

Week 4: 1 Corinthians 15:50–58 – The Victory over Death

Hook



Main Point: In Christ, we have been given victory over sin and death.

Q: What thoughts or images come to mind when you hear the word *resurrection*?

Q: In your opinion, do most Christians have a firm grasp on what their final, eternal state will be like?

A recent study of American adults reveals widespread uncertainty about the afterlife.

- Thirty-nine percent of those surveyed – and 52 percent of self-professed Christians – believe they will spend eternity with God.
- Nineteen percent expect some form of reincarnation.
- Thirteen percent believed they would cease to exist after death.¹

Every major world religion, culture and nation have opinions on death and the existence or non-existence of an afterlife. *But* do any of them bring any certainty?

Transition: In today's passage, Paul concludes the chapter by providing further insight into the Resurrection. There is no room for doubt or confusion—the Resurrection is certain, and this reality should profoundly shape the way we live today.

RECAP: In this year's Easter series, instead of studying the Easter account of the Resurrection in the Gospels, we are doing a deep dive into 1 Corinthians 15, Paul's most comprehensive theological statement about the Resurrection and what it means for believers.

In lesson 1, we learned that the Resurrection is not a theological side issue but is central to the Gospel, that the Resurrection is a verifiable fact supported by many eyewitnesses, and that the transformation the Spirit makes in our lives when we accept Christ is itself a resurrection – our old self dies and we are risen to a new life in Christ. In lesson 2, we learned that we can be confident of our own bodily resurrection because Jesus was

bodily resurrected. In lesson 3, we learned about the resurrection body and what it means to be made new in the final, consummated kingdom of God.

In this lesson, we will learn about the victory we have in the Resurrection and how it gives us hope for eternal life in heaven as well as purpose in our work for the kingdom on earth.

Week 4: 1 Corinthians 15:50–58 – The Victory over Death

Book

Main Point: In Christ, we have been given victory over sin and death.

1 Corinthians 15:50–53 [Read]

Talking Point 1: Our mortal bodies must be transformed to enter the kingdom of God.

Q: Why must our bodies become imperishable?

Q: How does the idea that God intends to redeem our bodies, and not just our souls, change the way you view your physical life right now?

Q: What does this tell us about the kingdom of God?

Paul summarized his discussion about the difference between the earthly body and the resurrected body with this simple statement: the mortal body must become immortal because “flesh and blood” cannot inherit the kingdom of God. In the ancient world, the phrase “flesh and blood” was a common figure of speech to reference mortals.² The kingdom of God is an eternal kingdom, but our mortal bodies are not built for eternity. These bodies continue to get weaker over time until we finally die. To live forever, we must have a different kind of body.

The night of His arrest, Jesus told Pilate, “My kingdom is not of this world” (John 18:36). This statement has a dual meaning that gives us a peek into the “already/not yet” of the kingdom of God, a theological truth we called “inaugurated eschatology.” *Eschatology* refers to the end times; *inaugurated* means that it has begun, but it is not finished. The kingdom of God is *already* here on earth right now, but it is *not yet* here in all its fullness as it will be in the age to come. Both the “already” and the “not yet” of the kingdom of God are “not of this world,” but in different ways.

The “already” is the kingdom of God in the here and now. During Jesus’ ministry on earth, He preached that the kingdom of God was at hand. The Church is the “already” kingdom of God. Those who follow Jesus as king in this world are His kingdom in the here and now. We are in this world, yet we are not “of this world.” We are citizens of His kingdom and ambassadors *to* the world, bringing His message of peace and reconciliation (2 Corinthians 5:20; Philippians 3:20).

Yet, there is also a future reality of His final kingdom (the “not yet”) that is not “of this world” in that it is a new creation, a new heavens and new earth. Paul said that even in this world, those of us who are in Christ are made a “new creation” on the inside (2

Corinthians 5:17). But to live in that future new-creation world, we need new-creation bodies as well, because “the perishable” cannot inherit the imperishable kingdom of God (v. 50). Our new bodies have to be fit for that new creation, that “other world.”

