

Gospel Gleanings, "...especially the parchments"

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From Fantasy to Fact: He Arose! He Lives!

But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept. For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive. But every man in his own order: Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ's at his coming. (1 Corinthians 15:20–23, KJV 1900)

Given the severity of errantly denying the resurrection among some in the Corinthian Church, Paul promptly refutes the error and moves to the positive and documented truth of Jesus' resurrection. First and foremost, the gospel deals with facts, not fantasy or imagination. Just as Paul has dealt with the consequences of denying the resurrection, he now deals with the glorious consequences of the truth of the resurrection. Despite contemporary human-centric ideas that a church should be a "Free for all" of debated ideas, often the idea supported by the smoothest, or loudest, speaker prevailing, Scripture teaches that a church is to be a body of believers who cohesively believe the same things. (Ephesians 1:3) Whenever you see doctrinal disagreement in the New Testament, you see major problems, problems that a wise and godly church should strive to avoid.

...firstfruits of them that slept. "Firstfruits" links the thought with the firstfruits sacrifice under the Old Testament Law. A farmer would gather the first ripe shoots from his crop and offer them to the Lord. God deserves the first priority of our life's effort, not the left-overs, a sound reminder to us from the Old Testament. The hope was, if God accepts the firstfruit offering, He will bless with a good harvest. Regardless the final harvest, God deserved the firstfruits. In the setting of Paul's teaching on the resurrection, the point powerfully affirms the reality of the final resurrection of the Lord's beloved family in precisely the same literal way that Jesus arose from the dead to die no more. And the same assurance comes to us in Jesus' resurrection as to the Old Testament farmer. If God accepted the firstfruit from the dead, the Lord Jesus Christ, He gives us promise that He shall also accept the final harvest, "Behold I and the children which God hath given me...." (Hebrews 2:13)

The point of firstfruits is not one of time, but of importance. Enoch was taken bodily from the earth, as was Elijah. There is indirect indication that Moses may also have been resurrected and taken bodily to heaven; he appeared with Elijah on the mount of transfiguration, and we have the brief reference to the dispute over his body in Jude. We find occasional references to bodily resurrections in the Old Testament, along with a number of resurrections that Jesus performed during His

ministry, including Lazarus (John 11). Other than Enoch and Elijah, possibly Moses, the other resurrections were back to a temporary time in this life. But we do have at the least two men whose bodies were taken to heaven prior to the time of Jesus' bodily resurrection and ascension. Despite their arrival in glory prior to Jesus' bodily resurrection and ascension, they could not be the official "Firstfruits" of them that slept, for their resurrection was not brought about by their own power or purity. Jesus alone stands out as the exclusive "Firstfruits" of resurrection in terms of modelling the final ingathering of all the elect.

For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. Paul here states a foundational truth of the gospel. Whatever God's chosen people lost in Adam, Jesus regained and secured so that it could not again fall into jeopardy. Of course, Jesus gained far more for His elect than we lost in Adam. "...double for all her sins." (Isaiah 40:2) We should never stop with thinking that Jesus merely regained what Adam lost.

A thorough study of Genesis 3 will indicate that "Death" had more than one meaning in that context. God warned Adam that he would face the consequences of his sin "...in the day that thou eatest thereof." (Genesis 2:17) As we move into Genesis 3 and read the account of Adam's actual sin, we discover that Adam didn't die a literal or physical death on the day that he ate the forbidden fruit. He actually died several hundred years later. What did happen on that same day that he ate the forbidden fruit? He died to his innocence with God. He died to his comfortable fellowship with God. Instead of comfortably and joyfully anticipating his afternoon "Stroll" with God in the Garden, he now feared God's appearance. For the first time in Scripture, the emotion of fear appears in the record. "I was afraid." (Genesis 3:10) Prior to his eating the forbidden fruit, we see no indication in Scripture that Adam in any way feared his time with God each afternoon in the Garden. Why was Adam afraid? What changed? While Adam didn't die a physical death on that same day, there can be no doubt that he died that day. It is not accidental that Paul refers to the Lord's reversing our sinful fallen state in Adam with similar words that also appeal to the analogy of life and death. "And you hath he

quicken, who were dead in trespasses and sins." (Ephesians 2:1)

It seems right and fitting that the source of the colossal problem of sin should also be the source of the remedy. However, Adam, now dead to God, can't step up to the task. And since we were also dead in trespasses and sins, we couldn't accomplish the work. One and only one man, the Lord Jesus Christ, could and did remove the stain and the death itself of our sins by His work, including His death and resurrection. (1 Timothy 2:5; notice the specific reference to "...*the man* Christ Jesus.")

