

First Corinthians 15:1-11

The philosophers at the Areopagus in Athens mocked the concept of the resurrection in Acts 17:32. Yet, Plato spoke of the immortality of the soul. The Greeks and Romans accepted an afterlife, but NOT a physical resurrection of the body.

Key Verse: 15:12

Since you believe in Christ's Resurrection, how can you not believe in the resurrection?

It appears that an influential group of teachers are opposing Paul's teaching concerning the physical, or bodily, resurrection in Corinth.

This is the last subject/issue Paul addresses in this letter.

If there is no resurrection then there is NO POINT to Christianity as stated in 15:19.

(Even the Christmas concept of "PEACE ON EARTH and GOOD WILL AMONG MEN" is off base with the Gospel message!)

Paul's response is in this chapter 15 in three parts:

1. 15:1-11 – Paul reestablishes the gospel
 - a. These are objective truths
 - i. Jesus Died
 - ii. Jesus was resurrected
 - b. Two Themes from 14:33-38 are picked up here:
 - i. Paul's apostolic doctrine was common doctrine for all true believers
 - ii. Paul's apostolic doctrine was what influenced their beginning
2. 15:12-34 – The contradiction of their position. Their doctrines are conflicting and illogical.
 - a. The main problem with their doctrine: Christ was raised, but there is no resurrection??
 - b. Paul then balances their illogical doctrine with three hypothetical logical conclusions.
 1. 15:12-19 – Christ was not raised so the Christian faith is a lie
 2. 15:20-28 – Christ was raised and so we will all be raised. Christ was the first fruits, or the beginning, of resurrection that will have its ultimate fulfillment in the destruction of death itself.
 3. 15:29-34 - If there is no resurrection for us then why do we live committed to things that do not matter?
3. 15:35-58 – How are the dead raised?
 - a. Short answer: With a physical resurrection with a transformed body that is adapted to the new realm

The Corinthian problem began with their false identification of spiritual. They had received the Spirit, manifested spiritual gifts, considered themselves part of the angelic realm and no longer needed to be concerned with marriage, sexual responsibilities, the effects of sin, Paul's "elementary" teaching nor with a physical body. The resurrection was unnecessary for their new spiritual state.

Early church thinking had to adjust to the death of the believer. Christ's resurrection meant salvation but some early believers did not necessarily connect Christ's resurrection to their own or other people's resurrection from death. Most of the Christians were still alive and waiting for Jesus. This issue is seen in Paul's letter to the Thessalonians that he wrote from Corinth. See 1 Thes. 4:13-18.

Paul's theology is that with Christ's resurrection, God set into motion the complete overthrow of death.

15:1

Paul does not try to prove the resurrection, but restates it to the Corinthians.

Starting point: Common Ground was → the Gospel.

Paul uses a similar point of argument in his attempt to recover the Galatian churches in Gal. 1:11 -

“For I would have you know, brothers, that the gospel that was preached by me is not man's gospel.”

15:1-2 - They have already believed

15:3-5 – An early Statement of Faith or Christian Creed

15:5-7 – A collection of commonly stated events that prove the above Statement of Faith

15:8 – Paul's experience

15:9-10 – Paul's apostleship

“I would have you know” (**gnorizo** which means “make known”) is a rebuke for the Corinthians who had already “known” the Gospel.

In fact, they had “received it” (the Gospel) in the aorist tense which means a decisive act they had made in the past.

The Corinthians had taken their “stand” (also referred to in 2 Cor. 1:24) on this fundamental point.

15:1-2

“**I remind**” or “I make known” picks up on the “ignorant” option of 14:38.

The “spirituals” are “ignorant” because they have ignored Paul's previous instruction.

1. “**Preached to you**” refers to the traditional Christian Creed of 15:3-7
2. “**You hold fast**” refers to the doctrine of hope presented in 15:12-28
3. “**Unless it is vain**” refers to the uselessness of the gospel if there is no resurrection discussed in 15:29-34. “**Believed in vain**” is **NOT** a reference to them losing their salvation but is a reference to the vanity of committing to the gospel if the above points #1 and #2 are not true.

“By the Gospel” uses the Greek **dia** Gospel means “through” the Gospel they were brought to salvation. The message of the death, burial and resurrection had brought them to salvation.

“You are saved” is present continuous action meaning “you are being saved”.

Notice:

- Verse 1 = received salvation in the past
- Verse 2 = continuous process of receiving salvation.

15:3

“**For What I received**” is a technical term from Paul's Jewish training and refers to transmission of religious instruction. It is also used in 1 Cor. 11:23 when Paul gives instructions concerning the Lord's Supper.

Paul is using this term now to identify the accepted Christian Creeds and early doctrine he had communicated to the Corinthians.

