

Present Tense Verbs in 1 Cor 15

A Reply to the Collective Body Argument

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The Collective Body View argues that the Present Passive Indicative form of the Greek verb EGEIRO should be translated "are being raised" (ongoing process, rather than an event) here in 1 Cor. 15:15-16. They need this process idea to support their application of this resurrection to a collective body. Here is a response to their argument.

First of all, the list of passages given by the collective body advocates is not exhaustive of all the "present tense" verbs in this chapter (1 Cor. 15). There are a few missing from the list, some of which render the "collective body" concept unnecessary and unwarranted. Consider the following:

- 1Cor. 15:11 Whether then it was I or they, so we preach and so you believed.
- 1Cor. 15:15 Moreover we are even found to be false witnesses of God, because we witnessed against God that He raised Christ, whom He did not raise, if in fact the dead are not raised.
- 1Cor. 15:20 But now Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruit of those who are asleep.
- 1Cor. 15:24 then comes the end, when He delivers up the kingdom to the God and Father, when He has abolished all rule and all authority and power.
- 1Cor. 15:25 For He must reign until He has put all His enemies under His feet.
- 1Cor. 15:29 Otherwise, what will those do who are baptized for the dead? If the dead are not raised at all, why then are they baptized for them?
- 1Cor. 15:32 If from human motives I fought with wild beasts at Ephesus, what does it profit me? If the dead are not raised, let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die.
- 1Cor. 15:35 But someone will say, "How are the dead raised? And with what kind of body do they come?"
- 1Cor. 15:36 You fool! That which you sow does not come to life unless it dies;
- 1Cor. 15:37 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.
- 1Cor. 15:38 But God gives it a body just as He wished, and to each of the seeds a body of its own.
- 1Cor. 15:42 So also is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown a perishable body, it is raised an imperishable body;
- 1Cor. 15:43 it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power;
- 1Cor. 15:44 it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body.
- 1Cor. 15:50 Now I say this, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable.
- 1Cor. 15:57 but thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Why don't the collective body advocates include the rest of the above present tense verbs and deal with them? Why are they so selective? It seems like only those few passages that could be twisted to fit the "collective body" concept were listed. This means the collective body advocates are coming to the text with an *a priori* assumption that there is a "collective body" under consideration here, so that meaning has to be eiseged into the verb tenses in order to bolster their presumed "collective body" application. Look at this verse especially:

*You fool! That which you **sow** does not **come to life** unless it **dies**;*
[1Cor. 15:36 NAS95]

How should these present tense verbs be translated? Should we follow the logic of the "collective body" folks and say it should be translated like this, "What you **ARE SOWING** is not **BEING MADE alive** unless it **IS DYING**." Do you see the absurdity involved in such a translation? Especially in view of verse 52 where the resurrection is mentioned as a wholly future event (rather than a present ongoing process):

*...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.* [1 Cor 15:52 NAS95]

Secondly, notice the translation of the verb tenses which were given in the above list. Now, pull out your various NT translations and see if any of them translate it the way the collective body advocates suggest. Can you find any translation which agrees with the CBV idea?

Now take the above list of "present tense" verbs and parse them, so that we know exactly what tense, mood, and voice they are. Then, go to the Greek grammars to see what they say about how these tenses should be translated in their respective contexts. Here is an example from J. Gresham Machen:

"The present active indicative, LUO, it will be remembered, can be translated either "I loose" or "I am loosing." The passive of "I loose," in English, is "I am loosed;" the passive of "I am loosing" is "I am being loosed." Both "I am loosed" and "I am being loosed" might, therefore, have been given in the translation of LUOMAI (passive). But "I am loosed" is so ambiguous that the student is advised, at least in the earlier lessons, to adopt the alternative translation. "I am loosed" may mean "I am now in a loosed condition," in which case it indicates a present state resultant upon a past action and would be translated, not by the present tense, but by the perfect tense in Greek. Example: SOZOMAI means "I am being saved." It represents the action as taking place at the present time. It could also be translated "I am saved" in such a sentence as, "every day I

am saved from some new trouble." Here "I am saved" is present because it indicates customary action. But **in the majority of cases** "I am saved" means "I am in a saved condition resultant upon an action that took place in the past." And in these cases the English sentence "I am saved" would be translated by the perfect tense, not by the present tense, in Greek. It will be seen, therefore, that the translation "I am loosed" for LUOMAI, though it is not wrong (since LUOMAI may sometimes be translated in this way), **would be misleading.** [*New Testament Greek* -- by J. Gresham Machen, professor of NT at Westminster, pp. 59,60]

"In present time there is no special form of the verb in Greek to indicate continued action -- there is no distinction in Greek between "I loose" and "I am loosing." But in past tense the distinction is made even more sharply than in English. The tense which in the indicative is used as the simple past tense is called the aorist. The tense which denotes continued action in past time is called the imperfect." [*New Testament Greek* -- by J. Gresham Machen, professor of NT at Westminster, p. 65]

So, Machen (and all the others I checked agree) says that the present tense can be translated either "I loose" or as "I am loosing." He tells his beginning students to use the second rendering ("I am loosing" -- like some of the collective body advocates do) in the very beginning of their studies until they learn how to distinguish from the context which way it should be translated. But, it is clear from the way the various translators render it in 1 Cor. 15, that most of the time (i.e., "in the majority of cases") it should be translated as "I loose." This is a significant argument. In order to overturn the many translations which render it as "I loose," the collective body advocates needs to prove from the context and its grammatical/syntactical construction that it can ONLY be translated the other way.

