

THE GOSPEL OF THE RESSURECTED CHRIST AND ITS IMPLICATIONS (BE WISE ABOUT THE RESURRECTION)

1 Corinthians 15:1-45

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Corinth was a Greek city, and the Greeks did not believe in the resurrection of the dead. When Paul had preached at Athens and declared the fact of Christ's resurrection, some of his listeners actually laughed at him ([Acts 17:32](#)). Most Greek philosophers considered the human body a prison, and they welcomed death as deliverance from bondage.

This skeptical attitude had somehow invaded the church and Paul had to face it head-on. The truth of the resurrection had doctrinal and practical implications for life that were too important to ignore. Paul dealt with the subject by answering four basic questions.

Are the Dead Raised? (1 Cor 15:1-19) It is important to note that the believers at Corinth did believe in the resurrection of Jesus Christ; so, Paul started his argument with that fundamental truth. He presented three proofs to assure his readers that Jesus Christ indeed had been raised from the dead.

Proof #1 - their salvation (vv. 1-2). Paul had come to Corinth and preached the message of the Gospel, and their faith had transformed their lives.

But an integral part of the Gospel message was the fact of Christ's resurrection. After all, a dead Saviour cannot save anybody. Paul's readers had received the Word, trusted Christ, 'been saved, and were now standing on that Word as the assurance of their salvation. The fact that they were standing firm was proof that their faith was genuine and not empty.

Proof #2 - the Old Testament Scriptures (vv. 3-4). First of all means "of first importance." The Gospel is the most important message that the church ever proclaims. While it is good to be involved in social action and the betterment of mankind, there is no reason why these ministries should preempt the Gospel.

"Christ died ... He was buried ... He rose again ... He was seen" are the basic historical facts on which the Gospel stands (**1 Cor 15:3-5**). "Christ died for our sins" (author's italics) is the theological explanation of the historical facts. Many people were crucified by the Romans, but only one "victim" ever died for the sins of the world.

When Paul wrote "according to the Scriptures" (**1 Cor 15:3**) he was referring to the Old Testament Scriptures. Much of the sacrificial system in the Old Testament pointed to the sacrifice of Christ as our substitute and Saviour. The annual Day of Atonement (**Lev 16**) and prophecies like **Isa 53** would also come to mind.

But where does the Old Testament declare His resurrection on the third day? Jesus pointed to the experience of Jonah (**Matt 12:38-41**). Paul also compared Christ's resurrection to the "first-fruits," and the first-fruits were presented to God on the day following the Sabbath after Passover (**Lev 23:9-14; 1 Cor 15:23**).

Since the Sabbath must always be the seventh day, the day after Sabbath must be the *first* day of the week, or Sunday, the day of our Lord's resurrection. This covers three days on the Jewish calendar. Apart from the Feast of First fruits, there were other prophecies of Messiah's resurrection in the Old Testament: **Ps 16:8-11**

Proof #3 - Christ was seen by witnesses (vv. 5-11). On the cross, Jesus was exposed to the eyes of unbelievers; but after the Resurrection, He was seen by believers who could be witnesses of His resurrection (**Acts 1:22; 2:32; 3:15; 5:32**). Peter saw Him and so did the disciples collectively. James was a half brother of the Lord who became a believer after the Lord appeared to him (**John 7:5; Acts 1:14**).

The 500 plus brethren all saw Him at the same time (**1 Cor 15:6**), so it could not have been a hallucination or a deception. This event may have been just before His ascension (**Matt 28:16ff**). But one of the greatest witnesses of the Resurrection was Paul himself, for as an unbeliever he was soundly convinced that Jesus was dead. The radical change in his life - a change which brought him persecution and suffering is certainly evidence that the Lord had indeed been raised from the dead.

