

1st Corinthians Chapter 15

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Introduction:

1. The centerpiece of Christianity is the resurrection of Jesus. The centerpiece is not racial equality, social justice, financial security, good health or being loved by our family.
2. The resurrection of Jesus was being questioned by a person or even a group in the church at Corinth (see 15:12). Paul writes this classic defense of the resurrection of Jesus and then continues with the resurrection of believers.
3. Note that Paul doesn't draw on Matthew, Mark, Luke or John for evidence of the Resurrection.
4. He is thought to have written 1 Corinthians about A.D. 54. If Matthew was written just before the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 (Coffman) and Mark is dated at about A.D. 68 and Luke is dated at A.D. 69 and John about A.D. 85, then Paul is the **first apostle to record the Resurrection**. It was being *preached* everywhere, but Paul may be the first apostle to get the story on papyrus.

CHRIST'S RESURRECTION IS CERTAIN

(1) Let me now remind you, dear brothers and sisters, of the Good News I preached to you before. You welcomed it then, and you still stand firm in it.

- This questioning of the resurrection was recent and Paul asks his readers to remember what he had preached among them. They were **still standing firm** in this fundamental belief.

(2) It is this Good News that saves you if you continue to believe the message I told you -- unless, of course, you believed something that was never true in the first place.

- This powerful **Good News** was at the foundation of their **salvation**. Then, he questions the resurrection so he can discuss it more.

**Good News
for Everyone!**

(3) I passed on to you what was most important and what had also been passed on to me. Christ died for our sins, just as the Scriptures said.

- Paul alludes to his earlier report about where he got the Good News:

When we tell you these things, we do not use words that come from human wisdom. Instead, we speak words given to us by the Spirit, using the Spirit's words to explain spiritual truths.

(1 Corinthians 2:13 NLT)

So the Holy Spirit had provided the very words used by Paul to affirm the bodily resurrection of Christ. He can't get any closer to the source of genuine truth than this!

(4) He was buried, and He was raised from the dead on the third day, just as the Scriptures said.

- Paul doesn't include the death of Christ in his evidence of the resurrection because the death of Jesus had never been denied by friends or enemies.
- His **burial** was well attested. The Jewish leaders took every means at their disposal to keep Him in the grave. Consider Matthew's story:

The next day, on the Sabbath, the leading priests and Pharisees went to see Pilate. They told him, "Sir, we remember what that deceiver once said while

He was still alive: 'After three days I will rise from the dead.' So we request that you seal the tomb until the third day. This will prevent His disciples from coming and stealing His body and then telling everyone He was raised from the dead! If that happens, we'll be worse off than we were at first." Pilate replied, "Take guards and secure it the best you can." So they sealed the tomb and posted guards to protect it. (Matthew 27:62-66 NLT)

- But their countermeasures couldn't work because they were directly opposing God who had a plan in place over many centuries:

No wonder my heart is glad, and I rejoice. My body rests in safety. For You will not leave my soul among the dead or allow Your holy one to rot in the grave. You will show me the way of life, granting me the joy of Your presence and the pleasures of living with You forever. (Psalms 16:9-11 NLT)

EYE WITNESSES OF JESUS' RESURRECTION

(5) He was seen by Peter and then by the Twelve.

- **Peter:** The heady leader of the apostles had denied Jesus and Jesus gave him a special audience.

Here is the testimony of the two on the road to Emmaus:

And within the hour they were on their way back to Jerusalem. There they found the eleven disciples and the others who had gathered with them, who said, "The Lord has really risen! He appeared to Peter." (Luke 24:33-34 NLT)

This is so touching. **Peter** was given a private audience with Jesus. How wonderful is the grace of our Lord!

- **Seen by the Twelve.** The term **the Twelve** denotes the group, not a precise count. Judas was no longer among

them and Matthias has not been selected yet. Even when they came together on one occasion, Thomas missed the meeting. But they were still called the Twelve.

(6) After that, He was seen by more than 500 of His followers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have died.

- While we are not told where these **500 followers** lived, it is widely thought they were in Galilee. So for anyone checking on the evidence of the resurrection, here is a list of nearly **500** who saw Him, not randomly, but at one time. There isn't any way to get **500** people to hallucinate in tandem.

(7) Then He was seen by James and later by all the apostles.

- **James.** This was the Lord's half-brother who hadn't believed Jesus was divine before His resurrection. He later wrote the epistle of James.

(8) Last of all, as though I had been born at the wrong time, I also saw Him. (9) For I am the least of all the apostles. In fact, I'm not even worthy to be called an apostle after the way I persecuted God's church.

- Paul presents his own witness last. He downplays his sense of **worth** because he had **persecuted** believers.

(10) But whatever I am now, it is all because God poured out His special favor on me -- and not without results. For I have worked harder than any of the other apostles; yet it was not I but God who was working through me by His grace.

- Paul now points to the **grace** of **God** working in his life. He had probably accomplished more on earth than the other apostles -- but he is an **apostle**.

