

First Corinthians, Chapter Fifteen

Two passages lifted from Chapter Fifteen of First Corinthians reflect some of the most profound reflections of Paul as to the role of Jesus Christ. That is to say, his relationship with the first man, Adam. This relationship sets up a developing pair of opposites which is outlined briefly at the end. Each passage is given as whole designated as Passage I and Passage II. There follows each verse with notations that hopefully will expand the text's meaning in light of the original Greek text. The two passages are given as follows, vss. 20-28 and 35-49 respectively¹.

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Passage I² (vss. 20-28)

20. But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep. 21. For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. 22. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. 23. But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ. 24. Then comes the end, when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power. 25. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. 26. The last enemy to be destroyed is death. 27. "For God has put all things in subjection under his feet." But when it says, "All things are put in subjection under him," it is plain that he is excepted who put all things under him. 28. When all things are subjected to him, then the Son himself will also be subjected to him who put all things under him, that God may be everything to every one.

Vs. 20: But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep.

-“But in fact” is *nuni* or “now,” points to a reality already present, a change in tone from the previous verses to the matter under discussion.

-*Egegertai* or “has been raised:” passive, the means by which is not given but assumed to be the Father as confessed by the Christian community. However, he is not mentioned here.

-*Aparche*: “first fruits” of an offering whether animal, cereal or otherwise. The root is *arche* or beginning in the sense of first principle prefaced with *apo* or “from”...i.e., from the beginning. Here it pertains to persons who “have fallen asleep” or *koimao* which means to put to sleep as well as to die. While the idea is that everyone has fallen asleep, mention of “those” (not in the Greek) can intimate that such persons are distinct from persons who have not fallen asleep. If we were to follow this strictly

¹On the Gregory of Nyssa Home Page is found a short treatise on this subject whose title runs in full as: *When (The Father) shall subject all things to (The Son), then (The Son) himself will be subjected to him (The Father) who subjects all things to him (The Son): A Treatise on First Corinthians 15.28*

²The intervening verses are 29-34. They are included here in order to bridge the gap between the two passages under consideration: “Otherwise, what do people mean by being baptized on behalf of the dead? If the dead are not raised at all, why are people baptized on their behalf? Why am I in peril every hour? I protest, brethren, by my pride in you which I have in Christ Jesus our Lord, I die every day! What do I gain if, humanly speaking, I fought with beasts at Ephesus? If the dead are not raised, ‘Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die.’ Do not be deceived: ‘Bad company ruins good morals.’ Come to your right mind, and sin no more. For some have no knowledge of God. I say this to your shame.”

in lines with the Bible, only Enoch and Elijah have not “fallen asleep.” The *aparche* as belonging to Christ suggests that he has been the first to rise from the dead and sums them all up as a sacrificial offering.

Vs. 21: For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead.

-Two men are mentioned here, both with the preposition *dia* (through, by) signifying two agents: death and the resurrection. The latter is contrasted more fully with the former by adding “of the dead,” *nekron*. Paul takes special mention to call Christ a “man” (*anthropos*) to say he is of the same substance, if you will, as Adam.

Vs. 22: For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive.

-Note *husper* and *houtos* or “as” and “so” which continue, if you will, the two uses of the preposition *dia* (through) in the previous verse. All persons are situated “in” Adam as well as “in” Christ (*en*). The first verb is in the present tense indicating that everyone continues to die. The second verb is in the future, *zoopoieo*: not just alive but to make (*poieo*) so, indicating an agent at work. The noun *zoe* (animal life) is used instead of *bios* (course of life). And so the life referred to here is one in the concrete. The time of this future event is not specified here, but an intimation of its reality can be seen by the just mentioned *husper-houtos*.

Vs. 23: But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ.

-Here the *husper-houtos* (as-so also) takes more specific shape by introduction of “order” or *tagma*. This noun is indicative of rank and status, suggesting a hierarchy of sorts. As expected, Christ is primary as “first fruits” or *aparche* which consists of the root *arche* (beginning as first principle) prefaced with the preposition *apo* (from). It is a term belonging to sacrifice or a votive offering and thus has liturgical connotations. Two passages suggest the sacrificial aspect of *aparche*: 1) “If the dough offered as first fruits is holy, so is the whole lump; and if the root is holy, so are the branches [Rom 11.15]. 2) “It is these who have not defiled themselves with women, for they are chaste; it is these who follow the Lamb wherever he goes; these have been redeemed from mankind as first fruits for God and the Lamb, and in their mouth no lie was found, for they are spotless [Rev 14.4].

