

This is the longest uninterrupted writing of Paul in this letter. Written with soaring language, some say that the King James version is the best to hear. He is addressing a those within the church community were saying that the there is no resurrection of the dead (human beings, but not including Christ). They seem to have argued this along the thought that a decomposed body cannot be resurrected, that in many instances there is no body to be raise or that the material body is not suitable for a resurrected existence. It's possible that they thought along the Greek worldview which thought of the soul as immortal and the physical body as temporary and of less value. [The spiritualization of this idea is called Gnosticism: the search for a spiritual mystery or knowledge which permits to escape the material body).

**you are [being] saved** :: the verb here (sozomenois: to save, heal, make whole) is in the participle – which implies that the action of the verb is related both to a past specific event and a present experience to be consummated or perfected/finished in the future. Here Paul echoes this vision of salvation as an ongoing, begun in the past, continuing into the future, dynamic process or life-shaping journey as he did in 1 Corinthians 1:18 : “For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.” In modern American evangelical flavored church-ese we tend to think of salvation as a past event, when we were saved, and sanctification as the ongoing process going forward in which through living out faith we are perfected, redeemed, remade in the image of Christ. Paul however, doesn't distinguish between them. For him they're complimentary parts of a dynamic whole.

**OF FIRST IMPORTANCE**:: this can refer to a temporal order, the first things done, taught, or in terms of importance such as the most important, first in line. Whether it was the first thing taught, or the chief point for Paul, he insists that he taught it as he received it.

he was raised on the third day :: this verb is conjugated in the perfect tense, meaning that although the time in the past is specified the continuing effect of this historic action is the essential part of the idea. This resurrection changes then as much as it does now and in the future still to come.

*have fallen asleep* :: this is the literal translation of the verb () which also means to die. It's used in 1 Corinthians 7:39 & 11:30.

**ONE ABNORMALLY BORN** :: the Greek word usually means “miscarriage” and can mean “monstrosity.” He seems to be saying that from a spiritual point of view, he wasn't born at the right time, referring to his late conversion to Christian faith as told in Acts 9:1-19 after having been one of the chief persecutors of those who followed Jesus.

*futile*:: the word is a synonym of fruitless. Easily compared to the repetition of firstfruits in v. 20-23.

## 1 Corinthians 15:1-26, 51-57

New Revised Standard Version | (NRSV)

<sup>1</sup>Now, brothers and sisters, I want to remind you of **the gospel I preached to you**, which you received and on which you have taken your stand. <sup>2</sup> By this gospel **you are [being] saved**, if you hold firmly to the **word I preached to you**. Otherwise, you have believed in vain.

<sup>3</sup> **For what I received I passed on to you** AS OF FIRST

IMPORTANCE: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, <sup>4</sup> that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, <sup>5</sup> and that he appeared to Cephas, and then to the Twelve. <sup>6</sup> After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers and sisters at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some *have fallen asleep*. <sup>7</sup> Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles, <sup>8</sup> and last of all he appeared to me also, as to **ONE ABNORMALLY BORN**.

<sup>9</sup> For I am the least of the apostles and do not even deserve to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. <sup>10</sup> But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect. No, I worked harder than all of them—yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me. <sup>11</sup> Whether, then, it is I or they, this is what we preach, and this is what you believed.

<sup>12</sup> But if it is preached that Christ has been raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? <sup>13</sup> If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. <sup>14</sup> And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith. <sup>15</sup> More than that, we are then found to be false witnesses about God, for we have testified about God

that he raised Christ from the dead. But he did not raise him if in fact the dead are not raised. <sup>16</sup> For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised either. <sup>17</sup> And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is *futile*; you are still in your sins. <sup>18</sup> Then those also who *have fallen asleep* in Christ are lost. <sup>19</sup> If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied.

<sup>20</sup> But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who *have fallen asleep*. <sup>21</sup> For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. <sup>22</sup> For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive. <sup>23</sup> But each in turn: Christ, the firstfruits; then, when he comes, those who belong to him. <sup>24</sup> Then the end will come, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority and power. <sup>25</sup> For he must reign until **he has put all his enemies under his feet**. <sup>26</sup> The last enemy to be destroyed is death.

....

<sup>51</sup> Listen, I tell you a MYSTERY: We will not all *sleep*, but we will all be changed— <sup>52</sup> in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last **TRUMPET**. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. <sup>53</sup> For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality. <sup>54</sup> When the perishable has been *clothed* with the imperishable, and the mortal with *immortality*, then the saying that is written will come true: “Death has been swallowed up in victory.”

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

*Where, O death, is your sting?*”

<sup>56</sup> The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law.

<sup>57</sup> But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

**he has put all his enemies under his feet** :: Paul’s language echoes that of Psalm 110:1 :

“The Lord says to my lord: ‘Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet.’”

**TRUMPET** :: we think of an orchestra instrument, but most often the Greek word used here refers to the Hebrew Shofar: a ram’s horn, blown to signal the announce of the rise of the new moon, the beginning of the Sabbath, the arrival fo the new year and the initiation of feasts. In time it came to be associated with the last day (of Judgment) or the Day of the Lord. It’s used by the angels in Revelation 8-10.

The word/image also appears in ! Corinthians 14:8; 1 Thessalonians 4:16 and Matthew 24:31.

*clothed ... with immortality* :: this notion of Paul’s is important to note. Many Greek philosophers asserted that immortality was a natural gift/state of humanity. The the immortal soul was thought of as clothed with flesh. Plato’s discourse on life and death, *Phaedo* 65-67 : “Now, the body is a hindrance in the search for wisdom? “[for], the soul of the philosopher greatly despises the body and avoids it and strives to be alone by itself...” ...“Then..all.. good lovers of wisdom [are lead to the] conclusion in our search that so long as we have the body, and the soul is contaminated by such an evil, we shall never attain completely what we desire, that is, the truth. For the body keeps us constantly busy by reason of its need of sustenance; ... fills us with passions, desires, fears and all sorts of fancies and foolishness, so that, ... it makes it impossible for us to think at all. We are slaves to its service. And so, .. we are never to know anything absolutely, we must be free from the body and must behold the actual realities with the eye of the soul alone. And then, as our argument shows, when we are dead we are likely to possess the wisdom which we desire and claim to be enamored of, but not while we live.”

This anti-body Gnosticism is also present within gospel we call gnostic and not part of the cannon, such as those found at Nag Hammadi. Among them are *The Gospel of Philip*: which in 23 affirms this duality that Paul refutes here : “There are people who are afraid of rising naked. This is because they want to rise in the flesh. Yet they do not understand that those who wear the flesh are naked (in front of spirits and God). But those who undress themselves (of the flesh) in or- der to become naked (i.e. “naked” souls) — they are not naked anymore.”

v. 55 is a quote of Hosea 13:14 and an echo of the vision of Yahweh destroying death forever on the mountain of the LORD as told in Isaiah 25:6-8 : “On this mountain the Lord Almighty will prepare a feast of rich food for all peoples... On this mountain he will destroy the shroud that enfolds all peoples, the sheet that covers all nations; he will swallow up death forever.”

**QUESTION FOR PONDERING: HOW DO YOU IMAGINE DEATH & RESURRECTION? HOW DOES IT RELATE TO LIFE TODAY, HERE AND NOW?**