

Total Power!

Lesson for August 27, 2023

Unit III: God's Eternal Reign

Scriptural Background: 1 Corinthians 15:1-28; Ephesians 1:15-23

Printed Text: 1 Corinthians 15:20-28

Key verse: *“When he has done this, then the Son himself will be made subject to him who put everything under him, so that God may be all in all.”* (1 Corinthians 15:28, NIV)

In a seminary missions class, Herbert Jackson told how, as a new missionary, he was assigned a car that would not start without a push. After pondering his problem, he devised a plan. He went to the school near his home, got permission to take some children out of class, and had them push his car off. As he made his rounds, he would either park on a hill or leave the engine running. He used this ingenious procedure for two years.

Ill health forced the Jackson family to leave, and a new missionary came to that station. When Jackson proudly began to explain his arrangement for getting the car started, the new man began looking under the hood. Before the explanation was complete, the new missionary interrupted, "Why, Dr. Jackson, I believe the only trouble is this loose cable." He gave the cable a twist, stepped into the car, pushed the switch, and to Jackson's astonishment, the engine roared to life. For two years needless trouble had become routine. The power was there all the time. Only a loose connection kept Jackson from putting that power to work.

J.B. Phillips paraphrases Ephesians 1:19-20, *"How tremendous is the power available to us who believe in God."* When we make firm our connection with God, his life and power flow through us.

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Key Terms

1. **Firstfruits** (verse 20) – The beginning of a sacrifice. The earliest gathered fruits offered to God in acknowledgment of the gift of fruitfulness.
2. **Reign** (verse 25) – Exercise dominion over; royal authority; sovereignty.
3. **Resurrection** (verse 21) – The rising of Christ from the dead; the rising again to life of all the human dead before the final judgment. A raising up.

Lesson Background

The First Epistle to the Corinthians views the assembly of God in its privileges and responsibilities on earth and presents God's appointed order for carrying out these responsibilities locally.

The grave disorders that existed in this assembly were the immediate occasion for the Epistle being written; it is therefore a corrective epistle. But it is evident that the apostle Paul, led by the Spirit of God, not only corrects the abuses in a local assembly in those early days, but also gives us divine and inspired instructions for all time as to the maintenance of holy discipline in the house of God, and the divine order for God's people, as forming the body of Christ, when come together in assembly gatherings.

In the course of this letter we learn that there existed in this assembly moral laxity, assembly disorder and doctrinal error. One evil leads to the other. Experience has often proved that worldliness and moral laxity will be found behind assembly disorder and that assembly disorder opens the door to doctrinal error.

The main divisions of the Epistle deal with these evils in this order:

1. In 1 Corinthians 1 to 10 the apostle deals with the moral laxity by bringing in the Cross of Christ and the Holy Spirit to exclude the wisdom of this world and the license of the flesh, and gives us directions for the maintenance of discipline amongst the people of God.
2. 1 Corinthians 11 to 14 deals with assembly disorder by presenting the free action of the Holy Spirit in the assembly viewed as the body of Christ.
3. 1 Corinthians 15 deals with the false doctrine that undermines the gospel and attacks the Person of Christ by denying the resurrection of the dead. To meet this snare of the devil the apostle shows how this error affects the gospel (verses 1-11), how it attacks the Person of Christ and those who believe in Him (verses 12-19), and then he unfolds to us some of the positive blessings that follow from the resurrection of Christ (verses 20-58).

Lesson in Depth

I. **Victory over Sin** (1 Corinthians 15:20-22)

Now Christ is risen from the dead: In the previous part of the chapter, Paul demonstrated beyond all doubt that Jesus rose from the dead, and the importance of that fact. Here, he simply states the fact: now Christ is risen from the dead.

And has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep: **Firstfruits** is the ancient Greek word *aparche*. In the Septuagint, this word is used for the offering of firstfruits and in secular usage the word was used for an entrance fee.

Jesus was the firstfruits of our resurrection in both senses. In the Old Testament, the offering of firstfruits brought one sheaf of grain to represent and anticipate the rest of the harvest (Leviticus 23:9-14). The resurrection of Jesus *represents* our resurrection, because *if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection* (Romans 6:5). The resurrection of Jesus also *anticipates* our resurrection because we will be raised with a body like His. “As in the firstfruits offered to God, the Jews were assured of God’s blessing on the whole harvest; so, by the resurrection of Christ, our resurrection is insured.” (Trapp)

The Feast of Firstfruits was observed on the day after the Sabbath following Passover (Leviticus 23:9-14). Significantly, Jesus rose from the dead on the exact day of the Feast of Firstfruits, the day after the Sabbath following the Passover.

The offering at the Feast of Firstfruits was a bloodless grain offering (Leviticus 2). No atoning sacrifice was necessary, because the Passover lamb had just been sacrificed. This corresponds perfectly with the resurrection of Jesus, because His death ended the need for sacrifice, having provided a perfect and complete atonement.

iv. The resurrection of Jesus is also the **firstfruits** of our resurrection in the sense that He is our “entrance fee” to resurrection. Jesus paid our admission to the resurrection!

