

“Ministry Diversity and the Centrality of Christ in the Local Assembly”
Issues of Theology - Understanding the Resurrection

Author: Patrick J. Griffiths ©
 Title: “Betting on a Sure Thing” - “So that God may be all in all”
 Text: 1 Corinthians 15:20-28
 Theme: The Implications of the Resurrection to the Purpose of God in the Future (vv. 20-28).

Introduction:

Back to the Future Part II is a 1989 film and is the second part of the Back to the Future trilogy. It is the sequel to the first movie in the trilogy, Back to the Future.

The story continues with **Marty McFly** and **Emmett Brown** as they now leave 1985 and time travel to the year 2015 to stop Marty's kids from destroying their lives. While Marty is in 2015, he witnesses a newsflash on a video screen that the Chicago Cubs have just swept an unnamed Miami team in the World Series. While Marty's initial reaction is surprise that Miami was the Cubs' opponent (Miami had no Major League Baseball franchise in 1985), a passerby laments that he wished he could "go back to the beginning of the season and put some money on the Cubbies," who were apparently 100-to-1 longshots at the beginning of the season to win the Series. This plants the idea in Marty that time travel and knowledge of the future can be used to win at gambling on sports event outcomes. At an antique store selling all sorts of memorabilia from the 20th Century, he purchases "Gray's Sports Almanac 1950s-2000," which contains all major sports results for that time span. Doc discovers the almanac and tells Marty that he did not build a time machine for such trivialities as ill-gotten financial gain, putting the almanac in a nearby trashcan. The **Biff** of 2015 overhears the conversation and takes the almanac from the trash after Doc and Marty walk away. Returning to 1985, Marty and Doc quickly realize that their time has been mysteriously altered. **Biff** has become a rich and powerful man. **Biff**, knowing the future, made his money betting on sure things. What if you knew who would win the World Series in Baseball for the next 50 years?

The passage before us is a response to the dark notes sounded in the previous paragraph (vv. 12-19). If Christ was dead and did not rise from the dead, then all Christian profession as it relates to Him and His promises would be of naught. Yet our text says, “Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, [AND IS] the first fruits...” This statement is significant. First, it stands in contrast to the dark notes sounded earlier. It is light in darkness. It strengthens, encourages, and lightens those who are weak, downcast, and broken. Second, it is a promise of what is to come.

The historical significance of Christ as a first fruit for His people is lost to most readers. In Leviticus 23 the initial produce of a crop was to be offered up as a “first fruit.” It spoke of more to come, of a fuller and larger harvest. This same idea is captured by the text. Because Jesus Christ has been raised from the dead, everything He has promised and we have believed, in light of those promises, will come to pass.

This can be applied to all of His promises, but there is a specific idea inside of the paragraph. First, His triumph over all things created is described as exhaustive. Second, His reign over all things created is described as eternal. Finally, His purpose for all things created is described as ended. We will consider each of these ideas as they are found in the text before us.

The resurrection of Jesus Christ by the Father is His guarantee that the program described and promised will come to pass. There is coming a day when the program of God will be completed. This is the assurance in which we now live.

The negatives of verses 12-19 are answered in verses 20-28. Not only do we reject the notion of non-resurrection, but we are equally not to be pitied. We are of all people most assured of our future. This life is not only acceptable, but part of His purpose that will culminate in the full expression of His reign over all things.

Acts 26:23 says, “by reason of His resurrection from the dead He would be the first to proclaim light both to the Jewish people and to the Gentiles.” The resurrection is the absolute guarantee of the Father to the purpose achieved by His Son. That which He justifies, He glorifies. Jesus Christ is “the firstborn of the dead” (Rev. 1:5). The idea found in verses 13 and 16 are abolished and answered in full.

“One of the principles that a first fruit offering taught was that a future harvest was promised - the first fruit were just a taste of what lay in store at the end of the full ingathering of the harvest. Therefore, when a first fruit offering was brought before the Lord, it represented a prayer to Him to watch over the future harvest that was there foreshadowed by the minute proportion that was being presented.”

