

## **Men's End Time Study**

### **Session 2 - I Corinthians 15**

As mentioned many times before, my subtitle for the book of I Corinthians is: "You're Doing It Wrong". The Corinthian church was misguided in many areas of their faith. The letter Paul wrote was meant to correct their many wrong beliefs and practices. In Chapter 15 Paul takes up their wrong belief concerning the resurrection of Christ and the subsequent resurrection of all believers upon His return. Some of those in the Corinthian church were denying the future resurrection of the saints and some were going so far as to deny the very resurrection of Jesus Christ Himself. This chapter deals with the reality of the resurrection of both Christ and His followers but also gives us some information on just when this will happen and a glimpse of what this resurrection will be like. Unlike our study in Matthew 24 that looked at the end times themselves, I Corinthians 15 looks not at the end times but the final day, the day of the Lord's return, and what it will mean for believers. Like all aspects of the end times, knowing these truths will give a believer hope despite the circumstances he faces.

#### **I. The reality of the resurrection of Christ.**

##### **A. [Read I Corinthians 15:1-11]**

1. Salvation comes from believing in the truth found in God's Word. The most important thing to believe is that Jesus Christ died for the sins of mankind and then He was raised from the dead.

2. If the Corinthians received the truth of the gospel then they are saved. However, if the faith they expressed was empty and worthless, i.e. faith built upon something other than God's truth then they were not truly saved. **[Read John 1:12]**

Q: What did Paul consider to be of the first importance when giving his gospel to the Corinthian church? (*vv. 3-4 - Christ died according to Scriptures, was buried and raised from the dead according to Scripture.*)

Q: Why do you think Paul would consider such basic things as essential to one's salvation? (*This is the cornerstone of what a person must believe in order to be saved.*)

##### **[Romans 10:9-10]**

B. The thing the Corinthians need is proof. Without proof it's one person's word against another.

Q: Is there any proof of Christ's resurrection? (*vv. 5-7 - after Jesus' death on the cross, He appeared to Peter and the other disciples, over 500 witnesses on one occasion - many of whom are still alive to verify this claim, and James, the Lord's half-brother, and then Paul himself*)

1. There were probably some of the 500 that were known to the Corinthians personally. The reference to James is not to one of the two original disciples of that name but rather the Lord's half-brother.

2. At any rate, it doesn't matter who preached the resurrection of Jesus Christ to them, they believed it and were saved. (v.11)

#### **II. The validity of the resurrection of the dead.**

This section is Paul's major proposition in this chapter. It is the hinge that holds everything else in place. Some at Corinth had argued that there was no resurrection of the dead. Paul's argument is that such a belief is absolutely contrary to the proclamation that Christ Himself had been raised. These beliefs were mutually exclusive and so only one group could be right.

**[Read I Corinthians 15:12-19]**

A. There are two grammatical points that need to be made about this passage.

1. There are a series of conditional clauses (if...) The condition in each one is an assumed fact. Example: v.12 - *"If it is preached [as it is] that Christ has been raised..."* There is no doubt in Paul's mind that any of these conditions could be false. It's purely stylistic since he is laying out a case for the Corinthian believers.

2. The other grammatical observation of importance is the use of the perfect tense in every instance where Paul is discussing Christ's resurrection. There are seven instances of this same verb in the same perfect tense in our passage (vv. 4,12, 13, 14, 16, 17, 20) Each of these is translated "He has been raised" or "He was raised". The perfect tense represents a completed state or condition from the standpoint of the present time. The present state of the event is a result of the completed past action. In other words, the resurrection of Christ is a completed action. His death and burial and return to life happened and were completed in past time but now that resurrection of Christ has implications for us in the present, mainly that we will be resurrected from the dead, too.

3. The way Paul presents his arguments is that suppose Christ did not rise from the dead.

Q: What are Paul's conclusions if Christ didn't rise from the dead? (vv. 13-19 - *Christ wasn't resurrected, preaching that He was is meaningless, their faith is meaningless and still in their sins, his own testimony about Christ is false, the dead are truly lost and most to be pitied among mankind.*)

Q: Why does Paul say that if we hope in Christ only for this life we are to be most pitied of all men? (v. 19 - *We have denied ourselves the pleasures of this world for nothing*)

Here's a better reading for v.19 - *"If all our hopes in Christ are confined to this life..."* - perfect periphrastic construction - the "if...then" construction is not a conditional phrase but rather a comparison. Christ gives us hope not only for this life but in the life to come.

