

In the next part of this chapter, Paul defends the truth of Christ's resurrection. So, apparently, this was another thing the Corinthians had either forgotten or misunderstood;

(1 Cor. 15:11-19) Therefore, whether it was I or they, so we preach and so you believed. Now if Christ is preached that He has been raised from the dead, how do some among you say that there is no resurrection of the dead?

A group of believers, assembling together each week to study the scriptures, to worship and pray together – allegedly all for the glory of Christ – and some of them decided that Christ is still in His grave. If you were Paul, what would you have written to them? As we'll see, Paul's response to this was both patient and genius (he says . . .)

If there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ is not risen. And if Christ is not risen, then our preaching is empty and your faith is also empty. Yes, and we are found false witnesses of God, because we have testified of God that He raised up Christ, whom He did not raise up—if in fact the dead do not rise. For if the dead do not rise, then Christ is not risen. And if Christ is not risen, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins! Then also those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most to be pitied.

One thing Paul makes very clear is that the resurrection is God's own testimony of His satisfaction with the death of His Son as payment for our sins; vs. 17, "If Christ is not risen, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins!"

If you read through the Book of Acts and look at every time the gospel was preached, you'll notice that the emphasis in each message was on Christ's resurrection. His death is mentioned, but the implications are not fully explained. The main emphasis is on His resurrection. Rather than read all of them, I'll just use two examples of this – one message that was given to Israel and the other which was given to Gentiles. Here's Peter's message to his nation in Acts 2:22-37;

Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a Man attested by God to you by miracles, wonders, and signs which God did through Him in your

midst, as you yourselves also know— Him, being delivered by the determined purpose and foreknowledge of God, you have taken by lawless hands, have crucified, and put to death; whom God raised up, having loosed the pains of death, because it was not possible that He should be held by it. For David says concerning Him: ‘I foresaw the Lord always before my face, for He is at my right hand, that I may not be shaken. Therefore, my heart rejoiced, and my tongue was glad; moreover, my flesh also will rest in hope. For You will not leave my soul in Hades, Nor will You allow Your Holy One to see corruption. You have made known to me the ways of life; you will make me full of joy in Your presence.’ “Men and brethren, let me speak freely to you of the patriarch David, that he is both dead and buried, and his tomb is with us to this day. Therefore, being a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him that of the fruit of his body, according to the flesh, He would raise up the Christ to sit on his throne, he, foreseeing this, spoke concerning the resurrection of the Christ, that His soul was not left in Hades, nor did His flesh see corruption. This Jesus God has raised up, of which we are all witnesses. Therefore, being exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He poured out this which you now see and hear. For David did not ascend into the heavens, but he says himself: ‘The Lord said to my Lord, “Sit at My right hand, Till I make Your enemies Your footstool.” Therefore, let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ. Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, “Men and brethren, what shall we do?”

Now, here’s Paul’s message to the Gentiles;

(Acts 17:22-34) Paul then stood up in the meeting of the Areopagus and said: “People of Athens! I see that in every way you are very religious. For as I walked around and looked carefully at your objects of worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: to an unknown god. So, you are ignorant of the very thing you worship—and this is what I am going to proclaim to you. “The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by human hands. And he is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything. Rather, he himself gives

everyone life and breath and everything else. From one man he made all the nations, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he marked out their appointed times in history and the boundaries of their lands. God did this so that they would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from any one of us. 'For in him we live and move and have our being.' As some of your own poets have said, 'We are his offspring.' "Therefore, since we are God's offspring, we should not think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone—an image made by human design and skill. In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent. For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to everyone by raising him from the dead." When they heard about the resurrection of the dead, some of them sneered, but others said, "We want to hear you again on this subject." At that, Paul left the Council. Some of the people became followers of Paul and believed.

The resurrection of God's Son was the main theme of all apostolic preaching. And it was that message that the Holy Spirit used to open hearts and save souls – both Jews and Gentiles.

So, for the Corinthians to either dismiss or even downplay the resurrection must have been absolute shocking to Paul and the others. Obviously, the Corinthians had no idea of the importance of that event.

The resurrection not only vindicated the forgiveness of our sins, but it also proclaimed, like a man shouting from the rooftops, that a new humanity had been born and the early disciples were eye-witness of the Man in whose image that humanity would be made.

The Cross was the death of the old humanity. When Christ breathed His last breath, He took the entire Adamic race with Him into the ground. He was the last Adam and when Christ was raised, it marked the beginning of an entirely new creation and species of humanity that had never existed before.

