

**God's Gracious Covenant With Israel:  
The Foundation For Worldwide National Covenanting #30 (Pt. 18)**

1 Corinthians 15:20

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We continue this Lord's Day our examination of Full Preterism. In the previous sermon we began a preliminary examination of the resurrection of the dead in which we learned (by way of review) that Full Preterism alleges that there is no moral/theological reason given in Scripture as to why the physical bodies of Christians should be resurrected from the dead. For Full Preterism claims that the physical body of man was not cursed as a result of the fall of Adam into sin. According to the Full Preterist, physical death is not among the wages of sin, but rather the physical body was created mortal and perishable from the very beginning of Adam's existence. Thus, since physical death (according to the Full Preterist) is not God's curse upon man for his sin, Christ's redemptive work did not have anything to do with the physical body of God's elect (particularly their bodily resurrection).

In response to this heretical position, we saw from our study of Scripture that there is a necessary moral/theological reason given for the physical resurrection of God's elect. The body of man was not created mortal, but was cursed with physical death for the sin of Adam. Thus, for Christ to accomplish full redemption for His elect, He must not only redeem the souls of His elect, but also the bodies of His elect from the curse of God's just punishment for sin. Christ fully accomplished this for His elect in His death and bodily resurrection. Thus, moving from that preliminary examination of the resurrection of the dead, we now begin our present study of 1 Corinthians 15 acknowledging the necessity of Christ's bodily resurrection in His work of redemptive love for His elect as providing the

necessary moral/theological reason for our bodily resurrection, as God's beloved children.

As we proceed this Lord's Day with our study of the resurrection of the dead, we shall seek to answer the following two questions from 1 Corinthians 15: (1) What is the "resurrection of the dead" in 1 Corinthians 15:12? (2) How is Christ "the firstfruits" of the dead in 1 Corinthians 15:20?

## **I. What is the "resurrection of the dead" in 1 Corinthians 15:12?**

A. What is the problem in the Church of Corinth that lies behind Paul's need to address the doctrine of the resurrection of the dead in 1 Corinthians 15? The problem is summarized in Paul's own words in the form of a question, "How say some among you that there is no resurrection of the dead" (1 Corinthians 15:12). There were some among those in Corinth that denied a future resurrection of the dead. Those same ones who held this error did not hold the same position with regard to Christ's resurrection it would seem. For Paul presents his argument for the future resurrection of the dead (which some denied) on the basis of the past resurrection of Christ from the dead (which apparently they did not deny) as we see in 1 Corinthians 15:12: "Now **IF** Christ be preached that he rose from the dead [this first class conditional sentence begins by implying that it would be acknowledged by those in Corinth that Christ was so preached and received by them; in other words, this conditional sentence begins with an assumption that does not seem to be disputed—GLP], how say some among you that there is no resurrection of the dead?" You see how Paul begins with a condition that they would affirm to be true, namely, Christ is preached that he rose from the dead (and they received that as true). Then Paul moves to that which they did not

affirm to be true, namely, there is no future resurrection of the dead. Thus, the primary argument of Paul in 1 Corinthians 15 will focus on the relationship of the future resurrection of the dead to Christ's resurrection from the dead. In other words, whatever the nature of Christ's resurrection from the dead, so is the nature of the resurrection from the dead of all those who have trusted in Christ alone for their eternal salvation.

B. Now as we consider more closely the phrase that is used by inspiration of the Holy Spirit and translated in 1 Corinthians 15:12 as "resurrection of the dead", let's begin by first considering what it is that is said to be DEAD in the phrase, "the resurrection of the DEAD". Is it the spirit of man that is dead and is raised from the dead, or is it the physical body of man that is dead and is raised from the dead, or is it something else that is dead and is raised from the dead?

1. The English word, "dead" (in 1 Corinthians 15:12), actually occurs in the plural number in the Greek text (i.e. "resurrection of the dead ones"). This is a resurrection that refers to THOSE who have died.

2. The exact same Greek word for "dead" (or dead ones) is used earlier in the very same verse (1 Corinthians 15:12) in reference to Christ when Paul says, "Now if Christ be preached that he rose from the DEAD" (i.e. rose from among the dead ones, in the plural). Now we may certainly ascertain what "the dead" or "dead ones" means in the case of Christ; for we see that Christ Himself physically and bodily became "a dead one" when He "died for our sins according to the scriptures" (1 Corinthians 15:3). Christ Himself was also buried as to His physical body in the tomb (1 Corinthians 15:4), just as all dead ones are in general. These words concerning Christ's bodily death and bodily burial are the inspired apostolic confession concerning Christ. And when Paul next confesses (by inspiration of the Holy Spirit) "that he rose again the third

day according to the scriptures”, Paul clearly means that the same physical body that died for our sins on the cross, was that same physical body that was buried in the tomb, was that same physical body that gloriously rose from among those who had physically died (as we compare 1 Corinthians 15:4 with 1 Corinthians 15:12). This physical resurrection of Christ’s body from among those who have physically died is the clear teaching of other passages of Scripture as well (Matthew 28:6,7; Luke 24:36-46; John 2:18-22; John 20:26-28).

