

All In All

by John W. Ritenbaugh

Forerunner, "Personal," May 1996

Branded upon our minds is the idea that I Corinthians 15 is the "resurrection" chapter, and indeed resurrection is its major theme. However, the apostle Paul inserts other important ideas into this inspiring chapter. As important as it is to us and to God's purpose, the resurrection is just another step contained within a concept suggested in the phrase, "that God may be all in all" (verse 28).

"All in all" has much to do with Pentecost and with oneness. It alludes to a time when all human beings will not only be reconciled to God, but everything in His awesome creation will be in total agreement and harmony with Him—as well as with each other!

This time is the complete restitution of all things, the conclusion of the work of Jesus Christ. It is the culmination of the new creation, the spiritual one begun in Christ. In the center, as the focus and the cause of the oneness, is God the Father. Verse 28, picturing Jesus turning over all things to His Father, is the exclamation point that draws our attention to the Father.

Christ's reign will and must continue until every enemy has been conquered, and the last enemy that shall be destroyed is death. For the rule and authority over all things has been given to Christ by His Father. But in that quotation, "All things are put under Him," it is self-evident that God, who reduced everything to subjection, is not included. When Christ has finally won the battle against all His enemies, then shall the Son acknowledge Himself subject to God the Father, who gave the Son power over all things, that God may be utterly supreme, that He may be everything to everyone. (I Corinthians 15:25-28)

If this quotation does not square with your Bible, do not be alarmed. It is an amplification of these verses pieced together from the *Phillips*, *King James*, *Taylor*, *Moffatt* and *Norlie* translations. The Father is drawing the entire creation into a state where everybody and everything acknowledge Him as God. When this occurs, division, confusion and warfare will not exist because all, everything, is at one with our Creator.

Our acceptance of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, repentance from dead works and receiving of God's Holy Spirit are the first major steps for each of us in seeking to become one with the Father. The next major step is the return of Jesus Christ, when we will inherit the Kingdom of God after the resurrection from the dead. The "all in all" of verse 28 is the very end point of the gospel.

Though I Corinthians 15:28 may appear to be something that happens in the distant future, the process has already begun in us. Understanding this as a reality is vital to our spiritual well-being. If we do not consider it to be real, we may be lured into neglecting our summons to this glorious destiny by letting ourselves follow distractions or grow irresponsible.

Heavenly Citizenship

Philippians 3:20-21 remains in the present tense, but the teaching is essentially the same as I Corinthians 15:25-28:

For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself.

Verse 20 begins by asserting that we are now a colony of people whose real citizenship is in heaven. "Citizenship" indicates a fellowship or society all living under the same administration, but in this case, not living in the land of their citizenship. When we see this in context with His purpose, God is already drawing the church as a body into oneness with Him. Paul then goes on to assure us that by His power Christ will complete the process—even to transforming our bodies to be like His! What an awesome oneness to anticipate!

Paul began the section in verses 17-19 by contrasting two groups, and the difference between the two lies in the way each lives. He implies that those who are citizens of heaven are one, and they have a fellowship whose characteristics are opposite to "the enemies of the cross of Christ" (verse 18). They will end in destruction because they have "set their mind on earthly things" (verse 19). As a people living by sight, they are not in control of their flesh, their carnal nature.

Paul must have used "heaven" in verse 20 to emphasize how vast the difference between the two groups is. Heaven represents the unreachable to those whose minds are fixed upon goals limited to the earthly, carnal gratification of their senses. Though satisfying the self may be much easier at the moment, God says living that way will end in destruction.

Because we are reaching for something we cannot see, hear, smell, touch or taste, the carnal mind perceives living by faith as wasting life on the unreachable or as living a daydream or fantasy. Why pursue something that never gives any immediate gratification? God, however, hastens to reassure us that He has the will and the power to bring us into this oneness with Him (verse 21).

Unsearchable Riches

Paul repeats this assurance in Ephesians 3:20-21: "Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, to Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen." His capacity to meet our spiritual needs far exceeds anything we can either request in prayer or even dream! These verses climax Paul's insistent teaching, beginning in the epistle's first chapter, that the culmination of our redemption is the very glory of God!

These verses look beyond the grave to our being resurrected and changed, when we will have a life of unending and limitless success and fulfillment! Within the relationship of a wonderful, loving family, we will surmount challenges, pursue adventures and make astounding progress throughout eternity! We could ask for no more rewarding life!

