

passages like this one, where **Spirit, Lord, and God** refer respectively to the Holy Spirit, Yeshua the Messiah, and the Father.¹⁵⁹

1 Corinthians 15:15-28

“that God may be all in all”

“Moreover we are even found *to be* false witnesses of God, because we testified against God that He raised Messiah, whom He did not raise, if in fact the dead are not raised. For if the dead are not raised, not even Messiah has been raised; and if Messiah has not been raised, your faith is worthless; you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Messiah have perished. If we have hoped in Messiah in this life only, we are of all men most to be pitied. But now Messiah has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who are asleep. For since by a man *came* death, by a man also *came* the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Messiah all will be made alive. But each in his own order: Messiah the first fruits, after that those who are Messiah's at His coming, then *comes* the end, when He hands over the kingdom to the God and Father, when He has abolished all rule and all authority and power. For He must reign until He has put all His enemies under His feet. The last enemy that will be abolished is death. For HE HAS PUT ALL THINGS IN SUBJECTION UNDER HIS FEET [Psalm 8:6]. 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. 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.”

To the Apostle Paul, Yeshua the Messiah's resurrection from the dead, is essential to the good news or gospel (Romans 1:3-4; 4:25; 6:4-5; 8:34; 10:9).¹⁶⁰ He bluntly tells the Corinthians, “But if there is no resurrection of the dead, not even Messiah has been raised” (1 Corinthians 15:13), or “If there's no resurrection, there's no living Christ” (The Message). Given the gravity of Yeshua's resurrection in not just conquering death, but inaugurating the future age to come breaking into the present—without such a resurrection, Paul has to say, “if Christ has not been raised, then our proclamation is without foundation, and so is your faith” (1 Corinthians 15:14, HCSB). Rhetorically, Paul goes even further, by announcing to the Corinthians, “And we apostles would all be lying about God—for we have said that God raised Christ from the grave. But that can't be true if there is no resurrection of the dead” (1 Corinthians 15:15, NLT). If there is no resurrection of the dead, Yeshua was not raised, and Paul and the Apostles are all guilty of bearing false witness (Exodus 20:16; Deuteronomy 5:20; cf. Mark 10:19; Matthew 19:18; Luke 18:20). In the view of Proverbs 19:5, “A false witness will not go unpunished, and he who tells lies will not escape.”

Prior explains how significant the resurrection of Yeshua is to those who believe in Him:

“[I]f he did nothing of the sort, if Jesus was another guru-figure and in fact an imposter, it is nothing short of blasphemy to link the name of God almighty with such a person. The only convincing reason for linking God to the person and work of Jesus is the fact of his resurrection. Only God has power over death: if Jesus rose from the dead, God raised him.”¹⁶¹

If the Corinthians deny the future resurrection of the dead, then there was no resurrection of Yeshua from the dead: “For if the dead are not raised, not even Messiah has been raised” (1 Corinthians 15:16). If Yeshua the Messiah was not raised from the dead, then this necessarily begs the question about the Corinthians' current spiritual state, as Paul tells them, “And if Christ be not raised, your faith *is* vain; ye are yet in your sins” (1 Corinthians 15:17, KJV). If

¹⁵⁹ Stern, *Jewish New Testament Commentary*, 476.

¹⁶⁰ This entry has been adapted from the author's commentary *1 Corinthians for the Practical Messianic*.

¹⁶¹ Prior, 264.

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Yeshua the Messiah was not resurrected from the dead, then Paul is forthright in his conclusion: “you have not, after all, been released from your sins” (New Jerusalem Bible), or “our sins have never been forgiven” (Phillips New Testament). **Without the resurrection of Yeshua** to conquer the power of death (Romans 6:1-11) and insure God’s own of the future He has promised in His Word of a restored Kingdom to Israel and eventual New Heavens and New Earth—then those who have believed in Yeshua have believed in lies, and they decisively return to a pre-Messiah, broadly hopeless, condition (Ephesians 2:1-3, 11-12; 4:17-19).

