

June 5th, 2022

The Last Enemy

1 Corinthians 15:50-57

How and what kind?

Last time we were together, Paul answered two questions regarding the resurrection of the dead. **First** it's asked in v.35 "*How* are the dead raised?" He shows the foolishness of this question by pointing to how God built the world. God appointed seeds to die, be buried, and then raised up to new life. The same is true with fallen man. We will die, be buried, but we will be raised up to life by the power of God. The **second** question is "With *what kind* of body do they come?" Paul spends most of his time answering this question. We will have a body to be sure, but it will be unimaginably better: imperishable, full of glory and power, bearing the image of the Man of Heaven. Meaning, our future bodies will be like the body of the risen Christ.

The Last Enemy

This morning Paul goes further. Not only will we receive a new heavenly body, but death *itself* will be finally destroyed. Beloved, we have *but* tasted the smallest portion of our redemption. The great feast is *still* to come. The well-aged wine is *still* to be poured. The dark veil that is cast over the nations is *still* to be swallowed up. The tears are *still* waiting be wiped away from our faces. When Jesus returns, our Spiritual David will slay the Giant, He will cut off death's head, and it will never rise again. "O death, I will be thy plagues; O grave, I will be thy destruction" (**Hosea 13:14**¹). He will throw both Death and Hades into the lake of fire (**Revelation 20:14**). *Then* our redemption will be complete. Then Christ will have finished the work He came to accomplish.

¹ KJV

The Big Idea...

It is necessary on the Last Day that Jesus Christ destroy death (specifically the death of our bodies) otherwise His work of redemption is incomplete

☆ Our Doctrine

☆ Our Duty

☆ Our Delight

I. Our Doctrine

Flesh and blood?

Please look at **v.50** “I tell you this, brothers: flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God...” Stop. This verse has been wrongly interpreted by some. Paul is *not* saying the same thing as Jesus in **John 3:3**, Jesus said “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.” There Jesus is saying that *an unregenerate person* cannot inherit the kingdom. That’s *not* Paul’s focus here. Paul is saying “flesh and blood” cannot inherit. The phrase “flesh and blood” does not refer to our sinful nature. In fact the phrase “flesh and blood” never refers to our sinful nature.² In **Hebrews 2:14** we see the author use this exact phrase to refer to the physicality of our bodies. “Since therefore the children [*that’s us*] share in flesh and blood, he [*Jesus*] himself *likewise partook of the same things.*” Flesh and blood manifestly do not mean the sinful nature because Jesus did not partake in sin. No, by this phrase Paul means that the present condition of our physical bodies cannot inherit the kingdom.

² Charles Hodge, *A Commentary on 1 & 2 Corinthians*, (Carlisle, PA.,: The Banner of Truth Trust, Reprint 2018), pg. 353

Which Kingdom?

Which kingdom is Paul referring to? You have to understand that when Scripture talks about the kingdom, the context determines which kingdom is meant.

1. Sometimes *Kingdom* refers to God's absolute sovereignty over all things. **Psalm 103:19** "The Lord has established his throne in the heavens, and *his kingdom rules over all.*"³
2. Sometimes *Kingdom* refers Christ's total authority and dominion over every realm in the universe since His ascension into Heaven. **Daniel 7:14** "And to him was given dominion and glory and *a kingdom*, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him."⁴
3. Sometimes *Kingdom* is synonymous with the Church. **Revelation 1:5-6** "To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood *and made us a kingdom...*"⁵
4. Sometimes *Kingdom* refers to the consummate state—the New Heavens and the New Earth. **2 Timothy 4:18** "The Lord will rescue me from every evil deed and bring me safely into *his heavenly kingdom*. To him be the glory forever and ever. Amen."⁶

³ This kingdom is preceded time. It is God's everlasting reign from eternity past to eternity future.

