

The Consequences Of Christ's Resurrection

1 Corinthians 15:20-28

Pastor John Miller

Follow with me as I read 1 Corinthians 15:20-28.

Paul says, "But now Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since by man came death, by Man also came the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive. But each one in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, afterward those who are Christ's at His coming. 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. For He must reign till He has put all enemies under His feet. The last enemy that will be destroyed is death. 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. 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."

In the book of Job, we have asked and answered the question, "If a man die, will he live again?" That's our series—is there hope beyond the grave? When I die, will my body be resurrected from the dead? Can I live forever in heaven with God?

Theologian Erich Sauer said, "The present age is Eastertime. It begins with the Resurrection of the Redeemer and it ends with the resurrection of the redeemed. Between lies the spiritual resurrection of those called into life through Christ. So we live between two Easters, and in the power of the first Easter, we go to meet the last Easter." How true that is. We live between two Easters—the Resurrection of Jesus Christ and the resurrection of our own bodies, when we'll be "caught up...to meet the Lord in the air."

There were believers in Corinth who were having problems with the doctrine or concept that our bodies would be resurrected. In verse 12, Paul shows them how illogical that is. He said, "How do some among you say that there is no resurrection of the dead?" The reality is that the Gospel contains the Resurrection; Jesus died, Jesus was buried and Jesus rose from the dead.

So Paul is writing to show us in 1 Corinthians 15 that you cannot separate the Resurrection of Jesus Christ from our own bodily resurrection. That is the one main thought of this entire chapter. If Jesus rose from the dead, then we will rise from the dead. You cannot separate the Resurrection of Jesus Christ from the resurrection of all believers; they are linked together. They are like two sides of one coin. Since Jesus rose from the dead, naturally we have the hope beyond the grave that we will rise from the dead.

Paul's arguments were first historical, verses 1-11, then he moved to the logical arguments, verses 12-19. He pointed out that if Christ is not risen, then their preaching was in vain and their faith was in vain, and that Paul and the Apostles were liars, because they were preaching that Christ rose from the dead. Then we would still be in our sins. Logically, if Christ didn't

raise from the dead, then we're still in our sins, and believing loved ones who had died in Christ were lost. They perished. There is no hope that we'll ever be reunited with them. And lastly, he said that "If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most pitiable."

Paul now moves to a third argument. He goes from the historical to the logical and now to the theological. He goes to the theological or doctrinal arguments in verses 20-28. The next section after this third one is the practical—how our bodies will rise and what kind of body we will have.

So Paul now moves to the future consequences of Christ's Resurrection. Theologians call it the "eschatological ramifications of the Resurrection," or what is going to happen in the future now that Christ has risen from the dead. In this passage, verses 20-28, there are four future consequences of the fact that Christ has risen from the dead. The first consequence is that the dead in Christ will be raised. That is future to us. In the future, there will not only be a resurrection of those who have died in Christ, but even the unbelievers will be resurrected and stand before Christ in judgment.

Verses 20-22 say, "But now Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep" or "have died." "For since by man came death, by Man also came the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive."

All these passages we'll cover today are theological and doctrinal. I'm going to try to make them as simple and clear as I can.

Notice the contrast in verse 20: "But now is Christ risen from the dead." The negative tone of verses 12-19 is now offset by the positive assurance of "But now is Christ risen from the dead." So Paul is basically saying that "You can take it to the bank." He wanted to establish the fact very clearly that Christ is risen from the dead, our preaching isn't vain, our faith isn't vain, our loved ones haven't perished, our sins can be forgiven. And there is hope beyond the grave; we're not to be miserable because we have a living hope in our living Redeemer, Jesus Christ.

What does Paul mean when he uses the phrase, in verse 20, that Christ "has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep." What does "firstfruits" mean? It goes back to the Old Testament book of Leviticus, where God was giving them instructions about their Passover feast and the feast of Unleavened Bread. God also gave them the feast of Firstfruits. What it means is that after Passover on that first Sunday, they would go out into the fields, which they hadn't harvested yet in the springtime, and they would gather one sheaf of wheat. There is a whole field out there waiting to be harvested. Get this picture. It's easy for us to picture here in Menifee, because we have all these wheat fields around us. So they would go to one corner of the field and gather one armload of wheat—it was a sheaf—and they would bring it to the temple to offer it to the Lord. That was an offering of firstfruits.