Paul “passed on” what he “received”.

Paul is not talking about theology he developed or worked out. Paul is passing on a creed.

The earliest creeds of Christianity are HERE:

1. That Christ died for our sins.
2. That Christ was buried.
3. That Christ was raised.
4. That Christ appeared.

The Creed that Paul is using here has four lines.

Each line begins with *hoti* or “that” which emphasizes the content of each line.

“First Importance” – if you do not have THIS (the above four lines of the earliest creed) you DO NOT have Christianity.

The death of Christ was an atoning death.

First Line:

“that Christ died for our sins”

1. Foundation of Faith as in 1 Th. 4:14
2. “Christ” is the English word for the Greek word “christos” which means “anointed one” which a word used to translate the Hebrew word “messiah” which means in Hebrew “anointed one”
3. “for our sins” is the message of Isaiah 53:5
 - a. Isaiah 53:5 says “*pierced for **OUR** transgressions*” and “*crushed for **OUR** iniquities.*”
 - b. This is reflected in 1 Corinthians 11:24 when Jesus taught at the Last Supper, “This **MY** body, which is **FOR YOU.**”
4. The language of Atonement:
 - a. “death” is the penalty
 - b. “our sins” is the crime

“According to Scripture”

1. Refers not to one particular passage of the OT but to the entire OT since the Messiah and his death for mankind’s sin is found from Genesis to Malachi.
2. The “scripture” could refer to the promise in the Garden, Isaac on the altar, the Passover lamb in Egypt, promises to David, Isaiah 53, etc.
3. “According to Scripture” means Paul is saying this line of doctrine or creed was not created by a religious system, but was instead a fulfillment of biblical prophecy. It happened according to what the Scriptures foretold.

15:4

Second Line:

“that he was buried”

1. the focus is on the dead corpse.

This was a real physical death. This was the life returning to a corpse.

Third Line:

“that he was raised on the third day according to scripture.”

1. “He was raised” is passive (not active) which means the focus is on someone else doing the work (the Father) (also in 15:15)
2. “He was raised” is perfect making the raising of Jesus permanent which means the results are abiding.”
3. (The perfect tense is used 7x in this chapter: 15:4, 12, 13, 14, 16, 17, 20)

4. “according to scripture” refers to the OT speaking of the Messiah or the Christ’s resurrection.
 - a) Isaiah 53:10-12 – “Yet it was the LORD’s will to crush him and cause him to suffer, and though the LORD makes his life a guilt offering, he will see his offspring and prolong his days, and the will of the LORD will prosper in his hand.
 11 After the suffering of his soul, he will see the light [of life] and be satisfied; by his knowledge my righteous servant will justify many, and he will bear their iniquities.
 12 Therefore I will give him a portion among the great, and he will divide the spoils with the strong, because he poured out his life unto death, and was numbered with the transgressors. For he bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.”
 - b) Psalm 16:10 – “you will not abandon me to the grave, nor will you let your Holy One see decay.”
5. “according to scripture” may NOT be referring to “on the third day” since that was not made clear in the OT. It was made clear by Jesus during his ministry.
6. “on the third day” is the statement by the believers that the resurrection had occurred in history. It happened on “the third day.”

Doctrine of the Resurrection of Jesus was foundational and central for the early church

- This began on Pentecost in Peter’s speech recorded in Acts 2:22-36 when Peter used OT verse of David from Psalm 16:10 – *“For you will not abandon my soul to Sheol, or let your holy one see corruption.”*
- 1 Thessalonians 4:14 has already been written from Corinth, *“For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep.”*
- “Three days” comes from:
 - Hosea 6:2 – *“After two days he will revive us; on the third day he will raise us up, that we may live before him.”*
 - John 2:19-21 – *“Jesus answered them, ‘Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.’ The Jews then said, ‘It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and will you raise it up in three days?’ But he was speaking about the temple of his body.”*
 - Matt. 26:61 (Mark 15:58) – “At last two came forward and said, ‘This man said, “I am able to destroy the temple of God, and to rebuild it in three days.”’ ”
 - Jonah in the fish for 3 days as in Matthew 12:40 – “For just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.”
 - Abraham traveled three days to Mount Moriah to sacrifice Isaac in Genesis 22:4 where he would hear the announcement that Isaac would not die, but a lamb would instead: *“On the third day Abraham lifted up his eyes and saw the place from afar.”*
 - Jesus said in Luke 24:46, *“This is what is written: ‘The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day.’ ”*

“his death” and “for sins” is proven by two historical facts:

- “his death” is proven by his Burial
- “for sins” is proven by his Resurrection as is also stated in Romans 1:4, “...was declared to be the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord.”

15:5

Fourth Line:

“that he appeared to...”

