

HOPE FOR A BETTER LIFE

BACKGROUND PASSAGE: MARK 16; 1 COR. 15

PRINT PASSAGE: 1 COR. 15:1-8, 12-14, 20-23, 42-45

RESOURCES: *The New National Baptist Hymnal 21st Century Edition*,
Boyd's Commentary for the Sunday School

KEY VERSE: If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable. But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept. 1 Corinthians 15:19-20, KJV

Intro

First Corinthians was an epistle or letter written by the Apostle Paul to the church of God at Corinth. It is uncertain, but Bible scholars believe the letter was probably written in A.D. 54-56 on Paul's third missionary journey. Paul wrote the letter from Ephesus, a city where he ministered for approximately three years.

An array of nationalities including Jews, Egyptians, Syrians, Greeks, and Romans lived in the city of Corinth. Corinth was a materially prosperous city known for its immoral living. It was an intellectual and cultural center as well. The people of Corinth had little regard for the law. The local residents of the city worshiped Aphrodite, better known as the great goddess of love, whose temple housed one thousand sacred prostitutes.

The city was morally corrupt and in great need of the Gospel. Unfortunately, some of the Christians living there were questioning their own beliefs. Members of the church were arguing, forming cliques, and feuding, which ultimately resulted in division and splits. In one of their letters to Paul, the Corinthians wanted to know the truth about bodily resurrection. Thus, they turned to their spiritual leader, the Apostle Paul for advice.

Paul wrote this letter for the purpose of unifying the church and to address some of their misconceptions and confusion as it related to the Gospel of Jesus Christ pertaining to such matters as marriage, public worship, Christian liberty and rights, spiritual gifts, and the resurrection from the dead.

Think About It

How does the hope of a bodily resurrection motivate you to give yourself completely to the work of the Lord?

1. Evidence of the Good News (1 Corinthians 15:1–8)

King James Version	New Revised Standard Version
MOREOVER, brethren, I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand; 2 By which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain. 3 For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; 4 And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures: 5 And that he was seen of Cephas, then of the twelve: 6 After that, he was seen of above five hundred brethren at once; of whom the greater part remain unto this present, but some are fallen asleep. 7 After that, he was seen of James; then of all the apostles. 8 And last of all he was seen of me also, as of one born out of due time.	NOW I would remind you, brothers and sisters, of the good news that I proclaimed to you, which you in turn received, in which also you stand, 2 through which also you are being saved, if you hold firmly to the message that I proclaimed to you—unless you have come to believe in vain. 3 For I handed on to you as of first importance what I in turn had received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, 4 and that he was buried, and that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures, 5 and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. 6 Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers and sisters at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have died. 7 Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. 8 Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me.

Know It In response to the Corinthians' questions about the resurrection of the body, Paul presented the same Gospel he previously had preached to them. Paul had come to Corinth and preached the Gospel, causing them to believe in Jesus. The word *Gospel* literally means, "Good News." They had been saved by God, yet some of the Corinthian Christians were wavering in their faith. They embraced it as true, but some of them were still denying the very hope in which they believed. All churches have people who do not yet believe. Some are moving in the direction of belief, and others are imposters. Jesus Christ saves us if we firmly believe His Gospel and faithfully follow it (*Life Application Study Bible*, KJV, p. 2021).

NOTES:

Paul advised the Corinthians to hold fast to their faith and keep in mind what he preached to them, unless what he had preached was in vain. Paul said what he received from the Scriptures he passed on to the Corinthians. Paul reassured the Corinthians he did not make up this Gospel. He argued from the Scriptures that Christ died for our sins and was raised from the dead.

Although the death and resurrection of Christ may seem foolish to some in the world, it is salvation to those of us who believe. There were eyewitnesses of the resurrection of Jesus Christ that should be sufficient attestation. Paul pointed out there is concrete evidence of His resurrection. Christ was seen by Cephas (Peter), the Twelve, five hundred additional followers, and James the brother of the Lord. Jesus also was seen by all the apostles and lastly Paul himself.

2. The Hope of Resurrected Bodies (1 Corinthians 15:12-14, 20-23)

King James Version

12 Now if Christ be preached that he rose from the dead, how say some among you that there is no resurrection of the dead?

13 But if there be no resurrection of the dead, then is Christ not risen:

14 And if Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain.

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20 But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept.

21 For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead.

22 For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive.

23 But every man in his own order: Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ's at his coming.

New Revised Standard Version

12 Now if Christ is proclaimed as raised from the dead, how can some of you say there is no resurrection of the dead?

13 If there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ has not been raised;

14 and if Christ has not been raised, then our proclamation has been in vain and your faith has been in vain.

.....

