

1Corinthians 18-12-09a

This is Sunday, December 9, 2018. Welcome to the Sunday morning services at Grace & Truth Bible Church. Continue our study this morning in 1 Corinthians chapter 15, one of the great thematic chapters of the Word of God.

You have here the most extensive treatment of the resurrection to be found anywhere in Scripture. We're about two-thirds of the way through it, having covered the first 28 verses and moving toward our final victory in the verses 50 through 58. I guess that makes us more like halfway through, but it seems further because this last part is going to go somewhat quicker.

Let's take a moment as we begin our investigation of the Word of God together by going to the Lord in prayer and ask His blessing on our fellowship and on the work of the Holy Spirit in our hearts to give us insight and to help us see the pertinence of this portion of God's Word. Shall we pray? Father, we thank You for this time of gathering together with one accord, with like mind under the presence and power of Your Holy Spirit in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ to celebrate the new life we have from You through Him. We thank You for the passage that is before us here in the book of 1 Corinthians, and we pray that as we look at it that Your Holy Spirit will illuminate it and minister it to each heart in a way that is effective, that's motivating, and that is an encouragement as well as a challenge to live the life to which we have been called and to redeem the time that remains to us in this life so that as we draw ever nearer to the time when the Lord Jesus returns to bring us to Himself and present us before Your throne, we will be ready.

We will know what is happening. We will be thoroughly equipped for every good work. We pray these things in Jesus' name, amen.

Let's review beginning at verse 20, Paul's case. He is addressing a challenge in Corinth, which is that there are people who say there is no resurrection, and that view, that opinion is really important to understand both then and now for two reasons. First of all, because it reflects a belief in the present day, widespread, pervasive, taught in the educational system, taught in everything from entertainment to social media.

We are engulfed. Our young people are inundated with the materialistic view of the world that says that everything is mechanistic. It began at the Big Bang, and if it's not natural, if you can't put it in a test tube or weigh it on a gram scale, it doesn't exist.

Anything that we think is spiritual or ineffable or rises above the immediate, the momentary, and the physical is just a lot of sparks going off in your head. It's imagination. It's just you using age-old instincts that used to help you when your ancestors were hunter-gatherers.

The bushes would make a noise, and you would think there's something there. This was a good survival mechanism, and so now we think that there's something there. We think there's something beyond.

We want to imbue life and existence with more meaning than is actually there because we've just got leftover, misdirected, appendicidal thoughts and instincts, and we have to have a mythology to get along. Of course, this is the biggest hogwash, and it is a way to justify, vindicate, and explain people's rejection of the conviction of God in their hearts. If you're going to disbelieve God, you have to construct an alternate reality.

There are abundant evidences that we've covered many times that God does exist, and one of the most profound evidences of His existence is that He did raise Christ from the dead. It's an incontrovertible fact. It was verified by eyewitnesses.

It is the earliest and most solid. I was reading some commentaries on this portion of Corinthians, just a survey. I was especially interested in something we're going to look at in verse 29, and I wanted to see what people say.

As I perused all of the available material, here's one thing that was a common consent, an almost universal acceptance, that when Paul says this portion that we read here, Christ has become risen from the dead and has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep, he first affirmed this in the beginning of the chapter. I deliver to you, first of all, verse 3, that which I also received. Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures that He was buried in, that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures, and that He was seen by this list of witnesses.

This is one of the most unanimous pieces of opinion in New Testament scholarship. Everybody believes that this is primitive, early, core doctrine in the church, that this was formulated, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that He was buried, that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures. This is as old as Pentecost.

This formulated and circulated, and is one of the earliest core strands of Christian tradition, Christian doctrine, to be found anywhere. It's not late, it wasn't made up, it wasn't dreamed up after the fact. This is what launched the church.

This is what made Christianity happen. This is what turned the world upside down, as it says in Acts, this belief. It is traceable all the way back to the time immediately after the crucifixion of Christ.

It is not an invention. This is what rocked the world, this truth. And nobody seriously disputes it.

Anybody who does doesn't really understand the history of the first century AD. Anybody who does recognizes that something this profound had to have happened to explain subsequent events in the Roman Empire. So this is a solid truth.

