

Exegetical Analysis — 1 Corinthians 15:20-28

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I have been told many times in the past that 1 Corinthians 15:20-28 poses a threat to the validity of Premillennialism. I will attempt to demonstrate the validity of Premillennialism as I do an exegetical analysis of 1 Corinthians 15:20-28.

20-24 – But now Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who are asleep. [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. [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. (20. Νυνὶ δὲ Χριστὸς ἐγήγερται ἐκ νεκρῶν ἀπαρχὴ τῶν κεκοιμημένων. 21. ἐπειδὴ γὰρ δι’ ἀνθρώπου θάνατος καὶ δι’ ἀνθρώπου ἀνάστασις νεκρῶν. 22. ὥσπερ γὰρ ἐν τῷ Ἀδὰμ πάντες ἀποθνήσκουσιν, οὕτως καὶ ἐν τῷ Χριστῷ πάντες ζωοποιηθήσονται. 23. Ἐκαστος δὲ ἐν τῷ ιδίῳ τάγματι· ἀπαρχὴ Χριστὸς ἐπειτα οἱ τοῦ Χριστοῦ ἐν τῇ παρουσίᾳ αὐτοῦ, 24. εἴτα τὸ τέλος, ὅταν παραδιδῷ τὴν βασιλείαν τῷ θεῷ καὶ πατρί, ὅταν καταργήσῃ πᾶσαν ἀρχὴν καὶ πᾶσαν ἔξουσίαν καὶ δύναμιν)

Drawing from the previous passages (vs.12-19), Paul has been attempting to demonstrate the validity of the resurrection of the dead. If there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ himself has not even been raised (vs.12-13). It necessarily follows that if Christ has not been raised than our faith is futile, and we are to be pitied. In (vs.20) Paul reassures the church in Corinth that it is a fact that we are not to be pitied because Christ *has* been raised from the dead. Christ is the first fruits (*ἀπαρχὴ*) of those who are asleep. This means that Christ was the “first sheaf of the harvest offered to the Lord.”¹ The fact that Jesus was the first sheaf meant that there was a certainty that the harvest was to come. As Jesus was in fact resurrected, so will the resurrection of the dead be a reality.

“He proceeded his people in his bodily resurrection and he is also the guarantee of their resurrection at his second coming.”²

In (vs.21-22) Paul engages in what is known as federal theology, or headship theology. The contrast is between the one federal head representing humanity (Adam), and the other federal head representing the elect (Jesus). All who are represented by Adam (died), and all that are “in Christ” will be made (alive).

Paul then goes on to establish an order (*τάγματι*) in (vs.23-24). This order is where the contention is argued by the Postmillennialist. They advocate that it is impossible, within the

¹ W. Harold Mare, *1 Corinthians*, The Expositors Bible Commentary, 285.

² Ibid.

order presented here by Paul, for there to be a Millennium, as Premillennialist's advocate. Let's test this theory!

Sequence of events (vs.23-24):

1	Christ is resurrected as the first fruits	vs.23a
2	<i>after that</i> (<i>ἔπειτα</i>)	vs.23a
3	Christ's people are resurrected at His Second Coming	vs.23b
4	<i>then</i> (<i>εἶτα</i>)	vs.24a
5	The End Comes	vs.24a
6	Christ hands over the kingdom to the God and Father	vs.24b
7	Christ has abolished all rule and all authority and power	vs.24c

With an immediate glance at these events (*resurrection of Christ, resurrection at his coming, the end comes*) it seems apparent that there is no indication of a millennial period. How do Premillennialist's rectify this? Quite simply actually. The Greek word (*εἶτα*) allows for an extended interval of time. Let's look at what scholars say:

“. . . according to premillennialists, the adverb *εἶτα* allows for a lengthy interval of time between the Second Coming and the consumption, the thousand years of Revelation 20.”³

“*Then* (*eita*) does not necessarily mean ‘immediately after’. It indicates that what follows takes place at some unspecified time after the preceding.”⁴

“*Then* (*eita*, see 15:5,7; 1Tm 2:13;) (v.24) also signals sequence after a lapse of time.”⁵

“*Then*, Greek *eita*, covers an interval, just as the closely related *epeita*, afterward, of the preceding verse, covers a long interval, the interval of the kingdom of Christ on earth. Every Pauline use of *eita* involves an interval. Note that the *epeita* of verse 23 has already covered an interval of at least 1900 years!”⁶

“*Then* suggests an interval in the same way afterward (cf. vs. 23) suggests an interval of an indeterminate length of time.”⁷

“*Then* permits an interval between Christ's coming and the final consummation.”⁸

Allowing for a temporal gap is plausible in the structure of the passage. If (*ἔπειτα*) can have an indefinite period (2000 + years) than (*εἶτα*) can account for an extended period as well. Not only that, there are significant events that must occur before the “end” comes. More will be said about

³ Matthew W. Waymeyer, *Amillennialism and the Age to Come: A Premillennial Critique of the Two-Age Model* (The Woodlands, Tx, Kress Christian Publications, 2016), 149.

