

## ***The Church of the Servant King***

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### ***Survey of the Bible Series – Paul’s First Letter to the Corinthians***

(SB\_1Cor15)

#### ***INTRODUCTION***

Why did Paul, seemingly out of nowhere and with no connection to the subject of the previous chapter (i.e. the need for order in the church especially with regard to the gift of tongues and prophecy), consider it necessary to devote such a lengthy portion of his letter to the subject of the resurrection? The answer is found in verse 12b of 1 Corinthians 15.

**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?***

The result is that Paul argues the whole subject of the resurrection from the dead. Unlike the prior subjects addressed in previous chapters – subjects that resulted from a letter that Paul had received from the household of Chloe (1:11) and a letter delivered by Stephanas, Fortunatus and Achaicus (16:15-18) – we do not know exactly how Paul was informed of this problem.

Evidently, even though the Corinthian believers had accepted the resurrection of Jesus, some confusion had emerged regarding the resurrection of believers. Perhaps there was confusion regarding their understanding of entry into the kingdom that was related to the ‘gospel of the kingdom’ – a vital part of the ministry of Jesus and the Twelve (Matt 10:7 cf. 1 Cor 1:12) – and Paul’s teaching of new Truth that contained new distinctions that they had yet to fully internalize.

*The flow of Paul’s discussion in chapter 15* – The flow of Paul’s exhortation of these believers and his apology for the resurrection is reflected in the following points:

- *Verses 1-3* – Paul’s presentation of the Gospel to them and their salvation had been built upon the foundational reality of the resurrection.
- *Verses 4-11* – Eyewitness testimony validates the historical reality of Christ’s resurrection.
- *Verses 12-19* – The resurrection of all believers hinges upon the resurrection of Christ.
- *Verses 20-28* – The sequence of the resurrections associated with Christ’s 2<sup>nd</sup> Coming are guaranteed by His resurrection.
- *Verses 29-30* – Baptisms for the dead are futile exercises – especially if there is no resurrection of the dead.
- *Verses 31-34* – Suffering for Christ is futile if there is no resurrection from the dead.
- *Verses 35-58* – Paul discusses the nature of the resurrection body and victory over death through our resurrection which was provided by Jesus Christ.

#### ***THE FOUNDATIONAL REALITY OF THE RESURRECTION WAS THE BASIS FOR THE GOSPEL PRESENTED (1 COR 15:1-3)***

1 Now I make known to you, brethren, the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received, in which also you stand, 2 by which also you are saved, if you hold fast the word which I preached to you, unless you believed in vain. 3 For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures. (1 Cor 15:1-3)

Paul begins his apologetic for the resurrection of believers with a summary of what they held in common. The gospel that Paul had preached to them – “*Christ [Messiah] died for our sins according to the Scriptures.*” Paul had received this gospel from Jesus Himself while traveling on the road to Damascus (Gal 1:11), but he also had more details provided to him from other sources.

The “if” in verse 2 (“*if you hold fast the word which I preached to you*”) is a Greek construction that implies reality – it assumes that the condition is fulfilled. It is the 1<sup>st</sup> class construction. This phrase is followed by the phrase “*unless you believed in vain.*” So, what Paul wrote can be interpretively translated – “*you are saved since you believed the gospel I preached to you; otherwise, if you did not really believe it, then your understanding of it is useless information.*”

The word “*saved*” is the present, passive, indicative of the Greek word *sodzo* (Gr. σωζω). The present tense means that they are continually being delivered by this gospel in the sense that by its very nature, this gospel protects them from adopting or being influenced by false “gospels” and the fear and uncertainty surrounding death – as long as they continue to believe it. In other words, while their eternal destiny is secure since they had believed the gospel preached by Paul, their assurance, peace and comfort from that fact during phase 2 of their existence depended upon whether they had fully internalized the Truth of the gospel and were making decisions to actualize it in their life situations.

The gospel that Paul preached contained two parts. The first part related to the death of Christ and is mentioned in verse 3. The death of the proclaimed Messiah, Jesus Christ, was contrary to human reasoning and was an overlooked fact that underlay so many prophecies. This is why so much of the ministry of the 1<sup>st</sup> Century Apostles and early church leaders involved establishing the connection between these prophecies and Jesus’ death. Jesus spent 40 days after His resurrection and prior to His ascension helping His remaining eleven Apostles understand the connection. It took Saul seeing the resurrected Jesus in a miraculous appearance to convince him that the Jesus, whose life and ministry were no doubt familiar to Saul, was in fact the promised Messiah-Christ.