**III. Christ is the guarantee of the resurrection from the dead.**

A. **[Read I Corinthians 15:20-28]**

1. If Christ has actually been raised from the dead, then the Corinthians need to also believe the sequel - the resurrection of believers at some point.

a. Christ is called the "first fruits" (v. 20) - The first fruits are an illustration from the Old Testament. The first fruits was the first sheaf of the harvest offered to the Lord each year (Leviticus 23:10-11, 17, 20). It was offered prior to the main harvest and it was given in anticipation and assurance that the rest of the harvest was coming.

b. So the resurrection is with Christ. He preceded His people in His bodily resurrection and He is also the guarantee of their resurrection at His second coming.

2. Then Paul begins the contrast between Adam, the first man and Christ, the resurrection and life. In Adam came death. In Christ comes life - even after physical death. In Adam all die. In Christ all in the faith will be made alive again.

Q: What is the sequence or order to the resurrection? (v. 23 - *Jesus then those who belong to Christ when He returns. There is a stress in the Greek on each in his own order. Christ first then believers later.*)

Q: According to Paul, what will happen at “the end”? (v.24 - *Christ delivers the kingdom to the Father after Christ has abolished all rule and authority other than His own.*)

The kingdom of God are those citizens of God’s kingdom, those who received God’s grace in this life by putting their trust in Jesus Christ as the payment for their sins and made Him the Lord of their lives. There will be no other powers or authorities to contend with God at that time so we will be given to God as those with no other loyalties or loves but Christ.

Now and the only place in this passage that discusses end times timing order is vv. 23-28. This portion discusses the millennial kingdom of Christ. The millennial kingdom is a time of Christ’s rule on earth whereby He restores or rejuvenates creation and subjugates everything to Himself before the ultimate destruction of the heavens and the earth.

#### **[Romans 8:18-25]**

#### **[Revelation 20:4-6]**

In v.28 we are told that Christ, God the Son, will in some way will be subjected to the Father when He turns over the restored Creation to the Father, who is the administrative head of the Trinity. Christ has brought the world from sin and disorder back to order by His power, who died and was raised in order to do the will of the Father and hand it all over to Him so that God will be recognized as the sovereign over all. This does not note any inferiority of the Son to the Father but merely that His work in the millennial kingdom will be completed so that the Father can then bring about a new heaven and earth. Once all the prophecies are completed, there is no longer any need for the old world any longer. God is free to bring in the new heaven and earth.

### **IV. Implications of denying the resurrection of the dead.**

#### **A. [Read I Corinthians 15:29-34]**

1. Paul is returning to his original thought of the resurrection of the dead and how important it is to believe that the faithful dead are to be raised.

a. [v.29] - This is a huge stumbling block for many. One commentary I read gave thirteen different ideas of how to interpret this verse and another gave eight. This is the ONLY place in the Bible that the notion of baptizing someone living in the place of someone who has died is brought up. Let me break it down for you into what I find as the most likely interpretation.

1) Remember the subtitle of the book of I Corinthians: “You’re doing it wrong”. This was some sort of practice that seems to have sprung up in Corinth only. Paul and no one else ever mentions this practice to any other church.

2) From what we see, it appears that the Corinthians believers are baptizing living believers in the place of Christians who had died before having the opportunity to be baptized. This was a superstition on their part feeling that this was needed in order to ensure the dead Christian’s resurrection from the dead when Christ returned.

3) Remember the point Paul is trying to make concerning the reality of the resurrection. He is using their superstition of baptizing someone for a dead believer, without approving of the custom or ritual, to fortify his argument of the faithful being raised upon Jesus’

return. Let me repeat this: Paul is not approving or commending or recommending the practice. He's merely pointing to something the Corinthians are already doing and asking them to examine why they do it - because they want to ensure their beloved, faithful dead are raised with Christ. Even in their superstition, they are believing in a resurrection.

4) On a historical note, this practice was continued but only in heretical sects after the Corinthians. The Marcionites practiced baptizing others for the dead. Today, the Mormon church does this but they do it in order to somehow magically transfer a person's soul to Mormonism after they have died. The thought is the same though. You've got family members paying to be re-baptized so that they can have their dead loved one who never joined the Mormon church be safe in the afterlife - or so they teach heretically.

