

Blake Gillen
Cornerstone Bible Church
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God's Glorious Plan for the Godly

1 Corinthians 15:20-28

Thank you all for being here this morning as we continue our study of the power of the resurrection from 1 Corinthians 15. This morning we have the privilege of looking at God's glorious future plan for the godly from 1 Corinthians 15:20-28.

Before we read these verses I wonder if any of you saw the movie that came out all the way back in 2004 called Super Size me. Normally people who have seen it don't have the courage to admit it publicly. **SuperSize me was a documentary about what happens to a person who only eats McDonald's three times a day for a month.** Every 7 year olds dream. From February 1 to March 2 2003 Morgan Spurlock only ate McDonald's three times a day, everything on the menu at least once, and every time he ordered, if the person asked if he wanted it supersized, he always said yes.

What do you think happens to someone's physical health who eats that way? Over that one month period, the then-32-year-old Spurlock gained 24.5 pounds, a 13% body mass increase, increased his cholesterol to 230 mg, experienced major mood swings, and at one point thought he was having a heart attack. After the month was over it took him over a year to lose all the weight gained from his experiment using a vegan diet supervised by his then-girlfriend, a chef who specializes in gourmet vegan dishes.

I know what some of you are thinking - Stop picking on McDonald's Pastor Blake. Everyone loves McDonalds, but there are only a few who have the courage to admit it publicly. **The documentary was a reminder that you cannot eat poorly and stay healthy.** We know this. This is why mothers always try and include some vegetables or piece of fruit in all their kids meals.

What is true physically is also true spiritually. What you and I are putting into our minds is a really big deal. *Transformation into the likeness of Christ happens through the Spirit of God as we receive His Word the right way.* To mature in Christ we all need a steady diet of this thing called sound doctrine. I want to begin our time together this morning reminding you what you already know. **Sound doctrine is essential for living a life that pleases God.**

Bobby Jamieson reminds us, "Sound doctrine is God's road map for living faithfully in the world. Sound doctrine tells you not just where you are, but who you are, and who God is, and how God has saved us from sin and enabled us to live lives that are pleasing to him."

The importance of learning sound doctrine was impressed upon me early in my Christian life. One of the first men who helped me understand how important sound doctrine is to the Christian life was the head athletic trainer at the masters university where God saved me in 1995. The head athletic trainer, Bill Vine, was a big guy. A former football player who decorated his office with pictures of gruesome injuries. No matter what the injury was an athlete had at the college, he pretty much said the same thing - Ice and stretch. I broke my nose at practice one day and I came in and that's what he told me. **I wasn't sure how icing and stretching was going to move my nose back in position.**

Bill was a tough guy with a tender heart to the Lord. He used to meet with me in his office before school and help me with reliable sermons and books to read. I remember he had 2 Timothy 2:15 posted on top of his office door, "Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth." Bill modeled that verse even though he wasn't a pastor. I remember something he told me close to 30 years ago, **"Doctrine received, believed, and practiced determines your character, behavior and destiny."** Bill taught me that everything in the Christian life flows from sound doctrine. He taught me that you can't think wrong and live right.

This is verified in Scripture, particularly in the pastoral letters. Paul reminded Timothy and Titus who were put in strategic locations to help plant local churches that glorifying God in the church flows from sound doctrine. Paul told Titus that a qualification for being an elder is to be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and refute those who contradict it (Titus 1:9). He told Titus to model this in Titus 2:1 where he told him to teach what accords with sound doctrine. He told Timothy to keep preaching the word because the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching.

If sound doctrine is such a big deal, what is it? Sound doctrine is healthy teaching from the word of God. **It's kale for the Christian soul.** I sort of view it like bumpers at the bowling alley. If you've ever bowled with someone who is not very good bumpers are non-negotiable. Bumpers keep the ball moving toward the pins. Sound doctrine keeps our lives moving toward Christ. Sound doctrine is a summary of the Bible's teaching that is both faithful to the Bible and useful for life.

1 Corinthians 15 is an example of why sound doctrine is essential to the Christian life. At the very end of this chapter Paul tells us to keep doing the work of the Lord. All of us are called into the service of Christ when we are saved. We all do the work of the Lord. The work of the Lord includes evangelizing lost people and edifying saved people. Before Paul tells us what to keep doing, he tells us why. What we do flows from what we believe about the resurrection. Thinking right about the resurrection fuels Christian service! We think right to live right.

