

High Peaks Bible Fellowship

The Doctrine of the Resurrection Is there a resurrection of the dead? 1 Corinthians 15:1-34

Introduction

- Paul has a new problem in mind as he begins this section, and the transition is rather abrupt between the last topic of spiritual gifts and the new topic concerning the resurrection. But it is not that unusual for Paul to begin a new topic in a somewhat abrupt fashion. For example, the topic of sexual immorality in chapter five is introduced by saying: "It is actually reported that there is immorality among you." Also, the topic of lawsuits between believers in chapter six is introduced by a question: "Does any one of you, when he has a case against his neighbor, dare to go to law before the unrighteous and not before the saints?"
- Here in chapter fifteen Paul opens his discussion of the resurrection by presenting the message he typically used when sharing the gospel, and this doesn't seem to have a clear connection with the Corinthians' error regarding the resurrection. We must go forward a little bit to the statement in the second half of 1 Cor 15:12 where Paul explicitly pointed out the Corinthians' error, and then we can put the first part of this chapter in context with the overall argument Paul used when dealing with the doctrinal error being held by the Corinthians.
- Some of the Corinthians were teaching that there is no resurrection of the dead. They were denying the doctrine of the resurrection, and this chapter is devoted to correcting that error.

Greek Philosophy and the Resurrection

- To the Greek way of thinking it would have been inconceivable that a person's earthly body would come back to life after death. When Paul met with the philosophers on Mars Hill in Athens (Acts 17:18-34), he spoke of Christ's resurrection from the dead and most of the philosophers mocked him.
 1. The Epicurean philosophers taught simple materialism: there is no existence beyond death.
 2. The Stoic philosophers taught that at death the soul was merged with Deity, and so there was a loss of individual personality.
 3. The Platonist philosophers taught that the soul was immortal, but they denied the idea of a bodily resurrection.
- The word translated *resurrection* is the Greek term *anastasis*, which literally means "to stand up again." The doctrine of the resurrection has to do with the physical body, rather than with the immortality of the soul or whether there will be some kind of existence after the grave. Resurrection means that a person will "stand up again" after he dies -- that he will come back to life in the body.



Proofs that Christ rose from the dead (1 Cor 15:1-11)

Scripture and the Gospel message claim that Christ was resurrected (1 Cor 15:1-4)

- *Now I make known to you, brethren* = This phrase is similar to the one Paul used in 1 Cor 12:3 when he was teaching the true nature of spiritual gifts. Here Paul is teaching the true nature of the resurrection. The Greek term *gnorizo* means to declare, to certify, or to present knowledge so that it will be clearly recognized.
- *The gospel which I preached to you, which also you received, in which also you stand* = Paul re-stated the message of the gospel which he originally preached to them, and which they originally recognized as being true. They originally staked their lives on this truth when they first heard it.
- *By which also you are saved* = This phrase declares that a believer's salvation itself depends upon acknowledging the truths which Paul will state in the next few verses, including the truth of the resurrection.

- [+] *If you hold fast the word which I preached to you* = This is a Greek first class conditional clause, which is assumed to be true. The Corinthians did believe in the truth of the resurrection, and their faith in these truths saved them.
- [-] *Unless you believed in vain* = The Greek word *eike* translated *vain* means "without cause or without effect." Paul is saying that people who deny the truth of the resurrection are believing only half the gospel, and that is not effective for their salvation.
- *For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received* = Paul did not create this message; he only served as the messenger from Jesus to deliver it. However, he is claiming divine authority for the truths he is declaring. The truths concerning the resurrection of Christ form the foundation for the gospel message and for our salvation.
- *That Christ died for our sins* = This verb is in the aorist tense, which indicates a definite event that occurred at a point in time. The preposition *for* can mean "concerning, on behalf of, or in order to deal with." Christ died in order to deal with our sins, but exactly how the death of Christ dealt with our sins is not discussed here. That is why Paul included the next phrase in this verse.
- *According to the Scriptures* = The Scriptures are the important key to explaining the death of Christ for our sins. There are many other places in Scripture which help us to understand what the death of Christ accomplished in dealing with our sins.
- *And that He was buried* = The verb here is also in the aorist tense, which tells us this event happened at a point in time during human history. The burial of Christ is what certified that He did really die -- that He paid the ultimate price for the sins of the whole world. Christ's burial was a fact of history which was witnessed by His friends as well as his enemies (see Matt 27:62-68).
- *And that He was raised on the third day* = Not only did Christ die for our sins, but He also rose from the dead in His resurrection body. The verb translated "was raised" is not in the aorist tense (like the previous verbs), but it is in the perfect tense which indicates that an event happened in the past that has consequences which carry forward up to the present time. Not only did Christ rise from the dead, but His resurrection remains in force and is His present condition even today.
- *According to the Scriptures* = As with the death of Christ, there are other Scriptures that either foretell or elaborate on the resurrection of Christ.

