

“But Now Hath Christ Been Raised ...”

“... from the dead, the firstfruits of them that sleep. For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive” (1 Cor. 15:20-22).

In vv. 12-19 Paul set forth the necessary conclusions that must follow if indeed *“there is no resurrection from the dead”* (an assertion made by some in Corinth) — the most significant being that *“then hath Christ not been raised.”* And if Christ had not been raised, then the preaching of the apostles was in vain, the Corinthians’ faith was vain, the apostles were false witnesses of God, those fallen asleep in Jesus had perished, and Christians were of all men most pitiable. But these conclusions were false because Christ had been raised from the dead — proof positive that instead of *“there is no resurrection of the dead,”* most assuredly there is a resurrection of the dead!

Paul calls Jesus *“the firstfruits of them that are asleep.”* He does not say that Christ was the first person raised for the dead: such was not true. The gospel writers record three different individuals whom Christ raised from the dead prior to his own, and there are accounts of others resurrected in the Old Testament. But, without exception, all these died again. Jesus was raised from the dead, never to die again, the firstfruits of that grand resurrection day when God’s own will also rise, never to die again.

Paul tells that it was appropriate that since by man came death, by man should come the resurrection from the dead. The Hebrew writer concurs: *“Since then the children are sharers in flesh and blood, he also in like manner partook of the same that through death he might bring to nought him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; and might deliver all them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage” (Heb. 2:14-15).* For Jesus to destroy Satan’s power of the dead; he had to first die, that he might be raised again.

Discussion has abounded through the years on v. 22 and its relationship to Romans 5:12: *“Therefore as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death passed unto all men for that all sinned.”* The only comparison which might be made is that Adam introduced both physical death (1 Cor. 15:22) and spiritual death (Rom. 5:12) into the world. The *“death”* of 1 Corinthians 15:22 is universal, man suffers this through no fault of his own. The *“death”* of Romans 5:12 is limited: it results because of man’s own sin and not all humans (infants who die in infancy) experience this death.

How is one to establish what kind of death is found in 1 Corinthians 15?
Context: the object of 1 Corinthians 15 is to prove a physical resurrection. Thus the death which is ended by resurrection is also a physical one. Not many people are confused about the "death" of 1 Corinthians 15, it is generally conceded to be physical. Great confusion exists over the "death" of Romans 5:12, some making that "death" also physical rather than spiritual.

Paul does not extensively expound upon "*so also in Christ shall all be made alive*" (1 Cor. 15:22). He uses these words to comfort and assure Christians. Nevertheless, the wicked are not excluded from the statement. All: good and evil; suffer physical death because of Adam's sin; and all, good and evil, will experience a physical resurrection because Christ, by His death and resurrection brought to nought him who had the power of death, the devil. A general resurrection was promised by Jesus for "*The hour cometh in which all that are in the tombs shall hear his voice and come forth*" (Jn. 5:28). For the good, it will be resurrection unto life; for the wicked, it will be resurrection unto judgment. We close with this observation: man has no personal control in either his physical death or resurrection. On the other hand, it is by man's personal choice that he suffers both spiritual death and spiritual life.

Twice in these four verses (1 Cor. 15:20-23), Christ is referred to as the "*fruitfruits*". The harvest began when Christ was raised on that Sunday morning over 2,000 years ago; the harvest will be completed when Jesus comes again and calls for all grave to be emptied. It will be then that those who love his appear will enter into eternal life.

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