20 But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have died.

21 For since death came through a human being, the resurrection of the dead has also come through a human being;

22 for as all die in Adam, so all will be made alive in Christ.

23 But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ.

Paul said the consequence of denying the resurrection of the dead is tragic. The Corinthian Christians did not deny Jesus' resurrection; they just didn't believe in their own bodily resurrection. In other words, the Corinthians believed we lived forever, but not in resurrected bodies. They did not believe our present bodies will live in a glorified state. In explaining the nature of the resurrection, Paul faced the conflicting views among the Greeks, who readily embraced the immortality of the soul but had trouble with the notion of the body being raised (Acts 17:32). In 1 Corinthians 15:35–44, Paul made the point there are many kinds of bodies, in which case the resurrection body is a new nonperishable body specially gifted from God (vv. 45–48).

The resurrection of the human body was a problem for many in Paul's day, and the disbelief had even leaked into the church. Many people in our churches today do not believe in the resurrection of the human body. However, if we deny the resurrection of the Christian's body, we deny the fact Jesus Christ was raised from the dead. If God raised Jesus from the dead, surely He can do the same for us. To deny the resurrection of Christ or Christians means our preaching is in vain. The Gospel we preach is that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. He died for our sins and rose again, conquering death. If there is no resurrection of Christ and no resurrection of His believers, then our preaching is worthless. If Christ had not risen from the grave, we would be serving a dead man. What makes our faith so strong rests in the fact our Savior is alive.

Because of Adam's sin, we all must die, but if we are in Christ, we shall be made alive. The first Adam was made from dirt, but the last Adam (Christ) came from heaven. The first Adam's disobedience to God caused sin to enter the world, but the last Adam (Jesus) was obedient to the Father, bringing righteousness and salvation into the world. The life and resurrection of Christ guarantees our life after death. The resurrection of Jesus was the first fruit of our resurrection. Christ has risen from the dead and has become the first fruits of the dead. The word *first* means the first in order of time. *First fruits* refers to the harvest of a farmer. The Jews gave the first fruit of their crops as an offering to the Lord. The Jews believed giving God the first fruit of their harvest guaranteed the blessings of God upon all the remaining fruit that followed. The Feast of First Fruits was observed on the day after the Sabbath following Passover (Lev. 23:9–14). In comparison, Jesus rose from the dead on the exact day of the Feast of First Fruits, the day after the Sabbath following Passover. Jesus' death ended the need for sacrifice because He provided a perfect and complete atonement. Jesus is not the first person to be raised from the dead, but only Jesus was resurrected. Unlike Jesus, every person who died and was raised from the dead, died again. When Jesus was raised from the dead, it was God's assurance to us that we all shall be raised one day as part of that future harvest. To believers, death is only sleep. The body sleeps, but the soul is at home with the Lord (2 Cor. 5:1–8). At the resurrection, the body will be awakened and glorified (Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Wise*, p 166).

3. Without Decay (1 Corinthians 15:42-45)

King James Version

42 So also is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown in corruption; it is raised in incorruption:

43 It is sown in dishonour; it is raised in glory: it is sown in weakness; it is raised in power:

44 It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body.

45 And so it is written, The first man Adam was made a living soul; the last Adam was made a quickening spirit.

New Revised Standard Version

42 So it is with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown is perishable, what is raised is imperishable.

43 It is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power.

44 It is sown a physical body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a physical body, there is also a spiritual body.

45 Thus it is written, "The first man, Adam, became a living being"; the last Adam became a life-giving spirit.

NOTES:

Paul made a point by stating the body of a believer is sown in corruption but will be raised in incorruption. Our earthly bodies are corruptible, but our resurrected bodies will be incorruptible. A corruptible body deteriorates and decays. Our incorruptible bodies never will age, deteriorate, and die. Our earthly bodies are buried in brokenness, but our resurrected bodies will be raised in glory. Our physical bodies will return to the dirt from whence they came, but our transformed bodies will be bodies of glory. *Glory* means to be full of light, splendor, brightness, luster, majesty, and the grace of God Himself. While on earth, our earthy bodies will become weak due to sickness and disease and eventually die. Our earthly bodies will be buried in weakness, while our resurrected bodies will be raised in power. Our resurrected bodies will have a mind and body. They will be perfect without any defects. There is a natural body as well as a spiritual body, and they are different in nature. Adam was given a physical body to live on the earth that he passed on to the rest of the human race. On the other hand, Christ was a quickening Spirit, and His Spirit is given to those who believe in Him. Because Christ is the Lord from heaven, He is able to transform those who belong to Him into spiritual bodies so they can live in power. Jesus' Spirit not only gives us our bright hope, but strength for today. As the Holy Spirit embeds within our hearts, our today is given new life.