The testimony of eyewitnesses proved that Christ was resurrected (1 Cor 15:5-11)

Christ's post-resurrection appearances were what certified or proved His resurrection from the dead. As with His burial, His resurrection was also an historical fact that was witnessed by many people.

- *He appeared to Cephas* = The Bible does not give the specific time or place where Jesus appeared to Peter, but we can assume that it was sometime after He appeared to Mary and before He appeared to the men on the Emmaus Road (Luke 24:34).
- *Then to the twelve* = Luke 24:35 & John 20:19 record that Jesus appeared to the eleven remaining disciples as they gathered in a house on the evening of the resurrection. Even before they replaced Judas, there were still referred to as "the twelve," which had come to mean the small inner circle chosen by Jesus.
- *After that He appeared to more than five hundred brethren at one time* = The Bible does not provide any specifics about Jesus' appearance to this large group, but this must have been a event that was well-known in the early church. Paul was writing this letter more than two decades after that event had occurred, and yet most of the large group who saw Jesus were still alive to testify to the facts.
- *Then He appeared to James, then to all the apostles* = James the half-brother of Jesus was the key leader of the Jerusalem church (Acts 15:13-21). In Acts 1:3 we are told that during the 40-day period between His resurrection and His ascension, Jesus appeared to all of the apostles on several occasions. An example of one of these events is recorded in John 21:1-14.
- *And last of all, as to one untimely born, He appeared to me also* = Paul described this unusual appearance with the analogy of a child who is born well after his due date. Jesus' appearance to Paul was not only after Christ's resurrection but also after His ascension.
- *For I am the least of the apostles, and not fit to be called an apostle* = Paul could not forget that, based on his personal background, he was the least likely person to be given this office by Christ. He was an arch-enemy and persecutor of the church, and he knew he did not deserve to be called an apostle.
- *But by the grace of God I am what I am* = The background Paul shared in the previous verse made it humanly

impossible for him to be an apostle, so the office he held was solely by the grace of God. Paul became completely dedicated to the work of the ministry that God gave him to do, and much of the New Testament is a witness to the accomplishments of the apostle Paul.

- *Whether then it was I or they, so we preach and so you believed* = This verse summarizes the unified testimony of all the witnesses Paul has just listed. Whether it was Peter, or the twelve, or the 500, or James, or Paul -- they all preached a consistent message based on the common experience of seeing the resurrected Lord Jesus Christ.

The Consequences of Denying the Resurrection (1 Cor 15:12-34)

The statement of the problem in Corinth which prompted this chapter (1 Cor 15:12)

- *Now if Christ is preached, that He has been raised from the dead* = Paul is recapping the gospel message that he preached among the Corinthians, and which he summarized in the first four verses of this chapter. The resurrection of Christ was a central part of the gospel message.
- *How do some among you say that there is no resurrection of the dead?* = Some of the Corinthians were denying that there was a resurrection of the dead. They were following the teachings of the Greek philosophers rather than the truth of the inspired message presented to them by Paul and others. This shows that it was a common error even in the early church to allow the ungodly culture or society to be the determiner of truth, rather than letting the inspired Word of God be the determiner of truth for living.

The apostle Paul will now set forth a series of logical conclusions that would result if a person accepted the tenet that there is no such thing as the resurrection of the dead.

Conclusion #1: If there is no resurrection, that would mean not even Christ was raised (1 Cor 15:13)

- If there is no such thing as the resurrection of the dead, then Christ Himself would not have been able to rise from the dead.
- However, in the previous section Paul just finished proving that Christ was raised from the dead. So to state the case positively, if Christ was resurrected then the Corinthians should definitely consider that resurrection is possible.