We don’t know for sure what that “other world” kingdom will be like, but because God said He is making all things new, we can imagine it may be like our world but perfected – bigger, brighter, better. As C. S. Lewis described Aslan’s Country in *The Chronicles of Narnia*, “The new [Narnia] was a deeper country: every rock and flower and blade of grass looked as if it meant more.” It was like the old Narnia, but more real, as different from the old one “as a real thing is from a shadow or as waking life is from a dream.”³

Our old mortal bodies simply cannot enter this otherworldly, imperishable eternal kingdom. We must be transformed into an imperishable body to live there. Paul described this as a mystery, a theological term he used in his letters to describe things human beings in their finite minds cannot understand unless God reveals it to them.⁴ This is the mystery – we will not all “sleep” (a euphemism for death), but we will all be changed “at the last trumpet,” in a moment. This is a description of the final resurrection of the dead, which the Pharisees believed but the Sadducees didn’t and what Martha described when Jesus asked her about Lazarus rising from the dead (John 11:24).

At the end of the age, the Day of the Lord, the dead will be raised (1 Thessalonians 4:16). Some Christians will still be alive when the end of the age comes, (“we will not all sleep,”) when Christ returns. They will not have to endure a physical death but will be raised to meet Jesus in the sky (1 Thessalonians 4:17). But even those of that generation will have to undergo the bodily transformation from mortal to immortal, from perishable to imperishable, so they can live in the eternal kingdom.

Paul said this will happen “at the last trumpet.” The trumpet was used in ancient Israel to announce war but also to call the people to assemble for worship, prayer and fasting. The Old Testament describes the Day of the Lord as being announced by a great trumpet sound (Isaiah 27:13). Jesus also described His Second Coming as His coming on the clouds like the Son of Man in Daniel’s vision, with a loud trumpet call, gathering His elect from the four winds (Matthew 24:31). Whether we have already died or are still alive, His people will all be changed in the twinkling of an eye to our imperishable form so we can inherit the kingdom of God. This transformation is not gradual moral improvement or spiritual enlightenment. It is a decisive act of God, an instant transformation possible only by His power and grace.

Q: Imagine an imperishable body in a perfect world. What might that be like?

Q: How does knowing our bodies will one day be imperishable give us hope today?

1 Corinthians 15:54–57 [Read]

Talking Point 2: Through Jesus, sin loses its power because death is conquered.

Q: According to this passage, what is the victory we have in Christ?

Q: What does this tell us about the power of sin in our lives now? In eternity?

The chapter hits its climax in this section. As much as he could in human language, Paul described heavenly mysteries that are beyond human understanding. He declared with gusto the result of the Resurrection – victory over death! He framed this victory through the fulfillment of Scripture (Isaiah 25:8; Hosea 13:14). Isaiah was describing the final Messianic banquet in the day of the Lord, a feast of rich food and the finest of wines “for all peoples,” when the Lord will wipe the tears from all faces, just as described in Revelation, and He will swallow up death forever (Isaiah 25:6–8).

The Hebrew word for “swallow up” carries the connotation of sudden and total destruction, like being engulfed in flames. It was used when Aaron’s staff swallowed the staffs of Pharaoh’s magicians and when the earth swallowed up the rebellious Korah and friends. This is not just God’s raising some people from death, it is the total destruction of death forever in the final kingdom of God. There will be no more death.

Sin is the “sting” of death. The Greek word literally means the sting of a bee, scorpion, or locust that can cause death. This comes from Hosea 13:14, where God described redeeming His people from death by His grace even though they had been disobedient and followed after other gods. With the imagery of Israel as the adulterous wife and Yahweh as her faithful husband who continually forgives, the book of Hosea consistently emphasizes that Israel’s survival depends not on their faithfulness but on God’s character. It is completely the grace of His covenant love, not His people’s merit.

The “sting” is the lethal weapon that causes death. This language shows us that death is not merely a natural process; it is the consequence of sin. Sin gives death its venom because it separates humanity from God, the source of life. Since the Fall, with a few exceptions of those who were taken up by God, every human being has experienced the same end to this life. None of us can escape death. But that which once “swallowed up” all people is now itself destroyed. This is a reversal of humanity’s experience since the day sin entered the world. Death no longer holds the final word because its underlying power (sin) has been atoned on the Cross.

