

**15:1-2:** *Now I make known unto you brethren, the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye received, wherein also ye stand, 2 by which also ye are saved, if ye hold fast the word which I preached unto you, except ye believed in vain.*

The chapter opens with a distinct change in thought and this is expressed quite well in the ASV (“*Now I*”). The KJV simply says “*moreover.*” Paul was ready to discuss a new topic, but his love for the Corinthians remained unchanged. He addressed these readers as “*brethren*” (*adelphos*), a word found about 350 times in the New Testament. Sometimes *brethren* describes a *physical brother* (Mt. 1:2, 11). In other places such as here, this word refers to fellow Christians (for other examples of this meaning see Acts 15:1, 3, 22; 16:2). Sometimes *brethren* referred to non-Christians (Acts 2:29; 7:2, 26; 13:26). There are also instances of non-Christians referring to Christians as *brethren* (the unsaved sometimes used this term to indicate they were not hostile to the gospel—see Acts 2:37; 13:15). Today it is still right to use the word *brethren* to describe God’s people. Christians may also be described as God’s “*sons and daughters*” (Rom. 8:14; 2 Cor. 6:18), God’s “*children*” (Jn. 1:12), “*saints*” (1 Cor. 14:33), etc.

Paul said he wanted to “*make known*” (declare/reveal) the “*gospel.*” Thayer (p. 119) defined *make known* (*gnorizo*) as “to recall to one’s mind, as though what is made known had escaped him.” Rienecker and Rogers (p. 193) suggested that Barrett’s explanation, “I draw your attention,” is a good expression of Paul’s thought. Rienecker and Rogers (p. 193) also cited Conzelmann who said *make known* “was used to introduce a solemn statement.” “Rather than reminding the Corinthians of the gospel he had preached, he declared it to them again. Some did not seem to realize the importance of the gospel Paul had preached to them even though they had received it” (CBL, First Corinthians, p. 455). In this opening verse we find a “gentle rebuke” (*ibid*).

The word *gospel* (*euangelion*) literally meant the “*good news*” (for all the other places this term occurs in this book see 4:15; 9:12, 14, 18, 23). Barclay offered an extensive study of this term, and the material in the next two paragraphs is drawn from his book on New Testament Words (pp. 101-106).

The *gospel* is “at the very heart and centre of the Christian faith” (p. 101). It “is so specifically and characteristically a Christian word that it has not a long history outside the NT. In classical Greek it has three meanings. (i) Originally it meant ‘the reward given to a messenger for bringing good tidings’. It is so used in the Septuagint in II Sam. 4.10. (ii) It went on to mean ‘the sacrifices made to the gods when such good tidings were received’. (iii) Not in classical Greek at all, but in late Hellenistic Greek it comes to mean ‘the good tidings themselves’. In the Septuagint it is used for the ‘good tidings of victory’ (I Sam. 31.9), the good tidings of ‘the birth of a child’ (Jer. 20.15), and sometimes simply of tidings of any kind” (p. 101).

Sometimes the gospel is said to be “*of God*” (Mk. 1:14); in other places inspired writers referred to the “*gospel of Christ*” (2 Cor. 4:4). Paul spoke of “*his gospel*” (Rom. 2:16; 2 Cor. 4:3). Jesus said the gospel is for “*all men*” (Mk. 16:15). God “*revealed*” the gospel to man (Gal. 1:11-12) and it is our duty to share this *good news* with others (Rom. 15:19; 2 Cor. 10:14). The gospel is worth all we have (Mk. 8:35), and we had better not “*hinder*” it (1 Cor. 9:12). It is possible to “*refuse*” the gospel (2 Thess. 1:7-8) as well as twist and distort it (Gal. 1:6-7). We turn to the gospel because it is “*truth*” (Col. 1:5), the good news of “*hope*” (Col. 1:23), the good news of “*peace*” (Eph. 6:15), the good news of “*promise*” (Eph. 3:6), the good news of “*immortality*” (2 Tim. 1:10), the good news of a “*risen Christ*” (2 Tim. 2:8), and the good news of “*salvation*” (Eph. 1:13).

The gospel was certainly not new to these Christians; Paul said he had previously “*preached*” it to them and they had “*received*” it (both of these words are verbs and they were written with the aorist tense—a definite time in the past). The word *preached* (*euangelizo*) closely resembles the noun *gospel* (*euangelion*). There was “good news,” this “good news” had been “preached,” and the Corinthians had “received” (*paralambano*) it. The word *received* is also found in 11:23 and 15:3. The Church’s Bible (p. 244) noted how Paul did “not say, ‘which you heard,’ but **which you received**, as if asking them to return something entrusted to them. He indicates that they received it not in words alone but in deeds and signs and wonders, and that they must keep it safe.”

Although Paul had presented the gospel to the Corinthians and they had obeyed it (compare Acts 18:1-

18), they needed to hear it again (compare 2 Pet. 3:1). It seems these Christians had forgotten some of what they had been taught or some of the gospel facts were no longer foremost on their minds. Perhaps false teachers had confused them, or they had stopped applying what they had learned. Whatever the situation, Paul made it clear that his readers had previously *received* all the information they needed to become Christians. Today there are still cases where Christians receive top-notch instruction and have all they need to live the Christian life, but they get “off track” and need correcting.

The word “*stand*” (*histemi*) at the end of verse 1 occurs several times in the New Testament and two of these places are found earlier in this letter (7:37; 10:12). Paul also used this verb in Eph. 6:11 to describe our *withstanding* the devil. This term described a very firm stand or conviction and here it is expressed with the perfect tense. Kittel (6:652) defined it as “stand in and by” the “message from Paul.” “In Paul’s day being a Christian was more than intellectual assent to a group of doctrines. The social price that followers of Christ paid forced them to take a stand in a hostile world” (Holman, 7:258).

As noted in this author’s commentary on Rom. 5:2, being a “*stander*” is sometimes difficult. McGuiggan (The Book of Romans, p. 162) told of a young nurse who was “preparing, for the first time, to assist a top-ranking surgeon in the northeastern states of America. During the course of this surgery, a dozen sponges were used inside the patient. When the surgeon finished he quickly removed the sponges and said, ‘Sew him up!’ The nurse knew that only eleven sponges had been removed so she nervously said, ‘We used twelve sponges and I can only account for eleven.’ The ‘king kong’ of surgery snapped back, ‘We got them all; sew him up.’ The young nurse again said, ‘We used twelve sponges; I only have eleven. We need to find the other sponge.’ The surgeon then snarled, ‘Nurse, I am going to tell you for the last time. We got them all. Suture!’ This time the nurse yelled; ‘We’re not sewing anybody up until I find the other sponge.’ The super-surgeon smiled, looked down at the floor, lifted his foot, and there was sponge number twelve. He murmured, ‘You’ll do.’” In 1 Cor. 15:1, Paul said it is absolutely necessary for Christians to *stand*. Christians needed to be faithful in their commitment to Christ as well as be fully committed to the right beliefs (the “doctrine of Christ,” 2 Jn. 9).

Paul said those who *stand* in the gospel and “*hold fast the word*” will be “*saved*” (2a). Since the tense of the verb *saved* (*sozo*) is *present*, the Corinthians were “still being saved” when this letter was written. They had received salvation when they were initially “baptized into the one body” (1 Cor. 12:13), but they would continue to be saved if they continued to “walk in the light” (1 Jn. 1:7 and compare Jn. 15:4-6). Their salvation could be lost “if” (verse 2) they did not “hold fast the word.” Stated another way, God saves people (verse 2), but humanity also has an on-going part in the process. A person must receive the truth (Jas. 1:18) and then *stand* in it (live a faithful Christian life), but some want to become a Christian and then *sit* (quit). Paul said this will not work.

There is a preposition in the first part of verse 2 (*dia*) that is translated “*by*” in the ASV and KJV. This word means we are saved *by* or *through* the gospel. As shown by the following charts, salvation *by* (*through*) the gospel includes several different things.

<b>We are saved by:</b>	<b>New Testament text:</b>
God	Mk. 10:26-27
Christ	Jn. 3:17
The name of Jesus	Acts 4:12
Jesus' words	Jn. 5:34
Jesus' life	Rom. 5:10
Faith and baptism	Mk. 16:16; 1 Pet. 3:21
Receiving the word and being baptized	Acts 2:40-41
Striving to enter the narrow door	Mt. 7:14; Lk. 13:24
Calling on the name of the Lord	Rom. 10:13
The words of Peter	Acts 11:13-14
The words of Paul	1 Thess. 2:16
Grace	Acts 15:11
Jesus' blood	Rom. 5:9
Receiving, standing and holding the gospel	1 Cor. 15:1-2
Loving the truth	2 Thess. 2:10
Listening to and believing the truth	Eph. 1:13
Losing our lives	Mt. 16:25
Obedience	Heb. 5:8-9
Jesus' intercession	Heb. 7:25
Humbly receiving the word of God	Jas. 1:21
An active faith	Jas. 2:21-24
Godly sorrow that leads to repentance	2 Cor. 7:10
Working out our own salvation	Phil. 2:12
Taking heed to self and teaching	1 Tim. 4:16
Using God's milk to grow to salvation	1 Pet. 2:2

<b>We are forgiven by:</b>	<b>New Testament text:</b>
Seeing, hearing, understanding and turning	Mk. 4:12
Loving much	Lk. 7:47-48
The blood of the new covenant	Mt. 26:28
Repentance and baptism	Acts 2:38
Repentance and prayer (for Christians)	Acts 8:22
Belief in Christ	Acts 10:43
Grace and blood	Eph. 1:7
Entering into Christ and His kingdom	Col. 1:13-14
Forgiving others	Mt. 6:14

<b>We are justified by:</b>	<b>New Testament text:</b>
Grace	Rom. 3:24
A system of faith instead of law	Gal. 3:28; Rom. 5:1
Jesus' blood	Rom. 5:9
Works and <i>not</i> faith alone	Jas. 2:24
Our words	Mt. 12:37
Belief	Acts 13:39
Death to our old life	Rom. 6:6-7

The information in the preceding charts demonstrates that salvation occurs in three distinct senses. In some respects salvation is a *past* event (Acts 2:47). Salvation is also described as a *present* experience (1 Cor. 15:1-2) and a *future* state (Rom. 8:24). The present and future senses of salvation explain why Christians are told to “work out” their own salvation with fear and trembling (Phil. 2:12).

*Hold fast* is translated from single present tense verb (*katecho*) that meant “‘hold fast’; ‘adhere to’” (CBL, GED, 3:306). This word has “the sense of following obediently” (ibid). In contrast to the KJV (“*if ye keep in memory*”), *hold fast the word* makes it clear that people must cling to the Bible and follow what it says regardless of their circumstances (compare Rev. 2:10 and Mt. 10:39). It is not enough to “keep in memory” what God requires. There are some things we must “do” if we wish to have God’s fellowship and spiritual blessings (1 Cor. 11:25). John described the point in this way: “*If* we continue to walk (present tense) in the light, God continues to cleanse us (present tense) of all sin” (1 Jn. 1:7, additions and emphasis mine, BP).

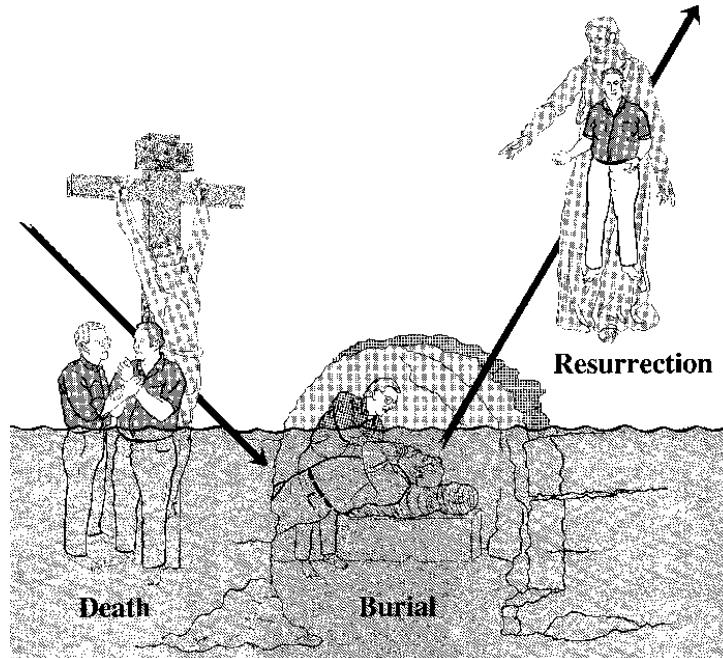
The doctrine of Calvinism says a “saved person cannot be lost” (see this topic discussed in the commentary on 2:14 and 14:20), but Paul said Christians can lose their salvation “if” they do not “stand fast” in God’s word. A Christian can “*believe in vain*” (2b). The word *vain* (*eike*) occurs just a few times in the New Testament (see Rom. 13:4; Gal. 3:4; 4:11; Col. 2:18). Some manuscripts have this term in Mt. 5:22 and this is reflected in translations such as the KJV and NKJV (in these versions this term is translated “without a cause”). In Classical Greek *vain* described an action that lacked a purpose or plan. Here Thayer (p. 174) defined it as “*in vain, without success or effect.*” People can “*believe*” (this word stands for all the things described in the preceding charts), but starting the Christian life is not enough. A person must *stand* in the gospel (compare Acts 14:22; Rom. 11:22; Col. 1:23; 1 Tim. 2:15; 4:16). Some embrace Christianity, but they are lured away by false doctrine, “hypocrites,” pleasure, or the cares and riches of life (compare Lk. 8:14). Many temptations encourage Christians to stop *standing* in the gospel, but turning from the Christian faith causes people to be “severed” from Christ (Gal. 5:4, ASV). The Christian life is a “narrow way” that only a “few” accept and continue with (Mt. 7:14). Although no Christian will be perfect in his beliefs or practices, there is a “pattern” that we must follow for our entire lifetime (for some specific information on this pattern see “An overview of New Testament Christianity” at the end of this commentary).

Lenski (First Corinthians, p. 625) suggested that those “who questioned the resurrection of the dead still believed firmly in the resurrection of Christ. If they had denied that they would have departed so completely from the historic foundation of the faith that Paul would have treated them as apostates.” A similar thought is found in 2 Tim. 2:17-18: “*and their word will eat as doth a gangrene: of whom is Hymenaeus and Philetus; 18 men who concerning the truth have erred, saying that the resurrection is past already, and overthrow the faith of some.*”

**15:3-4:** *For I delivered unto you first of all that which also I received: that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; 4 and that he was buried; and that he hath been raised on the third day according to the scriptures;*

The word “*delivered*” (*paradidomi*) meant “*pass on teaching and modes of conduct (for faithful observance)*” (Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament, 3:20). Rienecker and Rogers (p. 439) defined it as “*pass on authoritative teaching.*” This term is also found in 1 Cor. 11:2, 23 and it tells us that Paul did not come up with the information about Christianity on his own. The information about the Lord’s Supper (1 Cor. 11:2, 23), the resurrection, and everything else he taught came from deity. Paul knew he had to teach people what he had “*received*” (*paralambano*—the same word used in verse 1) from God. This point is also found in the previous chapter (14:37); there Paul said “*prophets*” or those who were truly “*spiritual*” recognized that his writings were “*of the Lord*” (compare, too, Gal. 1:11-12). Today we need to act as Paul did. When it comes to spiritual things, we do not teach people what we think or believe. We teach only what we have *received* (the completed Scriptures).

Since Paul had *received* information about Jesus' death (verse 3) as well as the Lord's burial and resurrection (verse 4), this is what he presented to the Corinthians as well as others. The significance of Jesus' death, burial and resurrection is explained more fully in Rom. 6:1-4 and illustrated by the following graphic (this picture is being included due to the courtesy of *We Care Ministries*).



Jesus died on the cross and the Bible says the unsaved must “die to sin” (this is also known as “repentance”). Jesus forcefully proclaimed the need for repentance in Lk. 13:3 (“*except ye repent, ye shall all in like manner perish*”) as well as Lk. 13:5 (“*except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish*”). Paul proclaimed the universal nature of repentance when he said “*all men everywhere*” must “*repent*” (Acts 17:30). On the Day of Pentecost Peter said his hearers had to “*repent*” (Acts 2:38). Before a person can become a Christian, he must “die” to the ways of the world. As Paul said in Col. 3:1-2, “*Set your mind on the things that are above, not on the things that are upon the earth. For ye died, and your life is hid with Christ in God.*”

After Jesus died He was “buried.” Those who want to become a Christian must also be “buried.” The Bible says this happens by and through baptism (Col. 2:12). Since Col. 2:12 describes baptism as a “burial,” proper baptism requires immersion (having water sprinkled or poured on the body is not New Testament baptism). Until a person is “buried with Christ in baptism,” he is not a Christian. Stated another way, baptism is the final act that puts someone “into Christ” (Gal. 3:27). God certainly requires belief (Heb. 11:6), repentance (Lk. 13:3), and an acknowledgement of who Jesus is (1 Tim. 6:12), but these steps are not enough. Until a person is baptized, he is not “joined with Christ” (Rom. 6:4-5).

The preceding graphic and Rom. 6:4 also refer to a “resurrection.” Jesus was raised on the third day and sinners need to be *raised* so they can walk in “newness of life” (Rom. 6:4b). This “new life” comes *after* baptism. Before baptism a person is unsaved (Mk. 16:16) and guilty of all his sins (Acts 2:38). Proper baptism allows a person to contact the benefits of Jesus’ blood and thereby “wash away his sins” (Acts 22:16). Once a person’s sins have been washed away, his life is literally *new* (compare 2 Cor. 5:17). For more information on this point, see “An Overview of New Testament Christianity” at the end of this commentary.

The process described in the preceding paragraphs is what was taught by all faithful first century Christians. Peter proclaimed this same information on the Day of Pentecost. He spoke of Jesus (Acts 2:22) and said the Lord was “*delivered up by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God*” and

killed “*by the hand of lawless men*” (Acts 2:23). He also said Jesus was “buried” (Acts 2:31) and then “raised up” (Acts 2:32) from the dead. Peter even affirmed that there were “*witnesses*” for the Lord’s resurrection (Acts 2:32). After Peter proclaimed that Jesus was “Lord and Christ” (Acts 2:36), several asked what they needed to do (Acts 2:37). Peter’s response is found in Acts 2:38: “Repent and be baptized.” The believers in Acts 2 were joined to Christ in the same way the Corinthians were. These people repented of their sins so they could share in the likeness of Jesus’ death, they were buried (immersed) into Christ so they could share in the likeness of Jesus’ burial, and they were raised from the watery grave of baptism so they could share in the likeness of Jesus’ resurrection. Readers may also wish to compare 1 Cor. 12:13 and the commentary on this verse as it also discusses baptism.

Some have thought the word *first* (*protos*) in 1 Cor. 15:3 described a *sequence in time* (i.e. one, two, three, four, etc.), but this term means *first in importance*. Paul meant “among the first things delivered to you by me” (Thayer, p. 555). If some facts of the gospel can be regarded as more important than others (compare Mt. 5:19), the Corinthians received the “most important information” (the basics of the Christian faith) *first*. Since we cannot believe what we do not know, and we cannot do what we have not learned, Paul initially taught the Corinthians the most basic facts of the Christian faith. It did little good for him and other evangelists to speak about worship unless a non-Christian knew *Who* to worship. Instruction about Christian living was of little value unless a man knew how to become a Christian. Paul’s initial instruction included information about “*Christ*,” how He “*died*,” and how this information was “*according to the scriptures*.”

The word *died* (*apothnesko*) “is used over 100 times in the New Testament, mostly by Paul in his epistles. It signifies the natural human death when the soul departs the body. The word is also used concerning animals that die (Matthew 8:32), vegetation (Jude 12), and (figuratively of a ‘death’ of the self) a kernel of wheat (John 12:24, NIV). It refers to the believer’s spiritual death to the Law (Galatians 2:19) and to sin (Romans 6:2; cf. Colossians 2:20)” (CBL, GED, 1:364).

Both the ASV and KJV say Jesus died “*for*” our sins. The word *for* (*hyper*) is a preposition that here means “for our sake” or “on our behalf” (compare Jn. 10:11; Rom. 5:6, 8 where this preposition has this same meaning). This verse reminds us that Jesus came to carry out a *spiritual* work (compare Mt. 26:28). Many of the Jewish people knew a King was coming (Isa. 9:6-7 and 2 Sam. 7:12-13), they were looking for this King in the first century era (compare Jn. 6:15), but they misunderstood the spiritual nature of their King’s work (Lk. 17:20-21). Even now (see the commentary on 1 Cor. 15:24-26) some misunderstand the true nature of the Lord’s work. Jesus is King of Kings and Lord of Lords (Lk. 1:32-32; Rev. 19:15-16), but His kingdom is “not of this world” (Jn. 18:36). For more information on the word “*sins*” (*hamartia*), a word that meant “to miss the mark,” see this author’s commentary on Rom. 3:23.

Because the Old Testament has information about sin as well as Jesus’ work and death, Paul was able to teach people about these things by using the *Scriptures*. Several of the Old Testament prophecies about Jesus and their fulfillment are found in this author’s commentary on Hebrews (see the special study near the commentary on Heb. 4:12), but an abbreviated study of this subject is offered here.

The Old Testament had passages that directly or indirectly predicted things such as Jesus’ betrayal. In Ps. 55:12-14 there is a reference to being betrayed by a close friend and this happened to Jesus (Mt. 26:47-50). Most are aware of Mt. 26:14-15, a passage that says Jesus was betrayed for 30 pieces of silver, but they may not realize that this detail also fulfills Old Testament prophecy (Zech. 11:12). Zechariah (13:7) also spoke of the “shepherd being smitten and the sheep scattering” and this happened (Mt. 26:56). Isaiah said Jesus was to be “numbered with the transgressors” (Isa. 53:12) and this occurred as promised (Lk. 22:37; Mk. 15:27-28). There was a prediction about Jesus saying He would be “forsaken” (Ps. 22:1) and this happened (Mt. 27:46). Psalm 22:7 speaks of people “shaking their heads” and mocking someone (Ps. 109:25 has this same prophecy); these Old Testament passages were fulfilled in Jesus’ death (Mt. 27:39-40). Lots were cast for the Lord’s clothing (Jn. 19:23-24), a fulfillment of Ps. 22:18. Psalm 22:16 refers to “hands and feet” being “pierced,” a prediction fulfilled in the crucifixion (compare Jn. 20:27).

The author of Ps. 34 spoke of a body in which no bones were broken (Ps. 34:20); Jesus fulfilled this prophecy in His death (Jn. 19:32-33, 36). The Lord was given gall to drink (Mt. 27:34), just as the Old Testament had predicted (Ps. 69:21). False witnesses arose against Him (Mk. 14:57-60), just as the Old

Testament had promised (Ps. 35:11). Jesus stayed silent as He was being accused (Mk. 15:4-5), another fulfillment of prophecy (Isa. 53:7; Ps. 38:13-14). Luke said Jesus' friends stood "afar off" (Lk. 23:49); even this seemingly insignificant detail was the fulfillment of prophecy (Ps. 38:11).

The Old Testament contains many prophecies about the Lord, but Jesus Himself offered some predictions about His life. For instance, He said He would be "delivered to the chief priests and scribes," "condemned to death," "delivered to the Gentiles," "mocked," "scourged" and "crucified," and then "raised on the third day" (Mt. 20:18-19). All these predictions came true. He also said "all" things written in the "prophets" about Him were going to be accomplished (Lk. 18:31). There were also predictions about Him in the "law and the psalms" (Lk. 24:44). First century Christians were able to use the Old Testament prophecies and their fulfillment to convince people that Christianity is true (compare Lk. 24:25 and Acts 8:28-38). It has been suggested that 1 out of every 53 verses in the Bible makes a reference to Jesus' death.

In addition to describing how Jesus' death was *according to the Scriptures* (verse 3), Paul also spoke of the Lord's *burial* (4a). As discussed in the commentary on verse 6, there are many things about Jesus' burial that help prove He is the Son of God. Jesus' Messiahship is also proven by His *resurrection*, another historical event that was *according to the Scriptures* (4b). The resurrection is so powerful that Paul said in another of his letters, "who was declared (to be) the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead; (even) Jesus Christ our Lord" (Rom. 1:4). Paul was able to use the Old Testament Scriptures to discuss Jesus' death, burial and resurrection with people throughout the first century world. Today this can still be done by us.

Some have thought Jesus was merely "raised in spirit" (His body stayed in the tomb but His spirit was *resurrected*), but this was not what the apostles taught or what first century people believed. In Lk. 24:39 we read: "See my hands and my feet, that it is I myself: handle me, and see; for a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye behold me having." There was no need for Paul or any other inspired writer to describe Jesus' resurrection as a "bodily" resurrection. People realized that *resurrection* meant Jesus' *spirit and body* were raised from the dead.

Paul not only affirmed that Jesus was raised from the dead, he said Jesus was *raised for all time*. The Greek text uses the perfect tense to describe Jesus' resurrection (this means it is impossible for Jesus to ever die again). Jesus is *alive forevermore* (Rev. 1:18). We can visit the graves of many well-known historical people, including well-known religious leaders, but there is no tomb containing Jesus' body. The grave in which Jesus was laid was used for just three days and God chose not to turn it into some type of shrine. Christianity is the only religion with a resurrected savior and this is one of the first things that Paul discussed with the Corinthians when he first met them. Today, as we deal with people who are not Christians, a good evangelistic approach is still to speak about Jesus. We can discuss who He was, what He experienced, and what He did.

