

The Church of the Servant King

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Survey of the Bible Series – Paul’s First Letter to the Corinthians

(SB_1Cor15B)

INTRODUCTION

In our previous study of the first portion of chapter 15, we examined verses 1-28. In those verses, we observed the following groupings of topics and verses.

- *Verses 1-3* – Paul’s presentation of the Gospel to the Corinthians and their salvation had been built upon the foundational reality of the resurrection.
- *Verses 4-11* – Eyewitness testimony validated the historical reality of Christ’s resurrection.
- *Verses 12-19* – The resurrection of all believers hinges upon the resurrection of Christ.
- *Verses 20-28* – The sequence of the resurrections associated with Christ’s 2nd Coming are guaranteed by His resurrection.

There were a couple of phrases in verses 20-28 that we did not discuss in any detail, so we will address them now prior to moving forward to address the remainder of the chapter. The remaining verses of chapter 15 fall into the following groupings and topics.

- *Verses 29-30* – Baptisms for the dead are futile exercises – especially if there is no resurrection of the dead.
- *Verses 31-34* – Suffering for Christ is futile if there is no resurrection from the dead.
- *Verses 35-58* – Paul discusses the nature of the resurrection body and victory over death through our resurrection which was provided by Jesus Christ.

THE SEQUENCE OF THE RESURRECTIONS ASSOCIATED WITH CHRIST’S 2ND COMING ARE GUARANTEED BY HIS RESURRECTION (1 COR 15:20-28) - CONTINUED

20 But now Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who are asleep. 21 For since by a man came death, by a man also came the resurrection of the dead. 22 For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all will be made alive. 23 But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, after that those who are Christ’s at His coming, 24 then comes the end, when He hands over the kingdom to the God and Father, when He has abolished all rule and all authority and power. 25 For He must reign until He has put all His enemies under His feet. 26 The last enemy that will be abolished is death. 27 For HE HAS PUT ALL THINGS IN SUBJECTION UNDER HIS FEET. But when He says, "All things are put in subjection," it is evident that He is excepted who put all things in subjection to Him. 28 When all things are subjected to Him, then the Son Himself also will be subjected to the One who subjected all things to Him, so that God may be all in all. (1 Cor 15:20-28)

The doctrine of Adam’s original sin and the transmission of that sin to subsequent generations of mankind resulting in spiritual death and physical death is embedded in the phrases “since by a man came death” (v. 21) and “as in Adam, all die” (v. 22). First, let’s review some of the major views in Church History on the subject.

Pelagian View	Arminian View	Calvinist-Augustinian
No corrupt nature - No guilt	Corrupt nature - No guilt	Corrupt nature – Guilt

“Guilt” = the imputation of the curse associated with Adam’s sin sometimes referred to as the imputation of Adam’s original sin.

Augustinianism – from Augustine (A.D. 354 – 430)

Augustine was responsible for initially developing the logical implications of the sinfulness of man and the need for transforming grace into a systemized body of thought. He stressed that Adam had begun life truly free with the only limitations upon his free will consisting of the inherent limitations imposed by his humanity itself. Therefore, the possibility existed of turning from the good (i.e. satisfaction of God’s righteousness which was inherent in a sinless creature). When Adam sinned, he became tainted in nature and transmitted this inclination toward evil to his descendants. Augustine believed that man thereby lost his freedom to abstain from evil and to do the good (i.e. satisfy God’s righteousness). Man still had free will, but he would inevitably use free will contrary to God’s intention. Without any divine assistance, man could not choose and do “the good.”¹

Augustine’s views of sin and grace were shaped by his past as a person “who wandered far from the path of morality and religion” according to his *Confessions*.² In other words, Augustine had a lascivious trend in his sin nature and when he came to the point in his life where he sought salvation, he realized he was inherently evil and incapable of satisfying God’s righteousness on his own. His conversion took place after a period of never finding rest during the years of his wanderings.³

There is certainly a lot of truth in Augustine’s views. He should be commended for his humility in realizing that he was incapable of generating the righteousness required of God on his own.

Pelagianism – from Pelagius (A.D. 360-420)

Pelagius was a British monk who relocated to Rome to be a teacher and who was primarily a moralist rather than a theologian. His primary concern was for people to motivate people to live good and decent lives. His moralist slant no doubt arose from his ascetic trend. He was a man of “austere life, of a blameless character, and of an even temper, and perhaps partly for that very reason a stranger to those conflicts of the soul, those struggles with sin, and those deep experiences of an all-renewing grace, which had such profound influence in molding Augustine’s thought.”⁴

¹ Ibid., 908-909.