When Paul added that “the power of sin is the law,” he was not saying the law itself is sinful or evil but that the law exposes sin because it shows us what is right and wrong. Because God’s law names sin, it reveals guilt and renders humanity accountable, stripping away any illusion of self-righteousness. The law exposes guilt, and death executes the sentence. If it ended here, it would be a despairing reality.

But then Paul proclaimed the Gospel of the victory of Jesus Christ. This victory is not achieved by our moral effort, law-keeping, or theological knowledge. It is *given* by God (v. 57). It’s also not a victory over earthly things such as illness, failure, loss or financial struggle. It’s not about material success or prosperity. Christians will still suffer in this life. It’s a spiritual victory over sin and death. Yet it is not only about our eternal future. Paul described this victory in the present tense. It is also about victory over the power of sin in the here and now.

When we accept Christ, we are made a new creation in Him (2 Corinthians 5:17). We are given a new heart. His Spirit dwells in us (1 Corinthians 6:19–20). The slavery to sin is broken; we can walk in freedom from sin (Romans 6:16; Galatians 5:1). This doesn’t mean we are suddenly perfect and will never struggle with sin again. Sin’s power is broken, but its presence remains until the whole world is made new in the end (Romans 6–7). We are made new creations in Christ at the moment of justification, but we are not made perfect until the moment when we get our new imperishable bodies. The period between – our Christian life on earth – is a *process* of sanctification, being made more like Jesus every day (2 Corinthians 3:18). So, we can find hope in Christ’s victory over sin, not only for our eternal future but for our walk with Him every day.

People misapply the victory we have in Christ when they turn it into triumphalism – expecting freedom from suffering, instant moral perfection, or material success. Scripture teaches that Christ’s victory breaks sin’s rule and guarantees final Resurrection, but it does not remove struggle, grief or weakness in this age. We can walk in victory over sin, but we will not be perfect. Ignoring the “already/not yet” tension of both the kingdom of God and our personal sanctification can lead to spiritual pride or moral complacency. True victory in Christ produces humility, perseverance and hope, not overconfidence or unrealistic expectations.

Q: How can knowing we have victory in Christ give you the power to persevere through suffering in this life? How can it give you the power to overcome temptation?

Q: What is the difference between believing Christ has won the victory over sin and actually living as if that victory is true?

1 Corinthians 15:58 [Read]

Talking Point 3: The Resurrection gives us a mission and a purpose.

Q: In verse 58, what does the word *therefore* signify?

Q: What is the work of the Lord? How can we know our labor is not in vain?

Paul concluded this chapter with a *therefore*, which is not only a theological conclusion but a practical application of all he had been saying about the Resurrection. It points back to all the truths he established, in which we can put our hope this Easter and always:

- Christ has been raised from the dead (vv. 1–11, 20).
- Death has been defeated (vv. 26, 54–57).
- Believers will also be bodily raised (vv. 35–49)
- Sin no longer has power over us, even in the here and now (vv. 56–57)

Because we can trust in the truth of the Resurrection, believers can be steadfast and immovable. This means we can stand firm on the promises of God. We can stand firm when Satan attacks (Ephesians 6:10–18). We will not be blown around by the world, by temptation, by “every wind of doctrine,” by human cunning, or by Satan’s deceitful schemes (Ephesians 4:14). Nothing will be able to shake us. We will be able to give ourselves fully to the work of the Lord.

This is what living with an eternal perspective can do for us. It can give us confidence in our future with Jesus but also purpose in our lives in the here and now. The Christian life isn’t about sitting around and waiting for the kingdom of God to come. It’s about bringing the kingdom of God to earth. It’s not just about waiting to be made a new creation in a glorified body; it’s about living as a new creation in our broken world, living as citizens of His kingdom and shining His light into the kingdom of darkness.