How are readers to approach Paul’s statement in 1 Corinthians 15:18, “Then those also who have fallen asleep in Messiah have perished”? Is this to say that those who have died can only exist in the future, by virtue of the future resurrection, and are presently in some kind of unconscious state? Hays comes close to this, by saying, “They have simply been destroyed by death and consigned to eternal oblivion.”¹⁶² Given the future orientation in view of an eternity where the One True God is acknowledged as supreme (1 Corinthians 15:28), it is best for us to not view 1 Corinthians 15:18 from the standpoint of it somehow saying that without the resurrection, people will not exist again. Yeshua’s own response to the Sadducees, who denied the resurrection, is that there must be a resurrection because Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were to be regarded as “living” (Mark 12:25-27; Matthew 22:31-33; Luke 20:37-39). This would affirm that figures like the Patriarchs are presently in a disembodied state, albeit temporary, until the future reanimation of their mortal remains at the resurrection.

If one does not believe in the resurrection of the dead, “It follows also that those who have died within Christ’s fellowship are utterly lost” (1 Corinthians 15:18, NEB). This is because, more than anything else, the work of the Messiah is something that involves far more than just the present human experience. Paul informs the Corinthians, “If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied” (1 Corinthians 15:19, ESV). Without the resurrection of Yeshua, all one has at best is a good moral and spiritual example to consider, for proper conduct on Planet Earth today: *tē zōē tautē...monon* (τῆ ζωῆ ταύτης...μόνον), “this life only.” Garland asserts, “if Christ is not raised, then the relationship with Christ and any hope based on that relationship cannot continue beyond the grave.”¹⁶³ Those who have died, apparently believing in Yeshua, are to be regarded as having “perished” (1 Corinthians 15:18) to all of the presumed promises of the world to come, and at best exist in the world of Sheol (cf. Isaiah 14:9-11, 18-20).

Paul will explain to the Corinthians in 1 Corinthians 15:20-34 some of the significant dynamics of the resurrection of the dead, not just in relation to the sacrifice of Yeshua the Messiah and for future salvation history—but also for living in the present. He asserts, “But now Messiah has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who are asleep,” something akin to how “He is the first of a great harvest of all who have died” (1 Corinthians 15:20, NLT). The analogy of Yeshua being first fruits, for certain, is drawn from the Torah (Exodus 23:19; Leviticus 2:12; Deuteronomy 18:4). Bruce actually concludes, “This analogy may have come the more readily to Paul’s mind if he was writing between Passover (5.7f.) and Pentecost (16.8): the presentation of the first fruits soon after Passover inaugurated the seven weeks which terminated at Pentecost (Lev. 23.15ff; cf. verse 4 above).”¹⁶⁴ Of course, it also has to be noted how later in this letter Paul will speak of, “the household of Stephanas, that they were the first fruits of Achaia” (1 Corinthians 16:15), and elsewhere of “my beloved Epaenetus, who is the firstfruits of Achaia to Christ” (Romans 16:5, NKJV), indicating a greater harvest of Believers in

¹⁶² Hays, 261.

¹⁶³ Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 703.

¹⁶⁴ Bruce, *1 and 2 Corinthians*, 145.

particular regions. Yeshua's resurrection is the first fruits of the resurrection (cf. Romans 8:29; Colossians 1:18), the historical reality of which is intended to assure skeptical Believers of the future resurrection to come at His return (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18).

