

THE END OF THE WORLD
1 Cor. 15:23-28

Turn back to 1 Cor. 15 in God's holy, inspired & inerrant Word...

Ever looking for a good conversation starter? – Perhaps at a year-end function, or a family gathering over the holidays? –

Here's a question guaranteed to wake up even the most tired, boring or unsociable people: 'How do you think the world will end?'

Here's some answers I found from unbelievers:

~ From Stephen King: *Scientists estimate that the Tunguska meteor, which leveled 80 million trees in Siberia in 1908 and generated an explosive force 1,000 times greater than that of the Hiroshima bomb, may have been 130 feet in diameter. It's not impossible that we might someday be impacted by a much bigger meteor.*

~ From a Princeton palaeontologist: *Four of the five mass extinctions in history were driven by volcanic eruptions that flooded entire continents. Our world could quite possibly end with the explosive eruption of Yellowstone, which is past due.*

~ From another scientist: *Since the sun is likely to behave as stars of its kind normally do, increasing solar radiation should render this world entirely lifeless in about 1 billion years. After 8 billion years, the Earth will conclusively disappear into the expanding atmosphere of a red, giant sun. Have a nice day.*

Did you notice a certain missing Person in all of those answers? –

Someone that has been totally left out of all the equation? God Himself, the Creator.

That's why, from their god-less point of view, these speculations are no surprise. – *Until they acknowledge that God began the world in the first place, how will they ever accept that God has also planned how to end this world?*

In fact, God has even told us how this world will end, and written it down for us in His Word. – And one of the best summaries in all the Bible of how the world will end is found here, in our next vss in 1 Cor. 15:

Stand, Read vv. 20-28 & Pray:

Remember, all of 1 Cor. 15 is one long rebuke to one big error in the Corinthian church: v. 12b....

So Paul spends this whole chapter proving them wrong – proving that if Christ rose, Christians also must rise, with new bodies. – But in order for that to happen, death must be defeated.

BUT HOW? – How will Christ destroy for us this great enemy of death?...

That's what Paul has begun answering here in vv. 20ff. – He is showing that Christ does not defeat death the moment you get saved. – Yes, at salvation, ALL your sin is forgiven, all guilt removed, “no condemnation” for those who are in Christ.

YET, in God's wise and patient plan, He has ordained that our bodies must still die, as the final consequence of sin.

We will probably have to die physically in order to experience the full benefits of the great salvation Jesus accomplished for us on the cross. – Here's how it will happen, vv. 23-28.

Give title...

v. 24a – The END is coming – history is not cyclical, it's not some Lion King 'Circle of Life' or some Eastern cycle of reincarnation. –

No, history is linear, it is going somewhere. – This world had a created beginning and has a definite ending. –

As the NT often says, “the end is near”, we live in the “end of the age”. – These are the “last days”; it is even “the last hour”. –

Beloved, think of it: We've never been closer to the end of the world than we are today.

****FOUR FINAL CHAPTERS in God's plan for this planet and for us His people:***

1. v. 23, Christ's COMING – *Answering the question of when our bodies will rise.*

HOW will we know we are about to get our new bodies, that our upgrade has arrived?! – When you see this happening:

v. 23c, Christ's *Parousia* (“coming, presence, advent, arrival”) = It was a Grk word used for when a ruler or dignitary would roll into town, make his grand entry or his royal appearance.

Turn over to Matt. 24...

Recall that Christ's “coming” was part of what the disciples inquired about here, the question which launched Jesus into His famous Olivet Discourse, His main teaching in the Gospels on end-times.

The disciples asked Jesus (v. 3), “What will be the sign of...Your COMING (*Parousia*) and of the end of the age?”

Here is the climax of His answer to that great question: vv. 27-31... (v. 31b, His elect will come, sporting our brand new bodies, freshly reassembled & resurrected from wherever our body [or ashes] were placed!)

Continue: Matt. 24:37-39 (*Parousia* used 2x more; like the Flood, an unexpected & swift judgment upon a complacent world)...

QUESTION: Could this perhaps just be an invisible, spiritual return of Jesus – just coming into your heart, inspiring your life? Never!