5) On a Biblical note, in the New Testament we only see believers baptized, never infants and never people getting baptized in place of other people. It is always seen as the "initiation" rite into the faith and is purely symbolic, not granting any grace. It is the outward sign of the inward change that happened in the past already when the person received God's grace and was born-again. It is the new believer's way to publicly proclaim that he or she now identifies with Jesus Christ as His follower and He is the new believer's Lord. It is an act of obedience to our Lord after we surrender our lives to Him.

b. Another reason to believe that the dead will be raised is that suffering and hardship in this life are meaningless and useless. If there is no resurrection of the faithful dead, then why not live to satisfy your fleshly desires. (v.32)

c. Paul turns to quote Greek literature in v.33. This is a line from Menander's comedy entitled, "Thais". Paul sees it as relevant to the Corinthian church's situation in that the bad company of the false teacher pushing the lie that there is no resurrection is actually corrupting the witness of the church. The teaching is a threat to the testimony of the church.

d. Lastly, Paul tells the Corinthians to stop sinning by denying the resurrection. The reason for the denial of the resurrection was that the Corinthians could then live as they pleased - loosely and in sin and shame. Why bother with how I live if I'm not coming back from the dead. It's going back to v.32.

## **V. The resurrection body: its nature and the big change**

A. **[Read I Corinthians 15:35]** Verse 35 has two questions in it that were hypothetically being asked by the Corinthians.

Q: What are the two questions posed by Paul in v.35? (*First, How are the dead raised? Second, With what kind of body do they come? These questions posed by human logic and philosophy rather than actual questions of faith. Paul is going to answer the last question first.*)

### **[Read I Corinthians 15:36-49]**

1. What is the nature of the resurrected body? What is the body like that returns from the dead?

Q: According to Paul, what needs to happen before does something sown have to do before it can come to life? (v.36 - it must die - **[John 12:24-26]**)

a. There are differences between the seed and the mature plant that springs up from the seed.

b. Paul's next analogy deals with different sort of bodies (flesh) from differing animals.

What Paul is saying here is that there are different sorts of bodies for living in differing sorts of environments.

c. There are also different sorts of heavenly bodies that differ from one another in size and brilliance. What Paul is saying is that God can take similar physical material and organize it differently for His purposes.

d. Then Paul gets to the actual application of the physical human body and the resurrected spiritual body.

Q: What are the ways that the human body is sown? (*vv. 42-49 - perishable, dishonor, weakness, natural, sown first, earthy - relates to the physical earth, born in image of the earthy*)

Q: What are the ways that the believer's body will be raised? (*vv. 42-49 - imperishable, glory, power, spiritual body, not sown first, heavenly, born in the image of the heavenly*)

Q: According to v.47 why does a person need to be born again in order to go to heaven? (They must have a spiritual body which is able to relate to the spiritual world because God is spirit.)

**[Read John 3:3-8, John 4:24]** - Jesus explained that a living spirit, one who is born from above is critical to having a relationship with God.

e. Paul is saying that the natural life came first and then the spiritual life was added to us later, as we were saved. We came from Adam who was created by God by fashioning dust from the ground. The last "Adam" who is Christ, was different. He was spirit first and then came from heaven into a physical body (the incarnation). Not only did Christ begin as spirit, He then was able to give us life after He died on the cross and rose from the dead. His life is eternal.

**[Read I John 3:2]** - There is a change that will take place in our bodies. We don't know the full extent of it yet but we do know it is going to be miraculous and like Jesus, the first fruits.

**[Philippians 3:20-21]** - Our true citizenship is in heaven and part of what it means to be a citizen of heaven is to have a new body that is transformed by to be like Christ's post-resurrection body.

**[Read Luke 24:36-43]** - This is but one story of the glorified or resurrected Jesus appearing after His crucifixion. Notice, He had flesh but He could also just appear places. He also could eat. His hands and side still showed the scars of His death on the cross. We don't know the full nature of the resurrected body but we do know that it is eternal- immortal in that it will never die or wear out.

