

Introduction

In his letters to the churches in Corinth, Paul displays some of his most sharp uses of rhetoric. He doesn't pull many punches and he is more than willing to take the arguments of his opponents and reduce them to nothing.

In [1 Corinthians 15](#), Paul does just this. There are some in Corinth who say there is no resurrection of the dead for Christians who die. Paul goes on to show how horrible all of the implications of this would be if it were true. Paul starts with their premise, that the dead are not raised, and goes on to show all the terrible consequences if it were true.

It reminds me of a scene from *The Fellowship of the Ring*. Members of the Fellowship are offered the chance to look into Galadriel's mirror. When Frodo looks into the mirror he sees all of the terrible things that would take place if the Fellowship's quest were to fail and Sauron were to return to full power.

But Paul does something else in this passage too. He goes on to reveal all the glories of the fact that Jesus has been raised from the dead.

Our passage breaks into two parts:

1. The Unity Between Christ and His People (vv. 12-19)
2. The Conquest of the Second Adam (vv. 20-28)

The Unity Between Christ and His People (vv. 12-19)

Verse 12 begins with Paul introducing the problem. ***When the gospel is preached, it is preached that Christ has been raised from the dead. But, some in Corinth are saying that there is no resurrection of the dead.***

Paul is setting up his argument by explaining that some in Corinth are saying that there is no *general* resurrection from the dead. But for Paul, to say that there is no *general* resurrection from the dead is to be in flat contradiction to the gospel. In particular, how Christ has been raised from the dead.

And this is where Paul makes his bold assertion in verse 13 which he then repeats again in verse 16. Paul states that ***if there is no resurrection of the dead, not even Christ has been raised.***

Paul's argues that there is a fundamental unity between the resurrection of Jesus Christ and the general resurrection at the end of history. Paul teaches that denying the general resurrection of the bodies of believers also denies the resurrection of Jesus. The reason for this is due to **the fundamental unity that exists between Jesus and His people**.

This unity between Jesus and his people is at the very heart of Paul's theology. Paul constantly speaks of the believer's union with Christ. Believers are united with Christ in every way. This is of immense practical importance to your Christian walk.

- › **The confidence you have in your own redemption, justification, adoption, sanctification, and resurrection is founded in your union with Christ. In these verses, Paul applies the Christian's union with Christ especially to resurrection.**

The union between the believer's resurrection and Jesus' resurrection is so complete, that if one not true, neither is. Step one in Paul's argument states, "if there is no resurrection of the dead, then Jesus was not raised, because these two events are fundamentally linked."

In verses 14 & 17 Paul draws the logical conclusion if Christ were not raised from the dead. Paul states ***our preaching is in vain and you faith is in vain***. The reason why (?), as verse 17 states: ***If Christ has not been raised, your faith is worthless and you are still in your sins***.

If Christ is not raised from the dead your sins have not been dealt with and your faith is in vain. You might as well put your faith in some other dead man. If Jesus is not raised from the dead, putting your faith in Him is no different than putting your faith in George Washington or Charlemagne to deal with your sins.

Paul adds to the problem in verse 15. He states that if Christ is not raised all those who preach His resurrection have ***borne false witness and misrepresented God***. The gospel message declares that God raised Christ from the dead. If Christ is not raised that message misrepresents God.

This first section concludes with verses 18-19. These verses describe the hopeless state of all who put their faith in Christ if Christ is not raised from the dead. "***All who have fallen asleep (or died) "in Christ" have simply perished if Christ has not been raised.***" If Christ is not raised from the dead, then all who die putting their hope in Christ, have no hope of resurrection. In verse 19 Paul explains that ***if we have hoped in Christ in this life only, we are of all men most to be pitied***.

Christians without resurrection hope are pitiable according to Paul. Scripture calls Christians to live as pilgrims looking to a better city, as slaves to a crucified Lord, and as ambassadors to a king who's kingdom is not of this world. Such a life is most to be pitied if it is based on a lie. But it is not based on a lie.