Paul made it clear that his salvation was purely an act of God's grace; but that grace worked in and through him as he served the Lord. "*Born out of due tune*" probably refers to the future salvation of Israel when they, like Paul, see the Messiah in glory (**Zech 12:10-13:6; 1 Tim 1:16**). At this point, Paul's readers would say, "*Yes, we agree that Jesus was raised from the dead.*"

Then Paul would reply, "If you believe that then you must believe in the resurrection of all the dead!" Christ came as a man, truly human, and experienced all that we experienced, except that He never sinned. If there is no resurrection, then Christ was not raised. If He was not raised, there is no Gospel to preach. If there is no Gospel, then

you have believed in vain and you are still in your sins! If there is no resurrection, then believers who have died have no hope. We shall never see them again!

First-fruits (vv. 20, 23). We have already noted this reference to the Old Testament feast ([Lev 23:9-14](#)). As the Lamb of God, Jesus died on Passover. As the sheaf of first-fruits, He arose from the dead three days later on the first day of the week.

When the priest waved the sheaf of the first-fruits before the Lord, it was a sign that the entire harvest belonged to Him. When Jesus was raised from the dead, it was God's assurance to us that we shall also be raised one day as part of that future harvest. To believers, death is only "sleep." The body sleeps, but the soul is at home with the Lord ([2 Cor 5:1-8](#); [Phil 1:21-23](#)). At the resurrection, the body will be "awakened" and glorified.

Adam (vv. 21-22). Paul saw in Adam a type of Jesus Christ *by the way of contrast* ([Rom 5:12-21](#)). The first Adam was made from the earth, but the Last Adam (Christ, [1 Cor 15:45-47](#)) came from heaven. The first Adam disobeyed God and brought sin and death into the world, but the Last Adam obeyed the Father and brought righteousness and life.

The conclusion is obvious: Why be a Christian if we have only suffering in this life and no future glory to anticipate? (In [1 Cor 15:29-34](#), Paul expanded this idea.) The Resurrection is not just important; it is "of first importance, because all that we believe hinges on it".

When Are the Dead Raised? ([1 Cor. 15:20-28](#)) Paul used three images to answer this question.

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The word order in **1 Cor 15:23** originally referred to military rank. God has an order, a sequence, in the resurrection. Passages like **John 5:25-29** and **Rev 20** indicate that there is no such thing taught in Scripture as a "general resurrection." When Jesus Christ returns in the air, He will take His church to heaven and at that time raise from the dead all who have trusted Him and have died in the faith (**1 Thess 4:13-18**). Jesus called this "the resurrection of life" (**John 5:29**). When Jesus returns to the earth in judgment, then the lost will be raised in "the resurrection of damnation" (**John 5:29; Rev 20:11-15**). Nobody in the first resurrection will be lost but nobody in the second resurrection will be saved.

Good and godly students of the Word have not always agreed on the details of God's prophetic program, but the major truths seem to be clear. Jesus Christ reigns in heaven today, and all authority is "under His feet" (**Ps 110; Eph 1:15-23**). Satan and man are still able to exercise choice, but God is sovereignly in control. Jesus Christ is enthroned in heaven today (**Ps 2**). The resurrection of the saved has not yet taken place, nor the resurrection of the lost (**2 Tim 2:17-18**).

When will Jesus Christ return for His church? Nobody knows; but when it occurs, it will be "in a moment in the twinkling of an eye" (**1 Cor 15:52**). It behooves us to be ready (**1 John 2:28-3:3**).

Why Are the Dead Raised? (**1 Cor. 15:29-34, 49-58**)

The resurrection of the human body is a future event that has compelling implications for our personal lives. If the resurrection is not true, then we can forget about the future and live as we please! But the resurrection is true! Jesus is coming again! Even if we die before He comes, we shall be raised at His coming and stand before Him in a glorified body. Paul cited four areas of Christian experience that are touched by the fact of the resurrection.

Evangelism (v. 29). What does it mean to be "baptized for the dead"? Some take this to mean "proxy baptism," where a believer is baptized on behalf of a dead relative; but we find no such teaching in the New Testament. In the second century, there were some heretical groups that practiced "vicarious baptism," but the church at large has never accepted the practice.

