

“The Gospel and Resurrection”

1 Corinthians 15

Hymns: #

Reading: 1 Corinthians 15

“It is said that the great French philosopher, Sartre, summed up all of life with this statement, “To do is to be.” Camus, his contemporary, summed up all of life with a conflicting statement, “To be is to do.” Then Frank Sinatra came along and put them both together in a song- “Do-be-do-be-do.”¹

It’s also been said that “Philosophers are people who write about things they don’t understand, and make it sound like it’s your fault.”²

These do make us smile at their absurdity. But today, you and I find ourselves living in an absurd cultural moment where everyone is a philosopher. And the competing philosophies of this world find their voice most often through the lyrics of pop music and sadly even much of so called “Christian music”. The double speak of Frank Sinatra’s “Do-be-do-be-do” has been swallowed hook, line and sinker by the world and by many within Christendom. Today, in many places the Gospel itself has been muddied and confused. And the priority of preaching the Gospel has been replaced with Social Justice. The proclamation and promise of bodily Resurrection from the dead into Christ’s Kingdom and a New Heaven and New Earth has been replaced with a powerless Platonism of disembodied spirits engaged in eternal ethereal harp playing in heaven.

As we come to this 15th chapter of 1 Corinthians Paul is addressing these same dynamics among the boasting baby believers in the Church at Corinth. You see “Corinth was a Greek city, and the Greeks did not believe in the resurrection of the dead. When Paul had preached at Athens and declared the fact of Christ’s resurrection, some of his listeners actually laughed at him (Acts 17:32). Most Greek philosophers considered the human body a prison, and they welcomed death as deliverance from bondage. This sceptical attitude had somehow invaded the church and Paul had to face it head on.”³

In this rather lengthy chapter we see Paul do three things: 1) Remind the Corinthians of the Gospel; 2) Refute their denial of the Resurrection; and 3) Reason with their foolish questions, all of which are desperately needed to be heard again today among believers.

1. REMINDER (V. 1-11) *“Now, brothers, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand. 2By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain. 3For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, 4that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, 5and that he appeared to Peter, and then to the Twelve. 6After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep. 7Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles, 8and last of all he appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born. 9For I am the least of the apostles and do not even deserve to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. 10But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect. No, I worked harder than all of them--yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me. 11Whether, then, it was I or they, this is what we preach, and this is what you believed.*

¹ Tim Timmons; *Maximum Living in a Pressure Cooker World*

² S. Lewis Johnson; *Bibliotheca Sacra*; October-December 1962

³ Warren Wiersbe; *Be Wise- 1 Corinthians*; Victor Books; 1983; p. 148

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Paul had to remind the Corinthians of the Gospel. Does that strike you as odd? I mean, why would something so basic need to be brought to their remembrance or ours? The simple answer is because they had swallowed the philosophy of their day rather than the theology of eternity. It is the same today folks. So let's be reminded again of just exactly what the four points of the Gospel are:

1. Christ Died for Sins According to the Scriptures
 - The good news is that you and I have a Vicarious Savior who has taken our place; our sin, death and judgment upon himself, freeing us from Satan's hold and reconciling us to the Father.
2. He Was Buried
 - This is important because it proves he was actually dead.
 - A Jewish burial in spice-wrapped linen inside a Roman guarded and sealed tomb proves he was actually dead and not just swooning or faking death.
3. He Was Raised on the Third Day According to The Scriptures
 - This is the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead; passing right through his undisturbed burial wrappings and out of the tomb in his same body.
 - The stone rolled away was not to let Him out, but to let the world in to see the evidence for themselves.
 - Either you believe in the physical, bodily resurrection of Jesus from the dead and thus believe the Gospel, or you do not believe in the physical, bodily resurrection of Jesus from the dead and thus do not believe the Gospel and are therefore NOT a Christian.
 - This is no small point!
 - His death and resurrection are said to be “according to the Scriptures”, that is OT:
 - Isaiah 53:4-12 Suffering Servant
 - Leviticus 16 Day of Atonement
 - Leviticus 23:4-14 Feasts of Passover (Death), Unleavened Bread (Burial) and Firstfruits (Resurrection)
 - Psalm 16:8-11 Not abandoned to the grave or decay
 - Psalm 22 Crucifixion and Resurrection proclamation to His brothers
 - Psalm 2:7 as interpreted by Paul as Resurrection in Acts 13:33-34
 - Jonah 1:17 as interpreted by Jesus Himself in Matt. 12:38-40
4. He Appeared
 - To Peter; “The Twelve”; more than 500 brothers at one time up in Galilee when He gave the Great Commission; to James- the half-brother of Jesus; to “all the apostles”- clearly these are not the same as “The Twelve” apostle just mentioned; finally he appeared to Paul who was “abnormally born” meaning he did not spend his gestational period walking with Jesus during His 3 ½ year earthly ministry.
 - That all of these witnesses could conspire to deceive and lie about seeing Jesus after He was raised is beyond possibility.