<http://home.clara.net/arlev/ffruits.htm>

“Before Israelites harvested their crops they were to bring a representative sample, called the first fruits, to the priests as an offering to the Lord (Lev. 23:10). The full harvest could not be made until the first fruits were offered. That is the point of Paul’s figure here. Christ’s own resurrection was the first fruits of the resurrection ‘harvest’ of the believing dead.” (John MacArthur, 1 Corinthians, 416).

“Christ’s resurrection is a pledge and earnest of ours, if we are true believers in him; because he has risen, we shall rise.” <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/henry/mhc6.iCor.xvi.html> (Matthew Henry’s Commentary on the Whole Bible)

There is coming a day when the Son of God will rule and reign over all things created. In that day the Father will receive from His Son the reward of His labor and the Father in turn will give to His Son the right to reign over all things created. The resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead is the beginning of this eternal purpose. This is the eternal purpose of the Godhead. This is what Ephesians 1:10 will look like. This is the thought contained in Revelation and the unfolding of the eschatos.

“Verses 20-28 represent the heart of Paul’s argument. Here he begins to reconstruct reality for the ‘some’ in order to compel them to transfer the adherence they have to the thesis that Christ is raised to the conclusion that there is going to be a future resurrection of the dead.” Firstfruits and Death’s Defeat: Metaphor in Paul’s Rhetorical Strategy in 1 Cor 15:20-28, ANDY JOHNSON, Eastern Nazarene College, Quincy, Massachusetts

http://www.luthersem.edu/word&world/Archives/16-4_Corinthians/16-4_Johnson.pdf

I. The contrast (v. 20)

Our passage begins with an emphatic “but now, as a matter of fact.” In contrast to the previous thought (vv. 12-19) the apostle lays out the idea that there is a resurrection from the dead and thus Christ Himself has been raised and is alive. It was through the Father that the Son experienced resurrection, and it will be through His power that His people will likewise experience resurrection truth (1 Cor. 6:14). Our Lord Jesus is risen and continues in that resurrected state to this day.

“So all Christian preachers affirm; there is no Christian faith without this affirmation.” (C.K. Barrett, A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians, [Harper & Row, 1968], 350)

Christ as the first fruit guarantees the outcome of our resurrection. This is the confidence and assurance we have of God keeping His word. He will fulfill His promises to us. Not because of who we are but because of who He is and what He has done.

“This is the first argument used by the apostle in confirmation of the truth; and it is, illustrated by a parallel between the first and second Adam.”

<http://www.ccel.org/ccel/henry/mhc6.iCor.xvi.html> (Matthew Henry’s Commentary on the Whole Bible)

“He is the first fruits of those who have slept in death. On the morrow after the first Sabbath of the Passover a sheaf of the first fruits of the barley harvest was “waved before the Lord” (Lev. 23:10-16) as a pledge of the harvest to come. So on the morning after the first Sabbath of the Passover, Christ, the first fruits arose and appeared living, “the first fruits” of the great harvest of souls gathered into eternal life.”

(B. W. Johnson *The People’s New Testament* [1891])

This leads us to our second idea within the paragraph.

II. The explanation/illustration (vv. 21-22)

This same imagery is used by the Holy Spirit earlier in Romans 5:12-21. Just as Adam began sin and death so also Jesus would begin grace and life. Adam is the prototype or model of the old whereas Jesus is the prototype or model of the new.

He uses an historical idea to establish a future one. Just as in Adam, so also in Christ. The “all” of verse 22 is inclusive: just as all died in Adam so also all will be raised in Christ. The unbelieving will be resurrected and it is because of Christ’s resurrection that they will be raised. Their resurrection is a resurrection to damnation whereas those who are in Christ will be raised to life eternal.

“The passage does not affirm the final salvation of all, but the final resurrection of all.” (B. W. Johnson *The People’s New Testament* [1891])

“The first-fruits are of the same nature as the rest of the harvest; so Christ, the bringer of life, is of the same nature as the race of men to whom He brings it; just as Adam, the bringer of death, was of the same nature as the men on whom he brought it.”

(Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown) <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/jamieson/jfb.xi.vii.xvi.html>

There are two statements concerning death in our text.

A. The origin of death (v. 21).

Sin and death found beginnings in the human race in and through Adam. This speaks of His place as race representative.

