

The Goal of God

Easter Sunday

1 Corinthians 15:12-28

Written By

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Here's a short video which really puts Easter in proper perspective for us. As you see, it gives us many goals God achieved in sending His to be our Savior by means of His sacrificial death and glorious resurrection. But there are more we encounter as we listen to the teaching of the Apostle Paul, a Jewish convert who understood those divine goals in an up close fashion.

What Are God's Goals Regarding His Son's Resurrection? (1 Cor. 15:12-28)?

Goal #1: Replace Illogic With Logic (1 Cor. 15:12-19)

What is illogic? It defies factual, verifiable evidence(s). It argues against reason, opting to embrace a notion or a position which is fundamentally flawed because it is either based on faulty evidence and reasoning, misguided emotion, or both. Just as bad logic concerning Christ's glorious and historical resurrection had filtered quietly into what we might call Corinth Community Church, it filters into our society and churches today. I'm sure you've heard it from the mouths of smiling proponents: *"There is no truth, but truths. There is no such thing as absolute truth, only personal, individual perceptions of truth. Hence, all religious positions are equal, meaning one is not more true than another. And, yes, don't forget that it is mean-spirited to claim you have the religious story at the expense of all other religious stories."* This, my friend, is the epitome of illogic, and is just a clever way so one does not have to engage what the late Francis Schaeffer called true truth.

One, to say there is no truth, but truths is to posit a self-defeating argument because you have, by definition, assumed your axiom is absolutely true that there is no truth, but truths. Second, all religious positions are far from equal, and they certainly don't see themselves as equal, do they? In logical terms the law of non-contradiction is the foundation of all logic: "This law says

that opposite statements cannot both be true at the same time in the same sense.”¹ As Geisler notes, “But if opposites can both be true then there is no difference between true and false . . .”² If this is the case then truth cannot ever be known. But truth is known and is knowable based on factual evidence(s). For instance, one can say, “I don’t think fire will burn my skin,” while another can posit, “I think fire will burn my skin.” Based on what we know of the nature of fire from personal experience, view one is a denial of factual reality, leaving us with the time, inexorable truth of view two. Only a foolish, naïve person would hold arrogantly that both diametrically opposed views are true concurrently.

Why all this talk about logic? Because people apply unsound, ungrounded logic when it comes to the resurrection of Jesus Christ in time and space history. I’m sure there are many reasons why they do this: (1) they want to appear open-minded and compassionate, (2) they don’t want to offend other people, (3) they want to go along in order to get along, (4) they are smug in their philosophical self-deception that opposing views can, in fact, be true even if the facts state otherwise, and perhaps (5) they don’t want to come to terms with the historically verifiable person and work of Jesus, the Christ.

Like many today, the folks in the Corinthian church the Apostle Paul had founded held to an untenable and illogical concept of the historical resurrection of Jesus. Spiritual leaders in the church, like Paul, taught that Christ *had risen* from the dead (based on all reasons just articulated in verses 3-11), while typical parishioners, impacted, no doubt, by the polytheistic worship culture of Corinth, embraced the belief that there was no such thing as bodily resurrection. You can readily see how quickly the logical law of non-contradiction came into play when Paul addressed this misguided local church. Both views could not be true at the same time because verifiable evidences supported one over the other.

In order to guide the confused Corinthians toward true truth regarding the resurrection, Paul methodically and lovingly dismantles their illogical understanding. How he does this is most thoughtful and ingenious. He begins with a conditional statement, which, if true, leads to a logical question and conclusion.

¹² Now if Christ is preached, that He has been raised from the dead, how do some among you say that there is no resurrection of the dead?

It is interesting that Paul employs a unique Greek verbal for the concept of preaching here: *kayrusso* (κηρύσσω).³ This colorful words was used by the Greek of a herald who would proclaim a victory of a military leader to the people, a victory which, of course, was based on the facts of a battle in question. Pragmatically, by using this term Paul asserted he was not just sharing his personal opinion about Christ’s resurrection, but was presenting indisputable, incontrovertible

¹Norman Geisler, *When Skeptics Ask* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2013), 282.

²Ibid.

³Walter Bauer, William F. Arndt, and Wilbur Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, ed. Frederick William Danker, 3rd ed. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2000), 543: κηρύσσω κηρύσσω [κήρυξ, also κήρυξ] ‘make a public announcement’, in the manner of a herald, proclaim – a. mostly about the reign of God and associated themes, including repentance, faith, the importance of Jesus (Christ) or his mission Mt 3:1; 4:17; 24:14; Mk 1:4, 38, 45; 6:12; Lk 3:3; 4:18f; 8:1; 12:3; Ac 10:37; 20:25; Ro 10:8, 14f; 1 Cor 1:23; 15:11f; 2 Cor 1:19; 11:4; Gal 2:2; Phil 1:15; Col 1:23; 1 Th 2:9; 1 Ti 3:16; 2 Ti 4:2. – b. Moses and his message featured as content Ac 15:21; cp. Ro 2:21. – c. as celestial call for someone to carry out a task Rv 5:2. – d. of Jesus’ declaration to imprisoned spirits 1 Pt 3:19.

evidences that the Lord had, indeed, laid His body down and picked it up just as He prophesied He would (John 10:15-18). In light of this raw reality, Paul draws the logical conclusion: How could you possibly hold the premise there is no such thing as the resurrection of the dead? Yes, how could a thinking person embrace this argument with a straight face? Point is, you shouldn't, or couldn't.

