



Understanding the
Resurrection

Readings from
1 Corinthians 15

Patrick J. Griffiths

Understanding the Resurrection

A Study of 1 Corinthians 15

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Waukesha Bible Church
S53 W24079 Glendale Road
Waukesha, Wisconsin 53189
www.waukeshabible.org

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Prologue

No Christianity without the resurrection

As a Christian, it is impossible not to see the centrality of the resurrection of Jesus Christ to Christianity. In fact, in its absence there is no Christian message of hope, healing, and wholeness. In the absence of His resurrection from the dead, sin's debt remains, God's wrath continues, alienation and rejection are persistent and perpetual, and guilt prevails. It is His resurrection from the dead and triumph over the grave that insures redemption, propitiation, adoption, and justification. Why the emphasis on His resurrection?

Many Christians regard the resurrection of Jesus as the central doctrine in Christianity. Others take the Incarnation of Jesus to be more central; however, it is the miracles — and particularly his Resurrection — which provide validation of his incarnation. According to Paul, the entire Christian faith hinges upon the centrality of the resurrection of Jesus and the hope for a life after death.¹

The resurrection of Jesus from the dead is central to the message of the New Testament - it simply does not make sense without it. The cross and resurrection are central to virtually all known forms of early Christianity. Michael Ramsey, a former Archbishop of Canterbury, has said:

For the first disciples, the gospel without the resurrection was not merely a gospel without a final chapter; it was not a gospel at all.²

Belief in the resurrection is not an appendage to the Christian faith: it is the Christian faith. The Gospels cannot explain the resurrection; it is the resurrection which alone explains the Gospels.³

If the resurrection is not somewhere at the heart of biblical preaching, then it is deceptive to call it Christianity.

I have no idea as to your motive for reading this short tract on the resurrection of Jesus Christ as noted in 1 Corinthians 15. My desire is for you to understand and accept His victory over sin and death freeing you from your imprisonment. He is the good news which can lead you from darkness to light, famine to feasting, and from death to life. May the Holy Spirit cause you to hear His voice and see Him.

¹ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Resurrection>

² Michael Ramsey, a former Archbishop of Canterbury

³ John S. Whale, *Christian Doctrine*

The Gospel is Jesus Christ



"For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that He appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve." (1 Cor. 15:3-5)

Read 1 Corinthians 15:1-11

Somehow within our thinking, we have reduced the gospel to a production or tract or system of presentation when the gospel *is* a person, NOT a presentation or program. First Corinthians 15:1-4 lays out the basic components of what constitutes the gospel. The gospel of grace of God and of Jesus Christ communicates a singular idea and that is . . . the gospel is a person, and that person is Jesus Christ. The gospel is gracious because Jesus voluntarily took upon Himself human nature in order that by becoming the second Adam He might become humanity's race representative (Rom. 5:12-21). He did for us what we could never do for ourselves. He became sin, who knew no sin (Heb. 4:15), in order that we might become righteous before His Father (2 Cor. 5:21).

Verses 3 and 4 tell us that He died in behalf of sin. The sin issue presupposes that a need was significant enough to warrant an action by God in our behalf. If sin was capable of resolution by human effort, then the incarnation and cross were unnecessary. But sin does exist. Like the presence of God, sin does not need verification. Its existence can be justifiably shown. What He did in His death was unattainable by any other death. His resolve secured our end.

However, His death is a part of a larger thought. Attached to His death is a confirming statement; He was buried. The burial of Jesus confirms that He was dead. The resurrection of Christ substantiates His death. In the absence of the resurrection, all bets are off. His resurrection stamps a “yes” to the promises of God. Resurrection says the grave is not the end. Resurrection continues a *Story* whose storyline reads “the best is yet to come.”

In addition, there is another thought: He appeared to many. His appearance tells us these are not mere words that cannot be supported by reality or fact. You can have the death of an idea, but we are not talking about theories or formulas or programs or hypothetical conjecture. We are talking about an individual, someone who possessed flesh and blood. This One died and was buried and rose on the third day and appeared to many.

When we speak of the gospel, we are not speaking of His church (which is a consequence of the gospel), or a method of presentation (which is perhaps necessary, but NOT the gospel). When we speak of the gospel, we are speaking of Jesus Christ. When we share the gospel, we share Christ. We might seek an indirect approach of sharing Christ when we invite people to a church service, but let us not confuse or dilute the gospel by thinking this is the gospel. Jesus Christ *is* the gospel. It is for this reason we say, “Christianity is not a religion; it is a relationship, and this relationship is with a person and His name is Jesus.” Jesus Christ is Christianity.

