

# Evangelical Review of Theology

A Global Forum

GENERAL EDITOR: THOMAS SCHIRRMACHER

Volume 41 · Number 2 · April 2017

Published by



for  
WORLD EVANGELICAL  
ALLIANCE  
Theological Commission

# Dying to Be the Church: 1 Corinthians 15 and Paul's Shocking Revelation about Death and Resurrection

Rob A. Fringer

IN 1 CORINTHIANS 15, Paul makes important theological claims concerning the resurrection of Christ and believers. For this reason, it has been held in high esteem by the church throughout the ages and has stood as a hallmark of hope. However, many in today's church, like those in the Corinthian church, have sought inclusion in future resurrection without significant contemplation of the implications of Christ's death and its impact on believers' identity and action in the present. For those seeking a trouble-free life in the present or a swift escape to a future celestial reality, Paul's words in 1 Corinthians will be shocking. They are full of hope, but it is a hope that is only made possible through death and through fruitful participation in Christ's mission in the present.

In this article, I will argue that this text is not just about future resurrection but provides vital information on how believers should embody Christ's life, death and transformation in the present. After a brief examination of the historical situation, I will explore

the importance of the dual themes of life and death found throughout this chapter. I will conclude with a brief exploration of 15:1–11 and Paul's profound example of death and life in the present.

## I The Historical Situation

1 Corinthians 15, while being the most theological chapter in the book, serves a very pragmatic purpose in that it addresses the fundamental issue of embodied faith, which was lacking in the Corinthians' own secular-spiritualized and individualized actions. Their salvation had evidenced itself in outrageous acts of carnality rather than Spirit-led transformation and sanctification.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See Kent Brower, *Living as God's Holy People: Holiness and Community in Paul* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2010), 80–5; Bruce Winter, 'Carnal Conduct and Sanctification in 1 Corinthians: *Simul sanctus et peccator*?' in *Holiness and Ecclesiology in the New Testament*, ed. K. E. Brower and A. Johnson (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 184–200.

Thus Paul concludes the entirety of his argument with his clearest expression of how the eschatological event of Christ's death and resurrection, and the believers' connection to Christ, has shaped and continues to shape both the present and the future, both their belief and their actions, both their dying and living.

The external impetus for Paul's immediate polemic was a group of Corinthians who denied *anastasis nekrôn* (12). Contextually it may be concluded that the Corinthians had (at least at one time) accepted Christ's resurrection since Paul spoke of the Corinthians having 'received' and 'believed' the gospel message (1–3a), which would have included teaching about Christ's resurrection (3b–5) and general (believer) resurrection (12–14).<sup>2</sup> The main question is whether the Corinthians' initial acceptance of Paul's gospel included 'bodily' resurrection or if they assume a different conclusion based on their own cultural understanding of the term.

Wright<sup>3</sup> and Segal<sup>4</sup> have convincingly shown that most Greeks and Romans believed in an afterlife (see 29) and that a dominant view consisted of some sort of immortality of the soul

apart from the body. However, Wright argues that both Jews and non-Jews only understood the concept of resurrection in terms of a bodily phenomenon; although the majority of non-Jews would have rejected the possibility of resurrection, they nevertheless would have understood the (Jewish) Pauline meaning of it.<sup>5</sup> Still, Paul's language of *anastasis nekrôn* and his polemic in verses 35–50 purport an argument around the 'bodily' aspect of resurrection, which seems to assume an acceptance of the broad idea of resurrection apart from the specific element of corporeality (see 6:14; 15:1, 11).