We have previously studied many of these prophecies such as found in Genesis 3:15, Psalm 22 and Isaiah 53 just to name a few. Peter alludes to the dichotomous nature of Hebrew prophecy in regards to the Messiah’s ministry in 1 Peter 1:10-11 and the letter to the Hebrews is designed to prove to a Jewish audience on the brink of apostasy that Jesus was in fact the prophesied Messiah.

10 As to this salvation, the prophets who prophesied of the grace that would come to you made careful searches and inquiries, 11 seeking to know what person or time the Spirit of Christ within them was indicating as He predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories to follow. (1 Pet 1:10-11)

#### ***EYEWITNESSES VALIDATE THE RESURRECTION OF CHRIST (1 COR 15:4-11)***

4 and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, 5 and that He appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. 6 After that He appeared to more than five hundred brethren at one time, most of whom remain until now, but some have fallen asleep; 7 then He appeared to James, then to all the apostles; 8 and last of all, as to one untimely born, He appeared to me also. 9 For I am the least of the apostles, and not fit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. 10 But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me did not prove vain; but I labored even more than all of them, yet not I, but the grace of God with me. 11 Whether then it was I or they, so we preach and so you believed. (1 Cor 15:4-11)

Verse 4 considers part two of the two-part gospel message – Jesus “was buried” and “raised on the third day according to the Scriptures.” His burial verified His death and His resurrection was verified by His appearance to others. His death was an accepted fact and Paul doesn’t need to cite witnesses. However, as a testament to the validity of His resurrection, Paul mentions some of the eyewitness accounts.<sup>1</sup>

The perfect tense and passive voice of the Greek verb translated "was raised" alludes to the completed finality of the resurrection – not to be repeated and comprehensive in its results. This construction also alludes to the fact that He is still alive.

Paul probably mentions Jesus’ appearance to Peter (Lu 24:34) in verse 5 for a couple of reasons. First, Peter was revered by one of the factions or sects in the church in Corinth (1 Cor 1:12). Second, Peter was considered the leader of the Jewish Apostles (cf. Matt 16:18).

"The Twelve" is a designation of the apostles as a group and should not be pressed numerically since Judas was no longer there and on one occasion Thomas (Jn 20:24) was not with them.

In verse 6, we find the only reference to this event in Scripture. The resurrection of Jesus had occurred approximately 23 years prior to Paul’s writing of this letter; therefore, many of this group of 500 were probably still alive and available to confirm Jesus’ resurrection.

The “James” in verse 7 is most likely the Lord’s half-brother who became a leader in the Jerusalem assembly and who wrote the epistle “James.”

In verses 8-9, Paul refers to himself in almost a self-deprecating manner due to the fact that his appointment was very unusual in comparison to the others and due to the fact that he had once been a persecutor of those who believed. The Greek word that is translated “untimely born” is *ektroma* (Gr. ἔκτρομα) and refers to an “abortion” or “miscarriage.” It has been suggested by some that the Corinthians themselves may have used the term to describe Paul, as one who because of his personal weaknesses was considered to be something of a ‘freak’ in comparison with other apostles, especially Apollos and Peter. Others have suggested that the term is a play on Paul’s name—*Paulus*, ‘the little one.’ Hence they dismissed him as a ‘dwarf.’ All of this probably served to motivate Paul to be more of a servant of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Paul and the other apostles all believed and preached the same gospel. Paul did not proclaim a different message from that which Peter, James, and the others did. This same message is what the Corinthians had believed when all of those who had ministered in Corinth had preached to them. By denying the resurrection, the Corinthians were following neither Apollos, nor Cephas, nor Christ. They were pursuing a theology of their own.

***THE RESURRECTION OF ALL BELIEVERS HINGES UPON THE RESURRECTION OF CHRIST  
(1 COR 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 testified against

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<sup>1</sup> A detailed examination of the subject of Jesus’ death and resurrection from the standpoint of fulfillment of Scripture is contained in notes associated with a 2008 Easter Special. See those notes for more detail.

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. (1 Cor 15:12-19)

This form of logic is called *modus tollens* and is from Latin meaning “the way that denies by denying.” If A and B are logically related facts, then if B can be disproved, A is disproved. If the resurrection of Christ (B) and the reality of a resurrection (A) are related facts, then since Christ was raised (B), there is a resurrection of believers (A). To deny the resurrection of believers (A) is to deny that Christ Himself was raised (B). Obviously, Paul had only believers in view here rather than the resurrection of all men. He is discussing the hope of believers. Other passages teach the resurrection of other groups of people (e.g., Dan 12:2; Rev. 20:4-5, 12).