Paul wrote this chapter to Christians some of whom who were thinking wrongly about the resurrection - not the resurrection of Christ, but their future resurrection with Christ. They weren't making the connection between what happened to Christ and what happens to them because of Christ. Making this connection is a big deal.

Remember these people came to Christ out of a culture that did not believe people rise again bodily after they die. Death is the end. When you're dead, you're dead. Your soul may go somewhere after you die, not really sure, but your body is gone forever.

Michael VanLaningham, "For the Greeks, death presented a problem for which there was no solution. The Corinthians came out of a cultural and religious environment for which resurrection was a complete novelty. No wonder they had a hard time grasping it. They believed in the immortality of the soul, but not the body, while the Christian hope is that of the immortality of both the immaterial (soul, spirit, mind) and material parts (the body) of one's constitution."

When Paul wrote 1 Corinthians, these people were not doing what Paul told the believers in Rome to do in Romans 12:2, "Do not be conformed to the world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds." Instead of being transformed by the renewing of their minds, these people were still allowing the culture to plant wrong ideas in their minds. That's no bueno. Paul knew that a little bit of wrong thinking leads to wrong living.

Look with me again at 1 Corinthians 15:12, "Now if Christ is proclaimed as raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead?" Do you see the problem? **The end of verse 12 is what 1 Corinthians 15 is correcting.** Paul is correcting the error that people don't rise again bodily. Why? Because we all do. Believers and unbelievers rise again bodily after we die. Jesus is the judge of the living and the dead. What happens to our bodies when we die is obviously a really big deal.

When Paul wrote 1 Corinthians, these people were allowing their culture to cloud their minds about what happens to people who believe when they die. Some were saying there is no resurrection of the dead. That's not true. There is a resurrection of the dead. Knowing God has a glorious plan for our lives when we die is essential for living for Christ now. If you are struggling to live for Christ, you

need to know this plan and you need to let this plan pull you out of wrong thinking that leads to a lack of courage or idleness in the Christian life.

This morning we are going to be reminded that Christ's resurrection guarantees the future bodily resurrection of everyone who turns from sin and trusts in Christ alone for salvation. I hope we are mutually challenged and encouraged as we consider God's future plan for the godly.

1 Corinthians 15:20-28

- 20 But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.
- 21 For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead.
- 22 For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive.
- 23 But each in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ.
- 24 Then comes the end, when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power.
- 25 For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet.
- 26 The last enemy to be destroyed is death.
- 27 For "God has put all things in subjection under his feet." But when it says, "all things are put in subjection," it is plain that he is excepted who put all things in subjection under him.
- 28 When all things are subjected to him, then the Son himself will also be subjected to him who put all things in subjection under him, that God may be all in all.

Please notice the word order in verse 23 - But each in his own order. That's what this section is about. There is an order to God's future plan and it all hinges on the resurrection of Christ.

I want to break these verses down for us under two headings:

1. What the resurrection of Christ means for God's Saints - 1 Corinthians 15:20-23
2. What the resurrection of Christ means for God's Supremacy - 1 Corinthians 15:24-28

Let's begin with what the resurrection of Christ means for God's saints. Saints is how Paul describes Christians back in 1 Corinthians 1:2. We are all saints in Christ positionally. What I want you to see in verse 20 is that before Paul writes about what is true for believers he reminds us what is true about Christ - **But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead.** Paul is not telling us to do something in these verses. He is reminding us what is true about Christ.

Has been raised is one word in Greek. Evidently, these folks were smarter than us because it takes us three words to explain what it took one word for them to explain. Has been raised is a verb that is in the perfect tense. What does that mean? The perfect tense describes a point in time event with abiding results. **The idea is that God raised Christ from the dead never to die again.**

This puts our Lord in a unique category. He's the prototokos. That's how Colossians 1:16 and Revelation 1:5 describe Him. In those verses Christ is called the firstborn from the dead. Jesus is the first one to do something. Jesus did something no one else has ever done. Jesus rose again never to die again.

Have people died and rose again? Yes. In the gospels we see Jesus raising people from the dead (The widow's son, Jairus's daughter, Lazarus), but they all eventually died again. Jesus died once for sins and God raised Him from the dead forever.