It is more probable that the Corinthians had either initially misunderstood Paul's teaching<sup>6</sup> or had recently come to abandon the bodily aspect of resurrection<sup>7</sup> that they formerly accepted.<sup>8</sup> Furthermore, since the thought of an embodied afterlife would have been objectionable to most (see 50),<sup>9</sup> it stands to reason that Jesus' bodily

<sup>2</sup> Pace Margaret Mitchell, 'Rhetorical Short-hand in Pauline Argumentation: The Function of "The Gospel" in the Corinthian Correspondence', in *Gospel in Paul: Studies on Corinthians, Galatians and Romans for Richard N. Longenecker*, ed. L. Ann Jervis and P. Richardson (Sheffield: Sheffield, 1994), 74.

<sup>3</sup> N. T. Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003), 32–84.

<sup>4</sup> Alan Segal, *Life after Death: A History of the Afterlife in the Religions of the West* (New York: Doubleday, 2004), 204–47.

<sup>5</sup> Wright, *Resurrection*, 82–3.

<sup>6</sup> Both Roy E. Ciampa and Brian S. Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians* (PNTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 755 and PHEME PERKINS, *First Corinthians* (Paideia; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2012), 182 allude to the possibility of a misunderstanding about Christ's bodily resurrection.

<sup>7</sup> It is not as Walter Schmithals, *Gnosticism in Corinth: An Investigation of the Letter to the Corinthians*, trans. by J. E. Steely (Nashville: Abingdon, 1971), 156–9 argues that they were Gnostic Christians who never believed in a bodily resurrection and that Paul had misunderstood the problem.

<sup>8</sup> Ronald Sider, 'St Paul's Understanding of the Nature and Significance of the Resurrection in 1 Corinthians 15:1–19', *Novum Testamentum* 19 (1977): 124–41.

<sup>9</sup> Segal, *Life after Death*, 425.

resurrection would have been at least equally as objectionable; and if the Corinthians were abandoning the idea of their own bodily resurrection, they were likely also abandoning this same element with regard to Christ's resurrection. Most scholars have argued the latter while denying the former. That is to say, they see the Corinthians as denying their own bodily resurrection while fully accepting Christ's bodily resurrection.<sup>10</sup> However, this does not adequately explain why Paul includes verses 1–11 and especially the extended 'appearance' list (5–8).

Additionally, Malcolm has convincingly argued that besides a disregard for the body there was a general disregard for the dead.<sup>11</sup> This was not unique to the Corinthians but reflected wider Greco-Roman views about the inferior state of the dead. This disdain towards death and related concepts, actions, and attitudes led to significant misunderstandings related to Christ's death and the requirements of his followers and had caused significant divisions amongst the body of Christ in Corinth.

It was one thing to be conformed to Christ's resurrection but quite another to be conformed to his death. For Paul, these two phenomena were inseparable; a person could not understand the significance of the resurrection if they did not understand and accept the significance of death, both Christ's and believers'.

## II Death and Resurrection: A Dual Theme

The Corinthians' attitude towards death helps explain what otherwise appears to be a perplexing secondary focus to resurrection in 1 Corinthians 15, namely death.<sup>12</sup> Paul uses the adjective *nekros* thirteen times,<sup>13</sup> the verb *apothnēskō* five times,<sup>14</sup> the noun *thanatos* six times,<sup>15</sup> and the euphemism *koimaō* four times.<sup>16</sup> By comparison, in regard to resurrection, Paul uses the verb *egeirō* nineteen times,<sup>17</sup> the noun *anastasis* four times,<sup>18</sup> and the euphemisms *zōopoieō* three times<sup>19</sup> and *allassō* two times.<sup>20</sup>

In order to understand the importance of Paul's 'death' language, a brief analysis of how the language is being

10 So Richard B. Hays, *First Corinthians* (IBC; Louisville: John Knox Press, 1997), 253; Dale Martin, *The Corinthian Body* (New Haven: Yale, 1995), 106; Robert Nash, *1 Corinthians* (Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentary; Macon: Smyth & Helwys, 2009), 401; Wright, *Resurrection*, 83, 322.