Conclusion #2: If Christ was not raised, then Gospel preaching and conversion are in vain (1 Cor 15:14)

- Earlier in this section Paul made it very clear that the heart of the gospel message was the resurrection of Christ. So if there were no resurrection then the "good news" of the gospel would actually be "bad news" and there would be nothing worth preaching or believing.

Conclusion #3: The apostles would be deliberate liars and deceivers (1 Cor 15:15)

- Paul had given a detailed list of people who were eye-witnesses of the resurrected Lord, but if there is no resurrection then all of those people are false witnesses. Not only that, but the entire group must have collaborated together to propagate the lie, so they would all be deliberate deceivers as well.

Conclusion #4: The Corinthians' own faith would be vain; they are still unredeemed sinners (1 Cor 15:16-17)

- Here Paul added the terrifying idea that anyone who put his trust in such an obviously false system would have no advantage over an unbeliever. The main point here is that there is no actual redemption and forgiveness of sin if Christ has not been raised.

Conclusion #5: All their dead Christian friends must be regarded as forever lost (1 Cor 15:18)

- Any believer the Corinthians know who has already died would be completely and eternally lost. The term perished means "to put out of the way entirely; to utterly and permanently ruin; to give over to eternal misery in hell."

Conclusion #6: They would be in a more miserable condition than unbelievers (1 Cor 15:19)

- Without the resurrection Christianity would be pointless, and anyone who believes in it should be pitied. Without the resurrection, there would be no gospel, no salvation message to believe, no forgiveness of sins, and no hope of a meaningful life (either now or after death).

Theological arguments for the doctrine of the resurrection (1 Cor 15:20-28)

Paul gives several theological arguments for the resurrection. Many people who reject the doctrine of the resurrection do not realize that this impacts other areas of their system of theology.

A clear affirmation of Christ's resurrection (1 Cor 15:20)

- But now Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who are asleep* = First Paul gives a clear affirmation of the fact of Christ's resurrection, which immediately contradicts the false teaching that some in the Corinthian church were believing.
- Paul described Christ as the "first fruits," which pictured the Jewish practice of sacrificing the first part of their harvest to God. Before they could reap the entire harvest they brought the first portion to the temple as a thank offering (Lev 23:10). Only afterward could they take in the rest of the crops. Paul is affirming not only that Christ did rise from the dead, but that we as believers in Him will also be raised in due time.

The origin of death with Adam and of life with Christ (1 Cor 15:21-22)

- Adam was the physical father of every human being, and sin and death entered the human race through his sin in the garden of Eden. But Christ is the originator of resurrection life for those who are associated with Him. In both cases, one man doing one act caused the consequences of that act to be applied to every other person who is identified with him.
- For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all will be made alive* = To be "in Adam" means to be a descendant of Adam. Because of Adam's sin every one of his descendants comes into the world spiritually dead and will suffer the consequence of physical death. To be "in Christ" means to be trusting in Christ for one's salvation. Because of Christ's substitutionary death on our behalf, every person who puts his faith in Christ will be given spiritual life, and even if he dies physically he will be resurrected bodily to enjoy eternal life with God.

The order of resurrection events (1 Cor 15:23-24)

- Here Paul expands on the idea that Christ was the first fruits, or the first to be raised, but that every other believer will also be raised at His coming. Using Paul's analogy Christ was the first fruits, but "those who are in Christ" will follow afterward just as the full harvest followed that first offering. God has a predetermined order of events involving the resurrection of the dead, and the resurrection of different groups of believers will happen in several stages.
 1. The resurrection of Christ
 2. At Christ's return for Church Age saints, He will come down as far as the clouds and believers who are already dead will rise first to meet Him in the air (1 Thess 4:16). Afterward the believers who are still alive at that time will then rise to meet Him in the clouds (1 Thess 4:17).
- It is probably the Rapture that Paul has in mind when he mentioned "His coming." However, at the end of the Tribulation period Christ will also resurrect every person who has come to faith in Him but was killed during that horrible time (Rev 20:4). Just prior to the beginning of the Millennial Kingdom there will also be a resurrection of everyone who was a believer during the period of the Old Testament (Dan 12:2).
- In verse twenty-four Paul explained some of the events that will occur during the Millennial Kingdom when the Lord Jesus Christ will reign over all the earth. It is during this thousand-year period when He will centralize all rule and authority and power under His absolute sovereign control.
- The Old Testament contains many descriptions of life during this time period.
 - Christ's government will be one of absolute authority (Ps 2; Rev 19:15), but it will also be characterized by complete righteousness and peace (Ps 72; Isa 11).
 - Israel will be restored to the promised land (Jer 30-31; Ezek 39; Amos 9), but Gentiles will also have abundant blessings (Isa 2:2-4, 19:24-25, 49:6, 60:1-3, 62:2, 66:18-19; Jer 3:17, 16:19).

