

A Resurrected Savior

1 Cor 15:1-8, 12-14, 20-23, 42-45
SS Lesson for 04/12/2020

Devotional Scripture: Isa 53:4-12

OUTLINE

LESSON BACKGROUND AND KEY VERSE

Background from the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary
Key Verse: 1 Cor 15:19-20
Commentary from the Bible Knowledge Commentary

MAJOR THEME ANALYSIS

REALITY OF JESUS' RESURRECTION (1 COR 15:1-8)

Reality through the gospel (1-4)

- The gospel proclaims the blessing of Jesus (Rom 15:29)
- The gospel proclaims the truth (Col 1:5-6)
- The gospel proclaims that everyone can believe and be saved (Rom 1:16)
- The gospel proclaims the establishment by God (Rom 16:25)

Reality through being seen by witnesses (5-8)

- Witnesses of the fact that God raised Jesus to life (Acts 2:32)
- Witnesses of Jesus' suffering and arising from the dead (Luke 24:46-48)
- Witnesses of the death of Jesus (Acts 3:15)
- Witnesses of Jesus' resurrection (Acts 4:33)
- Witnesses of everything that Jesus did (Acts 10:39)

NECESSITY OF JESUS' RESURRECTION (1 COR 15:12-14, 20-23)

Necessary for faith (12-14)

- Necessary because it took the blood of Jesus to take away sins (Heb 9:28)
- Necessary because it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins (Heb 10:4-6)
- Necessary to give us a living hope (1 Peter 1:3)
- Necessary to aid our faith and hope in God (1 Peter 1:21)
- Necessary because without faith it is impossible to please God (Heb 11:6)

Necessary for believer's resurrection (20-23)

- Believer's resurrection at the rapture (1 Thess 4:15-17)
- Believer's resurrection at the last trumpet (1 Cor 15:52)
- Believer's resurrection when Jesus returns (John 14:3)
- Believer's resurrection based on the promise of Jesus (2 Peter 3:13)
- Believer's resurrection at the great gathering to Jesus (2 Thess 2:1-2)
- Believer's resurrection that brings the completion of salvation (Heb 9:28)

NATURE OF JESUS' RESURRECTION (1 COR 15:42-45)

Resurrection of a glorified body (42-43)

- A glorified body of a child of the resurrection (Luke 20:35-36)
- A glorified body that will never perish (1 Peter 1:4)
- A glorified body that will be transformed (Phil 3:20-21)

Resurrection into a spiritual realm (44-45)

- A spiritual realm filled with blessings (Eph 1:3)
- A spiritual realm that is our inheritance (Matt 25:34)
- A spiritual realm where God seated us with Jesus (Eph 2:6)
- A spiritual realm where we will be united with Jesus (Rom 6:5)
- A spiritual realm where we will appear in glory (Col 3:4)

CONCLUSION AND OTHER THOUGHTS

COMMENTARY THOUGHTS FROM BOB DEFFINBAUGH

- The Gospel and the Resurrection of Jesus Christ From the Dead (15:1-11)*
- What if Christ Had Not Been Raised From the Dead? (15:12-19)*
- But Christ Has Been Raised: Implications of His Resurrection (15:20-28)*

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS FROM THE NIV STANDARD LESSON COMMENTARY

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS FROM THE ECHOES COMMENTARY

Lesson Background and Key Verse

Background from the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary

In the midst of his suffering, Job asked rhetorically, “If a man die, shall he live again?” (Job 14:14). He soon answered his own question when he declared, “Though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God” (19:26). Centuries later, God put a massive exclamation point on Job's conclusion when Jesus rose from the dead. Easter Sunday worship services today will likely feature songs, Scripture readings, and preaching to celebrate that fact—the cornerstone of the Christian faith. Many Christians even prefer to call this Resurrection Sunday. For the first-century church, every Sunday was Resurrection Sunday. Every week was a celebration and recognition that they served a living Savior. But at least one church had problems with regard to the implications of Jesus' resurrection.

The city of Corinth was located on the Isthmus of Corinth. That was a narrow strip of land, about five miles wide, that connected upper Greece with the Peloponnesian Peninsula to the south. This allowed Corinth to prosper as a trade center for goods coming from the eastern Roman Empire across the Aegean Sea to the Gulf of Corinth on their way to Italy and Rome (and vice versa). Corinth became a large, wealthy city made up of a business class, workers, and—sadly—slaves. The city attracted entrepreneurs from around the empire, giving the city a cosmopolitan culture and a mix of religions. The apostle Paul's first visit to the city of Corinth turned into a stay of 18 months in the early AD 50s (Acts 18:11). That was some two decades after the death and resurrection of Christ. Paul ended up planting a church of considerable diversity in Corinth, including Gentiles from many different religious backgrounds and Jews (see Acts 18:8). After Paul's departure, the Corinthian church endured many self-inflicted problems (examples: 1 Corinthians 3:3, 4; 5:1, 2; 7:1-16). He wrote his first letter to the church in Corinth in AD 56 to address these issues. Perhaps the most serious of the Corinthians' problems was a misunderstanding of the nature and significance of the resurrection of Jesus. Paul understood that the resurrection could not be neglected; there could be no compromise about it. This issue is dealt with more completely in 1 Corinthians 15 than anywhere else in the Bible. For this reason, the chapter is often called the Resurrection Chapter.

Key Verse: 1 Cor 15:19-20

19 If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most pitiable. 20 But now Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.