B. The end of death (v. 26).

Verse 26 uses the same word found in verse 24. He will render ineffective or powerless death. The death of death in the death of Christ begins judicially. Its demise has been pronounced, but the carrying out of the sentence is still yet future. Presently death still exercises its role, but let us not be deceived by death. Death is a consequence of sin, but its master is the Lord. He is Lord of death. Death is a servant and slave of our Lord. All who die do so according to the purpose of God. There is coming a day when death shall end its reign.

This leads us to our third idea within the paragraph.

III. The sequence (vv. 23-24a)

The sequence of events is suggestive and not exhaustive. This is true for much of the listings in the New Testament. The sequence tells us there are singular events within the idea of resurrection; first Christ, then those who are His, then the end. The order implies that those who are not His will not be raised at the same time as those who are His.

“Rank’: the *Greek* is not in the abstract, but concrete: image from troops, ‘each in his own regiment.’ Though all shall rise again, let not any think all shall be saved; nay, each shall have his proper place.”

(Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown) <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/jamieson/jfb.xi.vii.xvi.html>

“Observe carefully that all men are to be raised, but not all at the same time; ‘every man in his own order.’ The resurrections proceed in well-defined stages.” (James L. Boyer, For a World Like Ours: Studies in 1 Corinthians, 141).

First Thessalonians 4:16 speaks of this order whereby those who are in the grave and in Christ rise first and thus precede those who are in Christ and not yet in the grave.

- A. Christ, the first fruit
- B. Then those who are in Him – the receiving
- C. Then those who are not in Him – the rebelling

I choose to identify those who are not in Him as the rebelling, as opposed to the unbelieving, because I believe at that point in time they will believe, but to their eternal damnation. A Universalist would believe that those who at this point see Him will believe and be saved from their damnation.

The details of this chronology or sequence are sketch and broad.

¹ “Now at that time Michael, the great prince who stands guard over the sons of your people, will arise. And there will be a time of distress such as never occurred since there was a nation until that time; and at that time your people, everyone who is found written in the book, will be rescued. ² **Many of those who sleep in the dust of the ground will awake, these to everlasting life, but the others to disgrace and everlasting contempt**” (Dan. 12:1, 2).

²⁸ “Do not marvel at this; for an hour is coming, in which all who are in the tombs will hear His voice, ²⁹ and will come forth; **those who did the good deeds to a resurrection of life, those who committed the evil deeds to a resurrection of judgment**” (John 5:28, 29).

¹⁴ “But this I admit to you, that according to the Way which they call a sect I do serve the God of our fathers, believing everything that is in accordance with the Law and that is written in the Prophets; ¹⁵ having a hope in God, which these men cherish themselves, that **there shall certainly be a resurrection of both the righteous and the wicked**” (Acts 24:14, 15).

Although the Old Testament speaks of a general resurrection, the New Testament appears to differentiate between the first resurrections of the believing against the second resurrection of the damned.

⁵ “The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were completed. This is **the first resurrection**. ⁶ Blessed and holy is the one who has a part in **the first resurrection**; over these **the second death** has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with Him for a thousand years” (Rev. 20:5, 6).

I believe that the Old Testament believers, the New Testament believers, and the believers in the tribulation will all be a part of the first resurrection. I am not sure, however, as to sequence. Some suggest, and I am inclined to believe, that the New Testament believer goes prior to the tribulation and Old Testament and Tribulation believers go after the Tribulation, but I do not hold this rigidly.

There is a second resurrection for the damned spoken of in Revelation 20:11-15.

¹¹ “Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat upon it, from whose presence earth and heaven fled away, and no place was found for them. ¹² And I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne, and books were opened; and another book was opened, which is the book of life; and the dead were judged from the things which were written in the books, according to their deeds. ¹³ And the sea gave up the dead which were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead which were in them; and they were judged, every one of them according to their deeds. ¹⁴ Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is **the second death**, the lake of fire. ¹⁵ And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire” (Rev. 20:11-15).

