

# Living for Eternity

*(1 Corinthians 15:1-34)*

We now come to the most important doctrine in the Christian faith—the Resurrection. Apparently, the church at Corinth was not only having conflict about spiritual gifts but also basic theology, especially the Resurrection. Therefore, in this chapter, Paul makes it clear if you don't believe in the Resurrection, you cannot be a Christian. To become a Christian, one must *confess* (which means affirm verbally) *the Lord Jesus* (Rom. 10:9a). What else is required to be saved (10:9b)?

The Christian life is all about **living for eternity**, which requires a firm belief in the Resurrection. This requires **four** actions.

## **Realize the importance of the Resurrection (15:1-19)**

This entire chapter of fifty-eight verses is totally devoted to the Resurrection. In verse one, Paul reminds the Corinthians of the Gospel he preached to them. As a result, they had received Christ and have their standing in Him. In verse two, Paul makes it clear anyone who does not hold to the Gospel he preaches is not saved. Then, in verse 3b-5, he sums up the three-part Gospel they *received* from Christ. First, *Christ died for our sins*. Second, *he was buried*, and third, *he rose again the third day*.

After He rose from the dead, Christ appeared to *Cephas*, or Peter, and then *the twelve* (15:5). He also appeared to more than 500 at once, most of whom were still living when Paul wrote this epistle (15:6). Christ also appeared to His half-brother James (15:7). Before the Resurrection, what does John 7:5 record about Christ's half-brothers?

However, after the Resurrection, Jesus appeared to James, who became a leader in the church and wrote the epistle of James. There was another person who didn't believe until a personal appearance from Jesus after the Resurrection. Paul writes that *last of all as one born out of due time*, or sometime after the other apostles, Christ also appeared to him (15:8).

This refers to the Lord's appearance to Paul on the Damascus Road (Acts 9:3-6). Paul considered himself *born out of due time* because he was not one of the original Twelve. Yet, Christ appeared to him later, which qualified Paul to be an apostle.

Paul never doubted his apostleship, but he never ceased to be amazed God would call him to be an apostle. Therefore, he writes: *For I am the least of the apostles, that am not meet to be called an apostle* (15:9). Paul never forgot the horrible sins for which he had been forgiven. Before becoming an apostle, his name was Saul, and he unmercifully *persecuted the church*.

During his testimony to King Agrippa, what does Paul say in Acts 26:10b?

Paul doesn't call himself *the least of the apostles* because he has less authority. He chastised and corrected even Peter (Gal. 2:11). Paul considered himself *least* because, of all the apostles, he was the worst sinner, having persecuted the church.

Now, Paul gives a great example of two kinds of grace: *But by the grace of God I am what I am: and his grace which was bestowed upon me was not in vain; but I labored more abundantly than they all: yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me* (15:10). The first and second *grace* refers to saving *grace* and the third to empowering *grace*. God's *grace* not only saves us but empowers us. For example, why were the apostles able to testify to the Resurrection with *great power* (Acts 4:33).

Paul explains in verse 11 that it makes no difference whether he or one of the other apostles preaches, they all preach the same message about the Resurrection. Therefore, Paul tells the Corinthians they must not stray from the central message through which they received salvation.

Paul is shocked that some believers in Corinth were saying *there is no resurrection of the dead*, which would mean even *Christ* was not resurrected (15:12-13). And, what does it mean *if Christ be not risen* (15:14)?

Paul also writes, if Christ is not raised, he and all the apostles are *false witnesses of God*. If there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ has not been raised. Those who have died have *perished* and are forever lost. If that is the case, and we only have hope in Christ *in this life*, Christians *are of all men most miserable* (15:15-19).

Christians were suffering terrible persecution, and even death, because of their faith. If there is no hope of resurrection, we should be pitied more than anyone else in the world because we are wasting our lives living and hoping for eternity.

To live for eternity, **realize the importance of the Resurrection** and ...

### **Analyze the guarantee of the Resurrection (15:20-28)**

Those who argue there is no resurrection are wrong because *now is Christ risen from the dead*. Not only is this a fact, but He is also *the firstfruits of them that slept* (15:20). What are the *firstfruits*? The term *firstfruits* refers to the Feast of Firstfruits described in Leviticus 23:10-11. Each Israelite was to bring the first sheaf of harvested grain to a priest at the tabernacle, and later the temple.