Scripture alludes to the fact that belief in the resurrection of the body seems to have been difficult for Greeks to have accepted in other locations in addition to Corinth (cf. Acts 17:32; 2 Tim 2:17). It is very important to remember that the Corinthians were not denying the resurrection of Jesus Christ (B); what they were denying is the resurrection of the body (A). Paul is insistent that if a man denies the possibility of the resurrection of the body (A) he has thereby denied the possibility of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ (B), and has therefore emptied the Christian message of its truth and the Christian life of its reality.

***THE SEQUENCE OF THE RESURRECTIONS ASSOCIATED WITH CHRIST'S 2<sup>ND</sup> COMING ARE GUARANTEED BY HIS RESURRECTION (1 COR 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 will 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 hands over 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 When all things are subjected to Him, then the Son Himself also will be subjected to the One who subjected all things to Him, so that God may be all in all. (1 Cor 15:20-28)

Paul provides some insight into the order in which the various phases of the resurrection of the dead will occur. In order to see the complete picture, we must combine Paul's teaching in our passage with several other passages as follows.

Resurrection Of:	Passage
Jesus Christ	20 But now Christ has been raised from the dead, <u>the first fruits</u> of those who are asleep. 21 For since by a man <i>came</i> death, by a man also <i>came</i> 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: <u>Christ the first fruits</u> , after that those who are Christ's at His coming, 24 then <i>comes</i> 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. (1 Cor 15:20-28)

	<p>13 For He delivered us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son, 14 in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. 15 And He is the image of the invisible God, the first-born of all creation. 16 For by Him all things were created, <i>both</i> in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things have been created by Him and for Him. 17 And He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together. 18 He is also head of the body, the church; and He is the beginning, <u>the first-born from the dead</u>; so that He Himself might come to have first place in everything. (<i>Col 1:13-18</i>)</p>
<p><b>Body of Christ at the Rapture</b></p>	<p>9 For they themselves report about us what kind of a reception we had with you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve a living and true God, 10 and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, <i>that is</i> Jesus, who delivers us from the wrath to come. (<i>1 Thess 1:10</i>)</p> <p><b>13</b> 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 <i>the</i> 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. (<i>1 Thess 4:13-18</i>)</p>
<p><b>Tribulation Believers Who have Died and all Believers Who have Died except CA Believers</b> (Dan. 12:13 implies that believers must be resurrected prior to the Millennium; Rev. 20:4-5)</p>	<p>12:1 "Now at that time Michael, the great prince who stands <i>guard</i> 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 <i>and</i> 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. (<i>Dan 12:1-3</i>)</p> <p>13"But as for you, go your way to the end; then you will enter into rest and rise again for your allotted portion at the end of the age." (<i>Dan 12:13</i>)</p> <p><b>4</b> And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given to them. And I <i>saw</i> the souls of those who had been beheaded because of the testimony of Jesus and because of the word of God, and those who had not worshiped the beast or his image, and had not received the mark upon their forehead and upon their hand; and they came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years. 5 The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were completed. This is the first resurrection. 6 Blessed and holy is the one who has a part in the first resurrection; over these the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with Him for a thousand years. (<i>Rev 20:4-6</i>)</p>
<p><b>Believers of the Millennium<sup>2</sup></b></p>	<p>12 And I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne, and books were opened; and another book was opened, which is <i>the book</i> of life; and the dead were judged from the things which were written in the books, according to their deeds. 13 And the sea gave up the dead which were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead which were in them; and they were judged, every one <i>of them</i> according to their deeds. 14 And death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. 15 And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire. (<i>Rev 20:12-15</i>)</p>

<sup>2</sup> Revelation 20:12-15 (esp. v. 15) implies the presence of believers. There is no specific passage that explicitly states when believers of the Millennium who have died will be resurrected; however, it is fairly clear that they will have to receive their resurrection bodies at some point in order to enter the eternal state. The two options for Millennial believers are: 1) immediately upon death (assuming the believer died during the Millennium) so as to participate in Christ's rule and reign during the remainder of the Millennium; or 2) at the end of the Millennium. To choose either option is speculative, but one thing is for certain. If they are believers, they will not be a part of the second resurrection that experiences judgment at the GWTJ.

<b>Unbelievers of All Time</b>	Revelation 20:12-15.
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In 1 Corinthians 15:23, Paul mentions “those who are Christ's at His coming” as being resurrected next in sequence after Jesus’ resurrection. Since, Paul is teaching the hope to believers of the present, Gentile-centric dispensation, this could either be a reference to the Rapture or it is possible that Paul was viewing the “*coming of the Lord*” in a more comprehensive way to refer to everything surrounding the span of seven years which would include both the Rapture and the 2<sup>nd</sup> Advent. Either way, Paul doesn’t address details of the resurrection sequence in 1 Corinthians 15 thus necessitating an examination of other passages for that information.