

FPFWC Christian Development



God's Eternal Reign

August 2023

Summer Quarter

August 26, 2023

Lesson #4 – God’s Kingdom Will Be All in All

SCRIPTURE TEXT – 1 Corinthians 15:20-28

ICE BREAKERS-

1. How can you incorporate the truth of Christ’s resurrection into your witness to others?
2. What hope does Jesus’ resurrection provide for your daily life?
3. How does the resurrection of Christ encourage you regarding death?

Key Verse: “When all things shall be subdued unto him, then shall the Son also himself be subject unto him that put all things under him, that God may be all in all.” —1 Corinthians 15:28

LESSON BACKGROUND –

Our text comes from the next-to-last section of Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians. It could almost be said that Paul was saving the most important part of his letter for last: his teaching about the resurrection.

We should clarify at the outset what we mean by the word resurrection. Some students take that word to refer primarily to the immediate life after death: when someone who belongs to Jesus dies, that person’s spirit remains alive in the Lord’s presence. To be in the presence of the Lord after death is an important biblical idea, affirmed by Paul himself (2 Corinthians 5:1, 6; Philippians 1:20–24). The Lord is faithful: He will never abandon His people, even in death. But this is not the meaning of resurrection.

Life in Heaven as disembodied spirits is not the final status of the Lord’s people. From the outset, humans were intended to be a combination of body and spirit. As the Creator of everything that is seen and unseen, God’s intent is to reclaim His entire creation (see Romans 8:22–23). This means that when Christ returns to complete God’s saving work, God will raise the dead so that they are alive as a unity of body and spirit. They will be in fellowship with those who are still alive at Christ’s second coming (1 Thessalonians 4:13–18). This final act in God’s plan will mark the ultimate victory of God.

For reasons that are uncertain, some members of the church of Corinth had begun to dismiss the idea that God will raise the dead. In light of Paul’s emphasis on the church’s “puffed up” pride (see lesson 12), it may be that some found the idea of God’s raising dead bodies to be distasteful or bizarre. This view would have been compatible with pagan Greek philosophy, which viewed the body as a prison from which one’s spirit desired to escape; the Greek play on words for this

belief was *sōma sēma* (“the body, a tomb”; compare Acts 17:32). Another error is to equate resurrection with reincarnation, the latter being part of a never-ending cycle of reward and punishment.

Paul argued that God does indeed raise the dead because God raised Christ from the dead. He recounted to the Corinthians the gospel as they first heard it: focused on Jesus’ death, burial, and resurrection, all “according to the scriptures” (1 Corinthians 15:3–4). Then he recounted the many who saw Jesus after His resurrection, alive in His body that had been dead and entombed (15:5–7). Paul considered himself as the last of these witnesses (15:8), reminding readers that the Lord Jesus appeared to him in bodily form on the road to Damascus (Acts 9:3–9). It is Jesus’ resurrection, Paul says, that demonstrates not only that God can raise the dead but that He will raise the dead.

LESSON COMMENTARY

15:20–28. While in vv. 12–19 Paul explored the logical entailments of denying that there is a general resurrection for believers, in vv. 20–28 he developed the logical entailments related to the truth of Jesus’ resurrection, which has always been a central feature of God’s program for humankind. The first fruits imagery (v. 20) is a reference to the initial offering of crops to the Lord in anticipation of a bountiful harvest that would follow (Ex 22:28; 23:19; 34:26; Lv 23:10–11; Nm 15:18–21). This is an illustration derived from the Festival of First Fruits, at the beginning of the counting of the omer on the day after Passover. The first fruits of the harvest were set aside for God in anticipation of the rest of the crop arriving. Jesus’ resurrection is the first fruit in anticipation of His followers’ resurrection. First fruits also sometimes has the nuance of a pledge or guarantee of something to follow. His resurrection prefigures and guarantees the resurrection of believers who are asleep (have died). Verses 21–22 explain what Paul meant by the first fruits imagery. Just as union with Adam resulted in death for the race, all those in Christ will participate in the resurrection.