The end of verse 4 says Jesus was raised from the dead on a specific day—the "third day." The Old Testament promised a resurrection in places such as Ps. 16:8 (being in the "presence" of Jehovah and being at His "right hand" are references to Jesus' resurrection). Compare, too, Ps. 68:18 plus Eph. 4:8. Jesus' resurrection was also foreshadowed by Jonah (Mt. 12:39-40). The New Testament also has information about the Lord's resurrection and this material is even more specific. Jesus repeatedly said He would be raised on the "third day" (Mt. 16:21; 17:23; 20:19) and it seems even His enemies knew of this prophecy (Mt. 27:64). Specifying an exact day for the resurrection is a small but important detail. If Jesus "had been raised from the dead on the second, fourth, or any succeeding day, that would have been a remarkable, unprecedented achievement; but it also would have declared Him to be a false prophet. He named the day of His resurrection and He accomplished it on that specific day" (Gromacki, p. 183). Predicting the resurrection and predicting a specific day were two more ways to verify the truthfulness of the gospel.

**15:5:** *and that he appeared to Cephas; then to the twelve;*

After Jesus was raised from the dead on the third day (verse 4) He "*appeared*" to people (this point is

discussed more fully in the commentary on verse 6). One of Jesus' first resurrection appearances was to "Cephas" (Peter). We do not know when or how this occurred, but Paul said it did happen. Perhaps Peter shared this information with Paul during the time described in Gal. 1:18. The only additional information we have about this appearance is found in Lk. 24:34: "*The Lord is risen indeed, and hath appeared to Simon.*" Allen (p. 182) suggested the details of this appearance are not provided because of Peter's previous denials (in order to spare Peter any additional pain, God did not allow Paul or Luke to record the specifics of this appearance). We do know that *Cephas* (*Kephas*) is the Aramaic word for "rock" (compare Jn. 1:42).

Some have wondered why Paul specifically mentioned Jesus' appearance to Peter, but this question is also not answered. Some commentators think Paul offered this information because Peter was influential among the Corinthians (compare 1:12). It is also possible that Paul referred to Peter to remind the Corinthians that both he and Peter believed in and preached a resurrected Messiah (compare Acts 2:22-32; 3:15; 4:10; 1 Pet. 1:3).

After appearing to Peter, Jesus appeared to "*the twelve*" (the other apostles). This information is recorded in Jn. 20:19-23 and Lk. 24:34-43. Because this appearance took place when Judas and Thomas were not present (Judas was dead and Thomas was elsewhere), some have said Paul made a mistake. How could Paul say Jesus appeared to "the twelve" when only ten apostles were actually present? Paul simply spoke as we often do. If a man has 5 brothers and three of these men help him rob a bank, a prosecuting attorney might later say, "This man *and his brothers* robbed a bank." This statement is true, but the prosecutor would not mean all five of the man's brothers were involved with the robbery.

Some manuscripts say "*the eleven*," but almost every translation renders the text as *the twelve* and this author accepts this reading. The disciples were known as *the twelve*, even if they were not all together at the same time. Even after there were 13 apostles (Judas was removed from the group but Matthias and Paul were later added), this group could have been technically referred to as *the twelve* (compare Rev. 21:14 and Mt. 19:28).

Paul did not list all of Jesus' appearances after the resurrection (compare Jn. 20:14), but he did list enough examples to convince the Corinthians that the resurrection was true. The information in this chapter "shows that Christ appeared to individuals, small groups, and a large crowd; that He appeared at different times and in various places; and that He was seen, touched, and heard" (Gromacki, p. 184).

While many saw Jesus after His resurrection, it seems that no individual was sitting in the tomb watching the Lord's body. It also seems that no human being was allowed to watch the resurrection process or see the stone removed from the tomb. The fact that no one witnessed these events does not in any way lessen our proof for the resurrection. Today many crimes are committed without anyone seeing the physical act, but people are rightfully convicted of their crimes by various pieces of evidence. The life of Jesus is a life filled with evidence. There is vast evidence for His coming to the earth, His dying on the cross, and His resurrection. Some, however, do not want to consider the proof that God offers.

Thomas Jefferson, while working in the White House in 1804, sought to edit the Gospels and uncover the "essence of true religion in the simple story of the life of Jesus." If readers can find a copy of Jefferson's Bible (*The Life and Morals of Jesus of Nazareth* is the formal title of this book) they will see that a chapter—an important chapter—is missing. Jefferson's Bible ends by saying that Jesus was buried ("There they laid Jesus. And rolled a great stone to the door of the sepulcher and departed"). Although Jefferson cut out the resurrection information, the "full story" says Jesus was raised from the dead (Mt. 28). The "full story" also says we are to share in the likeness of Jesus' death, burial and resurrection (Rom. 6:1-4 and see the comments on 15:3-4).

**15:6:** *then he appeared to above five hundred brethren at once, of whom the greater part remain until now, but some are fallen asleep;*

In addition to being seen by the apostles, Jesus was also seen by "*above*" (more than) "*five hundred brethren at once*" (i.e. all these witnesses saw Him at the same time). If this appearance is not the one recorded in Mt. 28, it is not recorded anywhere else in the New Testament or mentioned by any secular



historians.

Jesus not only appeared to more than 500 people at once, the “*greater part*” (majority) of these witnesses were still alive when this letter was written (there was a space of about 25 years between Jesus’ resurrection and the writing of this letter). Some of the 500+ witnesses had “*fallen asleep*” (died), but the majority of them were still alive. Paul implied that if anyone wanted to question these people, that could (and should) be done. Christianity was started and perpetuated with many different miracles, thousands of people witnessed things about Jesus before and after His resurrection, and the beliefs of Christianity were “*delivered once for all time*” (Jude 3). No other religion has been introduced, verified, and perpetuated in the way that Christianity has been. In fact, several religions have been partially or largely based on legends.

The Muslim faith has traditions (legends) known as the “*Hadith*.” This information was written after Muhammad died and it allegedly helps people know some of the things said and done by Muhammad. The Hadith says Muhammad ascended to heaven on a mule, he healed a companion’s broken leg, and he fed large groups of people with little food. There is even a claim of Muhammad turning a tree branch into a steel sword. Unlike Christianity that had its entire doctrine established by the close of the first century (2 Tim. 3:16-17 and see the commentary on 1 Cor. 13:8-13), other religions have developed and refined their beliefs over time.

Instead of relying on legends and fanciful claims, Christianity is based on historical facts and numerous eyewitnesses. In 1 Cor. 15:6 Paul affirmed that some of Jesus’ resurrection appearances were to people who knew Him well (“*brethren*”). If the disciples wanted to fake Jesus’ resurrection, they could have pretended to have Jesus appear to people who did not know Him. History says Jesus appeared to people who knew Him—people who could really tell if it was Him. There is also this important point in Acts 10:41: “*not to all the people, but unto witnesses that were chosen before of God, (even) to us, who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead.*” Peter spoke these words before arriving at Cornelius’ household and this information tells us that God “*chose the witnesses of the resurrection beforehand.*” God knew who would and would not be the best witnesses for this historical event and God used the best witnesses to verify that Jesus was truly raised from the dead. Jesus’ known resurrection appearances include:

- Peter (Lk. 24:34; 1 Cor. 15:5)
- Cleopas and another disciple (Lk. 24:13-32)
- Mary Magdalene and the other Mary (Mt. 28:1, 9-10; Jn. 20:11-18)
- The apostles without Thomas (Lk. 24:36-45; Jn. 20:19-24)
- The apostles with Thomas (Jn. 20:24-29)
- Seven people at the lake of Tiberius (Jn. 21:1-23)
- The disciples (Mt. 28:16-20)
- 500 in Galilee (1 Cor. 15:6)
- James in Jerusalem (1 Cor. 15:7)
- Many at the ascension (Acts 1:3-11)
- Paul near Damascus (Acts 9:3-6; 1 Cor. 15:8)
- Stephen when he was stoned (Acts 7:55)
- Paul in the temple (Acts 22:17-21; 23:11)
- John on Patmos (Rev. 1:10-19)

The eyewitnesses for Jesus’ resurrection show that God used *quality* people. Instead of using moral reprobates (i.e. liars, thieves, murderers), or people who had a bad or questionable character, God used good and upright people. These eyewitnesses were also *competent*. Unlike many situations today where people cannot agree on what they see, there was *consistency of testimony* from those who saw Jesus after His resurrection. Moreover, this consistency came from *first hand sources* that *agreed on what they saw*. Today eyewitnesses sometimes tell conflicting stories because they have a poor perception of the event, they suffer from memory failure, or they interpret the event in a loose way. None of these things

happened with those who saw Jesus after His resurrection.

God wants people to believe because of evidence and He has given more than sufficient evidence to have a faith built on solid facts. Strobel (*The Case For Christ*, p. 320) described just the eyewitness testimony in this way: “if you were to call each one of the witnesses to a court of law to be cross-examined for just fifteen minutes each, and you went around the clock without a break, it would take you from breakfast on Monday until dinner on Friday to hear them all. After listening to 129 straight hours of eyewitness testimony, who could possibly walk away unconvinced?”

Christianity is a religion rooted in history and the facts about it are historically accurate or they are not. If the information about the resurrection is true, we must accept it and we are obligated to obey and follow the resurrected Christ. If the resurrection is false, everything about Christianity should be rejected. There is no “middle ground” with the Christian faith.

### **A special study on the resurrection of Jesus Christ:**

The evidence that Jesus is a real, historical figure is so overwhelming that very few skeptics try to say Jesus never existed. Still, since Jesus could not have been raised from the dead unless He was an actual historical figure, it seems necessary to briefly discuss whether or not Jesus is a fictional character (some skeptics have likened Him to Santa Claus). The gospels, which are highly regarded historical documents, say that Jesus lived, but they are by no means the only source.

Proof for Jesus being a real person is found in the writings of Josephus, a first century Jewish historian who said: “He convened a meeting of the Sanhedrin and brought before them a man named James, the brother of Jesus, who was called the Christ, and certain others. He accused them of having transgressed the law and delivered them up to be stoned” (Josephus, *The Antiquities* 20:200). This historical reference not only proves that Jesus lived, it is especially noteworthy because Jesus and Josephus were so different. Jesus encouraged people to pay taxes and encouraged people to submit to the government. Josephus was mainly interested in the Jews’ struggle against Rome and political matters (his philosophy was the very opposite of Jesus’ teaching). In spite of these two very different philosophies, Josephus does refer to Jesus and says people “called” Him the “Christ.”

Another reference to Jesus is found in the writings of Tacitus, a premier first century Roman historian. Tacitus said, “Nero fastened the guilt and inflicted the most exquisite tortures on a class hated for their abominations, called Christians by the populace. Christus, from whom the name had its origin, suffered the extreme penalty during the reign of Tiberius at the hands of one of our procurators, Pontius Pilatus, and a most mischievous superstition, thus checked for the moment, again broke out not only in Judaea, the first source of the evil, but even in Rome....Accordingly, an arrest was made of all who pleaded guilty: then, upon their formation, an immense multitude was convicted, not so much of the crime of firing the city, as of hatred against mankind” (The Annals, book XV, chapter 44). The gospels, Josephus and Tacitus all verify that Jesus really lived, but evidence for Jesus’ existence also comes from Jesus’ enemies (those who opposed the Lord actually help prove that He was a real person).

Skeptics and believers often find basic agreement on the fact that Jesus really did live. Believers and unbelievers also sometimes find some basic points of agreement regarding Jesus’ death and burial (many will concede that Jesus died on the cross and was buried). There can even be basic agreement on one more point: After three days one of two things was true: Jesus’ body was still in the tomb or it was not. If His body was no longer in the grave (and most agree it was not), it had to be somewhere else. Believers say the tomb was empty because of the resurrection. Unbelievers have many different explanations for the empty tomb, including the following.

Some believe Jesus’ body was still in the grave, but people forgot where the tomb was. Since the tomb could not be found, the disciples claimed Jesus had been raised from the dead. Others claim Jesus’ body was thrown into a mass grave and never found, even though people searched for it. Both of these explanations cannot be harmonized with several facts, eight of which are these:

1. The accuracy of the gospel writers has been repeatedly proven (their testimony is as historically credible as Josephus and other ancient writers). Since these authors affirmed that people went to the correct tomb (compare Mk. 16:6; Jn. 19:41; 20:1, 12), their testimony must be accepted or discredited. As of this writing the information in the gospels has never been successfully rebutted.
2. Joseph of Arimathaea, the owner of the tomb, surely knew where this grave was located (Mt. 27:59-60).
3. The disciples were familiar with the place where Jesus was laid (see the references under point 1).
4. The Jewish and Roman officials knew where Jesus' body was taken (Mt. 27:64-66).
5. Jesus' adversaries could have quickly denounced all resurrection claims by producing His body. If the Lord had been laid in a mass grave, this site could have been found, the body could have been recovered, and the resurrection story could have been proven false once and for all.
6. The tomb was "*sealed*" with a Roman seal (Mt. 26:66) and watched by guards (Mt. 28:4). Certainly the guards would have been familiar with the place they were guarding, especially since this was a "high profile case."
7. This grave belonged to a wealthy member of the Jewish council (Mt. 27:57-60). Would the location of a rich person's grave simply be *forgotten*?
8. After the resurrection Jesus appeared to the "apostles" (Acts 1:2) for a period of "40 days" and offered "many proofs" (Acts 1:3). How could these men who had traveled with Jesus for years have been fooled for more than a month?

Since the theories about people having difficulty finding Jesus' tomb or the Lord being buried in a mass grave are not convincing, skeptics have sometimes turned to other ideas to explain away the resurrection. It has been claimed that Jesus was supposed to be put into a specific tomb, but His body was mistakenly put elsewhere and the resulting confusion led people to conclude He had been raised from the dead. This is an interesting idea, but it also fails to account for what happened.

1. Mary was able to actually see where the body had been (Jn. 20:11-12).
2. If this theory was true, it would mean that many who really wanted to find the body (the disciples, the Jews, and the Romans) were unable to locate a recently used tomb.
3. What about the Roman guard? Did these men seal the wrong tomb and guard the wrong grave?
4. How do we account for all the eyewitness resurrection testimony described in the preceding commentary?

Since the foregoing theory is not credible, some have suggested that the resurrection is a legend (this story was circulated several years after Jesus' death). This idea is also too flawed to be true.

1. Over 500 people saw Jesus in His resurrected state "*at one time*" (1 Cor. 15:6).
2. The story of the resurrection was told *early* (soon after the crucifixion) and it was told in Jerusalem, the absolute worst place to perpetuate a false story about a resurrection (compare Jn. 11:53-54).

Since the *legend theory* cannot be true, some have claimed Jesus experienced a “*spiritual resurrection*.” In other words, Jesus was “raised in His Spirit,” but His physical body suffered decay and remained in the tomb. This explanation is also unacceptable for at least two reasons.

1. The 500 witnesses described in 1 Cor. 15:6 did not visit with a Spirit.
2. Three days in the tomb was not enough time for Jesus’ body to experience any significant decay. Why didn’t the Jews or Romans bring out the dead but still identifiable corpse and show it to people?

Another popular denial of the resurrection is found in the *hallucination theory*. This idea says those who claimed to witness the resurrection hallucinated; people thought they saw Jesus, but they were actually deluded.

There are situations in life where people are deluded or hallucinate, but, as shown by the following points, those who witnessed the resurrection did not experience these things.

1. Certain conditions must exist before people hallucinate. Two of the most common things that cause hallucinations are taking some type of drug or depriving the body of what it needs. There is no evidence that these or any of the other conditions that cause hallucinations were associated with those who claimed to be with Jesus before, during, or after His time in the tomb.
2. Hallucinations are common with people who have schizophrenia and (or) psychosis. Were the more than 500 people who saw Jesus on a single occasion *all* prone to schizophrenic or psychotic behavior or tendencies? The chance of this happening, to so many people who came from many different backgrounds, would be greater than the resurrection itself.
3. The chance that more than 500 people in a single setting, plus all the other resurrection witnesses described in the previous bulleted points, would have the exact same hallucination, at the same time, and describe their experience in precisely the same way, is not credible to those who have knowledge of psychology. Neither can such be believed by those who possess even a little common sense. Hallucinations are relatively rare occurrences and they happen to people on an individual basis (i.e. it is not possible for one person to somehow induce a hallucination in someone else).
4. Hallucinations do not sit down to dinner with people and invite them to have a closer look at things (Lk. 24:38-42).
5. Hallucinations occur in the minds of people who have hope and expectancy, but Jesus’ disciples were fearful, doubtful, and in a state of despair after the crucifixion. These men were the worst possible candidates for a hallucination.
6. How likely is it that Saul, who we usually describe as the apostle Paul, would become convinced of the resurrection and turn his back on a very successful Jewish career (Phil. 3:4-8) because of a hallucination?

Some have seen the problems with all the preceding arguments and have concluded it is better to say that Jesus’ tomb really was empty. These skeptics do not believe in the resurrection; they believe the tomb had no body because Jesus’ disciples stole it and then proclaimed that He had returned from the dead. This attempt is far from new; it was tried by people in the first century (Mt. 28:11-14) and it also is an insufficient answer to the empty tomb. In addition to failing to account for Jesus’ many resurrection

appearances, this explanation also does not account for the following points.

1. Consider the Roman guard. Suggesting that these soldiers were bribed or sleeping is so unrealistic that Matthew did not bother to refute this idea (Mt. 28:14-16). Matthew apparently mentioned this point to let us know that some tried to deny the resurrection by using this idea, but first century people knew this explanation could not be true.
2. The fearfulness of the disciples (they fled when Jesus was arrested) and the fierceness of the Roman soldiers cannot be reconciled with the disciples stealing Jesus' body.
3. If this theory is true, how do we know it was the disciples who stole Jesus' body? If the guards were sleeping, how do we know who entered into the tomb?
4. The guards at the tomb were Roman soldiers, battle-hardened men that people didn't interfere with (compare Mt. 27:65).
5. A huge stone ("*exceeding great*") covered the entrance to the tomb (Mk. 16:3-4). Instead of being pushed aside, this stone was actually moved away from the tomb entrance (see the commentary on Mk. 16:1-4 in section 47 of this author's commentary on the Gospels). How could men continue to sleep when a rock estimated to have weighed some 2 tons was lifted up and set somewhere else? McDowell (The Resurrection Factor, pp. 53-54) indicates that 20 men were needed to move a boulder of this size.
6. John (11:7-8) says: "*Then after this he saith to the disciples, Let us go into Judaea again. The disciples say unto him, Rabbi, the Jews were but now seeking to stone thee; and goest thou thither again?*" The disciples knew how the religious officials hated Jesus. If these men made up a story about Jesus being raised from the dead, or they tried to steal His body, they would have been doing things that would have resulted in the full wrath of the Jewish officials (i.e. arrest, imprisonment, beatings, and possibly death). Why would these men subject themselves to great risk and terrible suffering if there was no resurrection? Moreover, why didn't the apostles simply tell the Jewish officials they were lying about the resurrection when they began to face severe persecution? Why not deny the resurrection and stop the persecution?  
If the disciples suffered for a lie or they endured suffering for a prank, there is no parallel to their actions in the history of the world. Certainly there was no earthly incentive for these men to take Jesus' body or proclaim that He had been raised from the dead if the resurrection was untrue. There was no earthly mansion waiting for them on the Mediterranean and no cushy political job if they lied about the resurrection. The disciples believed and publicly proclaimed their belief in the resurrection because Jesus had shown Himself "alive by many proofs" (Acts 1:3).
7. If the disciples took the body, why didn't Jewish authorities or even the Romans use this explanation? Why was it necessary to give the soldiers "much money" (Mt. 28:12) to say Jesus' body had been stolen by the disciples *while they* (the guards) *slept* (Mt. 28:13)?

Since the theories about the disciples taking the body are inadequate to explain away the resurrection, some have said *the authorities took Jesus' body*. This explanation is also indefensible. The last thing the authorities wanted to do, especially the Jewish authorities, was to have an empty tomb on the day Jesus was supposed to have been raised. Why do the very thing Jesus had predicted!? The Bible says the authorities wanted to keep the Lord's tomb intact (Mt. 27:65-66) and they wanted to know where Jesus' body was (Mt. 27:62-64). Having the Lord's body disappear, or giving people any opportunity to claim He had been raised, were the very things the authorities wanted to avoid.

When skeptics realize all the preceding arguments cannot explain the resurrection, they sometimes appeal to the "*resuscitation theory*" (this is also known as the "*swoon theory*"). In the 18<sup>th</sup> century this view had many adherents and it is still somewhat popular in the United States, especially on some

university campuses. Proponents of the swoon theory say Jesus suffered shock, pain, blood loss and dehydration, but these things only led to His fainting—not His death on the cross. After Jesus collapsed, His lifeless body was removed from the cross and taken to a cool tomb. The coolness of the tomb revived Him and then He began to appear to people. It is further alleged that He was able to fool people because first century people lacked the medical knowledge we now possess. This theory also says Jesus' disciples were shocked at His recovery, but they masked their surprise by inventing the resurrection story. This is another creative theory, but it is just as inadequate as all the preceding attempts to explain away the resurrection.

Jesus went through six different trials and finally experienced a “scourging” (Jn. 19:1). This beating was a legal precursor to crucifixions and it was so bad that some men died from it. In fact, Jesus' beating was so terrible that the Greek text in 1 Pet. 2:24 literally says we are healed by Jesus' “*stripe*” (the singular indicates Jesus' wounds were so many or terrible that they all ran together and looked like a single injury). Strobel (The Case For Christ, p. 261) offered this description of the Roman scourgings: ““Roman floggings were known to be terribly brutal. They usually consisted of thirty-nine lashes but frequently were a lot more than that, depending on the mood of the soldier applying the blows.

““The soldier would use a whip of braided leather thongs with metal balls woven into them. When the whip would strike the flesh, these balls would cause deep bruises or contusions, which would break open with further blows. And the whip had pieces of sharp bone as well, which would cut the flesh severely.

““The back would be so shredded that part of the spine was sometimes exposed by the deep, deep cuts. The whipping would have gone all the way from the shoulders down to the back, the buttocks, and the back of the legs. It was just terrible.”” A “physician who has studied the Roman beatings said, ‘As the flogging continued, the lacerations would tear into the underlying skeletal muscles and produce quivering ribbons of bleeding flesh.’ A third century historian by the name of Eusebius described a flogging by saying, ‘The sufferer’s veins were laid bare, and the very muscles, sinews, and bowels of the victim were open to exposure’” (ibid).

Jesus was so weak after the scourging that He needed help carrying the cross (Lk. 23:26). We also should not forget that a “crown of thorns” was placed on His head (Mt. 27:29) and a “reed” (Mk. 15:19) was used to hit Him on the head. After these things Jesus was crucified (Lk. 24:39-40). The Bible says the Lord was on the cross for six hours (Mk. 15:25, 34) and then “soldiers” (Jn. 19:32) verified that He was “dead” (Jn. 19:33). These men were experts in their trade and they knew Jesus' physical life had ended. Nevertheless, one of these men “pierced” Jesus side and “blood and water” came from this additional wound (Jn. 19:34. Many believe the spear pierced Jesus' lungs, heart, or some other vital body part). After these things about 100 pounds of spices were used on the Lord's body (Jn. 19:39). Jesus' corpse would have been wrapped with a gummy substance. He was finally placed into a tomb that was sealed by a large rock, the weight of which has been estimated at two tons (compare Mk. 16:3-4).

In spite of all the preceding information, some claim Jesus was able to free Himself, move the stone away from the tomb, fight off the guards and somehow sufficiently recover from all His wounds. He then appeared to people and acted as if He was full of life and zest—the peak of health. Even if someone could have done all these things, he would hardly be in a position to inspire his “disciples to go out and proclaim that he's the Lord of life who had triumphed over the grave....After suffering that horrible abuse, with all the catastrophic blood loss and trauma, he would have looked so pitiful that the disciples would have never hailed him as a victorious conqueror of death; they would have felt sorry for him and tried to nurse him back to health” (The Case For Christ, Strobel, p. 271).

The other *natural explanation* for an empty tomb is known as the “*Passover Plot*.” This idea is related to the swoon theory, but it has an unusual twist. This *plot* explanation says Jesus was very familiar with the Old Testament and He decided to fulfill the Old Testament prophecies on His own. Stated another way, the *Passover Plot* says Jesus was a master pretender.

In order to carry out His plan, Jesus took Joseph of Arimathea and an unnamed young man into his confidence. Jesus arranged to fake His death on a cross by taking a drug (this was slipped to Him in the vinegar that was offered). This drug was supposed to render Him unconscious and Joseph was to take the Lord to the tomb where He intended to wake up and then proclaim He had been raised from the dead.

This plan did not go as scheduled because of the soldier who pierced His side with a spear (Jn. 19:34). This tale says Jesus did regain consciousness, but He later died and His remains were removed from the grave. Mary eventually went to the tomb and she mistook the young man (the Lord's confidant) for Jesus (Mk. 16:1-5). Even the disciples mistook this young man for the Lord because they, just like Mary, were in a state of emotional turmoil. Of course, Joseph of Arimathea "knew the truth" and kept this entire incident secret (i.e. Joseph never told anyone that Jesus had really died and the resurrection was false). Witnesses certainly did see someone, but it was not Jesus.

This theory faces many of the same problems associated with the previous ones (it fails to account for the eyewitnesses, some of whom saw Jesus for a period of 40 days, Acts 1:2-3). It does not account for the Roman guard and how 1-2 people could move a 2 ton stone away from the tomb. It does not explain where the body was taken or how Jesus performed a variety of miracles prior to His death, one of which was the raising of Lazarus, a man who had been dead for four days (Jn. 11:39-44). The *Passover Plot* view makes Jesus both a pretender and a liar.

