

Text: 1 Corinthians 15:1-11

Title: The Resurrection, Parts 1 and 2

Truth: The Resurrection of Christ is Central to the Gospel

Date/Location: Sunday February 28, 2021 at FBC

Introduction

Chapter 15 is lengthy. Its high-level outline can be laid out this way:

1. 15:1-11 Paul declares the Gospel and lists its primary witnesses.
2. 15:12-19 What if Christ was *not* raised from the dead?
3. 15:20-28 All will be raised to life and death will be destroyed.
4. 15:29-34 The futility of Christianity if there is no resurrection.
5. 15:35-49 The resurrection body is spiritual and incorruptible.
6. 15:50-58 The Christian's final victory over death is at the rapture.

I. Christian Resurrection

A. In Christian theology, the word *resurrection* most commonly is used to refer to Jesus Christ's death and subsequent coming back to life on the third day. This is an essential truth of Christianity.

Resurrection is a commonly used Christian word which refers to a dead body being given life once again. Notice the word *body* in the definition: it is a material, physical thing, not an "ethereal" one.

More than that, *all* Christian people will be resurrected in bodies like Christ's body, and will live then forever. All non-Christian people will also be raised again to life to face judgment. They too will live forever in their resurrection body.

A few times, God has raised dead people to natural bodies that die again. Lazarus is an example (John 11:43-44). *Resurrection* as we use it in these notes will not be speaking of that lesser kind of resurrection, but of the greater kind that results in a body outfitted for eternal existence.

B. A major part of the hope of the Christian is to be raised from the dead in a material (physical) body. Resurrection is not merely spiritual—not for the Christian, and not for Jesus Himself.

The word **hope** for the Christian signifies something far beyond a fond wish. It communicates the notion of a certainty that is expected to come at some point in the future (see Romans 15:12, 1 Cor. 15:19, 1 Peter 1:3).

There are other aspects to our hope as well—the complete removal of the effects of sin, living with God and Christ and all other Christians, the kingdom of God, etc. But in the book of Acts, the apostle Paul indicated His future expectation of the resurrection was a driving force in his life and ministry (Acts 23:6, 24:15, 28:20). Resurrection was similarly important to the godly among His Israelite countrymen

- C. Dear believer, you must not be ashamed of believing in the resurrection of Jesus, nor in the resurrection of all humanity. Why should we be embarrassed about this doctrine—that the infinitely powerful living God will give life to dead people’s bodies, when He in fact created those people in the first place? Why be backed into a corner because we believe that God already has raised several people from the dead, and Jesus Himself predicted He would rise and then did so with eyewitness proof? Why is that so unreasonable, compared to people today who believe that life came from evolutionary forces;¹ or that it is OK to kill a baby in the womb;² or that there is life on other planets;³ or that girls can become boys and vice-versa. Those beliefs are imaginary.

II. Wrong Views of the Afterlife

All the **boldface words** under this section heading are false doctrines which lead people astray from the truth of God’s word.

- A. The Christian doctrine of resurrection stands in clear contrast to the beliefs of other world religions. For example, the hope of Hinduism is **reincarnation**, in which that part of the person that continues after death is reborn into another person or animal or plant. Other religions that hold this view are Buddhism, Sikhism, Jainism, Gnosticism, and Manichaeism. Although people claim to have memories of past lives, these are nothing more than imaginations or thoughts prompted by demons. The Bible undercuts this belief because it teaches that it is appointed to people to die *once*, and after that the judgment (Heb. 9:27).
- B. The Seventh Day Adventist church and Jehovah’s Witnesses believe in a doctrine called **annihilation**.

According to **annihilationism**, the unsaved dead simply cease to exist. Eternal punishment is that they are vaporized, completely destroyed forever, in the grave, dead. They go back to being like they were

¹Approximately three-quarters of young adults according to slate.com

² Again, about 75% want to keep abortion legal, but many of them claim to be “pro-life.”

³ 60% of Americans believe life exists on other planets. <https://www.ipsos.com/en-us/news-polls/majority-believe-intelligent-life-exists-on-other-planets>

before they were conceived, meaning they do not exist at all. The attraction of this view is that it eliminates eternal conscious punishment for the lost.

