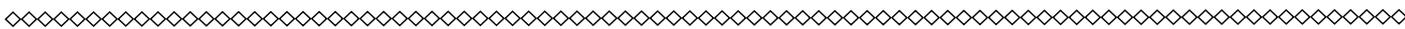




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Sermon Brief
Text: 1 Cor. 15:12-28
Title: If Christ Be Not Raised
Lorin L. Cranford

Seeking to faith-
fully proclaim
the whole coun-
cil of God in
scripture!



INTRODUCTION

Today is Easter Sunday! All over the world the followers of Christ are celebrating His resurrection on the first Sunday of Easter. For many Christian traditions this is the most solemn worship service of the entire year.

Without question the resurrection of Christ stands as one of the central points of the Christian faith. In the early church it certain had this level of importance. All four gospel accounts of the life of Jesus contain reports of Jesus' resurrection appearances to the Twelve and to other followers. Interestingly, none attempt to describe the resurrection itself. They considered this a mysterious miracle of God that lay beyond rational explanation. Instead, their concern was to affirm the reality of Jesus having come back to life from death by recounting His appearances to various individuals and groups of followers. The occurrence of the resurrection is affirmed only by Matthew in the briefest of description (Mt. 28:2): "And suddenly there was a great earthquake; for an angel of the Lord, descending from heaven, came and rolled back the stone and sat on it." But even here no effort is made to describe what happened and how God raised Jesus up from death.

This miracle of God remained a mystery in which God's power was exerted upon a dead body in unbelievable fashion in order to bring it back to life. What mattered in early Christianity was that God did it and thus Jesus who was dead now came back to life in a new form that now longer was limited to human restrictions on movement etc. That this had happened was evidenced by supernatural phenomena accompanying the resurrection; for Matthew the occurrence of an earthquake and also for Mark and Luke the appearance of an angel who would announce to the women that Jesus was no longer in the tomb. Following this narrative appearance to the women in all four gospels, each gospel writer goes his own distinct direction in reporting the appearances of Jesus to the Twelve and to others over the next forty days prior to His ascension back to Heaven. The concern of the gospel writers is not primarily to 'prove' that Jesus was raised from the death as to provide subsequent believers with insight into what Jesus had to say to His followers in these appearances to them. Here would be the greater insight and help to later believers in Christ.

When the apostle Paul attempted to deal with a fist full of problems existing in the church at Corinth through his first letter to them, one of the hot button issues was the resurrection of both Christ and believers. From all indication, false teachers with Gnostic tendencies had come into the church with a teaching that 'spiritualized' the resurrection so much that the understanding was that Jesus' physical body did not come back to life on that first Easter Sunday. Instead, the Lord was given a 'spiritual body' that had no direct connection to His earthly body. The primitive idea here later gained detailed expression in fully developed Gnostic teaching in the second Christian century and its falseness becomes fully exposed as depending on human reasoning based on ancient Platonic dualistic understanding of human existence. In 1 Corinthians 15, the apostle Paul vigorously counters this phoney idea with the most detailed discussion of the resurrection of Jesus and its implication for believers that can be found in the entire Bible. He passionately argues for a 'bodily' resurrection of Jesus and thus the same for believers at the end of human history.

I want today to plug into one part of Paul's discussion found in verses 12 through 28; to try to cover all of chapter fifteen would require much more time that we have available today. In this middle section of Paul's discussion he makes the central point of the significance of Jesus' resurrection for believers. This is the emphasis that is most relevant to us today as we celebrate the resurrection of our Lord.

Turn with me to 1 Corinthians 15:12-28 in your Bibles and follow along as I read the text:

12 Now if Christ is proclaimed as raised from the dead, how can some of you say there is no resurrection of the dead? 13 If there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ has not been raised; 14 and if Christ has not been raised, then our proclamation has been in vain and your faith has been in vain. 15 We are even found to be misrepresenting God, because we testified of God that he raised Christ — whom he did not raise if it is true that the dead are not raised. 16 For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised. 17 If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins. 18 Then those also who have died in Christ have perished. 19 If for this life only we have hoped in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied.

