

CGYG & LIFE Bible Study: 1 Corinthians 15:20-34

For Discussion: What place does the anticipation of eternity hold in your decision-making today? How consistent are your life choices with how you expect life to be at that time? What do they reveal about your priorities?

Read 1 Corinthians 15:12-34

For review: In 1 Corinthians 15:1-19, Paul began addressing a teaching among the Corinthians that denied the bodily resurrection of the dead. In his response, he first affirmed through the evidence of fulfilled Scripture and eyewitness testimony the common ground they shared in the gospel, especially the belief in Jesus' resurrection. Then taking their erroneous position, Paul showed how incompatible it was with core Christian belief. Without a general resurrection there could not have been Jesus' resurrection, rendering all promises of hope that are dependent on His victory over death null and void. Continuing from there, Paul provides further details of the events surrounding the final defeat of death and Christ's victory over all opposition to establish the full rule of God over His kingdom, in which all His resurrected followers will live with their everlasting Lord.

Read 1 Corinthians 15:20-28

What are the firstfruits (Lev. 23:10-11)?¹ What is the significance of Christ being the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep (Rom. 6:3-5, 8:29)?²

- ¹The firstfruits are the first part of the crop, which God commanded to be set apart and dedicated to Him (Lev. 23:10-11).
 - Offering the firstfruits at the beginning of the harvest was an act of trust that the rest of the harvest would be forthcoming.
- ¹Firstfruits are representative, they come from the same crop and have the same nature as the rest of the harvest.
- ¹The day after the Passover Sabbath was the day for offering firstfruits (Lev. 23:11), which is the day on which Jesus rose.
- ²As the firstfruits from the dead, Christ's resurrection is a pledge and a "down payment" guaranteeing that the rest of the resurrection harvest will follow. We have assurance of our future resurrection on account of our union with Him (Rom. 6:5).
 - As death is inevitable in Adam, life is inevitable in Christ (v.21-22).
 - "Firstfruits imply later fruits" – Rev. Leon Morris
- ²Christ belongs to the same harvest as those whose resurrections are to follow, and His resurrected human nature is representative of what theirs will be (Rom. 8:29).
 - Even though it is expressed in two separate episodes (v.23), believers experience the same resurrection that raised Christ from the dead (i.e., there is only one resurrection of the dead for all).

In what ways does the life and work of Christ parallel that of Adam – v.21-22 (Rom. 5:12-19)?

- For both Christ and Adam, the actions of the one man have widespread repercussions for all who are in them (v.22).
 - All of humanity are in Adam by virtue of being his descendants (we were "within" his body when he acted in disobedience) and those who remain in him will die. Those who are made to be in Christ by faith have already died with him and the ones who remain in Him will live.
- Both are covenant representatives, Adam of the covenant of works and Christ of the covenant of grace.
 - As opposed to Adam, who rebelled against God and incurred the covenant punishment for himself and all his posterity (Rom. 5:14-15, 17), Christ is Adam's faithful, covenant-keeping counterpart who, through perfect obedience, fulfilled the covenant requirements, securing its blessings for His people (Rom. 5:17, 21).
 - By Adam's one disobedience condemnation became widespread throughout humanity but by Christ's one obedience the many who are condemned find justification (Rom. 5:18-19).
 - Christ's work is greater because His act was enough to pay not only for Adam's sin but for all sins from all people since Adam's day.

Why is Jesus' humanity important for His ministry and what He needed to accomplish – v.21 (Heb. 10:4, Gen. 3:15, 1 Tim. 2:5, Heb. 4:15-5:2)?

- Jesus needed to be a man in order to fully perform all His roles (e.g., sacrifice, mediator, high priest).
- The blood of bulls and goats cannot atone for sin (Heb. 10:4). A human representative was needed because God requires an equivalent payment of life for life for justice to be done.
 - As the One who took our guilt and is our substitute recipient of God's wrath, Jesus needed to be a man and to live a sinless life so that His righteousness could be credited to us.
- The ultimate defeat of the serpent is accomplished by the offspring of the woman (Gen. 3:15).
- The mediator between God and man needs to be able to represent both sides. 1 Tim. 2:5 also emphasizes Jesus' humanity.
- The high priest, acting on behalf of his people, is aided in serving them when he identifies with them in their weakness (Heb. 4:15-5:2).