Paul says in v. 4 “By this Gospel you are saved”. Now, let me stop and ask you, “What does THIS Gospel, these four points, say you must do?” Absolutely nothing! The Gospel does not tell us that we must do anything, rather it tells us what Christ has already done for us. The Gospel is not an invitation to do anything in the first instance, it is a declaration of reality; these four points are historical FACTS! The Gospel is not philosophy or religion, it is the declaration of objection and historical Truth, Reality and Fact.

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Faith is our response TO the Gospel, it is not part OF the Gospel. Faith is first and foremost a discovery of this to be true; faith aggressively believes and receives these facts to yourself by which you are saved; you have “taken a stand” (v.3) on the only sure foundation.

But sadly today, this Gospel has been muddled and confused and in many places it has been replaced with the “gospel of social justice”. Social justice says “Oh, I don’t preach at people, I’m just trying to REALLY help them where they need it” or “I’m just letting my actions speak louder than my words.” This sounds so right doesn’t it? It obviously does because “social justice” is the buzz word and badge of honor in the world now, from corporations selling organic coffee or child/slave free labor produced chocolate to churches involved in freeing women caught up in the sex trade. I am not suggesting that we ignore the poor or disregard the plight of human sex trade and traffic. BUT, what I AM saying is that this is NOT the Gospel.

Allow me to offer a couple of reality checks in the case of this one example: First, the reality is that the human sex trade and traffic epidemic would evaporate overnight if people’s hearts were changed by the gospel. Second, the sad reality is that the overwhelming majority of women rescued from human sex trade and traffic return to it from their own volition. Without the change of heart brought through being born again and that through the Gospel, they don’t have the power to combat the pull and attack of the world, flesh and the devil. Third, the reality is that Bill Gates and Oprah Winfrey already do more for this cause than you or your church ever will. The financial resources they have and do use in “social justice” dwarfs that of all the churches combined. Fourth, the reality is that it is way “cooler” and “easier” to say you are involved “social justice” than it is preach the Gospel and suffer the offense the Cross brings. And finally, the reality is, if you are a believer, you have something Bill and Oprah don’t have, and in fact it is ultimately the only thing with the power of God unto salvation both temporal and eternal...it is the Gospel (Rom. 1:16) What are you doing with THAT?

“Now brothers, I want to REMIND you of the Gospel” Paul said...not philosophy; not the social justice gospel. As believers, our commission is first to the Gospel message; to making disciples; to immersing people in the name and meaning of the Trinity; to teaching them to obey everything Jesus commanded. All our “social justice” activity happens within and secondary to this commission and stewardship.

In Paul’s day, it wasn’t “social justice” that was leading people astray, but it was people claiming there was no resurrection and for this Paul had a strong refutation.