To begin with, salvation is a personal matter that each must decide for himself, and, second, nobody needs to be baptized to be saved.

The phrase probably means "baptized to take the place of those who have died." In other words, if there is no resurrection, why bother to witness and win others to Christ? Why reach sinners who are then baptized and take the place of those who have died? If the Christian life is only a "dead-end street" get off of it!

Each responsible person on earth will share in either the resurrection of life and go to heaven, or the resurrection of judgment and go to hell ([John 5:28-29](#)). We weep for believers who have died, but we ought also to weep for unbelievers who still have opportunity to be saved! The reality of the resurrection is a motivation for evangelism.

Suffering (vv. 30-32). I die daily does not refer to "dying to self," as in [Rom 6](#), but to the physical dangers Paul faced as a servant of Christ ([2 Cor 4:8-5:10; 11:23-28](#)). He was in constant jeopardy from his enemies and on more than one occasion had been close to death. Why endure suffering and danger if death ends it all? "Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we shall die" ([Isa 22:13](#)).

What we do in the body in this life comes up for review at the Judgment Seat of Christ ([2 Cor 5:10](#)). God deals with the *whole* person, not just with the "soul." The body shares in salvation ([Rom 8:18-23](#)). The suffering endured in the body will result in glory at the resurrection ([2 Cor 4:7-18](#)). If there is no future for the body, then why suffer and die for the cause of Christ?

Separation from sin (vv. 33-34). If there is no resurrection, then what we do with our bodies will have no bearing on our future. Immorality was a way of life in Corinth, and some of the believers rejected the resurrection in order to rationalize their sin. "Evil company corrupts good morals" is a quotation from the Greek poet Menander, a saying no doubt familiar to Paul's readers. The believer's body is the temple of God and must be kept separated from the sins of the world ([2 Cor. 6:14-7:1](#)). To fellowship with the "unfruitful works of darkness" ([Eph 5:6-17](#)) is only to corrupt God's temple.

It was time for the Corinthians to *wake up* and *clean up* (see [1 Thess 5:4-11](#)). The believer who is compromising with sin has no witness to the lost around him, those who "have not the knowledge of God." What a shameful thing to be selfishly living in sin while multitudes die without Christ!

Sigmund Freud, the founder of psychiatry, wrote: "*And finally there is the painful riddle of death, for which no remedy at all has yet been found, nor probably ever will be.*" Christians have victory in death and over death! Why? Because of the victory of Jesus Christ in His own resurrection. Jesus said, "*Because I live, ye shall also*" ([John 14:19](#)).

Sin, death, and the Law go together. The Law reveals sin, and the "*wages of sin is death*" (**Rom 6:23**). Jesus bore our sins on the cross (**1 Peter 2:24**), and also bore the curse of the Law (**Gal 3:13**). It is through Him that we have this victory, and we share the victory today. The literal translation of **1 Cor 15:57** is, "*But thanks be to God who keeps on giving us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.*"

We experience "*the power of His resurrection*" in our lives as we yield to Him (**Phil 3:10**).

First Corinthians 15:58 is Paul's hymn of praise to the Lord as well as his closing admonition to the church. Because of the assurance of Christ's victory over death, we know that nothing we do for Him will ever be wasted or lost. We can be steadfast in our service, unmovable in suffering, abounding in ministry to others, because we know our labor is not in vain. **First Corinthians 15:58** is the answer to Ecclesiastes, where thirty-eight times Solomon used the sad word *vanity*. "*Vanity of vanities, all is vanity!*" wept Solomon; but Paul sang a song of victory!