What will the future reign of God be like (Ps. 8:6, 110:1, Heb. 2:5-9)?¹ What kind of life does this call us to live while we await its consummation?²

¹Christ will rise to dethrone every power and authority until all things have been placed under His feet. He will then hand over that rule to the Father and take His place in submission to Him (v.28).

-God will be "all in all" => "God's supreme authority over everything will be eternally established, never to be threatened again." – ESV Study Bible

¹God's rule will be complete and uncontested – it will be a peaceful rule that is free from opposition because all of His enemies will have been destroyed (v.24-28).

-Death is the last enemy to be destroyed (v.26), its defeat is set within the larger context of God's victory over all.

-The defeat of death will happen at the resurrection of Christ's followers, when death will lose its power to hold anyone captive (v.54-55).

²Persevere and live with hope because the temporary struggles and difficulties of this life will give way to an endless life that is free from death and under God's perfect, loving rule.

Read 1 Corinthians 15:29-34

After describing the kingdom that Christ's followers are to anticipate, Paul points out several areas of life that show an implicit assumption of the continuation of life after death. What are these things that rely on an afterlife in order to have meaning?

1) [Baptism on behalf of the dead](#) (v.29).

What is baptism on behalf of the dead?

-Many attempts have been made to explain what this mysterious practice is. There are over 40 interpretations that vary in how they understand "baptize," "on behalf of" or "for" (NIV84), and/or "the dead."

-Plain meaning => baptism on behalf of the believing deceased who died before they could be baptized.

-Paul does not speak of it as a Christian practice, He mentions it without commanding it or even approving it. He talks about its practitioners in the third person, whereas he personally identifies with the experiences in v.30-32 ("I" and "we").

-Even in a practice of which he does not approve, Paul sees in it an implicit assumption of a life after death.

2) [Self-endangerment for the faith](#) (v.30-31).

-Paul's life was constantly in danger on account of his ministry (e.g., **Acts 23:12-15, 2 Cor. 11:23-27**).

3) [Conflict with opposition for the faith](#) (v.32).

-Paul did not literally fight with beasts but he faced severe human opposition (**Acts 19:21-41**).

-Paul's argument is that if death is truly the end, then there is no benefit to be received from baptism on behalf of the dead or for his self-endangerment and willing acceptance of all the suffering he faced.

-He concludes that without a resurrection, the only way of living that makes sense is to live for our own pleasure now because there is nothing else to look forward to but our eventual, inescapable death (v.32b).

Given the destructive potential of the false teaching they were facing, what did Paul exhort the Corinthians to do (Rom. 12:2)?¹ How are we to handle our relationships to be salt and light and not be influenced by the world?²

¹Paul first warned the Corinthians to not be under the false assumption that there were no consequences to the company they kept. He asserted that their morals were at stake when they indulged in "evil communications" (i.e., bad company).

-There is an implicit warning to the Corinthians to be mindful about their associations. They were preoccupied with knowledge and wisdom but, ironically, chose to consort with those who had no true knowledge (of God).

-Paul draws a connection between belief/thinking and behaviour (v.34). His call for them was to wake up (i.e., come to their senses) so that they could think rightly and, thus, stop sinning.

¹They were to not be deceived into conforming to the world but, rather, to be transformed in their thinking so that they could distinguish truth from falsehood (Rom. 12:2) and walk in it.

²Be deliberate about what we allow to influence us. God's Word is of the highest importance. Paul demonstrated this through his application of it for the Corinthians (v.3b-5), as well as his direct acknowledgement of it (v.3a – "first importance").

²We should be cultivating "good relationships" that can correct us and encourage us in the growth of godly character.

Reflection and application

Those who are in Christ have assurance of their future resurrection because they are fellow members of the harvest of which He is the firstfruits. The resurrection that began when Christ rose from the grave will one day be ours as well. At that time, Christ will usher in a universal reign under God the Father that will endure uncontested in peace and security for eternity. Even with such a glorious life to look forward to, our lives today are still meaningful. Paul exhorted the Corinthians to be mindful of their thinking and the company they kept so that they could live rightly. Let us also resolve daily to do the same in preparation for the coming resurrection, receiving encouragement from the hope of not only an endless life, but a life as a member of God's victorious kingdom, whose enemies have been defeated, never again to hinder or harass its citizens.