- The earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord (Isa 11:9), and the millennial temple will be a center of worship (Ezek 40-46).
- There will be a tremendous social and economic environment on a world-wide basis, and many aspects of the curse on the productivity of the earth will be rolled back (Isa 35:1-2).

The final events of human history (1 Cor 15:25-26)

- Here Paul is referring to the events at the end of the Millennial Kingdom where Christ will ultimately put down the final rebellion inspired by Satan after his release (Rev 20:7-9). The last enemy (death) will not be completely abolished until after the Great White Throne judgment (Rev 20:11-13), and then death itself will be thrown into the lake of fire (Rev 20:14).

A glimpse into the relationships within the godhead (1 Cor 15:27-28)

- *HE HAS PUT ALL THINGS IN SUBJECTION UNDER HIS FEET* = Paul seems to have in mind the words of Psalm 8:6, which in the original context refers to the dominion of mankind over the earth as originally given by God in Gen 1:26-28. Since the Fall in the Garden of Eden there has never been a time when mankind has maintained benevolent dominion over all creation, but this will finally be fulfilled by the Lord Jesus Christ during His Millennial Kingdom reign.
- In the last part of this verse Paul is anticipating the arguments of his opponents at Corinth who might try to use logic against him. You may have heard some people say, "ALL means ALL, and that's all ALL means!" They claim that the word *all* must always be used in a universal sense, but that is not true. The word *all* is always limited by its context. That is what Paul is teaching here. It is as if he means, "When I say that God has put all things in subjection to Christ, of course that does not mean that God Himself is in subjection to Christ."
- After Christ has completed all the work that He was given in relation to human salvation and millennial government in the plan of God, then Christ will be in a position to give His final account to God of his work.
- This verse gives us a brief and rare glimpse into the relationships within the godhead itself. The Eternal Son of God is fully God and completely equal with God the Father in His divine status. However, during Christ's earthly ministry at both His first and second comings, there is a sense in which He is fulfilling a different function in carrying out the will of God the Father.

Conclusion #7: If there is no resurrection, then baptism for such a resurrection would be absurd (1 Cor 15:29)

- *Otherwise* = This word can mean: "because, seeing that, since, as much as." It seems that in this verse Paul is continuing his previous list of arguments for the truth of the resurrection of the dead by saying, "There really is a resurrection of the dead, otherwise, what will those do who are baptized for the dead?" The word *otherwise* would not make much sense in this sentence unless we insert Paul's premise for the argument.
- In order to handle a difficult passage like this, we must apply the principle that "Scripture Interprets Scripture." In other words, we must view the entire Bible as God's only inspired, inerrant, and authoritative revelation; and we must compare the difficult passage with other passages that relate to the same subject while working from the assumption that Scripture cannot contradict itself. Even though some passages are difficult, the majority of the Bible is clearly understandable, and we should never base a theological doctrine on an unclear or ambiguous passage. When problems of interpretation do arise or a passage seems unclear, we should never assume that the Bible has a mistake in it. We must give the Bible the benefit of the doubt, and our task is to find a plausible interpretation that is not in conflict with the clear teaching of the rest of Scripture.
- *What it does NOT mean*
 - We know from comparing this difficult passage with the other clear teachings of Scripture that this passage is NOT teaching vicarious baptism for the salvation of the dead. The Bible teaches that people can only be saved while they are alive and can consciously understand and respond to the gospel message. It never teaches that a person can be saved after his death, nor that one person's faith can save another person.
 - We also know from the clear teaching of Scripture that baptism is not necessary for salvation but is only the outward, public declaration of a salvation that had already been achieved at the time one placed his faith and trust in Christ alone. This passage cannot be teaching *baptismal regeneration*, that one is saved by being baptized or that baptism is somehow required for salvation. And if one person's faith cannot save another person, then one person's baptism certainly cannot save another person.