The significance of Yeshua the Messiah's Incarnation, and His identification as the Second Adam, is expressed by Paul in how, "For since death came through a human being, the resurrection of the dead has also come through a human being" (1 Corinthians 15:21, NRSV). The sin of Adam and Eve resulted in the curse of death being passed on to all human beings (Genesis 3:17-19; Romans 5:12, 14-15), whereas the Incarnation, perfect life, sacrifice, and resurrection of the Messiah have brought redemption and new life to all who receive Him (Romans 5:17, 21; 6:4; Ephesians 2:5-6). Paul exclaims, "For just as in connection with Adam all die, so in connection with the Messiah all will be made alive" (1 Corinthians 15:22, CJB/CJSB). The life provided by the Messiah indeed does involve the future resurrection of the dead (John 5:25), but also involves the future realities of the Millennial Kingdom (Revelation 20:6) and beyond. Thiselton further indicates, especially as we will evaluate Paul's words which follow,

"[T]he argument that humanity is, simply as a brute fact, bound up in the solidarities, vulnerabilities, and consequences of the life and destiny of **Adam** finds its saving parallel in the gospel assurance that the new humanity is bound up in the solidarities, atoning work, and resurrection victory and promise of **Christ** as the 'last' (i.e., eschatological) **Adam**."¹⁶⁵

Yeshua the Messiah, as the Second Adam, is to be properly regarded as the first fruits of the resurrection (1 Corinthians 15:20), with the righteous to be resurrected from the dead subsequent to His Second Coming: "But there is an order to this resurrection: Christ was raised as the first of the harvest; then all who belong to Christ will be raised when he comes back" (1 Corinthians 15:23, NLT). Paul here does not go into detail regarding the intermediate state before death and the resurrection, but elsewhere in his letters he does describe a going to be with the Lord in Heaven, a temporary disembodiment, prior to the resurrection (2 Corinthians 5:8; Philippians 1:23; cf. Hebrews 12:23; Revelation 6:9). Once again, we need to be reminded of how the thrust of the Holy Scriptures is one of resurrection and permanent embodiment in the Messianic Age and Eternal State; the thrust of the Holy Scriptures is not one of permanent disembodiment.

Speaking in broad, salvation-historical terms, after the resurrection of the dead, Paul narrates how "Then is the end, when He delivers the kingdom to God, even the Father [*tō Theō kai patri*, τῷ θεῷ καὶ πατρὶ], when He makes to cease all rule and all authority and power" (1 Corinthians 15:24, LITV). Some discussion can be raised by examiners about the nature of the Millennium here (cf. Revelation 20),¹⁶⁶ but Paul's point involves highlighting the significance of the resurrection, and how the resurrection (Philippians 3:20-21) involves a defeat of the cosmic powers (Ephesians 1:20-21; Colossians 2:15; cf. Daniel 7:14) and then the inauguration of the Eternal State. Recognizing the resurrection of the righteous as a significant, future point in history for the redeemed, it is most appropriate here for *telos* (τέλος) to be rendered as "culmination," as the CJB/CJSB has, "then the culmination, when he hands over the Kingdom to God the Father, after having put an end to every rulership, yes, to every authority and power." Other versions have "the grand consummation" (The Message), or "the end, the goal" (Kingdom New Testament).

Among commentators, Witherington draws out his view that with the return of the Messiah and a defeat of various powers and authorities, that the supremacy of Yeshua over leaders like the Roman Caesar is what is being emphasized. He concludes, "[Paul] refers to the

¹⁶⁵ Thiselton, 1225.

¹⁶⁶ Ciampa and Rosner, pp 765-766.

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parousia [παρουσία] of Christ in 15:23, as opposed to the appearing of Caesar, and to Christ subjugating all kings and kingdoms when he appears in 15:24, as opposed to the boast of Caesar to have already done so in imposing his *pax Romana*.¹⁶⁷ Ciampa and Rosner appear to go even farther than this, actually comparing the reign of Yeshua over the world, and then the transition anticipated, to a Roman general going out into the provinces and asserting Roman political control. They conclude,

“Verses 24-28 reflect the motif of a dominion gone astray and needing to be crushed so that the proper dominion might be restored. The general idea would have been familiar to anyone in the Roman Empire. Just as a Roman emperor would send out his leading general to put down seditious movements and rebellious vassal states and restore the emperor’s authority throughout the empire, God has sent Christ to subdue all rebellion and opposition, to destroy all the enemies of God’s kingdom, and to restore all of creation to its proper submission to the Father for his glory and the good of all creation.”¹⁶⁸

