

## 1 Corinthians 15a – Chapter Study

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#### 1. The Gospel vs. 1-8

**<sup>1</sup> Moreover, brethren, I declare to you the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received and in which you stand, <sup>2</sup> by which also you are saved, if you hold fast that word which I preached to you—unless you believed in vain.**

In a moment, we'll see the reason Paul starts here, with a quick survey of what the Gospel IS, is because the resurrection was under attack.

There were those in Corinth who were fiddling with belief in the rising of Jesus from the dead.

We know the resurrection was a point of stumbling for some in the Greek world because of what happened when Paul visited Athens.

We read about that in Acts 17.

He was invited to speak to the *mighty* Areopagus, the *center* of Greek philosophy.

They followed his presentation of the Gospel pretty well until he got to the resurrection.

But the idea of someone rising from the dead was beyond the pale for most of them and they called a halt to his sermon.

Corinth was a Greek city & filled with philosophical academies.

The resurrection was a part of the Gospel many found hard to swallow.

So *some* in the Church, whether or not they were genuinely saved we don't know, thought it would be a smart move to *downplay* the resurrection.

You know, if the resurrection is a stumbling block to people joining the movement, then just don't make such a big deal of it.

This downgrading of the resurrection led it being massaged & turned into something completely foreign to the Gospel.

Some said the resurrection was just *metaphorical*; that Jesus didn't *literally* rise from the dead but that His example & memory had taken shape in His followers.

Paul wrote to dispense with this silliness & remind the Corinthians that the resurrection is crucial; a central part of the Gospel, & without it, we're just fooling ourselves.

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He begins with a quick summary of the Gospel – the *Good News*.

It's the message Paul had brought to them when they first arrived - & they'd believed.

It was their faith in THAT Good News that had resulted in their being saved!

But then he issues a warning – mark it well!

When Paul wrote, they were saved *because* they were *abiding* in Faith in the Gospel.

If they wanted to stay saved – they must *continue to abide*.

**<sup>3</sup> For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received:**

Paul didn't make up the Gospel! He received it. It had been faithfully passed on to him from others, then made clear by the Lord Himself on the way to Damascus.

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If you go to the library, or do a search for books on the Apostle Paul on the internet, you'll find many of them that say Paul *altered* the original message of Jesus.

They claim Jesus merely attempted to reform the corrupt Judaism of His day but that Paul added stuff to make it appealing to the Gentile world.

That's absurd!

Paul acknowledged that the Gospel is an *offense* to the lost, a stumbling block over which the self-reliant fall.

And far from adding things to the message, Paul worked diligently to keep the Gospel pure & true to its roots. *That's what he's doing here!*

**<sup>3</sup> For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received:**

Okay – here's it is; here's the Gospel . . .

**that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures,**

Jesus' death atones for our sins – just as the prophetic word foretold.

**<sup>4</sup> and that He was buried,**

Making it clear that He didn't just swoon on the cross. He died!

**and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures,**

The resurrection means Jesus' death was sufficient to atone for our sins.

If He hadn't risen, there'd be no surety that he'd fully paid for all our sins.

The resurrection proves that all *guilt* has been justly dealt with.

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Since the resurrection was the point of the Gospel that was under attack, Paul gives the *evidence* for it.

**<sup>5</sup> and that He was seen by Cephas, [Peter] then by the 12.**

Twelve? Oh *look*, Paul goofs! This is obviously an error – which proves the Bible isn't inerrant, Ha!

When Jesus 1<sup>st</sup> appeared to them there weren't 12, there were only 10.

Judas had hanged himself & Thomas as gone.

Hold on – didn't Paul know that? Of course he did.

The testimony of the disciples was well-known; something every follower of Jesus had committed to memory.

Look at it again. He doesn't say – “He was seen by Cephas, then by 12” It's “the 12.”

This is a label or synonym for the original disciples; a label by the way, that became the common designation for them.

The Beatles continued to be referred to as *the Fab 4* even after they broke up & John Lennon was killed.

**<sup>6</sup> After that He was seen by over 500 brethren at once, of whom the greater part remain to the present, but some have fallen asleep. <sup>7</sup> After that He was seen by James, then by all the apostles. <sup>8</sup> Then last of all He was seen by me also, as by one born out of due time.**

Following the resurrection, Jesus appeared now & again over the next 40 days.