11 Matthew Malcolm, 'Paul and the Rhetoric of Reversal: Kerygmatic Rhetoric in the Arrangement of 1 Corinthians' (PhD thesis, University of Nottingham, 2011), 263–301. See also Christopher M. Tuckett, 'The Corinthians Who Say "There Is No Resurrection of the Dead" (1 Cor 15:12)', in *The Corinthian Correspondence*, ed. R. Bieringer (BETL 125; Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1996), 261.

12 See Insawn Saw, *Paul's Rhetoric in 1 Corinthians 15: An Analysis Utilizing the Theories of Classical Rhetoric* (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen, 1994), 182–3.

13 Vv 12 (twice), 13, 15, 16, 20, 21, 29 (twice), 32, 35, 42, 52.

14 Vv 3, 22, 31, 32, 36.

15 Vv 21, 26, 54, 55 (twice), 56.

16 Vv 6, 18, 20, 51.

17 Vv 4, 12, 13, 14, 15 (three times), 16 (twice), 17, 20, 29, 32, 35, 42, 43 (twice), 44, 52.

18 Vv 12, 13, 21, 42.

19 Vv 22, 36, 45.

20 Vv 51, 52.

used throughout the epistle becomes necessary. The adjective *nekros* is only found in chapter 15 and is always used in correlation with resurrection (e.g. *anastatis nekrôn; nekroi ouk egeirontai*) and always refers to those who have physically died, irrespective of their standing in Christ. Martin has argued for the translation 'corpse', which was common in classical Greek.<sup>21</sup> As an adjective, it does appear to need a qualifier and this qualifier is likely either 'person' or 'body'. Therefore, the translation 'corpse' or 'body' is justified. Paul uses *nekros* to stress the bodily aspect of the resurrection.

Paul's use of *apothnēskō* is much more nuanced. It can refer to literal physical death for both believers and non-believers (9:15; 15:32), and is especially used for Christ's death (8:11; 15:3). Additionally, it can be used metaphorically, as when Paul says, 'I die every day!' (15:31). These words are not a reference to physical death. Nor are they hyperbole, a way of saying that his life is very difficult. Rather, Paul's *apothnēskō* is because of and in line with Christ's *apothnēskō*.

The last two uses of *apothnēskō* are more difficult to interpret: 'For as all die in Adam, so all will be made alive in Christ' (15:22) and 'What you sow does not come to life unless it dies' (15:36). Both could be construed as references to physical death. However, the context does not warrant this. The former is part of an Adam/Christ typology and the latter an elaborate metaphor concerning the 'changed' resurrection body, and both are making a similar

point. Those in Adam are marked by death, in the present and in the future, both physically and spiritually.

Nevertheless, those in Christ are made alive (*zōopoieō*) and freed from the finality of death both in the present and the future. Likewise, the seed which must die does so in order to be made alive (*zōopoieō*), changed from death to life in both the present and the future.

This is an important point in Paul's elaborate argument. He is not saying that all believers must or will die a physical death. In fact, he says the exact opposite in 15:51. Instead, Paul alludes to another type of death that all believers must undergo. It is a death that Paul has undergone and continues to experience daily (15:31); it is a death like Christ's. It is a death to his own carnal desires, whether noble or self-serving. It is a death to the constraints of the present evil age, which allows for the embrace of a new, eschatological age.

Paul's use of *thanatos* is also quite versatile and closely aligns with *zōopoieō* in regard to physical death in general (3:22; 11:26). Yet *thanatos* takes on a life of its own in chapter 15 and is personified similarly to how Paul personifies sin in Romans 5:12–8:3.<sup>22</sup> Paul describes 'Death' in anthropomorphic terms as one who has come through Adam (15:21) and as an enemy waiting to be destroyed (15:26). Likewise, the poetic discourse of 15:54–56 (cf. Is 25:8; Hos 13:14) is a mocking of Death, who has lost all power as a result of Christ's resurrection and the im-

<sup>21</sup> Dale Martin, *The Corinthian Body* (New Haven: Yale, 1995), 107–8; see p. 271 n. 9 for a list of Greek sources.

