

1 Corinthians Chapter 15

This chapter is the most extensive treatment of resurrection in the Bible. Both the resurrection of Jesus Christ as recorded in the gospels and the resurrection of believers as promised in the gospels are here explained.

Beginning in verses 1-11, we begin his teachings about the resurrection of believers, Paul reviewed the evidences for Jesus' resurrection:

- (1) The church (verses 1-2);
- (2) The Scriptures (verses 3-4);
- (3) The eyewitnesses (verses 5-7);
- (4) The apostle himself (verses.8-10); and
- (5) The common message (verse 11).

1 Corinthians 15:1 "Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand;"

Paul had not only preached the good news of the gospel to them, but had even started this church here at Corinth. Paul is also saying, that he has taught them what they know about the Lord. It appears that Paul feels that he is the founder of the church and its doctrine. It is as if he is saying, you have a church here, because I brought you the message of God and you accepted it.

1 Corinthians 15:2: "By which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain."

We must remember that the Corinthians had written Paul a letter about the problems going on in their church. Paul is reminding them here, of the simple message of salvation that he had brought to them. Notice in the above verse Paul says, "ye are saved", in the present tense. He says, were you just caught up in the emotions of the moment and went through the procedure without truly believing? Did you believe, or did you not believe? To go through the formality of being saved without truly a change in your heart, would be in vain.

"Unless ye have believed in vain". By this qualifying statement, Paul recognized and called to their attention that some may have had a shallow, non-saving faith (see Matt. 7:13-14, 22-27; 13:24-30, 34-43; 47-50, 25:1-30). Some believed only as the demons believed (James 2:19), i.e., they were convinced the gospel was true, but had no love for God, Christ, and righteousness. True believers "hold fast" to the gospel (compare John 8:31, 2 Cor. 13:5, 1 John 2:24, 2 John 9).

1 Corinthians 15:3 "For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures;"

1 Peter 2:24 "Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed."

Jesus was our substitute. It was our sin that crucified Him. In the sacrifice of the animal in the tabernacle, the sinner placed his hands on the animal's head and symbolically placed his sins on the animal. That is what Jesus did for us. He took our sin on His body. Our sin died on the cross. All the sacrifices in the tabernacle, and later in the temple, symbolize the crucifixion of Jesus for our sin.

Paul was merely stating that the true Gospel is what he had delivered to the Corinthians.

1 Corinthians 15:4 "And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures:"

Luke 24:46 "And said unto them, Thus it is written, and thus it behooved Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day:"

The hope of the Christian is the hope of the resurrection. In another book (Leviticus), we go into great detail why it was important for Jesus to be crucified on Passover, to fulfill the feast of unleavened bread, and that it was terribly important for Him to fulfill firstfruits, on the third day thereafter.

1 Corinthians 15:20 "But now is Christ risen from the dead, [and] become the firstfruits of them that slept." He not only fulfilled firstfruits by raising from the dead on the third day, but is, in fact, the first of the firstfruits Himself.

1 Corinthians 15:5 "And that he was seen of Cephas, then of the twelve:"

Before we get to the account of the others that Jesus appeared to, we must look at who Jesus appeared to first.

John 20:15-16 "Jesus saith unto her, Woman, why weepest thou? whom seekest thou? She, supposing him to be the gardener, saith unto him, Sir, if thou have borne him hence, tell me where thou hast laid him, and I will take him away." "Jesus saith unto her, Mary. She turned herself, and saith unto him, Rabboni; which is to say, Master."

Mark 16:9 "Now when [Jesus] was risen early the first [day] of the week, he appeared first to Mary Magdalene, out of whom he had cast seven devils."

We see the two witnesses here that tell of Mary seeing Jesus first. Why this is omitted by Paul, I cannot say. Since there was such an extensive list of the others, I thought we should tell of this also.

Peter and Cephas are the same person. Peter and John went to the tomb together. We know, also, that Jesus appeared to Peter and the others, and served them fish on the seaside.

1 Corinthians 15:6 "After that, he was seen of above five hundred brethren at once; of whom the greater part remain unto this present, but some are fallen asleep."

We know that the Lord Jesus ministered on the earth 40 days and nights after He rose from the tomb. He was establishing the church. We also, know that ten days after Jesus ascended into heaven, there were 120 disciples waiting in the upper room for the Holy Spirit to come upon them.

