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1 Corinthians

If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most pitiable.

1 Corinthians 15:19

In the preceding verse, a list of reasons was noted concerning our sad state if Christ is not in fact risen. Today's verse completes Paul's list. Taken together, his seven reasons are:

- 1) Preaching the gospel is empty
- 2) The faith of the believer is also empty
- 3) The apostles are actually found to be false witnesses of God
- 4) The believer's faith is futile
- 5) All remain in bondage to their sins
- 6) Those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished
- 7) We are of all men the most pitiable

Many scholars believe that Paul's words in this final consequence are directed to the apostles only and not to believers in general. However, when looking at the list as a whole, it is quite clear that this is not the case. He makes no distinction between the apostles and the believers unless it is otherwise noted. Further, he moved his thoughts from the apostles to all believers by consequence 4. Thus, that is a bad analysis. Rather, this final consequence applies to all who have put their faith in Christ.

The reason for this is that as believers, we are asked to not only hope in the future to come (which, admittedly is something many other religions do), but to also live a life worthy of that calling now. In other words, most people expect that

they will "go to heaven" even without Jesus. And so this can't be what Paul is speaking of. Further, most religions also teach to do good works in order to have the balances tip in their favor in hopes of heaven. As this is so, our good works and self-denial can't be the sole reason that Paul is speaking of.

Additionally, of those who do good works and practice self-denial, there are zillions of people who do far more than Christians. There are Buddhist monks, Hindu priests, Islamic Imams, Jewish Rabbis, Jehovah's Witnesses and the like - all who do stuff for their false gods or false perceptions about the true God. Islam even teaches that getting martyred in the cause of jihad is a one-way guarantee to heaven. All of these people are to be pitied for their misguided allegiances to false gods and/or false worship. And so what is it about Paul's statement that makes this ring true?

The answer is first to understand the grammar of the Greek. The word "only" comes at the end of the clause in the structure of the Greek - "If in the life this, in Christ having hope we are only..." The "only" is emphatic. If Christ isn't risen, then we are putting our hope only in Christ for this life. We have no hope of heaven like all the others have (even though they are wrong about their hope). We are hoping in something which ends in this life.

Further, our good deeds are *based on* our forgiveness of sins. They are not *in hopes of* forgiveness of sins. It is the great distinction between Christianity and all other religions. And so, logically, if we are out doing good stuff when we have already been forgiven, but with no hope of heaven (because Christ isn't risen), then truly "we are of all men the most pitiable."

Without some reason for the good deeds, why do them? As Paul says later in verse 33, "Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die!" If this is all there is, then the doing of good deeds *after* forgiveness is about as stupid as making football bats. You are doing something that has no final purpose. Why be a faithful spouse? Why tell the truth? Why be honest in business dealings? Why do anything moral and proper? If you are forgiven in advance, then take advantage

of it! If there are no further consequences, dive in to sin and immerse yourself in it!

Life application: We have a sure hope in heaven *because* of the work of Christ - all of the work of Christ, including the resurrection. We are not to be pitied, we are to be regarded with a burning jealousy which should drive men to Christ for the same sure hope that each of us possesses. Demonstrate your faith so that others see it and desire it as well.

But now Christ is risen from the dead, *and* has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. 1 Corinthians 15:20

After stating the terrifying consequences for believers if Christ isn't raised, Paul now begins a much happier thought with the resounding word "But." In contrast to the hopelessness of his previous words, there is the absolute assurance and promise that "Christ is risen from the dead." The many witnesses, the truth of the apostles' preaching, the reality of changed hearts and lives - they are all a testament to the surety of the believers' hope in this life and in the promised wonders of the time to come.

And in what is a response to the previous notion of verse 12 which said that "some among you say that there is no resurrection of the dead," he shows that this was more than a single occurrence, but one which will include all believers of Him. Yes, "Christ is risen from the dead," but even more He "has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep." This word, firstfruits, is Old Testament symbolism found in Leviticus 23; the passage where the "Feasts of the Lord" are detailed. Each of these feasts points to the work of Christ, and their fulfillment is in Him.

There are eight feasts noted in Leviticus 23. In order they are -

- 1) Sabbath
- 2) Passover &
- 3) Unleavened Bread (at times these are combined in terminology)
- 4) Firstfruits
- 5) Weeks
- 6) Trumpets
- 7) Atonement
- 8) Tabernacles

Each of them has been fulfilled in His work. For example in 1 Corinthians 5:7, Paul showed that "Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us." His cross for our redemption was the fulfillment of the Passover. In that same verse he also said, "Therefore purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, since you truly are unleavened." His sinless perfection, imputed to us, is the fulfillment of Unleavened Bread. Such is the case with all of these feasts.