<sup>22</sup> See James D. G. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle* (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1998), 111–14.

pending resurrection of believers.

Just as death to self is a plausible reality in the present through Christ, so too is the power of resurrection in the life of the believer. In effect, believers defeat the finality of physical death in the present as they acknowledge and live out the lordship of Christ. This too is part of the new eschatological reality wrought through Christ.

Paul uses the word *koimaō*, meaning to 'fall asleep', as a euphemism for death. However, for Paul, it is not synonymous with *apothnēskō*. The former is always used to refer to actual physical death, *but* only of believers in Christ. This is because *koimaō* 'carries with it the expectation of *awaking to a new dawn and a new day*, i.e., the expectation of resurrection and the gift of renewed life and vigour'.<sup>23</sup>

Therefore, it was to believers (*adelphois*)<sup>24</sup> that Christ appeared, both those living and those who had *koimaō* (15:6). Paul speaks about those who have *koimaō* 'in Christ' (15:18) and refers to Christ as the first fruit of resurrection for those who have *koimaō* (15:20). Likewise, when speaking about marriage, Paul says it is the woman who is 'in the Lord' who is free to remarry only after her husband, who was also 'in the Lord',<sup>25</sup> falls asleep

(*koimaō*), as long as her next marriage is also 'in the Lord' (7:39).

Therefore, when Paul says that 'we will not all die (*koimaō*), but we will all be changed' (15:51), he means that *not* all believers will face a physical death. However, this does not negate the need for believers to experience some type of death (*apothnēskō*) in order to be made alive in Christ (15:36).

Paul's use of *apollumi* (to perish or destroy, used six times<sup>26</sup>) needs also to be evaluated. Similar to *apothnēskō* and *thanatos*, it can pertain to actual physical death or destruction (10:9, 10). It can also refer to the destruction of abstract phenomena such as wisdom (1:19). However, unlike the others, it is exclusively reserved for unbelievers, those who have no hope. Thus, Paul can say the gospel is 'foolishness to those who are perishing' (1:18), in reference to unbelievers. Likewise, when he speaks of believers being destroyed by other believers (8:11), it is a reference to the shattering of their faith.

The latter meaning helps clarify 15:18, 'Then those who have died (*koimēthentes*) in Christ have perished (*apólonto*).' Paul argues that if Christ has not been bodily raised then living believers are still in sin (15:17) and are no different from unbelievers. Furthermore, if Christ has not been bodily raised, then believers who have fallen asleep are actually dead, without hope.

### III Paul's Example: A Brief Exploration of 15:1–11

The opening section of chapter 15 (verses 1–11) is of utmost importance

23 Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (NIGTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 1220, emphasis his.

24 Paul regularly uses *adelphos* as a reference to those who are in Christ. See H. von Soden, 'Adelphos', *TDNT* 1:143–46.

25 That the deceased husband is a believer is clear from the passage. So Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 355 n. 37. Such is also the case in 11:30.

26 1 Cor 1:18, 19; 8:11; 10:9, 10; 15:18.

in understanding how Paul employs death and resurrection to correct Corinthian misunderstandings of both. Unfortunately, many scholars have been distracted because they mistakenly take this section (especially 8–10) as part of an apostolic apologia.

For Bailey,<sup>27</sup> Fee,<sup>28</sup> Fitzmyer,<sup>29</sup> and others, Paul's autobiographic insertion adds little to the current pericope, or to the chapter as a whole. Rather, it highlights an underlying strife and demonstrates that Paul is willing to insert and assert his authority in the midst of important theological and ethical arguments, although these insertions distract from the main issue (unless apostolic apologia is the main issue<sup>30</sup>).

However, when apostolic apologia is set aside, the importance of this pericope can be seen. This pericope prepares Paul's audience for his discussion concerning death and resurrection and Paul's autobiographical statement provides an example for the Corinthians to emulate in the present.