There is a test every believer has to overcome at some point in their lives that deals with death. Believers have a head knowledge that they will be resurrected after their death to live with Jesus forever but when severe illness or injury strikes and they are faced with actual death, they have to allow that head knowledge to become faith in Christ so that they can experience the peace that surpasses understanding. Those who overcome this test by deciding that they too will be resurrected and this being a heart felt belief, they gain peace. Whether they die shortly after this realization or go on to live a long life afterwards, it's the experience of passing through the process of making the knowledge faith that allows God's peace to manifest itself in a life. (It is important to note that this is just one example of this. The Lord is always engineering our lives in ways that bring us to these points of decision whereby we take a piece of knowledge that we have gained

from God and through the test show faith in what God promises and turn that into peace and confidence. God may have to put the person through this test many times to get them to the place where they finally surrender their fleshly ways of dealing with things in order for them to finally trust that His promises are real but once a person goes through and passes this test, they will forever be changed in that area of their lives and able to experience the peace God desires for them to possess.)

2. The next and last subject of this chapter is how are the dead raised? [I  
**Corinthians 15:50-58]**

The mortal body which is perishable cannot inherit that which is imperishable and eternal. The unsaved cannot be in heaven at all and the saved must have their bodies changed in order to exist there.

- a. Some believers will sleep when Christ returns. Sleep was a figure of speech meaning dead. In other words, some believers will not be alive when Christ returns.
- b. Yet, there will be some believers who are alive when Christ returns.
- c. The key is that it doesn't matter whether you are asleep in the Lord or awake (living or dead) when Jesus comes back, when He comes back all believers will be changed.
- d. Notice that the trumpet sounds again. The trumpet sounding in this manner is a reference to Christ's return. Just like we saw last week in Matthew 24.

Q: How long will the process of transformation from the mortal to the immortal take? (v. 52 - *It won't take any time. The transformation from natural to spiritual will be instantaneous. We will go from one form (natural, mortal, perishable) to another form (spiritual, immortal, imperishable) in the blink of an eye.*)

e. When this happens, Paul quotes Hosea 13:14. (vv. 54-55) There is no victory for death and there is no sting of death as the resurrection proves. We join Christ in His victory over death once and for all. He was the first fruits, now we are the rest of the harvest. (This again goes back to Jesus' words in Matthew 24:31 when He speaks of sending out His angels to harvest the souls the redeemed.)

Q: What is sin? (v.56 - *Sin is rebellion against God. It is missing the mark He created us to hit. It is living independent of God. God is holy and has no sin and cannot sin or entice anyone else to sin. Thus sin separates us from God. Only the blood of Jesus shed for us on the cross has the power to save us from the power of sin.*)

f. vv.56-7 - If it weren't for sin, death wouldn't have any sting at all. We'd all be living with Jesus forever. The fact that sin is in the world and we have participated in that rebellion against God has led to death in the first place. It is the law of God with its stringent moral demands that strengthens the power of sin by showing us how sinful we truly are, and thus condemns us. Yet, we give thanks to God for the final victory over sin and death through Jesus Christ. Jesus rose from the dead. He is coming again and when He does, we will be given resurrection bodies, just like His.

Being born again begins when a person comes to understand that they have sinned against a holy and just God and are separated from Him by their own sin. They are both a sinner by nature and by choice. However, when one trusts in the death of Jesus Christ on the cross as payment for their sins, instead of attempting to wipe ones sins out oneself, and believes in His resurrection

from the dead then one can receive God's grace. It's a matter of asking God for this forgiveness and then inviting Jesus to be one's Lord for the rest of their lives. In this an eternal and wondrous exchange happens. The sinful nature is put to death and the righteous, eternal nature of Christ is given to the person. The basis is Christ's work on the cross not our own sincerity or personal "good" works.

g. Lastly, Paul warns the Corinthians to live in light of these truths rather than the heresy that they have allowed to flow through their church body. The Lord will bring His reward with Him.

Here's a brief list of the clear teachings from I Corinthians 15:

1) The death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ is the essential teaching of the gospel message and belief in this is the means to salvation.

2) The resurrection did actually, literally take place. Jesus Christ's resurrection provides the pattern of resurrection that all believers will someday follow. Just as Christ rose from the dead first, His children will rise to eternal life when Jesus returns.

3) When Christ returns, in the twinkling of an eye, believers will be transformed and given a new eternal body to participate in the eternal spiritual life that follows this one.

4) Sin, death, and that law will not be present in eternity.

Q: Any questions, comments, rebukes or rebuttals?