In whatever way the meaning of the word "Church" has been redefined over the last 2000 years, *that* is the way God defines it; in the heart and mind of God the Church is a new creation in Christ; not a religion, not an organization, it is Christ Himself expressed through a new, corporate, spiritual Body.

As we'll see later in vs. 22; "For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive." So, naturally, we who are born again are to "put off the old man and put on the new man".

(Eph. 4:22-24) Put off, concerning your former conduct, the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, and be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness.

Here's are M.R. DeHaan's comments on this;

The resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead is the keystone of the arch of salvation. Remove it and the whole structure of the plan of salvation crumbles in the dust. The good news of the gospel is that Christ died for our sins and that He rose again. The resurrection of Christ is the proof that His death atoned for sin. The wages of one single sin is death. One sin brought the curse of death upon all mankind (Rom. 5:12-15). If Jesus had paid for all the sins of mankind except one, He could not have risen, for one sin would have been enough to keep Him in the tomb. When Jesus arose, it was proof that He had completely met redemption's price. When He cried, "It is finished!" (Jn. 19:30), the work was fully done. God was satisfied and then proved the completeness of the work by raising Christ from the dead. This victory should not only be commemorated on a special day each year but every day! Because Christ did not remain in the tomb but conquered death by rising again, we can live in the joy of the full salvation provided by a risen, living, and soon returning Redeemer.

I'm sure all of us are aware of the fact of the Lord's resurrection, but I'm also sure there are an infinite number of 'implications' of His resurrection, and our union with Him *in* that resurrection, that remain a mystery to us.

The principle itself is shown in passages like Col. 3:1-4 and Eph. 2:4-6;

If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God . . . For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory . . . God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in

trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus.

In some way that we probably only barely understand, God has brought us into union with Christ where He is now – He was raised and so were we. That’s what the scriptures tell us. It’s a present-tense truth in each of our lives.

There is a very old-school theologian (F.C. Conybeare) who lived in the 1800’s who wrote about this;

(He said) . . . how surpassing is the power which He has shown toward us who believe; (for He has dealt with us) in the strength of that might wherewith He wrought in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead; and set Him on His own right hand in the heavens, far above every Principality and Power, and Might, and Dominion, and every name which is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come. And 'He put all things under His feet,' and gave Him to be Sovereign Head of the Church, which is His body; the Fulness of Him who fills all things everywhere with Himself.

The Church is the “fullness of Him who fills all things with Himself”. That’s our destiny based on our position in Christ, but our experience in this life of all that has been done for us is limited at best.

When we read passages that say things like “(God) raised Him from the dead; and set Him on His own right hand in the heavens, far above every Principality and Power, and Might, and Dominion, and every name which is named . . . And 'He put all things under His feet’”, we are obviously talking about the absolute authority of the One Who has been chosen to reign and rule over all His creation.

All that we are going through here, in time, is designed to prepare those willing to share in that reign for that exalted position. We know from Genesis that God’s original design was to “create man in His image and give him dominion. . . .” When the first Adam fell and lost that right, a second Adam had to enter this world and win back that right.

(1 Cor. 15:47-49) The first man (Adam) was of the earth, made of dust; the second Man is the Lord from heaven. As was the man of dust, so also are those who are made of dust; and as is the heavenly Man, so also are those

who are heavenly. And as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly Man.

What was hidden from all past generations about this was that the “second Man” would be corporate; our Lord’s spiritual body would be, as we saw in 1 Cor. 12, “many membered”. The Church is destined to be the corporate expression of the Second Person of the Trinity.

All that remains to make this a visible, universal reality is the final preparation of the Church to reach the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ. The sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared to the glory that shall be revealed when the Church *experientially* reaches that place of ascendancy.

In the passages we’ve looked at in 1 Cor. 15, Colossians and Ephesians, the emphasis in Paul’s explanation of the meaning and eternal purpose bound up with Christ’s resurrection and our union with Him is “position” and “power” (or authority).

As Sparks explains it;

That is the end, the goal, to which we work. What we have in view is the throne, coming to the throne, and, while the ultimate issue is a rapture, a distinct act, a definite movement *to* the throne, it is but the conclusion of something that has been going on spiritually for some time before. It is the culmination of a process. We come to the throne by the final act because we have been coming to the throne all the time; that is, we have been gaining spiritual ascendancy over the enemy progressively, we have been learning what it is to reign. We have been in the school of the reigning ones to be learning how to reign.

