

Study 20: Chapter 15

Introduction

The next issue that Paul addresses is that of the resurrection. Some of the brethren in Corinth were denying the resurrection completely. Paul points out in this chapter that the resurrection is absolutely central to christianity, and in fact our faith stands or falls on its reality.

Body of the Study

Introduction to the issues

The description of the gospel

Jesus' appearance to Paul

The implications of the resurrection

The firstfruits example

All things under His feet

Baptism for the dead

The mechanics of the resurrection

The nature of the resurrection

Homework and preparation for next week:

- *How does the historical fact of the resurrection affect our lives on a daily and practical basis?*
- *How different do you feel when attending the funeral of a christian compared to that of a non christian? What is different?*
- Read the notes as a review of the study.
- Read chapter 16 in preparation for next week's study.

Notes for study 20: Chapter 15

Introduction

The next issue that Paul addresses is that of the resurrection. Some of the brethren in Corinth were denying the resurrection completely. Paul points out in this chapter that the resurrection is absolutely central to christianity, and in fact our faith stands or falls on its reality.

Body of the Study

Introduction to the issues

The death of Jesus was (and is) certain. There were many witnesses to the event. Some who saw it (like the centurion) were used to dealing with death. They thrust a spear into Jesus' side, which proved (by his lack of reaction) that he was already dead (Jn 19:31-35). The disciples (effectively His "family") took Jesus's body and prepared it for burial, and then buried it. If there had been any sign of life they would have tried to revive Him, not bury Him.

Having Jesus die proved Him to be a man (proved His humanity). However His resurrection proved Him to be the Son of God (Rom 1:4). The Corinthians had accepted the resurrection of Jesus, as Paul had already preached it to them (1:15:3-4). The problem was that they had ignored and not grasped the full implications of the issue. So, Paul reiterates and spells out for them the things that he had already taught them. He reminds them of the essential things of the gospel.

1. It was preached to them,
2. They had received it,
3. They made a stand based on the things that had been taught and accepted,
4. Through these things they were saved,
5. Their salvation was conditional upon their continuation ("holding fast") to the things that they had been taught,
6. The alternative is that the things that they believed were wrong, and they had therefore believed in vain.

The Greek culture regarded "...the body as the prison-house of the soul, and death as a release of the soul from its captivity. The resurrection of the body, therefore, was regarded by them as a calamity rather than a blessing, and so contrary to sound philosophy as to excite ridicule..."¹ This was exactly the reaction that Paul got when he came to Athens (Acts 17:32).

What we see in this chapter is another case of the culture in Corinth invading the church. Their philosophical position had caused them to dismiss the obvious consequences of their faith. As Paul is about to show, they were in fact throwing out the basis of the faith, and substituting it with philosophy!

The description of the gospel

John 3:16 is often described as "the gospel in a nutshell". Yet, in this passage, Paul describes for us the essence of the gospel. [We could have a much longer discussion about what constitutes the gospel of Christ, and we can show that it is not confined to the death burial and resurrection of Christ. What Paul is saying here is that these three things summarise *the essence* – the essential and central things – about the gospel. They are important because of the subject under discussion.]

Paul presents three facets of the gospel for consideration:

¹ McGarvey, JW "Thessalonians, Corinthians, Galatians and Romans" Gospel Light Publishing Company, Delight Arkansas, p.145
Study of Corinthians by Graeme Offer

1. *That Jesus died for our sins.* This fact is not only a matter of history, of which the Corinthians would be familiar with the evidence supporting it, but it was also attested to in advance by the prophets (Is 53:5,10; Dan 9:26; Ps 22:1-22; Zech 12:10).
2. *That Jesus was buried,* is without dispute, and the Corinthians need no evidence to support it, although such evidence is revealed to us by all of the gospel writers. It is also attested to by the prophets (Is 53:9).
3. *That Jesus was raised from the dead on the third day.* The prophets also foretold of such an event; (Ps 16:10; Is 53:10; Hos 6:2), and as with the example of Jonah, the evidence of the event provides some quite precise timing (Jon 2:10; Mt 12:39-40).

