

1 Corinthians 15 • Believer's Resurrection

Introduction

This is probably one of the most foundational chapters which should be included in the earliest stages of every Believer's discipleship. Paul provides what is a very clear and understandable explanation of the working of the Gospel both in this present life and in the inevitable life to come to which it leads. What happened to Christ in the miracle of His resurrection is but the first and primary example of what is to occur for every Believer. The teaching here is a very powerful refutation of modern-day arguments that there are "many" paths to God or that all religions ultimately worship the same God. This is an expanded, detailed explanation of Jesus' own assertion, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me". (Jn. 14:6)

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

[Read v.1-2]

Q: How does Paul initially establish the foundation for the Resurrection? What is the doctrinal basis he establishes first?

A: He begins with the Gospel.

Q: What is the process of the Gospel as provided in v.1-2?

1. It must first be received by hearing the Word. (v.1)
2. It must become a lifestyle ("in which...you stand"). (v.1)
3. It must be obeyed ("hold fast the word") (v.2)

Q: Does Paul preach that salvation is provided unconditionally?

A: No, Paul teaches that it comes about "IF you hold fast the word which I preached to you". (v.2)

*So faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ.
— Romans 10:17*

Application: This is why this study is called "Believer's Resurrection". This is the inevitable result of accepting, living, and obeying the Gospel. Without the Gospel it cannot be experienced.

*Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me."
— John 14:6*

³For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, ⁴and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, ⁵and that He appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. ⁶After that He appeared to more than five hundred brethren at one time, most of whom remain until now, but some have fallen asleep; ⁷then He appeared to James, then to all the apostles; ⁸and last of all, as to one untimely born, He appeared to me also.

[Read v.3-8]

Q: How does Paul then begin to establish the fact of Believer's Resurrection?

A: He begins with the resurrection of Christ.

Q: How is the Gospel a proven, historical fact?

1. By the message of the Gospel. (v.3)
2. By the testimony of witnesses. (v.4-7)
3. By the conversion and witness of Paul. (v.8)

Q: What are the key points of the Gospel message to which all subsequent witnesses testify?

1. "...Christ died for our sins..." (v.3)
2. "...He was buried..." (v.4)
3. "...He was raised on the third day..." (v.4)
4. "...He appeared..." (v.5-8)

Q: What is the key phrase repeated in these verses which provide the proper context for all these things accomplished through Christ?

A: "...according to the Scriptures..." (v.3-4) These events are not a "new" religious movement but the fulfillment of God's plan as originally provided through His Word. The authenticity of the work and person of Christ is confirmed by their conformity to God's Word.

Application: Just as Christ was an example of the fulfillment of God's Word and thus the first example of Resurrection, so by adherence to God's Word all Believers will likewise experience Resurrection.

⁹For I am the least of the apostles, and not fit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. ¹⁰But 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. ¹¹Whether then it was I or they, so we preach and so you believed.

[Read v.9-11]

Q: What is the key word repeatedly used here which characterizes the work and message of the Gospel?

A: "Grace".

Q: What does "grace" actually mean?

A: It is something given by God as unmerited favor.

Q: How does Paul's personal testimony conform to his teaching about the Gospel message?

A: In spite of past sin, God's grace allowed him to put the message into practice and in turn became both a witness and minister of the message to others.

Application: The proof of the working of God's grace in each Believer is a changed life going forward which in turn testifies to and preaches the message of the Gospel.

¹²Now 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? ¹³But if there is no resurrection of the dead, not even Christ has been raised; ¹⁴and if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is vain, your faith also is vain. ¹⁵Moreover we are even found to be false witnesses of God, because we testified against God that He raised Christ, whom He did not raise, if in fact the dead are not raised. ¹⁶For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised; ¹⁷and if Christ has not been raised, your faith is worthless; you are still in your sins. ¹⁸Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. ¹⁹If we have hoped in Christ in this life only, we are of all men most to be pitied.

[Read v.12-19]

Q: What proof of the Resurrection does Paul now employ?

A: Paul uses the personal experience of Believers themselves.

Point: Leading up to this, Paul established that they had heard the Gospel, they had believed the Gospel, and their lives testified to being transformed by the Gospel.

Q: How does this relate as a personal issue of faith?

A: If the dead cannot be resurrected then Christ is dead and the Gospel which their very lives are a proof of is a lie!

Q: What two great biblical doctrines is Paul tying together, saying that they cannot mutually exist apart from each other?

A: The working or salvation and the forgiveness of sins cannot exist apart from the Resurrection from the dead. Put another way, the work of the cross is not complete without the work of the Resurrection. The proof of spiritually conquering sin leading to death through the work of the cross/salvation is in the conquering of death itself in the work of the Resurrection.

