

# Will Death Last Forever?

By Gerry Watts

The following was originally written as a reply to an email, though a few more sentences have been added since then. It is essentially a critique of a small portion of an article written by Howard Marshall on the subject of 1 Corinthians 15:22-28. The complete article entitled *Does The New Testament Teach Universal Salvation?* can be found at the following link <http://www.universalsalvation.net/howardmarshall.htm>

My reply, though, was only in relation to the following quote:

## **1 Corinthians 15:22-28**

"In 1 Corinthians 15:22-28 we are told that, as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all will be made alive. But Paul's point is not to affirm that all die in Adam and all will certainly come to life in Christ, but rather that just as the death of each and all is due to Adam so the resurrection of each and all is due to Christ. He means simply that in every case where people receive life it is through their union with Christ. Against those who would dispute it Paul is arguing that it is upon the man Christ that the hope of resurrection is dependent, just as death is due to the man Adam. Wherever death and resurrection take place, they are due respectively to Adam and Christ. Death of course is universal, but this is not necessarily so of resurrection. Indeed, the next verses show that Paul thinks of the resurrection only of 'those who belong to Christ'. The resurrection is followed by the subjugation of his enemies. Boring recognises all this, but argues that Paul is moving into the image of 'God-the-king who unites all in his kingly reign.'<sup>5</sup> But it must be noted that subjugation is not the same thing as unification and reconciliation. Paul teaches the destruction of the cosmic forces opposed to Christ, including death."

However, even though this is only a small portion of Marshall's article, I nevertheless firmly believe that a correct understanding and interpretation of 1 Corinthians 15:22-28 is the necessary key to knowing whether God is going to save all mankind or not. This is fundamental to the whole argument. The details that Paul reveals in this text, coupled with the details given in the vision of Revelation concerning the Second Death, leads us to the ultimate and inevitable truth of the Divine Logic - God will save ALL eventually. In the following analysis of the above text I give my reasons for believing this.

## All in Adam, All in Christ

Here are my thoughts and comments on what Howard Marshall has to say about 1 Corinthians 15:22-28.

Firstly, here is the text as it reads in the CV, which lays out the Greek words and tenses more accurately than most translations.

- <sup>22</sup> For even as, in Adam, all are dying, thus also, in Christ, shall all be vivified.  
<sup>23</sup> Yet each in his own class: the Firstfruit, Christ; thereupon those who are Christ's in His presence;  
<sup>24</sup> thereafter the consummation, whenever He may be giving up the kingdom to His God and Father, whenever He should be nullifying all sovereignty and all authority and power.  
<sup>25</sup> For He must be reigning until He should be placing all His enemies under His feet.  
<sup>26</sup> The last enemy is being abolished: death.  
<sup>27</sup> For He subjects all under His feet. Now whenever He may be saying that all is subject, it is evident that it is outside of Him Who subjects all to Him.  
<sup>28</sup> Now, whenever all may be subjected to Him, then the Son Himself also shall be subjected to Him Who subjects all to Him, that God may be All in all.)

It is possible that the 'all's' in verse 22 could be referring to believers only, as Marshall suggests, but it doesn't actually state it. And what Paul goes on to say doesn't make complete sense if it is just applied to believers. Also, throughout Paul's letters, believers in Christ are viewed as being alive in Christ even now! (E.g. Romans 8:9-16). Believers are not viewed as being in Adam any longer, but in spirit, by faith, they are in Christ. So I firmly believe that Paul is talking about ALL mankind in the above verse, and not just believers. This is confirmed as he proceeds in the subsequent verses.

It makes perfect sense what we are told here: that 'in Adam, all (humanity) are dying.' This is a universal fact. All humans are mortal (dying), and (according to Scripture) we were all in Adam in seed form. 'THUS ALSO, in Christ, all (humanity) shall be made alive (or vivified),' that is, all mankind will be resurrected and transformed into immortal humans by being spiritually begotten anew in Christ. Both are universal in scope.

This is a simple balanced equation: Universal mortality and sin on the one hand, and universal immortality and righteousness on the other. Paul makes this very clear in Romans 5. See my article **The Second Adam versus the First Adam** for further detail.

