50 I tell you this, brothers: flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. 51 Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall 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 shall be changed. 53 For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality. 54 When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass 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.

It is at this point Paul concludes his argument concerning the resurrection of the dead with what can only be described as an incredible crescendo. The reality of the resurrection of the dead has incredible implications, for it means that the Gospel of Jesus is true and the impacts of His resurrection will lead to this great reality. What is that reality? It is transformation.  
 Thus, Paul starts with what he has just been describing concerning the new body. He begins with reiterating his point in two ways. The first is flesh and blood, that is, the bodies which we currently manifest which are broken by sin, cannot inherit the kingdom of God. There is a truth that our current physical bodies are not enough, but this is not because of physical vs spiritual, but because of the effects of sin on the physical realm.  
 Thus he states it again by reflecting on what was said previously, the perishable cannot inherit the imperishable. That which is decaying cannot inherit that which persists. When something has been corrupted that corruption needs to be replaced before any kind of healing can truly begin. So it is in verse 50 that Paul sums up all the arguments since verse 35 in order to lead us to the new reality.  
 What is that new reality? Verse 51 begins with Behold! In this Paul is urging his readers to consider, see, understand. What is it they are to consider? What to understand? Indeed a mystery. Mystery here does not necessarily denote something which was only revealed to Paul, but instead it often reflects on revelation in Christ. Thus, what was once a mystery is now revealed in the person of Jesus and His Gospel.  
 Thus, the mystery is that we shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed. To sleep, according to Paul, is the state of the believer who has passed away. As we have seen previously for Paul they are merely asleep because the consummation of the Kingdom of God will bring them back into a new reality. Thus Paul makes the declaration not all Christians will pass away, but there will be some who are alive at the paraousia.  
 But what is interesting to consider is that there is a transformation. Indeed, whatever body we had inhabited, even those who have not died will have their bodies transformed as well. This was a final contention for certain Corinthians who rejected the resurrection. Paul has answered the question about the dead, but what about the living? Paul now declares they will be transformed as well.   
 Paul continues into verse 52 describing what will occur. When the event takes place it will be immediate. There will not be a long progress, but the transformation will be instantaneous. The sounding of the trumpet is a familiar theme in the Old Testament which precedes an announcement and event. For this to be the last trumpet is to indicate the end of this world as we know it and the start of something new. In this moment, at the last trumpet, will come the transformation where the dead will be raised imperishable and those who are still alive will be transformed.  
 In verses 53-54 Paul states, again, the point. This body is corrupted by sin which leads to perishing. Thus we must be given bodies which are not corrupted, which are imperishable. Something to notice is that the body as a whole is not the issue. The issue is what causes the body to decay, to break down, and perish. What needs to happen with our bodies is an attribute must be taken away, and a new one must replace it. That is, mortality must be replaced by immortality.  
 At this point Paul begins to quote two places from the Scripture. The first is Isaiah 25:8, where death is described as being destroyed. The second is in Hosea 13:14. The first is a statement of fact, this is what occurs with death, it is no more, it itself tastes death and is defeated. The second mocks death. As though death were personified and being taunted. For when death is undone, then the victory of death is no more, and the sting of death is no more. That which causes the separation of the body and soul, which is sin, is no more.  
 Indeed, this is what Paul says in verse 56. The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. What does this mean? When we consider what was written in Romans we understand that the wages of sin is death. It is through sinning that we experience death. [[1]](#footnote-1)  
 Yet, there is the reality that if there were no law there would be no power to this sin. For the Law states the ramifications of what happens if we disobey. If there were no moral Law, if there were no moral Law giver, then there would be no problem with living however we want. As it is, there is a Law which shows us the difference between good and evil, how we are to act versus how we aren’t, and as such, like our modern day laws, this law is what powers the repercussions. This does not mean the Law is bad, in fact, the law is very good because it shows us good and evil, right and wrong. Instead the law simply shows us ourselves, that we are fallen and deserve to be finite.  
 Yet, despite this, despite the sin which we face, and ultimately the law and law-giver who is good and holy and perfect, we can still have victory over it all. The victory is not through abandoning the law, or living however we want. Instead, the victory is found in the person of Jesus Christ who has conquered death through faithfulness and obedience to His Father, even to the point of death. Thus, through the perfect son of God, through His life, death, and resurrection, we attain the victory which only He deserves.

58 Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.  
   