It has been recognized that the *ōpsthē* references (5–8) form a chiasm based on grammatical structure and

lexical repetition. However, there is a larger chiasm encompassing the entire pericope (1–11), which is based on thematic and semantic structure.<sup>31</sup> See Figure 1 on the next page.

Verses 1 and 11 (A/A<sup>1</sup>) frame this section around the themes of proclamation and acceptance. Paul's use of *gnōrizō* is meant to do more than simply 'remind' the Corinthians of a previously accepted kerygma<sup>32</sup> or to introduce new information about the gospel and resurrection.<sup>33</sup> The only other place Paul uses this form of *gnōrizō* to open an argument is in Galatians 1:11, where he also speaks about his call/conversion and in which he 'reveals' information about his gospel.<sup>34</sup>

Likewise, Paul begins this section by setting his argument in the form of a revelatory proclamation. In so doing, Paul elevates the conversation and highlights the divine power behind the gospel he and others proclaim and behind the Corinthians' previous acceptance of this same gospel. He is able to remind the Corinthians that *to euangelion o euēgelisamēn* is a 'demonstration of the Spirit and of power' (2:5) and not a demonstration of 'human wisdom' (2:4–5; cf. 1:17). Furthermore, *gnōrizō* should be understood as introducing

<sup>27</sup> Kenneth E. Bailey, *Paul through Mediterranean Eyes: Cultural Studies in 1 Corinthians* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2011), 33–53.

<sup>28</sup> Fee, *First Corinthians*, 719.

<sup>29</sup> Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *First Corinthians: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB; New Haven: Yale, 2008), 551.

<sup>30</sup> This seems to be the claim of PHEME Perkins when she writes, 'The logic of Paul's construction is clearer if one presumes that he is deliberately trying to extend *apostolos* beyond the circle of the twelve' [*Resurrection: New Testament Witness and Contemporary Reflection* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1984), 200, see also 221].

<sup>31</sup> See Bailey, *Paul*, 422.

<sup>32</sup> Pace Fee, *First Corinthians*, 719; and Fitzmyer, *First Corinthians*, 540, 544.

<sup>33</sup> Pace Walter Radl, 'Der Sinn von *gnōrizō* in 1 Kor 15,1', *BZ* 28 (1984): 243–45. Nor is it a 'ceremonious introduction', pace Hans Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians: A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Hermeneia; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975), 250.

<sup>34</sup> See Timothy Churchill, *Divine Initiative and the Christology of the Damascus Road Encounter* (Eugene: Pickwick, 2010), 129.



Figure 1

- A <sup>1</sup> Now I should remind you, brothers and sisters, of the good news that I proclaimed to you, which you in turn received,
- B in which also you stand, <sup>2</sup> through which also you are being saved, if you hold firmly to the message that I proclaimed to you—unless you have come to believe in vain.
- C <sup>3</sup> For I handed on to you as of first importance what I in turn had received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, <sup>4</sup> and that he was buried, and that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures, <sup>5</sup> and that he appeared to Cephas,
- D then to the twelve.
- E <sup>6</sup> Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers and sisters at one time,
- F most of whom are still alive,
- F<sup>1</sup> though some have died.
- E<sup>1</sup> <sup>7</sup> Then he appeared to James,
- D<sup>1</sup> then to all the apostles.
- C<sup>1</sup> <sup>8</sup> Last of all, as to someone untimely born, he appeared also to me. <sup>9</sup> For I am the least of the apostles, unfit 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,
- B<sup>1</sup> and his grace towards me has not been in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them—though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me.
- A<sup>1</sup> <sup>11</sup> Whether then it was I or they, so we proclaim and so you have come to believe.

the whole of Paul's argument (15:1–58) and not just this pericope.

While much of the information introduced in verses 12–58 (esp. 35–58) is new to the Corinthians, Paul presents it as a continuation of the revealed gospel, which they have already received.<sup>35</sup> It is part of the eschatological reality to which they now belong.