People denying it in that early day, which is what was happening in Corinth. This is what Paul says, if Christ is preached that he has been raised from the dead, how does some among you say there is no resurrection of the dead? How do some say this? And then he goes on to give the consequences. If it is not true, you have that section from verses 12 through 19, and in this

life only, if we have hope in Christ only in this life, we are pathetic.

Christianity doesn't make sense without the resurrection, without the resurrected Christ, and without those who are Christ's being raised at his coming. It just isn't a viable way to live your life if there is no resurrection. It is central, it is key, it is foundational.

Well, this is important and the reason I am refreshing our memory on this right now is that we are going to begin this morning, this next section, which includes being baptized for the dead. And it is one of the biggest conundrums in the New Testament, short only some of the things in the Revelation. I will tell you by my own personal count and by something I ran across toward the end of my survey, verse 29, what will they do, they who are baptized for the dead, if the dead do not rise at all? Why then are they baptized for the dead? There are over 40 separate understandings of what that verse means.

And this is kind of like when you get a parallel New Testament, six translations or whatever, and each one of them reads something different. It basically tells you there is a real problem there. And I do not claim to have solved it, but I will tell you what I think.

I am comfortable with my understanding of it, but it is a conundrum. Nobody can figure this out. The commentators, when they come to this, they say, you know, I must confess, I just really don't know.

I mean, I was looking at one here, what was it, the Baker New Testament commentary on 1 Corinthians, and the fellow in there basically just says, I don't know. He says, I give up. So we are treading where few have been able to form a solid conviction.

But, what are our tools when you come to a difficult passage? What do we typically do when we come to a hard passage? What helps us? Context. What else helps us? Context. And what else? Context.

The Word of God interprets itself, right? So, in my observation, when passages have been difficult to understand, tough nuts to crack in terms of understanding and interpretation, many times our efforts to look at context are not wide enough. You haven't raised the helicopter far enough above the terrain to see exactly what's going on, and if the immediate context isn't tremendously helpful, sometimes you need to go to the wider context. And this is the key to what I'm going to suggest.

Because it is an interesting, I mean, is Paul saying that, you know, the Mormons are right and you can go get baptized? Latter-day Saints are big. One of their principal doctrines is that you can be baptized for the dead. You can sort of rescue them.

It's kind of like the Catholics praying somebody out of purgatory, or lighting enough candles, or saying enough Hail Marys, or paying enough indulgence is the favorite one for the old long-lost popes, you know, they, well, pay me enough money and I'll pronounce your relatives and loved ones free from the grip of hell and on the road to glory. But the Mormon Church, the Latter-day

Saints, this is a big part of their belief system is baptism for the dead, and they'll take you to this passage. So that can't be right.

So what is it? Well, we'll take a look. But this is one of the reasons I'm quickly reviewing the immediate context here, and it's also helpful for everything else that Paul says in the latter part of the chapter. So having introduced the problem, there are some among you who don't believe in the resurrection.

Paul says, evidently, this is one of the biggest problems in the Bible, because look at how much time he spends addressing it. So let's pick up in verse 20. Now Christ is risen from the dead and has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.

He has become the firstfruits. This by the way, I will tell you another anomalous interpretation that takes place right here, and by no less a formidable spokesman than Dr. W.A. Criswell. Take a look at this, and then I'm going to go back to it.

Christ is risen from the dead and has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. Since by man came death, by man came the resurrection from the dead. In Adam all died, Christ all made alive, but each one in his own order.

Christ the firstfruits, afterward those who are Christ's at his coming, then comes the end. So there's a sequence here in verses 23 and 24. Well, there is a school of understanding, and Dr. Criswell is the most notable proponent of it, that says there should be a comma in verse 23 after Christ.

When you read this as it stands, Christ the firstfruits, afterward those who are Christ's at his coming. So here's the Lord Jesus, and here's everybody who belongs to Christ. You've got two resurrections in view.

Dr. Criswell and those who he is following say, no, there are three. There are three groups here. There's Christ, then there's the firstfruits, and then there's those who are Christ's at his coming.

Well, who belongs to Christ at his coming? That's the church, right? So I would think, well, you've got the Lord Jesus, and you've got the resurrection of the church at the rapture. So who would the firstfruits be? Well, by putting a comma after Christ and saying, so here's the order of the resurrection. You've got Christ, then you've got this group called firstfruits.

