

Paul turns in these verses to a final, positive picture of what the future holds for the believer who is in Christ Jesus. Death, the penalty of sin, is called the final enemy (15:26). But death will be swallowed up in victory (15:54). Death will be conquered for all those in Christ. These verses describe four requirements involved in this victory over death.

- I. **Victory over death requires the transformation of the dead and the living** (vv 50-52). Having dealt with the dead, Paul now turns to the question of the living and says that all must be changed.
  1. *The transformation is mandatory in order to inherit the kingdom of God* (v 50). “Flesh and blood” speaks of our present form of existence. (Cf. Matthew 16:17 where the NIV translates the phrase with “man”.) In this form none can inherit the kingdom of God. “Inheriting” is similar to “entering” but emphasizes that we take a shared possession of the kingdom. It is illogical to think that something which cannot perish be given to beings who themselves are decaying and perishing.
  2. *The transformation will not require death for those in Christ* (v 51). Paul calls this a mystery, something which God had to reveal. The analogy of the seed required death for the transformation to occur, but our transformation will not require death. Not all will die (sleep) before Christ returns, nor need to die to experience this transformation.
  3. *The transformation will be instantaneous* (v 52). The analogy of the sown seed (dying to become a plant), which Paul used to support the concept of transformation, does not speak to the speed at which it will occur – the time it takes to glance at something or to blink the eye. The trumpet was primarily used as a way to signal and in the OT for God’s people. The last trumpet apparently refers to the last signal which God will give His people for them to join Him. At which point we will be changed and afterwards we will always be with the Lord.
- II. **Victory over death required victory over numerous foes** (vv 53-56).
  1. *Over our corruptibility and mortality – the essence of death* (vv 53-54) Even now we are in the process of dying. We could not enter eternity in such a state. Those who are in Christ will gain immortality and will not decay. Those who have died will be given life; those who are living will have the process of death stopped and reversed.
  2. *Over sin – the cause of death* (vv 55-56a) There must be death where there is sin. Death is the wages of sin. Paul calls sin the sting of death, more accurately translated as its “stinger.” If death were a bee, its stinger would be sin. No one would need to be afraid of a bee without a stinger. Neither must we fear death when the stinger has been removed. The biggest problem with death is when there is unforgiven sin. When the sin problem has been removed, death is just a threshold to enter into the presence of our Lord Jesus. By His death on the cross He paid the penalty for our sin and has removed for us the stinger from death.
  3. *Over the law – the ally of sin and death* (v 56b) Victory over death required victory over the law although it is “holy, righteous and good” (Rom 7:12). The law is unable to save people, but instead sets a standard which we cannot reach, condemns us for our failure, and even incites us to sin by inflaming in us rebellion and defiance. Sin and death, our enemy, is strengthened by the law. But Jesus has had victory over the law by fulfilling the righteous demands of the law.
- III. **Victory over death required the work of our Lord Jesus Christ** (v 57).

That, to which Paul has been alluding throughout these verses, is now directly expressed. Victory over death required the work of our Lord Jesus Christ. The Son of God had to become man and submit to death on the cross and be raised again. Thereby he fulfilled the demands of the law and paid the penalty for our sin. Jesus Christ was victorious over sin and death. This victory is given to us by God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Grace is expressed in that God gives us this victory.
- IV. **Victory over death requires present steadfastness** (v 58).
  1. *Steadfast in our conviction concerning the future resurrection.* The particular word used for “firm” is found here and in only two other verses of the NT. Earlier in this letter it carried the idea of having settled a matter in one’s mind. Hence, the Corinthians should get settled in their conviction concerning the future resurrection. This is supported by the second adjective, “immovable,” which the NIV translates with the sentence, “let nothing move you.” (Cf. Ephesians 4:14.) The Corinthians needed to fix themselves on the truth of the future, physical resurrection of the believer and the total victory which we have in Christ.
  2. *Steadfast in the work of the Lord.* Our conviction about the future is not an excuse to get lazy now. There is much to be done and our Lord wants us to be busy about it doing it. The term “labor” is work to the point of weariness which amplifies the sense of “giving yourselves fully to the work.” But we are not to be any less zealous in our work for the Lord because we know that it is by grace. Rather, perhaps more so, out of gratitude, we should give ourselves fully to the work. Our conviction about the future removes any doubt that our efforts today might be empty or useless. (Cf. Galatians 6:9.) At times it could be easy to get tired of doing what is right. But we can know that it is not in vain.

We have been given the victory over death through Jesus Christ our Lord, victory over death itself, sin and the law. We have the promise, whether living or dead, of being transformed into something adapted to living in the spirit in the very presence of God. Death will not have the final victory. So let’s get to work and be about the Lord’s business till He comes.