But Jesus taught of a rich man who was consciously in torment in Hades (Luke 16:23) and the Bible is clear that there is eternal punishment for sin (Revelation 20:10, 15).

Annihilation is closely related to the doctrine of **conditional immortality**, where immortality is conditioned on belief in Jesus Christ. Those who “fail” the condition are annihilated. Advocates of annihilationism include John Stott, Richard Bauckham, Clark Pinnock, Greg Boyd, Harold Camping, Ellen G. White, and Joel Green. Though some “evangelicals” hold this, these are generally very broad evangelicals whose theology should be considered at best suspect as a result.

- C. The **atheist** variation on annihilation is that *all* humans (not just unsaved ones) die and are annihilated. There is nothing for anyone in an afterlife. Truly, “eat and drink, for tomorrow we die!” is a sensible practice in this school of thought. But beside being Biblically wrong, there is something philosophically wrong about there being no consequence to how one lives in this life. It makes life meaningless.
- D. Jehovah’s witnesses also believe that there is a two-fold division between believers in the eternal state, with a privileged few living in Heaven and the rest living on the new “paradise” earth. Some kind of “resurrection” would be necessary to get to these places of blessing, but whether it is bodily as the Bible teaches, or annihilation followed by re-creation, is hard to discern.

They do not believe in the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ—only His **spiritual resurrection** (through annihilation and recreation)—thus throwing doubt on their view of bodily resurrection for believers. Scripture states that Christ is the firstfruits of those who have died (1 Cor. 15:20) and that we will have a body like His (Philippians 3:21). In fact, Christ did have a body (Matt. 28:9, Luke 24:30, 42-43, John 20:17, 21:12-13). As such, the JW system of theology is false and should be rejected entirely. It is imaginative and imaginary.

- E. Note that while the Christian awaits resurrection, he/she does not experience **soul sleep**. The Bible teaches not soul sleep, but that when a person dies, their spirit immediately goes to be with Christ in a conscious state (2 Cor. 5:8, Philippians 1:23, Luke 16:22).

Soul sleep is the idea that when you die, you are unconscious of the passage of time until you awaken at resurrection. It “feels” like you are immediately with the Lord after death, but many years or even millennia might pass unnoticed by you before that happens. I call this the “time warp” view of personal eschatology.

Also, the Christian does not experience **purgatory**. Rather, the believer is conscious and in Heaven. We can only know this via divine revelation, which God has given in the Bible.

Purgatory is supposedly a place where your spirit goes to be punished for your sins. Once you have paid enough of a price, or the living make enough donations or offer sufficient prayers for your soul, then you can spring out of purgatory and go to Heaven.

The Bible is crystal clear that purgatory does not exist. There can be *no* divine condemnation for Christians, neither now or in the life to come (Romans 8:1). Christ paid for *all* the sins of the believer, not just some of them. Belief in the doctrine of purgatory is an indication of belief in salvation by works. Christian salvation is completely by grace, not at all by works (Ephesians 2:8-9). Let me put it this way: if a person goes to a place that is *like* purgatory, the bad news is this: that place is actually Hades, and there is no escape from there.

III. The Gospel Saves, v. 1-2

A. By comparison to what Paul has written in the previous chapters, the “moreover” at the head of verse 1 (NKJV, KJV) hardly seems adequate. This is not an “additional topic” of the same weight as what came before. This rises to a level that should arrest the attention of the readers. An exclamation like “Now brothers...!” would convey a bit more of the urgency and importance of the topic. The lengthy treatment of it, and the placement near the end of the letter tells us that it is very important.

“Now brothers! I remind you of the gospel which one I preached to you, which also you received, and in which you stand...”

B. The opening verse of chapter 15 is simple: Paul reminds us of the gospel.

The **gospel** is the good news of Jesus Christ, that He came to save sinners such as ourselves.

C. This is the same gospel that Paul preached to them originally (*delivered*, v. 3). There was no different gospel, no new one, no adjusted one, no innovative one, just *the one* (see Galatians 1:6-9). He handed it to them

as a sacred deposit that was to be protected and lived out. Jude teaches us the same idea in verse 3 of his short letter—that the body of faith in which we believe was delivered *once for all* to the saints.