Application: The work of the Gospel is not limited to defeating the work of sin in this life but in overcoming the ultimate consequences of sin working for death in the next life. What begins with the cross is not completed without the Resurrection.

²⁰But now Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who are asleep. ²¹For since by a man came death, by a man also came the resurrection of the dead. ²²For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all will be made alive. ²³But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, after that those who are Christ's at His coming, ²⁴then comes the end, when He hands over the kingdom to the God and Father, when He has abolished all rule and all authority and power.

[Read v.20-24]

Q: Paul now employs doctrinal truth in support of Believer's Resurrection. What are the two doctrines mentioned?

A: The first fruits and the two Adams.

Q: What is the doctrine of the first fruits?

A: It was an Old Testament requirement to render to God the first and best of the harvest. It was an extension of the principle that the first belonged to God such as not only the firstborn male in each family but the firstborn among one's animals.

Q: How did Jesus' resurrection literally fulfill the Old Testament requirements concerning the first fruits?

A: On the Monday following Jesus' crucifixion and burial, the celebration of the first fruits took place. The high priest would have celebrated this by going to the Mt. of Olives and cutting off the first olive branch precisely as the sun rose to start the day. The Gospels record that it was precisely at dawn on this day when the stone on the tomb was rolled away and the resurrection of Christ took place. Jesus was the *literal* fulfillment of the first fruits.

Point: *Jesus was only the first of many to come. He is only the beginning of the work of resurrection, a visible testimony of what will take place for all Believers.*

Q: What is the doctrine of the two Adams?

A: Through Adam's sin, death came into the world; but through the Last Adam (Christ), death has been conquered by His victory over sin. The Last Adam reverses what was done through the first Adam.

Application: *Believer's Resurrection is not only the fulfillment of God's Law as exemplified in Christ literally fulfilling the first fruits, but the fulfillment of God's original plan dating all the way back to the Garden as exemplified in Adam. This has always been God's plan.*

²⁵For He must reign until He has put all His enemies under His feet. ²⁶The last enemy that will be abolished is death. ²⁷For 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. ²⁸When all things are subjected to Him, then the Son Himself also will be subjected to the One who subjected all things to Him, so that God may be all in all.

[Read v.25-28]

Q: To what else does Paul intrinsically tie to the working of the Gospel?

A: The future kingdom of Christ.

Q: How is this further evidence of the working of the Gospel?

A: It is not just sin and death which are come under Christ's subjection, but all things. Christ not only sets everything right spiritually, but proves so by setting everything right physically. He not only reverses the effects of sin in each Believer, but the overall effects of sin on this entire world.

Application: *To fully believe the Gospel requires not only the belief that it will defeat death through each Believer's Resurrection, but cannot be separated from faith in the coming kingdom of Christ. There is no separation between the cross, the Resurrection, and the Millennial Kingdom – they are all the singular work of salvation!*

²⁹Otherwise, 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? ³⁰Why are we also in danger every hour? ³¹I affirm, brethren, by the boasting in you which I have in Christ Jesus our Lord, I die daily. ³²If 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. ³³Do not be deceived: "Bad company corrupts good morals." ³⁴Become sober-minded as you ought, and stop sinning; for some have no knowledge of God. I speak this to your shame.

[Read v.29-34]

Q: What does "those...who are baptized for the dead" refer to?

A: To be sure, these verses are among the most feverishly debated among scholars. But if we examine them in conjunction with the whole of Paul's teachings and resist the temptation to lift out this one verse in isolation from everything else Paul has taught, it most likely refers to replenishing the ranks of the Church. In other words, if there is no resurrection from the dead, why baptize new people into the faith to take the place of those who have died?

Q: Why would baptism be a very powerful illustration of the entire work of salvation?

A: Baptism symbolized death, burial, and resurrection. It has no meaning if there is no resurrection from the dead.

Q: First Paul challenges if the Corinthians' practices of the faith are in vain, but then how does he follow this up?

A: With whether his own efforts were in vain.

Q: And if there is no resurrection, what does Paul conclude should have happened on everyone's part?

A: They should have continued living unchanged, unregenerate lives, enjoying all the sinful pleasures of this world.

Q: How does Paul basically summarize these arguments?

A: He concludes with a kind of, "Shame on you!" A Christian faith without fully embracing the Resurrection is, in reality, no faith at all, and lacks plain, common sense.

Application: *The Gospel is not a message about simply living a good life or becoming a good person; it is a total replacement both for this life and the one to come.*

Summary

The death and burial, resurrection, and future coming kingdom of Christ are not actually separate doctrines. From God's point of view they combine together to comprise the whole Gospel message. When Believers attempt to separate them from each other they place the work of salvation at risk. The Cross, the Resurrection, and the Millennial Kingdom are actually a single, inseparable work in the life of every Believer.