 I wanted to separate this verse to emphasize how it closes the whole of chapter 15, and in a way, the rest of I Corinthians. Chapter 15 has given us the strongest argument concerning the resurrection, and as such the strongest reason to be faithful to Christ. Throughout the letter Paul has emphasized the need for obedience in this life, not being duped by beliefs that would justify any kind of living.  
 So it is, because we have victory in Christ, because sin and death will be abolished because of Jesus, when we live this life, the sacrifices for Christ are not in vain. This world will continue to urge us toward doing whatever we want whenever we want. In Christ, however, we know that there is a Way to live which is in step with Christ and His Spirit given to us.  
 Our belief is not in vain. We are encouraged at the end to remain steadfast and immovable to the truth of the Gospel and all that the Gospel entails. Yes, the salvation of our souls from the complete separation of the body, but also the newness which comes in the life we live here and now. Not for our own glory, not for our own esteem, but because it honors Jesus who has conquered. Thus, our belief is not in vain, our actions are not in vain against this dark world. Instead, we can remain faithful regardless of whatever way seems right to the world, and regardless if the darkness of the world seems as though it will win in the end. We know, however, the ultimate victory will come in a twinkling of an eye at the last trumpet when Christ returns, as such, Paul urges us at the end, be faithful, it is not in vain.  
  
Main Point: The main point of these verses are to conclude the whole of chapter 15, and in a way, the rest of the letter as well. In the end, the climactic conclusion is the reality which our hope as Christians dwell. Not in the victory we attain by our hands, but the victory we attain through the person of Jesus Christ. It is through Him sin and death will be undone, and on that day of His return the transformation will be so instantaneous that all the powers of darkness and hell will seem a minor thing compared to the ultimate victory in Christ. Thus, be steadfast, be immovable, in the truth of Christ, knowing none of it is in vain.  
  
