

“Resurrection Guarantee” (part 1)

1 Corinthians 15:20-28

Turn with me in your Bible to 1 Corinthians 15, a chapter that we began looking at on Easter Sunday. The subject of this chapter is the resurrection, both of Christ as well as the future resurrection of the Christian. There is nothing that will build your faith, fill you with hope, and strengthen your confidence any more than an understanding of the truth in this passage. We need this confidence for times like these.

The doctrine of the resurrection involves the ultimate end of everything that God has planned in redemption, which will culminate in the establishment of a new heaven and new earth in which righteousness dwells. (see 2 Peter 3:13)

Erich Sauer—*“The present age is Easter time. It begins with the resurrection of the Redeemer and ends with the resurrection of the redeemed. Between lies the spiritual resurrection of those called into life. So we live between two Easters and in the power of the first Easter, we go to the second Easter.”*

This present time in which we live is between the time of Christ’s resurrection and before the future time of our own resurrection. And this is what the apostle Paul is explaining in the fifteenth chapter of 1 Corinthians. In the first verses of the chapter, he tells the Corinthians that the gospel is a resurrection gospel. In verses 1-11, he is dealing with the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus. He says that the gospel is this message—“Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, He was buried, and He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures.” This was the same message that Paul came to the city of Corinth with. It was the message received by these believers who now made up the church. They were standing firm in this gospel and were being saved by it. I have mentioned that there were some in Corinth who were troubling the church by a philosophy that denied the truth of the resurrection. The Greeks held to a

worldview that did not allow for bodily resurrection. The message of God's Word cut against the cultural grain, just as it always does. There were some in the church who evidently had bought into the philosophy of the day, and so Paul deals with that in verses 12-19 and says that we have resurrection hope. He presents a hypothetical situation and gives an answer to the question, "What if there were no resurrection?" He says that it would result in several consequences—Christ would not be raised, our preaching would be in vain, our faith would be in vain, the apostles would all be liars, we would still be in our sins, and those who have died in Christ would have ultimately perished. Verse 19 says, "If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied."

But when we come to verse 20, the tenor of the text shifts dramatically. It is a pivotal verse in which the assertion is made that the resurrection is not a theory, but a fact. In the first three words of the verse, 'But in fact,' Paul moves from the hypothetical to the factual, from the 'what if' to the 'what is.' So I want to pick up in verse 20 and read through verse 28. The theme of these verses is 'resurrection guarantee' and they show how Christ's resurrection is what secures the believer and ensures his own future resurrection.

1—The THEOLOGICAL argument (15:20-22)

"But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep. For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive."

The affirmation that is made

Paul affirms the truth of resurrection in verse 20 and shows how the resurrection of Jesus is proof. It is something that has been factually grounded in history. While the world's religions are founded upon the ideas of man, Christianity is

founded upon the resurrection of the Son of God. We must not lose sight of the fact that Christianity is a historical faith.

John Ankerberg—“*Other religions can also be tested by examining their claims and looking critically at the facts—but again, one finds that they are invalidated by such a procedure...no genuinely historical or objective evidence exists for the foundational claims of Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, or any other world religion besides Christianity.*”

The empirical evidence, the forensic evidence, and the philosophical evidence that backs up Christianity sets it apart from any other worldview or belief system. It stands upon the objective reality of major supernatural events that have happened in real time.

Someone has well said that faith, no matter how sincere, is only fantasy if it is based on bad information. Paul wants these Corinthians to know that is not the case when it comes to the resurrection of Jesus, something that is well established as historical fact.

The illustration that is given

You will notice that Paul uses a couple of illustrations in verse 20. The first illustration is that of a harvest, which we will come back to in a bit. The second illustration is sleep. In His own resurrection, Jesus has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. That is a reference to those who have died in Christ. Death is compared to sleep for a Christian. That’s nothing to fear at all, is it? We should fear death no more than putting our head to the pillow at night when we crawl into bed.

Now, keep in mind that this does not mean soul sleep. It is used in reference to the body. When a believer dies, we know that their spirit departs to be with Christ.

