

First Corinthians
Chapter Fifteen
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“The Significance of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ”

Paul now gives a defense of the basic tenet of Christianity: the physical resurrection of Jesus Christ. This is the topic that is the most attacked by the enemies of Christianity and they are really going for the jugular. If the physical resurrection of Jesus did not occur then our religion is meaningless. No other religion has such a vulnerable point for no other religion is based upon the teachings of a person who was physically raised from the dead. Actually I do not classify Christianity as a religion. A religion is an organization where people study the requirements for membership, affirm their intent to follow those requirements, and live a life in accord with those requirements to the best of their ability. Islam is a religion as are many other.

From Merriam-Webster: “Religion is a personal set or institutionalized system of religious attitudes, beliefs, and practices; scrupulous conformity to a cause, principle, or system of beliefs held to with ardor and faith commitment or devotion to religious faith.”

But a Christian is a child of God and we do not earn that right by our actions:

John 1:12 "But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name,"

Contrary to what many people say, all people are not children of God. So Christianity is the Family of God and not a religion.

It is indeed critical that each child of God understand the importance of the occurrence of the physical resurrection and be ready to defend it. At the end of this chapter discussion I have listed twelve appearances of Jesus after His resurrection.

**1Cor 15:1 “Now I make known to you, brethren, the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received, in which also you stand,
1Cor 15:2 by which also you are saved, if you hold fast the word which I preached to you, unless you believed in vain.”**

Paul is now delivering the Gospel message in a concise manner to them. He calls them brethren but modifies that term depending upon whether or not these people are really children of God. A true child of God will never recant his belief for he is not just someone who as believed the Gospel as the world uses the term “believe”. A child of God has been born again into the family of God and he has been given faith from God (see <http://livingtheology.com/Faith.htm>) from which trust and belief flow, never to be retarded. Every true child of God holds fast to the truth of the Gospel forever.

**1Cor 15:3 “For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures,
1Cor 15:4 and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures,
1Cor 15:5 and that He appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve.
1Cor 15:6 After that He appeared to more than five hundred brethren at one time, most of whom remain until now, but some have fallen asleep;
1Cor 15:7 then He appeared to James, then to all the apostles;
1Cor 15:8 and last of all, as it were to one untimely born, He appeared to me also.
1Cor 15:9 For I am the least of the apostles, who am not fit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God.”**

Now Paul elaborates the basic message of the truth of God concerning His actions toward the bringing into the family of God His chosen people from all time:

1. Christ died for the sins of His chosen people.
2. Christ was buried.
3. He arose from the dead at the precise time according to Scripture.
4. He appeared to many people including Cephas, the Apostles, 500 believers at one time, to James, to all the Apostles, and then to Paul.

Paul then refers to himself as the least of the Apostles, not in importance but in the time of appointment by Jesus. He refers to himself as not fit to be called an apostle because of how he persecuted the church of God. The pain of his treatment of Jesus by his persecution of the church of God was with him all his life but it also caused him to glorify God because of the work of God in the life of such a sinner. We can all identify with Paul in at least some manner because we have been chosen to be a child of God in spite of our previous actions against Him.

1Cor 15:10 “But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me did not prove vain; but I labored even more than all of them, yet not I, but the grace of God with me.

1Cor 15:11 Whether then it was I or they, so we preach and so you believed.”

I have often called part of verse 10 a Popeye statement: “I yam what I yam”. Most of you may not know that reference to an old comic book character! We can also all say with Paul, “I am what I am” meaning that it is only by the grace of God that we are children of God. We do not deserve anything from Him except condemnation but He chose us to be His children. God’s grace toward bringing His children from spiritual death to spiritual life is never in vain. Because of the action of God’s grace in Paul he was able to labor for His cause on earth even more than all the other Apostles. He then goes on to give credit to all who preached the true Gospel message that resulted in the rebirth of many of the people in Corinth.

1Cor 15:12 “Now if Christ is preached, that He has been raised from the dead, how do some among you say that there is no resurrection of the dead?

1Cor 15:13 But if there is no resurrection of the dead, not even Christ has been raised;

1Cor 15:14 and if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is vain, your faith also is vain.”

1Cor 15:15 “Moreover we are even found to be false witnesses of God, because we witnessed against God that He raised Christ, whom He did not raise, if in fact the dead are not raised.

1Cor 15:16 For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised;

1Cor 15:17 and if Christ has not been raised, your faith is worthless; you are still in your sins.

1Cor 15:18 Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished.

1Cor 15:19 If we have hoped in Christ in this life only, we are of all men most to be pitied.”

However there were people in the church of Corinth who were teaching that there was no resurrection. Perhaps they had been taught such by the Sadducees for they did not believe in any resurrection of the dead. It is interesting to note that even Moses taught of a resurrected life:

Luke 20:37 "But that the dead are raised, even Moses showed, in the passage about the burning bush, where he calls the Lord the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.

