

Paul's First Letter to The Corinthians
Lesson 7

1 Cor. 15:1 Now I make known to you, brethren, the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received, in which also you stand, ²by which also you are saved, if you hold fast the word which I preached to you, unless you believed in vain. ³For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, ⁴and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, ⁵and that He appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. ⁶After that He appeared to more than five hundred brethren at one time, most of whom remain until now, but some have fallen asleep; ⁷then He appeared to James, then to all the apostles; ⁸and last of all, as it were to one untimely born, He appeared to me also. ⁹For I am the least of the apostles, who am not fit 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 toward me did not prove vain; but I labored even more than all of them, yet not I, but the grace of God with me. ¹¹Whether then *it was* I or they, so we preach and so you believed.

If You Hold Fast to the Word – Unless You Believe in Vain – Once again, as we have seen in Paul's writings, a positive and negative example is used to explain Paul's point. This is also another example proving why it is so important to look at passages in their full context. Here, if you were to pull just the verses that include the phrases I have chosen to head this explanation, it is easy to draw the conclusion that you can lose your salvation if you do not hold fast to the Word of God, causing you to have believed in vain. But this is not the case. Paul is setting up the proof that he will hold over the heads of those in Corinth that do not believe that the resurrection actually happened. This we will find beginning in verse 12.

Proof of the Resurrection – The gospel that must be preached to all is that Christ died for our sins, was buried and resurrected on the third day. Notice the text does not say "in three days" but "on the third day. This matches the references at the actual time of the resurrection in Matthew, Luke and Acts. There is however a discrepancy in the Mark references. Mark states "after three days." However the Mark passage is like the Matthew 12:40 passage which is a prophecy and not a statement of fact at the resurrection. Even Matthew corrects his wording at the recording of the actual resurrection stating "on the third day" in Matthew 16:21.

Eye Witnesses - Looks at Paul's resume of eye witnesses to the resurrection of our Lord.

1. To Cephas
2. To the twelve
3. To more than five hundred brethren at one time, most of whom remain until now, but some have fallen asleep
4. To James
5. To all the apostles
6. To me also

More than five hundred and thirteen eyewitnesses are mentioned in this passage alone. Notice also that Paul states that many of them were still alive in the year he wrote this letter.

Many of those who knew the Lord had visited Corinth and shared the gospel with them. Paul did feel as if he had labored there more than all of them, especially since he spent 18 months there on his second missionary journey. However, it did not matter with Paul just who had shared the gospel

with them. What mattered was that they believed the true gospel and that included the resurrection of the Lord.

1 Cor. 15:12 Now if Christ is preached, that He has been raised from the dead, how do some among you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? 13 But if there is no resurrection of the dead, not even Christ has been raised; 14 and if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is vain, your faith also is vain. 15 Moreover we are even found to be false witnesses of God, because we witnessed against God that He raised Christ, whom He did not raise, if in fact the dead are not raised. 16 For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised; 17 and if Christ has not been raised, your faith is worthless; you are still in your sins. 18 Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. 19 If we have hoped in Christ in this life only, we are of all men most to be pitied.

Then Our Preaching Is Vain - We must be careful not to use this passage to prove that Christ was not resurrected. This is simply an example of how hopeless we are if Christ was not resurrected. If He was not resurrected then there is no chance that we will one day be resurrected. If He is not resurrected then there is no hope for life after this life. But as we read on we see that Christ has been raised from the dead.

1 Cor. 15:20 But now Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who are asleep. 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 shall be made alive. 23 But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, after that those who are Christ's at His coming, 24 then comes the end, when He delivers up 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. 26 The last enemy that will be abolished is death. 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 And when all things are subjected to Him, then the Son Himself also will be subjected to the One who subjected all things to Him, that God may be all in all.

That God May Be All in All - All of eternity future turns on the fact that Christ was raised from the grave. In this all will happen in perfect order. Notice that Christ is the first to be raised, then Christians will be raised, then the end of the world will come and Christ will give all that He has to God the Father. When all sin has been dealt with and purity and perfection is the order of all that is left and belongs to Christ, then His purpose will be fulfilled as Paul states in both Romans and Colossians.

Romans 11:36 For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever. Amen.

Col. 3:9-11 Do not lie to one another, since you laid aside the old self with its *evil* practices, 10 and have put on the new self who is being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created him 11 *a renewal* in which there is no *distinction between* Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and freeman, but Christ is all, and in all.

1 Cor. 15:²⁹Otherwise, 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? ³⁰Why are we also in danger every hour? ³¹I protest, brethren, by the boasting in you, which I have in Christ Jesus our Lord, I die daily. ³²If 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. ³³Do not be deceived: "Bad company corrupts good morals." ³⁴Become sober-minded as you ought, and stop sinning; for some have no knowledge of God. I speak *this* to your shame.

