

Just a little bit **longer...**

1 Corinthians 15

1 Corinthians 15 is another one of those famous parts of the bible; certain phrases will have a familiar ring, like “*Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die,*” or “*Where O death is your sting?*” It’s a long chapter, devoted entirely to the issue of resurrection from the dead. But perhaps the familiarity of some of the words, and the way we tend to turn to this passage to answer some of today’s attacks on the historical resurrection of Christ, steers us away from understanding the very odd ideas of the Corinthians. The trend among “liberal” Christian scholars - along with non-Christians - is to say stories about the resurrection of Jesus are a myth. Perhaps, they say, “*his spirit lived on in the memory of his friends.*” To Paul and the first Christians, a resurrection like that is no resurrection at all.

Here’s the strange thing. The Corinthians agree with Paul on the resurrection of Jesus. What they don’t see is the connection with what the future holds for them! In the first section of the chapter, Paul can happily say that he, the other apostles, and the Corinthians, are all in agreement. It’s the *logical consequences* of the resurrection of Jesus where the differences are found. Let’s take one step at a time...

A Resurrection Gospel

1. Read **1 Corinthians 15v1-11**. Both verse 1 and verse 11 say that...
2. What are the three key statements of the gospel message that Paul “passed on to them as of first importance”?
 - V3
 - V4a
 - V4b
3. What evidence does Paul cite that Jesus really *did* rise?

What is his own place on the “apostolic pecking order”? Why?

What difference has that made to the gospel the Corinthians heard and received?

A Strange Confusion

While many may doubt the fact of the resurrection of Christ, Paul is quite clear that there’s no doubt about the content of the gospel message the Corinthians first heard. Take it or leave it, the message certainly *said* that Jesus rose from the dead. And the Corinthians *said* they believed it. So here comes the strange turn in the argument...

Read verses 12 to 34.

4. What are some of them saying? (v12)

Remember, at this point we’re looking back at the very first generation of Christians in Corinth. They’ve heard about the promise of eternal life... but that doesn’t mean they’ve got things figured out! Perhaps they think that as Christians, they simply won’t die. Perhaps they think that somehow the more spiritual ones of them have been resurrected already!

5. Take a look at **2 Timothy 2:17-18** for comparison. What consequences does this teaching have?

A thought experiment...

Try to think yourself back into the minds of the Corinthians, who could accept the resurrection of Jesus as a recent historical fact, and yet didn’t think they’d be raised from death themselves. I wonder what implications there would be from a view like that? Paul explores some of them in verses 13 to 32.



6. Fill in the gaps in Paul's chain of logic.

a) If there is no resurrection then...

b) and if Christ has not been raised then...

c) so we are found to be...

Paul's argument is the reverse of what we expect, because we're usually so busy trying to argue that Jesus was raised from the dead. Paul's argument is that if the dead (literally "corpses") are not raised, then they must be wrong in what they've believed about Jesus! And that means, their sins haven't been forgiven... and that those who have "fallen asleep" already are lost.

7. If the Corinthians are right, faith in Christ is for this life only. What's Paul's response?

8. How does Paul's re-affirmation of the resurrection of Christ (v20-23) change the Corinthians perspective?

9. If some of the Corinthians have picked up the idea that their resurrection has happened already, and that they're already "spiritual" beings, they've misread the time! According to verses 24-28, what is "still to come"?

Think it through...

In our world, has death been defeated already?

What unrealistic expectations do Christians sometimes have of life in this world?

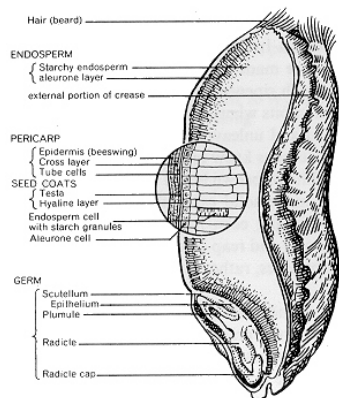
What are we still waiting for?

Clearly, the Corinthians are inconsistent in their thinking. They agree Jesus was raised...but they don't think they will be. They have a strange custom of "baptising for the dead" (v29) - but Paul says, why bother, if the dead are not going to be raised? And why would he personally put his life on the line (v30-32) if this life is all there is?

10. The consequences of thinking there's no resurrection are brutally simple. How does Paul put it in verse 31?

11. Verse 31 is apparently a pretty good description of how the Corinthians are living. What do they need to do?

A grain of wheat cut lengthwise (through crease)



Fit for Eternity

If the Corinthians are thinking they've already "arrived" as spiritual beings, they're in for a sad surprise. Our current bodies simply aren't built to last. Read **verses 35 to 49**.

12. What sort of continuity will there be between what we are now, and what we will be?

13. Read **verses 50 to 55**. What message do these verses hold for people like the Corinthians, or Christians today, who say that "if you have enough faith you won't get sick"?

14. Clearly, the time when there'll be "no more tears" is "not quite yet!" But we do have the first-fruits - and a share in the final victory. That's something to look forward to! In the meantime, what does Paul say Christians should be doing?

An over-realised Eschatology?

The technical term for the way the Corinthians - and many Christians today - are thinking is "over-realised eschatology." *Eschatology* is the "doctrine of the last things." *Realised* is used in the technical sense of "cashing in an investment." In short, they're thinking that heaven is (or should be) "now." Sadly, it's a form of thinking that always ends up in disappointment. This world, and our current bodies, are not fit for eternity. Next time your Pentecostal friend tells you that if you "just have enough faith" all your illnesses will go away, remind her that you're looking forward to a much better body - where that will indeed be true. But not here. Not yet. We're simply called to look back to the gospel we believed, hold on to the first-fruits of spring in the resurrection of Jesus... and look forward to the time when the whole harvest is ready! In the meantime, the work of the Lord is the work that's worth doing!