IF THERE IS NO RESURRECTION THEN . . .

(11) So it makes no difference whether I preach or they preach, for we all preach the same message you have already believed. (12) But tell me this -- since we preach that Christ rose from the dead, why are some of you saying there will be no resurrection of the dead?

- The apostles are united in **preaching that Christ rose from the dead**. And that is the message believed by the Corinthian brethren -- at least most of them. A few were saying that a **resurrection** is impossible. But consider what follows from the idea that there is no resurrection of the dead.

(13) For if there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ has not been raised either.

- Key to the Way of the Lord is that **Christ** arose from the grave on the third day. If **the dead** cannot be **raised**, then **Christ has not been raised**.

(14) And if Christ has not been raised, then all our preaching is useless, and your faith is useless.

- The apostles have been preaching about the hope that we have in **Christ**. The Corinthians had placed their **faith** in this truth. But it was **useless** without accepting a resurrection.

(15) And we apostles would all be lying about God -- for we have said that God raised Christ from the grave. But that can't be true if there is no resurrection of the dead.

- The **apostles** have been saying the **Christ** rose from the **grave**, but they have been **lying** if no one can **rise** from the **grave**.

(16) And if there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ has not been raised. (17) And if Christ has not been raised, then your faith is useless and you are still guilty of your sins.

- **Christ** died and **rose** again to pay the penalty for our sin; He had none of His own. If we reject His **resurrection** we are still in our **sins**.

(18) In that case, all who have died believing in Christ are lost!

- It follows that everyone is **lost** and without eternal hope.

(19) And if our hope in Christ is only for this life, we are more to be pitied than anyone in the world.

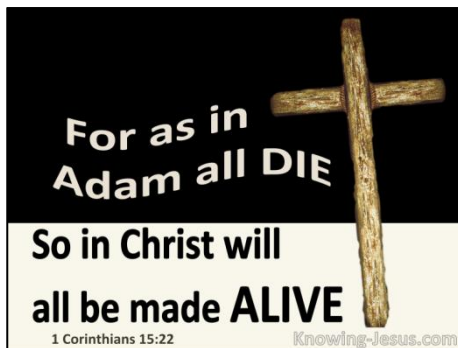
- While there are advantages of following **Christ** in just this life, the penalties far outweigh the gains.

(20) But in fact, Christ has been raised from the dead. He is the first of a great harvest of all who have died.

- The facts are that **Christ has been raised from the dead** and is the forerunner of the resurrection of all mankind.

(21) So you see, just as death came into the world through a man, now the resurrection from the dead has begun through another Man. (22) Just as everyone dies because we all belong to Adam, everyone who belongs to Christ will be given new life.

- **Death** came into the world because of the man **Adam**. This is documented in Genesis 5:5, 8, 11, 14, 17, 20, 27 and 31.



THE SEQUENCES OF THE RESURRECTION

(23) But there is an order to this resurrection: Christ was raised as the first of the harvest; then all who belong to Christ will be raised when He comes back.

- The matters of heaven are not spontaneous or random. There is a Divine plan. **There is order.**
- **The first of the harvest** word picture is drawn from Leviticus:

Then the LORD said to Moses, "Give the following instructions to the people of Israel. When you enter the land I am giving you and you harvest its first crops, bring the priest a bundle of grain from the first cutting of your grain harvest. On the day after the Sabbath, the priest will lift it up before the LORD so it may be accepted on your behalf. On that same day you must sacrifice a one-year-old male lamb with no defects as a burnt offering to the LORD. With it you must present a grain offering consisting of four quarts of choice flour moistened with olive oil. It will be a special gift, a pleasing aroma to the LORD. You must also offer one quart of wine as a liquid offering. Do not eat any bread or roasted grain or fresh kernels on that day until you bring this offering to your God. This is a permanent law for you, and it must be observed from generation to generation wherever you live.

(Leviticus 23:9-14 NLT)

Key Points:

1. The **first of the harvest** was brought on the day after the Sabbath, just as Jesus came out of the grave the day after the Sabbath.
2. A male lamb with no defects was to be sacrificed. That had happened on Friday.

J.W. McGarvey sees this from Leviticus:

The firstfruits had to be thus presented before the harvest could be begun, and its presentation was an earnest of the ingathering. Now on this very day after the Sabbath Christ was raised as the firstfruits from the dead, and became the earnest of the general resurrection. Moreover, that which was so clearly shown in the type was written with equal clearness in the history. If the justice of God caused the death of Adam to include in its scope the death of all, so the mercy of God had caused the resurrection of Christ to work the contrary effect of liberating all from the grave. But as the firstfruits preceded the harvest, so the raising of Christ preceded the resurrection of the race.

(24) After that the end will come, when He will turn the Kingdom over to God the Father, having destroyed every ruler and authority and power.

- Inspired Paul looks ahead and sees the time that Christ will turn His **Kingdom** over to the **Father**. He is saying that turning the **Kingdom** over to the **Father** is next in the order of events, not that it will happen immediately.