Notice how Paul has, from the beginning of Ephesians, repeatedly touched upon the abundance of God's gifts and power supplied to us:

» . . . having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He has made us accepted in the Beloved. In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace. . . . (Ephesians 1:5-7)

» . . . in whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestined according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will, that we who first trusted in Christ should be to the praise of His glory. (Ephesians 1:11-12)
» . . . [which] is the guarantee of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, to the praise of His glory. (Ephesians 1:14)
» . . . that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. (Ephesians 2:7)
» To me, who am less than the least of all the saints, this grace was given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ. . . . (Ephesians 3:8)
» . . . that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man. . . . (Ephesians 3:16)

Now notice Ephesians 1:17-19:

. . . that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him, the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what is the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe, according to the working of His mighty power. . . .

And Ephesians 3:17-19:

. . . that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height—to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

And finally Ephesians 1:22-23:

And He put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.

The phrase "all in all" that ends verse 23 summarizes Christ's relationship with the church. Between Christ and the church exists an indissoluble link through which the riches and glory of God flow because Christ and His church are complementary parts of one organism. Brethren, the process to bring us to the oneness to which I Corinthians 15:28 looks forward has already begun! As Head and body together, we form the organism in which God's glory is manifested.

Glorifying the Father

In Jesus' prayer in John 17:4, He says He had glorified the Father. Since the Son has returned to the Father in heaven, and the church is formed and joined to the Son as one organism, the church now has the responsibility to glorify the Father. How? By becoming one with Him just as the Son was—by the power of God's Spirit given to us.

Christ glorified the Father by successfully completing the work the Father gave Him to do. He qualified to be our Savior, Redeemer and High Priest, and along the way, He preached the gospel to others. Our responsibility is to yield to Him, allowing Him to form us into His image by growing, overcoming, producing fruit and carrying out the works of the church as He assigns them.

In Philippians 3:21, the phrase "subdue all things to Himself" adds more detail to this picture of oneness. "Subdue" (*hupotasso*) means "to place in order" or "to place under in an orderly fashion." This word describes someone neatly rearranging scattered, disorganized objects according to a pattern.

In this context, the objects are not merely things, but people whose minds are in disorder, divided, confused and not wholly subject to God as a result of their own actions. Before being subdued, they exercised their own free will, followed the deceptions of Satan, loved the world and showed enmity toward God. Yet when Christ puts us in order, rearranges us, subdues us to bring us into oneness, He goes so far as to change our bodies to conform to the body of the One doing the subduing—God!

Paul says in Philippians 4:1, "Therefore, my beloved and longed-for brethren, my joy and crown, so stand fast in the Lord, beloved." "Therefore" indicates a concluding thought or exhortation. In this case, Paul exhorts us to take advantage of what has been given to us as expressed in chapter 3. In his word-picture, Paul shows us standing at a crossroads. We can look both ways—where we have been and where we are going. In one direction is eternity in the Kingdom of God, and in the other is the time we began the journey toward oneness with God.

In Philippians 3:3 he affirms that we are the true circumcision; we are the ones with whom God is really working at this time. Whatever great, earthly position, power or wealth that we may have is merely rubbish compared to what lies ahead (verses 7-8). Our immediate goal is the resurrection from the dead (verse 11). Therefore, we must strain to reach it (verse 14), and strive to have one mind in the church (verse 16). Even as the process to bring us to oneness with God has begun, so also the process to unify the church has begun. Paul urgently exhorts us in chapter 4:1, "Don't let this slip!"

Working Out Our Salvation

I John 3:2 plainly states that "now we are children of God; and . . . we shall be like Him." Since God is going to be "all in all," and since we are already considered by Him to be part of the same organism as Christ, who is God, and will have bodies conformed to His glorious body, there is only one thing we can be after the resurrection—God! After all His preparation to mold us into His image, do we suddenly turn into something else, something less than what He is in terms of being a member of His Family?

But there is yet one "fly in the ointment." That is, we are not completely there yet. Our job is not yet done. Then again, this is not too bad because we are not yet ready to inherit eternal life! We would be miserable living forever the way we are now. To have eternal life while encompassed with human nature would be a burden to us.

We see so much overcoming yet to be done, and we wonder, how will we do it? God has figured even this out. Who brought the plagues on Egypt? Who got Israel out of Egypt? Who divided the Red Sea? Who supplied the quail, manna and water? Who divided the Jordan? Who brought down the walls of Jericho? The questions could be virtually endless, but the answer would always be the same.