In our own experience of the Christian life, we may or may not realize that this is what God is ultimately after; and the things we are going through are the means He has chosen to get us there. It can be a huge advantage to us if we can get this clear in our minds and see all of our circumstances and trials as providing very specific lessons in this “school” we’re in, of learning how to reign; how to appropriate the position we currently have as those seated in Christ above all principalities and powers that exist.

We are already in ascendency, our union with Christ in His resurrection has established that; but we don't fully understand what that means experientially. So, we have to learn. The first part is discovering the truth of all this through the study of God's Word, and the second part is what God does in our lives to teach us and move what we've learned academically into what we progressively possess empirically.

Here's another author's comments on what this is meant to be;

That whole old state of things has passed away in the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, He is no longer on that plane of life, nothing of Satan has any power over Him at all; He lives now by an authority which is given Him over all the authority of the evil one. "All the authority has just been given to Me in heaven and in earth." He is out in a new realm now. Resurrection means a new life in a new realm where all the old conditions have ceased. Now beloved, that is something to be entered into by faith. Resurrection union with the Lord Jesus is to be possessed of a life over which death has no power, over which Satan has no authority. It is the life of One who has taken the authority and who is triumphant over death. As Jesus said, "Because I live you shall live also." That is very familiar again and simple, but it is an epoch in His history and it represents an epoch in our spiritual life when we stand on it by faith.

The Lord is not only living in the power of a new triumphant life, but He is now set in the place of all authority in heaven and in earth. He is in a new place; it is this Man in a new place that helps you to get to the heart of things. Man, in Christ, is in a new place now. He has broken free from the whole world system as lying in the power of the wicked one, as encircled by the prince of the power of the air; He has broken free through His cross from that whole system. A Man is in the place of authority, in the place of dominion, at the right hand of God; and we are in union with Him there.

This is our reality, but as I said, our *empirical* knowledge of this is progressive because we have so much to learn. God desires that we set our hearts on this "upward call" and pray that the Holy Spirit will increasingly make our position in heaven, in Christ, real to us on earth.

There is another reason why it's so important that we learn to live by the strength of Christ's resurrection. As we grow into this, those around us begin to see something in us that is different than what we could call "normal humanity". They may not know what they're seeing, and it's unlikely that we would be aware of what is radiating from us. For those around us, it would just be a sense that you and I possess something unique and something unlike what they are used to. There is an attractiveness in this for those who are searching and there's an inward inclination toward rebellion *against* it for those who are perishing.

(2 Cor. 2:15-16) We are to God the fragrance of Christ among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing. To the one we are the aroma of death leading to death, and to the other the aroma of life leading to life.

This "spiritual aroma" they are sensing is the resurrection life of Christ being worked into and manifest through us.

In our last study we talked about how we can prove the fact of the Lord's resurrection, the 500 witnesses, etc., but Sparks brought out something that is also a proof of His resurrection that we didn't have time to look at last time.

You may believe in the resurrection; you may be willing to lay down your life for that faith; you may state it with tremendous emphasis, and yet you are not thereby proving it. You will never prove anything by saying: "I believe with all my might that this is the case!" You will never prove a thing by standing up and declaring it as something which you believe. You will never prove a thing by saying: "I believe in all the fundamentals of the Christian faith!" and calling yourself by some name which indicates that you believe in the inspiration of the Bible. Nothing is ever proved in that way. If you have appealed to the fact that the Word of God says so, even then you have proved nothing. Your proof can never be by argument, because what argument can build up, argument can pull down, and what logic can construct, logic can destroy.

How, then, are you going to prove that this is so? By the expression and manifestation of His risen Life. That signifies that you are the embodiment of the thing which you declare – besides the doctrinal statement there is the living expression. So, the resurrection and the lordship of Jesus are bound up

with this expression which is called the "testimony." The testimony is not a system of truth or of convincing arguments. It is that extra factor to the statement and presentation of truth which is the power of a Life which conquers death. How, then, will you prove that Jesus has conquered death? The proof of it will be a death-conquering Life that expresses itself in you.

Ok, I need to pause for a minute – I know these things are absolutely true because the statements of scripture on all of this are very straightforward; this is truly our position in Christ because of our union with Him in resurrection. But I have to admit that like many things in the Bible, "I see men like trees walking". I have *some* clarity, not nearly enough. As many of the theologians of the past put it, "I'm not fully possessing my possessions".