Paul reassured the Corinthians that because of the Resurrection, they could give themselves fully to the work of the Lord. They could know their labor was not in vain because this life is not all there is; we are storing up treasures in heaven (Matthew 6:19–21). Paul said earlier in Corinthians that the Church is building the temple of God together, each of us laying our own “living stone” on the foundations of the apostles and the cornerstone of Christ (1 Peter 2:4–5). In the Day of the Lord, what is not built for the Lord will be burned up in the Judgment, but what is built for the Lord will survive (1 Corinthians 3:10–17).

The Resurrection guarantees that nothing done for Christ is wasted. If there were no Resurrection, Christian suffering and obedience would be meaningless (vv. 14, 32). But because Christ is risen, every act of faithfulness has eternal significance. Paul was not saying, “Work hard so you will be raised”; He was saying, “Because you will be raised, the work you do in the Lord matters.” Our hope in the Resurrection doesn’t lead us to sit around and passively wait for our resurrection. It spurs us to action, to give our lives fully to the work of the Lord. Because what we do for the kingdom in this life will last forever.

Q: How would your priorities change if you truly believed that nothing done for Christ is ever wasted?

Q: What things are you doing right now that will last into eternity? What things will not matter anymore in the kingdom of God?

Q: In what ways is God calling you to use your specific gifts to build His kingdom?

Week 4: 1 Corinthians 15:50–58 – The Victory over Death

Took

Main Point: In Christ, we have been given victory over sin and death.

First Corinthians 15 is a unified rhetorical argument centered on the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ and its implications for faith, hope, ethics and perseverance.

Lesson 1: The Crux of the Gospel

The bodily Resurrection of Jesus is the foundation of the Gospel itself, not a secondary doctrine. It is grounded in Scripture, confirmed by numerous eyewitnesses, and demonstrated in Paul's own transformed life. Without the Resurrection, the Christian message collapses, but because Christ is risen, the Gospel is true and life changing.

Lesson 2: The Hope of Our Resurrection

Denying the Resurrection makes faith futile and leaves believers without hope, but Christ's Resurrection guarantees the future resurrection of those who belong to Him. As the "firstfruits," Jesus' Resurrection inaugurates God's redemptive plan in which death will ultimately be destroyed. The Gospel offers both new life now and the promise of bodily resurrection in the age to come.

Lesson 3: The Resurrection Body

Resurrection involves transformation, not mere restoration. Our earthly bodies are like seeds that become full-grown plants. Our natural bodies will be raised as glorified, imperishable bodies. The resurrection body maintains continuity with our present identity while being perfected by the Spirit and freed from death and decay. This points to new-creation life fully conformed to the image of Christ.

Lesson 4: The Victory over Death

Through Christ's Resurrection, sin loses its power and death is decisively defeated. Believers, whether living or dead, will be transformed at Christ's return and inherit God's eternal kingdom. Because this victory is certain, Christians are called to live with steadfast hope and purpose, knowing their work in the Lord has lasting, eternal significance.

Share with someone this week about what you learned about the bodily resurrection of believers. Explain why this is a foundational core tenet of the Gospel, not a secondary theology. Explain how it affects your life in the here-and-now and your hope for your future.

CHALLENGES

THINK: Reflect on what it means to have victory in Christ. What does it mean that we are given freedom from slavery to sin? How does that play out in our day-to-day lives? How does it help us overcome temptation? Why do we still struggle with temptation? What does that tell us about our human frailty? What does it tell us about the world we live in? What does it tell us about our hope in the future kingdom of God? How can that give us a longing for His kingdom instead of this world?

PRAY for God to give you a renewed passion for working to build His kingdom in this world. Ask Him to give you a sense of purpose in what you are doing and help you to refocus your life on investing in the things that will last into eternity. Pray that the Church as a whole will work together to build His kingdom and create disciples all over the world.

ACT: Labor for the Lord. Paul reminded us that nothing we will do for the Lord will be wasted. Everything done for the Lord matters into eternity. Choose one concrete act of faithfulness you can do this week that is focused on building the kingdom of God, something that will matter into eternity, not just in this life.

¹ https://www.arizonachristian.edu/2025/11/25/crc_americans_hold_conflicted_views_of_salvation/

² Craig S. Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament* (IVP Press, 1993).

³ C. S. Lewis, *The Last Battle* (Harper One, 2000).

⁴ *ESV Study Bible* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2000).