20 But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have died. 21 For since death came through a human being, the resurrection of the dead has also come through a human being; 22 for as all die in Adam, so all will be made alive in Christ. 23 But each in his own order:

Christ the first fruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ. 24 Then comes the end, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father, after he has destroyed every ruler and every authority and power. 25 For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. 26 The last enemy to be destroyed is death. 27 For “God has put all things in subjection under his feet.” But when it says, “All things are put in subjection,” it is plain that this does not include the one who put all things in subjection under him. 28 When all things are subjected to him, then the Son himself will also be subjected to the one who put all things in subjection under him, so that God may be all in all.¹

In these verses two basic points are made by Paul. What if Jesus wasn't raised? What would be the impact of that, if it were true? Second, because Jesus was raised from the dead, what impact does that have? The first point is hypothetical while the second point is an affirmation of reality.

BODY

I. If Christ be not raised, vv. 12-19

12 Now if Christ is proclaimed as raised from the dead, how can some of you say there is no resurrection of the dead? 13 If there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ has not been raised; 14 and **if Christ has not been raised**, then our proclamation has been in vain and your faith has been in vain. 15 We are even found to be misrepresenting God, because we testified of God that he raised Christ — whom he did not raise if it is true that the dead are not raised. 16 For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised. 17 **If Christ has not been raised**, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins. 18 Then those also who have died in Christ have perished. 19 If for this life only we have hoped in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied.

15.12 Εἰ δὲ Χριστὸς κηρύσσεται ὅτι ἐκ νεκρῶν ἐγήγερται, πῶς λέγουσιν ἐν ὑμῖν τινες ὅτι ἀνάστασις νεκρῶν οὐκ ἔστιν; 15.13 εἰ δὲ ἀνάστασις νεκρῶν οὐκ ἔστιν, οὐδὲ Χριστὸς ἐγήγερται· 15.14 εἰ δὲ Χριστὸς οὐκ ἐγήγερται, κενὸν ἄρα [καί] τὸ κήρυγμα ἡμῶν, κενὴ καὶ ἡ πίστις ὑμῶν· 15.15 εὐρισκόμεθα δὲ καὶ ψευδομάρτυρες τοῦ θεοῦ, ὅτι ἐμαρτυρήσαμεν κατὰ τοῦ θεοῦ ὅτι ἤγειρεν τὸν Χριστόν, ὃν οὐκ ἤγειρεν εἰπερ ἄρα νεκροὶ οὐκ ἐγείρονται. 15.16 εἰ γὰρ νεκροὶ οὐκ ἐγείρονται, οὐδὲ Χριστὸς ἐγήγερται· 15.17 εἰ δὲ Χριστὸς οὐκ ἐγήγερται, ματαία ἡ πίστις ὑμῶν, ἔτι ἐστὲ ἐν ταῖς ἀμαρτίαις ὑμῶν, 15.18 ἄρα καὶ οἱ κοιμηθέντες ἐν Χριστῷ ἀπώλοντο. 15.19 εἰ ἐν τῇ ζωῇ ταύτῃ ἐν Χριστῷ ἡλικιώτεροι ἐσμὲν μόνον, ἐλεεινότεροι πάντων ἀνθρώπων ἐσμὲν.

In verses 12-19, Paul makes two basic points by raising the ‘what if’ scenario of there not being a resurrection. As verse 12 clearly indicates, his strategy is to adopt the position of those false teachers in Corinth who were denying the bodily resurrection of Jesus. The apostle’s point is to argue the true consequences of their phoney ideas, rather than some fictitious ideas which they were advocating. Their negative attitudes toward physical existence had blinded them to the spiritual reality of Easter. And so in order to ‘rescue’ the gospel they had developed a substitute teaching about resurrection that stood in contradiction to the apostolic proclamation of the gospel. How does one effectively counter such nonsense? Paul did so by asserting the actual implications of this kind of false thinking, rather than their wrong ideas from there being no bodily resurrection of Jesus.