The kerygma and extended appearance list, which includes Paul's autobiography (3–10a), form the climax of this pericope and begin the dual themes of death and resurrection that are explicated in verses 12–58.

Argumentation over which phrases

are Pauline and which are pre-Pauline creedal material is not the focus of this reading and cannot occupy much space. It is likely verses 3b–5 form the traditional material with *hoti* acting as quotation marks and *kai* adding emphasis and that verses 6–8 are Pauline additions,<sup>36</sup> with verses 9–10 being definite additions.

<sup>35</sup> Similarly Mitchell, 'Rhetorical Shorthand', 74.

<sup>36</sup> So Jerome Murphy-O'Connor, 'Tradition and Redaction in 1 Cor 15:3–7', *CBQ* 43 (1981): 582–89. Birger Gerhardsson, 'Evidence for Christ's Resurrection According to Paul: 1 Cor 15:1–11', in *Neotestamentica et Philonica: Studies in Honor of Peder Borgen* (NovTSup 106; Leiden: Brill, 2003), 79–80, argues that all of verses 3–8a (minus v. 6b) is a quotation by Paul of what he had previously told them and that this is signalled by the *tini logō* in v. 2.



It is also likely that verses 3b–5 represent the agreed-upon premises of the Corinthians.<sup>37</sup> Paul is arguing from a common held belief as a platform for what follows in verses 6–10. This does not mean that the pre-Pauline material is insignificant; quite the contrary. Reference to Christ's death and resurrection is of 'first importance' (v. 3).<sup>38</sup>

Since Paul's audience is rejecting a bodily resurrection, not resurrection in general, it is odd that Paul does not include reference to Christ's body directly or via the empty tomb tradition.<sup>39</sup> It is obvious that Paul had no problem adding to the tradition (see 6–8). However, Paul intentionally leaves this out in order to emphasise the dual themes of death and resurrection that are important to his argument.

This does not mean that bodily resurrection is unimportant. This is indeed the surface issue that stimulates this very discussion. Nevertheless, Paul's concern is not just for correcting the Corinthians' erroneous theology. Throughout this epistle, Paul has been trying to shape their identity to motivate them towards genuine and lasting transformation in the present.

In essence, Paul is trying to help them embrace their new eschatological identity as those who have died to their old life and have been raised to

new life. This necessitates Paul's theologically profound discussion concerning death and resurrection, of which Christ's example is the prototype.

Many hypotheses have been set forth concerning the six resurrection appearances and the order in which they appear.<sup>40</sup> Important here is the recognition that the list begins with Cephas and ends with Paul. Peter and his position are known in Corinth (1:12) and Paul is the founder of this church (4:14–15). Since Paul's apostleship is not in question, their unified testimony about Christ's resurrection would have been significant enough proof of the resurrection (cf. Deut 17:6; 19:15).

Additionally, Paul's mention of the five hundred witnesses with the extended description 'most of whom are still alive, though some have died' (v. 6) occupies a climactic position in these verses (F/F<sup>1</sup>). Murphy-O'Connor has recognized this climax, contending that this best served Paul's apologetic purpose, not in arguing for his apostleship but for the reality of resurrection.<sup>41</sup> Therefore, he places the emphasis on the witnesses who are still living rather than on those who have died.

This is a common reading for those who see Paul as addressing the issue of bodily resurrection (Fee, Hays, Thiselton, Fitzmyer, Ciampa and Rosner)<sup>42</sup>. Those 'still alive' are seen as authoritative witnesses to the resurrection. On the other hand, those who believe

<sup>37</sup> Anders Eriksson, *Traditions and Rhetorical Proof: Pauline Argumentation in 1 Corinthians* (ConBNT 29; Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1998), 73–96.

<sup>38</sup> The reference to burial serves as proof of death and references to appearances serve as proof of resurrection. In this way, Paul stresses the dual themes of death and resurrection.

