

The Death of Death

(1 Corinthians 15:20-28)

Introduction

- Becoming a Christian involves a fundamental change of one's life. A true Christian is not one who merely professes to believe in Jesus, but also seeks to faithfully follow Jesus as Savior and Lord. To put one's faith in Christ is to undergo a radical conversion – a change in worship, purpose, perspective, wisdom, love, desires, and eternal destiny. Although no Christian lives a perfect life, every true Christian wants to live a Christlike life.
- After detailing the truth of the resurrection (15:1-11), and the importance of the resurrection (15:12-19), the Apostle Paul turned his attention to the results of the resurrection in the life of the believer (15:20-28). Far from simply being a theological hobbyhorse or trivial religious doctrine, the truth concerning the resurrection of Jesus Christ has an eternal and radical impact on the life of a believer. As we have consistently stated in the last couple of weeks, without the resurrection of Jesus Christ there is no hope, no forgiveness, no salvation, and no Christianity. The life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ is the only hope anyone has of eternal life with God. Specifically, the resurrection of Christ is the culmination and fulfillment of God's redemptive plan.

Christ's resurrection does more than impact a believer's eternal life. For the true Christian, the resurrection of Jesus Christ begins to impact their life the moment they are saved. It affects both this life as well as the life to come. In a very real way, eternal life begins when the believer first receives Jesus Christ as both Lord and Savior. At the moment of salvation, the life of the believer is forever changed – changed by the truth and power of the resurrection!

1 Cor 15:20-28 ~ “But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. ²¹For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. ²²For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. ²³But each in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ. ²⁴Then comes the end, when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power. ²⁵For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. ²⁶The last enemy to be destroyed is death. ²⁷For ‘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. ²⁸When 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.”

- From this passage, we can derive three life-changing truths that govern how every Christian should live.

1. Christians live in light of Christ's RESURRECTION (vs.20-22)

- Immediately after describing what life would be like if Christ had not raised from the dead (vs.12-19), Paul wrote: *“But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead”* (vs.20). It is important to note that the words *“in fact”* translate one Greek word (*nyini*) which carries the meaning of “now”, “even now”, or “at this very moment.” Not only did Christ rise from the dead, but He is (“at this very moment”) risen from the dead.

This, among other things (i.e., that He rose Himself from the dead; Jn.2:19; 10:17-18), indicates Jesus' resurrection did not (will not) end in a second (physical) death. As Christians, we embrace this truth each time we say, “He is risen! (He is risen, indeed!)” [we do not typically say, “He was risen! (He was risen, indeed!)”].

➤ To emphasize this point, the apostle Paul added that Jesus is *“the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep”* (vs.20). The word *“firstfruits”* (*aparchē*) is an agricultural term which refers to the first harvest from the crop. In the Bible, the Israelites were to offer the first of their harvest as an offering to the Lord (see Ex. 23:19; Lev. 23:10; Deut. 18:4). The term, in addition to being used as “the first in chronology”, can also be used to describe “the first in priority” or even “the first of its kind.”

1 Cor 15:23 ~ “But each in his own order: Christ the firstfruits [*aparchē*], then at his coming those who belong to Christ.”

➤ This is similar to the expression of Jesus being *“firstborn”* (*prōtotokos*):

Rom 8:29 ~ “For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.”

Col 1:15 ~ “He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation.”

Col 1:18 ~ “And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent.”

Rev 1:5 ~ “and from Jesus Christ the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of kings on earth.”

➤ Clearly, Jesus was neither the first one to ever have been born nor was He the first one to have ever been raised from the dead [He had Himself raised people from the dead; e.g., Lazarus (Jn.11:38-44; 12:1), Jairus’ daughter (Mk.5:22-24, 35-43), the widow’s son (Lk.7:11-17)]. Jesus was, however, the greatest resurrection (first in priority) and the first of its kind.