-The second half of verse 23 begins with “then” (*epeita*) which connotes after-ness, the time of which is not specified here. Actually, neither the sequence of events nor temporal dimension is of concern here, with attention more upon the *tagama* of Adam and of Christ. Both are not visible; Christ has ascended into heaven and his coming has not yet taken place.

-*Parousia* or “coming” literally means a being (*eimi*) about or nearby (*para-*) and is used with the preposition *en*, “in his coming.” It is characterized literally by “those of Christ.” The actual way or means by which this *en* is effected is not specified.

Vs. 24: Then comes the end, when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power.

-“Then” or *eita* is similar to *epeita* of the previous verse, the latter more for emphasis by reason of the preposition *epi* (upon) prefaced to it.

-*Telos* or “end” means that which has come to fruition or perfection, beyond which nothing can

be added. Its coming (no verb in the Greek text) is not specified so we have “then the end.”

-*Paradidomai* as “delivers” consists of the root *didomai* (to give) prefaced with the preposition *para* which usually means beside, in the presence of. Thus Christ will put the kingdom to God beside him, if you will. As for this “kingdom” (*basileia*), its identity is not spelled out but presumably Jesus Christ is head of it. Not being handed over to God makes it not fully subject to divine authority which suggests that Jesus is engaged in a struggle to make it so.

-The struggle at hand consists of “destroying” that which opposes this subjecting process, *katargeo* being the verb. It has the noun *ergon* as the root which means a work, task or business prefaced with the preposition *kata*. That word suggests doing something in accord with a given plan or disposition. Such a plan is directed not just to “rule,” “authority” and “power” but to every one of these three spiritual categories: *arche*, *exousia* and *dunamis*. *Arche* pertains to the beginning in the sense of an origin and connotes a certain sovereignty. *Exousia* is authority to do something and suggests being endowed with it. *Dunamis* is strength or the ability to do something. It involves authority as with *exousia* but less so.

Vs. 25: For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet.

-*Basileuo* as “must reign” (cf. *basileia* or ‘kingdom’ in the previous verse) contains a certain urgency extending over an indefinite period of time which most likely is long from the chronological point of view. This reigning by Jesus Christ consists of his teaching as, for example, summed up in the beatitudes. Reigning is to be distinguished from *hupotasso*: the former is partial, even obscure, whereas the latter is final and known to everyone.

-The small word *achri* or “until” (also, so far as, as long as) is open-ended as far as the passage of time goes. Thus Jesus’ rule is of yet incomplete. Although not specified, the enemies at hand are “every rule and every authority and power” of vs. 24.

Vs. 26: The last enemy to be destroyed is death.

-*Eschatos* as “last” suggests a point as far away as possible from Jesus Christ as well as being most unlike him. Jesus had conquered death through his Resurrection, but that requires extension throughout history. The verb for “destroyed” is *katargeo*. It is noted in vs. 24. So with the preposition *kata* (according to a given plan) in mind, *katargeo* can apply to a progressive destruction of death moving through time.

Vs. 27: "For God has put all things in subjection under his feet." But when it says, "All things are put in subjection under him," it is plain that he is excepted who put all things under him.

-This is a partial quote from Ps 8.6 which runs in full as “You have given him dominion over the works of your hands; you have put all things under his feet.” *Hupotasso* is the verb for “given dominion” which means a placing or arranging (*tasso*) under (*hupo*). It has a military connotation with the intent of becoming obedient. The preposition *hupo* is used for “under” as “under his feet,” this double use being indicative of the full subjection.

-The Hebrew of this verse has the verb *shalach* for “has put” and means to send, to cast. It refers to man, not God, and reads literally for “dominion” the words “you have put in the deeds (or works) of your hand.” This verse intimates the “dominion” of Gn 1.26 which is in the context of being made in the divine image and likeness: “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness; and let them have

dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over the cattle and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.”

-Vs. 27 has *hupotasso* is the past, that God the Father has put everything under the dominion of Jesus Christ. Compare with vs. 25 which has “he must reign until he has put all things under his feet.” There the verb is *tithemi* (to set, to place) which is of lesser force than *hupotasso*. Thus we have a temporal view of Christ’s dominion, if you will: he as already having put (*tithemi*) everything under his feet and he as having subjected (*hupotasso*) everything, also under his feet. I.e., “under his feet” is a way of saying that despite the temporal distinction, both are the same.

-Paul repeats the essence of Ps 8.6 to bring home a point, to make it “plain” (*delos*) that “all things” do not pertain to the person of Jesus Christ, *ektos* or “excepted” being applicable to him.