Apart from the evidence of the prophets, Paul presents the recent physical evidence for the resurrection. He was seen by people who could verify the circumstances that Paul presents. More than this, the evidence is presented at a time when it could either be verified or disputed by the eyewitnesses. Notice what Paul says:

1. He was seen by Peter (Lk 24:34),
2. Then He appeared to the 12 (Jn 20:26-29). [The “twelve” is an “official” name for the apostles, although at the time that Jesus appeared to them there were only 11].
3. Then He appeared to over 500 brethren at once [This is most likely the time that Matthew discusses in Mt 28:10,16, although he is not explicit. We have no other explicit evidence for this appearance besides what is said here. However, the importance of what Paul presents cannot be underestimated. Most of the witnesses were still alive at the time that Paul wrote. Probably some were known to the Corinthians. If the Corinthians had any doubts about the resurrection of Jesus, they could ask the witnesses].
4. Then he appeared to James. In the context, it must mean James the Lord’s brother, since the other two James’ were included in “the twelve”. Of interest, Jesus’ brothers did not believe during His earthly ministry, but James the Lord’s brother later assumes a prominent position in the church in Jerusalem (Gal 1:19). It is most likely that Jesus’ appearance to James was the event which led him to believe that Jesus was who he claimed to be, (much like the conversion of Paul).
5. The to all of the apostles (Acts 1:3). He had already appeared to them, but Paul records the second appearance, as does Luke.
6. Finally, He appeared to Paul (Acts 9:5; 22:14; 26:16). Paul’s witness should not be ignored, and he is about to reinforce it to the Corinthians.

Jesus’ appearance to Paul

Paul provides his own testimony as an eyewitness account of the resurrection of Jesus. Paul had already revealed this evidence to the Corinthians, and it was accepted as a valid witness (1:15:1). Further, his witness was confirmed by the spiritual gifts that Paul had given to them (1:2:4).

In contrast to the other apostles, Paul did not regard himself as “worthy” because he had persecuted the church. He says that he therefore “...laboured more abundantly than all of them...” (1:15:10), a fact which is attested to by the descriptions of his sufferings in 1:4:10-13 and 2:11:23-28.

The occasion of Paul’s conversion adds a great deal of weight to his argument. He was on his way to persecute christians when the Lord appeared to him. He had so rejected God, that his mind was closed to the obvious conclusions. It was a circumstance not unlike that of the Corinthians, who had closed their minds to the obvious conclusions of the resurrection.

The implications of the resurrection

Some of the Corinthians were saying that there is no resurrection from the dead (1:15:13). That conclusion stands in direct contrast to what Paul had preached to them (1:15:3-4). Clearly, if there is no resurrection from the dead, then how could Christ have been raised? There are a string of consequences that all stand or fall on the resurrection. If Christ was not resurrected, then:

1. The preaching of the apostles was merely a fabricated set of lies – since they taught that He was resurrected,
2. Our faith in Jesus as the Son of God is vain and false. Paul has already presented the essence of the gospel as the death, burial, and *resurrection* of Jesus. Without the resurrection, Jesus was no more than a good man who went about doing good to others, gave some great teaching, but was killed by his enemies, and was buried. It was the resurrection that proved Him to be the Son of God (Rom 1:4).
3. The apostles were false witnesses. Whilst “men” might conclude that this was the case, the Corinthians knew better. They had the miraculous gifts that were given to them by the laying on of the apostle’s hands (in many cases, Paul himself). The purpose of the gifts was to confirm the word (ie the things that were taught, Mk 16:20). So, when Paul taught them that Jesus was raised from the dead, and he was able to perform miracles to prove the things that he said, then the Corinthians would know that the things that he taught were true. Another example of this is in Acts 8:6 – “...when the people saw the miracles which Philip did, they took notice of the things that he had to say...”.
4. We are still in our sins, because Christ was not who he said he was.
5. Those who have died have no hope, if there is no resurrection.
6. If the blessings of this life are all we get, we are miserable. Whilst living the christian life is a life of blessing, we may as well just eat and drink and be merry. Remember that Paul and many of the christians in the first century were persecuted. What would be the point if this life is all there is?

The firstfruits example

There are 5 instances of the example of the *firstfruits* in the New Testament. The one here is by far the clearest. The illustration comes from an orchard. A few pieces of fruit will set on the tree – *the firstfruits* – and then some time later, the main harvest will come along. When the firstfruits appear, then the main harvest is assured. In the Old Testament, the firstfruits had to be presented before the main harvest could begin (Lev 23:9-14). The firstfruits offering was made on the day after the sabbath of Passover week.

In the example, Christ’s resurrection is the firstfruits (1:15:20), and our resurrection is the main harvest (1:15:23). The only conclusion is that we can be assured of our resurrection because of the certainty of Christ’s resurrection. Likewise, those who have died have not missed out on their salvation (1:15:20). On the very day of the firstfruits offering (the day after the sabbath of Passover week), was the very day that Christ was resurrected. He therefore fulfilled the *type* of the firstfruits both in a literal and a figurative sense.

