

MAIN POINT

God's great victory at the resurrection of Jesus confirms the gospel, secures our eternal future, and is our only hope.

INTRODUCTION

What does it take to convince you something is real?

How do people decide if something is true or false? What types of things do you think they consider before deciding?

The world we live in is a scientific one. People place great value on truth that is discerned by exploration, experimentation, and hard evidence. Often this marginalizes people of faith, but the beautiful truth of the resurrection is that it is a historical reality. Paul was so firmly convinced of Christ's literal, physical resurrection from the dead that he said, "if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching and your faith is in vain" ([1 Corinthians 15:14](#)). And upon this foundation Paul lays out the most thorough explanation and defense of the resurrection we have in the Scriptures.

UNDERSTANDING

READ [1 CORINTHIANS 15:1-11](#).

What are the essential elements of the gospel?

In verses 3-4 Paul claimed Christ's actions were "according to the Scriptures"? Why is this fact so important?

How crucial is the cross and resurrection to the entire gospel story? Why?

Before Paul takes the time to defend the historical reality of the resurrection, he takes the time to remind the Corinthians what is at stake: the gospel. It has been said that [1 Corinthians 15:3-4](#) is one of the earliest statements of faith. These two verses contain the essence of the gospel. Christ died for sins. He was buried. He was alive on the third day. This is not a secondary message, but the very core of Christian faith, the only matter of first importance.

If there are eyewitnesses in a news story, are you more willing to accept a story as true? What if you were able to personally speak with the witnesses?

A witness is defined as "a person who sees an event." How are we witnesses to Christ's resurrection?

When Christ rose from the grave, He did not simply ascend to heaven, but stayed and spent time with people. The point Paul was making is that the resurrection really happened. It is more than a good story; it is a fact. Jesus appeared bodily to living witnesses. At the time of this letter, the Corinthians would have been able to meet someone who saw the resurrected

Jesus because most of them were still alive. Were the resurrection to be brought to the court of law, there would be a pool of 500 eyewitnesses for the defense to call upon to testify to the reality of Jesus' resurrection!

According to church history, ten of the original twelve apostles were martyred for their faith in Christ. How does this point to the truthfulness of the resurrection?

The most common argument against the literal, historical resurrection of Christ is that the disciples stole Jesus' body from the tomb. When we stop to consider how many the people who saw Jesus rise from the dead gave their lives for their faith in the resurrection of Christ, such a notion is absurd. People often die for things that are not true, but no one gives their life for something they know to be false. If the disciples had made up Jesus' resurrection, we would have seen many of recant their faith in the resurrection when they were threatened with execution for preaching the gospel.

READ [1 CORINTHIANS 15:12-19](#).

How does the resurrection confirm the truth of the gospel?

If the resurrection of the dead is not true, what impact does that have on our faith, forgiveness of sins, and the future of deceased believers?

Paul made clear that if Jesus wasn't raised from the dead, then we will not rise from the dead. The resurrection makes the gospel good news because through the death of Christ, Jesus forgives our sins, and through the resurrection, Jesus overcame the consequences of our sin. Paul said that the wages of sin is death ([Romans 6:23](#)), but through the resurrection, Jesus conquered sin and death and in so doing offers us eternal hope!

Read verse 19. How should people feel about Christians if the resurrection is not true? Does this verse explain how some today feel about Christians?

What does Paul mean when he suggests that without the resurrection we only have hope in this life? Why is faith in a Jesus who did not rise from the dead insufficient?

Read [Romans 1:4](#). What does the resurrection prove about Jesus' identity?

When Paul preached the gospel at the Areopagus, it was the resurrection that caused the Greek philosophers to stop listening to him (see [Acts 17:32](#)). Though they acknowledged the possible resurrection of the soul, the philosophers of the day denied any form of bodily resurrection. The society and worldview that surrounded the Corinthians on all sides scoffed at the idea of a bodily resurrection. However, the resurrection of Jesus is important because it verifies His identity as the Son of God. Believing that Jesus is only a good man and moral teacher offers us an example to follow in this life, but it does not offer us life in the next. Christ's resurrection offers hope in this life as well as the one to come.

What would you say to someone who said, "it doesn't matter what you believe in as long as you have faith"? How does Paul's teaching about the resurrection in [1 Corinthians 15](#) contradict such thinking?

APPLICATION

How is the historical, literal, physical death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus absolutely essential to our faith?

How does the resurrection of Christ give you eternal hope? How has it changed your outlook on life?

How might remembering that Christ's death and resurrection has secured our eternal future, give us confidence to live for Christ in the present? How might it give us confidence to share the gospel?

PRAYER

Offer a time for group members to pray aloud, thanking God for salvation through Jesus Christ, and for the truth of His resurrection. Close the group in prayer, thanking Him for the resurrection of Christ and asking Him to empower us through the resurrection of Jesus to live as His faithful witnesses during our time here on earth.

COMMENTARY

1 CORINTHIANS 15:1-19

15:3-4. Paul explained why it was important for the Corinthians to believe his teaching about the resurrection. He justified his insistence that they hold fast to the gospel, insisting that the resurrection was central to the gospel message. Why was this so important? Why was the resurrection a necessary element of the gospel?

First, Paul received and passed on this gospel. In rabbinic Judaism this terminology described the transmission of authoritative religious teachings. Paul told the Corinthians to maintain the gospel as he had given it to them because it was a sacred tradition, not a human tradition.