Commentary from the Bible Knowledge Commentary

Some have suggested that Paul reserved this chapter on the Resurrection till last because he thought that a firm belief in it would help solve many of the Corinthians' problems. Certainly if the message of Christ crucified were foolishness to the Greek mind (1:23), the corollary doctrine of the Resurrection was no less so (cf. Acts 17:31-32). The implicit denial of the Resurrection on the part of some may be seen in the Corinthian conviction that the present era represented the consummation of God's material blessings (1 Cor. 4:8; cf. 6:2) and sexual immorality was a matter of no lasting consequence (5:1; cf. 6:9, 13-14).

Like the problems previously discussed (1:10-6:20), the denial of the Resurrection by some in the church was a matter apparently reported to Paul (15:12) and not something the Corinthians themselves had included among their questions in their letter to him (cf. 7:25; 8:1; 12:1; 16:1, 12). As in his response to the Thessalonian confusion on the Resurrection (1 Thes. 4:13-18), Paul began with a fundamental affirmation of the faith (cf. 1 Cor. 15:3-4; 1 Thes. 4:14) and expanded on it.

15:1-2. The gospel Paul had preached in Corinth (2:1-2) had not changed; but he feared that just as there had been declension in the church concerning the message of Christ crucified and its implication for believers, the same was happening with regard to the message of Christ resurrected. As the former message was an essential element in the Corinthians' experience of ongoing salvation (the pres. tense of the verb **saved** focuses on sanctification), so was the latter. To reject bodily resurrection eviscerated “the gospel” and made faith **vain** (*eikē*, “without cause” or “without success”; cf. vv. 14, 17) because it had an unworthy object (cf. 15:13, 17). Believing the gospel includes holding **firmly** to belief in Christ's resurrection. Unless one holds firmly, his belief is “in vain”; cf. Matt. 13:18-22).

15:3-5. Paul included himself in the company of all believers when he spoke of receiving the truth of Christ's death and His resurrection on behalf of sinful people. These verses, the heart of the gospel, were an early Christian confession which Paul described **as of first importance**. It was really a twofold confession: **Christ died for our sins** and **He was raised**. The reality of this was verified by the Scriptures (e.g., Ps. 16:10; Isa. 53:8-10) and by historical evidence verified by time in the grave and out of it, in the presence of the living. The fact **that He was buried** verified His death, and the fact **that He appeared** to others verified His resurrection. **Peter**, the first male witness, was soon joined by the remaining disciples who composed the Lord's immediate circle.

15:6. Later a much larger company of believers witnessed His resurrection. The **500... brothers** may have formed the audience who received the commission recorded in Matthew 28:18-20 (cf. Acts 1:3-8). Since **most of** those were **still living** when Paul wrote 1 Corinthians, they could be consulted.

15:7-8. Some have debunked this Resurrection appearance as simply the pious vision of believers seeing with the eyes of faith. But Paul could have cited the testimony of two for whom that was not true, **James**, the half brother of Jesus, and himself. Like Paul, James probably came to faith (cf. John 7:5 with Acts 1:14) because of an appearance of the resurrected Christ (Acts 9:3-6; 22:6-11). Paul considered himself **abnormally born** because he lacked the "gestation" period of having been with Christ during His earthly ministry (cf. Acts 1:21-22). It seems that **the apostles** were a body wider than the previously mentioned Twelve (cf. Eph. 4:11), but were all distinguished by having seen the resurrected Christ (1 Cor. 9:1) which made Paul the last of their company.

15:9. Because he was the last, like a runt, untimely born, Paul could call himself **the least of the apostles**. He felt less deserving of the office because he had been an opponent of the **church** (cf. Acts 22:4; 1 Tim. 1:15-16) which he now served (2 Cor. 4:5).

15:10. He realized, however, that his past was simply a backdrop on which to display **the grace of God** (cf. 1:3), the grace to which Paul had been so responsive. Indeed Paul was without peer in his devotion (cf. 9:19-27). The history of the church confirms that his devotion **was not without effect** (*kenē*, "empty"; cf. 15:14). He had **worked harder** than any of the other apostles, as he traveled more, suffered more opposition, wrote more New Testament epistles, and founded more churches. Yet Paul knew and ministered with the recognition that it was not his power but God's (2:4-5) which produced results (3:6).

15:11. In the final analysis it was not the messenger but the message which was important (cf. 1:18-4:5), and in that regard the apostolic message was that the crucified Christ became the resurrected Christ, which message Paul did **preach** and the Corinthians **believed**.

15:12. Paul then turned to consider the claim of some that no one **dead** could experience bodily **resurrection**. He pressed that tenet to its logical consequences within the framework of the Christian faith.

15:13. To deny a bodily resurrection in principle was to deny the **resurrection of Christ**. Presumably some in Corinth had done this, and Paul wanted to warn them and others of the serious consequences which would result from such disbelief.

15:14. Not the least of those consequences was the fact that a denial of the Resurrection tore the heart out of the gospel message and left it lifeless. If that were so, the Corinthians' **faith**, however vital, would be **useless** (*kenē*, "empty"; cf. vv. 2, 10, 17) since its object would be a dead man.

15:15-16. Second, the apostles of the church would turn out to be crass charlatans since their message uniformly affirmed the truth of Christ's resurrection (cf. v. 11).

15:17. Third, the Corinthians' salvation would be only a state of mind with no correspondence to reality. Their **faith** would be **futile** (*mataia*, "without results"; cf. *kenē*, "empty," in vv. 10, 14, *eikē*, "without cause" or "without success," v. 2). The Resurrection was God's validation that the redemption paid by Christ on the cross was accepted (Rom. 4:25). Without the Resurrection there could be no certainty of atonement and the Corinthians would remain in a state of alienation and sin.

