

Chapter 15

Resurrection 15:1-58

The reason that Paul was writing about the resurrection is in verse 12. Some Christians were saying that there is no resurrection from the dead. They may have denied this vital part of the gospel for any of the following reasons:

1. Greeks believed that the soul is in the body. It is as if it is in prison. This world is only like a shadow. Death sets the soul free to live in the real world. So some Christians may have believed that a ‘soul’ could live for ever without a body.

2. Some Christians believed that the resurrection had already happened. At baptism they had received every blessing that they needed. So they did not look forward to a resurrection of the body. In another letter, Paul mentions Hymenaeus and Philetus, who had this false idea (2 Timothy 2:17, 18).

3. Some Jews may have tried to explain the empty grave. This may have tested a person’s belief in the resurrection of Jesus.

Paul dealt with these beliefs. He wrote about the facts about the resurrection (verses 1-11). Then he gave the serious results if people deny the resurrection (verses 12-19). He then shows the results if people believe in the resurrection of Jesus. He shows the results for the future and in the present (verses 20-34).

The facts of the resurrection 15:1-11

v1 Now, brothers and sisters, I want to remind you about the gospel. It was the gospel that I preached to you. You received the good news and you believed it. v2 Because you believed the good news,

God has saved you. But you must make sure that you hold on to the right message. It was the message that I preached to you. If you do not, you have believed for nothing.

v3 What I received, I passed on to you. It was most important. It is that Christ died for our sins. The Scriptures said that he would. And that is what happened. v4 Friends buried him. God raised him on the third day, as the Scriptures said. v5 Christ appeared to Peter and then to the 12 men. v6 After that he appeared to more than 500 believers at the same time. Most of them are still alive, but some have died. v7 Then he appeared to James. Then he appeared to all the apostles. v8 Last of all, he appeared to me also. I was like someone who was not born in a normal way. I was like someone who was born at the wrong time.

v9 Because I am the least of the apostles, I do not even deserve to have the name ‘apostle’. I tried to destroy God’s church. v10 But by the grace of God, I am what I am. And his grace to me was not in vain. No, I have worked harder than all of them. But it was not my work. It was God’s grace that was with me. v11 So whether I or the other apostles preached to you, this was our message. And this is what you believed.

Verse 1-2 Paul said that they had received the good news. The apostles passed on the facts about the crucifixion and resurrection. Paul himself received a revelation from Jesus Christ (Galatians 1:11). He had also seen Peter and James in Jerusalem. He would have received further teaching from them (Galatians 1:18-19).

Verse 3 Christ died ‘for our sins’. Isaiah 53:5-12 speaks about a servant of God who died on behalf of other people. He ‘carried the sin of many’.

Verse 4 Jesus had really died. This fact is clear, because his friends had buried him in a tomb (a grave that was like a cave). Some Scriptures suggested that he would not stay in the grave. God would raise his servant from death. Psalm 16:9-10 was one of the scriptures that Peter used in his speech on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:24-28).

Verse 5 Jesus appeared to Peter. Jesus really did appear. It was not something that Peter imagined. The angel in the empty tomb had said, 'Go, tell his disciples, and Peter' (Mark 16:7). The two who had returned from Emmaus found that the apostles already knew about Jesus' resurrection. 'He has appeared to Simon (Peter)' (Luke 24:34).

'the 12 men' may refer to the 11 apostles without Judas. It was a way to describe the special group whom Jesus first called. But they may not all have been present. John recorded an appearance of Jesus (John 20:19-20). Thomas was not present (John 20:24-28).

Verse 6 The appearance to five hundred people is important. Five hundred people were not likely to make a mistake. As some of them were still alive, it would be possible to question them about their experience.

Verse 7 James was one of the four brothers of Jesus (Mark 6:3). He had not believed in Jesus during his life. He thought that Jesus was mad (Mark 3:21). He suggested that Jesus should go to Jerusalem (John 7:5). But after the resurrection, James was among the disciples (Acts 1:14). He became a leader of the church in Jerusalem, where he met Paul (Galatians 1:19). He believed that Gentile believers need not accept circumcision (Acts 15:13-19). Paul went to see him on his return from his third journey (Acts 21:18). There is no other record in the Bible of Jesus' appearance to James. But it is clear that something important made him change. He had doubted about Jesus. Now he had accepted him as Saviour.

'All the apostles' means that not one of them was missing. It may refer to the appearance of Jesus recorded in John 20:26-29. Perhaps it is his appearance at the time of the Ascension (Acts 1:4). (The Ascension was the time when Jesus returned to heaven.)