² Louis Berkhof, *The History of Christian Doctrines* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1937), 131.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Louis Berkhof, *The History of Christian Doctrines* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1937), 132.

Pelagius considered Augustine's emphasis upon the "extreme corruption of human nature and its corollary, human inability, to be both demoralizing to any genuine effort at righteous living and insulting to God as well."⁵

Holding to a creationist view of the origin of the soul, Pelagius maintained that the soul, created by God specially for every person, is not tainted by any supposed corruption or guilt. The influence, if any, of Adam's sin upon his descendants is merely that of a bad example. Other than this there is no direct connection between Adam's sin and the rest of the human race.⁶

If Adam's sin has no direct effect upon every human being, there is no need for a special working of God's grace within the heart of each individual.⁷

He did not believe that Adam's fall had any direct effect upon a person's ability to do "the good" (i.e. satisfy God's righteousness). Man does not inherit from Adam either evil or a tendency to evil according to Pelagius. His rationale was that surely a God who forgives each person his or her own sin would not hold any of us responsible for the act of another. Adam was merely a bad example. According to Pelagius, man has the ability to fulfill God's commands without sinning; therefore, "salvation" (if Pelagius would have even used that term) consists of not falling into a sinful condition.

Pelagianism was vigorously attacked by Augustine. These attacks no doubt led to the condemnation of Pelagianism by the Council of Ephesus in A.D. 431. Augustine more fully developed his views of predestination and the sinful nature of man during these attacks. In brief, Augustine's view that materialized was that without God's grace, man is unable to avoid sin and to possess a righteousness compatible with God's righteousness. To meet God's righteousness required an even greater grace, i.e. God working with man's will based upon God's omniscient understanding of those conditions under which a man will freely choose what God wills. Augustine's logic led him to conclude that man's choice was related to whether God chose to give grace to some and not others.⁸ Augustine's views will eventually become the basis for much of John Calvin's understanding.

Semi-Pelagianism (5th – 6th Centuries)

After the condemnation of Pelagianism by the Council of Ephesus in A.D. 431, a synergism of Augustinianism and Pelagianism developed. This synergistic view came to be known as semi-pelagianism. This view held that God and man together accomplished what must be done in order to be saved. Man was seen as corrupt, but fallen human nature was viewed as capable of co-operating with divine grace. Regeneration was viewed as the product of both factors.⁹ Apparently the flaw of semi-pelagianism was that man was viewed as making too great

⁵ Millard Erickson, *Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1995), 909.

⁶ Ibid., 633.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid., 911. As an interesting aside, the author also notes that Augustine believed that God's choice of the number of men to whom this irresistible grace was to be granted was equal to the number needed to replace the fallen angels. As I have already noted during class in the prior lesson, Augustine's view has been the basis for some who conclude that the Rapture of the Church will occur when the number of saved Church Age-Body of Christ believers equals the number of demons (fallen angels). There is really no Scriptural support for such a view even though there is admittedly a logical attractiveness to it.

⁹ Berkhof, 138.

a contribution to his own salvation. Semi-Pelagianism was condemned by the Synod of Orange in A.D. 529.

Arminianism – from James Arminius (A.D. 1560-1609)

James (or Jacobus) Arminius was a Dutch Reformed pastor and theologian. Many of his views were largely embraced and even popularized by John Wesley (1703-1791), the founder of Methodism. Arminius was at first a disciple of Theodore Beza and a strict Calvinist, but later changed his views in favor of views akin to semi-Pelagianism. His position was based in part upon ideas of universal grace and free will. He denied the doctrine of reprobation and adjusted the position of original sin. His followers articulated their position in five articles known as the *Remonstrance*.¹⁰

According to Arminianism, we receive from Adam a corrupted nature and we begin life without righteousness. However, among Arminians, there are differences of opinion regarding the “guilt” (i.e. imputation of Adam’s sin to man) associated with this corrupted nature. Most believe in “prevenient grace.” By this, they mean a universal benefit of the atoning work of Christ which nullifies the judicial consequences of Adam’s sin.¹¹ This “prevenient grace” is extended to everyone and in effect neutralizes the corruption received from Adam.

