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INTERTEXTUALITY IN 1 COR 15:54–55

A Call for Comfort and Admonition¹

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Abstract: In 1 Corinthians 15, Paul reaffirms the belief in the resurrection of Jesus, which also functions as a justification for the Christian faith. Towards the end, he describes the victory over death through Jesus, which includes the saying “Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?” in 1 Cor 15:54–55. It is well known that this saying alludes to Isa 25:8 and Hos 13:14. The function of this intertextual reference remains dubious however, especially since there seems to be no explicit reason why Paul might want to combine these two OT passages. This paper argues for a deliberate intertextual allusion that takes the context of Isa 25:8 and Hos 13:14 into account and reads the saying within 1 Cor 15:54–58, which shows that Paul’s theological interpretation of the resurrection has a twofold nature that is both comforting and admonishing. He takes Jesus to be the fulfilment of the promise made in Isa 25:8 and uses the context of Hosea 13 to present a warning to the Corinthian church to remain steadfast in Christ.

Paulus bestätigt im Traktat in 1 Kor 15 den Glauben an die Auferstehung als existentiellen Bestandteil des Evangeliums. Gegen Ende dieses Traktats beschreibt er den Sieg über den Tod mit dem Schriftzitat: „Verschlungen ist der Tod vom Sieg. Tod, wo ist dein Sieg? Tod, wo ist dein Stachel?“ (1 Kor 15,54–55). Zwar ist bekannt, dass dieses Schriftzitat eine Mischung aus Jes 25,8 und Hos 13,14 darstellt, jedoch existiert bislang kein Konsens über die Funktion dieser intertextuellen Verbindung. In dieser Studie wird argumentiert, dass diese intertextuelle Verbindung von Paulus vorgenommen wurde, um den Hintergrund von Jes 25,8 und Hos 13,14 bewusst in den Kontext von 1 Kor 15,54–58 miteinzubeziehen. Damit möchte Paulus seine theologische Interpretation der Auferstehung verdeutlichen, die sowohl einen tröstenden, als auch einen ermahnenden Charakter beinhaltet. Er stellt Jesus als Vollendung des Versprechens in Jes 25,8 dar und benutzt den Hintergrund von Hos 13 als Warnung für die korinthische Gemeinde, um fest im Glauben zu sein.

Keywords: 1 Corinthians 15, sting of death, Pauline eschatology, intertextuality, Isaiah 25, Hosea 13

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In 1 Corinthians 15, Paul provides a long treatise on the resurrection of the dead as an important aspect of the gospel (1 Cor 15:1–2,14). He reiterates this aspect to his audience, since it seems to have been doubted by some members of the community (1 Cor 15:12).² His treatise culminates in the explanation that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God because the perishable cannot inherit the imperishable (1 Cor 15:50). Afterwards, Paul provides the mystery (μυστήριον) of the transformation, when the perishable puts on the imperishable and the mortal puts on the immortal (1 Cor 15:51–54b). While this could have been a proper close for the treatise, it still continues by introducing the scriptural saying (1 Cor 15:54c; τότε γενήσεται ὁ λόγος ὁ γεγραμμένος)

Death is swallowed up in victory. Death, where is your victory? Death, where is your sting?

κατεπόθη ὁ θάνατος εἰς νίκος. ποῦ σου, θάνατε, τὸ νίκος; ποῦ σου, θάνατε, τὸ κέντρον; (1 Cor 15:54d–55)

It has long been recognised that this saying is an amalgamation of Isa 25:8 and Hos 13:14. However, with few exceptions, there has been little attempt to explain why Paul refers to these two passages.³ Paul himself appears to provide some sort of exegesis that identifies the sting of death with sin and the power of sin with the law, while the victory has been brought by Jesus Christ (1 Cor 15:56–57). Although this statement might fit well into the Pauline theology of

² The statement in 1 Cor 15:12 has led to different interpretations regarding these members of the Corinthian community. It has been suggested that they either deny the existence of life after death altogether, regard the resurrection as something that has already happened, or believe in an afterlife of the soul and the spirit, but not the body. By analysing the arguments and rhetoric of 1 Corinthians 15, Vos opts for the first option, which denies life after death altogether, see Johan S. Vos, *Argumentation und Situation in 1Kor. 15*, NT 41 (1999) 313–333. Against this view, see Oda Wischmeyer, *1. Korinther 15. Der Traktat des Paulus über die Auferstehung der Toten in der Wahrnehmung unterschiedlicher Textzugänge*, in: dies./Eve-Marie Becker (Hg.), *Von Ben Sira zu Paulus. Gesammelte Aufsätze zu Texten, Theologie und Hermeneutik des Frühjudentums und des Neuen Testaments* (WUNT 1/173), Tübingen 2004, 243–276: 246.