Although the need of man is great because of the sin issue and the penalty against it, the real attraction in Christianity

is not our deliverance from sin, but our relationship to Christ. Christ is the attraction. He brings hope to the despairing, healing to the diseased, and wholeness to the dysfunctional. He is glorious and great. He is incapable of deficiency and sufficient for our inability. He is the light in darkness, the water that quenches thirst, and the food that satisfies hunger. He is an unfailing companion and faith-filled friend. The gospel is good news not simply because we are saved from sin. The gospel is good news because of who Christ is. He *is* the good news. It is when we see Him that evangelization becomes spontaneous because it comes from the overflow. Sharing anything other than Christ is empty and unfortunate. So . . . as we think of the gospel, let us begin to think biblically. Let us begin to think “the Gospel *is* Jesus Christ.” And let us in thinking this, see who He is and then what he has done. Let us make this the centerpiece of our verbal and visual “gospel” communication.

2

The Centerpiece of Biblical Preaching

*“Now if Christ is preached,
that He has been raised from the dead...”
(1 Cor. 15:12a)*

Read 1 Corinthians 15:12-19

First Corinthians 15:12 begins with a simple statement, “Now if Christ is preached, that He has been raised from the dead...” There is a marked simplicity in the statement, “Christ is preached.” Perhaps the strength of the statement can be addressed by asking it in the form of a question, “Is Christ preached?”

Earlier in the chapter, Paul defines the resurrection of Jesus as the bulwark on which the Christian “good news” rests (v. 4). In the absence of this resurrection, all hope is lost.

Paul establishes the theology of the cross much earlier in the letter (1:18-25; 2:2). Here (in 1 Cor. 15:1-11) he welds together the theology of the cross and the theology of the resurrection and in so doing shows them to be indivisible. How many times is a theology of the cross and resurrection heard from the pulpits of today’s church? It is undeniable that our culture is rife with a consumer mindset. Consumerism or the need to purchase is either a necessary slave or a horrible master. When “I shop to live” becomes “I live to shop” we have crossed over into a dark abyss. The church has not been left unscathed by such thinking. Everything from ministry to message has fallen prey to a

market driven mindset. The congregant, as a consumer, dictates what many churches become.

Equally compelling is the prevailing ignorance of the general population. We find ourselves ensnared by such tantalizing tidbits offered by the Hollywood elite. We have become a world inhabited by the unthinking. Our attention span is deficient and our ability to think is significantly hampered by a consuming, non-desire to learn. We bend and conform to whatever pressures exist. We bow before whatever weight is most pressing. Does this have any significance in ministry and message?

I do not fault too harshly the need to meet the needs of growing families. When we had small children, we were compelled by employment to have our children go to the church where I was employed. Our choice was made for us. Today, the church has become a superstore of options whereby the congregant can pick whatever ministry expression (i.e. entertainment) best appeals to their appetites. The message communicated by the church sits in a position of secondary importance to how it is said and in what context it is said.

We are not so much concerned by truth as we are by attraction. The same is true with reference to the message taught on Sunday mornings. We forget that worship is truth driven. It is driven by an unfolding and revealing of God and His work, not by us and our needs. Modern technology has caused us to “need” something more than the “mere” preaching of Christ crucified. We fail to see or we have failed to make Christ relevant to the modern consumer. We do not ask questions that strike at the heart of biblical worship but rather, “What can He do for me?”

The relevance of preaching Christ to my family, spouse, friends, co-workers, my surroundings, in short, my life cannot be overestimated. In the absence of this message all ministry expression is vain. It becomes mere entertainment and the cuddling of the overfed and under-active. In the absence of this message, faith is empty. There is nothing left to drive self-sacrificing service. There is nothing that drives the courageous to offer up their lives in death for Him who loved them and gave Himself for them. In the absence of this message, we are still in bondage to sin. There is no deliverance, no freedom, and no hope. We still exist under the penalty of sin, the power of sin, and the very presence of sin. In the absence of this message, we mourn the death of loved ones knowing that nothing awaits them but darkness and separation. There will never be an ultimate reunion, if Christ is not preached.

How do we make Christ relevant in a consumer driven age? How do we make Him appealing when everyone wants cookies, ice cream, and Kool-aid? Friend, it is not our responsibility to make Christ relevant. What we are to do is preach Christ crucified. Let us proclaim Him as God. Let us believe He is enough in this life and in the life to come. And let us never stop preaching Him to a world that is blinded by and in bondage to their appetites and pleasures.