⁴ Leon Morris, *1 Corinthians*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Revised Edition), 211.

⁵ Michael G. Vanlaningham, *1 Corinthians*, The Moody Bible Commentary, 1801.

⁶ S. Lewis Johnson, *1 Corinthians*, The New Testament and Wycliffe Bible Commentary (The Iversen Associates, New York, 1971), 641-642.

⁷ Daniel R. Mitchell, *1 Corinthians*, King James Version Bible Commentary, 1496.

⁸ Paul W. Marsh, *1 Corinthians*, The International Bible Commentary with the New International Version, 1383.

the “end” below.

Sequence of events revised (vs.23-24):

1	Christ is resurrected as the first fruits	vs.23a
2	<i>after that (ἔπειτα)</i> ~ (Interval between Christ’s resurrection and the resurrection of the saints)	vs.23a
3	Christ’s people are resurrected at His Second Coming	vs.23b
4	<i>then (εἶτα)</i> ~ (Interval between Christ’s second coming and the end)	vs.24a
5	The End Comes	vs.24a
6	Christ hands over the kingdom to the God and Father	vs.24b
7	Christ has abolished all rule and all authority and power	vs.24c

Now that (vs.23a-23b) have been unpacked, let’s look at “comes the end” ($\tauὸ\ \tauέλος$) in (vs. 24a). The end that comes must be understood as the consummation of all things (the end of the resurrection, the end of the kingdom, and the end of all eschatological events).

““End” can refer not only to what is over, but to what is complete and fulfilled.”⁹

Now, the “end” described in (vs.24a) must be one of the last causal events here because Paul continues to explain things that will happen *before* the end comes. Two other things are mentioned before “the end comes” in (vs.24) - when He hands over the kingdom to the God and Father and when He has abolished all rule and all authority and power. The handing over the kingdom and the abolishing of all rule and all authority must be prior to the end and cannot be simultaneous with the end. Some have tried to argue that the parousia (vs.23b) and the end are simultaneous, but this simply isn’t the case.

“Therefore, since there is a sequence clearly marked, the telos cannot be simultaneous with the Parousia. Because the telos is preceded by the destruction of enemies, and the destruction of enemies cannot be put before the Parousia, the telos must stand beyond the Parousia and judgment.”¹⁰

The handing over of the kingdom has to do with the full reign of the Lord Jesus from David’s throne here on earth, as is outlined repeatedly in the Old Testament and New. Jesus will begin his reign from David’s throne when he comes back (vs.23b-24a). At the present time Jesus is anticipating his kingly rule here on earth. The Lord Jesus at his ascension sat down at the right-hand of the Father on his Father’s throne (Rev 3:21) having taken on the mediatorial role given to him (Heb 8:6). Jesus fulfills Psalm 110:1 by sitting at the Father’s right hand, but now waits until the appropriate time where the Father will “make” his enemies a footstool for his feet.

Psalm 110:1 NASB

The LORD says to my Lord: “Sit at My right hand Until I make Your enemies a footstool for Your feet.”

Acts 3:20-21 NASB

⁹ John MacArthur, *1 Corinthians*, The MacArthur Bible Commentary, 1606.

¹⁰ B. Wallis, *The Problem of an Intermediate Kingdom*, 231.

and that He may send Jesus, the Christ appointed for you, [21] whom heaven must receive until the period of restoration of all things about which God spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets from ancient time.

Hebrews 10:13 NASB

waiting from that time onward until HIS ENEMIES BE MADE A FOOTSTOOL FOR HIS FEET.

Once the time has come Jesus will descend, seat himself on the earthly Davidic throne, (Matthew 25:31) and will begin his reign (Revelation 11:15-19). However, Jesus cannot hand over the kingdom *until* he has abolished all rule and authority and *all* his enemies be made a footstool for his feet (vs.24c). With that outline in mind we can begin to further piece together our sequence of events.

Sequence of events revised (vs.23-24):

1	Christ is resurrected as the first fruits	vs.23a
2	<i>after that</i> (ἔπειτα) ~ (Interval between Christ's resurrection and the resurrection of the saints)	vs.23a
3	Christ's people are resurrected at His Second Coming	vs.23b
4	<i>then</i> (εἶτα) ~ (Interval between Christ's second coming and the end)	vs.24a
4a	Christ has abolished all rule and all authority and power	vs.24c
4b	Christ hands over the kingdom to the God and Father	vs.24b
5	The End Comes	vs.24a

25-28 – 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. (25. δεῖ γὰρ αὐτὸν βασιλεύειν ἔχρι οὗ θῇ πάντας τοὺς ἐχθροὺς ὑπὸ τοὺς πόδας αὐτοῦ. 26. ἔσχατος ἐχθρὸς καταργεῖται ὁ θάνατος. 27. πάντα γὰρ ὑπέταξεν ὑπὸ τοὺς πόδας αὐτοῦ. ὅταν δὲ εἴπῃ ὅτι πάντα ὑπὸτέτακται, δῆλον ὅτι ἐκτὸς τοῦ ὑποτάξαντος αὐτῷ τὰ πάντα. 28. ὅταν δὲ ὑποταγῇ αὐτῷ τὰ πάντα, τότε [καὶ] αὐτὸς ὁ νιὸς ὑποταγήσεται τῷ ὑποτάξαντι αὐτῷ τὰ πάντα, ἵνα ἡ ὁ θεὸς πάντα ἐν πᾶσιν)

