

1 Corinthians 15:20-34 – “In Christ All Will Be Made Alive”

15:20 - *But now Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.*

After writing in the first part of this chapter of the validity of the resurrection, Paul now comes to an emphatic statement to declare simply that Christ is risen from the dead. There's no argument to be made here. The resurrection is one of the most substantiated events in history.

And Paul ties in something very important that can be easily missed. He says that Jesus ***has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.***

This is looking to the Old Testament command of offering the firstfruits of your harvest to the Lord – this was known as the Feast of Firstfruits:

Leviticus 23:9–11, *"And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, ¹⁰ 'Speak to the children of Israel, and say to them: 'When you come into the land which I give to you, and reap its harvest, then you shall bring a sheaf of the firstfruits of your harvest to the priest. ¹¹ He shall wave the sheaf before the Lord, to be accepted on your behalf; on the day after the Sabbath the priest shall wave it.'"*

- This was a time for the Israelites to thank the Lord for His provision but also to acknowledge their anticipation of more to come.
- In the same way, Jesus has become the firstfruits in that He has established this harvest of eternal life, and there is much more to come – you and me, the believers in Jesus Christ! Those who are saved and have passed away, haven't died, they've just ***fallen asleep*** so to speak. Their physical bodies are awaiting this resurrection, while the person's spirit is presently with the Lord.
- Jesus' resurrection has set in motion an order for others to experience resurrection too!

And this offering was made on the day after the Passover Sabbath. When did Jesus rise again? The first day of the week, the day after the Passover Sabbath. Jesus fulfilled what this Feast was pointing to, just as He was sacrificed on the Passover, as He came to be our Passover Lamb that takes away the sins of the world.

15:21-22 - *For since by man came death, by Man also came the resurrection of the dead. ²² For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive.*

We get into some interesting things now as we look at two representatives of humanity – Adam and Jesus.

We read that by one ***man came death***. Through the fall of Adam, we all inherited this sin nature. We're not sinners because we sin, we sin because we're sinners. It's a part of our DNA and that goes right back to Adam.

Now some of you may think, that's not fair! I shouldn't have to deal with the repercussions of Adam's fall in the garden. We may not like that truth, but it's the reality in which we live. We are born in sin. But this is not the reality that we need to remain in!

It's true that Adam stands as our representative head. He is the father of all humanity. This has been called '***Federal Headship***'. A federal head is one who, through a covenant relationship, represents or stands in for someone else. The issue people can have is that they don't like someone else standing in their place. They especially don't like Adam being their representative. He failed! People think they could have done a much better job. *'If only I could have had a chance to be in the garden, I would have put Eve **and** the devil in their place. We would never be in this mess!'*

Instead of thinking you've been unfairly punished, recognize what God was actually working out for us.

Romans 5:12–17, *"Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned—¹³ (For until the law sin was in the world, but sin is not imputed when there is no law. ¹⁴ Nevertheless death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those who had not sinned according to the likeness of the transgression of Adam, who is a type of Him who was to come. ¹⁵ But the free gift is not like the offense. For if by the one man's offense many died, much more the grace of God and the gift by the grace of the one Man, Jesus Christ, abounded to many. ¹⁶ And the gift is not like that which came through the one who sinned. For the judgment which came from one offense resulted in condemnation, but the free gift which came from many offenses resulted in justification. ¹⁷ For if by the one man's offense death reigned through the one, much more those who receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ.)"*

Yes, we were brought into serious consequences by one man's act - but in a greater way, we were also delivered by one Man's act. This is the great Gospel. If we weren't brought into Adam's sin, and we were only accountable for our own sin, then we would have to meet the demands of the law. There would be no way for us to be accounted righteous. But Jesus has accomplished this for us! Just as Adam's guilt extended to the whole human race, God's gift of grace through Jesus *abounded to many*.

- Those that wonder how One Man can save so many, the answer is right here. Because through one man sin infected all, so too, through One Man sin can be cleared and salvation provided.
- In God's great wisdom, this is how He designed it!