Having laid the foundation for sound logic concerning Christ's breaking the bonds of death itself, Paul next posits a second conditional sentence in order to show what happens if you choose to stubbornly believe that resurrections of dead people cannot ever occur. His argument here is something akin to a knocking over the first domino of many carefully placed dominos. If the first one goes down, then they all fall in sequential order:

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

See what I mean? If Christ is still in the grave, then, basically, despair reigns supremely for man possesses no meta-narrative, no ultimate, over-arching story which explains the big, thorny questions of life like . . . Why is there death in the first place? Why do we all have to die? Is this life all there is? Is faith simply blind, irrational, and merely highly personal, and if it is, then how could we ever have real hope that something better is coming to replace this sinful world? Where did sin come from, anyway, and what can be done about it? What about loved ones who have died and believed in the resurrection of Jesus? You mean to tell they had a birthday and a death day and, according to humanism, that is it? You mean to tell me there is no hope of *ever* seeing them again? And why am I wasting my time being a pastor of a local church, espousing things which could not possibly be truth?

When you trade logic for illogic, things unwind quickly, do they not? I watched a man on TV once take his first parachute jump out of a plane in near the Florida Everglades. He didn't have a fear of parachuting, but he did have a fear of alligators. As his chute drifted away from the landing site and as a friend filmed the adventure, he frantically pulled a large military-style knife out of his suite and began cutting the lines of his chute to keep himself from drifting out into the swamp. You can imagine what his illogical decision cost him. He fell like a stone into shallow, muddy water. Not smart. Far smarter to trust the factual training he received and guide the chute to the intended drop zone. Even smarter not to jump anywhere near the Everglades, correct?

The point is well-stated: Illogical thinking leads to illogical and damaging results. Conversely, logical thinking leads to logical results which are most beneficial. Where the resurrection of Jesus from the grave is concerned this sound principle is most applicable for it leads to great life in the here and now and even more amazing eternal life in a resurrected body akin to that of Christ's. No wonder Paul took the Corinthians to task. He, who had seen and spoken with the resurrected Christ (Acts 9), had learned firsthand how spiritually dangerous and destructive illogical thinking is about the resurrection. God's goal on the Damascus Road many years prior was designed to move Paul toward sound thinking concerning the resurrection so he could be spiritually saved. Perhaps that is God's goal with you this morning, too.

A second divine goal concerning the resurrection is presented in verses 20 through 23:

Goal #2: Replace Death With Life (1 Cor. 15:20-23)

What is Christ's position right now? Is He still in the grave? No. Listen to Paul's joyous answer:

“²⁰ But now Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who are asleep.”

The past tense nature of the main verb “*has been raised*” highlights the historical reality of the bodily resurrection of Jesus three days after His crucifixion. Jesus isn't dead. On the contrary, He is seated on the right hand of the Father's magnificent, majestic heavenly throne (Heb. 1:3), functioning now as our great High Priest. Further, the perfect tense, not the past tense, is used here for the verb “has been raised,” *egaygertai* (ἐγήγερται/ἐγείρω). This infrequently used tense is employed to stress a past act, viz., the historical resurrection of Jesus, followed by an abiding result, viz, His perpetual life. Jesus verifies this reality at the close of the Bible when He, speaking as the High Priest over His local churches, exclaims, “I am the living One; and I was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of death and Hades” (Rev. 1:18).

Jesus is alive. Crucifixion did, in fact, kill him; however, He rose the third day just as He said He would (Matt. 12:40; Mark 8:31; 9:31; 10:34; John 2:19-20), and multiple lines of evidence substantiate this fact. We don't have time to develop all of them, but we can mention a few of them to support the point:

- The medical evidence is clear that no one *ever* survived a Roman crucifixion. Highly trained medical doctors wrote a carefully reached document on crucifixion which validates this point for all time.⁴
- Christ was seen by many people eleven times after His crucifixion and tomb internment (Mary Magdalene, Mark 16:9-11; the women at the tomb on resurrection morning, Matthew 28:10-18; Peter in Jerusalem, Luke 24:34; the two disciples on the road to Emmaus, Mark 16:12-13; the disciples behind closed doors, Matthew 16:14, all of the disciples, John 20:26-31; seven disciples as they fished, John 21:1-14; eleven disciples on a mountain, Matthew 28:16-20; a crowd of 500, 1 Corinthians 15:6; Jesus' brother, James, 1 Corinthians 15:7; and a crowd who watched His ascension in to heaven, Acts 1:3-8). Of all these appearances, the people saw with their eyes and heard with their ears, Jesus. On four occasions they saw Him actually eat. On four occasions He was touched. Two times His crucifixion scars were readily visible to the naked eye. Had this all been an elaborate hoax, all anyone had to do was two things: one produce the dead body, which never happened, and two, interview the witnesses to determine whether they were viable or not. Their witness, on the contrary, was accepted and many others became Christian based on their collective witness.
- When Peter and John looked into the empty tomb, what was it about the grave

⁴William D. Edwards, MD; Wesley J. Gabel, MDiv; Floyd E. Hosmer, MS, AMI, “On the Physical Death of Jesus Christ,” *Journal of the American Medical Association*, 1986:255(11): 1455-1463, accessed on April 4, 2019, <https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jama/article-abstract/403315>.

clothes which convinced them the Lord was alive (John 20:3-8)? Those grave clothes, which were wrapped around a dead body like a mummy, weighed a hefty 100 pounds because of the amount of spices woven between the wrappings. What they saw was an empty cocoon-like set of “grave clothes,” with a face cloth placed neatly to the side. Obviously, the body had simply passed right through the grave clothes. Peter was eventually crucified upside down by Nero for his faith in the resurrected Christ. Had this all been a hoax, Peter could have easily recanted, but he didn’t because of what he had seen, and who he eventually heard . . . Jesus himself.

I could go on, but I’m sure you get the point. The logical, historical evidence supports the fact that Paul’s words are true when he says, “*But now Christ has been raised from the dead*” (1 Cor. 15:20). Just his word of testimony is powerful and commendable, for how do you get a Jew schooled in Judaism, and an ardent rabbi at that, who also hated Christians to the point of persecuting them for believing in Jesus as the Messiah, yes, how do you account for his conversion if it did not occur like he said it did on multiple occasions (Acts 22:6-11; 24:21; 26:12-18)? Paul lost everything for this new-found faith, but in reality he gained everything, did he not? He was willing to lose power, position, a life-long career as a respected rabbi, connections, upward mobility, notoriety, fame, friends, family relationships, and so forth all because of the fact he had seen and spoke with the resurrected Christ. No wonder he employed the perfect tense in his verbiage. These are the cold, hard facts and they give you all the evidence you need to trade false thinking for true thinking, and spiritual death for spiritual life.

To these Paul adds that Jesus is “*the first fruits of those who are asleep.*” Like a skilled Rabbi, Paul reaches deep into the pages of the Torah (i.e., Genesis-Deuteronomy, the five books of the law of God), namely, the book of Leviticus chapter 23, and shows how Christ’s fulfillment of the Feast of Firstfruits leads to our bodily resurrection.

The purpose of this ancient feast is aptly described by Dr. Allen Ross of Dallas Theological Seminary:

“The purpose of firstfruits was both commemorative and prophetic. There are other firstfruits to be offered—every harvest time the first fruit was to be plucked and offered to the LORD when fully mature. This signified that the first belonged as a thank offering to God who gives the crop. It also signified their faith in the LORD, for from him [and here’s the key for us] more would come. A harvest was coming, this was the first of it.”⁵

After an Israelite farmer gave God the first of his crop, then, he had expectant faith an abundant harvest was about to follow in due time. How exciting! No wonder Paul taught us that Jesus fulfilled this feast to the letter. His resurrection was a statement and a promise that a massive resurrection of all people will follow His!

Why does there need to be resurrection of dead people anyway? That’s Paul’s next brief discussion.

²¹ For since by a man *came* death, by a man also *came* the resurrection of the dead.

²² For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all will be made alive.

⁵Leviticus, Dallas Theological Seminary: Unpublished Class Notes: 261.

Note the beautiful symmetry here in Paul's answer. Through Adam's disobedience in the Garden of Eden (Gen. 3), all of mankind was plunged into physical (and spiritual) death. However, through Christ's obedience and ultimate resurrection, bodily resurrection will occur for *all* ... none excluded. The only difference in the resurrection is the direction your eternal destiny will take in relationship with what you did with Christ. Some will go to heaven, others to eternal punishment. That's not my personal opinion, either. Jesus taught about it repeatedly so nobody would be caught off guard (John 3:16; 5:23-24).

Harvest-time is just around the corner. Let there be no doubt about it because it's guaranteed by the position of Christ as the first resurrected one. Did you catch that? Better yet, where will you be on that harvest of all harvests? Jesus is lovingly waiting for you to move, by faith, toward Him and toward eternal life. This is one of the main goals of God in the resurrection event.

