



**151<sup>st</sup> Church of Christ**  
**Small Group Study Guide – 1 CORINTHIANS**  
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**AN IMPERFECT LOCAL CHURCH**  
*A Study in 1 Corinthians*  
**TEACHER – Lesson 22**

**GENERAL OUTLINE**

**1 Corinthians 15:1-58, Another report – The resurrection**

**OUTLINE: Lesson 22**

**1 Corinthians 15:1-58, Another report – The resurrection**

**15:1-11, Christ is risen**

**15:12-19, The resurrection of Christ and logical implications**

**15:20-28, The resurrection of Christ and ultimate implications**

**15:29-34, Secondary arguments for resurrection**

15:35-49, The resurrection body

15:50-58, Resurrection victory

Most of the problems addressed in 1 Corinthians dealt with behavior. Some Corinthian Christians were doing bad things and Paul wrote to correct this inappropriate behavior. However, even if he is focused on the behavior, he shows that the bad behavior grew out of a failure to understand basic truths about the body of Christ. For example, their misconduct during the Lord's Supper demonstrated that they didn't understand godly love and the proper relationships among members of the church body (i.e., doctrines of love and fellowship).

However, in chapter 15, Paul goes directly and extensively at bad doctrine. He will allude to sinful behavior that bad doctrine could produce, but this is primarily a doctrinal discussion. Faithful Christians must believe that Jesus rose from the dead and that his resurrection leads ultimately to our own. If we don't believe in the resurrection from the dead, we will fail to keep our eye on the prize (9:24-27) resulting in a life that is focused on an earthly reward instead of eternity with God.

Paul opens the discussion on common ground – Christ is risen. All Christians were considered to believe that Christ was crucified and that he rose from the dead. From that common starting point, he proceeds to show that belief in our personal resurrection is the natural outcome of belief in Christ's resurrection.

## DISCUSSION

### 1 Corinthians 15:1-11, Christ is risen

1. **Paul reminds the Corinthians of the gospel that he had preached to them. How had the Corinthians responded? Paul presents their response in a past-present-future timeline.**

Past: they had received his preaching

Present: they were standing fast in their beliefs about Christ

Future: their ongoing saved condition was dependent on that gospel.

2. **Paul gives a 4-point summary of the gospel with each point stated in a phrase beginning with "that." What are the four verbs that express those facts?**

That Christ \_\_\_\_\_ died \_\_\_\_\_

That Christ was \_\_\_\_\_ buried \_\_\_\_\_

That Christ \_\_\_\_\_ rose \_\_\_\_\_

That Christ was \_\_\_\_\_ seen \_\_\_\_\_

3. **Paul had received the gospel in this form, and he had delivered (or passed on) that message. What was the other crucifixion-related message that he had "received and delivered" to them according to an earlier passage in 1 Corinthians?**

The story of Jesus teaching the disciples to observe the Lord's Supper in 1 Corinthians 11:23.

4. **How many witnesses or groups of witnesses to the resurrected Christ does Paul mention? Which of these appearances are recorded in the four Gospel accounts? What additional source of supporting testimony does Paul identify in verses 3 & 4?**

- a. Cephas (Peter) & the twelve: possibly a reference to Jesus' first appearance to them in the upper room (John 20:19-23). (Thomas was absent, but the group was known as "the twelve" E.g., Mark 4:10.)
- b. A group of 500 brethren "at once." Not mentioned elsewhere in the NT.
- c. James: this is most likely James the physical brother of Jesus who became a leader in the Jerusalem church (Matthew 13:55; Acts 12:17). This appearance to James is not mentioned elsewhere.
- d. All the apostles: Possibly at the ascension of Jesus (Luke 24:50-53).
- e. Paul (Acts 9:1-9).
- f. In verses 3 & 4 he twice says that these events are supported by Scripture (i.e. the OT, Psalm 16:8-11; 110:1; cf. Acts 2:25-36).

- 5. Considering his past, Paul says that “by the grace of God I am what I am.” Was God’s offer of grace to Paul the same as, or different from, God’s offer to anyone else? What could have rendered God’s grace, as offered to Paul, “vain?”**

Paul had a unique experience on the road to Damascus, and God called only a few to serve as apostles. But Paul’s salvation still depended on God’s grace, and he had to accept the gospel and serve as God ordered him. We won’t have a vision as Paul did, but at some point, by the grace of God, we heard or read the gospel and were expected to respond favorably.

- 6. Paul is writing to Christians, so his reference to the resurrection and witnesses to the same are not intended to convince the Corinthians or prove to anyone that the resurrection is factual. His readers already accepted that fact as true. What does Paul indicate in both verses 1 & 11 as his purpose in reviewing these events?**

This discussion isn’t spread over several chapters as for earlier topics, but here as then (e.g., chapters 8-10, 12-14) Paul lays a solid foundation in vv. 1-11 before directly addressing the problem.