The firstfruits was a picture or symbol of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ. Jesus is the

firstfruits of the ingathering of the harvest of those who would be resurrected. The symbolism conveys the idea that it is a sample and a security. It is a sample of more to follow, and it is a security that it will follow. When they brought the firstfruits in, it was a sample of the harvest they would have that season. If you tasted the wheat, you might say, "Oh man, this is going to be a great harvest!" That sample also spoke of a guarantee that there is more wheat or more harvest to follow.

The picture is that Christ rose first, and others will follow. And it pictured also that Jesus' Resurrection was a guarantee of the reality and the quality of our resurrection—that our bodies would be resurrected as well. So Jesus' Resurrection is actually a prototype of our own resurrection.

Now what about others who had been brought back from the dead? You say, "Now wait a minute, Pastor John. Christ was the first to raise from the dead? Didn't Lazarus raise from the dead?"

"Yes."

"Wasn't the widow's son raised from the dead?"

"Yes."

"Didn't Jairus have a daughter, probably about 12 years old, about whom Jesus said, 'Little lamb, arise,' and He brought her back from the dead? And weren't there Old Testament people who were brought back from the dead?"

"Yes." But listen carefully; this is an important distinction. They were all brought back from the dead in their mortal bodies, but they had to die again. Bummer. When I die, don't pray for me to come back. I'm in heaven, and I don't want to come back to Menifee. Can you imagine that? I'm in heaven and I'm told, "John, you have to go back to Menifee."

"Oh, Lord, please!" (I'm kidding; I love it here.)

But poor Lazarus. He had to die again. But what a glorious truth that Jesus will never have to die again! Jesus came out of the grave in an immortal, eternal, incorruptible body. That's the Resurrection of Jesus Christ. So Jesus is unique and set apart from any others. You might say that Jesus was resurrected, but the others were resuscitated. That would be a better way of saying it, because they had to die again.

In Colossians 1:18, Paul says that Jesus was "the firstborn from the dead." What that means is that He is "prototokos," the most important one. He is the superior one, the highest one, first, pre-eminent, the excellent one who was raised from the dead. So far, Jesus was the first one ever to be resurrected in a glorified body.

Then in 1 Corinthians 15:21-22, Paul does a contrast with Adam. It says, "For since by man..."

That phrase is a reference to Adam. You've heard the story of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden? There really was an Adam and Eve. They're not fictitious. It's not a fairy tale. It's not an allegory. They actually existed. There was a first human being. His name was Adam.

By the way, God took earth and made Adam. All you guys are dirt clods. God breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, put Adam to sleep, took from his rib the woman, Adam woke up from a nap and found out he was married. He was pretty excited. He looked at Eve and said, "Woe, man!" Wo-man, woman.

I emphasize that because there is a movement today in what I consider to be liberal, evangelical Christianity to allegorize the Old Testament. "There really wasn't an Adam and Eve. Jonah really wasn't swallowed by a whale. These things really didn't happen." No. It's history. When you read about Adam in the New Testament, it's confirmation that he really existed. Besides that, Jesus made mention of Adam and Eve, making them male and female. So Jesus believed it, I believe it and that settles it. There is no debating the issue.

If there wasn't an Adam, there wouldn't have been a disobedience and the resulting fall, there wouldn't have been a curse and, thus, no need for a redeemer. So be careful what you take out of the Bible, as some do. It's so very important.

All humanity dies in Adam. Have you ever noticed that everyone dies? Now I know that you came to church hoping to be encouraged, but I have an announcement to make: We will all die.

"Ah, what did the preacher say today when you went to church?"

"He said that 'We're all going to die. Now God bless you and have a great week.'"