Acts 1:15 "And in those days Peter stood up in the midst of the disciples, and said, (the number of names together were about a hundred and twenty,)"

The figure of 500 here, is probably a very low estimate, considering these things. Paul wrote this letter to the Corinthians approximately 20 to 25 years after the resurrection, so it would have been likely that many of these same people were still alive at this time. The specific number of 500 people is not mentioned, but was probably on the mountain where Jesus ministered.

The testimony of eyewitnesses, recorded in the New Testament, was added to support the reality of the resurrection. These included:

- (1) John and Peter together;
- (2) The 12;
- (3) The 500; only referred to here, had all seen the risen Christ;
- (4) James, either one of the two so named apostles (son of Zebedee or son of Alphaeus); or even James the half-brother of the Lord, the author of the epistle by that name and the key leader in the Jerusalem church; and
- (5) The apostles.

Such unspecified appearances occurred over a 40 day period (Acts 1:3), to all the apostles.

1 Corinthians 15:7 "After that, he was seen of James; then of all the apostles."

The James here, is probably the half-brother of Jesus. He was not a believer that Jesus was Messiah, until after Jesus rose from the tomb. This is the same James that was the head of the church at Jerusalem, and I believe, is the same who wrote the book of James.

1 Corinthians 15:8 "And last of all he was seen of me also, as of one born out of due time."

Paul really had not seen the face of Jesus, but had seen the bright light. Jesus spoke to Paul from this Light. Paul had been like James, he had not believed Jesus to be Messiah, until Jesus appeared to him in this great Light. The statement (born out of due time), just means that Paul did not believe, until after Jesus rose from the tomb.

Christ revealed Himself to Paul and, according to divine purpose, Paul was made an apostle. He was "last of all" the apostles, and felt himself to be the least.

1 Corinthians 15:9 "For I am the least of the apostles, that am not meet to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God."

The word "apostle" is not speaking of the 12, but of all who are ambassadors of the gospel. The word "apostle" means ambassador of the gospel, commissioner of Christ, and he that is sent. Paul was actually present at the stoning of Stephen. He was on his way to capture and imprison the Christians, when he first encountered Jesus Christ in the great Light. Paul regretted this, after he became a Christian. He was like so many of us who regret our behavior, before we came to Christ.

1 Corinthians 15:10 "But by the grace of God I am what I am: and his grace which [was bestowed] upon me was not in vain; but I labored more abundantly than they all: yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me."

It is the grace of God that makes each of us better than we ever could have been in the flesh. "Grace" is unmerited favor. We can see probably why Paul worked so hard in the Lord's work in the next Scripture.

Luke 7:47 "Wherefore I say unto thee, Her sins, which are many, are forgiven; for she loved much: but to whom little is forgiven, [the same] loveth little."

Paul worked very hard to make up for the errors he had made earlier. He knows that, except for the grace of God, he never would have understood. Paul not only worked hard, but suffered much for the work the Lord Jesus had given him.

In terms of years and extent of ministry, he exceeded all those named (in verses 5-7). John outlived him but did not have the extensive ministry of Paul.

Ephesians 3:7-8 "Whereof I was made a minister, according to the gift of the grace of God given unto me by the effectual working of his power." "Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ;"

1 Corinthians 15:11: "Therefore whether [it were] I or they, so we preach, and so ye believed."

Paul is saying, in this, that the message is the same regardless of which apostle brings the message. Paul has just finished naming Peter and many of the other apostles who are preaching. It really does not matter, who brings the message. The important thing was that they believed and were saved. One of the problems at this time, was there were no real guidelines set for the apostles to use.

1 Corinthians 15:12 "Now if Christ be preached that he rose from the dead, how say some among you that there is no resurrection of the dead?"

This had been argued by the Jews, even before the resurrection of Jesus. It seems that many of the teachings of the Jewish schools were still being believed by many of the converts to Christianity. Paul is saying, if they accepted Jesus as their Savior, part of the belief was that he rose from the dead.

The Corinthian Christians believed in Christ's resurrection, or else they could not have been Christians. But some had particular difficulty accepting and understanding the resurrection of believers. Some of this confusion was a result of their experiences with pagan philosophies and religions.

A basic tenet of much of ancient Greek philosophy was dualism, which taught that everything physical was intrinsically evil; so the idea of a resurrected body was repulsive and disgusting. In addition, perhaps some Jews in the Corinthian church formerly may have been influenced by the Sadducees, who did not believe in the resurrection even though it is taught in the Old Testament.

