

1 Corinthians Chapter 15

NKJV Notes by Pastor Bob Caldwell

The Risen Christ, Faith's Reality

v. 1 Moreover - Having concluded his teaching on the correct way to share in the gifts of the Holy Spirit, Paul now transitions into clearing up questions about the resurrection.

The Gospel - Gospel means "good news" and is used in scripture in reference to the good news concerning Jesus, the Messiah.

I Preached to you - Paul established this church during his second missionary journey (Acts 18:1-17). He reminds them of this because he is going to restate in this chapter the key truths he had left them, which they diverted from.

You Stand - These fundamental truths were the basis of their acceptable position before God, not the divisive and peripheral issues that had come to dominate their spiritual lives.

v. 2 Believed in Vain - Paul has just declared that it is faith in the gospel message that saves a person from the eternal judgment of God upon sin. He now reminds them that they must maintain this faith. If they set aside what they initially believed, then they would lose the salvation they had hoped for.

v. 3 I also Received - Paul wants to make clear that the message of the gospel did not originate with man, but with God. It is because it is from God that it should not even be a consideration of the Corinthians to add or take away from the gospel.

Died for our Sins - The death of Jesus was not the result of a good man dying as a martyr. It was God's purpose that He would send His sinless Son to pay the death penalty for the sins of all of humanity.

According to the Scriptures - The truth of the gospel message is rooted in the prophetic scriptures (Ps. 22; Is. 53; Dan. 9:26; Zech. 12: 10).

v. 4 He was Buried - This is stated to leave no doubt that Jesus was literally and physically dead. Otherwise the resurrection would also not be literal.

Rose Again - The resurrection is shown here to have been a literal historical event as foretold in scripture. Peter in Acts 2:24-32 gives a clear example of the Old Testament prophetic declarations pertaining to the resurrection.

v. 5 Seen by Cephas - Paul begins to recount for his readers the reliable witnesses who were able to attest to the literal resurrection of Jesus. He begins with the apostle Peter who was also referred to as Cephas.

Of the Twelve - This was a term used for the company of the twelve men chosen to be the apostles. This term continued to be used even though Judas had fallen from that position and was not a part of these resurrection encounters.

v. 6 Five Hundred - There is no other record of this event except here. It may be that this refers to an encounter Jesus promised to have with His followers in Galilee after the resurrection (Mt. 28: 10).

Remain - Paul points out that the majority of these eyewitnesses were still alive and could be independently questioned.

Fallen Asleep - This refers to the few witnesses that had died. This term is used because it conveys the appearance of the physical body at death. However, the scriptures make clear that to be absent from the body is to be present with Lord (2 Cor. 5:8).

v. 7 James - This encounter with James is not recorded in the gospels. This particular James was the half brother of Jesus, having been born of both Joseph and Mary. He is also the author of the New Testament book of James. He was also a leader in Jerusalem in the early days of the church (Gal. 1: 19).

All the Apostles - This may refer to the gathering of the apostles recorded in John 21:14.

v. 8 Last of All - Paul does not make reference to all of the resurrection encounters, but the ones he does refer to seem to be in chronological order, with Paul himself being the last.

Seen of me - This would have been on the Damascus Road (Acts 9:3-6).

Born out of Due Time - The word used here "Ek Truma" (Gk.) is found nowhere else in the New Testament. Its use in Greek literature, however, referred to an abortion. The thought here seems to be that Paul was born of God at the wrong time, many years after the resurrection. However, in God's grace Jesus literally appeared to Paul at his conversion.

v. 9 Least of the Apostles - This was a profoundly deep feeling Paul carried throughout his life because he had brought about much suffering and persecution upon the object of God's redemptive love, the Bride of Christ. However, this sense of unworthiness did not in any way disqualify him from being a bold witness for Jesus Christ.

v. 10 By the Grace of God - Paul reveals here how he was able to leave his guilt and remorse behind him and become an effective servant of God. It was solely the undeserved favor of God that far exceeded the depths of his sin.

I Am - Paul's life and actions were the result of grace.

Not in Vain - Paul alludes to the fact that just because God has given grace it does not necessarily follow that the provisions of grace will be automatically experienced. The believer must respond and yield to that grace so that it may have its effect upon our lives. Paul explains this when he declares that he labored more abundantly than any other, but that his labors were infused with the grace of God.

v. 11 I or they - After stating the abundance of God's grace, Paul is quick to add it is of no consequence who got credit for the faith of the Corinthians. Paul did not care about how they came to faith, he only cared that they believed.