But I also know that He Who has begun this work in us will complete it. One passage that I've spent a lot of time taking to the Lord is this;

(Lk. 24:44-45) He said to them, "These are the words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things must be fulfilled which were written in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms concerning Me." And He opened their understanding, that they might comprehend the Scriptures.

I'm extremely grateful for what we've seen in 1 Corinthians 15; it's God's Word, so it's true. But I'm sure I'm going to *more* grateful when He 'opens my understanding that I might comprehend the Scriptures. . . ' more fully than I do now, and we will all be *infinitely* more grateful still when our understanding is not limited by our weakness in this life and we are standing in heaven both knowing and experiencing the full reality of what these passages are telling us.

So, for now we move forward a day at a time and we pray to see what we need to see; and we trust that what God is doing in us, and with us, is going to eventually mean that we will see more clearly as He continues to open our understanding.

That 'day at a time' life we're meant to live is what God uses to teach us what resurrection life is; and it's not what we normally think it would be; a life filled with the experience of overflowing power and invincible strength. Those things may happen, but they are not always part of the 'learn by experience' process. It's another one of the paradoxes of the Christian life. How can we be indwelt and filled with the power of God Himself and at the same time feel so weak?

Here's an answer for that;

We shall not be able to raise ourselves any more than we can crucify ourselves, but we must recognize that the Lord's dealings with us are with that in view. In order to display the power of His resurrection, He will very often have to take the attitude toward us of letting things get well beyond all human ability to remedy or save, of allowing things to go so far that there is no other power in all the universe that can do anything whatever to save the situation. He will allow death, disintegration to work, so that nothing, nothing in the universe is of any avail, except the power of His resurrection. And Paul came into that: "We had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should *not trust in ourselves, but in God which raises the dead*" (2 Cor. 1:9).

We shall come to the place where Abraham came, who became the great type of faith which moved into resurrection: "He considered his own body now as good as dead" (Rom. 4:19). That is the phrase used by the apostle about Abraham: "as good as dead." Whatever else men may be able to do in the realm of creation, they stop short when death has actually taken place; they can do no more. Resurrection is God's act, and God's alone. Men can do very many things when they have got life, but when there is no life it is only God who can do anything. And God will allow His Church and its members to get into such situations as are altogether beyond human help, in order that He may give the display, which is His own display, in which no man has any place to glory.

This is just another example of the incredibly mysterious situations we find ourselves in that seem so contrary to what we expected; but they are situations specifically designed by the Lord to instruct us on how both the Cross *and* the Resurrection are at work simultaneously in our lives daily.

Now, let's look at why Paul wrote this in vs. 19; "If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men are most to be pitied." C.S. Lewis explained it like this;

Note that Paul does not just say pitied but *most* to be pitied using the comparative form as a superlative which describes the attribute of a person that is the highest in degree of wretchedness compared to other people. In essence Paul is saying if the resurrection is not true, we are far more to be

pitied that even non-believers! Without the resurrection Christianity would be pointless, and anyone who believes in it should be pitied. Without the resurrection, there would be no gospel, no salvation message to believe, no forgiveness of sins, and no hope of a meaningful life (either now or after death).

I think Lewis is saying that we would be sacrificing what minimal pleasures this life has to offer for a mere fantasy.

The hope of resurrection into eternal life, even at the loss of this life, provides us with an assurance of a destiny that makes anything *this* life has to offer pale into complete insignificance by comparison. But that hope or assurance is something that is experienced *only* by those who *do* believe in resurrection and in a glorious destiny. If our focus is here, rather than there, then our lives here will definitely feel empty and without purpose; which, again as we saw earlier, is why Paul wrote this in Col. 3:1-2

Since you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth.

We have to get to the place where we move beyond seeing passages like those as 'poetry' that create a fleeting sense of inspiration, and start taking them seriously in our daily lives. We can't benefit from what we could experience in being heavenly minded if we just agree with these verses intellectually- and move on. This takes time, discipline and practice.

Now, let's look at vs. 20-21;

But now Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since by man came death, by Man also came the resurrection of the dead.

The phrase "fallen asleep" refers to believers who have died. Here are some verses that show this;

(John 11:11-14) He said to them, "Our friend Lazarus sleeps, but I go that I may wake him up." Then His disciples said, "Lord, if he sleeps he will get well." However, Jesus spoke of his death, but they thought that He was

speaking about taking rest in sleep. Then Jesus said to them plainly, “Lazarus is dead.