Now that the sequence of events has been made clear in the above table, we can move onto (vs.25-28). “For” (γὰρ) connects us back with the point made in the previous passage (vs.24) regarding the “abolishment of all rule” and the “handing over of the kingdom”. In (vs.25) it is said that “He”, Jesus, must reign until He has put *all* his enemies under His feet.

Postmillennialist's and Amillennialists have wrongly understood this text. They have asserted that he is “presently” reigning and has “some” not “all” enemies under his feet. This simply isn’t the case. Jesus is waiting *until* his enemies are put under his feet, not that they are presently under his feet (Heb 10:11-13). When Jesus returns, his enemies will slowly be brought into submission to him, this includes the kings of the earth, the Antichrist and the False Prophet (Rev. 19) as well as Satan once he has been defeated in his final revolt (Rev. 20). Jesus will reign, for he must, until the Father has put all enemies under his feet. In (vs.26) we see that the “last enemy” that is placed under his feet is death. We can now further our sequence of events.

Sequence of events revised (vs.23-26):

1	Christ is resurrected as the first fruits	vs.23a
2	<i>after that (ἔπειτα)</i> ~ (Interval between Christ's resurrection and the resurrection of the saints)	vs.23a
3	Christ's people are resurrected at His Second Coming	vs.23b
4	<i>then (εἶτα)</i> ~ (Interval between Christ's second coming and the end)	vs.24a
4a	Christ Reigns (1,000 years)	vs.25
4b	Christ abolishes all rule and all authority and power	vs.24c
4c	Death is Abolished (Last Enemy Defeated)	vs.26
4d	Christ hands over the kingdom to God the Father	vs.24b
5	The End Comes	vs.24a

In (vs.27) Paul says that “He”, meaning God the Father, has put all things in subjection under his feet. What this means is that Christ has “all authority” (Matthew 28:18), but not that he is presently reigning bringing all things under his feet. Jesus has all authority, but he has not abolished all rule and all authority. Paul’s usage of Psalm 8 affirms that this is a future, not a present reign.

“His use of Psalm 8 confirms Paul is thinking of a future earthly reign of Jesus. Psalm 8 explained and expands upon Genesis 1:26-28 and its truth that God created man to rule successfully over the Earth. Since the last Adam, Jesus, must succeed from and over the realm where the first Adam failed, Jesus must reign over the earth. The last Adam’s destiny is not to rule from heaven in a spiritual Kingdom. Instead, he has to rule from and over the Earth just like the first Adam was supposed to do. But unlike Adam, Jesus will succeed.”¹¹

The reason this text is incredibly important is because Paul is saying that Jesus is the one who has been given the responsibility to succeed where Adam failed. The first Adam failed to rule over creation when he was given the dominion mandate. He failed in that he sinned and cast all under his offspring into death. Jesus will be the one (with all authority) to rule over earth.

In (vs.28) the final completed statement is made in this section. When all things have been made subjected to the Lord Jesus Christ and his reign has been complete, it is at that time that the Son of man will hand over the Kingdom and will be subjected to the Father. It is at that time that the Kingdom program merges with the Eternal State in a perfect unity between Father and Son.

“Elsewhere in biblical theology, this transition from a state of death to no death is identified with the final judgment, and in this text it is also coordinated with a transition in the kingdom from the coercive subjugating rule of Christ to a situation in which God will “be all in all” (v. 28).”¹²

Let’s lay out the final structure of the passages we just exegeted:

¹¹ Michael J. Vlach, *He Will Reign Forever: A Biblical Theology of the Kingdom of God*, (Lampion Press, LLC, 2017), 442.

¹² Craig Blaising, *The Kingdom that Comes with Jesus in The Return of Christ: A Premillennial Perspective*: Reflections from the Acts 1:11 Conference, 147.

Sequence of events revised (vs.23-28):

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3	Christ's people are resurrected at His Second Coming	vs.23b
4	<i>then</i> (<i>εἶτα</i>) ~ (Interval between Christ's second coming and the end)	vs.24a
4a	Christ's reign (1,000 years)	vs.25ab
4b	Christ abolishes all rule and all authority and power	vs.24c
4c	Death is Abolished (Last Enemy Defeated)	vs.26
4d	Christ hands over the kingdom to the God and Father	vs.24b
5	The End Comes	vs.24a
6	The Father is all in all	vs.27-28

As we have seen above, there is nothing conflicting with the Premillennial interpretation of this section of scripture and what we expect is completely inline with the Premillennial expectation of Christ's earthly reign.