By the way, quick tv timeout, you have to believe this to be saved. Romans 10:9-10, "because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe

in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved." This is a non-negotiable truth. Christians confess that Jesus is Lord and believe that God raised Him from the dead. If you don't believe that, you're not saved.

Paul starts with what happened to Christ as the foundation of what happens for Christians. What does this mean? Whenever you struggle in the Christian life, whenever your mind seems to be spiraling out of control, you need to slow down and ask yourself this basic question, "What is true about my Lord and Savior?" Start there to get stability. When your mind is going in all different direction, steady yourself by reminding yourself what is true about Christ. Why? What is true about Christ is ultimately true for every born again believer, whether we feel it or not.

Twice in these verses Paul uses the word firstfruits to describe Christ. You see it in the middle of verse 20 and verse 23. Why does Paul use this terminology? By using the word firstfruits, Paul is reminding us that Christ's resurrection is the firstfruits of a whole harvest yet to come. **Jesus' resurrection from the dead guarantees our resurrection from the dead.**

Paul is writing to people who came out of an agrarian culture. They understood this terminology. Some of you grew up on a farm. If you didn't, most of you are familiar with how life on a farm works in terms of planting crops and then comes the harvest season. My grandparents owned a ranch with cattle growing up that I loved going to, but I don't know much about farming. **This became apparent when we moved from Kentucky to Kansas in 2011.** The church we served at was filled with farmers.

One day I saw a few farmers who were close to my age between services. I stopped them in the foyer and asked them a farming question. How's the dirt looking? That was the best farming question I could come up with at the time.

Bless his heart. They got funny looks on their faces and then one of them asked, "You mean the soil. How's the soil looking?" I said, "Yeah, the soil. How's that looking?" Those guys never let me live that question down. Every time I saw them at church they would stop me and say, "The soils looking great, Pastor Blake." Thanks a lot fellas.

When Paul uses the language of firstfruits to describe Christ's resurrection he is doing more than just appealing to those who are familiar with farming. **The firstfruits imagery is rooted in the Old Testament.** In the Old Testament God continually reminds His people how to glorify Him. God continually describes that He is their provider and how to glorify Him with His provisions. Leviticus 23:10-11, "Speak to the people of Israel and say to them, When you come into the land that I give you and reap its harvest, you shall bring the sheaf of the firstfruits of your harvest to the priest, and he shall wave the sheaf before the Lord, so that you may be accepted. On the day after the Sabbath the priest shall wave it."

Notice God reminded them that He gave them the land. Before the crop was harvested God told His people to bring a shief of the harvest to the priest and the priest was to wave the head before the Lord so the offering would be accepted. **The first sheaf of the harvest, probably a sheaf of barley, was brought to the priest as an offering to the Lord.** This was a sign that God had provided the harvest to come.

Who provided the land for His people? God did. Who made the crop grow? God did. They were only giving back to God what He had already given to them. This is going to blow you away - Christ's resurrection is better than barley. Did you hear me? That was some insight right there. What God sent Christ to accomplish for us is the complete removal of our sins and the reception of His perfect righteousness. After Jesus completed the work of redemption God the Father raised Him from the dead never to die again.

Paul is teaching us that Christ's resurrection from the dead guarantees our resurrection from the dead. Christ's bodily resurrection guarantees the harvest to come. We are the harvest, folks. Are you with me? This is glorious news. Because Christ rose again bodily we rise again bodily. I hope this encourages you this morning. Remember back in the beginning of this chapter, Jesus' bodily resurrection was witnessed by hundreds of people. Jesus told the disciples the night before the cross in John 14:19, "Yet a little while and the world will see me no more, but you will see me. **Because I live, you also will live.**"

Look at 1 Corinthians 15:21-22 as Paul continues to describe and defend the resurrection. To defend the resurrection he goes all the way back to Adam. What Adam did brought death for the whole human race. What Jesus did brought life to all who believe in Him. 1 Corinthians 15:21-22, "For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive."

Again, I hope it's ok if I tap the breaks. This is another area we no longer think like the world around us. We believe that a real God created a real man named Adam who committed a real sin that plunged the entire human race into sin and death. Every time we drive by a cemetery we should see all of those tombstones and think - Adam, Adam, Adam, Adam. By Adam comes death. But another man comes, Christ, the second Adam and He brings something else - He brings the resurrection of the dead. In Adam all die, so also in Christ all shall be made alive.

