

First Corinthians

August 24, 2025

Chapter 15

The Matters of Worship Services – Part 6

“The Purpose of Worship in the Church”

Chapter 15:20 - 39

j) The Hope of Those Who Accept the Gospel (15:20)

With the LORD Jesus raised from the dead, the hope of those who embrace the Gospel carries significant consequences.

²⁰ *But now Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who are asleep.*

What does Paul mean when he refers to Christ as the “*first fruits*”? Once again, Paul employs a term that would have been well known to the Jews but somewhat unfamiliar to the Gentiles in the Church: “*first fruits*.” The initial mention of “*first fruits*” occurs in Exodus 23:16-19. In this chapter, the LORD establishes the timing for three national feasts: the Feast of Unleavened Bread, the Feast of the Harvest of First Fruits of the Labor, and the Feast of the Ingathering at the year's end. Among the two feasts that reference the first fruits, one takes place in the spring while the other occurs in the fall. These feasts are also noted in Exodus 34:22-26, as well as in Leviticus 2:12; 23:10, 17, 20; Numbers 18:12-13; 28:26; and Deuteronomy 18:4. When a crop is ready for harvest, the tithe from the first portion is gathered and given to the LORD. The first of anything presented to the LORD is considered first fruits. When dough is prepared for bread, the first portion is consecrated for the sacred bread (Numbers 15:19-21). The first believer to accept the LORD in Achaia was the first fruit of Paul's labor (1 Corinthians 16:15, Romans 16:5). The moral impact of Christianity served as a kind of first fruit in the world (James 1:18). Christ Jesus is referred to as “*the first fruits of those who are asleep*” (dead) because He was the first resurrected from the dead to eternal life, never to face death again. Just as Jesus was resurrected, all saints will be resurrected.

(1) The Role of Adam and Christ (15:21-22)

Continuing the imagery of first fruits, Paul explains the roles of Adam and Christ.

²¹ *For since by a man came death, by a man also came the resurrection of the dead.* ²² *For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all will be made alive.*

What is Paul conveying in these two verses? He expresses that the evil of death, introduced by one human, is, by divine design, eliminated and restored to life through another human. Through Adam's first fruit, all bodies will die. Through Christ's first fruit, the bodies of the saints will be brought to life. Make no mistake: Christ Jesus is the antithesis of Adam.

(2) Order of Resurrection (15:23)

But we must not get ahead of the sequence of the resurrection.

²³ *But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, after that those who are Christ's at His coming.*

Paul discusses the resurrection of Christ's body and the saints' bodies. He does not address the soul's fate upon the body's death. The soul immediately reaches its eternal home, while the body returns to dust until the time for its resurrection arrives.

As Paul states, Christ's bodily resurrection was the first fruits of those whose bodies will be resurrected in the future. When? Paul says, “*at His coming*.” Is this the Second Coming of Jesus to

Armageddon? No, this refers to the coming of Jesus to gather all the saints of the Church to protect them from the impending tribulation that will culminate at the end. As we mentioned, Paul had already written two letters to the Thessalonians by the time he penned this letter. In Chapter 4 of First Thessalonians, Paul reveals when the LORD will come to gather the saints of the Church and raise their resurrected bodies to life.

First Thessalonians Chapter 4:13-18

¹³ But we do not want you to be uninformed, brethren, about those who are asleep, so that you will not grieve as do the rest who have no hope. ¹⁴ For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep in Jesus. ¹⁵ For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. ¹⁶ For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. ¹⁷ Then we who are alive and remain will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we shall always be with the Lord. ¹⁸ Therefore comfort one another with these words.

Paul cannot refer to the Second Coming of the LORD because no one will be resurrected at that time. The saints will come with the LORD as His mighty army when the Second Coming occurs. During this event, all the enemies of the LORD will be killed, and Satan will be bound for 1,000 years. After this period ends, there will be a resurrection for all those who have rejected the LORD since creation. They will stand before the Great White Throne Judgment, where they will be cast into the Lake of Fire. At that point, there is no resurrection of bodies to eternal life, only a resurrection of bodies to eternal death, separated from the presence of the LORD.

(3) The End, the Kingdom, the Enemies (15:24-25)

After the saints are removed from the Earth, they are secure for all eternity. Paul then refers to the end, the kingdom, and the enemies of the LORD.

²⁴ then comes the end, when He hands over the kingdom to the God and Father, when He has abolished all rule and all authority and power. ²⁵ For He must reign until He has put all His enemies under His feet.

