SMITH FOR CHRIST

TEACHING THE WORD · LIVING IN THE LIGHT

†
15:58

DEEP DIVE

1 Corinthians

Chapter Fifteen, Verses 1–58

Your Toil Is Not in Vain — the resurrection chapter, from the gospel of first importance to the shout over death

NASB 1995 | VERSE BY VERSE | FOUR VOICES | WITH DIAGRAMS

Some in Corinth said there is no resurrection of the dead. Paul answers with eyewitnesses, a chain of "if"s, the order of the harvest, a seed in the ground and a trumpet in the sky — and ends with a shovel in our hands. Read through four teachers — **David Guzik**, **R.C. Sproul**, **C.H. Spurgeon** and **Matthew Henry** — with the Greek behind Paul's key words.

THE PASSAGE

1 Corinthians 15:1–58

gospel · if not · first fruits · danger · seed · victory

THE METHOD

Verse by Verse

Color-coded by teacher

WHAT'S INSIDE

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Six movements from "of first importance" to "not in vain in the Lord"

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"But now Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who are asleep." — 1 Corinthians 15:20

SECTION I · THE PASSAGE

1 Corinthians 15:1–58

Your Toil Is Not in Vain — Christ is raised, the first fruits; we will be raised and changed; therefore nothing done in the Lord is wasted

† How to Read This Study

This study walks 1 Corinthians 15 in 6 movements, in Paul's own order. Each movement opens with the full NASB 1995 text of those verses, marked with the Berean colors and shapes; then the Greek behind the key words; then the teachers, each in his own color — **David Guzik**, the pastor who walks the text verse by verse; **R.C. Sproul**, the theologian who presses every word for its doctrine; **C.H. Spurgeon**, the preacher who turns the doctrine into a call to the heart; and **Matthew Henry**, the Puritan commentator who gathers it into plain, practical counsel. The figures draw the argument so you can see where Paul is going. Read the Scripture first; then let each voice add its angle.

DAVID GUZIK · Enduring Word
R.C. SPROUL · Ligonier Ministries
C.H. SPURGEON · Metropolitan Tabernacle
MATTHEW HENRY · Commentary · 1 Cor. completed after 1714

HOW THIS STUDY IS MARKED
God — His character & actions
Command / instruction
Key repeated word
Sin / warning
Promise / blessing
Time / place / contrast

KEY VERSE · 1 CORINTHIANS 15:58

"Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your toil is not in vain in the Lord."

† Before the Passage

Paul has spent fourteen chapters on a church that was proud, divided and loud — factions, a man living with his father's wife, lawsuits, idol feasts, a disordered Lord's Supper, a competition in tongues. He saves the deepest problem for last. "How do some among you say that there is no resurrection of the dead?" (v. 12). Notice what they did not deny: Jesus' resurrection — "so we preach and so you believed" (v. 11). They denied ours. Guzik traces the denial to Greek philosophy, which thought pure spirit better than any body, or to the Sadducees; Henry thinks the deniers were "perfect Sadducees" who took death for the end of the whole man.

Corinth's Greek mind looked on the body as a shell to escape. When Paul preached the resurrection at Athens a few years earlier, "some began to sneer" (Acts 17:32). Chapter 15 shows that the two resurrections cannot be pulled apart: deny ours and you have denied His, and with His the whole gospel. And the doctrine is not a

footnote for the end of the letter; it explains the letter. A church that thought the body did not matter had felt free to sin with it (6:13–14) — and Paul has already said, "God has not only raised the Lord, but will also raise us up through His power" (6:14).

The chapter is soaked in the Old Testament. The gospel is "according to the Scriptures" twice (vv. 3–4) — Isaiah 53, Psalm 16:10, Hosea 6:2. Christ is the "first fruits" of Leviticus 23, the first sheaf waved before the LORD the day after the Sabbath of Passover week. He reigns as Psalm 110:1 promised and has all things put under His feet as Psalm 8:6 says of man. The skeptic's creed is Isaiah 22:13 ("Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we may die"); the first Adam is Genesis 2:7; and the closing shout over death is Isaiah 25:8 and Hosea 13:14 sung together.

Read it in six movements. The gospel received and seen (vv. 1–11). The nightmare if it is false (vv. 12–19). "But now" — the first fruits and the order of the end (vv. 20–28). Why anyone would risk anything (vv. 29–34). What kind of body — the seed and the two Adams (vv. 35–49). The mystery, the victory and the charge (vv. 50–58). Fifty-seven verses of doctrine end in one command: be steadfast, immovable, always abounding — "knowing that your toil is not in vain in the Lord."

I
MOVEMENT

1 CORINTHIANS 15:1–11

The Gospel of First Importance

Received, delivered, seen — Christ died, was buried, was raised, and appeared

[1] *Now I make known to you, brethren, △ the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received, in which also you stand,* [2] *by which also you are saved, if you hold fast the word which I preached to you, unless you believed in ⟲ vain.* [3] *For I delivered to you ◷ as of first importance what I also received, that △ Christ died for our sins ⟲ according to the Scriptures,* [4] *and that He was buried, and that △ He was raised on the third day ⟲ according to the Scriptures,* [5] *and that He appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve.* [6] *After that He appeared to ◷ more than five hundred brethren at one time, most of whom remain until now, but some have fallen asleep;* [7] *then He appeared to James, then to all the apostles;* [8] *and last of all, as to one untimely born, He appeared to me also.* [9] *For I am the least of the apostles, and not fit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God.* [10] *But △ by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me did not prove ⟲ vain; but I labored even more than all of them, yet not I, but the grace of God with me.* [11] *Whether then it was I or they, so we preach and so you believed.*

1 CORINTHIANS 15:1–11

παρέλαβον … παρέδωκα

PARELABON … PAREDŌKA · "RECEIVED … DELIVERED" · G3880, G3860

The two technical words of the ancient schools for handing on a tradition intact: one man *receives* (*paralambanō*, G3880) and then *delivers* (*paradidōmi*, G3860) exactly what he was given. Paul used the same pair for the Lord's Supper: "For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you" (11:23). The Corinthians in turn "received" it (v. 1). The gospel is a baton, not a composition. Then "as of first importance" — *en prōtois* (*prōtos*, G4413), "among the first things" — and the four clauses, each opened by *hoti*, "that": that Christ died, that He was buried, that He was raised, that He appeared. Verse 2's "hold fast" is *katechō* (G2722), present tense — keep holding on; its "in vain" is *eikē* (G1500), "to no purpose," the word of Galatians 3:4 and 4:11.