Don't get confused by the all's in verse 22. It doesn't mean that everyone who dies in Adam will be made alive with Christ. Paul did not teach universalism - the idea that everyone will be saved in the end. Back in 1 Corinthians 15:1-2 he already reminded them that the only people who are saved are those who keep believing the gospel. People who reject Christ are not saved. People who receive Christ are saved.

There is a definite order to God's plan for His people. Christ came to reverse the curse of Adam's sin. Now, the question for all who are in Christ, is when? When do believers receive their resurrected bodies? 1 Corinthians 15:23, "But each in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ." We receive our resurrected bodies when Christ appears. At the coming of Christ.

In a sermon on these verses John MacArthur quoted an author named Eric Sauer who wrote, "The present age is Eastertime. It begins with the resurrection of the Redeemer and ends with the resurrection of the redeemed. Between lies the spiritual resurrection of those called into life. So, we live between two Easters, and in the power of the first Easter we go to meet the final Easter." Believers in Christ receive their resurrected bodies when Jesus appears. This is our blessed hope.

Last week I heard that Kris Goertzen went to be with the Lord. Kris has been here to speak to our ladies. Rick, her husband, has also been here to speak to our men. I worked with Rick for 5 years in Kansas before he moved to Alabama and Kris would meet with the pastors wives. **Kris was an amazing woman of God.** Her entire life was spent loving her husband and kids and pouring into ladies. She definitely left her mark on this broken world for Christ. I would encourage you to visit Shades Mountain Community Church's website and watch her service. Our family drove down there on Friday and came back yesterday. 16 hours in the car is good for Gillen family bonding.

Many powerful things were said at her memorial service, but one thing stands out to me. Her husband said, "We know where Kris is and we know we will see her again." We know. We know. There was a confidence to his words. We don't guess where people are who die believing the gospel. We know there they are right now and we know when we will see them again. We know! Amen!

Remember what Paul reminded the Thessalonians in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18:

- 13 But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope.
- 14 For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep.
- 15 For this we declare to you by a word from the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep.
- 16 For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first.
- 17 Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord.
- 18 Therefore encourage one another with these words.

Have any of you lost a loved one who died believing in Christ? You will see them again. You will be with them again. It will happen. Whenever my grandmother was alive we would talk on the phone in the middle of the day. She would talk to me about some current event she would see on the news she didn't like and then she would say, "Blake, I took to bed over that." Gran would take to bed in the middle of the day when she heard about something happening in the world she didn't like. **Man, if she was alive today, she'd be taking lots of siestas.**

We can take to bed every day knowing that we will see our loved ones who died believing the gospel again. Why? Christ is the firstfruits of a great harvest to come. When Christ returns we receive glorified bodies like our Lord's.

Philippians 3:20-21

- 20 But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ,
 - 21 who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself.
- 4:1 Therefore, my brothers, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm thus in the Lord, my beloved.

Does God have a glorious future plan for His saints in 1 Corinthians 15:20-23? Yes. Jesus' resurrection is the first of a harvest to come and we're the harvest. Paul doesn't stop with us. Why? **Salvation includes us, but it's not ultimately about us.** In verses 24-28 Paul continues with the order of the resurrection and he fast forwards to an epic time when Christ defeats all God's enemies and hands the kingdom back to God the Father - This is infinitely glorious.

In verses 20-23 we see what the resurrection means for God's saints.

In verses 24-28 we see what the resurrection means for God's supremacy.

1 Corinthians 15:24-28

- 24 Then comes the end, when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power.
- 25 For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet.
- 26 The last enemy to be destroyed is death.
- 27 For "God has put all things in subjection under his feet." But when it says, "all things are put in subjection," it is plain that he is excepted who put all things in subjection under him.
- 28 When all things are subjected to him, then the Son himself will also be subjected to him who put all things in subjection under him, that God may be all in all.

Verses 24-28 reminds us that God not only has a future plan for us, God has a future plan for the whole world. God has a strategic plan for this world and His Son who rose from the dead is the One who fulfills the plan. Notice in these verses all the references to Christ - All the he's and his. Christ has accomplished the work of redemption, but He's not finished with the work of establishing His kingdom on the earth. Jesus reigns now, but his reign will extend until all things are placed in subjection to Him and then He will hand the kingdom back to God the Father.