Jesus’ resurrection is an eternal (a permanent) resurrection. Everyone who was raised to life in the Bible, died (physically) a second time. But this is not the case with Jesus, and this will not be the case for those who are *“raised with Christ”* (Col.3:1). He is risen! And as He rose Himself from the dead, so too will He raise all those who belong to Him. The Christian’s resurrection in Christ is an eternal resurrection.

✓ Illust: “The term “firstfruits” (Gk. *aparchē*) refers to a first sample of an agricultural crop that indicates the nature and quality of the rest of the crop; therefore, Christ’s resurrection body gives a foretaste of what those of believers will be like” (*ESV Study Bible*; 1Cor.15:20).

➤ This is exactly what Paul meant when he wrote that Jesus is *“the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep”* (vs.20) – *“fallen asleep”* a euphemism for death (not “soul-sleep”). Since Christ is eternally risen from the dead, so too will every true Christian be eternally risen from the dead – forever glorified in resurrected bodies.

Paul further explained: *“For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. ²²For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive”* (vs.21-22). Here we see a stark comparison Adam and Christ. Through Adam’s sin (unrighteousness) came the spiritual fall of all mankind. Because of Adam, every human is a sinner by nature and by choice (see Rom.3:10-12, 23; Eph.2:1-3). The consequence of this, apart from God’s saving grace, is physical and spiritual death for every human being (*“in Adam all die”*, vs.22; see Gen.2:17). All those who follow Adam are eternally condemned, and all those who follow Christ are eternally saved/redeemed (*“in Christ shall all be made alive”*, vs.22; see Jn.11:25-26).

Thankfully, Christ redeems us from the curse of Adam.

Rom 5:12-21 ~ “Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned – ¹³for sin indeed was in the world before the law was given, but sin is not counted where there is no law. ¹⁴Yet death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those whose sinning was not like the transgression of Adam, who was a type of the one who was to come.

¹⁵But the free gift is not like the trespass. For if many died through one man's trespass, much more have the grace of God and the free gift by the grace of that one man Jesus Christ abounded for many. ¹⁶And the free gift is not like the result of that one man's sin. For the judgment following one trespass brought condemnation, but the free gift following many trespasses brought justification. ¹⁷For if, because of one man's trespass, death reigned through that one man, much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man Jesus Christ. ¹⁸Therefore, as one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men. ¹⁹For as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous. ²⁰Now the law came in to increase the trespass, but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more, ²¹so that, as sin reigned in death, grace also might reign through righteousness leading to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord."

Eph 2:1-6 ~ "And you were dead in the trespasses and sins ²in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience – ³among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. ⁴But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, ⁵even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ – by grace you have been saved – ⁶and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus"

Gal 3:10-14 ~ "For all who rely on works of the law are under a curse; for it is written, 'Cursed be everyone who does not abide by all things written in the Book of the Law, and do them.' ¹¹Now it is evident that no one is justified before God by the law, for 'The righteous shall live by faith.' ¹²But the law is not of faith, rather 'The one who does them shall live by them.' ¹³Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us—for it is written, 'Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree' – ¹⁴so that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promised Spirit through faith."

➤ In this sense, the comparison between Adam and Christ could hardly be more opposed to one another:

1 Cor 15:45-49 ~ "Thus it is written, 'The first man Adam became a living being' [Gen.2:7]; the last Adam became a life-giving spirit. ⁴⁶But it is not the spiritual that is first but the natural, and then the spiritual. ⁴⁷The first man was from the earth, a man of dust; the second man is from heaven. ⁴⁸As was the man of dust, so also are those who are of the dust, and as is the man of heaven, so also are those who are of heaven. ⁴⁹Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the man of heaven."

Adam

"the first man Adam" (1Cor.15:45)

"the first man" (1Cor.15:47)

"the man of dust" (1Cor.15:48, 49)

Christ

"the last Adam" (1Cor.15:45)

"the second man" (1Cor.15:47)

"the man of heaven" (1Cor.15:48, 49)

➤ Belief always determines behavior. Right Christian doctrine is essential for right Christian living. The fact that Jesus is risen from the dead should have an immediate and lasting impact on our lives. Since, as Christians, we have been raised with Christ (and will be eternally resurrected in Christ) we ought live in light of that resurrection.