- D. Initially, at least, the Corinthian church people had received the gospel of Jesus Christ. They welcomed it as from God (1 Thess. 2:13). They came to believe that it was true and was directly applicable to themselves. They saw the impact of the message of Christ in the lives of those who turned from sin (1 Thess. 1:3).
- E. As they received the truth in the past, they were to remain in that truth in the present. The evidence of receiving the gospel in the past is standing in it during the present. Only those purified by the gospel of Jesus can *stand* before God—Psalm 24:3-6. But that *stand* is a bit different than the *stand* Paul refers to. The *stand* of 1 Cor. 15:1 is that they are holding firm and remaining strong in their belief in the gospel, not wavering away from it. They have experienced salvation in the past, and it has ongoing effects in the present (perfect tense). Just as important as “did you receive the gospel” is “are you still standing in the gospel?”
- F. This message is the one that saves them from eternal death. That is why it is good news. Anyone who embraces the person of Jesus Christ and His message likewise stands / exists in a state of salvation.

In Christian theology, to be **saved** means to be rescued from the dreadful consequences of sin—in this life and especially after death. It means being brought near to God instead of being separated from Him. It means being forgiven, justified, and re-created with spiritual life.

- G. Christian salvation is permanent. Those who are truly saved will hold fast the message of Christ. But “if” and “unless” are important words in verse 2. If a person does not hold fast, i.e. they “believed in vain,” then they prove that they are not and never were truly a child of God. The same “if” idea is found in Hebrews 3:14.

Believing in vain means that you did not initially think through what you were doing. There was no ultimate purpose or substantial underlying cause in your belief. As a result, your faith was not genuine or lasting.

The point of this Paul is dealing with those who once said they believe in Christ, but now do not. If *you* still do believe in Him—really do—then you need not worry about failing the “if” test. Those who believe will be kept by God. No one can snatch them out of the state of salvation (Jude 24).

But the Corinthian church was so shot through with problems that Paul had to raise the difficult possibility that some of their professions of faith were false. See 2 Cor. 13:5 for another instance of this.

IV. The Content of the Gospel, v. 3-8

This is a concise synopsis of the central truth of the gospel. There are other truths surrounding and supporting this that must be held in connection to it, but this is the core. It is really two points, but each with a supporting point for a total of four. The cliff-notes version is that Christ died for our sins and rose again. After dying, He was buried, and after rising, He was observed by many eyewitnesses.

- A. Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures. The fact is that Jesus died as a sacrifice, and He died on account of sin.
1. The next part of this phrase is critical: “**for** our sins.” He died in our place, as our substitute, to our advantage, because of our sins. The atonement of Jesus Christ is substitutionary, that is, He took our place. Our sins were laid on Him (1 Peter 2:24). He did not die for His own sins, for He had none. His wounds were for our healing. His stripes were for our peace. He was crushed so we could be free. He died so we could live. He was cut off so that we could be caught up to heaven.⁴ His death was not merely exemplary; it was substitutionary.
 2. Those were “our sins.” We are sinners. Do you acknowledge that? But take it a step farther: Jesus did not just die for sins. 1 Peter 3:18 says that He died for *sinners*. Sinners and their sins are inextricably linked.
 3. “According to the Scriptures” means that the events of Christ’s death were predicted in the OT. He made His soul an offering for sin (Isaiah 53:10). Also, it means those events had to happen just as they were pre-scripted to happen. An objection is sometimes advanced that human sacrifice was not prescribed in the Law of Moses. True enough. But a substitution *was* prescribed. The voluntary Divine-Human sacrifice provided Himself as a sufficient substitutionary payment for all the sins of all humanity. God accepted that sacrifice.

B. Christ was buried.

1. This is also “according to the Scriptures,” but to say so is unnecessary because it is understood from the context. Anyone who has carefully read the OT and NT knows that Christ was ordained to die and be

⁴ For more on the substitutionary use of the word *for*, please see 1 Peter 2:21, 3:18, 2 Cor. 5:14, 15, 21, Gal. 1:4, 3:13, Matt. 20:28, John 10:11, 15, Rom. 5:6.

buried. We can glean as much from Psalm 16:10 and Isaiah 53:9 and Christ's parallel with Jonah recorded in Matthew 12:40. Suffering had to come to Jesus, then glory (Like 24:26, Heb. 2:9-10, 1 Pet 1:11).

