

The Hope in the Resurrection

Introduction

a. objectives

1. subject – The eschatological hope in the resurrection of Jesus, the firstfruits of the dead
2. aim – To cause us to see the hope we have in the resurrection of Jesus, anticipating our own
3. passage – 1 Corinthians 15:20-26

b. outline

1. The Eschatological Nature of the Resurrection (1 Corinthians 15:20-22)
2. The Eschatological Order in the Resurrection (1 Corinthians 15:23-25)
3. The Eschatological Hope in the Resurrection (1 Corinthians 15:26)

c. opening

1. once again, it's **Easter Sunday**
 - a. each Easter, I attempt to bring to light some aspect of the resurrection *relevant* to the times
 1. **relevant**: not in “post-modern” sense of *feelings* (i.e. making me feel good), but in a *theological* sense which speaks to the *importance* of the event to our lives *going forward*
 2. so ... I'm going to “be relevant” this year by reflecting upon Paul's *eschatological hope*, which he saw *beginning* at the resurrection of Jesus and *culminating* in *our* resurrection
 - b. **eschatological hope** = the hope that comes from looking “forward” to Christ bringing to *fulfillment* everything that God purposes in human history
 1. eschatology = the area of study concerned with how God's decree is completed in time and space; everything that is a part of how he brings along his purposes, from the beginning in creation to the consummation of all in the return of Christ and into eternity
 2. eschatological hope = the hope of the Christian as the ages unfold – the “looking forward” to what God has in-store for the believer as he completes the plan of salvation
 - c. **thesis: the resurrection of Jesus is the beginning-of-the-end of human history – the moment at which everything God intended to do in time begins its completion, and is the quintessential hope for the elect in the face of a world that “seems” to have no purpose**
 1. Paul speaks of the resurrection in this *eschatological* sense in **1 Corinthians 15:20-26**
2. the **context** of the pericope
 - a. apparently, some (believers) at Corinth were suggesting that there was no actual resurrection from the dead for believers (**15:12**; i.e. probably because they weren't seeing it happen around them)
 - b. so ... Paul answers this “objection” by:
 1. reminding them of the *witnesses* to the resurrection, including himself (**15:1-11**)
 2. pointing out the *vain nature* of the gospel (and salvation) if Christ was not raised (**15:12-15**)
 3. demonstrating the *lack of hope* that springs from denying Christ being raised (**15:16-19**)
 4. **now**: developing the *real hope* that comes forth from the resurrection, as *the starting point* for the consummation of all things in time and space

I. The Eschatological Nature of the Resurrection (1 Corinthians 15:20-22)

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a. the fact of the resurrection (v. 20)

1. “*but in fact Christ has been raised from the dead*” = the **objective truth** of the resurrection at the core of the Christian religion – the *basis* of faith found in the *actuality* of Jesus' resurrection
 - a. **as above**: Paul now states *unequivocally* what is true, in contrast to their “objection”
 1. **i.e.** as a *personal eyewitness* to the risen Jesus (**v. 8**), he can claim this to be a “truth”
 - b. and ... Paul asserts this as an *undeniable fact*, even for those who did not *personally see it for themselves* (e.g. **us**) – the *preponderance* of evidence (**and more!**) demonstrates it to be factual
 1. **i.e.** the witnesses (certainly), but also the *soteriological ramifications* of it: if Christ was not raised, then *everyone* is still in their sin (**v. 17**) and *doomed* under the *unsatisfied* wrath of God
 2. **IOW**: the resurrection is verified *not only* by witnesses, but by the *soteriological ramifications of it* – **i.e.** if there is no resurrection, how does God intend to save men from his wrath?
 3. **again**: what is the *hope* of mankind if there is no *visible plan* of God to save us from hell?

2. “the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep” = the **beginning act** of the resurrection as the hope of the Christian religion – the *basis* of hope found in the *reality* of Jesus’ resurrection
 - a. “firstfruits” = first portion; foretaste; the beginning of the sacrifice; lit. the first of the crop harvested, either for testing purposes (**i.e.** establishing value) or for offering in gratitude (**see also v. 23**)
 1. the first action of the harvest, the first action of *completing what was started long before*
 - a. **e.g. Romans 8:23** – “we, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit” = the *initial* action of the Spirit to raise us from the dead – we then “wait eagerly for ... the redemption of our bodies”
 - b. **i.e.** the first action of salvation in *regeneration*, which then is *completed* through the process of *sanctification*, leading up to the *glorification* of our bodies (in resurrection)
 2. **LOW:** Jesus is the *first one* out of the tomb in resurrection – he is the “first cut” of the “harvest field” in anticipation of *all the rest* coming forth
 - b. “fallen asleep” = a *euphemism* for death; a way of describing death in *immortal terms*
 1. human beings are *immortal creatures* – we are “more” than the sum of our parts
 - a. **i.e.** we possess consciousness and self-awareness (unexplainable scientifically)
 2. we *inherently* understand that *physical* death cannot “end” that which is *immortal*
 - a. **i.e.** our personality, knowledge, experiences, emotions, relationships, etc.
 3. thus ... the term here *belies* the belief by Paul that those who *sleep* can also *wake up*
 - a. **i.e.** resurrection is the *anticipated* moment when those who have died (physically) will rise up again (physically) – the mortal and immortal being “joined” (again) by God
 3. **the resurrection of Jesus is the beginning act of a “larger” purpose – as he comes forth from the tomb, there is an expectation of many others to follow him (like a great harvest!)**
 - a. **but not yet**, dear Corinthian brothers and sisters ...
- b. the imputation in the resurrection (vv. 21-22)**
 1. it is here that Paul becomes **positively eschatological** in his argument
 - a. **Romans 5:12ff:** all humanity is imputed with original sin; the *guilt* and *pollution* in Adam’s fall has been imputed to all humanity *by virtue of being descended from him*
 - b. **so here:** he reasserts this argument by *repeating himself* in two verses (**v. 21 cf. v. 22**)
 - c. **contrast:** through one man came death cf. through one man comes resurrection = just as in Adam all die, so in Christ “*all shall be made alive*”
 1. the imputation of *death* (in Adam) is *reversed* by the imputation of *resurrection* (in Christ)
 2. the *hopelessness* of death (a certainty for all humanity) is reversed by the *hope* of resurrection
 3. this is **the eschatological nature** of the resurrection: what was *started* in Adam is *finished* in Christ – what came upon us through Adam *at the beginning* is reversed by Christ *at the end*
 4. **Christ has now begun the final hope of mankind by rising from the dead**
 - d. **ITC:** the term “*all*” (and its attendant *hope*) is *clearly* referring to those “*who belong to Christ*” (**v. 23**) – all of those *who belong to Christ* (the elect) are contrasted with all *who belong to Adam* (the whole human race) – the *hope* of resurrection is *specifically* for those who are elect
 1. **note:** while it *is* true that *every single human* will be raised from the dead *bodily*, the *reprobate* are raised to a form that suffers the “*second death*” (**Rev. 21:8**) – the *hope* of the resurrection is *only* for those who are elect to faith in Christ and experience **an initial resurrection**
 2. **the resurrection of Jesus is the basis for the (eschatological) hope of the believer – Christ coming forth from the tomb reverses the curse of Adam upon his people, as the first of the final acts of God in accomplishing his eternal purposes (decree of salvation)**