The Risen Christ, Our Hope

v. 12 There is no Resurrection - It seems that many of these believers had been strongly influenced by contemporary Greek philosophy, which maintained that the resurrection was impossible.

v. 13 Christ is not Risen - Paul begins to answer their doubt about the potential of their future resurrection by reminding them of the resurrection of Jesus. The fact that Christ had been resurrected was clearly demonstrated by the multitude of witnesses Paul already referred to in v. 4-9.

v. 14 Our Preaching is in Vain - Paul points out that without the historical and literal resurrection no one should expect any literal fulfillment of the promised benefits of the gospel that had been preached.

v. 15 False Witnesses - Paul points out that if there is no literal resurrection, then he is himself a liar and he and all other gospel messengers should be seen as nothing more than deceivers.

v. 17 Still in your Sins - The basis for the forgiveness of sin in Christ is that He became God's accepted substitute for the penalty of sin. By taking the death penalty for sin upon Himself, Christ proved His authority over death by personally conquering it at His resurrection.

v. 19 Have Perished - Paul forces these Corinthians who had doubts about the resurrection to face the logical conclusions of their doubts. If a believer in Jesus Christ had believed a lie about the resurrection of Christ, then the result of sin's debt upon them would doom them for all eternity. At death, their souls would be separated from God and their bodies left in a perished condition, never to be resurrected.

This Life Only - Paul is more honest than many Christians who believe that even if there is no afterlife Christianity is still of great personal benefit. However, Paul is more committed to truth than that. He saw it as a terrible personal deception to follow something that was based on falsehood even if it generated certain positive feelings or actions.

Most Pitiable - Paul was saddened at the idea of people believing a lie and basing their life and hopes on something false. It was Paul's genuine concern for ultimate truth that allowed him to proclaim its superiority over all other belief systems. Paul confidently believed the gospel, but he admits that if he didn't, then Christianity would have been a waste of his life.

The Last Enemy Destroyed

v. 20 Firstfruits - "Aparche" (Gk.) This is from the word "arche" which means beginning. It is rooted in Old Testament usage to refer to the offerings given to God that were the first part of the harvest. (Ex. 25:2-3; Num. 5:9, 18:8; Lev. 23:10-14) This word also referred to anything that represented what was first of a larger whole that would follow. Furthermore, it conveyed the idea of what was brought before God was consecrated to Him. Here Jesus is seen as the first one of many to be resurrected, who would never die, and that were consecrated to God.

v. 21 By Man Came Death - This refers to Adam. Through Adam's sin, death entered into the human experience and became part of the earth's environment (Rom. 5:12; 8:22).

By Man - This is why the eternal Son became man, born of the Virgin Mary. By becoming a man, Jesus became the first of a new race of humanity, which is based on deliverance from the penalty of sin. The resurrection life is eternal and glorious in its expression.

v. 22 In Adam all Die - Regardless of the type of sins we have committed, what religion we belong to, or ethnic background we claim, we will all suffer the consequences of the inherited curse of sin that flows through the entire human race.

In Christ - Just as a person is "in Adam" and shares in all that he brought upon the human race, when a person accepts Jesus Christ (John 1: 12-13), they share in all that Jesus Christ is and brings to the human race.

v. 23 His own Order - Paul points out that Jesus is the firstfruits of the coming physical resurrection, which will occur when He returns for His Bride—the Church (I Thess. 4:15-18).

v. 24 The End - At the completion of the resurrection, mankind's process of redemption will come an end. This will be followed by a new heaven and earth. The resurrection is portrayed in scripture as being realized in stages. The first stage occurs at the rapture of the church as recorded in I Thessalonians 4:16. Then there is the seven year tribulation, which will be followed by the resurrection of those who died after coming to Christ during the tribulation. (Rev. 20:4) Then will be the thousand year reign of Christ upon the earth. At the conclusion of the thousand years, those who are unsaved will be resurrected and sent into eternal separation from God (Rev. 21:8).

Delivers the Kingdom - Jesus will rule as King during the thousand year reign on earth. After the final phase of the resurrection, He will turn all things over to the Father who will then create a new heaven and earth.

v. 25 Must Reign - Jesus' authority over the rebellious world will be completely restored.

Enemies Under His Feet - This became a figure of speech to convey authority exerted over another. This practice was common in ancient times when a conquering King would literally have the defeated ruler bow to the ground and the King would place his foot upon his neck.

v. 26 The Last Enemy - The thought here is that at the conclusion of the resurrection and the banishment of those who will experience the eternal judgment of the second death (Rev. 21:8), death will be completely out of the realm of possibility in the new heavens and earth.

v. 27 Him Is Excepted - Paul includes this to avoid any confusion about the submission of the eternal Son in relationship to the Heavenly Father.

v. 28 Son Himself - This reveals that within the Godhead there is equality in essence, yet distinct roles. A human is one, yet within them there is an order of command or function in relationship to the spirit, soul and body.