In addition to what we just read in Matt. 24, Acts 1 also could not be clearer:

After Jesus had just gloriously ascended back into heaven, two angels themselves declared to the disciples:

“Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into the sky? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in just the same way as you have watched Him go into heaven.”

I.e., Jesus will return will be personal & visible, and it will be a literal, bodily, physical return to this very earth, before these very eyes! – As Scripture declares, “every eye shall see Him”.

Beloved, *HOW will we know when we are about to get our new bodies?*

Not only when we see Him personally coming on the clouds in power & glory, with His angels & a great trumpet, gathering His elect, and judging the world. – But also, one other key text:

Turn to 1 Thess. 4. – These believers were very disturbed about something: What about Christians who’ve died, will they miss out on Jesus’ return and seeing Him on the clouds?!

Read vv. 13-16 – When you hear that unmistakable shout from Heaven, and the very voice of an archangel, and the thundering blast of God’s own trumpet – when you hear that, get ready, it’s coming, He’s coming, and we’re going, rising, with Him!

NB, v. 16b – WHO gets VIP treatment, first out the gate?! (The Charismatics say that means we non-charismatics will rise first, b/c we’re so “dead”! ☺)

NEXT in the queue, to join up with the dead who just rose? – Those still alive when Christ returns:

1 Thess. 4:17 – “Caught up, snatched away, raptured”, from Lat, *rapturo*. – Up like a rocket will we go! – I can’t wait! –

Best of all, led by Christ, our risen Lord & Saviour, and in the company of one another and all the saints!...

I believe this will probably be before the 7-year Great Tribulation. – NB, Jesus 1st Coming was in stages: His incarnation, life & death & resurrection. – Likewise, it seems that Jesus’ 2nd Coming will also be *in stages*, starting with the Rapture of His people.

But regardless of the timing, which is debated, there is NO debate that there WILL be a rapture! –

→Christian, hear this: 1 Thess. 4:16-17...

Your risen & returning Lord will “pluck” you up and launch you into the air. (“I’ll Fly Away” will not just be a song or a spiritual reality; you will literally experience it!)

You will fly through the clouds with Christ and fellow Christians, and later (whether moments, or a few yrs) return with Christ down again through those clouds to reign with Him on earth! –

Let this sink in for a moment. – What a hope. – Doesn’t that put all your earthly troubles into eternal perspective?...

Back to 1 Cor. 15...

We’ll see this Rapture wonderfully described later in 1 Cor. 15 also: vv. 51-53...

+ Spurgeon imagines a great point here:

He says if Heaven were to allow any jealousies, it might just be this little one: The saints who never have to die, but are alive at Christ’s return, might look at those who died and rose and say: ‘Hey, I missed out. I never got to lay in the grave and then have Christ wake me & remake me from the dust!’

‘Unlike you Christians who died and then rose, I never got to fully experience that prayer of Paul’s in Php. 3, “that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death; in order that I may attain to the resurrection from the dead.”’

‘Since I never got to die, I never got to share with Christ in that way. But oh well, we’re in Heaven now with Christ, who’s to complain?!’

NONETHELESS, we long for Christ’s “coming”. – We say with the early church, “Maranatha, Our Lord Come!” (1 Cor. 16:22) – We say with John in the final vss of the Bible, “Even so, come Lord Jesus, come.” –

As another Christmas approaches and we celebrate His first coming, it only make us more eager for His 2nd & final coming.

→Php. 3:20-21 sums it up best, as a perfect parallel to 1 Cor. 15: *For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ; who will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory, by the exertion of the power that He has even to subject all things to Himself.*

Wouldn’t you love to be visiting a cemetery where some Christians are buried when this happens? – Or nowadays, in some church’s garden of remembrance where many ashes have been scattered or urns stored? –

Only the power of the Lord Christ, King Jesus, could accomplish such a stupendous feat!

→WHICH direction will you be looking when Christ comes? – I'm sure we'll be looking straight up at King Jesus, in all His glory. – But I wonder if we'll also get a glance in the direction of that place where departed loved ones were buried?...