By man came death, by Man also came the resurrection of the dead: Here, Paul communicates the same ideas found in Romans 5:12-21. Adam (**by man**) is one “head” of the human race, and all mankind was brought under death by Adam. The *second Adam*, Jesus Christ (**by Man**) is the other head of the human race, and Jesus brings resurrection to all that are “under” His headship.

“Men admire the man who is first to discover a new country... Oh, then, sing it in songs, sound it with voice of trumpet to the ends of the earth – Christ is the first who returned from the jaws of death to tell of immortality and light.” (Spurgeon)

In Christ, all shall be made alive: Does this mean everyone is resurrected? Yes and no. All will be resurrected in the sense that they will receive a resurrection body and live forever. Jesus plainly spoke of both *the resurrection of life* and *the resurrection of condemnation* ([John 5:29](#)). So, all are resurrected, but not all will receive *the resurrection of life*. Some will receive *the resurrection of condemnation*, and live forever in a resurrected body in hell.

“But though this text doth not prove the general resurrection, (being only intended of believers, that are members of Christ,) yet it doth not oppose it. But that the *all* here mentioned is no more than all believers, appeareth not only from the term *in Christ* in this verse, but from the whole following discourse; which is only concerning the resurrection of believers to life, not that of the wicked to eternal condemnation.” (Poole)

II. Victory over Satan (1 Corinthians 15:23-25)

Each one in his own order: It would be strange and inappropriate for us to receive resurrection before Jesus. So He receives resurrection first as **the firstfruits**, and then we receive it **afterward... at His coming**.

The **coming** of Jesus described here uses the ancient Greek word *parousia*. This word can simply mean a person's presence (as in Philippians 2:12, *not as in my presence only*). But when it is used of Jesus, it has special reference to His Second Coming (as in Matthew 24:27).

If Jesus is **the firstfruits** of our resurrection, does that mean He was the first one raised from the dead? What about the widow's son in the days of Elijah (1 Kings 17:17-24) and Lazarus (John 11:38-44), among others? Each of these were resuscitated from death, but none of them were *resurrected*. Each of them were raised in the same body they died in, and were raised from the dead to eventually die again. Resurrection isn't just living again; it is living again in a new body based on our old body but perfectly suited for life in eternity. Jesus was not the first one brought back from the dead, but He was the first one *resurrected*.

Then comes the end, when He delivers the kingdom to God the Father. In Ephesians 1:10, Paul reveals God's eternal purpose in history: *that in the dispensation of the fullness of the times He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth – in Him*. Paul wrote of the "gathering together" of all things in Jesus, or of the "summing up" of all things in Him. Here, in 1 Corinthians, he looks forward to the time when all things are resolved in Jesus Christ and He presents it all to God the Father, giving glory to the God who authored this eternal plan of the ages.

When He puts an end to all rule and all authority and power: For now, God has granted a measure of **rule** and **authority** and **power** to men, to Satan, and even to death. But all that is temporary. Jesus will take His rightful place as *the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings and Lord of lords* (1 Timothy 6:15). After the resurrection, God will finally resolve all of history according to His will.

"In raising Christ from the dead God has set in motion a chain of events that must culminate in the final destruction of death and thus of God's being once again, as in eternity past, 'all in all.'" (Fee)

He must reign till He has put all enemies under His feet: Paul here refers to the one-thousand-year reign of Jesus described in Revelation 20:1-6. After that time, there will be a final, Satan inspired rebellion (Revelation 20:7-10), which Jesus will crush and finally and forever **put all enemies under His feet**.

The expression **under His feet** is an Old Testament "figure for total conquest." (Mare)

The last enemy that will be destroyed is death: Death will be present during the millennial reign of Jesus (Revelation 20:9 and Isaiah 65:20), but afterward, death will be abolished. It is truly the **last enemy that will be destroyed**.

Paul reminds us of something important: death is an **enemy**. When Jesus came upon the tomb of Lazarus, He *groaned in the spirit and was troubled*, and *Jesus wept* (John 11:33, 35). Why? Not simply because Lazarus was dead, for Jesus would raise him shortly. Instead, Jesus was troubled at death itself. It was an **enemy**. Today, some are told to embrace death as a friend, but that is not Biblical thinking. Death is a defeated enemy because of the work of Jesus, an enemy that will one day **be destroyed**, and therefore an enemy we need not fear. But death is an enemy nonetheless.

