

Week 15, 1 Corinthians 15:1–34

Hook



Main Point: Christ's Resurrection provides Christians an eternal hope.

Group Activity: Today's lesson will explore the ramifications of changing an element of the Gospel—a Gospel that denies the Resurrection is no Gospel at all. To illustrate the point that altering a piece of something changes the whole, recruit a volunteer from the class to participate in a taste test challenge. Prior to class, fill several unmarked cups with a variety of sodas from the same brand (e.g., one cup of Coke[®], one cup of Diet Coke[®], one cup of Cherry Coke[®], one cup of Caffeine Free Coke[®], etc.). Provide the taste tester with an opportunity to correctly identify the beverages.

Who is a diet cola fan? Who is a regular cola fan? Why?

Describe a product, band or television show that made a drastic change. What do you think of the results?

How would denying Christ's Resurrection completely change the Gospel?

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Book

Main Point: Christ's Resurrection provides Christians an eternal hope.

Text Summary: The one theme throughout this first half of chapter 15 is the reality that the Resurrection of Christ is central to the Gospel message and the foundation of Gospel hope. This life is not all there is, and that's Gospel truth solely because Christ has defeated death and sin by conquering the grave and resurrecting bodily. Christ's Resurrection means that the Christian, too, has hope of resurrection. Paul says Christians can endure this life because this life is not the end. And that's true because of Christ. If He hadn't risen from the grave, then we would be in bondage to sin with no hope of ever rising out of our current predicament.

1 Corinthians 15:1–11 [Read]

Sub-Point: Christ's Resurrection is true and central to the Gospel message.

Paul wants his audience to be clear on something: there is one Gospel and it centers on the Resurrection of Christ. He wants to remind them of the one, true Gospel message that was delivered to them. That is what he begins here in chapter 15. It is this message of Christ and His life, death and Resurrection that is the full Gospel, worthy of believing, and there is no other. These first 11 verses are to show the centrality and the historical nature of Christ's Resurrection.

Tim Keller writes, "If Jesus rose from the dead, then you have to accept all that he said; if he didn't rise from the dead, then why worry about any of what he said?"¹

Paul wants these Christians to understand that the death and Resurrection were historical fact. People saw it. And he wants to make known that the Gospel, the foundation for every issue Paul has brought to light up to this point, is of first importance. The death and Resurrection are central. When he writes in verse 2 of vain belief, it is likely that his intention behind this comment is that if someone denied the Resurrection, there would be no saving faith.

Why? Because not believing the Resurrection is not believing the Gospel. There is no use to your faith if there is no belief in Christ's Resurrection. There's no Christianity. There's no eternal hope. The Resurrection is the key to a Christian's hope, as Paul will continue to unpack.

The use of "according to the scriptures" does two things. First, it shows that the death of Christ and his Resurrection was God's plan. This was the message of the Old Testament. It's likely that Paul doesn't have one passage in mind here, just the overarching message of God's history

¹ Tim Keller, *The Reason for God* (New York: Dutton, 2008) 203.

throughout the Old Testament. Paul shows that this was God's plan from the beginning. This was the hope for the world. This was the defeat of the serpent promised in Genesis 3:15.

There's something significant that Paul does with his language in this passage. Paul uses different tenses in the Greek language when talking about Jesus' death compared with talking about His Resurrection. Vang explains in verses 3–4, "The shift from aorist tense [when speaking about Jesus' death] to perfect tense [when speaking about the Resurrection] is not without significance. Aorist is the default tense that simply gives reference to what has happened; the perfect tense highlights that an event has lingering consequences for the present."² The Resurrection has massive implications for the past, present and future. Its impact has no end because the Resurrection guarantees the hope of eternity itself without sin and death.

That's what Paul is explaining. He writes that Christ's death had a purpose: for sin. If He didn't die and raise, then sins have not been dealt with. Sins have not been taken care of and if that was the case then we would have to bear the punishment to take care of them ourselves. Christ died for sins. Christ died to extinguish death. Christ died so that we could experience eternal joy with Him.

