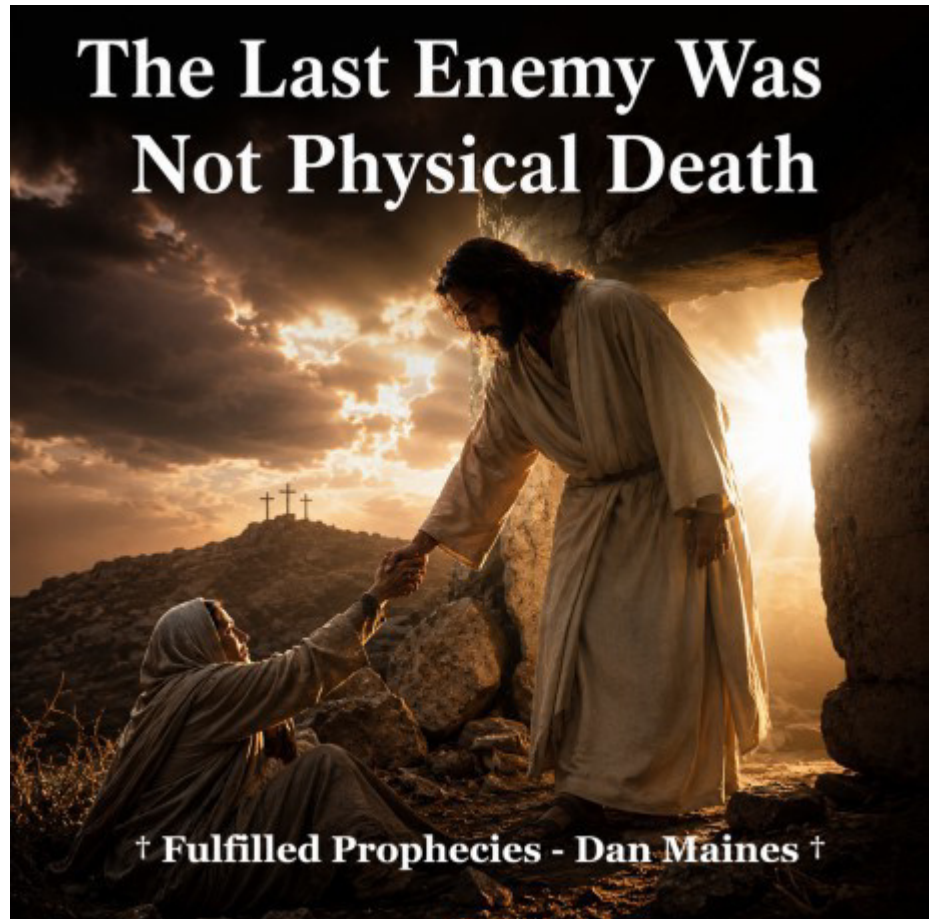


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The Last Enemy Was Not Physical Death



By Dan Maines

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Introduction

† Many Christians assume that the last enemy in 1 Corinthians 15 must be biological death because people still physically die. But Paul doesn't define death by looking at cemeteries. He traces death back to Adam, sin, condemnation, and the Law. (Romans 5:12-14; 1 Corinthians 15:21-22)

† The death Christ came to destroy was the separation and condemnation brought through Adam's transgression. Physical death existed as part of human mortality, but Adamic death

reigned through sin and covenant judgment. (Romans 5:12, 17-18; Ephesians 2:1)

† The great wow moment comes when Paul explains death's power. The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the Law. Once sin was dealt with and the Old Covenant Law reached its fulfillment, death lost its covenant power over those in Christ. (1 Corinthians 15:56-57; Romans 8:1-2)

Genesis 2:16-17

The LORD God commanded the man, saying, "From any tree of the garden you may freely eat; but from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for on the day that you eat from it you will certainly die."

† God warned Adam that death would enter through disobedience, establishing the foundation for Paul's teaching in Romans 5. (Genesis 2:17; Romans 5:12)

† Adam didn't physically die that very day, showing that the death introduced through sin involved immediate separation from God and covenant condemnation. (Genesis 3:7-10; Romans 5:12)

† Paul builds his entire argument in Romans 5 and 1 Corinthians 15 upon the death that entered through Adam's transgression. (Romans 5:12-21; 1 Corinthians 15:21-22)

Romans 5:12-14

Therefore, just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all mankind, because all sinned - for until the Law sin was in the world, but sin is not counted against anyone when there is no law.