*When He comes, our glorious King
All His ransomed home to bring
Then anew this song we'll sing,
Hallelujah, what a Saviour!*

Read 1 Cor. 15:24 – NB esp., v. 24c (Christ won't do v. 24b until He's done v. 24c)...

HOW will Christ do this absolute "abolishing"? – Answer: vv. 25-26...

2. vv. 24c-26, Christ's KINGDOM – *Answering the question of how v. 24c will happen, how Christ will abolish all opposition:*

What were some of the risen Christ's last words before ascending & returning to His Father:

Matt. 28:18...

So there is an ALREADY and a NOT-YET dimension to Christ's kingdom – i.e., a present, spiritual & heavenly dimension, but also a future, earthly dimension.

These are the *stages of Christ's dominion & kingship as given Him by the Father, as the way for vv. 24c-26 to be fulfilled:*

a. Christ's ALREADY kingdom (heavenly & present)

Peter & Paul in their sermons in Acts, Acts 2 & 13, show that Christ has already begun to fulfil Psalms 2 & 110. – By virtue of Jesus' resurrection, He has already been coronated & enthroned and begun to reign.

BUT WAIT: 1 Cor. 15:24c-25 – "All rule & authority & power...His enemies"??

Sure doesn't seem that way when you look around. – So many unbelievers. – Rising persecution & martyrdom of Christians. –

So much crime & evil & death in this world. – Is this what Jesus calls being 'in charge' of His kingdom? –

From where I'm sitting, it sure looks like Satan has more authority & power than Jesus?!

HOWEVER: *From where Jesus is sitting, at the Father's right hand, the view is very different. – He sees the whole picture, as it really is. –*

Christ is not yet ruling ON the earth, but He is surely ruling OVER the earth, and over all spiritual powers.

Eph. 1 & 1 Pet. 3 speak strongly about Christ already being exalted & seated at God's right hand, a place of great power & authority, over all spiritual forces & powers.

→We forget: Christ our King has defeated many enemies already. – His Church has withstood many foes in these past 2,000 years, and yet is still thriving and flourishing in places around the world, and in some of the most hostile areas, like Iran & China.

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King Jesus reigns over all persecution, division, heresy, worldliness, impurity, immorality, pride, lethargy, hypocrisy, temptation, discouragement, etc.

~ As we say with the Catechism. – Kids, remember this one? – 'How does Christ execute the office of a king?'

Answer: "Christ executeth the office of a king, in subduing US to Himself, in ruling and defending US, and in restraining and conquering all His and our enemies."

+ Scottish Covenanter motto in 17th c. (as encouragement amidst fierce persecution, as final cry when going up to the guillotine or platform to be hung), these three precious words:

v. 25a, "He must reign"!...

NB, Paul didn't say, v. 25a, Christ "should reign", or "would reign" or "might reign". – No, He "MUST reign"! –

It's a divine necessity. – It is compulsory that history will end this way. – It cannot end any other way. – It's not up for grabs, all is certain: "He must reign". –

The Son must reign in fulfilment of His Father's eternal purpose & plan, as we'll see, v. 28, for the glorification of His Father.

Christ must reign in fulfilment of prophecy. – "It is written", and it must come to pass. – "The word of the Lord has spoken". "Heaven & earth may pass away, but His Word will stand". – "He must reign"!

HOWEVER: Many of Christ's foes are still on the loose. – I do not believe Satan is yet bound. – And the most obvious enemy of all is *death*. – We still have to die. – Still this "last enemy" has not been abolished & eliminated.

But a day is coming when Christ's kingdom will not just be over this earth, but ON this earth. – A day is coming when His kingly authority & dominion will be obvious to all. – His royal power will be visible and invincible, ON this earth:

b. Christ's NOT YET kingdom (earthly & future)

Dan. 2 & 7 speak of Messiah's earthly kingdom that will crush all other kingdoms – that might stone that will crush all others, that Son of Man whom God, the Ancient of Days, will give an international dominion & everlasting kingdom.

Luke 1:32, speaking of Christ, “He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David.”