When Paul shows the evidence of Christ's Resurrection by listing those whom Christ appeared to, he lists himself last. The word Paul uses occurs only here in the entire New Testament. The English Standard Version translates the word to read "one untimely born." The phrase is a difficult one. The Greek term means a stillborn child. Taylor writes, "the use is debated, however it may have been used to describe Paul's sudden and unexpected call to apostleship. It was swift and abnormal."³ Other scholars, as Taylor highlights, "take the definition 'birth beyond term' where Christ's appearance to Paul was later than that of others. Whatever the definition, Paul is wanting to highlight God's grace and power."⁴

Paul explains the horrid nature of his past; his persecution of the Church plays a part in his unlikely conversion. His past was ugly. Taking the first definition, Paul is saying that Christ has brought a corpse to life by His power and grace. Christ's Resurrection has given Paul a resurrection as well. This is the hope for all believers. As he writes in verse 10, the grace shown to him was not in vain because Paul has been transformed by the saving power of the Gospel and continues to testify to its resurrection power. He believes that Christ has risen and wants to show God's grace in his life.

² Vang, Preben [2014] *Teaching the Text Commentary Series: 1 Corinthians*. Grand Rapids: Baker Publishing, p. 202.

³ Taylor, Mark [2014] *New American Commentary: 1 Corinthians*. Nashville: B&H Publishing, p. 375.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 376

Paul's message: The Resurrection is reliable. Christ is reliable.

What does Paul mean when he says "believed in vain" in verse 2? What is he primarily concerned with?

Why does he use the phrase "according to the scriptures"?

Why is the Resurrection important for the believer? What is significant about the various verb tenses Paul uses?

What would you say to a seeker who is questioning the validity of the Resurrection? How would you respond to someone who claims to be a Christian and views the Resurrection of Christ as a metaphor instead of a historical event?

1 Corinthians 15:12–34 [Read]

Sub-Point: Christ has risen, therefore the Church will rise with Him.

In this section of chapter 15, Paul deeply desires to show that Christ's Resurrection, and the reality of it, is 100 percent connected to the Resurrection of believers and any hope after death. Paul's question in verse 12 shows that there are those who believe in Christ, however, who aren't on board with the resurrection of the dead. They may believe that Christ has raised, but not that those in Christ will be. This doesn't make sense, as Paul will show. Paul was attacking the widely held cultural belief that humanity was body and soul, the soul was eternal and divine and the body was material and mortal. Paul wants to show them that God values the physical world and He will ultimately show this in the Resurrection of humanity.

But Paul's argument is that if Christ didn't resurrect, then believers won't, and if believers don't, then Christ didn't. On the other hand, if He did, then so, too, will believers, and if we do, then He did as well. In this section, we see the massive theological implications to the Resurrection. Paul says in verse 17 that without the Resurrection, our faith is meaningless and hopeless, and we are still in bondage to sin. Um writes, "Without [the resurrection of Christ] Christian ministry is pointless, personal faith is ineffective, God's character is called into question, Christians are still in need of salvation, any sense of future hope is removed, and our present experience is meaningless."⁵ The Resurrection of Christ is directly related to the work He accomplished on the Cross. Denying the Resurrection is to deny the efficacy of the Cross.

Remember, Christ died for sins. These sins are the effects of Adam, which Paul brings up in 22. Just as in Adam, all die due to sin, so in Christ all will share in His life and Resurrection that believe in Him and confess Him. Once Christ comes and resurrects His Bride, the Church, God

⁵ Um, Stephen T. [2015] *Preaching the Word Commentary: 1 Corinthians*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, p. 267.

will rule and reign for eternity. Death and sin will be done away with. This is the hope of the Christian. And this hope hinges on the Resurrection of Christ.

Without the Resurrection, sin is killing us, and we will die without hope of our situation improving. Faith is hoping that all will be made right and Christ will come as king and defeat death and evil. This is what believers hope for, what Paul describes in verses 24–28. Um explains, “the resurrection is the foundation of Christian faith; without it, faith cannot stand and Christian living has no motivation. It is the announcement that God has reversed the curse of the fall.”⁶ This hope is seen when Paul says that Christ was the first fruits, meaning that Christ is only the first Resurrection. More will come at His second and final arrival when He raises up His Church.

In Paul’s concluding section, he describes the basic view of life we should have if the Resurrection isn’t real. Why put ourselves in danger if this is all there is? Why risk our lives? Vang writes, “What would be the sense of exposing oneself to danger and risk of death if there were no hope beyond death?”⁷ If there’s no Resurrection, then let everyone indulge in self-pleasure and gratify every desire. Do everything today because tomorrow might be the last call.