2 Corinthians 5:8—“To be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord.”

We can say with utmost confidence that any Christian who has died in Christ is with Christ now where He is. It is not the spirit which sleeps, but the body. There is a temporary separation between the believer’s spirit and body. My spirit will go to be with Christ while my body sleeps in the dust of the earth waiting resurrection morning. That’s why death is not loss for the child of God.

Philippians 1:20-24—“...Christ will be honored in my body, whether by life or by death. For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me. Yet which I shall choose I cannot tell. I am hard pressed between the two. My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better. But to remain in the flesh is more necessary on your account.”

“Gain”—*the ultimate advantage*

For a believer, to die is gain rather than loss. I think that we are often so programmed in our thinking to shrink back from such a statement. How can it be? Everything within a person tries to avoid the inevitable. When our loved one dies, we feel the pain of loss. We try to do everything in our power to prolong our days. But how is it that death is actually gain for a child of God?

The explanation that is offered

Verse 21 says, “For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive.” I believe these are some of the most important verses in all of the Bible. They address the origin of death. They serve as a concise explanation of everything that is wrong with the world. It was through one man, Adam, that death has passed to all men. Because Adam is the federal head of the human

race, sin and death has been passed on to his descendants. To be in Adam is to be a member of a fallen race. That explains why there are so many problems in the world. Why is there injustice? Why is there sickness and disease? Why are people vindictive and manipulative, why are we at war with ourselves and are never satisfied? The answer lies in the fact that Adam's blood flows through our veins. Human beings are born in Adam, and that is why we die. It is all part of the curse brought on by Adam's sin.

Now, what is summarized here in these two verses is given more of an extended treatment in Romans 5.

Romans 5:12—“Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned...”

Death is the result of sin. Romans 6:23 says that death is the appropriate ‘wage’ that sin deserves. We cannot even begin to appreciate the grace of God until we have come to an understanding of the seriousness of sin. Yet it is a word that has nearly disappeared from our modern vocabulary. Years ago, Karl Menninger, renowned psychiatrist, wrote a controversial book entitled, “Whatever Became of Sin?” in which he pointed out how society at large had rejected the notion of sin. Words and phrases such as disease or anti-social behavior or lack of moral development had replaced sin as explanations for human behavior. He wrote:

Karl Menninger—*“I believe there is sin which is expressed in ways that cannot be subsumed as crime, disease, delinquency, deviancy. There is immorality; there is unethical behavior; there is wrong doing. And I hope to show that there is usefulness in retaining the concept.”*

That was nearly half a century ago. Just ask the average person what sin is, and they have a hard a time explaining it. Many within the church of our day seem to have lost a basic understanding of it as well. There are some who deal with sins,

but never get to the gospel. Others have abandoned the doctrine of sin and locate it only in the structures of society. What is sin, really?

“Sin” — *word is ‘hamartia’ and means to miss the mark*

Paul uses this word 19 separate times in Romans 5-6. It is a word that means to miss the target, to miss the mark. It defines ‘sin’ as failure to live up to God’s standard or meet His holy and perfect requirement. That standard was laid down by Him in the law:

Leviticus 11:14—**“Be holy, for I am holy.”**

If you’re not as holy as God is, then you have missed the mark. It has nothing to do with relative goodness. Rather, it’s about absolute holiness. Neither is it about being better than somebody else. You can always find somebody else worse than you are. It’s about absolute holiness. That is the mark. Miss that mark and you need redeeming grace, and the truth is that everybody does.

In addition to this word, there are at least four other words used throughout the New Testament to define sin.

“Trespass” — *word is ‘parabasis’ and literally means to step across*

Sin is going over the line. The line is drawn between right and wrong, between good and evil. Sin steps over that line. And we all enter into the forbidden territory of thought, or word, deed, action. We’ve all been there, for we have all gone beyond what God has established as His perfect standard.

So sin means we miss the mark. It means we step over the line. A third word used in the New Testament is:

“Lawlessness” — *word is ‘anomia’ and means no law*

‘Namia’ or ‘namos’ means “law.” ‘A’ as a prefix negates it. This word is translated as ‘lawlessness.’ Sin is breaking God’s law. It is rebelling against God. And it is the primary disposition of the proud, selfish sinner. A man kicks against God’s law because he wants to go his own way. All of this should help you see why sin is so severe. It is missing the mark, stepping over the line, rebelling against God. Well, there is another word that is used:

“Transgressions” — *word is ‘paraptoma’ and means to slip and stumble and fall*

This word defines sin as lacking the self-control necessary to stand on one’s own. It means being out of control, or being swept away by impulse. The word points to our impotence and inability. The idea is that we are weak and powerless and totally unable to live up to God’s standard. I could not no matter how hard I try.

