

Chapter 11

Each in His Own Order

In Adam all die, and in Christ all live, but each in their own order. This is a truth that has been lost and that needs to be recovered in our day. But before looking at what Paul teaches on this matter, there is an equally important truth that precedes this one.

All Died, All Live

(14) For the love of Christ controls us, having concluded this, that *one died for all, therefore all died*; (15) and *He died for all, so that they who live might no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died and rose again on their behalf.* (2 Corinthians 5:14-15 NASB [bold italic added])

Paul tells us that Christ died for all and in His death, we, meaning all of us without exception, also died. In other words, when Christ died, *figuratively speaking*, He took the old man of Adam that is in all of us with Him into the grave. *If everyone of the old man died with Christ*, how is anyone going to come to life before God? On the surface, this appears to be a hopeless situation, for if all have been made to die in Christ, then how will anyone come alive again, at least in the eyes of God? The answer is in Jesus.

Years ago, I had a picture of myself in a grave looking up. How was I going to get out of this grave? There was no way I could do it on my own. But then Jesus showed up. He alone rescued me from the grave. This is the same picture for all mankind. It is not based on whether we believe or not, for all humans from Adam to the last one born of his race were taken into the grave over 2,000 years ago, whether believer or not. There is only one way out of death, and it is through God's Son.

Paul went on to state that they who live might no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died and rose again on their behalf. But on whose behalf did He rise again? Was it not for all mankind? If all died, then He died for all, meaning He died on the behalf of all. However, it is true that in this age, many do not live for Him; nevertheless, this does not change the truth of His death for all. Besides, there are believers walking on earth today that do not live for Christ, just as there are unbelievers. Consequently, faith does not enter into this equation of one death for all and one death leads to the death of all.

Now, the question is, how does all mankind come into life? In some respects, Paul does not make it clear in the above verses. He implies that some live, but what about the rest of the dead? Do they not come alive, or are they stuck in the grave, physically (mortal body) or spiritually (lacking the holy spirit)?

Further, if by His one death all were brought into death, then who among the dead has the power to overcome death? How does anyone conquer the power of the grave? No one in history has been able to do this on their own.

What man can live and not see death? Can he deliver his soul from the power of Sheol? Selah.
(Psalm 89:48 NASB)

Paul gives us the answer to this riddle or enigma in his defense of the resurrection, as recorded in 1 Corinthians 15, which, perhaps, is one of the greatest chapters in the whole Bible, for here Paul gives all of us the hope of resurrection into immortality.

Hope of Resurrection

(13) But if there is no resurrection of the dead, not even Christ has been raised; (14) and if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is vain, your faith also is vain. (15) Moreover, we are even found to be false witnesses of God, because we testified against God that He raised Christ, whom He did not raise, if in fact the dead are not raised. (16) For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised; (17) and if Christ has not been raised, your faith is worthless; you are still in your sins. (18) Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. (19) If we have hoped in Christ in this life only, we are of all men most to be pitied.
(1 Corinthians 15:13-19 NASB)

Paul makes the case that everything hinges on the resurrection of Christ from the dead. If He was not raised, then we have no hope and believers in this age have a worthless faith. If Jesus was not raised up, then we have no hope of resurrection and the believers that died, that is, fell asleep in Christ are gone, for they will never rise up from the grave in new bodies.

Christ the First Fruits

(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. (1 Corinthians 15:20-21 NASB)

But here is the good news; Christ is the first fruits of those who are asleep, that is, of the dead. Keep in mind that Paul wrote this after the resurrection of Jesus; therefore, according to this great apostle, even those who died in faith are still asleep; they are still in the state of death, asleep and waiting for the promise of resurrection. This is our hope!

Then, Paul gives us his equation again. Since by the man Adam came death, so also by the man Christ comes the resurrection of the dead, which means all mankind are destined to come out of the state of sleep. We know this is what he meant, for he states it very clearly in verse 22.

When Christ was raised from among the dead, He became the *first fruits* of all the dead. Christ was raised from all the dead and is now immortal, for death has no more power over Him.

Further, Christ is the *firstborn* from among the dead so that He might have the preeminence or first place in all things (Colossians 1:18). Essentially, God's Son is first in everything, including being the first to rise up through resurrection from among all the dead that lie in the earth, and, as such, Christ is in a class all by Himself. We could say that He is the first class in all things.