2. REFUTATION (V. 12-33) *“But if it is preached that Christ has been raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? 13If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. 14And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith. 15More than that, we are then found to be false witnesses about God, for we have testified about God that he raised Christ from the dead. But he did not raise him if in fact the dead are not raised. 16For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised either. 17And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins. 18Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost. 19If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men. 20But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. 21For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. 22For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive. 23But each in his own turn: Christ, the firstfruits; then, when he comes, those who belong to him. 24Then the end will come, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority and power. 25For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. 26The last enemy to*

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be destroyed is death. 27For he "has put everything under his feet." Now when it says that "everything" has been put under him, it is clear that this does not include God himself, who put everything under Christ. 28When he has done this, then the Son himself will be made subject to him who put everything under him, so that God may be all in all. 29Now if there is no resurrection, what will those do who are baptized for the dead? If the dead are not raised at all, why are people baptized for them? 30And as for us, why do we endanger ourselves every hour? 31I die every day--I mean that, brothers--just as surely as I glory over you in Christ Jesus our Lord. 32If I fought wild beasts in Ephesus for merely human reasons, what have I gained? If the dead are not raised, "Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die." 33Do not be misled: "Bad company corrupts good character." 34Come back to your senses as you ought, and stop sinning; for there are some who are ignorant of God--I say this to your shame."

We could spend several weeks in this section of scripture alone, but let us observe the major peaks and Paul's refutation of those who were denying the resurrection. Apparently, either from swallowing the philosophy of the world around them or from the teaching of false apostles, the church at Corinth had a major problem and were in danger of losing the Gospel message and having "believed in vain" (v.2). To deny the bodily resurrection as a principle was to deny the resurrection Christ himself, and Paul refutes this with five clear points in v. 12-19. He says "If Christ has not been raised then...':

1. Your faith is useless (Lit. "empty")
 - You can have all the faith in the world, but it would be absolutely worthless faith because its object is a dead man in the grave. He is not able to do anything for you.
 - Faith is only as good as the object in which it is placed.
2. The Apostles were in fact crass charlatans.
 - Paul ,and all those previously mentioned to whom He appeared, were simply deceived and were deceiving others as false witnesses about God.
3. Your faith is futile (Lit. "without results")
 - Christ's death would be no different than any other man's death; no result for you.
 - You are still in your sins.
4. Your loved ones are lost
 - Those who have already died did not enter the bliss of Jesus's presence, but the perdition of hell.
5. The pagans would be right
 - Those who live for the pleasures of the flesh in the moment would be right and the sacrifices of the Christian's denial of the world, the flesh and the devil would only prove to be a cruel self-inflicted joke.
 - Not only would the pagans be right, they would be biblical, for in v. 32 Paul quotes Isaiah 22:13 saying, "If the dead are not raised: 'Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die'."

Let us eat and drink, seek pleasure and holidays and accumulate possessions as quickly as we can...for tomorrow we die. This is the world's mind set, and it is increasingly being adopted by Christians because the "social justice" gospel simply cannot deal with the despair of the human heart created by their loss of vision for a future with a resurrected Lord Jesus in their own resurrected body in a resurrected New Heaven and New Earth.

In v. 20 -28, Paul says BUT, the reality is Christ has been raised and that means an orderly resurrection is awaiting us all. Christ was raised first as the "Firstfruits" a reference to the OT feast in

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Leviticus 23:9-14 where a sheaf of the first fruits of the harvest were waved before the Lord as a sign that the entire harvest belonged to Him. When Jesus was resurrected as the “Firstfruits”, it was God’s assurance to us that we shall also be raised one day as part of that future and full harvest.

Paul has another refutation in V. 29, but now he draws on their own apparent embrace of the “urban myth” regarding being baptised for the dead. “Now if there is no resurrection, what will those do who are baptised for the dead?” I understand that there have been up to 200 different explanations given for this verse. But the most important thing is to see that from the context, Paul distinguished his own practice and teaching from that described here. He refers to “those” (not “we”) who are baptised for the dead. This was not and is not a practice of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic church. Rather, the Corinthians had likely bought into the Eleusinian philosophy and mystery religion that Homer and Cicero lauded and which included vicarious initiations and participation.