Christ isn't the firstfruits. The firstfruits were raised after Christ was raised. Who would this be? Well, he goes back to the Gospel of Matthew, and you remember in the account of the crucifixion, and it talks about the earthquake that happened, and the graves were opened, and then it talks about departed saints coming out and appearing unto many.

Well, if you just rely on your memory, you say, well, this happened during the crucifixion. But if you go back and read Matthew, it says the great earthquake that happened during the – we talked about earthquakes Thursday. The earthquake happened during the crucifixion, and

there was this appearance of dead saints.

If you read that closely, it says they appeared after Christ was raised. After his resurrection, these other saints appeared. And this kind of makes sense, because death is not conquered until Christ is raised.

And so you find that over in, I think it's Matthew chapter 27, and the verse 50 through 52. Jesus cried out with a loud voice and yielded up his spirit. Then behold, the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom.

The earth quaked, and the rocks were split, and the graves were opened. And many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised. And coming out of the graves after his resurrection, they went into the holy city and appeared to many.

So the graves are cracked open during the crucifixion, but the bodies rise and walk into the town and appear after his resurrection. And the more you think about that, the more interesting it gets, because the crucifixion happens on Thursday. Friday is a Sabbath.

Saturday is a Sabbath. And so the graves are cracked open, but the people in them do not come out and go into the holy city and appear to many until afterward. Only happens in Jerusalem, and it doesn't happen until Sunday and later.

But there's a fascinating picture there, because at the point that Jesus dismisses his spirit, he cried out with a loud voice and yielded up his spirit, then the veil is torn. And what does that suggest to us? What does it signify? Rent from top to bottom, God. This is addressed in Hebrews 10, where it says there's a new approach to God through the veil, which is his flesh, and the opening of the Holy of Holies, which is in the Godward direction.

But the graves are opened at this time, but nobody comes out. And open, this is like rolling away the stone of a grave, right? There's potential for egress, but it doesn't happen until after Christ is raised. So you see process here.

The potential for them to come out is at the crucifixion, but the coming out is after he is raised. Anyway, back to Corinthians, when it says Christ, then the firstfruits, and then they which are Christ's said is coming, Dr. Griswold thinks that the firstfruits should be treated as this group in Matthew that came out and appeared unto many. I don't hold with that because of what firstfruits are.

If the firstfruits are holy, then the rest of the harvest is holy. Christ's holiness establishes the sanctification of the rest of the harvest. And if you go back to verse 20, I don't see how you can make the firstfruits being the dead saints in Jerusalem work, because it says, now Christ is risen from the dead and has become the firstfruits of those who are asleep.

So if verse 20 context tells you that Christ is the firstfruits, then how can you see a different firstfruits down in 23? However, more importantly and more pertinently, you have the notion

that these have fallen asleep. When you fall asleep, you expect to wake up. We commonly understand sleep to be a temporary loss of consciousness.

And as you know, the New Testament routinely refers to the death of believers as sleep. Beginning with Stephen in Acts chapter 7, he sees the Son of God standing at the right hand of the Father to receive him, and he falls asleep. He fell asleep.

The Apostle Paul was a witness of that. So, these who have fallen asleep, as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive, but each one in his own order. There are separate orders.

Christ is the firstfruits. He is the one member of that order. Then those who are Christ's at his coming.

Christ's at his coming. So, our interest here is, what is the coming that is referred to? Is there just one coming that comprises what we call the rapture as well as the second coming after the tribulation and so on? I, at least, am a pre-tribulational rapture guy. We are not of those who are subject to wrath.

We are not of the night or of the darkness, that the day would overtake us like a thief. We are of the light. We are of the day.

So, there are varying understandings of what this order that Paul speaks of is. Each one in his own order. Christ the firstfruits.

Afterwards, those who are Christ's at his coming. Then the end, when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father, when he puts an end to all rule, all authority and power. So, as we saw last time, this is a broad overview.

He does not talk about the millennial kingdom. He says, there is the resurrection and then the Son hands the kingdom over to the Father. And he glosses over a thousand years of kingdom history here.

So, I feel confident in saying he is being very broad and very general and is not giving a detailed account of the sequence. There is no problem saying those who are Christ's at his coming. The coming that Jesus spoke of in John 14, 3, Jesus does not talk about the Old Testament saints.

He does not talk about Daniel and Job and Moses and everybody from Adam through the last of the Old Testament saints. The last great prophet, John the Baptist. What does he say? He says, I go to prepare a place for you, you all.