Nevertheless death reigned from Adam until Moses, even over those who had not sinned in the likeness of the violation committed by Adam, who is a type of Him who was to come.

† Paul traces death to Adam's transgression, not merely to the natural ending of physical life. (Romans 5:12-14)

† Death reigned because sin brought condemnation and separation from God. (Romans 5:16-18; Ephesians 2:1)

† Adam was a figure of Christ because one brought condemnation while the other brought righteousness and life. (Romans 5:18-19; 1 Corinthians 15:45)

1 Corinthians 15:21-22

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.

† Paul contrasts two covenant heads, Adam and Christ. Adam brought death, while Christ brought resurrection life. (Romans 5:17-19)

† Being "in Adam" describes participation in Adam's condemnation, while being "in Christ" describes participation in Christ's life and righteousness. (1 Corinthians 15:22; Romans 8:1-2)

† The resurrection Paul describes is the victory of Christ's people over the death that entered through Adam. (Ephesians 2:5-6; Colossians 2:12-13)

1 Corinthians 15:26

The last enemy that will be abolished is death.

† Paul identifies death as the last enemy because death was the final power connected to Adam's condemnation that Christ came to abolish. (Romans 5:17-18; 2 Timothy 1:10)

† He doesn't leave the nature of this death undefined. Later in the chapter he explains that its sting is sin and its power is the Law. (1 Corinthians 15:56)

† The enemy wasn't ordinary biological mortality, but the covenant reign of sin and condemnation that separated people from life in God. (Romans 6:23; Romans 8:1-2)

Isaiah 25:7-8

And on this mountain He will destroy the covering which is over all peoples, The veil which is stretched over all nations. He will swallow up death for all time, And the Lord GOD will wipe tears away from all faces, And He will remove the disgrace of His people from all the earth; For the LORD has spoken.

† Isaiah connected the swallowing up of death with the removal of the covering and veil that rested over the nations. (Isaiah 25:7-8)

† Paul quoted this prophecy in 1 Corinthians 15 because he saw its fulfillment in Christ's covenant victory. (1 Corinthians 15:54)

† The prophecy wasn't describing the elimination of every physical funeral. It announced the removal of the condemnation and separation that kept humanity from covenant life with God. (Isaiah 25:7-8; Ephesians 2:12-18)

Hosea 13:14

Shall I ransom them from the power of Sheol? Shall I redeem them from death? Death, where are your thorns? Sheol, where is your sting? Compassion will be hidden from My sight.

† Hosea promised redemption from the power of Sheol and death, language Paul later used to proclaim Christ's victory. (1 Corinthians 15:54-55)

† This redemption concerned release from the reign of death that held God's covenant people under condemnation. (Romans 5:14, 17)

† Christ possessed the keys of death and Hades and brought His people into life through the New Covenant. (Revelation 1:18; John 5:24)

1 Corinthians 15:54-57

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. 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 directly defines death's sting as sin and sin's power as the Law. (1 Corinthians 15:56)

† This means the last enemy can't be interpreted apart from Adamic sin, condemnation, and the Old Covenant Law that gave sin its power. (Romans 5:20; Romans 7:9-11)

† The victory came through Jesus Christ because He fulfilled the Law, removed condemnation, and brought life to those in Him. (Matthew 5:17; Romans 8:1-4)

† Notice that Paul doesn't define death by biology. He defines it by sin and the Law, revealing that the last enemy is covenantal in nature. (1 Corinthians 15:56; Romans 7:9-11)

Romans 7:9-11

I was once alive apart from the Law; but when the commandment came, sin came to life, and I died; and this commandment, which was to result in life, proved to result in death for me; for sin, taking an opportunity through the commandment, deceived me, and through it, killed me.

† Paul described a death that occurred when the commandment came, not when his physical body stopped living. (Romans 7:9-11)

† The Law exposed sin and brought covenant condemnation, demonstrating why Paul called the Law the power of sin. (1 Corinthians 15:56; Romans 3:20)

† Christ delivered believers from that condemnation so they could serve in newness of the Spirit. (Romans 7:6; Romans 8:1-2)

Romans 8:1-2

Therefore there is now no condemnation at all for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death.

