

Hope and Restoration for a Devasted World

1 Corinthians 15:1–28

Open your bibles, please, to 1 Corinthians 15. This is the Apostle Paul's Magnum Opus on the resurrection of Christ. It was written in a 1st century Greco-Roman world in which the prevailing philosophy held that you could worship anything and everything, as long as you confessed that Caesar was the main god above all others. It was a culture that said physical bodies have no spiritual connection or benefit. Bodies were earthy, and were simply containers that the spiritual "you" lived in. Since the spiritual is on a higher plane than the natural and earthy, do whatever want with your body; it will have no impact on your soul. Give yourself decadence, hedonism, sexual immorality — what difference does it make what you do with your body? Get all the pleasure out of it you can until it drops in the dust. Then you will be free of this earthy thing and ascend to a higher plane.

I did not just get lost in my notes and read a paragraph intended for 21st Century western culture. There's nothing new under the sun. But that's part of the hope of this treatise on the resurrection. It is as relevant, essential, and re-orienting as ever. We need to hear resurrection truth this morning. I will not get to everything here, but we will read through v. 28, and pray the straightforward reading of God's living, eternal, unchanging Word will strengthen our souls if no other word is said.

1 Corinthians 15:1–28 — Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, ² and by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you—unless you believed in vain.

³ For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, ⁴ that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, ⁵ and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. ⁶ Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. ⁷ Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. ⁸ Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me. ⁹ For I am the least of the apostles, unworthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. ¹⁰ But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me was not in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me. ¹¹ Whether then it was I or they, so we preach and so you believed.

¹² Now if Christ is proclaimed as raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? ¹³ But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. ¹⁴ And if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain. ¹⁵ We are even found to be misrepresenting God, because we testified about God that he raised Christ, whom he did not raise if it is true that the dead are not raised. ¹⁶ For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ

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has been raised. ¹⁷ And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins. ¹⁸ Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. ¹⁹ If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied.

²⁰ But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. ²¹ For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. ²² For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. ²³ But each in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ. ²⁴ Then comes the end, when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power. ²⁵ For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. ²⁶ The last enemy to be destroyed is death. ²⁷ For “God has put all things in subjection under his feet.” But when it says, “all things are put in subjection,” it is plain that he is excepted who put all things in subjection under him. ²⁸ When all things are subjected to him, then the Son himself will also be subjected to him who put all things in subjection under him, that God may be all in all.

PRAY

In **vvs 1 & 2**, the apostle Paul begins this resurrection treatise by rehearsing the way that we move from unbelief and rebellion to salvation in, and submission to Christ. We **hear** the word of God, we **receive** it – that is we acknowledge the truth of what God says and then live in accordance with his truth — we **continue in belief**. It is not merely that we were once saved, but being united with him he continues to save us through eternity as we continue to hold fast to his word and believe him. In other words, being saved changes us at *that* moment and *continues* to change us. Salvation is consequential — it makes a difference both now and into eternity.

Then, in v 3, he moves to what is of *first importance* – top priority.

The entirety of the Gospel, the Good News of salvation found in Christ alone is found in one concise package: Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, he was buried, and he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures. All of those points are necessary and irreducible. Now, if someone were to ask, “Exactly what do you mean by *the Gospel*,” we might be prone to say, “It is the Good News that Jesus came to save sinners!” Is that true? Of course it’s true!

- For our sake God the Father made Christ to be sin, who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. (2 Corinthians 5:21)
- Christ himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed. (1 Peter 2:24)

The Good News that we are delivered from the dominion of darkness is not merely that sin’s penalty was paid by Christ on the cross — that is massive and essential, and should stir us to deep love and consecration of our lives to him. But it goes past the payment of sin’s wage to the breaking of death’s

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chains, now and forever. The sinless Savior was raised because the penalty of sin had been paid so there was no claim over him. Those chains of death that will take this physical body to the grave (unless returns first) must be broken by Christ's physical victory over the grave.