Garland looks at the powers and authorities to be defeated from a much more supernatural vantage point, stating, “since death is named as the last of these powers, it is likely that he has in mind powers from the spirit world. These enemies and archenemies of God all take the side of death, the last and greatest of the opponents to be defeated. They all challenge the lordship of Christ and must be defeated.”¹⁶⁹ He also mentions the usage of the verb *katargeō* (καταργέω), a major definition being “**to cause someth. to lose its power or effectiveness, invalidate, make powerless**” (BDAG),¹⁷⁰ and directs how “It is best to translate it here as ‘dethrone,’ ‘abolish,’ or ‘overthrow,’ rather than ‘destroy.’ This allows for the possibility of Christ’s reconciling all things (Col. 1:20).”¹⁷¹

A hint of the thousand-year Millennium (Revelation 20:1-6) is detectable in Paul’s statement, “For He must reign until He has put all His enemies under His feet” (1 Corinthians 15:25). There is a probable connection with Psalm 110:1 here: “The LORD says to my Lord: ‘Sit at My right hand until I make Your enemies a footstool for Your feet.’” With the verb *katargeō* employed, Paul asserts how “The last enemy to be abolished is death” (HCSB), or “The last enemy to be overthrown will be death” (Goodspeed New Testament). In the Eternal State, the negative power of death (cf. Psam 49:14; Jeremiah 9:21) will be something that the righteous will never have to experience any more,¹⁷² as Isaiah 25:8 exclaims, “He will swallow up death for all time, and the Lord GOD will wipe tears away from all faces, and He will remove the reproach of His people from all the earth; for the LORD has spoken.” This is picked up again in Revelation 21:4, “and He will wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there will no longer be *any* death; there will no longer be *any* mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away.”

While there are definitely futuristic components to be experienced, associated with the Second Coming and general resurrection of the righteous, Paul was one who regarded death as an already-defeated foe, in his later statement of 2 Timothy 1:10: “our Savior Messiah Yeshua...abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.”

In 1 Corinthians 15:27, The Apostle Paul makes light of Psalm 8:6, speaking of the dignity of humanity in general, “You make him to rule over the works of Your hands; You have put all

¹⁶⁷ Witherington, *1-2 Corinthians*, 297.

¹⁶⁸ Ciampa and Rosner, pp 767-768.

¹⁶⁹ Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 710.

¹⁷⁰ BDAG, 525.

¹⁷¹ Garland, *1 Corinthians*, pp 710-711.

¹⁷² For some useful observations, consult the FAQ, “Afterlife, negates need for resurrection.”

things under his feet.”¹⁷³ Hebrews 2:5-9 employs the statement of Psalm 8:6 to speak to the issue of Yeshua the Messiah’s identification with humanity. Paul, however, goes further than this, as Yeshua being a Second Adam is the exemplar of what a true human person should be. When Yeshua reigns over the Earth in the Millennium, He will widely represent what was intended for Adam and Eve at the beginning. Those who rule and reign with the Messiah during this time (cf. Revelation 20:4), will decisively be associated with the new humanity represented in His salvation-historical work. Noting the presence of Psalm 8:6 in 1 Corinthians 15:27, Craig S. Keener concurs,

“In 15:27, Paul quotes from LXX Ps 8:7 (ET Ps 8:6), which he links by *gezerah sheva* (i.e., connecting texts by keywords, here, ‘feet’; and probably the idea of reigning in Ps 8:6 and Ps 110:2). Psalm 8’s ‘son of man’ (Ps 8:4; NRSV: ‘mortals’) who is ‘a little lower than God’ (8:5; although the LXX familiar to Paul’s audience reads ‘lower than angels,’ as in Heb 2:7) probably alludes to the first humans’ commission to rule (Gen 1:26-28, a text Paul elsewhere mines: 1 Cor 11:7-9). Thus, Paul is already (as in 15:22) preparing for his exposition of the contrast between the first and eschatological Adam (15:45-49), and the humankind implied in each.”¹⁷⁴

