

First Epistle to the Corinthians

28 – Essay Five: Resurrection (5.2) – Adam and Christ and the End of All

1 Corinthians 15:1-20

1. Outlines

- a. *ESV Study Bible*
 - i. The Futility of Faith If the Dead Are Not Raised (15:1–58)
 - 1. The truthfulness of the traditions about Christ’s resurrection (15:1–11)
 - 2. Christ’s resurrection and the resurrection of believers (15:12–34)
 - 3. The nature of the resurrection body (15:35–58)
- b. *Reading the New Testament: Reading Corinthians*
 - i. The Human Transformation Yet to Come
 - 1. A Reminder of Christ’s Resurrection (vv.1-11)
 - 2. Corinthian Assertions and Pauline Responses (vv.12-34)
 - 3. Corinthian Questions and Pauline Answers (vv.35-58)
- c. *New International Commentary on the New Testament: The First Epistle*
 - i. The Resurrection of Believers
 - 1. The Basis—The Resurrection of Christ (vv.1-11)
 - 2. The Certainty of Resurrection (vv.12-34)
 - a. If Christ is NOT raised (vv.12-19)
 - b. But Christ IS raised (vv.20-28)
 - c. Ad hominem arguments for resurrection (vv.29-34)
 - 3. The Resurrection Body (vv.35-49)
 - a. Analogies of seeds and “bodies” (vv.35-44)
 - b. Analogy of Adam and Christ (vv.45-49)
 - 4. The Assurance of Triumph (vv.50-58)
- d. Bailey¹
 - i. Resurrection: The Message and Validity of Faith (vv.1-20)
 - ii. Resurrection: Adam and Christ (vv.21-28)
 - iii. Resurrection and Ethics (vv.29-34)
 - iv. Resurrection: Adam and Christ (vv.35-50)
 - v. Resurrection: Victory (vv.51-58)

Table 1: Bailey, location 5221

1 Corinthians 15:21-28 (ESV)		
1	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.	Adam and Christ
2	23 But each in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ.	Christ - first Then those in Christ

¹ Bailey, *Paul Through Mediterranean Eyes: Cultural Studies in 1 Corinthians*, loc. 4971.

3	24 Then comes the end, when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power.	The end - To God the Father, All
4	25 For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet.	All enemies Under his feet
5	26 The last enemy to be destroyed is death. 27 For "God has put all things in subjection under his feet."	Death and all In subjection Under his feet
6	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.	All things In subjection Except God the Father
7	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.	The end - To God the Father All

2. Rhetoric

- a. Two-section intro, followed by five-part ring-composition
 - i. Vv.21-22: perfect double parallelism
 - ii. Vv.23: another parallel verse
- b. Intro: the future inevitability of the resurrection, just as death was inevitable
- c. Main body: all things restored to God at the end
- d. Repetitions:
 - i. All/every
 - ii. Subjection/subjected
 - iii. Under his feet
 - iv. Destroying/destroyed
 - v. Enemies/enemy

3. Intro

- a. Continues preceding themes: that Christ's bodily resurrection makes resurrection of believers (into physical bodies of some kind) inevitable; that the resurrection is proof of the power of God over power of sin and death.

[Paul] understood both the death and resurrection of Christ and the subsequent gift of the Spirit as eschatological realities. That is, he recognized that in those events God had set in motion the events of the End in such a way that they must of divine necessity be brought to consummation. The absolutely crucial matter in this view is the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. In Paul's Jewish eschatological heritage resurrection belonged to the final events of the End. The fact that *the* Resurrection had already taken place within history meant that the End had been set inexorably in motion; the resurrection of Christ absolutely guaranteed for Paul the resurrection of all who are "in Christ."²

² *New International Commentary on the New Testament: The First Epistle*, entry "2. The Certainty of Resurrection: B. But Christ Is Raised."

- b. New: A *human* agent brought death and so a *human* agent must bring life

This is the first use of the Adam- Christ analogy in Paul's extant letters. He will pick it up again, but in a different way, in vv. 45–49, as well as in Rom. 5:12–21. His varied use of this theme suggests that it is a commonplace with Paul, for whom Christ stands at the beginning of the new humanity in a way analogous to, but not identical with, the way Adam stood at the beginning of the old order, both temporally and causally. Paul's interest here is twofold: (a) in death and the overthrow of death through resurrection—the motif that will dominate the rest of the argument, and (b) in the *human* mediation of both death and life, and therefore in the genuine humanity of Christ. Whatever the Corinthians may have believed about Christ's resurrection, it cannot be argued to be of a different order because he was divine. Rather, just as death, so resurrection is *through a man*.³

- c. Paul is not discussing a *general resurrection*, but the *resurrection of believers*
- i. He does not address the question of what happens to those who died before Christ, or those who have died without hearing about Christ⁴

It must be noted at the outset that the general resurrection of the dead is not Paul's concern, neither here nor elsewhere in the argument.⁵

- d. The *coming* – Gk. *parousia* – Latin *adventus*
- i. *Adventus* used for the Roman emperor, a god, when he arrived in a city for a visit.⁶
 - ii. Paul invokes the image of Roman pomp but ascribes it to Christ
- e. Of note: Paul places the blame for introducing death onto man, the male of the human race. Jewish tradition blamed Eve, the woman.

This choice to blame Adam, and not Eve, is significant in any evaluation of Paul's attitudes toward women and men in the church.⁷

4. Main body – the End of All Things

- a. Main point: The resurrection of believers is inevitable and it *must* occur.
 - i. We need to be careful not to go off this main point while reading this passage, and in the process “find” theologies that are unrelated to it
- b. “Then comes the end...” (v.24)
 - i. Does not indicate chronological sequence from v.23: Christ's raising, the believer's raising, and then the end where Christ hands over the kingdom to the Father *and* Christ destroys every rule, etc.
 - ii. Rather it is logical: The resurrection of believers is evidence of Christ having fulfilled the goal (end) of destroying every rule, etc. and as a result his function has successfully been completed allowing him to “return” the function of salvation back to the Father (subject himself to God, v.28)

³ *NICNT*, entry for 15:21-22.

