

The Witness of Paul to the Resurrection

1 Corinthians 15, Colossians 3:1-4, 1Thessalonians 4:13-18

Introduction – Let me begin by asking a question. **Do you believe in the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead?** I follow up that one with another! **So what? How does that truth work out in your life? Does that truth make any difference in your life?** There's a danger, that we are all susceptible to, the creation of a discontent between **creed** and **deed** in our lives. In other words, we can believe in our hearts all the wonderful truths of the Christian faith but they do not make any major difference about how we live our lives. So, a question to ponder!

What difference does your belief in the resurrection of Jesus from the dead make to the way you live?

Paul's witness to the resurrection can broadly be viewed around three subject areas. First, teaching concerning the actual resurrection of Jesus, secondly, teaching concerning our own future resurrection and finally, the difference Jesus' resurrection makes on our own life of discipleship now. I'm going to hang these three sections on 1 Corinthians 15, adding other scripture along the way. I've put these in brackets – they are optional to this study.

1 Corinthians 15 - Dubbed by J B Phillips 'the most important chapter in the Bible', 1 Corinthians 15 is the key text in which Paul elaborates on the resurrection of Christ and its consequences for us. Not surprisingly, never a Christian funeral passes without verses from this chapter being read. Because 1 Corinthians deals with resurrection hope, this chapter is of permanent relevance.

Context – it is generally agreed that 1 Corinthians was written some time in AD 54, that is, around some 25 years after the death of Jesus.

Structure – 1 Corinthians 15 divides into three basic sections

1. vv 1-11 – Paul deals with the resurrection of Christ himself
2. vv 12-34 – Paul writes of the resurrection of the dead, which is consequent upon Christ's resurrection.
3. vv 35-58 – Paul elaborates on the nature of the resurrection body before he concludes with an assurance of the victory that is ours in Christ.

The resurrection of Jesus – vv 1-11

In this first section Paul is probably not trying to prove the resurrection of Christ. Rather, he is reminding the Corinthians of the beliefs he and they have in common.

According to verses 3-5 how does Paul define the Gospel?

What four propositions does he mention?

Is it his Gospel? How did he receive it? (cf 1 Cor. 11.23)

Why does he mention all those witnesses? What is Paul trying to establish?

For this study let's explore further the words used in verse 4. They are very important! The passive mood, *he was raised*, indicate that God is the implied subject: it is not so much that Jesus rose as that God raised him, and in doing so vindicated his death on the cross. The tense is even more significant. In the other lines of the creed a simple Greek past tense is used, namely *he died, was buried and appeared*; but in this line the verb is in the Greek perfect, a tense expressing a past action with consequences in the present. The implication is that Christ was raised to life and lives for ever. Christ is alive!

The resurrection of the dead – vv 12-34

From having established the certainty of Christ, Paul now seeks to establish the certainty of the resurrection of the dead. To do this, he develops his argument in three different ways.

1. The negative implications if Christ had not been raised from the dead.
2. The positive implications if Christ has been raised from the dead.
3. Finally, he returns to the negative implications and list three immediate consequences in the present if Christ has not been raised from the dead.

According to verses 12-19, what implications follow if *there is no resurrection of the dead*?

In the light of Paul's words, what do you make of preaching that denies Christ's bodily resurrection and interprets the event in purely 'spiritual terms'?

Paul does not pull his punches in this section. If the tomb were not empty and Christ not risen from the dead, then Christian believing has nothing to offer. The Christian Gospel stands or falls with the resurrection of Christ. Preaching that lacks the dimension of the

resurrection has no power to change lives. It is no longer Christian preaching.

Thank God, there is no need to major on the negatives. For with great certainty, Paul declares, *But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead* (v.20). The two little Greek words translated 'but... indeed' convey the sense 'the truth of the matter, however is ... The resurrection of Christ is the great reality on which the whole future of the world depends. Paul spells out the positive implications of the resurrection, which may be summed up in a series of Christological statements.

What does Paul state about Jesus in verses 20-28 and the consequences for our lives?

How do these truths encourage you in your own situation and as you look at the world around?

[1 Thessalonians 4:13-18]

It would appear that in his brief stay at Thessalonica Paul had led the new church there to believe that Jesus would be returning soon to usher in God's final kingdom. In the few months that had elapsed since Paul's visit, however, not only had Jesus not returned, but also some of the new Christians had died. These deaths had come as a great shock to many and had caused them to wonder what the future held for their loved ones. In response Paul wrote to reassure them. He sought to point out to them the tremendous future that awaits those who have put their faith in Christ.