Listen to the seriousness of humanity’s condition! We miss the mark. We miss the mark regularly because we can’t reach the standard of perfection. It is utterly impossible for fallen humanity. We step across the line because we cannot restrain our evil hearts. We rebel against the law because we’re driven by sinful pride. We stumble and fall because we’re weak and helpless. There’s another word used:

“Debt” — *word is ‘opheilema’ and refers that which is owed*

It is used in the Lord’s Prayer in Matthew 6:12, “Forgive us our debts.” What is this saying about sin? It means every sin you have ever committed has put you in debt to God. As a sinner, you have robbed God of what He is due, such as righteousness and obedience. You have violated His will. You have rebelled against Him. You’ve stepped over His line. You’ve missed His mark. You have stumbled and fallen. And all of that has caused you to incur a debt with God that

must be paid. Sin by definition is a missing of the mark. By definition it is a crossing of the line. By definition it is a stumbling and a falling. By definition it is an act of rebellion. But the cumulative effect of all of that is to incur a staggering debt with God, a debt that must be paid. But I'm bankrupt and have nothing that can atone for my sin. That is why all of humanity is under the condemnation of sin. Paul has said as much in Romans 3:23, "All have sinned and come short of the glory of God." There is none righteous, no not one. And this explains the situation for everything that is wrong in the world. It explains the chaos that is characteristic of man's world. Sin has affected every human relationship. Every human problem that exists between people comes from sin. Sin has stirred up chaos at every level, whether it is in a marriage, whether it is among coworkers, whether it is among citizens in a nation, or whether it is among rivaling nations. Sin is the ruling 'monarch' of this present world and it is pervasive. Sin is subtle, and those who are under its reign are blinded by it.

That is why we must understand what the Bible says about the basic elements of human nature. One person has said it this way:

Alistair Begg — *"There is nothing in modern contemporary thought that is adequately able to explain human nature except the truth of the Bible. Every attempt to explain the predicament of our contemporary culture is eventually left in silence and confusion because no matter how hard people try and how many theories may surface, we are all left with the feeling that we haven't quite got to it. Why do we do the things we do?"*

The experience of sin is obvious. Modern man is left with this quandary to figure out why he is flawed. He cannot restrain his behavior or change his behavior no matter how hard he may try. And so he turns to a number of social ideas to rationalize why he is the way that he is, such as environmental factors, economic

factors, educational factors, etc. All the while, he has abandoned any notion whatsoever that the Bible contains the answer to his dilemma. He tries to treat the symptoms apart from an accurate diagnosis.

Maybe you saw the news this week about the 30 year old woman in California who confessed to killing her three children. One little girl was 3, her brother was 2, and the littlest was a 6-month old baby girl. The children were all found stabbed to death in a scene that left first responders shaken and in need of counseling. But did you hear her confession? She said that she did it to save them from the abuse of their father. She said, "I've always been a person who has basically been for helping people. I've always been a social justice warrior for equal rights, a human rights activist." So in her twisted mind, she has justified the murder of her children. Why do we do the things we do? Are we left to assume that her environment led her to those actions? Was it the economy?

Humanity is in Adam, and that is why there is sin and death according to the Bible. It is the doctrine of original sin. It not only means a person is a sinner because they sin, but they sin because they are a sinner. The experience of sin is obvious, and the extent of sin is total. There is not a part of our humanity that remains unaffected by it. This is what is meant by 'total depravity.' Sin dominates the mind. Sin dominates the will. Sin dominates the emotions. Sin dominates the affections. Sin imprisons fallen humanity in a domain of darkness under the rule of Satan.

Something else to consider is the effects of sin are deadly and far reaching. It results in alienation from God meaning that left to himself, man is unfit for the presence of God. Man is unable to do the will of God. Man is unrighteous as far as the law of God is concerned. Man is uninterested in the things of God. Sin

shuts man up in a prison in his own mind and soul. He is driven to find some sense of identity.