⁴ This kingdom was given to Christ when as the reward for His obedience and suffering (Psalm 2:7-12; Matthew 28:18) which after subduing all enemies under His feet (Psalm 110:1; 1 Corinthians 15:25) He will deliver said kingdom back to the Godhead (1 Corinthians 15:24) This kingdom began at Christ's 1st coming and will conclude at His 2nd coming. This kingdom is most seen in the book of Revelation as Christ riding the white horse with a sword coming out of His mouth (the Word) tramples all His enemies throughout this age (Revelation 19:11-16)

⁵ You are brought into this kingdom through belief in Jesus Christ and are excluded through unbelief. That is why the Church is said to exercise the keys of the kingdom (Matthew 16:19).

⁶ cf. Matthew 8:11; Luke 13:28; 1 Corinthians 6:9; Galatians 5:21

This is the kingdom Paul has in view here. Paul is saying the present condition of our mortal bodies cannot enter into God's Heavenly Kingdom. A change is required. The second phrase in v.50 makes this clear "...nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable." We *must have* new bodies that fit that new environment.⁷ That's what Paul is teaching us.

The mystery of new bodies

Look at v.51 "Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed." The future resurrection of our bodies isn't *the mystery*. The OT Scriptures taught this. The mystery is that *we*—those who are in Christ Jesus—will be changed or transformed. Our bodies will cease to be one thing, and they will become another thing. The acorn will become the oak. The man of dust will bear the image of the Man of Heaven.

We shall not all sleep

Notice Paul says "We shall not all sleep." *Sleep* is a euphemism for death—when Lazarus died, he was said to be *asleep* (**John 11:11**). Paul is saying that when Christ returns, a vast multitude of Christians will be alive, and both they and those who have already died will alike be transformed into the likeness of Christ's resurrected body.

What of the damned?

Someone asked after last week's message: "What about the wicked? What type of bodies will they have?" The Scripture is clear that *they will* have bodies (**John 5:29**). But their bodies will be a body of living death. **Isaiah 66:24** says "And they [*the redeemed*] shall go out and look on the dead bodies of the men who have rebelled against me. For their worm shall not die, their fire shall not be quenched, and they shall be an abhorrence to all flesh." It is altogether unfitting that the wicked would bear the image of Christ's body since they don't belong to

⁷ "Incorruption cannot be an attribute of corruption" Hodge, pg. 353

Him.⁸ Jonathan Edwards says here: “The bodies of the wicked then living will be changed into such hideous things, as shall be answerable to the loathsome souls that dwell in them.”⁹ In other words, only the redeemed will bear the image of Christ in their resurrected bodies.

The rapture or the second coming?

When will this take place? Look at **v.52-53** “...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. ⁵³For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality.” Now what Paul is describing here finds it’s parallel in **1 Thessalonians 4:13-18**. Many of our Dispensational brethren take this not as the Second Coming but as the so-called rapture. Dispensationalist Charles Ryrie says here:

“1 Corinthians 15:51-52 cannot refer to the Second Coming of Christ...the reference is to something distinct, that is, the rapture of the Church before the [7 year] tribulation...The rapture...seems to be a private event involving the church only, and unseen and unknown to the world...First [Christ] comes secretly to rapture away His bride. There is no indication, however, that residents of earth will be able to see the church thus raptured. The rapture will be a secret appearing, and only the believers will know about it.”¹⁰

The problems with rapture theology

There are multiple problems with rapture theology. **First**, as we heard in our reading this morning from Matthew 24, the Great Tribulation is already past. That is what came upon the Jews in AD 70. Jesus said in **Matthew 24:34**

⁸ Theirs will be a living death. Isaiah 66:24

⁹ Jonathan Edwards, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards Vol. 2*, (Carlisle, PA.,: The Banner of Truth Trust, Reprint 2009), pg. 195