<sup>39</sup> Wright, *Resurrection*, 321 argues that this is implicit in the resurrection language.

<sup>40</sup> For detailed analysis see Thiselton, *First Corinthians*, 1198–1208.

<sup>41</sup> Murphy-O'Connor, 'Tradition', 588–89.

<sup>42</sup> Fee, *First Corinthians*, 730–31; Hays, *First Corinthians*, 257; Thiselton, *First Corinthians*, 1205–06; Fitzmyer, *First Corinthians*, 550; Ciampa and Rosner, *First Corinthians*, 749–50.

Paul is addressing a denial of the futurity of resurrection (Barth, Conzelmann, Tuckett, Lindemann, Garland)<sup>43</sup> emphasise 'some have died' and the reality that death precedes resurrection.

However, this may not be an either/or but rather a both/and situation. As noted above, the language of death and of resurrection share equal footing. This reference provides Paul with another opportunity to stress both death and resurrection.

This explanation may better explain why Paul includes his extended autobiography in reference to Christ's appearance to him. When verses 8–10b (C<sup>1</sup>) are examined closely, there are some striking parallels with verses 3–5a (C). Paul's description of himself as *ektrōma* (8) is difficult to interpret<sup>44</sup> and yet is arguably part of his 'death' language.

In scripture it is only found here and three times in the LXX (Num 12:12; Ecc 6:3; Job 3:16), where it always refers to a still-born child, and thus to literal physical death. Outside of scripture, its use is well attested in Greek literature in reference to miscarriages, abortions and possibly 'untimely births'.<sup>45</sup>

The last option, at first, appears viable. When taken together with Paul's use of *eschatos*, *ektrōma* could

be a reference to the lateness of Paul's new birth.<sup>46</sup> Still, Mitchell has shown that the predominant use of the word speaks more to pre-mature birth than late birth.<sup>47</sup> Nevertheless, Mitchell's own apostolic apologia reading is not convincing, seeing *ektrōma* as referring to Paul's understanding of being rejected and cast aside from among the apostles.<sup>48</sup> Likewise, seeing *ektrōma* as some type of derisive epithet given by Paul's critics requires the postulation of a rift between Paul and the Corinthians, for which there is no substantial evidence.<sup>49</sup>

More profitable are the readings that give credence to the 'death' aspect of *ektrōma*. Hollander and van der Hout see Paul's reference as self-deprecating, referring to his deplorable (death-like) state prior to his conversion when he persecuted the church; his unworthiness to be an apostle thus highlights the grace of God in calling him.<sup>50</sup> Garland, relying heavily on Hollander and van der Hout, but seeing Paul's self-abasement as sincere, writes, 'Before his call and conversion he was dead, but he was miraculously given life through God's grace.'<sup>51</sup>

<sup>43</sup> Karl Barth, *The Resurrection of the Dead*, trans. H. J. Stenning (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1933), 151; Conzelmann, *First Corinthians*, 257–58; Tuckett, 'Corinthians Who Say', 263; Andreas Lindemann, *Der erste Korintherbrief* (HNT 9/1; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2000), 333; David Garland, *1 Corinthians* (BECNT; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), 689–90.

<sup>44</sup> See Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 691–93 for a survey of prominent views.

<sup>45</sup> Schneider, 'Ektrōma', TDNT 2:465–66.

<sup>46</sup> Ciampa and Rosner, *First Corinthians*, 751.

<sup>47</sup> Matthew Mitchell, 'Reexamining the "Aborted Apostle": An Exploration of Paul's Self-Description in 1 Corinthians 15:8', JNST 25.4 (2003): 469–85.

<sup>48</sup> Mitchell, 'Reexamining', 482–85.

<sup>49</sup> Pace Fee, *First Corinthians*, 733–34; Hays, *First Corinthians*, 258.