(1 Cor. 11:29-30) He who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgment to himself, not discerning the Lord’s body. For this reason, many are weak and sick among you, and many sleep.

For the past 2000 years, countless believers have “fallen asleep” in Christ. We may know some of them personally and are looking forward to seeing them again soon. The reason Paul associates Christ with the “First fruits” would have sent a very clear message to His Jewish readers. Here’s Dr. Constable’s explanation;

The first fruits that the Jews offered following the Passover were only the first of the crops that they offered later. Paul saw in this comparison the fact that other believers would rise from the dead just as Jesus Christ did. He used the first fruits metaphor to assert that the resurrection of believers is absolutely inevitable. God Himself has guaranteed it.

It’s exactly like what we saw when we studied John – where, in John 14:3-4 & vs. 19 Jesus said,

If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also . . . Because I live, you will live also.

After Paul establishes this, in vs’s 22-23 he breaks down the diverse nature and timing of the resurrections ;

For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive. But each one in his own order: Christ the first fruits, afterward those who are Christ’s at His coming.

The Greek word translated "order" (tagma) is a military term used of ranks of soldiers. Paul was saying that Christ was the first rank; He experienced resurrection first. Christians are in a different rank and will experience resurrection together as a group at the Lord's coming or Parousia, meaning “appearing”; in other words, the Rapture.

There will be other ranks of people who will be resurrected at other times including the Tribulation saints, Old Testament believers, and finally the unsaved at the time of the Great White Throne judgment which we studied in Rev. chapter 20.

Ironside calls this the “Pageant of Resurrections”. And they are all possible only because our Representative Man conquered death and rose first.

And after all of that happens, we see what comes next in vs’s 24-28;

Then comes the end, when He delivers the kingdom to God the Father, when He puts an end to all rule and all authority and power. For He must reign till He has put all enemies under His feet. The last enemy that will be destroyed is death. For “He has put all things under His feet.” But when He says “all things are put under Him,” it is evident that He who put all things under Him is excepted. Now when all things are made subject to Him, then the Son Himself will also be subject to Him who put all things under Him, that God may be all in all.

I found a unique and illustrative story that describes this in terms that might help us understand it better. It’s written like a parable intended to make something that is essentially spiritual make sense;

Christ may be likened to the receiver of this world. Suppose a business in San Francisco is owned by a firm of three persons in New York City. They send a manager out to take charge of the business, but this manager proves to be dishonest and incompetent, and the business is in inextricable difficulties. One member says, “You allow me to go out there and act as receiver, and I will try to straighten everything up and put the business on its feet.” He goes out there, takes charge of everything, goes over all the books, and finds out where the crookedness has been. It may take him months, perhaps years, before he straightens things out, but after everything is cleared, every bill paid, and there are no longer any liabilities, he goes back to New York, presents his account, and hands it all back to the firm. Does he cease to have an interest in it? No, for he is a member of the firm; but the firm takes complete charge and he no longer exercises administration as a Mediator. This universe was put under the dominion of Adam. God created him in innocence and put him in charge, and said to him, “I have given you authority over it all.” But through his being deceived by Satan, through

incompetency and dishonesty, the whole thing was thrown into turmoil. And so, our blessed Lord Jesus, one of the Eternal Trinity, is coming back to this world and will take charge of things, and when everything has been subjected to God and all the wicked and utterly impenitent have been dealt with, He will hand it back to the Father that God may be all in all. Shall we lose our Savior then? No, He will remain the same blessed, loving Jesus that He has ever been since His incarnation, but the kingdom will be presented to the Father, and then God (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) will, in perfect unity and sovereign power, maintain it in righteousness for all eternity.

We are at the point in history when the Age of the Church, the calling out and spiritual development of the Bride of Christ, is nearly completed. Then the Tribulation will run its course; Israel will be purified, Satan will be bound for 1000 years, and as Paul said, "Then comes the end, when He delivers the kingdom to God the Father, and puts an end to all rule and all authority and power . . ."

And the wonder of the eternal state, which is beyond our imagination, involves an infinite number of unrevealed future Ages. All that has happened in the past ages, from the rebellion in heaven to the patriarchs, to the ages of Israel and of the Church are seasons of history that God has either created or recovered. But following the Millennial Kingdom an unlimited number of future ages, stretching on forever, will be created and introduced into God's eternal timeline based on His own incomprehensible wisdom and creativity. And the essential nature of each of those ages will be that they are designed to bring a sense of wonder and awe, as well as everlasting and increasing happiness and joy to the Son of God and His Bride.