15:18. Fourth, if Christ were not raised, the loved ones among the Corinthian believers who had died entered not bliss but perdition. The pagan concept of a liberated spirit was a lie. Without the Resurrection the sting of death would remain, with lasting painfulness (cf. vv. 54-56).

15:19. Fifth, if there were no Resurrection, the pagans would be right. The "foolishness of the Cross" (1:18) would be just that, and men such as Paul and the apostles who had suffered for the gospel (4:9-13) could only be **pitied**. Those who lived for the pleasure of the moment would be right and the sacrifices of Christians would only be cruel, self-inflicted jokes (cf. 15:32).

15:20. Paul had explored the logical negations which followed from a denial of the bodily resurrection of Christ (vv. 12-19). He then considered the theological tenet that the destiny of Christians was bound up in the destiny of Christ, and he set forth the positive consequences of this union. Speculation had given way to affirmation: **Christ has indeed been raised from the dead.** And He is the **firstfruits**, an Old Testament word (e.g., Ex. 23:16, 19) here used in the sense of a preliminary installment of what will be both an example and a guarantee of more to come (cf. Rom. 8:23).

15:21-22. **Death came** to all those related to Adam by natural birth because of the disobedience of one **man**. As the father of mankind Adam in his sin brought death to everybody (cf. Gen. 3:17-19; Rom. 5:12). But because of the obedience (Phil. 2:8) of another **Man** (1 Tim. 2:5) **resurrection** will come to **all** those related to Him by spiritual birth. Paul would later expand this grand truth in his letter to the Romans (Rom. 5:12-19). Those who are a part of the body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:27) will one day follow the lead of their Head (Col. 1:18), but will not do so immediately.

15:23. There will be a sequence in the unfolding of the final events. Paul was not concerned to detail all future resurrections since he was addressing the church and was primarily interested here in fixing their place in the scheme of things. As he had earlier affirmed (v. 20), Christ was their sample and surety. As He promised (John 14:2-3) Christ will return for those who compose the church and the dead in Christ will be raised (1 Thes. 4:16). No time frame was indicated in this sequence but a period of almost 2,000 years has now elapsed.

15:24. Following the resurrection of the church, another period intervenes until **the end** when Christ will deliver His **kingdom to God the Father** (cf. Matt. 13:41-43). Some interpreters dispute that an interval of any sort was hinted at by Paul and find instead the coming of Christ and the consummation of all things as virtually simultaneous events. As in the preceding verse, no time frame was specified and the chronological sequences set forth may indeed be almost momentary (1 Cor. 15:5) but then again they may be prolonged (cf. v. 23). If about 2,000 years can elapse between the first and second phases in this selected presentation of events, a lapse of half that time, that is, a millennium, between the second and third phases should cause no consternation.

15:25-26. **Death** as a personification of Christ's ultimate opponent (cf. v. 55; Heb. 2:14) will be nullified. It is not human bodies which will **be destroyed**, as some in Corinth were saying, but the destroyer of bodies, death itself.

15:27-28. The reprise of these verses is found in verse 57. It is by the power of **God** that the incarnate **Christ** victoriously mediates His authority (cf. Phil. 3:21). This work of **the Son** will find ultimate completion in the glory of the Father (cf. John 17:4-5). That too is the ultimate goal of the church (cf. 1 Cor. 10:31; Eph. 1:6, 12, 14). When God is **all in all** (cf. Rom. 11:36), the new creation will be consummated and the resurrected Christ and His church will share in that experience (cf. Rev. 22:1).

In this fourth collection of arguments against those who deny the Resurrection, Paul drew on Corinthian practice (v. 29) and also on his own way of life (vv. 30-32).

15:29. Up to 200 explanations have been given of this verse! Most of these interpretations are inane, prompted by a desire to conform this verse to an orthodox doctrine of baptism. It is clear from the context, however, that Paul distinguished his own practice and teaching from that described here. He merely held up the teaching of being **baptized for the dead** as a practice of some who denied the Resurrection.

How the false teachers came to this view may never be known, but just across the Saronic Gulf, north of Corinth, lay Eleusis, the center of an ancient mystery religion lauded by Homer (*Hymn to Demeter* 478-79) and widely popular (cf. Cicero, himself an initiate, in *De Legibus* 2. 14. 36). Part of the rites of initiation into this pagan religion were washings of purification in the sea without which no one could hope to experience bliss in the life hereafter (cf. Pindar *Fragment* 212; Sophocles *Fragment* 753). A vicarious participation in the mysteries was not unknown either (cf. Orphica *Fragment* 245). Given the Corinthian propensity for distortion in matters of church practice (11:2-14:40), it was likely that some in Corinth (possibly influenced by the Eleusinian mystery) were propounding a false view of baptism which Paul took up and used as an argument against those who denied the Resurrection. No interpretation of this text is entirely satisfactory, but this view has as its chief strength the natural reading of the Greek verse, an asset singularly lacking in other explanations. Also it is noteworthy that Paul referred to **those** (not "we") who are "baptized for the dead."