Colossians 3:1-3 ~ "If then you have been raised with Christ, seek [zēteō; pres., act., imp., keep seeking] the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. ²Set your minds on [phroneō; pres., act., imp., keep thinking about] things that are above, not on things that are on earth. ³For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God."

2. Christians live in hope of Christ's RETURN (vs.23-24)

➤ Christians will not experience the fullness of the resurrection until after Christ returns at His Second Coming. *“But each in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ”* (vs.23). When Christ comes again, all true believers will be resurrected with glorified bodies to be together with God, in heaven, forever. This happens, however, in a specific, sequential, order: *“each in his own turn”* (vs.23). First, *“Christ, the firstfruits”* (vs.23), then *“at his coming those who belong to Christ”* (vs.23). That is, Christ's resurrection and then the Christian's resurrection.

While we do not know that day or time of Christ's Coming (see Matt.24:36, 42, 44, 50; 25:13), we do know that order in which Christians will be resurrected in Christ at His Second Coming. First, the dead in Christ, and second those who are alive in Christ.

1 Thess 4:13-18 ~ “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. ¹⁴For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep. ¹⁵For 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. ¹⁶For 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. ¹⁷Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up [*harpazō*; to seize or take away] together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord. ¹⁸Therefore encourage one another with these words.”

1 Cor 15:50-54 ~ “I tell you this, brothers: flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. ⁵¹Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, ⁵²in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. ⁵³For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality. ⁵⁴When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written: ‘Death is swallowed up in victory’ [Isa.25:8; Hos.13:14].”

➤ This is commonly known as “the rapture” [derived from a Latin word (*rapio*) which means to be “taken away” or “carried off”]. When Christ returns, He will gather the dead in Christ first with new glorified resurrection bodies, and then those who are still alive in Christ will too be raised with new glorified resurrection bodies. The *“dead in Christ”* (1Thess.4:16) refers to all those who die before Christ comes again [“*fallen asleep*” (vs.15) is a euphemism for death not ‘soul-sleep’ (see 1Cor.15:20) which is unbiblical, or ‘purgatory’ which is unbiblical and heretical]. Before Christ's Second coming, all those who died in Christ go to “*paradise*” (or “*Abraham's side*”) awaiting their final resurrection and the new heaven (2Pet.3:9-13; Rev.21-22). Those who die without Christ go to “*Hades*” (*hades*; i.e., the abode of the dead), or more specifically to “*hell*” (Gehenna; Mk.9:45; a place of torment in Hades).

Luke 16:22-23 ~ “The poor man died and was carried by the angels to Abraham's side. The rich man also died and was buried, ²³and in Hades, being in torment, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham far off and Lazarus at his side.”

Luke 23:32 ~ “And [Jesus] said to him, ‘Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise.’”

2 Cor 5:6-10 ~ “So we are always of good courage. We know that while we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord, ⁷for we walk by faith, not by sight. ⁸Yes, we are of good courage, and we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord. ⁹So whether we are at home or away, we make it our aim to please him. ¹⁰For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil.”

2 Cor 12:3 ~ “And I know that this man was caught up into paradise – whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows”

Phil 1:23 ~ “I am hard pressed between the two [i.e., to live or die (vs.21)]. My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better.”

Phil 3:20-21 ~ “But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, ²¹who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself.”

The last “resurrection” is the resurrection of the unrighteous to their eternal condemnation and death (Jn.5:29). Those who are in Christ are raised to eternal life, which those who are not in Christ are raised to eternal death.

John 5:24-29 ~ “Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life. ²⁵Truly, truly, I say to you, an hour is coming, and is now here, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live. ²⁶For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself. ²⁷And he has given him authority to execute judgment, because he is the Son of Man. ²⁸Do not marvel at this, for an hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice ²⁹and come out, those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment.”