Betting on a Sure Thing

3

“Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep” (1 Cor. 15:20)

Read 1 Corinthians 15:20-34

The passage before us is a response to the dark notes sounded in the previous paragraph (vv. 12-19). If Christ was dead and did not rise from the dead, then all Christian profession as it relates to Him and His promises would be of naught. Yet our text says, “Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, [AND IS] the first fruits...” This statement is significant. First, it stands in contrast to the dark notes sounded earlier. It is light in darkness. It strengthens, encourages, and lightens those who are weak, downcast, and broken. Second, it is a promise of what is to come.

The historical significance of Christ as a first fruit for His people is lost to most readers. In Leviticus 23 the initial produce of a crop was to be offered up as a “first fruit.” It spoke of more to come, of a fuller and larger harvest. This same idea is captured by the text. Because Jesus Christ has been raised from the dead, everything He has promised and we have believed in light of those promises will come to pass.

This can be applied to all of His promises, but there are several specific ideas inside of the paragraph. First, His triumph over all things created is exhaustive. Second, His reign over all things created is eternal. Finally, His purpose for all things created described as ended. Let us consider each of these ideas as they are found in the text before us.

First, in verses 24-26, His triumph over all things created is described as exhaustive. There is nothing that can be excluded from His triumph. There is coming a time when nothing created will defy His authority. We presently live in a world that stands in open opposition to Him. It expresses a will that often appears in conflict to Him. It is hard to imagine that what we see and hear every day through various media is an expression of His exhaustive triumph over all things created. Yet for all of His people we understand that His triumph is an “already-not yet” truth. His cross-work has set in motion His full and final triumph over all things created. He will destroy “all dominion, authority, and power” (v. 25). And “the last enemy to be destroyed [will be] death” (v. 26). Because of the language used in verses 25 and 26, I chose the word “exhaustive” to show the far reaching arena of His triumph. Nothing will escape His victory over sin and death. Everything we encounter in our lives will fall into subjection to Him who has and will triumph over all things created.

Second, in verses 24-25, His reign over all things created is described as eternal. There is a lot of movement within the idea of His reign in our passage. First, everything, except the Father, will be placed in a position of subjection to the Son. Second, everything, including the Son, will be placed in a position of subjection to the Father. The idea presented reflects the economical Trinity whereby the Son is placed in a position of dependence to the Father. This is a part of the incarnation when He took upon Himself the nature of man and became the God-man. As Son, He was functionally in subjection to the Father prior to the incarnation. This economy or administration existed before the Trinity chose to create. There is a great mystery here. In this mystery within the Trinity we must never conclude that the Son, as

Son, is anything less than the Father or the Holy Spirit in their essence. The kingdom ruled by the Son and then handed over to the Father is singular in nature. When the Son hands the kingdom over to His Father, the purpose of God for all things created will be ended. This is a part of the imagery presented for us in 1 Corinthians 15.

Finally, in verse 28, His purpose for all things created is described as ended. O friend, there is coming a day when the purpose of God for all things created will be ended, when He will be all in all! What a glorious and compelling day that will be. To even speak of such things fills the writer with awe, excitement, and expectation. Everything that appears so disjointed and illogical will open before us into a unified and intentional whole. Nothing will be out of place. No longer will “square pegs be forced into round holes.” The union of all things will be consummated.

This is absolutely fascinating. Ephesians 1:9-10 speaks of this truth in the following manner:

“In all wisdom and insight He made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His kind intention which He purposed in Him **with a view to an administration suitable to the fullness of the times, that is, the summing up of all things in Christ, things in the heavens and things on the earth**” (Eph. 1:9-10).

When the Son places Himself along with the trophies of His work under the authority of His Father, the Father will be all in all, and in so doing He will have summed up all things in Christ. This same action echoes the idea of Philippians 2:9-11, when the Father grants to Christ a position before which

all things created bow, and in such action the Father receives glory.

“For this reason also, God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus EVERY KNEE WILL BOW, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Phil. 2:9-11).

It is the resurrection of Jesus Christ that speaks of this future. What the Father did in the raising of His Son was place a pledge on His promises to complete what He alone began. Oh what joy is ours both now and in the future. Today we can rest in full contentment knowing that He is faithful to complete what He started (1 Thess. 5:23, 24). He is both the author and finisher of faith (Heb. 12:1, 2). This is the Christian hope, and this is what stands out as our identifying quality to a world without this hope. Today, may you find great peace knowing the triumph of God is exhaustive, the reign of God is eternal, and that the purpose of God will end. God has won, and in Christ we share in this magnificent victory.