ἐγήγερται · ὤφθη

EGĒGERTAI · ŌPHTHĒ · "HE HAS BEEN RAISED · HE APPEARED" · G1453, G3708

Paul changes tenses on purpose. Christ *died* and was *buried* (aorists — done and finished), but He *egēgertai* (v. 4), a perfect passive of *egeirō* (G1453): He was raised and remains raised. The same perfect returns in vv. 12, 13, 14, 16, 17 and 20 — seven times; the resurrection is a standing fact, not a memory. And He "was seen" — *ōphthē*, aorist passive of *horaō* (G3708), four times (vv. 5–8), the word of Luke 24:34, "has appeared to Simon." Last comes Paul, "as to one untimely born" — *ektrōma* (G1626), used only here in the New Testament, the Greek Old Testament's word for a stillborn child (Numbers 12:12; Job 3:16; Ecclesiastes 6:3).

DAVID GUZIK · Enduring Word

Guzik notes first that the gospel "is only of benefit if it is received and if one will stand in it" — and held fast to the end. Paul did not invent it; he received it. "At the core of the gospel are things that happened – actual, real, historical events." The burial proves the death, and the resurrection proves the payment: "If the cross is the payment for our sins, the empty tomb is the receipt." No one saw the resurrection, but many saw the risen Jesus — Peter, the Twelve, five hundred who could still be asked, and James, a brother once hostile to Him. Changed lives rule out fraud; the women are probably omitted because courts would not hear them. And Paul's confession, he says, means "The grace that saves us also changes us" — then puts us to work: "God does it and we do it."

R.C. SPROUL · Ligonier Ministries

In his *Ultimately* podcast "Eyewitnesses of the Resurrected Lord," Sproul insists that "the church's faith in the resurrection of Jesus does not rest on inferences drawn from a missing body." An empty tomb could be explained a dozen ways; "It is not simply the empty tomb, but it is the post-resurrection appearances of Jesus" that carry the case — the women, the Twelve, doubting Thomas, and the time "He appeared to five hundred people at one time." He closes the list where Paul does, with the persecutor himself: "as one born out of due time, he appeared also to me." Our faith rests on "the testimony of those who saw Him, who touched Him, who ate with Him, and who spoke with Him."

C.H. SPURGEON · Metropolitan Tabernacle

On verses 3–4 Spurgeon warns preachers off novelty: "Notice that the preacher does not make the gospel." "If he makes it, it is not worth your having." Originality in the statement of doctrine "is falsehood"; "We are not makers and inventors"; "we are repeaters, we tell the message we have received." On verse 10 he turns Paul's "by the grace of God I am what I am" into a lesson in daily dependence: "we are only channels for grace" — "we are not even pools and reservoirs" — and so "we receive daily of His fulness grace for grace." The spring is in heaven, and "because He lives we must live also."

MATTHEW HENRY · Commentary · 1 Cor. completed after 1714

Henry calls the death and resurrection of Christ "a doctrine of the first rank," the foundation under every other hope: "Remove this foundation, and the whole fabric falls, all our hopes for eternity sink at once." It is confirmed two ways — by the Old Testament prophecies and types (Psalm 16:10; Isaiah 53; Hosea 6:2; Jonah; Isaac received back "in a figure"), and by many eyewitnesses who hazarded everything to assert it. Of Paul's humility he writes, "It is God's prerogative to say, I am that I am; it is our privilege to be able to say, 'By God's grace we are what we are.'" "A humble spirit is commonly a gracious one."

II
MOVEMENT

1 CORINTHIANS 15:12–19

If Christ Has Not Been Raised

Paul follows the denial to its end — and every link of the faith falls with it

> [12] *Now if Christ is preached, that He has been* ⟲ *raised from the dead, how do some among you say that there is no resurrection of the dead?* [13] *But if there is no resurrection of the dead, not even Christ has been* ⟲ *raised;* [14] *and if Christ has not been* ⟲ *raised, then* ⚠ *our preaching is vain, your faith also is* ⟲ *vain.* [15] *Moreover we are even found to be false witnesses of God, because we testified against God that He* ⟲ *raised Christ, whom He did not raise, if in fact the dead are not* ⟲ *raised.* [16] *For if the dead are not* ⟲ *raised, not even Christ has been* ⟲ *raised;* [17] *and if Christ has not been* ⟲ *raised, your faith is worthless;* ⚠ *you are still in your sins.* [18] *Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished.* [19] *If we have hoped in Christ in this life only, we are of all men* ⚠ *most to be pitied.*
>
> 1 CORINTHIANS 15:12–19

FIGURE · SEVEN "IF"S AND THEIR ANSWERS

IF THE DEAD ARE NOT RAISED … (1 Corinthians 15:12–19)		BUT NOW CHRIST HAS BEEN RAISED (the rest of the chapter answers each link)	
1 **Christ has not been raised**	vv13, 16	→ Christ has been raised	v20
2 **our preaching is vain**	v14	→ so we preach and so you believed	v11
3 **your faith also is vain**	v14	→ the gospel … in which also you stand	v1
4 **we are false witnesses of God**	v15	→ He appeared … to more than five hundred	vv5–8
5 **you are still in your sins**	v17	→ Christ died for our sins	v3
6 **the dead in Christ have perished**	v18	→ the first fruits of those who are asleep	v20
7 **of all men most to be pitied**	v19	→ your toil is not in vain in the Lord	v58

Pull out one fact — the empty tomb — and every link falls. Put it back, and every link holds.

Read each row left to right: every consequence Paul draws in vv. 12–19 if Christ is still dead is answered somewhere else in the chapter by the fact that He is not.

κενός · ματαία

KENOS · MATAIA · "VAIN · WORTHLESS" · G2756, G3152

Two different words, both rendered "vain" in the KJV. *Kenos* (G2756) is "empty, hollow, empty-handed" — a jar with nothing in it. Paul uses it twice in verse 14 ("our preaching is vain, your faith also is vain"), of God's grace in verse 10 ("did not prove vain"), and in the last line of the chapter ("your toil is not in vain," v. 58): the chapter that could have been empty ends full. *Mataios* (G3152), verse 17's "worthless," is "futile, fruitless" — faith that gets nowhere because the thing it trusts never happened: "you are still in your sins."

