

CGYG & LIFE Bible Study: 1 Corinthians 15:1-19

For Discussion: Aside from times of sharing with non-Christian friends and family, how often do you reflect on the gospel? Have you considered the significance of the various elements of the gospel and why each is important to the good news as a whole?

Read 1 Corinthians 15:1-34

For review: In 1 Corinthians 14:26-40, Paul concluded his teaching on the gifts of the Spirit with instructions for conducting corporate worship. Worship directed to God was to be marked by order since God is a God of order and His worshippers must exemplify the same character in how they approach Him. Specific areas in which order was especially needed for the Corinthians included the practice of their spiritual gifts, where there had been a lack of concern for understanding and the building up of others in the congregation, and the practice of the headship relationship between husbands and wives, where the congregation failed to maintain the order that God had established. In 1 Corinthians 15, Paul moves on to address a false teaching that was taking root among the Corinthians and clashing with the gospel hope they had.

Read 1 Corinthians 15:1-11

Which gospel elements did Paul emphasize to the Corinthians?

- Christ died for our sins (v.3).
 - In accordance with the Scriptures (e.g., **Isa. 53:4-9, Zech. 13:7**).
- He was buried (v.4) – (**Isa. 53:9, Matt. 27:57-60**).
- He was raised on the third day (v.4).
 - In accordance with the Scriptures (e.g., **Hos. 6:2, Matt. 12:40, Acts 2:25-32**).

Aside: The faith of Christians is not based on moral principles, ideologies, or rules for living but on a real person who lived a life in history that can be verified and which fulfilled both prophecy in Scripture (the Old Testament) and the person's own self-revelation (**Matt. 20:18-19, John 2:19-22**).

What evidence did Paul cite to support the truth of Jesus' resurrection?

- Paul listed many witnesses who were present at Jesus' post-resurrection appearances.
 - There were multiple appearances involving both individuals and groups, at different times, and in various places.
 - Almost all of Paul's witnesses were still living at the time of his writing and could validate his claims.
 - Paul himself was an eyewitness of the resurrected Jesus (v.8), his words were not hearsay but first-hand testimony.
- Paul also referred to the Scriptures (v.3-4), which correctly foretold Jesus' death. Since Jesus so precisely fulfilled Scripture in His death (as well as many other areas, such as His birth and the events of His life and ministry), it is reasonable to trust that the resurrection prophecies had also been fulfilled by Him.
 - Jesus' resurrection was important enough for God to reveal it beforehand and to preserve that message in His Word so that His followers would anticipate it and recognize it when it happened.
- The mention of Jesus' burial (v.4) further supports that His death was real and places the emphasis on His bodily resurrection.
 - His death had been verified (**John 19:31-35**) and the postmortem customs had been performed on the body. If He had not truly died, His return could not be attributed to Him overcoming death.

After establishing the certainty of Jesus' resurrection, Paul takes a pause in his argument to speak of his own experience. What effect did Paul's encounter with the resurrected Jesus have on his life?

- Paul's life was completely transformed by his encounter with Jesus (**Acts 9:1-22**). Through that experience he was saved and commissioned as an apostle of Christ.
- It instilled in him a sense of humility – he recognized his own unworthiness to be an apostle (v.9, **1 Tim. 1:15**) and rightly saw God's work in and through his life as an act of grace (v.10).
 - Even though Paul was a father to the Corinthians (**1 Cor. 4:15**), he acknowledged the work of others who had also ministered to them and considered them his partners in the work of the gospel (v.11, **1 Cor. 3:5-9**).
 - There was unity between Paul and the other apostles where there had previously been hostility.
- Paul was no stranger to hard work (v.10). When he worked hard by his own strength and wisdom, it resulted in the persecution of the church (v. 9, **Acts 8:3, 9:1-2, Gal. 1:13, Phil. 3:4-6**). When he worked hard by God's grace and direction, it resulted in the advancement of God's kingdom.
 - As a former persecutor of Christians, Paul's focus became love (**1 Cor. 13:1-7, 13**), the proclamation of the gospel (**1 Cor. 2:1-2**), and the building up of the body of Christ (**1 Cor. 14:19, 26**).
- Paul's transformed life provides further evidence of the power of God that had also raised Jesus from the dead.

Read 1 Corinthians 15:12-19

What false teaching was Paul addressing among the Corinthians?¹ What was his argument against this (also see verses 20-23)?²

¹Some among the Corinthians denied the possibility of bodily resurrection (v.12), not recognizing the incompatibility of this belief with the gospel.

