

**1 Cor. 15:20-28, The Harvest of Christ's Resurrection**  
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**Overview**

1. Planting and Harvesting are usually subject to the harvest law enunciated in Gal. 6:7, you reap what you sow. If you plant peas, you won't reap apples.
2. In John 12:24, the Lord Jesus promises that his death is like the planting of a corn of wheat. Unless he dies, there can be no harvest. But he has died, and the harvest from that death is unlike any ever seen in earthly field. 1 Cor. 15:20-28 shows that not just one crop, but a wealth of wonderful things spring up, of which the resurrection of the Lord Jesus is only the first. (NB: The same sequence of things, in the same order, is set forth in Rev. 19-22.)
  - a) The resurrection of the Lord;
  - b) The resurrection of believers;
  - c) The subjection of all rival authorities;
  - d) The resurrection of the unbelieving dead;
  - e) The submission of the creation to the Father.
3. But as the first, it is vitally important, and it is a serious matter when the people in Corinth, perhaps to please their secular Greek friends, begin to deny the resurrection. Paul devotes 1 Cor. 15 to refuting their error. See my earlier outline of the book for the overall structure. We concentrate on one part of his argument, the harvest that begins with Christ's own resurrection.

**A. 20, The Resurrection of Christ**

Paul states it as a fact, substantiated by the witnesses cited in 15:5-8. Celebrated as Easter; the early church remembered it every week; it was probably the reason they switched their worship from the Jewish Sabbath to the first day of the week.

1. Its importance: v.17. Christ's death by itself is evidence only for the power of our sin to kill. If he is still dead, that power remains unchallenged. Only by his resurrection do we know that sin has lost its hold on us.

*The resurrection of Christ delivers us from the guilt of sin.*

2. "Firstfruits": Drawing on OT imagery, Lev. 23:5-11. The morning after the sabbath of Passover week, the first grain from the harvest was to be offered to the Lord. This was happening in the temple just as the disciples were discovering the empty tomb! And just as the firstfruits promised more to come, so the Lord's resurrection points to a greater harvest to come.

**B. 23, The Resurrection of Believers**

Rom. 7:24 teaches us that even though we have new life in Christ, we

are confined to "the body of this death." Its limitations become clearest in physical death, which even Christians suffer.

When the Lord returns, dead believers will be raised to be with him, and those who have not died will be transformed, leaving behind "the body of this death."

1. John 11:25-26 contains in germ these two events: resurrection for the dead, and never dying for those still alive.
2. 1 Cor. 15:51-54 again distinguishes the two,
3. as does 1 Thes. 4:16,17, "the dead in Christ shall rise first: 17 Then we which are alive [and] remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord."

*The resurrection of believers delivers us from the fear of death.*

#### C. 24-28, "Then" the end

We need to consider the structure of this section before we can understand the aspects of the harvest that it presents.

1. Structure: chiasm about v.26.

3. 24a	28	Christ delivers kingdom to God
1. 24b-25	27	Christ subdues all enemies (Ps. 8:6)
2.	26	Christ destroys the last enemy, death

Note the order of these events in time (numbers at left of each line).

2. 24b-25, 27, *The Subduing of All Enemies*

- a) Both sections draw on promises of Messiah's dominion from the Psalms.
  - 1) 25 alludes to Ps. 110:1, and focuses on his *enemies*. Note "rule and authority and power." "Rule and authority" are elsewhere rendered "principality and power," and focus on the coordinated system of earthly political rulers and the angelic guides behind them.
  - 2) 27 recalls Ps. 8:6. The verb translated "put under" appears six times in vv.27-28, though the English rendering changes. Ps. 8 is broader than Ps. 110, covering not just Messiah's enemies, but all of creation.
- b) I believe this *follows*, rather than precedes, the resurrection of believers.
  - 1) Throughout the NT, we have references to believers executing judgment in a coming age: Matt. 19:28, Luke 22:30 (the twelve over the twelve tribes); 1 Cor. 6:3 (believers judging angels).
    - a> These promises were made to people who died long before

they experienced them, therefore they must apply to the resurrection state.