He opens and closes the paragraph (vv. 1 & 11) with a reminder that they all believed in the resurrection of Jesus. This is a simple, but emphatic, reminder that this is not new material. This is the message that Paul had preached that resulted in their conversion in the first place. The argument about the reality of our personal resurrection that he will present in the next paragraph is founded on something that his readers believed and accepted as true. The resurrection of Christ was the foundation of their faith and salvation. Paul starts on common ground before proceeding to deal with the area of disagreement.

- 7. Who are the “they” of verse 11? What, according to Paul, did they have in common with Paul on the subject of the resurrection of Christ? (Cf. Acts 2:30-33; 3:15; 10:40; 13:28-37; 17:31; 24:21)**

The “they” is the other apostles, plus possibly James the Lord’s brother. They and Paul all preached the same truths about Christ. It didn’t matter if someone was converted by Paul or another apostle, they all believed and preached the same death, burial and resurrection gospel.

It should be noted that the resurrection of Jesus played a central and critical role in the gospel sermons presented in Acts.

## **1 Corinthians 15:12-19, The resurrection of Christ and logical implications**

This paragraph (vv. 12-19) is developed with two hypothetical situations expressed in a series of “if...then” scenarios. The point is to show that if A is true, then B cannot be true. Conversely, if A is not true, then B must be true. In the following paragraph (vv. 20-28) the hypothetical and erroneous, “if Christ is not risen,” becomes, “since Christ is risen,” and serves as the foundation of our faith and reason for living.

### **8. Why is Paul presenting this extensive discussion of the reality of the resurrection of Christ along with the pros and cons of belief in the resurrection of Christians?**

Christians today take the doctrine of a general resurrection as a given truth of Christian faith. Apparently, in the early years of the church there were some who questioned or denied that Christians would be resurrected. Some of these people were members of the Corinthian church, and for that reason Paul was obliged to address the issue.

Note that among the Jews, the Sadducees didn't believe in a resurrection (Mark 12:18), or, for that matter, any afterlife. We also read of Hymenaeus and Philetus who claimed that whatever resurrection there was, it was already past (2 Timothy 2:17-18). Paul says that they had “strayed from the truth.”

### **9. If Paul's preaching about the risen Christ was true, and they all believed that truth, what was the logical conclusion concerning their own resurrection?**

If Paul's preaching was true, then to deny the reality of resurrection made no sense. They would have to choose. Christ had demonstrated the possibility of resurrection.

### **10. Every verse in 12-19, with the exception of 18, has an “if.” From 13-19 the if phrase is a hypothetical statement that either “Christ is not risen,” or that “the dead do not rise.” In 13-19, identify the logical conclusion that necessarily follows in each case if either of these statements is true.**

- A. v. 13, IF there is no resurrection...THEN Christ is not risen.
- B. v. 14, IF Christ is not risen...THEN our preaching and your faith are vain.
- C. v. 15, IF the dead do not rise...THEN the apostles are false witnesses (liars).
- C. v. 16, IF the dead do not rise...THEN Christ is not risen.
- B. v. 17, IF Christ is not risen...THEN a) your faith is futile, and b) you are still in your sins, and c) the dead in Christ are lost.
- A. v. 19, IF our hope in Christ is only in this life...THEN we are most pitiable of people.

Notice that the 1<sup>st</sup> and last statements are similar in thought; the 2<sup>nd</sup> and next to last are identical; the 3<sup>rd</sup> & 4<sup>th</sup> are also identical. This is described as an “ABCCBA” arrangement.

**11. In these few verses Paul twice repeats statements word for word that are of great importance for his message. Find them.**

vv. 13b & 16b: "then Christ is not risen"

vv. 14a & 17a: "if Christ is not risen"

Notice the structure throughout the passage. In verses 13-15, he makes an "if...then" statement, and then makes the "then" into an "if" leading to a disastrous outcome (e.g., our preaching is vain, your faith is vain, and we are false witnesses). In verses 16-18, he does the same thing. Both three-verse groups state the same thing affirming that denial of a resurrection destroys the substance of the gospel.

**1 Corinthians 15:20-28, The resurrection of Christ and ultimate implications**

**12. How does this paragraph balance the pitiable outcome of the "if Christ is not risen" scenario in the preceding paragraph?**

As opposed to a situation "if Christ is not risen," this paragraph describes the outcome "since Christ is risen." Since Christ is risen, we have a great future hope that Paul begins to describe here and on which he will elaborate in the second half of the chapter. If Christ is not risen, we might as well quit looking to eternity and "eat and drink for tomorrow we die," as Paul says a little later. But since, in truth, Christ is risen we have more than sufficient reason to live faithful lives as we look to our eternal reward.