God May be All in All - This seems to indicate that after the completion of the redemption of the Bride of Christ, the Godhead—Father, Son and Holy Spirit—will be expressed in a dimension of unity that will be realized after the completion of the redemptive work of the Son.

Effects of Denying the Resurrection

v. 29 Baptized for the Dead - This has consistently been a difficult passage to interpret because it seems to be out of harmony with what is generally taught about baptism. This verse sounds as if a person could vicariously, or by proxy, be baptized for a person who was already dead. A person who would find this necessary believes that baptism was the means of salvation. This concept of baptismal regeneration is not taught in scripture. What is

taught is that a person is born again by putting faith in Jesus Christ, which is then followed by water baptism as a public declaration of that faith. What seems to have occurred at Corinth was the practice of being baptized for those who had believed in Christ and had died prior to baptism. This is only one of several theories on this obscure passage. However in this passage Paul does not sanction its practice, he simply refers to it to show how inconsistent their actions were if there was no belief in a resurrection for the believers who had died.

v. 30 Stand in Jeopardy - Paul asks those who doubt the resurrection to give a logical reason why Paul would be willing to live in constant danger to proclaim it if he knew it wasn't really true.

v. 31 I Affirm - Paul uses the Greek word "echó" here. This used when a person wanted to make an important and forceful statement in regards to an issue.

The Boasting - Paul points out that the glory and boasting he has in Jesus Christ is rooted in his willingness to suffer a daily death to everything that would keep him from proclaiming the resurrection of Jesus Christ. In fact, it is only because of this attitude that the Corinthians ever became believers. If they deny the resurrection then they are denying one of the truths that propelled Paul to come and preach to them, leading them to Jesus Christ.

v. 32 Manner of Men - Paul makes reference to fighting wild beasts, which most likely involved some punishment he was given for preaching the gospel at Ephesus. Some however see this as a figurative statement since as a Roman citizen Paul would be legally protected from facing this type of judgment. However, he makes clear he did not place himself in such danger because of any natural motivation of man, but rather because he was willing to proclaim the truth of the gospel at any cost.

What Advantage - Paul tries to impress upon those who doubted the resurrection that it logically is not worth the risk for him to make himself vulnerable for the sake of a lie.

v. 33 Do not be Deceived - Paul warns the Corinthians that if they continued to believe the teachings that questioned the reliability of the resurrection it would result in corrupted and misguided lives. Beliefs do ultimately manifest themselves in behavior.

Evil Company - Paul quotes a common proverb used among the Greeks that originated with Menander, a Greek poet. The warning is obvious. If these believers continue to allow themselves to be influenced by bad doctrine it will undermine their walk with Christ.

v. 34 Awake to Righteousness - The Greek word translated as "awake" here is "eknéphó", which literally means "sober up." It's an interesting word choice because it captures the idea of clearing your mind from toxic substances, which in this case would be the deceptive teachings about the resurrection.

Not Sin - Paul again links bad doctrine with a bad life.

Your Shame - It was a disgrace upon the church that there was such a pervasive ignorance about God as revealed in their doubt about God being able to resurrect the dead.

A Glorious Body

v. 35 How are the Dead - Paul now states the main arguments that were raised against the resurrection. First, it does not seem possible that the physical matter of a person could be collected after it has decomposed into the earth. Secondly, how could a body be reconstructed with nothing but decomposed dust.

Foolish one - Paul sees this argument against the possibility of a resurrection as a denial of a commonly observed fact in nature—the growth process of seeds.

v. 36 Unless it Dies - Paul answers the first argument from the function of seeds. A seed placed in the ground must begin to decompose before a plant will begin to come alive and start to grow.

v. 37 Body that will be - Paul reminds them that the seed that goes into the ground looks much different than what will eventually grow from the seed. In like fashion, the resurrection will produce a new body that will be much more glorious than what went into the grave.

v. 38 God Gives - The genetic makeup of each seed that is given by God produces amazing results from a little seed.

That Pleases Him - God has ordained the beautiful diversity of plant life, which reveals the pleasure He derives from their awesome colors, shapes, and functions.

v. 39 All Flesh - This answers the second argument against a literal resurrection in regards to what a resurrection of the body would be like. Paul seeks to show that just as there are different physical bodies given in nature that are best suited for their function, so God should be seen as capable of giving a new resurrection body best suited for eternity. Furthermore, even in nature there are examples of something dramatically changing its bodily form. The caterpillar that becomes a butterfly is an example of this.

v. 40 Celestial Bodies - This refers to the various planets, stars, etc. of the universe.

Terrestrial Bodies - This refers to the various forms and body-types on earth.

The Glory - Paul points out the difference in form and function of the bodies of heavens and on earth.

v. 41 One Star Differs - Paul now points out how even among celestial bodies there is a vast difference between them.

v. 42 So also - Now that he's given examples to answer the arguments against the feasibility of the resurrection Paul applies this to the resurrection.