³ Wilk suggests that “Paul’s reasoning in 1 Cor. 15:5–57 shows some parallels with Isa. 24:23–25:10” and argues for a contextual connection. Further, he argues that “With one exception, Paul’s use of references to Isaiah indicates that he took the oracles together with their context to be prophecies of God’s revelation in Christ”, see Florian Wilk, *Isaiah in 1 and 2 Corinthians*, in: Steve Moyise/Maarten J. J. Menken (ed.), *Isaiah in the New Testament*, London 2005, 133–158: 145–147, 157. There is still a debate amongst Pauline scholars as to the influence of Jewish scriptures upon his writings, including 1 Corinthians. Recently, there has been an attempt to quantify and qualify the citations and allusions to Jewish scriptures in 1 Corinthians, which concluded that they have a profound impact, see H.H. Drake Williams III, *Light Giving Sources. Examining the Extent of Scriptural Citation and Allusion Influence in 1 Corinthians*, in: Stanley Porter (ed.), *Paul. Jew, Greek, and Roman* (Pauline studies 5), Leiden u. a. 2008, 7–37.

justification by faith predominantly known from the letter to the Romans,⁴ it does not appear anywhere else in 1 Corinthians, nor to this extent in any other letter by the apostle.⁵ As it stands, this exegetical remark does not seem to fit into the context of the letter.⁶ One way of circumventing this problem has been to declare 1 Cor 15:56 a gloss, which was interpolated by a later editor, because it reflects late Pauline theology.⁷ The present study attempts to offer a different solution on the basis of a synchronic investigation into the function of the amalgamated OT allusion and Paul's exegetical remarks. It argues that the combined intertextual link to Isa 25:8 and Hos 13:14, as well as the following remarks in 1 Cor 15:56–58, reveal the function of Paul's treatise in 1 Corinthians 15, which is a deliberate call for comfort and admonition.

1. Pauline instructions and his use of scripture in 1 Corinthians

Before investigating the Pauline use of the aforementioned scriptural citation, it is necessary to recognise the intention of the letter and some of its relevant points. While there is a debate on whether 1 Corinthians is better described as a paraenetic or a symbouleutic letter,⁸ Paul is likely responding to questions that have been put to him by the Corinthians.⁹ Although it is difficult to reconstruct these hypothetical questions, the topics discussed in the letter provide certain clues. These topics include:¹⁰

- Divisions between certain fractions within the community (1 Cor 1:10–4:21)
- Specific problems in the community (1 Cor 5:1–6:20)

⁴ Cf. Luise Schottroff, *Der erste Brief an die Gemeinde in Korinth* (Theologischer Kommentar zum Neuen Testament 7), Stuttgart 2013, 331.

⁵ Although justification by faith is a prominent topic in Galatians, the explicit connection between death, sin, and the law is only found in Romans, see Friedrich Wilhelm Horn, *1 Korinther 15,56 – ein exegetischer Stachel*, ZNW 82 (1991) 88–105: 99.

⁶ Horn, *1 Korinther 15* (Fn. 5), 101. Udo Schnelle, *Wandlungen im paulinischen Denken* (SBS 137), Stuttgart 1989, 50 has described 1 Cor 15:56 as a small excursus, which briefly points to the relationship between sin, law, and death.

⁷ Horn, *1 Korinther 15* (Fn. 5), 88–105. He suggests that this interpolation could stem from Paul himself at a later stage or some unknown Pauline disciple. However, the first argument that *justification by faith* is a later Pauline development has rightly been described as an “*argumentum ex silentio*”, see Wolfgang Schrage, *Der erste Brief an die Korinther. 1 Kor 15,1–16,24* (EKK 7/4) Neukirchen-Vluyn 2001, 366.

⁸ See Wolfgang Schrage, *Der erste Brief an die Korinther. 1 Kor 1,1–6,11* (EKK 7/1), Neukirchen-Vluyn 2008, 86–90.

⁹ This is suggested by the various topics addressed in the different parts of the letter, which neither seem to follow one main topic nor appear to have been connected on a literary or rhetorical base, see Schrage, *1 Kor 1,1–6,11* (Fn. 8), 90–91.

¹⁰ The list follows Schrage, *1 Kor 1,1–6,11* (Fn. 8), 90.

- Marriage and virginity (1 Cor 7:1–40)
- Pagan cult, specifically the eating of sacrificial meat and idolatry (1 Cor 8:1–11:1)
 - Israel as a warning for the Corinthian community to avoid fornication and idolatry (1 Cor 10:1–14)
- Rules for the congregation (1 Cor 11:2–34)
- Different charismas for the members of the community (1 Cor 12:1–14:40)
- The resurrection (1 Cor 15:1–58)
- Collection for Jerusalem and final remarks (1 Cor 16:1–18)

With each of these points, Paul provides instructions on recommended behaviour for the Corinthian church. Thus, he qualifies marriage as a good thing, but also allows for celibacy (1 Cor 7:38–40) or he forbids idolatry (1 Cor 10:14), but does not deny the eating of sacrificial meat for as long as it does not offend a fellow Christian (1 Cor 10:27–28). As regards 1 Corinthians 15, the treatise is likely sparked by the denial of the resurrection by some members of the community (1 Cor 15:12) and without doubt one of its functions is to reaffirm this belief. This affirmation of the resurrection is the central topic of the first part of the treatise (1 Cor 15:1–34), which already culminates in an admonition (1 Cor 15:34).¹¹ The second part is usually characterised as a description of how the resurrection will take place (1 Cor 15:35–58),¹² yet it also culminates in an admonition, which requests a steadiness in faith, to abound in the work of the Lord and to endure hardship because it is not in vain in the Lord (1 Cor 15:58). This admonition not only concludes the treatise, but also the second part (1 Cor 15:35–58) right after the scriptural citation and the following remarks about the sting of death, sin, the law, and the victory through Jesus Christ (1 Cor 15:54–57). This bears the question, if there is a direct connection between the admonition in 1 Cor 15:58 and the references and remarks in 1 Cor 15:54–57.