Baptized for the Dead – I Speak this To Your Shame – There are over 30 interpretations for this passage that I have personally seen and reviewed. None of them may be correct. However the oldest is the view of Tertullian who states that Paul was addressing the heretics in Corinth who were being baptized for those who had already died in order that they could still be saved. [Quintus Septimius Florens Tertullianus, anglicised as Tertullian, (155 – 222 AD) was a church leader and prolific author of early Christianity. He also was a notable early Christian apologist.] This actually fits Paul's outline.

1. In 15:12 and following Paul addresses those in Corinth who do not believe in the resurrection. This is a sin.
2. In 15:20 and following Paul states that the resurrection was a fact seen by many witnesses who could testify at the time of the writing of the letter. To not believe in this is a sin.
3. In 15:29 and following Paul addresses the heretics in Corinth that have taken the hope of the resurrection far past its intent to the point of trying to humanly obtain salvation for those who died without Christ. To this Paul "protests" in 15:31. To take baptism this far is a sin.

Corinth is full of problems and the people have been deceived by those who have sinned concerning the resurrection and baptism. They were boasting in their error. There was no profit for Paul to fight the wild beast from purely human motives, but there was a spiritual reason. Paul's purpose here is to show that it is useless to baptize for the dead because that is purely a human motive. There has to be something more to resurrection than just human motives. If there is nothing past this life then "why bother with good morals and a pure life?" But there is more and Paul states that those who associated with those who are sinning about the resurrection issue are corrupting the good morals of the true believers in the church. Those who are corrupting the good morals are not true believers and have no true knowledge of God. Therefore, the believers must start thinking straight and stop sinning by doing these corrupted practices like "baptism for the dead." Paul has made this entire address to the shame of the Corinthians. He is trying to shame them into truth.

1 Cor. 15:³⁵But someone will say, "How are the dead raised? And with what kind of body do they come?" ³⁶You fool! That which you sow does not come to life unless it dies; ³⁷and 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. ³⁸But God gives it a body just as He wished, and to each of the seeds a body of its own. ³⁹All 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. ⁴⁰There are also heavenly bodies and earthly bodies, but the glory of the heavenly is one, and the *glory* of the earthly is another. ⁴¹There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars; for star differs from star in glory. ⁴²So also is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown a perishable *body*, it is raised an imperishable *body*; 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*.⁴⁵ So also it is written, "The first MAN, Adam, BECAME A LIVING SOUL." The last Adam *became* a life-giving spirit.⁴⁶ However, the spiritual is not first, but the natural; then the spiritual.⁴⁷ The first man is from the earth, earthy; the second man is from heaven.⁴⁸ As is the earthy, so also are those who are earthy; and as is the heavenly, so also are those who are heavenly.⁴⁹ And just as we have borne the image of the earthy, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly.

The Earthly Body – The Heavenly Body – In Paul's long winded manner, the purpose of this dissertation is to explain that the resurrected body that we will receive one day is different from the earthly body that we now live within. We know about our earthly body so little needs to be addressed about that. But what will the heavenly body be like? Paul explains it like this in another letter.

Philip. 3:20-21 For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ;²¹ who will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory, by the exertion of the power that He has even to subject all things to Himself.

Since Paul is not through with this subject, let's read on.

1 Cor. 15:50 Now I say this, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable.⁵¹ Behold, I tell you a mystery; we shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed,⁵² in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet; for the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed.⁵³ For this perishable must put on the imperishable, and this mortal must put on immortality.⁵⁴ But when this perishable will have put on the imperishable, and this mortal will have put on immortality, then will come about the saying that is written, "DEATH IS SWALLOWED UP in victory."⁵⁵ "O DEATH, WHERE IS YOUR VICTORY? O DEATH, WHERE IS YOUR STING?"⁵⁶ The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law;⁵⁷ but thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.⁵⁸ Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your toil is not *in vain* in the Lord.

Perishable Imperishable –Mortal Immortality - We will not be able to enter into the kingdom of God in these bodies that we wear now. They must be changed from the perishable to the imperishable and from the mortal to the immortal. For those who have died their perishable body will be changed into an imperishable body. For those who are alive at the coming of the Lord, they will not taste death and their mortal bodies will be turned into immortal bodies. Either way all the bodies of those who have made Christ their Savior will be transformed into a body like the glory of His body. Death will no longer threaten victory of the life of those who are Christians. When the Lord gives all that belong to Him to God the Father, physical death will be no more.

The resurrection of the dead is an eternal truth and promise from God. Sharing the gospel is never in vain.