From Grime to Glory

4

“So is it with the resurrection of the dead.

What is sown is perishable; what is raised is imperishable.

It is sown in dishonor; it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness; it is raised in power. It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body” (1 Cor. 15:42-44).

Read 1 Corinthians 15:35-49

Many people refuse to face the reality of their immediate existence. Questions such as “who am I, why am I here, and where am I headed” are quietly and conveniently skirted. We live in a state of persistent denial. My present existence and circumstances, however, are non-negotiable. I do not have to look far to see that something is very wrong with the air I breathe, the ground I trod, and the context in which I live my life. I am marked by corruption and decay. I am perishing. Because of the fall into sin and the imputation of Adam’s sin to my nature, I am vile and shame-filled. My frame is frail. I have broken my wrist, nose, and knuckles. I have two 2” stainless steel screws in my left ankle. I have had concussions to my head and arthroscopic surgery on my left knee (or was it my right knee [my mind is also failing]) and I have had major neck surgery. My body is failing. It is diseased. I am not getting physically stronger or better. I am not like fine wine getting better with age, but rather a fish out of water . . . gasping and rotting. I am fragile whereby back slaps and hard hugs are unsettling. I am of Adam and of the earth. I am natural. This reality is not really open to debate. All of us at all times share in this marred way of life.

Yet . . . ah yes, yet, what a powerful word. The word “yet” opens the door to greater opportunity and hope. There is yet, despite my present condition, another page to be turned, another chapter to be read, another book to be written. The storyline continues. It moves from the present into the future. There is coming a day of promise whereby God will fulfill His words to me.

The promise of God tells me that I will exchange the perishable for the imperishable. I will give up dishonor and inherit glory. I will replace weakness with power and the natural body for a spiritual body. Oh what a day of unbridled celebration that will be. Such words sustain me in my descent into death and birth me into my new life. This time is not the final word, sentence, paragraph, chapter, book, or series to my life. There is “yet” more to come.

There is coming a time when I will no longer face corruption or decay. I will no longer be perishing. The vileness of my present condition will give way to His untarnished glory. I will be like Him for I will see Him as He is. This sin marred body of flesh will give way to perfection. My body shall no longer bear witness to its frailty. Today I am a memorial to flesh, but then I will be a trophy of His faithfulness. Although I am a descendent of Adam, I have been adopted into the family of God and will bear full witness to my union with Christ.

Today I face a life marred by stress, strain, depression, dysfunction, and disease, but all of this will one day be laid down and exchanged for the glory of God. He will transform me from the inside out, and I will finally reach the finish line. But until then I am called upon to rest and endure, knowing that He is moving me “from grime to glory.”

The Day Death Died and Hope Was Born



" . . . then will come about the saying that is written, 'DEATH IS SWALLOWED UP in victory. O DEATH, WHERE IS YOUR VICTORY? O DEATH, WHERE IS YOUR STING?' The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law; but thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Cor. 15:54-57)

Read 1 Corinthians 15:50-58

Scripture does not allow us to simply examine it without recognizing the intimate and personal nature of it. The Bible is not simply information. There is a God who comforts us in our loss and encourages us in our struggles. It is the hope of God making all things right that pushes us to endure the injustice of living in a fallen world. There is coming a day when the full disclosure of heaven on earth will be played out before our eyes. It is my theology of God and His world that causes every pleasurable sensation to have an eternal significance and every painful moment to make sense. The death of death in the death of the Savior is finalized at the resurrection of all things. He has triumphed and will triumph and His victory is our victory. It is because of this that we can endure and abound in obedience as the kingdom of God advances toward its final installment.

There are four movements within this one paragraph that help unpack the primary idea. Paul begins by noting the problem in verse 50. If we remain as we are, we will not be able to inherit the kingdom of God. This is the consistent witness of all Scripture. There is necessity behind the

change that is to take place. If God did not intervene, then all hope would be lost.

The solution to the problem is shaped in the form of a mystery. The mystery is that not everyone will experience physical death. A biblical mystery is something that was previously undisclosed but is now being disclosed. We are living monuments to the inevitable decline of all living things. Yet there is coming a day of great and glorious change.

Not everyone will die, but everyone will experience transformation. If we are fortunate to be alive when the Lord returns, we will be changed without having to experience death. Paul lived in light of an imminent return. He lived for the eternal in a world that is temporal.

