

# 1 CORINTHIANS 15.1-11

## The Resurrection (1)

**Intro:** We now come to the final “issue” Paul addresses in his letter to the Corinthians: the resurrection. He does not say if this was a matter the Corinthians had brought up in their letter to him (see 7.1), or if this was one of the issues that had been reported to him (see 1.11). I lean toward this being an issue that was reported to Paul, but that he chose to address at the end of his correspondence. As such, the resurrection isn’t simply one of many “issues” that the Corinthians struggled with, but perhaps one of the chief explanations for why the Corinthian church had so many problems. In short, if the Corinthian Christians were confused about the resurrection, then they were probably mistaken about everything associated with the resurrection, including the Judgment and what it means to be in the Kingdom. Their bad theology would become manifest in bad practices, which had clearly taken place at Corinth. So, having addressed their various issues, Paul now turns his attention to the main issue.

### THE PROBLEM: DENYING THE RESURRECTION (VS. 12)

1. While in this study we will focus on vss. 1-11, it is necessary to first examine the problem in Corinth. Paul lays this out in vs. 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?”
2. It is important to note that the Corinthians would have believed in an afterlife, but it was the soul that lived on, not the body. This is made clearer by Paul’s words in vs. 35, “But someone will say, How are the dead raised? And with what kind of body do they come?”
3. The Corinthians’ struggle with the resurrection of the body is easily understood when examined in the light of Greek philosophical teaching regarding the future of the body:

- » “Once a man has died, and the dust has soaked up his blood, there is no resurrection.” (words attributed to Apollo by Aeschylus, *Eumenides* 647f)
- » “she (the soul) is now finally released from the errors and follies and passions of men, and forever dwells in the company of the gods... his soul has escaped from the influence of pleasures and pains, which are like nails fastening her to the body. To that prison-house she will not return” (Plato, *Phaedo* 80-85)
- » “The denial of the restoration of the body is taken from the aggregate school of all the philosophers.” (Christian apologist Tertullian, AD 160-230).
- » Recall the response to Paul’s preaching in Athens, Acts 17.16-34.

### THREE THINGS TO KEEP IN MIND

Note: I recommend David Owen’s lecture from the 1996 Florida College lectures for further study.

1. The Corinthians believed in the resurrection of Christ (vss. 3-4,11)
  - » Believing in Jesus’ resurrection from the dead is essential for one to become a Christian. Paul makes it clear to the Corinthians that this was part of the gospel he had preached to them and that they had believed. That the Corinthians believed in Jesus’ resurrection is beyond doubt.
  - » What the Corinthians struggled with was the logical conclusion to Christ’s resurrection: their own resurrection! The bulk of Paul’s words in this chapter address this point.
2. Paul is discussing the resurrection of the body, not the immortality of the soul.
  - » It is important to remember that the im-

mortality of the soul was a given in Greek thought, but the preservation of the body was completely contrary to accepted Greek philosophy. Thus, Paul has very little to say in this chapter regarding the soul, but much to say regarding the body.

- » This point is helpful to keep in mind when dealing with espouse such things as the AD 70 doctrine. In short, this doctrine teaches that every Biblical prophecy was fulfilled when Jerusalem was destroyed in AD 70, including the resurrection of the dead. But how could the resurrection of the dead go unnoticed in history? They claim that it was a spiritual resurrection and not a bodily resurrection. But Paul's point in this chapter is that just as Christ's body was raised, so are we! I've yet to hear a good explanation of this chapter from the AD 70 perspective.
3. Paul is describing the resurrection of Christians, not of unbelievers.
    - » That all, the righteous and the unrighteous, are raised in the end is made in clear in John 5.28-29.
    - » However, in this passage Paul is speaking only of believers, those who are faithful to Christ. Paul does not deny that the unrighteous will be raised, he simply does not address them in this passage.

## **CHRIST'S RESURRECTION & THE GOSPEL**

1. Christ's resurrection is central to the gospel (vss. 1-4)
  - » First, note that Paul uses the language of tradition in this passage. Paul had "received" the gospel and "delivered" it to them (vs. 3), which they had "received" (vs. 1).
  - » The essentials of the gospel are clearly outlined in vss. 3-4:
    - Christ died for our sins
    - He was buried (not, bodies are buried, not souls).
    - He was raised on the third day.
  - » Paul makes it clear that this was "according to the Scriptures", showing that this was

a part of God's purpose (see Psalm 16.8ff; Acts 2.31; 26.22f).

- » This passage offers a compelling proof for the resurrection. It is generally agreed that 1 Corinthians was written in the 50s and if so this may well be the first written account of Christ's resurrection. If the resurrection was a myth, this is too short a time for such a myth to develop.
2. Christ's resurrection was verified (vss. 5-8)
    - » The Scriptures may have foretold that the Christ would die and then rise, but it was human eyes that witnessed and confirmed that Jesus rose from the dead.
    - » Paul's listing of Jesus resurrection appearances would have a couple of implications. First, it was His appearance that convinced all of these that Jesus is the Christ. Second, when Paul says "most of whom remain until now," he is making it clear that the proof of Jesus' resurrection is still there.
    - » Finally, you will note that Paul places Christ's appointment to him (Acts 9) on par with Jesus' other post-resurrection appearances.
  3. The effect of the gospel on their lives (vss. 9-10, 1-2,11)
    - » Jesus' resurrection changed the course of Paul's life. He went from a persecutor of the church to, by God's grace, to an apostle and laborer for God (vss. 9-10).
    - » Jesus' resurrection had changed the lives of the Corinthians. They were saved by the gospel (vs. 2), present tense indicating their salvation was ongoing process, secured by their faith in the gospel. However, they would have to "hold fast the word" which Paul had preached to them. Paul's point, while not explicitly stated here, is that failure to apply Christ's resurrection to their own future would constitute a departure from the gospel, hence they would have "believed in vain."