But it's true. This week, one of my heroes, Warren Wiersbe, went to heaven. He's the one who wrote the "Be" series that we all read and we're so blessed by. I don't know of a man who has impacted my life more powerfully in pastoral ministry than Warren Wiersbe. I had the privilege of meeting him and spending time with him. He came to my church and did a conference, and I got to spend three days with him. I have a letter he wrote to me that I will treasure even more now that he has gone to heaven. It is earth's loss and heaven's gain. He served his generation so well. Now we need to take up the torch and continue to preach the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

So Adam brought death, and Jesus Christ brought life. Verse 22 says, "For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive." Adam was from the earth, and Christ came from heaven. Adam disobeyed God and brought sin and death, but Christ obeyed the Father and by His death and Resurrection brought righteousness and eternal life. Paul is saying that the resurrection of our bodies is as certain as death itself.

I want to look at the phrase in verse 22 "all shall be made alive." The question is, is that a reference to every human being—which is Biblical and true—or in this reference, is it just limited to those who are in Christ? Granted, in the context, Paul uses the term "in Christ," but both scenarios are Biblically true. Because Jesus rose from the dead, all who are believers in

Jesus certainly will rise from the dead. But did you know that the Resurrection of Jesus Christ makes certain even the resurrection of the unsaved? Even the wicked? Even the ungodly? Even the unredeemed? The bodies of all human beings will be resurrected because of their connection to Christ, the man. Our connection to Adam the first means that we are born in sin and die. Our connection to the last Adam, Jesus Christ, means that we shall all be resurrected.

Daniel 12:2 says, "Many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, some to shame and everlasting contempt." All the way back in the book of Daniel we see a very clear reference to the fact that there are two groups that are in the grave that will be resurrected—some to life and some to everlasting contempt.

Then Jesus said in John 5:28-29: "Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice and come forth—those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation." I want you to see that there are two resurrections: one to life and one to damnation. Christ's Resurrection was a divine pledge of our future resurrection.

My favorite Scripture to illustrate this point is Job 19:25-26. Who suffered more than Job in the Bible? Only Jesus Christ. Job went through all that sorrow and suffering, the loss of his family, the pain that he endured. So in the midst of our sorrow and suffering, Job said these words: "For I know that my Redeemer lives, and He shall stand at last on the earth; and after my skin is destroyed, this I know, that in my flesh I shall see God." Isn't that great news?

Job realized that the worms were going to crawl in and the worms were going to crawl out, but one day, because "my Redeemer lives, and He shall stand...on the earth," in this body, "I shall see God." That's the hope we have beyond the grave.

The second consequence of Christ's Resurrection, in verses 23-24, is that the resurrection of the body will be in stages. The resurrection won't happen all at once; it'll come in stages. So many Christians lack an understanding of the order of the resurrection. I want you to see it in verses 23-24. Paul says, "Each one..."—every person, all mankind—"...in his own order..."—that's the key word, "order"—"...Christ the firstfruits, afterward those who are Christ's at His coming. Then comes the end, when He delivers the kingdom to God the Father, when..."—a time word again—"...He puts an end to all rule and all authority and power."

When will our bodies be resurrected? Verse 23 says, "each one in his own order." The word "order" is a military term. It has the idea of company or group. In the military you have your company, you have your group. They have order in the military. So we are going to be resurrected, but it will be in different groups or in a different order. Let me give it to you, and I want you to track with me very carefully.

The future resurrection of our bodies comes in two categories. Category number one is known as the "first resurrection." This category is only for saved individuals. Anyone part of the first resurrection is saved, and they're going to go to heaven for all eternity. The second category is

called the “second resurrection.” (I’m going to break it all down for you.) All those who are part of the second resurrection—this is a different group, “each one in his own order”—are lost; they are unsaved and will go to hell for all eternity. I don’t know any other way to state that doctrine to make it clear.

Let’s look first at this first category or group, the “first resurrection.” Under this category, there are three stages. The first stage is “Christ the firstfruits.” Notice it in verse 23. So you have mention of “firstfruits” in verse 20 and again in verse 23. So the first stage of the first resurrection is Jesus Christ Himself.

The second stage of this category is alluded to in verse 23: “afterward those who are Christ’s at His coming.” The word “coming” is the Greek word “Parousia.” It means “appearing.” I believe it’s a reference to the Lord appearing to catch up the church to meet Him in the air at the rapture. This is when the second stage of the first resurrection will occur.

I’ve already quoted last time 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18, where Paul says, “I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who have fallen asleep, lest you sorrow as others who have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus.”

