

Themes Of I Corinthians (Part 8)

Resurrection

Richard T. Ritenbaugh

Given 15-Sep-07; Sermon #848

Back toward the end of February, I started a short series on the themes of I Corinthians, which I intend to finish today. I know that it has been several months since the last installment; therefore, as I did in the first sermon, I am going to trace the footsteps of the apostle Paul in the time period immediately preceding his arrival at Corinth. In this way, I can come full circle with the entire series and also give an introduction for our final theme today.

As Acts 17 opens, Paul was preaching in Thessalonica. He enjoyed some success there for about three weeks' duration, but then the Jews began to figure out what he was doing and rioted out of envy, because he was taking people away from their synagogue. They accused Paul and his companions of spreading sedition against Caesar; they did not bring a religious argument (although it had a religious base in that they were to worship someone other than Caesar). This was tantamount to sedition.

The converts in Thessalonica hurriedly hustled them out of the city and sent them to Berea, where they again had success. However, the Jews followed them from Thessalonica to Berea, and the converts there had to help him, again, get out of town quickly. From Berea, Paul finally landed in Athens.

Athens, as we know, was the center of Greek culture and philosophy, and it had been for a couple hundred years by this time. We need to see Athens from Paul's perspective, though. He had grown up in Tarsus, a city of Cilicia in Asia Minor. Tarsus was a Greek city. It was Roman, of course, but its philosophy—its way of doing things—was Greek. There were many famous Greek philosophers from his part of the country—Asia Minor—not just the main homeland of Greece. Paul grew up in this environment of Greek thought. Of course, he was a Jew and had learned Jewish philosophy and the Jewish pharisaical understanding of the Scriptures. Later, he had been sent to Jerusalem to study under Gamaliel. As a result, he had an understanding and learning of both Greek things and Jewish things.

According to the history of Greek philosophy, Athens was the center of the learned world at that time. As a learned man himself, as an orator and a citizen of the Greek city of Tarsus, Paul probably thought that if he could convince the Athenians of the gospel message, he could convince anyone. Remember that he was the one who said that it was his job—the apostle's job—to persuade men. For him to persuade Athenians would

be a high-water mark in his ministry.

He must have gone into Athens not only running away from the Thessalonians but also with the thought in his mind that it would be a challenge to his skills in logic, persuasion, and rhetoric beyond the skills God gave him through His Spirit. He would have to be at the top of his game in order to persuade the Athenians, because they were so sharp. It is kind of like the song entitled "New York, New York," by Frank Sinatra. For Paul, this was "Athens, Athens." One line is, "If I can make it there, I can make it anywhere." This was a kind of Super Bowl or Daytona 500 for the apostle Paul to preach in Athens.

Maybe I am building this up too much, but I want to give you an idea of the way that the city of Athens was thought of during that day and time. It was the center of learning, and Paul was going into a type of philosophical lion's den regarding his message. He was confident of the message, but it was still going to be a challenge. He was going to face these people who were very good at debate.

This next verse will give us a feeling for the city:

Acts 17:16-21 Now while Paul waited for them at Athens, his spirit was provoked within him when he saw that the city was given over to idols. Therefore he reasoned in the synagogue with the Jews and with the Gentile worshipers, and in the marketplace daily with those who happened to be there. Then certain Epicurean and Stoic philosophers encountered him. And some said, "What does this babbler want to say?" Others said, "He seems to be a proclaimer of foreign gods," because he preached to them Jesus and the resurrection. And they took him and brought him to the Areopagus, saying, "May we know what this new doctrine is of which you speak? For you are bringing some strange things to our ears. Therefore we want to know what these things mean." For all the Athenians and the foreigners who were there spent their time in nothing else but either to tell or to hear some new thing.

Athens seemed to exist as only a place of discussion and debate. Everyone was involved in it, either telling tales and making speeches or listening to them. It seemed to be wholly given over to rhetoric and philosophy, and the citizenry looked down on newcomers and upstarts calling them derogatory names. They used the original Greek term *seed-picker* on Paul, implying he was like someone who made his living by picking up scraps, like a vagabond or bum. They looked down their noses at these people, thinking intellectually that these people were bums compared to them.

Yet, these philosophers, the real ones like the Epicureans and Stoics, must have heard something in Paul's rhetoric that made them wonder if maybe he did have something new and interesting to tell. Paul was not just an ordinary "seed-picker"; he had something more than they had. Thus, they brought him to the Areopagus, which is like the Mt. Everest of Greek philosophy, where all the great philosophers of the day spoke. They were actually giving him quite an honor by bringing him up to Mars' Hill.