Vs. 28: When all things are subjected to him, then the Son himself will also be subjected to him who put all things under him, that God may be everything to every one.

-Two uses of the verb *hupotasso* in order to make a clarification. First, the indefinite period of time for *ta panta* (‘all things’) to undergo subjection to Jesus Christ. Once this subjection has taken place (and that implies that Jesus will cease reigning or *basileuo* as in vs. 25), Jesus will undergo the same *hupotasso*. Note that he is not called such but Son which obviously implies the existence of his Father. This is the one who enabled Jesus to subject all things meaning that the two examples of *hupotasso* (*ta panta* to Jesus and Jesus to ‘him’) balance each other out.

-The end result of this so-called double *hupotasso* is for God (implying the Father) to be *ta panta*, the “everything” already noted, “to everyone” or *en pasin* (literally, ‘in all’). The *ta panta* here seems to differ from *ta panta* of vs. 27, the latter being a shadow or partial reality of the former. Before this happens Jesus’ act of reigning or *basileuo* is partial but not inferior.

Passage II

(vss. 35-49)

35. *But some one will ask, "How are the dead raised? With what kind of body do they come?"* 36. *You foolish man! What you sow does not come to life unless it dies.* 37. *And what you sow is not the body which is to be, but a bare kernel, perhaps of wheat or of some other grain.* 38. *But God gives it a body as he has chosen, and to each kind of seed its own body.* 39. *For not all flesh is alike, but there is one kind for men, another for animals, another for birds, and another for fish.* 40. *There are celestial bodies and there are terrestrial bodies; but the glory of the celestial is one, and the glory of the terrestrial is another.* 41. *There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars; for star differs from star in glory.* 42. *So is it with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown is perishable, what is raised is imperishable.* 43. *It is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power.* 44. *It is sown a physical body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a physical body, there is also a spiritual body.* 45. *Thus it is written, "The first man Adam became a living being;" the last Adam became a life-giving spirit.* 46. *But it is not the spiritual which is first but the physical, and then the spiritual.* 47. *The first man was from the earth, a man of dust; the second man is from heaven.* 48. *As was the man of dust, so are those who are of the dust; and as is the man of heaven, so are those who are of heaven.* 49. *Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the man of heaven.*

Vs. 35: But some one will ask, "How are the dead raised? With what kind of body do they come?"

-“Some one will ask” is more a rhetorical statement from a person unfamiliar with the new Christian religion and its teaching on the resurrection of Jesus. The two questions as to the dead rising and type of body are asked from a technical point of view, if you will. They can be a challenge as opposed to being representative of a person seeking to become a Christian. Also the questions are to be seen against the backdrop of many religious practices and options of the day.

Vs. 36: You foolish man! What you sow does not come to life unless it dies.

-Paul sees through the question posed to him in the previous verse as being half-hearted, even threatening. He calls the questioner a “foolish man” or *aphron*. This word means someone who lacks sense or alpha privative prefaced to *phren*. Technically this noun refers to the midriff or muscle which parts the heart and lungs from the lower viscera and is the seat of the passions. Use if *aphron* suggests the inquirer—either hypothetical or actual—is either stupid or posing a threat with the two questions of vs. 35.

-The idea of sowing (seed) with its dissolution before bearing fruit is sufficient to stop further questions which could be labeled as *aphron*.

Vs. 37: And what you sow is not the body which is to be, but a bare kernel, perhaps of wheat or of some other grain.

-Paul distinguishes between a body...that which is fully grown...and a “kernel” or seed (*kokkos*) which must be planted in the ground to become fully mature.

-This verse, plus the next several, go into some detail as to the different types of created beings. It becomes necessary to understand the primacy of the physical over (or before) the spiritual, not the other way around. To put it this would be characteristic of an *aphron*.

Vs. 38: But God gives it a body as he has chosen, and to each kind of seed its own body.

-*Theho* is the verb for “has chosen” and also means to choose. Here God identifies a specific “body” (*soma*) in accord with his choice, that is, when it is a seed.

Vs. 39: For not all flesh is alike, but there is one kind for men, another for animals, another for birds, and another for fish.

-*Sarx* or “flesh” refers to nature as opposed to anything endowed with the spirit and is not unlike *soma* or “body” as in the previous verse. The adjective *allos* for “another” implies difference which in the case of seed as in vs. 28, is difficult to determine.

Vs. 40: There are celestial bodies and there are terrestrial bodies; but the glory of the celestial is one, and the glory of the terrestrial is another.

