

Wednesday Evening Bible Study

April 20, 2022

Series - *The Life and Writings of the Apostle Paul*

The Corinthian Letters

The Long Letter (First Corinthians)

Chapter Fifteen – *The Resurrection*

Text – 1 Corinthians 15

This chapter of Scripture is one of the key passages in the Bible for two primary reasons: first, it defines what the gospel is in precise terms; second, it provides the most comprehensive description and explanation of the resurrection of Christ as well as the rapture of all believers.

Memory Verse – 1 Corinthians 15:19

"If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable." (1 Corinthians 15:19)

Key verses from this chapter – vs. 1 – 4; 19; 51 – 2; 58

Introduction

I The Famous Declaration of the Gospel (vs. 1 – 11)

A It's Definition (vs. 1 – 4)

The word gospel means "good news", and refers to the death, burial, and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ, which is good news for us because through it we who are believers have victory over penalty of sin, the permanence of death, and the pains of Hell. If the resurrection is removed from the gospel, it can no longer be considered good news, because the resurrection of Christ proves His claims.

B It's Deliverers (vs. 5 – 11)

The people that witnessed the resurrected Christ had all been commissioned and empowered to testify of the truth. The Corinthians received and believed the truth of the resurrection and were saved. Now there were some in Corinth who were denying one of the foundational truths of Christianity: "and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures:".

II The False Doctrine of the Gainsayers at Corinth (vs. 12 – 19)

"Holding fast the faithful word as he hath been taught, that he may be able by sound doctrine both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers." (Titus 1:9)

The word, "gainsay", means to say against; to deny, or contradict. There were some in Corinth who were gainsaying concerning the doctrine of the resurrection. Paul refutes their false doctrine with the following arguments.

“If there be no resurrection of the dead, then...”

A Christ is not risen – which means He did not have the power that He claimed to have over death. (v. 13)

B Our preaching is meaningless. (v. 14)

C Our faith is meaningless. (v. 14; 17)

D Paul and others that preach resurrection are liars. (v.15)

E We are still in our sins. (v. 17)

F Those that are already dead have no hope. (v. 18)

G We have only this world to live for. (v. 19)

III The “First-Fruits” Description of Guarantees Regarding the Resurrection (vs. 20 – 28)

A Christ is Risen (vs. 20 – 22)

Christ is the first fruits of the resurrection, along with a few Old Testament saints that rose after Him. (Matthew 27:52 – 53)

Notice the comparison of those who are “in Adam”, and those who are “in Christ”. Adam is the federal head of all of those who are born naturally, and through his sin were all condemned to death; but Christ gives life, and the promise of a resurrection.

B We will Rise at the Rapture (v. 23)

The rapture of the Church is the harvest. (1 Thessalonians 4:13 – 18; 2 Thessalonians 2:1; Revelation 4:1)

Note - The Tribulation saints are the gleanings. They will receive their resurrected bodies at the end of the Tribulation Period.

According to Revelation 20:4 – 6, all the saved, regardless of the time of their resurrection, are considered part of the “first resurrection”. All the lost will be part of the “second resurrection”, which will take place after the 1000-year Millennium, at the Great White Throne Judgment. (Revelation 20:11 – 15)

C Christ will Reign Supreme (vs. 24 – 28)

The time period referred to here in these verses is after the Millennium and after the Great White Throne Judgment when all His enemies, including death, will have been judged, and cast into the Lake of Fire. Note – though Christ will rule and reign on the earth during the Millennium, there will still be rebellion.

IV Further Discussions and Graphics Regarding the Resurrection (vs. 29 – 49)

A Paul Uses Another False Doctrine to Dispute Their Claim (v. 29)

Some of the people in Corinth were practicing a false teaching of baptism for the dead, which was the belief that a person could be baptized on behalf of someone else who had already died. Paul was using their false doctrine against them, because on the one hand they were claiming that someone who was dead could somehow be helped by someone still living, but on the other hand they were denying the fact that anybody could be resurrected.

How the false teachers came to this view may never be known, but just across the Saronic Gulf, north of Corinth, lay Eleusis, the center of an ancient mystery religion lauded by Homer (*Hymn to Demeter* 478–79) and widely popular (cf. Cicero, himself an initiate, in *De Legibus* 2. 14. 36). Part of the rites of initiation into this pagan religion were washings of purification in the sea without which no one could hope to experience bliss in the life hereafter (cf. Pindar *Fragment* 212; Sophocles *Fragment* 753). A vicarious participation in the mysteries was not unknown either (cf. Orphica *Fragment* 245). Given the Corinthian propensity for distortion in matters of church practice (11:2–14:40), it was likely that some in Corinth (possibly influenced by the Eleusinian mystery) were propounding a false view of baptism which Paul took up and used as an argument against those who denied the Resurrection. No interpretation of this text is entirely satisfactory, but this view has as its chief strength the natural reading of the Greek verse, an asset singularly lacking in other explanations. Also, it is noteworthy that Paul referred to **those** (not “we”) who are “baptized for the dead.”¹

Some have understood that Paul was merely pointing out the futility of being baptized (having to do with our identification with Christ) for the Lord, if the Lord was, in fact, dead. Others still state that this verse has to do with the futility of fulfilling the Great Commission, which includes baptism, for people that have no hope (if there is no resurrection). Whatever the true meaning of this verse, it is not wise to build a doctrine upon it. It was used as an illustration of the main argument in this passage – the resurrection.

B Paul Defends His Sacrifice for the Lord (vs. 30 – 32)

Paul was saying that it was senseless for him to experience all the hardship that he had suffered if there was no resurrection.

C Paul Warns Against Deception (vs. 33 – 34)

¹ Lowery, D. K. (1985). 1 Corinthians. (J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck, Eds.) *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*. Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

“Evil communications corrupt good manners” – communication = fellowship, meaning if we run with the wrong crowd, or listen to the wrong people, it will eventually affect what we believe and what we do.

“You are, or you soon will be, who you hang around.”

D Paul Depicts the Natural Body and the Resurrected Body (vs. 35 – 49)

Paul will now answer the question that was in some of their minds: “How are the dead raised up?” Paul first rebukes the one who would ask the question. He states that the body must first die before it can be raised.

- 1 An illustration from farming (vs. 37 – 38)
- 2 An illustration from animals (v. 39)
- 3 An illustration from the heavens (vs. 40 – 41)

E Paul Differentiates Between the Natural Body and the Resurrected Body (vs. 42 – 49)

Sown in:	Raised in:
Corruption	Incorruption
Dishonor	Glory
Weakness	Power
Natural Body	Spiritual Body
Living Soul	Quickening Spirit
Earthly	Heavenly

V A Forceful Display of the Gathering of Believers (vs. 50 – 58)

The mystery referred to in v. 51 is the fact that not everyone is going to die physically – some will be raptured.

See also 1 Thessalonians 4:13 – 18; 2 Thessalonians 2:1; Revelation 4:1

Notice that Paul ends the chapter with a final encouragement:

“Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord.” (1 Corinthians 15:58)

Keep Going! – Don’t Quit! – It Will Be Worth It All When We See Jesus!