¹⁰ Quoted in Kenneth L. Gentry Jr., *He Shall Have Dominion* 3rd Edition, (Chesnee, SC.,: Victorious Hope Publishing, 2021), pg. 285-286

that the generation then living would certainly not pass away until it took place. **Secondly**, rapture theology requires a 2nd Coming and a 3rd Coming of Christ.¹¹ But Scripture "...speaks only of a 'second' eschatological coming."¹² **Hebrews 9:28** says "Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, *will appear a second time*, not to deal with sin but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him." **Thirdly**, rapture theology claims this is a secret event as we heard from Ryrie. But this text and it's parallel in 1 Thessalonians 4 describe the noisiest most public event possible. **1 Thessalonians 4:16** says "For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with *a cry of command*, with *the voice of an archangel*, and with *the sound of the trumpet of God*." 3 times it's mentioned how noisy this event will be.¹³ No this will not be secret. It will be public and extremely audible. For these reasons, though we love our Dispensational brethren, we must reject their rapture theology. It is not Biblical.

The quickness of our transformation

This event is clearly speaking of the one and only 2nd Coming. When Christ returns our bodies will be transformed instantaneously. Paul says in **v.52** "in a *moment*," literally ἄτομος *atomos* where we get the word atom. Such a small portion of time, that it can't get any smaller. It will be "in the *twinkling of an eye*" Paul says. Children how fast do you blink? Blinking is the fastest thing you do. Paul says that's how fast our bodies will be transformed.

The last trumpet

He says this transformation will happen "...at the *last trumpet*." I never knew how rich the Bible was on trumpet theology until I studied this verse. God ordained the trumpet blast for very significant events in redemptive history.

¹¹ Not to mention multiple resurrections.

¹² *Ibid*, pg. 286

¹³ I'm not sure if this will be literal noise or not. But the Dispensationalist with his so-called literal hermeneutic must accept it as literal noise.

- When the *trumpet* sounded after their Exodus Israel gathered to the Lord at Mt. Sinai to hear the law (**Exodus 19:13**)
- Every fiftieth year on the year of Jubilee—a *trumpet* sounded—all slaves were set free, and everyone’s property was restored (**Leviticus 25:9-10**)
- At the *trumpet* blast Israel shouted and the walls of Jericho fell (**Joshua 6:20**)
- When Gideon’s 300 men blew their *trumpets*, God turned their enemy’s swords against themselves and they were defeated (**Judges 7:22**)
- As we heard in **Matthew 24:31** this morning, at the fall of Jerusalem, a heavenly *trumpet* sounded announcing the old age had ended and now “the time of worldwide deliverance...through the gospel [was] now at hand.”¹⁴

“The dead, the very dead, shall hear”

And there is still a *last trumpet* to sound. It is a sound that will be heard throughout the world, summoning even the dead in their graves. Oh loved ones imagine that how incredible that day will be! One author puts it like this:

“...how startling, how stupendous the summons! Nothing equal to it, nothing like it, was ever heard through all the regions of the universe, or all the revolutions of time. When conflicting armies have discharged the bellowing artillery of war, or when victorious armies have shouted for joy of the conquest, the seas and shores have rung, the mountains and plains have echoed. But...the trump of God will resound from pole to pole—will pierce the center and shake the pillars of heaven. Stronger—stronger still—it will penetrate even the deepest recesses of the tomb! It will pour its amazing thunder into all those abodes of silence. The dead, the very dead, shall hear.”¹⁵

¹⁴ J. Marcellus Kik, *An Eschatology of Victory*, (Phillipsburg, NJ.: P & R Publishing, 1971), pg. 150

¹⁵ Quoted from Hervey’s Theron and Aspasia in John Calvin, *Calvin’s Commentaries Vol. XX*, (Grand Rapids, MI.: BakerBooks, 2009), pg. 60, fn. 1

The end of Christ's work

The last trump signals the end of this age. And it signals the completion of Christ's work of redemption. Look at v.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."*" Paul is quoting one of the most beautiful passages in the OT from **Isaiah 25:6-8**. A great feast is coming, with rich food and aged wine. When the feast is ready, then God will swallow up the dark veil that has covered the nations. "He will swallow up death forever, and the LORD GOD will wipe away tears from all faces." It's vital not to miss the relevance of this quotation. Paul quotes Isaiah *because this is the completion of all of Christ's work: the death of death.*