Acts 17:22-34 Then Paul stood in the midst of the Areopagus and said, "Men of Athens, I perceive that in all things you are very religious; for as I was passing through and considering the objects of your worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: 'TO THE UNKNOWN GOOD.' Therefore, the One whom you worship without knowing, Him I proclaim to you—God, who made the world and everything in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, and does not dwell in temples made with hands. Nor is He worshiped with men's hands, as though He needed anything, since He gives to all life, breath, and all things. And He has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, and has determined their preappointed times and the boundaries of their dwellings, so that they should seek the Lord, in the hope that they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us; for in Him we live and move and have our being, as also some of your own poets have said, 'For we are also His offspring.' Therefore, since we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Divine Nature is like gold or silver or stone, something shaped by art and man's devising. Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent, because He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained. He has given assurance of this to all by raising Him from the dead." And when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked, while others said, "We will hear you again on this matter." So Paul departed from among them. However, some men joined him and believed, among them Dionysius the Areopagite, a woman named Damaris, and others with them.

If you know anything about Greek philosophy (and most of us do not, since we normally do not have a classical education in this country, you would understand that he directs this speech primarily toward the Stoics, because they were, of all the Greeks, probably philosophically closest to the truth. They believed in deity, at least, though pantheistic; they did believe that there is a god. They believed in discipline and self-control, and they believed in reason. This is different from the Epicureans, who were existentialists. They

Themes of I Corinthians (Part 8) by Richard T. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

were materialists and atheists. They thought that enjoying life through pleasurable experiences was the whole of life.

The things that he says here are the things with which the Stoics would agree, for the most part. He includes quotations from the Greek poets. He quotes Epimenides of Crete in verse 28, "In him we move, and have our being." He also quotes Aratus and Cleanthus. It is interesting that he quotes Aratus, who is from the province of Cilicia: He was a poet from Paul's home province whom he knew or knew about.

Quoting the Greek poets gave him a boost in the minds of these people, and they seemed to have been hanging on every word he was saying—until he mentioned the resurrection from the dead. It is at this point that the crowd probably began to jeer him, and the audience broke up. Some did want to hear more, but they were very few. There are only two people named here who believed, Dionysius and Damaris. There were others, but they are not named. It was a very small number of people that were actually converted at Athens. After the string of successes up through Thessalonica, Berea, and elsewhere, it was surely a disappointment when he came to Athens.

The doctrine of the resurrection from the dead was the cause of it; that is what had stopped everything. The book of I Corinthians contains what is commonly known as the "Resurrection Chapter." It is a long, reasoned explanation of this doctrine central to the faith. Today, we will take a survey only of his argument found in I Corinthians 15 so that we can better understand the doctrine and his reasons for including it in the epistle to the Corinthians. In other words, why is it in I Corinthians and not someplace else?

In the meantime, what was Greek thought on the matter of the resurrection? We must understand this because this was the milieu in which Paul was working, and the people in Corinth had these same Greek ideas. William Barclay gives a good summary of the Greek ideas of the afterlife, on page 140 of his commentary, *Letters to the Corinthians*.

When we turn to the Greek world, we must grasp one thing, which is at the back of the whole chapter [meaning I Corinthians 15]: The Greeks had an instinctive fear of death. Euripides wrote, "Yet mortals, burdened with countless ills, still love life. They long for each coming day, glad to hear the things they know, rather than face death—the unknown."

But on the whole, the Greeks and that part of the world influenced by Greek thought did believe in the immortality of the soul. But for them, the immortality of the soul involved a complete dissolution of the body. They had a proverb,

Themes of I Corinthians (Part 8) by Richard T. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

"The body is a tomb." One of them said, "I'm a poor soul shackled to a corpse." "It pleased me," says Seneca, "to inquire into the eternity of the soul—nay, to believe in it. I surrendered myself to that great hope." But he also says, "When the day shall come when which I shall part this mixture of divine and human, here where I found it, I will leave my body. My self I will give back to the gods."

Epictetus writes, "When God does not supply what is necessary, He is sounding the signal for retreat. He has opened the door and says to you, 'Come!' But whither? To nothing terrible, but from whence you came, to the things which are dear and kin to you—to the elements. What in you is fire, shall go to fire; earth to earth; water to water."