15:30-32. In contrast to the practice of those cited in verse 29, Paul now mentioned his own lifestyle as a forceful statement of his conviction about the certainty of the Resurrection. Some of the Corinthians may

have accused Paul of duplicity (cf. 2 Cor. 1:12-14; 2:17; 6:8), but no one thought him a fool even though he affirmed that he would be one if he ministered without certainty of the Resurrection. Many times his life was imperiled (**I die every day**; cf. 2 Cor. 6:4-5; 11:23-28). At least once he thought he would die (2 Cor. 1:8-9), probably referred to here as his fight with **wild beasts at Ephesus**. Though this was probably not an arena experience, it was like it in that Paul saw no hope of deliverance. Why face that if this life were all there is? The Epicureans (and less philosophical men before them; cf. Isa. 22:13) would be right—pursue pleasure and avoid pain (cf. Epicurus *Letter to Menoeceus* 128). But Paul knew there was more, and his life testified to that fact (cf. 1 Cor. 9:24-27; 2 Cor. 4:16-18).

15:33-34. Paul's concluding advice with reference to those who continued to deny the Resurrection was like his former counsel concerning immoral people in the church (chap. 5)—don't associate with them. Previously he had compared immorality in the church to yeast in bread (5:6). Here he quoted the pagan writer Menander (*Thais* 218) to the same effect: **Bad company corrupts good character**. False teachers should be avoided (cf. 2 Cor. 6:14-7:1) because though they claimed great knowledge they were in fact **ignorant of God** (cf. 1 Cor. 8:2). Were the wise Corinthians this easily deceived? (cf. 2 Cor. 11:3)

In the preceding section (vv. 1-34) Paul had taken up the question implicit in verse 12, why believe in the Resurrection? He answered it with arguments rooted in history, logic, theology, and experience. He then addressed two other questions: How is the resurrection achieved? What is the nature of a resurrected body?

15:35-37. One objection to belief in anyone's resurrection might be its incomprehensibility. This was the point of the questions **How are the dead raised? With what kind of body will they come?** Paul did not consider these sorts of questions a wise person would ask, as is obvious from his response, **How foolish!** (lit., "how senseless or thoughtless") to his imaginary interlocutor. Belief in the Resurrection was like belief in seedtime and harvest. Neither could be completely understood but both were real. As a plant which sprouted from a seed was directly linked to it but remarkably different from it, so too was the relationship of a natural and a resurrected body.

15:38-41. The variety in Creation reflects the will of the Maker (Gen. 1:1-26). The differences in the animate creation (**men... animals... birds... fish**) and inanimate creation (**sun... moon... stars**) give expression to the splendor of God and bring Him praise (cf. Ps. 148:13). The differences in splendor between the **earthly bodies** and the **heavenly bodies** suggested to Paul the differences between a natural and a spiritual body (cf. Dan. 12:3 where resurrected saints were compared to stars; also Matt. 13:43).

15:42-44a. An earthly **natural body** is fallen and so is temporal, imperfect, and weak. A heavenly **spiritual body** will be eternal, perfect, and powerful (cf. 2 Cor. 5:1-4). Like a seed sown in the earth and the plant which proceeds from it, there is continuity but a gloriously evident difference.

15:44b-49. Discussion of the contrast between Adam and Christ (mentioned earlier in v. 22) is resumed here. Adam exemplified the earthly (v. 40) natural body (the word trans. **being**, v. 45, *psychē*, is related to *psychikos*, which is trans. **natural** in v. 44). **Adam** gave his nature to all who followed him (the man without the Spirit is the natural [*psychikos*] man; cf. 2:14). **The last Adam**, Christ, exemplifies the heavenly **spiritual body** (15:22) which those who belong to Him (v. 23; cf. 2:15) will likewise assume at His coming from heaven (cf. Phil. 3:20-21). The full harvest will be like the firstfruits (1 Cor. 15:23; cf. Col. 1:18). First the seed must die; then the spiritual body will emerge.

Major Theme Analysis

(Scriptural Text from the New King James Version; cross-references from the NIV)

Reality of Jesus' Resurrection (1 Cor 15:1-8)

- 1 Moreover, brethren, I declare to you the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received and in which you stand,
- 2 by which also you are saved, if you hold fast that word which I preached to you--unless you believed in vain.
- 3 For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures,
- 4 and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures,
- 5 and that He was seen by Cephas, then by the twelve.
- 6 After that He was seen by over five hundred brethren at once, of whom the greater part remain to the present, but some have fallen asleep.
- 7 After that He was seen by James, then by all the apostles.
- 8 Then last of all He was seen by me also, as by one born out of due time.

Reality through the gospel (1-4)

The gospel proclaims the blessing of Jesus (Rom 15:29)

29 I know that when I come to you, I will come in the full measure of the blessing of Christ.

The gospel proclaims the truth (Col 1:5-6)

5 the faith and love that spring from the hope that is stored up for you in heaven and that you have already heard about in the word of truth, the gospel 6 that has come to you. All over the world this gospel is bearing fruit and growing, just as it has been doing among you since the day you heard it and understood God's grace in all its truth.

The gospel proclaims that everyone can believe and be saved (Rom 1:16)

16 I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile.

The gospel proclaims the establishment by God (Rom 16:25)

25 Now to him who is able to establish you by my gospel and the proclamation of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery hidden for long ages past,

Reality through being seen by witnesses (5-8)

Witnesses of the fact that God raised Jesus to life (Acts 2:32)

32 God has raised this Jesus to life, and we are all witnesses of the fact.

Witnesses of Jesus' suffering and arising from the dead (Luke 24:46-48)

46 He told them, "This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, 47 and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. 48 You are witnesses of these things.