Paul’s final refutation comes in the form of a couple questions. He says in v. 30 “If Christ is not raised from the dead, and if I’m not certain of my own resurrection then “...why do we endanger ourselves every hour?” and in v. 32 “If I fought wild beasts in Ephesus for merely human reasons, what have I gained?” In other words, it makes absolutely no sense for a man to expose himself to such dangers and death if the resurrection is not true. The reality is that men do not die or risk death for that which they KNOW to be a lie. Doesn’t happen. Yes, some men will die for a lie...just look at suicide bombers with ISIS...but they think it is the truth. Again, men do not die for what they KNOW to be a lie, yet Paul says in v. 31 “I die every day”.

Paul wraps up his refutation by quoting the pagan philosopher and writer Menander who said “Bad company corrupts good character”. In other words, if the Corinthians wanted to swallow hook, line and sinker pagan philosophy, then swallow this one...and put some distance between you and the false teachers who are saying there is no resurrection. Do you detect a bit of sarcasm here? Actually it is more than that. Paul says this to shame them (v. 34). He says in effect, “You Corinthians have lost your minds! Come back to your senses. Your denial of the resurrection is ignorant, sinful and just plain shameful.” I can hear myself wanting to yell AMEN and apply the same ignorant, sinful and just plain shameful declaration over many of Christendom’s compromises with the world and the cultural moment! Wake up church! Get serious! It’s late and the night is almost over.

Paul anticipates a weak response to this and some tiptoeing back towards the truth by those who want to ride two horses at once. This is usually seen in the form of foolish questions and lots of talk about peripheral things.

3. REASONING (V. 34-58) *“But someone may ask, “How are the dead raised? With what kind of body will they come?” 36How foolish! What you sow does not come to life unless it dies. 37When you sow, you do not plant the body that will be, but just a seed, perhaps of wheat or of something else. 38But God gives it a body as he has determined, and to each kind of seed he gives its own body. 39All flesh is not the same: Men have one kind of flesh, animals have another, birds another and fish another. 40There are also heavenly bodies and there are earthly bodies; but the splendor of the heavenly bodies is one kind, and the splendor of the earthly bodies is another. 41The sun has one kind of splendor, the moon another and the stars another; and star differs from star in splendor. 42So will it be with the resurrection of the dead. The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable; 43it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; 44it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body. 45So it is written: “The first man Adam became a living being”^F; the last Adam, a lifegiving spirit.46The spiritual did not come first, but the natural, and after that the spiritual. 47The first man*

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was of the dust of the earth, the second man from heaven. 48As was the earthly man, so are those who are of the earth; and as is the man from heaven, so also are those who are of heaven. 49And just as we have borne the likeness of the earthly man, so shall we bear the likeness of the man from heaven. 50I declare to you, brothers, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. 51Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed-- 52in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. 53For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality. 54When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: "Death has been swallowed up in victory." 55"Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?" 56The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. 57But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. 58Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain."

In v. 35-49 Paul is making two points: First, our present bodies are like seeds. There is life in every seed. It is small and you could never guess by looking at the shape and size of the seed what size and shape it will take after it has been planted. For the life within us to come forth into its splendour, these perishable seed bodies must be planted, that is be buried, die. Our current flesh and blood bodies simply cannot live in the glory for which we are destined. We must be changed; we must put on the imperishable body of glory to be able to live in and enjoy our eternal environment. And like a seed planted comes up into a splendour far beyond its small and encased existence, so our current bodies will one day be planted in the ground, but we too shall break forth from both our small and encased mortal flesh and we too will bust through the ground in resurrection into a glory and splendour that will be astonishingly beautiful, solid and the real us, the true us will be seen for the first time. We will finally be our own unique selves and will have arrived at our destiny of being conformed to the likeness of Jesus, and “just as we have borne the likeness of the earthly man, so shall we bear the likeness of the man from heaven.” The utterly daunting power and unfamiliarity of such a transition may no doubt generate a certain fear like a child’s first roller-coaster ride. So like a little child, let us put our afraid little hands in His strong nail-pierced hand and He will led us to the other side and there we’ll sing, “O grave, where is thy victory?”