-Two types of *soma* (‘bodies’): “celestial” and “terrestrial” or *epouranios* and *epigeios*. Both

adjectives have the preposition *epi* (upon) prefaced to their respective roots: *ouranos* (heaven) and *ge* (earth) or literally “upon the heavens” and “upon the earth.” It seems indicative of belonging to these respective spheres.

-*Doxa* means “glory” which often is associated with radiance, not necessarily the case here although more with *epouranios* by reason of the brightness (moon, stars, etc.).

Vs. 41: There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars; for star differs from star in glory.

-Here the idea of “glory” or *doxa* with its connotation of radiance is spelled out more clearly, that is, with reference to heavenly bodies. The verb for “differs” is *diaphero* which literally means to bear or to carry through (*dia*).

Vs. 42: So is it with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown is perishable, what is raised is imperishable.

-The words “so it is” are important to introduce the remaining verses of this second passage. They are rendered by the adverb *houtos* which means in this way or in this manner with respect to *anastasis* or “resurrection.” *Anastasis* assumes that of Jesus Christ but here refers to the “dead” generally speaking.

-“Perishable/imperishable:” *phthora/aphtharsia*. In other words, the noun destruction or ruin with a hint of mortality vs. that which not corrupt. Somewhere along the line...in the ground...a transformation takes place between the two. This transformation is invisible to everyone but the results are not. Both *phthora/aphtharsia* are used with the preposition *en* (in) which locate them, if you will, fully within their proper spheres. Note the passive of both verbs: “what is sown” and “what is raised.” This intimates that the sowing and raising are done in clear distinction by an agent other than what is acting upon. There comes to mind a seed, but what is of issue is the human person.

Vs. 43: It is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power.

-Two sets of opposites (“dishonor/glory” and “weakness/power”) or *atimia/doxa* and *astheneia/dunamis*. As with the previous verse, both verbs (‘sown’ and ‘raised’) are passive. Also the act of sown is a going down into the earth which can be taken as negative but necessary whereas the act of raising is an ascent which is positive.

-*Atimia* connotes disgrace, that which is not *timios* or held in esteem. The exact opposite is *doxa* or “glory” as noted in vs. 41 with connotations of radiance.

-*Astheneia* or “weakness” connotes being afflicted with a disease, of not being *sthenos*, a lack of force or might.

-Again, the transformation from dishonor into glory and from weakness into power is down within the earth, hidden away from prying eyes, if you will.

44. It is sown a physical body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a physical body, there is also a spiritual body.

-This verse contains the third and final example of a sowing and a raising, namely a “body” (*soma*) which is “physical” and the same *soma* which is “spiritual.” In other words, the two adjectives *psuchikos* and *pneumatikos*. However, the contrast between that which is physical or of the earth continues with that which is spiritual of belonging more properly to Jesus Christ.

-*Psuchikos* is that which belong to the *psuche* or the vital force which animates the physical body. In contrast to it, *pneumatikos* is that which is spiritual strictly speaking or transcendent, belonging to the *pneuma*. And *pneuma* has reference to the Holy Spirit. Both adjectives modify *soma* or “body.” In the first instance it is naturally physical whereas in the second, not so much a form but an entity.

-In this verse the second sentence says that the same *soma* or what we could call loosely a form remains the same but quite different. It is important in that positing the existence of the physical *soma* means right behind it or concomitant with it, as it were, is the spiritual *soma*. If the *soma* which is *pneumatikos* lacked form totally, we would not recognize it nor be able to speak of it as in this verse.

45. Thus it is written, “The first man Adam became a living being;” the last Adam became a life-giving spirit.

-“Thus it is written” lends an air of authority that what Paul has been proposing with this sowing-raising has precedent. These words also act as a way to grab the listeners’ attention.

-The last mention of Adam is vs. 22 (‘For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive’) and presumed to be that physical *soma* or body noted in the verses above.

-The authority to which Paul refers is Gn 2.7³ which runs in full as “then the Lord God formed man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being.” Here “living being” is a *psuche* which is endowed with *zoe* or animal life as opposed to *bios*, course of life.

-In contrast to the first Adam is the “last” one, *eschatos* suggestive of an extremity beyond which you cannot pass. This first and last “man” (*anthropos*) suggests that an indefinite number of men exist between the first and second Adam. Note that Jesus Christ is called by the first man’s name which indicates that he is of the same stock, of the earth. Those who existed and continue to exist after the Second Adam fall in between the two, the issue here not being a temporal or sequential one but one which is *psuchikos* and one which is *pneumatikos*.

