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 March 23, 2008

GENUINE SPIRITUALITY: A STUDY OF 1 CORINTHIANS

#39

HE MUST REIGN 1 CORINTHIANS 15:20-28

INTRODUCTION

The Apostle Paul is in the midst of correcting a severe theological problem in the Corinthian church: *some among you say that there is no resurrection of the dead (v12)*. Paul enlightens the Corinthians to the disastrous consequences of that theological fallacy by revealing its logical conclusion: *if there is no resurrection of the dead, not even Christ has been raised (v13)*. If no person, at any time, rises from the dead, then that truth must apply to Jesus. This logical conclusion should have been enough to awaken the Corinthians to their error, because they did certainly believe that Jesus had been raised from the dead [v1, v11]. Paul drives his point home by laying out the awful realities that follow if Jesus has not been raised from the dead: Our preaching is vain and we are all false witnesses, our faith is vain and worthless, we are still in our sins, believers who have already died have perished, and those who believe in Jesus as a living Savior are the most pathetic of all people [vv14-19].

Now having linked Jesus' past resurrection to their future resurrection, Paul provides the necessary theological framework for understanding Jesus' resurrection. The primary theological truth that emerges is this: Jesus' resurrection makes our future resurrection necessary for God's redemptive plan to be finished.

1. JESUS HAS BEEN RAISED FROM THE DEAD (15:20)

God sent Jesus into the world to save the world. 1 John 4:14, *We have seen and testify that the Father has sent the Son to be the Savior of the world*. Again, John writes, *16 "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life. 17 "For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him (John 3:16-17)*.

God also sent Jesus into the world to conquer all the enemies of God and of God's people; *1 John 3:8, The Son of God appeared for this purpose, to destroy the works of the devil*. Jesus came to conquer rebellious human beings who refuse to repent and believe, and He came to conquer the rebellious spiritual forces that operate in the background of it all. Colossians 2:15 says that God *disarmed the rulers and authorities, He made a public display of them, having triumphed over them through Him [Jesus]. He had disarmed the rulers and authorities, He made a public display of them, having triumphed over them through Him*.

How do we know that God accomplished His stated purposes? The answer lies completely in the resurrection of Jesus. The evidence that the Father is satisfied with Jesus' death as full payment for sin and complete victory over all opposing forces was accomplished is demonstrated by the historical fact that God raised His Son from the dead. Because of the resurrection, God calls every human to believe in Jesus and not just "in Jesus", but "into Jesus"; to fully commit ourselves to

Him as both Savior and Lord. Saving faith is essentially a self-commitment to Jesus. Hearing this Gospel, one must turn away from any other hope of salvation and commit himself to Jesus as an unsaved, lost, helpless person so that Jesus will save him. The resurrection offers us the assurance that God will save all who look to Jesus in faith. Notice the emphasis in verse 20; *But now Christ has been raised from the dead*. The emphasis here is upon the Father's work in accomplishing His plan by raising His Son from the dead.

2. JESUS' RESURRECTION WAS NECESSARY BECAUSE ONE MAN, JESUS, MUST OVERTURN THE FAILURES OF ANOTHER MAN, ADAM (15:21-22)

Paul has clearly stated that God raised Jesus from the dead, but the Apostle is not content to leave us with that historical fact only. He must now attach theological significance to Easter; fundamentally, Jesus had to rise in order to overcome Adam's fall. Paul puts it like this, *21For since by a man came death, by a man also came the resurrection of the dead. 22For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all will be made alive*. Verse 21 points out a causal relationship between Adam and death; *by a man came death*. Adam introduced sin and consequently, death to humanity. Paul says the same thing in Romans 5:12, *Therefore, just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned*.

Because we are vitally connected to Adam as the federal head of humanity, the death of our bodies is a certainty for us. Therefore, if our bodies are to be raised to eternal life, then we must become vitally connected to Jesus through faith. *22For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all will be made alive*. All who are "in Adam" die; all who are "in Christ" will be made alive! Here again we see this idea of being "in Christ". This means so much more than just acknowledging His existence or even His deity. It means casting ourselves upon Him as the crucified Savior and the risen Lord. This is why Paul exhorts us to *confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved; 10for with the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation (Romans 10:9-10)*.

3. THE RESURRECTION DEMONSTRATES THAT GOD IS BRINGING EVERY ADVERSARY INTO SUBJECTION TO JESUS (15:23-28)

The resurrection established Jesus as the head of a new humanity that possesses the life of Jesus within them. In His incarnation, Jesus added a human nature to His eternally divine nature. As the God-man, Jesus lived, died and arose again to live eternally as both God and man. Like Adam, but in a much greater way, Jesus is the head of a new humanity. At His resurrection and ascension, Jesus was granted the authority to reign over this new humanity until every enemy of both God and His people has been overthrown. Verses 23-28 explain that God is overseeing this process of redemption and conquering.