Then, Paul states the same verity that he wrote in Romans 5 that death came through one man but life or resurrection of the dead comes through a man as well. We should not overlook the import of Paul's reference that the resurrection of the dead comes through Christ. There is a difference between being resurrected *from* the dead and the resurrection *of* the dead. The former means that some are raised up but many remain in the state of death, whereas the latter means no one remains in the state of death. Resurrection of the dead speaks of all the dead rising out of the state of death.

In Adam, All Die

For as in Adam all die... (1 Corinthians 15:22a)

Could Paul state it any clearer? **In Adam, all die** or **all are dying** (CLV). Again, here is the word *all*. Can anyone dispute that all born of Adam's race, whether one believes in Jesus or not, will physically die one day, unless one happens to be in the company of believers alive on earth when He comes to usher in a new age? But, even in reference to the "alive and remain" ones, this verse applies, for all are dying, which is the way the *Concordant Literal NT* translates it: **In Adam, all are dying!** When we are born, we all enter into a process of dying that leads to physical death one day. (This is not to ignore the spiritual death we all have apart from Christ. We could just as easily insert spiritual death into all that is said about physical death. Both are in play; contrary to those who make it all about spiritual death while ignoring physical death.)

Paul makes no exceptions to this death sentence. Notice that Paul does not say all who are in Adam or the lost in Adam. He simply states that in Adam, all are dying, just as through one man death came to all men (Romans 5:12). The fact that all die a physical death places all in Adam in respect to death.

In Christ, All Made Alive

... so also in Christ all will be made alive. (1 Corinthians 15:22b)

Next, Paul states that **in Christ, shall all be vivified** (CLV) or **made alive**. Again, here is the word *all*. Who are we to exclude from this all? Paul makes no distinction between a believer and an unbeliever. Not one single person of Adam's race had any say in the "death sentence" of all; that is, so-called *free will* never entered into it. Why do we think it is any different with the "sentence of life" through Christ? There are no exclusions in this *all*. If all are *in* Adam, does it not follow that all must be *in* Christ, eventually, as well? Of course, logic dictates that it follows. This is God's "**life sentence**" for all!

This truth needs to be restored in the ecclesia of God; it is essential for understanding Paul's hope of resurrection for all.

Each in Their Own Order [Troop, Rank]

In the next set of verses, Paul establishes that in reference to being resurrected from the state of death, there are several classes of people and each class will be raised in its own respective order. Christ stands alone in His own class as the first in all things, including resurrection from the dead. However, just as He cannot be the firstborn without other brethren to follow, so to He cannot be the first fruit without a full harvest of other crops or fruit to follow.

(23) But each in his own order [tagma; troop]: Christ [christos; anointed] the first fruits, after that those who are Christ's at His coming, (24) then comes the end [telos; consummation], when He hands over the kingdom to the God and Father, when He has abolished all rule and all authority and power. (1 Corinthians 15:23-24 NASB [added])

Now, here is an important key to our understanding the revelation given to Paul—all will be resurrected according to order or rank. Paul makes an important distinction that all will not be made alive at the same time but each in their own order, class, or troop. It is about TIMING.

Paul brings the same concept into light in reference to Christ being **the ransom for all**, the testimony given at **the proper [appointed] time** (1 Timothy 2:6).

In the Greek, the word for *proper order* is *tagma*, which refers to "something orderly in arrangement (a troop), that is, (figuratively) a series or succession:- order."

In his defense of the resurrection, not only of Christ but of all humanity, Paul likens it to a harvest of crops. Just as a farmer harvests different crops at different times of the harvest season, so will God harvest mankind through resurrection. Consequently, troops or classes of people are raised in order, the first being a first fruits that follow in the likeness of Christ, which is similar to a barley harvest, or what could be called the cream of the crop, followed by a more general harvest, which is similar to a wheat harvest, and concluding with the final harvest of all that is left, which is similar to a grape harvest.

To reiterate, Christ is in a class or order all by Himself. He is the first fruit and the firstborn and, as such, no one else is included with Him. His resurrection is unique in the sense that He is the first man to put off mortality and put on immortality. As Paul wrote to Timothy: He is **the King of kings and Lord of lords, who alone possesses immortality** (1 Timothy 6:15-16).

