

## First Epistle to the Corinthians

### 31 – Essay Five: Resurrection (5.5) – Victory

1 Corinthians 15:51-58

#### 1. Outlines

- a. *ESV Study Bible*
  - i. The Futility of Faith If the Dead Are Not Raised (15:1–58)
    1. The truthfulness of the traditions about Christ’s resurrection (15:1–11)
    2. Christ’s resurrection and the resurrection of believers (15:12–34)
    3. The nature of the resurrection body (15:35–58)
- b. *Reading the New Testament: Reading Corinthians*
  - i. The Human Transformation Yet to Come
    1. A Reminder of Christ’s Resurrection (vv.1-11)
    2. Corinthian Assertions and Pauline Responses (vv.12-34)
    3. Corinthian Questions and Pauline Answers (vv.35-58)
- c. *New International Commentary on the New Testament: The First Epistle*
  - i. The Resurrection of Believers
    1. The Basis—The Resurrection of Christ (vv.1-11)
    2. The Certainty of Resurrection (vv.12-34)
      - a. If Christ is NOT raised (vv.12-19)
      - b. But Christ IS raised (vv.20-28)
      - c. Ad hominem arguments for resurrection (vv.29-34)
    3. The Resurrection Body (vv.35-49)
      - a. Analogies of seeds and “bodies” (vv.35-44)
      - b. Analogy of Adam and Christ (vv.45-49)
    4. The Assurance of Triumph (vv.50-58)
- d. Bailey<sup>1</sup>
  - i. Resurrection: The Message and Validity of Faith (vv.1-20)
  - ii. Resurrection: Adam and Christ (vv.21-28)
  - iii. Resurrection and Ethics (vv.29-34)
  - iv. Resurrection: Adam and Christ (vv.35-50)
  - v. Resurrection: Victory (vv.51-58)

#### 2. Rhetoric

- a. Three parts, in more or less straight-line sequence
  - i. Climax is in part three
- b. Ends with a final word of exhortation
- c. Part two is strictly not necessary, but it reiterates the foundation on which the outer two parts rest
  - i. Part two also contains duplicated parallelism – probably Paul’s intentional effort to create a balanced rhetorical structure of 4-4-4
- d. Balances the Hymn to the Cross in Essay 1 (1 Cor. 1:17-2:2)
  - i. The Cross and Resurrection are a singular event – they cannot be separated

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<sup>1</sup> Bailey, *Paul Through Mediterranean Eyes: Cultural Studies in 1 Corinthians*, loc. 4971.

Table 1: Bailey, location 5529

1 Corinthians 15:51-58 (ESV)		
0	51 Behold! I tell you a mystery.	A mystery revealed
1	We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed,	Not all sleep We - all changed
2	52 in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye,	A moment A twinkling
3	at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound,	The trumpet Will sound
4	and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed.	Raised - imperishable We - changed
5	53 For this perishable body must put on the imperishable,	Perishable Imperishable
6	and this mortal body must put on immortality.	Mortal Immortal
7	54 When the perishable puts on the imperishable,	Perishable Imperishable
8	and the mortal puts on immortality,	Mortal Immortal
9	then shall come to pass the saying that is written: "Death is swallowed up in victory."	Victory Death swallowed
10	55 "O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?"	Death Defeated
11	56 The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law.	Death Power gone
12	57 But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.	Victory Through our Lord Jesus Christ
13	58 Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.	Concluding Personal appeal

3. Details – 0

- a. Mystery – not “I am telling you something mysterious that is poorly understood,” but “I am revealing what was once hidden and secret”

4. Details – Part One (1-4)

- a. The logical problem of Christ’s return and those who are still alive
  - i. Not all will experience physical death
  - ii. But all will be changed (transformed)
  - iii. The material change from perishable to imperishable takes place instantaneously

- iv. The resurrected dead in Christ and those alive in Christ will have the same type of bodies
  - v. Physical death is not a requirement for completion of resurrection power
  - b. Trumpet (*shofar*) – part of Jewish tradition in regards to the *Eschaton*
    - i. Not a literal trumpet, but a symbolic image signaling the end
5. Details - Part Two (5-8)
- a. The final act – perishable to imperishable; mortal to immortal
  - b. The transformation is from one type of body to another
  - c. Nowhere is there any kind of disembodied spirit or soul
  - d. Life requires a body

The real sense of Paul's statement is that the new form of resurrection life is without the character or capacity of perishability and mortality. If one could translate "perishable-less" and "mortality-less" one would be closer to the sense of Paul's statements.<sup>2</sup>