κοιμάω · ἐλεεινός

KOIMAŌ · ELEEINOS · "FALL ASLEEP · PITIABLE" · G2837, G1652

Koimaō (G2837) is the believer's word for death — vv. 6, 18, 20, 51. From it the church named its burial ground the *koimētērion*, the "sleeping place" — our "cemetery." Sleep implies a waking; that is the whole point, and verse 18 shows what the denial does to it: "those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished." Verse 19's "most to be pitied" is the comparative *eleeinoteroi* of *eleeinos* (G1652), "more pitiable than all men"; its only other New Testament use is Revelation 3:17, where Laodicea does not know it is "wretched and miserable."

DAVID GUZIK · Enduring Word

Guzik points out that the Corinthians "did not deny Jesus' resurrection; they denied our resurrection," influenced by Greek philosophy or by the Sadducees — and resurrection, he stresses, "is not merely life after death" but life in glorified bodies. Then he walks Paul's logic link by link: no resurrection, then Jesus is still dead; then death defeated Him; then He is not God; then His sacrifice is not complete; then I am still in my sins — "Therefore, if Jesus is not risen, He is unable to save." Without resurrection "the whole Christian life is a pitiful joke!" He lists what rests on it: Christ's divinity (Rom 1:4), our justification (Rom 4:25), our new birth (1 Pet 1:3), our own resurrection.

R.C. SPROUL · Ligonier Ministries

Sproul's podcast "Is the Resurrection Essential?" answers theologians who say a historical resurrection is unnecessary for meaningful faith: "Is it conceivable, remotely conceivable, that we could have a meaningful Christian faith apart from resurrection?" Paul, he notes, argues first from Scripture and eyewitnesses and then from the opposite premise — "If Christ is dead and there is no resurrection from the dead, then what are the implications of that?" — empty preaching, empty faith, "You're still in your sins." His verdict is blunt: "take away the resurrection, you take away Christianity." In "The Hope of the Resurrection" he refuses the charge that our hope is wishful thinking: "This is the universal testimony of the New Testament writers."

C.H. SPURGEON · Metropolitan Tabernacle

In "If There be no Resurrection" (vv. 12–19) Spurgeon begins where Guzik later quotes him: "Our religion is not based upon opinions, but upon facts." He works through Paul's six consequences, and the hinge is union: "Christ is one with His people," so their rising is tied to His. If He did not rise, "your faith rests on what never happened." In a second sermon on verse 19, "Alas for Us, If Thou Wert All," he insists Christians are not miserable now — their joy "does not depend upon circumstances" — but they would be, having let go of the world, if this life were all. Hope of heaven is the belt that drives the engine of present obedience: "the band of faith connects the two."

MATTHEW HENRY · Commentary · 1 Cor. completed after 1714

Henry presses the absurdities one after another. If Christ is not raised, the apostles are "liars for God," and "the gospel is a jest; it is chaff and emptiness." Faith is vain and the believer is "yet under the guilt and condemnation of sin": "There had been no justification nor salvation if Christ had not risen." The dead in Christ are lost — which shows, he says, that the deniers took death for the extinction of the whole man. And believers, hunted and stripped in that age, would be worst off of all: "Better be any thing than a Christian upon these terms." For "the Christian is by his religion crucified to this world, and taught to live upon the hope of another."

III
MOVEMENT

1 CORINTHIANS 15:20–28

But Now — the First Fruits and the End

Christ first, then those who are His at His coming, then every enemy under His feet

20 But now Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who are asleep. 21 For since by a
man came death, by a man also came the resurrection of the dead. 22 For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ
all will be made alive. 23 But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, after that those who are Christ's
at His coming, 24 then comes the end, when He hands over the kingdom to the God and Father, when He has
abolished all rule and all authority and power. 25 For He must reign until He has put all His enemies under
His feet. 26 The last enemy that will be abolished is death. 27 For HE HAS PUT ALL THINGS IN SUBJECTION
UNDER HIS FEET. But when He says, "All things are put in subjection," it is evident that He is excepted who put all
things in subjection to Him. 28 When all things are subjected to Him, then the Son Himself also will be subjected
to the One who subjected all things to Him, so that God may be all in all.

1 CORINTHIANS 15:20–28

> "Speak to the sons of Israel and say to them, 'When you enter the land which I am going to give to you and reap its harvest, then you shall bring in the sheaf of the first fruits of your harvest to the priest."

LEVITICUS 23:10

> "The LORD says to my Lord: "Sit at My right hand Until I make Your enemies a footstool for Your feet.""