So what would be true then if Christ had not been raised from the dead as taught in the gospel?² Two

¹GNT: *15.12 Εἰ δὲ Χριστὸς κηρύσσεται ὅτι ἐκ νεκρῶν ἐγήγερται, πῶς λέγουσιν ἐν ὑμῖν τινες ὅτι ἀνάστασις νεκρῶν οὐκ ἔστιν; 15.13 εἰ δὲ ἀνάστασις νεκρῶν οὐκ ἔστιν, οὐδὲ Χριστὸς ἐγήγερται· 15.14 εἰ δὲ Χριστὸς οὐκ ἐγήγερται, κενὸν ἄρα [καί] τὸ κήρυγμα ἡμῶν, κενὴ καὶ ἡ πίστις ὑμῶν· 15.15 εὐρισκόμεθα δὲ καὶ ψευδομάρτυρες τοῦ θεοῦ, ὅτι ἐμαρτυρήσαμεν κατὰ τοῦ θεοῦ ὅτι ἤγειρεν τὸν Χριστόν, ὃν οὐκ ἤγειρεν εἰπερ ἄρα νεκροὶ οὐκ ἐγείρονται. 15.16 εἰ γὰρ νεκροὶ οὐκ ἐγείρονται, οὐδὲ Χριστὸς ἐγήγερται· 15.17 εἰ δὲ Χριστὸς οὐκ ἐγήγερται, ματαία ἡ πίστις ὑμῶν, ἔτι ἐστὲ ἐν ταῖς ἀμαρτίαις ὑμῶν, 15.18 ἄρα καὶ οἱ κοιμηθέντες ἐν Χριστῷ ἀπώλοντο. 15.19 εἰ ἐν τῇ ζωῇ ταύτῃ ἐν Χριστῷ ἡλικιώτεροι ἐσμὲν μόνον, ἐλεεινότεροι πάντων ἀνθρώπων ἐσμὲν.*

15.20 Νυνὶ δὲ Χριστὸς ἐγήγερται ἐκ νεκρῶν ἀπαρχὴ τῶν κεκοιμημένων. 15.21 ἐπειδὴ γὰρ δι’ ἀνθρώπου θάνατος, καὶ δι’ ἀνθρώπου ἀνάστασις νεκρῶν. 15.22 ὥσπερ γὰρ ἐν τῷ Ἀδὰμ πάντες ἀποθνήσκουσιν, οὕτως καὶ ἐν τῷ Χριστῷ πάντες ζωοποιηθήσονται. 15.23 ἕκαστος δὲ ἐν τῷ ἰδίῳ τάγματι· ἀπαρχὴ Χριστός, ἔπειτα οἱ τοῦ Χριστοῦ ἐν τῇ παρουσίᾳ αὐτοῦ, 15.24 εἶτα τὸ τέλος, ὅταν παραδιδῷ τὴν βασιλείαν τῷ θεῷ καὶ πατρὶ, ὅταν καταργήσῃ πᾶσαν ἀρχὴν καὶ πᾶσαν ἐξουσίαν καὶ δύναμιν. 15.25 δεῖ γὰρ αὐτὸν βασιλεύειν ἄχρι οὗ θῆ πάντας τοὺς ἐχθροὺς ὑπὸ τοὺς πόδας αὐτοῦ. 15.26 ἔσχατος ἐχθρὸς καταργεῖται ὁ θάνατος· 15.27 πάντα γὰρ ὑπέταξεν ὑπὸ τοὺς πόδας αὐτοῦ. ὅταν δὲ εἴπῃ ὅτι πάντα ὑποτέτακται, δῆλον ὅτι ἐκτὸς τοῦ ὑποτάξαντος αὐτῷ τὰ πάντα. 15.28 ὅταν δὲ ὑποταγῇ αὐτῷ τὰ πάντα, τότε [καί] αὐτὸς ὁ υἱὸς ὑποταγήσεται τῷ ὑποτάξαντι αὐτῷ τὰ πάντα, ἵνα ἡ ὁ θεὸς [τὰ] πάντα ἐν πᾶσιν.

²Paul defines the essence of the Gospel message in vv. 1-11 of this discussion (NRSV): “1 Now I would remind

implications are put on the table. They have to do with the proclamation of the gospel and the spiritual condition of those who have put their faith in Christ.