A third is equally instructive:

Goal #3: Replace False Rule With True Rule (1 Cor. 15:24-28)

Yes. God has a kingdom plan He has been sovereignly working out since the fall of man many millennia ago (Dan. 2, 7).⁶ The mystery of that plan is disclosed here for all, by Paul, to read and study:

²³ But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, after that those who are Christ's at His coming, ²⁴ 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. ²⁵ For He must reign until He has put all His enemies under His feet. ²⁶ The last enemy that will be abolished is death. ²⁷ For HE HAS PUT ALL THINGS IN SUBJECTION UNDER HIS FEET. But when He says, 'All things are put in subjection,' it is evident that He is excepted who put all things in subjection to Him. ²⁸ When all things are subjected to Him, then the Son Himself also will be subjected to the One who subjected all things to Him, so that God may be all in all.

Trust me, we could stop right here and launch into a lengthy series on the depth inherent in this theological discussion. Time, however, constrains us, so we will have to limit our thoughts to some salient observations.

First, realize that Paul isn't giving us all the details about how the resurrection and the end of the world and time as we know it will be played out. Key events are presented here, but they are far from exhaustive. For a clearer picture of the progression and fulfillment of God's grand plan, one must study numerous other exciting texts from both testaments.

Second, Christ was the first resurrected one, never to die again (as happened to some He raised while on His earthly mission; Matt. 9:18-25; Luke 7:11-17; John 11). In literary terms this is called *protimesis* where things are enumerated according to their places of honor and importance (E. W. Bullinger, *Figures Of Speech Used In The Bible*: 457). Christ, thereby, holds this highest place of honor as the resurrected one, and we will follow His lead, as Paul says, "at His coming." When

⁶For a more robust discussion of this theological truth, cf. Alva J. McClain, *The Greatness of the Kingdom* (Winona Lake, IN: BMH Books), 1987.

is this? Before we answer this query, let me first make this comment. The emphasis in this verse is upon order. The Greek word is a military one. Dr. Arnold Fruchtenbaum in his study *The Feast of Firstfruits* opens the meaning up for us:

The Greek used here is *tagma* [τάγμα] which is the Greek word for a military procession. In a military procession there is order: the infantry, the cavalry, the battering rams, and each of these things had a certain place in the procession. Not all believers will be resurrected at the same time, but in stages.⁷

Again, the entire resurrection order is not given by Paul here, just pieces of it. Taking into consideration other texts on this topic, here is how the order is going to unfold.

- One, Christ is resurrected first.
- Two, Christians from the Church Age, Jews and Gentiles, will be resurrected at the Rapture of the Church (1 Thess. 4:13-18).
- Three, all saints martyred during the Tribulation, coupled with all the saints from the Old Testament period will be resurrected at Christ's coming, or Christ's Second Coming (Rev. 20:4). This multiple stage resurrected is called, by John in Revelation, the first resurrection (Rev. 20:4-5). Those who have a part in this event walk into the joys of the Messiah's kingdom and the eternal abode, heaven.
- Four, the Messiah will, then, establish His 1,000-year earthly kingdom as prophesied (1 Chron. 17:11-14; Dan. 2:44; 7:14-22; Isa. 2; Zech. 12-14, etc.).
- Five, the next "order" will be the resurrection of all the unbelievers of all time at the end of the millennial kingdom (Rev. 20:11-15).
- Six, then will come the "end," the time when Jesus, the King of Kings and Lord of Lords, will abolish death once and for all, along with all other rulers and powers (Satanic/demonic or human), and He will then submissively lay all His marvelous work of reclaiming the cosmos for the Father at the Father's feet, as it were (1 Cor. 15:26-28). THIS is God's glorious goal: To be the supreme holy ruler over all things, all people, and all places! Thank God He has a plan! When you feel your world is tumbling out of control, take a deep breath and remember what He is up to. He is constantly working to erect His glorious kingdom, wherein there will be only peace, prosperity, purity, and perfection.

As you might correctly surmise, nothing will thwart God's plan. The cross couldn't. Your death can't and won't either. ISIS can't stop it. Communists are powerless to slow it down. Cultists can't revise it away. New Agers can't merge it with false systems and dilute it of its intrinsic meaning. Liberal professors can't explain it away. THE KING WILL BE KING IN ALL SPHERES ... and He will raise all of us to either enjoy it with Him, or to be punished eternally for our rejection of the saving work of His dear son on the windswept, rocky hill called Golgotha some 2,000 years ago.

Resurrection day is a comin'. It's guaranteed by the unique position of Christ and the awe-inspiring plan of God Almighty.

⁷Arnold Fruchtenbaum, *The Feast of Firstfruits*, Note packet, 6).