If anyone could have disproven the resurrection it would have been the first century Jews who were hostile to Jesus and His teaching. Many tried to discredit Jesus and His claims (including the resurrection), but these efforts were futile. Instead of discrediting the Christian faith, thousands of Jewish people became Christians. On the day of Pentecost about 3,000 embraced the Lord (Acts 2:41) and this number steadily increased (Acts 4:4). Also, rather than continue to follow the Sabbath—a day that Jewish people had been clinging to for thousands of years—those who became Christians began to assemble on the "first day of the week" (Acts 20:7; 1 Cor. 16:2), the day on which Jesus was raised from the dead (Mk. 16:9). For more information on the *first day of the week* see the commentary on 10:16; 11:20b; the *Introduction to 16:2 and the "first day of the week"*; and the commentary on 16:2.

Compelling testimony for the resurrection is certainly seen in 1 Cor. 15:6. Although Paul said more than 500 people saw Jesus in a single setting, consider what happens if we round this number down to just 500 and we say Jesus appeared to this group for just six minutes. Based on this extremely conservative estimate, Jesus offered more than 50 hours of eyewitness testimony on this one occasion. If an attorney introduced 50 hours of eyewitness testimony from a group of 500 people, and the testimony from these 500 eyewitness all said the same thing, would a jury be convinced by this evidence? God has given us this evidence plus much, much, more.

Some have said Jesus "only appeared to believers," but this claim is untrue. Jesus appeared to one of the most hostile unbelievers of all time, Saul of Tarsus (Acts 9:22, 26-27). Saul was so convinced by Jesus' resurrection appearance that he turned from persecutor to preacher! In fact, the Bible specifically says the turning point for Saul was seeing the resurrected Lord (Acts 9:5, 20-22). Skeptics cannot offer a good explanation for Paul's conversion, but the resurrection does fully explain Paul's radical conversion. In addition to Paul, there was also some initial unbelief among the disciples (Lk. 24:9-11 and compare Lk. 24:25). Readers may also wish to read Jn. 20:25.

Schaff (*History of the Christian Church*, 1:307-315) lists many of the common explanations that skeptics have given to explain Paul's conversion, but none of the proposed ideas adequately explain what caused Saul to quickly turn from persecutor to preacher. In fact, after considering the "rationalistic and natural interpretations" for Paul's conversion Schaff said all the *rationalistic* and *natural* explanations "turn out to be irrational and unnatural" (1:315) and the resurrection is "the most rational and natural" (ibid). Stated another way, without the resurrection, Paul's "conversion would have been impossible, and on the other hand the conversion of such a man and with such results is one of the strongest proofs of the resurrection" (1:297). Since Paul was "*on his way to Damascus*" (Acts 9:3) and he was "*breathing threatening and slaughter against Christians*" (Acts 9:1) only something as stupendous as seeing the resurrected Christ could have caused him to immediately change from persecutor to believer. In spite of all the "suddenness and radicalness of the transformation there is nevertheless a bond of unity between Saul the Pharisee and Paul the Christian. It was the same person with the same end in view, but in opposite directions" (1:301). Paul engaged in evangelistic efforts that spanned "more than a quarter of a century" and this "has no parallel in the annals of history, and affords an unanswerable proof of the sincerity of his conversion and the truth of Christianity" (1:303).

The resurrection also “furnishes the only key for the solution of the psychological problem of the sudden, radical, and permanent change in the mind and conduct of the disciples; it is the necessary link in the chain which connects their history before and after that event. Their faith in the resurrection was too clear, too strong, too steady, too effective to be explained in any other way. They showed the strength and boldness of their conviction by soon returning to Jerusalem, the post of danger, and founding there, in the very face of the hostile Sanhedrin, the mother-church of Christendom” (Schaff, 1:177).

The word “*asleep*” (*koimaomai*) in 6b is used in other parts of the New Testament. In most places this term describes physical death (see this illustrated in Mt. 27:52; Jn. 11:11; 1 Cor. 15:18). When Bible writers used this word to describe death, they always applied it to the saved (people who were in a right relationship with God). The word *sleep* suggests that saved people are in a satisfied and peaceful state when they die (Lk. 16:25). This peaceful state is not, however, experienced by the unsaved (Lk. 16:23-24). For more information on this word see the commentary on 11:30.

**15:7-8:** *then he appeared to James; then to all the apostles; 8 and last of all, as to the (child) untimely born, he appeared to me also.*

In addition to appearing to “*Cephas*” (Peter), “*the twelve*,” and more than “*500*” others “*at once*” (verses 5- 6), Jesus also appeared to “*James*” (*iakobos*). The name *James* is applied to four different New Testament characters. We read about James the apostle (he was the son of Zebedee and the brother of John, Mt. 10:2). This is also the James who was killed by Herod Agrippa the First (Acts 12:2). A second man who bears this name was the “son of Alpheus” (most believe this was “James the less” and the son of Mary, Mk. 15:40). A third man named James was one of Jesus’ half brothers; he was very influential in the Jerusalem church (Acts 15:13) and he wrote the New Testament book that bears his name (Jas. 1:1). The final New Testament character named James was the father (or brother according to the KJV) of “Judas” (see Lk. 6:16; Acts 1:13 and bear in mind that this *Judas* was *not* Judas Iscariot). Most believe the James described here was Jesus’ half brother.

We have no additional New Testament information about Jesus appearing to James, but there is a reference to such an appearance in an uninspired source. In the *epistle to the Hebrews*, an ancient document not recognized as Scripture, it is said that Jesus “went to James and appeared to him; for James had sworn that he would not eat bread from that hour in which the Lord had drunk the cup...till he saw him risen from the dead.” Jesus therefore “took bread and blessed it and brake it and gave it to James the Just and said to him, My brother, eat thy bread, for the Son of Man has risen from the dead.” This citation is given because it exists and may be of interest to readers; it is not offered as proof that Jesus appeared to James. Paul’s statement in 1 Cor. 15:7 is sufficient to believe that Jesus made a personal resurrection appearance to His half brother.

During Jesus’ earthly ministry His earthly family thought He was insane (Mk. 3:20-21) and His half brothers did not have faith in Him (Jn. 7:5). James not only changed his view of Jesus, he became a strong and influential Christian (he was a “pillar” in the Jerusalem church, Gal. 2:9). Skeptics do not have a good explanation for James’ radical change. Neither can they offer a good explanation for the conversion of Saul or people like the many “priests” who embraced Christianity (see Acts 6:7).

The end of verse 7 is related to the information in verse 5. Jesus was seen of the “*twelve*” (verse 5) and “*then of all the apostles*” (verse 7). As noted in the commentary on verse 5, “the twelve” was a description for the apostles and this description could have been used even if all these men were not together at the same time. In fact, when the appearance described in verse 7 occurred, it seems there were only eleven apostles (Judas was dead and Matthias’ appointment, Acts 1:26, was still in the future). Whatever the exact time of this appearance (Paul may or may not have been thinking of the occasion described in Jn. 20:24-29), this was just one of Jesus’ many appearances to the apostles after His resurrection (Acts 1:2-3). Jesus even appeared to Paul (verse 8), an appearance that Paul described as “*last of all*” (verse 8).

The word *last* (*eschatos*) has sometimes been understood chronologically, but the information in Rev. 1:16-17 (Jesus’ final appearance seems to have been to John) makes a chronological explanation unlikely.



Kittel (2:697) said the word *last* “suggests the closing of a series, so that from the time of this there can be no similar or equivalent events.” In other words, Paul was the last person to ever be appointed an apostle. Since God “set apostles in the church” (1 Cor. 12:28), and these men are part of the “foundation” (Eph. 2:20), there can be no additional apostles. In fact, instead of having new (additional) apostles, the church still has the original apostles (the first century apostles continue to do their work and reign through their writings). A similar point is found in Lk. 16:31. Although Moses and the prophets had been dead for many years, Jesus said those in His day could still “hear” (present tense) these Old Testament characters. This *hearing* came through their writings, just as we now have and hear the apostles through the books they wrote.

Verse 8 also refers to Paul “*as of one born out of due time*” (KJV) or “*untimely born*” (ASV). These translations come from a single term (*ektroma*) that occurs only here in the New Testament and commentators do not agree on what this word means. Some think Paul was describing the “lateness” of his conversion compared to the other apostles. Others believe he described the radical change he underwent or his deep regret over persecuting Christians prior to his conversion (verse 9). All three of these things are true, but we do not know which (if any) of these ideas was what Paul meant.

Schaff (History of the Christian Church, 1:313) suggested the key difference between Paul and the other apostles was their having seen “the *risen* Saviour still abiding on *earth*, while he saw the *ascended* Saviour coming down from *heaven*, as we may expect him to appear to all men on the last day. It is the *greatness* of that vision which leads him to dwell on his personal unworthiness as ‘the least of the apostles and not worthy to be called an apostle, because he persecuted the church of God.’” Others such as Lenski (First Corinthians, p. 639) believe Paul compared “himself to an abortion, to whom the risen Lord nevertheless appeared.” “God took this dead, vile thing, the most rabid persecutor of his church, and by his wondrous grace made not only a Christian of him but also an apostle, and not only one who was fit and worthy to be placed at the side of the other apostles but one who outranks the rest in his work, one who labors more abundantly than they all” (ibid, p. 640). “T Boman points out the triply depreciative expression: the last of the series—like a stillborn child—the lowliest or most minuscule of the apostles” (Spicq, 1:466). The CBL (First Corinthians, p. 459) noted how some think *born out of due time* was “one of the insults the Judaists threw at Paul. Perhaps his opponents took note of his personal appearance and his doctrine of free grace and called him an abortion. Paul adopted the title and gave it a deeper meaning.” This is possible, but there is little to no evidence for the CBL explanation.

Understanding exactly what Paul meant is very, very difficult. We do know that the word translated *untimely born* (ASV) is used three times in the LXX (the Greek translation of the Old Testament), but Spicq (1:464) noted how these passages shed “no light on the Pauline metaphor.” The first place where *untimely born* occurs in the LXX is Num. 12:12 (Aaron pleaded with Moses on behalf of Miriam after she was stricken with leprosy. He did not want her to be like a “still born” child). This term is also found in Job 3:16 and Eccl. 6:3.

We may not have a full understanding of verse 8, but it does seem safe to say that Paul had not forgotten his former manner of life. He knew his conversion had been radical (Gal. 1:22-23) and he felt like he was the “chief of sinners” (1 Tim. 1:13-15). He knew that while he had been busy with Judaism (Phil. 3:4-5) and opposing Christianity (this point is discussed more fully in verse 9), the other apostles were with Jesus and helping Him.

The word translated *appeared* (*horao*) is found in verses 5, 6, 7, 8. By using this term in each of these verses, Paul indicated that he, James, and all the other apostles witnessed the same thing. Paul saw Jesus just as the others saw Him; instead of seeing something like “*light*” (Acts 9:3) or a “*vision*,” Jesus actually “*appeared*” to Paul after the resurrection.

**15:9:** *For I am the least of the apostles, that am not meet to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God.*

The word “*least*” (*elachistos*) is applied to things that are “small in size” (Jas. 3:4), insignificant matters (1 Cor. 6:2), and even “commandments” (Mt. 5:19). Here this term is applied to the “*apostles*.”

The word “*meet*” (*hikanos*) in the KJV and ASV completes the thought, though the meaning of this word may not be immediately clear. *Meet* meant “fit, appropriate, competent, qualified, worthy.” Here the best translation for it might be “*fit*.” Other passages that have the word translated *meet* and use it in this same way include Mt. 3:11 (John the Baptist was not *fit* to untie the Lord’s shoes) and Mt. 8:8 (a centurion said he was not *worthy* of having Jesus come to his house).

Paul told the Corinthians he did not regard himself as someone who was *fit* for the apostolic office and we can understand why he felt this way. Paul had not only missed many of the things experienced by the other apostles, he had previously done all he could to undermine Christianity (Acts 26:10). He held the garments for those who stoned Stephen (Acts 8:1). He punished (Acts 26:11) and confined (Acts 22:19) Christians. Gromacki (p. 185) described Paul’s attitude as a man who “knew that he now was a genuine apostle, equal to the others; but he also was aware of his personal unworthiness.” “Paul held staunchly to two points: One was the high dignity of his position as an apostle; the other was his profound sense of unworthiness in the matter” (CBL, First Corinthians, p. 459).

Regardless of how Paul viewed himself, God had “*called*” Paul to be an “*apostle*” and this meant preaching the gospel (verses 1-2 and compare 2 Cor. 3:5-6). God’s grace was more than sufficient to cover Paul’s sins and to allow him to serve as one of God’s special servants. Paul accepted this unique role, but he was always mindful of the “*grace*” (verse 10) he had received. Paul had formerly “*persecuted*” (*dioko*—this word is also found in 4:12) the “*church of God*,” but Jesus’ resurrection and his appointment to the Lord’s service radically transformed his life.

Someone has said that life presents three great challenges to people: *guilt*, *grief*, and the *grave*. Paul felt guilt and grief due to his persecuting Christians. Before he experienced the *grave* he wanted forgiveness of his sins and the eternal “*glory*” available through Christ (1 Pet. 5:4). For information on the *church* (*ekklesia*), see the commentary on 11:16, 18 and “An overview of New Testament Christianity” at the end of this commentary.

**15:10:** *But by the grace of God I am what I am: and his grace which was bestowed upon me was not found vain; but I labored more abundantly than they all: yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me.*

Although Paul had been a great persecutor of the church (verse 9), he was able to receive and be saved by God’s “*grace*” (*charis*). Everyone else must also be saved by God’s grace. As shown in the chart on 15:1-2, grace is absolutely necessary, but salvation is not by “*grace alone*” (many things are involved in man’s salvation). This is why the Bible never speaks of being saved by “*grace alone*,” “*faith alone*,” etc.

Many have received God’s grace but people have not always made wise use of it. Here Paul said God’s grace has sometimes been bestowed on people in “*vain*.” In some places *vain* (*kenos*) means “empty handed” (Mk. 12:3; Lk. 1:53; 20:10). This term can also mean “without a basis” (for an example of this meaning see Col. 2:8). In other places such as here, *vain* means “fruitless and ineffective” (this same sense is found in Phil. 2:16; 2 Cor. 6:1). Spicq (2:305) said in 1 Cor. 15:10 *vain* is a “*litotes*.” Rather than being useless, God’s grace in Paul’s life “was prodigiously effective” (*ibid*). God’s grace becomes *vain* when it is rejected, neglected, or spurned, but these were not the things Paul did with God’s grace (Paul used God’s grace to go from persecutor to preacher). The word *vain* is also found in verse 14 of this chapter.

After Paul learned about the gospel and embraced God’s grace, he “*labored more abundantly than they all*.” The word *labored* (*kopiao*) described hard work, the type of activity that makes someone tired. Rienecker and Rogers (p. 440) defined it as “work to the point of exhaustion” and this term can describe both mental and physical labor. “It points to the weariness which follows on this straining of all his powers to the utmost” (*ibid*, p. 440). Here *labored* indicates that Paul worked harder than any other single apostle, or he worked harder than all the apostles put together (some prefer the latter meaning). Because Paul had previously done so much to oppose the cause of Christ (verse 9), it seems he worked extra hard after becoming an apostle. He certainly wrote more New Testament books than any other author, he started more congregations than anyone else we know of, and he seems to have evangelized more areas

than any other first century Christian. Spicq (2:329) summed up the word *labored* as: “(1) constant, exhausting manual labor; (2) the fatigue of long, incessant missionary wanderings; (3) blows, wounds, and suffering endured in the course of stonings and riots; (4) slanders and insults by enemies, the humiliations of imprisonment; (5) the difficulties of governing and exercising apostolic authority; (6) the preparation of sermons, speeches given in the open air; the editing of epistles; (7) care of all the churches and for each soul (2 Cor. 11:28-29; Heb. 13:17).”

If Paul had said nothing else to the Corinthians about his labor for Christ, some might have thought he was bragging. The rest of the verse makes it clear Paul was not boasting (compare 1 Cor. 13:4). Paul knew he worked hard, but what was accomplished through his life was only possible by God’s grace (compare 3:6).

Lenski (First Corinthians, p. 640) said, “God took this dead, vile thing, the most rabid persecutor of His church, and by His wonderful grace made not only a Christian out of him but also an apostle, and not only one who was fit and worthy to be placed at the side of the other apostles but one who outranks the rest in his work, one who labors more abundantly than they all.” If God was able to take one of the foremost persecutors of the church and turn him into a “chosen vessel” (Acts 9:15), He can also do great things through us, if we are willing.

Verse 10 is consistent with what Jesus said in Lk. 7:41-43. When people realize they have been freed from a tremendous burden, they often have a tremendous sense gratitude and thus have a great desire to serve. Grace and forgiveness are powerful forces to motivate people.

**15:11:** *Whether then (it be) I or they, so we preach, and so ye believed.*

The word “*preach*” (*kerusso*) is a present tense verb. This tense plus the preceding information in 14:3-6, 12, 17, 26 tells us the first century Christians dedicated a lot of time and energy to teaching (compare 1 Cor. 14:31). Some of this teaching involved Jesus’ death, burial and resurrection (verses 3-4). Here Paul affirmed that he and the other apostles preached (taught) the same message (compare 1 Cor. 4:17). Paul was not particular about who taught people; he just wanted people to hear and accept the “word of truth” (Jas. 1:18). When the gospel was preached at Corinth, people “*believed*” (verse 11) and “*received*” (verse 1) it.

Verse 11 reminds us that the gospel is not about the messenger—it is about the message. Since this message is true, those who heard it should have believed, accepted and continually obeyed it. The Corinthians had believed, accepted and obeyed for a while, but some problems eventually arose (verse 12). Some said there will not be a future resurrection of the dead. Apparently the Corinthians still believed Jesus had been raised from the dead, but they had become uncertain about a future resurrection for everyone else. Paul was aware of this belief and thus used Jesus’ resurrection to prove a future resurrection for all people. In the following verses Paul affirmed that Jesus’ “resurrection is a part of the total resurrection. For Paul, there was only one resurrection which began with Jesus and will end with all humanity (15:20, 23)” (Allen, p. 186). Stated another way, Jesus’ resurrection and a future resurrection for everyone else are “Siamese twins or two sides of the same coin” (Gromacki, p. 185).

**15:12:** *Now if Christ is preached that he hath been raised from the dead, how say some among you that there is no resurrection of the dead?*

Instead of saying “*Jesus*,” Paul said “*Christ*.” This may indicate that Paul was thinking of Jesus’ work as the Messiah (i.e. the Savior had to die, He had to be buried, and He had to be “*raised from the dead*”). Christians like Paul “*preached*” (present tense) that the Savior was *raised* (a perfect tense verb) from (out of) the dead. If the Corinthians accepted this teaching, how could they say a future resurrection for others was impossible? Either people were wrong in denying a future resurrection for all people or they were wrong about Jesus’ resurrection (compare verse 13). “A universal negative cannot be accepted if one fact to the contrary exists” (CBL, First Corinthians, p. 461).

Lenski (First Corinthians, p. 648) noted how “from the dead” does not mean “when Christ arose, he left all the other dead behind.” Rather, “Christ came out of death and re-entered life; that is what the phrase literally and actually conveys” (ibid). This “phrase is never used with reference to the ungodly; such a use, to say the least, would be misleading. When the ungodly are called forth from their graves, this summons is not an escape from death on the part of their bodies but an entrance of their bodies upon a state that is far worse than the decay in the grave” (ibid, pp. 648-649).

Paul described Jesus’ resurrection with the *passive* voice (i.e. Jesus was not involved in the resurrection process). “The passive voice implies that God is the agent who raised Christ. The Scriptures make both statements: that God raised Christ, Rom. 6:4; 8:11; Matt. 16:21; 17:23; 26:32; and that Christ himself arose, Mark 9:21; Luke 18:33. In both expressions the act is due to the divine power which is Christ’s equally with the Father. Jesus has power to lay down his life and to take it back again, John 10:18. The apostle properly uses the passive here and makes God the agent because of the parallel which he has in mind regarding our resurrection, which is the work of God” (Lenski, First Corinthians, pp. 647-648). In Rom. 8:11 Paul said Jesus was raised by the Holy Spirit. Just as all three members of the Godhead worked together to procure man’s salvation (1 Cor. 6:11), so all three were involved with Jesus’ resurrection.

Since believing in “Christ” meant accepting the “resurrection,” Paul was shocked that some could profess allegiance to Jesus but not accept a future resurrection of the dead. The word “*how*” asks a question as well as expresses shock and disapproval. In other words, the question in this verse is actually a rebuke. Some at Corinth were “*saying*” (a present tense verb) a future resurrection for all people at some later time would not occur. In fact, a possible translation of this verse is “*Now if Christ is always preached as having been raised from the dead, how do some among you keep on saying that there is no resurrection of the dead?*” (Willis, p. 440).

“Some at Corinth had doubted the resurrection of the dead. Such skepticism wrecked the faith of the church, just as party divisions had damaged its love” (CBL, First Corinthians, p. 461). Today some still reject or try to modify parts of the gospel and the Bible warns against these kinds of activities (compare 1 Cor. 4:6; 2 Jn. 9; Rev. 22:18-19). Changing any part of the revealed faith is compared to a “*word that eats like gangrene*” (2 Tim. 2:17). God says there is only “one faith” (Eph. 4:5) and accepting or teaching information contrary to this one faith is wrong. True Christians “know the shepherd’s voice” (Jn. 10:4) and will not listen to anyone or anything else.

The word translated *resurrection* (*anastasis*) is used about 40 times in the New Testament and it literally meant “*a standing up*.” Greeks used this term to describe the *erection* of a monument or the *setting up* of a statue. Here this word and the number of times it occurs remind us that Jesus’ resurrection is very important. The “theme of the resurrection of the body, including the bodily resurrection of Christ, is given more space in the NT than any other one basic Christian truth, with the possible exception of the death of the Lord Jesus. Rarely did Christ speak of his coming death without uttering a prediction of his resurrection within three days following” (Baker’s Dictionary of Theology, p. 449). Even baptism is directly associated with Jesus’ resurrection (see Rom. 6:4; Col. 2:12; and the commentary on 15:3-4).

The error that was taught at Corinth may have been somewhat similar to what the first century Sadducees believed and taught (Acts 23:8). “Some Greek philosophers theorized that the soul continued to exist, but the body died forever. Their idea belonged to the ‘wisdom of this age’” (CBL, First Corinthians, p. 461).

**15:13:** *But if there is no resurrection of the dead, neither hath Christ been raised:*

Since some at Corinth were denying a future resurrection, Paul showed a consequence for this belief in this verse: If there is no future resurrection, Jesus has not been raised from the dead (compare verse 16). Jesus cannot be the resurrected Son of God if there will not be a future resurrection for all people. This conclusion is based on the fact that Jesus came to earth in the form of a man (Jn. 1:1 + Jn. 1:14) and He fully shared in the human experience (Heb. 2:14-15). “Even though He was born of a virgin, He was still conceived and born; He grew as humans develop (Luke 2:52); He died physically as men die; and He rose

again as men one day will” (Gromacki, p. 186).

Our belief in and hope for a future resurrection is 100% linked to Jesus’ resurrection (see verse 20 where Paul said Jesus’ resurrection is the “firstfruits”). The Lord’s resurrection proves that the dead can be raised and raised to live forever (Rev. 1:18). Other questions such as “how,” “when,” and “what will our resurrected body be like” are often asked and Paul addressed some of these matters in the following verses (compare verse 35). Here it was imperative for the Corinthians to realize that Jesus’ resurrection (compare verses 5-8) guarantees a future resurrection for all who have died.

**15:14:** *and if Christ hath not been raised, then is our preaching vain, your faith also is vain.*

Here Paul began to expand on the consequences of having a dead Messiah. If Jesus has not been raised from the dead, all missionary efforts are useless. Believing in Jesus (the end of the verse) is also useless. If people tell others about a resurrected Savior and this information is untrue, they “misrepresent God” (verse 15). There can be “no forgiveness of sins” (verse 17) or spiritual hope after death (verse 18) without Jesus’ resurrection. Neither can there be any true basis for morality (verse 32). In fact, Christians should be greatly “pitied” (verse 19) if Jesus has not been raised from the dead. Verses 14-15 may be summed up as the “foolishness of Christianity if the resurrection is not true” and verses 16-17 may be summed up as “the pain and loss Christians suffer” if Jesus is not the resurrected Savior.

The verb “*raised*” (*egeiro*) is used in verses 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 20, 29, 32, 35, 42, 43, 44, and 52 of this chapter and in each of these places it describes a *resurrection*. Here *raised* is expressed with the perfect tense (i.e. this tense means Jesus was raised and He *continues to live*). If the Corinthians did not believe Jesus had been raised and will never again die, Paul said the “*preaching*” done by him and others was “*vain*” (these terms are defined below).

The word *preaching* (*kerugma*) is used only eight times in the New Testament and three of these times are in this book (1:21; 2:4 and here). Jesus associated this term with Jonah’s work (Mt. 12:41). In the Roman letter (16:25) Paul said “Jesus Christ” is “preached.” Paul also used this word in 2 Tim. 4:17 and Tit. 1:3 (for this latter reference see the KJV). This term focuses on the person doing the preaching instead of the message. Here *preaching* indicates that evangelists, as well as those who listened to them, wasted time, energy and other resources if Jesus has not been raised from the dead.