† Paul immediately answers the problem he described in Romans 7 by declaring that there is now no condemnation in Christ. (Romans 8:1)

† Believers have been set free from the law of sin and death through Christ's finished work. (Romans 8:2)

† This explains why Paul could proclaim victory over death through Jesus Christ. (1 Corinthians 15:57; Romans 8:1-2)

Hebrews 2:14-15

Therefore, since the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself likewise also partook of the same, so that through death He might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and free those who through fear of death were subject to slavery all their lives.

† Christ entered humanity so He could destroy the one who held the power of death. (Hebrews 2:14)

† His victory delivered God's people from the lifelong bondage produced by the fear of death. (Hebrews 2:15)

† This perfectly agrees with Paul's teaching that Christ defeated the enemy that entered through Adam's sin. (Romans 5:12; 1

Corinthians 15:26)

2 Timothy 1:9-10

who saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace, which was granted to us in Christ Jesus from all eternity, but has now been revealed by the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus, who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel,

† Paul said Christ had already abolished death through His appearing and gospel. (2 Timothy 1:10)

† If Paul meant physical death had to disappear from human experience, he couldn't have spoken of death as already abolished. (2 Timothy 1:10; Philippians 1:20-23)

† Christ abolished the condemning power of death and revealed the life that belongs to those who are in Him. (John 5:24; 1 John 5:11-12)

Historical References

† Isaiah and Hosea spoke of death's defeat centuries before Christ, and Paul applied their prophecies directly to the victory accomplished through Jesus. (Isaiah 25:8; Hosea 13:14; 1 Corinthians 15:54-55)

† Paul consistently connected death with Adam, sin, condemnation, and the Law rather than defining it only as the end of biological life. (Romans 5:12-21; Romans 7:9-11; 1 Corinthians 15:56)

† The first-century destruction of the Old Covenant order in AD 70 publicly completed the transition from the ministry of condemnation to the life and righteousness of the New Covenant. (2 Corinthians 3:7-11; Hebrews 8:13)

How It Applies To Us Today

† Those who are in Christ are no longer under Adamic condemnation because there is now no condemnation for those who belong to Him. (Romans 8:1-2)

† Physical death can't separate believers from Christ because they already possess eternal life and continue with Him beyond the death of the body. (John 11:25-26; Romans 8:38-39)

† We don't wait for Christ to defeat death someday. We proclaim the victory He has already given through the gospel and the New Covenant. (2 Timothy 1:10; 1 Corinthians 15:57)

Q & A Appendix

Q: Was Paul talking about physical death when he called death the last enemy?

A: Paul defined death through Adam's sin, condemnation, and the Law. The death Christ abolished was the covenant reign of sin that separated humanity from life in God. (Romans 5:12-18; 1 Corinthians 15:56)

Q: Why do believers still physically die if death was abolished?

A: Christ abolished the condemning power of death, not the biological process of mortality. Believers may die physically, but they never lose the life they possess in Christ. (John 11:25-26; 2 Timothy 1:10)

Q: What gave death its power?

A: Sin was death's sting, and the Law gave sin its condemning power. Christ fulfilled the Law and removed condemnation for those in Him. (1 Corinthians 15:56-57; Romans 8:1-4)

Q: When was death swallowed up in victory?

A: Death was swallowed up through Christ's death, resurrection, and the completed establishment of the New Covenant, which removed the Old Covenant ministry of condemnation. (Isaiah 25:8; 1 Corinthians 15:54-57; 2 Corinthians 3:7-11)

Q: Why does Paul define the sting of death instead of simply saying physical death is the enemy?

A: Because Paul explains that death's sting is sin and the power of sin is the Law. His definition points to Adamic condemnation and the Old Covenant, not merely the end of biological life. (1 Corinthians 15:56; Romans 5:12; Romans 7:9-11)

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

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Source Index

† Romans 5:12-14, 1 Corinthians 15:21-22, 1 Corinthians 15:26, Isaiah 25:7-8, Hosea 13:14, 1 Corinthians 15:54-57, Romans 7:9-11, 2 Timothy 1:9-10

† Isaiah the Prophet, Hosea the Prophet, Paul the Apostle

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