Notice the third movement of the triumphant cry at the death of death (vv. 54-56). There is coming a day when the sting of sin shall forever be lost. “Death has as yet *a sting* even to the believer, in that his *body* is to be under its power till the resurrection. But then the sting and power of death shall cease for ever.” The saints of God will glory over the conquest of death as one does a defeated foe, a vanquished enemy. Notice the nature of the two questions asked in our text.

“It is sin alone that makes life hard” . . . and it is the Law that makes men conscious of sin. It is only the grace of God and the triumph of Christ that makes men free from sin and death.

It is to our detriment that we fail to see the “now” of a living Christ. If the life we live is constantly pulling us away from

heaven and not pushing us closer to heaven, then we must begin to evaluate what it is in this life that is distracting us from the life to come.

The importance of this chapter for daily living is unavoidable. A correct theology of the resurrection forces a three-fold response.

The resurrection is confirmation God has kept and will keep His word. We are to thank God for His victory which He has given to us. The victory was in no way due to us. It is verse 57 that provides the fuel for verse 58. It is His victory given to us by grace that causes us to be steadfast, unmovable and always abounding in His work. There is great joy knowing that He is working in me and through me a work that is eternal.

Our lives are a part of an eternal line. Everything we do has an eternal significance. Nothing we do exists inside of a vacuum. There is a strong and adverse dichotomy between our heaven and our earth. We fail to see where the two are constantly intersecting. Each and every day, heaven and earth fusions are taking place. Everything you do and everything you encounter has purpose. Just because you do not see it does not mean it is not happening. Today may we live in the reality of His resurrection and the certainty of ours. May we see death as a vanquished foe, and may we live in His victory each and every day.

Epilogue

Well, here we are at the end of our short readings. If you do not know Jesus Christ as your personal Savior from sin and death, then I invite you to consider receiving/believing Him today.

Let me begin by asking you very personal question, "Are you sure of your relationship with God?"

Do you know where you will spend your life after death? If you are not sure, please consider the following thoughts.

Most of us have heard the word "Gospel." The word itself means "Good News." If there is "good news" it presupposes that there is "bad news." What is the bad news?

Bad news is having a problem you cannot fix. What that problem is varies from person to person, but whatever it is, when you cannot fix it, it is bad news.

Most problems in life can be fixed with either time or money. Both things, however, are limited.

There is one problem that cannot be fixed with either time or money and it is the problem that exists between you and God.

The BAD NEWS IS . . . YOU ARE A SINNER

- Your sin separated you from God.
“For all have sinned; all fall short of God’s glorious standard” (Rom. 3:23).
- Your sin results in judgment against you.
“For **the wages of sin is death**, but the free gift of God is eternal life through Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom. 6:23).

This is the “bad news” that neither time nor money can fix. Because of your sin . . .

- You have a debt you cannot pay,
- a gulf you cannot span,
- a burden you cannot bear,
- and a test you cannot pass.

As dark as this information is, there is hope.

THE GOOD NEWS IS . . . GOD SENT HIS SON TO BE YOUR SAVIOR.

- God had done for you what you could never do for yourself. He sent His Son to be your substitution. He became the sacrifice for sin (1 John 4:10).
“In this is love, not that we loved God but that **He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins**” (1 John 1:4:10).
- Because God loves you, Jesus died in your place for your sins (Rom. 5:8).
“But God showed his great love for us by **sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners**” (Rom. 5:8).

This next step is crucial. Without it the gift of Jesus Christ will continue for you unwrapped.

YOU MUST ACCEPT THE PROVISION OF GOD

(John 1:12)

- You must accept the provision of God in your behalf or you will live and die in “Bad news”.

“**But as many as received Him**, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name” (John 1:12).

“For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, **that whoever believes in Him. . .**” (John 3:16).

The provision of God is described in two ways.

- First, it is a gift received (Rom. 6:23; Eph. 2:8).
- Second, it is an object believed (Acts 16:31; Rom. 10:9).

If you desire to accept the gift of eternal life in Jesus Christ, then take Him at His word and believe what He has said is true. I cannot answer the question for you. You must choose to accept and choose to believe. Unless you do this, you will be lost forever. If you would like to discuss the above information and would like someone to pray with you, please feel free to seek us out at www.waukeshabile.org. Thank you for taking the time to read this short tract and may you find the rich blessing of God in the days ahead.

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Waukesha Bible Church (262) 542-7177

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