Application Points  
1). Be Steadfast for all will be made New: There is a reason why these verses have comforted us over the last 2000 years. There is a reason why, when any Christian falls asleep, we come to these verses to comfort those who are left behind. From these verses we are given a glimpse of part of the mystery of redemption, in which all shall be made new when Jesus returns. Thus, in the midst of our grief in this world, these verses provide us comfort precisely because of the truth they proclaim to each of us.  
 Indeed, the reality of our present situation seems somewhat dire. We all experience the pangs of sin and death. We all experience the repercussions of not only living in a fallen world, but delighting in that world. The devastation of the body, the brokenness we experience, is the result of sin in this world. Death comes to us because we are broken, in sin, and worthy of such a judgment as this.  
 Indeed, Paul declares all of these same things in another letter written to the Romans. There he spends a greater amount of time detailing the reality of sinfulness in this world. Indeed, in the first three chapters of Romans all are condemned before God with no escape. The Gentile who has sacrificed the true God for nature and their personal desires, the Jew who was unable to abide by the law of God.  
 It doesn’t matter where we come from. The ultimate reality of all of us is that we are sinners destined to die because of sin. Indeed, I find it interesting the way Paul describes it here in verse 56. He says, “The sting of death is sin.”  
 Imagine, if one will, a scorpion. Being stung by the scorpion will cause whatever toxins and venom to enter into our bodies, leading to serious pain at best, and death at worst. So it is with death. Death is like a scorpion, and the stinger is the sin which we commit. The sting which brings forth the corruption is found in the immorality and sinfulness we do each day. As such, like the scorpions sting which brings about the toxic conclusion, so the sting of death which is sin will always lead to death as the end result.  
 The question we need to ask is how can we be healed of this. The problem is great. For not only do we need the toxins to be removed from our bodies, but we also need new bodies because the corruption has already set in. Even a little sin leads to a complete transformation of the image of God which we were purposed to be being undone.  
 Thus the issue is greater than a mere removal of the toxin. There comes a point when amputation must occur, when the body has so experienced the decay that there is no hope other than to cast off. So it is with sin, the problem is the whole of the whole body is in need of restoration, the whole of the brokenness needs to be set aside, the poison must be drawn out, but so too must the body be made new.  
 How can this even occur? What possible hope do we have of anything like this occurring? The answer is a great hope, for in the victory of Christ comes both. That is, the poison, the toxin, is withdrawn, and the body transformed by the power of God at His second coming.  
 It is no wonder, then, that the battle which we all face against sin is so serious. It is no wonder, then, why Paul would conclude it all by encouraging the Corinthians, and all Christians everywhere, to be steadfast, to be immovable, to always be abounding in the work of the Lord knowing it is not in vain. To be steadfast to the truth by living in accordance with Christ.  
 For how can we, who believe what we believe about the overwhelming power of Jesus, honestly say that we are true followers of Jesus if we willingly allow death to sting us by continuing to sin? How can we who are destined for eternal life live as though sin and death is all that there is? Do we not know the great victory we have in Christ? Are we unaware of the reality of living in accordance with Him, desiring Him, and allowing His great and true Light to conquer all the darkness both within and without?  
 This has been part of the argument since the beginning for Paul to the Corinthians. The idea of complete and total liberty is anathema to Paul. We are not saved in order to keep on sinning, or to live however we want. Instead, we are saved from being slaves of one kind, that is sin, to being slaves to Christ.  
 20 For when you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness. 21 But what fruit were you getting at that time from the things of which you are now ashamed? For the end of those things is death. 22 But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the fruit you get leads to sanctification and its end, eternal life. 23 For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. Romans 6:20-23  
 Through the redemption given by Christ we have been set free from being slaves of sin. However, we have not been set free from our responsibility as human beings made in the image of God. We are still to be responsible with the lives He has given us, to cling to what is good and abhor evil. We are still to live according to His precepts, His ways, His desires, and align ourselves to Him. Not to be ensnared by ourselves and our own passions, for what did they lead to but death? Instead, we are to live to Christ, for He alone provides life.  
 Everything hangs in the balance when it comes to Jesus. It is all grounded on what He has accomplished through His life, death, and resurrection. It is not our victory as though we were the ones who conquered death with our hands. No, Christ has conquered sin and death through perfect obedience to His Father.  
 Indeed, and as Paul has shown throughout this chapter, we are bound to the fate of the first man through sin and death. However, in Christ we are redeemed and can be made new. When we place ourselves on the scales of sin and righteousness we are found wanting, but when Christ is placed on the same scales sin is no more. In our place, then, has come righteousness through Christ.  
 Hence Paul, in Romans, can also say, “18 Therefore, as one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men. 19 For as by the one man’s disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man’s obedience the many will be made righteous. 20 Now the law came in to increase the trespass, but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more, 21 so that, as sin reigned in death, grace also might reign through righteousness leading to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.” Romans 5:18-21  
 Is it any wonder, then, at the end of the letter in which Paul has had to chastise the Corinthians for their understanding of the resurrection, of morality, of righteousness, of wisdom, that he should tell them to be steadfast and immovable in Jesus? Not to the beliefs which they currently have, but to the person of Jesus Christ? That all the work we labor for, all the righteousness we seek, all the desires for holiness, all the times of obedience as being slaves to Christ, that none of these things are in vain? That they have purpose and meaning? That, in the end, Jesus conquers all and because of Him none of it is in vain?  
 As we live our lives we can continue to hear the same words spoken by Paul whispered to us throughout the ages. For the last two thousand years, believers have come and gone, yet this is what they continue to whisper to us. “be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.”  
 All the sinners turned into saints by God’s grace. All the apostles. Christians we know from history, and those whom history has forgotten. They all still say this same thing. They all still echo throughout history, urging us to continue on in faithfulness. To continue to trust in God through Jesus Christ. They all still say, “be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.”  
 As we live, let us not forget the salvation which comes through Christ. This Salvation is eternal life, and that this eternal life begins with the first fruits of transformation which comes through our obedience to righteousness. Let us seek to live in righteousness, turning away from sin and deceit, knowing that as we do it is not in vain.  
 For there is coming a time when in an instant all will be made new. When all the corruption will be put aside, and the great God we have served will by His power transform us into more. For we are beings corrupted, but He will, in that moment, in the twinkling of an eye, make us incorruptible through Jesus Christ. All those who belong to Him, both living and dead, transformed forever where the sting of death can no longer reach us.  
 We have a great hope. The hope is in Jesus. Let us continue to seek Him and His righteousness knowing that in Him we find this great salvation. That it is through Jesus we are saved, and as such, He alone deserves our ultimate allegiance in this life and into eternity. Know too, that this allegiance is not in vain, but will lead to all things being made new.

1. Like the scorpion that stings and leaves its venom, so it is with sin. Sin stings, and in it brings corruption. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)