Seneca talks about things as death being resolved into their ancient elements. For Plato, the body is the antithesis of the soul, as the source of all weaknesses, as opposed to what alone is capable of independence and goodness. We can see this best in the Stoic beliefs. To the Stoic, God was fiery spirit, purer than anything on earth. What gave men life was that a spark of this divine fire came and dwelt in a man's body. When a man dies, his body simply dissolved into the elements of which it was made, but the divine spark returned to God and was absorbed in the divinity of which it was a part. For the Greek, immortality lay precisely in getting rid of the body. For him, the resurrection of the body was unthinkable. Personal immortality really did not exist because that which gave them life was absorbed again into God, the source of all life.

Let us start putting things together. We talked before about how cosmopolitan Corinth was. Many people were coming into Corinth from every part of the Empire, because it was an important commercial city. While going there for trading, many of them decided to stay there. Thus, there were people there from all over the Empire.

However, despite being cosmopolitan, Corinth was a thoroughly Greek city. In fact, it was on the Greek mainland; it was a capital of Greece. It was steeped in Hellenism, which was the Greek way and thought that was exported to the rest of the world.

Corinth and Athens are separated by less than fifty miles. Corinth is almost directly west of Athens, and, philosophically, Corinth was dominated by Athenian thinking. It was just a short walk for the Athenian philosophers to come to Corinth. Also remember that everyone in Greece who was anybody gathered in Corinth for the Isthmian Games

every few years. Corinth was thoroughly Greek.

It is not a stretch of the imagination to believe that if the idea of the resurrection from the dead caused jeers and mockings in Athens, it would face the same resistance in Corinth. Thus, the Corinthian church needed to be taught and deeply grounded in this doctrine of the resurrection from the dead, lest the ideas from the society around them cause them to doubt and slip back into Greek thought on the matter.

We have to add another thing to this: There were Jews in the city, but the Jews were also divided on this matter of the resurrection from the dead. Being well versed in the Scriptures, the Pharisees accepted the resurrection from the dead. There are many places in the Old Testament that speak of it. However, the Sadducees had been heavily Hellenized in the preceding two hundred years. Over time, they began to agree with Greek thought on the matter until they did not accept the resurrection from the dead or that there was any such thing as the spirit, believe it or not.

Paul later used this difference in belief between the Pharisees and the Sadducees as a defense before the Sanhedrin. Remember when he was arrested in Jerusalem and they hauled him before the Sanhedrin, he said, in Acts 23:6-10, "It is because of the resurrection from the dead that I have been brought before you." That started a big brawl in which the Romans were compelled to protect Paul and get him out of there. Eventually, he was taken to Caesarea where he could appeal through Felix and Festus to Caesar in Rome. All of that was about the resurrection from the dead. Paul used it as a defense to get what he wanted: to finally be free, and he did that before Caesar in Rome.

Thus, there is some possibility that even the Jewish members of the church of God in Corinth needed clarification on the resurrection from the dead, depending on from which side of the Jewish beliefs they came. More than likely, they were Pharisees and believed in the resurrection from the dead, because most of the Jews tended to follow the Pharisees.

One caveat: Since the resurrection from the dead is a huge subject, we are not going to be able to cover every aspect of this chapter. Therefore, if I skip something, it is for a good reason. If I were to go into it, it would be a large digression that I do not have the time to finish. However, I will explain the gist of Paul's argument in I Corinthians in its major sections found there. We will see that he was using all of the skills he had learned in his education to get this point across to the people in a way that would be convincing to the Jews and also to the Greeks—especially to the Greeks in Corinth.

Chapter 15 of I Corinthians is one of the longest chapters in the New Testament. I have split this chapter into seven major sections. Many of you have paragraphs in your translation of the Bible, and my sections will pretty much follow those paragraphs, except for the first couple. I split the first paragraph into two parts.

Central to the Gospel

I Corinthians 15:1-4 Moreover, brethren, I declare to you the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received and in which you stand, by which also you are saved, if you hold fast that word which I preached to you—unless you believed in vain. For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures.

As Paul introduces the subject of the resurrection from the dead, he recalls to them the basic facts of the gospel message that he had taught them while he was with them before. When he says, "I declare to you," he was really saying, in a sense, "I am reminding you. I am trying to re-impress upon you the gospel that I preached to you."

One thing you have to remember is that these highlights by Paul are not the whole gospel that he preached to them. They are highlights. He did not come in and just preach only that Christ died for our sins and that He was buried and rose from the dead.

