

Order of the Resurrection

1 Corinthians 15:23–34

There were some in the Corinthians church who were teaching that there will be no resurrection from the dead. Paul uses the entire fifteenth chapter of 1 Corinthians to show how wrong that teaching is, and that all believers will be resurrected and given a body like Christ's (Philippians 3:21). Those who do not believe there will be a resurrection have no hope of an eternity with the Lord. Paul's entire ministry would be worthless because he would be teaching a lie. What is the point of living in light of eternity if everything ends at death?

Fortunately, God gave us many proofs that He raised His Son back to life and gave Him a glorified body. Since Christ was resurrected, we can have the same hope. Our hope is built on the many proofs of Christ's resurrection and upon the trustworthiness of Scripture. Now Paul gets into some details about our future resurrection.

In order

God has already planned every detail of the future of the earth, the heavens, and of His people. For instance, God had promised Abraham that He would make him a great nation (Genesis 12:3). He had planned out what He would do after Israel's 70 year captivity under Babylon (Jeremiah 29:10–14). The Body of Christ was also planned out before the foundation of the world (Romans 16:25; Ephesians 1:4; 2 Timothy 1:9). The Old Testament and Revelation show God's plans for the earth, including a reformation of the world (Isaiah 65:17; Revelation 21:1). Many people carry this too far by thinking God causes everything to happen, including sin, sickness and death. Just because God does not control everything does not mean that God is not in control. When I walked my dog, he had much freedom to do what he wanted to do and explore what he wanted to explore. However, I was ultimately in control. God is in full control, and knowing that He has already played out events that will happen in the future shows that there is an order to what He does.

Verse 23 gives a general overview of the process of the resurrection followed by additional details. Christ is the firstfruits. He is the first one resurrected and called the firstfruits because He will be followed by many others who have the promise of a resurrection. Paul says that this will happen at His coming. Verse 23 and 24 need to be read together and read carefully to see what Paul is saying. We mid-Acts believers often read Paul with blinders on, thinking he is only speaking about things concerning the Church, the Body of Christ. Notice how Paul defines the end as being when Christ has taken over the Kingdom and has put down all rule and authority and power. This will happen at the end of the Millennial Kingdom with the new heavens and new earth. At the Second Coming, Christ is shown coming to earth on a white horse with His warrior angels (Revelation 19:11–16). These are the clouds in Matthew 24:30. These reaping angels will be sent throughout the earth to gather up the tares and cast them into eternal damnation, and also gather up believers and bring them into Jerusalem (Matthew 24:31; 13:39–43). When Christ comes back as King, the Father will have made His enemies a footstool of Jesus Christ (Psalm 110:1–2; Matthew 22:44; 1 Corinthians 15:25).

Even after the Earthly Kingdom is set up, sin is still affecting the universe. At the end of the Millennial Kingdom, Christ will crush Satan (and sin and death) and reform the elements to make a new heaven and new earth (Revelation 20:14; 21:1; 2 Peter 3:11–13).

Using this knowledge with what Paul says in verse 23–24, His coming is a very general term that covers the resurrection of all believers, but will happen over the course of more than 1,000 years. Notice that Paul speaks about His coming, but this coming includes the Rapture of believers in the

Body of Christ and the Second Coming with the resurrection of the Old Testament saints (Zechariah 9:14–15; 14:4). There will also be a final resurrection of unbelievers who will stand before the Great White Throne to be judged and ultimately thrown into the Lake of Fire (Daniel 12:2; Matthew 25:46; Revelation 21:4–10).

There are some people who say the Rapture is the first part of the Second Coming, but that's not what Paul is saying. The Rapture marks the end of God's dealing with the Body of Christ on this earth. Following that, it signals God once more turning to the nation of Israel to deal with her under the prophetic program. The Rapture and the Second Coming are all included when Paul says He is coming for His saints, but the two events will happen over seven years apart. The Rapture and the Second Coming are two completely separate events for two separate groups of people.

It is, however, important to interpret the use of the word "coming" in light of the context. For instance, Paul uses "His coming" in 1 Thessalonians 2:19 to speak of the Rapture, and then in 2 Thessalonians 2:8 he uses it in reference to the Second Coming. Other writers also use coming when referring to Jesus Christ, but the use it in terms of the Second Coming (Matthew 24:37; Luke 21:27; 2 Peter 1:16; 1 John 2:28). In summary, the word *coming* can refer to the Rapture, the Second Coming, or both events.

Baptized for the dead (verses 29–32)

There are a lot of different ideas about what this verse means. Some, like the Mormons, use this verse to show that a living person can be baptized in the place of a dead person, to give the dead person another chance for salvation. Others interpret this spiritually. Paul says that he dies daily and that he had fought wild beasts in Ephesus right after speaking about baptism for the dead. Since he didn't literally die daily, the whole thought is interpreted as allegorical (Luke 12:50).

One possible interpretation is that baptism for the dead is actually about being baptized because of the dead. This would mean Paul was speaking to those who were under the Law within the church who would need to be water baptized for purification if they had touched a dead body (Numbers 19:11–13). Paul's point would be that there would be no reason for the Kingdom believers to continue to obey the Law if there were not afterlife.

I personally lean toward the idea that those baptizing for the dead are unsaved. Paul refers to them as "they" but changes to first person in the following verses when talking about believers. Paul seems to be making the point that even the unsaved heathen know that there is life after death, something that a group within the Corinthian church didn't understand. Paul follows this statement of baptism for the dead by saying that he dies daily for the sake of Christ. His point is that he wouldn't bother doing this if there were no resurrection?