6. Details – Part Three (9-12)
- a. Victory!
  - b. When the dead are resurrected, death's destruction is complete
    - i. Death no longer holds any power

No more can death tyrannize, because it has been "swallowed up" by resurrection.<sup>3</sup>

- c. Verse 56
  - i. Paul's theology of the relationships between death, sin, and law are found early
  - ii. It is not formed in response to later legalism and Judaizing in the church
  - iii. Paul, even in this early writing, expresses a negative perspective about law
  - iv. Because the Corinthian Christians did not have a problem with legalism Paul does not explain what he means as he will do in later writings of Galatians and Romans
  - v. Death comes through sin, and sin gains its power through the law

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 emboldened sin. But since both sin and the law have already been overcome

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<sup>2</sup> *Understanding the Bible Commentary: 1 Corinthians, 15:53* (Additional Notes).

<sup>3</sup> *New International Commentary on the New Testament: The First Epistle, 15:54.*

in the cross, this compendium prefaces a final doxology that thanks God for present "victory" as well.<sup>4</sup>

- d. But Christians need not dwell on the negatives of death, sin, and the law because the Resurrection is evidence that love and life in "our Lord Jesus Christ" is the basis for victory
  - i. "Our Lord Jesus Christ" – phrase occurs multiple time in Essay 1 and then not again until 15:57

[Paul] is discussing the resurrected *Jesus*, whom he met personally, not some departed historical figure out of the past. That Jesus is *Kurios* (Lord) in a way that Caesar is not. Let the Greeks and the Romans take note. Jesus is also *Messiah* (Christ). Let the Jews take note. Finally he is *our* Lord, not *my* Lord. Together we have one Lord and one Father.

These four words can cause all the problems discussed in this epistle to disappear.<sup>5</sup>

- ii. The Church exists to work together
- iii. There is no "Lone Ranger" Christian

This energetic word of thanksgiving to God for the victory given through the Lord Jesus Christ recognizes the present significance of what God is already doing and mitigates against the misperception that what God is doing in Christ has little to do with life in this world. Yet, the dominant future bent of Paul's reflections is an important corrective to the denial of the resurrection of the dead.<sup>6</sup>

## 7. Details – 13

- a. Concluding appeal
- b. Paul cannot say "imitate me" for this essay

The surprising feature of this exhortation is that, unlike vv. 33–34, it is not directed toward ethical behavior as such, but toward the work of the gospel...

There are those kinds of activities in which believers engage that are specifically Christian, or specifically in the interest of the gospel.<sup>7</sup>

- c. He explains the ethical working out of the Resurrection in this present time (v.58)
  - i. "Be steadfast, immovable"
    - 1. The "what" of the gospel: death, burial, bodily resurrection, and witnesses
    - 2. Not the "how": see earlier essays, in particular Essay 3 on mission
  - ii. "Abounding in the work of the Lord"
    - 1. The work of mission
    - 2. Christians do not sit around waiting for Christ to return – there is work of service to do in the present

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<sup>4</sup> *NICNT*, 15:56.

<sup>5</sup> Bailey, location 5607.

<sup>6</sup> *UBC*, 15:57.

<sup>7</sup> *NICNT*, 15:58.

iii. "Knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain"

1. Those engaged in mission may not see the fruits of their labor, or like Paul with the Corinthians, it may seem like things are moving backwards; but no labor done for the Lord is ever in vain

Paul calls the Corinthians to do the work of the Lord with full confidence because of their standing in the Lord; in other words, they stand in the Lord and do the Lord's work because they are secure in the Lord. Such a lifestyle is the result of the confidence acquired in knowing that the future is God's. As always for Paul, eschatology means ethics.<sup>8</sup>

8. Jewish perspectives on resurrection<sup>9</sup>

- a. Silence, or taken as perpetuation of name through offspring
- b. Denial (like the Sadducees)
- c. Immortality of the soul, apart from a body
- d. Resurrection of a physical body, for life on this earth
- e. Transformation into a glorified body for life in a new heaven and earth
- f. A combination of immortality of soul (and possible intermediate state) with one of the resurrection positions
- g. A combination of both resurrection positions, with a resurrection into a corruptible body followed by a transformation
- h. A type of realized eschatology where conversion is the point in which resurrection takes place figuratively

9. The cross and resurrection go together, but the cross without the resurrection is hopeless and meaningless

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.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> *UBC*, 15:58 (Additional Notes).

<sup>9</sup> Summarized from *Reading the New Testament Series: Reading 1 Corinthians*, 15:35-58, "Conclusion".

<sup>10</sup> *NICNT*, 15:58.