Jesus is not yet reigning on that earthly, Jewish throne of David from Jerusalem – as the OT prophets often anticipated & described (Isa. 2, Micah 4, etc.).

Repeat: 1 Cor. 15:25...

Then, of course, the last book of our Bibles, John’s glorious future vision in Revelation. – What is the whole story of Revelation? – ‘The Return of the King!’ –

God’s comfort to persecuted Christians that, even though evil is pervasive and wicked men are powerful, their doom is sure.

Christ, the Lion of Judah, takes the scroll from His Father. Jesus is the Last Adam who has died & risen, so He alone has the right to take this scroll and execute God’s final judgment on the world.

Christ will come again, and all His enemies will be defeated. – All 22 chapters of Revelation can be summed up in two words: “Jesus Wins!”

Repeat: 1 Cor. 15:25...

What all other despots in world history only dreamed of, Antichrist will do. – He will become Dictator of the world. – Then He will turn His armies against Jerusalem (Zech. 14), and against Christ Himself. – And at that moment, Christ will return. And Christ will win. –

And most amazing of all: we will win with Him. – We will “reign” and conquer “with Him”. – We will return with Him on the clouds and be witnesses to His final triumph (bloody, yet glorious somehow).

The great city of Babylon will be overthrown. – Christ will wield the sickle of His judgment and reap a harvest of defeated enemies. – Christ will tread the winepress of the wrath of God, and the blood will flow as high as a horse’s bridle (human blood, Jesus’ enemies). –

All of Antichrist’s army will be destroyed by a sword from Christ’s mouth. – The birds of the heavens will feast on their slain corpses. – And the Antichrist, “the beast”, and his false prophet, will be thrown into the Lake of Fire.

Repeat: 1 Cor. 15:25...

BUT that’s not all for Christ’s future kingdom. – Rev. 20 goes on to describe how, when Christ returns, Satan will be bound in the abyss for a 1,000 years. –

Then Christ, the “Firstfruits of those who are asleep” (1 Cor. 15:20), will do exactly what 1 Cor. 15 promises: Rev. 20:4, speaking of us/believers: “and they came to life and reigned with Christ for a 1,000 years. ...This is the 1st resurrection.”

See, there are many OT prophecies about Israel & the land that have not yet been fulfilled. – The prophecies about Jesus' 1st Coming were fulfilled literally, so I expect the same with these remaining prophecies. –

Jesus & Acts & Rom. 11 also speak about a future restoration of ethnic Israel, according to God's ancient promise, and as a blessing to the nations. (I believe the 1,000 years of Rev. 20 makes the most sense as the time in which this could be fulfilled.)

NB, 1 Cor. 15:23-24 – Timing between groups 1 & 2 (betw Christ rising & us rising at His coming)? – Nearly 2,000 yrs *and counting*. – Why then could there not also be a delay between group 2 and, v. 24a, “then comes the end”, once vv. 24c-26 is completed?? – Surely 1 Cor. 15 at least allows for my premillennial position.

THEN WHAT, after we reign with Christ for a 1,000 years on earth? – Rev. 20 goes on to tell us that Satan will be released for one last jaunt, and then be defeated once & for all and thrown into the Lake of Fire.

Then comes the Great White Throne Judgment of the unsaved:

Many of you have asked, ‘What about the bodies of the unsaved, do they rise? And if so, when?’ – Yes, Scripture tells us in Dan. 12 & Isa. 26 & Ezek. 37 that unsaved bodies will also rise.

John 5 is most explicit, when Jesus said, John 5:28:

Do not marvel at this: for an hour is coming, in which all who are in tombs will hear His voice, and will come forth: those who did the good deeds to a resurrection of life, those who committed the evil deeds to a resurrection of judgment.

But the rest of the NT shows us this is not necessarily a “general resurrection”, but one that occurs in stages. – The “1st Resurrection” of believers at Christ's coming. – Then this 2nd & final resurrection of unbelievers after the millennial kingdom.

The bodies of the unsaved will be reassembled, but not as glorified bodies. – In some fashion, they will be physical, yet dying bodies, fashioned only for eternal torment and unending punishment in the Lake of Fire.