Our doctrine: Christ must put death to death

And so we arrive at **our doctrine**: It is necessary on the Last Day that Jesus Christ destroy death (specifically the death of our bodies) otherwise His work of redemption is incomplete. Children, boys and girls, this is a really easy doctrine to understand. Think about when God created human beings. What if God didn't put fingers on your hands. Your hands would be these balls of skin and bone. What you could you do without fingers? Would God have completed His work? Or think about if a builder were to build a house for your family. What if the builder didn't put a roof on your house? Would you except His work as complete? No. Likewise though Jesus Christ has already accomplished the most marvelous things in the universe, by becoming the God-man, by obeying in our stead, by making satisfaction for our sins on the cross, by rising from the dead, His work is not yet complete. When last trumpet sounds, He will complete His work by swallowing up death so that our bodies will never die again. Let's see two quick proofs for this:

Proof #1: From the Person of Jesus

How could it be said that Jesus destroyed the works of the devil, if death —the devil's chief work—continues in the New World? Is the devil going to

finally win? How can Jesus Christ receive all the glory, honor and praise on the Last Day if the saints are still subject to death? Is He not strong enough to defeat death? That's absurd! "Our God is in the heavens; he does all that he pleases (**Psalm 115:3**). Is He not wise enough to defeat death? That's impossible. 'His wisdom is unsearchable and His ways are past finding out' (**Romans 11:33**). Is He not kind enough to defeat death for us? Unthinkable! "The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases; his mercies never come to an end" (**Lamentations 3:22**). Perhaps He will forget about us? Never! "I will not forget you. ¹⁶Behold, I have engraved you on the palms of my hands" (**Isaiah 49:15-16**) Beloved, Jesus will complete the work His Father gave Him. On the Last Day He will throw "Death and Hades...into the lake of fire" (**Revelation 20:14**).

Proof #2: From the Logic of the Gospel

Look at v.56 "The sting of death is sin..." Stop. Where does death come from? Only from sin. "For the wages of sin is death" (**Romans 6:23**). Paul continues "...and the power of sin is the law." Without the law there would be no sin (**Romans 5:13**). But when the law came, it pointed sin out, and it condemned sin. Law became the condemning power of sin. But what did Christ do loved ones? He perfectly fulfilled all the demands of the law. He obeyed the law in every jot and tittle. *If* therefore the law is what gives strength to sin, and sin is what brings death, *then* when Christ fulfilled the law, He destroyed the power of sin and the wages of sin which is death. In other words, Jesus not only drained the serpent's venom, but He knocked his fangs out. When Jesus swallows up death on the Last Day, it is the necessary conclusion to His dying for our sins. Take away sin, and death must be destroyed.

That's **our doctrine**. It is necessary on the Last Day that Jesus Christ destroy death (specifically the death of our bodies) thus bringing to completion to His work of redemption.

II. Our Duty

1. Preparatory Use

Our **first duty** to *prepare* for the day of our death. We prepare for all sorts of events. You *prepared* to come to worship this morning. You *prepare* to go to sleep each evening. No doubt some of you will *prepare* to go on vacations this summer. Paul in this passage is teaching us how to *prepare* for death. The **first** thing he teaches us in preparing for death is to mock it. Look at v.55 “O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?” Paul wasn’t waiting to get to Heaven to mock death. He mocked death in his perishable body. How he could he do that? It wasn’t because he wasn’t going to die. He did die. His head was cut off by Nero. Was Paul delusional then? No, not at all. He mocked death with a holy mockery. Just like Elijah mocked the prophets of Baal as they cut themselves. “You’ll have to shout louder...perhaps he is daydreaming...or maybe he is on a trip, or is asleep” (1 Kings 18:27).¹⁶ Why could Elijah mock Baal? Because he had no real power, he was a false god. That is why Paul could mock death, because for the Christian death has lost all its power and all its terror. Why do you think Paul calls death *sleep*? For those who have freed from their sins by Christ’s blood, death is but sleep. Beloved, prepare for your death by mocking it. “O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?” You and I will one day be buried in the dirt. Imagine that day, look into that grave. What can that coffin do to you? Can it transport you to hell? Can that grave blot you out of the book of life? Can death rob you of the place Jesus prepares for you? Can it separate you from the love of God? No. No. No. No. Death has be de-fanged by the Serpent Slayer. Mock it. Laugh at it. This is not irreverent. It is holy belief. This is not foolishness. It’s faith.

