

The Prototype
Small Group Discussion
1 Corinthians 15

Note for leaders: There is a great deal of material in this chapter. If you want to cover it all, you will have to plan your time well and stay on track. But please don't feel that you necessarily have to get through all of it—you can camp out on whatever seems most pertinent for your group. We have also included an optional addendum this week to address some of the more difficult verses in 1 Cor. 15.

Intro questions

- Pastor Josh began this week's sermon with the premise that we are willing to let our present be shaped by a vision of our future. Can you think of an example from daily life when you have been willing to endure something unpleasant in the present with a good attitude, because of something you envision in the future? Have everyone share.
 - Today's discussion is based on 1 Corinthians 15. (Open your Bibles now.) Much of the 1 Corinthians letter is "occasional," which means that Paul is addressing specific problems and questions in the church, about which he has heard. Based on v. 12, what seems to be the problem at hand in this chapter? (Some in Corinth are teaching that all you have to look forward to, after death, is, at best, a disembodied, vague, spiritual existence, and at worst, annihilation, where you just cease to exist.)
1. Read 1 Cor. 15:1-8, then discuss the following.
 - a. Paul begins by reminding the Corinthian Christians of the "gospel" which they have already believed. Herein are the barebones, most foundational elements of our faith. How would you boil down these elements?
 - b. Why does he go into such great detail about the eyewitnesses who saw Jesus alive after his resurrection? Given that this letter was written no more than 20 years after the death of Jesus, what is the relevance of these eyewitnesses for the Corinthians? For us?
 2. Read 1 Cor. 15:12-19, then discuss the following.
 - a. Given that the Corinthian Christians have already believed the gospel story, what is the essence of Paul's logical argument in these verses? Try to state it in your own words.
 - b. How does this argument impact the question at hand? (V. 12)
 3. Read 1 Cor. 15:20-26, then discuss the following.
 - a. What is the import of the term "firstfruits" in v. 20 and 23? (Pastor Josh said it this way: the resurrection of Jesus shows us the *fact* of our future—in other words, Jesus' resurrection gives us a guarantee of our own future resurrection.)
 - b. According to v. 23, to whom does this principle apply, and when will these things transpire?
 - c. How do you feel about the idea that Jesus' resurrection guarantees your resurrection, if you believe in him?
 4. Read 1 Cor. 15:35-49, then discuss the following.
 - a. What is the practical question to which Paul now turns? (V. 35)
 - b. What is the point of the "seed" analogy in this section, relative to the question at hand?
 - c. In v. 49, what does it mean that we will "bear the image of the heavenly man?" (Pastor Josh said it this way: the resurrection of Jesus also shows us the *form* of our future resurrection—in other words, his resurrection body is a prototype for our own).
 - d. Pastor Josh said that based on this teaching, we can look forward to having mind-blowing, transformed bodies when Jesus returns. How do you feel about this fact? Does it trouble you or encourage you?

5. Read some of the following accounts of Jesus' interactions after his resurrection. For the sake of time, you may want to divide your group and each take one of these. As you read them, what do you notice about Jesus' resurrected body? If he is the "prototype" for our future resurrected bodies, what observations can you draw out about our future hope? The passages to read are John 20:19-29, John 21:1-14, Luke 24:36-43, and Acts 1:1-11.
 - a. What aspect of this future gives you the most hope now? What do you most look forward to?
6. Read 1 Cor. 15:50-58, then discuss the following.
 - a. What else do you learn about our future hope from these verses?
 - b. Paul is immensely practical in his conclusion to this issue (v. 58). Why is this matter so practical?
 - c. What are some of the threats or circumstances that could "move you" to fear, or uncertainty, or even apathy? How does this chapter impact your approach to those things?
 - d. How can this vision of our future shape your present approach to life?

Prayer

- Share about any other needs that didn't surface in the last question above, and spend some time praying for them.

Addendum:

1. 1 Cor. 15:29 is a puzzling verse. What is Paul talking about when he speaks of "those who are baptized for the dead?" This verse presents a problem for at least two reasons: 1) There is no biblical or historical precedent for vicarious baptism on behalf of those who are already dead; and 2) Such a practice seems to be in conflict with the principle of justification by grace, through faith, and baptism as an expression of personal faith in response to that grace.
 - a. At least 40 possible solutions to this problem have been proposed by biblical scholars. To quote renowned New Testament scholar, Gordon Fee: "One may consider it as axiomatic that when there is such a wide divergence of opinion, no one knows what in fact was going on.... What is certain is how the text functions in the argument. Whatever it was that some of them were doing, those actions are a contradiction to the position that there is no resurrection of the dead."
 - b. Fee, again: "The most likely options are 1) that it reflects some believers' being baptized for others who either were or were on their way to becoming believers when they died (e.g., as in 11.30), but had never been baptized; or b) that it reflects the concern of members of households for some of their own number who had died before becoming believers.... But finally we must admit that we simply do not know."
2. On v. 44, "it is raised a spiritual body." Paul is not here saying that the bodies we receive in our own resurrection will be immaterial (i.e., all spirit, no substance), but rather, that they will be "supernatural," just as Jesus' resurrected body was supernatural.
3. In vv. 55-56, the relationship of sting, death, sin, and law can be difficult to grasp. The "sting" (in Greek) refers to the poison delivered by a stinger, not to the stinger itself. Gordon Fee clarifies: "The relationship of law to sin is that the former is what gives the latter its power.... Paul's point in this theological aside is that death is not simply the result of decay through normal human processes. Rather, it is the result of the deadly poison, sin itself, which became all the more energized in our lives through acquaintance with the law. Hence, in exulting in Christ's victory over death, Paul is reminded that that victory is the final triumph over the sin that brought death into the world, and over the law that has emboldened sin."