So, don't think it's wrong that one man brought death, rejoice that by one Man – Jesus, ***all shall be made alive!***

And in no way does this reflect a universal salvation. It's not that all will be made alive, it's that all who are ***in Christ***. If you have put your hope in Jesus, you have the great hope and assurance of everlasting life, being resurrected in glory!

- If you're born once, you will die twice. If you're born twice, you will die once.

15:23 - *But each one in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, afterward those who are Christ's at His coming.*

We see here that there's an order to the resurrection (not an odour). These bodies will be made new. The order is as follows:

1. Jesus Christ.
2. The Church. **1 Thessalonians 4:16b-17**, *"And the dead in Christ will rise first. ¹⁷ Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord."* Those that have died as believers in Christ will be resurrected, then those believers who are alive will be raptured up to meet the Lord in the air, and all will be given their resurrected bodies.
3. Tribulation Saints. They will be raised up at Jesus' second coming to reign with Him in the Millennium (Revelation 20:4). This will include Old Testament Saints (Daniel 12:2).
4. The Millennial Saints. Those who die during the Millennium while in their earthly bodies will be resurrected. This may well be an instant transformation into their eternal bodies at the time of death.

There will be a 5th resurrection – and that will happen after the Millennium. That is for unbelievers. Revelation 20 speaks more about this:

Revelation 20:5–15, *“But the rest of the dead did not live again until the thousand years were finished. This is the first resurrection. ⁶ Blessed and holy is he who has part in the first resurrection. Over such the second death has no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with Him a thousand years. ⁷ Now when the thousand years have expired, Satan will be released from his prison ⁸ and will go out to deceive the nations which are in the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together to battle, whose number is as the sand of the sea. ⁹ They went up on the breadth of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city. And fire came down from God out of heaven and devoured them. ¹⁰ The devil, who deceived them, was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone where the beast and the false prophet are. And they will be tormented day and night forever and ever. ¹¹ Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away. And there was found no place for them. ¹² And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is the Book of Life. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books. ¹³ The sea gave up the dead who were in it, and Death and Hades delivered up the dead who were in them. And they were judged, each one according to his works. ¹⁴ Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. ¹⁵ And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire.”*

This is what Paul speaks of as **the end**...

15:24-25 - Then comes the end, when He delivers the kingdom to God the Father, when He puts an end to all rule and all authority and power. ²⁵ For He must reign till He has put all enemies under His feet.

The end comes at the last resurrection. You see, Christ comes back again after the 7 year Tribulation with the raptured/resurrected saints at His side. Then there's the sheep and the goats judgment. Those who survived through the tribulation having repented and put their faith in Jesus will come into the Millennial Kingdom in their physical bodies. Those who survived through the tribulation still as unbelievers will be cast to hades where they will await the Great White Throne Judgment.

After the thousand year reign of Christ on the earth there will be one final rebellion when Satan is allowed to go and deceive the nations. But Jesus will bring a quick end to this and at this point the last resurrection will take place. This is when the sea and death and hades (Rev 20:13) deliver up their dead and they stand before God where they will receive their final sentence and will be cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death.

At this point Jesus will have put an end to all physical human life, and ***all rule and all authority and power.***

After all enemies are put ***under His feet*** (a way of describing total conquest – O.T. passages speak of stepping on the necks of their enemies) then the new heavens and new earth are created where nothing will ever corrupt or tarnish it any longer. Hallelujah.

15:26-27 - The last enemy that will be destroyed is death. ²⁷ For “He has put all things under His feet.” But when He says “all things are put under Him,” it is evident that He who put all things under Him is excepted.

When the new heaven and new earth is instituted, there will be no more death. Death is an enemy. It's the final curtain that leaves people unable to repent and receive salvation. If you're a believer, then death is no enemy. I'm not fond of it, but I'm not afraid of it, because I know what is awaiting me and all believers!

Verse 27 is a little difficult to follow who the pronouns speak of. “We might paraphrase it as follows: “For God has put all things under Christ’s feet. But when God says, all things are put under Christ, it is obvious that God is excluded, who put all things under Christ.”” ¹

15:28 - Now when all things are made subject to Him, then the Son Himself will also be subject to Him who put all things under Him, that God may be all in all.