So when a Christian dies, their soul goes immediately to be with the Lord. And when the Lord comes for the church, they’re coming with Him. We’re going to meet them in the air. But He has to resurrect their bodies. Paul says it like this in 1 Thessalonians 4:16: “For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first.” There it is. It is the second stage of the first resurrection: the bodies of the dead in Christ will rise. And only their bodies, because their soul is already with the Lord. “To be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord.” This is when the resurrection of their bodies will happen.

When we get to 1 Corinthians 15:51, Paul says, “I tell you a mystery: we shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed.” He says, “We’re not all going to die. Some of us are going to be changed in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye.” And he goes on to say how our bodies will be transformed.

But in 1 Thessalonians 4, Paul actually points out that the rapture first involves a resurrection. Some humorously suppose that the reason the dead in Christ rise first is because they have six feet further to go than those who are alive have to go. I don’t think that’s what the Bible is implying, but it’s kind of cute to think about, though. They have six feet to go, they meet those who are alive and we go up together.

The moment you are resurrected, you have a new, glorified body. You ask, “Well, what are we in heaven, then?”

“You’re the real you.” You’re with the Lord. Those whose souls are already in heaven are in what theologians call the “intermediate state.”

I laughed at Ray Steadman, who said, “God gives us a temporary bathrobe to wear.” Imagine that we’d be walking around with our bathrobes in heaven waiting for our new bodies. We’ll be talking about that as we go through this chapter—what kind of body will be resurrected, the nature of the resurrected body.

So stage one of the first resurrection is Christ’s Resurrection, the firstfruit; stage two, “afterward those who are Christ’s at His coming,” the rapture; and stage three—this is where it gets a little hard to track with, because it’s not what it’s clearly taught in the text, but this is where it would come—at the end of the tribulation. After the rapture, there will seven years of the tribulation. At the end of the seven-year tribulation, there is the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. Then there will be the thousand-year, millennial reign of Jesus Christ. Before this millennial reign of Jesus Christ begins, tribulation saints and Old Testament saints’ bodies will be resurrected.

That concludes the first resurrection. First stage, Christ arose; second stage, the church or “the dead in Christ” are resurrected; third stage, Old Testament saints and tribulation saints will be resurrected. In Revelation 20:4-6, it says that “This is the first resurrection,” those Old Testament saints and tribulation saints. It says, “They lived and reigned with Christ for a thousand years.”

Another point I want to make is that Christ will literally come back, and He will literally establish a kingdom on earth, the Davidic kingdom, for 1,000 years. Won’t that be awesome?

We’ll be going into a Presidential election year, and oh, the pain! All the political stuff that’s going on! I vote for Jesus Christ; don’t you? I want Him to come back. I don’t want Him to come back to the White House but to the great, white-throne judgment. He will cover the world with righteousness, He will reign in glory and we will reign with Him. How glorious that will be!

So the bodies of the Old Testament saints will be resurrected before the millennium along with those of the tribulation saints—those who are born again during the tribulation—and with the raptured church, and we will all be in glorified bodies during those thousand years and will co-reign with Christ.

Now the second category is called the “second resurrection.” This category is only for the unsaved. Their bodies will be resurrected altogether at once. When? That will happen at the end of the thousand-year millennium reign of Christ.

Notice verse 24 of our text: “Then comes the end.” When? “...when He delivers the kingdom...”—that’s the millennial, thousand-year reign of Christ—“...to God the Father, when He puts an end to all rule and all authority and power.”

You know what’s going to happen at the end of the millennium? Satan is going to have one, last opportunity to tempt men and lead them astray. Then Jesus is going to take the devil and all of his angels, that fell from heaven with him, and throw them into the lake of fire that burns with brimstone forever. Satan will never get out again. That’s good news! No more devil.

Now at the same time, Jesus is going to sit on a great, white throne during the millennium, and the bodies of all the wicked dead throughout all history will be resurrected.

