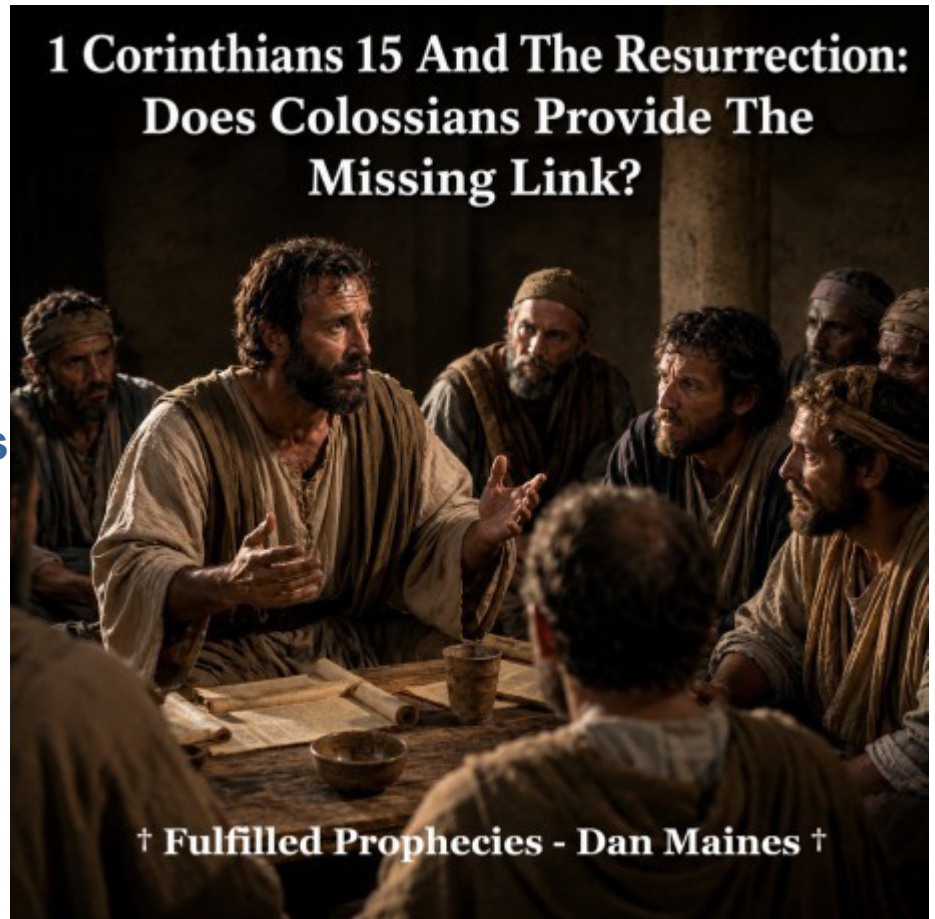


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1 Corinthians 15 And The Resurrection: Does Colossians Provide The Missing Link?



By Dan Maines

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Introduction

† First Corinthians 15 is one of the most important resurrection chapters in the Bible, but it shouldn't be isolated from the rest of Paul's teaching.

† Paul didn't teach one resurrection doctrine to Corinth and a different resurrection doctrine to Colossae. His letters must be allowed to interpret one another.

† Colossians provides an important link because Paul told living

believers that they had already been buried with Christ, raised with Christ, made alive with Christ, and raised up with Christ (Colossians 2:12-13; 3:1).

† This helps us understand the already and not yet language of 1 Corinthians 15. The resurrection life had already begun in Christ, while the covenantal resurrection harvest was moving toward its completion.

† First Corinthians 15 begins with Christ as the firstfruits and moves toward the harvest. Colossians shows believers already participating in the resurrection life of Christ. These aren't competing ideas, they are parts of the same redemptive story.

1 Corinthians 15:20-23

But the fact is, Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who are asleep. For since by a man death came, by a Man also came the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all will be made alive. But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, after that those who are Christ's at His coming,

† Paul begins with Christ as the firstfruits. Firstfruits weren't the entire harvest, they guaranteed that the rest of the harvest would follow (Leviticus 23:10-11).

† Paul's contrast is between Adam and Christ. Adam represents death, while Christ represents life. The resurrection is therefore inseparably connected with the redemptive work of Christ (Romans 5:12-21).

† Notice Paul's order, Christ the firstfruits, then those who belonged to Christ. This is harvest language, and the firstfruits and harvest belong to the same redemptive process.

† This becomes especially important when we compare Paul with Colossians, because believers could already be described as raised with Christ before the resurrection harvest reached its completion.

Colossians 2:12-13

having been buried with Him in baptism, in which you were also

raised with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead. And when you were dead in your wrongdoings and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our wrongdoings,

† Here is one of the clearest links to 1 Corinthians 15. Paul told living Christians that they had already been raised with Christ.