*Every island, sea, and mountain,
Heav'n and earth, shall flee away;
All who hate Him must, confounded,
Hear the trump proclaim the day:
Come to judgment! Come to judgment! Come to judgment!
Come to judgment! Come away!*

Rev. 20 ends by saying, “Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire.”

Reread: 1 Cor. 15:26...

The last & greatest enemy of all, Death itself, vanquished forever (the final rupture fixed, the final leak sealed, the final crack in God's universe removed, the final smudge on God's window wiped clean, forever). –

For us personally, it happens when Christ comes and we are raised, never to die again. – But globally, for God's universe, Death's final death blow will come at the end of the millennial kingdom, at that 2nd resurrection, at that final dying of death itself.

Then the Son's earthly work is done. – He has completed what His Father asked of Him. – His task as Mediator between God & man, and His mediatorial kingdom on earth, is finished. – Mission accomplished. – Now what?:

3. vv. 24b, 27-28a, Christ's HANDOVER – Answering the question of how v. 24b will happen, how Christ will deliver the kingdom to His Father:

Read v. 24b – Which is explained in: vv. 27-28a....

v. 27a – Ps. 8, 'What is man that you are mindful of him', that you give man dominion & rule on this earth. –

But listen to what Heb. 2 points out about man's current failure to subdue & have dominion, in this fallen world of anarchy:

*...we do not yet see all things subjected to him [man]. ...But we do see Him who was made for a little while lower than the angels, namely, **Jesus**, because of the suffering of death, crowned with glory & honour, so that by the grace of God He might taste death for everyone.*

As 1 Cor. 15 shows us, Christ is the Last Adam, the perfect Man. – Where Adam failed, Christ succeeds. – Where man did not rule the earth for God, Christ rules & reigns for God.

~ Godet, "It is for man to repair the evil done by man." – Man's failed dominion can only be rescued by another Man, a perfect Man, another Adam, who will perfectly subdue the earth.

NB: God's plan for earth has always been mediatorial – i.e., not Him ruling directly, but rather vicariously, through His representative & mediator. –

God created Adam to rule the earth for God, but Adam fell. God sent Jesus, the Last Adam, to restore that human dominion under God, on this earth.

NB, a clarification from Paul:

v. 27bc – Speaking of God the Father. – In the language of Ps. 110, the Father says to the Son, "Sit at My right hand, until I make Your enemies a footstool for Your feet."

HOW could a Father cease being a father to his son? – Or how could he reverse roles and make his son the father and he become the son? – Never. – That would be unnatural.

You cannot alter what is unalterable in a family, what is fixed & unchanging. – How much more in the family of a Triune Godhead that have been a 3-in-1 family from all eternity, from before time began?

NB, Christ would never have had a kingdom to give back to His Father if His Father had not first given it to Him.

v. 28ab (v. 28a, “Him” = God the Father) – But if we know our Bibles, this should not surprise us. – History has always turned on this relationship between God the Father and God the Son.

Back at Easter time, we looked at Isaiah’s 4 great Servant Songs. – God planned that He would save His people through the work of His suffering & victorious Servant.

John’s Gospel especially revolves around this grand story of fellowship between God the Father & God the Son:

John 6, amidst the fickle & unbelieving crowds, WHO are those that will truly repent & come to Jesus? – “All that the Father gives Me,” says Christ. – The Father has elected a people, a Bride, as a love gift to His Son. –

God’s Son will purchase these people with His blood and redeem them, and then give the gift back to His Father.

This is what John 17 is all about, in Christ’s final high priestly prayer before He dies: ‘Father, you gave me all authority, that I might purchase a people for You. I have now accomplished the work You sent me to do, and I present them back to You.’

Sound familiar? – Reread: 1 Cor. 15:24b, 28a...

+ Imagine what Jesus might say to God, once His earthly race has been run: ‘Dear Father, it is finished, . I left the comforts of Glory, I went down to that sin-stained world, I became incarnate, I took on flesh. I was conceived of the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary. I grew up, learned obedience, proved faithful.’

‘I suffered, bled, and died for sinners. On the 3rd day I rose, appeared to many witnesses, and then ascended back to You in Heaven.’