II. The Eschatological Order in the Resurrection (1 Corinthians 15:23-25)

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a. the order in the resurrection

1. Paul *clarifies* that this hope *has an order (historically)* – it was *not* to be assumed to be happening *now*, but as the *unfolding of history (i.e. as the Church Age unfolded in time)*
 - a. **above:** the Corinthians were *probably* “doubting” the resurrection because they were not seeing it happen *at the present time* – they *assumed* that believers who died in Christ would *immediately* be raised, and when it didn’t happen, they simply concluded *there was no resurrection*
 - b. so ... Paul puts a proper historical “spin” on this – to make sure they understand
 - c. and ... it is important **for us too** – it is *easy* to assume (2000 years removed) that resurrection is no longer “central” to our hope (**e.g.** why it is so rarely spoken of at funerals, even of believers)

2. the **historical order** of resurrection: (a) Christ (**i.e.** the firstfruits; the first to come forth); (b) “at his coming” the elect; (c) the “end” everyone/thing else (**i.e.** the end of the decree, accomplished in time)
 - a. **note:** the “distance” (in time!) between (a) and (b) is the Church Age (**i.e.** more than 2000 years)
 - b. so ... Paul helps the Corinthians to see that it is only “at the end” (**i.e.** when God’s plans are fulfilled in history) that they will be raised – not *now*, but *then*
 - c. and ... that history includes Christ bringing “every rule and every authority and [every] power” under his Lordship – taking the inheritance given to him by the Father (**Psalm 2**) of everything in human history (**i.e.** every aspect of human existence being brought under submission to him)
 1. **i.e.** bringing every single expression of the *Imago Dei* under his dominion, actually accomplishing the Creation Mandate originally given to Adam (**Genesis 1:28**)
 2. **e.g.** bringing all aspects of culture, language, government, technology, artistry, science, etc. under his dominion, turning everything in the world to himself (as Adam was supposed to do)
 3. **i.e.** “putting all his enemies under his feet” is not just a “subjective” phrase – for Christ to “reign until” he hands the kingdom to his Father = him taking all matters of human existence under his control **and handing his Father the completion of the divine decree**
 4. **IOW:** the *intervening period* (between the first and final resurrection) is the time in which Christ brings all things under his dominion
3. **the resurrection of Jesus is the first step of the (eschatological) hope of the believer – now that he has come forth from the tomb, it is only a matter of time before everything is brought under his dominion, and it is upon that moment of completion that our hope is fixed**
 - a. **i.e.** the believer simply *waits* for Christ to finish the work he started at his resurrection, **for what he now takes dominion over is given to those he raises up at the end**

III. The Eschatological Hope in the Resurrection (1 Corinthians 15:26)

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a. the last enemy to be destroyed

1. **question:** what’s the *one thing* that Adam could never take dominion over? what is one *indisputable* aspect of human existence that *no one* has been able to conquer? **answer: death!**
 - a. the *final reality* Christ conquers in human history holds **the single greatest dominion over us**
 - b. everything is *determined* by this reality: death *governs* the world, and it holds “hostage” all of humanity under its grip (**i.e.** it *stalks us* and *always catches us*)
 - c. **i.e.** it is the **final enemy** of human history – the very thing *ushered in* by Adam, *in the beginning*
 1. thus ... the *end* will be Christ conquering death *by raising all his own from the dead*
 2. **IOW:** Christ will *conquer* the “last enemy” of mankind in one, final, decisive act – taking dominion even over the power of death *as he did on the fateful Sunday 2,000 years ago*
2. **the resurrection by Jesus is the final step of the (eschatological) hope of the believer – Christ Jesus will call for all his own to come forth from the grave, and (by his power) they will be raised alive bodily, putting to an end the power of death forevermore**
 - a. **that is what we are waiting for** ... the world may “look” like its rebellion against Christ will last forever, **but do not be misled** – Christ Jesus *is* conquering everything that was corrupted by Adam’s failure, with the final enemy to be dispatched being death itself
 - b. we have an *eschatological hope* in the resurrection of Jesus – he has come forth to complete the decree established between he and his Father, and he *will* complete it when the trump sounds