

1 COR. 15:1 – 16:24

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VI. Correcting a Mistaken View of the Resurrection 15:1-58

A. The gospel includes the bodily resurrection of Christ (15:1-11)

1. This entire chapter is devoted to correcting the view of some in the Corinthian church that the dead will not be resurrected. We're not told the basis of this view; we're only told that some held it.

a. Perhaps they believed that salvation or entrance into the consummated kingdom was only for those who were alive at Christ's return. Recall that the Thessalonians had similar doubts about the status of those who died before the Second Coming (1 Thess. 4:13-18).

b. It seems more likely that they believed the eternal state would be non-corporeal, that Christians who died in Christ would receive salvation but would not receive any kind of resurrection body. Given their Greek worldview, they easily could have trouble comprehending how an earthly body that is physical and perishable could be made suitable for the heavenly realm that is spiritual and imperishable. The question "With what kind of body are they raised?" in 1 Cor. 15:35 may state the heart of the problem for them.

c. A twist on this would be that the resurrection already took place at conversion, which in one sense it did, and that only the soul would exist into eternity.

2. Paul reminds them in this section that the gospel they heard from him and accepted, the gospel that is saving them, includes the bodily resurrection of Jesus from the grave.

a. Paul notes that this gospel saves them "if [they] hold firm." This is a warning that the truth of that message cannot be abandoned without consequences. They must continue to believe what God has said about his work in Christ.

b. Paul adds that holding firm to the gospel message will save them "unless [they] believed in vain." If the gospel message was false, as their denial of the resurrection implied, then belief in it would profit nothing.

3. In vv. 3-5 Paul reminds them of the most important tenets of the gospel that he had received and passed on to them. In doing so, most scholars (because of the style and structure of the Greek) believe that Paul is repeating a very early creedal formulation.

a. Vv. 6-7 do not appear to be part of the familiar creed and probably do not belong to "the gospel which [Paul] preached to [them]." Paul probably adds the information about these additional appearances, which he no doubt had taught in Corinth, to bolster the case for the reality of Christ's bodily resurrection and to remind them of his own place in the tradition.

b. The first item in the creed is "that Christ died for our sins."

(1) This presupposes alienation between God and humans because of sin, and it means that Jesus who is the Christ, God's anointed one, died to pay the just penalty for our sins and to overcome that alienation. His death provides forgiveness and reconciles us to the Father.

(2) This was "according to the Scriptures" in that the deliverance through sacrifice is a regular feature of the O.T. and Isaiah 53 describes the one who "as a lamb led to slaughter" took away the sins of the people.

c. The second item in the creed is "that he was buried." In the creed this functions to verify the reality of Christ's death. In this context, it emphasizes the fact that what was resurrected is what had previously been buried, i.e., his body. Christ's resurrection was not merely a spiritual phenomenon; the tomb was empty!

d. The third item in the creed is "that he was raised on the third day." This was according to various references in the Scriptures. According to Acts 2:25-36 and 13:35-37, Ps. 16:8-11 and 110:1 bear witness to the Messiah's resurrection (see also, Isa. 53:10b-11, 54:7). Several O.T. passages refer to divine deliverance occurring on the third day (Hos. 6:1-2; Jonah 1:17 [see, Mat. 12:40]; 2 Ki. 20:5), and in Lev. 23:10-11, 15 the firstfruits of the harvest (see, 1 Cor. 15:20, 23) are offered to the Lord on the Sunday of Passover week.

e. The fourth item in the creed is "that he was seen by Cephas and then by the Twelve." This is so important to Paul's argument that he appends four more appearances to these first two. Jesus' resurrection was not a form of spiritual existence; he was raised from the dead *bodily* and seen by many witnesses on a variety of occasions.

4. In vv. 6-8 Paul recounts other appearances of the resurrected Christ, ending with the Lord's appearance to him on the Damascus Road. In referring to himself as "one untimely born," Paul is probably picking up a derogatory label that some Corinthians had applied to him with regard to his supposedly undeveloped spirituality. The word he uses referred to a birth after an abnormal gestation period, including abortions and miscarriages, and carried a sense of deficiency.

5. In vv. 9-10 Paul digresses about his apostleship. He does not disown "the untimely born" as a term of his relative worthlessness, but uses it to once again exalt the grace of God in his life. Whatever his weakness in relation to the other apostles, God graciously called him to be an apostle (whether they like it or not), and that grace both motivated and empowered him so that he labored more abundantly than all of the other apostles.