Second, he delivered this gospel teaching as a matter of first importance. In other words, nothing was more central or more important in Paul's conception of gospel than these teachings.

Paul summed up his gospel as having two main concerns: the death and the resurrection of Christ. Both of these took place according to the Scriptures. Paul repeated this phrase to emphasize the importance of the scriptural witness and to demonstrate that the resurrection's importance paralleled the centrality of Christ's death.

He spoke first of Christ's death, declaring, Christ died for our sins. Christ's substitutionary death on behalf of believers brought salvation to those who would otherwise have been lost. When Paul said that Christ's death was according to the Scriptures, he probably had in mind Isaiah's prediction that the son of David would suffer on behalf of the people of God ([Isaiah 53:1-12](#)).

Second, Paul referred to the resurrection. Christ was buried, but He was raised on the third day. Paul never said that Christ raised Himself. Instead, the apostle taught that God the Father raised Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit ([Romans 1:4](#); [Galatians 1:1](#)). The resurrection was also according to the Scriptures. Paul probably had in mind [Isaiah 53:10-12](#). The prophet explained that the Son of David would come back from the grave to bring great blessings to God's people. Paul also may have thought of [Psalm 16:10](#), a passage in which David recorded that God would not allow His Holy One to see decay. Jesus defended the idea of resurrection in the Old Testament by asserting that God was the God of the living ([Matthew 22:31-32](#)). By including both Christ's death and resurrection as essential elements of the gospel, Paul precluded those who denied the resurrection from claiming salvation in Christ.

15:5-8. Paul continued by adding a third element that expanded the second. Christ was not

simply raised from the dead. He also appeared; people saw and heard Him. Paul did not repeat the refrain “according to the Scriptures” here because no particular prophecy focused on appearances of the resurrected Son of David. But Paul did note that several people saw the resurrected Christ. These included Peter, the Twelve, more than five hundred of the brothers ...most of whom were still living, James, all the apostles, and Paul himself. Although Paul’s main idea was that all of these people bore witness to the resurrection of Christ, his list had at least three major concerns. Christ appeared to: (1) figures of central authority in the church (Peter, the Twelve, James, all the apostles); (2) large numbers of people (Twelve, five hundred, all the apostles); and (3) to Paul himself.

Paul declared that Christ had appeared to him on the road to Damascus last of all, as to one untimely born. The expression “last of all” probably indicates that Paul was the last person to see the resurrected Christ. Viewing the resurrected Savior was a requirement for apostleship ([Acts 1:21-22](#)). Yet, Paul admitted that his own situation had been extraordinary because Christ came to him in a miraculous manner after the ascension.

Thus, Paul saw himself as having been abnormally born. This expression is difficult to translate because it occurs only here in the New Testament. In an effort to express his humility, Paul compared himself to an untimely born child, indicating some degree of inferiority to those who had lived with Jesus during His earthly ministry.

15:9. In explaining why he spoke of himself in this way, Paul admitted to being the least of the apostles, not even deserving the title because he persecuted the church of God. This probably resonated strongly with his detractors. They most likely thought, “Obviously he is the least, that is why we favor Apollos and Cephas.”

15:10. But Paul went on to defend his apostolic authority by pointing to God’s choice of him. As Paul considered his background, he had no doubts that he had been called as a Christian and as Christ’s apostle (I am what I am) only by the grace of God. Paul taught elsewhere that the Christian life begins by grace and continues through God’s grace received by dependent faith. Here the apostle evaluated his own life in these terms. Not only had he initially believed because of God’s grace, but every good thing in his Christian life also came from the grace of God.

At this point, Paul concerned himself with one particular aspect of God’s grace in his life. Divine mercy had great effect, or result, on his service to the body of Christ. This is the same type of argument he used in 9:1-27 to defend his apostleship. The one who had once persecuted the church worked harder than all the other apostles. Paul assessed the situation honestly, not speaking proudly as if he had accomplished anything on his own. He reiterated that he did nothing in his own power. He performed only by the grace of God that was with him. Paul knew himself too well to take credit for the good he had done in Christ’s service. He knew that the only source that could produce these good works through him was the grace of God. Because he relied so strongly on God’s grace, he became one of the most effective apostles.

15:11. Paul closed this section by bringing his readers back to the main idea. The Corinthians must believe that Christ had been resurrected. On this all the apostles agreed—Christ’s resurrection was central to the gospel. All of the apostles continued to preach this message, and the Corinthians at one time had believed it as well. Paul hoped they would reaffirm their commitment to Christ’s resurrection.

15:12. Though it is uncertain what caused some Corinthian believers to deny the resurrection of the dead, Greeks viewed bodily death as final, with some saying the spirit survived disembodied. This view likely influenced the church at Corinth.

15:13-15. If Christ were not raised, then apostolic preaching of the resurrection was without foundation, the Corinthians' faith was void, and the apostles were false witnesses. "Faith" here refers to the content of the gospel message, and is synonymous with "system of beliefs."

15:16. A restatement, in reverse order, of the implications of the Corinthian skepticism regarding resurrection.

15:19. Christians should be pitied more than anyone if there is no resurrection, for in that case we have placed all our hopes in a falsehood. Christianity is fundamentally a resurrection faith.