Another point of enquiry is the way Paul uses scripture. Given that he regularly provides instructions for his audiences, it should be asked if scripture plays a role in these instructions. In this regard, particular attention can be drawn to the way Paul refers to Israel and scripture in 1 Cor 10:1–14. In a mid-rashic way, he recalls parts of the wilderness narrative known from the Pentateuch (he refers to different passages) (1 Cor 10:1–5) and develops admonitions for the Corinthians (1 Cor 10:6–10), which he summarises more broadly

¹¹ Cf. Schrage, 1 Kor 1,1–6,11 (Fn. 8), 9, 248–250.

¹² Cf. Schrage, 1 Kor 1,1–6,11 (Fn. 8), 9.

(1 Cor 10:11–14) with a distinct eschatological emphasis (1 Cor 10:11).¹³ This eschatological emphasis is not simply another way of urging the Corinthians, but it is the hermeneutical background against which Paul reads the Old Testament passages as having been written to shed light on his time and audience.¹⁴ Thus, he interprets these passages in light of a Christ typology (cf. 1 Cor 10:4) and uses them to extract specific paraenetic remarks, such as the demand to “flee from idolatry” (1 Cor 10:14). It will be shown below that the use of Isa 25:8 and Hos 13:14 in 1 Cor 15:54d–55 is following this very logic.

2. 1 Cor 15:54 as an introduction to the scriptural citation

After these initial thoughts on 1 Corinthians and the Pauline use of scripture, it is time to turn to the scriptural citation of 1 Cor 15:54d–55 in more detail. Firstly, it is necessary to situate it within its immediate context. This is particularly important, because 1 Cor 15:54 reads:

When the perishable puts on the imperishable and the mortal puts on the immortal, then will be fulfilled the word that has been written
 ὅταν δὲ τὸ φθαρτὸν τοῦτο ἐνδύσῃται ἀφθαρσίαν καὶ τὸ θνητὸν τοῦτο ἐνδύσῃται ἀθανασίαν, τότε γενήσεται ὁ λόγος ὁ γεγραμμένος

The scriptural citation is introduced by the designation “the word that has been written” (ὁ λόγος ὁ γεγραμμένος) (1 Cor 15:54c),¹⁵ while the verb γενήσεται signals the future tense of the saying.¹⁶ However, the adverb τότε specifies that this is the apodosis, upon which the condition in the protasis (cf. ὅταν) is fulfilled.

This condition reads:

When the perishable puts on the imperishable and the mortal puts on the immortal
 ὅταν δὲ τὸ φθαρτὸν τοῦτο ἐνδύσῃται ἀφθαρσίαν καὶ τὸ θνητὸν τοῦτο ἐνδύσῃται ἀθανασίαν

¹³ Wolfgang Schrage, *Der erste Brief an die Korinther*. 1 Kor 6,12–11,16 (EKK 7/2), Neukirchen-Vluyn 1995, 381–383.

¹⁴ Cf. Schrage, 1 Kor 6,12–11,16 (Fn. 13), 403–407.

¹⁵ The perfect participle γεγραμμένος is probably used to emphasise the λόγος, since scriptural citations are usually introduced by a perfect indicative form of γράφω (cf. 1 Cor 10:7; 14:21; 15:45). Schrage, 1 Kor 15,1–16,24 (Fn. 7), 378–379 points out the importance of the future tense in the sentence (cf. γενήσεται) and refers to 2 Cor 4:13; Rom 9:9 and John 15:25 for the use of λόγος and γεγραμμένος, as well as CD 7,10, which introduces a citation from Isaiah. Interestingly, λόγος is used at the beginning of the treatise to describe the word that Paul gave to evangelise the Corinthians (1 Cor 15:2).

¹⁶ This is usually understood as an eschatological future, e.g. Schrage, 1 Kor 15,1–16,24 (Fn. 7), 378.

For Paul, this seems to be a central point, since the protasis simply repeats the previous verse (cf. 1 Cor 15:53,54).¹⁷ However, the meaning of this statement is far from certain and depends on the word pairs φθαρτόν vs. ἀφθαρσία and θνητόν vs. ἀθανασία, as well as the verb ἐνδύω. In order to shed light on the meaning of these terms, it is necessary to investigate the way Paul uses them.

a) φθαρτόν vs. ἀφθαρσία

This pair only occurs in 1 Cor 15:53,54, though φθαρτόν occurs in 1 Cor 9:25 and Rom 1:23, while ἀφθαρσία is found in 1 Cor 15:42,50 and Rom 2:7.

