

# THE GOSPEL EXPLAINED

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*By the Book*™ A Chapter by  
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## Let's Begin

*The journey we have taken through 1 Corinthians reveals a never ending set of problems the congregation faced. Some wrongly think the early church was a community of angelic men and women who knew nothing of the problems of the modern church. Paul's correspondence to the Corinthians explodes that myth!*

*As we enter the home stretch in chapter 15, we are confronted with a problem almost unimaginable for Bible-believing Christians of today: doubt concerning the resurrection of Jesus Christ. While skeptics have employed every tool of their trade for two millennia to overturn the evidence for Jesus' resurrection, it remains the centerpiece of Christian belief.*

*The denial of a bodily resurrection stems mainly from three groups. The materialist insists there is no existence beyond death. Once breath ceases and the heart refuses to pump, all existence finally comes to a dark, decaying end—the human corpse mingles with the dust of the earth. Second, the pantheist argues at death, we all slip off into a sea of everything, merging with all other forms of energy. Religions from the Orient typically hold some form of this belief. Third, the Platonist believes the soul is immortal but the body ceases to be. In fact, one should long for release from the body's "prison."*

*Each of these views attempts to pull the rug from under the Christian faith by denying the resurrection of the body. Paul gives us the definitive Christian response. Thus, as we begin our study of chapter 15, let's follow the outline below:*

- I. Paul Explains How The Gospel Saves Us From Death (vv. 1-34)**
- II. Paul Explains How The Gospel Summons Us To Life (vv. 35-49)**
- III. Paul Explains How The Gospel Shelters Us For Eternity (vv. 50-58)**

## I. Paul Explains How the Gospel Saves Us From Death (vv. 1-34)

In broaching the theme of the Gospel, Paul opens with a clear affirmation of what the Gospel is. He writes, "Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand; By which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain. For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures" (1 Cor. 15:1-4). In Paul's most concise statement about the Gospel, coming as close as we can get to a "textbook definition", front and center is a focus on the resurrection. Three assertions are clearly presented.

First, Paul notes the prominence of the resurrection (vv. 1-4). Our faith is not built upon sand castles in the sky. Instead faith is built upon historical, verifiable facts. And, what are the facts? Paul says, "Christ died." He paid for our sins. There is nothing unusual about a man dying. Dying is an inevitable part of the present Divine economy. Jesus died as a criminal, yet He never sinned. He was unjustly condemned.

In addition, Jesus died "for our sins." He took our place on the cross,



“according to the Scriptures.” All was predicted beforehand. Afterward, “He was buried.” He put away sin by His sacrifice. But while His death is the first element of the Gospel, it is not the last. Jesus did not stay in the grave—“He rose again,” His resurrection indicates God’s approval of His sacrifice. This is the Gospel, Paul says, “where in ye stand.” Our foundation is the resurrection—the ground upon which we stand.

*Second, Paul observes the proofs of the resurrection (vv. 5-7).* Like Luke in Acts as he referred to “infallible proofs” (Acts 1:3), many proofs of the resurrection existed. One proof was the public nature of the resurrection, appearing openly to up to several hundred people (v. 6).

*Third, Paul notes the power of the resurrection (vv. 8-11).* The greatest proof of the resurrection’s reality is the biography of Paul. Jesus gave him a new life (v. 8), a heart-felt lowliness (v. 9), and a ceaseless labor for the Lord (v. 10).

*Fourth, Paul notes the point of the resurrection (vv. 12-34).* In other words, Paul queries the implications the resurrection has and divides the implications into three categories. He speaks about *personal implications* of the resurrection (vv. 12-19). Paul raises a series of conditionals; that is, “ifs.” What “if” Christ is still dead? What “if” there is no such thing as resurrection? Without the resurrection, our preaching is adversely affected, “And if Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain...” (v. 14a). No point would exist in preaching if Christ only died. Many men even die for good causes. However, the resurrection gives teeth to God’s approval of Christ’s sacrifice on our behalf (cp. Rom. 4:25).

*His resurrection indicates God’s approval of His sacrifice.*

In addition, the absence of resurrection results in negative implications on our faith (v. 14b). Indeed, our faith becomes “vain” without the resurrection! Worst still, according to Paul, we are still in our sins: “And if Christ be not raised, your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins” (v. 17).

Nor is that all. No resurrection means our witness is negatively impacted. What testimony would we have if we had no resurrection? (v. 15). Also our dying is affected. Paul writes, “Then they also which are fallen asleep in Christ are perished. If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable.” (1 Cor. 15:18-19). If Jesus is still dead, there is no hereafter.

Next, the Apostle speaks of *historical implications* of the resurrection (vv. 20-28). The resurrection has implications for past history (vv. 20-22) as well as prospective history (vv. 23-28). A man (Adam) put us in the grave and a Man (Jesus) will take us from the grave! The work of Christ includes all of history. “Every man in his own order” will one day be raised (v. 23; cp. Num. 2:2). Yet, “Christ is the firstfruit” before the end comes (v. 24). The end is, of course, the consummation of all things.

The final category about which Paul speaks is the moral. In other words, Christ’s resurrection has *ethical implications* (vv. 29-34). We died with Christ (vv. 29-32). Our old life was crucified with Him (cp. Gal. 2:20a). Yet we now live for Him (vv. 33-34; cp. Gal. 2:20b).