Remember that the Greeks devalued and misused the body that God gave as an instrument to glorify him. They said the body had no spiritual value; it chains us to the dust. In v. 13, we see why he is constructing the argument for the resurrection. Some Corinthian believers, influenced more by the culture than the Scriptures, were also denying Christ's physical resurrection. Paul debunks that devilish notion by presenting evidence of Jesus's literal, physical resurrection from the grave. He was seen by the witnesses described in vs 6–9. He ate meals. He walked with them after his resurrection, and he left footprints in the sand, if you will. He was not an apparition, and Thomas would be the first to testify so as Jesus invited him, at the end of John 20, to touch the physical wounds in his body. In a comprehensive view of the transforming power of Christ's resurrection, he goes on, in vs 20–23, to tell us that the bodies of those in Christ through faith will be resurrected in similar fashion to his — Christ, the firstfruits, and those in Christ follow at his Second Coming. As the Father physically raised Christ from the grave, so shall those in Christ be raised.

It perhaps easy for us to the implications of this as we ponder our own mortality and death. For the believer, we have the hope that death does not have the final say. We are raised to live with him forever. Consider that it also has enormous implications for us now as we live in a disordered and broken world that is increasingly disoriented and deluded about the nature and design of the body.

In a world that says I can do whatever I want to with my body, the Gospel's resurrection promise recovers and elevates the human body, male and female, to its sacred purpose, designed and created to physically worship him, serve him, and commune with him. The physical resurrection of the Son of Man with a body that endures forever corrects disordered and dysphoric notions about the body. It gives real hope, first that God has a purpose for our bodies that is displayed in its good design, and second, that his purpose is recovered through his resurrection. Those in Christ will continue in glorified bodies as he designed for eternity — not as we may imagine ourselves or alter ourselves or destroy ourselves — but as he created us to be for our good. This is great Gospel hope for this badly broken and rebellious generation.

In the resurrection, we are raised to eternal life, and we will be sustained through eternity in perfected bodies equipped to do all that he has planned for us in his good design. The sin, corruption, and

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curse of this world leaves us with real physical ailments, failing joints, and fading minds. It also our psyche and thinking, leaving us with disordered affections, corrupt desires, and destructive passions. Hear this: the announcement “He is not here, he is risen,” does not just signal God’s acceptance of Christ’s payment for sin; it further heralds that all of our brokenness, disordered affections, our ailments and desires are healed and reclaimed in the resurrection of Christ’s body from the grave. “He is not here in a grave subjected to death — death’s sting has been conquered. The curse of Genesis 3 is undone. He does save us to leave us broken; he recovers us for his design and restores us for the good works he purposed beforehand.

We must orient to this gracious, life-giving truth in an age of moral insanity. It’s simply a rehash of first century Greek culture that disconnects the body from the soul. It lives life as though the body is not sacred, it has no design or purpose ordained by God.

Does the resurrection power and resurrection purpose mean we won’t have any more temptations or struggles? Of course not. The battle between the old nature, rooted in sin, rages against the new nature — the new heart that Christ gives. Some areas of victory may come quickly and with relative ease. Some areas of victory may have to be fought for with great effort. But we have the Spirit and his Word. The fact that there is now a battle is actually good news of the resurrection at work in you. Without the resurrection power of Christ and his victory over the chains of sin and death, you would have no desire to battle sin nor awareness of the need to do so. Your heart and mind would simply remain darkened and enslaved to sin and death. When we see the need to make war on sin, and we feel the grief of loss in regard to sin, we know resurrection power is at work in us to free us from the chains of death.

Is there application here for us? God absolutely cares about our physical bodies. His purpose and design in our bodies — which design was revealed in the opening chapters of Genesis, and will be recovered in the closing chapters of human history. We can be braced against cultural death and encouraged in our weaknesses by this truth: He redeems our bodies and recovers our capacity to serve him and commune with him. We are not eternally disembodied fat cherubs floating around on clouds playing harps. We were created human, male and female, and will continue as humans, male and female, held in eternal life by Christ in bodies re-built for eternity. If the roar of the morally insane culture and the schemes of the enemy of your soul are disorienting, be oriented to this glorious truth: God made you for a purpose. Part of that purpose is revealed in the good design of the body which

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will ultimately be realized in the resurrection. There are no mistakes made concerning how you were made. Be oriented to this truth and live and flourish. It is possible in Christ's resurrection power.