¹⁶ NLT

Death is now your friend

That brings us to **the second** way that we prepare for death: realize that death is now your friend. And smile at your friend. ‘Pastor Josh, now you are just being obnoxious, it’s absurd to look on death as a friend.’ Wrong. Our own Confession goes further than I have. It says that death is God’s last gift to us in this world. Larger Catechism Q.85 “...so that, although [we] die, *yet it is out of God’s love*, to free [us] perfectly from sin and misery, and to make [us] capable of further communion with Christ in glory...” This is Paul’s theology as well! **Philippians 1:21** “For to me to live is Christ, and *to die is gain*.” Death is gain. Death is a friend because it us translates from sin to perfect righteousness, from sorrow to joy forevermore, from Christ seen through a glass darkly to Christ seen face to face. Beloved death translates you into the very special presence of Christ *who is your life*. Make friends with death. Regardless of what type of death you will face, whether it be quietly in your sleep, or being burnt at the stake know this unassailable truth: that your death will translate you into the glorious presence of God, and His Christ, and the holy angels, and the Church triumphant. The angels will carry you to God’s Heaven, just as Lazarus was carried to Abraham’s bosom. You will be escorted to glory. And in that moment, you will praise God for your friend death. Loved ones, prepare for your death. First by mocking it, then by making friends with it.

2. Admonitory Use

That brings us to our **second duty**: *rebuke*. **First** this text rebukes Christians who live lives of defeat. These are Eeyore Christians. You know from Winnie the Poo? I saw a meme with him saying “I was so upset I forgot to be happy.” These type of Christians live negative lives always denouncing everything, always melancholy. They fail to grasp the length and breadth of their glorious victory.¹⁷ Dear Christian if that is you, then rebuke yourself. What reason would you ever give to someone else to become a Christian? How

¹⁷ How absurd to imagine Joseph refusing Pharoah’s offer to be the second in command in all of Egypt because he would rather sit in the dungeon.

are you attracting non-believers to Christ? Defeat is never attractive. Nor is it Biblical. We did not join the losing side when we became Christians. We joined the winning side. We joined the side that has defeated death. “O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?” Christians ought to be those like the woman in **Proverbs 31:25** who looks at the future and laughs at the days to come. If you are a Eeyore Christian, then take ahold of yourself. Put this text to memory, let it renew your mind. Memorize it, meditate on, obsess over it. Let the eyes of your heart taste and see that feast that is to come. The time when you will drink refined and aged wine. The Day when the veil will be lifted. Return to those first principles, that Christ came that we may have life, and have it abundantly.¹⁸

The door is shut

Secondly, this rebukes the man, woman or child who has not yet closed with Christ. If that is you, if Christ is not your personal Savior and Lord, then rebuke yourself. Dear friend, if death is a friend to the believer opening up the door to paradise, then it is your enemy closing the door to all your future hope. You can not say “O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?” Death will have victory over you. It will sting you with such a poison, that you will be powerless against it. It will be drag you down to the depths of deepest darkness. It will lock you in it’s chambers. There you will wait until God passes judgment upon you. And then hell will open it’s mouth to receive you. What unspeakable horror that will be for you. How will you dwell with everlasting burnings? You will weary yourself out with sorrow. You will loath yourself for not heading the warning. Dear friend, death is your enemy. Each day you draw closer to his foul breath, his ice-cold touch. You are an hour closer to his victory over you than when I began this message. He’s coming for you and there is nothing you can do to stop him. “The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law.” God’s law condemns *you* for your sin. Your sin is the reason why death is your enemy. Outside of Christ you cannot have victory

¹⁸ John 10:10

over death. No other religion can help you. Trying to live a moral life will not help you. Only Jesus Christ can save you. He alone has triumphed over death. Everything that Jesus purchased for us, He offers to everyone who will repent of their sins, and turn to Him in faith. Come to Him this morning and believe. Take hold of the love of Christ Jesus. “He receives every poor sinner who comes unto Him, no matter how vile they have been, nor what sins they have committed.”¹⁹ He will love you freely, wash you fully, and save you eternally. Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved.