So, effectively, Arminius taught that the guilt of Adam’s original sin is not imputed to his descendants; however, sin as a “weakness” or “disease” is passed on from father to son. Therefore, man is not under a sentence of condemnation, but he possesses a weakened nature that makes him incapable on his own of producing “the good” (belief resulting in God’s righteousness). Nevertheless, man can as a result of possessing free will prepare himself (have positive volition) to turn to God and do His will. God’s election of the believer is based upon foreseen faith, obedience, and perseverance. Reprobation (condemnation) is understood to be based upon foreseen unbelief, disobedience, and persistence in sin.

Calvinist – from John Calvin (A.D. 1509-1564)

Calvinist draws heavily from Augustine. The Calvinist position is based upon a very literal understanding of Romans 5:12-19 where Paul teaches that sin entered the world through Adam and death (both spiritual and physical) resulted from that corruption. Through one man, all became sinners.

12 Therefore, just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned—13 for until the Law sin was in the world, but sin is not imputed when there is no law. 14 Nevertheless death reigned from Adam until Moses, even over those who had not sinned in the likeness of the offense of Adam, who is a type of Him who was to come. 15 But the free gift is not like the transgression. For if by the transgression of the one the many died, much more did the grace of God and the gift by the grace of the one Man, Jesus Christ, abound to the many. 16 The gift is not like that which came through the one who sinned; for on the one hand the judgment arose from one transgression resulting in condemnation, but on the other hand the free gift arose from many transgressions resulting in justification. 17 For if by the transgression of the one, death reigned through the one, much more those who receive the abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ. 18 So then as through one transgression there resulted condemnation to all men, even so through one act of

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Erickson, 634.

righteousness there resulted justification of life to all men. 19 For as through the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, even so through the obedience of the One the many will be made righteous. (Rom 5:12-19)

In response to the question that emerges regarding the nature of the connection or relationship between Adam and his progeny, two positions have emerged within the Calvinist camp. One is termed the "federal headship" position and the other is termed the "natural (or realistic) headship" position.

Federal headship position – this position is generally related to a creationist view of the origin of the soul, i.e. physical attributes come from one's parents, but the soul is specially created by God and is united with the body at birth. Adam is seen as having been our representative and God ordained that Adam act not only on his own behalf, but on our behalf. Bound by the covenant between God and man whereby Adam represented all of humanity, we are treated as if we have actually and personally done what Adam did. A parallel exists with the righteousness we receive as a result of our association with Christ.¹²

Natural (or realistic) position – this position is related to the traducianist view of the origin of the soul. As such, we are seen as present in germinal or seminal form in our ancestor, Adam. His action was effectively that of the entire human race. This was the view of Augustine.¹³

BAPTISMS FOR THE DEAD ARE FUTILE EXERCISES – ESPECIALLY IF THERE IS NO RESURRECTION OF THE DEAD (1 COR 15:29-30)

29 Otherwise, what will those do who are baptized for the dead? If the dead are not raised at all, why then are they baptized for them? 30 Why are we also in danger every hour? (1 Cor 15:29-30)

Is Paul endorsing the practice of baptizing for the dead here? The present tense of "baptize" (Gr. *baptidzo* – βαπτίζω) suggests that the practice of baptizing for the dead was current and evidently well known to the Corinthians. Throughout church history, there have been numerous attempts to explain this passage.

Epiphanius (A.D. 310-403) – understood it to be a baptism of catechumens (i.e., those being instructed in Christian doctrine) on their death beds. But there is no evidence that this was practiced in Paul's day.

Various proponents of the idea that Paul is referring to the practice of living believers being baptized for deceased believers. The reasons given for such a supposed practice are manifold. *Chrysostom (A.D. 347-407)* and others understood Paul to be referring to the statement in the baptismal creed "I believe in the resurrection of the dead," meaning that there was a baptism for the bodies of the dead in the hope of the resurrection. But the text does not support this complex thought, and such a creed came later than Paul's time.

Another closely related variant of the above view emerged from some who understood the practice as referring to living Christians who had were baptized for the sake of deceased believers, to show their yearning for them and assuring their connection with them and participation with them in the resurrection. But not all this is implied in the text.