Firstfruits is a picture of the resurrection. Here is how the feast is described in Leviticus 23 -

"When you come into the land which I give to you, and reap its harvest, then you shall bring a sheaf of the firstfruits of your harvest to the priest. ¹¹ He shall wave the sheaf before the LORD, to be accepted on your behalf; on the day after the Sabbath the priest shall wave it. ¹² And you shall offer on that day, when you wave the sheaf, a male lamb of the first year, without blemish, as a burnt offering to the LORD. ¹³ Its grain offering *shall be two-tenths of an ephah* of fine flour mixed with oil, an offering made by fire to the LORD, for a sweet aroma; and its drink offering *shall be* of wine, one-fourth of a hin. ¹⁴ You shall eat neither bread nor parched grain nor fresh grain until the same day that you have brought an offering to your God; *it shall be* a statute forever throughout your generations in all your dwellings."

The "sheaf of the firstfruits" was a representation of all of the harvest to come. It was offered with the expectation that all of the rest of the harvest would follow

to maturity. This was "on the day after the Sabbath." Christ was crucified on a Friday, was entombed over the Sabbath, and rose early on the morning of the first day of the week.

Everything about the rites and rituals of this feast pointed to the work of the Lord. He "has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep." Just as He slept the sleep of death, but was raised by the power of God, so we too have the absolute assurance that even if we sleep in Christ, we too will be raised by the same great power of God. As His life is eternal, so we too shall be granted eternal life. Paul's words show us the absolute assurance we have; because of Christ, we also!

Life application: The Old Testament is only old in that it finds its fulfillment in Christ. Never stop reading it and searching it out. Every detail contains hidden gems, pointing us to Him. We mature in our understanding of Christ by understanding the Old Testament as well as the New.

For since by man *came* death, by Man also *came* the resurrection of the dead.
1 Corinthians 15:21

Paul has, in his ever-consistent way, confirmed his words of Romans 5:12 -

"Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned..."

He explains this in further detail in the following two verses -

"...for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." Romans 3:23

&

"For the wages of sin *is* death, but the gift of God *is* eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." Romans 6:23

One can see the logical progression of sin's entrance into the world through Adam. Death came into humanity because of sin, and that sin spread to all men because all are "in Adam," and thus "all have sinned." Humanity is condemned to death because of one transgression. But there is the good news of Jesus Christ to follow up the terrible news of Adam! "By Man also came the resurrection of the dead."

What is implicit here, but explicit elsewhere, is that this Man (meaning Christ Jesus) had no sin. If the resurrection of the dead came through Him, but the wages of sin is death, then He must have been sinless in order to resurrect. It also means that He had to die *because* of sin, even if not *in* sin. The meaning of this is that His death was substitutionary in nature. If He died, but had no sin of His own, then He must have died because of some other sin, because "the wages of sin is death." How could Christ die if He had no sins unless there was still sin involved? The answer is that He died *for our sins*, not *in* His own.

In this then is a truth that cannot be missed. If He died for our sins, but had none of His own, then death could not hold Him. And at the same time, death can no longer hold us because "the wages of sin is death;" but Christ died for our sins. If our sins resulted in the death of Another, then our sins can no longer be imputed to us. The guilt is pardoned, the stain is removed, and the life which is true life has come. Paul dealt with this in Romans and he will continue to touch on it as he proceeds through the verses ahead.

Life application: Our sins are forgiven in Christ; all of them. We are completely free from the condemnation of sins committed in the body. However, we are still responsible for not sinning once we are "in Christ." Our future rewards and losses will be determined by our deeds and by sins committed from the time we are saved. Let us live in holiness and apart from sin as we await our final redemption!

For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive.

1 Corinthians 15:22

Paul's previous words stated, "For since by man *came* death, by Man also *came* the resurrection of the dead." Our "For" now builds upon that. Death came by man and so life also comes by Man. The man through whom death came was Adam. The Man through whom life comes is Christ.

Adam transgressed God's commandment and plunged humanity into death. This was noted in Genesis 3. But there is more to be understood in this than physical death. In Genesis 2, the Lord told Adam -

"Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; ¹⁷ but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die." Genesis 2:16, 17

However, after eating of the fruit, it says that Adam continued to live until the age of 930 years. Therefore, the death that occurred was spiritual death. The connection between God and man was lost; severed completely. Adam lived in time, and time was moving forward. He could not go back and undo what he had done. After his transgression, he had children, all of whom were born with the same spiritual disconnect from God. This has continued to be inherited by all humans since then, thus "in Adam all die."

Christ came to repair this spiritual rift though. Through His work we are spiritually restored to God. He was born without Adam's sin. As His Father is God, He did not receive Adam's sin nature. After this, the Bible records His life. He lived without sin and died without sin. Therefore, the natural, logical, and only possibility was that He would resurrect. Without sin, the spiritual connection to God remained.