For those familiar with the timeline of the End Times and the associated events, it's clear that Paul overlooks the Tribulation of Israel, the Second Coming of the LORD, the Battle of Armageddon, the binding of Satan for a thousand years, the Thousand-Year Kingdom of the LORD, the release of Satan, the final battle, the Great White Throne Judgment, and God the Father's arrival in the New Jerusalem on Earth for eternity with the saved in spiritual bodies. Essentially, Paul transitions from the snatching away of the Church saints to the manifestation of the New Jerusalem on Earth when the last event occurs. Here are the last two prophecies that will be fulfilled. When the end comes, signaling the time for these final two prophecies to be realized, the LORD has destroyed all earthly "rule and all authority and power" after defeating all His enemies in the final battle and the Great White Throne Judgment. Then, Jesus will fulfill the last prophecy by handing over everything He created, including His Kingdom, to "the God and Father" (God the Father), to possess forever.

Why would Paul take such a significant leap over so many crucial End-Time events? The reason is simple: they do not pertain to the Church. Once the Church is taken from this Earth, it is safe for all eternity.

(4) Defeat of Death (15:26)

But Paul mentioned the abolishment of all rule, authority, and power. What is today's most authoritative rule, authority, and power? It is death. The LORD will defeat death, the last enemy. Verse 26.

²⁶ *The last enemy that will be abolished is death.*

How will the LORD abolish death? Paul informs us about how the LORD abolishes death before the conclusion of this chapter. As the last enemy, death must be conquered by the LORD to end human mortality on earth. All humans in earthly bodies will eventually die. The existence of human death began when Adam and Eve ate from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. Just inside the New Jerusalem, the River of Life will flow to the center of the city. On each side of the river, the Tree of Life will grow. It will provide life to those in the city who partake of its fruit for all eternity. However, the New Jerusalem will not descend to Earth until after the Great White Throne Judgment is completed, and the LORD Jesus performs an act that will eliminate the possibility of any human dying again. In verses 51–52 of this chapter, Paul refers to this event as a “change.” He states, “We may not all sleep (die a human death), but we will all be changed.” Between this point and verse 51, Paul has more to elaborate on. He must explain how all things will be subjected to the LORD one day. He must discuss the significance for those who accept the Gospel. He must include the distinction between heavenly bodies and earthly bodies. He must clarify the difference between natural bodies and spiritual bodies, among other matters. He must also institute the change.

(5) All Things in Subjection (15:27-28)

With the abolition of death, all things will be subject to Jesus.

²⁷ *For HE HAS PUT ALL THINGS IN SUBJECTION UNDER HIS FEET. But when He says, “All things are put in subjection,” it is evident that He is excepted who put all things in subjection to Him.* ²⁸ *When all things are subjected to Him, then the Son Himself also will be subjected to the One who subjected all things to Him, so that God may be all in all.*

Paul references Psalms 8:6 to start this verse. The Psalm states, “*You make him to rule over the works of Your hands; You have put all things under his feet.*” He also cites Psalm 110:1: “*The LORD says to my Lord: ‘Sit at My right hand until I make Your enemies a footstool for Your feet.’*”

These two verses provide the context for verses 20–26. “All things” means “all things.” It refers to everything, not just a part, and asserts that “all things will be fully under the authority of the LORD. No authority will exist above the LORD’s authority.”

When Paul states, “*it is evident that He is excepted who put all things in subjection to Him,*” what does he mean by using the word “excepted”? The Greek term is “*ektos*,” which translates to *outside* or *without*. This suggests that the authority to place all things under Jesus is not from this world; it belongs to God the Father, who exists outside the bounds of earthly authority. To understand the pronouns used in this sentence, we interpret it as “*it is evident that He [God the Father] is excepted who put all things in subjection to Him [Jesus].*”

Continuing to identify the pronouns in verse 28, we can read it as follows: “*When all things are subjected to Him [Jesus], then the Son Himself [Jesus] will also be subjected to the One [God the Father] who subjected all things to Him [Jesus], so that God [God the Father] may be all in all.*” The phrase “all in all” signifies complete redemption for an individual.