Witnesses of the death of Jesus (Acts 3:15)

15 You killed the author of life, but God raised him from the dead. We are witnesses of this.

Witnesses of Jesus' resurrection (Acts 4:33)

33 With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and much grace was upon them all.

Witnesses of everything that Jesus did (Acts 10:39)

39 "We are witnesses of everything he did in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They killed him by hanging him on a tree,

Necessity of Jesus' Resurrection (1 Cor 15:12-14, 20-23)

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?

13 But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ is not risen.

14 And if Christ is not risen, then our preaching is empty and your faith is also empty.

20 But now Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.

21 For since by man came death, by Man also came the resurrection of the dead.

22 For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive.

23 But each one in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, afterward those who are Christ's at His coming.

Necessary for faith (12-14)

Necessary because it took the blood of Jesus to take away sins (Heb 9:28)

28 so Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many people; and he will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him.

Necessary because it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins (Heb 10:4-6)

4 because it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins. 5 Therefore, when Christ came into the world, he said: "Sacrifice and offering you did not desire, but a body you prepared for me;

Necessary to give us a living hope (1 Peter 1:3)

3 Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,

Necessary to aid our faith and hope in God (1 Peter 1:21)

21 Through him you believe in God, who raised him from the dead and glorified him, and so your faith and hope are in God.

Necessary because without faith it is impossible to please God (Heb 11:6)

6 And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.

Necessary for believer's resurrection (20-23)

Believer's resurrection at the rapture (1 Thess 4:15-17)

15 According to the Lord's own word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left till the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. 16 For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. 17 After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever.

Believer's resurrection at the last trumpet (1 Cor 15:52)

52 in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed.

Believer's resurrection when Jesus returns (John 14:3)

3 And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am.

Believer's resurrection based on the promise of Jesus (2 Peter 3:13)

13 But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness.

Believer's resurrection at the great gathering to Jesus (2 Thess 2:1-2)

Concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered to him, we ask you, brothers, 2 not to become easily unsettled or alarmed by some prophecy, report or letter supposed to have come from us, saying that the day of the Lord has already come.

Believer's resurrection that brings the completion of salvation (Heb 9:28)

28 so Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many people; and he will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him.

Nature of Jesus' Resurrection (1 Cor 15:42-45)

42 So also is the resurrection of the dead. The body is sown in corruption, it is raised in incorruption.

43 It is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power.

44 It is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body.

45 And so it is written, "The first man Adam became a living being." The last Adam became a life-giving spirit.

Resurrection of a glorified body (42-43)

A glorified body of a child of the resurrection (Luke 20:35-36)

35 But those who are considered worthy of taking part in that age and in the resurrection from the dead will neither marry nor be given in marriage, 36 and they can no longer die; for they are like the angels. They are God's children, since they are children of the resurrection.

A glorified body that will never perish (1 Peter 1:4)

4 and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade — kept in heaven for you,

A glorified body that will be transformed (Phil 3:20-21)

20 But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, 21 who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.

Resurrection into a spiritual realm (44-45)

A spiritual realm filled with blessings (Eph 1:3)

3 Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.

A spiritual realm that is our inheritance (Matt 25:34)

34 "Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world.

A spiritual realm where God seated us with Jesus (Eph 2:6)

6 And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus,

A spiritual realm where we will be united with Jesus (Rom 6:5)

5 If we have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection.

A spiritual realm where we will appear in glory (Col 3:4)

4 When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.

Conclusion and Other Thoughts

Commentary Thoughts from Bob Deffinbaugh

The Gospel and the Resurrection of Jesus Christ From the Dead (15:1-11)

I am writing this message on an IBM compatible computer operating under Windows 95. This new operating system requires a new anti-virus program, which I would be foolish not to install. A virus can enter my system through an on-line connection (via my modem and the phone line connected to another computer) or through a corrupted disk. Viruses are hidden; their authors do not want them detected until after they have achieved what they were written to accomplish. Viruses are not all meant to destroy; some are simply a sick joke, which causes strange things to happen in the program one is running or silly messages to appear on our screen. But there are viruses which are meant to destroy work by attaching themselves to certain executable files, to memory, or to certain locations (e.g., the boot track of your hard disk). An anti-virus program is designed to discover and eradicate these destructive hidden programs before they can do damage to programs or data (in some cases, wiping your hard disk clean of all program and data files). Every file or program which requires your computer's attention is scrutinized to make sure it does not contain a destructive virus.

Paul's devotion to the Word of God and to the good news of the gospel causes him to be as alert and vigilant as an anti-virus program. There is one "file" (so to speak) which is always searched out by the virus of false teaching, and that is the "gospel" file. Every action, every teaching, is scrutinized by Paul to make sure it does not seek to modify or set aside the "gospel file." Thus, when certain teachers insist that Gentile converts must be circumcised and required to keep the Law of Moses, they find immediate opposition from Paul, who would not allow men to corrupt the "gospel file" (see Acts 15:1-1). When some insist that Titus be circumcised, Paul will not allow it, for the sake of the gospel (Galatians 2:1-5; see 5:3). And when Peter stops sitting at the Gentile table and begins to sit with the Jews, Paul publicly rebukes him (and those who followed him) for his (their) hypocrisy, because his actions imply that Jewish Christians are better than Gentile Christians—and this Paul recognized as a corruption of the gospel (Galatians 2:11-21).

It should come as no surprise then that before Paul takes on the error of the denial of the resurrection of the dead, Paul first lays a foundation for his argument by reiterating the gospel. Whatever practice or teaching Paul might encounter, he always judges it by the gospel he and the apostles preach. That gospel must never be corrupted or altered in any way. Several characteristics of the gospel are emphasized in verses 1-11, which we can summarize.