Without a resurrection, preaching and even “*faith*” are *vain* (*kenos*). The word *vain* can mean “fruitless and ineffective” (CBL, 3:325 and see the following commentary on verses 16-18), but here “the meaning is more forceful...it has to be ‘nothingness, absolute void’” (Spicq, 2:305). Brown’s (1:547) definition was “pointless.” If Jesus has not been raised from the dead, there is no incentive to live a Christian life. In fact, without a resurrection we have no logical basis for living a “good” or “moral” life. Without a resurrected Savior there is, if we look at the grand scheme of things, no reason to live. If Jesus has not been raised from the dead, Christians should seek out the pleasures of life that interest them or make them happy (verse 32) because every single hope is found only in this life. This verse was one more way for Paul to say the resurrection is at the very heart of the gospel. The resurrection is so important that people must acknowledge their belief in it before becoming a Christian (compare Rom. 10:9).

**15:15:** *Yea, we are found false witnesses of God; because we witnessed of God that he raised up Christ: whom he raised not up, if so be that the dead are not raised.*

In addition to the consequences described in verse 14 (faith and preaching are “vain” if there is no resurrection), this verse says all who say Jesus was raised from the dead (if this statement is false) are “*found false witnesses of God.*”

*We are found* comes from a single present tense verb (*heurisko*) that meant “*to be proven through intellectual investigation.*” New Testament writers used this word about 175 times and Thayer (p. 262) defined it as “*to find by inquiry, thought, examination, scrutiny, observation, hearing; to find out by practice and experience, i.e. to see, learn, discover, understand.*” Gingrich and Danker (p. 325) defined it

as “intellectual discovery based upon reflection, observation, examination, or investigation.” Kittel (2:679) said in this verse *found* “suggests responsibility.” Brown (3:529) noted how the “follower of Christ no more wants to be found a sinner (Gal. 2:17) or a false witness (1 Cor. 15:15) than the pious Jew means to show himself to be fighting against God (Acts 5:39). The former is concerned rather to show himself to be a faithful steward (1 Cor. 4:2), to be in Christ (Phil. 3:9), to be worthy (Rev. 5:4), blameless (2 Pet. 3:14) and established in the faith (1 Pet. 1:7).” Since we are responsible for the life we live and this includes the things we teach (compare Jas. 3:1), we do not want to be “*false witnesses*” (*pseudomartus*). This term is found only here and Mt. 26:60, but a related noun (*pseudomarturia*) is found in Mt. 15:19; 26:59. Paul could have used a word that meant *mistaken* (this alternative term would have given him a loophole), but he specifically said *false witnesses*. This word reminds us that we must “take heed” to (keep a sharp eye on) our teaching (1 Tim. 4:16).

Gromacki (p. 186) noted how there “is a subtle difference between a liar and a false witness. A liar tells as true what he knows is false. A false witness tells as true what he believes is true when really it is false.” Paul believed that if the resurrection was not true, he and others were (present tense) *false witnesses* and this was a very serious matter. In fact, there is a preposition in the Greek text (*kata*) that in this verse means “*against*.” If the resurrection is false, this preposition means those who teach it actually *testify against* (incriminate) *God*.

If people say that God did something when He did not do it, they bear false witness against Him. Attributing untrue information to a fellow human being is a very serious matter (compare Ex. 20:16), but claiming that God did something when He did not is even worse. Here Paul affirmed that if Jesus was not raised from the dead, but he said Jesus had been raised by God, he (or anyone else proclaiming this information) would be *testifying against God*. As the CBL (First Corinthians, p. 461) said, “If the fact is untrue, the testimony is untrue.”

Today there are many who believe in Jesus’ resurrection and speak correctly about it, but they bear false witness against God in other ways. Anytime someone says “God did something” and God did not do what is claimed, a person *testifies against God*. People can commit this sin when they claim God gave them a message, a vision, etc. We can and should be thankful for answered prayers, but we should also be wary of making specific claims about God doing specific things in our lives or in the world in which we live.

Another significant word is “*raised*” (*egeiroi*). This term occurs nine times in verses 12-17 and these places should be found and studied. This word is also found more than 140 times in the New Testament and in more than half these places (73 to be exact) it describes a resurrection of the dead. In 48 of these 73 places the word *raised* describes Jesus’ resurrection. The word *raised* occurs 14 times in the book of Acts and half of these texts refer to Jesus’ resurrection. Paul used this same term 10 times in the book of Romans and 9 of these places refer to Jesus’ resurrection. In this present chapter the word *raised* is found 19 times and 9 of these references are associated with Jesus’ resurrection. This word leaves no doubt that the gospel is centered around Jesus and especially His resurrection.

**15:16-18:** *For if the dead are not raised, neither hath Christ been raised: 17 and if Christ hath not been raised, your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins. 18 Then they also that are fallen asleep in Christ have perished.*

Verse 16 must have shocked some of the Corinthians. If there is no future resurrection of the dead, then Jesus—man’s only spiritual hope—was not “raised” from the dead. This remarkable statement lays the foundation for the information in verses 17-18.

It may initially appear that verse 17 is a restatement of what Paul said in the previous material (compare verse 14), but there is a clear distinction in the Greek text. The word translated “*vain*” in verse 14 (*kenos*) describes the *reality* of Jesus not being raised from the dead. Here Paul used a different word (*mataios*); while this term is also translated *vain* in the ASV and KJV, this different word describes the *result* if Jesus has not been raised from the dead. Paul meant the Corinthians’ faith could not produce anything without Jesus’ resurrection. In fact, without a resurrected Savior the Corinthians’ faith would be

like a tree that never grows or a tree without leaves—a mere stick in the ground. Jesus’ death, burial and resurrection form the only foundation on which man can be saved. Thayer’s definition (p. 393) for *vain* in verse 17 is “*useless, to no purpose.*”

Without Jesus’ resurrection, the Corinthians were still in their “*sins*” (17b); clinging to a dead savior can only lead to disappointment. If Jesus could not overcome death, something that He promised to do (Mt. 16:18), how can He save anyone from sin or raise anyone at the end of time? A Savior who cannot meet His own needs cannot meet the needs of others. Jesus’ resurrection is literally the “linchpin” of Christianity (compare Rom. 4:25; 1 Pet. 1:3).

Verse 18 lists the next consequence for rejecting the resurrection. If Jesus has not been raised from the dead, Christians (those who are “*in Christ*”) “*perish*” when they “*fall asleep*” (die). This word *perish* (*apollumi*) is a metonymy for condemnation in hell. If Jesus has not been raised from the dead, all are still guilty of sin (Rom. 3:10, 23) and there is no one to turn to for salvation (Jn. 14:6; Acts 4:12). Jesus’ resurrection is an integral part of the Christian faith and Christians should show their understanding and appreciation of this fact through regular worship (compare 1 Cor. 11:26). Jesus was raised on the first day of the week (Mk. 16:9) and Christians should use this same day to honor Him on a regular basis (this point is also discussed in the commentary just prior to 12:1).

As noted in the commentary on 11:30, the word translated *fallen asleep* (*koimaomai*) is used 18 times in the New Testament. In four of these places (Mt. 28:13; Lk. 22:45; Jn. 11:12; Acts 12:6) this term describes *natural sleep*. In the other fourteen places where this word is used (Mt. 27:52; Jn. 11:11; Acts 7:60; 13:36; 1 Cor. 7:39 [“dead”]; 1 Cor. 11:30; 15:6, 18, 20, 51; 1 Thess. 4:13, 14, 15; 2 Pet. 3:4) *fallen asleep* describes physical death. Man’s physical body *sleeps* in the dust of the earth, but his eternal spirit returns to God (Eccl. 12:7).

Those who have a materialistic outlook on life (i.e. man does not have an eternal spirit that continues after death) often appeal to the Old Testament to justify their belief. Common proof texts for materialists come from the Old Testament poetical books. For instance, many appeal to Eccl. 9:5, a passage that says “the dead know not anything.” If people read the next verse (Eccl. 9:6), they would see that Solomon qualified his point; he said the dead *know not anything* “*under the sun*” (i.e. on the earth). When people leave this life they continue to exist (Lk. 16:25), but they do not know what is taking place on earth. The dead may have suspicions about what people are doing on earth (compare Lk. 16:28), but those who die do not in any sense “look down on those who are still alive.” People die and God keeps them in a place known as “*Hades*,” a word meaning the “realm of the dead” (compare Lk. 16:22-25). In the Hadean realm the saved and the lost are separated by a “great gulf” (Lk. 16:26). All remain in this place until Jesus’ second coming. Then, Hades as well as death will be destroyed (Rev. 20:14).

Verses 16-18 remind us that Jesus’ resurrection is a subject with no middle ground. Just as a woman is either pregnant or not pregnant, so Jesus was either raised or not raised from the dead. The apostles were so fully convinced that Jesus had come out of the grave they repeatedly proclaimed this message (Acts 2:24, 32; 3:15, 26; 4:10).

**15:19:** *If we have only hoped in Christ in this life, we are of all men most pitiable.*

If our “*hope in Christ*” is “*only in this life*,” Christians “*are of all men most pitiable*.” Stated another way, if Jesus was not raised from the dead, everything that Christians do (their good works, their struggle against sin, their financial contributions, their mission efforts, etc.) is a complete waste of time. The KJV uses the word “*miserable*,” but the ASV rendering (*pitiable*) better expresses the thought. If there is no resurrection, Christians should be *pitied* (*eleeinos*), a word that meant the “*most pitied*.” Aside from here this term is found only in Rev. 3:17.

Many Christians, including Paul, gave up almost everything they had to proclaim Jesus and His resurrection. Some abandoned prestige, their occupation, the conveniences of life, and even risked their lives to live for Christ. If people built their lives around the Christian faith and Jesus was not raised from the dead, all these saints were deceived by one of the greatest and worst lies ever told. If the resurrection is false, Christians today are also living a life of eternal hopelessness. Without Jesus’ resurrection, Christianity is like a failed rescue. Paul emphasized the gravity of this point by saying “*of all men*” (i.e. no one can suffer more than Christians if Jesus has not been raised from the dead).

“Modern Christians sometimes see Christian living as so beneficial that they think it would be better to live as a Christian than not, even if Christianity were false. This is true because, for many Christians, commitment to Christ does not require much suffering. In the early church, however, believers sacrificed a great deal to follow Christ. They lost families, friends, jobs, homes and even their lives. Thus, Paul could say that Christians would deserve great pity if their hope for resurrection proved to be false. Not only would they receive no benefit from their religion, but they would also forfeit the pleasures their brief life on earth offered” (Holman, 7:262-263). Some Christians had to put up with persecution from tyrants like Nero (disciples were covered with pitch and burned alive to light Nero’s garden). Whether Christians suffer a lot or a little, every type of suffering is vain if Jesus has not been raised from the dead.

Some commentators think the next section (verses 20-28) is a digression from Paul’s argument. Others, including Willis (p. 445), convincingly argue that Paul did not change his thought. Instead of being a digression, verses 20-28 add to Paul’s argument for a general resurrection at the end of time. Since Christians have been joined to Jesus, and Jesus has been raised from the dead, all Christians will be raised. Stated another way, since the church is Christ’s body (Eph. 1:22-23), and the *head* of this body (Jesus) has been raised, the rest of the body (the church) will also be raised. The unsaved will also be part of the future resurrection (Jn. 5:28-29), but in this context they are not discussed because they are not part of the point being emphasized.

**15:20-21:** *But now hath Christ been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of them that are asleep. 21 For since by man (came) death, by man (came) also the resurrection of the dead.*

As noted in the commentary on verse 6 (*A special study on the resurrection of Jesus Christ*), Paul provided plenty of evidence to prove that Jesus was raised from the dead and much of this evidence is still available. Here Paul reached a point in his argument where he said, “*but now*.” With these words “Paul broke into song and unconditionally asserted the resurrection of Christ. The ugly consequences of verses 12-19 are untrue because there *is* a resurrection of the dead; Christ *has* been raised. Paul used the perfect tense of the verb *to rise*. Not only did Christ rise, He is alive forever” (CBL, First Corinthians, p. 465).

Because Jesus has been raised from the dead, He is the “*firstfruits of them that are asleep*” (20b). The word *firstfruits* (*aparche*) is used nine times in the New Testament and seven of these occurrences are in Paul’s letters. This term described the Old Testament practice of giving the first ripened fruits to God. The first sheaf of the harvest was carried into the temple the day after the Paschal Sabbath (this early offering was a way of saying the rest of the crop would follow, Lev. 23:10-12). Jesus was the first one to be raised from the dead and never again die and this will also be the destiny for all others at the end of time. *Fallen asleep* (*koimaomai*) is found several other times in this book and this word is more fully discussed in the commentary on verses 16-18.



Verse 21 compares Adam with Jesus, though Adam's name is not specifically mentioned until verse 22. Adam brought "death" into the world (physical death was a consequence of Adam and Eve's sin, Gen. 2:17). Through Adam death became part of the "circle of life" (Eccl. 3:2). In contrast to this *gift*, Jesus has given humanity the "resurrection from the dead." Jesus demonstrated this gift by being the "firstfruits" (verse 20). Paul more fully explains this gift in verse 22.

**15:22:** *For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive.*

As noted in the comments on verses 20-21, Adam (and Eve) sinned and thereby introduced physical death to humanity. Paul believed Adam was a real person and he regarded Adam as the "agent" of physical death ("in Adam all die"). Stated another way, all who become part of the human family eventually suffer death (compare Heb. 9:27). Adam brought something negative into the world but Jesus brought something positive: "in Christ shall all be made alive."

This verse can be explained in different ways, though only one interpretation agrees with the context of this chapter and the rest of the Bible. Some think this passage means everyone will be saved, but the Bible says this idea is false (2 Thess. 2:10). Also, this view conflicts with Mt. 7:14, a place where Jesus said "few" will be saved. A second explanation says Paul described those who are *in Christ* (members of the Lord's body). According to this interpretation, all who are "in Christ" will be "made alive." It is true that those who are "in Christ" (compare Gal. 3:27) receive all spiritual blessings (compare Eph. 1:3), but here Paul was not speaking about spiritual blessings. He was making a contrast between Jesus and Adam and the point of his contrast is simply this: Being a member of the human family (*in Adam*) results in physical death. Jesus came into the world and His coming and resurrection will cause "all" to "be made alive" (be resurrected) when He returns (verse 23b).

The New Testament says Jesus is the source of all life (Jn. 1:4; Jn. 5:26). It also affirms that Jesus is the power behind all *spiritual life* (Eph. 2:1; 1 Jn. 5:11; Col. 3:4; Rom. 6:3-4) as well as all *physical life* (Gen. 1:26; Col. 1:16). When speaking with Martha (Jn. 11:25) Jesus specifically said He is the "resurrection" and the "life." Rather than say "I promise," "I procure," or "I bring," Jesus said "I am" this power. Since Jesus was able to raise Lazarus "four days" after he had died (Jn. 11:39), He can and will just as easily raise all people in the future, even if they have been dead for thousands of years.

**15:23:** *But each in his own order: Christ the firstfruits; then they that are Christ's, at his coming.*

The word "order" (*tagma*) occurs only here in the New Testament; in Classical Greek this term had a military connotation (it described a corps, division, or a specific group of soldiers). This word tells us God has a specific plan for the future resurrection. The first part of God's "order" (plan) is expressed here as well as verse 20 (Jesus is the "firstfruits"). When it is time to raise everyone else from the dead, this activity will be carried out in a specific way (God will follow a pre-arranged sequence of events). Paul also spoke about this matter when writing to the Thessalonians; in 1 Thess. 4:16 he said when the time comes to raise all people from the dead, the "dead in Christ" will "rise first." Then those who are still alive will rise to meet Jesus in the air (1 Thess. 4:17).

God's specific plan for the future resurrection can be compared to "a military division. There is the Captain, above all in His solitary glory; and there is His army, now sleeping, which shall rise at His trumpet's sound (1 Thessalonians 4:16)" (CBL, First Corinthians, p. 465). God has an *order* (sequence of events) for the resurrection, but this process will be so fast (1 Cor. 15:52) it will probably be too quick and overwhelming for us to distinguish the exact chain of events. All will be raised in a way that is so fast, it will seem almost simultaneous (compare verse 52).

Paul described the future resurrection with the word "coming" (*parousia*), a term that described a visit from important people such as kings and emperors. This word is never used to describe Jesus' coming to the earth and living as a man, but it is used to describe His next and final return. Spicq (3:54-55) said this word means Jesus' return "must somehow be filled out with the pomp and magnificence that

characterized royal and imperial ‘visits.’” Barclay (James, pp. 143-144) noted how this term “is the ordinary word for someone’s presence or arrival. But it has two other usages, one of which became quite technical. It is used of the invasion of a country by an army; and specially it is used of the visit of a king or a governor to a province of his empire. So, then, when this word is used of Jesus, it means that the *parousia*, the Second Coming of Jesus, is the final invasion of earth by heaven, and the coming of the King to receive the final submission and adoration of his subjects.” When Jesus returns, the saved (“*they that are Christ’s*”) will be raised and taken to spend eternity with God. All of the Lord’s enemies, and this includes the unsaved, will also be brought before Him and permanently swept away (verses 25-26). Then, with the saved and the lost sentenced to their proper eternal fate, God will be “all in all” (verse 28).

Since 1 Cor. 15:23 does not mention the unsaved, some have incorrectly concluded that the unsaved will not be part of the future resurrection. Other passages such as Mt. 25:31-46; Jn. 5:28-29 Acts 24:15 and Rev. 20:12-15 show that both the saved and the unsaved will be raised at the same time. The unsaved are not listed here and Paul does not refer to a “judgment” or even a “day of sentencing” in this passage because he was “dealing with believers” (Bengel, 2:256).

**15:24-26:** *Then (cometh) the end, when he shall deliver up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when he shall have abolished all rule and all authority and power. 25 For he must reign, till he hath put all his enemies under his feet. 26 The last enemy that shall be abolished is death.*

Verses 24 and 26 tell us about some of Jesus’ future work and verse 25 tells us about some of the Lord’s current activities. According to verse 25, Jesus is currently “*reigning*.” Instead of saying Jesus “has reigned” or “will reign,” Paul used the present tense. Jesus now reigns from a heavenly throne and the borders of His kingdom include heaven and earth (Mt. 28:19). Jesus’ special subjects are Christians, His Kingly law is the New Testament, and people enter Jesus’ kingdom by obeying the conditions given in places such as Jn. 3:3, 5 (this point is also discussed in the commentary on 15:3-4).

Cotham (Beyond the Sunset, p. 292) noted how the “kingdom of Christ has existed in various phases or forms:

1. It existed in the mind of God, called the ‘eternal purpose’ (Ephesians 3:10-11).
2. It existed in *promise* (Genesis 22:22; Galatians 3:8).
3. It existed in *prophecy* (Daniel 2:44; Zechariah 1:16, etc.).
4. It existed in *preparation* (Mathew 3:1-5).
5. It began to exist in *perfection* (Acts 2).
6. It now exists in *perpetuity* by the Word (Luke 8:11; 1 Thessalonians 2:12).
7. It will exist in heaven in eternity (2 Peter 1:11), in the eternal Paradise of God. The kingdom of God on earth today is ‘the reign of heaven.’”

Although many believe Jesus will one day return to “set up the kingdom,” Paul said Jesus will return to “*deliver up*” (surrender) the kingdom, verse 24. Jesus will appear once more and this “*coming*” (verse 23) will be “*in the clouds*” (Acts 1:9, 11) instead of “on the earth.” Jesus will appear with “*flaming fire*” (2 Thess. 1:7-8) and all people will be brought before Him to hear a pronouncement of salvation or condemnation (Mt. 25:31). This event will not only be noisy (1 Thess. 4:16), it will be the time when the world and universe end (2 Pet. 3:7, 10). Until this day comes, Jesus will continue to reign as King (compare Rev. 17:14).

Other passages also affirm that Jesus is now reigning as King. Paul told the Colossians that Jesus *now* has a kingdom (Col. 1:13; Heb. 12:22-24, 28). On the Day of Pentecost Peter said Jesus is ruling in His kingdom (Acts 2:29-36). In Rev. 1:5-6 John said, “*and from Jesus Christ, (who is) the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth. Unto him that loveth us, and loosed us from our sins by his blood; 6 and he made us (to be) a kingdom, (to be) priests unto his God and Father; to*

him (be) the glory and the dominion for ever and ever. Amen.” Jesus is the “seed of David” (Rom. 1:3) and this ancestry entitles Him to now rule (Lk. 1:31-33; Eph. 1:20-21).

Even though the Bible says Jesus is now reigning and He will return to “deliver up” instead of “set up” a kingdom, many still cling to various Premillennial doctrines that say Jesus will return to *establish an earthly kingdom*. A general summary of premillennial teaching and how it conflicts with the New Testament is illustrated with this chart:

The Premillennial view	The Scriptures
Jesus is <i>NOT</i> now reigning	Jesus <i>IS</i> now reigning (Mt. 6:33; Heb. 1:8)
Jesus will <i>BEGIN</i> His reign at His return	Jesus will <i>END</i> His reign at His return (1 Cor. 15:28)
Jesus will <i>ESTABLISH</i> a kingdom at His return	Jesus’ kingdom will <i>TERMINATE</i> at His return (1 Cor. 15:24)
Saved people are <i>NOT</i> now in the kingdom.	Saved people <i>ARE</i> now in the kingdom (Col. 1:13; Rev. 1:9; Jn. 3:5)
Jesus will gather with His people <i>ON THE EARTH</i>	Jesus will meet His people <i>IN THE AIR</i> and the earth will be destroyed (2 Pet. 3:10)

The preceding chart not only summarizes the basic facts about Jesus and the kingdom, it agrees with the Lord’s statement that His kingdom is “*not of this world*” (Jn. 18:36). This information also harmonizes with an Old Testament prophecy involving Jesus’ genealogy. According to Jer. 22:28-30, no descendant of “*Coniah*” would ever again prosper and rule from David’s throne in Jerusalem. *Coniah* (who is also known as Jeconiah) is part of Jesus’ genealogy (Mt. 1:11) and he did have children (Jer. 22:28 + 1 Chron. 3:16). However, as Jeremiah predicted, Coniah was the last king (none of his descendents ever ruled from a throne in Jerusalem). Many have noted how the Hebrew people went into Babylonian captivity after Coniah’s reign (Mt. 1:12) and how Coniah’s grandson Zerubbabel returned from this exile (1 Chron. 3:19), but even Zerubbabel did not rule as a king in Jerusalem.

Since Jesus was one of Coniah’s descendents, and Jeremiah said none of Coniah’s descendents would ever sit upon a throne in Judah and rule, Jesus can never rule from an earthly throne in Jerusalem. Jesus can, however, “prosper and rule” from the “throne of David” while He is *presently enthroned in heaven* (Heb. 8:1). Stated another way, Jesus can and does now reign from the “Jerusalem above” (Gal. 4:26). This is also the point affirmed in 1 Cor. 15:25: Jesus “*must reign*” *till* “*all His enemies*” are overcome. Since the overthrow of Jesus’ enemies will happen at His next return (verse 24), this is one more proof that Jesus’ rule will *end* instead of *begin* when He returns.

The word *end* in verse 24 (*telos*) occurs about 40 times in the New Testament and here it means “*the last part, close, conclusion* esp. of the last things, the final act in the cosmic drama” (Gingrich and Danker, p. 811). Jesus’ coming will *end* His rule as well as *end* the world (compare 2 Pet. 3:10).

The expression *deliver up (paradidomi)* in verse 24 describes the “*cessation of Christ’s dominion*.” The Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament’s definition (3:20) is to “*return or transfer power*.” Jesus used this same word in Mt. 11:27 to say “all things have been delivered to Him by the Father” (compare, too, Lk. 10:22). At Jesus’ next and final coming He will *return* the dominion He now has. Stated another way, after Jesus returns He will *end* the role He now fulfills. Jesus will terminate His current work to indicate that everything involved with man’s redemption has been completed (at this

point the “mystery,” God’s plan of salvation, 1 Cor. 2:7, will have been fully accomplished). Of course, as noted in the commentary on verses 27-28, *delivering up the kingdom* does not mean Jesus will lose any of His status or importance. His role will change and His glory will *increase*, not decrease.

Paul further described the future deliverance of the kingdom with the word “*abolished*” (the KJV says, “*shall have put down*”); this term (*katargeo*) occurs several other times in this book (1:28; 2:6; 6:13; 13:8, 10-11; 15:24, 26). Here Brown (1:73) defined it as “God’s putting out of action through the cross and the *parousia* (Jesus’ second coming, BP) destructive powers which threaten man’s spiritual well-being.” This includes “all forces hostile to Christ at present” (ibid).

Vincent (3:276) noted how *rule, power, and authority* are “Abstract terms for different orders of spiritual and angelic powers.” “The nouns here represent the evil powers under whose control the world has come” (Rienecker and Rogers, p. 442). At the end of time every human and spiritual enemy, including death (verse 26), will appear before Jesus and acknowledge Him as King of Kings (compare Rom. 14:11). Once all have recognized Jesus’ Lordship and His success in redeeming man, all things can and will conclude (compare Mt. 25:31-33). Until this time comes, Jesus “*must*” (*dei*—a word meaning this is absolutely essential) *reign* (verse 25). This “necessity arises out of the sovereign plan of God” (Rienecker and Rogers, p. 442).

Back in verse 22 Paul referred to “Adam.” Adam was given dominion over the earth (Gen. 1:28-30), but he forfeited much of what he received because of sin. In contrast to Adam and the death he introduced to the world, Jesus has introduced hope. In fact, Jesus has already conquered death by His resurrection (compare Heb. 2:15). At the end of time He will permanently destroy death (verse 26).