Philippians 2:12-13 adds an important element to understanding this process:

Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure.

It is God who saves! God saved Israel from Egyptian slavery. Israel did not overcome Pharaoh and Egypt by either warfare or by dint of superior intelligence. Jesus Christ is our Savior, and we cannot save ourselves from sin's power. When we accept Him as Savior, it obligates us as His servants to obey Him.

In like manner, when God broke Egypt's power, enabling the Israelites to be free, it obligated them to walk out of Egypt if they wanted their liberty. If the Israelites wanted to save their skins and be totally free of Egypt when God parted the Red Sea, it obligated them to walk the path God made for them between the walls of water. When God said, "I am going to bring you into the land and provide for you along the way," if Israel wanted these things, they were obligated to walk all the way to Canaan. It is very clear that if Israel wanted what God said He would give, then Israel had to also cooperate by *working* in the form of *walking* to where God said He would lead or take them. "Walk" is a code word for living.

With this as a background, when Paul says to "work out your own salvation," it cannot possibly mean we are going to save ourselves. Rather, like what confronted the Israelites when God opened the way to their physical salvation from slavery in Egypt, we should be ready to make God's spiritual salvation practical and operational. Paul does not say we must work *for* salvation, but rather carry our salvation out to its conclusion. He uses "work out" in much the same sense as when a student is told to work out an arithmetic problem—to bring it to its conclusion. For us, the conclusion, the goal, to work toward is Christ-likeness. The salvation here is sanctification, victory over sin unto holiness.

To make it very plain, if we want to be one with Him, we must get moving in the direction He is pointing, and He points toward His standards of conduct and attitude. Each person's walk is not exactly the same because each person's experience and makeup are somewhat different. There is enough similarity among humans, though, to make the Bible always relevant.

What God Supplies Us

One of the beautiful things about this is that each person's walk toward the image of God is exactly right for him. What is more, Philippians 2:13 also says God gives us both the will and power or energy to do it! *The New Testament in Modern Speech* renders it, "For it is God Himself whose power creates within you both the desire and the power to execute His gracious will." This work of God in us is another aspect of His grace, and without it, we could never be one with Him.

God Himself produces in us both the desire to live righteously and the effective energy to do so. He does not demand what we cannot do (I Corinthians 10:13). We see in Philippians 2:12 our responsibility and in verse 13 help to accomplish it.

We can see this working together with God in simple illustrations from physical life. We may launch a sailboat upon the water, but it takes what God supplies, wind, to make it move. We may plant vegetable seeds, but it is the power of God in nature that makes the plant grow and produce food. We may generate gigawatts of electricity in power plants, but God provides the wind, water, sunlight, coal, oil or gas to turn the turbines. In each case, we add something to what God already supplied.

Our salvation is something already given because it is God's will, and He is sovereign. We, though, must do something to make it practical by applying ourselves to salvation's demands. Even in this, God enables us to do it!

We will never know where the dividing line is between what God supplies and what we are responsible to do because it is different for each according to God's purpose. This proportion must be different because each person is different, and He is preparing us for different responsibilities within His Family. This is sure, however: Our walk toward salvation will always be difficult enough to be challenging and edifying.

Even here the analogy of Israel in the wilderness comes to our aid. Where did Israel get the energy to walk across the wilderness to the promised land? Did it not come from the manna and water God supplied, as well as the vision and hope of the inheritance which He also provided? Still, Israel walked! They had to work, to cooperate.

The verb "work" in Philippians 2:12 is in a tense that indicates continuous working. Just as Israel did not leave Egypt and arrive in the promised land in one step, neither are our salvation and oneness with God accomplished at once. It, too, is a process; it is our life's work.

God Is With Us!

That Israel spent *forty years* in the wilderness before reaching their goal may be intimidating, but God's Word abounds with encouragement. Did the pillar of fire or the cloud ever leave Israel? Did not the manna continue until they were in the promised land? Philippians 4:19 says, "And my God shall supply *all your need* according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus." Hebrews 13:5 strengthens us by assuring us that God will *never* leave us nor forsake us. Philippians 1:6 greatly encourages us by saying, ". . . being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you *will complete it* until the day of Jesus Christ."

We have no need to be discouraged! God is so closely involved with us! When we recognize just how closely involved He is, we need to glorify Him for what He truly is accomplishing as Creator.