Verse 8 The last appearance of Jesus was to Paul himself. It was on the road to Damascus (Act 9:1-5). Paul's spiritual birth took place after the Ascension. The other apostles lived with Jesus for a long time. They slowly realised that he was God's Son, the Messiah. The way that Paul became an apostle was quite different. It was sudden. He only saw Jesus long after the other apostles did. So, it was as if he was born at the wrong time and not in the normal way. People sometimes used the Greek word for this kind of birth as an insult. A baby that is born early can be very small. And it may sometimes look ugly. Paul was not handsome. He may have been quite small. Some Christians insulted him (2 Corinthians 10:10). People may have used the word as an insult because he emphasised God's grace. Some Christians said that he was not born again. He was like a baby that leaves its mother's body too soon to remain alive.

Verses 9-11 Paul emphasises that he has become a Christian through God's grace. He did not deserve to have the name 'apostle', because he had attacked God's church. God's grace gave him the desire and the strength to work harder than all the other apostles. But whoever preached the gospel gave the same facts about the resurrection as Paul gave. These were the facts that the Christians in Corinth had believed.

The results if people deny the resurrection 15:12-19

v12 We have preached that God has raised Christ from the dead. Some of you say that no one rises from the dead. v13 If no one

risen from the dead, then not even Christ has risen from the dead. v14 And if God has not raised Christ, our preaching does not mean anything. And your faith does not mean anything. v15 More than that, we would be telling lies about God. We have given witness that God raised Christ from the dead. v16 But God did not raise Christ if he does not raise the dead. v17 And if God did not raise Christ, your faith does not mean anything. God has not forgiven your sins. v18 Then those who have died as believers in Christ are lost. v19 Some people think that we have hope in Christ only in this life. Then people should pity us more than they pity anyone else.

Paul gives seven results if people deny the resurrection:

1. Verses 13 and 16 God has not raised Christ. Death and hate will have defeated life and love.
2. Verse 14 Those who preach the resurrection are wasting their time.
3. Verse 14 Those who have trusted in Christ will be disappointed. He said that he was the truth. What he said would all have been a lie.
4. Verse 15 Some people have preached that God raised Jesus. Those people are giving false ideas about God. They are breaking the law about false witnesses.
5. Verse 17 God will punish Christians for their sins. God has not forgiven them.
6. Verse 18 Those who have died as believers in Christ have no future.
7. Verse 19 If Jesus has not risen from death, his promises about the future eternal life make no sense. We have no hope for the future. Other people should pity Christians. Because Christians believe someone who could not keep his promises.

The results of the resurrection of Jesus 15:20-34

v20 But Christ really has come back from death. He is the first person to rise of all those who have fallen asleep. v21 Death came because of what a man did. Resurrection from the dead also comes from what a man did. v22 Because of Adam we all die. So, because of Christ, God will make everyone alive. v23 But each will be in turn. Christ is the first of those who rise from the dead. When Christ comes back, God will raise Christ's spiritual brothers and sisters. v24 Then the end will come. Christ will destroy all rule, authority and power. Then he will hand over the kingdom to God the Father. v25 Christ must rule until he has put all his enemies under his control. v26 The last enemy that he will destroy is death. v27 This is because Scripture says, 'God has put everything under his control.' It says that God has put 'everything' under his control. But it is clear that this does not include God himself. God puts everything under Christ's control. v28 When he has done that, the Son will also be under God's rule. In that way, God will have everything in heaven and earth in his love and power. He will be 'all in all'.

v29 Suppose that no one rises from the dead. There are people who go through baptism for the dead. Suppose that God does not raise the dead at all. Then these people cannot accept baptism on their behalf. v30 We would not put ourselves in danger all the time. v31 I die every day. I really mean that, brothers and sisters. I am proud about what our Lord Jesus Christ has done for you. You can be sure about that. v32 I did not fight 'wild animals' in Ephesus for only human reasons. I would have gained nothing as a result. If God does not raise the dead, 'Let us eat and drink, because tomorrow we die.'

v33 Do not let anyone persuade you to do wrong. 'Bad companions make a good person bad.' v34 You should come back to your senses and stop sinning. Some of you do not know anything about God. I say this to make you ashamed.

Verses 20-28 Future results of the resurrection

Verse 20 'First': Paul used a word that described the first grain of the harvest. Jews had to offer this first to the priest in the temple before the grain went into the shops. It was a sign of the future harvest. So the resurrection of Jesus was the sign of the future resurrection of all believers.

'those who have fallen asleep' means 'those who have died'. Jesus himself used the word 'sleep' to mean death. He said that he would wake Lazarus from 'sleep' (John 11:11-13). 'Sleep' describes a state that will not last for ever.