What Paul says here is that, "I delivered to you first of all..." He mentions this portion of the gospel. It was the crux of the matter that Christ died for our sins, as was prophesied in the Old Testament; that He was buried; and that He was raised to eternal life after three days, as was also prophesied. He is very clear on this point. He did not just tell them this small portion only, though. He had gone through the scriptures earlier and showed where in the Old Testament it had been prophesied by the various prophets that this would happen.

We could get the impression here that he just told them only this small portion, but he systematically laid everything down about the gospel from the Old Testament: what it was and how it had been fulfilled in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. By reminding them of this portion, he is showing them that the resurrection from the dead is a vital element in the saving knowledge of God. It has to be there. It is a central, early, foundational part of the gospel message; and if they disbelieved the resurrection, they might just as well not believe any of the gospel, because taking the resurrection out

causes the whole thing to crumble.

We should note, as we are passing through here, that he stresses that salvation is an ongoing process. Verse 2, where he says, "By which also you are saved," is not translated in the right tense. It should read, "are being saved." It was not a *fait accompli* that Christ died for our sins, was buried, and rose again, and that if we believe that, we have salvation. That is not quite how it works. That is foundational. That part is done, but there is so much more to it. The tense that he uses here suggests that thing very strongly.

Part of our salvation has already been done: the justification part, the forgiveness of our sins part. However, another part is now: we are being saved. That salvation will be completed in the future, at the resurrection from the dead.

Thus, he reminds them that currently, as he said in verse 1, they are standing in the belief in the gospel message and that they must hold fast or endure. This is the future part. They are standing now, and they must continue. They must hold fast or endure as time progresses, so that they will be ultimately resurrected from the dead. As he is starting this, he is throwing in encouragement and exhortation. We have to do more than profess belief to be saved; we have to continue in the process.

Eyewitness Testimony

I Corinthians 15:4-11 ...and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures, and that He was seen by Cephas, then by the twelve. After that He was seen by over five hundred brethren at once, of whom the greater part remain to the present, but some have fallen asleep. After that He was seen by James, then by all the apostles. Then last of all He was seen by me also, as by one born out of due time [as an abortion—he thought nothing of himself], for I am the least of the apostles, who am not worthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me was not in vain; but I labored more abundantly than they all, yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me. Therefore, whether it was I, or they, so we preach and so you believed.

In any court of law or in any deliberative body, evidence and eyewitness testimony are primary vehicles to establishing the truth of the matter. Since there can be no physical proof for a spiritual resurrection, then you are left with eyewitness testimony. Paul

Themes of I Corinthians (Part 8) by Richard T. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

introduces, then, the eyewitness testimony of all these people as his first argument.

Old Testament law said that a matter is established on the testimony of two or three witnesses. Paul gives us more than five hundred. He goes above and beyond. These people, most of whom were still alive at the time, could be talked to, if these Corinthians had opportunity; and they would tell what they saw with their own eyes. Such overwhelming proof should satisfy even the most skeptical judge.

If you had an accident on the road and there were five hundred people out there who watched it happen and you could bring all five hundred in to testify that it was not your fault, it would be likely that you would win your case. Paul had over five hundred eyewitnesses that all saw Jesus Christ after He died, after His resurrection.

This next passage is about His first appearance to the apostles:

John 20:19-20 Then, the same day at evening, being the first day of the week, when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in the midst, and said to them, "Peace be with you." When He had said this, He showed them His hands and His side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord.

I bet they were!

He appeared to them in a closed and locked room. He spoke to them and let them see Him. I would not be surprised if He allowed them to touch Him, too, to see that He was indeed real. He was not just a spirit.

This next one is Luke's testimony found in the Acts:

Acts 1:1-3 The former account I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach, until the day in which He was taken up, after He through the Holy Spirit had given commandments to the apostles whom He had chosen, to whom He also presented Himself alive after His suffering by many infallible proofs, being seen by them during forty days and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God.

The evidence for Jesus' resurrection cannot be doubted. Too many people saw Him, heard Him, touched Him, ate with Him, walked with Him, and probably many other

things that are not mentioned in the Scriptures. All of this happened after His death. Not only that, but also these people had this opportunity (many of them several times) for forty days! This argues conclusively against mass delusion! In that time, Jesus presented many infallible proofs. You cannot break them. The proofs were real; they are true; and these infallible proofs gave evidence that He was the same Jesus who died on the tree, was buried, and rose again.

He appeared also to the Apostle Paul on the road to Damascus, and the fact that Paul had seen him was perhaps the best eyewitness account for the Corinthians, because it was a first-person account. They knew Paul. They had spoken with him during the time he was in Corinth. They knew his character. They had seen him at work.