This resurrection takes place after a thousand year period (Rev. 20:5, 6). There is a tension as to sequence as it relates to a believing Jewish resurrection apart from a Christian resurrection. First Corinthians 15 speaks of “those who are Christ’s at His coming” (v. 23). First Thessalonians 4 speaks of those “who have fallen asleep in Jesus” (v. 14). An issue is whether or not Jewish believers prior to Christ are “in Christ.” Part of my problem is trying to be too exact as to sequence. In light of this, we have viewpoints representing a pre-tribulation rapture, a mid-tribulation rapture, a pre-wrath rapture, and a post-tribulation rapture. We also have viewpoints representing a pre-millennial coming, a post-millennial coming, and an a-millennial idea. I affirm a pre-tribulation rapture, pre-millennial coming, but I am neither dogmatic or an isolationist as it relates to the other positions. I am very much open to the conversation and I am emphatically, pro-tribulation, pro-coming, and pro-millennial. I also believe that the study of last things (i.e. eschatology) will err if the focus is not on Christ. The study of end time truth is a study of Christ and the establishing of His kingdom. This, I believe, is the focus of our present passage. The emphasis is on Christ and the establishment of His kingdom.

This leads us to our fourth idea within the paragraph.

IV. The goal (vv. 24b-28)

When Christ comes according to the statement found in verses 23, then the end will be here. Those who would deny a resurrection would find what the Holy Spirit speaks through Paul dreadfully disturbing. There is something that awaits them.

In these four verses we have a revelation of what is going to happen in the eternal purpose of God. This is the outworking of His plan. This plan was established in eternity past within the counsel of the Godhead. And it is this predetermined and foreknown plan that will unfold in time through the instrumentation of human willing. The choices of men are rushing the movement of God into place and it will unfold according to His purpose. Nothing will stop this from happening and all things are directly and indirectly connected to all of this singular idea.

In His death He defeated death. Although death has power, it was impossible for Him to be held in its power (Acts 2:24). Jesus Christ, in His death abolished death (2 Tim. 1:10). His victory over death is an already-not yet truth. What has begun in time will be finished in eternity. Death’s final sentencing will be after the Great White Throne judgment of Revelation 20:14. When death and Hades are thrown into the lake of fire this event and placing are called the second death.

Let us consider the primary ideas of this text as it relates to His triumph, His reign, and His purpose.

A. His triumph over all things created is described as exhaustive (vv. 25-28a)

There is coming a time when Jesus Christ, after abolishing all rule and authority and power, will turn the kingdom won over to His Father (v. 24). The singular reign of Jesus Christ over all created things is until He has vanquished every enemy (vv. 25-28a). Verse 24 tells us that He will render ineffective all rule and all authority and all power. All that presently stands in opposition to Him will be negated.

The Holy Spirit cites Psalm 110:1 and Matthew 22:44. They both refer to an event that is yet future. This passage is in keeping with the previous passages.

In verses 24-26, His triumph over all things created is described as exhaustive. There is nothing that can be excluded from His triumph. There is coming a time when nothing created will defy His authority. Presently we live in a world that stands in open opposition to Him. It expresses a will that often looks in conflict to Him. It is hard to imagine that what we see and hear every day through various media is an expression of His triumph over all things being exhaustive. Yet for all of His people we understand that His triumph is an “already-not yet” truth. His cross-work has set in motion His full and final triumph over all things created. He will destroy “all dominion, authority, and power” (v. 25). And “the last enemy to be destroyed [will be] death” (v. 26). Because of the language used in verses 25 and 26 I chose the word “exhaustive” to show the far reaching arena of His triumph. Nothing will escape His victory over sin and death. Everything we encounter in our lives will fall into subjection to Him who has and will triumph over all things created.

B. His reign over all things created is described as eternal (v. 28b)

There is coming a time when Jesus Christ after abolishing all His enemies will turn His reign over to His Father and in this act God becomes all in all (v. 28b). Verse 25 suggests that His reign has a termination point. It is “until” a point in time. There will come a point in time when His reign will fold into the reign of God the Father and they together will reign over all things created. Perhaps this is the millennial reign of Christ folding into the eternal reign of God.