The Second Adam Conquers Death (vv. 20-28)

In verse 20 Paul declares: ***But now Christ has been raised from the dead.***

After presenting a vision of reality if Christ were not raised, Paul states plainly the truth that Christ has been raised. Paul undoes all the hypothetical arguments from the previous section:

Because Christ is raised Christians do not have hope in Christ in this life only. Christians have not perished in their deaths. Christians are not to be pitied. Preachers do not bear false witness about God. Our faith is not in vain. We are no longer in our sins. Because Christ has been raised, so too will those who are united to him be raised from the dead on the last day.

The second half of verse 20, builds on the union between the resurrection of Jesus and the future resurrection of His people. Paul describes Christ, raised from the dead as, ***the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep.***

For Paul, the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the grave represents **THE RESURRECTION** that the entire Old Testament hope was built upon. Paul envisions the resurrection as a single great harvest and with Jesus as the ***first fruits***. In other words, when you are raised from the dead on the last day, it is not a separate resurrection Jesus' Resurrection.

The first fruits of a harvest are not a separate harvest from the ingathering of the rest of the harvest. They are the same harvest. Your union with Christ means that you are united to Christ's resurrection. Your resurrection at the end of history consummates the union with Christ's resurrection.

In other words, Jesus is **THE** resurrection and the life ([John 11:25](#)).

Paul grounds his argument in the fact that Jesus is the Second Adam. In verse 21-22, Paul contrasts the work of the First Adam with that of the Second Adam: ***For since by a man came death, by a man also came the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all will be made alive.***

Paul shows how the work of the Second Adam, Jesus Christ, mirrors that of the first Adam. Through the work of Adam, the curse of death spread to all **his** people. Through the work of Jesus, the Second Adam, the blessing of resurrection spreads to all **His** people.

Verse 23 informs the reader how this will play out. Christ, as the first fruits, has already been raised to God just as the first fruits of the wheat harvest were raised to God in the Jewish festival of the first fruits ([Lev 23:10-14](#)). So too we, at Jesus' second coming will be raised from the dead.

In the final four verses Paul expands and teases out what it means that Jesus is the Second Adam. Paul, in essence, presents a vision of Jesus accomplishing as the Second Adam what the First Adam never accomplished, but would have accomplished had he not rebelled against his creator.

In verse 24, Paul states that after Jesus' coming ***comes the end, when He delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power.***

Adam was given dominion over the entire creation but he never exercised that dominion before he fell. Paul here gives us a vision of what the First Adam would have done had he not fallen. Adam would have slowly exercised his dominion over the creation by being fruitful and multiplying and filling the earth with those who would have born both God's image and his own image. As such, humanity, in Adam would have exercised dominion over the entire creation.

Based on verse 24, we can gather that at that point, Adam would have delivered this kingdom that he had taken full dominion over to God. Now Adam's job would have been easier than Jesus' because the creation was not yet in rebellion when Adam was told to take dominion. That is not the case for Jesus. As verse 25 quotes from [Psalm 110](#), Jesus has had all authorities placed in subjection to him, but his reign as the Second Adam consists in His exercising His dominion over the rebellious authorities and powers of this world through His people filling the earth and tearing down strongholds.

In verse 25, Paul states that the last enemy that Jesus will exercise His dominion over as the Second Adam is death itself. Of course, He has already defeated death, but death still wages war against the body of Christ and in some sense still has power in the created order. But once that enemy is defeated at His second coming, the kingdom that Jesus was given to reign over as the Second Adam is complete.

And this helps us make sense of verses 27-28. As the Second Adam all things are placed under the subjection of Jesus, but of course God is not subjected to the Second Adam just as God was not subjected to the First Adam. That is what verse 27 teaches. Moreover, verse 28 shows how, as the Second Adam, Jesus will fulfill the commission of the First Adam and do what Adam should have done once all things have been subjected to Him. He will subject himself to God so that God may be all in all.

Conclusion

It is that final point that I conclude on. The goal of all things is that God may be all in all. When we as human's give up to God those areas of dominion that he has granted us, we are doing the very thing that God created us for. All of the dominion that we gain as humans over all the various aspects of this created order are wonderful things. Think of the dominion that man has taken over music, food, literature, recreation, and technology. These are all wonderful gifts from God. But they are ultimately all things that point to the goal of humanity. And that goal is to take all of our dominion and to give it God that He might be all in all!