3. Thus, when we come to the latter part of 1 Corinthians 15:12 where Paul asks, “How say some among you that there is no resurrection of the dead” (or “dead ones”), we clearly deduce that since the “dead ones” from among whom Christ was bodily raised were physically and materially dead ones, that likewise when the “dead ones” are mentioned again at the end of the very same verse (1 Corinthians 15:12) in reference to the future resurrection of believers, that again Paul is referring to those who are physically and materially dead. Therefore, we can conclude that the resurrection of believers (here in 1 Corinthians 15:12 and elsewhere in this same chapter) is (according to the Holy Spirit) a resurrection of those believers who are MATERIALLY and PHYSICALLY DEAD—not spiritually dead, or metaphorically dead, but rather MATERIALLY and PHYSICALLY DEAD. I know that seems obvious, but we are building here an argument line upon line from 1 Corinthians 15, and stating the obvious is one way to show the folly of error and heresy.

C. As we continue to consider the phrase “resurrection of the dead” (in 1 Corinthians 15:12), we now want to focus our attention on the noun “resurrection” (anástasis in Greek).

1. Literally, the word means “rising up” or “standing up” which implies that whatever in this case has fallen down is precisely that

which rises up or stands up again. What is it that has fallen down in 1 Corinthians 15:12? Listen to what Paul says, “How say some among you that there is no resurrection [i.e. no rising up—GLP] of what? “The dead”, i.e. the physically and materially dead ones. Full Preterists reject the physical and material resurrection of the dead in Christ, and rather speak of an immaterial or spiritual body that is resurrected. Yet in 1 Corinthians 15:12, it was not an immaterial or spiritual body that died, and therefore it cannot be an immaterial or spiritual body that is raised. To the contrary, that same physical and material body as to substance that fell down in death is that same physical and material body as to substance that must rise up again.

2. Moreover, carefully note in 1 Corinthians 15:12 the intentional and unmistakable connection between the rising up of Christ from among the dead ones in the first part of the verse, and the rising up of the dead ones who are in Christ in the latter part of the verse. Just as Christ’s resurrection from among the dead ones was a physical and material resurrection of the body, so the resurrection of the dead ones in Christ must likewise be a physical and material resurrection of the body (rather than an immaterial and spiritual resurrection of the body).

a. It is, in fact, absurd for Full Preterists to speak of a resurrection of that which as to substance was never in the grave. If it was an immaterial and spiritual body that was in the grave, then it would be perfectly consistent to speak of the resurrection of that same immaterial and spiritual body. But to begin with a material and physical body in the grave and to end up with an immaterial and spiritual body is not a RESURRECTION of the same body, but is rather a RE-CREATION of a new body (i.e. something altogether new as to substance and essence).

b. Let me illustrate for you what the Full Preterist believes about the resurrection of the body. If a Christian dies on an operating table, the Full Preterist claims that at the moment of death, the

believer is raised from that operating table with a new spiritual body that ascends to heaven to be with the Lord. So while the physical body still lies dead on the operating table, the Full Preterist would have us believe that a resurrection has occurred. As I have already stated, that is not a RESURRECTION, that is a RE-CREATION of something entirely new and altogether different from the physical body that is lying dead on the operating table.

3. Furthermore, in the various scriptural accounts of those who were raised from the dead, it must be noted that all the bodies of those who were raised from the dead were essentially the same material and physical body that died, thereby establishing a clear and consistent principle that when one dies physically, it is the same body as to substance and essence that is raised from the dead (whether the widow's son in Luke 7:14,15, or the daughter of Jairus in Luke 8:54,55, or Lazarus in John 11:43,44). Now these that were raised from the dead, died again later in life. However, the primary and chief example of the resurrection of the physical body is of course the Lord Jesus Himself whose selfsame material and physical body that was crucified, dead, and buried was raised again from the dead, never to die again. That is why Christ is called "the firstborn from the dead" (Colossians 1:18; Revelation 1:5). And God who raised up Christ from the dead "shall also quicken [i.e. make alive—GLP] your MORTAL BODIES by his Spirit that dwelleth in you" (Romans 8:11).