As noted in this author’s commentary on Heb. 9:23 (“*things in the heavens should be cleansed*”), it seems Jesus can be regarded as a “cosmic redeemer” (compare Col. 1:20). Jesus will restore man (the saved) to a perfect relationship with God. He will fix things so perfectly that the saved will be: Eternally freed from sin, eternally freed from needing a mediator (1 Tim. 2:5), eternally freed from needing “ministering spirits” (Heb. 1:14), and eternally freed from Satan (1 Pet. 5:8). Jesus will fully finish all the work He was given and then God will be “*all in all*” (verse 28 and see the commentary on verses 27-28). If there is no future resurrection (and this is what some at Corinth were saying, verse 12), none of the things described in verses 24-26 can occur.

Verse 26 says death is the “*last enemy*” to be “abolished” when Jesus returns. Paul may have referred to death as the *last enemy* because “it constitutes the climax of the destructive work of all the other hostile powers” (Lenski, First Corinthians, pp. 679-680). At the present time death is one of man’s greatest enemies.

The word *enemy* (*echthros*) is used in verse 25 as well as verse 26. Normally this term describes “those who oppose God” (CBL, GED, 2:667) and here this author agrees with Brown (1:554) who said the “enemies of the cross of Christ will come to grief (Phil. 3:18; Acts 13:10). Enemies of Christ are referred to again in those passages where Ps. 110:1 is cited as a prophecy of Christ (Matt. 22:44; Mk. 12:36; Lk. 20:43; Acts 2:25; 1 Cor. 15:25; Heb. 1:13; 10:13).”

**15:27-28:** *For, He put all things in subjection under his feet. But when he saith, All things are put in subjection, it is evident that he is excepted who did subject all things unto him. 28 And when all things have been subjected unto him, then shall the Son also himself be subjected to him that did subject all things unto him, that God may be all in all.*

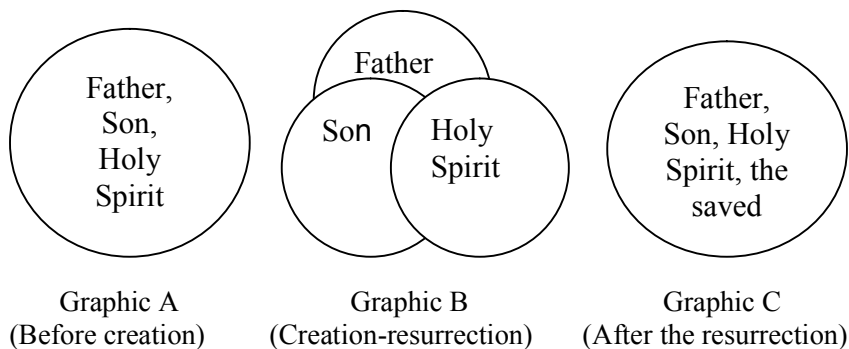
Since Jesus is presently “reigning” as King (verse 25), it is not surprising to find that “*all things*” have been “*subjected*” (*hupotasso*) to Him (verse 27). Jesus alluded to this same point in Mt. 28:18 when He said He possessed “*all authority*” in “*heaven and on earth.*” Here Paul wanted his readers to understand that Jesus’ rule over *all things* does not mean He also reigns over the other members of the Godhead (i.e. Jesus does not have power over the Father and the Holy Spirit). The Father gave Jesus authority over all things (compare Eph. 1:22), but the other members of the Godhead are “*excepted*” from this rule (The Father and Holy Spirit are not “under” Jesus). The CBL (First Corinthians, p. 467) said “behind Jesus rule” is “the absolute supremacy of God.” The NIV rendering of verse 27 may also help clarify the

thought: “For he ‘has put everything under his feet.’ Now when it says that ‘everything’ has been put under him, it is clear that this does not include God himself, who put everything under Christ.”

Part of Jesus’ current reign includes the construction of a “*spiritual house*” (1 Pet. 2:5). Jesus is “adding” people (Acts 2:41, 47) to the church He built (Mt. 16:18) and this process is an on-going activity (the word “*built*” in 1 Pet. 2:5 is expressed with the present tense). When God’s “house” is complete, Jesus will return, the resurrection will occur (verse 23), the “earth and the heavens” will be destroyed (2 Pet. 3:10), all God’s enemies will be subdued (verses 25-26), Jesus will “deliver up the kingdom” to God the Father (verse 24), and then (verse 28) Jesus will “subject” Himself to the Father so God will be “all in all.”

Christians are an important part of God’s spiritual house, but they will not be the only ones who are saved at the end of time. Before the New Testament church was established (compare Acts 20:28) people like Moses and Noah were part of God’s kingdom (Acts 7:30 refers to the “*church in the wilderness*”). All who never reached the age of accountability will also be part of the saved in eternity. In fact, God’s “whole house” (all the saved) will have people from every dispensation of time, every race, etc. We might think of all the redeemed as something like a “living museum” that will demonstrate how God interacted with man from the beginning to the end of time (compare Lk. 13:29). The saved will be like a spiritual tapestry that begins and ends with Jesus. Furthermore, each saved person will be perfectly placed in God’s house; the saved will illustrate and attest to God’s love and man’s value for all eternity.

Many seem to regard verse 28 as describing Jesus *losing* something at the end of time, but this is not quite right. When Jesus turns the kingdom over to the Father (“*then shall the Son also Himself be subjected to him that did subject all things unto him*”), Jesus will *gain* instead of *lose* glory and authority. Bengel (2:256) well said: “The Father will not then begin to reign without the Son, nor the Son cease to reign without the Father; for the divine kingdom of both Father and Son is from eternity and shall be to eternity.” Just as the Son was previously “derived” from the Father (Jn. 16:27-28), so He will be “absorbed” by the Father at the end of time. The Holy Spirit, the third member of the Godhead, will also be “absorbed” by the Father at the end of time so God will once again be “all in all” (verse 28). Although the following graphics are very inadequate to illustrate what is described in verses 27-28, perhaps they will be of some use in better understanding Paul’s point.



It seems there will be a permanent change in the Godhead at the end of time (somehow the saved will be perfectly joined together with deity for eternity). What started out as God (graphic A) will be man and all three members of the Godhead perfectly united together in eternity (graphic C). Somehow God's current association with the saved, which is partially described in the next paragraph, will be enhanced and brought to its fullest and deepest meaning in eternity.

Nieboer (First Peter, p. 118) noted how it "is really astounding how the Word describes us with the same names as it ascribes to Him. He is the Son of God; we too are the sons of God. He is the heir of God; we are joint heirs with Him. He is the great High Priest; we too are priests, as our verse and also verse 9 tells us. He is King of Kings; we too are kings. (Rev. 1:6.) He is the lamb of God; we are God's lambs and sheep. 1 John 3:2 is an astounding verse. 'Beloved, now are we the sons (children) of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be; but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be *like him*; for we shall see him as he is.'"

The expression "*all in all*" in verse 28 seems to describe a state of absolute perfection and completeness. When Jesus returns, all evil and enemies will be removed (verses 25-26), righteousness will reign, all the saved will be together, and God will be all that the saved have and need. There will not be one "hand or a voice in the whole universe raised against him" (Lenski, First Corinthians, p. 685).

The words "*when he saith*" in verse 27 take readers back to the Old Testament (Ps. 8:6). The Psalmist was probably thinking of mankind and creation when he originally penned this verse, but Paul said this writer was ultimately looking forward to things that followed Jesus' resurrection.

**15:29:** *Else what shall they do that are baptized for the dead? If the dead are not raised at all, why then are they baptized for them?*

At least 40 explanations have been given for this verse. The Bible Knowledge Commentary (p. 544) claims there have been up to 200 explanations, but most of the ideas put forth by commentators fall into one of four categories. (1) The baptism described in this verse may be a *metonymy* (it represents something else); (2) baptism for the dead was a dipping in water, but its purpose was not the forgiveness of sins; (3) Paul described vicarious baptism; (4) this verse refers to water baptism for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38).

The Mormon Church uses this passage to teach vicarious baptism (i.e. people may be baptized for the dead). Charles W. Penrose ("What the 'Mormons' Believe," p. 8), said "The living may be baptized for the dead. One who has received the ordinances of the Gospel can stand proxy for departed ancestors who will receive benefit of the earthly ordinances on obedience to the Gospel in spirit. As the Spirit of Christ preached to the spirits in prison while His body was in the sepulcher, so His servants, bearing His authority, preach to 'the dead' after finishing their work on earth. Ordinances for and in behalf of the dead are administered in temples built after a pattern revealed from heaven. Thus the living become saviors to the dead under Jesus Christ the 'Captain of their salvation.'" Mormons keep excellent genealogical records so they can be baptized on behalf of their dead relatives.

A vicarious view of this passage is flawed for several reasons, one of which is the fact that the Bible says a person's eternal state cannot be changed after death (Prov. 11:7; Jn. 8:21, 24; Lk. 16:26; Heb. 9:27). Moreover, God says we will be judged on our *own* works and lives instead of what others have done or tried to do for us (2 Cor. 5:10). We must "work out our own salvation" (Phil. 2:12). The Bible says each one will give an "*account of himself to God*" (Rom. 14:12).

Authors such as Penrose have pointed to 1 Pet. 3:19-20 and Jesus "preaching to spirits in prison" to prove that people can be saved after death, but Peter did not mean Jesus preached to people after He died. Jesus preached to these "imprisoned spirits" while Noah was building the ark. Woods (First Peter, p. 101) said it "should be noted that Peter does not declare that these who were the objects of this preaching were in a disembodied state and in prison *when the preaching was done*; such was their condition *when he wrote*. The period in which such lived in the flesh, and the time when this preaching was done is clearly stated in the verse which follows."

Jesus' "preaching to spirits in prison" (1 Pet. 3:19) is illustrated by Eph. 2:17, a passage that says Jesus *preached peace to the Gentiles*. How and when did Jesus *preach peace* to the Gentiles? It was not while He was in the grave; neither was it during His earthly ministry (Jesus specifically said His earthly ministry was to the Jews, Mt. 15:24). Jesus preached to the Gentiles about ten years after His death on the cross (Acts 10-11). Jesus preached *through* men like Peter, James, and Paul, just as He preached to people *through* Noah (2 Pet. 2:5). Stated another way, those who died in the flood heard preaching *while they were alive* instead of after they died. In fact, if there is a second chance at salvation, or the dead can be saved by people still living on the earth, why try to convert people before they die? It would be much easier to "evangelize the dead" if the unsaved were allowed to suffer for a while (compare Lk. 16:23-24).

It may surprise some readers as well as some Mormons, but the Book of Mormon says the unsaved have no hope after death. Alma 34:32-35 says: "*For behold, this life is the time for men to prepare to meet God; yea, behold the day of this life is the day for men to perform their labors. 33 And now, as I said unto you before, as ye have had so many witnesses, therefore, I beseech of you that ye do not procrastinate the day of your repentance until the end; for after this day of life, which is given us to prepare for eternity, behold, if we do not improve our time while in this life, then cometh the night of darkness wherein there can be no labor performed. 34 Ye cannot say, when ye are brought to that awful crisis, that I will repent, that I will return to my God. Nay, ye cannot say this; for that same spirit which doth possess your bodies at the time that ye go out of this life, that same spirit will have power to possess your body in that eternal world. 35 For behold, if ye have procrastinated the day of your repentance even until death, behold, ye have become subjected to the spirit of the devil, and he doth seal you his; therefore, the Spirit of the Lord hath withdrawn from you, and hath no place in you, and the devil hath all power over you; and this is the final state of the wicked.*"

Since Paul did not have in mind vicarious baptism, should we understand verse 29 figuratively? Might the word *baptism* in this verse mean something other than baptism? This is how some interpret Paul's point and commentators have offered several non-literal interpretations, some of which are these:

- **Penance for the dead.** According to this explanation, people pay money or do good works *for* (on behalf of) the dead. This view is part of Catholic theology and it has no basis in Scripture.
- **Sadness for the dead.** People are certainly sad when they lose a loved one (1 Thess. 4:13), but there is no evidence that this is what Paul had in mind here.
- **Persecution.** Some think a certain number of persecutions must occur before Jesus can or will return, so the *baptism* in 1 Cor. 15:29 refers to Christians who face persecution. The greater the persecution, the sooner Jesus will return. These ideas are also interesting but they

have no Biblical support.

- **Dying a martyr's death.** This explanation says Christians were willing to be persecuted to the point of death because of their belief in a future resurrection (compare verse 30).

While some have adopted a figurative explanation of verse 29, others believe Paul had in mind a literal baptism. Some of the literal explanations for verse 29 are these:

- **Washing the dead.** Because Christians believed in a coming resurrection, they *washed* dead bodies to ensure the deceased would be ready for the future resurrection.
- **Baptism on behalf of the dead.** There was a ceremonial washing similar to what the Jews used.
- **Purify deceased Jews who had died in an unclean state.** According to this explanation, baptism was used to remove any uncleanness from deceased Jews.

The last mainstream approach to understanding 1 Cor. 15:29 is found in one or more of the following categories:

- **An ancient Corinthian custom.** Some believe baptism for the dead was an ancient custom that Paul knew about but did not endorse. Unlike most of the preceding explanations, this is a very good possibility.
- **New Testament baptism** (Mk. 16:16). This interpretation says people were being baptized for the forgiveness of *their own sins* (Acts 2:38), but this view cannot be right. The baptism in 1 Cor. 15:29 was done for the benefit of others (the dead).
- **Those who were close to death.** Some think the Corinthians were baptizing those who were seriously ill (they immersed people like the terminally ill). As with the preceding view, this explanation does not agree with the text. Paul spoke of baptizing “for the dead” instead of “baptizing the sick.”
- **Took the place of deceased saints.** According to this idea, people were baptized so they could “fill someone else’s spot” (i.e. a newly baptized person replaced a Christian who had died). If the Corinthians did not believe in a future resurrection, why did they try to keep “filling the ranks”? This is another fascinating idea, but it has no Biblical support.
- **Christians were baptized in ancient burial tombs.** This interpretation says Christians used the privacy of tombs to avoid persecution when they wanted to worship or baptize people. There is some evidence for some Christians worshipping in tombs because of persecution, but there are no indications known to this author of the Corinthians having to resort to such desperate measures.



- **Baptism for the *dead one* (Jesus).** This explanation cannot be right because the word “*dead*” is plural.
- **A plague.** Some believe a plague had broken out and many of the Corinthians were dying. Because of the plague’s effect (“the dead”), people decided to be immersed.

Paul’s point is very difficult, but in the mind of this author, it seems one of the following four explanations offers the best understanding of this verse.

- The Greek text of the New Testament does not have punctuation so some think Paul’s point should be punctuated in this way: “*Otherwise what shall they do who are baptized? For the dead? That is, are they baptized to belong to and be numbered among the dead who will never be raised?*”  
If the thought is expressed in this way, Paul meant: “If the dead will never be raised, why are people baptized?” Baptism “would lose its meaning if Christ had not been raised from the dead in the past or if the dead will not be raised in the future” (Gromacki, p. 190). One argument in favor of this view is that Paul often used this teaching style in this letter (notice his rhetorical questions in 3:37-31; 4:10; 6:15; 7:7; 8:31-35; 9:14, 19-22; 10:6-8, 14-19).
- Allen (p. 191) proposed another good explanation. When Jesus was accused of casting out demons by Satan’s power (Mt. 12:27), He said the “sons” of the Pharisees were also casting out demons. Jesus knew these men were not literally casting out demons, but He made this statement to form an argument. Paul may have done a similar thing; he may have used an unscriptural practice to further illustrate the need for these Christians to believe in a future resurrection.
- Some think people were baptized *because of dead people*. Just as Abel died but “continued to speak” (Heb. 11:4), so some were baptized because they were greatly influenced by wonderful Christians who had died.
- The pronouns may suggest that false teachers were baptizing people *on behalf of the dead*. In 1 Cor. 15:1 Paul described himself and the Corinthians (“*I*” and “*you*”). Verse 19 refers to Paul and the Corinthians (“*we*”). Verse 25 refers to Christ (“*He*”). In verse 29 there is a definite switch in the pronouns (“*they*”). This change in pronouns indicates people (presumably false teachers) were involved with a baptism that God did not institute or authorize.

If some were teaching baptism for (on behalf of) the dead, Paul did not endorse this activity anymore than he endorsed eating in an idol temple (1 Cor. 8:10). Sometimes Bible authors used evil practices to make a positive point (compare Lk. 16:1-7). Here it seems that Paul used an unscriptural baptism to build on what he had previously said. In the previous verses Paul showed how preaching and faith are vain (verse 14), the apostles were false witnesses (verse 15), all the dead will be condemned (verse 18), and Christians are of all men most pitiable (verse 19) if Jesus has not been raised from the dead. Verse 29 is another argument for the resurrection and it helps introduce the information in verses 30-34.

The CBL (First Corinthians, p. 469) said the “fact that Paul only parenthetically referred to this practice suggests that it held no importance for him at all. He was merely using it as an example to show that the Corinthians were being inconsistent in their view of the afterlife.” We might compare verse 29 to

a point made by an old pioneer preacher who said: “The Indians bury a dog and a spear with the fallen warrior. Why should they do that, if there is no resurrection?” Paul apparently used this same type of argument with the Corinthians. If the dead will be not raised, why would anyone teach baptism, submit to baptism, or baptize people on behalf of the dead? If there is no resurrection each person should eat, drink, and live life to the fullest (verse 32).

There is information about New Testament baptism in the commentary on 1 Cor. 12:13, the commentary on 15:3-4, and “An overview of New Testament Christianity” located at the end of this commentary, but here we may briefly summarize this topic. Baptism is for those who are old enough to believe (Mk. 16:16). It is also for people who have “repented” of (turned from) sin, Acts 2:38. Before being baptized a person must confess Christ (Rom. 10:9-10). Proper baptism requires a “burial” (immersion), Rom. 6:4; Col. 2:12. In fact, a person must go “into” (Acts 8:38) and then “come up out of” *water* (Acts 8:39). Sinners must experience a “new birth” (Jn. 3:3) and part of this new birth includes baptism (“water,” Jn. 3:5). There is only “one baptism” that now has God’s approval (Eph. 4:5) and this baptism places a person “into Christ” (Gal. 3:27) and entitles him to every “spiritual blessing” (Eph. 1:3), one of which is “salvation” (2 Tim. 2:10).

**15:30-32:** *Why do we also stand in jeopardy every hour? 31 I protest by that glorifying in you, brethren, which I have in Christ Jesus our Lord, I die daily. 32 If after the manner of men I fought with beasts at Ephesus, what doth it profit me? If the dead are not raised, let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die.*

At the end of the preceding verse Paul asked an important question: “*If the dead are not raised, why practice baptism for the dead?*” Here Paul asked a second question: If there is no resurrection, why did (should) the apostles (“we”) jeopardize their lives “*every hour*” to proclaim the gospel? This question and the information that follows is still part of Paul’s argument for believing in Jesus’ resurrection as well as the future resurrection of all people.

The verb translated “*stand in jeopardy*” (*kinduneuo*) is expressed with the present tense (i.e. there were continuing dangers and risks for Christians like Paul). Aside from here this term occurs only in Lk. 8:23; Acts 19:27, 40. Thayer (p. 347) defined *stand in jeopardy* as “*to be in jeopardy, to be in danger, to be put in peril.*” Paul was a Christian who literally “*hazarded his life*” (compare Acts 15:26) for the sake of the gospel. Shortly after his conversion his life was threatened at Damascus (Acts 9:22-23). At Lystra (Acts 14:19) he was stoned and left for dead. At Philippi (Acts 16:22-24) he was beaten and imprisoned. He had to leave Thessalonica (Acts 17:1) because of persecution (Acts 17:2-10). Paul wanted to know why he should expose himself to these kinds of experiences and risks if the dead are not raised (compare verse 32).

To help the Corinthians understand how much he suffered for them as well as others, Paul said, “*I die daily*” (31b). This is a figurative statement and it means Paul faced real and constant perils. As indicated in the preceding paragraph, Paul faced things like confinement, beatings, ridicule, and hate because he believed in and taught the truth on subjects like the resurrection. He continually suffered so others could be blessed (compare Eph. 3:1 and Rom. 8:35-37). Today there are still Christians, many of whom are missionaries, who have similar experiences. Numerous missionaries have had to contend with persecution, infectious diseases, wild animals, venomous snakes, poor living conditions, financial hardship, government bureaucracy, and criminal attacks (readers may wish to refer back to the illustration about African missionaries in the commentary on 13:4).

The first part of verse 31 (“*I protest by that glorifying in you*”) is difficult to interpret. The Living Bible paraphrases the thought as “*For it is a fact that I face death daily; that is as true as my pride in your growth in the Lord.*” This paraphrase, plus a close examination of the text, suggests Paul intended to express at least four thoughts. First, he was glad the Corinthians had become Christians. Second, he credited the source of his successful work among the Corinthians to Jesus (“*in Christ*”). Third, he knew he would receive a reward for his work (compare 3:12-15). Fourth, he *protested* (31a) against those who denied the resurrection.

The word *protest* is not in the Greek text, but it is implied “in the particle of adjuration” (Vincent,

3:276) and the thought is quite strong. Paul knew that if Jesus has not been raised from the dead, his teaching was false, he was a “false witness” (verse 15), and his *daily dying* was in vain (i.e. he would receive no reward for his labor. All his work and suffering were useless without Jesus’ resurrection). Since Paul “knew him in who he believed” (2 Tim. 1:12), he strongly objected to anyone saying or implying that Jesus has not been raised from the dead. Because Paul knew and taught the truth, and because he was absolutely confident in Jesus’ resurrection, he said he had reasons to “glory.”

Verse 32 is also a challenging text for interpreters. This passage begins with “*If after the manner of men.*” These few words have been explained in many different ways; in fact, Barnes (First Corinthians, pp. 305-306) offers the following seven interpretations:

- (1) “If I have fought after the manner of people, who act only with reference to this life, and on the ordinary principles of human conduct, as people fought with wild beasts in the amphitheater.”
- (2) “Or if, humanly speaking, or speaking after the manner of people, I have fought, referring to the fact that he had contended with men who should be regarded as wild beasts.”
- (3) “Or, that I may speak of myself as people speak, that I may freely record the events of my life, and speak of what has occurred.”
- (4) “Or, I have fought with wild beasts as far as it was possible for man to do it while life survived.”
- (5) “Or, as much as was in the power of man, who had destined me to this; if, so far as depended on man’s will, I fought, supposing that the infuriated multitude demanded that I should be thus punished. So Chrysostom understands it.”
- (6) “Or, that Paul actually fought with wild beasts at Ephesus.”
- (7) “Others regard this as a supposable case; on the supposition that I had fought with wild beasts at Ephesus. Amidst this variety of interpretation, it is not easy to determine the true sense of this difficult passage.”

It is difficult to prove that any of preceding explanations is correct. This author prefers the view expressed by The Expositor’s Greek Testament (2:932): “seeking the rewards—applause, money, etc.—for which men risk their lives. Instead of these P. earns poverty and infamy.” However we understand these few words, we can be assured of these three points: (1) Paul referred to something that actually happened at Ephesus (he was not offering an imaginary illustration). (2) There was at least one case when his life was in extreme danger and his escape on this occasion was apparently quite memorable and perhaps miraculous. (3) When the Romans placed criminals and wild beasts together in the amphitheatres to amuse spectators, those who experienced this fate did not live to tell about it.

The expression, “*I fought with wild beasts,*” comes from a single word (*theriomacheo*) that occurs only here in the New Testament and this term can be understood literally or figuratively. Paul may have literally come face to face with wild beasts in an amphitheatre (which this author prefers), or the information in verse 32 may be a figurative reference to the kinds of experiences found in places like 2 Cor. 11:23-29.

Support for a figurative explanation is partly based on the fact that we never find any other statement in the New Testament that says Paul faced wild beasts in an amphitheatre. Since such an event in Paul’s life would likely be recorded somewhere else, but there is no such record, Paul was speaking figuratively. Support for a figurative explanation is also suggested by the fact that the end of verse 31 contains figurative speech (“I die daily”). In other words, verse 32 is just a continuation of Paul’s figurative speech. Even some historical writers argued for a figurative interpretation. Ignatius was an early Christian writer who figuratively described evil men as “wild beasts.” Thus, some understand verse 32 to mean “*I encountered men who were especially wicked.*” Other parts of the New Testament use figurative language to describe evil people and these passages are similar to 1 Cor. 15: 32. In Lk. 3:7 we find evil men being described as *vipers*; Paul and Jesus referred to some unrighteous people as *dogs* (Phil. 3:2; Mt. 7:6).

Compare, too, Ps. 22:12-13, 20-21. If Paul used figurative language to describe evil people, one of his main “beasts” may have been the Roman Emperor Nero.

If verse 32 is not figurative it is literal and this is the view preferred by this author. A basic rule of Bible interpretation is that we take passages literally unless there is a compelling reason to make them figurative. The fact that Paul’s experience is not mentioned in the book of Acts or anywhere else in the New Testament is irrelevant (compare Acts 20:35). A third century writer (A.D. Hippolytus) said Paul faced wild beasts and a literal understanding of these words is consistent with 2 Tim. 4:17. Moreover, while Paul’s second letter to the Corinthians does not specifically describe an experience in an amphitheatre with “beasts,” there may be allusions to such an event in 2 Cor. 11:23f; 6:9; 4:9-11. Paul’s experience may have been similar to that faced by Daniel (Dan. 6:16). Whatever this exact event was, Paul lived through it and he was able to use it to help explain his belief in and his willingness to suffer for a future resurrection.