Paul's eyewitness account is better, in a way, than these others, not only because it was first person, but also because it happened a few years after resurrection and after the occasions with Jesus that the other apostles had. It occurred to a man who was at the time the church's worst bitter enemy. Paul's experience was a different kind of appearance, and the experience so changed him from enemy to almost fanatical adherent that he dedicated his life to working tirelessly for the One whom he had hated and persecuted. Thus, he said that he had done more work than anyone else, because he was so appreciative of what God had done for him in calling him; taking him out of what he was, which was a bitter, hateful murderer; and giving him the opportunity for salvation and eternal life. The Corinthians, knowing how hard he worked and how fervently he believed and how zealously he preached that Christ was a living Savior, knew that it must be true.

A Dead Savior is No Savior

I Corinthians 15:12-19 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? But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ is not risen. And if Christ is not risen, then our preaching is empty [vain] and your faith is also empty [vain]. Yes, and we are found false witnesses of God, because we have testified of God that He raised up Christ, whom He did not raise up—if in fact the dead do not rise. For if the dead do not rise, then Christ is not risen. And if Christ is not risen, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins! Then also those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most pitiable.

He begins to argue logically, as Greeks might argue. We are getting a flavor of a Greek

Themes of I Corinthians (Part 8) by Richard T. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

logical, rhetorical style here. His first logical argument is that resurrection must be applied universally; it cannot be for one and not for another. We cannot say that the resurrection happened only to Jesus and not to anyone else. If we say that, if we deny the resurrection for men, then Jesus as a man did not rise from the dead—and we have no Savior. It is as simple as that.

He goes on: "If this is so, then the apostles' preaching is useless, and they are liars. They should all be stoned." If this is the case, if there is no raising from the dead, then the people's faith is absolutely empty. There is nothing there. You have faith in a dead Savior. It is gone. There would be no basis for it. If it were true that the dead are not raised, it means that the whole enterprise of Christianity is a sham, hoax, scam, and a lie. (This is not the case, because there is a resurrection from the dead.)

Finally, without the resurrection, Christians who have already died have no hope. If they have died, they are dead and will stay dead if there is no resurrection from the dead. If we have no hope in a life to come, no hope of an afterlife, then we are pitifully deluded people. We might as well go get white jackets and check ourselves in. We, then, would be certifiable. Are you mad? Are you crazy? Do you believe in a sham? No, because there is a resurrection from the dead. Christ did rise; and if Christ rose, then we can rise also.

I Thessalonians 4:13-14 But I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who have fallen asleep, lest you sorrow as others who have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus.

Paul says the same thing much more simply. (Maybe I should have come here first.) How simple! If Jesus died and rose from the dead, then God is going to bring those who died in Christ with Him. It is the same reasoning as I Corinthians 15, just in a simpler form. We have a sure, living hope because we know that Jesus died and rose again to life. If it worked that way with Him, if we believe and follow His teachings, then we will experience the same kind of resurrection to life at His return. It is so very simple.

The Place or Position of the Resurrection in God's Plan

I Corinthians 15:20-28 But now Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since by man came death, by Man also came the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive. But each one in his own

Themes of I Corinthians (Part 8) by Richard T. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

order: Christ the firstfruits, afterward those who are Christ's at His coming. Then comes the end, when He delivers the kingdom to God the Father, when He puts an end to all rule and all authority and power. For He must reign till He has put all enemies under His feet. The last enemy that will be destroyed is death. For, "He has put all things under His feet." But when He says, "all things are put under Him," it is evident that He who put all things under Him is excepted. Now when all things are made subject to Him, then the Son Himself will also be subject to Him who put all things under Him, that God may be all in all.

In this section, Paul briefly sketches the plan of God. It is not complete, but it is sketched with highlights. What he is doing here is showing how integral resurrection is to this whole outworking of God's will. That is Paul's whole point here. He wants to show where resurrection fits into the plan of God so we can see that if we pull resurrection out, nothing would work. It is necessary and vital to the whole process.

Therefore, he says, "Jesus, in His resurrection, and in every other way, is a Forerunner—a Pioneer, Trailblazer—for a much larger party of people to follow. This much larger party will be made up of beings similar to Him (meaning human), but given God's Spirit and the truth, following the same path that He forged, so that they will arrive at the same destination point." Christ is the Firstfruits, and those who follow, just like firstfruits of a plant, will be just like the firstfruits.