Christ was sent by the Father to rule and reign and establish the kingdom of God. When all things are finally under His reign, then the Son will hand everything back over to the Father who will be all in all. All throughout eternity there will continue to be this relationship between the Father and Son.

¹ MacDonald, W. (1995). *Believer's Bible Commentary: Old and New Testaments* (A. Farstad, Ed.; p. 1806). Thomas Nelson.

15:29 - *Otherwise, what will they do who are baptized for the dead, if the dead do not rise at all? Why then are they baptized for the dead?*

There have been numerous interpretations of this verse. This most likely spoke of a pagan custom that had influenced the Corinthian church. Paul's not advocating nor giving allowance for it, as it's not scriptural. But the point was, if you don't believe in a resurrection, why in the world are you baptizing for the dead? If the dead are just dead, why go through this formality?

"Another possible interpretation is that, by being baptized, the Corinthian Christians were publicly taking the places of their fellow believers who had died. They were filling up the ranks of baptized Christians who, by dying, had left vacancies in those ranks." (Ironside, quoted by Constable)

15:30-32 - *And why do we stand in jeopardy every hour? ³¹ I affirm, by the boasting in you which I have in Christ Jesus our Lord, I die daily. ³² If, in the manner of men, I have fought with beasts at Ephesus, what advantage is it to me? If the dead do not rise, "Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die!"*

Paul had numerous times put his life on the line. There was a constant threat of death. He would wake up each day wondering, *is this the day I come home Jesus, is this the day one of my enemies will finally accomplish their goal of getting rid of me?*

Paul says he **dies daily**. This wasn't literal but he lived with that attitude that it could be his last.

I have fought with beasts at Ephesus... We don't have any account of Paul getting thrown to wild animals as they would do in the Roman coliseums. Perhaps what Paul is referring to is the wild mob that came against him in Ephesus (Acts 19:21-41). They were ready to take Paul out and he had to flee the city.

But Paul endured all these troubles because of the hope and the reality of the resurrection.

- **Philippians 1:21**, *"For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain."*
- The resurrection means that the worst thing is never the last thing!
- If there's no life after this, then we might as well be calloused and cavalier in this life.

“John G. Paton, a nineteenth-century missionary to the South Seas, met opposition to leaving his home in Scotland and going to preach to the cannibalistic peoples of the New Hebrides Islands. A well-meaning church member moaned to him, “The cannibals, the cannibals! You will be eaten by the cannibals!”

Without hesitation, Paton replied, “I confess to you that if I can live and die serving my Lord Jesus Christ, it makes no difference to me whether I am eaten by cannibals or by worms; for in that Great Day of Resurrection, my body will rise as fair as yours in the likeness of our risen Redeemer!””¹¹³³ ²

15:33-34 - *Do not be deceived: “Evil company corrupts good habits.”³⁴ Awake to righteousness, and do not sin; for some do not have the knowledge of God. I speak this to your shame.*

These Corinthians Christians had certainly been corrupted in their views. It could have come from the sect of the Sadducees who did not believe in the resurrection, or it could have come from Greek philosophers.

This belief not only corrupted their eschatological view, it corrupted their present lifestyle. They began to see sin as no big deal since there weren’t any real consequences once this life was over.

- In the same way, we need to beware of those who might become a bad influence in our own lives. Even Christians who aren’t yielded to the Spirit or hold a high view of God’s Word can be a bad influence. Choose wisely who you keep company with.

So Paul ends with saying to wake up! Wake up to righteousness. Jesus is coming soon, and we’re going to stand before Him. Are you ready!?

1 Thessalonians 5:4–6, *“But you, brethren, are not in darkness, so that this Day should overtake you as a thief.”⁵ You are all sons of light and sons of the day. We are not of the night nor of darkness.⁶ Therefore let us not sleep, as others do, but let us watch and be sober.”*

² Michael P. Green. (2000). *1500 illustrations for biblical preaching* (p. 303). Baker Books.