In 1 Cor 9:25, Paul uses a comparison between participants in athletic competitions and Christians. He points out the rigour that athletes undergo in preparation for training in order to gain a “perishable victory crown” (φθαρτὸν στέφανον) and suggests that Christians show the same effort for an “imperishable” (ἄφθαρτον) victory crown, which is “the crown that awaits the believer in the life to come beyond this passing age”.¹⁸ The gist of the passage, therefore, is a call to devotion and sacrifice for Christians so they do not gain anything “perishable” (φθαρτόν) but something “imperishable” (ἄφθαρτον).¹⁹ The pair φθαρτός and ἄφθαρτος is compared again in Rom 1:23, where the adjective ἄφθαρτος describes God, while φθαρτός is attributed to humankind. The context pictures the arrogance of humankind and their ignorant attempt at creating an idolatrous picture, which does not reflect the glory of the imperishable God but the likeness of a perishable human (ὁμοίωμα εἰκόνης φθαρμοῦ ἀνθρώπου) (Rom 1:23). The noun ἀφθαρσία already features in 1 Cor 15:50, which marks the beginning of this particular section of the treatise on resurrection (1 Cor 15:50–58).²⁰ Here, Paul uses the pair “flesh and blood” (σὰρξ καὶ αἷμα)/“kingdom of God” (βασιλεία θεοῦ) and “the corruptible” (ὁ φθαρτός)/“the imperishable” (ὁ ἀφθαρτός), which equates “flesh and blood” (σὰρξ καὶ αἷμα) with “the corruptible” (ὁ φθαρτός) and “kingdom of God” (βασιλεία θεοῦ) with “the imperishable” (ὁ ἀφθαρτός).²¹ The saying “flesh and blood” (σὰρξ καὶ αἷμα) is best interpreted as denoting the earthly body in comparison with God

¹⁷ Schrage, 1 Kor 15,1–16,24 (Fn. 7), 378.

¹⁸ David E. Garland, 1 Corinthians (BECNT), Grand Rapids, MI 2003, 442. See also Schrage, 1 Kor 6,12–11,16 (Fn. 13), 368.

¹⁹ 1 Pet 1:23 also uses the pair φθαρτός and ἄφθαρτος in order to describe the turn to faith through the word of God.

²⁰ The introductory formula τοῦτο δὲ φημι in conjunction with the direct address ἀδελφοί signals the beginning of a new train of thought in Paul’s argumentation (1 Cor 15:50). This part is closed again with the address ἀδελφοί, now characterised as μου ἀγαπητοί (my beloved), and the conjunction ὥστε, which introduces Paul’s appeal.

²¹ Schrage, 1 Kor 15,1–16,24 (Fn. 7), 368.

(cf. Gal 1:16; Mt 16:17),²² which might have a pejorative connotation.²³ The connection between “the imperishable” (ἡ ἀφθαρσία) and the eschatological kingdom of God is already apparent in 1 Cor 15:42, where Paul employs the pair φθορά and ἀφθαρσία in regards to “the resurrection of the dead” (ἡ ἀνάστασις τῶν νεκρῶν); φθορά is the starting point (“it is sown”) and ἀφθαρσία is the eschatological end point (“it is raised”). Thus, ἀφθαρσία has been connected to the kingdom of God and the topic of “the resurrection of the dead” (ἡ ἀνάστασις τῶν νεκρῶν).²⁴ Apart from 1 Cor 15:42,50, ἀφθαρσία features in Rom 2:7. Here, it is part of a list of qualities that a person steadfast in the good deeds and worthy of eternal life searches for, which includes δόξα, τιμή, and ἀφθαρσία. These terms have been labelled as a description for the reality of eschatological salvation.²⁵ The statement is part of a passage that contextualises God’s judgement and portrays the righteous person that will pass his judgement (Rom 2:7) as opposed to the unrighteous one that will receive anger and wrath (Rom 2:8).²⁶

In sum, the Pauline use of the terms φθαρτόν and ἀφθαρσία reflects a constant comparison between the fallible earthly and the infallible heavenly that is to be desired. The adjective φθαρτόν is attributed to the human sphere (a human athletic crown, 1 Cor 9:25; or a human image, Rom 1:23), while the noun ἀφθαρσία denotes the eschatological kingdom of God (1 Cor 15:42,50) and qualities that belong within its sphere (Rom 2:7). Both terms are probably part of a Pauline *topos* when he speaks of the necessities of the eschatological kingdom of God and the resurrection of the dead.

b) θνητόν vs. ἀθανασία

Paul’s second pair, θνητόν vs. ἀθανασία, is only found in the present passage. Moreover, ἀθανασία is not used by Paul in his letters again.²⁷ The adjective θνητόν features in Rom 6:12; 8:11 and 2 Cor 4:11; 5:4.

²² Schrage, 1 Kor 15,1–16,24 (Fn. 7), 368.

²³ Schotttroff, Korinth (Fn. 4), 326.

²⁴ Schrage, 1 Kor 15,1–16,24 (Fn. 7), 368 declares ἀφθαρσία an interpretation of the ἀνάστασις τῶν νεκρῶν.