Without the resurrection, the gospel message is false, vv. 12-16. Clearly the heart of the Gospel message preached by Paul and the other apostles made the resurrection of Jesus a centerpiece of that message (NRSV): “13 If there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ has not been raised; 14 and if Christ has not been raised, then our proclamation has been in vain and your faith has been in vain. 15 We are even found to be misrepresenting God, because we testified of God that he raised Christ — whom he did not raise if it is true that the dead are not raised. 16 For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised.”

For those preaching this message, Paul declares that they would be false prophets of God who had grievously misled the people by proclaiming a lie. To mislead the people of God is serious business! And everyone doing this will face the horrific wrath of God in judgment. Additionally, for one to spend his ministry preaching a lie is to utterly waste a life time of service to God. His ministry has left the people who believed his lie in the same spiritual state they were in to begin with. Nothing has changed in their lives. This, even though both preacher and believer have based their faith on a lie!

Later in this discussion Paul warns the Corinthians to distance themselves from these false teachers (vv. 33-34):

33 Do not be deceived: “Bad company ruins good morals.” 34 Come to a sober and right mind, and sin no more; for some people have no knowledge of God. I say this to your shame.

Their teaching against the resurrection of Jesus led to an abandonment of principles of Christian morality, which was disastrous to the spiritual life of the Corinthians. These people had no actual knowledge of God -- Paul declares -- and their claim for a superior ‘enlightened’ way of faith was absolutely false. When one surveys the massive problems in the Corinthian church addressed by Paul, the danger of this false preaching becomes clear. The church was fussing with one another; men were sleeping with prostitutes; one member was living in sexual sin with his birth mother; the church was plagued with tongues speaking imported from the nearby pagan Eleusianian Mysteries that worshiped Demeter and Persephone; they were suing one another in the pagan courts over trivial issues. What a mess! The Corinthians should have known better. They were so blinded by this false teaching that they couldn’t discern even the basics of the Gospel message.

Paul’s intention in vv. 12-16 was to warn the Corinthians that to follow these false teachers (cf. v. 12) is to follow them straight into spiritual disaster, and ultimate ruination. Such people were going to end up in Hell, not in Heaven! Such remains true in our day as well. To follow preachers who tamper with the gospel and advocate such false versions as was being done at Corinth is to condemn oneself to eternal damnation, all the while thinking that everything is okay -- and for some falsely believing that they alone are truly ‘enlightened’ with the ‘true gospel.’ In our world cult groups such as Mormons and Jehovah Witnesses clearly represent the modern version of the ancient Corinthian heresy. But even in so-called mainstream Christianity subtle influences of denying the bodily resurrection of Jesus can be found. Such is dangerous heresy that jeopardizes the legitimacy of one’s profession of faith in Christ.

Without the resurrection, humanity is still under sin and headed to disaster, vv. 17-19. The second point of Paul is that this false gospel of no resurrection of Jesus leaves believers still in their sin; dead believers bound for Hell; and living believers looking like stupid morons! “17 If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins. 18 Then those also who have died in Christ have perished. 19 If for this life only we have hoped in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied.” Both Jews and Gentiles in the world outside the church considered believers in Christ to be fools who had been misled into a phoney religion. For traditional orthodox Jews, believers in the resurrected Christ were heretics who were corrupting the religious heritage of the Jewish people.³ For non-believing Gentiles, Christians who believed in the resurrection were

you, brothers and sisters, of the good news that I proclaimed to you, which you in turn received, in which also you stand, 2 through which also you are being saved, if you hold firmly to the message that I proclaimed to you—unless you have come to believe in vain. 3 For I handed on to you as of first importance what I in turn had received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, 4 and that he was buried, and that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures, 5 and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. 6 Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers and sisters at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have died. 7 Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. 8 Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me. 9 For I am the least of the apostles, unfit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. 10 But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me has not been in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them—though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me. 11 Whether then it was I or they, so we proclaim and so you have come to believe.”