Three Troops

But each in his own order [tagma; troop]: Christ the FIRST fruits, AFTER that those who are Christ's at His coming, THEN COMES THE END.... [added]

In verses 23-24, Paul identifies three troops using the words *first*, *after*, and *then the end*. The first fruits are the first troop; after them comes the second troop of those who belong to Christ at His coming; and then between His coming and the end is a third troop of the ones who are subjected to Christ. Paul does not identify the third troop directly in this verse; this is seen in verses 25-27 in the subjection of all things, *ta panta*.

In considering this order of *first*, *after*, *then the end*, I purposely avoid the actual timing of these other than to note there is an order. The reason for ignoring the timing is because it is not necessary to make the point of the salvation of all. Besides, there are too many schools of thought along these lines and I don't want to get distracted with the core message or get caught in the weeds of eschatology.

Further, I am fully aware that there are those who see resurrection as a spiritual resurrection we all receive when Jesus breaks into our lives, while either rejecting or significantly de-emphasizing the concept of a bodily resurrection. It seems to me that both a spiritual and a bodily resurrection should get equal billing, so to speak. To this point, I am not ignoring the very important concept of spiritual resurrection; I'm just choosing, at this point, to emphasize the resurrection into spirit-animated bodies.

First Fruit Anointed

But each in his own order [*tagma*; *troop*]: **Christ** [*christos*; *anointed*] **the first fruits....**

At first glance, it might appear that Paul is simply repeating the fact that Christ is the first in the order, but there may be another way to look at this based on Christ's unique place as a one-off, individual first fruit. Follow Paul's logic to see that *each in his own order* refers back to *in Christ shall all be made alive*. In other words, it refers to all mankind that die, not to Christ Himself. Besides, Jesus is an individual, not a troop.

Then, who are **Christ the first fruits**? Some see this as referring to those who were resurrected after Jesus rose from the dead. However, neither scripture nor the historical record offers proof that this group was raised to anything other than mortal life (a resuscitation); thus, they died again and did not enter immortal life at that time. After all, to repeat Paul's words, **the King alone possesses immortality**, and Jesus Himself, as the Son of Man, tells us: "**No one [man] has ascended into heaven, but He who descended from heaven: the Son of Man**" (John 3:13).

The answer seems to be revealed in the phrase **Christ the first fruits**.

The word *Christ* can also be translated as the word *anointed*. Rewording the verse yields the phrase "anointed first fruits." This point is made in the *English Sublinear of the Concordant Greek Text*, for it calls the first group in Paul's list "firstfruit anointed."

Also, the Greek word for *Christ* comes from the Greek word *christos*. Generally, when *christos* is not accompanied by the definite article *the*, it could simply mean "anointed" and apply to

anyone (e.g., priests, kings) and not specifically to Christ Jesus our Lord. It only follows that if Christ Himself is a first fruit, there are other first fruits to follow. In harvesting crops, a farmer picks a crop of several pieces of fruit and declares it to be his first fruits. In fact, each type of crop has first fruits to come forth before the main harvest of the rest of the crop. So then, who is included in the anointed first fruits?

One of the most common interpretations of the identity of this troop is that it comprises all who have believed on Jesus. However, there is another interpretation that might be a little more controversial to some. I simply offer it as a thought.

Those who conquer through Christ and His love are the first fruits. They are the ones counted worthy to attain to the oncoming eon to reign with Christ. They are sons of the resurrection (Luke 20:34-36; Revelation 20:4-6). They are the first called according to the plan of God to be conformed to the image of His Son (Romans 8:29). According to this thinking, not all who believe in our age are conquerors. Many have secured immortal life, but not all have secured eonian life to reign with Christ in His coming Kingdom. They aren't reigning with Him in this age and they will not be reigning with Him in the next one either. It is a matter of TIMING, and the condition of the heart—is one obedient to the Lord, holding fast to the head? It boils down to conquering.

Paul declared: **We are more than conquering through Him Who loves us** (Romans 8:37). How do we conquer? We do it through love—love for our God and Savior, love for one another, and love for our enemies. If we love, we also forgive, including our enemies that do us much harm, for this is what we are commanded to do (Matthew 5:44; 6:14). If we want to be in the *first fruits*, we must love, obey, forgive, and endure, and this is done by laying down our lives even unto death, if necessary.

They conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, for they did not love their lives in the face of death. (Revelation 12:11 HCSB)

Let us conquer while it is still day and before the midnight shout goes forth that King Jesus has arrived!