6. In v. 11 Paul returns to the point of the paragraph, namely that the gospel which is preached by all the apostles and which they believed includes the bodily resurrection of Christ.

B. Logical conclusion of denying resurrection of the dead (15:12-19)

1. Given that the gospel includes the resurrection of the dead-and-buried Christ, Paul wants to know how some can claim that there is no resurrection of the dead. The logical conclusion of that view is that not even Christ has been raised, and if that's true, then:

a. neither the apostles' preaching nor the Corinthians' faith has any basis in reality.

b. the apostles are liars because they testify that God did indeed resurrect Jesus from the grave.

c. the Corinthians' faith is useless in that they are still in their sins, without any hope of forgiveness or eternal life. Forgiveness and resurrection life are two sides of the same coin, so if Christ did not achieve the latter for mankind then neither did he achieve the former. In other words, his death and resurrection are inextricably linked in providing humanity's salvation (see, e.g., Rom. 4:25, 5:10, 10:9).

d. those who have died believing in Christ are lost, being eternally cut off from God.

2. If the Christian's hope in Christ is limited to this life, if there is no resurrection of the dead as some Corinthians claim, then Christianity is a lie and those who have given their hearts and souls to it are due the utmost pity.

C. But Christ has been raised and is the firstfruits of Christian's who have died (15:20-28)

1. But the fact of matter is that Christ has been raised from the dead and is the firstfruits of Christians who have died. In other words, his resurrection is a guarantee of our resurrection just as the firstfruits of the field serve as a kind of guarantee of the full harvest. It serves as a pledge on the part of God of the final eschatological harvest.

2. Paul explains this consequence of Christ's resurrection in terms of the Adam-Christ parallel. Just as death is the inevitable consequence of our connection to Adam, so resurrection is the inevitable consequence of our connection to Christ.

3. But the resurrection secured by Christ occurs in a certain order, according to God's plan. First Christ is resurrected and then, at the time of his Second Coming, those who are in him are resurrected (Paul is not concerned here with the resurrection of the wicked for judgment). See, 1 Thess. 4:13-18.

4. Having ended death (which includes the final judgment, but this is beyond Paul's concern) and thus having consummated God's plan of redemption by eliminating all that is opposed to the purpose of God, the Son's reign as mediator is fulfilled. His reign in that capacity ends, but he continues to reign through eternity as God the Son, forever functionally subordinate to God the Father.

D. Additional argument for truth of the resurrection (15:29-34)

1. Paul continues his attack on their denial of the resurrection. He says "otherwise," meaning that if Christians are *not* destined for resurrection in Christ, then why are some of them being baptized because of the dead?

a. It is clear that a good number of Corinthian Christians had died (see, 11:30, 15:18, 20). The hope of seeing them again in the resurrection had apparently helped to motivate some of their family members to be baptized into Christ. They were baptized "because of the dead" in that sense. Here's how Anthony Thiselton summarizes the matter in *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, *The New International Greek Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 1248:

We may return to G. G. Findlay's succinct and careful comments. After exposing the fallacy of some competing views, he observes, "Paul is referring rather to a much commoner, indeed a normal experience, that death of Christians leads to the conversion of survivors, who in the first instance 'for the sake of the dead' (their beloved dead) and in the hope of reunion, turn to Christ -- e.g., when a dying mother wins her son by the appeal 'Meet me in heaven!' Such appeals, and their frequent salutary effect, give strong and touching evidence of faith in the resurrection."

b. Paul's point is that those who have been baptized in this hope are dupes if the dead are not in fact raised. If there is no resurrection of dead saints, then they will not be reunited with their departed loved ones. (At best, they will join them in some disembodied state where people are mere shadows of themselves.)

c. There simply is no basis for interpreting this to mean that Christians were being baptized to affect the spiritual destiny of people who had already died.

(1) The N.T. knows nothing of salvation apart from a personal faith, repentance, confession, and baptism, and vicarious baptism was unheard of in any orthodox Christian church in the centuries thereafter.

(2) The only historical mention of vicarious baptism is in reference to the Marcionites, a heretical sect of the second century. As Gordon Fee asks regarding the Mormon interpretation, "How can such a practice be so *completely* unknown if in fact it had had any authorization within the churches of the first century?"