- *Those who are baptized* = The concept of *baptism* refers primarily to the public declaration of a believer's intimate association with the Lord Jesus Christ after entering into a salvation relationship by placing his personal faith in Christ and all that He accomplished on our behalf. In First Corinthians chapter one Paul used the word *baptism* six times with this meaning. To be baptized means to give public testimony to the fact that you are a Christian, that you have placed your personal faith in Christ for your salvation.
- *The dead* = That phrase is used thirteen times in First Corinthians, and all of those cases are in chapter fifteen where the context concerns the resurrection of the dead or the dead being raised. Otherwise, the phrase "the dead" does not occur in this book. This tells us that when Paul used the phrase here that he was still speaking of the *resurrection* of the dead.
- *Baptized FOR the resurrection of the dead* = The preposition *for* (*huper*) can mean: "above, about, beyond, on behalf of, because of, in reference to." Although the English word *for* is a perfectly legitimate translation of this Greek preposition, it seems clear from the context that Paul means: "because of or in reference to." Paul may be saying, "If there were no resurrection of the dead, it would be absurd to become a Christian with a hope of being resurrected from the dead to eternal life."
- *If the dead are not raised at all, why then are they baptized for them?* = This phrase adds another shade of meaning to the previous phrase. Here the implication is that a powerful motive for becoming a Christian is the testimony of other believers who have already died and gone to be with the Lord.

Conclusion #8: Ministry activity and suffering for one's faith would be meaningless (1 Cor 15:30-32a)

- *Why are we also in danger every hour?* = The apostle Paul and his companions were prime examples of servants of the Lord who were being persecuted for proclaiming the gospel message. But if there is no resurrection of the dead, why should they put themselves in danger for something that is not true?
- *I affirm, brethren, by the boasting in you which I have in Christ Jesus our Lord, I die daily* = When Paul says, "I affirm," he is using a term that meant taking a formal oath. So here Paul is affirming the truth of his previous statement that he and his companions were constantly in danger. In fact here Paul expresses the intensity of this danger by saying that he was in peril for his very life on a daily basis.
- *If from human motives I fought with wild beasts at Ephesus, what does it profit me?* = In this verse Paul goes on to say that putting himself in harm's way out of purely human motives would certainly not gain anything. It would be silly to face the perils that Paul faced in Ephesus (for example) if he were doing it for something that was not true.

Conclusion #9: Denying the resurrection results in a hedonistic philosophy of life (1 Cor 15:32b)

- *If the dead are not raised, LET US EAT AND DRINK, FOR TOMORROW WE DIE* = Paul presents the opposite side to his argument by saying, "If there is no resurrection of the dead, then live purely for pleasure today because you may die and cease to exist tomorrow." These words are excerpted from comments made by the Jews during the siege of Jerusalem by the Assyrian army (Isaiah 22:13). Instead of weeping and fasting as would be expected, many of the Jews focused on getting one last night of pleasure before the attack which they expected would take away their lives.
- This unbiblical attitude was not unique to the Jews of Isaiah's day though. It was also the motto of the Epicurean philosophers of Paul's day. Near Paul's home town of Tarsus there was a statue of the city founder with an inscription which read: "Eat, drink, enjoy thyself. The rest is nothing." So by using this quote, Paul is describing the worldly philosophy of the people who deny the resurrection.

Paul rebukes this worldly attitude and the Corinthians' doctrinal sin (1 Cor 15:33-34)

- *Do not be deceived: "Bad company corrupts good morals"* = Since Paul is very familiar with the philosophical culture of his day, it seems he cannot resist using their own words against them. In addition to being a true statement, this verse was also a common proverb of the day. It first appeared in the plays of the Greek poet Menander around 280 BC. It's as if Paul is saying, even you Corinthians who are steeped in the worldly philosophy of the day should know that what you are doing is wrong.
- *Become sober-minded as you ought* = Paul used a word here that means to wake up from a drunken stupor. This word picture is comparing their worldly mindset to a dim-witted mental fog, and Paul tells them, "Rouse yourselves, come back to reality and to the truth!"
- *Stop sinning* = Paul does not hesitate to call their behavior what it really is: SIN. In other words, it is a sin to deny

the truth of the resurrection of the dead, and that sin will lead to all of the consequences that Paul outlined in the previous verses.

- *Some have no knowledge of God. I speak this to your shame* = The grammar of this verse tells us that these people were continually and habitually living in a state of ignorance about the truths of God, as well as ignorance of the power of God in being able to raise the dead to life again.

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