Olshausen (A.D. 1796-1839) – This German theologian understood the passage to mean that the living believers had themselves baptized in place of the deceased believers, who thus had ceased to be members of the church, this custom being practiced so that the church membership

¹² Summarized from Erickson's analysis in Erickson, 635-636.

¹³ Ibid.

would not be depleted. But new converts would fill up the ranks of the church, so that there would be no need for such a practice.

Metaphorical use of "baptize" – In still another view, the concept of "baptize" in v. 29 is interpreted not in relation to the actual sacrament or ordinance of baptism but is understood metaphorically and spiritually as meaning "identify." Thus, the idea would be "If there is no resurrection of the dead, why are believers identified as dead men? Why should they be crucified with Christ?" According to this view, Paul is saying, "I die daily," meaning "I am identified daily with Christ in his death." But a major problem with this interpretation is that it makes the preposition *huper* mean "as," whereas its basic meaning with the genitive is "for," "in behalf of," or "in the place of."

At any rate, Paul simply mentions the superstitious custom without approving it and uses it to fortify his argument that there is a resurrection from the dead.

Up to 200 explanations are given for this verse. However, it is clear from the context that Paul distinguished his own practice and teaching from what is referenced here. Paul refers to "those" (not "we") who are "baptized for the dead." He was merely referencing the practice of some who had denied the Resurrection, yet who practiced this ritual. His reference is not an endorsement or presentation of the practice in any positive light.

***SUFFERING FOR CHRIST IS FUTILE IF THERE IS NO RESURRECTION FROM THE DEAD
(1 COR 15:31-34)***

31 I affirm, brethren, by the boasting in you which I have in Christ Jesus our Lord, I die daily. 32 If from human motives I fought with wild beasts at Ephesus, what does it profit me? If the dead are not raised, LET US EAT AND DRINK, FOR TOMORROW WE DIE. 33 Do not be deceived: "Bad company corrupts good morals." 34 Become sober-minded as you ought, and stop sinning; for some have no knowledge of God. I speak this to your shame. (1 Cor 15:31-34)

Acts 19 does not record any confrontation with wild animals, so Paul was probably referencing some of his numerous detractors and enemies of the Gospel who were at Ephesus. Paul's argument is simply that if there is no resurrection, then why not live like the Epicureans – pursue pleasure to the maximum and avoid pain for tomorrow we may die and that is all there is.

Paul advocates a separation, an avoidance of those who hold to erroneous doctrines in the essentials, e.g. the resurrection. Previously, Paul had compared error in the church to yeast (1 Cor 5:6). Here he quotes a pagan writer Menander to the same effect. False teachers should be avoided (1 Cor 8:2; 2 Cor 6:14-7:1).

6Your boasting is not good Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump of dough? (1 Cor 5:6)

2If anyone supposes that he knows anything, he has not yet known as he ought to know; (1 Cor 8:2)

14Do not be bound together with unbelievers; for what partnership have righteousness and lawlessness, or what fellowship has light with darkness? 15Or what harmony has Christ with Belial, or what has a believer in common with an unbeliever? 16Or what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; just as God said,

"I WILL DWELL IN THEM AND WALK AMONG THEM;
AND I WILL BE THEIR GOD, AND THEY SHALL BE MY PEOPLE.

17"Therefore, COME OUT FROM THEIR MIDST AND BE SEPARATE," says the Lord.

"AND DO NOT TOUCH WHAT IS UNCLEAN;
And I will welcome you.

18 "And I will be a father to you,
And you shall be sons and daughters to Me,"
Says the Lord Almighty. 1 Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all defilement of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God. (2 Cor 6:14-7:1)

PAUL DISCUSSES THE NATURE OF THE RESURRECTION BODY AND VICTORY OVER DEATH THROUGH OUR RESURRECTION WHICH WAS PROVIDED BY JESUS CHRIST (1 COR 15:35-58)