And these are the disciples representative of everybody who is going to transition and become a part of the church age. So, those who are Christ's at his coming, this is in every Pauline reference, the church. Then comes the end and he does not address everything that pertains to fulfilling the covenants to Israel, which is Israel's resurrection.

Israel's receiving the kingdom. Israel having the Davidic king on the throne and having a thousand years of dominance and rule with the rod of iron and all the rest of it. All of that is left out.

The end comes when he delivers the kingdom to God. The Father puts an end to all rule, all authority and power. He must reign until he has put all enemies under his feet.

The last enemy to be destroyed is death. Paul is driving to a point here and he's being very general. He's leaving a lot of things out.

What is he trying to say? My question is really raised as you continue here. The last enemy to be destroyed is death in verse 26. For he has put all things under his feet.

But when he says all things are put under him, it is evident that he who put all things under him is accepted. Now, when all things are made subject to him, then the Son himself will also be subject to him who put all things under him. There's a lot of subjection going on here.

And I thought his theme was resurrection. Why are we talking about subjection? He seems to kind of lose the thread. And a lot of commentators say Paul seems to have gotten distracted by a thought here.

Did a bug land on the wall or what? Because he was talking about resurrection and he's going to return to resurrection. And honestly, if you look at this chapter, if you were an editor as I am, and I was looking at Perry Mason the other night. And Perry's standing there talking to a guy at his desk.

And he closes the scene. They're just about to go to a commercial. And so he's kind of, you know how Perry does.

He sort of psychologically leans on a guy ahead of time. And so Perry whips out this sort of zinger at the end. And they're fixing to cut away to commercial.

But I've got captions on it down at the bottom. There's another line of dialogue. And Perry really lays into him in this last line.

But it's not said on the screen. And I'm thinking, wait a minute. Somebody's adding to the.

Well, I became curious about this. And so I went and discovered that when you watch Me TV or any of these that are showing the old reruns, which I love. I hardly ever miss Perry.

There are 270 episodes of Perry Mason. Did you know that? Actually 271. 270 are in black and white and one is in color.

Of the original series from 56 to 67 or whatever it was. Anyway, but come to find out they have been heavily edited because they play a lot more commercials now than they did back then. And the show won't fit.

So they have taken chunks out. Some of these shows were 50 and 55 minutes long. And they're showing them in a much shorter time.

You know, they have 17 minutes of commercials now. So they're chopping out maybe 10 minutes out of each of these episodes. Well, for those of you who do editing, you know that this can be a challenge.

How do you take stuff out and not lose continuity and have it make sense? Now, let's do some editing. I want you to take a look at this chapter 15. And if you were going to edit this and tighten it up like I would do on a sermon.

Maybe for translation purposes or whatever. Let me show you what I would do. Verse 20.

Now Christ is risen. This was his whole point. Some say there is no resurrection of the dead.

Here's all the reasons that would be a tragically bad thing. But Christ is risen. And he's become the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep.

By man came death. By man came resurrection. In Adam all die.

In Christ are all made alive. Each in his own order. Christ the first fruits.

Afterward, those who are Christ's at his coming. 35. Just leave right from there.

Christ the first fruits. Afterward, those who are Christ's at his coming. But someone will say, how are the dead raised up? And with what body do they come? Now isn't that just a nice continuation of the thought? Do we really need all of this kingdom being given to the Father and the last enemy all under his feet? But when he says all things under his feet, the he who put all things under his feet is not under his feet.

But he put the things under his feet. And when all things are made subject, then the Son himself will be subject. And baptism for the dead, nobody can figure that out.

Why do we stand in jeopardy? Do not be deceived. Evil company corrupts good habits. Awake to righteousness.

Do not sin. Some do not have the knowledge of God. I speak this to you shame.

Wouldn't it be a whole lot easier to just start at verse 24 and chop out the next 11 verses? 24 to 34. Just take them out. I don't have to figure out baptism of the dead.

I don't have to wonder about kingdoms and subjection. And why is he so worried about God not being under Jesus' feet when he's subjecting all things? It's just so distracting. We've got a chapter here on resurrection.

How are the dead raised up? Foolish one. Here's how it works. You sow the seed.

You get a plant. The plant doesn't look like the seed. It's different.

Glory differs from glory. So is the resurrection of the dead in verse 42. Sown in corruption.