In verses 24-25, His reign over all things created is described as eternal. There is a lot of movement within the idea of His reign in our passage. First, everything will be placed in a position of subjection to the Son except the Father. Verse 27 confirms an economical idea to the Trinity. Second, everything, including the Son, will be placed in a position of subjection to the Father. The idea presented reflects the economical Trinity whereby the Son is placed in a position of dependence to the Father. This is a part of the incarnation when He took upon Himself the nature of man and became the God-man. It is noted that His placement of dependency is a part of the incarnation. As Son, He was functionally in subjection to the Father prior to the incarnation. This economy or administration existed before the Trinity chose to create. There is a great mystery here. In this mystery within the Trinity we must never conclude that the Son, as Son, is anything less than the Father or the Holy

Spirit in their essence. The kingdom ruled by the Son and then handed over to the Father is singular in nature. The difference is where the Son sits in relation to the Father. Currently the Son sits at the right hand of the Father (Rev. 4 and 5). There is coming a day when the Son will sit on the throne of David. When the Son hands the kingdom over to His Father the purpose of God for all things created will be ended. This is a part of the imagery presented for us in 1 Corinthians 15.

In prophetic imagery, Daniel 2:44 speaks of “the God of heaven setting up a kingdom which will never be destroyed, and that kingdom will not be left for another people; it will crush and put an end to all these kingdoms, but it will itself endure forever.” This same truth is echoed in Daniel 7:14, 27.

Jesus Christ in His economical role will submit Himself before the Father as an expression of His Father’s complete and absolute rule over all things. In this act the Son continues to show His role as Son before His Father. Jesus recognizes that what He did and possessed were done and given by His Father. “All things were handed over to Him by His Father” (Matt. 11:27). The authority possessed by the Son as God is intrinsic to His person and position, but there is another authority possessed by the Son as Man that is received by Him and delegated to Him by His Father (Matt. 28:18). This giving by the Father is noted in Ephesians 1:22.

“And He put all things in subjection under His feet, and gave Him as head over all things to the church” (Eph. 1:22).

What the Son received from the Father He returns to the Father (Heb. 2:8). This same idea is present in 1 Corinthians 3:23.

“And you belong to Christ; and Christ belongs to God” (1 Cor. 3:23).

His authority to raise the dead, to subject all things under His authority, is all tied together in His resurrection from the dead (Phil. 3:21).

C. His purpose for all things created is described as ended (vv. 24a, 28)

In verses 24a and 28, His purpose for all things created is described as ended. There is a culmination to the purpose of God as it relates to His design for creation. Oh friend, there is coming a day when the purpose of God for all things created will be ended, when He will be all in all! What a glorious and compelling day this will be. To even speak of such things fills the writer with awe, excitement, and expectation. Everything that appears so disjointed and illogical will open before us into a unified and intentional whole. Nothing will be out of place. No longer will “square pegs be forced into round holes.” The union of all things will be consummated.

This is absolutely fascinating. Ephesians 1:9-10 speaks of this truth in the following manner:

“In all wisdom and insight He made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His kind intention which He purposed in Him **with a view to an administration suitable to the fullness of the times, that is, the summing up of all things in Christ, things in the heavens and things on the earth**” (Eph. 1:9, 10).

When the Son places Himself, along with the trophies of His work, under the authority of His Father, the Father will be all in all and in so doing He will have summed up all things in Christ. This same action echoes the idea of Philippians 2:9-11 when the Father grants to Christ a position before which all things created bow and in such action the Father receives glory.

“For this reason also, God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus EVERY KNEE WILL BOW, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Phil. 2:9-11).

This is the purpose toward which all things are rushing. It is the resurrection of Jesus Christ that speaks of this future. What the Father did in the raising of His Son was place on His promises a pledge to complete that which He alone began. Oh what joy is ours both now and in the future. Today I can rest in full contentment knowing that He is faithful to complete that which He started (1 Thess. 5:23, 24). He is both the author and finisher of my faith (Heb. 12:1, 2). This is the Christian hope and this is what stands out as our identifying quality to a world that is without this hope. Today may you find great peace knowing that the triumph of God is exhaustive, that the reign of God is eternal, and that the purpose of God will end. God has won and in Christ we share in this magnificent victory.

In that day Jesus Christ will reign as a co-regent with the Father over all things created. This is the picture in Revelation 4 and 5. This is also the idea contained in Colossians 1:13-20 and 2:9, 10.

APPLICATION: (What's the NEXT STEP?)

1. Are you resting in the triumph of God?
2. Are you resting in the reign of God?
3. Are you resting in the purpose of God?