²⁵ Ulrich Wilckens, Der Brief an die Römer. Röm 1–5 (EKK 6/1), Neukirchen-Vluyn 1978, 126. He comments that “ἀφθαρσία ist der griechische Begriff für die jüdische Vorstellung des endzeitlichen Lebens der auferweckten Heilsgenossen (vgl. 1Kor 15,42.50.53f; Weish 2,23; 6,19; 4Makk 17,12)”.

²⁶ Wilckens, Röm 1–5 (Fn. 25), 126–127.

²⁷ It only features in 1 Tim 6:16, where it describes God. See also Lorenz Oberlinner, Die Pastoralbriefe. Kommentar zum Ersten Timotheusbrief (HThKNT 11/2), Freiburg i. B. 1994, 299–300, who compares it with Rom 1:23, a passage already discussed above.

Twice θνητόν is used in conjunction with σῶμα (body) (Rom 6:12; 8:11) and once in conjunction with σὰρξ (flesh) (2 Cor 4:11). In the first instance, it is used in an admonition to prevent sin reigning in ones mortal body (ἐν τῷ θνητῷ σώματι) and to act according to Christian devotion by living in Christ Jesus (Rom 6:11–12).²⁸ The second passage refers to the θνητὰ σώματα as a designation for the mortality of the earthly body in the context of the eschatological scenario of the resurrection of the dead. The promise of the resurrection of the earthly body is given under the condition that the spirit of the one who raised Jesus (i.e. God) lives in you (Rom 8:11), which refers to the ones that are in Christ (Rom 8:1).²⁹ In 2 Cor 4:11, reference is made to the θνητὴ σὰρξ (mortal flesh), which denotes the earthly bodies. The context describes the suffering that can result from discipleship (2 Cor 4:10–11), which manifests itself upon the mortal flesh (θνητὴ σὰρξ).³⁰ Later, Paul expresses the Christian desire that τὸ θνητόν (the mortal) should be swallowed up (καταποθῇ) by life (2 Cor 5:4) because of the hope to be dressed by the heavenly house (2 Cor 5:2). This saying recalls 1 Cor 15:54, where death is swallowed up in victory. Further, the word play on ἐκδύω and ἐπενδύω in 2 Cor 5:2–4 reminds the reader of 1 Cor 15:53–54, where ἐνδύω describes the action that has to be performed.

Therefore, each time Paul employs the adjective θνήτον, it functions as a reference for the earthly body and is found in an eschatological context. Again, it can be speculated that the term is part of a Pauline eschatological *topos*.

c) ἐνδύω

The two pairs used in 1 Cor 15:53,54 (φθαρτόν/ἀφθαρσία and θνητόν/ἀθανασία) discussed above probably belong to Paul's eschatological vocabulary and present a comparison between the current (earthly) situation and the desired (heavenly) prospect. The action that has to be performed in order to reach the prospects of ἀφθαρσία and ἀθανασία is described by the verb ἐνδύω. Apart from the present passage, Paul uses the term in Gal 3:27 and Rom 13:12,14.

Gal 3:27 reads:

For as many of you as have been baptized (ἐβαπτίσθητε) into Christ have put on (ἐνεδύσασθε) Christ.

²⁸ Ulrich Wilckens, *Der Brief an die Römer. Röm 6–11* (EKK 6/2), Neukirchen-Vluyn 1980, 19–20.

²⁹ Wilckens, *Röm 6–11* (Fn. 28), 134.

³⁰ Schmeller comments that the expression θνητὴ σὰρξ denotes “die Schwäche, Geschöpflichkeit und Hinfälligkeit der paulinischen Existenz [...], an denen das Auferstehungsleben erkennbar wird”, see Thomas Schmeller, *Der zweite Brief an die Korinther. 2 Kor 1,1–7,4* (EKK 8/1), Neukirchen-Vluyn 2010, 264.

Here, the act of baptism is connected with the act of putting on Christ. Mußner precisely relates this to the “act of salvation” (Heilsgeschehen), which is provided at baptism.³¹ This use is certainly metaphorical and denotes an acceptance of Christ and the baptism in Christ’s name. A similar metaphorical use is found in Rom 13:12, where Paul admonishes his readers to let them “take off the works of darkness” (ἀποθώμεθα τὰ ἔργα) and “put on the weapons of light” (ἐνδυσώμεθα τὰ ὅπλα τοῦ φωτός) (Rom 13:12). The reason for this admonition is introduced by the explanation that the eschatological time (καιρός) and hour (ῥα) has come (Rom 13:11), which is followed by the contrast of the advanced “night” (νύξ) and the nearby “day” (ἡμέρα).³² This nearby “day” recalls the expression of the coming “day of the Lord” (ἡ ἡμέρα τοῦ κυρίου) (cf. 1 Cor 1:8; 5:5; 1 Thess 5:2) and functions as a typical eschatological reference.³³ The meaning of the request to put on (cf. ἐνδυσώμεθα) the weapons of light is elaborated by the small behavioural code in Rom 13:13 (to avoid excessive feasting, drunkenness, promiscuity, debauchery, strife, and jealousy) and the command “to put on the Lord Jesus Christ” (cf. ἐνδύσασθε) (Rom 13:14).³⁴ Given the similarity with Gal 3:27, this use of ἐνδύω not only encompasses the performance of righteous deeds, but reminds the reader of a baptism scene.³⁵ Therefore, the scriptural citation that is introduced in the apodosis in 1 Cor 15:54d–55 is connected to the heavenly prospects of ἀφθαρσία and ἀθανασία in the protasis, which can be reached by acceptance of Jesus Christ, probably through the act of baptism and continuous righteous behaviour, but not by clinging onto the earthly attributes encompassed by φθαρτόν and θνητόν.