The resurrection orients us to the reality that every blood-bought believer is highly valued and treasured by the Lord himself. There are no second-class Christians. **V 13** says that if the dead are not raised, then Christ himself has not been raised. It is an upside-down argument, and it is a powerful one. If the lowest, least Corinthian, who puts his faith in Christ, perhaps even at the last moment of life... If that Corinthian does not rise on the Great Day, Christ himself has not been raised. There is not a limit to resurrection power so that it is able to raise most, but not all. His resurrection power is infinite and his record keeping perfect. He knows those who are his. Put in the positive: Christ leaves no one behind. All that the father has given him he will raise on the last day. There is no insignificant saint who will be overlooked on that day. Indeed, there are simply no insignificant saints. There are only blood-bought trophies of grace who are so valued by the Son of God that he laid down his life in order to purchase their redemption, and takes it up again to secure their eternity.

Now, **v 24** — **The resurrection points us to the certainty of Christ's final victory.** It is after Christ raises us in like fashion to his resurrection that he brings the age to an end. All the effects and consequences of the curse are undone through the power of Christ's resurrection. Those who are in him joyfully bow the knee before him as they enter his victorious kingdom in resurrection bodies to fulfill their priestly duties. This is the ultimate joyful hope of all those in Christ.

But his resurrection also points to the undoing of the world's rebellious system — and not just the system, but the undoing of rebels themselves. The promise of resurrection of the dead did not begin in the New Testament. Old Testament saints understood the resurrection of the dead as being a resurrection to judgment where sin is finally judged and destroyed. Christ's resurrection points to the day when every knee shall bow, in heaven, and on earth, and under the earth, and every tongue, confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God, the father. Those in Christ will bow the knee and humble adoration before their Savior king. Those who have embraced rebellion and hardened their heart against the risen Lord will, nonetheless, bow their knee before him — but it will not be in joyful worship. It will be under the blow of the rod of judgment. The sheep will be welcomed into their eternal home; the goats will be sent out into the judgment of outer darkness. The resurrection of Christ is ultimate hope for those in Christ, and ultimate peril for those who choose rebellion. Today is the day of salvation. Come to the Risen Christ, turning from sin to him in faith, and be healed, mind, soul, and body.

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As it was in Corinth, there are those who deny the resurrection of Christ. Naturalists deny a supernatural resurrection. There are those who claim to be followers of Christ who allegorize the many accounts of his resurrection. There may be some here who like the hopeful message of a happy ending, but see it as nothing more than that. Others may embrace any number of notion that find a way around Christ's literal, physical resurrection. If Christ's resurrection was a metaphor, or something that was sort of a spiritual pointer, some aspirational illustration that we should be hopeful, that all things will eventually work out — don't be discouraged, stiff upper lip, it's going to get better... Eventually we all end up in a better place with some the god of our own imagination... If that's true, pay absolutely no attention to what I've said today. Indeed, everything I have said is absolute folly, and a lie. I've actually even lied about God if there is no resurrection.

If there is no physical resurrection from the dead, then we remain without hope physically. Our broken bodies will simply decay and be racked by greater pain, eventually dropping in the ground with no greater purpose whatsoever.

If there is no resurrection, our broken emotions and disordered affections — our understanding of who we are at the core and why we are here — all *that* brokenness and disordered-ness will likewise simply consume us.

If there's no resurrection, there is no higher purpose. There is no truth outside of ourselves that can re-orient us away from the destruction that is inside of ourselves.

Worse of all, if Christ is not resurrected, we remain in our sins, bearing the wrath of Holy God against them. Oh, what a hopeless world without the resurrection of Christ.

But now is Christ risen from the dead! And that changes everything.

Come in faith to Christ, the Living Lord, who heals and restores. Be changed by his resurrection power.

PRAY