- (1) The gospel is not a message devised by the minds of men, but a revelation from God, received by the apostles and delivered to men by them (see 15:1, 3, 11).*
- (2) The gospel is the only message by which men are saved and by which they stand (15:1-2).*
- (3) The gospel is "good news" concerning the grace of God, which informs men concerning the only way they, as undeserving sinners, may experience the forgiveness of their sins (15:3, 9-10).*
- (4) The gospel is the message which is based solely upon the person and work of Jesus Christ, the One who died for our sins on the cross of Calvary, who was buried, and who was literally and bodily raised from the dead on the third day (15:3-4).*
- (5) The sacrificial death and bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ are events which were prophesied in the Old Testament, foretold in the Gospels by our Lord, and then fulfilled by Him as God's promised Messiah.*
- (6) The gospel is the message which is of the highest magnitude of importance (15:3).*
- (7) The gospel saves and keeps only those who receive it and hold fast to it by faith (15:1-2).*
- (8) The gospel is false and our faith is vain if any element of it is proven to be false (15:2; 12ff.).*
- (9) The gospel is established on the literal, bodily resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ, as witnessed by more than 500 people.*

When Jesus spoke of His sacrificial death on the cross of Calvary, He always spoke of His resurrection as well. The enemies of our Lord knew this, and from the day of His resurrection attempted to pass it off as a deception perpetrated by His followers (Matthew 27:62-66; 28:11-15). Paul wants his readers to remember that the resurrection is based upon the most irrefutable evidence possible—the eyewitness testimony of over 500 people on various occasions and over a period of time.

The resurrection is a matter of great import to the apostle Paul. Few men can claim to have been more impacted by the resurrection of our Lord than Paul. First, the resurrection of our Lord was the means by which Paul was converted from an enemy of Christ to a true believer. Three times in the Book of Acts (chapters 9, 22, and 26) Paul's conversion experience on the road to Damascus is reported. This appearance of the risen and glorified Christ blinded Paul, stopping him in his tracks, and led to his conversion. No wonder Paul saw the resurrection of our Lord as such a significant event. It turned Paul's life upside-down.

The resurrection was important to Paul in yet another way—the resurrection appearance of our Lord to Paul on the road to Damascus was the means by which Paul was qualified to be an apostle of Jesus Christ. You will recall that Judas, the disciple who betrayed our Lord, killed himself, leaving a vacancy among the apostles (see Matthew 19:28; Acts 1:15-26). The disciples chose not to wait for “**what the Father had promised**” (Acts 1:4) and went ahead to select two men who seemed qualified as candidates to take the place of Judas (Acts 1:12-26). It is my opinion that it was not Matthias whom God had appointed to this position, but Paul. I believe Paul's words in our text (15:7-11) indicate that he was appointed as the replacement for Judas.

Who would have ever imagined such a thing? The apostles were those whose task it was to be witnesses of our Lord's resurrection (Acts 1:22; 2:32). How could Paul (or anyone else who had not been with the eleven disciples) possibly qualify? What seemed humanly impossible was possible with God. He arranged a private resurrection appearance for Paul. It was as a result of our Lord's post-resurrection appearance to Paul on the road to Damascus that Paul was qualified to be an apostle.

Just how important was the resurrection of our Lord to Paul? It was not only the basis for his salvation and apostleship, it was a constant theme in his preaching (Acts 17:30-31; 24:15, 25). It was the reason for Paul's imprisonment and trial before Caesar (Acts 23:6; 24:21; 26:6-8; 28:20). No wonder Paul is so emphatic about the resurrection of our Lord and about the error of those who say there is no resurrection of the dead. The gospel is the starting point and standard for all Christian teaching and practice. Paul takes us back to our origins to reinforce the vital role which the resurrection of our Lord plays in our salvation and Christian life.

What if Christ Had Not Been Raised From the Dead? (15:12-19)

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? 13 But if there is no resurrection of the dead, not even Christ has been raised; 14 and if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is vain, your faith also is vain. 15 Moreover we are even found to be false witnesses of God, because we witnessed against God that He raised Christ, whom He did not raise, if in fact the dead are not raised. 16 For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised; 17 and if Christ has not been raised, your faith is worthless; you are still in your sins. 18 Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. 19 If we have hoped in Christ in this life only, we are of all men most to be pitied.

It was not the resurrection of our Lord which was denied by some at Corinth, but rather the resurrection of the dead, the resurrection of men. The denial of the resurrection of the dead is a denial of Scriptural teaching:

1 “Now at that time Michael, the great prince who stands *guard* over the sons of your people, will arise. And there will be a time of distress such as never occurred since there was a nation until that time; and at that time your people, everyone who is found written in the book, will be rescued. 2 And many of those who sleep in the dust of the ground will awake, these to everlasting life, but the others to disgrace *and* everlasting contempt. 3 And those who have insight will shine brightly like the brightness of the expanse of heaven, and those who lead the many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever” (Daniel 12:1-3).

24 Jesus said to them, “Is this not the reason you are mistaken, that you do not understand the Scriptures, or the power of God? 25 For when they rise from the dead, they neither marry, nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven. 26 But regarding the fact that the dead rise again, have you not read in the book of Moses, in the passage about the burning bush, how God spoke to him, saying, ‘I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob’? 27 He is not the God of the dead, but of the living; you are greatly mistaken” (Mark 12:24-27).

28 “Do not marvel at this; for an hour is coming, in which all who are in the tombs shall hear His voice, 29 and shall come forth; those who did the good *deeds* to a resurrection of life, those who committed the evil *deeds* to a resurrection of judgment” (John 5:28-29).