† They hadn't physically come out of graves, yet Paul could truthfully say that they were raised with Him. Resurrection language therefore can't automatically be restricted to physical bodies leaving physical graves.

† Paul connects their former death with trespasses and their new life with being made alive together with Christ. This is the Adam-to-Christ movement that stands behind Paul's resurrection teaching (Romans 5:17; 6:4-11).

† Colossians doesn't eliminate the resurrection expectation in 1 Corinthians 15. It helps define the nature of the life that resurrection brings, life in Christ, forgiveness, reconciliation, and freedom from the dominion of death.

Colossians 3:1-4

Therefore, if you have been raised with Christ, keep seeking the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on the things that are above, not on the things that are on earth. For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory.

† Paul again speaks to physically living people and says they were raised together with Christ.

† He also says they had died. Obviously, they hadn't physically died. Their death and resurrection described their participation in Christ and their transition into His life.

† This gives us an important interpretive control when reading resurrection language elsewhere in Paul's writings. We can't simply assume that every reference to death and resurrection is

describing biological death and biological resuscitation.

† Christ Himself is called their life. Resurrection isn't merely about what happens to a corpse, it's fundamentally about possessing the life found in Christ (John 11:25-26).

1 Corinthians 15:35-38

But someone will say, "How are the dead raised? And with what kind of body do they come?" You fool! That which you sow does not come to life unless it dies; and that which you sow, you do not sow the body which is to be, but a bare grain, perhaps of wheat or of something else. But God gives it a body just as He wished, and to each of the seeds a body of its own.

† Paul answers the question by using the picture of a seed. What is sown isn't the body that will be. God gives the seed the body appropriate to His purpose.

† Paul's illustration emphasizes transformation and continuity without requiring us to imagine that resurrection simply means putting the old condition back together.

† The resurrection work of Christ moves His people from the Adamic condition of death into the life and glory belonging to Christ.

† Colossians helps illuminate this because Paul could describe believers as already participating in Christ's resurrection while they were still awaiting the completion of what God was accomplishing in that generation.

1 Corinthians 15:42-44

So also is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown a perishable body, it is raised an imperishable body; it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body.

† Paul's contrasts are corruption and incorruption, dishonor and glory, weakness and power, natural and spiritual.

† The word spiritual doesn't mean imaginary or nonexistent. It

describes that which belongs to and is governed by the Spirit (1 Corinthians 2:14-15; 10:3-4).

† Paul's emphasis is transformation into the order established in Christ. The resurrection is victory over the death inherited through Adam and participation in the life found in Christ.

† Colossians strengthens this connection because believers were already experiencing the life of the age that Christ's resurrection inaugurated.

1 Corinthians 15:45-49

So also it is written: "The first man, Adam, became a living person." The last Adam was a life-giving spirit. However, the spiritual is not first, but the natural; then the spiritual. The first man is from the earth, earthy; the second Man is from heaven. As is the earthy one, so also are those who are earthy; and as is the heavenly One, so also are those who are heavenly. Just as we have borne the image of the earthy, we will also bear the image of the heavenly.

† Paul brings us directly back to Adam and Christ. This is the controlling framework of the chapter.

† The resurrection is the movement from the first Adam to the last Adam, from death to life, and from the earthly order to the heavenly order.

† This parallels Colossians, where believers had died with Christ, had been raised with Christ, and were told to seek the things above (Colossians 2:20; 3:1-3).

† Paul's resurrection doctrine is therefore Christ-centered and covenantal. Christ is the last Adam who brings His people into the life that Adam couldn't provide.

1 Corinthians 15:50-54

Now I say this, brothers and sisters, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. Behold, I am telling you a mystery; we will not all sleep, but we will all be changed, 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 will be changed. For this perishable must put on the imperishable, and this mortal must put on immortality. But when this perishable puts on the imperishable, and this mortal puts on immortality, then will come about the saying that is written: Death has been swallowed up in victory.

† Paul specifically says that not everyone receiving this transformation would physically die, We all shall not sleep, but we shall all be changed.

† That statement is extremely important. Paul's hope included living believers who would remain alive through the approaching consummation (1 Thessalonians 4:15-17).

† The final result is victory over death. Paul isn't describing Adam winning another round. He's describing Christ completing His redemptive victory over the death introduced through Adam.

† The last trumpet belongs to the completion of God's redemptive harvest, when the firstfruits had reached the promised harvest and death was swallowed up in victory.

1 Corinthians 15:55-57

Where, O Death, is your victory? Where, O Death, is your sting? The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the Law; but thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

† Paul tells us what stands behind the death problem, sin and the law.

† This is crucial. His resurrection argument isn't disconnected from covenant, sin, condemnation, and redemption. The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law.