What did Paul believe about the future? What was the basis of this hope?

Explore the difference between 'grieving with hope' and 'grieving with no hope' in the face of death.

How can we encourage a bereaved Christian with these words (v18), without appearing to trivialize or rebuke their grief?

The resurrection of the body 1 Corinthians 15.35-50

The underlying issue is spelt out in verse 35: *How are the dead raised? With what kind of body will they come?* These were no hypothetical questions at Corinth. Strictly speaking, Paul does not write, 'But someone may ask', but rather, 'But someone will ask'. To be fair, this was an issue that concerned not just the Corinthians. The Jews themselves were much concerned with this issue. Down the centuries Christians too have been concerned about this issue. They have asked questions such as: what if a Christian dies at sea and their body is eaten

by various fishes who then scatter to the seven seas? What happens to the body of a Christian who is blown to bits by a bomb?

Ultimately, the Christian answer must be that if God created the world *ex nihilo* (out of nothing), then in the light of that supreme miracle, everything is possible. To an all-powerful God the resurrection of the body creates no difficulties. Indeed, is this not what Paul is to all intents and purposes stating right at the beginning of his argument when he describes such questions as *foolish* (v36)

Paul goes on to answer the question through the use of analogies.

First, **the analogy of the seed**. Basic argument – the process of change or transformation is in God's hands.

Second, **the analogy of the heavenly bodies**. Basic argument – God is not locked into giving his creature's one kind of body. He is a God of infinite creativity and variety.

What can we learn about our resurrection bodies from these verses, what will they be like? (at least three characteristics are mentioned in these verses!)

How does this doctrine differ from belief in the immortality of the soul?

The Difference the Resurrection makes (vv50-58)

As the apostle comes towards the end of his argument, he breaks out on a tremendous note of triumph. As he looks to the future he declares, '*Death has been swallowed up in victory*'. The saying he here quotes is Isaiah 25.8, which actually reads, 'he will swallow up death for ever'. A subtle change has occurred: *in victory* has replaced '*for ever*'. Paul has adopted this change because he wishes to highlight the victory is ours in Christ.

Not only death has been overcome: so too have sin and the law (v56) According to the rabbis, 'The law is the power of God'. For Paul, however, 'sin sprang to life' through the law (see Romans 7:7-12). Death has had its deadly power (sting) precisely because of sin and law. But thanks be to God, for sin and death do not have the last word. Christ has dealt with this 'root infection'. The victory is indeed already ours through our Lord Jesus Christ (v57)

In the light of this victory new meaning and purpose are given to lives.

Consider how Paul concludes this section? (v58) What follows the word *therefore*? He is putting creed and deed together! For Paul, what are the consequences of a belief in the resurrection?

Why does the resurrection make this difference?

Coming full circle in this study, how do you answer the question, 'so what'?

Let me finish with a Karl Barth quote (what bible study cannot be improved with a quote from that great theologian?). Karl Barth once said, "The resurrection of Jesus is not history". By that he didn't imply that he doubted the historicity of that event, but that we cannot leave the resurrection of Jesus back in Jerusalem 2000 years ago. The living presence of the risen Saviour is shaping his people's lives today. He is still making history in our midst!

[Colossians 3:1-4]

For the Christian, life in the here and now is lived in the light and power of the resurrection of Jesus. The resurrection does not simply give hope for the future; it transforms the way in which we live in the present.

Our new life in Christ is to lead a new lifestyle. But if this is to happen, then an on going act of the will must be involved. To live Christ-like lives we must actively rid ourselves of the old self and its practices. At first sight this new lifestyle appears to be very much a matter of human effort and achievement. Yet the truth is that it is a life lived out in the power of the risen Christ.

What rationale does Paul give for his exhortation to *set your hearts and minds on things above*, and what does this mean?

Conclusion

What can we learn from Paul concerning the resurrection?

1. Basis of our faith is the bodily resurrection of Jesus. Remove it, or distort it, and we are left with nothing! No hope, no forgiveness, no future and no message to bring to the world.
2. Are own resurrection body is modelled on the resurrection body of Jesus. Glorious, eternal, and immutable.
3. Discipleship is empowered by the living presence of the risen Lord.