13 But we do not want you to be uninformed, brethren, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve, as do the rest who have no hope. 14 For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep in Jesus. 15 For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive, and remain until the coming of the Lord, shall not precede those who have fallen asleep. 16 For the Lord

Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of *the* archangel, and with the trumpet of God; and the dead in Christ shall rise first. 17 Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and thus we shall always be with the Lord. 18 Therefore comfort one another with these words (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18).

Paul does not turn us to these texts or others like them, but rather to the gospel which he has just declared and which the Corinthians have received. Paul reasons from the resurrection of our Lord. If Christ has indeed risen from the dead, then how is it possible for anyone to reason that there is **no** resurrection from the dead? To say that there is no resurrection of the dead, and yet to affirm that Christ rose from the dead, is a logical impossibility. If there is no resurrection of the dead, then we must also conclude that Christ did not rise from the dead either.

The Corinthians who denied the resurrection of the dead are wrong on many counts. Paul chooses to begin with the most significant error in verses 12-19. He reasons that a denial of the resurrection of the dead is, of necessity, a denial of the resurrection of Christ from the dead. Since God has provided undeniable proof for Christ's resurrection, and since Paul and more than 500 others are witnesses of His resurrection, no one can logically say that there is no such thing as the resurrection of the dead. The Corinthians are logically wrong because they hold two contradictory statements to be true at the same time. *First*, they hold the resurrection of Christ from the dead to be true. *Second*, they hold the resurrection of anyone from the dead to be false. They must choose one or the other. Logically one cannot affirm and deny the resurrection of the dead at the same time. In denying the resurrection of the dead, some of the Corinthians are wrong, dead wrong!

The conclusion they reach—that the dead are not raised—is not logical, given the resurrection of our Lord from the dead. Furthermore, the implications of such a conclusion are astounding. Paul first rejects their conclusion as illogical; now he challenges the implications of their conclusion that the dead are not raised. What if Christ had not been raised from the dead? What would the implications of this conclusion be? In a word, they would be horrifying.

If Christ was not raised from the dead, then the gospel, outlined in verses 1-11, is false. The resurrection of our Lord was proclaimed by Paul and the apostles as one of the foundational truths of the gospel. Further, since the apostles²²¹ preached Christ crucified, buried, and raised again from the dead, their ministry would be vain if Christ did not actually rise from the grave (verse 14). It would be vain in the sense that these men risked their lives and made monumental sacrifices for a message that was false and which had no saving power. Both the message of the apostles and their ministry would be rendered useless if the proclamation of our Lord's resurrection were proven false.

Not only would the apostles' preaching topple if the resurrection of Christ had not occurred, but the faith of those who believed their message would also be undermined. The gospel Paul preached at Corinth is the gospel which proclaimed Christ's resurrection. It is also the gospel the Corinthians received, by which they are being saved, and in which they stand (14:1-2). If Christ did not rise from the dead, their faith is without foundation; it is empty and useless.

As Paul's argument unfolds, it gets worse. Up to this point, the apostles' ministry and message have been shown to be worthless. Now in verse 15, Paul shows that the denial of Christ's resurrection puts the apostles in an even more serious dilemma. If the gospel they have been preaching is a false gospel, then these men are actually in serious trouble with God. They are "**false witnesses.**" They have misrepresented God, making false claims about Him by proclaiming that He raised the Lord Jesus from the dead. They have defamed God. From an Old Testament point of view, the apostles would be exposed as false prophets (Deuteronomy 13 and 18:14-22), and this they would be, if Christ had not risen from the dead.

Things get worse for the Corinthians, as well as the apostles, if indeed Christ did not rise. Their faith in Christ would be worthless, for they have trusted in a dead man, a man who staked the integrity of His ministry and message on His resurrection (see Matthew 12:38-40; 27:62-64). If Christ was not raised from the dead, then His death on Calvary was meaningless, and the Corinthians are still condemned sinners. Take away the resurrection and you pull the rug out from under the atoning work of our Lord. It is not merely the death, but the death, burial, and resurrection of our Lord which saves sinners. To deny the resurrection of our Lord is to condemn men as sinners, without hope of forgiveness and eternal life. And so those saints who have already "**fallen asleep**" (verse 18) have no hope beyond the grave. They are dead and gone. In this sad state of affairs, brought about if Christ did not rise, Christians should be pitied for their stupidity, not persecuted.

But Christ Has Been Raised: Implications of His Resurrection (15:20-28)

20 But now Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who are asleep. 21 For since by a man came death, by a man also came the resurrection of the dead. 22 For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all shall be made alive. 23 But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, after that those who are Christ's at His coming, 24 then comes the end, when He delivers up the kingdom to the God and Father, when He has abolished all rule and all authority and power. 25 For He must reign until He has put all His enemies under His feet. 26 The last enemy that will be abolished is death. 27 For He has put all things in subjection under His feet. But when He says, "All things are put in subjection," it is evident that He is excepted who put all things in subjection to Him. 28 And when all things are subjected to Him, then the Son Himself also will be subjected to the One who subjected all things to Him, that God may be all in all.

The argument Paul plays out in verses 12-19 is a purely theoretical one. His "If ... then ..." argument was simply to show the folly of rejecting the resurrection of the dead, a claim which directly contradicts the resurrection of Christ from the dead. Now in verses 20-28, Paul takes up the truth of Christ's resurrection, a truth he has already set down in verses 1-11. Verses 1-11 point out the historical authentication of the resurrection of Christ. Now, Paul sets down the logical implications of His resurrection. The resurrection of the dead is not only consistent with Christ's resurrection, it is a certainty which flows out of His resurrection. There are no "ifs" here, but only the much stronger term "since" (verse 21).