What we have noticed here, is that the collective body advocates NEED to have the second rendering in order to support their CBV idea, but they are having to go against all the English translations that I checked. So, the burden of proof is on them to prove that it MUST be translated that way, and that it can ONLY be translated that way. They have not done that. Instead, they have assumed that the "collective body" concept is there, so that they can force the re-translation of the phrase to fit their presuppositions and their CBV paradigm. That is backward hermeneutics ("eisegesis"). They have assumed what they need to prove, namely that the present tense verbs in 1 Cor. 15 can ONLY be translated in a present participial form, and that they absolutely CANNOT be translated in the simple present form. But even if they could prove that, it still would not establish their "collective body" application in 1 Cor. 15, since the present participial translation can be used by the "individual body" folks as well, as I will show down below. So, the collective body advocates have a double burden of proof upon them here.

Thirdly, a look at the context should help us see that Paul is indeed making an "individual body" application here. The first 19 verses of this chapter are clearly talking about Christ being raised out of Hades at His resurrection, and those individual saints who had died during the transition period being raised out of Hades at the Parousia. There is no hint of a "collective body" in these verses. Where is the evidence that Paul suddenly shifted from talking about individuals being raised in the first 19 verses, to a "collective body (singular)" being raised in the rest of the chapter? This seems all the more difficult to accept when we see the phrase "resurrection of the dead ones (plural)" used throughout every section of this chapter. Every time this phrase is used, the word "dead" is plural (i.e. "dead ones"). This certainly would be a peculiar way to speak of a singular collective "body"! Dead ones (plural) would be raised. If the "collective body" view is the correct application in this chapter, it should say "dead one" (singular). The plural "dead ones" is inexplicable by the "collective body" interpretation. Notice how this phrase "dead ones" (plural) is used throughout the whole context (1 Cor. 15:12, 13, 15, 16, 20, 21, 29, 32, 35, 42, 52). It is found in every section of Paul's explanation about the resurrection. Not only is there no shift to a "collective body" application, but the whole chapter deals with the resurrection of the dead individuals (plural).

Notice the plural language used in these verses: (18, 19, 20, 22, 23, 29, 35, 38, 48, 49, 51, 52, 57) Here again Paul speaks of individuals. In addition to the "dead ones" (plural) sprinkled throughout this context, Paul uses these additional indicators of plural individuals: "those, we, all, each, they, each of the seeds, us." Notice verses 18-23 and 38 in particular. There is no way these can be twisted into a "collective body" application. It is clearly speaking of individuals (dead ones) being raised, not a (singular) "dead one." And verses 51,52 also become inexplicable by the "collective body" view. According to their concept, these two verses should read, "Behold I tell you a mystery; (it) shall not sleep, for (it) will be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet; for the trumpet will sound, and the dead one (singular) will be raised incorruptible, for (it) shall be changed." See how impossible and absurd it is for the "collective body" concept to be harmonized with this context?

Notice verse 18. It says, "Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished." The ones (plural) who have fallen asleep are individuals. If it was speaking of a collective body, it should say, "Then the one (body) which has fallen asleep in Christ has perished." The collective concept does not fit here.

Look at verses 20-23 -- Who are the "those who are asleep" in verse 20? If this is talking about a "collective body," it should say, "But now Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruit of (the one who is) asleep." But it doesn't say that. It says, "But now Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruit of (those who are) asleep." The same idea is found in verse 23. Instead of saying "the one who is Christ's," it says, "those who are Christ's."

Furthermore, from the "individual body" perspective, there is really no objection to an on-going resurrection process throughout the transition period, as long as we understand what we mean by that (i.e., a process in which several individuals were raised). For example, Christ was the first-fruit (1 Cor. 15:23,24).

There were others (Matt. 27:52) who were "raised" as a part of the "first-resurrection" (Rev. 20:4-5). We also have examples in the book of Acts where Peter and the other apostles raised some individuals from the dead. Those folks are good examples of how dead individuals (not collective bodies) "were BEING raised" during the transition period. That idea removes the grammatical problem completely.

But there are even more options here: As saints of the transition period began to die natural deaths or were martyred (like Stephen and the two James'), they "departed to be with Christ" (Phil. 1:23). They had some sort of "earnest" of eternal life from the Holy Spirit (2 Cor. 5:5). Jesus had told them that if they believed in Him they would never die (John 4:24; 6:40; 8:51; 11:25,26). The "second death" had no power over them. (Rev. 20:6) But this "eternal life" through the Spirit during the transition period was only the "pledge" or earnest of their resurrection inheritance at AD 70. They had something, but not the fullness of it yet. They did not have to go to Sheol/Hades, but they did not get to be in the Heavenly Holy of Holies yet either. They still did not have their immortal bodies nor dwell in the Holy of Holies yet. But they did "depart to be with Christ" in the heavenly realm. So, there is a sense in which we see an on-going gathering of individual saints during the transition period, but none of them were in the Holy of Holies presence of God until after "the rest of the dead" came to life at the end of the millennium at the resurrection event in AD 70 (Rev. 20:5,6). So it was not a process of raising a collective body out of dead Judaism, but rather a process of raising individuals. Study also the groups that were already being gathered in the heavenly outer courts during the transition period (Rev. 6,7). This is a remarkable picture of souls and saints who were delivered from Sheol/Hades and were already in the heavenly realm, but not in the Holy of Holies yet.

In conclusion, I think we can see that the "present passive indicative" verbs here in this chapter (1 Cor. 15), when translated correctly according to their context, do not teach an on-going "collective body" resurrection process. They might allow for the idea of a then-current ongoing (resurrection) harvest of "individual saints," but there is nothing in the verb tenses which would necessitate the idea of a "collective body" resurrection process going on at that time. Again, the burden of proof is upon the collective body advocates to substantiate their theory with real contextual and grammatical proof. In the face of an overwhelming number of translations to the contrary, their task is unenviable (and maybe impossible).