- b> The very act of judgment presumes that there is some rebellion against the law of God still present, relative to which judgment ("discernment") must be made.

2) The sequence of events in Rev. 20 supports this:

- a> 4, believers raised before the 1000 years

- b> 7-10, great battle with Satan AFTER the 1000 years. Thus there remain unsubdued enemies after the resurrection of the just.

c) Significance: The final great resolution to the problem of evil. How could there be a holy God in charge of a world as unfair and wicked as this one is? Three things to keep in mind:

- 1) God didn't make it wicked. People did, by their sin.

- 2) God restrains his judgment to give people time to repent, 2 Peter 3.

- 3) Some day, he will balance the books, and settle accounts with all those who have rejected him, both angelic and earthly--and we shall work with him in that great cleansing, 1 Cor. 6:3.

d) Note the pathos implicit in 27, "he saith, 'All things are subjected.'" Who is "he"?

- 1) Not the psalmist; the Psalm uses the active, not the passive, as in 27a.

- 2) Take it as the Lord Jesus upon the completion of his rule, crying aloud in triumph, "All things are subjected!" Long he has struggled with the forces of darkness, but now all is under his feet, and he proclaims the victory. Thus he finishes the rule of his second advent with a cry that echoes the cry that ended his first, "It is finished."

e) *The subjection of all things delivers us from the continual struggle against sin that now exercises us so.*

### 3. 26, *The Destruction of the Last Enemy, Death.*

How is it that death itself is to be destroyed? We've already had the resurrection of Christ and the resurrection of believers. The only dead people left are dead unbelievers, and the Scriptures teach that they too shall rise from the grave.

- a) Daniel 12:2, And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame [and] everlasting contempt.

- b) John 5:28-29, Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, 29 And shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the

resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation.

- c) Back to Rev. 20. After Satan's defeat at the end of the 1000 years, the next event is the judgment of the Great White Throne, when the graves are emptied--death is destroyed--and the wicked are judged.

Note the objective of the resurrection in each case. Just as the righteous are given bodies in which they may experience God's blessings forever, the wicked receive bodies in which to suffer forever the pangs of God's wrath.

*The resurrection of the wicked delivers us from the sense of unfairness we often feel about a world in which wicked people can prosper and die in peace, without any satisfaction for their sin.*

4. 24a, 28, *The kingdom delivered to God.*  
Now, in the church, "Christ is all in all" (Col. 3:11). A time is coming when the Father will hold this position. Our savior confessed, "My Father is greater than I," John 14:28.

Think of a military inspection. The General is coming, so the Colonel works hard to get everything in order, and when the General arrives, the Colonel reports, "Troops ready for inspection, Sir." The troops belong to and answer to the General, but it is the Colonel's job to get them ready. So, the Lord Jesus has the job of getting the world, broken by Adam's sin, fixed up for the Father's good pleasure.

Again, the last chapters of Rev. help to illustrate this. After the GWT at the end of Rev. 20, Rev. 21-22 describe the New Jerusalem, in which God comes down to dwell with his people. The Lamb has completed the work that the Father sent him to do, removing the barriers between heaven and earth, and now is a peer with the Father as the temple (21:22), the light (21:23), and the ruler (22:3) of the new order.

*The delivery of the Kingdom to God destroys the final barrier that separates us from our heavenly Father, and brings heaven down to earth.*

### **Summary**

Consider the rich and varied harvest that springs up from the sacrifice of our savior.

1. The resurrection of Christ delivers us from the guilt of sin.
2. The resurrection of believers delivers us from the fear of death.
3. The subjection of all things delivers us from the continual struggle against sin.

4. The resurrection of the wicked delivers us from the unfairness of this present world.
5. The delivery of the Kingdom to God destroys the final barrier that separates us from our heavenly Father, and brings heaven down to earth.

**Psalm:** 110 or 8