, *1 Corinthians*, Tyndale New Testament Commentary
Alan F. Johnson, *1 Corinthians*, IVP New Testament Commentary
David Prior, *The Message of 1 Corinthians*, The Bible Speaks Today
William Baker, *1 Corinthians*, Cornerstone Bible Commentary
Paul Ellingwroth and Howard A. Hatton, *A Handbook on 1 Corinthians*, UBSH

[3]Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, ed. Ned B. Stonehouse et al., Revised Edition, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2014), 882–894.