There is a substantial difference in how the ASV and the KJV punctuate the end of verse 32. The ASV says, “*If after the manner of men I fought with beasts at Ephesus, what doth it profit me? If the dead are not raised, let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die.*” The KJV reads, “*If after the manner of men I have fought with beasts at Ephesus, what advantageth it me, if the dead rise not? let us eat and drink; for to morrow we die.*”

This commentary is based upon the ASV and it understands Paul’s point to be something like this: Paul had fought with wild beasts at Ephesus, but how did this experience benefit him if there is no hope beyond the grave (i.e. a resurrection)? Additionally, if the dead are not raised, why should he or anyone else be serious about life? If Jesus has not been raised from the dead, we should seek as much fun and pleasure as possible (*eat and drink*) “*because tomorrow we die*” (verse 32). This was not Paul’s attitude, but it was the logical conclusion for anyone who rejects a future resurrection. In fact, this was the ancient philosophy of “Epicureanism.” If there is nothing beyond this life, life should be all about us and we should do whatever makes us happy, even if our happiness infringes on what others want. This is how many in the world think and act, but this is not the way of Christ. The Bible says life is not all about us. As shown in the next paragraph, life is supposed to be about our relationship with God (compare Eccl. 12:13).

Human beings have a “mortal body” that is eventually subjected to “death” (Heb. 9:27). When death occurs a person’s physical body becomes lifeless (Jas. 2:26) but the eternal spirit continues to exist (Eccl. 12:7). At the end of time God will raise all the dead (Dan. 12:2; Jn. 5:28-29) and each one will be eternally sentenced to heaven or hell. The future resurrection is one reason why Christians (and all others) should reject the “eat, drink and be merry” philosophy (a philosophy which is also mentioned in Isa. 22:13). Wise people not only live for God instead of self, they “*avoid*” those who believe things contrary to the Christian faith (verse 33).

The Church’s Bible (p. 262) offered this thoughtful quote from Augustine: “I wish they truly thought that they were going to die tomorrow! For who is so crazy and wrongheaded, who is so hostile to his own soul, as not to reflect, when he is going to die the next day; that everything for which he has worked is over? For Scripture says, *On that very day his plans perish* (Ps 146:4). If men take care, with their death day approaching, to make a will for the sake of those they leave behind, how much more should they have a care for their own souls? A man thinks of those he leaves behind: Does he have no thought for the one who is leaving all this behind? Consider this: your children will have what you lay aside, and you will have nothing! All your thought is expended on how travelers coming after you shall pass through life, not on the destination to which their traveling will take them.”

The word “*profit*” (*ophelos*) occurs only in verse 32 and Jas. 2:14, 16 and it can best be defined as *profit* or *advantage*. The KJV translates this word “*advantageth*.”

**15:33:** *Be not deceived: Evil companionships corrupt good morals.*

This is one of the better known verses in the Bible and people have applied it to a wide range

of things, including drinking parties and gang activity. Although this verse does have many possible applications, we must keep it in its context (Paul was speaking about those who denied the resurrection, verse 12). Some think Paul quoted from a Greek poet (Menander) and this quote was “familiar to Paul’s readers” (Warren Wiersbe, First Corinthians, p. 619). If Paul did quote a pagan poet, he simply meant this man’s words were true; he was not saying this poet’s words were inspired.

Paul had did not want these Christians to be “*deceived*” (*planao*), a word that described wandering planets (this same term is also used in 6:9). Here *deceived* means being “carelessly inattentive to sound doctrine” and so become “deceived” (CBL, GED, 5:198). The Greek text literally means “stop being led astray” (i.e. this action was already in progress and it needed to be halted).

Brown (2:460) noted how he “who is not firmly grounded in the faith is in danger of missing the truth” since “numerous false teachers threaten the church (1 Thess. 2:3; 2 Thess. 2:3; Eph. 4:14; Col. 2:8; 1 Jn. 2:26; 3:7; 4:6; 2 Tim. 3:13; 2 Pet. 2:18; 3:17). To be led astray by false teaching, in the form of philosophy or empty words, and to be led astray into definite acts of sin, are processes that go hand in hand.” False teachers are often so skilled at winning followers through smooth talk and feigned kindness (compare Rom. 16:18) that God compares them to “ravening wolves” who appear in “sheep’s clothing” (Mt. 7:15). In places such as Rom. 16:17 the Bible explicitly tells Christians to avoid those who teach error. Here Paul expressed these same sentiments as: “*Evil companionships*” (false teachers and ungodly philosophies) “*corrupt good morals*” (false teachers and their erroneous doctrines damage or destroy a Christian’s faith). The KJV says “*communications*” instead of “*companionships*” and “*manners*” instead of “*morals*.”

The word *companionships* (*homilia*) is found only here in the New Testament and this term described someone’s *company* (associates) instead of speech. In fact, translators could have used the expression “*bad company*” to communicate the point. The CBL (GED, 4:343) said the Corinthians “would be corrupted if they persisted in having evil persons as their *company* (companions).”

The word *evil* (*kakos*) is used in other places such as 1 Pet. 3:12 (God’s “face is against them that do *evil*”) and 1 Cor. 10:6. *Evil* may be defined as “evil, bad, destructive, damaging, unjust” (Brown, 1:563). In Phil. 3:2 Paul used this same word to describe “evil workers.” It may be hard for some to believe or accept, but false teachers are *evil* and being around or in fellowship with them can and most often will *corrupt* us.

The word *corrupt* (*phtheiro*) is found only a few times in the New Testament (1 Cor. 3:17; 2 Cor. 7:2; 11:3; Eph. 4:22; 2 Pet. 2:12; Jude 10; Rev. 19:2). “The primary meaning of this verb is ‘to destroy,’ particularly by means of corrupting” (CBL, GED, 6:424). “When used in the sphere of religion and morality, it refers to ruining or corrupting a person’s inner life, either by false instruction or by immoral conduct. His spoiling of another’s character is often accomplished by means of misleading tactics” (ibid). “In this context, Paul uses the saying to warn the Corinthians not to make common cause with those who deny the resurrection of the dead” (Brown, 1:469).

Being with the wrong person (group) or listening to the wrong thing just one time can corrupt someone, but here the point is expressed with the present tense. In other words, Paul meant *continued exposure* to the wrong person (group) could *corrupt* the Corinthians’ faith. This point is well illustrated with the Old Testament nation of Israel. Vine (2:67) noted how the “lusting of the Israelites recorded in Numbers 11:4 was largely due to the mixed multitude that came up out of Egypt with them, Exodus 12:38. If God’s people do not tread a path of complete separation,

they will inevitably find themselves led astray by evil associations.” In the case of the Corinthians, Paul wanted these saints to avoid involvement with those who denied a future resurrection (verse 12). Some think these Christians “had become apologetic, or even openly defiant, about the resurrection in order to please their pagan friends” (Beacon Bible Commentary, 8:466). Today Christians need to avoid those who believe and teach things contrary to the gospel (compare Mt. 15:14 where Jesus said, “*Let them alone*”).

The word *good* (*chrestos*) is an adjective that meant pleasant, easy, useful, good, reputable, kind (see Eph. 4:32 where this same term is translated “kind” in the ASV and KJV). Christians are also to have *morals* (the KJV says “manners”). This final term (*ethos*) is found only here in the New Testament and it described the “‘customary abode, haunt’ or ‘habit,’ such as the haunts of animals or men. Paul used it in 1 Corinthians 15:33 of the moral character or ethical conduct of a person” (CBL, GED, 3:45). Rienecker and Rogers (p. 443) defined *morals* as “custom, way, moral.” Christians need to develop and maintain “*good habits*” (NKJV) as well as “*good character*” (NIV). This is partly accomplished by maintaining a strong association with fellow Christians. Brown (2:438) rightly noted how the “church is doomed if it allows itself to be infected by the immoral habits of the surrounding world.” A good summary of verse 33 is found in MacKnight’s expanded translation (p. 203): “*Profane discourses and vicious examples corrupt even those who are virtuously disposed.*”

Today the principles in this verse are still very relevant. If a person typically works a 40 hour work week, and he does this for approximately 50 weeks a year for 45 years, about 25% of his life is devoted to secular employment. If this same person attends about four hours of religious instruction and (or) worship per week, he spends about 2.5% of his life in public gatherings with fellow Christians. The time that children spend in public school almost always outweighs the time they spend among those who are “seeking first the kingdom” (Mt. 6:33). Christians cannot go out of the world (1 Cor. 5:9-10), but they can actively work to avoid people and situations that undermine their desire to “hold fast” their faith and hope (Heb. 10:23).

**15:34:** *Awake to soberness righteously, and sin not; for some have no knowledge of God: I speak (this) to move you to shame.*

This verse closes the paragraph in the ASV and here Paul told the Corinthians to “*awake to soberness and sin not.*” A single word translates *awake to soberness* (*eknephō*) and this term is found only here in the New Testament. This term may be defined as “*become sober*” or “*come to one’s senses.*” Just as an intoxicated person needs to “sober up” and return to his senses, so the Corinthians needed to *sober up* from the false doctrine and beliefs they had learned or were learning from others (verse 33). Brown (1:515) defined *awake to soberness* as having “clarity of mind” and noted how it is similar to what is “required” in 2 Tim. 4:5. Since this *awakening* is expressed with the aorist tense, the Corinthians were to do this quickly and once for all (Vine, 2:112).

The Corinthians also needed to find “*righteousness*” (KJV). This *righteousness* (*dikaios*) was not *justification* (in 6:11 Paul said the Corinthians had already received this spiritual blessing). The *righteousness* in this verse is associated with the “good morals” in verse 33 (Paul wanted the Corinthians to engage in “upright living” and avoid “evil companionships”). Some of these Christians were involving themselves with false teachers and false doctrine (they were rejecting the idea of a future resurrection) and these things could separate them from God (verse 2 and compare 2 Jn. 9). The command to *sin not* is expressed with the present tense (i.e. the Corinthians were to no longer continue in sin). As Warren Wiersbe (First Corinthians, p. 619) said, it “was time for the Corinthians to *wake up* and *clean up.*”

These readers had apparently become so distracted that they were overlooking those who had “*no knowledge of God.*” Their preoccupation with arguing over the resurrection of the dead may have led

them to forget about the unsaved—people who were “dead in their trespasses and sins” (Eph. 2:1).

The expression “no knowledge” (*agnosia*) is found only here and 1 Pet. 2:15. Vincent (3:279) said this word means more than “ignorance;” people with “no knowledge” “have and hold it” (i.e. these people stay or persist in this state). This author believes “no knowledge of God” refers to non-Christians, but some expositors believe Paul applied this description to the Corinthians (i.e. the Corinthians lacked a real knowledge of God). This is a possible explanation, but it seems the Corinthians’ problems were mainly associated with failing to apply the information they had received instead of not knowing the truth about God (compare 15:1-4). The Corinthians knew about God and His will and here Paul reminded them about the need to do what they had learned. Stated another way, it was time for these saints to “wake up” and start thinking and acting as the people of God. It was bad enough for the Corinthians to listen to things contrary to the gospel (verse 12), but having *companionship* (verse 33) with non-Christians who were *ignorant* of God (accepting the philosophies of non-Christians) was inexcusable. The Corinthians should have tried to convert non-Christians instead of embracing their false ideas.

The evil influences from non-Christians or false teachers may explain some or most of the problems found in this book—problems that included congregational division, sexual sin, lawsuits, abuses of the Lord’s Supper, issues about women and their role in the church, and the misuse of spiritual gifts. The time had come for the Corinthians to be “*moved*” to “*shame*.” The word *shame* (*entropē*) meant “to arouse your shame” (Thayer, p. 219). Richardson (p. 225) said this word meant “the readers will be ‘turned in upon themselves’” and he cited 2 Thess. 3:14 and Tit. 2:8 as parallel texts. Lenski (First Corinthians, p. 701) noted how “False doctrine never aids true moral conduct but works to corrupt that conduct. Whatever eats at the root (doctrine and faith) damages or destroys the fruit (love and Christian virtues). Matt. 7:16, 17.”

It seems the Corinthians were like the Galatians—they were removing themselves from “Him that had called them in the gospel of Christ” (Gal. 1:6) and they were being “bewitched” into turning from the truth (Gal. 3:1). Thus, Paul spoke “*to*” (in a way that led to) convincing these brethren to abandon what is wrong and embrace what is right. Today there are still times when people, including Christians, need to be *shamed* into doing what is right.

**15:35:** *But some one will say, How are the dead raised? and with what manner of body do they come?*

“The phrase **someone may ask** indicates that Paul had either heard about this objection or he anticipated that someone might raise it” (Holman, 7:267). Perhaps people—very likely those who were critical of a future resurrection (verse 12)—were asking the kinds of questions that people ask today. For instance, this author has been asked: “How can God raise people from the dead if they were eaten by wild animals, consumed by worms, lost at sea, or burned to death? How can God raise a body that was destroyed in space? How can God raise those who died before birth? What will the resurrection be like for people who had a birth defect?”

Verse 35 contains two separate but related questions. Some were asking “*how*” the dead will be raised (this question focuses on God’s power or ability). The second question inquires about the “*manner of body*” people will have in the resurrection (the Corinthians must have wondered about the characteristics of the resurrection body). The word “*what*” (*poios*) is an interrogative pronoun that meant “of what sort” or “of what kind.” This term occurs about 35 times in the New Testament and it is applied to things like “what authority” (Mt. 21:23), “what commandment” (Mt. 22:36), “what works” (Jn. 10:32), “what name” (Acts 4:7) and “what hour” (Rev. 3:3).

People today still have questions about the resurrection body. Ministers are sometimes asked if infants will still be infants in eternity. Others want to know if “old people on earth” will appear “old” in eternity. Questions are also raised about the “shape” of people in eternity. This author was once asked if “fat people” on earth will be “fat in eternity.” Based on Phil. 3:21, there will not be anything about the resurrection body that is negative or unattractive. Everyone will be raised, but as Paul explained with an illustration involving seeds in verses 36-37, we should not expect the resurrection body to resemble what we now have.

The two questions in verse 35 seem to be based on the Corinthians' belief that the resurrection body will be a "fleshly" body or it will be the "recreation" or "reanimation" of our current body. Since human flesh decays, the Corinthians may have been wondering how a resurrection would be possible and what man's "future flesh" would look like. Like many today, the Corinthians were thinking in material terms. Paul had to remind these readers that the resurrection will not involve "flesh and blood" (verse 50). Man now resides in the earthly realm, but in the future, the body will be changed (verse 38) so it can inhabit a spiritual environment for eternity (verse 44). We can know some things about this future body and Paul does provide some details about this body in this chapter; however, there are other things about the future state that we must accept by faith (2 Cor. 5:7 and compare 1 Jn. 3:2). Since God was able to make man from the dust of the earth (Gen. 2:7), He will certainly have no difficulty raising man from the dead (the first question in verse 35) or providing a body that pleases Him as well as the saved (the second question).

Warren Wiersbe (First Corinthians, p. 620) said, "Nowhere does the Bible teach that, at the resurrection, God will 'put together the pieces' and return to us our former bodies. There is *continuity* (it is *our* body), but there is not *identity* (it is not the *same* body)." He also said (same page), "If at the resurrection, all God did was to put us back together again, there would be no improvement. Furthermore, flesh and blood cannot inherit God's kingdom. The only way we can enjoy the glory of heaven is to have a body suited to that environment."

**15:36:** *Thou foolish one, that which thou thyself sowest is not quickened except it die:*

The word "*foolish*" (*aphron*) is not the term used by Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount (Mt. 5:22). This word, which is translated "*fool*" in the KJV, meant "*senseless, foolish, stupid; without reflection or intelligence, acting rashly*" (Thayer, p. 90). Kittel (abridged edition, p. 1279) said Paul "does not pronounce judgment in 1 Cor. 15:36, but makes a rhetorical appeal for understanding." In other words, Paul used the word *foolish* as an exclamatory. It would be parallel to someone shouting "*What?!*" Lenski (First Corinthians, p. 703) said, "'Fool thou art!' Does this man try to make a joke of the resurrection and to turn the laugh upon simple believers by stating that the dead body will be patched together again from the dust, once more to begin its round of life in eating and drinking, digesting and eliminating, sleeping and working, begetting and keeping house? What a fool to think of the resurrection in so pitiful a way! This is a caricature and not the reality."

The Corinthians wanted to know "how" the dead would be raised and the "manner of body" people would have (verse 35) and here Paul began to answer these questions. Since some of these Christians had surely planted seeds in the ground, and they knew seeds must decompose before a new plant or tree can grow, Paul used this illustration to answer some of the Corinthians' questions (in Jn. 12:24 we find that Jesus used this same illustration).

The word "*sowest*" (*speiro*) occurs about 50 times in the New Testament (verse 37 uses this term twice) and this term is used both literally and figuratively. Here Paul meant the "burial of the body is, by analogy, like the planting of seed; it must decay before it brings forth new, incorruptible life" (CBL, GED, 6:90). "Perhaps Paul chose the analogy of the seed precisely because it implies continuity as well as discontinuity" (Rienecker and Rogers, p. 443). The word "*quickened*" (*zoopoieo*) meant to "*animate, to enliven, to make alive, revive or resuscitate, as from death*" (this ability belongs exclusively to God).

**15:37:** *and that which thou sowest, thou sowest not the body that shall be, but a bare grain, it may chance of wheat, or of some other kind;*

This verse continues the "sowing" illustration introduced in verse 36, but here an additional point is made: Things like the *size* and *shape* of seeds do not tell us very much about the types of plants or trees they produce. An oak tree does not resemble the acorn, and corn stalks do not look like the kernels planted by farmers. Such is also true for tomatoes, peas, and scores of other plants. Many plants dry, bare seeds and these seeds turn into vigorous and beautiful plants and trees. Even though seeds do not



resemble what they produce, there is a direct relationship between them and what they create. Paul said this same truth is found in the spiritual realm (man's physical body is "planted" in death, but it will be raised into something different and more glorious when the resurrection occurs, verses 42-46). It seems people will be able to recognize one another after the resurrection (this point is discussed in the next paragraph), but the resurrection body will be much different from our earthly state (Phil. 3:21; 1 Jn. 3:2).

Since the resurrection body will be very different from what we now have, many have asked if people will recognize one another in heaven. The answer to this question seems to be *yes* (compare Mt. 17:3-4; 22:32; Lk. 16:23). As Allen (p. 195) observed, "Change and identity are not incompatible terms. The river which undergoes constant change remains the same river. Our present bodies are not like the ones we had ten years ago but they are the same as far as identity is concerned. Paul did not affirm sameness nor recreation but identity for the resurrection body. How that identity is maintained is not clearly revealed."

The Bible says people were able to recognize Jesus after His resurrection (Lk. 24:16, 31) as well as identify Him after He returned to heaven (Acts 7:55). The Scriptures indicate that we will know who the "people of Nineveh" are (Mt. 12:41) as well as recognize the "Queen of Sheba" (Mt. 12:42). Jesus even hinted that we will be able to identify those who lived in "Sodom and Gomorrah" (Mt. 10:15). Compare, too, 2 Sam. 12:23. Gromacki (pp. 195-196) noted how all "men have natural bodies with distinct, personal characteristics (fingerprints, height, color), so all believers will have resurrection bodies with distinguishing marks of personal identity. We will not all look like Christ or like each other, and yet we will all have spiritual bodies with the same properties."

The Bible is not specific on how this future recognition will work, but it may partly be based on some memories. Certainly Abraham said the rich man could "remember" some things about his earthly life (Lk. 16:25). We do not know how much of our memories will be preserved in eternity, but it does appear there will be at least some recollection of our earthly lives and (or) the lives of others. If there are no memories of life on earth (and this includes the memory that we were guilty of sin), it would seem difficult or impossible to praise God for redeeming us from sin. Finally, if the saved are able to recognize each another in eternity, it seems reasonable to conclude that the unsaved will also be able to recognize each other. It seems safe to say, after the resurrection and for all eternity, the identity of all people will be preserved and perpetuated (compare Lk. 13:28).

The word "*bare*" (*gumnos*) is an adjective that meant "naked, unclad, bare." This term is found more than a dozen times in the New Testament and one of these places is 2 Cor. 5:3. The CBL (GED, 1:653) noted how "Paul used a double metaphor in 2 Corinthians 5:1-4 where he apparently was speaking of a bodiless, intermediate period between death and resurrection. He described the soul as living in a tent, the body, and being 'clothed' with it. He compared this with the change which will occur at the resurrection when the believer's temporary dwelling place will be exchanged for a 'house not made with hands.' It will be like moving from a tent to a mansion. ... In 1 Corinthians 15:35-37 Paul used another illustration, this time of a seed which dies and loses its original covering. In time it is transformed into the better form of a plant." Whatever the resurrection body is like, it will be different and vastly superior to what we now have.

The word "*grain*" (*kokkos*) described a seed, a grain, or a kernel. "Here a mystery arises: around what will this resurrection body be built? If the stalk of wheat, e.g., must come from a living germ buried in the ground, is there some hidden germ of our own being around which Christ will build our resurrection bodies?" (Baker's Dictionary of Theology, p. 454).

**15:38:** *but God giveth it a body even as it pleased him, and to each seed a body of its own.*

Although some believe in the theory of evolution, Paul claimed that "*God*" exists and God personally designed the various "*bodies*" in and beyond our world (compare verses 39-40). Here Paul specifically spoke about the bodies for "*seeds*." The stalks, bushes, or other types of "*bodies*" that grow from seeds have all been individually designed by God ("*to each seed a body of its own*"). This verse also implies that every other detail about seeds and what they produce was also carefully planned by God. In other words, God not only determined what type of body (shell) all seeds would have, He designed things like

root systems, how things would grow, the rate at which things would grow, what leaves would look like, the size, types and sturdiness of branches and limbs, the texture of bark, the color and hardness of plants and trees, etc. Evolution says things were created by time, chance and change, but the Bible says there was a Master Designer (God) who designed things down to the minutest possible level. Gromacki (p. 193) said, “God has so designed the genetic code that men can trust the relationship that exists between seed and plant.” “What men attribute to evolutionary natural law, Paul saw as the superintending, sovereign plan of God controlling His creation” (ibid).

The final thought in verse 38 “meets the finer point of the second question of ver. 35; God will find a *fit* body for man’s redeemed nature, as He does for each of the numberless seeds vivified in the soil” (The Expositor’s Greek Testament, 2:935). MacKnight (p. 204) suggested this *fit body* will provide man with a completed “consciousness of his identity, by which he will be sensible of the justice of the retribution which is made to him for his deeds. Besides, this new body will more than supply the place of the old, by serving every purpose necessary to the perfection and happiness of the man in his new state.” Wuest (2:104) proposed that in the resurrection our “minds will again function perfectly. Our bodies will be immortal, perfect, free from all the effects of sin that have accumulated in 6000 years of human history.” Those who died in sin will also receive a body that is just right for an unending existence in hell.

**15:39-41:** *All flesh is not the same flesh: but there is one (flesh) of men, and another flesh of beasts, and another flesh of birds, and another of fishes. 40 There are also celestial bodies, and bodies terrestrial: but the glory of the celestial is one, and the (glory) of the terrestrial is another. 41 There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars; for one star differeth from another star in glory.*

In the first chapter of the Bible (Gen. 1:20-27) there is an *ascending* “scale of creation” (fish, fowl, beast, and man). Paul used this same scale here, but he reversed it (i.e. this list is given in *descending* order). Paul’s list also omits reptiles.

The statement that “*all flesh is not the same flesh*” means the skin and bone of animals is different from that possessed by man. Just as *fish* are different from *birds*, and *beasts* are different from *fish* and *birds*, so man is a distinctive creature. The word “*birds*” (*ptenos*) is an adjective that meant “feathered” or “winged” creatures. The word “*beasts*” (*ktenos*) seems to describe “animals of the land in general” (CBL, GED, 3:416). The key point in verse 39 as well verses 40-41 is that God designed an almost unbelievable number of different “bodies.” He has designed the various bodies for seeds (verse 38), as well as the numerous bodies for “fleshly creatures” (verse 39) and the “heavenly bodies” (verses 40-41). Based on what God has done in the past, we can have confidence in His ability to produce a resurrection body that is absolutely perfect for both the saved and the lost in eternity.

In verse 40 Paul spoke of “*celestial*” (*epouranios*) bodies (*celestial* is another word for “heavenly”). These heavenly bodies include but are not limited to the *sun*, *moon*, *stars*, and *planets*. Virtually all people know that planetary bodies differ in many ways, one of which is their “*glory*.” “We see how they shine with a light and a radiance that are far above every kind of body that is visible to us here on earth” (Lanski, First Corinthians, p. 709).

Some think the “bodies” in verse 40 refer to men and angelic creatures, but, as stated in the previous paragraphs, this author understands them to describe planetary bodies. Vincent (3:281) quoted Godet who noted how “scoffers who refused to believe in the existence of the future body would hardly have admitted the existence of angelic bodies. To convince them on their own ground, the apostle appeals exclusively to what is seen.”

The word “*terrestrial*” (*epigeios*) in verse 40 is used elsewhere to contrast earthly things with spiritual things. If *celestial* bodies describe things such as the sun, moon, and stars, and this is the conviction of this author, the word *terrestrial* describes things on the earth—that is, the bodies of men, animals, fish, birds, and perhaps even things like “mountains, trees, and rivers on the earth. Each aspect of nature has its own particular beauty and attractiveness” (Beacon Bible Commentary, 8:468).

The CBL (GED, 2:524) noted how the word *terrestrial* is used seven times in the New Testament and

these passages reflect “a dualism between the ‘heavenly’ and the ‘earthly.’” Here *terrestrial* describes the vast differences between heaven and earth (the amount of glory between these two places is very, very great). Stated another way, it is impossible to compare heaven to earth (heaven is far, far more glorious).