- The “*end*” (vs.24; *telos*) does not refer to all things being over but all things being completed or fulfilled. The end of all things will come what Christ, the risen and glorified Son of God, “*delivers the kingdom to God the Father*” (vs.24). This marks the successful completion of Christ’s redemptive mission. For He came to earth to redeem God’s people and bring final judgment to God’s enemies. This fulfills what God had sovereignly determined (purposed) before the foundation of the world (see Eph.1:4; 3:9; 1Pet.1:20; 2Tim.1:9-10; Tit.1:2-3).

In the end times, God will sovereignly direct all things to their eternal end. Everything will forever be in absolute and perfect harmony with His sovereign will. After God (the Father) brought everything in submission to His Son (Col.1:15-20), the Son will give the Father a redeemed and sanctified kingdom.

- After His Second Coming, Christ will permanently – once and for all – vanquish all of the enemies of God: “*after destroying every rule and every authority and power*” (vs.24). Sin will be no more. The Greek word translated “*destroying*” (*katargeō*; vs.24) means to “render useless” or “make inoperative.” In other words, when the end comes, Satan’s power over this world (see Jn.12:31; 14:30; 16:11; 2Cor.4:4), and all evil or demonic forces, will be completely and eternally eradicated.

1 John 3:8 ~ “... The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil.”

- Christians live in hope of Christ’s return. For it is at Christ’s Second Coming that all believers will experience the eternal fullness of their resurrection in Christ. If Christ had not been raised then He would not return, and (if Christ had not been raised) “Christians” would suffer God’s just and eternal condemnation.

1 Peter 1:3-5 ~ “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, ⁴to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, ⁵who by God’s power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.”

3. Christians live in submission to Christ's REIGN (vs.25-28)

- The Bible clearly states that God reigns over all creation – which is everything (excluding the Godhead). He is the sovereign ruler over everything (Ps.47:8). Nothing in all of creation is greater than God, nor equal to Him. Yet, we know that according to His sovereign will God allows for humans to rebel against Him. There will come a time, however, when God's reign will be absolute – with no one in rebellion to His will or His commands. Christ's Second Coming marks the beginning of *"the end"* (vs.24).
- The delivering of *"the kingdom"* (vs.24) to His Father, gloriously and unmistakably showcases the reign of Christ. The reign of Christ is present and eternal. While always submissive to His Father's will, Christ was never subservient to satanic or human powers (see Jn.14:30; 18:36; 19:11).

John 5:22-23 ~ "The Father judges no one, but has given all judgment to the Son, ²³that all may honor the Son, just as they honor the Father. Whoever does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent him."

Matt 28:18-20 ~ "And Jesus came and said to them, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.'"

- In verse twenty-five we read: *"For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet"* (vs.25; cf. Ps.110:1). Notice the utter annihilation of everyone and everything that opposes God – *"every rule ... authority and power"* (vs.24) and *"all his enemies"* (vs.25). This includes Satan, and all satanic forces; every demon and all demonic activity; every evil doer and all evil deeds; every unrepentant sinner and all sin; every idol and all idolatry; every unjust act and all immorality; including every disease and all death – *"The last enemy to be destroyed is death"* (vs.26).

1 Cor 15:54-57 ~ "'Death is swallowed up in victory.' ⁵⁵'O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?' ⁵⁶The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. ⁵⁷But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."

Heb 2:14-15 ~ "Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, ¹⁵and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery."

- Quoting from Psalm 8:6, Paul wrote: *"For 'God has put all things in subjection under his feet'"* (vs.27). In invokes powerful imagery of God's complete and eternal dominance over His enemies. He reigns over all, and all are in subjection to Him (see Eph.1:22; Phil.2:9-11).