³⁵But someone will say, "How are the dead raised? And with what kind of body do they come?" ³⁶You fool! That which you sow does not come to life unless it dies; ³⁷and 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. ³⁸But God gives it a body just as He wished, and to each of the seeds a body of its own. ³⁹All 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.

[Read v.35-49]

Q: How would you summarize Paul's answer to the question, "How are the dead raised? And with what kind of body do they come?"

A: Something different is experienced in the Resurrection. Just as a flower bears little or no resemblance to the seed from which it sprung, so our physical nature in this life is but a seed giving way to something far different when resurrected.

Q: What might be the best biblical proof of this?

A: The resurrection of Christ Himself. No one recognized Him at first, His earthly form having given way to a heavenly replacement. He had vestiges of His earthly appearance such as the scars in his hands and

⁴⁰There are also heavenly bodies and earthly bodies, but the glory of the heavenly is one, and the glory of the earthly is another. ⁴¹There 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.

⁴²So also is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown a perishable body, it is raised an imperishable body; ⁴³it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; ⁴⁴it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body. ⁴⁵So also it is written, "The first MAN, Adam, BECAME A LIVING SOUL." The last Adam became a life-giving spirit.

⁴⁶However, the spiritual is not first, but the natural; then the spiritual. ⁴⁷The first man is from the earth, earthy; the second man is from heaven. ⁴⁸As is the earthy, so also are those who are earthy; and as is the heavenly, so also are those who are heavenly. ⁴⁹Just as we have borne the image of the earthy, we will also bear the image of the heavenly.

⁵⁰Now I say this, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. ⁵¹Behold, I tell you a mystery; we will not all sleep, but we will all be changed, ⁵²in 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 will be changed. ⁵³For this perishable must put on the imperishable, and this mortal must put on immortality. ⁵⁴But 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. ⁵⁵O DEATH, WHERE IS YOUR VICTORY? O DEATH, WHERE IS YOUR STING?" ⁵⁶The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law; ⁵⁷but thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

⁵⁸Therefore, 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.

side, but He was transformed into something substantially different. Christ was able to pass through locked doors, yet He still ate food and invited His disciples to touch Him. It was the same body in many respects, but very different in other ways. As Paul states, "...but the glory of the heavenly is one, and the glory of the earthly is another". (v.40)

Q: What is Paul describing in v.46-49 in his comparison of the spiritual to the natural?

A: The essence of each Believer's personality and identity is formed in the course of their earthly life – in the illustration of the seed, as it were. When the seed – this present life – gives way to the spiritual form to come, the basic imprint of their personality and identity remains, but the physical form is substantially different. Again, the resurrected Christ was much different physically, but the essence of the person they knew as Christ was still present.

Application: *The process of Believer's Resurrection can only be partially comprehended in the illustration of a seed dying in one form in order to give rise to something completely different and far more desirable, one glory giving way to a greater glory. We will retain our personal identity and individuality, but become better suited for a new way of life.*

[Read v.50-58]

Q: What additional event does Paul teach as being an inextricable part of the Gospel?

A: The Return of Christ when all Believers – both living and dead – will rise to "inherit the kingdom of God". There will come a time when every Believer is transformed from the "perishable" to the "imperishable".

Q: And what is the ultimate proof of the complete working of the Gospel?

A: Victory over death. Paul affirms that the Believer's Resurrection is an inseparable work of the overall Gospel, the logical conclusion to what first begins at the cross.

Q: So how does Paul's concluding admonition in v.58 fit within the overall context of this teaching?

A: Believers can be "steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord" because if they know their worst enemy in death has been overcome, they need fear no other enemy. Their work will not be limited to its effects in this life but count in eternity. Our labor is not in vain!

Application: *Because a Believer's life is seen in the context of eternity, what they do in the course of this life is a reflection in the next. They do not live for the seed of this life but the greater work to spring forth from this seed.*

Overall Application

There are several times where Paul uses the phrases “in vain”. What this literally describes is something that is empty and without content. In the greater application of Paul’s teaching, because the tomb is not empty, our faith is not empty. But if the tomb was empty, then everything else would be in vain:

- *Our preaching would be empty. (v.14)*
- *Our faith would be empty. (v.14)*
- *Our works would be empty. (v.58)*

The resurrection is God’s answer to Solomon’s lament over this life in Ecclesiastes...

“Vanity of vanities,” says the Preacher, “Vanity of vanities! All is vanity.”

— Ecclesiastes 1:2

Because of the Believer’s Resurrection, neither the course of this life nor the one to come is in vain. In fact, we live as if they are connected because in fact they are inseparable.