Luke 20:38 "Now He is not the God of the dead, but of the living; for all live to Him."

These people were teaching such an error in a church where that truth was essential for the existence of a church of God. So Paul attacks this false teaching vigorously. He lays out the truth very clearly in that if Christ had not been resurrected then there was no truth in His ministry and death. If there was no truth in His ministry and death then no sins have been forgiven and nobody has been given faith by God. The world has a meaning of “faith” and if the resurrection is not true then the only faith that these people had was the worthless faith of the world, which is taken to be synonymous with belief and trust. He continues in that if the resurrection of Christ is false then all who had professed a belief in Jesus as the Son of God and had died then they were just dead and gone never to appear again. If anybody just followed the teaching of Jesus as a way of life here but the resurrection was not true then such people are to be pitied over all people.

1Cor 15:20 “But now Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who are asleep.

1Cor 15:21 For since by a man came death, by a man also came the resurrection of the dead.

1Cor 15:22 For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all shall be made alive.

1Cor 15:23 But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, after that those who are Christ's at His coming,

1Cor 15:24 then comes the end, when He delivers up the kingdom to the God and Father, when He has abolished all rule and all authority and power.

1Cor 15:25 For He must reign until He has put all His enemies under His feet.

1Cor 15:26 The last enemy that will be abolished is death.”

He now repudiates the false teaching of no resurrection to assert that indeed Christ has been raised from the dead as the first of all who have died in a true trust in Him. All of God’s chosen people will be resurrected one day to live forever with Him in a physically resurrected body. Adam’s sin resulted in spiritual death that was passed on to all people since him. But Jesus brought spiritual life as a reality for all of God’s chosen people. Paul then goes into some eschatology for there is an order to physical reality. First came the resurrection of Jesus, then at the second coming of Jesus there will be a resurrection of all those who had been already spiritually born, finally there will be a real end of physical reality as we experience it today. At this end time Jesus will abolish all the worldly authority and power and deliver the kingdom of God to God the Father. Jesus is reigning now in the kingdom but it is not complete until the end time when He will put all of his enemies under His subjection. Praise the Lord the final enemy to be put to death will be death itself!

1Cor 15:27 “For He has put all things in subjection under His feet. But when He says, "All things are put in subjection," it is evident that He is excepted who put all things in subjection to Him.

1Cor 15:28 And when all things are subjected to Him, then the Son Himself also will be subjected to the One who subjected all things to Him, that God may be all in all.”

Paul says that the Father has put everything under the control of Jesus. Although we do not see the complete subjection of all to Jesus at this time, it has already been accomplished through His birth, life, ministry, death, resurrection, and ascension. But Paul does make it clear that the Father is not put under the control of Jesus. The “He’s” can become confusing! He concludes by saying that when all control is given to Jesus then Jesus will also be subject to the Father. Contrary to some thinking that this is teaching an authority line between the Father and the Son, Paul is saying that then each will be as One.

1Cor 15:29 “Otherwise, what will those do who are baptized for the dead? If the dead are not raised at all, why then are they baptized for them?”

I stop at this verse because this verse is used improperly by a religion to actually have a ceremony in which living people are baptized for the purpose of gaining salvation for their relatives who have already died. Such an application is very far from what Paul meant in this verse. He is saying that if the resurrection is not true then there is no salvation for anyone and the dead will never be raised. If then there is no resurrection why should we keep baptizing people into a “religion” that has no lasting meaning. An analogy would be people fighting a war that was not for a valid cause. In such a war people would die but, if the war was not valid, then there is no reason to keep replacing the dead soldiers with new ones. If the war is not valid then it should just be stopped. Similarly if Christianity is not true then there is no reason to keep baptizing new “converts”. We should just all live for today for there is no tomorrow.

1Cor 15:30 “Why are we also in danger every hour?

1Cor 15:31 I protest, brethren, by the boasting in you, which I have in Christ Jesus our Lord, I die daily.

1Cor 15:32 If from human motives I fought with wild beasts at Ephesus, what does it profit me? If the dead are not raised, let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die.”

Paul suffered a lot for the cause of Christ and he and his companions were in danger every hour. If our only motives are purely human then why take them so seriously? Why should we continue to put ourselves in danger if our cause is not true? If we are not going to be resurrected then we might as well quit fighting with the world.

1Cor 15:33 “Do not be deceived: "Bad company corrupts good morals."

1Cor 15:34 Become sober-minded as you ought, and stop sinning; for some have no knowledge of God. I speak this to your shame.”

They were compromising their faith to be in good standing with people outside of Christianity. Paul warns them of the direction of corruption and this is the verse we used to warn our son. Corruption flows from bad to good so any compromise we make with the world will corrupt us. It is indeed shameful for a Christian to compromise with the world as many do today. Many of our churches in America are compromising with the world by offering “services” that are world-centered instead of God-centered. Such churches should also be ashamed.