After That, Christ's at His Coming

But each in his own order [*tagma; troop*]: ... **after that those who are Christ's at His coming...** (1 Corinthians 15:23 NASB [added])

The next troop to be made alive through resurrection is identified by Paul as those who belong to Christ when He comes [*parousia; presence*]. Again, many (probably most) see this as all believers based on Jesus being the first fruit in Paul's order. But in line with the idea that the first fruits refer to conquerors, as a company of believers, would make this troop the rest of the believers who did not conquer during their time in mortal bodies.

Again, as Paul wrote, these ones will be saved, yet so as through fire. All their carnal, fleshly works will be burned up, but they will be purified by God's spirit-fire.

Then Comes the End [Consummation] — Subjects all

(24) ... then comes the end [telos; consummation], 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 Corinthians 15:24-28 NASB [added])

Paul defines the end in two ways by referring to what could be called *controlling entities or influences over mankind*. First, it comes when Jesus has abolished all rule and authority and power. Second, it comes when the last enemy, death, is abolished. Take note that these entities are abolished but all others, specifically, a troop of enemies (people), are subjected.

The key to identifying the third troop is discovered in how the Son of God abolishes all rule and authority. He does it by subjecting all things under His feet. The point is that the Son must subject all things under His feet so that the Kingdom can be delivered up to the Father, so that He may be all in all. When this occurs, it is called **the consummation of the eons [ages]**.

This third troop will be resurrected and pass through the lake of fire for as long as God determines necessary to purify them and bring them into New Jerusalem.

How do we know that the unjust one day will be brought into immortal life? We know it because Paul declares that Christ must reign until He has subjected all things to Himself. The ones being subjected to Christ are the unjust or the wicked. In other words, His purpose of reigning is to subject all things in heaven and on earth to Himself, so that He can then subject all things, including Himself, to His Father, so that God may be *All* in all. Notice that the mission of the Son of God is not to destroy all things but to subject all things, **for the Son of Man did not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them** (Luke 9:56). It is not His purpose to destroy or annihilate the unjust but to subject them, so that the word of God, which does not return void, is fulfilled.

Scripture is abundantly clear that **the all or all things** will be subjected to Christ. If we agree that **all** is truly all, then there will be nothing excluded from this subjection or, worded in the positive, everything is included in **all things**.

Consider this: Paul declared that the creation will be set free from its slavery to corruption (Romans 8:21). Most people acknowledge this. However, if creation is to be set free, do you think that God will not set free all mankind that has been in slavery to sin and death; a race

created to be in His image and likeness and to have dominion over the earth? The whole earth will be filled with the glory of God.

Again, do you think that most of mankind is destined to be left out of this glory, a race that began in the glory of God? The lion and the lamb will be brought into peace with each other. Do you think that if God is going to do this with the animal kingdom (or: the beast-like nature within us all), He will not do it with humanity that was created to have dominion? Will He forever be at enmity with what He created to be in the image of His Son when Paul tells us that He is not reckoning their (the world's) offenses against them but is reconciling all things in the heavens and on the earth to Himself, having made peace through the blood of His cross? May God be **all in all!**

He Purchased the Whole Field

There is more proof along these lines. In the parables of *the mysteries of the reign of the heavens*, the Lord Jesus explained that He, as the Son of Man, sowed the good seed in the field, which He purchased. To redeem the treasure hidden in the field, the Lord bought the entire field, which is the whole world (Matthew 13:44).

The Lord not only purchased His treasure (however one views the treasure), but He also purchased all the crops in the world, which, more than likely, refers to the rest of mankind. Thus, He purchased the whole world, the field, which means that He possesses not only His treasure hidden in the field but also all else that the field contains, which must refer to all mankind.

Psalm 2 confirms this, as the Father decreed to His Son: **'Ask of Me, and I will surely give the nations as Your inheritance, and the very ends of the earth as Your possession'** (Psalm 2:8). Christ possesses all the earth.

The good news is that just as a farmer harvests different crops at different times of the harvest season, so will God harvest all humans into His glory. Again, there are troops or classes of people raised up in order, the first being a first fruits, followed by a more general harvest, and concluding with the final harvest of all that is left. As referenced earlier, some teach that this signifies barley, wheat, and grape harvests.