This feast acknowledged the fertility of the land God had given His people. The first sheaves of grain, or *firstfruits*, were presented to the Lord, indicating their faith that the Lord would later provide an even larger harvest. According to Leviticus 23:11, on what day was the priest to wave the sheaf of *firstfruits* before the Lord?

What day is that? Sunday! On what day was Christ raised from the dead? Sunday! Today, we call this Feast of Firstfruits “Easter.”

The resurrection of Christ is the first fruit of a much greater harvest to come. The raising of Christ from the dead is just the beginning of God’s resurrection plan. Just as death came to the human race through one man, Adam, the resurrection came through one man, Christ Jesus. In Adam, all die, but in Christ, all will be *made alive* (15:21-22).

The dead will be raised each *in his own order* (15:23a). The word translated *order* (TAGMA, tag’-mah) refers to a series, or sequence. Some believe we have a “resurrection number.” However, the Bible doesn’t say that.

It does say there are two resurrections. The first is the resurrection is for believers only when they get their glorified bodies. (includes Rapture, OT saints and Tribulation saints) This happens right before the millennium. What does Revelation 20:6 declare?

The second resurrection is the resurrection of the lost who will stand condemned before the Great White Throne Judgment. They will all be condemned to the lake of fire, which is the *second death* (Rev. 20:11-15).

When Christ returns to raise the bodies of those who belong to Him, the end will come and Christ will *put all enemies under his feet* (15:23b-25). The phrase *under his feet* has two meanings. First, ancient kings sat on elevated thrones, so when the subjects bowed they were under the king’s feet.

Also, in ancient times, a victorious king or general would place his foot on the neck of a defeated enemy, symbolizing the total submission of the enemy. The book of Revelation describes how Jesus will *put all enemies under his feet*. What does Paul declare in 1 Corinthians 15:26?

Paul makes it clear, when Christ puts everything under His feet, it does not include God the Father, who gives Christ His authority (15:27-28). The first resurrection will set in motion a chain of events that will culminate with the destruction of death. Everything will be put into submission to Christ, with God being *all in all* (15:28). This means all evil is forever destroyed and God is *all* and *in all*. That’s the guarantee!

To live for eternity, **realize the importance of the Resurrection, analyze the guarantee of the Resurrection**, and ...

### **Ostracize those who deny the Resurrection (15:29-34)**

Now we come to an often misunderstood verse: *Else what shall they do which are baptized for the dead, if the dead rise not at all? why are they then baptized for the dead? (15:29)*. We don't have all the details; therefore, we cannot be dogmatic, but one of the best explanations I have heard is this:

*It often happened that those who publicly proclaimed their faith in Christ in the waters of baptism were martyred shortly thereafter. But did this stop others from being saved and from taking their place in baptism? Not at all. It seemed as though there were always new replacements coming along to fill up the ranks of those who had been martyred. As they stepped into the waters of baptism, in a very real sense they were being baptized for, or in the place of the dead. Hence the dead here refers to those who died as a result of their bold witness for Christ.*

Though we cannot say for sure what this verse means, from other Scriptures we **can** say with absolute certainty what it does **not** mean. It does not mean dead people can be saved through the actions of someone still living. Why, according to Hebrews 9:27?

That means there is no second chance. When you die, that's it. You stand in judgment the way you die—saved or unsaved.

Paul asks, if there is no resurrection, why would he live in danger and face possible death daily because of his faith (15:30-31a)? One example of Paul's facing death was when he faced the *beasts*, which were the people of *Ephesus* (15:32a; Acts 19:23-41). If there is no resurrection, why would Paul take such risks? Also, if there is no resurrection, Paul quotes Isaiah 22:13: *let us eat and drink; for to morrow we die* (15:32c). In other words, if there is no resurrection, just live for today with no thought of judgment or eternity.

But, Paul warns his readers not to be deceived (15:33a). Why (15:33b)?

Keeping company with those who deny the Resurrection corrupts sound doctrine and good morals. There are people we need to stay away from—those who will corrupt what we believe and how we behave.

Paul concludes this section by exhorting his readers to come to their senses and stop sinning because some people don't know anything about God. His readers need to stop living for the present, like their pagan friends, and start sharing the Gospel. In the last phrase of verse 34, what does Paul write about the fact that many in Corinth *have not the knowledge of God*?

The Corinthian believers, who are *enriched ... in all utterance, and in all knowledge of Christ (1:5)*, should be ashamed they have friends and neighbors who *have not the knowledge of God*. The same can be said of believers today.