The destruction of death was shown at the resurrection of Jesus, when *the graves were opened; and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised; and coming out of the graves after His resurrection, they went into the holy city and appeared to many* (Matthew 27:52-53). “When at the Redeemer’s resurrection many of the saints arose and came out of their graves into the holy city then was the crucified Lord proclaimed to be victorious over death and the grave... these were but preliminary skirmishes and mere foreshadowings of the grand victory by which death was overthrown.” (Spurgeon)

If death is destroyed, why do Christians die? “Death since Jesus died is not a penal infliction upon the children of God: as such he has abolished it, and it can never be enforced. Why die the saints then? Why, because their bodies must be changed ere they can enter heaven... Saints die not now, but they are dissolved and depart.” (Spurgeon)

“Death is not the worst of enemies; death is an enemy, but he is much to be preferred to our other adversaries. It were better to die a thousand times than to sin. To be tried by death is nothing compared to being tempted by the devil. The mere physical pains connected with dissolution are comparative trifles compared with the hideous grief which is caused by sin and the burden which a sense of guilt causes to the soul.” (Spurgeon)

“Notice, that death is the last enemy to each individual Christian and the last to be destroyed... Brother, do not dispute the appointed order, but let the last be last. I have known a brother wanting to vanquish death long before he died. But, brother, you do not want dying grace till dying moments. What would be the good of dying grace while you are yet alive? A boat will only be needful when you reach a river. Ask for living grace, and glorify Christ thereby, and then you shall have dying grace when dying time comes.” (Spurgeon)

III. **Victory over Separation** (1 Corinthians 15:26-28)

But when He says “all things are put under Him,” it is evident that He who put all things under Him is excepted: Paul reminds us that the Son will not someday be superior to the Father. The relationship of *Father* to *Son* will be eternal: **the Son Himself will also be subject to Him.**

Those who deny the deity of Jesus say this verse proves their point. They take the submission of God the Son as “proof” that He must not be equal in deity to God the Father. But the submission of Jesus to the Father doesn’t come from any inherent inferiority; instead, it comes from the administrative order of the Godhead. A *son* is always in submission to his *father*, even if both are “equal” in substance.

“The son of a king may be the equal of his father in every attribute of his nature, though officially inferior. So the eternal Son of God may be coequal with the Father, though officially subordinate.” (Hodge)

“The Son’s subjection to his Father, which is mentioned in this place, doth no where prove his inequality of essence or power with his Father; it only signifieth what was spoken before, that Christ should deliver up his mediatory kingdom to his Father.” (Poole)

Simply put, God the Father will always be God the *Father*, and God the Son will always be God the *Son*, and for all eternity they will continue to relate to each other as *Father* and *Son*.

That God may be all in all: Here, Paul refers to God the Son’s desire to glorify God the Father through all eternity. Importantly, each person of the Trinity desires to glorify another person of the Trinity. The Son glorifies the Father (John 17:4), the Father glorifies the Son (John 17:5), and the Holy Spirit glorifies the Son (John 16:14). This aspect of the nature of God is something God wants us to walk in, having a concern for the glory of others, and not our own (Philippians 2:3-4).

Lesson Summary

In this lesson Paul guarantees believers eternal life through Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is the One who gives the first testimony to support the proof of this eternal guarantee.

“But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.” (1 Corinthians 15:20).

The word “first fruits” comes from the Old Testament. It means that this is the first evidence of the crop. In this case, Christ is the first evidence of the eternal guarantee. He rose from the dead. Therefore, anyone who comes after Him who belong to Him will also see this eternal guarantee (1 Corinthians 15:23).

Why we can trust the eternal lifetime guarantee of Jesus Christ

1. Jesus is raised as the firstfruits (1 Corinthians 15:21-23) – We can trust the eternal lifetime guarantee of Jesus because He proved it. Jesus is the only One to raise from the dead. You know that you trust the mechanic who has repaired and replaced many parts before. You trust the doctor who has successfully completed many surgeries. You can trust Jesus who has the eternal experience that is necessary for overcoming death.
2. All who are in Jesus are raised at his coming (1 Corinthians 15:23) – I will be resurrected from death, but only if I belong to Christ. When Jesus returns (which is what “at His coming” means), then only those who belong to Jesus will be “made alive.” Resurrection is not just being raised to life to live and die again. Instead, we will be raised to live forever.

3. All rule and authority is subjected under Jesus' feet (1 Corinthians 15:24-25) – The 'end' of all rule and authority and power is speaking of the time when all human authority upon the earth will be brought to an end. Christ will establish His eternal kingdom. The great aim of the kingdom of Christ will be to bring the whole universe into subjection to God. As the creation has been subjected to sin and death and the power of the devil by one man, Adam, so every enemy will be dealt with by one Man, Christ, and all be brought into subjection to God. The "end" here is not simply the end of the present age, as in Matthew 13:39,49. The end of the present age introduces the kingdom of Christ. Here the end marks the close of the kingdom and the beginning of the Eternal State, the new heavens and new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness.

“Then comes the end, when He hands over the kingdom to God the Father, when He abolishes all rule and all authority and power. For He must reign until He puts all His enemies under His feet.” (1 Corinthians 15:24–25, HCSB)

4. Jesus presents the kingdom to the Father (1 Corinthians 15:27-28) – God will put everything (including death) under Christ's authority. Christ will have power over death. All rule and all authority and power shall be put down by the once-crucified Christ. Then shall He bring to a close His mediatorial reign and upon the threshold of eternity He shall deliver up the kingdom to God, even the Father. All shall be wound up in absolute perfection. The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death. Elsewhere we learn that 'death and hell will be cast into the lake of fire' (Revelation 20:14).