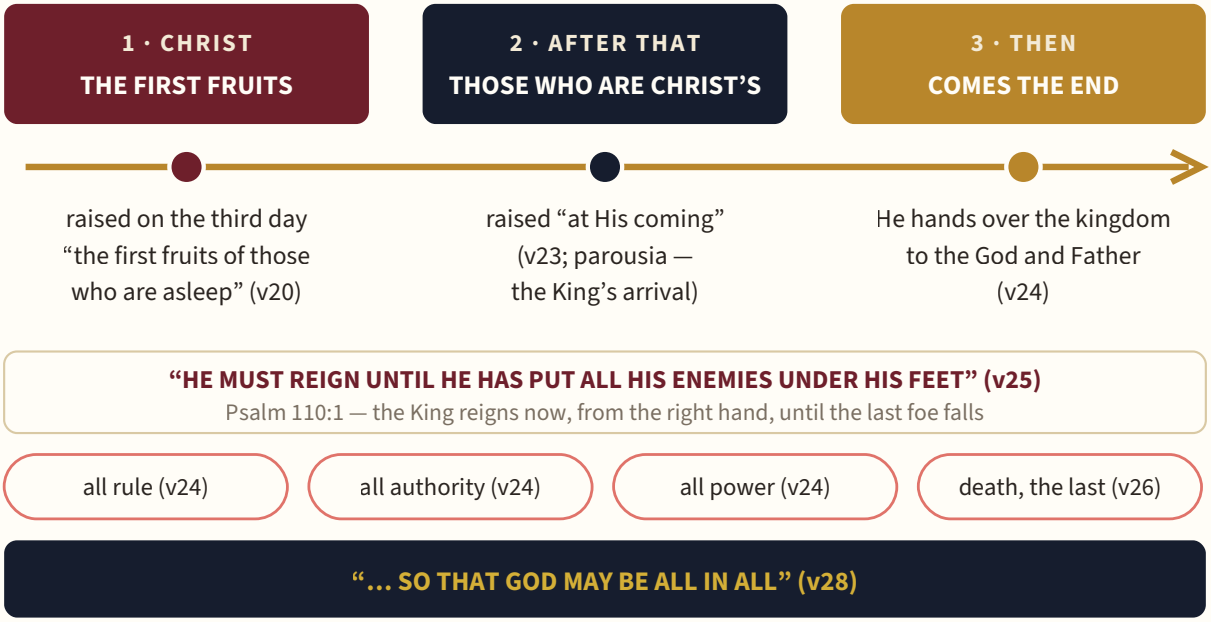
PSALM 110:1

> "You make him to rule over the works of Your hands; You have put all things under his feet,"

PSALM 8:6

FIGURE · EACH IN HIS OWN ORDER

"EACH IN HIS OWN ORDER" · 1 CORINTHIANS 15:23–28



Readers differ on the gap between 2 and 3: Guzik sees Christ's thousand-year reign (Rev 20); Henry reads His present mediatorial reign running on to the end. All agree on the order.

Christ first, then His people at His coming, then the end — every enemy under His feet, death last, and God all in all.

ἀπαρχή

APARCHĒ · "FIRST FRUITS" · G536

The first sheaf of the harvest, brought to the priest and waved before the LORD on the day after the Sabbath of Passover week (Leviticus 23:10–11) — the pledge that the rest of the field belonged to God and was coming in. Guzik notes the word was also used in ordinary Greek for an entrance fee, and that Jesus rose on that very day. Paul uses it of the Spirit as the first fruits of our redemption (Romans 8:23) and, in the next chapter, of "the household of Stephanas, that they were the first fruits of Achaia" (16:15). A first fruits is never alone; it means a harvest.

τάγμα · καταργέω

TAGMA · KATARGEŌ · "ORDER · ABOLISH" · G5001, G2673

Tagma (G5001), used only here in the New Testament, is a military word — a rank, a division, a troop marching in its turn. "Each in his own order": Christ, then His people "at His coming" (*parousia*, G3952, the word for a king's arrival), then the end. *Katargeō* (G2673, vv. 24, 26) means to render idle, put out of business, abolish — the verb of 2 Timothy 1:10, Christ "abolished death," and of Hebrews 2:14, "render powerless him who had the power of death." Verses 27–28 then use *hypotassō* (G5293), "subject," six times, ending with the Son Himself subjected — so that God may be all in all.

DAVID GUZIK · Enduring Word

Guzik explains *aparchē* both ways: the first sheaf that represents and anticipates the harvest — and an entrance fee: "Jesus paid our admission to the resurrection!" As Adam is one head of the race and brought death, Christ is the other and brings life (Rom 5). All will be raised, but not all to life (John 5:29). Lazarus was resuscitated, not resurrected; he died again — "Jesus was not the first one brought back from the dead, but He was the first one resurrected." Guzik reads "He must reign" as the thousand-year reign of Revelation 20, with death abolished after it. Death is an enemy — Jesus wept at Lazarus' tomb — and the Son's subjection comes "from the administrative order of the Godhead," not from any inferiority.

R.C. SPROUL · Ligonier Ministries

In a *What Did Jesus Do?* teaching clip on this chapter, Sproul says the Father raised the Son "not simply for His own vindication, but He's raised for us." "He may be the first to be raised in this manner, being brought forth in a glorified state, but is by no means the last." "Everyone who is in Christ Jesus will share in this resurrected glory. This is our hope." In his *Tabletalk* article "The Last Enemy" he reads verses 25–26 with Psalm 8 and Hebrews 2: "The Bible describes death as an enemy." Christ already reigns, "But the whole of creation is not yet in willing submission or subjection to Him. In short, Christ has rebellious subjects." The final victory over death is still ahead.

C.H. SPURGEON · Metropolitan Tabernacle

Spurgeon preached "Resurrection: Christ the Firstfruits" (No. 445, 1862) on verse 20: "Christ is the first who returned from the jaws of death," and "The firstfruits were a pledge of the harvest" — so the rising of His people "must be looked upon as a harvest." On verse 26, in "The Last Enemy Destroyed" (No. 721, 1866): "Death, the child of Sin, is the foe of man," yet "Christ on the cross took away the sting of death." In "Christ the Destroyer of Death" (1876) he calls death "not God's invited guest, but an intruder whose presence mars the feast," and counsels patience in the order of battle: "Let the great enemies go down first." "If you live well you will die well."

MATTHEW HENRY · Commentary · 1 Cor. completed after 1714

Henry calls Christ's resurrection "a pledge and earnest of ours": the first fruits made the whole lump holy, and "He has not risen merely for himself, but as head of the body, the church." The "all" of verse 22 he limits by the argument to those who are Christ's. Of the order he admits, "What that precisely will be we are nowhere told." He reads the kingdom as Christ's mediatorial reign, given Him after His ascension and delivered up when its work is done — the last enemy abolished, His saints raised to die no more. Verse 28 concerns the man Christ Jesus as Mediator, not His Godhead: "It was the Lord's doing and should be marvellous in our eyes."

IV
MOVEMENT

1 CORINTHIANS 15:29–34

Why Stand in Danger Every Hour?