It would be beneficial to compare this topic with the one found in Hebrews 2:6-10. What is absent in the Corinthians passage is present in the Hebrews passage. Conversely, what is lacking in the Hebrews passage can be found in the Corinthians passage. In Hebrews 2:6-10, we hear,

“But one has testified somewhere, saying, ‘What is man, that You remember him? Or the son of man, that You are concerned about him? ‘You have made him for a little while lower than the angels; You have crowned him with glory and honor, And have appointed him over the works of Your hands; You have put all things in subjection under his feet.’ For in subjecting all things to him, He left nothing that is not subject to him. But now we do not yet see all things subjected to him. But we do see Him who was made for a little while lower than the angels, namely, Jesus, because of the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, so that by the grace of God He might taste death for everyone. For it was fitting for Him, for whom are all things, and through whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to perfect the author of their salvation through sufferings.”

In summary of the two passages, it is God's intention to have everything subdued unto Jesus, Who came to earth as a man to experience the suffering of earthly death *“so that by the grace of God,”* Jesus *“might taste death for everyone.”* Ultimately, Jesus will willingly submit Himself to God the Father so that *“God may be all in all.”* This implies that all things, including the Person of God the Son, will ultimately be subject to the Person of God the Father. For clarity, in God's plan, the Person of God the Father designated the authority to create all things and became the Savior of all sinners through the Person of God the Son, who humbled Himself to come to Earth as a man and establish the Gospel message necessary for sinners to accept Him as their Savior for complete redemption.

k) The Reason for Those Who Accept the Gospel

Therefore, Paul asks, “What is the reason for those who accept the Gospel?”

(1) With Baptism (15:29)

Paul starts the question with the topic of baptism.

²⁹ *Otherwise, what will those do who are baptized for the dead? If the dead are not raised at all, why then are they baptized for them?*

Chloe's report must have indicated that some people in Corinth were practicing baptism for the dead; however, those same individuals rejected the concept of resurrection. Let us remember the topic sentence of this chapter and the key elements Paul presented in the Gospel message in Chapter 1, verses 3–4.

³ *For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures,* ⁴ *and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures,*

This entire chapter focuses on Paul addressing the essential elements of the Gospel message, particularly the resurrection. He dedicates time to laying a solid foundation for a logical argument to respond to these startling questions: *“Otherwise, what will those do who are baptized for the dead? If the dead are not raised at all, why then are they baptized for them?”* Paul is neither teaching nor endorsing the practice of baptizing for the dead as Mormons do. Instead, he uses the concept of such baptisms to highlight the absurdity of baptizing for the dead if those performing the baptisms do not believe in the resurrection.

To verse 29, *Ellicott's Commentary for the English Readers* states the following.

St. Chrysostom gives the following description of it: “After a catechumen (i.e.,

one prepared for baptism, but not actually baptized) was dead, they hid a living man under the bed of the deceased; then coming to the bed of the dead man they spake to him, and asked whether he would receive baptism, and he making no answer, the other replied in his stead, and so they baptized the 'living for the dead.'" Does St. Paul then, by what he here says, sanction the superstitious practice? Certainly not. He carefully separates himself and the Corinthians, to whom he immediately addresses himself, from those who adopted this custom. He no longer uses the first or second person; it is "they" throughout this passage. It is no proof to others; it is simply the argumentum ad hominem. Those who do that, and disbelieve a resurrection, refute themselves. This custom possibly sprang up among the Jewish converts, who had been accustomed to something similar in their own faith. If a Jew died without having been purified from some ceremonial uncleanness, some living person had the necessary ablution performed on them, and the dead were so accounted clean.

(2) With Danger (15:30)

Paul then discusses the reason for accepting the Gospel in relation to danger. Verse 30.

³⁰ *Why are we also in danger every hour?*

Paul's question in verse 30 underscores the absurdity of practicing baptism for the dead. If baptism for the dead can save someone after they die, then why would anyone need to believe in the Gospel message before dying? Why would the Apostles risk their lives to preach the Gospel for salvation before death if a person could be saved through another person's baptism afterward?

(3) With Death (15:31)

Paul acknowledges that preaching the Gospel can lead to death at the hands of those who reject Christ. To illustrate this, he reminds the Corinthians of his commitment by sharing that he has preached the Gospel of the resurrected Christ to them. Verse 31.

³¹ *I affirm, brethren, by the boasting in you which I have in Christ Jesus our Lord, I die daily.*

The word "affirm" is not in the original text. This verse should read, "I affirm, brethren, by the boasting in you which I have in Christ Jesus our Lord, I die daily."

In other words, Paul's converts in Corinth serve as strong evidence that he is willing to risk his life daily for preaching the Gospel. In the Americas, few people face the threat of death for sharing the message of Jesus's resurrection. However, in many parts of the world outside the Americas, preaching the Gospel can be a crime punishable by death, especially in nations under Islamic control.