Sometimes it was to just one or 2 people; sometimes to a large crowd, as when He appeared to 500 who were gathered together.

The James of v. 7 is Jesus' brother, who became a believer during that 40 days after the resurrection.

Now this is interesting. We would expect Peter or one of the other original disciples to take the leadership of the Church, but it wasn't so.

A few years after James conversion, he became the de-facto leader of the Church in Jerusalem.

It's not difficult understanding how this came about when you realize the early church was modeled after the synagogue.

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And the *ruler* of the synagogue was most often a hereditary role.

When it was time to pick a new leader, they looked to the son or brother of the previous ruler. No doubt Peter was recognized as the primary leader in the first few years, but the leadership of the church in Jerusalem soon passed to Jesus' brother James.

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Now – notice that Paul in v. 7 also mentions the “apostles.”

Since he's already referred to the original disciples in v. 5, these are a different group.

We should probably understand the word “apostles” here from its context.

Paul means *any believer* who actually **SAW** the resurrected Jesus & as a result became the core, the foundation of the church.

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It was well after the ascension of Christ back into heaven that Paul was converted.

Several years later Christ appeared to him as he was on the way to Damascus to carry on persecution of Jesus' followers there.

Paul likens his vision of Christ & subsequent conversion to a long overdue pregnancy.

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The reason Paul gives this list of eye-witnesses of the resurrection is because it's by evidence that we establish facts.

And in a court of law, eye-witness testimony is crucial.

Paul's marshaled 6 groups of eye-witnesses here – all giving the same testimony; Jesus rose from the dead.

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The 6<sup>th</sup> witness he mentioned was himself. So he elaborates a bit, showing how his past did not commend him to be an eye-witness of the resurrection . . .

## 2. Paul's testimony vs. 9-11

**<sup>9</sup> For I am the least of the apostles, who am not worthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God.**

Paul did not begin as a believer! Far from it – he was on a mission to *wipe out* Jesus' followers when he himself was confronted with the truth of their message.

This is probably why Paul so often pointed to the grace of God in his writings – because he knew how desperately he *needed* it, and how abundant God's grace toward him had been – in that it was in the midst of his persecuting believer that God saved him.

In stead of much deserved wrath, God showed him mercy.

**<sup>10</sup> But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward 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.***

The grace of God became the motivating core of Paul's life.

He may have been *late* in becoming an apostle, but he'd made up for it by pouring out his life in service of God.

**<sup>11</sup> Therefore, whether *it was I or they*, so we preach and so you believed.**

He brings it back to the beginning: The Gospel that save is grace of God, received by faith in Who Jesus is and what He has done.

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Now Paul focuses directly on the resurrection, the one aspect of the Gospel that was being assailed there in Corinth.

## 3. The resurrection vs. 12-58

### a. our hope vs. 12-19

**<sup>12</sup> Now if Christ is preached that He has been raised from the dead,**

Which is exactly what all the previous verses of ch. 15 so far have made crystal!

**how do some among you say that there is no resurrection of the dead?**

See? Some in the church were saying *resurrection is impossible*.

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They weren't directly attacking the resurrection of Jesus so much as saying that resurrection *itself* isn't possible.

Therefore, by extension, Jesus didn't rise.

The reason they denied the resurrection was because of their acceptance of Greek *science* which was all bound up in *philosophy*.

You see, philosophy & science were all one & the same until the European Enlightenment of the 18<sup>th</sup> Century.

Then an artificial distinction was made between philosophy, faith, & science.

When Paul penned this, Greek philosophy & science were all one & the same.

And the Greeks divided reality into 2 parts – *the spiritual & the physical*.

The *spiritual*, as the realm of the gods, was *good*.

The *material/physical* realm of nature was *corrupt & evil*.

Furthermore, these 2 realms were *unalterably* either good or evil.

The spiritual could not be made evil, nor the material made good.

This had all kinds of ramifications for how people viewed religion & morality.

One of the biggest obstacles it presented for believers as they shared the Gospel was in how it effected belief in the resurrection.

If the body, as a material thing, is corrupt, then the *last thing* Jesus, as a holy spirit, would want to do is raise it – according to Greek thought.

Of course, for believers, whose worldview is *Biblical* – the material realm *isn't* evil.