A puzzling practice, a dangerous life, and a call to sober up and stop sinning

> [29] *Otherwise, what will those do who are baptized for the dead? If the dead are not raised at all, why then are they baptized for them?* [30] *Why are we also in danger every hour?* [31] *I affirm, brethren, by the boasting in you which I have in Christ Jesus our Lord, I die daily.* [32] *If from human motives I fought with wild beasts at*

> *Ephesus, what does it profit me? If the dead are not raised, LET US EAT AND DRINK, FOR TOMORROW WE DIE.*
> [33] *Do not be deceived: "Bad company corrupts good morals."* [34]
> *Become sober-minded as you ought, and stop sinning; for some have no knowledge of God. I speak this to your shame.*
>
> 1 CORINTHIANS 15:29–34

> *"Instead, there is gaiety and gladness, Killing of cattle and slaughtering of sheep, Eating of meat and drinking of wine: "Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we may die.""*
>
> ISAIAH 22:13

βαπτιζόμενοι ὑπὲρ τῶν νεκρῶν

BAPTIZOMENOI HYPER TŌN NEKRŌN · "BAPTIZED FOR THE DEAD" · G907

Baptizō (G907) with *hyper*, which can mean "on behalf of" or "for the sake of, on account of." Guzik counts more than thirty interpretations; Henry, "more than three times three." Two things are plain in the grammar: Paul says "those" and "they," not "we" or "you" — he describes a practice without joining it — and his argument works whatever it was: the practice is pointless if the dead are not raised. Nothing here teaches that the living can be baptized to save the dead. Verse 32's "fought with wild beasts" is *thēriomacheō* (G2341), used only here.

ὁμιλίαι · ἐκνήψατε

HOMILIAI · EKNĒPSATE · "COMPANY · BECOME SOBER-MINDED" · G3657, G1594

Homilia (G3657), only here in the New Testament, is association, keeping company, conversation — the root of our "homily." "Bad company corrupts good morals" is a line of Greek verse from the comic poet Menander's *Thais*, a proverb everyone in Corinth knew. Verse 34's *eknēphō* (G1594), also only here, means to sober up out of a drunken stupor — a pointed answer to the "eat and drink" of verse 32 — and it is an aorist imperative: wake up, now. Then a present imperative: *mē hamartanete* (*hamartanō*, G264), stop going on in sin.

DAVID GUZIK · Enduring Word

Guzik calls verse 29 "a mysterious passage" and notes that Paul asks what "they" do, not "we": he mentions a superstitious custom without approving it, and the Mormon practice built on the verse "is neither Scriptural nor sensible." Paul's own life was the stronger argument — "There is no way he would live like that unless there was a reward waiting for him in heaven." "I die daily," he insists, means constant danger to Paul's physical life (Acts 23:12–13), not mortifying the flesh, though he commends Spurgeon's seven steps for "dying daily." Without resurrection, life is Ecclesiastes "under the sun." Their bad doctrine came from bad company — Sadducees or Greek philosophers — and "To remain willfully ignorant of the truth is sin."

C.H. SPURGEON · Metropolitan Tabernacle

Spurgeon's "Dying Daily" (No. 828, 1868) takes the text as a discipline for every believer. "The very moment we begin to live we begin to die." "We are like hourglasses." To die daily is to consider death's certainty, to rehearse it by faith, and above all "to hold this world with a loose hand": "Look on your lands as a dying man would look on them." Come to the cross each day as a sinner, live so you would not be ashamed to die at any moment, keep your affairs in order — "Who would wish to die with a duty left undone?" Guzik, note, reads Paul's words more narrowly as physical danger; Spurgeon preaches the posture that danger produced.

MATTHEW HENRY · Commentary · 1 Cor. completed after 1714

Henry admits the phrase "has had more than three times three senses put on it," weighs several, and offers his own: converts baptized on account of those God had struck dead at Corinth (11:30) — "as easy an explication of the phrase as any I have met with" — while granting that whatever it meant, the argument was plain to the Corinthians. The beasts at Ephesus he takes as men "of a fierce and ferine disposition" (Acts 19). If there is nothing after death, the epicure is wiser: "Let us even live like beasts, if we must die like them." But "Bad company and conversation are likely to make bad men," and "Real atheism lies at the bottom of men's disbelief of a future state."

V
MOVEMENT

1 CORINTHIANS 15:35–49

Sown a Seed, Raised in Glory

What kind of body? One as different from this one as the plant is from the seed — and like the last Adam

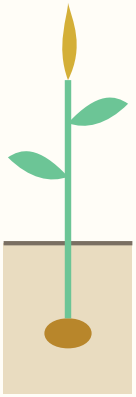
35 *But someone will say, "How are the dead* ⟳ *raised? And with what kind of body do they come?"* 36 *You fool! That which you sow does not come to life unless it dies;* 37 *and that which you sow, you do not sow the body which is to be, but a bare grain, perhaps of wheat or of something else.* 38 *But* △ *God gives it a body just as He wished, and to each of the seeds a body of its own.* 39 *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 fish.* 40 *There are also heavenly bodies and earthly bodies, but the glory of the heavenly is one, and the glory of the earthly is another.* 41 *There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars; for star differs from star in glory.* 42 *So also is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown a perishable body,* ☆ *it is raised an imperishable body;* 43 *it is sown in dishonor,* ☆ *it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness,* ☆ *it is raised in power;* 44 *it is sown a natural body,* ☆ *it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body.* 45 *So also it is written, "The first MAN, Adam, BECAME A LIVING SOUL."* △ *The last Adam became a life-giving spirit.* 46 *However, the spiritual is not first, but the natural; then the spiritual.* 47 *The first man is from the earth, earthy; the second man is from heaven.* 48 *As is the earthy, so also are those who are earthy; and as is the heavenly, so also are those who are heavenly.* 49 *Just as we have borne the image of the earthy,* ☆ *we will also bear the image of the heavenly.*

1 CORINTHIANS 15:35–49

"Then the LORD God formed man of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being."

GENESIS 2:7

FIGURE · SOWN A SEED, RAISED A BODY

IT IS SOWN …		IT IS RAISED …
a perishable body phthora — decay	God gives the body	**an imperishable body** aphtharsia — cannot decay (v42)
in dishonor laid in the ground		**in glory** like His glorious body (v43)
in weakness unable to stir	a bare grain	**in power** never weak again (v43)
a natural body psychikon — fit for this life		**a spiritual body** pneumatikon — ruled by the Spirit (v44)

"That which you sow does not come to life unless it dies" (v36) — the same seed, a different body.
Spurgeon: "The identity is preserved." Guzik: they "are not lost; they are sown" (quoting Spurgeon).

Burial is a sowing: the four contrasts of vv. 42–44 run down the page, and the seed in the middle is the same life coming up in a far greater body.