(4) With Resurrection (15:32)

In discussing the resurrection, Paul reflects on the mindset of the lost world by recounting his experience with the beasts in the amphitheater at Ephesus.

³² *If from human motives I fought with wild beasts at Ephesus, what does it profit me? If the dead are not raised, LET US EAT AND DRINK, FOR TOMORROW WE DIE.*

"If from human motives" indicates that he is speaking not from the LORD's perspective but from that of the lost world.

The statement, "I fought with wild beasts at Ephesus," is difficult to support with other Scriptures. Paul's Roman citizenship would have prevented him from encountering wild beasts unless ordered

by the emperor. Therefore, Paul ultimately aims to stand before the Roman Emperor. In understanding Paul, his purpose in appearing before the emperor isn't to defend himself; rather, it is to share the Gospel of the resurrected Christ in hopes of saving the emperor's soul.

What happened in Ephesus with Paul? What kind of beasts did Paul face there? In Chapter 4:9, Paul tells us that, as an Apostle, he was "condemned to death" and a "spectacle to the world." In his subsequent letter to the Corinthians, specifically 2 Corinthians 1:8, Paul reveals that he is afflicted and enduring suffering. Some teachers mistakenly reference Acts 19:11-41 as Paul's point of reference, but this cannot be accurate. The events described in Acts had not occurred by the time this letter was written. However, it is clear that a storm was brewing. It's possible that Paul is referring to another struggle. Remember, for three years, Paul reasoned with those who questioned him in the theater. Men came from all over, but undoubtedly, the men of Ephesus visited regularly. Four hundred years before Paul's arrival in Ephesus, a man named Heraclitus called his countrymen "wild beasts." Heraclitus was a notable ancient Greek philosopher from Ephesus, greatly influencing both ancient and modern philosophy. His philosophy maintained that there is harmony and justice in strife. He was labeled a "mob-abuser" and was critical of religion, believing that "most men are bad." Thus, he referred to the men of Ephesus as "wild beasts." It is likely that his sentiments regarding the Ephesians still echoed during Paul's time there. In fact, in Paul's closing to this letter, he tells us,

⁸ *But I will remain in Ephesus until Pentecost; ⁹ for a wide door for effective service has opened to me, and there are many adversaries.*

Paul's "adversaries" in Chapter 16:8-9 are likely the "wild beasts" referred to here.

Within this context, Paul's subsequent words resonate perfectly.

(5) With Corruption (15:33)

³³ *Do not be deceived: "Bad company corrupts good morals."*

Ephesus was a town rife with corruption. For those who have visited, you likely noticed the carved advertisement on the main street promoting the city's prostitution industry. In that context, and given the influence of Heraclitus, Paul can justifiably assert, "*Bad company corrupts good morals.*" Sin was widespread in the city and throughout the Roman Empire. Recall Chapter 6:18, when Paul says, "*Flee immorality. Every other sin a man commits is outside the body, but the immoral man sins against his own body*"; he had the sins of Ephesus in mind. Remember Chapter 6:9-10, when Paul proclaims, "*Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals, nor thieves, nor the covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God.*" Paul was reflecting on the sins prevalent in Ephesus. It's important to note that none of these sins were considered illegal in the Roman Empire. In response, Paul stated in Chapter 6:12, "*All things are lawful for me, but not all things are beneficial. All things are lawful for me, but I will not be dominated by anything.*" In truth, none of the actions legal within the Roman Empire were profitable for Paul because they constituted offenses against the LORD. None were suitable, proper, or beneficial, nor could he partake in them without facing the consequences of sin. Even though they were permissible in the Roman Empire, Paul chose not to succumb to the control that grips those who indulge in such crimes. Therefore, Paul urged the Corinthians to cease their participation in ignorant sinning.

(6) With Ignorant Sinning (15:34)

³⁴ *Become sober-minded as you ought, and stop sinning; for some have no knowledge of God. I speak this to your shame.*

It is disappointing that the NASB does not translate this verse accurately. It should read, “Sober up righteously and not sin; some are ignorant of God; to your shame, I speak.” “*Righteous*” can mean *what is just and proper*, or, as in this verse, *to become righteous*. “*Sober up*” means *to regain your senses*—it literally means to wake up from indulgence after drunkenness. Sober up; sin not. The problem with those in Corinth is that they are mere babes; they do not know, nor do they understand what God considers righteous or sinful. That is why Paul says, “*for some have no knowledge of God*” or “*some are ignorant of God*.” It is a habitual lack of knowledge because they have not sought to learn about God and what He considers sin. However, the Roman Empire does not regard it as a sin.