3. Two diverging Old Testament Texts

Before attempting to understand the scriptural citation against this contextual background of the letter, it is necessary to recall the OT context of Isa 25:8 and Hos 13:14.

³¹ Franz Mußner, *Der Galaterbrief* (HThKNT 9), Freiburg i. B. 1974, 262–263. Further, he provides a good overview of the metaphorical uses of ἐνδύω in the LXX.

³² Heinrich Schlier, *Der Römerbrief* (HThKNT 6), Freiburg i. B. 1977, 396.

³³ Schlier, *Römerbrief* (Fn. 32), 397.

³⁴ This putting on the Lord Jesus Christ is set in further opposition to the “provisions of the flesh” (τῆς σαρκὸς πρόνοιαν), which summarise the behavioural code of Rom 13:13.

³⁵ Schlier, *Römerbrief* (Fn. 32), 397 goes further and comments “Die Redeweise der Mahnungen ist traditionelle Taufsprache, sowohl was das ‚Ablegen‘ und ‚Anlegen‘ als auch was das ‚Anziehen des Herrn Jesus Christus‘ betrifft”.

a) Isa 25:8

Paul's scriptural citation starts with the saying:

Death is swallowed up in victory.

κατεπόθη ὁ θάνατος εἰς νῖκος. (1 Cor 15:54d)

This recalls Isa 25:8, although it is unclear which OT *Vorlage* Paul used for this allusion.³⁶ The Greek versions provide some difficulty,³⁷ e.g. Isa 25:8 LXX portrays death as the subject and reads κατέπιεν ὁ θάνατος ἰσχύσας (death was stronger and swallowed), while in the MT God is the implied subject (בלע המות לנצח; he swallows up death forever).³⁸ Given that the Pauline version uses a *passivum divinum* (cf. κατεπόθη),³⁹ God must have been understood as the subject. Isa 25:8 is part of the eschatological banquet that God offers on mount Zion (Isa 25:6–8). Beuken argues that the statement of God swallowing death in Isa 25:8 functions as an explanation for the previous two verses, where YHWH offers the banquet on mount Zion for all peoples (Isa 25:6) and swallows the face of the covering over all peoples and the veil that is spread over all nations (Isa 25:7).⁴⁰ It is noteworthy that both verses emphasise the universality of the eschatological banquet by specifying that it is for all people (cf. כל־העמים / τὰ ἔθνη), which makes this a comforting passage, promising the end of death and affirming God's ultimate power and his all-encompassing dominion.⁴¹ Such an emphasis might explain the εἰς νῖκος (in victory), which is found in the Pauline version (possibly taken from proto-Theodotion or some other LXX variant).⁴² Therefore, it is probable that Paul's intention in regards to Isa 25:8 is twofold; it comforts his readers and assures God's ability and power to take away death.

³⁶ For the textual variants, see Peter J. Thomson, "Death, where is thy victory?" Paul's Theology in the Twinkling of an Eye, in: Reimund Bieringer et al. (ed.), *Resurrection in the New Testament*. FS J. Lambrecht (BETHL 165) Leuven 2002, 357–386, 376.

³⁷ See John D. Watts, *Isaiah 1–33* (WBC 24), Waco 1985, 329. The difficulty arises from the translation of בלע. The LXX probably attempts to avoid a passive form, while other Greek witnesses employ a passive.

³⁸ Schrage, 1 Kor 15,1–16,24 (Fn. 7), 364. See also Willem A. M. Beuken, *Jesaja 13–27* (HThKAT) Freiburg i. Br. 2007, 342. Some scholars presume that Paul used some version by Theodotion, cf. Schrage, 1 Kor 15,1–16,24 (Fn. 7), 364.

³⁹ Schrage, 1 Kor 15,1–16,24 (Fn. 7), 364.

⁴⁰ Beuken, *Jesaja 13–27* (Fn. 38), 349.

⁴¹ Cf. Beuken, *Jesaja 13–27* (Fn. 38), 349–350.

⁴² Cf. Schrage, 1 Kor 15,1–16,24 (Fn. 7), 364.

b) *Hos 13:14*

Paul continues the scriptural citation with two (rhetorical) questions taken from Hos 13:14:

Death, where is your victory? Death, where is your sting?