**13. What was the immediate outcome of Adam's sin? If Adam's sin spoiled God's plan for mankind, what does the resurrection of Christ do for God's plan?**

Through Adam's sin (and Eve's), death entered the world. The resurrection of Christ was the first step towards the ultimate defeat of death. Christ was the first to overcome death with the intent that others would eventually follow.

**14. What does Paul say in verse 23 that lets us know that the "all" who shall be made alive of v. 22 does not mean that every person who has ever lived will be made alive? Who are those who will be made alive?**

Verse 17 refers to "those who have fallen asleep in Christ." Those "who have fallen asleep" in verse 20 are the same ones, of whom Christ is the "firstfruits" by his resurrection. Paul does not address the situation (in life, death or resurrection) of nonbelievers in this chapter. That was not the problem in Corinth, and it is not Paul's concern. His concern is to encourage Christians who are the beneficiaries of the resurrection of Christ.

Likewise, the phrase “all shall be made alive,” doesn’t mean that all, or everyone, will be made alive, but that all who are made alive will be made alive by and in Christ. There is no other way to eternal life than by Christ. Christ is the firstfruits of those who are to be made alive, and he will be followed by “those who are Christ’s at His coming.”

**15. Does Jesus reign over his kingdom today? What will Jesus do with his kingdom when the “end” comes? If Jesus reigns today, why is there still so much evil in the world (cf. Hebrews 2:8-9; 10:13)?**

This passage clearly affirms that Christ has established his kingdom and reigns over it today. When all his enemies and those of his kingdom have been defeated he will deliver his kingdom to his Father. The idea or doctrine promoted by some churches that Christ did not establish his kingdom and will do so only when he comes again is contrary to what Paul says in this passage.

As in any kingdom on earth, not everyone submits to and obeys the king and this produces much evil. The day will come when all will acknowledge Christ as king (Philippians 2:9-11). But acknowledged by all or not, Christ is presently king over his kingdom.

**1 Corinthians 15:29-34, Secondary arguments for resurrection**

This paragraph concludes the section of the chapter that affirms the reality of resurrection. The next section (vv. 35ff) fills in some blanks concerning what will happen at the resurrection. Here, for this preliminary conclusion, he mentions a couple practical examples of things people do, or that he has done, that are done on the conviction that there will be a resurrection. If there is no resurrection, these actions are futile. He begins with an intriguing mention of people “who are baptized for the dead.”

**16. Whatever is meant by being “baptized for the dead,” what good purpose could this baptism have if there is no resurrection from the dead?**

Commentators offer dozens of possible interpretations, usually with the caveat that in the end, no one can be sure of what this baptism was about. It could be that we accept baptism because we know that we will one day be among the dead and that baptism into Christ is a vital part of our preparation for that eventuality (cf. vv. 35, 52). It could be that there were people who were baptized on behalf of relatives (or other “good” people), in the hope that this substitute baptism would save them. If so, note that Paul doesn’t say, “what will YOU do who are...,” but “what will THEY do...,” indicating that this was practiced by someone other than Corinthian Christians. In that case, he uses this practice as an example of people who believe in the resurrection, but he doesn’t pause to condemn them since they aren’t the ones likely to read his letter.

In Romans 9:1-5, Paul says that if he could be accursed and it would save his Jewish kinsmen, he would do so. If a vicarious baptism would have resolved Paul's concern for his fellow Jews, he doesn't seem to have been aware of it.

This verse is at best obscure about this intriguing practice. All other mentions of Christian baptism in the New Testament present it as the response of a believing sinner to God's grace. We have no other mention or hint of one person being baptized (or believing) in the place of another.

In the end, whatever this practice was, it was a useless act if there is no resurrection. That is Paul's purpose when he mentions it.

**17. When did Paul "fight with beasts"? What is the message of this statement?**

We have no record in Acts (cf. Acts 19) of Paul facing literal wild animals while in Ephesus or anywhere else. Most scholars think this is a metaphorical statement referring to severe physical and life-threatening persecution. But we must admit that Paul had many experiences that aren't detailed in Scripture.

His point is that he would not have put himself in such dire circumstances had he not believed in the resurrection. If there is no resurrection, we should enjoy life with all its vices and pleasures because this is all there is.

**18. What role does belief in the resurrection have in maintaining good habits (ESV: morals; NIV: character)? How does this verse (v. 33) connect with verse 12?**

Paul often lays a doctrinal foundation in his letters before moving on to practical instructions. He believed that good behavior depended on good doctrine. In the case of the doctrine of the resurrection, listening to "some among you who say that there is no resurrection of the dead" (v. 12) would lead to sinful conduct. We deceive ourselves when we think otherwise.

There are many reasons for following Christ and living godly lives, but belief in the resurrection and a reward in heaven are among the more important of those reasons. If Corinthian Christians were being taught and influenced by people who denied the resurrection, the result would be more serious than merely accepting a wrong idea or doctrine. It would eventually lead to sinful behavior.