"**Christ has been raised from the dead**" (verse 20) is the premise of Paul's argument in these verses. As the risen Christ, He is the "**first fruits of those who are asleep.**" In other words, whatever happened to our Lord is sure to happen to those who have fallen asleep, those who have died trusting in Him. In the Old Testament, the "**first fruits**" are the first offspring or crop to be obtained by the farmer. It was proof that there was more to come. Christ's resurrection is our proof that more resurrections will follow.

How do we know that Christ's resurrection guarantees a resurrection for others? The answer to this can be seen when one understands the unique relationship which exists between Adam and our Lord Jesus Christ, to whom Paul later refers as the "**first Adam**" and the "**last Adam**" (15:45). By his sin, Adam brought about death for himself and the whole human race. Christ, by His righteous life, substitutionary death, burial, and resurrection, brings about life for mankind.²²² Adam brought death upon all men; Christ will make men alive.

As some falsely taught (2 Timothy 2:18), this resurrection of men from the dead has not already occurred but is yet to come. Christ's resurrection will actually bring about a sequence of resurrections, with the last and final resurrection abolishing death altogether (verse 26). Everything must occur in its proper order, as ordained by God (verse 23). Christ has already risen from the dead, and His resurrection is but the first fruits of the other resurrections yet to occur. The next resurrection mentioned is that of those who have trusted in our Lord for salvation, which occurs when He returns to this earth to defeat all His enemies and to establish His rule over all the earth (verse 23). Then, finally, the last resurrection will take place, the resurrection of the unbelieving dead.²²³

Paul speaks here of two "reigns", the "**reign**" of Christ, during which time all of His enemies are defeated, and the "**reign of the Father**," when Christ hands the kingdom over to the Father, in submission to Him. The reign of Christ is, I believe, the millennium, described in Revelation 20. The reign of the Father is the eternal kingdom of God, forever and ever, described in Revelation 21 and 22.

Are there those who deny the resurrection of the dead and thus also (by implication) the resurrection of our Lord? They cannot be those who look for the coming kingdom of God, for the last and final victory of Christ is His victory over death, a victory achieved by the resurrection of the unbelieving dead and the banishing of death to the lake of fire. The kingdom cannot come until all of our Lord's enemies are defeated, and His last and final enemy is death itself. The final stage of resurrection, the last fruit of our Lord's resurrection, is the resurrection of the unbelieving dead. When this final enemy is defeated, the kingdom of our Lord is secured, and it is at this time that our Lord subjects the final "thing" to God—Himself—by handing the kingdom over to the Father. The resurrection of the dead is not only a vital part of the gospel, it plays a crucial role in the establishment of the kingdom of God. Who would dare to deny it?

(Adapted from URL:<https://bible.org/seriespage/30-refresher-course-resurrection-dead-1-cor-15>)

Concluding Thoughts from the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary

Before and during the first century AD, there were instances of the miraculous restoration to life of a dead person (examples: 2 Kings 4:32-35; 13:21; Luke 7:11-17). But those people eventually died again. Jesus' resurrection, however, was different. He rose from the dead never to die again. Because He lives, we can be confident that we will live with Him in resurrected bodies, never again to face death (Romans 8:2). Paul's Corinthian readers had produced fruit and would continue to do so as long as they remained faithful. However, their faith was endangered by the choices some had made to abandon the doctrine of the resurrection—and so the danger is with us. We should join Paul therefore in seeing resurrection as victory over humanity's greatest enemy: death. On the glorious day of Christ's return, we will be changed “in the twinkling of an eye” (1 Corinthians 15:52). As we celebrate the resurrection of Christ, let us anticipate the promise of our own resurrection

Concluding Thoughts from the Echoes Commentary

Remember the Fundamentals - Paul emphatically stated in this letter to the Corinthian church and to all those who choose to follow Christ—don't ever allow anyone or anything to direct your attention away from the central, essential fundamentals of the Gospel. If you don't believe in the resurrection of Jesus, your faith is useless. Paul emphasized the reliability of the Resurrection accounts. The events are actual, historical occurrences. Some Corinthians—and many people today—attempt to classify these events as a myth. No, it is the truth; it's verified like any other historical information. When Jesus returned from the grave, He appeared before many witnesses, even 500 people at the same time.

Prophecy Fulfilled - Paul confirmed that after Jesus' horrific crucifixion, He was buried and rose again on the third day. All of the details of the crucifixion, burial, and resurrection validate the Old Testament scriptural prophecies about the Messiah. Further, to authenticate the Resurrection, Jesus appeared to over 500 people at once, as well as to His brother James, Peter, and the 11 disciples.

Firstfruits - Paul also emphasized that Jesus' resurrection made Him the firstfruits of others who will be resurrected—that's us! The firstfruits offering symbolized for the Jewish nation the beginning of harvest. This sacrifice represented an anticipation of God's blessing upon the entire season. Scripture promises, because God raised Jesus from the dead, therefore, Christians will in like manner die and also be raised. Christ's resurrection was the first of many more, believers who will receive a new body after death and live with God forever.

Jesus Made the Way - Paul compared two bodies. The believers' resurrected bodies will be glorious. When our bodies are resurrected, they will be perfect, without defects or any trace of deformities, and they will be like the one Jesus had.