ἄφρων · γυμνὸν κόκκον

APHRŌN · GYMNON KOKKON · "YOU FOOL! · A BARE GRAIN" · G878, G1131, G2848

Aphrōn (G878) is "senseless, without understanding" — the word God speaks to the rich man who built bigger barns: "You fool!" (Luke 12:20). Paul is not insulting honest questions; he is answering a sneer with something every farmer knows. You do not plant the plant; you plant "a bare grain" — *gymnon kokkon*, a naked seed (G1131, G2848), the same *kokkos* as Jesus' "unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies" (John 12:24). "Sow" (*speirō*, G4687) runs seven times through vv. 36–44: burial is planting. And "come to life" (v. 36) is *zōopoieō* (G2227), the very verb of v. 45 — the last Adam is the "life-giving" spirit who makes the seed live.

ψυχικόν · πνευματικόν

PSYCHIKON · PNEUMATIKON · "NATURAL · SPIRITUAL" · G5591, G4152

Not a body made of soul versus a body made of spirit. The *-ikos* ending means "belonging to, suited to, animated by." The *psychikon* body (G5591) is fitted for this life and run by the soul's natural powers; the *pneumatikon* body (G4152) is a real body wholly governed and fitted by the Holy Spirit. Paul used the same pair in 2:14–15 for the "natural man" and "he who is spiritual" — and no one thinks the spiritual man there has no body. The other contrasts: *phthora* (G5356), decay, against *aphtharsia* (G861), incorruptibility; and *eikōn* (G1504), "image" (v. 49), the word of Genesis 1:27 in the Greek Old Testament.

DAVID GUZIK · Enduring Word

Guzik says Paul hardly answers "How are the dead raised?" because the answer is obvious: "God raises the dead." The seed answers the rest. "When you bury the body of a believer, you are 'sowing' a 'seed,'" and he quotes Spurgeon: "They are not lost; they are sown." What comes up is not a big seed but a plant, so we should not expect merely "improved" bodies; and God does not need every atom to raise one. The varied bodies of creation show bodies fitted to their realm, and the one-star-differs verse may hint at degrees of glory. Of the four contrasts: "On all counts, the resurrection body wins!" The pattern is Jesus' own risen body — material, able to eat (Luke 24:39–43), yet not bound by nature's limits.

R.C. SPROUL · Ligonier Ministries

Sproul does not preach this paragraph in the pages we could find, but in an article on death and the fall (reprinted at ChurchLeaders) he presses the same two-Adam frame Paul uses in verses 21–22 and 45–49. Death is not merely natural; it came through the historical fall of the first Adam (Genesis 2:17; Romans 5), and so it must be answered in history: the work of the first Adam is "matched and conquered by the historical life of the last Adam, Jesus Christ." Much is at stake: deny the first Adam's fall and redemption itself is put in question. His conclusion is the chapter's: "For the believer, death does not have the last word."

C.H. SPURGEON · Metropolitan Tabernacle

Spurgeon's "Resurgam" ("I shall rise again," No. 306, 1860) on verses 35–38 begins by noting that reason may argue for the soul's immortality, but only revelation teaches the resurrection of the body. His first point is identity: as "the same wheat arises from the soil into which it was cast," so "The identity is preserved" — not by the same atoms, as the body renews itself all through life. His second is transformation: "The body is here but as a shrivelled seed," and he piles up pictures — caterpillar and butterfly, rusty iron in the smith's fire, a beggar clothed as a prince. "The difference shall be extraordinary, yet shall the body be still the same."

MATTHEW HENRY · Commentary · 1 Cor. completed after 1714

Henry splits the objection: "How?" is the opponent's denial of God's power; "with what body?" is the curious doubter's question. To the first: "It is a foolish thing to question the divine power to raise the dead, when we see it every day quickening and reviving things that are dead." To the second: "Burying the dead is like sowing them," and each contrast is a glory — the body raised will be "out of the power of the grave." "Spiritual" is comparative: "Not that body would be changed into spirit." Then the two Adams: "If the first Adam could communicate to us natural and animal bodies, cannot the second Adam make our bodies spiritual ones?" "We must die before we can live to die no more."

VI
MOVEMENT

1 CORINTHIANS 15:50–58

We Will All Be Changed

A mystery revealed, death swallowed up, and a charge to stand firm and keep working

50 *Now I say this, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable.* 51 *Behold, I tell you a mystery; we will not all sleep, but* ☆ *we will all be changed*, 52 *in a moment,* ◷ *in the twinkling of an eye*, *at the last trumpet; for the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be* ⟳ *raised* *imperishable, and we will be changed.* 53 *For this perishable must put on the imperishable, and this*

mortal must put on immortality. [54] *But when this perishable will have put on the imperishable, and this mortal will have put on immortality, then will come about the saying that is written, "DEATH IS SWALLOWED UP in victory.* [55] *"O DEATH, WHERE IS YOUR VICTORY? O DEATH, WHERE IS YOUR STING?"* [56] *The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law;* [57] *but thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.* [58] *Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your toil is not in vain in the Lord.*

1 CORINTHIANS 15:50–58

"He will swallow up death for all time, And the Lord GOD will wipe tears away from all faces, And He will remove the reproach of His people from all the earth; For the LORD has spoken."

ISAIAH 25:8

"Shall I ransom them from the power of Sheol? Shall I redeem them from death? O Death, where are your thorns? O Sheol, where is your sting? Compassion will be hidden from My sight."

HOSEA 13:14

ἐν ἀτόμῳ, ἐν ῥιπῇ ὀφθαλμοῦ

EN ATOMŌ, EN RHIPĒ OPHTHALMOU · "IN A MOMENT, IN THE TWINKLING OF AN EYE" · G823, G4493

Atomos (G823), only here in the New Testament, is "uncuttable" (*a-*, not + *temnō*, cut) — the word that gave us "atom": an instant too small to divide. *Rhipē* (G4493), also only here, is a quick throw or flick — the flutter of an eyelid. "Changed" is *allassō* (G236), twice (vv. 51–52): not replaced, but altered. The trumpet is *salpinx* (G4536), the signal of God's assembly and God's coming (Exodus 19:16; 1 Thessalonians 4:16). And the change is something put on like clothing — *endyō* (G1746) four times in vv. 53–54 — the perishable putting on *aphtharsia* (G861) and the mortal putting on *athanasia* (G110), immortality, a word the New Testament uses only here and of God, "who alone possesses immortality" (1 Timothy 6:16).

