

The Village Church – Rancho Santa Fe
Week #18 – Adult Bible Study

I Corinthians 15:1-58

February 11 & 12, 2025

Introduction

1. The penultimate “chapter” of the letter is, arguably, the most important
2. Here, Paul addresses the last major issue of the Corinthian church: the resurrection of the body
3. The resurrection – of Jesus the Christ, and then of our own – is the fundamental point of the Christian message
4. To deny the resurrection is to undercut *everything* else about Christian faith
5. Some Corinthians say that there is *no* resurrection, especially that there is no *bodily* resurrection
6. Typical Greek theology/philosophy saw the “spiritual” as good and the “physical” as bad
7. The Judeo-Christian viewpoint sees a fundamental unity of spiritual and physical – both are good
8. Because of this, what ones does in the body (or what happens in the physical world) is just as much of concern to God and just as much of eternal consequence as what one does in the spirit

15:1-11

9. What the Good News is and how it was shared: A summary of the earliest Christian preaching
10. Without this truth, there is no gospel, there is no faith, there is no church
11. There are 4 parts to the message: Christ died for our sins, he was buried, he was raised, and he appeared
12. The earliest church understood the gospel as the *continuation and fulfillment* of God’s dealings with Israel
13. Exactly *which* scriptures Paul has in mind as having been fulfilled is unclear
14. Jesus was, clearly and definitively, *dead and buried*, but...he is no more!
15. Paul himself also had an experience with the Risen Christ
16. The Corinthian Christian had come to believe this message
17. But...now some of them were wavering/backsliding/abandoning this belief, and also its implications

15:12-19

18. V12 states the problem Paul is now addressing: “If Christ is raised, how can some say there is no resurrection?”
19. The issue was not about “spiritual” resurrection but about “bodily” resurrection
20. (Ancient Greeks, ancient Christians influenced by ancient Greeks, and modern Christians influenced by ancient Greeks: *all* of them believe the same heresy: that what happened to Jesus was only “spiritual” and not also “physical”)
21. To deny the resurrection of Jesus (the “whole” Jesus, body/spirit) was to obliterate any other message about, concern with, and importance of anything having to do with Jesus

15:20-28

22. What has happened to Jesus Christ will also happen with those who belong to him
23. Paul’s thought here is straight out of typical Jewish apocalyptic theology: With the original human, Adam, death came into the world, and now, in Jesus we have a new “original” human, Christ, through whose resurrection life is established again
24. The complete and final realization of this reality has been *started* with Jesus and it will be *completed* in the future, but the *importance and impact* of this reality is *already becoming present*
25. Everything is, therefore, finally and completely under the reign and power of God (and *not* of anyone/anything else, like the Roman Empire, or any other earthly ruler)

15:29-34

26. V29 is the only place in the NT where baptism on behalf of the dead is mentioned, and here it is neither condemned nor condoned, but clearly, some early Christians believed so much in the power of baptism itself that it was practiced. Paul mentions it here only to bolster his primary argument, that resurrection of the dead is itself a fact and a vital one at that!

27. Paul's larger argument here is that, without belief in the resurrection, there is no ground for changed (Christian) behavior – because what happens here is of no consequence or concern of God

15:35-49

28. Remembering that ancient Greek (and other) thought separated body and spirit, and that body/physical was seen as less than spirit, Paul takes up the question of *what kind of body one receives* in the resurrection
29. In short: resurrection is *not* the resuscitation of a corpse: it *is* a transformation into a different state of being
30. And: "...the resurrection body is a *spiritual body*, free from the decay and weakness that we know in the present life." (Richard B. Hays)
31. (JWB: with this statement by Paul, we have to move into a complete reimagining of the nature of reality that is beyond anything we encounter in the "normal" world)
32. The metaphor of the seed instructs us here: a seed looks and is nothing like the plant that will spring from it, and yet the seed and the plant are still tied to each other (transformation *and* organic continuity)
33. The flesh and blood of our present existence does not live forever: but it is the beginning of the "spiritual" flesh and blood that does/will live forever
34. Jerusalem Bible: "When it is sown it embodies the soul, when it is raised it embodies the spirit. If the soul has its own embodiment, so does the spirit have its own embodiment."

15:50-57

35. Here, Paul comes at the matter in a slightly different way
36. Our current bodies are perishable; our future bodies will be imperishable
37. Whether we are dead or alive when Christ returns, we will all be given the same new bodies
38. The new corresponds with the old: therefore, the old (where we are currently) is valuable and still present in its essence and character when the new comes
39. Here, Paul expresses what is the ultimate and final hope of God's people: that one day all things will be made new, free from decay, disease, evil, dysfunction, misery, sin, the law that reveals sin, and even death itself
40. Note: This glorious expression of our resurrection and of the final realization of Creation's glory is something that *God* does, not us – this is radical grace flowing from love

15:58

41. For the Corinthians, who struggled mightily (as do we!) with what constituted a moral and ethical life, here is Paul's "final" answer – the upshot
42. Living by the highest moral/ethical code (love) is the only choice for those who believe that the resurrection *exists*, and that it is a fusion/completion/realization of all things, whether of this (bodily) world or of the next (spiritual) world
43. "*All things merge into one*" – from "A River Runs Through It" (Norman Maclean)
44. "*And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, 'See, the home of God is among mortals. He will dwell with them; they will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them; he will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away.' And the one who was seated on the throne said, 'See, I am making all things new.'*" (Revelation 21:3-5a)

Questions for Your Life Today

- A. Think about what will happen when you die and reflect critically on your thoughts using the ideas of this passage
- B. Think about how others view death, and how their ideas either fit with or contradict the message of this passage
- C. What would you say to a child who asks you what happens when we die

Notes by The Rev. Dr. Jack Baca, Senior Pastor, The Village Church, Rancho Santa Fe, California

Resources:

- Interpretation Commentary on First Corinthians, Richard B. Hays, John Knox Press, Louisville, Kentucky, 1997
- Interpretation Commentary on Second Corinthians, Ernest Best, John Knox Press, Louisville, Kentucky, 1987
- The Bible Speaks Today: The Message of 1 Corinthians – Life in the Local Church, David Prior, InterVarsity Press, Downers Grove, Illinois, 1985
- The Bible Speaks Today: The Message of 2 Corinthians – Power in Weakness, Paul Barnett, InterVarsity Press, Downers Grove, Illinois, 1988
- The Communicator's Commentary, 1, 2 Corinthians, Kenneth L. Chafin, Word Books, Waco, Texas, 1985