Ciampa and Rosner also state, “Christ as the last Adam retrieved the situation the first Adam lost. It is an explicitly christological use of the Old Testament, with the Old Testament notion of corporate representation as its presupposition; Christ represents his people (see 15:22-23).”¹⁷⁵ This is important to keep in mind, how it is Yeshua in His humanity, as the Messianic King (Isaiah 9:7), who will deliver over (1 Corinthians 15:24) the Millennial Kingdom to His Father, and the Eternal State is thus inaugurated. Paul specifies, “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” (1 Corinthians 15:27), an obvious reference to the Father not being subjected to Yeshua ruling as the representative of redeemed humankind.

As it appears in most Bibles, 1 Corinthians 15:28 reads, “When all things are subjected to him, then the Son himself will also be subjected to him who put all things in subjection under him, that God may be all in all” (ESV). There are some significant questions which have been raised from 1 Corinthians 15:28 about the nature of the Messiah, specifically in terms of what it means for Him to be subordinated here. Is this an indication that Yeshua the Son might not actually be God, or at least might it be an indication that Yeshua the Son is (permanently) subordinate to God the Father? There is little doubting that from the Gospels, the incarnated, human Yeshua submitted Himself to do the will of the Heavenly Father (Mark 14:36; Matthew 26:39; John 4:34; 5:19; 7:16; 17:4). It should also be apparent, for those who hold to a high Christology of Yeshua being God, that veneration or worship of Yeshua is not independent from veneration or worship of the Father (Romans 16:27; Philippians 2:9-11; Galatians 1:3-5).

Many evangelical Christians consider Yeshua the Messiah to be equal to the Father in His Divinity (cf. Philippians 2:6), but functionally subordinate to the Father. Blomberg is a commentator who states, “Although God the Son is *essentially* equal to the Father, he remains *functionally* subordinate, just as his glorified humanity keeps him distinct from what he was prior to the incarnation.”¹⁷⁶ Representing a relatively classic Twentieth Century perspective on 1 Corinthians 15:28 is Mare, who views the Son’s delivering up of His Millennial Kingdom to the Father, as widely an administrative action:

¹⁷³ An inclusive language version like the NRSV stresses humanity in general being addressed here, actually changing the singulars to plurals: “You have given them dominion over the works of your hands; you have put all things under their feet.”

¹⁷⁴ Keener, *1-2 Corinthians*, 127.

¹⁷⁵ Ciampa and Rosner, 776.

¹⁷⁶ Blomberg, 298; also Keener, *1-2 Corinthians*, 127; Fee, *1 Corinthians*, 760.

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“If there were inherent inferiority, the present tense would be expected—i.e., ‘he is ever subjected to the Father.’ But the future aspect of Christ’s subjection to the Father must rather be viewed in light of the administrative process in which the world is brought from its sin and disorder into the order by the power of the Son, who died and was raised and who then, in the economy of the Godhead, turns it all over to God the Father, the supreme administrative head. All this is to be done so that God will be recognized by all as sovereign, and he—the triune God—will be supreme (cf. Rev 22:3-5).”¹⁷⁷

The statement which necessarily requires our attention from 1 Corinthians 15:28 is *hina ē ho Theos [ta] panta en pasin* (ὡς ἵνα ὁ θεὸς [τὰ] πάντα ἐν πᾶσιν), “that God may be all in all.” It is to be rightly protested that this is a statement of universalism, something akin to, “so that God may be everything to everyone” (Moffat New Testament), and with it perhaps the hope that the unrighteous may actually become “saved” and not consigned to eternal punishment. Instead, this is to be correctly approached as involving the unchallenged reign of God: “God will rule completely over all” (Good News Bible) or “God’s rule is absolutely comprehensive” (The Message). The Deuteronomy 6:4 *Shema* explicitly claims that the God of Israel is the One True God (also: Deuteronomy 4:35, 39; 1 Kings 8:60; Isaiah 45:5; 46:9), and history is moving in a definite direction where “the LORD will be king over all the earth; in that day the LORD will be the only one, and His name the only one” (Zechariah 14:9). Fee is correct in his conclusion,