III. Our Delight

Doubting Christian

In the story *Pilgrim’s Progress*, after Christian fights Apollyon, is persecuted in Vanity Fair, and escapes the dungeon in Doubting Castle, he has one more obstacle before he reaches the Celestial City. He and his companion Hopeful had to pass the great river. There was no bridge. It was very deep. This river was death. Now Bunyan tells us that Christian began to despair in his mind at the thought of crossing. He looked and looked and found no way in which he might escape crossing this river. Immediately upon entering the river he began to sink and a great darkness and horror fell upon Christian. He lost his senses, he failed to remember all the deliverances of His Savior along the way. Horror filled his mind, fear flooded his heart. His companion Hopeful on the other hand, had remembered that death was swallowed up in victory. So he did his best to keep his brother’s head above water. He cried out to Christian “Brother, I see the gate, and men standing by to receive us...These troubles and distresses that you go through in these waters are no sign that God hath forsaken you...Be of good cheer, Jesus Christ maketh thee whole.”²⁰ And as

¹⁹ John Bunyan, *The Works of John Bunyan Vol. 3*, (Carlisle, PA.: The Banner of Truth Trust, Reprint 2009), pg. 96, fn.3

²⁰ *Ibid*, pg. 163-164

quickly as they entered the river, they found themselves standing on solid ground on the other side, ready to be transported by the Shining Ones to the Celestial City.

Not by human strength

What do we take away from this? Beloved there are two types of Christians. One type who will face their death with confidence, and others who will face their death with fear and trembling. But both types of Christians make it to the other side. Why? You don't overcome death by bravery. You overcome death because Christ Jesus has already gotten the victory. **v.57** in our text "But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." Beloved do you think that Christ Jesus "...would wrestle with death and hell, and go down to the grave for our sakes, and yet allow our eternal life to hang on such a thread as our poor miserable endeavors?"²¹ No. Whether you are full of fear or full of faith, you will pass through the shadow of death unharmed. You are not saved at death by your bravery. You are saved by the blood of Jesus Christ. You will not rise to life because you were doubtless and fearless. You will raise to life because Jesus satisfied all the demands of the law on your behalf. Whether you are able to mock death or you shrink back at it, it matters not. God has already given you the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

When Rising from the Bed of Death

The poet Joseph Addison (1672-1719) wrote a poem during a serious illness from which presumably he thought he was going to die. It is called "When Rising from the Bed of Death."

When, rising from the bed of death,
O'erwhelmed with guilt and fear,
I see my Maker face to face,
O how shall I appear?

²¹ J.C. Ryle, *Practical Religion*, (Carlisle, PA.: The Banner of Truth Trust, Reprint 2015), pg. 428

If yet, while pardon may be found,
 And mercy may be sought
 My heart with inward horror shrinks,
 And trembles at the thought.

When thou, O Lord, shalt stand disclosed
 In majesty severe,
 And sit in judgment on my soul,
 O how shall I appear?

But thou hast told the troubled mind
 Who does her sins lament,
 The timely tribute of her tears
 Shall endless woes prevent.

Then see the sorrow of my heart,
 Ere yet it be too late,
 And hear my Savior's dying groans,
 To give these sorrows weight.

For never shall my soul despair
 Her pardon to [secure]
 Who knows thine only Son has died
 To make her pardon sure.²²

Loved ones, Christ has died. More than that He has been resurrected. Your pardon is sure. "Death is swallowed up in victory."⁵⁵ "O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?"

²² Quoted in Leland Ryken, *The Soul in Paraphrase*, (Wheaton, IL.: Crossway, 2018), pg. 164-165