Raised in incorruption. Shortens the chapter. Tightens it up.

Thematic flow. It's great. As an editor, this is what I would do.

And I would leave 24 to 34 on the cutting room floor. Caption might betray it. Give it away if you were watching closely.

So this sticks out like a bent thumb here. It doesn't flow with resurrection. He's not talking about resurrection in verses 24 through 34.

There's one little last enemy to be destroyed is death. But the rest of it is all about authority and subjection. And who's subject to who and when and why.

And then he seems to return to kind of a lame argument about resurrection in verse 29. Let's read it. Otherwise, what will they do who are baptized for the dead, if the dead do not rise at all? Why then are they baptized for the dead, and why do we stand in jeopardy every hour? I affirm by the boasting in you which I have in Christ Jesus our Lord, I die daily.

If in the manner of men I have fought with beasts at Ephesus, what advantage is it to me if the dead do not rise, let's eat, drink, for tomorrow we die. Do not be deceived. Evil company corrupts good morals, good habits.

Awake to righteousness and do not sin. Some do not have the knowledge of God. I speak this to your shame.

Now, see, I would take, as an editor, otherwise, what do they do who are baptized for the dead? This is back to, if there's no resurrection, look at the consequences. And so I would take 29 through 34 and stick it up after verse 19 or somewhere up in that section. It just seems scrambled.

It seems strange. And I ask myself, why is that? If the Word of God is alive and powerful and it is designed to teach us and to help us understand, then why is this so mixed? Well, I will offer you an answer to that question. What was my recommendation for a difficult passage if the context doesn't seem to solve it? We've been looking at the context here.

What do we do? Back up and look at more context, right? What's the context of this letter? What was he talking about in earlier chapters? How about the church service and the meals and how gifts function? What was the theme there? Decently and in good order, right? You discipline yourself. You don't put yourself out in front. You don't make an issue out of yourself.

Love is sacrificial towards self, beneficial toward others. And things need to be done decently and in good order. You should be unified.

You should be of one mind. You should proceed in an orderly fashion. And women shouldn't be standing up prophesying.

There shouldn't be random firing of gifts with no discipline. And the spirits of prophets are subject to the prophets, right? It's about... And remember what he said? He said the spirits of the prophets are what? What was the word in English? Spirits of the prophets are subject. Subject to the prophets.

Subject. Right? What does it take to subject yourself under the mighty hand of God? Humility, right? What is the central problem in the Corinthian church from the first chapter to the end of the 16th chapter? What's the problem? Pride. Pride causes them to divide.

Pride causes them to claim, I am of Paul, I am of Apollos. Pride causes them to be earnestly desiring a greater gift than the one God gave them. I've got a better idea, Lord.

I don't want the gift of helps. I want the gift of tongues. I don't want the gift of administration.

I want the gift of healing. I want to put myself forward. I want to be more appreciated.

I want to be more notable. I want to be the center of attention. I, I, I, me, me, me.

Throughout this book, Paul has been preaching and teaching into arrogance, into self-centeredness. One of the things about arrogance, when we are in the grip of it, is we never think we are. We don't typically accuse ourselves.

I don't wake up in the morning and look in the mirror and say, boy, I am really proud today. I've just got a terrible pride problem. I need to humble myself down.

What's the matter with me? Look at that pride. What am I doing being so proud? When's the last time you or anybody you know ever woke up and looked at themselves and said, you know, I've got a real pride problem here? We can say, I've got a, I've got a self-control problem. We can say, I've got an anger problem.

I've got a patience problem. I've got a worry problem. I've got a meddling problem.

I've got a gossip. But we can identify all kinds of things. But we don't typically accuse ourselves of pride.

Paul has been preaching in this letter into pride, pride in its manifestations. There are manifestations of pride. I am going to submit to you that that is the key to understanding the center of this chapter, is Paul's goal.

What is his goal here? That's the old Dr. Phil question. What are you trying to accomplish with your strategy? If you're nagging, if you're beating your wife, if you're being obstreperous, if you're being impatient, if you're being this, that, and the other, how is that strategy working for you? How is that accomplishing your goal? You want your wife to be excited when you come

home and greet you with a pipe and slippers and a hot meal and a newspaper. How is this haranguing and temper tantrums and all the rest of it, how is that working to achieve your goal? Right? So let's ask ourselves the question.