The creation was originally good. It's sin that's brought evil & corruption.

The cross provides the means for the *redemption* of creation.

And the resurrection of Christ from the dead *proves* the redemption is real & has power to undo the effects of the Fall & curse.

But there were some in the church at Corinth who reasoned that if the resurrection was hard for potential converts to swallow, why not just remove it?

Make it *allegorical* rather than literal.

Say, "Jesus didn't literally rise from the dead – His spirit just appeared, like a ghost."

Which is silly because Jesus purposely nailed that thought when He asked the startled disciples for something to eat.

Today, there are people in Church, in seminaries, Bible colleges & pulpits, who know the miraculous is a sticking point for some people, so they remove it from the Bible.

They *explain miracles away* by saying they're a "pre-scientific explanation of phenomena."

Or they're *myths* meant to communicate a moral message but aren't to be taken literally.

The problem is, in making it easier for people to believe – they cut the power of the message to save.

It isn't bare belief that saves – it's belief in what's true that brings salvation.

Listen, if the God of the Bible is real, then miracles are not only *possible*, they're *probable*.

And if Jesus didn't *literally* rise from the dead, then there's no basis for our faith in Him – as Paul makes clear . . .

**<sup>13</sup> But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ is not risen. <sup>14</sup> And if Christ is not risen, then our preaching is empty and your faith is also empty. <sup>15</sup> Yes, and we are found false witnesses of God, because we have testified of God that He raised up Christ, whom He did not raise up—if in fact the dead do not rise. <sup>16</sup> For if the dead do not rise, then Christ is not risen. <sup>17</sup> And if Christ is not risen, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins!**

Listen – the resurrection is a non-negotiable!

If Jesus didn't rise from the dead – we're still in our sins & it's all been a pitiful waste of time going through all this.

**18 Then also those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. 19 If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most pitiable.**

Because it's all been a sick joke!

If there's no resurrection awaiting us, if this life is all we have, & we've lived a deferred life, hoping for glory, then we've been wasting our time.

We could have been partying & going for all the gusto – because there's no judgment, no heaven, no hell.

**b. sure vs. 20-28**

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

Firstfruits anticipate a greater harvest.

Our resurrection will follow the same pattern as His.

There was no body left in the tomb – because the resurrection transformed Jesus mortal body into an immortal one. That's the change *we* await.

**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.**

It's from this that we glean what is known as the “Federal Headship of Adam & Christ.”

There are 2 great representatives for the human race.

The first is *Adam*, from whom we all descend *physically*.

The second is Jesus, in whom we can all identify *spiritually*.

When Adam made the fateful choice to eat of the forbidden tree, not only did he die spiritually, but he passed on spiritual death to all his progeny.

Spiritual death became like a genetic flaw.

Faith in Christ is the “gene therapy” that reverses the flaw & restores life.

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

Jesus was the first to be resurrected.

The next resurrection occurs at the Rapture of the church.

**24 Then comes the end, when He delivers the kingdom to God the Father, when He puts an end to all rule and all authority and power. 25 For He must reign till He has put all enemies under His feet. 26 The last enemy that will be destroyed is death. 27 For “He has put all things under His feet.” But when He says “all things are put under Him,” it is evident that He who put all things under Him is excepted.**

As the Risen Lord who conquered sin & death, Jesus will return to establish the Kingdom of God on Earth.

Once that's been accomplished & the Name, Plan, & People of God have been vindicated, then the creation as we know it will be dissolved & death will itself die.

When that finally happens, all of creation will witness the pre-eminence of Christ.

**28 Now when all things are made subject to Him, then the Son Himself will also be subject to Him who put all things under Him, that God may be all in all.**

What Paul says here is profound and could occupy our attention for hours.

In short what he's saying is this . . .

When all is said & done, Christ will reign over all creation.

But Christ, as the Son, will be subject to the Father.

But Jesus IS God – so what we'll witness is God subject to God!

The epitome of power & authority → *in* submission.

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So, Paul has established the essential necessity & meaning of the resurrection to the Gospel.

Now he points out some logical inconsistencies on the part of others as it relates to the resurrection.

Remember, the reason the resurrection was being *downplayed* was because of the supposed stumbling block it presented to potential converts.

Paul points to some things being done by unbelievers that in fact ought to have paved the way for the good news of the resurrection.