κατεπόθη … νῖκος · κέντρον

KATEPOTHĒ … NIKOS · KENTRON · "SWALLOWED UP … VICTORY · STING" · G2666, G3534, G2759

Katapinō (G2666) is to gulp down, drink down whole — the verb of 2 Corinthians 5:4, "so that what is mortal will be swallowed up by life." Death, which swallowed every man, is itself swallowed. *Nikos* (G3534) rings three times (vv. 54, 55, 57); notice who wins it and who receives it — God "gives us the victory." *Kentron* (G2759) is a goad or a scorpion's sting — Saul was told, "It is hard for you to kick against the goads" (Acts 26:14). Sin is the stinger that makes death deadly; the law gives sin its power by condemning it. Then verse 58: *hedraioi* (G1476), "seated, settled"; *ametakinētoi* (G277), only here, "un-move-able"; *perisseuontes* (G4052), overflowing; *kopos* (G2873), toil to the point of exhaustion — and it is not *kenos*, empty.

DAVID GUZIK · Enduring Word

Guzik explains that “flesh and blood” here means “our present bodies,” not matter as such — the risen Jesus had “flesh and bones” (Luke 24:39). The mystery is that a final generation will be changed without dying; Paul was not wrong about the timing, for as Morris says, he “did not know when these events would take place.” Guzik connects the instant change with the catching up of 1 Thessalonians 4, holds that the last trumpet need not be the seventh trumpet of Revelation 11, and that the dead in Christ are with the Lord now (2 Cor 5:8). Paul can taunt death, but for the unbeliever “death is not your friend; it is your enemy.” And verse 58: “right now counts forever!” Even if your labor is vain to everyone else, it “is not in vain in the Lord.”

R.C. SPROUL · Ligonier Ministries

In a teaching clip on verses 54–57 Sproul reads the taunt with relish: “Death is devoured, consumed by victory.” “O death, where’s your sting now?” In “The Last Enemy” he explains why the taunt is no bravado: “Something glorious and decisive did take place on the cross with respect to death.” “The sting of death was removed by the captain of our salvation.” So “For believers, death is a friend insofar as it ushers us into the immediate presence of Christ” — “death is but the portal or threshold to that glory.” And in “The Hope of the Resurrection” he draws verse 58 into his own suffering: because Christ is raised, “So my suffering is not in vain.”

C.H. SPURGEON · Metropolitan Tabernacle

Spurgeon preached these verses again and again. In “Thoughts on the Last Battle” (1855, vv. 56–57): “The sting of death shall be unforgiven, unrepented sin.” “Where death leaves me, judgment finds me.” “The law never remits a farthing of debt” — but Christ “has completely satisfied it.” In “A Challenge and War-Charge” (vv. 55–58): “Death, thou skeleton monarch, where is thy sting?” “Christ hath vanquished death by dying,” and “Death has no sting to a believer.” And in “Motives for Steadfastness” (No. 1111, 1873) he turns doctrine to duty — truth held fast, work done, never handed off: “All for Jesus, always for Jesus, everywhere for Jesus.”

MATTHEW HENRY · Commentary · 1 Cor. completed after 1714

Henry reads the last trump as “the loud summons of all the living and all the dead, to come and appear at the tribunal of Christ”; at it the dead saints rise and the living are changed in a moment. Then the saints’ song of triumph: “Captivity is taken captive.” “The sting of death is sin”; “but Christ, by dying, has taken out this sting.” “It may hiss therefore, but it cannot hurt.” “Death may seize a believer, but cannot sting him.” So be steadfast in the faith, immovable in the hope — “This hope should be an anchor to their souls” — and abounding in the work. Christians “may lose for God, but they will lose nothing by him.” “Those who serve God have good wages.”

VII
THEME

CROSS-REFERENCES

The Passage in the Whole Bible

From Job's Redeemer to the last tear wiped away — where 1 Corinthians 15 reaches back and forward

FIGURE · TWO MEN, TWO IMAGES

1 COR 15	THE FIRST MAN, ADAM	THE LAST ADAM
WHAT HE BROUGHT	by a man came death (v21)	by a man … the resurrection of the dead (v21)
THOSE IN HIM	in Adam all die (v22)	in Christ all will be made alive (v22)
WHAT HE BECAME	a living soul — received life (v45; Genesis 2:7)	a life-giving spirit — gives life (v45)
WHERE HE IS FROM	from the earth, earthy (v47)	from heaven (v47)
HIS IMAGE IN US	we have borne the image of the earthy (v49)	we will also bear the image of the heavenly (v49)

Paul sets the first man and the last Adam side by side twice (vv. 21–22, 45–49): what each brought, what each became, and whose image we bear.

> *"As for me, I know that my Redeemer lives, And at the last He will take His stand on the earth. Even after my skin is destroyed, Yet from my flesh I shall see God;"*
>
> JOB 19:25-26

> *"Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in Me will live even if he dies, and everyone who lives and believes in Me will never die. Do you believe this?""*
>
> JOHN 11:25-26

> *"He who was delivered over because of our transgressions, and was raised because of our justification."*
>
> ROMANS 4:25

> *"Therefore, just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned—"*
>
> ROMANS 5:12

> *"For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ; who will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory, by the exertion of the power that He has even to subject all things to Himself."*
>
> PHILIPPIANS 3:20–21

> *"For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we shall always be with the Lord."*
>
> 1 THESSALONIANS 4:16–17

> *"and He will wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there will no longer be any death; there will no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away."*
>
> REVELATION 21:4

DAVID GUZIK · Enduring Word

Guzik sets verse 20 beside Leviticus 23:9–14: the Feast of Firstfruits fell "on the day after the Sabbath following Passover," and Jesus rose on that very day — the first sheaf of the harvest.

MATTHEW HENRY · Commentary · 1 Cor. completed after 1714

Henry hears Isaiah 25:8 and Hosea 13:14 fulfilled in the risen saints' song: "the prison-doors are burst open … our shackles are knocked off, and we are for ever released. Captivity is taken captive."