The word *glory* (*doxa*) meant “*brightness, splendor, radiance*” and Paul used this term multiple times in verses 40-41. In commenting on this word in verse 40 the CBL (First Corinthians, p. 475) said: “Although it is only implied in English, the Greek noun *doxa* (‘glory’) governs not only the phrase ‘celestial (heavenly) bodies’ but also bodies ‘terrestrial (earthly).’ It is true that Paul was drawing a distinction between the glory of the heavenly bodies in their brilliance (i.e., the sun, moon, and stars all reveal brightness) and that of earthly bodies, but it must still be recognized that Paul spoke of the earthly bodies (*somata*) as having glory.” Spicq (1:369) said, “the brilliance (*doxa*) of heavenly bodies is different from the brilliance of earthly bodies; there is the brilliance of the sun, and the brilliance of the moon, and the brilliance of the stars, for one star differs from another in its brilliance.” Even unbelievers admit that heavenly bodies vary in their brightness and radiance. There is literally “*one glory of the sun,*” “*another glory of the moon,*” and “*another glory of the stars.*”

God was so meticulous when He created all things that the end of verse 41 says He even caused the “*stars*” to differ from one another in their *glory*. “Not only have the stars a different glory from the sun and moon, but further, even one star often surpasses another star in brightness. There is no star, no glorious body, that does not obviously differ in some way from another” (Bengel, 2:264) and this is an amazing fact. We now know that some stars are blue and very hot (these stars may give off dangerous radiation and have a relatively short life span). Others are red or brown and are considered to be “cold” and virtually inactive. We also know that some stars “pulsate” at frequencies ranging from a fraction of a second to several years.

At the present time astronomers believe there are about ten billion galaxies that can be seen with a 200-inch telescope. If the total amount of space is more than 100,000 times greater than what we can observe (this was Einstein’s estimate), there are at least 100 septillion stars in the universe (this is a “1” with 26 zeros behind it—100,000,000,000,000,000,000,000,000). If everyone in the world helped count the stars, each person would have to count 50 billion stars and never count a star twice. God not only made all the stars and caused them to differ from one another, He has *named* each one of them (Ps. 147:4). Since God has determined how much *glory* every single star should possess and He has personally named each star, He is certainly capable of resurrecting all people at the end of time and giving all people an ideal body for eternity.

Since all the planets “differ in glory from one another” (verse 41), some have concluded this means the saved will also experience different degrees of reward in heaven. If there are degrees of reward in heaven as well as different degrees of punishment for the unsaved (see Mt. 10:41 and this author’s comments on Lk. 12:47-48 in section 17 of his Gospels commentary), this point cannot be established by any of the information in 1 Cor. 15.

Another idea, found even among ancient authors, is the belief that “celestial” bodies refer to the saved and the “flesh of beasts” and the “flesh of birds” describes the unsaved. This idea also reads too much into the text. Paul simply wanted the Corinthians to realize there will be a vast difference between the bodies that people have on earth and the bodies they will have after the resurrection (Paul continued to discuss this point in verses 42-49).

Mormons have attempted to use verses 40-41 to teach their belief about three kingdoms of glory in the next life. According to Mormon theology and as discussed in the commentary on verse 50, there is the “Celestial Kingdom,” the “Terrestrial Kingdom,” and the “Telestial Kingdom” and a person’s faithfulness determines which kingdom he receives. If people would just read the text they would see that Paul did not use the word *telestial* in verses 39-41, let alone anywhere in this chapter. Also, as shown in the preceding comments, Paul was speaking about heavenly (celestial) planetary bodies and how these stand in contrast to the various earthly (terrestrial) bodies made by God. He told the Corinthians a similar thing will be true for man; in this life the human body is weak and greatly impacted by sin (verses 42-44). In the resurrection people will receive a new body from God that is eternal and perfect (2 Cor. 5:1-4).

**15:42:** *So also is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown in corruption; it is raised in incorruption:*

This verse begins with an adverb (*houtos*) that meant “in this same manner.” In other words, “‘So also...of the dead’ serves as both a summary and transitional sentence” (CBL, First Corinthians, p. 475).

In the four preceding verses Paul said God has made all the “bodies” that exist and these various bodies have differing degrees of “glory.” Here he added that our earthly bodies are “*sown in corruption*” but they will be “*raised in incorruption*.” The word *sown* (*speiro*—this term is discussed in the commentary on verse 36) continues the illustration of seeds bringing forth life (verses 36-37). The word *corruption* (*phthora*) meant “perishable, subject to decay or destruction.” Vine (2:113) defined this term as “the effect of the withdrawal of life and thus the condition of the human body in burial.” Paul spoke of a similar thing in 2 Cor. 4:16 (our “outward man decays”).

Because man’s current physical body is subject to things like weariness, injury and death, God views our current state as a “body of humiliation” (Phil. 3:21). We live in a world where the current circle of life involves birth, life, and eventually the *sowing* of a corpse. However, a time is coming when all the dead will be raised in *incorruption* (*aphtharsia*), a word that meant “not subject to decay and control by sin” (Rienecker and Rogers, p. 444). After the resurrection man will never again suffer any type of fatigue, sickness or death. Ancient Greeks spoke of deliverance *from* the body (they saw the body as a prison and something to be freed from), but God speaks of the body being *delivered* (Rom. 8:23). For the saved, this deliverance means being clothed with immortality (verses 53-54), having a body that is no longer “weak” (verse 43), and “*shining forth as the sun*” (Mt. 13:43). The unsaved will also be resurrected and receive an eternal body, but their future state will not be glorious.

The *corruptible* nature of the body is so bad (compare Jn. 11:39) that people go to great lengths and expense to hide it (cosmetics are used to improve the appearance of the deceased and beautiful cemetery markers help mask the ugliness of death). Man can disguise a few of the things caused by sickness and death, but in the end we cannot overcome the corruptible nature of our body. Jesus, however, can. When the Lord returns and raises the dead (Jn. 5:28-29), He will remove every form of weakness and decay.

The word *incorruption* is a noun and it is found only here; Rom. 2:7; 1 Cor. 15:50, 53-54; Eph. 6:24; 2 Tim. 1:10; Tit. 2:7. This term is also used as an adjective (*aphthartos*) in places such as 1 Pet. 1:4 (Christians have an “incorruptible” inheritance) and 1 Pet. 1:23 (God’s word is “incorruptible”). For all the other places that use *incorruption* in its adjective form, see Rom. 1:23; 1 Cor. 9:25; 1 Tim. 1:17.

**15:43:** *it is sown in dishonor; it is raised in glory: it is sown in weakness; it is raised in power:*

Man’s physical body is not only “*sown in corruption*” (verse 42), it is “*sown in dishonor*” (*atimia*), a word that meant “disgrace” and “shame” (see how this same term is used in Rom. 1:26 and 1 Cor. 11:14). Secular writers sometimes used this word to describe “the loss of the rights of citizenship” (Rienecker and Rogers, p. 444). Here *dishonor* has the connotation of *humiliation* (man has nothing to rejoice over or be glad about when he dies). The CBL (GED, 1:484) said this term “suggests the difference between the secular and the supernatural, the profane and the holy, and the defeat of death versus the victory of the resurrection.” The Living Bible, which is a paraphrase, renders the first part of verse 43 as: “*The bodies we have now embarrass us, for they become sick and die; but they will be full of glory when we come back to life again.*”

Lenski (First Corinthians, p. 712) noted how we “try to honor the dead whom we bury by clothing them in their best, giving them a fine casket, flowers, our attending presence, etc. All of this is well; it means much if we have the sure hope of a blessed resurrection with reference to the dead. What it means when this hope is absent we need not say. Yet the body itself is enveloped ‘in dishonor’ – we soon hurry it from sight. In a little while its decomposition would cause us to shrink from it in horror.”

Although man is currently confronted by frailness as well as physical death, Jesus’ resurrection (verse 20, “firstfruits”) guarantees a future resurrection. When this resurrection occurs, all will have a new form. The saved will be “*raised in glory*” (i.e. the redeemed will be honored and glorified in the resurrection).

Compare Rom. 8:18-23 and Phil. 3:21). Just as our living bodies are *glorious* when compared to a corpse, so the resurrection body will be glorious when contrasted to our current body (compare Dan. 12:3). The Beacon Bible Commentary (8:469) said the “resurrection body will experience a perfect environment without any of the things which constantly threaten man’s earthly existence.”

A second contrast is found in 43b; man’s current state is one of “*weakness*” (*astheneia*), but the resurrection body will be one of “*power*” (*dunamis*). Man’s current body has many physical limitations (it needs food, water, sleep, air, and protection from harsh elements. In places like Antarctica man cannot survive without special clothing and housing). Even in cases where a man “cultivates his health, disciplines his powers, or pampers his person, the body remains a comparatively frail and weak instrument” (Beacon Bible Commentary, 8:469). Weakness is also seen in death; a dead body cannot resist being buried and it has no resistance to decay. In contrast to our current body, the resurrection body will be one of strength and vitality.

**15:44:** *it is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual (body).*

Man’s earthly body is a “*natural*” (*psuchikos*) body, a “physical body which is suited to earthly life” and “is subject to sin” (Rienecker and Rogers, p. 444). This natural body is composed of things like muscles, tendons, cartilage, a variety of bones, arteries, veins, nerves, and blood—the things we need for life on earth. Our earthly body is eventually “*sown*” in death, but it will be “*raised*” at the end of time and changed into a “*spiritual body*.”

Some think people will not have any type of body in heaven, but this verse says mankind will have some type of form (body) in the afterlife and this body will not have the kinds of limitations we now experience. Rienecker and Rogers (p. 444) said our physical bodies will be “renovated by the Spirit of God and therefore suited to heavenly immortality.” The latter part of verse 44 is especially clear in the original text: If there is a natural body there *will* be a spiritual body. We might think of receiving a new body as a “divine appointment” (compare verse 53).

Geisler and Rhodes (p. 239) noted how a “‘spiritual’ body denotes an immortal body, not an immaterial body. A ‘spiritual’ body is one dominated by the spirit, not one devoid of matter.” Also, a “‘spiritual body’ does not mean immaterial and invisible, but immortal and imperishable” (ibid). “The resurrection body can be called a ‘spiritual body’ in much the same way we speak of the Bible as a ‘spiritual book.’ Regardless of their spiritual source and power, both the resurrection body and the Bible are material objects” (ibid, p. 240). On page 239 of this same work these authors offer the following chart to point out the “parallels drawn by Paul”:

Preresurrection body	Postresurrection body
Earthly (verse 40)	Heavenly
Perishable (verse 42)	Imperishable
Weak (verse 43)	Powerful
Natural (verse 44)	[Supernatural]
Mortal (verse 53)	Immortal

**15:45:** *So also it is written, The first man Adam became a living soul. The last Adam (became) a life-giving spirit.*

In verses 45-47 Paul contrasted Adam with Jesus. Adam is portrayed as the head of man’s “natural” body on earth (verse 44) and Jesus is depicted as the head of man’s “spiritual” and future resurrection body. Stated another way, through Adam all men become living souls (they receive physical life). Through Jesus all will one day be raised from the dead and live for eternity (compare verse 49). Brown (2:57-58) said, “Adam and Christ are not here thought of as individual persons, but as representatives of a

whole community. The ‘last Adam’ therefore does not mean the last man either numerically or chronologically.” Paul was thinking of Jesus “as the new, the second representative of a new humanity created in his image, by contrast with the first humanity summarised in Adam” (ibid). This contrast and how it relates to the context may be summarized with this chart:

<b>Our <i>present body</i> (which is like Adam’s)</b>	<b>The <i>resurrected body</i> (which will be like Jesus’)</b>
It is “ <i>sown in corruption</i> ” (42)	It will be “ <i>raised in incorruption</i> ” (42)
It is “ <i>sown in dishonor</i> ” (verse 43a)	It will be “ <i>raised in glory</i> ” (verse 43)
It is “ <i>sown in weakness</i> ” (43b)	It will be “ <i>raised in power</i> ” (43b)
It is a “ <i>natural</i> ” body (44a)	It will be raised as a “ <i>spiritual</i> ” body (44a)
It is a “ <i>living soul</i> ” (45)	It will be a “ <i>life-giving spirit</i> ” (45)
It is an “ <i>earthly</i> ” body (47)	It will be a “ <i>heavenly</i> ” body (47)

The expression “life giving spirit” describes the things on the right side of the preceding chart (through Jesus all the saved will have an eternal and glorious body that is fit for the world to come). Lenski (First Corinthians, p. 722) described this *life giving spirit* as Jesus’ “relation to us: he is the fountain of spiritual life for us.” Jesus will also *give life* to the unsaved, but this *life* will be for eternal punishment.

**15:46:** *Howbeit that is not first which is spiritual, but that which is natural; then that which is spiritual.*

This verse says mankind “*first*” received a “*natural*” body. In other words, people must first live on the earth (all begin life with a physical body). Then, at the resurrection, all will receive a spiritual body. Vincent (3:284) described this as a “general principle, illustrated everywhere in human history, that the lower life precedes the higher.” Willis (p. 475) added that this “verse merely asserts God’s order. The physical body will precede the spiritual resurrection body. There can be no resurrection body except there be first a physical body.”

What Paul said in this verse (the “natural comes before the spiritual”) also implies an order regarding when man receives his eternal spirit. In other words, rather than creating man’s eternal spirit and then forming a body to contain it, God first created man’s physical body and *then* created his eternal spirit.

Some believe God created eternal spirits at some point in the past and these spirits are just “waiting to inhabit a future body.” Lightfoot (3:339) attributed this belief to a Rabbi named Solomon, a teacher who claimed there “is a repository, the name of which is *Goph*: and from the creation, all the souls that ever were to be born were formed together and there placed.” Others believe people inherit their eternal spirits from their parents. This view was apparently originated by Tertullian, an African theologian (160-225 A.D.), and this idea helped lay the foundation for the unscriptural doctrine of original sin (for a discussion of original sin as well as an overview of Calvinism see the commentary on 2:14 and 14:20).

A person’s eternal spirit has either been created in the past or it is “created when needed.” If eternal spirits were created in advance (i.e. some time in the past), they would have been formed when God created all things (i.e. the “creation week” described in Gen. 1-2) and then kept somewhere until a child is conceived. This view is possible, but it does not seem probable. A better explanation is the belief that God set in motion several laws at creation, one of which is the creation of an eternal spirit at the time of conception. God has assigned the role of producing children to the human race, and it seems man’s eternal spirit, which is a necessary ingredient to form a human being (1 Thess. 5:23), is a natural part of

the conception process. In other words, our “life force” (the part of our existence we have in common with animals) is automatically and simultaneously joined with a body and an eternal spirit at conception. Thus, the body, soul and spirit form a human life.

The Bible does say God gives man his “spirit” (Eccl. 12:7), but, as demonstrated by Jn. 4:1-2, this does not necessarily mean this act is done directly by God. The Bible says “Jesus baptized people” (Jn. 4:1), but Jesus accomplished this through someone else (He baptized *through the hands of others*, Jn. 4:2). In a similar way God seems to give each person a spirit at conception, but this is done *through* the laws He instituted at creation.

Some might infer from this verse that man’s current body is completely *unspiritual* (Rom. 8:14; 2 Cor. 5:17; Gal. 5:22), but this is not what Paul meant. Hodge (p. 351) rightly said our “present life is like a seed time, the harvest is the hereafter. The natural comes before the spirit.” Lenski (First Corinthians, p. 723) expressed the point in this way: Here our spirit rules the animated body only partially, as a refractory subject; there it shall rule the body perfectly as itself being a truly spiritual object.”

**15:47:** *The first man is of the earth, earthy: the second man is of heaven.*

The “*first man*” (Adam) was “*of the earth*” and “*earthy*.” The word *earthy* (*choikos*) is found only in 1 Cor. 15:47, 48, 49 and it meant “made of soil” or “made of dust” (i.e. Adam was literally made from soil). Paul also used a preposition in the Greek text (*ek*) that meant “of, from, out of” and this further stresses that Adam was made *of* earth (dust). Paul reminded the Corinthians that all human beings share in this same quality (45a). In contrast to Adam, there is Jesus (the “*second man*”). Although the Lord spent about 30 years on the earth, His origin and nature were “*of heaven*.” Stated another way, Jesus did live and die as a man, but human flesh was not His natural form (Jn. 1:14). As noted in the commentary on verse 45, we now have a body that resembles that possessed by Adam, but in the resurrection we will have a nature that resembles the one possessed by Jesus (compare verse 49).

Lenski (First Corinthians, pp. 725-726) said: “But are the soul and the spirit of Adam not also of heavenly origin, breathed into his body by the Creator himself? And is the human body of Christ, born of the Virgin Mary not a descendant of Adam, ‘out of the earth,’ just as much as Adam’s body? Both observations are quite true. The first man has a heavenly side, the second man an earthly side. And we must add that Christ retained his earthly body, transformed it, and elevated it into the glory of the Trinity, that body that came from his human mother. Nevertheless, Paul’s antithesis stands: there is an absolute difference in origin as well as in being between Adam and Christ. Adam began with the dust of the earth. God formed that dust into a body that was composed of earth. Then, without knowledge, consent or activity of this body, God breathed his breath into it. Thus Adam became a living being. The complete opposite is true regarding Christ. The person of the Son of God existed from all eternity. By that person’s own volition and power a human body was conceived in the womb of the Virgin, in which this person became incarnate, not for the purpose of his own existence, but for the purpose of redeeming our fallen race. Thus Adam is ‘out of the earth, earthy’; Christ ‘out of heaven.’” This verse lays the foundation for what is said in verses 48-49.

**15:48-49:** *As is the earthy, such are they also that are earthy: and as is the heavenly, such are they also that are heavenly. 49 And as we have borne the image of the earthy, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly.*

As Paul affirmed in verses 42-47, Adam was “of the earth” and we share in his *earthly* nature (i.e. our bodies become weary, they are subject to illness, and they eventually succumb to death). Although our present body is *earthy* (verse 47), a time is coming when our “*flesh and blood*” state (verse 50) will be exchanged for a “*heavenly*” body. The saved will receive bodies that permit them to spend eternity with God and the unsaved will receive bodies that are capable of being eternally punished (Mt. 18:8). The New Living Translation tries to capture the point in verse 48 with this rendering: “*Earthy people are like the*

*earthly man, and heavenly people are like the heavenly man.”*

The word “*borne*” (*phoreo*) occurs only six times in the New Testament and two of these times are in 1 Cor. 15:49. In Mt. 11:8; Jn. 19:5; and Jas. 2:3 this same term describes the wearing of clothing. Here *borne* reminds us of two things. First, as human beings we “have been flesh.” We have had the type of body that God designed for an earthly existence. Second, while our current body is designed for life on earth, it is far more than a physical body. Our flesh is like a vessel that holds what really matters (our eternal spirit). Stated another way, our physical body is just a shell that contains who we really are. For all intents and purposes, people are an eternal spirit and our eternal spirit *wears a body*. Just as a container can hold liquid, so there is a container (the human body) that holds the true essence of who we are and this essence cannot die. In the resurrection we will receive a new and eternal body for our everlasting spirit (verse 44). Paul discussed the nature of this new body in verses 51-57.

The word “*image*” (*eikon*) in verse 49 was used by Jesus to describe the *image* of an emperor on a Roman coin (Mt. 22:20). Here it “carries the meaning of representation and manifestation. The application is twofold. All men are representations and manifestations of the original prototype, Adam. Even so shall all true believers become representatives and manifestations of Christ” (Beacon Bible Commentary, 8:471). Spicq (1:412) noted how the “word ‘image’ is the first word uttered by God in his relations with humans (Gen. 1:26-27).” “Because an image not only implies the likeness of a copy to a model, but derives from an earlier reality, it implies a relation of dependency and of origination; and possessing to some extent the same ‘form,’ it resembles its precursor” (ibid, pp. 416-417). Lenski (First Corinthians, p. 730) said what “our bodies will look like and with what heavenly powers and functions they will be endowed when they come forth at the resurrection like unto Christ’s glorious body, we may dream about but cannot now describe.”

This verse concludes the answers to the questions raised in verse 35: “How will the dead be raised” and “What kind of body will people have in the resurrection?” Paul answered these questions by saying human bodies are “sown in death” (verse 36), just as seeds must decompose before they can become plants. In verses 50-57 Paul introduced to a new topic: What if people are still alive when Jesus returns? In the next seven verses Paul affirmed that some will be alive when Jesus returns and those who are alive at this time will be transformed (i.e. they will not experience physical death).

**15:50:** *Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; neither doth corruption inherit incorruption.*

This verse introduces some new topics: Will people still be alive when Jesus returns? If people are still alive, what will happen to them? Will they, like the dead, also be “changed” (verses 42-49)? Paul answered these questions both positively and negatively. In addition to the point made here (“*flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God*”), verse 51 says “*all*” (the living and the dead) must be “*changed*.” In verse 53 Paul said this “*corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality*.”

The expression *flesh and blood* (compare Gal. 1:16 and Heb. 2:14) describes man’s earthly body. The CBL (First Corinthians, p. 479) said, “‘Flesh and blood’ denote first substance (flesh), then the life-giving principle (blood) of the physical body.” Since our present body is like Adam’s (we are “of the earth” just as he was, verse 47a), and this current state is subject to “*corruption*” (compare verses 42-44), both the living and the dead must be “changed” when Jesus returns. Both the living and the dead must become like the “second man” (Jesus) who was from “heaven” (verse 47b) and this change will provide each one with an eternal body that is suitable for heaven or hell.

Some have understood verse 50 to mean it is impossible for a “body” to exist in eternity, but this is incorrect. As noted in the discussion on verse 44, people *will* have a body in eternity, but this body will be unlike our present form (compare 6:13-14 and the commentary on these verses). MacKnight offered this expanded translation: “*And this I affirm, brethren, because a body composed of flesh and blood, such as ours is at present, cannot enjoy the kingdom of God, where there are no objects suited to the senses and appetites of such a body; neither can a body subject to dissolution live in a state where every thing is*



*incorruptible.*” There will be significant change to man’s form, but, as noted in the discussion on verse 37, it seems people will still recognize one another in the hereafter.

The Beacon Bible Commentary (8:471) noted how this verse eliminates “all crude and magical ideas of the resurrection.” This observation is important because many do teach *crude and magical ideas* about the future state. The Islamic concept of heaven is a type of “bedroom paradise” (faithful followers of Mohammed are promised multiple virgin wives). As noted in the commentary on verses 39-41, the Mormon faith believes in three levels of heaven: A celestial kingdom, a terrestrial kingdom, and a telestial kingdom. The *celestial* kingdom is said to be a place or state where people can become “gods” and rule over a planet. The *terrestrial* kingdom is said to be for “moral” people who did not become Mormons or those who did and fell away from the faith. The *telestial* kingdom is an idea made up by Joseph Smith; supposedly this place will contain murderers, liars, adulterers, unbelievers, etc. Rather than speak of multiple or layered “kingdoms” in the afterlife, Paul simply spoke of the *kingdom* (singular). God has only one kingdom for the saved and He says the saved will “*inherit*” (*kleronomeo*) it.

The word *inherit* occurs twice in this verse and it tells us God’s kingdom is an actual inheritance (see how this same term is used in 6:10). The Baker’s Dictionary of Theology (p. 266) noted how this “inheritance is the kingdom of God with all its blessings (Matt. 25:34; 1 Cor. 6:9; Gal. 5:21). While enjoyment of it begins in this life, in so far as the kingdom is already present, the full possession must be future (Rom. 8:17-23; 1 Cor. 15:50; Heb. 11:13; 1 Pet. 1:3, 4).” This inheritance “is given to us by the testator as heirs according to his testament (the promise), and we receive and have it only as heirs, only according to the provisions of that testament” (Lenski, First Corinthians, p. 732). Lenski also (First Corinthians, p. 734) noted how this “kingdom cannot break down or disintegrate. Only when sin together with its effects are completely removed from our bodies, which takes place in the resurrection, do our bodies attain incorruption and thus inherit God’s kingdom.”

There is a significant difference between “inherit” and “enter” and this distinction is important. We may “enter” a city or “enter” a store, but these “entrances” do not mean we *inherit* the city or store. Paul said the saved will *inherit* the kingdom of God. If we wish to *inherit* the kingdom at the end of time, we must first “enter” it before our body is “sown” in death (verses 43-44). In other words, we must become a Christian and be added to Christ’s church (see Jn. 3:3, 5; Acts 2:38, 41, 47, the commentary on 12:131 and 12:13b, plus “An overview of New Testament Christianity” at the end of this commentary). If we comply with the conditions given in the Scriptures, we will one day *inherit* the kingdom and heaven will be our eternal home. If we fail to enter the kingdom before we die, there will not be any type of “second chance” after death (Lk. 16:23-26).

The word “corruption” (*phthora*) occurs only here, Rom. 8:21; 1 Cor. 15:42; Gal. 6:8; Col. 2:22; 2 Pet. 1:4; 2:12, 19 (some translations do not use this term in 2 Pet. 2:12 because of a manuscript variation). Here *corruption* may be defined as “perishable,” and “incorruption” (*aphtharsia*) may be understood as “imperishable.” Paul wanted the Corinthians to realize the “power and glory form of the resurrection body conquers all perishableness and mortality” (CBL, GED, 1:500).

**15:51-52:** *Behold, I tell you a mystery: We all shall not sleep, but we shall all be changed, 52 in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.*

Sometimes the word *mystery* (*musterion*) describes things like Jesus’ death, man’s salvation and the future resurrection (compare 1 Cor. 2:7; 4:1; 13:2; 14:2). In other places this term emphasizes that the church is Christ’s body and Christians are members of this body. Here the word *mystery* is associated with the *change* that all will undergo when Jesus returns (“*We all shall not sleep, but we shall all be changed*”).