1Cor 15:35 “But someone will say, "How are the dead raised? And with what kind of body do they come?"

1Cor 15:36 You fool! That which you sow does not come to life unless it dies;

1Cor 15:37 and that which you sow, you do not sow the body which is to be, but a bare grain, perhaps of wheat or of something else.

1Cor 15:38 But God gives it a body just as He wished, and to each of the seeds a body of its own.

1Cor 15:39 All flesh is not the same flesh, but there is one flesh of men, and another flesh of beasts, and another flesh of birds, and another of fish.”

Paul continues in his pc-style! The question asked was not asked in a proper spirit or he might have been a little kinder! He says that it is perfectly obvious from nature what will happen to our bodies. A seed is planted not as it will one day become. An acorn becomes an oak tree but we do not plant an oak tree to obtain an oak tree! There are some exceptions to this planting routine. One that I know of is the planting of sugar cane since I used to do that with my granddaddy. A cane is planted and new canes grow from the joints. Paul says that God will give to us a body of the type He desires for that person just as to each different seed a different product will grow. An acorn will not grow into a mustard bush. Just as in nature all flesh is not the same. He teaches that there is a different flesh for men, for beasts, for birds, and for fish. It is good to note the differences in flesh as to the differences in God’s original creation stated in the first chapter of Genesis.

1Cor 15:40 “There are also heavenly bodies and earthly bodies, but the glory of the heavenly is one, and the glory of the earthly is another.

1Cor 15:41 There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars; for star differs from star in glory.”

Paul then states that there are also difference between heavenly bodies and earthly bodies and the glory contained by each. He then gives us a bit of an astronomy lesson in that there are differences in the glory of the sun, the moon, and each star. By glory here Paul means there character and manifestation. God has infinite creativity so He can make many different kinds of bodies in the earth and in the heavens. We can readily witness this vast creative ability and so it is easy to understand that God can make us again into a perfect glory for Him.

1Cor 15:42 “So also is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown a perishable body, it is raised an imperishable body;

1Cor 15:43 it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power;

1Cor 15:44 it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body.

1Cor 15:45 So also it is written, "The first man, Adam, became a living soul." The last Adam became a life-giving spirit.”

Now Paul goes specifically to the nature of the resurrection of the body. Obviously our bodies are first sown as those that will decay but we will be raised into a body that will never decay. Our original bodies are a dishonor to God but we will be raised as a body that will reflect the glory of God. Our original bodies are incredibly weak but the new ones will be of great power. We are physically born as a natural body but we will be raised into a spiritual body, one that is ideally suited for life in the presence of God. God’s creation order is first physical and then spiritual. He is not saying that we will not have a body of some type but that our spirit that once lived in a natural body will then live in a spiritual body. Every living body will one day also live in a spiritual body but only the children of God will have a spiritual body that will be consistent with living in Heaven with God. Adam gave up his spiritual existence with God so he then only became the seed that would bring forth earthly people. But the last Adam, Jesus, came to give His children an eternal spirit that would continue to live in the resurrected body. Our new bodies will be different as taught by Jesus:

Luke 20:34 “And Jesus said to them, "The sons of this age marry and are given in marriage,

Luke 20:35 but those who are considered worthy to attain to that age and the resurrection from the dead, neither marry, nor are given in marriage;

Luke 20:36 for neither can they die anymore, for they are like angels, and are sons of God, being sons of the resurrection.”

1Cor 15:46 “However, the spiritual is not first, but the natural; then the spiritual.

1Cor 15:47 The first man is from the earth, earthy; the second man is from heaven.

1Cor 15:48 As is the earthy, so also are those who are earthy; and as is the heavenly, so also are those who are heavenly.

1Cor 15:49 And just as we have borne the image of the earthy, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly.”

Now Paul goes back to the basics! Regarding beings created by God, the natural man comes first. Note that this gets rid of the basic idea some religions have that all people born on earth first had a spiritual existence that was put into earthly form. The natural man is the first order of business. It is only after being physically born that a person can then be spiritually born. By the first man, Paul means the first man, Adam. By the second man, Paul means Jesus as he has told us before. Every being manifests his basic character. Physical man will act his basic nature until he is born again when he begins to exhibit the spiritual nature imparted to him by God. Heavenly beings will exhibit their characters also. Now Paul gives the great promise that even though we were born originally as physical beings we will one day exhibit the total characteristics of heavenly beings.

Now we have earthly characteristics that hinder us from totally glorifying God. Now our bodies are perishable, then we will be imperishable. From the appearances of Jesus after His resurrection we have some limited insight into what we will be like. He walked through walls and closed doors. He could appear and disappear at will. He seemed something like the others but very different. Note the following for reference:

Matt 13:43 “Then the righteous will shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears, let him hear.”