⁴ C.f., Bailey, location 5245.

⁵ *NICNT*, entry for 15:21-22.

⁶ Bailey, location 5248.

⁷ Bailey, location 5238.

- iii. Paul is, in effect, writing that the Roman Empire will be destroyed – hardly a safe thing to do, even if it is something in the distant future. Christ is in opposition to *all* earthly rule, authority, and power.⁸
 - 1. Something to think about when Christians are tempted to align with, accommodate, or take advantage of civil powers
- c. V.28 is saying the same thing as v.24, just in different manner and words
 - i. It is *not* about the Son being subordinate to the Father (for eternity)
 - 1. This verse is sometimes used to argue the hierarchical nature of God (at least in role) and consequently to justify the hierarchical nature of church and human relations (e.g., gender roles)

1 Corinthians 15:28: In this passage Paul seems to speak of the Son's rule coming to an end at the consummation of all things and of him becoming subject to the Father. The first problem this text raises is that elsewhere the Son's reign is said to be "forever" (2 Sam. 7:13; Isa. 9:7; Lk.1:33; 2 Peter 1:11; Rev. 7:10-12, 11:15; cf. Eph. 1:20). Then there is the question as to whether the Greek verb translated "subjected" is passive voice, "Christ is subjected by God", or middle, "Christ subjects himself." The latter seems preferable because in the incarnation the Son voluntarily subordinates himself, and this would be a parallel. What Paul thus seems to be suggesting is that the rule God the Father gave to God the Son at the resurrection is freely handed back to the Father by the Son at the end. Rather than speaking of fixed roles, or of the eternal subordination of the Son, this text indicates a changing of roles in differing epochs.⁹

- ii. When the function of "Christ" ceases, it is returned to the Father (i.e., "the Son himself will also be subjected to him who put all things in subjection under him" (v.28))

As in 3:22-23 and 11:3, the language of the subordination of the Son to the Father is functional, referring to his "work" of redemption, not ontological, referring to his being as such. The unity of God lies behind all such language.¹⁰

- d. Paul employs Old Testament language and metaphors to describe the results of "The End"
 - i. Psalm 110:1; 8:6 – "under the feet"
 - 1. It is a Middle Eastern image of victory
 - ii. Christ's resurrection is the beginning of "The End" and inauguration of Christ's reign
 - iii. Christ's return is the end of "The End"
 - iv. The problem for believers is that they are still dying during "The End"
 - v. If Christ is reigning and we are in "The End" why is there still death?
 - vi. Christ's resurrection signals the defeat of death and its inevitable destruction
 - vii. The resurrection of believers indicates the destruction of death

⁸ Bailey, location 5262.

⁹ Giles, Kevin. "The Doctrine of the Trinity and Subordination" at CBE International, <http://www.cbeinternational.org/?q=content/doctrine-trinity-and-subordination>, retrieved 4-April-2014.

¹⁰ NICNT, entry for 15:28.

- viii. Believers are living in the time in-between; when death has been defeated but not yet destroyed – but there is nothing to fear because death’s destruction is certain
- e. Paul’s concern is not with Christ’s reign and how it works
 - i. We might be curious about it, but Paul doesn’t really answer these questions
 - ii. Paul’s focus is the certainty that death will be destroyed

Paul's concern is therefore not with "two reigns," but with the Messiah's bringing to completion his work of redemption...¹¹

In a sense death, the final enemy to be subdued, is already being destroyed through the resurrection of Christ; but Paul's concern here is with its final destruction, which takes place when Christ's own resurrection as firstfruits culminates in the full harvest of the resurrection of those who are his. Death is the final enemy. At its destruction true meaningfulness is given to life itself. As long as people die, God's own sovereign purposes are not yet fully realized. Hence the necessity of the resurrection—so as to destroy death by "robbing" it of its store of those who do not belong to it because they belong to Christ!¹²

- f. The image of subjection and victory that Paul paints is one that is total and complete. Death and its allies will never make a comeback.¹³
- g. Paul affirms the centrality of the Resurrection to the gospel. It is the gospel. Everything else is secondary.

Paul is thereby saying to his readers, “If Christ is not raised, then this vision of the end of all things is a lie. But Christ *is raised*, and we the apostles have seen him. If you deny him as the reigning Lord, you are the losers.”¹⁴

5. Summary

This is one of the great passages in the NT... in terms of the true significance of Easter. It is therefore unfortunate that at times this powerful demonstration of the certainty of our own resurrection is overlooked in favor of an apologetic of trying to prove the resurrection to unbelievers. First of all, that is not what Paul is trying to do. What he has going for him is the common ground of their common faith in the resurrection of Christ. There is a place for apologetics, that is, the defense of Christianity to the unconverted; but Easter is not that place. Easter, which should be celebrated more frequently in the church, and not just at the Easter season, calls for our reaffirming the faith to the converted. The resurrection of Christ has determined our existence for all time and eternity. We do not merely live out our length of days and then have the hope of resurrection as an addendum; rather, as Paul makes plain in this passage, Christ's resurrection has set in motion a chain of inexorable events that absolutely determines our present and our future.¹⁵

¹¹ NICNT, entry for 15:25.

¹² NICNT, entry for 15:26.

¹³ Bailey, location 5288.

¹⁴ Bailey, location 5289.

¹⁵ NICNT, entry for 15:28.