The word *sleep* (*koimaomai*) is used 18 times in the New Testament and in 4 of these places this term describes *natural sleep* (see Mt. 28:13; Lk. 22:45; Jn. 11:12; Acts 12:6). The other 14 appearances of this word in the New Testament are associated with physical death (see Mt. 27:52; Jn. 11:11; Acts 7:60; 13:36; 1 Cor. 7:39 [“dead”]; 1 Cor. 11:30; 15:6, 18, 20, 51; 1 Thess. 4:13, 14, 15; 2 Pet. 3:4). In every

passage where this term describes physical death, it always refers to the death of the saved.

Man's body *sleeps* in the dust of the earth, but his eternal spirit returns to God (Eccl. 12:7). Jesus explained this process with the story of a rich man and Lazarus in Lk. 16. He said these two men died and both were taken to "Hades," a word that meant the "realm of the dead" (compare Lk. 16:22-23, 26). For the saved, entering into the Hadean realm means "being with Christ" (Phil. 1:23) and going to "paradise" (Lk. 23:43). For the unsaved, entering into the Hadean realm means being confined to what is described as a "*prison*" (1 Pet. 3:19) and a place of torment (Lk. 16:24).

When Jesus returns at the end of time, all who are in the Hadean realm as well as all who are still alive on the earth will be brought forth and "changed" (verse 51b) so they have an eternal body. The word *changed* (*allasso*) is used in the Septuagint to describe the "changing" of Jacob's wages (Gen. 31:7) as well as "changing" clothes (Gen. 35:2). Here it means "*transformed*." Since flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God (verse 50), "mortality must be transformed into immortality" (Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament, 1:62).

The living and the dead will not only all be changed, all will be changed *immediately* (verse 52 says this will occur "*in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye*"). The word *moment* (*atomos*) is found only here in the New Testament and it is the basis for our English word "atom." This term described an amount of time that is so small that, just like an atom, it cannot be divided (the NIV says "in a flash"). The living and the dead will be changed so quickly that no one will have any time to react (the entire process will be faster than blinking our eyes). Lenski (First Corinthians, p. 738) said, "As the creative acts recorded in Genesis, including the animation of Adam's body, were instantaneously timeless, so the final change at the end will be." The word *twinkling* (*rhipe*) is found only here in the New Testament and it "suggests the idea of throwing. It refers to the time it takes to cast a glance or flutter an eyelid" (CBL, First Corinthians, p. 481).

The Church's Bible (p. 278) noted how we should "remember how long it takes to conceive and for the seeds of children to coalesce in their mothers' wombs. After an interval their limbs are formed, over a fixed number of days and months, until what was created and formed within is brought forth into the light. Then what time the child takes to grow, how long until adolescence succeeds childhood, young manhood adolescence, old age young manhood, and death everything! Then there is another interval. The newly dead body seems whole, but it is dissolved into putrescence. And for that dissolution time is needed until the body flows again into decay and dries up into dust. From the first beginnings in the womb until the last dust of the grave, what is the interval? How many days, what length of time? But when it comes to the resurrection, the body is all reconstituted **in the twinkling of an eye.**"

Paul also said this change will occur when then "*last trump*" (*salpinx*) is sounded. While some believe this part of the thought is related to Revelation 8-11, the best explanation is found here in 1 Cor. 15 (a trumpet sound will mark the end of time). Just as trumpet blasts signaled some type of military action in ancient times, so the *last trump* will announce the end of time, Jesus' return, the resurrection of the dead, and the day of judgment. Since Paul was familiar with the Old Testament he must have known that trumpet sounds sometimes signaled God's presence (compare Ex. 19:16). The expression "*the trumpet shall sound*" in the middle of verse 52 (*salpizo*) is another way of describing "the Lord's return and the unfolding of the end time" (CBL, GED, 6:20). The Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament (3:226) rightly noted that just "who sounds the 'last trumpet'" is "unclear."

The word "*incorruptible*" (*aphthartos*) in verse 52 is only found here, Rom. 1:23; 1 Cor. 9:25; 1 Tim. 1:17; 1 Pet. 1:4, 23; 3:4. The CBL (GED, 1:501) said this term always has the sense of "that which constantly endures, that which is no longer subject to corruption, that which is immortal and imperishable." Stated another way, in the resurrection "bodies will be clothed in immortality" (CBL, GED, 1:500). "This is part of Christ's total victory over death. The human form of appearance will be changed, but the term 'clothed in' emphasizes that there is identity and connection between that which was and that which will be. The personality is not wiped out. The power and glory form of the resurrection body conquers all perishableness and mortality" (ibid).

**15:53-54:** *For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. 54 But*

*when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory.*

Since our current bodies are “*corruptible*,” they “*must*” be changed into “*incorruption*” so they can spend eternity in heaven or hell. The word *must* (*dei*) means this future change cannot be stopped. Also, this change will affect “*all*” people (verse 51). The dead will be raised and changed, but the living must also be changed because “*flesh and blood*” (our current body type, verse 50) is not suitable for an eternal existence. The word *corruptible* (*phthartos*) is also used in places such as Rom. 1:23 and 1 Cor. 9:25, and it is parallel to the word “*mortal*” in the middle of verse 53.

Our *corruptible* nature is illustrated by our on-going need for food and rest (some estimates say we spend a third of our lifetime sleeping). Our present form is also subject to things like excessive heat, excessive cold, bruising, tearing and the breaking of bones (no part of our physical body is guaranteed freedom from injury or disease). Science and medical advancements now offer many things to improve man’s health, even to the point of replacing worn out parts of the human body, but all still have a “*corruptible*” body that eventually dies. After Jesus returns, however, people will be in a state of *incorruption* (*aphtharsia*), a word that meant “*imperishability*” (Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament, 1:181). Paul also used this term in verses 42, 50, 54 of this chapter.

The word *mortal* (*thnetos*) in verse 53 is found only a few times in the New Testament (Rom. 6:12; 8:11; 1 Cor. 15:53, 54; 2 Cor. 4:11; 5:4). This term describes our current state—our “*flesh and blood* existence (verse 50). Although this is the type of body we have now, our *mortality* will be done away with when Jesus returns at the end of time. Paul promised that all will *put on* (see the expression defined below) “*immortality*” (*athanasia*), a word that occurs only in 1 Cor. 15:53, 54; 1 Tim. 6:16.

For the saved *immortality* means fellowship “*with God, where man will share the immortality of God himself and His eternal life*” (CBL, GED, 1:92). Brown (1:471) noted how instead of just describing “*an existence past death*,” *immortality* describes “*an existence in communion with God, where man will share the immortality of God himself and His eternal life.*” “*The perishable is laid aside; the imperishable, the divine is put on*” (ibid). For the unsaved, Jesus said *immortality* means being “*cast into hell; where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched. For every one shall be salted with fire*” (Mk 9:47-49).

Although all the living and the dead will one day receive an everlasting body, some have thought they could avoid this fate. One woman, whose grave is in Hanover, Germany, claimed she did not believe in a resurrection but she took steps to prevent anyone from ever interfering with her grave. Huge slabs of granite were placed on top of her burial plot and these stones were fastened together with heavy metal clasps. A sign at her burial place said, “*this grave must never be opened.*” Her wishes were clear, but nature did not cooperate. During the burial process workers happened to cover a seed that eventually grew into a tree and this tree split apart the granite as well as the steel fasteners. If a small seed can overcome man’s attempts to avoid a future resurrection, certainly nothing will stop God from raising the dead and giving each person a body that lasts for eternity.

The expression “*put on*” (*enduo*) is used twice in verse 53. Other key passages that use this term include Gal. 3:27 (“*put on*” Christ in “*baptism*”); Eph. 6:11 (“*put on*” the “*Christian armor*”); Col. 3:10 (“*put on*” the “*new man*”); and 1 Thess. 5:8 (“*put on*” the “*breastplate of faith and love*”). All will *put on* a new form, but, as noted in the comments on verse 37, this change will not involve a loss of recognition.

Verse 54 is apparently drawn from Isa. 25:8 (Isaiah prophesied that God would one day overthrow death). Hosea affirmed this same basic point in Hos. 13:14. Here Paul affirmed that these Old Testament prophets were right; at the end of time death will be completely overthrown (verse 26 and compare Rev. 20:14). The CBL (First Corinthians, p. 481) noted how the word translated “*swallowed*” (*katepothe*) “*presents a dramatic figure and expresses complete destruction. Not only will death be destroyed so that it can do no more harm, all of its apparent victories in days and years past will be undone, reversed, destroyed. Those who are in Christ shall live in absolute victory!*”

Lenski (pp. 744-745) said, “*Death is not merely destroyed so that it cannot do further harm while all of the harm which it has wrought on God’s children remains. This tornado is not merely checked so that no additional homes are wrecked while those that were wrecked still lie in ruin. The destruction of death is*

far more intense; death and all of its apparent victories are undone for God's children. What looks like a victory for death and like a defeat for us when our bodies die and decay shall be utterly reversed so that death dies in absolute defeat, and our bodies live again in absolute victory."

The word "victory" (*nikos*) is found only in Mt. 12:20 and 1 Cor. 15:54, 55, 57. Brown (1:651) said, "Rom. 8 and 1 Cor. 15 are the chapters in which Paul speaks most forcibly about overcoming the world and death through the redemptive work of Jesus Christ. Jesus' death on the cross and his resurrection are the reason that no power in the world can finally have the victory." "As children of God, believers are included in this victory. Their victory is not an achievement or reward, but is 'given' them (1 Cor. 15:57)" (ibid). This victory will also include a triumph over sin and the law (verse 56). A similar thought is found in Rom. 8:37 where Paul said Christians are "*more than conquerors*." Earle (p. 186) noted how this clause "is all one word in the Greek—*hypernikomen*. It is compounded of *hyper* (Latin *super*), meaning 'above,' and *nikao*, from *nike*, 'victory.' So it means literally 'we are super victors.'"

Since Christians can see some of this victory at the present time, and they have faith that the victory will be completed when Jesus returns (verse 57), they should be faithful and patiently wait for Jesus' next return and the end of time (verse 58).

### **15:55:** *O death, where is thy victory? O death, where is thy sting?*

The ASV and the KJV do a good job at illustrating some of the manuscript variations associated with this verse. The ASV rendering has Paul asking "death" where its "victory" is and the KJV has Paul asking "death" where its "sting" is (this difference is also found at the end of this verse). The middle of this verse contains another manuscript variation so the ASV says "death" and the KJV says "grave." At the end of this verse the ASV uses the word "sting" and the KJV says "victory" because of yet another manuscript variation.

If the first part of the verse should be translated "victory" instead of "sting" (and this is what several mainstream translations do), the thought builds on verse 54 (since "*Death is swallowed up in victory*," it has no ultimate triumph). If the word *sting* (*kentron*) is right, Paul introduced an image of poisonous, stinging tails. The word *sting* "represents death as a venomous creature, a scorpion, or a hornet which is rendered harmless" (Rienecker and Rogers, p. 445). Whichever word Paul intended, the point remains unchanged. At the present time death takes people hour after hour, regardless of age, race, geographical location, belief or unbelief in God, etc. The "sting" and "victory" of death have been experienced by an almost unbelievable number of people on the earth and to some it may seem like this force cannot be stopped. About 700 years before Jesus came into the world, Isaiah (verse 54) said death will one day be "swallowed up in victory." For Christians, this is one reason to rejoice and be "steadfast and unmovable" in their commitment to Christ (verse 58).

The ASV uses the word *death* in the middle of this verse and the KJV says *grave*. This difference is due to the fact that the KJV rendering is based on a word (*hades*) that meant "the realm of the dead" and the ASV rendering is based on a different word (*thanatos*) that is usually rendered *death*. These two words describe two different but related things. The word *grave* (the KJV translation) is the "place where the physical remains of a deceased person are interred. It is 'the place appointed for all living' (Job 30:23). It is where all go, even animals (Eccles. 3:19-20). It is a place with no class distinction (Job 3:14-19)" (Baker's Theological Dictionary of the Bible, p. 317). *Hades* "is the state in which all the dead exist. In the New Testament a descent to Hades may simply refer to someone's death and disembodied existence" (ibid, p. 322).

At the present time both the righteous and the unrighteous experience physical death (Heb. 9:27) and their eternal spirits go to Hades. The Hadean realm has one section for the righteous, another area for the unrighteous, and there is a "great gulf" between these two places (Lk. 16:26). At the end of time Jesus will return and He will "unlock" Hades (Rev. 1:18b). In other words, all will be removed from this place, the saved and the lost will be raised from the dead (Jn. 5:28-29), and everyone will be "changed" (verses 49-52) into an eternal state to spend eternity in heaven or hell. When this happens, death (the grave) and Hades will both be destroyed (Rev. 20:13-14). Jesus' next and final return will show that Hades and death

do not have any lasting “sting” or “victory.”

Sigmund Freud, the founder of modern psychiatry, said: “And finally there is the painful riddle of death, for which no remedy at all has yet been found, nor probably ever will be.” Many think and reason as Freud, but Christians know this type of outlook in life is wrong. There is a guaranteed remedy for death—Jesus Christ. In fact, the CBL (First Corinthians, p. 483) noted how this verse contains more than a question. “‘Where’ denotes an exclamation of victory, a challenge, that must be answered by ‘Nowhere!’ Death holds no permanent victory. Believers are victors over death and its sting.”

MacKnight’s expanded translation (p. 207) brings out the point pretty well: “*Where, o death! Is thy sting with which thou killest the saints! Where, O hades! Who has led them captive, is thy victory, now that they are all brought out of thy dominions?*” Sin and death have won many battles since the earth was created, but in the end they will not be the ultimate victors.

**15:56-57:** *The sting of death is sin; and the power of sin is the law: 57 but thanks be to God, who giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.*

Many attribute death to things like accidents, old age, and poor nutrition, but God says death comes from something else: “*Sin*.” Stated another way, if sin did not exist, death would not exist (sin is one of the things that gives death its on-going power). This point is not difficult to understand, but the second point (“*the power of sin is the law*”) is more complicated. It seems this second point is similar to some of Paul’s teaching in the book of Romans.

As noted in this author’s commentary on Rom. 7, especially Rom. 7:7-8, a “law” not only makes people accountable for their actions, it can actually increase the number of sins a person commits (it is as if “sin” gets part of its “power” from “God’s law”). When people are told that they cannot do something, they are often interested in doing the very thing they have been told to avoid. In Rom. 7:8a Paul said he had an increased desire to covet when he learned that covetousness is a sin. Then he said (Rom. 7:8b) that “without the law sin is dead” (i.e. if there was not a law against some things, many would not think about or try these activities). Just as “death is powered (fueled) by sin,” so there is a sense in which “sin is powered (fueled) by God’s law.” The Beacon Bible Commentary (8:472) said, “Law intensifies sin in that it makes man aware of sin, increases its power and guilt, yet makes no provision for the victory over it.” God’s law is not a bad thing (Rom. 7:12), but it does tell people what sin is and this information has sometimes prompted people to explore what God has forbidden.

The “sting of death” and the “power of sin” are examples of bad news, but God has some good news for humanity: There is “*victory through our Lord Jesus Christ*” (verse 57). If we are “in Christ” (Eph. 1:3; 2 Tim. 2:10), we can have the victory that is *through Christ*. If we do not go *through Jesus*, we will not obtain this eternal victory (Jn. 14:6).

There are many aspects to the end of time *victory* for God’s people (i.e. salvation from sin and an eternity without suffering), but here it seems the main point of emphasis is on the future resurrection (i.e. sin and death will not rob a Christian of his eternal prize). Because Paul described this victory with the present tense, the “victory is bestowed upon us now, hour by hour. We obtain it from God in ever increasing measure. Compare 1 John 3:2 for the thought” (Lenski, First Corinthians, p. 751). Rienecker and Rogers (p. 445) noted how the present tense emphasizes “the certainty of the victory.” Christians will be raised up to “inherit the kingdom” (verse 50) that has been “prepared since the foundation of the world” (Mt. 25:34). Because of what God has prepared for His people, our attitude should be “*thanks be to God*.”

The Church’s Bible (p. 266) offered these interesting comments from Augustine: “You are made sad by the burial of your loved one because you do not immediately hear his voice. He used to live but is dead. He used to eat but eats no more. He used to have sensation but now does not: he has no part in the joys and delights of the living. Would you mourn for the seed while you were plowing?” Also, “Do not be sad. What we have buried is certainly not in the barn and not in our hands. We will come to this field, and you will be delighted to see the beauty of the crop where you now weep for the bare furrowed land” (ibid).

**15:58:** *Wherefore, my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labor is not vain in the Lord.*

Since both the dead and the living will meet Jesus at the end of time (verses 36-57), the Corinthians needed to persist in and with their faith. Paul introduced this conclusion with the word “*Wherefore*” (the KJV says “*Therefore*”). “The word ‘therefore’ brings the matter to the point of conclusion and application” (CBL, First Corinthians, p. 483). “*My beloved brethren*” was an expression of concern as well as a request for these Christians “to prove themselves brothers” (ibid). Gingrich and Danker (p. 6) defined *beloved* (*agapetos*), which is also used in 4:14, 17; 10:14, as “*dear friends*.” Paul wanted his dear friends to “*be*” (this is a present tense imperative—an ongoing command) “*stedfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord.*”

The word *stedfast* (*hedraios*) meant “settled” or “fixed.” Thayer (p. 168) said this term described “those who are fixed in purpose.” Kittel (Abridged Edition, p. 200) said this word meant “Christians are to be steadfast and immovable in light of the resurrection.” Christians should make this choice because “God has overcome death. Hence their life and work, and the earth on which they stand, have a future and are thus of serious import in the present” (Kittel, 2:364).

This verse reminds us that what really matters is not the day we are born and (or) the day we die, but the years that occur between these two dates. Do we live our lives in a *stedfast* way? Are we someone who can be counted on by God and others? Are we “stubborn” in our commitment to Christ because we know a resurrection is coming? Do we refuse to be involved with things that will lead us or others astray from the truth (verse 12)? If we were to face the kinds of church problems described in this letter, would we remain *stedfast* in our commitment to Christ? If our relatives, friends and society do not like the Christian faith and refuse to believe the truth, will we persevere? Do we refuse to waver in our commitment to Christ no matter what happens to us? If the answer to these questions is *yes*, we have chosen to be *stedfast*. Aside from this verse *stedfast* is only found in 1 Cor. 7:37 and Col. 1:23.

Paul also wanted the Corinthians to be “*unmovable*” (*ametakinetos*), a word found only here in the New Testament. This term is based on a verb (*kineo*) that meant “move,” a preposition (*meta*) that meant “change,” and an “alpha privative” (i.e. an “a” is added to the beginning of this word to change its meaning). Just as we change the word “theist” into “atheist” by adding the letter “a,” or we would change “tie” to “untie” by adding “un,” so some New Testament words are negated by adding an “a” to them.

The word *unmovable* described something that cannot be moved from its position. Thayer (p. 32) defined *unmovable* as “*firmly persistent*.” Vincent (2:287) said *stedfast* refers to a “firm establishment in the faith” and *unmovable* describes “that establishment as related to assault from temptation or persecution.” This “fixedness” is “a condition ‘*of abounding in work*’” (ibid). Paul wanted these Christians to stay faithful to God no matter how many “fiery darts” Satan threw at them (Eph. 6:16) and this should be how we live our lives. Too often Christians allow hurt feelings or some negative experience to move them away from God and this is wrong. Satan wants us to have a “changeable and movable faith,” but God wants us to have an “unchangeable and unmovable faith.”

Christians not only need to be *stedfast* and *unmovable*, they are to be “*always abounding*” in God’s work. *Abounding* (*perisseuo*) is a present tense verb that is found two other times in this book (8:8; 14:12. In 8:8 this word is translated “better”). Here this term may be understood as a “challenge to *excel*” (Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament, 3:77). The Beacon Bible Commentary (8:473) described *abounding* as “going beyond minimum requirements, and gladly doing more than the situation demands.” The Corinthians “were urged negatively not to be flighty, movable, or unstable in their Christian beliefs and actions, but steadfast and unmovable. Positively, they were urged to be ‘abounding’ or over-flowing in the work of the Lord” (CBL, First Corinthians, p. 483).

Today Christians still need to *abound* in the Lord’s work; our goal should be to engage in spiritual “*labor*” (*kopos*). The word *labor* is found earlier in this letter (3:8) as well as places like Rev. 14:13. Brown (1:263) noted how this term has a “general sense of to labour or toil in everyday work (cf. Matt. 6:28; Lk. 5:5; Rom. 16:6; 1 Cor. 3:8)” and how it “also denotes weariness” (ibid). We may also infer from

this word that some of the work done by Christians is effortless, simple and quick and some efforts fall into the category of *labor* (work that is hard and often slow).

Lenski (First Corinthians, p. 754) noted how the description *work of the Lord* should “correct the so-called ‘church work’ of many who busy themselves with worldly tasks in the churches, with mere humanitarian ‘social service’ and a hundred other things with which the Lord and the gospel are not concerned.” The *work of the Lord* describes works that are in harmony with God’s will (i.e. we do what the New Testament describes). If we want Jesus to be the *Lord of our work* and we want to *abound in the Lord’s work*, we must *do the work He wants us to do* and we must *do it in the way He has specified*. In other words, we must follow the “pattern” found in the Bible (2 Tim. 1:13). Part of this pattern involves being *in the Lord*. Many want to “do the work of the Lord,” but they refuse to be “in the Lord.”

The Bible says people are placed “into the Lord” by the act of baptism (Gal. 3:27). After being properly baptized a person must “abide in the Lord” (Jn. 15:5-6) and the Bible says this is accomplished through the church (Eph. 1:22-23). Those who have not been baptized into Christ (Rom. 6:3) for the forgiveness of sins (Acts 2:38), or those who have and refuse to abide in Christ through His church, cannot do the work of the Lord because they are not truly “in the Lord.” Paul said the Corinthians “*knew*” (perfect tense) this information, but many today seem to be ignorant of this point. If we do not do things in the way God has described, and this includes getting into the Lord as the Bible specifies, all of our efforts are “*vain*.” If we follow God’s will, all our efforts are not *vain*.

The word *vain* (*kenos*) is also found in verses 10 and 14 of this chapter. Here *not vain* means “that despite obstacles and disappointments their efforts will come to fruition; they will triumph” (Spicq, 2:305). If we are “in the Lord” and we do the right things in the right way, God recognizes and will ultimately reward our acts (Mt. 25:34-39). If we do not do these two things, there will not be a reward, no matter how hard we work (Mt. 7:22-23).

In some cases people will not see, appreciate or recognize our work “in the Lord,” but this does not matter. God always sees, appreciates and will at the appropriate time recognize and reward our efforts. Lenski (First Corinthians, p. 755) noted how a “bricklayer lays so many bricks in so many hours and receives so much pay. A merchant sells so much in his store and makes so much profit. But it is not so in this work of the Lord. We cannot count or take inventory. The results are too intangible. The Lord alone sees and knows. We often feel as though our efforts are in vain and are therefore liable to become discouraged, to cease the strong exertion, or to stop altogether. Hence this apostolic assurance: ‘having realized that our labor is not empty in the Lord.’ This deep conviction sustains our spirit to continue to the end with joyful confidence, John 4:36.”

Someone has said there are three kinds of people in the church: (1) *Tow boat* Christians (these never go unless someone drags them along). (2) *Sail boat* Christians (these are only found in “fair weather”). (3) *Steam boat* Christians (these are ready to go all the time). This observation, plus the fact that *abounding* is expressed with the present tense, reminds us that the Christian life is a life of commitment and activity. God does not want His people to work for a while then grow “faint” or “weary” (Gal. 6:9). Neither does He want people to “spiritually retire” in their later years and rest on their previous accomplishments. God knows about the pitfalls that face His people so Christians are warned to “stand fast in the faith,” “act like men,” and “be strong” (1 Cor. 16:13). Even though our physical bodies weaken with age, our inward man can be “renewed day by day” (2 Cor. 4:16) and we can “set our minds on what is above” (Col. 3:2). If Christians do seem to become somewhat lax in their service to God, they should be exhorted to again turn to God and serve Him with eagerness (compare 2 Tim. 1:6-7 and Col. 4:17).

## **Introduction to chapter 16:**

The previous chapter ends with a command to *always abound in the work of the Lord* (15:58) and Paul offered an illustration of how this could be done in the opening verses of this final chapter (the Corinthians could send financial aid to some needy Christians in Jerusalem, verse 3).

We are not told why the Christians in Jerusalem were poor, but commentators have put forth a variety of suggestions. Some believe these Christians had given so much in the past they now needed assistance

from others. If this is correct, it suggests these Christians lacked foresight and did not practice good stewardship. A better explanation is based on the persecution described in places like Acts 8:1. Christians in this area had certainly suffered great persecution in the past and perhaps this maltreatment led to the loss of most or all their wealth. These Christians may have also faced severe hardship from natural calamities (Acts 11:27-30 refers to a famine). For additional passages that deal with this great collection, see Acts 24:17; Rom. 15:25-27; 2 Cor. 8-9.

This chapter may be divided into several sections, such as this six point outline: (1) Collecting money for poor Christians in Jerusalem (verses 1-4); (2) Paul's intended visit to Corinth (verses 5-9); (3) Information about Timothy and Apollos (verses 10-12); (4) Various exhortations (verses 13-14); (5) Personal comments about Stephanas and others (verses 15-18); (6) Concluding remarks (verses 19-24).