In God's plan, Christ would establish this new humanity through His resurrection. This was God's chosen order of operating; Christ would die and be raised to grant life to an untold number that would comprise God's people. These vast numbers of people comprise the harvest that will be reaped when believers are finally raised from the dead. Christ was the *first fruits* of that resurrected harvest and we, believers, comprise the harvest. In other words, Jesus' resurrection guarantees the resurrection of all believers, but those two bodily resurrections do not happen at the same time. Christ was the first fruits; the harvest is yet to come.

This harvest will come at the end; meaning, the end of the world as we know it now (v24). This resurrection of believers to eternal life in glorified bodies will take place *when*, or better

translated, *after* (NIV) *He has abolished all rule and all authority and power. 25For He must reign until He has put all His enemies under His feet.* At His resurrection and ascension, Jesus was granted dominion over the world, both the physical world and the spiritual world. God presently rules men through a man, the God-man, the Lord Jesus Christ. He will continue to rule the world this way until Jesus has saved or subdued His enemies. When that task is accomplished, then the final bodily resurrection will take place as Jesus *hands over the kingdom to the God and Father* (v24).

The end has not yet come because *He must reign until He has put all His enemies under His feet* (v25). That is to say, Jesus' kingship is an established fact, but we do not yet see all the world, physical and spiritual, brought under His Lordship. As time moves on, we shall see more and more of this until the kingdom of darkness has been radically subdued. Evil, sin and rebellion will be with us until the Second Coming, but this passage teaches us that Christ's kingdom must be vastly expanded prior to the end. God sent Jesus into the world to become the eternal God-man. God has forever linked Himself to this world, this humanity and everything that goes with it. This should help us see what Paul is teaching here; there is a glorious future for this world. God did not connect Himself to us to only watch it fall apart. This is why Paul writes: *1 Corinthians 2:6-9, 6Yet we do speak wisdom among those who are mature; a wisdom, however, not of this age nor of the rulers of this age, who are passing away; 7but we speak God's wisdom in a mystery, the hidden wisdom which God predestined before the ages to our glory; 8the wisdom which none of the rulers of this age has understood; for if they had understood it they would not have crucified the Lord of glory; 9but just as it is written,*

*"THINGS WHICH EYE HAS NOT SEEN AND EAR HAS NOT HEARD,
AND WHICH HAVE NOT ENTERED THE HEART OF MAN,
ALL THAT GOD HAS PREPARED FOR THOSE WHO LOVE HIM."*

The end, or the Second Coming, will bring ultimate and final defeat of all God's enemies, including enemy number one, death (v26). Death will be destroyed when our bodies have been redeemed just as our souls have been redeemed. Obviously, this is a future certainty fundamentally connected to a past reality, Jesus' own bodily resurrection. Christ defeated death at His resurrection [2 Timothy 1:10, Hebrews 2:14], but He will destroy it at our resurrection [1 Corinthians 15:54-55, John 5:29]. Most other enemies will have been subdued prior to the Second Coming, but death will be destroyed when He comes.

Paul supports this understanding of God's plan of redemption by quoting Psalm 110 and Psalm 8. These psalms teach us that God has entrusted His dominion to a man. Adam lost that dominion in the Garden of Eden, and Christ has reestablished that dominion by way of the cross and empty tomb.

CONCLUSION

This passage teaches us that by raising Jesus from the dead, God the Father set in motion a series of events which will most certainly lead to our resurrection as those who have believed "into Jesus". When Jesus has subdued all God's enemies, even death, He will joyfully hand the kingdom over to His Father so that God may be all in all (v28). That at least means that there are no remaining enemies to even attempt to rebel against the Most High God. The created order will have been set aright under the rule of Jesus and now He gladly takes His place in functional subjection to the Father as God rules forever and ever.

We gather on this Easter day because we have experienced a spiritual resurrection. We have come to life as we believe "into Jesus". God has made us individually and corporately "new". Our sins have been crucified in the body of Christ. The Gospel invitation is not "feel bad about yourself and try to be like Jesus". The Gospel invitation is "believe what has been proclaimed". What has been proclaimed is our sinless, crucified, dead, risen and ascended Lord Jesus. We take Him as both crucified Savior and risen Lord. And we anticipate our bodily resurrection when this salvation is made complete and death has been destroyed. So we say, Even so, come Lord Jesus!