35 But someone will say, "How are the dead raised? And with what kind of body do they come?" 36 You fool! That which you sow does not come to life unless it dies; 37 and that which you sow, you do not sow the body which is to be, but a bare grain, perhaps of wheat or of something else. 38 But God gives it a body just as He wished, and to each of the seeds a body of its own. 39 All flesh is not the same flesh, but there is one flesh of men, and another flesh of beasts, and another flesh of birds, and another of fish. 40 There are also heavenly bodies and earthly bodies, but the glory of the heavenly is one, and the glory of the earthly is another. 41 There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars; for star differs from star in glory. 42 So also is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown a perishable body, it is raised an imperishable body; 43 it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; 44 it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body. 45 So also it is written, "The first MAN, Adam, BECAME A LIVING SOUL " The last Adam became a life-giving spirit. 46 However, the spiritual is not first, but the natural; then the spiritual. 47 The first man is from the earth, earthy; the second man is from heaven. 48 As is the earthy, so also are those who are earthy; and as is the heavenly, so also are those who are heavenly. 49 Just as we have borne the image of the earthy, we will also bear the image of the heavenly. 50 Now I say this, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. 51 Behold, I tell you a mystery; we will not all sleep, but we will all be changed, 52 in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet; for the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. 53 For this perishable must put on the imperishable, and this mortal must put on immortality. 54 But when this perishable will have put on the imperishable, and this mortal will have put on immortality, then will come about the saying that is written, "DEATH IS SWALLOWED UP in victory. 55 "O DEATH, WHERE IS YOUR VICTORY? O DEATH, WHERE IS YOUR STING?" 56 The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law; 57 but thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. 58 Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your toil is not in vain in the Lord. (1 Cor 15:35-58)

In these verses, Paul begins to address questions regarding the nature of the resurrection body and attempts to understand the phenomenon. Paul considers such questions a little foolish – probably because he detected that the questions were being raised out of cynicism and disbelief versus a sincere desire to understand the truth. The concept of the seed of a plant and harvest was very familiar and no different than the concept of the resurrection of a human body. The variety in Creation reflects the will of the Maker (Gen 1) and the differences amongst God's creatures is a testimony to His genius and make Him worthy of praise (Psa 148:13).

13 Let them praise the name of the LORD,
For His name alone is exalted;
His glory is above earth and heaven.

The differences in splendor between the earthly and heavenly bodies suggested to Paul the differences between a natural and spiritual body such as in Daniel 12:3 where resurrected saints are compared to stars (cf. Matt 13:43).

12:1 "Now at that time Michael, the great prince who stands *guard* over the sons of your people, will arise. And there will be a time of distress such as never occurred since there was a nation until that time; and at that time your people, everyone who is found written in the book, will be rescued. 2 "And many of those who sleep in the dust of the ground will awake, these to everlasting life, but the others to disgrace *and* everlasting contempt. 3 "And those who have insight will shine brightly like the brightness of the expanse of heaven, and those who lead the many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever. (Dan 12:1-3)

43 "Then THE RIGHTEOUS WILL SHINE FORTH AS THE SUN in the kingdom of their Father He who has ears, let him hear. (Matt 13:43)

In verse 51, Paul addresses the question of how those who are still living at the Rapture will be transformed and receive their resurrection bodies. This is the same truth that Paul had previously taught the believers in Thessalonica (1 Thess 4:15-17).

13 But we do not want you to be uninformed, brethren, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve, as do the rest who have no hope. **14** For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep in Jesus. **15** For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive, and remain until the coming of the Lord, shall not precede those who have fallen asleep. **16** For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of *the* archangel, and with the trumpet of God; and the dead in Christ shall rise first. **17** Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and thus we shall always be with the Lord. **18** Therefore comfort one another with these words. (1 Thess 4:13-18)

In verses 54-55, Paul makes allusion to passages (not direct quotation of) in the Old Testament, i.e. Isaiah 25:8 and Hosea 13:14. The apparent victories of Satan in the Garden of Eden (Gen 3:13) and on Golgotha (Mark 15:22-24) were reversed on the Cross and vindicated in the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

8He will swallow up death for all time,
And the Lord GOD will wipe tears away from all faces,
And He will remove the reproach of His people from all the earth;
For the LORD has spoken. (Isaiah 25:8)

14Shall I ransom them from the power of Sheol?
Shall I redeem them from death?
O Death, where are your thorns?
O Sheol, where is your sting?
Compassion will be hidden from My sight. (Hos 13:14)

13Then the LORD God said to the woman, "What is this you have done?" And the woman said, "The serpent deceived me, and I ate." (Gen 3:13)

22 Then they brought Him to the place Golgotha, which is translated, Place of a Skull. 23 They tried to give Him wine mixed with myrrh; but He did not take it. 24 And they crucified Him, and divided up His garments among themselves, casting lots for them to decide what each man should take. (Mark 15:22-24)