ποῦ σου, θάνατε, τὸ νῖκος; ποῦ σου, θάνατε, τὸ κέντρον; (1 Cor 15:55)

Again it is difficult to ascertain which OT *Vorlage* was used here, probably some form of the Septuagint or some unknown version.⁴³ Further, the context of Hos 13:14 is unclear. Some scholars assume that it functions as a promise for God's people, possibly even the first expression of hope for resurrection.⁴⁴ Others regard it as a threat, which proclaims punishment for sinful behaviour.⁴⁵ If Hos 13:14 is read within the context of Hosea 13, a clear picture emerges that supports the latter. Hos 13:1 addresses Ephraim, which is used synonymously for the northern kingdom of Israel (cf. Hos 6:4). It explains that Ephraim offended God by worshipping Baal (Hos 13:1 MT). The LXX is more specific because it mentions *δικαιώματα* (righteous regulations), which Ephraim received in Israel, but placed them with Baal instead (Hos 13:1 LXX). Subsequently, those being addressed are accused of idolatry (Hos 13:2), suggesting that the *δικαιώματα* (righteous regulations) are likely to be divine ordinances that are transgressed.⁴⁶ In Hos 13:4 the problem of idolatry and polytheism becomes even more apparent when the first commandment of the Decalogue is repeated and it is stated that there is no saviour apart from God.⁴⁷ The high point is reached when God proclaims that he will destroy Israel (Hos 13:9 MT).⁴⁸ The LXX differs slightly, because it features the rhetorical question "in your destruction (*διαφθορά*), Israel, who will come to aid" (Hos 13:9 LXX). This sets the scene for the rhetorical questions spoken by God, which in Hos 13:14 MT read:

⁴³ See the comparison in Thomson, *Death* (Fn. 36), 377–378.

⁴⁴ Artur Weiser, *Das Buch der zwölf kleinen Propheten* (ATD 24), Göttingen 1963, 99. See also Theodore H. Robinson, *Die zwölf kleinen Propheten* (HAT 14), Tübingen 1964, 51–52 and E. Earle Ellis, *Paul's Use of the Old Testament*, Edinburgh 1957, 138.

⁴⁵ Deissler points out the possible contrast between salvation (cf. פדה and גאל) and condemnation in the passage and emphasises that the time for divine mercy is over, see Alfons Deissler, *Zwölf Propheten* (NEB.AT), Würzburg 1981, 59. Jeremias even states that "Grauenhafter ist der Tod des Gottesvolkes nie im Alten Testament beschrieben worden", see Jörg Jeremias, *Der Prophet Hosea* (ATD 24/1), Göttingen 1983, 166.

⁴⁶ This is in accordance with the LXX usage of the term (cf. Gen 26:5; Ex 15:25,26; 21:1). Lk 1:6 uses the pair ἐντολαί and δικαιώματα. See also Gottlob Schrenk, *δικαίωμα*, ThWNT 2 (1957) 223–227. Paul uses the term in the expression τὰ δικαιώματα τοῦ νόμου when he outlines the importance and proper obedience of the law for Jews (Rom 2:26).

⁴⁷ Douglas Stuart, *Hosea – Jonah* (WBC 31), Waco 1987, 203.

⁴⁸ Stuart, *Hosea – Jonah* (Fn. 47), 204–205.

From Sheol shall I ransom them? From death shall I redeem them? Where are your plagues, death? Where is your destruction, Sheol?

Hos 13:14 LXX differs slightly, since it reads:

I will rescue them out of the hand of Hades and I will redeem them out of death. Where is your punishment, death? Where is your sting, Hades?

One might assume that the future tense signals that God is going to perform the rescue, but the MT and the LXX both continue by adding that “sorrow/consolation is hidden from my [God’s] eyes” (Hos 13:14).⁴⁹ Thus, the passage refers to curses that are summoned for disobedience of God’s covenant, which presents a solely negative image.⁵⁰

Taking both, Isa 25:8 and Hos 13:14 together, the reader is left with a two-fold message, which provides comfort by God’s promise to take away death for all peoples (Isa 25:8), but also a warning by the curses that are summoned for disobedience of God’s covenant (Hos 13:14).

4. 1 Cor 15:56–58. Paul’s exegesis and consequences

Following the combined scriptural citation (1 Cor 15:54d–55), Paul provides his own exegesis (1 Cor 15:56–57), using a chiasmic structure:⁵¹

- A κατεπόθη ὁ θάνατος εἰς **νῖκος**. (Isa 25:8)
- B ποῦ σου, θάνατε, τὸ **νῖκος**; ποῦ σου, θάνατε, τὸ **κέντρον**; (Hos 13:14)
- B τὸ δὲ **κέντρον** τοῦ θανάτου ἢ ἁμαρτία, ἢ δὲ δύναμις τῆς ἁμαρτίας ὁ νόμος·
- A τῷ δὲ θεῷ χάρις τῷ διδόντι ἡμῖν τὸ **νῖκος** διὰ τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ.