All will be made alive does not teach universal salvation. The resurrection to blessed eternal life is only for all in Christ (v. 22, emphasis added) and those who are Christ’s (v. 23). While every true believer will be resurrected (v. 22), they will not all be resurrected at the same time (v. 23). Order was sometimes used as a military term for a specific company, division, or class of soldiers, often arranged in an orderly fashion. The order of those resurrected is Christ the first fruits, followed sequentially (then, *epeita*; cf. 15:6, 7) and after a substantial amount of time (at least 2,000 years) by those who are Christ’s at His coming. Some maintain that Paul’s use of coming (*parousia*) describes a posttribulational rapture that takes place at the second coming following the tribulation. But *parousia* can mean “presence” (cf. 16:17, its only other use in 1 Corinthians), and its use in 1 Thessalonians is instructive. Thomas writes, “The complexity of the term *parousia* demands [at least in 1 Thessalonians] that it include an extended visit as well as the arrival initiating that visit. This is provided for adequately in the rarer meaning of *parousia*, ‘presence’ (cf. 1Co 16:17; 2Co 10:10; Php 2:12). Included in this visit is an evaluation of the saints (cf. [1Th] 2:19; 5:23), which is

the aspect in view here in [1Th 3:13] ... This judgment cannot be completely dissociated from Christ's coming in the air (4:15–17), because this advent marks its initiation. Yet it must be conceived of as a session in heaven in some measure separate from the arrival itself" (Robert L. Thomas, "1 Thessalonians," in EBC, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin [Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1978], 269). The use of *parousia* in 1Co 15:23 refers to the Lord's presence (*parousia*) with the Church in heaven prior to the second coming at the end of the tribulation, and supports a pretribulational view of the rapture.

Then (*eita*, see 15:5, 7; 1Tm 2:13;) (v. 24) also signals sequence after a lapse of time. Saucy (*Progressive Dispensationalism*, 281) writes that the end "is separated from the coming of Christ even as his coming is separated from his resurrection, as we see at the beginning of the sequence. If Paul had desired to say that the 'end' occurred at the coming of Christ, he could easily have used another adverb (*tote*, meaning 'at that time') for the second 'then' " (similarly Godet, *First Corinthians*, 785). Paul does not explicitly mention the millennial kingdom between the resurrection of believers and the end in this verse, but what he says allows for it, and the following verses are understood best within a premillennial framework. The end may refer to the resurrection of tribulation saints (cf. Rv 20:4c, d) or the resurrection of unbelievers for their final judgment (Rv 20:12; Jn 5:28–29; Ac 24:15), but end (*telos*) does not usually mean "the rest" (of those who are resurrected; cf. Murray J. Harris, *Raised Immortal: Resurrection and Immortality in the New Testament* [Basingstoke: Marshall Morgan & Stock, 1983], 175). Here it probably refers to the conclusion of the millennial kingdom.

In vv. 25 and 27, Paul cited Ps 8:4–6 to demonstrate how Jesus (all the third person pronouns in v. 25 refer to Jesus), with His people (note "who is man," Ps 8:4, a reference to humankind), fulfill God's purposes for the race by ruling and reigning together over all the earth in the kingdom. Paul also alluded to Ps 110:1, which in other passages appears to refer to Christ in His current exalted position in heaven (e.g., Ac 2:30–36), but here refers to what He will do in the future millennial kingdom. In support of this, the word *reign* (v. 25) describes a future function of Jesus in Lk 1:33; 19:14; Rv 11:15, 17, suggesting that the subduing of Jesus' enemies takes place in the future (see Rv 20:7–15) when the last enemy, death, will be abolished (v. 26), not during His present time in heaven (see Saucy, *Progressive Dispensationalism*, 282–288). The antecedents of the pronouns in vv. 27–28 are not completely clear, but the verses probably should be read this way: "For God has put all things in subjection under Jesus' feet. But when it [not "He"] says, 'All things are put in subjection,' it is evident that God is excepted who put all things in subjection to Jesus. When all things are subjected to God, then the Son Himself also will be subjected to the One who subjected all things to Jesus, so that God may be all in all." When Jesus hands the millennial kingdom over to God at the conclusion of His earthly messianic reign, this will signal the beginning of the eternal state, for which there will be no end. There will be a perfect merging of Jesus' earthly, Davidic, millennial throne with the eternal

throne of God, so that God the Father and God the Son may be seen together as supreme (cf. Rv 22:3).

LESSON NUGGET – Our resurrection is our only hope for eternal life. Why does Paul say believers should be pitied if there were only earthly value to Christianity? In Paul's day, Christianity often brought a person persecution, ostracism from family, and, in many cases, poverty. There were few tangible benefits from being a Christian in that society. It was certainly not a step up the social or career ladder. Even more important, however, is the fact that if Christ had not been resurrected from death, Christians could not be forgiven for their sins and would have no hope of eternal life.

Sources: Moody Bible Commentary, Standard Lesson Commentary, The Handbook of Bible Application and The Essential Everyday Bible Commentary