In this then is the truth that our physical death also came as a result of inherited sin. If the spiritual rebirth doesn't occur before the physical death comes, then we

will remain spiritually dead; forever separated from our Creator. This must be true because Paul says that "in Christ, all shall be made alive." Many people have called on Christ, and to this day, all of them have or will physically die. However, if we are "in Christ" and this was speaking only of physical life and death, we would never die.

Therefore, this must be speaking first of "spiritual life." As Jesus Himself said, "...whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die" (John 11:26). Because all have or will physically die, even since Jesus said this, then He must have first been speaking of the "spiritual" state of the person. Once this has been corrected, the inevitable outcropping of it is physical resurrection. If we are "in Christ" and now deemed without sin, then death no longer has mastery over us. Therefore, we shall come to eternal physical life at the call of the Lord as well.

In this then, Paul's words "in Christ all shall be made alive" are speaking of those who are "in Christ." Those who remain "in Adam" cannot be counted in this "all." It is dealing with rebirth, not continued death. All will, in fact, be raised. Those "in Christ" will be raised to eternal life at the resurrection. Those "in Adam" will be raised for judgment and condemnation. All of this is explained elsewhere in the Bible.

Life application: One is either "in Adam" with their father as the devil, or "in Christ" with their Father as God. These are the only two possibilities for humanity. Choose wisely; choose Christ.

But each one in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, afterward those *who are* Christ's at His coming. 1 Corinthians 15:23

In this verse, Paul speaks of "order" concerning resurrection, not specifically "timing." The timing of the future events is dealt with elsewhere and must be inferred from a careful reading of the Bible. Concerning order, however, specific detail is revealed in this verse. He just noted that, "as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive." He follows this with "But each one in his own

order." This order then explains more fully the concept of "in Christ" from the preceding verse.

The word for "order" is used only here in the New Testament and it indicates a "band" or a "troop." The stalk of grain at the harvest of the firstfruits was emblematic of the entire harvest. Christ was raised and those who are "in" Him will be raised in the same manner with the same eternal likeness (see 1 Corinthians 15:49). This is the "order" then. As Vincent's Word Studies notes concerning this -

"The reference is not to time or merit, but simply to the fact that each occupies his own place in the economy of resurrection, which is one great process in several acts. Band after band rises. First Christ, then Christians. The same idea appears in the first-fruits and the harvest."

Life application: If you are a part of Christ's harvest field, then you will be presented before God, just as He was. As with the Firstfruits, so with the rest of the harvest!

Then *comes* the end, when He delivers the kingdom to God the Father, when He puts an end to all rule and all authority and power. 1 Corinthians 15:24

Paul is giving a logical order of things to come, not all of the details included in those things. There is within his words a multitude of events not mentioned. What he said in the previous verse spoke of the order of the resurrection - first Christ and then those who are His. There is nothing to discount a rapture, a post-tribulation resurrection, and other events all occurring in his wording.

After the resurrection phase will come "the end." The word is *telos*. It signifies an end; event or issue; the principal end, aim, purpose; or even a tax (which would be considered a final payment on something, thus "ending" it). This then is the end of the mediatorial role of Christ. He is currently in this position, working

between God and man. However, there will be a time when this is no longer necessary.

That time will be "when He delivers the kingdom to God." When there is no longer the need for a Mediator between God and man, God will be open and accessible directly. At this time, when Christ's work of redemption and mediation are finished, God will receive the kingdom directly rather than through His Mediator. When this occurs, our relationship to God will be close and personal, rather than only accessible through Christ. All who are redeemed will be, in fact, redeemed. God will be "the Father" that we have truly anticipated since the fall of man.

This term, "God the Father," can be taken in one of two ways. The first is speaking of the Father within the Godhead - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The second would be the nature of God as the Father. The second is surely the use of "Father" which is intended here. This same concept of God as Father is seen many times in Scripture. One explicit use of this is found in Malachi 2:10 -

"Have we not all one Father?
Has not one God created us?"

Paul's continued words will bear out that this is certainly speaking of God as "Father of all rather than the Person of "God the Father" in the Trinity. But logically, even from this verse, we can deduce this to be true. If there is no need for a Mediator, then we will have access to the Father-God referred to, such as in Malachi. He will truly be our eternal Father figure in the fullest sense. But such is not the case at this time because there are still people who are being redeemed (who are not yet God's children, but who will be at some future point), and thus there is still the need for Christ's work.

When that work is done, a new order of things will take form. However, this must wait until the time "when He puts an end to all rule and all authority and power." Until then, we as saved believers are God's adopted children, but we are still

awaiting the fullness of what that means. The last page of the Bible gives us a glimpse of that. Take a gander at it today and revel in what lies ahead as we await the completion of Christ's marvelous work!

Life application: There is one God - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. This God, our Creator, is a Father to all who are saved by the blood of Christ. Keep getting the word out while you can. The day is coming when those who are not adopted as His children will be banished from His presence forever. Now is the time to go about our business telling of the great work of Christ to redeem fallen man.