‘At the appointed time, I returned to earth triumphantly, to reclaim My own, raise their bodies, and crush all opposition. I reigned for a thousand years, then threw Satan & death itself into the Lake of fire.

‘Holy Father, You have put every foe, every rival, every competitor under My feet.’

'Every knee has bowed, every tongue has confessed that I am Lord, the glory of You My Father. Now I bow my knee and my tongue confesses that You are God the Father.'

'I gave My life to redeem the people, the Bride, that You gave Me. I have conquered the kingdom You gave Me. Now I return it to its rightful Owner. And I gladly take My place at Your right hand forever and ever.'

→Beloved: HOW can we be sure that our bodies will rise one day and that death will be defeated forever? – Because, not only does God love us, God supremely loves *His own Son*. –

What grace! – That God would give us as a love-gift, a Bride, a kingdom, to His Son?!

QUESTION (as raised by Muslim scholar in one of the debates): Does this make Jesus less than God? – No:

Like we saw in 1 Cor. 11 when Paul applied the Trinity to marriage. – The husband is head of the wife, as Christ is the head of the Church. – Equal in worth & dignity & humanity. – Yet she is subordinate in function & role.

Because that is how the Triune God Himself functions. – Christ the Son, eternally equal in deity & essence, 100% God. – Yet forever the Son, subordinate in role & task, as assigned by His Father.

QUESTION: WHAT THEN will Christ do for the rest of eternity?...

Answer: He will keep reigning at His Father's right hand. – But no longer as earthly Mediator & King, but as eternal Son. –

Rev. 22:3 tells us that in the New Jerusalem, there is the "throne of God AND of the Lamb". – Scripture says that Christ's "kingdom will have no end". –

But it will be handed over and then merge into the everlasting rule & reign of the triune God, world without end.

WHY will everything be so perfect, so right on that day? – Here's why:

1 Cor. 15:28c...

4. v. 28b, GOD'S GLORY – *Answer the question of God's end purpose & goal for history & the universe:*

When God is "all in all", all is well. – When God is source & centre, hub & axis of everything, all is well. – When God becomes the sun in the solar system of that new universe, all is well. – Paradise is restored. – Eden is renewed, in fact, Eden is improved better than the first Garden ever was!

Remember, Satan once wanted to be 'all in all'. – Next to God, Satan was the most gifted, talented, impressive being in the universe. – Just one problem: He was 2nd, not 1st; and that he could not bear. –

So Satan did all he could to change that: sweeping a 1/3 of the angelic hosts with him as he plunged to earth, seeking to bruise the Saviour's head, killing Him on the cross, and using Death to terrify mankind and even Christians.

But in the perfect plan of God, because of Christ's atoning death on the cross in our place, Satan's plan failed. – It was a colossal failure, the biggest failure in the universe.

God's goal for all of creation and all of history will be perfectly, gloriously, eternally accomplished: v. 28c...

I.e., God will be supreme and all-powerful in every place and in every way. – At last, the world will be totally God-centred as it always should've been.

Now back to my title: "The End of the World". – I chose that deliberately, b/c of a dual meaning. – Not only how the world will end, but, to borrow from one of Jonathan Edwards' most famous sermons, 'The End for Which God Created the World'.

The world will end by fulfilling God's end, His aim & goal for the world: that His fame would spread from shore to shore.

+ What will make Rev. 21-22, the best 2 chps in the Bible, what will make that new world so breathtaking? – What will make the new Jerusalem so beautiful, like a bride prepared for her husband. –

What will make that new garden-city (with its crystal-clear river, and its orchard of trees, and its unending light, and its jewelled walls, and its golden streets) – what will make it so gorgeous and stunning, so playful and worshipful and loving, all at the same time?

Reread: v. 28c...

All that is wrong will be banished forever, and all that is right & pure will fill the universe!...

Zech. 14:9, "The LORD will be king over the whole earth. On that day there will be one LORD, and His name the only name."

On that day, finally, "the knowledge of the LORD will cover the earth as the waters cover the sea", perfectly & completely & permanently.