4. I understand that the Full Preterist has re-interpreted or re-defined the nature of the resurrection of believers from a material and physical bodily resurrection to a immaterial and spiritual bodily re-creation because a material and bodily resurrection cannot fit with a 70 a.d. second coming of Christ and a 70 a.d. resurrection of the dead. They have begun with the TIMING of the resurrection of the dead rather than having begun with the NATURE of the resurrection of the dead. As a

result, the Full Preterist is led to embrace a position that cannot be truly called a resurrection at all, but rather must be called a re-creation of something entirely new that did not exist previously. In so doing, the Full Preterist has in fact denied and rejected what Scripture and reason call the resurrection of the dead, and thus has also by consequence denied and rejected the full and complete redemption of Christ for both the body and the soul of His elect.

## **II. How is Christ “the firstfruits” of the dead in 1 Corinthians 15:20?**

A. Paul begins in 1 Corinthians 15:20 with a strong statement of present reality: “But now is Christ risen from the dead.”

1. Paul has just listed a number of hypothetical consequences that would hopelessly befall the Christian in 1 Corinthians 15:14-19 if Christ was not physically raised from the dead and if believers should not be physically raised from the dead.

a. First, the preaching of the apostles is in vain and the faith of Christians in the Gospel preached is in vain, if Christ is not physically risen from the dead (verse 14).

b. Second, the apostles are false teachers if believers shall not be physically raised from the dead, for so they preached (verse 15).

c. Third, Christians are still under the guilt and penalty of all their sins, if the dead in Christ shall not be physically raised from the dead, or if Christ was not physically raised from the dead (verses 16,17).

d. Fourth, those Christians that have already died are eternally lost, and we who yet live are the most miserable among men for we have no future hope (verses 18,19).

e. In summary, Paul says that if believers shall not be physically raised from the dead, then Christ was not physically raised

from the dead, then we who have hoped in Christ are hopelessly lost and eternally damned. Dear ones, our entire salvation hinges on the certainty of Christ's physical resurrection and as a result of Christ's physical resurrection, upon the certainty of the physical resurrection of all who have hoped in Christ alone.

2. Moving from the dark hypothetical consequences that would follow if Christ was not physically raised from the dead or if believers should not be physically raised from the dead, Paul now declares with absolute certainty by inspiration of the Holy Spirit what is in fact true: "But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept" (1 Corinthians 15:20). The darkness of those hypothetical consequences is only matched by the brightness of this present certainty that Christ has been physically raised from the dead and so shall all the dead in Christ. Paul's contrast between the hypothetical and the reality is similar to one who has a frightening nightmare that terrorizes him while he sleeps, but upon awakening he thankfully realizes that it was only a dream and that he is safely lying in his own bed beyond the terrors of that dream.

B. Paul does not stop with the absolute certainty of Christ's physical resurrection in the past ("But now is Christ risen from the dead"), but moves on to another absolute certainty that necessarily follows from Christ's physical resurrection. Just as certain as Christ is physically risen from the dead, so has He become the firstfruits of them that have died believing in Him: "And become the firstfruits of them that slept" (1 Corinthians 15:20).

1. Christians who have physically died are referred to as having fallen asleep here as well as in other places in God's Word (as in John 11:11-14; Acts 13:36; 1 Corinthians 11:30; 1 Corinthians 15:18,20,51; 1 Thessalonians 4:14 etc.). Why would such an expression



be used for the physical death of believers? Because the same physical body of the Christian that is laid in the grave shall be supernaturally and physically awakened from the dead and raised up in glory never to die again. It is not the soul of the Christian that sleeps, for the soul of the Christian is distinguished from the body of the Christian at death, just as the Apostle Paul teaches to be absent FROM THE BODY is yet to be present with the Lord, i.e. the soul of the Christian is immediately present with the Lord (2 Corinthians 5:8). Thus, it is the physical body of the Christian that sleeps in death and that shall likewise be awakened in the resurrection of the dead. In all of the Scriptural examples of those believers who were said to have fallen asleep in physical death (e.g. Lazarus in John 10), it was the selfsame physical body (and not a newly created and altogether different body) that was awakened when raised from the dead. So here in 1 Corinthians 15:20 when we read of those Christians who have fallen asleep in physical death, we are led to anticipate from the many other examples in Scripture (and from sound reason itself) that that which fell asleep in physical death (namely, the physical body) is that which shall be resurrected or awakened from the dead (contrary to the view of Full Preterists).