God, being a God of order, does everything in its proper time. First comes Christ; then come His saints; and then will come those who will rise in the end. When all of this is complete, when all the people have been brought into oneness and unity with God, when they have been resurrected from the dead, then death will be destroyed.

This is an argument by Paul to give perspective and to show purpose. The perspective is very long-range. Paul is not being narrow here in his application of resurrection; he is being universal and eternal.

Resurrection became necessary, he says, at the foundation of the world when Adam sinned. Because all men since then have sinned just like Adam, resurrection will remain necessary until every human being has had his or her opportunity for salvation. Sin requires an atonement, and it is given to all men once to die, and after this, the judgment—after they die, they are raised in judgment, either to eternal life or eternal death. All people will go through this process.

Themes of I Corinthians (Part 8) by Richard T. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

Once this is accomplished—that is, everyone has been given an opportunity for salvation and has been raised to eternal life or eternal death—then resurrection will be unnecessary because no one else has died. The only people left will be those who have attained salvation. Thus, there will be no sin, no death, and no more need for resurrection. Death will have been destroyed by righteousness and holiness. Since death occurs only in the presence of sin, once people stop sinning as eternal beings, death will be gone and resurrection will be unnecessary.

The purpose of resurrection, then—remember, this is an argument of both perspective and purpose—is a tool that God uses toward His ultimate end of voluntary subjection of all things to His authority. That is what Paul gets to toward the end of this section. All things will be put under Christ; then Christ Himself will put Himself under God; and everything will be subject to God: all things, the whole universe, every being. When that happens, God will be all in all. Everybody will be one with God, and God will be one with everyone.

It is, then, by resurrection that we truly become one with God. This is why I said that it is a tool that God uses toward His ultimate end of voluntary subjection of all things to His authority.

Maybe this will take on added significance if we look at Jesus' prayer for us. We can look at this and say, "Yes, it does take us all the way into God's Kingdom," but if you look at resurrection as being a tool, then you can see that Jesus was praying for our success in this Christian life the whole way along.

John 17:20-24 I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me. And the glory which You gave Me I have given them, that they may be one just as We are one: I in them, and You in Me; that they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me. Father, I desire that they also whom You gave Me may be with Me where I am, that they may behold My glory which You have given Me; for You loved Me before the foundation of the world.

Jesus was thinking along these same lines of eternal oneness, and that could happen only through the resurrection of the dead.

Life is Purposeless without the Resurrection

I Corinthians 15:29-34 Otherwise, what will they do who are baptized for the dead, if the dead do not rise at all? Why then are they baptized for the dead? And why do we stand in jeopardy every hour? I affirm, by the boasting in you which I have in Christ Jesus our Lord, I die daily. If, in the manner of men, I have fought with beasts at Ephesus, what advantage is it to me? If the dead do not rise, "Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die!" Do not be deceived: "Evil company corrupts good habits." Awake to righteousness, and do not sin; for some do not have the knowledge of God. I speak this to your shame.

In this section, Paul shifts to a negative argument: What if there were no resurrection? What then? He advances two examples: 1) the baptism for the dead and 2) his own dangerous commission from Christ. Doing either of these things would be worthless if there were no resurrection.

I do not want to go into disproving the baptism for the dead thing right now; I do not have the time. There are ways of explaining it; and because it has been done elsewhere, I will leave that for now. Evidently, though, there were some people who were doing this, and Paul does not say one way or the other whether he agrees with it or not. However, he uses it as an example that if you were to be baptized for a dead person, what good would it do if there is no resurrection from the dead? If that person is not going to rise from the dead, why are you getting baptized for him? His hope is lost. He is dead. It is a stupid idea in the first place, and this is a digression on which I will not touch on anymore today.

Secondly, "Why do we stand in jeopardy every hour?" This means, "Why do we put ourselves in danger for the cause of Christ if, when we die, it is over?" This reiterates his arguments in verses 12 through 19. If there is no resurrection, we might as well live just for ourselves. We might as well live for pleasure like the Epicureans. They believe that life is what we put into it: "We might as well squeeze all the good juices out of life, because that is all we are going to get." Therefore, Paul says that if that is all we are going to get, we might as well become Epicurean. Why should anyone, if he has no hope beyond this life, put himself in any peril? That would be idiotic!