**QUOTE: "Death of course is universal, but this is not necessarily so of resurrection. Indeed, the next verses show that Paul thinks of the resurrection only of 'those who belong to Christ'. The resurrection is followed by the subjugation of his enemies."**

Marshall admits here that death is universal, then he arbitrarily states that this doesn't apply to resurrection. This is an UNBALANCED equation. Paul clearly says "thus also" that is, in the same way that death came to all through Adam (it was imputed), so resurrection will come to all through Christ. There is a clear parallel here. If the first ALL applies to all mankind, then so does the second ALL.

Marshall then says that the 'next verses' prove his point, when in actual fact they do the opposite! Let me explain.

In verse 23, Paul says "**Yet each in his own class**" and he then proceeds to describe THREE groups or squadrons. This 'making alive' or 'vivification' doesn't happen to everyone all at once. It occurs in stages. Now notice that the first two groups or classes involve believers. According to Revelation 20, all believers will partake of the First Resurrection at the coming (or presence) of the Lord. So before the New Creation begins, after the 'Millennium' and the Great White Throne Judgement, all believers are saved and reconciled to God. They belong to Christ in His presence, while the remainder of humanity (the majority) are cast into the Lake of Fire.

Yet Paul says "thereafter the consummation" which is the third class. This era or age of Consummation will involve all the rest of humanity. Even though the actual 'end' itself may be considered a single event, which will complete the saving of all from DEATH, it is evident from the Greek tenses used here that this 'saving and subjecting' or 'the nullifying, reigning and abolishing' is a process. A Consummation or Finishing doesn't have to be a single event. For example, in a tournament of some kind there may be many stages or rounds leading up to the final round of the tournament where the Winner is found. That final round or stage is the Round of Consummation for the whole tournament - and depending on the sport, it may last quite some time. This is how God's plan of the ages should be viewed - and there is an Age of Consummation, or the Finishing Age of the New Creation.

For further information on the resurrection order see my articles **Is There Really A Hell? Appendix: The Resurrection Order** and **The First and Second Resurrections**.

Christ has to reign *until* He has subjected ALL His enemies to God, nullifying their authority and power. (The Greek word *katargeo* translated *nullifying* and *abolishing* in the above text is a legal term for 'making something void, of no effect, useless.') Believers are already His friends who reign *with* Him, so the enemies must refer to the rest of humanity, as well as Satan and His forces. Christ cannot subject something that has been literally destroyed (or annihilated) or which remains in constant torment and rebellion forever!

Rev. 21:8 states that the Lake of Fire, where all unbelievers end up, is called the Second **DEATH**. Yet Paul says above that death is the last enemy to be abolished and subjected.

The bottom line is this: **As long as the Second DEATH exists, DEATH has not been abolished and subjected! Yet Paul states that Christ will abolish Death and nullify the power of His enemies. The only way that this can satisfactorily occur is by giving them LIFE and making them His friends, thereby reconciling them to God. This is exactly what Paul says will happen in Colossians 1:19-20.**

This DEATH is not just referring to the dying condition of mortality, it also includes the state of death itself (that is, the first death and hades - Rev.20:14). Whichever way one looks at it, and however one chooses to interpret the Second DEATH (and there are three possible interpretations), the truth nevertheless remains: **it is still DEATH - and it MUST be abolished for Christ to be victorious.**

QUOTE: "**Paul teaches the destruction of the cosmic forces opposed to Christ, including death.**"

This cannot be the case because their destruction would place them in DEATH - the Second DEATH! And how can this be a victory! Even sinful humans are aware that the greatest victory of a king is not to destroy over half of his kingdom because they won't submit to him! His greatest victory would be to win them over and have mercy upon them. Christ Jesus is the all-powerful, all-merciful King - and He *will* achieve the greatest victory.

Finally, Paul makes it evident of what he means by 'subjection' in this passage: willful, heart-obedience to God - because the Son Himself becomes subject to the Father once His reign is complete so that God will be ALL IN ALL!

One final thought: Paul, and the other apostles, proclaim the Gospel of God's Grace under the authority of Christ Himself - and nowhere in their writings do they focus on Hell or Eternal Torment. If 'Eternal Hell' is awaiting all unbelievers, then surely Paul and the others would have clearly said so numerous times due to the extreme seriousness of the subject. They talk of 'fiery judgement' and 'chastening' and similar terms, but this is not the same thing as Eternal Torment or Annihilation. To the contrary, Paul especially gives us numerous texts that reveal to us the plan of Universal Redemption - for Christ Jesus is truly **The Saviour of ALL mankind** (1 Timothy 4:9-11).