**c. think! Vs. 29-34**

**<sup>29</sup> Otherwise, what will they do who are baptized for the dead, if the dead do not rise at all? Why then are they baptized for the dead?**

Paul refers here to a practice we know nothing about.

There's just no record that comes down to us of what this was about.

Now – if it had been something practiced in & by the early church, the Fathers would have mentioned it.

Since there's not a whisper of it in any of their writings, we conclude this wasn't a practice of the church.

And indeed, Paul points to it as something *others* did – not Christians.

**What will they do who are baptized for the dead, if the dead do not rise at all? Why then are they baptized for the dead?**

The use of water in pagan rituals was common.

They used all kinds of washings & ablutions as a way to expunge moral corruption.

So the thought is that there were groups there in Corinth that were practicing a kind of surrogate purifying for dead family & friends.

Their souls couldn't cross over to the Elysian Fields until they'd paid for their sins.

The living could assist the passage of their deceased loved ones by going through these rites of ablution – these baptisms for the dead.

Paul pointed out the logical inconsistency in the Greek mind that if the material realm is evil & cannot affect the spiritual, then this practice is pointless!

But if people engage it with the hope that they are affecting the afterlife, then that's an opening the doctrine of the resurrection can speak powerfully to.

**<sup>30</sup> And why do we stand in jeopardy every hour?**

If the resurrection isn't true, why did Paul & other faithful believers cling to it when it was one of the primary causes of opposition & persecution?

**<sup>31</sup> I affirm, by the boasting in you which I have in Christ Jesus our Lord, I die daily.**

In Galatians 2:20 Paul writes . . .

**I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the *life* which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.**

The WHOLE REASON Paul could die to self was because he knew the best life he could have was not his own, but the resurrected Christ living in & through Him.

So, he did as Jesus called His followers to do – die daily, so that Jesus could take up residence in him.

The appeal of many reality shows is the near universal longing people have for *another* life.

They want to be someone else.

They want to be the survivor, explorer, biggest loser, smartest, most creative, whatever.

That's the message of the Gospel – You can be someone else!

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You can become the person you were created to be!

Die to the petty, vain, corrupt, shameful thing sin has made you & let the greatest, wisest, most beautiful person in all of existence indwell you.

**<sup>32</sup> If, in the manner of men, I have fought with beasts at Ephesus, what advantage is it to me?**

Paul challenges the resurrection nay-sayers: Why would he put himself in constant peril of death if there's no resurrection?

What does he possibly hope to gain?

Paul didn't just preach the resurrection, he was counting on it with every ounce of his being.

**If the dead do not rise, "Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die!"**

Hey – if this life is all there is – go for the gusto.

Paul quotes both Ecclesiastes & Isaiah here.

Those passages sum up the logical conclusion to rejecting the afterlife.

If this life is all there is & there's no judgment to be faced after death – you might as well go wild.

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Having quoted the philosophy of the materialists who said exactly that – "*Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die!*" Paul warns his readers about the danger of spending **a lot of time** with people who hold thoughts contrary to Truth.

**<sup>33</sup> Do not be deceived: "Evil company corrupts good habits."**

While this looks like a quote from the OT, it's actually from the play *Thais* by Menander.

Truth is truth, even when spoken by a pagan & Paul had no problem quoting it.

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Paul is not saying believers must sever all contact with the lost.

He's saying we must be careful about the influence the world is having on us.

If you spend a lot of time around the lost, they're going to influence you.

So it's best to be on guard & be careful the direction influence is **from** you toward them, not the other way round.

**<sup>34</sup> Awake to righteousness, and do not sin; for some do not have the knowledge of God. I speak this to your shame.**

This is a challenge to those in the church who were fiddling with the doctrine of the resurrection.

His point is – wake up and realize what was happening.

Fiddling with such a central truth of the faith is a good sign someone's not saved.

That the issue had become such a point of controversy was an indication the leadership at Corinth had not dealt with it sooner.

If Mark stands up one day and begins teaching that God is an egg, we're going to deal with him real quick.

That teaching is just going to get no traction.

But if in a year from now *Christianity Today* magazine prints an article highlighting the new GodEgg movement sweeping the churches of SoCal, what does that say about the leadership of the church?

Denying the resurrection was the "God is an Egg" issue of that day & Paul calls the church at Corinth to task for letting it get so huge.