✓ Illust: "The figure of putting His enemies under His feet comes from the common practice in ancient times of kings and emperors always sitting enthroned above their subjects, so that when the subjects bowed they were literally under, or lower, than the sovereign's feet. With enemies, a king often would literally put his foot on the neck of the conquered king or general, symbolizing the enemy's total subjection. In His millennial reign, all of Christ's enemies will be put in subjection to Him, under His feet, so that God's sovereign plan may be fulfilled" (John MacArthur; *The MacArthur New Testament*

Commentary: 1 Corinthians; 15:24-28).

- Paul then gave a detailed, albeit confusing, explanation: *"... 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. ²⁸When 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"* (vs.27-28).

1 Cor 15:27-28 ~ "... But when it says 'everything' has been put in subjection, it is clear that this does not include the one who put everything in subjection to him. ²⁸And when all things are subjected to him, then the Son himself will be subjected to the one who subjected everything to him, so that God may be all in all." (NET)

1 Cor 15:27-28 ~ "... But when it says 'everything' is put under Him, it is obvious that He who puts everything under Him is the exception. ²⁸And when everything is subject to Him, then the Son Himself will also be subject to Him who subjected everything to Him, so that God may be all in all." (HCSB)

- The main point seems to be that while the Son gives the kingdom to the Father (vs.24), the Father gives the Son unlimited sovereignty over all creation – which, of course, excludes the Father (who is neither created nor subject to anything or anyone). For the Son is equal to the Father is deity (see Jn.1:1-3; 10:30; 14:9) and yet functionally submissive to the Father's will (see Mk.14:36; Jn.5:19, 26-27, 30; 17:4).
- ✓ Illust: "Although Paul's argument in this section is difficult in its details, its thrust is clear and powerful. The Corinthians must understand that the Resurrection is not an isolated event with limited repercussions. It is rather an integrating and culminating event in God's sovereign rule over history. Redemption is not complete 'until he has put all his enemies under his feet' (v.25, a clear reference to Ps.110:1), and since death is 'the last enemy' (v.26), Christ's work is not done until death is destroyed. Paul's statement that the Son 'will also be subjected' to the Father (v.28) does not mean that the Son is inferior in dignity and being. Rather, in His messianic work the Son subjects Himself to the will of the Father 'when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father' (v.24). The climax of Christ's submissive, messianic work is this total conquest over His enemies, 'that God may be all in all,' when His absolute rule is universally acknowledged" (*The Reformation Study Bible* [ESV]; 1Cor.15:24-28).
- As believers in the risen Christ, our lives are radically changed because we know that our risen Savior will one day rule as Lord and God. Although He was born humbly, He will reign sovereignly. Although He lived as a servant, He will reign as a King. Although He died terribly, He will reign triumphantly. Although He was buried ignobly, He will reign gloriously. The sacred irony is that through His death Christ conquered death – once and for all time. Through the power of His resurrection, Christ reigns over everything in the world. That knowledge not only impacts our future (eternal) life, but should also radically impact our present (temporal) life.

Ephesians 1:20-23 ~ "This power [God] exercised in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms ²⁴far above every rule and authority and power and dominion and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come. ²²And God put all things under Christ's feet, and he gave him to the church as head over all things. ²³Now the church is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all." (NET)

Conclusion

- Ultimately, after Christ's return and reign, God is glorified in everything – "*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*" (vs.28). This does not, at all, mean that the Son is diminished in deity or divine glory – He forever remains one in essence and character with the Father. Out of infinite love for His Father, the Son will (again) submit Himself to the Father "*that God may be all in all*" (vs.28; see Col.3:11).
- God's authority will never again be challenged or questioned. God's name will never again be mocked or blasphemed. God's glory will never again be dishonored or rejected. God's Word will never again be ignored or disobeyed. His sovereign supremacy will be absolute, universal, and eternal!
- These truths ought to radically influence how we live our lives. They should compel every person, every Christian, to live their lives to the glory of God.

1 Cor 10:31 ~ "So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God."