“Nothing lies outside of God’s redemptive purposes in Christ, in whom all things finally will be ‘united’ (Eph. 1:9-10). Therefore, at the death of death the final rupture in the universe will be healed and God alone will rule over all beings, banishing those who have rejected his offer of life and lovingly governing all those who by grace have entered into God’s ‘rest.’”¹⁷⁸

There are good reasons for examiners to actually conclude that Yeshua’s subjection to God in 1 Corinthians 15:28, involves Him as the representative of redeemed humanity as Second Adam (1 Corinthians 15:21, 27), in His Incarnation as Messianic King, especially given how Yeshua will be reigning over the Eternal State (Revelation 3:21; 22:3), and not the Father exclusively. Payne proposes, in view of the source text *hina ē ho Theos [ta] panta en pasin*, that it is most appropriate for us to view the statement along the lines of, “that the Godhead may be all in all.” He directs,

“...1 Cor 15:28...may be better translated as ‘so that the Godhead (ὁ θεός) may be all in all.’ The shift from ‘God the Father’ in verse 24 to ‘the God’ in verse 28 makes sense as indicating a shift in reference from the Father to the Godhead. This is also suggested by what it affirms, namely, that God ‘may be all in all.’ This final statement, ‘that God may be all in all,’ is more appropriate as an affirmation of the oneness and encompassing authority of the Godhead than a restricted reference to the Father. Other statements by Paul show that he did not believe in the new age, God the Father would be everything to the exclusion of Christ...{quoting Romans 9:5; Ephesians 1:20-22}...Consequently, ‘the God’ in 1 Cor 15:28 makes best sense as referring to the Godhead...”¹⁷⁹

With a salvation-historical transition to occur, with the Incarnate Yeshua ruling and reigning in the Millennial Kingdom, to the totality of God ruling and reigning, then 1 Corinthians 15:28 can indeed (and probably should) be translated to reflect this: “And when all things are subjected to Him, then the Son Himself also will be subjected to the One who subjected all things to Him, that the Godhead may be all in all” (PME). This is a most proper way to avoid any difficulties present among those who might think that in the Son being

¹⁷⁷ Mare, in *EXP*, 10:286.

¹⁷⁸ Fee, *1 Corinthians*, 760.

¹⁷⁹ Payne, pp 134-135.

subjected to God, that the Son is somehow not God. The issue is actually an administrative shift from the Incarnate (yet exalted) Son, to God in totality ruling and reigning over the New Creation.¹⁸⁰

¹⁸⁰ To be sure, there are many evangelical Christian theologians who do not favor the perspective here, “that the Godhead may be all in all,” and instead believe in some permanent subordination of the Son to the Father, which can actually leave an open door to some wondering whether or not Yeshua the Son is genuinely God, or instead a supernatural yet created agent. As is indicated by a selection of literature produced in the past decade or so, the debate between examiners over the subordination of the Son to the Father being limited to Yeshua’s Incarnation, or being something permanent, involves more differences of approach to contemporary male-female relations and gender role debates (apparently reflective of the relationship of the Son to the Father) and women in ministry controversies, than it does to actual Christology and Yeshua’s Divinity:

Kevin Giles, *The Trinity & Subordinationism: The Doctrine of God & the Contemporary Gender Debate* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2002); *The Eternal Generation of the Son: Maintaining Orthodoxy in Trinitarian Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2012); Millard J. Erickson, *Who’s Tampering with the Trinity? An Assessment of the Subordination Debate* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2009); Dennis W. Jowers and H. Wayne House, eds., *The New Evangelical Subordinationism? Perspectives on the Equality of God the Father and God the Son* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2012); Bruce A. Ware & John Starke, eds., *One God in Three Persons: Unity of Essence, Distinction of Persons, Implications for Life* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015).