Isaiah 57:20—“The wicked are like the tossing sea, for it cannot be quiet... There is no peace, says my God, for the wicked.”

The cancer of sin lies at the core of our very being. It is all pervasive, affecting every part of our lives and faculties. Therefore our case is terminal. Left to run its awful course, sin will damn every man and woman, it will lead to a grave, and consign every soul to hell and we are incapable to do anything about it. That is humanity's problem.

Death is universal in scope. Since sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, death has spread to all men. By a man came death, and in Adam all die. It is without loophole and double standard.

Hebrews 9:27—“And just as it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment...”

That means death is the one appointment in your calendar that you are sure to keep. You won't be late for it.

Death is an enemy. It is an alien invader into God's good creation. It isn't the way things are supposed to be. Death is the legacy of the first man. It is the inheritance that he has passed on to his descendants. In the fifth chapter of Genesis, Adam's legacy echoes with an eerie emphasis—“...and he died.” Sons are born to Adam, those son lived and had sons of their own, then they died. And on and on it goes.

Like king and queen, sin and death rule together over our broken world. In Adam, all die. There was a far reaching relationship between the death of Adam and the death of his descendants. It was his sin that catapulted the whole

human race into the reality of sin and death. That is the awful news that we can't avoid.

Do you see what else Paul says in verse 22? As in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. Just as there is a correlation between Adam's sin and death and those who are in him, so also is there correlation between Christ's death and resurrection and those who are in Him. It is through Christ that sin and death have been defeated. While Adam is the federal head of a fallen race, Christ is the federal head of a new race. Those who are in Adam will die, but those who are in Christ will live. The reason is that God's grace has determined that Christ taste death for every man. As the One who bore our sin, the sentence of death was carried out in Him upon the cross. Romans 4:25 says that He has been raised for our justification!

Death is a defeated enemy. That is why death is not to be feared if you are safe in Christ. That is the only alternative to those who are in Adam.

Hebrews 2:14-15—“Through death He has destroyed the one one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery.”

Throughout human history, all Satan has held as a trump card is the fact that God declared that man die for his sin. There is none who are righteous, and the wages of sin is death. As the accuser, this is what Satan has appealed to in his hatred of humanity and his rebellion against God. In His own death and resurrection, Jesus Christ has taken the trump card out of the devil's hand. When Satan accuses a Christian before the bar of God's justice, demanding that a sentence of death being carried out as a prosecution—in Christ we have Someone who rises in our defense! He is our Advocate, and His wounds plead our case before the throne. We often sing it from time to time:

Before the throne of God above

*I have a strong, a perfect plea;
a great High Priest, whose name is Love,
who ever lives and pleads for me.
My name is graven on his hands,
my name is written on his heart;
I know that while in heaven he stands
no tongue can bid me thence depart,
no tongue can bid me thence depart.*

*When Satan tempts me to despair
and tells me of the guilt within,
upward I look, and see him there
who made an end of all my sin.
Because the sinless Savior died,
my sinful soul is counted free;
for God the Just is satisfied
to look on him and pardon me,
to look on him and pardon me.*

*Behold him there! the risen Lamb,
my perfect, spotless righteousness;
the great unchangeable "I AM,"
the King of glory and of grace!
One with himself, I cannot die,
my soul is purchased by his blood;
my life is hid with Christ on high,
with Christ my Savior and my God,
with Christ my Savior and my God.*

That's why when condemnation comes, when the enemy attacks, when his accusations gather like a storm, you and I must remember what Christ done. We

claim the victory—His blood has won! All of Satan’s empty threats have been conquered by the cross, You declare me innocent before the throne. And I claim the victory—Your blood has won!

For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. How then can a man or a woman be found in Christ?

John 3:16—“For God so loved the world, that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life.”

Colossians 1:13-14—“He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son, in whom we had redemption, the forgiveness of sins.”

2 Corinthians 5:17—“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.”

The CHRONOLOGICAL sequence (15:23-27)

“But each in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, then at His coming those who belong to Christ. Then comes the end, when He delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power. For He must reign until He has put all enemies under His feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death. 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 He is excepted who put all things in subjection under Him.”

The COSMOLOGICAL result (15:28)

“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.”