-The Corinthians did not deny Jesus' resurrection, they had accepted and held true to the gospel that Paul had delivered to them (v.1, 11).

-The notion of bodily resurrection was generally dismissed by the educated and regarded as little more than fable. There were two sources of thinking that might have had such an influence on the Corinthians:

1) Greco-Roman philosophy saw death as fully extinguishing life or leading to an incorporeal existence in the underworld

2) the Sadducees did not believe in a world beyond the physical world and denied the resurrection (**Act 23:6-8**)

²Rather than jumping directly into refuting the Corinthians' false belief, Paul began by reminding them of the gospel and affirming the correct beliefs they held, which is how they were saved (v.1-8). He then proceeds to show how a denial of bodily resurrection is incompatible with Christian belief, using the gospel as his point of reference.

²Paul twice assumes the Corinthians' position to demonstrate the consequences of it when taken to its logical conclusion.

-Both verses 13-14 and 16-17 contain a parallel "if-then" structure. When general resurrection is rejected, the resurrection of Christ is rendered an impossibility. Once Christ's resurrection is invalidated, the foundation on which Christian faith stands, and all accompanying promise of hope, disintegrates.

²Paul shows that there is a causal relationship between Jesus' resurrection and the resurrection of His followers (v.20-23). A general resurrection is the consequent of Christ's resurrection, if the *effect* is rejected then the *cause* must be discarded as well.

What did Jesus accomplish for His followers through His resurrection (Rom. 4:23-25, 1 Pet. 1:3, Rom. 8:11)?

-Jesus' resurrection confirmed the testimony and prophecies about Him (v.4) and further showed that He is the one who was spoken of in the Scriptures – this provides additional assurance for the strengthening of our faith.

-Our justification was secured by His resurrection (v.17, Rom. 4:25), without which the primary problem of the guilt of our sin remains.

-Jesus' resurrection was a sign of acceptance of His sacrifice. God's wrath had been satisfied so His punishment ended because justice demanded no more.

-“If the cross is the *payment* for our sins, the empty tomb is the *receipt*, showing that the perfect Son of God made perfect payment for our sins.” – David Guzik

-Jesus' life is the basis of our regeneration (1 Pet. 1:3) – spiritual life.

-Those who have the Spirit who raised Jesus from the dead will also be resurrected in their bodies (Rom. 8:11) – physical life.

-Jesus' resurrection is a foretaste and “proof of concept,” not only demonstrating that bodily resurrection is possible but showing us what our resurrection and glorified bodies will be like.

Why would those who only hope in Christ in this life be more pitiable than all others (Luke 14:25-33, 1 Cor. 4:9-13, 15:30-32)?¹ Given that Christ did conquer death in His body and secured that same victory for His followers, what impact should this hope have on our focus and perspective now?²

¹Only hope that finds its eventual fulfillment has true worth, anything less is delusion.

¹Those who follow Christ invite hardships and difficulties into their lives on account of their faith, which is meaningless if their hope is limited to this life.

-The focal point of the hope that is in Christ is in the future, which often comes at the cost of ease and comfort now. To waive the opportunity to enjoy these for no ultimate benefit would be foolish.

¹If there is no true forgiveness of sins in Christ, those who live in that hope will be no better off than non-Christians with respect to God's judgment. Worse than that, believers would be additionally guilty of misrepresenting Him and misleading others (v.15).

²Having assurance of our resurrection should cause us to look forward in joyful expectation so that we neither attribute ultimate importance to this life nor dwell on what we may have had to sacrifice or bear to follow Christ. It should also inform our priorities as we, like Paul, work diligently by God's grace to build the kingdom that is as enduring as the life that is to come.

Reflection and application

Using the very position he was disputing, Paul paints a bleak picture of a world in which there is no resurrection of the dead. In such a world, there is neither hope for the past nor for the future because Christ would still be in the grave, and those who persist in following Him needlessly bring woes upon themselves in this life only to fare no better than the denier of God in the end. But praise God that we have good reason for the hope that is ours! Jesus has conquered the grave and His resurrection serves to guarantee and pave the way for our own. Let us seek to grow in our appreciation of this truth, indeed the whole gospel, allowing the hope that it entails to permeate and guide our lives and thinking. Let us also be mindful to guard our faith from influences that threaten to impinge upon the glorious grace given to us by God so that we may be found in the end to have held fast to the word of truth that we have received.