³For example, note the negative reception from the synagogue leaders at Thessalonica (Acts 17:1-9, NRSV): 1 After Paul and Silas had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where there was a synagogue of the Jews. 2 And Paul went in, as was his custom, and on three sabbath days argued with them from the

just plain stupid.⁴ Evidently the Corinthian false teachers had some awareness of the negative attitudes of the surrounding world to the apostolic preaching of the Gospel. They concluded that to “grecianize” the gospel to make it more compatible to traditional Greek and Roman thinking would make the gospel more attractive to non-believers, plus it would cause fewer problems for Christians who adopted this version of the gospel.⁵

Compromising the Gospel is spiritual suicide! Particularly when it comes to the foundational tenants of the message.⁶ The very heart of that message is the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ as Savior of sinful humanity and Son of God. To alter these truths is to create a false gospel that Paul in Gal. 1:6-7 calls a non-gospel:

6 I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel — 7 not that there is another gospel, but there are some who are confusing you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ.

To dare attempt such a thing is utterly reprehensible to Almighty God, as Paul declares in Gal. 1:8-9 (NRSV):

8 But even if we or an angel from heaven should proclaim to you a gospel contrary to what we proclaimed to you, let that one be accursed! 9 As we have said before, so now I repeat, if anyone proclaims to you a gospel contrary to what you received, let that one be accursed!

Preaching the true gospel message is not a popularity contest. The calling to preach is from God; not from

scriptures, 3 explaining and proving that it was necessary for the Messiah to suffer and to rise from the dead, and saying, “This is the Messiah, Jesus whom I am proclaiming to you.” 4 Some of them were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, as did a great many of the devout Greeks and not a few of the leading women. 5 ***But the Jews became jealous, and with the help of some ruffians in the marketplaces they formed a mob and set the city in an uproar.*** While they were searching for Paul and Silas to bring them out to the assembly, they attacked Jason’s house. 6 When they could not find them, they dragged Jason and some believers before the city authorities, shouting, “These people who have been turning the world upside down have come here also, 7 and Jason has entertained them as guests. They are all acting contrary to the decrees of the emperor, saying that there is another king named Jesus.” 8 The people and the city officials were disturbed when they heard this, 9 and after they had taken bail from Jason and the others, they let them go.

⁴Remember the reaction of the Greek philosophers to Paul’s preaching of the resurrection at Athens (Acts 17:32, NRSV):

18 Also some Epicurean and Stoic philosophers debated with him. Some said, “What does this babbling want to say?” Others said, “He seems to be a proclaimer of foreign divinities.” (This was because he was telling the good news about Jesus and the resurrection.) 19 So they took him and brought him to the Areopagus and asked him, “May we know what this new teaching is that you are presenting? 20 It sounds rather strange to us, so we would like to know what it means.” 21 Now all the Athenians and the foreigners living there would spend their time in nothing but telling or hearing something new. 22 Then Paul stood in front of the Areopagus and said, “Athenians, I see how extremely religious you are in every way. 23 For as I went through the city and looked carefully at the objects of your worship, I found among them an altar with the inscription, ‘To an unknown god.’ What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you. 24 The God who made the world and everything in it, he who is Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in shrines made by human hands, 25 nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mortals life and breath and all things. 26 From one ancestor he made all nations to inhabit the whole earth, and he allotted the times of their existence and the boundaries of the places where they would live, 27 so that they would search for God and perhaps grope for him and find him—though indeed he is not far from each one of us. 28 For “In him we live and move and have our being”; as even some of your own poets have said, “For we too are his offspring.” 29 Since we are God’s offspring, we ought not to think that the deity is like gold, or silver, or stone, an image formed by the art and imagination of mortals. 30 While God has overlooked the times of human ignorance, now he commands all people everywhere to repent, 31 because he has fixed a day on which he will have the world judged in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed, and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead.” 32 ***When they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some scoffed;*** but others said, “We will hear you again about this.” 33 At that point Paul left them. 34 But some of them joined him and became believers, including Dionysius the Areopagite and a woman named Damaris, and others with them.

⁵In another setting Paul accused the Galatian Judaizers of the gospel of the same cowardice in requiring circumcision by non-Jewish believers; cf. Gal. 6:12 (NRSV): “It is those who want to make a good showing in the flesh that try to compel you to be circumcised — only that they may not be persecuted for the cross of Christ.”

