

| 1 Corinthians |
Week 24 Scripture Guide | 1 Corinthians 15:1-11

Biblical Context

Paul has been addressing both what had been written to him by the Corinthians (1 Cor 7:1, 25; 8:1; 12:1) and what had been reported to him by others (1:11; 5:1). Having addressed division (chs. 1-4), sexual purity (5-7), idolatry (8-10), and the church gathering (11-14), Paul has been attentive to the undercurrent of the Corinthians' spiritual arrogance and over-realized eschatology. Because they believed that they had arrived spiritually and that the kingdom of God had already come, they inadvertently promoted division, tolerated sexual immorality, deprived one another in marriage, dabbled in idolatry, exploited their own rights, looked down on others, and lacked sacrificial love. Their behavior revealed their carnal thinking. While they walked in a degree of spirituality (1:7; 12:1-14:40), their over-realized eschatology ignored the future bodily resurrection of believers (15:12).¹

In 1 Corinthians 15, which many view as the climax of the whole letter, Paul first reaffirms the church's commonly held belief regarding the objective reality of both Christ's crucifixion and his bodily resurrection.² He does this by reminding them of the gospel which he preached (εὐαγγελίζω, *euangelizō*) to them (1:23; 2:2; 3:6; cf. 14:36), which they received (παρελάβετε, *paralabete*), in which they stood (ἑστήκατε, *hestēkate*), and by which they were being saved (σώζω, *sōzō*; 15:1a, 11).³ Though the Corinthian church consisted of Christians who followed different teachers (1:12), who were rich and poor (6:1-8; 11:17-34), knowledgeable and naive (8:1, 7), had diverse gifts (12:1-11), were culturally and socially diverse (12:13)—all had common ground in the gospel preached and gospel received. Paul here reminds (γνωρίζω, *gnōrizō*, “causing to know”) the Corinthians about gospel basics because it is evidenced by their actions that they seem to have forgotten.⁴ Holding fast to the word (λόγος, *logos*; cf. 1:18; 14:36) of the preached gospel—Christ crucified and resurrected—is essential to Christianity. “If they do not hold fast to the gospel, that is, if their current position as to ‘no resurrection’ [15:12] is correct, then Christ did not rise, which in turn means that they did indeed believe in vain” (15:2b-c).⁵ Paul will go on to expound in the implications of disregarding the future bodily resurrection of believers in 15:13-19.

Paul unpacks the core of gospel essentials, “For I delivered (παραδίδομι, *paradidōmi*, “passed on a tradition”) to you as of first importance (ἐν πρώτοις, *en prōtois*) what I also received (παρέλαβον, *parelabon*): that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, and that he was buried, and that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures,” (1 Cor 15:3-4).⁶ The “bare bones” gospel as far as Paul was concerned was Christ's atoning sacrifice (1:2) and resurrection (15:20). Christ's burial solidified his bodily death and his appearance confirmed his bodily resurrection. These are the non-negotiable basics of Christianity, all fulfilled in accordance with the Messianic prophecies that pervaded the Hebrew Scriptures. Of the many Messianic prophecies in the Hebrew Scriptures, some of the most notable are Psalm 22 and Isa 52:13-53:12. Psalm 22 prophesies about the circumstances concerning Jesus on the cross, being surrounded by evil men (Psa 22:16:a) who mock him and cast lots for his clothing (22:18; cf. Matt 27:35; Mark 15:24; Luke 23:34; John 19:24),

¹ “The doctrine of the resurrection of the dead, more fully expounded here [in 1 Corinthians 15] than in any other part of Scripture, makes it clear that God's purpose has never been simply that of ‘saving souls’ for a disembodied existence in heaven, as though creation itself was of merely temporal usefulness and significance. Roy E. Ciampa and Brian S. Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2010), 738.

² Ciampa, 736. As a whole, the letter is framed by Christ's crucifixion (1 Cor 1:23; 2:2) and his resurrection (15:1-58) and addresses issues in this light.

³ Paul uses different verbal forms “to remind them that the gospel he preached is also the one on which their past (‘you received’ [aorist indicative]), present (‘you stand’ [perfect indicative]), and future (‘you are being saved’ [futuristic nuance of present indicative]).” Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, ed. Ned B. Stonehouse et al., Revised Edition., The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2014), 800.

⁴ Paul's reminder (*gnōrizō*) is used in contrast to certain Corinthians' ignorance (ἀγνοέω, *agnoeō*) in 1 Cor 14:38 (cf. 10:1; 12:1).

⁵ Fee, 801.