2. Next Paul asks why, if the resurrection is not true, he and his companions constantly risk death for the sake of the gospel. That would be foolish on two counts: they are risking a death, which is permanent, and they are doing so for a false gospel.

a. In v. 32 he elaborates by way of a specific instance. He says, "If as a [mere] man I fought wild beasts in Ephesus, what is the benefit to me?" Paul clearly had a difficult time in Ephesus (1 Cor. 16:9; 2 Cor. 1:8-11), but we don't know much about it. Paul's point is that if he endured the struggle with his opponents in Ephesus as a mere human, meaning that if the world's Spiritless perspective on the resurrection was true, then his effort was worthless, for him and them, because his gospel was a lie.

b. If this life is all there is, then a life of sacrifice and discipline, a "death-facing" life, is pointless. One may as well live a self-indulgent life. If there is no reality to the gospel, you might as well go for the gusto in the few years you have on earth.

3. Paul urges them not to be misled and quotes a proverbial saying: "Evil associations ruin good habits."

a. Paul is referring to those who deny the resurrection (15:12) and making the point that their doctrine will have a corrupting effect on the Corinthians' character. As he has already indicated, the resurrection hope has important ethical ramifications.

b. They need to "sober up" or come to their senses about the resurrection and start living accordingly.

E. Dispensing with a foolish objection to a bodily resurrection (15:35-44)

1. The rejection of a bodily resurrection by some in Corinth was apparently based on their inability to understand how this would be accomplished. After all, the body is decayed. Paul calls them foolish for raising such an objection.

a. They simply need to look at the way God has arranged the natural order of plant life. The seed that they plant goes out of existence, but it does so as part of the process of being transformed into a plant that has a different kind of body, a body given to it by God. The life of the seed thus continues in resurrected form.

b. They simply need to consider that God has made all kinds of different bodies. Earthly bodies differ from one another in terms of substance. Man has one kind of flesh, beasts, birds, and fish all have another. Earthly bodies differ from heavenly bodies, and heavenly bodies differ from each other in terms of splendor. God has adapted the bodies he has made to fit a variety of kinds of existence.

2. The resurrection of the dead follows the same principles.

a. Our present, earthly body, the naked seed, is sown in a perishable state, in dishonor, and in weakness. It will be raised, however, in an imperishable state, in glory, and in power. Just as the seed continues in a transformed body, so Christians will live forever in bodies of the resurrection. As Paul says in Phil. 3:20-21: "For our commonwealth is in heaven, from where we eagerly await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform the body of our humiliation to be conformed to the body of his glory in accordance with the power that also enables him to subject all things to himself."

b. Our natural bodies will thus be transformed into "spiritual *bodies*," *not* into spirits (as that term is commonly understood - but see v. 45). They are "spiritual bodies" in that they are adapted to the end time existence that is dominated by the Spirit. They are "spiritual" not in the sense of "immaterial" but in the sense of "supernatural."

F. Support for claim of a spiritual body (15:45-49)

1. In support of his assertion in v. 44b that just as there is a natural body so there is a spiritual body, Paul gives an interpretive citation of Gen. 2:7.

a. The fact that Adam became a living "person" (*psyche*) points to his having a natural (*psychikos*) body, and to speak of the *first* man Adam implies the existence of another comparable or analogous figure, who has already been identified as Christ (15:21-22).

b. The fact that at his resurrection, Christ, the last Adam, became a life-giving "spirit" (*pneuma*), in the sense that he became the breath/spirit of resurrection life, points to the spiritual (*pneumatikos*) nature of his resurrection body (and the resurrection body which he gives).

2. Paul emphasizes, against the Corinthian concept, that ultimate spiritual existence does not come until after natural existence has been brought to an end. In other words, the view that they already possessed full eschatological existence while in the natural body was wrong. That will only occur at the resurrection.

3. Adam's body was earthly in nature, but Christ's resurrected body is heavenly or glorious in nature. As Adam's body typifies natural mankind, so Christ's glorified body typifies resurrected mankind. Just as we Christians bore the image of Adam, having a corruptible body, so at the resurrection we will bear the image of Christ, having a glorified body.

G. Conclusion of argument about the resurrection body (15:50-57)

1. Paul here concludes his argument about the resurrection body by stressing the necessity for transformation. The kind of body with which Christians will enter the consummated kingdom is a transformed body, a body in which the perishable and mortal has been clothed with imperishability and immortality.

2. This transformation is essential for everyone entering the eternal kingdom, not simply for those who died before the Second Coming. The body in its present form simply cannot inherit the kingdom of God. Instead, when Christ returns, the dead will be raised with glorified bodies, and the saints who are alive at the time will likewise be transformed (without experiencing death). The same idea is expressed in 1 Thess. 4:16-17.