SECTION II · STUDY HELPS

At a Glance

Four voices, one chapter

Four teachers, one chapter — and on the resurrection itself they stand shoulder to shoulder. They part on the details Paul leaves open: what "baptized for the dead" was (Guzik: a pagan or superstitious custom; Henry: converts won by the deaths of 11:30), whether "I die daily" is physical danger (Guzik) or a daily discipline (Spurgeon), whether a millennium falls between Christ's coming and the end (Guzik yes; Henry reads one present reign), and whether the last trumpet gathers the church before judgment (Guzik) or summons all to the tribunal (Henry).

THE MOVEMENT	GUZIK · the text	SPROUL · the doctrine	SPURGEON · the heart	HENRY · the counsel
I · The gospel	Real events; the empty tomb is the receipt; grace changes and puts to work.	Not an inference from a missing body — the risen Lord was seen, touched, heard.	Preachers are repeaters, not inventors; we are channels, not reservoirs of grace.	A doctrine of the first rank; remove it and the whole fabric falls.
II · If not raised	They denied our resurrection, not His; if He is not risen He cannot save.	Take away the resurrection, you take away Christianity.	Our religion rests on facts; hope of heaven is the belt that drives today.	The gospel a jest and chaff; better be anything than a Christian on those terms.
III · First fruits	Jesus paid our admission; Lazarus revived, Jesus resurrected; a millennial reign.	Raised for us — first in glory, not the last; Christ has rebellious subjects.	The firstfruits pledge the harvest; death is an intruder at the feast.	Risen as head of the body; the mediatorial kingdom handed back.
IV · Why risk it	Paul says "they," not "we"; dying daily is physical danger; bad company, bad doctrine.	— (no source found for this movement)	We are hourglasses; hold this world with a loose hand.	Three times three senses; live like beasts if you die like them.
V · The seed	God raises the dead; burial is sowing; on all counts the new body wins.	The first Adam's work matched and conquered by the last Adam's.	Resurgam: the identity preserved, the difference extraordinary.	God quickens dead grain every year; spiritual is not spirit.
VI · The victory	Flesh and blood means these bodies; the dead in Christ with the Lord; now counts forever.	Death devoured; the sting removed by the captain of our salvation.	Unforgiven sin is the sting; Christ vanquished death by dying.	It may hiss but cannot hurt; you may lose for God but nothing by Him.

1 CORINTHIANS 15:1–58 · A COMPARATIVE READING

† Key Insights to Carry

- **The gospel is a report before it is a request.** Four "that" clauses — died, buried, raised, appeared (vv. 3–5). Paul received it and delivered it; he did not compose it. Spurgeon: "We are not makers and inventors; we are repeaters." SPURGEON
- **He has been raised — and stays raised.** Paul switches from aorists (died, buried) to the perfect *egēgertai* (v. 4), and uses that perfect seven times in the chapter. The resurrection is a standing fact, not a fading memory. THE GREEK
- **Go and ask them.** "Most of whom remain until now" (v. 6) was an invitation to check the story with living witnesses. Sproul: our faith "does not rest on inferences drawn from a missing body." SPROUL
- **The empty tomb is the receipt.** Guzik: "If the cross is the payment for our sins, the empty tomb is the receipt." Without it, "you are still in your sins" (v. 17). GUZIK

- **Everything hangs on one fact.** Seven consequences follow if Christ is still dead (vv. 13–19); the rest of the chapter answers every one. Henry: "Remove this foundation, and the whole fabric falls." HENRY
- **A first fruits means a harvest.** *Aparchē* — the first sheaf of Leviticus 23, offered the day after the Passover Sabbath, the day Jesus rose. Spurgeon: "The firstfruits were a pledge of the harvest." THE GREEK
- **Death is an enemy — and the last one.** Not a friend to embrace, not a natural passage; an intruder (Spurgeon), an enemy (Sproul), abolished last (v. 26). Christ already reigns until it falls. THE TEXT
- **What we believe about tomorrow shapes how we live today.** No resurrection, then "eat and drink" (v. 32). Bad company had corrupted Corinth's doctrine and its morals together; Paul's answer is "Become sober-minded … and stop sinning" (v. 34). THE TEXT
- **Burial is a sowing.** "Sow" runs seven times through vv. 36–44. Spurgeon: "The identity is preserved," yet "The difference shall be extraordinary." Guzik: "They are not lost; they are sown." SPURGEON
- **Doctrine ends with a shovel.** The longest argument in the letter ends in a work order: steadfast, immovable, always abounding — because toil in the Lord is not *kenos*, empty (v. 58). THE TEXT

† Questions for the Table

1 **Paul calls the death, burial and resurrection "of first importance." What have I let crowd it out of first place?**

Received, stood in, held fast — past, present and future all resting on one message.

15:1-4; Gal 1:11-12

2 **If Christ had not been raised, what in my life would look exactly the same?**

If nothing would change, I may be hoping in Christ "in this life only."

15:17-19

3 **Paul was the man who "persecuted the church of God," and grace made him what he was. What does my past say about what grace can do?**

"By the grace of God I am what I am" — and that grace "did not prove vain."

15:9-10; 1 Tim 1:15

4 **What company is shaping what I believe about the future — and how I live now?**

Bad company corrupts good morals; wake up and stop sinning.

15:32-34; Prov 13:20

5 **How does the picture of the seed change the way I stand at a believer's grave?**

It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power — we grieve, but not as those who have no hope.

15:42-44; 1 Thess 4:13

6 **What work for the Lord have I been tempted to think is wasted?**

Your toil is not in vain in the Lord — not the lesson, not the prayer, not the visit no one thanked you for.

15:58; Heb 6:10

Corinth wanted a faith for this life and a vague hope for the soul. Paul gives them a risen Savior, the first sheaf of a harvest, a body sown in weakness and raised in power, and a victory over death already won and freely given. Doctrine this large has a simple application: be steadfast, immovable, always abounding — your toil is not in vain in the Lord.

Teaching the Word. Living in the Light. — Smith For Christ

† Sources

Each teacher's section summarizes the pages below in our own words; short quotations are verbatim from them. Matthew Henry died in 1714 having reached Acts; his *Commentary* on 1 Corinthians was completed after his death by Simon Browne from his notes and method, and is cited under his name as it is published. Henry's Commentary and C.H. Spurgeon (1834–1892) are in the public domain; Guzik and Sproul are summarized — consult each author's own work.

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