### Reflection Connection

*How often do you find yourself defending the resurrection? Do you think you know the evidences well enough to defend the resurrection against unwarranted attacks?*



## II. Paul Explains How The Gospel Summons Us To Life (vv. 35-49)

Centuries ago, Job asked if men died, would they live again? (Job 14:14). Paul forces us to come to terms for an answer. And, he gives us a solid one in his discussion.

First, Paul discusses the proofs of the new body (vv. 36-41). In his discussion, he begins by affirming the physical body's continuity. He writes, "Thou fool, that which thou sowest is not quickened, except it die: And that which thou sowest, thou sowest not that body that shall be, but bare grain, it may chance of wheat, or of some other grain: But God giveth it a body as it hath pleased him, and to every seed his own body." (1 Cor. 15:36-38). Only by the power of God is this a reality.

Paul next affirms the physical body's adaptability (v. 39). If you go to the zoo, you will find each animal has a body adapted for its respective environment. Humankind likewise have bodies adapted for their natural habitat. Hence, it should not surprise us that God plans a new body for a new environment—eternal life in heaven.

*The spiritual body we are going to have in the resurrection is perfect.*

### Reflection Connection

*Take a few moments to reflect upon what it means to possess a perfect body. What comes to mind? Be prepared to share with the entire group.*

Second, Paul discusses the perfection of the new physical body (vv. 42-44). The natural body we possess Paul contrasts with the spiritual body we shall have in the resurrection. So far as our natural physical body goes, it is obviously flawed—corrupted, dishonorable, and weak. However, the spiritual body we are going to have in the resurrection is perfect.

Paul writes, "So also is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown in corruption; it is raised in incorruption: It is sown in dishonour; 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. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body." (1 Cor. 15:42-44). Incorruption, glory, and power are the attributes Paul reveals about our spiritual body in the resurrection.

Third, Paul discusses the purpose of the new physical body (vv. 45-49). Again, we find the focus on two men—Adam and Christ. The characteristics of the first Adam are stamped upon us presently in this world. The characteristics of the last Adam will be featured in our physical bodies in the resurrection.

Paul writes, "And so it is written, The first man Adam was made a living soul; the last Adam was made a quickening spirit. Howbeit that was not first which is spiritual, but that which is natural; and afterward that which is spiritual. The first man is of the earth, earthy: the second man is the Lord from heaven." (1 Cor. 15:45-47). In short, we will be like Him! (cp. 1 John 3:2).



### III. Paul Explains How The Gospel Shelters Us For Eternity (vv. 50-58)

The final section of chapter 15 represents Paul's climax to his teachings on the resurrection. Throughout the chapter, we have heard the resurrection choir loud and clear! Jesus not only won the battle at Calvary, He won the battle over the tomb by rising from the dead. Based upon Christ's resurrection victory, believers can have the victory every day of their lives! Hence, Paul offers, in his closing thoughts, precisely the victories Jesus won for us.

First, the *personal reality* of our victory was won. Take care to understand Paul's meaning, "Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; neither doth corruption inherit incorruption. Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal *must* put on immortality." (1 Cor. 15:50-53). The key to understanding Paul's meaning is the twice-used phrase, "we shall all be changed" (vv. 50, 53). In other words, our change is necessary.

*God's mystery revealed to us is, whether we are dead in Christ or alive when Jesus comes again, we shall have a glorious change!*

#### Reflection Connection

*Explain how the resurrection gives the believer victory to live each day pleasing to the Lord. Be specific.*

According to Paul, however, our physical body's change is not only necessary, it is also mysterious. Paul desires to "shew you a mystery" (v. 51). In the Bible, mystery is not something unknowable. Rather mystery is something not known by the human mind but revealed to the human mind through God's revelation. God's mystery revealed to us is, whether we are dead in Christ or alive when Jesus comes again, we shall have a glorious change!

In addition, this change will take place both speedily ("in a moment") and silently ("twinkling of an eye"). Furthermore, our resurrection will mean our physical bodies shall change suddenly ("trumpet of God") and savingly ("immortality").

Second, the *powerful realization* of our victory was won (vv. 54-57). Paul goes into great detail to show us how Christ's victory procures for us a glorious victory over death and the grave. As for the substance of the victory, Paul pictures death as a fearful monster with a poisonous sting. He writes, "So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where *is* thy sting? O grave, where *is* thy victory? The sting of death *is* sin; and the strength of sin *is* the law. But thanks *be* to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." (1 Cor. 15:54-57).



And, just what causes death to possess such a sting? Sin! Sin puts the sting in death and this makes it so fearful. But God gives us always the victory “through our Lord Jesus Christ.”

Third, the *practical results* of our victory were won (v. 58). No truth is more practical to the Christian’s life than Jesus’ resurrection from the dead. He won the victory for us over sin, death, and the grave. The reality of this victory is our life will result in a life of confidence. Paul writes, “Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord” (v. 58).

### Golden Greek Nugget

Paul concludes his great chapter on the resurrection by exhorting believers to never give up, but remain steadfast, “always abounding in the work of the Lord” (v. 58). The Greek term translated “abounding” is from a word meaning “to be over and above, to abound.” It was to super-abound and refers to extreme excess. Our work for the Lord should never be measured by the minimum we can do just to “get by.” Instead a disciple’s heart serves out of abundance, “abounding” in service to the Lord.

### Wrap Up

*Because the tomb is empty, our labor is not empty. We have results here and now because of Jesus’ empty tomb. And, in the end, we are promised a secure, eternal life of blessed existence with the Lord. Nothing compares to the Christian life! Make sure you make your life right with God before you delay another moment. Jesus promises to him or her who comes to Him, He will never turn away. Come to Jesus today.*