-As for the Adam who is “last” or *eschatos*, he is a “spirit” or *pneuma* which is “life-giving” or *zoopoieo*, this verb meaning literally as making (*poieo*) life (*zoe*). This verb is not applicable to Adam.

46. But it is not the spiritual which is first but the physical, and then the spiritual.

-*Protos* or “first” is mentioned in vs. 45 with respect to Adam and implied in the verse at hand. Here it is equivalent with “physical” or *psuchikos* noted in vs. 44 with respect to a physical body.

-In contrast to *protos* is that which is *pneumatikos* or “spiritual,” imply Jesus Christ. Instead of something like “second” vs. 46 has “then” or *epeita*, an adverb comprised of *epe* and *ita* (upon and then as accordingly). Such “then-ness” has a temporal span between Adam and Jesus Christ though that is not of issue here. It is as though Adam had in kernel form the *pneumatikos* of Jesus. Nothing here is said of Adam or man in general as being made in the divine image and likeness. That is presumed with focus in these two passage from First Corinthians upon the sequence of physical and spiritual.

³This is the so-called “second creation” story compared with the one of 1.26 which speaks of man being made in the divine image and likeness.

47. The first man was from the earth, a man of dust; the second man is from heaven.

-“Dust” and “earth” are more or less equivalent with respect to the man who was *protos* (‘first’).

-The man who is *deuteros* (‘second’) is from “heaven.” In both cases the preposition *ek* (from) is used, indicative of from where they came.

48. As was the man of dust, so are those who are of the dust; and as is the man of heaven, so are those who are of heaven.

-The couplet *hoios* and *kai* or “as” and “so” is used twice. In the first it pertains to Adam and human beings. The former is an adjective implying what sort or manner of nature or kind. From the time of Adam’s expulsion from the Garden of Eden until the present humanity consists of dust.

-The second couplet *hois* and *kai* pertains to the man who is *deuteros* or “second. The relationship between this man (Jesus Christ) and those who “are of heaven” or *epouranios* is not spelled out. However, it can be inferred by the relationship between the “man of dust” and “those who are of the dust, hence the importance of *hois* and *kai*.

-The adjective *epouranios* has the preposition *epi* (upon) as prefaced. Compare with the “second man” in vs. 47 who is “from heaven” where the noun is used. In other words, Christ is “from” (*ek*) heaven whereas those belonging to him are *epi* heaven, if you will, indicative of their newly found origin there.

49. Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the man of heaven.

-The verb *phoreo* is used for “have borne” suggests being in possession of, of carrying or even wearing. In other words, implied is someone who brings along with him something else, almost as though it were external to him. This could suggest the notion of image and likeness of Genesis as foundational to the distinction and order of the physical and spiritual which runs throughout these two passage from First Corinthians.

-*Phoreo* is in the past tense suggesting something of the past which no longer carries over into the present. The second half of vs. 48...the second couplet *hoios* and *kai*...suggest this. The verb refers not so much to the “man of dust” but to his “image” or *eikon* (different, it seems from the divine *eikon* of Genesis). So from Adam to the present (‘we’) this *phoreo* has been abortive compared with the *eikon* relative to “the man of heaven.” Here the adjective is *epouranios*, not the phrase “from heaven” as in vs. 47. With respect to *epouranios*, the verb *phoreo* is in the future. In other words, it does not exist at the present (present life) but will so at a later time which can also apply to after death.

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Both Passage One and Passage Two contain a developing pair of opposites, if you will. They are presented here as a summary of what had been outlined above.

Passage One

Vs. 21: by a man came death - by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead

Vs. 22: For as in Adam all die - so also in Christ shall all be made alive

Vs. 23: Christ the first fruits - at his coming those who belong to Christ

Passage Two

Vs. 40: celestial bodies - terrestrial bodies (the glory of the celestial is one, and the glory of the terrestrial is another)

Vs. 42: What is sown is perishable - what is raised is imperishable

Vs. 43: It is sown in dishonor & it is sown in weakness - it is raised in glory & it is raised in power.

44. It is sown a physical body & if there is a physical body - it is raised a spiritual body & there is also a spiritual body

45. The first man Adam became a living being - the last Adam became a life-giving spirit

46. But it is not the spiritual which is first but the physical - and then the spiritual

47. The first man was from the earth - the second man is from heaven

48. As was the man of dust - so are those who are of heaven

49. Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust - we shall also bear the image of the man of heaven

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