There’s much debate surrounding verse 29, so much so that scholars have yet to come to a majority consensus on the meaning of the verse. The ESV Study Bible explains:

Some interpreters through the centuries have thought this referred to vicarious baptism on behalf of deceased people, probably those who had believed in Christ but had not been baptized before they died (cf. Luke 23:43). But the interpretation is uncertain, and whatever the practice is, Paul reports it without necessarily approving it, and is clearly not commanding it. Baptism for the dead is an important part of Mormonism, but the Bible gives no support to the idea that anyone can be saved apart from personal faith in Christ (see notes on John 3:18; 14:6). Other interpreters argue that by “the dead” Paul means the bodies of living Christians, which are subject to death and decay: they are baptized “on behalf of their dying bodies,” showing hope that their bodies will rise again (see Rom. 8:23; 1 Cor. 15:42–44, 47–49, 53–54). On this view, Paul argues here that the baptism of perishing bodies is useless if the dead are not raised.⁸

While there are other views, again, no one view is completely clear on Paul’s meaning. While that stands as the case, what is clear is that in both the views mentioned, why go through such

⁶ Vang [2014] *Teaching the Text Commentary Series: 1 Corinthians*. Grand Rapids: Baker Publishing, p. 206.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 209.

⁸ Crossway Bibles, *The ESV Study Bible* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2008), 2215.

ritualistic trouble if there were no Resurrection? If this life is all there is, why make preparations to save a lost loved one through vicarious baptism or try to ensure seeing that person again after death?

Paul compares the Corinthians' confusion concerning the Resurrection with inebriation and tells them to snap out of it. Wake up and think rightly. Resurrection is real. Christ is raised, and because He was, believers will be also. Believe rightly. Don't be deceived, he writes in verse 33. One's faith directly connects to one's lifestyle. Paul wants these misinformed Christians to realize their misplaced views aren't isolated. They will bleed into the church and those that don't know better than to believe wrong teaching.

Stop. Come back. Believe that the Resurrection changes everything.

Why are Christians without hope if Christ did not rise from the dead?

What does it mean that Christ is the first fruits?

Paul warns against false teachers who deny the Resurrection in verse 33. What does the phrase "Bad company ruins good morals" mean? In what ways has the Corinthian church proven the phrase true?

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Took



Main Point: Christ's Resurrection provides Christians an eternal hope.

Discussion: Break your class into groups again and encourage them to discuss the following:

How would you answer someone who claims that Christianity is still helpful even if the Resurrection did not occur?

How has the hope of the Resurrection made a difference in your life?

What does a life that is characterized by hope look like? Has God ever used you to display His hope during a difficult time in your life?

Lesson Conclusion: How does Paul's argument encourage us? It lets believers know that through trials, through struggles, through pain, because of the Resurrection of Christ, believers have hope of life that extends beyond this current life. Believers can hope in a life to come that is free of sin and free of death because Christ has conquered them both through His death on the Cross and ultimately through His bodily Resurrection. For this reason, the Resurrection of Christ is directly tied to the reality of the Resurrection for each believer. Because of this, Resurrection is central to the message of the Gospel and the hope it offers.

Challenge

Rest in Christ's Victory. Life can be hard; there's no doubt about it. It's a roller coaster that isn't fun all the time. Let Paul's message concerning the hope we have in Christ bring comfort to you. Let the reality of Christ's defeat over sin and death be not only good news, but glad news. Because of His victory, we, too, get to experience victory.

Hope in Christ's Resurrection. Christ's victory means we will one day be united with Him and death will have no hold on us. Christ will bring a new world order and complete new creation. All will be joyous and eternal. There will be nothing temporary. Let the hope of our bodily Resurrection with Christ give hope to you and allow you to see its central importance in our Gospel message.

Read Revelation 21 & 22. These concluding chapters to the Scripture are beautiful pictures for what we can look forward to when Christ returns. Let the miraculous fulfillment of God's promises described by John give you great excitement. May these chapters show you how Resurrection and new creation are integral to what God has been up to all along: bringing His people to be with Him. Forever.