Sown in Corruption - First Paul shows how the human body, like a seed, is placed in the ground. It is done so in a state of decay as it returns to dust.

Raised in Incorruption - The promise of the resurrection is a new body that knows no form of decay or imperfection.

v. 43 Sown in Dishonor - The process of death is completely out of character with what God originally had desired for mankind. The weakness, the inability to do the simplest of tasks, etc. bring a form of dishonor to even the greatest of men and women as death brings its claim upon them.

Raised in Glory - The resurrection body will have a glory that will even surpass that of Adam and Eve before the fall. We will be given bodies that share in the likeness of Jesus' resurrection body (v. 49).

Sown in Weakness - This refers to the culmination of the gradual aging process as our bodies begin to wind down toward death.

In Power - The perfect bodies we will receive will have the ability to function at a level of power that is hard to even imagine. However, we do know our bodies will not restrict us in any way from experiencing all God has prepared for us in eternity.

v. 44 Sown a Natural Body - This refers to the physical body that is adapted to the environment of earth.

Spiritual Body - This refers to the body we will be given that will be adapted to a life in the realm of the spirit for eternity.

v. 45 First Adam - Through Adam the human race has been given a life that is said here to enable mankind to exist as a living entity.

Second Adam - This refers to Jesus as the originator of a new race of humanity. This new humanity will be endowed with a life that is not bound to the earth like Adam, but is destined to be lived in the realm of the spirit for all eternity.

v. 47 Of the Earth - Adam was literally made from the dust of the ground.

Lord from Heaven - In contrast with Adam, Jesus is seen as not limited to the earthly realm because for all eternity He has known a life in the heavens.

v. 49 Image of - Having laid out the contrast between the first and second Adam, Paul declares that the resurrection will give us a body that is in the image of Jesus.

Our Final Victory

v. 50 Flesh and Blood - The physical body we presently have is easily damaged and not capable of dwelling in eternity in God's presence.

Inherit - A term used to denote the privileges we have coming to us because of what the death of Christ provided.

Kingdom of God - This term refers to the rule of Christ as King, the realm of that rule, and the resulting benefits of that kingdom.

v. 51 A Mystery - This refers to something that up to this point had not been understood or revealed. Paul reveals what will happen to believers who are still alive when Christ returns.

Changed - The transformation that will occur for those who are living will be the same as experienced by the resurrected dead. This may be what happened to Enoch and Elijah when both were caught up to heaven without dying.

v. 52 A Moment - The root word in Greek here is "atomos." It refers to the smallest amount conceivable of something.

Twinkling of an Eye - This is another way to convey the idea of a sudden, instantaneous change.

Last Trumpet - A trumpet was often used in battle to call men in an army together. This word picture is used to convey the thought of calling God's people to Himself. It will be the last trumpet for the believer since we will thereafter be with Christ (I Tess. 4:16-17). However, there will still be subsequent trumpet calls during the tribulation as recorded in the book of Revelation.

v. 53 Must put on - The spiritual, non-materialistic aspect of man will be clothed in a body that is indestructible and able to function for all eternity.

v. 54 That is Written - Paul gives the basic sense of Isaiah 25:8 as he applies it to the resurrection.

Death is Swallowed - The one thing that no man in all history has been able to overcome, death, will be defeated by all of those who share in the benefits of Jesus Christ.

v. 55 O Death - Paul quotes from Hosea 13:14 to identify the powerful force of death.

The Sting of - The source and power of death is identified as the result of sin (Gen. 3:3).

v. 56 Strength of Sin - The relationship between the law of God and the force of sin is further developed in Romans 7:9-13. In that passage, Paul shows how the law of God actually stirs mankind to challenge the law by violating it. The law gives no intrinsic power to keep it.

v. 57 Gives us the Victory - Paul gives thanks to God who has conquered not only death through the resurrection, but also the power of sin through Jesus Christ.

v. 58 Therefore - Paul concludes his teaching on the resurrection with an exhortation to live our lives in the present in light of our future glory.

Steadfast - "Hedraios" (Gk.) This points to an attitude of holding a firm position.

Immovable - "Ametakenatos" (Gk.) The firm position we have in the gospel allows us to maintain an attitude that nothing can or should move us from the truth.

Abounding - "Perisseo" (Gk.) This refers to an overflow, something that exceeds what is necessary.

Work of the Lord - The focus of our solid position in Christ enables us to have an abundant capacity to do God's will in the midst of this fallen world as we await the resurrection.

Not in Vain - The resurrection is sure. Therefore, the rewards of a life lived in God's purpose will not be lost at death—they will be gained.

In the Lord - The believer's labors are done on His behalf in the nature and power of Jesus.