His work in us has already begun, and John 14:23 helps us to see how close the union already is: "Jesus answered and said to him, 'If any one loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him.'" Here Jesus shows the relationship of the Father and the Son with one who loves Them and is obedient to Them. They are all part of the same home! They have a warm and loving family relationship.

One With God and the Brethren

We can carry this idea even one step further:

Do not lie to one another, since you have put off the old man with his deeds, and have put on the new man who is renewed in knowledge, according to the image of Him who created him, where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcised nor uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave nor free, but Christ is all and in all. (Colossians 3:9-11)

Here is another "all in all" phrase used in addressing the church. We need to connect this to Galatians 3:26-29:

For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.

These verses pair groupings or concepts that separate people and keep them divided and sometimes at war with each other. Paul shows racial differences (Greek and Jew); religious differences (circumcised and uncircumcised); cultural differences (barbarian and Scythian); social differences (slave and free); and finally sexual difference (male and female).

These are in no way all the differences that divide humanity, but they give enough of a representation for God to make His point. He makes it clear that we cannot be united to Him and separated from our brother at the same time. To do something for or against a brother is to do it to Christ (Matthew 25: 31-46). Because we, as brethren, are "in" Christ and He "in" us, we are one organism. John says if a man does not love his brother, he does not love God (I John 4:20)! This is serious business. We must be one with both.

The person who is truly converted is motivated, guided, inspired, led by, yielding to and empowered by the radiant energy flowing from Christ, who lives and works in Him. It is almost as if Christ and His converted brethren are driven together because they share the same nature. Ephesians 2:13-18 provides an explanation of the legal basis and motivation to make unity, oneness, a practical possibility:

But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been made near by the blood of Christ. For He Himself is our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of division between us, having abolished in His flesh the enmity, that is, the law of commandments contained in ordinances, so as to create in Himself one new man from the two, thus making peace, and that He might reconcile them both to God in one body through the cross, thereby putting to death the enmity. And He came and preached peace to you who were afar off and to those who were near. For through Him we both have access by one Spirit to the Father.

When we understand this is God's will, then we can consider it a certainty because God does not fail at what He undertakes.

Paul has shown us that Christ, through His crucifixion, has created the condition needed for peace. The crucifixion made possible the forgiveness of our sins, access to the Father and the granting of the Holy Spirit. These empower us to make peace and be unified into one by enabling us to live God's way. In this way, we are actively creating peace.

We sometimes have division in the church for two reasons, but both of these are actually expressions of the same reason: ***Not everyone attending services are of the same spirit***. This does not mean demon possession, but simply that, with God's permission, Satan has sown some unconverted tares within the congregation (Matthew 13:24-30). Paul makes it very clear in I Corinthians 3:3 that some of us having God's Spirit are still carnal! That is, we are very weak in the faith. As he points out in that same scripture, the result is "envy, strife, and divisions." Those three are sufficient to produce anything but oneness. Oneness will occur when each person chooses to act out of love and loyalty for

Christ and within God's law to eliminate sins that separate them. This will allow us to achieve a true family relationship.

Considering Colossians 3:10-11 in context, Paul is saying that because these people had undergone the radical transformation of receiving the new nature and being renewed, they should work hard at making practical the salvation Christ made possible. They should do this by ceasing to do the things that separate and starting to do the things that bond. From chapter two, he carries over an underlying assumption that some measure of doctrinal difference is probably exacerbating the unity problem.

God's purpose is drawing us into oneness with Him, and this process has already begun! It is effected by our yielding to Him through the power of His Spirit. When each of us yields to what He says to do, it will draw those who are also doing likewise into unity also.

Christ is our Savior. We love Him for what He has done for us. We are obligated to Him because He has given so much of Himself for us. He lives and works in us, and the combination of our love for and our loyalty to Him—the very love and loyalty that came from God by His Spirit originally—is what motivates or causes the very oneness God is drawing us into.

Christ is our Creator and Redeemer. It is through Him and because of Him that we are justified and sanctified and receive God's Spirit. He is our High Priest, Mediator and Head of the church. He lives in us, energizing us to desire and practice His good pleasure, all for our God and the completion of His plan. He will do this until He arranges all in order under the Father. He truly is all in all to us. If each of us turns our attention to yielding to God and emphasizing that instead of the differences that separate us, the unity problem in the church of God will be solved in God's good time.