⁶Passages such as Rom. 1:1b-6 (NRSV) define these fundamentals: “the gospel of God, 2 which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy scriptures, 3 the gospel concerning his Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh 4 and was declared to be Son of God with power according to the spirit of holiness by resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord, 5 through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith among all the Gentiles for the sake of his name, 6 including yourselves who are called to belong to Jesus Christ,”

people. And preachers must remain true to that calling or else face the wrath of God in final judgment, as Paul contends in Gal. 1:10-12 (NRSV):

10 Am I now seeking human approval, or God's approval? Or am I trying to please people? If I were still pleasing people, I would not be a servant of Christ. 11 For I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that the gospel that was proclaimed by me is not of human origin; 12 for I did not receive it from a human source, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ.

Why is this so critical. The reason is simple and clear: the eternal destiny of people is at stake! A resurrectionless gospel has no saving power, just as does a crucifixionless gospel. Without the resurrection of Christ, no believer in Jesus will experience resurrection. They remain dead in their sins in the grave, so declares Paul to the Corinthians in verse 17.

II. If Christ be raised, vv. 20-28

20 But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have died. 21 For since death came through a human being, the resurrection of the dead has also come through a human being; 22 for as all die in Adam, so all will be made alive in Christ. 23 But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ. 24 Then comes the end, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father, after he has destroyed every ruler and every authority and power. 25 For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. 26 The last enemy to be destroyed is death. 27 For "God has put all things in subjection under his feet." But when it says, "All things are put in subjection," it is plain that this does not include the one who put all things in subjection under him. 28 When all things are subjected to him, then the Son himself will also be subjected to the one who put all things in subjection under him, so that God may be all in all

15.20 *Νυνὶ δὲ Χριστὸς ἐγήγερται ἐκ νεκρῶν ἀπαρχὴ τῶν κεκοιμημένων. 15.21* *ἐπειδὴ γὰρ δι' ἀνθρώπου θάνατος, καὶ δι' ἀνθρώπου ἀνάστασις νεκρῶν. 15.22* *ὥσπερ γὰρ ἐν τῷ Ἀδὰμ πάντες ἀποθνήσκουσιν, οὕτως καὶ ἐν τῷ Χριστῷ πάντες ζῶσοιηθήσονται. 15.23* *ἕκαστος δὲ ἐν τῷ ἰδίῳ τάγματι· ἀπαρχὴ Χριστός, ἔπειτα οἱ τοῦ Χριστοῦ ἐν τῇ παρουσίᾳ αὐτοῦ, 15.24* *εἶτα τὸ τέλος, ὅταν παραδιδῷ τὴν βασιλείαν τῷ θεῷ καὶ πατρὶ, ὅταν καταργήσῃ πᾶσαν ἀρχὴν καὶ πᾶσαν ἐξουσίαν καὶ δύναμιν. 15.25* *δεῖ γὰρ αὐτὸν βασιλεύειν ἄχρι οὗ θῆ πάντας τοὺς ἐχθροὺς ὑπὸ τοὺς πόδας αὐτοῦ. 15.26* *ἔσχατος ἐχθρὸς καταργεῖται ὁ θάνατος· 15.27* *πάντα γὰρ ὑπέταξεν ὑπὸ τοὺς πόδας αὐτοῦ. ὅταν δὲ εἴπῃ ὅτι πάντα ὑποτέτακται, δῆλον ὅτι ἐκτὸς τοῦ ὑποτάξαντος αὐτῷ τὰ πάντα. 15.28* *ὅταν δὲ ὑποταγῇ αὐτῷ τὰ πάντα, τότε [καὶ] αὐτὸς ὁ υἱὸς ὑποταγήσεται τῷ ὑποτάξαντι αὐτῷ τὰ πάντα, ἵνα ἡ ὁ θεὸς [τὰ] πάντα ἐν πᾶσιν.*

With verses 20-28 Paul turns to the positive arguments. Verse 20 signals the shift from the false thinking of the Corinthian false prophets to the spiritual reality of Easter. Christ has indeed been raised bodily from the dead! This is the core message of Easter. What does this imply for believers in a resurrected Christ? Paul makes two basic points: believers can expect to be raised, and death will be ultimately destroyed.