Exhortation comes at the end of this section. Evidently, some in the Corinthian church were living as if there were no resurrection from the dead. They were spending time with the wrong sort and losing their inhibitions to sin, to which Paul basically says, "Snap out of it! You should know better than that! There is a resurrection in front of us. We have to

Themes of I Corinthians (Part 8) by Richard T. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

live for it, and we have to qualify for it! There is work we must do." Remember, that is how Paul started the chapter. He said that this is part of the gospel—but there is more to it than that. We are being saved, and there is salvation yet ahead in the resurrection from the dead. Since God is not going to just hand it to us if we do not deserve it, we had better get on the ball and start living as if we truly believe that there is a resurrection from the dead. We hope they would live truly believing that there was a resurrection from the dead.

What he is saying is that we should think of the resurrection like a carrot in front of us—the carrot and stick principle. The resurrection is the carrot—the reward—in front of us. We must look at the resurrection as a goal, a wonderful goal for which we will struggle with all we are worth to fight and beat our human nature and desires into submission to be we are worthy of it.

Paul says something similar to the Colossians:

Colossians 1:21-23 And you, who once were alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now He has reconciled in the body of His flesh through death, to present you holy, and blameless, and above reproach in His sight—if indeed you continue in the faith, grounded and steadfast, and are not moved away from the hope of the gospel which you heard, which was preached to every creature under heaven, of which I, Paul, became a minister.

As Paul often does, he said that his theological arguments often turn into moral and ethical arguments and exhortations to get on the stick: "This is what we need to do..." Paul went on to say in I Corinthians, "Do not be deceived: 'Evil company corrupts good habits,'" meaning, "You have been fellowshiping with the wrong types. Leave them alone who are not going in the same direction as you are, toward the Kingdom of God," who were people of the world. Perhaps they were fellowshiping with the church; I do not know. Paul wanted them to start fellowshiping with people who believed the same way as they all believed.

Also, Paul says, "Awake to righteousness," meaning right doing. Also, "Do not sin, for some do not have the knowledge of God." This is where we get the idea that they were not converted people Paul was talking about no longer fellowshiping with. Then he tops it off with, "You should have known

Themes of I Corinthians (Part 8) by Richard T. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)
better."

The Resurrection Body

I Corinthians 15:35-49 But someone will say, "How are the dead raised up? And with what body do they come?" Foolish one, what you sow is not made alive unless it dies. And what you sow, you do not sow that body that shall be, but mere grain—perhaps wheat or some other grain. But God gives it a body as He pleases, and to each seed its own body. All flesh is not the same flesh, but there is one kind of flesh of men, another flesh of animals, another of fish, and another of birds. There are also celestial bodies and terrestrial bodies; but the glory of the celestial is one, and the glory of the terrestrial is another. There is one glory of the sun, another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars; for one star differs from another star in glory. So also is the resurrection of the dead. The body is sown in corruption, it is raised in incorruption. It is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power. It is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body. And so it is written, "The first man Adam became a living being." The last Adam became a life-giving spirit. However, the spiritual is not first, but the natural, and afterward the spiritual. The first man was of the earth, made of dust; the second Man is the Lord from heaven. As was the man of dust, so also are those who are made of dust; and as is the heavenly Man, so also are those who are heavenly. And as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly Man.

Paul knew that questions like this would logically arise. "How does the resurrection work?" "What is the resurrection body like?" He uses a common process from nature to explain the mechanics of the resurrection. Like a seed, what goes into the ground perishes. When you see a seed, it is dry and sometimes even wrinkled. It appears like some piece of debris—dead—but we know that there is biological life in there that must be brought up through the natural processes. The analogy is very good, because the seed appears dead.

Themes of I Corinthians (Part 8) by Richard T. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

Like a seed, The body that goes into the ground is dead. Miraculously, God supplies the energy—the force and power—and what comes up is different from what is put into the ground. Regardless of what seed you plant into the ground—like the bean seed experiments most kids do at school—when it comes up, it does not come up as a bean, but as a stem with leaves, and then eventually flowers and pods, and then beans. It does not look at all like the seed you put into the ground. The bean was the little thing, but what came up was this stem with leaves on the top. They do not look anything alike. The body that went into the ground is different from the body that came up once the miraculous natural life of the plant was energized. That is Paul's analogy.

The Greek idea that what would come out of the ground, out of the grave in the resurrection from the dead, was totally worthless. They believed that if a person died and was resurrected from the dead, he would appear as the rotting, stinking corpse. They could not imagine a spiritual body. All they could imagine was the physical body that went in, and that is what came back up, right? Therefore, they said that was impossible. A rotting stinking corpse, even if given life, would be worthless—it would just die again. It would not communicate with anyone, but only scare people. Therefore, a resurrection from the dead was impossible to their way of thinking.