Paul is serious in this verse. He says, “*I speak this to your shame*.” In other words, Paul is saying, “*I am speaking to shame you*.” Shame on you for being an ignorant saint.

l) The Resurrection for Those Who Accept the Gospel**(1) Resurrection Comes Through Death (15:35-38)**

The saints in Corinth should not be unaware of God's knowledge since they have heard the Gospel. The resurrection is for those who embrace the Gospel, and it comes through death. Here, Paul aims to clarify the truth of the doctrine of the resurrection.

³⁵ *But someone will say, ‘How are the dead raised? And with what kind of body do they come?’* ³⁶ *You fool! That which you sow does not come to life unless it dies;* ³⁷ *and that which you sow, you do not sow the body which is to be, but a bare grain, perhaps of wheat or of something else.* ³⁸ *But God gives it a body just as He wished, and to each of the seeds a body of its own.*

Paul has demonstrated the truth of the resurrection of Jesus by presenting witnesses who saw Him alive after His resurrection—more than five hundred of them (15:5-7). He has validated the reality of the resurrected Jesus through his own encounter with Him on the Damascus Road. Consider Paul's two questions: “*How are the dead raised? And with what kind of body do they come?*” The dead are raised by divine power—that is the straightforward answer. The response to the second question is more complex: “What kind of body do they come?” The *Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges* addresses this question.

It was the doctrine of the Resurrection of the body which was the stumbling-block of many hearers of the Gospel. Estius remarks that the Pharisees taught that men would rise again with bodies possessing in every respect the same functions as those in which they were laid in the grave. This was a difficulty to many, especially to the Sadducees.

To address the difficulty surrounding the type of body in the resurrection, Paul discusses it in verse 36.

³⁶ *You fool! That which you sow does not come to life unless it dies;* ³⁷ *and that which you sow, you do not sow the body which is to be, but a bare grain, perhaps of wheat or of something else.* ³⁸ *But God gives it a body just as He wished, and to each of the seeds a body of its own.*

“You fool.” The Greek term for “fool” refers to a *senseless person, someone who is ignorant*. Paul isn’t criticizing; he’s stating a fact. Those who practice baptism for the dead simply don’t know any better. To educate them, Paul shifts the conversation to the planting of seeds, using a wheat seed as an *example*. In nature, a resurrected body is indeed possible. A dead seed is buried in the ground, and then God works to bring that seed to life. If you plant one seed, God will yield one plant. If you plant ten seeds, God will yield ten plants. Each seed emerges as a living plant. Through this analogy, Paul illustrates that any difficulty can be overcome. However, Paul hasn’t demonstrated that a person buried in the ground can rise from the dead. Nonetheless, Paul has already established Jesus’ resurrection by identifying the witnesses who are still alive today.

(2) Resurrection Not for All Flesh (15:39)

Paul further develops his analogy by stating that the resurrection is not meant for all flesh, as noted in verse 39.

³⁹ *All flesh is not the same flesh, but there is one flesh of men, and another flesh of beasts, and another flesh of birds, and another of fish.*

Paul shifts from plant flesh and seeds to animal flesh. Plant flesh and animal flesh are significantly different. Moreover, not all animal flesh is identical. Humans possess one type of flesh, while beasts have another, birds have yet another, and fish possess yet another. Here, we observe the vast diversity of God’s creation. Earthly bodies vary from one another. The flesh of beasts cannot be resurrected, nor can that of birds or fish. They exist within the food chain of life for humans. However, human flesh is unique. It does not belong in the food chain of life for humans. It is forbidden for one person to consume another. Here are the Lord's teachings regarding the food chain.

And God blessed Noah and his sons and said to them, ‘Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth. The fear of you and the terror of you will be on every beast of the earth and on every bird of the sky; with everything that creeps on the ground, and all the fish of the sea, into your hand they are given. Every moving thing that is alive shall be food for you; I give all to you, as I gave the green plant. Only you shall not eat flesh with its life, that is, its blood. Surely I will require your lifeblood; from every beast I will require it. And from every man, from every man’s brother I will require the life of man. ‘Whoever sheds man’s blood, By man his blood shall be shed, For in the image of God He made man (Genesis 9:1-6).