Verses 21-22 Adam's failure to obey God brought sin into the world (Genesis 3:17-19). Sin was responsible for death. As people, we all have the same tendency to sin. Everyone has sinned. Therefore all will die. We cannot avoid death.

But Christ is the new Adam. He came into the world as a real person. He came into the world to rescue us from sin and its results. Christ gives life. We can choose to share in his life. If we belong to him, we are part of his completely new human family. We have God's gift of eternal life. This life begins on earth. It continues beyond physical death. Our spirit will live with God.

Verses 23-24 Events will take place in the right order. Christ is the first to rise from the dead. Christ will come again. Then, God will raise all those who belong to Christ. Then the end of human history will come. Christ will destroy the power of everyone and everything that opposes him. 'Rule, power and authority' can refer to both

human and spiritual beings that are against God. Christ will give to the Father those who belong to his kingdom.

Verses 25-28 Paul uses two Psalms to explain that Christ will defeat his enemies. Psalm 8:6 describes the authority that God gave to man. God gave this authority to men when he created them. God has 'put everything under his feet.' Christ was the perfect man. So these words perfectly refer to him. In Psalm 110:1, God gives honour to Christ. Christ will rule until he has defeated all his enemies. God raised Christ from death. And he will raise those who belong to Christ. So death, which is our final enemy, will suffer complete defeat.

Christ finished the work that God gave him to do. So, God will be 'all in all'. These words of Paul mean that nothing in heaven or on earth will be able to act against God's power. Then nothing will want to act against his love.

Results of the resurrection for the present, verses 29-34

1. Some members of the church at Corinth were having baptism on behalf of friends or family. They had died before they became Christians. Or as Christians they had died before baptism. If there is no resurrection, there was no sense in 'baptism for the dead'. They would be wasting their time.

The later Christian church has never used this practice.

2. Verses 30-32 Paul then spoke about himself. He suffered and put himself in danger every day to preach the gospel with its good news about resurrection. At Ephesus, he had been in great danger. 'To fight with animals' was a way to describe the very dangerous situation there. The angry crowd were like animals and could easily have killed Paul (Acts 19:23-31). There was no reason for him to go through such hard times if there is no resurrection.

He might just as well follow pagan advice: 'Let us eat and drink, because tomorrow we die' (Isaiah 22:13). Instead of the daily struggle, he could enjoy physical pleasures. And he could live without care.

3. Verses 33-34 Some people think that there is no future life. So, they live as if this world is everything. They easily behave badly. The rich man in Jesus' story forgot about eternity. So he planned to live selfishly (Luke 16:19). A Greek poet had written, 'Bad company ruins good characters.' This was a well-known thing that people said. Paul says that those who deny the resurrection are the bad company. They behave badly and they will cause other people to behave badly too. So, Paul tells the Christians at Corinth to come back to their senses. The words that Paul used mean that they are like confused people. They are like people who have drunk too much alcohol. The Christians at Corinth must make sure that they can think clearly. They must stop sinning. To deny the resurrection is not a sign of their superior 'knowledge'. It is a sign that they are like pagans. They do not know God. And their lack of love for other people is also a sign. They do not know what God wants. Paul wanted to make the Christians at Corinth ashamed about their wrong behaviour. Their behaviour was the result of their proud, false ideas. Paul hoped to make them change their behaviour.

The nature of the resurrection body 15:35-50

v35 But someone may ask how the dead become alive. And they may ask what kind of body they will have. v36 That is a foolish question. What you plant does not become alive unless it dies. v37 When you plant something, it is not a mature plant. You only plant a seed. Perhaps it is a seed of wheat or of some other crop. v38 But God gives it a body, just as he has planned. And he gives

its own body to each kind of seed. v39 Not all created bodies are the same. People have one kind of body. Animals have another kind. Birds have another kind. Fish have another kind.

v40 There are also bodies that belong to the heavens. And there are bodies that belong to the earth. The bodies that belong to the heavens are splendid in one way. The bodies that belong to the earth are splendid in another way. v41 The sun has one kind of glory. The moon has another kind. The stars have another kind. And the glory of one star is different from the glory of another star.

v42 It will be like that with bodies that God raises from the dead. The body is like a seed that someone buried in the earth. It does not last for ever. The body that God raises lasts for ever. v43 The present body is weak and it has lost some of its honour. The risen body will be glorious. The present body is weak. The risen body will be powerful. v44 God will raise the natural body to become a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body. v45 The Scripture says 'The first man Adam became a living soul.' The last Adam became a life-giving spirit. v46 The spiritual body did not come first. The natural body came first. After the natural, the spiritual came. v47 The first man came from the dust on the ground. The second man came from heaven. v48 People are like the man from earth. People will be like the man from heaven, so that they can live in heaven. v49 We have been like the man from earth. So, in the same way, we shall be like the man from heaven. v50 I declare this, brothers and sisters: The bodies that we have now cannot have a place in the life of heaven. These bodies do not last. So they cannot become part of the kingdom that lasts for ever.