As Paul writes this letter of 1 Corinthians, if his goal, and it is, is to help them overcome a proud and self-centered attitude, how is his approach working? Well, he starts by addressing the symptoms. And he says, look at your factions, look at your self-interest when you feed yourselves at the expense of others, when you drink at the expense of others, when you try to exercise a gift at the expense of others. All through this book, isn't that what he's been doing? He says, you're not functioning in humility.

You do not have the Christ-like attitude of selfless interest in the well-being of others. And this is what you need to have. He has pointed it out symptomatically in the first 14 chapters.

And he has said, it shouldn't be this way. Here's how it ought to be. If somebody is going to speak, let one or two speak.

Have the others sit and listen. One at a time, decently and in good order. Women should not subvert the authority of their husbands by praying with their heads uncovered.

They should be subject. Christ is the head of the church. Woman is the head of the man.

He went through all of that. You remember? It was all about recognizing the order and your place in it. Isn't it? Doesn't that explain a lot of what we've read up to this point? So now you think, okay, it's a break and he's going to talk about resurrection.

Why is he talking about resurrection? Why does he break off and talk about resurrection? Is it just because somebody said there is not one in Corinth? How is this going to accomplish his goal? Doesn't he have a spiritual objective in preaching to the Corinthians? And when he brings up issues, I hear there are wars and divisions among you. What's the cure? You've got to get your heart right. You've got to return to love and humility.

I hear that there is disorderly conduct in your services. What's the cure? You've got to get your heart right. There's got to be love and humility.

I hear that your women are running amok and people with spiritual gifts are all competing with one another and shouting down one another and somebody walking in from the outside thinks you're crazy. What's the solution? Humility. Recognizing that God has established an order.

And humbly subjecting ourselves to it. So, I hear that there are people who say there is no resurrection in Corinth. What is the solution going to be? Let me give you a long doctrinal argument on why there is a resurrection and how there is a resurrection and what the details of the resurrection are.

He's going to do that, but think about the bigger context. What is he actually trying to imbue

the Corinthian people with? What is God trying to imbue us with in giving us this passage? Preserving it, inspiring it, putting it before us this morning. We may not have a serious question about the resurrection.

We may not be elbowing each other out of the way at the table. We're not competing to see whose spiritual gift is the loudest and the boldest in a Sunday service. We're not split up into factions and saying I am of Bob and I am of John and I am of Charles and I am of whatever other radio teacher you want to name or guy on tape.

But what is the overarching purpose of this letter and purpose of this scripture? What is it supposed to do for us? The same thing it did for them. To help us recognize the need for humility, for love toward others, and recognizing God's divine order. Now, with that perspective, this is what I glean when I myself try to back up and look at the whole letter.

It's a lot about having the humility to recognize your place in God's plan and endeavoring to function there in love. I think that would be a fair summary. Look at God's order, recognize your place in it, and function there as best we can in love.

Now, look at this chapter on resurrection. Christ is risen from the dead. He's the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep.

By man came death. By man came resurrection of the dead. This is God's orderly plan.

Whereas by one man sin entered the world, and death by sin. So the death passed upon all men, because all have sinned. Even so, by one man comes also life.

And those who are in the new man have new life. In Adam all die, in Christ all shall be made alive. But there is an order.

There is an order. And Paul goes back to this underlying foundational theme that has threaded its way through this entire letter and formed its fabric. And that is, there is an order.

There's an order when you come together to worship. There's an order when you're in the body of Christ. There are different members.

The eye is not a hand, and the hand is not a foot. There's an order. There's an assignment.

And you don't boast and say everybody ought to be an eye, or everybody ought to be a mouth, or everybody ought to be a thumb. There is an order. You recognize your place in that order.

Each in his own order. Christ is first. Why is Christ first? Why doesn't Christ last? The order communicates something, doesn't it? Christ is the victor over death.

He is the first one to conquer it. And so he is the first one to emerge from its grasp. Death could not hold him.

He has the keys of the grave. He has the keys of death and Sheol. He's got the keys.

He owns them. He's first. And he's first in sequence and first in order for a reason.

It tells you his place and his importance. Then those who are Christ's at his coming. Afterward, those who are Christ's at his coming.

He is the firstfruits. The firstfruits speaks of an entire ritual in the Levitical system that was an order. If you're going to do a harvest, you go get a little bit first and bring it before the Lord.