2. The point simply is this: Christ was buried because He was really dead. We bury dead people. The various theories about how Christ did not die or was only seriously injured have no credibility at this point. The Roman soldiers knew how to kill people. That was their job and they were expert at it.

C. Christ rose again the third day according to the Scriptures.

1. In our zeal to simplify the gospel—or to make it more palatable to others—we often leave out this point. “Jesus died for your sins” is not enough. If He died but did not rise again, no one can be saved. If He did not rise, the ethical debt of sin has not provably been paid. If He did not rise, God has not been satisfied and we are lost. But Romans 10:9 says that if you declare with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. This switch of allegiance to Christ and acknowledgement of his finished cross-work is the true indication of salvation.
2. The phrase “according to the Scriptures” again tells us that the Old Testament prophesied of the resurrection of Christ. We mentioned Psalm 16:10 already; Isaiah 53:10-12 is another. See also Luke 24:25-27 and Acts 26:22-23. All the OT Scriptures that point to the glorious reign of the Messiah imply the resurrection following His suffering.
3. The resurrection was predicted by Jesus Himself—Matt. 16:21, 17:23, 20:19. And then it happened—Matt. 28:5-6.
4. We are justified by the finished work of Christ (John 19:30), and the resurrection of Jesus shows that that work is indeed finished.
5. One of the most common excuses is the naturalistic objection: “Jesus could not rise from the dead, because that just does not happen.” It is like saying, “I’ve only ever seen white swans before, so there is no such thing as a black swan.” Think about that logic...

D. Jesus was seen by witnesses.

1. The **apostle Peter**. Peter needed a special restoration because he had denied the Lord three times on the night of His betrayal (Mark 14:72).
2. The **twelve apostles**. If we exclude Judas, that leaves 11, but Matthias was newly part of the 12 (Acts 1:21-26).

3. **Five hundred** people at one time. This seals it. We are not talking about just a bunch of hallucinating crazy men.
4. **James**, likely the half-brother of Christ and leader of the Jerusalem church, but possibly one of the James's of the 12.
5. Several times Jesus appeared to **the apostles**.
6. **Apostle Paul**. He was the odd man out, "one born out of due time." He did not fit the description of an apostle. Although he was physically born before the death of Jesus, He was not a follower of Jesus until after Jesus's death, resurrection, and ascension to Heaven. He was saved by Jesus Christ in Acts 9, which is 32-35 A.D., one to three years after Christ's death.

We could comb through the gospel accounts and the book of Acts to find all the appearances of Jesus to the disciples and expand on this list. But this is an accurate summary of the 40 days in which he presented Himself and gave them convincing proof that He was alive (Acts 1:3).

The idea with all these witnesses is that there is solid *eyewitness* evidence both of Jesus's death *and* of His resurrection. Use this fact in your evangelism. This number of witnesses in the different circumstances over such a length of time would suffice in any court of law to prove beyond a reasonable doubt that Jesus was in fact alive from the dead. Yet, most of humanity does not believe it. Satan has done an effective job of blinding their minds to the truth.

V. Paul's Place Among the Apostles, v. 9-11

- A. The apostle was humble about the reality that He was saved after the resurrection of Christ, but still was privileged to see Christ on the road to Damascus. He was *last* and considered himself *least*, not only because of the timing we just mentioned, but also because he persecuted the church (v. 9; see Ephesians 3:8). Also, he considered himself as the chief of sinners (1 Tim. 1:15). Yet he was instrumental in the advance of the gospel throughout the Roman empire and thus to the rest of the western world.
- B. Paul was what he was and did what he did all because of God's grace. He was not a self-made man. He was a man made by the grace of God. You should be mindful of the same truth in your life.
- C. Some "take better advantage" of God's grace than others. They put in more effort, more study, more work, more evangelism. And they generally get more results (more seed = more crops). Paul put forth a ton

of effort to labor diligently with God's grace so that he would have a big impact for God. How are you working with the grace of God?

Conclusion

Paul preached everywhere, and among his converts were the Corinthians. Now, the question was this: would they hold fast to that gospel, or were they just temporary disciples?

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