† Christ's victory deals with the entire problem. He doesn't merely postpone death, He gives His people victory through Himself (Romans 8:1-3).

† Colossians says the same thing from another angle. God made them alive with Christ, forgave their transgressions, canceled the certificate of debt, and triumphed over the rulers

and authorities (Colossians 2:13-15).

2 Corinthians 3:6-8

who also made us adequate as servants of a new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life. But if the ministry of death, engraved in letters on stones, came with glory so that the sons of Israel could not look intently at the face of Moses because of the glory of his face, fading as it was, how will the ministry of the Spirit fail to be even more with glory?

† Paul explicitly calls the old covenant ministry engraved on stones a ministry of death.

† He contrasts that ministry with the Spirit who gives life. This provides important covenantal background for the death-to-life contrast in 1 Corinthians 15.

† The old covenant order was passing away in Paul's day, while the glory of the new covenant was being revealed (2 Corinthians 3:11; Hebrews 8:13).

† This helps explain why Paul's resurrection teaching contains both present participation and future expectation. The first-century believers lived during the transition from the old covenant age into the fully established new covenant age.

Historical References

† Josephus described the catastrophic destruction of Jerusalem and the temple in AD 70, including famine, slaughter, fire, and the collapse of the Jewish national and temple order. His account provides important historical background for understanding the first-century judgment surrounding the completion of the covenant transition, especially Wars of the Jews, Books 5-7.

† Tacitus described the Roman siege of Jerusalem under Titus and the desperate conditions surrounding the city. His account independently confirms the historical setting of Jerusalem's first-century destruction, especially Histories 5.10-13.

† Eusebius recorded the tradition that believers in Jerusalem

departed the city before the war and settled at Pella. He also connected the calamities that came upon Jerusalem with the generation that rejected Christ, especially Ecclesiastical History 3.5-7.

† These historical writers don't establish our doctrine. Scripture establishes our doctrine, but their testimony helps confirm the historical world in which the New Testament's first-century expectations reached their fulfillment.

How It Applies To Us Today

† We don't live waiting for Christ to defeat Adamic death someday. We live in the victory Christ accomplished and brought to completion.

† We have been made alive in Christ. Our relationship with God isn't based on the old covenant ministry of condemnation, but on the completed work of Jesus Christ (Romans 8:1).

† Because Christ is our life, we should seek the things above and live as people who belong to His kingdom (Colossians 3:1-4).

† First Corinthians 15 gives us the resurrection harvest, while Colossians shows us participation in resurrection life. Together they reveal one consistent message, believers move from death in Adam to life in Christ.

† We don't need to fear death as though Christ's resurrection victory remains unfinished. The gospel announces victory through our Lord Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 15:57).

† Our hope today is Christ Himself. We live in His kingdom, share His life, and when our physical lives end, we remain with the Lord (2 Corinthians 5:6-8; Philippians 1:23).

Q & A Appendix

Q: Does Colossians form a link to the resurrection teaching in 1 Corinthians 15?

A: Yes. Colossians says believers had already been raised with Christ and made alive with Him (Colossians 2:12-13; 3:1). First Corinthians 15 describes the larger resurrection harvest moving

from Adamic death into the life of Christ.

Q: Were the Colossians physically dead when Paul said they had been raised?

A: No. They were physically alive, yet Paul said they had been raised with Christ (Colossians 2:12; 3:1). This proves that Paul's resurrection language can describe redemptive and covenantal realities.

Q: Does 1 Corinthians 15 primarily contrast physical bodies with invisible spirits?

A: No. Paul's controlling contrast is Adam and Christ, death and life, corruption and incorruption, natural and spiritual (1 Corinthians 15:22, 42-49).

Q: Why is 1 Corinthians 15:56 important?

A: Because Paul connects death with sin and the law. This shows that his resurrection argument is deeply connected to God's redemptive and covenantal work (Romans 7:9-10; 2 Corinthians 3:6-8).

Q: Did every believer Paul spoke about have to physically die before the resurrection was fulfilled?

A: No. Paul specifically said, We all shall not sleep, but we shall all be changed (1 Corinthians 15:51). His expectation included believers who would still be physically alive.

Q: What does the resurrection mean for us today?

A: We live on the fulfilled side of Christ's victory. We have life in Him, no condemnation in Him, and confidence that physical death can't separate us from Him (Romans 8:1, 38-39; 2 Corinthians 5:6-8).

† This is the fulfilled perspective we proclaim at Fulfilled Prophecies †

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† 1 Corinthians 15:20-23, 35-38, 42-44, 45-49, 50-54, 55-57;
Colossians 2:12-13; Colossians 3:1-4; 2 Corinthians 3:6-8
† Josephus, Wars of the Jews, Books 5-7; Tacitus, Histories
5.10-13; Eusebius, Ecclesiastical History 3.5-7

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