Paul creates a strategic catalogue of witnesses that saw the resurrected Lord:

- Peter
- The Twelve – only time Paul uses this title “the Twelve”. It was a general term for the group of Jesus’ chosen Twelve. (In this case Judas was dead and Thomas was absent from the group.)
- 500 – most are still alive was a huge testimony
- James
- All the apostles – may refer to those meeting on the Mount of Olives at the Ascension in Acts 1
- Paul

There is no catalogued listing like this in early church writings which would seem to mean this is Paul’s addition to the creed to emphasize the reality of the resurrection.

Resurrection proved by multitude of witnesses.

This list of names and appearances makes the Resurrection a historical event.

Paul names a multitude of witnesses that were still alive and could be cross examined at the time Paul lists their names in this public document.

The death, burial and resurrection of Jesus was not a myth.

15:6

The appearance to 500 is not recorded in Scripture, but it may refer to hundreds of people following Jesus’ directions to meet him in Galilee.

- Mark 16:7 – “*But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going before you to Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you.*”
- Matthew 28:16 – “*Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them.*”

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15:7

Paul had met James early in his ministry (Gal. 1:19) and would again meet with James later after these letters to Corinth and the conflict was resolved.

15:8-10

Jesus’ appearance to Paul on the road to Damascus is given equal credit as the other appearances. But, Paul seems to consider himself the LAST of the apostles to be chosen which means there are no others after Paul. The Lord was not going to appear to and chose any other apostles.

“Abnormally born” is the English translation of a Greek *to ektromati* which focuses on an abnormal process. ***Ektromati*** means:

- Miscarriage
- Abortion → both refer to taken not at the due date nor in season. The focus is on:
 - An abnormal process
 - No time for training , growth, development
 - The use of an offensive Greek word that may have been used by the critics in Corinth to insult and reject Paul. But, Paul agrees with and uses the offensive term.

“Abnormally born” may be Paul referring to:

- Paul being chosen as an Apostle by the Christ AFTER his resurrection, instead of before
- Paul being a persecutor of the church, BEFORE he was chosen
- Paul moving about without the eyewitness credentials of an apostle so that when he came into Corinth he came with “fear and trembling” (1 Cor. 2:3
- Paul snatched like a miscarriage from his sinful, rebellious life

In **15:8**, the last words in the Greek sentence are “to me also” making the emphasis on Paul’s person which include his lack of credentials and personal attractiveness, as the least in the sentence.

In **15:9** the “I” is emphatic which makes the focus on Paul the center and his position as “least of apostles” the focus.

This position as “least” is in agreement with the historical setting of Paul as:

1. persecutor of the faith
2. lacking in apostolic training by Jesus (lack of credentials)
3. lacking in proper calling

But, Paul knows that by God’s grace he is good, great and worthy as an Apostle because:

1. 2 Corinthians 11:5 – he is NOT inferior to the super-apostles
2. Gal. 2:11 – Paul stood up to and shut up Peter
3. 1 Corinthians 9 – Paul has rights of an apostle, but chose not to use them

Paul overcame all these obstacles “by working harder”

- Wrong time
- Wrong past
- No credentials
- No support

15:10 – “without effect” is *kene* meaning “empty” and “without content”

- “worked” is *kopiano* meaning “labour to the point of exhaustion” Deissmann says *kopiano* was a word used by a proud, skillful craftsman to describe his labor.
- “than all of them” can be read in the Greek as saying either of these:
 - “more than all of them put together”
 - “more than any one of them”
- Historical proof shows that the first could be true: Paul accomplished “more than all of them put together.” And, this is supported by the fact that Paul is bragging about the work of God’s grace.
- “Grace” was “with” Paul which means beside him like a fellow worker. Grace was NOT “in” Paul making him work.

15:11

But, Paul’s teaching was consistent with:

- Old Testament
- Jesus’ words
- Apostles teaching, creeds and doctrines
- Apollos who taught in Corinth (1:12)
- Cephas (Peter) who taught in Corinth (1:12)
- The original Gospel message that Paul preached to the Corinthians

POINT: There is only ONE gospel and the Corinthians do not get to create their own.

“We preach” is present continuous tense meaning the habitual practice of preaching this.

POINT: Paul’s teaching was still in the mix of the heart of the Gospel message in the Scriptures, in Jesus’ teaching, the apostle’s teaching, Church creeds and the Corinthian message! BUT, the Corinthians had left Paul’s teaching which means they had also left: Scripture, Jesus, Apostles, Church doctrine and even the original message they had accepted at first!

“This is what you believed”

- You heard this message and accepted it.
- If you change it you are leaving the message. You are not leaving Paul behind, because Paul (like the others) is still holding to the message.
- The Corinthians will be Gospel-less (“without good news”) if they continue this path