Phil 3:20 “For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ;

Phil 3:21 who will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory, by the exertion of the power that He has even to subject all things to Himself.”

If you are not excited about that coming time then something is basically wrong with your soul!

1Cor 15:50 “Now I say this, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable.

1Cor 15:51 Behold, I tell you a mystery; we shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed,

1Cor 15:52 in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet; for the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed.

1Cor 15:53 For this perishable must put on the imperishable, and this mortal must put on immortality.”

Paul is now bringing this subject to a close. He tells us that, as we now exist, we cannot enter the kingdom of God for it is not a place for the earthly. We who are perishing

cannot inherit the land of the imperishable. But he tells us a mystery. Not everyone will die before entering the kingdom of God. Some people will be transformed from the perishable to an imperishable body before dying! This process is also taught elsewhere as we have studied before:

1Thess 4:17 "Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and thus we shall always be with the Lord."

Phil 3:20 "For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ;

Phil 3:21 who will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory, by the exertion of the power that He has even to subject all things to Himself."

Since Paul used the word "we", some people thought that Paul thought that he was going to be raptured and would not physically die. I do not think such an extrapolation is warranted from all of the other writings of Paul. He just knew the process and it brought an admiration and expectation to him that should be in all of us. The last trumpet to which Paul refers will end the church age and all Christians will leave earth to be with our Lord. Maranatha!

In verse 52 Paul uses the word "moment" and that word comes from the same Greek word from which we get the word "atom". So he is telling us that in the smallest possible division of time this change will occur!

1Cor 15:54 But when this perishable will have put on the imperishable, and this mortal will have put on immortality, then will come about the saying that is written, "Death is swallowed up in victory.

1Cor 15:55 "O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?"

1Cor 15:56 The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law;

1Cor 15:57 but thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."

There is no fear of death for any child of God for whether we are raptured or if we die we will all be with God forever. Death to the Christian is just a doorway to heaven. I recommend that you read <http://livingtheology.com/Death.htm> for further discussion on this wonderful topic.

1Cor 15:58 "Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your toil is not in vain in the Lord."

Because of all that Paul has taught us in this wonderful chapter we should be encouraged to indeed be steadfast, immovable, and always abounding in the work of our Lord for our work is not in vain. One day we will all be in our imperishable bodies praising the work of our Lord. Now we are here to work for the Lord. There are many people who are

spiritually blind and there is much work to be done for the Lord. We are all tempted by the things of the world but we must not love the world:

1John 2:15 “Do not love the world, nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.”

How we spend our time and money reveals the nature of our heart. You say that you have to work in the world and certainly God may have called you to such work but how do you spend your time to and from work may tell you something. You may have 30-45 minutes to spend in a car going and coming from work. What are you listening to during those travels? Your travel may give you three hours a week to listen to the teachings of a Bible teacher so that your mind will be focused on God when you get to work and when you get home. If your focus is not on spiritual things then you may not be born again. If your heart does not yearn for the things of God then you need to ask yourself some basic questions about your spiritual health. Paul leaves us with a great exhortation at the end of this chapter and it is up to us to prove to whom we belong.

Appearances of Jesus after His Resurrection

1. He appeared to Mary Magdalene (John 20:11-18) near the tomb on the morning of the first day.
2. He appeared to Mary Magdalene, the other Mary (the mother of James and Joseph) and possibly Salome (Matt 28:9-10) near the tomb on the morning of the first day.
3. He appeared to Peter (Luke 24:33-35, 1 Cor 15:5) at an unknown place on the first day.
4. He appeared to two disciples, one named Cleopas, (Luke 24:13-32) on the road to Emmaus on the afternoon of the first day.
5. He appeared to the ten disciples minus Judas and Thomas, the two from Emmaus, and other disciples (Luke 24:36-43, John 20:19-25) in the upper room on the evening of the first day.
6. He appeared to Thomas and the ten disciples (John 20:26-31) in the upper room on the evening of the eighth day.
7. He appeared to seven disciples (John 21) on the Sea of Galilee at an unknown time.
8. He appeared to five hundred believers (Matt 28:16-20, 1 Cor 15:6) at Galilee at an unknown time.
9. He appeared to James (His half brother) (1 Cor 15:7) at Galilee at an unknown time.
10. He appeared to the eleven disciples (Luke 24:44-49) in Jerusalem probably during the last week before His ascension.
11. He appeared to the eleven disciples and probably others (Luke 24:50-52, Acts 1:4-11) at the Mount of Olives on the fortieth day after His resurrection (Ascension Day).
12. He appeared to Paul (1 Cor 15:8, Acts 9:3-6) on the road to Damascus some time after the ascension.

References

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