2. Now according to the Apostle Paul what is the relationship of the risen Christ to those Christians who physically sleep in physical death? He is the firstfruits; they are the certain harvest to follow (He is “become the firstfruits of them that slept” 1 Corinthians 15:20). The firstfruits of the harvest in the Old Testament was not something altogether different in substance from the harvest itself, but was simply the earliest stage of the same harvest which was offered to the Lord as a sacrifice of thankfulness, indicating that the whole harvest truly belonged to the Lord (Numbers 18:12). Thus, Paul clearly teaches that Christ’s physical resurrection is the first step in the resurrection of the dead. Christ’s physical resurrection is not unrelated to the resurrection of all

believers, but simply precedes and guarantees their physical resurrection. What is true of the firstfruits is true of the harvest. Christ was physically raised from the dead as the firstfruits of the harvest, so shall all those Christians who have physically died be physically raised as the fullfruits of the harvest.

3. Full Preterists don't mind referring to the resurrection of believers as being a bodily resurrection as we shall see in the next sermon from 1 Corinthians 15. However, the bodily resurrection of Christians (according to the Full Preterist) is not like the bodily resurrection of Christ (contrary to what Paul here states in 1 Corinthians 15:20 in his illustration of the firstfruits and the full harvest). According to Full Preterists, Christ was raised from the dead with a material, physical body, whereas Christians are raised from the dead with an immaterial, spiritual body completely unlike and altogether different in substance from that of the physical body of Christ. That would completely change Paul's illustration to mean that the firstfruits of the harvest may be material, physical wheat, but the full harvest that is to follow may be immaterial, spiritual wheat. How absurd! Dear ones, Christ can only be the firstfruits of the full harvest, if the resurrected bodies of believers are the same substance as His resurrected body, namely, material and physical.

4. Full Preterists do maintain that Christ was physically raised from the dead, and yet they seem to have difficulty giving sound biblical reasons why Christ was physically raised from the dead. Why was Christ not "raised" (or really re-created) from the dead with an immaterial and spiritual body as they claim is true of all believers at death? Full Preterists really do have a hard time knowing what to do with Christ's physical resurrection of the same body from the dead. Christ's resurrection of His physical body is absolutely unique and exceptional (and that is true as He was "the first-born from the dead"). No other person (Full Preterists

allege) shall be physically raised from the dead never to see death again. This was only true of Christ (the Full Preterist claims). But our question to the Full Preterist is, why was Christ alone physically raised from the dead never to see death again (as they claim)?

5. Full Preterists do not believe Christ's physical resurrection was necessary in order to apply any redemptive benefits to His elect, for as you recall from the previous sermon, the physical death of mankind (according to the Full Preterist) is not a curse for man's sin. Thus, the body of man (according to the Full Preterist) does not need to be redeemed from the curse. But why then does the Holy Spirit clearly teach through the Apostle Paul that Christ was physically raised from the dead "for our justification" (Romans 4:25). Is our justification not a redemptive benefit obtained in part by means of Christ's physical resurrection from the dead? Yes, there is a redemptive purpose in view for Christ's physical resurrection from the dead. Full Preterists are clearly wrong and have in so doing attacked the Gospel of Jesus Christ (as was noted in the previous sermon).

6. Some Full Preterists also attempt to explain the uniqueness of Christ's physical resurrection by saying that only He was free of sin, and this is why Christ was physically raised from the dead. For as one Full Preterist explains, Christ's physical body "wasn't tainted by sin. Our sinfulness negates that luxury" (Harden, *Overcoming Sproul's Resurrection Obstacles*, pp. 30-31). But in so arguing a distinction between a sinless Christ and sinful Christians as the basis for Christ's material and physical resurrection, are they not implying that if Christians were also sinless like Christ, they too would be physically raised from the dead? Thus, the good and necessary inference of such an argument for Christ's physical resurrection (as opposed to our own resurrection) is that the effects of sin are the cause of our "resurrection" (or rather re-creation) of an altogether new immaterial, spiritual body, because if we

were sinless like Christ, we would have a material, physical resurrection like His. Where in the Word of God is any of this taught? Furthermore, has not the Full Preterist in so arguing contradicted his stated position that the effects of sin did not reach to the body of man? For if Christians will not be physically raised from the dead as Christ was, due to the sin of Christians and the sinlessness of Christ, then the effects of sin (according to this argument of Full Preterists) did in fact reach to the body of man.

Consider, dear ones, the extremes to which false teachers must go to deny what is so clearly taught here in 1 Corinthians 15 concerning the material, physical resurrection of the body of believers. Dear fellow Christians, our certain and confident hope of our glorious physical resurrection is firmly secured and guaranteed by the physical resurrection of Christ, the firstfruits. And our everlasting salvation is absolutely secure because Christ was physically raised again from the dead “for our justification” (Romans 4:25). Not only was Christ physically raised for our justification, but He was also physically raised from the dead to guarantee our physical resurrection from the dead with a resurrected body like His (“For our conversation is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ: Who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself.” Philippians 3:20,21).

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