⁶ The phrase *kai hoti* (“and that”), syntactically unifies the contents of 1 Cor 15:3-5 as being the that which Paul had received (15:3a). The verbs “died” and “buried” occur in the aorist tense indicating that they had previously occurred. The verb “was raised” occurs as “a perfect passive (‘he has been raised’), implying that he was both raised and still lives.” Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, ed. Ned B. Stonehouse et al., Revised Edition., The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2014), 806.

piercing his hands and feet (Psa 22:16b). The figure in the Isaiah 52-53 prophecy is referred to as the Suffering Servant who was a “man of sorrows” (53:3), and though “he had done no violence” (53:9), he “was numbered with the transgressors” (53:12), and was “pierced through for our transgressions, ...crushed for our iniquities” (53:5). The third day resurrection finds its Hebrew Scriptures link in John 1:17 (cf. Hos 6:2), as mentioned by Jesus prior to his crucifixion (Matt 12:40; cf. 26:61; Mark 14:58; John 2:19-22). In Luke 18:31-33, Jesus told his disciples, “See, we are going up to Jerusalem, and everything that is written about the Son of Man by the prophets will be accomplished. For he will be delivered over to the Gentiles and will be mocked and shamefully treated and spit upon. And after flogging him, they will kill him, and on the third day he will rise.”⁷ Thus Jesus was crucified and resurrected according to the Scriptures and just as he foretold.

As the burial of Jesus was a confirmation of his bodily death, so his appearance was a confirmation of his bodily resurrection. In 1 Cor 15:5-8, Paul uses the word “appeared” (ὄραω, *horaō*) four times as confirmation of Jesus’ bodily resurrection. After his resurrection, Jesus appeared to Cephas⁸ and then to the twelve (1 Cor 15:5).⁹ “Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep” (15:6).¹⁰ At the time of Paul’s writing to the Corinthians (ca. AD 53-54), several of the eyewitnesses of Jesus’ resurrection were still alive and could be consulted for verification that a literal bodily resurrection of Jesus had occurred.¹¹ A point that Paul seems to be making is the objectively verifiable fact of Jesus’ resurrection that, in light of all the aforementioned witnesses, is not an event up for debate.¹² “Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles” (15:7).¹³

Paul seems to be coming against any voices in Corinth that would tempt these Christians to believe that something as unbelievably good as the gospel was therefore unbelievable in its ability to be true. Paul appeals to the staggering number of eye-witness accounts—including himself having seen the risen Christ in his own Damascus road conversion experience—to dispel any doubts that the Corinthians might have in regards to the validity of the bodily resurrection of Jesus.

Connection and Application

We are not so unlike the Corinthians in the ways that we lose sight of the centrality of the gospel for daily living. For the Corinthians, they lost sight of the gospel as they bogged themselves down with unrepentant sin, unbiblical sexual ethics, and an over-emphasis on personal giftedness and empowerment by the Spirit. The culture that we live in has certainly primed the church to fall prey to the same ideas. We are at war with one another over sexual ethics, over moral-failure of professing believers in light of unrepentant sin, and over a false gospel of self-empowerment. Paul’s message to the Corinthians is the same for us—make the gospel our center.

⁷ In Luke 24:44-47 Jesus reminded his disciples how everything written about him in the Law of Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms, including his atoning sacrifice and resurrection on the third day must have been fulfilled.

⁸ Cephas (Κηφᾶς, *Kēphas*) is the Greek transliteration of כֶּפֶז (*Kēpha*), an Aramaic word, meaning “rock.” Peter (Πέτρος, *Petros*) means “stone.”

⁹ “The Twelve” refers to the group of Apostles that Jesus called to serve with him and send out to preach (Mark 3:14). Contextually, Judas Iscariot was not present and Matthias had not yet been chosen (Acts 1:26). Cephas and the other 10 Apostles saw Jesus. “The Twelve” is a collective designator.

¹⁰ While we have no extant texts explicitly stating this, Paul could be drawing from contemporary tradition.

¹¹ According to a textual tradition captured in Matt 27:52, when Jesus resurrected, so did many other saints, who appeared to many in Jerusalem.

¹² Jesus resurrected around AD 30-33 and Paul is writing to the Corinthians a mere 20 years later. Denying the public bodily resurrection of Jesus in Paul’s day, having stated the many witnesses, would be like us denying that the Holocaust, WW2, Korea, Vietnam, or events of 9/11 ever happened.

¹³ James is Jesus’ half-brother and was not one of the Twelve. During his earthly ministry, none of Jesus’ brothers believed him (John 7:2-9). James became an Apostle in Jerusalem (Acts 12:17; 15:13; 21:18). In his letter, James calls himself “a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ” (Jam 1:1).