Paul disabuses them of that by explaining that in a spiritual resurrection, a spiritual body different from the physical body is the result. The body goes into the grave physical, and it comes out spiritual. It is far different. It may look similar, but it certainly does not act the same. He says that they have different glories, different strengths, different abilities, different qualities. Those who have died in Christ will be clothed with a body like Christ's body. That is what Paul said here as he came to the end of this section. He said that if we are like Adam in this life, in the next life we are going to be like the glorified Christ—the second Adam. If we were made of dust on earth, then in the resurrection we are going to be like the heavenly Man made of heavenly things—spirit. The whole Greek idea has nothing under it. The heavenly body in perfection and power and glory is what awaits us.

I John 3:1-2 Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God! Therefore the world does not know us, because it did not know Him. Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is

Themes of I Corinthians (Part 8) by Richard T. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.

How it all works and what it will be like is still much of a mystery to us. We do not know all the mechanics; we do not know exactly how it all is going to work; but we know this: We will be like the resurrected Jesus Christ in every way except our authority. We will see Him as He is. We will be like Him. Now, that is a carrot for which to reach!

The Unwritten Question

I Corinthians 15:50-57 Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does corruption inherit incorruption. Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed—in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. So when this corruptible has put on incorruption, and this mortal has put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written: "Death is swallowed up in victory." "O Death, where is your sting? O Hades, where is your victory?" The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Now Paul answers the unwritten question, "Why can we not have this now? If God is so good and great and powerful, why can He not just give us this now?" His answer comes in two parts. First, we are still corrupt, flesh-and-blood human beings. The Kingdom of God is too holy and spiritual for a mortal man to enter into its fullness, which begs the need for a resurrection. There must be a resurrection. We cannot have this now because we have to be resurrected into it—changed from mortal and corruptible into immortal and incorruptible. We cannot have it now because we need to go through a resurrection, which brings back the notion of how vital it is in God's plan.

The second part of the answer he gives them is that God had a plan. He is repeating himself for emphasis. God has a plan, and these things must happen in their proper time in accordance to what has been prophesied,

Themes of I Corinthians (Part 8) by Richard T. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

what has been revealed. God just will not say, "Okay! Scrap the plan! We will just make them all immortal and incorruptible," and off we go. God is not that way. He is a God of order, and He has set up this plan to do it a certain way: He gives us His Spirit while we are still flesh and blood and can still repent, and we go through a process in which we learn and grow in righteous character. There are things to be learned in this physical life that can be applied when we become eternal beings. We have to go through this period of mortality first to learn those lessons.

Then, at the resurrection from the dead, we can be given that power and that form. All these things have to be put into their proper place in the plan. Certain things have to be done and done at the right time. We just have to wait.

Paul explains to them a mystery, a truth that will give them hope—a truth, though, that can only be understood by those with God's Spirit: Some will be alive when Jesus Christ returns, and they will be instantaneously changed into spirit beings at the Last Trumpet when He descends in the clouds.

I Thessalonians 4:15-18 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 by no means precede those who are asleep. For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord. Therefore comfort one another with these words.

He gives them hope that if Christ should come soon, this change will be instantaneous. The dead will rise first, and then the living will be changed. All in Christ will be transformed from mortal, corruptible humans into immortal, incorruptible spirit beings; and when this happens we will have our victory over sin and death. We, by this time, will have overcome our natures, our flesh, this world, Satan the devil and all his demons, and death itself. We will have passed through death to eternal life by the power of God in Christ.

This next passage is said of Jesus Christ, but in a large part, it can to us, also, because He is the Forerunner and we follow Him.

Acts 2:24-28 [Christ] whom God raised up, having loosed the pains of death, because it was not possible that He should be held by it [the same will be for us regardless how long we are dead]. For David says concerning Him: "I foresaw the LORD always before my face, for He is at my right hand, that I may not be shaken. Therefore my heart rejoiced, and my tongue was glad; moreover my flesh also will rest in hope. For You will not leave my soul in Hades, nor will You allow Your Holy One to see corruption. You have made known to me the ways of life; you will make me full of joy in Your presence."

On to the last verse in I Corinthians 15, because I stopped short. Paul always seems to get around to an exhortation: "Now, what do we do with this knowledge?"

I Corinthians 15:58 Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord.

There should be no doubt in us about the resurrection from the dead. The sure hope that we have should infuse us with energy and determination to dedicate ourselves to the work of the Lord. What is the work of the Lord in us? It is the growth into perfect, holy, righteous, spiritual character. Our labor will be greatly rewarded with glory.