Revelation 20:11-15 ties in with our text. John says, "Then I saw a great white throne..."—this is right after the end of the millennial reign of Christ and Satan has been thrown into the lake of fire. Jesus had already returned in Revelation 19. John says, "...and Him who sat on it [the throne], from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away. And there was found no place for them." So notice that "heaven and earth shall pass away." There will be a new heaven and a new earth, Revelation 21. Revelation 20:12: "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. The sea gave up the dead who were in it, and Death and Hades..."—or "hell"—"...delivered up the dead who were in them. And they were judged, each one according to his works. Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire."

So this is the one resurrection at the end of the millennial reign of Christ of all the wicked dead. They are resurrected out of hell. [Their soul only? Then their dead bodies come out of the earth and sea and both soul and body go/return to hell? You talked about at the death of Christians where their soul and body goes. How about the soul and body of unbelievers at their death?] The books are open, their names do not appear in the Book of Life, so they are thrown into the lake of fire, which is eternal hell. What a sad and sobering thought.

There is a third consequence or implication of Christ's Resurrection, and that is that man's greatest enemy, death, will be destroyed. In verses 25-26, Paul says, "For He..."—that is, "Christ"—"...must reign..."—now He will turn the kingdom over to His Father, but He is still reigning—"...till He has put all enemies..."—Satan, all fallen angels, demonic hoards and rebellious humans—"...under His feet. The last enemy that will be destroyed is death." Is that good news or what?! No more death. That's why in 1 Corinthians 15:55, Paul says, "O Death, where is your sting? O Hades, where is your victory?" That's kind of a "Nanny, nanny, nanny! You can't touch me!" Death has lost its sting and the grave has lost its victory. Death is man's greatest enemy.

With all our modern technology, science has no cure for death. We've cured all kinds of diseases, we do so much to try to look young and healthy. People spend so much time, money and energy to get rid of wrinkles, but you're going to die. You're going to get a new body, so don't worry about your wrinkles. They'll be gone. They'll be no pain, no sorrow, no suffering, no sickness, no cancer—new body!

Sigmund Freud, the founder of psychiatry, wrote, "And finally, there is the painful riddle of death, for which no remedy at all has yet been found, nor probably ever will be found." He couldn't have been more wrong. For Jesus said, in John 11:25, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die." In Revelation 21:4, John said, "There shall be no more death."

In 1 Corinthians 15:27-28, we see the fourth and last consequence of Christ's Resurrection, which is Christ's reign and rule over all things. It also results in subjection; He will bring everything under His power and authority. The verses say, "For 'He...'—which is "God the Father"—"...has put all things under His..."—which is "God the Son's"—"...feet." But when He says 'all things are put under Him,' it is evident..."—or "made clear"—"...that He..."—or "God the Father"—"...who put all things under Him is excepted." He's basically saying that "All things are put under Christ's feet, except God the Father."

And we'll see that even God the Son submits to God the Father, because in verse 28, Paul says, "Now when all things are made subject..."—key word—"...to Him..."—that is, "Jesus"—"...then the Son Himself will also be subject to Him..."—that is, "God the Father"—"...who put all things under Him, that God may be all in all." Everything is leading to one target, and that is the glory, the praise, the honor and the majesty of God the Father. God the Son will commit the kingdom to God the Father. There will be in heaven God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit, the three persons of the Godhead, but all glory, praise and honor will be to God the Father. That's why he closes with, "that God may be all in all."

Jesus came to rescue and redeem a fallen earth. That includes our bodies and that includes creation. Your salvation will include your physical body. When you are in heaven, you're going to have a brand-new you, new and improved. So don't be disappointed—"I have to take me to heaven? I was hoping I could be left in the grave." No; you're going to have a new you, and it's going to be glorious.

Another thing is that we'll know our loved ones. They'll be new and improved. We'll hug them and kiss them and talk to them. We'll eat with them and fellowship with them, for all eternity. What a glorious prospect that is. "If a man dies, will he live again?" Yes! It's because Jesus Christ died and His body rose from the dead.

In closing, listen to these words from Revelation 21:3-5: John said, "I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, 'Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away.' Then He who sat on the throne said, 'Behold, I make all things new.' And He said to me, 'Write, for these words are true and faithful.'"

Is there hope beyond the grave? Yes, there is hope beyond the grave, because Jesus Christ conquered sin and death and the grave. When all the stars of this universe have gone out and stopped their shining, we will shine in heaven with God for all eternity. Amen.