



1 CORINTHIANS

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INTRODUCTION

In the first eleven verses of 1 Corinthians 15, Paul emphatically stressed the historical reality of Jesus' resurrection as well as the central place it holds in the gospel message itself, a message which is "of first importance". It is crucial for the Corinthians to understand how important the resurrection is, and Paul will now explain why.

MAIN POINT

Jesus' resurrection gives believers a powerful motivation for holy lives spent in service to him.

REFLECT

The reason Paul began this chapter the way he did comes in verse 12: some in the Corinthian church were denying bodily resurrection. Considering that Jesus' resurrection comprised a huge part of the message Paul deemed "of first importance" (vv. 3-11), this is a very serious denial. In verses 12-19 he lists out several of the ramifications of such a denial. For one thing, Paul's preaching and the Corinthians' faith (which was based on his preaching) are in vain if a core component of Paul's message is removed. On top of this, if the resurrection isn't true, Paul's been lying about God. And according to verse 19, if Jesus hasn't been raised, all the comforts of this life that believers have sacrificed for the sake of Jesus have been an enormous waste.

Worst of all, perhaps, is that if Jesus didn't rise from the dead, then "you are still in your sins" (v. 17). Why is this the case? "If Jesus stayed dead, there are only two possible conclusions: either he was not the sinless person everyone thought him to be and his death marked his final separation from God; or he might have been without personal sin, but his attempts to atone for the sin of the world by his death did not meet with divine

approval. Either way, we are still in our sins, cut off from God and facing his judgment like everyone else.”¹

Thankfully, there’s a “but” (v. 20). Jesus *has* been raised. And because his resurrection is the “firstfruits”, this implies that there will be more fruit – the resurrection of believers. Because of Adam, we’ll all die. But because of Jesus, not all have to stay dead. Death is no longer the final word. Jesus’ resurrection means that death will one day die when his kingdom comes in its fullness (vv. 21-28).

This isn’t an abstract doctrine for Paul. His belief in the resurrection is what helps him endure great suffering for the sake of the gospel (vv. 30-32). On the other hand, he’s careful to remind the Corinthians that denying the resurrection leads directly into a sinful lifestyle (vv. 32b-34). After all, if this life is all there is, why not live it up?

The questions in verse 35 aren’t the questions of a curious student, but of a mocking skeptic. “So how is a body that has rotted away in the ground going to come back, Paul?” This is a foolish question, says Paul, because you see this happening all the time in nature. When seeds go into the ground, the form in which they’re buried are altered (or “die”) in order to make way for something new and far more glorious: a plant. There is continuity as well as discontinuity between the body that’s buried and the one that rises.

Our bodies have to undergo such transformation to be fit to enter into God’s kingdom (v. 50). After all, bodies prone to decay can’t live in a realm where death doesn’t exist. When the resurrected Jesus returns, Christians dead and alive will instantly be clothed with glorious new bodies that are fit to live forever with him.

God, through Jesus, has carried out a plan in which death is not the end, and for that we are to be eternally grateful (v. 57). The reality of this should motivate us now to work hard for the Lord. Because Jesus rose from the dead, our “labor is not in vain” (v. 58).

- According to Paul, what are some of the practical dangers of minimizing the resurrection? How have you seen these dangers in your own life?
- In what ways does Jesus’ resurrection provide motivation to overcome sin and to live holy lives? Where in your life do you most need this motivation?
- How can you practically encourage one another to abound in the work of the Lord?

MEMORIZE

1 Corinthians 15:58 – *“Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.”*

¹ David Prior, *The Message of 1 Corinthians*, p. 264