Gordon Lyon writes in his *Expository Notes* © 2005 (www.1-word.com)

Then, the consummation of the age will occur. This present age will be wound up; this present world order will pass away, to be replaced by a new world order over which Christ will reign with his Father forever and ever. (Dan. 7:13-14)

Before this happens, however, the Son of God must complete his present reign over his church and people—bringing to a conclusion, the present phase of the kingdom of God.

Then, he must hand over this kingdom to his Father: For, when the Lord Jesus presents his church to God, this part of his work will be finally completed.

Firstly, however, the glorified Lord Jesus must bring about the total destruction of every dominion, authority and power. All must yield to him. All must acknowledge him as the Eternal Son of God: the one who is King of kings and Lord of lords.

(25) For Christ must reign until He humbles all His enemies beneath His feet. (26) And the last enemy to be destroyed is death. (27) For the Scriptures say, "God has put all things under His authority." (Of course, when it says "all things are under His authority," that does not include God Himself, who gave Christ His authority.)

- The Psalm speaks of mankind having authority, but the Son of Man had total authority.

**You gave them charge of everything You made,
putting all things under their authority --
(Psalms 8:6 NLT)**

(28) Then, when all things are under His authority, the Son will put Himself under God's authority, so that God, who gave His Son authority over all things, will be utterly supreme over everything everywhere.

- Experts explain this verse in numerous ways. Here is one possibility from **Paul Butler**:

God has subjected this world and all creation to the Son (Christ) (John 5:19-29) in order that the Son might carry out his redemptive and mediatorial work. This work began with his incarnation and continues through his high priesthood (cf. the book of Hebrews). But when the Son finishes this work and returns to consummate

redemption and judgment, there will be no more need for mediation. The person of Son will be the person of eternal Father, that God may be everything to every one.

REASONING ABOUT THE RESURRECTION

(29) If the dead will not be raised, what point is there in people being baptized for those who are dead? Why do it unless the dead will someday rise again?

- Being **baptized** for the **dead** is a hotly debated comment. This writer understands it to mean being **baptized with reference** to the dead. **Baptism**, rightly understood, is a picture and reenactment of the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus and our identification with that great event. If there is no **resurrection**, we are just playing games.
- **Gareth Reese** discusses all known possibilities as to the meaning and concludes:

Two viable interpretations then are left – namely, the baptism of suffering (or martyrdom), and the baptism that puts one into the body of Christ (believer's baptism, it is called). The latter part of this verse (1 Corinthians 15:29) will suggest that the baptism of the Great Commission, the baptism that puts one into the body of Christ, is the one intended.

If there is to be no resurrection of dead bodies, why go through a ceremony (i.e., the baptism in water commanded in the Great Commission) that pictures death, burial and resurrection?

(30) And why should we ourselves risk our lives hour by hour? (31) For I swear, dear brothers and sisters, that I face death daily. This is as certain as my pride in what Christ Jesus our Lord has done in you.

- Paul raises the question of why he would **risk** his life all of the time to preach the resurrection of **Christ** (and ourselves symbolically) if there is no resurrection in the first place.

(32) And what value was there in fighting wild beasts -- those people of Ephesus -- if there will be no resurrection from the dead? And if there is no resurrection, "Let's feast and drink, for tomorrow we die!"

- Paul struggled with nay-sayers at **Ephesus** that he calls **wild beasts**. Why bother **if there is no resurrection** anyway? But he is more than convinced there is life beyond the grave.

(33) Don't be fooled by those who say such things, for "bad company corrupts good character." (34) Think carefully about what is right, and stop sinning. For to your shame I say that some of you don't know God at all.

- Some true believers were being misled. **William Barclay** says:

So Paul insists that the Corinthians must not associate with those who say that there is no resurrection; for this would be to risk an infection which can pollute life. To say that there is no resurrection is not a sign of superior knowledge; it is a sign of utter ignorance of God. Paul is unleashing the lash that very shame may bring these wanderers back into the right way.

- Every believer must consider their **company** carefully. It was true then at Corinth and the rule remains until God calls us home. While Jesus accepted and had dinner with men of questionable character, they were not His close friends.



(35) But someone may ask, "How will the dead be raised? What kind of bodies will they have?"

- When challengers are in a losing position, they ask questions to obscure their weak views, thinking if they ask

a question that can't be answered quickly, they have salvaged their point. Paul next calls the question foolish:

(36) What a foolish question! When you put a seed into the ground, it doesn't grow into a plant unless it dies first.

(37) And what you put in the ground is not the plant that will grow, but only a bare seed of wheat or whatever you are planting.

- Paul draws his response from the natural world. For a **seed** to become a **plant**, it must **die first**. Then it can **grow** into a **plant**.

(38) Then God gives it the new body He wants it to have. A different plant grows from each kind of seed.

- A **new body** will unfold that **God** has prepared for every presently earthbound believer. It will not have the health limitations of our present **bodies**.

The story of hope continues in the next lesson.