How Are the Dead Raised? (**1 Cor. 15:35-48**) Being philosophers, the Greeks reasoned that the resurrection of the human body was an impossibility. After all, when the body turned to dust, it became soil from which other bodies derived nourishment. In short, the food that we eat is a part of the elements of the bodies of generations long gone. When the body of the founder of Rhode Island, Roger Williams, was disinterred, it was discovered that the roots of a nearby apple tree had grown through the coffin. To some degree, the people who ate the apples partook of his body. At the resurrection, then, who will claim the various elements? Paul's reply to this kind of reasoning was very blunt: "You fool!" Then he made the important point that *resurrection is not reconstruction*.

Nowhere does the Bible teach that, at the resurrection, God will "put together the pieces" and return to us our former bodies. There is *continuity* (it is our body), but there is not *identity* (it is not the same body). Paul knew that such miracles cannot be explained, so he used three analogies to make the doctrine clear. **Seeds - (vv. 35-38, 42-48)**. When you sow seed, you do not expect that same seed to come up at the harvest. The seed dies, but from that death there comes life. (See **John 12:23-28** for our Lord's use of this same analogy.) You may sow a few grains of wheat, but you will have many grains when the plant matures. Are they the same grains that were planted? No, but there is still continuity. You do not sow wheat and harvest barley.

Paul discussed the details of this marvelous change in **1 Cor 15:42-48**. The body is sown (in burial) in corruption, because it is going to decay; but it is raised with such a nature that it cannot decay. There is no decay or death in heaven. It is buried in humility (in spite of the cosmetic skill of the mortician); but it is raised in glory. In

burial, the body is weak, but in resurrection, the body has power. We shall be like Jesus Christ!

Today, we have a "natural body," that is, a body suited to an earthly environment. We received this body from our first parent, Adam he was made of dust, and so are we (**Gen 2:7**). But the resurrection body is suited to a spiritual environment. In His resurrection body, Jesus was able to move quickly from place to place, and even walk through locked doors; yet He was also able to eat food, and His disciples were able to touch Him and feel Him (**Luke 24:33-43; John 20:19-29**).

The point Paul was making was simply this: The resurrection body completes the work of redemption and gives to us the image of the Saviour.

First Corinthians 15:40 states an important biblical principle: first the "natural" (earthly), and then the "spiritual" (heavenly). The first birth gives us that which is natural, but the second birth gives us that which is spiritual. God rejects the first birth, the natural, and says, "You must be born again!" He rejected Cain and chose Abel. He rejected Abraham's firstborn, Ishmael, and chose Isaac, the second-born. He rejected Esau and chose Jacob. If we depend on our first birth, we shall be condemned forever, but if we experience the new birth, we shall be blessed forever.

Flesh (v. 39) Paul anticipated here the discovery of science that the cell structure of different kinds of animals is different; and therefore, you cannot breed various species indiscriminately. The human body has a nature of one kind, while animals, birds, and fish have their own particular kind of flesh. The conclusion is this: If God is able to make different kinds of bodies for men, animals, birds, and fish, why can He not make a different kind of body for us at the resurrection? (Pet lovers take note: Paul did not teach here that animals will be resurrected. He only used them as an example.)

CONCLUSION

Heavenly bodies (vv. 40-41). Not only are there earthly bodies, but there are also heavenly bodies; and they differ from one another. In fact the heavenly bodies differ from each other in glory as far as the human eye is concerned. Paul is suggesting here that believer may differ from believer in glory, even though all Christians will have glorified bodies. Every cup in heaven will be filled, but some cups will be bigger than others, because of the faithfulness and sacrifice of those saints when they were on earth. These illustrations may not answer every question that we have about the resurrection body, but they do give us the assurances that we need. God will give to us a glorified body suited to the new life in heaven.

It will be as unlike our present body in quality as the glory of the sun is unlike a mushroom in the cellar. We will use this new body to serve and glorify God for all eternity.

We must remember that this discussion was not written by Paul merely to satisfy the curiosity of believers. He had some practical points to get across, and he made them very clear in **1 Cor 15:29-34**. If we really believe in the resurrection of the body, then we will use our bodies today to the glory of God (**1 Cor 6:9-14**).