<sup>50</sup> H. W. Hollander and G. E. van der Hout, 'The Apostle Paul Calling Himself an Abortion: 1 Cor. 15:8 within the Context of 1 Cor. 15:8–10', *Novum Testamentum* 38 (1996): 224–36. Yet they too see Paul as using this to defend his apostolic position.

<sup>51</sup> Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 693; see also Fitz-

However, Paul's use of *ektrōma* to reference his own figurative death is not necessarily limited to his past life. After all, he writes, 'I die every day!' (15:31), and from the immediate context it can confidently be stated that Paul sees God's grace as continually working in and through him (15:10) and not just at the moment of his call/conversion. Instead, it seems more plausible that Paul uses his own situation to emphasise the necessity of death prior to resurrection. He emphasises the necessity of *apothnēskō* (not *koimaō*) in the life of the believer so that they will not *apollumi* at the hand of *thanatos*, and this is part of their present and future hope for *anastasis nekrōn*.

Here, Paul's own example of a transforming grace both received and lived out (8–10) provides a corrective to the Corinthians whose lives are marked by God's grace and yet appear to lack the necessary transformation, which should serve as proof of God's grace in their lives. Paul reveals this contrast by stating that his faith is not in vain whereas the Corinthians' faith is dubious at best (B/B<sup>1</sup>). In this way, and through his own example, Paul calls the Corinthians to the same Christ-centred death, a death that leads to resurrection.

In Malcolm's words, 'There can be no leaping ahead of present labour to manifest glory and immortality. Rather, the one pre-requisite for resurrection immortality is the inhabitation of death—Christ's death—in the

present.'<sup>52</sup> It is not enough for them to accept the gospel or to believe in the death and resurrection of Christ; they need to embody it and be transformed by it, both individually and corporately.

This takes place as they die to themselves, to their own kind of wisdom, their own kind of power, their own kind of spirituality; as they die to the present evil age and as they presently live under the resurrection power of Christ as part of a new eschatological people of God. By embodying the death and resurrection of Christ in the present, they are assuring that their faith is not without result (15:14) and that their labour in the Lord is not in vain (15:58).

#### IV Conclusion: The 'Shocking' Revelation

Paul's opening words in chapter 15 have set the stage for the shocking revelation that both death and resurrection are part of the believers' present calling. It is only as the Corinthians embrace the sacrificial death of Christ in the present that they are also able to embrace the transforming resurrection of Christ in the present. Paul's own life is an example of both these realities, and he invites the Corinthians to walk with him in death so as to walk with him in life, both in the present and in the future.

This same truth rings true for the church today. There is no resurrection apart from death and there is no hope other than the hope of sharing in both the death and resurrection of our

myer, *First Corinthians*, 552; Wright, *Resurrection*, 327–29.

<sup>52</sup> Malcolm, 'Paul and the Rhetoric of Reversal', 289.

Lord and Saviour both now and forevermore. The irony of my title is that it speaks of Paul's words as 'shocking'. Quite the contrary. Paul's words are a reminder of Jesus's words: 'If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will save it' (Lk 9:23–24 NRSV).

The most shocking aspect of these words of Jesus and Paul is that they have often been downplayed and ignored by those who call themselves followers of Christ. Paul's words are a

warning of the implication of following after a cost-less gospel; we do not want to be a divided and ineffective church! Likewise, they are a reminder of both the joys and costs of following a crucified Saviour.

May our lives emulate Paul's as he emulates Christ (1 Cor 11:1), both in our daily dying to self and in our daily living in and for Christ. May we experience both the sacrifice of Christ's death and the incredible joy, peace and power of the resurrection of Christ. In other words, may we be 'dying to be the church'.

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**Mary Patton Baker** is a Deacon at All Souls Anglican Church in Wheaton, IL, involved in ministries of teaching, discipleship, and spiritual formation.

ISBN 9781842279281 (e.9781842279298) / 260pp / 229mm x 152mm / £29.99

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