Paul’s second point is to drive home beyond any possibility of confusion or doubt, that our resurrection is a bodily one. You and I are going to have a body for eternity! Jesus has a body now and forever; there is a man in glory...NOW...and He is the firstborn among many bodily resurrected brothers and sisters. We are not looking forward to being eternal, ethereal, floating around in a heavenly outer space existence. NO! We are looking forward to a new BODY. We WILL have an intermediate body given to us in “heaven” upon our death (2 Cor. 5:1-9; Phil. 1:20-23), and we will have our resurrected bodies at the rapture and resurrection of the dead in Christ (1 Thess. 4:13-18). This is the message the apostles preached. They preached the Resurrection not heaven. Trace this through the Book of Acts and you may be shocked at the frequency and insistence of the main point to them. It was the resurrection of Jesus from the dead, and all its implications for our own resurrection. (At least 23 references in Acts 1:22; 2:24,32; 3:15; 4:2,10,33; 5:30; 10:40,41; 13:30,33,34,37; 17:3,18,31,32; 23:6; 24:15,21; 26:8)

This event is Paul’s focus here in v.50-58. He calls it a “mystery”, meaning that which was unknown prior to and apart from its disclosure in the New Testament by Divine revelation. Folks the day is coming and it could be very, very near...when we will be changed, in the twinkling of an eye, at Christ’s calling of His Church out of this world...we who are alive and remaining, we will take on the

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splendour of a resurrected body without facing death. This is our blessed hope (Titus 2:13) and there are no prophecies or events that must happen before this glorious event and transformation. Oh, I hope you are beginning to feel the joy, excitement and the riches of our inheritance as believers in Jesus Christ. We have a glorious share as heirs of God and co-heirs of Christ, and that includes sharing in His bodily resurrection from the dead or transformation at the rapture. And while no man knows the day or the hours, Jesus has told us to watch and that the day should NOT catch us by surprise. We are not date setters, but we are date watchers...and with that said can I remind you that the 70th anniversary of THE SUPER SIGN of the fulfilled prophetic promise of Israel being brought back into her land is just a few weeks away on May 14th! Watch my friends. Watch.

So what are we to do in response to all this? Look at the last verse, v. 58 “Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain.” We looked at this on Easter Morning a few weeks ago, but it is so important it bears repeating. Paul has a threefold call to respond with:

1) Stand Firm

Whether you know it or not, whether you like it or not, you and I are involved in a cosmic battle with spiritual forces far beyond our strength. We are a “Band of Brothers at Bastogne” far, far behind enemy lines. It is from this perspective that Paul tells us to stand firm.

“Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. Stand firm then,...” (Eph. 6:10-)

To stand firm in the Resurrection, we need to take our warfare seriously and get dressed daily in the six pieces of God given armour- Jesus Christ Himself. Wearing one's helmet while dug in at Bastogne in December 1944 was not an optional requirement for survival. Folks we have an enemy who hates us and is dead set on stealing from you, killing you and destroying your life and the work of your hands. While our future context will be resurrection in a new heaven and new earth, our current context is war and we live in a theatre of operations where it really is a life and death.

2) Let Nothing Move You

How do we let nothing move us? “Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock.” (Matt. 7:24) To let nothing move us we must be grounded in Jesus Christ and put into practice the Word of God, for it is not a case of if the storms of life will blow against our house, but when. Only one kind of house will remain standing and unmoved. We must be doers, not just hearers.

3) Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain

How do we know our labor in the Lord is not in vain?

First because “God is not unjust; he will not forget your work and the love you have shown him as you have helped his people and continue to help them.” (Heb. 6:10)

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Second because Jesus has told us, “Behold, I am coming soon! My reward is with me, and I will give to everyone according to what he has done.” (Rev. 22:12)

Receiving the reward of sharing in the Millennial Reign of our coming King is no little reward. Likewise, one thousand years is a long time to be told to go “stand in the corner” if we insist on squandering our time, talents and God given gifts.

Lets pray...