A direct comparison is made between Adam (the first man) and Christ (the first resurrected). It may well be observed that Christ was not the first person to be resurrected. That honour lies with the sick widow’s son in the Old Testament (1 Kings 17:19-23). There are several cases in the New Testament, such as the widow of Nain’s son, Jairus’ daughter, and of course Lazarus. Although these were all resurrected from the dead, they all died again. Jesus was the first person who was raised from the dead never to die again. Adam typified death, but by contrast, Christ typifies life.

All things under His feet

Paul is here referring to Christ’s reign as King. The two OT references (Ps 8:6, and Ps 110:1) are clearly Messianic, and refer to Christ having victory over His enemies. The NT writers refer to this in Heb 2:8 and in the passage here under consideration in 1Cor:15:27. It is in this same context that the term “...*His enemies a footstool*...” is used in Lk 20:43; Ac 2:35, and Heb 1:13.

The time will come (at the main harvest) when Christ returns, that we will receive our salvation, and our resurrection. “...*Then (at that time - GO) comes the end, when He delivers the kingdom to God the Father...*” (1:15:24). Christ will reign for a period of time until He comes to take His

children home. At that time, the kingdom (the church) will have finished its function, and Jesus will hand the kingdom back to God. Jesus said “...*All power (authority NJKV) has been given to me in heaven and in earth...*” (Mt 28:18). He was placed in that position at His resurrection (Acts 2:30). When He comes again, He will give up that position of power “...*when He puts an end to all rule and authority and power...*” (1:15:24).

“...*For He must reign until all of His enemies are in subjection to Him. The last enemy that will be destroyed is death* (1:15:25-26) and death will be destroyed by the resurrection.

Baptism for the dead

This verse is one of the most puzzling in all of the NT. Many writers have proposed many and varied applications as to what it says and means. There is no support from the text or the context that the church at Corinth would have understood it to mean that some living Christians were submitting themselves to baptism as a proxy for people who had already died (as is practiced by the Mormons).

Paul uses a present tense to describe the baptism, which suggests that whatever it was, it was something that was current – *baptising for the dead*. He describes the purpose of the baptism as *for* (*nper* – on behalf of, or with a view to) the dead. Three plausible explanations are:

- Some of the brethren were growing old and dying. They would summon their children and urge them to repent of their sins and be baptised. Perhaps after the old person had died, the younger may have thought about death and its consequences, and then been baptised *with a view to* the dead person.
- People were taking due consideration of their own mortal lives, and recognised that we need God. Because of this, they were baptised *with a view to* their own eventual death.
- The baptism that Paul speaks about is a baptism (immersion) in suffering. Why would they put up with such suffering and torture if there was no resurrection? They were prepared to suffer the baptism of suffering *with a view to* their death and the resurrection beyond.

Whatever meaning Paul had in mind, the Corinthians would have understood it – either directly, or by explanation from Paul himself at a later time, or by the use of the spiritual gifts. The consequences of that understanding could never be achieved without the resurrection – and that is the very point that Paul is making here.

In closing the arguments about the resurrection, Paul makes the point about why go through all of the suffering and pain? (1:15:30). We may as well live a decadent life if there is nothing after death (1:15:32).

The comment that “...*bad company corrupts good morals...*” (1:15:33) is a true saying, and has very wide application. The point that Paul is making though is that those who are saying that there is no resurrection were corrupting those who were looking and awaiting it.

The mechanics of the resurrection

To those who denied the resurrection, just *how* it is to happen was a great mystery. But the answer lays in nature itself. A crop cannot grow without a seed, and in order to get the seed, the flower must die.

Our bodies will be different at the resurrection. We die in corruption – ie we sin, and our bodies decay – but at the resurrection we will be raised in incorruption – our sins will be behind us, and we will no longer be subject to the decay of our bodies.

Paul again draws on the comparison between Adam and Christ. Where Adam *started* things, Christ *finished* things.

The nature of the resurrection

Paul says plainly, that not all of us will die (sleep is used here as a metaphor for death). This shows that Paul thought that the return of Christ could be in his own lifetime (as he also shows in other places (1 Thess 4:17)).

It is going to happen quickly when it happens (1:15:52; 1 Thess 4:16). The dead in Christ shall rise first, and a short time later, those who are alive will join them in the air.

We might not all die, but our bodies will all be changed. Just how this is to happen is a great mystery that God has not revealed to us. But, our corruptible and mortal bodies will put on immortality and incorruption (1:15:53).

The end of all this is not failure in the grave, but victory over death – and that victory has already been demonstrated in Jesus' resurrection!

Death is swallowed up in victory!

O death, where is your sting?

O Hades, where is your victory?

As a christian we have hope and assurance. But if we are not in Christ, there is no victory, and all that lies on the other side of the grave is eternal death and punishment.

"...Therefore...be steadfast, unmovable...knowing that your labour is not in vain in the Lord..."
(1:15:58 NKJV)