Stay with me here because we're going to dip our toes into the deep end of eschatology for a few minutes. The end does not come when Christ appears.

Then in verse 24 signifies a sequence after a lapse of time. Everything does not end when Christ comes back for His saints. There's more to come. 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'), but he used a different verb, *eita*, indicating an interval between His coming and the completion at the end.

There is a sequence of events that happens after the coming of Christ for His saints. Those who die in the Lord and those who are alive when Christ returns rise with Him. That's clear in verses 20-23 and 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18. That's the next great event for which there are no signs needed. In verses 20-23 there's no judgment. In verses 20-23 Jesus does not come back to judge. He comes back to save. Then the judgment begins.

John MacArthur describes what happens this way, "When we go up, something begins to happen on earth. The war machine of God begins to grind, like you see it in Ezekiel 1 or in Revelation 4, and God begins to judge the world. He judges the world, according to the book of Revelation. The book of Daniel for a seven-year period. It's called the time of tribulation. For seven years judgments are poured out on this world, described as the opening of seals, the blowing of trumpets, and the pouring out of bowls, all wrath – fierce, devastating, deadly judgment in which the sky begins to collapse, the earth and all of its functions is dramatically altered for the worse. Business is ground to a halt, music stops. A third of the world dies, a fourth of the world dies, water turns to blood; all of those are described in detail in the book of Revelation in the time of tribulation."

Do people come to faith in Christ during the tribulation? Yes they do. We see God still sending out the gospel from Revelation 6-19. The world will still be evangelized. There will be people who refuse to take the mark of the antiChrist who are martyred. Those who martyred during this time come back to life. Revelation 20:4, "Then I saw thrones, and seated on them were those to whom the authority to judge was committed. Also I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for the testimony of Jesus and for the word of God, and those

who had not worshiped the beast or its image and had not received its mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years."

But even after the Millennium, after the 1000 year reign of Christ on the earth, there will be one final rebellion against God (Rev. 20:7–10) which Jesus Christ will put down by His power. The lost will then be raised, judged, and cast into the lake of fire (Revelation 20:11-15). Then death itself shall be cast into hell, and the last enemy will be destroyed. Jesus Christ will have put all things under His feet! He will then turn the kingdom over to the Father and then the eternal state—the new heavens and new earth—shall be ushered in (Rev. 21–22).

Some of you are probably thinking - Blake, how did you see all that in 1 Corinthians 15:24-28? I didn't see it all there. Paul's point in verses 24-28 is not to tell us everything about God's future plan for His people. **His main point is to prove that the resurrection is central to God's redemptive plan for saints and for God's supremacy.** He leaves things out between the coming of Christ and the consummation that other parts of the Bible fill in.

Here is what we know - Jesus Christ is alive. He is Christ the firstfruits. He is the first in a great harvest to come. Because He lives, we will live. But God's plan is far greater than just our salvation. His plan is global. The resurrection of the redeemer followed by the resurrection of the redeemed followed by the destruction of sin, satan and death followed by Jesus delivering the kingdom back to God the Father. The purpose of everything God does is His own glory. It's all so that God may be all in all, as Paul writes at the end of verse 28.

So what? Remember doctrine received, believed and practiced determines your character, behavior and destiny. **Because of the resurrection we can live with confidence.** Our confidence is totally in Christ. None of this is our doing - It's all dependent on what Christ has done and will do. The resurrection has eternal significance for God's saints and God's supremacy.

I began this lesson talking about McDonald's, remember that? Remember the fella who only ate McDonald's for a month. He almost died. What we put into our bodies is essential for physical health, but what we put into our minds is essential for spiritual health. Why so downcast o my soul - what was the Psalmists answer for that question in Psalm 42-43? Put your hope in God. Why? God has a glorious future plan for all who are in Christ because Christ the firstfruits is alive, therefore, there is a glorious harvest to come. God's plan is amazing for His saints and for His supremacy.

Where is your hope this morning? I hope you hope in God. His plan will happen and the resurrection proves it. The resurrection of Christ is central to God's plan for His saints and for God's plan for His own supremacy. Let's pray.