On the other hand, New Testament teaching in the words of our Lord Himself was extensive on the resurrection and it was the theme of the apostolic preaching. In spite of the clarity, the church at Corinth was in doubt about the resurrection.

Verses 13-19: Paul gives 6 disastrous consequences if there were no resurrection.

- (1) Preaching Christ would be senseless (verse 14);
- (2) Faith in Christ would be useless (verse 14);
- (3) All the witnesses and preachers of the resurrection would be liars (verse 15);
- (4) No one would be redeemed from sin (verse 17);
- (5) All former believers would have perished (verse 18);
- (6) Christians would be the most pitiable people on earth (verse 19).

1 Corinthians 15:13 "But if there be no resurrection of the dead, then is Christ not risen:"

If Christ is not risen, then the basis for the Christian belief would be gone. The two resurrections, Christ's and the believer's, stand or fall together; if there is no resurrection, then Christ is dead.

Jesus defeated Satan and sin on the cross, and defeated death when He rose from the grave.

1 Corinthians 15:14 "And if Christ be not risen, then [is] our preaching vain, and your faith [is] also vain."

If there is no life after physical death, why bother? If Christ did not rise, then there is no Spirit of the risen Christ. The sad thing in all of these problems they were bringing up is, that they did not believe the good news of the Lord Jesus Christ, but the old news of the Jewish traditions. I see this in all of the problems, not just the doubt about the resurrection.

1 Corinthians 15:15 "Yea, and we are found false witnesses of God; because we have testified of God that he raised up Christ: whom he raised not up, if so be that the dead rise not."

One of the fundamental teachings of Christianity is, the third day he arose. As I said above, this is some leftovers from their Jewish teaching. Paul is saying here, that if this one thing is not true,

then they are all lost, because they have believed a lie. The assurance that Jesus was God was the fact that He rose from the tomb. We serve a risen Savior.

1 Corinthians 15:16 "For if the dead rise not, then is not Christ raised:"

This is almost identical to verse 13. One of the things that set the Christian apart from the world is that the Christian has hope of the resurrection. We know that because he rose, we shall rise, also.

1 Corinthians 15:17-18 "And if Christ be not raised, your faith [is] vain; ye are yet in your sins." "Then they also which are fallen asleep in Christ are perished."

Simply put, if Christ had not risen as has been written, then no one is saved and will have to pay their own sin debt which is eternal death.

Just as Moses redeemed the children of Israel out of Egypt (type of world), and took them to their Promised Land, Jesus will redeem us from this earth and take us to our Promised Land (heaven). The Lord is going to redeem those who are looking for Him. It is a dangerous thing to doubt the resurrection.

1 Thessalonians 4:14 "For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him."

We will continue with the promises in 1 Thessalonians:

1 Thessalonians 4:16-17 " For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first:" "Then we which are alive [and] remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord."

Jesus is our resurrection, our hope and our life.

1 Corinthians Chapter 15 Questions

1. What had Paul done, besides preach the gospel to them?
2. Paul feels that he is the founder of the _____ and its _____.
3. What kind of message had Paul brought them?
4. What was the if, to their salvation in verse 2?
5. What profit would there be in going through the formality of baptism, if you did not believe in your heart?

6. Why did the sinner place his hands on the head of the sacrificial animal?
7. What did all of the sacrifices in the tabernacle and the temple symbolize?
8. Jesus arose on the _____ day.
9. What is the hope of the Christian?
10. In chapter 15 verse 20 of 1 Corinthians, Jesus is called what?
11. Who was Jesus actually seen of first when he rose?
12. What did Mary call Jesus in John 20:16?
13. Who is Cephas?
14. Who was with Peter when he went to the tomb?
15. Verse 6 says that Jesus was seen of how many people at once?
16. Approximately, when was the book of 1 Corinthians written?
17. Who was mentioned individually in verse 7 who saw Jesus?
18. Which one of the people with this name was this?
19. What was a peculiarity of James?
20. What does Paul have to say about himself in verse 8?
21. When did Paul begun to believe in Jesus?
22. Why did Paul call himself least of the apostles?
23. Where was Paul headed, when he saw the Light of Jesus?
24. Paul not only worked hard, but _____ _ _ _ _.
25. What would Paul preach to the Gentiles?
26. What is verse 11 saying about the message of God?
27. Who had argued for years about the resurrection of the dead?
28. What would cause the basis of Christianity to be gone?
29. What 2 things would be vain, if Christ had not risen?
30. What is one thing that sets the Christian apart from the world?