God recognizes it. God blesses it and sanctifies it. And if the firstfruits are holy, the whole lump is holy.

The whole harvest is holy. But there's an order. And one thing enlarges and attaches to another.

Firstfruits are small. The harvest is big. The presentation before the Lord, you don't have to drag the whole harvest in there, wagonload after wagonload after wagonload.

Oh, priest, please come out and pronounce God's blessing on this wagonload. You bring a sheaf. You wave it before the Lord and the firstfruits are holy.

That sanctifies all the rest of the harvest and you have recognized God's place in bringing it. Well, the same thing here. But there is an order.

And what Paul is really driving for here is not to help them better understand the resurrection or to change their mind and convince those who don't think there is a resurrection that there is. He presents that evidence and he presents that argument, but what's his purpose? It's the purpose of the letter. And it is to impress on the hearts of these Corinthian believers and by extension all believers that God has a plan.

God has an order. We have an assignment in it. We're not first.

Christ is first. It seems self-evident until you realize that Paul has written fourteen and a half chapters to get to this point. Christ is first.

He's the firstfruits. Afterward, those who are Christ. And even as Paul teaches about resurrection, he is teaching about order.

That's why the text turns here. Then comes the end. When he delivers the kingdom to God the Father, when he puts an end to all rule and authority and power.

You Corinthians are looking for rule. You're looking for authority. You're trying to exercise power.

You're trying to be powerful. You're trying to be authoritative. You're trying to say you know what's what doctrinally, what's what spiritually, what's what in practical terms.

Christ is going to put an end to all rule and authority and power. He's going to deliver the kingdom to God the Father. You're not going to deliver it.

You're not going to build it. You're not going to deliver the kingdom to God the Father. If we build it, he will come.

Nonsense. He must reign. Verse 25.

If you were going to sum up these verses, if I was going to sum them up, here's how I would caption it. The centrality of Christ. He's central.

He's first. He's foremost. He leads.

He's the point of the spear. He's central. He must reign until he has put all enemies under his feet.

The last enemy that will be destroyed is death. This tells you that death is not destroyed until after Gog Magog. If there's any doubt that there's going to be death in the Millennial Kingdom, and the Millennial Kingdom is not heaven, there's death there because death is not destroyed until after all of the other enemies, including Satan, including the beast, and the false prophet, including everybody who joins the Gog Magog rebellion.

Death is the last enemy to be destroyed, and that's not until you get to Revelation chapter 20. What is the emphasis here in these verses? He must reign until he has put all enemies under his feet. The last enemy destroyed is death.

He has put all things under his feet, but when he says all things are put under him, it is evident that he who put all things under him is accepted. God the Father is not under the feet of the Lord Jesus. God the Father is the one who ordered things to be under the feet of God the Son.

But this is all about the central theme of the letter. This is not a sidetrack. This is not a derailing of Paul's thought.

He is uncovering the very heart of the letter here, and it is the centrality of Christ and the importance of recognizing God's order. If any man be in Christ, he is a new creation. He is the head of all things to the church, which is his body.

We are in the body. He is central. He is first.

He is the first fruits. He will reign. He is going to subject everything, and then he is going to turn all of that over to the Father.

Why? Because Jesus Christ, our Savior, our example, recognizes God's order, recognizes his place in God's order, and has dedicated himself to fulfilling that place in love and humility. Was the Lord Jesus humble? You think of a lot of things with the Lord Jesus. What manner of man is this? Did the wind and sea obey him? Heal all those who came? Had power over demons? Was

he an example of humility? What did he himself say? Come unto me, all ye who labor and are heavy laden, I will give you rest.

My yoke is easy. My burden is light. I am meek and lowly of heart.

I am meek and lowly of heart. What does it say in Philippians 2? Did not think equality with God a thing to be grasped? What did he do? Humbled himself and became obedient, even to the death on the cross. This is why God has highly exalted him and given him the name that is above every name.

He is exalted because he humbled himself and was obedient. Humility and obedience are what Paul is offering the Corinthians by way of antidote to all of their problems. And it's revealed here.

We're going to pause here and take our break. When we come back, we're going to see how he carries this through and why this section that seems so much of a conundrum about baptism and dying and beasts and Ephesus and a lot of cryptic references is actually revealing the heart of this letter in chapter 15. But let's pause here and take our break.