Verse 35-41 The Christians at Corinth then asked a question about the kind of

resurrection body that anyone would have. The question was a foolish one. The word 'body' describes many different kinds of bodies. The human body is suitable to live on earth. A fish has a body that is suitable to live in water. The bird's body is right to live in the air. The sun, moon and stars are all different in the splendid light that they give out. So, God will give each Christian a risen body that is suitable to live in heaven.

Verses 42-44 Seeds have to 'die' in the ground before they grow into plants. A seed that we bury in the earth produces something much more beautiful. A tiny brown seed dies and a splendid flower with bright colours grows from the seed. In the same way, when the human body dies, the risen body will be much more wonderful. It has a relationship with the human body, but it is different. When Jesus rose again, his friends could recognise him. But his appearances were sudden. He could enter a room, although the disciples had locked the doors. As soon as the two people who had walked to Emmaus recognised him, he disappeared (Luke 24:31).

The risen body will not die or have any physical weaknesses. The human body has lost some of its honour because of sin. 'All people fall short of the glory of God' (Romans 3:16). But the risen body will be glorious. 'The Lord Jesus - - - will change our weak human bodies. He will make them like his glorious body' (Philippians 3:20-21). In the Lord's prayer, we say that 'the power and the glory' belong to God. Our risen bodies will have both power and glory. They will be more like God. And so they will be suitable bodies for us to live in heaven.

Verses 45-50 The first man, Adam, was a 'man of dust' (Genesis 2:7). All of us are like Adam. God raised Jesus, the 'last Adam', from the dead. The resurrection of Jesus showed that he was the man from

heaven. All those who belong to Jesus will receive his life. Jesus is a spirit who gives life. These human bodies cannot enter heaven after death, because there is no death in heaven.

The time of the resurrection body 15:51-57

v51 Listen! I tell you a mystery. We will not all die, but God will change us all. v52 That will happen in a flash, as quickly as an eye shuts and opens again. It will happen when the last trumpet sounds. The trumpet will sound and God will raise the dead to live for ever. And God will change us. v53 Our natural bodies do not last for ever. They must put on the clothing of a body that lasts for ever. What dies must have the clothing of what does not die. v54 That is what will happen. The body that does not last will receive the clothing of a new body. It will be a body that lasts. The body that dies will receive a new body. It will be a body that will never die. Then what Scripture says will come true: 'God will destroy death completely.' v55 'Death will have no victory. Death will have no 'sting'. v56 The 'sting' of death is sin. And the power of sin is the law. v57 But we give thanks to God. He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Verse 51 Christians who have died will receive a resurrection body. Paul has explained that. Now he speaks about other Christians. Those Christians will still be alive when Jesus comes again. The Holy Spirit has shown Paul what nobody knew before. Those still alive will need a different body. It must be suitable for heaven.

Verses 52-54 'In a flash' translates the word 'atom', which is something very tiny. So it will be in the very shortest time. The change from a human body to a spiritual body will happen very quickly. A trumpet gave a signal that the enemy had lost the battle. In

the Old Testament it is often one of the signs of the 'Day of the Lord' (for example Joel 2:1). The sound of the last trumpet will tell everyone that Jesus has defeated death. It is the time of Jesus' return. Then God will change our human bodies into spiritual bodies. It will be like when a person changes his clothes. Paul used the words from Isaiah 25:8 to show that God's victory over death was complete.

Verses 55-56 The prophet Hosea spoke about death as if it were a person. He asked where its victory came from (Hosea 13:14). Paul used these words to show that there is no longer a need to fear death. A 'sting' is the painful and poisonous attack from an insect or a snake. The law showed what sin is like. And it made us all guilty in front of God. Sin is like the poison that leads to death. It makes us afraid to meet God.

Verse 57 Christ's last words on the cross were 'It is finished' (John 19:30). He had

destroyed the power of death. God raised Christ from the dead. So he will also raise those who belong to Christ. So Paul ends his teaching about the resurrection with words of praise.

The demand for action 15:58

v58 So my dear brothers and sisters, stand firm. Do not let anything move you from your faith. Always do the Lord's work with all your power. Your work will not be without worth. Since you belong to the Lord, you can be sure about that.

Verse 58 Paul ends by encouraging his Christian brothers and sisters. They have the promise of the resurrection. So they should not let anything disturb their faith. They should not let anything destroy their faith. They should do all that they can to work for Christ. Anything that they do for the Lord will certainly be worthwhile.

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