Occasionally sincere Christians will engage in friendly debate over the length of time that Jesus was in the grave. Did He die on Friday afternoon and rise early Sunday morning, a portion of three days, sometimes reckoned by the Jews as three days? Since the Jews reckoned each day as indicated in Genesis 1, the day beginning at 6:00 P. M., a full three day and three night duration requires a Wednesday afternoon death and burial near the 6:00 P. M. transition. Thursday, Friday, and Saturday He is in the tomb, in death. And then sometime between 6:00 P. M. on Saturday and 6:00 A. M. on Sunday morning, He arises. Whether Jesus was dead for bare portions of three days, the Friday death view, or three full days, the Wednesday death view, He literally died, and He literally arose from the dead. Paul ignores this question, but he affirms the literal reality of Jesus' death and resurrection. He literally, actually died. His body experienced literal, real death. But the faithful record of Scripture fills out the account. His body also experienced literal, real resurrection from death. "Why seek ye the living among the dead?" (Luke 24:5) Man, Adam, first brought death upon himself and his offspring. Man, Jesus Christ, just as literally brought life, resurrection life, to Himself and to His offspring.

But every man in his own order: Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ's at his coming. Just as the firstfruits sacrifice distinguished between the first ripe clusters and the final harvest, Paul follows the analogy. And just as the Old Testament farmer hoped for a final blessed harvest as he offered the firstfruit sheaves, Paul affirms that God has guaranteed the final "Resurrection" harvest in Jesus' resurrection. While we inherit the accomplishments of Jesus' death and resurrection, we fall in the order of harvest, not firstfruits.

...afterward they that are Christ's at his coming. Paul's point deals with ownership, with possession; *...they that are Christ's.* When Jesus died, He died to purchase a people, the point made in the Bible doctrine of redemption. Those people were held captive under a legal debt. Jesus paid their debt in full and thereby freed them from that old debt. He didn't merely make a partial payment or offer to pay their debt. He actually and fully paid it. They no longer owe a single penny against that debt.

Occasionally you will hear the idea that Jesus died for the sin debt of all humanity, but He didn't die for their specific sin of unbelief, so, unless you believe, you remain indebted to God and doomed to eternal separation. You only gain freedom from that sentence by your decision to believe. This idea builds on the concept of partial payment. It stops distinctly short of the Biblical teaching of payment in full by Jesus. Paul doesn't so much as imply that resurrection shall bless those that "Mostly" or "Almost" belong to Christ at His coming. They belong fully to Him. He paid for all their sins, none excepted.

Which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of his glory. (Ephesians 1:14)

Paul's point is clear. There is a purchased possession, fully purchased. We now enjoy the loving mercy of the earnest of that final inheritance, though the Lord shall not stop until all of that purchased possession is redeemed, a reference to their (Our) bodily resurrection at the Second Coming. Based on Paul's words in this passage, we cannot make any numerical distinction between the number of those "purchased" by Jesus and His "redemption" of them at His Second Coming. All of those whom He "purchased" shall be "redeemed" from death and the grave to live with Him in glory for eternity. Hallelujah! What a Savior!

Augustus Toplady wrote a beautiful poem that addresses this Biblical truth.

It Pleased the Lord to Bruise Him

August Toplady

From whence this fear and unbelief?
Did not the Father put to grief
His spotless Son for me?
And will the righteous judge of men,
Condemn me for that debt of sin,
Which Lord was charg'd on thee?

Complete atonement thou hast made,
And to the utmost farthing paid,
Whate'er thy people ow'd:
Nor can his wrath on me take place,
If shelter'd in thy righteousness,
And ransomed by thy blood.

If thou hast my discharge procur'd,
And in the sinner's room endur'd,
The whole of wrath divine:
Payment he cannot twice demand,
First at my bleeding surety's hand,
And then again at mine.

If thou for me hast purchas'd faith
By thy obedience unto death,
He must the grace bestow:

Would Israel's God a price receive,
And not the purchas'd blessing give?
His justice answers, No!

Turn then, my soul, unto thy rest;
The merits of thy great High Priest,
Have bought thy liberty:
Trust to his efficacious blood,
Nor fear thy banishment from God,
Since Jesus dy'd for thee.

Little Zion Primitive Baptist Church
16434 Woodruff
Bellflower, California

Worship service each Sunday
Joseph R. Holder

10:30 A. M.
Pastor