The key words for Paul are νῖκος and κέντρον. He adds νῖκος both for Isa 25:8 and Hos 13:14,⁵² which he picks up again in 1 Cor 15:57, surrounding his use of κέντρον from Hos 13:14. This encompassing use of τὸ νῖκος is Paul’s key message, resting on a typological interpretation of scripture. Thus, Paul interprets Isa 25:8 by presenting Jesus as the fulfilment of the Isaianic promise to all nations and, consequently, as the means to take away death, when he states “Gratitude to God, who has given us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Cor 15:57). Read in light of the Hosea passage, Paul provides a positive response to the rhetorical question and yet the original context of Hosea is

⁴⁹ For the textual variants of Hos 13:14 among the Greek witnesses and the Targum, see Thomson, *Death* (Fn. 36), 377–378.

⁵⁰ Stuart, *Hosea – Jonah* (Fn. 47), 207.

⁵¹ Cf. Wilk, *Isaiah* (Fn. 3), 146–147.

⁵² Or Paul possibly found the τὸ νῖκος in proto-Theodotion or some other Greek variant.

not completely lost. Although the τὸ νῆκος frames the Hosea citation with its “sting” (κέντρον), the warning from Hosea is picked up in 1 Cor 15:56. There, Paul identifies the “sting of death” (τὸ κέντρον τοῦ θανάτου) with “sin” (ἁμαρτία) and deduces that “the power of sin” (ἡ δύναμις τῆς ἁμαρτίας) is “the law” (ὁ νόμος) (1 Cor 15:56).⁵³ Read against the background of Hos 13:14, the law could refer to God’s regulations (including a part of the Decalogue) that were broken due to Israel’s covenant disobedience.⁵⁴ However, the sting is not equated with the law, only with sin, which relates to the trespassing of the law, presenting Israel’s disobedience as a warning.⁵⁵ The law is merely “the power of sin” (ἡ δύναμις τῆς ἁμαρτίας), which provides sin with the opportunity to become the sting of death. Thus, Paul employs a typological reading of scripture (here Isa 25:8 and Hos 13:14) to provide a comforting assurance and an admonition for the Corinthian church by referring to Israel’s past, following the logic already known from 1 Cor 10:1–14. Therefore, it does not surprise that Paul concludes his treatise on the resurrection with a paraenetic call, using the same words to address the members of the Corinthian church (“my beloved”; see 1 Cor 10:14 and 15:58).⁵⁶ This final paraenetic call requests continuous (πάντοτε) perseverance in the work of the Lord (τὸ ἔργον τοῦ κυρίου) with the comforting knowledge that this work (κόπος) is not in vain.⁵⁷ The concrete consequences of this call for comfort and admonition have already been expressed by Paul in the previous condition for the fulfilment of the (prophetic) scriptural citation (1 Cor 15:54), viz. to aspire the heavenly attributes (ἀφθαρσία and ἀθανασία) in rejection of the earthly ones (φθαρτόν and θνητόν); this is done by *putting on* (ἐνδύω) Christ.

⁵³ It should be noted that the “sting” functions only as an instrument of death, cf. Schrage, 1 Kor 15,1–16,24 (Fn. 7), 382. For a diachronic study of the origins of the “sting” and its Canaanite background, see Johannes C. de Moor, O Death, Where Is Thy Sting?, in: Lyle Eslinger / Glen Taylor (ed.), Ascribe to the Lord. Biblical and other Studies in Memory of Peter C. Craigie (JSOT.S 67), Sheffield 1988, 99–107.

⁵⁴ Stuart, Hosea – Jonah (Fn. 47), 207.

⁵⁵ Hos 13:12 also includes an explicit reference to Ephraim’s sin, see Stuart, Hosea – Jonah (Fn. 47), 206.

⁵⁶ In 1 Cor 15:58, he adds ἀδελφοί. See also the use of the expression in a previous paraenetic call of the letter (1 Cor 4:14).

⁵⁷ The expression “work of the Lord” (τὸ ἔργον τοῦ κυρίου) is used by Paul to refer to the act of the apostle to spread the good news and create Christian communities (cf. 1 Cor 9:1; 16:10). Schrage, 1 Kor 15,1–16,24 (Fn. 7), 378–385 comments “Bei ἔργον τοῦ κυρίου wird man von [1 Cor] 3,13–15; 9,1 und 16,10 her am ehesten an das Werk des Aufbaus der Gemeinde denken”.

5. Conclusion

The combined scriptural reference to Isa 25:8 and Hos 13:14 has to be read in the context of the temporal sentence in 1 Cor 15:54. There, Paul mentions the dichotomy between the fallible earthly and the desired heavenly attributes and explains that the latter can be reached through righteous behaviour, with a potential hint towards baptism. In light of this statement, it is possible to understand the twofold scriptural citation, where Paul invokes the immediate context of Isa 25:8 and Hos 13:14 as a pedagogical tool for his audience. The two key issues for him are the victory and the sting, which he picks up in his exegesis (1 Cor 15:56–57); the sting as a warning for trespassing against God and the victory as an assurance of Jesus as the saviour. The pedagogical intention is emphasised again in the final admonition for his audience (1 Cor 15:58).⁵⁸ Such a use of scripture is symptomatic for Paul, as shown by the parallel in 1 Cor 10:1–14.

⁵⁸ It could be argued that this final paraenetic call also picks up the assurance of the victory through Jesus Christ by mentioning the knowledge that the work is not in vain.