3. Paul notes that when this occurs, death will have been swallowed up in victory, and then, using Hos. 13:14, he taunts death in v. 55 in light of that certain event: "Where, O death is your victory? Where, O death is your sting?" Death has been defeated and rendered impotent by the Lord Jesus Christ!

4. Having mentioned death and sting, Paul interjects a theological note that the sting of death is sin and the power of sin is the law. I think he means that physical death only really stings for those who are in sin, those who are under condemnation for rebellion against the law of God. For them, death is entrance into an eternal judgment. For the righteous, the forgiven, the victorious in Christ, death is a passage to eternal glory.

H. Exhortation not to be moved from this conviction (15:58) – Given the resurrection hope that he has so staunchly defended, Paul now urges them to not be moved from this conviction and to constantly give themselves to the work of the Lord, knowing that they are not pursuing a mirage.

VII. Closing 16:1-24

A. Mechanics of collection for poor saints in Jerusalem (16:1-4)

1. Regarding the mechanics of the collection Paul was taking up for the poor saints in Jerusalem, he directs the Corinthians to do as he had told the Galatian churches to do. Each of them is to save up every first day of the week an amount that is in accordance with whatever prosperity may have come their way that week.

a. Christians are called to share their wealth in the name of Christ. We must be willing to put our money on the line for Christ-glorifying purposes.

(1) The collection that churches take up on Sundays provides an opportunity to contribute toward a Christ-glorifying goal.

(2) There certainly are other Christ-glorifying uses of one's money, but if you're spending all your money on yourself, you've got to ask, "Have I not prospered at all?" If you have, your refusal to give is sinful; you are refusing to allow Christ to exercise his lordship over your finances.

b. Since Sunday, the first day of the week, was the day on which Christians, whether in Galatia or Corinth, regularly assembled to share the Lord's Supper and engage in other

acts of worship, it was convenient for Paul to note that day as the time for saving up money for the collection.

2. When Paul arrives in Corinth, he will write letters of introduction for those the Corinthians approve to bring the gift to Jerusalem, and if it is appropriate, he too will accompany them.

B. Travel plans (16:5-11)

1. Paul informs them that he plans to stay in Ephesus until Pentecost and then to come to them by way of Macedonia. He had a great opportunity for evangelistic success in Ephesus, and not surprisingly, there were many who opposed him. This opposition culminated in the riot reported in Acts 19:23-41.

2. As indicated in 1 Cor. 4:17, Paul had dispatched Timothy to Corinth. Paul wants to be sure that whenever Timothy arrives that he is properly received. There was tension between Paul and segments of the Corinthian church, and Paul is concerned that Timothy may be mistreated in some way.

C. Apollos's return (16:12)

1. It seems that the Corinthians had requested that Apollos return to Corinth, and Paul was all for it. Despite how some had wrongly pitted them against each other, Paul joined their request and urged Apollos to return to Corinth.

2. Despite Paul's strong urging, Apollos was unwilling to return with the brothers from Corinth (Stephanas, Fortunatus, and Achaicus). Paul's advice was just that -- advice. It was not sinful for Apollos to refuse to heed it.

D. Concluding exhortations (16:13-18)

1. In vv. 13-14 Paul commands them to be on their guard against corrosive influences and to stand firm in the truth of the gospel. They are to be courageous and strong and to let love characterize all that they do.

2. In vv. 15-16 Paul urges them to submit to the household of Stephanas and to all who labor with them. Stephanas and his household were the first converts in the area and they gave themselves to ministry to the saints there. They were the ones presenting the Word to the people and for that reason were to be heeded. (Remember that much of Christian truth at that time was orally communicated. The Stephanas group were ministers in whom Paul had confidence.)

3. In vv. 17-18 Paul says that he rejoiced over the coming of Stephanas, Fortunatus, and Achaicus because they filled in the lack that he felt in being away from the church in Corinth.

Their coming refreshed Paul's spirit, and he commends them to the church ("Therefore, recognize such men").

E. Final warning (16:19-24)

1. In v. 22 Paul offers one last warning to those who persist in deviating from his gospel, those who might refuse to obey the injunctions of this letter. He puts such disobedience in terms of love for the Lord. He says that if anyone does not love the Lord, let him be one who is cursed.

2. To this he adds, "Our Lord, come!" to reinforce the warning. Christ is indeed coming, and those who do not love him are under the curse and in danger of being rejected by him.