Because of Jesus' resurrection, all who are in Christ will be raised, vv. 20-22.: "20 But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have died. 21 For since death came through a human being, the resurrection of the dead has also come through a human being; 22 for as all die in Adam, so all will be made alive in Christ."

Paul bases his contention on the image of 'first fruits' (*ἀπαρχὴ τῶν κεκοιμημένων*). Christ is the first fruit of believers, especially at the point of resurrection. What was a 'first fruit' in the ancient world? This was a distinctly Jewish image, that related to the Festival of Pentecost in particular. The first fruit was the initial harvest of wheat and barley in late May that was gathered and taken to the temple in Jerusalem as a grain offering made to God. In the acceptance of the offering by God, it was understood that God's blessings would be upon the full harvest that was yet to come. That harvest was assured by the first fruit offered in the temple.

Thus Paul sees in Jesus' resurrection the divine promise of the resurrection of the believer at the last day. Jesus' resurrection is the divine promise of our resurrection. Spiritual death came through the one man Adam and thus infected all humanity with sin and death. The remedy to this then must come through the divine reversal. One man's sacrificial death can solve this problem by this man's being raised from the dead. And that man was none other than Jesus Christ, the Son of God and the Savior of sinful humanity. Thus through His resurrection all humanity has the possibility of being raised from the dead, if they are "in Christ."

This phrase, *ἐν τῷ Χριστῷ*, means in spiritual union with Christ.⁷ To be in spiritual union with Him through confession of faith means that we can expect to be raised from the dead at the final day just as Jesus was raised from the dead on Easter morning.

Because of Jesus' resurrection, death will ultimately be destroyed, vv. 23-28: "23 But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ. 24 Then comes the end, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father, after he has destroyed every ruler and every authority and power. 25 For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. 26 The last enemy to be destroyed is death. 27 For "God has put all things in subjection under his feet." But when it says, "All things are put in subjection," it is plain that this does not include the one who put all things in subjection under him. 28 When all things are subjected to him, then the Son himself will also be subjected to the one who put all things in subjection under him, so that God may be all in all."

Humanity has many enemies. That is, many things in this world are poised to hurt and destroy us. They stand as enemies of God. But the great news of Easter is that in the resurrection of Jesus God has set in motion His plan for the ages. By overcoming the greatest of man's enemies, physical death, God has signaled that He will eventually subdue all our enemies. He will gradually retake absolute control over His creation as He moves history toward the great climax of the Second Coming of Christ to this world. At that time our great enemy of death will be destroyed forever. No longer will it rain its terror over humanity. The eternal order of things will be set in motion. And God's people will be ushered into the Father's eternal presence in Heaven.

The resurrection of Jesus on Easter Sunday signals the beginning of this heavenly plan. Jesus' resurrection is the first fruit of this, the guarantee of Almighty God that all these things are going to take place. In His resurrection Jesus begins subduing all our enemies. And when this process is complete, He will hand everything over to the Heavenly Father. God at that point will exercise absolute authority over everything. And the climax of all of it for God's people will be the destruction of death.

John gives us a glimpse into this day in Rev. 21:1-8 (NRSV):

1 Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. 2 And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. 3 And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "See, the home of God is among mortals. He will dwell with them; they will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them; 4 he will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away." 5 And the one who was seated on the throne said, "See, I am making all things new." Also he said, "Write this, for these words are trustworthy and true." 6 Then he said to me, "It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To the thirsty I will give water as a gift from the spring of the water of life. 7 Those who conquer will inherit these things, and I will be their God and they will be my children. 8 But as for the cowardly, the faithless, the polluted, the murderers, the fornicators, the sorcerers, the idolaters, and all liars, their place will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur, which is the second death."

Wow! All this is now assured to the saints of God. How? By the resurrection of Jesus! Because Christ was raised, we will be raised. We will share eternity with the saints of God in the very presence of Almighty God Himself.

CONCLUSION

Easter Sunday! We have come to church today to celebrate Christ's resurrection. And rightly so. Easter stands as the turning point of human history. Our experience of God grows out of it. Our hope for eternity is based on it.

Let us truly celebrate Easter today!

⁷See the frequent use of this phrase 'in Christ' by Paul; over a hundred times.