1 Cor. 16:1 Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I directed the churches of Galatia, so do you also.² On the first day of every week let each one of you put aside and save, as he may prosper, that no collections be made when I come.³ And when I arrive, whomever you may approve, I shall send them with letters to carry your gift to Jerusalem;⁴ and if it is fitting for me to go also, they will go with me.⁵ But I

shall come to you after I go through Macedonia, for I am going through Macedonia; ⁶and perhaps I shall stay with you, or even spend the winter, that you may send me on my way wherever I may go. ⁷For I do not wish to see you now *just* in passing; for I hope to remain with you for some time, if the Lord permits. ⁸But I shall remain in Ephesus until Pentecost; ⁹for a wide door for effective *service* has opened to me, and there are many adversaries.

The Collection on the First Day of the Week – The instruction for the Corinthian church is to collect money every Sunday, as the congregation has prospered in their work so that a special collection will not have to be taken when Paul arrives in Corinth. The collection is for the saints in Jerusalem. They are struggling to survive in Jerusalem. Once Paul has seen the collection it will be sent to Jerusalem by someone they wish to deliver it or perhaps Paul will deliver it himself.

Paul does not want to make a quick trip to Corinth. He wants to stay there for a while when he arrives. As for now he will stay in Ephesus where he is writing this letter until Pentecost which was the time of Harvest. After the Harvest people generally made the moves that they would make until after winter was over. Such was the case here. Paul would stay through the Harvest and then travel across or around the Aegean Sea to attend to matters in Macedonia and then continue down to Corinth. Once there history tells us that he would pen the wonderful letter to the Romans.

¹ **Cor. 16:**¹⁰ Now if Timothy comes, see that he is with you without cause to be afraid; for he is doing the Lord's work, as I also am. ¹¹Let no one therefore despise him. But send him on his way in peace, so that he may come to me; for I expect him with the brethren. ¹²But concerning Apollos our brother, I encouraged him greatly to come to you with the brethren; and it was not at all *his* desire to come now, but he will come when he has opportunity.

Timothy and Apollos – As usual, Timothy was on the trail doing the work directed by Paul. Paul's good friend Apollos was also on the missionary tour saving souls by spreading the gospel. The Corinthians could expect either of them at any time.

¹ **Cor. 16:**¹³ Be on the alert, stand firm in the faith, act like men, be strong. ¹⁴Let all that you do be done in love.

Love – Once again Paul reminds them of the importance of love. Everything else is meaningless unless it is accompanied by love.

¹ **Cor. 16:**¹⁵ Now I urge you, brethren (you know the household of Stephanas, that they were the first fruits of Achaia, and that they have devoted themselves for ministry to the saints), ¹⁶that you also be in subjection to such men and to everyone who helps in the work and labors. ¹⁷And I rejoice over the coming of Stephanas and Fortunatus and Achaicus; because they have supplied what was lacking on your part. ¹⁸For they have refreshed my spirit and yours. Therefore acknowledge such men.

They Have Supplied What Was Lacking – Paul mentions three men and their work. This is a wonderful testimony. The families of these men took the lead in the church with their good works. Oh that we would have such men in the church today. If we could only find great leaders that supplied the leadership that was lacking in the church today! They would refresh us too. But there must be loyal followers too. This would solve so many of the problems in the churches across the world. Imagine the potential of great leadership and great following in one church.

1 Cor. 16:¹⁹The churches of Asia greet you. Aquila and Prisca greet you heartily in the Lord, with the church that is in their house. ²⁰All the brethren greet you. Greet one another with a holy kiss.

The Church in Their House – There were many churches in Asia. This included all the churches mentioned by John in the Revelation along with all the churches in Galatia, Pamphylia, Turkey, etc. But the Church in Ephesus was in the home of Aquila and Prisca. The church in Rome was also started in their home while they lived there. Most likely the church in Corinth was started in their home since they moved there from Rome after Caesar ordered all the Jews out of Italy. They moved from Rome, to Corinth, to Ephesus, allowing a great church to be started in their home in each town.

1 Cor. 16:²¹The greeting is in my own hand-- Paul. ²²If anyone does not love the Lord, let him be accursed. Maranatha. ²³The grace of the Lord Jesus be with you. ²⁴My love be with you all in Christ Jesus. Amen.

The Greeting in Paul's own hand - As always, Paul picks up the pen to write the greeting, the logo, so the church would know that this was an authentic letter from Paul. There is the logo, "The grace of the Lord Jesus be with you." It was proof of Paul's authorship in those days. They knew his writing and his logo.

One final attempt to press the importance of love and Paul says goodbye. Two facets of love are quickly addressed. Without love for Christ you will be "banned" from the Lord's coming. Then there is Paul's love for the saints. Two loves that we should imitate in our lives.